

Batt Bytes

A = instant classic B = a cut above C = average
D = don't buy it F = burn in effigy

Command and Conquer: Tiberian Sun

Developer: Westwood Studios
 Genre: Strategy
 System: Windows PC

Westwood took its sweet time rolling out the next installment of the conflict between the Global Defense Force and the Brotherhood of Nod, but the end product is more than worth the wait.

As is the custom, the rules are simple — players build a base with money gleaned from a mining process (like harvesting wheat, but with guns), then go out and stomp a mudhole in their enemies.

The aforementioned is easier said than done. Westwood revamped the artificial-intelligence engine, making computer-controlled enemies smarter and more tenacious than ever. On the highest difficulty setting, the computer could almost replace a human opponent.

The AI is not the only thing Westwood seriously monkeyed with. The graphics, still essentially two-dimensional, are superb, with well-drawn unit animations and faithfully reproduced lighting and shading. Shoot out a street lamp, and it gets dark — at least until the next building gets converted to slag. Ion storms, meteor showers and other assorted pixelations are mind-blowing.

The quality of *Tiberian Sun*, however, is more than the sum of its individual parts. The cerebral satisfaction of a well-timed flank-

ing maneuver is tempered by the less noble pleasure of making the bad guys suffer terribly.

If players say it with sabots to an infantry division, they are rewarded with screams for a medic. Blow up a building, and the explosion hurts nearby enemies, who must flee the flying shrapnel.

While the game's central concept, killing thine enemies, is relatively straightforward, both sides differ greatly in their approaches to conducting campaigns. Learning to play well as both sides is its own unique challenge.

Finally, computer-strategy buffs can put away their aged copy of *Starcraft*, because *Command and Conquer: Tiberian Sun* is the new king of the heap. (Grade: A)

— Stephen Wells

Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo

Developer: Capcom
 Genre: Puzzle
 System: Playstation

At first glance, it looks like any other puzzle game. Drop the gems and break them with orbs. Kind of a cross between *Tetris* and *Columns*. No big thing, just a fun little game. But then playing it turns from minutes to hours. People drop by and keep playing, and they do not leave. Suddenly, dawn breaks, and madness turns into hysteria. No sleep. No food. And that look in the eyes of the roommate who has been winning for the past hour and a half!!

For those who dismiss this game as cute or simple, be forewarned — This is a dangerous and addictive game, conceived in the very bowels of hell and the insanity of popular Japanese culture. This game is the Nintendo Antichrist.

The characters of *Street Fighter* and *Darkstalkers*, shrunk to "cute" size, scream out wacky Japanese phrases. The colors are bright, wild and wacky, and the screen flashes enough to put a three-toed tree sloth into an epileptic seizure.

Everything insane in Japanese pop culture except Pokémon is represented in this game.

But all this only adds to the quality and surrealism that makes *Puzzle Fighter* so appealing. Playing the game is like being in an arcade, but without the pimply-faced kid whose claim to fame is performing Ryu's ultimate death-karate eye poke with his eyes closed.

Each time a player destroys blocks (by lining them up into rows), more blocks are dropped onto the opposing player's side of the screen. But those blocks, known as temporary blocks, do not become real until the player drops five subsequent sets of blocks. Each character drops a different color pattern of blocks, and hidden characters can be found for even more unusual drop patterns.

This game is easy to learn and provides hours of entertainment. *Puzzle Fighter* is probably the best party game to come along since *Mario Kart* and *Goldeneye*. (Grade: A+)

— Kyle Whitacre

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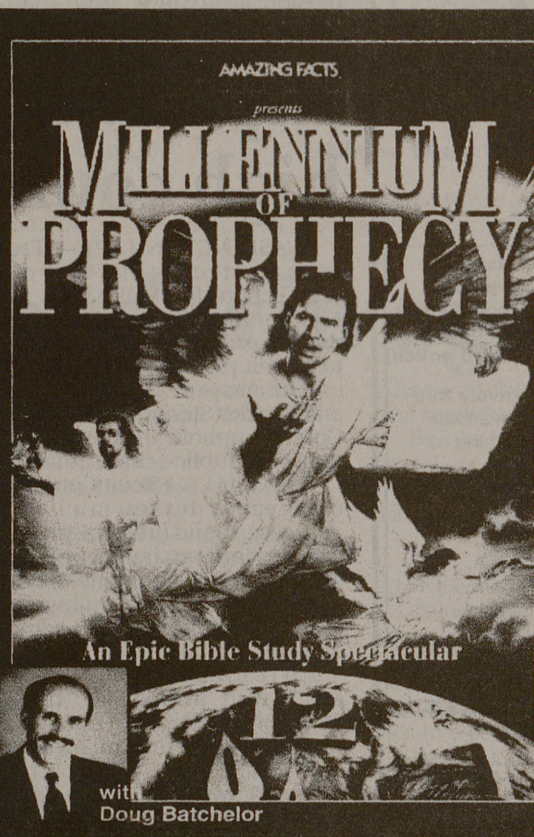
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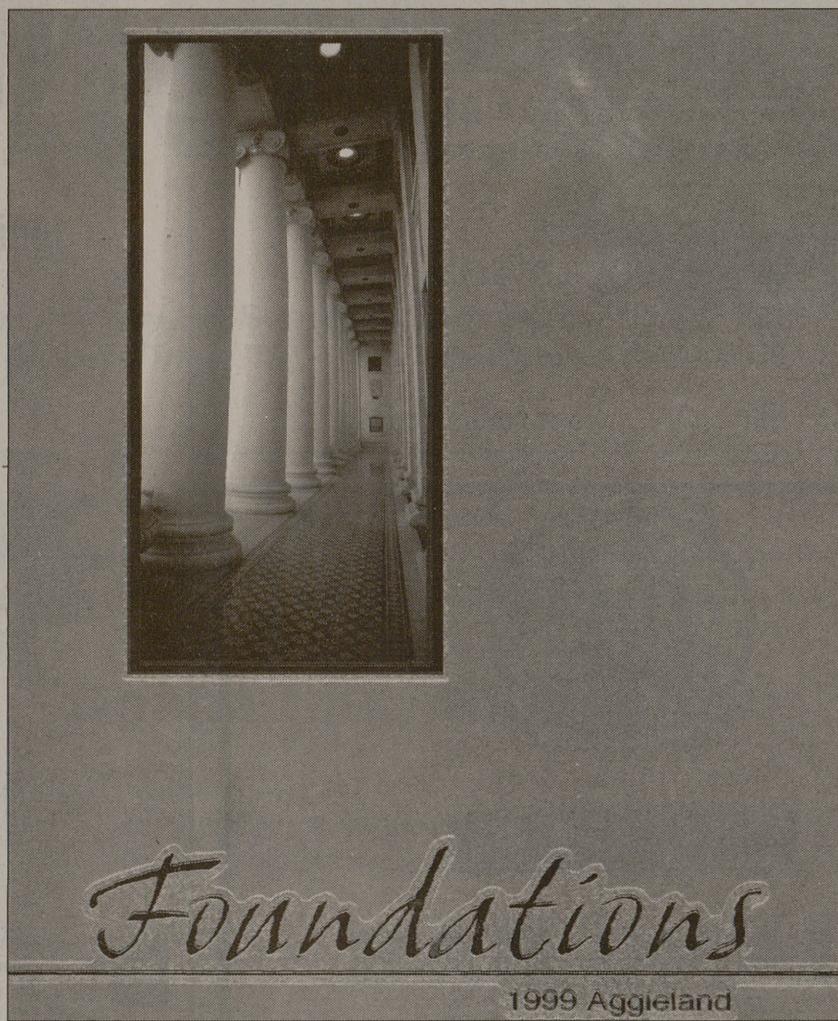
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