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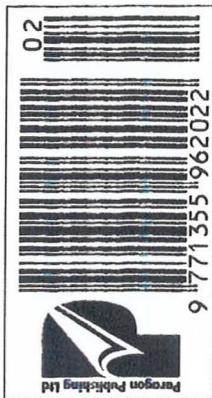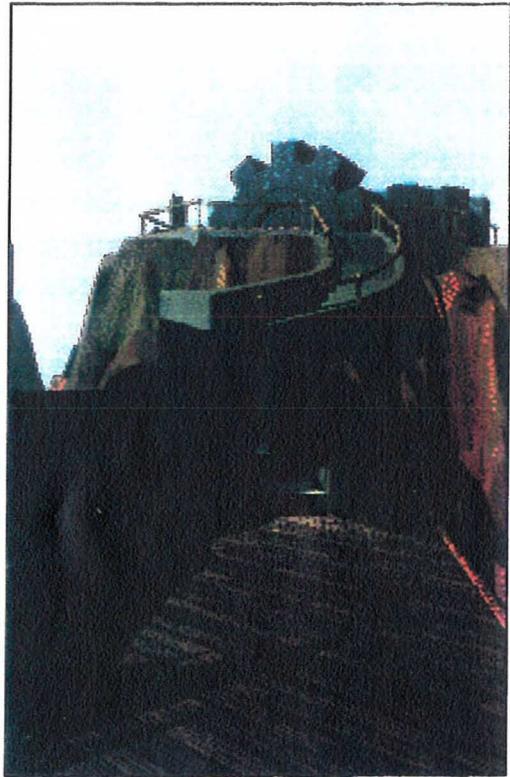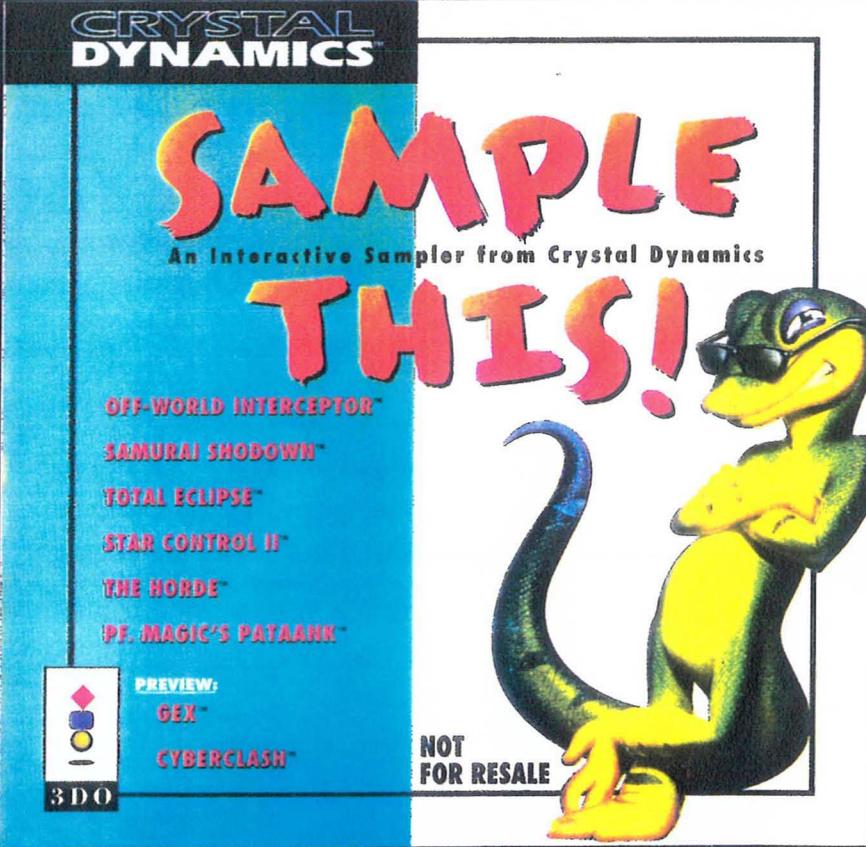
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It's *Mystical*

The best adventure of all time gets a face lift on the 3DO system

Reviewed Inside: *Return Fire, Demolition Man, StarBlade, Operation JumpGate, Family Feud, Rebel Assault, Shanghai Triple Threat, Virtuoso, Iron Angel Of The Apocalypse and more.*

Features include: *Massive CES report; new GoldStar GPA 101M review; joystick round-up, plus interviews with EA's Chris Thompson and Silent Software's Baron Von Wolfsheild.*

WIN THE UK'S VERY FIRST GOLDSTAR 3DO SYSTEM

NEW!

Baron R K Von Wolfsheild

Making Porsches in a VW World

Silent Software's Reichart Von Wolfsheild is one of videogaming's most colourful and controversial characters. After earning a fortune as an MTV producer and TV ad maker, he set up a software company he estimates is a thousand times more efficient than its competition. Stuart Wynne asked about his story and why he thought 3DO was winner.

When did you first get involved in the business?
"I started in 1974 with the Altair and then went onto the Apple I, II, the Timex-Sinclair computers, the ZX81 I think you called it over there. When the IBM PC came out I actually wasn't very interested in it – it was too primitive, it didn't even have a video output... In the Eighties the Macintosh came out and I was a real fan, it was so much simpler to use than even the [Apple] Lisa. It affected totally what I thought you could do with computers. But in 1984 a friend of mine introduced me to the Black Box Amiga. I realised then that there was a platform on which games and utilities could be created much easier, much faster than even on a Macintosh. With colour, and sound!

In 1984 I didn't like most computer games, but I liked a game on the Atari by Jay Minor called *Tank*. It was simple and given away with the Atari and in it you drove a tank through a maze on a search for your enemy. I like the idea of tanks because it doesn't get any simpler. Computer games are particularly enjoyable when they take the form of some sort of destruction or violence and what epitomizes destruction more, a person running around with a gun?... or a Tank - a big, heavy vehicle with a big, powerful cannon?"

Are you essentially a programmer?
"No, my background is as a traditional artist. But my history is odd. In essence while most people would love to come to Hollywood and get in the film business, this was always my worst nightmare! Friends kept coming to me with film and TV jobs, but I didn't want them.

In the early Eighties a friend of mine, a director who worked with Michael Jackson, came to me and said he wanted to create short videos for popular music – like the Monkees used to do. And I knew it was the Mike Nesbitt thing, MTV. So I was the art director and special effects guy working with a whole bunch of friend. We

produced something like the first 10% of videos that aired on MTV. I was working with all these pop stars like J. Giles, Rick Springfield, Donna Summer...

"It was a lot of fun, but what I really wanted to do was work in computers. Of course, eventually the two worlds collided with computer special effects. I did TV ads for Pepsi, Pizza Hut, God Father's Pizza, and 7-11. The money was great; I made more money in a month that most people earn in a year. But I just hated it, the whole scene: the drugs, the self-importance, alcohol, cigarettes. I guess I was a nerd but I didn't look like it! I was really craving intellectual stimulation. There's only so many times I can discuss where to put a camera, what colour to use.

"It was also about the time two acts took off, Boy George and Wham, and I just thought 'this is over, this is so frivolous and crappy.' George Michael has gone on to do some great stuff but Wham was so child-like and techno-boppy. I was hoping to get into the epic grunge, even back then, I wanted music videos to do something serious and artistic. Wham was eye-candy. So I said 'I can't do this anymore.' I stopped working for a year and began doing research on computer to see what the market wanted.

"I decided what I wanted to do was, well, a game I wanted to play and on a PC with a serial port, this meant it could include modem play. And this Amiga was awesome, so basically what I did was write a fast asynchronous transfer routine for it. The other thing I did was write a game with two independent windows with two tanks, each in one window. From there I developed *Firepower* [a 16bit prequel to *Return Fire*] which was a top ten hit. Then I created *Galactic Invasion*, *Turbo* and *Mindroll* – which was a reinterpretation of C64 *Quedex*, by Stavros Fasoulas. I don't usually convert other people's work, but I so liked *Quedex* I wanted to see it on other machines.

"Anyway, then we did *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* for Amiga, PC, C64 and Apple II... the real magic there was we did all the formats in just ninety days! One of my key animators was Eric Daniels, who we hired away from Disney. It was on *Roger* that we developed software called *Onion* [after the animation paper used in conventional animation], because animators are expen-

sive and it was wasting time for him to draw on paper and then scan each drawing in. Onion allowed us to create about 16 times more animation.
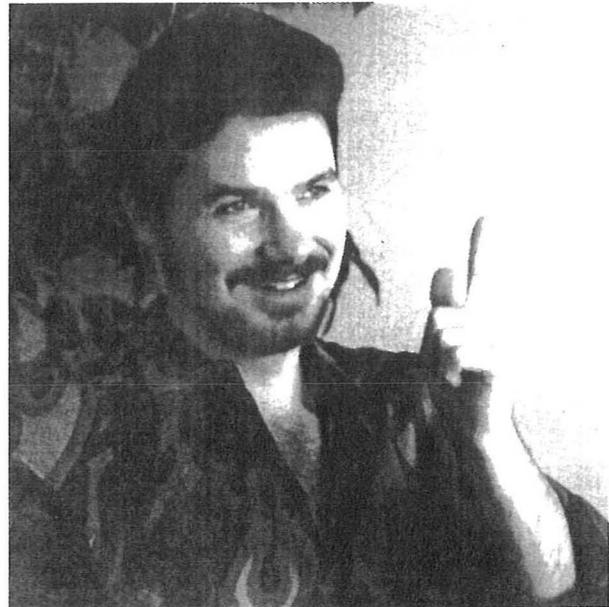
"*Onion* was later developed into *Disney Presents.. The Animation Studio*. It also won an award from the SPA [Software Publishers Association], and is still used in movie houses all over the world to create videos, time animation, and create shorts. After that we worked with Commodore designing CDTV – we developed special video compression techniques which had to fit into the machine's ROM, and we created and designed the whole CD audio virtual control panel."

After that you seemed to take a break...
"Yeah, I took about a three year break. I can't really tall about the work we did then, it was for the government education and private companies. It was nice. We worked fast, compared to other companies we *seem* to work a thousand times faster. We estimated one hour o our time was equal to about one year of another person's. We made a lot of money solving other people's problems – and I've got such a large network of friends there's always these calls – where people have been working for three to four years on a piece of software and we've solved their problems in a day, literally day. We look at the code and we fix it. A very simple analogy: we build Porsche race cars in a world where most people are Volkswagen designers. And once in while someone comes to us and says, 'oh, my VW is broken.' So we walk over and say 'oh, this is it righ here.' Because we're used to working on these incredibly complex, high performance engines it's so simple...

"I'll take a small diversion here because recently booted up my old C64 for reference. I like to believe you should use the worst example of a machine a game could run on. If you can make the game fun on a primi-

tive piece of technology, then you should be able to make that game fun on a more sophisticated piece of technology. I have a friend who recently bought an Atari 800 because he really enjoyed the games back then and he wanted to understand why. He owns the entire library of 3DO games (he's fanatical) and he thought so many are just eye-candy, which I agree with. On *Return Fire* the last thing we put in were the special effects..."

How would you compare *Return Fire* to old C64 games?

"We've become so sophisticated nowadays with the PC and Macintoshes we work on. With *Return Fire*, for example, we recently figured out printing its source code would use something like eight reams of paper with about 66 lines of code per page. We're talking about a stack of paper a foot and a half tall on your desk. For a computer game! And I can remember when games were just 8K. I wrote a 2K game once for an Altair. So the way to look at it is we've become like brain surgeons. Expert technicians for this sophisticated technology. C64 games were better thought out than most games of today. It is so easy to throw fancy sound and full motion video into games machines today. I call them 'Animated Slide Shows.' *Return Fire* was built with the care and consideration of the old days. You might say that it's an old fashioned game... destroy, destroy, destroy.

"*Return Fire* does not have an intelligent, computer generated opponent because it was primarily designed for two players. I want people to play against each other. I don't design computer games to play against a computer, I design computer games so that people can play against each other using the computer as the "board" on which to play the game. I would like to use more computer intelligence in the future, but not necessarily using the computer as an opponent - because there is no challenge. In a war game what's happening? You're targeting and firing. What's going to do that better, a human or a computer? A computer can win constantly, it's not a challenge, it's not fun. I think many more games will be like this in the future. "

What are you working on now?

"Currently we're developing 15 products, including *Return Fire*. You're not going to hear about all of the products. Some are utilities which will be reviewed in PC magazines, who won't know about our games, so it's like two separate worlds we operate in, but I guarantee you'll eventually use one of our utilities even though you probably won't know it was by us. And all these projects were financed out of our own pocket, which is pretty unusual for a developer. That's one of the reasons we're getting into publishing our own software."

Who worked on *Return Fire*?

"Some of the people working on *Return* are Van Arno, who's the graphic artist, then there's Will Ware who's the programmer who did all of the programming. Alex Kasperavicius was the producer. And we're an odd group, all Lithuanian or German, all over six foot – a pretty ominous group, but we're all incredibly non-violent. Yet we're for the freedom of expression in entertainment, although we don't think we'll ever step outside the boundaries of what is acceptable. The tanks in *Return Fire* may squash people, but we hope we've done that in the most delightful way possible! It makes people laugh. Yet we're constantly appalled by TV. I can't even watch the news. It might seem like a contradiction, but that's the question; if you can separate real violence and what the game symbolises – which is just the game. I tell you when I first saw *Street Fighter II*, and to this day, I think this is an excessively violent game with imagery I don't think is acceptable. This sounds like a contradiction

with *Return Fire*. But permit me, take 100 women, bring them in a room, mothers alike, let them play both games and let them tell me what they say. I don't see any redeeming qualities, or intelligence, or even spatial comprehension in *SFII*. In *Return Fire* you have to comprehend in your mind, not merely on the screen, what your enemy is doing. Unless you do that, you cannot win."

How long did *Return Fire* take to program?

"That's a difficult question because everyone here works on what they want, pretty much whenever they want. *Return Fire* was a backburner project, just something we did in our spare time, because we had to wait for there to be a big enough installed base out there [for 3DO]. I mean I loved the machine from day one. It was ahead of its time when it came out and it's still ahead of its time.

"Anyway, *Return* took about two years in all; we played around with it a lot. It took us about three months just to develop the 'look.' It uses a lot of very tiny polygons, every vehicle, tree and so on is made up of polygons – everything. I estimate the 3DO is handling about 200,000 polygons per second, and we could go up to 230,000. If you look at *Return Fire* you see it rendering animated men and translucent shadows. Then if you look at the helicopter it's got a transparent cockpit and you can see the men in there. People keep on saying that 3DO can't do polygons. Right."

How would you say 3DO is still ahead of its time?

"Probably with an American accent. Okay, a couple of ways. 3DO is really a computer with a videogame machine output, whereas other machines are simply games machines. You see 3DO is really a philosophy, not just hardware. The inherent philosophy is: when you upgrade, it works... At the CES I went in the 3DO booth with all these machines and our game's running, then I walk down to this huge Panasonic stand and there are more machines with this huge projection TV display, and then I walk to the GoldStar booth. And it all works, all these different 3DOs, just like a VCR. This is awesome... oh, and there's the Creative Labs 3DOBlaster too!

"Then there's the development environment. I can't really comment on the other systems, except to say I've got a Sega development system and doesn't seem to even run all of its own demos. For 3DO there's a solid compiler tool, audio tool and video tool. Also we use IBMs, Mac and Amigas all linked together with no problem (amazing, eh?). The hardware's really cheap, I got the development system for around $10K... I've even got a CD mastering machine so I can put my game on disc for proof of concept. 3DO is just such a cool concept.

"They [3DO] also have great technical support. I have a problem and I get on the line and there's a real person there to answer a real question. I know some people think 3DO is a bit stand-offish, but that's not my experience and I know other guys, like Morpheus who're just a couple of guys with their first game (*VR Stalker* which is great for a first game), and they think the same. So it's not just because I personally know lots of people at 3DO. Besides which, it's such a kick ass incredible piece of hardware."

Do you think the base machine is powerful enough to establish the format?

"Definitely. Look at Sony's PlayStation. It's their first attempt. They're not a games company and the technology is based on what was available about a year-and-a-half ago. The Sega Neptune, basically the Genesis and the 32X mated, that's basically just a frame buffer. It is good, I am impressed with it technologically, but the sound is never going to be good enough if it's not fulll CD quality – you can get a CD player but then it costs more than a 3DO. And they've been working on that for

about a year-and-a-half too. So we all know what their technology can do. So let me put the question back to you: what do you think 3DO's team of top engineers and seasoned software designers have been doing since they *released* 3DO over a year and a half ago?

M2.

"Right. I saw the PSX. I saw the Saturn. I saw the Ultra64, and then I saw the M2 and literally my jaw fell open. I'm not making a joke. One of the people with me pointed it out and we joked about it. M2 is 'very impressive.' Especially because of some of the stuff inside that I know about. Which I can't talk about. And especially because of the price, which I also can't talk about. I definitely will support 3DO. There's no doubt about it.

"The designers of 3DO are old friends of mine (even graying). R.J. was looking forward to seeing what I could do with his hardware as much I was. He and Dave Needle design hardware from the perspective of software designers. It's just great hardware."

Will you do another game for 3DO? And will you redo games for M2?

"Oh absolutely, we'll do more games. We're doing some now but I can't describe them. As for re-doing them for M2, I don't know. All our 3DO games will run with M2, we've done tests, but M2 is so powerful that I think anything we do for it will be done from scratch. *Return Fire* is actually more a philosophy than a game though, it's like chess, so there might be another game in the same style for M2."

What other 3DO games do you like?

"There's a lot of eye-candy out there, but I like *Gex*, *Road Rash*, *Need For Speed* for 3DO. Although I have problem with *Need For Speed*, which is when you have the crashes everything goes into the slow-motion. I race, I average 100mphon surface streets, and I've seen real flips and everything happens extremely fast."

You think the standard 3DO could run *Need* faster?

"Sure, I think it could run a lot faster, definitely. I don't know the program well, I don't want to criticise the developers but I'd say there were at least three calculations they're doing that they don't need to do. One thing about 3DO is that divide calculations are very dangerous. Because it's a RISC chip and there's no divide function built-in you have to be very careful and do shifts instead of divisions."

How do you regard the software scene generally?

"There's a lot of these titles which I call 'GBG': Games Between Glass. Games like *Ecco The Dolphin* and *Mario Bros* games. It's like they're squished between panes of glass. I don't like those sort of 'games'. I like games with real depth, with substance. With 3DO the hardware can do real-time 3D. So why don't people do it? I'd like to see developers push themselves more. A lot give up far too easily, on all formats."

3DO Magazine