

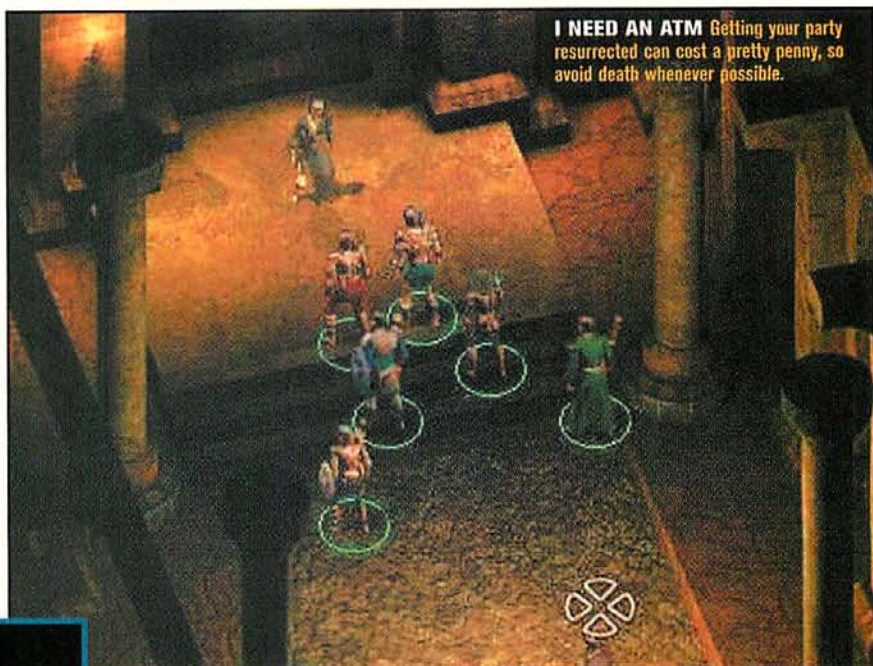
ICEWIND DALE is a first-rate D&D dungeon romp

# Ice Ice Baby!



**T**he RPG genre has been suffering for the last few years from a lack of games that truly capture the spirit of role-playing.

Although there's been a plethora of wannabes, few games claiming to be of the RPG variety have lived up to the claim – they're usually action and/or adventure games in disguise. Black Isle's ICEWIND DALE is the developer's third foray into the AD&D world of the Forgotten Realms, and is a cup of refreshingly cold ice water in the vast desert of the RPG genre. It's been a long time since I've found a game that has held my interest for more than a couple of days at most. I've been playing ICEWIND DALE for several weeks now.



**I NEED AN ATM** Getting your party resurrected can cost a pretty penny, so avoid death whenever possible.

## ICEWIND DALE

reviewed by Tina "Cassandra" Haumersen

Anyone who has read *The Crystal Shard*, the first book of the Icewind Dale Trilogy by R.A. Salvatore, will find much of the unfolding story in ICEWIND DALE familiar. But because the game doesn't tell the same story as the book, those who haven't read the book aren't at a disadvantage. The biggest advantage readers will have is in being familiar with the region. You start off in Easthaven, one of the infamous Ten Towns in the Icewind Dale region of the Forgotten Realms,

north of the Spine Of The World. However, you don't play Drizzt, Wulfgar, Bruenor, or anyone else from the story. In fact, the game is set over a decade before Drizzt – one of D&D's most popular characters – makes his first literary appearance.

ICEWIND DALE uses Bioware's Infinity engine, the same used in BALDUR'S GATE. It's set in the same world, but its relationship to BALDUR'S GATE ends there. It's set in a different area of the world and the story doesn't relate in any way. While the interface and game may feel familiar to those who

have played the earlier games, if you're looking for a BALDUR'S GATE sequel, you need to wait for BALDUR'S GATE 2.

### Stone Cold

The game begins with the moderator (voiced by the talented David Ogden Stiers) telling of an invasion from the creatures of the lower planes, a desperate battle, and the emergence of a hero who saves the world but gets turned into a large stone, not unlike Han Solo in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Rather than the now-standard 3D-rendered intro movie, ICEWIND DALE's intro unfolds as a series of hand-drawn sketches, which gives a richer flavor to the narrative.

Character creation is a long and involved process – at least, if you want to get it right – and a dream come true for hardcore role-players. There are no pre-rolled characters to use; you must create your entire party from scratch, which usually means you form a greater attachment to your party than when you are issued stock characters.

Using the basic AD&D rules, you can choose from a variety of races and classes, everything from humans to gnomes and paladins to druids. Each character type has its advantages and disadvantages, as do the classes and alignments. Many NPCs react



**Requirements:** Pentium 233MHz MMX or faster, 32 MB RAM, 400 MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz or faster, 64 MB RAM, 600 MB hard drive space, 8X CD-ROM, 4 MB SVGA video card. **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, TCP/IP, modem, serial (null modem).

**Publisher:** Interplay • **Developer:** Black Isle • \$44 • [www.interplay.com/icewind](http://www.interplay.com/icewind) • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.

### CGW RATED

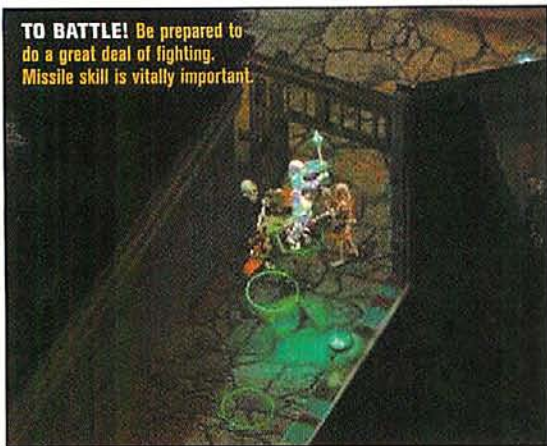
#### PROS

Highly customizable characters gives you a greater attachment to them.

#### CONS

A bit of a steep learning curve for combat.

**TO BATTLE!** Be prepared to do a great deal of fighting. Missile skill is vitally important.



differently to different types of characters, so you'll want a good variety. (Hint: Make sure the majority of your party have some sort of missile-weapon skill.) You can import your own character portraits and voice files for your characters, and Interplay has released some new portraits by one of their artists on their Web site ([www.interplay.com/icewind/](http://www.interplay.com/icewind/)), as well as several PLANESCAPE: TORMENT portraits that were altered to fit ICEWIND DALE.

### Die, Monster, Die!

Combat in ICEWIND DALE is intense and plentiful. Rather than immerse you in FedEx quests, most of the game involves combat in a large variety of dungeons. Yes, ICEWIND DALE is ultimately a dungeon crawl, but it's a good crawl. As in BALDUR'S GATE, combat can be real-time, turn-based, or a mix of the two. Being able to pause the action while directing your druid to heal your party is vitally important, or you'll quickly find yourself with a large party of corpses – and it can get rather expensive to have them constantly resurrected.

The ICEWIND DALE combat system rewards clever strategy over a fast mouse-hand. You can't run into an area, click on everything with an axe and expect your party to survive, especially in some of the more dangerous and difficult areas. You'll want to walk slowly into an area and lure some of the creatures into range, and then hit them with as many missile weapons as you can before they get close enough to do any damage.

One of the game's best features is the ability to use scripts to control your party during combat, either using the pre-written scripts that come with the game, or by writing your own. You can set your fighters to go berserk as soon as a battle starts, or have your mages cast offensive or defensive spells

and then run to safety if anyone comes close enough to attack. After your first few forays into combat situations, you'll learn what works best with your style of play and may find yourself rolling some new characters. Characters can be exported from the single-player game and then imported into multiplayer games or for use in other saved games.

The multiplayer game is the same as the single-player game, except that instead of creating your party and controlling them, your party consists of other players using their own characters. The host starting the game is the leader and is in control of things such as saving the game and deciding who can join and what types of characters to allow. You can either import one of your previously-created characters, or use a button to pre-generate a generic character. The leader can set up various permissions as well, deciding whether people can spend party gold, pause the game, or initiate dialogue, among other things.

### Bring It On

After such a long dry spell, there seems to be a large number of RPGs hitting the shelves these days. Everyone's trying to cash in on the action and there's a lot of hype surrounding some of the biggest names. For serious role-players, I'd recommend ICEWIND DALE before DIABLO 2. While DIABLO 2's pure hack-and-slash approach can get tiring after awhile, ICEWIND DALE manages to combine a lot of slashing with a great story and more strategic gameplay. Once again, Black Isle has succeeded admirably in creating a game that both the casual gamer and hardcore roleplayer can enjoy. **CGW**



**CUSTOMIZING IS GOOD** Write a customized script to control your party's behavior during battles, and write your own background for each character.

## It's My Party, I'll Die When I Want To

**L**ittle piddly goblin marshals taking you down? Here are some tips for optimizing your party makeup.

■ No matter what, every character should put at least one star in a ranged weapon of some sort, whether it be bows or missile weapons. Ranged weaponry is extremely powerful, and having at least one star in a ranged weapon means you don't suffer any penalties when using one. Give fighters and thieves bows, and the rest of the party slings.

■ Put two fighter-types up front. Have at least one pure fighter, and either create another pure fighter, or something "fighter-ish" (Ranger, Paladin, or one of the multi-class Fighter combinations). With the best weapons and armor, they will soak up and deal the most damage.

■ Back up the fighters with two priests; at least one pure cleric, and either another cleric, or a druid, or a multiclass involving one of the two. Have one memorize nothing but healing spells, and the other a few healing spells and some general spells. There will be a lot of undead, so the pure cleric is needed for Turn Undead. Having two healers ensures survival in large dungeons away from town.

■ Have at least one mage, preferably two. The mage is artillery; physically weak, needs protection, but possesses vital firepower. To ensure your mage stays out of combat, he or she should never have a melee weapon (unless that weapon enhances spell-casting skills). Stick to slings.

■ You need at least one thief for both trap spotting/disarming, and to serve as "bait." We prefer the multiclass Mage/Thief, as he provides thieving abilities and extra spell support. Take the armor off, cast spells, then re-arm and backstab everyone else.

—Thierry Nguyen