

RPGs of the Future

Have you ever been in a situation where you had a job to do, and no matter how fast you ran, how quickly you looked, or how hard you tried, you just didn't get it done? That's exactly how I felt after this year's Electronics Entertainment Expo, otherwise known as E3. With

such a proliferation of products, it was well-nigh impossible for me to run around and see everything I wanted to see. I saw a lot of neat stuff; I saw a lot of new stuff; and I saw a lot of boring stuff — but I didn't see everything. Here's a quick look at some of the most promising titles I saw at the show:

Swords and Sorcery

In this new roleplaying game from Virgin Interactive, you take control of a party of adventurers, but you see the world through the eyes of whatever character you have control of. While you control one character, the others react according to their own artificial intelligence. You can stop time and fight enemies in turn-based mode, or you can keep everything in real-time (a choice many RPGs are offering today). This is an RPG that really puts you in the characters' shoes — your viewing perspective even shifts when you move from a tall character to a shorter one. You'll have to split up your party to solve some puzzles, which should make for some good brain-teasers. From what I saw of the game, it has great potential. The interface needs to be cleaned up a bit, though — if it remains as cluttered as it is, it could be a serious downfall. However, with smooth play control, this one has a lot of promise. I don't know

why more people aren't talking about it, but we'll see how well it does when it comes out. Too many potentially great games have been ruined by lack of fine tuning.

Gabriel Knight: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned

The Gabriel Knight games have always been some of my favorite adventures. As far as I'm concerned, Jane Jensen is the best adventure storyteller in the business, and she's put in extensive research to get this new story just right. The game's engine is quite differ-

— you walk to a stairway and you suddenly appear in the next area. The new character classes are a blast to play. The environments are spookier than ever. Outdoor combat looked awesome. You can even run quickly, to avoid the drudgery of walking through cleaned-out halls. The dreamt-of multi-player aspects over *battle.net* sound thrilling, to say the least. Basically, this game is going to kick some serious ass.

Baldur's Gate

What more can I say about this game? Beautiful graphics, huge story, large game world, multi-player capabilities.... The Bioware team is still working

on scripting the story line into the game, but most of the environments have been completed. Work on the game's multi-player aspects has also just begun in earnest. It shouldn't be too much longer before we all get our hands on the most anticipated RPG of 1998, but any wait is too long as far as I'm concerned.

Fallout 2

Another game everyone's buzzing about is the sequel to one of the best RPGs of last year. *Fallout 2* contains a lot of improvements made from the original *Fallout*, but the same game engine powers the story line. There are new items, new skills, and new environments. Also, the quests are no longer timed, so you have leisure to explore the world at will. This is another game I'm itching to get my hands on.

Ultima: Ascension

I'm not going to say too much about this one right now. I have to mention it because, well, it's an Ultima game. Unfortunately, I didn't get to spend a whole lot of time with the game, and I didn't get a tour of its features. One thing is for certain, however: it is *not* the ninth Ultima. The third-person perspective and the action sequences looked more like something that should be in a game from Eidos than Richard Garriott's latest offering. I look forward to taking a closer look at this game, but until then, I'm withholding my opinion.

Wrap Up

Unfortunately, what happened with *Ultima: Ascension* happened all too often at E3. I only got a few minutes with some products — just long enough to take a quick look at what they had to offer before moving on to get a glimpse of something else. Overall, however, the show indelibly etched one very important fact into my mind: roleplaying games are back in a big way. What a great time to be a gamer!

PCG

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ent from any other adventure game I've seen. The 3D environment is viewed from a detached camera the player can manipulate to examine everything in the immediate area. Players even see Gabriel from a third-person perspective. If it's successful and easy to use, this could be the revolutionary graphic adventure that will breathe new life into the genre.

Diablo II

As I wandered over to the Sierra booth to check out their new offerings, my jaw hit the ground when I saw Blizzard's *Diablo II*. The crowd surrounding the game was thick — I had to hack and slash my way through to get close enough for a good look. At first glance, I thought it was simply more *Diablo*, but it's so much more. There are no wait times between levels

It's time to take a step back and examine what the future has to offer roleplaying and adventure gamers. Wolf tells us that the future looks bright.