



# PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



Words fail us. This is overloading the awesome meter

UNLIMITED ENABLED

## PC Age of Empires III

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBD) ► **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS ► **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS  
► **RELEASE** FALL

### THE NEW WORLD

Ensemble Studios' acclaimed Age series has provided gamers with a unique take on the RTS genre since the original Age of Empires came out in 1997. This year will see a new chapter in mankind's saga played out in digital form with the release of Age of Empires III. While the screenshots speak volumes about the graphical prowess of this title, Ensemble's own lead designer Greg Street and lead programmer Dave Pottinger took the time to answer some of our questions about AoE III, and the gameplay sounds just as delicious as the visuals.

Though AoE III's setting of the New World during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries is a much smaller chunk of time than is covered in Ensemble's previous titles, the ever-faster march of technology provides as much room for development of your civilization as before. Likewise, the fact that the game only takes place in the Americas seems limiting at first, but Street states that this was a very deliberate decision. "We stopped the game before you see lots of colonial revolutions so that players have a clear focus: build up a new colony, defend it from your enemies, and eventually

conquer the map."

As for the nuts-and-bolts gameplay of AoE III, well, the previous Age games featured stellar RTS action that was anything but broken, so it isn't getting fixed. It is, however, getting expanded in a few key areas. Take the economy, for instance — there are several different ways to gather a single resource, all with their own benefits and drawbacks. A simple tweak, but with far-reaching consequences. "It's cool to see two different players funding their colonies through completely different strategies," says Pottinger. In a similar vein, the vastly improved and streamlined Age of Mythology engine does more than make your eyes dance with joy. Since it's more efficient, there's more room for extra animations and units onscreen, which Pottinger notes as being surprisingly helpful in gameplay terms. "[This] may not seem like a huge deal for gameplay, but simple things like being able to blend in damage animations on top of existing animations add a lot to RTS gameplay because you can more easily tell when units are taking damage."

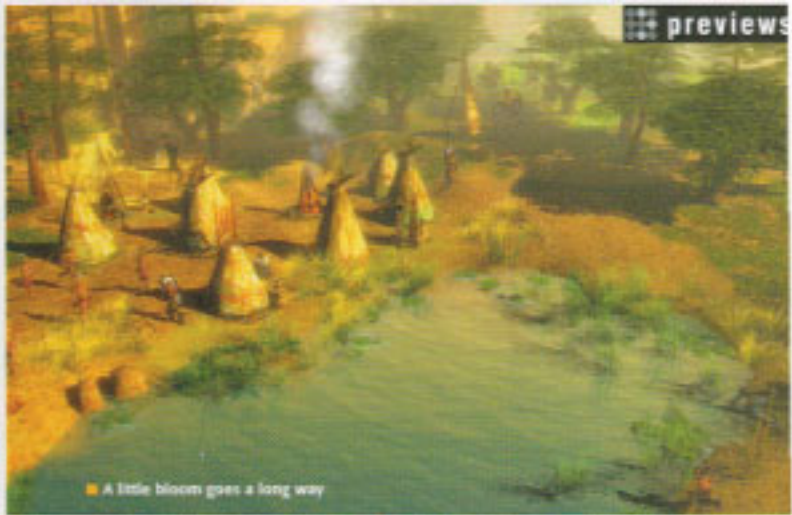


What a terrible night to have a curse...

A new Age title with tweaked, expanded gameplay and amazing graphics is certainly nothing to complain about, but Ensemble has more than that in store. Multiplayer in AoE III has a mode like nothing seen in RTS before: Players will be able to take their carefully-crafted persistent Home City (the Old World power you're aligned with, which confers defining traits onto your empire, though it's never seen) online and use it in multiplayer battles. Though reluctant to spill details, Street gushed, "It should have all the drama of high-level MMO characters duking it out, but in an RTS game." And if that tidbit isn't enough to excite you for AoE III, there's not much else we can do. ■■■■



■ Even the deer have real-time soft shadows! Ridiculous.



■ A little bloom goes a long way.



■ The Bostonians' disrespect of civilized refreshment bought them nothing but misery.



■ We'll take this Oregon trail over the old one any day.

