

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

While *ULTIMA ONLINE* gets all the headlines for finally almost maybe shipping, 3DO's online world, *MERIDIAN 59*, is a year old already and is getting ready for a major upgrade this fall. **MERIDIAN 59:**

REVELATION will be a completely new version, with new graphics, interface, quests, spells, weapons, and NPCs. The world is being greatly enlarged, including the creation of a new island city open to more experienced characters.

Meanwhile, Bill Gates, not content to own most of the real world, is getting set to conquer the online RPG world as well. Microsoft's **ASHERON'S CALL**, due to debut in early 1998, will be another massive Internet RPG—playable on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone—with a continuing, persistent world. The game will utilize a first-person perspective and combat will be real-time. One question remains: Will Bill Gates roam the world as Lord Windowsia?



ASHERON'S CALL

By the time you read this, Interplay should have their post apocalyptic RPG **FALLOUT** out the door, and will be shifting gears to a more traditional RPG setting: TSR's AD&D world of *Forgotten Realms*. The game, called **BALDUR'S GATE**, uses a *DIABLO*-like isometric perspective, combat is real-time, and the story (which we're keeping mum about right now) will unfold over eight chapters.

Finally, the game that many of us are drooling for is Square's **FINAL FANTASY VII**, the first PC port of the RPG series that is a phenomenon in the console gaming world. At press time, *FFVII* was just on the verge of making its American debut on the PlayStation, but a Square spokesperson at E3 swore we'd see the PC port sometime in early '98.

WIZARDRY VIII

Briefing: Like *ULTIMA* and *MIGHT AND MAGIC*, Sirtech's *WIZARDRY* series is another longtime role-playing favorite that is making a grand return in the coming year. And like those other games, *WIZARDRY VIII* is going to be showing off a whole new look, with a brand-new high-res 3D engine. *WIZARDRY VIII* will complete the storyline from the previous two games, *BANE OF THE COSMIC FORGE* and *CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT*. You'll still lead a party of six on your adventures, which you can either create from scratch or import from *CRUSADERS* or *WIZARDRY GOLD*. Sirtech isn't saying a whole lot about the plot yet, but what they are saying is that they've totally revised the combat engine to include facing, ranged attacks, and phased turns (no, not real-time). They've also added area and ranged effects to the spell system, and created new professions and skills to master. Check our RPG feature next month, when we hope to get Sirtech to spill more about this major release.

Contact: Sirtech (315) 393-6451, www.sir-tech.com

ETA: Classified



LANDS OF LORE II:

GUARDIANS OF DESTINY

Briefing: Here's another RPG that we wrote about in last year's E3 roundup that never shipped. But, like *RETURN TO KRONDOR*, it looks like we actually might get to play it very soon. Westwood's sequel to their popular *LANDS OF LORE*

game will again be more of an adventure/RPG hybrid, where you take on the role of one character and follow his particular story. *GUARDIANS OF DESTINY* concerns the plight of Luther, son of the evil Scotia, who suffers from an uncontrollable shape-shifting curse, and must travel through the Lands to seek out the magic cure. Throughout the game you'll learn to master the shape-shifting—which can turn you into, among other things, a giant beast and a tiny lizard—and use your new forms to your advantage. The game's combat and spell system look great (the intelligent enemy AI is particularly cool), but the graphics, due to the game's long delay, are now a tad behind the times. (Call this the *DAGGERFALL* Syndrome.) Still, the story and gameplay look strong enough to make *GUARDIANS OF DESTINY* worth watching.

Contact: Westwood Studios, (702) 228-4040, www.westwood.com

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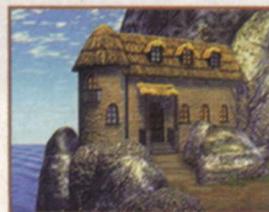


QUEST FOR GLORY 5: DRAGON FIRE

Briefing: Yet another longtime series returns, looking better than ever. Like *LANDS OF LORE*, the *QUEST FOR GLORY* series has always been more of an adventure/RPG hybrid, and the new version, created by the series' designer Lori Cole (along with Terry Robinson) promises more of the same gameplay that has enthralled legions of fans for years. You play the role of either a warrior, mage, or thief who has been summoned to Silmaria, a city on the island kingdom of Marete. Your mission is to help discover who has assassinated the king, and to help deal with the horde of monsters, mercenaries, and—rumor has it—a giant dragon that will soon besiege the land. You'll also need to battle four other competitors in a "challenge of seven rites" to prove yourself worthy of taking the assassinated king's place. *QFG 5*'s new features include a new 3D engine, a more flexible real-time combat system, and, most surprisingly, multiplayer support for up to eight players over a LAN, modem, or the Internet.

Contact: Sierra On-Line, (206) 649-9800, www.sierra.com

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