

**LAUNCH NO. 27**  
**Temple Of Twitch**  
**Game Reviews**

**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri**

(Fraxis/Electronic Arts)

System: PC

From the creative team responsible for such groundbreaking strategy games as *Civilization I* and *II*, *Colonization*, and *Gettysburg!* comes *Alpha Centauri*, a game so rich, so deep, and so compelling it's guaranteed to give strategy gamers reason to celebrate.

Fans of *Civilization II* will remember that that game ended as the player left Earth's conflicts behind to establish a new society on Alpha Centauri. This new game starts when a meteor strikes the player's colony ship before it lands at the desired destination. In the ensuing chaos wrought by the explosion, the ship's crew splits into seven factions, each with its own priorities for setting up the new world. Seven factions with different viewpoints? It's a sure-fire recipe for intergalactic war. But *Alpha Centauri* is linked to *Civ II* in more ways than just its storyline; the point-and-click command interface is familiar, the style of gameplay is similar, and certain historical elements of *Civ II* have been respawned in *Alpha Centauri* as futuristic elements (i.e., Planetary Datalinks instead of the Great Library). Fans of *Civ II* will have a definite edge in navigating *Alpha Centauri's* complex interface and understanding the game's basic nature.

Set in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, *Alpha Centauri* is a turn-based strategy game focused on the seven warring factions and their attempts to save humankind from extinction. Players control one of the factions (Gaia's Stepdaughters, Human Hive, University of Planet, Morgan Industries, Spartan Federation, the Lord's Believers, and Peacekeeping Forces), each with its own strengths and weaknesses. More than 75 future technologies rooted in modern-day science are available for gamers to discover, and players can build more than 60 base upgrades and large-scale secret projects for their empire. Decide on a political system (frontier, police state, democratic, or fundamentalist), determine your society's values (survival, power, knowledge, or wealth), pick an economic structure (simple, free market, planned, or green), determine your colony's altitude, terraform (cultivate farms, construct mines, build roads, etc.),

launch attacks, and defend against the enemy. There are countless things you can do to promote the success of your society.

*Alpha Centauri* features a random 3D world generator, six difficulty levels, a full-featured map/game editor, and multiplayer support. There are five different ways to win the game: you can conquer the world or lead your people to the next step in the evolution of humanity. Diplomatic, economic, and scenario-based victories are additional options.

One peek at the game's 250-page manual should illustrate just how complicated *Alpha Centauri* is. Numbers, percentages, and point values inform much of the math-based gameplay. This is not a title for strategy-gaming newbies; only the most experienced gamers with an ungodly amount of time on their hands need apply. But those with that time will soon be embroiled in one hell of a rich and involved gaming experience; when it comes to strategy gaming, *Alpha Centauri* is about the best there is. Would you expect anything less from the great Sid Meier? --Jeff Kitts

## Contender

(SCEA)

System: PlayStation

In the world of sports video gaming, boxing has been all but ignored through the years. But boxing fans have had every reason to cheer in recent months with the release of not one, but two excellent boxing games: EA Sports' *Knockout Kings*, and this new entry from Sony Computer Entertainment America, *Contender*. Both have their strengths and weaknesses, and each caters to a different segment of the boxing community. *Knockout Kings* is more of a simulation, with actual fighters from different eras in boxing, where *Contender* is more of an arcade brawler, featuring 40 fictional fighters (male and female), quick knockdowns, and devastating Super Punches. *Contender* has something of a *Virtua Fighter* look and feel, with blocky, polygonal fighters and fast punching movements. Unfortunately, control is a bit awkward (you can't punch and move at the same time... huh?), and the fighters are pretty much flat-footed, refusing to bob or weave as you trade heavy-handed blows. If you're looking for a game that specializes in boxing realism, stick with *Knockout Kings*--but if it's pure pummeling arcade excitement you crave, *Contender* is the real deal.--Jeff Kitts

## Apocalypse

(Activision)

System: PlayStation

When you think of Hollywood actors starring in video games, washed-up personalities like Dana Plato and Kirk Cameron usually spring to mind--but *Bruce Willis*? Yes, Mr. *Die Hard* has lent his buff physique and unmistakably gruff voice to *Apocalypse*, a fast-paced action-shooter for the PlayStation. You play Trey Kincaid (Willis), a gun-toting nano-physicist on a mission to defeat the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. From a high-above perspective you guide Kincaid through 11 different 3D levels, including prisons, sewers, war factories, rooftops, cemeteries, and more, killing everything in sight and jumping from platform to platform. "Kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out," is what you'll hear Kincaid mutter from time to time, and that pretty much sums up the idea behind *Apocalypse*. Kincaid's arsenal of weaponry is incredible, ranging from machine guns and pulse lasers to homing missiles and smart bombs. Control is stellar, particularly when using analog control sticks (left side moves Kincaid, right side fires in the direction you push the stick, resulting in tremendous accuracy). The game's only marked flaw is the fact that some environments can be so dark that all you can do is run, shoot, and hope for the best. But that's the worst of it, and if you can get past it you're left with an explosive, lightning-paced affair that'll have your fingers crampin' and eyes waterin' in no time.--*Jeff Kitts*

## Turok 2: Seeds of Evil

(Acclaim)

System: PC, N64

Dinosaur hunters, prepare yourselves: Turok is back, ready once again to engage in bloody battles with all sorts of prehistoric monsters. Like its predecessor, *Turok 2* doesn't quite take place in the Jurassic period, but rather mixes time periods for a unique combination of the ancient past and far-off future (a "Proximity Fragmentation Mine Layer" is required to fend off dinosaurs). *Turok 2's* storyline returns Turok to the Lost Land to battle the Primagen, an evil force he unknowingly awakened at the end

of the first *Turok* game. This time, there are six enormous worlds to explore and more than 35 new enemies to fight. Weapons are as nasty as they come, ranging from simple machine guns and .9 mm pistols, to grenade launchers and flame throwers. The action is pretty typical 3D gaming fare: shoot, find keys, flick switches, rescue hostage children, climb ladders, hop platforms, grab powerups, etc. It's all good stuff to be sure, but not without its share of flaws. For starters, the loud and annoying music completely overpowers what few sound effects can be heard in the game. Also, the gameplay environments, while vast in size, feel extremely tight and claustrophobic; the limited visual perspective leaves the player susceptible to attacks from unseen enemies. Graphics are good (especially when using a 3D accelerator card), although the dinosaurs look too cartoonish (and the blood is ridiculously fake-looking). *Turok's* movements are slow; a "run" option should definitely have been included in the keyboard controls. Still, the game offers some nice details, like arrows that stick in dinosaur flesh and monsters that die gruesome, convulsing, slow deaths. Despite its shortcomings, *Turok 2* is a well-done 3D gaming experience and a worthy successor to the original.--  
*Jeff Kitts*

## Wargasm

(Infogrames)

System: PC

*Wargasm* might just be the strategy game for people who hate strategy games. While there is the requisite map screen where small icons move in even smaller increments as you button-click your way to territorial domination, the truth is that the real gem of *Wargasm* is the Instant Action mode. Just activate Instant Action and all strategic elements go bye-bye as you pilot a helicopter, command a tank or a soldier on foot, and engage in balls-out gunfire with the enemy troops scattered across a fully explorable 3D landscape reminiscent of *Interstate '76*. Run down desert cacti in your M1 Abrahms tank or fire missiles at buildings from your Comanche helicopter; you can even steamroll over enemy infantry men and turn your virtual windshield into a crimson mess. It's fun, it's violent, and about the only strategy involved is kill or be killed.

But if you're looking for a little more control over your troops, you can enter the game's War Web mode. Here, *Wargasm* becomes more of a standard strategy game: various mouse clicks allow you to deploy forces, commandeer units, call in

air strikes, and navigate the map screen. Every so often the game will switch into 3D action mode, as in Instant Action, and you get to control your troops from a 3D perspective. Controls are rather simple (directional arrows for movement, space bar to fire, shift to raise or lower your gun turret, etc.), although wrestling with the tanks and helicopters can be a bit of a chore (remember, these are hulking military vehicles, not race cars).

The game isn't terribly involved in either Instant Action or War Web mode; it's easy to pick up right out the box and the combat sequences are pretty engaging. Hardcore strategy fans may balk, as might hardcore *action* fans--but those in the middle likely will find *Wargasm's* melding of strategy and action appealing. --Jeff Kitts

## Myth II: Soulblighter

(Bungie)

System: PC/Mac

In 1997, Bungie Software--the company best known for the Mac-based *Marathon* series--released *Myth: The Fallen Lords*, a medieval-themed real-time strategy game that quickly earned its place among the best in its class. Still riding high on the success of *Myth*, Bungie wasted no time in developing a sequel that promised to outdo its predecessor in nearly every respect: *Myth II: Soulblighter* is that game, and it more than makes good on those promises.

*Myth II* takes place roughly 100 years after the events in *The Fallen Lords*. However, it's still an ancient world where Dwarves, Bowmen, and sword-wielding Warriors face off against Dark Archers, Stygian Knights, Warlocks, and other inhabitants of the dark side of *Soulblighter's* world. Available for both Windows and Mac systems, the game features numerous controls and keystrokes that direct your troops on the battlefield, but the title's brilliantly designed (and refreshingly humorous) tutorial will have your Dwarves hurling deadly mortar shells and your Bowmen launching flaming arrows in no time. Using a point-and-click interface, you tell your troops where to go, when to attack, what formation to take, etc. The battle scenes are thoroughly bloody, with limbs that detach upon a quick swipe of a Warrior's sword. The action is viewed from an overhead perspective, though a fully controllable camera lets you zoom and pan all around the battlefield for countless viewpoints.

*Myth II* offers some of the best script-writing and

dialogue in gaming, not to mention some wholly intuitive control. A classy affair all the way...even with all the blood and dismemberment.--*Jeff Kitts*

## CASTLEVANIA

(Konami)

System: N64

It's been 11 years since the original *Castlevania* first reared its ghoulish head, and Konami has chosen to further increase the product line's lifespan with the 12<sup>th</sup> title in the long-running series, *Castlevania* for the Nintendo 64. In this one-player frightfest, you can play as either Reinhardt Schneider, member of the famous Belmont vampire hunting family, or Carrie Fernandez, a 12-year-old girl with the ability to hurl magic fireballs. *Castlevania's* fully explorable 3D world is something right out of a John Carpenter movie, rife with skeleton warriors, two-headed dogs, vampires, lizard-men, and the big man himself, Dracula. A typical array of weapons is at your disposal to use in your fight against the undead, including crosses, knives, and axes. Gameplay is of the *Legend Of Zelda* variety, with vast areas to explore, doors to open, puzzles to solve, and platforms to jump, walls to climb, powerups to obtain, etc. It's a little generic, but positively brimming with atmosphere. As the fog rolls across the land and a lone werewolf howls somewhere off in the distance, a giant clap of thunder may pierce the air and scare you silly. Or you may be standing in the middle of a forest when day suddenly gives way to night, leaving you alone in the darkness. What lurks around the corner is anybody's guess...but chances are good that it's the stuff of nightmares. Did you remember to bring your holy water?--*Jeff Kitts*