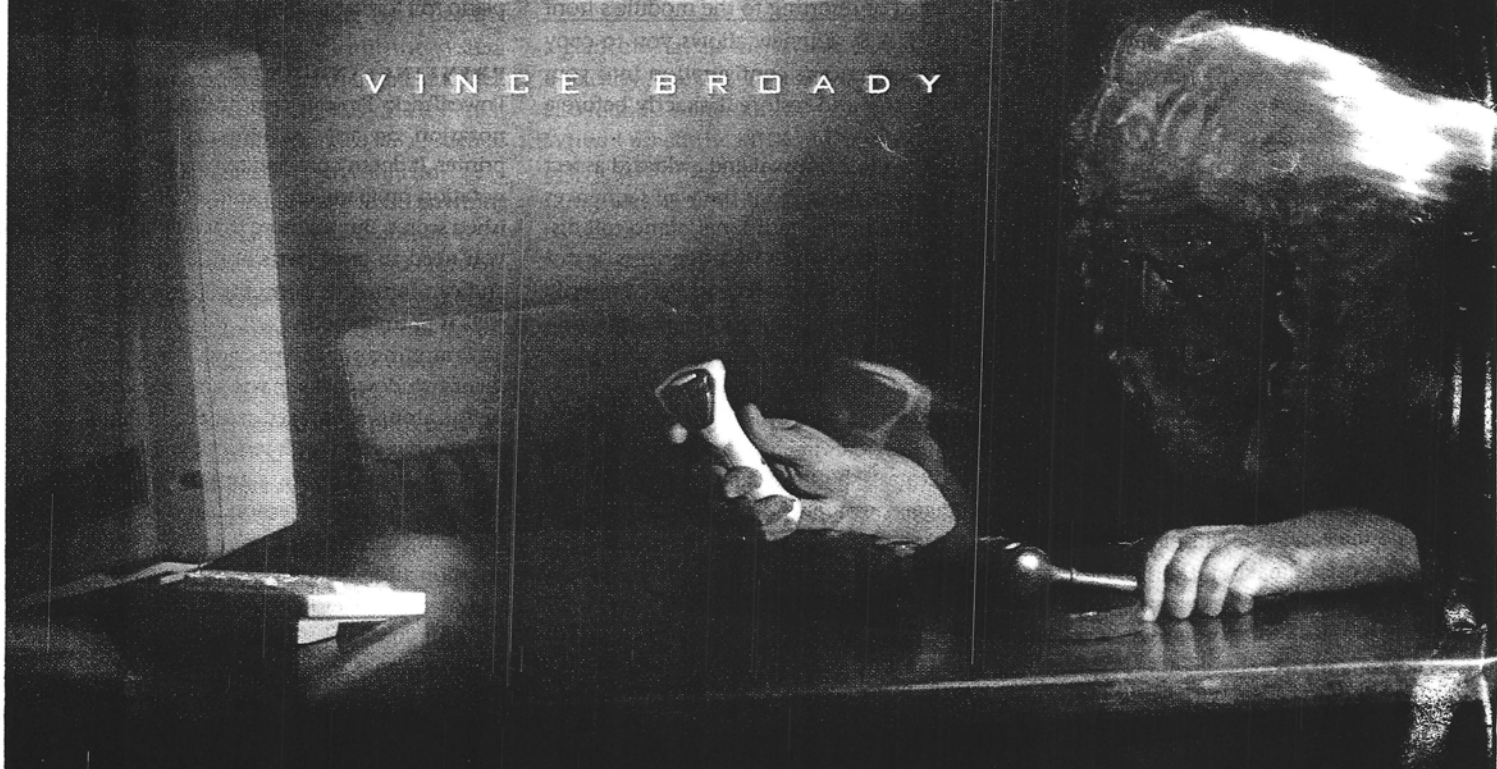


IF BEING FUN IS A CRIME,
THESE EIGHT GAMES ARE
GUILTY AS CHARGED.

THE VERDICT IS

VINCE BROADY



IN

Almost since its inception, CD-ROM has been judged by computer gamers—and they've found it wanting. While the industry pundits have preached the gospel of multimedia's entertainment potential, the people who count—the players—have often been left scratching their heads, wondering what all the hype was about.

Of course, the news hasn't been all bad. There have been a dozen or so solid multimedia games released over the past three years, and a handful of truly fabulous ones (see "The Unofficial *Multimedia World Gaming Hall of Fame*"). But the fact remains that, up to this point at least, the vast majority of CD-ROM games could be filed under S for slow, stupid, or shovelware.

But thankfully, things are beginning to look up for MPC gamers. The explosive growth of the multimedia market has attracted the interest of the greatest names and brains in the industry. Programmers are learning how to play to a CD-ROM's strengths, while cleverly avoiding its weaknesses. Top talent from Hollywood has gotten in on the act as well, with professional screenwriters, producers, and actors turning their attention from the silver screen to the silver disc.

The result of these factors is a new generation of multimedia software that finally lives up to its potential, delivering an unprecedented level of gaming excitement.

WHAT MAKES A GAME GREAT?

Even so, not every new title is a winner. Obviously, there are dozens more new CD-ROM games on the market than are featured in this article. What makes these eight games special?

A combination of factors. The first is that each of these CD-ROMs is centered around a real game. You won't find any interactive movie, edutainment, or coffee-table book titles mentioned here. Nor will you find any CD-ROMs that include a game as a sideshow, or as a last-minute addition designed to appease the marketing department. These titles have been built from the ground up with the sole purpose of offering the player a great gaming experience—nothing more, and nothing less.

The second factor is that each of these titles takes full advantage of multimedia's vast possibilities. The specific combinations of media elements—including music, speech, video, animations, and text—vary greatly, but all of these CD-ROMs make the most of the elements they include. As a result, these attention-grabbing titles make the player react with a heartfelt "Wow," immediately hypnotize impartial bystanders, and singe the ears of anyone within

speaker range.

The third factor is that these games make no concessions to the inherent performance characteristics of CD-ROM. Players know that blackouts, unexpected pauses, and hourglass icons are symbols of boredom, not of enthralling entertainment. The developers of these games realized this as well, and successfully rooted out such distractions from their programs. Unlike many multimedia titles, these CD-ROMs respond almost instantaneously to the user's commands. In fact, as far as their raw performance goes, these titles are essentially indistinguishable from hard-disk games.

Finally, these CD-ROMs are relatively painless to install (some even run under Windows). They prove that it is possible to create compelling entertainment software without requiring users to manually reconfigure every last aspect of their system files. They're still not at the user-friendly level of a plug-in cartridge, but they aren't that far away, either. As a side note, I should also mention that while these games run best on a state-of-the-art multimedia Level 2 PC, they all function quite nicely on a basic system (486SX-25, 4MB of RAM, and a single-speed CD-ROM drive).

LESS TALK, MORE GAMES

So the formula for a winning entertainment title is pretty simple: First, focus all your efforts on making a great game. Second, incorporate a ton of cool multimedia elements. Third, overcome any negative performance issues relating to CD-ROM. Fourth, make it easy to install and play on almost any multimedia PC.

If development teams do all these things successfully, there is a good chance they will create the types of games that players clamor for—games like these.

MODEL: VINCE BROADY

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK GARY

EIGHT GREAT GAMES

EIDOLON MILLENNIUM AUCTION

Although CD-ROM affords game designers the opportunity to create completely new forms of entertainment, more often than not they stick to tried-and-true themes and designs. Refreshingly, this is not the case with *Millennium Auction*, the first effort from a New York-based firm, Eidolon.

The game is set in 2015, in a dog-eat-dog world where everything is up for sale, including history's most famous works of art. You are cast in the role of a predatory bidder, seeking to acquire as many artifacts as possible and then resell them, at a profit of course, to third parties. Your competition consists of three other players, either human or computer controlled, who share the same ambitions. Each game consists of the bidding, buying, and selling of 12 objects. Whoever makes the most money wins.

To make the right decisions on which pieces to buy, and how much to pay, you are given the chance to do a little fact checking before the auction begins. You can listen in on private conversations, watch television newscasts, or peruse standing offers for the objects in question. Of course, even the most disciplined of players may be goaded into making foolish purchases during the game's frantic bidding sessions.

Needless to say, *Millennium Auction* doesn't play like any other CD-ROM game. It doesn't look or sound like any other game,

Right: Kirk Cameron readies his sword, but you'll have to do the actual fighting in *The Horde*.

Below: *Millennium Auction*'s characters trade small talk before a heated bidding session.

Player	Cash	Portfolio	Net Worth
Rasheed Ahmad	8.5	0.0	8.5
Dieter Haas	8.5	0.0	8.5
Renate Antonelli	8.5	0.0	8.5
Takeshi Mori	8.5	0.0	8.5

either. The audiovisual environment is highly stylized and incredibly detailed, and the 3-D-rendered animations of both people and places are smooth as silk. The various combinations of objects (over 120 in all) make the game eminently replayable, and add-in modules will allow you to plug in new *objets d'art* in the near future. If you're looking for a diversion even your non-techie friends can enjoy, or if you want to challenge your mind rather than your fingers, put in a bid for *Millennium Auction*.

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CRYSTAL DYNAMICS THE HORDE

In *The Horde*, the first MPC release by 3DO developer Crystal Dynamics, you are cast as Chauncey, a young and somewhat naive servant boy. You recently saved the life of the king, so you have been elevated to near-princely status, complete with your own little fiefdoms scattered throughout the countryside. Your duty is to protect the people who live under your care, and, more importantly, to generate revenue for the king's coffers.



Unfortunately, a nasty gang of hobgoblins, known only as

the Horde, stands between you and your noble aspirations. These ruthless, revolting, and rank creatures sweep down like a plague upon your villages—destroying the humble abodes, wreaking havoc with crops and cows, and ingesting any unlucky souls who happen to cross their path.

There are two ways to combat this evil menace: strategy or the sword. First, by placing defensive fortifications—such as pit traps, walls, moats, and so on—in key areas around the village, you may eliminate some of the enemies before they can do any damage. But if your strategy fails, you'll need to use your sword and engage in arcade-style combat against Hordlings