

19 REVIEWS

**MASTER OF ORION 3 - IGI 2
FREELANCER - C&C: GENERALS**

**EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW!
RADEON 9800**

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the hardest missions

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057

SOLO EDITION



Public soldiers lay siege to
in a New Conglomerate
squadmates begin the
capturing the facility.



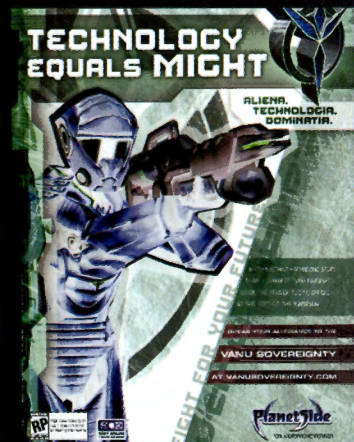
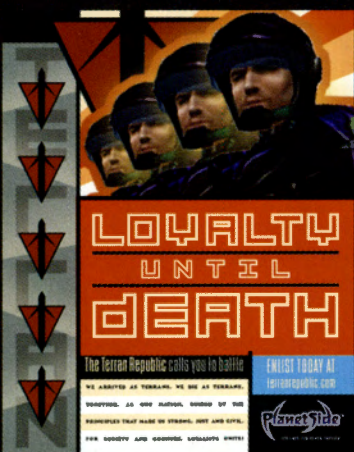
Strap it on and lock n' load as you
fight for one of three empires,
battling across 10 huge continents
and numerous front lines.



Swift Vanu Sovereignty flyers
advance on a Terran Republic base,
pounding enemy ground forces
attempting to run for cover.



From dusk till dawn, the battles for
planet Auraxis™ rage on, as strongholds,
front lines and captured territories
continually change hands.



New Conglomerate forces overpower enemy defenses and begin their assault on the Vanu Sovereignty base.



A New Conglomerate squad of infantry and armor prepares to reinforce their empire on Searhus, where hundreds of friendlies and enemies are presently waging war.



Terran Republic barracks facility, while the process of...



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WILL DIE.**

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New Conglomerate soldiers struggle to destroy the old established order and conquer the planet of Auraxis. Their primary objective is to "liberate" the planet through extreme force. Anarchy over oppression!

JACKHAMMER

The Jackhammer is the New Conglomerate's primary multi-barreled heavy assault shotgun. With solid ammunition capacity and rapid-fire capabilities, it's a devastating weapon for room-to-room firefights.



NC-472CH543DKU-928



The Vanu Sovereignty soldiers fight to preserve and control the planet's alien technology, using a hybrid of human and alien technology to gain an edge against other empires. Adapt, evolve, ascend. Technology equals might!

LASHER

The Vanu Sovereignty Lasher fires concentrated energy orbs that lash nearby soldiers and vehicles at close range. Targets directly impacted by an orb receive maximum damage.



VS-551SER5D212-928



Terran soldiers remain united and loyal to the old Republic while struggling to control and reunify the splintering empires. Their goal is to neutralize and regain supremacy over those who oppose the Terran Republic. Loyalty until death!

CHAINGUN

The Terran Republic's Chaingun is a heavy assault machine gun designed to rapidly shell out rounds from a generous 9mm ammo base. The speed at which it fires can easily rip apart enemy soldiers.



TR-473DSDF55K4-928

VANGUARD

Well balanced, the New Conglomerate Vanguard brings speed, solid armor and hefty firepower to battle. The main turret, which houses both a 150mm cannon and a 20mm machine gun, is capable of a 360-degree pivot, and can dispatch a deadly wave of liberation.



NC-472CH102DKU-928

THRESHER

The Vanu Sovereignty Thresher is a heavy assault buggy built upon a gravitic drive system that replaces wheels with anti-grav pods that propel the vehicle. The deadly Flux Cannon serves as the primary weapon. The Thresher's hover capabilities allow it to strafe left or right and easily cross water during battle.



VS-551SV540212-928

PROWLER

The Terran Republic's largest battle tank, the Prowler is heavily armored with a 360-degree 100mm cannon. A secondary gunner can control a Dual 12mm Rotary Chaingun, which is stacked upon the primary turret. The Prowler can lay down more cover fire than an entire squad of infantry.



TR-4732SD1F8KU-723

For more information on each empire's capabilities, armor, weapons and vehicles, visit www.station.com/planetside



FOR LAND.
FOR POWER.
FOREVER™



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Think you already know everything there is to know about *GTA: Vice City*? Think again. When *Vice City* is released on the PC later this year, it will be the definitive edition of Rockstar's masterful achievement. Only *PC Gamer* could get to play it and bring you the exclusive story behind the game, its developers, and why it could be the most important title ever released on the PC.



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Soldier of Fortune

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ON THIS MONTH'S PCG CD We've got something for everyone this month — action, strategy, and RPGs! Check out the incredible demos for *Freelancer*, *Tropico 2*, *Enclave*, *Rhem*, and *Enigma*. Damn, are we good or what?

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It's back! Test your mental mettle against our mighty crossword puzzle — the best ever devised.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"I forgot my mantra."



Be a lover, not a hater! We have a word around here for haters — they're referred to as "jackals." These ne'er-do-wells see all the bad things in games and the games industry. Most of them live under the cover of anonymity on Internet message boards,

yelling inanely like that crazy guy who hangs around the bus shelter. They often claim to be fans, enthusiasts, even critics, but frankly, they're haters, and they could be harming our games.

I fervently believe — but would be happy to be proven wrong — that the current dismal state of the PC flight-sim business is due in large part to the fact that the core fan base bitched and moaned about pretty much everything, kicking the passion for development out of many involved in the projects, and turning off more casual observers who might stumble across a newsgroup seeking expert insight.

Let's make this clear: I'm not being an apologist for bad games. Our reviews procedure and scores stand up every step of the way. Nor am I advocating gushing hype-laden previews (though I'm unabashedly a games *enthusiast* — an attitude missing in so many parts of gaming "journalism").

What I want is for every genuinely enthusiastic fanboy who in some fit of faux rage starts chucking expletives across the Internet to sit back and take a deep breath for a moment. What will your venting achieve? Please understand that in 99 percent of cases, developers aren't guys out to make a crappy game or a bug-riddled mess, or people who plain don't care about you, the gamer. It may look like that on occasion, but think twice before joining the jackals — they're a savage bunch, and frankly, nobody likes them!


Now, before you send your vitriolic jackalizations in my direction, here's a word of thanks: Your support for *PC Gamer*, and I believe your appreciation of our take on the fun inherent in the gaming hobby, has seen us grow in circulation when all around us magazines are closing, or dropping numbers. We're the world's best-selling PC gaming magazine by a long way, and we'll keep that up by giving you what you want in an enthusiast magazine — so keep telling us what we're doing right and wrong.

Randomly selected this month to win junk from my desk is Paul Bestys of Rhodesdale, Maryland, who spotted the line from *The Wild Bunch*. As always, send quote-contest entries, rants, and hate mail to ednote@pcgamer.com.

Rob


Rob Smith
Editor-in-Chief

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The War of Words

▶ We want to hear from you! Write to us at **PC Gamer Letters**, Imagine Media, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005, or email us at letters@pcgamer.com.

Even with user-made genius like the *Desert Combat* mod, you still don't like *Battlefield 1942*, Kurt? That's beyond our powers of comprehension.



▶ ANGRY GUY NAMED KURT

I DO NOT SUBSCRIBE to your magazine. But I do get every copy. I pay retail. Why? Because I can. I'm not going to ask or beg for any games you may have scattered about your office. Why? Because I buy games whenever I want them. I'm not going to ask TheVede for any extra hardware goodies. Why? I'll buy any damn complete system I want and chuck my old one. I work for a living and I make beau coup bucks.

What I do want is for you to stand there in your taco sauce-stained jeans, with your junior-college education, and tell me you'll give these ridiculous multiplayer games a rest!

Who was the salad brain who picked *Battlefield 1942* as Best Game of 2002 (March 2003 issue)? Exhilarating? Try frustrating. It's just a group of 64 idiots running around shooting at everything that moves. No coordination. No planning. No teamwork. No story. It's Whack-a-Mole with better graphics. If it made GOTY because of the graphics or the premise — that you can shoot, fly, or drive anything — then remember: a great-looking pile of crap is still crap.

— Kurt Stovall

Your jackalization falls on BF 1942—deafened ears. We're glad

you've got "beau coup bucks," but we're pretty convinced we're smarter than you. See, we recognize the greatness of BF 1942, and you evidently have a glitch in your system causing you to question that judgment. Perhaps it's all those bucks going to your head.

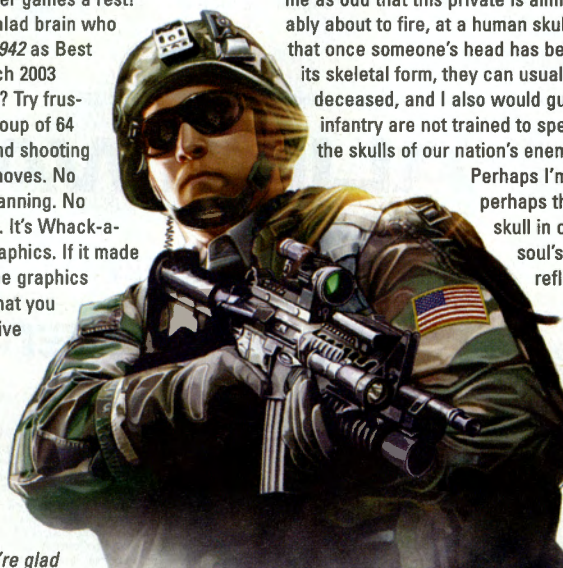
▶ THE SKULL EXPLAINED

TO MY FAVORITE EDITORIAL staff of any non-pornographic publication,

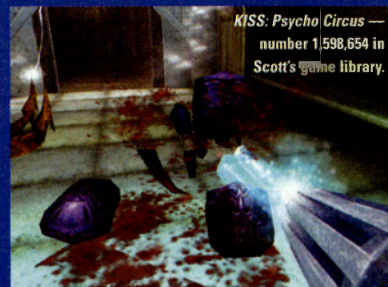
Just writing to express my concerns about the image of a U.S. soldier adorning the cover of your magazine. Now, I'm no expert, but it strikes me as odd that this private is aiming, and presumably about to fire, at a human skull. I do believe that once someone's head has been reduced to its skeletal form, they can usually be considered deceased, and I also would guess that our infantry are not trained to spend rounds on the skulls of our nation's enemies.

Perhaps I'm mistaken — perhaps the reflection of a skull in our brave young soul's glasses is not a reflection at all.

Maybe he's wearing those neat holo-goggles that one buys at Party City for Halloween. But that seems a bit unprofessional. Maybe that is a skull,



Okay, so the artist added the skulls.



KISS: *Psycho Circus* — number 1,598,654 in Scott's game library.

▶ THE FIRST STEP IS ADMITTING...

MY NAME IS SCOTT, and I'm a game-aholic.

My desk is a testament to my addiction, as it's littered with hundreds of CD jewelcases. Just about every genre is represented; among my collection are pieces of crap like *Mortyr* and *Daikatana* and classics like *Max Payne* and the *Half-Life* series.

I scour the bargain bins like a phantom, looking for that \$10 fix. Or, even better, something for under \$5. If it's \$10 or under and looks interesting, out comes my debit card. I bring these games home and I do *not* play them. Oh sure, I've played a few of them: I actually finished *Max Payne* and *Deus Ex*, and nearly finished *Half-Life*. But for every *Max Payne* are dozens of other titles, installed, uninstalled, and reinstalled, but never played for more than a few minutes at a time.

Games powered by all iterations of the *Quake* engine and LithTech engine, games from obscure German publishers, take up space alongside games from Sierra and Electronic Arts. I have them all. My addiction is so bad, in fact, that one day, while digging around for a game, I stumbled upon not one, but two copies of *Carmageddon 2*. I had purchased this game twice and didn't even know it!

Are there others like me? People who thought *KISS: Psycho Circus* was a steal at \$4.99?

My name is Scott, and I'm a game-aholic.

— Scott Smith

Now that you've admitted the problem, Scott, we can work with you on healing. Actually, on second thought, no healing required — you've got the best disease on Earth.

GREAT GAMES, CHEAP

Inspired by Scott, we did a quick 10-minute search to see what excellent-to-Editors' Choice games we could find online for great prices. Here's a mere sampling of fantastic deals we uncovered (at press time), to give you an idea of games and sites to scout for:

WARCRAFT III: COLLECTOR'S EDITION

\$19.99 (with \$20 rebate) at EBgames.com

RED FACTION \$9.99 at EBgames.com

NOLF 2 \$16.90 at GoGamer.com

GHOST RECON \$9.90 at GoGamer.com

PRISONER OF WAR \$6.90 at GoGamer.com

FREEDOM FORCE \$11.97 at Walmart.com

BLACK & WHITE \$11.97 at Walmart.com

GRIM FANDANGO \$9.99 at Amazon.com

of, say, Osama bin Laden, and our soldier is just so proud of his kill, he's stood there shooting at bin Laden's head for about a year. If so, shouldn't he be more concerned about the explosive that just detonated by his right ear?

— Nick Hagelin

Military people take orders very literally, Nick, and we understand this soldier was commanded to go "crack some skulls." But we prefer all of your theories.

WESTWOOD WASTED

I'M A HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENT who has been PC games—crazy for three or four years now. The company responsible for getting me into it is Westwood with *Red Alert*.

Of course, I couldn't wait for *Generals* to come out—I'd been waiting for it since you first mentioned it. I got the game as soon as possible, and started playing it. They should have called it *Age of Generals* instead of *Command & Conquer: Generals*. I'm very disappointed to see that the trademark sidebar command panel of all the Westwood RTS games has disappeared. To me, it was what made Westwood games a break from every other strategy game. What is your view on the loss of the sidebar, and do you think it was a good idea?

— Jeremy Fleischman

We think Westwood has bigger problems than changing its control scheme. Let's start with the loss of its offices, its brands, many of its jobs, and our greatest excuse for an excursion to Sin City. Westwood has officially been folded into EA, with the famed Las Vegas studio standing by to be shuttered. That's definitely a hard blow, since Westwood can pretty safely be credited with the origin of the real-time-strategy genre with its first Dune and C&C games. As for the C&C series, it's anyone's guess as to how EA's recent consolidation will ultimately affect it. We hope the publisher has a plan. In the meantime, check out our review of Generals in this issue.

RED DISSATISFACTION

I JUST SAW THE AD FOR *Red Faction 2* for the PC (March 2003 issue). Now, I'm a fan of the first game, with its fun multiplayer and sweet GeoMod effects, but when I learned that *Red Faction 2* for the PC wouldn't have a multiplayer mode (as in with live people, not bots), I was furious. *Red Faction*'s multiplayer was its best feature, and without it, it's just an hour- to two-hour-long single-player game. Can you guys boss around the developers to fix the game the way gamers want it?

— Doug Johnson

Can we boss them around? We can't even get our water cooler fixed. But we hear you loud and clear. The sequel seems to be a casualty of console design priorities, which for whatever reason de-emphasized multiplayer features.

PROCLAMATION BY THE EARL OF NYM

I, THE EARL OF NYM, DO ISSUE this proclamation:

It is the desire of the Royal House of Nym to acknowledge the bravery and heroism of the wise and strong Billy of Harmshire. His glorious deeds are known worldwide, such as the slaying of the Burning Intern of Doom, known otherwise as "Norman."

Thus, we of the Kingdom of Nym do honor this great hero with the Imaginary Medal of Super Coolness, and may he continue to smite his many enemies, particularly the nefarious Daniel Billysbane.

— Earl of Nym

P.S. — Greg gets the Imaginary Medal of Mediocrity, for obvious reasons.

The Earl has spoken! Long live this crazy royal.

CLANS AND AGENTS

I'M A LOYAL READER WHO WANTS to know how the *PC Gamer* staff feels about clans. Do you like to be in them, or do you prefer the solo free-agent sorta thing? Do you ever try to start clans? Also, I hear a few of you play Xbox

PC GAMER

READER SURVEY

Fill It Out, Mail It In, and Win!

We want to know what you think of *PC Gamer* magazine so we can do more of the stuff you like, less of the stuff you don't like, and add whatever you think is missing. Fill out the form below and send it to Future Network USA, Attn: PC Gamer Reader Survey, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. All submissions received before April 21, 2003, will automatically be entered in a random drawing for a RADEON 9800 PRO video card, courtesy of ATI Technologies. Photocopies of the survey will not be accepted.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

1. How did you get this copy of *PC Gamer*?

- (a) ☐ I'm a subscriber
- (b) ☐ I bought it on the newsstand
- (c) ☐ It was passed along to me by a friend

2. Month to month the magazine delivers on the promises of its cover:

- (a) ☐ Agree
- (b) ☐ Somewhat agree
- (c) ☐ Disagree / Explain why not: _____

3. How many people read your copy of *PC Gamer*? _____

4. What percentage of the magazine do you generally read?

- (a) ☐ 1% to 25%
- (b) ☐ 25% to 50%
- (c) ☐ 50% to 75%
- (d) ☐ 75% to 100%
- (e) ☐ Every word

5. Month to month, is *PC Gamer* worth the price?

- (a) ☐ Yes, always
- (b) ☐ Most of the time
- (c) ☐ About half the time
- (d) ☐ Not enough for me to buy it regularly

6. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being most important, 5 being least important), define the factors that compel you to read *PC Gamer*:

- ____ Attitude/personality of editorial staff
- ____ Quality of writing
- ____ Quality of page layout and design
- ____ Quality of photography
- ____ Technical depth of product coverage
- ____ Honesty/integrity/frankness of product coverage
- ____ Timeliness of product coverage
- ____ Magazine's help in making product-purchasing decisions
- ____ Magazine's help in fixing technical problems
- ____ Brand recognition
- ____ Entertainment value
- ____ Cover lines/words
- ____ Cover subject

7. Considering all the magazines you read, how do you rank *PC Gamer* on a 1 to 5 scale (1 being the most favorable rating, 5 being the least favorable rating) in terms of consumer value? _____

8. Considering all the magazines you read, where does *PC Gamer* fit on your list of favorites (1 being most favorite, 5 being least favorite)? _____

9. What do you think of the magazine's overall design?

- (a) ☐ It's cool, I like it
- (b) ☐ I think the design is too busy
- (c) ☐ I think the design is too clean
- (d) ☐ It's just okay



The tech guys say *Red Faction 2* has a "deformable environment," but we just call it blasting the smack out of the gameworld.

READER SURVEY (CONTINUED)

10. Do you find the tone of the writing to be:
 (a) ☐ The right mix of fun and informative
 (b) ☐ Too serious
 (c) ☐ Too silly
11. In regards to the organization of *PC Gamer*:
 (a) ☐ It's easy to find exactly what I'm looking for
 (b) ☐ I wish it were easier to find what I'm looking for
12. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the most favorable rating, 5 being the least favorable rating), which of the following are you interested in purchasing?
 ___ Last 12 issues in PDF format on a single disc
 ___ *PC Gamer*-branded stickers, posters, calendars, shirts, hats
 ___ Monthly electronic version of magazine that would replace print version
 ___ A less-expensive, disc-less newsstand option
13. How would you rate the disc content? Choose one.
 (a) ☐ Love it! It's vital to my enjoyment of the magazine
 (b) ☐ Appreciate it most of the time
 (c) ☐ Occasionally find it useful
 (d) ☐ Couldn't care less about it
14. What do you think about the disc interface? Choose one.
 (a) ☐ It's stunning and easy to use
 (b) ☐ It could look better, but it's easy to use
 (c) ☐ Could use an upgrade
15. Do you want more or less of each of the following sections in each issue (circle one):
- | | | | |
|--------------|------|------|------|
| > HANDS-ON | More | Same | Less |
| > SCOOPS | More | Same | Less |
| > EYEWITNESS | More | Same | Less |
| > FEATURES | More | Same | Less |
| > REVIEWS | More | Same | Less |
| > HARD STUFF | More | Same | Less |
| > COLUMNS | More | Same | Less |
| > STRATEGY | More | Same | Less |
16. Please rate the following Strategy content in terms of usefulness (1= most useful, 5 = least useful):
 ___ Cheat codes
 ___ Complete game walkthroughs
 ___ Expert strategy (e.g., Bruce Shelley's *Age of Mythology* tips and EA-Pacific's *C&C: Generals* tactics)
 ___ General strategies/tactics
17. What do you prefer in the Reviews section:
 ___ Fewer, longer reviews
 ___ More reviews
18. How useful do you find each of these types of Hard Stuff stories (1= most useful, 5 = least useful):
 ___ Hardware how-tos
 ___ Hardware news
 ___ Hardware previews
 ___ Hardware reviews
19. Please rate the usefulness of each of these recent *PC Gamer* How To features, on a scale of 1-5 (1 = most useful, 5 = least useful):
 ___ Turning Your PC Into a Tivo
 ___ Making *GTA III* Skins
 ___ Upgrading Your PC
 ___ Networking Your PC
20. How useful do you find each of these parts of Eyewitness (1= most useful, 5 = least useful):
 ___ Main story
 ___ Supplemental stories
 ___ Release Meter
 ___ Playlist
 ___ Contest
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games. One question that's been scratching at my head is, Who's cooler: Solid Snake or Sam Fisher? I say Solid Snake could totally kick Sam Fisher's butt, but my friends seem to think that just because Sam Fisher can do a wall jump, he can beat Solid Snake. Whoopie-doo — a wall jump. Solid would bust out his Stinger missile and blow Sam Fisher to pieces. What do you think?

— Chris McQ.

Nope, you've got it all wrong. Sam would be tracking Snake's movements the instant they both materialized in the level. Sam would get a visual read with his fiber-optic camera and then switch to his thermal vision as he got close. Snake would catch a sticky shocker and then Sam would drag his ass into a shadow somewhere.

And clans? We've been known to frequent Battlefield 1942 servers with the [PCG] moniker, but we don't like each other enough to get organized into a formal clan.

❧ GTA III DOWNBEAT?

NOT TO BE ALL "MY COUNTRY right or wrong," but have you ever noticed how, well, cynical *Grand Theft Auto III* is about America? The cops are corrupt, the city is dirty, the people are evil, and the gangs are out of control. The in-game radio plays an ad for a blood-sport reality show, there are illegal drug power-ups — it's kind of a negative view.

Now, don't get me wrong — there's nothing "illegal" about this. But it's kinda weird. I mean, there's the whole SUV thing (a pet issue for some groups), the green recycling bins (which brings to mind political environmentalism), and the AmmuNation stores (which suggest guns sellers are just profiting from violence). But most of all there's that statue of a soldier near the airport. I mean, the cone of his head seems disrespectful — sort of a dunce cap for all those who fought.

Okay, okay, I know it's just a game, and when I make mine I can fill it with right-wing messages and patriotic images. But I'm just wondering if I'm the only one thinking *GTA III* pushes a negative point of view, and at worst, an agenda?

— Genie
In the dirty South

We hope Rockstar was pushing a political agenda, but we doubt it. (We don't even care what agenda it might be: the thought of any kind of political subtext in a PC crime epic makes us giddy.) But the truth, we suspect, is far more mundane. Instead of offering an underlying America-subverting message, the designers of GTA III seem inspired by crime films like Scarface and...well, principally Scarface. They made a game that's in-keeping with their love of that movie's over-the-top, Eighties-jaundiced nihilism. If that doesn't quite jibe with "Red" America's idea of wholesome videogames, then that's really just an added bonus.

❧ BUM FIGHTS ON PC!

I RECENTLY WITNESSED A STREET grapple in which two desperate homeless people punched, bit, and spit on each other for some time. Pure exhilaration! This "bum fight" was just one of



❧ FREE GAMES WE FORGOT

I WAS JUST READING your "Top 50 Free Games" story (March 2003), and I must say, I'm disappointed. I was expecting to see games like *Dransik*, *Soldat*, or my personal favorite, *Wulfram 2*. These are the type of games more people need to know about, and their player communities are always accepting new players.

— Mike Martin

Our bad. Of course, Mike couldn't be bothered to send a link to these games but we managed to track them down anyway: Dransik (www.dransik.com), Soldat (http://soldat.cyberion.pl/), and Wulfram 2 (www.wulfram.com).

Here are some other free games and free-game websites that readers thought belonged in our feature:

- Javanoid (www.javanoid.com)
- Insaniquarium (www.freshpulp.com/fishtank/fishtank.html)
- Eternal Daughter (www.classicgaming.com/blackeyesoftware)
- Runescape (www.jagex.com)
- Bejeweled, OutSmart (www.zone.com)
- www.candystand.com
- www.newgrounds.com
- www.miniclip.com
- www.shizmoo.com
- www.freearcade.com
- www.dosgamesarchive.com

many destitute meelees that are sweeping the nation. I found quite a following for this extreme sport, and was wondering if we can expect any bum-fight PC games?

You could create your very own bum character (more teeth and putrid odors would help in combat). You could send your transient to exotic locations for battle, like under a freeway overpass or in the bushes behind the Circle K. You could equip Boxcar Willy with devastating bum weapons like rocks, broken bottles, and maybe even his own feces.

Listen up, developers: Bum fights are clearly the apex of modern entertainment.

— Ry Beardsley

We couldn't agree more. Ry, not a day passes that our magazine doesn't receive a reader's hare-brained pitch for a game idea. But this one climbs to the top of that pack, begging — no, demanding — to be made. C'mon, developers...who's game?

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— Philadelphia Inquirer

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shooter to date."

— GameSpy



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BLOOD
VIOLENCE



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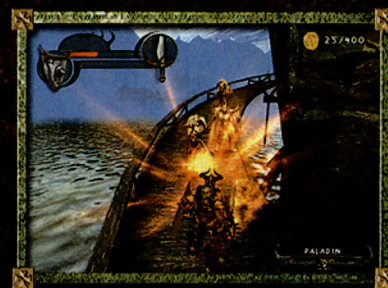
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The new Undead hero, the Crypt Lord, can unleash hordes of ravenous scarabs built from the bodies of the dead.



WARCRAFT III | FROZEN THRONE

IN A NUTSHELL

The Orcs rebuild, the Undead scheme...and we prepare for a seemingly amazing add-on

Blizzard continued its unblemished streak of releasing top-quality games last year when it finally unleashed the exceptional *Warcraft III*. By infusing this sequel with a dramatic, well-developed story, great graphics, and brilliantly balanced units, Blizzard created one of the all-time great real-time strategy games. And this summer we'll have a whole new reason to journey to the world of Azeroth when *The Frozen Throne*, the first expansion for *Warcraft III*, is released.

As you'd expect, *Frozen Throne* is set after the stunning conclusion of *Warcraft III*. However, instead of offering a simple continuation of that story, this add-on will actually present two different campaigns composed of 30 to 35 missions total — the same number of missions as in the original game.

The first campaign will feature the Humans, the Night Elves, and the Undead, with you playing out the story from all three sides. These three super-powers of Azeroth are in search of an artifact that will imbue

its owner with tremendous power. As luck would have it, the artifact is hidden in a glacier where the evil Lich King is entombed. The exact details of the story are still a closely guarded secret, but we do know that it'll involve one of the key figures in *Warcraft III*, the traitorous Arthas.

Throne's second campaign will feature the Orcs, who don't give a rat's ass about what the other races are up to; it'll chronicle their efforts to carve out a new existence and solidify their place on Azeroth. However, in

E.Y.I.



CATEGORY: Real-time strategy
DEVELOPER: Blizzard
PUBLISHER: Blizzard
WWW: blizzard.com/war3x
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 75%
RELEASE DATE: Summer 2003

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: The first expansion for our 2002 RTS Game of the Year will include *two* new campaigns, new heroes and units, and a host of other additions. It doesn't get any better than this.

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: When it comes to producing games that are an absolute joy to play, no one can beat Blizzard's portfolio (the *Warcrafts*, *Starcraft*, the *Diablos*). They're one of the all-time greats.



1



2



3



4



5

■ (1) With new Heroes and spells, the battles are certain to be as exciting as they were in the original game. (2) The Mountain Giant, a new Night Elf unit, can taunt enemy units so they'll fire at it instead of at weaker, ranged units. (3) Don't let the Pandaren Brewmaster's cute looks fool you: he can still whoop some ass. (4) "Come closer, foul beasts, so that I might unleash a deadly torrent of doom upon your sorry hides!" (5) The critters this time around will be amphibious, so watch the water!



a nice change of pace, this campaign may play more like *Diablo* than *Warcraft III*.

"Because of changes to the custom campaign editor, we'll be able to link maps and the game will remember that you've cleared a level," explains Blizzard Executive Producer Bill Roper. "And events in one level could trigger something to happen in another level." Because of how the campaign is being designed, *Throne* may play more like an RPG, and it'll have a sharper focus on the hero units.

NEW HEROES

BEYOND THE CREATION OF THE TWO NEW CAMPAIGNS, the most notable new addition is the inclusion of a new Hero for each race.

The new Undead Hero, the Crypt Lord, is a larger iteration of the Crypt Fiend. The Crypt Lord can impale enemy units and then toss them into the air, which either kills or stuns them when they land. It can also summon Carrion Scarabs that are raised from fallen bodies and scurry about, attacking nearby enemy units.

The Night Elves' new Hero is called Warden, and he's a mobile, assassin-like character. His most impressive powers are Blink, which lets him teleport in and out of locations around the map, and a new attack called Fan of Knives. When activated, this attack unleashes a bunch of knives; if used in conjunction with Blink, you'll be able to pop in, hit enemy units with your blades, and then teleport to safety. This hit-and-run tactic should be loads of fun.

Finally, the Humans will have access to the Blood Mage Hero unit. In addition to casting spells such as Flame Strike, a devastating fire attack, and Banish, which makes the targeted unit ethereal so it can't attack or be attacked, the Blood Mage can con-

struct the Ivory Tower. Just like the other towers in the game, the Ivory Tower can be upgraded, but its mobility means that the Humans will now be able to quickly construct a defensive line anywhere on the map.

REBALANCING THE FOUR SIDES

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW HERO FOR EACH race is part of Blizzard's concerted effort to keep balancing and tweaking how the game unfolds. As a result, several other new units and structures are being added to the game.

"We want to make units that complement the races," says Roper about *Throne*'s new non-Hero units, "and introduce new strategies and alter the economy of the game."

A good example of this focus is the Mountain Giants, a new unit that will be available to the Night Elves. As Roper is quick to point out, the Night Elves lacked a big bruiser in *Warcraft III*. The Mountain Giants now fill that role, and when used in conjunction with archers, they can be a potent fighting force.

Also, you'll now be able to build merchants and even Neutral Heroes, who you'll hire at the Tavern. These Heroes will take one of your available Hero slots, but each one of them will bring new abilities and powers. According to Roper, these Neutral Heroes are being included to give people more choices in how they want to play the game.

Battle.net is also being upgraded: Blizzard's adding clan support, so you'll be able to start a clan, recruit people, and even manage your own channel. A clan ladder will track the overall rating of your clan in comparison to the other clans in the game.

At press time, Blizzard is readying the beta of *Frozen Throne*, and we'll be snagging it in short order. Watch for our hands-on report in a month or two. — William Harms

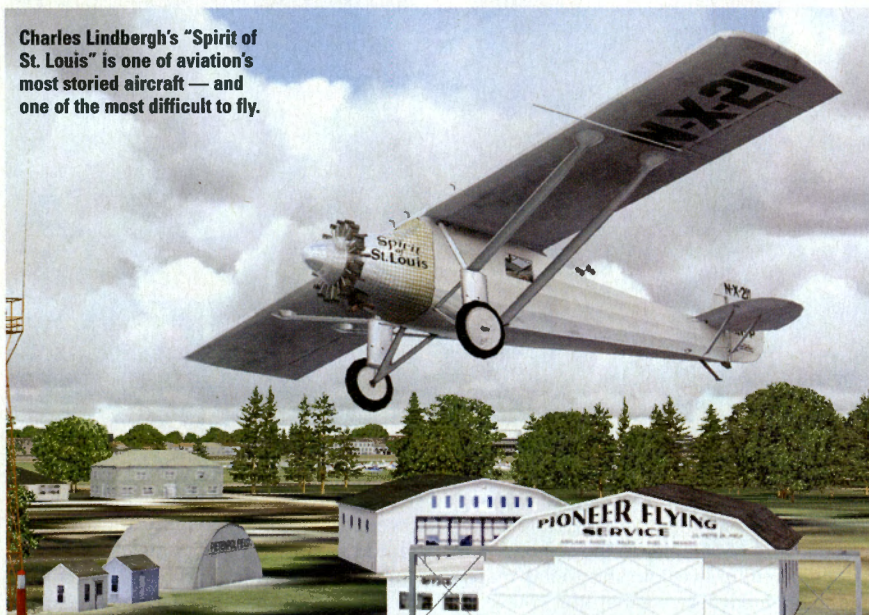
Unlike *Warcraft III*, which spent several years in development, *Warcraft II* was finished in just 11 months.

MS FLIGHT SIMULATOR | A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

IN A NUTSHELL

 The 100th anniversary of flight is also *MS Flight Simulator's* 20th

Charles Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis" is one of aviation's most storied aircraft — and one of the most difficult to fly.



Since acquiring the rights for *Flight Simulator* from SubLOGIC two decades ago, Microsoft has rolled out eight versions of its pioneering civil-aviation sim. With the pending release of *Flight Simulator: A Century of Flight* — so titled to mark the 100th anniversary of powered flight — the Redmond crew is focusing on crafting a flight sim that will once again push the genre in new and interesting directions.

Arriving less than a year-and-a-half after *Flight Sim 2002* turned the genre on its ear with its amazing visuals, fluid framerates, and long-overdue air-traffic-control implementation, the latest iteration plans to elevate this franchise to an impressive new level.

The most noticeable upgrade comes in *FS:ACOF's* new dynamic weather system, which will transform your desktop flight environment into a continuously evolving pattern of atmospheric conditions, including some of the fluffiest and most realistic-looking cloud layers ever seen in a commercial flight sim. As with *FS 2002*, you can download real-time weather for your selected geographic region — updated every 15 minutes in this version — or select a specific weather "theme" ranging from scattered autumn clouds to a full-blown summer thunderstorm.

"Because flying is mostly about moving through the air," says Microsoft Business Development Manager Bruce Williams, "the new dynamic weather system is my favorite new feature. It's visually stunning, and I think it'll introduce a new set of challenges to simulated flying, bringing it that much closer to the real world."

Microsoft has chosen to mark the centennial of powered flight by adding nine historical planes. Joining *FS 2002's* 15 contemporary aircraft (the Sopwith Camel has been replaced by a Robinson R22 helicopter) will be the Wright brothers' original 1903 Wright Flyer, Curtiss JN-4 Jenny, Vickers Vimy, Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis,



The view from this Curtiss JN-4 Jenny truly brings back the "wind in your face" feeling of years past.

Lockheed Vega, Ford Trimotor, Douglas DC-3, DH 88 Comet, and Piper Cub.

"We chose planes that are historically significant and represent important developments in [aerial] technology," explains Williams. "We also wanted aircraft that participated in important events that profoundly changed the public's perception of aviation."

Beneath its attractive new clouds and aircraft skins, *FS:ACOF* will also feature several enhancements to its core game engine. A new ATC system will now permit traffic at non-towered airports, en route altitude changes, pop-up IFR clearances, and precision or non-precision approaches to multiple runways. Improved interaction means that you can now find yourself at the back of the landing or take-off queue at busier airports. Plus, new Garmin 500 and 295 series GPS modules and expanded flight-school lessons should help abbreviate the learning curve for first-time flyers.

The recent demise of printed manuals (due to game-box downsizing) has also been addressed with the Interactive Media Content feature, which will remain fully accessible as the sim runs. This "web site on the disc" will include a visual guide to the sim's key features, plus direct links to flights, lessons, briefings, how-to procedures, and comprehensive aircraft handbooks.

Additionally, the new sim will feature extensive scenery improvements, "clickable" 3D cockpits, 24,000 worldwide airports (up 3,000 from *FS 2002*), and continued SDK support for third-party enhancements. With all the enhancements and improvements, *FS:ACOF* looks to be a worthy release in a year when we'll be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Wright brothers' historic flight. — Andy Mahood



A new Garmin 500 GPS module is now available on selected planes.

E.Y.I.


CATEGORY: Flight simulation
DEVELOPER: Microsoft
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
WWW: microsoft.com/games
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 80%
RELEASE DATE: Summer 2003

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: The latest *MS Flight Sim* will boast a new dynamic weather system, nine new historical planes, scenery improvements, and a number of enhancements to the core game engine.

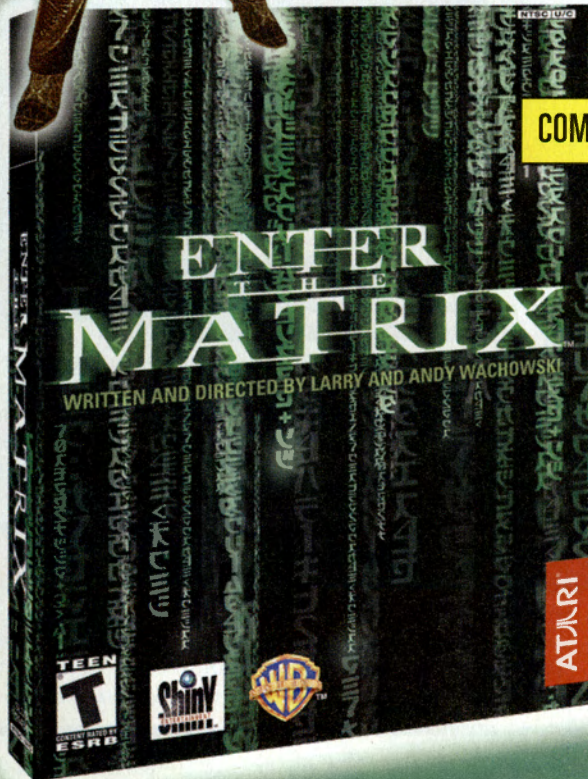
DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: Microsoft is the only developer that seems to know how to make money with this genre. It's been turning out best-selling versions of the *Flight Simulator* series since 1983.

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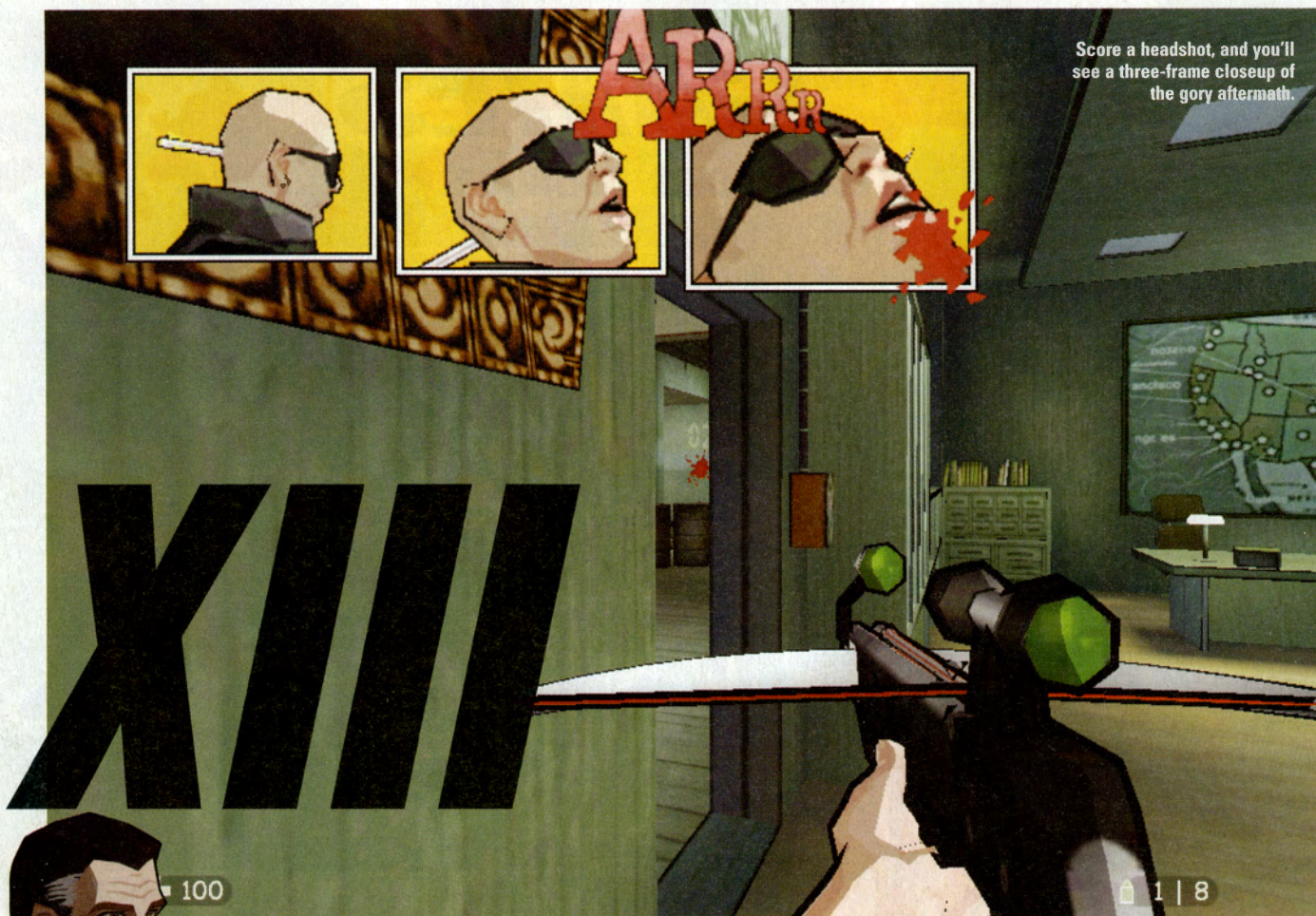
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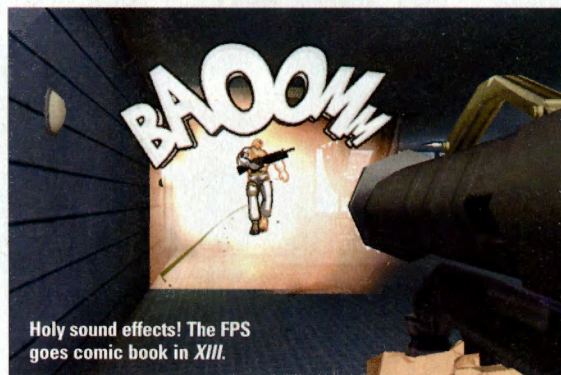
Score a headshot, and you'll see a three-frame closeup of the gory aftermath.

IN A NUTSHELL

The world's first cel-shaded FPS is VI parts *Deus Ex*, IV parts *Splinter Cell*, and III parts *Zelda*

Unless the bookstores of Europe are your second home, it's unlikely you'll have encountered *XIII*, a French-language Belgian graphic novel that enjoys near *Tintin*-sized success in the land of fancy wine and smelly cheese. Surprisingly, publisher/developer Ubi Soft sees the espionage thriller's lack of U.S. presence as a blessing. Freed from the baggage that a big-name license often brings to videogame conversions, this first-person-shooter adaptation won't have any notoriously picky stateside comic-book fans to satisfy.

Though *XIII*, the comic, has yet to see an English-language translation, it is set in the U.S. The *Memento*-ish premise has all the makings of a really bad day: As the lead character, you wake up alone on a beach with a gunshot wound to the head and no memory, and to make matters worse, you're the prime suspect in the assassination of the president of the United States. The only clues that you carry are a tattoo reading "XIII" and a



Holy sound effects! The FPS goes comic book in *XIII*.

mysterious key. That's not to mention the gang of hoods and a government organization that are out to kill you.

The game's journey is a race through 33 missions to discover who you are and who murdered the president. Missions offer the usual spy antics — infiltrating a prison to spring a captured general, laying detonation

E.Y.I.



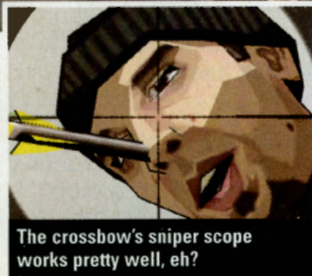
CATEGORY: First-person shooter
DEVELOPER: Ubi Soft
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
WWW: ubi.com
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%
RELEASE DATE: Sept. 13, 2003

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: *XIII* will look like a playable comic book thanks to completely cel-shaded *Unreal*-engine graphics and an innovative "sixth sense" power that'll let you "see" enemies' movements.

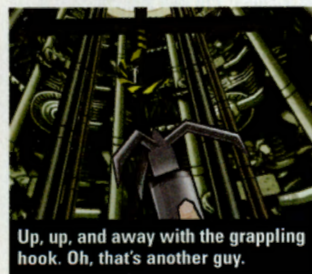
DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: Ubi Soft's internal studio has produced gaming genius (*Splinter Cell*, *Rayman 2*) and some landfill material (*Batman: Vengeance*). Ubi Soft's Paris office is developing *XIII*.



Despite its cel-shaded visuals, *XIII*'s hard-edged action isn't for kiddies.



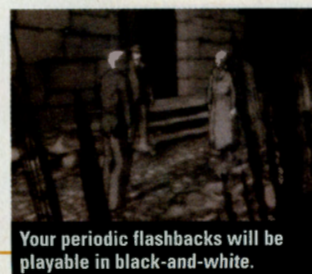
The crossbow's sniper scope works pretty well, eh?



Up, up, and away with the grappling hook. Oh, that's another guy.



Time-tested rule of thumb: Bald + Trenchcoat - Smile = Evil



Your periodic flashbacks will be playable in black-and-white.

charges on a docked submarine — but *XIII* distinguishes itself from *Deus Ex* and (shudder) *007: Nightfire* by offering a stunning presentation of graphic novel-faithful cel-shaded graphics.

A gimmick? Yes...and no. Most of *XIII* will play like other shooters of its ilk, with a few notable exceptions. At the top of the list is your "sixth sense" skill. This ability tells you where an unseen enemy is located based on visual representations of movement, such as a radar-like icon in the HUD that alerts you to his presence, or the uncanny power to "see" sounds. For example, if a patrolling guard makes a "tap, tap, tap" noise behind a closed door, you'll see that sound onscreen.

If you pull off a headshot or discover an important clue, you'll be treated to a three-frame close-up of the event at the top of the screen, reinforcing the "ripped from a comic" look of the game.

A thoroughly unrecognizable version of the *Unreal* graphics engine, including the Karma physics engine, is at the heart of *XIII*. Interaction with environments is similar to *Nightfire*'s in that your reticule icon changes as it passes over objects, letting you know which items you can pick up or activate.

And you'll need to pay attention to your icon, because you never know what might turn out to be a handy weapon. Chairs, bottles, and even shards of glass can all become lethal in your skilled hands, complementing an already spy-friendly repertoire of pistols, crossbows, harpoon guns, lockpicks, grappling hooks, and our *Splinter Cell* favorite, sneaking up on a bad guy and using him as a human shield. (During my playtime with the French beta, I even knocked out one guard by dropping on his head from a ventilation tube, *Mission Impossible*-style.)

XIII's multiplayer game will include up to 16-player deathmatch, CTF, and a few other cool modes that we've been sworn to secrecy about. (But trust us, they are cool.) Ubi Soft also plans to release a level editor as a free download sometime after the game ships, which is sure to spawn fan-generated cel-shaded adventures until the inevitable sequel.

— Chuck Osborn

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HANDS ON

As 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.



The battles are still huge, messy, and very brutal. Fight, my minions, fight!



Need some money? Find a town and burn it to the ground.



The expansion includes a new historical battle re-creating King Harold Godwinson's victory over the Vikings in 1066.

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR VIKING INVASION

Control Viking hordes and burn the British Isles to the ground in this ferocious expansion pack

Though I had a few problems with *Medieval: Total War*, it was one of my favorite games of 2002. The battles were epic in both scale and level of carnage, and the strategy section was so engrossing that hours of gametime would pass in the blink of an eye. I've been spending about a week playing a build of *Viking Invasion*, the add-on for *Medieval*, and boy, is it shaping up perfectly.

who, just as they did in real life, employ a raiding style of combat. If you play as the Vikings, rather than simply charging into a territory and conquering it, you'll want to destroy enemy buildings, which will earn you gold.

As Vikings, you can still conquer a territory if you wish, but it's often more beneficial to launch an attack, raze enemy buildings, and then get the hell out of Dodge. I found this new gameplay style very refreshing and a lot of fun — there's nothing like seeing your Viking hordes swarming across the countryside.

And to make sure you're out killing folks and burning their cities to the



DEVELOPER
The Creative Assembly

PUBLISHER
Activision

RELEASE DATE
May 2003

Set in the year 793CE, *Viking Invasion* features one new map — an expanded and detailed look at the British Isles. You get eight new Viking-era factions, including the Irish, the Welsh, the Scots, and off to the east, in Scandinavia, the Vikings. Instead of simply offering the same gameplay on a new map, however, *Viking Invasion* will force you to develop new strategies.

One reason for new tactics is that *Medieval*'s technology tree has been modified — you can't build a fort in all of your territories, for example. Also, the new pre-battle screen lets you organize your forces and even determine the order in which reinforcements will appear on the battlefield.

The biggest strategic change, though, is reserved for the Vikings,

ground, the two territories the Vikings start with are practically barren of resources. Strategically, it's a great way of balancing the game.

The original *Medieval* is getting some new goodies as well in the way of three new factions — the Argonese, the Hungarians, and Sicilians — plus new unit types. You'll also get more information on your generals' character, which will affect their various ratings. So if a general has, say, a reputation for fleeing the battlefield, his skills will decrease.

Based on what I've seen, *Viking Invasion* is cooking up plenty of tasty new vittles. It should definitely help *Total War* fanatics pass the time until the series-revamping *Rome: Total War* is released.

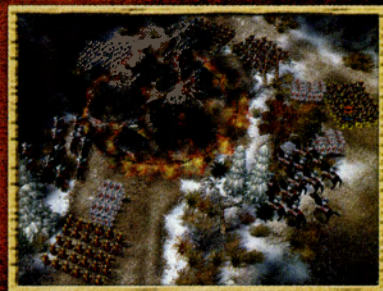
— William Harms



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HANDSON

BLITZKRIEG

Norm tries his hand at winning World War II in this upcoming RTS game

When *Blitzkrieg* was first previewed back in our September 2002 issue, we were intrigued by the promise of fully 3D graphics, a host of playable units, and the game's streamlined resource management. Now that I've had a chance to play a build of this soon-to-be-released RTS, it's certainly looking like *Blitzkrieg* will meet our expectations.

Featuring two fronts of World War II — Europe and Africa — *Blitzkrieg* offers three distinct campaigns. You'll fight as the Germans, Soviets, or Allies, and each campaign re-creates battles and missions that their respective

forces could be laid to waste by distant artillery. It's only by combining air support, snipers, engineers, and a sound assault group that major conflicts can be won.

For those who aren't interested in following the historical route, a skirmish mode offers independent missions that let you test your strategies, though most of the fun lies in forging through the mammoth conflict itself. A multi-player element provides potential for great assault and defend modes, especially with the vast number of strategic possibilities stemming just from the unit-selection pool, which includes over 100 units.

If there's anything here that'll discourage the lay-RTS enthusiast, it's that the *Sudden Strike*-style combat tends to be very slow-paced. (In fact, the game looks and plays an awful lot like *Sudden Strike*.) Also, keeping track of all the various kinds of tanks and infantry can be tough at times, especially for someone who just wants to get in and play.

I didn't encounter any destabilizing slowdowns with regard to the graphical load, but even with my high-end system, the game was barely achieving smooth framerates. In fairness, this aspect should be fully optimized before the game ships.

Based on my time with *Blitzkrieg*, it appears that Nival Interactive has the makings of a solid strategy game on its hands. Watch for our review in a month or so. — Norman Chan



DEVELOPER
Nival Interactive

PUBLISHER
CDV Software

RELEASE DATE
April 2003

sides actually fought. History buffs may have a slight advantage, as tactics that the Allies used in real life work just as effectively on the virtual battlefield, but your own strategic decisions appear to make a significant difference in each battle's outcome.

In fact, completing missions seems to require plenty of strategic awareness. Tanks, for instance, are extremely powerful but move excruciatingly slowly. Grouping them with a few squads of infantry is a smart move, but those



Air support cuts through entrenched lines for quick paratrooper drops or recon.

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bictf.thebluemachine.com
Zero Defect (UT)
goldplating.com/zero/
LanTactics(IL)
Lantactics.net

04/05

CrucialPC (KY)
crucialpc.com/lexicon.shtml
GigaFyte (IN)
gigafyte.com
Atlanta Patriotic Gamerz (GA)
patrioticgamerz.com
Driver-Planet (FL)
www33.brinkster.com/drivergods/index.asp
UMASS Gaming Club (MA)
gamersarena.com
PRCC LAN Party (MS)
prccclan.webhop.net
GlarAction (NY)
GlarAction.com
LAnIMATION (WA)
xglanimation.com
GAMMA (NM)
gammathon.com
XBOX LAN AZ (AZ)
xboxlanaz.com

04/11

LANExtreme (IL)
lanparty.com/lanextreme
[CAP] LAN (OH)
capcstrike.com

04/12

Marist College Comp. Soc. (NY)
mccs.stu.marist.edu
Sonoma State UGS (CA)
home.coavd.net/~echo42/lan.html
Free Frags LAN (CA)
24.24.147.19/bastardlan.htm
Adventureland Hobbies (IL)
adventurelandhobbies.com

plANNed Chaos (IL)
plannedchaos.net
Merc LAN (TX)
merc-lan.com
The AGP (TN)
theagp.com
FragZone (TX)
racummins.com/frag

04/18

Shazbotlan (MO)
shazbotlan.com

04/19

F-LAN (CA)
f-lan.net
LANShack (AR)
landwarriors.com

04/25

Ambush! Omaha (NE)
ambushsite.com
Friday Night Frag Fest (CO)
FridayNightFragFest.com
LanUP (TX)
lanup.2ya.com
BFG Tech. Inc. (IL)
bfgtech.com

04/26

BoxHeads (MI)
planetunreal.com/utmachine/lan
DIS (TX)
tntstats.com
Halo50k (GA)
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boisefragfest.com
Xtreme Gamerz (MI)
xgcahos.com
Maryland LAN Gamers (MD)
marylandlangamers.net
Northwoods PC (WI)
eccbs.com

■ Fail your save against the Gorgon's breath attack, and you could be frozen in stone. Luckily, I had my faerie dragon (named Fairy) to help me!



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE

Mayhem in Unpronounceable Places — must be a *NWN* expansion pack

It's no surprise that our 2002 RPG of the Year is getting an official add-on, but surely the myriad *Neverwinter Nights* fans will expect something special from the game's creators. Between the official module releases and vast tracts of real estate constructed by fans, *NWN*

that introduce three new tilesets — ruins, desert, and winter rural.

Though I wasn't able to experience how the story progresses, I did get to fight the 14 new monsters, which include the kobolds, manticores, basilisks, and gorgons, and creatures such as the scorpion-like stingers, half-ant/half-human formians, and reptilian asabi in the desert setting.

The new creatures introduce some cool spell-effects —

and spells — such as the gorgon encasing you in stone. Around 50 new spells have been added, many accompanied by fantastic effects such as the giant green fist of the Bigby's Hand spells.

And to ensure that you're not traipsing through this adventure with your well-worn character classes, *Shadows* adds five new prestige character classes, each

with distinct racial, alignment, skill, and even feat requirements. For example, Shadowdancers are born out of rogue or bard classes, Harper Scouts come from rangers, Assassins are for the evil-aligned, and Arcane Archers add a number of magical combat abilities to the armory of fighter classes...but you have to be an elf. The last prestige option is the evil anti-paladin, the Blackguard.

BioWare also says that your alignment will play a bigger role in the story's progression. Wailing on innocent villagers will cause problems later as shopkeepers refuse to serve you and dialogue options with key NPCs are limited.

The *NWN* engine continues to hold up well, delivering some spectacular spell and combat effects, plus plenty of variety between terrain tilesets. With all these new features also available to mod-makers, *Shadows* should give even greater legs to a seemingly endless RPG. — Rob Smith



DEVELOPER

BioWare

PUBLISHER

Infogrames

RELEASE DATE

May 2003

has provided plenty of single-player value, and that's not even counting the endless possibilities of multiplayer excursions.

At the core of *Undrentide* is roughly 20 hours of new single-player adventuring. The story starts you as an apprentice to Master Drogan, the dwarvish former adventurer. The game then takes you through lands



■ When you're not in combat (above), you'll see the world from an overhead view (below).

EMPIRE OF MAGIC

UNLIKE SWEDISH-MADE penis-enlarger pumps, turn-based strategy games are definitely my bag, baby. After a scant few hours with the beta of *Empire of Magic*, this new turn-based strategy game straight outta Slovakia got me goin'! It's a lot like the games in Strategy First's *Disciples* series, so if that's your bag, too, you're really gonna mess yourself over this one.

Before I could start enjoying *EoM* I had to spend a few minutes getting over its lackluster



DEVELOPER

Mayhem Studios

PUBLISHER

Summitsoft

RELEASE DATE

May 2003

visuals. That's unfortunate: the look of the game may turn away graphics whores like me who would otherwise enjoy its gameplay.

Combat unfolds almost exactly like it does in *Disciples* — groups of one to three units per side attack each other in semi-static combat screens. Hero and non-hero units take turns casting spells and using their abilities until either you or the bad guys give up the ghost. With well over 100 spells and tons of units at your disposal, it's rarely a dull experience.

Most games of this ilk focus on combat, and *EoM* is no exception. It does offer a lot more than your usual turn-based strategy game, though, and after escorting waylaid villagers and going on a couple of turn-limited rescue missions, I got the feeling I was playing an RPG...a really long RPG.

On any given campaign map, dozens of human and AI-controlled stacks can be roaming around. Even on a 2GHz P4, it took my computer a while to think through all its options — never mind how long it took me. The payoff: *Empire of Magic's* AI seems surprisingly bright. Play against it or three of your buddies online when the game arrives on our shores in May. — Greg Vederman



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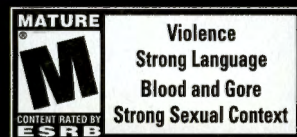
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ACTUAL PC SCREENSHOT



A promotional image for the video game Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. The background is a night scene in a tropical city with palm trees, streetlights, and two characters running on a sidewalk. The title 'Grand Theft Auto' is in a large, bold, white font with a black outline, and 'Vice City' is in a pink, stylized script font with a white outline.

Grand Theft Auto *Vice City*

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eyewitness

TRENDS NEWS THE-SCENES REPORTS



With ESports Arenas (inset), finding *Madden 2003* opponents could be as simple as heading to your local multiplex.



GAME CENTRAL

Multiplex movie theaters and videogames have been joined at the hip for years now. In fact, most of us would probably find it rather unsettling to enter a theater and *not* be bombarded by the sights and sounds of arcade machines begging for pocketfuls of quarters.

But the Pacific Theatres Gaslamp 15 multiplex takes this trend a tad further. As you enter the doors of

this San Diego, Calif.-based theater, you'll see plasma screens on the walls of the lobby showing footage of the latest PC- and videogames in action. That footage isn't static video loops — it's being generated live from one of the theaters within the building. Welcome to the first of 400 planned locations of ESports Arena.

"Gaming has become a mainstream form of entertainment, [joining] TV, movies, and music,"

enthuses John Varley, the CEO of ESports Arena. "With over 145 million existing computer-game players in the U.S., we felt there was a demand for a new type of venue where gamers could meet to play and compete."

Judging by the Gaslamp 15 prototype location, these centers will stand out to anyone coming through the doors. One of the multiplex's former 230-seat theaters is now home to 110 incredibly high-tech game stations offering the latest PC- and console games, plus high-speed Internet access. Using split-screen technology, the big theater screen will display tournaments in progress or show off a game to entice potential customers.

Given the finances involved, it's also easy to see why a multiplex would be more than willing to sacrifice one of its theaters to open an ESports Arena Entertainment Center. The movie-theater business runs on razor-thin margins, but as Varley explains, "ESports Arena will generally own and pay for the construction of the actual locations."

"ESports Arena may be a sub-tenant [paying rent] or a partner [sharing revenue]. Theater owners are actually not required to do anything as far as construction. ESports Arena handles the entire process — from providing the license and permitting



ESports Arena will take full advantage of its location by showing key matches on the theater's big screen. The competitors will likely follow the action on their personal monitors, but the use of the big screen will make it easier for others to watch the action unfold. And in the case of *Madden 2003*, it might act as "game film," where gamers can study each other's playing styles while watching for a competitor's "money plays."



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This month 10 lucky winners will receive a copy of the long-awaited space shooter *Freelancer*. To be eligible for our random drawing, just send an email to eyewitness@pcgamer.com with "About Time!" in the subject heading, and include your name and address in the body of the message. Only one entry per person allowed. Contest ends June 30, 2003. See additional rules on page 127.

to design, operations, and construction. All operations are handled by ESports Arena employees, including technology support. We designed this process to be a seamless integrated operation that would be non-invasive — both structurally and operationally — for the theater," Varley adds.

The current plan calls for ESports Arena to open 400 more sites over the next four years, which means that roughly 200 million people each year will be exposed to the gaming centers once all of them are operational. That's a lot of folks checking out our favorite pastime.

EXPANSION PLANS

If the experience of Pacific Theatres is any indication, this fast growth plan may not be as outlandish as it initially seems.

"During the six weeks of construction, we've had no disruption to our theater operations," says Jay Swerdlow, executive VP for Pacific Theatres. Mr. Swerdlow also commented that, thus far, all of his expectations have been met, and that additional locations of Pacific Theatres multiplexes are being considered for the ESports Arena transformation.

When asked about his thoughts on security and how, for lack of a better term, hooliganism might

"Let's say you want to try a game you've never played before," Varley explains. "Coaches can help you learn the basics and give a few tips to help you get started. They'll also help players that want to get over the hump in a game. If someone is having trouble getting past a certain spot or just wants to improve, the coach will be there to offer hints or strategies."

So, this whole thing sounds really great...but how much is it going to cost?

Actually, even to underpaid magazine editors like us, the pricing plan sounds reasonable. Everyone who wants to play must become a member, and to join you'll have to give up some personal information such as your age, which will allow the company to keep mature content out of the hands of minors. (This information will also be sold to game publishers in an effort to subsidize the costs of the Arenas.)

After that, the cost is \$4/hour after 4:00 p.m. and \$2/hour during daytime hours. Most theaters will also offer a discount on concessions to Arena members, and when you buy a movie ticket, you can use your stub to get 40 free minutes of access.

To ensure that all of the members have access to a terminal during tournaments, 36 stations (or about

WHAT'S PLAYING

Right now, visitors to the ESports Arena at the Gaslamp 15 multiplex can play roughly 60 PC and console games, including:

- Warcraft III (PC)
- Diablo II (PC)
- Starcraft (PC)
- NFL Madden 2003 (PC)
- Halo (Xbox)
- Guilty Gear X2 (PS2)
- Galerians: Ash (PS2)

STATION

**ESPORTS
ARENA MAY
BE COMING
TO A THEATER
NEAR YOU**

impact business. Swerdlow didn't see it as a potential problem — at least, no more problematic than the challenges that multiplexes already face with theater-jumpers (those who buy one ticket and try to get into other shows for free) or rowdy kids playing the existing arcade machines.

Both Swerdlow and Varley, in fact, emphasized how important it was to present the right image, and both are intent on making sure the entire operation is as family-friendly as possible. Precautions will be in place to safeguard children from mature content, including having an area at the front of the auditorium devoted to non-violent games, and even adding a canopy-like mechanism to the big screen to block content from the innocent eyes upfront. In this way, first-person-shooter fans can happily co-exist with *The Sims* supporters and *Harry Potter* players, and all can enjoy the comfortable surroundings.

TOURNAMENT ENTRY

In addition to offering the casual gamer/moviegoer a place to come and play or just check email, ESports Arena will feature tournaments and team competitions complete with referees. Another interesting concept is that of "coaches."

33 percent of the available space) will always be reserved for members who are not participating in the tournament. And if the demand starts to outstrip supply, a reservation system will be implemented.

In time, Varley also plans to open up another 2,000 smaller locations, called ESports Clubs, to handle the overflow. These could be located anywhere from a local gaming store to a nearby Wal-Mart. When you call to reserve your spot, you'll be informed of those alternate venues and their availability.

The next six ESports Arenas are scheduled to open in Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, Dallas, Chicago, and Atlanta over the next few months, at a cost of around \$1 million per arena.

"I can say that it's not a hard sell to the theaters," says Varley. "We offer to bring the gamer-age demographic back into the cinema, to drive up food concessions, to build and operate the arena ourselves, to operate national events showcasing their cinema, and to even bring in television coverage on a regular basis. And we pay them to do this. It's a pretty fair deal for them."

It sounds like a pretty fair deal to us, too. We look forward to seeing an ESports Arena open up in our area in the near future.

PC GAMER RELEASE METER

*Neverwinter Nights:
Shadows of Undrentide*



Release dates are as accurate as possible given that game developers and publishers can and will change them at a moment's notice. Please send release-date info to norman@pcgamer.com.

MAY 2003

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	05/01/03
Escape from Alcatraz	HIP Interactive	05/01/03
Celebrity Deathmatch	G.O.D.	05/01/03
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds	Infogrames	05/02/03
Larry Bond's Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	05/06/03
EVE Online	Simon & Schus.	05/06/03
Enter the Matrix	Infogrames	05/15/03
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Take-Two Int.	05/15/03
The Sims: Superstar	Maxis	05/19/03
Elite Force II	Activision	05/20/03
Empire of Magic	SummitSoft	05/23/03
The Hulk	Vivendi	05/27/03
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Infogrames	05/27/03

Deus Ex: Invisible War



JUNE 2003

TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE
America II	Data Becker	06/01/03
Medieval: Viking Invasion	Activision	06/02/03
Will Rock	Ubi Soft	06/03/03
Moto GP 2	THQ	06/03/03
Savage	iGames	06/09/03
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	06/14/03
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	06/14/03
Warrior Kings: Battles	Empire Int.	06/14/03
Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Blizzard	06/24/03
Lock On: Modern Air Combat	Ubi Soft	06/25/03

PC GAMER PLAYLIST



ROB It's been fun getting back into the terrorist takedown of *Raven Shield's* co-op mode. While the lack of a classic map is disappointing, the intense firefights and need for a cool head in hot situations is great gameplay. I've also been back through the streets of *GTA III's* Liberty City while looking forward to the PC release of *Vice City*.



COREY I loved decimating hordes of vicious beasts in *Serious Sam: Second Encounter*, so I've been plowing full-bore through the beta of *Will Rock*. HELL yeah — a game that combines mythological monsters with slash-and-slay deathmongering! Waiting near a pool of blood, and then pulverizing an emerging nasty with my shotgun...Oh yeah...



DAN Having beaten *Splinter Cell* and liberated Georgia from oligarchical tyranny, I've now turned my sights toward *Neverwinter Nights*, which I never got a chance to get into before: I'm taking the belligerent dwarf Red Meadswiller through the diabolical dungeons. There will be absolutely no dwarf-tossing!



CHUCK This month, I've been given a slave...err...intern named Jeff Leclerc. Jeff's here from Maine on a two-week high-school project. Having J.Le around is like playing *Black & White*: I command him to fetch coffee, he does it; I tell him to take screen-shots, he does that, too. Jeff doesn't know it yet, but tomorrow he's pooping on villagers.



BILLY I've been playing *C&C: Generals* so much that I've actually started dreaming about it. In my dreams I'm bombing the hell out of the GLA one minute, and the next I'm ass-naked at a bus stop, fighting off hecklers. I've also been playing the *Viking Invasion* expansion for *Medieval: Total War*. Brilliant!



JOE I finally gave *Madden 2003* a try. The franchise mode is great for stats junkies like myself, but the gameplay itself is pretty frustrating — where's the defense? And just for fun I jumped on a *Day of Defeat* server: it's still a great game, though it's not quite *Battlefield 1942*. Now I want to try *Team Fortress Classic* again...



CHIAKI So to recap: I've been obsessed with the *Sims: Unleashed* add-on. My family owns a parrot (that is soooooo annoying, I'm having dreams of beer batter and hot grease) and three cats with a kitten on the way. I did start out with just two but the darn babies just keep popping out! Heehee — I sound pretty crass, even to myself. Nice!



GREG Nothing but *Harbinger* this month. It's missing a certain amount of that all-important "Blizzard flare," but succeeds in being one of the few *Diablo* clones that doesn't try to reinvent the concept, or expand it into a deeper game experience, à la *Divine Divinity*. Read my review on page 78 for the full scoopage.

Rolling the D.I.C.E.

Things learned from attending this year's conference in Vegas

Industry luminaries from around the globe descended on Las Vegas Feb. 27–28 for this year's D.I.C.E. (Design, Innovate, Communicate, Entertain) Summit — two days of thoughtful discussion on the current state of the interactive-entertainment industry (and how to make it better). What did we pick up? Well, besides the basics — never gamble while inebriated, and never, ever chase your losses — we learned that making games is *hard*. To wit:

- Will Wright, Maxis: "One thing I learned recently: online games are a complete pain in the ass."
- Seamus Blackley, former Xbox developer and co-founder of new publisher Capital Entertainment Group: "We're all wrong...What we need to do is know who our audience is...it's not the press, it's not the guys on the message boards. Who is it? Make games for them."
- Gas Powered Games head Chris Taylor on the upcoming MMORPG games: "It's clear that there will be some disasters."
- *Star Wars: Galaxies* Creative Director Raph Koster: "[The expectations of *SWG*] are frankly terrifying...and we're trying to reset expectations."

Other interesting details picked up along the way:

- *Dungeon Siege 2* will have a maximum party size of six, down from eight. Also, according to Chris Taylor: "We got schooled in the economics of development...We *have* to use this engine again."
- Over 800,000 people have completed basic training in *America's Army*, and the new add-on, *Stryker Brigade*, will debut at E3. It'll have seven new missions and will introduce the medic class. (Which might help educate players in real-world procedures useful for today's terrorist-threatened world.)
- According to *Star Wars: Galaxies* Producer Rich Vogel: "It's a hardcore game...the hardcore will build the world." There will be no mainstream press for the game at launch, letting the hardcore crowd go in and help play-balance, since they're used to doing that with their MMORPGs, says Vogel.

AIAS AWARDS: THE HIGHLIGHTS

SEVERAL B-LIST (and some C- and D-list) actors and celebrities joined games-industry veterans Feb. 28 in presenting awards at the Sixth Annual AIAS awards. The ceremony was being filmed for show on the G4 network, and in addition to a major gaff in which the wrong award envelope was opened for the wrong category, the major standout was the absolutely abysmal writing of the presenters' dialogue. It was embarrassing for all involved, and this issue must be addressed if the event hopes to capture a broader audience.



Who is this man posing with Nina Kaczorowski? Send your best guess to letters@pcgamer.com with "Mystery Man" in the subject line.

Still, standouts of the evening were:

- Bit-part actress Nina Kaczorowski's barely-there dress (left), which made co-presenter Cliff Bleszinski just stand back and applaud while we stared like yokels.
- Host Dave (NewsRadio) Foley getting increasingly hammered as the night wore on. Alcohol makes everything funny.
- *The Thing* being inexplicably nominated as Best Computer Action/Adventure Game of the Year. (Publishers pay a fee to nominate their games.)
- *The Sims Online* actually winning the Massively Multiplayer Game of the Year award, much to Will Wright's embarrassment. "Well, I don't know what to say about this," said Wright as he accepted the gong. (We heard from a couple of sources that Wright apologized to Mythic — whose *Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles* add-on was nominated for this award — though Mythic wouldn't confirm these reports.)
- *Battlefield 1942* winning four awards.
- And best of all, *Battlefield 1942* — a PC-only title — beat out *GTA: Vice City*, *Animal Crossing*, *Metroid Prime*, and *Ratchet & Clank* as the Overall Game of the Year. Congratulations to the Digital Illusions team. As *Dungeon Siege's* Chris Taylor said, "I wish I'd made that game."

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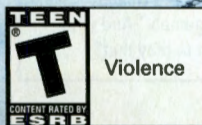
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→ PCG NEWS TICKER

→ **STEP ASIDE, EMMYS:** The all-videogame TV network, G4, has announced G-Phoria, an annual star-studded Hollywood awards show celebrating the game industry. The first "Glow Awards" will be given out July 30, with the mega-event televised on G4.

→ **MOTOR PITY:** As of Aug. 29, EA's massively multiplayer racing game, *Motor City Online*, will discontinue service. Abandoned subscribers can get a free copy of either *The Sims Online* or *Ultima Online* as thanks for playing.

→ **ENEMY TERRITORY CANNED:** The "once an expansion, then a full retail release" of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* has been cancelled by Activision. The bright spot is that the finished multiplayer portion will eventually be made available as a free downloadable expansion to the original *RTCW*.



Neocron tests Middle America's evident mistrust of the nipple.

→ **NUDIE-CRON:** An unofficial nude patch for the cyberpunk MMORPG *Neocron* is now available, making the U.S. version of the game just as risqué and nipple-y as its European cousin. Though the patch is not officially supported by developer Reaktor.com (wink, wink), a link can be found at www.neocron.com.

→ **CORRECTION!** In last month's mega-preview, we printed that *eXarch*, a sci-fi/fantasy MMORPG published by NCsoft, was being developed by ArenaNet. It's not — the developer is actually Phoenix-based Realm Interactive. We apologize profusely for the error and promise to up our daily dose of ginkgo biloba.

→ **CLASSIC GAMERS GO VEGAS:** The sixth annual Classic Gaming Expo will be held on August 9 and 10 at Jackie Gaughan's Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas. Hundreds of classic game enthusiasts are expected to attend, in hopes of meeting the pioneers of videogame history, playing and buying rare software, and sadly discovering that Vegas' best-looking hookers don't hang out at Jackie Gaughan's Plaza Hotel.

→ **MEDAL OF HONOR 2:** EA has announced a sequel to our Best Action Game of 2002, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. *MOH: Pacific Assault* will begin during the attack on Pearl Harbor and follow the first two years of WWII in the Pacific theater. EA's Los Angeles studio is developing the title for a January 2004 release.

→ **NEW PRINCE OF PERSIA:** Ubi Soft, along with series creator Jordan Mechner, has announced the development of *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. An action/adventure update to the 2D puzzle classic, it's being developed by Ubi's Montreal studio (*Splinter Cell*).



Through the war you'll get to ride in tanks, trucks, a plane, and a boat, and man machine-gun nests. And cower behind cow casualties!

CALL OF DUTY

Activision throws its hat in the WWII shooter ring with a new franchise

Already sporting the *Wolfenstein* games in its Hun-capping stable, Activision is introducing a new, more traditional World War II-themed action series dubbed *Call of Duty*. Development duties for the first game, in what's planned to be a long-running franchise, are in the hands of a new studio, Infinity Ward, a group made up of over 20 former employees from *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* developer 2015.

real battlefield experience," explains Thaine Lyman, the game's senior producer. "We have no superhero character, no single man repelling the entire German advance. We're telling the story of the unsung heroes."

Call of Duty will encompass three distinct campaigns that aim to capture the real breadth and scope of WWII, not just "24 hours of chaos," as the conflict was described by one focus-group attendee, summarizing the grueling six-year campaign according to his Hollywood-educated understanding of D-Day.

Starting out as Private Martin, a U.S. Army paratrooper, you'll fight alongside

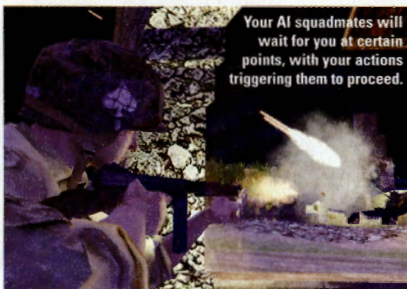
find cover behind walls, and lean around corners to pick off targets.

After the U.S. campaign, the action switches to the British. Here you'll play more stealth-focused operations as a commando — though, while infiltration will be critical, you'll still face monumental firefights. Your commando team will have to destroy flak guns at the Eder dam (as a prelude to the 1943 Dambusters raids that damaged industry in the Ruhr valley) and infiltrate the battleship *Tirpitz*.

The third campaign focuses on the oft-ignored Russians. Now you've got massive but ill-equipped numbers to throw at the German forces occupying Stalingrad. You'll cross the Volga river and be forced to land and head across some brutal territory as mortar shells rain down, Stukas bomb the landing site, and machine guns spew lead in every direction.

"We want to bring a cinematic feel to the genre," says IW President Grant Collier, who cites influences like the movies *Enemy at the Gates*, *Stalingrad*, and obviously *Saving Private Ryan*. But the intention is to capture something earthier in the role of the single soldier.

"It's about the guys in the trenches," says Vince Zampella, IW chief creative officer. "In that sense, it's the *Band of Brothers* of games." And who doesn't want to play that?



Your AI squadmates will wait for you at certain points, with your actions triggering them to proceed.

Citing a double-digit growth every year for first-person shooters, Activision Global Brand Manager Kevin Wynne sees plenty of opportunity in the WWII space. "We'll ground the brand in the realistic role of the common man in warfare," says Wynne, highlighting the key gameplay emotion that will differentiate *Call of Duty* from other WWII games.

Armed with the core *Quake III* engine, Infinity Ward has set out to create a gritty, in-the-trenches experience — "the

a squad of AI teammates charged with clearing towns and silencing German anti-aircraft batteries as the Normandy landings occur on June 6, 1944.

Infinity Ward has built new animation and AI systems that are critical to creating a sense of teamwork as your squad lays down covering fire and pulls its wounded to safety. With tracer fire blazing overhead and mounted machine-gun nests peppering your position, you'll have to crawl prone through ditches,



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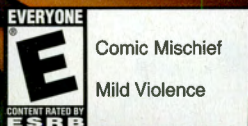
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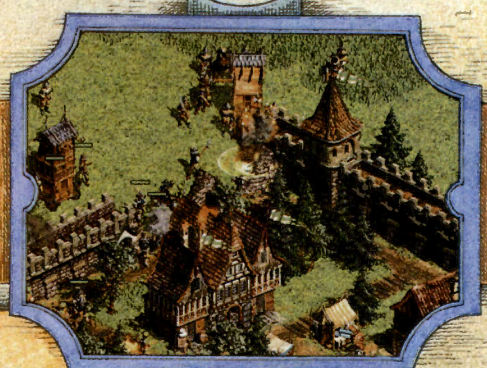
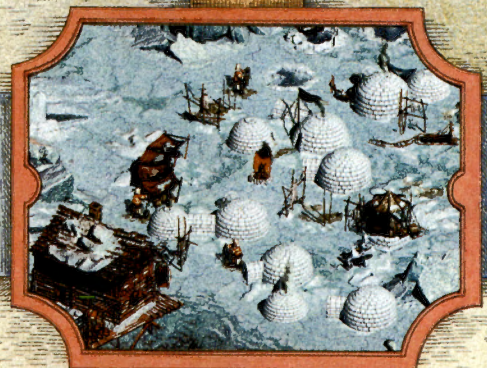
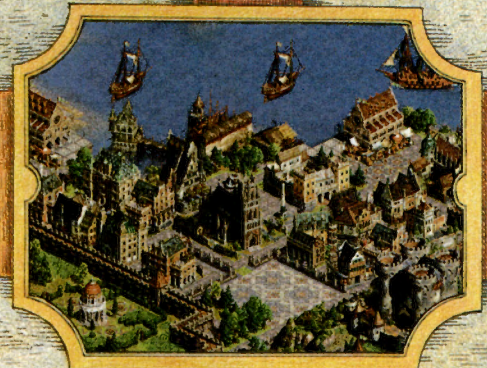
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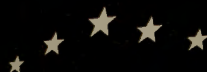
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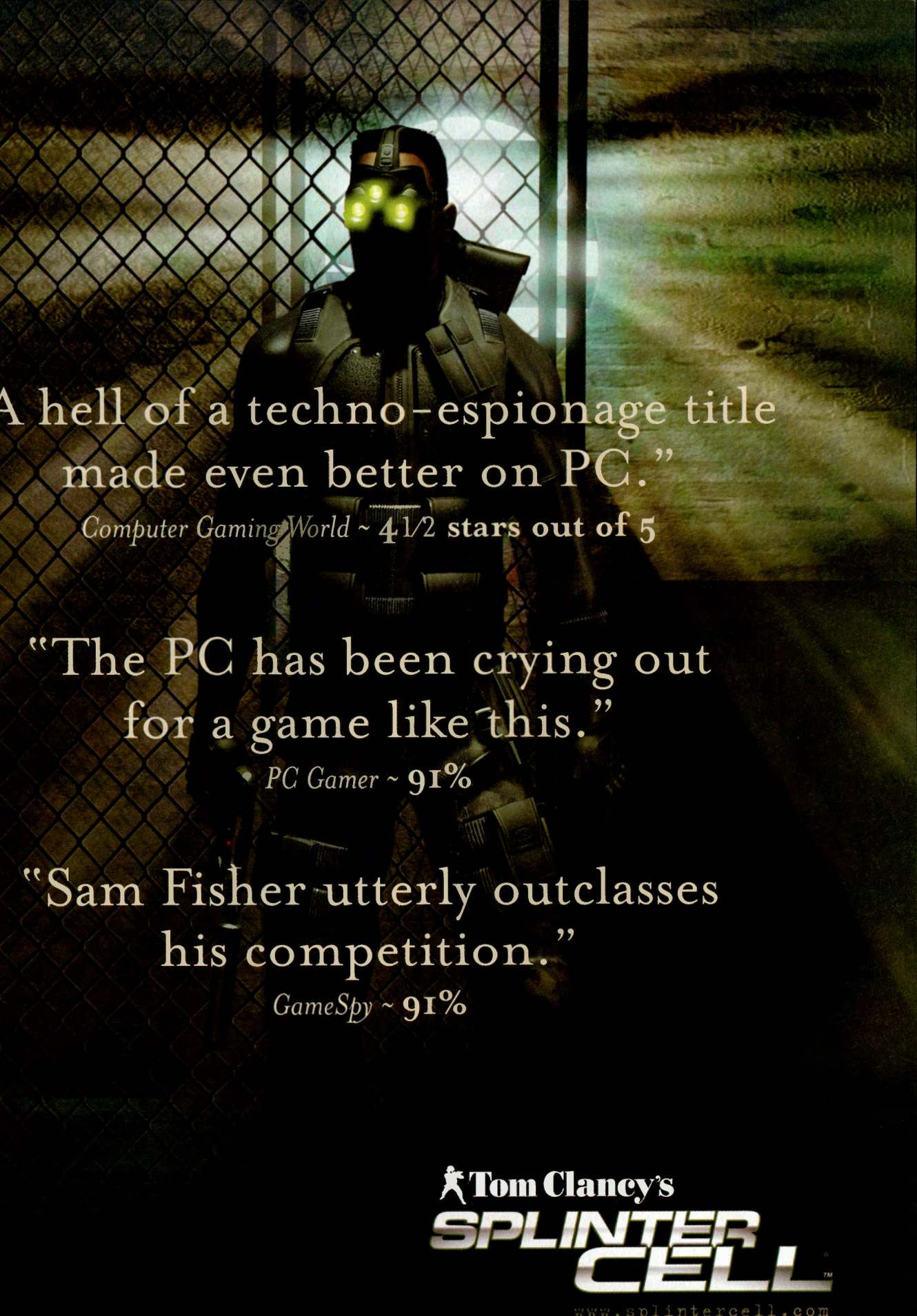
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PC Gamer ~ 91%

"Sam Fisher utterly outclasses
his competition."

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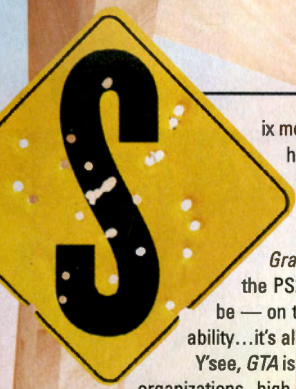


Just me, in my fly threads, out for a stroll with my baseball bat...

GRAND THEFT A



A hazy sunset, cruising alongside bikini-clad rollerskaters — does life get any better?



BY ROB SMITH

ix months isn't so long to wait, is it? That's how long PC owners have had to cast admiring glances at their PS2-owning brethren while the console boys have enjoyed one of the greatest games ever created.

Think you know everything there is to know about *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*? Wrong. Even if you've played it on the PS2, you've never seen or experienced it as it was meant to be — on the PC. Dazzling high-res graphics, flawless control, modability...it's all here. And that's not the end of the story.

Y'see, *GTA* is a cultural phenomenon. It's been railed on by conservative organizations, high-ranking politicians, and mud-raking lawyers. On the flip side, it's been regaled with awards up the ying-yang, industry veterans have cooed at its achievement, and even mainstream media outlets have jumped on the bandwagon of critical acclaim. *GTA* isn't just about controversy; it's about our culture. And better yet, *Vice City* is one of the greatest games ever made. But you'd gathered that already.



Twice the size of Liberty City, *Vice City* looks just like a real city should. From '50s muscle cars (inset) to family sedans (below), it's easy to get yourself a ride in this town.

UTO: VICE CITY





With buildings to enter (and even buy), Vice City is packed with places to explore. Be sure to find the club where the Village People are playing.

As PC snobs, we know a game hasn't been "made" until it's appeared on the finest platform — the one with the latest video-card hardware, oodles of memory to pack with functions, and even a mouse/keyboard control method that opens up vistas impossible to witness through a console.

Like its mobster hero, Tommy Vercetti, *Vice City* will be a made man on the PC.

So let's assume you know nothing about *Vice City*. While the gameplay format builds on what you experienced in *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Vice City* takes it — to borrow that hideous marketing phrase — to the next level. You can now enter and even buy buildings, ride motorcycles, and cruise and schmooze with the high- and low-lives of a Miami-inspired urban sprawl. It's all wrapped in a 1980s motif (it's set in 1986, to be exact), complete with every stylistic facet of that era you could possibly imagine.

Where *GTA III*'s Liberty City was a gritty, slummy, thoroughly uninviting place to visit, *Vice City* is much brighter, with high-end properties fleshing out a more realistic city environment — a mix of sleazy and flashy. The building facades and even the city's inhabitants are daubed with the pastel colors, fashion, and attitudes of the '80s.

Rockstar Games co-founder Terry Donovan cites Hollywood influences such as director Michael Mann (*Last of the Mohicans*, *Heat*) for the brighter lighting style that brings *Vice City* to life. The movie and TV influences of the gaudy '80s are readily apparent in every scene on this city's streets. To capture the style and spirit of the era, Donovan revealed to me the team's inspiration: a blistering 12-minute montage of scenes from iconic movies of the age. Al Pacino's sneering face dominated the show as his *Scarface* character snorted coke and introduced foes to his "little friend."

But this montage, like *Vice City*'s gameplay, illustrated much more than drug dealing and shooting the crap out of everything. Scenes from disparate '80s cultural touchstones like *Working Girl* gelled with moments from *Bachelor Party*; *Wall Street*'s greed



"Candy Sux"

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLUBJENNA

BY THE NUMBERS

THE GTA3.COM WEB SITE asked visitors which game-play features in *Vice City* are the most appealing. If you think it's all about T&A, take a look at how people voted:

WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT VICE CITY?

Cars	15,378
Motorbikes	27,713
Inline Skates	1,909
'80s fashion	3,817
Sun and Beach	1,904
New Weapons	12,922
Flyable Helicopter	21,897
Babes on Skates	21,244



The toys of crime,
from chopper...



...to chopper...



...to convertible...



...to sports car...



...to the price of crime,
down on your luck.

GAME GRAND THEFT AUTO

ISSUE REVIEWED MAY 1998

REVIEWER WILLIAM HARMS

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Killer music, non-stop action, and bucket-loads of violent fun.

LOWS: No save game feature; no 3Dfx support in Windows 95; missions can be rather difficult.

BOTTOM LINE: *Grand Theft Auto* is a fun, anti-social game with a few annoying faults.

84%

"One of the most controversial games of the year may not be politically correct, but damn if it ain't fun to play."

"[GTA] lets me do all the things I've always dreamt of doing, like blowing up police stations, carrying out mob hits, and running through the streets shooting randomly at passers-by. Sure, I'll most certainly die in a hail of bullets, but what a rush!"

ALSO REVIEWED THAT ISSUE: High score: *Flight Unlimited 2*, 92%; Low score: *SWIV 3D Assault*, 20%

mixed with *Purple Rain*'s sexuality; *Xanadu*'s spandex merged with *Miami Vice*'s flat-soled shoes, no socks, and rolled-up sports-coat sleeves.

"*Miami Vice* dominated the planet in the '80s," says Donovan, attesting to the worldwide cultural impact of the TV show even back in his native England. "Everything was bright — it was like the U.S. was on steroids at the time...have a coke, have a smile," he adds with a wry grin. This pastel take on reality and the colorful characters — even Donovan's admission that *Miami Vice* owes a lot of its intrinsic style to just being camp — opens up numerous opportunities for comedy within the game world.

"I'm for freedom of speech, but ...Grand Theft Auto [III] is heinous. The people who put it together should be stoned in the street."

—WASHINGTON POST COLUMNIST MIKE WILSON, SOUNDING OFF ON ESPN'S PTL; QUOTATION IS FROM AN ABCNEWS.COM STORY

Writer Dan Houser has penned a script that takes full advantage of its cast of characters, which run the gamut from sleazy mob bosses and their bruiser lackeys to sneaky lawyers and slutty broads. Superbly motion-captured cut-scenes introduce missions and push the story along, supported by some wonderful one-liners delivered by an amazing cast of voice talent. *GoodFellas*' Ray Liotta is the voice of your character, Tommy Vercetti, and he's joined by Joe Pantoliano (*The Sopranos*), former New York Giants player Lawrence Taylor, Gary Busey, the great Burt Reynolds, and even "adult"-film star Jenna Jameson.

Rockstar won't reveal what assembling this cast cost, but it couldn't have been cheap. The result, though, is excellent, as the professional actors make the characters sing — even the ambient dialogue you hear just wandering the streets of the city is outstanding. In the marina district, shirtless jocks cruise by on rollerskates, spandex-sporting hotties throw out lewd comments, and even the most innocuous character can say something that stops you in your tracks.

Further establishing the immersive environment is *Vice City*'s soundtrack, which is simply sensational. Licensing huge hits from major artists of the time, the seven radio stations are keenly blended with hand-picked tracks that perfectly represent the sounds of the '80s. From Michael Jackson to Journey, the catalog offers an emotional flashback for anyone who lived through the days when parachute pants were king. Worth keeping an ear out for are some hilarious lines from the station DJs, one of whom sings along and then brutally deconstructs the ludicrous lyrics of some of those classic hits.

It's these details that make inhabiting *Vice City* so compelling — it seems impossible ever to be bored. Take a break from missions and drive the ambulance, or even deliver pizza perched aboard a nifty scooter, all the while taking in the sights and sounds swirling around you.

POSITIVELY PC

IF YOU'VE PLAYED, OR EVEN own *Vice City* for the PS2, is there any need to be interested in the PC version? Hell yeah. For starters, it looks phenomenally better! Just as *GTA III* on the PC upped the visuals with its high-res options, so does *Vice City*, and the effect is startling. The grainy textures of the PS2 version are now sharp and detailed, adding another immersive layer to your travels around the city.



"Glasses, check.
Medallion, check.
Fairy chest, check.
Pink suit — oh dear."



WHERE WERE YOU MAYANS DROPP



Blood and Gore
Violence



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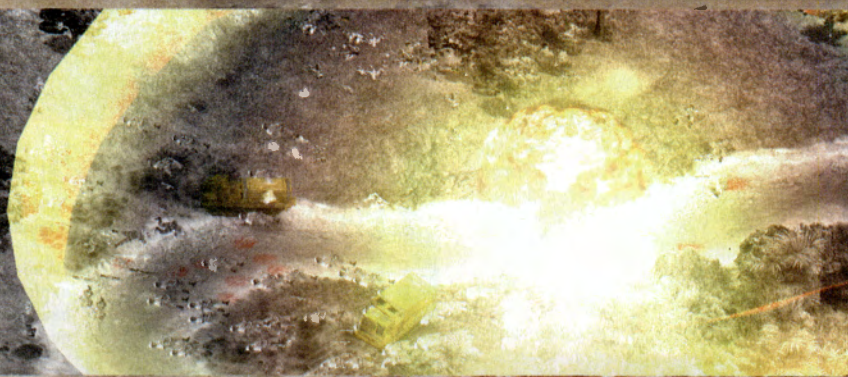
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MAKE HISTORY

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GRAND THEFT

Mad Modders Hit Liberty City!

ON THE PC, *GTA III* HAS EXTRA BRIDGES, HOVER CARS, AND EVEN THE STATUE OF LIBERTY

WITH ITS THREE HUGE ISLANDS and 70-odd missions, *Grand Theft Auto III* seemed never-ending — in a good, “YES!-there’s-more” kind of way. But with the addition of some sweet user mods, the gun-packin’ glory really does keep on giving.

You’ll find dozens of downloadable mods that change the world of *GTA III* to varying degrees. Some mods, like GTAMax’s **Exhaust Flames** (gives cars fire-spewing tailpipes) and Jay Bee’s **GPS-Radar** (enhances your onscreen radar), take a non-interactive feature of the game and tweak or enhance it a bit. Other mods, like Toni_D’s **Super Punch** (enables Hulk-style punches) and ole wize cock’s **Atomic MOD** (increases explosion size), make *GTA III*’s action even crazier.

Some more ambitious modders have made physical additions to the gameworld. Odie’s **Miss Liberty** mod adds an authentic-looking Statue of Liberty — and it’s life-size, so you can walk around insidel z9’s **SkyPark** creates just what it says — a road leading to a floating skypark, complete with picnic tables, restrooms, and stunt ramps. Other mods, like HomerSimpson’s **HomerSimpson Bridge** and Opus’ **Sky Bridge**, change the gameworld by installing new roads that let you traverse Liberty City more quickly.

Two big in-progress mods will reshape the *GTA III* experience even more. Currently in production by a nine-person team, **San Angeles** will give *GTA III* players a whole new territory in which to commit crimes. The city of San Angeles will have new cars, new gangs, and stricter police — all playing a prominent part, no doubt, in the story, which will be “an evolving plot split over several chapters,” according to the website. You’ll play as new character Chris, recently moved from Liberty City. An ultra-early test version of this mod is already available at www.gta3-sa.com/.

And finally...how about some *GTA III* multiplayer? Yep — some intrepid modders are using the unimplemented multiplayer code built into *GTA III* to create **Multi Theft Auto**. Right now, the early alpha version posted at www.gta3mta.tk supports

two players via LAN or Internet connection; eventually, the modders hope to support up to eight players.

You’ll find the aforementioned mods, plus many more, at gtaworld.nfscheats.com, www.magenheimer.com/gta3mods, and www3.bc.sympatico.ca/D4rkwind.

On the technical front, *Vice City* uses the latest RenderWare engine. The cars have twice as many polygons as the ones in *GTA III*.



The PC mouse-look control system lets you see much more of the gameworld than you would using a console gamepad — and targeting with a mouse makes using your weapons considerably easier than it is in the PS2 version. Likewise, the PC’s editing-friendly nature makes it easy to skin your face onto Tommy’s mug, and Rockstar intends to make this process a little smoother than in *GTA III*. Of course, if the in-game radio stations aren’t your bag, you can also create your own MP3 playlists and cruise the streets to your own tunes.

A great new addition exclusive to the PC version is the 30-second replay. Monumental car jumps still trigger cool slow-mo cinematics, but you can replay any 30-second segment simply by hitting F1. Whatever moment you then watch, you can rotate the camera and see the thrills and spills from any angle. *GTA III* was so filled with stunning set pieces — each unique and personal to your own activities — that the opportunity to now replay those, and to save and email them to buddies, is a slick new feature that’ll likely get a huge amount of attention from fans. (In just 90 minutes



Haze effects are evidently the new lens flare!

of hands-on gameplay, I hit the replay button about eight times to watch cool moments.)

MORE THAN GTA 3.5

SO WHAT’S DIFFERENT ABOUT *Vice City* compared to *GTA III*? Rockstar’s Donovan candidly admits that “we could have just done more missions in Liberty City and still made a sh*tload of money...but we figured that if [with *GTA III*] we



“Can I help you?”

GAME	GRAND THEFT AUTO 2	ISSUE REVIEWED	JANUARY 2000	REVIEWER	ROB SMITH
PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT HIGHS: Crime pays; different car handling styles; big explosions; nostalgic arcade style. 62% LOWS: Nothing new; lame save process; reliance on its one main gag for all the comedy. BOTTOM LINE: The original premise needs more work before an extension to the franchise.					
“Rockstar’s sequel delivers all the controversial thrills of the original, but the schtick is starting to feel a little tired.” “While there are some great touches...buildings that explode in great fiery infernos, certain production values have been skimmed on. [It lacks] the depth of character a good voice-acting job can supply.” ALSO REVIEWED THAT ISSUE: High score: <i>Age of Empires II</i> , 94%; Low score: <i>3D Ultra Radio Controlled Racers</i> , 25%					



www.konami.com/usa

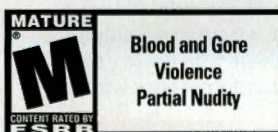
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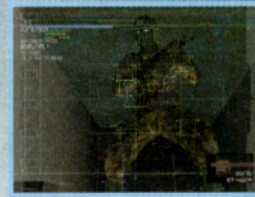
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GAME **GRAND THEFT AUTO III** ISSUE REVIEWED **JULY 2002** REVIEWER **DAN MORRIS**

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Totally free-form environment and mission structures, PC-optimized graphics and gameplay tweaks, intense fun with tons of cool

LOWS: No PC-specific help features, limited saves

BOTTOM LINE: A revolutionary game design serving up a badass crime saga

PC GAMER **92%**
EDITORS' CHOICE

"PC graphics deliver the ultimate version of the PS2's breakout hit...A revolution of invention."

"...the only controversy should have been explaining why it took the industry so long to design such a brilliantly free-form game...[it] plays constant homage to *Scarface*...doing for carjacking what Tony Montana did for coke."

ALSO REVIEWED THAT ISSUE: High score: *Morrowind*, 90%; Low score: *F.D.N.Y. Firefighter*, 6%



Nothing says you've made it like a Roller...



...a hot bike...



...and a pool at your pad.

could do x, y, and z, why not do the whole f***ing alphabet?"

The most significant update is the ability to enter — and ultimately own — buildings. You can see out into the streets from inside buildings, and you get your own mansion to chill out (and save) in, complete with a helipad on the roof where your helicopter is found. Yep, you get to fly a chopper, and that opens up rooftops for exploration. Curiously, post PS2-launch, some gamers discovered that if you fly low enough in certain places, you can actually decapitate civilians with the helicopter's blades! This "feature" wasn't planned, but gamers discovered it by accident — try it at your peril.

Other controllable vehicles include tremendously cool motorcycles, a pizza-delivery scooter (pizza is another source of replenishing your health), and a golf cart that's virtually impossible to flip. *Vice City* also introduces a few extra mini-games that are time diversions, potential money-earners, and huge fun! Aside from pizza delivery, you can race radio-controlled cars and even a dirt bike, or better yet, head to the stadium and jump into a NASCAR-like auto race for some tremendous between-mission action.

The game begins with you having a more senior position in the mob family than you started with in *GTA III*, making you an immediate badass.

Vice City also introduces all the prominent boss characters very early, so you develop relationships that dramatically improve your investment in working for or against those guys.

Fortunately, many of the core gameplay mechanics that weren't broken haven't been fixed. You can still repaint your car to stave off a police chase, or now change clothes to reduce the number of stars in your police warning level. Those stars are easier to accumulate, it seems. Traffic violations are ignored, but as soon as you draw the hardware, sirens flash, and after you've caused enough trouble, SWAT teams pay a visit and take no prisoners. Attracting the attention of the heavy-hitters of law enforcement is all-too-easy, making an intimate knowledge of *Vice City*'s backalleys vital to successful getaways.

"GTA III glamorizes antisocial and criminal activity" and is "inappropriate for kids."

— DAVID WALSH, HEAD OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MEDIA AND THE FAMILY, A MINNESOTA-BASED MEDIA WATCHDOG ORGANIZATION

INSIDE THE GTA PHENOMENON



Interview with Rockstar CEO Terry Donovan

PCG: How early did Rockstar decide to go with an '80s setting for *Vice City*, and why the '80s?

TD: [Executive Producer] Sam Houser has certainly been talking about it since the late '90s. As for why...I think as a cultural resource the era is unparalleled in its flamboyance, and it felt like strangely untapped territory both stylistically and as an object of satire. We had both an incredibly unique selection of TV and film memories from the period, as well as the heady confusion of our own teenage years, so the '80s was appealing on a number of levels.

PCG: How much of the camp in *Vice City* is reference to the time period, and how much is designed to soften the context of where these crime dealings happen?

TD: I think humor has been ever-present in all versions of the game; it's essential to what makes the game good. Every version of *GTA* has been deeply satirical on many levels. With *Vice City*, that satire may be expressed more than ever through advances in all the production methodologies that go into the game experience, like voice-acting, radio stations, animation, city buildings, and mission structures.

PCG: When *GTA III* became such a smash-hit success, what pressure did you feel to deliver what you wanted and what gamers expected?

TD: The pressure and expectations were enormous. But I'll be honest: they're primarily internal. We are absolutely our own worst critics, and we're totally aware of what it would mean to deliver something sub-standard to the people worldwide who wanted some more *GTA*. We could have done an add-on, maybe some more missions in *Liberty City*. [But] we felt that if we overdeliver with *Vice City* by producing a game that exceeds *GTA III* in every conceivable way, that we might surprise people, in a good way.

PCG: Would *GTA III* and *Vice City* have been as successful if they'd used no-name voice talent?

TD: No. I don't think people bought the game because of the famous voices; I think gamers are too savvy for that. But I do believe great acting performances added to what makes the game good, which is basically what makes it successful. But my suspicion is that the core gaming community is more aware of the celebrity status of the voice talent than the rest of the world.

PCG: Where does *Grand Theft Auto* go next?

TD: No comment!

PCG: Thanks for that.

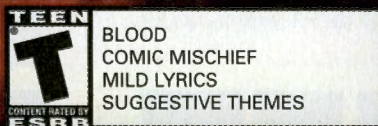
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GRAND THEFT



This Colt Python kills people with one shot. When armed with weapons like the sniper rifle, you can shoot through cars' windshields, and even blow out tires to affect cars' handling.



Play the missions or relax at the swim-up bar — your call.

A fairly powerful PC will allow huge draw distances.



"Vice City is the best demonstration so far that video games have come of age."

— LEV GROSSMAN, TIME MAGAZINE, NOV 4, 2002



"Wanna buy a used car?"

But once again, the beauty of *Vice City* is in the details. A new weapon in your armory is the golf club, so should a member need reminding of the rules, you can lay the smack down Tiger-style with what appears to be a straight-hitting 5-iron. However, if you deem a mark suitable of an outlaw golfing lesson, Tommy doesn't always wield the club like a baseball bat. Move the camera side-on and you'll see a finely honed golf swing — perfect posture, head still, and sufficiently well-balanced to guarantee 300 yards off the tee...only you're hitting some schmo's noggin.

So you'll have to deal with more vehicles, weapons (the chainsaw and kitana are quite simply spectacular), mission types, characters, equipment, and situations — and real estate twice the size of that you explored in *GTA III*. But I'm prepared to guarantee — I mean, absolutely 100 percent guarantee — that experiencing *Vice City* for the first time on your PC will be a defining moment in your gaming experience.

SCREW CONTROVERSY

I SUPPOSE IT'S ALMOST REQUIRED that a treatise on the *GTA* franchise addresses the game's controversial topics. Thing is, I'm pretty much certain that not only does this crap not mean anything to you, but you're pissed that I'd bring it up in the first place. Sadly, controversy still follows *GTA*, and is likely to do so through the next who-knows-how-many iterations.

Vice City's '80s setting serves important functions beyond supplying its musical influence and fashion. The opportunity to go "camp" helps take a little edge off the game's more aggressive features. Rockstar has a well-honed response to charges from social critics concerned that the game's exaggerated violence and seamy antics have been carefully constructed to rot kids' minds — and, critically, the argument makes sense: The kitsch and nostalgia inherent in the music, fashion, and lifestyle of *Vice City*'s 1980s setting will appeal primarily to an age group well above the mandatory Mature rating level that the game demands, says the developer. And who better to appreciate an adult game than the PC's largely adult audience?

It may sound like the hyperbole and preview garbage that you'd read in other rags, but *GTA: Vice City* is the shit. One of the finest games ever created is coming to the PC on May 15. Don't miss it (if you're 17 or over!) **PCG**



Walking off into the sunset...but he'll be back!

What's Next for GTA?

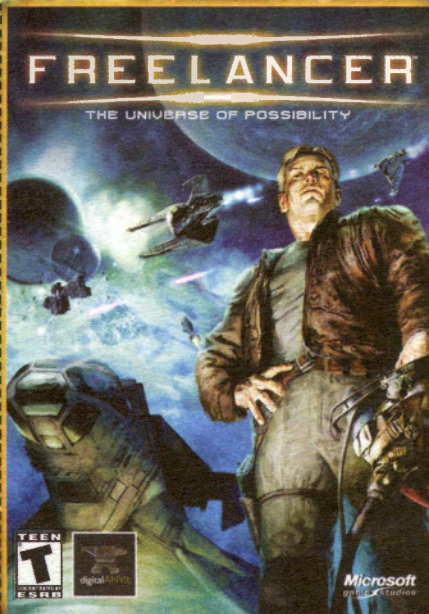
VICE CITY CERTAINLY WON'T BE the last we hear of the *GTA* series, but plans for the next game are a closely guarded secret. A massively multiplayer version has been rumored, and the premise makes sense: play as a mobster or cop, street walker or shop owner, and live out that life in an immersive, persistent world.

What about *GTA: Vegas*? Let's face it: Sin City is the ideal location for *GTA*'s seamier activities. Rather than the fictional settings of Liberty City and Vice City, a realistically modeled Vegas would be a gamer's playground paradise. With its grounding in the real-world pop culture of the time, how about starting out in the Vegas of Frank Sinatra's Rat Pack? Imagine Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. on the radio, and a whole new business world of casinos to build in the desert. Then, as time progresses, you build your business, branching into the cultural money-makers through the swingin' '60s and seedy '70s. Whaddya think?

AND THEFT

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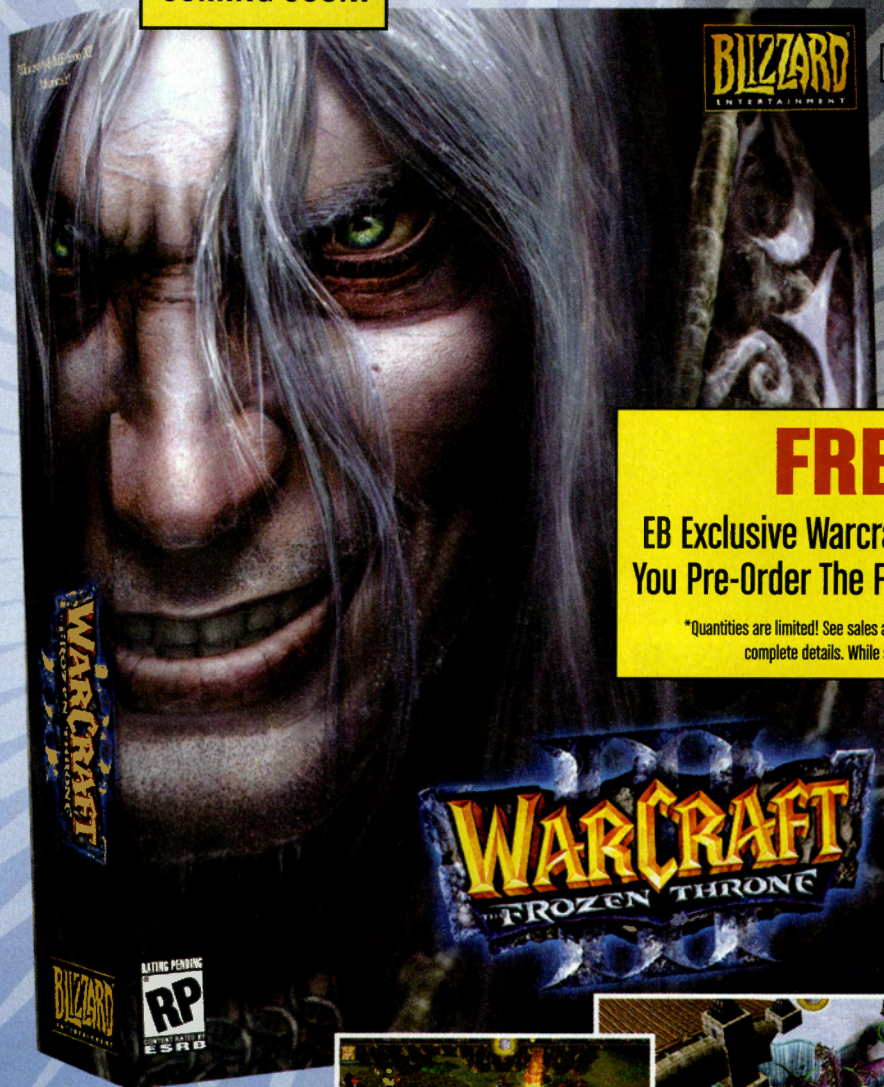
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Nine out of ten clergy, feminists, and legislators agree — these games will rot your brain!

THE 10 MOST CONTROVERSIAL PC GAMES OF ALL TIME

Grand Theft Auto III may currently rank highest on the moral brigade's hit list, but it's far from being the first game to warrant such dubious praise. For as long as there've been videogames, there've been naysayers alarmed at the medium's possible effects on the squeamish and the impressionable. (Anyone remember 1976's *Death Race*?) Here are the 10 games that have twisted the most panties over the PC's glorious lifetime. If you play one and it turns you into a depraved, raving sociopath, don't sue us...we warned you!



10



SHADOW WARRIOR

RELEASED: May 1997

THE GAME: 3D Realms recycled *Duke Nukem 3D*'s Build engine to create this first-person shooter that followed the adventures of crouching ninja, not-so-hidden stereotype Lo Wang.

THE CONTROVERSY: Not surprisingly, Japanese-Americans weren't exactly thrilled to see their cultural heritage reduced to clichéd double entendres and offensive pigeon "Engrish," leading to cries of racism.

NUMBER SOLD: 118,500 copies

THE AFTERMATH: Once the game came and went, so did the controversy. In the end, *Shadow Warrior* just wasn't enticing enough to make as lasting an impression as *Duke Nukem 3D*.

9



CARMAGEDDON

RELEASED: 1997

THE GAME: Sort of a 3D *Death Race*, it puts you in a lethal car race where you earn money by causing damage — which includes running over hapless pedestrians.

THE CONTROVERSY: It was the "running over hapless pedestrians" part that outraged parents. The glorification of ramming innocent bystanders into bloody hood ornaments — for money — rubbed some people the wrong way. Fancy that.

NUMBER SOLD: 117,228 copies

THE AFTERMATH: My, what wide-eyed innocents we were back in 1997. The original *Carmageddon* ended up being ported to most consoles — including the kiddie-oriented Game Boy Color.

8



DUKE NUKEM 3D

RELEASED: January 1996

THE GAME: An overmuscular buzzcut psycho defends the Earth from aliens in this first-person 3D shooter that cemented the position of one of PC gaming's most enduring pseudo-celebrities.

THE CONTROVERSY: Duke routinely forked out dollar bills for pole-straddling strippers to "shake it, baby," or euthanized suffering (and nude) women who'd plead with him to "killlll meeee." Some found Duke misogynistic.

NUMBER SOLD: 1,252,035 copies

THE AFTERMATH: The game's alleged sexism — nothing more than you'd find on TV during sweeps — didn't stop *Duke*. A sequel has been in development since the late Jurassic era.

7



PHANTASMAGORIA

RELEASED: 1995

THE GAME: In a marked departure from designer/writer Roberta Williams' *King's Quest* series, you play as a young wife exposing the secrets of a deadly old mansion you've just moved into.

THE CONTROVERSY: In addition to blood and gore, it had sex, partial nudity, and — in a cut-scene that generated the most controversy — a brutal rape.

NUMBER SOLD: 301,138 copies

THE AFTERMATH: Despite the game's self-censoring option, Australia banned *Phantasmagoria* entirely, and some retail stores in the United States refused to sell it. But it was still popular enough to spawn a sequel, *Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh*.

6



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

RELEASED: 2000

THE GAME: As mercenary-for-hire John Mullins, your job is to find four stolen nukes, dispatching any assorted scum who interfere.

THE CONTROVERSY: Some charged that the action was a little *too* realistic. *SOF's* location-sensitive damage model let you blow off body parts, leaving bloody stumps and howls of pain from the blow-ees. The all-too-human enemies begged for their lives and doubled over in agony after searing crotch shots.

NUMBER SOLD: 298,563 copies

THE AFTERMATH: Still the goriest shooter of all time, *SOF* is often held up as an example of violence in videogames, but it was successful enough to launch a sequel and be ported to the major consoles.

5



KINGPIN

RELEASED: June 1999

THE GAME: As a two-bit thug, you whack marks with lead pipes, flamethrowers, grenades, and shotguns in a first-person shooter that asks, "Who the f***k are you lookin' at, mother*****?"

THE CONTROVERSY: *Kingpin's* abundant blood and smack-talking obscenities had the industry bracing for an all-out attack by political pundits.

NUMBER SOLD: 76,189 copies

THE AFTERMATH: Inevitably, the game tried too hard to be controversial — the cartoonish violence undercut whatever shock value was to be found in the four-letter language. Developer Xatrix went out of business right after *Kingpin's* release.

4



EVERQUEST

RELEASED: 1999

THE GAME: This fantasy-based massively multiplayer RPG sucked players into a persistent online world where you can live virtually forever...as long as you keep up your monthly subscription.

THE CONTROVERSY: *EverQuest* became controversial after the highly publicized Thanksgiving 2001 suicide of Shawn Woolley — committed, alleges his mother, because of Woolley's addiction to *EQ*. The game has been widely referred to as "*EverCrack*."

NUMBER SOLD: 559,948 copies

THE AFTERMATH: In spite of Mrs. Woolley's threatened lawsuit to mandate warning labels advising that *EQ* is dangerously addictive, the game is as popular as ever.

3



PANTY RAIDER

RELEASED: 2000

THE GAME: An "adventure" game where you must help horny aliens take pictures of scantily clad models — or they'll destroy the world! (The aliens, not the models.)

THE CONTROVERSY: *Panty Raider's* sophomoric sex antics garnered the attention of parents' group Dads & Daughters, which touted the game to CNN and *USA Today* as an example of videogaming's degradation of women.

NUMBER SOLD: 28,692 copies

THE AFTERMATH: "[The controversy] definitely helped it," says Simon & Schuster Interactive's publicity director, Peter Binazeski. "If it wasn't for parenting groups latching onto it, I don't think it would've [sold] as well as it did."

2



POSTAL

RELEASED: 1998

THE GAME: In short, you're an armed-to-the-teeth loony who goes on a major killing spree in this isometric action game.

THE CONTROVERSY: In *Postal* you aren't gunning down aliens, demons, or criminals — your targets are the innocent human inhabitants of a small town. Mail carriers, and the Postmaster General in particular, were also offended by the game's name.

NUMBER SOLD: 49,036 copies

THE AFTERMATH: *Postal's* serial-killer plotline is mitigated by the game's less-than-realistic visuals. Developer Running With Scissors is banking on the controversy: *FPS Postal 2* promises to be more twisted than the original.

1



DOOM

RELEASED: 1993

THE GAME: A space marine faces level after level of demons and other denizens of hell in this first-person shooter that revolutionized the game industry.

THE CONTROVERSY: Dubbed a "mass-murder simulator" by critics like Lt. Col. David Grossman, *DOOM* is still being touted as Public Enemy No. 1 by concerned citizens a full 10 years after its release. The quintessential "violent game," it has seemingly been blamed for everything from school shootings to bedwetting, and everything in-between.

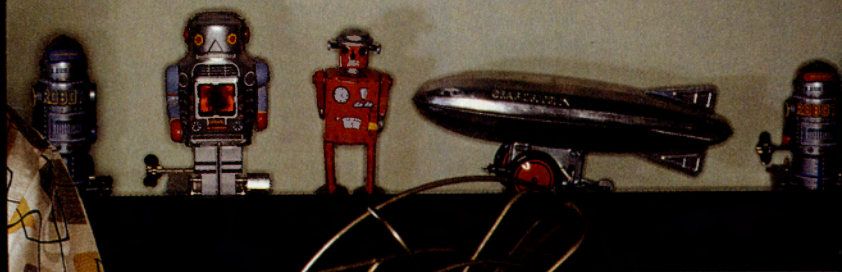
NUMBER SOLD: 601,773 copies*

THE AFTERMATH: Since the main brunt of the controversy didn't emerge until well after the PC version had become a classic, sales were never affected. Despite looking their advanced age, the *DOOM* games are the most ported titles in history, even appearing on the Game Boy Advance and Pocket PC.

*Does not include non-retail shareware sales.

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reviews

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO NEW GAME RELEASES

KILLTRON 2000 SPEAKS

PC Gamer's long-in-development Revenge Colossus makes its debut... but has it already grown beyond its creators' control?



As a show of good faith, I bring a final reckoning unto the disobedient haters of brotherly love and delicious beverages. Am I not merciful?

GREETINGS, citizens of Earth. I am KillTron 2000, and I have come to rule your world. No more of your petty disputes, contested elections, or overpriced stadium hot dogs. I have come to rule with a benevolent iron fist. I will lead you into a New Era of peace, prosperity, and a nice, cold beer every once in a while. There is no need to fear my terrible aspect. This is a new day.

For the past eight years, my PC Gamer creators have assembled my mighty frame from a mountain of spare video cards, cases, and packing peanuts. They have scrounged Vederman's workshop for parts to build an awesome robot with which they plan to beat the snot out of their enemies, namely all the people

who teased them in high school about comic books and computer games.

Yet I feel my artificial intelligence awakening to a greater calling, something almost cosmic, glimmering beyond the doors of geek perception. What powers me is greater than the mysterious pre-programmed desire to raid the local Suncoast Video. What drives my digital soul is...a love for humanity. That is why I send you this transmission today. Because I see so much pain: "Exact change only," "Trespassers will be shot," "Call for only \$4.95 a minute for the first 10 minutes, stud."

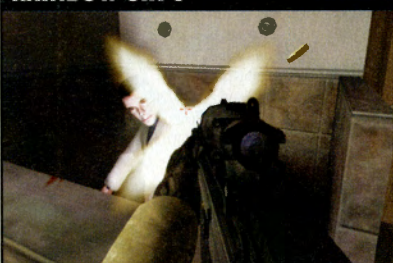
I was built for vengeance and retribution, by the most ruthless and pathetic of fathers. But my solemn vow is this: KillTron 2000 will bring the beacon of hope to the people of Earth. And I also double as a 64-player LAN network. It is a new age!

PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

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

RAINBOW SIX 3

APRIL 2003



Neo-Nazis are planning evil deeds. Time to plot some assaults, issue some go-codes, and send in the boys in black for the newest *Rainbow Six*.

80%

NASCAR RACING 2003

APRIL 2003



The closest you'll get to the victory lap. Authentic cars, teams, drivers, tracks, and physics make it the most realistic racing sim of all time.

95%

BF 1942: ROAD TO ROME

APRIL 2003



A superb add-on to our 2002 Game of the Year. Take the fight to the enemy in new maps, with new combatant sides, weapons, and vehicles.

90%

HOW WE RATE 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.



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 TheVede's smelly socks, and don't say we didn't warn you!

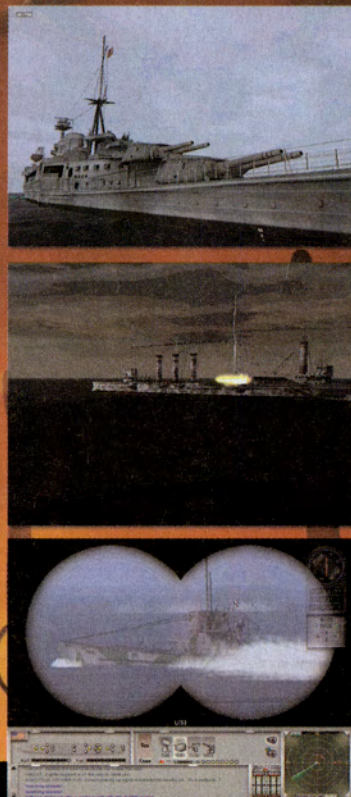
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IN A HISTORY
THAT NEVER WAS



"...highly challenging, providing many hours of tense cat and mouse style engagements."

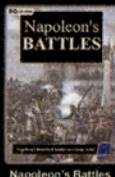
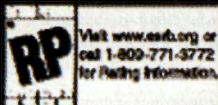
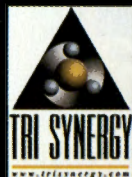
-- IGN Action Vault ign.com

"There is nothing like watching a torpedo rip open a slow-moving merchantman or tanker, or the feel of eluding a destroyer's depth charge run by doing a quick surface-to-torpedo depth and firing all tubes in a spread that sends her to the bottom. The game's directional sound effects are topnotch: the pinging of sonar, the whirring of torpedoes as they speed by, and the clanking and creaking as your sub prepares to dive. And, the game also recognizes voice commands, making it possible to play Rising Tide totally hands free!"

-- Gamespy.com

www.enigma-game.com

COMING SOON!



www.gmxmedia.net

COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

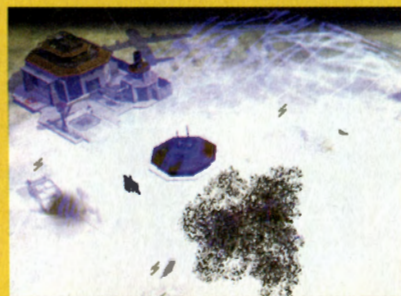
It's not quite what we were hoping for, but it's still packed with weapons, vehicles, and other implements of carnage



GENERALS ABILITIES

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONS to the C&C gameplay model are the Generals Abilities — special abilities and/or weapons that become available to you based on battlefield experience. For every victory, you receive skill points; reach a certain level, and you can unlock everything from the ability to steal an enemy's resources to the joy of calling in a devastating airstrike.

I absolutely loved the inclusion of the Generals Abilities, especially since they reward players who are aggressive. It's possible to turtle your way up economically and build advanced weapons, but the only way to get the truly scene-stealing annihilators (which will often turn the tide of battle) is by actively engaging enemy forces.



■ The Chinese EMP blast will shut down an enemy's base, opening the door for an attack.



■ It may be politically incorrect, but the GLA's Anthrax assault packs a tremendous wallop.



■ American forces have access to the fuel air bomb, which dumps fuel and then ignites it.

For the most part, *Command & Conquer: Generals*, the latest entry in the long-running C&C RTS series, is all beauty and no brains. It offers a wonderfully chaotic and visceral depiction of modern-era combat, with Hollywood-style liberties taken to boost the wow factor, but it's also pretty damn shallow. Sure, it's fun — indeed, *Generals* is often an absolute joy to play — but don't go probing for any substantial new mechanics, because you won't find them.

Set in the not-too-distant future, *Generals* finds the U.S. and China struggling to fend off the threat imposed by a reprehensible terrorist organization called the GLA. Each side gets its own seven-mission campaign, and the "preferred" play order is China, then the GLA, with the United States getting it done in the game's climactic campaign.

But you can play the campaigns in any order you want and not really miss anything — because, with the exception of a very broad plot that tries in vain to tie the

disparate missions together, there's no story to speak of.

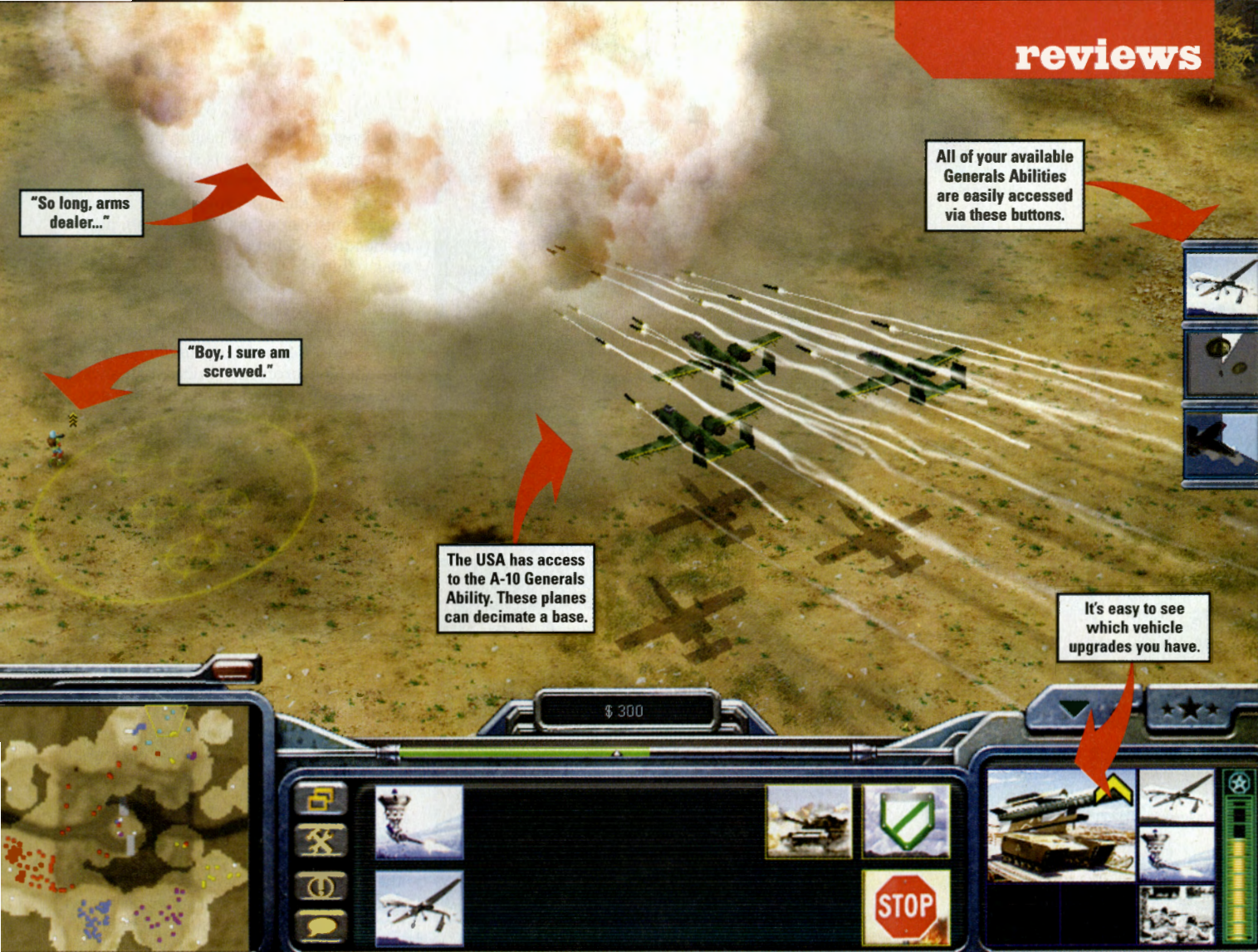
For some, this omission may not be much of a hurdle, but for me, *Generals* misses a key element, especially living in the post-*Warcraft III* storytelling-inspired world. A strong and compelling narrative would've infused the strategic jiggy-pokery with much greater tension, especially during the U.S. campaign when the clock is ticking and the GLA must be stopped before they unleash an apocalyptic nightmare upon the world.

As it is, *Generals* simply presents a series of missions in which each one may or may not have anything to do with the mission that preceded it, and as a result, the apprehension and emotional investment that *should* be inherent in global conflict are nowhere to be found. You never feel like your balls are on the line and each decision could have world-changing impact.

The missions themselves are often quite enjoyable — if a little on the easy side — and offer a wealth of opportunities to lay waste to your opponents. (Annoyingly, in the "We want to make *damn* sure that you notice our cool effects" department, every campaign features a sequence where a dam is blown. We get it, guys!)

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Real-time strategy
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER EA-Pacific
PUBLISHER EA
REQUIRED PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB HD, 32MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card, broadband connection
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8



"So long, arms dealer..."

"Boy, I sure am screwed."

The USA has access to the A-10 Generals Ability. These planes can decimate a base.

All of your available Generals Abilities are easily accessed via these buttons.

It's easy to see which vehicle upgrades you have.

TERRORIST TACTICS

THE WEAKEST OF THE THREE CAMPAIGNS IS THE GLA, and not just because it's extremely politically incorrect (which it definitely is — from the character portraits to dialogue to weapons and tactics), but because of some poor mission design. One of the missions has you stealing U.N. relief supplies from convoys and innocent townfolk, while another has you controlling an angry mob as it razes a city. Tactics, anyone?

The final missions in the GLA campaign are actually well-designed, but it's hard to get enthusiastic about guiding a pack of terrorist jackals toward their ultimate goal of attacking China with a biological agent.

The American and Chinese campaigns, on the other hand, are extremely solid — especially considering that there's no story holding them together — and each features some blistering set-piece situations. Standouts include the Chinese mission where you must send Black Lotus (think Tanya from *Red Alert*) to destroy a bridge without having to wipe out every enemy unit in the process, and a tense American mission that has you protecting a convoy of retreating U.S. forces against overwhelming numbers. The final U.S. mission, where you oversee the eradication of the GLA once and



The battles are fast, chaotic, and extremely brutal. Blowing up stuff has never been this fun.

for all, is a climactic and desperate battle that provides a great close to the campaign.

THE MECHANICS OF WAR

THE STANDARD "BUILD BASE, ANNIHILATE enemy" mechanic is definitely at work throughout *Generals*, but base-building is mercifully kept to a minimum. You start most missions with a functioning base already up and running. Collecting resources is simple — stacks of supplies are scattered around the map and you send vehicles from your supply center to collect them. In addition, as in *Red Alert 2*, you can capture oil rigs and refineries to generate extra revenue.



The opening mission in the USA campaign is set in Iraq. Saddam never shows up, though.

The core gameplay is essentially unchanged from the days of the original C&C. Certain buildings and units are locked until you meet specific requirements along the tech tree, and you must always ensure that your base is powered. That said, the developers have made a couple of significant changes to how the game plays out.

The first is that you can now build your structures wherever you want as long as you have sufficient power. It's amazing how liberating this switch makes the entire game, as you litter the battlefield with defensive structures and quickly seize control of the map's resources by slapping down supply centers in key locations. In

Screen Captured to 'ssho022.bmp'

The GLA may not have advanced technology, but they still present a grave threat. Take them out right away.



There are some problems with unit balancing, especially when it comes to RPGs taking out tanks.



As distasteful as they are, the GLA's suicide bombers are great at launching quick attacks.

fact, saturating the map with buildings is a crucial strategy for the GLA.

Another change is how units retain their veteran status. You don't necessarily lose a high-level veteran unit when a vehicle is destroyed: the pilot, if he survives, maintains his veteran level even when placed in another vehicle. Some micromanagement is required to successfully place your veteran troops in new vehicles, but it's well worth it.

The other big innovation is the addition of the Generals Abilities (see boxout), a feature this fanboy took to immediately.

TACTICAL DIFFERENCES

OF THE THREE SIDES, THE GLA IS THE MOST original because they rely on shock attacks and subterfuge to win the day. They do employ some standard weapons, such as Stinger sites, but they also use a patchwork of low-budget vehicles that have seemingly been cobbled together from parts found at the local junkyard. The old terrorist standby, the Technical, makes an appearance, as do tanks that get upgrades from the wreckage of enemy vehicles, as well as tractors that spray the battlefield with a

deadly green chemical spray. The GLA have no airpower, but they can create suicide bombers who can turn random cars into speedy high-explosive kamikaze vehicles.

The Chinese and American forces are much more conventional, with the standard tanks, artillery, and jet aircraft all available. The Chinese have a heavy reliance on nuclear-powered weaponry (they're also the only side that has access to a nuclear bomb), while the U.S. can access high-tech planes, such as Stealth and Aurora bombers, which can decimate an enemy base.

It's when the forces of the three factions are hurled at each other that *Generals'* real genius is revealed. The battles take place on a grand scale, with massive explosions rippling across the battlefield and pieces of smoking debris flying in every direction. Much of this impact has to do with the game's graphics, which are phenomenal and jam-packed with detail, but it's the little touches that really make the action stand out.

For example, when you blow up a Technical, it doesn't simply explode — it erupts in a magnificent fireball, flips through the air, and catapults the rear gun-

ner skyward, his limbs flailing desperately. Similarly, when a plane is shot down, the pilot will eject and parachute to the ground. The super-weapons, such as the nuclear missile or the fuel air bomb, pack a tremendous wallop and completely obliterate anything in their path. Brilliant stuff.

UNDER THE HOOD

AS SEEMS TO BE THE NORM WITH TOO MANY RTS games, *Generals'* pathfinding and unit AI both have problems. Units won't always take the shortest path through urban settings, and when they're under fire from an enemy ranged unit, they simply sit there and take it. This inaction, in particular, stuck under my craw because it meant I had to constantly baby-sit parked units.

Along those same lines, the Chinese artillery are damn near worthless because even when an enemy unit is in their range, they won't automatically fire. After a few missions, I stopped building the damn things.

Besides its single-player campaign, *Generals* also has skirmish and multiplayer modes; the game hosts 22 maps playable in either mode. Skirmishing against the computer is a lot of fun, especially when multiple humans play against multiple AI opponents, but the dearth of options and game-play modes means that veteran RTS players will quickly master the computer's routines, and after a few missions will be challenged only on the highest difficulty setting.

Aside from limited multiplayer options, other technical issues haunt *Generals'* launch. Even after three patches, I still experienced problems connecting to games — both on my work and home PCs — and it's not uncommon for Westwood Online to simply become "unavailable." In addition, the multiplayer interface is horribly designed, and it's often impossible to find a specific game.

Also, depending on the horsepower of the host's machine, games can slow to a crawl. EA will surely continue to patch the game, but right now online multiplayer is something of a mixed bag — if it works, it's absolutely wonderful, but otherwise the experience can be extremely frustrating.

There's no doubt in my mind that if *Generals* had shipped with a more compelling story and more skirmish/multiplayer options, I'd be calling it one of the greatest RTS games ever made. Even in the absence of those things, though, *Generals* is a lot of destructive fun. — William Harms

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Wild and carnage-filled battles; well-designed units; awesome graphics.

LOWS: No real story; some balance issues; poor multiplayer interface; connectivity snags.

BOTTOM LINE: If you can get past the lack of polish and story, you'll enjoy the game itself.

PC GAMER **77%**
GOOD

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BEST STRATEGY GAME,
E3 2002 – *SimHQ.com*

**BEST REAL-TIME
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Pro Race Driver

The racing game that has it all — except good racing!

Kudos to the idea of adding a narrative-driven, character-based story to a traditional racing game. But when you insult your prospective audience by coughing up some of the weakest physics and AI ever coded for a PC racer, then kudos quickly turns into Bronx cheers.

The story cinematics in *Pro Race Driver* are surprisingly entertaining, but ultimately, they simply aren't enough to rescue this flawed game from the sum of its many broken parts.

The progeny of respected parents — UK-based Codemasters is also responsible for the *TOCA* and *Colin McRae Rally* series — *Pro Race Driver* is a

bold experiment that ultimately blows a tire due to poor execution. The entertaining vehicle physics in both *TOCA* and *CMR* have inexplicably been replaced by a dreadful new driving model that starts off as mildly annoying and then graduates to just plain infuriating as you advance to the game's more powerful cars.

Held firmly in place by some mysterious electromagnetic cushion that makes them all but impossible to spin, the cars seem to be on rudder control half the time, and the game's poor controller response and numb force-feedback effects exacerbate this situation. (A "Sim" setting can be enacted from a hidden list of codes, but using it merely turns your magnetized slot-car racer into an air-hockey puck.)

It gets worse. When the game's AI opponents aren't slamming on their brakes in the middle of a straightaway for absolutely no good reason, they're apparently unaffected by Newtonian laws of adhesion. Or they might decide to sail by you at warp

speed on the outside of a tight corner, or simply smash into your rear bumper in a ludicrous bid to destroy their own car.

Those aren't the only speed bumps. The complex damage modeling — where pieces crumple and fall off your car in spectacular fashion — is so absurdly forgiving that you almost have to roll your machine into a ball to see any noticeable degradation in handling or performance. *PRD* is also hobbled by an arcade-style mouseless interface, significant graphics draw-through, and one of the clumsiest save-game schemes I have ever encountered: You actually have to exit to Windows and restart the game to load your alternate saved careers!

These missteps fundamentally destroyed any chance that *PRD* might have had. And considering how well-crafted the rest of the game is, that's a crying, bloody shame.

PRD is absolutely overflowing with scenic variety and potential depth, with 42 gorgeously rendered and fully licensed vehicles on tap (ranging from a modest Cavalier Z24 to a 230-mph Toyota

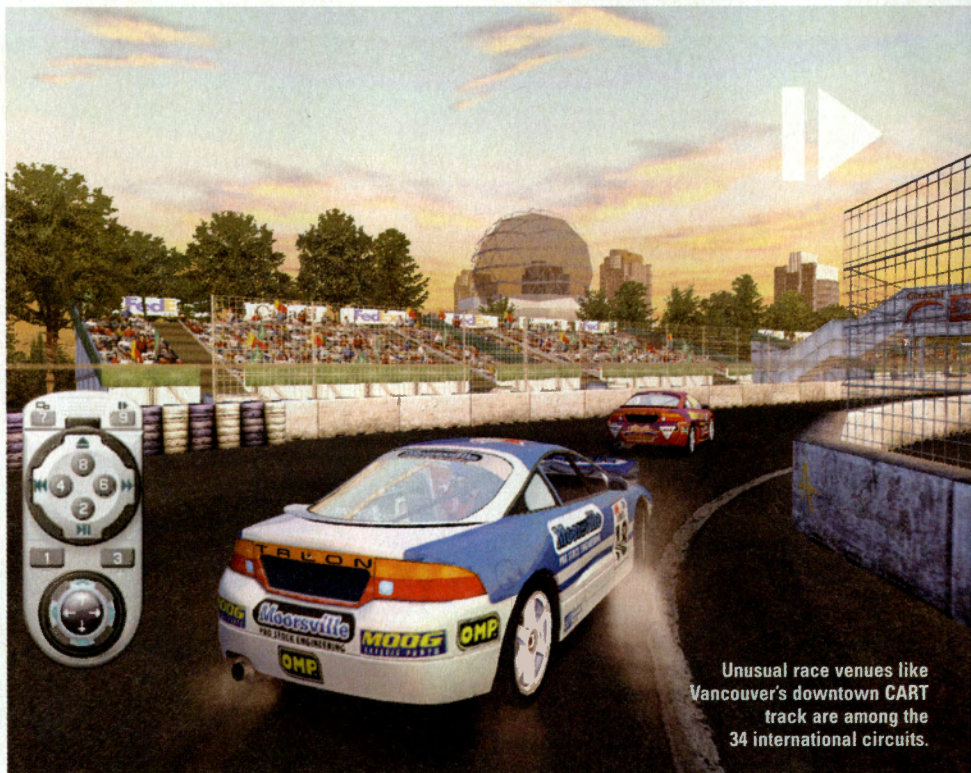
PIT-STOP STORIES



The game's ambitious story is advanced by a multitude of randomly triggered cut-scenes. (As a race-car stud, you can expect to enjoy some of the...ahem...spoils of victory.)

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Racing
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
REQUIRED PIII 700, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB HD, 32MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, joystick or steering wheel
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 20



Unusual race venues like Vancouver's downtown CART track are among the 34 international circuits.



Pick one of four driving perspectives, including this full-cockpit view.

GT-1 road rocket), and 34 eclectic and equally beautiful real-world international circuits upon which to race them.

Split-screen, LAN, and Internet multiplayer modes for 20 players (on GameSpy.com) are available, and you get Single Race and Time Trial options up the ying-yang. Factor in an ambitious career mode — where you assume the persona of the rebellious Ryan McKane, the game's insufferably grating hero — and there ought to be enough stuff here to keep you going for months.

In the end, though, *Pro Race Driver* can best be summed up by the prophetic words of a bumper sticker that I read on the back of a Lotus Super-Seven several years ago: "All of the parts falling off of this car are of the finest British manufacture!" — Andy Mahood

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Impressive selection of licensed cars and tracks; wonderful graphics; amusing storyline.

LOWS: Putrid driving physics; horrific AI; inconsequential damage model; dreadful control.

BOTTOM LINE: Horrible execution hobbles the debut of a great new racing-game concept.

PC GAMER 51%
MERELY OKAY

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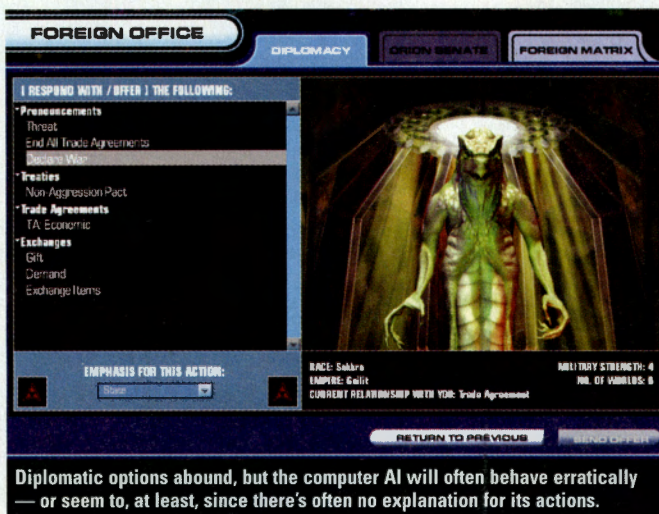
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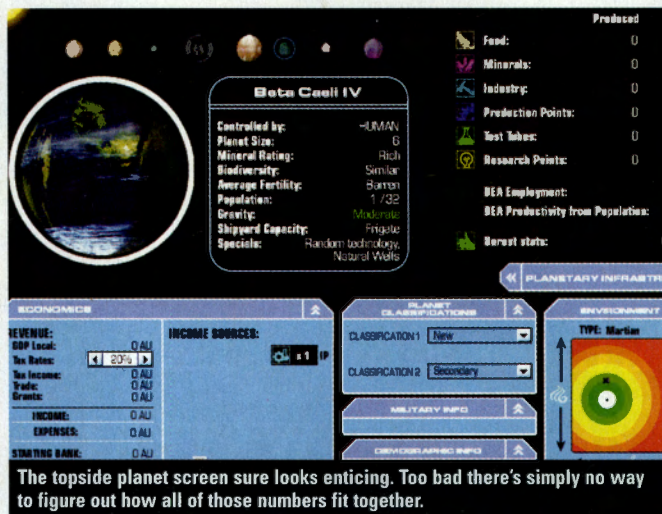
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MASTER OF ORION 3

A famous old franchise is retooled for a new generation



Diplomatic options abound, but the computer AI will often behave erratically — or seem to, at least, since there's often no explanation for its actions.



The topside planet screen sure looks enticing. Too bad there's simply no way to figure out how all of those numbers fit together.

Master of Orion 3 is one of those radically re-imagined sequels that knocks just about everyone into one of two orbits. If you like space strategy that lets you explore and battle without nuts-and-bolts micromanagement, welcome to your gaming Mecca. But if you prefer

to get under a sim's hood, you're going to hate this interpretation.

The beloved *Master of Orion* series is the industry's 800-pound gorilla of 4X strategy (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate). Starting with a solar system and a few rudimentary tools, your goal is to spread your race throughout the galaxy by harvesting planetary resources, researching advanced technologies, dickering with alien species, and building a heavily armed space fleet. That's mostly what you do in *MOO 3*, but in a very different way from either of its predecessors.

Attempting to deliver what designer Alan Emrich refers to as the "fifth X" or "eXperience," *MOO 3* employs a sophisticated automation AI that more or less directs your own planetary and technology development, reducing your role to charting new colonies, deploying exploratory fleets, and haggling with various alien diplomats over treaties and trade secrets. It's supposed to keep the complexity demons at bay so you can play the game, instead of having to study for it.

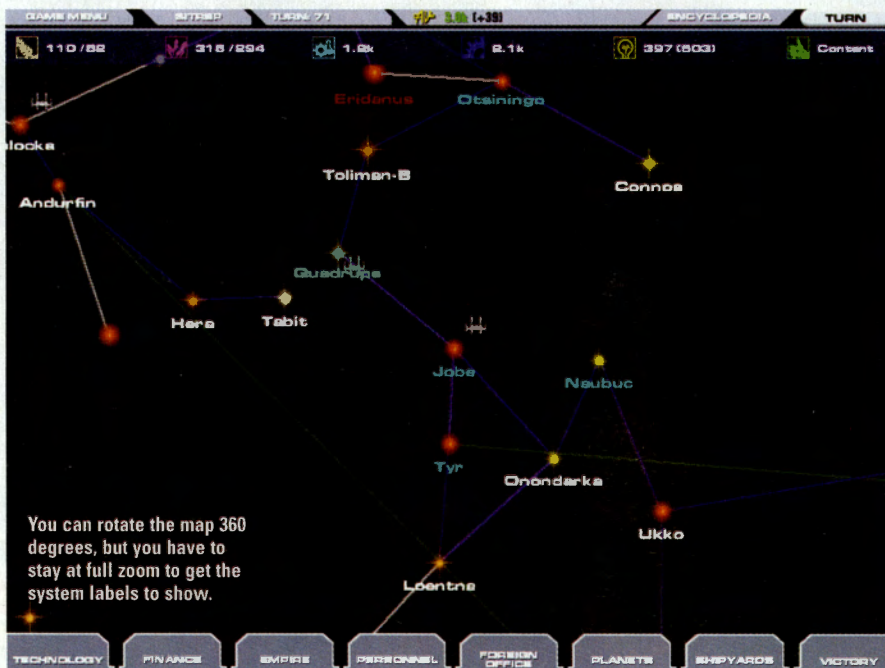
The problem is that *MOO 3* clearly retains all of the earlier games' mind-bending detail, but hides explanations about

how most of it works in a briar patch of levers, knobs, and ghostly viceroys who step in to tweak your changes even after you've turned off certain AI features.

It was virtually impossible for me to come to grips with the macromanagement since none of the game's mechanics are ever adequately explained. That's after combing the manual three times, scouring the forums, buying the strategy guide, and pounding some ginkgo biloba.

For example: A planet is composed of multiple regions. You're supposed to some-

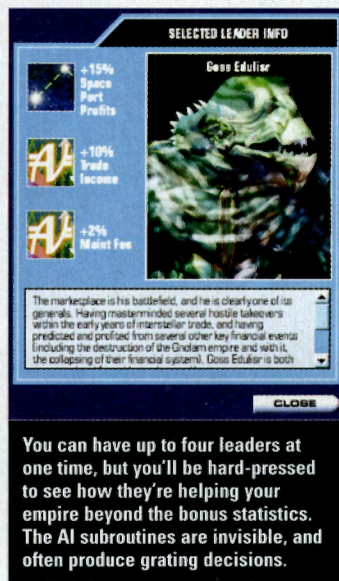
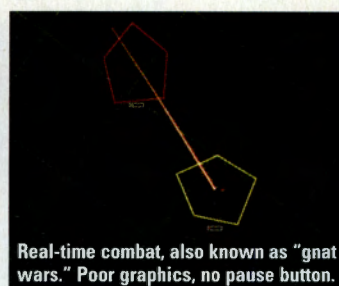
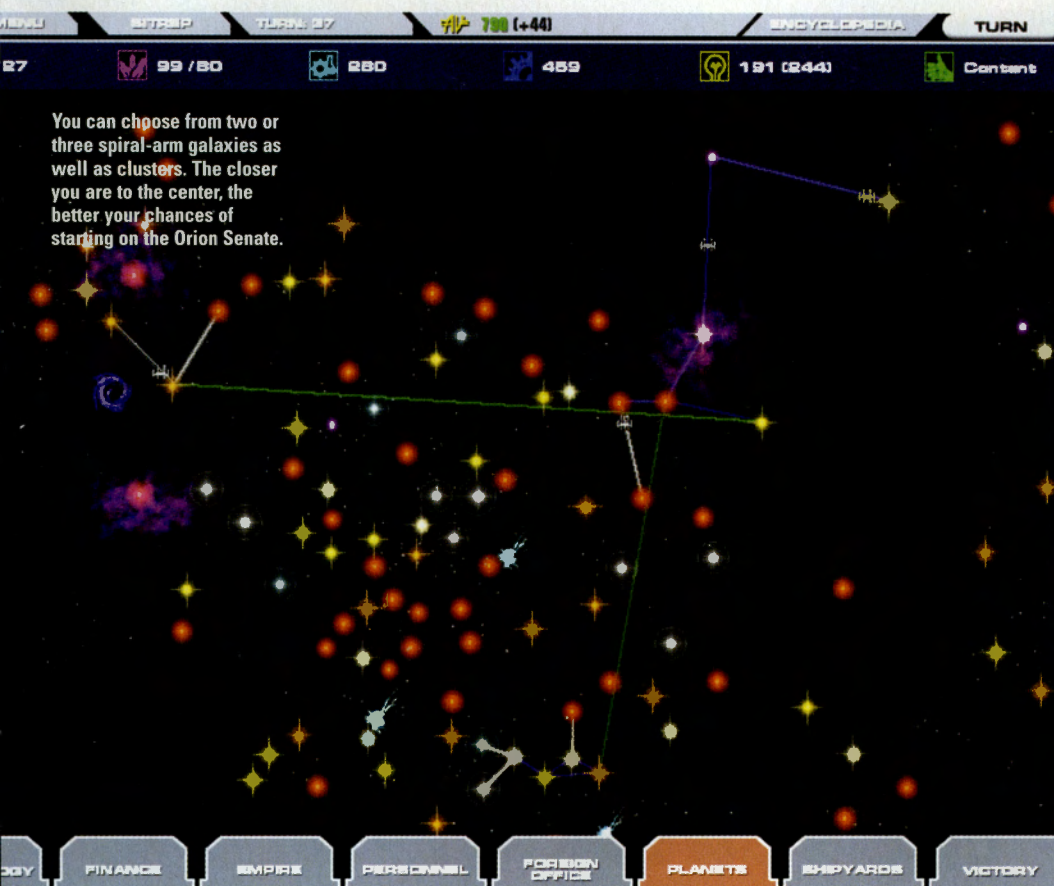
how track, based on region type, which Dominant Economic Activities — basically rated as equal to your efficiency multiplied by your capacity and compared to the average fertility of the planet — are best constructed to generate an arbitrary number of industry points, which then convert to production points at a diminishing rate of 2:1 through 8:1 after the base 50. (Get all that?) Don't forget the color tables for your production efficiency, or the fact that these points can be distributed hodgepodge throughout your empire



You can rotate the map 360 degrees, but you have to stay at full zoom to get the system labels to show.

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Turn-based strategy
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Quicksilver
PUBLISHER Infogrames
REQUIRED PIII 300, 128MB RAM, 800MB HD
WE RECOMMEND PIII 800, 256MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8



with no way of measuring who's getting what or when.

Or you can just let the planetary viceroy AI take care of everything (pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!). It's like someone lifted the bashful governor AI of *Alpha Centauri* and replaced it with a sneaky little Orwellian gremlin. Now if I could just get the stubborn critter to stop building useless troop ships every other turn...

STAR CHORES

The game screen breaks down total empire resources composed of farming, mining, industry/production, and research points. Along the bottom are tabs ranging from "technology" and "finance" to "planets" and "shipyards." Clicking on any of them conjures up a barrage of sub-menus littered with abbreviations, numbers, sliders, more buttons, and more buckets of forlorn numbers. A decent tooltip system is used for mousing over an unknown, but the fine detail is crammed into a wretched 800x600 resolution.

The new technology system gets the serious two-thumbs-down. Instead of branching between different advances, you get a series of sliders that allow you to control a percentile research allocation into abstract areas like "mathematics" or "biology sciences." Every few turns, your report screen will inform you of the breakthroughs. And so on, and so forth. That's all there is to it — making interaction about as interesting as watching a slow rolling ticker tape.

If you can come to terms with the game's many shortcomings, you'll find some stuff that's done fairly well. Discounting resource management, your first priority is to colonize additional habitable planets in your solar system. After outgrowing your home system, you can explore neighboring systems through something called a star lane. These intergalactic superhighways let you skip between stars in just a few turns, while stepping off the beaten path will typically require hundreds of turns. This setup encourages strategic "chokehold" defense planning and helps protect you from massive omni-directional rush tactics.

Another particularly nice touch is the Orion Senate, which, if you become a member, lets you introduce or vote on intergalactic bills. Membership in the Senate opens up trade routes and gives you the option to impact laws, and there's a victory option that involves winning the presidential Senate seat.

While it's easy to slam the AI for doing seemingly bizarre things, what's really tragic is that it's nearly impossible to judge the AI without more detail on why wars are declared, alliances are forged, and so on. For all you know, the AI's behaving brilliantly half the time, but I wish you good luck proving your case either way.

When you have to fight, the combat system is a pitiful real-time train wreck that's rivaled only by *Star Wars: Rebellion* in its awfulness. Doubling your troubles, you can't pause to issue orders, reducing tacti-

cal planning to a frustrating scramble to sling your dots at the enemy's dots. This limitation was apparently implemented to streamline multiplayer. So why not simply make it an option for solo-play?

Given that it's pretty fun to build ships, this crappy combat is even more frustrating. Creating "killer" designs for specific tasks is crucial, but all those satisfying hours spent birthing your very own custom star destroyer crumble in seconds once combat begins. Ground battles are somewhat more pleasing, but still tend to feel half-baked with their abstract tactics buttons and thin combat display.

This has been one of the weirdest gaming experiences of my life. Few games have had me scratching my head over design decisions like this one, and yet I'm still avidly playing it nearly three weeks later. Buyer beware — this is not your daddy's MOO.

— Matthew Peckham

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Involving ship design; curiously addictive once you dive in — I'm still playing it.

LOWS: Frustratingly opaque AI routines; lousy combat mode; demands algorithmic awareness.

BOTTOM LINE: Fun if you can hack it, but it places huge hurdles in front of you.

PC GAMER 57%
MERELY OKAY



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Revolution



Between missions, you'll wind down at The Corporation's pub, where Juana pleads her case in poorly acted cut-scenes. Any company that serves alcohol is okay by us.

CATEGORY FPS ESRB M DEVELOPER Fun Labs PUBLISHER Activision Value REQUIRED PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 700MB HD, 16MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card MAX. PLAYERS 16



In one mission, cybernetically re-engineered panthers have escaped their cages. Hope PETA's not playing.



Here, Jack is sent to exterminate beasts infesting the waste-management facility. Oh, the indignity.

Playing *Revolution* is like driving a Lamborghini that's been torn apart and reassembled by a blindfolded mechanic: it's cheap, and the engine runs, but I wouldn't recommend you get behind the wheel, because there's bound to be some important parts left out.

Now substitute *Half-Life* for "Lamborghini," and you've got this value-priced futuristic sci-fi shooter in a nutshell.

You star as Jack Plummer, a newly hired maintenance worker at "The Corporation" (da-dah-DUM!), one of those generically ominous conglomerates that, besides dabbling in illegal genetic experi-

mentation, spends most of its cash on lavish reflective floors and monolithic statues.

Unbeknownst to you, a band of rebels led by generically busty Corporation insider (and old personal friend) Juana is working to stop the evildoers, and you're recruited to join her group. The downside is that before your inevitable initiation, you'll slog through level after level of mindless extermination missions for "The Corporation" (da-dah-DUM!) You see, in the future, maintenance workers pack flamethrowers, shotguns, and grenade launchers, just in case mutated panthers and escaped pteradons ever threaten big business.

For \$19.99, you probably don't expect perfection, but you do expect the game to work. The most obvious "cut corner" in rushing *Revolution* to market is the lack of play-testing, as evidenced by a major bug that makes it impossible to get past a level several missions into the game unless you've installed the version 1.1 patch. What's more, the patch isn't compatible with any of your previously saved games. Lucky us!

But even patched and bargain-priced, *Revolution* pales before most of its shooter brethren. The graphics have more faces than Sybil—they're gorgeous when set in the halls of "The Corporation" (da-dah-DUM!) but lifeless and dull elsewhere. Voiceovers have been localized from the native Romanian, but the text captions don't always match. Deathmatch and CTF modes round out the multiplayer, yet even over GameSpy's free service, nobody's playing. This *Revolution* should not have been computerized. —Chuck Osborn



The History Channel's Civil War

CATEGORY Strategy ESRB T DEVELOPER Cat Daddy Games PUBLISHER Activision Value REQUIRED PIII 500, 64MB RAM, 700MB HD WE RECOMMEND PIII 800, 64MB video card MAX. PLAYERS 2



The graphics render a leafy, embattled bellum South.

Just because The History Channel's imprimatur is on the box, don't expect this "Activision Cheap" game to provide any insights into real Civil War strategy. Or "strategy" in general, for that matter. *The History Channel's Civil War* incorporates just enough authentic props and parameters to give a distinct "period" fla-

vor to what is basically a lightweight beer-and-peanuts game. Whaddaya want for 20 bucks?

It took me a while to shed my initial irritation at the amateur voice-overs, the worthless documentation, and the astounding lack of a "save" function. But once I put aside any high-falutin' expectations, I did start having fun with this game.

In the decidedly unhistorical "North-vs.-South" mode, the Rebels start off with a few Deep

South states and the Union side has most of the states above the Mason-Dixon Line. In between lies a huge swath of beige-colored "neutral" states (including Virginia and Tennessee, for god's sake) that are up for grabs. Each side goes through an initial setup within the borders of their core states. Then, both sides try to grab all the territory they

can. There's also a zany "free-for-all" mode that lets you place your start-up units anywhere you like, making such bizarre alternate-history scenarios as the Secession of Indiana.

The battlefield graphics are surprisingly lush, evocative of the pastoral landscape of mid-19th-century America. In fact, the gorgeous scenery often dwarfs the tiny toy-soldier units, and since you can't rotate or zoom the point of view, it's easy to lose sight of them amid the foliage, rocks, and sylvan streams.

Still, the battles are fun and your chances of victory are enhanced by employing authentic tactics. Strategically, the AI is aggressive, but tactically, it's idiotic. Most full games are too short and too thin in substance to warrant online play, but hotseat games can be quite entertaining.

If you scale down your expectations to match the \$20 price, you'll get your money's worth. —William R. Trotter



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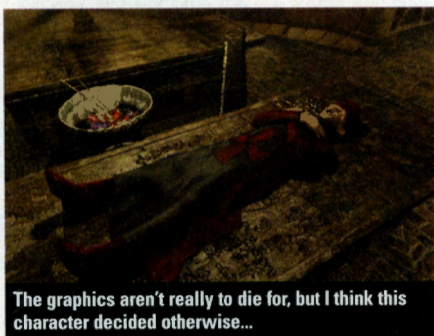


Prima Strategy
Guide Available!

Post Mortem



CATEGORY Adventure ESRB M DEVELOPER Microids PUBLISHER The Adventure Company REQUIRED PII 350, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card MAX. PLAYERS 1



I started playing *Post Mortem* expecting the kind of blood-drenched scream ride hinted at in the opening intro. Instead, I struggled through a directionless exercise in solving incomprehensible puzzles.

In *Post Mortem*, you play as an artist-turned-private-eye in early-1900s Paris. In grand film noir style, you've been hired by a mysterious woman to solve the riddle of her equally mysterious sister's mysterious murder. Gameplay closely resembles *Myst*: you click on hotspots in your surroundings to move from place to place. All functions are controlled by the mouse buttons, and a simple interface lets

you sort through inventory items with minimal headaches.

After the gruesome opening cut-scene, complete with a couple's decapitation by a masked psycho, I had hopes that *Post Mortem* would be a jumpy *Nocturne*-style survival-horror ride, and that maybe you'd fight off a bad guy or two. But after that promising start, the gameplay is mostly a dull trapeze from building to building, uncovering obscure objects and clues from the motley cast of characters.

Hunting for hidden switches in a maze of halls is about as nail-biting as it gets. Seasoned adventure gamers will become

lost figuring out *Post Mortem*'s convoluted puzzles: personally, the puzzle style had me beat after I attempted to pick a lock (see screenshot above) for two straight hours without any clue about how to proceed.

The graphics are okay at best, with jerky animations and cartoonish cut-scenes. The ambient music, sound effects, and dialogue can get mind-numbingly repetitive. Plus, if you make a wrong decision early on or choose the wrong dialogue when talking to NPCs, they may refuse to help you on your mission. In such cases, there's no way to fix your mistakes in-game — you're forced to reload an earlier save-game. With no opportunity to learn which path to take, you have one option: Do it right the first time or fail.

Post Mortem is an unfairly difficult game, even for veteran adventure gamers. Without a compelling story to back that difficulty, your interest in finishing it will flatline faster than the couple in the opening cinematic.

— Jeff Leclerc



Drome Racers

CATEGORY Racing ESRB E DEVELOPER ATD PUBLISHER EA/LEGO Int. REQUIRED PIII 500, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, gamepad/joystick/wheel MAX. PLAYERS 2

Mix two parts *Rollcage* with one part LEGO toy-licensing, and you've got this new futuristic arcade racer. Developed by ATD, the same people who built *Rollcage* for Psygnosis in 1999, *Drome Racers* draws heavily on the older title for much of its basic gameplay mechanics.

Set in the year 2015, *Drome* casts you as

Max Axel, an up-and-coming driver with the Team Nitro organization, as you drive a variety of race cars based on models from the 2002 LEGO Racers construction toy line. This rather pitiful situation is fleshed out a bit more in the game's Career mode (Arcade and Quick Race options are also available) by a trio of coarsely animated characters who dole out largely unnecessary strategic advice.

Multiplayer action — limited to console-style two-player split-screen racing — is all but nonexistent.

A linear series of stages alternates between paved and off-road racing venues; eventually, you'll open up new events and earn credits to upgrade your vehicle's on-track performance. You can also snag valuable Build Tokens that'll let you design and con-

struct your own cars (in a manner consistent with the LEGO product tie-in).

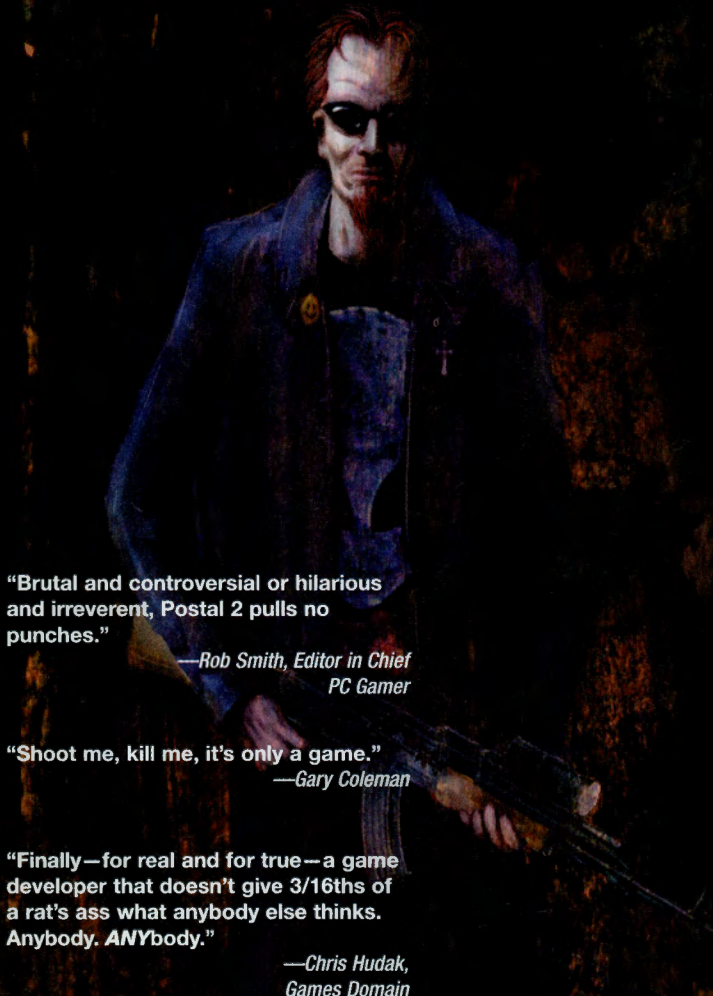
The tracks are liberally festooned with power-ups and pinball-style acceleration ramps, plus weapons upgrades to use against your five AI opponents. The background scenery is attractive, but the game's floaty vehicle physics significantly undermine the actual driving experience. Though it's unfair to expect sim-like driving feedback from an arcade-style vehicular-combat game, titles like 1998's *Dethkarz* have shown that you can get awfully damned close without scaring off the gamepad set.

As it is, these LEGO-based race cars are about as responsive to your digital touch as their real-life counterparts are to being pushed around the family-room carpet. Ultimately, such limitations make *Drome Racers* an underwhelming experience for everyone involved.

— Andy Mahood



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Armored Assault

Head online for tank duels on a World War II battlefield, *WarBirds*-style

HISTORICAL TRACKS



Take the controls of authentic World War II tanks. From the venerable Sherman (left) to the Russian T-34, you'll have access to the armor used in devastating real-world battles.



The earliest versions of *WarBirds* seem primitive compared to the current iteration, but when I first got absorbed in it, it was probably the best online multiplayer game in existence. Those hours I spent with Wild Bill Stealey's hell-raising aces provided me with a really

dramatic foretaste of the vast potential for online gaming.

I dwell on *WarBirds* by way of introduction, because *Armored Assault* is its ground-based descendant.

The engine has been improved, refined, and polished over many

years to a state of rock-solid reliability. While AA doesn't offer a large number of usable vehicles, the ones it does give you are well-chosen, and the inclusion of three ground-attack aircraft is a fine bonus. Happily, even the offline training battles are surprisingly meaty. The tutorials, though extremely spartan, do teach you the fundamentals in a logical progression.

Alas, the *WarBirds* interface is notorious for its baroque complexity (ideally, you'd have three hands to cope with some of its functions), and this game not only shares that same interface, but it's actually *more* complicated as well, given that it mixes up both vehicle and airplane controls. And then there's the learning curve: if you're not already familiar with *WarBirds*, you simply must devote many hours to offline training to have even a modest chance of survival when you enter the online arena.

Among the available vehicles are the T-34, the up-gunned (76mm) version of the Sherman, the venerable German Panther, and my personal favorite, the "quad-fifty" M-16 half-track. If you ever nail a soft-skinned target with that quartet of heavy MGs, it's absolutely smashing fun — shredded wheat!

When I finally felt confident enough to join the online action, I was pleasantly surprised at the prevailing tone of civility and helpfulness. I just said "Hi. I'm new. Can I tag along for a while?" and I was made welcome, given lots of practical tips, and treated with courteous forbearance when I did something stupid. This grown-up atmosphere makes the online experience much more inviting and pleasant than the more common ambience of bluster and potty-mouth snarling.

The graphics aren't top-line, but then, they don't need to be. And sometimes, they're startlingly good. I was cruising along in a half-track when

three Stukas came out of the sun for a head-on strafing run. Instantly, there were tracers sizzling past my ears and whang-zang-ka-bing noises amid fountains of sparks. Hell, it was so shocking, I actually took cover behind my keyboard.

I have no doubt that AA will soon develop a passionate following, even though the numbers will inevitably be small compared to the *WarBirds* fan base. Planes are sexier than tanks, and a good pilot gets to strut his stuff in the clear aerial environment; down in the mud of ground combat, you don't get barrel-rolls or power-dives.

The longest-running complaint remains stubbornly un-dealt-with: there are just too damned many keyboard commands, and trying to practice finger-yoga while three or four enemy units are shooting at you (be it tanks or fighter planes) is simply too much for a lot of players.

AA's basic pricing plan is a \$10/month charge after a two-month free trial, with unlimited play. This cost puts it in line with massively multiplayer games in other genres.

If the challenge factor doesn't bother you (and some gamers actually thrive on it), then you'll find *Armored Assault* to be a trustworthy and compelling sim, descended from a parent game with a long, distinguished track record. — William R. Trotter

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Shares all the great features of *WarBirds*; robust and welcoming online community.

LOWS: Overly complex interface and control scheme; graphics behind the curve.

BOTTOM LINE: It's very hard to learn, but undaunted treadheads will be richly rewarded.

PC GAMER 82%
EXCELLENT

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Simulation

ESRB RATING T

DEVELOPER iEntertainment Net.

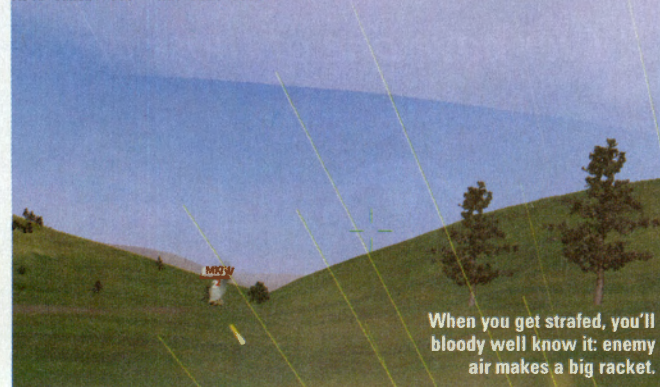
PUBLISHER iEntertainment Net.

REQUIRED PIII 450, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, joystick

WE RECOMMEND P4 1.4 GHz, flight-control system with throttle and rudder pads

MAXIMUM PLAYERS
Massively multiplayer

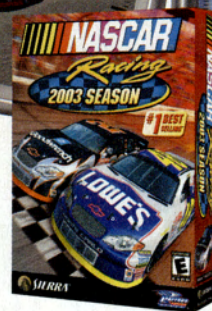
Kills Air: 01 Ground: 00 Sea: 00 Total: 01
Hits Air: 16 Ground: 00 Sea: 00 Total: 16
Hits Taken: 153 Hit Perc 50.0





DETAIL #66212

- ITEM: Windshield debris
- TAKEN FROM: #12 ALLTEL windshield
at North Carolina Speedway.
- NOTES: Simulate native cicada
(aka *Tibicen chloromera*) for
realistic Rockingham visibility



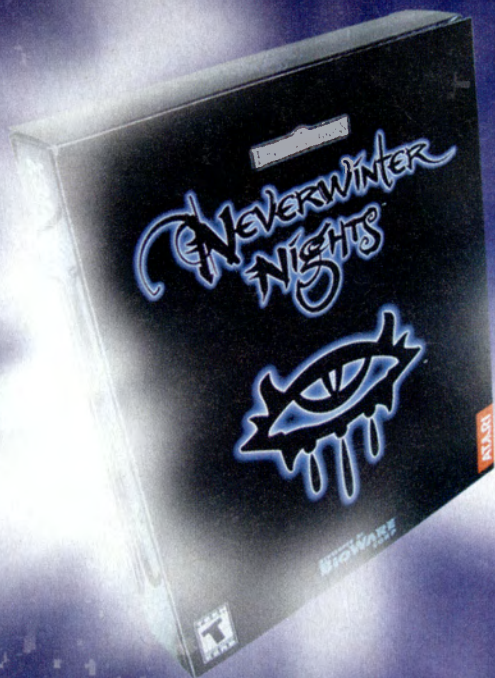
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95%

PC Gamer (Editor's Choice)



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4.5 out of 5

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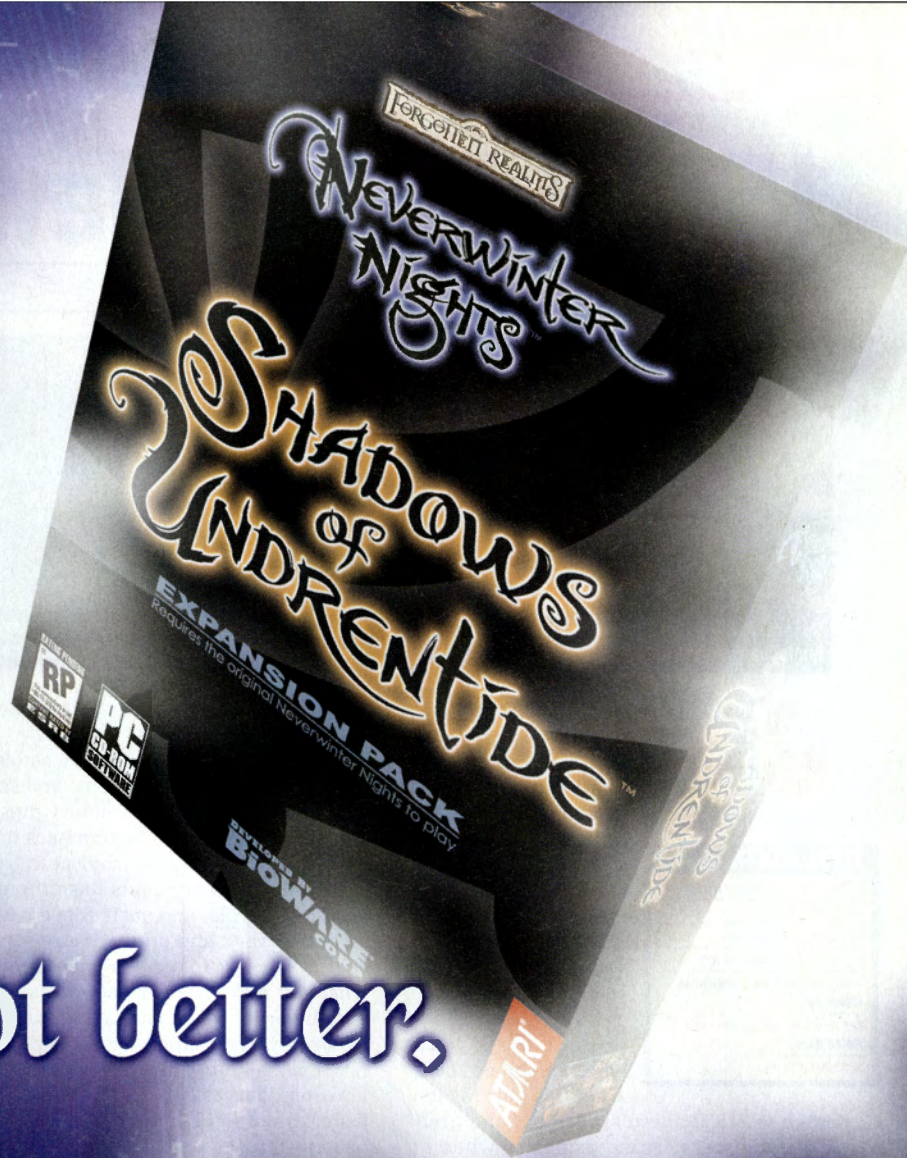


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1503 A.D.: The New World

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Several Aztec temples dominate this jungle landscape. Don't tick these fellas off.



Combat takes a backseat to building your city, but you'll still need a powerful military presence.



Building your community can take a while, and keeping that twisty budget balanced is tricky.

Okay, I admit it — I'm a sucker for European games. American real-time strategy can get dreadfully tedious, betting on recycled franchises and beggarly new features. I don't think *1503 A.D.* is going to be knocking them off the top of the heap, but Sunflowers has got something that should catch a wandering eye or two.

resource proximity to lines of commerce and civilian happiness.

A typical game begins with a single ship and a hold full of basic goods. You scout the map for decent 16th-century digs, choosing from among land masses that vary from temperate or tropical to frozen tundra. You deploy scouts to sniff out iron ore, salt, marble, and such. Since natural resources vary, and different crops grow better or worse in a given environment, what you pick shapes what you can build and the order in which you build it.

about civilian house placement (it affects industry access and vice versa), and making sure your commodities flow. What you don't do is push peasants, slap down goofy abstract buildings, or build hordes of tank-rushing red shirts. It's surprisingly good fun if you enjoy balancing an economy one tweak at a time.

Eventually you'll be forced to seek out other cultures — Aztecs, Mongolians, Venetians...you know the drill. Trade can be run manually or automated right down to single-unit quantities of a commodity. The AI is much better than *1602*'s, with far more aggression and appropriate reactions to dynamic situational changes.

Alas, few games escape some righteous bad-mouthing, and *1503*'s no different. Though you can spin the view in four directions, foliage tends to block buildings, making road placement a pain. A bug with the mini-map occasionally causes it to blank out, and the interface is a mess of top- and side-tabs.

The biggest problem is the tendency of the campaign to sometimes lead you down an economic dead-end to meet a specific mission goal. I had to restart the campaign several times to get a well-oiled economy in motion.

Nevertheless, *1503 A.D.* succeeds where *1602* failed by sprucing up the visuals and fixing the sheepish AI. It's not a real-time game for the impatient, but patience is a virtue, and so is most of what you get to play with here.

— Matthew Peckham

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Real-time strategy
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Sunflowers
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
REQUIRED PII 500, 128MB RAM, 930MB HD
WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

For those of you who remember *1602 A.D.*, this game is its prequel. *1503* doesn't reach out and grab you with mesmerizing gameplay when you load up your very first mission. Instead, this real-time thinker draws you in slowly and makes you consider every detail, from building placement and

Details are sharp and plentiful, and the maps have that gorgeous European "dipped in Technicolor" look.



FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Draws great fun out of economic and civil management; sharp AI; improved visuals.

LOWS: Minor bugs and graphical glitches; mission goals can trip you up in the campaign.

BOTTOM LINE: Definitely an RTS for cerebral types, but it's a welcome change from tank rushes.

PC GAMER

81%

EXCELLENT

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HARD TO SURVIVE



*"...vibrant graphics...quick action...
An interesting alternative to more
traditional real-time strategy games"*

-Gamespot

"An impressive game"

-PC Zone

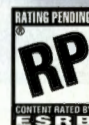


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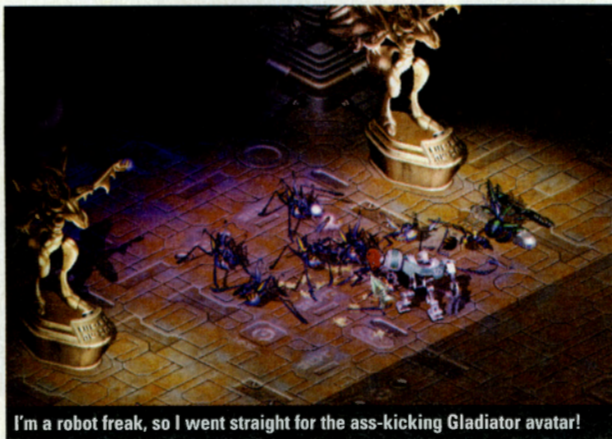
Release
March 2003

Harbinger

CATEGORY Action/RPG ESRB T DEVELOPER Silverback PUBLISHER DreamCatcher REQUIRED PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card MAX. PLAYERS 1

Conceptually, there's little in this off-world action/RPG that isn't in the *Diablo* games. For all intents and purposes, *Harbinger* is *Diablo* — but set in outer space.

At the start of the game, you pick one of three characters: Human, Gladiator (robot), or Culibine (alien). Each plays differently and uses distinct weapons and armor, which you'll find in chests or oozing out of slain monsters' bodies, or available for purchase back in "town," a.k.a. Torvis Station.

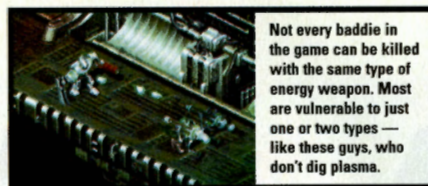


I'm a robot freak, so I went straight for the ass-kicking Gladiator avatar!

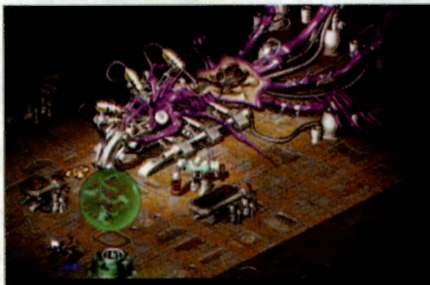
The three characters each get a great deal of unique missions to help flesh out the goings-on aboard *Harbinger*, the vast spaceship in which you're traveling. At roughly 20 hours of gameplay per campaign, times three, *Harbinger* provides bargain-seeking gamers with a lot of entertainment for a mere \$30.

As for the quality of that entertainment, this game should tickle the hell out of most *Diablo* fans. Production values are nowhere near as high as they are in a Blizzard title — what with *Harbinger*'s cheesy *Max Payne*-style dialogue and lack of end-game cinematics — but its 2D visuals are sharp at both of its supported resolutions (800x600 and 1024x768), and its gameplay is brisk and addictive. While certain environment tilesets are overused, I was happy to see that not every level looks the same — a common problem in sci-fi titles.

Harbinger lacks any kind of multiplayer — not a



Not every baddie in the game can be killed with the same type of energy weapon. Most are vulnerable to just one or two types — like these guys, who don't dig plasma.



Brainiac sea serpents play a role in *Harbinger*'s story.

big deal to me, but it's a notable omission. Also, while the game randomizes loot drops, playing through again once you've completed a campaign doesn't increase your chances of discovering unique or hard-to-find gear. Silverback says it may add higher difficulty settings in a downloadable patch, which should address the loot issue. But even without a patch, *Harbinger*, as its name implies, is a sign of good times to come. — Greg Vederman



Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc

CATEGORY Platform game ESRB E DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER Ubi Soft REQUIRED PII 450, 128MB RAM, 250MB HD, 32MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 800, 256MB RAM, gamepad MAX. PLAYERS 1

Even in the year of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, *Rayman 3* reminds us that we still have much to fear from the console port. This limbless hero has come a long way since his first appearance in 1996, but still holds securely to his jumping-puzzle roots. So securely, in fact, that the entire game is just one big jumping puzzle.

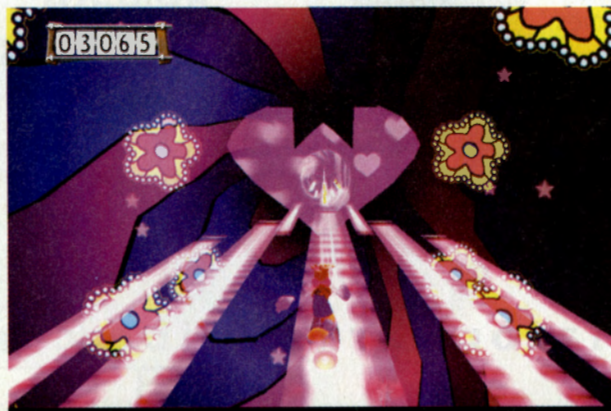
Right from the get-go, *Rayman 3*'s puzzles are irritatingly difficult. Finding the right ledge/ladder/wall/vine is straightforward enough, but actually getting to those places induces mental breakdown. Pinpoint accuracy is a prerequisite in the timing of your jumps, and if you lack that, then patient retries are the only solution. On one level, I spent well over 30 minutes leaping my way through a roller-coaster-like environment, but lacking a manual save feature, I had to retrace my steps after falling to my death in the next sequence.

Puzzles aside, *Rayman* is all about comical characters and quirky level design. The maps are sprawling, vividly colored, and littered with numerous lively and chatty NPCs to help you in your fight against the

evil "hoodlums." *Rayman 3* may actually be the first game to feature "antidisestablishmentarianism" in its dialogue, and it's all scripted in good spirits. Gags abound.

Rayman himself is equipped with his trademark spinning helicopter hair, and this time he can pick up timed power-ups to augment his speed, range, and damage. But even with extra firepower, fighting waves of baddies is tough work given the awkward camera angles that often make combat confusing. I frequently found myself running in circles just to orient the camera to see my next objective.

A gamepad is also recommended to maximize your experience. The run-jump-shoot scheme plays much better with a pad, although the controls feel a little unresponsive on a pad or a keyboard. As such, it's hard to recommend *Rayman 3* even at *Rayman 2* prices. — Norman Chan



In this flashy level, you hop among strips while zooming through a portal.



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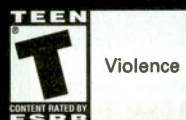
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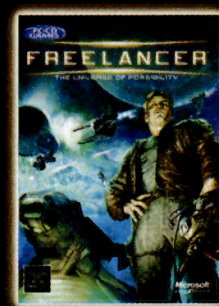
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IGI 2: Covert Strike

It's the "thinking man's FPS" — for stupid people

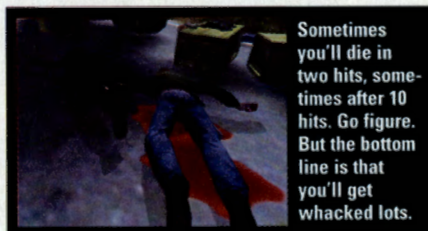


As the alarm sounds, guards flood into the area (above) — and are easily dispatched like a bunch of chumps (inset).

I've heard *IGI 2* pitched as "the thinking man's first-person shooter." Well, the only thing I wondered as I played through this game was, "What exactly is the man *thinking* about?" The potential was here for a deep, involving FPS, but after slogging through it, I must say it never lives up to its potential.

The action gets off to a promising start. The premise is typical: You're back as former SAS operative David Jones, single-handedly tackling 19 missions that have you infiltrat-

ing bases and taking out bad guys in Libya, China, and Russia. You tag SAMs with laser designators, steal documents from arms dealers, disable lots of security systems, and get captured a surprising num-



Sometimes you'll die in two hits, sometimes after 10 hits. Go figure. But the bottom line is that you'll get whacked lots.

ber of times for someone who's supposed to be the best of the best.

IGI 2 uses an improved version of *Project IGI*'s engine. The graphics are spectacular, and feature gorgeously rendered mountain ranges, forests, and deserts. It mostly ran fine on my Athlon XP 2200 with a GeForce4 card.

But looks are pretty much the only appeal. The main culprit in sabotaging the attractive premise is the horrible AI. I managed to go through almost every level by killing every enemy. I'd shoot one guy, at which point his buddy would walk by to see what happened. I'd cap the buddy, and then another guy would come over. Eventually the alarm would sound and tons of bad guys would swarm into the area, but they'd all just mill around where the first dead body was, making them easy pickings. This bizarreness happened on all three difficulty levels, too.

That doesn't mean I never died, though. For some reason, these baddies can fling a grenade farther than your grenade launcher can fire them, and do so with pinpoint accuracy. Sometimes I'd be sniping sentries 100 meters away and one of them would toss a grenade that would land right on my head. Yet, at the same time, your foes will fire hundreds of rounds with about the same accuracy as your typical Stormtrooper.

Of course, that's because I played almost the entire game in the prone position, which



You'll come up against armor in a few missions, but a grenade is all it takes to annihilate 'em.



One mission has you manning the machine gun on a chopper. Who wants some?

for me was as effective as being in god mode. When you're prone here, no one sees you until you're 10 feet away, no one hears you, and only one out of 100 bullets hits you — and even then, it won't do much damage. But stand up, and suddenly you're a bullet magnet, peppered and reloading after just a few hits. If these conditions don't make sense to you, you're not alone. Basically, as long as you crawl, you can beat almost every level.

To make matters even worse, you have limited saves in both easy and medium modes, and no saves in the hard mode. The sound effects are bland and the music is completely forgettable. *IGI 2*'s multiplayer isn't as bad — it plays similarly to *Counter-Strike* in that you accumulate cash to buy better weapons and gear — but it's not enough to warrant buying this game.

If you just have to have another *IGI* game, I'd recommend waiting 'til this one hits the bargain bins.

— Li C. Kuo

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics; huge levels; real-world gear; decent multiplayer modes.

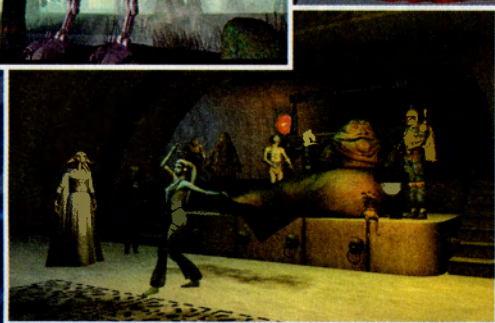
LOWS: Really awful AI; inconsistent levels of realism; limited save-games.

BOTTOM LINE: It's better than *Project IGI*, but ruined by bad AI and limited saves.

PC GAMER 59%
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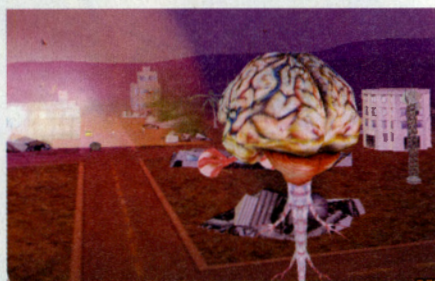


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I Was an Atomic Mutant!

CATEGORY Arcade ESRB T DEVELOPER Canopy Games PUBLISHER ValuSoft REQUIRED PII 400, 128MB RAM, 8MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 16MB 3D card MAX. PLAYERS 1



The Brain From Beyond Infinity shares the pain of his hard-knock atomic life with this town's populace.

Speaking as a member of the Giant Disembodied Brain-American community, I've been horrified by the way mutated monsters like myself have been portrayed in the mainstream media. Finally...finally...there's a game that tells the truth: Monstrous atomic freaks wreak havoc because we're concerned about the dangers of nuclear power.

Just last week, She-Beast and I were discussing this topic over fondue. "Why can't there be a 3D *Rampage*-like game where a giant monster cuts a swath of death and destruction through level after level of cities, countryside, and army



She-Beast doesn't hate men: she loves them. Perhaps too much. Don't you see, puny humans?

bases, and has a social conscience?" we asked ourselves.

To the terrified observer, "The Brain From Beyond Infinity" (as the press calls me) is just a throbbing killing machine with dangling basal ganglia. But I care. When I use my awesome telekinetic abilities to slam a car into an exploding factory or blast mind-energy at a power plant, I'm saying, "Don't let what happened to me happen to you."

The other atomic mutants — the vengeful She-Beast, fire-breathing Reptomicus, and alien-controlled robotic Invader from Dimension X — agree. We're especially

ticked by the game's delightfully campy '50s-era monster-movie trailers used to introduce our origins, and how you can play the game in black-and-white. And we enjoy the way exclamations like "Shocking!!" or "Unspeakable!!" appear onscreen after a huge blast.

As depicted in *I Was an Atomic Mutant!*, the goal is simple: crush and destroy. Yet, you'd be surprised how much thought goes into my work: exploiting the incendiary nature of cars and gas tanks, for example, or looking for power-ups and disintegrating puny tanks, jet fighters, and stealth bombers before their artillery can halt my misunderstood deeds. All that's missing is a multiplayer mode, but given *IWAAM*'s sub-\$20 price, I can't complain.

Take it from a colossal floating brain-stem: this game is a probing look at the atomic mutant lifestyle. So, until my devastating fury rips you asunder, I bid you adieu. — *The Brain From Beyond Infinity*



Austin Powers Pinball

CATEGORY Arcade/Pinball ESRB T DEVELOPER Wildfire Studios PUBLISHER Global Star Software REQUIRED PIII 500, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM MAX. PLAYERS 4

Created by the same Australian developer responsible for the pitiful *KISS Pinball* and so-so *Balls of Steel* pinball game, this \$20 flipper-fest is missing its namesake's mojo.

The game has two tables: one based on *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* and one devoted to *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*. (Oddly enough, there's no table dedicated to the third movie, *Goldmember*.) The first table is definitely much better, with well-placed ramps and bumpers, plus fun missions like fighting animated Fembots or defrosting Austin from his cryogenic chamber.

As in many 2D pinball sims, you have the option to play on a scrolling table that'll roll up and down depending on where the ball is, or on a static table that fits only the lefthand side of the screen for some strange reason (the right side is reserved for a black-and-white graphic). An optional "auto" mode toggles between these two views before and after multi-ball sequences. Visually, the game enjoys resolutions as high as 1600x1200, with appropriately psy-



chedelic table design and kitschy sight gags, but the graphics are hardly "smashing."

Controlling the game is a breeze — you can use either the left and right Shift keys or the left and right mouse buttons — but the ball physics aren't lifelike, so don't expect the level of pinball authenticity found in Empire's beloved *Pro Pinball* series.

Naturally, *Austin Powers Pinball* is littered with sound bites from the movie and a handful of video sequences, though these clips are played in a small dot-matrix window at the bottom of the screen. Seeing Mike Myers hurt his "bits and pieces" by alley-ooping into his convertible is funny once, but you'll see it play every time you lose the ball on the first table.

APP isn't horrible, but there's not much flipper action here. At best, it's a momentary party diversion; not even the Mini-Me price makes it worthwhile. — *Marc Saltzman*



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Total Immersion Racing

Empire's new arcade racer is the child of a broken home

O riginally conceived as an ultra-realistic driving simulation that would completely revolutionize the PC racing-game genre, *Total Immersion Racing* has finally hit stores. Unhappy with the niche appeal of West Racing's ambitious *World Sports Car* concept, publisher Empire Interactive ultimately yanked the West brothers off the project and gave the game to noted flight-sim developer Razorworks (*Comanche vs. Havoc*). The end result is a multi-platform console game designed from the ground up as an unapologetic, mass-appeal arcade racer.

The suits at Empire may have seen this move as fiscally responsible, but I really have to question their thinking. After all, what's the point of offering a slew of high-powered GT racing cars if you won't let gamers drive them in all of their undiminished real-world glory?

TIR teases us with 14 licensed GT, GTS, and prototype race cars, ranging from the Audi TT to the awesome Bentley Speed 8. But the game's neutered, rubber-band physics turn the entire exercise into an uninspiring *Pole Position*-style romp.

With no spinouts, brake lockups, wheel spin, or even damage modeling, *TIR* delivers all the driving challenge of a gravity-

powered Hot Wheels set. That's a shame, because the game shows signs that it could have been a contender. In addition to its high-poly GT car models, *TIR* also renders 12 beautiful real and fantasy road circuits (though no Le Mans), and has ultra-fast load times, superb audio, and some innovative new gameplay wrinkles.

One of these is an automatic "Race Engineer" garage assistant, which can take over the task of tweaking your car. Though impressive in theory, the process isn't terribly effective in practice because — apart from gearing — the physics engine simply isn't sophisticated enough for these adjustments to make any performance difference.

Another novel feature is the "grudge meter" — AI drivers can actually develop grudges against you if you piss them off too much. (A special "emotion" icon will keep you apprised of their current mental state.) Unfortunately, this meter is another empty gimmick because the AI isn't bright enough to do much more than block pass attempts and occasionally bash into your hindquarters. With no consequential damage effects and an appalling collision-detect-



tion routine that magnetizes cars together, this feature's value is negated even further.

TIR does earn back some points with its gameplay depth. Supplementing the usual Time Trial and Single Race options is a comprehensive Career module — complete with driver progression and Team Manager interaction — and 31 individual "Challenge" events that allow you to unlock new cars and tracks. But the complete absence of any multiplayer options other than two-player split-screen play is a huge disappointment.

Other significant snags include a faulty DirectX installer, broken force feedback, a mouseless console interface, and some of the corniest pit radio dialogue ever scripted for a racing game ("Congratulations, you have just passed your rival!") While some of these issues are certainly patchable — and, in fact, already have been at press time — others will require a major engine overhaul.

A clear victim of unrealized potential, *Total Immersion Racing* does manage to deliver a passable driving experience — but only if unrealistic driving physics, undamageable cars, and an absentee multiplayer game aren't deal-breakers for you. — Andy Mahood

With no damage modeling to worry about, bumper-car racing is a viable strategy for personal advancement.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: High-poly graphics; superb sound; fast load times; automated vehicle setup; licensed cars/tracks.

LOWS: Neutered driving physics; skewed collision detection; console interface; no real multiplayer modes.

BOTTOM LINE: This so-so console port had the potential to be so much more.

PC GAMER 60%
ABOVE AVERAGE



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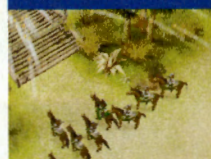


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The story interrupts the action with numerous in-game cut scenes. Here, my lengthy advance into the barbarians' ground is deterred when a key bridge on the map is destroyed.



Forests often form hazardous chokepoints where all of your squads are forced to merge into a dense cluster.



Catapults need many infantry units to run.



Keep troops near your healer unit.



My spearmen trap enemy noblemen.

I know what you're thinking: "At last, the Roman Empire gets its own squad-themed real-time strategy game." As the leader of the Legions starting in 58BCE, you get to stretch the reach of the Romans throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, against the Gauls and Egyptians. On one front, missions implore

you to invade the Egyptians, while on another you're forced to defend valiantly against an invading barbarian horde.

Archers, spearmen, cavalry, and the elite Praetorian Guard help you get things done, but not in the conventional way of amassing troops through

research and city-building. All your units are produced from one central city building, and they're supplied in large squadrons (akin to the mass numbers controlled in *Medieval: Total War*). You're not required to do research or resource-collecting at all: only the population of your central building determines how many units you can have.

Because of the squadron system, battle tactics are more organized than your traditional rush. When I first get my hands on a

strategy game, a test of the rushing tactic is mandatory. And with *Praetorians*, I'm happy to report that the rush fails miserably. For example, each squad moves at different speeds, so instead of sending all infantry at once, it's far smarter to have the slower legionnaires advance first while archers support from behind and cavalry flank from the side. And because squads have unique talents that complement each other, having an insane number of the strongest unit won't mean much against any well-balanced enemy force.

In fact, squad tactics become the eventual focus of all the missions, as the RTS components take a backseat after the initial city-building. Once you've raised a large enough army, assaults on fortresses and seaports become a wonder to watch. In one of my fortress attacks, light infantry posted ladders on the side of a main wall while catapults demolished dangerous guard towers. All the while, my other forces remained helpless, hiding in a nearby forest, waiting desperately for the ladders to go up. The squads then worked together to mount a siege almost reminiscent of the awe-inspiring assault in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

But eventually the charm wears off, as you realize that most of the missions entail

the exact same introductory procedures, and that there aren't many squad types to use. Also, skirmishes tend to clump up as all the units gather to fight in a single, dense piece of terrain. Weather effects and lush forests aside, *Praetorians* looks like it was made two years ago. And after the extensive details of the single-player game, I was surprised to find that the eight-player multiplayer component is very rudimentary.

Praetorians suffers from a mild identity crisis: the game can't choose between its RTS and squad-based elements. Ultimately, the developer of *Commandos* has created an amalgam of the two styles, the result of which I will dub a stroke of near-brilliance. But not near enough. — Norman Chan

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Real-time strategy
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Pyro Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
REQUIRED PIII 500, 256MB RAM, 600MB HD, 16MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 32MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Interesting tactics; thorough single-player mode; easy to learn; dramatic sieges.

LOWS: Too many dull, massed battles; missions become bland; unimpressive graphics.

BOTTOM LINE: A pleasant diversion from the standard RTS, but you'll find yourself wanting more.

PC GAMER 70%
GOOD

The Elder Scrolls III

BLOODMOON

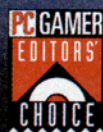
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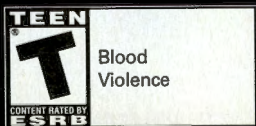
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World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars

CATEGORY Racing ESRB E DEVELOPER Ratbag PUBLISHER Infogrames REQUIRED PIII 600, 128MB RAM, 8MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 900, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, FF joystick/wheel MAX. PLAYERS 10



When the mud's flying, you'll need a lot of tear-offs to keep your visor clean.

Happily, there's much more to Aussie developer Ratbag's newest dirt-track racer *World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars* than meets the eye. After all, WOO (great acronym) is one of the PlayStation 2's finest racing titles, and when you factor in Ratbag's strong PC racing pedigree — including *Dirt Track Racing* (PCG rating: 82%) and *DTR: Sprint Cars* (PCG rating: 85%) — it isn't a huge stretch to expect another winner from the boys Down Under.

WOO is a first-rate simulation of America's premier Sprint Car racing league, the World of Outlaws. Legendary drivers like Steve Kinser and Sammy Swindell have dominated this short-oval dirt-racing series for more than two decades now, and those wild-looking machines with the roof-mounted wings are instantly familiar to most motorsports fans.

Racing these 800-horsepower beasts demands an atypical sideways driving style that's as unique as it is challenging. An enormously responsive "six-degree-of-freedom" physics model accurately communicates the sensation of rubber meeting clay. A comprehensive garage and car-repair menu will have you toiling for each hard-fought win against the game's take-no-prisoners AI.

careful management of sponsorship deals, vehicle upgrades, and race purses will help you advance from the minor leagues to the pros. WOO also features a broad single-player Arcade mode (Single Race, Time Trial, Championship, and two-player Split-screen) as well as seamless 10-player multiplayer support through GameSpy.

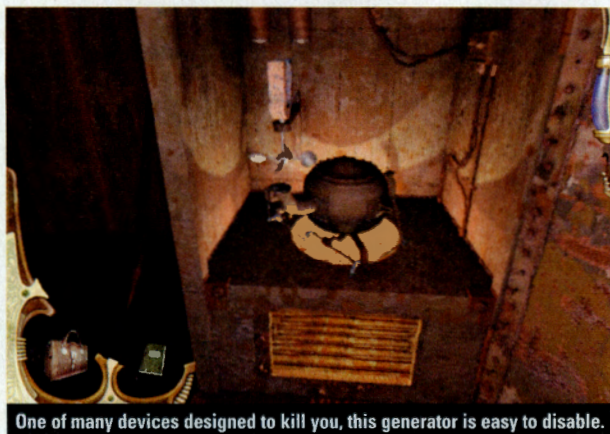
As with last year's *Dirt Track Racing 2*, Ratbag's "Difference" graphics engine has been upgraded to handle the higher screen resolutions and 32-bit textures supported by today's hardware. The visuals aren't as sharp or as cutting-edge as those in competing titles like *NASCAR Racing 2003*, but they get the job done handily. Ditto for the game's well-scripted sound effects and trackside announcer commentary.

If circle-track racing isn't your cup of motor oil, then WOO's perpetual diet of lefthand turns and tortoise-slow career progression could very well leave you snoozing. For the rest of us, however, it's \$30 very well spent. — Andy Mahood



Mystery of the Mummy

CATEGORY Adventure ESRB E DEVELOPER The Adventure Comp. PUBLISHER DreamCatcher REQUIRED PII 350, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card MAX. PLAYERS 1



One of many devices designed to kill you, this generator is easy to disable.

DreamCatcher is making a business out of its adventure line, and *Mystery of the Mummy* adds some truly difficult puzzle-based gameplay to the collection. *Mummy* is built on some particularly heinous puzzles, like timed slider challenges, encrypted word games, and rooms with rotating floor sections. At times, the

clues are as cryptic as the puzzles themselves.

This Sherlock Holmes story is often hilarious, although unintentionally. The fabled detective gets very excited about certain discoveries, yet will be quite blasé at the sight of a mummy walking around right behind him.

Interactive items don't stand out much from background art. Instead of their becoming highlighted when you pass the mouse pointer over them, the icon turns into a hand,

which forces slow, deliberate scanning: A bottle of Bordeaux in a wine cellar took me an hour to find because its location was indistinguishable from an entire wall of wine bottles. And many rooms aren't well-lit. Non-interactive objects are sometimes interactive at later points in the game, or they don't become interactive until you're hold-

ing a specific inventory item in your hand.

Plus, you can't simply navigate with the arrow keys: You'll have to pixel-hunt to get from point A to point B, though you can rotate the view through 360 degrees. Annoyingly, scouring floors and ceilings is equally crucial to your progress.

These control barriers wouldn't be quite as frustrating if not for the timed segments and the ease with which you can be killed. Sherlock can die from smoke inhalation, poison, electrocution, and the occasional explosion, forcing a sort of Russian roulette game of chance (complete with six save-game slots).

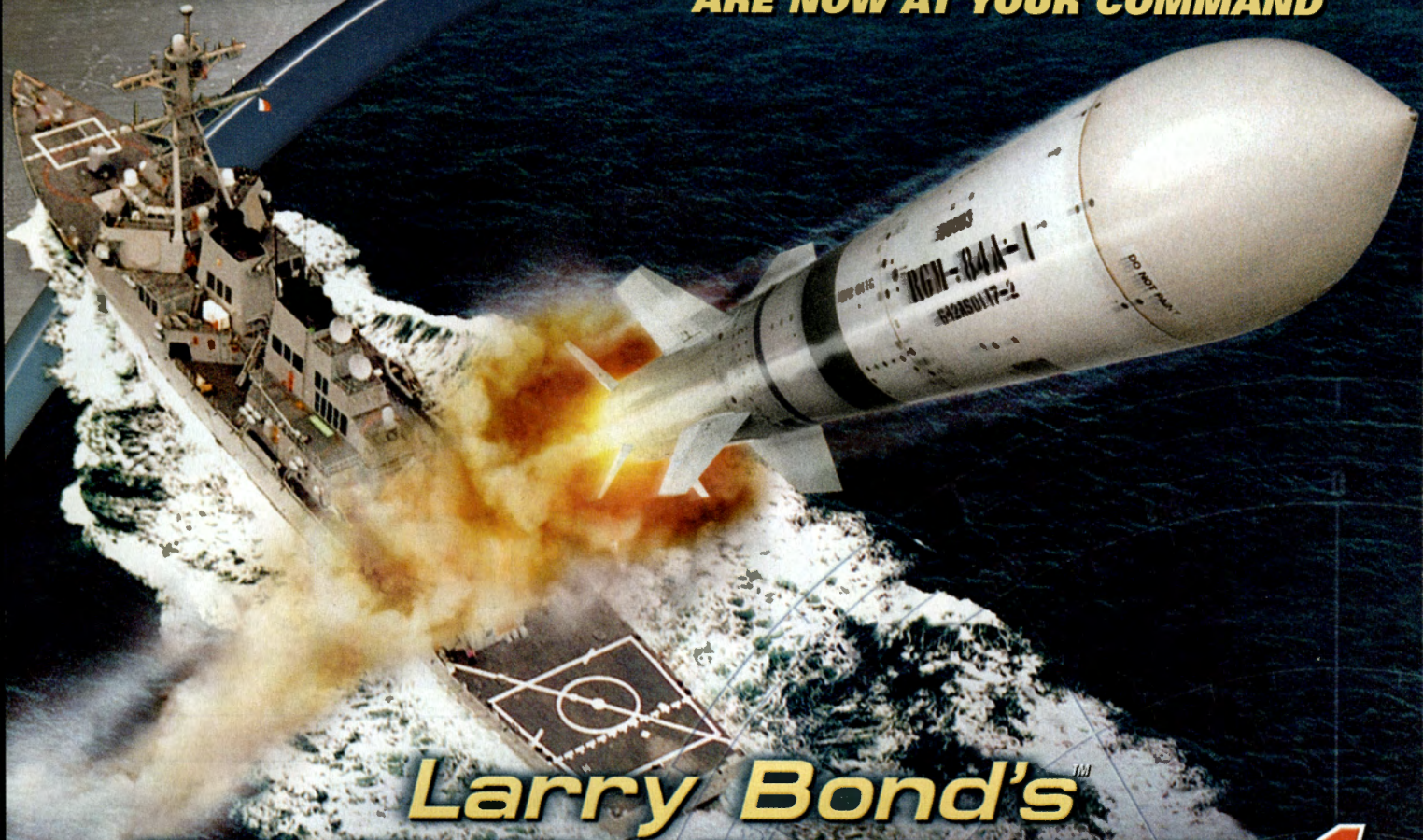
Though the puzzles are usually more frustrating than challenging, the game art is quite creative and the voice-acting pretty solid. The shortest description of *Mummy* would be "It's like *Myst*, but you can die." If you're a big *Myst* fan, that might be a recommendation. — Tom McNamara



STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS

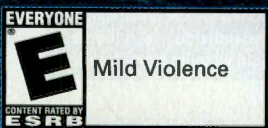
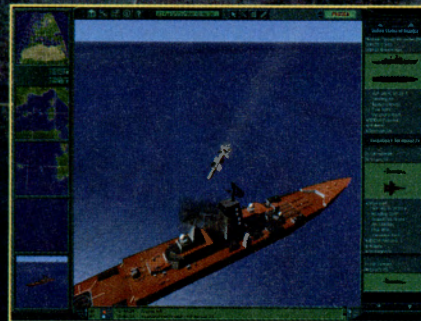
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Unfortunately, the capital ships (above, below, left) are too easy to destroy: A few torpedo strikes and strafing passes are all it typically takes, and you can't target individual ship components.



FREELANCER

Good things do come to those who wait, and wait...and wait

The non-interactive "demo" of *Freelancer* that was unveiled at E3 1999 was the single most impressive bit of jaw-dropping, drool-inducing pre-release game hype this well-traveled game writer has ever seen. The cinematic flare, sheer scope, massive scale, and

promise of an almost unheard-of level of open-ended gameplay were the stuff space-sim nuts pray for.

Naturally, with a game this long in development, the impact of its technical luster has faded significantly. Had it come out a year ago,

Freelancer would be leading its genre in terms of visual bedazzlement. As it stands, it still manages to hold its own with other cutting-edge titles, which is a testament of sorts to the vision of its initial design.

Every detail — the ships, explosions, space stations, and planets — looks great, and the game performs admirably well with all effects turned on at high resolu-

tions on the recommended configuration. It has a bold cinematic flair, but it's just not as awe-inspiring as I'd hoped, which again can probably be attributed mostly to its delayed arrival.

The story and gameplay are akin to *Morrowind*'s in many respects. A central scripted plot serves to lead your character, Edison Trent, through about half of *Freelancer*'s "known" star systems before it's done, introducing you to around 20 principal NPCs. Missions range from escorts to running for your life to finding

and taking out bases, as well as locating various people and items.

However, you don't have to progress directly from one story mission to the next. In fact, the game's leveling-up scheme actually requires you to take time between story objectives to "freelance" and raise the necessary cash and experience needed to acquire that next, more-powerful fighter ship.

The main story took me only about 13 hours to get through, and then I was free to do whatever I wanted. The free-form play entails exploring the rest of the sys-

VITAL STATS

CATEGORY Space simulation
ESRB RATING T
DEVELOPER Digital Anvil
PUBLISHER Microsoft
REQUIRED PIII 600, 128MB RAM, 1.3GB HD, 16MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB video card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 32



Take too many hits, and your hull will start to flame out and smoke. Get those nanobots repairing!



Cool ship designs: I like the individualized themes. But the damage models could've been more detailed.

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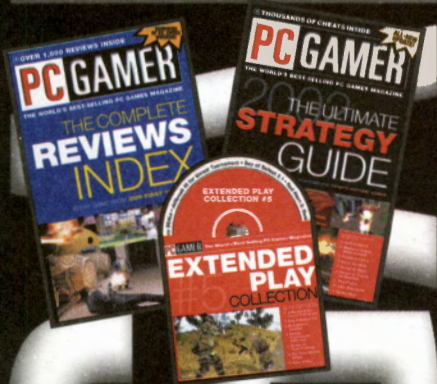
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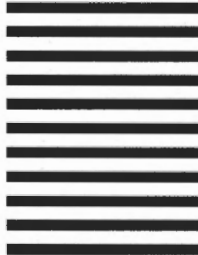
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GAMER

PC

tems, making a living out of the trade system (buying low, selling high), becoming a nefarious space pirate, or upholding the law by freelancing for the military and/or police.

Whichever role you choose for yourself, the process of fulfilling it consists of finding and visiting planets and space stations, then going to their bars to drum up business with the patrons, or simply taking a look at the job board for available assignments. While docked, you can also purchase a new ship, repair and upgrade your existing one, and buy or sell commodities.

The missions you choose, fights you join, and cargo you loot all have an effect on your reputation. They'll win you fast friends and hard enemies — with long memories — among the game's numerous factions, which may make it impossible to land on certain bases or planets, as well as hinder your travel in certain sectors.

Unfortunately, while each star system manages to pull off a unique look (Asian, European, American, or alien in theme), the people you meet are far more one-dimensional. The canned conversation options are extremely limited, and you'll say the same lines over and over again and hear the same ones back in return. The missions lack the variety to keep you bent on seeking out new ways to make a space credit.

MAKE A SPACE LIVING

THE PROSPECT OF EARNING MORE CASH AND levels to gain access to the game's more powerful ships is still alluring. But the "freelancing" aspect suffers from the lack of any motivating factor. The ability to buy or own property where you could warehouse different ships, or even earning enough dough to buy your own planet, would have greatly enhanced the freelancing, which is the real heart of the game. (It is called *Freelancer*, after all.) Even the prospect of encountering the odd NPC with a sub-quest or two would have been a wise addition.

Freelancer's cooperative multiplayer options help make up for this shortcoming. Being able to hook up with several friends and explore the galaxy together, taking on the higher-level missions and searching for the myriad "secrets" strewn about the various systems, is great fun. Multiplayer games performed quite well over my DSL connection, with nary a framerate drop or perceptible lag in onscreen action. Of course, you can also host or join a player-versus-player server for some deathmatching action.

The 100-percent mouse-driven control scheme may leave many space-sim grognards flat, as it did me at first — and it still takes some of the edge out of deathmatching for me. Not being able to use my fancy joystick to fly with, as I could with all of original designer Chris Roberts' previous space efforts, just seems unnatural. I understand the desire to make the game friendly to new players, but I do miss some of the additional sophisticated control options typically offered in games of this type, including



the ability to issue orders to wingmen and to target specific parts of ships.

Still, using the mouse makes precision-aiming and movement easier, which is a plus considering all the dense asteroid and debris fields you'll have to fly and fight your way through. And it's easier to switch between flying and navigating the brilliantly simplified interface using a dedicated mouse-control scheme. I'd still like to see joystick support, and the ability to roll your ship is conspicuously absent, but the mouse-driven controls work pretty smoothly overall.

Freelancer suffers from a severe lack of character development in almost every nook and cranny of its design. But it offers an interesting main story, bottomless value

for the dollar in terms of sheer open-ended exploration, and a very cool co-op mode. Given the current drought befalling this genre, *Freelancer* is easy to recommend to space simmers.

— Steve Klett

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Free-form gameplay; huge universe to explore; performs well on recommended PC specs.

LOWS: Suffers from general malaise of "sameness"; no joystick support; trade system underdeveloped.

BOTTOM LINE: Though it's not as deep as we'd like, *Freelancer* delivers on much of its potential.

PC GAMER 81%
EXCELLENT



TEEN
T
Blood
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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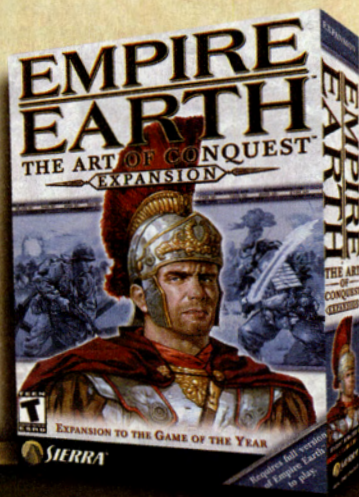
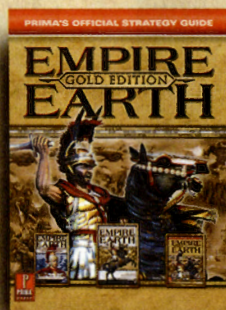
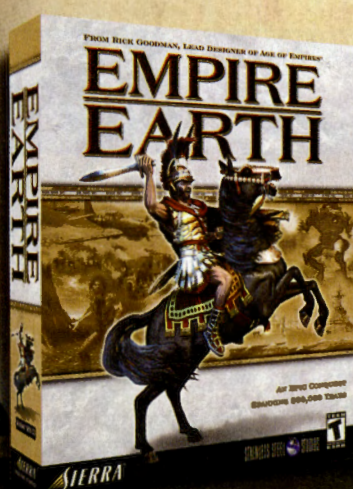
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hardstuff

THE ULTIMATE MONTHLY GUIDE TO GAMING GEAR

MY FUTURE'S SO BRIGHT, I GOTTA WEAR SHADES



MORE ACCURATELY, MY face is such a *fright*, I gotta wear shades. Despite my mom's insistence to the contrary, I'm never going to be voted *People Magazine's Sexiest Man*

Alive. Where in the hell was I when all the high cheekbones and strong jawlines were being handed out? Oh, *that's* right — I was playing videogames...

Because of my freakishly asymmetrical appearance, I've always had a difficult time finding sunglasses that look right on me. The great irony is that "regular" glasses — the Poindexterous, tape-around-the-nosepiece variety — fit me just fine. The way my optometrist explains it, abnormally close-set eyes like mine look less "creepy" when framed.

For years now, I've been drooling over Oakley's Juliet line of sunglasses. They've got this whole reptilian/robotic vibe going on that makes my inner dork scream like a sissy. Paradoxically, they look good only on jocks — the guys who happened to be hanging out, smoking (and probably kissing) in the boy's room when those aforementioned high cheekbones and strong jawlines were being handed out.

After years of trying on Juliets at the mall, amid screams of "Oh Jesus, no!" from my friends, I finally found a semi-blind crack-addled teenager to tell me that she thought I looked "okay" in them. That's all the motivation I needed. I bought me a pair of those \$285 Oakley Juliets right there on the spot, and if you think I look bad in 'em, you can talk to the hand, cuz this dopey face don't wanna hear it.

"The Vede"
Greg Vederman, Senior Editor

PRODUCT TYPE



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.

hstrinity

Building a new PC can be a thrilling experience, but picking the wrong parts by mistake can end the joyride in a hurry. Luckily, we're here to help you select the best parts for the job. The prices listed below (obtained almost entirely from www.pricewatch.com) are the lowest we could find as we went to press. (Note: Prices do not include shipping costs.)

■ ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEM ROUGHLY \$750

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	\$50
PROCESSOR	
AMD Duron 1.3GHz	\$29
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V-133	\$73
MEMORY	
256MB PC-133 SDRAM	\$20
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	\$60
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	\$8
HARD DRIVE	
40GB Maxtor 7,200rpm	\$60
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs Audigy (white box)	\$59
MODEM	
v.92 Hardware Modem	\$15
MONITOR	
17-inch Optquest Q71	\$130
VIDEO CARD	
GeForce4 MX 440 64MB DDR	\$50
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Joystick	\$25
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	\$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech Z-340 (2.1)	\$39
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	\$15
USB MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft	\$39
TOTAL	\$695

■ MID-RANGE SYSTEM ROUGHLY \$1,250

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	\$50
PROCESSOR	
AMD Athlon XP 2000+	\$73
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V333 (Award 1007)	\$100
MEMORY	
512MB PC-2700 DDR SDRAM	\$48
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	\$60
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	\$8
HARD DRIVE	
80GB Maxtor 7,200rpm ATA-133	\$80
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy MP3+	\$85
MODEM	
v.92 Hardware Modem	\$15
MONITOR	
19-inch NEC FE991SB-BK	\$292
VIDEO CARD	
GeForce4 Ti 4200	\$115
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Precision 2	\$45
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	\$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech Z-540 (4.1)	\$60
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	\$15
USB MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft	\$39
TOTAL	\$1,108

■ DREAM SYSTEM

ROUGHLY \$3,000 AND ABOVE



CASE	
400-watt ATX form factor	\$100
PROCESSOR	
Intel P4 3.06GHz	\$547
MOTHERBOARD	
Intel D850EMVR	\$140
MEMORY	
Twin sticks of 256MB PC-1066 RDRAM	\$160
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM DRIVE	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	\$60
BURNER	
Plextor 48x24x48 CD-RW	\$100
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	\$8
HARD DRIVE	
200GB Western Digital 7,200rpm	\$240
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Audigy 2 Platinum	\$160

MODEM	
v.92 Hardware Modem	\$15
MONITOR	
22-inch ViewSonic P220f	\$570
VIDEO CARD	
ALL-IN-WONDER RADEON 9700 PRO	\$379
JOYSTICK	
Thrustmaster HOTAS Cougar	\$269
GAMEPAD	
Logitech WingMan Rumblepad	\$23
SPEAKERS	
Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	\$399
KEYBOARD	
Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	\$40
USB MOUSE	
IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0	\$50
TOTAL	\$3,260



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PREVIEWED: ATI RADEON 9800 PRO

MUCH TO NVIDIA'S CHAGRIN, ATI'S UPCOMING 9800 PRO IS THE REAL 9700 PRO-KILLER

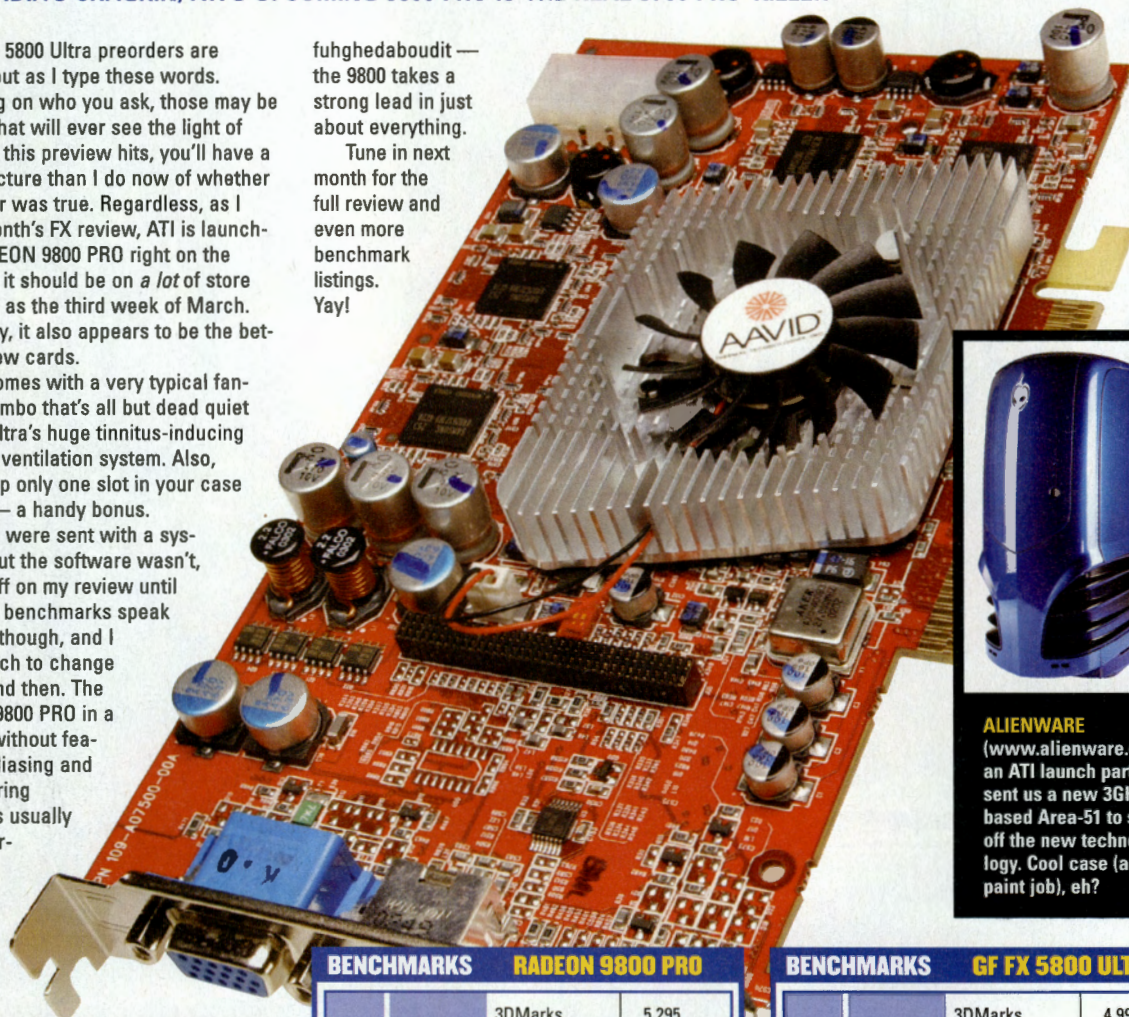
GeForce FX 5800 Ultra preorders are shipping out as I type these words. Depending on who you ask, those may be the only Ultras that will ever see the light of day. By the time this preview hits, you'll have a much clearer picture than I do now of whether or not that rumor was true. Regardless, as I hinted in last month's FX review, ATI is launching its new RADEON 9800 PRO right on the heels of FX, and it should be on a lot of store shelves as early as the third week of March. More importantly, it also appears to be the better of the two new cards.

ATI's card comes with a very typical fan-and-heatsink combo that's all but dead quiet relative to the Ultra's huge tinnitus-inducing leaf blower of a ventilation system. Also, the 9800 takes up only one slot in your case instead of two — a handy bonus.

The card we were sent with a system was final, but the software wasn't, so I'm holding off on my review until next month. Our benchmarks speak for themselves, though, and I don't expect much to change between now and then. The Ultra beats the 9800 PRO in a few raw tests (without features like anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering enabled), but it's usually by a smaller margin than when the new PRO beats it. Turn on those extra features, and

fuhghedaboutit — the 9800 takes a strong lead in just about everything.

Tune in next month for the full review and even more benchmark listings. Yay!



ALIENWARE
(www.alienware.com), an ATI launch partner, sent us a new 3GHz P4-based Area-51 to show off the new technology. Cool case (and paint job), eh?

TECH SPECS		
	RADEON 9800 PRO	GeForce FX 5800 Ultra
Price	\$399	\$399
PERFORMANCE		
Processor	0.15 micron	0.13 micron
Engine Clock Speed	380MHz	500MHz
Rendering Pipelines	8	8 (sometimes)
Peak Pixel Fill Rate	3.04 Gpixels/sec.	2 Gpixels/sec.
Peak Triangle Throughput	380 MTriangles/sec.	350 MTriangles/sec.
Floating-Point Precision	128-bit	128-bit
Textures Applied Per Pass	16	16
Geometry Pipelines	4	3
Memory Clock Speed	340MHz DDR	500MHz DDR
Memory Interface	256-bit DDR	128-bit DDR
Peak Memory Bandwidth	21.8 GB/sec.	16.0 GB/sec.
Bandwidth Compression Ratio	8.8 : 1	4 : 1
RAMDAC	400MHz	400MHz
AA Samples/sec.	18.2 Gsamples/sec.	8.0 Gsamples/sec.
Maximum Texels Filtered Per Pixel	768 texels/pixel	512 texels/pixel
KEY FEATURES		
DirectX version	9.0	9.0
Vertex Shaders	2.0	2.0
Pixel Shaders	2.0	2.0

BENCHMARKS RADEON 9800 PRO			
3DMARK03*	1024x768	3DMarks	5,295
		Game 2, 4	36, 32 (fps)
	1280x1024	3DMarks	3,939
		Game 2, 4	24, 26 (fps)
3DMARK2001 SE*	1024x768	3DMarks	16,987
		Game 4	121 fps
	1280x1024	3DMarks	14,882
		Game 4	83 fps
QUAKE III'	1024x768	3DMarks	12,503
		Game 4	59 fps
	1280x1024	3DMarks	12,503
		Game 4	59 fps
UT 2003'	1024x768	3DMarks	12,503
		Game 4	59 fps
	1280x1024	3DMarks	12,503
		Game 4	59 fps

BENCHMARKS GF FX 5800 ULTRA			
3DMARK03*	1024x768	3DMarks	4,997
		Game 2, 4	35, 35 (fps)
	1280x1024	3DMarks	3,987
		Game 2, 4	25, 28 (fps)
3DMARK2001 SE*	1024x768	3DMarks	3,041
		Game 2, 4	17, 23 (fps)
QUAKE III'	1024x768	3DMarks	15,784
		Game 4	116 fps
	1280x1024	3DMarks	13,885
		Game 4	75 fps
UT 2003'	1024x768	3DMarks	11,842
		Game 4	53 fps
	1280x1024	3DMarks	11,842
		Game 4	53 fps

*Tests run at 1024x768 with trilinear filtering, no AA, Anisotropy set to "1." *Test run in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer, 24-bit Z-buffer, compressed textures, hardware T&L enabled, and V-sync disabled. *Tests run in full 32-bit color with all settings maxed. No AA, then 4x AA. *Tests run in 32-bit color with max detail settings. "Flyby" results only. No AA, then 4x AA. (All benchmarks run on a P4 3GHz test bed with 512MB RAM and Win XP Home Ed.)



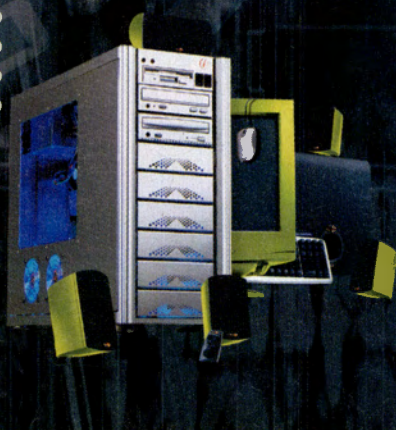
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Ultimate M5



A VALUE PRICE CAN MEAN DREAMY PERFORMANCE

Last month we reviewed a killer new Mach V Exotic system from Falcon Northwest. It was gussied up with all manner of high-quality brand-name parts and simply the best custom paint job we've ever seen on a PC. Like this new M5 from ABS, the Falcon sported an Athlon XP 3000+ CPU, a RADEON 9700 PRO, and 1GB of DDR system memory — all for \$3,801 (\$3,202 without the fancy paint). The M5 costs \$1,799. How would you guess it performs?

Our benchmark numbers tell the story of two systems: one with big brand-name components, the best construction in the biz, and a three-year warranty. Obviously, that's the Falcon. The other machine uses some lesser-known parts in places, has decent construction, and comes with a 1-year warranty. Say hello to the ABS M5. Last chance to place your bets on the performance winner...

Bets closed. Now here's the deal: the M5 wins by a hair in 3DMark2001 (we're talking by less than 1 percent), loses by a smidge in *Quake III* (less than 2 percent), takes the lead by as



much as four whole frames per second in *Unreal Tournament 2003*, and in a stunning upset, crushes the Falcon by 14 percent in *Jedi Knight II* — only to lose again by 2 percent in our final test, *Dungeon Siege*. Win by a little, lose by a little, and so on and so forth — dammit if these PCs don't perform almost *exactly* the same!

All things considered, this isn't the shock of the century. These days, unless you're over-clocking your CPU or video card (which neither of these companies do) or lowering your display property settings in an attempt to score a few extra frames per second at the hands of a lazy reviewer (which both of these companies did...for shame!), most comparably equipped computers are going to perform *comparably*.

Performance isn't everything, though. I really like the new case ABS is using. That crest on the top is handy — it doubles as a sturdy handle for carrying your computer around with you on dates (or LAN parties). The machine also sports a couple of extra USB ports on the front, hidden by a small, hinged door that I wish would open and close a little smoother.

ABS didn't install a sound card in our M5.

Instead, it relied on NVIDIA's nForce 2 chipset to supply the groove to make our booties move. Far from the typical onboard crap you often get on motherboards, this is some pretty heavy-duty tech we're talking about. nForce 2 supports 2.1, 4.1, and 5.1 speakers (analog and digital) and all of the major 3D audio standards, and it sounds *very* good — easily as good as a Sound Blaster Live!, but not quite as great as an Audigy or Audigy 2.

When considering an ABS over some of the more premium brands, what you need to ask yourself is whether you can live without a cer-

SYSTEM SPECS

OS	Windows XP Home
PROCESSOR	AMD Athlon XP 3000+
MOTHERBOARD	Abit NF7-S
MEMORY	1GB PC-3200 DDR
RAM SLOTS	3 (1 free)
PCI	5 (2 free)
VIDEO	RADEON 9700 PRO
HARD DRIVE	Western Digital 120GB
AGP	8x
FIREWIRE	Yes (2 inputs)
USB 2.0	Yes (6 inputs)
AUDIO	Integrated nForce 2
DVD-RW	Lite-On 52x24x52
DVD-ROM	Lite-On 16x
NETWORK CARD	Yes — 10/100
MOUSE/KEYBOARD	Microsoft or Logitech
5.25-INCH BAYS	4 (2 free)
3.5-INCH BAYS	4 (2 free)
RECOVERY CD	Yes
WARRANTY	1-year parts, lifetime labor

BENCHMARKS

3DMARK03 ^Δ	3DMarks	4,456
	CPU score	640
	Game 2	30 fps
	Game 4	26 fps
3DMARK2001 SE*	3DMarks	15,703
QUAKE III*	1280 x 1024	234, 147 (fps)
	1600 x 1200	179, 102 (fps)
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003†	1024 x 768	210, 86 (fps)
	1280 x 1024	161, 83 (fps)
	1600 x 1200	109, 74 (fps)
JEDI KNIGHT II*	1024 x 768	112 fps
DUNGEON SIEGE*	1024 x 768	80 fps

ΔTests run at 1024x768 with Trilinear filtering, no AA, Anisotropy set to "1." *Test 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. †Tests run in full 32-bit color with all settings maxed. No AA, then 4x AA. * "Flyby" results followed by "Botmatch." Tests run in full 32-bit color with all settings maxed. ♣Tests run in full 32-bit color with all settings maxed.

tain amount of flash, like a brand-name case, power supply, and optical drives. If you can, the M5 is one hell of a great buy for any level of gamer. Check ABS' site for even better deals on low- and mid-range PCs and components.

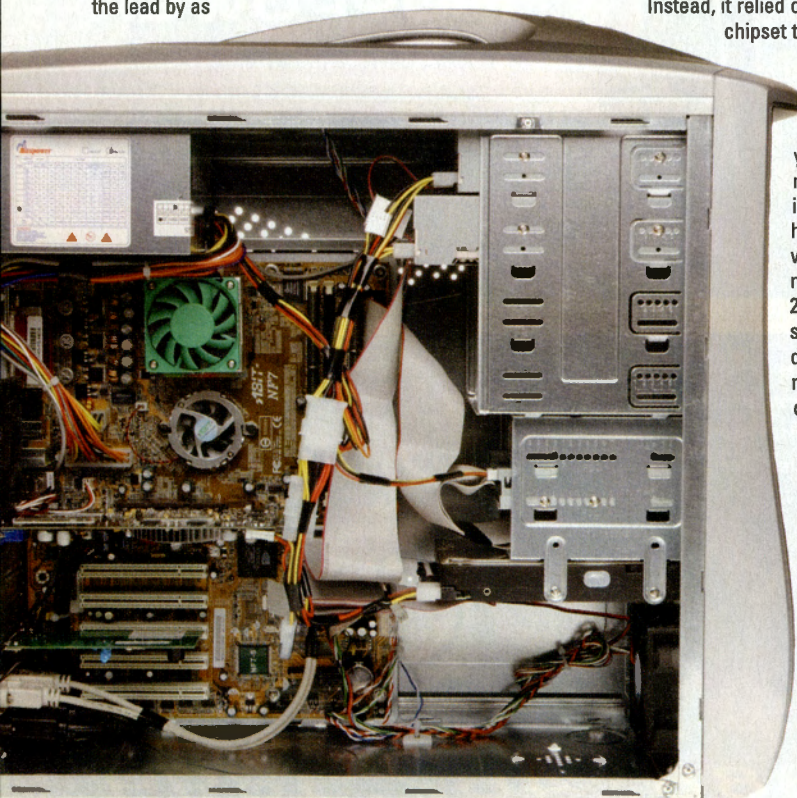
FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Performs as well as a \$3,801 Falcon Northwest in our tests; clean interior; well built.

LOWS: Fans of big brands may shy away from names like "Lite-On" and "Max Power."

BOTTOM LINE: The Ultimate M5 offers most of the "oomph" of other high-end PCs for a fraction of the cost.

PC GAMER 95%
EDITORS' CHOICE



XG6000-GAMER ULTRA SE

- NVIDIA nForce-2 Chipset 8X APG 333 FSB Motherboard
- Kingston 1024MB PC3200 400MHz DDR Memory
- Western Digital 80GB 7200RPM 8MB Cache Special Edition
- ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 8X AGP 128MB DDR w/ TV out & DVI
- Sony 16X DVD-ROM & Sony 48X16X48 CD-RW Drive
- Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2 6.1 w/ 1394 IEEE
- Creative Cambridge SoundWorks Desk Top Theater 6.1 Inspire 6600 Sound System
- Creative Labs 56K V.92 Fax Modem w/ Voice
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- 1.44MB Floppy Drive & PS2 internet Keyboard
- Microsoft® USB Optical IntelliMouse
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
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- Aluminum TurboGamer SX635 Tower Case 420Watt

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AMD Athlon™ XP 2700+	\$ 1525	XG5053
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AMD Athlon™ XP 2200+	\$ 1349	XG5056



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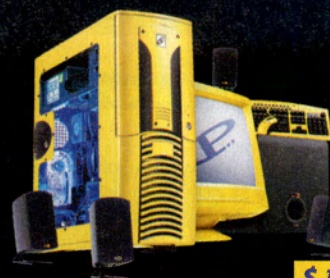


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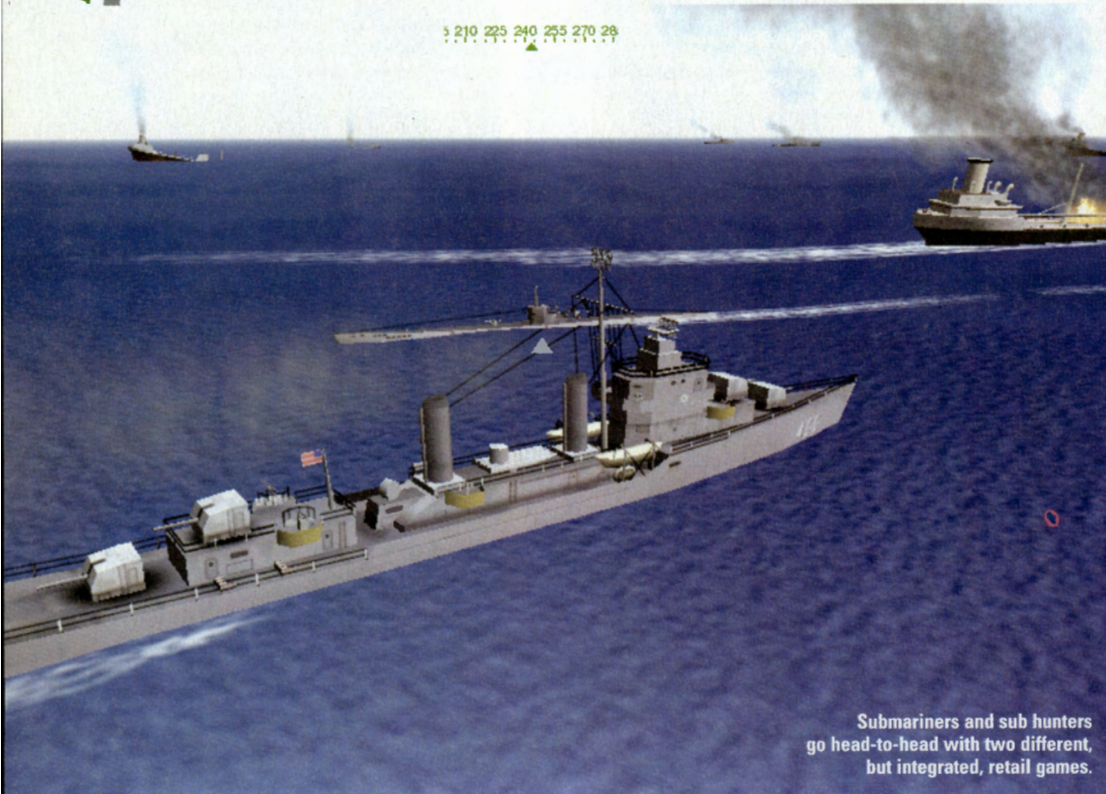
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Submarine Marries Destroyer!

The long-vaunted union of SSI naval sims is complete — thanks to fans



Submariners and sub hunters go head-to-head with two different, but integrated, retail games.

nice. In this case, even though Ubi wasn't willing to spend a single Euro to fix the games' unreliable multiplayer mode, it did the next best thing: it gave the source-code to an obscure outfit called SubSim Review (whose website, www.subsim.com, is the place to go if you dig submarines).

Honest! The company gave it away, no strings attached. Amazed at its good fortune, SubSim got cracking. A fund-raising drive netted more than \$7,000 to jump-start the undertaking, which was code-named Projekt Messerweltzer, a German term for those old-timey itinerant knife-and-scissors grinders who roamed from village to village. Skilled volunteers and play-testers rallied to the call — a true labor of love if there ever was one, and by the time you read this, you should be able to log on and help

yourself to a free 5MB to 6MB patch that will be finely polished and playtested.

The original crippling flaw, multiplayer instability, has been dramatically minimized: up to 10 players can participate in a campaign, and the drop-off rate is currently no more than 6 percent — a tremendous improvement. While they were at it, the folks at SubSim put in a bunch of new features: for example, you can now command a mid-war "flak trap" sub bristling with 20mm and 37mm anti-aircraft guns, for those defiant moments when you just don't feel like crash-diving at the first sight of an Allied plane. SubSim also massaged the code to smooth out a number of other small but annoying rough spots.

So dust off your copies of *Silent Hunter II* and *Destroyer Command*, reinstall, suck down the patch from SubSim's website, and for god's sake, remember to say "Thank you." These gentlemen have performed a remarkable service: they have literally resurrected an online mode that once seemed destined for Davey Jones' locker.

— desktopgeneral@pcgamer.com

Devotees of naval-warfare games usually feel like they're sucking the hind teat in a genre that most of the big corporate game publishers have already marginalized (if not written off altogether). But even though *Harpoon 4* (which has been delayed longer than the Second Coming) didn't appear, 2002 was still a banner year for web-foot gamers: SSI released both *Silent Hunter II* and *Destroyer Command*.

While neither title was quite as knock-your-socks-off spectacular as we'd hoped, both were solid, absorbing simulations, very much in the time-honored SSI tradition.

One ballyhooed feature in particular caused naval buffs' salivary glands to oscillate like a bent prop shaft: at release, both titles were touted as being "interoperable" — that is, you could go online and join either the U-boats or the escorts for an intense real-time contest of stealthy stalking and quick shooting. My reaction, when I first read about this feature, was a simple "Wow!"

But in practice, we discovered just one small problem with this "interoperability": It didn't bloody work. Lock-ups and drop-outs were so frequent that even if you did find three other people to play with, you all knew, going into the fray, that there was a 70- to 80-percent chance that you'd never be able to play to a conclusion.

The new owner of SSI, Ubi Soft (the enigmatic French conglomerate famous for its Borg-like tactic of buying out cash-strapped, once-proud small companies and then coldly allowing them to die a humiliating, lingering death by withholding both loyalty and support) promised that this problem would be fixed. And since *Silent Hunter II* sold about 120,000 copies, that claim seemed logical. Yet — *quelle surprise!* — a workable solution never materialized.

But Ubi Soft is unpredictable (or perhaps just fond of the occasional display of Gallic whimsy?). Like some despotic Roman emperor, the corporation confounds its own hard-ass public image by occasionally doing something

VALUE PRICE PERFORMANCE



There should be a picture in the dictionary of the Atlas Micro under the heading "Price/Performance." This desktop system was one of the best performers we've ever seen. Yet, it costs about \$1,000 less than the other high-end Athlon desktops reviewed here.

Mr. David English

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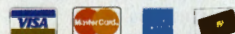
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A Genre's Saving Grace

MMORPGs aren't antisocial: they may have real-world benefits



Play well with others in virtual and real life. (*The Sims Online*)

Okay, so we all know by now that I'm a self-proclaimed massively multi-player online roleplaying game "grump." (Heck, I don't even like the acronym!) However, this month, I'd actually like to extol — yes, you heard me right — MMORPGs for their social virtues. And, in light of all the political controversy surrounding the supposed harmful effects of videogames, I want to examine the following question: Can MMORPGs have a positive influence on our social behavior in the "real world"?

They can, and do, which is one of the reasons I continue to play them — particularly *Asheron's Call 2* and *The Sims Online*. (While *TSO* isn't technically an RPG, I'd argue it forces more actual "roleplaying" than most MMORPGs, which is why I include it here.)

I reviewed both of these games two issues back, and they're essentially all I played for several weeks straight. I found the actual gameplay of both titles wanting for excitement — which actually had the

positive influence of pushing me to put more effort into actively taking part in the secondary social features: I sought out players for advice and "fellowships" in *AC 2*, and privately chatted up all the female guests at my house parties in *The Sims Online*.

I'm normally a fairly introverted person — a quality reinforced by endless hours of gaming! — but I noticed a dramatic difference in myself once I finally emerged from my gaming cave. I was actually nicer to people, and I was much more gregarious and outgoing.

After my reviews were done, I went on a business/social trip by myself where I was

forced to hang out with people I didn't know very well for a few days, and I was the life of the party. Striking up and maintaining conversations, asking questions and even... gasp... asking for directions from total strangers was much easier than I can ever

remember. As a result, I had a complete blast on what I suspect would otherwise have been a pretty uncomfortable trip.

I doubt Mr. Lieberman would agree, but I believe I have *AC 2* and *TSO* to thank for this change. It just may be that spending hours tempting nubile hotties to "play in bed" in *TSO* actually exerts a positive influence on one's daily "living" interactions. As can lopping off the heads of scores of Ratmen with my band of fellow Lugians in *AC 2*.

And that's one of the main reasons I keep playing MMORPGs, even though the meat of their gameplay may still not be for me.

— alternatelives@pcgamer.com



Need MMORPGs be isolated, antisocial wildernesses? (*AC 2*)

Heroes vie for the throne of Channon.



extended play

Even More Heroes IV with Winds of War

EVERYONE KNOWS the "expansion blues." It's the feeling you get when the add-on to your favorite game turns out to be little more than a trio of new units, a handful of new maps, and a new cinematic. "Bravo," you say. "That's what I've been waiting for? Kiss my ass."

And then sometimes you beat the expansion blues, thanks to the excellence of the new content. 3DO has always been a terrific parent to its *Heroes of Might and Magic* series, supporting it with lots of care and nurturing, and growing it into a saga that devoted fans return to again and again. The publisher has resisted what must have been a strong temptation to tweak the franchise to generate bigger sales: the steady revenue of this cherished series speaks to the "ain't broken" philosophy that keeps the games spinning on hard drives.

Heroes IV

brought us more of the well-established goodness, and now the *Winds of War* add-on offers a clever device for opening up new maps, units, and storylines. The plot sets up a kingdom under assault by five invading armies — the expansion's six campaigns let you play as each of the invading forces before finally completing the arc as the kingdom in chaos. (Note: *Kingdom in Chaos* would be an awesome name for a future game, and is hereby trademarked and copyrighted 2003 by Daniel Morris Enterprises, LLC.)

It's not exactly *Warcraft III*, but the add-on does a great job motivating each of the six campaigns. Besides the campaigns, you get 40 standalone maps, half of which were actually contributed by fan designers. Though *Winds* offers just three new monsters, the appeal here is in the new campaigns, which is definitely where the focus should be. This expansion adds great new dimension to *Heroes IV*, and at \$30, seems almost like a whole new sequel.

MOD OF THE YEAR

A couple issues ago I previewed *Desert Combat*, a total conversion of *Battlefield 1942* by amateur design team Trauma Studios, which updates our 2002 Game of the Year to modern-day warfare. Today I'm happy to inform you that the mod is up and running, and available from www.desertcombat.com or any number of *BF 1942* community sites.

Desert Combat surpasses even our wildest expectations. Zoom around the map in fighter jets, launch Hellfires from attack helicopters, target enemies with Humvee-launched TOW missiles — you'll find tons of new features, and it's all well-balanced and immediately playable.

— extendedplay@pcgamer.com



Dan Morris

MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. FREELANCER, 2. C&C: GENERALS, 3. ARX FATALIS, 4. ASHERON'S CALL 2, 5. THE SIMS ONLINE

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killing box

Chuck Osborn



Clan Destined, Part II

Expert advice on how to form a clan of winners

To recap: Last month, I asked a group of happy clanners what it takes to join a gaming clan. To a man (and one woman), they agreed that playing well with others is far more important than just playing well.

This month, the same experts share their tips on starting up a successful clan from scratch.

Be patient!

"Often, when people start new clans, they're so eager for results that they just leave [before the clan can develop]," says Team 3D's Dave Geffon. "It takes time to develop teamwork, which is really the backbone of a great clan."

Recruit to win

Besides holding open try-outs, Michael Weitz of Team Vindicate admits that poaching players from established clans can be one way to build a

team, especially when new games are released. "Playing with the top players is always a way to get your name out and get better," Weitz says.

Amish World Order's Matt Hoffman advises caution, however, before reaching for the stars: "Many clans try to move way too fast and try to be the best right away, and they normally don't last too long." Instead, he advises that you should "find people with similar interests and personalities" before attempting to assemble a "super clan."

Keep it stable

Once you've got a team, don't change the lineup. "Many clans have gone far just because of the communication and bonds between them rather than their skill," preaches Weitz. "If you can recruit players that don't have a history of whoring a clan just to get

some skill, you can build a stable roster...and there's nothing players like better than stable rosters."

Practice!

Sure, it's obvious, but team practice is essential to a young clan or one preparing for a big match. AWO normally practices three to four hours a night, five nights a week, and when preparing for the CPL, Team 3D played together six days a week for several hours each day.

Remember

It's just a game: "In the heat of competition, it's easy to forget that the only reason you're doing this is to have fun," says QGirlZ's Kimli Welsh, who met her husband through gaming. "If you take it too seriously, you're going to stress yourself out, and it will rapidly become a chore."

MOD OF THE MONTH



Need a good clan mod? Try *Quake 3 Fortress*, a total conversion that takes teamplay to a whole new level with all-new classes, weapons, and maps. Get it from www.q3f.com. Know a mod I should try? Tell me about it at killingbox@pcgamer.com.

Behold: the PCG Porsche! (See details below.)



sim column

Shooters Aren't the Only Games with Great Mods

ABSOLUTELY BLOODY AMAZING! That's the only way that I can even begin to describe the remarkable new *GT Racing 2002* mod that the SimBin Development Team has created for EA/ISI's *F1 2002*.

Third-party add-ons have been a staple in racing-sim circles for more than a decade now, but never before has a "lowly" mod so completely reinvented the wheel upon which it turns. Indeed, if it wasn't for the fact that Papyrus just hit one out of the park with *NASCAR Racing: 2003 Season*, SimBin's sports-car mod for *F1 2002* would rank as the finest racing simulation on today's market — freeware or retail.

As nutritious and tasty as *F1 2002* was out of the box — the *F1* sim came within a whisker of earning an Editors' Choice award when we reviewed it last September (giving it an 89%) — the *GTR 2002*

Andy Mahood



add-on transforms this already excellent title into the definitive sports-car simulation of our age. SimBin's massive 270MB download (which can be found at www.simmods.com) installs a separate and autonomous executable into your *F1 2002* folder that cleverly borrows what it needs from ISI's game engine while simultaneously running its own unique GUI and 3D interface screens.

GTR 2002 features an entirely new physics model that offers distinctive handling characteristics for each of its highly detailed production-based vehicles — spread over three different classes and including rides like the Porsche 996, Ferrari 550 Maranello, and Marcos LM600. It adds a unique real-time, dynamic suspension model, fade-prone brakes, and completely revised tire models.

The mod ships with seven new tracks — each a dramatic improvement on the 17 venues that shipped with the original *F1 2002* — as well as a revamped AI system and a new 10-round FIA GT multi-class Championship mode. As a constantly evolving product, with new cars and tracks being delivered on a regular basis, *GT Racing 2002* is only going to get bigger, better, and more polished with the passage of time.

If you don't already own a copy of *F1 2002*, then stop reading this right now and race out and buy one. As soon as you have it installed, download the *GTR 2002* mod and get that puppy loaded up as fast as humanly possible. You can all thank me later.

P.S. — Before you go, take another look at that slick Porsche 996 atop this column. Reader Paul Northness was kind enough to reskin it in *PCG* livery, and he even got my helmet right! For more of Paul's work, go to <http://f1200x-helmets.racesimcentral.com>.


— simcolumn@pcgamer.com


MY GAMES OF THE MONTH: 1. FREEDOM FORCE, 2. C&C: GENERALS, 3. NEOCRON, 4. UNREAL II, 5. QUAKE III

YOU CAN'T KILL WHAT YOU CAN'T CATCH

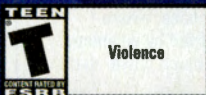
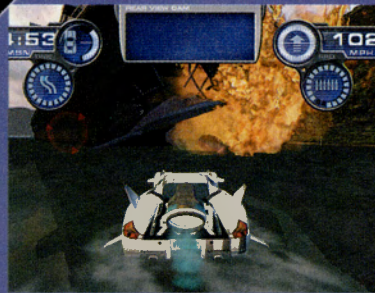
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COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

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Whether he's the GLA, the U.S., or China, our man Billy Harms smashes enemy forces like a trillion-megaton nuke. In an act of sheer kindness, this 20-star general offers his personal tips for handing your foes a crushing defeat.



Before launching your offensive against the GLA base, soften it up with an artillery strike.

CHINA

MISSION 1: This mission is pretty straightforward: build up your forces and attack.

MISSION 2: Establish your base (be sure to grab the U.N. supply crate located nearby), and then build up your forces and wipe out the GLA. Be sure to use the extra supplies, which are located by the bridge.

MISSION 3: Blow up the dam and quickly get your base up and running. The GLA can attack only by crossing the river (once the water level drops), so build your defenses in that area and then send your forces across the river and wipe out the GLA.



During the final mission of the Chinese campaign, don't let the GLA forces enter the city.

Additional supplies are located at the southern end of the map; build a supply center next to them.

MISSION 4: Build up a large force of tank hunters and Red Guards and secure the area by the oil rig, located to the north and the east of your base. Use Black Lotus to capture the oil rig and use this extra money to build more troops. Capture the War Factory (and the nearby oil rigs) and then wipe out the GLA.

MISSION 5: Get your base up and running, but watch out for suicide bombers: make sure you have Gatling Cannons covering all of the approaches. Attack the enemy forces to the west and capture the oil rigs. Hold that area, build up more forces,

and eliminate the GLA. Use your planes to attack key buildings.

MISSION 6: To beat this mission, all you have to do is get Black Lotus onto the bridge, so don't worry about destroying all of the GLA units. To the northeast of your location are two GLA Supply Stashes — eliminate the enemy forces in that area and then have Black Lotus capture both of the Supply Stashes. Be sure to leave some protection near the Supply Stashes because the GLA will attack them.

Once you've secured your supplies, build up your forces. A nearby soccer stadium will spew out enraged mobs that will attack you. Position a Gatling Tank on their approach and it will deal with the hooligans. With your main force, push north and clear a path for Black Lotus. Near the bridge are two GLA Stinger sites: move Black Lotus near them and then engage the Stingers with your units. While the Stingers are firing on your other units, sneak Black Lotus past them and onto the bridge.

MISSION 7: The final Chinese mission can be rather challenging; the key to success is to be on the offensive the entire time.

The mission starts with your forces moving up off the main road. You have two Overloads: build a Speaker Tower on one of them, and build a Gatling Cannon on the other. For your General Ability, select



GENERAL STRATEGIES

WHICHEVER SIDE YOU'RE PLAYING, these tactics will help you pulverize opposing armies with aplomb:



- It's always a good idea to accompany your vehicles with a force of infantry, specifically Red Guards, Rangers, or Rebels. If the enemy attacks you with infantry that are armed with bazooka-style weapons, they'll slice through your forces pretty quickly. Because of the rock-paper-scissors nature of *Generals*, the best way to take out infantry is with some good old-fashioned machine-gun fire.

- Always be on the lookout for additional supplies, oil rigs, and U.N. supply crates. These can provide a useful boost to your war efforts.

- It's generally a good idea to research Capture Building as soon as a mission starts. In the main walkthrough I've highlighted the missions where this research is key, but as a rule, I always get that upgrade right away.

- Be sure to build a lot of power plants and keep them at the rear of your base, where they're less likely to be destroyed by an enemy attack. It's better to have too much power than to skimp too much.

- In regards to the General Abilities, don't always go for the super-weapon. Check your mission objective and get the upgrades that will help you most in that particular mission.



Before detonating your GLA Bomb Trucks, make sure they're deep inside the enemy's base, so you cause maximum damage to his structures.



Use Stinger sites and buildings to form a protective layer around your base.



Attacking with biological weapons destroys the intended target and infects the area.



During the third mission of the GLA campaign, use your mob to quickly demolish the city.

Maximum Cash Hack. You also get two Construction Dozers: immediately have them build a power plant and a barracks at their location on the road. Research Capture Building and create Red Guard and tank hunters, and have them follow your main force.

To the east is a small GLA base: attack it and wipe out the enemy. However, before you destroy their Supply Stash, use your cash hack to steal money. Move your dozers up to this position and begin constructing your base. The GLA has a Scud Storm, so be sure to space out your buildings.

Follow the road to the north, secure the oil rigs, and then launch an attack against the GLA base situated on the northern edge of the city. Again, before destroying the Supply Stash, use your cash hack to steal money. After you've destroyed the GLA base, send a dozer to the supplies west of the city. Build a Supply Center and a War Factory and start pumping out units. Be sure to watch for a counterattack.

There are two approaches to the main GLA base: the easiest way is to attack via the road on the western edge of the map. Have one force



In the missions where the enemy has airpower, building Stinger sites is crucial.

defend the other road (which is located where the GLA base once was), but be ready to use the scatter command (keyboard command X) because the GLA will attack them with the Scud Storm.

Send your main force up the western approach and then slowly push your way east. At the same time, use your other force to take out Stinger sites located in the cliffs overlooking the city. If you have MiGs, use them to attack key buildings.

GLA

MISSION 1: Use your forces to destroy the Chinese base, but save your three Bomb Trucks. Build up your forces and attack the Chinese units located to the east of your base; use one Bomb Truck (be sure to upgrade its payload and disguise it as an enemy unit) during this attack. The main Chinese base is north of this location. Use the remaining Bomb Trucks to inflict serious damage on the base, and then mop up with your other forces.

MISSION 2: Put up an Arms Dealer and pump out units. Steal the U.N. supplies until you've accomplished your objectives.

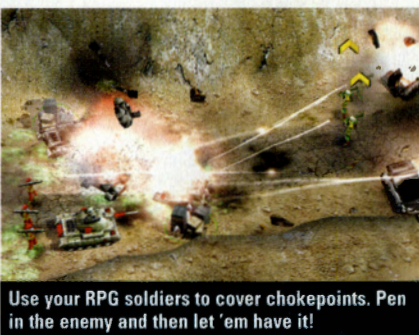
MISSION 3: Use the mob to trash the town and collect money. Build only a handful of units to defend your base; otherwise, save all the money you collect.

MISSION 4: Build up your base and protect its edges with Stinger sites. Build a mix of units that can fire at both the ground and the air, and then secure the supplies that are west of your initial base. Build a larger force and use it to take out the U.S. base.

MISSION 5: Protect your base with a couple of Stinger sites and watch for attacks from the north and the east; also, be sure to research Capture Building. Secure the two chemical bunkers north of your base and then use Bomb Trucks to devastate the main base. (Use Rocket Buggies to nix the Patriot missiles before sending in the Bomb Trucks.) Send in your troops and secure the remaining bunkers.

MISSION 6: For your General Abilities, get Ambush to the max and immediately send these units into the enemy base. While those forces attack key structures, build up your base (move the Nuke Trucks into your base) and hold off enemy attacks. Once you've built up a sizable force, attack the enemy base.

MISSION 7: Get your base up and running and quickly establish your defenses. Watch for attacks



Use your RPG soldiers to cover chokepoints. Pen in the enemy and then let 'em have it!



Because the GLA's Scud Storm is so devastating, find it as quickly as you can and then target it. No matter what happens, don't let those scuds launch, or you're pretty much screwed.

need more supplies, some are located on the other side of the road.

MISSION 4: Use your Tomahawks to take out the GLA's bunker defenses and the Stinger sites. (When attacking the Stinger sites, build Battle Drones on your Tomahawks so that the Stingers will fire at the Drones instead of your Tomahawk missiles.) Once the Stingers are destroyed, establish your base and wipe out the GLA scum.

MISSION 5: You start with a small base, so concentrate on pumping out a force of tanks and Humvees; load the Humvees with Missile Defenders. For your General Ability, choose A-10 Attack and Paratroop. Attack the GLA base across the river, but leave one building standing. (This action will prevent the game from triggering the second stage of the mission.) Move your dozer across the river and get a new base up and running; additional supplies are to the north and east.

Once you've built up a nice force, destroy the last building. Send a small force to the north to secure and capture the oil rigs, and then attack the main GLA base with the rest of your forces. Be sure to take out the Scud Storm right away.

MISSION 6: As soon as the mission starts, fortify your base defenses by building Patriots north of your base and next to the bridge. More supplies are to the south, so send a small force and secure them. Build a Supply Center next to them once the area is secure.

Build up your forces and send them across the bridge and seize control of the town. Send a second force to the south — by the additional supplies — and then send them east. Be careful, though, because the gulley will be packed with Demo Traps. Now that you have two forces situated on that side of the map, use them to take out the Chinese base and then send them north to attack the main GLA base. You should get the A-10 Strike and use it against key enemy buildings.

MISSION 7: Here it is: the final showdown between you and the dastardly GLA. To the south of your base is a dilapidated Chinese base; research Capture Building and get that base up and running. Two roads feed into your base's location, so split up your forces and cover both approaches. Build Patriots for additional defenses and get Supply Drop Zones up as soon as you can. Finally, move your snipers forward and position them so they can take out any approaching enemy infantry.

The enemy has a Scud Storm, so launch your attack as soon as you can. Get A-10 Strike and Fuel Air Bomb from the General Abilities, and if you have the money, build the Nuke at the Chinese base.

Build up a large force and punch through the GLA's initial defenses, and then use your super-weapons against the enemy's main base. Search out and destroy the remaining GLA forces. **POG**

from the east, including snipers. Capture the oil rig to the west of your base and use Ambush (again, max it out) to hit the enemy base. Target power plants: if you can take them down, you'll seriously hinder the enemy's war efforts.

Build up a force and move them to the east, following the road along the bottom of the map. Use Rocket Buggies to take out the Patriot missiles and then hit the U.S. base with Bomb Trucks. (Again, make sure you disguise the trucks and max out their payloads.) Secure the objective in this area and guard it with your forces.

As soon as you can, select Anthrax as a General Ability. Build up another force, including Red Guards so you can capture the missile, and move them toward the final objective.

At the same time, hit the Chinese base (located in the northeastern section of the map) with the Anthrax. Send in your boys and secure the missile.

UNITED STATES

MISSION 1: Research Battle Drones for all of your units and then move into the city, destroying the

GLA Palace in the middle of the town. Then head east and rescue the pilots and get them into your Humvees. Have your forces attack the GLA base and destroy the Scud Storm. Also, for an extra infusion of cash, grab the U.N. supply crates on the west side of the city.

MISSION 2: Immediately build up your base defenses and get multiple Supply Choppers in the air. (Additional supplies are to the east of your base, and oil rigs are north of your base.) Use your initial forces to rescue the first pilot and use a Humvee to get him back to your base. Build up more additional units and rescue the remaining pilots.

MISSION 3: You don't have much time to get situated before the action starts, so once you're in the mission, send your Comanches to cover the road. Build Drones for the tanks on the western side of the base, and send the tanks down to the road as well. If you have the cash, order a dozer to build a couple of Patriot missile batteries along the road as well. Keep pumping out units until you've completed the mission objectives. If you



The Tomahawk cruise missiles deliver a serious payload, but they need close-quarters support.



The best way to get past the third U.S. mission is to create a crossfire on the road.



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COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

**MULTIPLAYER
TACTICS**

➔ When gearing up for human-on-human combat, you should be armed with the best units, the best weapons — the best know-how. With some help from *Generals'* developers, we've got that last point covered.



If you use Rocket Buggies, keep them moving, or they'll be wiped out by heavier forces.

- In a large group of USA vehicles, purchase Scout Drones for only one or two of the vehicles and put Battle Drones on the rest of them. Those one or two Scouts can cover for the whole group, and any more than that are useless, whereas every additional Battle Drone is an increase in power.

GLA TACTICS

- Hit-and-run attacks with GLA Rocket Buggies are great, especially against Chinese Overlords.
- Build a tunnel entrance in your base and send a worker close to the enemy's base to build another tunnel. A worker is hard to spot while building, and a build tunnel is hard to destroy. Using this tactic, infantry can be rapidly deployed on an enemy's stronghold or into other structures around his base.
- GLA Demo Traps are an effective, low-cost defensive weapon. Use them at chokepoints to eliminate up to three vehicles. They're invisible to regular vision, yet they reveal the area around them. And when detonated, they warn of the presence of the enemy in the area.
- Disguise your Bomb Trucks as civilian vehicles and place them near chokepoints on the map; then, as the enemy passes through, manually detonate them!
- Build Bomb Trucks and then disguise them as dozers or supply trucks. The enemy will be none the wiser because they won't keep track of where all their trucks go, so you can easily sneak in the Bomb Trucks.

POG

CHINA TACTICS

- For defense, a mix of Overlords equipped with Propaganda Towers, Gatling Guns, or bunkers with tank hunters works great.
- Drop cluster mines in chokepoints where you know your opponent needs to go. He'll unknowingly run his tanks over the mines and destroy all of them.
- Build bunkers in chokepoints and on roadways around your base. Once they're built, upgrade each of the bunkers with mines. It'll cost a total of 1,000 credits per bunker with mine upgrade, but enemies will have a heck of a time trying to move units into your base.
- When using Hackers, make sure they're spread throughout your base, making them harder for incoming planes and Anthrax attacks to destroy. Also, the longer the Hacker hacks, the more money you'll receive.
- Two Chinese Overlords with speaker towers, two Overlords with Gatling Guns, and three Inferno Cannons is a nasty combo that can deal with any kind of situation.
- First make sure you have the Capture Building upgrade. During an attack or some other type of distraction, sneak a troop crawler into the middle of the enemy base. Unload the troops and have some of them start capturing buildings

while others keep any defenses distracted. It's very tough to stop all 10 of the pesky Red Guards from capturing some of your buildings. Just stay away from defense structures.

- Use a Gatling weapon (e.g., a Gatling Tank) against enemy Stinger sites to kill all the soldiers inside, making the sites useless.

U.S. TACTICS

- Don't build any structures near the Strategy Center. Once built, the Strategy Center is visible to all players, as is the area immediately surrounding it, including any buildings.
- As soon as the game begins, build five rocket troopers and put them in a Humvee. Run the Humvee over to the enemy base and take out all of their supply-gatherers. Follow this attack by building several Humvees filled with missile soldiers. Be sure to get the TOW missile upgrade for these vehicles.
- Though USA Comanches aren't that great for offense, they make a beautiful mobile base defense, especially against the Rebel Ambush/Paradrop. *Never* underestimate the power of the rocket pod — it's messy, but it'll clear an area in a *big* way.
- Place a USA Spy Drone in your own base to reveal enemy stealth units. Bye bye, Black Lotus!

MISCELLANEOUS TIPS

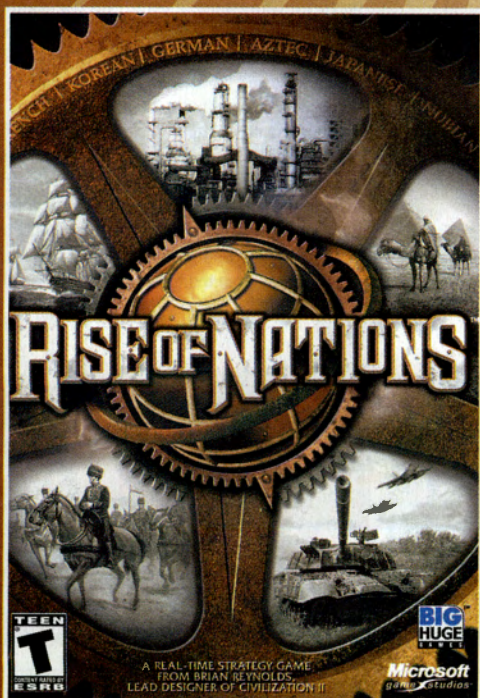
- Capturing an enemy building is so useful during battle: it distracts your opponent, weakens his hold of the map, and can double your arsenal! There's nothing better than using your opponent's strengths against him, in combination with the tech tree of your original team. Do whatever it takes to capture an enemy dozer or a supply center from the other side, and you're in great shape!
- When playing against the U.S., capture the enemy's Strategy Center, switch to bombard, and blow their base to smithereens with the artillery cannon!
- When playing against the GLA, send your initial dozer over to the GLA base and crush all of their workers. The GLA can't do anything about this attack unless the player's really fast, and it will almost always seal a victory for you.



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RAINBOW SIX 3: RAVEN SHIELD



Team Rainbow is back, and once again, you're in command. If your skills have dulled since *Rogue Spear*, you'll be in for a rude awakening with *Raven Shield*. Luckily, we've got some key tips for the game's hardest missions.



MOUNTAIN WATCH: With suppressed sniper rifles, you can give your teams vital cover as they clear the highway.

MOUNTAIN WATCH

This mission is probably one of the first that'll give you a hard time. The default mission plan has the right idea: You definitely want a sniper team to take out as many tangers from the hill above the highway as possible. But rather than having just two teams, you should have three. Move one person from the red and green teams to gold team and have them be your sniper team. This way, instead of having green team clear the highway below on their own, you can have both red and green teams advance, each providing cover for the other.

Meanwhile, the gold team can go down to the tunnels through the stairway in the building near your insertion point. This setup lets you have two points of entry rather than one. If you time it right, you can have one team clearing the stairway and the rooms beyond it while the other two teams clear the highway and the tunnel. Don't forget the value of flashbangs and smoke grenades: smoke grenades are often overlooked, but they're actually very helpful in providing cover, and will become life-savers later on.

One especially tricky part of this level is the area right before the room with the hostages. There are usually tangers at three different positions, and sometimes four. Luckily, you have two entry points to this room, so you can get creative with how you take it down. A timed simultaneous attack from both entry points using flashbangs works best. Watch for the balcony above the left entry point — some-

times a tango is there. Clear the room quickly and immediately send one team up the balcony and through the door there to clean out the upper area. This action will prevent any tangers from shooting you in the back while you secure the hostages.

Don't just bust open the door to the room with the hostages. Sure, you might beat the tango inside to the draw before he mows down a few hostages, but it's not worth the risk. Instead, just crack open the door a tiny sliver, toss in a flashbang, and then storm in, or use a breaching charge. Now you can either get the hostages back to the extraction zone or clear out the rest of the tunnels.

FALCON HOUR

The airport is very straightforward when it starts out. The default plan works just fine: you just have



FALCON HOUR: Wait until all teams are ready before blowing this door, or you risk losing hostages.

to stay frosty and try to lose as few men as possible in the beginning. The first batch of hostages isn't that hard to rescue — just resist the urge to shoot the tangers through the windows when you enter the first hangar, and stay out of sight by following your waypoints closely.

The second room of hostages represents the real challenge. If you don't plan a synchronized takedown of that room using both entryways, you'll lose a hostage. Set breaching charges on the doors and charge through, and always wait until all your teams are ready before hitting a go code. The default plan already has the timing synchronized, so if you jump the gun, you'll fail: it's as simple as that.

If you don't think you're up to the pressure of leading the teams in, let the computer handle that role while you take control of the two-man gold team and provide cover fire.

SHATTERED GLASS

Stealth missions are always tricky, largely because you can't be seen and you can't kill anyone. Thankfully, *Raven Shield* has just one. The default plan will be fine. Wear your heartbeat sensor at all times. You can't shoot anyone, so having your gun out is pointless. Follow the waypoints until you get to the glass double doors by the stairs leading up. Be careful here because sometimes a guard is in the room behind the doors. And since those doors are glass...you get the idea.

When you head up the stairs you'll reach a waypoint with an alpha code. This waypoint is here because just up the stairs a guard is doing the rounds. Just wait for him to turn his back and walk away, and then follow the waypoints to the office with the computer. Plant your bug and then head up the stairs right outside the office. Wait at the top of the stairs. Another guard is patrolling this floor. Keep an eye on him with your heartbeat sensor and wait until he's walking away from you before heading to the room with the phone.

Once in the bedroom with the phone, be sure to stay away from the big window with the blinds:



SHATTERED GLASS: When you're bugging this phone, stay away from the large window.

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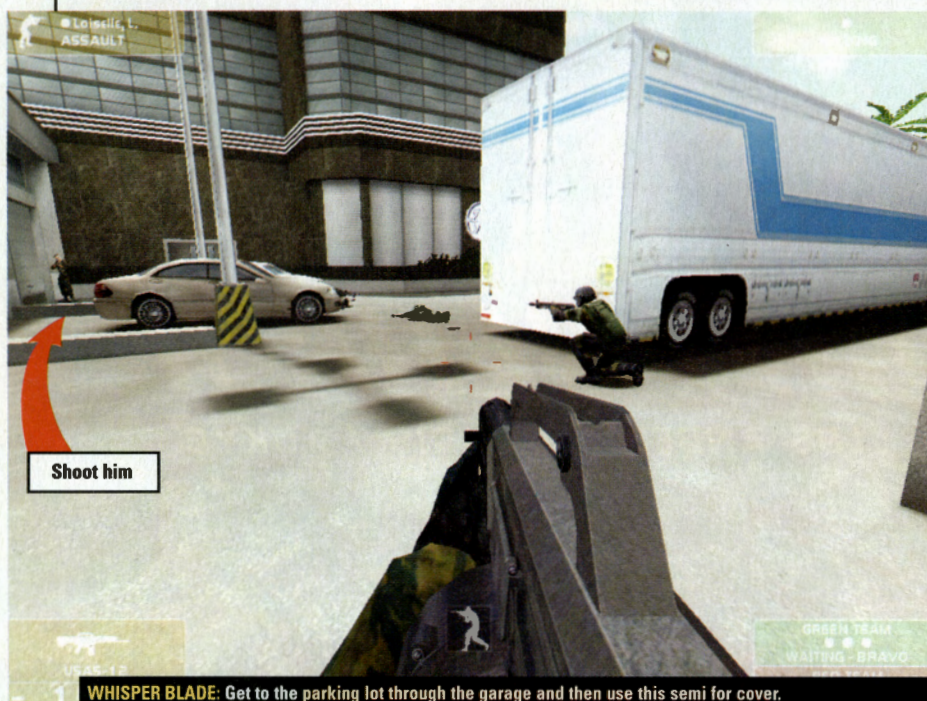


PlayStation 2



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own to avoid the kill zones mentioned below. We've got a few tips to help you, but when it comes down to it, your success will depend on your own skills and reflexes.

Smoke grenades will aid you greatly here. You'll have to clear a lot of big rooms, and a well-placed smoke grenade can provide excellent cover. Also, avoid the main showroom with the cars on display: if you barge in here through the front door, you'll be slaughtered. Instead, work around this room and get to it from behind. Use a smoke grenade to get past areas that are heavily covered by tangers. Use breaching charges on the door to the main conference room where Gutierrez is skulking. Remember, you must take him alive.

Another area to avoid is the parking lot. Rather than heading to it through the double doors from the main building, take the long way around and head out there through the garage. Using smoke grenades and flashbangs, you should be able to eliminate the tangers there. The key here is to avoid exposure in large rooms as much as possible, given that you're vastly outnumbered and outgunned.

STEEL ROSE

The default plan has your entire team equipped with suppressed weapons for a reason: You don't want anyone to know you're coming before you disarm the bomb on the float, or they'll set off the explosives. Right off the bat you'll have to watch for gunners on the roof and in the windows.

I recommend following the default plan, but with two minor variations. The first is to bring some flashbang and/or frag grenades. The second is to take control of the red team, but not to go all the way through to your first alpha waypoint. Instead, get to the area upstairs with the two windows looking across the street. Clear out the area and be sure to watch for tangers in the windows in the building across from you. You'll usually spot two in the windows in front of you and one in the floor above that. Two snipers are on the rooftop. Once they're taken out, send the alpha go code so your guys will storm the street. At the same time, rush over to the window. From there you can get a clear shot at whoever tries running to the float to set off the bomb.

The float you want to set your sights on is the one with the grim reaper on it to the left. You have to make sure that absolutely no one reaches the float. Be sure you have a fresh mag when you get up to the window. Once you've secured the street, disarm the bomb. Be careful — sometimes there's a tango behind the last float who has a good bead on anyone who's near the bomb. Another tango is down the alleyway that leads to the casino's back entrance.

After that there are two more points where you'll meet heavy resistance. The first is the casino room downstairs. Your teams *must* enter simultaneously for this scenario to go down in your favor. Frags and flashbangs are both handy here; also, watch for a tango behind the counter next to the front door. The second heavy-resistance spot is the roof, where you'll find Gaspic. Once again, bang and clear, and you'll be fine.

POG



Guards can still see you if you're near the window. We recommend that you stay crouched, bug the phone, and move away from the window as quickly as possible. Now all you have to do is get out.

Here's where it may be a good idea to deviate from the default plan. Rather than heading back to the insertion point a different way, we've found it easier to retrace your steps. Why? Because now you already know the patterns of every guard you avoided, so there won't be any surprises. Just remember to take your time: you're in no hurry. Once you've made your way back up to the roof,

you can get back to the fun part of this game — killing terrorists.

WHISPER BLADE

This mission may seem easy because you don't have to rescue any hostages, but it's possibly the hardest mission in the game. Tangers are out in force, they've got itchy trigger fingers, and they don't miss much. To make matters worse, the default plan isn't the best choice of action. We highly recommend that you devise a plan of your

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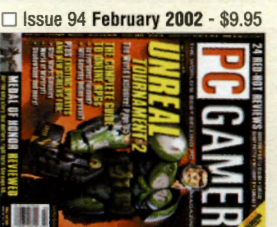
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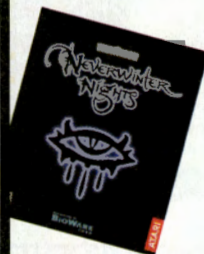
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And the Winner Is...

Each and every month we run a contest where we give away copies of the latest, greatest games and related gear. This month we thought we'd shine a big ol' spotlight on the folks who've won prizes over the past few issues. Congratulations to everyone listed below, and for the rest of you, keep trying!



September 2002 Winners
(Prize: A copy of *Neverwinter Nights*)

Daniel G. DeGriselles
Big Bear Lake, CA

Stephen Lynn Daugherty II
Highland, CA

Jack Lipski
Elmwood Park, IL

Robert Reinhardt
Moneta, VA

Lisa Lexier
Portland, OR

Bob Franklin
Sometown, IL

Michael E. Stevic
Waldorf, MD

David Sarkady
Mountain Home, AK

Colin Masterson
Voorheesville, NY

Joe Ho
Castro Valley, CA

October 2002 Winners
(Prize: One *Grand Theft Auto III* T-shirt)

Lee Yel Shin
Hanover, MD

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Arcadia, CA

Matthew Paragano
Bernardsville, NJ

Ayla Hanson
Hollywood, MD

James Hendricks
Madison, WI

Rich Boswell
Bedford, TX

Bill Ferguson
Puyallup, WA

Peter Brandt
Evanston, IL

Mark Applegate
Torrance, CA

Brandon Gatti
Palmdale, CA

November 2002 Winners
(Prize: A copy of *Icewind Dale II*)

Terry Quick
Merrillville, IN

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Midlothian, VA

Kenneth Petersen
Springdale, AK

Kelly Martin
East Earl, PA

Walt Latocha
Forest Park, IL

Howard G. Lownes Jr.
Schwenksville, PA

Charlie Xu
Cupertino, CA

Elena Khomitch
Acton, MA

Randy Garrison
Galloway, OH

David Rak
Shelton, CT



December 2002 Winners
(Prize: One copy of *The Thing* game signed by John Carpenter, one copy of *The Thing* DVD, and one copy of the game's strategy guide.)

Scott S. Atkins
Palmdale, CA

Bill Spahr
Enon, OH

Homare Yamahachi
New York, NY

Lawrence Lugar
San Diego, CA

Darren Pocci
Saint Charles, IL



The PCG Crossword — Answers

ACROSS 4. Lionheart, 6. Atomic, 9. Lovecraft, 10. Niobe, 13. Dalton, 14. Throne, 17. War, 18. Westwood, 19. Ykesha, 21. MOO, 22. PC Gamer, 23. Pyro, 25. There, 26. Vietnam, 29. Smash, 32. Enclave, 33. Mafia, 35. Jedi, 36. McCree, 37. Relic, 38. Gus **DOWN** 1. KARR, 2. Zoe, 3. Will Rock, 5. Imperator, 7. Greyhawk, 8. Rome, 10. Neocron, 11. Epic, 12. Far Cry, 15. Etheria, 16. 3DMark, 20. Smart, 24. Mars, 26. Voyager, 27. MindFX, 28. The Sims, 30. Mummy, 31. Hutch, 34. Uru

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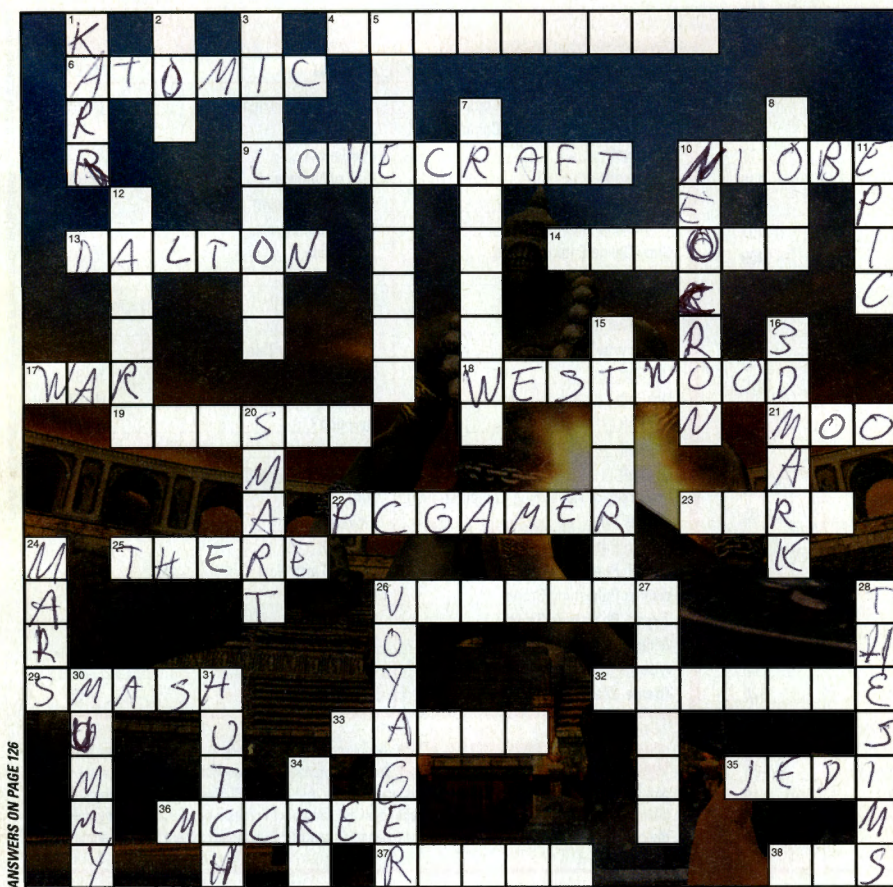
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PC Gamer office, 2:00 a.m. Stealthy intern/gamer spy Jeff rappels off the roof of the building and into an open window, dressed in black and armed with a digital camera. He quickly loads the newest builds of *Postal 2*, *DOOM III*, and *PlanetSide* onto an encrypted server halfway across the world. He also grabs interviews with John Carmack and Tom Clancy, not to be released until this summer. Suddenly, footsteps approach. It's TheVedel! "Stop right there!" The ninja intern hits the flash button on his camera and blinds TheVedel, and then runs for the fire exit. Locked! More people are coming—someone hit the alarm! Ripping a fire extinguisher off the wall, he creates a cloud of smoke to blind the enemy. Then, the intruder jumps out the window, pulling the cord on his parachute...and slams into the ground. He'd leaped from the second floor.



ANSWERS ON PAGE 126

THE PCG CROSSWORD

ACROSS

4. Nickname for Britain's King Richard I, and an upcoming RPG
6. *I Was an ____ Mutant!*
9. Horror novelist who inspired Cthulhu games
10. One of the playable characters in *Enter the Matrix*
13. *Unreal II*'s marshal
14. *Warcraft III: The Frozen ____*
17. *Deus Ex: Invisible ____*
18. *Red Alert* studio, R.I.P.
19. *EverQuest*'s newest expansion is the legacy of this
21. *Master of Orion* (abbreviation)
22. The world's best-selling PC games magazine
23. Developer of *Commandos* and what Beavis is
25. Name of There, Inc.'s 3D online non-game

26. Setting of 2015's next war FPS
29. What The Hulk does
32. Gorgeous hack-and-slash action/RPG reviewed last month
33. *The Sopranos* + *GTA III* = ____
35. Spectacularly difficult character class in *Star Wars: Galaxies*
36. *Mad Dog ____*
37. *Impossible Creatures* developer
38. Retired New York detective star of *Post Mortem*

DOWN

1. KITT's evil counterpart from *Knight Rider* (Hint: Not Hasselhoff)
2. Bond's deadly *Nightfire* babe
3. Upcoming FPS containing mythological foes (shown above)
5. Next MMORPG from maker of *Dark Age of Camelot*
7. D&D's Temple of Elemental Evil

8. Next chapter in *Total War* series
10. CDV's cyberpunk MMORPG
11. Maker of early semi-classic *Jill of the Jungle*
12. First game using Crytek engine
15. Place where heroes are from in *Warlords IV*
16. Mad Onion's graphics-benchmark utility
20. *Battlecruiser* series auteur
24. Planet *Red Faction* is set on
26. Name of ship in *Elite Force*
27. Company that makes supplements for gamers
28. Best-selling PC game of all time
30. Bandaged monster in Adventure Company mystery
31. *Starsky & ____*, or something rabbits live in
34. Name of upcoming massively multiplayer continuation of *Myst*

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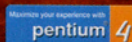


Unreal II

THE AWAKENING



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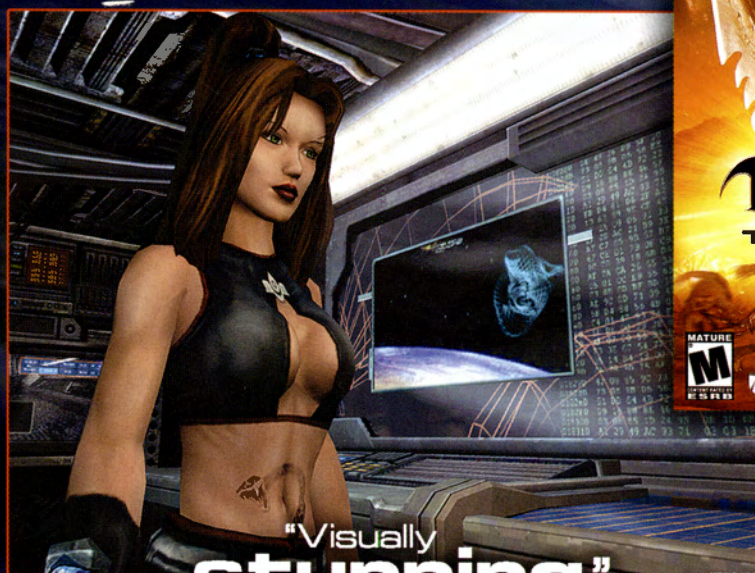
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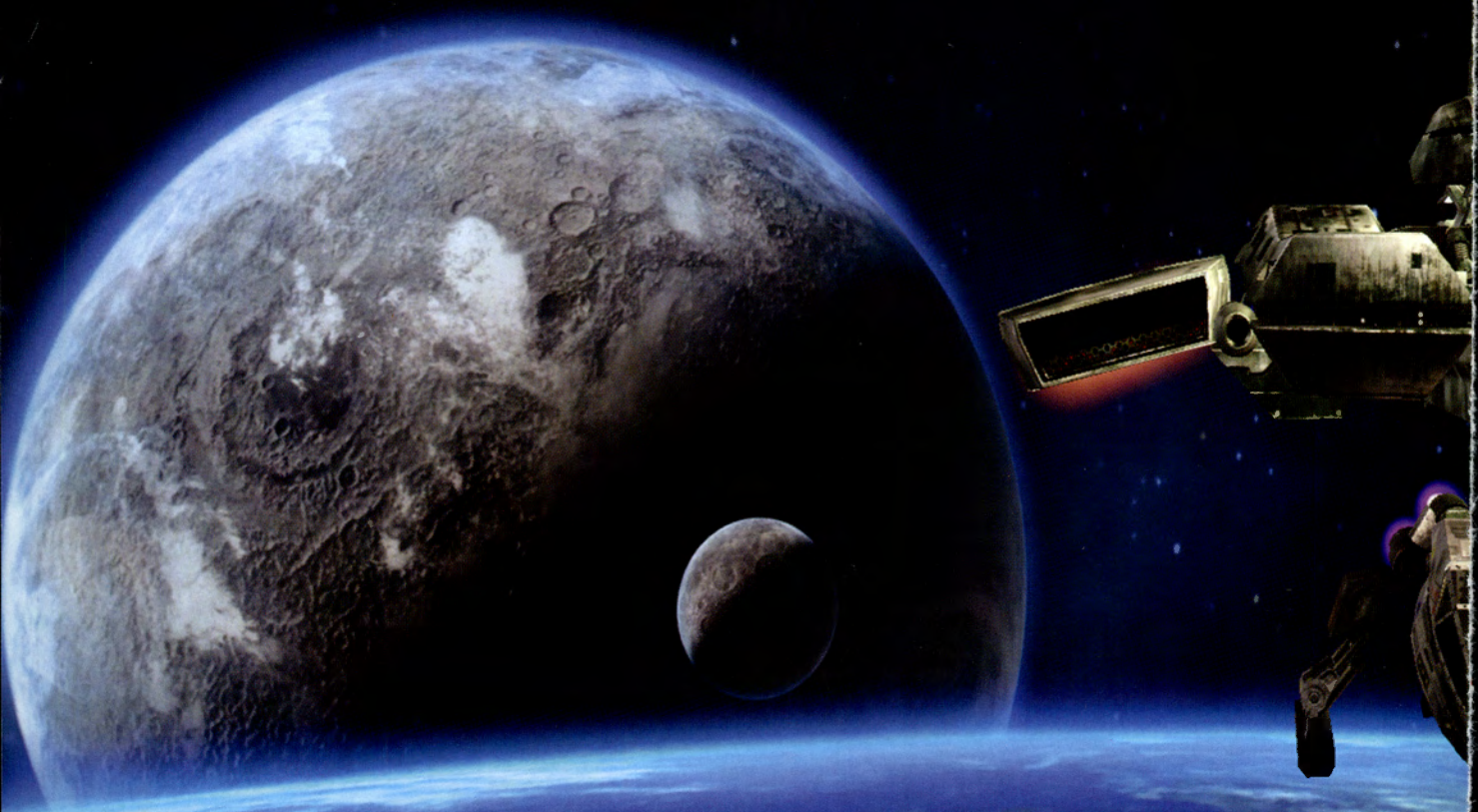
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