

# ICEWIND DALE

Interplay's hack'n'slash RPG emerges just moments before Diablo II

## DETAILS

Genre: Gigantic immersive dungeon crawl

Multiplayer: Yes (1-6)

Developer: Black Isle

Publisher: Interplay

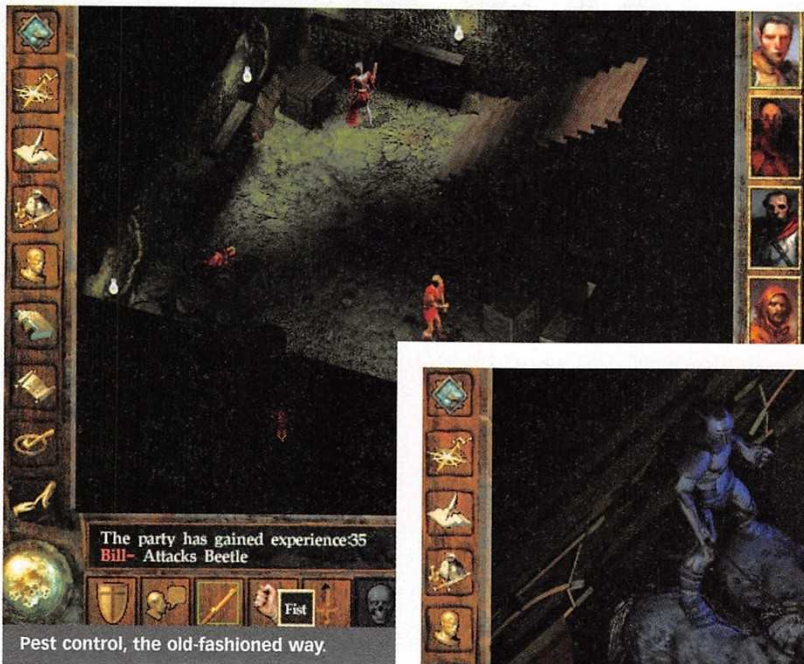
Distributor: Interplay

Available: Now

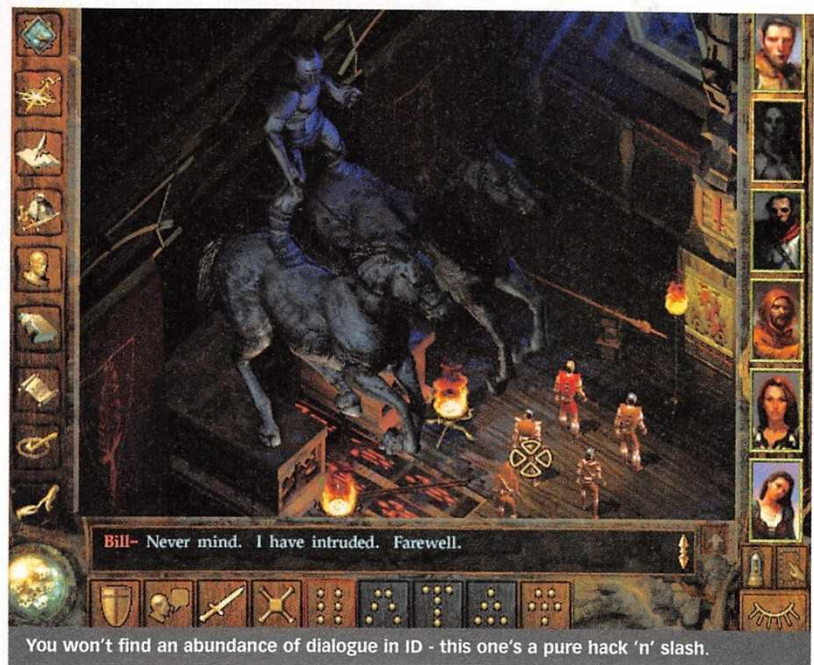
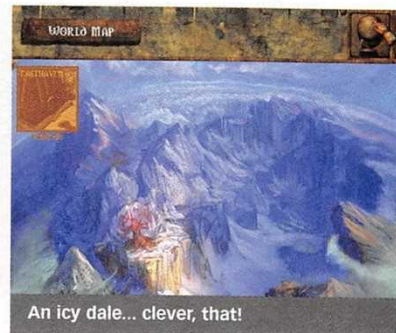
Rating: M

Need: P-200, 32Mb RAM

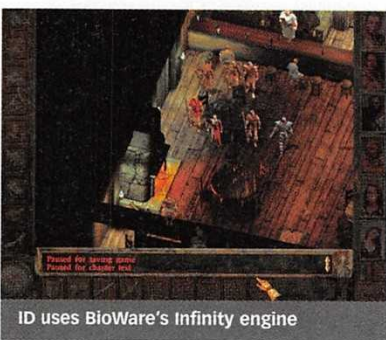
Want: PII-300, 64Mb RAM



Pest control, the old-fashioned way.



You won't find an abundance of dialogue in ID - this one's a pure hack 'n' slash.



ID uses BioWare's Infinity engine

## ONLINE

Official Website  
[www.interplay.com/icewind](http://www.interplay.com/icewind)



Baldur's Gate Chronicles  
<http://www.BGChronicles.com/>



Ice Winds of Dale  
<http://icewind.dbtavern.com/>



I should probably admit that I'm biased. Planescape: Torment is easily my favourite RPG of all time, if not my favourite game of all time. When I head that Black Isle, the team behind both Torment and Baldur's Gate was set to loose another creation on the world I fairly swooned. Icewind Dale is, unfortunately, not at the pinnacle of excellence Torment was, but it's still pretty damn cool.

### A bollocking

Classic D&D is where this particular product is at. It's hack and slash time, children, and it's all old school. Assemble your party just like in the olden days, by rolling stats, assigning alignment, hit points, deciding character classes and races and all the rest of it. Then give them stupid names and let them loose on the world like any good RPG. But pay attention. Unlike BG,

weapon proficiencies have become a lot more important to the overall combat levels of your PCs. It's single weapons that require proficiency now, not groups of weapons. Pick carefully.

The game then basically turns into a gigantic fight. You get your first

game. It's linear, it's totally combat based and while stating that it's dull would certainly be pushing the limits, I should say that unless you are a frothing combat monkey, you may not get as much out of it as you did with Torment or even Baldur's Gate.

the real beauty of the game is without doubt the monsters... these buggers are big

mission, which is to travel to the south of the Dale to find some answers to why beasts are bothering your town and that is pretty much the last conversation that you will have of substance. This is not a talking type game, you understand. It never pretends to be. And, getting straight into it, this is the big fault with the

### Delightful spells

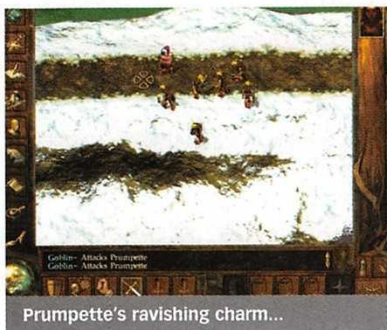
But, supposing you love combat, then you are going to have mucho blood letting fun. The game uses an isometric top-down viewpoint (and interface), and combat all takes place in realtime. It's fast, it requires concentration and - keeping up with the high standards previous games have set - it looks, feels

## COME BACK & FIGHT!

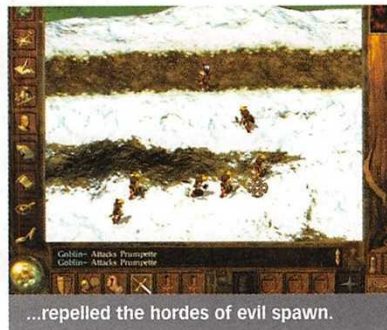
Combat in the Dale is a tricky thing and one that requires tactical planning. There are a few solid methods you can use. The first is to send in a quick character, usually a thief to lure foes into an ambush. Then pepper the enemy with missile weapons and the spells. Once that is done, jump in and focus attacks on one target. Keep your mages out of physical contact if you can. Position them where they can provide supporting fire and enhancement spells.



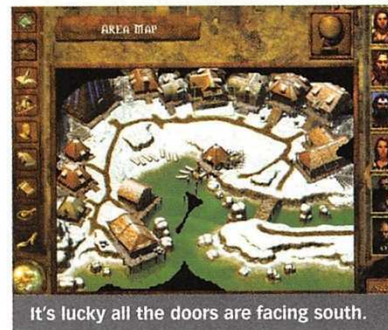
The snow was so heavy, it took days for our adventurers to leave this stretch of road.



Prumpette's ravishing charm...



...repelled the hordes of evil spawn.



It's lucky all the doors are facing south.

and sounds great. Spells look as good as ever and the animations are smooth. Expect a variety of new spells from the pen and paper that have not made it to PC yet. Sunray, Conjure Fire Elementals, Heal and Fire Storm, Chain Lightning, Death Fog, Prismatic Spray and Shades - what a delight!

The attention to detail that makes Black Isle one of the great teams is present. The sound of weapons chopping into meat is particularly satisfying, as are the screams of the dying. But the real beauty of the game is without a doubt the monsters. These buggers are scary and big. The Tundra Yeti, the frost giants, the Cyclops and the UMBER Hulks are all here, are all big and all move beautifully.

Going through the worlds is a pleasure all in itself. The different locales are spectacular, moving from open snowfields through to abandoned,

ancient Dwarven cities. Then there are the geothermal caverns, the volcanoes, the black caves and the bone-strewn lairs. The atmosphere, lighting, the detail, the strange and wonderful architecture - all of it combined highlights pure Black Isle style and pure quality. Very simply, no one has an eye for beauty like these guys. No one else puts as much care and love into the total visual appearance of a game.

### Rampant destruction

Improvements in the Bioware Infinity engine are hard to make. It's so smooth, but the big wart on the nose is the character tracking. Remember the Fortress of Regrets in Torment? You had to spend so much time getting to the final battle it was barely worth it. Well, that's exaggerating, but just take my word for it. Dale's engine has improved on both this and on

character "bumping". They'll not stop moving if they hit each other now. Resting is a bit easier as well, with the command on the playing screen. Walking speed is 40% faster as well which is almost as much a relief.

As mentioned before, the whole point of Icewind Dale is to pretty much destroy every living creature you encounter, so if you are still high on things like System Shock 2 then this won't really be of much interest to you. But as far as dungeon crawls go, I'd have to recommend this one pretty highly. With the improvements made, the Bioware Infinity engine makes the transformation from interaction to combat model smoothly. It's like Diablo meets Starcraft and gives the player much leeway and strategic gameplay. Clever, beautiful and with a superb engine, you really can't get much better.

Christian Read

## PCPP

### FOR:

- Great level design
- An excellent engine
- Fantastic monster animation

### AGAINST:

- Hack 'n' slash...
- ...and repeat

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