

Frictionless Insight

E3 2002

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Frictionless Insight's First Annual E3 Awards

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May 24, 2002

FI is still digesting the surfeit of information it gathered from this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo. Expect a spate of information in the days and weeks ahead. For now, we have the following broad observations to share. Xbox owners should take heart. Over the next year or so, the Xbox



figures to get a flood of titles, including a few exclusives (even if only temporarily so). The PlayStation 2 and GameCube have their share of treats to look forward to, as well. We cannot begin to describe (or, at points, understand) the devotion of Nintendo fans, but suffice it to say they are dedicated as evidenced by the throngs at Nintendo's displays. The life of the PS2 continues **with unabated strength.**

Despite periodic doomsaying and hand wringing, the PC games scene looks as lively as ever. Some long-awaited games like *Neverwinter Nights* are finally on the cusp of release. From what FI saw, and with due respect to some outstanding console titles, PC games still seem to hold the edge in innovation, if not in budget. The worst case scenario for PC gaming is hardly devastating. It is easy to see console gaming developing into something like Hollywood, while PC games become the world of theater. Theater is the first entry for most actors into the profession since "the school play" is far more prevalent than "the school movie." Similarly, first entry for programmers still seems to be through the PC, often through the mod community. Even so, theater is less wealthy and less widely viewed than film. So too could it be for PC games . . . someday. But that day is not today. PC gaming retains glitz and star power by any definition.

FI has decided to summarize its other reflections in Frictionless Insight's First Annual E3 Awards. True to FI style, however, we will not be granting a Best of Show or any such thing. Too many projects are in too different stages of development to make such an award meaningful. Besides, there was simply no way to get hands on with all the titles we wanted to see or spend as much time as we wanted with those we did see. In any event, we hope the following awards will give you a flavor of the 2002 E3 experience. We'll have more on each of the mentioned games later on.

Best Gimmicky Display: Honorable mention here goes to the Sega Sports faux-Vegas sports gambling complex. Sega set up a small coliseum of comfy seats facing multiple screens on which Sega sports games (all computer players) were running. Sega even took fake bets and offered odds lines. But the Best Gimmicky Display belongs to Universal Interactive for its Hobbit home. Not only was the hut full-



sized and grassy, but it had smoke piping out its chimney. The kicker was that Universal was running the demos for its *Lord of the Rings* games inside the hut, projected onto the interior dome in planetarium-like fashion. Cool.

Frenchest Game: You might think Ubi Soft would offer the winner her, but *non, monsieur!* The key here is not simply to be the Frenchest company, but to provide the game most distinctly French. The winner is *Gladiators*, a real-time strategy game for the PC, shown at the Arxel Tribe booth. Your hero unit is a 6'7", 207 lbs. soldier with *tres Francais* 3 o'clock shadow. Your main units are clone-copied stout, square-jawed, beret-wearing monster killers. *Si feroz*. We kid because we love. The game looks like it could offer an uncomplicated good time. More later.

Biggest Boobs (In Game): FI declines to comment on the – ahem – booth attendants, but we think the games are fair play. Lara Croft was on display in her new *Tomb Raider* game, so you know she was a contender. Also vying for top honors(?) was [BloodRayne](#) of the eponymous game. Nevertheless, FI has never encountered anything quite like the modified anime beach volleyball players of *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. We aren't sure, but suspect that Tecmo spent more time on the physics of the chests of its busty lasses than on the volleyball and net.



Hero of E3: Honorable mention goes to Leo Olebe of Disney Interactive who demoed *Tron 2.0* for us. At 3 p.m. on Day 3, this guy was effusive, in full voice and incredibly helpful. The E3 grinder had no impact on this guy. The winner, however, is indisputably the nameless (and surely underappreciated) young QA guy we forced to demonstrate *Britney's Dance Beat* for us over at the THQ booth. This guy was a trooper. We made him stomp out several levels on a dance mat in searing temperatures while explaining to us the finer points of the gameplay mechanisms and story, such as they are. He even pretended not to resent us.

Best Business Model (Developer): There's no runner-up here, just a flat out winner. The developers of the [America's Army, the Official U.S. Army Game](#) (a group simply called the America's Army development team) are practically beside themselves with glee and not just because they believe they've put together a pretty sharp game. These guys have a business plan that reads like a fairy tale. The Army pays them to make a cool game – and here's the kicker – they don't have to worry about sales since the game is being given away for free as part of the Army's recruitment efforts. Moreover, the Army wants the game to expand with regular episodes, so the project lives on well past release. FI also offers kudos for the 87th Army Mobile Combat Public Relations Team (which may not be their real unit designation) that absolutely dominated the show with its combat vehicles and rappelling demonstrations.

Game-We-Didn't-Want-To-Play-But-Now-Must-Have: Second place goes to *Outlaw Golf*, due out mid-June for the Xbox (at least initially). *Outlaw Golf* grabs attention with the gimmick of putting trailer park sweetsies on some unusual courses (like the New Jersey Turnpike course), but actually appears to deliver an attractive and solid golf game at its core. Come for the caddy beatings; stay for the sweet fade. The winner here, though, is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, coming out mid-summer

just for the Xbox. FI confesses to having watched a couple or 20 episodes of the Buffy TV show, but we figured the game would be a non-starter. Our look at it was motivated by kitsch value. We were surprised to discover that *Buffy* actually appears to offer a satisfying and genuinely innovative action/adventure. The game looks sharp, is easy to play, and Buffy packs a good variety of combat moves. We're not kidding. Take a look when the time comes.

Most Curious Swag: E3 is, at its core, a trade show, no different than a car expo. And where there are trade shows, there is swag – the little prizes and trinkets handed out as promotional items. The oddest, most unexpected bit of swag we were handed was a small Velcro pouch containing a rudimentary first-aid kit that attaches to your belt. The pouch came courtesy of Strategy First and features the logo for *O.R.B., Off-World Resource Base*. It's just plain odd to get handed a belt pack of band-aids and an antiseptic towelette at E3.

