The PC game industry: Enjoy it while you can

By Karen Zierler

The announcement in March of Microsoft's new wonder—the X-Box—has been hailed by some as the death knell for the PC game industry. But two major publishers are working hard to keep it alive. Black Isle Studios and BioWare Corp have resurrected the dying "computer role-playing game" (CRPG) genre.

In May Black Isle plans to release **Icewind Dale**, based on stories from *Forgotten Realms* author R. A. Salvator. By fall, BioWare expects to release **Baldur's Gate 2**, which incorporates 3D special effects. We'll all have to wait for 2001 to see full 3D in the cooperative BioWare/Black Isle production, **Neverwinter Nights**, promoted as a true Dungeon Master's dream

> Microsoft's X-Box may eventually **kill off the PC game industry**—but until then, there's plenty to enjoy.

(the official site for Baldur's Gate II, Icewind Dale and Neverwinter Nights is found at www.interplay.com/bgate2).

And there were several other new titles released this spring: Raven shipped its realistic mercenary shooter **Soldier of Fortune** (www.activision.com/games/sof/). Don't play this unless you have a tough stomach! Also out are **Heroes of Might & Magic III: Shadow of Death**, with new artifacts, combat terrain types, 38 new scenarios and a new campaign. Also out: **Thief 2** (www.lglass.com/thief2/), the sequel to the atmospheric action-adventure Allegiance; a buggy **High Heat Baseball 2001** (http://gamespot.com/sports/hh2001) and the popular series **Might&Magic VIII** (www.sabinsky.com/mm8/).

So, who cares if they've predicted doom on the PC horizon? There is still a PC heyday! •

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Customizing Your Favorite Video Games

By Nick Montfort

The most gripping games of recent years are in the first-person shooter category—a category created by the id Software hits Doom and Quake. These games take place in cavernous environments, corridors of stone or steel. There's a great pleasure in racing through these worlds, bucking for a frag in a network game.

But there's also an exquisite joy to putting such a setting together, as any designer will testify. And with the software available today, you don't have to be an expert programmer to carve out a cave of your own.

Just slapping a Doom or Quake level together, or twiddling around with an existing level, is a cinch—it does, however, take time and effort to create a truly original level. Designing a game map with an software editor is a experience that has lots of appeal to the hardcore.

Once you've learned to use an editor, the possibilities are almost endless. One level-building idea is to model your college. The University of Texas computer science department challenged students to create a Doom wadfile that represents its rather nightmarish building, Taylor Hall. A rule quickly had to be added: Don't make the attacking monsters look like professors!

Worldcraft, by Ben Morris, is a widespread favorite for creating Quake levels. There more than a dozen utilities for examining and editing levels in Doom, Doom II, Heretic and Hexen are out there. Many choose **Wad Author**, the **DCK** (Doom Construction Kit) or the **DEU** (Doom Editing Utilities). Worldcraft, Wad Author and DCK are available free- or shareware at www.stormtroopers.com/ZWR/lbl.htm; DEU is also free at www.montefiore.ulg.ac.be/~quinet/games/DEU/DEU-en.html.

Two major toolkits now give players a powerful way to create their own single-player text adventures. **TADS** (Text Adventure Design System: www.tela.bc.ca/tela/tads/) came out first. It was followed by **Inform** (www.gnelson.demon.co.uk/inform.html), which allows programmers to build story files in the original Infocom format (this is a stodgy web site that is slow to upload). A college is the setting of one famous early TADS game, the 1991 Save Princeton, and the excellent 1995 Inform game Christminster takes place at a fictional English college.

Fashioning a text game is tough—both Inform and TADS are true programming languages—but it certainly isn't impossible. More than 100 homespun adventures were released last year. •

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