#100

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S ISSUE

PC GAMER

The World's Best-Selling PC Games Magazine

DOOM III

What's made Carmack so giddy?
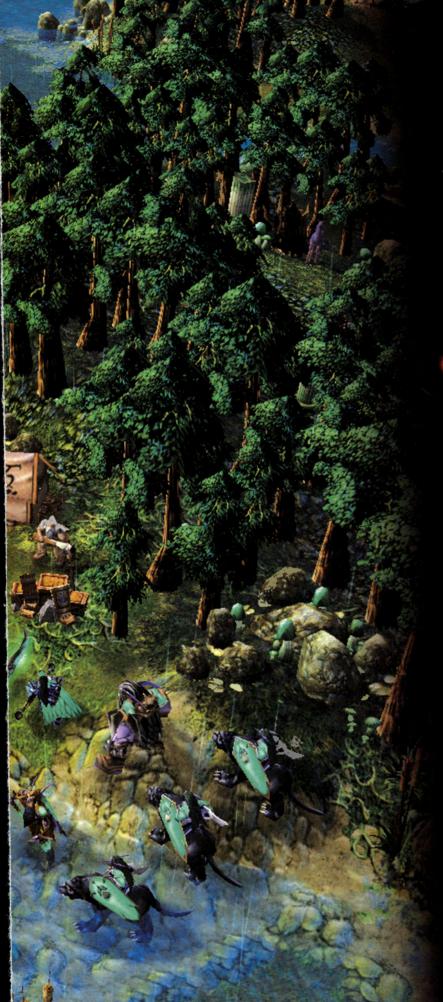**Plus: Our take on 58 new games**

8 Glorious Years of PC Gamer

→ **The biggest stories**
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10 Stories We Could Never Print — Until Now!

WARCRAFT III

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

WARCRAFT III
REIGN OF CHAOS

WHAT WILL YOUR LEGEND BE?

Weilding arcane might, the Archmage smites all who oppose him.

Channeling chaotic powers, the Demon Hunter walks the line between shadow and light.
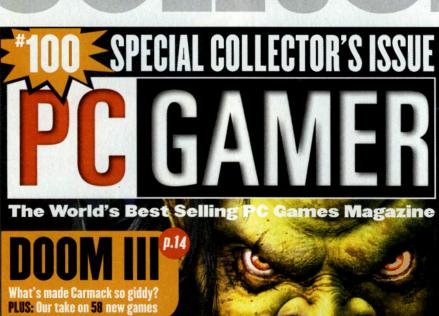
EVERY HERO LEAVES A LEGEND…
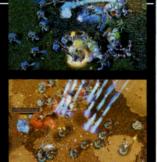
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PC GAMER

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- The biggest stories
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THE WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

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CD-ROM EDITION
AUGUST 2002 · VOL. 9 · NO. 8

SCOOPS

Doom III

ON THIS MONTH'S PCG CD Not only do we have an EXCLUSIVE on the brand-new multiplayer world for *Dungeon Siege*, but we've also got demo versions of *The Sum of All Fears, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3, Cultures II,* and *Sudden Strike II*!

"Money won is twice as sweet as money earned."

All Hail *Doom III*. All Hail *Doom III*. All Hail *Doom III*.

Once again we return from the games industry's biggest event — the E3 trade show — and the biggest buzz is all about a PC game. Like last year's debut of *Star Wars: Galaxies, Doom III* blew away everyone that saw the demo. And it was more than just the technology that caused onlookers to gush. Ominous and potentially terrifying gameplay moments took advantage of the moody atmosphere created by the flickering lights and claustrophobic setting.

In the commotion of E3, you can't help being impacted by the purely visceral scenes. But *Doom III*'s visual impact was significant for greater reasons. Casting a look around all the amazing-looking titles on display (*Unreal II* and *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *America's Army, Rainbow Six: Raven Shield, C&C: Generals,* and *Age of Mythology*, to name a few standouts), it was apparent that while they were all graphically superb, they were also all…well…similar.

With the *Unreal* engine proving to be incredibly dominant as the licensed engine of choice for big-name titles, the artistic qualities in the modeling and texturing became more apparent. And it's all good. *Doom III*'s significance, therefore, was as the first example of the true next generation of game graphics. The bar has been raised, and the next level is now clearly defined. With John Carmack promising a more complete toolset for future developers to use, we may have seen the technology that's likely to dominate the games industry for the next two to three years.

Of course, *PC Gamer* will be bringing you all the latest announcements of those big games as we drive with a full head of steam into our second century of issues. While the story of *PC Gamer*'s success since its inception in 1994 is fascinating in itself, we took the opportunity in our 100th issue to celebrate the PC games industry as a whole, as viewed through the eyes of our editors over the years. It tells a wonderful story, packed with insight into the biggest developments that have brought game fans to this point in our history. Enjoy it, and let me know what you'd like to see in the coming 100 issues.

As usual, I'll sign off by giving this month's quote-contest winner. Congratulations to Scott W. Smessaert, who wins a free game for spotting last month's line from the movie *Contact*. Identify the quote at the top of this column, and send your entries and thoughts to *ednote@pcgamer.com*.

Rob

Rob Smith
Editor-in-Chief

Hacks and Slashes

>> CROSSWORD ERRATA

I FOUND A PROBLEM with your crossword puzzle (*PC Gamer*, June 2002 issue). For 32 Down, the clue is "The world's best-selling computer-games magazine." The word *PC Accelerator* does not fit. Neither does the abbreviation *PCXL*. What am I to do?
— **Trikky**

Ahhh, you touched a chord with the former PCXL staffers who now bring you PC Gamer. If the clue was "What was the best PC games magazine?" your answer would most certainly have been correct. But now some of those same editors bring you that great gaming insight every month at "The World's Best-Selling PC Games Magazine."

>> JEDI RIGHT

YOUR REVIEW OF *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* was absolutely correct. The first three, completely uninspired levels almost made me not want to finish the game, either — 'til I got the Force, that is!
— **Norman Bates**

I THINK YOU DIDN'T GIVE *JKII* a high enough rating. It should have been around 94%.
— **Cactusbob**

JKII DESERVED AT LEAST a 96%!
— **Danny Maurer**

Lots o' love for Jedi Knight II — *and rightly so. It's worth struggling through those mind-numbingly dreary early levels to get to the cool stuff. And the* game's *even more entertaining with the "saber-decapitation" cheat, which, when enabled, lets you hack off enemies' heads, arms, and legs, leaving 'em a pile of appendages. To use it, during gameplay, press Shift + ~ to call down the console, type* devmapall *(to enable cheat codes), type* g_SaberRealisticCombat 1, *and then press Enter.*

>> THE SLAYER FAMILY

I'M A LONG-TIME READER whose husband got her hooked (I admit, I wanted to see what was taking all his time away). Now we argue over who's going to read *PC Gamer* first. We've thought about reading it together in bed, but come on, who wants to do that?

Which brings me to why I'm writing. I was rereading an article on *High Heat Baseball 2003* (May 2002 issue), and was wondering if there's a PC baseball game that you can play online? I'm a hardcore baseball fan, and would rather enjoy spanking my husband's butt online. (It would just add to the number of online games at which I already do so.)

I was also wondering what the hell is up with Sierra and its *SWAT 3* servers? I know the game's old, but what can I say — I love it. You'd think Sierra would put some money and time into keeping them up and running. What are they going to do when *Urban Justice* comes out? Stick us with the same laggy, no-servers-available, try-again-later crap?

With *JKII*'s saber cheat, you can hand Imperial scum the degrading fate they deserve.

>> HEY, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

Fantastic Journey indeed.

Just wondering if Empire Interactive is going to do any more pinball games. The *Pro Pinball* series — *Big Race USA, Timeshock,* and *Fantastic Journey* — was really great.
— **Randy Chapek**

We agree, Randy, the Pro Pinball *games were amazing. Official word from Empire is that the developer, Cunning Development, took time off to create* Endgame, *a light-gun shooter for PlayStation 2. Empire's general manager, Jimmy Lamorticelli, told us, "It's possible they'll make more pinball games, but right now we don't have one slated for release this year." We live in hope.*

Just so we're all on the same page, Team Fortress 2 *is never coming out, right?*
— **Tim Harcoff**

Correct. TF2 is never coming out. Well, that's not strictly true. It is, we're told, coming out. Except nobody will give us any clue about actually when. Our best guess? Late 2003 or even 2004. Sucks, huh?

I thought I would check with the guys in the know and see what you've heard about *Dragon's Lair 3D.*
— **Earl "of the frozen North" Krause**

The game's publisher, Ubi Soft, assures us that Dirk's jaunt into 3D is coming by the end of the year. No, really.

Is EA releasing *Triple Play 2002* for the PC? It'd be a shame if they didn't: ditching the ultimate gaming platform for consoles is ridiculous. If they aren't, can you suggest a good alternative?
— **Jeremy Scranton**

EA will not *be releasing* Triple Play 2002 *for PC. That's wonderful news for 3DO's* High Heat Baseball 2003, *which is now the only game in town. If you need your PC baseball fix for the year,* HH2003 *is still the best baseball sim on any platform, despite its bugs.*

We understand that Triple Play *will be back on the PC for 2003, and EA is already committed to bringing* NBA Live *back to the PC for 2003 after skipping a year.*

Please tell me it's true: is Counter Strike: Condition Zero *coming out May 5?*
— **Andrew Jordan**

Nope. CS:CZ is slated to hit stores in October.

▶ 8,000 LBS. OF GUIDED JUSTICE

JUST GOT YOUR MARCH 2002 issue (sent out to me by my wife) and saw the little blurb regarding the FDNY stenciled on the Holiday 2001 (*Ghost Recon*) cover. Thought you might appreciate the following pics we took the other day. Yes, that is Afghanistan in the background. The patch is NYPD, and it has flown 15-plus sorties over the 'Stan and delivered over 8,000 pounds of guided justice.

— "Elf," VFA-131 Wildcats
aboard USS *John F. Kennedy*

Ladies and gentlemen, we salute our Military Mailmen, who are busy delivering their "guided justice" for all our freedoms!

I mean, you don't log onto *Counter-Strike* and get any of that. And I know not as many people play *SWAT 3* as *CS*, but it does have faithful followers. And while I'm on the subject of *SWAT/CS*, what is it with all the hacking? I'm sorry if players aren't good, but they should either practice or find a game they are good at, and let us play a decent game. I'm no computer genius, but you'd think someone would make a Punkbuster/cheating death type deal for *SWAT*.

So please tell me, what's a girl to do?

— Mrs{Slayer}

Reading PC Gamer in bed? Not even the editors here do that (well, we're guessing — it's never actually been discussed). As for baseball, High Heat 2003 is playable online and Rob has spent quite a bit of time trying to connect to games through the GameSpy matchmaking service. There are also numerous leagues online for regular opponents. Check out message boards like http://pub38.ezboard.com/ftheclubhouseonlineleagues for options (or email Rob at ednote@pcgamer.com and challenge him to a game).

We're sure Sierra will address server issues for the upcoming Urban Justice tactical shooter (for more on this game, see our E3 roundup starting on page 12), and are probably focusing efforts on that project, rather than supporting the older SWAT 3.

So what's a girl to do? Keep checking out our news updates…and keep giving that hubby a good spanking!

▶ YOU WERE ROBBED!

YOU KNOW THOSE RUBBER elastic sticky thingies you put on the back of your "Disc of the Month" to ensure that the CD stays there? Well, recently I've been getting magazines that contain only one CD sticky thingie on the back instead of the usual two, and I'm wondering if you guys are cutting your production budget.

— Godwin Leung

Godwin, send us your contact details immediately. Someone is stealing your CD sticky thingies™. Some crazy is probably collecting them for a heinous purpose. Please report all instances of CD-sticky-thingie theft to the local authorities. This was a public service announcement.

▶ THEVEDE'S FAN CLUB

GREG VEDERMAN IS THE COOLEST game reviewer. Greg Vederman is the coolest everything. Sorry to the rest of you staff guys, but Greg just owns all. He gives the most accurate game and hardware reviews, and he's just plain cool.

I even wrote a song about how cool *PC Gamer* is, but I don't know how to send a music file. *[You must find a way: we need to hear it! — Ed.]*

You can call me…TheCow (kinda like…TheVede). Cool, huh? Greg Vederman is the best.

— Alexander "TheCow"

That's right, TheCow — glad you see how it is around here. I am the coolest… [Vede, stop answering the Letters and get back to Hard Stuff — "Really cool" Ed.]

▶ NO SUPERPOWER

[In reference to Dan Morris' review of *SuperPower* (June 2002 issue), in which he wrote: "I carried out a terrorist strike on my own people and successfully blamed it on Uruguay. I then conquered Uruguay…"] Hi Mr. Morris, I'm from Uruguay, and I have to tell you that we (Uruguay) are too shitty to even have goddamn terrorists. I don't see how a terrorists' strike could be carried out with only wood sticks.

— HolaMundo

Great to see such national pride, HolaMundo. You know, all Uruguay really needs is someone to sharpen their wood sticks, and a superpower could be born. Maybe.

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GAME

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Here's all the reinforcement you may need on why your PC is the perfect gaming platform. Over 50 great PC games in this feature alone. And by "great" we mean "looking really, really good." Genuinely good.

While every game maker showed at least a sampling of its wares at this year's E3 — with the notable exception of 3D Realms, who stayed home to keep slaving away on *Duke Nukem Forever* — there were a few standouts. (Of course, you can just turn the page now to get to the *Doom III* goodness, including our exclusive chat with John Carmack and Trent Reznor.)

Most notable is the genre trends we're seeing. Late 2002 and early 2003 appear to be RPG-light, with big names like *Dungeon Siege, Neverwinter Nights,* and *Morrowind* all having shipped in the first half of 2002. Their place has been taken by a slew of massively multiplayer RPGs that will all be vying for the same parts of the pie. The tactical-shooter genre appears to be losing no steam, with *SWAT: Urban Justice, Rainbow Six: Raven Shield, CS: Condition Zero,* and *America's Army* all looking outstanding. (Score two of those for the ubiquitous *Unreal* engine.)

And we've a strategy renaissance in the making, led by the stunning *Age of Mythology* and *C&C: Generals.*

So turn the page to get the skinny on them all, including our behind-the-scenes first look at *Half-Life 2...*just kidding.

Who let the dogs of hell out? If this poor sap had taken a sicky today, perhaps he'd have avoided having his flesh served for dinner.

So does being zombie-fied add the extra pounds, or were all these workers simply porkers?

Around every tight corner is a different denizen of damnation ready to rip you limb from limb.

DOOM III

WANT A BAROMETER of the PC's position in the games industry? *Doom III*'s appearance at E3, the hourlong line to get a glimpse of the closed showing, and feverish post-demo chatter confirmed what we already knew: PC games set the technological standards that all others follow. The *Doom III* demo (a video of gameplay, though John Carmack showed fully playable code behind closed doors) was simply stunning.

As the action shifted from a rendered cut-scene showing the classic marine's isolation inside a futuristic space station to his initial cautious steps through its claustrophobic corridors, the graphical fidelity between pre-rendered and real-time gameplay was barely perceptible.

Certainly the incredible detail in the facial animations, environment textures, and zombie-fied monster animations looked a level above that in every other game being shown at E3. But the true revolution was in the lighting effects. A swinging, flickering neon tube cast eerie shadows on every surface it touched. Scripted events had lights falling from the ceiling, and again the shadows danced all around, causing you to look at every piece of movement for fear it was a monster hidden in the shadows. Frankly, it looked scary as all hell.

Alongside the now-obligatory monster that leaps straight in your face, zombie-like creatures, evidently the remnants of the human workforce that unleashed a portal to hell, shuffled pathetically forward to be met by the business end of your marine's hardware. Only a few simple weapons were on display — a pistol, a powerful repeating shotgun, and an assault rifle — but each projectile left a specific (and bloody) location mark on its target.

Other monsters included a flesh-ripping, um, creature — these denizens of hell defy description — wrenching chunks from some poor chubby bastard (see screenshot above). And the finale was a supreme example of the scripted pieces you should expect from this true horror story: perfectly illustrating the power and new functionality of the graphics engine, the Marine leaps to the floor below, his own shadow shrinking as he walks toward an apparent exit, before his shadow is devoured by that of a horror stalking behind him.

The *Doom III* demo, as limited in scope as it was, was utterly amazing. It also highlighted the real horror tone of the game: id is using its generation-leaping technology to power an immersive experience that's sure to terrify as much as it thrills. Without a doubt, the game of the show.

— RS (ID SOFTWARE; ACTIVISION; Q2 2003)

THE AMAZING CARMACK (AND REZNOR)

Though Johnny Carson may never have met id Software's programming guru, his character's brainiac powers wouldn't be amiss explaining John Carmack's incredible talent. With id Software now at a high of 17 employees, Carmack is comfortable enough to concentrate fully on creating the rendering engine for *Doom III*. And he's almost giddy with excitement about how it's going. That's right — genuinely giddy.

What's got John Carmack so gleeful? "I made some good calls at the beginning," he told *PC Gamer* about the engine-building process. In addition, "some other procedures, like with the physics, have worked. [These were] optional functions, but they ended up working," he continued.
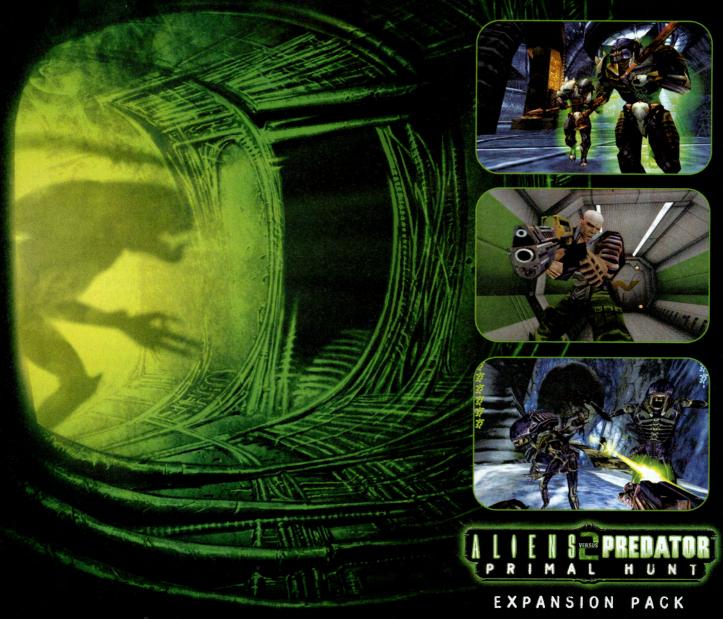
The *Doom* technology is clearly a generational leap for game engines, and Carmack insists that more user-friendly elements will be addressed for the mod community: "The engine could be used as a tool," he says.

This broad functionality includes a sound engine that id programmer Graeme Devine is building. It will be the first to feature full 5.1 support, a decision that led to Carmack's contacting Creative Labs to tell them the drivers for 5.1 didn't work. "We know, we're working on it," Creative's designers reportedly said, "but no one has tried to use them yet."

As Carmack is aware, enforcing an immersive environment involves more than graphics, and he's evidently thrilled to have former Nine Inch Nails front man Trent Reznor coordinating *Doom III*'s sound design. Already working closely with Devine on the pure functionality, Reznor hopes to bring a new form of sound design to the game world. "The environment is unnerving and scary," Reznor told *PC Gamer*, "so we're not creating just a soundtrack over the action. [This project's] sound design is intriguing." Though Reznor admits to being in the learning process of this design, "on first seeing the engine — seeing the light moving realistically — I could tell it was an exponentially more realistic experience." Carmack confirmed that id had approached Bob Prince, who produced the original *Doom*'s resonant sounds, but unfortunately couldn't work out a deal for the new project to include any homage to those classic pulsing effects.

Carmack's enthusiasm bubbled for more than just the technology; he was also excited about the possibilities for the game's tone. "We want to [do more] than just scare people," he says. We'll be waiting.

LONG BEFORE THE HORROR BEGAN,
FEAR STEPPED OUT OF THE SHADOWS.

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THE REST OF SHOW

EVERQUEST II

Work continues apace on this massive sequel. Visually, the new Norrath looks superb, and numerous options such as the levels at which you specialize character-class choices (5th, 10th, 20th, 30th) are being finalized. Next month we'll have an in-depth scoop on some of the critical design decisions already made.
— RS (SOE; SOE; LATE 2003)

LIONHEART

Powered by Reflexive's own engine (used in *Star Trek: Away Team*), this new RPG set in a 16th-century Europe that faced a cataclysm in the 12th century is built on the *Fallout* gameplay system. With cameos from Galileo and pals, and Leonardo da Vinci acting as your mentor, you'll be balancing the factionalism of four races across various European locations, avoiding the dreaded Spanish Inquisition.
— RS (REFLEXIVE; INTERPLAY; Q4 2002)

INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

Backed by The Collective's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* engine, Jones is once again knee-deep in third-person adventuring with a penchant for hand-to-hand combat. This time he traipses through Prague, Istanbul, and Hong Kong, before ending up in China (where *Temple of Doom* picks up — this is how he got there!). There are also mini-games — like shooting down fighter planes with a machine gun — and an estimated 30 hours of whip-swinging action.
— CO (THE COLLECTIVE; LUCASARTS; Q4 2002)

SPLINTER CELL

In this hugely promising new stealth-based single-player third-person action/adventure, you play as Sam Fisher, a government agent empowered with the "fifth freedom" — the ability to kill, steal, or do whatever it takes to complete a mission. Stellar graphics and a plethora of lethal and non-lethal weapons are standouts, along with the *Metal Gear Solid*–like gameplay.
— CO (UBI SOFT; UBI SOFT; Q4 2002)

PLANETSIDE

It exists! Judging by the demo we saw, in which a firefight was raging in a dense forest, this long-delayed persistent-world shooter looks excellent. *Planetside* will boast vast-scale maps (up to 64 square km.), and its action quotient will be blended with a strong strategic element, guided by commanders. Your team will be tasked with taking and holding key establishments, and the world politic will shift with your actions. Death is not harshly penalized (you'll return to a bind point), and the gameplay style will benefit from the experience of *Tribes 2* alum Dave Georgeson.
— RS (SOE; SOE; Q1 2003)

The new future's worst nightmare realized: the Chinese launch the nuke.

The tightly scripted single-player plot will show off some amazing set-piece moments...in slo-mo.

C&C: GENERALS

THIS IS THE GAME that more than one *PC Gamer* editor is looking forward to more than any other release of the next six months. Talk about a change in direction — this edition of the *C&C* series features contemporary and near-future weapons in a three-way fight between the U.S. Armed Forces, China, and the ad hoc terrorist cabal known as the Global Liberation Army (GLA).

The major appeal of *Generals* is the idea of finally getting our hands on the high-tech weaponry currently being deployed around the world — and all of it within the tense real-time framework of the *C&C* formula.

In a single captivating mission, depending on which side you're playing, you'll be able to conduct a well-organized mechanized bridge crossing, bust a tunnel network with a fuel-air bomb strike, take on terrorist positions with a human wave of Chinese infantry, blow up a dam and drown an entire fishing village, or retaliate against the dam-busting terrorists by nuking their base. Each blistering moment is framed with a slo-mo effect that perfectly details the amazing look of the units and the power of the explosive tools under your command.

Generals is a full-3D game, allowing a gorgeous set of in-engine scripted sequences to provide story points. In one sequence, a diplomatic envoy's motorcade is ambushed by terrorist jeeps, leading to a rapid response by Allied forces. The scene is rendered from an isometric perspective, but with the camera moving freely to set up the mission for you with the non-interactive cinematic. These bits will also be triggered at later points in your mission.

C&C: Generals is going to rule.
— DM (EA PACIFIC; EA; Q4 2002)

SIMCITY 4

AFTER SPENDING THE LAST two years on *The Sims* and its never-ending stream of expansion packs, Maxis is finally returning to its roots with *SimCity 4*. It's not surprising that the developer behind *The Sims* is bringing some elements of that smash hit to its return to the classic city-building simulation.

"We want to make it a much richer experience," says Lucy Bradshaw, general manager and VP at Maxis. "How do the cities match gamer's imaginations? How does the city and the people who live in it respond to your actions? We want your actions to have dramatic feedback and make the cities more personable."

A large part of that process involves making you care about the people who move into your metropolis. To help facilitate this "bonding," *SimCity 4* will let you import up to three characters from *The Sims*. You can decide where your imported Sims live and get constant feedback on the state of their lives. The hope is that since you

Generals' beauty is in the details — the small touches that turn unit explosions into works of art.

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2003

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THE AWAKENING

WINTER 2002

Sack the urban planner that thought it was a good idea to nestle next to an active volcano.

Was this the "blue" period of architectural design, or is it just night-time? Who can tell?

created and nurtured these folks in *The Sims*, you'll make sure they're taken care of once they're imported into *SimCity 4*. You'll need to look after them, too, given that they can be robbed or even killed once they've moved into your city.

The *SimCity* interface has also been tweaked to reflect these changes. You now have three main menu options: My Sim Mode, where you manage your imported Sims; Mayor Mode, where the city-building tools are located; and God Mode, which is where you'll find the terrain-editing tools. As in earlier versions of *SimCity*, you'll be able to create mountains, valleys, and rivers, but now every detail looks utterly fantastic, thanks to the new graphics engine: fog rolls across inland water areas, clouds hug the tops of mountains, and when a volcano erupts it spews forth a glorious river of lava.

Besides looking great, the game's improved graphics also feed directly into the gameplay. For example, wind will now blow across your city, and if you have any pollution-creating factories next to residential areas, you'll be able to see the choking smoke drift across the houses. These toxins, in turn, will impact the living conditions in that area and drive down property values.

"We want the simulation to be more responsive to the player," explains Bradshaw. "You can build up certain areas and neglect others."

And the management of your city moves beyond the city itself: *SimCity 4* will also feature a larger regional map, divided up into sections, and

each section can be home to a separate city. For example, you could make one town strictly a residential area while a nearby burg is a heavily industrialized area, with workers commuting between the two. (Assuming you have the roads to handle the traffic load, that is.)
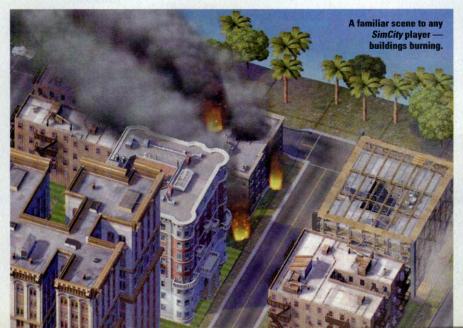
Unlike the earlier iterations of the series, the way you lay out your roads and highways will have a substantial impact on how the game plays out. Instead of the fire trucks magically zipping across the map, for instance, you'll actually see them rushing through the city streets. And if your poorly organized roads are a mess of gridlock, the fire engines will get caught in traffic while your city burns.

SimCity 4 appears to have all the earmarks of another classic installment in one of gaming's most revered series. Maxis could well be serving up another reason never to leave the house.
— WH (MAXIS; EA; NOV. 2002)

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

IT'S NOT HARD TO SPOT the relationship between the superb *Age of Empires* games and Ensemble's newest addition, *Age of Mythology*. The truly substantial changes, though, are beneath that shiny veneer. First off, beyond the terrestrial resources of gold and stone, you'll be able to create *favor*, which can be used to produce mythological units.

A familiar scene to any *SimCity* player — buildings burning.

CITY OF HEROES

With 150 different super-powers to choose from, this superhero-themed MMORPG is flying high…literally. Designer Jack Emmert boasts that *COH* will have 2.44 x 10^{24} unique costume configurations, practically guaranteeing that you'll never team up with a bizarro doppelganger. Gain fame, experience, and cash rewards while capturing common crooks and super-villains alike.
— CO (CRYPTIC STUDIOS; NCSOFT; Q1 2003)

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

Like the first two, except more, better, and prettier. Or at least that's Ubi Soft's strategy behind the third in Tom Clancy's acclaimed squad-based shooter series. *Raven Shield* has all the old weapons plus a few undisclosed new ones, a move to the *Unreal* engine, the introduction of a prone position, and a cool (yuk, yuk) thermal mode for snipers. All that, and you can open doors slowly via your mouse wheel. Brilliant!
— CO (UBI SOFT–MONTREAL; UBI SOFT; Q4 2002)

XIII

Of all the games in the cel-shaded spy action genre, this is the first! Based on a Belgium graphic novel by author Jean Van Hamme, *XIII* is a mature, story-driven first-person shooter in which your amnesiac character has a "sixth sense" power that lets you see bad guys before they see you. If only it weren't so darn quirky and French.
— CO (UBI SOFT–FRANCE; UBI SOFT; Q1 2003)

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT 2

Though it's only 25 percent complete, we expect great things from this sequel to the ultimate police chase. You'll get 12 tracks and more than 20 licensed cars on which to play cop or speed demon, in one of five gameplay modes: Quick Race, Single Challenge, Hot Pursuit, and a new Top Cop career-type mode in which you're a highway patrolman. Typically great *NFS*-style graphics and humorous "busted" animations top off this promising package.
— CC (EA; EA; Q1 2003)

LINEAGE II

The name may have a "II" after it, but this follow-up is actually set 150 years before the events in *Lineage*. The real surprise, though, is that this MMORPG world is getting a full 3D makeover, powered by the *Unreal Warfare* engine. It'll be interesting to see if the original's massive castle sieges — with hundreds of players onscreen at one time — will leap or lag in three dimensions.
— CO (NCSOFT; NCSOFT; 2003)

HARPOON 4

It's been a long time coming, but the *Harpoon* legacy of naval tactical combat is steaming back

" ...people who like more action-oriented games like Counter-Strike or TacOps should find Sum of All Fears right up their alley..."

–Computer Gaming World

Based on the award-winning game engine featured in Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon™.

" ...seamlessly blends elements from Tom Clancy's best-selling novel with Paramount's feature film for a thrilling, yet intuitive, videogame experience..."

–John Gaudiosi
Hollywood Reporter

to the PC. Still set during the cold war of the 1980s, *H4* is going back to the roots of the original *Harpoon* — and that means stats, stats, and m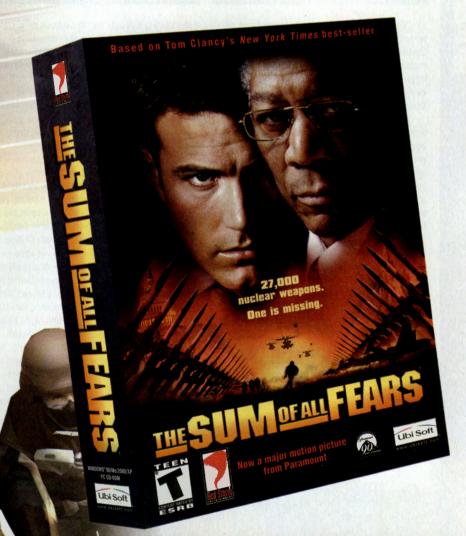ore stats. The new side thumbnails that let you manage units and give graphical updates of the action are a great new addition, and, of course, a scenario editor will be packed right in the box.
— CO (SSI; UBI SOFT; LATE FALL 2002)

LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

You're a hardcore flight nut but your roommate's not? No problem — *Lock On: MAC* is like two games in one: It can be a high-fidelity flight sim, satisfying the jones of air jockeys clamoring to pilot modern-day Russian, German, and U.S. combat aircraft, or it can be a great-looking *TIE Fighter*–ish shooter. It'll ship with a mission editor.
— CO (SSI; UBI SOFT; FALL 2002)

FAR CRY

Blend *Halo* and *Half-Life*, squint a little and hope, and you may just get a tactical action shooter using the Crytech engine called *Far Cry*. As a boat skipper hired to investigate an island in the Pacific, you're ambushed by mercenaries, forcing you into armed combat and making quick getaways in jeeps, motorcycles, and speedboats. It features deformable terrain and a new process called "polybumping" that lets 105,000-polygon models appear to have 250,000 polys.
— CO (CRYTECH; UBI SOFT; FIRST HALF 2003)

PRISONER OF WAR

Imagine *Hogan's Heroes* as a stealth adventure game but without the laugh track, LeBeau, and supple German frau-mamas hanging out in Klink's office, and you'll understand this stealth-based World War II prison sim. Through an estimated 20 hours of gameplay in various P.O.W. camps, you'll covertly sabotage the Nazis...and...and...oh, that's right, escape!
— CO (WIDE GAMES; CODEMASTERS; Q4 2002)

STAR WARS: GALAXIES

It's true, there's more to *Galaxies* than Naboo and Tatooine. With the developers promising eight (and hoping for 12) different worlds to visit, we got to see a small part of Theed, where the level detail is very impressive and you can play a role in local government. Let's face it: you're going to at least try it, regardless of what anyone says, aren't you?
— RS (SOE; LUCASARTS; EARLY 2003)

THE SIMS ONLINE

Maxis is currently putting the finishing touches on its next cash cow, and thus far it looks to be every bit as addictive and creative as the offline original. The game is now in an extremely playable state, and messaging/harassing your friends is a breeze using its succinct interface. Naturally, you still have complete control over your avatar's life. Poor sap.
— WH (MAXIS; EA; LATE 2002)

With Hydras, Cyclopses, and other creatures fighting, the battlefields of *AoM* will certainly be colorful.

Shelley tells us that *AoM*'s plot is very tight, so you have to do all the scenarios to progress the story.

"Each of the (five) sides generates favor differently," says designer Bruce Shelley. "The Egyptians like large structures, so their monuments get bigger, with the pyramid being the largest of all." By contrast, the Norse gain favor by destroying stuff and killing folks, and the Greeks by having people pray next to a temple.

What's likely to blow your socks off in this tightly scripted march through the ages are the god powers that Shelley suggests you'll get to witness once per scenario. There are four powers total, and they're graphically stunning. The lightning strike is a great weapon against super-units, but our favorite god power is the one that turns all nearby units into pigs, which you can then butcher for food. Truly brilliant.

Shelley also afforded us a look at a large battle scene with Medusae, Minotaurs, Norse Giants, and other mystical creatures throwing all their powers at each other. Take our word for it — it'll never get old watching a pack of your Medusa units turning enemy peons into stone.
— WH (ENSEMBLE STUDIOS; MICROSOFT; Q3 2002)

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Elsewhere in this issue, we give *Warcraft III* a knockout Editors' Choice review. And once you're done tearing through the third edition of Blizzard's awesome RTS series, the plot continues in the persistent RPG universe of *World of Warcraft*.

Set about four years after *WCIII*, *World* tells a whole new story via the game's manual, NPCs, and various books found in the gameworld. Indeed, you'll spot numerous details from *WCIII* here, including statues of its heroes in a giant monastery and a familiar clocktower in the human outpost of Darkeshire.

Wherever you go, *World*'s graphics benefit from highly detailed textures, with clumps of waist-high grass and rickety fences as fine examples of the visual quality in this depiction of Azeroth. From what we've seen of *World*'s playable build, the ins and outs of gameplay look very similar to *EverQuest* — right down to the giant rats in need of killing. We saw three of the character classes in action — a warrior, a mage, and a shaman — and really dug the latter's spell attacks, which include Bolt of Fire, Scorching Blast, and the paralyzing Frozen Finger.

Blizzard is counting on its popular character races, including Humans, Orcs, and Night Elves (they've also added Dwarves), to provide the foundation for the shared-world storytelling. With these much-loved characters, its slick graphics, and its intuitive interface, *World* seems more than ready to conquer the MMORPG cosmos.
— DM/CC (BLIZZARD; BLIZZARD; LATE 2003)

World's third-person view is designed to facilitate your identification with your hero character, and all of his or her movements are fluidly animated in the game's 3D engine.

SUBSPACE COMLINK

INCOMING MESSAGE

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RECORD

TRANSMIT

PROBE

UPLINK CONFIRMED: IDENTIFY

GUILDS   ALLIES   NEWS

FORMATION   MISSIONS   ABORT

INSTANT MESSAGE

INCOMING MESSAGE

VALKARIEONE:
HAVE RARE ITEM OF INTEREST. POWERFUL NEW WEAPON. DISCOVERED IN ANEBULA NEAR THE OUTER BELT. NO SET PRICE. WHAT'S YOUR OFFER?

ALLY TRADER:
MEET ME IN THE STARLOUNGE-WORM-HOLE ON THE THIRD DECK OF CEV THIS ORBITAL STATION. CAN'T DISCUSS OVER UNSECURED LINES.

PROJECTED MODIFICATION

DEFENSE
SPEED
CARGO

DEFENSE
SPEED
CARGO

DEFENSE
SPEED
CARGO

DEFENSE
SPEED
CARGO

DEFENSE
SPEED
CARGO

DEFENSE
SPEED
CARGO

HULL

SHIELDS

ENERGY

THE REST OF SHOW

SOLDIERS OF ANARCHY

In the year 2013, you emerge into a post-apocalyptic future to play real-time strategy against an evil, oppressive religious cult (and we're not talking about Scientologists). Included are 10 campaigns filled with 23 missions, 16 weapons, 29 vehicles, and one of the easiest-to-use level editors we've ever seen (a definite plus).
— CO (SILVER STYLE; S&S INT.; SEPT. 2002)

JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE

It's been a long time in the making, but James Bond will *finally* appear on the PC when *NightFire* is released later this year. This first-person stealth shooter will feature an all-new story (not attached to any movie), tons of gadgets, and over 10 exotic locations. And because of its enhanced graphics engine, *NightFire* looks utterly magnificent, especially the hot babes.
— WH (GEARBOX; EA; LATE 2002)

TREASURE PLANET

Timed to coincide with the release of the animated movie of the same name, *Treasure Planet* is a *Homeworld*-style RTS set in space. Despite the source material, it's not a kiddie game: in fact, *TP* looks to be an engaging game for the whole family. There's no resource management, yet Barking Dog says it's so addictive that their designers stay at the office late playing it just for fun.
— CO (BARKING DOG; DISNEY; HOLIDAY 2002)

DRAGON EMPIRES

A massively multiplayer game with an emphasis on commerce, *Dragon Empires* plunks you down into a fantasy world where trade rules. Buying low and selling high is your main goal in life, as you barter goods when not slaying monsters or other players. We were most impressed by the graphics, including the way bushes and grass sway as you walk through them.
— CO (CODEMASTERS; BETA BEGINS SEPT. 2002)

SYBERIA

Pure adventure games are becoming a rare breed these days, making *Syberia* a very pleasant surprise. In the vein of *The Longest Journey*, you are Cate Walker, a 25-year-old lawyer whose visit to the Universal Toy Company on business sucks you into four worlds of mystery, mechanical automatons, and up to 25 hours of gameplay.
— CO (MICROIDS; DREAMCATCHER; SEPT. 2002)

SEA DOGS II

More detail and freedom is the order of the day for this 3D roleplaying game. This sequel will let you fully explore the islands you visit and drop anchor at multiple landing spots. When at sea, you'll see men working the sails, loading can-

Team-focused weapons like the Link Gun will give an advantage to *UT 2003* clans that can get organized.

UNREAL II

By now everyone knows the premise of *Unreal II* — you're an intergalactic cop charged with eliminating space scum and maintaining order. Not the most original setup to be sure, but based on the extended time we spent with the game, the final product should be damn impressive.

The first mission we saw was set on a planet that's been taken over by a gigantic sentient creature. This beast covers the entire planet, but a corporation that has found a secret item under the world's surface is slowly killing it off. Fearing that the object will be taken off-planet, you're sent down to take care of business. At first you're fighting human guards, but once the creature awakens, the focus shifts and you must battle its immune system. Thrilling stuff.

Another mission has your ship, the *Atlantis*, damaged and setting down for repairs. As your crew rushes to get the vessel up and running again, you must erect barriers and auto-cannons in an effort to fight off the mercenaries closing in on your position. Showing off a gripping mixture of strategy and full-on action, this level's design was extremely impressive.

TALKING (LION)HEADS

PETER MOLYNEUX TALKS a great game. Even when he doesn't have playable code to show, you'll be transfixed by his enthusiasm for his ideas. He did present some more screenshots of *The Movies*, a game he conceived of only in January 2002, and now scoffs at any mention of a suggested release date. Lionhead Studios project lead Jonty Barnes did admit to saying, "Peter, that's f***** brilliant" on hearing of the concept, but we'll likely not see gameplay for a while.

In the meantime, get excited by the promise that the movie scenes that you can direct in real time should be hugely entertaining to watch. Shifting the level of romance in a given scene will alter how the actors behave in a dynamic style that we'd like to see to believe!

Then there's *Black & White 2.* With over 2 million copies of *B&W* sold worldwide (and six of those purchasers actually finishing the game), expectations are high. For *B&W2*, the island's inhabitants have a little more power now, and your godly decisions are based around war and peace. Your creature will still need training, but it'll have extended functions (and

"You can't hurt me with those little pricks."

still be controlled by keeping it on the leash) and be able to lead an army of your worshippers against an enemy god and his creature.

Villages can be fortified, and towers manned as you stave off attack. With a focus more clearly on war — and on villagers with more opinions of their own to balance — *B&W2* should be just as involved as the original.

We're going to have to tune the reflexes from our tactical-shooter gaming to contend in *UT 2003*.

In *SWAT: UJ*, hiding behind bulletproof shields is perfectly acceptable if it means staying alive.

Handing out some much-deserved justice requires the use of the latest in law-enforcement hardware.

The pièce de résistance was the introduction of the new Skaarj. Taking a page from the most memorable scene in *Unreal*, this sequence has you in an elevator that suddenly goes dark…just before the cable is cut. Just watching it was thrilling; if playing it is as good as we expect, we could be witnessing a moment of gaming legend.
— WH (LEGEND; INFOGRAMES; EARLY 2003)

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

The release date for *UT 2003* is quickly approaching, and after seeing an extended demo and playing a few deathmatch bouts, we can guarantee that fans of the original should clear their calendar now, because once you get your hands on it you can kiss your life goodbye.

UT 2003 will have five new races, each with a variety of skins, for a total of 48 different skins in the game. The 30 maps are based on the homeworlds for each race, and that's what gives the environments their variety. What's really got us excited, though, are the weapons.

The ION Cannon, which reduces anyone in its path to skeletal form, is quite cool, but by far the most impressive weapon is the Link Gun. On its own it can cut a decent swath of destruction, but when used in conjunction with teammates, you collectively produce a super-powered beam of destruction. To achieve this effect, you simply shoot your teammate(s), and as long as your beam is on them, your point man will kick all kinds of ass. To help balance this weapon, though, any damage taken by the point man will be shared with everyone joined by the beam.

Also factoring into the carnage is Adrenaline.

You earn it by scoring points and killing the enemy, and when it reaches 100 you use it to perform special tricks, such as running superfast or performing cool flips.
— WH (DIGITAL EXTREMES; INFOGRAMES; Q3 2002)

SWAT: URBAN JUSTICE

The sequel to the excellent and under-appreciated *SWAT 3*, *Urban Justice* is set in the year 2006. It seems that gangster scum are running wild through the streets of Los Angeles (as if that's anything new) and you're the law-enforcement agency ready to take them down.

Urban Justice's new Takedown graphics engine shows off extremely detailed character models, complete with extremely fluid animations, and the world is brought to life with

nons, and fighting by your side when you're pillaging a nearby vessel.
— WH (AKELLA; BETHESDA; Q4 2002)

CIVILIZATION III: PLAY THE WORLD

We loved *Civilization III*, and *Play the World* promises to give the classic world-builder a whole new dimension. This expansion will feature eight new civs, new items such as radar towers, and a full multiplayer experience. The heart of the multiplayer game will be the fast-paced turnless mode, which lets you execute commands simultaneously with your buddies.
— WH (FIRAXIS; INFOGRAMES; Q3 2002)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Universal has secured the literary license for Tolkien's work, and the first game looks to be a dandy (though only its Xbox version was demoed at E3). *Lord of the Rings* is a 3D action/adventure that lets you control Frodo, Gandalf, and Aragorn through massive and intricate environments. The Mines of Moria look particularly stupendous, and will leave even the most curmudgeonly Tolkien fan with a mess in their shorts.
— WH (SURREAL; UNIVERSAL INT.; Q4 2002)

BATTLEFIELD 1942

If you dream of online World War II battles that actually *work*, pay attention to this. Spanning the entire theatre of WWII, *1942* will feature 64-player games that'll have you dogfighting in the skies above Midway, storming the beaches of Normandy, and driving tanks through the North African desert. The bandwidth-challenged will find full bot support for offline play.
— WH (DIGITAL ILLUSIONS; EA; LATE 2002)

ELITE FORCE II

Having already seen one of *EFII*'s gorgeous Borg levels, it was great to see a new planetside mission in which you're rescuing Attrexian colonists from one of the game's two new alien aggressors. You'll use several tricorder functions, including a night-vision mode and a structural-integrity mode with which you can find doors' weak spots. In a heated boss battle, two of your AI companions take cover while firing furiously at a huge alien, making for a sweet three-pronged attack. Awesome.
— CC (RITUAL; ACTIVISION; Q1 2003)
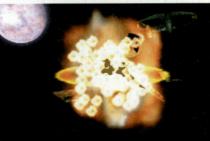
COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

Much has been made of *CZ*'s bots and skirmish mode, but until recently we didn't know a whole lot about its single-player narrative; now we do. One mission begins with a chopper getting shot down *Black Hawk Down*–style, and the rest of the 20 missions will have you taking out drug dealers and other scum.
— WH (GEARBOX; SIERRA; LATE 2002)

RISE OF NATIONS

What has us particularly excited about *Rise of Nations* is Conquer the World, its open-ended single-player game. Starting out as a small nation at the beginning of time, you must slowly take over the world one nation at a time, until

You won't be able to play *as* the Borg in *SFC III*'s single-player campaigns, but you will fight them.

The explosions get better and better in each new *SFC*. Even those stoic Romulans must be chuckling.

Base assaults will undoubtedly be a part of *SFC III*'s single-player campaigns and multiplayer bouts.

dynamic lighting and real-time shadows. And as in *SWAT 3*, all of the 16 missions are set in real-life locations around the Los Angeles area.

The best part, though, is that much of what made *SWAT 3* a great game is being left alone. *Urban Justice* will use the same command structure for your AI teammates that was in *SWAT 3*. We're quite thrilled about this decision, since the command menu in *SWAT 3* is the best we've ever seen in a tactical shooter.

Sierra is also promising robust and realistic AI, and though we didn't see it in action, the quality of the AI in *SWAT 3* leaves us confident that they'll be able to deliver on their promise. And to help you subdue the enemy, you'll find a full arsenal at your disposal, including the ability to customize your weapons by changing the stock, suppressor, and magazine. Each change to your weapon impacts its weight, which in turn will affect how fast you can fire.
— WH (SIERRA; SIERRA; Q3 2002)

STARFLEET COMMAND III

IT'S GOOD TO SEE a solid niche strategy series maturing well and showing obvious improvement with every iteration. Paradise for finicky Trekkers

who want to control every aspect of an inter-galactic space battle, the *SFC* games have always been a bit *too* complex for the average RTS fan — but not anymore, it seems. Series developer Taldren has redone the games' interface to make it more accessible, scaling down some of the functions and making others easier to select without quite so many sub-menus.

SFC III is set post-*Voyager*, in the *Next Generation* universe, and you'll get three single-player campaigns — Federation, Klingon, and Romulan — each with 15 missions. (You'll encounter other familiar races, like the Borg, over the course of your encounters.) Expect mission themes similar to those in earlier *SFC*s, with heroic Fed missions, honor-seeking Klingon missions, and sneaky Romulan missions involving stealth and subterfuge.

Naturally, given the change in timeline, you'll now be helming more powerful vessels — Federation Galaxy- and Sovereign-class ships, the newest Romulan warbirds, and so on. That means better shields and quantum torpedoes, and the developers have added a new in-system warp ability with which you can warp away from enemy vessels or race around a system.

In a very cool move, Taldren has brought back the RPG element from the original *SFC*,
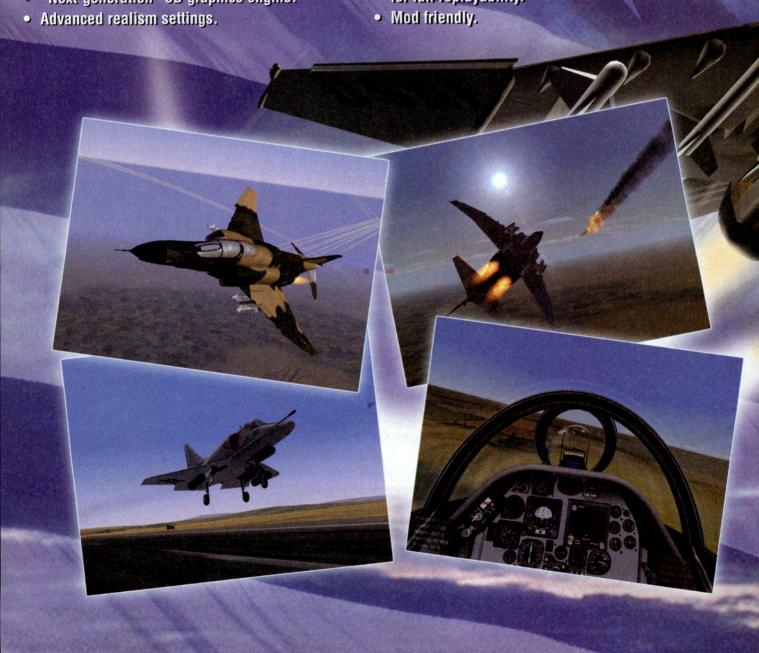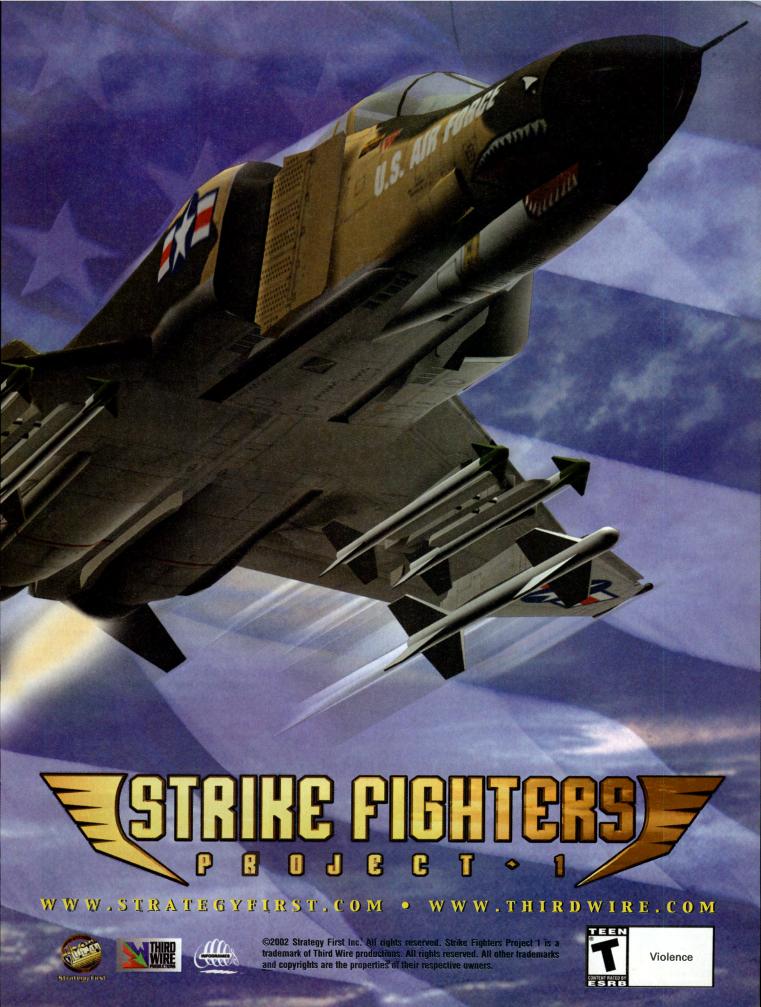
KICK THE TIRES AND LIGHT THE FIRES!

Get in the seat of a thundering jet fighter and outmaneuver your high-flying opponents with in-your-face dogfighting. Seek and destroy ground targets while jinking anti-aircraft fire! Set in the historic 1960s, **STRIKE FIGHTERS - PROJECT 1** is a multi-faceted flight sim featuring the best aircraft of the era, including the F-4 Phantom II, considered the most versatile combat aircraft of all time!

- From Tsuyoshi Kawahito, the lead designer of award-winning Flight Sims.
- Blood draining, G-pulling dogfights.
- "Next-generation" 3D graphics engine.
- Advanced realism settings.

- High flying combat action over the Middle Eastern sands.
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THE REST OF SHOW

everyone bows before your boot hell of tyranny. Mixing elements of the *Age of Empires* series with *Civilization* and a spattering of *Empire Earth*, *Rise of Nations* has all the right ingredients.
— WH (BIG HUGE GAMES; MICROSOFT; 2003)

DEVASTATION

Fresh off *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project*, Arush is building a new team-based FPS using the *Unreal* engine. On a post-apocalyptic Earth, groups of gang leaders, street fighters, mercenaries, and ex-military operatives will vie for power. In a neat twist, players will be invincible for the last few levels of the single-player game — then become vulnerable again for a last-man-standing scenario.
— CC (ARUSH; ARUSH; Q4 2002)

KOHAN II

Fans of *Kohan* rejoice! The sequel to last year's RTS of the Year is in the works, and it's not only looking bigger and better than the original, but it's finally making the move to 3D, thanks to the power of NDL's NetImmerse engine! Expect to see over 100 units onscreen at a time, complete with bump maps and vertex/pixel-shader effects!
— GV (TIMEGATE; TBD; Q4 2003)

COMBAT FLIGHT SIM III

Microsoft's WWII dogfighter gets a broad new campaign mode. Push the frontline back and forth in different sectors of the English Channel, as you vie for control of Western European airspace. This third installment also features several historically accurate jet fighters for use in combat missions.
— DM (MICROSOFT; MICROSOFT; FALL 2002)

REPUBLIC

This incredibly ambitious strategy game is coming together splendidly. The game's titular breakaway Eastern European nation is composed of several major cities, each with thousands of citizens carrying out a life in real time — and all of it awaiting your control. It's a great concept, and we have enormous hopes for the execution.
— DM (ELIXIR STUDIOS; EIDOS; Q4 2002)

DX2: INVISIBLE WAR

The sequel to *Deus Ex* comes as close to simulating the interaction of real-world objects as any game we've yet seen. In the quest to find J.C. Denton, you'll be able to affect practically every piece of the game environment thanks to the stunning physics model. Will Ion Storm score another Game of the Year? So far, so good.
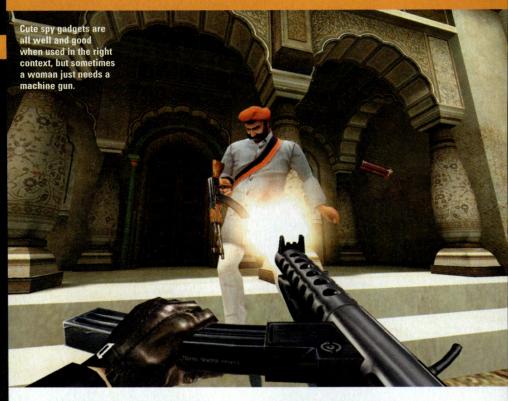— (ION STORM; EIDOS; Q2 2003)

SÖLDNER

JoWooD has been quietly testing out European games in the U.S. market, but 2002 is the year this powerful European publisher gets serious.

Cute spy gadgets are all well and good when used in the right context, but sometimes a woman just needs a machine gun.

whereby you could buy or sell crewmembers and watch their skills grow. Better yet, the effects of these improved skills on crewmembers' performance will now be much more obvious.

The Dynaverse multiplayer servers will be back, too, allowing you to join one of the three main races for a colossal persistent campaign. Taldren promises improved AI and an easier setup for linking with other players.
— CC (TALDREN; ACTIVISION; FALL 2002)

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Topping one of the most critically acclaimed games of 2001 isn't easy, so *NOLF 2* designer Craig Hubbard went to the forums and fan boards to find out what should be done with the sequel. What did he learn? "People liked the humor and varied gameplay elements…but they didn't like the stealth missions where, if you were spotted, there was no way of rescuing the situation," he says. So that issue's been addressed for the sequel, along with more sensible placement of those "secret" documents that were laying out in the open. (Cool little effects like flicking through

file cabinets and browsing through stacks of paper at least add *some* mystery to the search.)

More detailed AI routines will have enemies living their own lives until you interfere. Switch off a light to hide, and an enemy will switch it on when he comes into a room. Bad guys will also hear footsteps, weapons loading, and other noise, such as you flushing a toilet.

Cate Archer will be further equipped with all manner of apparently girly merchandise that conceals cool spy paraphernalia. While Hubbard promises more weapons, he's also insisting on diversity, and that's meant the introduction of a banana skin that causes enemies to slip (no, really), allowing you to steal their weapons while they're stunned.

Of course, *NOLF*'s signature cut scenes will be back (but shorter), and the mission originality will attempt to match that of the original. One level we saw was set in a trailer park in Ohio, where a tornado was whipping up a storm (and overturning objects and even the buildings) while ninjas were attacking. Surreal, but kinda cool. And we expect more of the same as *NOLF 2* heads to its launch.
— RS (MONOLITH; VIVENDI UNIVERSAL; EARLY 2003)

Ah, the old slipping-on-the-banana-skin gag — it's comedy gold, y'know.

Don't be fooled by their looks: *NOLF2*'s ninja warriors can slice and dice with the best of 'em.

THE REST OF SHOW

Söldner is a very cool multiplayer-tailored FPS featuring modern combined-arms combat. Drive tanks, fly planes, and slug it out as line infantry in a fully destroyable battlefield. Keep your eye on this one, folks.
— DM [WINGS SIMS; JOWOOD; Q2 2003]

TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

The reinvention of Lara Croft continues apace. The new graphics engine shows off a fluidly animated heroine, and the usual jungles-'n'-caverns environments make way for a few more edgy, urban locales. Core Design continues to show a commitment to growing Lara out of her current doldrums, and *Angel of Darkness*' darker themes look suitably…dark.
— (CORE DESIGN; EIDOS; LATE 2002)

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Yes, Virginia, *KOTOR* is coming to the PC. And believe us, it'll look far better on your desktop monitor than in 640x480 on your living-room telly. LucasArts' RPG will let you play as a Scout, Scoundrel, or Soldier as you adventure through a story set 4,000 years before the events in *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.
— CO (BIOWARE; LUCASARTS; SPRING 2003)

LINKS 2003

The *Links* series has long been our favorite golf simulation. With the 2003 edition, the lead on the competition grows even wider. The new 3D golfers look phenomenal, and the mouse-swing system is fluid and graceful. New texture technology makes the photo-realistic courses even more spectacular.
— DM (MICROSOFT; MICROSOFT; Q4 2002)

TRON 2.0

Not much is new since our big reveal on this baby two issues ago, but behind closed doors at E3 Monolith showed off its Triton engine's shimmering outline effects that the folks on the show floor missed out on. Unfortunately, we also found out that the *Discs of Tron*–type level being demo'd at Disney's booth will *not* be in the game. Why?
— CO (MONOLITH; DISNEY; FIRST HALF 2003)

HIGHLAND WARRIORS

This RTS begins around 850 B.C. and climaxes with the battle for Scotland's independence. There will be four playable sides (three Scottish clans and the British), 35 single-player missions, and a great twist on resource management. Real-time weather cycles will vary between winter and summer, which means you'll need to store enough food for the winter or watch your troops slowly starve.
— WH (SOFT ENT.; DATA BECKER; Q3 2002)

RCT II has many visual similarities to its parent game, which should please the legions of fans.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON II

RollerCoaster Tycoon was a massive success, due in no small part to its accessible and addictive gameplay. It's also an original and incredible story of essentially one man — Chris Sawyer — producing the hit, and programming in core machine code.

Keeping the same 2D isometric view of its predecessor, *RollerCoaster Tycoon II* will feature overhauled graphics and will now support resolutions of 1024x768. The parks and objects will also be much larger, and the number of animations has been increased as well.

One of the biggest additions is the inclusion of five Six Flags theme parks. We took an extended look at the Magic Mountain park and found the reproduction to be spot-on, including its depiction of the Goliath coaster. Beyond the new licensed parks, there'll be six new themes (such as a pirate theme), nine new coasters, and 20 total scenarios. You'll also get a coaster designer, which looks extremely simple to use.

Unfortunately, according to senior producer Thomas Zahorik, *RCT II* won't include a sandbox mode. But you will be able to create a kinda-sorta sandbox mode with the enclosed scenario editor. "You can build a park," says Zahorik, "and use the editor to give yourself a $5 million loan, give yourself all the land, and so on. It's not an exact sand-box mode, but it's pretty close."

As soon as you hit the ground, your buddies take position and prepare to move in on the objective.
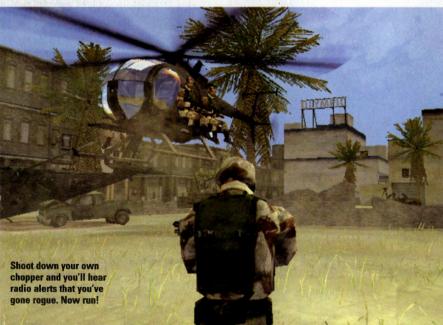
The interface looks to be nearly identical to the one that powered the first game, and all of the quirky animations and other trademarks appear to be intact.
— WH (CHRIS SAWYER; INFOGRAMES; FALL 2002)

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

With the official movie license and technical advisors from among the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* simulates this scenario and other actions of Operation Restore Hope. The environments are massive: In the Mogadishu level that the developers showed us, giant swathes of urban buildup were ringed by sniper-friendly mountains in the Mogadishu level (and *all* of it playable in the mission). NovaLogic senses it's got its hands on a winner, and promises a big step forward for its FPS franchise.

There are some great ideas on display in the early build we've played. The Mogadishu mission (the last in the game) begins at the Army airfield, as you pile on to the skid of a Kiowa attack chopper and enjoy the ride into the enemy-held city, a teammate giving you the briefing as you fly. As the choppers streak in low and fast over the huge urban center, you begin taking fire from enemy gunmen on the ground — and you can return fire from your perch on the

Shoot down your own chopper and you'll hear radio alerts that you've gone rogue. Now run!

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES 2002

A follow-up to last year's conversion of the world-famous Tennis Masters Cup championship, *TMS 2002* still doesn't offer licensed players from the real sport, but it does give you a graphical upgrade, more player-style choices, and an all-new career mode. With Empire Interactive refusing to release the PC port of *Virtua Tennis* in the U.S. this series is the only tennis option in town. Now if only Microids could take a leaf out of *VT*'s book and work out that sluggish control...
— CO (MICROIDS; MICROIDS; Q4 2002)

SHADOWBANE

Wolfpack's long-awaited MMORPG is currently undergoing beta testing as it nears release, and has just recently gained new high-detail ground textures and upgraded character models to satisfy critics who've complained about the game's sub-*Galaxies* visuals. We only wish the difference in appearance was more noticeable.
— CO (WOLFPACK; UBI SOFT; SECOND HALF 2002)

IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE

The first *IGI* was knocked harshly for lacking a multiplayer mode and not allowing in-mission saves. *IGI 2* will include both, as well as three single-player campaigns that'll have you "going in" to the likes of Russia, Libya, and China through a total of 19 missions. Multiplay will be team-based with multiple objectives, and while only five maps will ship with the game, new ones will be available for download post-release.
— CO (INNERLOOP; CODEMASTERS; SEPTEMBER 2002)

STEEL BEASTS II

Tank sims are few and far between, but Strategy First has got a lock on the best one in development. *Steel Beasts II* adds much-improved visuals and even more realistic physics than its acclaimed forebear. Operate a single battle station or take command of a multi-tank platoon — either way, you'll need skills and smarts to survive.
— DM (εSIM GAMES; STRATEGY FIRST; Q4 2002)

REAL WAR: ROGUE STATES

Thought you bombed the Independent Liberation Army back into the Stone Age, right? Well, it's back, and financially backed by a mysterious new rogue state. Once again, the U.S. must open up an industrial-sized can of whup-ass on the freshly armed ILA and its backers in this stand-alone sequel.
— CO (RIVAL; S&S INTERACTIVE; JULY 2002)

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Shogun moves into the Middle Ages in this sequel to a mass-mayhem real-time strategy game that we loved. In addition to the shift in scenery, you'll now get a full non-linear campaign mode letting you conquer Europe and North Africa. Castle sieges will feature ballistas, trebuchets, and boiling oil. *Sweeeet.*
— DM (CREATIVE ASSEMBLY; ACTIVISION; Q4 2002)

As in *Postal*, you'll come across a marching band (this time with an elephant). Remember, lighting them on fire is NOT funny.

Make that *102* uses for a cat — a cat silencer. Kids, don't even *think* of trying this at home.

Other games have let you whiz, but have they shown the stream? RWS calls it "liquid physics."

skid. Once the chopper touches down in the dust, you help storm the target building.

Multiplay ought to be an absolute blast. In Mogadishu, the surrounding high ground can be occupied by a sniper and used as a perfect perch from which to shoot across the gigantic map. The tight, claustrophobic alleys of the city will make for a nasty close-quarters situation in running gunfights as you work with your teammates. Indeed, the setting provides a variety of combat situations.

The graphics aren't up to id standards just yet, but the gameplay ideas are rock-solid. We'll be watching *BHD* closely.
— DM (NOVALOGIC; NOVALOGIC; Q4 2003)

POSTAL 2

The nightmares of the ACLU, the easily offended, and parents everywhere have come to vivid life in the form of *Postal 2*. With obvious pride, Running With Scissors chief Vince Desi gave us a firsthand look at various parts of the game world — one whose graphics and shock value dwarf those of its controversial predecessor.

Essentially one huge FPS map representing the fictional mining town of Paradise, Arizona,

Postal 2 starts you out in one small corner with areas opening up as you receive new missions. Your first mission sounds peaceful enough: Get Milk, Pick Up Paycheck, Cash Paycheck, Return Book. Of course, when (in game) you go to RWS' office to pick up your paycheck and Desi fires you, you go postal — and the slaughter begins. (Interestingly, you don't *have* to take the violent approach: RWS tells us that many missions offer alternatives to killing and looting. So in that initial mission, you could simply get milk, pick up your [last] paycheck, wait in line at a bank to cash it, and so on. On the other hand, you can up the destruction factor, too: instead of picking up your paycheck, you could get money by robbing the bank!)

Thanks to the *Unreal Warfare* engine, *Postal*'s isometric perspective and meager visuals are gone, but the wanton carnage remains. All your deathdealing — via pistol, machine gun, shotgun, or gascan and match — is harshly depicted, but with an exaggerated feel that suggests the designers aren't taking this too seriously. Nevertheless, the ability to use cats as silencers — and to light people on fire and then pee on them — will certainly generate a firestorm of public reaction.
— CC (RUNNING WITH SCISSORS; TBD; FALL 2002)

As some big-name games finally near release, playable late-beta builds land on our desks. Here's where we give hot-off-the-burner first impressions of how these titles are coming along.

If there's one thing aliens hate, it's flamethrowers. Roast 'em like a pig!

The Thing

DEVELOPER **Computer Artworks** PUBLISHER **Sierra** CURRENT RELEASE DATE **Fall 2002**

ITS THEMES OF ISOLATION and paranoia (and some of the goriest special effects ever) earned *John Carpenter's The Thing* a place in the upper echelon of horror films. Now this movie property is coming to the PC in what seems from our playtest to be a very promising action/adventure.

Set immediately after the events of the 1982 film, *The Thing* has a military rescue team dis-

Say hello to my little friend!

patched to find out what happened to Kurt Russell and crew. Taking the role of military commando Blake, you begin the game with you and your team landing next to the shattered remains of what was U.S. Outpost #31. From the second *The Thing* starts, it oozes foreboding atmosphere. The flying

snow and howling wind combine to create virtual white-out conditions, and when you move inside, you'll be greeted by blood-splattered walls, eviscerated corpses, and other juicy horrors.

As the game progresses, you'll work with AI-controlled teammates such as an engineer and medic, and they'll often perform vital tasks, like fix broken electrical circuits and heal other characters. Since no one knows who's infected, AI characters will suspect you and you'll have to do things to earn their trust, such as clear a room of ravenous beasties.

Graphically, *The Thing* is looking great. The models, especially the creatures, are highly detailed and deliciously gruesome. The alien nasties will split into smaller creatures, spit poison, and burn to a crisp when you light 'em up with a flamethrower. Even more impressive are the moments when a human is revealed to be infected, and creature parts come bursting out of his torso.

The one area that has us concerned is the gameplay mechanics. Its multi-platform release means that many aspects of *The Thing* have console roots: fixed save-points on each level and no free-look with the mouse are major PC limitations. We're hoping the developers will realize what the PC audience wants and address these issues before the game ships.
— *William Harms*

Neverwinter Nights

DEVELOPER **BioWare**
PUBLISHER **Infogrames**
CURRENT RELEASE DATE **June 2002**

IF YOU WERE ONCE a big-time AD&D player but real life (jobs, family, no more Friday-night cohorts) eliminated your playtime, *Neverwinter Nights* is absolutely your way back *in*.

The game's module editor works on a 2D plane and has a vast assortment of terrain styles, room shapes, and objects. Having spent quite a few hours with the editor, I must say that it's packed with options, though the greatest results will come only after hours of micro-tweaking.

Laying down a few interconnected dungeon rooms — inhabited by selected nefarious foes, with the odd special item — is simple. The menus are easy to navigate, and generally clear. Building lively, compelling adventures will come in expert manipulation of NPCs' dialogue trees. This process requires a talent for pacing, and for remembering to compile the code properly within the engine.

Creating great dungeons will also lie in the details, such as placing important items effectively among more ambient debris. By *Neverwinter Nights*' release, expect a mass of so-so dungeon crawls — plus some truly inspired creations, with carefully placed lights and items that turn static locations into memorable adventures.
— *Rob Smith*

Besides building dungeons, you can customize unique creatures and items.

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1
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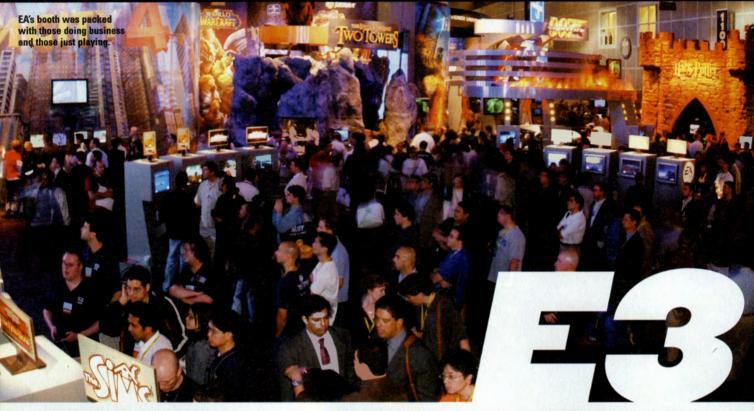In seconds, *Magic: The Gathering®* Online lets you access over a thousand powerful creatures and spells. All different. All deadly. And every year, hundreds more are added to the arsenal.

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EA's booth was packed with those doing business and those just playing.

E3

Eight Years of Games, Booth Babes, and Loud Music

IDSA President Doug Lowenstein discusses the past and future of the games industry's biggest event

For those lucky enough to work in the games biz, the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) is a magical three days where the games industry opens its kimono to reveal the family jewels. With the latest in games, hardware, weird peripherals, and game-related software on hand, new product announcements are devoured, updates on delayed games are dissected, and thousands of screenshots and gameplay movies are watched again and again. So imbedded in our consciousness is E3, it's hard to imagine a time when it didn't exist.

But there was such a time, and it was a mere eight years ago. Prior to 1995, companies wishing to show off their gaming-related wares displayed at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. Amid the high-tech gadgetry that was the CES show's raison d'etre, the gaming element got lost, and as the industry was growing, it deserved its own recognition.

"The videogame industry was a stepchild at CES, relegated to tents and temporary facilities with second-class–citizen status," says IDSA President Doug Lowenstein. "There didn't seem to be any likelihood that this scenario would ever change. Moreover, by 1994, the games industry was sensing

that it was poised to take off and that it had reached sufficient critical mass to support a show of its own, and E3 Expo was born." (The show's name was an extension of *Electronic Entertainment* magazine — *E2* — whose parent company, Infotainment World, co-managed E3 for a couple of years.)

The idea of a games-only trade show sounded great on paper, but turning it into a reality was a different matter. The IDSA, which owns and operates E3, had to work hard to convince game publishers that the new show could succeed. Says Lowenstein: "The biggest challenge was to convince companies that we could make it on our own and that they should take this leap of faith. That a start-up trade association and its partner at the time, Infotainment World, could pull this off. A lot of persuading needed to be done — and more than a few crises dealt with — as companies committed, had second thoughts, or sought special treatment. We had many highs and lows."

The first E3 occurred the third week of May in 1995 and was held in Los Angeles. A total of 28,000 people attended, 264 companies displayed their wares, and major product announcements included the Sega Saturn and the original PlayStation. From

those humble beginnings, E3 has acted as a gauge of the games industry's well-being, and as the sales and interest in games, gaming hardware, and console platforms have grown, E3's size and importance have grown as well.

"There's no question that an event like E3 Expo plays a critical role in drawing attention and visibility to the industry, which, in turn, stimulates interest and demand," explains Lowenstein. "I believe

NO. OF ATTENDEES AT EACH E3 SHOW
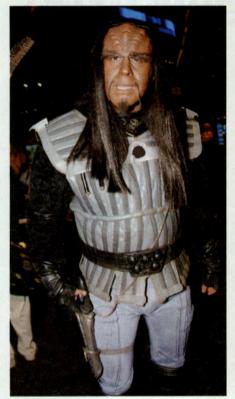
Year	Attendance	City
1995	28,000	L.A.
1996	55,000	L.A.
1997	37,100	Atlanta
1998	41,300	Atlanta
1999	55,000	L.A.
2000	57,800	L.A.
2001	62,000	L.A.
2002	60,000	L.A.

SOURCE: IDSA

PC GAMER RELEASE METER

Hitman 2

These are the most current ship dates for new PC games, as supplied by their publishers. Please send info to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com*.

→ July

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
Icewind Dale II	Interplay	07/03/02
Stronghold: Crusaders	Take-Two	07/19/02
Auryn Quest	DreamCatcher	07/24/02
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	Microsoft	07/26/02

→ August

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	08/01/02
V.I.P.	Ubi Soft	08/01/02
G.I. Combat	Strategy First	08/01/02
Mini Power Boat Racer	Infogrames	08/02/02
Season Ticket Football	Infogrames	08/14/02
The Thing	Universal Int.	08/14/02
1503 A.D.: The New World	EA	08/15/02
Beam Breakers	Fishtank	08/15/02
Call of Cthulhu	Fishtank	08/15/02
Arx Fatalis	Fishtank	08/15/02
Operation Tiger Hunt	Infogrames	08/22/02
O.R.B.	Strategy First	08/30/02

→ September

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	09/03/02
Mafia	Take-Two	09/03/02
Industry Giant 2	JoWooD	09/03/02
WarBirds III	Simon/Schuster	09/03/02
Farscape	Simon/Schuster	09/03/02
IGI 2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	09/03/02
Medieval: Total War	Activision	09/04/02
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	09/04/02
Battlefield 1942	EA	09/06/02
Emperor of Middle Kingdom	Sierra	09/11/02
Starsky and Hutch	Empire	09/11/02
Operation Steel Tide	Infogrames	09/17/02
Hitman 2	Eidos	09/17/02
Lock On: Air Combat	Ubi Soft	09/18/02
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	09/18/02
Chessmaster 9000	Ubi Soft	09/19/02
Law and Order	Legacy	09/19/02
Real War: Rogue States	Simon/Schuster	09/19/02
Prisoner of War	Codemasters	09/25/02
Master of Orion III	MicroProse	09/25/02
Dirt Track Racing 2	Infogrames	09/25/02
Scrabble 3	Infogrames	09/27/02

that the stature and reputation of E3 Expo as perhaps the most exciting trade event held anywhere in the world, by any industry, feeds mass-media interest in the [games] industry. Without a global one-stop–shopping venue for media and others, it's less likely that the industry would have the prominence and coverage it does. So in that sense, yes, E3 Expo has certainly been a positive factor in the industry's growth, though not the primary one by any means."

Over the years, E3 has been witness to a litany of events, stunts, and attractions — celebrities and sports figures are everywhere, the WWF has staged a wrestling match, world-class BMX bikers have showed off their half-pipe skills, and a couple of years ago attendees could watch characters from *The Simpsons* lay the smackdown on each other. And though it was technically a separate entity from E3 (because it was across the street from the main

A time-honored E3 trend: companies using costumed characters to promote games. At this year's show, a Klingon (left) plugged Activision's *Star Trek* line, a *Rocky Horror* reject (top) pushed Majesco's *Blood-Rayne*, and soldiers (above) backed *America's Army*.

fessionalism and care. And above all, [there's] a recognition that this is not about the IDSA, but about and for the companies that exhibit and the people that attend."

As E3 closes in on a decade of existence, there's little doubt that the show will continue to grow and evolve. But Lowenstein is quick to point out that no matter what the future may hold for the convention, the IDSA will also stay focused on ensuring that E3 stays relevant and valuable, while reflecting the best the industry has to offer.

"Our goal is to make sure we anticipate where the industry is headed and tweak the show year by

"The videogame industry was a stepchild at CES, relegated to tents and temporary facilities with second-class–citizen status."
— IDSA President Doug Lowenstein

convention center), Gathering of Developers' Promised Lot offered a host of side-show (and freak-show) attractions, including wrestling midgets.

Despite its often carnival-like atmosphere, E3 serves a very serious purpose in the games industry. Lowenstein feels that the show's focus on games is one of the primary reasons it's been so successful and continues to grow. "People know that E3 is about games and edutainment and related software content, and that the show is run with a high degree of pro-

year," he explains. "With so much pressure on companies to squeeze all they can out of marketing budgets at a time of intense competition for shelf space and consumer mind share, we can't lose sight of the fact that exhibitors and attendees invest tremendous time and resources into the show. And our job is to make sure they feel this [effort] is well-spent."

With the continued focus on all things gaming, E3's future seems secure. Unfortunately, the aver-

Governor Jesse Ventura, Game Hero?

We dream up ways for a virtual Ventura to kick ass and take names

We've long been supporters of Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura. After all, how many state-level politicians have kicked ass as a Navy SEAL, had a long career as a professional wrestler, and gone toe-to-toe with Arnold Schwarzenegger?

And that's why we were damn excited to hear that the Ventura campaign committee is mulling over the idea of creating games starring the irrepressible political star. According to press accounts, the games would be designed to educate Minnesota voters on a variety of issues. It remains to be seen whether or not the products will be made, but the mere thought of games starring Ventura set our minds into overdrive. We tried numerous times to contact Ventura's campaign office for more details, but were unsuccessful.
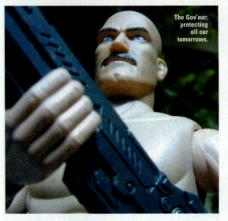
Without official comment, we thought we'd devise our own list of what we'd like to see. Best of all, each and every one of these suggested titles not only features Governor Ventura getting it done, but also serves as an important voter-education tool. Behold:

I AIN'T GOT TIME TO BLEED

If there's one thing Governor Ventura hates, it's fat-cat political action committees. And this first-person shooter, which uses the *Quake III* engine, is a visceral display of that contempt. Starring as the Governor himself, you'll wade your way through 32 levels of *Soldier of Fortune*–style mayhem as you single-handedly bring down the nefarious PACs that are secretly stripping away our rights and destroying our fine country. Be on the lookout for an end-boss showdown with Fat Cat McRat, the diabolical head of all PACs.

THE BODY

There's no question that most Americans would rather spend their time stuffing themselves with delicious, greasy cheeseburgers than hanging

The Gov'nor: protecting all our tomorrows.

around some smelly gym. Unfortunately, poor dietary habits equate to poor health, which places a financial strain on state budgets. This interactive CD-ROM is designed to reverse that downward spiral and get the slovenly into a workout routine. It begins with a highlight reel of Governor Ventura kicking ass, and then proceeds to offer a six-week fitness regimen developed by the Governor himself. And as an added bonus, a second CD features an adventure game in which you must uncover the lost secrets of Minnesota's legislative process.

VENTURA VS. SADDAM

Since bin Laden is holed up in a cave somewhere and our President seems more concerned with taking down his daddy's nemesis, Saddam, it only makes sense for Governor Ventura to lead the charge into Baghdad. In this *Ghost Recon*–style game, you steer a group of Navy SEALs through 15 missions; the final one is a brutal hand-to-hand bout as Governor Ventura beats Saddam into a bloody pulp. A bonus CD includes a detailed dossier on the Navy SEALs, which highlights their history, their training, and the types of weapons they use, along with a variety of application forms.

Eight Years of E3

age gamer hoping to get into the show will continue to be disappointed. Though there have been discussions about opening the event to consumers, it isn't likely to happen.

"The security challenges of tens of thousands of consumers swarming to the show," laments Lowenstein, "along with the increased cost it would impose on exhibitors, make this option unlikely in the near future."

Though the average gamer will likely never be allowed access to E3, there's no doubt that the show's importance and place within the games industry is secure. What was once nothing more than a collection of tents at CES is now an event that no one in the games industry can ignore — an event that mirrors the outstanding growth the industry has seen over the last few years. And loud, pounding techno music or not, we wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm laughing on the inside."

With *Deus Ex*'s detailed game world already realized, the producers of the movie have plenty of material to draw upon.

Deus Ex Goes to Hollywood

Spider-Man producer gets game

Warren Spector can get excited when he's talking about games. As a philosopher (and pragmatist) of the art of game design, once he starts going, he'll fascinate you for hours on the kind of thought processes that have led to games like *Deus Ex*. Now sit him in a room with Laura Zisken, the producer of the fabulous *Spider-Man* movie (and a producer of the Oscar ceremony, among other projects), and screenwriter Greg Pruss (one of many to contribute to the *Alien³* script), and let them begin chatting about a *Deus Ex* movie. Now that's excitement.

With the ink barely dry on the contract, nary a line of screenplay committed to paper, no director attached ("That won't be a problem," Zisken offers assuredly), and no actors signed, *PC Gamer* was there at the birth of a project that likely won't see the silver screen until 2005. That'll be just enough time for us to run our "*PC Gamer* Picks the Cast of the *Deus Ex* Movie" story about six times. Maybe seven.

So who are the players in this project? Pruss confesses to not being a gamer, but says "I played *Deus Ex* a lot, and it took over my mind for six months." The beauty of *DX* for the movie industry is that it's not just a popular character (Lara Croft) or franchise (*Mortal Kombat, Super Mario Bros.*). "I was astonished by the storytelling and the well-devel-

oped, interesting characters," notes Zisken. The *DX* universe is ripe for Hollywood, she insists: "It's great source material with the added benefit of a visual aesthetic we could adopt. And it has an audience and fans."

Pruss and Spector were already spit-balling ideas about the big *DX* plot points for a project Spector describes as "a dream." Though the gamemaker won't be writing any part of the script himself ("I know where my talents lie"), Spector is confident that his *DX* universe is in good hands. "[What struck me] about *Spider-Man* was the movie's respect for the comic's mythology," he describes. "It was evident in every scene."

Pruss accepts that the *DX* movie won't be slavish to the game, but will pay homage to the world that Spector created (unlike *Super Mario*, which he describes as "a pure cash-in," and *Mortal Kombat*, which he sees as suffering due to having "no narrative.") For Spector's part, he'll be handing over material — "there's *a lot* of backstory," he says — and keeping his team focused on their own project, which could be difficult given that "we're all a bunch of movie buffs." Who isn't?

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Four USB Ports and One IEEE 1394 Port
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10/100Mb Ethernet LAN and 56k Modem
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Weight: 7.6lbs. without battery
Exclusive 120-Watt A/C Adapter
Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional
1-Year Toll-Free 24/7 Technical Support
AlienAutopsy: Automated Technical Support
Personalized Owner's Manual
Optimized & Configured for High-Performance
FREE Alienware® Custom Mouse Pad

$2,499.00
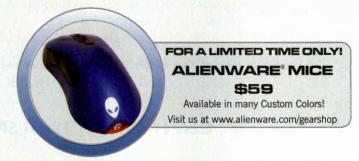
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100
GLORIOUS
ISSUES

PREMIERE ISSUE

100 issues. That's over 5,000,000 words, four editors-in-chief, more editors than we can bother to count, one cross-country move (from North Carolina to California — whew!), and eight exhausting years of fantabulous Gaming Goodness™. Boy, are our fingers tired.

A lot's changed over those eight years. When the first issue of *PC Gamer* shipped in April 1994 (before then it was known as *PC Entertainment*), DOS was the gamer's operating system of (no) choice. Sound cards had to be configured manually for each game you played. The average system was a 486/33MHz complete with a then-luxurious 400MB of hard drive space and a whopping 8MB of RAM. Just figuring out how to get a game to run was part of the gameplay. (Remember memory managers?) In comparison, we're now spoiled with technological riches.

We've scoured the pages of each and every *PC Gamer* issue ever printed (ow — our poor backs...) to ferret out the biggest stories of the last eight years. This isn't just our history: it's yours, too. So dive in, enjoy the good times, and let's do this again in another 100 issues.

10 HIGHEST-RATED GAMES IN PC GAMER HISTORY

→ SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI
- April '99
- Developer: Firaxis
- Publisher: EA

98%

→ HALF-LIFE
- January '99
- Developer: Valve
- Publisher: Sierra

97%

→ # DOOM

THE STORY: In 1993, id Software's follow-up to *Wolfenstein 3D* hit the gaming world with the metaphoric force of a tidal wave, an earthquake, and Mothra all rolled up into one. Colleges banned it from campus computer labs because students were deathmatching instead of studying, and fledgling office LANs ground to a stuttering halt as a wonderful new use was found for this emerging technology. Not only that, but the game's pioneering "try before you buy" shareware release eventually led to the rise of game demos.

THE UPSHOT: Every modern first-person shooter (including its own progeny, the *Quake* series) owes a big debt to *Doom* and that gangly crew from id. The mod community that struggled with clunky tools to create new maps would later benefit future games like *Half-Life*, opening the door to professional-quality user-made modifications such as *Team Fortress* and *Day of Defeat*. So prevalent was *Doom*'s effect on the world at large that many mass-market newspapers, TV stations, and congressmen *still* think it's the only game PC owners play. Well, at least when *Doom III* is released next year, they'll be up-to-date again.

FEATURE
DOOM!
Why It Took Over My Life

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

by **Matt Firme**

PC GAMER TRIVIA: We were so wrapped up in *Doom*-mania that our premiere issue included the story above, written by then-EIC (and current Imagine Media VP/Editorial Director) Matt Firme. *Doom* went on to take top honors in our First Annual *PC Gamer* Awards (March '95). Most recently, it was #15 on our list of the 50 Best Games of All Time (October '01).

PC GAMER
QUIZ FOR DIEHARDS

THINK YOU KNOW EVERYTHING about the magazine you hold in your hands? Not so fast there, bub. Take this quick quiz to see if you *really* know your stuff. (See answers below.)

1 Who was the original *PC Gamer* mascot? (Hint: He had arms.)

2 Who was *PC Gamer*'s second beloved mascot? (Hint: He was kidnapped.)

3 In what issue did our final mascot, Coconut Monkey, make his debut?

4 What was Coconut Monkey's official job in the *PC Gamer* offices?

5 Before there was a Hard Stuff (or TheVede, for that matter), what was the first name of *PC Gamer*'s hardware column? (Yes, column.)

6 What is the official *PC Gamer* theme song? (Hint: It's not "Pac-Man Fever.")

7 What *Quake* champion once wrote a column for *PC Gamer*?

8 Before he was known as "TheVede," what was Greg Vederman's office nickname?

9 What was the name of *PC Gamer*'s dearly departed office pet?

10 *PC Gamer* magazine is no longer distributed in the prisons of which state?

11 Who's the only Game God that's appeared on a *PC Gamer* cover twice?

12 How many Jack in the Box Ultimate Cheeseburgers did *PCG* editor Billy Harms once eat in a single sitting?

13 What two LucasArts games have taken the No. 1 spot in a *PC Gamer* Best Games of All Time feature?

ANSWERS: 1. Big Boy (Feb. '95); **2.** "Rikki," the monkey debuted in Feb. '96; **3.** August '96, issue #27 (on the disc); **4.** Receptionist (Sept. '96); **5.** "Peripheral Visions"; **6.** "Inca People," from the soundtrack to the game *Inca* (April '97); **7.** Dennis Fong, aka "Thresh" (Jan '98 through Dec '98); **8.** The Fancy Man; **9.** Hammy (the Hamster) (March '99); **10.** Florida (June '99); **11.** Richard Garriott (Oct. '96 and Sept. '99); **12.** Four (Oct. '99); **13.** *TIE Fighter Collector's Edition* (May '97) and *Jedi Knight* (Oct. '98).

NOW, THAT'S FANCY!

→ ## DESCENT
- May '95
- Developer: Parallax
- Publisher: Interplay

96%

→ ## LINKS LS
- November '96
- Developer: Access Soft.
- Publisher: Access Soft.

96%

→ ## SYSTEM SHOCK
- January '95
- Developer: Looking Glass
- Publisher: Sierra

96%

AWARD-WINNING
AND CRITICALLY ACLAIMED

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THE BIGGEST EVENTS IN PC GAMER HISTORY

→ THE CD-ROM REVOLUTION

THE STORY: When the first single-speed commercial CD-ROM drives were introduced in 1991, they were a bit of a novelty. Sure, you could play music and mini-movies off them, and each disc could hold more data than most hard drives, but who in the world could possibly use 640MB of program space when the average game took up less than 10MB even when fully expanded? Why, gamemakers, of course, by introducing such multimedia niceties as full-motion video, recorded voice-overs, and orchestral scores! By 1994, CD-ROM drives were standard on almost all new PCs (thanks in part to the incredible success of the CD-only game *Myst*), making obsolete — for a few years at least — the practice of swapping disks when installing a new game.

THE UPSHOT: Initially, game developers felt they had to pad their products with as many execrable extras as possible to make the new format worthwhile, leading to heaps of less-than-playable shovelware. For every *Myst* and *7th Guest* released, there were 10 *Microcosm*s and *Who Shot Johnny Rock*s. Game publishers saw *Myst*-magnitude dollar signs in their eyes, and Hollywood-style egos to nurture. But now that the "interactive movie" has mostly died off, CD-ROMs have literally changed the way we play games, and opened the door to opportunities not possible with floppy disks.

PC GAMER TRIVIA: While the first few disks that came with *PC Gamer* were of the floppy variety (our very first demo was EA's *Theme Park*), the CD-ROM edition premiered with our seventh issue, allowing us to put a staggering 19 demos on that first disc instead of the single demo that would ship on each floppy.

→ GAMES GET RATED

THE STORY: With the United States Congress breathing down the necks of game publishers over certain scenes in games like *Doom*, it became apparent in 1994 that the software industry would have to set up a system of voluntarily rating games before the federal government did it for them. Two groups emerged with two different rating systems: the non-profit Recreational Software Advisory Council (RSAC) established by the Software Publishing Association (which rated on content), and the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) proposed by the Interactive Digital Software Association (which used an age-based rating system). In the end, the ESRB won out, and every game you buy now is stamped with a rating right on the box cover.

THE UPSHOT: Although for the most part, the rating system has worked well, local municipalities are still wrestling with how best to enforce ratings. Bills have been introduced in several states to make selling Mature-rated video games to minors a criminal offense, but a similar law in Indianapolis, Indiana, has already been struck down as unconstitutional by a federal court.

HOW IT AFFECTED PC GAMER: Being the morally pure boys (and girl) that we are, *PC Gamer* has done its part to protect the virtue of our littlest readers by including the ESRB rating for each and every game we review or put on our demo disc. (We also eat apple pie and call our mothers every weekend.)

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Full-motion video (FMV) resulted in many games having to ship on multiple CD-ROMs (in the days well before DVD): "classics" such as Ripper, for example, required six CDs. Obviously, more discs did not equal better games.

STUFF WE TAKE BACK
(OR, WHAT WERE WE SMOKING?)

OKAY, WE ADMIT IT — we've goofed a few times. Here are some notable quotes we now retroactively delete from the annals of time.

"[*Outpost*] is brought together in a flawless manner that makes it very easy to forget that you're sitting in front of your home PC."
— Review (rating: 93%!), September '94

"With talented professional actors like Tanya Roberts, *The Pandora Directive* may have the best cast ever featured in a PC game."
— "*PC Gamer* Awards," March '97

"Set for a mid- to late-'98 release, [3D Realms'] *Prey* is a technological tour-de-force, beyond *Quake* and *Unreal*; in plain English, [it] rocks."
— Eyewitness, September '97

"The long-awaited superhero tactical combat game formerly known simply as *Agents of Justice* is finally seeing the light at the end of the production room — and this is after several delays and even a rumored cancellation."
— Scoop of *Guardians: Agents of Justice*, October '97

"*Team Fortress 2* is without a doubt one of our most eagerly anticipated titles of 2000."
— Cover story, August '99

Sovereign...
— One of the Top 10 Games of 2000, August '99

Beneath...
— One of the Top 10 Games of 1999, Sept. '98

Good & Evil...
— One of the Top 10 Games of 1999, Sept. '98

Has *TF2* marched off into the sunset?

10 HIGHEST-RATED GAMES IN PC GAMER HISTORY

→ **GABRIEL KNIGHT II**
- April '96
- Developer: Sierra
- Publisher: Sierra

96%

→ **THE SIMS**
- April '00
- Developer: Maxis
- Publisher: EA

96%

THE BIGGEST EVENTS IN PC GAMER HISTORY

→ WINDOWS 95 PREMIERES

THE STORY: Back in the old days (pre–Win 95), the only games you could play in Microsoft Windows were *Minesweeper* and *Solitaire*. The problem was that up to version 3.11, Windows was a resource hog, and game developers needed the direct access to memory, sound, and video that only user-unfriendly DOS could provide. Microsoft set about making Windows 95 a game-friendly platform, introducing Direct X to developers and creating a media frenzy so raucous that stores opened at midnight on launch day just to sell an operating system.

THE UPSHOT: At first, Windows 95 had problems. Games ran slower than they did in DOS, games made for DOS wouldn't always play on the new platform, and many developers decried the weaknesses of Direct X. Microsoft even got into the game business to prove that its OS worked — and that move has ultimately led to such huge hits as *Age of Empires* and *Dungeon Siege*. With patching and newer versions, it's hard to believe there was ever a time when we had to free up more memory just to play a game of *Wing Commander*.

PC GAMER TRIVIA: So in awe were we of Bill Gates' nod to gaming that, for the first — and probably the last — time ever, we spotlighted an OS on our cover (August '95 issue).

Graphically intense games like *MechWarrior 2* received a major boost from 3D accelerators.

→ GRAPHICS GO 3D

THE STORY: Rendering realistic 3D environments may be commonplace now, but calculating all those pretty polygons is a two-hour high-impact, high-intensity workout for your processor. 3D accelerators, originally a supplement to your PC's existing 2D video card, offered a way of taking the load off to give you cleaner, non-pixelated graphics.

THE UPSHOT: Besides better graphics for everybody, the result of the 3D-card boom was one of the most astounding rags-to-riches-and-back-to-rags-again stories ever to emerge from the games industry. 3dfx debuted its Voodoo chipset in 1997, and it was used as the basis for Diamond's Monster 3D card. Everyone loved it, including us (it was the first 3D card to get our Editors' Choice award). 3dfx introduced the Voodoo II a year later and it seemed as if the company could do no wrong, even acquiring video-card maker STB after announcing its Voodoo3 chipset in 1999 to produce a 3dfx-branded line of 3D accelerators. Rival NVIDIA was small potatoes up to this point: its TNT chipset had hit the market but was plagued by driver problems and incompatibilities. But by late '99, 3dfx was focusing on gimmicks (like the T-Buffer) while NVIDIA was promoting the power of fill rates, faster performance, and anti-aliasing with the announcement of its GeForce-256 GPU. Following dismal sales for 3dfx's much-delayed Voodoo5 line of cards (the Voodoo4 name was skipped), plus Microsoft's decision to use NVIDIA's chip as the basis for the Xbox, 3dfx was bought by NVIDIA in 2001 — and the Voodoo name landed in the dustbin of gaming history.

The dearly departed 3dfx Voodoo

PC GAMER'S TAKE: Even though the technology is only a few years old, almost all games that come our way now require a 3D card. And reviewing these cards keeps Greg Vederman off the street.

→ TIE FIGHTER
- October '94
- Developer: Totally Games
- Publisher: LucasArts

96%

→ WARCRAFT II
- March '96
- Developer: Blizzard
- Publisher: Blizzard

96%

→ WING COMMANDER III
- March '95
- Developer: Origin
- Publisher: Origin

96%

TRENDS THAT WEREN'T

Virtually Real

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

VIRTUAL-REALITY HEADSETS

Inspired by Hollywood hokum like *The Lawnmower Man*, hardware makers wrongly figured that the future of gaming lay in Virtual Reality. We admit that we caught the bug, going so far as to run a six-page feature on home VR units in our third issue and even making it our cover story for May '96. We forced poor editors Mike Wolf and Todd Vaughn into posing while wearing the silly-looking contraptions, making it the only time that *PCG* staff members have appeared on the cover of the magazine.

MMX

Right before 3D cards became every gamer's must-buy necessity, Intel espoused MMX technology — a series of instructions in your Pentium processor that would boost the look and speed of computer graphics. And if you believed the hype, it'd also cure cancer and trim pounds off your waistline. Needless to say, 3D accelerators put the kibosh on MMX in a heartbeat.

GAMES ON DVD

CD-ROM drives were a big hit, so DVD-ROM drives should be an even bigger hit, right? Not quite. Though a few games (*Starfleet Academy*, *Zork: Grand Inquisitor*, *Baldur's Gate*) released on DVD, the drives never caught on with the public to the same extent as CD-ROMs.

VIBRATING CHAIRS

At the height of the force-feedback craze, some savvy hardware makers decided that what gamers really wanted was tingly buttocks. So BSG introduced the Intensor, a plastic chair with built-in speakers that would rumble your tuckus every time you fired a rocket launcher. Hunsaker also put out an upscale version called the Battle Chair. Both units were too expensive for most gamers, too loud for most parents/spouses, and painfully uncomfortable to sit in. G'bye.

THE BIGGEST EVENTS IN PC GAMER HISTORY

I won't ask for the bra...

HELP
OPTIONS
LOG OUT
JOURNAL
SKILLS
STRATEGY
PEACE
STATUS

¡PC Zone Test¡ Novice Warrior

With the release of *Ultima Online*, civil discourse over the Internet sunk to a whole new subterranean level.

→ ULTIMA ONLINE LAUNCHES

THE STORY: RPGs had nearly been declared dead and buried when Origin announced its intentions to create an online multiplayer world for its classic series *Ultima* in late 1995. ("*Multima*" was one of the names considered; luckily, "*Ultima Online*" was the name Origin decided on.) Though 3DO's *Meridian 59* was actually the first "massively multiplayer" game to launch, *Ultima Online* met with the most success due to the series' cache and the celebrity of its eccentric creator, Richard "Lord British" Garriott. During beta testing, a user calling himself Rainz shocked the world by doing the unthinkable — successfully assassinating the invincible Lord British! Rainz was kicked out of the beta (for "cheating," according to Origin), but his legendary stunt was big news in the gaming press (and in *PC Gamer*'s November 1997 issue). *UO* launched to modest reviews in late '97, but a combination of rampant player-killing and poor server support led to harsh criticism from fans. In 1998, some disgruntled players even filed a class-action lawsuit against Origin. (The lawsuit ended with EA agreeing to make a charitable donation of $15,000.) *UO*'s publisher, EA, eventually canceled a planned sequel, though it's still releasing add-ons for the game.

THE UPSHOT: The massively multiplayer business has massively multiplied. *EverQuest* is by far the most popular MMORPG with over 430,000 subscribers, and newer MMORPGs such as *Dark Age of Camelot*, *Anarchy Online*, *WWII Online*, and *Asheron's Call* have all launched to varying degrees of success. Shortly before *UO2*'s cancellation, Richard Garriott left Origin, and has now joined NCSoft, the creator of the world's most populated MMORPG, *Lineage*.

PC GAMER'S TAKE: Rob was addicted to *EverCrack* for a time. Greg and Chuck still play *Anarchy Online* but can quit anytime they want. However, everyone on staff is anxiously waiting for *Star Wars: Galaxies*, *World of Warcraft*, and *City of Heroes* so we can give up our real lives and become fictional beings permanently.

"W00t! u suX0rz!"

---

10 LOWEST-RATED GAMES IN PC GAMER HISTORY

→ SKYDIVE!

- October '99
- Developer: Gonzo Games
- Publisher: EA

5%

→ EXTREME WATERSPORTS

- August '99
- Developer: HeadGames
- Publisher: Activision

5%

PC GAMER UNCOVERED!

→ **OUR 5 FAVORITE COVERS OF ALL TIME**

August '97

See, Lara's back and we're showing her back. Get it?

October '97

Striking. Monolithic. *Quake II*. Nuthin' wrong with that.

June '98

A great line matched with an even better near-3D image.

September '00

Backed by glowing flames, Bond's never looked better.

June '02

TRON 2.0's Jet pops off the page larger than life.

→ **OUR 5 LEAST FAVORITE COVERS OF ALL TIME**

February '95

A plane, a ship, and a truck. Now, *that's* an exciting game.

November '95

Blurry spider-creatures don't sell mags like they used to.

December '95

Gary Whitta with a hangover? Even we don't know.

August '98

He doesn't look happy to be in *Civilization*, does he?

May '02

Well, at least you know what games we've got inside.

→ **COVERS OF THE DOOMED**

We pick the hottest properties to showcase on our cover...but sometimes the damn games get canned. Each of these covers was for a game that was ultimately cancelled for the PC (from left, *WarCraft Adventures*, *Obi-Wan*, *Ultima Online 2*, and *The World Is Not Enough*).

Our first issue with multiple covers was November 1999, when we unveiled Warcraft III with two different covers. Now, celebrating our 100th issue, we have FOUR different Warcraft III covers on newsstands. Gotta get 'em all!

→ **EXTREME PAINTBRAWL**
- February '99
- Developer: HeadGames
- Publisher: HeadGames

6%

→ **F.D.N.Y. FIREFIGHTER**
- July '02
- Developer: Mekeda
- Publisher: Activision

6%

→ **SWAMP BUGGY RACING**
- May '00
- Developer: Daylight Prod.
- Publisher: WizardWorks

6%

→ JOHN ROMERO LEAVES ID

Our average review score for games with the word "Extreme" in their title is 42.9% (a figure boosted by *Extreme Chess* scoring 91% back in April 1997!).
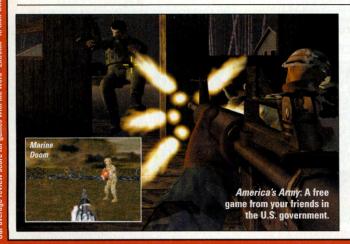
THE STORY: Fresh off the high of *Doom* and *Quake*, long-maned level-designing "stud" John Romero left id in 1996 to start his own company, citing a desire to work on more than one game at a time. "Romero was fired for incompetence," said veteran id member American McGee in our October '97 issue. "He got rich, he got successful, he got lazy. He would come into work at around noon, he'd go eat lunch, and he'd leave at four or five." (John denied this version of events.) Romero's company was named ION Storm, and it set up shop in a deluxe Dallas high-rise complete with foosball and arcade games. With the motto "Design is Law," Romero announced his epic, *Daikatana*, in 1997. The futuristic shooter, originally set for release in 1998, was fueled by high expectations and Romero's god-like status. The flames were fanned further by an unfortunate ad in our January 1998 issue that stated "John Romero's About to Make You His Bitch," causing fans to demand that he put up or shut up pronto. As *Daikatana* was delayed from 1998 to 1999, followed by a mass exodus of staff (including *Daikatana*'s lead programmer) and a biting inside exposé of company craziness by the *Dallas Observer*, Romero's opus became a subject of jokes and ridicule. By the time *John Romero's Daikatana* lamely limped to release in early 2000, few gamers really cared if John Romero made them his bitch or not.

THE UPSHOT: The *Daikatana* disaster served as a warning to developers everywhere about the dangers of unbridled hype and corporate excess. And though ION Storm–Dallas dissolved after releasing its last (and really quite good) game, *Anachronox*, in 2001, ION Storm–Austin delivered the best game of 2000 in *Deus Ex*. While Romero left the company he founded in 2001 to start Monkeystone Games, a studio devoted to creating games for handheld platforms, the ION Storm name lives on under the tutelage of Warren Spector.

PC GAMER'S TAKE: Well, at least *we* never put *Daikatana* on our cover.

> "Romero was fired for incompetence," says veteran id member American McGee. "He got rich, he got successful, he got lazy."

→ THE MILITARY GETS INTO GAMING

Marine Doom

America's Army: A free game from your friends in the U.S. government.

THE STORY: In our April 1996 issue we ran a feature called "Looking for a Few Good Games" in which we revealed *Marine Doom*, the U.S. Marines' *Doom* mod that was being used as a soldier training tool. Over a year later in our July 1997 issue, our own Desktop General, William Trotter, revealed an even newer non-*Doom* training game that the Marines had created called *MEU-31*. And it looked like even Air Force pilots were getting in on the act, flying the friendly skies of *Microsoft Flight Simulator* while gaining valuable flight experience without risking expensive real-world aircraft.

THE UPSHOT: Training via videogames has been so successful within the ranks of the U.S. military that the Army is going to give them away as a recruiting tool. As we reported in our July 2002 issue, the first-person shooter *America's Army* and interactive adventure *Soldiers* will be released to the general public this summer. Cost to you? Absolutely nothing.

PC GAMER'S TAKE: It's uplifting to see gaming taken seriously by the U.S. government. Now how about a game that teaches us how to do our taxes?

10 LOWEST-RATED GAMES IN PC GAMER HISTORY

→ **BLAZE & BLADE: ETERNAL QUEST**
- June '00
- Developer: T&E Software
- Publisher: THQ

7%

→ **HOLOGRAM TIME TRAVELER**
- July '01
- Developer: Digital Leisure
- Publisher: Digital Leisure

7%

THE SECRET ORIGIN OF
COCONUT MONKEY

MANY YEARS AGO, CAPTAIN CORNELIUS MONKEY, THE FAMOUS GRAVY-SHIPPING MAGNATE, WAS IN THE MIDST OF TRANSPORTING AN ORDER TO THE COAST OF INDIA WHEN HE CRASHED ONTO AN UNCHARTED ISLAND...

"MY BEAUTIFUL GRAVY — GONE! BUT AT LEAST I'VE GOT MY HANDS. A MAN AIN'T NUTHIN' WITHOUT BIG, STRONG HANDS."

LONELINESS BEGAN TO TAKE ITS TOLL ON THE CAPTAIN.

MY ONLY FRIEND HERE IS YOU, LUCILLE — AND YOU'RE NUTHIN' BUT A COCONUT.

BUT THEN ONE NIGHT...

OOH, OOH, OOH, OOH, OOH, OOH, OOH, OOH, C'MON, BABY!

...FRIENDSHIP TURNED TO LOVE!

NINE MONTHS LATER, A MIRACULOUS BIRTH!

WHAT TH'? BUT, BUT, HE DON'T GOT NO HANDS! MY SON'S GOT NO HANDS! NOOOOO...

HEARTBROKEN, CAPTAIN MONKEY DIED SCREAMING.

OH MY, THIS IS SAD. I WILL SWIM TO AMERICA AND MAKE A NEW LIFE FOR MYSELF. WHICH WILL BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE I HAVE NO HANDS.

In eight years, we've given 335 games an Editors' Choice award.

→ THE ATTACK OF THE SIMS

What every home needs: a French maid.

THE STORY: Will Wright, the man behind *SimCity*, had a bright idea back in the early '90s: Create a game in which you control not a building or an island, but a family of little virtual people. Taking a full seven years to develop, that simple idea turned into *The Sims*. It exploded onto the gaming scene in 2000, rocketed up the sales charts (where it's stayed ever since), and spawned four best-selling expansion packs. In just two years, *The Sims* overtook *Myst* to become the best-selling PC game of all time, with more than 6.3 million copies sold.

THE UPSHOT: The *Sims* phenomenon has done more to bring women into gaming than a hundred Barbie titles. Its complete lack of obvious violence and its diverse appeal to both hardcore and casual gamers is the sort of innovative, addictive creativity that we applaud. It's curious, then, that more developers haven't tried to duplicate *The Sims'* unique success. But Maxis is trying — *The Sims Online*, a massively multiplayer version, is coming later this year.

PC GAMER TRIVIA: In our May '99 issue, Maxis announced two games: *The Sims* and *SimMars*. One sold millions; the other was quietly canned.

→ BASS AVENGER

POINTS: 30000   WEIGHT: 600

- January '01
- Developer/Publisher: Simon & Schuster

TIME'S UP!

9%

→ EXTREME RODEO

- July '99
- Developer: Radish Works
- Publisher: HeadGames

9%

→ MODE

- January '97
- Developer: Corel Corp.
- Publisher: Corel Corp.

10%

→ **100TH ISSUE**

THE WINNER OF THE "WIN A DATE WITH CHUCK OSBORN CONTEST"! (ALSO THE SOLE ENTRY.)

10 STORIES WE COULD NEVER PRINT...UNTIL NOW!

THE "NEW GAME GODS" COMIC STRIP
FEATURES, NOV. 2000

When we first decided to run a New Game Gods feature, the bright idea to create a comic-book story starring our incredible selection of super-heroic super-developers was proposed. But ultimately, after writing a script, hiring an art team to create the drawings, and finally getting back the two-page story in time to run it in our November 2000 issue, there was no room for it! The comic book has only run in its entirety at *www.pcgamer.com*.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE ORIGINAL SURVIVOR REVIEW BY GUEST REVIEWER WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.
FEBRUARY 2002

"If yet another example is needed of America's arrant xenophobia at its worst, think only of the proliferation of so-called 'reality television' in the malodorous cesspool of our national landscape. Inasmuch as PC gaming may be a reflection of the culture at large, it is with heavy heart that I must bear witness to the undeniable truth that *Survivor* (the game) is a big, fat, steaming pile of crap."

THE RISE AND FALL OF JUSTIN WILLS, PRO GAMER
EYEWITNESS, JULY 2002

FROM THE 06/04/02 BALL RIVER, PA POLICE REPORT OF CASE #1BX1234-4453098546

OFFENSE REPORT — WILLS, JUSTIN G., A.K.A. "BUSTIN' G"

...ed the a... ...nthe closet. ...further quest......ing one girl nnamed ...the above complaint, but he demanded that "one girl ...g your friends". Upon discovering he had no mooney, ...ex. The above complaint apparently tri... ...", but unable to get an ere... ...to yell and scream atth... ...lared he was "Bustin' G", the worlds greatest living gamer when and ...", began to giggle. He then, according to... ...curled up on ...was still drooling when we arrived. We woke the above compl aint ...read him his rights... ...ried. ...uty jailhouse...

COCONUT MONKEY REVEALED!
LETTERS, DECEMBER 2001

It's a secret we've kept for a while. But it's time we let the cat, er, monkey, out of the bag... Coconut Monkey *is* Jeremy Williams. He has no hands! And his legs aren't particularly long, either.

WHERE ARE THOSE CRAZY (FORMER) PCG STAFF MEMBERS NOW?
LETTERS, MAY 2002

Of course, not all our former staffers stayed in the games industry. Gary Whitta is now a songwriter. Michael Wolf sells used cars. Li Kuo and Lisa Renninger joined the circus. And shown here is the rookie card of ex–art director Dean Renninger, who, after leaving *PCG*, went on to play point guard for the St. Louis Pistols of the IBL. Nice socks — Artis Gilmore, eat your heart out.

PISTOLS — DEAN RENNINGER   GUARD

SONGS OF LOVE AND WANTING — GARY WHITTA

HANDS-ON: HALF-LIFE 2

FEBRUARY '00 APRIL '00 MAY '00 JUNE '00 JULY '00 AUGUST '00 SEPT. '00 DECEMBER '00 MARCH '01 APRIL '01 MAY '01 AUGUST '01 OCT. '01 JANUARY '02 FEBRUARY '02 APRIL '02 JULY '02 AUGUST '02...

We've tried. Often. One day, we believe...

ROB SMITH TAKES OVER PC GAMER
EYEWITNESS, MAY 2000

"More T&A!" promises the ex-*PCXL* editor.

BILLY HARMS' FINAL VERDICT BOX FOR CARNIVORES: CITYSCAPE
REVIEWS, JULY 2002

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Hunting humans made me feel like a big, strong, toothy T-Rex! Rrrrrarrrrrrr!

LOWS: Dinos are extinct! We should collect their DNA samples for future repopulation!

BOTTOM LINE: It still can't soil the legacy of Barney, Dino, and the rest of our cuddly dino friends.

PC GAMER 20%
DON'T BOTHER

E3 HOAX REVEALED!
EYEWITNESS, AUG. 2000

"We went to Puerta Vallerta," the staff now admits. "Sorry, didn't see any games."

Comic panels: "SHOVELWARE MUST BE STOPPED, BUT I'LL NEED HELP!" / "...AND IF WE DON'T DO SOMETHING, GAMERS ARE DOOMED!" "CRIPES!" / "CLIFF 'UNREAL' BLESZINSKI, AKA CLIFFYB, THE MAP WIZARD" "AMERICAN 'ALICE' MCGEE, AKA TOKAY, MASTER OF LEVEL DESIGN" / "SPREAD THE WORD, GUYS, BECAUSE IT'S TIME WE FORMED..." / "THE *NEW* GAME GODS!!"

reviews

After 100 Issues, PCG Staff More Out of Shape Than Ever

The words "girth" and "roly-poly" banned forever from use in office

Amid stacks of empty pizza boxes and greasy pink donut cartons, the tireless *PC Gamer* staff has triumphed through 100 issues. After a brief renaissance of healthy eating and exercise (around issues 85 to 95), the staffers have since abandoned all hope of a lifestyle breakthrough, and now stand at the brink of 100 more issues, excitedly resigned to becoming fat, disgusting slobs.

"It's really amazing to think that we've come so far," said editor-in-chief Rob Smith through a mouthful of Hot Pocket cheese-'n'-sausage. "I'm honestly not sure I'll make it to see Issue 200, given my current cholesterol count. But it's going to be a great ride, no matter how long I last."

Executive editor Daniel Morris echoed this sentiment. "I remember about a year ago, when I climbed on that crazy healthy-living band-

Slave to their gluttonous impulses, our editors make short work of any fast food.

wagon. Talk about sucking all the joy out of gaming. I'm glad to be once more subsisting on KFC buckets and deli burritos."

Many readers felt that the staff had lost a crucial edge when they temporarily shut down the traditional KFC Bucket Week, and refrained from partaking of the Hack Alash offerings in the lobby.

"Those days are gone for good," declared senior editor Billy Harms, who has championed the return to the "salad days" of never eating salad. "This used to be a crack team of gluttons and lay-abouts. As we celebrate our 100th issue, I feel it's high time we returned to what made us so great in the first place — cheeseburger eat-offs and the trusty Admiral's Feast at Red Lobster. Mmm…"

With that, the staff piled into three cars (unable to fit in just two) and made their way to the Lobster for some of the Admiral's "fine, fine cheesy biscuits" in celebration of 100 brilliant issues of *PC Gamer*. Happy eatin'…er, happy reading!

PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

Bust out your wallet, free up some time: these recent games are still worth checking out.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III — JULY 2002

Rise through the ranks of the criminal underworld in this incredibly action-packed and open-ended game (which looks far better on the PC, thank you).

92%

MORROWIND — JULY 2002

Hundreds of hours of exploring might not yield every realm, quest, or creature in this truly massive roleplaying game. A system hog, but well worth it.

90%

STARSHIPS UNLIMITED — MAY 2002

This impressively deep space-strategy game lets you explore, exploit, research, and fight it out with alien rivals for control of the galaxy.

82%

HOW WE RATE THE GAMES: THE BREAKDOWN

90%
100%–90%
EDITORS' CHOICE

It's not easy to get here, and games in this range come with our unqualified recommendation.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

80%
89%–80%
EXCELLENT

These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your purchase, and is likely a great example of its genre.
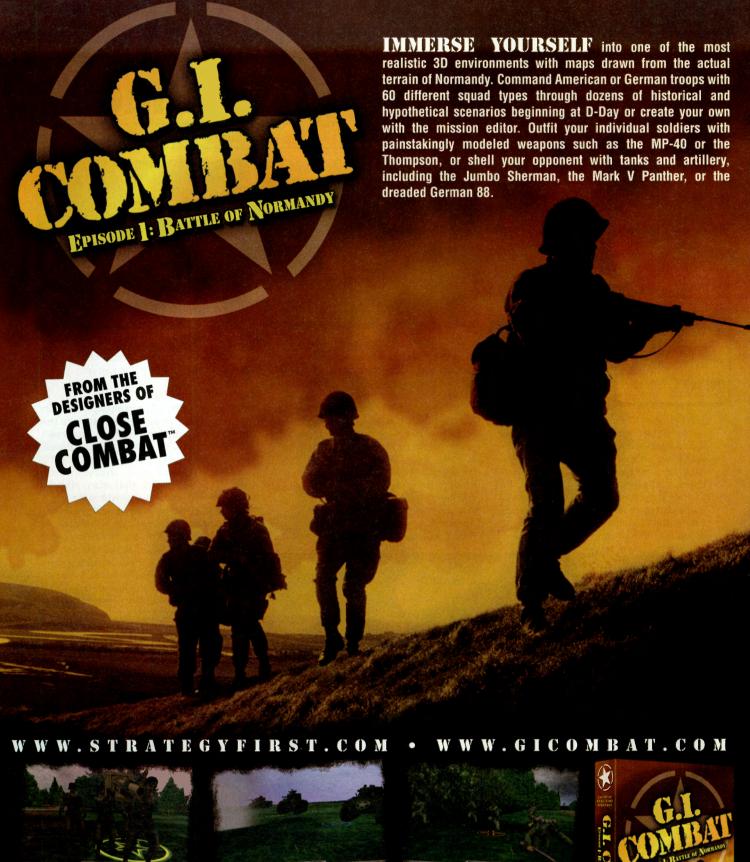
70%
79%–70%
GOOD

These are pretty good games that we'd recommend to fans of the particular genre, though it's a safe bet you can find better options.

60%
69%–60%
ABOVE AVERAGE

Reasonable, above-average games. They might be worth buying, but they probably have a few significant flaws that limit their appeal.

50%
59%–50%
MERELY OKAY

Very ordinary games. They're not completely worthless, but you can definitely find numerous better places to spend your gaming dollar.

40%
49%–40%
TOLERABLE

Poor quality. Only a few slightly redeeming features keep these games from descending into the utter abyss of the next category.

30%
39%–0%
DON'T BOTHER

Just terrible. And the lower you go, the more worthless you get. Avoid these titles like the plague, and don't say we didn't warn you!

Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Four stellar campaigns and apocalyptic drama...what more do you want for 50 bucks?

As *Warcraft III*'s development cycle dragged on and on, and announced features were either stripped from the game or scaled back, I was really worried that the final product would ultimately release as little more than an updated version of *WarCraft II*. But after blazing through all of the game's 34 perfectly designed missions in just two day-long sittings (on Normal difficulty), I can honestly say my worries were way off the mark. *Warcraft III* is a brilliant game in every facet of its design and execution, with not a single dull moment in the lot.

The primary reason *Warcraft III* succeeds so marvelously is because of its rich, detailed narrative and the realization of its vivid characters. The epic story unfolds over the four races' campaigns with a compelling new twist revealed at every turn.

This is the first real-time strategy game that's kept me pushing forward because I *had* to find out what plot surprises lay around the corner. And considering that

Many of the units in the game have secondary abilities, such as the ability to ensnare foes.

Look at this fella — guts hanging out and stitches everywhere. No wonder he's on a killing spree.

Warcraft III resides in a genre in which story is usually tertiary to the onscreen unit clashes, that's quite an innovation.

As the saga begins, the Orcs undertake an exodus from their internment camps, fleeing to the island of Kalimdor after their warchief, Thrall, receives a chilling vision. In the human kingdom of Lordaeron, the young prince Arthas is investigating the Scourge, a plague that turns people into the undead. Arthas soon discovers that the Scourge is the prelude to the arrival of a demonic force known as the Burning Legion — and once the population of Azeroth has been undead-ified, the Burning Legion plans to sweep across the

land, laying waste to everything in their path. (Which is to be expected of a group that calls itself the Burning Legion.)

BURNIN' FOR YOU

During the game's first campaign, the story is focused on Arthas as he struggles to stop the Scourge and find out who is responsible for it. I wish I could reveal more details about what happens, but doing so would ruin some great surprises. Trust me when I say that by the end of the Human campaign you'll be very surprised at where the story has shifted — and once you've finished as the Humans, you'll move on to command the Undead, the Orcs, and finally the Night Elves. (See the "Single-Player Saga" sidebar for a spoiler-free breakdown of the four campaigns.)

As the narrative rolls along, the action swirls around a hero — such as Thrall for the Orcs or Tyrande Whisperwind for the Night Elves — and shows how their race struggles to prevent the coming apocalypse (or, in the case of the Undead, pushes to bring it about). Each of the hero characters gains experience and "levels up" throughout his campaign, obtaining magic items and learning new spells.

These RPG-style elements not only add strategic depth to the game (once leveled-up, the hero characters are all serious ass-kickers), but also ensure that you'll care for your hero characters and their plight. And as the heroes lead their forces into combat, you truly have a sense that an epic and meaningful conflict is raging all around you.

Grand battles are the norm for many of the game missions. Here the Undead stick it to the hapless Orcs.

SINGLE-PLAYER SAGA

SOLO PLAY features four unique campaign settings, one for each of *WCIII*'s four sides. All of them advance the same over-arcing story toward its ultimate conclusion. Even within each campaign, you'll play missions as different heroes.

HUMAN CAMPAIGN

The first nine-mission campaign begins in the human kingdom of Lordaeron, with rumors of a plague sweeping through the countryside. The king's valiant son Arthas sets out to stop the spread of the scourge, and discovers the threat of an undead army of darkness. Be prepared for the ironclad ethics of knighthood to be tested by the hard realities of the undead onslaught.

UNDEAD CAMPAIGN

From the Humans, the narrative baton is handed off to the Undead, who scheme to resurrect their dreaded overlord and lay waste to the lands of the living. This means that you get to have lots of fun as the bad guys, cannibalizing freshly slain corpses and generally enjoying a zombie-licious romp through Azeroth. Wielding the powers of evil has never been such fun.

ORC CAMPAIGN

With Azeroth in chaos and the Undead at the peak of their power, the story turns to the Orcs (who, by the way, are the subject of the game's tutorial prologue). Young warchief Thrall sets out to unite the tribes of Orcdom. In addition to the usual Orcish brawn, you get to harness awesome magic such as chain-lightning and the summoning of feral spirits.

NIGHT ELF CAMPAIGN

Finally, the sweeping story is closed out by the Night Elves, the guardians of the realm's most prized magic. In this campaign, you'll get to play as nature's baddest bodyguards, with units based on woodland flora and fauna. They may sound a little "druidy" at first, but the Night Elves let you throw around some of the most impressive powers in the game.

The interface at the bottom right shows each character's health, stats, and special abilities (if applicable).

"Tonight on the Discovery Channel — when water spouts go horribly, horribly wrong."

To be successful, you'll definitely need a balanced force. Go in ill-prepared and you're doomed.

It's during these tremendous battles that you come to understand the raw power the heroes possess. The leader of the Undead legions can resurrect nearby corpses; Arthas can heal allied units; and Thrall can summon Feral Spirits (powerful wolf creatures) or fire a lightning bolt that jumps from one enemy to the next, creating one long crackling chain of electric death. The speed of the combat is suited perfectly to spell-casting. The pace is fast enough to keep the action exciting, but slow enough that you can easily manage your entire army while casting spells. Even during the game's largest battles, I always felt like I had complete control over the carnage.

WONDROUS MISSIONCRAFT

Helping to facilitate the game's epic flavor are its brilliantly designed missions. One mission has Arthas razing one of his own towns, killing its scourged citizens before they can become undead. (Talk about dirty jobs!) Another has the Undead defending an evil magical ceremony against a siege of crusading Humans. And another features Thrall of the Orcs as he searches the coastline for shipwrecked Orc tribes, massing a

makeshift army to take on the forces of evil. Each mission has a primary objective along with numerous optional quests that help flesh out the plot and serve to introduce new units into the game.

When playing as the Humans, for example, you can fetch an item from a dragon's den for the local Dragon Hunter, and in return he'll give you the ability to create riflemen. Other optional quests include helping a potential ally secure a besieged city, preventing messengers from warning nearby enemy forces, or stopping a convoy of diseased grain from infecting the countryside. Each completed sub-quest illuminates the story and provides you with wonderful new toys.

PAY THE ARMY UPKEEP TAX!

Despite the inclusion of all these roleplaying elements, *Warcraft III* is very much a real-time strategy game. As such, you must collect and manage resources. As in *WarCraft II*, there are three resources — gold, wood, and food — but *Warcraft III* throws a new wrinkle into the mix called Upkeep. It's essentially a tax on your growing army, and is present in both the single- and multiplayer game.

Toward the end of each campaign, you'll face some incredibly powerful foes, including these dragons.

In a brilliant move, some campaigns will team you with AI-controlled allies. Might times two!

Killing innocents and defiling the land — it's all in a day's work for the bloodthirsty Undead.

Upkeep exists in three stages — none, light, and high — and represents a percentage of your gold drained to "support" your troops; the higher the level of Upkeep, the more money you lose. I can't tell you how much this feature annoyed the hell out of me; in fact, it's the only major complaint I have with the game.

I can understand why Upkeep is included in multiplay: it makes it more difficult for players to rush. And if players choose to rush, it makes them very susceptible to counter-attacks, because as long as they're fielding a large force, their income-tax worries make it tough to add new units quickly.

Why the penalty of paying Upkeep is part of the single-player game, though, is a total mystery to me.

Blizzard's included its patented rendered scenes, but most of the exposition occurs via in-game cut-scenes.

On more than one occasion, I had multiple gold mines running and still didn't have enough cash flow to do much of anything. A few other times, I found myself purposely sending some troops off to die so I could lower my Upkeep penalty. Having to worry about Upkeep is a little too much micromanagement for my tastes, especially when you consider that you must also contend with a relatively low unit cap of 90.

BLIZZARD, 3D; 3D, BLIZZARD

Heralding Blizzard's entry into the world of 3D games, *Warcraft III* looks absolutely phenomenal. Excellent unit animation shows off tremendous details such as ball-and-chain weapons, meat cleavers, and airborne Gryphon riders who throw hammers. The actual unit design is first-rate: the Meat Wagon is a slow-moving catapult that collects corpses and hurls bloody body parts at the enemy; the Shade is a ghost-like scout unit that's easily the creepiest in RTS history; and the first time you see the dragons, you'll be floored.

As you'd expect, *Warcraft III* comes with a full multiplayer suite. Up to 12 players can play over a LAN or through Blizzard's free Battle.net service. Multiplayer games

SHOP 'N' SLAY

NEW TO THE WARCRAFT universe are ambient monsters, merchants, and magic sites. These dot the landscape in both single- and multiplayer games. This time around, Azeroth becomes a much more dangerous place just to travel through — but help can also be found when needed most.

MONSTERS

Sprinkled across each mission and multiplayer map are neutral monsters of varying lethality. The random troll or wolfpack will be a common threat, whereas more powerful demon types will be guarding prizes (usually magic items, or occasionally a rich gold mine). While ambient monsters are a menace in single-player missions, they become a strategic concern in multiplayer games — you can level up your heroes by monster-slaying, and snag their caches for use against your human opponents.

MERCHANTS

Goblin merchants are sprinkled throughout the maps as well. In their establishments you can spend your hard-earned gold on potions, rings, and other choice magic items that only heroes can use. Alternatively, you'll occasionally come upon Mercenary Camps that'll lend you units for a fee. In several single-player missions, these Camps become necessary aids because your available forces are insufficient to complete the quest (as when Arthas is up north and must fight his way across the map with only a handful of men, and thus needs Mercs to make the journey).

MAGIC SIGHTS

Wandering a map with a weary, war-battered posse of troops? Then count your blessings when you come upon a magic site such as a Fountain of Health (which restores your units' hit points) or a Fountain of Mana (which restores all of your spellcasters to full mojo). Knowing the location of a magic site can mean the difference between victory or defeat in a pitched battle or on a long expedition.

PC GAMER

The World's Best-Selling PC Games Magazine
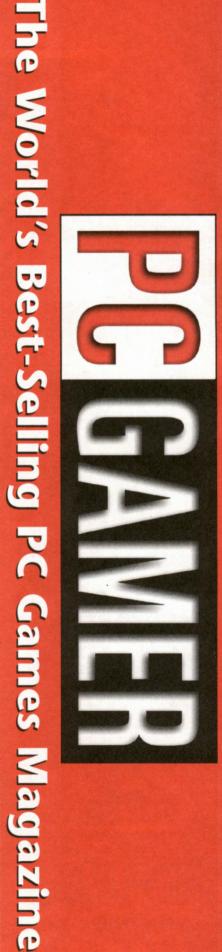
Thrall doesn't take too kindly to folks killin' Orcs. Suck down his lightning fury!

From the character models to the environments to the spell effects, this game looks awesome.

Once you field a large force, your Upkeep costs skyrocket. If these boys fail, you're toast.

The game's impressive AI doesn't enjoy losing, so they'll summon some serious firepower.

To help you keep track of key objectives, your progress is listed onscreen.

We've said it before and we'll say it again — wielding the forces of Evil is good ol' American fun.

tend to be slow, with an initial period of building before hostilities erupt. As I already mentioned, this lull is partly due to Upkeep, which strives to prevent the rush.

Multiplayer games are also a little slower because of the hero units. Regardless of which of the four races you're playing, you can create up to three unique hero units, which you'll want to level-up as quickly as possible. To help in this process, AI enemies are scattered across the map, usually guarding gold mines or other structures, and your hero will gain experience by defeating them. It's possible to defeat opponents without using a hero unit, but if they're fielding an experienced hero, you're pretty much screwed.

All four sides are extremely well-balanced. There's usually a unit to counter each of the enemy's units, and because you can upgrade your troops by building dedicated upgrade buildings (the process is quite similar to that in *StarCraft*), it's possible to slow down larger, more powerful units with fully upgraded lesser units.

"I AM ORC-HOLIO!"

The humor that was abundant in *WarCraft II* is back via the unit responses. The trans-

port ships, for example, do their best Beavis impersonation when they shout "Are you threatening me?!" The Undead regularly proclaim their eagerness to die. And of course, the Orcs still have their classic lines "Work, work, work" and "Zug, zug." Though the dialogue is well done, I wish there were a little more variety in the unit responses, most of which get annoying real quick.

Although *Warcraft III* is pretty much bug-free by our estimation, a few problems did crop up from time to time. I had some issues with unit pathfinding, especially during the Orc campaigns, where Thrall wouldn't always go where I told him to. A more troubling problem was a glitch in the interface: often, I'd click the Heal icon from my hero's interface, but when I went to click on the unit I wanted to heal, the cursor would *select* that unit instead. Too often, by the time I got back to the wounded unit, he was already dead.

None of these issues seriously detracts from the simple fact that *Warcraft III* is an utterly brilliant game. Blizzard could have been content to churn out another "Orcs vs. Humans" slog, but instead they took a gamble and crafted a tightly constructed,

character-driven narrative with four colossal campaigns all serving a classic story. It's a joy to play a game in this day and age that's both ambitious and flawlessly executed.

A special word to RTS neophytes: the game is expertly balanced at its Easy difficulty setting, giving you a pulse-pounding challenge on every mission but *never* losing you or frustrating you. It's a perfect game for anyone cold to this genre.

The best thing I can say about *Warcraft III*, though, is that at no point during the game was I bored — from start to finish, it's a *blast* to play. And that's the highest praise I can give a game. — *William Harms*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fantastic story and characterization; outstanding graphics and unit balance; accessible.

LOWS: Upkeep is annoying; minor pathfinding issues; it eventually came to an end.

BOTTOM LINE: Not just a classic RTS, but a classic PC game, period. It's a must-buy.

PC GAMER **EDITORS' CHOICE** **94%**

Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix

Get out the up-chuck bag — the contents of your stomach may be spewing forth

Ultra-gory, blood-spattered, almost stomach-turning…and still *Soldier of Fortune II* delivers "more of the same" gameplay. While better than its predecessor on almost all counts, *SOF II* still does little to turn heads in the genre. Instead, it blows them clean off.

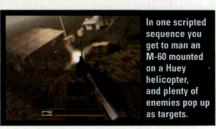The game's primary strengths are awesome new *Quake III: Arena*–powered visuals, a heightened emphasis on story, much more attention to detail, and at least a *few* attempts at ingenuity. But the no-holds-barred, unflinching emphasis on rendering the bloodiest action possible on the PC is still *SOF II*'s primary calling card.
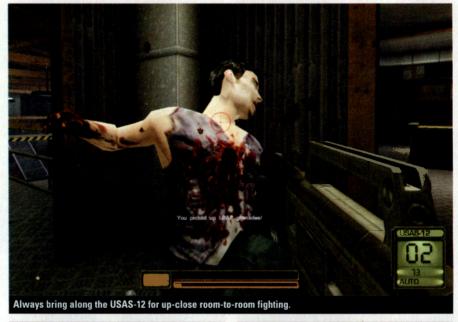
Once again, you fill the size-15 boots of one badass hombre known as John Mullins (based on the game's "technical advisor," who was a former soldier of fortune). A network of terrorists has its sights set on using a deadly bio-agent to hold the world hostage, and it's up to you — working for "The Shop," an ultra-secretive counter-terrorist group — to stop them.

Your efforts will take you on an all-expenses-paid trip around the world, visiting Colombia, Hong Kong, and Prague. Each locale serves up a well-varied mix of environments and baddies that you can blast to smithereens with 14 hard-hitting weapons, most of which have secondary firing modes. My personal fave has to be the fully automatic 12-gauge shotgun. Designed to eliminate scads of bad guys quickly in room-to-room fighting, this beast does its job extremely well. It'll decorate the walls, ceilings, and floors with blood and chunks of flesh and bone, leaving a trail of body parts in its wake.

Raven's proprietary GHOUL 2 system performs as advertised with its hit-specific damage modeling. Pop a guy (or gal) in the stomach with a shotgun, and they keel over in all manner of painful ways — lurching forward, groaning, and failing to keep their innards from spilling on the ground. You can use a password to lock out all the blood

In one scripted sequence you get to man an M-60 mounted on a Huey helicopter, and plenty of enemies pop up as targets.

Always bring along the USAS-12 for up-close room-to-room fighting.

The sniper rifle is truly punishing at long ranges, as you can see by this bad guy's free face-removal.

Phosphorus grenades are also a good choice for creating space quickly in crowded rooms.

and gore, but if you do, you're left with a pretty unremarkable experience.

The game's greatest failing is its *completely* unbalanced AI. Most missions emphasize stealth, and *SOF II* gives you the ability to lean around corners and even go prone and crawl on your stomach. Problem is, the AI bad guys spot you *way* too easily, and they *will* nail your ass with impossible accuracy, particularly with grenades. I was continually spotted when there appeared to be no line of sight, and even when crawling behind cover — at night and in the rain, no less. Grenades — tossed by opponents who couldn't see me, mind you — frequently landed in my lap. Needless to say, this hardship makes the game *very* challenging, even on the easier of the five difficulty settings.

Also, the "fortune" aspect I liked so much in the original *SOF* is gone, so there's no cash to earn, no running tally of enemies waxed — no fortune to be made. It's a big loss.

Still, if all you're wanting in an FPS is frenetic, brutal, scarily realistic and bloody action, no game delivers these ingredients better. And the random-scenario and map generator is a cool addition, though the missions and maps it creates do look and feel a bit too, well, *random* in their construction. Fans of *SOF* will likely get a kick out of the updated gore factor, but be warned: it's a tough play, with too few rewarding gameplay moments. — *Steve Klett*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Awesomely brutal weapons and realistic damage effects; unparalleled gore.

LOWS: Unbalanced AI; performance can suffer during scripted vehicle sequences; linear level design.

BOTTOM LINE: Though the furious action may be cathartic, this shooter has some sizeable flaws.

PC GAMER **70**%
GOOD

2002 FIFA World Cup

CATEGORY Sports **ESRB** E **DEVELOPER** EA **PUBLISHER** EA **REQUIRED** P233, 32MB RAM, 65MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 500, 128MB RAM, GeForce2 card **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 2

It's the world's largest sporting event — the FIFA World Cup. An estimated worldwide audience of 3 billion watched the final game in the 1998 tournament. It's a big deal everywhere in the world, bar the U.S., but that didn't stop EA Sports from throwing in an officially licensed soccer game. It's just a shame that *2002 FIFA WC* does "the beautiful game" such a disservice.

I raved about this year's *FIFA* rollout from EA, giving it 89%. Now I'm gonna harass the lazy buggers at EA Sports for their shoddy treatment of this iteration. This *World Cup* edition of *FIFA 2002* is essentially a port of that game's console versions. That shouldn't be a bad thing; however, the console version was a few steps behind the

beautiful fluidity, fast-paced action, and impressive depth of the PC skew.

While some fans of the series berated the last *FIFA* for its pinball-like speed (and thus, lack of realism), the sluggish pace and inept AI here simply piss me off.

Ignoring the crashes to desktop and game-hangs I encountered, the gameplay itself is pedestrian. Sure, the animations are great, and the most famous players look amazingly lifelike. And it's great that the moves you can make are occasionally smooth, calculated, and authentic-looking. EA even fixed a franchise-long issue of not being able to pull back a ball that's heading out of play. But at the higher of the four difficulty levels, the sluggish control is frustrating. Add to that constant AI screwups (defenders blindly running past attackers, and most distressing, goalkeepers backing away from oncoming forwards so that they can hardly miss), and the World Cup becomes a lottery, not a skillful challenge.

The shot-power meter hits "fiery" — and in it goes!

A prelude to England's success in Japan?

In typical EA Sports fashion, you can unlock special teams (such as an All-Europe Eleven) by winning the cup, and multiplay option is fun enough if you're both sitting at one machine. But this game's still a rush-job, and certainly not worth your time if you already own *FIFA 2002*. — *Rob Smith*

PC GAMER **MERELY OKAY** **56%**

Atari Revival

CATEGORY Action **ESRB** E **DEVELOPER** Meyer-Glass/Creature Labs/Magic Lantern **PUBLISHER** Infogrames **REQUIRED** PII 266, 32MB RAM **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 32MB video card **MAX. PLAYERS** 4

This $20 collection should be called *Atari Remake*. It compiles "updated" 3D versions of '80s arcade classic *Missile Command* and Atari 2600 standby *Combat* (released in 1999 and 2001, respectively) and debuts *Warlords,* a redux of the four-player coin-op game.

Warlords is probably the best adaptation of the bunch. As in the original, each player — you can have up to four human/AI players competing at once — must protect his castle tower against a dragon's fireball with the aid of a roaming shield. Players can also capture the fireball and throw it at an opponent; the game is over if your tower is destroyed before the others. Simple but fun.

The new version adds some power-ups, LAN support, and nifty new visuals: the varied levels have themes such as Egypt, Japan, and Medieval, with the final environment set on an Alien world.

In case you haven't already played the *Missile Command* update, it adds some CG cut-scenes, 3D graphics, and a couple of minor tweaks to the "save Earth by shoot-

Sick of this? *Warlords'* coin-op version is here, too.

ing down enemy missiles" gameplay. But it looks and plays very similar to the 1980 trackball machine.

Combat (*PCG* rating: 50%) fares worse, with unresponsive hovertank control, bland textures, and tedious gameplay. Thankfully, the still-charming original game is included.

Nostalgic "bookshelf value" aside, this collection isn't really worth the time or money, especially given the prevalence of similar, better, and free diversions (e.g., RealArcade and Shockwave games) available online.

MC's detailed cities make you crave carnage.

The Atari franchise is a helluva brand, particularly for mainstream gamers, but Infogrames needs to do a better job of milking it. For a case in point, check out the publisher's cheaper *Atari Anniversary Edition* (*PCG* rating: 83%), which compiles 12 classic Atari diversions. — *Marc Saltzman*

PC GAMER **TOLERABLE** **48%**

Hooters Road Trip

America's biggest hicks can't even be bothered with this reeky racer

"Hey Zeke, come'n take a gander at this."

"Watcha got thaere, Skeeter?"

"*Hooters Road Trip* — a new 'puter game I got down at the Bait 'n' Tackle. You race all these diffrunt road stages from Flo'ida to Califo'nia and then y'all get t'check out some Hooters Gals when you get to the big cities. I said cities."

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY	Racing
ESRB RATING	T
DEVELOPER	Hoplite Research
PUBLISHER	Ubi Soft
REQUIRED	PII 350, 64MB RAM, 600MB HD, 12MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND	PIII 450, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, joystick or wheel
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

"Didn't you already play this on cousin Ned's PlayStashun a couple o' weeks back?"

"Yeah, but this's the *Pee-Cee* version, Zeke! Better graphics."

"Looks purdy much the same t'me."

"Yeah, it *does* look kinda sucky, don't it? Sounds like wasps in a tin can, too."

"Whut in tarnation kinda cars is these?"

"I dunno — they got 16 o' these. There's an Eye-talian sporty car, but I'm gonna take the stocker."

"So when does ah git t'see some *boobs*? Whar them Hooters Gals y'all promised me?"

"Y'all gotta make it to the end of a stage to see the video...ahh crap! Damn 'puter froze up again."

"Game does that a lot, huh?"

"Only a couple dozen times so far. Fetch us some cold ones while I give this hyar thing a boot."
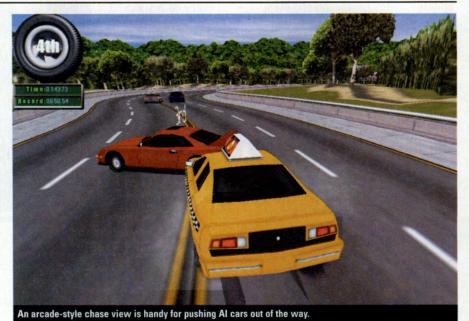
[Five minutes later]

"See, ah just gotta pass these seven cars and dodge the ona-comin' traffic and I'll git a video of some sweet l'il darlin' welcomin' me t'Atlanta."

"Who they tryin' t'kid, anyways? That ain't Geo'gia. Hell, it looks like somebody whit-

The finely attired Hooters Girls make brief appearances to cheer your progress. Mmmm... Hooters Girls.

An arcade-style chase view is handy for pushing AI cars out of the way.

A VCR-style replay screen highlights all of *Hooters'* excessive clipping and draw-through issues.

If you somehow avoid all the lock-ups and mandatory do-overs, you can cross the country in a half-hour.

tled a big ol' chunk outta that build'n wit a bowie knife. Y'all kin see clean through it."

"Heck wif the scenery, Zeke. Lookit me, ah'm cookin' now!"

"Them cars yo' got thar shore seem t'stick awful good. Didn't know you could take a corner at 180 like that. Plus, your front end's all tore up now."
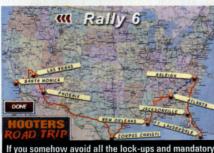
"Ain't slowing me down none though, is it?"

"Don't seem right."

"Here we go! Check it out — here comes the Hooters Gal video."

"Woo-eee! Lookit them hoot...*hey*, whar'd they go? Dangit!"

"Them clips are kinda short. Y'all gotta look quick, ya hear?"

"Well, y'all get her *back* here!"

"Skeeter, what'd y'all pay for this thing?"

"Twenty bucks. Purdy cheap, huh?"

"Damnation, Skeeter — we coulda had ourselves a meal at Hooters for that! Where's the dang receipt?"

— *Andy Mahood*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Has cameos by the Hooters Girls; comes on a purdy orange CD; costs only $20.

LOWS: Cow-patty graphics; buggy and crash-prone; slot-car physics; tinny sound.

BOTTOM LINE: Even Skeeter and Zeke don't much like this pid'ful excuse for a racer.

PC GAMER **18%**
DON'T BOTHER

Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza

CATEGORY Action   ESRB M   DEVELOPER Piranha   PUBLISHER Fox Interactive   REQUIRED PII 400, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card   WE RECOMMEND PIII 600, 128MB RAM   MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

Now you can play the movie! Except the movie is wonderful, and playing this game isn't.

Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza is a phenomenally good idea — use the indoors-friendly LithTech engine to put you in the bare feet of John McClane for his heroic one-man stand against German terrorists. *[Who said they were terrorists? — Ed.]*

The game follows the narrative of the original *Die Hard* film very closely, which is both reassuring and weird. Watching stiff cinematics of the classic scenes and listening to awful voice actors re-create German accents is like watching a high-school play: you kind of admire the effort, but you can't help but wince and wish they would stop.

A snip in time saves thine (life). You'd better hustle.

Unfortunately, the FPS gameplay has problems of its own. While the graphics are very appealing, your progress is *utterly* railed, which sort of defeats the purpose of all the impressive architectural design. Enemy-AI tactics consist mostly of running right at you, with occasional breaks to roll around on the ground in a comical evasive maneuver. Baddies require many direct hits to finish them off, and since Hans evidently brought along around 1,000 guys for this caper, it can result in some frustrating meatgrinders, even on Normal difficulty.

Progress can also be bizarrely confusing. At the end of one early stage, I waxed the taunting Tony ("I promise I won't hurt you") and then spent 10 minutes wandering the empty level trying to figure out what to do next. Turns out I just had to *activate* Tony's corpse to end the level. I got hung up on several such unclear snags.

But for all the tedium, there are still some fun bits. The invasion of SWAT teams late in

Like the movie McClane, you're left-handed...and you've got your hands full.

the game — they shoot at you on sight, but if you hit them the game is over — adds some fun punch, as does the inevitably cool elevator-shaft and firehose-jump sequences.

McClane wannabes may find some joy in this $30 title, but "die hard" action fans are better off buying the DVD. — *Daniel Morris*

PC GAMER MERELY OKAY **58%**

Combat Medic: Special Ops

CATEGORY Simulation   ESRB T   DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER Legacy Interactive   REQUIRED PIII 333, 32MB RAM   WE RECOMMEND P4/XP 1GHz, 64MB RAM   MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

"You're" ready for evacuation. "You" definitely need some pain relief.

What is it with budgetware titles that have an interesting premise but execute like a pre-Viagra Bob Dole? *Combat Medic* is the latest medical-themed offering from Legacy Interactive, continuing the shameful tradition of *Vet Emergency* and *911 Paramedic*.

Your job, as a member of U.S. peacekeeping forces deployed in the Middle East, is to treat the wounded while keeping the bad guys at bay. Gameplay consists of directing a team of grainy soldiers around a lumpy top-down map. When you encounter wounded soldiers, the game switches to a pseudo-3D view, and you're on scalpel duty in something vaguely resembling human form wearing combat fatigues. Every now and then, the screen flashes yellow, which indicates you're being shot at. You can either stick with your patient or zip back to the 2D interface to trade bullets with baddies.

Performance is appalling for a game that looks like it was mugged and left for

dead after a thrashing with the ugly stick. Placing splints and syringes over body parts is a complex and infuriating game of "hover and twitch." Realistic medical processes are admirably constructed, but the tutorial is woefully inadequate, and you'll spend most of the game clicking for hints with no idea where the next step is heading. The top-down combat is a pointless arcade throwback. Point, click, fire, repeat — it rivals *Berzerk* for sheer moronic inanity.

Combat Medic is one of those games that simply shouldn't be played — not for fun, not for education, and not even for free. Someone somewhere probably could've made this game clever and interesting, but alas, Legacy Interactive is not that company. Chances are, you'll have more fun reading a medical textbook.   — *Matthew Peckham*

PC GAMER DON'T BOTHER **21%**

The Sum of All Fears

We'd like to suggest a new title for this game: *Rainbow Six for Dummies*

Mess with the U.S., and you'll slowly bleed to death in a pool of your own filth.

Sum's weapon load-out screen lets you choose only from pre-created kits.

Had I followed the default mission plan (the white line in the middle map), I'd be dead right now.

Just in time for the movie "blockbuster" of the same name comes Red Storm's latest squad-based shooter. Designed for the novice tactical gamer, *Sum* strips out the hardcore elements of the *Rainbow Six* series and replaces them with streamlined mission briefings, minimal weapons selection, and tenuous control over your AI teammates. The result is an experience that may appeal to newbies curious about this tactical-action vogue, but will dismay veterans of Red Storm's hardcore combat sims.

Based on the events of the movie and the Tom Clancy novel, *Sum* starts you off as an FBI agent investigating a group of right-wing American extremists. After a nuke levels Baltimore, you join a top-secret CIA outfit (headed up by *Rainbow Six*'s John Clark) and set out to

Your squadmates provide adequate assistance, but I wish the game offered more advanced movement orders.

exact some good-old-fashioned American vengeance on the shitbags responsible.

Each mission begins with a spartan briefing from Clark before allowing you to select from pre-packed, ready-made weapon/equipment kits. New kits are unlocked as you complete missions — an annoying trend started in *Ghost Recon* that assumes you're not smart enough to use grenades right away.

Once deployed, you're given a three-person squad but limited command options, such as "clear area" or "flash bang room." This system is extremely aggravating because your "clear area" commands work only on doorways. For instance, one mission has you crawling along a conveyer belt, and when you get to the other end, since there's no door, your commands to clear the area are ignored.

Adding to the frustration is the fact that you can't control the support squads, and following the default waypoint plan (you can't make your own) is a sure way to get yourself killed.

All these practical problems obscure *Sum*'s flat-out brilliant mission design. The locales cover the entire gamut, from a prison to a mansion to a TV station, and the *Ghost Recon* engine has been tweaked to perfection, creating the perfect settings for close-quarters combat. The character models are also beautifully animated and undergo some great death throes. And the mission objectives show a lot of variety, with you assassinating key figures, plant-

ing bugs, and collecting evidence.

That said, the terrorist enemies in the game are severely schizophrenic. Sometimes they duck behind cover and flank you; other times they simply stare at you. Most astonishing are the times where they stand around like slack-jawed yokels as you snipe the guy right in front of them.

The usual multiplayer modes, such as Firefight and King of the Hill, are available via Ubi.com's matchmaking service, direct IP, or LAN. Multiplayer action is wonderfully intense, and the AI opponents in the co-op missions will challenge even the most veteran *Rainbow Six* warrior.

It's truly unfortunate that in an attempt to lure novice gamers, Red Storm stripped out the detailed gameplay that made the *Rainbow Six* games so great. There's still fun to be had, but folks looking for more depth will have to wait for *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*. — William "Creamy Smooth" Harms

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great missions; fantastic graphics; fun multiplay; no sign of Ben Affleck.

LOWS: Stripped-down design; suspect AI; dodgy squad control; lite-style tactical action.

BOTTOM LINE: Need something to pass the time until *Rainbow Six III* ships? This might do.

PC GAMER GOOD **72%**

Dragon Throne

Should an RTS really make you work this hard?

You won't find this fact anywhere on the box, but *Dragon Throne: Battle of Red Cliffs* is the sequel to last year's mediocre *Fate of the Dragon* — and unfortunately, it shares many of the same problems that made its predecessor more of a chore than a joy to play.

As in *Fate,* the setting is 3rd-century China. *Throne's* three campaign modes are inspired by the historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* and are prefaced with quotations from the book. Whether you choose to play as Cao Cao, Sun Quan, or Lieu Bei, the game climaxes with the fabled Battle of Red Cliffs, where the "three kingdoms" were decided.

But you most likely will never get that far. The game gets off to a rocky start with the Tutorial mission, where you discover that all the dialogue is in Chinese — English subtitles are provided only during cutscenes. It's here that you'll also discover one of the most insane "fog of war" designs ever seen: you control a walled city, but huge tracts of it are blacked-out until you send laborers or troops to "discover" the area you already control. I guess the guys who built that wall were ordered to face *away* from the interior of the city as they worked!

Throne's tech tree offers more than 100 items to research, but many of them are simply variations on improved production or better armor protection for troops, and the process soon becomes a tedious exercise in repetition. And remember the idea of different buildings for production? Object Software decided to go that route with troop production: rather than have existing barracks crank out better-equipped soldiers once an improved weapons shop is researched, you have to create *new* barracks, adding to the general feeling of confusion you'll doubtless be experiencing by this point in a level.

Worse yet, the in-game help system is all but worthless, and the manual is only marginally more useful. Take research, for

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Real-time strategy

ESRB RATING T

DEVELOPER Object Software

PUBLISHER Strategy First

REQUIRED PII 233, 64MB RAM, 270MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive

WE RECOMMEND PII 266, 128MB RAM

MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8

You can place "stone-launching wagons" — i.e., catapults — atop the walls surrounding your city, though it remains an ancient Chinese secret just how they could possibly get there.

The biographical sketches for *DT's* three warlords are a good intro to the events in the campaign game.

Strangely enough, "snoozing" is the default assignment when you send laborers to a farm.

Dialogue boxes pop up when certain goals are achieved during battles — a good thing, since all *spoken* dialogue is in Chinese.

instance. The manual says "advanced Science items cannot be researched until a Technical Officer has been appointed," but never tells you how to appoint one! Turns out you do that on the Kingdom interface — though the manual can't be bothered to tell you how to *access* this interface.

You'd expect battles to offer some excitement, but thanks to a lack of formations, these conflicts generally wind up as confounding melees. The inclusion of camps and supply wagons does add an element of realism to your efforts at conquest, but then again, it's just one more of the myriad things you'll have to worry about in a game that deluges you with micromanagerial headaches.

Object Software is to be commended for providing a ton of historical back-ground information on this turbulent and exciting time period. But by tossing in *too many* details, they've created a game that's better suited for bookkeepers than vicarious warlords. And we're definitely the latter.

— *Stephen Poole*

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Forgiving system specs; realistic focus on supply lines and camps; single-player skirmish mode.

LOWS: Tremendous learning curve; uninformative manual; ho-hum graphics; excess micromanagement.

BOTTOM LINE: By the time you've learned the mysterious mechanics, you'll be bored with the game.

PC GAMER 58%

MERELY OKAY

Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds
Clone Campaigns

Hop aboard the *Episode II* bandwagon in this *Battlegrounds* expansion

Like a mystical salve, last year's *Galactic Battlegrounds* went a long way toward healing the wounds inflicted by the affront to gaming that was *Force Commander*. Sure, *Battlegrounds* was little more than a mod for *Age of Empires II*, but who cares? It was a *Star Wars* real-time strategy game that *worked*, offering sweet gameplay and great mission and unit variety.

Set immediately following the events of *Attack of the Clones*, *Clone Campaigns* introduces two new *Episode II*–oriented civilizations, the Confederacy and the Galactic Republic. Each new civ gets its own seven-mission campaign, along with unique units and structures. The overall story follows the two main characters — Sev'Rance Tann for the Confederacy and Echuu for the Galactic Republic — and fans of *Episode II* will be pleased to see Count Dooku and Mace Windu in the game, although neither character is playable. The two single-player campaigns occasionally overlap, but the story isn't all that engaging.

Part of the problem lies with the mission design. All the standard RTS missions

The bonus mission for the Galactic Republic lets you play with old favorites like Han and Luke.

It seems Dan's forces are no match for Billy's sheer military might. Bow down, pig!

are present — escort someone across the map, destroy the enemy's base, capture a precious technology — but as in *Battlegrounds*, too much of the game is mired in the drudgery of resource mining. As a result, you get psyched about invading enemy strongholds, but that excitement evaporates in the mundane 30 minutes spent building a base *before* you can even launch the invasion.

Thankfully, it's not all back-breaking ore mining, and some of the missions really stand out. "The War Erupts," for example, has you controlling a squad of Jedi as war rages all around you, and "The Taking of Coruscant" is a tactician's delight, giving you a finite number of troops with which to stamp out the last bit of Confederate resist-

ance. This mission should be the blueprint for all future *Star Wars* RTS games.

Clone Campaigns also adds new units to the civs from *Battlegrounds*, such as the A-Wing for the Rebel Alliance, and other units have been tweaked: the AT-AT, for example, will now fire at both land- and air-based units. These balance issues really help *Clone*'s multiplayer component, in which several new tile-sets and maps have been added to the mix, all based on *Episode II* locations such as Coruscant, Tatooine, and Geonosis, a rocky planet where the battle droids are created.

A few graphical upgrades, such as more detailed explosions and better unit animation, help prop up the elderly *AoE II* engine. More disconcerting though, is the fact that AI problems managed to sneak their way in. The computer will do stupid stuff like send anti-air units to attack your buildings, and even worse, enemy units will occasionally walk right by you and neither side will fire a shot. As is the norm with RTS games, the pathfinding can be extremely taxing, too — especially when you're trying to move a large force through a narrow pass and half your units wander off.

Hopefully, LucasArts' next RTS will push the gameplay in new and innovative directions. Until then, *Clone Campaigns* is an easy recommendation for *Star Wars* fans jonesing for some RTS action.   — William Harms

One of the new units is the Decimator, an ass-kicker if there ever was one.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Adds two civilizations; graphics have been slightly improved; it's *Star Wars*.

LOWS: Pathfinding still suspect; AI does idiotic things; mining for nova crystals is stupid.

BOTTOM LINE: It's still a *Star Wars* mod for *Age of Empires II*, but like *Battlegrounds*, it's a lot of fun.

PC GAMER **70%**

GOOD

Ultima Online: Lord Blackthorn's Revenge

CATEGORY Online RPG **ESRB** T **DEVELOPER** Origin **PUBLISHER** EA **REQUIRED** PII 300, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** PII 450, 128MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** Massively multiplayer

Is that man asking the cow to be his friend? Yeesh!

Lord Blackthorn is not a pleasant person. Half-man, half–crazed beast, he's a bit like Sean Penn during his marriage to Madonna. His plan: to conquer the online world of Britannia from his base in the new realm of Ilshenar, possibly stroking a fluffy white cat while he does so.

This third expansion for *Ultima Online* is the first to benefit from Todd McFarlane's celebrated artwork — he's designed 30 new monsters for the game. But *Lord Blackthorn's Revenge* includes more than a sprinkling of foul new brutes. There's a fresh emphasis on the world being dynamic.

These new creatures are still being introduced gradually into the game, and the coming months should see a continuation of Gamemaster-led events and an unfurling plot centering on Blackthorn's conflict with Britannia. Excitingly, different shards (servers) will become truly unique worlds depending on how their players fare in this storyline.

Also new is the introduction of a virtue system. (Grizzled veterans will remember it from the likes of *Ultima IV*.) Character virtues such as compassion and honor can be increased in specific ways: humility, for example, is gained when you help out new players. Boosted virtues earn you improved statistics.

It's also worth noting that novices to the game will appreciate the introductory "young player" quests. No monster will attack for the first 30 hours, so you can explore freely and without peril, slowly sussing out the intricacies of the huge *Ultima Online* world.

The double-edged sword of this beginner friendliness is that some have abused the "no aggro" rules, travelling to super-hard dungeons they've no business being in, therein making tons of gold from game loopholes. On the whole, though, the effort made for new players is commendable.

How much will *Lord Blackthorn's Revenge* appeal to existing players? 2D-client users will most certainly want it for the updated graphics and access to Ilshenar, but those who already use the 3D client from the last expansion (*Ultima Online: Third Dawn*) will have precious little reason to fork out for this box. Consider before buying. — *Darren Allen*

PC GAMER **MERELY OKAY** **58%**

Master Rallye

CATEGORY Racing **ESRB** E **DEVELOPER** Steel Monkeys **PUBLISHER** Microids **REQUIRED** PII 400, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** PII 700, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, joystick/wheel **MAX. PLAYERS** 4

Rallye's dust and particle effects are first-rate.

Based loosely on the 5,000-kilometer trans-European off-road race of the same name, and co-developed for the PS2, *Master Rallye* places you behind the wheel of over 20 robust 4x4s, buggies, and purpose-built racing trucks. Featuring a gameplay style that falls somewhere between *4x4 Evo 2* and *Insane*, *Master Rallye* is an undeniably appealing treatment of cross-country "raid" rallying.

But once you get past the game's richly textured terrain graphics, you're left with a marginal arcade racer that's been saddled with some disappointingly floaty driving physics. The absence of any proper cockpit view or rear-view mirrors — not to mention mouse support in the front-end menus — further underscores the game's console roots.

To its credit, *Rallye* does offer a healthy dose of gameplay options, including over 250 miles and 30 stages of point-to-point racing, spread over seven countries. There's also a two-player split-screen mode and four-player GameSpy support for the socially active crowd. Damageable vehicles and challenging AI competition add to the experience, but the inability to drive your machine more than a few dozen yards off each course's predetermined path (and some positively anemic force-feedback effects when you're off-road) won't win over any hardcore simmers.

While it may not reproduce the full 3,000-mile course from Paris to Moscow, or let you properly "find your own path" as the game box optimistically promises, *Master Rallye* does offer an attractive and stable platform from which to kick up some impressive-looking particle effects. The inclusion of eclectic vehicles such as the Indian-built Tata Safari or the Schlesser-Renault Buggy also adds a nice curiosity factor.

If convincing physics aren't terribly important to you, *Master Rallye* might earn itself a significant hitch on your hard drive until *Colin McRae Rally 3.0* rolls out of the garage later this year. It's a decent game for not-so-serious racing fans. — *Andy Mahood*

PC GAMER **ABOVE AVERAGE** **67%**

ELVEDE EN MEXICO

I'VE GOT PRETTY good luck with the ladies south of the border — and, no, I'm not trying to be perverse, so get your head out of the gutter. What I'm trying to say is that Mexico has treated me well with regard to the fairer sex. Hmm, I guess I *am* being perverse…

My first trip south came during the summer between my junior and senior years in high school. For a month and a half, I lived with my father in a town just south of Mexico City called Cuernavaca. Dear ol' dad had signed us up in a language-enrichment program where we lived with a Mexican family, spoke nothing but Spanish, and then went to school during the day to learn even more Spanish. Of course, I was also learning the sweet language of love…

The family we lived with had a daughter named Citlali, and Citlali was a hottie. That I looked like a New Kids on the Block reject back in those days never scored me many points with the honeys back home, but in the land of the pop group Menudo, chicks dug ElVede — Citlali especially. We kissed a lot. Better still, while I was out on a day trip with my Spanish class one day, I even managed to lock lips with a *different* señorita! Then, when I came back home, I made out with Citlali some more. Could I have been any cooler? I think not.

A year later I was back — this time, in Puerto Vallarta with the rest of the seniors from my high school. I kissed a girl I met there, too. I wanted her to be my girlfriend. She laughed at me. I cried. Things haven't gotten much better for me since then. The End.

"The Vede"

**Greg Vederman,
Senior Editor**

PRODUCT TYPE

☐ ENTRY	Every hardware review now includes a chart that lets you know if a product is meant to be used with an Entry-level, Mid-range, or Dream-class computer, or if the product itself falls into one of these three categories.
☐ MID	
✓ DREAM	

hstrinity

Trinity is four months shy of its third birthday this month, and this being our big 100th issue, I thought it'd be fun to take a look back at how system specs have changed over the past few years. Gaze in amazement at the differences between a current Dream System and one from late 1999. I wonder, how many of you are still running the old config? Can you still play modern games? Drop me a line and let me know at *hardstuff@pcgamer.com*.

DREAM SYSTEM — AUGUST 2002 — ROUGHLY $3,000 AND ABOVE

CASE			**MODEM**	
400-watt ATX form factor	$100		3COM #2976 56K v.90 hardware modem	$25
PROCESSOR			**MONITOR**	
Intel 2.53GHz P4 533MHz FSB	$650		22-inch ViewSonic P220f	$647
MOTHERBOARD			**VIDEO CARD**	
Intel D850EMV2	$160		NVIDIA GeForce4 Ti 4600	$300
MEMORY			**JOYSTICK**	
Twin sticks of 256MB PC-1066 RDRAM	$320		Thrustmaster Hotas Cougar	$269
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE			**GAMEPAD**	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	$60		Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	$23
BURNER			**SPEAKERS**	
Plextor 40x12x40 CD-RW	$130		Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	$399
FLOPPY DRIVE			**KEYBOARD**	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8		Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$40
HARD DRIVE			**USB MOUSE**	
160GB Maxtor ATA100/133	$240		IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	$50
SOUND CARD			**TOTAL**	**$3,581**
Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy Platinum 5.1	$160			

DREAM SYSTEM — DECEMBER 1999 — ROUGHLY $3,000 AND ABOVE

CASE			**MONITOR**	
300-watt ATX form factor	$100		19-inch Optiquest V95	$343
PROCESSOR			**VIDEO CARD**	
Intel PIII 600MHz	$577		NVIDIA GeForce-256	$300
or AMD Athlon 700MHz	$858		**ADD-ON 3D**	
MOTHERBOARD			12MB 3dfx Voodoo II	$70
For PIII: A-Bit BE6	$106		**JOYSTICK**	
For Athlon: FIC SD-11	$155		Saitek X36 Flight Control System (USB)	$96
MEMORY			**GAMEPAD**	
128MB PC-100 SDRAM	$181		Original MS SideWinder	$23
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE			**SPEAKERS**	
Creative Labs Encore 6x with Dxr3 hardware decoder	$189		Klipsch ProMedia v.2-400	$249
FLOPPY DRIVE			**KEYBOARD**	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8		Microsoft Natural Pro	$75
HARD DRIVE			**USB MOUSE**	
22GB IBM Deskstar 7,200rpm Ultra66	$226		Original IntelliMouse IntelliEye	$55
SOUND CARD			**TOTAL**	With Intel	$2,730
Creative Labs SB Live! Value	$46			With AMD	$3,060
MODEM				
3COM #5685 56K v.90 hardware modem	$86			

■ VOODOO COMPUTERS, WWW.VOODOOPC.COM, 888-708-6636 ■ **PRICE** $3,798

ENTRY
MID
✓ DREAM

F-Class

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

ALRIGHT, WHO DO I HAVE TO MAKE OUT WITH TO GET THEM TO BUY ME ONE OF THESE?

Every high-end PC builder on the market today has pretty much the exact same limited selection of parts to choose from when building a Dream-class system. Many of the brands you see will vary components-wise depending on which way the wind is blowing, but the tech is still fundamentally the same. In other words, whether the GeForce4 in your new PC is made by, say, MSI or Hercules, your 2.53GHz P4-based computer is going to run *just about* as fast as the next guy's.

Where companies are starting to differentiate more than ever is in their case design, build quality, and warranty. As you can imagine, a tweak to any one of these features — say, to the length and robust nature of the warranty — is sure to affect the overall price of a system. Let alone a tweak to *all* of them.
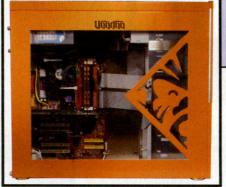
Never has this point been more prominent than with Voodoo machines. Generally speaking, top-end Voodoos like this new F-Class system cost more than the competition, but you're getting the best overall case modification, build quality, and warranty currently available from any of the top-tier builders whose products we've tested.

No other company tricks out Cooler Master's aluminum cases better than Voodoo. With its new Exotix series (reviewed in our June 2002 issue), Falcon Northwest easily competes when it comes to drop-dead-gorgeous paint jobs — both companies can custom-paint your new system with a finish that looks as good as it does on any $500,000 automobile. But Voodoo kicks things up another notch by cutting a window in the side of its towers, complete with its tikki-doll like moniker for added flare. Inside the case is an etched personalized nameplate that lets everyone else at the LAN party know who the beast belongs to. If it's too dark to see, simply fire up this system's internal neon light!

The build quality and cabling of this new F-Class are damn near perfect. Internal case fans are *everywhere*, making the machine sound more like an F1 than a PC, but the cooling system does its job well. And this computer proved to be extremely stable — even with its GeForce4 Ti 4600 overclocked from the default 300MHz core/ 650MHz memory to 315MHz/720MHz, respectively.

Voodoo's warranty is the best in the biz. Every machine comes with a top-to-bottom three-year warranty. If a tech can't fix your computer over the phone, Voodoo will pay for your system to be shipped back and forth for repair. Better yet, if you want to upgrade your computer at any time during its life, Voodoo will pay to have it shipped back and forth from the factory (minor upgrades excluded), where, along with installing your new hardware, Voodoo techs will perform any number of requested operations such as updating your drivers, rewiring the case to look like new — even burn you a new restore CD that takes the new changes into account — all for the price of one hour's worth of labor. (That cost doesn't include the price of your new hardware, of course, but Voodoo does offer upgraders a discount.)

Yeah, yeah — but who cares about all of that other crap if the system doesn't perform, right? No worries there: this F-Class gets it done — it's even faster than the 2.4GHz Mach V we reviewed last month. Why the difference in speed? Voodoo's machine runs on Intel's new 533MHz platform, while Falcon's ran on the older 400MHz FSB. (Remember that Falcon now offers the 533MHz FSB as well.)

Voodoo Computers can build you an AMD or Intel-based system to your exact specifications — *if* you can afford it.

■ SYSTEM SPECS	
■ System	
Processor	P4 2.43GHz
Motherboard	MSI 845SE
Memory	512MB DDR
■ Storage	
Primary Hard Drive	120GB Western Digital
Secondary Hard Drive	None
RAID Controller	None
DVD-ROM Drive	Pioneer 16x
CD-RW Drive	Plextor 40x/12x/40x
■ Expansion	
5.25-inch bays	4 (2 free)
3.5-inch bays	7 (5 free)
AGP Slot	(Yes)
PCI Slots	6 (4 free)
RAM Slots	3 (1 free)
■ Audio	
Sound Card	Sound Blaster Audigy Gamer
■ Video	
Primary Display Adapter	GeForce4 Ti 4600
■ Other	
Keyboard	Logitech Cordless Freedom Optical
Mouse	Logitech Wireless Optical Scroll Mouse
Network Card	Yes
Recovery CD	Yes
Firewire	Yes (one port)
Warranty	Three-year parts and labor

■ BENCHMARKS

■ 3DMARK2001
(Tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer, 24-bit Z-buffer, compressed textures, hardware T&L enabled, and V-sync disabled)
3DMarks: 11,269
Game 1: Car Chase
High Detail: 59.7 fps
Game 2: Dragothic
High Detail: 108.6 fps
Game 3: Lobby
High Detail: 71.5 fps
Game 4: Nature: 55.9
Fill Rate: 2,452.0 MegaTexels per second
Vertex Shader: 99.5 fps
Pixel Shader: 135.6 fps
Advanced Pixel Shader: 103.0 fps

■ QUAKE III
(Tests run in full 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, and V-sync disabled. Second number is with 2x AA; third number is with Quincunx AA; fourth number is with 4x AA.)
640x480
245.5 fps
800x600
243.2 fps
1024x768
229.4 fps, 202.5 fps, 203.0 fps, 122.0 fps
1280x1024
486.8 fps
1600x1200
142.6 fps, 77.8 fps

■ MDK 2
(Tests run in 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, T&L enabled, and V-synch disabled.)
640x480
229.0 fps
800x600
223.6 fps
1024x768
222.6 fps
1280x1024
205.9 fps
1600x1200
158.8 fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Terrific case mods and warranty; extremely fast; exceptionally well-built.

LOWS: Use of DDR memory instead of RDRAM slows performance slightly; it's pricey.

BOTTOM LINE: Computers simply don't get any more "custom" than the new F-Class. It's a work of art.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE 94%

ENTRY	
✓ MID	
✓ DREAM	

Plextor 40/12/40A

A GREAT DRIVE HUMBLED BY THE BUNDLE

If CD burning and read speeds are all you're after, then this drive's for you. Using the bundled Basic version of Roxio's Easy CD Creator, we burned a 647MB CD-R in a breathtaking 3:21. Our test software, CDSpeed2000, reported an average read speed of just over 31x across the entire span of a 700MB disc.

Audiophiles will dig the tweaks introduced in the PlexWriter 40x for improving the quality of CD Audio rips. Optimized PCB circuits near the power supply provide cleaner power to the drive (based on the premise that unreliable, noisy power equals crappy discs). Plextor also made its CD tray black, a color that absorbs more laser light and allegedly results in reduced digital audio extraction error. And a new feature called VariRec allows the real propeller heads to subtly tweak the strength of the laser that burns the disc in order to compensate for finicky players and cheap media.

The catch? Difficult as it is to believe, the Plextor2000 Manager software isn't

compatible with Windows XP! So XP users are left with Liquid Audio's icky Liquid Player — crippleware that permits only 30 dog-slow rips before demanding that you pay for an upgrade (though freeware options are available). Adding insult to injury, VariRec isn't yet supported by Easy CD Creator, so this feature isn't accessible, either, unless you have Ahead's Nero 5.5.7.6 or higher.

Plextor earned its reputation for awesome optical drives with consistently blazing read and write speeds, as well as fast and accurate digital audio extraction. The PlexWriter 40x is no exception, but it loses points for its software issues.

■ BENCHMARKS

Average data transfer
4.7MB/sec.
Average drive rating
31.79x
Random/full-stroke seek (ms)
116/210
Audio extraction (min:sec)
2:30 (using Audiograbber)
Data CD burn (min:sec)
3:21
CPU utilization (at 8x)
5%

Note: The audio extraction test uses a commercially stamped 75:27 minute audio CD. The data-CD burn test uses the bundled applications to create a 647MB CD-R.

PC GAMER EXCELLENT 82%

✓ ENTRY	
✓ MID	
✓ DREAM	

Tacticalboard

THRUSTMASTER'S NEW CONTROLLER *IS* A KEYBOARD!

Thrustmaster's proud history of developing game controllers has carried it into the FPS/strategy market. The Tacticalboard is big: it's half the length of a standard keyboard and slightly wider, too. When considering whether or not to outfit your rig with one, determining if you have the space should be job one. It requires a flat surface to rest on, so plopping it down on your knee won't work.

The Tacticalboard comes complete with four centrally located direction keys, an adjustable seven-button thumb pad, nine quick-action keys, 22 command keys, an escape button, a six-button "chatterbox" voice-command center and volume wheel, and one adjustable squishy gel-filled palm rest. Forty-one of the Tacticalboard's 42 buttons are fully programmable — the escape key isn't — giving you at least four times as many buttons as any other comparable device.

The Tacticalboard uses Thrustmaster's Thrust-mapper configuration software, so mapping keys and key combos to each button is simple. Nineteen preset game configurations are included, but

some of the choices are wonky. Why *Counter-Strike* pre-sets but none for *Half-Life*, for example? The package also includes TeamSound voice-conferencing software and the super-cool Game Commander 2 voice-control program, which is $29.95 on its own.
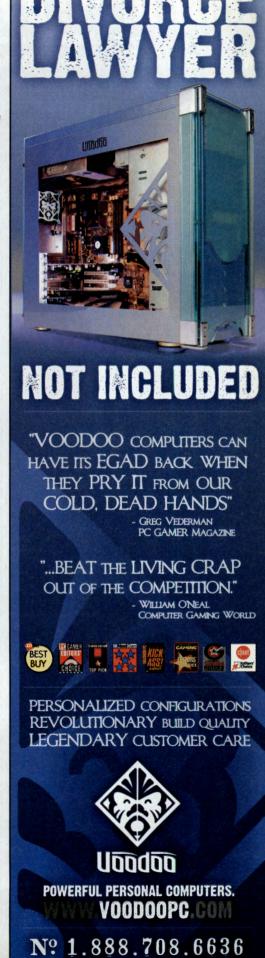
At its heart, the Tacticalboard is a keyboard replacement, just without all those silly letters. It does its job well for first-person shooters and strategy games alike, and it's even more comfortable than Belkin's popular Nostromo n50 gamepad. We have only two minor gripes: reading the black text on the Tactical's dark-blue command buttons can be tough at times, and the unit's thumb-pad buttons are bunched a little too close together for our tastes, making erroneous button-presses somewhat common during furious button-mashing.

Still, if you have the space and the cash, the Tacticalboard is a supremely versatile controller.

PC GAMER EXCELLENT 83%

■ ALIENWARE, WWW.ALIENWARE.COM, 800-494-3382 ■ **PRICE** $3,294

| ENTRY |
| MID |
| ✓ DREAM |

Area-51

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

LIKE THEVEDE, ALIENWARE'S COMPUTERS JUST GET BETTER WITH AGE

If every premium system builder built us a 2.53GHz Pentium 4 with a GeForce4 Ti 4600 along with 512MB of system RAM like this new Area-51, chances are, save for any absolute disasters, the performance difference between them would be nominal. Still, one of the questions I'm asked most here at *PCG* is, "Which company builds the best computers?" That, friends, is a tricky one — even if money is no object. After all, different folks, different strokes. Plus, let's face it: for 99 percent of us, money is a *huge* object. How then, do you, as a buyer, make a choice?

If you've read our review of Voodoo Computers' new F-Class, then you know to be concerned mainly with four things: case design, build quality, warranty, and price vs. performance (i.e., are all those bonus souped-up extras worth the added cost?). We're looking at super high-end computers here, so let's assume that on a scale from 1 to 10 (one being the worst and 10 being the best), the *worst* you'd ever see from any of the usual suspects like Falcon, Alienware, Voodoo, or Hypersonic are 7s across the board. Now, ask yourself, how much money are you willing to spend to turn some of those 7s into 8s, 9s, or 10s?

It's somewhat subjective, but to our eyes, ears, and hands, Voodoo's new F-Class scores a

10 with its case, a 9 with its build quality, a 10 with its warranty, and a 7 when it comes to price vs. performance. How does Alienware's new Area-51 stack up? The case gets an 8, build quality is a 10, the warranty gets an 8, and for overall price vs. performance, the Area-51 is again a perfect 10. In case you weren't paying attention, these numbers give both systems an average score of 9. They're different but equal! Get it? At this level of performance, it's impossible for us to tell you which machine is best for you — only which features we liked more than others and how well the system performed overall.

Why those scores? The Area-51's case gets an 8 because it looks terrific (the new "Titanium" paint job is Alienware's best ever), it's easy to get into and out of, and it offers plenty of room for expansion. It's plastic instead of aluminum, or it would've scored higher.

SYSTEM SPECS

System	
Processor	P4 2.53GHz
Motherboard	Intel 850EMV2
Memory	512MB RDRAM
Storage	
Primary Hard Drive	120GB Western Digital 7,200rpm
Secondary Hard Drive	Same (240GB total storage space)
IDE Controller	Promise
DVD-ROM Drive	Samsung 16x
DVD-RW	Pioneer DVR-104
CD-RW Drive	Plextor 40x/12x/40x
Expansion	
5.25-inch bays	4 (1 free)
3.5-inch bays	6 (3 free)
AGP Slot	(Yes)
PCI Slots	5 (2 free)
RAM Slots	4 (full)
Audio	
Sound Card	Sound Blaster Audigy Gamer
Video	
Primary Display Adapter	GeForce4 Ti 4600
Other	
Keyboard	Standard
Mouse	MS IntelliEye Explorer 3.0
Network Card	Yes
Recovery CD	Yes
Firewire	Yes
Warranty	One-year parts and labor

Both Alienware and Voodoo score 10s when it comes to build quality because both companies use the best parts available, both keep their computers cool despite heavy video-card overclocking (like Voodoo, Alienware overclocks its GF4 Ti 4600 to 315MHz core and 720MHz memory), and both

its competition sells hundreds of systems a month, Alienware sells *thousands,* and it's this huge volume that allows the company to keep its prices so

THESE CREAM-COLORED DRIVES LOOK A BIT OUT OF PLACE NEXT TO ALIENWARE'S SPACE-TASTIC TITANIUM PAINT JOB. REMEMBER, KEEP THAT DRIVE DOOR CLOSED WHILE SHOWING OFF TO YOUR FRIENDS!

pack away internal cables exceptionally well. Alienware didn't rely on an origami master to plan its cable layouts like Voodoo did (true story), but they may as well have — this work is the best we've seen from Alienware to date.

Alienware provides a one-year warranty standard, which is why it scores lower than Voodoo in this category, but along with 24-hour phone support, Alienware will send a qualified technician to your home should the need arise. Furthermore, should that person prove unsuccessful, Alienware will pay to have your system shipped back and forth from the factory for repair, at no additional charge to you.

Alienware is the true price-vs.-performance champion. Time and time again, we're hard-pressed to build our own comparably equipped machines for less than they charge! While most of

low. Oh, and then there's that whole "performance" issue. In case you were wondering, this Area-51, complete with its 2.53GHz P4, is the fastest computer we've ever tested! Still, if you prefer AMD, Alienware swings that way, too.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Faster than The Flash on crack; looks amazingly good; is built tough.

LOWS: Having DVD-RW, DVD-ROM, *and* CD-RW may be overkill — do you *need* them all?

BOTTOM LINE: Alienware's new Area-51 is the absolute fastest PC ever to grace our workbench.

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE **94%**
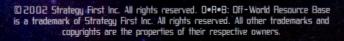
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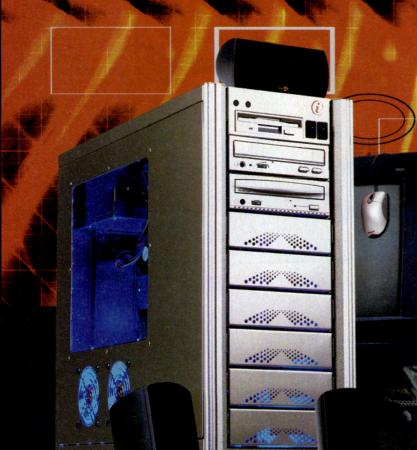# GAMER PRO XP

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$ 1709

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100 MONTHS IN THE TRENCHES

FOR 13 YEARS (SINCE BEFORE WE WERE PCG), BILL TROTTER HAS BEEN WRITING 'THE DESKTOP GENERAL.' HERE HE REMINISCES ABOUT SOME GLORIOUS TIMES

The 100th PC Gamer Desktop General

GREENSBORO, N.C. — I began reviewing for *PC Strategy Guide*, the direct ancestor of this magazine, in August 1988, when the editorial offices were located in Greensboro, N.C. One of the nicest things about the "gaming biz" at that time: it was so new and unformed that almost everyone I worked with came into it from *somewhere else*, and all of us were drawn to it precisely because it was so fresh and exotic.

ent on text-parser technology, embellished only with monochrome graphics or the hideously bilious "colors" made possible by CGA cards. But I remember three titles in particular that were not only great programs in their own right, but also gave me a vision of what might one day (i.e., *now*) be possible through evolved PC technology:

The Universal Military Simulator (1987, designed by Ezra Sidran): It

In my case, I landed a reviewing job because I had written some history-based articles for *PCSG's* founder and publisher, Robert Lock (the entrepreneur who founded *COMPUTE*, cranking out the first few issues on a mimeograph machine in his living room), during a time when he was publishing a slick regional magazine called *Carolina Piedmont*. Lock knew I had also been a peripatetic reviewer for seven years (books, movies, concerts), so I knew how to make a deadline. Even better: I also had many years' experience playing boardgames. When asked if I would like to try my hand at reviewing PC wargames, I went for it like a duck after a June bug.

In the late '80s, of course, all the *real* action in gaming was for the Atari, the Mac, the Commodore 64, and the wonderful but hopelessly mis-marketed Amiga. IBM clones, as PC systems were called back then, were, by comparison, kludgey, hard to program, graphically primitive machines. Lock made some disastrous business decisions, but he *was* prescient enough to see that the IBM PC would gradually overtake and crush all competing systems.

So most of the games I reviewed in the first two years were PC conversions of titles designed on other platforms. By today's standards, most of them were laughably crude, heavily depend-

Trotter receives the gratitude of General Eisenhower

INSIDE:

Wargames of the future — is the hex dead? Read our stunning exposé on page 3.

took a *lot* of imagination to visualize the battles, but the damn thing *worked* — you could indeed simulate any battle, or modify any scenario.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms **(1988, designed by Kou Shibusawa, published by Koei):** The first historical simulation I ever played that achieved true "epic" sweep and dynastic depth. It also introduced a brand-new element of roleplaying, since all the major characters had variable stats for loyalty, courage, tactical moxie, and so on.

Empire **(PC version published in 1987, Mark Baldwin and Walter Bright, designers):** One of the first games I reviewed with EGA graphics, *Empire* hooked me from the start. Some of my custom-made games were so huge and complex that they required *months* of daily play to reach a conclusion. This is the only game that stayed on my hard drive for 11 consecutive years. I'd still be playing it, if I could ever figure out how to get that ancient DOS coding to work under Windows 98.

By the time I started writing "The Desktop General" on a regular basis, the magazine had morphed into *PC Entertainment*, but it was still seen by the wargaming community as pathetically inferior to *Computer Gaming World*. (Not without reason: Lock preferred warm-'n'-fuzzy softball reviews, and ruthlessly purged our copy of any negative comments that might "offend" anyone — hence the origin of that "*PC Lamer*" reputation.) It took at least a year — and Lock's enforced retirement — before the magazine gained legitimacy. Often, I had to call and beg for review copies. In one case (I won't embarrass the designer by identifying the game!), my request was greeted with open derision: obviously, I was some kid in the sticks who was trying to cop a freebie by pretending to be a columnist for a magazine this guy had never heard of. He finally told me to "**** off!" and slammed the phone down, and that particular company never sent us a review copy of any of its subsequent games. It also went out of business a year later. Coincidence? *I don't think so.*

While we're reminiscing about Ye Olde Times, this might be a good opportunity to tell you how I came to be known as "The Colonel." When Matt Firme (now VP and editorial director for all of Imagine Media) joined the Greensboro staff as a lowly reviewer of video games, he and I had this roleplaying thing: I referred to him as "Old Ned," the peg-legged pirate ("Arrgh, laddy, 'tis a fine day for rapine and pillage!"), and he referred to me as "Colonel Trotter" ("Why Ned, Ah think it's time to sit on the verandah and have the slaves whip up some mint juleps!"). Added to this daily badinage in the office cubicles were the facts that I *did* have an impeccable Confederate heritage and a

remarkable capacity for good bourbon, and my grandfather, one of the most prominent citizens of Charlotte, N.C. — a famous man in these parts — really *was* a retired bird colonel: he'd served in both world wars, risen to command an 1,800-man "base force" of engineers in the Pacific, and was always called "Colonel Pease" by everyone, including President Eisenhower, until the day he died, at age 102, in 1989. Put all that together, and the "Colonel" moniker stuck like a burr, eventually becoming an integral part of my columnistic persona.

So I've had a unique viewpoint from which to observe the evolution of PC gaming, as it's grown from a hobby for a small number of eccentric and notoriously crabby fanatics into a form of robust mass-market entertainment for millions of people in every part of the world. There are still hardcore grognards who think I'm an asshole, and a corrupt one to boot (those are the unforgiving jerks who keep bringing up the *Ascendancy* fiasco on the Usenet forums, even though 95 percent of today's wargamers have no idea what they're talking about, and despite the fact that I published an unprecedented public mea culpa explanation in the pages of *CGW*), but I wear their darts of contempt without shame. I don't write to please *them*, but to attract as wide an audience as possible to the war/strategy genre — how else will it continue to thrive? I've consistently tried to use this forum for the good of the genre as a whole, and especially as a means of calling attention to praiseworthy independent designers who couldn't afford to advertise in a high-school yearbook.

I've tried to write to the highest professional standards, and I've been fortunate to work with a series of editors who value good writing and have given me the kind of unwavering support that makes all the deadline hassles tolerable. What I write in these pages has *real* consequences, and that's a responsibility I take very seriously.

I still have a lot of *fun* doing this, and I'll keep cranking out these columns as long as the magazine exists or until I enter the shadows of Alzheimer's Land. Someday, when the history of PC gaming is formally written, I hope the collected "Desktop General" columns will serve as an important archive, chronicling how one distinctive genre evolved. I hope that I'll at least be remembered for raising the tone of the critic-vs.-reader dialogue, for sustaining some reliable measure of eloquence, for taking this "hobby" *seriously*, and for giving our readers a reliable monthly dose of hard news and cheerfully subjective opinion — leavened, I trust, with a soupcon of civilized wit.

Here's to another 100!

Colonel Trotter's strategic insights contributed to the historic accord reached at the Yalta summit in 1945 (Trotter, exhibiting profound reverence, is standing at far right)

The Colonel's Official Favorite Games Ever

Wing Commander (1990; Chris Roberts; Origin): *Everybody* who first saw this game just stood around the giant monitor screen with mouths agape, filled with joy and wonder. Not only was it one of the all-time greatest dogfight sims ever conceived, but it also blew that whole genre wide open by virtue of its stunning graphics and feverish intensity.
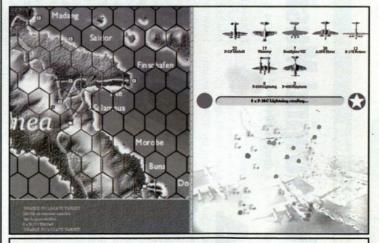
War in Russia (1993; Gary Grigsby; SSI): A Russian Front fan's wet dream, combining awesome sweep with mind-boggling detail.

Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord (2000; Charles Moylan and Steve Grammont; Big Time Software): Belongs in the core collection of every serious wargamer. Its perfect-pitch blend of real-time bang-bang and tactical depth, seamlessly wedded to exciting 3D "personal war movie" graphics, represented something entirely new.

Gettysburg (1995; John Tiller and Jim Rose; TalonSoft): The biggest, handsomest, most manageable simulation of this gigantic battle ever published. It still towers above every other Civil War game.

Rainbow Six (1998; Carl Schnurr and Brian Upton; Red Storm): So powerful, so realistic, so nail-bitingly intense that it simply obliterated every previous attempt to simulate small unit-missions. This is about as close to the Real Thing as a simulation can get.

HONORABLE MENTION: THE ABSOLUTE WORST WARGAME I'VE EVER PLAYED:

Patriot (1992; Rick Banks and Frank Chadwick; Three-Sixty Software): Ostensibly a staff-college-level simulation of the Gulf War, this beached whale offered not one single *battle scene* — just a ton of boring organization charts, "unit-frontage" statistics, some badly recorded radio transmissions that purported to describe the action you were never allowed to actually *see*, and a few big arrows that crawled with maddening, glacial slowness across a featureless map of Iran. Never before or since has any wargame numbed me into such a paralyzing, coma-like state of inertia. If you want a perfect example of a game that's literally "unplayable," look no further.

After plotting the seaborne invasion of Normandy, Trotter drew up the plans for a strategic assault on the Pacific Theater

alternate lives

Steve Klett

Morrowind Musings

Don't have a dream system? These tips may improve your game.

As I've been sucked completely into the world of Vvardenfell for the last month, logic dictates that I talk about the little diversion that is *Morrowind*.

I feel it only fair to share a few technical secrets I've learned that will give *anyone* a huge frame-rate boost when playing this power-hungry beast of a game. The trick to fluid play with those mind-boggling graphics is…drum-roll please…to go out and buy a shiny new 1.7GHz machine with 512MB RAM and a GeForce4 Ti card. Simple.

Okay, so you don't have a spare $1,500 or so for such an upgrade. Neither did I, and my 1.1GHz Athlon with 256MB RAM and a 64MB GeForce2 MX was barely chugging along at 5fps to 10fps when I entered the game's towns.

There *is*, however, a decent (if controversial) immediate fix, which comes in the form of a user-created "crack" that effectively sidesteps *Morrowind*'s built-in anti-piracy software, better known as Macrovision's SafeDisc.

This SafeDisc component was added to try to prevent people from making illegal copies of the game or from simply installing one copy on multiple machines. Unfortunately, though, it has the side effect of reducing the game's performance by 20 percent or more!

Now, it hardly seems fair that good folks like us need to endure such a performance penalty when we're paying for *our* games. (Okay, so I got mine for free, but you get the point.) That's why I have few qualms about recommending that you go out and find the "Morrowind NOCD" crack, which was floating around the web and various newsgroups at the time of this writing. This "crack" replaces the default *Morrowind* executable file and allows you to launch the game without the encumbrance of SafeDisc. (You should back up everything before using the file, of course.)

I've been using the crack for several days now, and it's boosted my average performance by at least 5fps to 10fps across the board. Similar cracks are available for other games saddled by SafeDisc: *Morrowind* is certainly not alone in its misery.

Speaking of Bethesda's masterpiece, rumors persist about the existence of a rare, magical robe — the Robe of St. Roris — that supposedly imbues the wearer with near-invincibility, and can be worn over armor! Some stories point to its location in a dungeon on an island just off the coast, southeast of Seyda Neen! Search carefully, traveler.

Send your Morrowind *frame-rate tips and tricks, plus any cool items or easter eggs you've discovered, to* alternatelives@pcgamer.com.

Owners of GeForce-based video cards should try setting Digital Vibrance (in the nView tab in Device Settings) to high, which gives the world a more colorful hue.

MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. MORROWIND, 2. MORROWIND, 3. MORROWIND, 4. MORROWIND, 5. JEDI KNIGHT II (CHANGE OF PACE)

extended play

The Bargain Bin-efits of Three Oldies

KOHAN GOTY EDITION: Who knew that *PC Gamer* editors wielded such colossal power? When we named Strategy First's *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns* our 2001 Real-Time Strategy Game of the Year, we figured it would lead to little more than a few more online sales of this excellent RTS. But, lo and behold, you can now wander into your local games shop and grab the *Kohan Game of the Year Edition*, based on the simple fact of our having presented the game with this award. The *GOTY Edition* features 12 new maps, 13 new hero characters, and patched AI that offers better pathfinding. From its smart use of terrain to its deep story elements, *Kohan* does every element impressively well. We give this $30 package a hearty recommendation.

STEEL BEASTS GOLD: We really liked *Steel Beasts* when it first appeared. Realistic tank sims are rare these days, and when you find one that solidly simulates life inside a battle-ready M1A1 or German Leopard 2A4, it's a thing to cherish. *Steel Beasts Gold*, also from Strategy First, adds a whopping 30 new missions. Many of them are designed by

Daniel Morris

gamers who took full advantage of the powerful map/mission editor to craft new scenarios for the original release. It's rare that an add-on offers even 15 new missions, let alone 30.
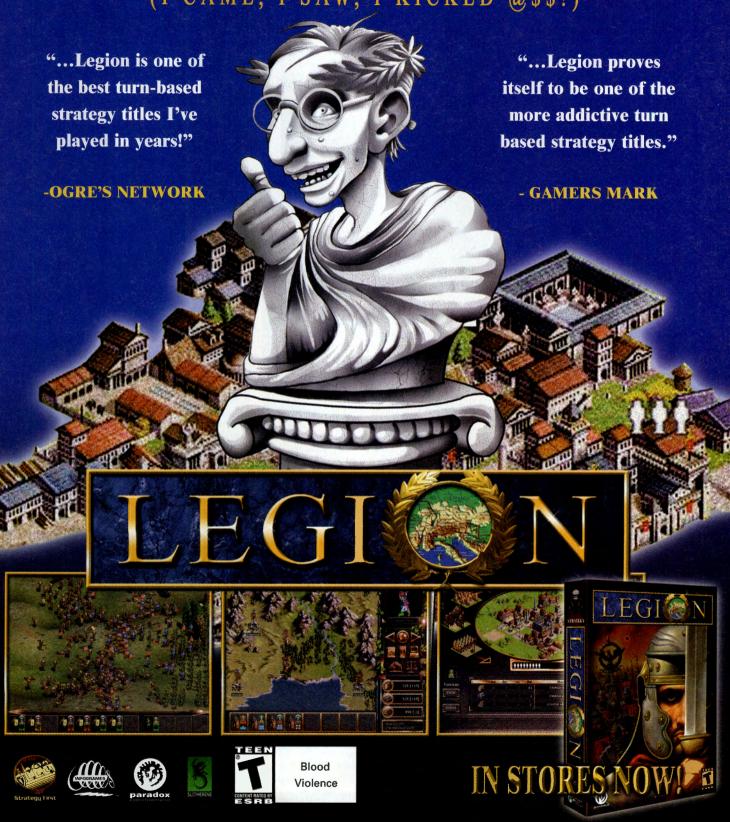
All the original goodness is intact, too. You can play as the gunner in an individual tank, or pull the command level all the way up to company command. Multiplayer support lets you play cooperatively with buddies at several stations inside a single tank.

Steel Beasts Gold is retailing at $30, and can almost certainly be found cheaper. But even at the full price, it's money well spent for those who missed it on the first go-round.

DELTA FORCE TRILOGY: Lest you think we're recommending *all* bundles this month, we must now turn our attention to NovaLogic's *Delta Force Trilogy*. Now, we wish NovaLogic all the success in the world — they're a smaller publisher fighting the good fight, and each of the three *Delta Force* games was an underrated pleasure when it first appeared. But that time has passed, even for the most recent of the three, *Delta Force: Land Warrior*. In February 2001, we thought *Land Warrior* was a decent game (78%) that hadn't really kept pace with the times. Well, a year and a half has passed, and if *Land Warrior* looks dated, imagine how *Delta Force* and *Delta Force 2* play. Not very well.

— extendedplay@pcgamer.com

killing box

Chuck Osborn

War Games

Giving away violent games? Arrest that man's Army!

America's Army uses the *Unreal Warfare* engine and emphasizes killing, and you'll be able to get it for free from the government.

I read last month's feature about *America's Army* with much interest. Published by the U.S. Army, this first-person shooter will be released for free to the public this summer, primarily as a recruitment tool (despite the Army's insistence to the contrary).

My first reaction? I couldn't believe no one's thought of this before. Games are already used as training tools (remember *Marine Doom*?), and *America's Army* extends that idea.

But then something began to gnaw at me. First, there's the contradiction: the same government that's highly critical of violent games on the federal level and is attempting to legislatively restrict access on the state level now plans to give out a free Teen-rated shooter. (Blood is marginally visible; however, most tactical military FPSs are burdened with the ESRB's Mature rating.). Isn't that a bit...peculiar?

Yes, it is. But extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary measures. We're a nation at war. And unlike past generations, ours has watched *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*; prospective recruits know that young soldiers die on the battlefield, and in terrible ways. The Army is doing what it has to do to fill boots with warm bodies.

America's Army will be a multiplayer-only game (at least at first) run over government-financed servers that'll track your stats and experience. The developers foresee future servers that auto-assign squad leaders based on experience and a "value gauge" that monitors your worthiness as a teammate.

It only follows that the best players — those most proficient in battlefield strategy, teamwork, and leadership — will be the ones most coveted for recruitment.

In my January 2002 column I asked, "If the Senator Liebermans of the world really think that action games turn normal kids into skinny, pale killing machines, then wouldn't they want to put a copy of *Ghost Recon* in the hands of every draft-age American male?" Essentially, that's what's happening.

I'm not saying you shouldn't play *America's Army*; for now, the only personal info required will be a handle, password, and an optional email address for updates (which means, ironically, that the Army won't have a way to check if a player meets the 13-and-over age requirement). There's also no military draft right now, and — theoretically, at least — our blind lottery system won't allow data culled from an online game to let the Army pick and choose draftees.

But I have to wonder, how will crusading legislators and judges react? Will they attempt to lock up four-star generals for giving "violent" games to kids?
— killingbox@pcgamer.com

MOD OF THE MONTH

Can't wait to enlist? Own *Ghost Recon*? Then try *Hunt for Osama* on this month's *PCG* CD, or download it from *www.levels4you.com*.

MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. FREEDOM FORCE, 2. JEDI KNIGHT II, 3. DUKE NUKEM: MANHATTAN PROJECT, 4. WARCRAFT III, 5. ANARCHY ONLINE

88   AUGUST 2002   PC GAMER

My '67 Camaro is 650hp worth of tire-smokin' excitement.

sim column

No Victory Laps for *Motor City Online*?

LATE LAST YEAR, ABOUT the time that loyal fans were gearing up for a fresh new chapter in EA's long-running *Need for Speed* franchise, the company executed a sharp left turn. Instead of releasing another standalone arcade racer in the tradition of 2000's critically acclaimed *Porsche Unleashed* or 1999's *High Stakes*, the publisher jumped directly into the subscription-based Internet gaming wars with *Motor City Online*.

It was a bold new experiment in online racing and car customization, showcasing classic American hot-rods and muscle cars. EA even dropped the venerable *Need for Speed* prefix from the title to distinguish *MCO* from any of its arcade-racing predecessors.

While *MCO* was generally well-received by the gaming press (I personally gave it an 81% in the February 2002 issue of *PCG*), it still suffered from a few conceptual design flaws and mechanical misfires. Chief among these were an ongoing lag issue and a serious shortage of gamers willing to fork out $10/month for the privilege of playing the thing.

As with any online game, however, *MCO* has the luxury of being able to reinvent itself

Andy Mahood

through the ongoing release of patches and upgrades. Factor in a steadily growing list of subscribers (depending on time of day, the numbers online at any one time now vary between 1,000 and 2,000), and it seems appropriate for a second look at the updated game.

I've stuck with *MCO* since its initial launch, and while the game may not require a full factory recall just yet, it's still plagued by some significant speed bumps. Lag and warping issues remain the largest. The car-customization screens and user interface have clearly benefited from new wrinkles like a "test-before-you buy" parts catalog and a more generous weekly paycheck. But head-to-head racing events are often exercises in sheer frustration, as an absurd lag-induced time-travel bug allows crashed-out backmarkers to regularly warp ahead of clean-lapping front-runners.

The situation has gotten so bad that many subscribers don't even bother to enter their machines in anything but solo-vehicle trials events anymore.

MCO certainly offers a lot of gameplay depth for gearheads who simply want to build up hot-rods from scratch (with a gazillion available performance parts) and then proudly show them off to their peers. But in the end, that's just not gonna cut it. EA needs to get that lag/warp thing figured soon out if *MCO* is ever going to be more than just an obscure MMORPG for virtual mechanics.
— simcolumn@pcgamer.com

Morrowind

It's worth an early trip to Vivec to seek out Sirilonwe for Mark and Recall spells.

→ GENERAL TIPS

■ Must-Have Spells — Mark and Recall

You can buy them from Sirilonwe at the Vivec, Guild of Mages. Always cast Mark near your quest giver. When you've completed the quest and need to return, you can do so quickly. Got too much loot to carry? Cast Mark in front of the merchant you want to sell your stuff to. Grab as much loot as you can until you can't move, then cast Recall and cash it all in.

■ Tip for Redguards

Be careful using Adrenaline Rush. If your health dips below 25 and you are experiencing Adrenaline Rush, you'll die when it wears off. Heal your health back above 25 and you'll live when the effects disappear.

■ Strong characters right out of the box

(1) Like archery? Be a Wood Elf with Marksman as a Major Skill: it gives you a Marksman of 75. (2) Like the long sword? Pick Redguard with Long Blade as a Major Skill and you'll have a Long Blade of 50.

→ LEVEL ADVANCEMENT

For optimal level advancement, pick major skills carefully. You can choose only five.

Two skills you can use all the time are Athletics and Acrobatics. Training like an Olympic athlete is effective gameplay and good roleplaying. Since you can always practice and improve these skills, at character creation, make them major skills for fast level advancement.

In general, also include at least one armor skill and one weapon skill as a major skill. These are essential for survival and quest success.

The last major skill is usually a spell college. Conjuration is a good choice for a fast start, since casting Bound Weapon and Bound Armor spells give you skill and attribute bonuses (see below).

→ SKILL ADVANCEMENT (GENERAL HINTS)

■ Advancement in miscellaneous skills can be the most frustrating at very low skill levels (5 to 20). Thus, training miscellaneous but useful skills to 20 is good if you can afford it, and at skill level 5 to 20, it's most important to cast spells that improve chance of success. (Many players rarely use anything but their major and minor skills, yet some skills, like Armorer, are always useful, even if not critical to a character concept.)

■ Join all the factions to get best rates for training. If you have spare gold, invest in training hard-to-advance skills like Marksman and Armorer.

■ Cast all skill success–enhancing spells before practicing. You normally get skill uses only for successes.

■ Do not underestimate Agility: it's potentially the strongest of all your attributes. It governs how much you hit enemies, how hard you are to hit, and how much you are knocked down and helpless.

■ Find weak sparring partners for practice. A perfect sparring partner has low skills (so you have higher chance of success per attempt), high health (so he can take a licking and keep on ticking), slow movement (so you can escape if things get exciting), feeble attacks, and handy locations. Preferred sparring partners for beginners are the slow-moving, easy-to-find, feeble mudcrabs abundant near your starting location, Seyda Neen. Another convenient sparring partner is the solitary harmless citizen in his house. You can bully most solitary citizens in houses, and let them beat on you, without triggering the reaction of guards and good Samaritans. (For example, Astius Hanotepelus in Balmora has no weapon and loves getting a good beating.)

■ Be kind to your sparring partners, or they won't last long. Don't kill them: that's not the point. You want them handy for training again and again. Exit, sleep a lot, and they'll regain their hit points and be fresh for your next beating. Better yet, practice

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Use Bound Weapons to practice. They include skill and attributes bonuses, both of which make you more likely to succeed.

Bound Battle-Axe: +10 Axe
Bound Boots: +10 Speed
Bound Cuirass: +5 Heavy Armor, +5 Medium Armor, +5 Light Armor, +5 Unarmored
Bound Dagger: +10 Short Blade
Bound Gauntlets: +10 Hand-to-Hand, +10 Agility
Bound Helm: +5 Heavy Armor, +5 Medium Armor, +5 Light Armor, +5 Unarmored
Bound Longbow: +10 Marksman
Bound Longsword: +10 Long Blade
Bound Mace: +10 Blunt Weapon
Bound Shield: +10 Block
Bound Spear: +10 Block

Join all the Guilds! It'll give you the best prices on stuff all over Vvardenfell, as well as safe and free places to rest, plus plenty of low-level quests to beef up your character.

Seek out this pigeon in Balmora's southeast quadrant. He's alone in his house and unarmed, and not so bright. Practice everything from sneak to boxing/hand-to-hand combat on him.

your healing spells on your sparring partners, and train a weapon skill, an armor skill, and Restoration, all at once. Very practical.

- Keep your Fatigue at 100%. Lowered fatigue is lowered chance for success.
- Think of battle experience and skill training as very different processes. In battle, concentrate on not dying, and don't worry about whether you're getting lots of uses. In skill training, make sure you have feeble opponents, do minimum damage per attack, and have maximum enhanced chance of success for each skill use.

→ ## SKILL ADVANCEMENT (SPECIFIC SKILLS)

Enchant: You get uses for making items, but also get small uses just for using items. So cast all the enchantments you have on all your enchanted items periodically. The items regenerate magicka over time. In theory, you always want all your enchanted items depleted and recharging all the time. Just make sure you sleep a good long time to bring all enchanted power bars up to 100% before tackling a tough dungeon or opponent, so you're good and ready.

Restoration: Purchase a Fortify Attribute spell (Nimbleness, Fortitude, Wisdom, Jack of Trades, Charisma, Feet of Notorgo, Orc Strength, Iron Will). Now make a custom Fortify Strength spell and use it regularly in combat. Secret Tip: If you make multiple Fortify Strength spells with different names (e.g., My-T-Strong, SO-Strong, 2-Strong), their effects will stack. In other words, you can cast four differently named spells, each with Fortify Strength +5, for a total effect of +20 Strength.

Purchase a Vigor spell (or other Restore Fatigue variant) and use it. Remember, you get uses only for successes, and low Fatigue reduces your chances of success.

Alchemy: Eat ingredients. Beginners feel obliged to carry around their harvested ingredients, but they're often not worth carrying and selling. Just eat all those flowers and mushrooms.

Armor Skills (Block, Unarmored, Light Armor, Medium Armor, Heavy Armor): Collect rats and let them follow and chew on you. Being a rat teething ring also gives you an opportunity to practice healing spells and enchantments. When training Block,

THE PERFECT HERO

Race

Redguard (strong combat focus with a +15 bonus in Long Blade — the most of any race)

Class

Custom Class with the following attributes:

- Specialization: Combat (because brute force is a quick and dirty solution to any problem)
- Favorite Attributes: Strength (so you can optimize your attack); Agility (it enhances your attack damage *and* makes you harder to hit)

Major Skills

- Long Blade (easy to find, great weapons)
- Conjuration: Bound weapons are nice weapons to have, especially Bound Long Sword and Bound Long Bow (both available at Balmora, Guild of Mages). Both do wicked 40+ damage.
- Mysticism: For Mark and Recall spells.
- Light Armor: Because, well, it's light. It protects you and allows you to carry more loot.
- Athletics: You run a lot in the game. May as well take advantage of the uses so you can level-up faster.

Minor Skills

- Acrobatics: Like Athletics, jumping is an easy way to gain uses toward leveling up.
- Alchemy: While Alchemy is a useful skill, the key here is to train your Alchemy up at the Balmora, Guild of Mages. Alchemy helps raise your Intelligence, which allows you more Magicka. Redguards aren't very good at magic, so this extra help is needed.
- Speechcraft: There are lots of conversations and persuasion in the main quest, so this skill is important to have.
- Marksman: Complements Bound Long Bow.
- Security: Always good to have, given the number of locked doors in the world.

Birthsign

The Steed: Gives you +25 to speed. Higher speed means you run faster *and* you're harder to hit.

You now have a character with a Long Blade skill of 50, Speed at 65, and strong Health and Strength — the perfect Hack and Slash right at the start. Buy the Iron Saber from Arrille in Seyda Neen, and you're all set!

You'll look like an idiot, but jump as much as possible when traveling. It'll do wonders for your Acrobatics skills.

Swim whenever possible (and it's safe, of course) to raise your Athleticism rating.

Lure monsters to the water and then jump in and pick them off with long-range weapons.

Spell Colleges

Make low-magnitude, low-duration versions of spells for practice — one for each spell college you want to improve in. Then use these spells just before you go to sleep. Never go to sleep with any magicka points left: always use them to practice spells. The following custom spells are useful for both practice and gameplay:

Destruction: Custom short duration, 5-damage ranged fire, frost, shock, or poison spell.

Alteration: Custom Water Walking (short duration). Short duration means you get lots of practice. And water-walking is very handy for long-distance wilderness travel. It keeps the slaughterfish away, and turns Vvardenfell's coastline into a well-marked, broad, safe highway. (And hell, water-walking's just plain cool, isn't it?)

Illusion: Custom Light (short duration). Use often during exploration and loot-searches.

Mysticism: Custom Detect Enchantment (short duration). "So *that's* where the good loot is." Or "Say, he's got an enchanted item? He might be a great deal more dangerous than he looks."

Restoration: Custom Restore Strength (Magnitude 18-18, Duration 1). Costs one point. Vital when you become encumbered because of the dreaded Damage Strength attacks of certain undead.

Conjuration: Any Custom Bound Weapon or Armor costing 1 point.

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make sure you face the rats: you use Block only when your attacker is in front of you.

Armorer: Unfortunately, you can't practice this skill without expensive, cumbersome, consumable resources. Join the Fighter's Guild and visit each of their guild halls. Find the Fighter's Guild Equipment Chests, which contain free Armorer's Tools. Use them up first.

Melee Weapon Skills (Blunt Weapon, Long Blade, Axe, Spear, Short Blade): Keep a badly worn weapon for practice on weak, harmless things. And uncheck the "Use Best Attack" option and use the worst attack. (Each weapon has different damage effects for three modes — slash, chop, and thrust. For practice, you should use the mode with the lowest average damage.) If you do less damage, you get more successful uses per doomed punching bag. Use the badly worn weapon, even if you have a Bound Weapon summoned: you still get the bonuses for the duration of the spell, whether you use the bound weapon or not.

Marksman: No short-cuts for this one. It uses consumable resources, and reloads

aren't always easy to come by. And victims insist on running around and making themselves hard to hit. Definitely practice with Bound Longbow. And stand waist-deep in water and shoot at creatures (not NPCs). Creatures won't enter water deeper than a quarter their height, so your standing waist-deep makes them come close and stand still, presenting a good target. Just watch out for slaughterfish.

Hand-to-Hand: You can't reduce damage delivered by choosing a worn weapon or the worst attack. But your victim always recovers (so long as you stop punching the moment the victim faints), so a single punching bag will last forever if you're careful. (Poor mudcrab.)

Athletics: Run everywhere. And don't shy away from swimming: Swimming earns skill uses 50% faster than running.

Security: Good news: better-quality tools increase your chance of success. Bad news: the tools are consumed with use, all tools cost money, and few folks sell them. At least finding easy practice locks is a cinch. Learn the Lock spell (adds a

super-easy Level 5 lock). Lock a crate, then pick. Repeat endlessly.

Sneak: Find a solitary guy who never turns around. Then stand behind him and stack a dozen Krugerands on the Sneak button. Go take a shower, eat, read the paper, check your high-tech investments. Return to a more-Sneaky hero.

Acrobatics: Just jab the jump button every second of your hero's life. Each fall gives lots of uses, but climbing and falling and recovering from the fall take so long (not to mention the pain) that it's not an efficient method for skill training.

Mercantile: Keep trying. Even if an offer is refused, you can keep offering it until the NPC accepts. You make him very angry in the process, but skill uses in mercantile depend on the percentage change of offer price. So the higher the percentage, the more uses you'll get.

Speechcraft: Free slaves. They instantly Like You A Lot. Then Admire them until they despise you. (They're slaves. Who cares if they despise you?) Also, Orcs are easy to practice your speechcraft on. **PCG**

Check the Rating!

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating system can help you decide whether a computer or video game is right for your family. The ESRB system provides both CONTENT DESCRIPTORS that indicate whether there are particular content elements which may be of interest or concern, and RATING Symbols that tell you what age the game is appropriate for.

RATING SYMBOLS
(found on the front of the game box):

EARLY CHILDHOOD
eC
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Content may be suitable for persons ages 3 and older.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Content may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Content may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older.

MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Content may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older.

ADULTS ONLY
AO
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Content suitable only for adults.

RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Product is awaiting final rating.

CONTENT DESCRIPTORS
(found on the back of the game box):
The content descriptors tell you whether the game includes elements such as:

- Mild language
- Strong language
- Mild animated violence
- Mild realistic violence
- Comic mischief
- Animated violence
- Realistic violence
- Animated blood and gore
- Realistic blood and gore
- Animated blood
- Realistic blood
- Suggestive themes
- Mature sexual themes
- Strong sexual content
- Use of tobacco or alcohol
- Use of drugs
- Gaming
- Edutainment informational content
- Some assistance may be needed

ESRB
ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD
1-800-771-ESRB   www.esrb.org

ARC
ADVERTISING REVIEW COUNCIL
ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

This publication abides by the *Principles and Guidelines for Responsible Advertising Practices* developed by the Advertising Review Council of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

PC GAMER CONTEST RULES
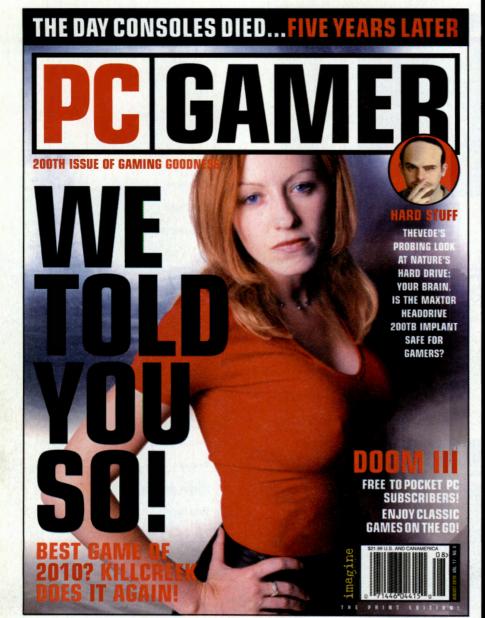
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THE DAY CONSOLES DIED...FIVE YEARS LATER

PC GAMER

200TH ISSUE OF GAMING GOODNESS

WE TOLD YOU SO!

BEST GAME OF 2010? KILLCREEK DOES IT AGAIN!

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THE PRINT EDITION!

WE TOLD YOU SO!

Our cover story this month — Stevie "Killcreek" Case. The legendary Game Goddess shares the intimate details on her tumultuous life in the games industry, reveals the ups and downs of founding her own development startup, and gives us an exclusive sneak peek at the long-awaited sequel to her sensational runaway blockbuster success *Operation BlackJolt: The Lilith Imperative.*

CONSOLES R.I.P.

The Xbox, PS2, and Gamecube...what happened? This month we celebrate the five-year anniversary of the last console sold. Our sad retrospective includes exclusive interviews with Microsoft's Bill Gates ("Wow — what a f***-up!") and Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto ("What was I thinking?"), plus sneak peeks at *Zelda X* and *Metal Gear 2010: The Return of Solid Snake.*

SUPER PREVIEWS

Your first looks at twisting the night away in *Mary-Kate and Ashley's Twentysomething Dance Party*; warping around the universe with a million alien pals in the super–massively multiplayer *Star Trek: Federation*; the very last return of bitter, sagging septuagenarian Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider Retirement: So Very Tired*; plus a look at *Bruce Shelley's Sid Meier's Civilization.*

FEATURE REVIEW

SimGeneSplicer is supposed to let you mix and match DNA, and with the help of household ingredients kept under the sink, create new life. Well, we've got the monkey. We've got the coconut. Are you ready for the coming of *Coconut Monkey II*? (May God rest CM's gravy-smothered soul.) Plus, first reviews of *Star Wars: Episode VII*, American McGee's *Hello Kitty*, and *Starcraft 2.*

PC GAMER

"Excellent...all is going according to plan," snivels the dark shape melodramatically. "The fools! Little do they realize that this 100th issue — which they hold right in their clammy, unsuspecting hands — will seal their doom." Another figure pops into view. "But master," says the second, equally dark shape, "how exactly will this doom-sealing commence? I don't understand." The first shape sighs. "Okay, one more time. The mystic number of 100 coincides with the rise of the Cult of the Monkey. We've been laying the groundwork for this movement since issue #1. Haven't you been paying attention?" The second shape ponders for a moment. "Cult of the...Monkey, you say? Are you sure? I'd been hoping it was a more exciting animal. Lemurs are nice." "No, it's definitely a monkey." A pause. "Can we take a vote?"