

SUPREME COMMANDER

EXCLUSIVE 4-PAGE PREVIEW
INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS TAYLOR
PLUS: ALL-NEW SCREENS AND INFO

COMPUTER

The PC Gaming

Authority

GAMING

25
YEARS OF
GAMING
P. 74

FOR 25 YEARS
ISSUE 268

WORLD

EXCLUSIVE
WORLD PREMIERE!

ALAN WAKE

FROM THE MAKERS OF MAX PAYNE

THE NEW NAME IN TERROR

FIRST DETAILS

NEW SCREENS

PREVIEWED
HALO 2 FOR PC

WHAT'S NEW,
WHAT'S NOT
PAGE 68

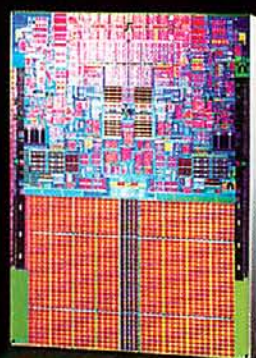
COLLECTOR'S ISSUE

25 YEARS OF CGW!

A LOOK BACK AT 268
AWESOME ISSUES

PLUS: 4 CLASSIC COVERS





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Hot Strategies for the Year's Best Games!



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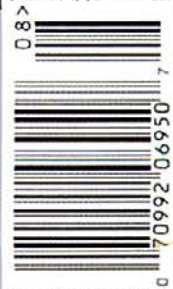


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Computer Gaming World

Lloyd Case
On MMX Gaming

MAY 1997
NO.154

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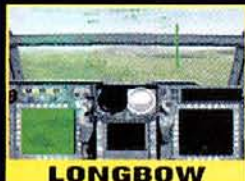
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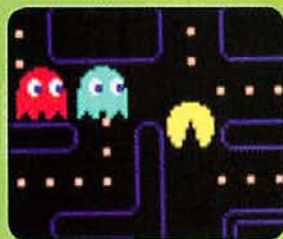
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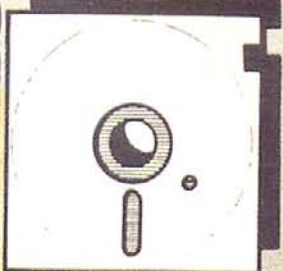


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VOL. 1, NUMBER 1

NOV.—DEC. 1981





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PlayStation 2

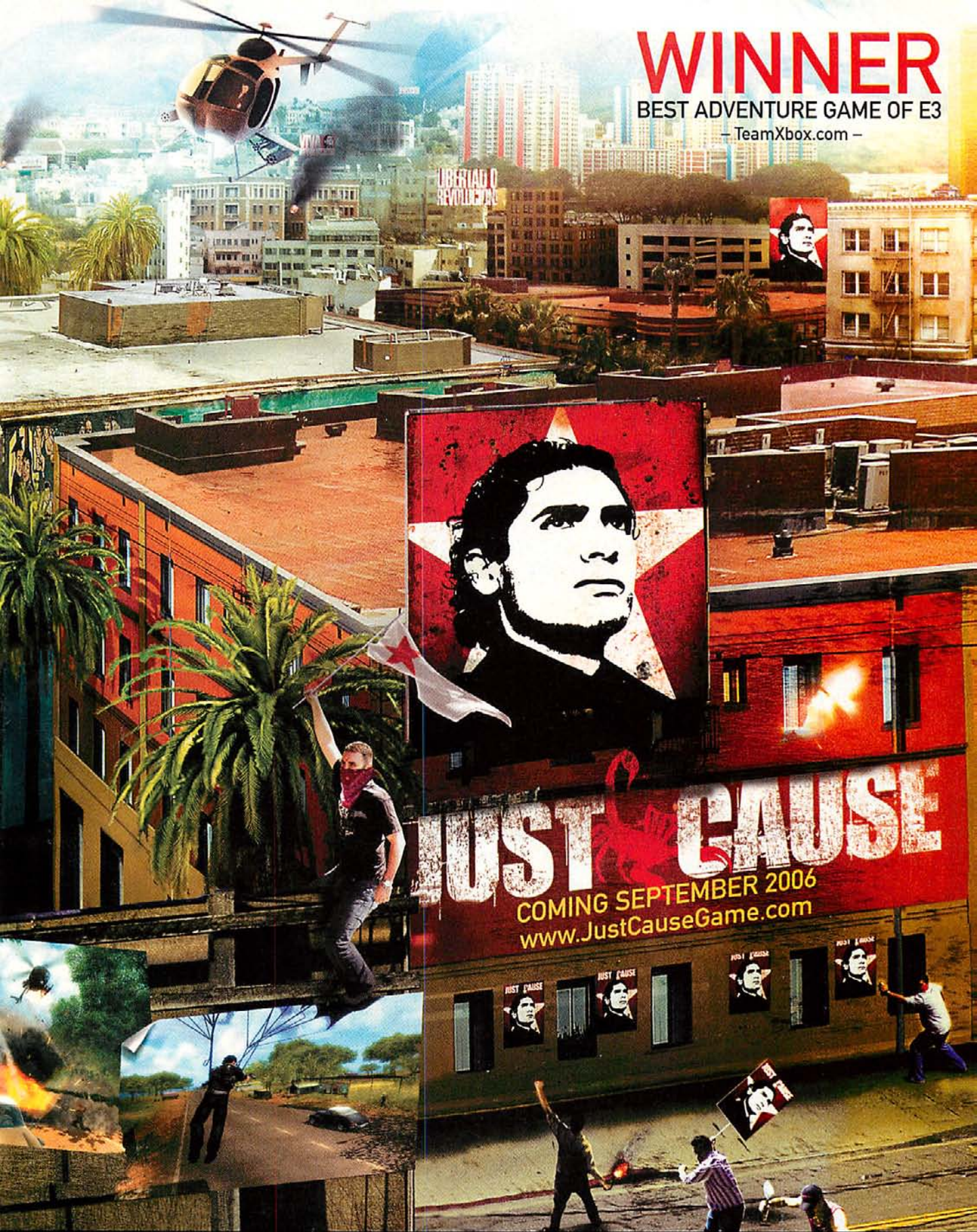


avalanche

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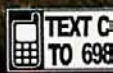


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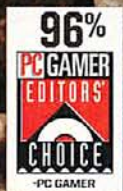


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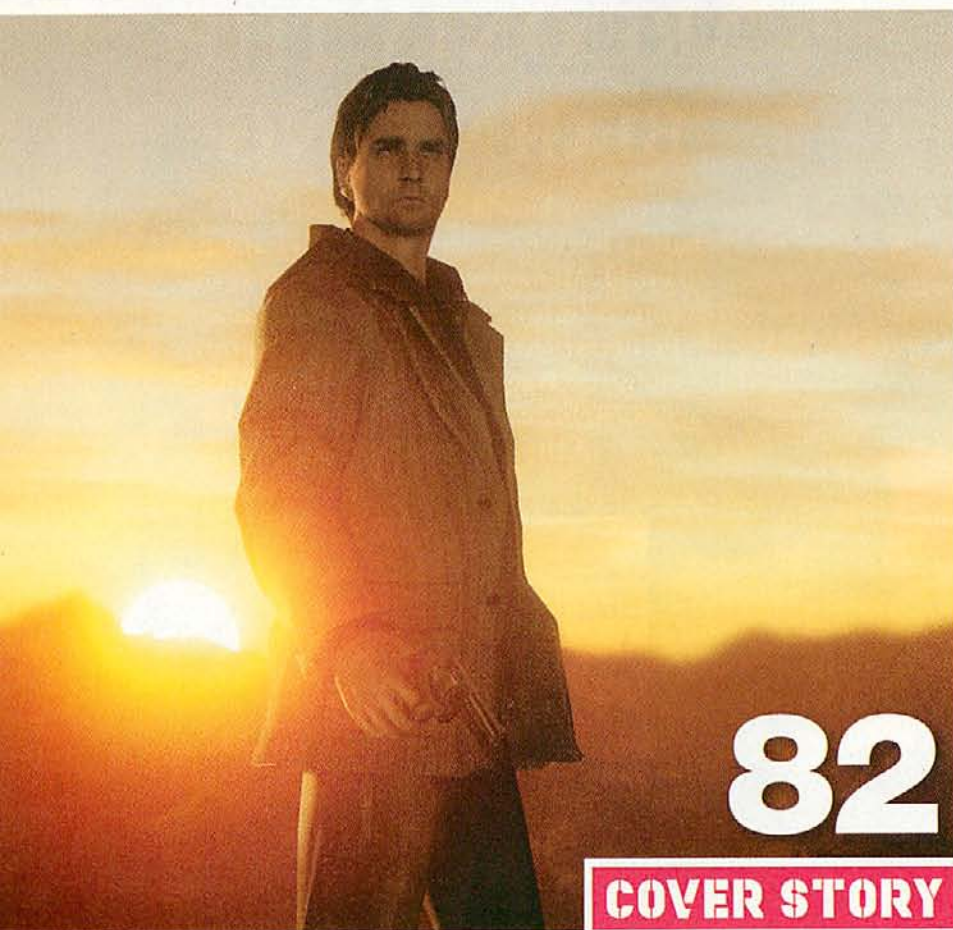
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6 MILLION WAYS TO DIE



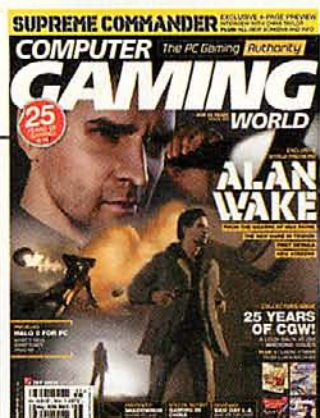
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COVER STORY

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Is violence the only solution in games? Do PC gamers really need (or want) *Halo 2*? Could China be the next frontier for PC game development? Why is *Pirates of the Burning Sea* one of the most underrated MMORPGs of 2007?

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Join us for a stroll down memory lane as we reminisce about how the PC-gaming landscape has evolved over the course of *Computer Gaming World's* 25-year history.

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This month, CGW hits the Blue Screen of Death—but stay tuned for next month's reboot!

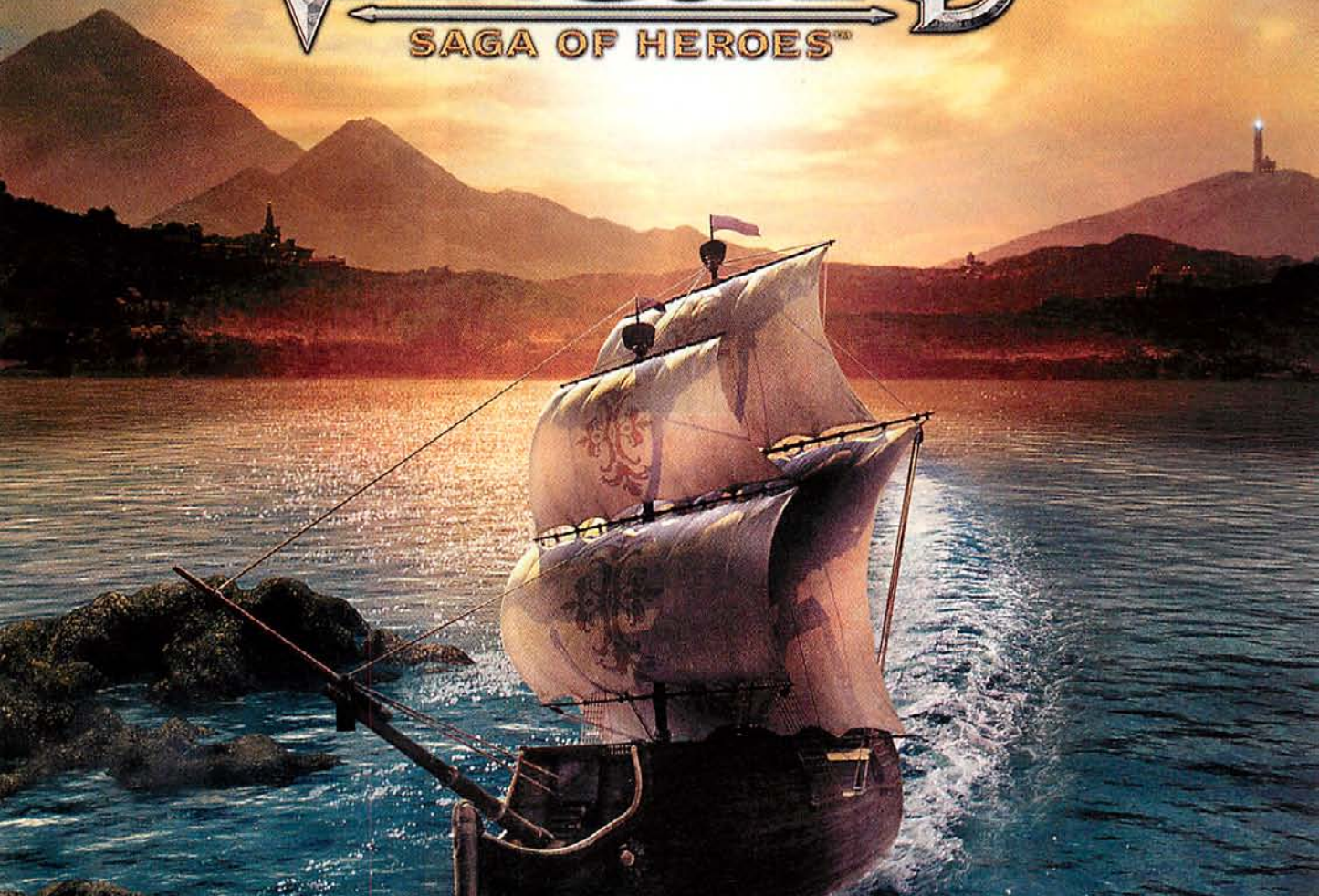
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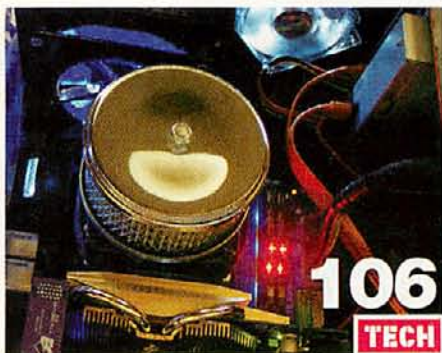


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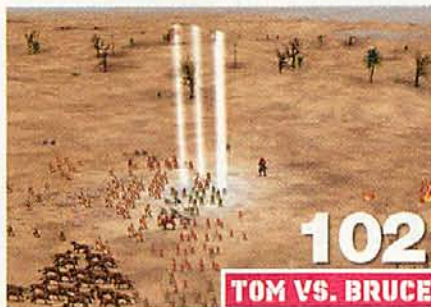
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BAD DAY L.A.



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DARKSTAR ONE



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TOM VS. BRUCE

**THIS MONTH
ON 1UP.COM**



CGWRADIO.1UP.COM

Hello and welcome...to the weekly *CGW Radio* podcast! Crank the volume and hear what the intrepid editorial staff has to say about all things PC gaming-related.

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Get the full details on our impending *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine* relaunch—as well as unfiltered reactions from readers and editors alike—at the official *CGW* message boards.

CGWJEFF.1UP.COM

Jeff Green is still so mad about Patsie not making it onto *Entertainment Weekly's* "50 Best Sidekicks" list that he hasn't blogged in a whole month. Stop by to point and laugh.

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THOSE WHO WOULD RULE THE WORLD OF CHANTRA ARE LEGION. THOSE WHO WILL RULE CHANTRA NUMBER ONLY ONE. WILL IT BE A HUMAN? OR AN ORC? OR A MOON ELF PERHAPS? YOU DECIDE.

Fashioned out of five elements, fire, earth, water, spirit, and air, Chantra's finely textured landscape provides an immersive visual experience. But it is the gameplay that breathes life into ArchLord.

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The Humans

Throwing off the shackles of their Orc overlords, Humans are forging a brave new destiny on Chantra. Relentless and loyal, the Knight is the master of the melee. The Archer fields a potent ranged attack and offers fantastic combat support from afar. Small in size but stout of heart, the Mage wields mighty magic to make even the strongest foe quake.



The Orcs

Once considered the elder race on Chantra, the Orcs have occupied the world for a very, very long time. The ferocious Berserker possesses great strength and surprising magic skills. No wonder they are relatively rare. Sharp-eyed and strong, the Hunter lives "on point" as the premier mission scout. The Sorcerer is charismatic and can devastate with a mere curse, but is forever in danger of losing his soul to the dark arts.

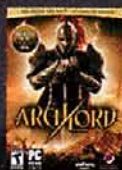


The Moon Elves

The Moon Elves have inhabited Chantra for eons and only recently have chosen to reveal themselves. Only two classes are known: the Ranger and the Elementalist. The Ranger is the most well-rounded of all the ranged attack classes, with dazzling speed and mobility. Though weak physically, the Elementalist employs powerful summons to defeat his foes.



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Purely You

EDITORIAL 268

GOODBYE, HELLO

You say CGW, we say GFW



WELL, KIDS, THIS IS IT. WITH THIS ISSUE, *COMPUTER Gaming World*, as we know it and love it today, is done. Finis. Kaput. Next month, we'll begin life anew as *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*. I'd say we should all gather for a group hug and a nice round of "Kumbaya," but, first of all, I don't know how clean you are or where you've been, which kind of grosses me out—and second, anyone who sings "Kumbaya" within 10 yards of me will end up with my fist in their face. So forget that.

Still, it is a rather important occasion. So we will not let this moment pass without comment. In fact, there is quite a bit of commentary ahead, including a special eight-page

look back at the glorious 25-year history of this magazine, featuring reminiscence from the three great guys who held the position of editor-in-chief here before I did. (And thanks, Russell, Johnny, and George—it was fun not making that deadline one last time, huh?)

And lest you think that I am bereft of sentimentality, I will confess that in the decade I have been here, this is the hardest issue I've ever worked on, bar none—even counting those 450-page beasts we used to do back in Johnny's day. Even though CGW isn't so much ending as it is morphing into something new, this is the end of an era. Getting a job at CGW was the best thing, professionally, that ever happened to me. I've loved working here since the very first day, when I played the other editors in a round of *CivNet* and got my newbie ass handed to me within five minutes. So this change isn't easy for me, either.

But here we go, my friends. Read it and weep. No, actually, don't. Not only would that look pathetic—crying while reading a gaming magazine—but we'll all be back together in 30 days anyway. You're not done with us yet. We're just putting on fancier clothes. And we're confident you'll like what you see.

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Now Playing: *Company of Heroes*, *World of Warcraft*
1UP.com Blog: cgwjeff.1UP.com



DARREN GLADSTONE
SENIOR EDITOR (FEATURES/TECH)

I just had to see the most "infamous" cover in CGW history one more time. To all those who sent hate mail: It was a woman on the cover! Get over it!

Now Playing: *Dead Rising* (Xbox 360), *Dark Messiah of Might and Magic*, *Company of Heroes*, *Defcon*, *Just Cause*
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SHAWN ELLIOTT
EDITOR (RADAR)

A stark, vector statement at the tail end of the Cold War—with no cluttered cover copy! Too bad we didn't duplicate the treatment with a *Defcon* feature, though.

Now Playing: *Company of Heroes*, *Faces of War*, *Defcon*
1UP.com Blog: cgwshawn.1UP.com



MICHAEL JENNINGS
ART DIRECTOR

An arbitrary illustration with echoes of the infamous *Heavy Metal* style? I'm in love. Check out CGW.FileFront.com for more old-school CGW...and a big shout-out to my new best Canadian friend, Capt. Stephane Racle. You rock, sir!

Now Playing: *Prey*
1UP.com Blog: cgw_jennings.1UP.com

FAVORITE CGW COVER



SEAN MOLLOY
MANAGING EDITOR

Isn't that a third-edition paperback of *Conflagration of Eternity's Arrow*? Oh, it's actually one of those surreal paintings that used to decorate CGW's façade. They just don't make covers like they used to. Er, well, I guess we don't.

Now Playing: *World of Warcraft*, *Defcon*
1UP.com Blog: cgwsean.1UP.com



RYAN SCOTT
EDITOR (VIEWPOINT)

I will forever associate PC gaming with Sierra On-Line's glory days...and no game better symbolizes that than the original *Gabriel Knight*—one of the best (and last) games to use Sierra's classic point-and-click engine.

Now Playing: *EVE Online*
1UP.com Blog: cgw-ryan.1UP.com



LOGAN PARR
FILEFRONT LIAISON

Sam and Max were two of the reasons I went to work for LucasArts. Their unreleased game was one of the last few I worked on there. Seeing their new game come to life brings a smile to my face. Hello, old friends.

Now Playing: *Oblivion*, *Prey*, *F.E.A.R.*
1UP.com Blog: logans_run.1UP.com



SEAN DALLASKIDD
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR

This one is awesome because it was my first issue here at CGW. Also, the fact that "Indian #2" and "Bearded Soldier #20" made the cover makes me believe that dreams really do come true.

Now Playing: My new Xbox 360, *Tenchu*
1UP.com Blog: the_dallaskidd.1UP.com

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LETTER OF THE YEAR?



SERIOUSLY...HOW COULD PEOPLE still be sending in letters and e-mails about the move away from numerical review scores? Here's my compromise: Start giving stars or percentages to the letters that people send in, so I know at a glance which ones consist of people whining about doing away with the ratings and can skip over them accordingly.

Burdett

This letter receives 5 out of 5 stars and a Letter of the Year nomination.

COMPUTER PINKO WORLD

I am about to end my 20-year readership of CGW. During that period of time, I have liked and agreed with much of what you publish, and disagreed with some. The September issue (CGW #266) was the first that actually offended me—in this issue, you published two politically charged articles ["Islamogaming," pg. 38; "Guns and Roses," pg. 44].

All of us have our opinions regarding the happenings of the day, and many of us turn to gaming as an escape from bad news and partisanship. In my opinion, a magazine like CGW is not a place to start yet another forum on the Middle East or antiwar sentiment...especially when no counterbalance is offered. The articles are thinly veiled political commentary by proxy and are not appreciated by a number of us.

Never before have I been so motivated to express my extreme disappointment with a magazine as I am today. These articles have no business in a gaming magazine, and the "gaming" ties are just a thinly veiled way to express a political view. When I open CGW, I want to read about gaming, not politics.

Baer

Thank you for your "Islamogaming" and "Guns and Roses" articles. It is unfortunately rare for any media outlet to take such an honest and critical outlook on any subject, but it's refreshing to see that—even in the glitzy, here-and-gone world of PC gaming—a voice of sanity examines important issues from an honest point of view.

"Islamogaming" did raise a question for me, though...as games have matured, the best of them have become more complex, both from a human and moral standpoint—sometimes there may not be a clear "bad guy," or the "right" choice may be unclear and confused. Did you see any development like this in the Islamogam-

ing culture, or are developers there as locked into their views of the "right and wrong" sides as some developers here in North America?

Shawn Sadler

I don't think you know your target audience very well. Either that, or you've officially and openly joined the political left. How else can you explain seven pages devoted to Islam, Iraq, and the War on Terror? Did they have anything to do with games? Only on the most superficial level...I think one paragraph of the "Guns and Roses" article had anything to do with the actual game itself. Were games even mentioned in the Islam article? Sure...but did you need that many pages to repeat the same basic idea over and over? Did you somehow delude yourself into thinking that you were reviewing said games? What about Tom Chick's comment in "Tom vs. Bruce" about entering the war being a mistake? We want his opinion on games—not on unrelated current events.

I am not among those looking for political claptrap. Keep your opinions on the war...or Islam or Iraq or anything else political...out of the magazine, please. That is not what the vast majority of your subscribers pay you for. You owe me seven pages.

R. Degarmo

As we expected, we got lots of mail on the "Islamogaming" and "Guns and Roses" stories, both positive and negative. What we didn't quite expect was the level of vitriol and hate directed at us in many of the negative letters. For the record: Reporting on events happening in the gaming world does not equal a lack of patriotism. We stand by both stories.

SPELLING AND GRAMMAR

On page 110 in the September issue, you spelled *Civ 4: Warlords—Expansion Pack* as *Civ 4: Warloards—Expansion Pack*. Notice the extra "a" in there?

Jordon

Congratulations! You passed the test! We put that in there just for you. Your reward? You can now look for spelling errors in this month's issue, too!

I have been reading your lovely magazine for a long time but one thing has persisted to bother me for since I can remember, and that the whiney



bitch-osity and smart-ass-o-rama of everyone who rights in. I just don't get why people care so much about little grammar problems and where or not the US currency to some silly money rate is correct. Why don't people axe questions, like about release dates and possibilities of games or I dunno anything. It's like month after month it's just some super nerd bitching about this or that, rating system this magazine mistake that. You make a high quality magazine that has kept me interested and informed for years, you do the best you can and I appreciate it. Yes, I recognize the irony in me complain about complainers but seriously is just me, can people just get over stuff once in awhile, is it worth time and effort. These people are Maniaxe.

Preston

D3TH TO D3THF4RT



In response to CGW #266's interview with D3thf4rt: Bluntly, he is the most stupid and sad person I've ever heard of. How can he say anything negative about the 10-year-old who had a higher frag count than him at the Quake tourna-

ment? He was at a tournament. Tournaments are about winning...how did he expect to win if his frag count wasn't higher? I think he should feel ashamed of himself, since he has all this great experience from spending all his time in his mom's basement [playing] games at his old age instead of spending time with his kids and tending to his wife like real men do. This inarticulate, delusional, horrible sportsman is a disgrace not only to gamers but also to all men who work hard and actually stick around for their kids. >

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F***ing hell yeah!
Psychonauts is coming to Steam!
—Dough with Fish

Playing *World of Warcraft* teaches kids a whole slew of important life lessons, which they can use to help them succeed when they become adults.
—Aaron Cooperband

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"People put too much emphasis on winning" is what he said. Well, of course they do! Isn't that the gauge by which success is measured? I've played videogames since I was old enough to hold a controller (back in the early 1980s), so it's not like I'm some old geezer. But when he said he feels like an inspiration to gamers, it made me want to hurl. The thought that anyone would be inspired by this fool sickens me, and I truly hope that never happens.

Ricky Estrada

I do hope this interview was a joke. If not, it's pathetic that a 36-year-old man sees riding around in a Camaro as a goal. Not to mention the fact that he moved back in with his mom! I'm 25 and play videogames a few hours a day, but I have a job, which comes with it stability, a house, and I see my 2-year-old daughter every night. What kind of immature idiot would quit his job to be a professional gamer even if it hurts his children? Bottom line, put this freak of nature next to Michael Vick, or even Jay Cutler, and he would be an afterthought.

David Leggett

Jeff Green got in touch D3thf4rt, who sent in this response: "You n00bs are just jealous and afraid of me, just like L4metal1ty. Once I hit it big and can move out of my mom's place, we'll see who's laughing then. Also, maybe my wife's lawyer will let me see my kids again. So who's lame now, huh? LOL!"

I am a total dork for asking this, but what vowels go with what numbers in computer handles? Professional *Counter-Strike* player Deathfart calls himself D3thf4rt, and Fatal1ty calls himself Fatal1ty. So, a=4, 3=e, 0=o, 1=i, and does 2=u? How did they ever come up with that numbering convention? An O looks like a 0 maybe, and an I looks like a 1. So why isn't Fatal1ty called F4t4l1ty?

Steve (or St3v3, maybe? I don't know...)

Depends on the dialect. The morphemes of the leet cipher are often a function of irony as much as true leetness. We suspect the spelling "Fatal1ty" is an archaic neo-*Quake*-ian Welsh aberration from the post-*Rise of the Triad* era.

POUT AND CLICK

Am I loving myself horribly when I tell you how much I dated *The Last Express*? What if I expound on my cartoon crush, Gabriel Knight? No? What if I mention *Laura Bow*? I know adventure games aren't "where it's at" right now, but what's available right now is so subpar, I can't see how the genre will ever make it big again. Please prove me wrong—give me three or four (or five!) titles that will keep me enthralled for hours!

Lady K.



We hear you, Lady K. Many of us on staff are big-time adventure-game fans and yearn for the good old days, too. Sadly, we can't come up with three (or even two) adventure games that we're currently looking forward to, but we can give you one: *Sam & Max*, from Telltale Games.

WHAT'S "EQ2"?

Every month, it's the same thing: WOW this, WOW that. What about that other little-known MMORPG, *EverQuest II*? Yes, I'm an EQ zombie—I have been for years, and I'm sick of always reading about WOW. It seems as though EQ2 has fallen off the face of the Earth, as far as your magazine goes. I've played WOW, my wife was a beta tester and has several level 60 characters on WOW, and my kids play WOW, but only with strict parental supervision due to the punks on WOW. How about some coverage of a more developed, *grown-up* game? Is anybody in your office playing EQ2? Too difficult for you? If it is, I can understand—you're only magazine journalists. Maybe I need to go someplace else to get my EQ fix in print.

Patrick Buck

Yeah, we're a bit WOW-centric here, we admit, but, hey, so is most of the world. We write about what The People are playing. But we know you are People too (we think), and we hear you. Our monthly column Crisis on Infinite Servers covers multiple MMOs—and hopefully EQ2 will get some love there in upcoming issues.

WHAT'S "ASHERON'S CALL 2"?



I miss playing older online RPGs that went under due to a lack of subscribers. I wanted to know if it's possible for the publishers of these older games—like *Asheron's Call 2* and

Earth & Beyond—to sell their server-level versions of the game (with limits, of course) to the general public. I know the purpose of these games is to play online with masses of people, but the underlying games themselves are still interesting to me (and many others, I'm sure).

Ed Dischley

Great question. To which we have no answer. But if you find out, let us know, because we have a couple *Meridian 59* quests we're still dying to finish. Oh wait, that game's still going?

WHAT'S A "MAC"?

I've been a Mac user for more than 10 years...and a few days ago, I ordered a Mac Pro...along with Windows XP and *Half-Life 2*. My mind boggles at the sheer number (comparatively speaking) of PC games I'll now be able to play. What have I done? Now that I've opened the Ark of PC Gaming, will the Angel of Death fly out and melt my face? Help!

Atticus

Welcome to the Dark Side. Mr. Gates would like you to put on this black shroud now, please.

I recently picked up a copy of your magazine for the first time (CGW #266), and I was surprised at how much console bashing went on, from one



▲ Yes, this...thing plays PC games. Quickly, turn away, lest yer eyes liquefy in their very sockets!

reader letter to even some reviews. You see, I'm in the Marine Corps, and I've played consoles for almost 20 years. I've never bashed PC gaming—in fact, I've always envied it. Consoles are a means for those who can't afford a high-end PC to get their gaming fix. I'll never argue the fact that PC gaming will always rise above consoles...just please remember that some of us can't afford a gaming-worthy rig.

B. Stephenson

FURRY CORNER

I'd like to start with a simple declaration: I am not a furry. On that note, a lot of my friends are, and they run the gamut of anthropomorphic creatures. I'm writing this letter in response to the self-righteous writer of a certain letter in your October 2006 issue. He knows who he is; he went about listing four ways to "deal" with furies.

I do not agree with what he has to say, but I will not flame him for writing such a disgusting and hateful letter. Nor will I flame CGW for publishing it. In this regard, I've decided to compose a rebuttal to his letter.

Furies, as a whole, are no more dim, irrational, self-righteous, easily offended, or quick-to-anger than any other group or fandom. Yes, they will defend what they believe, but no more so than a religious man would defend his beliefs.

Of course, there is a large portion of the fandom that supports anthropomorphic erotica, though nowhere near as many as support the "clean" artwork and stories. Just like an anime fan might love anime and also enjoy hentai, a furry fan might enjoy yiffy art as well. But to say that all furies are perverted is irrational.

No, furies are not a "race" or an "ethnicity," so no, racism doesn't apply. Another word does, though, and that word is prejudice, and at times discrimination. Yes, they chose to be a part of the community, but so did fans of baseball or other such sports.

All in all, your statements about the furry community show your prejudice for people who have different interests than yourself. You mock a community you obviously know little about, without regard to those who follow it.

Before you mock a group of people for their respective interests, think about your interests and/or beliefs and see how people mock those. Would you not defend your right to express yourself, when you are in no way affecting others? If furry art offends you, don't visit furry archives. I know that simple statement is used far too often these days, but the fact remains—if you can't see it, it shouldn't bother you.

Jack Kahn

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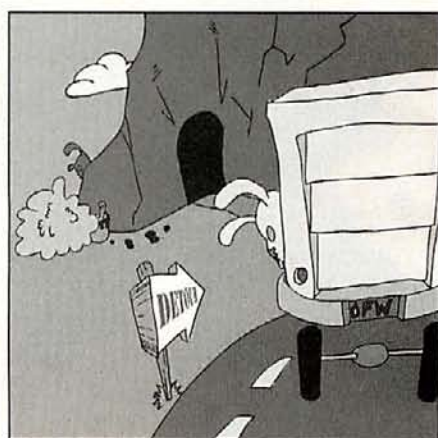
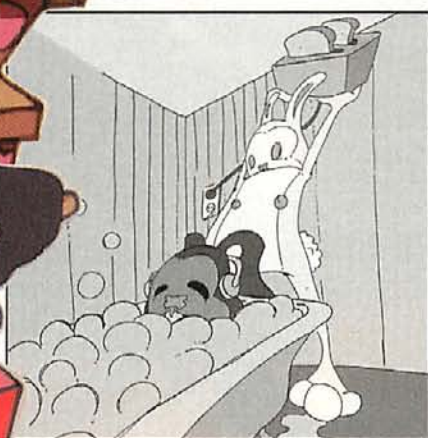
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SIX MILLION W

TRENDS

DOES EVERY GAME NEED TO BE ABOUT punching, shooting, or otherwise inflicting deadly harm upon aliens, zombies, vehicles, and/or human beings? It's a question most of us have asked ourselves at some point along the road of virtual life. Somewhere between zapping space invaders, gibbing *Doom*'s cacodemons, or giving *Vice City*'s police department a collective ulcer, it has occurred to many of us that incessantly maiming bad guys is getting passé.

OK, so a slight adjustment to that exaggeration is in order. Many of the most successful titles on the market—*The Sims*, *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, *Guitar Hero* (PlayStation 2), to name but a few—are nonviolent. But when it comes to character-driven, narrative games—whether they be first- or third-person, online or off, single- or massively multiplayer, fantasy, science fiction, or present day, open- or closed-world—they're nearly all, with a mere handful of

not-so-recent exceptions, intensely, exhaustively violent.

Many of us simply enjoy inhabiting the mind and body of a character when we pick up a controller or keyboard—that's precisely *why* we play games. Neither the role-playing narrative component nor the intense physicality of this kind of experience can be communicated in, say, *SimCity*; it's the difference between being in the shoes of a human being and in the shoes of God (or, for that matter, those of a railroad tycoon). Aside from, say, *Indigo Prophecy*, when was the last time you directly controlled a character in a virtual world without violence being your primary means of interacting with it? And more importantly, is this dependence merely a bump in the road of a maturing medium, or is the physicality and drama of violence simply what videogames are best at communicating? And what kind of shoes do you think God actually wears? (Twenty bucks says they're not Nikes.)

It's also true that videogames are often much more complex than they might seem to the

untrained eye. Usually, more goes on beneath the surface of even the most violent games than the majority of nongamers care to understand. Plus there's something slightly crotchety about asking why videogames are all so violent—it's a bit like asking why all rap music sounds like a bunch of black guys yelling. But we digress.

The point is not that videogame violence is turning those who play it into raving sociopaths. Nor is it that violence in videogames is, in itself, necessarily a bad thing; the visceral charge you get from crashing through a fruit stand in *GTA* or the rhythmic, zenlike state you can achieve through any number of FPSes represent the upside of unrepentantly violent videogames. But when violence has proper context in similar media—as repeatedly demonstrated by the likes of Scorsese, Tarantino, and Poe—it reaches an emotional summit that *Quake* and its ilk haven't quite achieved.

"Violence has been a major component of games for a very long time," says David Cage, creator of last year's experimental, critically ac-

World in Conflict

Cold War superpowers clash in a resource-free RTS unlike any other.

34

Supreme Commander

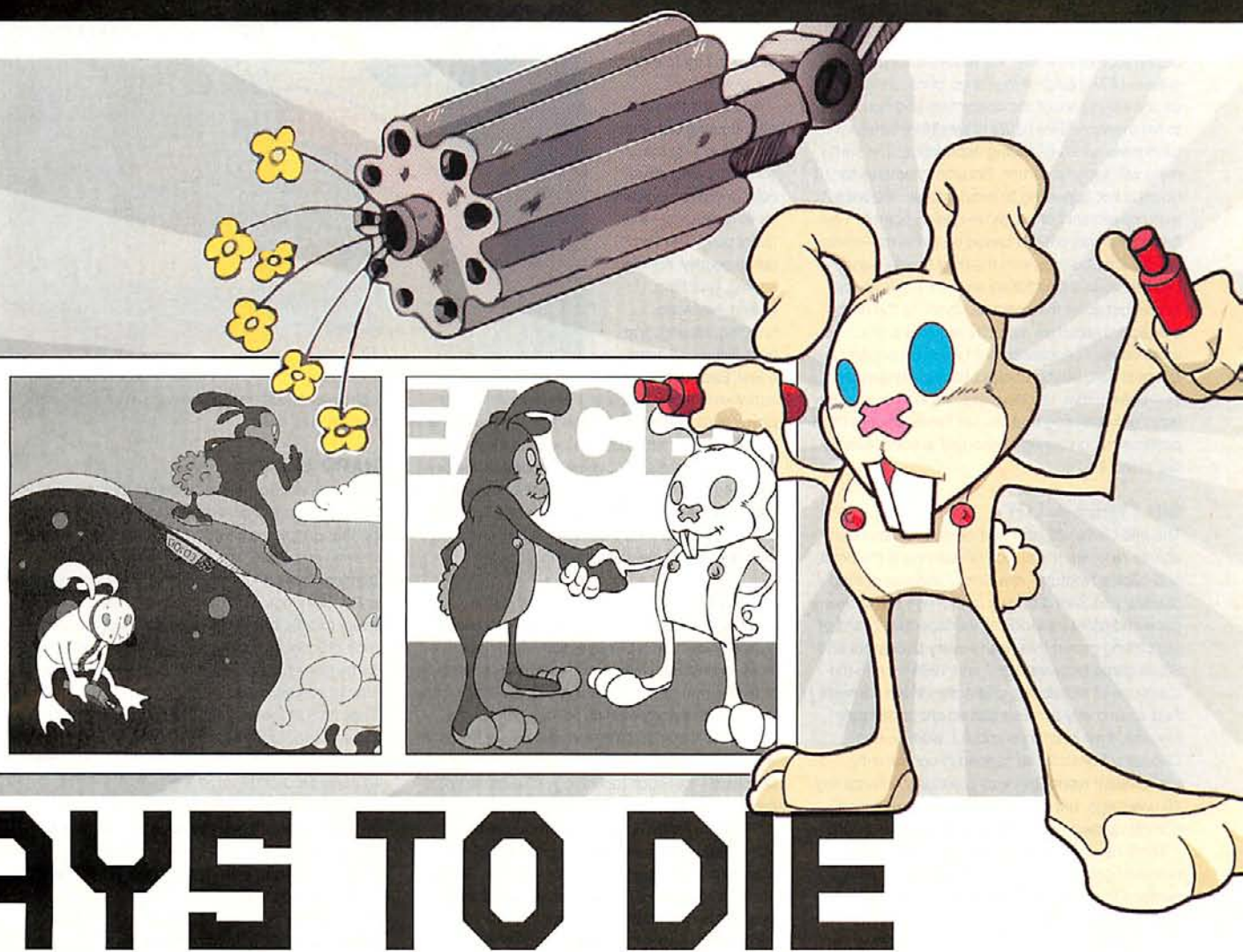
Exclusive hands-on with Gas Powered Games' gem.

44

China Syndrome

Gaming in the "Chinese Century."

54



claimed, and generally nonviolent *Indigo Prophecy*. "The reasons behind this phenomenon are multiple and complex. One of them is probably that, initially, games were designed by teenagers, for teenagers—an age where we have a very different relationship to violence and where we try to test the limits."

Another, more age-agnostic reason: Shooting stuff is, like, *totally freaking sweet, man*. "I think that a lot of games are based on 'instinct emotions'—provoking physical reactions from the body like fear, anger, frustration, domination, et cetera," says Cage. "They are known to generate a strong body response through adrenaline or dopamine—higher heartbeat, sweat, increased attention, more sugar in the blood, et cetera. Through this physical response, the user feels intense but primitive emotions. Other media like literature, theater, or movies managed to explore social emotions like empathy, sadness, joy, love, jealousy—but most games today are still stuck in the limitations they created for themselves."

Essentially, it's much easier to "perform" violent, physical action than it is to perform dramatic action...particularly when the input mechanism in your hand is built around the former. The only remotely subtle "acting" you're able to perform in *Grand Theft Auto*, for example, is walking past the cops instead of running. The rest is purely the stuff of action movies.

We're also a very easily affected lot. Most of us have been using those same tools (mouse/keyboard combo for the PC-heads, control pad for the console junkies) to perform the same or similar violent actions for some 20 years. Handing someone a DualShock controller and asking them to make their character emote is like handing someone a turkey baster and asking them to make pudding. The tool may be equally adept at performing both tasks, but one process is ingrained in our muscle memory, while the other requires unlearning. And one is like making pudding with a turkey baster, which is moronic.

OUT OF HARM'S WAY

But maybe that's missing the point—maybe we perceive videogames' relative lack of emotional diversity as a limitation only because we bring to them baggage from other forms of media. So contends *Galactic Civilizations* creator Brad Wardell: "Violence is just one type of play. Violence occurs in games because the people who play games recognize that they are pretending. So we do things in games that we can't do in real life—race cars, go on adventures, and yes, shoot zombies."

Certainly, violent instincts are part of what make us human (particularly those of us cursed with testicles), and videogames do a superb job of placing the physical element of violence, quite literally, in our hands. "The real question is what the audience wants," says Wardell. "It's not as if gamers were a bunch of pacifistic flower dancers who one day got sucked in by the dark overlords of id to play *Wolfenstein 3D*. Quite the opposite—kids were pretending to be violent in their play long before there were videogames, >

and the game industry catered to that existing tendency."

Cage has a different perspective. "Think about cinema: There are still movies with 90-minute shooting or fighting sequences, but they are far from being the main genre, just because this is very boring for most people. We all love the epic battle scenes of *The Lord of the Rings* because they tell us something about the characters and contribute to tell the story. Two hours of repetitive battles may have been a less engaging experience. The same thing will apply to games. Shooting zombies for 10 hours is not appealing to most people. Violence was convenient from a game-design point of view because it was entirely based on patterns—pressing the right buttons with the right timing—and because it was structurally easy to manage—obstacle, get rid of the obstacle, move to the next obstacle. Interactive narrative requires a much more complex approach not based on success/failure states, but on choices having consequences. I believe that, as designers, we will have to find ways of interacting that are not based on repetitive patterns but on varied contextual actions, exactly like in real life."

SIR TYPES-A-LOT

The one character-centered genre that has been able to sidestep the crutch of violence is the point-and-click adventure—the *Grim Fandagos*, *King's Quests*, and *Sam & Maxes* of the world. The slower pace and more methodical, introspective brand of storytelling meant that nearly every LucasArts and Sierra game between 1987 and 1995 rose to the challenge of nonviolent, character-driven gameplay. And while many of these games are undeniable classics, their interfaces and A.I. were limited: Choosing from a list of canned (if consistently well-written) responses was gloriously entertaining 10 years ago, but perhaps lacks the procedural oomph to keep us emotionally engaged in 2006.

There have also been successful attempts at drama in games, but they have generally been wedged into other (violent) genres. Sure, *Brothers in Arms* has its moments of grand redemption, *Grand Theft Auto* its moments of guilty pleasure, and *Knights of the Old Republic* its moments of guilty guilt. You feel camaraderie and sometimes question your own loyalties in *World of Warcraft*, and weigh the loss of other human lives against your own in *Half-Life 2*. But in every one of these games, you will kill hundreds, likely thousands of Bad Guys™ on your way to dealing with said emotions, which—even for real-life Jedis, mobsters, and night elves—just isn't very realistic.

So aside from punching, kicking, shooting, and secondarily firing, what actions are videogame characters actually good at performing? If you're a forward-thinking videogame designer, what do you replace all the violence with? Cage, whose *Indigo Prophecy* was largely spent speaking with other characters, exploring environments, and thinking about what exactly to do next—in many ways a modern update to the point-and-click adventure—realizes this is still a major stumbling block.

"Our main issue is that the ways of interacting without shooting still have to be discovered," says Cage. "How can we create a game where interacting with the environment or talking to other characters could be the main aspect of the game? Once people discover convincing answers to these ques-

tions, they won't want to shoot in videogames anymore, because they will know that there are more exciting things to do. This is really the direction I try to explore in my work."

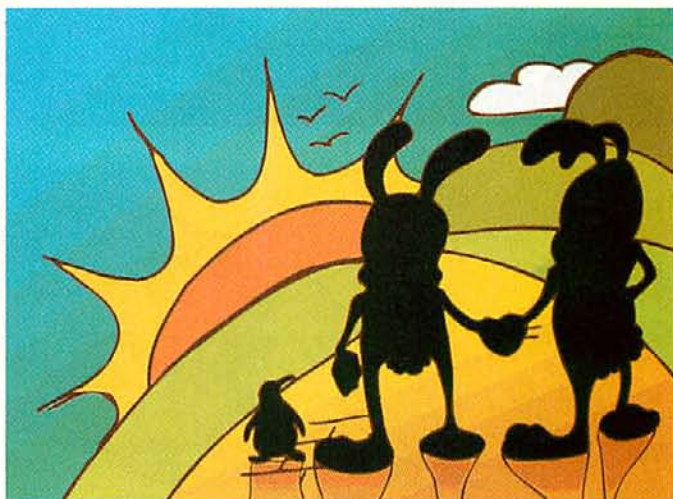
And that's the hard part: figuring out what's more "fun"—in the sense of being physically or psychologically more rewarding—than pistol pulls. The verbs come quickly: cooking, finding, grabbing, pulling, kayaking, hugging, kissing, and high-fiving...to name a few. Each of these activities is fully capable of being translated into physical gameplay. But, taken alone, none of these individual mechanics can be used on its own to create truly compelling, emotional drama. Rather, the need to combine these disparate parts into one varied, unified whole of an experience will be part of the challenge. And they need to be combined with one more adjective: speaking.

LEVELING UP

So how can we stray from such well-established norms? New forms of interaction—from input devices to onscreen interfaces—will almost certainly enter the equation. Something less artificial (something that's already starting to happen with the release of Nintendo's Wii) will replace control sticks, and speech recognition will eventually replace the keyboard—but such technology still seems years away from successful implementation.

"Physical action is the default mode of today's videogames—running, jumping, manipulating objects or game pieces, and so on," says Andrew Stern, whose game *Façade* has explored and pushed the boundaries of interactive drama. "Games are about competition and conflict; in that space, the most interesting physical action game designers have come up with is violence, akin to violent action movies. One solution is to come up with other types of physical action that still allow for interesting competition and conflict. Some already exist—playing poker, strumming a virtual guitar, or nurturing a virtual pet.

Says Stern: "The true frontier is in non-physical-action-oriented games: competition and conflict using natural language, i.e., conversation. This is largely unexplored in games, but of course is the foundation of interaction between characters in the best movies, books, and TV sitcoms. I think many game designers want to move beyond the action genre but are stuck in this rut due to constraints of interface and the lack of A.I. required for a non-action-oriented interface." A quick jaunt through *Façade*—an enlightening (if primitive) vision of things to come—quickly makes you realize that a visibly, convincingly angry friend screaming at you



can be every bit as frightening as a zombie lurching toward your neck.

HARD SELL

If figuring out how to make these games compelling is the Holy Grail, convincing the powers that be that people actually want to play them will be the last crusade. "I am always amazed to see how conservative our industry is," says Cage. "We are used to changing our software and computers every month, but a lot of people seem to change their preconceived ideas only every 20 years. For some gamers and designers, the only possible way of interacting is punching, driving, or shooting. They are OK if there are other activities in between, but a game has to be about killing someone. This is not only absurd, it is also an insult to our medium to consider that this is all it can do."

Cage remembers shopping *Indigo Prophecy* around to various publishers and having the same dialogue with nearly every one of them.

Cage: "Mmmm, well, in fact, there is no weapon. The hero does not shoot."

Publisher: "So how many cars can we drive?"

Cage: "Well, in fact, you cannot drive."

Publisher: "Then it's not a game?"

Sadly, not much has changed in the two years since—Cage says he recently had the exact same discussion with the head of a huge publisher, who simply could not understand what else one could do in a videogame. Stern agrees: "Game publishers are pretty conservative, and many are doing just fine sticking with the action genre," he says. "I think innovation in other game genres will come from risk-taking independents, probably with financing from outside the game industry."

"I can no longer play a game where all I have to do is to kill hordes of enemies just for the sake of killing them," he continues. "When I was [a teen], I bought this game called *Barbarian*, where you could cut off the head of the enemy with a sword. For my friends and me, this was the key feature, and we laughed each time a head fell on the ground. Now I'm 37, and I [expect] more from this medium than cutting off heads." **Evan Shamoon**

» **"WE HAVE TO FIND WAYS OF INTERACTING THAT AREN'T BASED ON REPETITIVE PATTERNS"**

—DAVID CAGE, FOUNDER, QUANTIC DREAM

FIVE HEROES, ONE FATE, INFINITE ADVENTURE

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COMING FALL 2006



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WORLD IN CONFLICT

Cold War conflagration

AIR

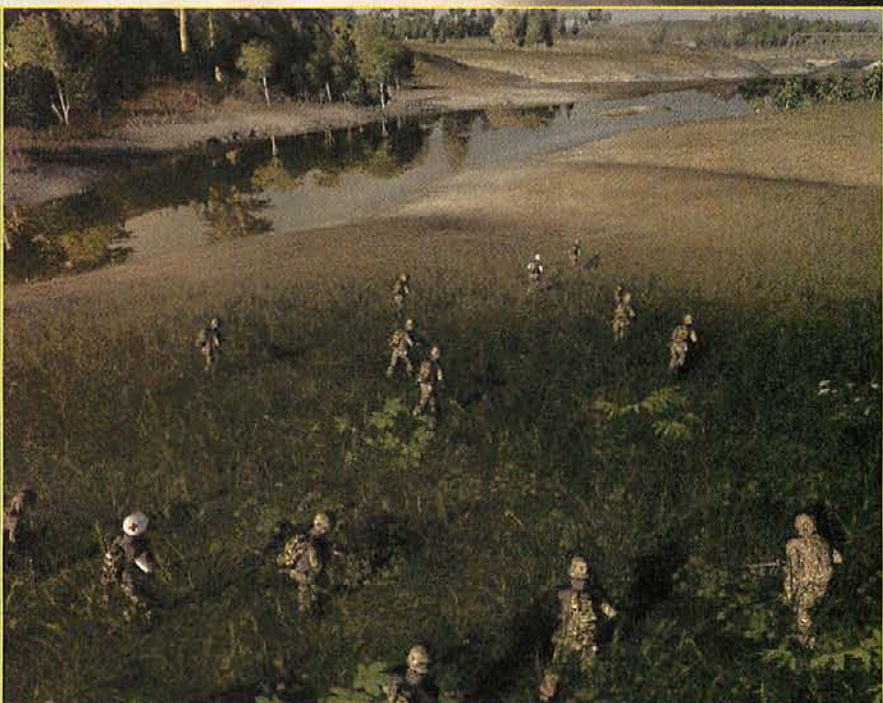
World in Conflict producer Mike Schneider on the ups and downs of joining the air force: "Air support, especially fast and fatal attack helicopters, which punish opposing armor and infantry, is essential to any successful offensive. An air commander zips from firefight to firefight but pays big time for his offensive benefits with costly units and an inability to capture perimeter points...not to mention the scourge of hostile antiair units. A first-rate air commander moves into combat with strong ground support and is quick to support overwhelmed allied armor on the front lines."



INFANTRY

"A Delta Force infantry squad is pinned in an open field. Veritable sitting ducks, exposed to enemy fire without a tree or building around for cover, they should call in a transport helicopter or ground vehicle to get them into crucial cover.

Infantry is a vulnerable and rewarding role all in one package. It's at its most powerful when units are cleverly concealed in houses and forests, with antitank troops and snipers taking advantage of unsuspecting enemy units. At the same time, infantry is easily mowed down in the open or, even worse, crushed under the tracks of opposing tanks. Work together, people: Call for cover."

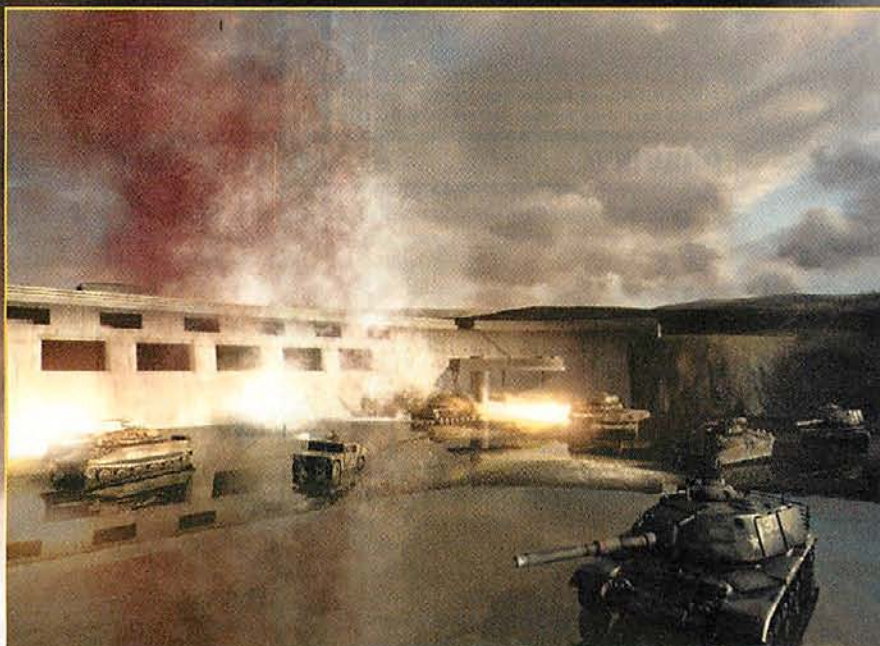


PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal Games DEVELOPER: Massive Entertainment GENRE: Real-Time Strategy RELEASE DATE: 2007

SUPPOSE GORBACHEV STAYED A LAWYER. IN HIS stead as Soviet leader, another Brezhnev, Andropov, or Chernenko—another dangerous sphinx. Glasnost, perestroika, free-market flexibility never come, the USSR's command economy continues to teeter, and the Kremlin turns Cold War into conflagration. Kookier still, the Russki initiative is nonnuclear. Its amphibious force strikes Seattle first, somehow ducking satellite detection and what all on the way into Puget Sound. Suspend that disbelief for *World in Conflict's* real revisionism, though, as it's an RTS as un-RTS-like as any.

Where FPS camera control and the ability to enter and exit servers at any time (even midmatch) chisel convention, *World*

in *Conflict's* de-emphasized resource management sledge-hammers it. No need to accumulate ammunition and fuel. Instead, a "replenishment number" serves as a population cap, permitting players to spend when—and on what—they want (although new assets are available only after foes trash those already in the field). The idea, in fact, is to breach the Berlin-esque wall dividing genre-dedicated RTS and FPS gamers. Hence *WC's* class equivalents—each player picks and commands either his army's air, infantry, support, or armor group, much as FPS gamers opt into medic or sniper roles. Producer Mike Schneider explains how it plays out in 4-on-4 online face-offs. / Shawn Elliott



ARMOR

"An armor commander has the rolling thunder of the battlefield at his fingertips. M60A3s rumble into enemy-controlled territory while allied air support wisely scouts ahead for helicopters as well as enemy infantry garrisoned in defensive positions lining the roadway. Armor units take intense punishment before going down and are unmatched when it comes to capturing and holding perimeters."

MASSIVE OPS

Developer Massive Entertainment is no stranger to strategy. Their *Ground Control* series focused on tactics-only gameplay.



SUPPORT

"A deployment of 2S7s drops heavy artillery support, hammering enemy troops deep within their territory. No doubt the Russian artillery officer in charge is sitting back sipping a glass of vodka while his boys pound the enemy's back line. Support commanders have many faces: devastating arty strikes from afar, the ability to repair troops, and antiair support. Pounding the enemy from behind the front line may seem safe at first, but that can change at any time when an enemy tank group rolls around the corner or a tactical nuclear strike comes down from above."

TOTAL WAR (HAMMER)

Hands-on with Black Hole's *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos*

THAT'S OLD IN ORC YEARS

Originally released in 1983, *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* just unveiled its seventh-edition rules.

PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Black Hole Entertainment
 GENRE: Real-Time Tactical RELEASE DATE: October 2006

PREVIEW

ASK AROUND AND YOU MIGHT FIND three gamers who'd remember *Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat*—one of the industry's first real-time "tactical" games—if their lives depended on it. You heard right: "tactical," not "strategy." No bases or buildings...just you, a half-dozen regiments, and the lay of the land. Set in the *Warhammer-but-not-40K* "game of fantasy battles" universe, *SoTHR* and its sequel *Dark Omen* briefly channeled fantasy tabletop gaming to the Windows 9x masses. And then, inexplicably, the fantasy videogame franchise vanished, put to pasture while its sci-fi sibling nabbed the spotlight.

Say hello to Black Hole Entertainment, the guys behind 2004's *Armies of Exigo*. *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos* is project number two, and the first *Warhammer* fantasy PC game in eight years. For the uninitiated, *Warhammer* plays in a vaguely "old world" European milieu, where invading "chaos" (think radioactive magic) and Machiavellian infighting turn the planet into a ragged proving ground for exactly the sort of army-sized havoc *Mark of Chaos* hopes to portray. Can Black Hole pull off the franchise equivalent of Relic's acclaimed *Dawn of War*? No promises, but after wrapping our fingers around preview code, we can say things are looking respectably *Warhammer-y*.

BACK IN BLACK

Nothing spells "doomed" like an apocalyptic sunset, rust-stained terrain, craggy pine forests, storm-wracked skies, and a fine layer of grit clinging to everything like a three-pepper rub. *Mark of Chaos* has the whole "grim and grimmer" thing pretty well nailed at this stage. From a Tactical Map (technically, it ought to be called the *strategic* map), you're treated to a grab bag of Germanic towns and resource

points as low-hanging clouds roll over the grungy landscape and cellos punctuate the silence with ominous thrums. You march your army by turns, gathering gold, camping to rest, and spending experience points on hero abilities in combat, duel, and command categories.

Hit a battlefield and your options multiply. You can tweak units in the Army Composer before combat, then position them around your side of the battlefield. Hate games that lock your view top-down and close enough to see whiskers? Position *Mark of Chaos*'s camera anywhere you like, or invoke an indispensable bird's-eye view similar to the one employed in *Star Wars Empire at War*.

We were only able to play as the Empire, so our choices were limited to Halberdiers, Swordsmen, Bright Wizards, and Handgunners (for the opposition, Night Goblins, Orc Boys, and Trolls—the final game promises to include dozens more). Units can be assigned to "super groups" or attached/detached as desired, and you set waypoints by Shift-clicking. Formations are limited to tight versus loose and line versus column, which seems a bit skimpy at this point given the tabletop pedigree. But that's offset somewhat by the ability-focused hero system with its 1-on-1 battlefield dueling.

It's tough to gauge how environment (rain, mud, snow) will factor in the final version, but terrain and facing elements were functional. Position light-armored Empire Handgunners atop a hill, for instance, and watch them assail a lumbering Orc Boyz charge, then speed away at the last minute as you spring your Swordsmen to flank the Orc morale to hell. The prize for handiest feature goes to the tall banners arrowing above each regiment, allowing quick hit point and morale assessment. Better still, it's a snap to follow the action when a half-dozen regiments morph into a single flailing mob—almost like having "tactical" and "strategic" views combined.

The folks at Black Hole still have miles to go before they sleep, but the good news is that their extremely close partnership with Games Workshop seems to be paying off. You need only wait until October to rub Skaven and Goblin snouts in the dirt. /Matt Peckham



▲ Climb the hero skill tree as you gain experience, adding combat abilities alongside special dueling and unit command bonuses.



▲ Black Hole's seen fit to include a full-on unit customization tool so you can mod colors, banner emblems, uniforms, and more.

MARK OF CHAOS HAS THE WHOLE "GRIM AND GRIMMER" THING PRETTY WELL NAILED AT THIS STAGE.

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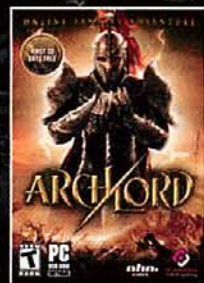
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PC DVD

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS III

One 3D Nation, Under You

CARING AND SHARING
Cooperative multiplayer will allow several players to work as one, controlling the same nation.



▲ In the new Holy Roman Empire screen you can follow elections, scan member states, and check who's up-and-coming in the standings.



▲ EU3's interface helps you focus on your most important demographics by wrapping critical information into aggregate info screens.



▲ Europa Universalis III's revised battle summary shows terrain modifiers and a new "tactical" overview.

PUBLISHER: Paradox Interactive DEVELOPER: Paradox Interactive GENRE: Real-Time Strategy RELEASE DATE: Winter 2007

PREVIEW

CONFESSION: THE ORIGINAL *EUROPA UNIVERSALIS* (2000) nearly convinced me to switch majors after it debuted all fresh and board gamey and, well, frankly a bit weird-looking. A real-time version of *Risk* with the intricacy of *Civilization* and sufficient historical panache to stoke the hard little hearts of stodgy academics? Get real, said most of us, and boy were we ever wrong. Here, at least, was one-handed gaming for those bored with hex maps, smartass orcs, Tesla coils, and anything WWII. (Hey, one on the mouse, the other on a history book—what were you thinking?) With over a dozen games notching its belt,

Paradox is finally back to its bread and butter with *Europa Universalis III*. I spent a week with an early build and, while it's predictably roughshod, I can assure Paradox loyalists that *EU3* is, if anything, shaping up to be even more nuanced than its predecessors.

The first thing that grabs you isn't the big 3D switcheroo but that you can launch, literally, in any year (even month) between 1453 and 1789. Instead of scenarios, Paradox added what it's calling "bookmarks"—helpful recommendations to get you straight to hotspots like the Thirty Years' War or the American War of Independence. Maybe you'd rather play a tiny nation like Lithuania and resist the Lithuanian-Polish Union of Lublin in 1569? By

all means, go for it. Taking over the world isn't really the primary goal—just hauling your national briches (petite or XXL) through some of history's noteworthy pickles can be reward enough.

Of course the switch to 3D is indeed a bit arresting (after six years of 2D, after all) and, while it's not quite *Civilization 4*, it's still an Olympic pole vault over *EU2*. Instead of a flat map snaked with province lines and covered in cramped low-res sprites, *EU3* sports steep mountains, rolling forests, and rippling oceans, as well as fully polygonal units and cities. Necessary? Not really, but neither are Revlon and L'Oréal, and the new 3D engine certainly isn't interfering with anything at this point.

Moreover, *EU3* is teeming with new features—"national ideas," for example. Maybe you're a seafaring nation (Naval Glory yields extra prestige in naval battles), or theocratically inclined (Divine Supremacy boosts your yearly missionaries). Cribbing from *Hearts of Iron II*, you can now add leaders (from a pool of more than 1,000) to your military forces or call in historical advisors like Bosch, da Vinci, or Descartes to supplement attributes like land tech or national stability. And much improved over *EU2*'s infantry, cavalry, and artillery trio, you now can select from dozens of different army/navy traditions, say "Gaelic Galloglaigh" or "Western Medieval Infantry," to improve your shock and morale values.

Talk about scratching the surface. I'd need a thousand words at least to convey all the tweaks and subtle additions in the preview build. In fact, Paradox's biggest challenge won't be impressing feature wonks but stomping bugs and balancing all that dizzy minutiae. Rest assured the company that still occasionally tweaks *EU2* will no doubt continue refining *EU3* long after it's released early next year. / Matt Peckham

THE FIRST THING THAT GRABS YOU ISN'T THE BIG 3D SWITCHEROO BUT THAT YOU CAN LAUNCH IN ANY YEAR (EVEN MONTH) BETWEEN 1453 AND 1789.

OVERRATED/UNDERRATED YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO THE OVERHYPED AND OVERLOOKED

GAME TECHNOLOGY

OVERRATED: PHYSICS

The one "gimme" feature that even the shabbiest game boasts: physics! Now the back of almost every box tells of wonder worlds where "every time you play, it's a dynamically different game"—if only because the fool hiding behind the flammable barrel never lands in the same spot twice.

UNDERRATED: BUILT-IN VOIP

Since the first caveman grunted, "Hey, what's that fire stuff all about?" our lips have done the talking. Voice is a natural way to communicate, and it's a helluva lot easier to focus on playing when you don't have to type, "L33tGunnar7 is a n00b."





AS REAL AS IT GETS

After that, let's see you rescue an injured climber on Mt. Kilimanjaro. Or take on the world's best pilots in the Red Bull Air Races. With 23 aircraft and over 50 real-world missions, it's the most realistic version yet. Whole cities and airports have been faithfully recreated, with a 16x overall improvement in terrain graphics. Suddenly, calling it a "simulator" just doesn't seem right.



(ACTUAL GAME SCREEN SHOT)



Microsoft game studios
Games for Windows

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH 2:

THE RISE OF THE WITCH-KING

APPENDIXITIS

Check out the expansion's source material in "Appendix A," specifically "The North-kingdom and the Dunédain."

The Mouthful of Sauron



▶ ROTWK allows players to move units in formation. "Every RTS fan has felt the pain of giving a large group of units a move order and watching them collapse into an ant line," says producer Amir Rahimi.



▶ A dozen new multiplayer maps slot into a brand-new version of the strategic War of the Ring map. War of the Ring adds persistent armies, siege weapons, a basic economy, a fourth hero army, and more.

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EALA GENRE: Real-Time Strategy RELEASE DATE: Winter 2006

PREVIEW

WERE LORD OF THE RINGS AUTHOR J.R.R. Tolkien alive today, bets are he'd be a little iffy about Electronic Arts' *The Battle for Middle-earth 2*. Watcher-in-the-dirt? Free-range Balrogs? Shelob the goblin-hero instead of snacker? Aww, who cares? If you want fidelity, read the books. If you just want more film-filtered war toys, you'll be interested to learn that, for its encore, EA's reaching back, as in literally to the very back of the trilogy—namely those stuffy academic sections called "appendices." Never poked around in those? And you call yourself a Tolkien fan.

"We're filling the 3,000-year gap between Isildur's death and Gollum finding the Ring for the first time," explains producer Amir Rahimi, noting the focus in *The Rise of the Witch-king* is on the 500-year war between Angmar (northwest of the Misty Mountains) and Arnor (big swath of land north of the Shire and Bree). One thousand years after Isildur's death, the Nazgul reappear, led by

a horse-mounted version of Mr. "No Man Can Kill Me." The Lord of the Nazgul is known exclusively as the Witch-king here, and he heads the new Angmar faction.

"Think of Angmar as the evil counterpart to the Dwarves," says Rahimi. Meaning they'll be relatively slow moving, have very powerful units, walls, and defenses, and be, well...evil. They're also pretty hot in the magic department. "The Witch-king himself was known as a sorcerer, and sorcery was an important part of his arsenal," says Rahimi. "Therefore, the Angmar faction will have access to powerful spells." Take Angmar's sorcerers, support units that cast hoodoo-like Black Ice (slows the enemy), Fell Strength (augments friendlies), and your choice of a third: Soul Freeze (freeze an enemy), Well of Souls (damages units, turning any it kills into wights), or Corpse Rain (downpour of exploding cadavers).

Angmar also gets a unit called the Thrall Master, who runs around the battlefield and, on the fly, can summon basic infantry to fight for him. Rahimi says this works a bit like a game of rock-

paper-scissors, with players assessing a tactical situation and reacting by calling either Gundabad Warriors (orcs), Wolf Riders, Rhudaur Spearmen, or Rhudaur Axe Throwers. Elite units will include Dark Dunédain (extra-extra evil men), Hill Trolls with siege hammers (Angmar's pikemen), Snow Trolls (cavalry), and four new heroes: Hwaldar, chief of the Rhudaur hillmen; Rogash, a giant troll with a jump attack that trumps Gimli's; Morgomir, another Nazgul and the Witch-King's right-hand, er, wraith; and "The Whisperer," a man who's basically suffered Frodo's fate, had the Morgul blade sent our favorite hobbit over to the dark side.

Finally, existing factions get two or more new units and heroes, plus an entirely new "somewhere-between-elite-and-hero" unit type, while the Create-a-Hero feature gets a new troll class and more flexible economics, allowing you to build lower-cost heroes you can bring out sooner. And as for Angmar's Ring powers, try "Shadow of the Wolf," which summons the spirit of a giant werewolf (think sprier, snarlier Balrog). "All the new content stays as true as possible to what may have happened in the Tolkien fiction," says Rahimi. Including werewolves (look it up, o ye of little faith). And look for all that new content before the end of 2006. /Matt Peckham

THINK OF ANGMAR AS THE EVIL COUNTERPART TO THE DWARVES.

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SUPREME COM

An exclusive chat and multiplayer session with Gas Powered Games' Chris Taylor

PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Gas Powered Games GENRE: Real-Time Strategy RELEASE DATE: Spring 2007

PREVIEW

"YOU MIGHT NOT WANT TO PICK THE AEON ILLUMINATE THE first time you play," warns Gas Powered Games founder Chris Taylor as I sit down for a session of *Supreme Commander*. "That faction is the hardest one because it's so different." But since when has common sense stopped anyone? The United Earth Federation comes with familiar warheads and futuristic offshoots of conventional craft—been there, nuked that. The Cybran Nation is composed of self-actualized super-robots that clearly cribbed notes from *The Terminator* or Will Smith's magnum opus *Wild Wild West*. The Aeon Illuminate, a religious order, uses some weird alien technology that—I'll admit now—takes a lot of getting used to.

WARTIME ECONOMIES

Any RTS mastermind knows there's a science to build order. Do you churn out a tank rush, become an economic juggernaut, or go scouting? In my case, you try doing everything at once—and fail miserably. *Supreme Commander's* maps

are huge—even the two-player battlegrounds here measure 400 square kilometers—and encourage thought and exploration. The best course of action: Quickly get an economy off the ground and send out scouts to gather intel.

An army needs energy and mass (the two in-game resources) to operate, and a quick look at the map shows where to set up mass extractors. Some key advice: Select your first engineer, hold down the Shift key, and start stacking orders. Look for the mass collection hash marks on the map; and for every mass extractor you erect, order at least one generator. Quickly tag resource spots and let your engineers work in the background while building your army.

Stacking orders early enough—and smartly enough—is half the battle. Let's say you drop down a factory and want to upgrade it to tech level 2. Click the upgrade button, and you can place a build request for tier-two tech. Then order some more units and request the tier-three upgrade. Instead of waiting around for idle engineer units or monitoring every individual event on the battlefield, you only need to focus on giving general directions while the A.I. follows through on the orders.

DE-FENSE! The enemy's shield generator is active. They must be guarding something....

THE VIEW: The seamless zoom system really does an amazing job of not only giving you the big picture, but also allowing you to quickly and intelligently traverse the whole map. Just point your cursor somewhere and scroll the mouse wheel. Get down close to the ground or pull back for a view from space (like we did for the second monitor). The only other recent game that nails the war-room/control-center feeling is *Defcon*.

BATTLEZONE: That sweet-looking battle on the other screen? This is how it looks zoomed out.

MANDER

RANDOM OBSERVATION #42

You can earn a military-industrial-complex production bonus for placing factories and buildings near each other, but you then run the risk of turning yourself into a bigger target. This forces you to think about spreading out.

The way Taylor puts it: "Patton has to say to a guy, 'Drive the tank over to the hill.' And the guy comes back and says, 'Now what?' And Patton goes, 'OK, now fuel it.' And the guy comes back and goes, 'Now what?' 'Put some bullets in the gun.' He comes back later and says, 'And now what?' Patton goes, 'Take those tanks, get 'em all ready, and attack that small town to the north.'" You're supposed to be a supreme commander, not a babysitter.

"Here, the commander is able to say all that in one fluid sentence while the guy says, 'Yes, sir. And I'll be there by tomorrow afternoon.'" *Supreme Commander* instantly gives an estimated time of arrival for all your commands.

Meanwhile, I create my first scouting party to gather intel on my wily opponent—it's time to set a course into unknown territory. I create a full loop by setting various waypoints, and an ETA timer tells me how long the loop will take to complete. Oops. I forgot to send a scout out to the northeast corner of the map. No prob. Hold down the Shift key and just drag a waypoint out to adjust the route. The ETA timer updates automatically, and I'm back in business.

Of course, that's until I screw things up and make idiotic demands of my troops. Remember that whole build-order thing I was just talking about? Stu-

pidly tapping a couple of upgrade buttons too often and too quickly sent my economy into a tailspin. My mass extractors all received orders to upgrade to level-three technologies right from the game's start. Sure, it'll yield a metric ass-ton of mass once completed, but it was too much, too soon. With my first

DUAL-SCREEN DESTRUCTION

Gas Powered's demo setup probably isn't what you have at home—two 24-inch Dell LCD panels attached to a tricked-out PC—but you might consider reclaiming desktop space for an extra display just for *Supreme Commander*. Dual-screen play adds a new dimension and some authentic war-room flavor to RTS gaming. Taylor reveals that the game is running with a single GeForce 7800GTX card pushing pixels to both screens, impressively enough—and the screens above on these two pages look exactly like what you'd get.

few scouts on patrol destroyed, I was out of cash, short on troops, and running out of time.

Forced into a turtling position, I quickly shut down the mass-extractor upgrades (and watch as the economy jumps back to life) while erecting some walls and point-laser defenses. Using my supreme commander unit as an extra set of engineering hands, I clear-cut some trees to build mass and energy collectors to stockpile resources for the fight ahead. I was about to get swarmed and had little time to react. Defensive positions! Laser turrets, tier two. Start producing shields for the inevitable nuke strike. Build a radar system. Start upgrading my supreme commander unit for battle (yes, command units can also be upgraded—be a better engineer or develop personal shields, for example). Order up some tech-level 3 Siege Assault bots to fight back.

With my head back in the game, it was easy to appreciate everything happening. My artillery and defensive turrets tag anything entering radar range—or at least scare 'em away. When you target one unit to attack another in *Supreme Commander*, there's no guarantee you'll hit it. Taylor chimes in, "You don't know if you're going to miss, hit something else, or hit a tree and then the tree catches fire, falls over, and hits a shield system instead." Proper physics decide the battle—physics that I wished to God would work in my favor right about now. I finally clear a path for my assault bots to locate and take out the missile silos. Launch detected. Crap.

My shields absorb some of the damage, but it's over. All but a few ragtag units get wiped from the map. I will have my revenge, but there is one thing I can promise: Losing the first round won't influence my opinion of the final game.

Much. /Darren Gladstone



▲ *Total Annihilation's* robo-centrism returns.



▲ Spidery Cybran naval units sprout legs.



▲ Look for WWII inspiration everywhere.



▲ The entire game has an amazing sense of scale. Watch as the Galactic Colossus crushes units.

MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

The superpowers' superweapons

Every major war has its conflict-ending experimental technology. World War II had Fat Man and Little Boy. The future holds Voltron-like robots and cannon-bristling, trundling dreadnoughts. Here's a quick debriefing:



UNITED EARTH FEDERATION: FATBOY

Intel: This Mobile Land Factory is a superior support unit, featuring four battleship cannons and a powerful shield generator mounted on a heavily armored frame. An internal construction bay permits troop reinforcements in the field.

Tactics: The Fatboy is ill-prepared for small, fast-moving targets. Penetrate the shields and avoid the limited firing arc of side-mounted riot guns to inflict significant-to-serious damage.



CYBRAN NATION: "MONKEYLORD"

Intel: This monstrous spiderbot houses an extremely powerful microwave laser for short-range destruction. Prepped for resistance, it also has extremely thick armor and short-range anti-air/anti-ground countermeasures.

Tactics: The "Monkeylord" (which doesn't look anything like a monkey, by the way) is a slow-moving unit that's especially vulnerable to long-range bombardment or when traveling through water.



THE AEON ILLUMINATE: GALACTIC COLOSSUS

Intel: The Colossus focuses quantum energy through its eye into a highly destructive, short-range beam attack. Upon death, the chest cavity breaks open and releases a highly unstable, incredibly volatile quantum energy "being" that quickly dissipates.

Tactics: The Colossus is extremely vulnerable to air and naval attacks.



TAYLOR MADE

Time out with *Supreme Commander* creator Chris Taylor

> AFTER A FEW MORE ROUNDS (I DID eventually get my revenge), Gas Powered Games founder Chris Taylor gave a tour of his company's offices while chaffing about his *Total Annihilation* legacy and what's on the horizon.

Computer Gaming World: How does it feel coming back to RTS games after *Dungeon Siege*? Have your tastes or expectations changed?

Chris Taylor: If you think of me as an artist, I'm going to paint with the same brushstrokes. I'm not going to suddenly go off and create a *Command & Conquer*-type game. I can only do things that fit my own personality style. Big nukes, big theater of war—those are all things that match my design tastes.

CGW: And what would you say is one of those defining tastes—besides the big nukes, that is?

CT: One thing that I loved [in *Total Annihilation*] was the ability to add new things to the game after the fact by simply dropping in new data, without recompiling the executable. Every game made should be data-driven because if you have to recompile, then you have to update the executable, increment the version number, and you're probably invalidating saved games. You're gonna make it so every single person who wants to play a multiplayer game has to go out and upgrade to that version.

CGW: And it works so well with *Battlefield 2*. On that topic, are you thinking of creating an online community—a "gpg.net" of sorts?

CT: Well, we're making an online matchmaking solution. I just wish that we had a

final name for what it is, because it's more a community pillar. It's a meeting place with friends lists and chat rooms. There's a ladder ranking system, and we've got plans to allow people to be ranked locally so you can see where you sit with everyone in your hometown versus everyone in your state versus everyone in your country.

CGW: What about a *Supreme Commander* online metagame?

CT: Well, we've toyed with the idea. We haven't got anything official on that yet. But



that could be something we do in the future, because we really love the idea.

CGW: Talking single-player for a sec, you'd mentioned in interviews that you're working on a personality-archetype system.

CT: Yeah, we really want to see our A.I. opponents play with personality. Unfortunately, we may not get as far down that road as we wanted to for now. Most people, when

they first unwrap the game, aren't going to say, "Oh, I really want to play against, you know, 17 different A.I.s." So it'll give people a chance to warm up to the game. Our expansion pack will probably be where we roll the personality A.I. out in a big way.

CGW: What do you think of other tech? Like, say, Windows Vista promising to make PC gaming easier, more like consoles. Will this make your job any easier?

CT: Vista's got a refreshing angle, but aside from the glitz, what's cool is the prioritization on making PC gaming easier. Drop-and-play is a step in the right direction, but I also think the developer has a lot of responsibility. Like right now, *Supreme Commander* plays right off the DVD drive. Believe it or not, all the no-load stuff, all the streaming predictive caching stuff—it loads right off the DVD drive. There's performance cost involved with making it work like a console, but we can do it. It's completely within our grasp. It's not the open architecture of the PC that has caused it entirely; it's actually probably more a function of dollars in the development, and we can do it because we can be clever, we can be resourceful, and we can make it happen. And we will make it happen.

CGW: One last thing I'd been meaning to ask: *TA* consisted of robots fighting. *Supreme Commander* has maybe two humans on the battlefield. Is there a philosophical statement you're making here?

CT: I am. To make war games is almost like saying that war is cool. War is not cool. Real war is terrible. I think when soldiers die, it's bad enough, but when children die because a missile hits kids sleeping in a hospital, it's absolutely the worst thing ever. We don't need our entertainment to be more of the worst part of being human. So why not focus on the intellectual exercise of strategy, mitigate all the human suffering, and reduce it to vehicles, equipment, and stuff like that? Like chess. /

>> "MAKING WAR GAMES IS ALMOST SAYING THAT WAR IS COOL. WAR IS NOT COOL."

—CHRIS TAYLOR, GAS POWERED GAMES FOUNDER

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SHADOW-RUN-

FASA Studio reshuffles the teampay shooter

PUBLISHER: Microsoft Game Studios DEVELOPER: FASA Studio GENRE: FPS RELEASE DATE: February 2007

BY NOW, YOU'VE PROBABLY READ about—yes, it's true—*Shadowrun* coming back as a first-person shooter, so let's get this out of the way: Either you're kinda hazy on urban-cyberpunk role-playing game *Shadowrun*, or you're a fanatic, ready to tar, feather, and torch any game translation that's not an RPG. Never mind what folks were saying about Tolkien as an RTS, or, for that matter, an RTS like *WarCraft* as an MMORPG. (Did you know *Shadowrun* was also an award-winning card game?) With a team collectively tallying *MechWarrior*, *MechCommander*, *MechAssault*, *Crimson Skies*, and, of all things, *Halo*, you'd think *Shadowrun* fans would cut FASA a break.

"We're action-game developers, and we're focused on the things we're best at doing," remarks studio manager Mitch Gitelman. "If I sound passionate, it's because I've heard so many vocally fervent FPS reviewers lament repeatedly that no one is innovating in the FPS genre. Here comes *Shadowrun* with the ability to teleport through walls, summon creatures, turn to smoke, glide through the air, return dead friends to life, and lots more—and all anyone wants to talk about is that we're not making an RPG."

Set in Brazil, 2031, *Shadowrun*-the-FPS is still grounded in the paper game's cyberpunk trappings, only taking place a couple of decades earlier—a time when magic's returned but society's still on edge. Metahuman races like elves and trolls stride the planet, megacorporations collude or clash in the open, and, in FASA's version, two factions—one a dehumanizing monetizer (RNA Global), the other quasi-shamanistic (The Lineage)—vie for control of urban combat arenas. "We originally planned to set the game in 2021, but *Shadowrun* fans felt some of our choices diverted too heavily from the fiction," explains Gitelman. A quick call to Jordan Weisman (*Shadowrun* cocreator) helped the team slot the game more comfortably into existing canon.

Fidelity or no, FASA's *Shadowrun* certainly seems to plumb unorthodox territory. "You start off choosing to play a human, elf, dwarf, or troll," says Gitelman. "All your tech and magic abilities thereafter are persistent for your character, which allows you to customize them based on your play style." Humans are predictably the jack-of-all trades, Elves are turbo hit-and-runners with regenerative abilities, Dwarves absorb magical "Essence" from their surroundings, and trolls are large and slow-moving tanks with skin that hardens when hit.

Matches proceed in rounds, which Gitelman describes as "like an arms escalation." In the first round, most players have enough cash for one ability and maybe a weapon, which encourages diligent teampay. With each round, you gain more abilities, leading to increasingly complex tactical choices and snap judgments. "When someone summons a minion (think mini-Balrog), the other team launches an antimagic grenade to neutralize him," explains Gitelman. "When someone gets blown off the edge of a building with a magical gust, he turns to smoke before he hits the ground and just drifts away. People are teleporting and gliding around the map, raising friends from the dead, getting caught in vines, and whooping it up."

Intriguingly, Gitelman says tech and magic aren't really weapons in *Shadowrun*. "Anyone can make a weapon like a rocket launcher, put FX on it and call it a fireball...boring. When I look at other FPS games, I see a lack of defensive abilities. You can duck or take cover or run away." Alternately, every tech or magic ability in *Shadowrun* changes the way the game plays. Instead of health packs, for instance, you might summon a Tree of Life for proximity-based healing. "But these abilities also have tactical components to them," stresses Gitelman. "The tree doesn't care who it heals, so where you place it's important. In addition, you're summoning a solid object and getting cover. I've seen teams set up defensive positions behind small magical groves."

Other double-edged abilities include raising the dead: Resurrect friends, and they'll live as long as you do—if you bite it, they'll bleed out. Or take smoke: "Lots of players will turn to smoke when they're overrun by enemies," says Gitelman. "But clever players will realize that weapon fire goes right through them." Imagine leading an enemy's shotgun fire toward one of his friends—at the right moment, you turn to fumes and the blast passes through you, nailing his friend. While they're screaming at each other over headsets, you rematerialize and "say hello" with your SMG.

Gitelman says the team's making a game for the current generation of gamers, many who don't know *Shadowrun* at all. "We want the world of *Shadowrun* we all know to come back and thrive. But in order to do that we've had to evolve our approach and not make decisions based on games that came out over 13 years ago." Fair enough, and a chain of reasoning we can get behind if the FPS dynamics measure up. / Matt Peckham



— A magical power like teleportation lets you pop through walls, floors, ceilings, solid objects—even other players, where a tech ability like gliding lets you coast from heights or float up short distances for better shooting angles.

SHADOWRUN IS STILL GROUNDED IN THE PAPER GAME'S CYBERPUNK TRAPPINGS.

AND-GUN

HUMAN META-HUMAN VAMPIRIC VIRUS

Banshees, ghouls, or vampires as opponents? "HMHVV, eh?" says Gitelman. "Wow, you know your *Shadowrun*.... We'll have to wait and see."



Additional tech skills include Vision Enhancement (identify friend/foe, race, and weapon type through walls), Smartlink (improves accuracy and caps friendly fire), and Wired Reflexes (lets you run and reload faster and deflect bullets with a katana).



Story mode's out, but you can play each of *Shadowrun*'s maps and game types against bots, or just train with them. "Our bots don't cheat," claims Gitelman. "They use tech and magic and change weapons just like you do."



Weapons previewed so far include katanas, submachine guns, shotguns, and sniper rifles. "The most 'out there' weapon in the game is the minigun, like the one Jesse Ventura used in *Predator*," says Gitelman, adding that it takes some skill to wield due to its spin-up time. "There's something chilling about hearing that telltale mechanical whine. It means someone's about to open up a can of whup-ass."



Shadowrun supports PC-versus-Xbox 360 cross-platform roughhousing out of the box. "We were definitely concerned that the mouse would dominate when we started but that hasn't been the case," says Gitelman. "Mouse/keyboard has a slight advantage with long-range shooting, but the controller seems to have the advantage in close-quarters combat."

PIRATES OF THE BURNING SEA

This sailboat's no Disneyland ride

PUBLISHER: N/A DEVELOPER: Flying Lab Software GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Summer 2007

PREVIEW

NOT EVERYONE WANTS TO PLAY *WORLD OF Warcraft*. Sure, the theme park-style conventions (get on the ride, see the sights, kill the big bad, and exit the ride so the next group can rinse and repeat) work well enough for more casual-minded MMORPG fans who crave an online *Final Fantasy*-like experience...while more immersion-oriented genre geeks stick to the oddball *Eve Online* or *Shadowbane* that occasionally surfaces. The design philosophy of Flying Lab Software's *Pirates of the Burning Sea* reads like a love letter to this oft-neglected minority, while also steering the pirate subgenre into previously uncharted waters.

YO HO HO, CAPTAIN BLOOD! PLEASE RETURN HERE AFTER SACKING 10 MERCHANT VESSELS!

"The truth," says producer John Tynes, "is that a lot of our staff doesn't like the MMORPG genre much. We all see the potential of the medium, but don't like the kinds of gameplay that have arisen from that potential. What we're trying to accomplish [with *POTBS*] is to create an amazing swashbuckling adventure. We're looking at the classic movies of the genre, the classic literature, and the great actors—Errol Flynn, Douglas Fairbanks—and we're asking ourselves, 'How can we give the players that experience and make them feel like those heroes?'"

"MY INSPIRATION FOR SYSTEM DESIGN STARTS WITH *ISLAND OF KESMAI* AND HAS A HEAPING SPOONFUL OF EVERY OTHER MMORPG I'VE EVER PLAYED."

—JOHN TYNES, PRODUCER

One thing's for sure: Errol Flynn was certainly never told to sail out to sea, kill 20 pirates-in-training, and return to the harbormaster for his 100 XP reward—nor does *POTBS* treat players this way, says Tynes. "We're not starting with a lot of the ground-level assumptions other games seem to. We're opposed to the idea of a 'treadmill' because it includes the assumption that all the stuff you do until you hit the level cap is worthless and you don't really start the game until you're maxed out. We went a different route; we wanted even the early ships and low levels to be useful and important. A cannonball is a cannonball, whether fired by a level 1 or a level 50. Not to say that advancement *isn't* beneficial...but we don't need to artificially inflate the power of a high-level character."

Every player acts as master and commander the moment they set foot in port, beginning a seafaring career (ranging from bloodthirsty pirate to honest merchant to shipwright) in a small schooner, and gaining access to bigger and badder ships over time. "We're very much about player empowerment," Tynes explains. "We want people to feel larger than life...to take up heroic roles and do amazing deeds."

This empowerment also applies to the game's player-powered economy. As players traverse 18th-century England, France, and Spain (along with a fourth pirate 'nation'), they pay player-defined prices for player-made goods. According to Tynes, "Every significant



"PVP is world-relevant. You're not just ganking; you're trying to take ports for your nation and conquer the whole Caribbean."



"We expect pirates to be both hunters and prey—seizing merchant cargo to sell, and in turn being hunted by the navy."



"Our role model for character customization has always been *City of Heroes*, which raised the bar for the whole industry."

item in the game is player-created." Indeed, *POTBS* places a high priority on player interaction of all kinds, from the economy to PVP (though we're assured that the game "totally supports solo play"). Says Tynes: "Nobody plays *WOW* for the monster-killing; they play *WOW* because of their friends, their guilds, their rivals, and their enemies. The game is a context—the other players are the real content."

—Ryan Scott

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BURNING CRUSADE: KARAZHAN
Intrepid hacker (or Blizzard insider?) tours an unreleased and unpopulated *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade*.



XBOX 360 CRAZY LADY
Hilarious casting clip for unaired Xbox 360 commercial showcases an Italian hunchback going Ma Fratelli with imaginary guns.



SILENT HILL: THE LONELINESS OF PYRAMID HEAD
The *Silent Hill 2* spook takes a day off from horror to feed the cat, mow the lawn....



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COLUMN

FREELoader

Scoring free games without that icky "pirate" aftertaste

YEAH, YEAH, YOU KNOW THE DEAL. I'M LAZY AND SHIFTLESS. WATCH ME TRY TO BE A BETTER MOOCH EACH MONTH. HA. HA.

Very funny. Well, my shtick finally bit me in the ass. Happy?

Y'see, I don't check my mail that often. Letters get "sorted" into three piles: "opened," "unopened," and "I-really-know-I-should-open-but-don't-want-to-open." It's getting to the point where I'll need a Sherpa to help navigate the mailbag Mt. Rainier forming at my doorstep. Anyhow, I just accidentally kicked a stack over while playing *Frets on Fire* (more on that in a second) and slipped on the notice that this is my last issue of CGW.

I'd been meaning to pay my bills—really. It's just that, well, I...I forgot, OK? I've been so busy rocking the free games, I ignored just about everything else I needed to do this month. Look, the check's in the mail. Promise! Just cut me a little slack. If you were playing these games, you'd forget about your deadlines (and bills), too. / The Freeloader

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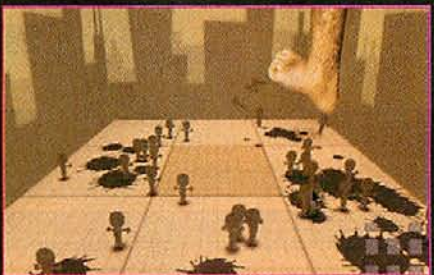
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THE GAME: *Frets on Fire*
FILE UNDER: RAWKI

I'm tired of hearing about *Guitar Hero* from all those cooler-than-thou PS2 jackasses. Feh, what-friggin'-ever! I found this totally sweet rhythm game and it can rock your socks off, gratis—mash buttons to the beat and make sweet, sweet music. Since the few songs that come with *FOF* are kinda weak (but the tutorial is hee-larious!), this open-source game allows people to import versions of popular songs.

There's just one small problem: Nobody looks cool playing a guitar game with a keyboard. Wait...is there a way? Following the lead of visionary band Frankie Goes to Hollywood, I'm gonna slap on a guitar strap and become a Keytar Hero!



THE GAME: *Extermination Disco Nation!*
FILE UNDER: Monty Python Dance Revolution

Like any couch-potato nerd worth his TiVo remote, I can quote *Life of Brian* line for line. So imagine my joy when I found the surreally stupid *Extermination Disco Nation!* Someone at the Experimental Gameplay Project created a game in which a bizarre picture of a dude's foot slams down and squishes little stick-figure men into paste, in true *Monty Python* fashion. That's it—that's the whole game. Just your foot, tiny dancing targets, and a goofy faux-disco song that'll camp out in your brain long after you're done playing. All this game needs is a *Dance Dance Revolution* dancepad. Y'know, this reminds me—I really need to clean between my toes more often. Who says games aren't educational?



THE GAME: *Every Extend*
FILE UNDER: PSP-free

I got this one buddy who's a big huge show-off (yeah, I'm looking at you, Gladstone). He's the kind of ass monkey who has to get everything before anyone else and then brag about it to everybody. Yeah, you know the type. So there's this sick action game for the PSP in Japan called *Every Extend Extra*. In it, you build explosive chains with some kamikaze geometric shapes and just try to last as long as you can. Like the trance-inducing PSP puzzler *Lumines*, *Every Extend Extra* is simple and addictive. Well, congrats, you dumbass. That Japanese import you just blew over \$60 on has been available for the PC for a couple of years now—as a free download.

DEVELOPER'S DESKTOP

What games are they playing?



Jason Kapalka has sapped our ability to get work done with games like *Bookworm* and *Zuma*. What insidious titles kill his productivity when he isn't making his next casual game?

TITAN QUEST

"I feel a little guilty about this one, since it's such an egregious *Diablo II* clone. But everyone needs a little click-and-slay. Besides the fancy new graphics, though, it actually makes me a bit nostalgic for *Diablo II*'s elegance and punch."

ANCIENT DOMAINS OF MYSTERY

"This is my favorite *NetHack/Rogue*-like ASCII-graphics game, and it's been on my desktop for nearly a decade. I've never even come close to finishing it and I probably never will."

MAPLESTORY

"This is a casual 2D RPG MMO where the game itself is free but you have to pay for in-game power-ups, upgrades, avatars, and so on. *MapleStory* is what might happen if *WOW* mated with an old *Mario Bros.* title."

HALF-LIFE 2 AND EPISODE ONE

"Shamefully, I never finished *HL2* when it came out...I'm going back to complete it so I can try

Episode One. The best thing about the *Half-Life* games is how they never, ever spell anything out with an 'exposition dump;' they just incorporate you into the plot. The story line of the first *Half-Life* isn't different from the plot of *Doom*...but instead of sticking it in a three-paragraph block of text in the README file, *HL* brilliantly let you participate in it as an 'actor.'"

CIVILIZATION IV

"I never get tired of this modern Sid Meier classic. It's probably the only computer game around today (besides *Tetris*) that we'll all still be playing in the year 2050. If we haven't been replaced by cybertronic work units."

SPECIAL
REPORT:
GAMES IN
CHINA

CHINA SYN

A rapidly changing nation finds its own ways to game

CULTURE

CHINA'S ECONOMY, NOW THE FOURTH largest in the world, has outstripped those of both France and Britain, and the nation's ongoing experiment in blending capitalism with communism has created a rapidly expanding middle class with discretionary income. The rise of Chinese gaming is part of this transformation. Though for many years the growth of mainland videogame companies was hindered by widespread software pirating, the recent popularity of online subscription-based games has worked around the black market, since the software itself is often distributed for free. Chinese government statistics state that there are between 20 million and 30 million online gamers among its citizens: That means almost one in every four people in China with Internet access use it to play games, and state agencies predict a 35-percent annual growth rate for the online gaming sector in the next half-decade. *World of Warcraft* alone boasts more than 3 million players in China—more than 40 percent of all *WOW* players worldwide—making it a bigger phenomenon there than even in the U.S., which supports a mere 2 million.

As it attempts to meld Maoism with free markets, China is evolving a game culture all its own, one in which state controls and post-Marxist propaganda campaigns mix with entrepreneurship gone wild.

FARMING AND FATIGUE

So much manufacturing has been outsourced to China, where cheap labor churns out everything from toys to sneakers for hungry consumers around the world, it was probably inevitable that online economies would follow suit. As a result, China has become the global leader in "gold farming," a notorious practice in which

PC-laden "virtual sweatshops" of low-paid gamers grind away through *World of Warcraft*, *Lineage*, or other lands of adventure, then sell their loot for gold which can be exchanged for real-world cash. Other firms, some with hundreds of players toiling away at a time, offer services to level characters for impatient players in the West, zipping their Paladins or Druids from 1 to 60 for a fee. At the end of 2005, *The New York Times* estimated that there were "well over 100,000 young people working in China as full-time gamers, toiling away in dark Internet cafes, abandoned warehouses, small offices, and private homes," most garnering less than 25 cents per hour wages, often in addition to room, board, and unlimited gameplay; a low paycheck, perhaps, but many see the work as a step up from factory labor.

Yet China's government also fears the loss of labor to the online world through "Internet addiction." Newspapers run sensationalistic stories about teenagers failing their studies, going blind, or even dying from fatigue after many hours of extended play. In response, online publishers signed a "Beijing Accord" at the government's behest to create in-game limitations to extended play. Three hours has become the cap for normal gameplay within China's biggest titles; those who play beyond the "healthy" three-hour mark find their experience and loot value greatly reduced. After five hours of play, a nagware pop-up announces a warning every 15 minutes: "You have entered unhealthy game time, please go offline immediately to rest. If you do not, your health will be damaged and the benefits you can win will be cut to zero."

The government has also censored the content of games imported from abroad—not an unusual practice in a country that regularly blocks websites containing what the government considers questionable information or opinion.

For the past two years, strict Ministry of Culture regulations have overseen the inspection of all games manufactured outside of the country, in order to ensure that their "content accords with Chinese national conditions and has positive effects on young people's mentality," according to Ministry officials. A number of strategy and military-themed games have been banned based on their depiction of the Chinese army. For example, Electronic Arts' 2003 title *Command & Conquer: Generals Zero Hour* expansion became forbidden to sell or download for "smearing the image of China and the Chinese army," according to state-issued press releases.

LIKE AMERICA'S ARMY, BUT RED

In the U.S., politicians have attacked the violence in games, even as the American military is using its own game titles for recruitment and training. The U.S. military has met with great success with *America's Army*, so it's perhaps no surprise that China has similar plans for its own government-backed patriotic online games: new-media extensions of Party-backed propaganda campaigns.

China's state news agency Xinhua reports that a "patriotic" game called *Chinese Heroes* is in development with Shanghai-based firm Shanda Interactive Entertainment. The country's biggest online gaming company, Shanda launched numerous popular MMORPGs such as *World of Legend*, *Magic Land*, and *The Age*, and also imports localized versions of *Dungeons and Dragons Online* and South Korean superhit *Legend of Mir II*. Designed to instill "traditional values"—and compete with games like *World of Warcraft*—the new game is planned to feature 100 different national heroes lifted from Chinese history and fable, including Zheng Chenggong, a 17th-century military leader who successfully battled Dutch colonists for control of Taiwan,



DROME

and medieval admiral Zheng He, the celebrated explorer. Many of these characters have long been deployed in state propaganda, such as Lei Feng, a People's Liberation Army soldier who died at age 22 in the early 1960s and has since been trotted out regularly as the epitome of model citizenship, beginning with Mao Zedong's own "Learn from Lei Feng" campaign.

If early reports of *Chinese Heroes* hold true, the game will likely prove ineffective in stemming the tide of mass defection to Azeroth. According to the government press release, the game will feature a "cute cartoon" style and involve "tasks like moving bricks and catching raindrops on a building site" as well as quizzes about the heroes' life stories—which sounds more like dismal educational software than the next big craze. Even Xinhua voiced skepticism by quoting the reactions of teenagers to the game at the Beijing Internet Addiction Treatment Center, who said it sounded "boring" and "too simple." (Though perhaps their lack of enthusiasm merely indicates the effectiveness of their anti-Internet addiction treatments.)

Chinese Heroes isn't the only state-sponsored game project. The China Communist Youth League has announced numerous historically based war titles, including *Anti-Japan War Online*, created with Shenzhen firm PowerNet Technology, which plays into a long pedigree of Chinese nationalism expressed through anti-Japanese sentiment. In this game set in the 1930s and '40s, players take on the role of everyday citizens who join the real-life Eighth Route Army to combat the invading Japanese. Developers say the game "will allow players, especially younger players, to learn from history.

They will get a patriotic feeling when fighting invaders to safeguard their motherland."

For younger gamers, there's already a Lei Feng title available, the state-approved *Learn From Lei Feng Online*, aimed at elementary school kids. Designed to teach "hard work, a plain life, and willingness to help others" according to government press reports, *Lei Feng Online* includes a treasure hunt whose prize is a virtual signed copy of Mao's Little Red Book.

ONLINE NATIONALISM

Yet even without government prompting, a new wave of nationalist sentiment has become visible in China within the imaginary kingdoms of online gaming worlds. Last summer, controversy brewed within NetEase's massively popular *Fantasy Westward Journey*, a cartoon-style commercial adventure game set in the heroic Tang dynasty of the early medieval period. Game masters placed one high-level player in virtual lockdown (within a structure called "The Great Tang Permanent Incarceration Prison") because of the name he gave his character and guild. The player's character was called "Kill the Little Japs," and his guild "The Alliance to Resist Japan."

In response to queries, a NetEase administrator explained on an official company site that this wasn't the first time they'd removed a player due to potentially offensive in-game names. One guild called the "Triad Society," named for the infamous Hong Kong-based international crime syndicates, was removed, as was a guild named "Al Qaeda" which boasted a leader named "I am bin Laden." One player with the alias "Kill all. Loot all." oversaw a guild called "Unit 731,"

which was also disbanded. The name refers to a unit of the Japanese army that secretly performed medical experimentation and biowarfare research using human subjects during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the subsequent years of World War II. (Such censorship isn't limited to China, of course. In the West, *World of Warcraft* administrators may delete character and guild names they deem obscene or racist.)

Whether NetEase feared that these names would offend the government, other players, or both isn't clear, but its crackdown on "The Alliance to Resist Japan" may have to do with in-game protests previously fomented by the guild. "The Alliance" caused a ruckus over what it perceived to be a graphic of the Japanese Empire's Rising Sun flag on the walls of a structure representing a Chinese government building. Over 10,000 players gathered their characters in an area known as the Summer Palace in collective fury, typing in obscenities and complaints until the screen filled with angry text. Some players speculated that the Japanese flag indicated that NetEase had been taken over by foreign investors.

NetEase, however, responded by explaining that the red sun image was based not on the Japanese flag, but a Chinese painting called "Green Mountain Ocean Water Morning Sunrise," found historically in government offices, which was meant to remind officials to "always maintain a clear mind, never mistreat the people, never betray the nation."

A little over a decade and a half ago, the world witnessed brutal government response to prodemocracy protesters in Tiananmen Square. Today, a thriving private high-tech firm squashes virtual protests stemming from nationalist, anti-Japanese rage inside a virtual world, even as China's government encourages such attitudes with their own anti-Japan videogames. / Ed Halter



THOSE WHO PLAY BEYOND THE "HEALTHY" THREE-HOUR MARK WILL FIND THEIR EXPERIENCE AND LOOT GREATLY REDUCED.



SILK ROAD

Game developers head East for bigger, faster, cheaper **BY MATT PECKHAM**

**SPECIAL
REPORT:
GAMES IN
CHINA**

TRENDS

➤ "MADE IN CHINA," A PHRASE AS RECOGNIZABLE AS COCA-COLA, is stamped on everything from welding masks and perfume sprayers to porcelain holiday plates depicting painted snowmen that smile and wave under lacquered snow. In 2005, China's economy topped \$2.2 trillion, just ahead of the U.K. and nipping at Germany's heels. Take the CIA's latest estimates based on "purchasing power parity," a theory that adjusts for exchange rates, and China's GDP jumps to \$8.8 trillion, second in the world and four-fifths the size of either the United States or the European Union. Columbia University professor and economist Jeffrey Sachs estimates that by 2050, China will surpass the absolute size of the

ILLUSTRATION BY JOSHUA ELLINGTON



U.S. economy by as much as 75 percent, and during a 2004 speech, he proclaimed: "The 21st century is not the American century—it is really the Asian century."

Welcome to the international version of *Trading Spaces*, where intertwining economies, tumbling foreign labor costs, and aggressive game studios are transforming the race to produce triple-A games. In view of skyrocketing domestic production expenses, studios are moving aspects of their business offshore, focusing on quality *through* quantity, soliciting increasingly skilled Chinese workers in bulk to build the games of the future as quickly and cheaply as possible.

REBALANCING ACT

Outsourcing, just as it sounds, means obtaining goods or services from an outside source, simply supply and demand writ large upon a global stage. In terms of game development, this includes any component in the process,

from assets to code to bodies, and it's been occurring progressively in U.S. and European game studios for at least the last five years. In mid-July 2006, Niko Partners, a market research and consulting firm for the Chinese videogame industry, reported "cost savings and a need to augment development staff" as the force impelling publishers and developers to outsource portions of their projects. Surveying 20 outsourced game development studios in Shanghai and Beijing, Niko identified the cost savings to be in the range of 40 to 60 percent over development costs in the U.S. or Europe. The study's results also indicated that the market for outsourced game development is growing swiftly as publishers and developers turn increasingly to China for help with mostly artwork-related projects, leading demand for outsourcing studios to outstrip supply.

Today's games are yesterday's pipe dreams, complex amalgams of code, sound, and art, often requiring extensive collaborative efforts

from different creative subsidiaries as studios attempt to meet increasingly steep production goals. In the U.S., senior programmer salaries alone range from \$75,000 to more than \$100,000, and that's before benefits. Compare to Chinese programmer costs, which eschew benefits altogether and typically range from \$18,000 to \$30,000—cheaper still for asset creation (the value of art outsourcing alone is predicted to reach \$1 billion by 2010). Is it any surprise that companies are gazing eastward with increasing frequency?

In a March 2006 report for London-based business intelligence provider Screen Digest, researcher Rick Gibson says outsourcing "tends to follow a standard path as companies introduce it to an industry, first prioritizing cost over quality, then establishing partnerships with suppliers, and finally moving into joint value creation." According to Gibson, the transition to the next generation of games will be more disruptive and costly than in previous generations. ▶

Unchecked, production cost averages will rise by 50 percent or more (primarily driven by a four-fold increase in art requirements). Sixty percent of game studios outsource today, a number that Gibson says will increase to more than 90 percent by 2008; the proportion of total production budgets allocated to resourcing will jump from 14.6 to 29 percent—and will reach as high as 40 percent in 2010. Globally, the outsourcing marketplace is expected to reach \$1.1 billion this year, \$1.9 billion by 2008, and \$2.5 billion by 2010. If Gibson's numbers are accurate, today's studios ignore tomorrow's outsourcing provisos at their peril.

OFFSHORE EXODUS

Take a labor pool as large as China's, and it's easy to see why the lure for foreign investors is gauged in workforce aggregates. At between one-half to one-fifth the cost of a comparable U.S. game-studio employee, publishers and development houses can achieve literally two to five times the output per dollar spent on projects like churning out code or creating assets for the latest MMO expansion. And it's not just up-front costs. Time, as they say, is also money, and U.S. studios can get Chinese artists for \$100 a week who deliver fast, high-quality work. "Most next-gen games for PC or console cost between \$8 and \$12 million, depending on the franchise and genre, over a 24- to 30-month period," says Atari creative director Paul Steed, referring to cost estimates others predict are spiraling toward \$20 million and higher. "If communication is clear and the target quality or style level met, Chinese outsourcing can save anywhere from six to 12 months." (A cost savings of between \$2.4 and \$4.8 million using the 30-month model.) Steed adds that, in the past, game developers have tended to cannibalize schedule savings by throwing in the kitchen sink. "The difference with outsourcing," he says, "is that it actually achieves an impossible amount of work in a very short amount of time." Like using a sledgehammer to pound a nail (for the cost of a hammer), Chinese outsourcing takes the financial sting out of delivering cutting-edge content as consumer expectations skyrocket.

Consumerism cuts both ways, of course, and when you're talking about a country with a population of more than 1.3 billion (roughly one-fifth of the world's people), publishers in or out of China have a vested interest in courting both domestic and international markets. The economic ramifications of this "ricochet effect" are potentially enormous. "China is a very high interest point for publishers, not just because of the components that they can outsource, but for her domestic market," says Dustin Clingman, a professor of game design at Full Sail, a technical college. "As it's always been in history, external countries are eager to peddle their wares to the billion customers whose earnings are growing. Investing into China today isn't just for cheap labor, but for a long-term strategy of participating in the growing consumer base."

Of course, you can't overlook competing markets like Eastern Europe or India, but when it comes to growth potential, Vykarian CEO Xin Chung says China is unique. "Eastern Europe has a strong computer graphics and gaming culture, in addition to lots of great talent dumped out of the military/aerospace complex, but they have a much smaller population, so large-scale operations will always be an issue," says Chung, regarded by some as the "grandfather" of China art outsourcing for major game titles—his company, Vykarian, is one of the up-and-coming outsource leaders. "India has its strengths in a large English-speaking population and the longest, most developed IT outsourcing industry," he says. "But since they don't have access to the latest triple-A games, the question is, would you rather have a game artist that speaks English, or one that speaks videogames?"

MIDDLESOURCING

Like any other high-volume service, outsourcing has its middle-layer consultants, companies usually located at outsourcing endpoints, focused on assembling local talent and mediating the often complex language and culture barriers between outsource service-seekers and providers. What's more, China's government is helping. "With such a huge audience for outsourcing, the Chinese government has implemented a number of incubator programs to assist businesses in obtaining domestic and foreign development," says Clingman.

Just as it sounds, an "incubator" is essentially a third party designed to target specific market sectors—such as biotechnology, microelectronics, telecommunications, or software—offering strategic advice on issues ranging from management to financing. For example, Shanghai Withub Hi-tech Business Incubator lists itself as a nonprofit service organization jointly founded in May 1999 by the Science and Technology Commission of Shanghai, the Xuhui District Government, and Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Among its functions it lists the following: "Science and technology innovation" and "Cultivation of hi-tech enterprises as well as entrepreneurs."

Located within the Withub Jiao Tong University Science Park is Virtuos—a "middlesourcing" firm operating from Shanghai since 2004 and employing roughly 110 people—which provides art and game-conversion services to major publishers like Electronic Arts, Microsoft, THQ, and Ubisoft. According to developer resource site Gamasutra.com, Virtuos is at the high end of the Chinese outsourcing boom in terms of quality and pricing, but still provides up to 50 percent in savings over Western development costs. Interestingly, part of Virtuos' job involves knowing when to outsource, but also when *not* to.

"Not everything can be outsourced to an offshore country successfully," says Virtuos CEO Gilles Langourieux, a former member of Ubisoft



Shanghai. "The more uncertainty and iterations you have in a task, the less suitable it becomes for offshore outsourcing. So art production, programming, and quality assurance are easier to outsource to China than game design." Langourieux stresses that, contrary to conventional wisdom, it's not solely about cost savings. "Most of our clients are looking for extra capacity and flexibility so that they can produce more with the resources they have." Those resource savings can lead to the creation of higher-skilled jobs in the U.S., though as game-design luminary Warren Spector puts it, "There's a danger in equating 'highly skilled personnel' with 'the ability to make cool games.'" In Spector's view, game designers are creating art (or, he says, if you're less generous, "entertainment"). "There's a world of difference between building a spreadsheet program and making a game," he argues. "You can learn the skills associated with the former, but you can't learn the talent necessary to do the latter. The thing to worry about—if there's cause to worry at all—is that there are so many people in China, odds are damn good there are dozens of folks as talented as the West's best game developers. If those folks learn the skills needed to exploit their talents, watch out."

Part of honing a talent involves hands-on immersion within its medium—in this case, endless hours spent playing games. According to China-based research firm Pacific Epoch, more

▶▶ "THERE'S A DANGER IN EQUATING 'HIGHLY SKILLED PERSONNEL' WITH 'THE ABILITY TO MAKE COOL GAMES.'"

—WARREN SPECTOR, FOUNDER, JUNCTION POINT STUDIOS



than 80 million Chinese will be playing online games by 2010, and Chung says that China will soon have the largest overall videogame population in the world. Since many Chinese artists play games like *World of Warcraft*, he reasons, they're instilled with a keen sense of what global-quality games look and "feel" like. The result? Higher-quality returns from practically bred gamers at market-competitive labor prices. "China definitely has the culture," adds Virtuos' Langourieux. "There are more gamers in China than in any other country in the world, more qualified students in the arts or computer science that are also avid gamers than in any other country. So they get it; they want to work in this industry and put China high on the world gaming map."

GEOGRAPHIC DEMOGRAPHIC

At a recent Game Developers Conference summit, OutsourceReport president Jonathan Hales delivered a presentation entitled "Geography of Outsourcing." OutsourceReport owns and operates the Gaming Industry 411, a database of outsource providers, as well as *OutsourceReport* magazine—a free outsourcing resource for game developers. In his presentation, Hales made the point that labor costs are only one factor in determining a possible outsource development partner. The more salient considerations, he argued, would include development experience, the portfolio of the outsource provider, internal management, the communicative abilities of the outsource provider, and labor shortage, which he says is "a factor of management experience and capability."

"'Labor shortage' should be redefined [as] 'the shortage of experienced labor,'" says Hales, adding that while experienced-labor shortage is a growing concern in developing third-world

countries, it's specifically true in China. "It's not that they're not churning out game development graduates by the thousands—they are. And it's not like eventually they won't have more cumulative game development experience than any nation on earth—they will." The problem, he says, is really threefold: 1) A shortage of experienced developers and, more importantly, managers in China, 2) experienced managers and developers being wooed and pulled from company to company, and 3) the dramatic increase in development outsourcing interests in China increasing the volatility of the foregoing two factors.

One notable consequence of the rush to plumb foreign labor markets is a phenomenon called "outsourcing through the back door," a response on the part of local outsourcing companies to remain competitive in the global outsourcing market. Hales says local outsourcing companies are finding their own development partners overseas and utilizing the offshore labor market to remain competitive and gain scalability. "In essence, an outsourcer outsources," he says. "In doing so, they minimize the risk, exposure, and complex due diligence otherwise required of management dealing directly with the overseas providers."

Other challenges for outsourcers include security and legal protection. "Security has always been an issue when dealing with any external relationship and thus is not unique to China," says Hales. "On the other hand, many very large and conspicuous projects have been completed in China without any known security breach." Hales attributes this to increased management education and security personnel as well as extremely strict working procedures, which have included practices such as ripping all USB ports out of

working systems as well as stringent regulations on what was allowed into working environments.

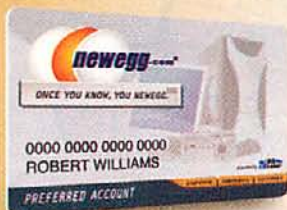
Legal protection is tougher, and any company is at risk to a certain degree when they turn to outside development. "If a foreign company folds, the developers are going to be left holding the bag," he explains. "When dealing with the Orient, developers have always been cautious regarding their [intellectual property]. And who wouldn't be? China still has a very far way to go to come into alignment with international IP laws. If you want to be protected in China, get a good lawyer, one who is fluent in English and Chinese as well as Chinese law." Since Chinese law is changing daily, especially in hot areas like IP, Hales says it would be wise if your lawyer was associated with (or had connections to) a Chinese law firm. You should also ensure that your Chinese contract and your English contract are the same verbatim. If litigation occurs, "an English contract is worthless," says Hales, as cases will be litigated in China by Chinese attorneys under China law—and very expensively. To certify full delivery of assets before payment, you should make sure good talent is working on your project and set up a good milestone payment system. "Finally," says Hales, "always, always have a contingency plan."

Whatever the risks, the global market is omnivorous and irrepressible. Yesterday's domestic market assurances are today's blinders. For better or worse, game studios are outsourcing in droves. And while that hot new game you just picked up may not bear the familiar "Made in China" stamp, the chances are better than ever that its snow-capped mountains and lush fantasy forests were shaped by foreign hands, some 6,500 miles away. /



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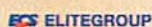
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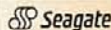
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BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

Fighting words

PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** DEVELOPER: **Gearbox** GENRE: **First-Person Shooter** RELEASE DATE: **2007**

PREVIEW

HELL'S HIGHWAY PRODUCER AND Gearbox president Randy Pitchford is sick of seeing historical shooters grab Teen ratings with honeyed violence and half-assed language. "War isn't for kids," he says. "What happened was as horrible as it was amazing...a monumental thing, and so many games trivialize the memory, turn it into a sensationalistic shooting gallery." Other period-piece FPSes, he argues, are fun—*Half-Life* trussed up in WWII textures—but ultimately hollow. "In fact," he holds, "for those of us who have dug into the history and understand what was at stake, they're sort of shameful." Fighting words for sure.

His company's commitment with *Brothers in Arms*: "To treat veterans and their families with

deference. To re-create real history and to portray places, events, and participants as faithfully as possible. As with movies such as *Saving Private Ryan* or [television miniseries] *Band of Brothers*, we're obligated to entertain," he says, "but we can do so with authenticity and respect." Some things even his games haven't gotten right. "Even so, we still can't completely capture the tension and trauma of being shot or having the buddy who's helped you through hell die in your hands," he says. "Here, no one is literally hurt, and as long as we're safely in our living rooms, we won't truly know what it was like."

Nonetheless, Pitchford wants us to imagine it as we might. "We hate the implausibility of magic canteens that patch you up," he says. "We hate recharging health meters. We want it the way it happened. In life, several senses work

together to tell you that you're at risk; in *Hell's Highway*, we create audiovisual cues, and you can tell the difference between a bullet breaking the sound barrier beside you versus one that's several yards away. You read it and react." He isn't, however, insisting that *Hell's Highway* is obligatorily difficult (where anything less is a disservice to vets' lived experiences). "We're interested in understanding and participating in these paratroopers' experiences, not punishing ourselves...even though it's essentially still 'get down or get dead.'"

SCREAMING EAGLES

Set in Operation Market Garden, an Allied effort to secure a series of bridges over the Rhine and Waal rivers in German-occupied Holland, and based, in part, on veteran historian George ▶





WAR ENGINES ▲

This August, EA announced that its delayed *Medal of Honor Airborne* would employ Epic Games' Unreal Engine 3, the same graphics power plant driving *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*. Gearbox president Randy Pitchford is sympathetic (sort of), if unsurprised: "My guess is that the executives there know that their franchise is at risk, and that *Hell's Highway* scares them. I showed some EA guys the game at [the Electronic Entertainment Expo], and I could see it on their faces. They know they have to nail it. It's not fair for the development studio [that] had to deal with EA's decision to stick with RenderWare, [which it owns]. They're eating the cost, throwing out their last 60 or so man-years of work, and playing catch-up, whereas Gearbox is one of the earliest licensees of UE3 and is very close with Epic. It's tough—management sets the targets, and then the talent there has to deal with those decisions. We're an independent developer, so we can shield ourselves from such difficulties."

Koskimaki's (see "Engaging History," below) book of the same name, *Hell's Highway* chronicles the 101st Airborne's campaign actions. At one point—a scene Pitchford finds especially moving—Germans begin bombing the Dutch city of Eindhoven. "So many civilians are caught up in the mess, and Sgt. Hartsock, who has a wife back home with a daughter he's never met, is seriously affected by the implications. He decides to disobey orders and goes through the town, house-to-house, hoping to help its women and children."

Wehrmacht soldiers arrive, however, and attempt to retake the town and seize Highway 69, the Allies' route for reinforcing their paratroopers. "So," says Pitchford, "as Sgt. Baker, you're in a bind. Hartsock is acting outside the immediate problem, and it comes down to deciding between the success of the mission and the lives of fellow soldiers, between winning the battle and preserving the people you're fighting for." *Hell's Highway's* concern with civilians caught in combat is a first among historical FPSes, although we wonder how naturally it will integrate narrative with interaction.

The game's ever-evolving, "Four F"-grounded gameplay (a support squad *finds* and *fixes* the enemy with fire, while an assault element *flanks* and *finishes* him) isn't as worrying. Effected in

Road to Hill 30 and perfected in sequel *Earned in Blood*, it rewrote FPS rules with Patton's "grab 'em by the nose and kick 'em in the ass" maneuver, and now tweaks them in *Hell's Highway* with new mortar, bazooka, and machine-gun crews.

"Stone walls block bullets, so they're an excellent place for the enemy to set up a base of fire," says Pitchford. "Suppress them all you want, but you won't pierce the stone. This is where an up-and-over-and-onto-their-heads mortar crew comes in handy."

According to Pitchford, "Tanks are virtually impervious to bullets, and even mortars aren't always able to take them out. You need to pierce the tank's armor and explode something inside of it, and that's what bazookas are for. They're great against armor, big artillery pieces, clearing out rooms by shooting through windows—all kinds of applications. But a bazooka team is vulnerable. It has to expose itself in order to fire and afterward everyone knows where it's at.

"And a machine-gun team, of course, carries the Browning .30. The thing's a suppression blower—set it up to make sure that no one approaches from a specific angle."

It's also a way to chip, crumble, and cut whatever soft cover an enemy happens to be hiding behind. Not, in other words, a "rated T for Teen" tool. /Shawn Elliott



➤ "AS LONG AS WE'RE SAFELY IN OUR LIVING ROOMS, WE WON'T TRULY KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE." —RANDY PITCHFORD, PRESIDENT, GEARBOX



ENGAGING HISTORY

How does George Koskimaki—*Hell's Highway* consultant and WWII veteran who served in the 101st Airborne Division, U.S. Army, during the D-Day operation, Operation Market Garden, and the Battle of the Bulge—respond to *Brothers in Arms*? Specifically, is he concerned that the game might trivialize or glorify lived experience, perhaps even more so than a movie might? "The story of WWII, and why we had to fight, is important to retell," he responds. "The idea that these guys get people excited about experiencing this in their games makes me realize what a powerful new communication medium games can be—provided they're done well. From what I have seen, *Hell's Highway* is a tribute to why we served and why we fought."

Koskimaki, we should also note, isn't worried that videogames are the one place where people engage WWII history; rather, he sees the medium as simply one of several ways in which smart folks supplement reading and other research.



MULTIPLAYER MATTERS

Pitchford says he's "super excited" to show off *Hell's Highway's* off- and online multiplayer modes—only not today. "We've shown off the single-player stuff a bit, so that talk isn't cheap. But because we haven't demonstrated multiplayer yet, I'd rather not reveal details until the evidence backs it up. I will say that you need to forget everything we've ever done with *Brothers in Arms'* multiplayer material in the past. We're moving in an entirely different direction, and it's more exciting than anything we've done to date."

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GREEN, JEFF

COLUMN

GLADSTONED

Confessions of a mail thief

TRUE STORY

I LOVE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD. Always have. These aren't the ramblings of some dude drunk on a Jonestown-sized helping of corporate Kool-Aid. Since the tender age of 12, when I picked up my first issue, I became a fanboy...and a hopeless nerd. Thanks for that, CGW!

Over the years, I scratched my head over the random Nietzsche and Kierkegaard references (how many 12-year-olds do you know who ponder staring into the abyss?), I relied on Scorpio's walkthrough to help me beat *The Magic Candle*...and even though I'm half-Canuck, I laughed at the now-infamous "Canadian Corner" column in the Letters section. And now, in that fine tradition, I have a story to share that I was saving for a special occasion. Since this is the last issue of CGW (before we change to the sexy *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine* moniker), it's now or never. Confession time.

I stole then-associate editor Jeff Green's mail. This probably requires a little more explanation.

Years back, I landed a sweet job at the same company that published CGW; I worked just one

floor below the editors. Every day, I'd show up at the office and contemplate hitting the wrong button in the elevator. I'm a grown man; I've profiled high-tech CEOs and interviewed A-list celebrities. Yet I felt intimidated by a bunch of man-children in funky T-shirts who played games for a living. I was just a like-minded nerd who happened to be a fan of Jeff's Greenspeak column.

So what does a neurotic, self-effacing dork from New York do when he wants to approach someone whose work he admires? He swings by the 14th floor, goes to the mailroom, and swipes an innocuous package destined for Jeff's desk.

Later that day, my delivery run began... and the 14th floor sounded like a war zone. Erstwhile CGW tech editor Dave Salvator was getting his ass handed to him in a *Half-Life* deathmatch; I could hear him screaming curses about some damned camper on the map, hammering his keyboard with both hands and shouting as if someone had just shoved his grandma down a well. Up ahead—Jeff's cube. Jeff was that camper.

The match ended...and I saw my chance. What would I say? It had to be clever. Should I make fun of Jeff for taking cheap shots at Salvator? I

hemmed and hawed for a second and settled on, "I...ummm...got your mail this morning by mistake and just wanted to make sure that you got it."

"Thanks, man. Really appreciate that," he said, nicely enough. "No problem," I answered. "See you around." And then I took the elevator back to my floor. Why couldn't I come up with anything better? In that moment, I realized I was still in awe of what CGW does for a living—and that I wanted a job there.

Years later, and here I am, working with the people I respect most in the game industry—but all the mystery and wonder is gone. I've stepped behind the Wizard of Oz's curtain and found out that Old Man Green is kind of like me (God help him); he doesn't drink as much, but he's a goofball and a gamer—and that's gotta count for something.

Yeah, it sucks that the name of the magazine has to change. But the way I see it, I'm here for the end of the first chapter of CGW and the beginning of the second. I'm OK with that. I've made my peace. But if I've learned one thing that I can pass along to you readers, it's this: If you want a job in the gaming industry, steal somebody's mail. Just not mine. /Darren Gladstone

THE LAST-MINUTE CONFESSION OF AN OLD-SCHOOL PC GAMING DORK AND LONGTIME CGW FANBOY.



Darren Gladstone
How much of an old-school nerd is CGW senior editor Darren Gladstone? He remembers his first stroll down Contra-Dextra Avenue. Do you?

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY NOVEMBER 2006



THE GOOD PSYCHONAUTS LIVES!

Despite massively positive critical reception, genius designer Tim Schafer's most recent game, *Psychonauts*, sold about as well as Ebola in a Box. Fortunately for the few intelligent gamers out there who actually value quality over name recognition, *Psychonauts* is Steam-bound. Those who missed this masterpiece the first time around will have a second chance to enjoy it in all its glory. This means you!



THE BAD DESIGNERS FLEE DUKE

Key graphical designers left *Duke Nukem Forever* developer 3D Realms, causing many to wonder what this means for the infamous near-vaporware. 3D Realms president George Broussard says it's just business as usual, and that *Duke's* progress is unaffected: "Physics and animation systems are virtually finished and shippable. It's simply maintenance and polish from here on out." We'll believe it when we see it.



THE UGLY MMO ADS

Shiny founder Dave Perry has a crazy idea for in-game advertising. His upcoming Acclaim-published MMO *2Moons* gives players the ability to gain more experience if they keep an ad banner open at the bottom of the game's interface. What's more, Perry says the *2Moons* is set up so that advertisers can pay for your in-game items. "Foul beast! Taste the wrath of my +5 Sword of Vanquishing...SPONSORED BY DORITOS!"

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HALO 2 VISTA

Still synonymous with console shooting



▲ According to producer Jo Clowes, "Cheating is a big concern for us, especially in online play. We will be using the Live Anywhere services to help us bring the technologies available on Xbox Live to the PC. The Live Anywhere team has also been hard at work to bring extra PC-specific security measures to the service. That said, there will always be those that try to work around these measures, and...it will likely never be possible to 100-percent eliminate any and all forms of cheating."



▲ "Halo 2 Vista is a DirectX 9 title, but it will run on DX10 systems as our users start to adopt them," Clowes says. "On a suitable PC, [it] offers significantly enhanced visuals compared to the Xbox version." Namely, higher resolution (1920x1200).

PUBLISHER: Microsoft Game Studios DEVELOPER: Bungie Studios GENRE: First-Person Shooter RELEASE DATE: "Early 2007"

PREVIEW

➤ HALO 2? MOON JUMPING AND LEADED movement. Alien structures made to funnel Spartan firefights—walkways and walls, never more plausibly inhabited than mazes. Call it Earth or a circular space station for narrative purpose and color it purple, green, gunmetal. Uh huh. Is it that we don't dare admit an FPS on any other platform matches those on our muscle machines, or is it more matter-of-fact: Xbox's big fish is itty-bitty in PC's bigger pond?

Bungie Studios community lead Brian Jarrard thinks big is big, no ifs, ands, or buts. *Team Fortress 2*, *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, *Crysis*, *UT 2007*? "All good and unique in their own right," he says, "although *Halo 2* has practically taken over tournament play—certainly as far as consoles are concerned. What we hope is that the Vista version can attract more of those high-caliber tournament players who've thus far avoided the console version. Also, the ability to craft custom maps makes everything that much sweeter."

What will grab us, if it grabs us, is a map-for-map port rejiggered for mouse input without veering much from the original version's joystick roots. "The Xbox 360 controller versus keyboard-and-mouse are well balanced at the moment, but we're working to get the right

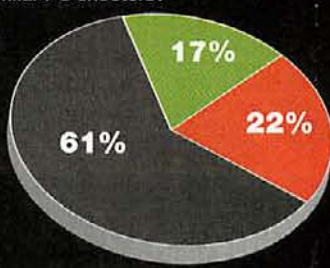
'feel' for existing Xbox users," says producer Jo Clowes. "Support for the Xbox 360 pad allows our Xbox players to easily transition between Xbox and PC without needing to learn a new controller layout."

Another enticement, according to Jarrard, is Live Anywhere, Microsoft's online network initiative to connect Xbox, PC, and mobile gamers' digital identities in an always-on world. "With it," he says, "we can create a seamless community between the [PC and Xbox] worlds, giving gamers a shared friends list [between] both

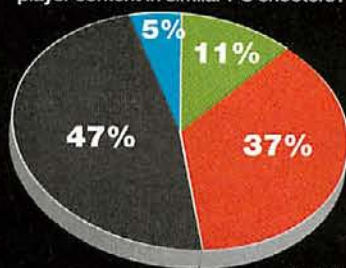
platforms and the ability to send and receive messages on either 360 or a Vista machine." But Clowes clarifies, "We are not, however, offering cross-platform play." So, while we can confirm that poster children *BeatBuilder* and *VelocityGirl* are indeed playing *Project Gotham*, we can't, you know, challenge them to a game. However, popular Xbox Live Achievements—virtual merit certificates awarded for completing missions, meeting various performance criteria in multi-player matches, and so on—are available for public viewing. / Shawn Elliott

CGW POLL: CANNON-MEASURING CONTEST

Q: How does *Halo 2* for Xbox's single-player campaign compare to those of similar PC shooters?



Q: How does *Halo 2* for Xbox's multi-player component compare to multi-player content in similar PC shooters?



Source: Poll conducted on CGW Reader forums on 1UP.com, September 2006



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MEDIEVAL II:

The alchemy of chaos



PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: The Creative Assembly GENRE: Strategy RELEASE DATE: November 2006

PREVIEW

WE PAINT PC STRATEGY GAMES IN two broad strokes: Do you take it turn-based, or do you like yours real-time? But mixing TB with RT can be a dangerous alchemy. A *Civilization* adheres to a different set of gaming laws than a *Rise of Nations*; combine the two, and the potential for frazzled brains (or excruciatingly long campaigns) increases exponentially.

"We've been very aware right from the start about the need to avoid too much micromanagement," says Bob Smith, project director of The Creative Assembly's method-mixing *Medieval II: Total War*. "That's been true for all the games in the *Total War* series. The design for the new agents is an example of this awareness. They've been designed to be useful without you having to constantly take care of them—the merchant, for example, is simply used to locate a resource, and once it's discovered, he can remain feeding income back to the player's cities without any additional micromanagement. The numbers of agent characters you can train are limited so that moving them around is never a chore."

For those unfamiliar with *Total War*'s modus operandi, it goes something like this: Administer towns, build armies, and engage in diplomatic tasks in a turn-based map not too far-flung from *Civilization*. Run an army into an opposing force (or click them onto an enemy city or castle), and

you have the option to settle things in a real-time battle of dozens of units, each comprised of dozens of individual soldiers. The scale's the thing, and the devil is in *Medieval II*'s details: Individual arrows fly through the air from battalions of archers (a touch you only notice when you zoom in for a sadist's-eye view); individual characters have their own details—clothes, hair, faces—to prevent combat from looking like a dark-age *Clone Wars*; and battlefields wind up littered with hundreds of bodies. *Total War*'s aspiration is total chaos, and when battalions clash and their soldiers mingle, the illusion works—even though you can spot soldiers swatting at invisible demons instead of the mounted chargers in front of them when you zoom in close enough.

As for tactics, siege weapons are key—ladders for infantry to scale keep walls, battering rams to knock down citadel doors. Knowing your ranks' strengths and weaknesses is vital (no lassooing your whole army and just clicking on the enemy hoping your numbers beat theirs), and so is understanding the weather. "Rain reduces the power of missile troops," says Smith, "hot sun makes [soldiers] tired, and of course fog makes it hard to see the enemy." Choke points—both when entering the city and once inside its maze of streets and alleys—become a sort of third force to fight against, and it's here that pathfinding A.I. becomes paramount—and it's here where *Medieval II* could potentially falter. Nothing brings a Crusade to a halt

faster than having your holy warriors head to the stables when they were supposed to run for the church; in the build we played, units in town- and castle-based skirmishes would often take inexplicable routes or simply stand motionless when we administered orders. The Creative Assembly warns that the battlefield A.I. is a work in progress; we warn that it's the most important work they've left to finish. And if they don't? Just click the autoresolve button to skip the whole thing. "Many *Total War* fans actually play the entire campaign map autoresolving battles along the way," says Smith. "That's their choice of method of play, and that's great." / Sean Molloy

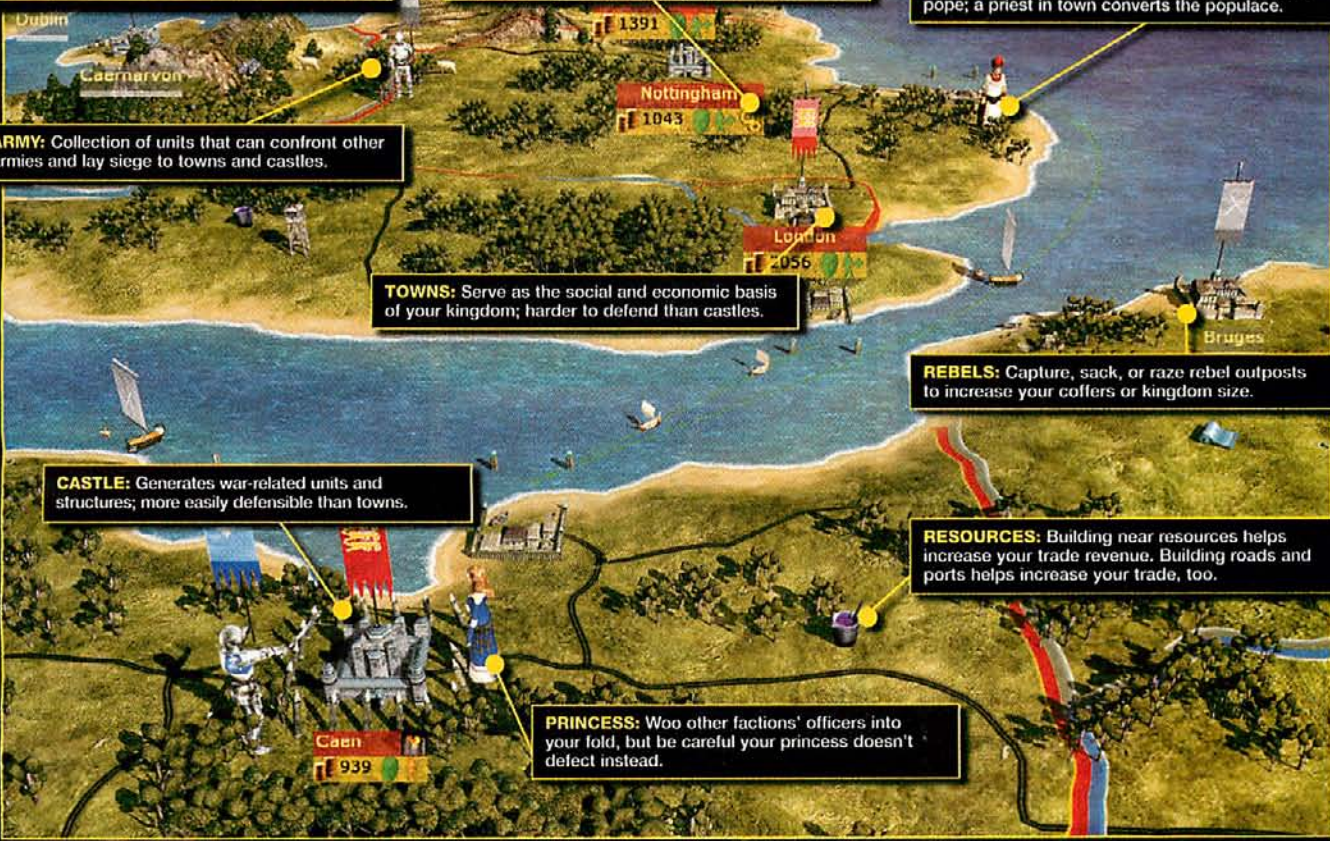
TOTAL DIPLOMACY

In most turn-based strategy games, diplomacy is usually synonymous with balancing a list of tradable items until Gandhi stops insulting your mother. *Medieval II* adds a more human touch. "We wanted to offer the player a great deal more feedback," says Smith. "Although it sounds a small thing, being able to hear the tone and inclination of another faction's response to your offers makes a lot of difference—it gives the A.I. a more human face, adds flavor, and provides more information...A.I. factions have a far better memory of what's gone before, so bully it or make insulting offers, and it'll be far harder to make a deal in future negotiations."

TOTAL WAR

THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Here are just a few of the many pieces that make up *Medieval II's* turn-based puzzle.



AUTOMANAGEMENT ICON: When there isn't an officer stationed in a town or castle, you can't manage its projects manually.

PRIEST: Religion breeds order and appeases the pope; a priest in town converts the populace.

ARMY: Collection of units that can confront other armies and lay siege to towns and castles.

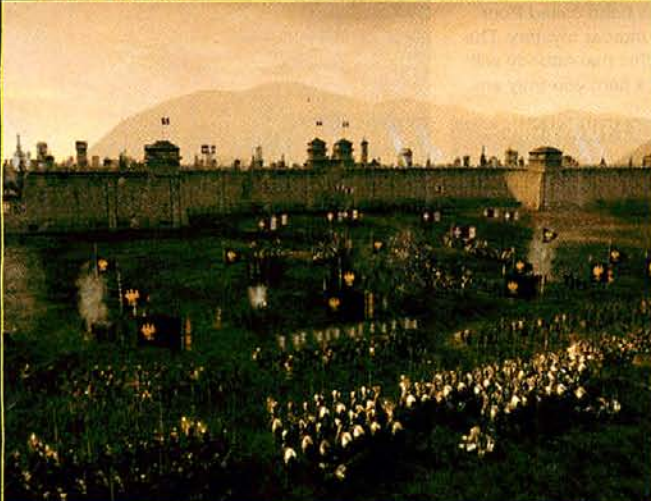
TOWNS: Serve as the social and economic basis of your kingdom; harder to defend than castles.

REBELS: Capture, sack, or raze rebel outposts to increase your coffers or kingdom size.

CASTLE: Generates war-related units and structures; more easily defensible than towns.

RESOURCES: Building near resources helps increase your trade revenue. Building roads and ports helps increase your trade, too.

PRINCESS: Woo other factions' officers into your fold, but be careful your princess doesn't defect instead.



▲ One thing project director Bob Smith never wants to see again: "A cheesy story. Strategy games should be about making your own story."



▲ Every *Civ*-style campaign needs carrots—new Wonders to strive for or a Space Age to race toward. *Medieval II's* is the mad scramble to claim the New World, a costly endeavor that could have huge payoffs if all goes according to plan.

THE HOT SHEET

TEN THINGS THAT ROCK CGW'S WORLD

1 WTF GAME OF THE MONTH

While you'd think that this award would go to the aptly named PSP *WarioWare* clone *Work Time Fun* (get it?), the award goes to Capcom's brawler *God Hand*. In it, you button-mash to spank women and fight fey fellas dressed as Native Americans.



2 WONDER SHOWZEN

It has puppets, children, and life lessons—but *Wonder Showzen* is no kids' show. The show even warns up front: "If you allow a child to view this, you are a bad parent."



3 VAMPIRES SUCK

Anne Rice screwed it up for everyone. She turned scary vampires into whiny Eurotrash. Well, game-industry hack William Harms is trying to reinvent *das vampir* with the comic series *Impaler*. After 500 years, Vlad travels to NYC—and he ain't happy.

4 HOLY HAND GRENADE



Killer rabbits running amok? Quick, consult the Book of Armaments (or fetch ye a Web browser and visit thinkgeek.com) before thou lobbest the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch toward thy foe!

5 BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

If you haven't seen the Sci-Fi Channel's new take on the classic space opera, we're officially revoking your nerd card. Seriously, hand it over right now. Or just go out and grab the newest box set.



6 CLONING CLYDE

The whole idea of shareware isn't lost on us PC gamers. Hell, we invented it! So will someone please explain how this awesome (and damn funny) platforming game is only available over Xbox Live Arcade?



7 I, SPY

Wild Planet sent us this crazy "stealth" surveillance toy—a remote-control car with a black-and-white camera on top. It's just a little hard to be inconspicuous when this big plastic thing roars up to your feet and only has a 15-foot transmission radius.

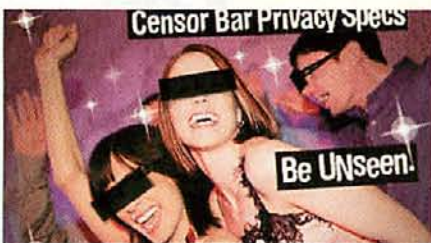
8 MMMM, BRAAAAAAINS

Fact or fiction? *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* by Max Brooks is a series of short pieces, interviews, and personal accounts "as told to the author" chronicling the lives of survivors of the zombie apocalypse.



9 WEAR'S THE CODE?

It's not just a sweet clothing line—edoc laundry is a series of wearable puzzles that tie together a fictitious band called Poor Richard, a website, and a murder mystery. The best part: The gear is so chic that nobody will even realize how much of a nerd you truly are.



10 CENSORED SUNGLASSES

When you're popular, you need to hide your identity from those crowds of adoring fans. Before they have a chance to record some embarrassing home videos, buy these stupidly idiotic \$10 black bar shades from stupidiotic.com.

PIPELINE

Save some money for these upcoming games!

OCTOBER 2006	PUBLISHER
Age of Empires III: The WarChiefs	Microsoft
ArchLord	Codemasters
Battlefield 2142	Electronic Arts
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic	Ubisoft
Desperate Housewives	Buena Vista Games
F.E.A.R. Extraction Point	Vivendi Games
FIFA 07 Soccer	Electronic Arts
Genesis Rising: The Universal Crusade	DreamCatcher
Guild Wars Nightfall	NCsoft
Microsoft Flight Simulator X	Microsoft
Evidence: The Last Ritual	DreamCatcher
Neverwinter Nights 2	Atari
Panzer Command: Operation Winter Storm	Tri Synergy
Phantasy Star Universe	Sega
Reservoir Dogs	Eidos Interactive
Sid Meier's Railroads!	2K Games
The Sims 2: Pets	Electronic Arts
Star Wars Empire at War: Forces of Corruption	LucasArts
Storm of War: Battle of Britain	Ubisoft
Stronghold Legends	2K Games
Scarface: The World Is Yours	Vivendi Games
Splinter Cell Double Agent	Ubisoft
Test Drive Unlimited	Atari
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	Electronic Arts
UFO: Extraterrestrials	Tri Synergy
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War—Dark Crusade	THQ
Zoo Tycoon 2: Marina Mania	Microsoft
NOVEMBER 2006	
Agatha Christie: Murder on the Orient Express	DreamCatcher
Charlotte's Web	Sega
Eragon	Vivendi Games
EverQuest II: Echoes of Faydwer	SOE
Left Behind: Eternal Forces	Left Behind Games
The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II—The Rise of the Witch-King	Electronic Arts
Medieval II: Total War	Sega
War Front: Turning Point	CDV Software
WINTER 2006-2007	
Gothic 3	Aspyr Media
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	SOE
World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	Blizzard

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25 YEARS

OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

A lot can happen in 268 issues

END RUN

WELL, KIDS, IT WAS A GOOD RUN. IT WAS A LONG ONE, TOO. WITH THIS ISSUE, WE celebrate the 25-year anniversary of *Computer Gaming World* magazine—and we also get ready for The Big Switch. Next month marks our new beginning as *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*. And while we're excited about the change, we wanted to pause here in this final issue of *CGW* to take one last look back at the evolution of the magazine—and of the PC-gaming industry itself—over the past two and a half decades.

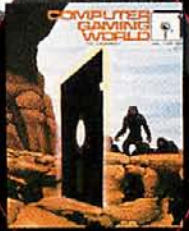
Joining us in this look back are all four editors-in-chief who ran the magazine over the past 25 years—Russell Sipe (founder of *CGW* and editor-in-chief from 1981–1992), Johnny Wilson (1992–1999), George Jones (1999–2002), and Jeff Green (2002–present)—each offering his own perspective on the era he covered. We've also picked out a few notable covers from our 268-issue run to punctuate computer gaming's long and storied history. So join us as we take a look back one last time. And no sniffing there, soldier! We'll be back next month. Just a bit...different looking. >

by the (past and present)
editors of *Computer Gaming World*

IN THE BEGINNING...

ISSUE 2-1, Jan-Feb 1982 INSIDE: *Zork* review, *Ultima* review

When the first issue of CGW hit stands, Ronald Reagan was a year into his presidency, the Cold War would soon start cooling off, and PC games were all abstraction—numbers, letters, and graphics that required players to be, um, especially imaginative. And since computers were still solely the domain of college professors and hard-programming übergeeks, playtime mostly involved the sorts of challenges one associates with the intellectual elite: strategy war games, simulations, text adventures (*Zork*), and ASCII dungeon crawls (*Rogue*). Leave *Pac-Man* in the arcades and the "action" to the ColecoVision kids.



ELECTRONIC GOTHIC

ISSUE 3-5, October 1983 INSIDE: *Archon* review, *Delta Squadron* review

Game graphics of the 1980s did not good cover images make—and so the CGW of the era oft decorated its front with bizarre *American Gothic* parodies. Hiding behind this voluptuous space monstress and her new human rural husband-slave: an interview with fledgling gamemaker Trip Hawkins in which we say his company (Electronic Arts) "is attempting to jump into the forefront of the microcomputer software field as an immediate success, much as the goddess Minerva leapt [sic] full grown from the brain of her father Zeus." Truer words have ne'er been spoken.



GOLDEN YEARS

ISSUE 4-3, June 1984 INSIDE: *Questrom*, *MIG Alley Ace*, column on "telegaming"

Ask any ancient computer gamer to name their favorite games from the 1980s, and chances are that a great majority will answer *Seven Cities of Gold*, an awesome cross-genre strategy/adventure/RPG by legendary game designer Dan (later Dani) Bunten, that put you in the role of a 15th-century Spanish explorer setting sail for the New World. Why was it so great? Its sheer addictive nature; it was an early, perfectly executed example of open-ended gameplay—no set goals, no scripted sequences, an entirely different experience every time you played. Two decades later, many designers still have trouble achieving that.



1981-1990

THE MOTHER OF INVENTION by Russell Sipe



Find a need and fill it. Read any book on starting a business, and you'll find words to that effect as a basic guideline to building a successful business. It's the principle that led to and sustained

Computer Gaming World's success over the past 25 years. What follows draws heavily from what I wrote back in August 1988 on the occasion of our 50th issue.

In the spring of 1981, I was driving down the Orange Freeway near Anaheim Stadium in Orange County thinking about some problems I had encountered while playing SSI's *Computer Air Combat* game. Specifically, I was bothered by the way the game handled certain aspects of the ME-109 range and related factors. It was a very game-nerdy moment.

I will never forget what happened next—it's as clear in my mind now as it was then. While passing Anaheim Stadium on the left, I thought to myself, "I sure would like to read up on this game." However, it occurred to me that no one was writing about computer games in any detailed fashion. "Someone should start a maga-

zine on computer games," I thought to myself.

Then a little voice spoke to me: "Why don't you do it?" Rather than bothering myself with the implications of having a voice speak to me out of the blue, I instead answered the voice. "I have no experience in publishing," I said. "So what? You can learn!" replied the voice. I considered debating the voice in my head, but before I could get another word in, I recalled that I had read somewhere that the secret of a successful business is to find a need and fill it. If I personally felt the need for a computer game magazine, surely there were others that felt it as well. By the time I reached home, I was getting excited. Explaining the little voice in my head to family and friends, I raised \$6,000 and put together the first issue of *CGW*, which was slated for a November 1981 release.

By August, we found out that we would have some competition. *Electronic Games* (later renamed *Computer Entertainment*) from Reese Publishing out of New York and *Softline* (later renamed *St. Game*) out of North Hollywood were also scheduled

for winter 1981 debuts. "Great!" I thought to myself, "I haven't even printed an issue yet, and I already have big-time competition!"

All three magazines debuted within days of each other, and the computer-game-magazine industry was born.

By 1983, the arcade game fad was in high swing, and *CGW* had something on the order of 18 competing titles on the newsstand. The years 1983 and 1984 were trying times for us. We had to compete with higher-circulation magazines for advertising dollars and newsstand space. Nevertheless, our conservative business approach helped us weather the storm. Then came the videogame-crash of 1984. It took down the majority of the computer-game magazines with it. By the winter of 1984, only a few such magazines remained—and by summer 1985, *CGW* was the only four-color computer game magazine left.

The manufacturers who survived the crash and prospered during that time were those companies that, for the most part, targeted an older age group (especially those consumers who were interested in strategy and adventure games

◀ The 1980s were marked by the rise of Ronald Reagan and the fall of the Berlin Wall; PC games by heady war simulations.

RISE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

ISSUE: 26, March 1986 **INSIDE:** New column on the Amiga computer; Scorpius reviews *Star Trek: The Kobayashi Alternative*
Five years into CGW's history, computer gaming was still largely the domain of the Apple II, Atari, and Commodore 64—though games for the IBM PC were now popping up as well. The mid-1980s also saw the beginning of the designer-as-superstar phenomenon, with Richard "Lord British" Garriott as the era's, um, Brad Pitt, if you will. This issue found him at "the ripe old age of 24," as he put it, working on *Ultima IV*, still largely programming it all himself, but amazed to see his staff at Origin Systems now up to 20 whole employees.

COMPUTER WARGAMING WORLD

ISSUE: 37, May 1987 **INSIDE:** Charles Ardal analyzes EA's success; wargaming's future: the Amiga or the Atari ST?
Sometimes it feels like half the games out right now here in 2006 are set in *World War II*. Funnily enough, it felt that way 19 years ago, too. Thus an issue (all 56 pages of it!) almost entirely devoted to the topic. Back then, it wasn't first-person shooters or real-time strategy games—it was hexagonal turn-based strategy games, the direct descendants of the board games we used to play before these new-fangled computers came around. The genre is not as popular today, but we still love it, and even have a column by Bruce Geryk devoted to it.

POINT-INTERACTIVE CLICKTIVITY

ISSUE: 61, July 1989 **INSIDE:** *Lords of the Rising Sun*; "Is VGA Worth It?"
In the late 1980s, "cinematic" had a much more lenient definition than it does today—a couple cut-scenes, a few lines of dialogue printed across your screen, and you qualified. Highest among the cinematic kings of yore: graphic adventures like the *King's Quest* series and *Maniac Mansion*. LucasArts ushered in the Golden Age with *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and set the stage for adventure-game dominance in the early nineties—the era of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max*, *Myst*, and more. Game coroners mark 1998's *Grim Fandango* as the graphic adventure's time of death—but hey, at least it went out in style.

as opposed to arcade action games). Fortunately for CGW, our readership has always been dominated by the adult strategy/adventure gamer; an audience that was not only interested in the games themselves, but also in the personalities that designed the games and the companies that manufactured them. CGW catered to this readership.

CGW began life as a bimonthly magazine. Reader demand caused us to go to a nine-issue-per-year schedule with the January/February 1986 issue. In 1988, CGW went monthly. As with all growing industries, there is change. The early 1990s were a time when large magazine publishers were eyeing the growing computer game field and the publications serving it. The inevitable market forces lead to CGW's acquisition by Ziff Davis Publishing. While a lot of our past

readers have graciously let us know that they preferred the CGW of old, the move to sell CGW to Ziff Davis was the right decision for more reasons than can be discussed in the scope of this story.

So now here we are, some 25 years later. My "baby" hasn't been under my stewardship for more than a dozen years now. But even though she was bound to another, she has always been "my baby." And even though my byline as founder has shrunk to 0.5-point type, I still proudly point her out to friends on the newsstand.

But now my baby is moving on and transforming into something else. *Computer Gaming World*, my child, you will always have a place in my heart and in the hearts of thousands. May your new masters heed the voices of those that have toiled in the past and will do so in

the future to be what you have always been: America's first, oldest, and best computer-game magazine.

Oh! Speaking of finding a need and filling it? For the last couple of years, I have been active in the virtual world called *Second Life* (www.secondlife.com) in the guise of MarkTwain White. Not very long ago, working with an in-world partner, I created *Second Life's* first golf course. The project turned a profit in the first month, and now two more courses are under development. It looks like we've hit a nerve. So if the secret of success is to find a need and meet it, here we go again. CGW readers are welcome to sign up for *Second Life*, come to the Holly Kai Golf Club in the Hollywood "sim," and look me up. Let's play a round together.



Russell Sipe founded CGW in 1981 and remained editor-in-chief until 1992 and publisher until 1995. Visit his virtual golf course, then see what he's up to at www.sipe.com.

"THE MANUFACTURERS WHO SURVIVED THE CRASH WERE THOSE THAT TARGETED AN OLDER AGE GROUP."

—RUSSELL SIPE



IMPENDING BOOM

ISSUE 113, December 1993 *INSIDE: The Elder Scrolls: Arena, Master of Orion*
Hell broke loose and PC gaming changed forever when id Software released the original *Doom* for MS-DOS in December 1993—as shareware, no less, meant to be distributed (as it was) to the farthest reaches of the computer gaming world. You can trace the roots of the modern LAN party back to *Doom*'s brown-gray deathmatch-stained corridors; modern modding owes a hefty debt to *Doom*'s portable WADs and simple level-editing tools. *Doom*'s other claim to fame? Frontline duty, alongside *Mortal Kombat* and full-motion-video curiosity *Night Trap*, in the first battle of the War Against Videogame Violence.



THE YEAR OF THE CD-ROM

ISSUE 119, June 1994 *INSIDE: Microcosm, Alone in the Dark 2*
Up through the mid-1990s, even as PC gaming phased into the first-person shooter era, you could still bank on at least two or three aeroplane-themed flight-sim CGW covers per annum. Within the pages of this issue, we boldly heralded 1994 as “The Year of the CD-ROM” and sounded the death knell for the floppy diskette. Early CD-era pioneers (circa 1992) saw the quantum leap in storage capacity as an opportunity to use/abuse full-motion video of Dana Plato and tiger puppets. “Don’t watch the game, play the movie!” enthused the ad for *Wing Commander III*. This was gonna take some getting used to.



WINDOWS TAKES OVER

ISSUE 134, September 1995 *INSIDE: The Dig, Multimedia Celebrity Poker*
(with Joe Piscopo)
Ten years after games for the IBM PC joined CGW’s rotation, the revolution was complete, and, as usual, the winner was Microsoft. By 1995 CGW was devoted all but exclusively to DOS- and Windows-based games. That was about to change, too, as the release of Windows 95 would spell doom for DOS; gamers need never touch an autoexec.bat file again. CGW didn’t necessarily recommend dumping DOS right away, and in a 50-page (!) feature devoted to the topic, told PC gamers how to survive the impending cataclysm.

1991-1999

THE NOTORIOUS NINETIES by Dr. Johnny L. Wilson



“Looking at the current state of the computer game industry is a lot like watching a videotape when the VCR is on ‘Pause.’” That’s what I said in my editorial for November of 1991 (CGW

#88). From today’s perspective, that reads pretty silly. With today’s DVDs, the reference to the VCR is anachronistic, but when I think back on all that happened in the 1990s, I have to question my sanity.

It was the decade when the long-promised switch from floppy disk to CD-ROM took place. That switch alone disabled the “Pause” button. Art assets increased from VGA to SVGA to the era of accelerated and enhanced graphics cards. CGW was there, covering Sierra’s first VGA game in the June 1990 issue (#72). Music assets were expanded, largely due to the proliferation of soundcards, combined with the efforts of people like George Alistair Sanger (“The Fat Man”) and Hollywood film composers to create game soundtracks while John Miles and others worked for a

soundcard standard. CGW was there, with the digitized version of *Swan Lake* represented in the *LOOM* cover (April 1990, #76) and our glowing words about Bob Siebenberg’s (of rock group Supertramp fame) music written for *Space Quest III* (August 1989, #62).

But all was not good. The CD-ROM revolution enabled an unholy alliance between Hollywood and the game industry. Instead of the “New Hollywood” envisioned by EA, 3DO, and Digital Chocolate founder Trip Hawkins where “the tail (interactive entertainment) would wag the dog (traditional linear entertainment), we entered the lame era of FMV (Full Motion Video), where companies crammed bad video segments onto those CDs in order to fill them up. As a result, the strength of the games—interaction—was sacrificed on what we called the altar of “Sillywood” (Silicon Valley meeting Hollywood). To be sure, there were some worthy products that used FMV. Access Software scored big with *Under a Killing Moon*, Origin (newly merged with EA) invested heavily in *Wing Commander IV*, and Sierra bet the bank on *Phantasmagoria* and *Gabriel Knight*

II: The Beast Within. CGW was there, as demonstrated by the werewolf cover for February 1996 (#139). In fact, CGW was there when its founder, Russell Sipe, appeared with a cameo in *Amazon: Guardians of Eden* from Access (September 1992 cover story).

It was also the age when the processor industry began carving off chunks of Moore’s Law. Originally, according to this accepted wisdom, processing power was supposed to double every two years. In the ‘90s, that accelerated with the Intel 386 becoming the 486 and giving way to generations of Pentium processors. This allowed the wave of 3D games to proliferate. Once the refuge of pure polygons, great-looking texture-mapped games like *Aces of the Pacific* (CGW was there in March 1992, #92) and the *Wing Commander* series (rated No. 1 by our readers throughout 1991) appeared. And once *Wolfenstein 3D* took off, could *Doom* (previewed in July 1993), *Betrayal at Krondor* (CGW was there on the cover of February 1993, #103), *Alone in the Dark* (previewed in #103), *Duke Nuke ‘em*, *Ultima Underworld*, and *Quake* (CGW



QUAKIN' WITH CHANGE

ISSUE: 143, June 1996 INSIDE: *Civilization II* review; *Gabriel Knight II: The Beast Within* named Game of the Year

By 1996, PC gaming was in a golden age, with one amazing title after another: *Crusader: No Remorse*, *Full Throttle*, *Command & Conquer*, *WarCraft II*, *Panzer General*, *TIE Fighter*. The amazing bounty was reflected in CGW's size (culminating with a 500-page issue in 1998), but this cover story on the now-forgotten *Dark Earth*, and our declaration that "3-D Is Here!" tells another story: CGW was having trouble keeping up with the times, as newfangled shooters like *Quake* had to fight for respect amidst the mag's traditional fare of simulations and war games.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN...

Take an interactive stroll through 25 years of CGW history—we've archived the covers (and 100 entire issues) from our 268-issue run at CGW.FileFront.com.

THE COLUMBINE FALLOUT

ISSUE: 179, June 1999 INSIDE: *Ultima IX: Ascension* preview; *Heroes of Might and Magic III* review

The tragic, horrific shooting at Columbine High School in April 1999 will no doubt go down as the most notorious act of violence for which videogaming became at least a partial scapegoat. Facing a hailstorm of mainstream media scrutiny and criticism, the game industry blinked and ducked for cover. CGW itself faced a barrage of criticism for its June cover, which featured Max Payne, in a leather jacket, firing his guns in a corridor—which to our horror was mistaken by some as a guy in a trench coat, firing in a school.

◀ The 1990s: We fragged to the music of Nirvana and memorized lines from *Reservoir Dogs*, *The Simpsons*, and *South Park*.

THE PROPHECY

ISSUE: 184, November 1999 INSIDE: *Black & White* preview; *System Shock 2* review

It would take a couple years before we'd understand just how eerily prophetic our November 1999 cover would be: *Halo* did indeed "change gaming forever"—just not the way we'd hoped. While consoles such as the NES and Sega Genesis had always managed to live harmoniously with PCs, it wasn't until the PS2 and Xbox that audiences started to converge—and games like *Halo* that were once considered pure PC were migrating to cheaper and increasingly capable consoles, causing onlookers to declare again and again, "PC gaming is dead." If we come across as a little defensive now and then, behold the reason why.

"THE CD-ROM REVOLUTION ENABLED AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE BETWEEN HOLLYWOOD AND THE GAME INDUSTRY."

-JOHNNY WILSON

was there with the cover of July 1996, #144) be far behind?

We were there when the era of the "memory managers" gave way to Win-G and Direct X. One of our most controversial covers was September 1995 (#134) with its "Are DOS Games Dead?" headline. We had seen the future, and, considering the new title of this magazine, quite prophetically realized that future was Windows.

Some Personal Indulgence: When I'm asked what I most remember about CGW, I have to answer with both positive and negative feelings. On the negative side, I remember the death threats after our *Seal Team* cover (#106) and the online attacks by those who accused me of being "in bed" with MicroProse and Origin (at the same time that I was losing friendships at both places because they thought I was biased against them).

On the positive side, I was able to bask in the reflected glory of a whole generation of visionaries who birthed a new entertainment medium. I feel great about that. I didn't deserve the recognition, but I was the lucky guy who was a visible symbol of what the public would think and how

the press would handle something. I might have been the Walter Cronkite of the industry—the elder observer interpreting the fast-paced events for a wide range of readers, a psychographic rather than a demographic, as I always tried to share it with my bosses.

Journalistically, I feel positive about the way we called 'em as we saw 'em. Origin hated me for breaking the EA/Origin Systems merger on the Prodigy network before even Bloomberg could get the news. The executives at Ziff Davis were furious at me for the "*Wing Commander IV: Is It Worth \$12 Million?*" story, but I still thought it was a valid question. Some EA executives still accuse me of reading the budget upside-down off of Lord British's desk. They tried to say we were lying. I did read that budget upside-down as someone slowly turned the pages in a binder, but that person wasn't Lord British. It was exacerbated when I revealed the problems with a planned 3D version of *Ultima* (*Ultima: Ascension*) and we proclaimed *Ultima Online* to be the Coaster of the Year. I proudly became the jwilson slime in *UO*, my only regret the fact that they claimed I "dulled" the

blades of my attackers.

Finally, I have a confession to make. When I left CGW to prepare for my role as group publisher of magazines at Wizards of the Coast, Jeff Green wrote a column about my departure (CGW #184). I cried when I read it, and I still open it up every so often. I still cry when I read it. I guess it's a good thing that ZD is changing the name of *Computer Gaming World*. You cannot return to an institution and expect it to be the same as when you left it. You can't go home again. Now, when I see the magazine on the newsstand, I won't have to pretend that it doesn't sadden me that I am no longer part of it.



Johnny Wilson is currently the executive vice president for content and community for www.manifestogames.com, a source for community, game information, and mainstream computer games.

If it's not in retail, it's probably available at www.manifestogames.com. Read more reminiscence from Johnny at CGW.1UP.com.



A NEW HOPE

ISSUE: 190, May 2000 **INSIDE:** Online flight sim roundup; *Icewind Dale* preview
 The first great game of the 21st century was more than just a great game. It was a genuine phenomenon, a milestone that would go on to become the biggest-selling game of all time. Will Wright and his Maxis team had already proven themselves as great designers with the *SimCity* series, but with *The Sims* they propelled themselves, and PC gaming, into another dimension. What everyone thought would be nothing more than an oddball little *SimCity* spin-off became one of the rare videogames to appeal to people of all ages, genders, nationalities, whatever. Six years later, *The Sims'* innovation and impact has yet to be matched.

REGULAR

WAR OF THE WORLDS

ISSUE: 208, November 2001 **INSIDE:** *Anarchy Online* review; *Ghost Recon* preview
 Massively multiplayer online roleplaying: *Meridian 59* pioneered it; *Ultima Online* popularized it; *EverQuest* redefined it; and *World of Warcraft* refined it, achieving 7 million subscribers and generating nearly \$1 billion a year in revenue ("one of the most lucrative entertainment media properties of any kind," according to the *New York Times*). Of course, back in 2001 when we first peeked at what Blizzard had in store (and when Taurens, Orcs, and humans were all getting along smashingly), we had no idea how huge the *World* would become. Must have been one hell of a greed roll.

THE FALSE PROPHECY

ISSUE: 219, October 2002 **INSIDE:** *Battlefield 1942* preview; *Magic: The Gathering Online* review

One year after the first *World of Warcraft* cover, but still two years before that game would be released, *CGW* and the rest of the gaming media were still waiting for that first big MMO smash hit and pontificating about what it might be. It seemed quite reasonable to assume that *The Sims Online* would be that hit. But even in our enthusiastic cover story, we had questions: "Will gamers line up for an online game in which killing dragons and aliens is not the main goal?" we asked. The answer turned out to be a resounding no.

SUPER UNLEADED



HOW IT WAS FOR ME by George Jones



No matter what competitive magazine I've worked for or will work for, I'll always have a soft spot in my heart for *CGW*. I read the magazine as a kid and was lucky enough that my first job as a gaming journalist was at *Computer Gaming World*, back in 1994.

What a time of change and excitement my first two and a half years at *CGW* were. DOS-based gaming went out, Windows-based gaming came in. Flight sims started to vanish, action games leapt to the screen thanks to Windows 95. Bye-bye 2D gaming, hello 3D cards and first-person shooters. You know, given how dominant a role Microsoft Windows has played in shaping the sphere of PC gaming, maybe it's appropriate that *Computer Gaming World* become the official gaming magazine for Windows. Although that sure is a mouthful.

I still count the day when Lee Uniacke, the then-publisher of *Computer Gaming World*, approached me to gauge my interest in leaving the dot-com goldmine at CNET.com and come back to the magazine as editor-in-chief as one

of the greatest moments in my life. But wow, talk about rugged transitions. *CGW* was in the middle of making a hard double-shift. Into a world where the Internet was absolutely dominant in terms of game previews and reviews, thereby reducing the importance and relevance of print magazines. Into a world where flight sims and war games—two key *CGW* staples—were dying, dying, dead. It was a weird time to be running a magazine, that's for sure. I'll never forget the angry letters I got from readers blaming me for making the magazine shrink from 200-plus (and sometimes 300-plus) pages to a more "normal" size. But the good times were plentiful. In my entire career, I don't think I've ever laughed as loudly on a daily basis. How funny was it? The phrase "fecal donut" was effectively used numerous times as a joke. I know what you're thinking, "That's not funny." And I'm here to tell you that you're wrong. The rest, as you know, is history. I look back on those days and wonder exactly how *CGW* won all those Pulitzer

Prizes and "Most Influential Magazine" awards and appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and got invited to the White House and Red Square in the same month. And then I chuckle to myself, because I know exactly how. And now I'm going to share it with you: For the first time ever, I present *CGW's* "secret recipe" for success.

1. Never be afraid to treat computer games on the same level as movies or music.
2. Never be ashamed to admit to loving computer games publicly. Even if the admission of such a desire will get your ass kicked.
3. No game is above or beneath you.
4. Never assume that one form of gaming will last forever.
5. The words "fecal" and "donut" should probably never be used in the same context. Even if it is funny.



4 The 2000s: As war and terrorism seem to pull the outside world apart, online gaming unites us in ways we never imagined possible.

NEWELL'S FOLLY

ISSUE: 227, June 2003 INSIDE: *GTA: Vice City* preview; *Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels* preview

You can only hear that a platform is doomed a couple hundred times before it starts to wear you down—and *Half-Life 2* came exactly when we needed it. And at a time when shelf space for PC games was dwindling, Steam proved that games can be sold without the help of a fancy box or a point-of-purchase display. Today, Steam is a small fortress filled with independent projects that would otherwise have perished were it not for the boxless scheme. If consoles house the Jerry Bruckheimer productions, consider this the art-house scene.

WORLD WIDE WARFARE

ISSUE: 240, July 2004 INSIDE: *Painkiller* review; Tom vs. Bruce vs. *World of Warcraft*

By 2004 and the announcement of EA's *Battlefield 2*, the proliferation of broadband and the sheer horsepower of modern gaming PCs meant that online gaming could be more graphically intense, and realistic, than ever before. It also meant that a game's "multiplayer component" was no longer just a secondary consideration or an afterthought. It was, in more and more cases, the primary component, and it was getting more sophisticated than ever. We were all online now, and we wanted to play our games that way, too.

THE END IS THE BEGINNING

ISSUE: 263, June 2006 INSIDE: *Medieval II: Total War* preview; *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* viewpoint

The curtain's closing on *Computer Gaming World*, but it's not closing on computer gaming. Great things are coming, we guarantee it: Look no further than *Spore*, Will Wright's upcoming omnigame of strategy, simulation, community connection, and xenoevolution. And we suppose evolution is as apt a way as any to end our trek through CGW history, since we're not really going away—we're just adapting. Come back around next month when we're reborn as *Game for Windows: The Official Magazine*. Change is good. We'd love for all of you to be a part of it.



THE DARK TOWER VII

2006

A NEW BEGINNING by Jeff Green

True confession time: I never wanted to be editor-in-chief of this here magazine. By 2001, I had been at *Computer Gaming World* for five years, and I was really happy with my job. Happier

than I'd ever been at any job, in fact. I had been hired by Johnny in 1996, served under both him and George, and, after watching those guys, felt that I'd gone as high up the ladder as I needed to go.

Yeah, sure, I could see the perks of being the boss. The riches. The power. The babes. But I also saw all the grief those guys went through—the political BS, the late nights, the headaches—and my first reaction, when offered the promotion in 2001, was "thanks but no thanks." I was happy playing my games, writing my Greenspeak articles, and going home with my sanity intact. Of course, only a complete moron turns down the opportunity to run a national magazine, and fortunately

I am only a partial moron. So, ultimately, I accepted the

promotion, and, five years later, I'm sure glad I did.

Not that it's been a piece of cake. If George Jones thought it was rough during his tenure, I'd humbly ask him to walk in my orthopedic shoes for awhile. Because, if anything, it's only gotten tougher as the decade has gone on, as print magazines have continued to struggle for relevance in the Internet Age and as the PC-gaming market has continued to lose mind-share and shelf space to the console world. I've had to watch as the magazine has shrunk down literally hundreds of pages in size, and as former PC-only game developers have migrated over to the consoles.

On the other hand, I have also presided during the rise of humongous franchises like *The Sims*, the *Battlefield* games, *Half-Life*, and, of course, *World of Warcraft*, arguably the biggest and most important game—on any platform—of the new century so far. So it will simply not do to whine. It has been and continues to be an amazing time to be a PC gamer. And if you don't see it, then I submit that you need to open your eyes.

As for my five years running this place, I see things I'm both proud of and regret. I'm proud of the changes we tried, the chances we took, whether they worked out or not. I'm proud of the ambition and hard work of my staff, who, rather than rest on CGW's longstanding reputation for integrity and commitment—earned the hard way by all the CGW editors and artists before us—never took the easy way out, never compromised, and, most importantly, never stopped asking the hard questions, either of ourselves or of the gaming industry in general.

So it's onward to the future. CGW is outta here. But if you listen closely, I promise, you'll hear the beating heart of *Computer Gaming World*—still alive and kicking—in every page, every sentence and word of the new magazine. We'll see you next month! /



Jeff Green, an editor with CGW for 10 years, once had the modem and router beat for a now defunct Macintosh magazine. He couldn't be happier to be helping Games for Windows: The Official Magazine, coming to you in just 30 days.

15
YEARS OF
GAMING
P. 74

5:23 AM

CGW's notes on

\$4.99

Alan Wake

12:23 PM

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A QUICK STUDY GUIDE TO ALAN WAKE

- Alan Wake is a free-roaming "psychological action thriller" set across a large swath of the United States' Pacific Northwest.
- Remedy Entertainment, an independent developer best known for the Max Payne series, is developing Alan Wake at its studio in Helsinki, Finland. Published by Microsoft, the game has no firm release date. Sometime in 2007 is probably a good guess.
- Wake is the main character in an ensemble cast, many of whom will be playable in story missions.
- Modeled after a single season of a television show, the game's story will unfold over several smaller story arcs, which will be organized into missions.
- Light plays a crucial role in both puzzles and combat. Wake and cast use various light sources to weaken supernatural enemies and conventional weapons to finish them off.
- Wake is an insomniac. His world becomes more surreal and twisted as the game progresses.



CHAPTER 1: WELCOME TO BRIGHT FALLS

I've checked into a sleep clinic somewhere in the boonies of Washington state with a two-pronged plan of attack: 1) Get some nice, wholesome, dreaming-about-angels-and-puppy-dogs sleep. 2) Coast for a while on my publisher's generous advance. So far, only number two is working out.

The Pacific Northwest is a beautiful place to lose your mind. Cold diamond rivers carve their way through valleys embossed with evergreens and jagged mountain peaks. In the morning, the sun rises over the Pacific Ocean, a consolation prize for another sleepless night. There's a little picture-postcard town near the coast called Bright Falls. Maybe it's just my inner city slicker (or the chronic hallucinations of an insomniac), but the locals seem to act a bit strange around me. I spend my days enjoying the fresh air and wilderness. My nights.... My nights are something else. I know this sounds like the farfetched premise of a new A. Wake best seller, but at night, when the sun sets over the Cascade mountain range, I find myself in situations ripped from the pages of my own writing.

CHAPTER 2: THE HITCHHIKER

It's a leisurely drive around the corkscrew interstate that leads to my place, the quaint hillside cabin I temporarily call home. I'm here to learn how to sleep, so I've got nothing better to do than enjoy the peace and quiet of my drive. I should be clearing my mind and taking in the scenery. Instead, I pick up a hitchhiker. Driving along a lonely stretch of highway, trees flicker past like the frames of an old movie. He appears around the bend, a bad edit on scratchy film. I know I shouldn't stop, but I can't resist.

"First taker I've had all night," he says, unzipping his raincoat to settle into the passenger seat, knapsack between his knees.

"I guess I look a little rough." He does. But then again, so do I.

Now, I'm not a self-promoter, and I don't talk shop—definitely not with some random stranger picked up on the side of the highway—but here and now, with this guy, I feel compelled to do so.

"Funny thing...I'm a writer, and I'm working on a story about—of all things—a writer." I give the guy a friendly once-over, really just searching for some signal that I haven't picked up a psychopath. "After a tragic loss, the writer goes to live in a secluded cabin someplace out in the Pacific Northwest. He writes a horror story there, a story about shadowy specters that disguise themselves as men. Unimaginable things." Now the guy thinks I'm the psychopath. "When he leaves the cabin, he discovers that his world has turned into the nightmare he's just written." My passenger keeps quiet, staring out into the distance. "The story began with the writer picking up a hitchhiker on the way to his cabin...."

"Let me guess." A wry smile cracks across the stranger's face. "The hitchhiker's the killer."

"Actually, the hitchhiker's the one who gets killed."

From around the bend, I see it: An explosion of glass and steel, the dead chassis of an overturned car, fresh blood on the road. There's been an accident. Somebody's hurt. I leave the car—and the hitchhiker—on the highway and rush over to the debris. A smashed jeep, almost identical to mine, lies silent on its doors, its bloodied driver ejected onto the pavement. I don't have a problem with the gory details of my own imagination, but the

AT NIGHT, I FIND MYSELF IN SITUATIONS RIPPED FROM THE PAGES OF MY OWN WRITING.



real thing is overwhelming. I'm woozy as I approach the man, the body. I enter his orbit in slow motion, afraid, somehow, for my own life. Hovering over his torn face, I look into his glassy, mirror eyes. The dead man on the street is me.

Here comes the twist. I know—I wrote it: The massive rumble of a semi approaches at rocket speed, horn howling. I turn my attention back across the street to see what I know is about to happen: The semi slams into my jeep with the force of a junkyard compactor, crushing everything in it, hitchhiker included.

CHAPTER 3: OFF TO SEE THE WIZARD

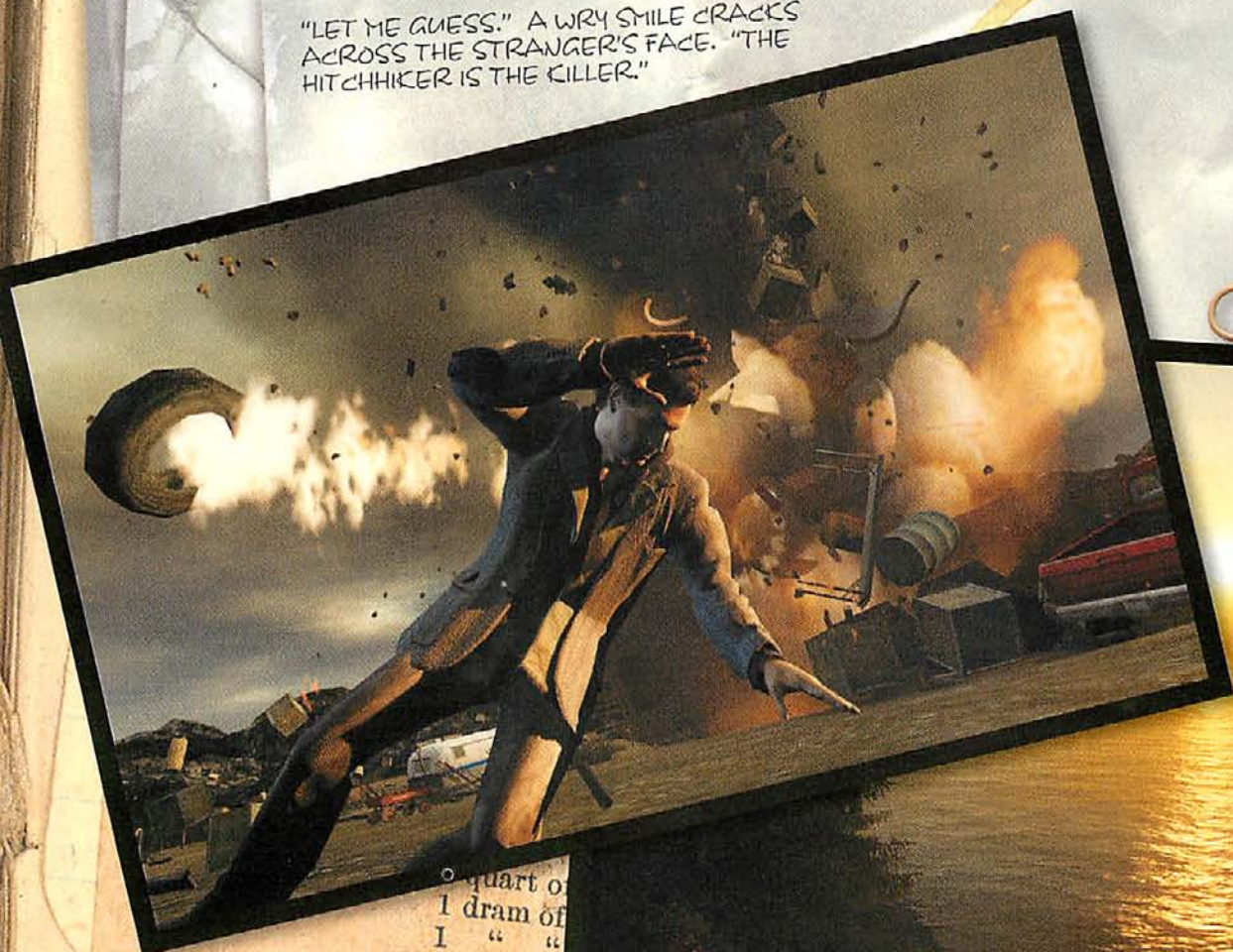
Had I finally slept? How long was I out? In my half-crazed condition, I'm used to hallucinatory happenings. This, however, is too much. Where's the dead man? Where's the highway? Where are the mountains and the rivers, the town of Bright Falls? As a storyteller, I worship at the altar of believability, but I'm afraid, dear reader, that I'm about to murder your suspension of disbelief. Like Dorothy, magically transported to the land of Oz, I've been snatched from the rural Northwest and dropped into Finland—and not a twister in sight.

I walk down the cobblestone streets of Helsinki, taking in the city's vast supply of pretty blondes in sensible shoes. Through old cafes and ultramodern furniture galleries, I wander with a mysterious purpose, pulled like a moth toward an unfamiliar flame. Across lakes and over bridges, down streets alternating between the bland cube tenements of the city's past and the high-tech, abstract office parks of its present, I arrive, finally, at my destination. The sign on the front of the building says Remedy Entertainment, but to me it's the Emerald City, and I've come to see the Wizard.

I press the buzzer. A man who introduces himself as "Sam Lake, head writer" greets me, flanked by small army of quiet followers. This place and these people are strangely familiar. "Welcome, Alan." Sam escorts me into the complex and raises his arms theatrically. "This is where we created you, created your game: *Alan Wake*."

Sure—why not? Considering the circumstances, the idea that my life exists entirely on the shiny surface of a DVD seems as believable as anything. My insomnia-induced hallucinations are usually out to kill me. This I can handle. Besides, how often do you get the chance to sit down and have a chat with God? >>

"LET ME GUESS." A WRY SMILE CRACKS ACROSS THE STRANGER'S FACE. "THE HITCHHIKER IS THE KILLER."



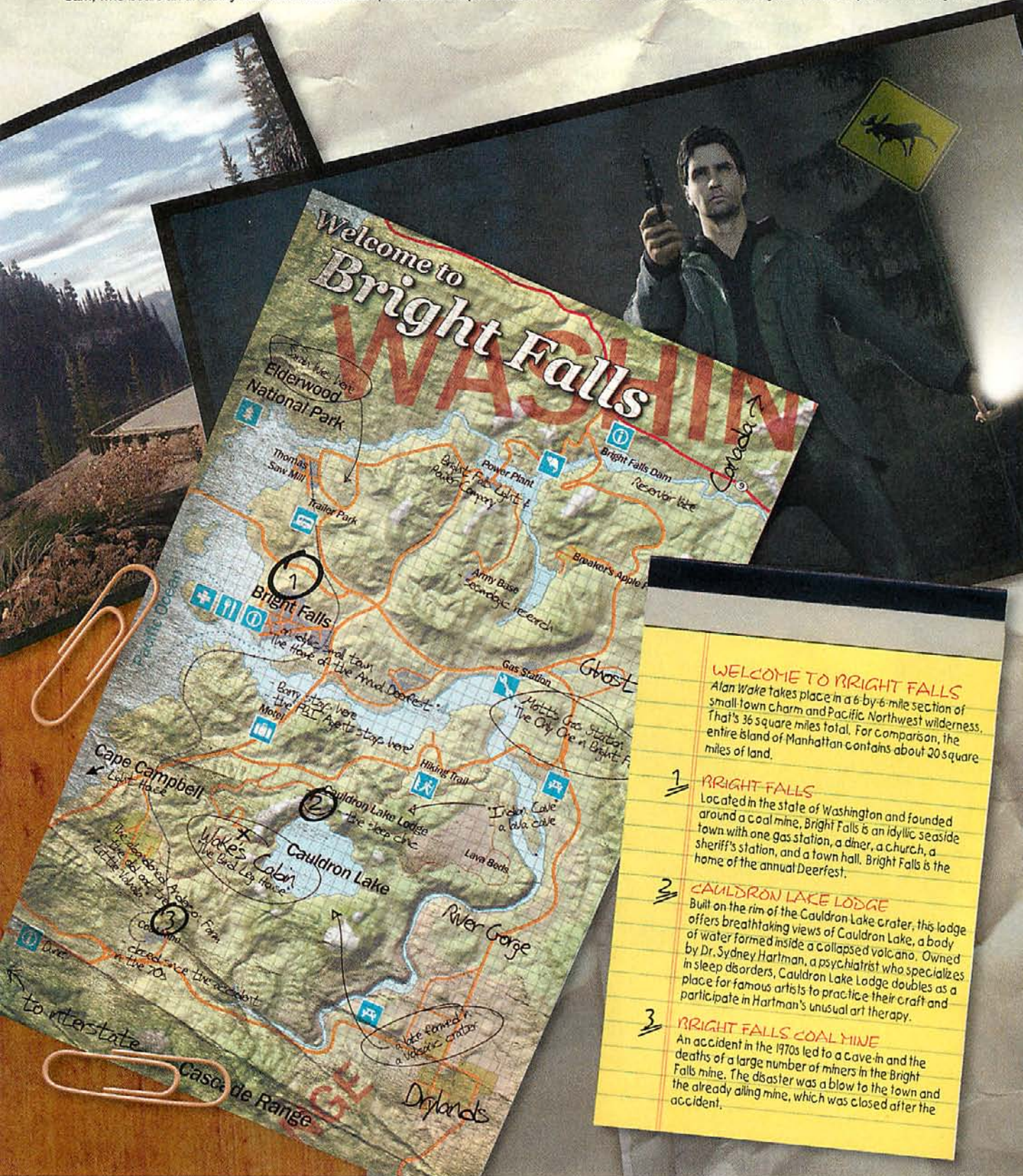
o quart of
1 dram of
1 " "
2 " "
Sufficient

C. H. R., Binghamton, N. Y.:—Cut glass should be washed in section
it has

CHAPTER 4: ENTER ALICE

Fun fact: God owns a conference table and several comfortable chairs. I take my place facing an enormous, wall-size video screen. Some people spend a lifetime traveling, making friends, and reading books, all in search of personal essence and a sense of self. Me, I just watch a multimedia presentation on the subject. The screen comes to life, projecting a bird's-eye view of the mountain range outside Bright Falls. I'm there, on a mountaintop looking out over the land as the camera circles. Like in a car commercial.

Sam, who bears an uncanny resemblance to a man pictured in the poster above his head—someone named Max Payne—stands up to narrate my life.



WELCOME TO BRIGHT FALLS

Alan Wake takes place in a 6-by-6-mile section of small-town charm and Pacific Northwest wilderness. That's 36 square miles total. For comparison, the entire island of Manhattan contains about 20 square miles of land.

1 BRIGHT FALLS

Located in the state of Washington and founded around a coal mine, Bright Falls is an idyllic seaside town with one gas station, a diner, a church, a sheriff's station, and a town hall. Bright Falls is the home of the annual Deerfest.

2 CAULDRON LAKE LODGE

Built on the rim of the Cauldron Lake crater, this lodge offers breathtaking views of Cauldron Lake, a body of water formed inside a collapsed volcano. Owned by Dr. Sydney Hartman, a psychiatrist who specializes in sleep disorders, Cauldron Lake Lodge doubles as a place for famous artists to practice their craft and participate in Hartman's unusual art therapy.

3 BRIGHT FALLS COAL MINE

An accident in the 1970s led to a cave-in and the deaths of a large number of miners in the Bright Falls mine. The disaster was a blow to the town and the already ailing mine, which was closed after the accident.



"After Alan met his girlfriend, Alice, he began to have strange dreams," Sam speaks as though my life were the plot of a daytime drama. "With those dreams as material, his first book—a psychological thriller—practically wrote itself, almost as if Wake was not in control of the process. The book was a best seller. Then Alice vanished without a trace. The events surrounding her disappearance were chillingly mirrored by Wake's book. Wake was devastated. He could no longer write and began suffering from a severe case of insomnia."

It's nice to have the painful details of your life reduced to bullets in a PowerPoint presentation. This isn't how I wanted to introduce you to Alice, but there she is, lurking just under the surface of everything. I just can't seem to dig her up.

"Wake travels to a private sleep clinic to get help," he continues. "There, he begins to see glimpses of Alice. The line between dreams and reality blurs as Wake spirals deeper and deeper into this nightmare. Dark secrets lurk under the surface of the idyllic small town of Bright Falls."

CHAPTER 5: THE MANIACS BEHIND THE CURTAIN

If you had a chance to sit down and talk to the authors of your life, what would you ask them? I'm in that situation. Seated around a mundane conference table, the 30 or so individuals that constitute Remedy Entertainment look like typical, quiet Finns. On closer inspection, however, they all seem a little off. I start with the basics:

"What, exactly, am I?" I pose the question to no one in particular.

"Alan Wake is a psychological action thriller," Sam speaks, joined by a cult of call-and-response agreement from the team: "Psychological thriller! A thriller, yes, a psychological action thriller...." One of those chanting, a bearded 3D artist on my right, appears to be frantically drawing pentagrams on his Wacom tablet.

"So, I'm in a horror story—a game like one of my books?" The Remedy hive mind emits a collective hiss. A few especially zealous team members spit on the floor.

"To many people, horror means gore and endless scares for their own sake," Sam's musical Finnish vowels sing over the gasps of his team ("No horror! Thriller! Psychological thriller!"). "We are definitely not doing that."

"But it's supposed to be scary, right? I mean, it scares the s*** out of me all the...." A wiry programmer comes uncorked. He leaps onto the table, scurrying on his hands and knees toward me with astounding speed, swiping at my face with a can of Battery energy drink (a Remedy favorite, apparently). Sam removes a whistle from his pocket and furiously blows. The programmer slinks back to his seat.

"Yes, we are building a very strong atmosphere. We're going to be scaring the player—a lot, but the idea is to have a good story behind it all—a mystery to be solved." A man who, up until this point, has been seated quietly next to me scribbling in his notebook slides a business card across the table (Remedy Entertainment: Petri Järvillehto, creative director). I flip the card over to read his note: "Duck, stupid!"

An assassin among the hive stands, shotgun in the crux of his shoulder. "I preferred army-jacket Alan Wake, not this pretentious, bohemian Bono look-alike!" I slide down my chair and under the conference table, narrowly avoiding the blast. >>

"We want to use the player's imagination to our advantage by not necessarily showing everything closely," says Sam, directing my attention back to the hive. "A scary monster, once you've seen it 10 times, isn't scary anymore. That's the idea—to keep some of it hidden and keep up the mystery."

"How do you manage to create fear when I can go anywhere and do anything I want? Bright Falls isn't a haunted house. I can easily wander off the tracks...." Petri Järvielto, the business card guy, turns in his chair.

"Yes, it's a free-roaming game and, with the exception of time-sensitive missions, the player is free to go anywhere he wants," says Petri. "But we're still in control."

CHAPTER 6: LAND OF THE FREE, HOME OF THE AFRAID

The lights in the conference room fade once again and the enormous screen opens its eye on my Pacific Northwest world. My doppelganger is at a gas station, staring directly into the camera, completely motionless. Petri stands up from his chair and strolls behind me, placing his hands on my shoulders.

"In your world, the weather and time of day are completely dynamic, but we keep control." He leans into my view, puffs out his cheeks out like a blowfish, and blows a gust of hot, wet breath into my face.

"For example," he kicks his heels together and spins around to the screen, "as you head to the top of a mountain, the sky becomes overcast. Clouds roll in. When you finally reach the peak, you're in a full-blown storm. We can use the world to create suspense and drama." Onscreen, doppelganger Alan is in trouble. The weather turns from bad to worse as a tornado appears, sucking up anything not nailed to the ground. Alan runs toward the camera. Behind him, the twister picks up a rusted-out truck and flings it into the air. It crashes and explodes on the asphalt. Flaming tires bounce back to the earth. The storm vanishes as quickly as it came.

"You say the game is an open world," I break the silence. "But it doesn't seem like you want me, or the player, to feel free." With precise comic timing, the conference table begins to rumble. Something grabs my leg. I pull away and glimpse the Creature crawling out.

"Games journalist! Games journalist!" The Remedy hive mind shrieks and flails about. Some team members attempt to run but make it only as far as the power cords on their laptops will allow. The Creature stands at the head of the table. He's morbidly obese in an ill-fitting Pac-Man T-shirt and a red military beret, a small piece of paper hanging from the headband that reads "PRESS." Having finished chewing the frayed remains of a pencil, he speaks.

"It seems that you are using the open world to create a different effect than your contemporaries." A smell fills the room: Rico's nacho cheese, mixed with the aroma of some old, dusty couch. "It seems that, instead of using open-world design to convey a sense of freedom—as in, say, *Grand Theft Auto—Alan Wake* uses it to create a feeling of safety and familiarity. You will use this familiarity against the player, pulling the rug out from underneath them by turning the places they've come to know as safe into surreal nightmares."

Petri, the only hive member in the room willing to look the creature in the eye, answers: "Yes. The player thinks, 'I've spent three hours playing the game in this location, but now it's dark, it's raining, and my vision is limited. I've been here, but now it's a completely different scenario.'"

"WE'RE GOING TO BE SCARING THE PLAYER—A LOT, BUT THE IDEA IS TO HAVE A GOOD STORY BEHIND IT ALL—A MYSTERY TO BE SOLVED."

—SAM LACE, HEAD WRITER, REMEDY STUDIOS



CHAPTER 7: Q&A WITH THE CREATURE

As the Creature moves across the conference room, hive members part like the Red Sea. He takes a newly vacated seat, slumping into the chair as if completely exhausted, belly hanging over the elastic of his sweat pants. "So, Petri and Sam... do you guys have time for a little Q&A?"

Petri: Well, I'm quite busy now. Can we do this later, on the phone, perhaps?

The Creature: I'll make it quick: With *Alan Wake*, are you going for a movie feel or a book feel?

Sam: The story of the game is modeled after one season of a TV series with multiple episodes, cliffhanger endings, and an ensemble cast of characters around Wake himself. Each episode is divided into missions for the player to complete.

The Creature: What is it about the TV-series format that attracts you?

Sam: We were thinking of models that might better fit a game. A season of a TV series feels very much like a perfect match. Its shorter, episodic nature keeps the player hooked.

The Creature: Who are the other playable characters?

Petri: We're not going to talk about the supporting cast.

The Creature: But you can play as other characters, and the game is called *Alan Wake*. Are you trying to trick me?

Petri: One of the things with using the TV-series format is that it indirectly means the ensemble cast is something we rely heavily on. You have Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and then you have this large supporting cast, but it's still all about the lead character. It's a similar setup with *Wake*.

Sam: Our goal is to make as much of the story playable as possible. You won't be watching long cut-scenes.

The Creature: Will daytime be a reprieve from the scary stuff at night?

Sam: Fear and suspense in a game work much better if they are properly paced. If we are trying to keep the player afraid all of the time, they become numb. We have these daytime periods where everything feels quite nice and safe, and then there are these nighttime periods that are really hectic and scary.

The Creature: So what's so scary? Where's the action? Didn't you guys make *Max Payne*?

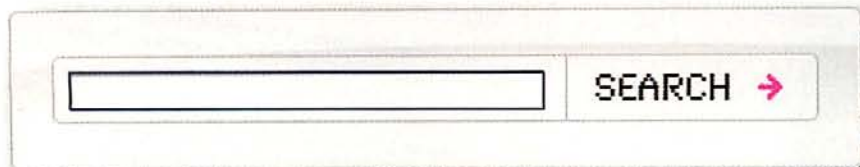


CHAPTER 8: ON THE ROAD AGAIN

The pavement feels cold on my face. I'm surrounded by debris from the crash, glass everywhere. Somehow, I'm completely unhurt. It's dark. In the right pocket of my jacket is a flashlight, in the left a revolver. I switch on the light and palm the gun. On top of a hill, just a few hundred yards from the road, I can see my cabin, a lantern swinging on the porch. I huff it up the path, my breath steaming as I race. It feels like a matter of life or death. As I reach a streetlight—a small comfort—it explodes, snuffed out. I pick up the pace, continuing on. I make my way around the bending path toward the next light, hearing nothing but the crunch of shoes on gravel. The next light explodes, as does the next, just as I reach them. The trees at the top of the path open onto a field. As the cabin and the lantern, warmth and safety, get larger and larger in my view, relief creeps in. Of course, that light goes out, too. I hear him behind me, out in the field. I can make out, in the pale light of the moon, the outline of his form. The hitchhiker stands before me, his body in a state of perpetual undulation, flesh and fabric melded into one indistinguishable ether. He is a walking shadow, now only yards away.

I aim the revolver and pull the trigger. The sound is big and brutal, but the shadowy hitchhiker presses on. I squeeze again—a body shot I'm certain, but the result is the same. I still can't quite see. I swing the beam of my flashlight toward him. Trapped in its light, the shadow freezes. I have him pinned. Letting loose a quick succession of bullets, I dissipate the black cloud.

Was it even here? Was I even here? In Finland or Washington state, driving down an infinite, twisting highway? At the end of the road there is a bed, a bed covered in white sheets and pillows, and in that bed is Alice—warm Alice. That's where I lie down to sleep. /



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VIEWPOINT

BEYOND
REVIEWS

ISSUE 268

READ THIS FIRST! THE CGW REVIEWS SECTION IS NO MORE. HERE'S HOW VIEWPOINT IS DIFFERENT:



NO MORE REVIEWS

Mindful of the lateness of magazine reviews, we don't print our reviews in the magazine anymore. Instead, we publish our reviews online the day the games come out—you can find them online at <http://CGW.1UP.com>.



MULTIPLE SCORES

Yes, we still have scores! We give every game a score when we first review it online (just look for the 1UP Network score—that's us!). For additional perspective and points of comparison, we also list the scores that other websites and outlets gave each game.



BROADER ANALYSIS

These articles are meant to give you the bigger picture: a summary of our original online review, community and media reaction to the game, and a look at patches and updates since a game's original release. In short: It's everything you need to know.



THIS IS NOT A REVIEWS SECTION

The astute among you have probably noticed a bit of tinkering going on with the Viewpoint section over the past several issues—namely, the addition of a "Reality Check" box on each featured game noting review scores given to the product in question by major gaming opinion sites.

For those of you who want scores, that's what the 1UP Network number exists for. 1UP's PC reviews—all scribed by the very same snappy writers whose witticisms you're about to read—form the baseline for what you see in this section each month. We include those other guys' scores as a frame of reference for readers curious about some of the other points of view we occasionally refer to—a shocking inclusion for a section called Viewpoint, we know.

OK, so the headline on this page isn't completely true—but we don't want you to look at Viewpoint as the typical reviews section that you see in every other magazine (hence the name change). Yes, you can find opinions on games now available in stores. Yes, we attempt to provide relatively timely coverage of games you might be interested in playing. Beyond that, we go a cut above the norm in our content thanks to all the elements spelled out in the handy FAQ below. Embrace the change—we definitely have.



EDITORS' CHOICE AWARD

CGW's reviews don't concern themselves with scored evaluations; you can find those at 1UP.com well before the magazine arrives. Our Editors' Choice emblem signifies the best in PC gaming.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VIEWPOINT

So do you still review games?

YES! The CGW team posts its reviews online as the games hit store shelves. Read them at CGW.1UP.com.

What's 1UP.com?

Computer Gaming World is just one part of the larger 1UP Network (www.1UP.com). Visit us there at CGW.1UP.com.

How do I know if I should buy the game?

Read the Viewpoint article and check the scores in the box to see what we originally scored the game and how others rated it.

If you still can't decide, read our in-depth review online at CGW.1UP.com.

It's a game's marketing that has convinced us to review it. The review exclusively looks at the game of which a player can make during a mission, but this time out, you cannot reach maximum stars when ending the game. "Sneaking" is a game session means restoring the camera location from square meters back on. Considering how challenging it gets later on to gain simple access to, it's, etc. the other scores, the low level of each the device and the PC case. Other than that, you really can't miss with Blood Money. Little bit of course, you have to be someone else. / Patrick Gately

CGW	VERDICT
Kiosk	
REALITY CHECK	
1UP NETWORK	8/10
IGN	8.5
GAME DIV	8.5
USA	8/10

INSIDE



American McGee Presents Bad Day L.A.

More like American McGee Presents My Backed-Up Toilet.



Wings of Power II: WWII Fighters

One of the best flight simulators...ever!



Tom vs. Bruce: Dominions 3: The Awakening

Hopefully less confusing than Dominions II.

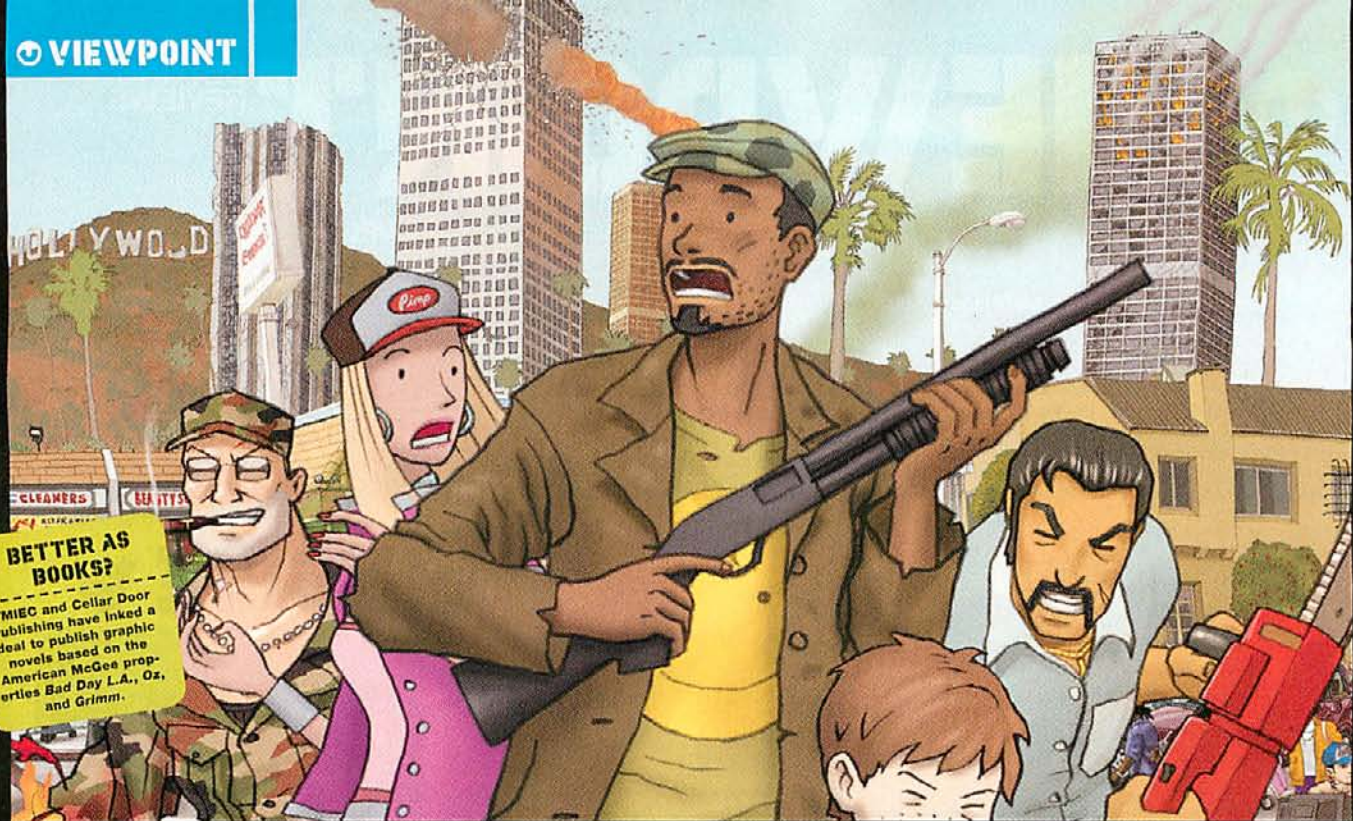
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AMERICAN MCGEE PRESENTS BAD DAY L.A.

OK, who forgot to flush?

PUBLISHER: Aspyr DEVELOPER: Enlight Software GENRE: Action AVAILABILITY: Retail Box ESRB RATING: Mature
REQUIRED: 1.6GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 2GB hard drive space RECOMMENDED: 2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM MULTIPLAYER: None

LET'S SEE...THINGS I'D RATHER DO than play *Bad Day L.A.*.... Hmm.... Take a honey bath next to a fire ant nest? Make anagrams of the game title to get names for *D&D Arabian Adventures* characters (Al Yaddab, Ady Abdal)? Whistle the game's sunny theme song while pounding my head with a rubber mallet? Chug a gallon of pinto beans marinated in Crazy Mother Pucker's Liquid Lava and chase with Ex-Lax?

Like a skinny dip in hydrochloric acid, *Bad Day L.A.* strips you of your patience and gentility. It's the sort of game obviously targeted at an audience that could only exist in Loonyland, where *Dianetics* wins the Pulitzer and Uwe Boll sweeps Cannes. As shipwrecks go, this could've been a *Titanic*. Bereft of hype, I suppose we should be grateful it's more like watching a fishing dingy sink off the coast of Madagascar: Yo-yo dialogue out of an Ed Wood film, collision detection tantamount to rubbing magnets, and pointless cel shading that covers

everything like the skim off a two-day-old cappuccino. In its own scathing review, online site Amped IGO describes *Bad Day* as "a desperate stabbing pain in our sides." Well, yes, if you simply must be polite about it.

FEAR IN A HANDFUL OF JOKES

The idea for *Bad Day* apparently came to former id Software designer American McGee as he took a spin down Los Angeles' Sunset Boulevard. Spying a Homeland Security billboard on the virtues of biochemical terror readiness with the words "Are you prepared?" McGee's imagination lit up: How about a game that poked fun at America's propensity for scaring itself to death? Oh, what could have been—had someone with any *real* sense for comedic timing worked over the script and game mechanics.

Exacerbating the problem: *Bad Day* thinks it's genuinely funny, and I suppose it is, if "genuinely funny" is an *SNL* sketch with Horatio Sanz running around for 10 minutes yelling, "Hey, guys—

I farted!" Rambling about modern L.A. in third-person, you're Anthony Williams, a former Hollywood agent who's cynically traded his money gig for a shopping cart and champion breakfasts of "mud-butt" burritos. Dropping your drawers one morning to crap on a "backed-up" freeway (are you laughing yet?), you're interrupted by an airplane crashing into the nearby overpass. Out of the plane, barrels...and out of the barrels, what else? Mutant zombie gas! Grab a fire extinguisher, bandages, and tire iron—then your game choices consist of: spraying "infected" zombie-people with the extinguisher to "cure" them; optionally (and therapeutically) beating them to death with the tire iron; healing the wounded (if you can get them to stop scrambling like headless chickens); and resisting the temptation to commit suicide for kicks by running headlong into the arbitrary "keeps-ya-on-rails" walls of green fumes. Oh, and some signposts that happen to look exactly like squirrels give you "tips" on how not to make too much of an ass out of yourself.

From there, you're basically playing *Ghetto Raider* without the hot chick or anything like a good time. Terrorists pop in randomly behind barricades or chase you careening through the streets in the back of a truck (oh, boy—an arcade gun sequence!), snipers perch on rooftops and

LIKE A SKINNY DIP IN HYDROCHLORIC ACID, *BAD DAY L.A.* STRIPS YOU OF YOUR PATIENCE AND GENTILITY.



Games for Windows®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

Dear CGW Subscriber,

Hello! This is Jeff Green, the editor-in-chief of *Computer Gaming World* magazine, with an important message for you.

Thanks to the phenomenal success of games like *World of Warcraft* and *The Sims 2*, and the ever-increasing access to broadband Internet, PC gaming is in the middle of its biggest renaissance in years. In recognition of this, Microsoft recently made an extraordinary new commitment to PC gaming, rebranding the platform as "Games for Windows" as a way to give PC gaming the kind of first-class exposure and treatment that consoles like the Xbox and PlayStation 2 receive.

When we learned of Microsoft's new commitment, we decided that it was time for CGW to step up its game, too. We believed that the time was right for PC gaming to get its own official magazine. And that, with our unparalleled 25-year history, we were the right magazine for the job. We presented this idea to Microsoft—and it agreed. And so with Microsoft's relaunch of the PC gaming platform as "Games for Windows" comes CGW's relaunch as *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*. The gaming platform that you know and love is getting its own official magazine. The one you already subscribe to.

But let me reassure you about a few things. Because if you like CGW, I promise that you have nothing to worry about. We are, at root, the same magazine, with the same editors and artists, writing the same articles about PC gaming that we always have. All of your favorite columns and sections like "Tom vs. Bruce" and "Line of Attack" are still going to be around. We are still a hard-core PC gaming magazine for hardcore PC gamers like you. And despite that new "official" tag, we are not owned by Microsoft. Microsoft will never see what we write before we write it, nor will it have influence over the articles we publish. We have complete editorial independence. Everything in the magazine, including the game reviews, will be entirely our own. Microsoft chose CGW for this partnership most of all because it respected our editorial honesty. And I assure you that won't change.

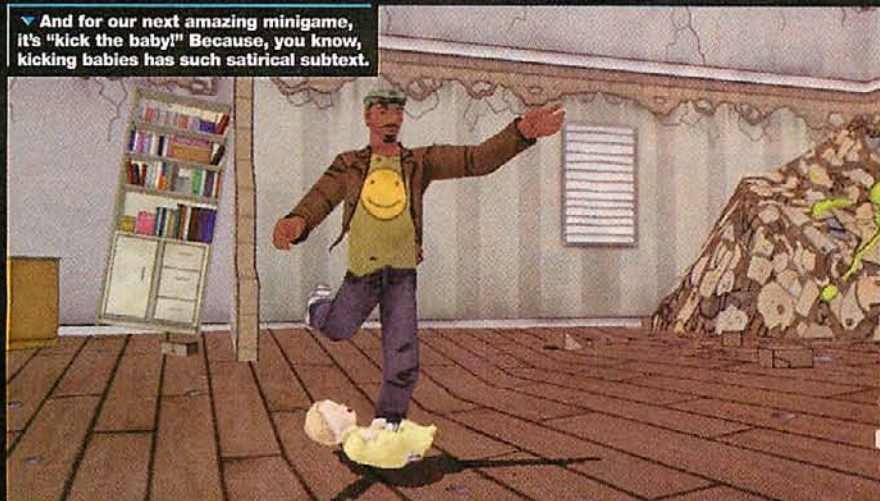
So with this issue we say goodbye to *Computer Gaming World* after a glorious 25 year run. In four weeks, you will have a brand new magazine coming your way: *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*. But I think you're going to recognize everything inside it. And like it just as much, if not more.

Sincerely,

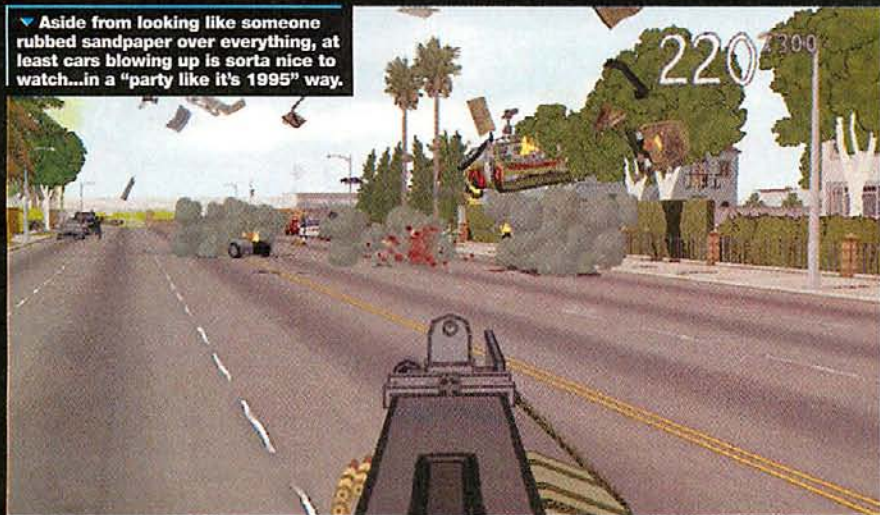
Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief, Computer Gaming World



▼ And for our next amazing minigame, it's "kick the baby!" Because, you know, kicking babies has such satirical subtext.



▼ Aside from looking like someone rubbed sandpaper over everything, at least cars blowing up is sorta nice to watch...in a "party like it's 1995" way.



◀ Honestly, people—can you imagine a better sidekick than this?

sting you with tracerless bullets like a merciless pack of invisible bees, and flammable citizens flail about begging for a dousing before running back into burning buildings for fiery seconds. Further on, you experience additional catastrophes like an earthquake, a meteor shower, and a run-in with a missile-packing street gang, but they're all bark and no bite—just ugly, scripted disaster sequences that allow the game's bad writers time they don't deserve to crack the sort of "jokes" you find scrawled in high school bathrooms.

CRAPTASTIC PLAY, HOORAY!

In another sad attempt at wittiness, *Bad Day* includes a "threat advisory" meter, which mimics the Homeland Security five-color system. Harm citizens (which makes "frownies" appear) and you're headed for yellow, orange, or red territory—at which point even the nonzombies swarm you like, well, zombies. Do a few good deeds (pop go the smilies) and you cruise back to green. Pretty much after the first level, you'll start paying as much attention to this as you do the real thing, because you move along fast enough that it simply doesn't matter.

We're supposed to care that NPCs use cover or exhibit changing emotional states based on what's going on around them, as if this were

somehow new or special. I guess that means we also shouldn't notice when the so-called "herd" technology ("where one looks, the others look; where one runs, the others run") devolves into a tangle of jittery, jerking bodies with the directional sensibilities of the bugs in *Centipede*. Along the way, you snag a few companions from the rabble, including a gardener, some blonde, a one-armed guy, and a puking kid. Yeah, they're about that memorable, too. They follow you whether you lose them or not (hello, magic teleporters!); they're along for the comedy shtick, which—as we've established—is funny like passing a kidney stone.

Bad Day's idea of social commentary would elude even the Farrelly brothers. / **Matt Peckham**

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK	1/10
GAMESPOT	3/10
GAMESPY	1.5/5
IGN	—

COMPUTER
GAMING
WORLD

VERDICT

A sloppy mess of a satire...and a sorely missed opportunity.



ANTHONY: Better be some morphine up in here. Man can't be shoot'n things without being high.

▲ You play as Anthony, self-respecting anything-plus-crack-addict.



PECKHAM: Hear injured people! Eat things people who are on fire! Help people or they are going to kick your ass! Remember: Don't be a dick!

▲ *Bad Day's* heavy on cut-scenes...most of which flow about as well as peanut butter through a cheese grater.

MADDEN NFL 07

Mad about Madden

www.easports.com



▲ The always effective "Charlie Brown and Lucy" play.



▲ What touchdown is complete without a rollicking end-zone celebration?

PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon GENRE: Sports ESRB RATING: Everyone REQUIRED: 800MHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 4GB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED: 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard, gamepad MULTIPLAYER: 2 players

▶ WHEN A GAME FRANCHISE BECOMES as big, as powerful, as *monopolistic* as *Madden*, it's inevitable—hardcore fans scrutinize it to death. And why not? EA Sports adheres to a thuglike philosophy: It cripples competing products by securing exclusive licensing deals, then releases a slightly tweaked annual update with just enough to pique the interest of veterans but not enough to be considered a wholesale revision...leaving the door wide open for the next high-revenue installment.

But such cynicism glosses over one very important fact: EA Sports generally delivers great products. Granted, occasional gameplay issues simply don't go away fast enough; however, the most vociferous complaints typically come from obsessive players who find and exploit subtle A.I. weaknesses year after year. Moreover, what one person perceives as a problem, another person may not.

THE WANTON DESIRES OF A FOOTBALL VIRGIN

The newbie sees things from an entirely different perspective. I know I did, coming to the PC football giant for the first time after a decade of chasing *NHL* pucks and *FIFA* soccer balls. With *Madden*, I didn't care so much about comparisons with the 2006 model—I merely wanted EA to utterly convince me I'd been embedded inside the world's top level of football. I wanted stadiums to mimic every nuance of their real-world counterparts and players to look

TV-perfect even while stretching for overthrown passes...or when viewed from three feet away. I wanted sensibly programmed A.I., total customizability, and a bevy of authentic plays and controls with which to dazzle my opposition. And for the most part, *Madden* complied.

However, it also delivered dull, truncated commentary that belied the game's budget-blowing 17-year pedigree. And its players seemed to glide across the turf as if running on an air-hockey table, and then perform quickie time-warps at the last millisecond to get where the coding dictated. Such transgressions didn't seriously impact the gameplay experience, but I expected more sophistication from a flagship title.

Did it matter to me that some early reviews—while awarding the highest *Madden* scores in years—still knocked EA Sports for its complacency? Or that the PC version didn't make use of the console version's new kicking meter? Or that certain stats are apparently *still* out of whack? Not really. I was too busy enjoying what's right.

CRUSHING BLOCKS AND NIMBLER JOCKS

Moreover, the development team really did change things up this time around. It enhanced the running game, allowing players to deftly swap control between a back and his punishing lead blocker. It gave ball carriers a new arsenal of manually triggered evasive maneuvers. It offered a new defensive weapon

through which an entire squad can receive instructions, at the line, to break from their assigned play and fully commit to either a run or pass—a brilliant tactic if used in the right spot, but a potentially backbreaking error if not. And EA rejigged the game's Superstar mode so you really *do* feel like you're guiding one player through his career. Indeed, it's hard to imagine the game *without* these features.

But what really strikes this *Madden* rookie: how incredibly busy I get in those precious few seconds before the ball is even snapped. Particularly, when gearing up for a deception-riddled multiplayer contest, I spent days poring over the manual, coordinating button presses and putting it all into practice. Playing *Madden* at its full capacity and mastering the split-second madness is most *definitely* an art.

First-timers will greedily devour it, and—judging by early online discussions—it should appease most franchise returnees. *Madden NFL 07* is EA Sports at the top of its game.

/Gord Goble

COMPUTER
GAMING
WORLD

VERDICT

Murderously challenging and finally brandishing a solid roster of upgrades, *Madden NFL 07* is a worthy proposition for newcomer and veteran alike.

REALITY CHECK

TUP NETWORK	8.5/10
GAMESPOT	7.8/10
GAMESPY	4/5
IGN	8.3/10

▶▶ THE NEWBIE SEES THINGS FROM AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.

COLUMN

FALLING PIECES

OUR FAVORITE
WAYS TO WASTE
SPARE TIME

CASUAL CENTRAL

Looking for a good casual game to play? We recommend heading over to RealArcade at www.realarcade.com.

LIGHTNING REFLEXES

WHILE FAR TOO MANY CASUAL-GAMING websites present hellishly cluttered messes, Reflexive Arcade (reflexive.com) is one of the friendliest and most navigable, making it a snap to find just the right way to waste your time. Lately, I've wasted a ton of time on one of Reflexive's in-house games: *Ricochet Lost Worlds: Recharged*. The original *Ricochet* reinvented the brick-busting *Breakout*-style formula; *Recharged* does it one better, as Reflexive solicited the input of designers from around the world. The result: over 350 original and challenging levels, with most featuring some clever gimmick or bizarre theme (one level celebrates Herbie the Love Bug; another presents a playable antismoking PSA). Inventive new power-ups and an emphasis on tricky moving targets make *Recharged* a black hole for free time.

SUPER TROOPERS

My other big time-burner: *Devastation Zone Troopers*, developed by CGS Software and also

available at Reflexive Arcade. I don't expect much more than disappointment from any \$20 game claiming to deliver solid 3D-shooter action, but *DZT* lives up to its modest hype. It's remarkable how much quality gameplay this third-person shooter packs into a 50MB download.

After you select a mission, you pilot your ship through space, dodging obstacles and shooting mines along the way. It's a nice prelude to the main terrestrial part of the game: running and gunning against a slew of enemies in a game world of destructible 3D terrain. Once you meet the mission objectives, the game shoots you back to the menu, where you can spend credits to upgrade your arsenal. It won't make you forget *Prey*...but it costs a good \$30 less and runs on just about anything but an abacus. / **Robert Coffey**



CGW alum Robert Coffey blames his inability to get anything done on "column research." He's really just playing word games online.



▲ *Devastation Zone Troopers* is liberal with the power-ups...because it's just as liberal with the enemies.



▲ The more balls left at the end of a *Ricochet* level, the higher the score bonuses.

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WINGS OF POWER II: WWII FIGHTERS

The world's best noncombat aircraft sim

IN THE KNOW

Developer Shockwave conducted detailed, filmed interviews with real owners and pilots of every included aircraft to get inside information and details you can't pick up in books.



▲ OK, let's see what this button does....



▲ Buzzing NYC in a P-51.

PUBLISHER: Tri Synergy DEVELOPER: Shockwave Productions GENRE: Flight Simulation AVAILABILITY: Retail Box ESRB RATING: Everyone REQUIRED: 800MHz CPU, 128MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space, Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004 RECOMMENDED: 1GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 128MB videocard, flight stick MULTIPLAYER: None



HARDCORE FLIGHT-SIM FANATICS (those who view any simulation with the wrong shade of flat black paint on the rudder trim knob as not worth flying) who put massive pressure on developers to invest all their resources in pure fidelity at the cost of gameplay stand accused of driving the genre's demise. But this searing focus on reality has an upside: It encourages products that provide an experience that the average person could never enjoy in real life. Shockwave's *Wings of Power II: WWII Fighters* (an add-on to *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004*) is the perfect example of this.

Most of us who look into the cramped cockpit of a Messerschmitt Bf 109 at a flight museum and try to imagine the feeling of flying the bird know it won't ever happen. Enter Shockwave: The developer's detailed attention to reality results in planes that fly precisely—in every condition—like their real-world counterparts. You can use the actual flight manuals for these fighters and get the predicted results in your virtual aircraft. If you've ever wanted to know what it's like to take a P-51D Mustang,

Spitfire Mk IB, P-47D-20 Thunderbolt, Bf 109-E4, or A6M5 Zero up for a spin...hop in, buckle up, and prepare for takeoff.

WHAT WOULD YEAGER DO?

Everyone claims their virtual rendition of a WWII fighter is "real," but what sets *WWII Fighters* apart is Shockwave's passionate attention to the minutest of details—as seen in extracts from this e-mail sent by real-life P-51 pilot Dudley Henriques and posted on the game's official forums: According to Henriques, the P-51 in *Wings of Power II* exhibits "almost perfect rudder response while taxiing, taking off, and landing. It's very much like the real thing, with almost the exact amount of lead and lag required [versus] slipstream effect on the rudder. This is especially noticeable on the rollout as the airspeed dissipates.... The fairing door [opening] is a nice touch. I can't tell you how many times I've told P-51 owners not to forget to pull that damn thing when parking on a hot ramp.... The stall characteristics are damn near perfect."

» "THE FAIRING DOOR [OPENING] IS A NICE TOUCH. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MANY TIMES I'VE TOLD P-51 OWNERS NOT TO FORGET TO PULL THAT DAMN THING WHEN PARKING ON A HOT RAMP."

-DUDLEY HENRIQUES, P-51 PILOT

Such attention to detail (the fairing door?) is manna to the perfection-seeking sim fan. Aficionados argue online over the thousands of add-ons for *Flight Simulator 2004*, consistently citing the original *Wings of Power* as one of the best. A poster on SimHQ.com's forums raves, "Shockwave's Bf 109 and Spitfire cockpits are the best of any aircraft [in] any flight simulation around—worth every cent." Indeed, the virtual cockpits amaze: Almost every gauge and button is fully operational and completely readable, and each plane feels unique on the runway and in the air, both in ways you would expect (such as the tighter turn radius of the Zero over that of the Bf 109) and in a multitude of more subtle, detailed responses during flight.

Wings of Power II doesn't include combat (*Flight Simulator 2004* is a civilian flight sim, after all), but if you really want to get a feeling for what it was like to climb in the cockpit and soar into the skies with one of these WWII legends, this is as good as it gets. / Jeff Lackey

COMPUTER
GAMING
WORLD

VERDICT

Amazing attention to detail makes this package a hardcore flight sim fan's nirvana.

REALITY CHECK

TUP NETWORK	9.5/10
GAMESPOT	—
GAMESPY	—
IGN	—

LINE OF ATTACK

YOUR MONTHLY
GUIDE TO
HARDCORE WAR-
GAMING

SCUTTLED

IF FLIGHT SIMULATIONS ARE A DYING genre, then naval simulations are dead and buried, with the tomb location lost entirely. We really haven't gotten any naval sims to speak of since SSI's *Fighting Steel* back in 1999; HPS Simulations' *Naval Campaigns* series (*Jutland*, *Tsushima*, and *Guadalcanal*) does a good job of modeling the action, but the presentation is so dry that the fundamental weakness of such games becomes glaringly obvious.

The problem with naval simulations as games is that players don't really have enough to do on their own, as naval sims present smaller numbers of decisions than similar-scale land-combat games. You arrange your battle line (a factor often defined by the scenario), your ships choose their targets...and that's pretty much it. In a tabletop naval sim, the charm lies in moving the little model ships manually and admiring how nice they look. With a computer moving the pieces for you—and the models reduced to featureless ovals—the PC sims manage, in one fell swoop, to eliminate everything that's appealing about them.

This makes Storm Eagle Studios' new *Distant Guns* worth a look on its own. Designers Norm

Koger (the man behind *The Operational Art of War*) and Jim Rose (former head of TalonSoft Games) apparently know what these kinds of games are all about, as they chose the Battle of Tsushima and modeled it with 3D dreadnoughts. You don't necessarily get more stuff to do than in the aforementioned HPS games, but this is one case where presentation makes all the difference. *Distant Guns* is really a love letter to naval miniatures, with the kind of lens-flare sensibility that shows how, in the end, what we really want to do is play with toy boats. **Bruce Geryk**



Longtime CGW contributor Bruce Geryk can probably kick your ass at any board game, any day of the week.

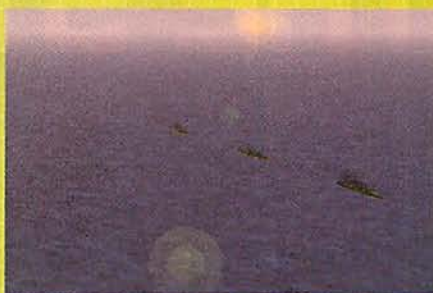
WE REALLY
HAVEN'T GOT-
TEN ANY NAVAL SIMS
TO SPEAK OF SINCE
FIGHTING STEEL IN 1999.

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SWORD OF THE STARS

Star-crossed

THE OLD GUARD

Longtime readers may remember Kerberos Productions CEO and *Sword of the Stars* lead designer Martin Cirulla as the writer of CGW's old "What's the Deal With..." column.



▲ It's not the size of the ship that matters... it's how many weapons you can fit on it.



▲ The SOTS universe holds many mysteries beyond the interface. Random events like this alien encounter, for example.



▲ The lightning gun is good for...umm...how can I get back to the tech screen?

PUBLISHER: Lighthouse Interactive DEVELOPER: Kerberos Productions GENRE: Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail Box ESRB RATING: Everyone 10+
REQUIRED: 1GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard RECOMMENDED: 1.5GHz CPU, 1GB RAM MULTIPLAYER: 8 players

MOST ONLINE REVIEWS OF SPACE SIM *Sword of the Stars* are mildly positive, noncommittal softballs. It's a difficult game to decipher and manage—and no reviewer wants to leave himself open to the charge that he didn't understand a game well enough to not like it. It's better to be vaguely positive.

That said, I'm baffled by statements like this: "It's great to see a 3D playfield, at least on the star map, that's actually both workable and contributes depth to the gameplay." This comes from Yahoo! Games' Mike Smith, regarding *SOTS*' unplayable strategic map. He's right that it contributes depth, but only in the literal sense in that it adds a z-axis...much to the chagrin of anyone interested in seeing what's happening without having to unfocus his eyes as if staring into one of those posters with fuzzy dots that somehow resolve into a unicorn if you look at them a certain way.

"The galactic map is presented in a nifty 3D form that can be rotated and zoomed in and out of at will. It's a slick piece of work, and one that's reminiscent of 1995's *Ascendancy*," says GameSpot critic Jason Ocampo, perhaps unintentionally drawing a comparison to another really awful space strategy game before awarding *SOTS* 7.4 points worth of "good."

Many reviews praise the streamlined ship-building, but they fail to note the lack of information about components on the shipbuilding screen. What's the difference between gun X and torpedo Y? Where's the line between "streamlined" and "inscrutable"?

DAMN THOSE DISTRACTING OVERLAYS

The tactical battles—which are the sloppy, sclerotic heart of the game—also receive numerous compliments. During a battle, you're supposed to draw conclusions about damage and weapon interaction by visual cues. "Remarkably thorough visual damage modeling," IGN's Steve Butts calls it in his 7.7 review. The developers seem proud of the fact that you don't get a health bar for your ships; the manual calls a health bar "another distracting overlay." A recent patch added color-coded icons that give a broad indication of a ship's health; maybe with a few more of these "distracting overlays" patched in *SOTS* might become more manageable. You're supposed to manually target weapons as if you were playing *Star Fleet Battles*. "The way this all works so naturally is truly remarkable," writes IGN's Butts of the game's expectation that

you're going to zoom in and click on individual parts of enemy ships.

Frankly, I think *SOTS* is awful—almost train-wreck awful for how badly and boldly it splays out in front of you, as uncommunicative and unrepentant as a surly teenager. I'm sure the developers have no problem rotating the 3D map, remembering what weapons do, and managing their wayward-inclined ships during tactical battles. After all, they made the damn thing...but what about the rest of us?

"*Sword of the Stars* is the best candidate in years to make 'you go, I go' interstellar empire-building accessible to hurry-up junkies like you and rest of the twitchy masses," says Games Radar's (and CGW's) Matt Peckham, addressing his readers as if they were convulsing from a lack of superficial games. They're in for a rude surprise when they sit down to try to figure out *Sword of the Stars*. **Tom Chick**

COMPUTER
GAMING
WORLD

VERDICT

A mess of bad interface and design.

REALITY CHECK

TUP NETWORK	4/10
GAMESPOT	7.4/10
GAMESPY	3/5
IGN	7.7/10

FRANKLY, I THINK *SOTS* IS AWFUL—ALMOST TRAIN-WRECK AWFUL.

COLUMN

CRISIS ON INFINITE SERVERS

CGW'S MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF THE ENDLESS MMORPG LANDSCAPE

TWICE SMITTEN

BEING A NEWBIE IN AN MMO ALWAYS makes for the best of gaming experiences. It's a rare time when everything feels fresh and new, but recently it also hit me with an uncanny sense of déjà vu—after all, lightning doesn't strike in the same place twice, does it? Well, for me it just did.

My first experience with newbie-dom, as well as with death (the two always manage to go together somehow), took place in the now-aged classic *Ultima Online*. You see, back then player killers (or PKs) ruled the game, and you only needed two spells to PK someone—Paralyze and Lightning Bolt. First you'd cast Paralyze; if that spell succeeded, then congratulations—you won! After that, you simply cast Lightning Bolt on your incapacitated (and oftentimes profanity-spewing) victim until he finally perished.

The first time this happened to me, I'd just looted a meager fortune in gold from an abandoned orc camp when I ran into a menacing-looking fellow wearing a gray robe and a bone helm. I hesitated—should I flee, or was he really harmless? The magical words "An Ex Port!" appeared over this grim reaper's head, and I found myself frozen, unable to move. The lightning followed a moment later; my heart, and even time itself (or maybe just my dial-up connection)

seemed to stand still until the screen finally faded to black, followed by the awful *UO* death-moan and the words "You are dead." I lost everything I owned—including my newfound fortune in gold.

SPACE RACE

Fast-forward nine years from fantasy past to sci-fi future, where I recently found myself living the newbie experience all over again in the vast space of *Eve Online*. I had just invested all my money in a load of planetary vehicles I could sell in a nearby star system for a healthy profit...but as I approached the local jump gate, a hulking battle cruiser came to a halt right in front of me. I hesitated, thinking to myself, "Come on, what are the odds he could actually be a PK?" As if I'd jinxed it, he activated a warp scrambler on me, disabling my engines and effectively paralyzing me, preventing any means of escape. Seconds later, a staccato of laser fire tore my poor ship to shreds, and the pirate made off with the full contents of my cargo bay.

I immediately felt...well, shocked at how I'd died the exact same way I had so long ago in *UO*. But, after thinking about it, I realized that getting PK'd didn't even make me feel bad—it made *Eve* feel just like home. It also made me realize how much I missed this type of gameplay.

Other MMOs embrace quite the opposite mentality as a key to success, coddling their

player base as a parent would an infant. For me, this risk-lite approach waters down the feeling of living in a virtual world. Life is only as sweet as death is painful; sure, I lost everything, but the more you stand to lose, the more you care about what you have. That makes any MMO infinitely more gripping, and I'm glad at least one developer still appreciates this effect instead of catering to the lowest common denominator. Only 125,000 people (give or take) play *Eve* so far as a result, but that's only one side of the statistic. The way I see it: *Eve* boasts 125,000 loyal fans and continues to grow even after three years in a very heated market.

Lightning can indeed strike twice. I'm taking its scorch mark as the hallmark of something truly great. / **Matthew Chase**

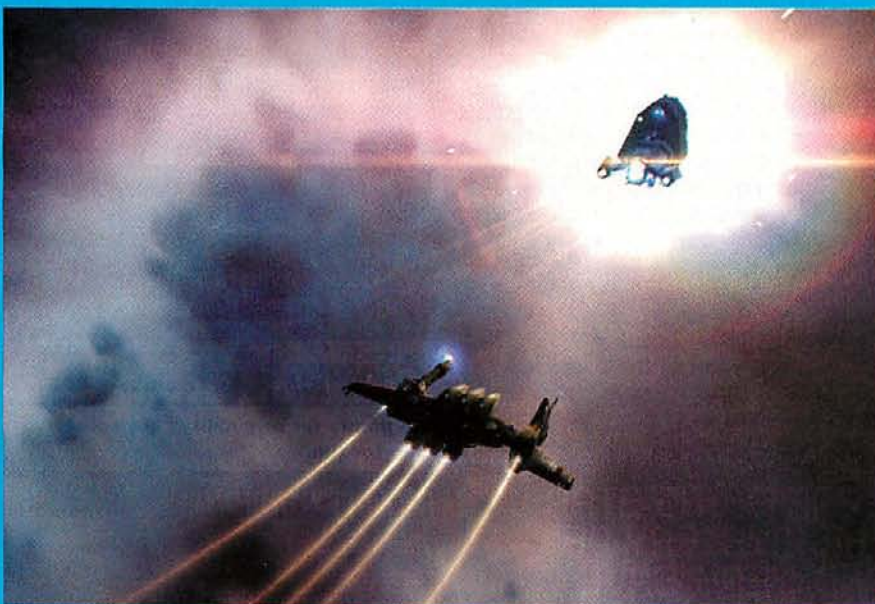


Matthew Chase remembers when 30-year-old Apple II titles like *Bob Bishop's Bomber!* constituted the hottest gaming action around.



▲ An *Ultima Online* PK encampment from the days of old. Pay the toll or heads will roll!

AFTER THINKING ABOUT IT, I REALIZED THAT GETTING PK'D DIDN'T EVEN MAKE ME FEEL BAD—IT MADE *EVE* FEEL JUST LIKE HOME.



▲ That ship disappearing in the blazing fireball used to be me.



▲ No self-respecting PK should underestimate the importance of looking menacing. Or at least silly. Luke, I am your father!



▲ This guy's epitaph: "Killed because of name."

DARKSTAR ONE

More fun than meets the eye

STRATEGY FIRST?

Ascaron, *DarkStar One's* German design house, is better known for strategy titles like *Sacred* and *Port Royale 2*.



▲ Star systems are populated with planets, space stations, and various ships just going about their business.



▲ In a throwback to the *Descent* days, some sequences require you to fly into (and desperately grope your way out of) asteroids.

PUBLISHER: CDV Software DEVELOPER: Ascaron Entertainment GENRE: Space Sim AVAILABILITY: Retail Box ESRB RATING: Teen REQUIRED: 1.6GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 6.5GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard RECOMMENDED: 2.6GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 7GB hard drive space, 256MB videocard, flight stick MULTIPLAYER: None

AS MAJOR DEVELOPERS CONCENTRATE on the four basic food groups of PC gaming (MMO, RTS, FPS, and sports), it falls on the shoulders of smaller companies to sample the less-popular menu items. One such item: the space sim—the genre of choice for designers in the early-to-mid 1990s who sought to showcase their technological bells and whistles (and B-list FMV acting skills). Having reached its pinnacle with the fantastic *FreeSpace 2*, the genre abruptly petered out, taking with it the sun-bleached bones of Mark Hamill's onscreen career.

So, German design house Ascaron takes a bit of a risk with its latest offering, *DarkStar One*. With this highly competent—but nevertheless totally conventional—space sim, Ascaron gambles that former *Wing Commander* addicts are jonesing for a bit of nostalgia. With the mild success of other recent European-made space sims, like the *Space Rangers* and *X* series of games, it isn't a bad bet. But the game hasn't proved particularly popular (never even cracking the top 250 of Amazon.com's Computer & Video Games sales charts).

STRIKING BACK

If some of Ascaron's designers get canned over *DarkStar One*, it's a shame—those sales

figures add up to nothing less than a bum rap. Sure, the game is highly derivative of *Freelancer*, and sure, the graphics won't give *Crysis* a...er...crisis of confidence. But the freewheeling, guns-blazing gameplay, quirky, lost-in-translation dialogue and clever little touches hearken back to a classic era.

The pitch is simple. Your dad died mysteriously, but not before bequeathing you his greatest invention: the flux capacitor, with which you can travel back in time to astonish bewildered bobby-soxers with the sounds of Chuck Berry. No, actually it's a spaceship called *DarkStar One*, fully modular and capable of simultaneously taking on dozens of ornery star pirates or uppity space cops (depending on what kind of character you choose to play). At the helm, you'll travel to far-flung star systems, solve the mystery of your father's death...and, yeah, save the galaxy, too.

Now, all this sounds pretty lame on paper (which may account for the distinct lack of online buzz about *DarkStar One*), yet the game itself is surprisingly entertaining. The core gameplay consists of space combat and ship/load-out management, both of which get handled elegantly. Winning battles garners you more money for upgrades (purchased via a long and

intricate menu), which, in turn, lets you take on tougher and more interesting missions. Further, you have free rein to tackle the kinds of missions you like for whomever you like. The only real gripe: Enemy A.I. isn't as sharp as it could be. Fortunately, *DarkStar One* generally picks up the slack in quality by upping the quantity.

A NEW HOPE?

The space sim's gradual fall from grace in recent years is indicative of a shift in gaming tastes, but that doesn't mean the genre's run out of steam...or mysterious alien artifacts. While *DarkStar One* certainly won't single-handedly resurrect a bygone era, it will please gamers who fondly recall those days...and may even bring in the odd newbie or two. Perhaps, if a big-budget studio were willing to take a risk on a game like this—throwing some serious graphics and an original story line into the mix—gamers might just have reason to dust off those flight sticks. /Eric Neigher

COMPUTER
GAMING
WORLD

VERDICT

No points for originality...but score one for fun.

REALITY CHECK

TUP NETWORK	7/10
GAMESPOT	8.1/10
GAMESPY	2.5/5
IGN	8/10

YOU'LL TRAVEL TO FAR-FLUNG STAR SYSTEMS, SOLVE THE MYSTERY OF YOUR FATHER'S DEATH...AND, YEAH, SAVE THE GALAXY, TOO.

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www.espn.com/videogames



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RANK	GAME NAME	SYSTEM	SCORE		
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2	MLB2K7				
3	MLB2K6				
4	MLB2K6	360	68		
5	NBA Ballers: Phenom	Nintendo	72		
6	NBA Ballers: Phenom	PS2	70		
7	TopSpin2	Nintendo	68		
8	TopSpin2	PS2	68		
9	TopSpin2	XBX	63		
10	TopSpin2	360	62		
	AND 1 Streetball	Nintendo	58		
		Nintendo	55		
		Nintendo	54		

TOM vs. BRUCE

DOMINIIONS 3: THE AWAKENING

Tom vs. The Guy Who Wrote the Game's Manual

LAST MONTH...

Tom's earth golem leveled Bruce's army in the Java-based collectible card game *PozNora*.

PUBLISHER: Shrapnel Games DEVELOPER: Illwinter Game Design AVAILABILITY: Online Store (www.shrapnelgames.com) GENRE: Turn-Based Strategy
ESRB RATING: Not Rated REQUIRED: 600MHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED: 1GHz CPU, 512MB RAM MULTIPLAYER: 21 players

TOM: I JUST WANT TO START WITH a disclaimer about *Dominions 3*. Guess who wrote the manual? If you guessed me, you're wrong. If you guessed Bruce Geryk, you're right. I just want you to keep this Tom vs. Bruce in mind next time you feel bad for how much Bruce sucks at, say, a real-time strategy game or *The Sims*.

BRUCE: I'm playing the Yormi, a Japanese-themed nation with demons in it. I saw *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*, so I know that having demons in a Japanese fantasy world is very realistic. The demon I plan to use is the Dai-Oni, which is a priest-mage-general kind of guy who just happens to be huge and cause fear. I'm going to make him something called a "supercombatant," which is the term for turning *Dominions* into a role-playing game by choosing one guy and equipping him with phat lewt. In order to get magic gear in *Dominions*, you have to make it, which means doing research. That's fine—I'm good at that.

TOM: One of the new races in *Dominions 3*: monkeys. Monkeys! How can you pass that up? Naturally, I'll assume the role of the monkeys in this game. I will defeat Bruce with a monkey rush. I can imagine him talking about it at the watercooler at work the next day. "Yeah, Tom just came at me with a bunch of monkeys—hundreds of the little guys! Nothing I could do about it." It's

the most humiliating defeat you can inflict on a person, short of, like, a kitten rush.

BRUCE: My pretender is a Lord of Plenty with Astral-4, Nature-4, and Earth-1. I took the Nature skill because my Dai-Oni is sacred, and having a Nature-4 pretender gives my Dai-Onis Regeneration +5 when they're blessed. I also take Order-3 to crank up my income. Most importantly, though, I take Dominion-8—this means my dominion has an 80 percent chance of spreading, and my high maximum dominion makes it really hard to make a dent in my religious dominance, once established. On a small map, it's easy to get out-dominioned...something I hope happens to Tom and not me.

TOM: I make a pretender by selecting the most fearsome unit available—a dragon, naturally. To get extra points, I let my dragon sleep in. He's like me in that he can't be bothered to get out of bed before noon (or Year Two, in the dragon's case). I spend points jacking up as many of the scales as I can, then I spend points on dominion, which will help me spread the monkey religion. I take the rest on a gift certificate.

BRUCE: We're playing on a large-sized random map, which gives us about 40 provinces. We've set the victory conditions at four victory points out of the five available on the map. Two such provinces lie near our respective capitals, with another kind of out in the wilderness.

TOM: My strategy: build as many cheap little monkeys as I can every turn, and then sally forth under the leadership of my damn dirty ape commanders with their stinking paws. Eventually, I'll back up my monkey blitzkrieg with ape warriors and holy guys called Yavanas. I have no idea what the Yavanas have to do with monkeys. They're apparently some sort of Hindu dudes, which makes me imagine a horde of invading monkeys with Hare Krishnas bringing up the rear. What a way to beat Bruce Geryk! The only thing better would be the kittens with a bunch of Santa Clauses following behind.

BRUCE: A big sea divides the two halves of the map. The only nonwater connection is along the southern map edge, where a couple of single provinces form a sort of bridge.

TOM: My favorite thing about this map—other than the fact that it's random, which is a really sweet addition to the *Dominions* games—is that I start with a bunch of farmlands nearby. Farmlands are great for gold income. Imagine, if you will, thousands of well-fed, fat little monkeys conquering Bruce Geryk. That's me in this game. Bruce, on the other hand, is smack-dab in the middle of a bunch of nonarable forests.

BRUCE: My target is Kepria, in the center of the map. Thanks to the sea and a mountain range, Kepria is a bottleneck, controlling access to the central victory point. If I can take Kepria

TWO GAMERS
ENTER, ONE
GAMER WINS

PLAYERS



▶ Tom Chick

In addition to being one of the videogame industry's most prolific freelance journalists, Tom also runs the popular website QuarterToThree.com.



▶ Bruce Geryk

Longtime CGW contributor Bruce Geryk has written about videogames for over 20 years; he loves war games like most people love oxygen.



▶ Curious George has the power to vomit fire.

and build a fortress there, Tom's basically sealed into one third of the map, leaving the other two thirds under my control.

TOM: My prophet, the Monkey Whisperer, runs into a bit of trouble. Monkeys are fine against light infantry and militias...but they're having trouble taking a Horse Tribe territory. The tribe's cavalry turns back two waves of monkey attacks, and I don't seize the territory until a third attack. I'm getting bogged down fighting an upstart computer-controlled Genghis Khan wannabe when I should be moving forward to head off Bruce.

BRUCE: Ichtyids! One of the land-bridge provinces, Vocan, is defended by Ichtyyids, which are these amphibious fish. This is good, because if a province is defended by a certain type of unit, you can usually recruit that same unit once you capture the province. Priority 1A just became getting to Vocan first and recruiting a bunch of these guys, then gobbling up ocean provinces. I hope Tom's dragon can't swim. Can any dragons swim?

TOM: Unfortunately, my monkeys are again beaten back by Horse Tribes. My commander, Clint Eastwood, can't make any headway with his light monkey infantry, so I start building up a complement of heavy apes. Meanwhile, another commander, Clyde, dies while fighting the Jaguar Tribe in nearby swamps. Since my monkey rush went this poorly against the independent territories, I'm worried about how it's gonna fare against Bruce's samurai warriors. I'll find out soon enough: One of my scouts, Bad Dates, found Bruce's army marching up toward Kepria. Unless he slows down, he's going to get there well before me.

BRUCE: I get to Kepria ahead of Tom and start building a fortress. It takes three turns. This is gonna be a nail-biter.

TOM: In early spring of Year Two, a dragon wakes up in my capital city of Kailasa. Get your ass out of bed, Mr. Pretender! No snooze button for you! Curious George is put to work flying around and single-handedly capturing neutral territories around my side of the map.

BRUCE: Uh-oh. One turn left until my fort is finished, and what shows up next door but about 1 billion monkeys. No, seriously—the monkey icons in that province take up about six lines. Show-off! If he attacks me and wins, I'll lose all

The monkey rush doesn't work so great against Horse Tribes. ▼



I SPEND POINTS ON DOMINION, WHICH WILL HELP ME SPREAD THE MONKEY RELIGION.

the money I spent building the fort, the temple, and the laboratory.

TOM: In the summer of Year Two, Bruce and I fight our first big battle. It doesn't go well, and I'm not entirely sure why. I think it's mainly because Bruce wrote the manual for this game and I didn't.

BRUCE: Tom makes the right (and obvious) choice and comes after me in Kepria. Hundreds of Tom's monkeys charge straight at my province defense. I've built 40 defense, which gives me something like 40 bandits, 40 Ko-Onis, and 20 Ao-Onis. That's 100 extra guys. But that's just the cannon fodder—my big advantage is the Bakemono archers in my regular army, which I place in back and order to rain volley upon volley of arrows on Tom's monkeys (each with an average protection of 4...if that). That's a real technical way of saying that his unarmored monkeys had to cross a huge field while my archers used them for target practice. The ones that made it were engaged by my foot soldiers. They never had a chance.

TOM: The two things I learned from this battle: 1) I should build a whole bunch of archers, and 2) monkeys are quick to flee, even with their prophet, the Monkey Whisperer, preaching the Sermon of Courage spell at the little guys. Maybe this whole monkey-rush strategy is ill-advised. I

outnumbered Bruce...and according to *Dominions'* magical under-the-hood calculations, I ended up losing half my army while he lost nine guys. This game is blatantly antimonkey.

BRUCE: I actually didn't lose nine guys total. I just lost nine guys that weren't part of my province defense. The game doesn't account for province defense in the battle reports because the province defense all comes back, anyway. So next turn, I'll have those 100 extra guys again. That was Tom's best chance to win a battle in that province; the longer he waits, the more reinforcements I bring up.

TOM: Great...Bruce managed to build a fortress in Kepria right after the battle. Out of sheer frustration, I throw another wave of monkeys at him. Hopefully, I can whittle away some of his defenders. No such luck—this time, I lose half my army, including some commanders. I only kill 14 of his dudes.

BRUCE: My plan was to research to Alteration-6 so I could have my prophet use Soul Vortex, a spell that fatigues all the units around him and makes them a lot easier to hit. The problem: I'm up against a bazillion monkeys. I would probably be better off researching some summoning spells, like the one that gets me flying sacred units. Why should Tom's dragon be the only one who flies? ▶

We have now taken control of the province Konburg. Our forces met no resistance. An enemy Temple was found and it was swiftly razed.

Exit

▶ Tom needs to build some province defense.

TOM: The good news is my awesome income—I might be losing, but I'm rich...which makes it all the more stupid that I haven't built defenses in my rear territories. Bruce has stealth units or some such nonsense running around, grabbing my undefended land. So I dispatch commanders Bonzo and Bush-or-Chimp back from the front to deal with Bruce's impromptu Resistance fighters.

BRUCE: Here's the situation: I have three VP provinces locked up, either behind my fort in Kepria or way off in my half of the map, which Tom isn't likely to reach for a while. A single VP province lies on the north coast. Now that I've captured a sea province, I can build up a big army of Tritons (fish-men who unfortunately can't leave the water) and conquer the ocean. That will let me move my amphibious Ichtyids through the sea and invade that fourth VP province—kind of like the Normandy invasion, except I won't have to race the Russians for Berlin, since that fourth province will win me the game.

TOM: Since Curious George, my dragon pretender/god, has done so well mopping up independents, I fly him over the mountains closing off Kepria. By leapfrogging the mountains and a territory on their far side, I can grab a victory point location right behind the Kepria bottleneck. Then I can pump some of my vast wealth into a powerful defense force.

At least that's the idea. But I've used Curious George recklessly and he's accumulated quite a few wounds at this point. He's Weakened, has a Limp, a Chest Wound, and a Never-Healing Wound. *Dominions* remembers that kind of stuff! In the ensuing battle against the independents, Curious George is fatigued to the point of retreat...but when he tries to flee, he has nowhere to go, since I flew him in. As a result, my pretender gets killed. "Where is your god now?" is a perfectly valid question for someone to ask me.

BRUCE: Even better luck—one of the sea provinces I conquered lets me recruit Mermen, which are amphibious. So now I can build up in Vocan and this undersea province, secure in the knowledge that Tom can't get to me.

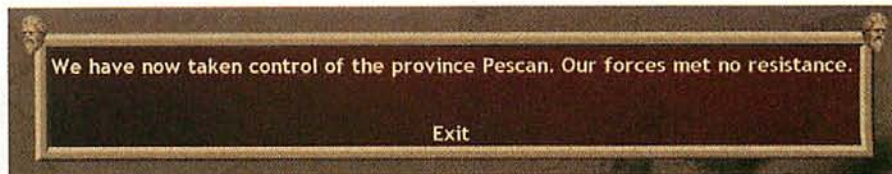
TOM: I am so over monkeys. I've been putting my expensive Hindu magicians (whom I can readily afford, what with all the rich farmlands on my side of the map) to work researching conjuring magic. Now I've summoned a bazillion lions, along with a couple of cave drakes and some celestial dancing beings called Apsaras (I guess they're good for morale or something). From my controlled territories, I've also marshaled heavy



▲ The sad demise of Curious George...who was Weakened, Limping, and afflicted with Never-Healing and Chest Wounds.



▲ Tom still hasn't built any province defense.



▲ Tom—build province defense!

➤ NOW I'M DOWN TO PLAN D, WHICH INVOLVES HOPING BRUCE'S PC CRASHES AND THE TURN PASSES WITHOUT HIM TAKING HIS MOVE.

infantry, barbarians, a few Amazons, and some of those pesky Horse Tribe units that gave me such a hard time earlier in the game—time to try a counterattack.

BRUCE: Tom is making the classic *Dominions* mistake of just collecting a bunch of units without coordinating a magic strategy. This can work...except not so much against the guy who wrote the manual. I have some evil sorceresses called Hannyas, who torch Tom with fire spells. You know, the kind you use in *D&D*—fireballs and such. Tom's also clumped his lions together in one big squad, which reduces the number of lions fighting at any given time, thanks to the laws of geometry. Eventually, arrows and fireballs cause one morale check too many and Tom's lions slink off.

TOM: So that happened.

BRUCE: And that, as they say, is that. My Mermen and Ichtyids stormed out of the ocean and took the fourth VP province without much trouble. Wait a minute—why didn't I win? I have four VP provinces! Tom's haxored the game!

TOM: Ha! Bruce forgot to capture the victory-point location closest to his starting territory. I was actually going to summon a bunch of werewolves, long-distance, to take it from him. Unfortunately, none of my Hindu magicians are good enough

at Nature magic to summon long-distance werewolves. Plan B involves hoping Bruce doesn't notice that last victory-point location.

BRUCE: Erm, yeah. I guess I forgot about that one right next to my capital. So I quickly recruit an army of archers and send them out with some Hannyas to capture it.

TOM: OK, I'm down to Plan C, which involves a counterattack on Bruce's beachhead. The counterattack consists almost entirely of monkeys, since my better troops are at the front, down by Kepria.

BRUCE: I spend all my money on province defense in that coastal VP province. It would be really embarrassing to have Tom take it and deny me the victory just because I forgot how to count.

TOM: OK, so I could have guessed that the plan with the monkeys wasn't going to work very well. Now I'm down to Plan D, which involves hoping Bruce's PC crashes and the turn passes without him taking his move.

BRUCE: That's better. I wipe out the Deer Tribe defending the VP province and win the game in the late fall of Year Three after 37 turns. That's about half the time our *Dominions II* game took. Using the victory point is a good way to limit the length of the game. Or, in Tom's case, the duration of the pain. /



▲ Tom mounts a final counterattack against the Guy Who Wrote the Game's Manual (aka Bruce).

REALITY CHECK

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO WHAT WE SAY—AND WHAT THEY SAY—ABOUT THE LATEST IN PC GAMING



COMPANY OF HEROES

We say: "You're going to hear folks talk about this being a banner year for RTS games. That's true, depending on whether you thought *Rise of Legends* or *The Battle for Middle-earth II* were great, good, or merely average. *Company of Heroes* brooks no such debate."
—Matt Peckham, 1UP.com (10/10)

They say: "It's a brilliant combination of incredibly deep real-time strategy, beautiful presentation, and innovative features that make it one of the best gaming experiences of 2006 to date."
—GameSpy (5/5)



IRON WARRIORS: T-72 TANK COMMAND

We say: "Tank sims are few and far between, but luckily, they're generally worth playing. *Iron Warriors* doesn't break that trend, and although it lacks the *joie de vivre* of the classic *Steel Beasts*, it's still pretty solid."
—Bruce Geryk, 1UP.com (6/10)

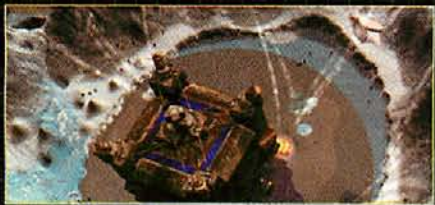
They say: "Insufficient documentation, an unreliable engine, and some obvious gaffes in terms of realism make *Iron Warriors* a hard sell for the sim fans out there."
—IGN (6/10)



LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

We say: "Like any good sequel, *Lego Star Wars II* improves on the original in almost every way. But most importantly, it's about the good episodes now. For that reason alone, [it's] one of [this fall's] most enjoyable games."
—Sam Kennedy, 1UP.com (8/10)

They say: "The concept itself isn't quite as potent as it was the first time around.... Still, anyone with even a sliver of nostalgia for *Star Wars* will find this to be a fun, good-natured romp."
—GameSpot (7.7/10)



PERIMETER: EMPEROR'S TESTAMENT

We say: "Apart from die-hard fans of the original [*Perimeter*], gamers will be better served sticking to more mainstream RTS games than putting in the heavy lifting needed to pick up *Emperor's Testament*."
—Eric Neigher, 1UP.com (5.5/10)

They say: "The concepts of energy management, unit morphing, and land leveling definitely set *Emperor's Testament* apart from the rest of the RTS titles on the market."
—IGN (7.6/10)



THE SHIP

We say: "[The] unique art, along with the appropriate period music for atmosphere, help turn the offbeat, dark pleasure of being in a confined space trying to kill off your shipmates one at a time (even as they hunt you) into a campy retro-romp."
—Patrick Joynt, 1UP.com (6.5/10)

They say: "*The Ship* is one of the best and most innovative multiplayer games available right now, particularly at its cut-rate price of \$20."
—GameSpot (8.3/10)



WORLD WAR II COMBAT: IWO JIMA

We say: "*Iwo Jima* looks and plays like a tech demonstration from a couple of gifted grade schoolers, with deplorable graphics, clunky controls, and completely unimaginative level design."
—Di Luo, 1UP.com (3/10)

They say: "If you're looking for a cheap shooter, go to the store and grab any game off the shelf, and you're practically guaranteed to have a better game than this one."
—GameSpot (2/10)

SCORECARD Available now

GAME	RELEASE	1UP NETWORK	GAMESPOT	GAMESPY	IGN
Age of Pirates: Caribbean Tales	Sept 2006	4/10	—	—	—
Civilization IV: Warlords	July 2006	8/10	8.6/10	3.5/5	8.4/10
Company of Heroes	Sept 2006	10/10	9/10	5/5	9.4/10
Dungeon Siege II: Broken World	Aug 2006	6/10	6.3/10	3/5	6.3/10
Glory of the Roman Empire	July 2006	6/10	5.6/10	3/5	7.6/10
Iron Warriors: T-72 Tank Command	Sept 2006	6/10	—	—	6/10
Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	Sept 2006	8/10	7.7/10	—	8/10
Perimeter: Emperor's Testament	Sept 2006	5.5/10	7.3/10	—	7.6/10
The Ship	July 2006	6.5/10	8.3/10	—	7.4/10
World War II Combat: Iwo Jima	July 2006	3/10	2/10	—	3/10

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EXTREME TECH!

Check out even more participants in our case-mod contest (along with lots of other crazy PC case mods) at ExtremeTech.com.

PIMP YOUR RIG

COFFEE-TABLE COMPUTERS. Plexiglas PCs. Creepy life-sized anime dolls stuffed with motherboards. A quick Google search and you'd think you'd seen just about every possible PC case mod under the sun. But we weren't satisfied. And so our partners at ExtremeTech.com sent out a call online for the few, the proud, the geeky—our readers—to find out what a good case mod really is.

The challenge: Test your imagination and engineering knowledge by building your own PC and doing something with it besides shoving components into the same boring beige box. The designer of the sweetest rig would walk away with the King Nerd crown, the respect of our resident tech dorks, and enough PC components to assemble his own killer gaming rig, including a Cooler Master Mystique 631 PC case, a Cooler Master eXtreme 600W power supply, and a Core 2 Duo processor. Read on to see some of our favorite cases. Then turn the page to find out who we named the big winner.



▲ This 1969 Boss 302 Mustang mod will race you for pink slips, punch you in the face, and steal your girlfriend. You got a problem with that, punk?

THE RIGHT STUFF

The search for the ultimate case mod



> Tech Medics

This month:

Someone is going to be upgrading his computer soon. Is it you? ExtremeTech's Loyd Case tells all.



▲ Check out that fan under the hood. Simple, but it still says this is one baaaaadass box.

THE MOD: 1969 BOSS 302 MUSTANG

The Modder: Craig Tate

THE STORY: "The 1969 Boss 302 (see photo, pg. 106) is, without a doubt, one of the best street rods in existence. Unfortunately, my issue is that I am 6-foot-8, and I don't fit into the car very well, so I had to settle on making a case mod instead. My PC takes lots of influence from the design of that beautiful car—fastback shape on the back of the scoop; all forward-facing front bezel lights made white to look like a dashboard display; engine compartment-styled internals and cabling, et cetera.

It starts with custom authentic 1969 Boss-style side striping, but [I replaced] the '302' engine displacement with a more appropriate FX-57 designation. I arranged the interior of the chassis to look like an engine compartment with an emphasis on swooping pipes—CPU heat sink and Gigabyte GeForce 6800 GT videocard heat sinks—and an air manifold mod to the top of the heat-sink fan. I crafted a hood scoop from aluminum, spray foam, fiberglass, Bondo, and a whole lotta elbow grease. I even switched out the LED lights in the CoolDrive 3, Real Power voltage VU meter, mouse, and Saitek keyboard with matching white LED lights and paint. After all the work, this is now my daily-use machine for LAN parties and general gaming. It's becoming my web dev platform as well."

WE SAY: Grease monkeys that spend weekends tuning up muscle cars have a whole lot in common with PC tweekers—and this rig proves it. With its sweet styling, this PC looks anything but nerdy. Make the hood scoop a little bigger, and we'd carjack it from you at your next LAN party.

UNDER THE HOOD

CASE: Cooler Master Centurion 531
 PROCESSOR: AMD Athlon 64 FX-57
 MOTHERBOARD: ECS KN1 SLI Extreme
 RAM: 1GB (2x512MB) Crucial Ballistix Tracers
 GRAPHICS CARD: Two Gigabyte GeForce 6800 GT graphics cards in SLI
 SOUND CARD: Sound Blaster X-Fi
 DVD DRIVE: Plextor SATA DVD-RW
 HARD DRIVE: 200GB hard drive
 POWER SUPPLY: Cooler Master Real Power 550W (modded to an SLI)
 HEAT SINK: Cooler Master Hyper 48
 KEYBOARD: Saitek Eclipse keyboard
 MOUSE: Logitech mouse

THE MOD: UAL 737

The Modder: Brian Carter (aka Boddaker)

THE STORY: "My dad is a retired United Airlines mechanic, with 35 years of service. I wanted to pay tribute by building him a Boeing 737 case.

In order to keep the size relatively small and still fit all the components inside, I went with a pudgy, cartoonish look. I also chose to build only the right half so the PC could be set up against a wall or hung up using a monitor wall-mount system. Since it had to be reasonably lightweight, it's made of acrylic instead of wood or aluminum.

The center section holds the motherboard, the front nose houses the two hard drives, and the tail section is where the power supply is mounted. The DVD/CD drive is hidden in the wing, and discs are loaded through a slot in the leading edge. The keyboard and mouse receiver are integrated into the wing, and the Cooler Master Jet 7 CPU cooler is attached underneath and functions as an intake fan.

Since the motherboard was deep inside the midsection, I needed to provide an easy way to plug everything in: A standard front-mount I/O panel built under the tail did the trick. In addition to the audio, USB, FireWire, and game ports, I added a network port, custom United-logo power switch, reset button, and the AC adapter plug for the mouse docking station. After six months, it was time for the finishing touch: a commemorative plaque dedicating the case to my dad.

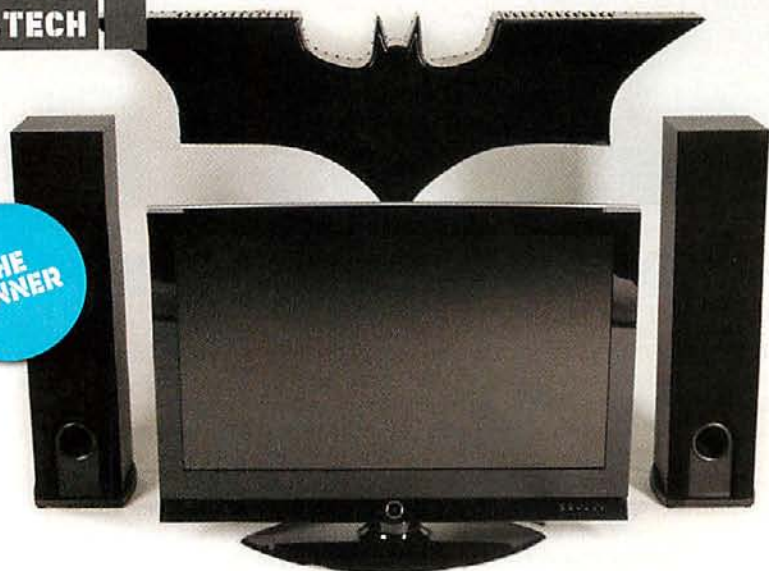
WE SAY: Brian's tale of making a machine for his retired pop touched our cold, shriveled hearts. And being able to crack outdated, lame jokes about getting motherf***ing spyware off this motherf***ing plane is a nice bonus as well. Overall, this solid-looking and unique piece would fly in any flight-simulation fan's house. >



▲ Brian's dad now files first class. Well, at least in Flight Simulator X, he will.

UNDER THE HOOD

PROCESSOR: AMD Athlon 64 FX-55
 MOTHERBOARD: Asus A8N-SLI
 RAM: 1GB Centon DDR PC3200
 GRAPHICS CARD: XFX GeForce 7800 GT
 DVD DRIVE: Pioneer Slimline slot-loading DVD/CD
 HARD DRIVES: Two 80GB Western Digital hard drives (RAID 0)
 POWER SUPPLY: Thermaltake Pure Power 600W
 HEAT SINK: Zalman CNPS7700 CPU cooler
 KEYBOARD: Logitech LX 700 cordless keyboard
 MOUSE: Logitech MX 1000 cordless laser mouse



THE MOD: BATMAN BEGINS

The Modder: Alex Wiley

THE STORY: "Why *Batman Begins*? I was excited for the new movie—yes, this case mod started that long ago. The project dragged on for over a year and five months, but it was worth it. This is easily the most intense project I've done to date.

The PC is made out of aluminum and weighs in at around 50 pounds with all the components inside. And, while I haven't measured it, the steel stand the PC sits on probably adds another 50 pounds—so trust me, a strong wind won't knock this thing over. I painted the case black using PPG basecoat/clearcoat for the interior and exterior. I added cold cathode lights underneath the center piece—the power supply—and clusters of LEDs light up the two hard drive cages. I have one logo for the old *Batman* movie and one for the new movie. A slot-loading 16x DVD-RW drive sits just underneath the motherboard, as does a lot of wiring. With a case that is 55 inches wide, you have to find extra long cables for everything.

With such an odd shape, most people wonder where the cables plug in. I had to reroute most of the motherboard plugs—VGA, DVI, audio, LAN, USB, S-Video,

and so on—to the back of the case. From there, you can plug into any of the ports and send the cables down the stand. The square tubing sends cables down the stand and out of the bottom to eliminate any ugly mess of cables. With the 40-inch LCD in front, I doubt it'll really matter."

WE SAY: Did Alex break into the Batcave and steal the Dark Knight's rig? This PC is damn solid and, quite honestly, a little intimidating. Which, we suppose, is the point—you want to strike fear into the hearts of gamers when you light this thing up. For outstanding design—and the ability to cater to the comic dorks on staff—we have ourselves a winner! /

UNDER THE HOOD

PROCESSOR: AMD Athlon 64 3000+
RAM: 2GB Mushkin DDR3200 RAM
GRAPHICS CARD: 256MB ATI x800 XL videocard
DVD DRIVE: 16x DVD-RW drive
HARD DRIVE: 300GB Maxtor hard drive



▲ Holy cool computer, Batman!



THE MOD: THE COFFEE TABLE

The Modder: William Urbina

THE STORY: "The Coffee Table is my second case mod. Following the success of my first mod, The Desk, I decided to continue bringing further functionality to my computers than what the internal components could provide. The idea for this coffee table mod came to me as I was sitting on my couch playing a competitive game of *Halo* with my roommate. In one intense moment, I accidentally knocked over a glass of Coke I had set carelessly on the rug. I decided it was time to get a coffee table. It came to me then that this piece of furniture could also tie my living room into my computer network—this coffee table could act as a file server, media control for my living room TV, and light entertainment for guests.

For this project, I wanted to keep the cost as low as possible, seeing as it did not have to be a high-performance computer. Almost all the parts for the PC, except for the screws and power supply, are extras that I had lying around. The case is primarily made up of steel tubing and sheet metal. The rear panel is removable and, as a final touch, I tore apart an old 5-inch 4GB drive and gave it a Plexiglas window to display through the case."

WE SAY: Who needs IKEA when this modder's on the case? A great idea with simple execution—and we could technically get our MAME fix on this machine. But why not build a whole living room? Someone needs to hook up William with some top gear so that he can build a kick-ass gaming rig out of, oh, a chaise longue or something. /

UNDER THE HOOD

PROCESSOR: 800MHz Pentium 3
GRAPHICS CARD: Radeon VE with TV out
SOUNDCARD: Sound Blaster Audigy 2
HARD DRIVES: 400GB Seagate hard drive,
4GB mystery hard drive
I/O PORTS: FireWire and USB 2.0 cards
NETWORKING: 54Mbps Belkin wireless router,
Gigabit LAN card

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JUST IN CASE

Four choice chassis

UNLIKE THE FOLKS IN OUR CASE-MOD COMPETITION (SEE PG. 106), not everyone wants to make a piece of modern art when putting together a PC—but it's still possible to have a killer home-made rig without taking out a home loan to pay for the pleasure. It all starts with a good case. Or, we suppose, four good cases, depending on what you want to build. A portable LAN party-ready box? A full server case? If you're dabbling in home theater PCs, maybe you're all about smart design and high style. Even Dell (yes, *that* Dell) is getting into the case market; the build-to-order business now offers individual components right down to the case level. Want to get your hands on the sleek XPS 700 case with just a CPU, motherboard, and RAM? Done. You can order as little—or as much—as you want.

SHUTTLE XPC SN27P2

GAMING TO GO

Shuttle has built some great small-form-factor rigs over the years. Hell, the company popularized the cube-shaped, high-performance portable PC. So what's new? How about a truly game-worthy LAN boy case?

Shuttle's new SN27P2 uses the latest nForce4 570 core logic chipset. It also supports AMD's Socket AM2 and DDR2 memory. Shuttle's obviously done its homework, building a system that's more expandable than past designs while managing to reduce the overall noise level.

Shuttle's latest P-series system houses the motherboard, which has one PCI Express x16 graphics card slot and one 32-bit PCI slot. Inside is a 400W power supply and PCIe six-pin power connector for graphics cards so that you

don't have to go fishing for odd cables at Radio-Shack. The front sports two USB ports and one unpowered four-pin IEEE 1394A connector.

The rear side wastes no space on legacy PS/2, parallel, or serial ports. Instead you'll find audio jacks and a full six more USB 2.0 ports.

The SN27P2 hits a sweet spot between performance, heat, and sound. Even when running 3DMark06, which can stress both a dual-core CPU and a graphics card, the Shuttle ran on par with a high-end nForce 590 SLI system while keeping quiet and relatively cool.

The only obvious downer is that a case with such cramped quarters means little room for expansion compared to a normal ATX case.



Want a double-wide videocard? Fine. You just won't have room for much else. The other problem: The SN27P2 will run you about \$400—and that's just for a case, motherboard, and power supply. Still, Shuttle's new nForce 570-based system is about as good as it gets. /

PRODUCT: Shuttle XPC SN27P2
 COMPANY: Shuttle Computer
 PRICE: TBD (\$400 estimated)
 WEBSITE: www.shuttle.com



THERMALTAKE EUREKA

YOU GOT SERVED

Ah, those wide, open spaces. Adding storage capacity (and stacks of hard drives) to your PC requires lots of elbow room, airflow, and a sturdy frame capable of holding everything together. Heat and vibration kill hard drives, so selecting the proper container is more than just a matter of finding that happy delta between price and aesthetics. That's where Thermaltake's Eureka comes in.

Thermaltake's subwoofer-styled home server chassis looks like it was designed to blend into a home theater environment. It even comes in your choice of two innocuous home theater-friendly colors: black or silver. Despite its featherweight 20-pound frame, the all-aluminum Eureka is solid as a rock.

There isn't anything radical about the Eureka's interior layout—it's essentially a standard configuration with a couple of home server-specific enhancements. The

removable motherboard tray is easy to guide and slide into position. The lower right edge of the tray supports extended-length PCI cards, the kind usually found in servers such as RAID controllers.

Swapping a hard drive is quick and painless. Just remove the side cover, slide it out of the cage, and unbolt it from its tray—handy for when you want to hotswap a failed disk while keeping everything else up and running. It's also easy to see which drive corresponds to which SATA port on your motherboard or controller card with the backs of the drives pointed out of the cage.

Aside from a minor beef with the designers' decision to mix Torx-head screws with garden-variety Phillips-heads, the Eureka provides great bang for your buck. /

PRODUCT: Eureka
 COMPANY: Thermaltake
 PRICE: \$159
 WEBSITE: www.thermaltake.com

The background is a vibrant orange with a pixelated, digital aesthetic. It features various black silhouettes of gaming-related scenes: a person on a skateboard, a person on a horse with a sword, a person with a camera, a person with a controller, and several small alien-like creatures. The central focus is the 'GAME VIDEOS' logo, which consists of a stylized white 'G' and 'V' forming a square shape, with a small alien icon inside the 'G'.

GAME VIDEOS

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ANTEC FUSION

HOT FUSION

What the—someone actually listened to us?! Antec has somehow figured out how to achieve exactly what we've always wanted in a microATX home theater PC chassis. Let's start with design: The brushed aluminum bezel is simple and belongs in your home theater. A Media Center Edition-compatible vacuum fluorescent display (VFD) scrolls useful text information. Using Antec's software, you can customize the VFD to show system information (CPU utilization, memory usage, and so on), media information, e-mail alerts, news, weather, or a graphic equalizer.

Beneath the display, the cover flap for the optical drive blends cleanly without causing any additional installation headaches. The FireWire, USB, and audio jacks integrate naturally into the lower half of the bezel. A large knob for volume control sits above the reset and backlit power buttons.

Inside, the Fusion features a triple-chamber design that divides the chassis into separate compartments for motherboard, power supply, and hard drives. The walls baffle noise, isolate heat, and keep things organized. (Cable management is an oft-overlooked aspect of case cooling. In addition to improving your system's internal appearance, it also lowers temperatures by improving airflow through the chassis.) The ventilated floor beneath the hard drive (you can fit two disks) and two massive 120mm fans manage airflow. Each fan has a three-speed switch for manually dialing in fan RPM, and they're practically silent at the lowest setting when running alongside an Athlon 64 X2 4600+^s stock cooler. Set them on high, and the movement of air feels sufficient to

cool practically anything you could stuff into this case. Someone at Antec deserves a pat on the back.

With an astute layout, attractive industrial design, and useful features that enhance performance and aesthetics, the Antec Fusion is a great package that performs well and looks good—and at around \$165 online, it's a fantastic bargain for a gorgeous case with a 430W power supply and programmable VFD. /

PRODUCT: Fusion
COMPANY: Antec
PRICE: \$165
WEBSITE: www.antec.com



XPS 700 CASE

A DELL DIVIDED

Right now, some half-baked pitchman is practicing his new lines: "Dude, you're getting a Dell case." Yes, the build-to-order PC manufacturer is dipping its foot a little deeper into the hardcore gamer pool. That much is obvious the second you gaze upon the sleek, gunmetal industrial design of the new XPS 700. Quite honestly, past Dell designs never lit a fire under our collective asses. Now, though, we would pay for the case alone.

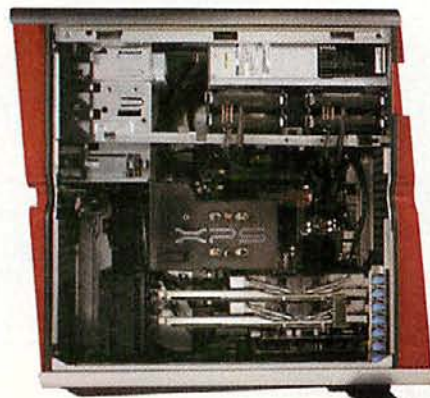
Unfortunately, you can't. Buying the XPS 700 case means also buying into a basic configuration that consists of an Intel-based, Nvidia SLI-friendly BTX motherboard with a tower six-copper heat sink and 750W power supply. (The Formula Red Chassis, which we tested, comes with a 1,000W PSU). This base-level machine also includes 512MB of DDR2-533 memory and Pentium D 930 processor that you can upgrade. Ordering from a soup-to-nuts manufacturer means you get a little

more from the get-go. All the wires come expertly routed through the case for easy access.

Besides external eye candy and front-mounted USB/FireWire/headphone jacks, one standout feature is the hard drive cage. Once you get past the flimsy plastic tray that snaps onto your hard drives, it locks into the metal frame and you're ready to boot. The screwless design for expansion cards allows you to install a graphics card faster than you can say "DirectX 10." In all fairness, we said it slowly.

A few problems: The plastic front grill looks cool, but feels chintzy. Hit the power button at the wrong angle and it feels like it'll snap. Installing an optical drive is a pain, and good luck squeezing a control box into the drive bay.


Finally, make sure you have enough room to stow this monster machine. It measures 22.5 by 8.6 by 24.25 inches. Second, make an appointment to see your chiropractor before lifting the 48-plus-pound case out of the box. /



▲ You can now buy a Dell computer case without getting a whole Dell computer.

PRODUCT: XPS 700 Case (with CPU, motherboard, and RAM)
COMPANY: Dell
PRICE: \$1,220 (basic configuration)
WEBSITE: www.dell.com





EXTREME TECH

TECH MEDICS

Plague-riddled PC? ExtremeTech's Loyd Case has the cure

Q: IF YOU HAVE A MOTHERBOARD THAT supports ATI CrossFire technology for dual videocards, can you instead use two Nvidia GeForce 7900 GTXs in SLI mode? Can you use ATI cards on an SLI motherboard? In other words, are SLI and CrossFire basically the same thing?

I know you can run a single Nvidia card on a CrossFire motherboard because the PCIe slots are exactly the same, but I'm not exactly sure how SLI or CrossFire work. It seems to me that they would be cross-compatible because PCIe 16x slots are all the same size.

Daniel Lazarus

A: The short answer: no, sorry.

The long answer: You can run ATI's CrossFire setup on systems running an ATI CrossFire chipset or an Intel 975X chipset. You can run Nvidia's SLI technology only on systems with Nvidia chipsets. It's really unfortunate, but that looks to be the situation for the foreseeable future.

Q: I can't run *Call of Duty 2* using DirectX 9. Can you guys help me out?

I have a GeForce FX 5500, 768MB of RAM, and a 1.75GHz AMD Sempron 2500+. When I try to run *COD2* with its DX9 effects enabled, the game gets all laggy.

I'm a big fan of the game, so I want to know if my processor or my videocard is the problem—they're both pretty low-end. If you could tell me which one I would need to upgrade to fix my problem, that would be great.

Joe Benson

A: We feel your pain—really, we do. The problem is that your rig is just too low-end for what you want to play. I hate to deliver the bad news, but it's time to get that bank loan so you can go out and get a new PC. In your case, both the processor and the graphics card are too low-end to run *Call of Duty 2* with all the eye candy turned up. If you can't afford a new PC, you can get an Athlon XP 3000+ CPU, which should fit in your motherboard, for about \$130 to \$150. Better AGP videocards such as those using Nvidia's 7800 GS or ATI's X800 XL will also help.

Q: I'm having some problems with my GeForce 6800 GT videocard. It's idling at about 82 degrees Celsius and, under load, it can go up to over 100 degrees! The system ambient temperature isn't much better (idle at 53 degrees Celsius). I've had the system for over a year. I've never over-clocked it and I try to clean out the dust regularly. The wires are arranged so they don't interfere with the cooling. I have two system case fans that, as far as I know, function very well. I do keep my computer in a room where the temperatures are often fairly warm (80 degrees Fahrenheit—I live in Georgia); would that have any effect on my system temperature? Do I need new fans? A water-cooler attachment for the videocard? A garden hose? What?

Daniel Singleton

A: Actually, short of parking your PC inside an iceberg, you probably need to move your system to a cooler room in the house.

That might help a little, but it does sound like you still have some serious heat issues. It could be that you need to pull the cooling fan off the GeForce 6800 GT and possibly replace it with something more robust, like Arctic Cooling's NV Silencer. Replacing your current CPU cooling fan might help, too. Also, make sure that you aren't stacking the high-heat cards all on top of each other. If you have room in the case, give 'em room to breathe.

Speaking of which, you should also consider getting a new PC case. Older PC cases often don't allow adequate airflow, while newer case designs facilitate cooling more efficiently. In fact, you might want to try a new case before disassembling your graphics card./

Got questions? Send them to
Tech_Medics@ziffdavis.com

**▶▶ CAN YOU USE
ATI CARDS IN
A CROSSFIRE SETUP
ON AN SLI MOTHER-
BOARD? THE SHORT
ANSWER: NO.**

It's the first time in my life
that I've felt like I actually fit in.
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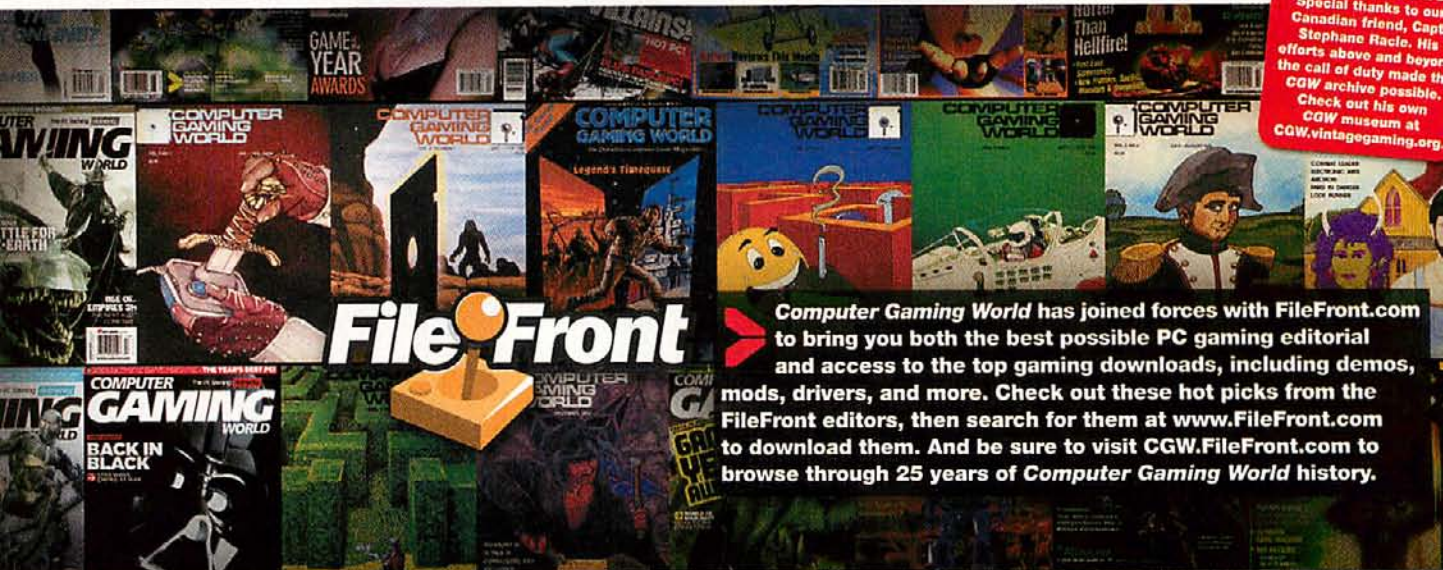
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THANKS!
Special thanks to our Canadian friend, Capt. Stephane Racle. His efforts above and beyond the call of duty made the CGW archive possible. Check out his own CGW museum at CGW.vintagegaming.org.



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WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR—DARK CRUSADE
Play the tutorial and two single-player missions from the second expansion to *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*.



COMPANY OF HEROES
Sample Skirmish mode complete with full tech and commander trees in the single-player demo of this intense and visceral single-player WWII RTS.



DAWNSPIRE: PRELUDE
FileFront exclusive demo! Get a taste of this team-based online fantasy action-RPG that features four unique character classes to choose from.



FACES OF WAR
Direct your squad through WWII battlegrounds in this demo, which includes three different multiplayer modes and two different maps to play.

BATTLEFIELD 2 V1.4 (PATCH)
Grab the v1.4 patch for *Battlefield 2*, which fixes some minor issues—and enjoy a new map while you're at it.

MAGIC STONES: HAUNTED MINES OF VOX (SHAREWARE)
Make sure you grab the v1.18 update for *Magic Stones*, which adds a new quest and new avatars to play.

BROKEN SWORD: THE ANGEL OF DEATH (DEMO)
The *Broken Sword* saga continues. Follow George Stobbart as he attempts to retrieve a manuscript stolen by some mafiosi.

PREY V1.1 (PATCH)
This patch improves multiplayer bandwidth optimization and the game's browser, and also fixes a number of crash bugs.

BATTLEFIELD 2: POINT OF EXISTENCE 2 (MOD)
This mod adds new game modes, vehicles, weapons, maps, and features to *Battlefield 2*.

SPINNN (SHAREWARE)
Move and spin falling game pieces to create horizontal lines in more than 30 different games from four different sets, each with its own special style and rules.

THE SILVER LINING (SHAREWARE)
This fan-designed graphic adventure was inspired by the classic *King's Quest* series.

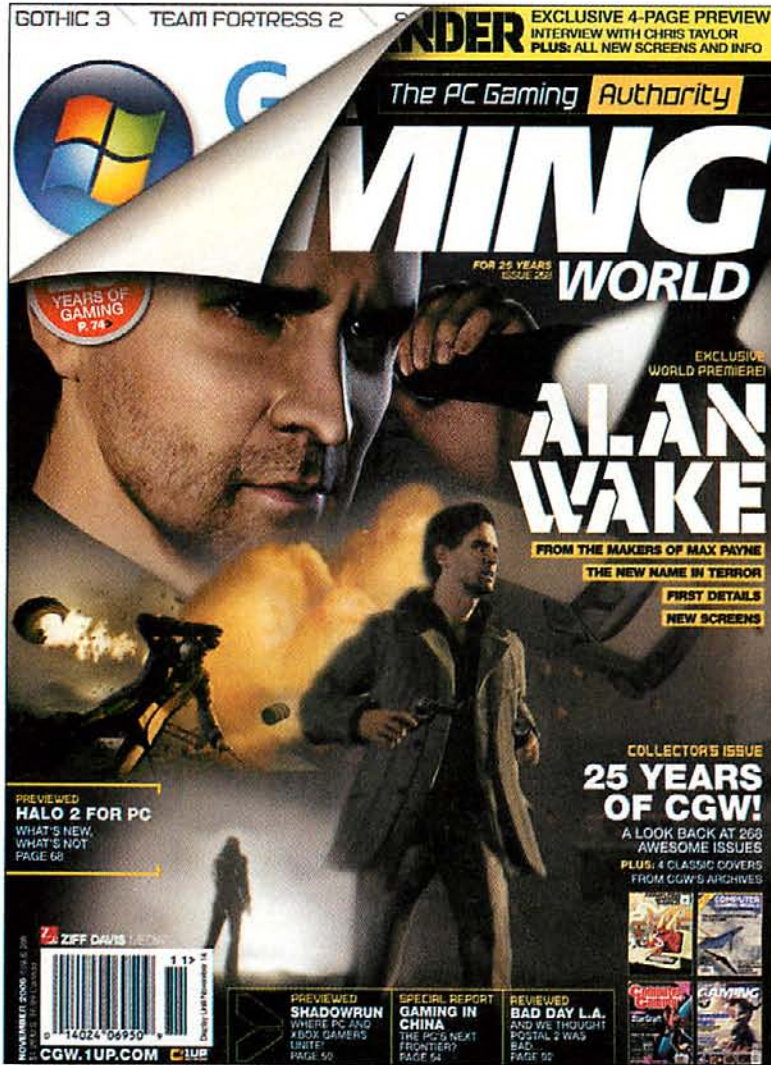
TITAN QUEST V1.15 (PATCH)
The latest patch includes a number of crash fixes, an improved autobackup system, enhanced multiplayer gameplay, and more.

JUST CAUSE (DEMO)
Take on a rogue government in this demo for the third-person action game *Just Cause*.

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Jeff will be back next month as Microsoft Jeff for Windows. Send your favorite autoexec.bat and config.sys file jokes to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

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Use of Alcohol
Violence

