29 **REVIEWS:** Motocross Madness • Tiger Woods 99 • Falcon Mach V

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ON THE CD

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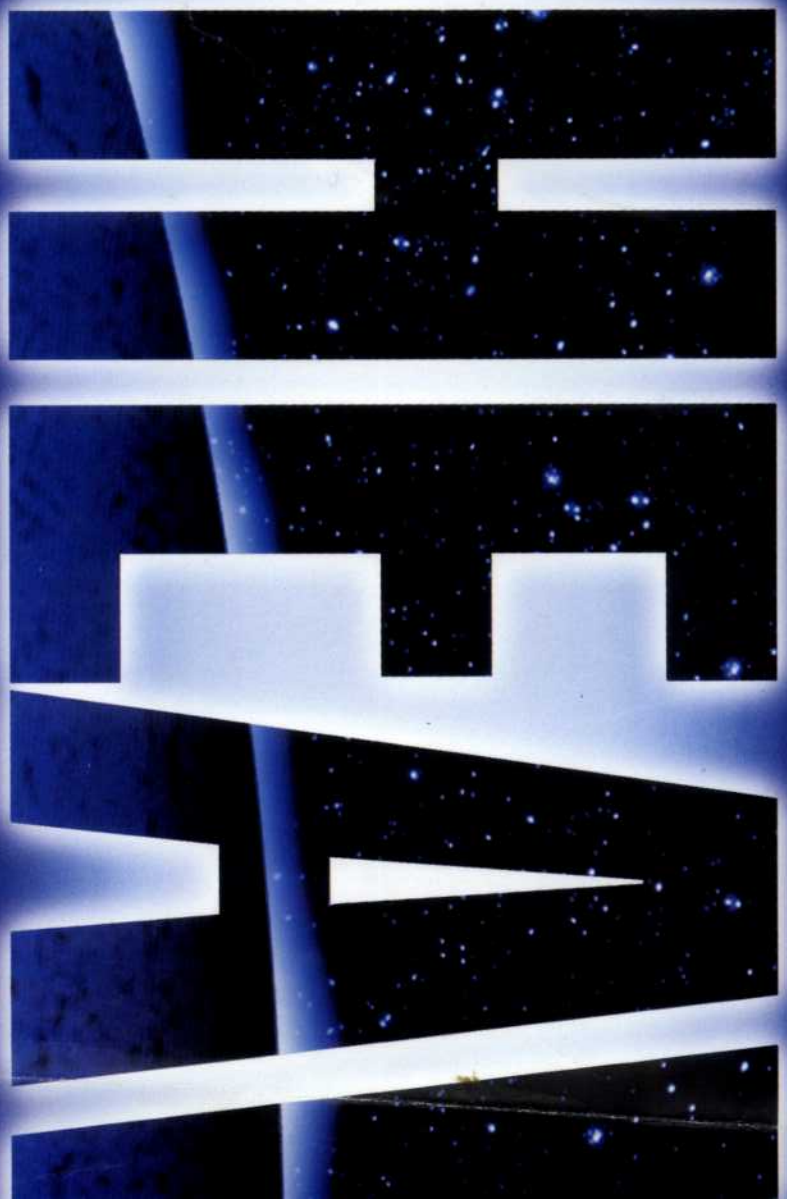

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PC GAMER

VOLUME 5 • NUMBER 11 • NOVEMBER 1998

Cover Story

QUAKE III

The Holy Grail of PC gaming returns — and, predictably, we've got the exclusive first look. Can Carmack and company do it again, this time with the focus being squarely placed on multi-player? We're certainly not going to bet against them. 91

Features

GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES 118

Don your helmet and prepare yourself as your number one sports game source, PCGSN, brings you the latest on the hot new racing simulations that will get your motor running.

AN EPIC EXPERIENCE: The Sons of Unreal 138

Years in the making, the *Unreal* engine proved to be worth the wait, and now that developers are licensing it for their own games, we've got a preview of the best upcoming releases.

BURN, BABY, BURN! 172

The Making of *Diablo II*

The original *Diablo* came out of nowhere to captivate gamers. The sequel promises to be bigger, deeper, and prettier — and we've got the most detailed info yet on this anticipated game.

BY RAMOND E. FEIST MURDER IN KRONDOR 188

Fantasy fans are in for a treat as we exclusively present the prologue and first chapter of Raymond Feist's upcoming novel, *Murder in Krondor.*

Interstate '82 40

Activision does the Reagan years in this sequel to the funkadelic *Interstate '76.*

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Sierra's first-person shooter has plenty to make it stand out from the Death-Match crowd.

Scoops

Return to Krondor 50

Back from the very brink of extinction, this roleplaying epic is finally nearing release.

Drakan 56

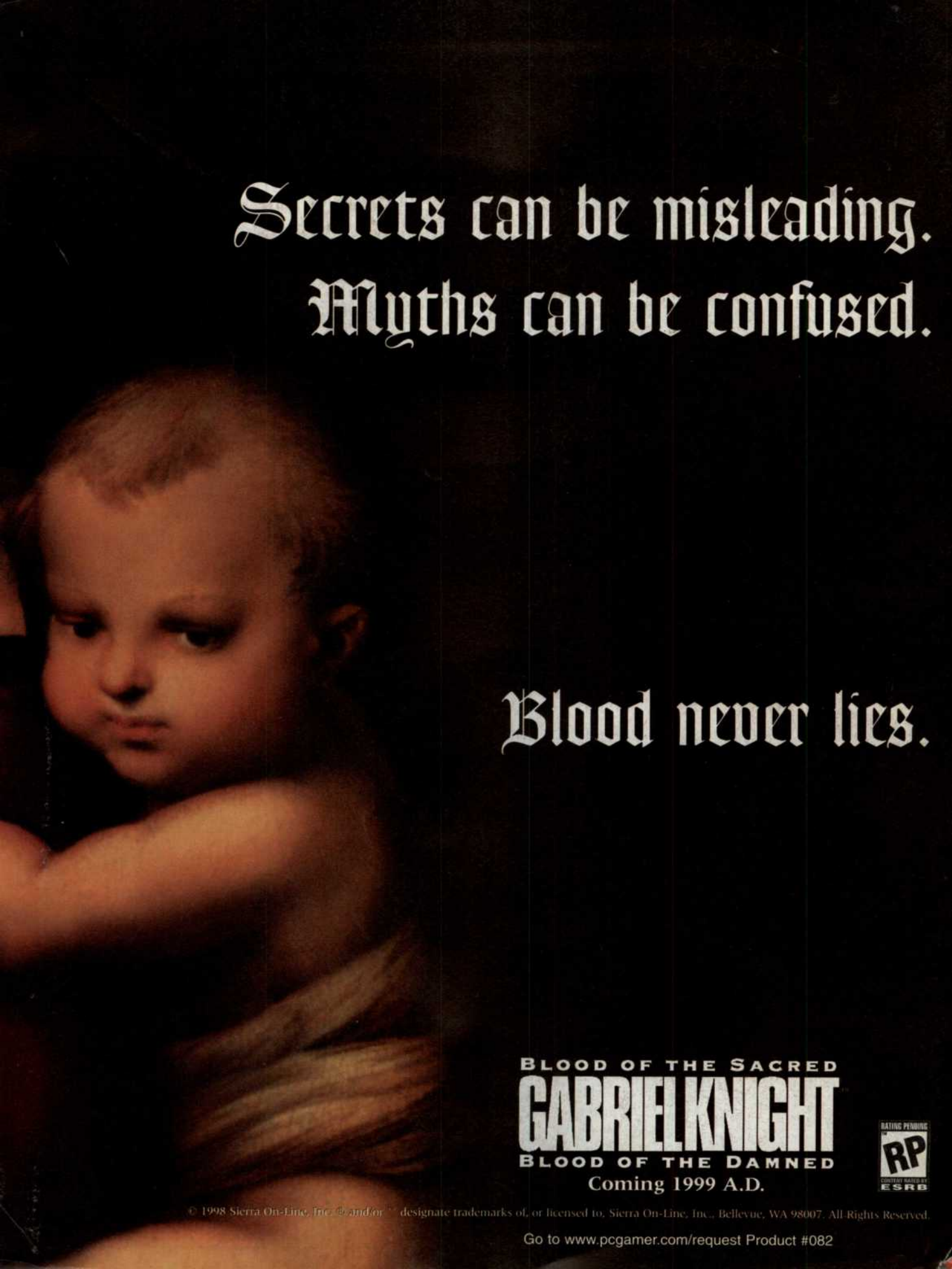
This third-person action/adventure full of friendly dragons adds a draconian twist to the genre.

Planescape: Torment 60

It's more role-playing goodness from Interplay's Black Isle Studios, this time using the engine from *Baldur's Gate.*

Heretic II 64

The *Quake II* engine goes third person in Raven Software's latest fantasy frag-fest.



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A Bold New Beginning...

This month sees the continuation of the all-new adventures of Coconut Monkey. You may recall that as his little raft was sinking, he was rescued by two aliens — okay, maybe that's not how you remember it, but that's how it happened. We swear. And, naturally, all sorts of mayhem soon followed. Pierre, Coconut Monkey's evil coconut nemesis, is planning his revenge — but when (and how) will he strike? And what do those two aliens really think of Coconut Monkey? Pop *The CD* into your drive and have a seat in *Coconut Monkey Theater.* Hilarity will no doubt ensue — or, at the very least, nausea and marked dizziness.

We've also got the winner of our *Quake II* mod contest. We can't reveal who the winner is here (after all, we want you to read every page of our beloved magazine), but you can get all the info on page 22. And once you've done that, check out the demos. We've got the exclusive *Rainbow Six* demo, the demo for the bone-crunching *NFL GameDay 99*, and a little bit of racing in *Motocross Madness.* Pull the shades, pour yourself a big glass of something cold, and settle down with the best demo disc around.

Quick Start for The CD

1. Insert the CD.
2. If Autorun does not start the CD, click the Start button and choose Run. Type *X:\PCGAMER.EXE* where *X* is the letter of your CD-ROM drive.
3. This will run *The CD.*

System Requirements

Windows 95; 486/33; 4MB RAM; Mouse

NOTE: 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.

Attention Win3.1 Users

The *PC Gamer* front end was created for Windows 95. If you run Windows 3.1, you will have to install Win 3.1 demos separately.

Get Demos for Free!

Newsstand buyers have the choice of purchasing either the CD-ROM Edition of *PC Gamer* for $8.99, or *PC Gamer* without a CD-ROM for $4.99. If you purchase the edition without a disc, you can still get free game demos in a couple of different ways:

1. Download demos and check out the new IGN PC web site at *http://pc.ign.com* on the Internet. The new site contains daily gaming news and a plethora of game news. Our own PC Gamer Online now lives at *http://pcgamer.ign.com.*

2. Call PFC at (800) 865-7240 (between the hours of 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. CST, Mon. - Fri.) to have *The CD* mailed to you for only $7.99 shipping and handling.

Disc Editors' Note

For the latest information on the *PC Gamer* CD, be sure to check our web site at *pcgamer.ign.com/static/magazine/cdrom.shtml.* As well as new updates, you'll find our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at this location.

CONTENTS / MANUAL INSTALLATION COMMANDS

Installation Shortcuts

In the event our interface 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, simply use the Start-Run command for Windows 95, or the File-Run command from the Program Manager for Windows 3.1. When the dialog box appears, type in the letter of your CD-ROM drive, followed by the directory and install command listed at the right.

For example, to install the *Rainbow Six* demo type *X:\RSIXDEMO\SETUP.EXE* where *X* is the letter of your CD-ROM drive, and press Enter. The setup program for *Rainbow Six* will then run. You can also use the File Manager or Explorer to find the appropriate directory on *The CD*, and then double-click on the installation command.

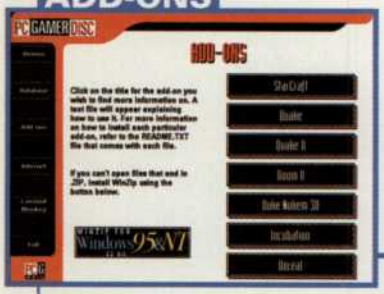
Please remember that if you're using Windows 3.1, you cannot run most Windows 95 demos or our front end.

* Indicates that the demo requires DirectX to run. Install DirectX by running DXSETUP.EXE in the \DIRECTX directory on *The CD.*

Demo	Directory	Install Command	Page	OS
Rainbow Six*	\RSIXDEMO	SETUP.EXE	10	WIN95
Motocross Madness*	\MCMDEMO	MSMCM.EXE	13	WIN95
NFL Gameday '99*	\GAMEDAY	GAMEDAY.EXE	14	WIN95
Ares Rising*	\ARESDEMO	ARESDEMO.EXE	19	WIN95
Army Men*	\ARMYMEN	SETUP.EXE	21	WIN95
Quake II Contest Winner			22	WIN95
Knights and Merchants*	\KMDEMO	KMDEMO.EXE	27	WIN95
F-16*	\F16DEMO	SETUP.EXE	27	WIN95
West Front	\WESTDEMO	SETUP.EXE	28	WIN95
Urban Assault*	\UADEMO	MSUADEMO.EXE	28	WIN95
Crop Circles*	\CROPDEMO	CROP1100.EXE	31	WIN95
Hexplore*	\HEXPLORE	HEXPLORE.EXE	31	WIN95
Sanctum	\SANCTUM	SANCTUMCURRENT.EXE	31	WIN95
EarthLink	\EARTHL\14DAY\TA (3DAY\TA)	SETUP.EXE	33	WIN95
MindSpring	\MSPRING	SETUP.EXE	33	WIN95
Patches	\PATCHES		324	
Having Problems?			33	WIN95

FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND

ADD-ONS



All the add-ons on *The CD* are located here, with instructions for use.

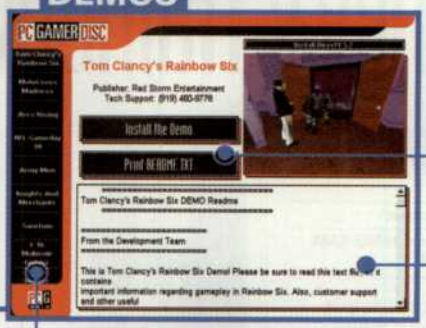
INTERNET

If you want to get online fast, this is the place to go. Get your Internet fix here!

COCONUT MONKEY

What's our lovable companion up to now? Click this button to find out!

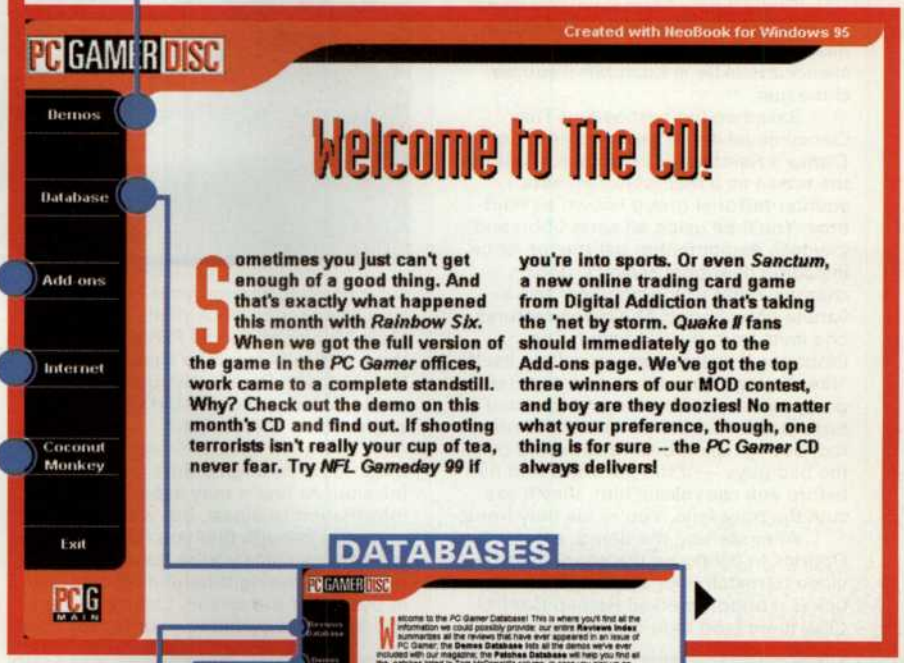
DEMOS



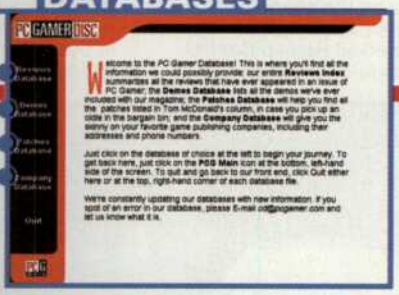
The menu screen lets you go to any demo at any time. To access demos not available on the opening screen, just click "More Demos."

The "Install the Demo" does just what you'd expect. Most demos come with README files that further explain gameplay. If you want a hard-copy of the game's README.TXT file, click "Print README.TXT."

If you don't want to print the README.TXT file, you can scroll through this window and get detailed information on your selected demo.



DATABASES



REVIEWS

What rating did that game you found in the bargain bin get when it was new? The Reviews Database contains handy summaries of all the reviews we've ever published.

DEMOS

Which month's CD had that demo you've been meaning to try? The Demos Database tells you everything you need to know about demos that have appeared on *The CD*.

PATCHES

Looking for a patch for that ailing game? Check out our Patches Database, listing every fix and update we've covered in the Extended Play column and included on *The CD*.

COMPANY

Wondering how to reach a game's publisher? Here's the place to go. Whether you want their street address, tech support number, or web site address, we've got it all here.

http://pc.ign.com

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six

EXCLUSIVE! PCG 1998

INSTALL \RSIXDEMO\SETUP.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (919) 460-9778
CATEGORY: Strategy/Action
COMPANY: RedStorm Entertainment
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 65MB hard-drive space; DirectX

It seems some folks don't believe in sitting down and talking out their problems. Nope, they've just got to get themselves wired up and loaded down with all sorts of guns and such, and take out their frustrations on a bunch of innocent people.

That's where team Rainbow comes in. They show up and take care of business the old-fashioned way — with a silenced Heckler & Koch MP-5 submachine gun.

Based on the best-selling Tom Clancy novel of the same name, *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* places you right in the action as a member of an elite counter-terrorist group known as Rainbow. You'll be using all sorts of hi- and low-tech equipment to get the job done, including heartbeat sensors, door charges, night vision goggles, and a variety of weapons. The demo features one level from the full game: The Embassy. It seems a group calling itself "Free Europe" has taken over the Belgian embassy in London and grabbed a hostage. The ambassador is still inside, too, but he hasn't been discovered by the bad guys — if the terrorists find him before you can rescue him, they'll execute the poor fella. You're his only hope.

After starting the demo, enter Options to configure the sound and video to match your system. Below that box is a button marked Remap Controls. Click there (and then on the subsequent submenus) to change your in-game controls to suit you. Once that's done, click Main Menu and Single Player. There are three difficulty levels to choose from — but start with Rookie (the other difficulty levels increase the number of terrorists and mission objectives).

In the mission on our CD, you have to get the ambassador to safety before he's found and killed.

There are several screens that you must scroll through before getting to the mission. At first it may seem like a lot of information to digest, but we can't recommend enough that you read through everything. Once you're done with a page, click the right-hand arrow located at the top of the screen. Later screens will have you outfitting your troops (click the arrows under each item to change what you will carry) and selecting your mission plan.

Use the heartbeat sensor in map mode to find those terrorist scum and then take them out.

Rainbow Six makes heavy use of AI partners, and they're just smart enough to execute the mission themselves. The demo comes preloaded with a plan that will select and outfit your troops and create a series of waypoints — your AI buddies will follow those waypoints to the letter and take out any bad guys they may encounter. The waypoints will also lead you through the level as well.

Start the mission by hitting Execute, and go to it. You'll need to use the action key to open doors, but everything else is pretty self-explanatory. One word of advice, though. This is not *Quake*. Running around with guns blazing will only get you a neat little hole in your forehead. The only way to succeed is through patience, stealth, and good aim. If the terrorists see you, they *will* kill you, and they can generally do it with one shot. Have fun!

Contact! That cowardly terrorist wasn't worth the bullet that killed him. Now go find his buddies.

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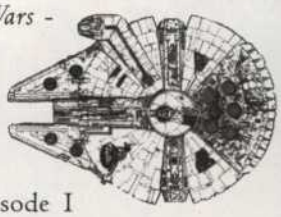

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Motocross Madness

INSTALL \MCMDEMO\MSMCM.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (206) 637-9308

CATEGORY: Racing

COMPANY: Microsoft

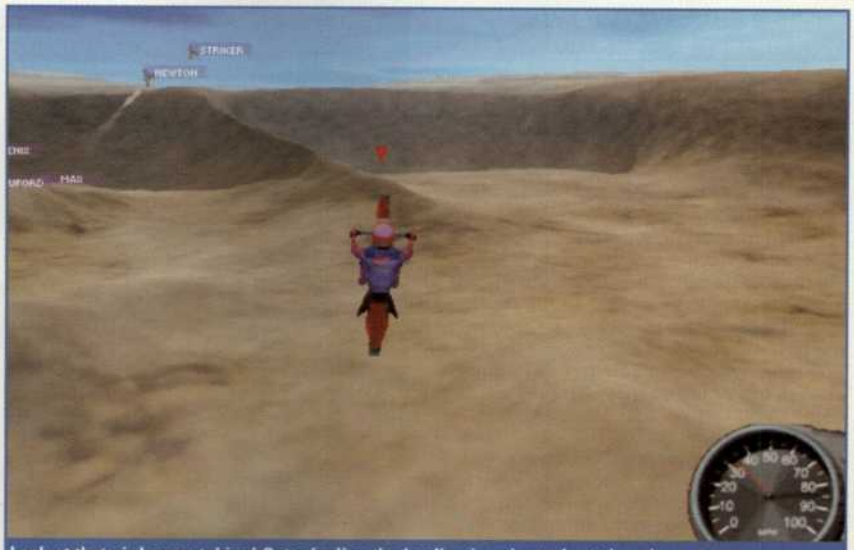
REQUIRED: Winows 95; Pentium 133; 16MB RAM; 50MB hard-drive space; Direct 3D video card; DirectX

There's nothing more exciting than flinging yourself along at 110mph on a vehicle with only two wheels, no seatbelt, and no roll-bar, looking for the perfect outcrop of rock from which you will catch big-time air. Ah, the thrill of sailing through the air, the wind whistling by your ears, the whisper of your fervent prayers that God will see fit to keep you from breaking every bone in your body. Now, that's the American dream.

And thanks to those lunatics over at Microsoft, your dream of smashing yourself all over the landscape can finally come true. With *Motocross Madness*, you too will know the thrill of stunt racing, with all its glory and pain. The demo lets you try out two modes of play from the full game, along with two tracks.

Once you start the demo, you'll need to select the type of video card you have in your system, then enter your name. Along the right-hand side of the screen is a menu; to tweak your control, sound, and video settings, click on the Options button. This will take you to another menu, which has each option listed. Configure away, then back out to the main menu.

The demo offers both single- and multi-player support. Go to Single Player, and you'll get to choose which kind of challenge you want: National Race (a standard race) on the Skyline Track; or Stunt Quarry on the T-Rific track, where you're awarded points for performing jumps and stunts. In either case, you'll be able to select the number of opponents (one to ten) and choose the style of your slicked up motorcycle.



Look at that air I am catching! Got a feeling the landing is going to hurt, though.

Racing on the National track is pretty simple: use the assigned keys to accelerate and steer, and try to finish first. The Stunt mode is a bit more involved, as you will need to find the best places to jump, then figure out how much time you have to pull off your stunts (you can only perform the stunts — sticking your legs out, riding side-saddle, etc. — while in the air; the longer you hold the stunt, the more possible points you get, but only if you land safely). Your first impulse will be to go for the big-time stunts, but you'll want to fight that urge (smashing it deep within your belly) and go for the little stunts, at least at first. They won't get you as many points in the short-term, but overall, they'll you keep in the running.

Playing the multi-player game is just like playing single-player. Either join or start a server, then determine which race you want to play. The same two tracks that were in the single-player mode are available in multi-player as well.

SPECIAL NOTE: The demo of *Motorcross Madness* requires a Direct3D-compatible video card in order to run.

Yee-haw! Holy crap, it's a long way down from here! Guess I messed up this stunt.

BILLY'S TIP

One good technique in Stunt mode is to find a nice, smooth ramp, then turn around and go the opposite way, as far as the map will allow you. Get a good running start, heading for the ramp at full throttle. Hit that puppy at one hundred miles an hour, and glory will surely follow (that, or a complete set of broken ribs).

The mad dash for the finish includes one last jump. Do you have the guts to hang on to the bitter end?

NFL GameDay 99

INSTALL GAMEDAY\GAMEDAY.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (888) 436-3702
CATEGORY: Sports
COMPANY: 989 Sports
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 40MB hard-drive space; DirectX

The football season is now well under way, and things are certainly shaping up in interesting ways. Of course, exactly *how* they're shaping up is a mystery to us, since this is being written in August (ah, the wonders of magazine publishing!). Will the Packers be leading their division? Will the Broncos repeat? Will the Cowboys be able to bail enough players out of jail so they can play a game? You know what? None of that really matters.

Why? Because we've got the demo for *NFL GameDay 99*, that's why. Why watch that boring stuff on television, when you can enjoy two minutes of bone-crunching action from the comfort of your PC! Not only that, but the demo is a rematch of last year's Super Bowl — the Broncos versus the Packers. Will the Broncos repeat as champions, or will Brett Favre & Co. avenge themselves? That's for you to decide.

After starting the demo, you'll be given the choice to select which video card you want to use while playing the demo (handy if you've got a 2D/3D card and a 3D-only card in the same system). Select the one you want and click okay. This will take you to a menu — the only option available in the demo is Exhibition, so click on that button. The next screen contains lots of buttons; in the demo, only Controls and Options are active. Go into Controls to configure your gamepad or keyboard, and use Options to adjust the video settings and game speed. Click Next, and you'll go to a screen where you can select the team you wish to control. Move the direction controller left for Green Bay, right for Denver. Hit Next again, and the game begins. If you're the Packers, you'll call the toss. Go through the rest of the preliminary stuff, and get to the kickoff. To kick off, press the B button to start the kick meter climbing, then press it again select how hard you kick the ball. On defense, the C button will switch control to the player nearest the ball, and A will make you dive toward the ball carrier. On offense, C is a spin move and A is a dive. For both offense and defense, the B button is for extra power.

Here comes Davis, right up the gut. Hope them Packers got a new tube of BenGay waiting.

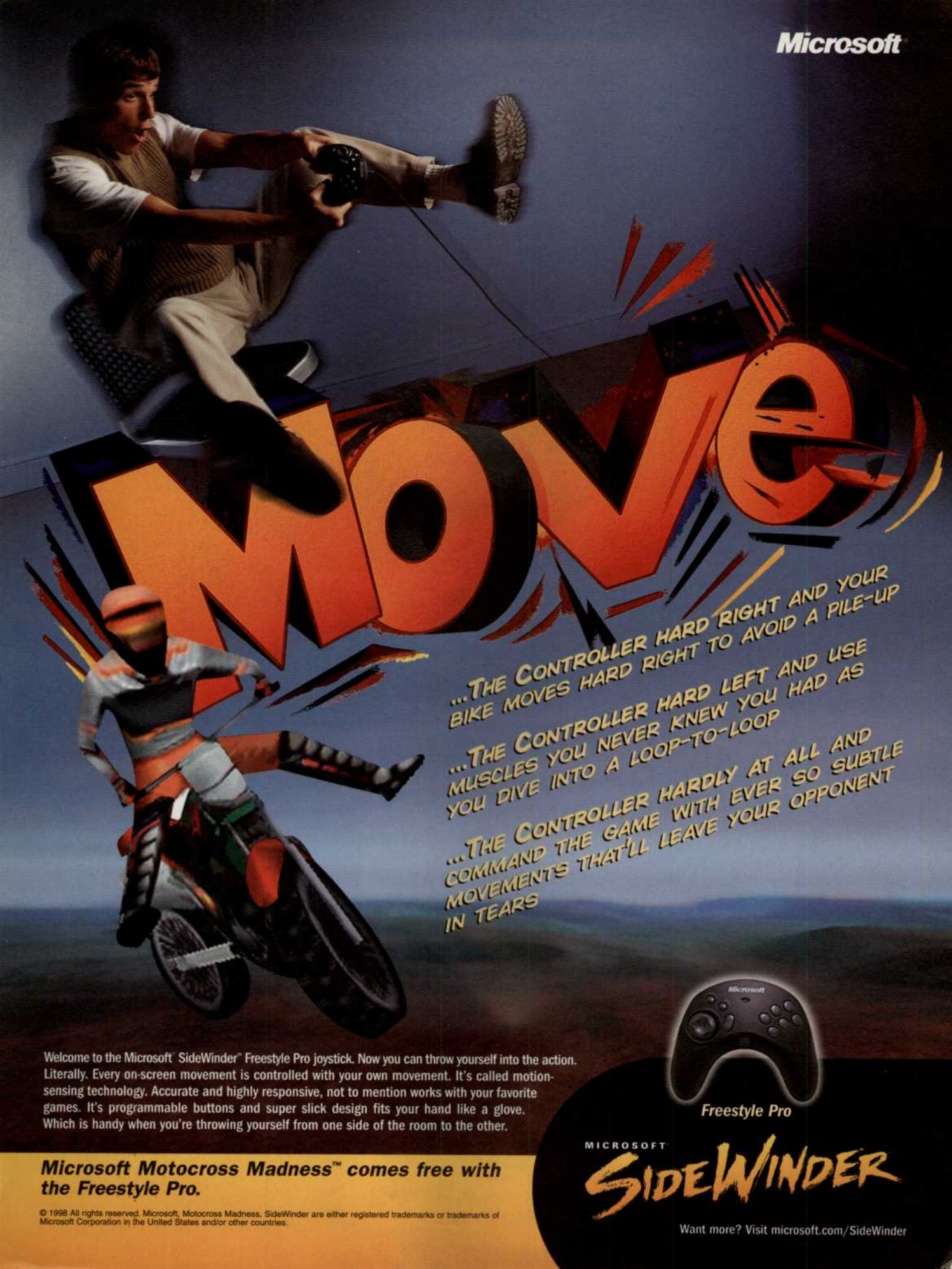
After the kickoff has come and gone, you'll be presented with a menu. The bottom row (default) contains the various formations available to you. Move left or right to find the formation want to use and click a button. You'll be taken to a whole slew of plays for that formation — choose the one that fits your strategy and press the corresponding letter.

On defense, use the C button to pick the player you wish to control (B will also switch you to the closest player once the play starts) — on offense, use the B button to hike the ball. If it's a running play, the quarterback will automatically toss the ball; if it's a passing play, you'll need to press B again to bring up the passing "window." Look for the open receiver and press the key he is assigned to pass to him.

Elway surveys the battlefield, his keen eyes searching for any sign of weakness. This is going to hurt.

Elway is back to pass, but here comes Reggie White. I can't watch! (This is gonna hurt!)

Microsoft



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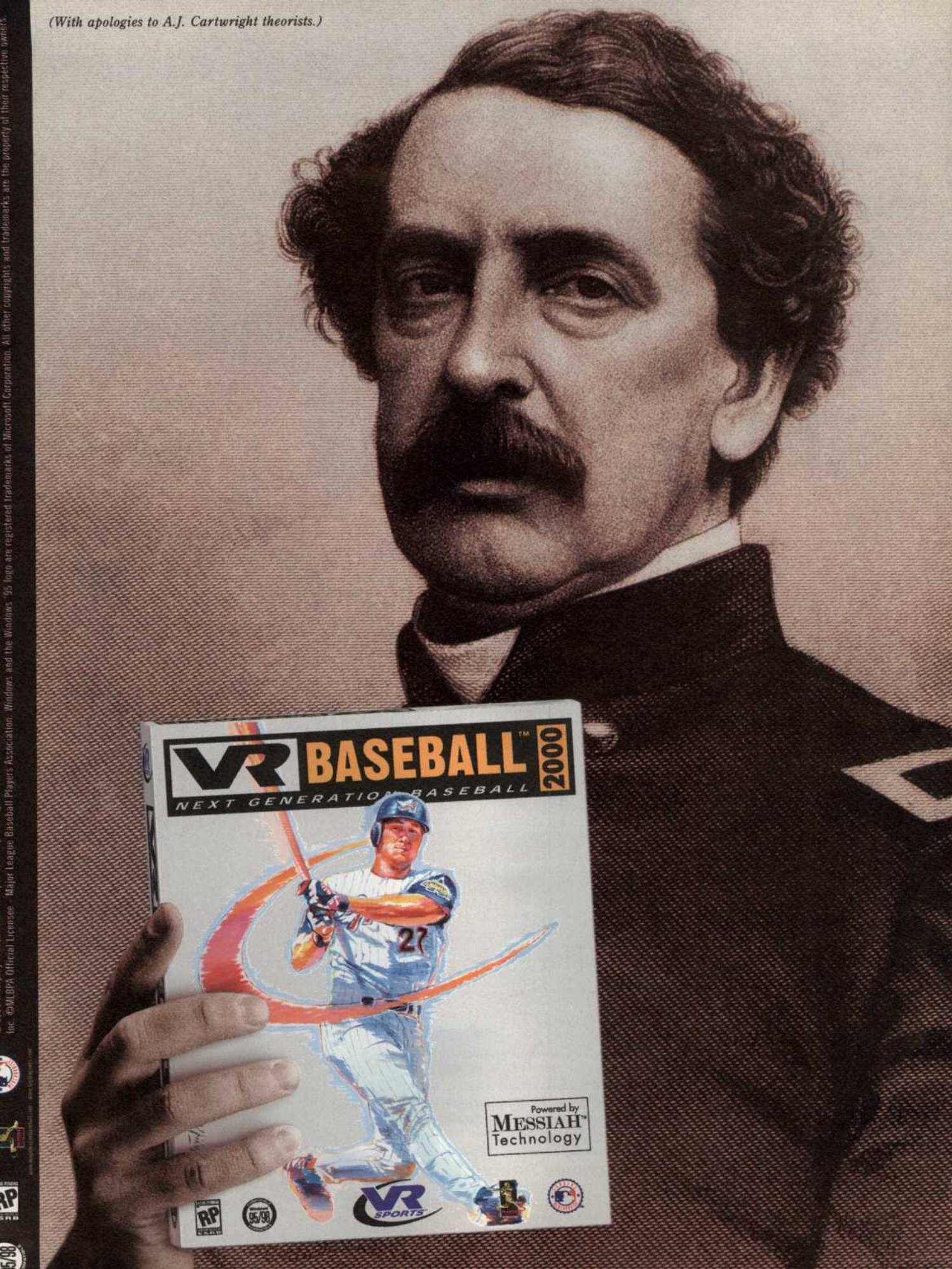
(With apologies to A.J. Cartwright theorists.)



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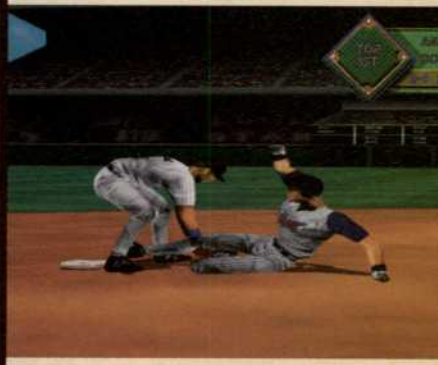

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Ares Rising

EXCLUSIVE PCG 1998

INSTALL \ARESDEMO\ARESDEMO.EXE
TECH SUPPORT *www.aresrising.com*
CATEGORY: Action
COMPANY: Imagine Studios
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 90MB hard-drive space; DirectX

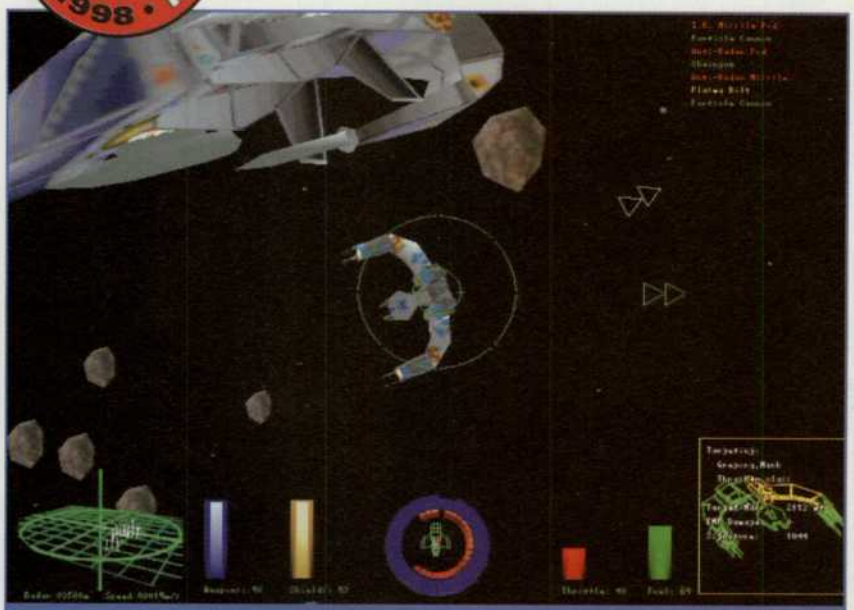
Set in the far-flung future of outer space, *Ares Rising* casts you as Marlowe, a small-time mercenary on the run from deadly enemies (who, of course, are after you because of your dark and shady past). You arrive in the Anayed system as a desperate fugitive with little hope for any sort of future. And then along comes Helena, who sets you up in a mobile base and offers you loads of work and tons of money. All she wants in exchange is your unquestioning obedience as you use your skills to enforce her will across the universe.

Once you've got the demo up and running, you'll have the option of starting a single-player game or a multi-player game. The multi-player tab lets you set up and run a multi-player game. Before starting a single-player game, there are several options you can choose. Along the left side of the screen are video options (DIB Mode, Direct Draw, and D3D); simply click the button that matches the type of video card you have in your system. Under the New Game button are the difficulty settings; choose your difficulty setting and start up the game.

After the nifty little movie that explains what's going on, you'll come to the main screen. Click the Communications button, click Missions, and then click CTR. A description of the mission will appear in the description box. Click Accept, and then click Launch. This will launch you out into the wonders of space.

Once in space, a tutorial will begin; it'll show you how to fly your little craft and blow things up.

PLEASE NOTE: There is a large and extensive readme file included with the demo. Do yourself a favor: print it out, and study it a bit. Then again, if you'd rather spend your time beating your head against the wall in frustration, who are we to say anything?



Once the action in the mission starts, target those ships and let the missiles fly. So long, suckers!

CONTROL KEYS

Pitch Up	↑
Yaw Right	→
Yaw Left	←
Pitch Down	↓
Next Target	T
Enemy Target	Y
Friend Target	U
Front Target	I
Next Child	O
33% Throttle	P
66% Throttle	[
100% Throttle	]
Cloak	L
Match Speed	Enter
Fire Group 1	Spacebar
Fire Group 2	Ctrl
Fire Group 3	Alt
Afterburner	Tab

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tracks,

and riders,

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EVERYONE E ESRB

SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

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Army Men

INSTALL \ARMYMEN\SETUP.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (650) 261-3454
CATEGORY: Strategy
COMPANY: 3DO Company
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 40MB hard-drive space; DirectX; Mouse

One of the happiest memories from Billy's childhood is when he and his brother waged war with those little green army men. They'd blow them up with firecrackers, wipe them out with mustard gas (smoke bombs)... and on one dark day, his brother called in a napalm strike. First, he doused Billy's beloved boys with gas, then he giggled and dropped a match. Oh, how they screamed, how those poor boys writhed in agony. They managed to get off a few shots (winging Billy's brother on the arm), but in the end they all fell. That was truly a dark day for Billy, and one he'll never forget....

Well, now I (and army-men fans everywhere) have a chance to avenge those lost battles of long ago. This new demo for 3DO's *Army Men* lets you try out two missions from the single-player game. But before you get to the action, you should head on over to Boot Camp, where you'll become versed in all sorts of strong-arm tactics. It's here where you'll learn how to handle a bazooka, how to toast poor suckers with a flame thrower, and how to lob grenades with deadly efficiency. Once you've learned how to use the various weapons, click on Single, enter your name, then click on Alpine. The first mission is Enemy Mines, and you play the game as the gruff, no-nonsense Sarge. In this mission, members of the Tan forces are using a Blue army man to carry a note for them. Your job is to take out that blue scumbag and capture the note — this will give you the location of the all-important key.

Boom! Those Tan fanatics never had a chance. I love the smell of burnt plastic in the morning....

You play the demo using the keys listed to the left, and you aim with the mouse. You will also have some boys under your command. Make sure you make the most of them — you don't want to spend your day writing a lot of letters to grieving mothers.

The second mission is Ghost Train. The object of this mission is to blast your way deep behind Tan lines and steal the key from those fiends. This mission will give you all sorts of cool toys to play with, including a flame thrower (man, them plastic boys sure do melt real pretty).

SPECIAL NOTE: If you find that you really suck at this demo, check out the walk-through of the two levels included in the demo's readme file.

CONTROL KEYS

Forward	NUMBERPAD 8
Backward	NUMBERPAD 2
Left	NUMBERPAD 4
Right	NUMBERPAD 6
Fire	Spacebar
Drop Selected Weapon	D
Enter/Exit Vehicle	E
Turn Turret Left	Z
Turn Turret Right	X
Half-speed	Shift
Kneel	NUMBERPAD 5
Roll Left	NUMBERPAD 7
Roll Right	NUMBERPAD 9
Dive	NUMBERPAD /
Walk	Shift
Toggle Through Squads	Tab
Puts Squad on Attack	F2
Order Squad to Follow	F1
Puts Squad on Defend	F3
Return to Sarge	Enter

Sarge surveys the carnage and thinks: "Why did it come to this? Can't we all just live together in peace?"

Quake II Mod Contest Winners

When we started this contest last spring, we knew that there would be some quality mods submitted to us. But even we were surprised by the quality of the mods we received — they all kicked serious ass. But, as they say, in the end there can be only one winner. And so the editors here at *PC Gamer* sat down, lots of soda on hand, and fragged their way through the entries. Hours later we had come up with the winners. So, without further ado, here are the top five winning entries, along with what they received in the way of prizes.

Fifth Place: Final Night by Marina on Wheels. And what nifty prizes do these folks get? How about a lovely 3Dfx t-shirt, a one-year subscription to *PC Gamer*, and a sexy *Quake II* hat?

Fourth Place: Phaser Frag by Matt Zeher. Matt will receive a kick-ass 3Dfx backpack/duffel bag, a 3Dfx T-shirt, and a one-year subscription to *PC Gamer*.

Third Place: Crystal Conflicts by Rich Wells, Steve Crumpler, and the other members of Two Pole Software. These chaps will get a 3Dfx backpack/ duffel bag, a 3Dfx T-shirt, and a one-year subscription to *PC Gamer*.

Look at them arms and legs fly! In Q2 Kick, the object is to gib the enemy and kick that ball that appears.

The red team, lead by Billy, drives in toward the blue goal. Those saps never had a chance, playing the *PC Gamer* team at a game of QPong.

Second Place: This one was very, very close — in fact, only four points separated first and second place. The runner-up, capturing second, is Q2 Kick by Doyoon Kim. Not only did this entry meet all the requirements of the contest, but it included not one, not two, but *four* variations for gameplay. Plus, it features a nifty observer mode so folks can sit back and enjoy the mayhem as spectators. Doyoon will get a Voodoo2 video card, a 3Dfx T-shirt, and a one-year subscription to *PC Gamer*.

First Place: And now we've come to the moment everyone's been waiting for — the first prize winner! And who is this lucky person? Let's see...stupid envelope.... Oh, my! None other than Dave Wallin, for QPong. QPong places players in a living pinball machine, where points are scored by shooting giant balls into goals (and flattening other players in the process). Dave will receive $2,000, a copy of *Quake II* signed by the fine folks at id Software, a 3Dfx T-shirt, and a one-year subscription to *PC Gamer*.

Billy defends the honor of his goal in another rousing game of QPong. So long, Hot Nickles — wouldn't want to be you!

The top three mods (QPong, Q2 Kick, and Crystal Conflicts) all appear on this month's *CD*. We also have a dedicated server running QPong — head on over to *quake2.pcgamer.com:27915* to play.

In addition to the inclusion of the winning mods, we've also got the usual assortment of *Quake II* and *Unreal* levels just waiting for you to load them up and frag some bad people. In addition, we've got a cool *StarCraft* campaign called The Antioch Chronicles by Auspex Turmalis. This is an all-new campaign, which will certainly help pass the time until *StarCraft: Brood War* is released.

And the madness doesn't stop there! We've got the usual high-quality *Duke Nukem 3D* map by Steve Long, and other assorted goodies. Just look for the add-ons area of *The CD*, and prepare yourself for a journey of amazement and wonder. Or some computer gaming fun, anyway.

Can you play with your eyes shut? It's not easy with traditional speakers, which create unwanted audio reflections that can mask your games' 3D effects. But Monsoon uses Planar Focus technology to precisely direct sound energy so you hear every sound exactly where your game puts it – even behind you. With its powerful, matched subwoofer, you're drenched in sound from every direction. Monsoon is available as part of select new multimedia computers, or for purchase through www.monsoonpower.com or toll free at 1-877-722-8346.

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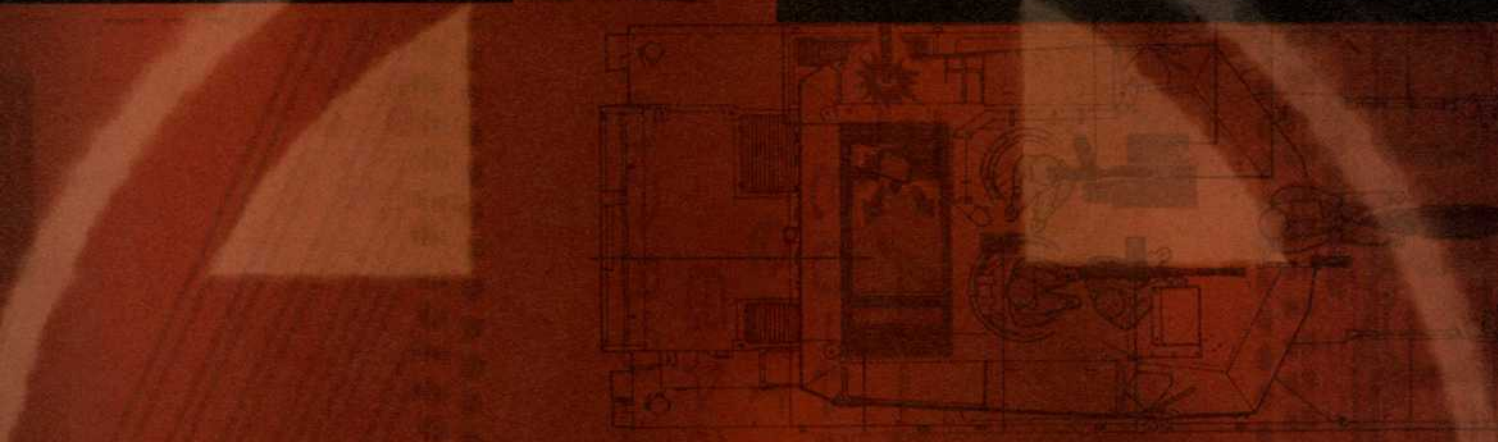
CINEMATIX

www.eidosinteractive.com

Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #192



RECOIL

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

designed for WINDOWS*95 CD-ROM

ZIPPER INTERACTIVE

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Playable demo available at: www.vie.com/recoil

Knights and Merchants

INSTALL \KMDEMO\KMDEMO.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (919) 461-0948
CATEGORY: Strategy
COMPANY: Interactive Magic
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 30MB hard-drive space; DirectX

Europe has been ravaged by war. Your once-proud kingdom has been torn to scraps — and still the battles continue. The good news is that you're a captain of the Royal Palace Guard, and you've got the gumption, will power, and brass balls needed to restore your kingdom. The bad news: you're going to have to do it province by province, battle by battle.

Make sure you build plenty of farms and wine fields; you've got to feed them people and keep 'em drunk if you want them to stick around.

Knights and Merchants is a real-time strategy game set during the Middle Ages. Based completely on that time period, it challenges you to defend your struggling little empire from attack, then build up your resources so your little kingdom can grow and grow and grow.

The demo lets you try out two missions from the full game: "Go to Battle" and "Build a Town." "Go to Battle" whisks you away to a far-off battlefield — the mission here is very simple: duke it out and kick some ass. To get in there and whomp up on someone, left-click the unit you wish to use, and then right-click on the location where you want to send them. If you want to attack a unit, right-click on the enemy, and your boys will charge in and crack some skulls.

"Build a Town" lets you try your hand at running a medieval city. This is a bit more complex than bashing heads. You have all the military units from before, but you've also got a group of peasants to push around. There are four options available to you while playing in this mode, and all four appear on the left-hand side of the screen. The far left icon is Building Selection, which lets you build buildings, plants crops, and create roads. The next one to the right is Distribution of Wares, which of course lets you determine how your wares are distributed. Next in line is Statistics (the game everyone loves to play), followed by Options, where you can fiddle with game settings.

The menu buttons to the left represent game options. Take the time to check them out.

To build something, select what you want to build — like a road — and click the area of the map where you want to build the road. Your peasants will trot over and start working. A scroll will appear at the bottom of the screen; it will provide you with additional help.

F-16: Multirole Fighter

INSTALL \F16DEMO\SETUP.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (818) 878-0325
CATEGORY: Simulation
COMPANY: 3DO Company
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 41MB hard-drive space; TCP/IP Internet connection for multi-player; DirectX

If there's one thing that gamers can't seem to get enough of, it's combat flight sims. There's nothing finer than taking to the skies and blowing the crap out of some poor sucker who never sees it coming. Lock on with those missiles, chase that bandit down, and make that anti-American pig-licker taste the full might and fury of the United States military. Bad guys look so pretty when they're burning up.

No...I've been hit! If you're damaged too badly, your plane is going to come down in a big way. Better hope they can find your dog tags!

The demo of *F-16* lets you wreak airborne havoc in one single-player mission and gives you a shot at Internet multi-play on Novaworld. When you start the demo, you're offered three choices: Quick Mission, Multi-Player, and Options. Options lets you configure many aspects of the game, including video, audio, and flight model, which lets you determine how authentic the sim will be. Exit out and click on Quick Mission to start the single-player level.

The first thing you'll want to do is start your engines — press 0 to bring them up to 100 percent thrust, and you'll start to roll down the runway. Once you get up to speed, lift off. Soon you'll encounter some planes that have no business flying around in your neck of the woods. Teach 'em a lesson.

To play a multi-player game, click the Multi-player tab, select the type of web browser you have, then hit Connect. A list of available servers will pop up.

SPECIAL NOTE: The technical support number listed in *The CD*'s interface is incorrect. The correct tech support number is: (818) 878-0325.

CONTROL KEYS

Pitch Down	↑
Pitch Up	↓
Bank Left	←
Bank Right	→
Brakes	B
Gear Up/Down	G
Fire Cannon	F
Select Next Weapon	/
Next Target	Tab
Cycle Targets	\
Engines Off	5
25% Throttle	7
50% Throttle	8
75% Throttle	9
Full Throttle	0
Afterburner	Backspace
Cockpit View	F1

West Front

INSTALL \WESTDEMO\SETUP.EXE
TECH SUPPORT *www.talonsoft.com/tech_support*
CATEGORY: Strategy
COMPANY: TalonSoft
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 10MB hard-drive space; mouse

On June 6th, 1944, thousands of allied troops stormed Omaha Beach in what would become the largest invasion in the history of warfare. That battle was one of the bloodiest moments of the war, but in the end the sacrifices paid off and the tide of the conflict was turned.

The folks at TalonSoft have created *West Front*, which lets you experience first-hand one of the greatest battles of all time. You can play as either the Axis or the Allies in this turn-based strategy game. When the demo begins, select the AI control for both sides (either human AI or computer AI), and the battle begins. Left-click on the unit you want to move; the bottom of the screen contains a row of icons that offer you various movement options (before making your first move, be sure to hold your mouse pointer over each icon to see its function). If you control the allies, the first thing you'll need to do is move your landing craft onto the beach. After selecting a unit, right-click where you want to move the unit. Move all your boats up, then end your turn.

The first boys to land are met with heavy German fire. Get up that beach as fast as you can.

The Germans will take their turn and open fire in a big way — after they're done, unload your boats and begin to work your way up the beach.

CONTROL KEYS

Help	F1
Load/Unload Units	NUMBERPAD 0
Move Unit Up	NUMBERPAD 8
Move Unit Down	NUMBERPAD 2
Move Unit Left	NUMBERPAD 4
Move Unit Right	6
Objectives	O
Scroll Map Up	↑
Scroll Map Down	↓
Scroll Map Left	←
Scroll Map Right	→
Exit	X

It'll take some serious strategy to establish a beachhead, so plan your moves in advance. There *will* be losses, but you'll want to keep them to a minimum.

SPECIAL NOTE: You must have *The CD* in your CD-ROM drive in order to play the *West Front* demo.

Urban Assault

INSTALL \UADEMO\MSUADEMO.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (206) 637-9308
CATEGORY: Action
COMPANY: Microsoft
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 30MB hard-drive space; DirectX; mouse

In the future, the human population was nearly decimated by The Big Mistake (which was so big that no one talks about it). To make matters worse, there are Offworlders invading our planet. In order to fight them and save the precious few humans left, a process is created where machines will be linked via one human being. This person will control all the machines at once, feeling their triumphs and defeats. And — of course — you are that person.

CONTROL KEYS

Forward	↑
Backward	↓
Left	←
Right	→
Fire	Spacebar
Brake	NUMBERPAD 0
Become Squad Leader	L

The demo for *Urban Assault* contains a little multi-player action and three single-player training levels. To get to the action, click Single-Player. A map will appear, with three areas highlighted in the upper right-hand corner. These represent the missions available to you in the demo: Vehicle Creation and Control; Map/ Squad Manager; and First Blood. Start with Vehicle Creation and Control.

You play the demo from a first-person POV. Along the bottom of the screen are several menu icons — move your mouse over each one to see its function. These early missions feature a voiceover tutorial that will tell you what you should be doing. The first order of business is to construct a new unit, then move inside of that unit to control it. The almighty Voice will help you proceed from there.

The menu items along the bottom will open up a world of details and options in the demo of *Urban Assault*. Click away!

You can enter the map mode to see where the hell you are in the demo. Ah, there you are! Now go blow up some bad folks.

Sanctum

INSTALL \SANCTUM\SANCTUMCURRENT.EXE
TECH SUPPORT *help@digitaladdiction.com*
CATEGORY: Card Adventure Game
COMPANY: Digital Addiction
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 24MB RAM; 40MB hard-drive space; 800x600 resolution; TCP/IP Internet connection; Internet account

An exciting new game from Digital Addiction, *Sanctum* is a fantasy-themed, card-based roleplaying game similar to the mega-popular *Magic: The Gathering*. *Sanctum*, however, is comprised of virtual cards, allowing you to play online.

If it can capture the kind of audience *Magic: The Gathering* has, *Sanctum* could become one of the most popular online games going.

To get to the fun, click on Create Account. This will take you to the Digital Addiction web site — you'll need to register an account, enter your E-mail address, and choose a user name, a house, and an Avatar. You begin with four minions and six novices in your Sanctum; the type of characters you receive is decided by what house you choose (the house of Death, Body, Life, etc.) but you're free to choose cards from other houses.

There are many more rules and playing tips, and lots more information on card types (plus other cool stuff) at the Digital Addiction web site. Fire up your browser and head on over to *www.digitaladdiction.com*. Read through all the information, and see why *Sanctum* could to do for online gaming what *Magic: The Gathering* did for card-playing.

This is just one of the many cards featured in *Sanctum*, a new online game.

Crop Circles

INSTALL \CROPDEMO\CROP1100.EXE
TECH SUPPORT *support@zeroentertainment.com*
CATEGORY: Arcade
COMPANY: Zero Entertainment
REQUIRED: Windows 95; 16MB RAM; 32MB hard-drive space; SVGA; DirectX

Crop circles — those mysterious shapes that show up in the middle of the night. No one sees or hears anything. The next morning, an unfortunate farmer is called a fraud, and the entire incident becomes nothing more than fodder for Art Bell (nothing against Art Bell, but everyone knows he's a government informer with the mission of spreading disinformation and lies).

It's a good thing for us that the folks at Zero Entertainment decided to explain the mystery behind crop circles once and for all with their nifty little game, *Crop Circles: Escape From Planet 3*. It seems that on previous expeditions to our little planet, those alien folk have left behind data energy. You must collect that energy.

The demo lets you fly around in a little spacecraft, collect the energy, and convert cows into more fuel (another mystery explained). Be on the lookout for mad cows, pissed-off farmers, and government agents, though — they're none too pleased that you're buzzing around their heads in that fancy flying widget of yours. If they spot you, your mission is a failure.

To collect the energy, fly your craft (using the arrow keys to control your direction) over the little crop-circle area and hit the space bar. To refuel, find a nice little cow, hover over it, and hold the space bar until the cow is completely inside your ship — if you let up too soon, the cow will fall.

Fly around looking for the data energy. Since you can't fly across the corn, you'll need to find another way.

Hexplore

INSTALL \HEXPLORE\HEXPLORE.EXE
TECH SUPPORT *www.hexplore.com*
CATEGORY: Roleplaying
COMPANY: Infogrames Multimedia
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Pentium; 16MB RAM; 20MB hard-drive space; SVGA; DirectX

That evil guy, Garkham, Grand Master of the Black Magicians, is up to his old tricks again. It seems he's not content at being the Grand Master; he wants the whole ball of wax. You see, there's this little book called the Book of Hexplore. If Garkham and his hordes of evil magicians get their hands on it, the world is going to be in the crapper real quick.

Oof! Those guys pack a punch. Better start fighting back, or your life will be over right quick.

The demo on our CD will provide you with some instruction as you pass the mouse across hot-spots on the screen.

The demo lets you try out a couple of missions from the full game. Like any roleplaying game worth its salt, you'll need to do some adventuring, collect weapons, meet people, and even have some folks join up with you. Your goal? Why, to get the Book of Hexplore first, of course.

You control Mac Bride with the mouse. Click where you him want to go, and Mac Bride will head on over there. To collect an item, click on it; when you want to fight someone, right-click on them. Be sure to watch yourself, though, because the baddies are tricky, and they'll try to sneak up on you. The levels included in the demo feature a brief tutorial, which will further explain how the game is played.

Your TEAM is dug in 5 miles west of the extraction point.
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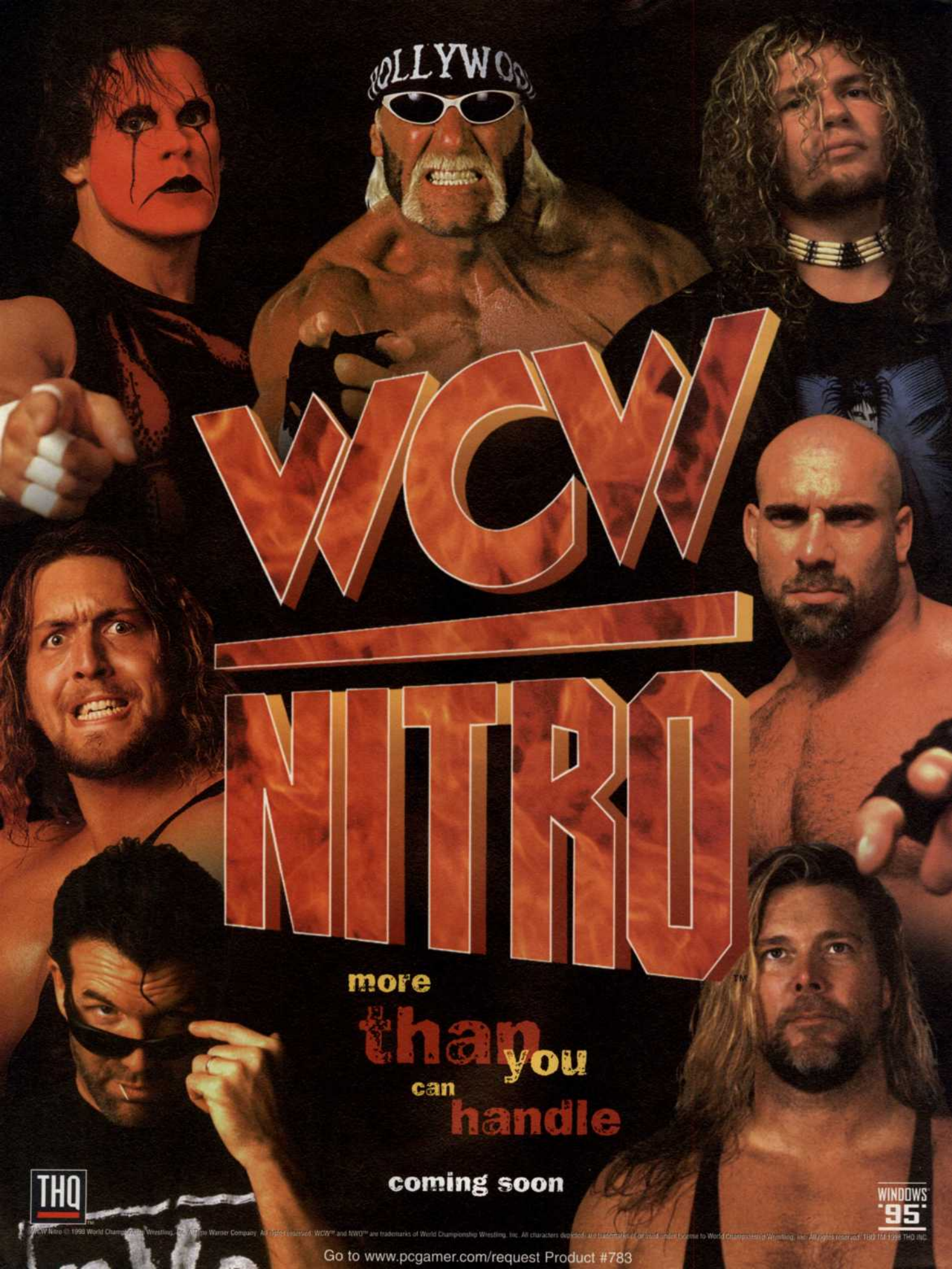

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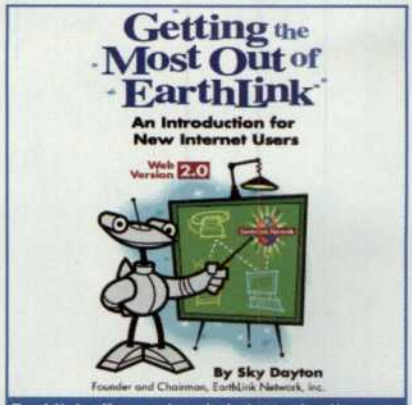
Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #783

Earthlink

INSTALL \EARTHL\SETUP.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (800) 395-8410
CATEGORY: Online service
COMPANY: Earthlink
REQUIRED: 486; 8MB RAM; 15MB HD space; SVGA; Windows 3.1 or higher; 9600bps modem



Earthlink offers a virtual plethora of online support features, and it's all only a click away.

EarthLink Network, winner of the 1997 *PC Magazine* Editors' Choice Award for Best Internet Service Provider, supports all kinds of Internet games and even has its own online gaming site (*www.thearena.com*). EarthLink membership includes unlimited Internet access, unlimited E-mail, a free 6MB of space for your own web site, a free subscription to *bLink*, EarthLink's newsletter, a fully customizable Personal Start page, and your choice of browser.

EarthLink is renowned for its 24/7, around the clock superior custom service and tech support, so if you find yourself with questions, rest assured that EarthLink will have a friendly representative standing by to help you out.

To get you started, EarthLink offers *PC Gamer* readers a 15-day free trial, plus free set-up (a savings of $25!). After that, you'll be billed $19.95 a month unless you cancel.

Take that exceptional value, toss in bundles of local access numbers, and loads and loads of cool features, and Earthlink is presenting one opportunity that you can't afford to pass up.

So what are you waiting for? Fire up that modem, load up the goodies, and get ready to start surfing the Internet Earthlink style!

MindSpring

INSTALL \MSPRING\SETUP.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (800) 719-4660
CATEGORY: Online service
COMPANY: MindSpring
REQUIRED: 486; 8MB RAM; 25MB HD space; SVGA; Windows 3.1+; 14.4Kbps or faster modem

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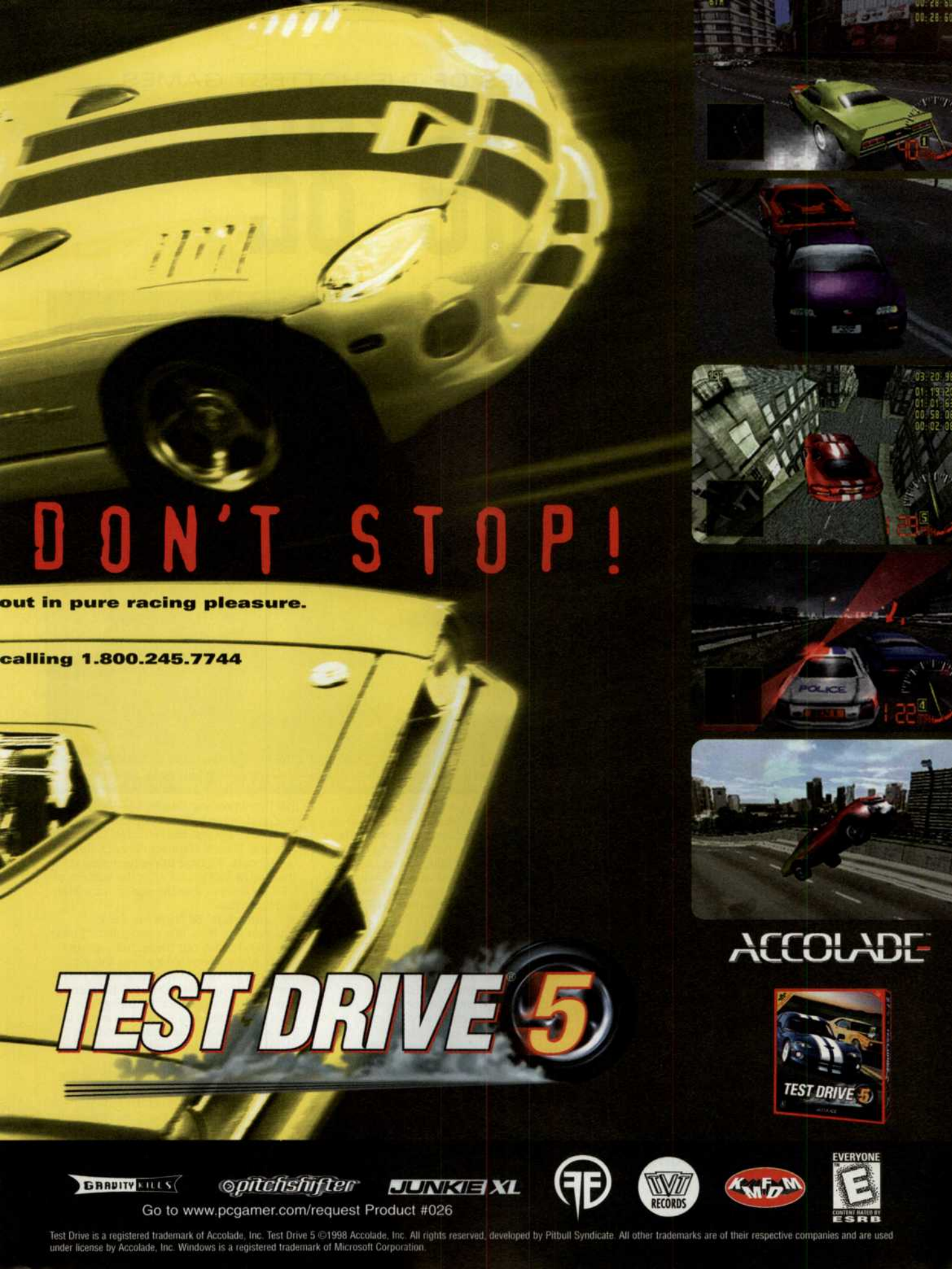

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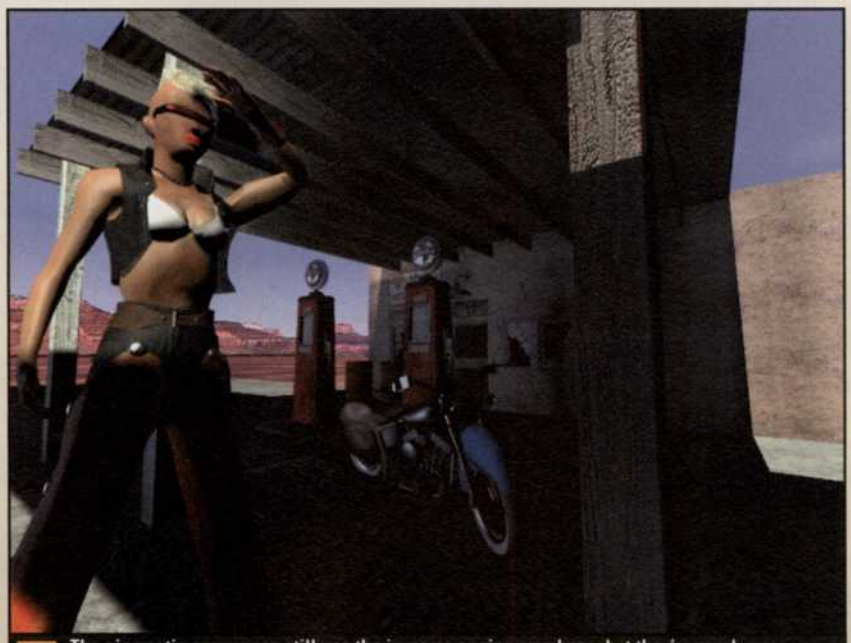
Interstate '82

Retro-chic is back... again!

Pop some Loverboy into the deck, pull on those white socks (or don't wear any socks at all), and feather your hair: It's time for a nostalgic drivin' trip back to the good old 1980s.

—T. Liam McDonald



The cinematic sequences still use the in-game engine as a base, but they're much more sophisticated than those scene in *Interstate '76*. The characters even have mouths now!

FYI. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Action
Developer: Activision
Publisher: Activision, (800) 477-3650
www.activision.com
Percentage Complete: 80%

In a nutshell:

Interstate '76 blew everybody away last year with its killer combination of high-octane action and funky 1970s nostalgia. Now it's time to drive, crash, jump and kill your way through the infamous "me decade" in the sequel to the hippest racing game ever created. Hold on to your hats, Van Halen fans!

What's so special?

The engine is all-new, unlike the creaky ***Mech-Warrior II*** engine used for ***Interstate'76***. With a host of new multi-player features, improved physics, and new cars and weapons, it should be a natural for anyone who dug the original. And dig those '80s-style music tracks!

And when's it coming out?

Spring 1999

It's six years later. Groove Champion is on his own as an auto-vigilante. He goes undercover to bust up a ring of bad dudes running greenbacks into Mexico with the help of the U.S. Government and the Contras. Since he's getting a little long in the tooth, and is down to only one leg, he decides to leave the heroics to someone younger and tries to slip away ... a little too late. The bad guys nab him and put him on ice. Groove's in a sticky situation.

Enter his younger sister Skye Champion, a biker chick who takes on the identity of her dead sister, Jade. With the help of Groove's sharp-dressed, Jeri-curled ex-partner Taurus, she's gonna get her bro back, dig?

There's something about Activision's Interstate games where you always wind up sounding like someone from *The Mod Squad*. That's because the games have *style*. *Interstate '76* thrust us, willingly or not, into the funked-up groove of a mid-seventies cop show set in an alternate universe where the gas crisis has spawned "auto-vigilantes" hungry for justice. Now that *The Wedding Singer*, VH-1's *The Big '80s*, and other dubious pop culture ventures have shoved the retro feel of *Family Ties* and *What's Happenin'?!* back down our throats, it's time to create a similar, alternative 1980s, and after the success of *I-'76*, Activision was the perfect candidate to do just that.

Interstate '82 Director Zack Norman is a true '80s evangelist. "I hear you all whining out there, 'why do the '80s!? Man, everything about the eighties *sucked*!' Yeah well that's what everyone said about the '70s, and the game was cool, so stop your whining," he says. "Did I tell you Groove is really into The Knack, which is understandable given the fact that he wears a checkerboard cutoff tee shirt."

As the man who helped pull off the retro-cool atmosphere of *I-'76*, he may just be able to do it. With the new technology underpinning the game, his job is halfway done. Activision has built its first truly new graphics engine since *Mech-Warrior II*, and this one has some real potential. It's called "Dark Side," for no apparent reason, and it's at the core of both *I-'82* and *Heavy Gear II*. Built from

http://pc.ign.com

Like its predecessor, *Interstate '82* will offer a wide range of vehicles, from the mundane to the wacky to the out-and-out insane. This old-style pick-up is one of the many to choose from.

the ground-up as a hardware-only renderer, it supports strong terrain modeling and is able to crank out "buttloads of polygons," according to Norman. "It's hardware dedicated, so it's hot and fast. The engine has an LDM handler (that stands for Large Driveble Mesh — it's a name from the *I-'76* days) which allows us to display *Quake II*-like environments. 3D hardware lets us do a lot of cool render tricks, which will rock like granite. Also, the terrain doesn't 'pop'."

The goal is to simply make everything look and perform better, from the cut scenes to the in-game action. Cinematics are stylized, but are more detailed and complex than the mouth-less, square figures of *I-'76*. Graphics and texturing are substantially improved, for a sharp, clear look. Special environmental effects like fog, rain, and lightning give action a dynamic feel. The physics model has also been ratcheted up a few notches, so you won't be driving up sheer mountains and performing impossible moves. As Norman says, "We want the car to be a blast to drive *and* behave realistically when it rolls and collides with things. Traditionally 'realistic physics' and 'fun to drive' are at odds. We want the physics to feel hyper-real and at the same time feel super-fun. We have to walk that tightrope. I think driving *I-'82* cars will be kinda like getting hit in the back of the head with a step-ladder of flavor."

Gameplay itself will be more complex, with an array of new features and options. Missions take place in deserts, cities, mines, and other complex locations in and around Vegas, Norman says. "Some will be desolate like *I-'76* missions, others will be packed with pedestrians and other drivers, creepers, and normals. Some take place in a *huge* Vegas map, others underground or in nutty places like knotted freeway cloverleaves." So far, there are thirty missions across twenty individual levels.

"I think driving *Interstate '82* cars will be kinda like getting hit in the back of the head with a step-ladder of flavor."

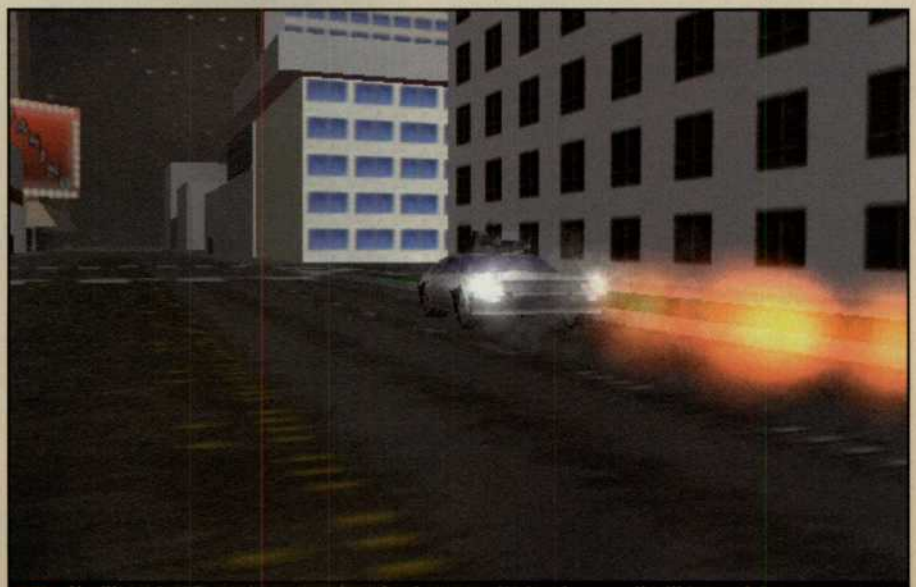
—ZACK NORMAN, DIRECTOR, *INTERSTATE '82*

Adding to the depth of gameplay is the ability to get out of your car and hit the battlefield. Some missions require you to change vehicles to complete the objective. Outside of your car, you can enter other vehicles, throw switches, escape a ruined car, shoot, and kill drivers to take their place. You can even pop into a bunker and operate heavy gun emplacements. Norman gives some tasty examples: "Is the opening to the sewers under Vegas too narrow to drive your car through? Guess you'll have to jack some fool for a motorcycle and go in. Chasm too far to jump? Try the helicopter!"

Some forty driveable vehicles are planned, combining some familiar from *I-'76*, such as '60s and '70s muscle cars, with more exotic, '80s-style wheels. Activision isn't doing any particular licensing for real cars this time out, but some hallmark-'80s TV wheels should be included. Cars styled after those in *Magnum PI*, *Miami Vice*, and even *Knight Rider* (remember K.I.T.T.?) should be there, along with a DeLorean — and there are even plans for a heavily armed golf cart (for the DeathMatch golf course level).

A new drag-and-drop interface gives access to a whole batch of new of weapons, which fall into three categories. "Force based" weapons are stopped only by armor. "Energy" weapons are stopped only by energy shielding. Most intriguing of all are the new "karpoons": harpoons that stick into an enemy's armor and do nasty things to the car. Microwave cutting beams, structobumpers, guns, cannons, acid sprayers, carbide cutters (a la "Speed

As before, you'll be able to outfit your ride with all manner of cool weapons.



You'll need a 3D accelerator card to play *Interstate '82*, but the pay-off will be particle weapon effects and funky colored lighting that far outstrip the angular graphics of the first game.

LOOK OUT, KIDS! IT'S THE '80s AGAIN!

I grew up in the 1980s (high school class of 1986) and I can tell you: pop culture was *not* cool. My friends and I retreated into the only refuge we had: heavy metal. I didn't own Capezios or Izod shirts, I didn't listen to Duran Duran, and I didn't use Sun-In or feather my hair. You want to know why death metal became popular? Try listening to Men Without Hats and going to school with people wearing skinny ties. You'd be violent and suicidal, too.

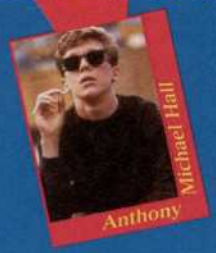
You could actually make a case for the music of the '70s: Neil Young, CSN, Skynnard, Zep, Sabbath, T-REX, and Bowie when he was still cool. But how could you possibly make a case for Kajagoogoo? ("Too-shy-shy, hush-hush, eye-to-eye"). But Zack Norman bristles at the suggest that the '80s music was not cool: "The music of 1982 wasn't cool? You sound a lot like those cats who said, 'Man the seventies were lame. Just make a game that takes place in the future.' Is that what I should have done? No thanks. Let me ask you all a question — how much funk do you have in your record collection? I bet you have one CD with a big blue car on the cover. In other words, funk (not Disco, funk) was hardly popular in the gaming community before *I-'76* and now everyone loves it because of *I-'76*.

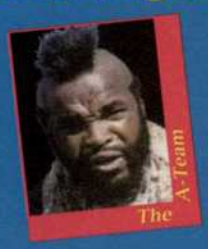
"Open your minds, people! Think back and try to get past the angst you felt about your mother asking you to take out the trash, and the cold war, and pimples, and the prom, and crap. What was your first concert!? It wasn't James Brown. I bet you went to see WHAM! Or was it The Police? Or was it Adam Ant? Killing Joke, Duran Duran, Gary Numan, David Bowie, The B52s, DEVO, Soft Cell, Berlin, XTC, the Cure; this stuff rocked. I grew up on MTV, Jack! I WANT MY MTV! Don't deny it."

Well, Norman, I can hold my head up proudly and say that my first concert was Ozzy Osbourne (with Randy Rhodes!), and I never owned anything by The Motels or Toni Basil. (Okay, so I did have a Frankie Goes to Hollywood album, but it was a gift.)

Some of the other cringe-worthy '80s set dressing you'll find in *I-'82* include "linen, salmon-colored tee shirts, Jeri-curl, wood paneling, Vans (not the car — the shoe), blue neon-rimmed bar tops, and Faux-Japanese interior design," according to Norman.

Here are a few other things not to forget:





Yes, the DeLorean is one of the cars you'll be able to drive in *Interstate '82*. Strap yourself in and prepare to burn rubber in and around Las Vegas!

***Interstate '76* was famed for how well it mixed its cinematic sequences in with the racing action, and the sequel looks to do the same while drastically ramping up the image quality.**

Racer"), and items such as the SuCCLeR (Self Contained Car Launching Rocket) are all designed to ruin the other guy's day. The MAGMA (Magnetic Guidance Missile Attractor) causes all airborne missiles to re-target on your enemy, while the CHIP (Car-launched Hypertoxic Inhalant Projectile) sprays gas inside a vehicle to force the driver out. One big weapon is based on Star Wars SDI tech: the LARS (Light Amplifying and Reflecting Satellite) weapon, which calls down a beam of reflected and magnified sunlight from orbit onto a designated target. You couldn't very well have an '80s game without an SDI weapon, could you?

DeathMatch play with have not only standard last-man-standing maps, but also some interesting variants. In Hot Potato, you have a ticking bomb onboard. Bumping another car passes the bomb off, and going back to the regeneration point resets the clock. Capture the Flag, Team DeathMatch, weapons restrictions, and password locking are among the other multiplayer features. Kills aren't rewarded for destroying vehicles in multi-play — you only score by killing the actual driver. If a car is wrecked and the driver escapes, he can find another one on foot, jack a driver to steel his wheels, or go back to the regeneration spot to get the old car back.

What's the keyword of the new *I-'82*? "*Action!*" says Norman. "We have streamlined the game to create a faster, more stable, easier to play, more fun game. It's got all the good parts of *I-'76*, killer car combat, and killer multiplayer, with none of the fluff and cumbersome interface issues. If you liked *I-'76* you will dig this game. *Interstate '82* is better, stronger, and faster."

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RP

ESRB

Starsiege Tribes

First-person action in the great outdoors

With a heavy emphasis on teamwork, tactics, and multi-player matches, the folks at Dynamix are trying to rewrite the book on 3D action games with *Starsiege Tribes*.

— Stephen Poole

***Tribes* kicks some major booty in the graphics department — provided you've got a good 3D accelerator, that is, which is becoming more and more common in gaming.**

FYI. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: First-person shooter
Developer: Dynamix
Publisher: Sierra, (800) 757-7707
www.sierra.com
Percentage Complete: 85%

In a nutshell:

Set in the Starsiege universe, *Tribes* is a multi-player-only, squad-based shooter in which teams of warriors wage battle both inside buildings and outdoors over large expanses of land. Dynamix has focused most of its energy on the multi-player aspect of gameplay.

What's so special?

Plenty. *Tribes* features mind-blowing graphics, ultra-realistic motion-capture animations, fully integrated Internet play features, and an easy-to-use mission editor that will let gamers running *Tribes* servers create exactly the sort of games they like to play.

And when's it coming out?

December 1998

Whether you're talking about real-time strategy games or first-person bloodbaths, there's no denying that one of the most challenging aspects of game development is creating good artificial intelligence (AI) routines for computer-controlled opponents.

"Doing good single-player missions requires a huge amount of work these days," says Scott Youngblood, lead designer on *Starsiege Tribes*, "because it's extremely difficult to create the AI programming required for a competitive single-player experience."

So while work progressed on *Starsiege Tribes*, Dynamix came to what some might consider a strange decision: to forgo a single-player mode and instead focus intensely on creating the best multi-player game possible. Actually, this squad-based, first-person shooter (FPS) will feature ten training missions with computer-controlled opponents — but the AI routines for the enemies in these missions are merely rudimentary because Youngblood and the *Tribes* design team feel that as far as a FPS is concerned, multi-player gaming is where the real action is.

"My experience with FPS games has been that once I've played through the single-player game, I spend the rest of my time — and I mean a *lot* of time — playing in multi-player mode," Youngblood says. "Few games are *really* good at both single-player and multi-player, so we chose to focus our efforts on where we think people want to spend their time — which is in the multi-player setting."

Still, you might think the checkered history of multi-player-only games that have been distributed through retail channels in the past — *Tanarus*, *netWAR*, and *Ultima Online* spring immediately to mind — would give Dynamix cause for concern. But there are a couple of key differences between those games and *Tribes*. Unlike *Tanarus* and *netWAR*, *Tribes* owners won't be burdened by any type of monthly fee stacked on top of what gamers pay for the software at retail. And although people who bought *netWAR* were given a free year of online play, there's really no comparison between it and the tactically rich and graphically stunning *Tribes*.

Set 1,000 years after the events in Dynamix's upcoming *Starsiege* (originally called *Earthsiege 3*), *Tribes* allows as many as eight tribes — each with a unique name, symbol, and colors — to battle it out in at least 20 missions which take place in three distinct environments: a lush, verdant world; an icy planet dominated by towering mountains and deep

gullies; and a sandy desert planet.

If you're thinking 20 missions doesn't sound like that many, think again: Youngblood points out that *Tribes* will feature a relatively easy-to-use script editor that will give users the chance to modify the missions in about every imaginable way.

"One of our goals was to bring game modification down to a level that most people could deal with," he says. "Our scripts are interpreted at run time, so no compiler will be required to change the game's behavior."

Even without user modification, the mission goals offer a nice variety of challenges. Besides what Youngblood calls "vanilla-flavored" deathmatch and Capture the Flag (CTF) missions, there's also Last Tribe Standing (like CTF, but you're kicked out of the game if you lose your flag), Neutral Flag CTF (tribes battle for a flag or multiple flags in neutral areas of the map), and Towers (capturing a flag gives you control over enemy resources and gun turrets). There'll also be several variations of what Youngblood calls "Defend/Destroy," in which each tribe can have a base and tries to destroy the other tribes' bases while defending its own. In one interesting variation, there'll be a single base that one tribe will defend against attacks from all the other tribes.

Like *OutWars*, warriors in *Tribes* are equipped with jet packs — but how far and fast they can fly, as well as how much damage they can take, will be determined by which of three types of armor they choose to wear. The lightest armor provides little protection against weapons fire, but it lets the wearer move very quickly on foot and travel huge distances with a single burst from the jet pack. Heavy armor turns the wearer into essentially a miniature HERC (the EarthSiege/Starsiege universe's giant battling robots), which means its jet pack will lift the wearer just a few yards — but it's required to carry the Heavy Mortar, capable of lobbing powerful shells from more than a kilometer away. Medium armor provides a balance of jump range and protection.

But armor is used for more than just protection. It can be outfitted with packs that increase maximum ammo count, speed up energy recharges, provide temporary shielding, jam enemy sensors, and repair damaged tribesmen and their weapons. Other packs contain items that can be carried to a spot and deployed: pulse sensors increase the range of your team's sensor network; motion sensors detect moving enemies; jammers nullify enemy pulse sensor; and remote turrets and remote cameras do just what their names imply. Tribesmen also will be able to hop into fliers and tanks, but Youngblood says these carry just a single player; plans for an APC have been put on the back burner.

The weapons in *Tribes* range from what some would consider standard issue for a futuristic shooter — energy blaster, plasma rifle, grenade launcher, chain gun — to more exotic fare like the disk launcher (fires an explosive disk well beyond a kilometer), the aforementioned heavy mortar, and the incredibly deadly sniper rifle. Combined with scopes that provide magnification as high as 20x, the sniper rifle and the tribesman manning it will be a crucial component of any squad. And then there's the targeting laser, which one tribesman can use to "paint" a target for a teammate so he can lock onto it with the heavy mortar or missile launcher.

This is all very good stuff, but what really sets *Tribes* apart is the game's most important concept: organized team play.

The sniper rifle has an incredibly long range — and packs a deadly punch.

"*Tribes* is about the ability of groups of individuals to get together and play against other groups of individuals using organized strategy," says Youngblood. And that's where the commanders come in: they can set waypoints for team members and issue orders such as Defend Base, Deploy Items, Repair Items, Hold Location, and so on.

Users can also create .WAV files to let them transmit voice commands during battle to complement the visual commands ("Cover my left flank!"), and custom animations can accompany the spoken words (like waving your left arm). In addition to the standard commands, players creating custom missions will be able to extend the commander interface to support customized commands.

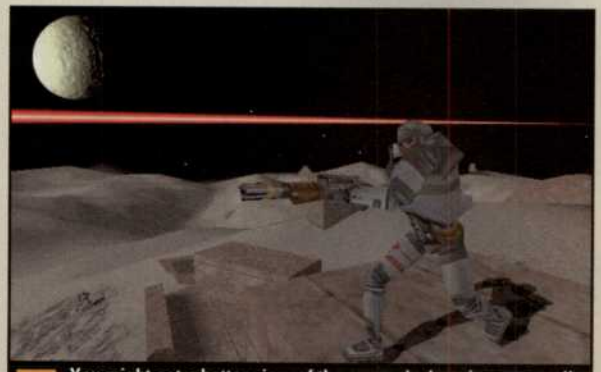
It looks like *Tribes* is being designed to make sure teamwork is the biggest key to success. Attack an enemy base by your lonesome, and defensive turrets will likely mow you down before you're able to squeeze off even a few shots; work in tandem with a team member to divert the turret's fire, on the other hand, and one of you will probably make it inside the enemy's defenses.

Another unique aspect of *Tribes* that Youngblood is particularly proud of is that these battles take place both indoors and outside.

"As far as the game engine goes, *Tribes* is unique in the world of first-person shooters," he says. "No longer are gamers limited to duking it out inside cramped interiors or fake exteriors. *Tribes* seamlessly integrates both interior and exterior settings, creating worlds previously not available in any game."

Tribes is slated for a December release date, but by the time you read this a demo may well be available at the *Tribes* web site (*http://www.starsiege.com/tribes/home.html*). If you're an action fan looking for a game that provides tactical complexity and depth as well as high-powered mayhem, you'll definitely want to stay on the lookout for this one.

PCG



You might get a better view of the enemy by hopping on a wall, but don't expect to be stay up there for very long — the enemy won't even need a scope to spot you in these conditions.

Teamwork is absolutely vital for success in *Tribes*. Just bringing in a team member to lay down covering fire for you can mean the difference between victory and a bloody death.

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Return to Krondor

Krondor returns to Sierra with good news for RPG fans

After an ill-fated collaboration with 7th Level, best-selling fantasy author Raymond E. Feist rejoins forces with the publisher of *Betrayal at Krondor* — much to our delight.

— William R. Trotter

After years in development, Raymond Feist's Krondor saga is almost ready to return to the PC in a gorgeous new roleplaying game.

Raymond E. Feist's ongoing Riftwar Saga is one of the greatest successes in the epic fantasy genre. Enormously popular with readers all over the globe, Feist has done something marvelous: he has created imaginary worlds peopled with cities that seem as real as Rome and characters that seem as real as any who actually walked the corridors of Earth's history.

Feist himself has long been a game player, so it was only natural that he joined forces with Sierra in 1993 to help script and develop the first RPG based on his work. That game was the now-legendary *Betrayal at Krondor*, and it was one of the last big games to be released on floppy disks. Since the buzz at the time was all about CD-ROM, *Betrayal* was undeservedly overshadowed by form-over-content titles like *Myst* and *The 7th Guest*. But the game got a second chance when Sierra reissued it a year later in CD format, and this time it took off like a rocket. It's been firmly ensconced in every RPG fan's hall of fame ever since.

Since 1994, *Betrayal*'s fans have been thirsting for a sequel. Unfortunately, Feist and Sierra had a falling out, and the author took the rights to do a new Krondor game to another company, 7th Level. When 7th Level vanished from the gaming scene, one of its subsidiaries — Cincinnati-based PyroTechnix, which had previously specialized in commercial applications — recognized the Feist property as a perfect chance to do something that PyroTechnix CEO Sinjin Bain had long wanted to do: produce games.

"The stuff we inherited from 7th Level was very preliminary — some pre-rendered backgrounds and document specs and character sketches," Bain says, "but it was of very high quality. Acquiring the rights to the *Krondor* sequel gave us the 'bait' to attract some first-rate graphics people and writers, all of whom happened to be big Ray Feist fans — and before we knew it, we had an outstanding development team bringing the project to life."

Nothing stands still for very long in this business, of course, and it wasn't long before Feist "kissed and made up" with Sierra, with whom PyroTechnix is now affiliated.

"It's now a very solid relationship among all three parties," Bain says. "Sierra has given us strong, unquestioning support, and Ray is very happy with the way things have worked out."

Feist did not script every word of *Return to Krondor*, but he's been intimately involved in the project for the past 18 months, fleshing out the narrative, developing the characters, and polishing the backgrounds and plot-twists. It's still filled with the classic elements of a fantasy

Yep, I'm one scary dude. Judging by the poor fashion statement this guy is making, he must be a baddie. Feist's world will be full of creeps like this.

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Roleplaying
Developer: PyroTechnix Incorporated
Publisher: Sierra, (800) 757-7707
www.sierra.com
Percentage Complete: 85%

In a nutshell:

Popular author Raymond E. Feist is back, and his story sounds promising: A pirate attempts to seize the most powerful relic of the Ishapian Church: the Tear of the Gods. Your adventurers will retrieve this potent artifact, but not without becoming ensnared in a violent, three-sided conflict to determine the fate of their world.

What's so special?

The original collaboration between Feist and Sierra, *Betrayal at Krondor*, was one of the classiest, most involving RPGs ever. If the cutting-edge sequel is equally gripping, *Return to Krondor* will be a must-have for every computer roleplayer.

And when's it coming out?

November 1998

http://pc.ign.com

Nobody said that this was going to be easy... After being jumped by a group of sword-wielding ghouls the party makes ready to swap steel and trade blows.

high adventure. My hope is that even players who've never tried an RPG before will be curious enough to give this game a shot — and once they do, they'll be hooked."

Return to Krondor begins approximately a year after the events of *Betrayal*. Prince Arutha still rules Krondor, and Pug is still the master magician at Stardock, although he makes only a cameo appearance in the sequel. His son, William, however, becomes a major party member — William has an inherited gift for magic, but has chosen the path of a warrior instead.

See the extract from Feist's latest Krondor novel on page 188

In true swashbuckling fashion, the game begins with a bloody battle at sea. The cruel mercenary pirate, Bear, has been hired by Sidi, an evil magician. Bear's assignment is to waylay an Ishapian transport carrying the legendary Tear of the Gods, a religious artifact of awesome power. If it falls into Sidi's possession, he can achieve direct linkage with Nalor, the god of evil, and become his agent in the world.

Before Bear sets out on his voyage, Sidi gives him an amulet guaranteeing

Krondor is a place of strange locations and even stranger creatures. Let's hope these goblins are friendly, or this could get ugly.

RPG (magic, monsters, and exotic, sometimes sinister environments), but its design takes the emphasis off of the old hack-and-slash, dungeon-crawl cliches and surrounds its fantasy elements with all the plausibility of historical fiction. Feist himself likes to say: "I don't write fantasy; I write historical novels about an imaginary place."

Bain agrees with that concept wholeheartedly: "I'm hoping that *Return to Krondor* will have the same crossover appeal as, say, *Panzer General* did for wargames. The traditionalists — the hardcore RPG fans — will find everything they want, but the story has such texture, such literary polish, that it should find a broad audience with gamers who are not necessarily crusty old veterans of the Dungeons & Dragons era but who simply love to immerse themselves in a tale of

The Creator Speaks

Raymond E. Feist is a very approachable guy, and he loves talking about his work — not to mention any other topic under the sun. Get him started on the subject of his pride and joy — the world of Midkemia and the novels he's set there — and he's good for hours. Here's some of what he had to say:

"When I was in college, I got sucked into fantasy roleplaying with a pretty deep bunch of people. They created Midkemia — I'm only writing about it. They were the architects of that world, and while I contributed to it, I'm certainly not the sole creator. But there was a clear differentiation between the game world we were playing in and the five centuries of its previous history, which is where my stories take place. That freed me up in a lot of ways. Working backwards, I could create a huge evolutionary path where one situation generated another; it gives the books a sense of real history, I think. I didn't have to do much world-building; the world was already there, which freed me to concentrate on what interests me most: why people do the heroic, stupid, vicious, inspiring things they do within a given historical context."

"One of our discussions focused on the question: would magic take the place of science? But science is a process — you can't go out and buy a bottle of science; it's a process that thinking people always arrive at. We finally concluded that magic should be thought of as a kind of technology — I mean, if you want to build something, it's a lot cheaper to hire a magician to cast a spell and conjure it than it is to hire 12 burly guys to go out and build it."

"What I really love is that other people are adapting my work in their own, personal ways, in the games especially. It's been a treat to see some of the artwork in* Return to Krondor *— I've seen buildings that I described cursorily in my prose brought to life with a vividness that startled me. I'm just as fond of the characters that the other writers developed as I am of the ones taken from my books. It's been a very energetic, dynamic, experience."

If scenes like this are any indication, *Return to Krondor* may be one of the best-looking roleplaying games to come along in a long time, thanks to gorgeous texture work and eye-popping effects.

The interface will make things as simple as possible. Smart icons will change depending on the location of the cursor, and the camera angles change depending on the position of the characters.

him immense power and protection from Ishapian magic. What Bear doesn't know is that the amulet is also a multiplier of evil that twists his already dark soul into the service of Nalor. Bear gets a little carried away when he overtakes the Ishapian transport; instead of simply capturing and looting it, he slaughters everyone in sight and sinks the ship, taking the priceless Tear of the Gods to the bottom.

Aghast at the changes he sees come over Bear, First Mate Knute jumps ship and seeks refuge in the Rainbow Parrot inn. Unfortunately, Knute's first priority is to get stinking drunk, which he quickly does — and after bragging about what a bloodthirsty pirate he is, he finds himself under arrest. Meanwhile, the wrathful

The opening chapter of the game takes place in the city of Krondor itself.

Bear has returned and is trying to persuade the Wrecker's Guild to help him retrieve the lost artifact.

In one way or another, all of the game's major characters are drawn into this situation, each for his or her own reasons. As the game develops, it becomes apparent that there is a vicious three-way struggle between various factions to who all want to gain control of the sunken artifact.

Each chapter contains a quest, the completion of which brings the player closer to the overall goal of recovering the Tear. Different characters therefore come and go on mini-quests, but none actually leaves the game permanently. The effect, Bain hopes, will be to "place the gamer inside the heart of a Raymond Feist novel."

The original Krondor game's turn-based, third-person-perspective combat system was one its most popular elements, and PyroTechnix isn't trying to reinvent the wheel with *Return* — only to improve on it. Battles take place inside the same 3D environments as navigation, so the transition from travel to combat is seamless.

For example, say your characters are strolling through the Poor Quarter of Krondor when a gang of thugs jumps them. Everyone draws weapons, and there's a brief pause while the game engine determines which side gets the first move — but all environmental objects, NPCs, items, and obstacles that were visible before the encounter remain right where they are. There's no sense of being temporarily withdrawn from the virtual game world and compelled to fight in an artificial, boardgame-style arena.

Instead of the pre-rendered 2D sprites seen in the original game, the characters engaged in battle are now real-time 3D models based on the latest motion-capture technology. Attackers employ a multitude of cut, thrust, and slash motions, while opponents parry, dodge, and wince with pain when hit.

Characters can concentrate on defense as well as attack, and can even choose to defend characters other than themselves. Characters can switch weapons, step back and retrieve items from their packs, and interact fully with every object in their environment.

Magic, of course, must play a role equal to that of swordsmanship in a game like this. The approximately 60 spells available to the player are arranged in six "paths," each focusing on a particular magical theme: the Path of the Mind, for instance, or the Path of Flames. Mages can simply hurl lightning bolts and electrocute their enemies, or they can choose more subtle methods, such as scrambling the brains of an opponent for a period of time.

Mere spell-casting, of course, is nothing new in this kind of game. What's more interesting, and certainly more refreshing, is the Path of Alchemy. Characters who want to become proficient alchemists must either purchase or somehow uncover an Alchemy Lab — a set of alembics, thurifers, and other gizmos based on authentic medieval alchemic lore. The more components a character collects, the subtler and more potent his spells can become.

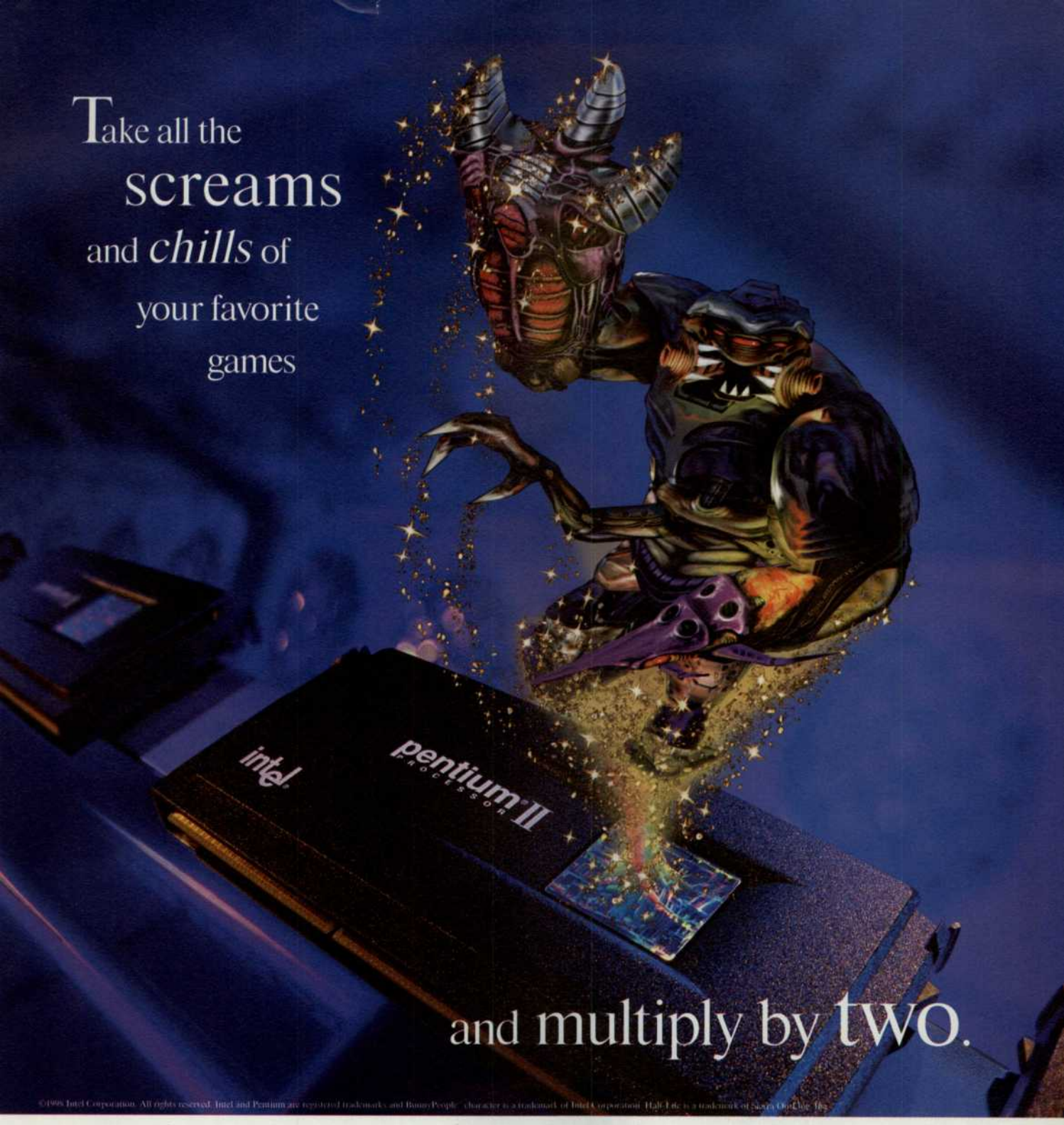
Characters can work on their spells while camped or while spending the night in a town. First, they have to acquire recipes, either by buying them or by finding them in treasure troves. Impatient alchemists can try concocting their own recipes based on whatever implements they've got and whatever knowledge they've absorbed while playing the game (plus a dose of intuition), but a failed recipe can result in unpleasant — and potentially fatal — consequences for the alchemist and anyone in the immediate vicinity.

> **"I don't write fantasy; I write historical novels about an imaginary place."**
>
> —RAYMOND E. FEIST, AUTHOR

Return to Krondor's world is made up of 200 locations and more than 2,000 per-rendered backgrounds designed using a combination of *3D Studio* and *Lightwave*, then fine-tuned with *Photoshop* down to the finest level of detail. Characters are rendered in even greater detail; Bain says each has a stock of 300-400 facial expressions, and there are more than 180 characters in the game. And as you can tell from the screensshots shown here, *Return* is set to be one of the prettiest RPGs yet.

Given Feist's enthusiastic participation and the designers' devotion to "getting it right" with regard to the details of the epic Riftwar Saga, *Return to Krondor* looks like it has all the right ingredients to help keep the current roleplaying renaissance rolling — and to raise the bar for future games. PCG

http://pc.ign.com



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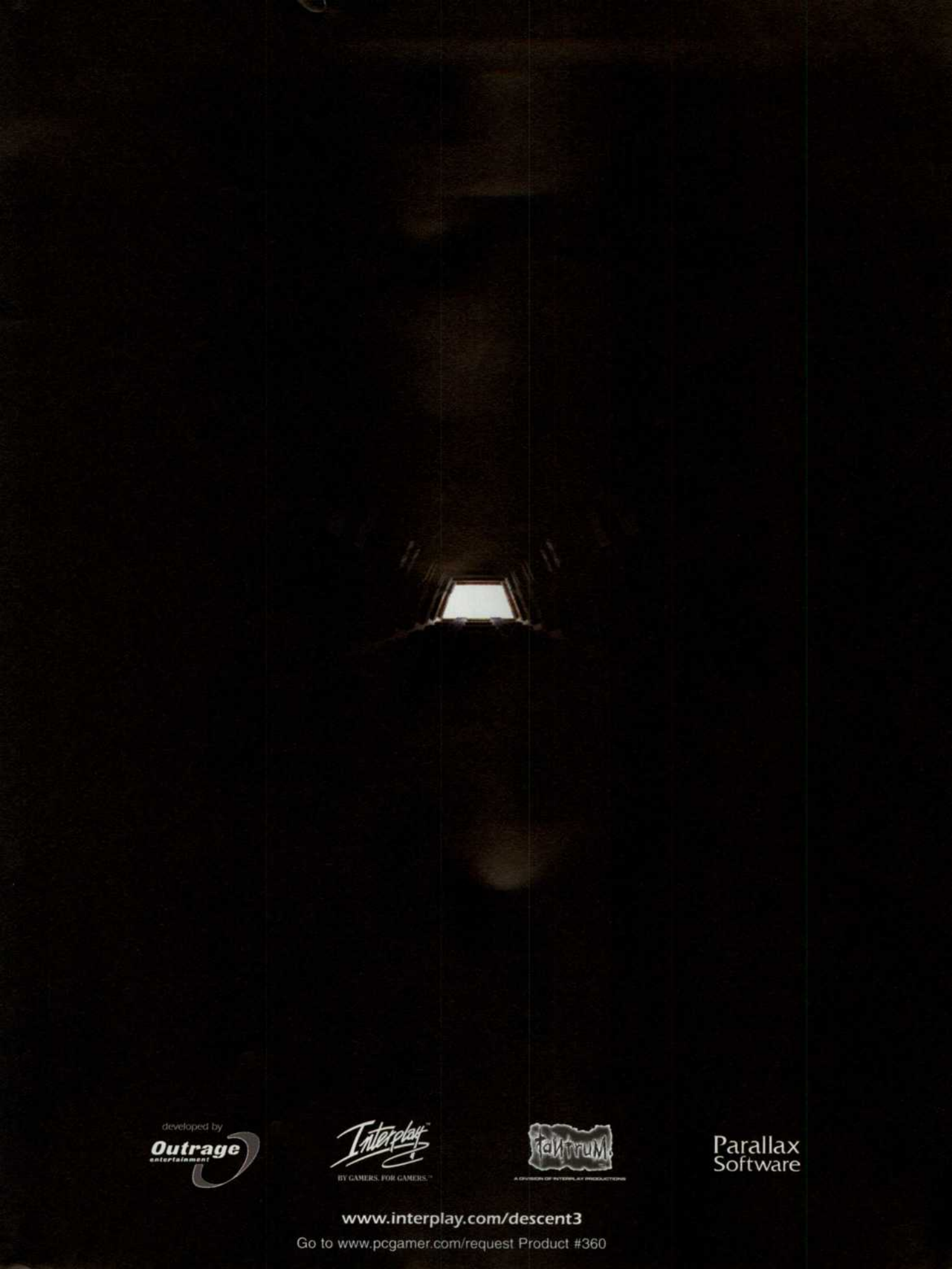
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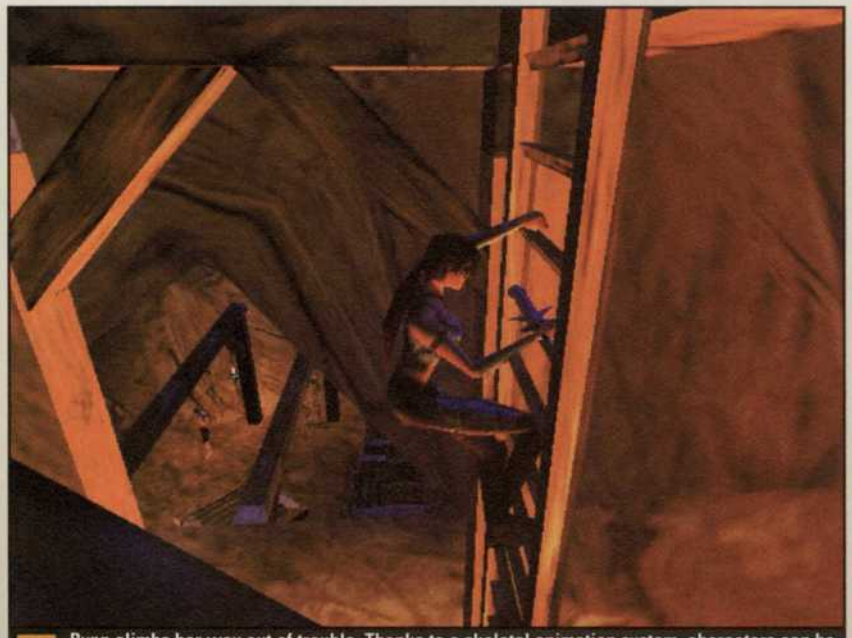
Drakan: Order of the

Don't you dare call him 'Puff!'

Psygnosis transports gamers to the beautiful realm of *Drakan*, where humans and dragons co-exist to destroy the forces of evil in this medieval action-adventure romp.

— Colin Williamson



Rynn climbs her way out of trouble. Thanks to a skeletal animation system, characters can be given dozens of individual, natural-looking movements.

FYI. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Action
Developer: Surreal Software
Publisher: Psygnosis, (415) 655-8000
www.psygnosis.com
Percentage Complete: 70%

In a nutshell:

Drakan is a fantasy-adventure game with multiple modes of play — you can fly around on a giant dragon, or go questing on foot. You play a Lara Croft-like character who is on a quest for revenge for the kidnapping of her brother. You and a dragon named Arokh will battle together until the end.

What's so special?

Imagine the combat and perspective of *Tomb Raider* mixed with the puzzle-solving of *Quest for Glory* — and you've only begun to scratch the surface of Surreal's *Drakan*. This medieval action-adventure game looks to set a whole new standard in the genre.

And when's it coming out?

First quarter 1999

Throughout the course of computer gaming history, the dragon has almost *always* been the bad guy. Let's face it — in 99 percent of all fantasy games, it's the established custom to track down one of the legendary fire-breathing beasts and *kick its ass!* Few people realize that dragons — just like humpback whales — are actually intelligent beings with intuitive behavior, a set social structure, and vegetarian diets. The only reason they eat entire villages is because we humans irritate them so much.

Fortunately, developer Surreal Software and publisher Psygnosis have opted to portray our winged beasties in a more politically correct light with *Drakan: Order of the Flame*, a medieval action-adventure that chronicles the teaming-up of a beautiful warrior and an ancient dragon.

Our protagonist is a Lara Croft-like femme fatale named Rynn, whose brother is snatched away from her during a raid on her village. Even though the attacking race of Wartoks decimated her home, she was left unscathed. Devastated and lusting for revenge, Rynn meets up with an old-school dragon named Arokh, who befriends her, following her orders and becoming her trusty scaled steed. Ready for the expected ass-kicking and name-taking, Rynn hops aboard and heads for the heavens. She has unwittingly become a new member of the ancient Order of the Flame — an age-old group of dragon-riding protectors.

As the game begins, Rynn is on foot. This is the game's exploratory portion, which plays similarly to *Tomb Raider* or *Fade to Black*. Any annoying camera niggles are solved by zooming in to an over-the-shoulder view whenever Rynn backs against a wall or a solid object, and the control uses a *Quake*-like mouse-look steering system.

Rynn has full freedom of movement in the entire environment during these action-adventure sequences, engaging enemies in hand-to-hand

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Flame

With décor that looks like it's straight from the mind of Wes Craven, this torture chamber is one location you don't want to be caught hanging around in. Rynn will have to face this challenge without Arokh.

combat, solving puzzles, and interacting with the game's 25 non-player characters (including Arokh himself, who is quite vocal throughout the game). As the game progresses, Rynn's diary will automatically update, reminding you of the quests you've been assigned, and tasks you still need to complete.

When the time comes for cross-country travel, you can either go by foot or hop on Arokh's back and take off. These flight sequences reveal the raw scope and scale of the gaming environment — in fact, figuring out just *where* to go can be almost overwhelming. In the air, the style of gameplay shifts dramatically — with a touch of a button, the dragon lifts off and hovers in the air. Controlling Arokh is surprisingly intuitive, hearkening back to Bullfrog's classic *Magic Carpet*. Most will prefer using the mouse, which makes the required airborne circle-strafing simple. And if you're more content with ground-based battling, you can 'drive' Arokh around. He's fast on his feet, and his fire-breathing ability makes him the medieval equivalent of a Sherman tank.

Of course, you can't take Arokh everywhere you may like to — he can't fit his burly frame into some locations, so Rynn needs to 'park' the big fellow outside and go in by herself. When you dismount Arokh, he won't just sit around — after a few minutes, he'll take off and circle through the skies, attacking any targets within your vicinity.

The world of *Drakan* is an enormous one, and there are no individual levels. Dozens of miles of terrain have been mapped out, and no expense has been spared in creating a believable world. In most third-person perspective adventures, there are locations that simply can't be explored — like the tops of castles in the distance, or rocky cliffs jutting out in a canyon. But in *Drakan*, you can go *anywhere* — Arokh can land on a dime, and the sky is, quite literally, the limit.

Drakan's custom-built engine is called *Riot*. Fully Direct3D compliant, it's able to scale the level of detail depending on your hardware accelerator, be it a stock Voodoo Graphics or a high-end TNT. It's also capable of delivering enormous worlds with a relatively high level of detail, and can draw far into the distance before fogging out. There's also support for deformable landscapes, which can create realistic earthquakes, cave-ins, and other funky effects where the ground gives way. Several of your quests will take place in subterranean caverns, castles, and other indoor environments. Fortunately, there's no visible load time, so from beginning to end, the game is seamless. While *Tomb Raider* feels as if it's made up of blocks, *Drakan*'s world looks like a very real place.

Rynn isn't afraid to take on two Wartoks at once — she's much speedier than the lumbering beasts, and can bust-a-move with that sharp axe of hers.

And that world doesn't consist of simple, static geometry — barrels can be broken, houses and trees can be set on fire with a blast of Arokh's flame-breath, and traps can be triggered. The *Riot* engine also contains some great physics code — shattered wood bounces as it would in real life, and boulders can tumble down hills and crush unsuspecting enemies. Colored lighting is in (but is not overused), and the shadowing effects are pulled off in a unique fashion that 'projects' over nearby rocks and walls.

The inventory system in *Drakan* is similar to that of *Diablo*, with Rynn's belongings stored in a grid. The fifty different weapons can be armed by clicking and dragging them onto Rynn's body. Not much has been finalized about the game's magical spells, but you'll probably get to use some mysterious sorts of wizardry in the final game. Arokh himself becomes more and more powerful as the game progresses, since the fighting spirits of his enemies enter into his system as he destroys them.

Drakan features sprawling vistas and unlimited freedom of movement — but watch out for those fireball launchers on the ground.

In the end, it looks like *Drakan* is going to be a technical tour de force with its unique gameplay, superb character designs, and copious special effects. The team plans to ship in the first quarter of 1999, and is well on track. Much of the gaming world is built, and the gameplay is down pat. *Drakan* looks like it is some fire-breathing fun you won't want to miss.

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—Computer Gaming World, September 1998

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Planescape: Torment

TSR's Planescape universe comes to life

The debut effort from Black Isle Studios, Interplay's new roleplaying division, has all the hallmarks of a potential winner. Move over *Baldur's Gate* — now there's something meatier.

— Michael Wolf

The Nameless One joins up with an empty, animated suit of armor with peculiar notions of honor, a beautiful succubus love interest, and a talking skull with a penchant for insulting others. Hey, you can't be too choosy about your friends in Planescape.

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Roleplaying
Developer: Black Isle Studios
Publisher: Interplay Productions, (800) 969-GAME
www.interplay.com
Percentage Complete: 65%

In a nutshell:

Interplay's new roleplaying division has taken the Bioware Infinity engine, used in the upcoming *Baldur's Gate*, to create a game that takes place in the Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Planescape universe. *Planescape: Torment* will be filled with dark images, frightening creatures, and some subtle dark humor.

What's so special?

The Infinity engine still hasn't been proved, but most agree that it's one of the most exciting new technologies for the RPG genre. *Torment* will modify that engine to include larger character sprites, bigger and flashier spells, and larger backgrounds. It's also the first computer game to ever take place in the Planescape universe.

And when's it coming out?

Spring 1999

Advanced Dungeons and Dragons' Planescape universe is one filled with dark imagery, nightmarish fantasy, and portals to worlds beyond human comprehension. It's a place where palaces are constructed from human regret, the laws of physics are turned on their ears, and reality is simply a reflection of a child's daydream. This is the universe where the latest roleplaying game from Black Isle Studios takes place. It's a land filled with horror and ecstasy, where the imagination is the only limit to truth.

Enter into this world a character that is immortal, yet who has already died. As a matter of fact, the main character of this bizarre new RPG has been alive for centuries, and has died thousands of times. He is "The Nameless One," also known as "The Restless One," or "The Deathless One," and other "less" names. The game starts as he wakes up on a stone slab in the middle of a mortuary, unable to remember who, or what, he is. The entire point of the game is to get the player to uncover who this character is, what he's done in his past incarnations, and figure out why he was killed and by who. Throughout the adventure, non-player characters will attempt to assassinate, befriend, betray, confuse, and harm the character. The game takes place in Sigil, a city that lies at the center of all the planes of the uni-

Needless to say, not all the denizens of Planescape are attractive.

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verse. Also known as the City of Doors, it's where everything connects to everything else.

Given the vast flexibility of the world, the guys at Black Isle Studios have the opportunity to do things no one has ever thought of in a roleplaying game before. The main character is immortal, so it will take much more than a stab wound to put him down. That means he can cut off his own limbs to use them as weapons. He can get beheaded, sliced, diced, and eviscerated, and all he'll need is a little time to heal. So, there'll be death screens to take up a player's valuable time. Sure there are a few things that will put him down for good — cremation being just one of them. But for the most part, death is not an issue. Since the character has been alive for centuries, he's also amazingly skilled. For those of you who know what it means, he will have reached at least 25th level in all major character classes in past incarnations. The game starts with his amnesia in full effect, though, so he can't remember his stronger powers. He will recall how something is done as time goes on. That lets the character cast high-level spells well before what is usual, since he's not learning them, just remembering them.

The hellish universe of Planescape also provides some gruesome ways to die, not just for the character, but also for the character's enemies. The Nameless One can kill others by ripping out their limbs and beating their owners with them. He can tear out their souls and tell them to kill their owners. He can taunt someone to death. He can even summon insects to feast on the flesh of his enemies. In other words, the game is not for the weak of heart (or stomach). The Nameless One can equip pieces of his enemies, like skinning a monster and wearing its hide as armor, or replacing his own eyeballs.

Helping to accomplish all this is the Bioware Infinity engine, the same one developed for *Baldur's Gate*. This is a gutsy move — *Baldur's Gate* hasn't hit stores yet, and so Infinity is still untested in the market. However, the guys at Black Isle have already made modifications to the engine as their game demanded. For example, unlike in *Baldur's Gate*, the player can make the characters run from location to location to speed up travel. The sprites for the player characters are larger, showing much more detail than *Baldur's Gate*. The backgrounds are also much larger, which, while making the world more detailed than *Baldur's Gate*, will bump up the system requirements a bit.

Although you can't tell from this still picture, each one of these gears moves in the actual game. The backgrounds contain detail only available through hand-constructed pre-rendering.

The view will remain isometric. Players can pause the action and deliver commands to the characters at any time by hitting a single key. When not paused, the game will continue in real-time mode. Unlike *Baldur's Gate*, however, there is no character creation. You're given a clean slate to work with, and you develop the main character's personality and abilities throughout the game by the decisions you make. Non-player characters will react accordingly to the player's actions. If you're a heartless scoundrel who kills innocents, people will fear you. If you're a do-gooder who always helps the helpless, other people will try to befriend and take advantage of you. The character is created through playing, not by rolling dice at the beginning of the game.

Unfortunately, *Planescape: Torment* will have no multi-play. Black Isle says that the design is simply too solo oriented to work well as a multi-player game. However, as the Nameless One makes his way through the game-world, he'll meet other characters who can join the party (right at the beginning, you meet a sarcastic, floating skull named Mort who guides you through the game and torments other characters). Characters that join the player include romantic love interests (which is somewhat surprising, considering what the main character looks like), and even a talking box on legs, with four arms that wield two crossbows. Although dark and gruesome, *Torment* promises to contain a lot of humor. Mort, the talking skull, continually insults and pesters the character as well as NPCs. The items in the game will have names, histories, and certain abilities. Many of them will even talk back to you. Imagine wielding a cowardly mace, or having to bully a reluctant book to share what's within its pages.

The creatures you face will range from scary to terrifying, and they'll all want a piece of you.

From what Black Isle Studios had to show us, *Torment* looks set to take the roleplaying world by storm. Its irreverent attitude, frightening characters, and bizarre locales will have many players laughing while they look over their shoulder nervously. The excellent Infinity engine is expected to deliver it all with stunning visual effects and a streamlined interface. The result could be the next big "must-have" RPG on your shopping list....

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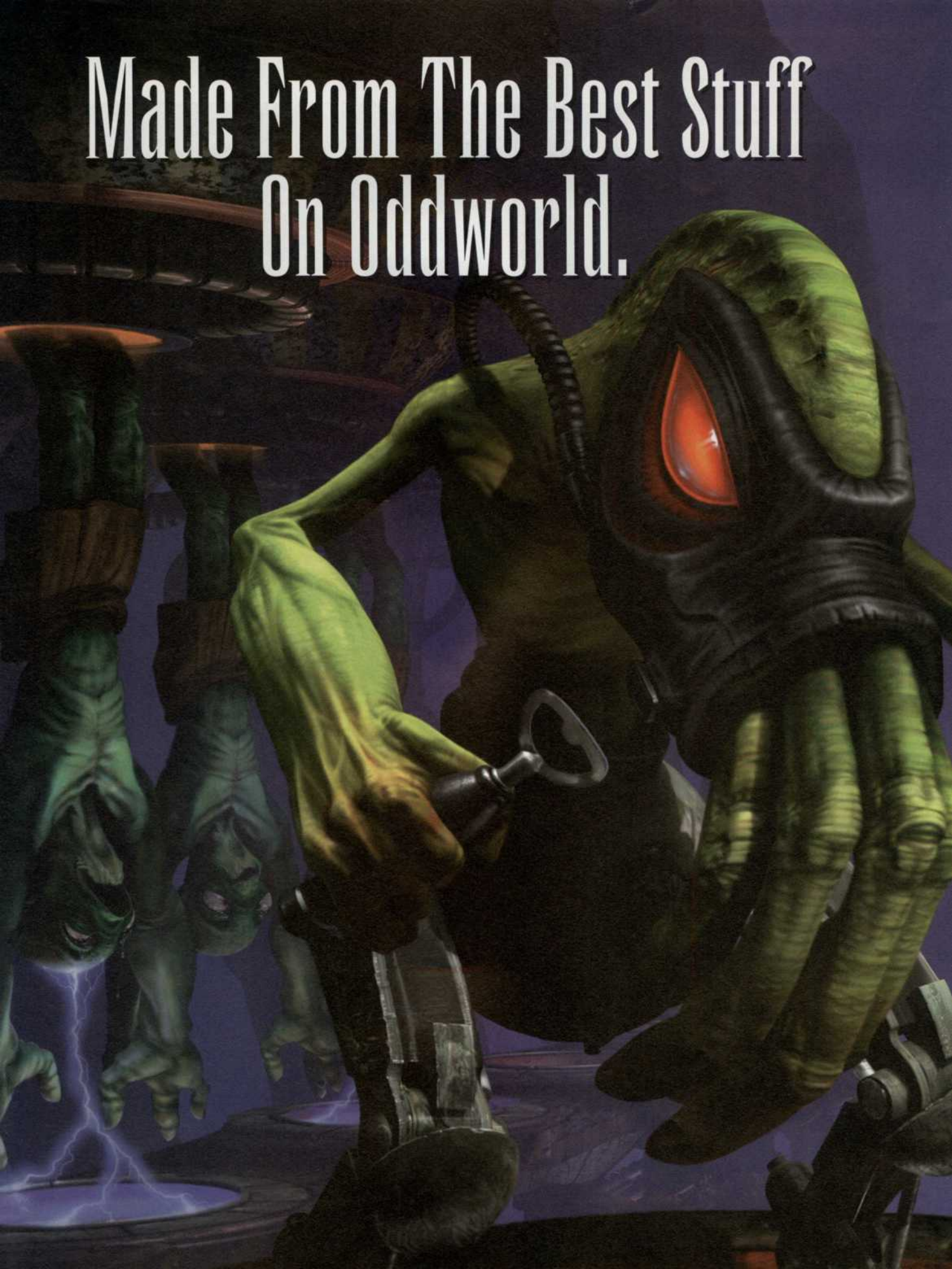
The spells you can use in *Torment* will be huge and powerful, as well as a heck of a lot of fun to watch.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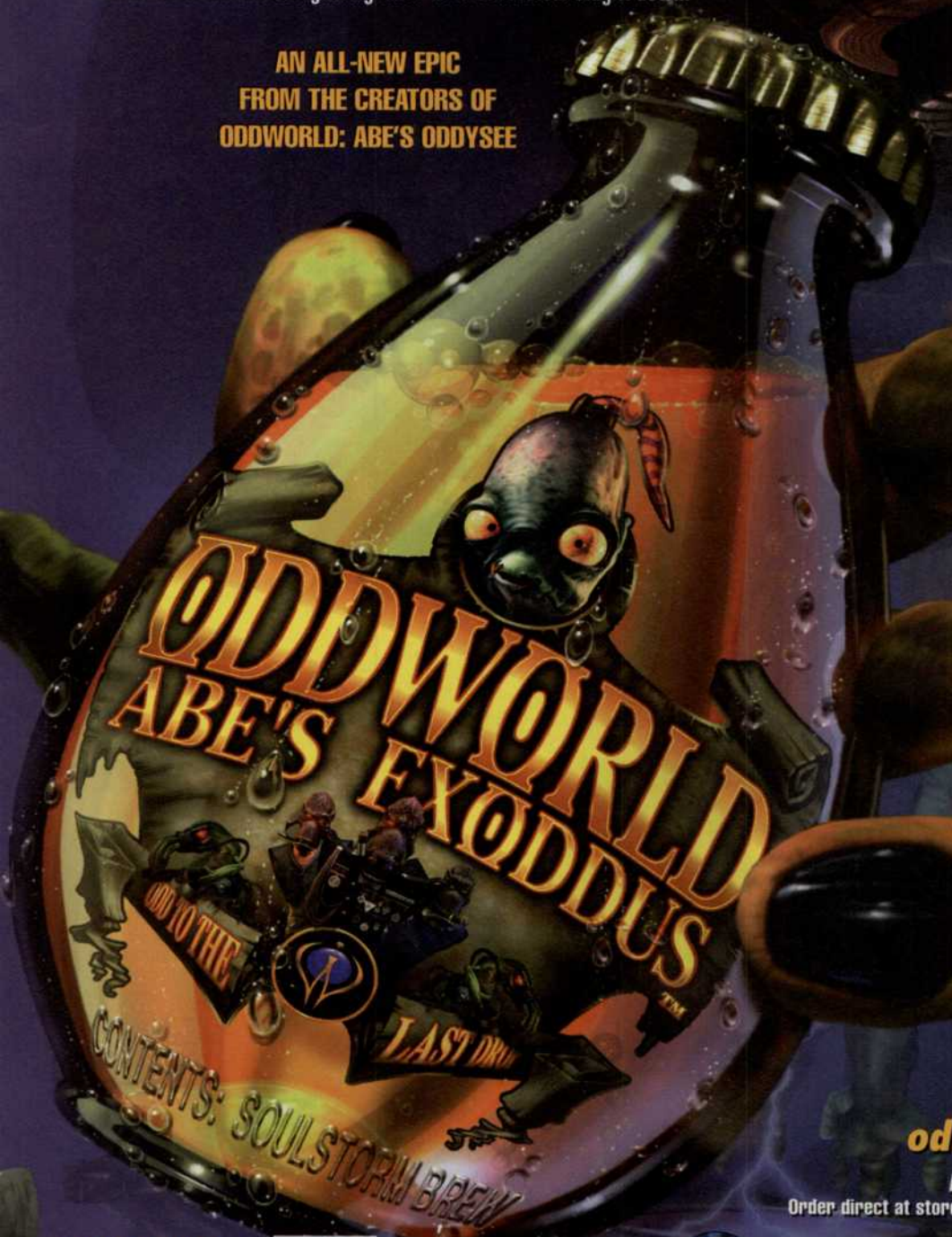

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Heretic II

Third-person magical mayhem!

Everyone's favorite fantasy actioner is back, and this time it's got the *Quake II* engine in its corner, while Raven Software is still at the helm. The result? Bliss, pure bliss.

— Joel Durham Jr.

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Action
Developer: Raven Software
Publisher: Activision, (800) 477-3650
www.activision.com
Percentage Complete: 80%

In a nutshell:

Based on the *Quake II* engine, *Heretic II* parallels the *Hexen* games as a sequel to the original *Heretic*. You step back into the leather boots of Corvus, the Sidhe (Tolkien-esque elf) hero of the first game — this time, after being lost in the spooky Outer Worlds, you're back in your homeland and ready to kick butt.

What's so special?

Raven has carved out a strong reputation by overhauling id Software's engines to create its medieval games. *Heretic II* is no exception, and Raven is also making its biggest and most daring modification to date by moving the series into the third-person perspective.

And when's it coming out?

Holidays 1998

Corvus's bow handles two types of magic arrows, one of which causes a deadly Red Rain effect similar to, but much prettier than, the Hellstaff effect from *Heretic*.

1994 was the year of the *Doom* Dynasty. Nearly all other computer games were overshadowed by id's dominant shooter, including most of the knock-offs that trickled out toward at the end of that year and into the next. In fact, the second most talked-about first-person game of the period (discounting *Doom II*) was also attributed in part to id Software, but it was actually a collaboration with an up-and-coming developing house known as Raven Software. That game, of course, was *Heretic*, the medieval shooter built on the *Doom* engine that instantly transformed Raven into a household name among gamers.

Heretic was followed by *Hexen* and *Hexen II*, and together, the three games compose a trilogy of sorts. Each game took place in a world being overrun by the armies of one of three demonic Serpent Riders from another realm, and it was up to you to defeat the dark beings. Now that all three of the Serpent Riders have been vanquished, what's next for the series? The unexpected answer: a sequel — to the *original* game.

"During the course of each of these games, a different set of heroes rose up and combated the minions of the Serpent Rider on their world, and eventually defeated him," says Dan Freed, Raven Software's Project Administrator. "*Heretic II* is picking up with the story of Corvus, the hero from *Heretic*. When

You control the third person camera in the game, so you can get a good view of Corvus in any situation. Here, he's swimming through the murky water of a cave.

Plan, Build, Explore, Anticipate...

Heretic II

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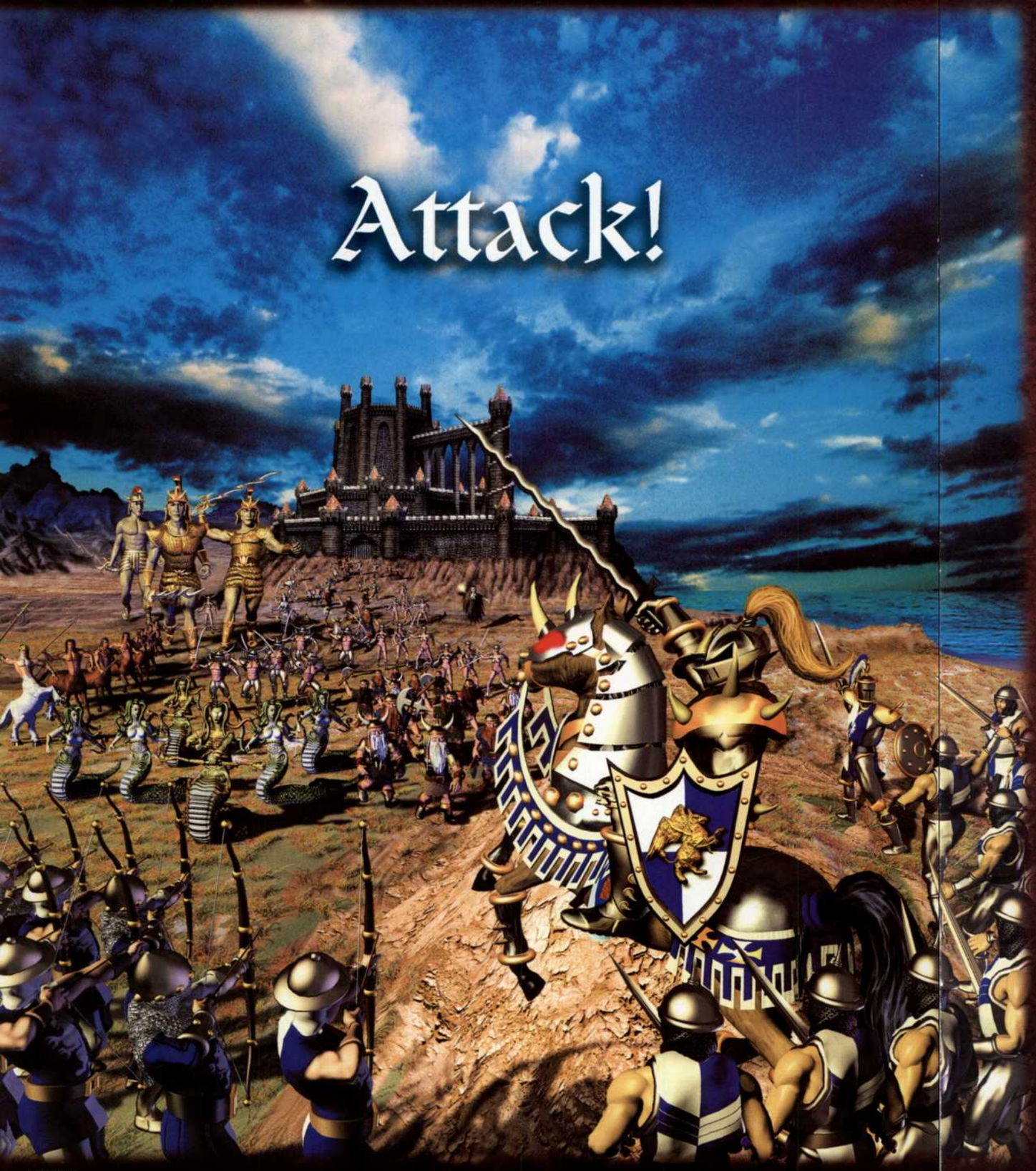

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Corvus defeated D'sparil, the first Serpent Rider. D'sparil, with his dying breath, banished Corvus to wander the Outer Worlds forever. *Heretic II* picks up with Corvus after years and years of wandering, looking for a means to return home. As the game opens, Corvus has finally found a way to get back to his homeland."

Fans of the original *Heretic* should rejoice: the fact that *Heretic II* is based on a heavily tweaked *Quake II* engine guarantees an excellent graphical experience, and Raven is working overtime to perfect the gameplay and environment.

Many gamers felt that the *Hexen* games, while fine in their own right, didn't carry on the one major element that made *Heretic* an instant classic: the atmosphere. *Heretic* was one of the first games that was truly scary, with its gothic setting, creepy ambient sounds (like the distorted church bells), and the downright frightening enemies like the cackling Warriors and the Disciples, whose haunting whispers made it hard to play the game alone at night. Happily, *Heretic II* heralds a return to the emphasis on atmosphere. "We have spent a considerable amount of time making sure we have captured a particular ambiance for the game," says Freed. "As the game progresses, this nearly sub-conscious emotion subtly changes as Corvus's situation changes."

Corvus' situation certainly fosters ambiance. The game's design has him crossing a massive continent, and levels include both towns and the beast-filled wilderness in between. "At one point, the player is in a plague-infected village," Freed says. "As the village is explored, sounds of babies crying for their lost mothers can be heard, and the streets are filled with the dead and bloated bodies of plague victims. Corvus will audibly question what the player is seeing and hearing, wondering what has happened to his people. The experience is truly made real by a combination of sound, music, art work, and game pacing."

A strong atmosphere isn't the only element to make the transition from *Heretic*. Although all of D'sparil's minions were destroyed in the original game, preventing the return of familiar monsters (like those lovable, bat-like Gargoyles), a few weapons will make a comeback. Says Freed, "It is a fine line we walked when bringing back some of these weapons because we didn't want to just rehash an old game with a new engine. *Heretic II* is an entirely new experience, but with some sense of familiarity to it. So, we decided the only weapons we would bring back 100 percent as they were in *Heretic* would be the Hellstaff and the Morph Ovum — while the Morph Ovum wasn't really classified as a weapon in *Heretic*, it is a defensive spell in *Heretic II*. Both of these function nearly identically to how they functioned in the original game."

In all, there are expected to be nine offensive weapons and four defensive weapons. Most of the weapons are spell-based, and their bright effects will push your 3D accelerator right up to the level of graphics flash-fests like *Unreal*, *Forsaken*, and *G-Police*.

In another departure from the *Hexen* games that *Heretic* fans will be grateful for, Raven has nearly abandoned the "hub" style of level handling, which requires players to move back and forth between levels to accomplish goals. "The levels will be a combination of linear levels and some fairly limited

Heretic II **will take its main character, Corvus, through towns and wilderness, where he'll battle wild beasts driven by a revamped AI. The third-person perspective lets you see Corvus as he fights.**

Some of the folks Corvus will meet are stricken with a maddening plague, like this Sidhe townie. Raven is planning to have a real sense of atmosphere felt throughout the game.

The weapons that Corvus will use will include both offensive and defensive, physical and magic based weapons.

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Move over, *Forsaken* and all of the other pretty eye-candy games: nearly every weapon in *Heretic II* features breath-taking lighting effects.

The detailed backgrounds, like this turbine driving waterfall, add to *Heretic II*'s realistic atmosphere.

Intact from *Heretic* is Corvus' melee staff, which he uses to bust this guy open like a melon. Nice shot!

hubs," says Freed. "The times that players will have to go back and forth between levels has been seriously reduced. This was done to keep the pacing and action of the game high."

Like all of the games in the Serpent Rider trilogy, *Heretic II* is based on an id engine with some serious modifications. *Heretic* added the ability to fly and to look up and down, to the *Doom* engine, and the *Hexen* games made various improvements upon their respective engines. *Heretic II* makes the biggest and most daring change yet: it adds a third-person perspective to the *Quake II* engine. "The idea to make a third-person *Heretic* game actually came about shortly after the first *Heretic* was finished," says Freed. Brian Pelletier, the *Heretic II* project director, and Steve Raffel, one of the co-owners of the company at the time, had tossed around the idea, but the technology just wasn't where it needed to be in order to do an effective job of it. They tabled the idea until about a year ago. "When we first started talking about making a sequel to *Heretic*, the idea of third-person came up again and it almost immediately stuck," says Freed.

The transition is a complete one — there won't even be an option to play from a first-person point of view. "Once the decision had been made to go with third-person," says Freed, "we talked about the possibility of including a first-person mode, but the idea was pretty quickly thrown out. We wanted to be able to take full advantage of the perspective. This included having the ability to perform incredible acrobatics. Can you imagine trying to do a back handspring in first-person? It just wouldn't work. With a purely third-person perspective, the design team has been able to build spell effects that completely encompass Corvus. There's no doubt that we are taking full advantage of the perspective.

"This perspective also allows us to focus player's attention on Corvus," Freed says. "They can identify with him because they can see him getting hurt. Players will be able to see damage on Corvus's body as he is hurt. It brings him out, as a character and as the focus of the game. He isn't a nameless warrior. He is Corvus, the slayer of D'sparil and savior of Parthoris. These are important elements to the story."

Besides the third-person perspective, Raven made a whole batch of changes to the *Quake II* engine. "We have also added a full 32-bit pallet; gone are the days of 256 colors," Freed says. "The AI has been completely rewritten, so that the monsters act differently depending on the type of enemy. This way, we have some smart creatures and some more instinctual rush-in-and-attack creatures. When appropriate, creatures can open doors, ride elevators, jump to higher elevations, and even swim."

Even with the defeat of the last of the Serpent Riders, it's good to see the *Heretic* world alive and well. Based on what we've seen so far, there's certainly plenty of life left in the series, especially with the innovative minds of Raven Software at the helm.

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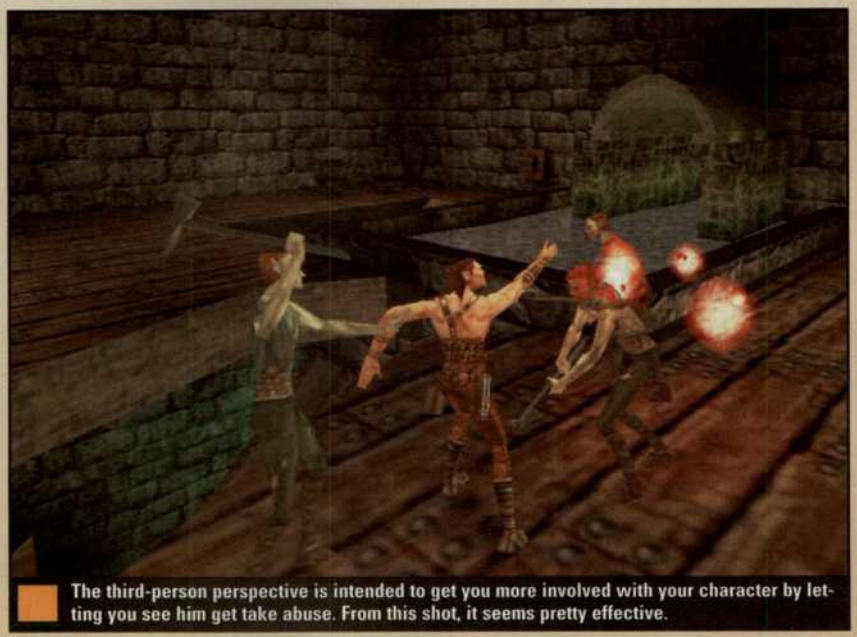

The third-person perspective is intended to get you more involved with your character by letting you see him get take abuse. From this shot, it seems pretty effective.

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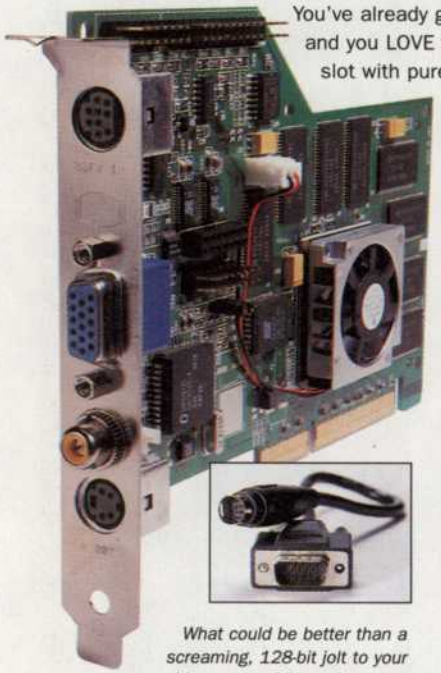

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Heavy Metal Noise

Activision readies the next Heavy Gear title

The giant robot craze is about to strike again — Activision is putting the finishing touches on its next game set in the Heavy Gear universe, appropriately titled *Heavy Gear II*. The first game made a fine replacement for Activisions's lost MechWarrior license, but the developers let just a few too many bugs slip through the cracks to make it a classic. *Heavy Gear II* is being given a brand new engine, and hopefully, will get a little more polish than its predecessor had before it hits the shelves.

The new engine will make *Heavy Gear II* a sight to behold, but for all of you Gear heads who haven't yet made the leap to a 3D accelerator, you'll be out of luck. In order to pull off the fast action and complex battlefields (including a huge increase in the number of vehicles and structures, as well as indoor fighting and realistic weather effects), a 3D accelerator card will be mandatory. By going the hardware-only route, Activision won't have to compromise any part of the game's appearance to cater to the lower end of the technological totem pole. Plus, you'll get all kinds of neat effects like fire and smoke that a software-only version just couldn't do justice to.

Gameplay is being given an overhaul as well, with new features and expanded tactics. Real squad-based tactics, such as flanking maneuvers and ambushes, will be possible, and the player will have greater control over the units under his command. The enemy AI will also be a lot better, as they adapt to your strategies and lay down cover fire to protect their teammates.

The most important new addition has to be the ability to engage in hand-to-hand combat. This was one of the features that *Heavy Gear* fans were craving most, and Activision has listened and delivered. This also is the first appearance of this feature in any of the giant robot type games that have been on the market.

As fans of the series know, ammunition is a very valuable commodity, and there are times during some of the more intense battles you may run out. In the past, your only choices were to high-tail it out of there (not very heroic), or scavenge around looking for a dropped weapon. Now, you can stand and deliver.

When equipped with one of the three "Vibro" weapons (blade, sword, or axe), the player will be able to walk his Gear up to an opponent and take a few hacks. The weapons contain an energy source in the hilt that causes them to vibrate at high speeds, inflicting massive amounts of damage. If you don't have a Vibro weapon with you, you'll still be able to use your fists, but it's only recommended in the direst of emergencies since you run the risk of damaging yourself as much as your opponent if you connect.

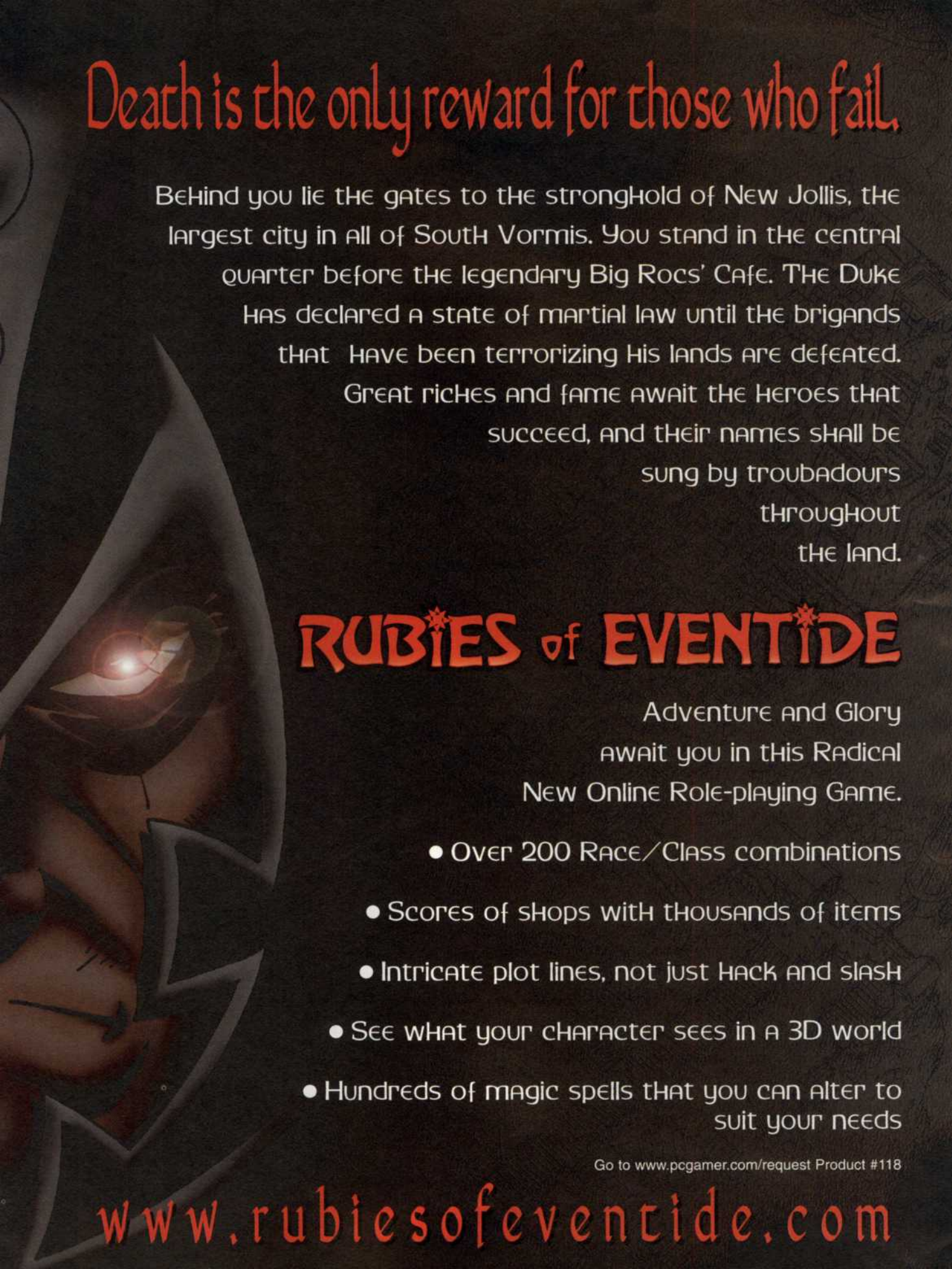
These melee attacks will be context-sensitive, with your Gear's neural net determining the best attack for a given situation. These different swings will include an uppercut, jab, and a cross for unarmed Gears, and an overhand slash and a thrust if you have a close combat weapon.

With a deep solo campaign game, as well as support for multi-player action in deathmatches or cooperatively, fans of the giant robot genre may well want to keep a spot on their hard drives reserved for when the game ships later this fall.

You'll need a 3D accelerator just to get the game to run, but the special effects like this smoke and fiery explosion should be worth it.

The enemy AI will be improved, allowing it to adapt to your tactics.

For the first time in a giant robot game, you'll be able to engage in hand-to-hand combat. These Vibro-weapons should come in handy for this purpose.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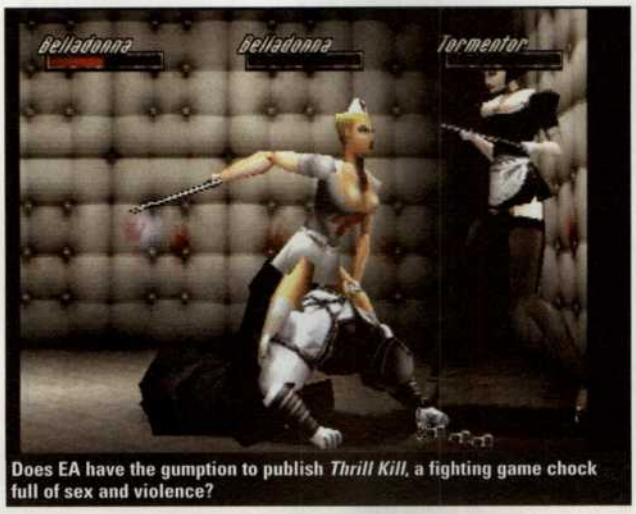
Electronic Arts Digests Westwood

Industry titan adds Virgin's jewel to its weighty crown



Does EA have the gumption to publish *Thrill Kill*, a fighting game chock full of sex and violence?

Electronic Arts (EA) is paying $122.5 million in cold hard cash to acquire Westwood Studios and will receive Westwood's backlog and future games, Virgin's U.S. development studio, and a fistful of external projects already signed with Virgin.

The big coup for EA is Westwood's evergreen *Command & Conquer* series, giving the company one of the most powerful franchises in gaming. It also picks up *Blade Runner*, the *Lands of Lore* series, and ten or so other Virgin titles (see sidebar).

But while the Westwood games are a no-brainer for EA to publish, it may not look so kindly on all the Virgin titles. Final decisions on each product hadn't been made by press time, but look for EA to sell off some properties that might not fit its corporate image, such as *Thrill Kill* (which features fighting French maids); or titles that don't fit its marketing plans, such as the somewhat redundant Virgin F-16 game (EA already has a large flight sim line with Jane's Combat Simulations).

But gamers needn't worry that this deal will affect Westwood in the short term, or delay the release of *Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun*. Key to the deal, according to both sides, was the signing of Westwood honchos Brett Sperry and Louis Castle to five-year contracts. Like Peter Molyneux (Bullfrog) and Richard Garriott (Origin) before them, the Westwood brass will stay aboard to continue steering the ship after the acquisition, at least for the time being. EA tells us that the Virgin studio located in Irvine, CA, will report directly to Sperry, and will be renamed as Westwood Pacific.

As for Virgin Interactive, this deal pretty much signifies the end of the company as we know it. The remaining portions of the company (both in the U.S. and UK) are still for sale, although early reports indicate an attempted buyout of what's left by Virgin's European executives that would regroup the remaining pieces as the basis for a new game company.

The sale has been imminent for nearly a year, with the Spelling Group not attempting to hide the fact that its gaming division was on the block. What held up a move was the parent company's insistence on auctioning off the interactive group as a whole, including the marketing, sales, and distribution staffs. Most bidders said "no thanks" to the whole enchilada, and in EA's case, such extra overhead would have been redundant. It appears that EA simply wore Viacom down until the latter agreed to sell off only those pieces that fit into the EA puzzle (i.e. Westwood's programmers and the *C&C* name).

And if this buyout is not enough fuel for the fire, the imminent sale of Cendant Software (see the related story on page 76), raises even wilder possibilities. Could EA buy Sierra? No comment from those involved, but EA has a proven cash reserve (it issued no stock to make the Virgin deal), and there's a possibility it could wait out Cendant's besieged management as it did with Viacom, then go cherry-picking for Blizzard, Dynamix, or whatever studio suits its fancy.

From Virgin to EA

Here's the list (as of press time) of unpublished games acquired by EA from Virgin/Westwood in this deal.

- *Nox*
- *Thrill Kill*
- *Swords & Sorcery*
- *Dawn of War*
- *Golden Nugget*
- *Recoil*
- *Professional Sportscar Racing*
- *Star Trek Voyager*
- *Superbike World Championship*
- *Pirate's Plunder*
- *C&C: Tiberian Sun*
- *C&C: Tiberian Sun* expansion pack
- *C&C: Commando*
- *C&C: N64*
- *Dune 2000*
- *Games People Play II-IV*
- *Lands of Lore III*

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Shadow Company

Games featuring crack teams of special-forces commandos are becoming almost as commonplace as hunting games these days, and Interactive Magic is the latest to join the party with a new real-time strategy title featuring a squad of commando mercenaries going on missions of stealth and violence. In *Shadow Company*, you'll assemble your team from a diverse group, each having a distinct personality and history. During missions, you'll be able to operate a variety of vehicles such as helicopters, tanks, trucks, motorcycles, and jet skis. The physics model will allow everything in the game world to react realistically, such as the wind having an effect on bullet trajectories. The 3D graphics will be plenty detailed, even going so far as to use the textures taken from the real world object they represent. *Shadow Company* is scheduled for an early spring release.

Shadow Company will have a free-floating camera that can be zoomed in or out, depending on the situation.

Real Feel Golf

If last month's golf round-up wasn't enough for you, we've got another in-development title to tell you about. *Real Feel Golf* (working title) is being developed by British-based Vertex Multimedia and will be published by UbiSoft. With 3D graphics, yet another take on the mouse-swing (called, you guessed it, "real feel"), and a TV-style presentation, this one will be aimed at the arcade crowd, although it does promise accu-

Continued on page 76

http://pcgamer.ign.com

Continued from page 75

rate courses and realistic physics. Play against the computer or as many as eight other duffers on the Internet when *Real Feel Golf* ships in March.

This early screen from *Real Feel Golf* has some nice looking terrain, but that lady golfer needs a little work.

Dethkarz

This futuristic combat racing game will feature 12 tracks in four environments, races with 20 cars at once, four vehicles to choose from with three variations on each, and plenty of deadly weapons to annihilate your competition. *Dethkarz* will support force feedback controllers, and Internet play for as many as eight combatants should be a blast. The 3D-accelerated graphics are looking tasty (software support will be included as well), and the developer, Beam Software, is promising that new cars and tracks will be available via the Internet after the game ships later this November.

The graphics in *Dethkarz* will have plenty of lens flare and transparencies... you gotta love 3D acceleration!

Big Brother

Picking up where the book leaves off, *Big Brother* from Mediax is based on the classic *1984* by George Orwell. As Eric Blair, the player returns to his homeland, only to find his fiancée

Continued on page 81

Cendant Software for Sale

Want to buy Sierra? How about Blizzard?

The gargantuan Cendant Corporation, the multinational company that owns Avis, Century 21, Coldwell Banker, and Ramada (to name but a few), has recently found itself in need of some quick cash. And how does it intend to get it? By selling off the PC gaming companies it bought just a short time ago, including Sierra and Blizzard.

The imminent sale of Sierra will affect thousands of employees throughout the company's many subsidiaries, including Yosemite Entertainment, Impressions, Davidson & Associates, and Berkeley Systems. Blizzard is a much smaller company but well regarded as one of the PC's finest game developers, so the company's long-term fate is of prime importance to gamers. Cendant has said it wants to sell its software division off as one complete unit, but the current meltdown of Virgin Interactive proves that what's intended is not necessarily what will actually happen.

So who could actually afford to buy Cendant Software? Perhaps Electronic Arts or Hasbro (which just recently purchased MicroProse), but that would be a stretch even for those giants, and any buyer would be saddled with redundancies in marketing, sales, and distribution. It seems the only way Cendant Software could be sold in one lot is for a really well funded media conglomerate to step in and buy it. Possible candidates include Microsoft, or Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, which already has a toe in this water with Fox Interactive and Kesmai. Perhaps even NBC or good old Ted Turner — any big company that might want to get into this industry could do so in one fell swoop with this deal.

If no one takes the bait, another possibility voiced by Cendant is to spin off its software division as an independent company in an initial public offering (IPO), but this seems unlikely given the recent turmoil in the stock market.

So, if a serious buyer for the whole unit is not forthcoming and if a spin-off IPO is rejected by investment banks, it's quite possible that Sierra, Blizzard, Dynamix, Berkeley, Impressions, and all the rest will be auctioned off to the highest bidders, piece by piece.

Fortunately, none of this turmoil will affect coming games like *Diablo II*, *Half-Life*, or *Homeworld* — those games are far enough into production to virtually ensure their release, but a transfer of ownership for Sierra or Blizzard will undoubtedly have long-term affects on the entire industry. Stay tuned.

Games that are far enough along, such as *Half-Life*, should be unaffected, regardless of how the Cendant situation resolves itself.

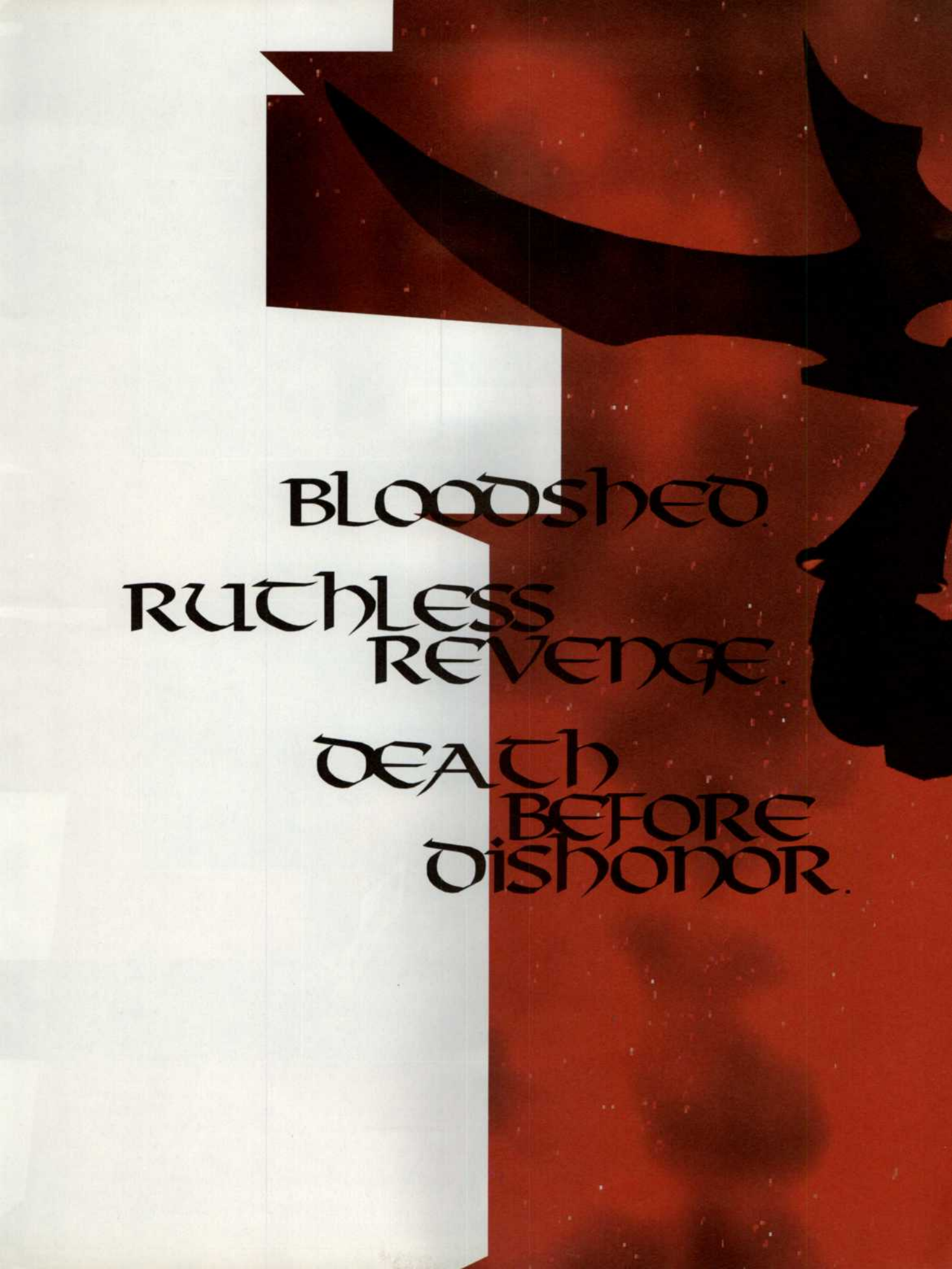
Bailout at Blizzard?

GT Signs start-up Fugitive Studios

The employee-hemorrhaging at Blizzard continues as more staffers from the House that *WarCraft* Built depart to do their own thing. Following Ron Millar's departure to found his own company, Redline Games, Greg Williams, James Phinney, and Jeff McReynolds, folks that worked on such hits as *StarCraft* and *WarCraft II*, have founded their own start-up, Fugitive Studios.

Fugitive has already signed a publishing deal with GT Interactive, and its first project is described somewhat vaguely as a "3D game" due early next year. GT will have the rights to both PC and console games by Fugitive, as well as merchandising rights. Ron Chaimowitz, CEO of GT, is quite pleased with the signing, having lost two of its top development names (id Software to Activision and Chris Taylor to Microsoft), and said, "I am confident that the members of Fugitive will deliver new, innovative entertainment experiences." And, of course, we're always on the lookout for new, innovative entertainment experiences. Or just good games, for that matter.

So does this mean the end is nigh for Blizzard? Well, of course not. Nearly every developer loses talent from time to time (with the rare exception of Westwood Studios, but with EA's recent acquisition, even this could change). id Software has certainly lost plenty, 3D Realms is a veritable breeding ground for start-ups, Bullfrog spawned both Lionhead and Mucky Foot, brand-new Cavedog lost a key man in Chris Taylor, and even LucasArts gave birth to two new studios founded by Justin Chin and Ray Gresko. People may come and go, but franchises last forever. Blizzard could certainly prove this true by giving us *WarCraft III* if they got the urge. Mmmm, what do you think, Blizzard?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Fly the Millennium Falcon!

LucasArts' new X-Wing game emerges

LucasArts has announced that its award-winning series of Star Wars-based flight combat simulations will soon be joined by a new arrival — and it looks like a corker.

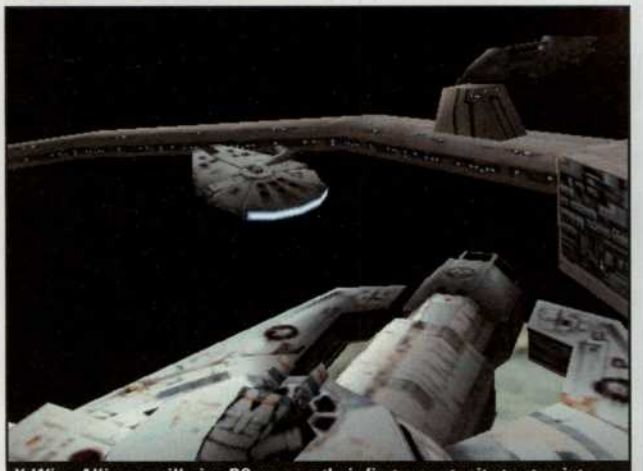
After a string of re-issues and compilations of older X-Wing titles, and the disappointment of the multi-player only *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*, LucasArts looks to be getting back on track with *X-Wing Alliance*, the first all-new single-player Star Wars sim since *TIE Fighter* debuted in 1994. Larry Holland and his team at Totally Games will once again be the talent behind this latest effort, which for the first time ever will give gamers a chance to fly a fully modeled sim of the Millennium Falcon and attempt to recreate the Battle of Endor, the climactic Death Star assault from *Return of The Jedi*.

X-Wing Alliance **features fully three-dimensional hangar environments. Here's the Falcon parked in a Mon Calamari cruiser's launching bay.**

X-Wing Alliance will feature more ships than any previous X-Wing sim — in addition to the Millennium Falcon, players will get to fly the X-Wing, Y-Wing, B-Wing, A-Wing, Z-95 Headhunter, and a number of Corellian transport craft. 50 single-player missions based on two interweaving story lines (including an intriguing "Secret Weapons of the Empire" scenario) should provide plenty of challenge, while five multi-player missions will be available for modem, network and Internet play. The game's revised engine will also feature 3D "virtual cockpits" for all craft and support for 3D accelerators and force feedback joysticks.

3D "virtual cockpits" like this one in the Millennium Falcon will enable players to look around their in-craft environments.

X-Wing Alliance will be released by LucasArts in the first quarter of next year, and is likely to be the company's last "old school" Star Wars title before the company switches its focus to games based on *Star Wars: Episode I*, which will hit theaters next May. The first *Episode I* game is already well into development at a top-secret bunker somewhere inside LucasArts and should appear at around the same time as the movie.



X-Wing Alliance **will give PC gamers their first opportunity to step into Han Solo's shoes and pilot the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy.**

Stick 'em Up!

New first-person shooter turns you into a bank robber

The LithTech engine from Monolith will be getting another workout when *BankHeist*, a new first-person shooter being developed by IcePick Games, is ready for public consumption next Spring.

The player will take on the role of one of three very different characters, with the object being to work your way up through the ranks of a major city's leading underground crime syndicate. The early levels (around 20 are planned) will be relatively easy training missions, while later scenarios will require you to break nearly every law in the book. There will be some 18 weapons, and the plan is for the player to be able to hop into a vehicle and do some drive-by shootings if the situation calls for it.

Sounds like a lot of fun, and we're sure it'll all be done in the best possible taste. More news on this one when we have it.

Okay, so now are you going to approve my loan application? Uh-huh, thought so.

Continued from page 76

missing and the Thought Police in control. You will explore 10 square blocks of the retro-futuristic world set over more than 20 levels in this real-time 3D-adventure game. There will be plenty of puzzles to solve, spy cameras to destroy, and characters to interact with when *Big Brother* makes its debut this holiday season.

George Orwell's novel, *1984*, comes to 3D life in Mediax Corporation's *Big Brother*.

Flight Unlimited III

The next installment in the ultra-realistic and beautiful Flight Unlimited series from Looking Glass Studios is being readied for a mid-1999 release. *Flight Unlimited III* will take place over the Seattle area, giving pilots the chance to experience the splendor of the local attractions such as Mt. Rainier and the Space Needle. Five new aircraft, including a corporate jet, a new weather modeling system allowing for dynamic weather during your flight, and animated ground objects, such as boats, cars, and airport vehicles will all be included on this trip.

The photo-realistic graphics of the Seattle, WA, area will be yours to explore when *Flight Unlimited III* is released next year.

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Grab your claymore and remove the body parts from those English sassenachs in Eidos' upcoming *Braveheart* game.

Will the game be every bit as bloodthirsty as the movie? We sure hope so... but something tells us it'll be toned down a tad.

The Scottish Are Revolting!

Eidos has a Braveheart *game in the works*

In one of the more surprising revelations of the year, Eidos Interactive has announced that it has acquired the rights to develop a game based on the Mel Gibson movie *Braveheart* and that the game is already in an advanced stage of development.

Eidos' *Braveheart* game is a strategy epic being developed, appropriately enough, by a Scottish development team called Red Lemon Studios. One of the game's aims is to recreate the large-scale sword and axe battles between the armies of Scotland and England as depicted in incredibly bloodthirsty style by Gibson's Oscar-winning movie. To this end, Red Lemon is using a scaleable, multiple-camera 3D engine (which looks similar to the one used in Bungie's *Myth*) so players can get as close as they want to the action.

The game also hopes to stay true to *Braveheart* by using many of the characters, scenes, and images from the movie, and Eidos is in negotiations to secure some level of creative input from Gibson himself. The game has also been endorsed by the Clan Association of Scotland, which is a good indicator of its historical accuracy.

This Game Rules!

GT brings us a new Beavis and Butthead adventure

Those two charming and lovable scamps Beavis and Butthead will be making their triumphant return to the PC in a new adventure game from GT Interactive, developed in conjunction with MTV and Mike Judge, the man responsible for bringing these two losers to life.

The title, simply enough, is *Beavis and Butthead*. The setting will be a college campus, allowing our heroes to engage in such hijinx as exploring locker rooms, dormitories, and frat parties, all in search of that elusive chick who will allow them to score.

If this new game starring the dopey duo can manage to be half as amusing as their first adventure, *Virtual Stupidity*, (see our Best 50 Games Ever feature in the October issue), we'll be the first in line when the game ships this winter.

We can only imagine what the hazing process will entail in a Beavis and Butthead game.

Down Under

The latest on Bullfrog's Dungeon Keeper 2

A couple of months ago, we brought you some early news about what to expect in Bullfrog's *Dungeon Keeper 2*. Well, the info just keeps on coming, and we've even able to get our hands on this screenshot that shows off the new 3D engine.

Several new creatures for you to manipulate have been announced. The Black Knight is a master of the chaos arts, but don't get too close...this bad boy is also deadly in close combat! The Dark Elf brings deadly accuracy with his bow, and he's swift of foot as well, making a very effective counter to the Elven Archer. Last but not least is the vicious and bad-tempered Salamander...better stay on his good side.

New spells will also be on offer, but even the old favorites will look spectacular, thanks to their reworking through the new 3D accelerated engine. Among the new incantations will be the Tremor spell that will send creatures, as well as walls, crumbling to the ground. The Turncoat spell may cost a lot of mana to use, but you'll be thinking it's a bargain after you take over one of your enemy's creatures and send him on a killing spree through his own ranks.

The new engine allows for much more effective (and bright) spell effects.

A new mana system will be used for powering magical traps. The Fear trap, activated by a pressure tile, sends your foes running off in a panicked state, and the Sentry trap will fire projectiles when an enemy comes near.

Combat will be improved, too. Instead of the "throw all your creatures into the area of the battle and hope they do the right thing" strategy, this time around you'll have control over each individual, so tactics will be a much bigger factor. All is looking good, even without Peter Molyneux's help, for this spring release.

If you were unlucky enough to register your copy of *WarGames* electronically, head on over to *www.wargamesmgm.com* to cure the virus.

News Briefs

id Chooses focus2 As Design Firm

Maybe it was because of the lack of a capital letter in its name, or maybe the *Quake II* level that the team designed to impress Carmack and Co. was the reason. Whatever the case, focus2 is to be the new company in charge of the artistic chores that id requires, such as box art, advertisements, etc. For a chance to sample the focus2 deathmatch level, visit our web site at its new address, *pcgamer.ign.com.*

They're Back...Again!

Yet another classic game is scheduled for the spit-and-polish treatment from our friends at Activision. After *Battlezone* and *Asteroids*, Taito's classic coin-op *Space Invaders* becomes the third old favorite to be re-invented for the modern-day PC market. The license has just recently been acquired, so no details have been released yet on what direction the game will take — but we're betting that you'll have to fight off some invaders from space.

WarGames Is Under the Weather

WarGames, from MGM Interactive, was shipped containing the Win32/Marburg virus in the electronic registration portion of its code. The game files themselves remain unaffected, so if you purchase the game after reading this, all you need to do to avoid the virus is to ignore the electronic registration program. MGM is sending out new game discs and the Symantec Norton Anti-Virus disinfectant software for all those who have registered with the infected program. For more information, tootle along to *www.wargamesmgm.com.*

Wombat Emerges From Origin

Three Origin programmers have left the company to form a new venture called Wombat Games. The first game from the unfortunately named company has yet to be announced, but the crew claims that it will revolutionize online gaming. It's not surprising that the game will be heavily (perhaps entirely) online based, since Wombat's three founders were main participants in *Ultima Online.* Wombat Games has yet to secure a publisher.

Racers Turned Roleplayers

Blue Fang Games is the name of a new development group formed by ex-members of Papyrus (those racing game guys). Adam Levesque, one of the co-founders, will be the company's president. Levesque was the general manager of Papyrus Design Group. John Wheeler, the lead tech-man on the *Grand Prix Legends* game, is the other co-founder, and will assume the role of vice president. No specific details have been released regarding their first game, other than the genre; it will be a racing ga...ah! Had you fooled for a second there. Actually, it will be a roleplaying game.

The PC Gamer Playlist

What's hot at the magazine's offices this month.

It's baby boom time at the *PC Gamer* offices. Not only is our lovely marketing manager Ellen Virden happily expecting, but Dean and Lisa recently dropped a bombshell on one of the editorial team's routine meetings with the announcement that they, too, are expecting. "My boys can swim!" Dean proclaimed proudly just before champagne was passed around for all to enjoy — apart from Ellen and Lisa, of course, who enjoyed a glass of non-alcoholic apple cider. We thought that we might be in for a hat-trick with a third announcement of a maternal nature, but it just turned out that Billy had eaten a particularly large lunch.

Amazingly, despite all this baby-tastic news, we've still had time to play our favorite PC games, which at the moment are as follows:

1.	*Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*	Everybody
2.	*NCAA Football 99*	Rob, MLuton
3.	*Val Kilmer Bridge TE*	Lisa
4.	*Dune 2000*	Dean, Mike
5.	*Motocross Madness*	Billy, Greg
6.	*Independence War*	Todd
7.	*Head Rush*	Gary
8.	*The Terminator: Skynet*	Dan
9.	*Meat Gone Bad*	Jay
10.	*Quake II (with vibrating Intensor chair)*	Greg

Don't Shun This Outcast

Infogrames' latest effort is looking good

From the team that brought us the revolutionary Alone in the Dark series comes *Outcast*, a 3D action/adventure that promises to raise the bar on artificial intelligence.

In a story reminiscent of the movie *Stargate*, the player will assume the role of Cutter Slade, the leader of a group of elite infantry units who is given the responsibility of rescuing a lost space expedition that wound up in a parallel universe after passing through a black hole.

Six unique worlds will present the gamer with 30 characters to interact with and 24 weapons to brandish. Using a combination of voxels and polygons, the graphics are looking real purdy, and will look even better when you see the characters in action, thanks to the 52,000 frames of animation.

Where *Outcast* plans on standing out from the crowd is in the AI area. The technology is known as GAIA (Game's Artificial Intelligence with Agents), and it works by creating reactionary behaviors within environments. Many factors, or agents, are combined to give each character and animal in the game an instinctive reaction to stimuli. It sounds intriguing, and from what we've seen so far, Infogrames may just have something here. We'll know more as we get closer to the game's release in March.

Your foes will be blessed with GAIA, Infogrames new take on artificial intelligence.

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ON FRIDAY, March 13th, 1998, at 8:07 P.M., id Software guru John Carmack updated his .plan file with a tantalizing tidbit of news that set the gaming industry abuzz. He announced that the mysterious *Trinity* project would be delayed, in favor of another *Quake* sequel — one with an entirely new engine.

ON TUESDAY, June 16th, 1998, at 5:16 P.M., Carmack's .plan file is updated again, and the bombshell drops. *Quake III* will not consist of the traditional combination of story-based single-player missions and a multiplayer mode — instead, id Software's new title will be concentrating solely on DeathMatch play.

ON THURSDAY, August 20th, 1998, at 10:33 A.M., the DeathMatch-only plans for *Quake III* are confirmed by the game's publisher Activision in an official announcement to the gaming press. The game's full title will be *Quake III Arena*.

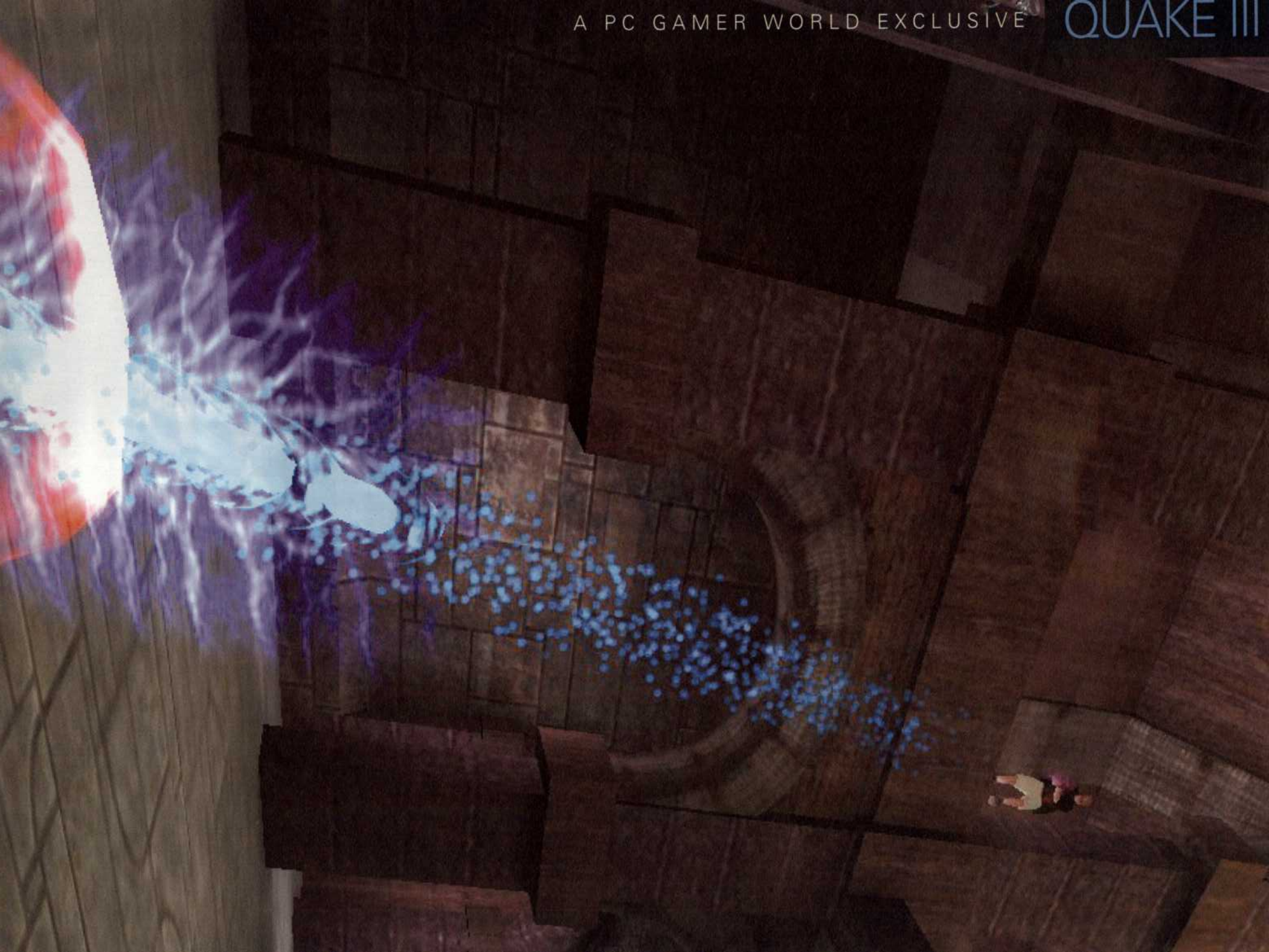
SOME GAMERS are ecstatic. Some are furious. Some are confused. That's why *PC Gamer* went inside id Software's headquarters for the first-ever look at the game in development, and to ask the all-important question...

WHAT IS QUAKE III?

TURN THE PAGE TO FIND OUT THE ANSWER...

A PC GAMER WORLD EXCLUSIVE

QUAKE III



THIS IS QUAKE III ARENA.

AND IT KICKS ASS!

STORY BY COLIN WILLIAMSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH R. BROCK

AFTER WOWING MILLIONS OF GAMERS — AND SELLING MORE THAN A MILLION COPIES OF *QUAKE II* — ID SOFTWARE REACHED A TURNING POINT IN THE COMPANY'S DIRECTION. WHILE THE BULK OF THE STAFF WAS TO GO TO WORK ON PRODUCING A *QUAKE II* MISSION PACK, PROGRAMMING CHIEFTAIN **JOHN CARMACK WOULD BE WORKING FROM SCRATCH**, DESIGNING A NEW ENGINE FOR A MYSTERY PROJECT KNOWN ONLY AS ***TRINITY***.

But all that soon changed. Early into his work on *Trinity*, Carmack decided to put the project on the back-burner and take a 180-degree turn, abandoning the typical mission-based single-player mode altogether. With Carmack now spending much of his time creating a network model that would outshine even his work on *QuakeWorld*, the rest of the id team could finally go full-steam designing their favorite type of game: the multi-player DeathMatch.

The result, eventually, will be *Quake III* (or to give it its full title, *Quake III Arena*), but this third installment in the world's number one gaming series won't have you mowing down fields of menacing Stroggs, nor will it concern finding keys or unlocking doors. The challenge will be fighting a series of ruthless opponents, one-on-one, and conquering them all in the Arena. There will be no exit doors, no storyline — and no surrender. So what on earth does it have to do with the *Quake* name? "It kinda throws people off when you call it *Quake*," says artist and id co-founder Kevin Cloud. "*Quake* is more suited to the style of gameplay. And the fundamentals of the gameplay are DeathMatch."

The way *Quake III* will appeal to both hard-core and amateur Death-Matchers is via an integrated server tracking and pinging system, that will still include support for popular programs like *GameSpy 3D* and *Qplug*. The goal is to have the player up and running on a network game within three presses of the Enter key.

id Software has reason to believe that once the mass market gets a taste of *real* DeathMatching, it's going to go over. Big. "We think when people start playing online, they'll love it — it's just *the* way to play," says Cloud. "The problem is that most people don't have an Internet connection, or when they first try it, they get completely obliterated! We want the game to *introduce* people to the concept of fast-action shooting. How to look up and down, how to strafe, maybe even how to rocket-jump. So instead of jumping into this extremely cold water, this is something where they can train."

Creating a game with enduring longevity is the biggest goal. "I want this to be a game where people will keep it on their desktop for a couple years," says head honcho John Carmack. "And whenever they feel like it, they can jump in, start killing, and have some fun. There are so many people who have gotten thousands of hours of enjoyment out of the *Quake* games, most of them by playing online."

THE *QUAKE III* TEAM

THE PROGRAMMERS

(IN BACK) JOHN CASH, BRIAN HOOK
(IN FRONT) JOHN CARMACK

THOUGH YOU CAN'T TELL FROM THIS SCREENSHOT, THE REFLECTIONS ON THE YELLOW PIPES CHANGE AS YOU WALK UNDER THEM. IT'S SPECULAR HIGHLIGHTING IN ACTION!

MAPPING IT OUT

Even though *Quake III* has no shortage of eye candy, the main emphasis now is on the raw gameplay. "We're targeted on the gameplay experience, rather than the exploration of graphical environments," says Carmack. "In our conventional games, a lot of the feedback to the player is walking into a new area and experiencing a rich, lush environment. We're designing things so you *know* you're going to be running back and forth through the same areas many times.

"It's gotten worse over time with the different generations," Carmack says. "You've got about the same number of 'gee-whiz' points in *Quake II* as you did in *Doom*, it just took four times as many man hours to create all that, and the player gets the same amount of benefit out of it."

But the id guys are, as always, up to the task. "The challenge that we're faced with as level designers is *just* making DeathMatch maps," says level designer Tim Willits. "But DeathMatch maps have to sell the game, look good, and play fast. Before, we made DeathMatch maps during the weekends and during our spare time. They took the least amount of time to build, but they've probably been played more than any other maps." Willits goes on to explain that many of the addictive maps that hooked the online crowd were outcasts — some weren't even going to be included in the final game.

While *Quake* was Techno-Gothic, and *Quake II* was Neo-Techno-Gothic (with funky colored lighting), *Quake III* will show a little more diversity in environments. "We're shooting for a number of different Arena styles," says Cloud. "One of them is more neo-gothic than we've done in the past, with castle-y architecture that's bumped up into the future quite a bit. Then we're going to have some basic space-type settings, and then some sewers and tunnel areas." But what about the standard satanic references? Willits assures us that they'll be in there. "You start out in a base-y type area, with hints of demonic presence," he says. "Then you move more toward a Giger-ish underground area, where it's techno meets organic alien architecture."

New technology tricks lead to new gameplay factors, as we see when Willits loads a DeathMatch map in which the ceiling is a mirror. "You're like a rat in a maze," says Willits. "You run around in a

trench, but you always see where the other person is." As Willits and fellow designer Brandon James start zipping around in the map, lobbing grenades at each other, it's obvious that there's plenty of life left in the old DeathMatch concept yet — provided neat ideas, like this one, are there to keep it fresh.

The most luscious new graphical effect is the addition of curved surfaces. "We're really trying to build stuff that has never been built before," says map designer — and 'Curvy Stuff Master' — Christian Antkow. "Before, with these perfect, smooth curves, it was hard and complex and time-consuming. Now that it's a part of our architecture, we're making more and more things curvy." Any possibility for curved surfaces is exploited — in the sewer levels, enormous pipes wind their way along the ceiling, and organic tunnels beckon. The rendering is flawless. Want to design your own? The easy-to-use map editor will be included with the final release, and will allow gamers to create their own organic-looking environments with a nearly unlimited 3D canvas.

To demonstrate the editor's flexibility, Antkow fires up the program and pulls up a blank screen. "Let's say we want to do some simple landscaping," he says, as he lays down a flat 13x13 mesh. He selects a few points, and easily terraforms a large hill with a quick drag of the mouse. "Now, let's say I want to rotate it," he says, as he twists the top of the hill like a corkscrew. "There pretty much isn't anything we can't build right now," says Antkow. "It's just a matter of how much time we want to invest in it."

SIZING UP THE COMPETITION

At its heart, *Quake III Arena* is a fighting game, and several underlying elements of the beat-'em-up genre will be thrown into the mix.

"The gameflow hasn't been completely worked out," says Cloud. "but the beginning of the game will probably have an opening cinematic, as will the final conclusion, which we feel will take a long time for a person to actually reach.

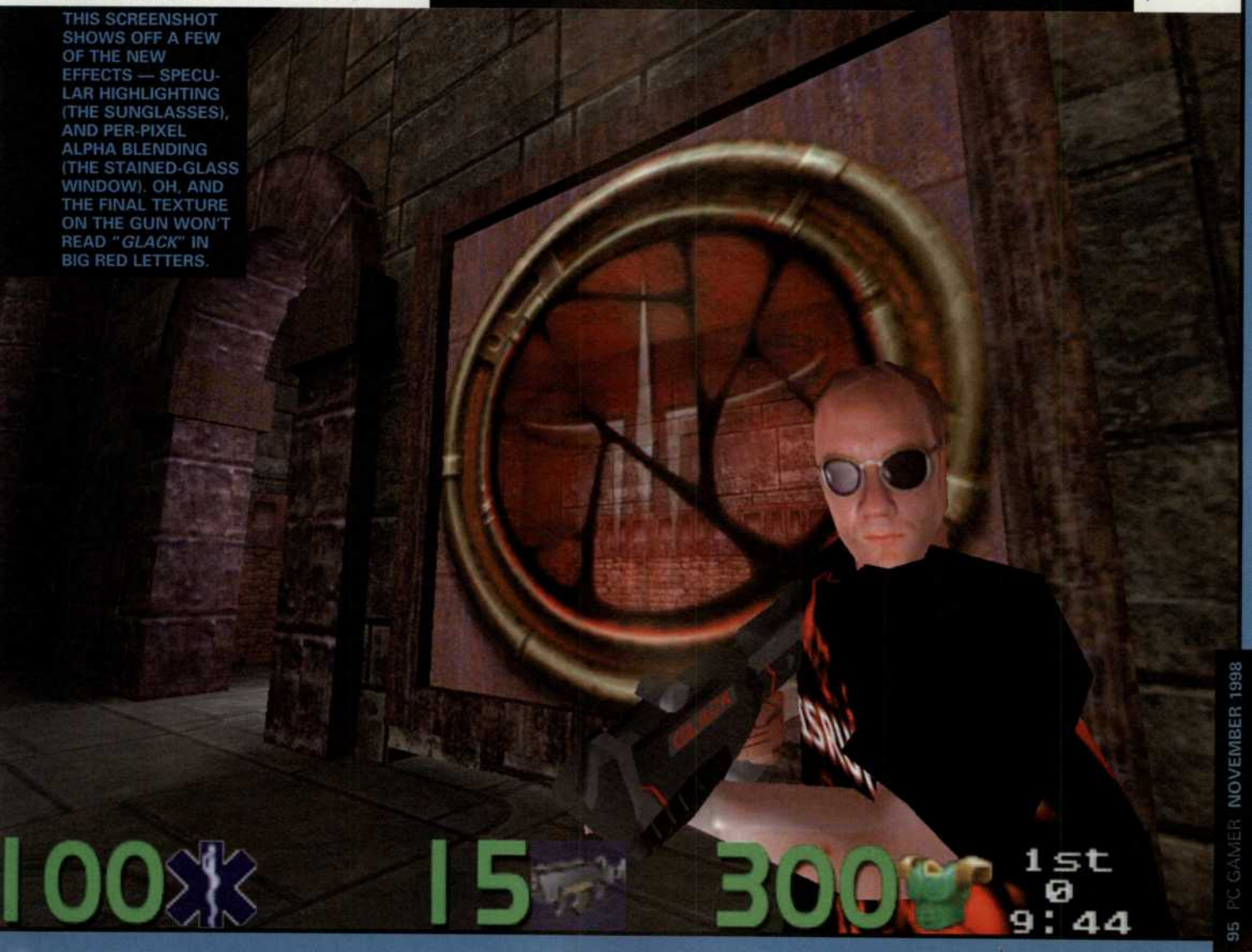
"There's a ranking in the game, and let's say that it goes from one to one hundred," says Cloud. "You start out at the bottom, and your goal is to fight to the top. There are certain characters you have to fight to get there, and *they* have a ranking in the world. You can go to any level in a group of four, and once you succeed at that, you move on to the next."

Tthe team is considering including that old beat-'em-up staple of victory poses at the end of matches. "We're not quite sure how we're going to work out the victories," says Cloud. "That may happen with a cinematic point, where you move up to another ranking, and you have a presentation that goes on."

And since identifying with your

"*Quake II* was a hacked-up, modified version of *Quake* as far as rendering technology went. *Quake III*'s rendering is a completely new design, so there are a lot more changes."

JOHN CARMACK, HEAD HONCHO, *QUAKE III*



THIS SCREENSHOT SHOWS OFF A FEW OF THE NEW EFFECTS — SPECULAR HIGHLIGHTING (THE SUNGLASSES), AND PER-PIXEL ALPHA BLENDING (THE STAINED-GLASS WINDOW). OH, AND THE FINAL TEXTURE ON THE GUN WON'T READ "*GLACK*" IN BIG RED LETTERS.

character is an integral part of *Quake III*, the game will include a total of twenty selectable characters. "With the concept of *Arena*, there's no need to come up with something that is a uniform character type," Cloud says. "When you see who people play in traditional fighting games, you don't see a need for consistent character types. People like to individualize with unique-looking creatures."

Though it's questionable as to whether or not they'll make it into the final version, Cloud has expressed interest in including some old-school id Software characters. "It's really a dedication to the online gamers," he says. As a result, *Quake III* may give you the chance to battle the *Doom* Guy, the *Quake* Marine, and Hans, the bulky Nazi warrior from *Wolfenstein* (sorry, *Commander Keen* fans — the kiddie commando died for good back in *Doom II*). And if modeler Paul Steed gets his way, he'll include some cheesecake CrackWhore-type character in a nurse outfit. Ooh la la....

Creating a seemingly intelligent foe — and not just a mindless killing machine — isn't an easy task, as any *Quake* Bot programmer will tell you. "It's not difficult to make an enemy character that can hunt you down and kill you on the spot," says Cloud. "We could make him find you and shoot you immediately. So making a tough guy is not the hard part. The hard part is making a guy that has certain tendencies — like whether or not he goes for the armor, or goes for the weapon, how fast he hunts you, how good his aim is. Once we get all these attributes down — speed and skills — we're going to break that into character types."

id's resident artificial intelligence supremo John Cash is currently working on building the AI routines and personalities for the opponents you'll encounter, so expect some wildly different playing styles as you work your way through the single-player game. "You can play a fighting game for five minutes, or play it for five hours," says Cloud. "You can play it from start to finish for weeks, and that's what we want to see — a real arcadeish concept where you can jump in and get some excitement out of it, and experience that learning curve by having fun."

AFTER SCANNING AND MODELING A REAL-LIFE HAND, RENDERMASTER PAUL STEED IS ABLE TO TWEAK A FEW TEXTURES...

... AND PRODUCE WHAT YOU SEE HERE — THE WEAPON HAND. ALL FOUR FINGERS USE THE SAME TEXTURE, CUTTING DOWN THE USAGE OF TEXTURE MEMORY. CLEVER!

TWEAKING THE GAMEPLAY

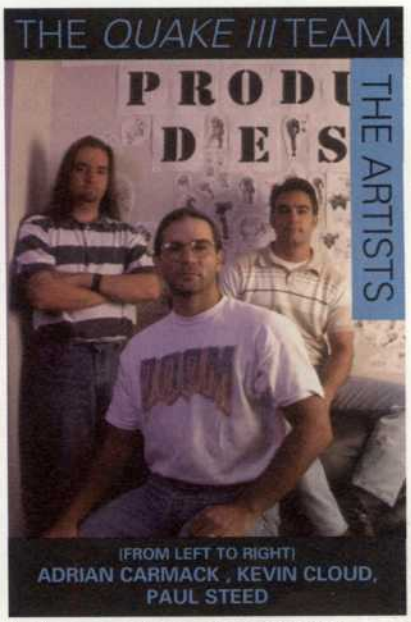
Even though it's far too early to do a run-down on the intended weapons, the id group is toying with several new spinecrushing elements. Many complained about the lack of a melee weapon in *Quake II* — after all, the most satisfying frags in *Doom* and *Quake* were those achieved with the chainsaw and axe. To address this, there's currently a mace that you can swing around and bludgeon people with. This can be combined with a planned *berserker* powerup, where the player can go on a rampage, gibbing others with a single blow. There's also something called a "bouncy gun," and the promise of a *Batman*-style grappling hook system. And maybe, just *maybe*... a flame-thrower.

Physics are a big issue with the new engine, and may be more "rubbery". A rocket hit is likely to send an opponent flying across the screen, and jumping is being tweaked. Speaking of airborne travel, there are plans for a rocket pack for some actual free flight, as in *Duke Nukem 3D* or *Rise of the Triad*. And if you decide to drop all your weapons, you can run at an increased speed.

But id is determined to keep the new features from becoming overwhelming. "If you change the environment, the gameplay, and the fundamentals *too* much," says Cloud, "the player can't grasp what's going on enough to understand the strategy of the guy he's fighting. He's gotta know *what* weapon the other guy has, and what it does. He's gotta know the weapon *he* has, and what it does. And when you start introducing a ton of different variations, he'll lose sight."

AND THE CROWD GOES WILD!

One of the more amusing aspects of sports games is the color commentary — whether it's John Madden shouting an adrenaline-boosting "Boom!" or a caustic narrator making fun of your putting skills in *Jack Nicklaus 5*. New, user-created *Quake* mods like *Rocket Arena*, *Red Rover*, and *Q-Pong* have added multiple vocal samples within the game, and id may go in that direction, with either or both commentary and crowd noises.



(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)
ADRIAN CARMACK, KEVIN CLOUD, PAUL STEED

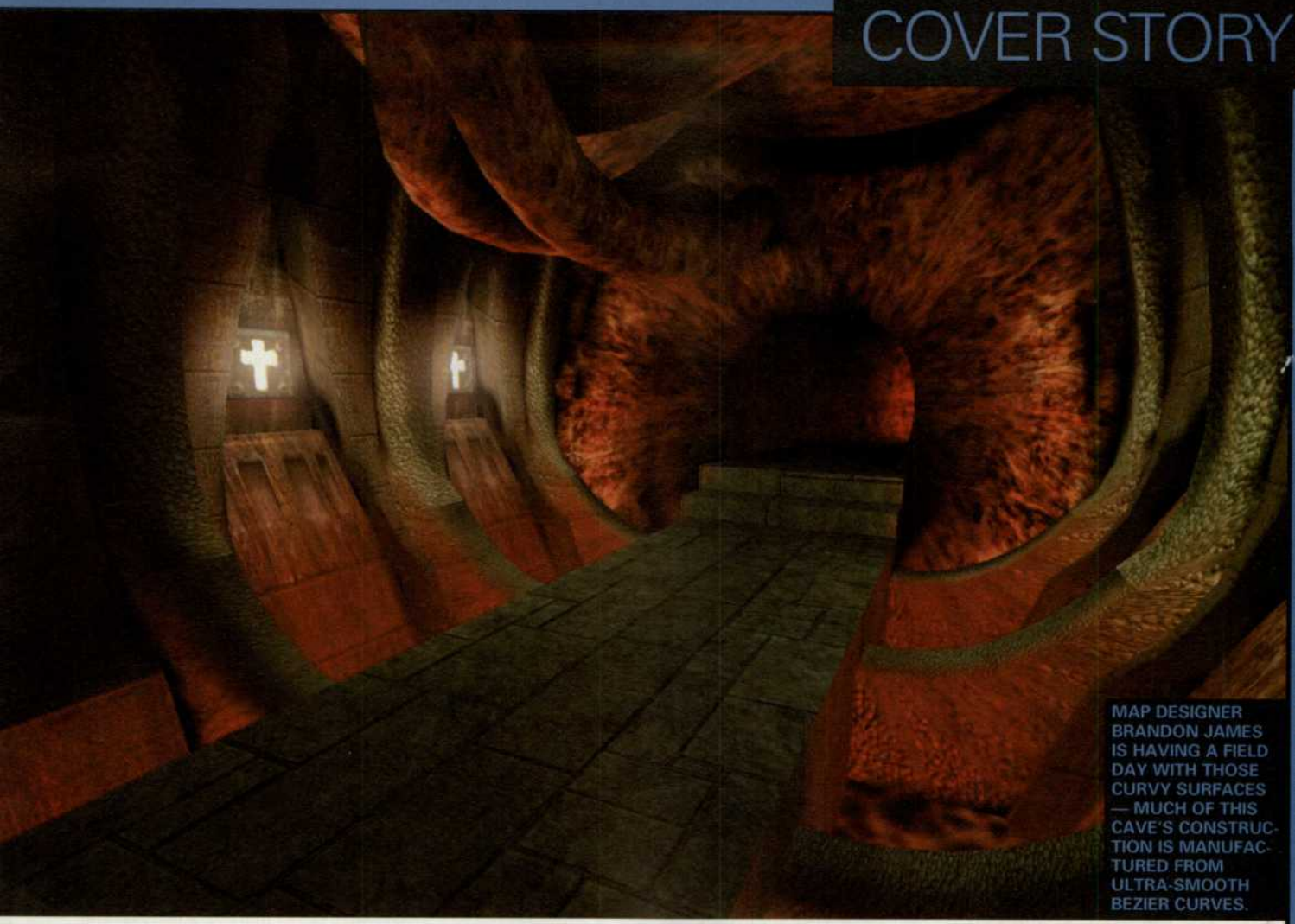
"We've had all these theories passed around," says Cloud, "and we *really* want spectators. You could have a server with eight players, but with hundreds of spectators. This could serve as a waiting room before you jump on the server. And potentially they could boo and yell, stuff like that. For the player, it's kinda like having this big circus going on, clapping if you do something great. Maybe even some catcalls, like 'camper!'"

And what about color commentary — like a Marv Albert sound-a-like screaming "Yes!" after a good gib?

"We'd love to, if we could figure out how to do it," says Cloud. "We had discussions about that. When you think about boxing, you've got all these well-dressed, sophisticated people, and these guys with the babes on their arms. And they're all dressed up to see two guys club the shit out of each other!" he says, laughing. "So we've got a class-act killing arena, where you've got the girls introducing the levels and everything, and having a sports announcer-type thing where he's describing the characters. We may have some elements of that. We're basically over-the-top in the production concept, and it's so bizarre to have this type of bloody arena be produced in a classy way. There may be some voice-over stuff, but it would be really cool to actually tie character motion to an announcer saying stuff, and we haven't been able how to do that in a way that the player won't get annoyed with the effect. There's only so many ways you can say 'he's dead.'"

PUTTING IT IN MOTION

Quake III's animation is a bit different from that of the first two games — the familiar, deformable-mesh animation has been scrapped for an easier and faster segmented system, where charac-



MAP DESIGNER BRANDON JAMES IS HAVING A FIELD DAY WITH THOSE CURVY SURFACES — MUCH OF THIS CAVE'S CONSTRUCTION IS MANUFACTURED FROM ULTRA-SMOOTH BEZIER CURVES.

ters' bodies are broken up into independently animated parts and saved in a standard ASCII format. And since each of these parts are easily separated, you can count on decapitation after a good head-shot. While *Quake II* 'faked' this effect by inverting the head into the rest of the model, *Quake III* will have lots of realistic heads a-poppin'. In terms of geometry count, the *Quake III* models will feature around 100 more polygons than used before, giving chief animator Paul Steed more to work with.

Instead of animating with *Alias* on a Silicon Graphics workstation, Steed is working with *3D Studio Max* on a standard Windows NT box. Though the animation is still being done by hand, motion capture data is used for reference. "In the case of a walk, I'll look at the timing when they put their foot down," says Steed. "The problem with motion capture data is that when you walk, you don't realize it, but your hips are turning a little bit, and you've got all these little movements. In the game, I have to keep the hips completely perpendicular to the ground the whole time. When you rotate the hips, the whole body rotates! It just got to be so much work, it's better to use it as a keyframe guide."

The extra motions — that are programmed in accordance to player input — add greatly to the illusion of human movement. "With *Quake III*, we wanted to have the motion more responsive to what the player's doing, because the players would move *so* fast," says Cloud. "So we wanted the freedom that if he looks up, his head looks up. If he turns to the right, his head leans."

> **"There pretty much isn't anything we can't build right now. It's just a matter of how much time we want to invest in it."**
>
> CHRISTIAN ANTKOW, LEVEL DESIGNER, *QUAKE III*

Several features that gamers were hungering after in *Quake III* will finally be implemented — including visible weapons. Firearms are clearly obvious from far away, *especially* the BFG, which is now truly enormous. Jumping and swimming will look more realistic, and switching weapons (which now takes, roughly, a third of a second) will be visible. As for rocket jumping... it's possible, but it still looks pretty goofy.

Texture maps on characters have been boosted to a roomy 512x512, and single textures can be repeated on a model to save memory (the fingers on the weapon hand is a good example). The 24-bit art means that the team can use digitized textures with realistic results: after taking multiple pictures with a digital camera, the faces of map designers Christian Antkow and Brandon James have been "skinned" and pasted on to a preliminary player model, and it looks shockingly realistic within the engine.

The game's amazing specular highlighting effects have been extended to the in-game player characters. All the skin artist has to do is create a *specular map* — a black and white image that tells the engine what parts of the skin should look shiny — and the results are impressive, be it the reflective surface of Antkow's sunglasses or the gleaming metal on a hellish bio-organic creation. It's subtle, but it works. And you'll even be able to see yourself perform taunts — just hit the correct key, and your weapon will drop out of view, a hand will pop up, and do the honors of flipping off your opponent.

GETTING IT RUNNNING

While several graphical trade-offs will have to be made, you'll probably be able to get *Quake III Arena* up and running on an MMX-equipped Pentium 166 system with a 3D accelerator card. "We are fairly nice and scalable here," says Carmack. "Our standard mode includes specular highlighting and everything, but you *can* drop back to *Quake II* stan-

dards, and use light maps only." Also dynamically scalable are the curved surfaces — if they're dragging down the frame rate, you'll be able to reduce their level of detail. *Quake II* will be quite playable on a first-generation 3Dfx Voodoo card, but you'll probably need to reduce the texture detailing. "Somebody who's able to run *Quake II* well should be able to run *Quake III* — with the features turned down," says Carmack.

Former 3Dfx employee and *Glide* author Brian Hook is pleased with the number of solid, consumer-level 3D cards that are capable of running a good game of *Quake III*. "The best consumer-level card for GL is the Rendition v2200 in the Hercules Thriller3D, or possibly the Intel i740," he says. "Those are both comprehensive 2D/3D boards, they have a lot of RAM. Now, in the next two months, we're going to see the advent of Banshee, Savage3D, and Riva TNT. Out of those, I think Riva TNT is going to be the best, hands-down. I think the Savage3D is going to be a great low-cost board."

As for gamers without 3D cards, you may be saved by a software renderer — but it's extremely unlikely. "If it looks like we absolutely *have* to do a fill-in software rasterizer, we'd actually do that as an OpenGL version with *no* lightmaps," says Carmack. "In that case it would actually look worse than *Quake II*, because it wouldn't be optimized for that."

IN *3D STUDIO MAX*, IT'S EASY TO APPLY MOTION-CAPTURE DATA TO THE *QUAKE III* CHARACTER MODELS. HERE, A VIRTUAL CHRISTIAN ANTKOW PERFORMS THE RAILGUN BALLET.

THE *QUAKE III* TEAM

THE LEVEL DESIGNERS

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) BRANDON JAMES, TIM WILLITS, CHRISTIAN ANTKOW

Cloud agrees that for a DeathMatch-style game, speed is of the essence. "We want to keep the gameplay *fast*," he says. "There's been a lot of consideration making a game like this, but keeping it fast is the main concern. The level of detail is greater than it was in *Quake II*, and the art is going to be at a higher level of detail than we've done in the past."

This raw speed is so important that Carmack had to leave out a few eye-candy features. Bump-mapping, which gives flat textures a more three-dimensional look, was recently scrapped. With the feature turned on, retaining a high frame rate on lower-ended systems would have been a major problem.

KILLING THE LAG

With *Quake III Arena*'s massive emphasis on online play, you can bet that Carmack is optimizing the hell out of the networking code. This may be the smoothest, most transparent online game yet, thanks to ingenious client and server-side prediction. When you fire a weapon, you'll get instant feedback with both muzzle flash and sound. Weapon selection is also instantaneous.

Moving entities — or all the stuff that moves around during the game — frequently take the form of arcs, or straight lines. "Doors and flats are now sent over as parametric representations with a starting time," says Carmack. "My reasoning for that was to smooth out packet drops. You can back-project trails through time, and have everything start at exactly the right position." In other words, don't expect any movement anomalies.

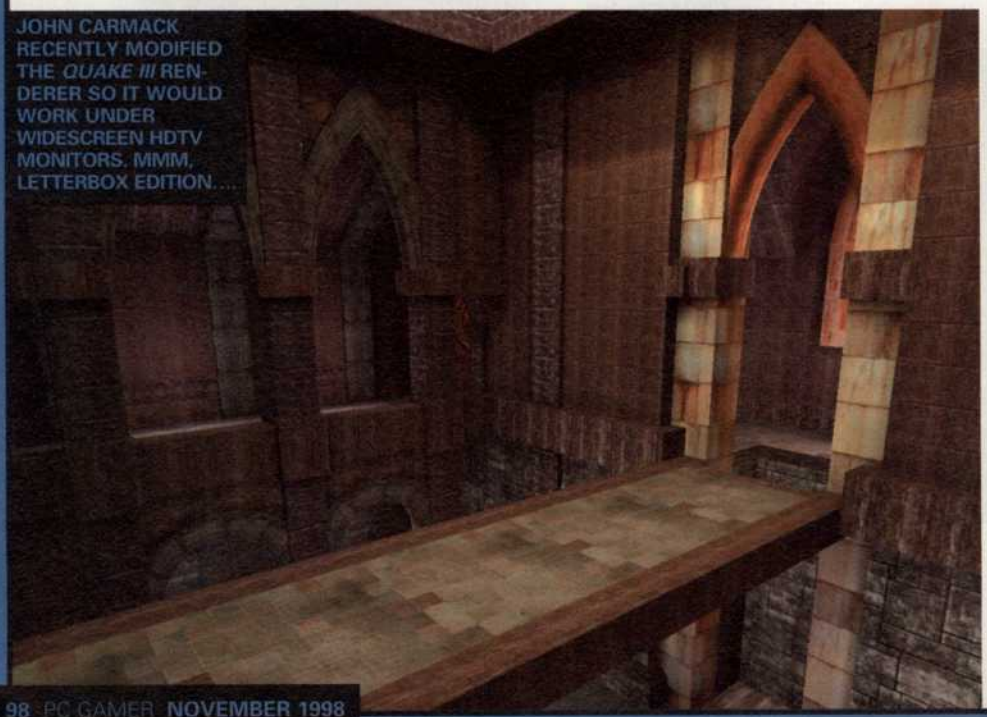
Players are an entirely different matter. "Other characters are the hardest thing to predict," says Carmack. "Not only are they highly unpredictable, they can change direction in the course of one frame. They also don't have continuous updates." So the client will take educated guesses in predicting what the player will do next, cutting down the amount of jitter when a character moves in several directions within a short period of time.

LAGGING FOR GODOT

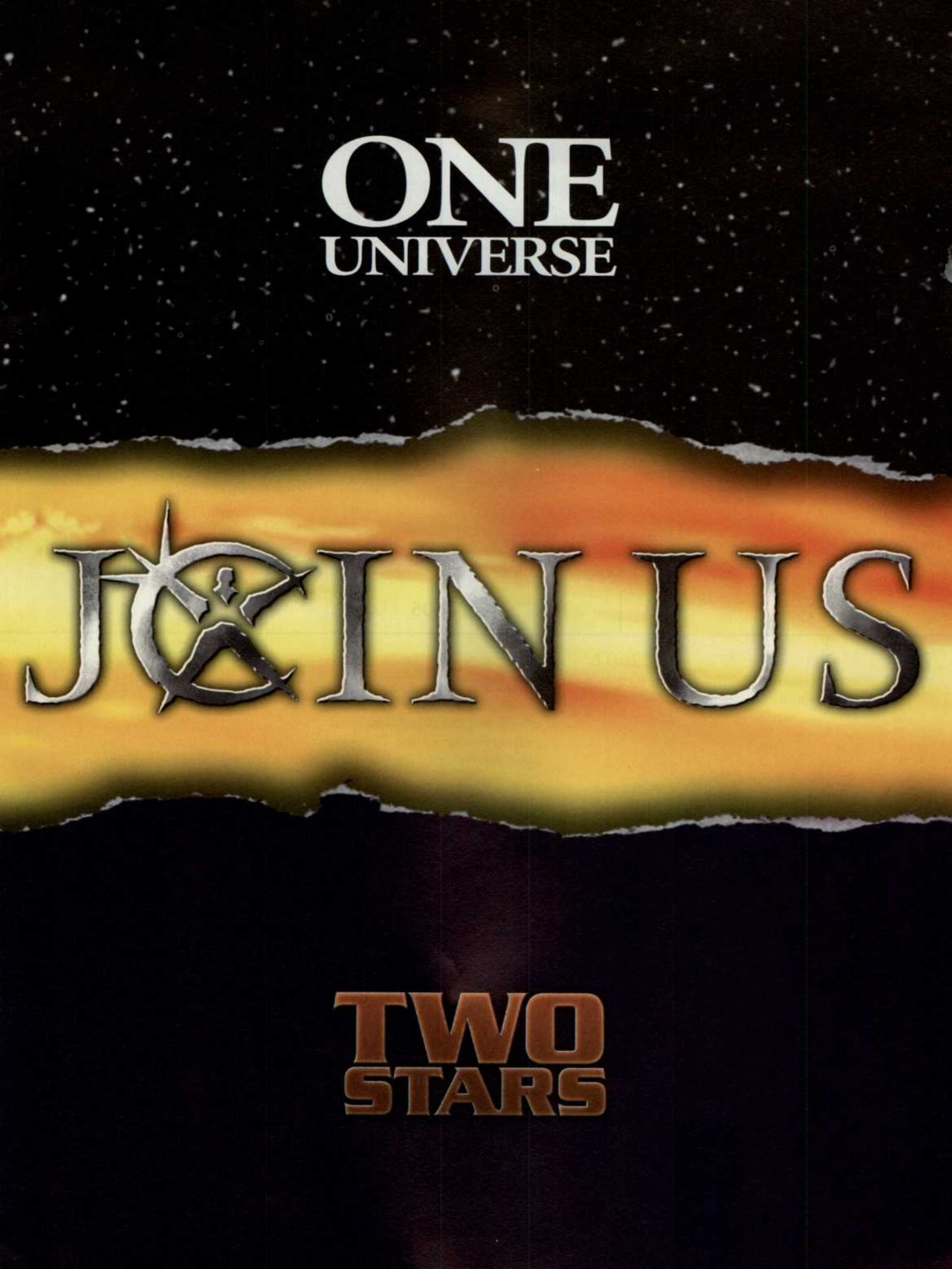
Quake III is still in its *very* early stages, and the maps you see in the screenshots here may never make it into the final game. However, the game is very playable at this point: DeathMatching is possible, and several of the weapons have been inserted into the game with temporary textures. "John wants us to build a fully functional game right away, with temp art and models, so we can actually play it and test it as we go," says Cloud.

But what about the future, and what ever happened to *Trinity*? "If *Quake III* isn't *Trinity*, it's really damn close," says Cloud. " I think the big difference is probably the level of detail, and being able to accommodate massive changes in level of detail so you can create a lot of outdoor terrain. That doesn't really work in a DeathMatch game — you don't want to have people running around in a big world. Other than that, everything we talked about that *Trinity* would be is basically in *Quake III*."

When the topic of conversation inevitably turns to when the game will be finished and in stores, the id response, predictably by now, is "When it's done." A release in time for the big Holiday season, like *Quake II* last year, has been mentioned, but that is looking extremely unlikely given the state the project is in now, and how much work has yet to be done. Instead, the smart money is in a release in the early part of next year, most likely around March or April — but with id, of course, anything is possible....



JOHN CARMACK RECENTLY MODIFIED THE *QUAKE III* RENDERER SO IT WOULD WORK UNDER WIDESCREEN HDTV MONITORS. MMM, LETTERBOX EDITION....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2471

Sentinel Cybertronix unveils Prometheus.

2602

The Fire. *The Cybrids turn on humanity and destroy the Age of Hope. Earthsiege begins.*

2605

A series of defeats forces Earth's people to withdraw support for the fledgling colonies on Luna, Mars, Venus, and outlying mining stations. The colonists suffer massive casualties.

2627

End of The Fire. *The daring destruction of Prometheus's moon base fails to uncover signs of the Dark Intellect* ITSELF.

Inception of the Great Human Empire. Petresun I crowned Emperor.

2652

2800

The Empire and the Cybrids have amassed huge armadas, but no one really knows the extent of the buildup.

Martian rebels discover advanced alien technology which shifts the balance of power. Rebels become a legitimate challenge to the Empire.

2826

2829

Hostilities break out on Mars and Venus. The Emperor unleashes the Imperial Fleet to crush the rebellion. The Cybrids seize the opportunity and launch a massive invasion armada. STARSIEGE *begins.*

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2832

STARSIEGE ends.

3350

Meta-jumpgate discovered to be part of a network of interstellar gates. The Diaspora begins. Humanity begins to spread throughout the galaxy. "Those Who Jumped," the first people travelling through the jumpgate, forsake the security of the Great Human Empire to journey into the unknown.

3400

Settlers refer to themselves as a "tribe," the Children of the Phoenix. They claim to follow the teachings of the renowned warrior Harabec Weathers, hero of the Cybrid Wars.

3450

A powerful force of Imperial Knights, the Blood Eagle, appear in tribe space to subdue the Children of the Phoenix for the Great Human Empire. The conflict fractures the Children, as groups break away to form new tribes. This event becomes known as The Splintering.

3455

The Starwolf tribe forms, supposedly founded by renegades from the Children of the Phoenix and Blood Eagle.

Tribal culture is now in a perpetual state of war. The Blood Eagle, far from their homes for decades, have come to consider themselves a "tribe." Finding HERCs impossible to maintain, they adopt the flexible armors used by the many tribes.

3480

3530

Formation of the Diamond Sword tribe under the tutelage of the Enlightened Master. Using innovative strategies and striking with precision and economy, the Diamond Sword rapidly carve out a large holding for themselves.

Blood Eagle forces prevail in the Hepta Ourubis system following use of ecocidal weapons. Starwolf losses are high.

3932

3940

Rough census by the Children of the Phoenix shows that of the hundreds of smaller, independent tribes, an "alarming number" have either allied with or agreed to non-aggression pacts with either the Starwolf or Blood Eagle. Already the skirmishes have increased, and bloodfeuds grow more common.

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CARMACK 3:16

An Interview with the Master of 3D

After creating the graphic engines for *Wolfenstein*, *Doom*, and *Quake*, you'd imagine that John Carmack would take some time off — maybe go for a nice long drive in one of his Ferraris and take a breather for a few months. But this is *John Carmack* we're talking about — as far as the man in charge of id Software is concerned, there's no time for rest.

Once again, Carmack was kind enough to invite us for a chat about the technology behind *Quake III*, and the multiple directions id could go.

After redefining the shooter genre with *Quake II*, why aim for a DeathMatch-only sequel?

Originally, the intention was just to do *Quake III*. It was a pretty clear plan, and it probably would have worked out just fine. We'd basically take the *Quake II* artistic style and storyline, extend it with similar gameplay and a brand new graphics engine. We were a fair bit into that, and were running into some problems with the internal development team — the artists weren't all thrilled about redo-ing the art they had done before in 24-bit color with extra maps, and that wasn't really exciting anyone very much. No one seemed to be all that enthusiastic about the project.

We went over a bunch of different ideas about what we were going to pursue, and this was an idea that I came up with right after I finished *QuakeWorld*. I've always wanted to do an online-targeted game designed for an online persistent world, and you can do some really wonderful things with that.

Whether or not that's commercially viable for an action game is doubtful, but the insight was that if we only followed the multi-player experience, rather than having two divergent styles of gameplay, we could produce a game that could probably be successful.

In terms of the "wow" factor, what about *Quake III* is going to impress gamers?

Quake II was a hacked-up, modified version of *Quake* as far as rendering technology went. There was nice integration with the separate renderers, but it used the same fundamental design decisions as *Quake*. *Quake III*'s rendering is a completely new design, so there are a lot more changes. In obvious terms, everything's 24-bit color graphics, the curved surfaces are the big new thing that people wouldn't have seen before. Anything you've seen in *Unreal*, like fog volumes or light globes — those are good features that we're thinking of for our new technologies.

> **"I've always wanted to do an online-targeted game designed for an online persistent world, and you can do some really wonderful things with that. Whether or not that's commercially viable for an action game is doubtful..."**
>
> JOHN CARMACK, HEAD HONCHO, *QUAKE III*

Did any aspects of the *Trinity* project get funneled into *Quake III*?

The networking architecture is getting completely rewritten for *Quake III*. There's going to be really significant improvements in all of that, and it's not that there's specific directions for the *Trinity* project to get rolled into this, but it's a focus on working on the networking and getting better stuff out of it. There's some things that I had talked about that aren't in the plans, such as an unlimited-sized world. That's not nearly as relevant for a DeathMatch-type game. Most multi-player games are going to be of a relatively small scope. We haven't punched it to the limits of what a *Quake II*-sized map can do in DeathMatch play.

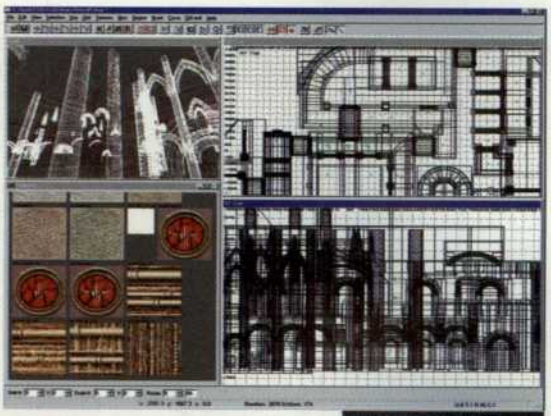
Levels can be built that can handle a few hundred people. I've always wanted to see someone do a *Quake Armies*, where there are large-scale team maneuvers, where you have thirty people on a team. There's a very different style of interaction there.

Is this engine built from scratch?

The way I started building the renderer turned out to be a really wonderful way to do development. I actually built three different renderers in my early experimentation. Since *Quake II* does the renderer in a separate DLL with a fixed interface between it, I was able to use all the *Quake II* game stuff. So you could run around with *Quake II* game logic, picking stuff up, in a voxel renderer! That was awesome.

As far as the rest of the code, I'm going through major rewriting, but I haven't started with a clean sheet of paper in the rest of the code. In the end there's going to be certain things that were pretty close to right in the first place, like the basic command parsing stuff. Almost every subset got some good work done. The keyboard code now handles international keysets — it's little minor things that enhance everything. We've got arbitrary color sets on all the different text printing. The networking code is

completely changed. With the game logic, there's an entirely new module of code in client-side game logic, which is where all the multi-piece entities and events are stuck together.



THE NEW LEVEL EDITOR IS MUCH MORE COMPLEX THAN THE LIKES OF *WORLDCRAFT* OR *BSP*. BUILDING SOMETHING AS DETAILED AS TIM WILLITS' CATHEDRAL IS GOING TO TAKE A *LOT* OF SPARE TIME.

What do you think will be the average gamer's system by the time *Quake III* is released?

The standard gamer's PC is going to be a Pentium II system, with a reasonable 3D card. The range of 3D acceleration is still a lot broader than we'd care for, really, but the truth is that most of the systems selling right now are selling with chips with various flaws. The common ones shipping in OEM systems right now — the ATI Rage Pro is barely adequate, but it'll work; Permedia 2s are shipping, and they are fairly adequate, but they won't be able to do several of the features like in *Quake II*. No colored lighting, and they also can't do the specular lighting in *Quake III*. The RIVA 128 is plenty fast enough — and they've got really good driver coverage and all that, but the chip has internal issues. It doesn't have enough bits of precision on its rasterization or blending, and the biggest problem is that it doesn't interpolate triangles across alpha channels, so it can't do the specular lighting effects. But it's certainly fast enough for the game.

All the Voodoo cards do everything right. The Intel i740 cards do everything right. The Rendition cards do everything right, and all the upcoming cards are great. The generation coming out over the next couple of months, like the Matrox, the Savage3D, the TNT, the Banshee — all of those are great. There are individual strengths and weaknesses, but it's all nitpicking, they all do everything right.

In the multi-player focus, I think it's fair to say that our consumers will have decent 3D chips. I think we're definitely going to lose some by doing no software rendering, but we're already taking some risks with the multi-player focus there. Throwing out the software rendering altogether does let us make a lot of architectural improvements, like I mentioned with the polygon rendering thing — we can improve the game there, and it's also the purity of focus. By narrowing our focus rather than trying to accomplish everything, we're able to do a much better job in the areas that we're working on.

Is the diversification of the 3D card market a good thing or a bad thing?

I think that early on, during the first couple of generations, there were some bad designs, like having too much power. Now, everyone has kinda settled down; everyone understands what's necessary. I won't name any particular names, but I wouldn't be sad if a couple more 3D card companies vanished off the face of the earth. It would make everyone's life easier, because now that most of the majors are doing things right, I don't think there's nearly as much push for radically different innovations from other companies.

Aside from the *Quake* engine games, there aren't many GL games available. What's your take on the latest implementation of Direct3D and DirectX 6.0?

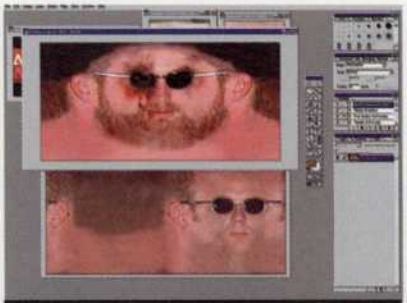
DirectX 6 is pretty good. They've added

THIS SUBTERRANEAN ARENA SHOWS OFF THE BRAND-NEW LIGHTING AND CURVED SURFACE EFFECTS IN *QUAKE III*.

a lot of functionality, and it's a lot easier to use. It's still limited to the Microsoft platform, and that's something of an issue for us. We're trying to make sure we'll run on UNIX platforms, and if things go well, the Macintosh.

Do you foresee porting the *Quake III* engine to any of the upcoming consoles, like Sega's DreamCast?

I hate working on consoles for a lot of reasons. Working on a console from a purely technical standpoint is actually pretty entertaining — it's nice working on a fixed hardware platform, and not worrying about diversity. But the console business market, working with especially big Japanese companies, just really bites. I really doubt we're ever going to do that again, in-house. We've been allowing our stuff to be ported by outside teams, and none of them have really been great successes, and we don't pay any attention to them. It's not a focus for us. Now, we are beginning to loosen up a bit on our console ports, to allow them a little more creative freedom. That should help them out better, since previously we had been more paranoid. We were like, "Do as close to an exact port from the PC as you can, because we don't want you to screw something up and make something we're not happy with." But as the memory on the platforms spreads so much, they just make something that's a small fraction of the PC in terms of visual experience, and they don't add anything else, which is *not* a good game. We're loosening up a bit on that. I'm sure you'll see derivatives of the games on the consoles, and the new consoles are actually very good.



YOU MAY BE SEEING SOME FAMILIAR FACES IN *QUAKE III* — WITH A FEW SNAPS OF A DIGITAL CAMERA AND SOME CLEVER SKINNING WORK...

... THE ID DESIGN TEAM MADE BRANDON JAMES ONE OF THE FIRST HUMANS IN THE GAME. YES, THE BULLET SHOT THROUGH THE GLASSES IS A *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*/*BATTLESHIP POTEMPKIN* REFERENCE.

How are you pulling off the curved surfaces?

They are non-rational Bezier curve nets. We're tessellating them dynamically, so that we can choose different levels of detail — you can knock them all the way down until an arch is two polygons, or you can tessellate them down to an incredibly fine detail level. That's a good chunk of the scalability. Actually, we're using these a lot more than I was originally expecting to, and I have to change some of the ways I'm doing collision detection against them. When I originally set up the curves, I figured we'd use them for columns, arches, and things like that, as an accent. But after several things that Brandon [James] has done — like building an entire *level* out of curves — I have to redo a few things based on that.

I may wind up putting in the ability to import some more conventional NURB models, but one of the main reasons we're using quadratic Beziers instead of cubic NURBS is that it's a lot less control points for them to deal with in the editor. A quadratic patch only needs nine points, while a cubic patch needs sixteen. When you go to rational patches, it's an extra parameter per point, and it just takes a lot longer to create stuff with that. It takes longer to dynamically tessellate them, but that's really a second-order effect.

Er, yeah, that's what I was thinking. So what kind of a frame rate hit are you getting when you add features like specular highlighting?

Specular highlighting is really neat because there's a little bit of extra calculation to determine what it is, but I was able to use a blending mode that already exists, and the rasterization cost of it is *nothing* over regular lighting maps.

Were there any big sacrifices you had to make with *Quake III*?

There are always sacrifices, in terms of the trade-offs. Bump-mapping is an obvious example — that's something that's very hardware intensive, and in a slow-paced game, it's a neat effect. It's a subtle thing, where a big wall of stuff doesn't look like a tiled representation of it as light strikes the different things. It would be ridiculous to put that in a multi-player-focused game. Some people say "have both," but it's rarely the right way to do things. If you want to do bump-mapping, you should go all the way, and all your artwork should be composed of bump maps. If you know that ninety percent of your players aren't going to use it, you've wasted a lot of time, added a lot of resources, and given them a sub-optimal experience.

What do you think of the bitching and moaning from some quarters of the Internet crowd on *Quake III*'s direction?

I was actually pretty surprised at the Internet reaction. The 'net community focuses on multi-player, and there were a large number of people complaining about it. But I really don't take that many cues from public opinion, because people are like that. If people like something a certain way, they will assume that change is for the worse. Public opinion comes and goes, and you make yourself pretty unhappy trying to please everyone in the world.

CARMACK SAYS "A *DOOM* SEQUEL WITH MODERN TECHNOLOGY IS A SURE-FIRE WINNER." WE CAN ONLY HOPE.

Have you ever considered going back to *Wolfenstein* or *Doom*?

This comes up a lot. We had two proposals to do a *Wolfenstein* game by a couple of people we've worked with, and we came really close on a couple of occasions, but we kinda backed off for various reasons. But we still think it's a great thing, because the thing about *Wolfenstein* is that everyone understands World War Two and Nazis. It's important to give people something they can identify with — that's LucasArts' great advantage. Everyone knows *Star Wars*. You don't have to explain *Star Wars* to bring them into the story. They just get it immediately, and that's a big advantage. *Wolfenstein* has that going for it, too — you are the cliched hero of all the old war movies, and people just *get it*. I think it'd make a great game. Some gamers right now never played the original *Wolfenstein*, and a lot of them don't even know what it is — I'm not sure if it has that much brand loyalty — but it's still a great concept one way or another.

Doing a *Doom* sequel with modern technology is a sure-fire winner. We really have no plans for after *Quake III Arena*, because it's so dependant on how well it's received. We have no idea how well it's going to do. If *Quake III Arena* is a hit, we'll probably follow along with more things like that, maybe persistent online world stuff. I've wanted to do that for a long time. But there's a very real chance that we'll go out and sell half as many copies of this as we've sold of anything before, because it just turns out that there aren't as many people who want to play that type of stuff. In that case, we'll probably do another single-player game, probably a *Doom 2000* or something like that.

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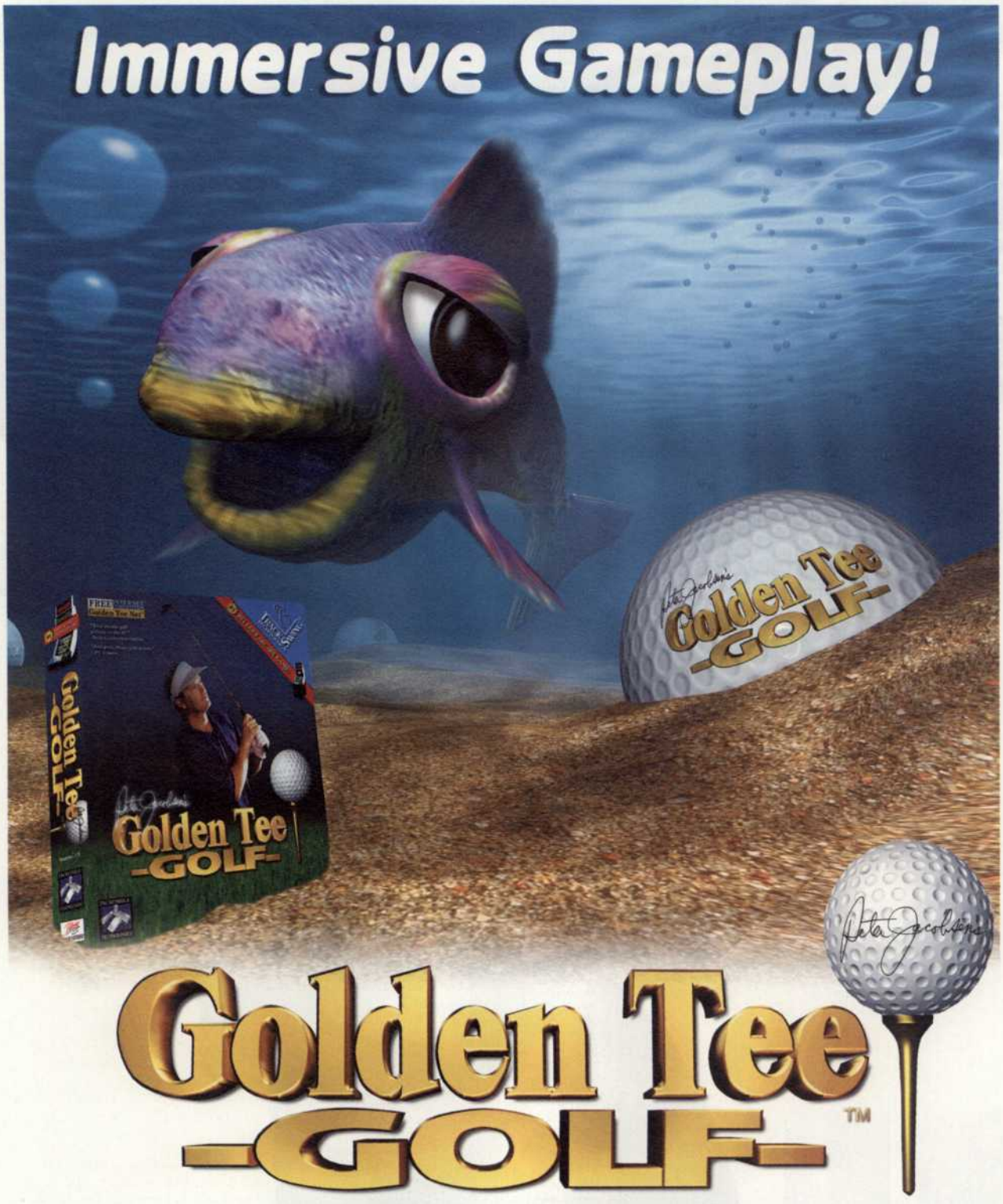

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

A Chat with id CEO Todd Hollenshead

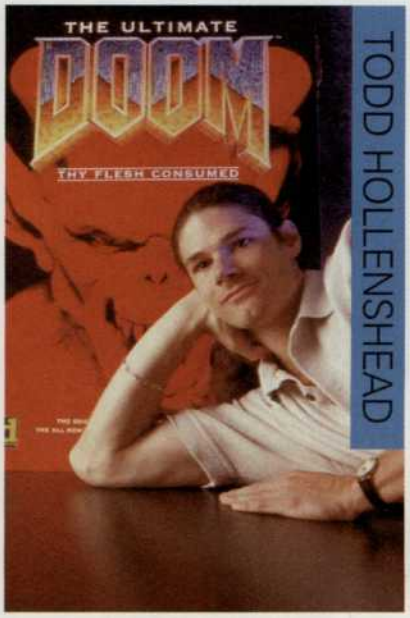
Even though Todd Hollenshead is the man in charge of id's financial arrangements, he's far from the stuffy accountant type. On the contrary, Hollenshead is a member of the id Software tribe – and, unlike many business managers, this is a man who knows how to DeathMatch. Hollenshead spoke with *PC Gamer* about licensing out the technology, keeping the *Quake* merchandise top-notch, and where id is headed.

You're the "Biz Guy;" how's the biz been?

It's been really good. We've been in a position where we really can't complain too much. We've got a great relationship with Activision, and we're still working with GT and some other distributors on the console side. Sales have been very good, so no worries, as they say, on the business side. We're about as firmly planted as you could be.

How have the licensees been doing with the *Quake II* engine?

We don't really keep in touch with them that much on what their specific ship dates are. We've obviously been in contact with the licensees on an occasional basis for the various requests they may have. Raven's got *Heretic II* that's coming up, that looks to be on schedule. The reports that I saw on the 'net were that the *Half-Life* release is imminent, and the Ritual guys will be done with *SiN* in October. Then you have *Daikatana* and *Anachronox* — I'm not exactly sure where those are. It looks like *Daikatana* is going to be delayed a little now that John Anderson left there, so they're in search of a new level designer and maybe a new programmer. *Anachronox* is a pretty big game; I think they're pretty aggressive on that. Tom Hall showed us the design document one time, and it was a *thousand pages*! To get that done in twelve months was going to be a Herculean effort anyway, but it sounds like everything's going well with that project. And Xatrix is working on *Kingpin*.



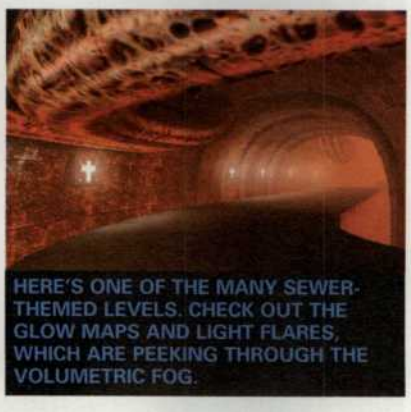
"Lots of people have brought up the demand for *Wolfenstein*. We could also go back and revisit *Doom*, or we could do something new. We've got a lot of options in front of us. The reception of *Arena* will have a lot of input over where we go in the future."

TODD HOLLENSHEAD, CEO, ID SOFTWARE

Many developers have moaned that working with the *Quake* engine is extremely difficult. Does anyone at id work in third-party developer support?

We don't specifically have anyone assigned as third-party licensee support. To preface that, I think that it's difficult making games, so if somebody says "It's difficult working with *Quake* technology," that's sort of like "Yeah, well, if it was easy, everybody would be doing it, right?" Nobody said it was going to be an easy task to do a great game — it's a long, hard, arduous task, and you have to be dedicated to be able to pull it off. That's the case, even if you have the best technology in the world.

I've seen some comments that it's easier to do levels with the *Unreal* technology than it is with the *Quake* technology because of the BSP processing and the VIS times — it takes a lot of processing power. Of course, when Carmack designed the *Quake* engine, he designed a process knowing we had an Origin2000 back there to process BSP and VIS maps on, so it wasn't necessarily designed for somebody who would be processing maps on a Pentium 200, a Pentium II, or even a two-processor system. It is time-consuming in that regard, and I think that's part of it.


HERE'S ONE OF THE MANY SEWER-THEMED LEVELS. CHECK OUT THE GLOW MAPS AND LIGHT FLARES, WHICH ARE PEEKING THROUGH THE VOLUMETRIC FOG.

Is it true that it costs a million dollars to license the *Quake II* engine?

The licensing terms we don't really publicize. There's not anything that really says "It costs this much," and it's certainly not a million dollars; it's a lot less than that. As in every business deal, the terms would vary, and there's certain royalty points we look for in a license, and there's a certain advance we want in a license. Before we give out the technology, we want to be sure they're serious, and that there's going to be some return on putting the technology out there and the risk we take that it'll be released.

But if somebody is 100 percent convinced that their game's going to be a blockbuster, and they're willing to pay us more advances, we're willing to substitute

A HIDING CAMPER SURPRISES THE VIEWER WITH A GALLON JUG OF WHOOP-ASS. YEOWH, THAT HURTS!

that for lower royalty points. There is a trade-off — I think I've seen some of the numbers floating around about what Apogee's license was for the engine, and how that was a big huge number, and a whole lot more than what the Epic guys were charging for *Unreal* and those sorts of things, but the Apogee guys are pretty certain that *Duke Nukem Forever* is going to be a hit, so that would be something to contemplate when you look at those specific numbers. We don't try to put anybody in the poorhouse — it's in our interest to make sure that they get the game out and developed in a timely fashion.

Has anyone licensed the *Quake III* engine yet?

I have to be a little shady along these lines, because there's not anything that we can talk about. We haven't done any *Quake III* engine licenses, but that's not to say we won't before the game has shipped. Generally, our philosophy about that sort of stuff is that technology development isn't "Okay, here's where we are now, we're going to go to this point in X amount of time" — it's more like "This is where we are, we're headed north, but we may wind up northeast, or west, or whatever." We're not exactly sure what our final destination is, especially with Carmack. He'll be going in a direction, and see something he thinks is important, and he'll be changing back and forth. If you license somebody technology, you don't want to drag them around on that ride. We're used to that technology, but other companies aren't. We like to talk about licensing once we have something that's done enough where we can have a pretty clear vision of where the end of the road is.

We've all seen the *Quake* T-shirts and hats, but aside from that, id hasn't done much in terms of *Quake* merchandise. Why is that?

Adrian [Carmack] is adamant about making sure this stuff is top-notch quality. He won't let something slide. Some other companies have done some watch games or whatever, where they do a 3D game and it's supposed to be on an LCD display. We actually had a company with a reasonable financial proposal, and I brought it back to Adrian. He said, "Tiger Electronics? *Smash!*" [Hollenshead laughs].

We're working on some action figures. The deal is not signed, so I won't go into too much detail on it — then I'll be guilty of doing what I asked these guys not to do — but hopefully we'll have that deal inked up really soon, and we'll be able to put some shots of some of the stuff we're working on up on the Internet. I think everybody's going to think that's really cool. Adrian's really into it — and if Adrian's into it, it'll be cool.

But a lot of that stuff we don't do, like *Quake* jewelry — believe me, nobody's retiring off the money we're making off those, not even the guy who's making the jewelry — he's just doing it because he's a big fan of *Quake* and does that sort of stuff in his spare time. He does it also to support the community.

Most of the stuff we evaluate on cool factor first, financial value second. It doesn't necessarily have to be something that's going to be profitable for us. We also sell a lot of T-shirts through 1-800-idgames, but every T-shirt we sell is made of that Beefy-T/100 percent cotton, where we spent six bucks on the shirt before we even thought about screening to make it. By the time we mail it out, we're basically breaking even on stuff like that. When Activision came up with the *Quake II* hat idea, Adrian was like "Don't be coming back to us with some shitty ass hat! It better be good, or else I'm gonna say no!"

"We haven't done any *Quake III* engine licenses, but that's not to say we won't before the game has shipped."

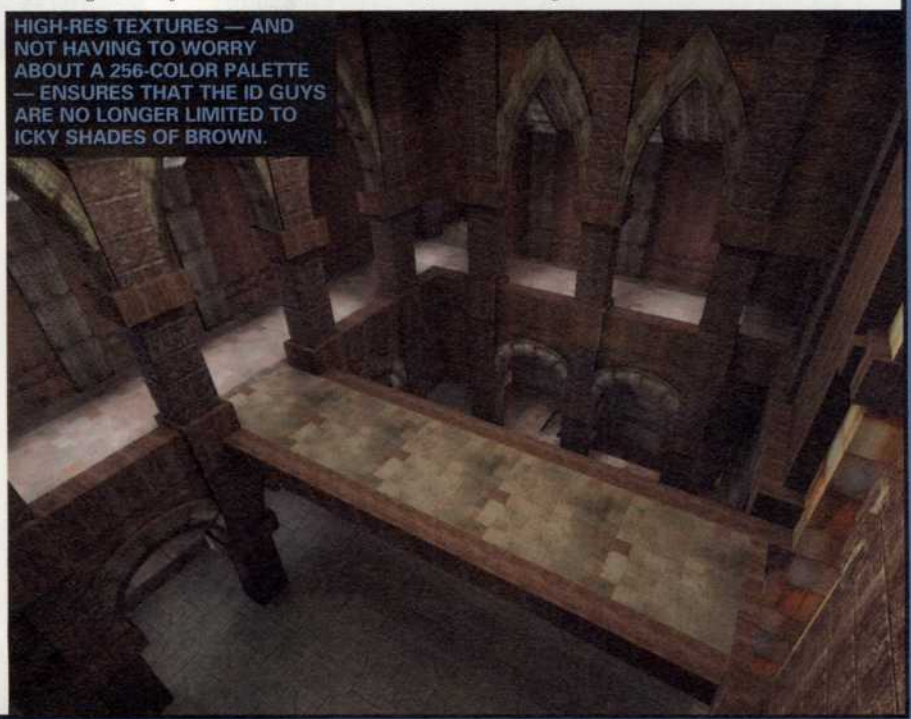
TODD HOLLENSHEAD, CEO, ID SOFTWARE

So Adrian has the final say on everything artistic?

Before we do anything, it's Kevin, Adrian, and John. Generally, the stuff will come to me or Anna [Kang]. If it comes to me, I'll take a look at it, then take it back to the guys and say, "Hey, are you interested in doing this stuff?" If they like it, then we go forward, if they don't, we won't. Adrian is the person who's basically quality assurance on that sort of stuff. Even if we do a deal, we always make sure that we have owners' approval rights, so if they screw something up, we can say no, you're not going to sell this with our logo on it. The company rests on intellectual property rights, and if you don't protect those and make sure they're viewed in a favorable light, you're draining the value of your company.

So what's the future of id after *Quake III*?

We'll probably look at what we did for *Quake III* and how successful it was, and make a determination on what our future path is — do we want to do something that's another *Arena*-type game, or do we want to steer back into the first-person shooter model we developed with *Wolfenstein*? We've got some interesting possibilities with what we could do. Lots of people have brought up the demand for *Wolfenstein*. We could also go back and revisit *Doom*, or we could do something new. We've got a lot of options in front of us. Where we end up at the end of the day and the reception of *Arena* will have a lot of input over where we go in the future. PCG



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GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES!

Our automotive experts check under the hoods of the new season's hottest motorsports games in this exclusive *PC Gamer* Sports Network report.

"Hi, I'm Gary Whitta."

"And I'm William 'Broiler' Harms. We're coming to you live from the *PC Gamer* Sports Network studio in San Francisco with an exclusive look at this season's fastest, slickest, and baddest motorsports simulations."

"Bill, ever since the good old days of the Papyrus classic *IndyCar Racing*, the PC has been the premier platform for gamers looking for realistic raceway action — but this year looks like it should be a real stand-out."

"That's absolutely right, Gary, and the main reason for that is the amazing power that 3D acceleration is making available to racing developers today. This year's batch of motorsports sims will be the first to have been developed from the ground up with dedicated 3D hardware in mind. PC gamers without acceleration will still be able to experience some amazing gaming, but if you really want to get the best out of this season's high-octane action, you're going to need a 3D card under your PC's hood."

"Well, Bill, this year we will of course be seeing the latest efforts from Papyrus, undeniably the most respected creator of racing sims in the world today, but a lot of the other contenders are coming from names less well-known in this highly specialized field."

"Right, Gary. Some of the more impressive-looking games on the grid this year are coming from less seasoned constructors like UbiSoft, RedOrb, GT Interactive, and Psygnosis. But they're all looking to make a big splash and claim pole position in this genre, and we'll have location reports on all those titles a later in the show."

"Why wait? Let's take a trip across the pond to check in with our first location reporter, Todd Vaughn. Are you there, Todd?"

UBISOFT
MONACO GRAND PRIX RACING SIMULATION

****PCGSN LIVE REPORT****
TODD VAUGHN, MONTREUIL, FRANCE

"Hello, Gary. I'm here in the land of frog's legs and French bread to bring you an exclusive first-look at one of this season's most exciting motorsports titles: *Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation*. That's the working title of UbiSoft's follow-up to *F1 Racing Simulation*, its exceptional debut racing sim of last year, and the developers are really trying to outdo themselves, with even sweeter looking graphics, more realism in the driving models, and a host of features to give racing fans as complete a package as they could ever hope for.

"The basics are already in place, including 17 authentic circuits, 11 teams with specific car designs, and 22 drivers that have individual personalities adapted to each of the tracks. Pre-configured car set-ups will be available for each track with an in-depth garage to tweak these settings to your liking. You'll even be able to make adjustments during the race, such as balancing your brakes and anti-roll bars, and planning your pit-stop strategy for taking on fuel. *Monaco* will also incorporate a choice of two brands of tires, a full flag system including blue, yellow, and black flag conditions, and true-to-life qualifying rules (the 107 percent rule).

"Out on the track, this game should appease even the most ardent sticklers for realism. In addition to the standard game modes, there will be customized championships, a training program, time attack, and a career mode. You can now race multiple seasons, starting off as an amateur racing for a small team and proving your worth to the more established teams for next season. If you just want to throw yourself in at the deep end, there's a new scenario mode that will feature 10 different hair-raising situations that you might find in a Grand Prix race, and you'll have to figure out a way to overcome these obstacles. The most interesting of the new game types has to be the Retro mode — take a trip back to 1950 (the first year of the championship) and see how you fare while driving one of the four included death-machines on the old-time track!

Both Direct3D and Glide APIs will be included to make the game's graphics absolutely sparkle.

"3D support will come via Direct3D, and a Glide version will be included for Voodoo Graphics users. There will also be support for 3D sound effects and force-feedback controllers. The best news is how much control you'll have over customizing nearly every part of the game. There will be an editor that allows you to create new car graphics (including the cockpit), redesign the menus, and most importantly, edit the tracks. You can import your own graphics files or use the included utility to create your own. Plenty of multi-player options will also be available such as a two-player split screen, eight-player network, and Internet play via a service being set up at UbiSoft's web site.

"If UbiSoft can improve upon the incredible work it did with *F1 Racing Simulation*, there's no doubt that *Monaco* will be a major contender when it's released in February. That's all from me, so I'll hand you over to Michael Wolf who's out in California taking a look at the latest hot-wheeled effort from Electronic Arts. Mike?"

Multi-play options are abundant; UbiSoft is setting up its web site for online racing.

You can make adjustments to your anti-roll bar or brake bias on your car during the race.

ELECTRONIC ARTS PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAR RACING

****PCGSN LIVE REPORT****
MICHAEL WOLF
SAN MATEO, CA

"Thanks, Todd. Based upon the increasingly popular Sports Car GT series, this simulation of Grand Touring (GT) class racing is looking good. The appeal of GT racing lies in the use of production model cars with limits placed on the power of the engines to increase the level of competition. Putting these restrictions on the cars results in a lot of close racing and plenty of contact, and it should also make for a very exciting game.

"But don't be fooled into thinking that *Sports Car* will be just a lighthearted, arcade-style romp around some pretty tracks in some hot cars, since care is being taken to make all elements of gameplay as realistic as possible. Yes, it will look great with its 3D accelerated graphics, but there's going to be a lot of meat on this bone. Each car has an accurate physics model, and the tracks have been meticulously recreated to conform to their real-life counterparts. Unfortunately, *Sports Car*'s license doesn't extend to the use of the actual names of the drivers who compete in this sport, but each of the computer-driven cars is being programmed to replicate their tendencies and abilities.

"All of the teams and manufacturers from both North America and Europe that participate in the series will be represented, and the heavy contact of GT racing may make you cry when you see some of the cars that will be taking the body damage. So far, the list of teams and their vehicles include the Panoz Esperante GT1, BMW M3, Honda/Acura NSX, Dodge Viper GTS, Saleen Ford Mustang, Callaway Corvette, Mazda RX-7, Mosler Raptor, Vector M12, Lister Storm, Morgan +8, and the Nissan 240SX. More licensing deals in the works call for the inclusion of the Panoz Esperante Q9 Hybrid, Callaway C12, McLaren F1-GTR and the Mercedes CLK GTR, among others.

"Among the real-like tracks reproduced in the game are Sebring (FL), Laguna Seca (Canada), Las Vegas (NV), Road Atlanta (GA), Lime Rock Park (CT), Mosport Park (Ontario, CAN), Hockenheim (Germany), and Donnington Park (UK). There will also be a number of fantasy tracks created for the game. Each track will feature realistic weather conditions that will affect the handling of the cars, and time of day will also be a factor — many of the tracks mentioned above feature night races.

"A full-featured replay system will be included so you can enjoy every pass and collision over and over, and the designers are hoping to emulate modern television-style coverage with a plethora of camera angles. Multi-play will be available, including Internet racing, although no word so far on the maximum number of participants.

"With the wide selection of tracks and vehicles that will be part of the package (even more are promised after the game is released), combined with the intense action and dedication to realism, *Professional Sports Car Racing* is gearing up for a push toward the winner's circle when it hits store shelves later this year. But it won't be the only sportscar sim to hit market around that time, as Dean Renninger, who is up in New York, can explain. Give us the word, Dean."

Many tracks feature night racing. Turn those headlights on for a little racing under the stars.

Many of the cars used in *Professional Sports Car Racing* will be familiar to the public.

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  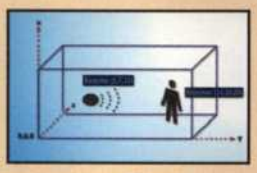

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GT INTERACTIVE

TRANS AM RACING '68–'72

The physics model will allow the cars to leave the road and take to the skies.

****PCGSN LIVE REPORT****
DEAN RENNINGER
NEW YORK, NY

"I'm here in New York City to get the low-down on GT Interactive's first entry into the motorsports market — *Trans Am Racing '68 – '72*. Although this lesser-known style of racing is still around today, the most popular time in its history was back in the late sixties and early seventies, when men were men and cars were made of the heaviest steel that money could buy. Now, thanks to GT, you'll be able to relive this exciting but often forgotten period in racing history.

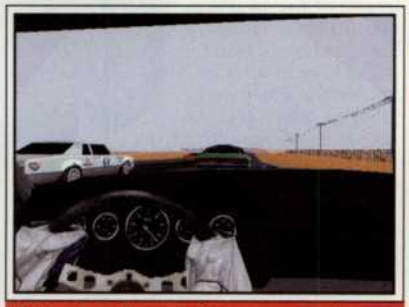
"*Trans Am* will primarily be aimed at the hard-core simulation crowd, but a more relaxed arcade mode with preconfigured car setups will also be included to accommodate the more casual gamer. At the highest level of realism, you'll be able to get under the hood and make all kinds of adjustments to your chassis, gearbox, tires, brakes, and suspension. The developer, Engineering Animation, Inc., (EAI) is best known for its nine years of experience creating reenactments of vehicle dynamics and traffic accidents for use in court cases, so the car physics should be some of the most realistic ever. The driving model uses a combination of driver input (steering, accelerating, and braking) and road conditions to determine how they affect the suspension, tires, and powertrain of the car, resulting in some seriously realistic handling. Of course, if you get into a little fender-bender (or worse, since tires *will* leave the ground, and rollovers or even end-over-end crashes are possible), you can expect the car's performance to suffer accordingly. Not only that, but *Trans Am* includes an on-the-fly crash model that will make each encounter a unique event and deform the car appropriately. The pretty graphics will have support for 3D accelerators and use the Direct3D API, but a software-rendering mode will also be available.

"Much work has gone into recreating the time period. There will be 12 classic muscle cars such as the Ford Mustang, AMC Javelin, Plymouth Barracuda, Chevrolet Camaro, and Pontiac Firebird. The tracks (a minimum of 12) will be recreations of the actual circuits that were used at the time, such as Bridgehampton, Lime Rock, Mid-Ohio, Riverside, and Kent. Some of the courses no longer exist or have been remodeled over the years, and EAI did a lot of research to make sure each was authentic to the era. Thirty actual Trans Am teams will make it into the final game, and the racing style of the computer drivers will be modeled after the men who drove for those teams (although it's still not known if GT will be able to use their real names).

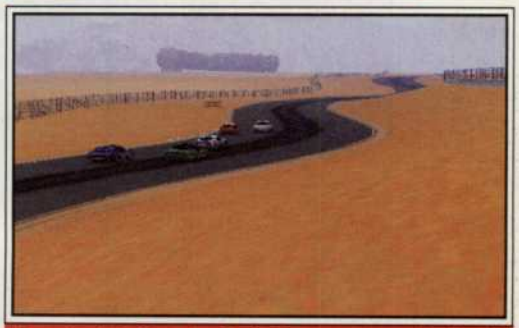
"Other neat features of *Trans Am* include an automatic anticipating camera for looking ahead as you enter turns using the cockpit view, and optional interactive 3D pit-stops — enabling this feature will allow you to control the members of your pit crew as they go about refueling and changing tires. As many as 16 players will be able to race via LAN or over the Internet, and a ton of camera angles will let you view your favorite moments using the VCR-style replay functions.

"In the crowded genre of racing simulations, *Trans Am Racing '68 – '72* looks to have the nostalgia factor on its side to distinguish itself from the pack (only *Grand Prix Legends* offers a similar hook), and the awesome collisions and relaxed physics in the arcade mode should give it appeal to a wide audience when it's available next January.

"Now it's time to hand off to my good buddy and a man with more than a few moving violations on his record, Jay Vidheecharoen."



Driving from the cockpit camera, your view will shift to anticipate upcoming turns.



Every track in *Trans Am Racing* is an exact reproduction of the circuits that were raced from 1968 to 1972.

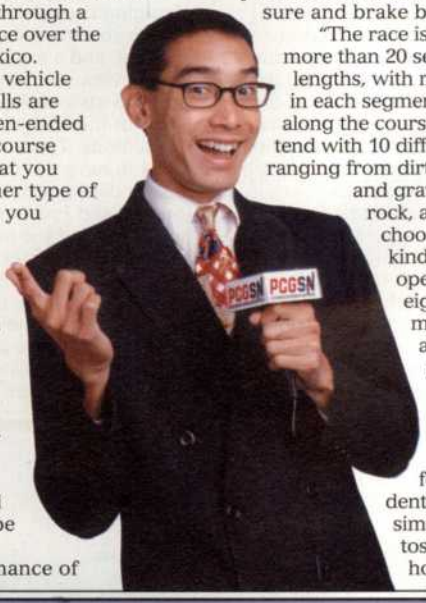
RED ORB ENTERTAINMENT

BAJA 1000 RACING

****PCGSN LIVE REPORT****
JAY VIDHEECHAROEN
NOVATO, CA

"I'm just a stone's throw away from Mike in nondescript Novato, where the innovative *Baja 1000 Racing* is being developed. This 3D off-road racing simulation from developer Trilobyte (yes, the guys responsible for *The 7th Guest*) will let you compete in the SCORE Tecate Baja 1000, a yearly race that pits man and machine against the elements through a grueling 1000-mile race over the Baja peninsula in Mexico.

"A fast, reliable vehicle and good driving skills are essential, but the open-ended environment of the course demands strategy that you won't find in any other type of race. This is because you need to make decisions about when and where you will make pit-stops. Before the race even starts, you'll need to set up your support stations along the length of the course, hoping the treacherous conditions don't mangle your vehicle far from a scheduled pit area. You'll also be able to make adjustments to the performance of your vehicle in areas such as tire pressure and brake bias.



"The race is broken down into more than 20 segments of various lengths, with multiple checkpoints in each segment. As you advance along the course, you'll have to contend with 10 different terrain types ranging from dirt roads, mud, sand, and gravel to tarmac, lava rock, and water. You can choose from two different kinds of vehicles — 16 open-wheel buggies and eight Trophy Trucks models will be available, each set up to a particular team's specifications. The handling of the vehicles should be very realistic, using a four-wheel independent physics model to simulate the feel of being tossed around by the horrendous driving conditions. The graphics will, of course, be 3D accelerated (using the same engine as Trilobyte's upcoming action game *Extreme Warfare*) with special effects ranging from the mandatory (lens flare), to the original (lighting effects based on the changing time of day).

Choose your ride from a selection of 16 open wheel buggies and eight Trophy Trucks.

"Your competition will consist of 15 other actual drivers from the Baja 1000 race, and the AI routines have been based on their driving abilities. Game modes include Practice (so you can go out for a leisurely spin), Time Trials, Ghost Racing (race against your own best time), and the Championship. In order to compete in the big race, you'll first need to qualify by racing up to five consecutive segments in Sportsman class (the lower of the two difficulty settings) before you can tangle with the Pros on the full course.

"*Baja 1000* will include support for 3D sound systems, and after the game is released, new cars and track segments will be available for download. For the ultimate in competition, you'll be able to hop on the Internet and race against as many as 15 people. There will also be team play and a full ranking system.

"The potential of *Baja 1000 Racing* is enormous. It's an unusual and refreshing subject for a racing sim, and the chance to get behind the wheel of a dune buggy and take to the open desert is hard to pass up. It's still early in the development process, but we'll be watching it as it nears its May release date. And now it's over to Greg 'Fancy Pants' Vederman in Seattle."

The four-wheel independent physics model should simulate the teeth-rattling Baja ride very well.

SIERRA SPORTS

The Dodge Viper sure is a pretty car, and you'll get the chance to try one out yourself when *Viper Racing* is released this November.

With 3D-accelerator support, these "tubes-of-death" in *Grand Prix Legends* look very sweet.

****PCGSN LIVE REPORT****
GREG VEDERMAN
SEATTLE, WA

"Hello, it's great to be here in Seattle where Sierra has not just one but three new motorsports simulations in the works, each one focusing on a very different kind of racing. Whether you're into classic Grand Prix racing, stock car tussles, or taking the latest ultra-modern sports car out for a spin, you should find something in this upcoming batch to get your motor running.

"Sierra is, of course, the home of premier race-game developer Papyrus, and its latest effort is the long-awaited *Grand Prix Legends*. Set in 1967, this game gives you the chance to relive a time of racing when safety precautions were minimal and the cars had a tendency to fly off the road at will. The danger carried over to the spectators, who enjoyed watching the races from the precarious vantage point of the shoulder of the track. *Legends* promises to be Papyrus' next big step towards realism, and will feature a brand new physics engine, historic teams, cars, and tracks. A new artificial intelligence model was designed to make the races extremely competitive. Authentic tracks from the 1967 season will include Watkins Glen, Spa, Zandvoort, Monaco, and seven others. Old-time drivers Grant Hill, Jim Clark, and Jack Brabham, as well as teams such as Lotus, BRM, and Ferrari will be represented. You can expect support for 3D accelerators based on the 3Dfx and Rendition chips, and eight-player racing via LAN. *Grand Prix Legends* should be available by the time you read this.

"Next up is another title from Papyrus: *NASCAR Racing — 1999 Edition*. Using the same game engine as its award winning *NASCAR 2*, Papyrus has spruced up the graphics, and tossed in a few new items that should make this a cool addition to the series. *NASCAR 1999* will have 34 tracks consisting of those from both the original title and the *Grand National Series* expansion pack, plus 12 never-before-seen circuits such as Las Vegas, Homestead, and Heartland Park Topeka. Both the tracks and the cars will be updated to reflect the 1998 season. The exciting news is the addition of the Craftsman Truck series. The slower but less stable dynamics of the trucks will be accurately modeled, and all of the rules of the series will be featured. 3D support will be via 3Dfx and Rendition, and multi-player support will include access to the NASCAR Racing Online Series (*www.nros.com*). *NASCAR Racing — 1999* Edition will be available towards the end of October.

Racing in the Craftsman Truck series will be a exciting new experience for NASCAR racing fans in the 1999 edition.

"Last but not least is *Viper Racing*. The lead developer on this title is Rich Garcia, a former owner of Papyrus, so it too has some pedigree behind it. You'll be able to race the stock Dodge Viper GTS, as well as the stripped down version, the GTS-R, using three difficulty levels from arcade to all-out simulation. A career mode will allow you to earn money to upgrade your car as you progress through three classes of racing. A paint kit will let you decorate your Viper in your own style, and adjustments can be made to your set-up using the same telemetry analysis that real racing teams employ. The tracks will have no boundaries, meaning you're not limited to the road, and in multi-player, there will be a handicapping method that allows drivers of various skills to have a competitive race. *Viper Racing* will, of course, support all the latest tricks that your hardware accelerator can handle when it comes out this November.

"Well, that's all from me and my report from the Sierra proving facilities. Now I'll hand you over to Rob Smolka, who has the scoop on this season's top two-wheeled contender."

ELECTRONIC ARTS

SUPERBIKES WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

****PCGSN LIVE REPORT****
ROB SMOLKA
SAN MATEO, CA

"As you've seen from our previous reports, there's going to be plenty of variety this season for those who like the four-wheeled variety of racing. But if you'd rather scream down the road on two wheels and feel the wind in your hair and the bugs in your teeth, Virgin's *Superbike World Championship* could be the one for you.

"If you've ever witnessed a real-life Superbike Championship, you know that racing doesn't get much more exciting than this. At speeds of up to 200 miles per hour, these brave (some might say insane) men who ride these machines are never more than a few inches away from meeting their maker. All that stands between them and disaster is heavy-duty kneepads and a lot of skill as they lean into one treacherous turn after another.

"In *Superbike World Championship* you'll be able to emulate these daredevils, using the actual bikes and racing against the teams and drivers on 12 accurately modeled Superbike race courses, like Laguna Seca (USA), Monza (Italy), Donnington (UK), and Phillip Island (Australia). The bikes, including dream machines such as the Ducati 916, Honda RC 45, Kawasaki ZX7R, Yamaha YZF, and the Suzuki GSXR are being intricately recreated using technical data supplied by each manufacturer. You'll be able to fool around with this data too, tweaking settings like gear ratios, suspension, and tire pressure. To make sure that the handling of the bikes feels just right, professional riders have been brought in to put the bikes through their paces and make suggestions on how to improve the handling characteristics. The drivers include the likes of two-time Superbike winner Carl Fogarty and the 1997 champion, John Kocinski.

"As many as 30 participants will be involved in the races, with four modes of play — Practice, Qualifying, Warm-up, and Championship. The 3D graphics (Glide and Direct3D will be supported), as you can see from the screenshots, are looking fantastic, and multiple camera angles will let you enjoy the racing from all over the track. The driver and the bike are separate entities, so the crashes should be realistic as your polygon driver goes flying off his ride, subject to the laws of physics. The sounds should be authentic as well, using samples from actual races.

"To top off the fun, force-feedback devices will be supported so you can feel every pebble on the road, and multi-player races can handle as many as eight players via LAN. Modem and serial play features will also be included when *Superbike World Championship* races to store shelves towards the end of this year.

"And on that note, it's over to Lisa Renninger in Foster City, California, where Psygnosis is putting the finishing touches on its motorsports effort. Lisa?"

Actual riders from the series have given their input on the handling of the bikes.

The track could get a little crowded if the full retinue of 30 drivers is racing.

We say, God bless the 3D accelerator. *Superbike World Champion* is looking mighty fine.

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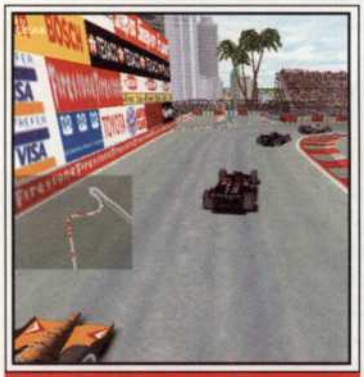
PSYGNOSIS

NEWMAN/HAAS RACING

****PCGSN LIVE REPORT****
LISA RENNINGER
FOSTER CITY, CA

"Thanks, Rob. Now, no list of racing simulations would be complete without a title based on the CART circuit — for you laymen out there, that's what we used to call IndyCar racing — and Psygnosis has joined forces with the very successful team of Newman/Haas for a game that looks sure to please hardcore simmers.

"In *Newman/Haas Racing*, you'll go up against sixteen drivers, including Michael Andretti and Christian Fittipaldi of Newman/Haas, Jimmy Vasser, Robby Gordon, Arie Luyendyk, and Alex Zanardi. The AI will model the real drivers' abilities, taking into account factors they must contend with during a race like racing lines, drafting, tire wear, fuel consumption, and crash avoidance and recovery.



Plenty of camera angles will let you view the action from a comfortable distance.

"The 11 licensed tracks (plus four hidden circuits) will be a good mix of ovals (the Milwaukee Mile), temporary street circuits (Surfer's Paradise in Australia), and permanent road courses (Toronto in Canada). An exciting addition to the list of tracks in the new permanent road course in Houston — the developers used detailed survey plans to recreate this course, which is debuting in this year's CART season.

"When it comes to tuning up your racing machine for peak performance, *Newman/Haas Racing* is expected to deliver. Settings such as tire pressures, gear ratios, springs, and downforce will be adjustable. The physics model will take all of these factors into account, so the driving dynamics should feel realistic. When there's contact between vehicles, you'll see flips, flying debris (like wheels, for instance), and real-time deformation of the cars. If you're not up to the challenge, *Newman/ Haas* will offer plenty of help to the less experienced driver — damage, crashes, steering and braking assistance can all be toggled on or off. There will also be several difficulty settings that will alter the intensity and smarts of the computer-controlled drivers' AI.

Dynamic crash modeling will feature flying debris and real-time deformation of the cars.

"The appearance and presentation of *Newman/Haas Racing* is looking excellent. The graphics will be 3D accelerated through Direct3D. Extensive commentary will be provided by Bobby Varsha (of ESPN and ABC) and driver-turned-announcer Danny Sullivan. Twelve camera angles, including a television-style replay feature, motion-captured pit crews, authentic cockpit and engine sounds, and active rear-view mirrors should go a long way toward immersing you in the world of CART racing.

"*Newman/Haas Racing* has a lot of history to contend with. The Papyrus IndyCar titles, even though they're aging, are still considered the standard-bearers, and Microsoft produced a decent effort in last year's *CART Precision Racing*. In order to win over this audience, Psygnosis has to make sure the game has the realism that fans demand, while giving newcomers a way to ease in to the sport. We'll see if they manage to pull it off when the game is released in late October.

"That's all from me — now it's back to Gary and Billy in the PCGSN studio."

Try not to lock your brakes as you slow down to enter a turn… the smell of burning rubber is most unpleasant. But it looks pretty, huh?

"Thanks, Lisa. Well, Billy, after watching those reports it looks like serious motorsports fans have got a lot to look forward to. But what about the more casual racing fan who just wants to gun it and go?"

"I'm glad you asked me that, Gary. There are plenty of more action-based racing games in the pipeline too, and to help you sort the dream machines from the lemons, here's a quick guide..."

NEED FOR SPEED III: HOT PURSUIT

WHO: Electronic Arts
WHEN: Out now
WHY: Race for or against the law on eight tracks. Radar, dispatchers, and roadblocks will help you catch the scofflaws — or if that happens to be you, use a police scanner to outwit Smokey. Beautiful 3D-accelerated graphics and a host of high-priced will round out this eye-catching game.

What side of the law are you on? *Need For Speed III* will let you play as good guy or bad.

MOTO RACER 2

WHO: Electronic Arts
WHEN: Early November
WHY: Last year's hit makes its return with some new features and improved graphics. A track editor will let you design your own courses to go along with the 32 already included. Both Superbike and Motocross events will again be featured, and there will be night racing and varying weather conditions.

Motor Racer 2 hopes to build on the incredible reputation of the successful original.

POWERSLIDE

WHO: GT Interactive
WHEN: Winter 1998
WHY: A post-environmental holocaust setting should help this one stand out from the crowd. Sprawling tracks will let you race over sand dunes, swamps, and mud, and your vehicle will be able to go anywhere — even up walls. Combine this with advanced AI for the computer drivers and multi-play over a LAN or the Internet, and you have the makings of a very exciting game.

GT Interactive's *Powerslide* lets you race across hostile post-apocalyptic environments.

TEST DRIVE OFF-ROAD 2

WHO: Accolade
WHEN: Holidays 1998
WHY: Choose from a wide selection of powerful off-road vehicles (including the exclusive Hummer license), and race on six tracks set in real-world locations like the Matterhorn, Santa Cruz mountains, and Kona, Hawaii. Improved graphics with 3D acceleration and breakable objects on the track should help to make this a better game than its mediocre predecessor.

Take a selection of classic muscle cars and modern roadsters to their limits in *Test Drive 5*.

TEST DRIVE 5

WHO: Accolade
WHEN: Holidays 1998
WHY: A huge selection of 14 sports cars and 14 muscle cars and a whopping 17 tracks will give you much more for your dollar than last year's version. Of course, the graphics will be improved, and the tracks will feature multiple paths and shortcuts, breakable objects, night driving, and varying weather conditions. There's even a new cop chase mode that lets you chase down those ne'er-do-wells with the expensive cars.

AD

WHO: Carts Entertainment
WHEN: Sometime in 1999
WHY: Race in four different eras (1930s, 1950s, 1970s, and 1990s) over 12 courses with three scenery themes. As the years roll by, the cars will change, and the course will morph to reflect the progress of the times (i.e. a gravel road may become a super-highway). A 3D-rich world with varying weather effects and changing seasons, sophisticated physics models, advanced AI, and the freedom to race anywhere in the world sure make *AD* sound like a game worth investigating.

AD will give gamers the chance to test their racing skills in four different decades.

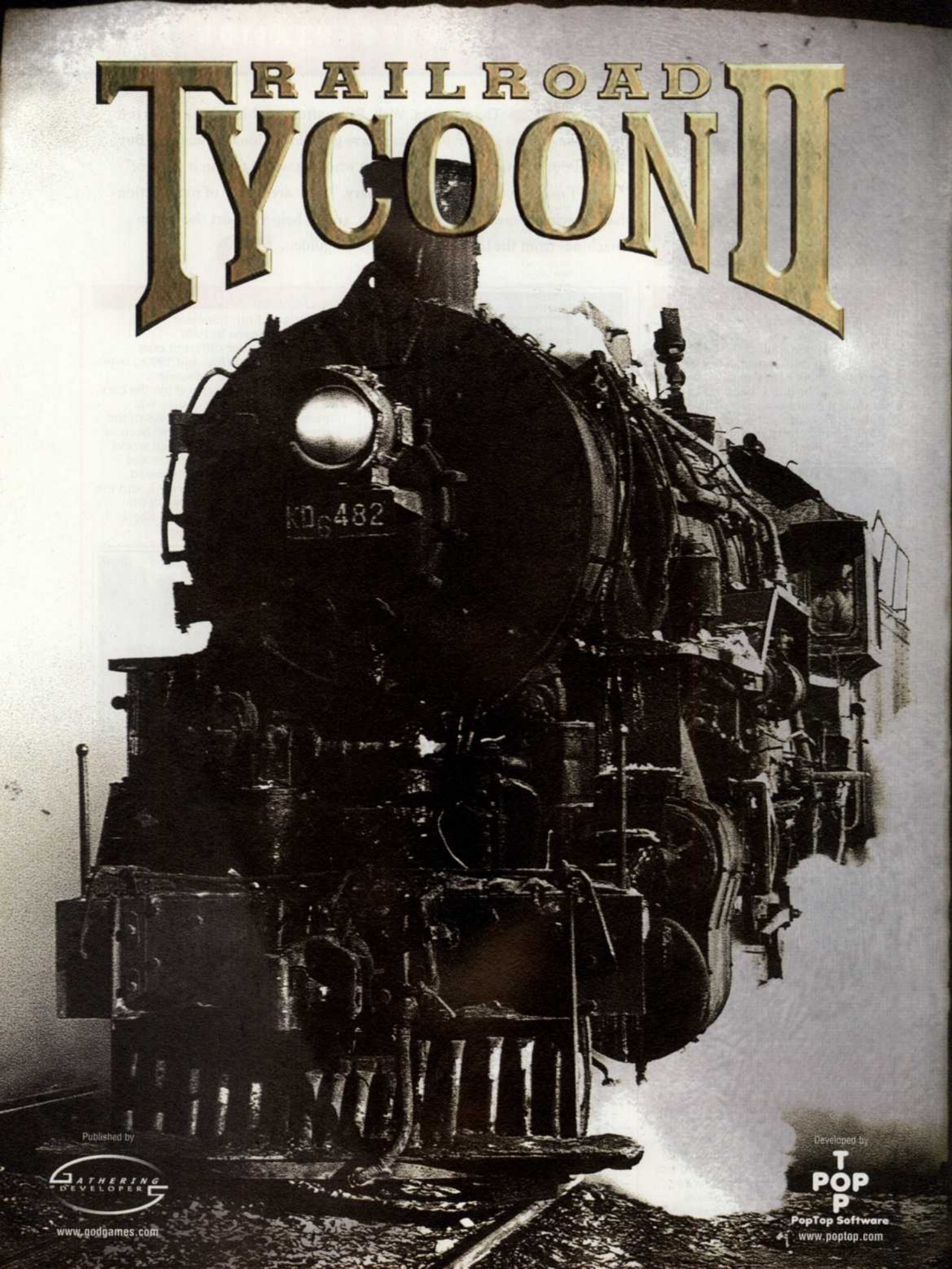
OUTLAW RACERS

WHO: Megamedia Corporation
WHEN: Holidays 1998
WHY: Race across randomly generated tracks featuring both city and highway driving. In order to win races and earn money to upgrade your car, you'll have to contend with the police, city traffic, and your fellow competitors. The graphics will be 3D accelerated, and multi-play will be included for as many as eight.

Outlaw Racers pits you against the clock, the cops, and an entire city filled with road-hogs.

PCG

RAILROAD TYCOON II



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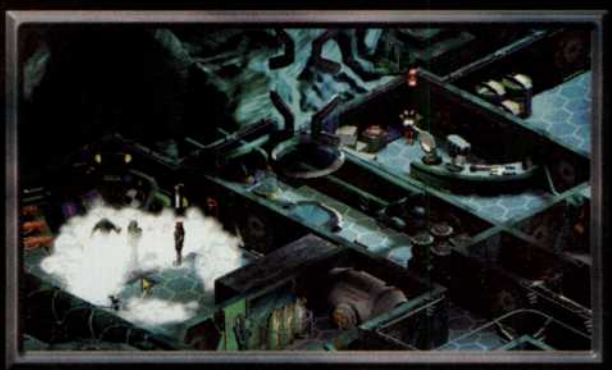

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Number of games based on the *Quake II*

Number of games based on the *Unreal* engine

Discrepancy? You betcha. T. Liam McDonald
Epic's ultra-sexy 3D engine in droves, and

GT INTERACTIVE
DEUS EX
PAGE 163

3D REALMS
DUKE NUKEM FOREVER
PAGE 142

ASC GAMES
TNN OUTDOORS PRO HUNTER
PAGE 150

# of Unreal

engine released in the past year: **1** (*Hexen II*)

expected by this time next year: **12** (approximately)

finds out why developers are flocking to previews some of the fruits of their labors...

ASC GAMES
WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE
PAGE 149

LEGEND ENT.
WHEEL OF TIME
PAGE 160

MICROPROSE
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MICROPROSE
KLINGON HONOR GUARD
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ONE MAN AGAINST AN EMPIRE

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All great games have a breakout moment.

Go-go dancers pop their tops in Duke Nukem 3D. A chainsaw is perched on a pedestal like a holy relic in Doom. And your emergence from a crashed spaceship to find the cataract of a tropical waterfall spilling foam into a massive canyon in Unreal, while little bunny critters scamper around and odd birds soar overhead.

It is the creation of a whole new world in a way that has never been done before. It transports you somewhere else. It practically demands that you shatter the bucolic scene with a spray of blood and brains by squishing the harmless critters. It is the breakout moment of *Unreal*, and when gamers — and game developers — saw it, the future of *Unreal* was decided for the next two years: this was an engine that would power games into the next millennium.

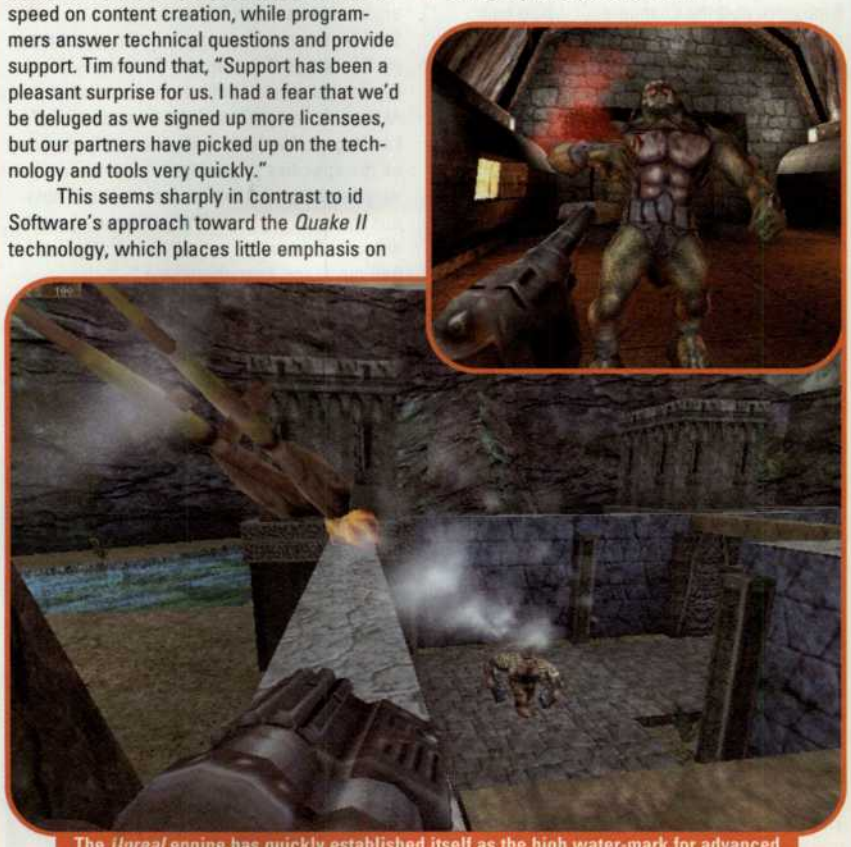
That was exactly how Tim Sweeney, the Chairman and Founder of Epic MegaGames, planned it. Tim created and is the principal programmer for *Unreal*. As he says, "The big goal with the *Unreal* technology all along was to build up a base of code that could be extended and improved through many generations of games. Meeting that goal required keeping the technology quite general-purpose, writing clean code, and designing the engine to be very extensible. The early plans to design an extensible multi-generational engine happened to give us a great advantage in licensing the technology as it reached completion. After we did a couple of licensing deals, we realized it was a legitimate business. Since then, it has become a major component of our strategy. So, our success there has been a combination of good planning and good fortune. We were very fortunate that great developers like MicroProse, Legend Entertainment, ION Storm, and 3D Realms evaluated the *Unreal* tech and chose it for their projects."

Rumor has it that an *Unreal* license costs upwards of a million dollars, but Epic would not discuss financial issues. If that figure is accurate, Epic will probably wind up making more on third-party games than on retail sales of *Unreal* itself. With a license, the licensee gets all the source code for the *Unreal* game, engine and editor. The game code is provided merely as an example, since licensees are not permitted to reuse it. A level designer visits the licensee to get them up to speed on content creation, while programmers answer technical questions and provide support. Tim found that, "Support has been a pleasant surprise for us. I had a fear that we'd be deluged as we signed up more licensees, but our partners have picked up on the technology and tools very quickly."

This seems sharply in contrast to id Software's approach toward the *Quake II* technology, which places little emphasis on licenses and offers almost no support. But then, the two engines are very different. John Carmack's 3D technology is very malleable and enables developers to rewrite and change huge chunks of code. *Unreal* focuses instead on offering a full set of tools that can be used as-is out of the box, such as the elaborate scripting engine that gives *Unreal* events their punch. *Quake* is more readily hackable, while *Unreal* has a better set of tools for easy content creation.

The power of *Unreal* to create vast outdoor environments and enable developers to get moving quickly and relatively easily has spawned a large set of forthcoming "Sons of Unreal." MicroProse is using it for *X-COM Alliance* and *Klingon Honor Guard*. Legend has *Wheel of Time*, ION Storm has *Deus Ex* and the intended *Daikatana* sequel, 3D Realms has *Duke Nukem Forever*, and ASC has *TNN Outdoor's Hunter* and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. A rumor that GT was making the next *Oddworld* game using *Unreal* is inaccurate, though, according to GT's Dan Harnett, "*Oddworld* is looking at *Unreal* as a rendering and layout tool, and even that is not a given yet."

Add these to the number of total conversions being worked on, such as *Force Recon*, and action games look set to be *Unreal* for a long, long time....



The *Unreal* engine has quickly established itself as the high water-mark for advanced 3D environments. Third-party developers like how easy it is to adapt the engine.

Working With Unreal

"Working with UnrealED is *very* different than building a level in *Quake/Quake II*! Unlike *Quake/Quake II* editors you do not simply place polygons in space and hope you don't have any leaks. In UnrealED you start with a huge solid mass and carve rooms out of it. Think of it this way: instead of building a house of cards (like in *Quake/Quake II*) you have a huge block of clay. You create your level by cutting rooms out of the block of clay. Of course at any time you can add clay in to the empty spaces you created."

DR. SIN'S *UNREAL*ED EDITING TUTORIALS PAGE

3D REALMS

Duke Nukem Forever

PUBLISHER: Apogee/GT | **DEVELOPER:** 3D Realms | **DUE DATE:** "When it's done"

KICK-ASS FACTOR: Duke in Vegas, complete with strippers, sunglasses, and that nuclear cool.

***UNREAL* TRICKS:** Rumor says there is a boat, motorcycle, and some sort of wheeled vehicle.

After all the hype the largely imaginary 3D Realms-versus-id Software battle got in the press, it came as something of a shock when 3D Realms announced that *Duke Nukem Forever* would be based on the *Quake II* engine. The *Duke*-based Build engine and its games had been the only serious competition for the *Doom*/*Quake* nexus for almost two years, and now it seemed as though 3D Realms was giving in to the enemy. Its own next-generation engine — *Prey* — was lagging far behind the latest John Carmack creations. Indeed, there have been two full id engines since Build was created, so licensing the *Quake II* technology seemed like a good way to play catch-up.

But deep into its development cycle on this *Quake*-based *Duke*, 3D Realms surprised everyone yet again with a sudden switch to the *Unreal* engine. *Duke* guru George Broussard said the change-over would only cost about six weeks of development time, which either says a lot for the ease of *Unreal* or for the talents of the 3D Realms team. The "why" was more difficult to figure out, as Broussard himself admitted:

"That's a simple question with a very complex answer. It was a combination of many things. In the end we felt the *Unreal* engine would allow us to do more things with *Duke* and his universe and in the end actually save us time. As we were near the end of *Quake II*-licensed games coming out, we saw that we were going to have to make substantial tech changes to *Quake II* to compete in 1999. With *Unreal* we essentially bought five to six months of tech changes, and now can focus more on gameplay and extending *Unreal* to new heights. We also knew the Epic guys very well, so the deal fell together in just a few days once we made the decision. Had we been releasing a *Quake II* game this year like *Sin* and *Half Life*, I doubt we would have switched. It was a matter of timing and having the freedom to make a radical move like this. Most people would have said 'next game,' but not us."

Little of the original *Quake*-based *Duke Nukem Forever* has made it into the *Unreal*-based version. As far as level designer Keith Schuler is concerned, "There wasn't really a conversion — we started everything over. The *Unreal* engine allows us to create levels that better represent our vision of Duke's world, and altering the existing levels just didn't seem feasible."

For Schuler, there's always a bit of a trade-off between engines and editors: "Each editor has its own strengths, and I really wish we could create a hybrid of the two. UnrealEd actually uses the game engine, so the lights, meshes, and translucent textures all appear exactly as they would in the game. Also, a map that takes hours for *Quake* to compile on a quad Pentium Pro would take UnrealEd a couple minutes. This means the level designer can repeatedly make small changes to a level without having to sit around waiting a lot."

The key to the switch for everyone involved in *Duke* was primarily *Unreal*'s ability to render outdoor environments. Both Broussard and Schuler are maddeningly evasive about the particulars of *Duke Nukem Forever* — All Broussard would commit to was: "*Duke Nukem Forever* takes place 'in and around' Las Vegas. We don't really want to give away all the specifics this early, but there are some very key locations in that area that are obvious to use in a game. *DNF* will span about 6 different 'zones,' all with different art, mood, bad guys, and everything else."

Specific elements that have leaked out through previews and behind-closed-door viewings at trade shows have given us a taste of what to expect. A few eye-popping screenshots are already getting fans excited, none so much as the old Geezer "Gus" and a shot of a helicopter attacking Duke. The vehicles tend to vary from report to report. At some point in development there has been a level on a moving train (a la *Blood*), a truck, a speedboat, and a motorcycle. Whether any of these will make the final game, however, is still to be decided.

More tasty details include greatly enhanced and more interactive strippers, character interaction, the ability to choose Duke's style of shades, an interface based on those shades, jet skiers who attack Duke's boat, and a "sidekick" that works alongside the player. How much of this will make the final game, since much is unverifiable rumor, remnants from the *Quake* version, and demo models, remains to be seen.

Asked for more specifics about the interaction and gameplay, Broussard would only say it will be "Insane. That's the only word for it. We plan on making *DNF* the most interactive game to date when it ships, just like *Duke 3D* was in 1996. Fans can definitely count on us going above and beyond with the interactivity. This applies to the environment as well as characters you run across, or vehicles for that matter. We have a pretty good track record with *Duke 3D* and *Shadow Warrior* of doing interactive things that players really enjoy. You can expect new levels of that in *DNF*."

Duke Nukem Forever's switch from *Quake II* to *Unreal* technology took six weeks, but it will ultimately save months of development time.

Working With Unreal

"*Unreal* definitely handles outside areas better than *Quake II*. It should be pretty clear that from a visual basis *Unreal* simply looks better than *Quake II* does at the moment. *Quake II* definitely has the upper hand on the Internet play issue, but I'm confident Epic will get that sorted out, and if they don't, we will. *Quake II* can visually do anything *Unreal* does (at least with modifications), but we simply didn't feel we had the time to modify the engine, then make the game under *Quake II*. As it is, we're adding new visual tech to *Unreal* now, and using it as a base, so we are much farther along than if we had stayed with *Quake II*."

GEORGE BROUSSARD, PARTNER, 3D REALMS

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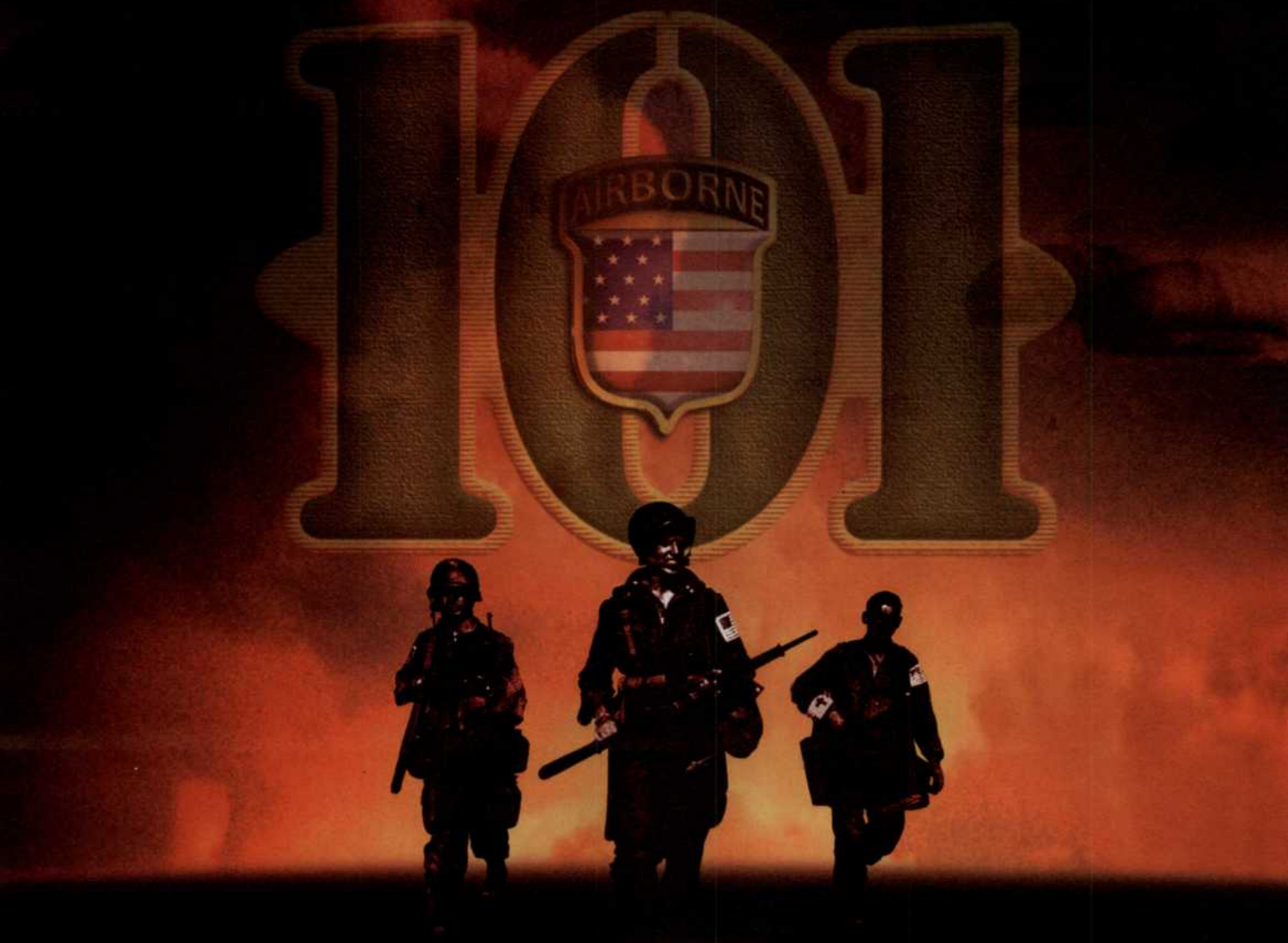

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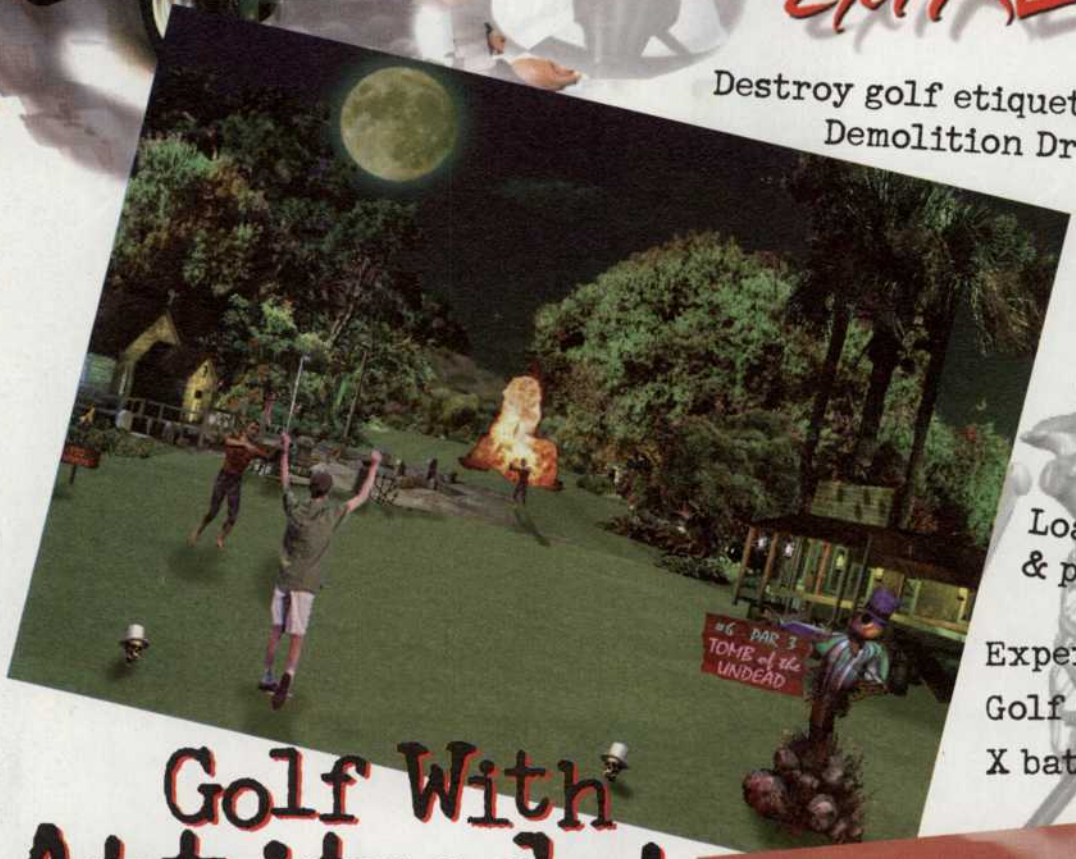

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Werewolf: The Apocalypse

PUBLISHER: ASC | **DEVELOPER:** DreamForge | **DUE DATE:** "When it's done"

KICK-ASS FACTOR: Hand-to-hand combat — as a werewolf!

***UNREAL* TRICKS:** Creature morphing.

We all love werewolves, of course, but we could always use more of them in our PC games. Developer DreamForge and publisher ASC Games plan to remedy that problem with the release of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, a new *Unreal*-powered actioner based on the popular roleplaying/storytelling game from White Wolf and aimed squarely at the hard-core gaming market. ASC's Travis Williams (one of the original *Werewolf* authors) and DreamForge have both been champing at the bit to create a deep, narrative action game based on White Wolf's sinister universe of fantasy and horror mythology. The central story involves the struggle of young Garou (werewolves) against the evil forces of the Wyrm to save Gaia, the Garou's patron earth spirit.

You play the game in the three different forms of the werewolf: human, half wolf, and wolf. Each form has access to different sensory information that figures into gameplay. For instance, some puzzles require you to use a heightened sense of smell, while others need better hearing. Combat is still a large part of the game, though it varies radically depending upon your current form. Humans can use weapons but wolves can't, and shamanistic magic will play a large part in combat. Most intriguing of all is the emphasis placed on hand-to-hand combat as wolf and werewolf, using claws and teeth in a variety of moves.

The adapted version of the *Unreal* engine used by *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* will allow creatures to morph into different forms right before the player's eyes.

Since transformation into a wolf is key to the game, DreamForge is working on building a morphing system into *Unreal*. "You can't be a Werewolf without changing into one," observes Williams. "We are not going the easy route with the morphing system, either. You will see people and animals change in front of you. No camera tricks, no bright lights and model swapping — our models will morph. Since morphing would be useless without being able to see yourself, we will be working on a more robust third-person camera so that you can play this game like *Tomb Raider* if you feel so inclined."

The action in *Werewolf* includes levels and maps set in the streets of London, the Amazon rain forest, an elaborate labyrinth, and the digestive tract of a gigantic worm. Needless to say, that last level is probably a gaming first, and one we frankly can't wait to pass through.

The high-res graphics and gross-out subject matter of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* should have no trouble making you want to hurl — especially if you had spaghetti for lunch.

Working With Unreal

"To be honest, there is nothing that *Unreal* offers that couldn't be done by any talented developer. However, who wants to spend that amount of time reinventing the wheel? What *Unreal* offers is an excellent foundation in which we can build much better games because a significant amount of groundwork has been done for us. We could spend three years coming up with an engine like Epic did, or we could thank them very kindly and worry about the other facet of making games — the content."

TRAVIS WILLIAMS, ASC GAMES EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (*WEREWOLF* & *TNN HUNTING*)

ASC GAMES

TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter

PUBLISHER: ASC | **DEVELOPER:** DreamForge | **DUE DATE:** "When it's done"

KICK-ASS FACTOR: The world's first accurate 3D turkeys.

***UNREAL* TRICKS:** The world's first accurate dead 3D turkeys.

Nothing comes close to the pulse-pounding, heart-stopping adrenaline rush of walking through a darkened wood, gun slung low, and coming face to face with man's most deadly adversary: the North American wild turkey.

Apparently, judging by the proliferation of hunting and fishing games, computer gamers are tired of killing things that might potentially shoot back, so they've moved on to harmless wildlife. This in itself is not necessarily a problem. The problem is how appallingly bad the actual gameplay and content of the hunting games has been. ASC and its developers at DreamForge may have hit upon a solution. Instead of the poor graphics, indifferent controls, and rooted-to-the-spot environments of *Deer Hunter* and similar games, they're using *Unreal* to create a true 3D environment with a full range of motion. Until you've faced down a 3D rendered turkey, deer, or bunny, you won't know the meaning of fear.

TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter promises to provide a much more comprehensive simulation than the cheapo deer hunting games we've seen so far.

This encounter may not exactly be a fair one, but hey, that's why we're at the top of the food chain.

Nine types of wild game are featured in *Pro Hunter*: small game (rabbit, quail, squirrel), big game (deer, elk, turkey) and migratory birds (ducks, dove, geese). Each creature has AI scripting to replicate their real-world behavior and "hit regions" (i.e., head, heart, etc.) that require the hunter to take precise aim. The "Active Wildlife Environment" creates variations in the experience by altering climate, temperature, weather and ground conditions (leaves, brush, snow), and scurrying animals. A wide variety of weapons and gear enables players to use handguns, shotguns, bows, scopes, and other equipment. Hell, there's even a virtual hunting dog included to scent and flush prey, and multiplayer, head-to-head tournament options.

"Interactivity will be the order of the day for *Hunter*," says ASC's Executive Producer Travis Williams. "We want you to feel like you are in the forest. You will see other animals moving around in the environments that are not your prey. Most hunting games are pretty boring in this aspect. They don't make you feel like you are there. In *Hunter*, the player interacts with the game environment just like in the natural outdoors. How the hunter decides to hunt — walking, sneaking, standing, and from a stand — will influence his or her chances of success as will the use of the calls and lures. The player hunts wildlife that has intelligence that mirrors their activities and traits in the wild. The hunter is able to track, scout, and hunt from tree stands to outwit their target. *TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter* will also offer the player the ability to bring along a Beagle or Brittany to kick up and circle small game."

The Unreal technology used by *TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter* will give virtual hunters a smooth-moving, full-featured countryside environment to explore.

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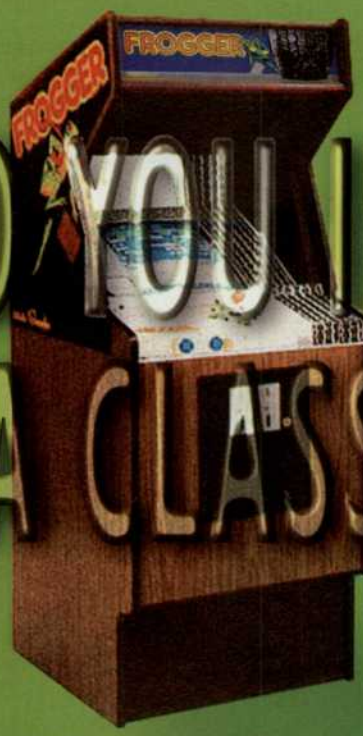

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MICROPROSE

X-COM Alliance

PUBLISHER: MicroProse | **DEVELOPER:** MicroProse UK | **DUE DATE:** Summer 1999

KICK-ASS FACTOR: Classic *X-COM* strategy element with real-time, first-person squad combat.

***UNREAL* TRICKS:** Command over multiple units, 2D mapping, multiple camera views.

MicroProse's *X-COM Alliance*: What better use could there possibly be for the *Unreal* engine than protecting the people of earth from invading bug-eyed scum?

After the disappointment of *X-COM Interceptor*, fans of the UFO-busting series will be understandably wary of any more radical moves away from its strategy roots. Nevertheless, the series will be taking a further step into uncharted waters with *X-COM Alliance*, a first-person action game, and it's a move that MicroProse says many fans have been requesting from the beginning. According to John Broomhall, producer of *X-COM Alliance*, "Ever since the release of *X-COM UFO Defense*, fans have been asking for the same thing: to meet the X-COM aliens face to ugly face, eye to evil eye, and see the scum eat our dust. However, we're determined not to make *'X-COM* meets *Quake,'* which is why we're spending so much time and effort modifying the *Unreal* engine to make an original title that's true to *X-COM*. MicroProse is not deserting the isometric squad-based strategy-style *X-COM* games: we've just always thought that the brand was strong enough to support many types of game, and this is just a different flavor which we think people will get really excited about."

Judging from what we've seen to date, they may just be able to pull it off. *X-COM Alliance* is a squad-level, first-person action game in the tradition of *Space Hulk*, *Terra Nova*, and *Rainbow Six*. Most of the familiar elements of the previous *X-COM* games are still in place; squad selection, arming, bases, psi-training, and research are all here in a somewhat simplified form. The core of the game is the management and strategic deployment of as many as four troopers (you and three "wingmen") into various alien confrontations. These missions take place in locations right out of the series: Sectoid scout ships, Ascidian bases, the Sectoid home world, a transport ship crashed into an asteroid surface, and your own home base during alien strikes.

The narrative unfolds throughout the various missions. *Alliance* takes place shortly after the end of the original *X-COM*, with you in command of a squad returning to Cydonia to recover supplies. A wormhole diverts your ship, landing you square in the middle of an alien war. The squad of hardened X-COM soldiers must infiltrate and investigate the alien ships in order to find a way home, but to succeed they must form an alliance with the aliens. Each map has a set of objectives and tasks that go beyond twitch-to-kill gameplay. How well or poorly you do against the alien threat is directly linked to how well you balance research, psi-training, weapons, and squad management.

Troopers are deployed into each mission at specific locations, and their actions may be controlled as a group or individually. Key commands enable you to direct their movement and firing orders, but MicroProse is working hard to keep it simple. Using a 2D map utility with waypointing and unit controls, you have precise control of the positioning and patrol routes of squad members. The 2D map can be overlaid on top of the 3D view, and you can view either the motion scanner mini map or a "trooper-cam" image from any member of your squad. Through the combined use of trooper waypoints, orders, and hot keys, you can coordinate attacks much like those in *Rainbow Six*.

As Broomhall says, "*Unreal*'s great routing system, combined with our Trooper AI, has given us the ability to order a trooper to go to a point halfway across the terrain, take on any alien encountered en route, and then to guard at the final destination. On occasion, you'll have to split your troopers up across a level to successfully complete the mission. Players can even psionically 'possess' them — if their psi-strength is high enough."

Working With Unreal

"The *Unreal* engine has given us the platform we needed to make a cool 3D X-COM game. Its extensibility and code flexibility has allowed us to create some unique features. For instance: our multiple viewpoints, 2D map, and trooper waypointing. The editor is extremely powerful and has greatly simplified the task of implementing the game content. It's an excellent tool for our designers, audio guys, and artists. Some of *Alliance*'s main features have been produced by our engine modifications, of course, but *Unreal*'s procedural texturing, scripting language, and its AI navigation systems are great facilities to have at our disposal."

JOHN BROOMHALL, PRODUCER, *X-COM ALLIANCE*

You'll have a whole arsenal of weapons with which to dispose of aliens like this ugly critter.

MICROPROSE

Klingon Honor Guard

PUBLISHER: MicroProse | **DEVELOPER:** MicroProse Hunt Valley | **DUE DATE:** Fall 98

KICK-ASS FACTOR: *Unreal* with Klingons, making it the first Star Trek shooter.

***UNREAL* TRICKS:** Anti-gravity, surveillance cameras, stealth suit, D'k Tahg knife.

Expect to see plenty of impressive 3D trickery like this glowing weapon effect, in *Klingon Honor Guard*. And, of course, there will be plenty of purple blood.

Over at MicroProse's Hunt Valley, Maryland, offices, another team is hard at work putting the finishing touches on *Klingon Honor Guard*. The first true first-person shoot-'em-up set in the Star Trek universe, *Honor Guard* will probably be the first *Unreal*-licensed game to make it to market — it was nearly complete as we went to press.

The story deals with an attempt to assassinate the Klingon leader Gowron — your duty is to find the conspirators among twenty-odd levels, including Klingon cities and fortresses, three different starship types, space stations, ice planets, and mines. Players will be able to affect gravity, fight in zero gravity and vacuum environments, destroy ammo dumps, and interact with countless objects in the game world. The levels we've seen so far look sharp and suitably "Klingony." More impressive is the D'k Tahg dagger, which you can use to execute some pretty elaborate attack moves, similar to the lightsaber in *Jedi Knight*.

Some of the *Star Trek: Next Generation* cast are even lending their voices to the game, including Tony Todd (Capt. Kurn), Robert O'Reilly (Gowron), Barbara March (Lursa) and Gwynyth Walsh (B'Etor). Paramount has been working closely with the developers, as it does on all Trek games, lending its talent and expertise to flesh out the game worlds. As producer Alex DeLucia says, "*Klingon* will be different than most other shooters, in that it is as much about the story as it is the blasting. Paramount was a team member in this endeavor. Access to their resources helped us to recreate the Klingon universe in a way that would not be possible otherwise."

By the time you read this, *Honor Guard* will probably be out, and you can see for yourself what a D'k Tahg knife does to a Klingon.

Thanks to the ease-of-use of the *Unreal* technology, *Klingon Honor Guard*'s levels can be bathed in glorious multi-colored lighting effects with little effort.

Working With Unreal

"The *Unreal* engine is simply the best engine available for license today. It allows developers to create worlds with a level of detail never before seen in games of this type. Aside from the obvious graphic abilities, the AI and scripting language is incredibly flexible. There was almost nothing that we dreamt up that we could not quickly and easily make a reality. Fractal effects, portals, advanced AI, creature/level interactivity, cooperative creature behaviors, disruption effects are just a few. While other engines may have some of these features, *Unreal* offers them all in the most affordable package out there."

ALEX DELUCIA, PRODUCER, *KLINGON HONOR GUARD*

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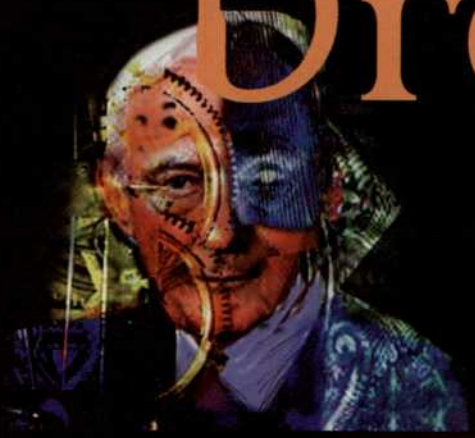

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LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT

The Wheel of Time

PUBLISHER: GT | **DEVELOPER:** Legend Entertainment | **DUE DATE:** Late 1999

KICK-ASS FACTOR: The warring fortress strategy element is bound to be an eye-popper.

***UNREAL* TRICKS:** NPC dialogue, complex event scripting, heavy narrative, and plenty of magic spells.

Robert Jordan's fantastical "Wheel of Time" novels have won legions of fans over the years, boasting a universe that's both politically complex and rich in character and incident, making it ideal for game conversion.

Legend's Glen Dahlgren spotted this potential and has been trying to bring this project to fruition since the days of *Doom*. The plot and characters of Jordan's world are too involved to explore at length here, but fans of the novels should know that the game takes place in a period *before* the first novel, so you won't see Rand or many other familiar characters. *The Wheel of Time* has already earned praise as one of the most promising and unusual games to come out of the *Unreal* engine. Designer Dahlgren and his team are pushing the editor to its limits to deliver a quasi-roleplaying experience with a remarkable strategy twist.

There are two distinct elements to the game: single- and multi-player. The plot is largely confined to the single-player game, which leads up to a blow-out style multi-player game. The lands are divided into "pockets," or regions, each of which has some important geographical features or items to find. Travel between these pockets can be done by magical spells, dimensional gateways, and Portal Stones.

As Dahlgren explains it, "The single-player game tells a story, introducing the characters, motives, and background; it explains why things are the way they are. It also exposes players to all of the design elements of the multi-player game. By the time they've finished the single-player game, they'll be ready to take on the world. The multi-player game focuses on certain key design elements: customizable citadels and strategic spell combat. It's presented as the climax of the single-player story, and it's mostly action."

The single-player game is a mission-based narrative in which the player assumes the role of an Aes Sedai sister who specializes in the study of magic artifacts (ter'angreal). The gamer must find those responsible for a massacre at the White Tower and thwart a plot to free the forces of darkness. There is plenty of story, dialogue with non-player characters, in-game scripted story events, cut-scenes, dynamic mission objectives, and some puzzle-solving, but the gameplay itself is still heavily rooted in action. "It's actually more of an action/strategy game with RPG elements,"

With *Unreal*, it's becoming increasingly quicker and easier to build 3D environments like this one.

Dahlgren says. "I didn't want to take away from the immersive experience by adding layers between the user and the environment; I just wanted to add depth to the design. Action is a large part of the experience. Combat is actually somewhat deeper than most first-person shooters. I wanted the experience to be more about choices than aim.

"It's much more important to make the right decision about what to do than to be the first to pull the trigger," he says. "For many of the ter'angreal, as long as you have a valid target, you don't even have to worry about putting him in your crosshairs. These artifacts are like spells; once you've cast them, they *will* have

Check out the impressive lighting and layered fogging effects in this moody exterior environment. Expect to see many more effects like this in the final game.

Working With Unreal

"It was difficult working with the engine in the early days — we were one of the first licensees — but I think that experience has given us a leg up on every other development team just coming onto the scene. We've built a number of tools and editor enhancements that have made life much easier for us and, hopefully, everyone else who's used them. After working with *Unreal* for so long, I can't imagine another engine having the flexibility to realize this design, or the power to realize the environments we're constructing. We're pushing a lot of limits, both on the programming and art fronts, and *Unreal*'s making it possible."

GLEN DAHLGREN,
DESIGNER, *WHEEL OF TIME*

Wheel of Time features architectural elements that are a little reminiscent of some of the levels seen in *Unreal*.

an effect. Also, the more powerful an artifact is, the slower it moves, giving someone time to react to it. That target may see a nasty effect floating towards them and decide to use a defensive artifact like absorb or reflect. Some of the more common artifacts, like fireball, allow you to unload your fury in a more straightforward fashion, however. The experience remains quite visceral, believe me."

The multi-player game is one of the most original and intriguing elements in *The Wheel of Time*. As many as four players act as leaders of the political factions in Jordan's books: two "dark" and two "light." The four citadel environments are Shadar Logoth (Hound), the White Tower (Aes Sedai), the Fortress of the Forsaken (Ishamael), and the Fortress of the Light (Whitecloak). Each has military forces, its own unique home fortress, and two "seals" that hold magical power. The object is to protect your seals and attempt to capture those of the other players, thus winning the game. You begin by hiding your seals in your fortress, then placing troops and traps to protect them. There are three types of troop: grunts (cannon fodder), captains (stronger units with programmable behaviors), and champions (level bosses). Users can also set up spears, pits, tilting stairs, portcullises, alarms, walls, and other structural features to act as traps. All of this is accomplished using a simple editor, based on UnrealEd, to view floor plans and place items.

"The citadel editor uses a lot of the functionality built into the *Unreal* editor," Dahlgren says, "although we've streamlined the interface and made it much more intuitive, given that the player isn't actually designing levels. The combat system absolutely capitalizes on *Unreal*'s strengths, both in functionality and special effects. And I think you'll see a lot of interactivity in the environment that simply wouldn't have been possible otherwise."

With a heavily guarded castle, players can then venture forth into the vast outside world, collect artifacts, fight monsters, and breach the enemy castles. Artifacts are the key to achieving this. There are about four dozen different items which can be used for such things as trap detection, transportation, communication, and combat. Some artifacts can defend against attacks, cancel them out, or even reflect them back at the attacker. Many are hidden or guarded by monsters.

The design of each level is drawn from the Jordan books, as Dahlgren explains. "Our in-house architect uses description from the books and real-world inspiration to create sketches which inform the work of the sculptors. They create the primitives from which the maps are derived. The primitives are covered by textures created by experienced fine-artists. Every scene is architecturally sound and frequently breathtaking. I wanted the player to feel like he was walking into a piece of fantasy fine-art. I think we've achieved that. Shadar Logoth, for example, is an ancient ruined city haunted by an evil force called Mashadar. We've also supplemented these environments with other places derived from the books, such as the Mountains of Mist and the otherworldly abyss known as the Ways, a dark dimension corrupted long ago, but still the only way to travel long distances in a short time."

The world of *The Wheel of Time* is shaping up to be one of the most intriguing to come out of the *Unreal* engine: visually rich, narratively complex, and with a truly unique twist at the end. This is one to watch.

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GT INTERACTIVE

Deus EX

PUBLISHER: GT Interactive | **DEVELOPER:** ION Storm | **DUE DATE:** "When it's done"

KICKASS FACTOR: A rich, immersive universe and narrative with no monsters or fantasy weapons!

***UNREAL* TRICKS:** Heavy NPC interaction and event scripting. Real-world environments.

Corner any *PC Gamer* staffer and demand a list of his all-time favorite games, and at least one Warren Spector game is bound to be on that list. The man behind *Ultima Underworld*, *Ultima VI* and *VII Part II*, the underrated *Wings of Glory*, and one of the greatest games of all time, *System Shock*, he is as close as it gets to game-design royalty, with a resume stretching back to the old pen-and-paper days of Steve Jackson Games and TSR. His presence at ION Storm is the single most compelling reason to take them seriously, and *Deus Ex* is his current project. Along with some other notable Origin/Looking Glass veterans, such as Team Leaders Bob White and Harvey Smith, Lead Programmer Chris Norden, and Artist Al Yarusso, he is crafting a typically ambitious Spector project that will make *System Shock* fans drool.

Deus Ex takes place in a nihilist future of rampant terrorism, drugs, disease, pollution, class conflict, and economic collapse. As a technologically-enhanced anti-terrorist agent, your task is to stop an ancient cabal bent on world domination. Toward this end, you travel the globe in search of answers, develop your abilities, and create a network of allies. Spector describes it as "a first-person perspective roleplaying game in the spirit of the old *Ultima Underworld* games, but with a near-future setting and a story inspired by conspiracy theories, 'The X-Files,' and so on. I started out with the idea that I wanted to explore what happens when you drop a James Bond-style hero who expects things to be black-and-white into an 'X-Files' world where everything is shades of grey — that still sums it up pretty well."

The plan is typically ambitious: combine fast action, deep roleplaying, and heavy narrative. Conversations with NPCs, choices of interactions with characters, and a plethora of options in developing various character skills will make it more complex than any other *Unreal*-based game. "I really want this to be a game where you can end up as Stealthy Spy Guy or Killer Fighting Machine or anything in-between." Spector says. "If you want action, it'll be there in spades; if you'd rather downplay that aspect of the game, just don't run into every situation with your gun in hand. The game can accommodate that."

Through long experience, Spector and his team have found that a good narrative is hard to do in a large, contiguous world, so the structure of *Deus Ex* will be highly mission-based. Each mission takes place on a series of small, detailed maps that are more evocative and better tied to the story than large, rambling environments. There is still full freedom of movement throughout and between the maps, and exactly how a player achieves the goals of each map is up to the individual — the only fixed thing is the narrative element linking them all.

Since the ship date is still a year off, the team is keeping most of the game's locations a secret, though Hong Kong, Paris, New York, and the White House are a few they are willing to leak. As Warren says, "I want to try to recreate places people might have visited in real life, and then I want them to be able to blow them up real good! What I really want is to allow people to open the doors they aren't allowed to open on, say, the White House tour. And how many of us will ever get to wander around a missile silo or the Paris catacombs or the pyramids of Egypt? Even more important, I want the game world to follow the same conventional rules as real-world spaces. When you walk into a real office building, you pretty much know what to expect. You know there'll be a map or list of offices on a wall. You know where to look for bathrooms. When you walk into an office, you know what you'll find there.

"This may sound like foolishness or unnecessary attention to pointless detail, but it's not. If

There are no screenshots of *Deus Ex* yet, but these conceptual sketches give a sense of the game's mood.

Working With Unreal

"It's simply amazing! It's well organized and thought-out, and it has to be the most flexible engine on the market right now. The tools are top-notch, and the support that Tim Sweeney and Digital Extremes gives its licensees is simply unparalleled in this industry. They really are dedicated to making the most usable technology for first-person games. Out of all of the 3D engines I have used and researched, *Unreal* surpasses all of them in almost every respect. Every 3D engine (including *Unreal*) has its own unique set of limitations, but with *Unreal* we can build what we need to build to give the player the feeling that he is exploring a real space in a real world."

CHRIS NORDEN,
LEAD PROGRAMMER, *DEUS EX*

we follow the rules, we give players the opportunity to apply their own real-world knowledge to the solution of game problems. Several upcoming games seem to be applying this kind of thinking, and it's about bloody time. We're also upping the object density dramatically, back to where we were in *Underworld* and beyond. I don't want to see another warehouse world — big, empty, weird game spaces filled with crates. We're building a world that mirrors what we experience every day, and our goal is to fill that world with objects that behave as you'd expect them to. We'll probably fall a bit short of making every object usable, but that's the goal."

The team is shying away from creating an "ultimate sim" with complete and physically real environmental interaction a la *Thief: The Dark Project*, but they hope to go beyond what was found in *System Shock*. The main way they're doing this is with NPC interactions in which you actually meet and talk to people in your game world. And they are *all* people: *Deus Ex* is going way out on a limb by crafting a game with no monsters whatsoever. How you interact with these people and this very dense world will have a ripple effect. An aggressive approach will mean important NPCs won't speak to you or law enforcement may step in, thus creating more combat situations. If, however, you choose to just talk to people and keep the bloodshed to a minimum, you'll get ahead in the story and won't draw the fire of the authorities. The goal is to create a game that adjusts to the way you choose to play.

But is the age of the dense *System Shock*-style game dead? Spector doesn't think so: "If the age of deep games like *System Shock* is gone, I'm in a world of trouble! The immersive quality of *System Shock* was one of the coolest things about it, and that's something I fervently believe has a place in today's marketplace. There were three elements that contributed, I think. First, the technology and perspective — first-person games are just more immersive, as a rule, than other kinds of games; second, the story; and third, the depth of simulation Doug Church and the rest of the team created. *Deus Ex* has that immersive first-person advantage but, with the *Unreal* engine, we can ratchet up the visual quality several notches compared with *Shock*. *Deus Ex* has the story, in spades — heck, even I have trouble keeping all the twists and turns and characters and motivations straight! *Deus Ex* will have the depth, too. I want to take the immersive qualities of *System Shock* a step further. There are two ways to do that — a deeper sim or bringing some real non-player-character interaction and player-character development back into the picture. We'll do a little of the former and a lot of the latter."

Creating *Deus Ex* with the *Unreal* engine has been an incredible experience for the ION Storm team. The flexibility, power, and scripting capabilities of UnrealScript and UnrealEd have certainly freed them to spend more time on creating a fun and real experience. As Lead Programmer Chris Norden says, "The big thing that we are taking advantage of is the power of UnrealScript . *Deus Ex* isn't just about great technology; we are pushing the envelope of *gameplay*. If a game isn't fun, the best technology in the world won't make people play it. Having UnrealScript lets us get the most out of our coding time by making it extremely easy to prototype and refine gameplay elements quickly and efficiently.

"What other companies have taken days, or even longer, to do with their engines, we have been able to do in just a couple of hours. The level of interactivity with the world is higher than with other engines, and it's very easy for the designer to customize every little aspect of gameplay without the need for a programmer to do it for him. Bottom line: *Unreal* lets us spend more time making our game fun, and less time worrying about the technology getting in the way of the player's experience."

As with everyone using *Unreal*, Spector is finding the freedom from creating new technology for every game is enabling him to create a game that moves the genre forward: "My hope is that advances in interface thinking, the mission structure, and a believable story that doesn't involve furry-footed freaks with pointy ears saying 'Prithee, m'lord' and all will make deeper, richer games more accessible to normal human beings."

PCG

Sam Carter is one of *Deus Ex*'s many non-player characters, and is easily recognizable thanks to his robotic leg.

The *Unreal* engine should allow *Deus Ex*'s artists to bring these character sketches to life on screen with ease.

Working With Unreal

"*Unreal* is wonderful. Incredibly powerful. We're stressing the engine and editor pretty hard and, to be sure, there are limitations, but *Unreal* is way beyond anything else I've seen. Our simplest maps are more complex than the most sophisticated levels in *Unreal* — a direct result of trying to build realistic spaces. We've had to bend the engine to do what we want it to do. I think my programmers would all agree — the *Unreal* engine is quite flexible. We've been integrating a new conversation system and editor, a new inventory system, new AI ... all sorts of stuff. The *Unreal* team did a great job of making sure licensees would have an easy time building on the *Unreal* foundation. I said it before and I'll say it again — *Unreal* is unreal."

WARREN SPECTOR, DESIGNER, *DEUS EX*

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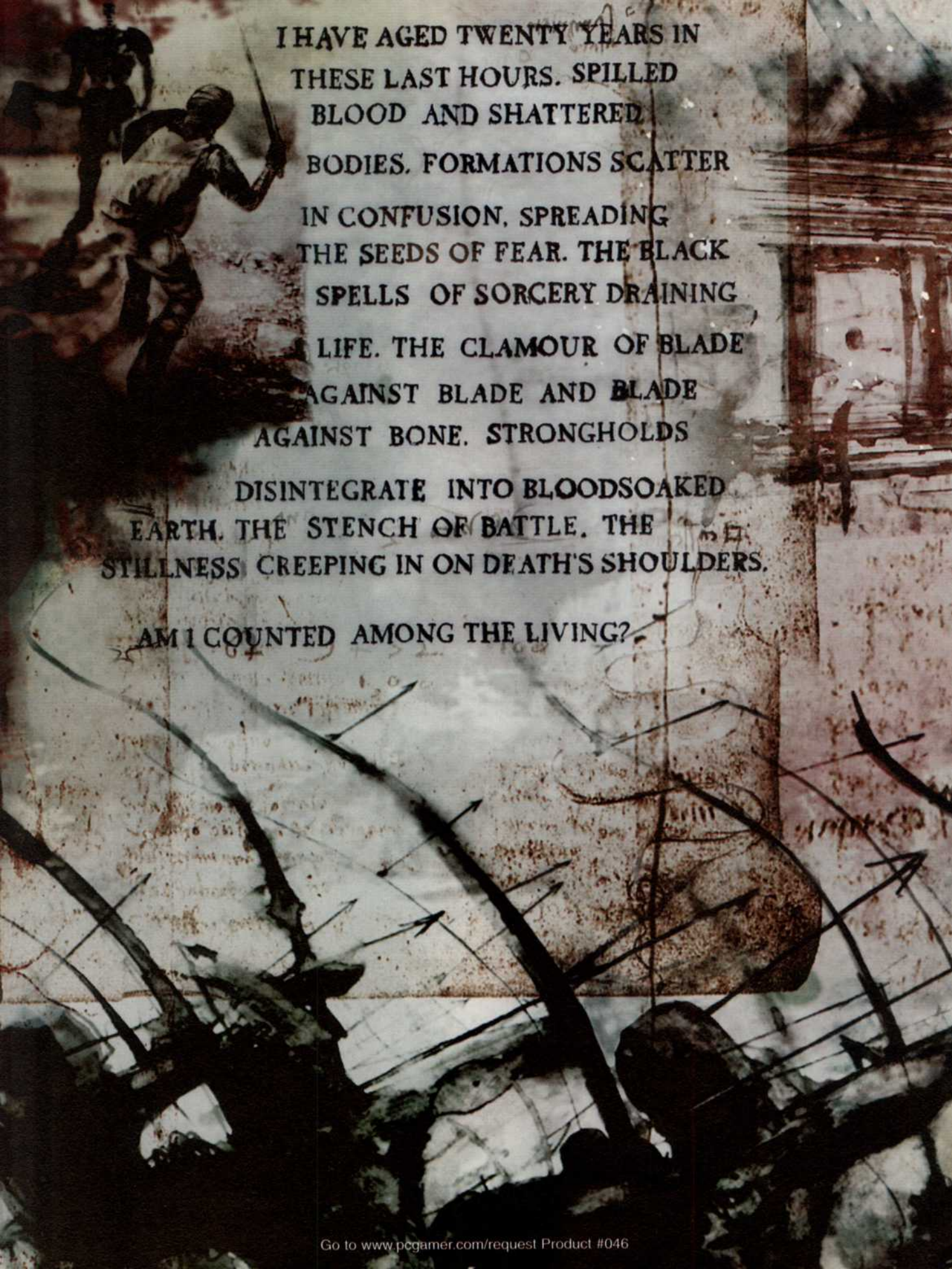

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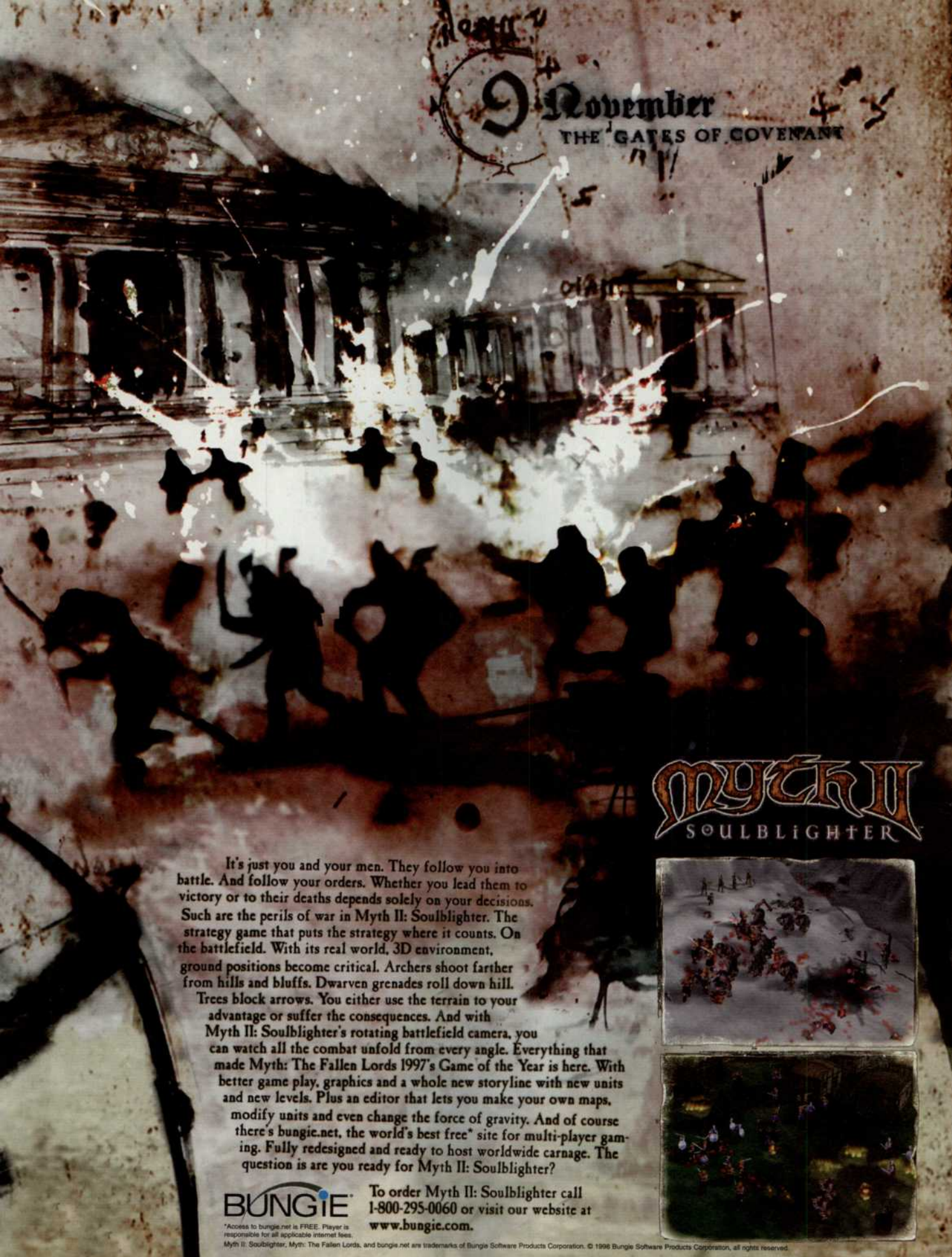

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BURN, BABY, BURN!

The Making of *Diablo II*

Almost two years ago, Blizzard Entertainment released Diablo *and kick-started a roleplaying revolution. Now, it looks set to happen all over again as the talented team that designed the original takes the wraps off the long-awaited sequel.*

By Michael Wolf

Nestled in a quiet little neighborhood among the industrial areas of Redwood City, California, Blizzard North takes up a small portion of a large business complex. There are no signs to indicate that this is a place of significant cultural heritage — the place where *Diablo* was born. Open the door to the office space, and you're greeted by a long hallway bare of decoration. The only time you might realize where you are is when you walk into the tiny reception area — which contains a life-size model of Diablo himself.

And so began our trip inside Blizzard North to bring back the scoop on *Diablo II*. Capitalizing on the success of the first game, the very same team has been hard at work creating a sequel that is expected to garner even more praise than the original; one that intends to address all the suggestions, desires, concerns, and hopes of the gamers who gave up months of their lives to hack through the multi-leveled dungeons of *Diablo*. And from what we could see, they're on the right track.

The Story Goes On

The sequel picks up a short time after the end of the original game. Rumors of the Diablo's return to the world of man prompts our hero to search the area around Tristram. He (or she, depending on what class you choose) returns to find nightmarish monsters roaming the countryside. So, looks like it's time to start loppin' some demonic heads again....

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Diablo II will contain four acts, each one promising to be larger than the entire original game. The first takes place in the area near Tristram, a countryside filled with medieval overtones. The second act is in a town called Lut Gholein — it's a desert-like area, with tons of sand-dwelling monsters ready to pull down the unwary adventurer. The third act unfolds in the jungle. The developers are still scripting out some story line elements, but the main gist of the area will involve lots of rain forest creepiness. The fourth and final act is still in the early stages of production, so there are few details available about the environment, but Blizzard North promises that this fourth act alone will be almost three times bigger than all of *Diablo*!

Each act will have its own overall quest, and each in turn will have its own set of sub-quests. For example, the main quest of the first act is to clean out the monastery, but while doing so there will be plenty of smaller dungeons to explore and lots of errands to run. These quests will also have a larger impact on the game itself. For example, there's a point early in the game in which you'll need to rescue a particular individual from the ruins of Tristram, your old stomping grounds. If you succeed in the quest, then you'll have someone back in town who can identify magical items for you.

The quests will have good and bad implications. If you fail to complete a quest, or refuse to perform it, the townspeople may treat you with less respect or the prices for certain goods may even rise. It will be in your best interests to complete certain quests, because this time the results will have far-reaching effects.

Character and Skills

In *Diablo*, players could choose from the Sorcerer, a spell-casting genius, the Warrior, a man of all brawn with little brain, and the Rogue, a woman of agility and skill who could twang a bow like nobody's business. This time around, those three classes will be replaced with the Barbarian, Sorceress, Amazon, Necromancer, and Paladin. All five will have vastly different characteristics. The Barbarian is a pure hand-to-hand fighter. He'll have all kinds of weapons at his command, and the most strength of any character. The Sorceress is nearly his opposite — she will be a master of magic, but her weakness will be her lack of strength. The Amazon is a woman of agility and skill, much like the Rogue, but with more versatility. Her skills will also include weapons like the javelin and spear. The Paladin, a man of good, will focus primarily on defensive skills. He will also be a master of the blade, with a variety of different maneuvers. The Necromancer is the direct opposite of the Paladin — akin to a very dark Sorcerer. His concentration will mostly be on cursing and hurting the enemy, as well as raising the dead or summoning creatures to fight for him.

The attributes for the characters will be pretty much the same as they were for *Diablo*. Each character will have a certain amount of Strength, Magic, Dexterity, and Vitality. These can be adjusted as the characters go up in levels, and they affect things like how much mana the character has, or how fast they are with their weapons.

Each character will have their own items, weapons, and skills. Unlike *Diablo*, where a Warrior could cast fireballs just as well as a Sorcerer with a bit of patience and a lot of experience, the Barbarian will never have the ability to cast any Sorceress spells. Likewise, the Sorceress will never be able to handle the weapons the Barbarian can use at will. The division between the classes is absolute.

Each act in the game will have one central town where the player can buy, sell, identify, and repair items, as well as get quests.

Although the skills within each class are strictly divided, the variety within a class is tremendous. This is due to the new skill tree introduced in *Diablo II*. Rather than characters finding spell books to gain new spells and abilities, those special movements will be a part of the new skill system. As characters earn experience, they'll gain levels. For each new level they reach, they'll receive a certain number of skill points. Those points can be distributed among several skills, and the more points a skill has, the more powerfully the character will use it. The tree works like the technology trees seen in some real-time strategy games — in order to learn a certain skill, you may need mastery in more than one skill. Each class will have three tabs, or groups, of skills. The Paladin, for instance, can learn skills in the Aura, Healing and Undead, and Combat groups. Each tab has many different skills within it. Thorn (known as Shield of Thorns in *Diablo*) is an Aura spell that, when cast, causes reciprocal damage to creatures when they strike the wearer of the spell. Since the Paladin is the only class with an Aura tab, he's the only character who can cast the spell.

"Not only do we have the five character classes," says *Diablo II* producer Matt Householder, "but each person within that character class will be specialized differently and will be a completely different character." Some players may decide that their Paladin should specialize in Combat, and will have a ton of special combat moves at their command to use against monsters. Others may decide Healing and Undead is more important area to work on, and will have spells to combat poison and strike down zombies. Some people may try to be a "Jack of All Trades," someone who tries to specialize in all the skills. According to the developers, though, that won't work — those players will just end up with weak abilities in all

Some of the cool new spells in the game include this favorite from the Sorceress' arsenal: Blaze. As the character runs through the countryside, she leaves a trail of fire in her footsteps.

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The Paladin's Aura spells will both protect players from harm, as well as damage enemies foolish enough to strike.

the skills, and won't really get anywhere. The skills, you see, will use up mana, just like the spells from *Diablo*. The amount of mana they use depends on how many points are devoted to that particular skill — another reason to specialize in just a few. According to Householder, the new skill system "is a unification of combat and spells." This will hopefully help the game stay more true to its roleplaying roots.

The variety of skills will also let multi-player groups work better together against the monsters. For example, one of the Necromancer skills under discussion right now is the ability to take mind control over a monster and make it do whatever the player wants. So the Necromancer could cast that spell on a baddie, and then the Paladin can cast the Thorn aura on it, and the group will have an enchanted monster doing their dirty work for them. The possibilities for combinations are endless.

The way players will use the skills is very similar to the original game. Rather than using the left mouse button for the standard attack, and the right button to cast any readied spell, any of the skills can be assigned to either button at any time. This will let players configure their character with whatever setup they like, so favorites will always be ready. The list of skills for each class changes constantly — as the developers keep coming up with new ideas, they keep changing what each class can do. Needless to say, each class will have a huge selection of very cool skills at their disposal.

Technological Changes

Diablo II was rebuilt completely from the ground up. Although Blizzard North could have used the engine for *Diablo* as a foundation, the team decided against it. This has let them do many new things they hadn't previously considered — like adding 3Dfx support. According to David Brevik, President of Blizzard North, "With a 3Dfx card, we get free gourad shading and things like that. We had to spend a lot of time in DirectDraw to do the same thing to translate each pixel. With 3Dfx, it does it all for you. It's a lot faster. Because it's faster, we can do a whole bunch of extra effects, like colored lighting, zoom in and zoom out, there's a bump map on the floor... stuff like that." We watched the effects of the 3Dfx enhanced game, and were dumbfounded. Aside from the colored lighting, translucent spell effects, and improved frame rate, even simple additions like the bump-mapped floor made a big difference. You wouldn't normally tell the difference between a flat ground texture and one made up of many different bumps, but the changes are obvious when you compare them side by side. Although the version we saw only supported 3Dfx using Glide, Blizzard North plans on supporting other cards, although nothing is set is stone at the current time.

Along with the 3Dfx enhancements, there are plans to add lots of environmental effects, such as fog, rain, and smoke. The game will also have a time cycle — as the adventure continues, day will turn to night and back to day again. The time of day will affect the monsters you encounter in the countryside. Chances are, wandering around in the middle of the night will be a dangerous pastime. "There will be a lot more life to the game this time, and it will seem like a real place," says Brevik.

Players will notice immediately that the level load between dungeons is virtually instantaneous this time around. This has to do with a new way of preloading the environments. As soon as you hit a staircase, you'll be on the next level, rather than having to wait for that indicator bar to fill up. This cuts down on load times, and will make the game feel much more continuous.

Blizzard North will also overhaul the automap. For the outside map, a lot of ideas are in the planning stages. By the time the game is done, players should be able to mark the map with their own nota-

Champions, Step Forth!

Here's a quick run-down of the character classes of *Diablo II*. The list of skill groups is by no means final, so things may change a bit before the final release, but this will give you some familiarity with the characters.

Amazon

The Amazon is a fierce female warrior. Quick with a bow, she's similar to the Rogue from the original *Diablo*, yet her additional combat skills make her an asset in close quarters. Her skill groups involve Javelin and Spear, Healing, Movement and Repair, and Bow and Crossbow. A nice addition to the skills is "Safe Shot," which will let the Amazon warrior shoot monsters on the other side of player characters without hitting the players, a problem encountered with the Rogue from *Diablo* that frustrated many a players stuck in doorways in the game.

Barbarian

The Barbarian hails from the outskirts of the civilized world. The most combat-oriented class, his huge frame and overwhelming weapon skills make him a formidable opponent in a fight. Currently, he will have few to no ranged combat skills, although there might be some skills he can call on to negate the distance attacks of some monsters. Hand-to-hand combat is his forte, and to the end he'll have access to a host of weapons and special moves. Although his skill groups aren't finalized, they will almost universally deal with aggressive combat.

Continued on page 179

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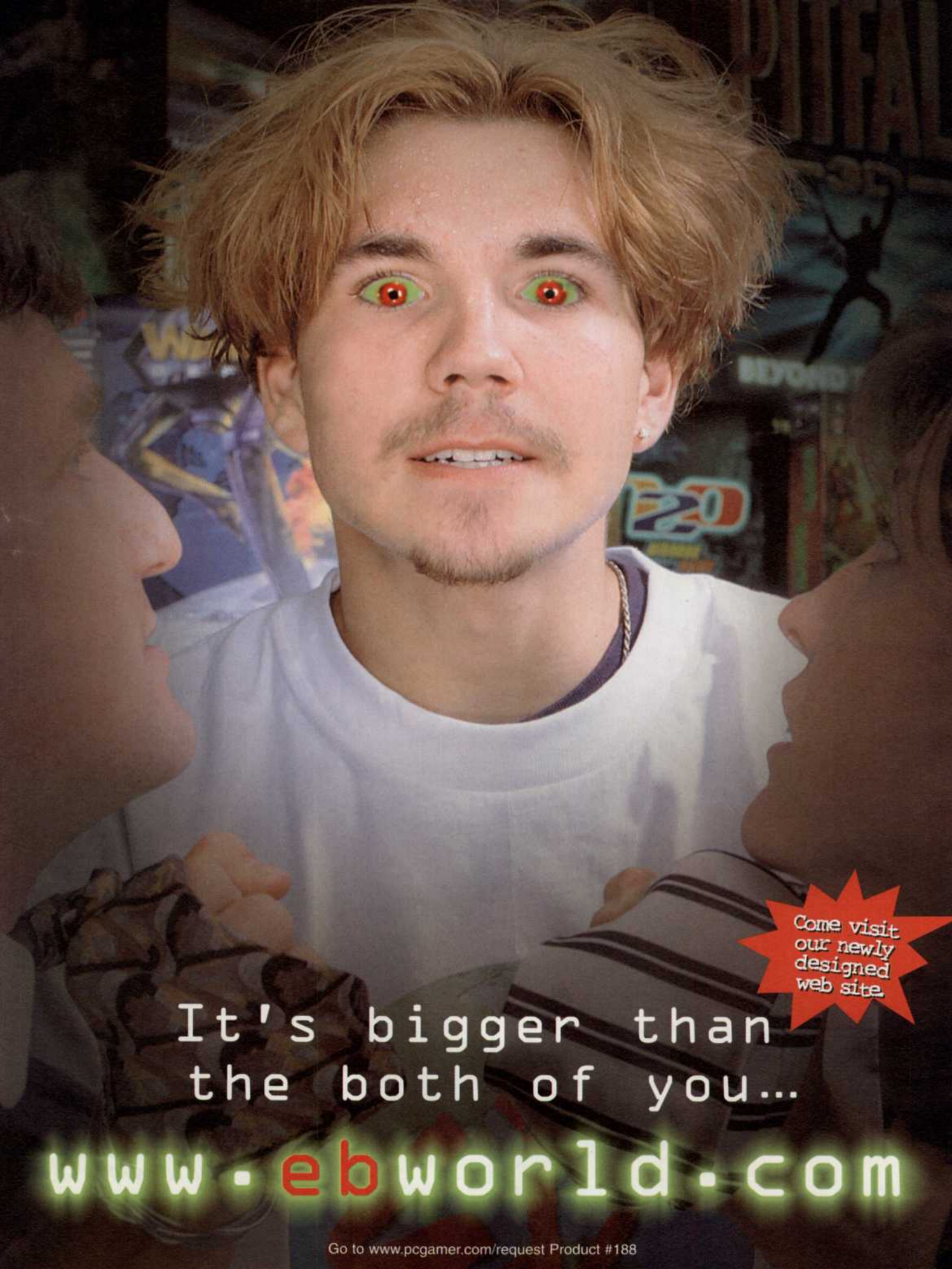

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tions, and in multi-player games, others should be able to see the marks. Ideally, players can put a mark on the map and tell the other players to meet up at that location. The game itself will note entrances to dungeons and other points of interest. The dungeon maps will more than likely work similarly to the current automap in *Diablo*. "Although hopefully it will look a lot better," says Erich Schaefer, Vice President of Blizzard North.

The mouse-controlled interface will also change a bit. Although things are very similar to *Diablo*, the ability to run will please many long-suffering players who've had to journey over scoured dungeons. From what we could see, even the movement was improved, showing much more fluid control and the ability to fire at virtually any angle. The monsters we saw were huge, demonstrating the fact that scale is no longer a factor in creating monsters in proper proportion.

Players can even enter buildings — the roof will "pop off," much like in some of the Ultima games. The buildings will therefore be to scale, with proper dimensions. There will also be bi-level dungeons, so you can actually see down to the next level, or perhaps hang out on the balcony of a building in town.

The All-Important Multi-Player

The biggest technological changes of all have to do with multi-player. As a matter of fact, that was the biggest reason why the team re-wrote the game from scratch. *Diablo*'s online play was plagued by hackers and cheaters — players who would apply a patch to their version of the game, enter a game on battle.net (Blizzard's proprietary free online gaming service), press a key, and immediately kill all the other players. Other players figured out ways to duplicate items, which made rare objects not so rare.

"The biggest priority we have with multi-player right now is just ensuring that the games are fair," says Householder. "That's pretty much the thrust of what we're trying to do with battle.net. Someone may try to kill you, but they'll have to do it the conventional way — with weapons and spells." The team plans on keeping player-killing to keep that kind of excitement and pressure in the game — you never know when someone's going to turn on you. However, at the same time, they're going to give hosts more control over who enters their game. "We thought giving people the ability to create private games and giving them passwords would make the players as safe as they want to be. But people still get mad when they play *Diablo* and someone enters the game who they thought was a nice guy, and he kills them," says Schaefer.

Right now the number of players who can quest together is still up in the air. The current plan includes eight players total, but it all depends on how fun the game is with different numbers of people. "We had *Diablo* running with more than four players, but it wasn't really fun," says Brevik. Because of the size of the levels, people would break up into groups, and while one group killed monsters the others would simply scavenge the leftovers. This caused quite a few arguments and anger on the part of players who weren't getting enough action. The areas in *Diablo II* are much larger, however, and so should be able to support more players.

Blizzard North's plans for multi-

The lighting effects will make spells light up hallways. The more skill points you assign to a skill, the longer spells like this will last.

Continued from page 176

Sorceress

The Sorceress wields magic like a toy. Her skills groups will be Fire, Lightning, and Ice. With those elements, her magical attacks will be devastating. Although she might be the most powerful range attacker, her lack of strength could be her downfall. Players who choose this class should most likely stick close to other players or hired NPCs. If stronger enemies get too close, the results could be disastrous. But then, few monsters can get that close — her bite is much worse than her bark.

Necromancer

The Necromancer makes deals with the dead. His skill groups include Curses, Summoning, and Mind Control. His curses will cause damage to monsters (and players) over time, such as reducing their total hit points to half their original value. He can also summon monsters to fight for him or take control of already living monsters. Although dark, his powers can be used for light. As a result of his secluded study in dark, dank mausoleums, his figure is gaunt and pale. He may not be strong, but his power is nightmarish.

Paladin

The Paladin's strengths are his high defense and strong sword arm. His skill groups center on Aura, Healing and Undead, and Combat. Although not as strong as the Barbarian in close combat, his warrior's training will make him more than capable of defending himself. Many of his special skills will involve moves like shield bashing. His skills in Aura will protect those that fight with him, just as they'll hurt those that oppose the player. His skills at healing are also unmatched. A figure of Light, he's considered the most holy of warriors.

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Almost all of the buildings in *Diablo II* are to scale, and the player can enter them at will. In fact, the player will have to enter buildings to find some dungeons.

player over battle.net go much deeper than just in-game changes. "We want to respect the fact that there are guilds a bit more," says Brevik. Guilds are groups of players who band together with a common theme — there are hundreds of guilds for *Diablo*, and some have already formed for *Diablo II*. Brevik says, "You'll be able to set up a guild house, which is kind of like a sub-game — a meeting place for your guild where you can store some items and start games." It will be an alternative to a private chat channel — a place actually using the game engine that could even have custom art for the buildings representing that guild. Although they're not sure of the numbers, these little "sub-games" could have as many as 16 players connected at once, socializing, trading, and launching quests. That sub-game flavor can also spill into non-guild meeting places. There might be a market where players can trade goods, or a battle arena where players can take out their aggressions on one another.

A Whole New Inventory

The inventory system in *Diablo II* works very much like the original, but with some major changes. The screen for buying and selling items shows a view of all the items much like your inventory, so you can see what the items look like. The stats for each item will pop up with a mouse click. You can buy, sell, identify, and repair items from the same screen if the particular NPC you're dealing with can perform the appropriate actions. "We have plans to support trade on battle.net, and this type of interface could be adapted for more secure trading," says Householder. That means there won't be any more incidents of stragglers coming along and swiping merchandise when it's lying on the ground during a swap between players.

The items themselves will be broken down into five categories. The mundane, everyday items are "Normal." Items that are constructed a bit better, such as a sword with more durability, are "Quality" items. Then there are "Magic" items, which provide some magical enhancement. "Unique" items will be harder to find, and will have some nice enhancements. The really precious items are the "Random Uniques," of which there are very few. These are the Unique items that have random attributes set for them when they're discovered. Then there are item "Sets," which might include a suit of armor, a sword, a shield, and a helmet that, when all worn together, provide some sort of enchantment. One of the cool new things we saw was how the new belt system works. If you put in a different belt, the number of slots available for your quick-access items will change. This could make certain belts very valuable, as this real estate gets filled up with health and mana potions.

What you see on screen is what your character will wear. Unlike *Diablo*, where there was a single piece of art for a sword no matter what the sword looked like in inventory, everything will look as it should in *Diablo II*. That means if you put on a helmet with large antlers, you'll see the antlers on your character as you wander through town. Not only will this let you see what exactly you're equipping, you can also make fashion statements.

Characters can also throw items. Each class will have its own throw, and you can use it with potions, throwing daggers, axes, and javelins. The potions will have different effects, like exploding on impact or emitting a poisonous cloud. Also, unlike the original *Diablo*, arrows are limited. Blizzard North promises they'll be abundant, but it will keep some players from just firing blindly and killing creatures off-screen. Also, turning the arrows into limited items will let the creators introduce arrows with different characteristics for more variety.

Over battle.net, all these items will be well tracked. If an item is unique, it will stay unique. A new pastime may form with some players — merchandising. Players might commission other players to find certain items, such as the final piece to their set. Rewards for items could become commonplace, and players could send other players on quests to find the particular items. There may even be a bulletin board for players to post their requests, but the details haven't been worked out as yet.

Expect to see bigger and more scary monsters straight from the Pits of Hell when you delve into the dungeons.

Non-Player Characters

From now on, NPCs (non-player characters) won't just be vehicles for information or items. The normal NPCs will be there to sell you some new weaponry or tell you about a new quest. Quite a few of the NPCs are going to be "extras" — they won't serve any function but to make the towns look populated. However, a third brand of NPC will also appear — that of the hired thug. For a certain amount of gold, an NPC will travel with you, lending their skills to combat as you take on the denizens of the deep. The different levels of skill will mostly be represented in how much the NPC costs. In the first act, you'll only be able to hire rogues, much like the character from *Diablo*. They may be overly courageous and charge into battle, leaving you in their dust. Or they might be cowardly and turn tail and run at the worst moments. Or they might just be greedy, taking all the treasure before you can get at it. If you spend the right amount of money, though, you could get a quick companion that will watch your back when things get tight. But they won't be the smartest characters in the world. Schaefer says, "They'll be smart enough to get into battle with you, but will they be smart enough to live forever? No." The ultimate goal is to make them a help, and not a hindrance. You might be able to make them carry some of your inventory, but you won't have to micromanage their actions.

A Long Way to Go...

The developers at Blizzard North showed us *Diablo II* with enthusiasm. The ideas are constantly flowing, and we even got to witness the birth of new ideas and the death of old ones in the short time we were there. The release date is "early to mid late next year." In other words, it's going to be done when it's done. Blizzard has a great track record, and it knows that in the small, unassuming office of Blizzard North, a product is under construction that will blow people away. Although all hopes point to a Spring 1999 release, nothing is guaranteed, and the game won't ship until it's as perfect as can be. As far as we're concerned, they can take as much time as they need. If even half of what we heard about makes it into the game, it will be a force to be reckoned with. PCG

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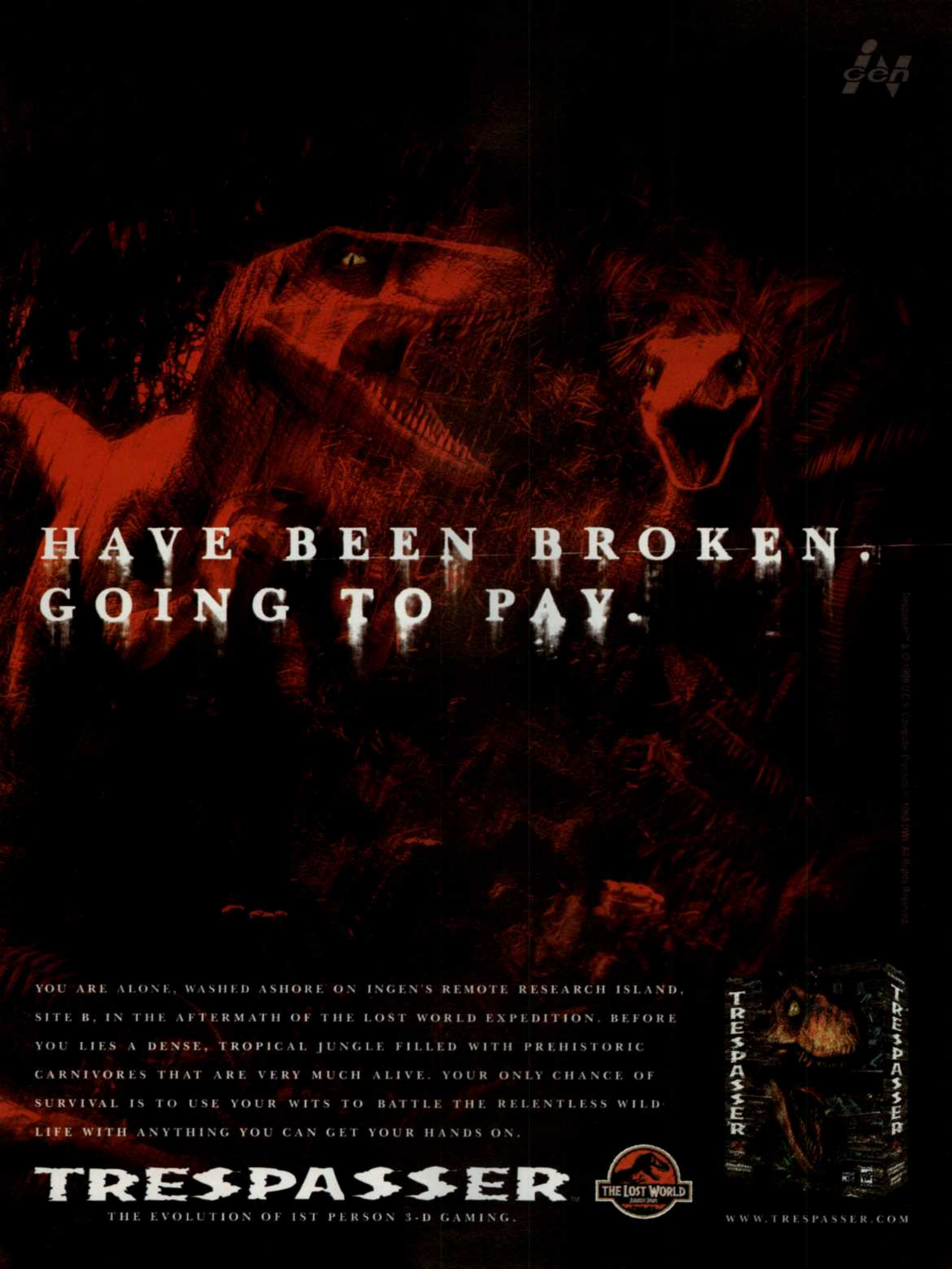
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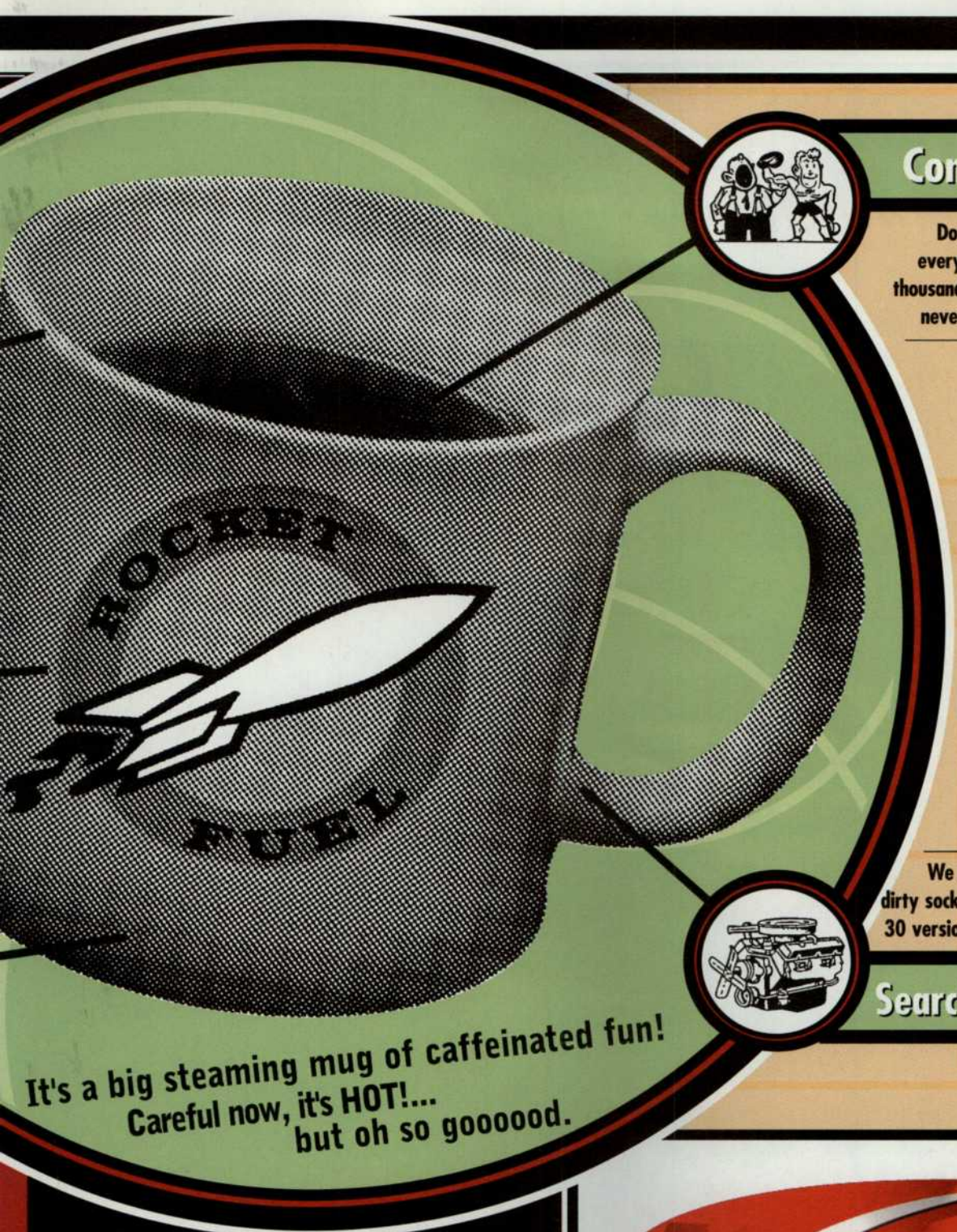

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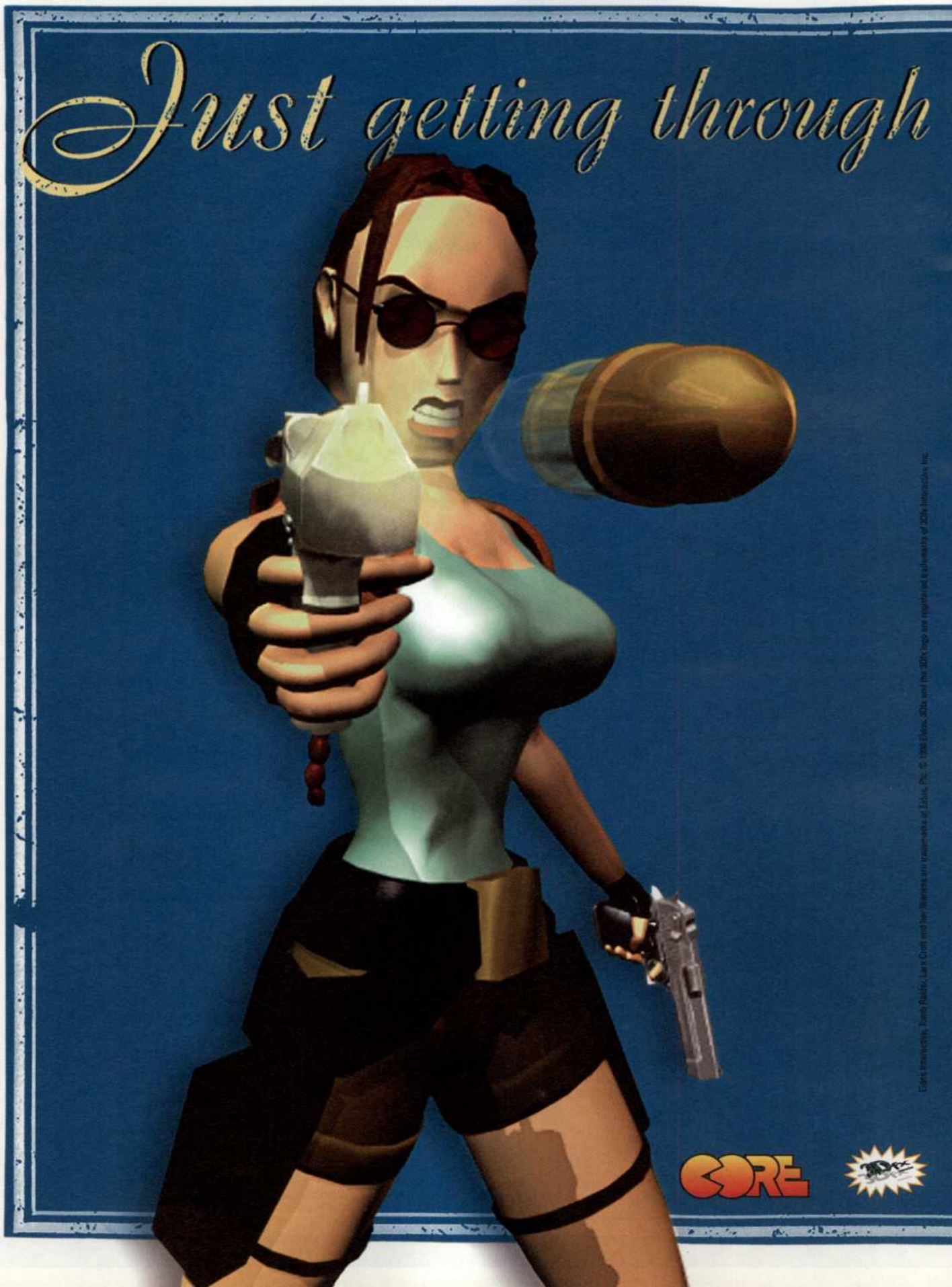
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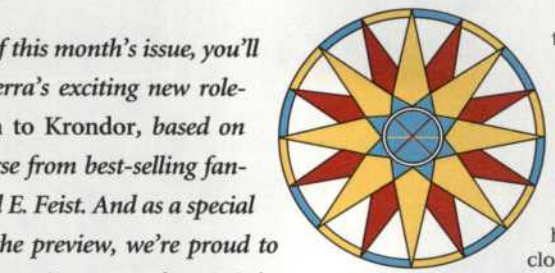
MURDER IN KRONDOR

BY RAYMOND E. FEIST

ON PAGE 50 *of this month's issue, you'll find a preview of Sierra's exciting new role-playing game* Return to Krondor, *based on the Midkemia universe from best-selling fantasy author Raymond E. Feist. And as a special treat to accompany the preview, we're proud to present this exclusive opening extract from Feist's new novel,* Murder in Krondor. *The book is still in production and won't be published until next July, but you can read how it all begins now, exclusively in* PC Gamer. *Enjoy....*



PROLOGUE: DEPARTURES

Lines of soldiers marched along the ridge.

The baggage train had been broken into two segments, the first of which was now departing with the wounded and the dead who would be cremated with honors back in Krondor. Clouds of dust rose from the trail as wheels rolled and boots tramped toward home, the fine powder mixing with the acrid smoke from campfires being extinguished. The rising sun streamed through the haze, orange and pale gold, lances of color in an otherwise grey morning. In the distance birds sang, ignoring the aftermath of battle.

Arutha, Prince of Krondor and ruler of the Western Realm of the Kingdom of the Isles, took a moment to enjoy the majesty of the sunrise and the serenade of the birds as he watched his men heading home. The fighting had been blessedly short but bloody, and while casualties were lighter than anticipated, he still hated to lose even one soldier under his command. He let the beauty of the vista before him soothe his frustration and regret for a few moments.

Arutha still resembled the youthful man who had come to the throne of Krondor ten years before, though lines around his eyes and a small scattering of grey through his otherwise black hair revealed the toll of rulership on him. For those who knew him well, he was still much the same man, a competent administrator, military genius, and fiercely duty-bound man who would surrender his own life without question to save the lowest soldier under his command.

His gaze went from wagon to wagon, as if somehow willing himself to see the wounded men inside, as if he could communicate to them his sense of gratitude for a job well done. Those closest to Arutha knew he paid a silent price, pain kept within, for each injury done a man who served Krondor and the Kingdom.

Arutha pushed aside his regrets and considered the victory. The enemy had been in full retreat for two days, a relatively small force of dark elves. A much larger force had been prevented from reaching the Dimwood when a rift machine had been destroyed by Arutha's two squires, James and Locklear. It had cost the life of a magician named Patrus, but his sacrifice had allowed the invaders to fall prey to their own internal conflicts. Delekhan, the would-be conqueror had died beside Gorath, a moredhel chieftain who had proven as honorable and worthy a being as Arutha had ever met, while they struggled to seize control of the Lifestone. Arutha cursed the existence of that mysterious and ancient artifact under the abandoned city of Sethanon, and wondered if its mystery would ever be understood, its danger removed, in his lifetime.

Delekhan's son Moraeulf had died from a dagger thrust home by Narab, once an ally of Delekhan. As agreed to by Narab, the retreating moredhel weren't being harassed by Kingdom forces as long as they were heading straight north. Orders had been dispatched to allow the moredhel safe passage home as long as they kept moving.

The Kingdom forces in the Dimwood were now dispersing to their various garrisons, the majority returning to the west, and some heading back north to the Border Baronies. They would start moving later in the morning. The previously secret garrison north of Sethanon would be moved to another location and reprovisioned.

Sunlight began to bathe Arutha as the morning mist burned off, leaving only the smoke and dust to cloud the air. The day was already growing hot, and the cold of the previous winter was fading from memory. Arutha kept his distress deep inside as he considered the latest assault upon the tran-

quility of his Kingdom.

Arutha had taken the Tsurani magicians at face value after the end of the Riftwar. For nearly ten years they had been free to come and go between worlds, via several magic rifts. And now he felt a profound sense of betrayal. He fully understood the rationale that had driven Makala, a Tsurani Great One, to attempt to seize the Lifestone at Sethanon, the belief the Kingdom possessed a great weapon of destruction, some engine of power that would give predominance in war to whoever held it. Had he been in Makala's place, with the same suspicions, he might have acted the same way. But even so, he could not trust the Tsurani loose in the Kingdom, and that meant an end to almost a decade of trade and exchange. Arutha pushed aside worry as to how he would effect the changes he must make, but he knew that eventually he would have to sit down with his advisers and fashion a plan that would insure future security for the Kingdom. And he knew almost no one would be pleased at the changes he would make.

Arutha glanced to his right and saw two very fatigued young men sitting astride their horses. Arutha permitted himself one of his infrequent smiles, a bare upturning of the sides of his mouth, which served to soften the often somber expression on his still youthful face. "Tired, gentlemen?" he asked.

James, Senior Squire to the Prince, returned his ruler's gaze from eyes surrounded by dark circles. James, and his companion Squire Locklear, had ridden a punishing ride, abetted by magic herbs which had kept them awake and alert for days in the saddle. The aftereffect of the prolonged use of the draught was to unleash all the pent up fatigue and body ache on the young men at once. Both had slept through the night, upon cushions in Arutha's tent, but had awakened tired and bone weary. Summoning up his usual brazen wit, James said, "No, sire, we always look like this when we wake. Usually you don't see us until after our morning's coffee."

Arutha permitted himself a laugh. "I see none of your charms have faded, Squire."

A short man with dark hair and beard walked over to where the Prince and his companions sat on the rise.

"Good morning, Highness," said Pug, as he bowed.

Arutha returned a polite nod and said, "Pug, do you return to Krondor with us?"

Pug's expression revealed concern. "Not straight away, Highness. There are matters I need to investigate at Stardock. The activities of the Tsurani Great Ones involved with this last attempt at Sethanon cause me great concern. I need to insure that they were the only magicians involved, and that those who still reside at my Academy are free of any guilt."

Arutha looked at the retreating wagons again as he said, "We do need to talk about the role played by the Tsurani in your Academy, Pug. But not here."

Pug nodded agreement. Even though everyone within earshot was privy to the secret of the Lifestone which sat beneath the city of Sethanon, it was wise to talk only in secret. And Pug also knew of Arutha's concern over the betrayal by the Tsurani magician Makala which had led to this last battle between the Prince's Army and an invading army of moredhel warriors. He expected Arutha would insist on far more stringent controls over who and what came through the rift — the magic gateway — between Midkemia and the Tsurani homeworld of Kelewan.

"We will, Highness. First, I must see to the safety of Katala and Gamina."

"I understand your concerns," said the Prince. Pug's daughter had been abducted and transported by magic to a distant world to lure him away from Midkemia while the Tsurani magician attempted to seize the Lifestone.

Pug said, "I must insure that never again am I made vulnerable through a family member." He looked knowingly at the Prince. "There's nothing I can do about William, but I can insure Gamina and Katala are safe at Stardock."

"William is a soldier, so by the nature of his craft he is at risk." Then he smiled at Pug. "But he's as safe as a soldier can be surrounded by six companies of the Royal Krondorian Household Guard. Anyone attempting to extort you through William will find him difficult to reach."

Pug's expression showed he didn't approve. "He could have been so much more." His look silently implored Arutha to do something. "He still can. It's not too late for him to return to Stardock with me."

Arutha regarded the magician. His expression showed he understood Pug's frustration and his parental desire to see his son back with his family. But his tone left no confusion as to his willingness to intercede on Pug's behalf. "I know you two have had your differences about his choice, Pug, but I'll leave it for you to work out at your own leisure. As I told you when you first objected to William coming into my service, he's a royal cousin by adoption and a free man of age, so there was no reason for me to refuse his request." Before Pug could voice another objection, he raised his hand. "Not even as a favor to you." His tone softened. "Besides, he's got the makings of a better than average soldier. Quite a knack, actually." Arutha changed the subject. "Did Owyn return home?" Owyn Belefote, youngest son of the Baron of Timons, had proven a valuable ally to James and Locklear in the recent struggle.

"At first light. He said he must mend fences with his father."

The enemy had been in full retreat for two days, a relatively small force of dark elves. A much larger force had been prevented from reaching the Dimwood when a rift machine had been destroyed by Arutha's two squires, James and Locklear.

Arutha then motioned toward Locklear, while keeping his eyes on Pug. "I have something for you." When Locklear failed to respond to the gesture, Arutha glanced over his shoulder to Locklear. "*Squire*, the document?"

Locklear had been on the verge of falling asleep in the saddle but he snapped to alertness as the Prince's voice penetrated his muzzy thoughts. He moved his horse to where Pug stood and handed down a parchment to him.

Arutha said, "Over my signature and seal, this names you final authority over all issue of magic as they affect the Kingdom, or at least the Western Realm." He smiled slightly. "I should have no trouble convincing His Majesty to ratify this for the entire Kingdom. You've had our ear in this area for years, Pug, but this gives you authority if you ever find yourself having to deal with another noble or King's officer without me at your shoulder. It names you official magician of the court of Krondor."

"My thanks, Highness," said Pug. He seemed about to speak, but hesitated.

Arutha cocked his head to one side. "There's a but here, isn't there?"

"But I need remain at Stardock with my family. There's much work to be done and my attention there precludes me from serving in Krondor, Arutha."

Arutha sighed slightly. "Understood. But, that still leaves me without a magician in court, if you're unwilling to take residency in the palace."

"I could send Kulgan back to nag at you," said Pug with a smile.

"No, my former teacher is too quick to forget rank and scold me in front of my court. It's bad for morale."

"Whose?" asked Jimmy under his breath.

Arutha didn't look at the Squire, but said, "Mine, of course." To Pug he said, "Seriously, the betrayal of Makala shows me the wisdom my father employed by having an advisor on matters of magic close to hand. If not you or young Owyn, who then?"

Pug thought a moment and said, "I have one student who might be just the person to advise you in the future. There is one problem."

"What would that be?" asked Arutha.

"She's Keshian."

Arutha said, "That's two problems."

Pug smiled. "Knowing your sister and wife, I would have thought a woman's advice wouldn't be alien to His Highness."

Arutha nodded. "It's not. But many in my court would find it . . . difficult."

Pug said, "I've never noticed you to be overly concerned with the opinions of others when your mind was set, Arutha."

The Prince said, "Times change, Pug. And men get older." He was silent a minute as he watched another contingent of his army break camp and start to move out. Then he turned to face Pug, one eyebrow raised in question. "But Keshian?"

"No one will accuse her of allying with this or that faction in court," said Pug.

Arutha chuckled. "I hope you're joking."

"No, I'm not. She's unusually gifted despite her youth; she's cultured and educated, reads and writes in several languages, and has a remarkable grasp of magic, which is exactly what you need in an advisor. Most importantly, she's the only one among my students who can understand the consequences of magic in a political context."

Arutha seemed to consider this a long moment, then said, "Come to Krondor when you can and tell me more. I'm not saying I will not finally agree to your choice, but I need more convincing before I do." Arutha chuckled as he turned his horse around. "Still, the expression on the faces of the nobles in court when a woman from Kesh walks in might be worth whatever risk she brings."

"I will vouch for her; my word on it," said Pug.

Arutha looked over his shoulder. "You're very serious about this, aren't you?"

"Very. Jazhara is someone I would entrust my family's lives to. She is only a few years older than William and has been with us at Stardock for almost seven years, so I've known her a third of her life. She can be trusted."

Arutha said, "That counts for much. A great deal actually. So, come to Krondor when you will, and we will discuss this at length." He bid Pug and Owyn goodbye, then turned to James and Locklear. "Gentlemen, we have a long ride ahead."

Locklear barely concealed his pain at the thought of more days in the saddle, albeit at a less furious pace than a few days earlier.

"A moment, if Your Highness permits. I would speak to Duke Pug," said James.

Arutha waved his permission as he and Locklear rode forward.

When the Prince was out of earshot, Pug said, "What is it, Jimmy?"

> As agreed to by Narab, the retreating moredhel weren't being harassed by Kingdom forces as long as they were heading straight north. Orders had been dispatched to allow the moredhel safe passage home as long as they kept moving.

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"When are you going to tell him?"

"What?" asked Pug.

Despite his crushing fatigue, James managed one of his familiar grins. "That the girl you're sending is the great-niece of Lord Hazara-Khan."

Pug was forced to smile in return and suppressed a chuckle. "I thought I'd save that for a more propitious moment." Then his expression changed to curiosity. "How did you know that?"

"I have my own sources. Arutha is consumed with the notion that Hazara-Khan is the head of Keshian Intelligence in the West, which he almost certainly is, and has moved to counter that with an organization of his own—you didn't hear that from me."

Pug nodded. "Understood."

"And as I have ambitions, I count it a wise thing to keep current on these matters."

"So you were snooping?"

"Something like that," said James with a shrug. "And there just can't be that many noble born Keshian women from desert families named Jazhara."

Pug laughed. "You will go far, Jimmy, if someone doesn't hang you first."

James seemed to shed his fatigue as he returned the laugh. "You're not the first to say that, Pug."

"I will get around to mentioning the relationship, in the future." Waving to where Arutha and Locklear had ridden, Pug said, "You'd better catch up."

Nodding, as he turned his horse, James said, "You're right. Good day, My Lord Duke."

"Good day, Squire."

James put heels to his horse's sides and the animal cantered after Arutha and Locklear. He overtook Locklear as Arutha moved to confer with Knight-Marshal Gardan about the ongoing dispersal of the army.

As he reined in, Locklear asked, "What was that about?"

"Just a question for Duke Pug."

Locklear yawned and said, "I need to sleep for a week."

Arutha overhead the remark as he rode back and said, "You can rest for a full night in Krondor when we get back, Squire. Then you leave for the north."

"North, sire?"

"You came back from Tyr-Sog without leave, although I grant your reasons were good ones. Now the risk has subsided, you must return to Baron Moyet's court and fulfill the terms of your service there."

Locklear closed his eyes as if in pain for a moment, then opened them and said, "I thought. . ."

"You'd wormed your way out of that banishment," supplied James under his breath.

Arutha, taking pity on the exhausted youth, said, "Serve Moyet well, and I may order you back to Krondor early. If you stay out of trouble."

Locklear nodded without comment.

James said, "Well, you can sleep in a warm bed in the palace for a night before you leave."

Arutha had taken the Tsurani magicians at face value after the end of the Riftwar. For nearly ten years they had been free to come and go between worlds, via several magic rifts. And now he felt a profound sense of betrayal.

"What about you?" asked Locklear. "Don't you have some unfinished business in Krondor?"

James closed his eyes a minute as if thought made him tired, then said, "Yes, there's a bit of trouble with the Guild of Thieves. But nothing for you to be bothered with. Nothing I can't handle by myself."

Locklear snorted and said nothing. He was too tired to think of a jibe.

James said, "Yes, after this nasty business with the Tsurani and moredhel, my business with the thieves in Krondor will seem dull by comparison."

Locklear looked at his friend and saw James's mind was already turning to whatever problems were caused by the Mockers — the Guild of Thieves. And with a chilling certainty, Locklear knew his friend was making light of something serious, for James had the death mark on him for leaving the Guild to serve the Prince. And there was something more. Then Locklear realized, with James, there was always something more.

ONE: ESCAPE

The sounds of pursuit echoed through the tunnels.

Limm was nearly out of breath from attempting to evade those set upon killing him. The young thief prayed to Ban-ath, God of Thieves, that those who followed were not as knowledgeable about the sewers of Krondor as he was. He knew he could not outrun them or fight them; his only hope was to outwit them.

The boy knew panic was the enemy, and he struggled against the terrible fear that threatened to reduce him to a frightened child, clinging to anything that might provide warm comfort while he huddled in the shadows, waiting for the men who would kill him. He paused a moment at an intersection of two large channels and then was off to the left, feeling in the gloom of the deep sewers, his only illumination a small, shuttered lantern. He kept the sliding window closed to the narrowest setting, for he only needed the slightest light to know which way to go. There were sections of the sewer where light from above filtered down, through culverts, gratings, broken

street stones, and other small sources. A little light went a long way to guide him through the stinking byways under the city. But there were also areas of total darkness, where he would be as blind as one born without eyes.

He reached a narrowing of the sewer, ducking to avoid hitting his head on the smaller opening, his bare feet splashing through the filthy water which rose up to funnel down the rough and rusty narrow pipe.

Spreading his legs, Limm moved in a rocking motion, his feet high up on the side of the circular passage, for he knew that in less than ten feet a nasty outfall sent waste to a huge channel twenty feet below. Hard callouses kept the ragged metal from slicing open his soles. The boy shuttered the lantern, for he knew exactly where he was and was fearful of even the smallest light being seen from those coming after as he entered an area with long lines of sight. He would be moving down passages hundreds of feet long, with even the faintest spark being visible from one end to the other.

Hurrying as best he could in this awkward fashion, he felt the tug of air as the water fell below him, splashing noisily below. The sound of it echoed in the small pipe, making its exact source difficult to locate.

Reaching a point ten feet beyond, Limm encountered a grate, almost bumping into it so focused was he on the sound of those who came behind. He crouched, in case a mirrored light was shined into the tunnel, making himself as small a target as possible.

Within moments he heard voices, at first only the sound of men speaking, not recognizable words. Then he heard, " — can't have gone too far. He's only a kid."

"He's seen us," said the leader, and the boy knew full well who the speaker was. He had the image of that man and those who served him etched in his memory, though he had only seen them for a few seconds before turning and fleeing. He didn't know the man's name, but he knew his nature. The boy had lived among men such as this all his life, though he had known only a few who might be this dangerous.

He had no illusions about his own abilities; he knew he could never confront such men. Limm was often full of bravado, but it was a false courage designed to convince those who were stronger that he was just a little more trouble to dispose of than he really was. The willingness to look death in the eye had saved the boy's neck on more than one occasion; but he was also nobody's fool: Limm knew these men wouldn't give him the time to even try a bluff. They would kill him without hesitation, because he could link them to a horrible crime.

Looking around, the young fugitive saw a trickle of water coming from above. Risking detection, he briefly shined the barest light he could manage above him. The top of the grating didn't reach the roof of the tunnel, and just the other side of the grate was a passageway upward.

Without hesitation the youth climbed up on the grate and pushed his free arm through, experience showing him how likely he might pass through such a tiny passage. Praying to Ba-nath that he hadn't grown too much since the last time he had tried such a stunt, he pushed upward and turned. His head went first, for it was the only part of his body he couldn't contract. If he couldn't force through, he would be caught in a dead-end. Twisting his head slightly, he thrust his face forward between the top bar and the stones above. Practice had taught him that his ears would suffer less if not bent backwards by trying to pull his head through. A rising sense of urgency battled the pain he felt, as he sensed those following were coming closer. Yet the pain from his cheeks as he slowly pressed through the gap grew more intense. He tasted the salty, iron tang of blood and sweat and he continued to wiggle his head through the gap. Tears flowed freely, yet he held his silence as he cruelly scraped both ears, one against stone and the other filthy iron. For an instant panic threatened to rise up and overwhelm him as images of him hanging helpless in the grate while his pursuers raced to seize him vividly played in his imagination. Then his head was past the top bar. He easily snaked his arm through, and he moved his shoulder. Hoping he wouldn't have to dislocate his joints to get through, the young thief continued. He got his shoulders through and by exhaling, his chest after. He held the lantern in his trailing arm and realized it wouldn't fit through the gap.

Talking a deep breath, the boy let it fall and twisted. He was now on the other side of the grate, clinging to it like a ladder as the lantern clattered off the stones.

"He's in there!" came a shout from close by and a light shone into the tunnel.

Limm held himself poised a moment, and looked up. The hole above him was barely visible in the faint light hurrying toward him. He shoved upward, slapping his palms against the walls of the tunnel, keeping his feet firm on the grate. He pressed hard with both hands on the sides of the vertical shaft. He needed solid hand-holds before he pushed off the grate. He felt around and got his fingers into a deep seam between two stones on one side and had just found another when he felt something touch his bare foot.

Instantly he pushed off with his feet, and heard a voice cursing. "Damn all sewer rats!"

Another voice said, "We can't get through there!"

"But my blade can!"

With all his strength the young thief pulled himself upward, into the shaft, and in a dangerous move, he released his hand hold on the top of the grate, dropped his hands to his side, and pushed upward. He slapped his palms backwards and

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>
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braced his back against the wall of the chimney, and pulled his feet upward, jamming them against the far wall in an acrobatic move. He heard the scrape of steel on iron as someone shoved a sword through the grating. Limm knew had he hesitated, he would have been impaled on the point of the long blade.

A voice swore and said, "He vanished up that chimney!"

Another voice said, "He's got to come out somewhere on the level above!"

For an instant Limm could feel the shirt on his back move as the material was pulled against the stone and his bare feet slipped on the slimy stones. He pressed harder with his feet and prayed he could hold his position. After an instant of downward movement, he stopped moving.

"He's gone!" shouted one of the men who had been chasing him. "If he was going to fall, he'd have been out of there by now!"

The boy recognized the voice of the leader. "Head back up to the next level and spread out! There's a bonus for whoever kills him! I want that rat dead before morning!"

Limm moved upward, one hand, one foot, another hand, another foot, by inches, slipping down an inch for every two gains. It was slow going and his muscles cried out for a pause, but he pressed on. A cool whiff of air from above told him he was close to the next level of the sewers. He prayed it was a large enough pipe to navigate, as he had no desire to attempt another passage downward and back through that grate.

Reaching the lip of the shaft, he paused, took a deep breath and turned, snatching at the edge of the shaft. One hand slipped on something thick and sticky, but the other hand held firm. Never one for bathing, he looked forward to scrubbing this muck off and finding clean clothing.

Hanging in the silence, the boy waited. He knew it was possible the men who had pursued him might appear in a few moments. He listened.

Impulsive by nature, the boy had come to learn the dangers of acting rashly in dangerous situations. Seven boys had come to Mother's, the Mocker's safe haven, at roughly the same time, within a few weeks of one another. The other six were now dead. Two had died by accident: falling from the rooftops. Three had been hung as common thieves during crack-downs by the Prince's magistrates. The last had died three nights before, at the hands of the men who now sought out the young thief, and it was his murder Limm had witnessed.

The boy let his racing heart calm and his straining lungs recover. He pulled himself up and into the large pipe, and moved off in the darkness, a hand on the right wall. He knew he could negotiate most of the tunnels hereabout blindfolded, but he also knew it only took one wrong turn or not noticing a side tunnel in passing to become completely lost. Especially where the side passages caused the echoes to bounce off of too many walls. There was a central cistern in this quarter of the city, and knowing where he was in relationship to it provided Limm with a navigational aide as good as any map, but only if he kept his wits about him and concentrated.

He inched his way along, listening to the distant sound of water gurgling, turning his head this way and that to insure he was hearing the sound coming down the sewer and not a false echo bounding off of nearby stones. While he moved blindly, he thought about the madness that had come to the city in recent weeks.

At first it had seemed like a minor problem: a new rival gang, like others that had showed up from time to time. Usually a visit from the Mocker's Bashers, or a tip to the Sheriff's men, and the problem went away.

This time, it was different.

A new gang showed up on the docks, a large number of Keshian thugs numbered among them. That alone wasn't worth notice: Krondor was a major trading port with Kesh. What made this group unusual was their indifference to the threat posed by the Mockers. They acted in a provocative fashion, openly moving cargo into and out of the city, bribing officials and daring the Mockers to interfere with them. They seemed to be inviting a confrontation.

Locklear looked at his friend and saw James's mind was already turning to whatever problems were caused by the Mockers — the Guild of Thieves. And with a chilling certainty, Locklear knew his friend was making light of something serious, for James had the death mark on him for leaving the Guild to serve the Prince.

At last the Mockers had acted, and it had been a disaster. Eleven of the most feared bashers — the enforcers among the Guild of Thieves — had been lured into a warehouse at the end of a semi-deserted dock. They had been trapped inside and the building was set afire, killing all eleven. From that moment on, warfare had erupted deep in Krondor's underworld.

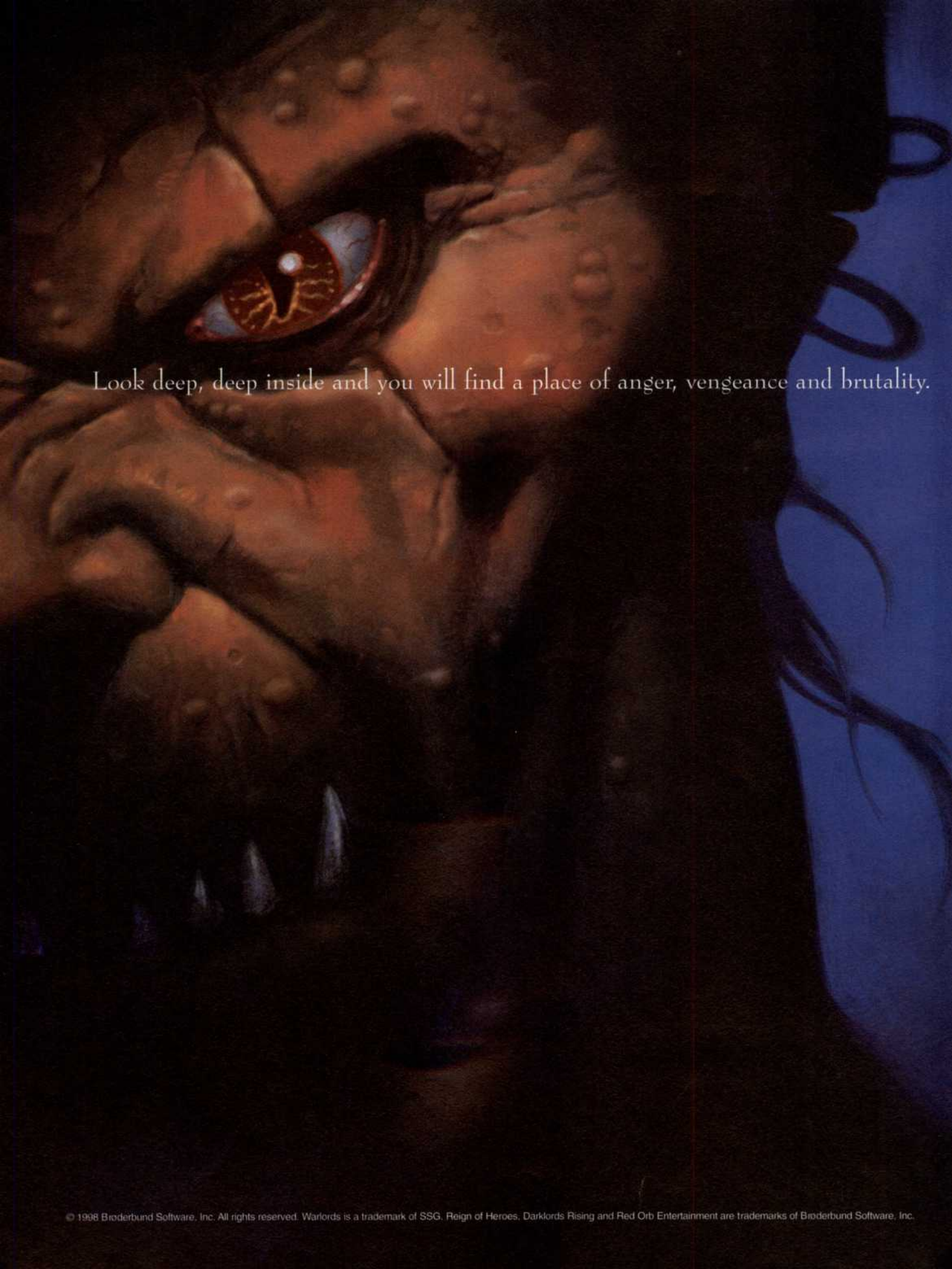
The Mockers had been driven to ground, and the invaders, working for someone known only as The Crawler, had also suffered, as the Prince of Krondor had acted to restore order to his city.

Rumor had it some men dressed as Nighthawks — members of the Guild of Assassins — had been seen weeks before in the sewer, bait to bring the Prince's army into the sewers, with the final destruction of the Mockers as the apparent goal, but that had come to naught.

Squire James, once Jimmy the Hand of the Mockers, had foiled that ruse, before vanishing into the night on a mission for the Prince. Then the Prince had mustered his army and moved out, and again the Crawler had struck.

Since then, the two sides had stayed holed up, the Mockers at Mother's, their well-disguised headquarters, and the Crawler's men at an unknown hideout in the north docks area. Those sent to pinpoint the exact location of the Crawler's headquarters failed to return.

The sewers had become a no-man's land, with few daring to come and go unless driven by the greatest need. Limm



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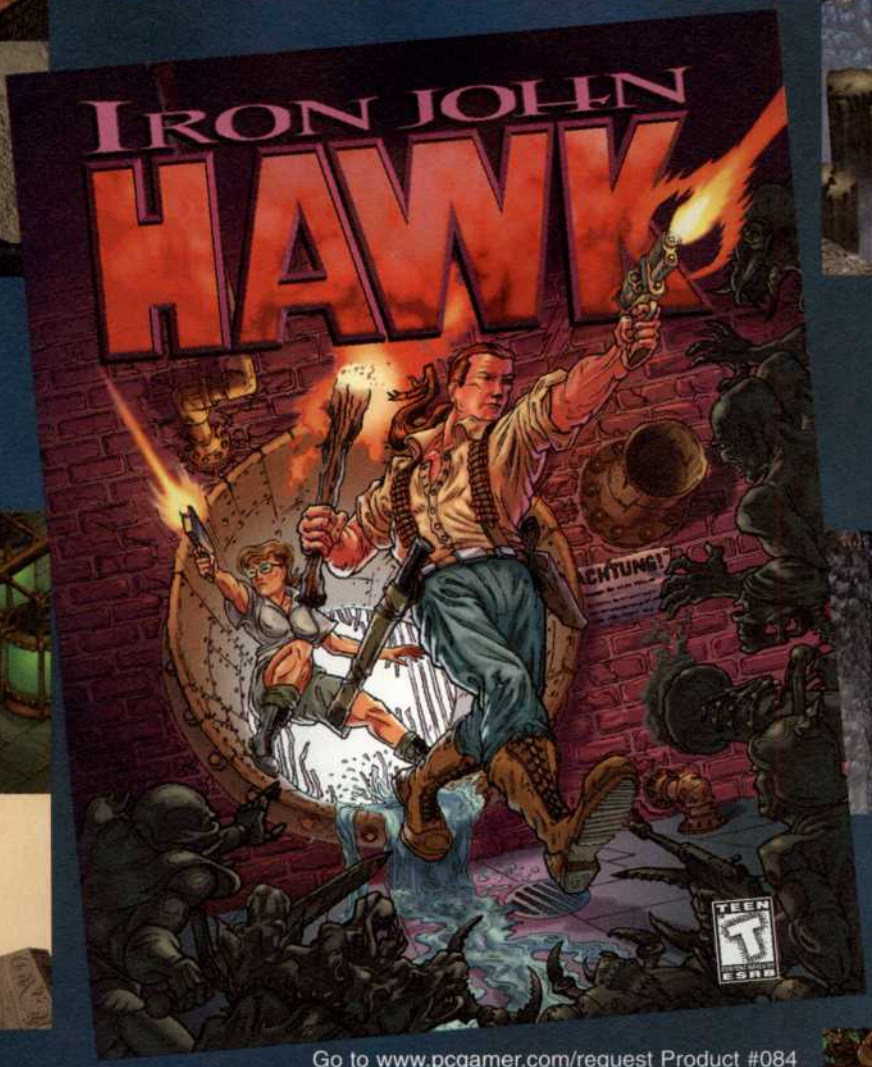

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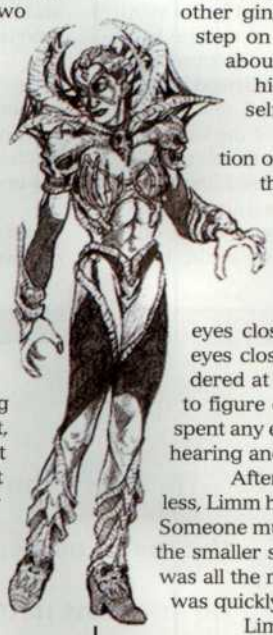
would now be at Mother's save for two things, a terrible rumor that had come to those at Mother's and a message from an old friend. Alone, the rumor or the message, and Limm would have huddled in a corner at the Mockers' hideout, but the combination of the two forced him to act.

Mockers had few friends; the loyalty between thieves was rarely engendered by affection or comity, but from a greater distrust of those outside the Guild and fear of one another. Strength or wit earned one a place in the Brotherhood of Thieves.

But occasionally a friendship was struck, a bond deeper than common need, and those few friends were worth a bit more risk. Limm counted less than a handful of people who he would take any risk for, let alone at such a high price should he be caught, but two of them were in need now, and had to be told the rumor.

Something moved in the darkness ahead and Limm froze. He waited listening for anything out of the ordinary. The sewer was far from silent, with a constant background of noises, the distant rumble of water rushing through the large culvert below that took the city's refuse out past the harbor mouth, a thousand drips, the scrabble of rats and other vermin and their squeaky challenges.

Wishing he had a light of any sort, Limm waited. Patience in one his age was rare outside the Mockers, but a rash thief was a dead thief.



darkness would shelter him and he could remain silent enough to avoid being heard. Once away from the intersection, he could be safely on his way.

Limm barely crept, placing one foot ahead of the other gingerly, so as to not dislodge anything or step on an object that might betray his whereabouts. Fighting the impulse to hurry, he kept his breathing under control and willed himself to keep moving.

Step by step he approached the intersection of the two passages, and as he was reaching the corner where he had to turn, he heard another sound. A small scrape of metal against stone, as if a scabbard or sword blade had ever-so-lightly touched a wall. He froze.

Even in the pitch dark, Limm kept his eyes closed. He didn't know why, but having his eyes closed helped his other senses. He had wondered at this in the past, and finally stopped trying to figure out why it was so. He just knew that if he spent any energy trying to see, even in pitch black, his hearing and sense of touch suffered.

After a long silent period of remaining motionless, Limm heard a rush of water heading towards him. Someone must have purged a cistern or opened one of the smaller sluices that fed the sewer. The slight noise was all the mask he needed to resume moving, and he was quickly around the corner.

Limm hurried, cautious but now feeling the need to put some distance between himself and whoever guarded the intersection behind him. He silently counted steps and when one hundred had passed he opened his eyes.

The boy knew panic was the enemy, and he struggled against the terrible fear that threatened to reduce him to a frightened child, clinging to anything that might provide warm comfort while he huddled in the shadows, waiting for the men who would kill him.

Limm earned his keep in the Mockers by being among the most adroit pickpockets in Krondor, and his ability to calmly move among the throng in the market or down the busy streets without attracting attention had set him high in the estimation of the leadership. Most boys his age were still working the streets in packs, urchins who would be used to provide distraction while other Mockers lifted goods from carts, or to direct attention away from a fleeing thief.

Patience was rewarded, as the faint echo of someone moving a boot on stone reached Limm. A short distance ahead two large culverts joined in a cross. He would have to cross through the slowly flowing sewage to reach the other side.

It was a good place to wait, thought the boy thief. The sound of him moving through the water would alert anyone nearby and they'd be on him like hounds on a hare.

Limm considered his options. There was no way around that intersection. He could return the way he came, but that would cost him hours of moving through the dangerous sewers under the city. He could avoid crossing the transversing sewer by skirting around the corner, hugging the wall to avoid being seen, and moving down that passage to his right. He would have to trust the

As he expected, ahead was a faint dot of light, which he knew was a reflection of light coming down from an open grating in the West Market Square. There wasn't enough light for him to see with, but it was a point of reference and confirmed what he already knew about his whereabouts.

He moved quickly and reached the crossway that ran parallel to the one he had been traveling before encountering the silent guard. He eased into the foul sewage and crossed the now-moving stream of refuse, reaching the opposite walkway without making much sound.

Limm was quickly up and on his way again. He knew where his friends were holed up and knew that it was a relatively safe place, but given the time and circumstances, nothing was truly safe anymore. What had once been called the other Thieves' Highway, the rooftops of Krondor, was now as much an open war zone as the sewers. The citizens of the city of Krondor might be blissfully ignorant of this silent warfare above their heads and below their feet, but Limm knew that if he didn't encounter the Crawler's men along the way, he risked murderers posing

as Nighthawks or the Prince's soldiers. No man unknown to him was trustworthy, and a few whom he knew by name could only be trusted so far these days.

Limm reached the limit of his travels along this corridor and felt the wall to his left. He had moved by his own silent count and discovered with satisfaction that he had been less than a foot off estimating the whereabouts of the iron rungs in the wall. He started to climb. Still blind, he felt himself enter a chimney of stone, and quickly knew he was at the floor of a cellar. He reached up and felt the latch. An experimental tug showed it was bolted from the other side.

He knocked, twice, rapidly, then paused, the twice again, another pause and a single knock. He waited, counting to ten, then repeated the pattern in reverse order, one knock, pause, two knocks, pause, and two again. He heard the bolt slide open.

The trap swung upward, but the room above was as dark as the sewer below. Whoever was waiting, preferred to wait unseen.

As Limm cleared the floor of the room, rough hands hauled him through, the trap shutting quickly behind him. A feminine voice whispered, "What are you doing here?"

Limm sat down heavily upon the stone floor, fatigue sweeping over him. "Running for my life," he said softly. Catching his breath, he continued. "I saw Sweet Willie killed last night. Ugly basher working for the Crawler." He snapped his fingers. "Cracked his neck like you'd break a chicken's, while his mates stood watching. Didn't even give him a chance to beg or say a prayer, nothing. Just put him out of the way like a cockroach." He was close to weeping as he told the story and as relief at being relatively safe for the first time in hours washed over him. "But that's not the worst of it."

A lantern was lit by a large man with a grey beard. His narrow gaze communicated volumes. Limm better have compelling reasons for violating a trust and coming to this hideout. "What else?" he asked.

"The Upright Man is dead."

Ethan Graves, one time leader of the Mockers' bashers, for a time a brother of the Order of Ishap, and now fugitive from every court of justice in the Kingdom took a moment to accept the news.

The woman, named Kat, was half her companion's age, and an old friend to Limm. She asked, "How?"

"Murdered is the rumor," said Limm. "No one is saying for certain, but it's held without doubt he's dead."

Graves sat down at a small table, testing the construction of the small wooden chair with his large frame.

"How would anyone know?" he asked rhetorically. "No one knows who he is. . . was."

Limm said, "Here's what I know. The Daymaster was still working when I came to Mother's last night, and he was holed up in the back with Mick Giffen, Reg deVrise, and Phil the Fingers."

Graves and Kat exchanged glances. Those were the senior-most thieves in the Mockers. Giffen had succeeded Graves as leader of the Bashers, deVrise oversaw those who burgled and fenced goods, and Phil was in charge of pickpockets, smash-and-grab gangs, and the urchins who ran the streets of Krondor.

Limm continued. "The Nightmaster never showed. Word went out and we started looking for him. Just before dawn, we heard they found the Nightmaster, floating in the sewers near the dock. His head was all bashed in."

Kat almost gasped. "No one would dare touch him."

Graves said, "No one in the know. But someone who didn't care about the Mocker's wrath would."

"Here's the dicey part," said Limm. "The Daymaster says he was supposed to meet with the Upright Man. Now, as I understand things, if the Upright Man is supposed to meet with you, and you don't show, he's got ways of sending word to the Daymaster or Nightmaster. Well, no word was heard. So the Daymaster sends one of the boys, Timmy Bascolm, if you remember him,"— they nodded they did — "and Timmy turns up dead an hour later.

"So the Daymaster heads out with a bunch of bashers and an hour later they come running back to Mother's and hole up. Nobody's saying anything, but word spreads: the Upright Man's gone."

Graves was silent a minute, then said, "He must be dead. There's no other explanation for this."

"And there are bully boys to make a strong man faint chasing through the sewers, tonight, so Willie and I figure the hunt is on and our best bet is to lie low somewhere. We got run to ground last night near Five Points"—both Kat and Graves knew the region of the city sewers by that name—"so after they killed Willie, I figured my best bet was to get here, with you."

Graves said, "You want to leave Krondor?"

The boy said, "If you'll take me. There's a war on, for truth, and I'm the last of my band alive. If the Upright Man is dead, all bets are off. You know the rules. If the Upright Man isn't here, it's every man for himself and make what deal you can."

Graves nodded. "I know the rules." His voice

He didn't know the man's name, but he knew his nature. The boy had lived among men such as this all his life, though he had known only a few who might be this dangerous.

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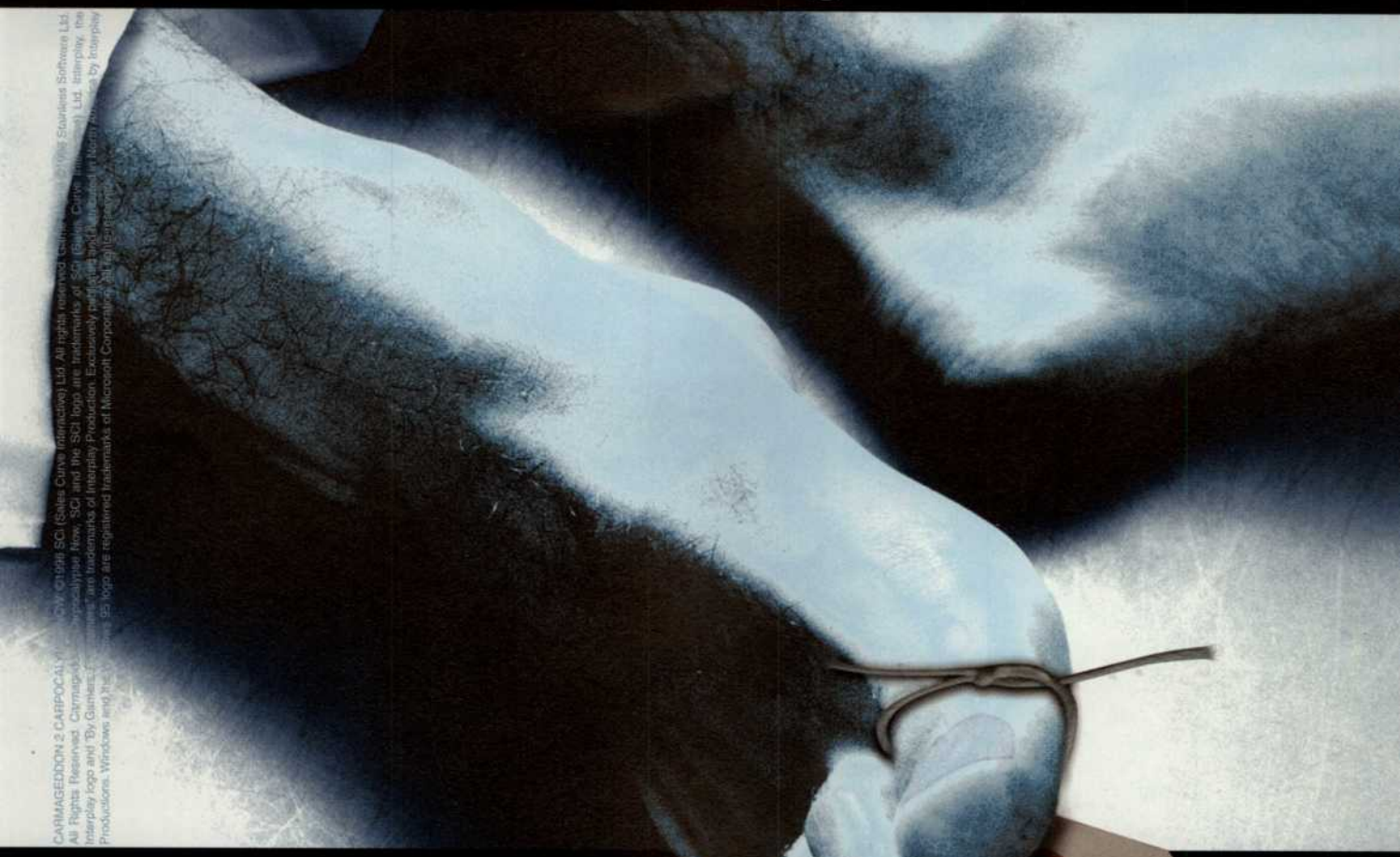

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lacked the rough, commanding edge Limm had come to know as a boy in the Mockers, when Graves was first among the Bashers. Still, Graves had saved Limm several times, from freebooting thugs and the Prince's men alike. Limm would do whatever Graves said.

After a moment of reflection, Graves spoke. "You stay here, boy. No one in the Guild knows you've helped Kat and I, and the truth is, I'm fond of you. You were always a good lad, as far as that goes. Too full of yourself, but what boy isn't at times." He shook his head in regret. "Out there it'll be every hand against us, Mockers, Prince's men, or the Crawler's. I've got a few friends left, but if the blood is running in the sewers, who knows how long I can count on them."

He tasted the salty, iron tang of blood and sweat and he continued to wiggle his head through the gap. Tears flowed freely, yet he held his silence as he cruelly scraped both ears, one against stone and the other filthy iron.

"But everyone else thinks you've made free!" objected Limm. "Just me and Willie knew, 'cause you told us so we could fetch you food. Those notes you sent out, to the Temple, and some of your friends, to that magician you traveled with . . " He waved his hand as if trying to recall the name.

"Owyn," Graves supplied.

"Owyn," repeated Limm. "Word spread through the city you'd fled to Kesh. I know at least a dozen bashers were sent outside the walls on your trail."

Graves nodded. "And an equal number of monks from the Temple, too, I warrant." He sighed. "That was the plan. Lie low here while they looked for us out there."

Kat had remained silent throughout, said, "It was a good plan, Graves."

Limm nodded.

Graves said, "I figured another week or ten days, and they'll come back, each thinking some other had just missed sight of us, then we'd walk down to the docks one night, get on a ship, and sail off to Durbin, just another merchant and his daughter."

"Wife!" said Kat, angrily.

Limm grinned.

Graves shrugged and spread his hands in a sign of surrender. "Young wife," he said.

She put her arms around his neck and said, "Wife," softly.

Limm said, "Well, you play the parts well enough, but right now getting to the docks is no small order." He glanced around the cellar. "What about just going out the door, up there?" He pointed upward.

Graves said, "Sealed off. That's why I built this place as a hideout. The building upstairs is abandoned, roof beams collapsed. The man who owned it died, so it belongs to the Prince for back taxes. Fixing up old buildings is not very high on the Prince's list of things to do, it seems."

Limm nodded in approval of the scheme. "Well, how long do you think we should stay?"

"You," said Graves rising up, "are staying in Krondor. You're young enough to make something of yourself, boy. Get off the dodgy path and find a master. Apprentice in a craft or become a serving man."

"Honest work?" said Limm, as he jumped to his feet. "When did a Mocker seek honest work?"

Graves pointed a finger at him. "Jimmy did."

"Jimmy the Hand," agreed Kat. "He found honest work."

"He saved the Prince's life!" objected Limm. "He was made a member of the court. And there's a death mark on his head! He couldn't return to the Mockers if he begged."

Graves said, "If the Upright Man is dead, that mark is erased."

Softly Limm asked, "What should I do?"

Graves said, "Leave the city. There's a man named Tuscobar, once a trader from Rodez. He has a shop up in a town called Biscart, two day's fast walk up the coast. He owes me a favor. He also has no sons, so there is no one to apprentice for him. Go there and ask him to take you to service. If he objects, just tell him 'Graves clears all debts if you do this.' He'll understand what it means."

"What does he do?" asked Limm.

"He sells cloth. He makes a good living, as he sells to nobles for their daughters."

Limm's expression showed he was less than taken with the notion. "I'd rather go to Durbin and take my chances with you. What are you going to do there?"

"Turn honest," said Graves. "I have some gold. Kat and I are going to open an inn."

"An inn," said Limm, his eyes alight. "I like inns." He got down on his knees in an overly dramatic pleading. "Let me come! Please! I can do many things in an inn. I can tend fires, and show customers to their rooms. I can haul water and I can mark the best purses for cutting."

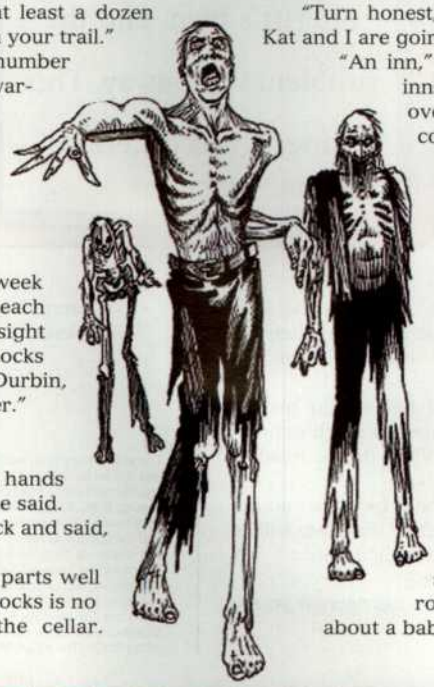
"An *honest* inn," said Graves.

Some of the enthusiasm left Limm's expression. "In Durbin? Well, if you say so."

Kat said, "We're going to have a baby. We want him to grow up honest."

Limm was speechless. He sat in wide-eyed astonishment. Finally, he said, "A baby? Are you daft?"

Graves exhibited a wry smile and Kat's brown eyes narrowed as she said, "What's daft about a baby?"



Murder in Krondor

Limm said, "Nothing, I guess, if you're a farmer or a baker or someone who can expect a fair chance at living to old age. But for a Mocker. . . ." He let the thought go unfinished.

Graves said, "What's the clock? We've been cut off from sunlight so long I have no sense of it."

"It's nearly midnight," said Limm. "Why?"

"With the Upright Man dead, or even just the rumor of it, things will be happening. Ships will be leaving the docks before the morning tide that would otherwise have stayed in Krondor."

Limm fixed Graves with a questioning look. "You know something?"

Graves stood up from the small chair and said, "I know lots of things, boy."

Limm jumped to his feet. "Take me with you. You're the only friends I've got, and if the Upright Man's dead, who knows who'll come to rule in his place. If it's that Crawler, most of us are dead anyway, and if even if it's one of our own, who's to say what my life is worth."

Graves and Kat understood. The peace within the Mockers was imposed from the top down, and it would never be mistaken for friendship. Old grudges would surface and old scores would be settled. More than one Mocker would die not knowing for which past transgression he was paying the ultimate penalty.

Graves sighed in resignation. "Very well. Not much for you here, I'll grant, and another pair of eyes and nimble fingers might prove worth while."

"What's the plan?"

"We need to be at the docks before the dawn. There's a ship there, a Quegan trader, the *Stella Maris*. The captain is an old business acquaintance of mine. He was lying low, claiming a refit was needed, against the time when we could smuggle ourselves out of here. He'll sail for Durbin as soon as we board."

Kat said, "Lot of ships will be leaving on the morning tide, so another won't cause too much notice."

Limm suddenly felt tired. "When do we head to the docks?"

"An hour before dawn. It'll still be dark enough for us to stay in shadows, but enough of the town will be awake and about so we won't attract much notice."

Kat smiled. "We'll be a family."

Limm got a sour expression on his narrow young face. "Mother?"

At first it had seemed like a minor problem: a new rival gang, like others that had showed up from time to time. Usually a visit from the Mocker's Bashers, or a tip to the Sheriff's men, and the problem went away. This time, it was different.

Kat was barely ten years older than Limm, so she said, "Big sister."

Limm said, "We have one problem, though."

Graves nodded. "Getting to the street."

Limm sat back, for he knew that there could be no plan, ruse, or providential miracle that would get them safely to the docks. They would simply have to leave this hideout and risk a short walk through a dark tunnel which might house a dozen murders or sewer rats. And they wouldn't know which until they left.

Limm was suddenly tired and said, "I think I'll sleep until it's time."

"Good idea," agreed Graves. "There's a pallet over there you can use. We'll wake you when it's time to go."

Limm moved to the indicated corner and lay down. Kat whispered, "What are the odds?"

"Bad," admitted her lover. "We've got to get the boy some clothing. Dirty boys are nothing unusual at the dock. But not that dirty." Trying to muster some optimism, he said, "Still, if the Upright Man is dead, there may be enough chaos in the city we can slip out without attracting notice."

"Any other choice?"

"Only one," admitted Graves, "but I won't use it unless we're caught."

"What is it?"

Graves looked at the young girl for whom he had thrown away everything and said, "I have one friend left, who gains nothing from my fall. If I must, I'll send Limm to him begging for help."

"Who?" whispered Kat.

Graves closed his eyes as if admitting he might seek help was hard for one as self-reliant as himself. "The only thief who can beg the Prince of Krondor for my life."

"Jimmy?"

Graves nodded. "Jimmy the Hand."

PCG

The above story is an early draft of a work in progress by Raymond E. Feist. The final text will be presented in the novel *Murder in Krondor*, to be published by Avon Books and HarperCollins Publishing in July 1999. *Murder in Krondor* is a sequel to the forthcoming book, *Krondor the Betrayal*, coming this fall. Set in Feist's world of Midkemia, both books are novels based on the best-selling computer RPG *Betrayal at Krondor* and the upcoming *Return to Krondor* from Sierra Studios and PyroTechnix, releasing this winter. In 1982, with the publication of his debut novel, *Magician*, Raymond E. Feist took the fantasy world by storm. Since that time, he has become one of the preeminent writers of epic fantasy, with more than 12 million copies of his books in print and translated into 13 languages. His work appears regularly on best-seller lists including *The New York Times* and *The Times of London*. His extensive literary works include the novels in the *Serpentwar* and *Riftwar* sagas, the *Empire Trilogy*, *Prince of the Blood*, *The King's Buccaneer*, and *Faerie Tale*, a dark-fantasy set in America.

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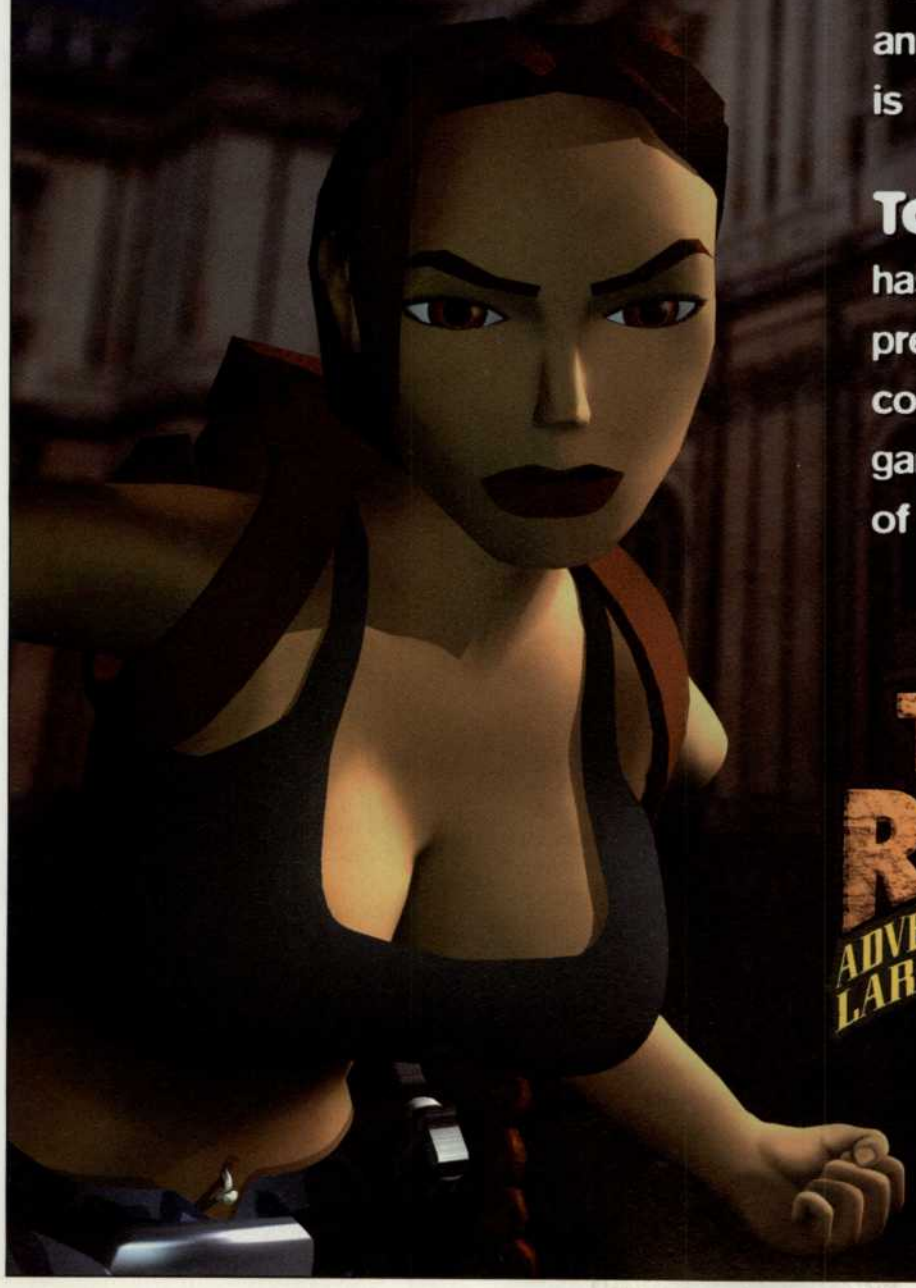

For everyone who wondered if it could get any better, the answer is **YES!**

Tomb Raider III has improved upon the previous two with a completely redesigned game engine and loads of other improvements.

TOMB RAIDER
ADVENTURES OF LARA CROFT
III

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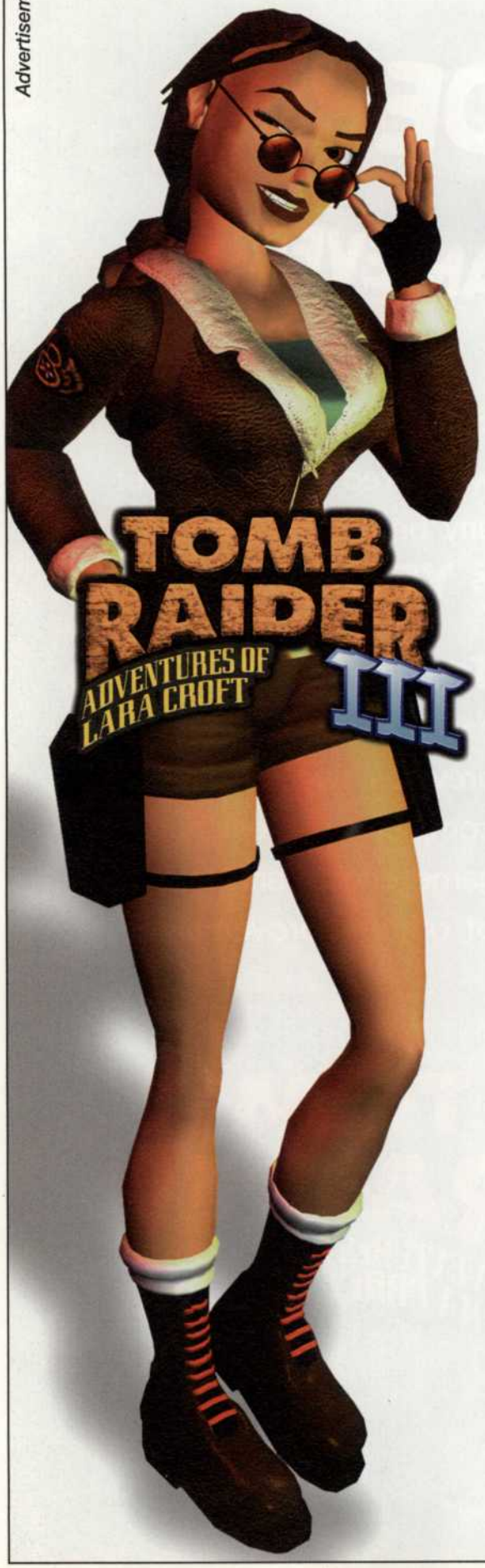
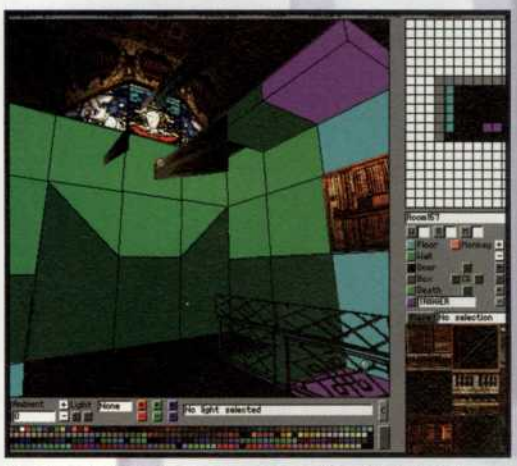


Lara's new outfit in Antartica

We've been talking to Adrian Smith at Core Design to find out exactly what makes this Tomb Raider the best one to date.

The right texture maps turn a room of colored shapes into a historic cathedral.



Complex architectural shapes are now possible with revamped game engine.

Why did you decide to do another Tomb Raider so quickly after Tomb Raider II?

We were about halfway through Tomb Raider II development and there were plenty of elements that we couldn't include in the second game due to time and memory restrictions. At this point we knew we had enough ideas to fill the levels of an entirely new game and didn't see any reason to stop the momentum.

What are the most impressive differences between TRIII and TRII?

Where to start...?
Of course there are the obligatory new outfits, vehicles and moves...

but a whole lot more too: Multi-colored lighting has made a vast difference to the overall atmosphere of the game. The environments, baddies and Lara herself all look far more realistic with the different coloured light-sources.

The new landscape system has allowed us to create far more organic maps than were possible in the previous games. We are also able to construct more complex architectural structures such as arches and domes - St Paul's Cathedral for example!

The AI has had a complete overhaul so all enemies will behave in a much more life-like manner, rather than just running at Lara and attacking immediately.
Lara's new moves such as the crawl, dash and the monkey swing have opened up new possibilities for puzzles and exploration.

New water reflection effects and surfaces also add to the realism, as do semi-transparencies such as light beams and mist. We've also got weather effects such as snow and rain and a host of other effects such as the following:

How about gameplay?

Tomb Raider III combines the best elements of its two predecessors:

- Tomb Raider's atmosphere, vast locations, puzzle-solving and exploration elements.

Lara's new outfit in Area 51

Lara's new outfit in London

Lara's new Jungle outfit

• Tomb Raider II's action and use of vehicles.

Tomb Raider III's levels are non-linear, presenting the player with more than one route to complete each level. So, it will be possible to complete a level without having explored the whole map.

There is also a new structure for the order of game-play: Tomb Raider III contains 5 separate worlds which link together. After completing the first adventure, the following three may be played in any order, before the fifth level brings the game to its conclusion.

The improved artificial intelligence allows more sophisticated combat techniques since it is now possible to sneak past some of the enemies and duck behind objects whilst shooting.

Snow and rain are also possible because of new particle and transparent lighting effects.

One of the strongest parts of the previous two Tomb Raiders has been the level design. How do you go about constructing them and how does TRIII compare to the other games?

We've developed our own level-editing system - it's unique to the TR games. The maps comprise a series of rooms, stacked side-by side and on top of one another. The editor

Lara swings into action with a host of new moves.

Colored lighting effects add to the realism of London at night.

allows us to place all objects, effects such as water, light etc, triggers, enemies and Lara into the maps and then immediately play them to check that everything works. This system allows us to immediately correct any mistakes - so if there's anything we've overlooked it becomes obvious as soon as we play.

The level editor has been improved for TRIII - instead of using squares to generate height and sufraces, we can now use triangles. This means that the maps themselves can be more complex and organic - less 'blocky' than the previous 2 games. Also, the textures that we apply to the maps are more detailed in the previous-games. Incorporation of multi-coloured lighting and improved dynamic lighting gives the levels a lot more atmosphere.

What was behind the decision to have five separate adventures in TRIII?

Simply because we wanted to change the basic game structure for TR3. India is the first location and the player can then choose any of the three mid-game areas either Area 51, South Pacific or London and play them in any order, gaining certain advantages or disadvantages depending on the levels they chose to play first.

Continued over page

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NEW FEATURES

- Vehicles such as canoe, quad bike, mine cart, underwater propulsion unit and snow vehicle..
- Weapons such as grenade launcher, desert eagle and rocket launcher.
- New costumes for Lara.
- A greater number of enemies than TRI and II combined.

NEW MOVES

DASH

Lara has the ability to dash at high speed for several seconds, allowing her to avoid time-based traps. A dive can also be added to this move.

DUCK

Lara can duck to avoid flying missiles.

DUCK & CRAWL

Lara can proceed forward and backwards in the crawl position.

MONKEY SWING

A jump and grab will enable Lara to swing around certain parts of the levels.

ROPE SWING

The rope swing will be similar to the death slide, in that Lara will be able to hold the rope, swing and release at any time.

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

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New organic shapes and textures bring exotic jungles to life.

So what's your favourite puzzle in the TRIII? Take us through it (without giving away the solution!).

In Area 51 there's one bit where you have to escape from a prison - you can't Shoot the guards (your guns have been confiscated) and the level is full of Laser Defence Systems. You're only hope is to find another prisoner who can lead you Through the laser traps, then it's up to you to sneak past the guards. The only snag is finding the prisoner...

Which level do you think looks the most impressive? And which is the toughest?

London is probably the most impressive level just because of the fact that it's so different from any past Tomb Raider loca-

Lara will need both physical agility and a sharp mind to make it through Area 51.

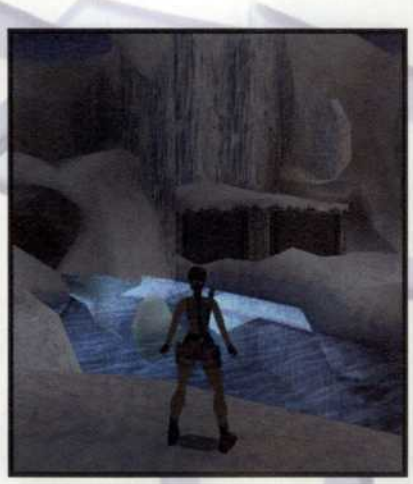
tion. The hardest has to be the last location Antarctica, but Area51 (screen) is also very tough and very clever.

What new enemies are we going to be drawing our Uzis on in TRIII? Are there any new monsters that are going to make us gasp?

The human enemies in TR3 are very intelligent now, they can guard a certain objects, they have L.O.S. (line of sight) code allowing Lara to sneak past them if they can't see her or if they're looking the other way, some enemies even flee when shot and return later with swat team backup. As for monsters, we have some very scary beasts within the dark tunnels of the game, but what and where you'll have to find out for your self!

What new weapons has Lara been given?

Lara now has a proper rocket launcher that isn't auto targeting but the explosion now has a blast radius, she also carries a grenade launcher similar to the one in quake, you can bounce the grenades around corners and fire them into water.



Non-linear gameplay opens many options for Lara to reach the same end.

Which sections of the new game are going to excite people the most? Which bits have people at Core been the most enthusiastic about?

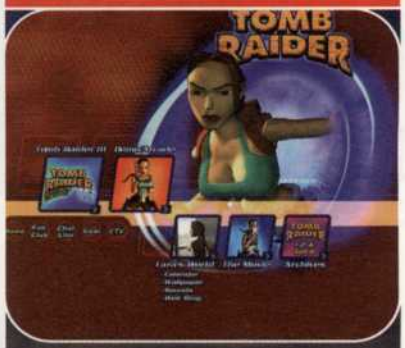
There's a section of the South Pacific that involves a rapid ride, Lara has to find a kayak and brave the white water down a deep ravine.

Tell us a TRIII secret that nobody knows.

I'll have to whisper this one so listen very carefully. Lara has a proper bum and Dynamic skin over the many joints of her body.

Be careful stepping into the light. New effects make new puzzles possible.

NEW TOMB RAIDER WEB SITE



The Tomb Raider web site is also bigger and better than ever. A new look and improved navigation make getting around easier, faster and more fun.

Get the latest on story, screens, art and features at the Tomb Raider III web site.

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LARA CROFT
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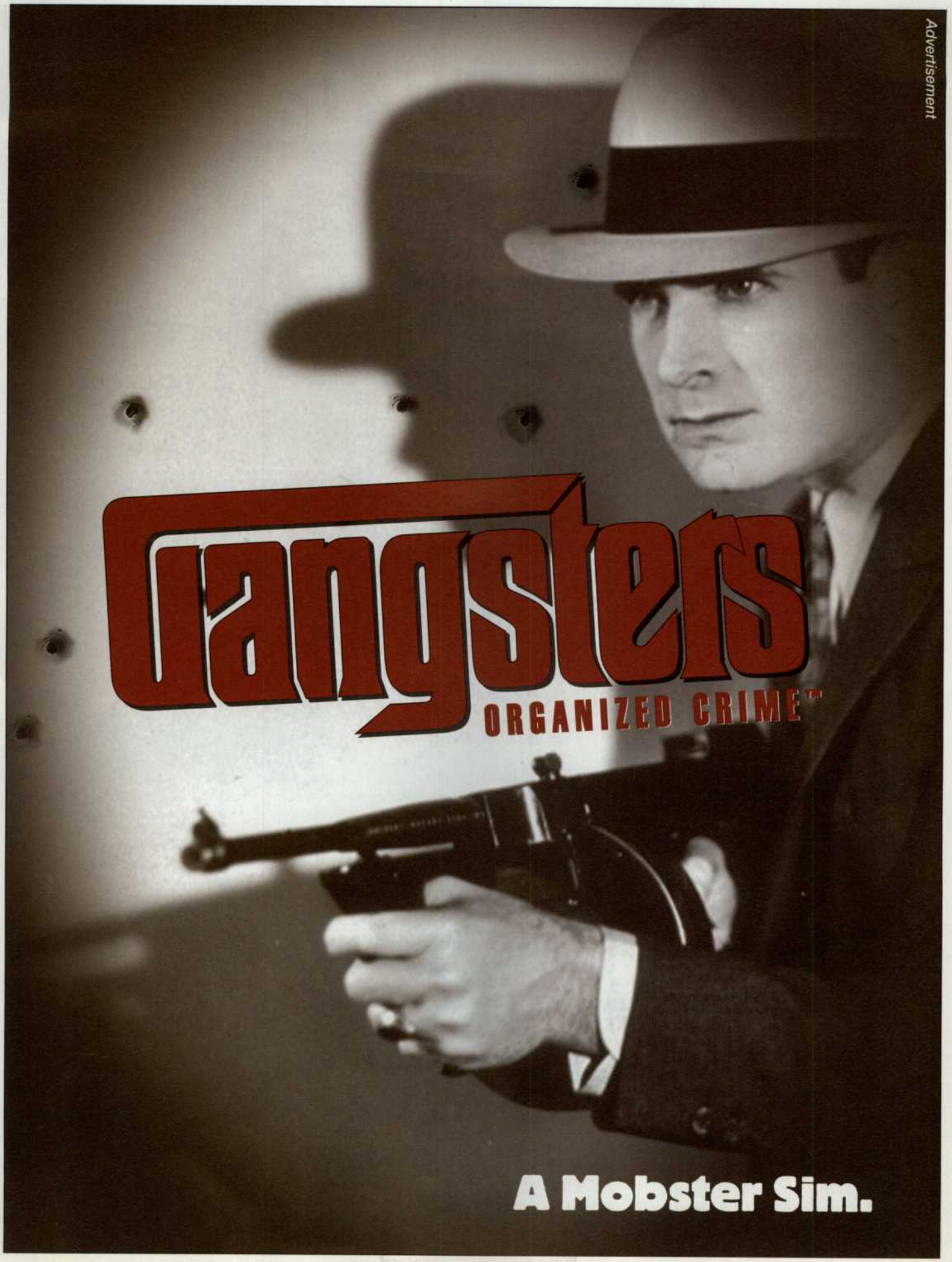

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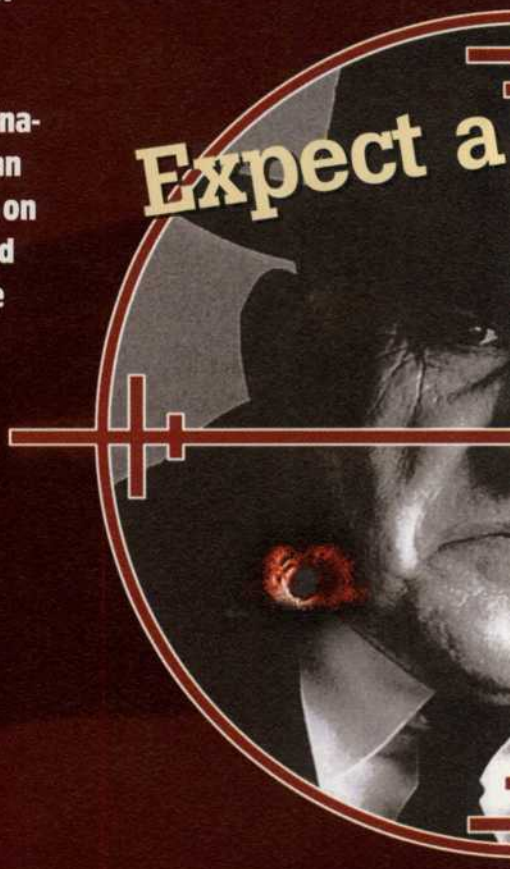

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Imagine a world where it is illegal to buy beer. A world where shop owners have to pay for protection. A world where half the police force is corrupt, and "open season" has been declared on the other half. A world where a politician's promise to "clean up this town" had better disappear by election day... or he will.

Welcome to the world of *Gangsters: Organized Crime*. You are Al Capone, John Gotti, or Michael Corleone. It doesn't matter. All that matters is that you are the Godfather, you control the operations, you control the payouts, and you take out the contracts. Who lives and who dies in your city is your decision.

But, you are not alone, for up to three other Godfathers vie for the ultimate control of the Chicago-esque city where *Gangsters: Organized Crime* takes place. Each Godfather gives orders for the week, sets up territories, extorts local businesses, and puts out hits on local figures. Just like you. So, not only do you have to watch your back for Johnny Law, but for hit men from other crime families.

Gangsters: Organized Crime is a combination of turn-based and real-time strategy gameplay. The turn-based portion takes place when you give your lieutenants their orders for the week. You divide up your forces into squads and send them off on various missions, playing to their areas of expertise. Is Tommy "The Fist" Tognetti part of your crime family? Well, send him in to do some muscle work on one of the business owners who refused to pay you last week. Are you payrolling Henry "Pyro" McClaine? Outfit him with an explosive device to take care of the flower shop that tried to call the

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where crime pays!

www.eidosinteractive.com

Internet, LAN and modem multiplay for up to four players

Both in-depth strategic planning and real-time tactical gameplay

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

- 100% compatible Windows 95 and DirectX 5.0 system
- Pentium 133 or better
- 16MB RAM
- SVGA video card
- DirectX 5.0 (supplied)
- DirectX 5.0 compatible sound card
- Mouse

Control every aspect of a 1930's-era mob "family"

cops on you, once, and for all.

Take your time in these planning stages, and make sure that each of your guys has the whole week planned out. You don't want your "good fellas" sitting around while there are crimes out there that need to be committed! At the beginning of each game week you begin by issuing your guys their orders. This can be anything from extortion or intimidation, to violent crimes like a drive-by hit. You also outfit your guys with Tommy guns and pistols, cars and explosives. You can try your hand at bribery, and then check on your sphere of influence within the city government, the police force, and the legal community. You can hire a bookkeeper for when the dollars become much more than you can handle, and you can retain the best defense attorney in the country for the right price so that when the need arises, he is right there. You decide what sort of illegal operations your front companies are covering up, be it a speak-easy, a gambling house, or a house of ill-repute.

After you set up your forces, set the wheels in motion with the click of the mouse and watch your orders happen in real-time. Here in the game week itself you can watch your thugs as they go about their business, roughing up shop owners for the money they owe you, or performing hits on people who have 'offended' you. It's all seen in an isometric third-person view with multiple levels of zoom. The farthest out level shows you entire blocks at a glance, while the close up mode shows you buildings and cutaways so you can track your individual members easily. You can even put important people into separate windows so you can keep tabs on them when you are off busy doing something else.

You also have control of the game speed. If the week is just dragging by (and doesn't it always seem that way?) you can speed it up and see the results of your actions that week quicker. Or, if you need to take matters in hand, you can slow the week down and get personal with your thugs.

All in all, YOU are in total control. Every aspect of your gang is at your disposal. *Gangsters: Organized Crime* combines the best elements of a strategy game with the underworld doings of a criminal syndicate. If you ever wanted to break the law and get away with it, Gangsters: Organized Crime is the way to go.

For more information on *Gangsters: Organized Crime*, go to the Eidos Interactive web site at www.eidosinteractive.com.

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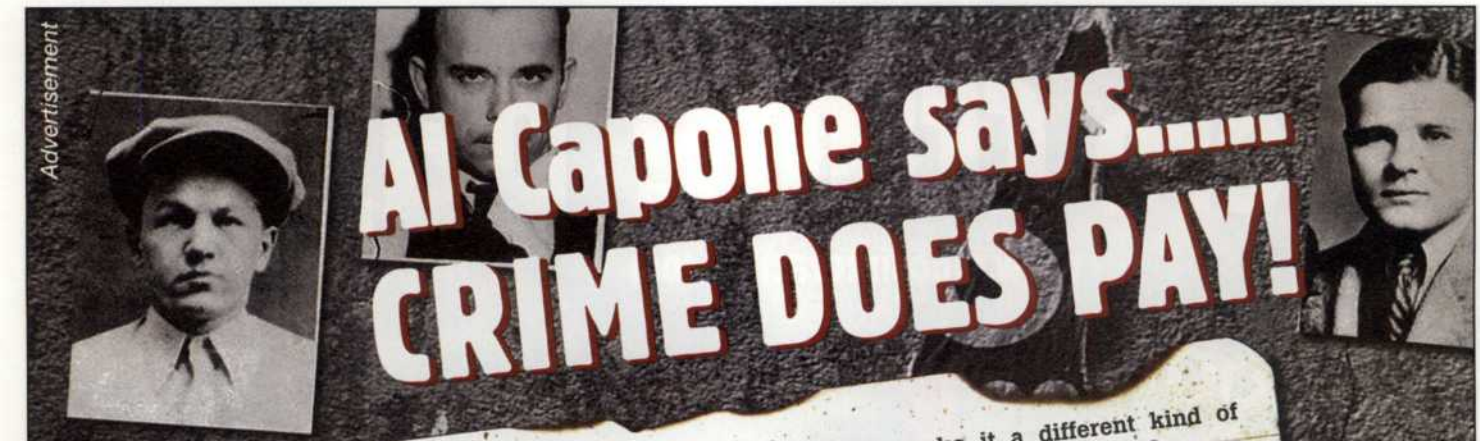

Al Capone says..... CRIME DOES PAY!

Well, we couldn't get Al's opinion on Gangsters: Organized Crime, but we did have the opportunity to discuss the game design and history with Martin Carr, the Director of Hot House productions. Hot House is a thirty person development outfit based in central Bristol, currently developing three strategy/action titles for Eidos. Founders Peter Mordland, Martin Carr and Rob Davies have previously held senior positions in publishers/developers such as Microprose, Activision and JVC, and their diverse roles in these companies have given them hands-on experience in the development and publishing aspects of the interactive entertainment software industry.

Gangsters is neither a real-time strategy game, nor a turn-based strategy game. How would you define the gameplay? Can you compare it to another game?

Gangsters is very unusual in its style of gameplay. It is a fusion of turn-based strategy coupled with real-time tactical decision making. The 'turn-based' element consists of you analysing what has happened in the city during the previous week (turn), making decisions about how these events have affected your gang, territory and businesses, working up a strategy for your gang to use during the next week to expand your empire and dealing with the competition or authorities.

Once you have given all your gang orders you are ready to move to the isometric city where all the action takes place. So, as your guys start carrying out their orders, your job in this part of the game is making tactical changes to orders and direct intervention if your hoods run into trouble. You have to remember the other gangs and authorities are also following their own agendas, you will undoubtedly have to make some tough tactical decisions!

What is the background story for the game?

The game is set during the US prohibition era in a fictional city named 'New Temperance'. The city has four fledgling gang leaders, you take the part of one of them. You start with an office hidden away at the center of a city block. Along with the office you own one of the businesses on the block which acts as the 'front' for your operations. You also get a few hundred dollars to get started with and a few hoods who are willing to join your start-up outfit!

Gangsters ORGANIZED CRIME™

What is the primary goal, and, in general terms, how does the player go about achieving it?

The primary goal is to control the city, gain power and wealth. To achieve this you have to grow your gang with hoods that have the right qualities. Increase your territory and income, handle the police, FBI and media appropriately. Make sure you have some public support, even a strong gang will find it tough to win if everyone in the city hates them.

What are some of the unique gameplay features of Gangsters? In other words, what are some of the things that set your title apart and make it a different kind of gameplay experience?

Well, it is the style of gameplay that makes Gangsters unique rather than the ingredients. It involves creativity as well as destruction. To build a good gang with a large territory, defending it and destroying your enemies will be challenging. In Sim City, you build stuff, in Quake you kill stuff. In Gangsters, you have to blend both types of play to achieve your goals.

Is there a mission structure to the game? If so, how many missions are there?

Gangsters isn't mission based. There is a basic city template, from that we generate different city layouts for each new game. We plan to include pre-set cities with different scenario goals for the player, how they achieve them will be their choice.

How dirty can players be? What sort of consequences will there be for the player's actions? Essentially, how will the computer combat the player?

There is usually more than one solution to a problem in Gangsters. If one of your hoods is up on charges, you could get him freed by using a top notch lawyer to defend him. Otherwise, before the case gets to court you might try to bribe the judge, intimidate jurors and witnesses, or make the investigating officer an offer he can't refuse!

The more blatantly illegal things you do in the game will attract extra attention from police, FBI agents and the other mobs. The computer opponents have their own agendas and will try to win the game based on the type of character we generate for them.

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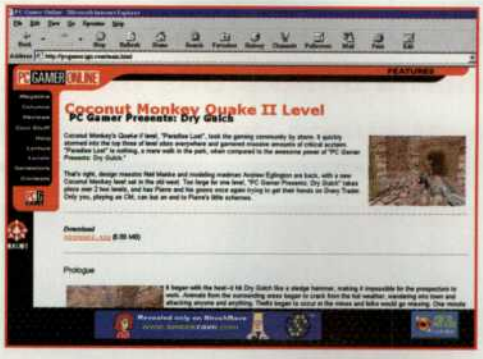


Long-time readers of our august tome will no doubt have noticed the addition of web site addresses to the bottom of each page. This might have taken a few of you by surprise (it certainly surprised Mike Wolf — he's just sitting there, staring off into space, trying to grapple with it all) so we thought we'd take a couple of seconds of your time and explain it all in one fell swoop.

The first URL is *http://pc.ign.com*. Longtime *PC Gamer* Online visitors are already familiar with the Imagine Games Network, or IGN. Well, they've started a whole new site called IGN-PC. You'll find all kinds of cool stuff over there, including daily news, previews, features, and even reviews. Under the watchful eye of former *PC Gamer* whipping boy Trent Ward, IGN-PC looks to be a pretty cool online gaming site.

The next URL is *http://pcgamer.ign.com*. Yep, you're reading it right. Gone is the good old-fashioned *www.pcgamer.com* — but then that "www" bit was becoming so blasé... everyone's doing it these days. The focus of the newly addressed site has changed a bit as well. Since IGN-PC is now providing news, features, and previews, those areas have been dropped from *PCG* Online. Now, we know what you're thinking — if those are gone, what's left? Well, the answer is plenty, because we're adding tons of new features. We've got daily columns, written by the likes of Gary, Lisa, Colin, and the Crabby Old Bastard; a new levels area, which is shaping up as the premier place online to get levels for *Quake*, *Quake II*, and *Unreal*; interactive interviews, which let you put your questions to today's top gaming celebrities; and of course we've still got the daily letters and killer contests. So point your browser to *http://pcgamer.ign.com* and check out the new *PCG* Online!

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!

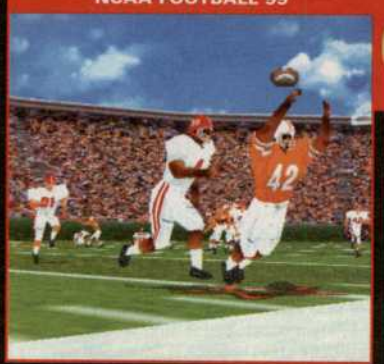
PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

Every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 88% or above — with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.

INDEPENDENCE WAR p.214

MOTOCROSS MADNESS p.222

NCAA FOOTBALL 99 p.254



Independence War

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category:	Action
Developer:	Particle Systems
Publisher:	Infogrames, 877-INFOGRAMES *www.independencewar.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90 (software rendering); Pentium 166 (3Dfx); 130MB hard-drive space; DirectX-compatible sound card	Pentium 233; 32MB RAM; Voodoo or Voodoo II-based graphic accelerator; Joystick; Throttle; Rudder pedals

Multi-player: None

A new twist on a familiar theme makes this one of the best space combat sims since *X-Wing*.

Ever since Origin's *Wing Commander* premiered in the early 1990s, space combat games seemed to have slipped into a creative rut. Not a bad one mind you, but a rut nonetheless. From the Star Wars games to current releases like *Descent: Freespace*, the genre has drawn most of its inspiration and design cues from World War Two aerial combat to create glorified dogfighters that just happen to be set in space. There's certainly nothing wrong with that, but considering the universe of possibilities out there, you'd think there'd be at least a *little* variety. After all, aren't there other ships in the galaxy?

There are times when it's important to join up with your allies to accomplish certain mission goals. Here we move to provide cover for a marine troop transport en route to an Indie base.

Infogrames' space combat game *Independence War* addresses this issue by making the next logical step up, putting players in command of a Corvette class starship. It's not as grandiose or as ungainly as a carrier or destroyer, yet it's significantly more demanding than flying a fighter, and it adds to the challenge by giving you the freedom — and the burden — of managing multiple stations on the bridge.

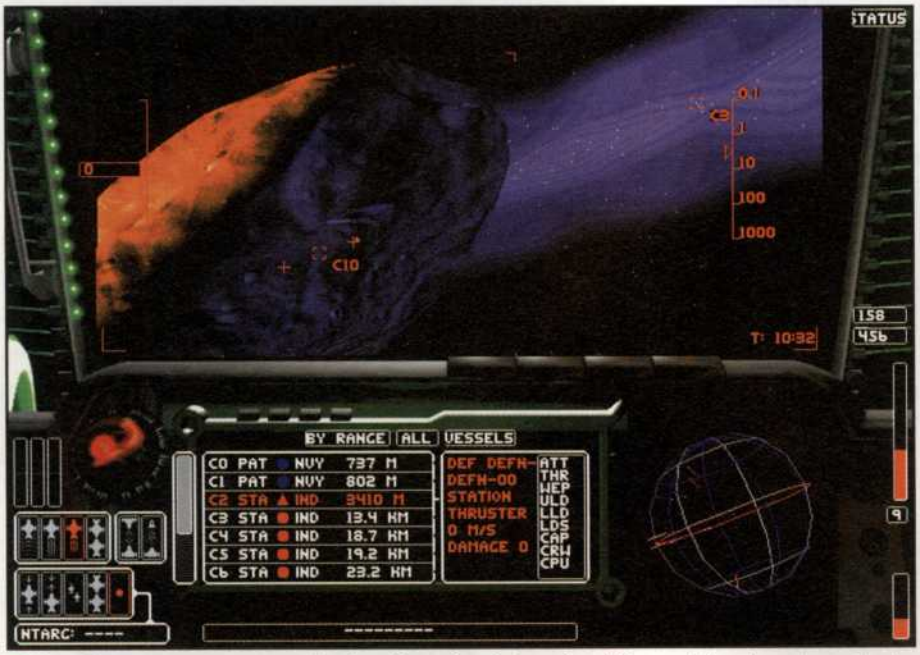
The idea sounds simple enough, but games that have tried this sort of thing in the past — *Battlecruiser 3000A.D.* and *Starfleet Academy* — haven't really struck a palatable balance between action and command; they either tried too hard or not hard enough. However, *Independence War*'s tightly integrated interface and thoughtful mission design allows it to succeed with surprising aplomb.

You start the game as a new recruit in a vast Commonwealth fleet at a time when rebellious colonists seeking independence are mounting aggressive attacks against remote outposts. The Commonwealth has assigned you to a Corvette class warship to assist in putting down the rebellion.

As captain, you'll monitor and control every aspect of the ship's operation using the four bridge stations at your disposal — Command, Engineering, Weapons, and Navigation. The navigation console serves as your primary workspace as it consolidates all of the major weapons systems, targeting information, communications, and, of course, navigation controls. Much like the cockpit in a fighter, you view the environment through the main view port as vital information is superimposed on the horizon via a heads-up display.

Using a joystick, preferably in conjunction with a rudder and throttle, you control the ship much like you would any space combat game. However, the Newtonian physics model never lets you forget that you're flying a ship roughly the size of a football field. As you take the ship out for a spin, the unique handling characteristics are readily apparent giving you a get a real sense of mass and momentum. Visual cues in the HUD add to the sensation of all that rumbling mass under your backside as velocity cues are super-imposed on the HUD. It's a little disorienting at first, but several automatic aids lighten the workload for the pilot.

According to the game's story line, starship builders recognize the foibles of gravity-bound pilots and have built their ships to counteract some of the disorienting effects that typically occur in space. On-board systems automatically control thrusters across the hull to keep the forces of momentum and velocity under control as you pitch or roll by halting the turn when you



If you like your space operas overflowing with tension, *Independence War* can deliver drama in spades. In this nail-biting mission, you're sent to intercept an asteroid that's been launched at earth — it's up to you and your plucky crew to track it down and destroy it before it gets to the planet.

http://pc.ign.com

The engineering section displays the status for each of the ship's 35 vital systems and gives you the ability to selectively decide which items should be repaired first.

Your Corvette class ship can handle just about anything that comes its way. Here, a crippled Indie PATCOM ship slowly spirals out of control.

return the stick to center. The result is a stable platform that's remarkably responsive when turning and rolling, but forward momentum is a little trickier to deal with. The correcting thrusters for forward flight don't respond with the same immediacy — you'll slow eventually, but if you've got a full head of steam, it can take some time to stop or change direction.

While you can play the game almost exclusively from the navigation console, some stations can perform specialized functions that can't be achieved at other stations. The Command console features remote piloting controls useful in directing pilot-less craft and a complete record of mission briefings and navigation charts. The engineering section tracks the ship's subsystems, and from here you can set new damage control priorities and reroute power to shields and weapons when needed. Rounding out the stations is the weapons control area. It's completely unnecessary if you prefer to pilot and track your targets using traditional dogfighting techniques, but if you're looking to hit your targets with the most firepower and use the full potential of your ship, this is the chair to be in. Rather than pilot the ship by looking directly out in front, you're presented with a wireframe outline of the ship shown in relation to the selected target. You still have full control over the ship, but the third-person view gives you the ability to control both forward-firing and rear-firing weapons platforms. When used in combination with ripple fire setting (which cycles through targets automatically) you can track and attack multiple targets with ease.

While mastering the controls for the various stations is a major part of *Independence War*, there are a number of missions where fighting is secondary, forcing you to use your head, and your skill as captain, to see your crew and ship safely home. The mission variety keeps you on your toes, thanks to its tight connection to the story line and creative use of mission scripting. Overall, *Independence War*'s missions are some of the most lively and memorable to be found.

If there's one complaint, it's that the missions ramp up in difficulty very quickly, giving you little opportunity to get your bearings during the initial part of the game. Thankfully, the mission tree offers a couple of missions at a time, allowing you to try something else if you find yourself frustrated by a particularly tough mission. A series of elective training missions also help in learning various systems.

Throughout the game, pre-rendered cinematics reveal the ongoing struggle between the Commonwealth and the Indies with fast dramatic cuts and tight, riveting dialogue. The voice-over work can be a bit stilted at times, but the production value and attention to detail found in these animations is exceptional. The in-game graphics are amazing too, due in part to several months of enhancements following the game's European release late last year. The software renderer is nearly as good as most hardware accelerated games, while the supported 3Dfx is simply a knockout, with rich vibrant colors and amazing textures for the ships, space stations, and background nebulae.

It's curious, though, that in the time since the UK release, a few irksome problems weren't addressed. There's still no in-game feature for remapping keyboard or joystick buttons, and the menu system still doesn't contain a quit or exit button — you must use Shift-Q to back out through every menu layer to exit the game. Even more curious is the fact that the full-motion video introduction must be played via an external Active Movie viewer, even though the in-game cinematics run fine before, during, and after a mission. There are also a few areas where the narrative pieces fall behind the mission goals.

But if you're willing to overlook these minor flaws (and you should), *Independence War* is some of the most fun you can have in zero gravity. If you've been looking for a space combat game that's more than a glorified World War Two dogfighter and don't mind learning a few new moves in the process, this is the one for you.

—Todd Vaughn

Gorgeous animated sequences like this one reveal important plot elements at various points throughout the game. The storyline, for the most part, is a good one.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

90%

HIGHS: Great graphics, excellent flight model, terrific missions, and nice story line.

LOWS: No keyboard remapping. Curious method of playing opening cinematic.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're looking for a good, challenging space epic, *I-War* will float your boat.

Tiger Woods 99

Category:	Sports
Developer:	Electronic Arts
Publisher:	EA Sports, (650) 571-7171 *www.easports.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Pentium 133; 32MB RAM; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Sound blaster-compatible sound card	Pentium 200; 64MB RAM; Direct3D-compatible accelerator card

Multi-player: Modem: 14.4K minimum (56K recommended); IPX; TCP/IP (maximum 4 players); Free built-in multi-player service (EA Sports Net)

EA Sports has jazzed up its venerable PGA Tour Golf series with the much-heralded addition of its latest big-name license.

It was inevitable that EA Sports, the biggest name in sports gaming, would win the race to sign Tiger Woods, the biggest name in golf. And the impact that Woods has had on the sport is echoed in the major changes EA has made to the latest installment in its PGA Tour series in order to accommodate his arrival. Before, the PGA license was the hook, and the dozen or so featured pros were all treated equally under that banner. This is no longer the case. Stadler, Jacobsen, O'Meara, Janzen, Kite, Love, and Faxon are all here, but now they're playing second fiddle to Woods, who has a fancier shot meter than the rest and all kinds of new features tailored around him.

This isn't a problem if you're a fan of Woods, of course, but those familiar with EA's golf games may find the shift a little overwhelming. His influence is noticeable in every aspect of the game, from the "Tiger Tips" that pop up to help you on certain holes, to the upbeat soul-pop "Tiger Tunes" replacing the traditional string instrumentals that usually accompany golf games. Overall, the presentation is, as we've come to expect from EA Sports, second to none.

The game treats you to close-up victory animations when Tiger sinks a monster putt.

Out on the course (of which there are three: Pebble Beach, TPC Sawgrass, and TPC Summerlin), things are not so different as might be expected. The traditional three-click swing meter is still in evidence, and in a concession to the latest trend in computer golf, an analog mouse-based swing method (dubbed Pro Swing here) has been included — although it does seem like a concession, rather than a serious attempt to compete in this growing area. Unlike the advanced mouse swings seen in *The Golf Pro* or even *Golden Tee 3D*, *Tiger Woods 99*'s Pro Swing takes only shot strength into account — shot positioning, via loft, fade and draw, is handled by manual adjustments before the backswing. With the traditional three-click method, it's possible to alter the path of your shot with the timing of your third click during the down-swing, but not with Pro Swing — since it only reads your movements along one axis, it takes only the speed and strength of your shot into account, resulting in perfectly straight drives every time (wind not withstanding). Also annoying is the fact that the swing is not "live" like in other golf games — you do the work on the swing meter, and only then does the golfer appear on screen to play out the shot. It's more satisfying to see the golfer actually swing and connect with the ball as you move the mouse — it makes you feel like you *are* that on-screen golfer. Sadly, EA decided to go with this less instinctive approach.

This is Tiger Woods. Get used to seeing him in this game. A lot.

A cute new feature, no doubt inspired by Tiger's reputation as a power hitter, is the ability to choose between "safe" and "aggressive" shots each time you step up to the ball. Let's say you're looking at a 220-yard carry over a lake to the green. The safe play would be to pull the 7-iron and lay up on the lake's near side, giving you an easy chip over onto the green. Select "aggressive" mode, however (symbolized by the icon of Woods' face changing from a smile to a roar) and the program will re-compute your shot preparations for a monster 3-wood blast over the lake and onto the green in one shot. It's a riskier proposition, but your score will be that much rosier if you decide to "go for it" and manage to pull it off.

The EA Sports Net service launched for *PGA Tour Pro* last year has been updated, and it's easy to set up and play games with Internet opponents. The game speed still needs some work, however — I played a round from my office T1 line against a friend with a 28.8K modem, and the time it took to switch from golfer to golfer was just too tedious to make 18 holes a viable proposition. Don't let anyone with less than a 56K modem into your game if you want to play "ready golf".

Overall, *Tiger Woods 99* is a solid golfing prospect for people with faster systems. On a 400MHz system with a Voodoo 2 it's got to be the best-looking, smoothest-moving golf game ever. On a non-accelerated 166MHz, it still looks good and moves at an acceptable pace, but the packaging's claim of "18 holes in 30 minutes" seems a little far-fetched.

Experienced players will, of course, want to wait for *Links LS 99* to tee up, but for the mainstream fan looking for a glitzy, easy-to-play introduction to computer golf with satisfying results, *Tiger Woods 99* delivers.

—Gary Whitta

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

84%

HIGHS: Pristine presentation; many options; great graphics; easy gameplay.

LOWS: Sub-par performance on low-end PCs; inadequate analog swing; Internet play can be too slow for comfort.

BOTTOM LINE: A solid all-around golf game, but Tiger can't dethrone the mighty Links series just yet.

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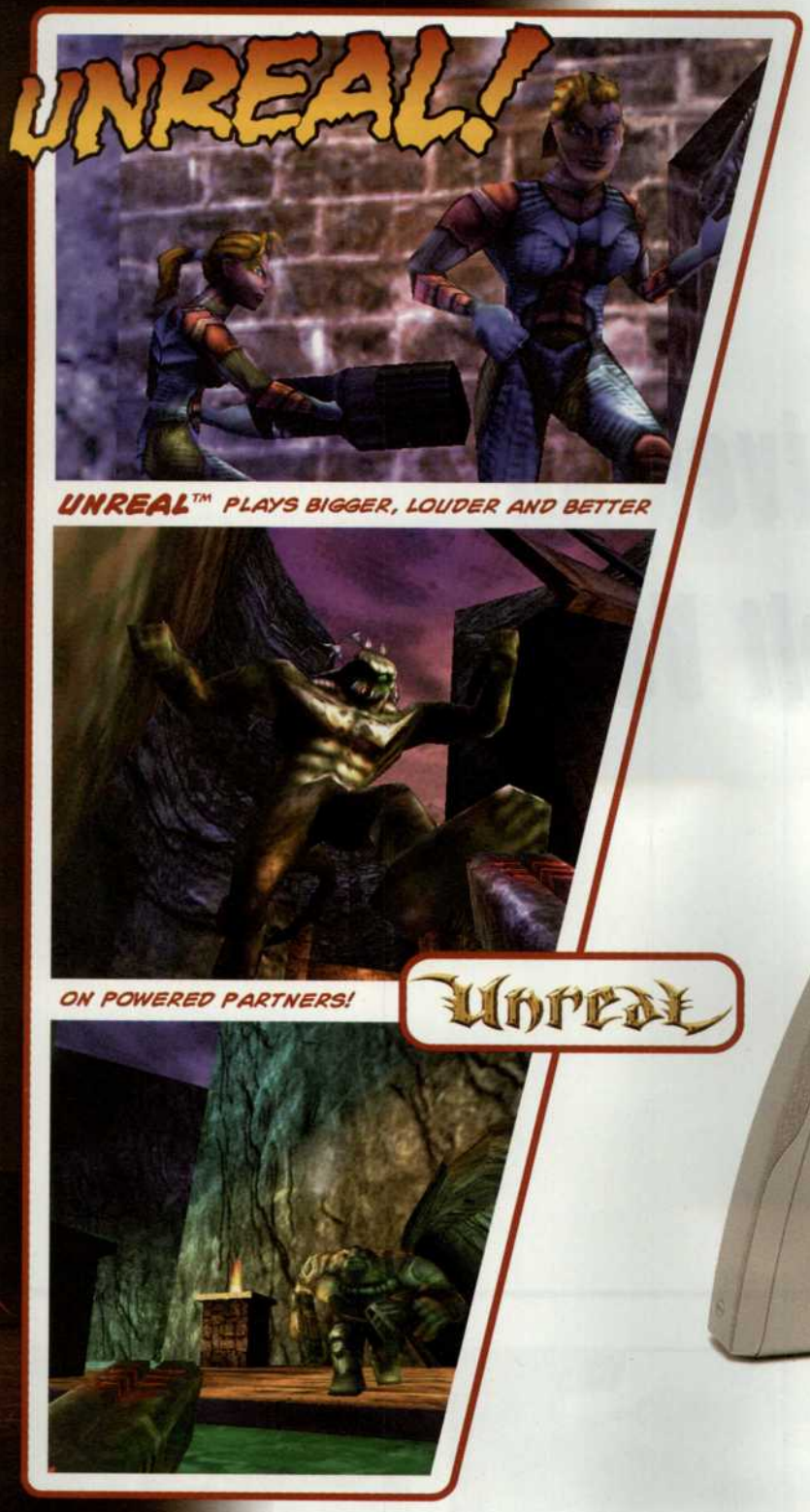

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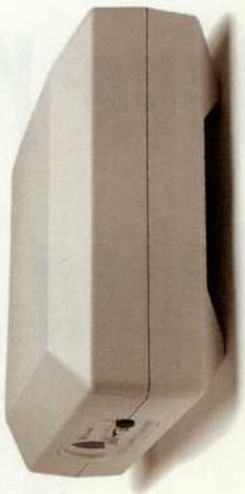

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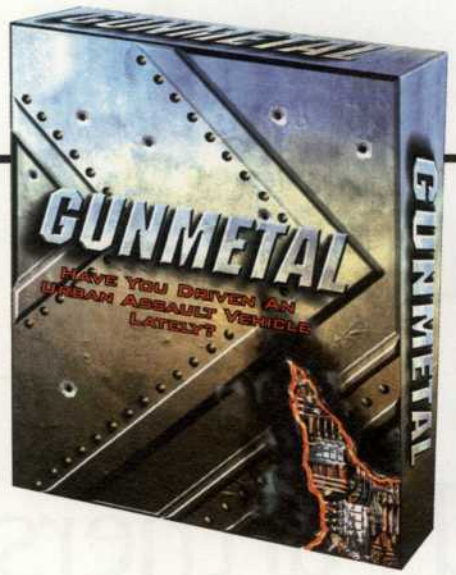

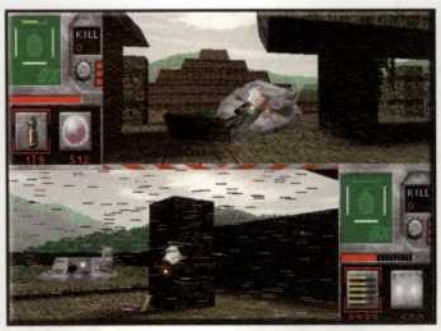

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Motocross Madness

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Action

Developer: Microsoft

Publisher: Microsoft, (800) 429-9400
www.microsoft.com

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 133; 16MB RAM; 60MB hard-drive space; DirectX 5 compatible D3D card; DX5 compatible sound card	Pentium 233; 180MB hard-drive space; Joystick or gamepad

Multi-player: Direct Cable Connection; Modem: 28.8; TCP/IP; Maximum players: 4 (TCP/IP Internet) or 8 (TCP/IP LAN); Free Internet Service: *www.zone.com*

This classy throttle-twister dethrones *Moto Racer GP* as the PC's pre-eminent bike sim.

Can a computer game really capture the chaotic feel of motorbike racing? Is it possible to simulate the experience of kickin' up roosters, grabbing big air, and pulling nac-nac? Could you actually lose a filling in a computerized face plant?

Microsoft's answer to those probing questions comes in the form of *Motocross Madness*, and it translates to "Hell, yes!" Not since *Moto Racer GP* has a game come this close to capturing the pure seat-of-the-pants feel of motorcycle racing, and *Motocross Madness* leaves that classic title in the dirt (sorry).

Focusing solely on the rambunctious sport of off-road motorcycle racing, *Motocross Madness* is all about kicking up dirt, pulling crazy stunts, and riding at breakneck speeds. The bikes are small and powerful, and the center of gravity is really high. For that reason, the rider makes or breaks virtually every maneuver by how he leans. While going up a steep hill, you have to lean forward or you'll tip over backward. If you hit a jump and catch air, you have to lean to keep your bike even with the ground because if you land on one wheel, you'll dump. Need to turn fast? Lean forward and get the weight on the front wheel. Gotta speed up quick? Lean back and dig the knobby tires of the drive wheel into the dirt.

If you want more traditional racing, screaming through the wilderness in search of checkpoints is what the Baja is all about.

All of these subtle effects are brought to life by the amazing physics engine of *Motocross Madness*. Doughnuts, powerslides, wheelies, and other side effects of speed and momentum are there and occur with natural ease. The bike handling feels real in every conceivable way. To get the full effect, and the most natural control, you'll want to play this game with a joystick. Sure, a gamepad works acceptably, but having tried it both ways, I can say the joystick wins hands down.

After a few minutes of tooling around in practice events, you'll quickly see how natural and intuitive this control interface is. It's even more so if you've got a force feedback joystick; since Microsoft makes one of the only two on the market, it's no surprise that the support for this device is well implemented. In most force feedback supportive games, the extra effect adds to the immersion of the game experience but ultimately proves detrimental to the actual control. Not so in *Motocross Madness;* the tactile feedback actually helped me control the bike, and my performance was noticeably better with my Microsoft SideWinder Force Feedback Pro than with my Logitech Wingman.

No matter what controller you choose, you'll have plenty of opportunity to test your skills. There are four competitive events, some borrowed from real-life events, and others that are completely original. The freestyle Stunt Quarry sends you off into bumpy, open terrain to

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME!

Grab enough air, and you have your choice of sixteen majestic stunts you can try to pull — for points in the quarry, or just to wow the crowd in the Supercross. Here are a few of the stunts demonstrated:

The Bar Hop
Kick your heels over the handlebar and get 'em back before you hit the ground.

The Barney
Kneel on the handlebar as you soar through the air, and get your butt back in the seat quick.

The Superman
Grab the grips, throw your legs back, and fly! Cape not included.

The Split-X
This one looks easier than it is: throw your limbs out to make an "X."

The Skurfer
Surf on the seat. For added pleasure, ditch the bike and make a graceful landing. That's called the Big Kahuna Dumpster.

The Heel Clicker
This is just like it sounds: click your heals over the handlebar. Then look down and think: there's no place like home.

The Cliffhanger
Leap off the foot pegs, hook your toes underneath the handlebar, yank the front wheel up, and then sit back down.

The Nac-nac
Throw your leg over, just don't dismount. This one will cause your bike to lean to one side, so you'll need time to straighten out before you land.

http://pc.ign.com

Land a stunt in the quarry and a point score briefly floats in the air above your head.

rack up points catching air and landing stunts by your lonesome or against artificial intelligence or multi-player opponents. It's a blast trying to get the highest score, pulling off ridiculous jumps at full throttle and sailing halfway across the map in pursuit of the ultimate stunt.

For more traditional racing, the cross-country Baja sends you through similar, open terrain, but this time you're chasing checkpoints in a timed race against opponents.

The National Race consists of large looping outdoor tracks set in various environments, and each of these is designed to accommodate more traditional lap-based racing, with jumps, tight turns, and long straightaways thrown into the mix. However, for the ultimate race challenge, you'll want to head out to the Supercross track events where you'll compete against your rivals in 3D-rendered stadiums filled with washboards, whoop-de-doos, and killer jumps.

With all this great scenery whipping by, it's no wonder that a 3D card is required to run this game — I doubt that software rendering could have done it justice. The rider, bike, and landscapes all look wonderful, and the Supercross stadiums are magnificent. Even on a slightly higher than base system, you can expect playable frame rates with a decent Direct3D video card.

Look at me kiss the sky! Someday, when I land, this is gonna hurt.

The Supercross stadiums make a beautiful backdrop. Supercross tracks can be made with the editor.

With the hardware doing all of the dirty work, the graphics take on a believable edge. Subtle particle effects add to the overall experience like the wash of dirt behind your bike as you kick in the throttle and great transparent clouds of dust and debris when you take a spill. Oddly, Microsoft removed lens flare effects before the final release, and it's too bad; the added effect would have been welcome, since the barren landscapes of the quarries look a bit dull after riding in the stadiums. A touch of added detail in the form of plant life or rocks would have been nice too.

The sound is just as impressive as the graphics, and if your sound card accelerates DirectSound3D, you'll even hear opponents riding up (or crashing) behind you. Regardless, the bikes sound lifelike enough to bring back memories of gripping the handlebar with that little, two-stroke engine beneath me.

When you've had enough of racing against computer-controlled opponents on the supplied tracks, there's a plethora of multi-player support options and a track editor to extend the replay value. Not only is there standard LAN/Internet IPX support, but modem and direct cable connections are supported, too — quite refreshing, considering that most game makers have inexplicably decided that those commonly demanded multi-player modes have gone out of fashion. The replay value from the multi-player features will easily make *Motocross Madness* an Internet favorite, and thanks to the track editor, there will probably be no shortage of user created courses. However, one gripe is that

You don't need wings to fly this high; you just need a running start and a pair of big brass ones.

the bare bones editor is only sufficient for making simple Supercross tracks — it's not a true, 3D terrain editor capable of rendering new outdoor areas.

Even after you've mastered all the tracks, made a few of your own, and beaten all of the competition, it's fun to simply load up a Stunt Quarry game, ignore the other riders and just take the bike out for a spin... just like you would with a real motorcycle. That's a testament not only to how enjoyable this game is, but how incredibly *realistic* it is. Put it all together, and every other two-wheeled racing game on the market is eating *Motocross Madness*'s dust.

—Joel Durham Jr.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

92%

HIGHS: Feels like the real thing! Awesome graphics, sound; great control.

LOWS: There could have been more terrain detail on the stunt and baja tracks; limited track editor.

BOTTOM LINE: No time to write bottom line. Must return to *Motocross Madness. Now.*

Heart of Darkness

Category:	Adventure
Developer:	Amazing Studios
Publisher:	Interplay, (800) 969-4263 *www.interplay.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486DX2/66; 16MB RAM	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; Supported sound card; Gamepad

Multi-player: None

Can a side-scrolling adventure still crank out the thrills in this day and age? The answer just might surprise you.

One of my favorite games of all time — and *the* game that got me excited about computer gaming in the first place — is Delphine's classic *Out of this World*. It was a platform-based adventure that used extremely fluid character animation to bring to life an outlandish alien environment. But it wasn't a run and jump side-scroller like the Mario or Sonic games; it was a taut adventure that revealed a new piece of its strange story with every new screen. It was genuinely creepy, challenging, and almost criminally addictive. There really hasn't been a game that captured the challenge and adrenaline of the original — at least until now.

Heart of Darkness was in development for more than five years, with the core *Out of this World* team at the reins. Adopting the same surreal, stranger-in-a-strange-land setup as *Out of this World*, you play Andy, a Dennis the Menace wannabe whose greatest fear is the dark. After an eclipse of the sun whisks away his beloved dog, he rushes to his treehouse and flies off into another dimension in a spaceship he built. No, it doesn't make much sense, but hey, it's French.

Andy takes out a shadowy critter. When these bums gang up on you, it's time to run — they'll tear you into a thousand pieces, then eat the gory leftovers.

Once the little goober crash-lands his craft in a dark canyon, Andy must battle his way through screen after screen of unspeakable horrors to find his dog. While the story sounds simple, *Heart of Darkness* throws some very strange curve balls into the mix, and even side-scroller veterans will find themselves dying more than usual after only a few minutes of play. *Heart of Darkness* is a game that requires patience, flawless reflexes, and lots of trial and error (*and* error, *and* error) to complete. It's brutal, merciless, and in some ways, it kinda hearkens back to the days of *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, always sending you back to the beginning when you screw the pooch.

Fortunately, Andy has the ability to run, double-jump, and shoot his way through multiple screens, and the action is more thought-out than, say, *Jazz Jackrabbit*. Rather than mindlessly jumping for coins or power-ups, this is a true action adventure, and survival relies on more than reflexes. Careful backtracking and keeping a close watch of your environment are just some of the skills you'll need to develop in order to keep Andy alive. Light and shadow, along with subtle audio cues, play major roles in the game, as seemingly innocent reflections come to life. Though the enemies are cartoony, several of them are quite disturbing, and this probably isn't the best game to give your kids. After all, Andy gets beaten, snapped in two, swallowed whole, torn apart, immolated, and crushed in a variety of grisly fashions.

Half-way through the game, Andy discovers that he has the power to fire fluorescent balls of energy. These can nuke enemies *and* make tiny seeds turn into enormous trees.

***Pitfall*-style action is to be expected in the swamp stage. Don't fall into the toothy plants below unless you want your spine collapsed. Ouch — that's gotta hurt!**

Though the quality of the animation is quite good, it's not entirely smooth. Jumps and other split-second moves are *way* too fiddly. This problem carries over into the game's poorly compressed cutscenes. Even though the cinematics have been rendered with the utmost attention to detail (and accompanied by a peppy score from Bruce Broughton), they also suffer from a choppy frame-rate and poor resolution — and just like the rest of the game, it's not even full-screen! Gads. You'd think that after five years of development time, they'd be tweaking the graphics to a modern standard. Fortunately, those five-year-old graphics translate into five-year-old system requirements — you'll be able to make do with a 486/66 and a dual-speed CD-ROM drive, as long as you've got Windows 95.

If you're a big fan of *Out of this World* or even *Abe's Oddyssee*, *Heart of Darkness* should give you a retro kick in the arse, and you'll enjoy every brutal moment of it. On the other hand, if you're searching for a quick and dirty side-scroller a la *Mario* or *Sonic*, stay as far away from this game as possible. As for me, I think I'll find a few new ways for Andy to get killed this evening.

—Colin Williamson

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

78%

HIGHS: Good animation, audio; neat level design; back-to-basics gameplay.

LOWS: The motion gets choppy; the game is mind-numbingly difficult.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a long-overdue action game. If you're a fan of classic side-scrolling adventures, *Heart of Darkness* is freaking *hardcore*.

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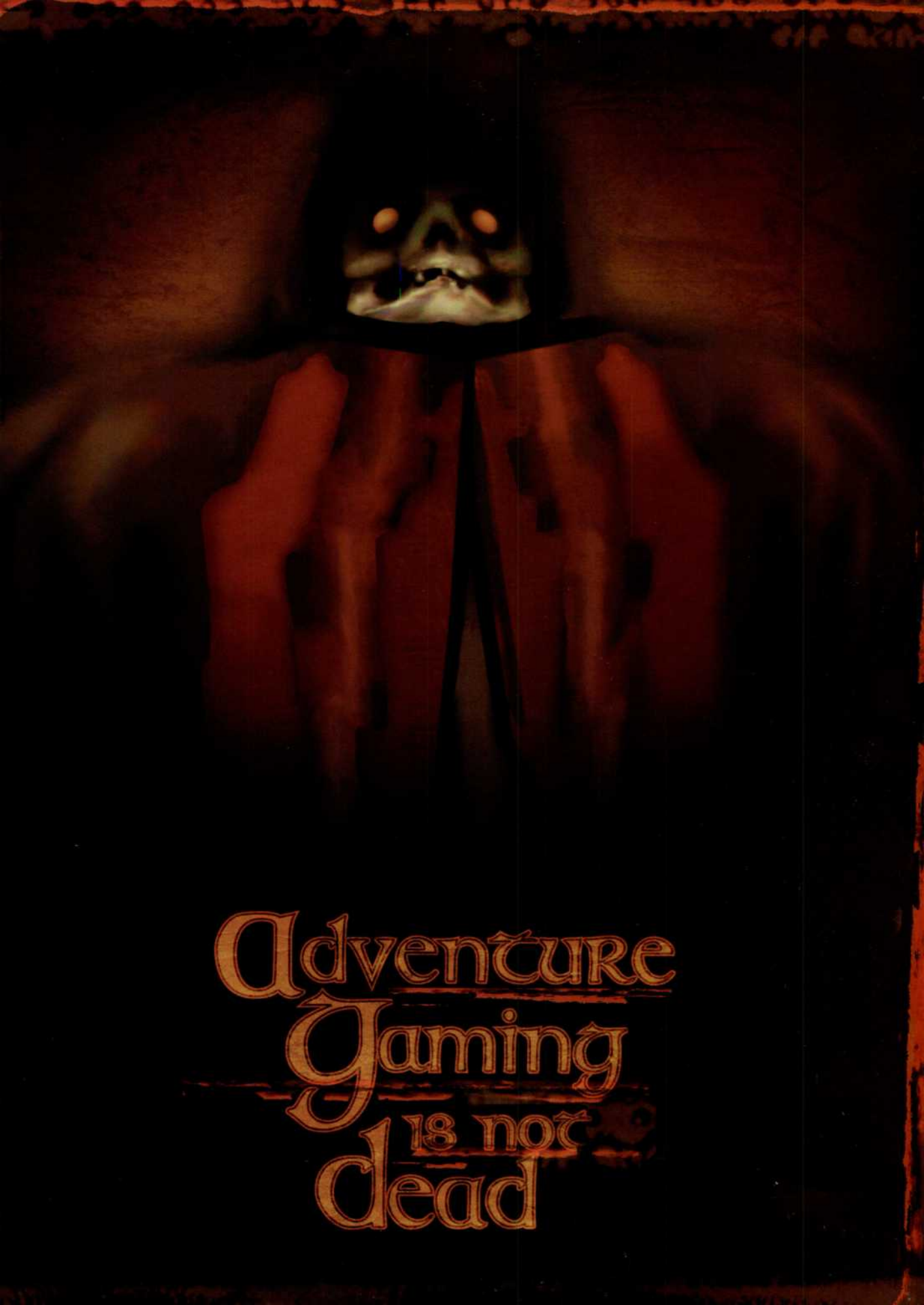
Adventure
Gaming
is not
dead

Heart of Darkness

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—Colin Williamson

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

78%

HIGHS: Good animation, audio; neat level design; back-to-basics gameplay.

LOWS: The motion gets choppy; the game is mind-numbingly difficult.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a long-overdue action game. If you're a fan of classic side-scrolling adventures, *Heart of Darkness* is freaking *hardcore*.

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Plane Crazy!

Category:	Arcade
Developer:	Innerspace
Publisher:	Segasoft, (888) 734-2763 *www.segasoft.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Pentium 166; 16MB RAM; 1MB Super VGA card	Pentium II; 32MB RAM; Voodoo or Voodoo II based graphic accelerator; Supported sound card; Joystick

Multi-player: Serial/Null Modem; Modem: 28.8; IPX; TCP/IP; Maximum Players: 8; Free Internet Service: *www.heat.net*

Barnstorming antics and attractive graphics can't save this high-flying arcade racer from crashing into the ground.

To date, we've seen arcade racing games cover a wide range of topics, from road racing and off-road vehicles to powerboats and skateboards. But for some strange reason, flying games have been few and far between. Well, Segasoft has remedied this peculiar oversight with *Plane Crazy!*, a game that attempts to bring seat-of-your pants flying action together with fast, colorful arcade-style racing. But, attractive premise and nice graphics aside, *Plane Crazy!* spirals out of control due to its frustrating track design and fussy controls.

Getting up in the air is hardly a problem; just pick one of the available planes, choose a course, and away you go. There are several modes of play, ranging from single races against computer or multi-player opponents, a ghost mode that pits you against your own best time, and a circuit mode that challenges you to score one win on every map. However, staying aloft long enough to complete just a single race is a daunting proposition. From either a third-person perspective behind the tail of your chosen ride or a first-person view, you'll begin the race in-flight, taking control of your aircraft shortly after passing the starting point. The object of course is to steer your way to the finish line while successfully reaching each checkpoint before time runs out. The controls are simple enough — just use a joystick or a gamepad to pitch up and down, turn left and right, and manage your speed with just a few buttons. Along the route, there are power-ups that can be collected, offering bonuses in speed, armor, or even weapons to attack your opponents.

During one inner city race, you'll find yourself racing around inside an empty shopping mall. Anybody know where I can find an Orange Julius?

In a perfect world, flying in between skyscrapers and through subways would be a sure-fire recipe for success, but *Plane Crazy!*'s sloppy controls and frustrating level design puts a damper on the fun.

With support for a number of hardware accelerators, *Plane Crazy!* looks great, but you'll need a horse of a machine to keep it running smoothly.

It seems simple enough, but in practice it's a royal pain. Even on the easiest difficulty setting, completing each course ahead of the artificial intelligence players will require a lot of trial and error, not because of tough opposition but because of the infuriating level design. Each of the race locations is built on a different theme, some set in tight desert canyons and others in dense metropolitan areas, and though they are visually very different from another, each is equally annoying.

Without exception the levels in *Plane Crazy!* are some of the most sadistic and unforgiving maps ever put forth in an arcade racer, forcing players to weave through tiny tunnels, ravines, and under low hanging objects often without any visual cue of upcoming hazards. It's the type of track design that requires players to memorize every twist and turn through constant trial and error. While it's intended to be all part of the challenge, the sluggish response of the controls combined with these poorly designed maps make it nearly impossible to thread your way through some sections, even if you know what lies ahead.

Having found the experience utterly impossible with a gamepad or keyboard for control, I decided that a joystick must be the preferred method, and though it does offer more precision, I still found myself bouncing off walls or plummeting into the ground with regularity.

If the controls were more responsive, and the track design a little (okay, a lot) more forgiving, then *Plane Crazy!* could've been a lot of fun. The graphics are nicely done with colorful graphics and cartoonish effects, and there are tons of display options available that you can tweak and tune for a wide range of systems. But aside from the usual hardware accelerated eye-candy that's becoming all too common in today's games, *Plane Crazy!* has far too little to offer.

—Todd Vaughn

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

35%

HIGHS: Pretty nice graphics, but only if you have a horse of a machine to run it on.

LOWS: Numbing gameplay, frustrating maps, and awkward controls.

BOTTOM LINE: The perfect gift for the masochist who has everything.

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Hexplore

Category:	Roleplaying
Developer:	Helio Visions Productions
Publisher:	Infogrames Ent., (408) 289-1200 *www.hexplore.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 100; 16MB RAM; 30MB hard-drive space; DirectX compatible video card; DirectX compatible sound card	32MB RAM; 350MB hard-drive space

Multi-player: Modem: 28.8; IPX; TCP/IP; Maximum Players: 4; Free Internet Service: *www.zone.com*

Can ease of use and a cozy roleplaying feel make up for dull graphics and a boring story? We say, hell no!

Now that roleplaying games are beginning to return to the PC with renewed vigor, we're beginning to see new titles from publishers big and small. Yet, greater numbers doesn't necessarily mean greater games. Take *Hexplore* for example. It has many of the tried-and-true roleplaying elements; a fairly user-friendly interface, multiplay, and interesting technology — but the story and the gameplay are flat and unappealing. It can be a nice diversion if you're starved for a no-brainer fantasy romp, but it's not a good place to start if you're interested in revisiting the genre.

The story is serviceable, but doesn't really carry the same narrative weight or importance of other games. The game takes place during the days of the Crusades, and in this world, magic and evil are tangible entities. Garkham, Grand Master of the Black Magicians, has pledged to find the Book of Hexplore, the volume that will lead those who find it to the Garden of Eden where the Divine Power resides. Your job, of course, is to stop him from plunging the world into darkness. Things don't exactly get off to a good start — you begin your quest after monsters attack your band of crusading knights on their way to the Middle East. Your companions are kidnapped, and you are left for dead.

These guys have a problem with you, and they're not afraid to show it! Our advice — retreat!

Hexplore is presented in an isometric view similar to *Diablo*, yet, when you first start traveling, you'll immediately notice some sharp differences. You can hold down the right mouse button and rotate the view a full 360 degrees, and thanks to its use of voxel technology, *Hexplore* offers a lot of undulating outdoor terrain to explore. Yet the same technology leaves the landscape awash in thick coarse graphics that are a bit of an eyesore when compared to most modern RPGs.

Even though there is a variety of terrain and textures, the graphics themselves are pretty ugly, especially when compared to other RPGs.

There are a lot of puzzles in *Hexplore*, especially toward the end of any given level.

A few nice touches grace the interface — a mini-map in the upper corner lets you zoom in and out of the current view at a mouse click, and you can zoom in to any other portion of the map. Sighting rules are also in effect thanks to a fog of war, which dissipates as you explore the area. The controls are a little unusual when compared to other isometric roleplaying games, but with a little practice, they become usable.

Once you've got your head around the interface, the game offers little in the way of surprises, slipping into a predictable pattern of quests, puzzles, and battles all designed to prepare you for the final conflict. While the same can be said for many other roleplaying games, *Hexplore* is particularly annoying because it does such a horrible job of disguising it.

If you can accept these problems, the game can be enjoyable, and its simplified party-based gameplay and sword-swinging action does have its moments. As many as four players can adventure together on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone, SegaSoft's HEAT network, or Engage. The multi-player works well enough, yet I couldn't help shake the feeling that it felt like a slow *Diablo* clone with inferior graphics.

Hexplore's designers probably felt that the people who are put off by the depth of some roleplaying games would give this one a shot — unfortunately, the staid story, poor graphics, and sometimes annoying interface put this into the "try the demo first" category (which, incidentally, is on this month's CD, so that's handy).

—Michael Wolf

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

47%

HIGHS: New voxel technology is interesting. Lots of gameplay, monsters, items, secrets, puzzles.

LOWS: Poor graphics; interface is frustrating; story line is nothing special.

BOTTOM LINE: *Hexplore* does try something new, but comes up short in too many other areas.

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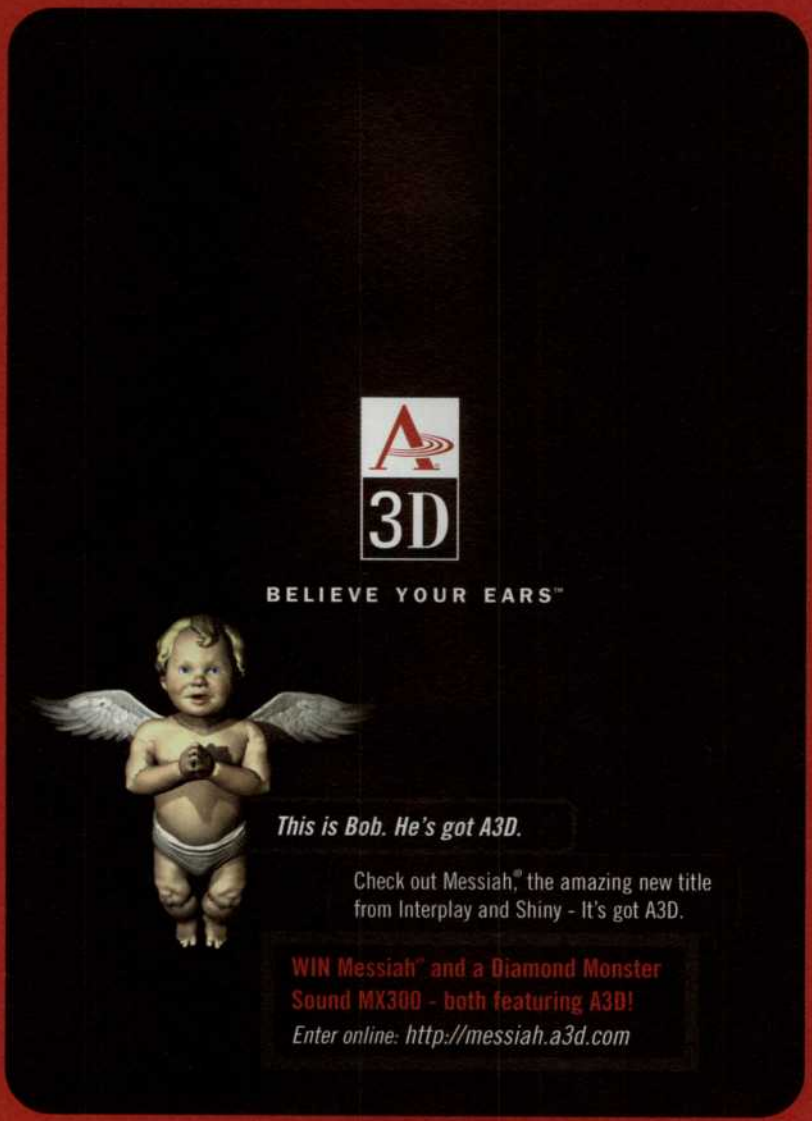

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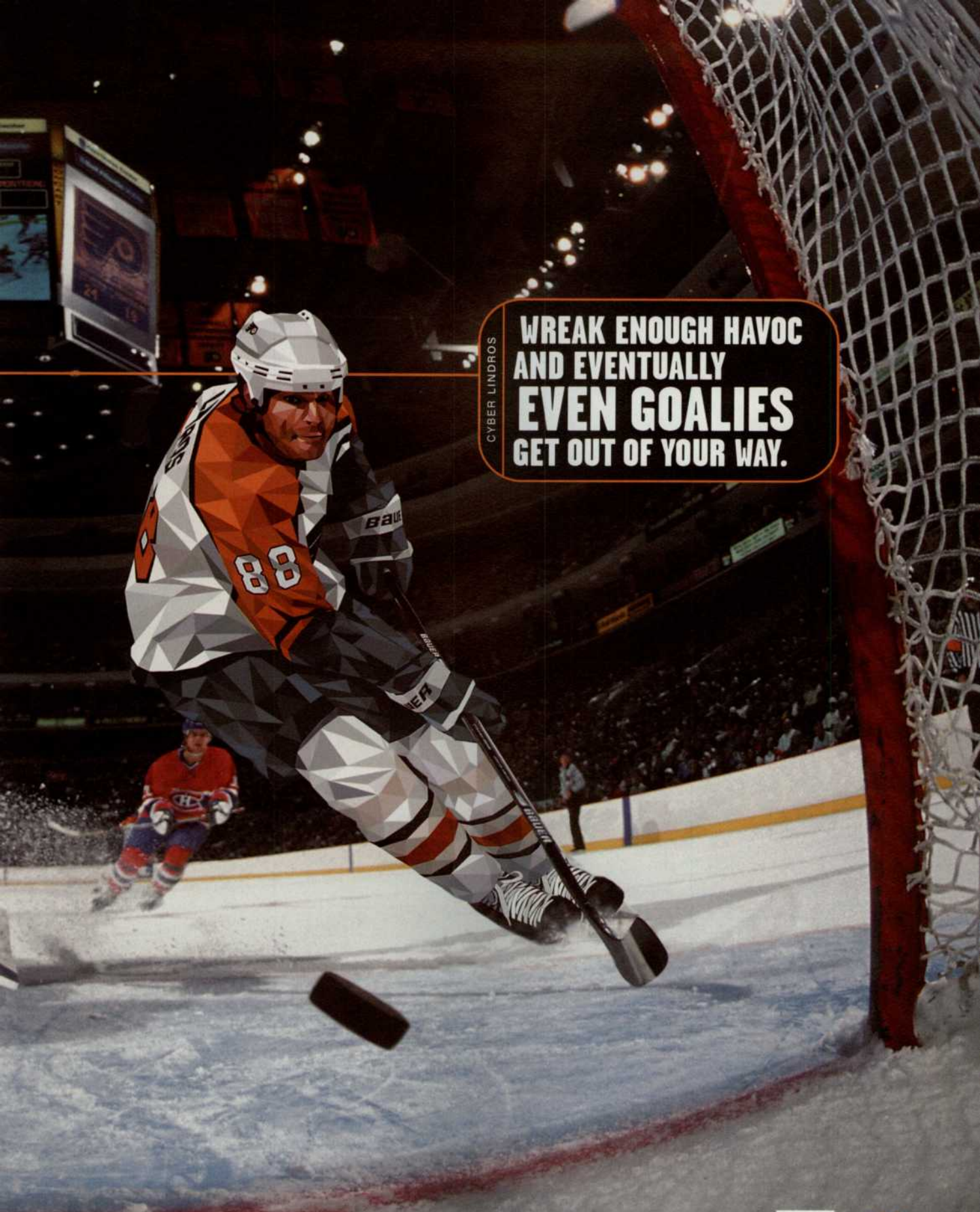

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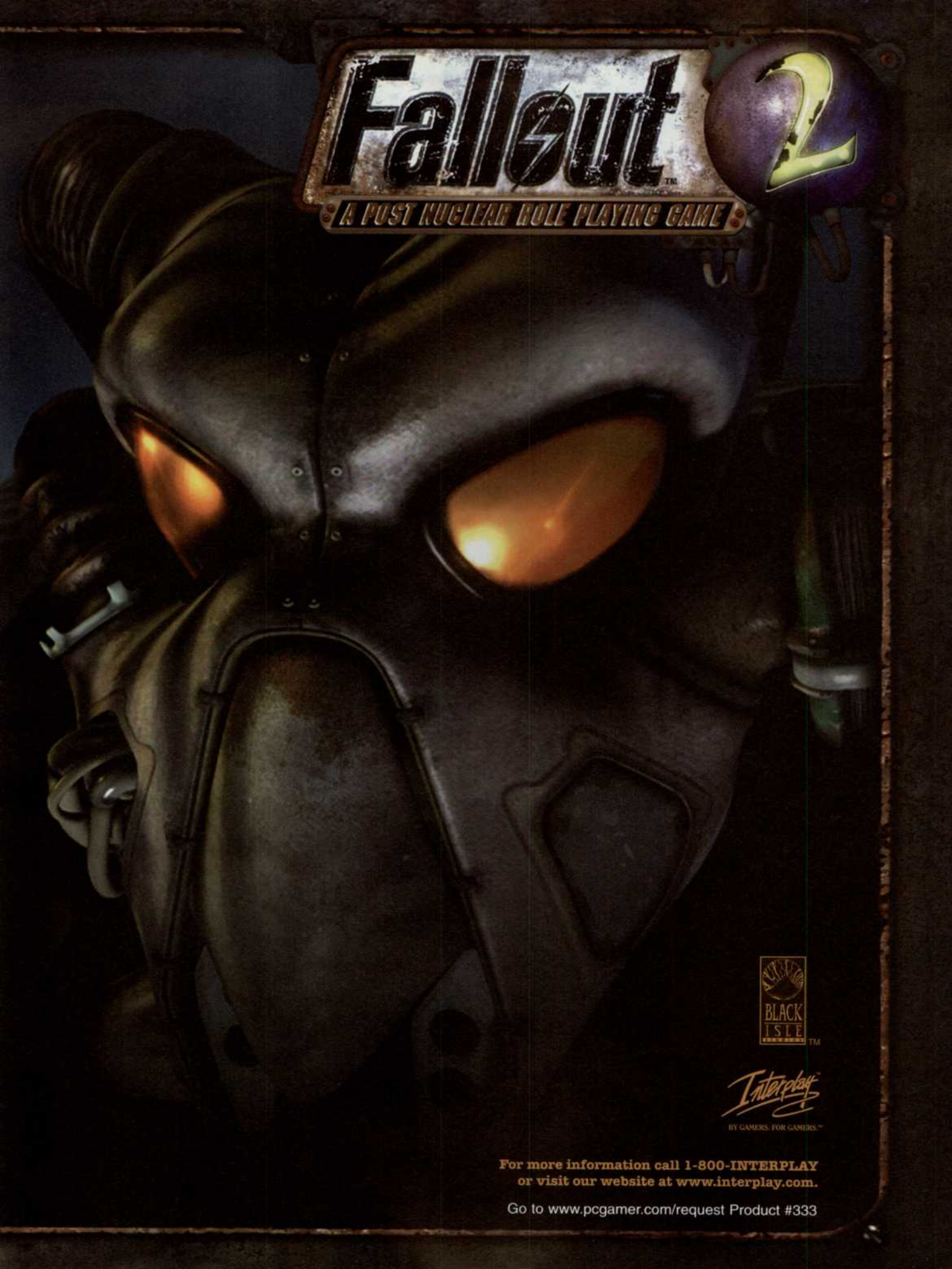
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Play This, Play That

Category:	Puzzle/Action
Developer:	Patch Products
Publisher:	Patch Products, (800) 524-4263 *www.patchproducts.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 3.1; 486DX2/66; 8MB RAM; 1MB Super VGA video card; 20MB free hard-drive space	Pentium 75; Supported sound card

Multi-player: LAN; Maximum players: 2 (Air Hockey)

Why is it that in the crazy world of so-called "variety packs" the price for diversity is almost a complete lack of value? *Play This, Play That* is a games compilation that tries to shotgun its way onto your PC by offering a little bit of everything in hopes that at least one of its wares will tickle your fancy — but in every instance, you'll find little to hold your interest.

There are six games in all; two word games, a couple of mindless action games, and even some logic puzzles straight from the corner bar. Representing the mindless action side of things are Air Hockey, Skeet Shooting, and Shooting Gallery. Skeet Shooting is a simple single screen twitch game where you use the mouse to point your cursor over animated skeet in order to score points. Shooting Gallery doesn't even go that far. It's a single screen filled with targets, and once you shoot them all, you simply reset the screen and go again. On the action side of things, Air Hockey is the only game to hold any significant appeal. It does a reasonable job of recreating the look and feel of the real thing and features customizable settings that allow you change the rebound, air cushion settings, scoring, opponent difficulty and graphic style. It's even playable on a LAN against a human opponent. The simplistic nature of the game means that even this gets old pretty quick, however.

The remaining games are simple translations of games we've seen before. Memory Challenge is little more than a computerized version of *Concentration*, Walk the Plank is a variation on *Hangman!* featuring animated pirates dueling as the letters fall into place, and Odd Man Out is a straight translation of an old wooden peg parlor game.

While all the games are presented in a nice Windows-esque environment with sharp colorful graphics, there's very little reason to return to any of them once you've taken them out for an initial spin. Most are just too boring and static (no offense to *Concentration* and *Hangman* fans) to be entertaining for more than a few minutes of play. Unfortunately, for all the value and variety touted on the box *Play This, Play That!* is disposable gaming at its most redundant.

—*Todd Vaughn*

The classic Hangman gets the pirate treatment in this variation called Walk the Plank.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

37%

HIGHS: Nice presentation. Air Hockey and Memory Challenge are fun diversions.

LOWS: Most of the games have been done before and done better. Not much replay value.

BOTTOM LINE: Low cost fun for youngsters, but not much value for regular gamers.

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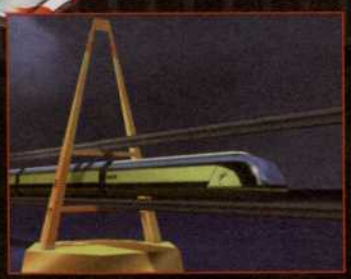

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Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #347

Safecracker

Category: Puzzle

Publisher: Daydream Software

Publisher: PXL Computers, (416) 868-6388
www.daydream.se

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 75; 16MB RAM	Eight-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 120; 32MB RAM

Multi-player: None

In *Safecracker*, you're a professional, erm, safecracker hired to test the latest and greatest creations of safe manufacturer Crabb & Sons. Left alone in the company's main facility, your goal is to defeat all of the company's 50 safes in the time allotted.

Originally released in Sweden a couple of years ago, *Safecracker* is a stylish puzzle game that mixes its collection of puzzles with some nice first-person style navigation. Though it has some cool adventure game trappings, with its *Zork Inquisitor*-style interface that gives you the ability to move through the environments, look around, and even pick up items, *Safecracker* isn't an adventure. There are no people to interact with, no traps or pitfalls, and there's no annoying plot to get in the way — it's just you against the safes. However, safecracking is not an easy task. Many safes require simply tracking down the proper keys or codes, others fall in the word-jumble or sliding-tile puzzle category, still others tend to make you scratch your noggin a bit more and dig a little bit deeper in the search for clues.

While the puzzles could've come straight out of any of the dozens of *Myst*-clones, *Safecracker*'s clarity of purpose is a lot more agreeable than the awkward relationship of story and puzzles found in those sorts of games. But that doesn't mean you should neglect the navigation or exploration part of *Safecracker*. If you happen to get stuck, you'll find there's a logical clue to be found for each puzzle located somewhere. Once a safe is open you can grab the contents that might contain additional clues or items. Using the inventory feature, you can pick up everything in front of you and have it displayed on a roll-down list. One complaint with the inventory system, however, is that the list tends to get cluttered with items you no longer need.

One of the weakest aspects of the game is how it handles the contents of a safe once you've opened them. Most safes contain important clues needed to unlock other safes — however, if you forget to pick something up you cannot go back and reopen it. In other words, you're S.O.L. (in a polite world, that spells stuck). But if you're willing to save often and pick up every item, *Safecracker* is a good puzzle game for gamers of all skill levels.

—Joseph Novicki

Who in their right mind would use a sliding-tile puzzle to safeguard anything?

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

75%

HIGHS: Easy to get into and good pacing.

LOWS: Contents of safes should be automatically included into inventory.

BOTTOM LINE: It's nothing fancy, nor does it try to be. If you're looking for puzzles but hate *Myst*-clones, *Safecracker* is for you.

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M.A.X. 2

Category:	Strategy
Developer:	Flat Cat
Publisher:	Interplay Productions, (800) 969-4263 *www.interplay.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 133; 16MB RAM; 80 MB hard-drive space; DirectX compatible video card and video card	Pentium 200; 32MB RAM; 561MB hard-drive space

Multi-player: Hot-seat (up to 6 players); Serial/Null Modem; LAN; Maximum Players: 6; Free Internet Service: *www.MAX2.net*

Here we go again: a potentially great game crippled by premature release, and more bugs than the Brazilian rain forest.

If you're one of the many *M.A.X.* fans considering whether or not to buy the sequel, here's a quick teaser of what you can expect when you get it home. The first thing you must do after installing the game is go to Interplay's web site and download the patch (*ftp://ftp1.interplay.com/pub/patches/max2p131.exe* — version 1.4 should be up by the time you read this). You see, friends, *M.A.X. 2* is not playable straight out of the box. And I don't mean minor graphics glitches or irritating freeze-ups; I mean *literally unplayable*. One campaign mission invariably crashes after a certain number of turns, and another one is impossible to complete in the time allocated. With the 1.3 patch, both those problems are corrected.

But the point is: How in the hell could Interplay release a game with such major, glaring, near-fatal flaws? Didn't anybody *know*? Didn't anybody *care*? Didn't anyone actually play-test this product before shoveling it out the door? After this company's previous debacles (remember *Descent to Undermountain?*), one would think it had gotten the message. And with so many devoted fans of the original *M.A.X.* salivating to get their hands on this sequel, it's even more inexplicable.

The game features more than 80 different units.

Let's start at the beginning: installation. If you don't have a whizz-bang CD-ROM drive (32x, say), and you opt for the small installation, you'll have to wait a long, long time for missions to load. If you go for the full installation, you need 561 MB of free space! Yeah, right, all us dedicated gamers have half a gigabyte lying around on our hard drives.

Next come the (very impressive) introductory cinematics: cities are being nuked, havoc committed...but unless you've played the original game, you'll have no idea what's supposed to be going on. The manual doesn't tell you who you're fighting, or why, or even who you're supposed to be! If you haven't played the original game, and you want to get some kind of backstory context, well, friend, you'll just have to go out and buy the *strategy guide*!

The changes made to *M.A.X.* for its sequel aren't necessarily improvements, and they seem to have introduced a load of bugs.

M.A.X. 2 is exponentially more complex than the original. Besides containing more than 80 different units (with various upgrades and modifications, thousands of possible variants can be constructed), the game features more complicated resource management requirements, 3D terrain that allows for some very sophisticated and subtle tactics, and a new waypoint and queue system. It also allows you to play four elaborate campaigns, a plethora of pre-packaged scenarios, tinker with a customizing editor, and fight a wide variety of multi-player battle types (capture the flag, kill all mining stations, last-man-standing, the lot), *and* it has an interface that is often baffling.

M.A.X. 2's graphics are an improvement over the original game's visuals.

In short, this game cries out desperately for not just one, but several well-thought-out tutorials. You don't get one. Instead, with almost insulting arrogance, the manual simply tells you "Your best bet for getting into *M.A.X. 2* is to run through the first campaign game."

Let me tell you about that first campaign game. It's a simple tactical set-up in which your only victory requirement is to annihilate all enemy units. You're given adequate resources, although this "learning" scenario contains no buildings, mines, air, or naval units, so all it really teaches you are the basics of fire and movement. It's a small-scale slugfest, and you'll probably wipe out the enemy and still have 6-7 functional (though often damaged) units. You think you've won. But there is invariably a single enemy scout unit that manages to sneak away and vanish into the countryside. The scenario will not end until you track down the bugger and take him out. The map is large, the terrain full of hiding places, and you don't have enough units to organize a systematic sweep. You just fan out and lumber along, turn after turn, until you accidentally stumble on that one remaining scout. I've played this one scenario three times, and the shortest game lasted three hours and six minutes! That's the *shortest*, folks. Ninety per cent of that time was spent beating the bushes, in a state of rage, frustration, and bewilderment, until I finally lucked out and found the elusive enemy survivor.

This is a monumental exercise in thoughtless game design. I was so pissed off by the time I actually won this pseudo-tutorial that, had I not been given the responsibility of reviewing it, I would have returned the game to the store and never played another minute of it.

The manual is, alas, typical of its kind: opaque, presumptive, printed in itty-bitty type, and sprinkled with such bewildering statements as: "Pressing ALT-U will delete all instances of the

The CLANS

For stand-alone battles and multi-player variants, you can choose to play as one of eight different human/Concord clans (or as the Sheevat, for that matter). Here's the roster of the human/Concord races and the special characteristics that might influence your decision:

Aven: a Concord race, bonded with a human religious sect called the Chosen. They have superior aircraft and pilots, and all their units feature superior stats and cheaper production costs.

Fen: Aquatic Concordians affiliated with humans who used to be Communists (the logic of this escapes me, but it's a novel twist), who focus their skill on naval craft. A Fen submarine, for instance, has a +4 attack rating and +2 speed. Surface units have similar potency.

Cloaks: Intelligence specialists whose radars and scanners have greater range than anyone else's.

Phemer: An alliance of Concordians and human rocket specialists. Their missiles have longer range and their mobile launchers are much less vulnerable than the norm.

Kamren: Experts in defense. Tough tanks, even tougher gunboats. Somewhat sluggish in offensive modes, they're hard to crack when they're dug in and armored.

Elan: Avoidance and speed are their specialties, and they manufacture superior anti-aircraft weapons.

Aspen: Another race who prefers defense to aggression, they are experts in mine warfare.

Beaker: With their Concord allies, these are superior engineers and constructors. Their buildings, mines, and fixed fortifications go up faster, and require less maintenance cost, than those of any other race.

currently selected unit for the current team only." Excuse me, but how, exactly, does one delete an "instance"? This is gibberish, not information.

There is a fairly ambitious structure to the game (human clans are trying to prove their galactic worthiness to the Concordians while fighting for survival against the evil Sheevat), but, again, you won't have a clue about any of this unless you played the first game or buy the strategy guide.

The highly touted "Spycam" feature lets you watch peripheral, but potentially important, areas of the map while controlling the main action. I found it marginally useful on many occasions, but rarely vital; half the games I played, I didn't even bother turning it on, nor did I need to.

Command and control of a large-scale engagement, however, is pretty funky. You can only command eight units inside a drawn box, and if you suddenly need to move a single unit within the group, the "grouping" mode ceases to function (needless to say, neither the manual or the on-screen help texts bother to inform you of this, much less explain the logic behind it — if there is any). And if you want to load a full eight-man squad into an APC, you have to click on and issue an "enter" order to each man individually.

You can assign hot-key numbers to groups, but as the battles develop, the groups often become scattered and the hot-key function seems to fade into unexplained oblivion. A game feature like this should work as it's supposed to *all the time,* since it can be a major ingredient in your tactical plans; if it's not reliable, why bother at all?

What saddens and angers me most is that, with a little bit more play-testing and bug-crunching, *M.A.X. 2* could have been a wonderful strategy game. The terrain is beautifully rendered and has significant impact on tactics. The air forces and naval units are well designed and fun to manipulate.

There is great variety to the missions, and innumerable clever ideas embedded in them. You can play turn-based, simultaneous turn-based, or real-time, as your mood dictates. The resource-management, exploration, and research elements are complicated but well integrated into the grand scheme of things, and once you figure out what does what, you'll find plenty of action and challenge.

If only Interplay had spent just a little more time eliminating the major bugs and minor irritants, it could have published a masterpiece of its genre. How do things like this *happen,* and when is the industry going to abandon its stonewalling pretense that it's *not* intentionally releasing beta versions and then trying to cover its collective ass with patch after patch until we *finally* get the quality of game we should have gotten when we left the store?

***M.A.X. 2*'s 3D terrain allows for some sophisticated tactics — but it can mean some long, tedious searches for that last surviving enemy unit.**

The sequel is considerably more complex than the original, but it proves that's not always a good thing.

One final warning: there are a lot of cheat codes for this game floating on the 'net (for example, "maxspy" to reveal all enemy locations). In desperation, I tried this cheat on that first campaign game and an angry message appeared on the screen: "Cheater! Prepare to face the consequences!" after which all of my units blew up. Turns out the cheats are valid only for stand-alone missions, not for the campaigns. For them, you're very much on your own.

It's possible that, once all the patches are up, *M.A.X. 2* will become the great game it could have been and should have been. But as matters stand, this is one of the major disappointments of the year.

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

40%

HIGHS: Varied missions, lots of interesting units.

LOWS: No tutorial; countless bugs; this game simply was not finished when shipped.

BOTTOM LINE: This could have been a great game. But as it stands, Interplay's credibility has just taken another head shot.

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Commandos

Category: Strategy

Developer: Pyro Studios

Publisher: Eidos Interactive, (800) 617-8737
www.eidosinteractive.com

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM Drive; Pentium 120; 16MB RAM; 125MB hard-drive space	Pentium 200; 32MB RAM; Supported sound card

Multi-player: TCP/IP; Maximum players: 6 (cooperative only). Free Internet service: *www.mplayer.com*

Tactical real-time action goes behind the lines of World War Two in this addictive and sometimes frustrating game.

Taking a page from classic World War Two films such as *The Dirty Dozen* and *The Guns of Navarone*, Eidos Interactive's tactical combat game *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines* takes a trip back to a time when war engulfed the entire world, and it was up to a few brave boys to stick it to the bad guys and keep the flag of freedom flying.

As the commander of an elite team of six soldiers, you'll send your commandos behind enemy lines to disrupt key installations, eliminate enemy soldiers, and capture valuable information in order to prepare the way for the coming Allied invasion. The focus of *Commandos* isn't on large-scale battles fought with tanks or battleships — it's about small intimate engagements where each man plays a vital and important role. However, this is not the stuff of which Rambo or John Wayne movies are made; one wrong move here, and your guys don't make history — they *are* history.

Fortunately, your boys are well trained in the deadly arts and ready to respond to your every command. Once briefed on the latest hot zone, you'll control the commandos through an interface that takes a few familiar cues from the real-time strategy genre. You can select a single soldier or a group, and you access your soldiers' weapons, tools, and special abilities either through a knapsack in the corner of the screen, or through the use of hot-keys.

Getting this truck through that gate will be tough with all those guards patrolling.

A minute ago, those garage bays were full of tanks, but thanks to the quick work my sniper made of a nearby fuel truck, now they're just scrap metal. The sniper rifle has a long range, but less ammo.

The missions will take you to various areas, from the deserts of Africa to the lush greenery of Normandy. You'll wage war in vivid, isometric battlefields of deserts, forests, and snow, over land, sea, rooftops, docks, and bridges. Using each of the soldiers' unique skills, you'll coordinate your attack, moving stealth units into position to take out sentries, while moving other units like demolitions experts to wire up an enemy installation for destruction.

While the soldiers' abilities are central to the game's strategy, they're also unfortunately devoid of logic. For example: only one of your commandos has the ability to drive land vehicles, and another is the only one with aquatic skills such as diving and piloting an inflatable raft. Only one carries an automatic weapon, only two can move and hide dead bodies, only one carries a sniper rifle, only one can put on enemy uniforms to disguise himself, and so on. I understand the concept of specialization, but it doesn't take special training to row a boat, drive a jeep, or climb over a wall; it certainly doesn't take any extra skill to drag a body into the bushes.

Adding to the challenge is the fact that you don't get all six squad members for each mission; you're given only the men with the abilities needed to accomplish the objectives. For example,

Before each mission begins, a stodgy Brit reads a briefing screen to help you understand the historical significance of what you're about to do.

missions that involve crossing water include the marine; when you need to pilot land vehicles, the driver will be deployed; when you have to lay explosives, the Sapper will be available. The Green Beret, being the most ubiquitous soldier, is present in almost all of the missions. But there's no option to mix and match units on your own.

Due to the heavily structured nature of the missions and the way in which your commandos' abilities are so specialized, this game often feels less like an action/strategy game and more like a puzzle game. Each mission has its own unique obstacle or series of obstacles that can only be overcome by using the right unit at the right time in the right place. It's less about real combat tactics than it is about learning each mission's puzzles through trial and error, and repeating the process until you get it right. Happily, you can open multiple windows showing different parts of the battlefield to coordinate simultaneous attacks in different locations — which is necessary to complete several of the missions.

The first few missions are deceptively easy. There aren't too many enemy soldiers, and figuring out the sequence to winning them only takes a few tries. By the fifth or sixth mission, however, the battlefields are teeming with Nazis and getting past them takes lots of planning and split-second timing, not to mention saving and reloading every minute or so. At times I was convinced that some of the missions were unbeatable due to the inhuman timing required to maneuver the units into position.

Alarm! Alarm! Once word of your presence gets out, your mission gets a lot tougher.

Interspersed throughout the game are AVIs of WWII stock footage, which is used to introduce you to the theaters of war your men will fight in.

Adding to the frustration is the fact that if you lose even a single soldier, the game is effectively over. Though you're given the option to continue the mission in progress as long as you still have men alive, you can't advance to the next mission unless they all survive. A recruitment interface similar to the one used in *Jagged Alliance* or *Soldiers at War* would have been a worthy feature to replace commandos killed in action without forcing you to reload quite so often.

Multi-player *Commandos* only offers cooperative play against the computer, and like *Rainbow Six*, it's engaging and rewarding to work together and accomplish a goal — especially when the goals are this tough. However, as a stand-alone single-player game, most players will have their work cut out for them — *Commandos* isn't for the faint of heart, or the short of temper, but when played with methodical planning and patience, it can be an enjoyable game.

—Joel Durham Jr.

A Handful of Exceptional Men...

In *Commandos*, you'll be in charge of six uniquely skilled soldiers, and you'll have to master their special abilities to get through the missions. Get to know them well.

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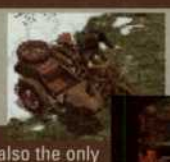
The Marine: Fins is the only commando who can row a boat. He's equipped with diving gear and a silent, deadly harpoon gun.

The Sapper: What would a commando squad be without an explosives expert? Inferno also carries a poisoned bear trap, good for offing unsuspecting Nazis

The Spy: Spooky has the unique ability to dress in the garb of an enemy officer and move around undetected. He can distract enemy patrols while the rest of the team is up to no good.



The Driver: Not only is Tread the only commando who can drive, he's also the only one with an automatic weapon. He's also the group's medic, equipped with a first aid kit.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: The tactical action and mission-based puzzling can be fun...

LOWS: ...although much of the time the linear campaign and very difficult missions are frustrating.

BOTTOM LINE: *Commandos* has a lot to offer, but less patient gamers should look elsewhere.

NFL Gameday 99

Category:	Sports
Developer:	989 Studios
Publisher:	989 Studios (Sony Computer Ent.), (888) 426-3702, *www.989studios.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Eight-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 75MB hard-drive space; Direct3D compatible accelerator	Pentium 200; Gamepad

Multi-player: 2 or 4 players; Serial/Null modem; Modem: 28.8+; LAN; Free Internet service: *www.989studios.net*

One of the PlayStation's veteran titles makes a play for the PC market, but some fumbled features keep this rookie effort from scoring.

If you were to look at my PlayStation these days, you'd probably find a healthy coating of dust on it — I couldn't even tell you for sure, because it's been more than a year since I've had any desire to power the thing up. After playing the PC version of *NFL Gameday 99*, last year's hit PlayStation title, I don't feel as if I've been missing much. Don't get me wrong — *Gameday* is not a bad game, but after hearing all of the accolades heaped on this franchise, I was expecting a lot more.

For every good point in this game, a corresponding negative drags it down. If *Gameday* had made its appearance on the PC last year, there's no doubt that the graphics alone would have caused quite a stir, as it's definitely one of the best-looking football games. The stadiums are well rendered while the 3D players are decently modeled and fairly smooth at the highest detail level.

On the field, the controls are responsive, but there are too many moves for most gamepads. Using a Sidewinder, I had to decide which four actions I wanted to forgo since you can't combine the pad with keyboard commands. The play is fast and furious with a nice running game model, but the stiff, sharp movements of the players make the action appear very unrealistic.

As the game clock winds down, the CPU coach will tend to ignore the game situation, making for a less than compelling solo game.

While the running game is good enough if all you crave is action, most football fans want a little more meat on the bone when it comes to tracking their favorite players and teams — yet as with most console-style action games, the statistics and management options seem to have gotten the short end of the stick. The game keeps track of a decent amount of statistics, but they're poorly organized, and you can't sort them. There is a draft feature, but it only allows you six picks, filling in one player at each key position. Why even include this feature if you're going to cripple it like this? You can trade and sign players, but the computer doesn't have the ability to manage its roster, so you'll have to babysit every team yourself. You can choose to play any quarter length from one to 15 minutes, but the CPU team will always use four seconds of the play clock while you fumble through the poorly organized play selection screens, eating up clock time and destroying the time-of-possession balance. The play-calling for the artificial intelligence team is solid, but the computer coach is clueless when it comes to clock management near the end of halves. To top things off, penalties are sparse even on the highest setting, there's no way to save your game in progress, and if you fail to advance in the playoffs, you get kicked back to the title screen with no way to see who won the Super Bowl or even review the season stats.

The big selling point of *NFL Gameday 99* is supposedly its online Internet action play. Unfortunately, this feature is not worth the hassle. If you're the server (i.e. the player that creates the game), the action is as smooth as glass, virtually indistinguishable from the single-player game. Join someone else's game, however, and you'll soon be begging for mercy — the lag is so horrendous it's nearly impossible to control your players, since they're constantly switching from one position to the next as the game updates. Whether you meet up on *989studios.net* (the meeting place the developers set up for gamers to find opponents) or a direct TCP/IP link, you'll have the same problem, even with a T1 connection.

The graphics in *NFL Gameday 99* are pretty good, but the animations make the players appear to be moving at 45-degree angles.

The running game is one of the things that this title does very well.

If you're looking for an arcade-style game to play against a friend or the computer, *Gameday* does deliver some nice results on the field. However, if you're looking for a deep simulation or are curious about the Internet play, forget it. If the patch that 989 Studios is promising can address some of the shortcomings (the lag problem being the major stumbling block), the game may deserve a closer look but at this point no one else is even attempting action play over the Internet. Enough said.

—Rob Smolka

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

68%

HIGHS: Good sound, commentary; solid two-player arcade action; good 'net play as server.

LOWS: Robotic player movement; poor clock management for AI teams; poor 'net play as client.

BOTTOM LINE: A decent action-oriented football game in need of a few major and minor repairs.

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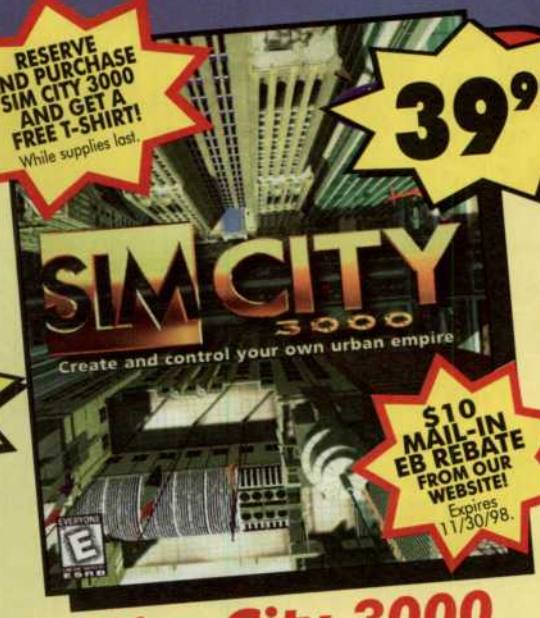

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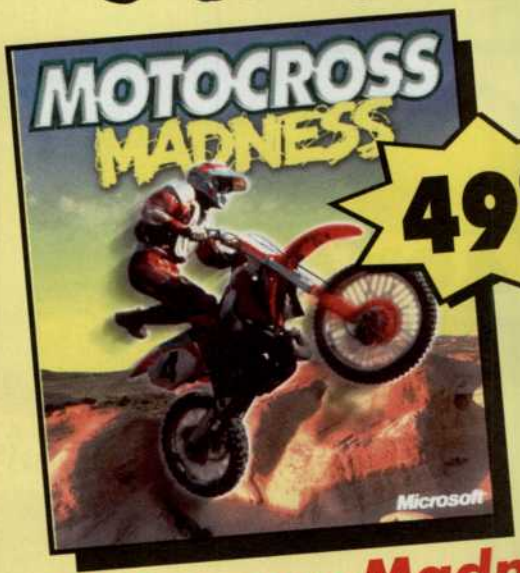

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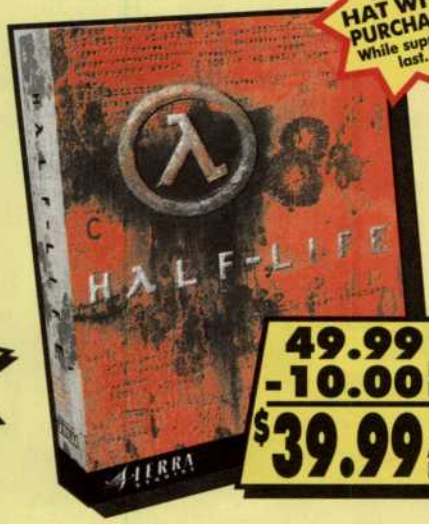

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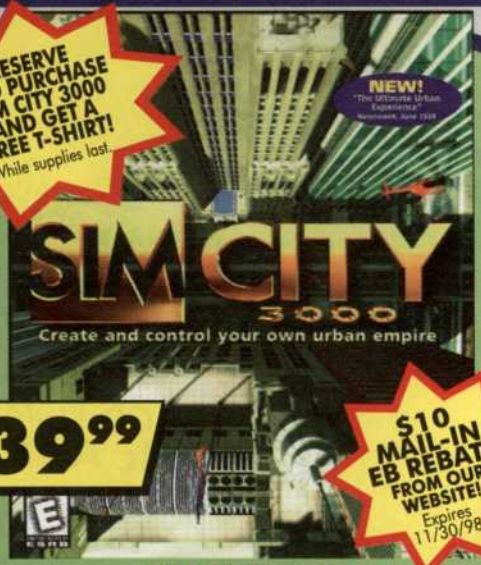

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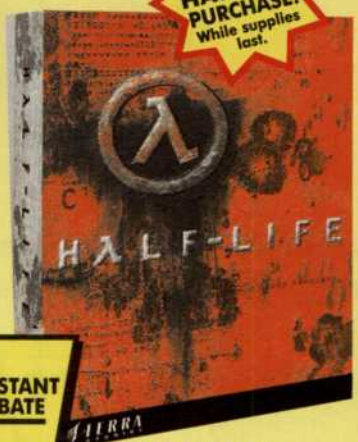

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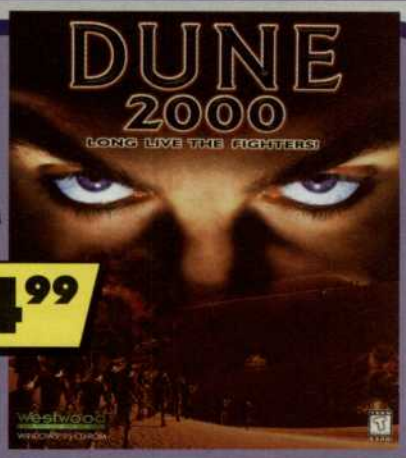

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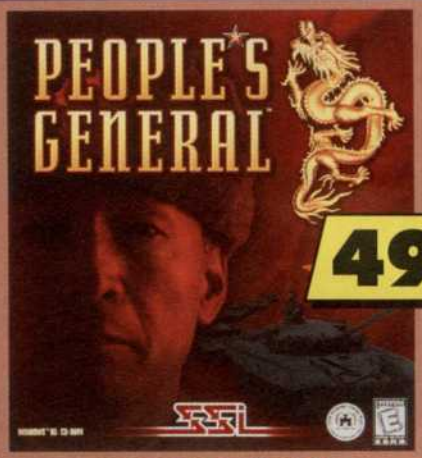

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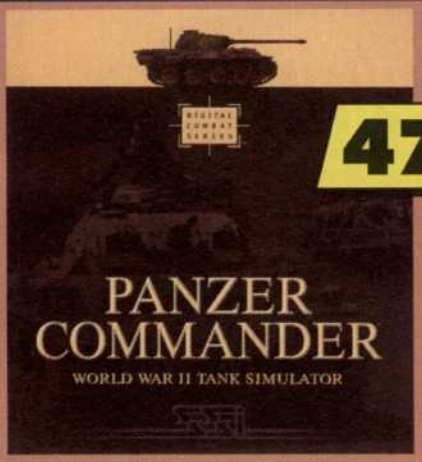

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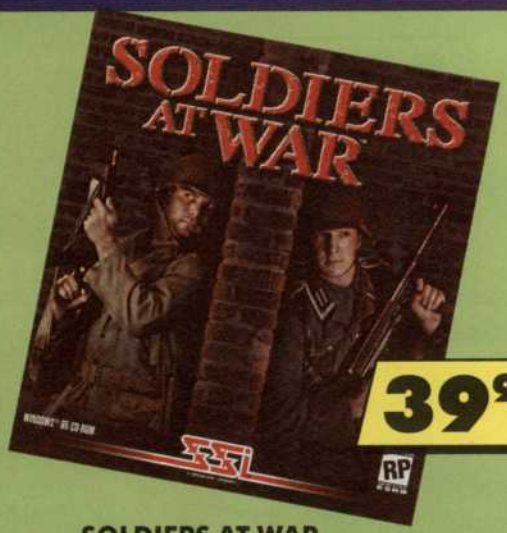

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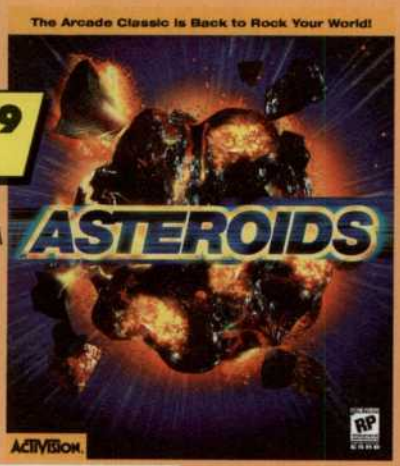

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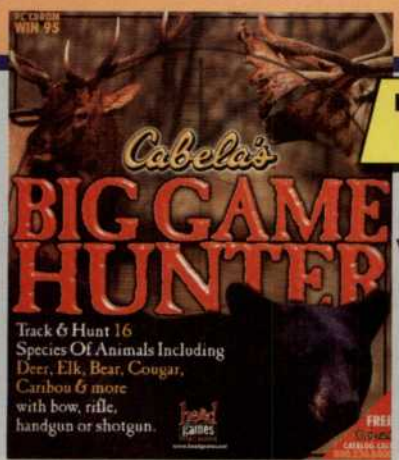

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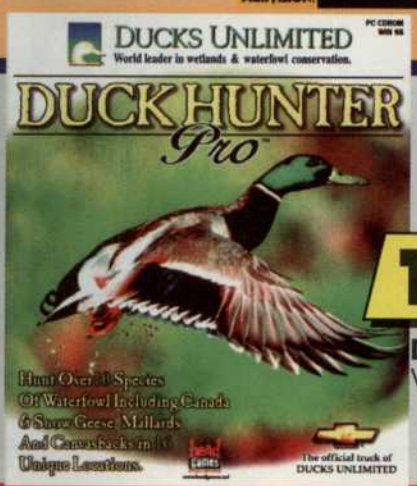

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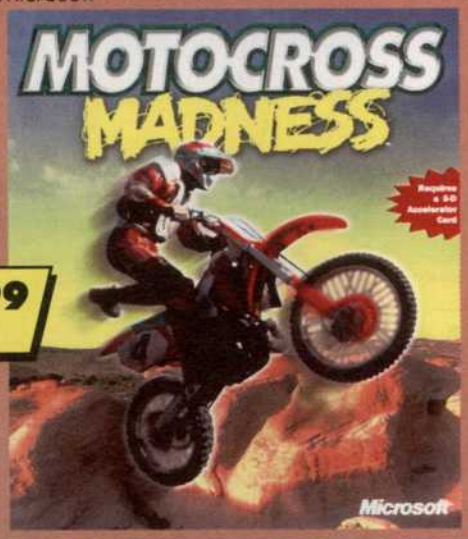

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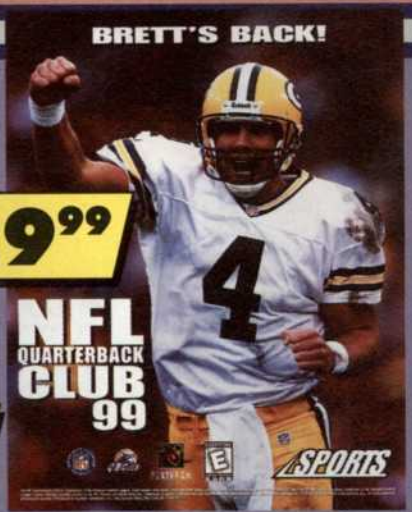

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Police Quest: SWAT 2

Category: Strategy

Developer: Yosemite Entertainment

Publisher: Sierra, (800) 757-7707
www.sierra.com

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Pentium 133; 16MB RAM; 43.4MB hard-drive space; Super VGA video; Mouse	Pentium 200MHz; 32MB RAM; 278MB hard-drive; Video card with at least 4MB memory

Multi-player: Serial/null modem; Modem; IPX; TCP\IP; Maximum players: 4; Free Internet service: *www.won.net*

Sierra returns to the world of "real-life" gaming with *SWAT 2*, but it doesn't live up to the intensity of the subject matter.

With the release of *Police Quest: SWAT*, Sierra took the first step in steering its successful Police Quest adventures into the realm of strategy gaming. Now that long-dormant series is taking the plunge into the crowded real-time strategy genre, and while *SWAT 2*'s real-life setting and emphasis on saving lives is undeniably a breath of fresh air, numerous flaws ultimately keep it from being the compelling experience gamers were hoping for.

SWAT 2 gives you absolute control of the LAPD's entire Special Weapons and Tactics division (you can also play as a terrorist leader — more on that later). That means you make decisions affecting nearly every aspect of SWAT operations, from allocating equipment and weapons to each officer to deciding who'll be trained to become team leaders, snipers, demolitions experts, and EMT specialists — and all the while you must keep a watchful eye on your budget. Go on a spending spree by creating too many SWAT teams (known as elements) and handing out expensive gear, and you'll find you've lost your job for misappropriating funds.

All this responsibility is intimidating at first, and the interface doesn't help matters much initially (it pays to read the manual), but once you master a fairly sophisticated Sort function, you'll be able to find just the right officer for a position in an element faster than you can say "Drop it, punk!" There's still the problem of managing monetary resources, but after going bankrupt, I found an easy solution that eliminated all money woes. Each non-assigned officer's carrying a fancy pistol you can "hock" for $600 a pop, and by stripping all non-assigned officers of their guns, I was able to raise my budget by nearly $50,000.

As chief of SWAT, you play 15 missions — two training missions to acquaint you with the interface, and 13 real assignments involving family disputes, riots, botched bank robberies, terrorist bombings, political assassinations, and more. After watching a short intro video and reading a mission synopsis, you choose the appropriate elements and head to the scene of the crime; once there, you play from an oblique overhead perspective, controlling the element members just as you'd expect in a real-time strategy game.

But "scene of the crime" has a double meaning here: there are so many problems with the tactical interface that someone, somewhere should be hauled up on some sort of charges.

The biggest issue in any real-time strategy game is unit control, and here *SWAT 2* fails on several counts. You determine the actions of any officers you're controlling via icons on two vertical bars: a Unit Command panel and a Gear sub-window. Unit commands include Crouch, Stealth/Dynamic (run) movement, Challenge, Arrest, Rescue, Search, Disarm (bombs, not suspects), Pick Up, Drop, Cover, and Entry. There's also an Initiate button if you prefer to give orders to several units and then have them execute your command simultaneously.

The Gear subwindow is where you

Because the small characters make it tough to tell perpetrators from innocent bystanders (they're often dressed identically), you sometimes must wait until they raise their weapons before you open fire.

***SWAT 2*'s oblique perspective usually works just fine, but sometimes characters will bunch up against a wall and are difficult to locate. Numerous interface glitches also make the game tedious to play.**

select which weapons or tools the officer will use. To move, you select one or more officers then click on a destination; to fire a weapon, you select it and put the crosshair cursor over the target.

That sounds simple, but in practice, it's clumsy and confusing. Take the question of movement and attack; you'd think a SWAT officer would always able to move and shoot at the same time, as long as a weapon is selected, but in *SWAT 2* the interface distinguishes between movement and firing and once armed, your character can no longer move in or out of danger. Want to have three officers in an element cover a team member moving into position? Naturally, you'd click-and-drag to select all three before clicking on the Cover unit command — but it only issues the command to *one* of the three selected officers. To have all three cover, you must issue the cover command individually. Efficient? I don't think so.

The interface quirks don't end there. Let's say you select an officer and click the Stealth/Dynamic movement button so he'll run, then select a new officer you'd like to move stealthily toward the suspect. Surprise, surprise! The Stealth/Dynamic button is still set to run even though you're dealing with a new officer. It's a small thing to be sure, but remember a stealthy approach and a fast approach are two entirely different things and this sort of situation has the potential to endanger lives!

There's not enough space in this review to explain all the other interface glitches, but trust me when I say that frequently the toughest aspect of a mission isn't devising tactics and strategies to save lives — it's using the clunky interface to carry them out.

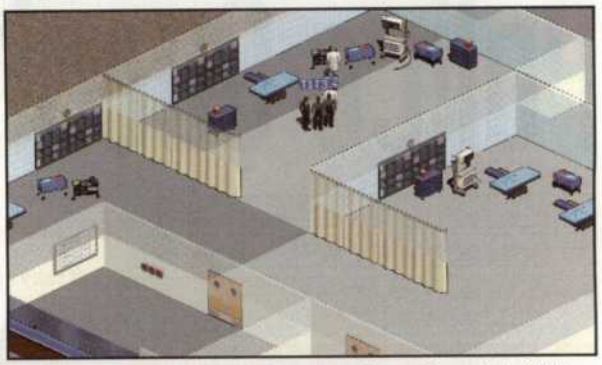
In addition to the interface aggravations is a long list of other oddities. Audio and text reports from element members and the Crisis Negotiator can play simultaneously, resulting in a verbal mosaic nearly impossible to interpret and no way to view a log of all that was said. The lack of a zoom function turns suspect/victim identification into a minor nightmare. Any sense of realism during missions is lost because all officers walk with arms extended like sleepwalkers, regardless of the equipment they're carrying. Missions can end midway through because you're out of money(!), and sometimes the character you're controlling can't see a suspect or an object that's literally a few feet away.

Some might question Sierra's judgment in allowing you to embark on a campaign as a terrorist in *SWAT 2*, but in all fairness gamers would have been screaming to high heaven if they hadn't been able to play from the other side of the fence, especially in multi-player. It's also a way of ratcheting up the difficulty level for gamers who blow through the SWAT campaign: in the missions I tried as head of the Five Eyes organization, I found myself struggling just to score an acceptable rating.

To say that *SWAT 2* is a total failure would be an exaggeration. In spite of all my grievances, I still wanted to complete my campaign as SWAT chief. But I also have to admit that my desire to keep playing could well be the computer game equivalent of the Stockholm Syndrome, in which hostages wind up sympathizing with their captors.

If *SWAT 2* had been released six months ago, it might have been easier to overlook its problems because it would have been the only game that gave you a chance to rescue hostages and battle terrorists. With the excellent *Rainbow Six* now available, though, *SWAT 2* is relegated to a second-place finish — and not even a close one at that.

—Stephen Poole



Although some terrorist missions — such as taking a sick child to the hospital for treatment — start out with non-violent intentions, the arrival of the LAPD means there's almost always going to be some sort of gun play. Too bad it's not that exciting.

Special units like "Big Bertha" can end a deadly situation, but they'll drain your budget of substantial funds.

Whether you play as a SWAT chief or as a terrorist, you're rated in a host of categories at the end of each mission.

The inclusion of negotiation options is a nice touch, but the chief negotiator doesn't always explain that "deny" can have more than one meaning. Turn down a request for money, for instance, and you learn he's going to send the suspects an empty briefcase to string them along.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

52%

HIGHS: Developing successful strategies and tactics is rewarding and fairly addictive.

LOWS: Convoluted interface; tiny graphics; terrorist missions feel like an afterthought.

BOTTOM LINE: *SWAT 2* falls far short of realizing the potential of its thrilling subject matter.

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Redline Racer

Category:	Arcade
Developer:	Criterion
Publisher:	UbiSoft Entertainment, (800) 824-7638 *www.ubisoft.com*

Required	We Recommend
Win95; 4x CD drive; Pentium 133 (w/Voodoo Graphics based accelerator); Pentium 166 (All other supported chipsets); 16MB RAM; Supported sound card	Pentium II; 64MB RAM; Voodoo or Voodoo II based accelerator; Joystick

Multi-player: Serial/Null Modem; Modem: 28.8; IPX; TCP/IP; Maximum Players: 8

Ubisoft's arcade racer delivers fast road-racing action at breakneck speeds, but the lean gameplay may leave you unsatisfied.

Ever since *Moto Racer GP* sideswiped the car-dominated racing genre with its infectious brand of throttle-twisting action, motorcycle games have seemingly become the in-thing. Now UbiSoft is joining the pack with *Redline Racer*, a stylish new motorcycle game that almost eclipses *Moto Racer GP* in sheer road-hugging action, but struggles to keep pace in the long run due to its over-simplified arcade design.

Rather than divide its time between off-road and road-racing cycles like *Moto Racer GP*, *Redline Racer* focuses on a selection of lightning-fast crotch rockets and tight, twisty road courses. And in terms of graphics, *Redline Racer* has all the bases covered, with nicely detailed bikes and riders, rich colorful scenery, and very attractive presentation. As you'd expect from an arcade racer, there's very little fuss in getting on the road. Once you've picked a name and rider, it's off to the bike selection screen where you'll pick one of the available machines based on top speed, handling, acceleration, etc., and head off to the track. Playing from either an over-the-shoulder view or a stomach-churning first-person view, you'll start out proving yourself on a few available tracks and unlock additional circuits by finishing in first place on two difficulty levels.

When you tire of blasting past the computer controlled riders, you can try full-tilt racing against the clock or multi-player play against human opponents.

The tracks cover several different themes, from lush English countrysides and snowy Alpine roadways to sandy seaside lanes and desert highways. The tasty hardware accelerated graphics and the lovely track design work in unison to pull off a great sense of speed — unfortunately, the raceways don't put up much of a challenge. Unlocking all of the tracks took less than an afternoon as I blasted my way through each course with no more than one or two attempts. Part of the problem is that most of the tracks are designed to be very forgiving when running at full speed, and though there are quite a few turns and hazards along the way, it only requires a few laps to learn which areas need to be avoided. The tight handling of the bikes makes it even easier to come to grips with the various tracks. The controls are good, and the bikes handle well with either a joystick or gamepad, yet they lack any real liabilities. You never lose traction during a turn, and about the only thing that can knock you off your bike is a collision with another rider or a roadside obstacle. Damage and injuries aren't modeled, so the only penalty for crashing is the loss of time and position in the race. The artificial intelligence opponents don't really put up much of a challenge except, of course, when they just happen to get in your way.

Though the handling isn't affected by the icy roads, a fast blast through this snowy mountain course does make for intense riding.

Redline Racer's accelerated graphics and selection of fast bikes results in an amazing sense of speed.

While the arcade handling is par for the course (this is an arcade game, after all), one area that *Redline Racer* seems to have overlooked is matching a course with a specific bike. *Moto Racer* accomplished this with ease, forcing riders to select a bike that not only suited their driving style, but one that was appropriate for a course's design. In *Redline Racer*, it's all about speed, handling be damned. If you're pretty handy with the controls and don't make many mistakes, any bike with a good top speed is capable of winning against the toughest drivers the artificial intelligence can muster, leaving hazards such as jumps and crashes as the only thing that could upset an otherwise predictable victory.

Players can duke it out against each other via the game's robust multi-player support. Up to eight people can play at a time, leaving lots of opportunity for spills and thrills — but even then, the too-easy tracks start to wear thin.

To say that *Redline Racer* isn't any fun would be too harsh; it is a fast, energetic, and unabashedly friendly arcade game; but its over-simplified courses, limited replay value, and modest difficulty will probably disappoint fans looking for something a little more substantial.

—Todd Vaughn

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

69%

HIGHS: Attractive graphics, nice controls, decent track selection. Good multi-player options.

LOWS: Easy tracks and easy opponents.

BOTTOM LINE: *Redline Racer* is a lot like a donut... it satisfies when the urge hits, but you'll still be hungry for something more substantial.

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NCAA Football 99

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Category: Sports

Developer: EA Sports

Publisher: Electronic Arts, (650) 628-1001
www.easports.com

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 166; 16MB RAM; 2MB hard-drive space	Pentium 200; 32MB RAM; 55MB hard-drive space; 3Dfx Voodoo-graphics based accelerator; Gamepad

Multi-player: Serial/Null modem; Modem: 14.4; IPX; Maximum Players: 5

EA Sports is back with a stunning sophomore effort in this very impressive college football game.

One of the most pleasant surprises from last year's PC football offerings was EA Sports' *NCAA Football 98*. Though it arrived with little fanfare at the height of the football season, this collegiate pigskin sim managed to outshine even EA Sports' own vaunted *Madden NFL* series in just about every area, and even made a fringe college football fan like myself giddy with school spirit. Featuring powerful hands-on play, smart artificial intelligence, and realistic statistics, *NCAA Football 98* did almost everything right, but there were still a few rookie mistakes in that first outing. The good news is that this year's edition erases nearly all of those problems, and raises the bar on what was already a quality game.

There has been comprehensive improvement in nearly every area. Some changes are subtle, like the addition of new stadium chants for every team and newly recorded dialog while others, like the enhanced graphics, add a whole new dimension to the game. Last year's graphics drew a few complaints because of the use of sprites, so this year the game has laid that grumble to rest by moving to a true 3D environment. *NCAA 99* looks absolutely fantastic, with beautiful stadiums, gorgeous weather effects, and player animations that are better than ever. The sense that a real football game is happening on your screen has never been this close to being realized, especially if you have the horsepower to run the game at 800x600 with all the details. If your system is not up to the task, EA has even left in the original sprite-based engine, which runs very well on lower-end machines.

Great looking players, stadiums, and weather effects are just some of ***NCAA Football 99's*** charm.

But aside from the graphic touches, the real reason to pick up this game is its vigorous and believable performance on the gridiron. Though the coaching modes and managerial portions are very well handled, *NCAA 99's* amazing running game is the stand-out feature, even if you shun hands-on action. The offensive line makes holes that are easy to read, while the speed of the players is perfectly balanced and creates accurate statistics. The problems that plagued last year's version have been fixed; safeties no longer get lost on plays, making the passing game more challenging and realistic. The quarterback can now throw on the run, and the computer artificial intelligence is on the ball, both in the area of play-calling and clock management. I've yet to see it do something that made me shake my head in bewilderment, and at the highest difficulty level, the CPU puts up a hell of a challenge if it has the offensive and defensive muscle to compete. Frequency of penalties can be adjusted manually, and with a little tweaking, a very realistic number can be attained.

Very few games come close to ***NCAA's*** brilliant running game model.

Not happy with the effort being put out by your cornerback? Use your prestige points in the Dynasty Mode to recruit a new one.

In addition to shoring up the gameplay and fixing last year's problems, *NCAA 99* adds new features that were noticeably absent in the 98 edition. A Dynasty mode, which allows you to recruit and manage your team from year to year, has been included, and it's so well implemented that I've even started a career just to play as personnel director. After the season is over, you'll be notified of which players are leaving (and if/where they were drafted), which ones are staying, and how much improvement they show — and then it's up to you to flesh out your roster with new recruits. Depending on how well you did, you'll have a certain number of prestige points to use in your recruiting. You never know how many points you have, but you get to devote a percentage of your efforts to players you're interested in. This takes some strategy — will you pour a high percentage into going after that blue chipper and have little left to fill your other needs, or will you have a more balanced approach and go after a handful of quality players that will be solid contributors?

A few minor things still prove irritating, like the lack of an additional viewing angle positioned between the default view and the upper deck camera, and the inability to save during tournament or dynasty games (although you can in exhibition mode). However, neither of these niggles can take away from the fact that *NCAA 99* is by far the most complete and well designed football game around.

—Rob Smolka

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

92%

HIGHS: Stunning graphics; perfect atmosphere; astounding game play; Dynasty Mode.

LOWS: Save game problems seen in the first game still exist; no play editor.

BOTTOM LINE: Don't hesitate to add this to your sports collection — it's da bomb.

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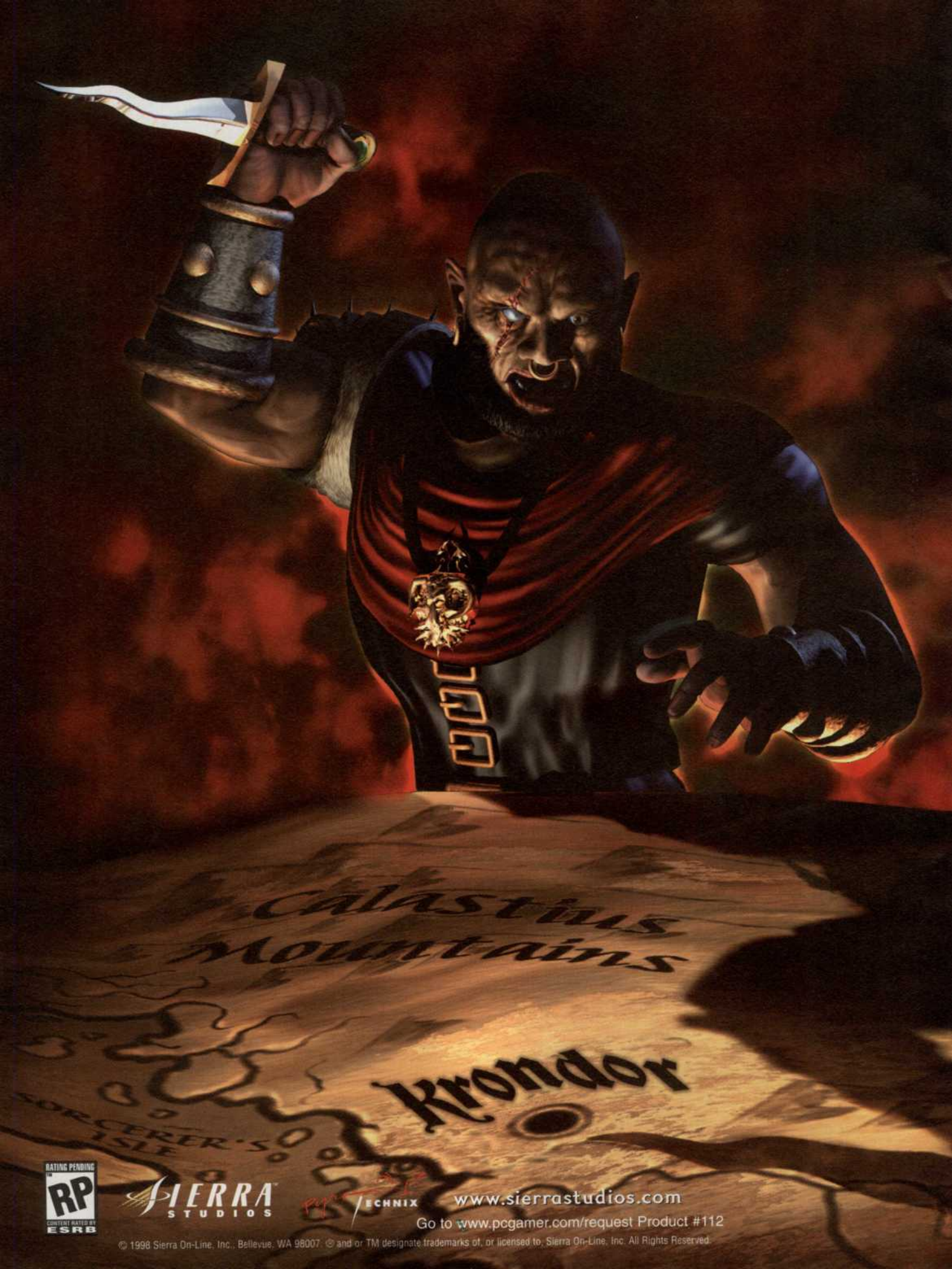

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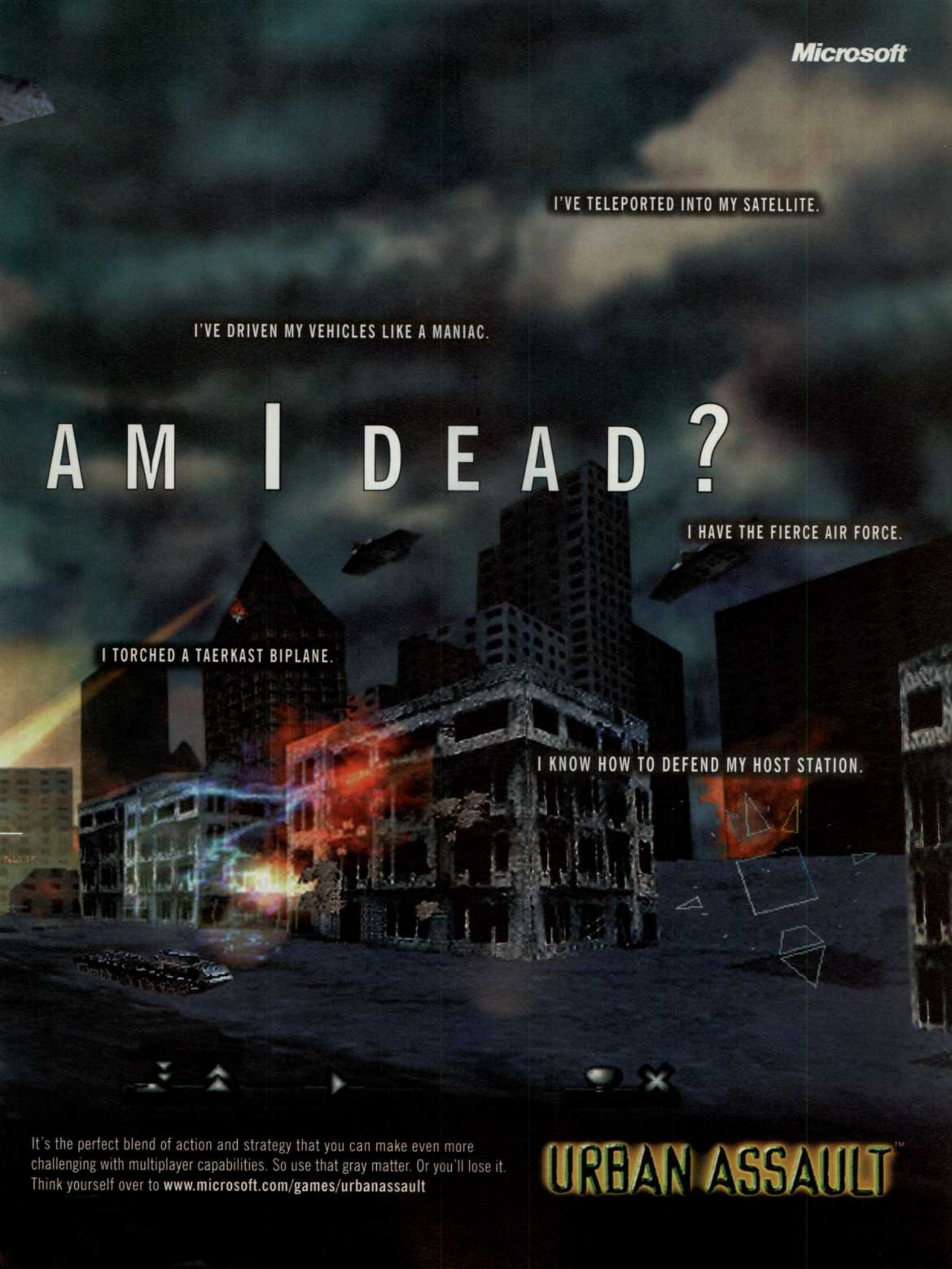
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Ares Rising

Category: Action

Developer: Imagine Studios

Publisher: Imagine Studios, (877) 272-7747
www.imaginestudios.com

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 120; 16MB RAM; Super VGA	Eight-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; Supported sound card

Multi-player: None

Fussy controls and bland graphics keep this witty mercenary space simulation from reaching the stars.

The release of Interplay's excellent sci-fi shoot-em-up *Descent: Freespace* proved that Origin and LucasArts aren't the only ones who know how to spin a good science fiction yarn. Without the benefit of the prized Star Wars license or the FMV glitz of the Wing Commander series, *Freespace* managed to succeed due to creative missions, jaw-dropping graphics, and good controls. Now another publisher has charged into the ring in the hopes of adding its own wrinkle to the growing genre, mixing a *Privateer*-style mercenary tale with a more believable spaceflight mode. Yet, in spite of all the hard work that went into it, the potential of *Ares Rising* is overshadowed by fussy controls, less than stellar graphics, and a been-there-done-that plot.

In *Ares Rising*, you are John Marlowe, a hot-shot mercenary pilot who teams up with a shady corporation-state called IPEC. The company is beneficial in setting you up with various missions, from routine scouting to bounty hunting — though IPEC's ulterior motives may turn out to be a bit more pernicious. After a few minutes of poking around *Ares Rising*'s interface, the game seems promising enough, with interesting warring factions and a deep storyline. Unfortunately, it all begins to unravel as you step into the cockpit and start playing.

This is the view from inside the cockpit. Note the 3D radar system in the lower left hand corner — it's a pretty nifty feature of the game.

The spaceflight physics are a sharp departure from the standard *X-Wing* or *Wing Commander* flight model, using an inertial system that mimics the real-life Newtonian physics you'd find beyond the pull of earth's gravity. As your ship accelerates along a given path, it will continue to move along that path until enough force is applied to overcome the momentum. In the frictionless vacuum of space, this becomes a tad more difficult to control than the traditional fighter-plane style of control found in other games. Most of the time, it's a lot like driving a car on a frozen lake. This flight model makes for difficult turns and maneuvering — imagine the drifty control of Electronic Arts' arcadish *Darklight Conflict* applied to a game like *Privateer*, and you'll get the idea. Although you can switch to an arcade flight model in the options menu, you'll be hard-pressed to find any difference between the two.

It's possible to stick with the controls and get the hang of it, but the unimpressive graphics might make it hard to push on through. Even though the whole kit and caboodle is given the Direct3D treatment, this game is barely a step above the original *Privateer* and its rendered sprites. The textures are painfully bare in detail, and the particle effects are unconvincing splotches of pixels, while the ships have an ultra-low polygon count. Ironically, the game looks a bit sharper *without* hardware acceleration.

A Lynx-class fighter puts the smack-down on an enemy. The beam weapons in this game aren't your typical projectiles — just get your foe in your sights, and let 'em have it. It's not real complicated.

While the graphics are serviceable and run smoothly, my biggest complaint is that there's no real *atmosphere*, with nondescript spaceships, bright-and-shiny rendered space stations, and pointless cutscenes with rubbery-faced characters.

That's not to say that *Ares Rising* is utterly devoid of interesting features. You can salvage items after each mission and the radar system is truly exceptional — you can keep track of other ships via their emissions, and shutting off your own engines results in virtual invisibility. You can hire wingmen to accompany you in later missions, and you have complete control over who flies when and where. You can even fire them, should their performance weaken.

And in terms of story, there sure is a *lot* of it — an extensive E-mail system updates after every mission. The player is almost overloaded with messages from fellow wingmen and government higher-ups, and is even spammed with humorous advertisements. Actually, the best feature of *Ares Rising* is how you can repair your ship with the universal fix-all: duct tape!

Still, not even duct tape can't repair *Ares Rising*'s biggest flaws — the maligned control scheme and poor visuals. If you've beaten *Wing Commander Prophecy* and *Descent: Freespace*, and are desperately searching for a worthy spaceflight game to tide you over... keep searching.

—Colin Williamson

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

59%

HIGHS: The E-mail system; interesting story line; cool radar.

LOWS: The control system is irksome. Graphics are behind the times. Nondescript atmosphere.

BOTTOM LINE: There's a lot of gameplay content, but the bad simply outweighs the good.

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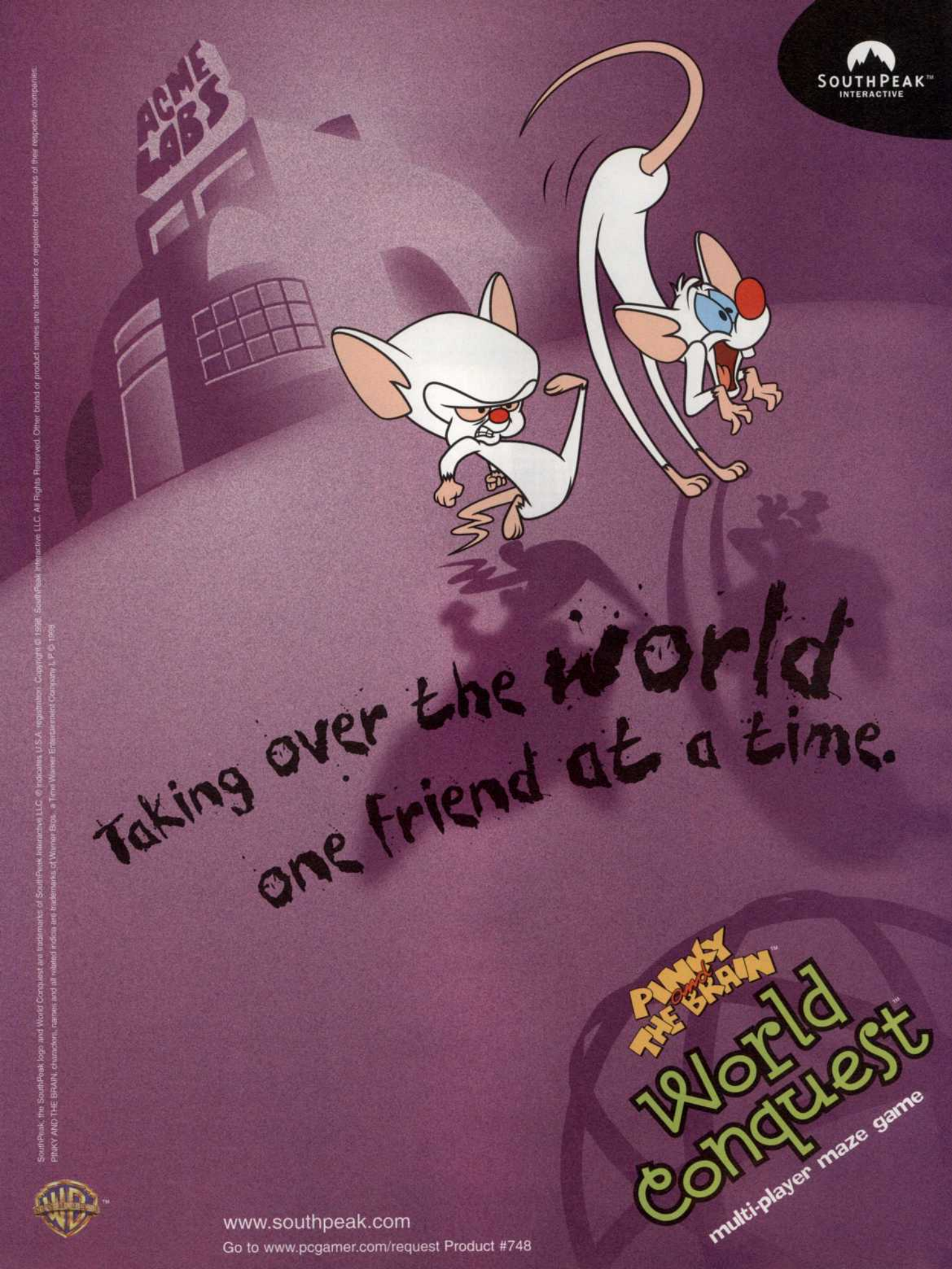
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Stratosphere

Category: Strategy

Developer: Kodiak Interactive

Publisher: Ripcord Games, (425) 889-7099
www.ripcordgames.com

Required	We Recommend
Win95; 4x CD drive; P133; 32MB RAM; Windows-compatible sound card and mouse; DirectX 5-compliant video card	PII 266 or higher; 64MB RAM or higher; 3Dfx Voodoo- or Voodoo II-based graphics accelerator

Multi-player: None

You take control of giant floating fortresses in this unique real-time strategy offering. Too bad it's so annoying.

Bungie's *Myth: The Fallen Lords* and Activision's *Battlezone* have proven that real-time strategy games don't have to look and play like *Command & Conquer* or *StarCraft* in order to win praise. And though it's not without its flaws, *Stratosphere: Conquest of the Skies* is another innovative RTS game that takes a very unusual approach to the genre and is, for the most part, a success.

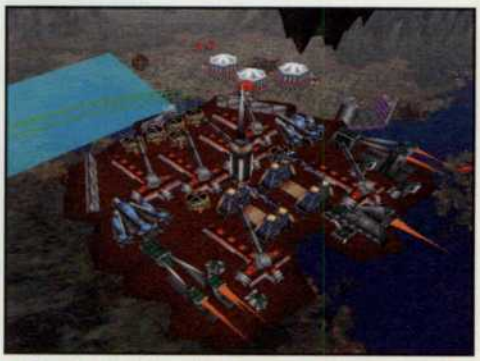
In *Stratosphere*, gamers custom-build a floating fortress and pilot the craft over a 3D Tolkein/H.G. Wells-esque planet known as New Earth. But don't expect a peaceful frolic over these snow-capped mountains and futuristic cityscapes — the goal in this game is to save your kingdom by destroying an onslaught of enemy flying fortresses. Plus, there's the occasional reconnaissance, escort, and ground target assignment to be carried out. Although it sounds like a flight sim, the focus lies in figuring out what fortress construction is needed prior to and during missions as well as the tactics of battle, which vary wildly with each given situation. For instance, in some scenarios it may be best to cripple the enemy with long range artillery, while in other situations you'll engage in short range combat with enemies all around.

In order to power your fortresses and support a varied selection of offensive and defensive units, a mineral known as "floatstone" must be gathered from mountainsides or acquired from crumbling enemy fortresses during battle. To shore up defensive or offensive capabilities, new units can be built on the fortress itself. These new units will require up to three kinds of floatstone — rock, ore, and crystal — each with different values and functions. Sure, you can accept a pre-configured fortress, but don't expect to stay alive past the fourth or fifth mission. Exactly how you build up the size and prowess of your fortress is entirely up to you, assuming you've got the floatstone, military rank, and technology to allow it. In total, there are more than 60 specialized units to manage, categorized into six types: command towers, attack weaponry, defensive structures, energy supplies, maneuvering jets, and a group of miscellaneous add-ons known as TechnoMage units. Balancing these units can be a challenging task in itself. For example, powerful cannons and mines may be employed if there's enough energy and space on your fortress to support them, but without extra thrust and rudder jets, it may be difficult to maneuver your large craft due to the weight and strong winds. Then there's energy management to consider, as the correct amount of power must be circulated to the new units for them to work properly. Decisions, decisions....

Repairing units is another integral part of the gameplay, especially after taking a solid beating in the heavens — and of course, floatstone is required to fix units as well.

At any time during the game, players can access a "Unit Library"; a handy database with a full description, 3D picture, and statistical breakdown for each of the units. This on-the-fly archive is more than just eye-candy and is actually quite useful since the number of choices can be overwhelming.

Stratosphere employs a third-person view of the playing field, with adjustable camera angles and zoom levels, with the default setting behind and slightly above the player's fortress. During battle, an automatic lock position can be set with an effective overhead view of the action. The rest of the screen serves as both a heads-up display and control center for all the resource management in the game.



See the city down below? Taking out ground targets is key if you want to get ahead in *Stratosphere*.

There are six categories of units to choose from, but as with most RTS games, the right resources are needed and technology must be researched for more advanced weaponry and defensive structures.

http://pcgamer.ign.com

A good number of thrust jets are needed to lug this floating juggernaut that you've created.

Three fortresses duke it out over green valleys and towering mountains. Only the strong will survive.

For veteran players, the HUD and control center can be taken away, leaving just the compass and radar to work with.

We're cruisin' to the next way point over the lava world. Check out the spikes on this puppy....

Similar to the familiar interface of *Red Alert*, available units are listed along the right side of the screen, while the bottom of the display contains the radar map, message center (chatter from friendlies), waypoints, compass, and navigation tools. Although it may take some getting used to, the user interface is intuitive since everything you'll need to use is only a mouse-click away.

Most Direct3D-compliant accelerator chipsets are supported, but the graphics are still a mixed bag at best. The terrain from 6,000 feet above the ground looks surprisingly realistic for a fictional world, with cities, rivers, and roads dotting the landscape, but the fortresses and explosions during battle are lame in comparison.

Stratosphere offers a number of gameplay preferences to suit all types. For those looking for a long, gradual single-player progression, the game ships with a 24-mission "career" mode, linked by an evolving story with dialogue and impressive cut-scenes. Casual gamers with less time on their hands may prefer to indulge in one of the ten unrelated skirmish missions, set across seven distinct environments. Alternatively, there are ten multi-player missions, including straight Death-Match, Escort, and Ground Strike missions, with the last two played cooperatively. As with many real-time strategy games, the CD is only needed for the host computer, so you can install a fully functional spawned version on a friend's PC for use with multi-player games only. Additionally, players can enter the Fortress Builder to create, save, and trade their own aerial inventions. The folks at Kodiak Interactive knew there was a lot to learn in *Stratosphere*, so, thankfully, they've included a comprehensive and well-organized tutorial, covering most of the gameplay basics.

As clever as the *Stratosphere* concept is, the execution falls short in a few key areas. Gamers without a fast processor and a boatload of RAM will undoubtedly experience slow and choppy gameplay. Even with a P233 MMX and 64MB of RAM (considerably faster than the game's minimum system requirements),

Stratosphere's interface is well-conceived, providing quick access to available units, floatstone, and fortress navigation.

the frame rates while flying the fortress proved sluggish, especially when three or more fortresses were battling at the same time. The single-player game ran quite smoothly on a 300Mhz Pentium II with a 12MB Voodoo card and 96MB of RAM, but once I set up a TCP/IP multi-player game with two friends, the frame rates dropped backed down again and even crashed a few times during setup and gameplay. There are a few other bugs, some of which have been fixed by the patch available at *www.stratospherepc.com*. This patch also repairs a critical bug in the 23rd mission in the career/campaign mode that prohibits the gamer from finishing objectives needed to complete the level. Be forewarned before playing the game — saved games from the 23rd mission won't load after the patch is installed.

Game speed and bugs aside, the combat itself is somewhat anti-climactic. Players simply left-click over the enemy craft to attack. It would've been more fun to select individual units on your fortress and assign exactly how and where to attack the targets, instead of just having the entire fortress deliver uniform blows. The real-time element is fun since you must consider the tactical position of your fortress during these ongoing melee exchanges, but I'd prefer more direct interaction with the cool units during battles.

Despite these assorted flaws and steep system requirements, *Stratosphere* is a deep and infectious ride for gamers looking for something fresh. It may not be revolutionary, but it certainly is a step in the right direction. Kodiak and Ripcord deserve a pat on the back for taking a chance in releasing an unconventional and entertaining action/strategy game in an over-saturated and dominantly unoriginal genre.

—Marc Saltzman

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

77%

HIGHS: Great concept; neat fortress-building feature; broad unit library; high replay value.

LOWS: Steep system requirements; buggy; unrefined multi-player support; weak combat.

BOTTOM LINE: A challenging, unique real-time strategy with some annoying imperfections.

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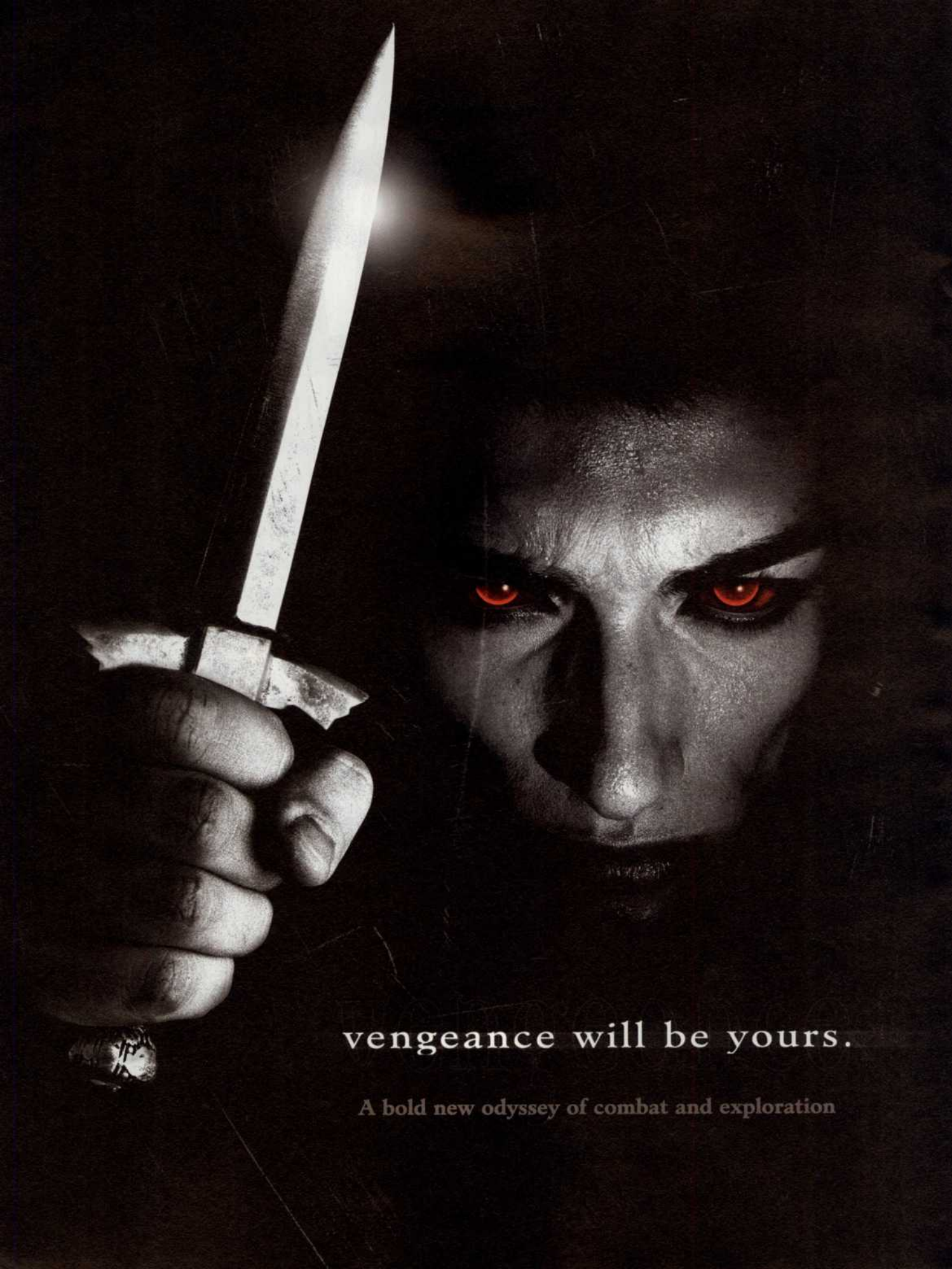
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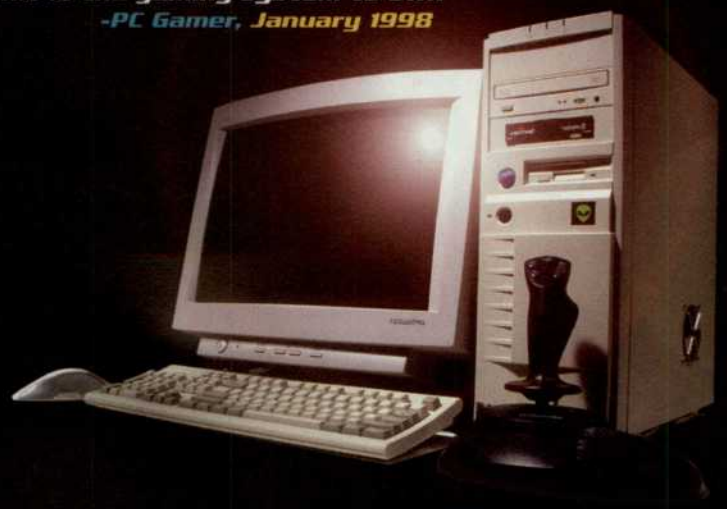

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Industry Giant

Category: Strategy

Developer: JoWood Production

Publisher: Interactive Magic, (800) 789-1534
www.imagicgames.com

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; 16MB RAM; Mouse	Supported sound card; Super VGA graphics capable of 800x600 or 1024x768

Multi-player: None

Empire building takes a back seat to transportation concerns in this somewhat confused economic simulation.

Take a pinch of *Capitalism* and a touch of *Transport Tycoon*, and you have a pretty good idea of what Interactive Magic was shooting for with *Industry Giant*. This is an economic strategy game that allows you to set the bottom line, purchase resources, and improve the community with the goal of beating your competitors. It's not an entirely original concept, yet for all the potential still left in this type of game, *Industry Giant* seems to rely on a handful of ideas that have been done before and done better.

Set among isometric cityscapes and sparse suburbs filled with product-hungry citizens, *Industry Giant* begins by asking you to choose the type and location of retail store to set up (toys, furniture, and sporting goods are a few examples), build the appropriate production facility, and set up transportation lines to nearby resources, such as a lumber or steel mill. Advertising and profit margins are also key ingredients. The menus and interface are fairly well designed and concise, and after plunking down a few buildings and fiddling with settings, you're almost on the road to riches — but first you have to build that road.

Once you've got goods established and your profit margins are set, you'll have to ensure that your products and supplies can reach their destinations quickly and efficiently. From here, transportation becomes the lifeblood of your economy. In this regard, *Industry Giant* seems to draw heavily on MicroProse's *Transport Tycoon* for inspiration. The similarities are so striking that when I first loaded *Industry Giant*, I had to pull out an old January 1995 issue of *PC Gamer* to check if *Industry Giant* is from the same developer (it's not). With its similar view and features, like bulldozing over rough terrain and laying down tracks to haul goods, this could easily have been called *Transport Tycoon '98*.

If your plans are effective, you'll see profits, and your city will become more prosperous. However, the biggest problem with the transportation model is that only you can use the network you build — you can't charge others to use the lines you've established. And since the economic side of supply and demand is fairly limited (you can't even own your resources as part of your economic strategy), the transportation aspect has the feeling of busywork.

Still, there is some fun to be had even with these limitations. The artificial intelligence competitors are efficient enough that you'll have your work cut out for you in some scenarios, and *Industry Giant* does offer a surprising number of styles in which to play. Single missions provide short, goal-oriented games, and scenarios provide ready-made maps you can jump right into. Random maps allow you to decide details such as the number of cities, land-to-water ratio, etc., or you can start a career, which is basically a series of linked missions. If these aren't enough, there's also an editor so you can design your own maps. The game can simulate up to 100 years (similar to Sid Meier's original *Railroad Tycoon*). You can start as early as 1960, and as time goes by, newer equipment and technology becomes available, allowing new goods to be produced. The city around you will also evolve of its own accord, eventually growing into a bustling modern metropolis, yet your effect on the environment is indirect. Aside from the ability to plunk down a few structures like amusement parks and cultural centers to keep the city folk happy, you have little control over a city's growth.

The 3D isometric view is similar to *SimCity 2000* and *Transport Tycoon*, two games that obviously were heavy influences on *Industry Giant*.

If you're hoping to tailor your cities to meet your own needs, you're out of luck. But you can add a football stadium or two.

Always keep an eye out for when larger and faster means of transporting goods come along; it's the lifeblood of your economy.

This lack of control over your overall destiny underscores *Industry Giant*'s simplistic approach to a genre we've come to know and love — other than making a few purchasing decisions at key points through the game, you spend most of your time making sure the transport vehicles keep things moving, and that's about it. Though it is firmly rooted in the *Capitalism/Transport Tycoon* style of gaming, *Industry Giant* just doesn't do enough with the good elements from either to be truly satisfying.

—Joseph Novicki

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

58%

HIGHS: It's fun watching this world of yours grow as you nurture it.

LOWS: Not very original. Keeping tabs on your transportation networks becomes a chore.

BOTTOM LINE: It's an interesting idea, but it ends up too basic and sterile to remain compelling.

Emergency

Category:	Strategy
Developer:	TopWare Entertainment
Publisher:	WizardWorks, (800) 229-2714 *www.wizworks.com*

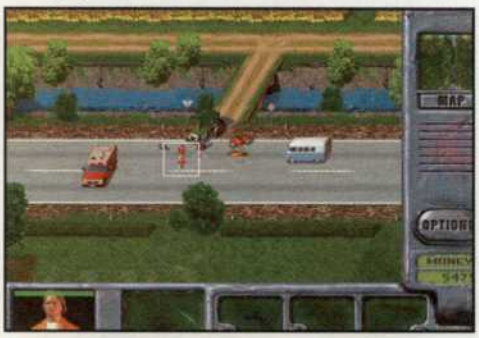
Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 120; 16MB RAM; Super VGA	Eight-speed CD-ROM; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; Supported sound card

Multi-player: None

While there's plenty of blood and carnage to go around, the life signs are very faint in this real-time strategy search-and-rescue game.

If nothing else, you've got to give WizardWorks a hand for using a little creativity. Instead of producing a cookie-cutter real-time strategy game filled with evil aliens or power-mad dictators, the company famous for producing cheap, unofficial add-on packs for existing games (and also for *Deer Hunter*, ugh) has come up with a fire-fighting, search-and-rescue game where the goal is to save lives and keep the body count down. Yep, *Emergency: Fighters for Life* is a game where tanks and infantrymen get the boot in favor of burly firemen and brainy doctors — too bad this novel approach is marred by poor artificial intelligence pathfinding, clunky interface problems, and maddening procedure-based gameplay.

Here's the skinny: You're in charge of a slew of EMS workers, and have full access to a series of fire trucks, ambulances, helicopters, and other rescue vehicles. Each mission begins with a full-motion video sequence setting up some horrific accident, be it a routine fire, an automobile pile-up, or a crashed 747. From here, you have to equip and dispatch a series of vehicles to save the survivors, shoo away oncoming traffic, and clean up the mess.



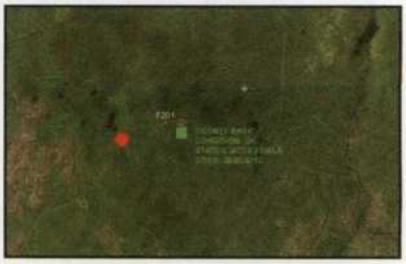
Get that man on to the stretcher — and hope the ambulance driver stops doing donuts in the middle of the road. Programmers: this is a bad place to use the "Dukes of Hazzard" artificial intelligence algorithm.

After receiving the FMV overview of each incident, you get a text description of the accident scene and head to the firehouse to assemble a response team from a selection of doctors and firefighters to deploy in vehicles such as ambulances and fire trucks. Once the teams putt across the map to the disaster site, you make your way to the scrolling accident screen, and here's where the trouble begins. Sometimes the fire engines and doctors' vans will park by the side of the road in a typical fashion — or sometimes they'll start driving off-road and doing donuts (the result of really bad pathfinding code). Worst of all, when you're trying to reorganize your vehicles on the road so others can get through, they frequently get confused and drive in circles, forcing innocent bystanders to run out of the way. It's absurd to watch, and it only gets a lot worse. Moving multiple characters through buildings is painfully cumbersome as units block each others' paths, get choked in tight hallways, and can't seem to find their way through the proper doorways. More frustrating are the firefighters that seem to forget to use their fire extinguishers.

Select your vehicles, stock 'em up with volunteer firefighters, and go kick some a... I mean, save some people. Yeah.

In other words, you'll have to micro-manage every unit, or you'll have utter chaos on your hands. Fortunately, the time limits on most missions aren't that demanding, giving you plenty of time to cope with your dimwitted and understaffed fire brigades and police departments.

While the time limits are forgiving, the procedures (read — puzzles) that must be used for each accident are not. Be sure to use the in-game save sequence frequently, since an improper response can result in instant death for the people you're trying to rescue. You'll learn this important lesson in the very first mission involving a simple motorcycle accident with a wounded driver. If you have a medic attempt to treat the injured driver, the spilled gas surrounding the scene will instantly ignite, immolating you and everyone else within fifty feet. Whoops! Instead, you'll have to coat the victim with foam, *then* administer medical attention.



Here's the county overhead map. While your troops rush to the rescue, there's not much to do but sit back and twiddle your thumbs.

Even if you're mentally stable enough to withstand the horror of watching innocents go up in flames or die as a result of your team's gross incompetence (it's not that bad once you become desensitized to it, really), the clunky interface, annoying artificial intelligence, and vague mission parameters are more than enough to make you throw in the towel and leave the game's virtual victims to fend for themselves.

—Colin Williamson

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

45%

HIGHS: Lots of opportunities for life-saving goodness in a variety of missions.

LOWS: Confusing gameplay, idiotic artificial intelligence.

BOTTOM LINE: Even though the concept is solid, *Emergency* is another half-baked RTS game.

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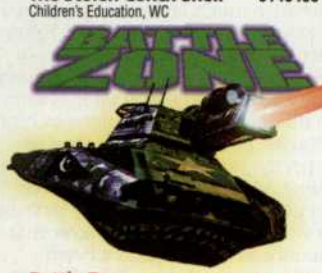

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Golden Tee Golf

Category:	Sports
Developer:	Incredible Technologies
Publisher:	Interplay, (800) 969-GAME *www.interplay.com*

Required	We Recommend
Windows 95; Double-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 90; 16MB RAM; 90MB hard-drive space	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM

Multi-player: 4-player hot seat; Serial/Null Modem; Modem: 14.4; IPX; TCP/IP: 28.8; Maximum Players: 4

Avoid the crowds at the local pub and enjoy this immensely popular arcade title from the comfort of your own home.

As a teetotaller in my early thirties, I tend to steer clear of bars and arcades, so I didn't have a clue that the coin-operated version of *Peter Jacobsen's Golden Tee Golf* has been a favorite pastime in bars across America for quite some time now. Yet, when the alcohol-soaked poltroons on the *PC Gamer* staff informed me that this was indeed the case, I began to have my doubts about the quality of this new home version — after all, how hard can a golf game be if even drunkards can play it?

The truth, to my surprise, is that *Golden Tee Golf* is actually a great deal of fun and not a bad simulation of the sport for novices and experience golfers alike. Though it stays true to the arcade original with its simplified rendition of computerized golf, the PC version adds an extra pinch of depth and variety for long-term play. The key to its success is its simple approach. Forget the old three-click method, or the fancy mouse swings of today's high-end simulations — *Golden Tee*'s trump card is its simple swing method that allows even the most inept golfer to play quality strokes right from the start. Called "Trackswing," this mouse-powered method is easy enough for novices to quickly get the hang of, while offering the more seasoned player enough subtlety to pull off some spectacular shots. Using an exaggerated motion, anything from a slight fade to a monster hook is easily accomplished. For example, to execute a huge slice, you start the swing with your mouse in the upper right hand corner of your pad, pull it down to the bottom center, and then push it back up to the left top corner. Though the arcade version uses a big free-spinning trackball, the mouse proves to be a more than acceptable alternative in the home version and even offers a bit more control. By right-clicking before the swing, you can put backspin on the ball when it lands on the green. Like the rest of the physics in the game, this effect is well implemented (more backspin occurs from a shot using a short iron as opposed to a long wood), and adds a lot of strategy to your game plan.

Up close, the trees tend to get pixelated, but that buffalo sure looks good!

Instead of using the traditional grid, the box on the bottom left will fill you in regarding the slope of the green.

Five difficulty settings have a major impact on gameplay. If you want to emulate the way the game plays at your local watering hole (perhaps for those with a "soused mouse"), try using the easiest setting. The wind will be calm, the slope of the greens forgiving, and almost every putt will drop if aimed anywhere near the hole, regardless of how hard you whack it. At the highest setting, however, the game becomes unforgiving with noticeable environment effect and tricky course layouts. Gale force winds, undulating greens, and a cup that will reject putts that are even the slightest amount off in speed or accuracy provide a healthy challenge. Another nice touch is that the pin placements randomly change, keeping things fresh from round to round.

The three included courses are very colorful, and depending on your system, can be bumped up to resolutions as high as 1024x768. From a distance, they're rather pretty, but get up close and personal with a bit of shrubbery or a tree, and it's pixel city, baby. You also have no choice when it comes to the player that represents you on screen; it's Peter Jacobsen or the highway. Pete, though, is an accommodating chap and something of a quick-change artist, donning different colored shirts in multi-player games. While he looks somewhat pasted onto the screen, his swing animation is nice. After hitting a particularly good or bad shot though, he goes through a small animation sequence that's a few frames shy of convincing.

On the downside, there is no computer competition (you'll have to settle for "shadow games" that you can create or download from the Internet), and game modes are limited to stroke or skins play. While they are nicely varied in style, the three courses become old very quickly. Fortunately, Internet play via Golden Tee Net is well implemented, and with a few clicks of the mouse, you'll be engaged in some head-to-head competition with fellow hackers. Most importantly, it's easy to pick up and a lot of fun to play. In the end, *Golden Tee Golf* is as comfortable and easy to get into as the coin-op version, and adds enough variety and challenge to the mix to keep dedicated duffers happy.

—Rob Smolka

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

83%

HIGHS: Simple but effective swing method; good physics model; quality 'net play.

LOWS: No replay or computer opponents; only three courses and two play modes.

BOTTOM LINE: Golf fans and gamers of all types will have a good time with this one.

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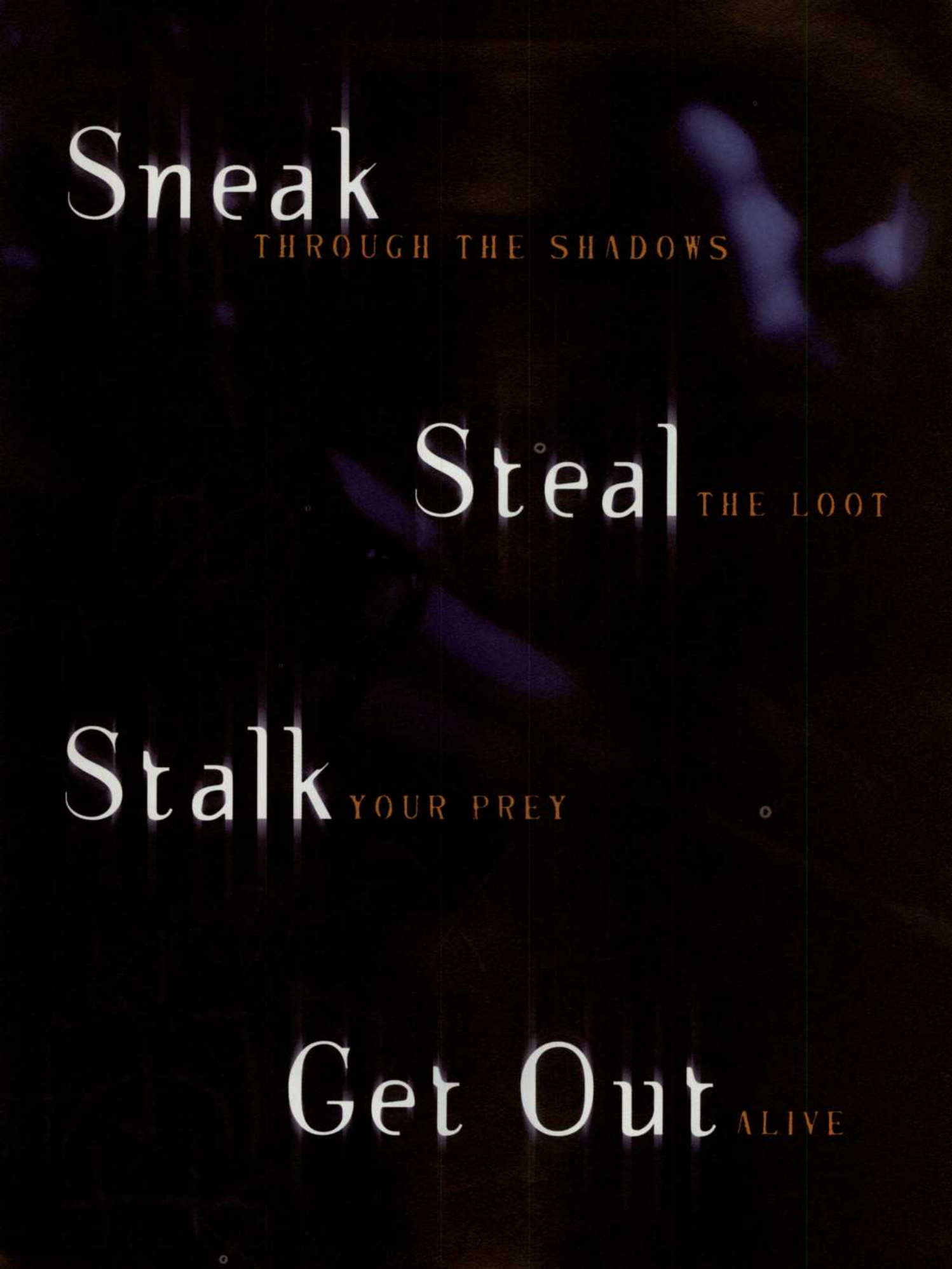
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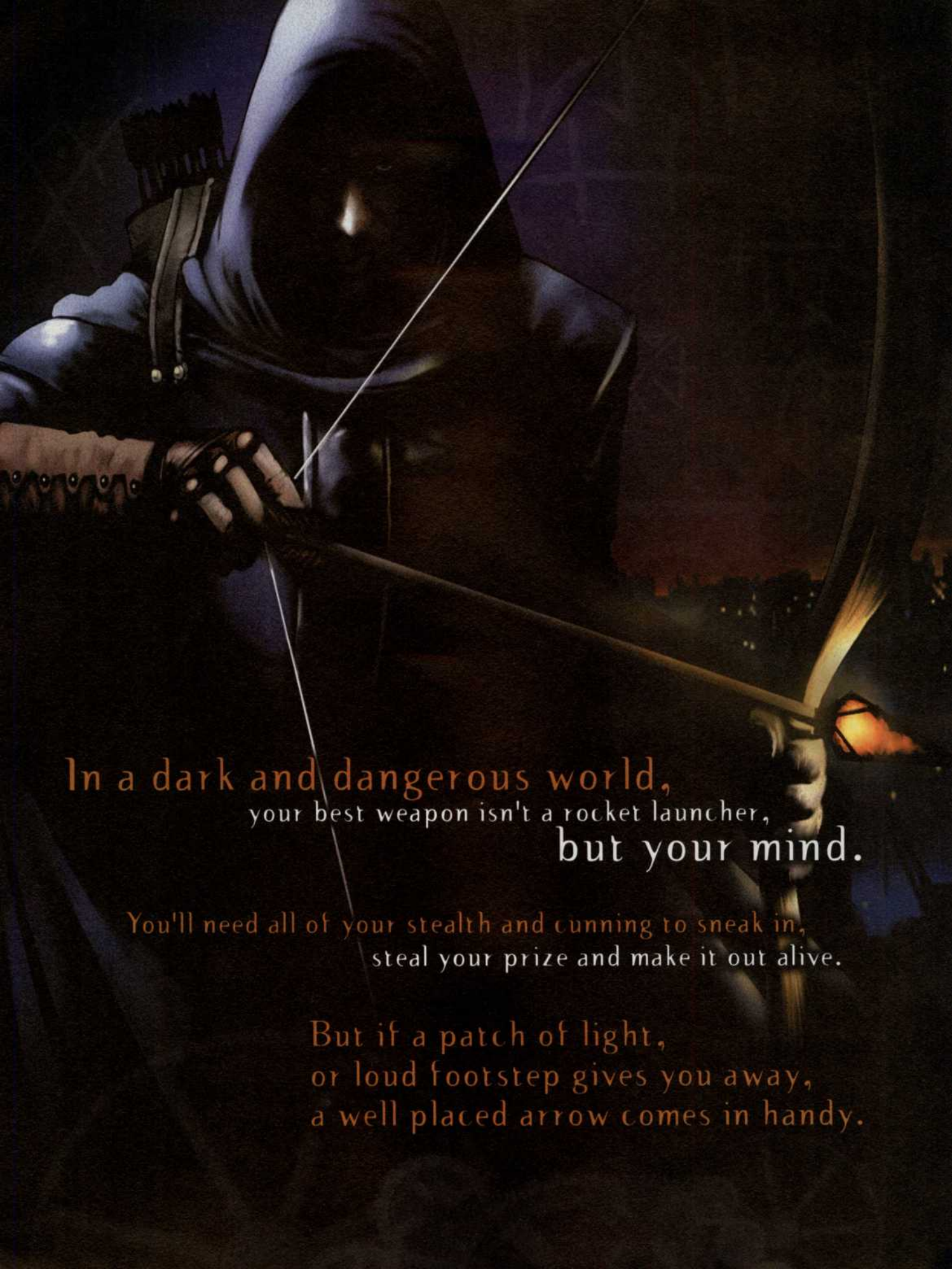
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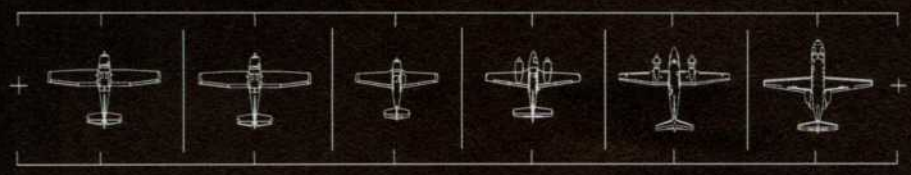

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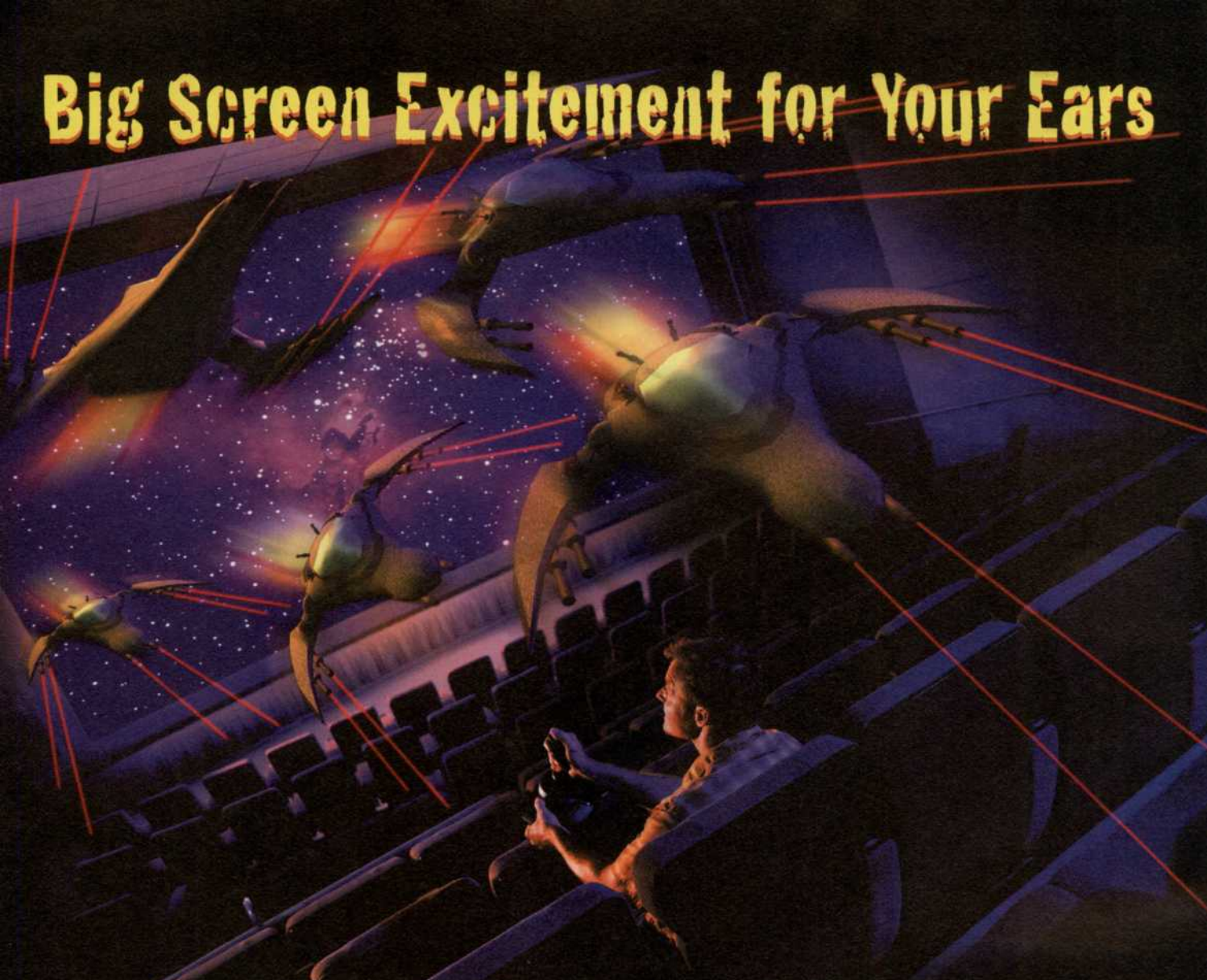

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The Hard Stuff

As much as our resident tech boy, Greg, loves a good joke, he seems to think a grave injustice has been fiendishly perpetrated against him, and he's insisted on using this space to right the wrong that has been done him. The *PC Gamer* Playlist, which appears monthly in our Eyewitness section (near front of the magazine, in the high-rent district), has credited Greg with playing some very interesting games while the rest of us were working. And as much as Greg appreciates *Barbie Fashion Designer*, he now claims it's not the game he spent the most time playing back in July, when the September issue was put together. Greg actually spent most of his time with the latest gem from Kilmersoft: *Val Kilmer Bridge*. And in August, Greg's favorite game was not, in fact, *Hide the Sausage*. While this may indeed be the game of choice for many red-blooded Americans, Greg says he was busy playing what everyone else was playing at the time: *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*.

So what the poop does this have to do with hardware? Precious little, but many of you may remember back in our August issue, we were talking about how we were all playing *Unreal*, and that it was one heck of a resource hog. Anyone with less than a Pentium Pro and 64MB of RAM was having serious difficulties playing the game at acceptable frame rates. At the time, we were worried that this might indicate a new trend. "Once the technology genie's out of the bottle, there's no putting it back," we thought, or words to that effect. Fortunately, *Rainbow Six* went a long way toward dispelling our concerns. Even on Greg's 200MHz Pentium MMX or Gary's lowly P166MHz plain-vanilla Pentium, the game runs quite well. While it's true that the graphics in *Rainbow* aren't quite as elaborate as *Unreal*'s, it's refreshing to see a new action game that actually runs well on sub-PII class system. Let's hope we see more — at least until our bosses pony up the cash to put Pentium II systems on everybody's desk. Oh yeah, that's really going to happen. Nope, we're destined to play the newest games on slow-ass wuss machines. Don't cry for us though, we have other things to occupy our time. And even if we have to play games on our home systems instead of our work ones, we'll survive. In the mean time, relax, turn the page, and get ready for a serious dose of The Hard Stuff.

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How We Rate The Hard Stuff

You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world testing, but when a number is in order for comparisons, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our hardware-frenzied sister publication, *boot* (now called *Maximum PC*). Between our testing and the bootMarks, we'll give you the lowdown on which devices perform and which ones fizzle.

PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Every month, we honor the best peripherals, utilities, and hardware we test with our Editors' Choice award. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on hardware at a local computer store, you can be sure it's among the best.

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Looking for a

■ Buying a new computer can be a nerve-wracking experience. Relax, The Hard Stuff is here to help.

Well kids, it's getting near the holidays. And you know what that means... lots of socks and underwear wrapped in pretty paper. Don't despair, though; if you've been a good little boy or girl, you may be treated to a brand-new computer — no, not from us, but perhaps from a loved one, or perhaps as a gift to yourself.

But what sort of computer should you get? How much money should you spend? And, most importantly, where should you send the bill? That last question is up to you, but this month we're going to try and answer the first two.

You may have noticed the ever-changing "The Game Machine" box we always thrown in near the back of The Hard Stuff. Some of you have even sent E-mail asking about the breakneck pace at which we have been beefing up the system specs in that box. Or maybe you've worried that the game companies expect you to upgrade too frequently, when you just want a system that'll be viable for more than two years.

Unfortunately, guaranteeing a long life-span for a new PC has always been difficult. As long ago as 1965, a man named Gordon Moore made the observation that there was a "doubling of transistor density on a manufactured die every year." This principal became known as "Moore's Law," and it's used throughout the computer industry to explain why, in a very literal way, CPU performance doubles nearly every year. With this in mind, you can see how difficult it is to guarantee that your PC won't be obsolete in a couple of years — especially if it's used as a gaming machine.

What we *can* tell you is that, for gaming purposes, an Intel Pentium II 450MHz CPU (the fastest currently on the market) should last at least two years as a gaming machine. After that, the newest games will likely begin requiring faster hardware than that "dated" technology. A horrible thought, to be sure, but history shows it's true; the 200MHz Pentium MMX that was hot stuff two years ago is barely fast enough to run some of today's most demanding games.

Given this information, a lot of people still ask "should I wait for a faster processor to come out before I upgrade?" Probably not, unless for some bizarre reason you have your heart set on a specific clock speed that hasn't been released yet (500MHz, for example). Regardless of the CPU you purchase, Moore's Law will still apply, so if you've been thinking about upgrading, this holiday season is just as good as any. So let's get down to brass tacks.

The first choice you are going to have to make is what type of system you want. We've broken this down into three categories: Standard Retail Machines, Brand Name Mail-Order Machines, and Custom Machines built for you from scratch. Each one has its advantages and its disadvantages.

Check out the sidebars to understand the differences between each of the three basic routes to new-computer heaven, and once you have, you'll probably be wondering what type of hardware your system should have in it.

The most important choice you can make is the type and speed of CPU you want. It used to be that Intel was the only dog on the block, but lately, AMD has come on strong with the K6-2 chip and its 3DNOW! instructions. Clocking in as fast as 350MHz these days, a K6-2 can compete with all but the fastest Pentium IIs Intel has to offer — but only when running games specifically programmed to support 3DNOW! Many game developers have promised 3DNOW! support in many of their upcoming games, and there are already several optimized titles currently on the market. With the release of DirectX 6.0, with its built-in support for 3DNOW!, the future looks bright for the K6-2, and if you decide to go with the it, you'll likely save a few hundred dollars off of the prices we have listed for each type of system. Keep in mind, however, that the PII is still a faster, more proven CPU overall, and will likely remain the processor of choice for most gamers — at least until more games ship with 3DNOW! support.

Regardless of the CPU you choose, make sure you buy as much power as you can afford. Too often, people look to save money when buying a gaming rig, even when they can afford more. If you do this, you'll likely end up having to upgrade sooner, and you'll just end up spending even more money down the road.

The second most important part of your new computer will be

BRAND-NAME MAIL-ORDER SYSTEM

(Moderately priced option for high-end systems: Expect to spend as much $3,000 without monitor)

This category includes computers that carry a brand name (like Micron, Dell, or Gateway 2000), but that are configured for you and shipped directly to your home. The advantage of a system like this is that you get all of the warranties and software you'd ordinarily get with a retail machine, but at a lower price (on average) — and with many, if not all, of the parts you want. While you don't have a choice over everything in your system, these companies generally offer a much wider selection of components to choose from than the retail systems can.

Another advantage is that these systems tend to be considerably less proprietary in their construction their store-bought counterparts. In most cases, you shouldn't have any problems upgrading even your motherboard down the road.

The only drawbacks to these systems is that you can still end up spending more many than you absolutely need to (see the Custom System entry at right), and you may not be able to get the kind of prompt warranty service you'd get with a retail system (which you can generally just take back to the store that sold it to you).

These systems are a good choice for gamers and business people alike. You could do a lot worse than buying one of these.

new PC?

the graphics accelerator. Based on what we've seen as we go to press, the best choice for the speed-hungry hard-core gamer is the combination of a Matrox Mystique G200 AGP card with at least one — but preferably two — Voodoo boards. This setup will give you the fastest 2D Windows performance currently available as well as the fastest 3D money can buy. If you're nearing the limit of your budget, though, it's much better to spend the money on a faster processor than a second Voodoo2.

As for the rest of the components, we've provided a list of minimums you'll want if you're serious about buying a new, high-end system that'll still be able to handle any game you throw at it for the next couple of years:

CPU: Pentium II 350-450MHz/AMD K6-2 350MHz.
MEMORY: 64MB of PC100 SDRAM.
STORAGE: 6.4GB Ultra IDE hard drive.
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: 24-40x IDE (we generally still recommend a fast CD-ROM drive rather than DVD, but if you absolutely must watch movies on your PC, go with a second-generation DVD-ROM drive).
SOUND CARD: PCI card with A3D or EAX compatibility.
MODEM: 56K v.90 (make sure your Internet provider supports it).
FLOPPY DRIVE: 1.44MB standard floppy drive.

With all of this information, you should be able to set out on your computer-shopping trip with a lot more confidence in what to look for. Even so, make sure you've exhausted all of your options before making your final purchase. If you do, you'll be much less likely to have buyer's remorse down the road. Now get out there and spend some cash!

CUSTOM SYSTEM

(The least expensive option: Expect to spend as much as $2,800 without monitor)

This category encompasses computers built to your specifications (either by you or a local mom-and-pop dealer or web site). The advantage of this option is clear: you can mix and match whatever components you want. If you want to put in a Voodoo2 card but can't afford a modem, no problem; you'll buy a modem later, when you have the cash. If new technology comes along that makes you want to replace the motherboard, go nuts; there's nothing proprietary in your system because you used off-the-shelf parts.

The disadvantage is that you really need to know computers to keep this system running well. PC experts who make the mistake of building a system for a computer-novice friend know what we're talking about; they generally end up becoming a 24-hour tech support and repair service for their buddies, who don't know what to do and have no other recourse when something goes wrong. Unlike a retail or brand-name mail-order system, you generally get no restore discs or user guides. You get your computer and a copy of Windows 95/98. If you mess something up, you may be able to take the system back to the shop that built it for you — but when you're dealing with a smaller store, who's to say it'll be in business six months from now? Your warranty won't be worth much if there's a Starbucks where your PC dealer used to be. If you're not willing and able to deal with problems on your own, you'd best go for a retail or brand-name mail-order system.

Having said that, the custom route is probably the best of the three in terms of gaming bang for your buck. But if you're unsure of your troubleshooting skills, have your custom system built by a local dealer that's been around for a while, so you can be relatively certain they'll be there in the future should you need any help.

RETAIL SYSTEM

(The most expensive option for high-end systems: Expect to spend as much $3,500 without monitor)

This category includes the kind of machine you'd buy at your local electronics store, such as a Packard Bell, Compaq, IBM, or Hewlett Packard. The advantage of buying a system like this is that, for all intents and purposes, you don't need to know a whole lot about PCs to use them. They come with all sorts of online tutorials and manuals, as well as recovery CD-ROMs that let you quickly and easily restore all of the software and hardware configurations that originally came with your computer — in case you accidentally screw things up. In addition, they all come with industry-standard warranties and most dealers also have extended warranty programs that can be beneficial — assuming you can talk them down on price!

The disadvantage is that you're pretty much stuck with what you buy. These brand-name machines are notorious for using proprietary cases and/or motherboards, which means that when the time comes to do a big upgrade, you can just about forget it. You may be able to change out the sound card or modem, but moving up to a new kind of processor or motherboard will probably mean buying a whole new system. And even if upgrades are possible, you may be limited to those made by the company that manufactured your system, which generally means paying a high price.

Another disadvantage is that you don't have a wide range of choices when it comes to the system's configuration; they generally come in just a handful of models with a fixed set of features. If you don't like the video card a system comes with, you probably won't be able to make substitutions. And in many situations, manufacturers will cut down on cost by combining the sound card and modem on a single ISA or PCI board; if you want to upgrade either of them down the road, you'll have to find out if it's possible to disable the original — or replace both. Upgrading a video card may prove difficult as well, since many manufacturers include graphics chips built into the motherboard rather than mounted on a card in an AGP or PCI slot. If it's of the PCI variety, you'll need to find out if you can disable the onboard chip before you can make an upgrade. If it's AGP, you may really be in a world of hurt, since most motherboards that include built-in AGP graphics don't have an AGP slot at all.

The bottom line here is that retail machines are usually tailored more toward novices, small businesses, and families — not the hard-core gamer. Stay away from these machines unless you find a great price.

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Sound Blaster Live!

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Company: Creative Labs
www.creativelabs.com

Phone: (800) 998-5227 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $199 (SBLIVE! M.S.R.P.)
$99 (SBLIVE! VALUE M.S.R.P.)

Could this be Creative Labs' last shot at dominating the PC sound market?

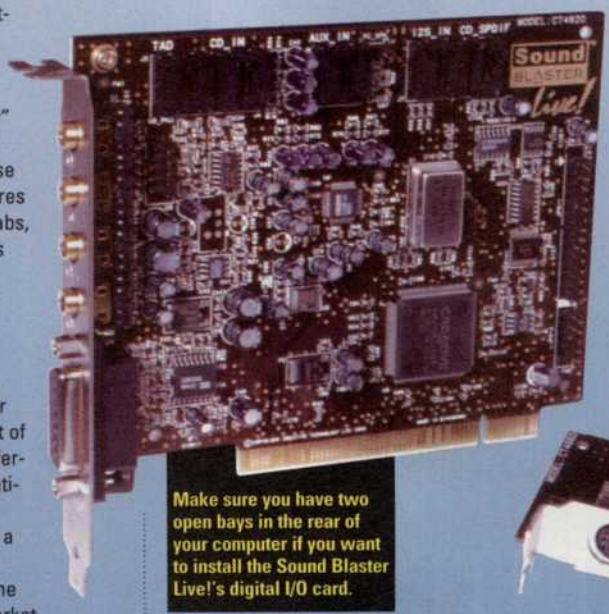
After years of being nearly the only game in town when it came to PC audio, Creative Labs and its Sound Blaster line are slipping out of the spotlight, thanks in large part to Windows 95 and its DirectSound API. Now that DirectSound is used for practically every new game on the market, the once-ubiquitous need for "Sound Blaster compatibility" has fallen by the wayside, and gamers have been free to choose a sound card based on its features and price. Suddenly, Creative Labs, once the king of the audio hill, is in the unenviable position of playing catch-up with a host of competitors.

Sound cards like Turtle Beach's Montego A3D Xstream and those in Diamond's Monster Sound line have taken a bite out of Creative Labs' market share, offering features like PCI-bus compatibility, 3D positional sound, and audio "acceleration" that takes a load off the CPU.

Creative has recognized the need to compete in this new market. Part of its strategy is the development of a new positional audio standard called Environmental Audio Extensions (EAX) — designed to compete directly with Aureal's increasingly popular A3D standard used in those Diamond and Turtle Beach cards. Creative says EAX differs from A3D because it was designed from the ground up to work with four speakers rather than two. The Sound Blaster Live! is the first sound card to use EAX, and our experience with it suggests that Creative's new standard has what it takes to bite back at the competition.

Creative says EAX goes above and beyond what the original A3D offers by rendering audio reflections (reverb that varies with the placement of walls, ceilings, and other surfaces in a game) and allowing for real-time panning and mixing of multiple sound sources using two or more speakers — all in hardware, which means there's no appreciable load on your processor (and no big reduction in frame rates).

We connected the Sound Blaster Live! to a Cambridge SoundWorks PCWorks FourPointSurround speaker system (reviewed last issue) and loaded up *Unreal*. The results were very impressive: Using four speakers — two in front, on either side of the monitor, and two behind us — the surround and positional effects were unparalleled even by the Monster Sound MX200 PCI (also reviewed last issue). A perfect demonstration, it turned out, involved the use of *Unreal*'s GES BioRifle (the gun that shoots the green goo); we fired off multiple globs in a circle at our feet, then held still and waited for them to explode. We could literally hear the explosions going off all around us. Nice.



Make sure you have two open bays in the rear of your computer if you want to install the Sound Blaster Live!'s digital I/O card.

As it currently stands, a lack of supported games is the only thing holding this card back. Of course it just shipped in the past two months, and Creative says a whole slew of upcoming games will support EAX, including most of the blockbusters set to release late this year and in 1999 (you can check out the list at *www.sblive.com/eaudio/gamelist.html*).

In the meantime, if there isn't an EAX patch of a game you're currently playing, the Sound Blaster Live! still supports DirectSound and DirectSound3D, so it should work with any Windows 95 game. It's also fully Sound Blaster-compatible, so it should work fine with pre-DirectX Windows games and even with DOS-only games. And if you've only got two speakers, the SBLive! still does good simulated surround sound, just like A3D.

Creative Labs markets another, professional-level sound card that uses the same EMU 10K1 chip that powers the Sound Blaster Live!, but the company has still seen fit to add a lot of professional-type goodies to this new card. A separate digital I/O (input/output) card provides connectors for a MIDI keyboard as well as SPDIF in/outs for connecting the SBLive! to a recorder or amplifier that accepts digital signals.

If you don't feel a need for all those audiophile gewgaws, you'll probably want to opt for the Sound Blaster Live! Value. It has all of the SBLive!'s features, minus the digital I/O card and its accompanying recording/sampling software, and lists for $99, which makes it competitive with most other new PCI audio cards.

Regardless of the version you choose, you'll find that Creative Labs finally has a product (and an audio standard) that can help it give the competition's A3D-based boards a run for their money.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Best-sounding positional audio we've heard (with four speakers); full legacy support for DOS games; audiophiles will like the digital I/O card's MIDI and SPDIF connections.

LOWS: Most games that support EAX are still on the horizon.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a powerful, great-sounding PCI card.

Quantum Obsidian X-24

Company: Quantum3D
www.quantum3d.com

Phone: (888) 747-1020 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $599 (M.S.R.P.)

Quantum3D works some of that old black magic on the Voodoo2 chipset, but the price tag may be too much for some gamers.

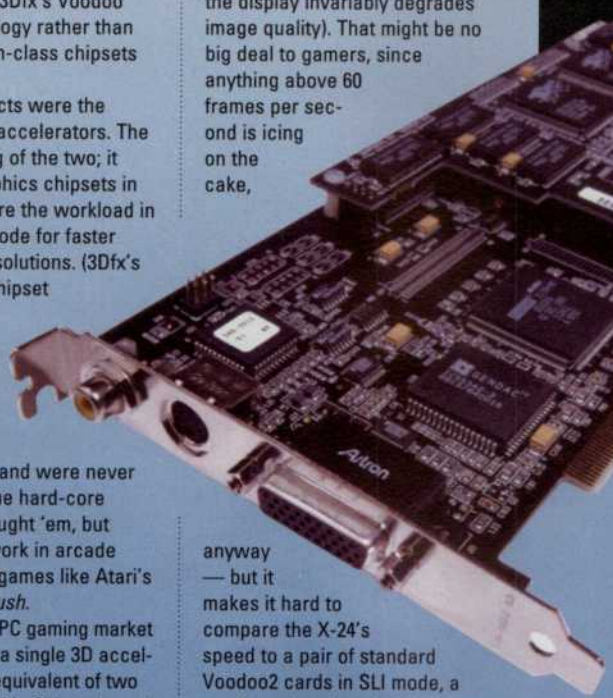
Quantum3D has long been in the business of making what it calls "Affordable Reality." Originally, that meant offering inexpensive 3D accelerators for commercial applications by using 3Dfx's Voodoo Graphics technology rather than more expensive workstation-class chipsets like 3DLabs' Permedia.

Quantum's first products were the Obsidian 50 and 100 series accelerators. The latter was the more exciting of the two; it combined two Voodoo Graphics chipsets in one board, letting them share the workload in scan-line interleave (SLI) mode for faster performance and higher resolutions. (3Dfx's original Voodoo Graphics chipset was fully capable of doing SLI, just like the newer Voodoo2 chipset, but only Quantum3D took advantage of this feature). These first Obsidian boards cost $1,500 or more and were never intended for home use. Some hard-core gamers went ahead and bought 'em, but most Obsidian 100s found work in arcade cabinets powering coin-op games like Atari's *Mace* and *San Francisco Rush*.

Intended more for the PC gaming market this time around, the X-24 is a single 3D accelerator card that boasts the equivalent of two 12MB Voodoo2 boards linked in SLI mode, and it's offered at a much more reasonable price point than its predecessors. Additionally, the X-24 has good-quality TV output.

Testing the X-24 with our benchmark programs proved more difficult than the average Voodoo2. For some reason, Quantum3D has seen fit to limit the refresh rate to 85Hz. That meant we wouldn't see frame rates higher than about 85 frames per second unless we turned off the vertical synchronization setting (V-Sync), allowing the card to run as quickly as possible, independent of the refresh rate (something we'd never do in real-world gaming, since cranking out frames of animation faster than the video card refreshes the display invariably degrades image quality). That might be no big deal to gamers, since anything above 60 frames per second is icing on the cake, anyway — but it makes it hard to compare the X-24's speed to a pair of standard Voodoo2 cards in SLI mode, a configuration that can yield frame rates much higher than 85fps in our benchmark games. We contacted Quantum to see if there was any "backdoor" way to adjust the X-24's refresh rates, and they told us where to look in the Windows 95 registry to make the necessary changes — unfortunately, the settings didn't show up on some machines, including our test PC.

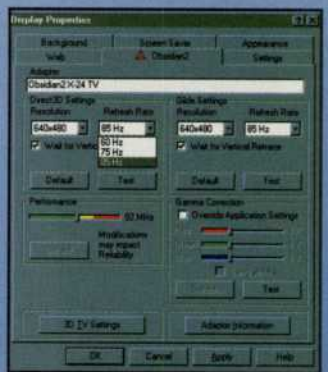
Considerably shorter than the original Obsidian 100 series boards, the X-24 should fit in most any case.



Ultimately, we ended up leaving V-Sync on for our official benchmark numbers, which is why some of the results (most notably those of *Forsaken* and *X* at 640x480) aren't as high as what we've seen with other Voodoo2 pairs. Out of curiosity, though, we also ran the tests with V-Sync off. We got the results we expected: graphic quality suffered, but the X-24 was every bit as fast as any two Voodoo2 boards in SLI mode.

Of course, unlike with the Voodoo Graphics-based boards of yesteryear (well, okay — *last* year), anyone with two Voodoo2 boards of the same make and model can easily link them in SLI mode using a provided ribbon cable. And using two separate Voodoo2 boards means you can buy them one at a time — two boards with a street price of $200 each, give or take, are probably easier to squeeze into your budget than a single board with a suggested retail price of $599. So why would you consider the X-24?

The obvious answer is that Quantum's board takes up only one PCI slot inside your PC — prime real estate, especially if you're thinking about getting a PCI sound card, TV tuner, or other gadget. If you're hot to move up to the power of two Voodoo2 cards linked in SLI mode, but you've only got one free PCI slot left in your machine, the X-24 is the way to go. Otherwise, you're better off buying two regular Voodoo2 cards.



As you can see here, 85Hz is as fast as the Obsidian's property sheet will allow one to go.

bootMarks

BOOTMARK	Pentium II 266
X (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 84.95fps 800x600: 84.02fps 1024x768: 76.07fps
Forsaken (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 85.10fps 800x600: 84.28fps 1024x768: 80.52fps
Quake II (TESTS *QUAKE II* PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 62.4fps 800x600: 60.9fps 1024x768: 48.8fps

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Two 12MB Voodoo2s linked in SLI mode, but only one slot; TV output.

LOWS: The Obsidian X-24 is quite expensive; refresh rates are limited to 85Hz, which makes benchmarking difficult.

BOTTOM LINE: A great card to be sure, but only if you can't spare the extra PCI slot in your crowded computer case.

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Monsoon MM-1000

Company:	Monsoon *www.monsoonpower.com*
Phone:	(877) PC-AUDIO (TO ORDER)
Prices:	$229 (M.S.R.P.)

Monsoon tries to cross over from the car audio market to the games industry, with mixed results.

Monsoon, having developed sound systems for automotive companies like Pontiac, Chevrolet, and AM General, has jumped over into the multimedia speaker market with its new MM-1000 three-piece speaker system, and these speakers look like nothing you've ever seen before.

The 50-watt system (12.5 watts per satellite and 25 watts for the subwoofer) mounts all of its controls on the subwoofer, which would normally sit out of the way under your desk. But this design decision is understandable, considering the slim design of the satellite speakers, and Monsoon alleviates most inconvenience by adding a small, wired remote control that includes a mute button and a volume control and can easily be placed on your desk. The remaining knobs on the subwoofer control its volume and bass-boost.

The first thing you notice about the MM-1000 system is that the satellites themselves are less than an inch thick. That's because they don't use the standard, cone-shaped speaker with a big magnet at the back. Instead, the satellites house planar dipoles, thin sheets of mylar film containing conductive strips that react to the magnetic field created by the anoalog information coming from your sound card. It is these strips that are responsible for moving the mylar diaphrams (there's one in each satellite) back and forth.

This picture serves as an example of how the 1000s should be set up on your desktop.

The idea is that the satellites create improved "3D" sound because they project sound both forward and to the rear.

Of course, the MM-1000 system only has this advantage if you've got an uncluttered computer desk with nothing sitting behind or directly to the sides of the satellites. Placement of the speakers is key, too; they're designed to cancel crosstalk (a phenomenon that reduces the depth of the stereo image when sounds from the left speaker reach the right ear, and vice versa), but this effect is greatly reduced if a shortage of desktop real estate forces you to elevate one or both of the satellites. If you can achieve crosstalk cancelization, the sound is much more encompasing, similar in to the way 3D audio is enhanced when listening through a pair of stereo headphones.

Sleek and elegant in appearance, the MM-1000 system is a mixed offering in the sound department.

Given perfect positioning and placement, the MM-1000s sound very impressive. Even without simulated 3D technology like A3D, these speakers really do create a wide, deep sound field. When we switched back and forth between the MM-1000 and a couple of good, standard PC speakers, the difference was quite clear. The additional depth provided by the MM-1000 created a significantly better illusion of being *in* the game.

But what about sound quality? Therein lies the bummer: as good as the MM-1000's satellites are at engulfing the gamer in sound, they do it at the expense of quality. Maybe it's because of the way planar dipoles inherently function, or maybe it's just a design flaw of the MM-1000 system, but to our ears, these speakers seemed to produce very little in the way of midrange frequencies. The result is sound that's just plain tinny when it's not backed up by the 25-watt subwoofer (which, for the record, uses a standard cone-type driver).

Ultimately, the unique design of the MM-1000's satellites makes for an attractive speaker system that produces loads of audio depth without the need for special electronic processing, but it also makes for a big disappointment to the audiophiles in us. The price is another problem; the $229 suggested retail price puts these speakers in Cambridge SoundWorks' territory, which means you can get much better speakers for the money.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Planar dipole design makes for the perception of added depth when listening to music and games.

LOWS: Sound quality is sub-par; no way to adjust treble, bass, or mid-range frequencies.

BOTTOM LINE: The MM-1000 seems to serve more as a proof of a technology than a true gamer's sound system.

http://pc.ign.com

Logitech SoundMan Extreme

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Company: Logitech
www.logitech.com

Phone: (800) 231-7717 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $129 (M.S.R.P.)

Logitech, those bad boys of the PC peripheral world, have ventured into new territory with the SoundMan Extreme three-piece speaker system. Logitech has long been known and respected for its line of joysticks, mice, trackballs, and scanners — all manner of input devices. You might say these speakers are Logitech's first output devices. And they do put out; for the money, the SoundMan Extreme is the best-sounding system we've heard in a while. In fact, we've heard plenty of speakers that cost a lot more and couldn't equal the Extreme.

The first thing we noticed when we unpacked the speakers is that they are very compact. The satellites are less than 7" tall, and the subwoofer is only 3.2" high and 9.5" deep, so it fits easily under your desk or even under your monitor. And if you're worried that the weight of your 21" beast of a monitor might be too much for this little sub to handle, worry not — Labtech claims it ran these speakers over with a jeep just to prove their durability and sent us a picture to prove it (lots of time on those guys' hands, we're guessing).

Once and for all, we say size *doesn't* matter — the big sound you get from these little speakers is proof of that.

Durability aside, the size of these speakers almost threw us off. Believe us when we say that big sound was the last thing we were expecting to hear when we powered these pups up. But our assumption that size matters was quickly proved incorrect. The sound that came out of the Extreme was clean, warm, crisp, and above all else, *big*. Even without the subwoofer, the satellite speakers still produced that same feeling of size. Obviously, this isn't a case of a good subwoofer making up for weak speakers.

Not only was the sound impressive, but the volume the speakers could achieve was surprising as well. The satellites share 25 watts (RMS), and the sub has an additional 25 watts (RMS) all its own. Power ratings can often be deceiving, however — having lotsa watts doesn't always equal clear, clean sound. In the Extreme's case, though, it does; this speaker system cranks out plenty of volume with very little discernible distortion or noise. All in all, it'd be hard to find a better set of PC speaker for the price.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Very clean sound; very solid construction means no rattling at high volume; big, big sound out of small speakers.

LOWS: No headphone jack (will speaker designers ever listen to this simple request?).

BOTTOM LINE: These are among the best we've heard for the price, and if you ever run over them with a jeep, they'll still work.

Skywell Magic 3DII

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

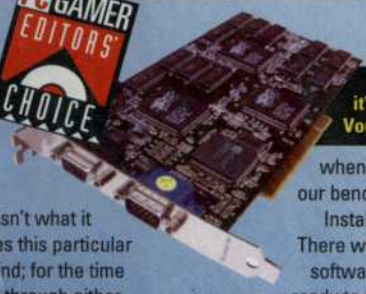
Company: Skywell
www.aries-marketing.com

Phone: (909) 468-5535 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $199 (M.S.R.P.) (12MB VERSION)

Skywell Technology, a large manufacturer out of Taiwan, has opted to bring its 3Dfx Voodoo2-powered Magic 3DII over to the States. Based squarely on 3Dfx's reference design, the Magic 3D II has little to recommend it over the growing crowd of Voodoo2 boards — besides its low price, at any rate.

Of course, the other side of that coin is that the Magic 3D II provides almost nothing to complain about. Like every other Voodoo2-based 3D accelerator, the board cranks out some very clean graphics and a very fast frame rate for silky smooth animation. Skywell's North American distribution isn't what it should be, which makes this particular board a tough one to find; for the time being, all U.S. sales go through either through the Skywell web site or via telephone. Skywell hopes to rectify the situation soon and get the Magic 3D II on the shelves here, but for now it's direct-sale-only.



Look familiar? It should — it's yet another standard Voodoo2 board.

Another shortcoming lies in the Magic 3D II's control interface. As with a few other new Voodoo2 cards, it comes with no control panel settings to adjust its clock speed (up for higher performance; down to reduce the likelihood of lock-ups). The board's default speed is the usual 90MHz, and that's how it'll stay unless you manually change the settings in the autoexec.bat file that loads when you start your PC. Yet another omission from the control panel is the ability to turn vertical sync on and off, but that shouldn't be a problem for most gamers; in our opinion, turning V-Sync off costs way too much in image quality for the few extra frames per second it yields (which is why we always leave it on when we're testing a board with our benchmark games).

Install and setup went smoothly. There was no difficulty in loading the software, and in no time at all we ready to play ball. And when we put it through its paces, it turned in numbers as fast as brand-name Voodoo2 boards costing a lot more. It chewed up all of our benchmarks and spit them out as flaming chunks of gaming goodness — just the way we like it. At $199, Skywell's Voodoo2 card offers up the goods at a very reasonable price. There's nothing new to be found here, but that's okay; for the money, you'll get every bit as much out of the Magic 3D II as from its competition, at a price that is much easier to swallow.

bootMarks

BOOTMARK	Pentium II 266
X (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 88.53fps 800x600: 80.42fps
Forsaken (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 106.26fps 800x600: 68.45fps
Quake II (TESTS *QUAKE II* PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 56.4fps 800x600: 42.4fps

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Voodoo2 speed and image quality; very good price.

LOWS: Yet another Voodoo2 without a clock-speed setting in its control panel; as of press time, it's only available via direct-sale orders.

BOTTOM LINE: A great Voodoo2 for the price — this card may be difficult to track down, but you'll be happy when you do.

Actual screen shots.

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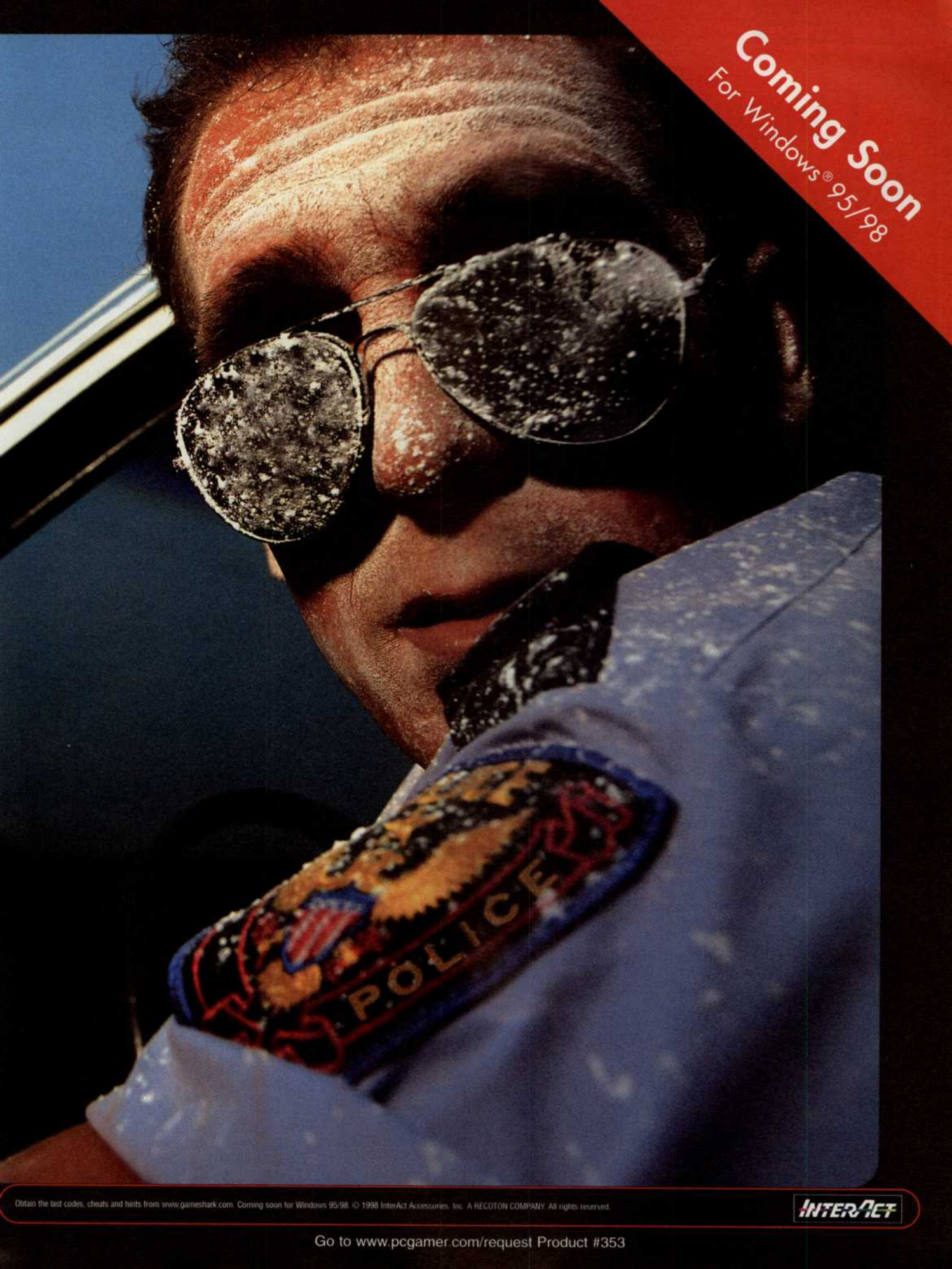

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INTERACT

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The WitchDoctor is a great companion for a Voodoo2.

Canopus WitchDoctor AGP

Company: Canopus
www.canopuscorp.com

Phone: (408) 954-4500 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $139 (M.S.R.P.)

Canopus' newest card, the WitchDoctor, adds a number of goodies to NVIDIA'S RIVA 128 2D/3D chip to make it a great match for the Pure 3D II.

The Witch-Doctor allows for what Canopus calls a "reverse" pass-through connection between it and any brand of Voodoo2 card. The connection ordinarily made by a pass-through cable on the outside of the computer is now made via a ribbon cable that connects the two cards internally. Where once your monitor had to be connected to the Voodoo2, you now plug your monitor directly into the WitchDoctor — just as you would if it were your only video card.

So what does this process accomplish, besides removing an inelegant external cable? For one thing, it lets you use WitchDoctor's TV output with any Voodoo2 card, so you can view your favorite 3Dfx-enhanced games on your big-screen TV at resolutions as high as 800x600. The second benefit is that image degradation that can occur with a pass-through cable at high resolutions is eliminated. Ironically, though, the 4MB WitchDoctor isn't capable of the high resolutions that would really make this useful.

That, friends, is this card's Achilles heel. With 4MB of RAM, it's 4MB short of many of today's 2D/3D boards, and as fast as some of its Direct3D benchmarks scores are, its image quality still makes using a Voodoo2 preferable. It's anybody's guess why Canopus didn't opt to use the newer 128ZX chip — that chip shares the 128's rendering engine, but at least it has support for 8MB of RAM.

In addition to the RAM limitation, we were unable to get any OpenGL games to run with the WitchDoctor. We called Canopus' technical support line and verified that we hadn't missed anything, but were still unable to solve the problem.

Finally, it should be noted that the WitchDoctor's reverse pass-through feature connects to your Voodoo2 card's SLI interface — so if you take advantage of the internal connection, you won't be able to add a second Voodoo2 card for higher speed and resolutions in SLI mode. Ultimately, as much as the WitchDoctor has to offer, its downsides put a major cramp in its style.

bootMarks

BOOTMARK	Pentium II 266
X (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 83.26fps 800x600: 66.91fps
Forsaken (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 81.37fps 800x600: 64.29fps
Quake (TESTS OPENGL GAMING PERFORMANCE)	320x200: 58.4fps 640x480: 32.0fps
Duke Nukem 3D (TESTS DOS GAMING PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 58fps 800x600: 41fps
MDK Perftest (TESTS DIRECTX PERFORMANCE)	126

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Reverse pass-through feature is cool; being able to play Voodoo2-enhanced games on your TV is a terrific feature.

LOWS: Only 4MB RAM; internal connection precludes connecting two Voodoo2 cards in SLI mode.

BOTTOM LINE: A card with some great features — unfortunately hampered by the older technology under its hood.

Midiland Forzando Plus

Company: MidiLand Inc.
www.midiland.com

Phone: (888) 592-1168 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $99.95 (M.S.R.P.)

Back in our June '98 issue of *PC Gamer*, we reviewed MidiLand's outstanding MidiLand 4100 three-piece S2-designed speaker system. Coming in at a whopping $400, they were some speakers to be reckoned with, and in spite of the hefty cost, we gave it a well-deserved Editors' Choice. We'd been wondering what the folks over at MidiLand had been up to in the meantime when, suddenly and without warning, the Forzando Plus speaker system showed up at our door. More of an entry-level setup, the Forzando Plus isn't geared toward the same segment of the market as its big brother, so don't expect the same performance.

The first thing we noticed when we pulled these bad boys out of the box was that they aren't the sexiest speakers on the block. They're not the end of the world by any means, but considering how handsome the 4100s were, the Forzando system came as a bit of a letdown.

The next thing we noticed was that the sound controls themselves are pretty limited. A knob lets you control the level of the subwoofer, but there's no control for treble — and since many sound cards don't let you adjust tone through Windows, this feature is likely to be missed. Of course, some high-end speaker systems, like those from Cambridge SoundWorks, don't have any tone controls at all — then again, they don't need them. Unfortunately, these babies ain't from Cambridge SoundWorks.

The speakers' "3D sound" processor can be turned on and off; as with many enhancements of this sort, you're better off leaving this feature disabled. In most of our tests, the questionable 3D sound the Forzando produced came at the expense of hollowing out the sound its satellites produced.

With the 3D processing disabled, these speakers sound pretty good, although in some instances they were a little midrange-heavy. Since the Forzando system comes equipped with both 1" tweeters and 3" midrange speakers in both satellites (two-way speakers are relatively uncommon in this price range), it would've have been nice to be able to tweak the midrange.

Not as sexy as MidiLand's S2-designed speaker systems, the Forzando Plus also lacks a lot of its siblings' punch.

What you're left with, when looking at the Forzando Plus as a whole, is a decent- sounding set of speakers that you'd better be happy with out of the box. If you're considering buying these speakers, try to test-drive them first.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Three-piece system; decent sound out of the box; the $100 M.S.R.P is well within most gamers' price range.

LOWS: The sound out of the box is what you're stuck with since tone control is limited; 3D sound feature is unimpressive and hurts sound quality.

BOTTOM LINE: Not a bad set of speakers, but there are better ones out there for the price.

ACT Labs RS Racing System

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Company: ACT LABS
www.actlab.com

Phone: (800) 980-9997 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $69 (M.S.R.P.)

Long before we actually plugged the ACT Labs Racing System into a PC, it had already garnered a lot of praise. For a week, it sat on a desk while one editor after another fiddled with it and remarked on how comfortable it felt.

Not until it came time to remove the RS from its happy home and install it in front of an actual computer did we run into a problem: the threads on the screws that tighten and loosen the wheel's desk-clamps were much too fine. We had to turn the wheels that adjust the clamps an inordinate number of times to release the RS from one desk and attach it to another. This was apparently a known problem; a label on the RS actually advised that we'd have to turn the wheels a whole lot. ACT Labs says they're in the process of switching to fatter threads on all future RS wheels, so this minor annoyance may be a thing of the past by the time you read this review.

The RS features six buttons on its face and a four-way direction pad in the middle. In addition, a gear-shift lever that passes through the steering column can be used with either hand or both. Brake and accelerator pedals are mounted in a unit that goes under your desk. A switch on the right-hand side of the front panel lets you easily alternate between Win 95/98 and MS-DOS compatibility.

In Windows mode, all of the buttons and features work perfectly. In DOS mode, however, the wheel acts only as a four-button controller, with the two-way gear lever acting as buttons 1 and 2 and buttons on the wheel serving as 3 and 4.

We put the RS through its paces with several racing games, from *Monster Truck Madness* to *Moto Racer*, and were hard pressed to find any problems with it. Unlike most sub-$100 steering wheels, the RS was accurate and responsive, with no big dead-zone in the middle of its travel. And the pedals were some of the nicest we've seen for any setup; decent-sized for adult feet, with a little place to rest your left foot. But the highlight of this system is the wheel itself. Generously padded and covered in a nifty substance that feels a lot like leather, it's got a no-slip grip that's amazingly comfortable. And if you've got a Sony PlayStation or Nintendo 64 console, you've definitely found your wheel — you can buy an optional cartridge that contains all the necessary electronics and connectors to make the RS work with your videogame system.

One of the more comfortable wheels we've seen in a while, the RS is a great deal for the racer on a budget.

With good-looking new wheels coming soon from Microsoft, Saitek, and Thrustmaster, the competition is about to get a lot more interesting. But if you're in the market for a good wheel that goes for less than $100, the RS deserves a serious look.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Extremely comfortable and responsive; affordable; optional cartridges make it compatible with PlayStation and N64.

LOWS: On some early models, threads on the desk-clamp are too fine and require a lot of turning to lock down.

BOTTOM LINE: A versatile wheel that should make just about any PC racing fan happy.

ADS USB Port (PCI Card)

Company: ADS Technologies
www.adstechnologies.com

Phone: (562) 926-1928 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $39 (ESTIMATED STREET PRICE)

Last month, we reviewed ADS Technologies' new USB hub, an external widget that lets you connect loads of USB peripherals to your PC without fiddling with the USB connectors on the back of your PC. This month, ADS sent along its USB Port PCI card, the widget you need if your PC doesn't have USB ports at all.

Most new systems purchased in the past couple of years have shipped with USB ports built in, but many Pentiums and even Pentium Pros arrived too early for such amenities; for owners of those systems, adding ports via an expansion card is the only way to get on the USB bus. The ADS card provides two USB ports, just like any new system would have, and it supports all of USB's features: 1.5 or 12Mbps (megabits per second) data transfer and the ability to daisy-chain as many as 127 peripherals all at once.

Installation of this PCI card in a machine running Windows 98 was as simple as could be; we seated the USB Port in a free PCI slot, turned on the machine, and Win 98 detected the new ports and installed the proper drivers. ADS didn't include any drivers, because they weren't needed. One word of warning, though — as the USB Port's box clearly states, it requires Windows 98 (ADS says it's possible to get the USB Port running under Windows 95 if you've got the proper software updates from Microsoft, but the company says it only supports the product under Win 98).

Once we were up and running, we plugged our USB speakers into one of our new USB ports, and they were detected flawlessly. We also tried a new USB keyboard in the other slot; it, too, worked fine. No rebooting was necessary in either case. The Universal Serial Bus is shaping up to be as versatile and user-friendly as we'd hoped, and ADS Technologies' card means that some people who would otherwise be left out in the cold will be able to reap the benefits with an inexpensive upgrade.

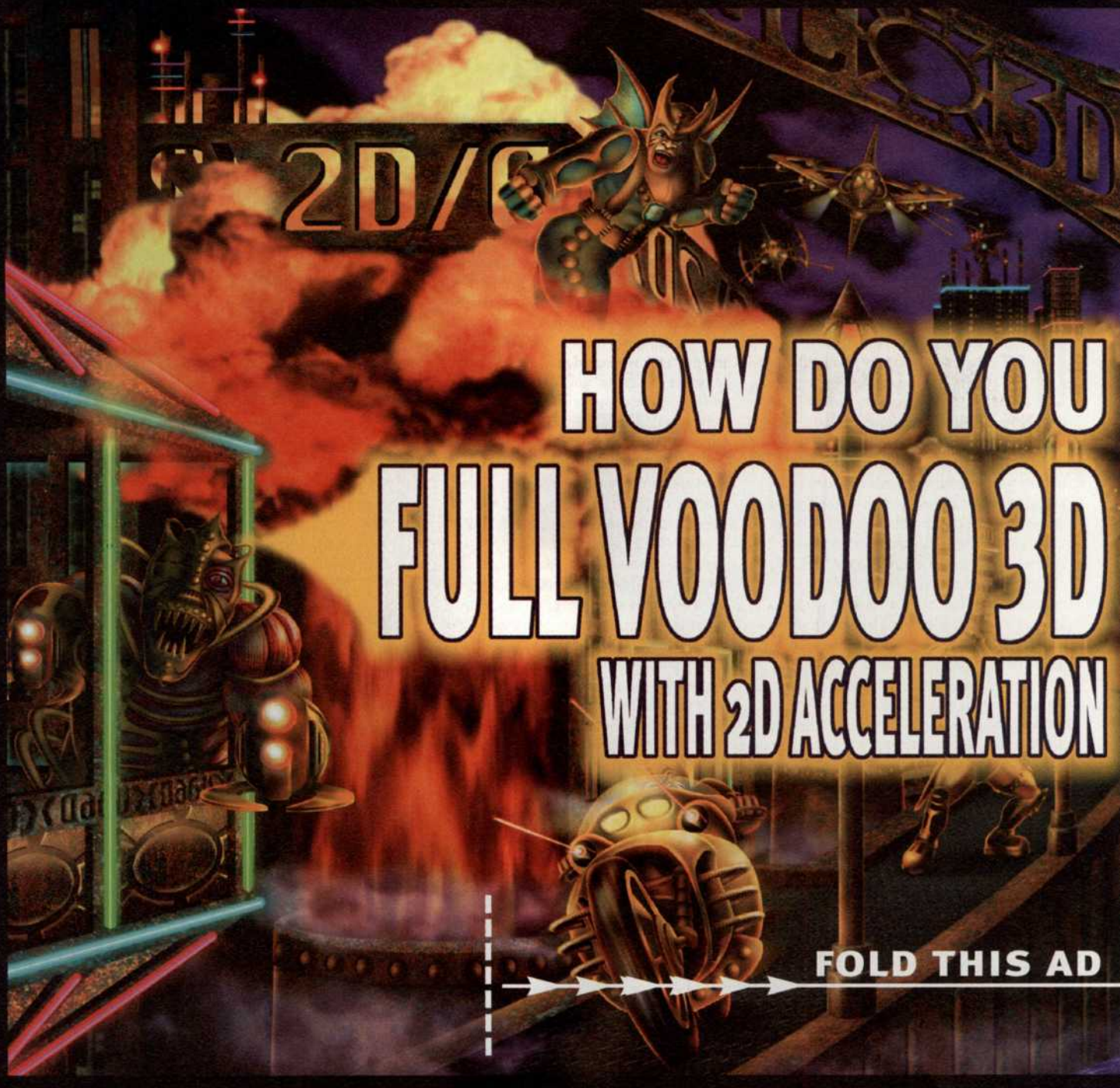
This little PCI card could be your ticket into the fast, friendly new world of USB peripherals.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Works just as well as USB ports; inexpensive by any measure.

LOWS: Requires Windows 98, not just Win 95 with the USB upgrade patch.

BOTTOM LINE: If you have a system without USB ports and you've got a free PCI slot, this is a terrific way to prepare your system for all the USB peripherals on the horizon.



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Falcon Mach V

Company: Falcon Northwest
www.falcon-nw.com

Phone: (888) FALCON1 (TO ORDER)

Prices: $5995 (M.S.R.P.)

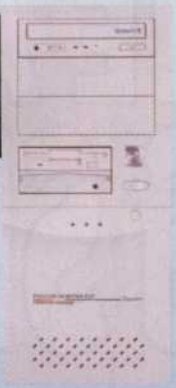
Falcon does it again with another monster gaming system, its most powerful and impressive Mach V to date.

Falcon Northwest has developed a reputation for building the most high-end, butt-kicking gaming PCs in the world. The company seems more in tune with the latest technology and the wants and needs of hard-core gamers than any other computer manufacturer, and while Falcon's systems are often significantly more expensive than similar systems from other manufacturers, Falcon has established itself as a premiere figure in PC gaming

This month, we look at one of the fastest PCs we've ever laid eyes on. Every benchmark we threw at it had us staring in amazement at the results it churned out. So how is this Mach V different from your average gaming rig?

First of all, the ASUS Motherboard at the heart of the Mach V has an Ultra2 SCSI adapter built in, allowing for data transfer speeds as fast as 80MB per second. Paired with a 9.1GB Ultra2 SCSI hard drive, it cuts load times down to a bare minimum. The CD-ROM drive is a 32-speed SCSI model, so game installations are super-fast, too (although we ran into some problems when trying to read a couple of recordable CD-ROMs we threw at it).

In addition to the fast drives, the Mach V also comes equipped with some very beefy video cards. The primary 2D/3D card Falcon chose to fill the system's AGP slot is STB's new 16MB Velocity V4400. This is one of the first RIVA TNT boards we've gotten to play with, and it is a beast in every sense of the word. Unfortunately, as we went to press, we only had beta drivers for the card, so we didn't feel it appropriate to include the 3D benchmark scores — yet. Still, it seems clear that the TNT is one of the fastest 2D/3D chips on the market. When we receive a board with final drivers, we'll give you the official scores in an upcoming issue. Accompanying the V4400 is Quantum3D's new dual-Voodoo2-powered X-24 (reviewed this month). This board packs into a single slot the equivalent of two 12MB Voodoo2s boards linked in SLI mode — thereby freeing up a precious PCI slot. In terms of performance, the X-24 is really no faster or slower than any other pair of Voodoo2s in SLI mode — but, of course, that's very, very fast indeed (check out page 293 for a full review of the X-24).



As you can see from this shot, there's only room for two more 5.25" components. That said, we can't think of anything else we'd want to install.

Falcon gives the Mach V its usual overload of goodies, but that means there's not a lot of space left. Only one free PCI slot remains.

The monitor that ships with the Mach V is no slouch, either. The Optiquest V115 21" display is perhaps a little on the dark side, but it has no serious flaws. It displays images at resolutions as high as 1,600x1,280 with refresh rates upwards of 160Hz. Text is sharp and clean at all but the highest resolutions, and color saturation is excellent.

That takes care of the visual side; what about the audio? In keeping with the system's performance-over-cost philosophy, the speakers that came with the Mach V would fit right into a high-end home theater system. In fact that's what the 200-watt Acoustic Research speaker system is designed for. It even sports a Dolby Pro Logic Surround sound decoder built into the hefty subwoofer unit. The one downside to using a speaker system so emphatically targeted at the home theater market is that it uses onscreen controls similar to those in your VCR. That means you'll have to hook them up to a TV to set their levels the first time you use them; once that's done, you can unplug the system from the television and hook it back up to your computer — until the next time you need to adjust them. Still, the rich sound these speakers produce is well worth the hassle. It's good enough, in fact, that you may find yourself reluctant to disconnect them from your home theater system.

Ah, the 21" monitor of love... It doesn't seem to matter how many times we say it, we never tire of that phrase.

bootMarks

BOOTMARK	
X (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 107.41fps 800x600: 105.41fps 1024x768: 76.85fps
Forsaken (TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 119.52fps 800x600: 117.43fps 1024x768: 85.64fps
Quake (TESTS *QUAKE II* PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 110.2fps 800x600: 49.9fps
Quake II (TESTS *QUAKE II* PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 86.0fps 800x600: 84.2fps 1024x768: 54.4fps
Duke Nukem 3D (TESTS DOS GAMING PERFORMANCE)	640x480: 86fps 800x600: 63fps
Norton SI (TESTS CPU & SYSTEM BOARD PERFORMANCE)	214.7
Sysmark 32: 186 (TEST VIDEO AND OTHER SUBSYSTEMS)	
MDK Perftest (TESTS DIRECTX PERFORMANCE)	193

http://pc.ign.com

System Specs

SYSTEM
Processor: Pentium II 450MHz
RAM: 128MB SDRAM
Cache: 512K

STORAGE
Hard Drive: Seagate Cheetah II 9.1GB UW SCSI
CD-ROM: Plextor 32X SCSI-2
ZIP Drive: Iomega ZIP 100MB drive

EXPANSION
Internal 3.5" bays: 5 (3 free)
Internal 5.25" bays: 3 (2 free)
External 3.5" bays: 2 (occupied)
External 5.25" bays: 4 (3 free)
Bus slots: 1 AGP (occupied), 2 PCI (1 free), 1 ISA (occupied), 1 shared ISA/PCI (occupied)
RAM: 4 DIMM sockets (3 free)

VIDEO
Base Card: STB Velocity 4400 (AGP) with 16MB
3D: Quantum3D Obsidian X-24
Monitor: 21" Optiquest V115

AUDIO
Sound Card: Diamond Monster Sound MX200
Speakers: Acoustic Research "Cutting Edge" 6-speaker Dolby Surround system

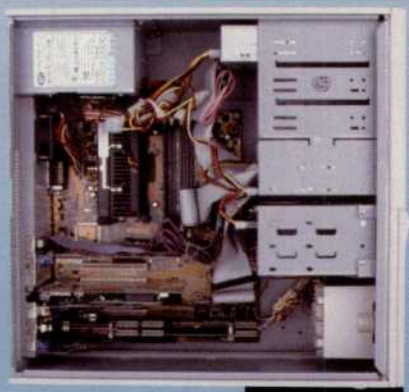
INPUT
Keyboard: Keytronics 104-key
Mouse: Microsoft IntelliPoint
Joystick: CH Products F-16 CombatStick
Game Card: CH Products High-Speed Game Card

The Mach V also comes with a sound card that garnered an Editors' Choice in our October '98 issue. Diamond's Monster Sound MX200 PCI card supports Microsoft's DirectSound and DirectSound 3D standards as well as Aureal's A3D, and it has connections for either two or four speakers. This

This 200 watt, six-piece speaker system pumps out some serious sound for gaming.

card's one major shortcoming is its lack of support for older, DOS-only games. Even Diamond recommends backing up the Monster MX200 with a Sound Blaster-compatible card for these legacy games. Unfortunately, that means adding a 16-bit ISA card to the system, but the ASUS motherboard's two ISA slots are already occupied — one with the PCI card it shares a slot with, and the other with the CH Game Card. That brings us to one of Falcon Northwest's most curious quirks: its long-standing insistence on including a dedicated game card in its systems. We've never, ever found a need for one — the sound card's built-in joystick port has always been sufficient, regardless of the PC's speed — and since the presence of additional joystick ports can cause configuration problems in Windows, it's really more trouble than it's worth.

In the end, the only real downside to this Mach V system is its price. It's unlikely that most gamers will be able to justify coughing up this much green, even for a tower of power like this one — especially when a little diligent shopping can yield a near-identical system for considerably less money. Still, it's unlikely that Falcon Northwest will lower its prices significantly any time soon — the company is doing quite well in its high-end gaming niche without trying to undercut Gateway 2000 or Dell (or the growing number of smaller companies that sell custom-built systems at low cost). Having said that, our experience with this latest Mach V has some of us thinking about getting paper routes so we can afford one of our own in 15 to 20 years....



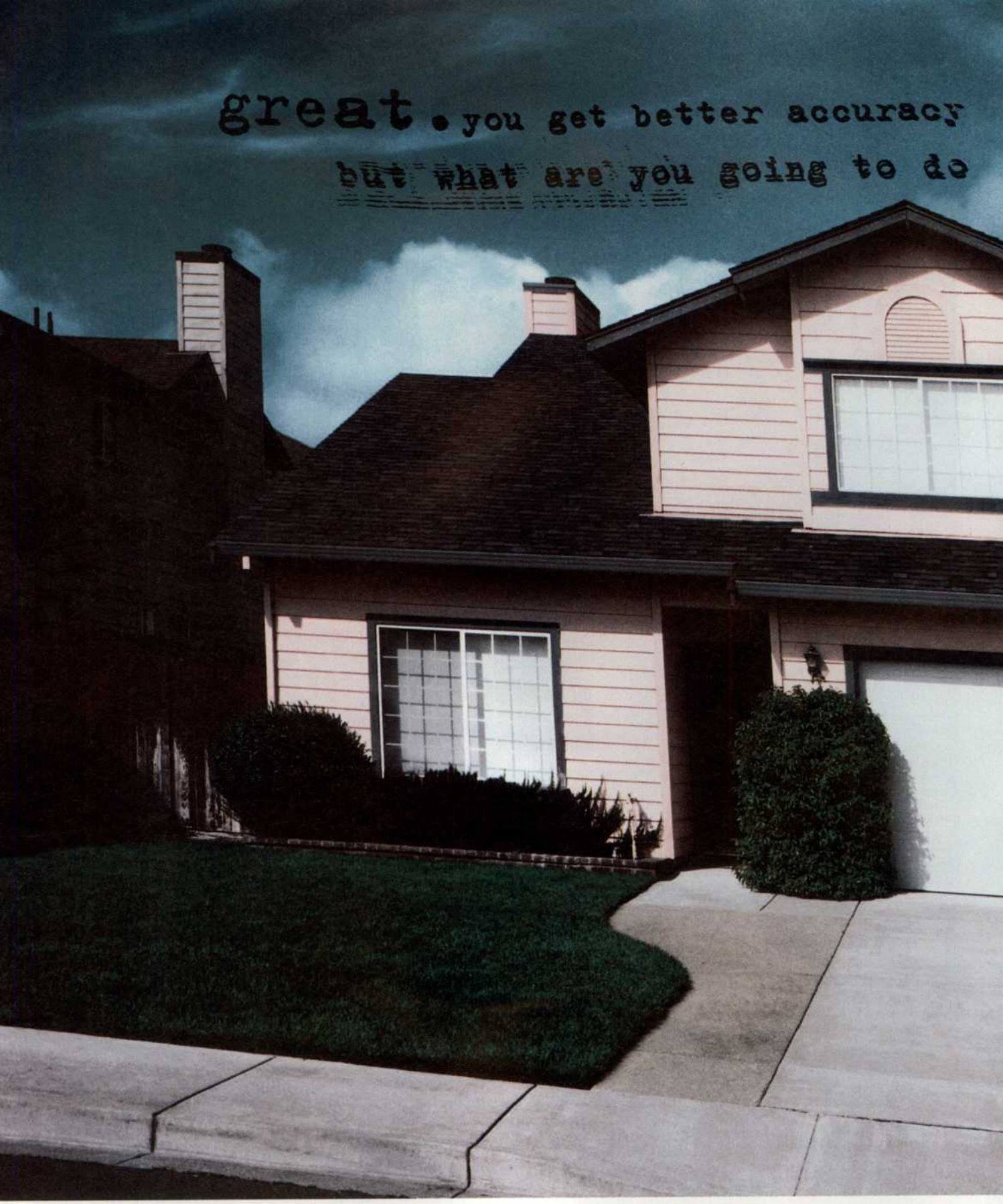
Fans, nothing but glorious fans. Falcon really believes in keeping its systems cool, as you can see by all the fans in the case.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fastest PC we've seen so far; amazing sound and graphics systems; excellent construction and support.

LOWS: Really high price; lacks a legacy sound card for DOS games; speaker system needs to be plugged into a TV to tweak sound levels.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're a serious gamer with money to burn, the Mach V is a great system.



59 programmable functions. 2 directional pads—one for smooth, joystick-like control, one for mega-fast, mega-deadly digital action. Proportional flippers let you "feel" how hard or soft to hit, swing,

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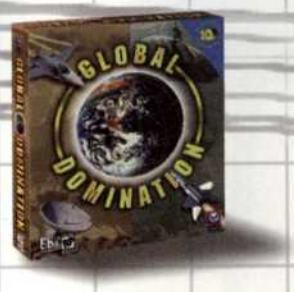

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- STAY ABREAST OF MISSION GOALS AND BREAKING DEVELOPMENTS VIA LIVE ACTION BRIEFINGS. VIEW RESOURCE DATA THROUGH YOUR HUD DISPLAY.
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Diamond Stealth II G460 8MB AGP
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Diamond Monster Sound M80
Altec Lansing ACS45 Speakers w/ Subwoofer
Toshiba 32X CD-ROM Drive
Diamond Supra Sonic 56K V .90 Modem
Microsoft Intellimouse, 3.5" Floppy Drive
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Altec Lansing ADA305 Digital PowerCube USB Speakers w/ Subwoofer
Creative Labs Dxr2 DVD-2 Drive with Hardware MPEG-2 & AC3 Sound
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The Hard Stuff Sideways Page

WE REVIEW SO MUCH HARD STUFF EVERY MONTH, it can be hard to keep track of what's hot and what's not. On this page, we dare to compare hardware we've reviewed. In fact, there's so much data, we had to turn the page sideways to make it all fit! This month: miscellaneous controllers!

CONTROLLER	ISSUED REVIEWED	PRICE AS REVIEWED	TYPE	PROGRAMMABLE?	COMMENTS
InterAct 3D Program Pad	July 97	$29.99	Gamepad	Yes	Easy to program with or without software; quite comfortable; program multiple key strokes to one button; poor software interface.
Logitech ThunderPad Digital	July 97	$29.99	Gamepad	Yes	Good programming interface; program multiple keystrokes to one button; uncomfortable to hold.
First-Person Gaming Assassin 3D	August 97	$59.95	Trackball	Yes	Digital gaming device; nice mouse alternative for *Quake*-style games; requires support for each game, which limits usefulness.
Logitech MouseMan Pro	August 97	$79	Wireless Mouse	Yes	Desktop mouse. Very convenient; unusual shape can be offputting.
Logitech SurfMan	August 97	$99	Wireless Trackball	Yes	Presentation/Internet controller. Awkward to use; can't click and move ball at same time without both hands.
Sejin FreeBoard Beamer	September 97	$169	Wireless Keyboard	n/a	Infrared; good range; nice trackball built in; laptop-style keys poor for gaming.
Interlink VersaPoint Wireless Keyboard	October 97	$159.99	Wireless Keyboard	n/a	Infrared; good range; laptop-style keys poor for gaming; poorly placed touchpad is a real annoyance.
ACT Labs PowerRamp Mite	October 97	$29	Gamepad	Yes	Keyboard emulator; program multiple keystrokes under one button; comfortable; versatile.
Suncom G-Force Plus	October 97	$49.99	Flight Yoke; racing controller	No	Versatile; nice grip and tension; jerky yoke Y-axis; poorly placed throttle slider.
Logitech CyberMan II	October 97	$99	6-axis 3D controller	Yes	Ergonomic and comfortable; good software interface; terribly twitchy; small range of motion; takes a long time to master.
Diamond GyroMouse	October 97	$99.95	Wireless Mouse	No	Works on desk or in midair; good response; unique and fun; but rechargeable battery can die without warning.
Saitek PC Dash	December 97	$69.95	Keyboard Emulator	Yes	Visual interface relieves need to memorize keyboard commands. Easy to program.
Quickshot 3D Striker	February 98	$59.99	Keyboard Emulator/joystick	No	Tries to do too much; there are better controllers for every type of game.
AITech PC/TV Airlink	March 98	$399	Wireless Keyboard	No	Good idea, but its implementation doesn't work well for games.
Wireless PC @ TV	April 98	$599	Wireless Keyboard	No	Crisp display on TV; good for casual web-surfing, but for gaming it could be a lot better.
Techmedia 3DZoneMaster	May 98	$99	Wiresless Mouse/joystick	Yes	Fun for a few minutes, but it's not an ideal controller for any game.
UR Gear	June 98	$99	Wireless joystick	No	Helmet-shaped controller responds to head movement; responsive, but controlling games by moving your head feels very awkward.

The Game Machine

The Game Machine represents what we consider a solid, affordable gaming PC that will handle every game currently on the shelves. The Game Machine has a maximum theoretical price of $2,500 — but shop around, and you'll find it for much less. In the span of only a few months we've taken the processor up from 200MHz to 233 — and now to a Pentium II 233 — to keep ahead of recent increases in games' minimum requirements. We've also replaced the Rendition card with a Riva 128. But we're sticking with a good, old 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics-based 3D accelerator; the newer Voodoo II is a very hot chipset, but the Voodoo Graphics is still plenty powerful for most games.

- Intel Pentium II 233 MMX
- 32MB SDRAM RAM
- NVIDIA RIVA 128 card OR 128-bit 2D card
- 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics-based 3D accelerator
- 4GB IDE hard drive
- 16x CD-ROM drive
- Sound Blaster AWE32 AND/OR positional sound card
- 17" SVGA monitor, .26 dot pitch
- Multi-player gamepad (Gravis Gamepad Pro OR Microsoft SideWinder)
- 56K modem

Tech Q&A

Can you add 3D acceleration to a laptop? What's the best Voodoo2 card? And who needs a PCI modem?

Q I am upgrading two computers with FIC VA 503 100MHz bus motherboards, AMD 300MHz K6-2 chips, and 64MB of SDRAM. I want to buy two 4-to-8MB AGP 2D/3D video cards for *hopefully* $100 or less. On one system I plan to add a Sound Blaster 8MB or 12MB Voodoo2 card, and the other system will have just the 4-8MB AGP card. I'm going nuts trying to wade through the specs and advertising hype! One computer store I recently went to recommended a 4MB Diamond Viper ($100), while another store I visited said to go with the ATI Rage Pro 3D ($85). What does *PC Gamer* think might be best for my new systems?

— Steve Reddick, via the Internet

A Well, for the price range you're interested in, we'd ordinarily recommend an Intel i740-based card. In this case, however, since Intel claims that cards made using their graphics chip may not function properly in non-Intel AGP slots — such as the ones on Super 7 motherboards like yours — this is probably out of the question. Of the two cards you mentioned, you'd probably be better off with the Diamond Viper. It has good support, and while it may not have the world's best visual quality, games still look better and seem to run more smoothly on the Viper than they do on the ATI.

What you might also consider doing is spending an extra $50 on just the one card that will sit in the system you're not putting a Voodoo2 in. If you're willing to do this, you should be able to get a card like the Matrox Mystique G200, which we think is a much better all-around 2D/3D card than either the ATI or the Diamond Viper. With a card like the G200, your second machine will be almost as fast as your primary system — not bad for half a C-note.

Q I recently read Greg's wait-and-see comments about the AMD K6-2 [See Greg Vederman's column on the *PC Gamer* web site at *www.pcgamer.ign.com* for more information on this subject]. As I was reading, I noticed that Greg said *Quake II* supported the K6-2's 3DNOW! instruction set. Is this true, or am I mistaken? Is there something I need to download for this enhancement to work?

— Daniel Garner, via the Internet

A Yes, if you have a K6-2 (and a Voodoo2, preferably, AMD says), you will see significant performance gains in *Quake II* after you download and install the optimized patch and drivers from AMD's web site (*http://www.amd.com/products/cpg/k623d/drivers.html*). And as far as installation is concerned, the patch comes with its own install program, so you won't have to worry about knowing where specific files should go. Check it out.

When you jump over to AMD's site to grab the patch, you'll be greeted by this gentleman.

Q I recently purchased a laptop (P233 w/MMX, 4.1GB HD, 32MB EDO RAM, Dual Scan display at 800x600) and was wondering if it is worthwhile (or even possible) to purchase a 3D card for it. I enjoy playing games like *Jedi Knight* and *Quake*, for example, but have only played them on a desktop. I played your *Mysteries of the Sith* demo on the laptop and it was okay, but would a 3D card make a noticeable difference in performance and graphic appeal given the limits of a dual-scan display?

— Quintin Mecke, via the Internet

A A few companies make laptops with built-in 3D chips — but adding one after the fact is currently impossible, given the way laptops are built. Their emphasis on small size and light weight leaves no room for the kind of expansion slots you find in a desktop machine — much less an additional graphics card. Unfortunately, that's the trade-off you make when you decide you want (or need) the portability and convenience of a laptop.

Q I'm in the market for a new 3D card. I was leaning toward some sort of Voodoo2 graphics accelerator, but a friend of mine told me about the Number Nine Revolution IV. I checked it out on the Internet, but I trust an unbiased opinion more than what the company says about its products. So I was wondering if you could tell me anything about this card and whether or not the fact that it does not support Glide (as the Voodoo cards do natively) would limit its usefulness with any existing or upcoming games.

— Mario Esparza, via the Internet

Has anyone else noticed a trend toward placing graphic accelerator chips in strange locations? This Revolution IV chip looks like it's about to start talking about its favorite ice-cold beer....

http://pc.ign.com

A We haven't yet gotten the chance to make any first-hand tests of the Revolution IV, so it's hard to tell where the new card will fit — especially since Number Nine doesn't seem to offer even its own claimed numbers for polygons per, fill rate, etc.

As for Glide compatibility, it's still an important factor to consider, since we're still seeing a significant number of 3Dfx-only games on the shelves. Until — and unless — the Revolution IV proves itself to be a very good performer, we'd advise you to go with a Voodoo2-based card.

We hope to bring you more detailed information about the Revolution IV in a news story in an upcoming issue.

STB has not sent review units of its BlackMagic board yet, so we can't tell you much about it.

Q **My friend recently asked me who I thought made the best Voodoo2 card. I immediately responded "Diamond Multimedia with its Monster 3D II" Well, I thought that was the best card until I heard about a new Voodoo2 card from STB Systems called the BlackMagic 3D (12MB). In your opinion, which card is better, the STB BlackMagic 3D or the Diamond Monster 3D II?**

— Jak, via the Internet

A It's true: STB has recently joined the crowded Voodoo2 market with a 12MB Voodoo2 board named the BlackMagic. As we go to press, however, we haven't received a review unit, so we've had no chance to put the BlackMagic through its paces. But since STB is probably using the same 3Dfx reference design that just about everyone else is using, don't expect benchmark numbers to be significantly different from other Voodoo2-based boards. Any discernible difference in performance would almost certainly come down to driver enhancements — and even then, we're talking about just a few frames per second. If you're in the market for a Voodoo2, the best way to pick one is to compare prices and consider any past experience you've had with the manufacturer and its products. If you're not partial to any particular company, chances are the cheapest Voodoo2 card you find will be the best buy.

Q **Hello, I have a few questions that I would like to ask, and would appreciate your knowledgeable response/opinion(s).**

Need Help?

If you have a hardware question or comment, write to us at:
Greg Vederman, The Hard Stuff, *PC Gamer*, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005
or E-mail: ***gvederman@pcgamer.com***

1) As far as I know, A3D is the greatest thing since sliced bread in cheap surround sound. Although it only uses two speakers, I have heard over and over again just how great this technology sounds, and with very little performance penalty. Now my question is this: if it's so great and inexpensive, what are the odds of it ever being implemented in the "real" world, i.e., new videogame consoles, home theatre, or at the local cinema? I mean, if the technology is on the same level of quality as, say, Dolby Digital (AC3), SDDS, or DTS, does this mean that A3D has a shot at bigger and better things?

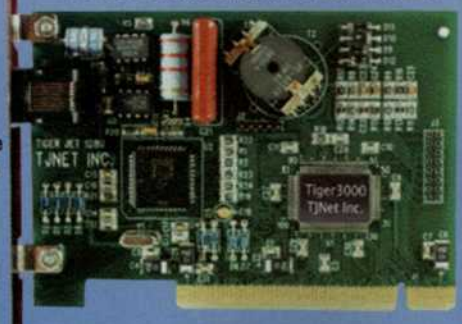
2) Is there any point in getting a PCI-based modem? If there's no performance increase, why are they being made? I have a USR 56K ISA modem, and I'm hoping that it's enough.

— Bao Ly, via the Internet

A Let's see if we can help you out, Bao:

1) Yes, A3D is a good, inexpensive way to get positional audio out of only two speakers, but there are any number of surround sound standards out there that are more impressive. All of the standards you listed — AC3, SDDS, and DTS — offer the average movie-goer or home audio enthusiast much more in the way of sound fidelity and true, multi-speaker surround than A3D currently offers. As far as videogame consoles are concerned, the companies that make those systems are notorious for insisting on proprietary technology; they're more likely to create their own audio standard as a way to ensure better control over the sound environment (not to mention third-party game developers).

2) Today's modems can't really benefit from the PCI slot's architecture; the PCI bus is a 64-bit pipeline, although it's usually implemented at 32 bits. Even at just 32 bits and a bus speed of 33MHz, the PCI line can move data at 133 megabytes per second — much, much faster than any existing modem. So until modems get a lot faster, the only reason you'd want to buy a PCI modem would be if all the ISA slots in your PC were full.



Here is what an ISDN modem looks like when it is made to fit in a PCI slot.

Glossary

Every month, the Glossary will define terms that appear in The Hard Stuff and may be new or confusing to some readers.

API
Short for application program interface, code that allows programmers to write to a single, standard interface instead of writing specific support for different types or brands of hardware. Examples of gaming related APIs include: A3D, EAX, Glide, OpenGL, DirectX, etc.

Clock Speed
The speed, in MHz, at which a chip carries out instructions. Since each instruction takes one or more clock cycle — in most cases — the clock speed of a chip greatly affects its overall performance.

Driver
A small program that controls hardware in a computer. A driver generally acts like a go-between for a given component and any programs that happen to use that device. The driver interprets generic commands and translates them into specific instructions that the hardware component can understand.

MHz
Short for megahertz, or one million hertz (Hz). Hertz is a measurement of frequency; in the case of computers, it represents how many times a processor chip runs through its cycle in a second. 1Hz represents one cycle in one second, so 1MHz is one million cycles per second.

SCSI
SCSI is short for Small Computer System Interface, a standard used in personal computers for connecting peripheral devices. SCSI interfaces have the benefit of being able to move data much faster (up to 80 megabytes per second, depending on the which version of the SCSI standard is used) than the IDE interface or standard serial or parallel ports.

S/PDIF
Short for Sony/Philips Digital Interface, a method of transferring digital data between compliant devices. An audio device designed for DVD, such as a DVD disc player or PC DVD decoder board, might have an S/PDIF-output port to send the audio signal to an S/PDIF in port on a digital-compliant amplifier or speaker system. Keeping the audio signal in digital form until it reaches the amplification stage reduces signal degradation and results in higher fidelity.

Upon further reflection,

"DragonFire will raise the bar for RPG/ Adventure games." – GameCenter

"Sierra pulled out all the stops for this beautiful game." – PCFan

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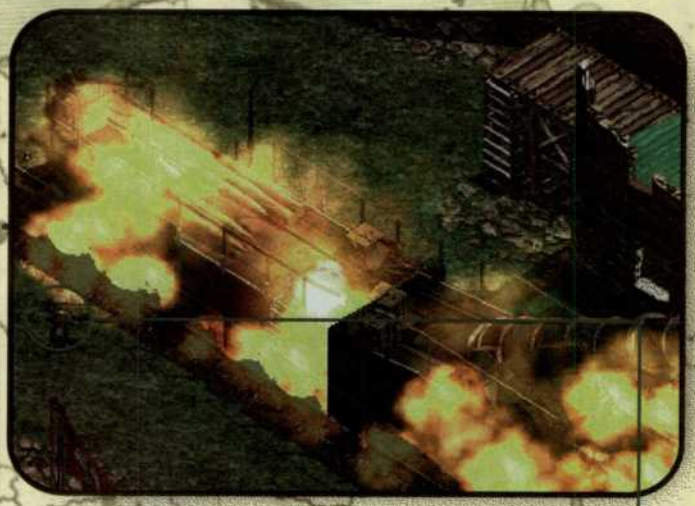

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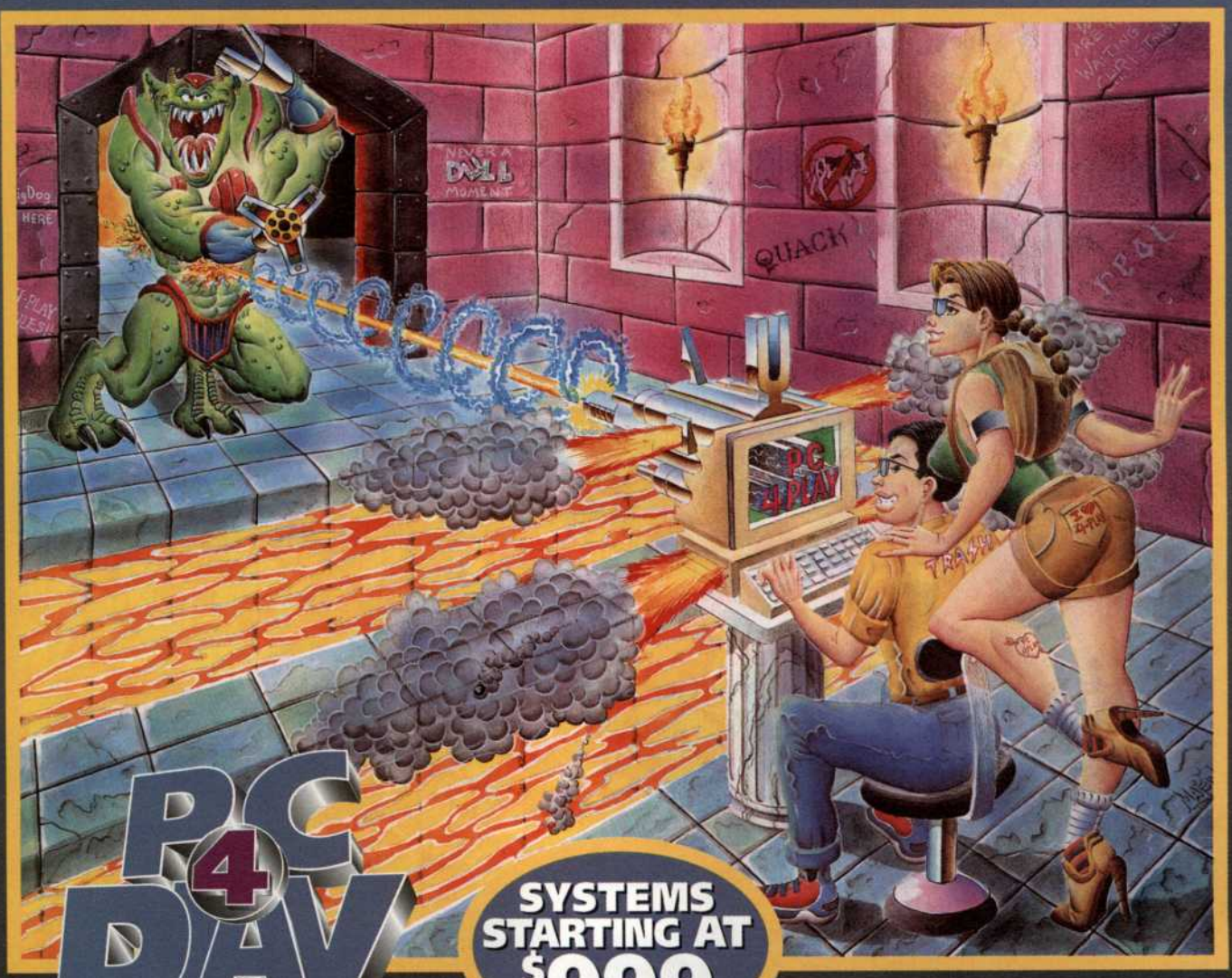

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Sea of Blood

DID's reputation as one of the uber-developers of flight sims wasn't acquired overnight. Its breakout title, *EF2000*, didn't exactly prompt an immediate love-in when it was first released, since it was buggy and had a questionable damage model. It only developed its cult following through diligent patching and the development of a tactical command element, creating — with *EF2000 2.0* — one of the best flight sims on the market. As with *Falcon 3.0*, it proves that flight sim fans are patient and forgiving with developers who vigorously support and enhance their products.

Curiously, DID seems to be repeating the cycle all over again with *F22 Air Dominance Fighter*. *ADF* wasn't as buggy as *EF2000*, but it had some odd lapses, such as the strangely un-dynamic campaign and limited loadout feature. Most controversial, the *Total Air War* module was scheduled first as an add-on disc and is now a full-blown product of its own. When it does finally hit, *TAW*'s ability to let you control every element of the air war, truly dynamic campaign, and other features will undoubtedly be greeted with hosannas, but it's been a bit of a rocky road to that point.

Added to DID's headaches is a lengthy string of Internet flames directed at the company's somewhat heavy-handed attempts to stop third-party developers from creating add-on missions or editors for DID products. Game companies have every right in the world to protect their trademarks and prevent third parties from creating products that contain pieces of their original code. Some of the items DID targeted, however, didn't appear to break these rules, such as WarDogz' "AGE" mission editor, which doesn't appear to contain either the DID.DAT file or any trademarked material — it merely lets users modify them.

DID responds to its critics as follows:

"In principle, DID is in favor of third-party add-ons and appreciates their value for lawful owners of products. DID has already supported third-party developments for both *EF2000* and *F-22*, providing considerable support and custom-written code for free. These instances have professional and business-like attitude between DID and the third-party developers. DID considers both Sim-Tech in the UK and GTT in the USA to have acted responsibly and with respect for DID's rights. We talk directly to the people concerned, not anonymous call-signs.

"It would be folly for DID to tolerate exploitation of its lawful properties and brand investment by a third party without granting prior written permission. DID and Infogrames are also bound by contract to invoke the laws of copyright on any third-party materials paid for by them, such as *World Air Power Journal* photographs, logos, and text, which may not be reproduced anywhere without the prior written permission of Aerospace Publishing.

"DID is not prepared to grant permissions to third-party developers who make claims for their add-ons that are proven to contradict DID's intimate knowledge of its own code, who are unknown to DID by name, who charge customers high prices for small, unapproved utilities, or who besmirch the good name of DID, its products, and its employees for their own commercial gain. To end on a positive note, we will work together with third-party developers for the common good."

Fair enough. Anyone shipping any part of DID's code or any trademarked material is clearly on shaky ground, but third-party editors that simply modify the DID.DAT file already on your hard drive should not be targeted.

Well, if you were waiting for new missions to expand *ADF*, that wait is over with Sim-Tech's *F-22 Air Dominance Fighter: Red Sea Operations*, a tour of duty expansion disc. Sim-Tech did a previous mission pack, published only in the UK, for Interactive Magic's *iF-16*, and it used to publish the sim magazine *Enemy Lock On*, so this is a company that definitely knows its subject matter. This new set of missions is an effective and well-conceived addition to *ADF*, though not without some disappointments. The biggest of them is the lack of any new scenery. A mission pack doesn't need to have new

The aircraft and terrain modeling in *ADF* is some of the best on PC, but no new models or terrain were added for the Red Sea tour of duty expansion disc.

T. Liam McDonald

The first official add-on pack for DID's *F-22 Air Dominance Fighter* isn't spectacular, but it's a solid enhancement for a fine sim.

territory to be a success, but it has come to be expected.

But the missions SimTech created are strong enough to carry it past this. Three new *F-22* campaigns and one new AWACS scenario add a total of 30 new missions. The tours of duty are tied to conflicts along the Sudan-Yemen border and deal with U.S. intervention in conflicts among Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, and Egypt. The F-22 faces largely Russian-built strike and air superiority craft, with a few French Mirages and Rafales. The AWACS element in *ADF*, one of the most interesting features in the original game, is ably served by a whole new U.S./Saudi-Yemen AWACS tour.

The missions are all very well crafted and create a good counterpoint to the original missions. They are crafted to follow a campaign arc, but may be played in any order. Some versions of this disc apparently included an installation error that eliminated simulation items from the menu, but I didn't encounter this, leading me to believe the culprit was either an earlier version (or a UK version) of the add-on pack. There's a patch to fix this at the SimTech web site (*www.simtech.co.uk*). The installation also fails to shut down at completion, leaving you wondering just when it's done and adding a rather amateurish feel to the proceedings.

F-22 Air Dominance Fighter **is the premier F-22 sim on the market, and a new set of Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Sudanese missions expands the action considerably.**

Short Bits

"Short and sweet" is the name of the game in *Total Annihilation Battle Tactics*. All 100 missions are available at once and grouped by play time: long (more than 40 minutes), medium (20-40 minutes), short (10-20 minutes), and very short (5-10 minutes). Four new units are included: quite a contrast to the 100-plus offered in *The Core Contingency*. Arm forces get the Stunner, an ICBM that stuns opposing forces, while the Core gets a Neutron bomb that kills soldiers but leaves buildings standing. Each side also get a new flak unit.

Many of the new missions are quick, coffee-break knock-offs meant to focus on a single tactic or a select group of units. It's a step backwards, in a sense, since instead of being harder than the original missions and those in the first add-on set, most of these are easier and faster to play. The idea is to break various tactics down into concentrated bursts for the real-time strategy novice — but at this point, are there any RTS novices left? Shifting focus to force you to deal with just the D-gun or just the Brawler, for instance, is a good idea, but maybe a little too late to capture the hard-core *TA* crowd's interest. The missions are quite strong for what they are, but experienced players will probably want to give this one a miss.

PCG

BUG PATCHES*

Civil War Generals II v. 1.04 (Sierra): The AI now always follows the line of sight rule. Version 1.03 introduced a bug wherein the AI enjoyed the advantage of full visibility without regard to whether the line of sight rule in the options panel was selected. Version 1.04 corrects the bug by forcing the AI (and only the AI) to always follow the line of sight rule. The full visibility option continues to work fine for the human players who choose to use it. *CW29514H.ZIP*

Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3 Patch 1 (ION Storm): Right-click scrolling available on mini-map. Cursor is visible over the game interface when placing a building. Yes/No confirmation has been implemented when aborting or restarting a game. Shutter problem preventing units from being built has been fixed. Alt-Tab will work properly if *Dominion* is the only application running. The AI will not be able to see your invisible units. Various Load/Save issues have been addressed and fixed. Autosave problem fixed. Game speed adjustment works properly in multi-player mode. Various graphic glitches have been fixed. Follow mode on an enemy's unit fixed. Mplayer uninstall fixed. *DOMN_P1.ZIP*

Final Fantasy VII v. 1.01 (Eidos Interactive): This patch is intended to fix the problem users have had with the Riva 128 and Riva 128 ZX video cards. This patch also enables the "ESC" key in the name menus that laptop users have not been able to leave because they have no numeric keypad. *FF7RIVA.ZIP*

Final Fantasy VII Cyrix Fix (Eidos Interactive): This patch will fix the problem that users with 6x86, 6x86L and the 6x86GX CPUs have had running *Final Fantasy VII*. *FF7CYRIX.ZIP*

Longbow 2 v. 2.09 (Jane's Combat Simulations): This patch fixes (among other things) known bugs such as the autopilot occasionally disengaging, hat-switch issues with some joysticks, and includes a filter to remove some harsh language in the game. This patch also includes support to play *Longbow 2* on Jane's *combat.net*. See the readme file for details. *LB2209E.ZIP*

M.A.X. II v. 1.31 (Interplay Productions): Fixes: Lockup when cycling through unit list with "<" and ">" keys. Units using waypoints in turn-based and multi-player modes. Preference menu would pause a multi-player game. Problem with units not attacking enemy units in multi-player mode. Units under bridges not displayed in MiniMap. Fixed "Capture the Flag" play in multi-player mode. Chat "Whisper" command would truncate messages. Chat "Color" command was not compatible with certain video cards. Gas clouds counted as built units in reports. Various lockups and crashes in multi-player mode fixed. Various server based bugs fixed. Various in-game bugs fixed. *MAX2P131.ZIP*

The Operational Art of War Volume I v. 1.03 (TalonSoft): Weather effects have been refined. Bicycle and ski unit icons are now displayed only if local conditions are appropriate. Airborne sub-units (broken into smaller units by the player) are forced into reorganizing status if they would otherwise have scattered. Special forces units are no longer eligible for reconstitution. Many other changes. *TOAW103.EXE*

Rainbow Six Voice Transmission Fix (Red Storm Entertainment): Includes the files needed to enable voice communication in the game. *VOXWARE.ZIP*

Red Baron II 3D Patch (Sierra): This patch turns the full version of *Red Baron II* into *Red Baron 3D*. Changes include: 3D hardware acceleration for a more realistic world and smoother flight, flight model enhancements for more accurate aircraft behavior, AI improvements which create smarter computer-controlled pilots, game balance modifications to make the experience even more immersive, and a multi-player system for enormous online battles. *RB2_3D.EXE*

StarCraft v. 1.02 (Blizzard Entertainment): Flying units no longer receive "cover" from terrain features. Fixed the bug when canceling a guardian in high latency games that killed the mutalisk and gave multiple refunds. Fixed the bug that could sometimes cause a map editor, hit point modified siege tank's hit points to be incorrect after transforming. Time elapsed while the game is paused no longer counts toward total elapsed game time. Increases the cost of a Zerg Hatchery from 300 to 350 minerals. Many other changes. *STAR102.ZIP*

Total Annihilation v. 3.1 (Cavedog Entertainment): The 3.1 Patch adds many new features to *Total Annihilation* and will upgrade any previous version of *Total Annihilation* to version 3.1. In addition, the 3.1 Patch contains all the units previously available via download. Players with non-Intel computers running Windows (e.g. Cyrix, AMD-K6) should also download and install the Non-Intel Update Patch. *TA1X_31.ZIP* (3.1 Patch) *NON-INTELUPDATE.EXE* (Non-Intel Update Patch)

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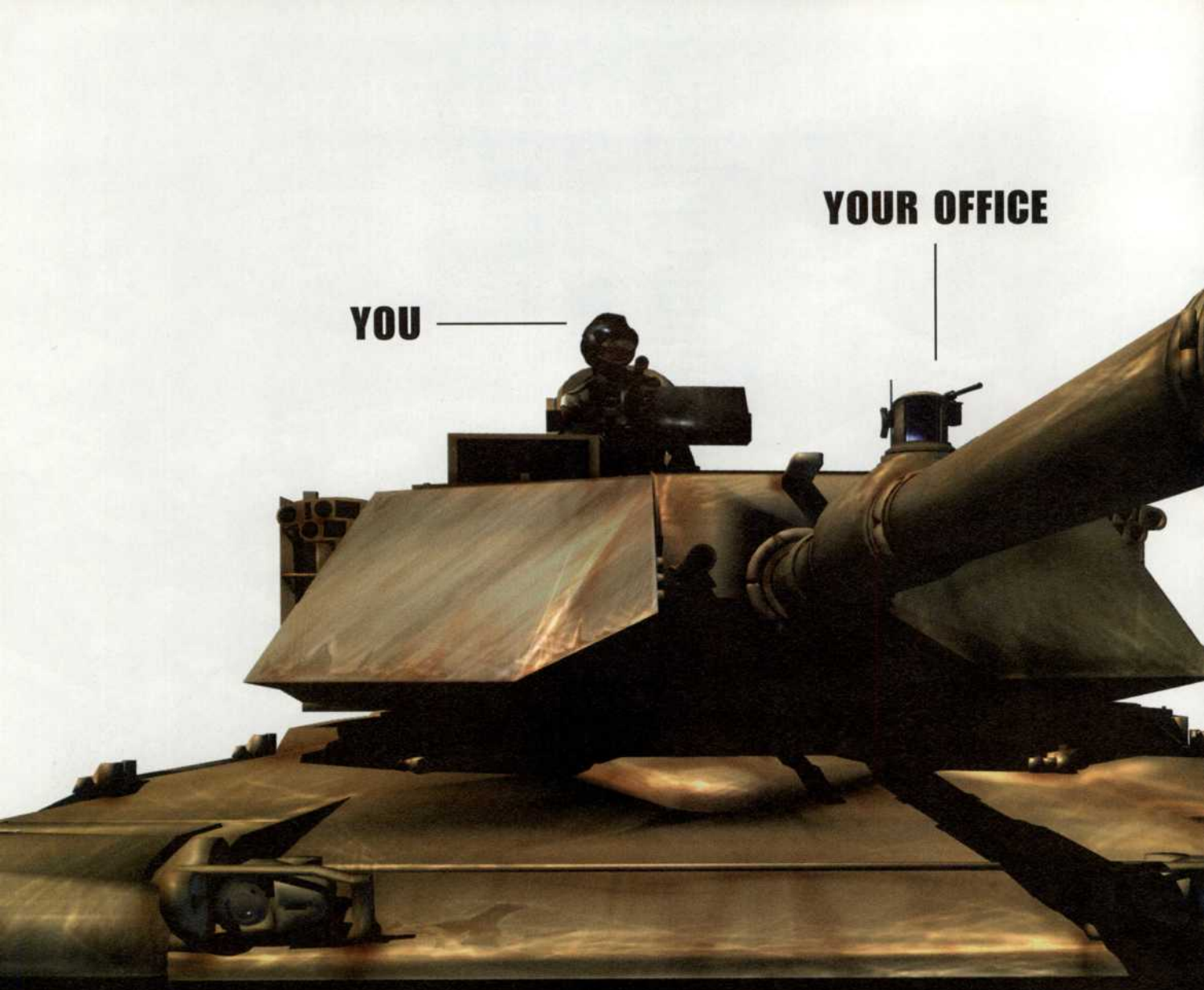

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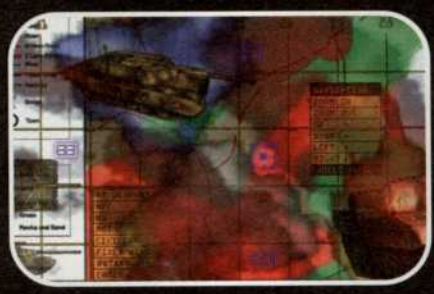

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Deathmatch 2000

Precision. Poise. Discipline. The flawless execution of teamwork and the practiced hand of the commando. Those are the elements of the game called *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*.

Everyone at *PC Gamer* works for a gargantuan multinational publishing company called Imagine Media — which has about 200 employees. Of these, maybe 30 of us are game editors (we're not sure what the other 170 people do, although they seem busy enough). At any rate, we lucky few are equipped with PCs hooked up to a local-area network. Being connected to a network is important, because it lets us share documents and keep ahead of interdepartmental memos about cubicle nomenclature and such.

Actually, the only real reason to be on a LAN is to play network games. And while it may not be scientific, there's a pretty good chance that's what hot on our LAN will go over pretty well with Internet gamers, too. And over the past five or six weeks, the game of choice at Imagine has been *Rainbow Six*. It's not like any other multi-player game we've played, because it delivers the intensity action gamers crave, blended with the realism the sim crowd thrives on. This cross-fertilization has immense appeal and opens up all kinds of design possibilities for future games.

The premise is relatively straightforward — something to do with a special force set up to fight terrorists — and it offers a fairly involved single-player game. But what matters most to me is how intense a multi-player game it is.

If you're shot dead, or even badly wounded, you're out of the match, and have to lie there and stare through your dead eyes until the next mission. Carelessness or bad luck can take you out of the game — that's a formula for adrenaline-tinged paranoia.

You must work together with your team to win a firefight, and this factor puts *Rainbow Six* among the best cooperative and team versus team multi-player games yet released, along with just a few user-made *Quake* mods like Capture the Flag or Team Fortress and others.

A benchmark to consider when trying to judge the appeal of a multi-player game is to listen for the number of anecdotes it generates. After a match, people frequently gather around and talk about what happened. But when people talk about a *StarCraft* or *Quake* match, it tends to be "Well, you had so many resource points, it didn't matter," or, "You camped on the rocket launcher during the whole game." Here, it's much more visceral — something like, "I blew through the door, shot you in the back, chucked a grenade upstairs, then ran around the other side. But I never saw that sniper." Each episode becomes more visceral, more personal. It's as close as I've come to playing paintball on a computer.

For example, in one incident, Bill Harms and I were inside an airplane hangar, besieged by *PC Gamer*'s former associate art director Quintin Doroquez and some of his cronies from *PC Accelerator*'s Blue Team. The two of us took up covering positions on the catwalk overlooking the two sole doors, which were in diagonally opposite corners. Ready with our rifles trained on the doorways, there was simply no way anyone could get in without getting killed — something that would never happen in an unrealistic shooter. So after a few of the Blue Team's members died in reckless human-wave assaults on the place, the remaining villains were left scampering around outside, afraid to enter. They resorted to typing insults. Their mission a failure, they could only resort to an ignominious exit.

And it goes on from there. But while such anecdotes show that *Rainbow Six* is perfect for the local area network, it's still too early to tell how well it will work over the Internet.

Jason Bates

Rainbow Six is a fantastic LAN game, but it raises questions about LAN versus TCP/IP design, and how the two may merge.

Teamwork wins games in *Rainbow Six*, and the better you know your teammates and can communicate with them, the better your chances are. And it's a lot easier to communicate with someone on the same LAN than it is with someone across the Internet. This is the fundamental difference between LAN games and TCP/IP play.

Certainly there's a precedent for teams to spontaneously arise on the Internet without having ever met, and yet still perform complex teamwork. *Quake*'s clans, obviously, are one example, as are the squadrons in online flight sims like *WarBirds*. But it's nothing like the ease of cooperation you get when you can yell at people in the same room, or even use interoffice speaker-phones.

The obvious solution is real-time voice communication over the Internet, using a microphone hooked up to your sound card. *Rainbow Six* attempts to provide this, using technology similar to the online-only game *Fire Team* — but it's hobbled by a couple of things: when *Rainbow Six* shipped, the voice communication feature didn't work because some vital files were left off the CD-ROM. And even now that a patch has fixed the problem, it's a bit of a bandwidth hog and there are small but significant delays between the time when a command or warning is issued and when it's received. And what do you do about games that don't even try to do this?

Interestingly, a new shareware program has arisen that can add voice communication to almost any Internet game. The software is called the Battlefield Communicator; check it out at *www.shadowfactor.com*.

And while voice communication may well gobble up half of today's bandwidth, that's a problem that will fade as faster Internet connections become common. And if cooperative multi-player games like *Rainbow Six* and beyond are to truly bring the essence of LAN gaming to the Internet, teamwork via voice is a must.

PCG

Showdown in Sweden: What Went Wrong?

On August fifth, 1998, one of the biggest and most heated clan battles in the history of *Quake* took place in Stockholm, Sweden. It was dubbed a virtual Clash of the Titans; my clan Death Row, considered one of the best in the United States, went up against Clan [9], deemed one of Europe's hottest teams of fraggers. The rules were set — five games to be played on *NetQuake*, Death Row's favored platform, and five games on *QuakeWorld*, the choice of Clan [9]. Our clans met, and countless rockets and pock-marked walls later, the score was a convincing eight to two... in favor of the Swedes.

Okay, I'll be the first to admit, I was shell-shocked — we didn't expect to lose, especially not to that kind of extent. Although the last five games were all decided with less than a minute to play, it was still a bitter pill to swallow. I'm not going to delve too much into how the matches played out — you can see what happened by simply downloading the demos from any number of *Quake* sites. But anyone with aspirations of making it as a professional (or at least serious) clan gamer might well learn something from a few of the things we overlooked on that fateful day in Sweden.

The bottom line is, of course, that Clan [9] was the better team on the day. Their teamplay was impeccable, and that, coupled with some great individual skill and a unique strategy, was definitely a formidable combination to go up against.

Beyond that, the problems were all of our own making. Primarily, Death Row didn't do its homework on the opposition. Not unlike a boxer studying his opponent's techniques, strengths, and weaknesses before a bout, serious *Quake* players should studiously observe their opponent's tendencies, strategies, and tactics before any competitive match. Problem for us was, we couldn't find any demos of Clan [9]'s past games anywhere! This turned out to be a pretty considerable disadvantage, as they were able to surprise us with their unique play style once the game began.

Another mistake we made was not practicing in the same room together before the match. Since most clans in the United States consist of people from different cities and states, we're used to communicating via the game, with the use of "binds," or pre-defined messages assigned to key-presses, rather than by direct speech. We simply weren't accustomed to actually *talking* to each other while playing, so we'd get overly excited and yell at each other! This turned out to be quite a disaster — we found out (too late, unfortunately) that Clan [9] could hear everything we were saying! We'd tell each other everything, from where we were to what direction we were attacking — and that in-game intel was leaking through the walls to the enemy!

There's a funny story to this, though. After we realized they were listening to us, by which time it was too late to pull back a winning result, we decided to switch the names of some of the key objects/areas in the game to fruit names so that they wouldn't understand what we meant. For example, we renamed the Quad Damage to blueberry, Red Armor to apple, Yellow Armor to banana, and so forth. Of course, us being the knobs that we are, we jumbled it all up during the game. Picture the scene:

Me: "I'm at WATERMELON!!!"

Frick (my teammate): "WHAT THE F*** IS A WATERMELON?!"

Me: "Ummm, crap! Err... I'm at APPLE?!? Oh wait... ummm, WHAT'S THE PENTAGRAM CALLED AGAIN?!"

D'Oh! As you can see, we screwed it up big time.

Aside from our own Keystone Kops antics, the effects of Clan [9]'s astounding teamplay were all too evident. Against a clan with average teamplay, if you can fight off any two enemies from a key position, you can hold that position, no problem. The opposing team may send one guy in to try to flush you out, but in general, there isn't any combined team effort to remove you. However, against Clan [9], it was a completely different story. I'd go in, take out two enemies, and within seconds, two other enemies would come in to help out — along with the other two that I fragged earlier. It was nearly impossible to play against, but it was amazing to watch, and a powerful demonstration of the old axiom that no matter how good you may think you are, there's always somebody better.

Probably the biggest mistake (and this will sound the most like an excuse) was that we didn't anticipate how much difficulty we'd have getting accustomed to the jet lag. There's a reason why Olympic athletes arrive in the host city at least a week before opening ceremonies — to relax, and get used to the time changes. By contrast we got, on average, about two to three hours of sleep, with an additional twenty minutes that we snuck in an hour before game time. Arriving on a transatlantic flight one night and then having to play the very next day is a horrific prospect, and I hope future international tournament organizers take this into consideration.

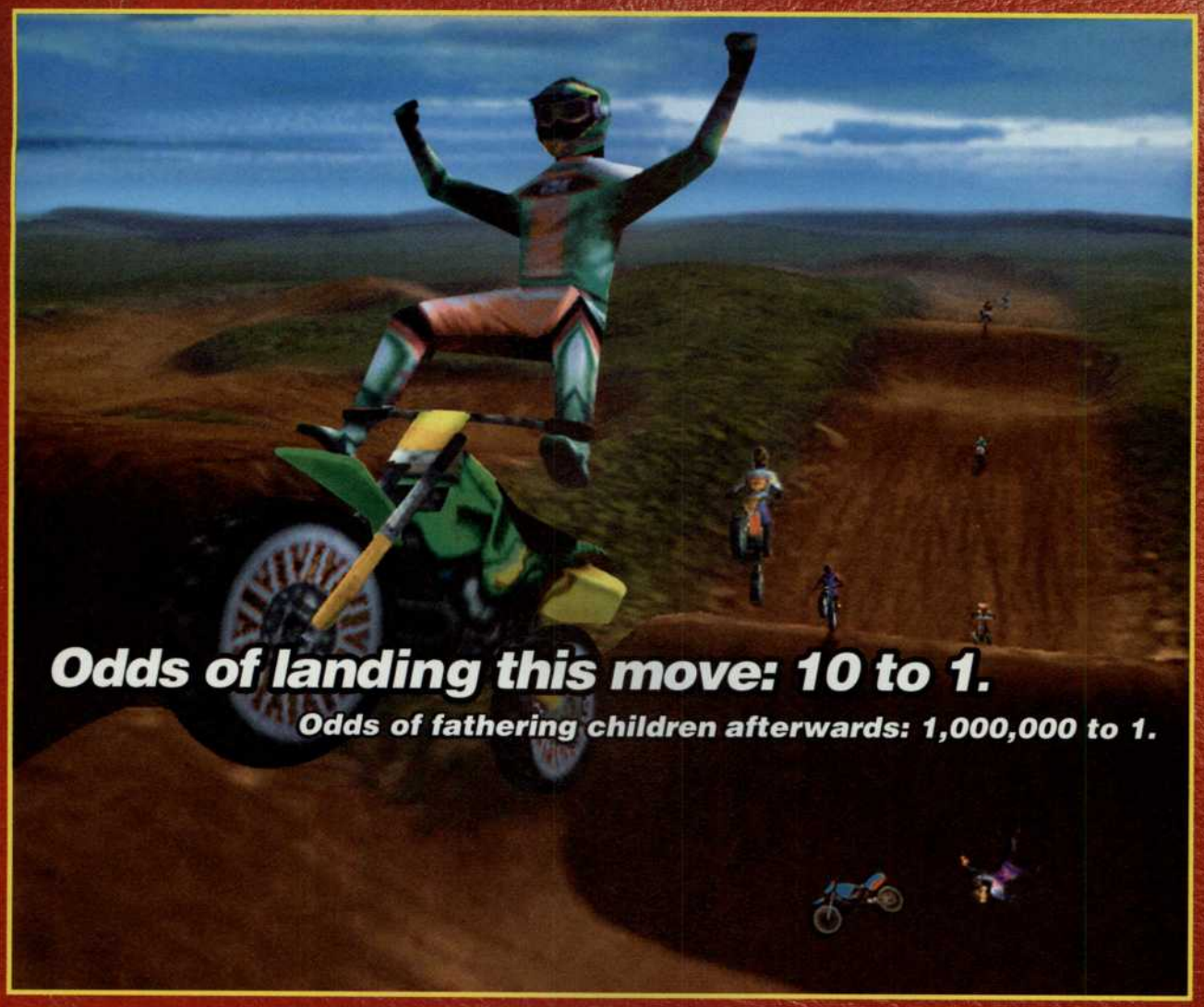
I want to make clear that I'm not trying to make excuses. Clan [9] spanked us good, and they deserve all the kudos in the world for it. I don't blame our loss on any of the obstacles we encountered — but we sure as hell would have played a lot better without having to deal with them. I look forward to the re-match, for which Death Row will be infinitely better prepared...

PCG

You can read more from Dennis at his regularly updated web site, located at www.gamers.com.

Dennis Fong, a.k.a. "Thresh"

The destruction of Thresh's *Quake* clan at the hands of European opposition led our resident fragmeister to wonder how it could have happened.



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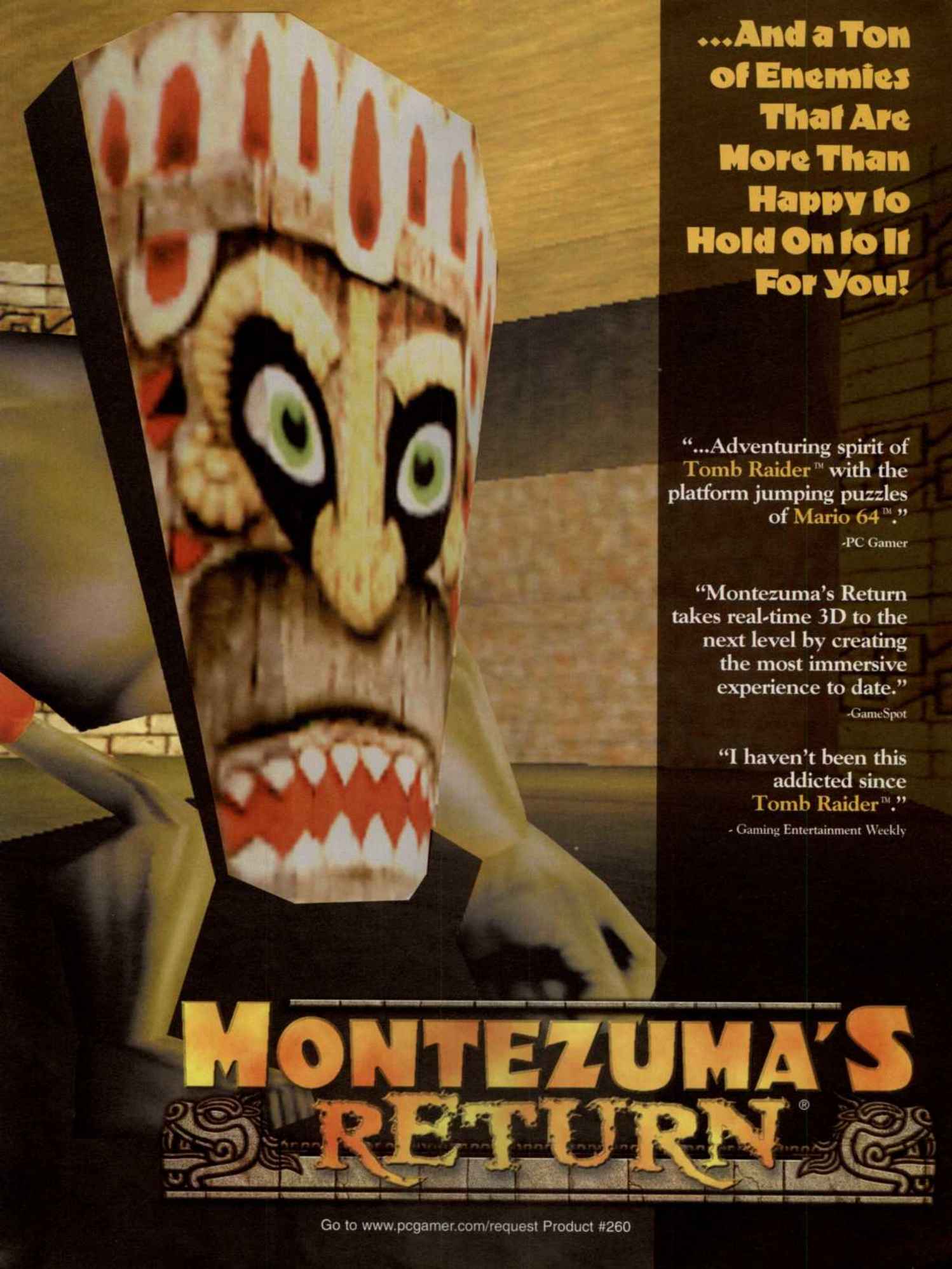
Actual Gameplay Screen



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The New Brood

Walking into the Interplay offices was a frightening experience. It had been a pleasurable morning — Krys Card, the PR rep for Interplay's new RPG division, Black Isle Studios, and marketing guy Greg Peterson picked me up from the airport, and we had bagels and coffee at Starbucks (that was a bit of a shock, finding a Starbucks in another city). They said they were giving the rest of the team time to prepare for my visit.

I shrugged it off — I figured I'd just be hustled into some programmer's den, and one of the designers would walk me through a presentation of *Torment*, Interplay's upcoming RPG set in the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Planescape world. Boy, was I wrong. When we arrived at Interplay's building, the first thing I noticed was that people were already waiting outside the conference room with big smiles — too big, if you know what I mean. They promptly opened the double doors on a dark, dark room. All I could tell was that the room was full of people, and I couldn't see any of them. And, of course, they wanted me to go in first.

With trepidation, I stepped into the room, worried that one of the people hiding in the shadows had read my review of *Of Light and Darkness* and held a grudge. Once I sat down, however, the presentation began. Feargus Urquhart, director of the RPG division, began with a small speech about the origins of Black Isle Studios. Then Senior Designer Zeb Cook stepped up to the plate and presented an account of the origins of the Planescape universe from his time spent at TSR. Colin McComb, who took over for Cook at TSR, described the further development of Planescape. Then Guido Henkel, senior producer for *Torment* and best known for his work on the Realms of Arkania series, described how Planescape and Black Isle mixed to form the new game. The others spoke out as well — Chris Avellone, the lead designer of *Torment* described how dark and dismal, yet filled with humor, the game was. Tim Donley, the lead artist, described some of the sharp edges of the game's artwork. These are guys who've been in the industry for a while, and even in the case of Cook and McComb, have been on the pen-and-paper side of the fence for years.

Michael Wolf

With all these talented people in place, Black Isle Studios is in a good position to back up its plan "to create the best electronic RPGs on the market." These are the people working with Bioware to finish off *Baldur's Gate* (they're helping with the testing, anyway — the game itself is in production up in Bioware's Canadian offices). They're also hard at work producing *Fallout 2*, the sequel to last year's best roleplaying game, and possibly the best science fiction RPG ever created. Check out Black Isle's web site at *www.blackisle.com* for more information.

Needless to say, I was impressed. Not just with the game, which was impressive enough, but with the guys behind it. After lunch, we returned to the office, and I had a chance to sit down with the developers themselves. No prepared speeches. No lights and fancy backdrops. Just the guys who make it happen. We went through the game, and they detailed how they'd changed the Bioware engine to suit their needs — bigger character graphics, more background movement, larger textures, etc. Of course, this was familiar territory — I meet with game designers all the time. But this was different. For one thing, it wasn't a half-hour presentation of a game that they'd presented time and time again. I hung out with these guys for a good three hours, looking at every aspect of *Torment* they had to show me.

The spells in *Torment* will be big and dramatic.

It was a singularly spectacular sensation to be in a room filled with the minds and talents that were working on what looks like another fantastic roleplaying game. I even got a chance to play the game myself. The subtle humor reminded me a lot of the guys who were creating it. With the two head artists, the lead programmer, and the designer all crammed into one small office, these guys have to deal with each other all the time — but somehow they manage to not only deal, but to have fun in the process. One would start a sentence, and other would finish it. One would speak two words, and the rest would burst out laughing at an inside joke. These were people who'd worked together for two years on a single product, and not only could stand each other, they seemed to genuinely *like* each other. More importantly, their love for the game was just as evident.

I don't want to sound like I'm favoring one company over another, but let's face it — Interplay has some of the best-looking RPGs under development we've seen a long time. With *Baldur's Gate* queued to take the RPG world by storm, *Fallout 2* poised to capture fans of the first game all over again, and *Torment* set to turn Spring 1999 into a season of RPG goodness, Interplay's roleplaying status is quickly on the rise. The days of *Stonekeep* and *Descent to Undermountain* appear to be past. And that's something any roleplaying fan should be thrilled about.

PCG

Interplay's Black Isle Studios is dedicated to making the best RPGs possible, and it's on the way to doing just that.

Taps for Avalon Hill

The news hit the Internet like a 2,000-pound bomb: Avalon Hill (the company that *invented* modern wargaming) is dead.

For a rumored price of $6 million, the legendary AH was purchased by Hasbro Interactive. When the Colonel made telephone inquiries to both companies, the response was "no comment."

Well, by God, *I'm* going to comment. When the scythe of corporate death swept through the Avalon Hill offices, it left no survivors. Let us record, for honor's sake, the names of some of the fallen: Steve Holmes, Mark Glidden, Rich Kuryk, Stuart Tucker, Don Greenwood, Chris Lawrence, Ben Knight, and my beer-drinking buddy, Bill Levay. All gone, jobless, in the space of an hour. I did not know all of these gentlemen personally, but I knew them by their high professional reputations, by the quality of the games they created, and by their self-evident integrity.

It would be well to remember just *how* important Avalon Hill was to the history of wargaming. The company was founded by Charles S. Roberts. Freshly commissioned in the Maryland National Guard, Roberts envisioned a cheap, noiseless, form of training: an imaginary country whose terrain features were overlaid with a square grid (similar to that used on real military maps). Two contending countries would wage war on this "board" using cardboard pieces instead of miniatures. Each piece would be printed with basic information: attack and defense strength, and movement capability. Battles were resolved by comparing the strengths of adjacent stacks of units, rolling a die, and comparing the result with a Combat Results Table.

The U.S. Army wasn't interested in *Tactics* (as Roberts' first game was called), but a lot of people who played the game in his living room *were*. Roberts had the map and unit counters professionally printed, stuck the whole thing in big plastic bags, and started selling them, by mail order and word of mouth, out of his living room. In 1958, after selling 2,000 games ("I either netted or lost about $30," Roberts said in a later interview), he'd seen enough to convince him there was "a market for realistic games of a specialty format, designed to appeal to those who enjoy intellectual content and prefer competition wherein skill is a primary virtue."

William R. Trotter

The rest is history. Classic boardgames such as *Gettysburg (1859), D-Day, Tactics II,* and *Bismarck* (with its revolutionary "hidden search and movement" system), created the boardgame hobby from which all else derives. Until Roberts turned the company over to one of its biggest creditors, Monarch Services (they printed all the maps and boxes), Avalon Hill was a shoestring operation. Erich Dott, CEO of Monarch (and whose son, Jackson Dott, ran the daily operations), gave the struggling company an infusion of cash and brought onboard some of the most brilliant minds in the nascent gaming industry, such as James F. Dunnigan.

Classic followed classic: *Stalingrad, Afrika Corps, Jutland, Guadalcanal, Panzerblitz,* climaxed by the greatest cult success in board-gaming history, *Advanced Squad Leader.* During the Golden Age of boardgaming, Avalon Hill *ruled.*

When home computers became a market to be reckoned with, AH was quick out of the starting gate with hybrid games such as *B-1 Bomber,* which used the computer to track the paperwork that could be so burdensome in boardgames, but made no effort to enhance the games graphically. Curiously, the more sophisticated the PC market became, the more AH seemed either reluctant or unsure as to how it wanted to capitalize on this new format.

By the early 1990s, AH was known more for its eccentricities than for new product. Its advertising budget was minuscule (even when the company put out a *good* PC game, nobody knew about it); the Monarch company continued to print manuals and boxes (despite competitors' bids that were less than *half* of what Monarch was charging); thousands of dollars were wasted warehousing boardgames that nobody was buying, or ever would buy; and PC conversions of boardgame classics (*Third Reich* is a perfect example) were stodgy, literal, and uninspired.

Schemes for modernizing and creating really innovative PC games were proposed, and rejected, for reasons which the more progressive employees regarded as capricious, shortsighted, and just plain dumb. Some of the best talent saw the handwriting on the wall and left to start their own companies — Jim Rose, who's made such a resounding success out of TalonSoft, being the most notable.

Somewhere or other, Bill Gates wrote: "A company is either in an upward spiral, or a downward spiral; stasis is only the precursor to the downward spiral." Sometime this year, Avalon Hill reached the bottom of its spiral.

What happens now? My guess is that Hasbro will repackage some of AH's best family-oriented titles and get them into Toys-R-Us, Wal-Mart, and other major retail chains that Avalon Hill never made any serious effort to penetrate.

As for the wargames, you can kiss them goodbye. Hasbro publishes *family*-oriented games, and we all know what that means. *TacOps II* is road-kill (unless it finds a new buyer). The warehoused boardgames and PC wargame titles will be remaindered, and some of us will pick up a few bargains. The terminated employees will find new jobs. Life will go on.

But for those of us who learned to love wargaming back in the 1960s, the passing of Avalon Hill marks a moment of sadness almost amounting to grief. A once-proud giant has fallen; an era has ended. How sad, how *unnecessary,* how absurd it all seems! PCG

"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings..." — Shakespeare, *Richard II*

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Has Co-Op Flown the Coop?

In this month's Letters section, a reader named Keith Mitchell asks a good question: What happened to the cooperative multi-player features that promised to revolutionize combat sims about a year ago?

Think about it; DID's *EF2000 2.0* and Jane's Combat Simulations' *Longbow 2* came out about this time last year, and they set new standards for multi-player action in air combat sims. Not only did they have the usual head-to-head options; they also offered multiple sim nuts the chance to fly on each other's wings in cooperative missions, joining forces in multi-player mode to do virtually everything you could do in single-player mode. Both of these games were great news for all of us who were waiting to see combat sims with multi-player options that go beyond a kind of airborne deathmatch. But if we thought they were the start of something big, we were apparently wrong.

The hoped-for wave of sims with sophisticated co-op play has turned out to be less than a trickle. Even Jane's own *F-15*, released earlier this year, lacked any kind of cooperative multi-player options. That was especially disappointing, since *Longbow 2*'s co-op support was so versatile and thorough; in that sim, gamers could fly as lead and wingmen in separate AH-64D attack helicopters, or even pair up as pilot and copilot/gunner in the same chopper. Since *F-15*'s single-player game has you flying lead with as many as seven other F-15E Strike Eagle fighters — each of them a two-seater — the sim had tons of built-in potential to be a great multi-player co-op game. Unfortunately, the *F-15* development team opted to limit multi-play to the same old head-to-head, air-to-air deathmatch action. Maybe one day we'll see an *F-15* sequel that lets us fly cooperative strike missions (and maybe even team up as pilot and weapons systems officer in a single plane), but until then I hope the *F-15* guys will understand if we gripe a little bit about their otherwise wonderful simulation.

EF2000 2.0 featured great cooperative multi-play.

This year has held a few more disappointments in the arena of multi-player sims. DID followed up *EF2000 2.0* with *F-22 Air Dominance Fighter* which, like Jane's *F-15*, was a really fantastic single-player sim but felt like a step backward in terms of multi-player support. More robust multi-player features were held back for *F-22 Total Air War*, which started life as a planned add-on and has become a full-fledged, stand-alone sequel. And judging from the beta version of *Total Air War*, its co-op support won't be nearly as sophisticated as that in *EF2000 2.0* — a major let-down for gamers who were looking forward to flying with other human pilots in *TAW*'s new real-time dynamic campaign or commanding them via the game's AWACS mode.

Eidos' *Flying Nightmares 2* promised some great co-op action, in addition to head-to-head thrills, with its mix of real-time strategy and authentic flight sim — but it's apparently dead in the water (or the air, as the case may be). And *Team Apache*, another promising sim abandoned by Eidos, did see release through Mindscape — but while its multi-player support included co-op missions, it was much more limited than what *Longbow 2* gave us. In fact, no sim since *Longbow 2* and *EF2000 2.0* has come close to providing the kind of multi-player support those games delivered.

Hey, I know the developers of all these games (or most of 'em, anyway) can supply reasons why they don't include the cooperative multi-play features we were hoping for. And as a guy who gets to see the industry from the inside, I can understand those reasons. But they're only a small consolation to the rabid sim-nut in me.

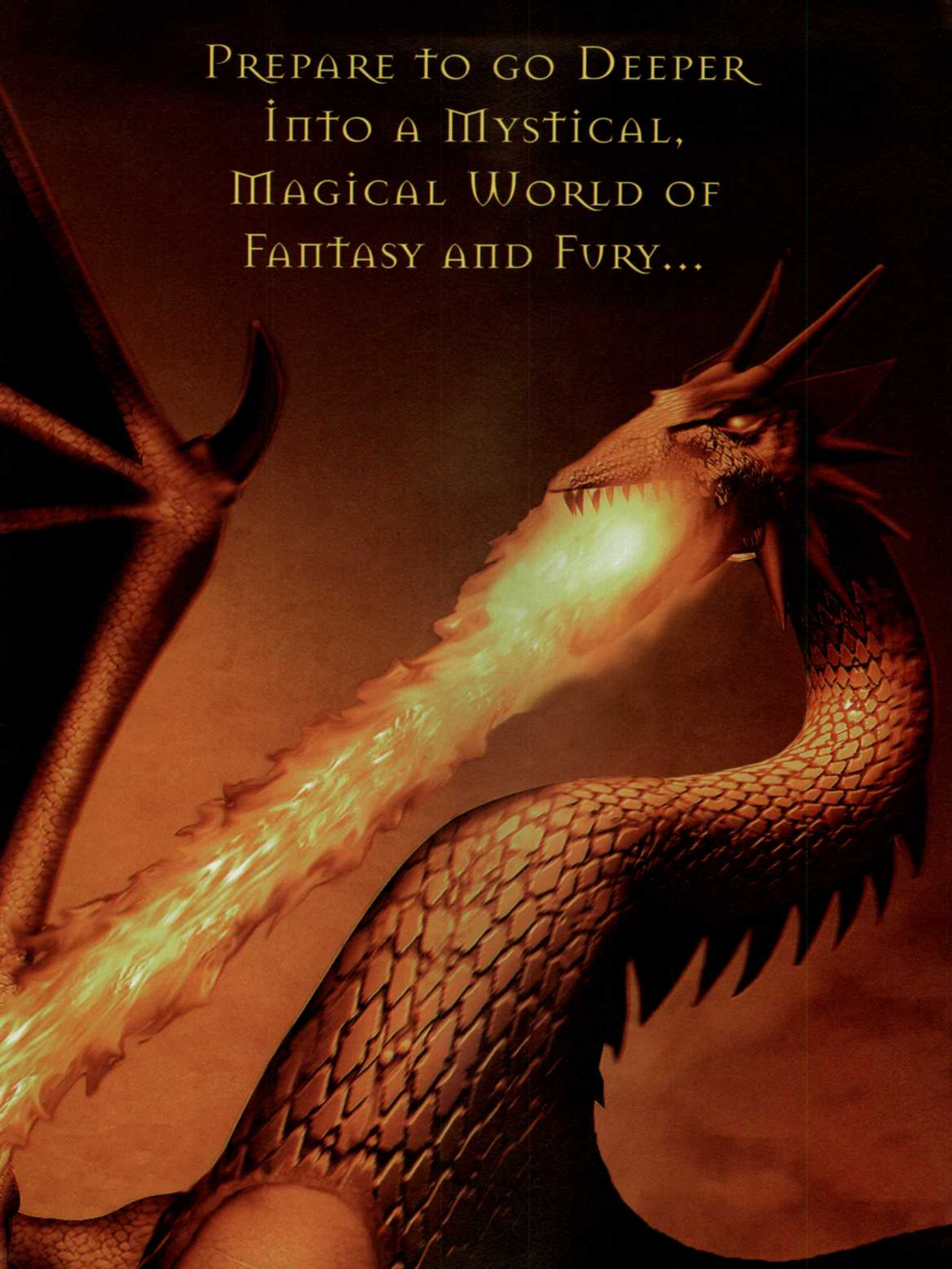
Still, a new year is almost upon us, and there's no doubt it'll bring a whole slew of new sims. Here's hoping they'll put as much emphasis on rich, versatile multi-player support as they do on the latest 3D-accelerated graphics and other bells and whistles. Combat sims can benefit more from good cooperative multi-play than just about any other kind of game — I'm eagerly awaiting the day when it becomes a standard feature.

PCG

Dan Bennett

Longbow 2 boasts more co-op multi-player options than any other sim.

What looked like a really promising multi-player trend in combat sims seems to be falling by the wayside — but Dan wants it back.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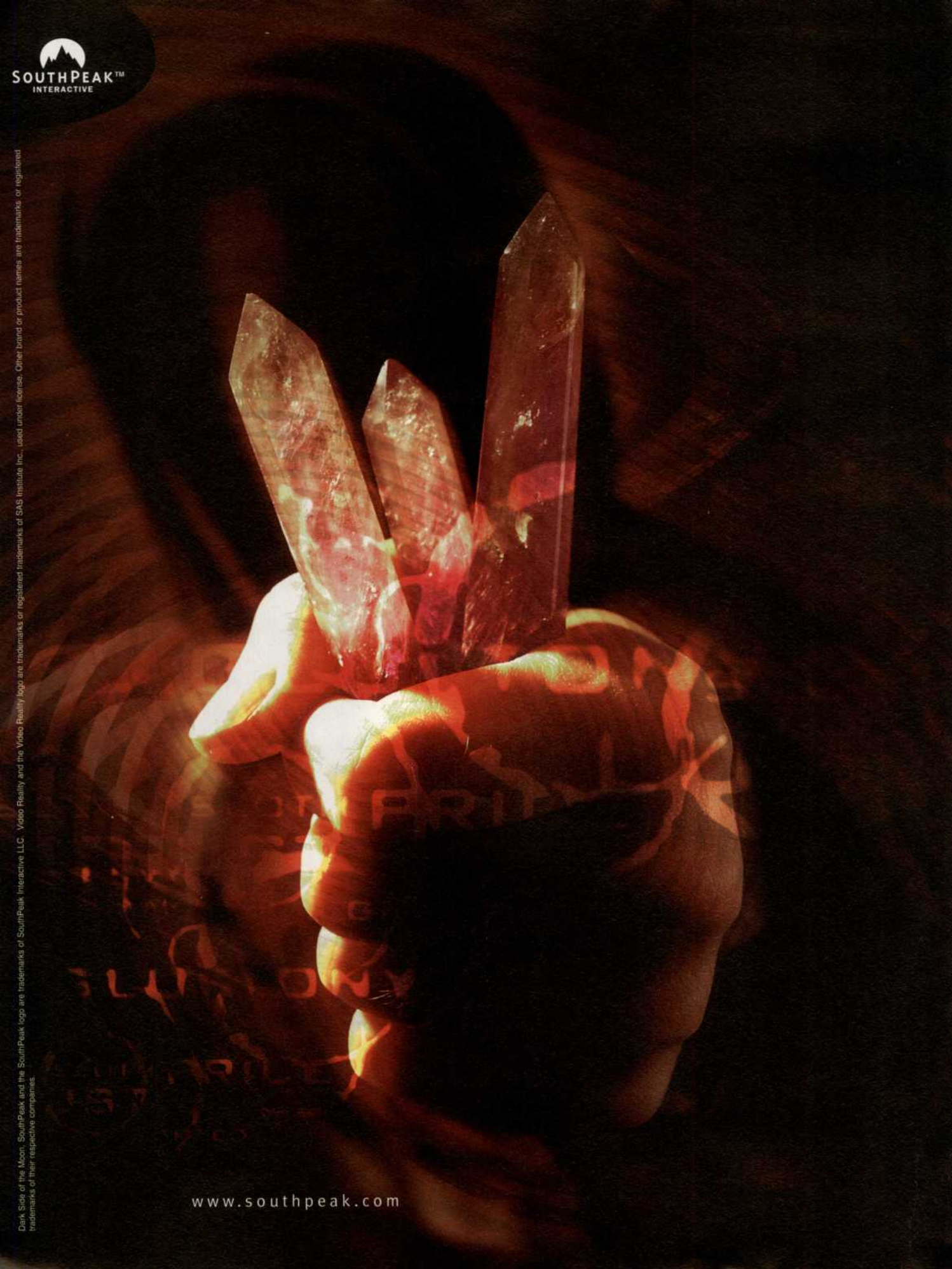

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This month, we had intended to present the final installment of our *Unreal* walkthrough... but unfortunately, erm, the dog ate it or something.

But we promise we'll have it for you next issue, and in the meantime we've got tip-top tips for *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six, Mech Commander, SWAT 2, Commandos*, and more!

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Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six, Part 1

On your feet, soldier! These multi-play tips straight from the experts at Red Storm will help you win your missions every time.

It's one of the best games out there right now, but the multi-player can be a killer — literally! That's why we enlisted the help of Red Storm Entertainment's own elite commandos from the game's development team to give you some expert pointers on how to survive longer than your opponent. Special thanks to Thomas Devries and Wendy Beasley from Red Storm for these life-saving strategies.

Step One: The Ten Commandments of *Rainbow Six*

1. Know thy Level
2. Customize your gear to your environment.
3. *Everyone* has Class 2 Armor as default in Adversarial mode.
4. Use your surroundings to your advantage. Remember why you have camouflage on.
5. Flashbangs don't kill friendlies!
6. Always watch your "six" (as in your rear).
7. Two-man teams means the guy in the rear is using a Heartbeat Sensor.
8. The best strategy is different than the one you just used.
9. First one to a Bottleneck wins!
10. You have a better shot when not moving. Don't get flustered.

Step Two: Use the Right Equipment

PRIMARY WEAPON — GENERAL USAGE: It all depends on the environment. For most cases you want the CAR-15. It has the ability to penetrate an opposing team's armor *and* the targeting reticle focuses faster than the M-16A2 (which has the same penetration). Environmentally speaking, it's the most versatile. It has a good enough zoom factor for sniping and the size of the weapon allows the reticle to close in fast enough for use in close quarters. There are some situations where you'll want something else, though.

OUTDOORS (OPEN AREA FIGHTING): The best weapon for fighting in large open areas is the M-16A2. The reason (stated above) is the rifle's excellent armor penetration combined with its superior zoom. It's great for sniping! The key to getting the maximum performance out of this weapon is to select the single shot mode and to fire crouched. Single shot is preferred because the rifle will "kick up" drastically when in full auto and in snipe mode, affecting accuracy. The three-round burst is as effective a shot as single, but you'll use up a lot more ammo when taking "pot shots" like this. Conservation of ammo is a must.

The reason you want to stay in the crouched position is because it presents the smallest target area to the enemy. This is essential, due to the fact that the M-16A2's reticle is the slowest to come to rest when moving to acquire a new target. Whenever you need to move up from your sniping task and engage at shorter ranges, you'll need to switch to three-round burst (or full auto if you're a bad shot).

INDOORS (CLOSE-QUARTER BATTLE): This is a tricky area to talk about. You really have to determine what the mission in question demands. But here's a quick guide:

The Benelli M1 Tactical 12-Gauge Shotgun is a fantastic weapon for short-range combat. In missions containing locked doors, the Benelli makes short work of them. Also, this beast of a weapon will put a man down with one shot to the center body mass within a few meters. The trick is that you have to get close enough to take advantage. The limited number of shells carried can make for hairy situations. This is definitely not a "Lone gun" weapon. Best used in a support role.

The HK MP5-A2 is the steadiest of weapons. Best used indoors, but is also good for larger area combat (though not as accurate at far distances and has only a medium-range zoom). The only thing that counts against the MP5-A2 is that its ammunition lacks the punch you need to get through armor. If you have a steady hand, and are quick to target the head or legs, by all means make this your primary weapon of choice, but chest shots will not always put your man down.

The HK MP5SD5 is the sure bet for a silent option. Not only is it hard to discern where its shots are coming from, but it also has the smallest muzzle flash of any weapon. What most people don't appreciate when they are hiding in a dark corner and trying to shoot at any-

Hallways are secured by pairs with overlapping fields of fire, as illustrated by this enhanced image from the two-story Killhouse scenario.

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thing that moves, is that their muzzle flash gives away their position every time they pull the trigger. This weapon keeps you hidden. The downside is that it has less stopping power than the other MP5s, a disadvantage brought about by the suppression unit.

The MP5K-PDW is also known as "My Little Buddy." When it comes to fighting in tight quarters, there's nothing better. Its targeting reticle locks in to steady the fastest after moving. It's a better choice than the other MP5s because it has the highest rate of fire, which means you can put bullets into your enemy more quickly. But that can be a double-edged sword. To get its maximum effectiveness you need to use it at full auto, but if you don't have good trigger discipline... you'll be needing to change magazines often, and switch over to your secondary weapon sooner than you want because it burns up ammo so fast. Taking a second set of primary magazines with you can help counter this, but generally this is a weapon best left to the experts and should only ever be used indoors.

SECONDARY WEAPON:
The main consideration when it comes to choosing your back-up armament is whether you want it to be silent or not. If your strategy is to sneak around and kill an enemy or two and then let loose with anything else than an MP5SD5, then by all means use the HK .40 USP-SD. But most of the time when you go for a pistol, it's as a last resort and you want to kill someone just a few feet from you. For that kind of a job you want maximum penetration, and the pistol that provides it is the HK .45 MARK23.

OTHER ITEMS:
This is the most delicate area. You *really* have to know where you plan to fight and how. Generally, you always carry a Heartbeat Sensor (HBS). It's nice to have your own, because if you're the last one on your team standing... you'll need it. The best use of the HBS is on stairs, because it enables you to detect the enemy on both levels joined by those stairs. Other than that, you'll want to take either frag grenades or flashbangs. Frag grenades are your friends in large open areas. Their effective blast radius is about 10 meters. You should be very careful using them in confined areas. Always check your map for friendlies before throwing a frag. To minimize accidental death to your teammates, learn to use Flashbangs. They are highly useful in close quarter combat, and excellent precursors to the storming of an enemy stronghold where two teams are entering in a classic "pincer movement". Flashbangs are also the preferred method for capturing the enemy's hostage in games of Double Bluff.

For some missions, it is fun to use door charges as booby traps. If you want to try that, make sure that you have a buddy with a HBS close by so that you know when to fire. Other than that, you have three kit items and extra ammo for your primary and secondary weapons.

This shot illustrates how to lay down covering fire for an advancing group. The colored triangles on the map represent the fields of vision for the two shooters on either side of the main Hacienda gate — between them, they have the entire forward area covered.

Only use the kit items for games that require them. The only time you really need to carry extra ammo is for the Benelli shotgun. Using extra ammo for any other weapon is an admission of being a poor shot!

Step Three: Know Your Character Types

ASSAULT
This is the default setting that gives you the best targeting accuracy.

DEMOLITIONS
Allows you to place breaching charges very fast (important for setting your booby traps in games in confined areas).

ELECTRONICS
The most useful advantage of this skill is the ability to pick locked doors in about 1.5 seconds.

RECON
The advantage here is quiet movement.

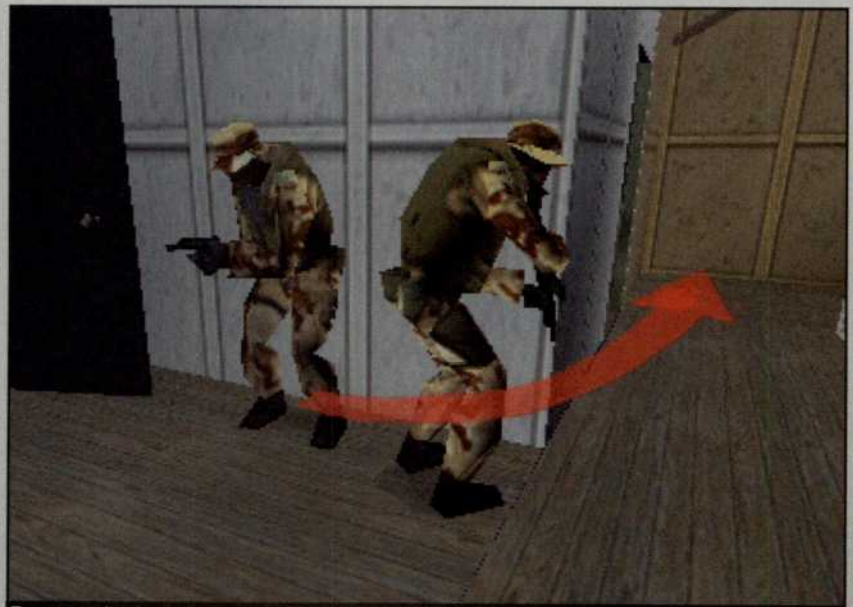
Step Four: Tactics

The following suggestions assume that you generally know the location of the enemy.

ROOM CLEARING
There are several ways to clear a room. The best scenario is to first have your group stack against the wall with the door leading into the hostile room. Once in position, the first man in line must cover the door to prevent the enemy from rushing out. The second man in line then moves toward the open doorway and throws in a frag grenade (being careful not to be in line of site with the blast).

The way to clear a room without the use of frag grenades (in most cases you would want to enter following a flashbang) is to simply overrun the room. The first person through the door has to pick a corner to secure by peeling around the doorframe and walking along the wall, eliminating any threat in the way. Immediately on the heels of the first man, the second man must take an opposite corner, running the walls, dispatching anyone in his way. As soon as the enemy has been put down, try to move out of the room in case this was bait for a grenade attack.

DEFENDING AGAINST A ROOM CLEARING
The best defense against a room clearing is to never get shut into a room with one exit. That being said, there will be times when you don't have any other choice. In the case of a frag grenade coming into your room, run out of the room in the direction that it was thrown. You have a 40/60 chance of catching the thrower without his weapon ready. Otherwise, if the enemy tries to invade your room, take cover behind furniture (which presents a smaller target area for them) and unload on anyone that steps



Teams moving in pairs should always designate the man at the rear to operate the Heartbeat Sensor to detect enemies around corners, while the man in front covers him with a weapon at the ready.

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through the door. Leave the room as soon as you can, because a grenade will be coming sooner rather than later.

COMBAT AT LESS THAN FIVE METERS
This winds up happening too often. For some reason, people get sloppy shooting at this distance (probably because the encounter was a surprise, like when opposing players run into each other around a corner). Make sure that you have full auto selected in tight quarters so as to maximize damage to the enemy. The problem with this is that about three times out of ten both parties will run out of ammo at the same time and freak out. If this happens to you: Immediately run into the enemy which will push him backwards and disorient him to his surroundings. Then use this time of confusion to move to his blindside, switch to your secondary weapon (this is slightly faster than reloading) and put some hot lead into his backside. If the enemy slips into a room before you can get a shot off (presumably to change clips) quickly ready yourself to use the room clearing techniques mentioned above.

Step Five: Know Your Maps!

These strategies are tailored for each map, but in general they all assume that both sides are acting aggressively to eliminate the other team.

KILLHOUSE 2-STORY
Clear out as many of the opposite team as possible by throwing frag grenades immediately after starting the level — whether it's from the roof throwing down, or from the ground throwing up to the roof. On the inside, move quickly to secure the stairs — he who controls the stairs controls this level.

EMBASSY
This is a tricky level because of all the locked doors. Have at least one team member be an Electronics expert to pick those locks quickly. The "obvious" place to have the first conflict is the foyer. The team starting from the piano room on the first floor should move outside or keep moving from their base to the dining room, occupying the attention of the enemy. This should buy time for the others to work their way upstairs from the outside. The other possibility is to make a mad dash for the main stairs up to the second floor, then closing off exits from the enemy's base. When starting from the third floor storage room, run as fast as you can and secure the stairwells. Others from that team should try for the ground floor via the fire escape. The main idea is to contain the opposing force into a controllable area. Frags and flashbangs will win the day.

CONGO MANSION: In Team Survival, the attacking team must be fast and devious if they are to get anywhere near the house, where snipers lie in wait.

CONGO MANSION
This entire level revolves around the jungle entrance. The team starting from the jungle insertion zone must use a weapon other than the CAR-15 or M-16A2. The priority for the team starting inside the house is to get to sniping points at breaks in the stone wall, the basement entrance, the destroyed room by the patio, and the balcony atop it.

From the balcony and patio areas, a sniper can see the bright color of the CAR-15 and the M16A2, so the attacking team's first priority is to get to cover behind the shed. You may want to use flashbangs to distract the snipers while running for the shed. About the only other thing you can do is lay down suppressive fire into the house's sniper positions to keep the rifles there busy while your other teammates make a run for the shed. Once the shed is reached, you have to start throwing grenades to cover your advancing to the side of the house. Use a HBS to locate the enemy and try to flank them with whoever is left. Otherwise, take crouching cover at various spots in the jungle trail and wait for the enemy to come to you.

If you start in the house, keep the enemy contained in the trail. Try to advance one or two others to the mouth of the jungle and lob frag grenades to kill those too timid to come out.

OIL RIG: Split into pairs to hunt most effectively, and remember to use the Heartbeat Sensor on all of the stairwells to get the jump on those enemy positions.

OIL RIG
This is a *big* space. Go forth and hunt in pairs. Try to get to stairwells and scan for enemy movement with a HBS. Remember, the bigger the level, the more important it is that you contain your adversary. If you can't account for them, they will try to flank you.

HACIENDA
This mission comes down to getting past the main gates. The team starting from the road first has to remove any threats from the second story patio closest to the gates. The most effective approach to the gate is to run up to the left gatepost while in sniper mode, set to single shot. When you get within sight of the balcony check it for snipers. If none are seen, immediately use a HBS to scan for the enemy moving around on the right side of the building. Snuggle up close to the gate and use it as cover while setting up a crossfire. Moving at the same time, a second person or group needs to advance up the hill (slightly behind his teammates on the left) on the right. Whoever runs up on the right must double check the second story and then immediately look for the enemy making a run for the shed in the back yard. Once both groups are in place and have "cleared" the area, the team must advance

EMBASSY: The foyer is the most likely location for early skirmishes between rival forces in games of Team Survival. A split-level room like this one is a good place to use a HBS.

one at a time to the side of the Hacienda and do an HBS sweep to locate threats. Always check the far side second story patio for snipers. Once in the building, use standard room-clearing techniques.

The team that starts in the basement should take positions around the four corners of the building and cut down as many intruders as possible. If the enemy makes it to the side of the building, then fall back to the entryways in the house, always checking your HBS for contacts.

WATER RIDE

The layout of this level leaves it wide open. Try to get to the catwalks as fast as possible. Avoid getting into the water — you move slower than usual and the noise gives your position away. Always double-check the control booths; they are great shooting platforms and not easily checked with the HBS. Hunt in packs and try to secure the area in sections.

DAM

This mission poses the same problems as Water Ride. Your best hope is to either move to the upper-level hallway connecting all of the generator rooms and flank the enemy, or to do the same through the access tunnels. Other than that, slowly advance to the middle of the level, constantly checking for snipers on the high catwalks and generators, and watching your "six" position.

BIO LAB

There are only two exits to the main building. As the attacking force, you must always contend with the possibility that *someone* is making a break around the backside of that building to outflank you. To enter the building, first throw frag grenades to eliminate people close to the door and the landing of the garage. Then throw a second volley of grenades to clear the halls and garage, and follow it up with advancing troops. Once inside, sweep the areas with a HBS and hunt down whoever is left. Always check your six for "uncontained" enemies flanking you.

The team starting in the garage should immediately send a small group around the back of the building. The others need to take up positions both outside of the garage ready to fire parallel to the garage opening and to move people just outside of the locker room ready to shoot out of the office entry. When these cover fire positions are made, try to send

AIRPORT: The control tower is key — but sniping works both ways, and a good long-rifleman will be able to punch a hole in anyone who gets too close to the upstairs window.

BIO LAB: Be sure to have all the entrances covered and take out any stragglers before attempting to storm the main structure. Once inside, be sure to practice good room-clearing tactics at all times.

MINT: The Heartbeat Sensor is a must. Be extra careful around the barred doors, where ambushes tend to happen.

the rest of your team to the far shed near the fence opening to pinch the opposition. Always be ready for grenades.

AIRPORT

The key to this mission is controlling the tower. The team starting furthest away from the tower must move at least two people across the airstrip to the light array closest to the control tower. One man will remain at the light array on the side furthest from the airstrip. His job is to first shoot out the glass then check for shooters coming around from the backside of the tower. The other man should continuously run to the corner of the control tower and then ready himself to throw a frag grenade. While this is taking place, another team member should open the front door of the hangar and keep an eye on any opposition trying to either reach the tower or to come out of the enemy hangar and shoot at your grenade team. Anyone else not used for these two tasks should sweep behind their hangars to the field sheds and try to keep the enemy from sneaking up on your blind side.

The team starting closest to the tower should make a dash for it. It's an excellent shooting platform with a commanding view of the entire field. Keep in mind that the enemy knows this and will try to remove you from it. Try to spill out of your hangar and move at least one other person into the first story of the building to prevent someone from coming in from the bottom and shooting your guys upstairs. If you can spare the manpower, put a sentry by the tower's fence opening to pick off the advancing enemy. If there is anyone else available, send them on a flanking maneuver around the back of your hangar to the field sheds and try to create a withering crossfire with your snipers in the tower.

MINT

The two keys to this mission are to use the stairs to track the enemy with your HBS, and to never be afraid to run outside and help flank the enemy. The action tends to get at its stickiest near the jail-barred hallways and the press-room. Keep that in mind.

SHIP

This mission is a race to the stairs. The best strategy is to periodically probe the stairs with grenades and the occasional HBS sweep. Persistence and belligerence will win.

ESTATE

This is a tough one for both teams. The team starting in the house must try to put themselves at key points near the rear windows and the garage area. The team starting from the creek must first shoot out the windows and set up a sniper to keep any enemies near those windows pinned down. Move other groups along the sides of the yard to clear the windows and the crossfire from the garage. The group closest to the garage must try to make contact with any opposition by throwing grenades and securing that area. If possible, the sniper in the back yard can advance through the broken windows into the house and start clearing rooms. The

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SKYSCRAPER: This level is very similar to the ship map. Access to this crucial penthouse area can be secured by use of the elevator maintenance tunnels. You must control them.

team that crept up on the left must secure the front yard and the front door. Whoever is left from the primary assault must make their way to the stairs and locate the remainder of the resistance.

SKYSCRAPER

This mission is about the same as the ship, but with two areas of contention. Both sides are in a race to punch through either the elevator shafts or the fire escape staircase, or both.

ROAD AMBUSH

This mission is a sniper's paradise. Better yet, it's a challenge to see who can remove snipers from their perches. Both teams will meet at the bend in the road at the middle of the map. At this point snipers on both sides will start to search for heads peeking out beyond the bend. There are basically two sweet spots. The team starting next to the truck will put one or more guys on the sloping ledge nearest the bridge. This has a commanding view of the bridge in the middle of the map. The others on that team will advance to the bend in the road. Their best hope at an overwhelming victory is to get a few people across the road to the light generators and then advance to the bridge. The team starting from the unfinished bridge side will advance to the middle of the map. At least one team member should situate themselves somewhere on the crest of the bridge, while another runs to the right side of the bridge and takes cover where the road was cut out of the side of a plateau. This frees all of the rest to move toward the bend in the road.

The only chance for this team to achieve total victory is to make it to the semi truck parked on the other side of the bend. The key is to eliminate the snipers. To remove either sniper, you must attack with two groups simultaneously. A sniper has a lot of trouble with multiple targets. To remove the sniper closest to the semi, you must have the guy near to the top right side of the middle bridge start a barrage of suppressive fire, while another team member walks up the road from underneath the bridge and fires in three-round bursts in and around where the road sign will appear to be nearest the slope. To dig out the snipers on the middle bridge, Blue team must make a dash for the light generators and take potshots toward the top of the bridge and to the right of the bend in the road. Both teams will lose people trying to do this. Good luck.

BIO DOME: Set up lethal traps at any of the security checkpoints. A multi-leveled ambush works best by not giving the enemy's Heartbeat Sensors a full reading on your positions.

ATHLETE'S VILLAGE

This level is wide open. Travel in packs and check every corner for enemies with your HBS. If you can, try to control the middle hallways. He who controls them can quickly move in conjunction with another group to isolate pockets of resistance. Expect lots of grenades.

BIO DOME

This is another containment mission. You must search in small packs and locate the enemy quickly. What makes this mission difficult in particular is that it's so sprawled out. Your search parties must keep close by because you could quickly find yourself in an ambush. The nature of the Bio Dome complex lends itself to a series of flanking maneuvers, but most fights take place in two areas: The "core" staircase area of the central Dome, and the security checkpoints. The key to defending yourself is to always have someone watching the doors in front of you and behind.

ROAD AMBUSH: Use your M-16A2 and set it to single shot — the accurate long-range sniper is king here.

Cheat Codes

Here are some handy codes that should make your life a little easier — or at least more fun! Hit ENTER to open the in-game chat box and type these in for the desired effects. Warning: these codes only work in single-player mode!

1-900 – Exaggerated breathing effect

5fingerdiscount – Restores full ammo

avatargod – Makes your player invincible

teamgod – Makes your entire team invincible

bignoggin – Large head mode

meganoggin – Extra-large head mode!

Explore – Toggles victory conditions on/off

No-brainer – Toggles enemy AI on/off

Silentbutdeadly – Makes you, erm, break wind, while moving

Turnpunchkick – Turns characters into two-dimensional figures

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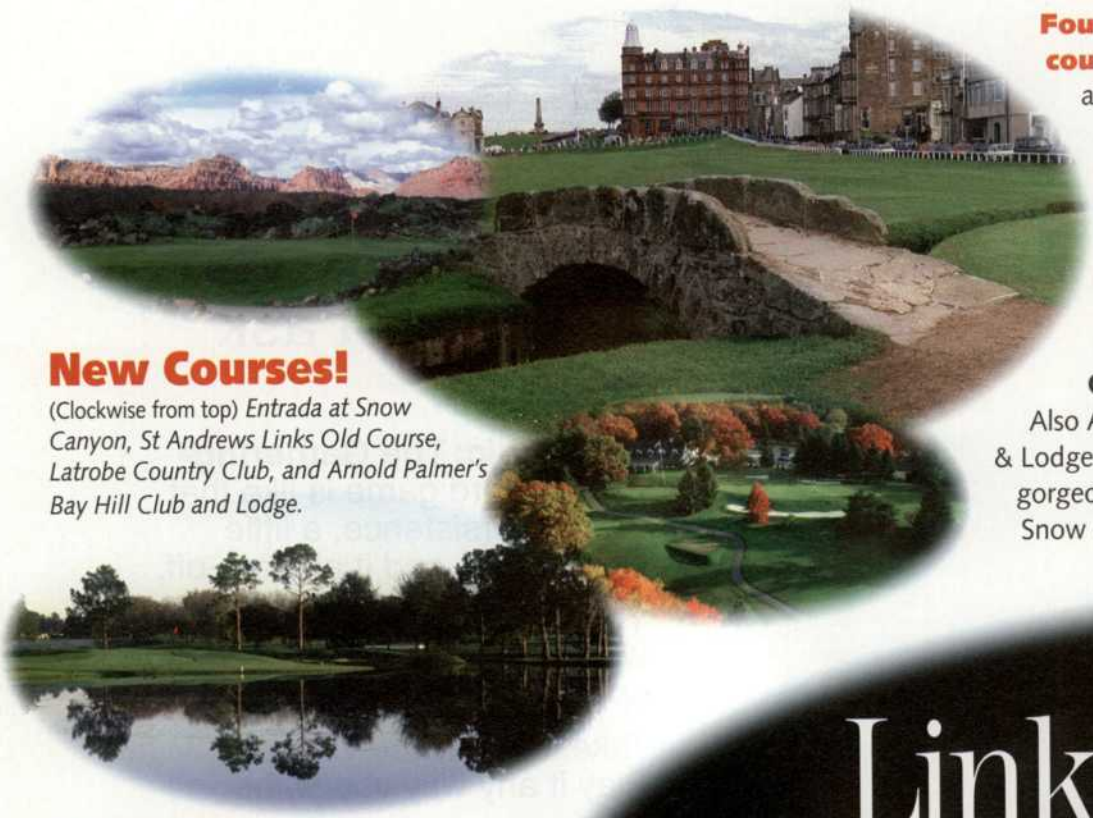

New Courses!

(Clockwise from top) *Entrada at Snow Canyon, St Andrews Links Old Course, Latrobe Country Club, and Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club and Lodge.*

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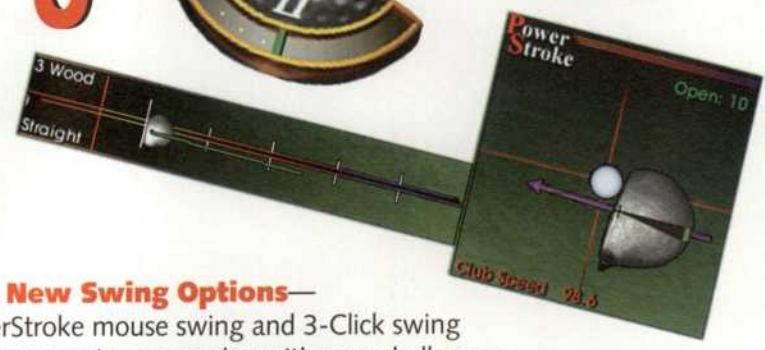

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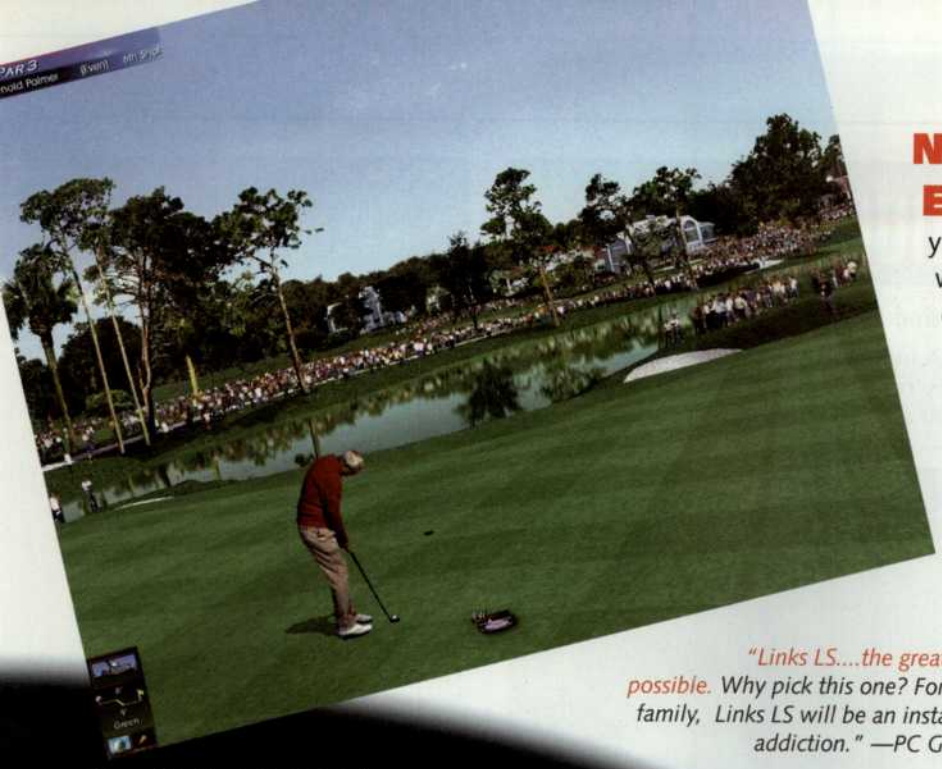

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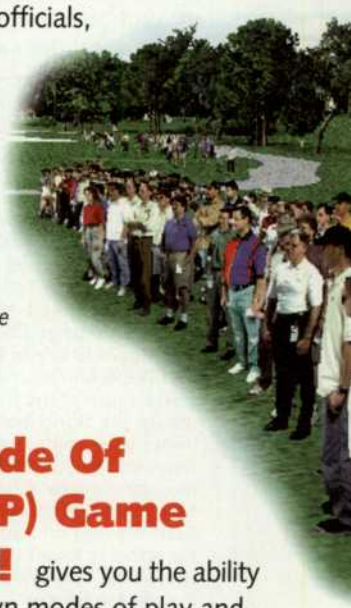

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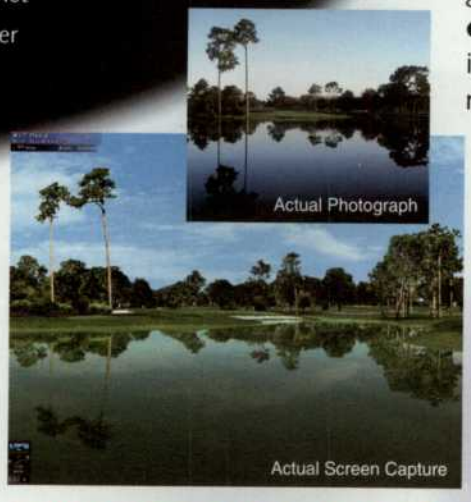
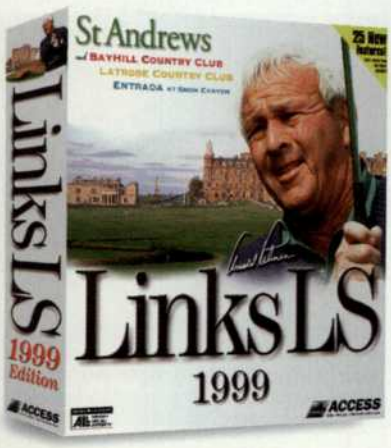


Is It Real Or Is It Links LS '99?
Compare the difference between the screen capture and the actual photo taken at the Bay Hill Club and Lodge.

M.O.P. GAME DESIGNER



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Mech Commander, Part 2

Does this strategy game have you tied in knots? We can help!

Last month our good friends at FASA Interactive guided you step-by-step through the first campaign. Now they're back to take you through... that's right, the second! Give yourself a cookie for guessing correctly.

OP2 — Mission 1

MISSION: A House Kurita commando has obtained vital information about enemy units and is attempting to escape in a captured enemy Hunchback IIC. You must join up with her and escort her to safe ground.

LOADOUT: Speed mixed with as much long-range firepower as you can mount is key in this mission.

BATTLEPLAN: Your Force Group 1 starts south of the river. Unfortunately, the Hunchback IIC, which is under your control, is north of the river. You will need to get both moving simultaneously and heading southeast along the river. Start moving immediately. Your first objective is to get the Hunchback IIC across the first bridge you encounter. An Aerospace Spotter guards its northern approach and another Aerospace Spotter and a Saracen hover tank guard the south. The Aerospace Spotters serve as, well, spotters, for incoming airstrikes. The Saracen attempts to physically block the south end of the bridge and strand the Hunchback IIC on the bridge and leave it a sitting duck for the spotters.

MISSION 1: This is the Hunchback IIC. Its Heavy Ultra Autocannon is designed for short range castration. Fortunately, it fights for you in this mission...

The Hunchback IIC needs to fire as soon as it can on the Aerospace Spotter BUT IT MUST KEEP RUNNING AND CROSS THE BRIDGE. Do not allow her to stop to engage the spotter. At the same time, Force Group 1 on the south must quickly destroy the Saracen and then the spotter, in that order. If the Saracen is not destroyed, the Hunchback IIC can easily be stranded on the bridge as airstrikes tear it up.

Once the Hunchback IIC has linked up with Force Group 1, head all your units south-southwest along the forest edge. Continue along the edge until you reach a hill. Climb it and reveal a large area of terrain. From the hill, and leading with Force Group 1 (since the Hunchback IIC must be protected), head southeast. Pass to the south of the small developed area. On the far side of the highway there is another forest area. Continue southeast moving south of the forest (if you find yourself on a dirt road, you are north of the forest). If you encounter a group of Saracen tanks, destroy them quickly.

Heading southeast, south of the forest, you encounter a series of small hills. Climb each and reveal terrain. From the last hill you can see a small portion of an industrial park that contains fuel tanks. The last set of enemies should come at you through the park. Move northeast off the last hill and watch your sensors. As the enemy Hunchbacks and Hollander IIs (lethal long and short-range combination) come at you, use your weapons and artillery to blow up the tanks and tear into them as they come through the park. Destroy the Hollander IIs first, if possible, and then move away from the Hunchbacks to stay out of range of their Heavy Autocannons. Once the enemy is destroyed, head southeast to the extraction point and safety.

MISSION 1: This House Kurita commando is stuck on this bridge — she's toast! To get across, keep her moving and show some guts in the face of the incoming airstrikes.

MISSION 1: These Hunchbacks and Hollander IIs make a deadly combination. Kill them quickly or pay the price.

OP2 — Mission 2

MISSION: The commando you rescued in the last mission has information that the Smoke Jaguars have been manufacturing fuel and supplies at some nearby industrial parks. Instead of taking out those heavily guarded sites, you're ordered to destroy the two power generators that feed them.

MISSION 2: This Power Generator, and the guarding Catapult, represent half of the objective for this mission.

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MISSION 2: This container stack, and others like it found throughout the game, hold supplies (weapons and sensor equipment) which can be mounted on to your Mechs.

MISSION 2: This is the second Generator. Like the first, it's well protected.

LOADOUT: Load up on principally large Mechs. You may also wish to bring a Refit Truck as there will be a couple of occasions where you'll have the time to use it effectively.

BATTLEPLAN: From your drop point, move your units northeast along the road. You quickly encounter a group of Bulldog tanks. Do not let these tanks and their Heavy Autocannons get too close. Stay at long range and destroy them quickly. Beyond them on the road are some Striker missile tanks. These may come to assist the Bulldogs giving you a mix of long and short-range enemy to fight.

Once done, proceed to the "T" intersection in the road. Head a short distance northwest and destroy the three Harasser hover tanks guarding a container stack there. Capture the container stack for the supplies it contains. Double back and follow the road to where it curves northeast. Southeast from that curve is a large hill. Send your fastest Mech to climb it and reveal a large area of terrain.

Now, continue north along the road. Stay to the south of the road, however, as there is a minefield north of the road where it begins to zig-zag. Beyond that along the road is a small vehicle base. Destroy its buildings from long range, and if any of the base's guards come after you, destroy them too.

From that point, continue northeast, turning right at an intersection, but advance slowly. Watch for Perimeter Alarms. If you come within sight of one, it'll begin to squawk — destroy it quickly or it may alert other forces. When the road turns northeast again, continue heading southeast. Follow the coastline there east-northeast. You may need to burn through a small section of forest. At the far side of the forest head due north as quickly as you can, staying as far east as you can. Ahead of you a Catapult guards a Power Generator. Close in on the Catapult, destroy it from short range, and then torch the Generator.

From here, it's pretty much a slug-fest. Head out northwest across the long bridge and continue heading northwest once across. You will need to fight a Rommel medium tank, an LRM Carrier, a Bulldog heavy tank, some SRM Carriers, a group of Elementals, and a Hunchback Mech along the way. Watch for nearby fuel tanks that you can use. Once the Generator is destroyed, head southwest to the extraction point. Mission complete.

OP2 — Mission 3

MISSION: Battalion has learned of an enemy convoy carrying some important equipment. You are ordered to destroy that convoy.

LOADOUT: Despite what you might think, speed is not that big of an issue. Firepower, especially long range, is far more important. As such, take heavy and/or medium Mechs and load them up. Try to stick to energy weapons as you will be firing often, and there won't be time to make proper use of the Refit Truck.

BATTLEPLAN: The convoy is on the opposite side of the river from you and there are three ways to go after it. (Note: at any time, you can drop a sensor probe to note the progress of the enemy convoy. This is especially helpful once they have moved out of visual range.)

If you have jump-capable Mechs, parallel the convoy on your side of the river. You can jump across at a couple of

MISSION 3: You've caught the enemy using the fuel tank trick. But be careful... they're smart enough to use it themselves.

locations where the opposite banks are close together. You probably only want to keep your jump Mechs on that side long enough to waste a truck or two before pulling them back. The only jump-capable Mechs you probably have access to aren't going to be tough enough to take on the enemy escort force by themselves. But combined with the long-range sniping from your other Mechs, they should be able to pull it off.

Even without jump-capable Mechs, you can parallel the convoy and take long-range sniper shots when appropriate. Enemy forces on your side of the river will come out, dividing your attention. But, since the convoy slips in and out of line-of-sight you can fire on the trucks when you can see them and the harassing enemy when you cannot. Be warned, however, this method relies a great deal on luck and the Gunnery Skill of your pilots. You may end up having to catch the enemy near the end. If they move out of sight (which they should do shortly after you see the minelayer), move your units at full speed along the shore. You'll reach a bridge. Cross it and make a stand on the far side. The convoy will come to you.

Your last option is to move at full-speed and head southeast from the drop point. Keep moving. Pause only when you encounter the LRM Carriers or the

MISSION 3: Your target is the convoy trucks. You can reach out and touch them with long-range weapons, or get in their face with jump-capable Mechs.

Aerospace Spotter. When these show up, be careful! If you get too close to fuel tanks, the enemy will try to use them against you. Keep your distance from explosive objects. (During your dash, keep an eye out for container stacks and warehouses holding supplies. You have just enough time to grab them and continue on.)

Eventually you will reach the bridge, as described above. Cross it and make a stand. As the convoy comes at you, destroy the Aerospace Spotter (if it's still alive) and then concentrate on the trucks. Only shoot the defenders if they're making life particularly rough, or there are no trucks immediately in view. Once the trucks are destroyed, the mission ends.

OP2 — Mission 4

MISSION: Fearful that the Smoke Jaguars may call for reinforcements, Battalion orders you to destroy their deep-space communications system. You must destroy the two Hyperpulse Generators before the mission timer runs out and the message is sent.
LOADOUT: Power is key here. Take Heavy Mechs (Atlases rule here) and pile in as much firepower as you can.
BATTLEPLAN: If you want an awesome slug-fest, just head northeast from the drop location. Don't stop until you hit the Hyperpulse Generators. Good luck.

The alternative is much sneakier. From the drop point, head southeast through an opening in the forest. Follow that forest path as far as you can to the southeast, head east for a bit, and then swing northeast. You shouldn't run into any enemies during this stretch.

After you've been heading northeast for a short time, you'll hit a highway. Take the highway northwest until another path through the forest appears on the north side of the road on the far side of some tree. Burn the trees and then follow it, heading northeast.

Along this path are a number of Pop-Up Turrets. These turrets are buried underground and only deploy when one of your units gets close enough. Your forces will probably take some hits from each turret before you destroy it, but if you've got Heavy or Assault-Class BattleMechs it shouldn't amount to more than a few scratches. There are also Perimeter Alarms positioned along the path. Destroy those quickly as well since if they are allowed to squawk there will be more defenders alert at the base when you reach it.

The base is northwest of the path, so you must swing toward it at some point. Follow the path as far as you can, heading north, and then north-northwest. You may have to burn through some trees along the way. Once you've reached the back of the base, punch through the rear wall and invade.

Inside, your first target should be the MechWarrior Barracks. By destroying this building quickly you can prevent some enemy Mechs from powering up. Next, capture the Gate Control Building that controls access to the Hyperpulse Generators. If you don't, you must blow through the walls around them or fire missiles over those walls. Capturing the Gate Control Building saves time and effort. Concentrate on the Hyperpulse Generators even though enemy vehicles quickly move in to harass you. Once both Hyperpulse Generators are destroyed, the mission ends.

MISSION 4: Repeat after us — A city fight is a pain in the ass. A city fight is a pain in the ass.

MISSION 4: If those Hyperpulse Generators fire off their message, it's game over. Literally.

MISSION 4: The enemy wasn't kind enough to build a rear gate. Make one for them.

OP2 — Mission 5

MISSION: In a continuing attempt to shore up their lines, the Smoke Jaguars are trying to bring a train full of valuable equipment into the area. You are ordered to destroy it.
LOADOUT: If you have captured Clan chassis, bring them. Otherwise, load up on Medium and Heavy Mechs. Don't bother with anything fancy, like ECM Suites — they're of no help here.
BATTLEPLAN: In order to win, you need to destroy all the train cars. However, it is imperative that you stop the train initially, rather than destroy it. A derailed train isn't going anywhere, and you can deal with it once you've dealt with its escorts.

From the drop point, head southeast. You immediately encounter a group of Rommel tanks where the road you are on crosses the railroad tracks. Destroy them.

Once they're destroyed, head northeast along the rail tracks. Only go as far as the second forest southeast of the tracks. Then backtrack a short distance and wait. When the train or its escorts approach, order your units to attack at long range. Shoot the train engine first, force it to derail, and then deal with the escorts. There are seven Mechs defending the train, half of which are jump-capable Hunchbacks. If a Hunchback and its Heavy Autocannon can get a rear armor shot on any of your Mechs,

MISSION 5: These five tanks think they can stop you... show them who's boss by taking them out with your mighty forces.

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MISSION 5: Cripple the engine and derail the train. Once the train is stopped, the pressure is off. Deal with the escorts without worrying about the train.

cross your fingers. Once the enemy Mechs are destroyed, torch all the train cars. When the last train car is destroyed, the mission ends.

Optionally, bring a minelayer. Mine the tracks northeast of the railroad crossing for a short distance and then mine both sides of the track (don't worry about the track itself) all the way up to the second forest. When the train comes, the escorts hit the mines on the side and the train hits the mines at the intersection. Your forces can stand at the intersection and get in the kill shots as needed.

OP2 — Mission 6

MISSION: Your orders are to attack and capture an enemy base. Unfortunately, the Jaguars are already sending reinforcements to that base, so shortly after you take it, you will have to defend it.

LOADOUT: We recommend a mix of speed and firepower. There are times when both will be valuable. And load up on long-range weapons for the defensive portion of the mission.

BATTLEPLAN: Your drop point is southwest of the base you have to first attack and then defend. First, head south and destroy the group of Commandos lurking there. Then, double back and head north-northwest past the base and head northeast along the road that cuts in front of it. Stay as clear of the base as you can for now (especially the turrets). Some enemy units will come out of the base at you. Destroy them with concentrated fire. DO NOT ATTACK THE TURRETS OR THE CONTROL BUILDINGS. You will need them later.

MISSION 6: The Jaguars are spoil-sports. Once you've captured the base from them, they don't want it any more. They'll destroy it instead of recapturing it.

MISSION 6: Destroying the bridges the Bulldogs are defending prevents some enemy forces from attacking the base.

MISSION 6: Do not destroy the base's defenses — you'll need them once you've captured it so you can defend yourself.

Continue northeast along the road until you encounter a group of Bulldog tanks. Beware their Heavy Autocannons as you engage and destroy them. Then, destroy the bridges they are guarding.

Now, return to the base. Order your fastest Mechs into the base to capture the Turret Control Building and the Sensor Control Building while your heavy Mechs provide fire support. Capture the HQ Building to officially capture the base.

Immediately, enemy units begin to close in on the base. You may have to do some maneuvering if they come at the base from different sides, but do not be afraid at this point to leave the base and take care of business.

Watch the Tactical Map. Since you captured the Sensor Control Building, you'll have advance warning of when enemy forces begin approaching. Move your forces out of the base and position yourself between it and the incoming force. Engage the enemy away from the base in order to inflict the most damage before they get near the base. The enemy will be gunning for the HQ Building, so be prepared to defend it. And watch out for the enemy Hollander IIs. Their Gauss Rifles will be able to reach out and smack the HQ Building from some distance away.

PCG

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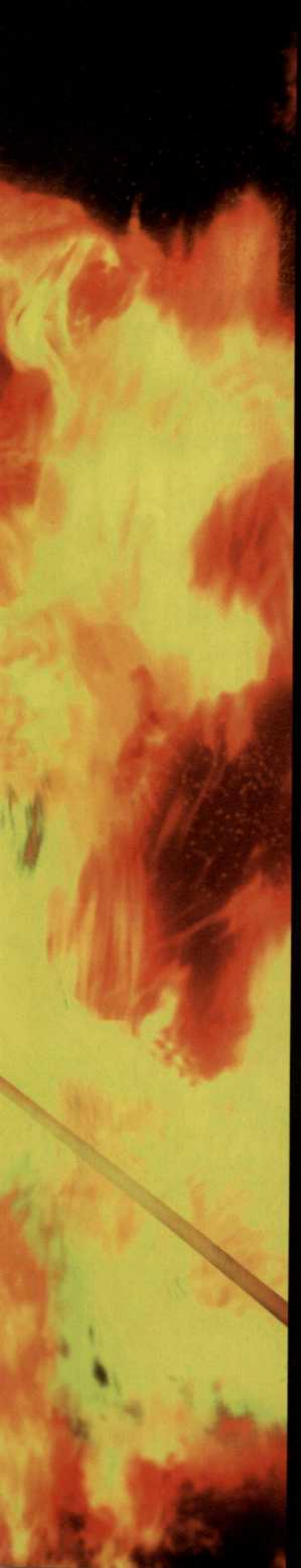

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Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines

Time, once again, to kick some Nazi butt!

Eidos' new WWII tactical wargame is one tough cookie. So to help you defeat the book-burning scum, we've enlisted the help of Eric Adams, the game's producer. This month, he'll hold your hand through the first two missions and give you tips for the next three. Come back next month for the knife-edge conclusion!

Cheats

1982GONZO — activates cheat mode (while in game)
CTRL+I — invulnerability for selected commando(s)
SHIFT+X — teleport selected commando to that location
CTRL+SHIFT+N — advance to next mission
SHIFT+V — shows line-of-sight for all non-commando units
PASSWORD = JONXX — where XX is mission number
PRINTSCRN — screenshot

Your Team Members

James "Fins" Blackwood

Specialty: Marine Expert
Country: Australia

Fins is your expert in naval combat and he can operate any vessel that you have. He uses his scuba gear to submerge and sneak around the enemy. He can use his Harpoon for the silent land kill. Fins also carries a raft when the team needs to do a river crossing. All this heavy gear can slow him down, however.

Rene "Spooky" Duchamp

Specialty: Spy
Country: France

Spooky is a master linguist, actor, and subversive expert. He can utilize German uniforms found on the map to penetrate German strongholds. There he can use his lethal injection to take out guards in hidden areas or he can distract patrols so that your boys can ambush them. He also carries the medical kit.

Sir Francis "Duke" Woolridge

Specialty: Sniper
Country: England

Duke is your long-range "silent" killer, kind of like that scripture-spouting guy in *Saving Private Ryan*. He uses his sniper rifle to remove threats when your team is stuck in some tight places. He also is the team's medic and can use the medical kit (carried by Spooky) to heal your wounded team members.

Sid "Tread" Perkins

Specialty: Driver
Country: USA

Tread can drive or fix any vehicle that you have available. He can steal tanks or half-tracks and fire on the enemy. He also can use the machine gun when it is available. If there is artillery or available German heavy machine gun posts, let him try his hand at these so your team can gain the upper hand on the enemy.

Russell "Inferno" Hancock

Specialty: Sapper
Country: England

Inferno is the explosive expert on the team. He can plant timed explosives or use delayed bombs for mass destruction. Russell can also use grenades quite effectively to remove obstacles. Finally, he loves deploying his poison-laced bear trap in the path of patrolling Germans and hearing the "snap" of success.

Jerry "Tiny" McHale

Specialty: Green Beret
Country: USA

Tiny is the "muscle" of the team. He is a close-combat expert. Use his knife to slice the enemy. He can climb almost any structure with his climbing axe. Tiny can carry petrol barrels to set up as explosives. In snow or sand, he can bury himself to hide from trouble. He digs using his acoustic decoy to lure Germans to their doom.

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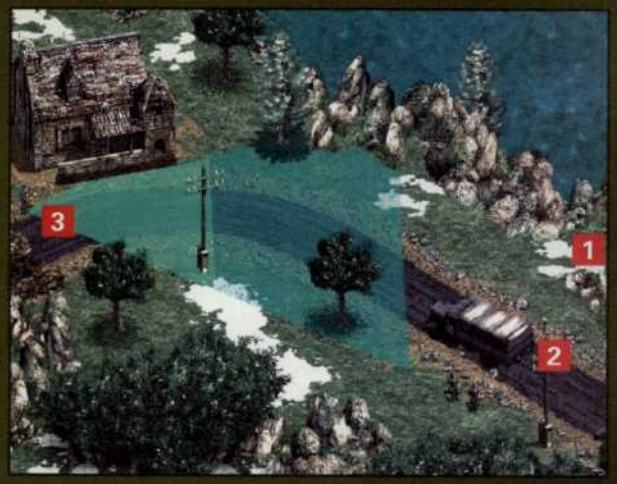
Baptism of Fire

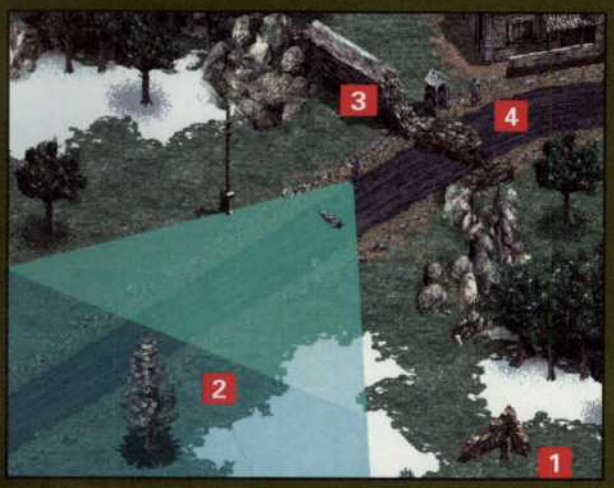
MISSION 1

LOCATION: Norway **OBJECTIVE:** Destroy Radio Station
TEAM: Tiny McHale (Green Beret), Fins Blackwood (Diver), Tread Perkins (Driver)

You will start this first mission with your team separated. First, you need to reunite the team and then proceed to the radio station camp in the northwest corner of the map.



TREAD: Near the rocks located on the far right center of this screenshot (POINT 1), you will see that Sid Perkins is hiding behind some rocks, armed with a submachine gun. This is a great ambush weapon. Move behind the truck (POINT 2) and wait for the patrol to come near to your team. Then whip out your machine gun and take out the Germans. If the sentry (POINT 3) is still alive, he will come to investigate. He can easily be dispatched with the same method of hiding behind the truck and then ambushing him when he comes within range of your team.



TINY: Move Tiny to the rubble (POINT 1) where the patrolling German will not see him. Then, when the guard turns, knife him while his back is turned (POINT 2). If you like, you can hide his body from prying eyes by dragging it out of sight. Proceed to the wall (POINT 3) and climb over it using the axe. If the sentry (POINT 4) is alive, you can take him out with the knife. Behind the house is the dock where Tiny and Tread should wait for Fins to bring the raft. For kicks, you can enter the house to hide from troops.

FINS: Fins is near the coast at the lower right-hand corner of this screenshot (POINT 1). When the nearby guard (POINT 2) turns, run behind him and activate your Harpoon. Take him out as quietly as possible. Wait until the guard patrolling the coast (POINT 3) turns. Rush to the guard near the raft (POINT 4) and use the Harpoon gun to skewer that German fish, and then run behind the patrolling guard and use the knife or harpoon to remove him. Now, as quickly as possible, return to the raft and get in. Proceed to the pier and pick up your team mates. Have Fins row north to the camp. Unload the boys, and then move behind the building.

ATTACK: You should be near the building (POINT 1), ready to take out the objective. The first order of business is to remove the machine gunner (POINT 2). While the patrol is away from the area, run Tiny to the gunner and use the knife to kill him. Take the body and move it to where your men are located. Next, run Tread to the gun and man it. Use the gun to wipe out the patrol as they round the corner of the radio station. Take Tiny and move to the fuel barrel (POINT 3). Grab the barrel and take it to the station (POINT 4). Drop the barrel and move a safe distance away. You can use any commando to fire at and explode the barrel. Once the station is destroyed, the mission is complete.

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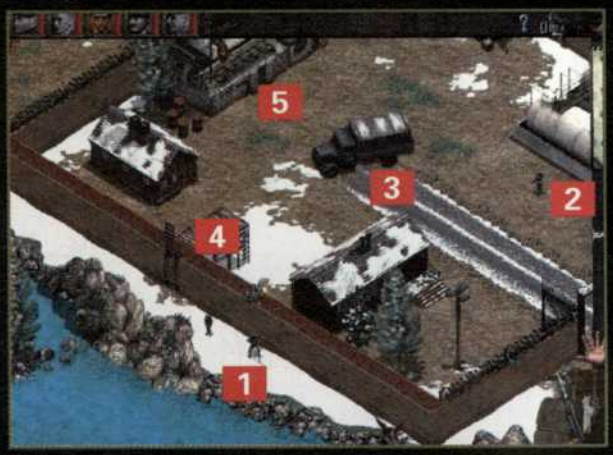
A Quiet Blow-Up

MISSION 2

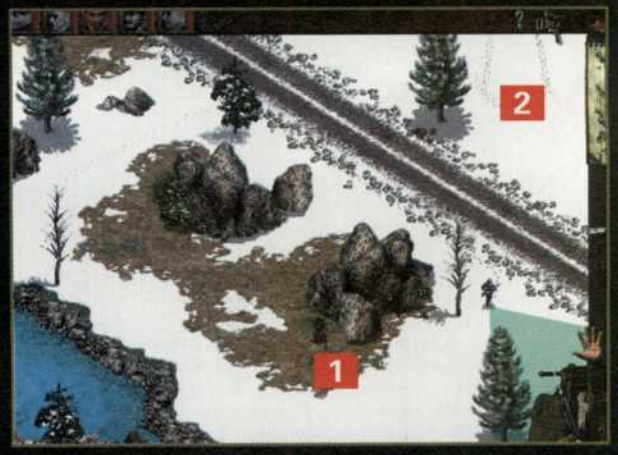
LOCATION: Norway **OBJECTIVE:** Destroy Fuel Dump
TEAM: Tiny McHale (Green Beret), Fins Blackwood (Diver), Tread Perkins (Driver), Duke Woolridge (Sniper), Inferno Hancock (Sapper)

START: Your team is in a courtyard (POINT 1). The best way to take out the three guards is to fire your pistol — they will hear the noise and investigate. Now, when the guards appear, open fire as a team on them — instant death. Once the Germans are eliminated, move the team to the rubble wall (POINT 2) and hide from the patrol boat (POINT 4 — the boat traverses the river every two minutes). At the river's edge (POINT 3), move Fins and Duke. Duke needs to activate his rifle and snipe the guard walking on the wall opposite the river. Have Fins launch the raft and load Duke. Move toward the rocks on the opposite shore (follow POINT 4 route). Unload the men and have Fins store the raft. ▶

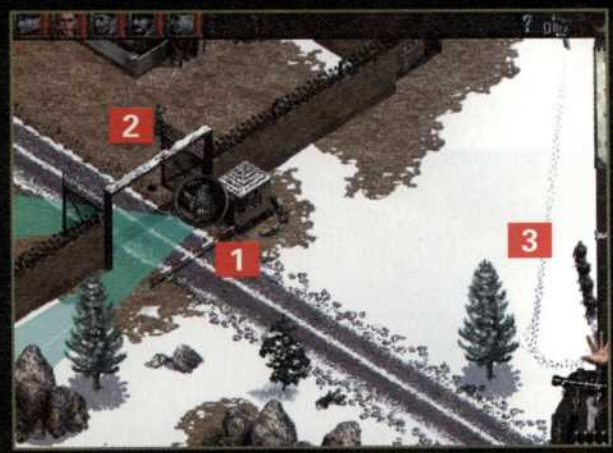


ENEMY SHORE: Here is your beachhead (POINT 1) for the attack on the camp. You can enter the camp via the ladder (POINT 4 — you will need Tiny to climb up and lower it), but this is risky.

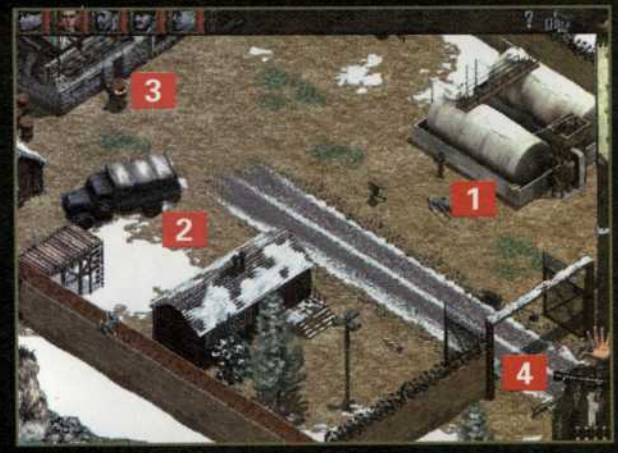
Reconnaissance has shown that there is the dump (POINT 2), an enemy barracks (POINT 5), and your escape truck (POINT 3) inside the camp. The goal is to enter the camp without triggering the alarm. The best tactic is to use Fins and have him scuba-dive to the southeast shore.



CAMP ENTRANCE I: Fins needs to hide behind the large rock formation (POINT 1) when the guard is not there. Quickly and quietly ambush the guard when he moves around the rock. Make sure the patrol (they're wandering around up near POINT 2 — in this screenshot, you can see their footprints) does not see you as you take out their patrolling buddy. If they do, you can either duke it out with them or run to the river and scuba away — it's up to you.



CAMP ENTRANCE II: Fins can now bring the raft with the Sniper (watch out for the river patrol boat!) to the large rock. The camp sentry (POINT 1) has a long visual range so check his line of sight before proceeding. Move the raft around his view. Move Duke to the road, avoid the patrol (POINT 3), and use the rifle to target the sentry (POINT 1). Kill this soldier and then take out his patrolling buddy (POINT 2) with the rifle. Now the coast is clear to bring the whole team across the river. Use Fins to raft over to the rubble wall and pick them up.



CAMP DESTRUCTION: Once in the camp, the simple way to accomplish your goal is to use Tiny to blockade the barracks (POINT 3) with a petrol barrel. Then load Tiny, Fins, and Tread on the truck (POINT 2). Next, move Inferno to the fuel dump (POINT 1) and place the explosive. Now quickly run Inferno to the gate (POINT 1) and raise the gate. Have Tread drive the truck out of the compound before the explosion (you have about 10 seconds). Pick up Inferno and drive down the road to your next mission!

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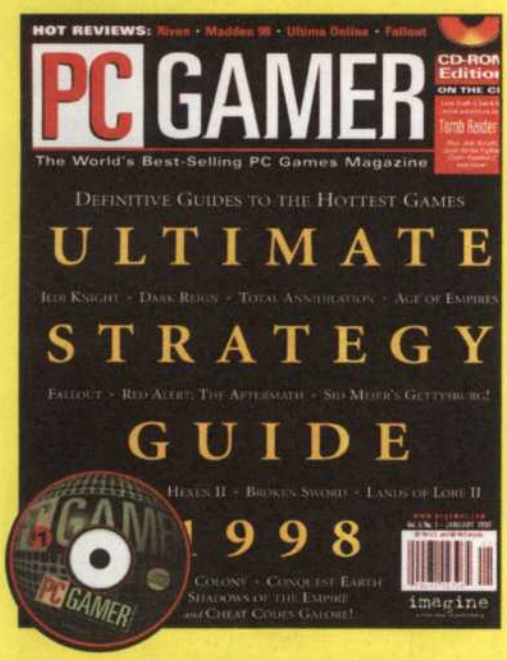

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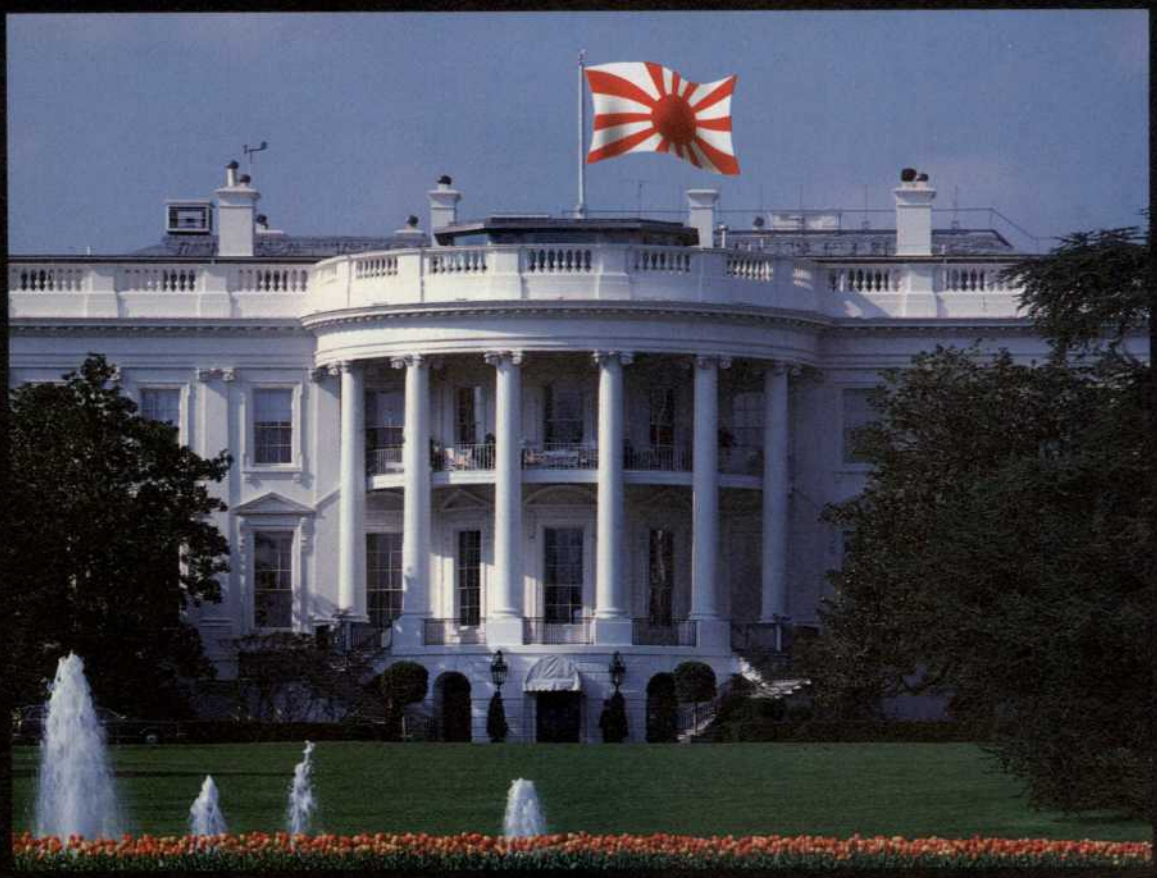

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PC CD-ROM

Reverse Engineering

MISSION 3

Inspired by the film *Force Ten from Navarone*, this mission requires you to play the role of dam-buster. In this mission you have four trusted colleagues, Tiny McHale, Fins Blackwood, Inferno Hancock, and Spooky Duchamp, assisting you.

Take out the nearby patrol with a gun ambush — you can use your footprints to lure them (POINT 1). Get to the river with the team. Once there, have them crawl to avoid detection (POINT 2). Use Fins to scuba to the raft, take out the guard with the harpoon gun, and get the raft (POINT 3). It is best to use Fins to take out the perimeter guards (near the water) so you can raft into the camp.

Bring Spooky over to the camp (via raft) and then get the uniform on the line (POINT 4). Once Spooky is ready, have him infiltrate the camp across the river. In this camp, you have two goals: deactivate the electric fence and get the explosive charges (POINT 6). Spooky needs to turn off the power and Inferno can cut the fence and snag the charges (POINT 5). Use one charge for the pillbox guarding the base of the dam, where you will place the charges (POINT 7).

Once the pillbox is rubble, Fins can row Inferno to the base to plant the charges (POINT 8). After the fireworks, escape in the truck that is sent for you (near the starting location at POINT 2).

Advanced tactics: Do not use the top dam location for your entrance, since it is too well guarded. When rowing Inferno across the river, check the line-of-sight of the coast guards. It is best to drop him toward the southeast corner of the map. You can use your spy to distract the guards watching the pillbox so Inferno can place the charges.

Know Your Enemy

In *Commandos*, your team is behind enemy lines. Therefore, you will find that you are always out-manned and out-gunned. The German units will be dressed and armed according to what theatre you are operating in. The enemy will use sight, sense, and even smell to locate you. If they sound an alarm, barrack patrols will be launched to search for the trespassers. These patrols show no mercy. In combat, your men and the enemy can take a couple of small arm rounds, but large caliber guns mean instant death.

Here is a breakdown of the German units that you will encountered in combat:

GUARD
Guards are the most common unit in the game. They will force you to halt, and they will investigate any disturbance they hear or see. They are very susceptible to the bear trap or the decoy lure.

SENTRY
These guards will not leave their post or patrol area. Instead, if they spot you, they will hold you until a patrol comes along to capture you. Use the Sniper for the long-range kill or sneak up behind them.

MACHINE GUNNER
A heavy machine gun versus a commando is a no-win situation for you. Instead of a frontal assault, sneak behind him and use the knife or harpoon gun for the silent kill.

STANDARD PATROL
This is a three-man patrol armed with machine guns whose orders are to shoot on sight, so be careful when they are in the same area as your team. The ambush technique works well against this nuisance.

SERGEANT PATROL
This three to five man patrol is led by a Sergeant. They shoot on sight, and enhanced detection and investigation skills make them extremely dangerous for your team. Avoiding them is a good idea.

ELITE PATROL
These three men are lead by a Sergeant and a guard dog. The dog will attack any target. They are very hard to defeat so you need to run like hell or toss a grenade.

ARTILLERY
These are fixed units, including AA and coastal emplacements that are very lethal to any commando or the vehicle he is occupying. Your Sniper (Duke) can take out the gunner, or a well-placed fuel barrel can also do the job.

PILLBOX
The Pillbox is similar to artillery but it is impervious to gunfire. Use explosives to destroy these structures. They have a very long range of sight, so don't get too close to them when you're trying to take them out.

ARMOR
(tank, half-track, truck, and motorcycle)
If the unit has a gun, it will attack on sight. Armor units are fast and hard to defeat with small arms. The easiest way to defeat them is to either bypass them or use explosives (Inferno is very handy in this regard).

BARRACKS
Buildings with Nazi flags contain ten to 20 German troops. At any alarm, a three to five man patrol will be launched to locate and eliminate the intruders. The best defense in this case is a good offense. Use explosives to eliminate these buildings and their unpleasant occupants.

http://pcgamer.ign.com

Restore Pride

MISSION 4

You will have the services of Tiny McHale, Inferno Hancock, Tread Perkins, Duke Woolridge, and Fins Blackwood on this mission. Your team needs to "remove" the German headquarters near the train tracks and then escape to a waiting U-boat.

At mission start, position Duke near the rubble and take out the nearby patrol with the rifle. You will need the services of Tiny and Inferno to kill the Germans guarding the tank (POINT 1).

Once Sid is in the tank, use it to eliminate the patrol guarding the bridge (POINT 2). While crossing the bridge, watch out for the train (it runs every 45 seconds) — stay to the right of the track (POINT 3). Have Fins climb down the bridge and wait to move on to the dock (POINT 3). Use Duke to remove the motorcycle guard or he will race away to warn the garrison (POINT 4).

Use a three-man force (Tiny, Inferno, and Thread) on other side of the bridge (POINT 4 is a good staging area). Sneak to the ammo crate and have Inferno get the explosives and grenades (POINT 6). You can destroy the track with grenades and block the train and the intersection, cutting off reinforcements (POINT 5).

Use grenades to ambush the perimeter patrol in this area to avoid alerting the garrison (POINT 7). If any commando is captured, he can be freed from jail (POINT 8).

Remember to take out the arch in the compound to prevent the garrison guards from wiping you out (POINT 9). Inferno needs to plant the explosive at the base of the German HQ (POINT 10).

Afterwards, you need to get the team to the dock. Be cautious of the Germans protecting the entrance, especially the heavy machine gun (POINT 11). Fins can take out the dock guards and even several guards at the entrance after he scubas to the dock (POINT 12).

Load the team in the Patrol Boat to exit the mission (POINT 12).

Advanced tactics: To get to POINT 1, you will need to use Tiny to kill the guards and then hide the bodies. The patrol in this section can be ambushed with Inferno and Tiny near the railroad cars. Conserve Duke's ammo for the other side of the river. Do not worry about the guards on the northeast corner of the map. Use Tiny's decoy and the bear trap to take out the sentry guards. The truck can see your commandos but will not sound the alarm.

Blind Justice

MISSION 5

This mission mirrors the film *Where Eagles Dare*. Here you will have only Tiny McHale and Spooky Duchamp to get the job done. You must destroy the radar installation on top of a steep mountain, then hustle your way to the autogyro for a quick exit.

The first task it to clear out the nearby Germans. Use the decoy or fire the pistol to attract their attention, then group the commandos and ambush them as they investigate (POINT 1).

Attract the attention of the German guarding the uniform on the clothesline. Do this by running near the woodpile (let him see you). He will investigate and you can then take him out. This hides his body from the patrol (POINT 2).

Have Spooky get the uniform. Use Spooky and lethal-inject your way to the cable car (POINT 3). Send both Commandos in the cable car to the top. Immediately kill the guard at the top; use Spooky to distract him (POINT 4).

Have Tiny take out the barracks by shooting the nearby explosive barrel (POINT 5). Tiny can place a fuel barrel near the radar and then shoot the barrel to destroy the installation (POINT 6).

Load the team into the autogyro for the escape (POINT 7).

Advanced tactics: Moving the team down the west side of the map is the easiest. Do not bother with the patrols and minefield in the southeast corner. You can distract a patrol by having Spooky use the phone (POINT 2) and call the other phone at the bottom. However, the tactic of Spy distraction is great to turn guards away and sneak Tiny in for the kill. At the mountain top, lethal-inject the guard near the garrison. If you are discovered, you can retreat to the mountain lodge (POINT 4) and wait to ambush the investigating patrols.

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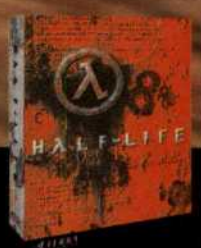

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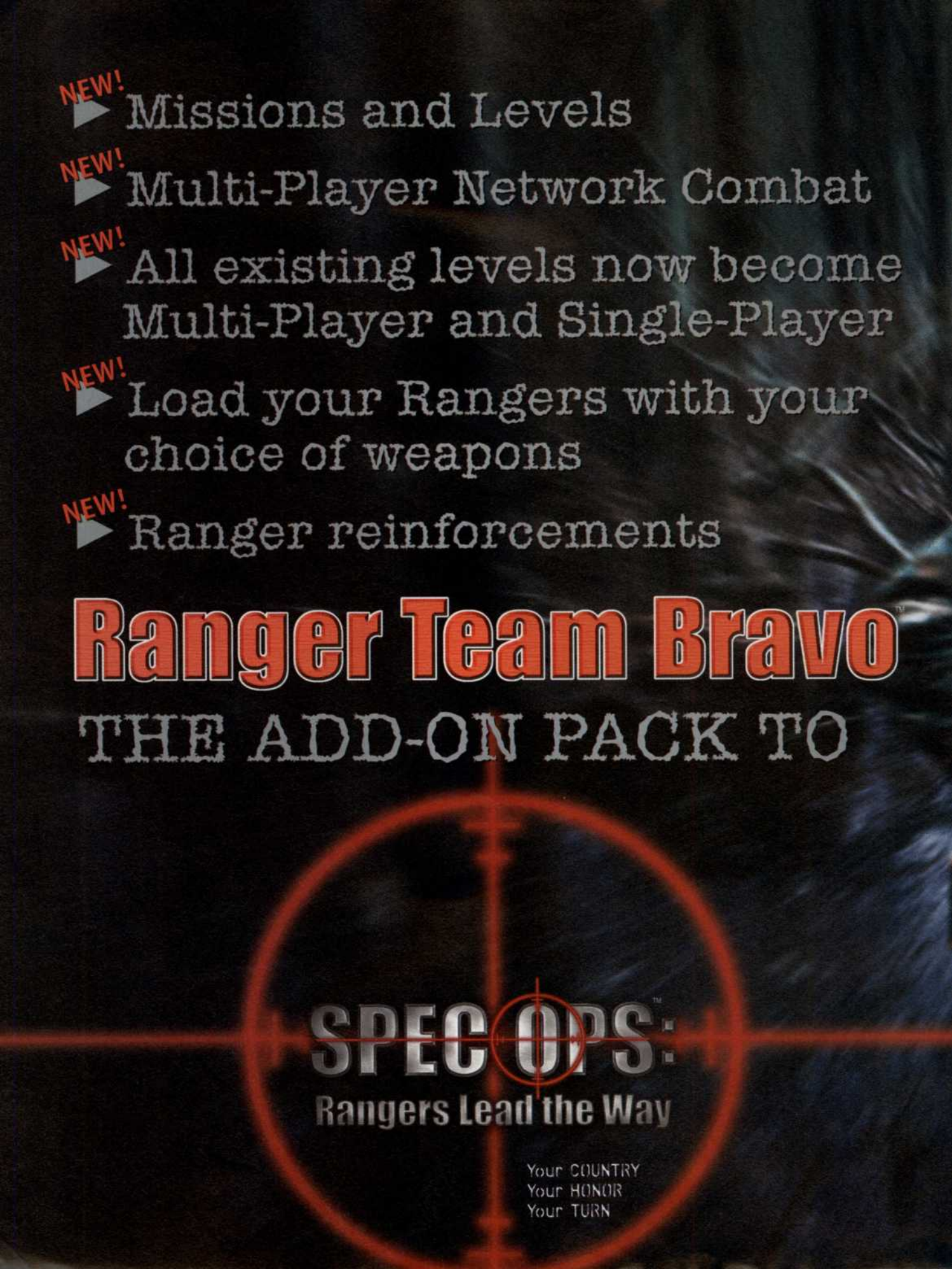
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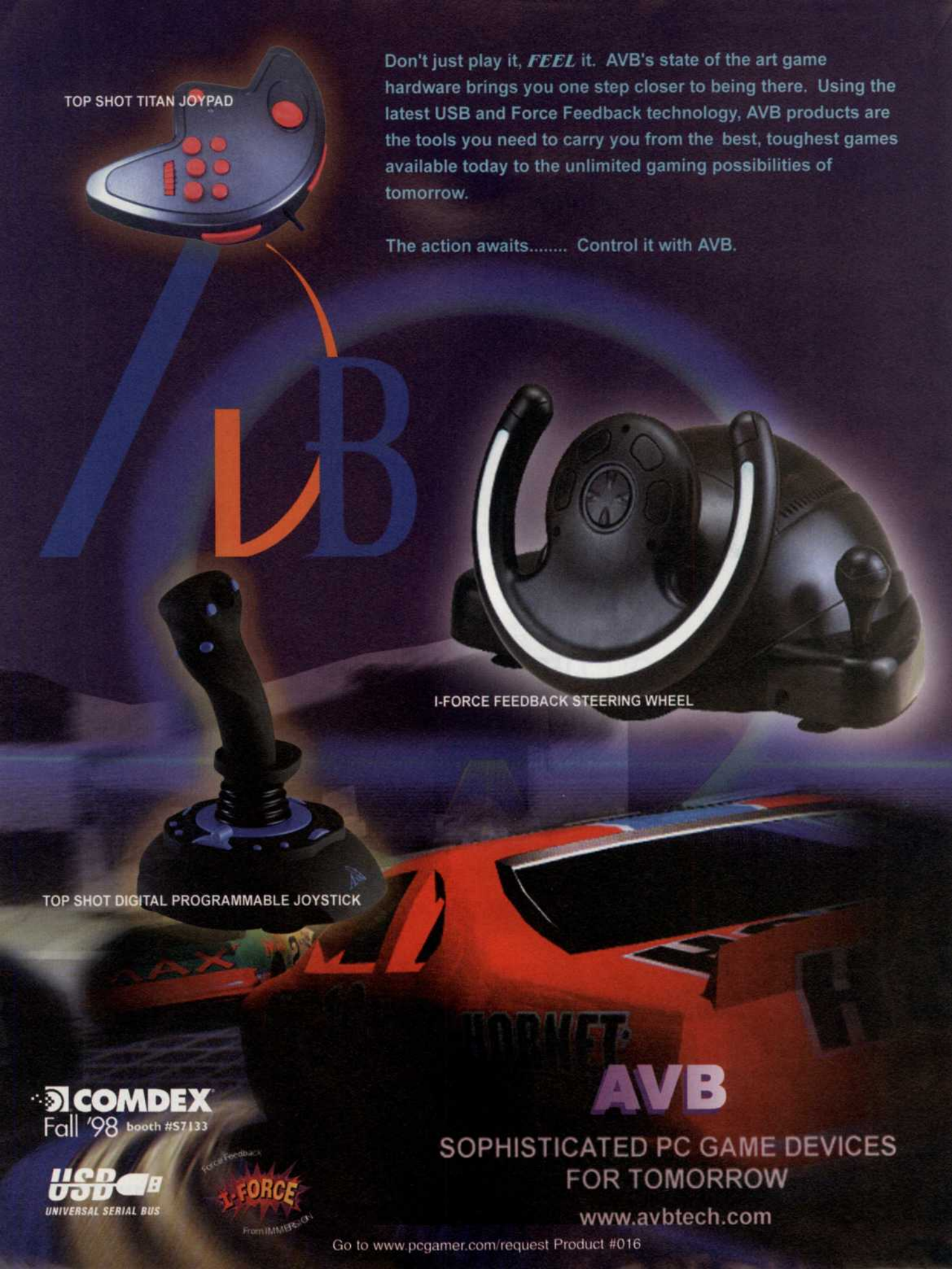

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Readers' Requests

Get ready to take out some terrorists!

With this month's Strategy Central featuring guides to *Rainbow Six* and *Commandos*, tactical, squad-based combat seems to be the underlying theme. Not wanting to spoil the mood, we now present some great tips from reader John Anderson on how to get through the "good guy" missions in Sierra's latest police thriller, *SWAT 2*. We also have some cheat codes for some of your other favorite games — wow, the Strategy Central crew comes through for you again!

SWAT 2

READER'S TIP WINNER OF THE MONTH

Your Guide to SWAT Weapons

COLT 1911: This is the standard issue pistol for SWAT officers. For a pistol, it's very accurate and should be used at close to medium ranges.
SHOTGUN: This weapon is virtually useless. It's strange that most officers tend to be able to score tough shots with a pistol, but miss easy shots with a shotgun. But that's just the way the game is. Even when you do score a hit, there's a good chance the suspect won't go down! Also, it is easy to accidentally hit hostages when using the shotgun, so don't bring this gun along unless you want to spill innocent blood.
MP5: This is the best gun for assault elements. It's accurate and takes down suspects in a hurry. Most of your men should have this weapon.
SNIPER RIFLE: It's the best rifle in the game, and sniper units are a must to be successful.
GAS GRENADE LAUNCHER: These things are awesome! They're great for those pesky hostage situations. You should have at least one in every assault element — bring extras if you have the room.

Mission 1

Bring in one assault element. Once the mission starts, enter the building through the west entrance. Continue through the building, having your scout look around corners and then making stealth entries. Once the suspect is located, challenge him from a distance. If he doesn't give up, fire a tear gas canister into the room. You should be able to complete this fairly easy mission without any shots being fired.

Mission 4: To save the innocent shoppers, you'll have to use some tear gas.

Mission 2

This is similar to mission one, but on a slightly larger scale. Bring one assault and one sniper element in. Position the snipers on the buildings in the southwest. Have your assault element make a dynamic entry through the southeast door. If the suspect isn't present, move into the next room. Position the team so that they are using the desk for cover but can still shoot at the door to the warehouse. A suspect should come through the door shortly. Challenge him, and shoot if necessary. Finally, proceed into the warehouse area and clean up.

Mission 2: Before entering the warehouse, use the safety of the desk for cover to eliminate the suspects in the doorway.

Mission 3

Bring a sniper and an assault unit. Immediately position the snipers on the garage. Next, make a stealth entry through the front door. Getting the kid out should be your first priority. Once the suspect is found, challenge and arrest him. If he resists, use tear gas and make him cry like a baby.

Mission 4

Bring only an assault element. Use the CNT to get a picture of what's going on in there. You will end up storming the place. I recommend using the battering ram on the door and then firing tear gas in before entry. The tear gas won't take out everyone in the room, so shoot any suspects not affected by the gas.

Mission 5

One assault and two sniper elements should do the trick for this mission. Position one sniper unit on the lower part of the building to the west of the bank. Put the other on the gas station to the east of the bank. Authorize the throw phone. Spread the assault element out among the cars in front of the bank. Have the team leader put the throw phone in front of the door. The rest of the element should cover him. After he drops the phone, the leader should move off to the side of the door and out of view. If a suspect comes out to get the phone, have a sniper shoot him. If a hostage comes out, have the leader rescue her. Next, storm the bank, making sure to collect evidence while keeping your eyes open for booby traps.

Mission 5: When you storm the bank, keep an eye out for evidence and booby traps.

Cheater's Corner

TOCA TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP

Enter these codes as if you were naming your driver. The game will announce that the cheat code is enabled, and then you can enter your name normally.

JHAMMO	Access all tracks
CMLOCK	Lock tracks back up
PATSCREEM	Obtain TOCA Showdown, mirrored championship
CMNOHITS	Disable collision detection
CMSTARS	Staring sky mode
CMTOON	Cartoon background
CMDISCO	Volcanic track
CMCOPTER	Helicopter view
CMGARAGE	Bonus car
CMCHUN	Go-kart mode
CMLOGRAV	Low gravity
CMRAINUP	Reverse falling rain
XBOOSTME	Fast mode, all cars driving faster
CMMICRO	Micro Machines mode
CMMAYHEM	All AI cars drive like madmen

Mission 6: Use the helicopter to lift your men to the top level of the building. Then tell the helicopter to wait.

Mission 6

Bring one assault element. Call for the helicopter immediately after the mission starts. Listen to the CNT. After the helicopter arrives, have your element board it and climb down onto the top floor. Tell the helicopter to wait and make a dynamic entry into the hallway. Be aware that both the shooter and maid are against you. Look all the way down the hallway. Sometimes a door is open — that's the room the suspects are in. If there is no open room, start a room-by-room search of the right side of the hall. Have the officer with the battering ram knock the doors down and then run away (so he won't get shot). If the suspects are inside, use tear gas. This will neutralize the maid, but probably not the shooter. Challenge the shooter, and fire if he draws his weapon.

Mission 7

Bring one assault element and make sure you have entry explosives. Call for the helicopter right away, and tell it to wait when it arrives. First make sure there are no suspects outside. If there are, you will probably have to shoot them. Next, search the house that is in the northwest part of the compound. Go to the front of the big house in the southwest and have your scout quickly look in the windows to make sure no hostages are near the door. If the door is clear, blow it open with the explosives and do a dynamic entry. If hostages are near, enter through the back door. Evidence is located in the shed to the northeast.

Mission 8

This mission can be tricky at times. Bring a sniper and assault element and deploy the sniper on the east part of the top level immediately. Have your assault element kneel. You may end up having to snipe a suspect that has his gun down in order to prevent your assault team from getting shot up. Try to have a member of the assault team challenge a suspect so he raises his weapon, then quickly shoot him with the sniper. Also, suspects in this scenario tend to run right into the middle of your elements, and then start shooting. This can turn the mission into a disaster.

Mission 9

This mission is pretty easy. Bring one assault element and two sniper elements. Deploy snipers on the northeast and southwest buildings. Next, have your assault element enter the northwest trailer. Pick up the suspect's gun and then rescue him. Have your team kneel and stay away from windows. Now lead the suspect out the door and immediately take him back inside and around the corner. Several terrorist snipers will appear. Shoot them with your own snipers to end the mission.

Mission 7: Check the shed to the northeast of the compound for important evidence.

Cheater's Corner

WARGAMES

Hit the T key and type the following codes:

HERMES	speeds up building of units
DONKEYS	all units that normally fire missiles will now fire jeeps
MORNINGAFTER	removes fog of war
GIMMIEGIMMIE	allows you to build any unit, even without a command center
UNCLEJOHN	god mode
CHACHING	adds $10,000 to cash total every time it is entered
MRMUSCLE	upgrades player armor
BIGSOFTY	downgrades enemy armor
COFFEE	upgrades player speed
BEER	downgrades enemy speed
SHAFT	upgrades player firepower
SHANK	downgrades enemy firepower

Mission 8: Try to lure the suspect in this part of the mission into going "gun-up" so you can shoot him with a clear conscience.

Mission 10

Depending on how confident you are and how well you think you can handle the situation, bring along one or two assault elements. Make sure to have plenty of tear gas launchers with you, and any K9 officers you have. Call for the helicopter and tell it to wait. Be aware that there is an armed terrorist present. Place your first element at the south entrance to the mall. If you brought a second element, position them at the west entrance. This will close off the mall. Now, fire some tear gas along the stores to prevent looting. Continue firing tear gas and arresting rioters. You will probably have to shoot the terrorist.

Mission 10: Close off the entrances to the mall and use tear gas to prevent any looting.

Mission 11

Bring one assault and one sniper element. Call for the helicopter. Allow the bullhorn callout. Put the snipers on the east end of the building you start next to. Hide your assault element behind the building until the helicopter arrives. It is possible that a suspect will walk down the street heading south. He is extremely dangerous and should be shot by your snipers on sight. After the helicopter arrives, use it to see if the storage area is clear. If a suspect is present, use tear gas on him. From this point on, battering-ram all the doors down before entry to make sure there aren't any booby traps. Next, check the occupied house. Finally, check the abandoned house. When you are searching it, fire tear gas into the room before you enter.

Mission 12

This is probably the hardest mission, so be very careful. Bring two assault and one sniper element. Position the snipers on the ridge above the house, and use them to quickly end any hostage situations. Don't let the CNT do anything. There are only two bystanders and the rest are armed suspects. None of the suspects give up readily. This adds up to one big shootout. Try to keep control of the situation, dealing with only a few suspects at a time. They won't run off, so take your time.

Mission 13

Bring one assault element into the mission. Call for the helicopter, then let the CNT call the offices. He should give you a good picture of the situation. Load the team onto the helicopter and then climb down onto the balcony of an unoccupied office. Start moving towards the suspects' location. There are two suspects — one in a black suit and one in brown pants and a green shirt. Challenge the one wearing a suit, and he will surrender peacefully. The other suspect tends to take a hostage and engage you in a shoot-out.

Mission 14

Before starting this mission, create as many elements as possible. All of your elements will be brought into the final mission automatically, and you will need every last one of them. For this mission, bring two assault elements. Before entering the mission, I recommend turning the game speed *way* down. Call for the helicopter. Start arresting suspects immediately. They will usually be squatting near a tree. They almost always give up with little resistance. Have two officers cover the mayor. Position several more officers in the hills to the north and east. Any suspects not arrested will become snipers, so find them!

Mission 15

Keep an eye on the chief, the mayor, and bystanders during this mission. Just start a room-to-room search, and use a lot of firepower. Fire gas before you enter. Don't hesitate to shoot suspects.

—John Anderson, *Franklin, WI*

Thanks, John, for those great tips. You are the lucky winner of our Tip of the Month award — your goodies will arrive soon!

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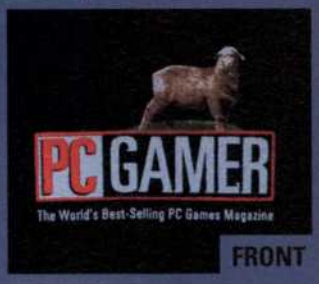

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What would you do if we sang out of tune? Would you stand up and walk out on us? Lend us your ears, and we'll sing you a song — and we'll try not to wake Uncle Gus.

Or something like that there. Fact is, we'd do just about anything to get some mail from our insightful, attractive, and beloved readers — sing, dance, juggle, um, sing... anything! Can you see that we are serious?

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The Great White North

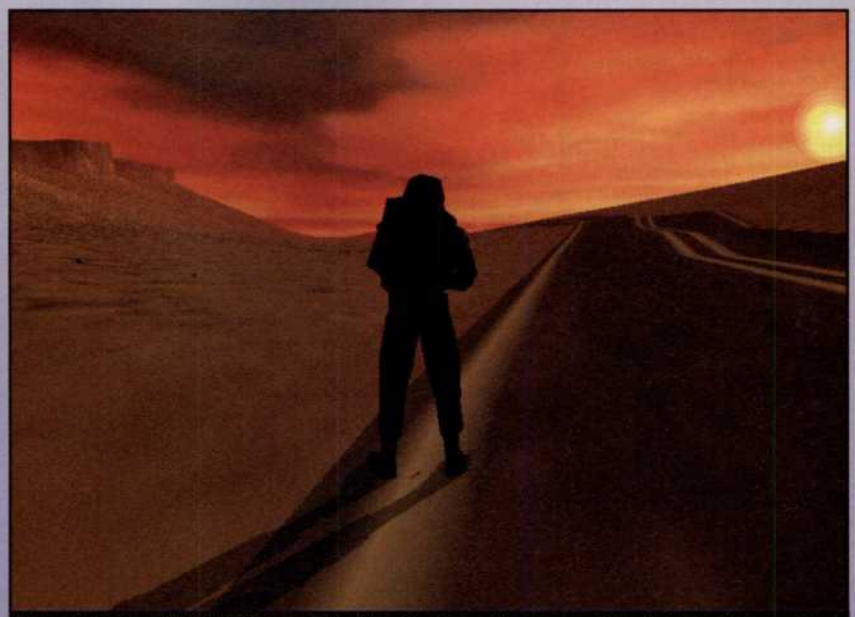
First of all, on the topic of *Wargasm*: If the game is called *Wargasm*, wouldn't multi-player be a "Wargy"?

Second...after reading a recent reviews introduction page in *PC Gamer* (September 1998), my buddies and I led a hunting party across the ice and chased away the menacing polar bears with pointy sticks we found just the day before (lucky for us). On behalf of the Canadian population (yes, all 500 of us), we would like to thank the editors of *PC Gamer* for bringing notice to this rising threat of world domination.

But seriously, Canada is a great place for gamers. Having only ten hours of sunlight a year, glare is very rarely a problem. Glare shields are not needed, and gamers can spend their money on more important things, like food, or better yet, copies of *PC Gamer*.

— **Adam Lydan**, *via the Internet*

P.S. EH!



DID uses the term "Multiple Wargasm" to describe the multi-player version of its upcoming real-time strategy game — but we like Adam Lydan's "Wargy" pretty well, too.

I just purchased the September issue of *PC Gamer*, and was thrilled by its usual quality. However, like many others, I've noticed how idiotic the advertisements are becoming. I know you have nothing to do with them, but someone has to let the game publishers out there know that their ads are brainless, and are often offensive to many readers.

I've gotten used to pages plastered with busty babes urging me to purchase a product that has nothing to do with said babe. I've shrugged off commands from egocentric game developers who order the consumer to perform fellatio on them. I try to ignore the buzzword laden feature lists, and the attempts to convince gamers that it's the in thing to play a certain game. But, one game developer has gone too far, and really pissed me off.

That developer is Psygnosis. On page 160 in the September issue of your magazine was an ad for a game called *Global Domination*. In it, Canada is placed into a commonly made, ignorant stereotype. Let me set the record straight: Canadians do not say "eh" at the end of every sentence. "Eh" is used to transform a statement into a question. It is not just something us Canadians add to every thing we say. Usually, I shrug my shoulders and ignore people who hold this Canadian myth close to their hearts. But this ad bothered me particularly. Maybe it's because I'm unusually patriotic or I'm overly sensitive (I doubt the latter — I realize it is just a game, and can often laugh at jokes that poke fun at Canadians), but using a much-used stereotype to sell a product seems wrong to me. Inflating U.S. consumers' egos by portraying the U.S. as conquerors over Canada just to sell more copies in the U.S. irritates me as well. But hey! It's just a game, right?

Psygnosis has disgusted me, and I suppose this ad has tainted my opinions of their further products. But I suppose it doesn't matter — since *Lemmings*, they've done very little in the industry anyway. They've also demonstrated that not only do they stereotype people, but that they would do horribly in an actual war. The ad shows a bunch of missiles targeted at Canada. Strangely enough, the missiles are heading toward an

If our worst fears of war between Canada and Psygnosis are ever realized, who would win?

empty spot on the map, somewhere in Manitoba. If you were planning on taking over a country, you would target your weapons at a city, wouldn't you? Oh well, if the U.S. ever does try to take over Canada, let's hope that Psygnosis is the prime strategist. Canadians everywhere would be grateful.

Keep on churning out a great magazine, and watch out for migrating polar bears, eh?

— Glenn Lyre, *via the Internet*

Thanks for writing, Adam and Glenn. It's always good to hear from our cousins to the north. And while many people seem to think insulting Canada is hip and fun, you'll never see us doing that. We've got too much respect for the contributions Canada has made to world culture. Imagine a single country with a population of less than 30 million giving us actors like William Shatner and James Doohan (not to mention Keanu Reeves, who honed his skills at Toronto's High School of the Performing Arts); musical masters like Loverboy and Corey Hart; and such cinematic masterpieces as Terror Train, Going Berserk, *and* Scanners III — The Takeover. *In the face of those offerings, how could anyone laugh at Canada?*

Quake! Quake! Quake!

I'm sick of all the *Quake II* stuff you have in your magazine. In your September issue, three of the six columns were about *Quake II*. I'm sick of it — I read the first two, and by the time I got to Dennis "Thresh" Fong's, I gave up (partly because of the fact that *Quake II* is all Dennis writes about). Sure *Quake II* is a great game, but haven't we had enough of it? I know I sure have.

— Eric Milne, *via the Internet*

You know, Eric, you're right. In fact, your letter prompted us to change the contents of this magazine. We were going to do a big cover feature on Quake II, *but you talked us out of it. Never let it be said that we don't listen to our readers.*

Are people really getting sick of hearing about id's masterpiece, *Quake II*? Inconceivable!

Marketing the Monkey

Have you ever thought of expanding Coconut Monkey into a franchise? He would be a great mascot for all kinds of beverages, especially coconut drinks. Coconut Monkey could also make guest appearances at schools, teaching valuable lessons of tolerance for mascots made out of fruit. I think he would also be good at sporting events — people could use him as both the ball and the pins in bowling, and I'm sure he makes a great football. Pretty soon, you'd have people wanting CM's autograph (or maybe it would have to be an imprint of his pointy head, since he has no hands). And of course, he would have to attend any national industry trade shows, so he could dispense his vast knowledge about game design.

Okay, so maybe this is a little much. I wouldn't mind a Coconut Monkey T-shirt, though.

—Julia Harmons, *via the Internet*

Coconut Monkey as a spokesmodel? When heck freezes over, we say!

Coconut Monkey responds: Thank you for thinking of me, Julia, but I will never allow myself to become a corporate shill. Why, just last week, while I was enjoying a delicious Veggie Delite™ sandwich from Subway® and a bag of Tostitos® brand Restaurant Style Tortilla Chips, someone suggested that I could bring in more money by offering my services as a product sponsor. I was so insulted, I spewed Cherry Coke® all over my new Swatch® Irony Scuba 200. I repeat: I shall never sell out!

Jane's Combat Simulations' *F-15* is a great air combat sim — but imagine how much fun it would be if you and your friends could go online and fly cooperatively....

No Cooperation

There seems to be a disturbing trend in combat flight sims these days (at least it's disturbing to me) — the total lack of co-op multi-play in missions, campaigns, etc. Even Jane's excellent *F-15* has nothing but the same old "let's go on the 'net and shoot other people down" capability. My friends (wingmen) and I used to play the old *Falcon 3.0* in cooperative mode religiously, and we really miss it. Co-op play is more exciting, more demanding, more difficult...which could be why it's not supported any longer?

Hopefully this is a trend that will soon pass. There are folks out here that enjoy doing things more as a team.

—Keith "Boogieman" Mitchell, *via the Internet*

You touched on the problem yourself, Keith — so few air combat sims (and, in fact, so few games in any genre) support cooperative multi-play because it's much harder to design than the standard deathmatch. But we're with you; the only sims we really enjoy playing in multi-player mode are those that let us fly together against a common enemy — games like Longbow 2, EF2000 2.0, *and* F-22 Total Air War, *for example.*

PCG

READERS RESPOND TO:

What game from our "Top 10 Games of 1999" cover story are you looking forward to?

My pick is *Beneath*. I played the *Tomb Raider II* demo on your demo disc and it instantly became one of my favorites. But *Beneath* is making *Tomb Raider* look like a third-person 3D version of Pong. I hate to say it, but I think Lara will get booted when Jack comes around.

—Jason Ballingham, *via the Internet*

I'm waiting for *Anachronox*. I heard Tom Hall had his entire design team play *Chronotrigger* before work on *Anachronox* began. Consequently, the Top 10 was the first thing I turned to in the September issue. It offered the first actual screen shots I've ever seen of this remarkable game. Thanks a bunch!

— Andrew E. Burnop, *via the Internet*

X-COM Alliance will be the biggest game of 1999, because it will be the only game people will recognize as an instant classic, thanks to all the other classic X-COM games.

—Linda Doyle, *via the Internet*

I would have to say *Max Payne* is the game I'm most looking forward to. Some senators may squeal about it, but who gives a rip? More and more developers are pushing the envelope of violence in games, and I think it's a welcome turn of events. No *Payne*, no gain — right?

—Reuben Jones, *via the Internet*

For a die-hard RTS gamer like me, *Black & White* is a dream come true, and you guys now have me eagerly awaiting its release next year!

—Ed Fitzmaurice, *via the Internet*

No. 1: *Anachronox*: I am a RPG man. I love them, I live them, I worship them. This game looks like the movie the *Fifth Element*. It's a sci-fi theme, but with a mystical/mythical twist.

No. 2: *Black & White*: Strategy gamers are the best. I love *Lords of the Realm*, and the game *KKND* is fun, but what I want is versatility. *Black & White* seems to give just that.

No. 3: *Giants*: This just looks and sounds like a blast. It's full of big things crushing little things, which is always really cool. And I love the underdog look, as the real men are 1/100 of the size of a giant.

—John Faria, *via the Internet*

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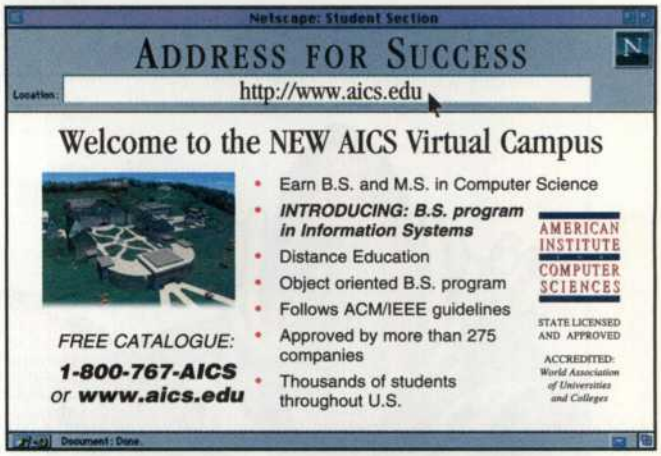

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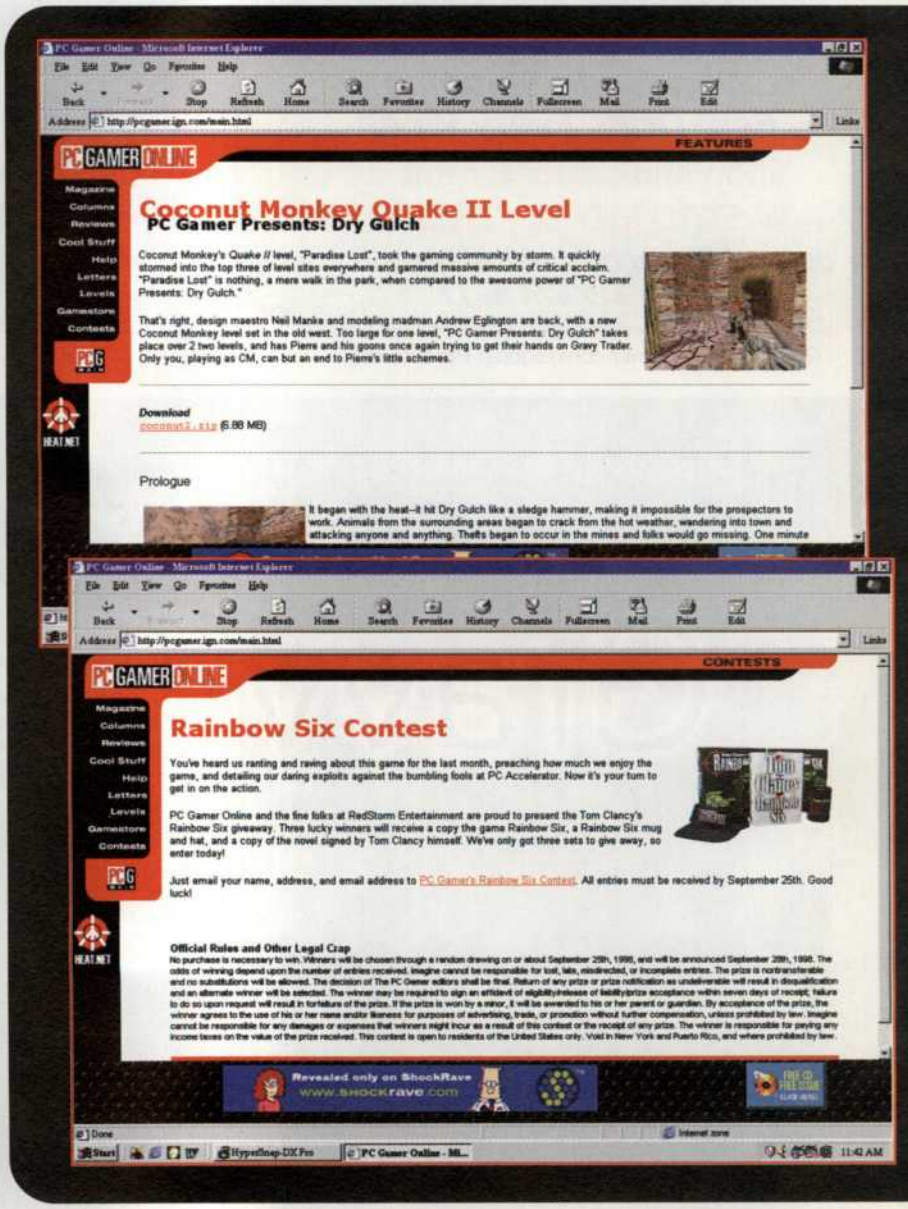

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Sierra / Dynamix	Tribes	102-103	089
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Sierra Sports	Grand Prix Legends	294-295	090
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Sierra Studios	Gabriel Knight 3	6-7	082
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SSI -Strategic Simulations, Inc.	Chaos Gate	217	745
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101st Airborne
People's General
KKND 2
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Montezuma's Revenge
Dip & Twiddle: DT20
Val Kilmer Backgammon
...and sleigh-loads more!

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Thanks for joining us.

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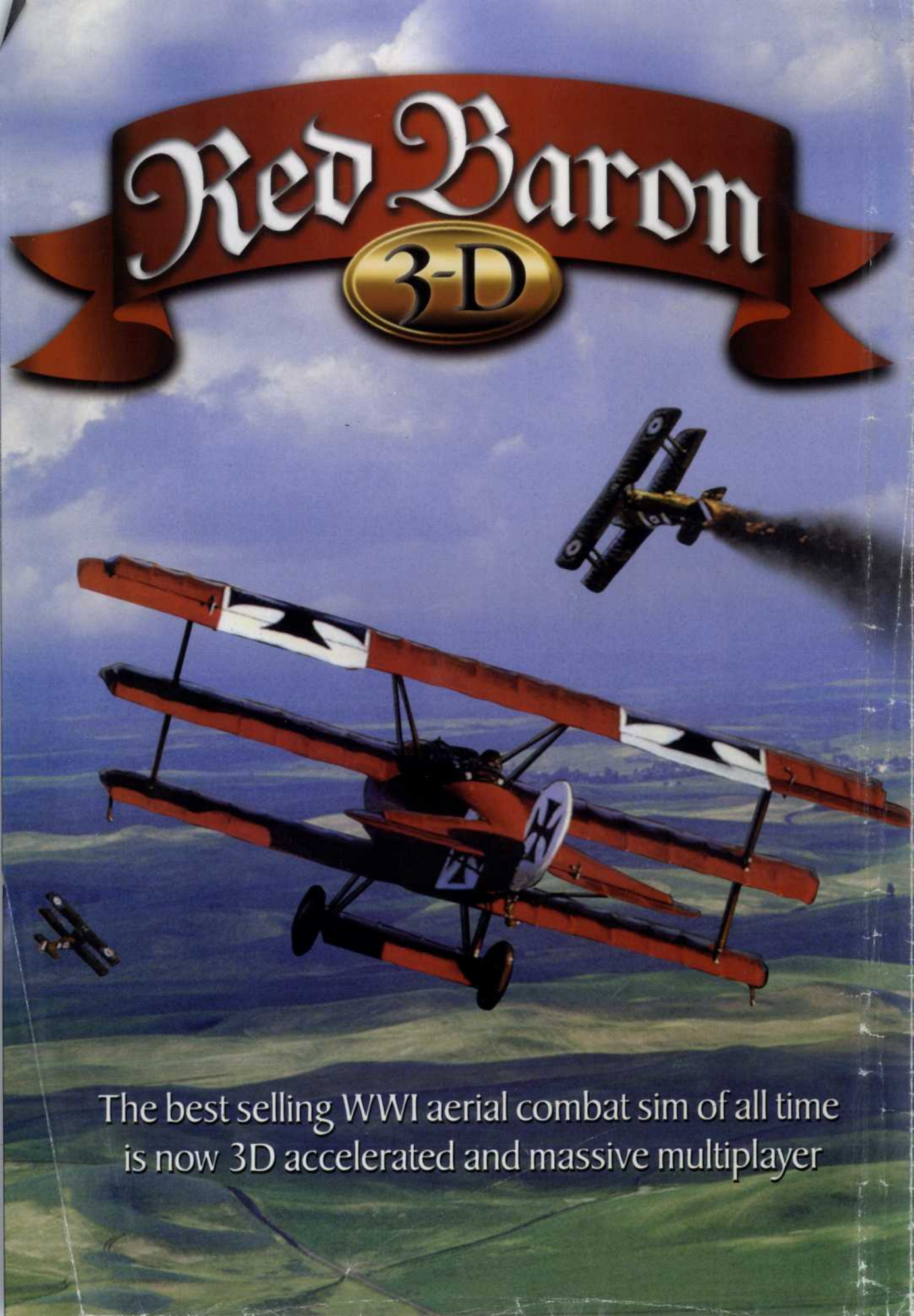
Red Baron 3-D



The best selling WWI aerial combat sim of all time
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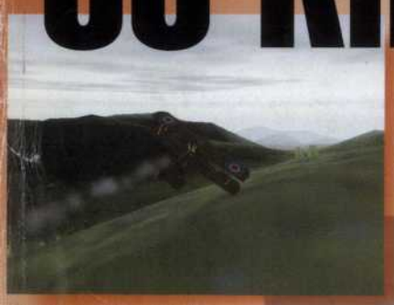

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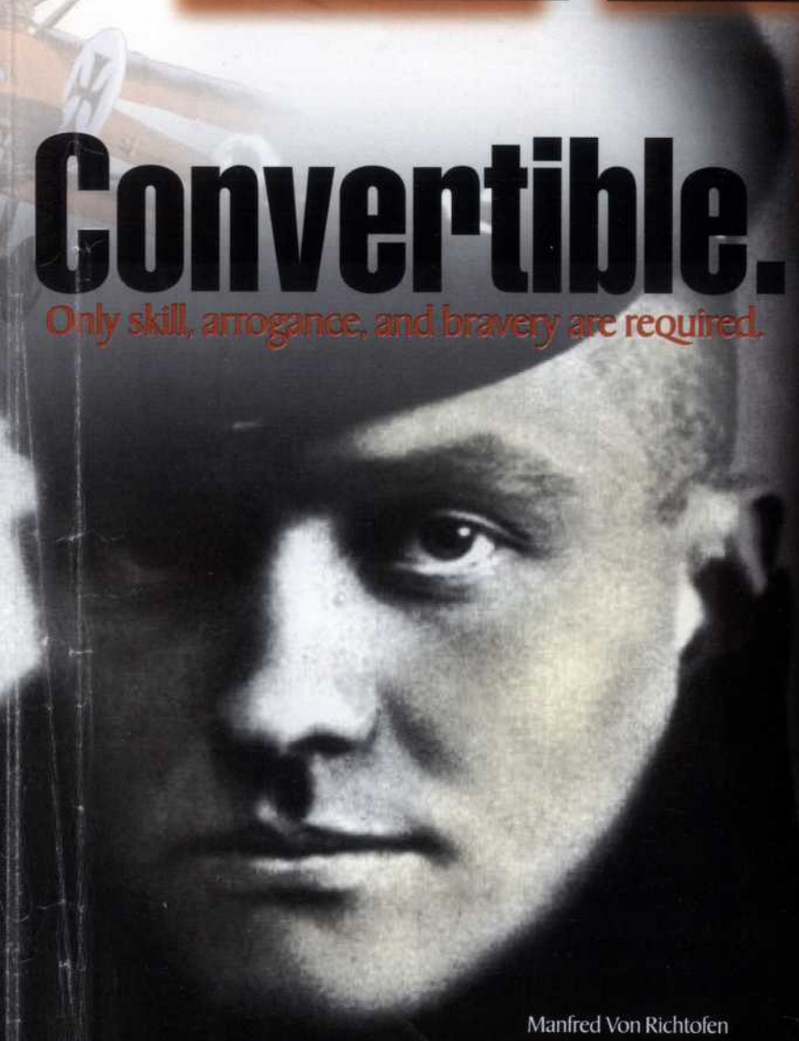
Over 40 unique aircraft with 22 flyable planes.

New and improved flight models with torque and gyroscopic effects.

Only skill, arrogance, and bravery are required.



Bullets riddle your plane shattering wood and canvas. Deafening anti-aircraft gunfire thunders in your ears and fills the skies with smoke and destruction. Distant sirens and church bells ring out through the air, warning of your approach above enemy townships. Enemy aircraft search the sky for any hint of your existence.

But, this is your time and place to become a hero. You cannot deny your chivalrous nature. You are the Ace that your country pins its hopes upon to defeat the darkest of all enemies, the deadly Red Baron.

Manfred Von Richtofen

Red Baron 3-D

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