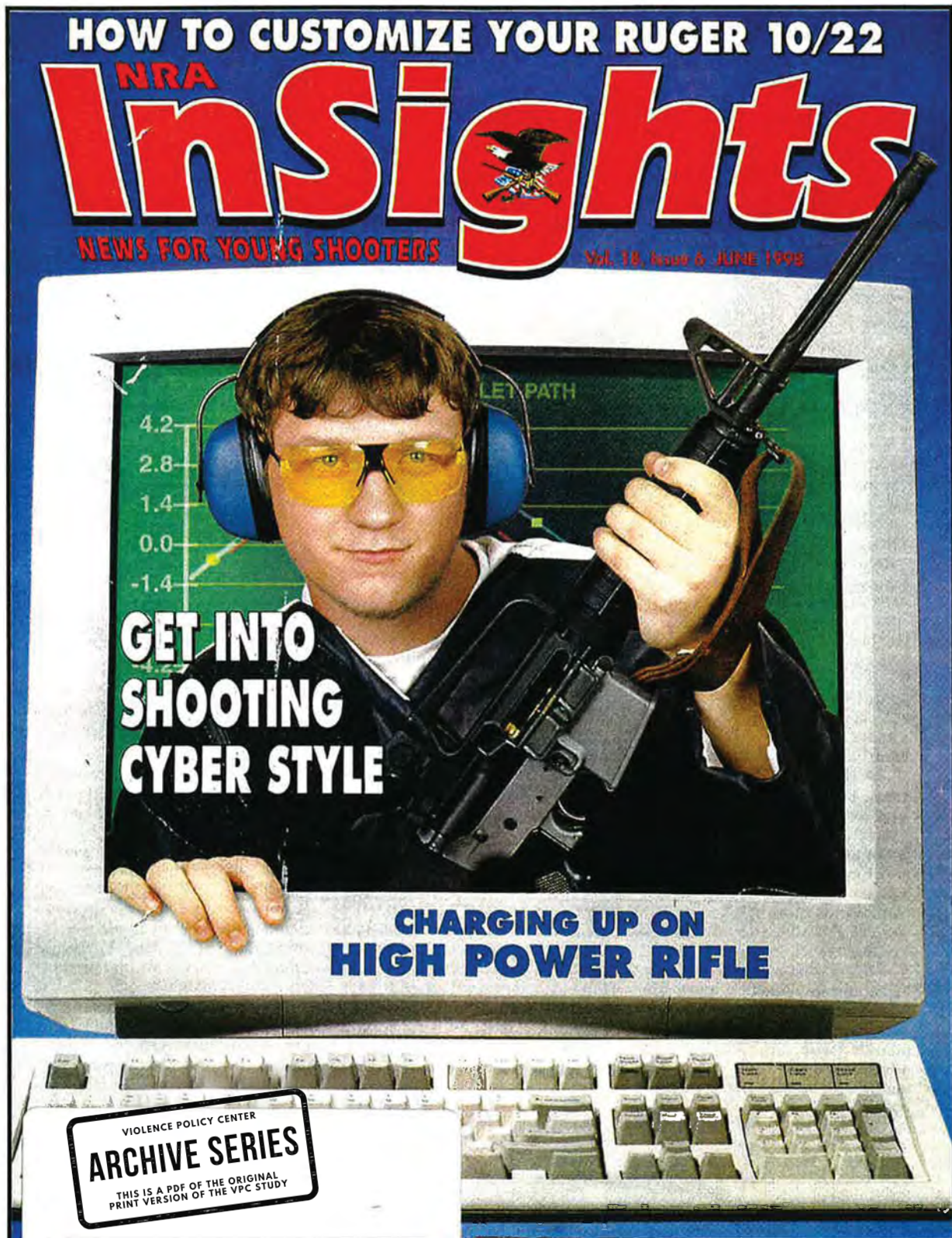


# FROM GUN GAMES TO GUN STORES

WHY THE FIREARMS INDUSTRY WANTS THEIR VIDEO GAMES ON YOUR CHILD'S WISH LIST



**The Violence Policy Center** is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on firearms violence and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, grassroots advocates, and the general public. The Center examines the role of firearms in America, analyzes trends and patterns in firearms violence, and works to develop policies to reduce gun-related death and injury.

This report was authored by VPC Policy Analyst Marty Langley and edited by VPC Publications Coordinator Aimée Stenzel.

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- *Firearms Production in America, 1975-1997—A State-by-State Breakdown* (December 2000)
- *When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 1998 Homicide Data* (October 2000)
- *Handgun Licensing and Registration: What it Can and Cannot Do* (September 2000)
- *License to Kill III: The Texas Concealed Handgun Law's Legacy of Crime and Violence* (August 2000)
- *Pocket Rockets: The Gun Industry's Sale of Increased Killing Power* (July 2000)
- *Gunland USA: A State-by-State Ranking of Gun Shows, Gun Retailers, Machine Guns, and Gun Manufacturers* (June 2000)
- *Guns For Felons: How the NRA Works to Rearm Criminals* (March 2000)
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- *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999)
- *Start 'Em Young—Recruitment of Kids to the Gun Culture* (April 1999)
- *License to Kill, and Kidnap, and Rape, and Drive Drunk...* (March 1999)
- *Who Dies?—A Look at Firearms Death and Injury in America* (February 1999)
- *Making a Killing: The Business of Guns in America* (January 1999)
- *Young Guns: How the Gun Lobby Nurtures America's Youth Gun Culture* (March 1998)
- *Joe Camel with Feathers: How the NRA with Gun and Tobacco Industry Dollars Uses Its Eddie Eagle Program to Market Guns to Kids* (November 1997)
- *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence* (Revised, October 1997)
- *Kids Shooting Kids: Stories From Across the Nation of Unintentional Shootings Among Children and Youth* (March 1997)

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## Introduction

The gun industry has struggled with stagnant or shrinking sales for several years due to the saturation of its primary market of white males. According to the *General Social Survey* conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, the percentage of gun-owning homes dropped nearly 20 percent from 1977 to 1996.<sup>1</sup> An advertisement for New England Firearms summed up the challenge facing the industry, "In effect, [the] greatest threat we face is the lack of a future customer base for the products which we all sell."<sup>2</sup>

To meet this challenge the gun industry—working hand-in-hand with the National Rifle Association (NRA)—has targeted children as vital to the future of the gun culture in America, both as future customers and as political foot soldiers for the gun-control battles that lie ahead.<sup>a3</sup>

The latest assault in the gun industry battle for the "hearts and minds"<sup>b</sup> of America's youth is the use of video games that put virtual guns in the hands of potential customers. Designed and marketed as children's toys and sold freely through channels such as eToys.com and amazon.com, they are the newest marketing tools for attracting children to the gun industry. In fact, one game—*Remington Upland Game Hunter*—features an "On-line Catalog" of selected Remington firearms.

Scott Farrell, editor of *Guns Magazine*, outlined the thinking behind such video games, "What we need is a computer game which combines the use of a real handgun...with state-of-the-art graphics and an exciting story....A game like that

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<sup>a</sup> The gun industry has launched a campaign to attract children to the gun culture on several fronts—

- Advertising in magazines aimed at youth, such as *Boy's Life* and the NRA's own youth magazine *InSights*.
- Funding the National Rifle Association's Eddie Eagle program—a marketing tool designed to put a friendly face on gun ownership disguised as a safety program.
- Designing smaller, lighter versions of their firearms which are marketed as youth models.
- Using public school wildlife management lessons to develop schoolchildren's interest in hunting and firearms.

<sup>b</sup> At the NRA's 1996 Annual Meeting, then-President Marion Hammer outlined the NRA's agenda to "invest" in America's youth saying, "It will be an old-fashioned wrestling match for the hearts and minds of our children, and we'd better engage our adversaries with no holds barred....If we do not successfully reach out to the next generation, then the freedom and liberty that we've lived for—and that many of our ancestors have died for—will not live beyond us."



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WELCOME

SHOP BY AGE

TOYS

BOOKS

HOBBIES

VIDEO GAMES

SOFTWARE

DVD, VIDEO & MUSIC

PARTY STORE

BabyCenter STORE

Welcome! Our promise: We have the lowest prices, easy returns, and 100% safe shopping.

SEARCH

Search eToys



## Shop by Age

0-12 Months

1 Year

2 Years

3 Years

4 Years

5 Years

6 Years

7 Years

8 Years

9-12 Years

Teen

Grown-Ups

## Shop eToys

### • Toys

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[Popular Characters](#)  
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[Stocking Stuffers](#)

[Extra-Special Gifts Under \\$20](#)  
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[Nintendo 64](#)

[PlayStation](#)

### • Hobbies

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### • Children's Books

### • Software

### • DVD, Video & Music

### • Party Store - NEW!

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## 2000 HOLIDAY HOT LIST

Hot toys. Great prices.



- Barbie Dolls & Accessories
- Fisher-Price
- LEGO
- Tekno Puppy
- Scooters
- See all Hot List.

Why is eToys the best on the Web?



- Shop Until Midnight, Dec. 20
- Lowest Prices -- Guaranteed
- 100% Safe Shopping
- Delivery You Can Count On

## HOLIDAY KICKOFF SALE

We've got more than 500 top-notch toys at new low prices.



- Infant Toys
- Toddler & Preschooler Toys
- Games & Puzzles
- Arts & Crafts
- Construction Toys
- See all sale items.

## Extra-Special Gifts

The box they can't wait to open — wonderful and unexpected presents.



- For Boys
- For Girls
- For Teens
- See all Big Gifts.

## Favorite Toys for Girls



Goodies a girl can't be without.

- 0-12 Months
- 1 Year
- 2 Years
- 3 Years
- 4 Years
- 5 Years
- 6 Years
- 7 Years
- 8 Years
- 9+ Years

## Favorite Toys for Boys



Oh boy! Give 'em something they'll love.

- 0-12 Months
- 1 Year
- 2 Years
- 3 Years
- 4 Years
- 5 Years
- 6 Years
- 7 Years
- 8 Years
- 9+ Years

Homepage of eToys.com, a web site offering a selection of these video games for sale.

would be an extremely effective vehicle to introduce safe recreational shooting to the video-game generation."<sup>4</sup> Or, as the NRA urges on the cover of *InSights*, its youth magazine for members age 17 and under, "Get into shooting cyber style" (see report cover).

The gun industry's addition of video games to its youth marketing strategy is hardly surprising given the explosive growth in video game sales and the attractive demographic profile of video game players—39 percent are under the age of 18 and 43 percent are women.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the video game industry is the fastest growing segment of the U.S. entertainment industry.<sup>6</sup> Retail sales of computer and video games have grown from \$3.2 billion in 1995 to \$6.1 billion in 1999.<sup>7</sup> According to a survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 60 percent of all Americans over the age of five—or 145 million people—play computer or video games.<sup>8</sup>

Using video games offers several advantages over other youth marketing strategies employed by the gun industry. Through video games the gun industry is able to appeal to a larger and demographically more diverse audience—there are 145 million video game players versus 44 million gun owners, 43 percent of video game players are female versus nine percent of gun owners, and the average age of a video game player is 28 while the majority of gun owners are age 40 or older.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, the gun industry is able to put "virtual" versions of their deadly products into the hands of children who are not legally eligible to purchase firearms and would be unreachable by more traditional means of marketing.

Despite the fact that children can't purchase guns from dealers, in many cases they *can* legally possess them. A 1998 poll conducted by *The New York Times* and CBS News found that 15 percent of American youths owned their own gun.<sup>10</sup> Renowned gun writer Grits Gresham summed up the situation in a 1993 column in the gun industry publication *SHOT Business*—

Kids can't buy guns, you say? Well, yes and no. It's true that most students from kindergarten through high school can't purchase firearms on their own. But it's also true that in many parts of the country, youngsters (from preteens on up) are shooting and hunting. Pop picks up the tab.<sup>11</sup>

Video games featuring shooting have been played for as long as video games have existed. Typically, these games featured traditional hunting rifles or shotguns. Recently, as gun companies have lent their brand names to video games, the products featured have become decidedly more lethal. Shooting games now include fully automatic machine guns, assault weapons, and all types of handguns—from "pocket rockets" and "junk guns" to large-frame 50 caliber pistols. The industry sees these

games as a means to introduce children to guns and the shooting sports, as well as an opportunity to engender brand loyalty.

As the guns have changed, so have the targets. Where once were stationary targets or perhaps a flock of ducks, now stand human targets or, as *Remington Top Shot* euphemistically phrases it, "interactive targets." *Colt's Wild West Shootout* instructs the player that "you're the law and you carry the firepower to back it up!," while *Soldier of Fortune* offers the more direct, "Meet interesting, exotic people from all over the globe, and dispatch them."<sup>12</sup>

Recent school shootings and disturbing levels of youth firearms use have focused attention on the problem of youth gun violence. Clearly, there is a spectrum of factors involved, ranging from the remote to the proximate. In other words, some factors may only arguably contribute to the problem, but other factors most certainly do.

For example, some might argue that such cartoon violence as that seen in a typical "Road Runner" scene contributes at some level, however remote, to a desensitization of youth to the nature, meaning, and real-life consequences of violence. On the other hand, it is clear beyond doubt that real guns in the hands of troubled young people have been the immediate cause of countless tragedies, from lonely suicides to mass public shootings.

Unfortunately, policymakers—such as members of Congress and more recently the Federal Trade Commission—have devoted an enormous amount of attention to the more remote end of this scale of factors. They have preferred to expend resources on largely repetitive, redundant "investigations" of the alleged contributions to youth violence of media images and song lyrics rather than scrutinize the role of gun companies in their target marketing of firearms to children. For the most part, the gun industry and its affiliates have gotten a free ride in the national inquisition into the causes of youth gun violence.

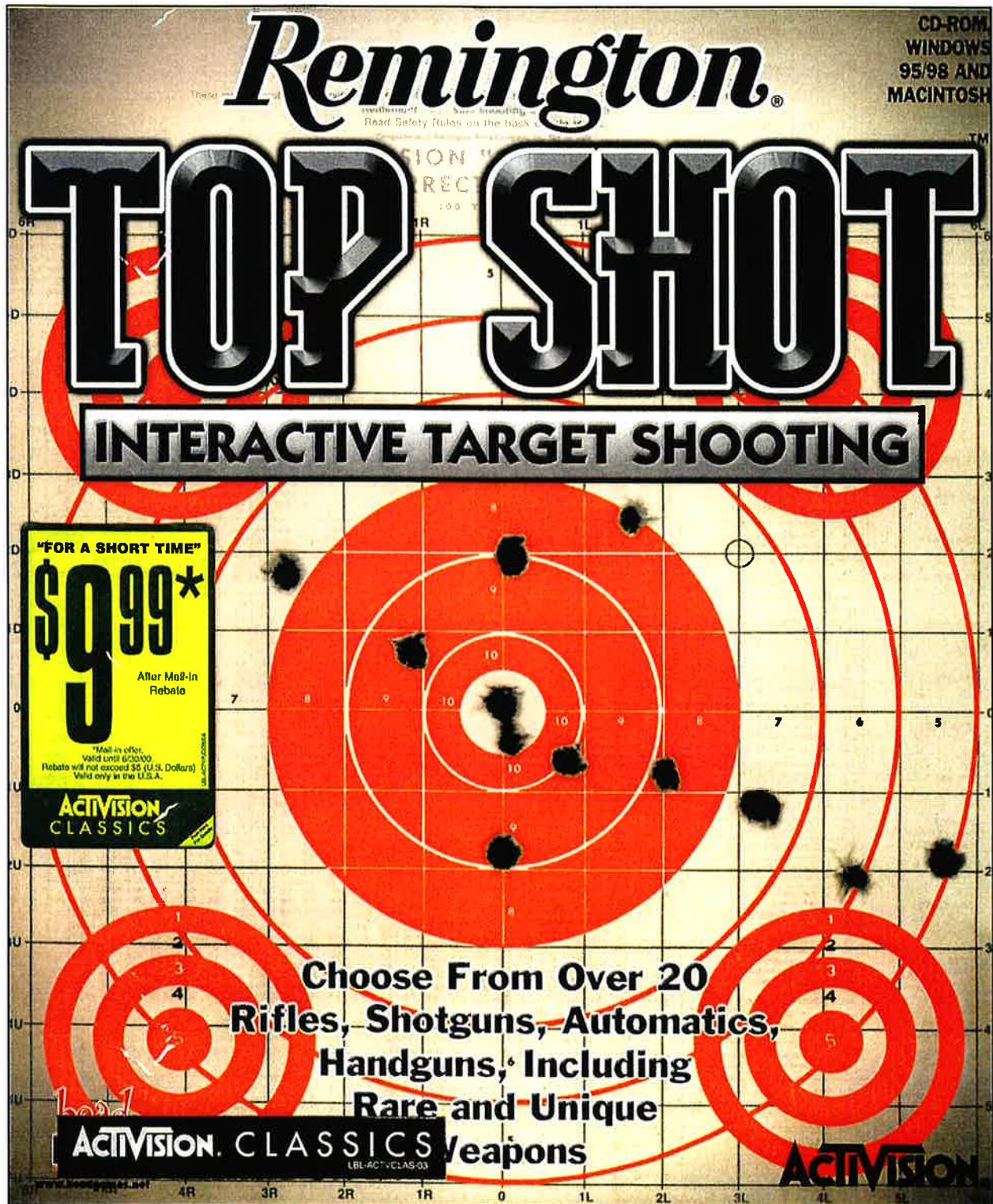
The games reviewed in this study lie at the more proximate end of the scale of factors for two reasons: they put surrogate firearms into the hands of children, thus closely approximating the real experience of shooting to kill. And they are intended to lure children into possessing real firearms. These should be of at least as much interest to parents, Congress, and others concerned about youth violence as the putative effects of music and motion picture images.

It is time to end the gun industry's free ride: Congress, independent agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission, and investigative agencies such as the General Accounting Office should examine closely the role of the gun industry in promoting the gun culture to children through these games and other marketing schemes.

## **Summary of Selected Video Games**



Remington Top Shot



The cover art features a large, detailed target with concentric red and white rings. Numerous black bullet holes are scattered across the target, with a high concentration in the center bullseye. The background is a light tan color with a grid pattern. The title 'Remington' is written in a large, elegant script font at the top. Below it, 'TOP SHOT' is in a very large, bold, blocky font with a 3D effect. Underneath that, 'INTERACTIVE TARGET SHOOTING' is in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font inside a black rectangular box. In the top right corner, the text 'CD-ROM, WINDOWS 95/98 AND MACINTOSH' is printed. On the left side, there is a yellow price tag with the text '\$9.99\*' and 'After Mail-in Rebate'. Below the price tag is the 'ACTIVISION CLASSICS' logo. At the bottom, the text 'Choose From Over 20 Rifles, Shotguns, Automatics, Handguns, Including Rare and Unique Weapons' is displayed. The 'ACTIVISION CLASSICS' logo is repeated at the bottom left, and the 'ACTIVISION' logo is at the bottom right. A small URL 'www.thegames.net' is visible at the bottom left.

**Remington**

CD-ROM, WINDOWS 95/98 AND MACINTOSH

# TOP SHOT

INTERACTIVE TARGET SHOOTING

**"FOR A SHORT TIME"**  
**\$9.99\***  
After Mail-in Rebate

**ACTIVISION CLASSICS**

Choose From Over 20  
Rifles, Shotguns, Automatics,  
Handguns, Including  
Rare and Unique  
Weapons

**ACTIVISION CLASSICS**

**ACTIVISION**

[www.thegames.net](http://www.thegames.net)



## Remington Top Shot

### Description

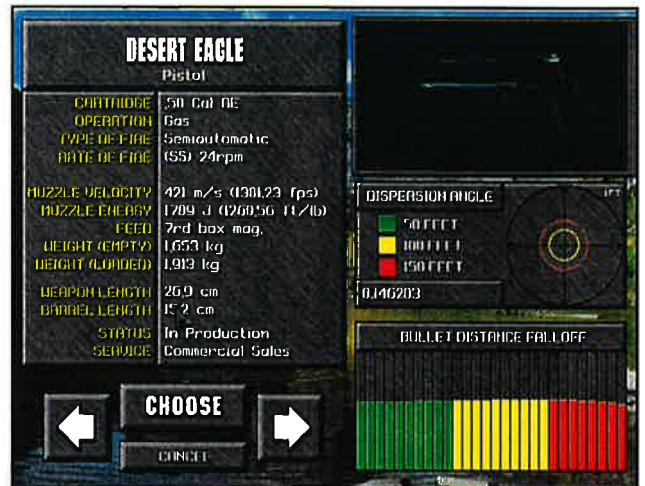
Top Shot features a distance range, an indoor range, and a skeet range, but focuses on the simulator range—which includes backdrops ranging from a public street to the inside of an airplane—where the shooter must kill as many villains as possible in a set amount of time. Points are taken off for killing police officers or other innocent bystanders.

### Firearms Featured

Although Remington rifles are featured, other guns include: the Desert Eagle 50 caliber handgun, Springfield Armory M1A rifle, and SAR 4800 assault rifle. The game also features select-fire machine guns, including the M16, AK-74, and M60.

### Rating

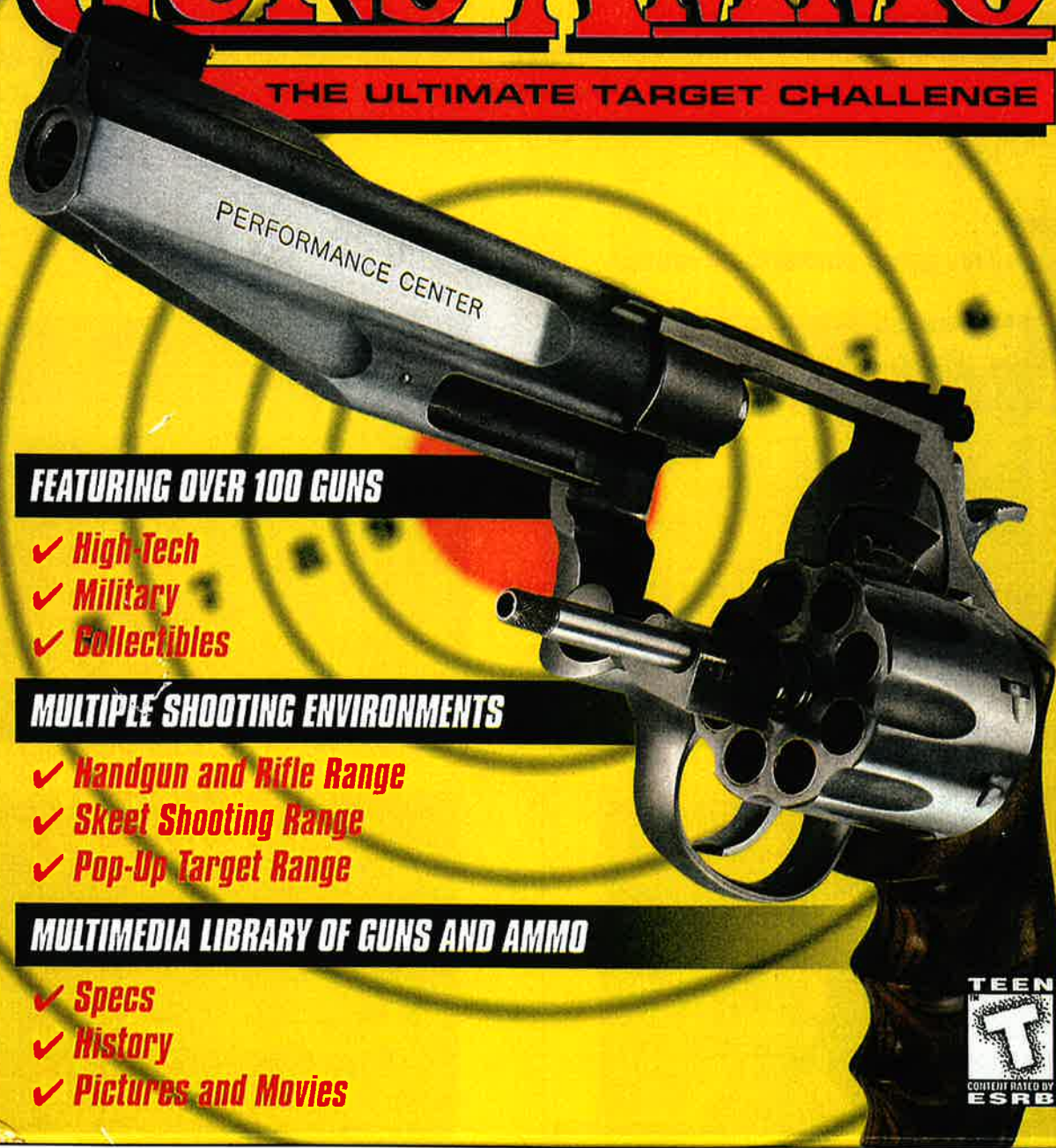
This game contains no rating.



Guns & Ammo: The Ultimate Target Challenge

# GUNS & AMMO<sup>®</sup>

THE ULTIMATE TARGET CHALLENGE



## FEATURING OVER 100 GUNS

- ✓ High-Tech
- ✓ Military
- ✓ Collectibles

## MULTIPLE SHOOTING ENVIRONMENTS

- ✓ Handgun and Rifle Range
- ✓ Skeet Shooting Range
- ✓ Pop-Up Target Range

## MULTIMEDIA LIBRARY OF GUNS AND AMMO

- ✓ Specs
- ✓ History
- ✓ Pictures and Movies





## Guns & Ammo: The Ultimate Target Challenge

### **Description**

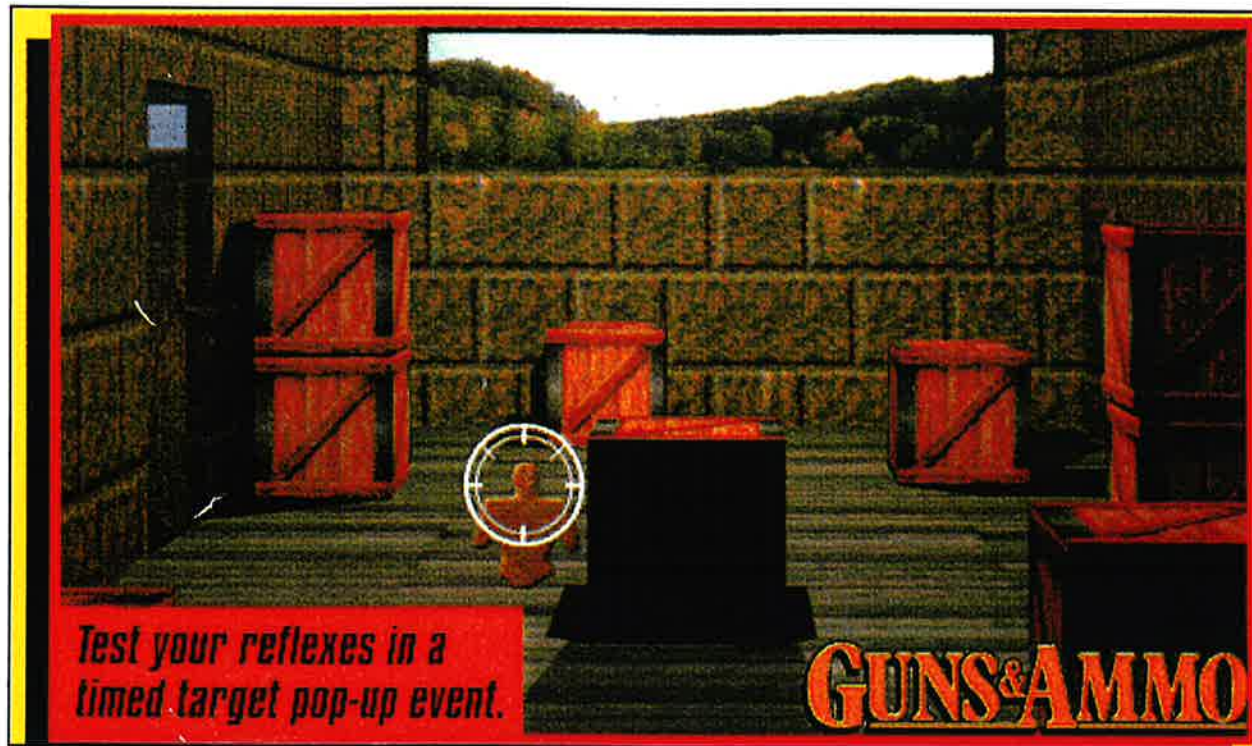
The shooter has a choice of more than 100 different guns to use at a handgun and rifle range, a skeet shooting range, or a pop-up target range featuring humanóid targets.

### **Firearms Featured**

More than 100 guns from more than 20 manufacturers including: Colt's, Smith & Wesson, Ruger, Taurus, Heckler & Koch, New England Firearms, Rossi, Marlin, Beretta, and Kahr Arms.

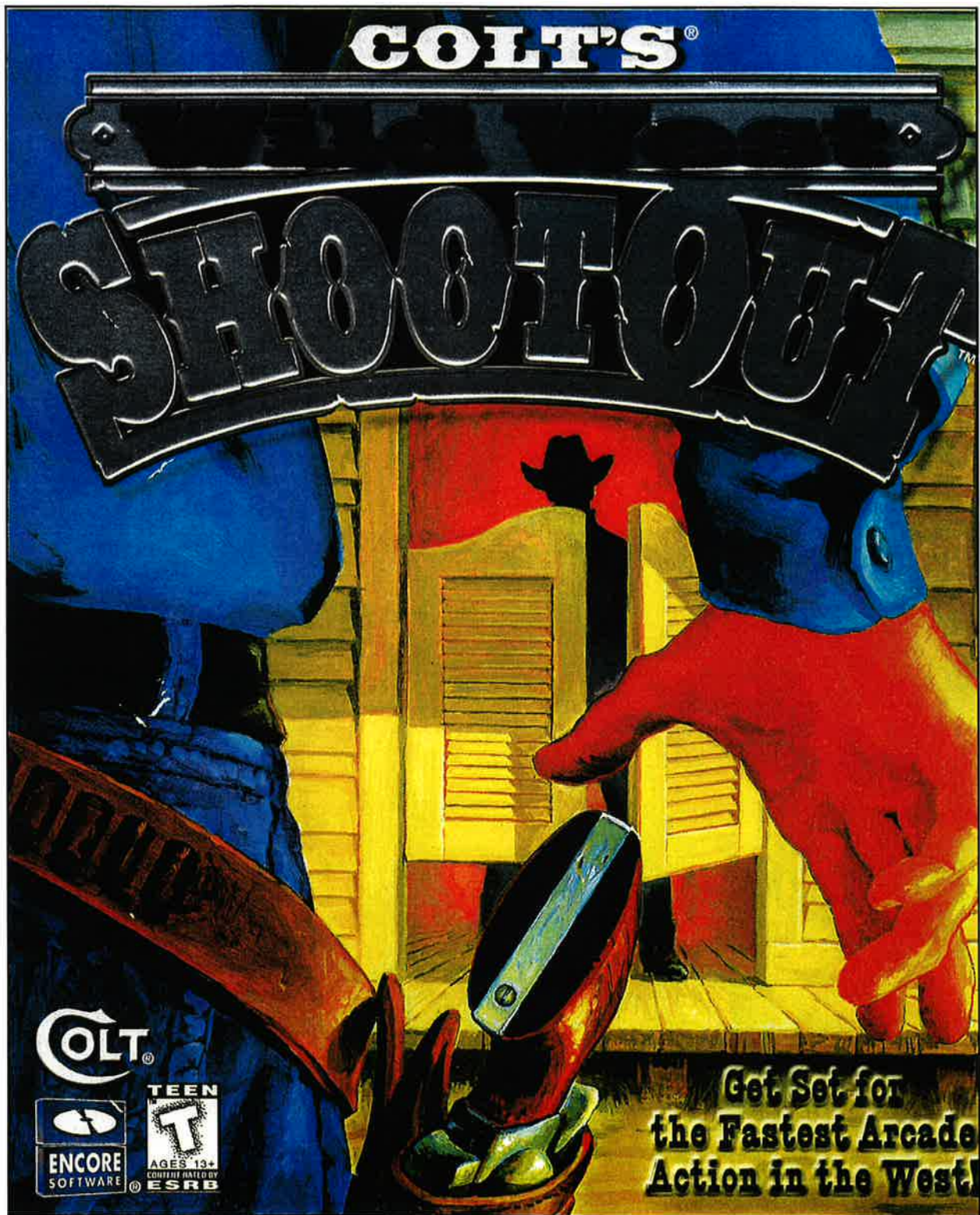
### **Rating**

Teen, ages 13 and up.





Colt's Wild West Shootout



## Colt's Wild West Shootout

### **Description**

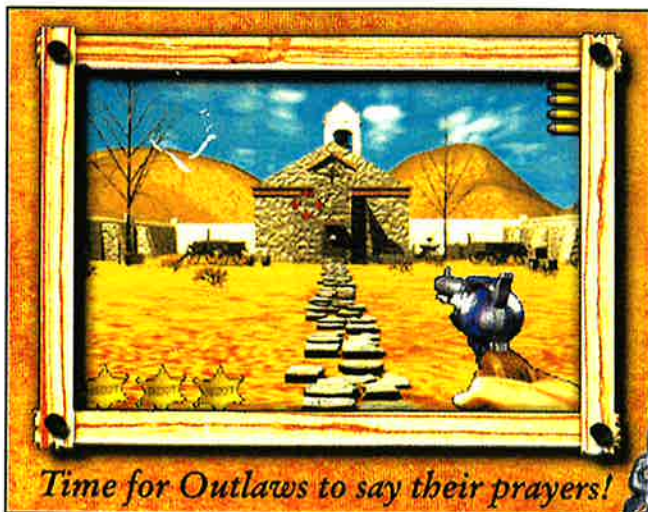
The shooter goes up against bandits and desperadoes in four different settings including a church and a train. The "bad guys" scream as they are killed, although the game refers to these incidents as "arrests." The promotional blurb on the box advises: "Be quick or be dead."

### **Firearms Featured**

The shooter can choose from both handguns and long guns including: Colt .45 Single Action Revolver, Colt Long-Barreled Peacemaker Revolver, and Colt Fast Action Rifle.

### **Rating**

Teen ages 13 and up.





Remington Upland Game Hunter

PC CDROM

WIN 95/98

*Remington.*

FROM THE  
PUBLISHER OF  
**BIG GAME  
HUNTER™**

**UPLAND  
GAME HUNTER™**

Hunt **10 Species** of Upland Game  
Including **Pheasant, Quail, Grouse**  
& More With **6 Authentic**  
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## Remington Upland Game Hunter

### Description

The shooter pursues 10 different species of birds, employing four different breeds of dogs. The hunter can choose between first- and third-person views as he roams through woods, deserts, or cornfields. The game features a Remington firearms "On-line Catalog."

### Firearms Featured

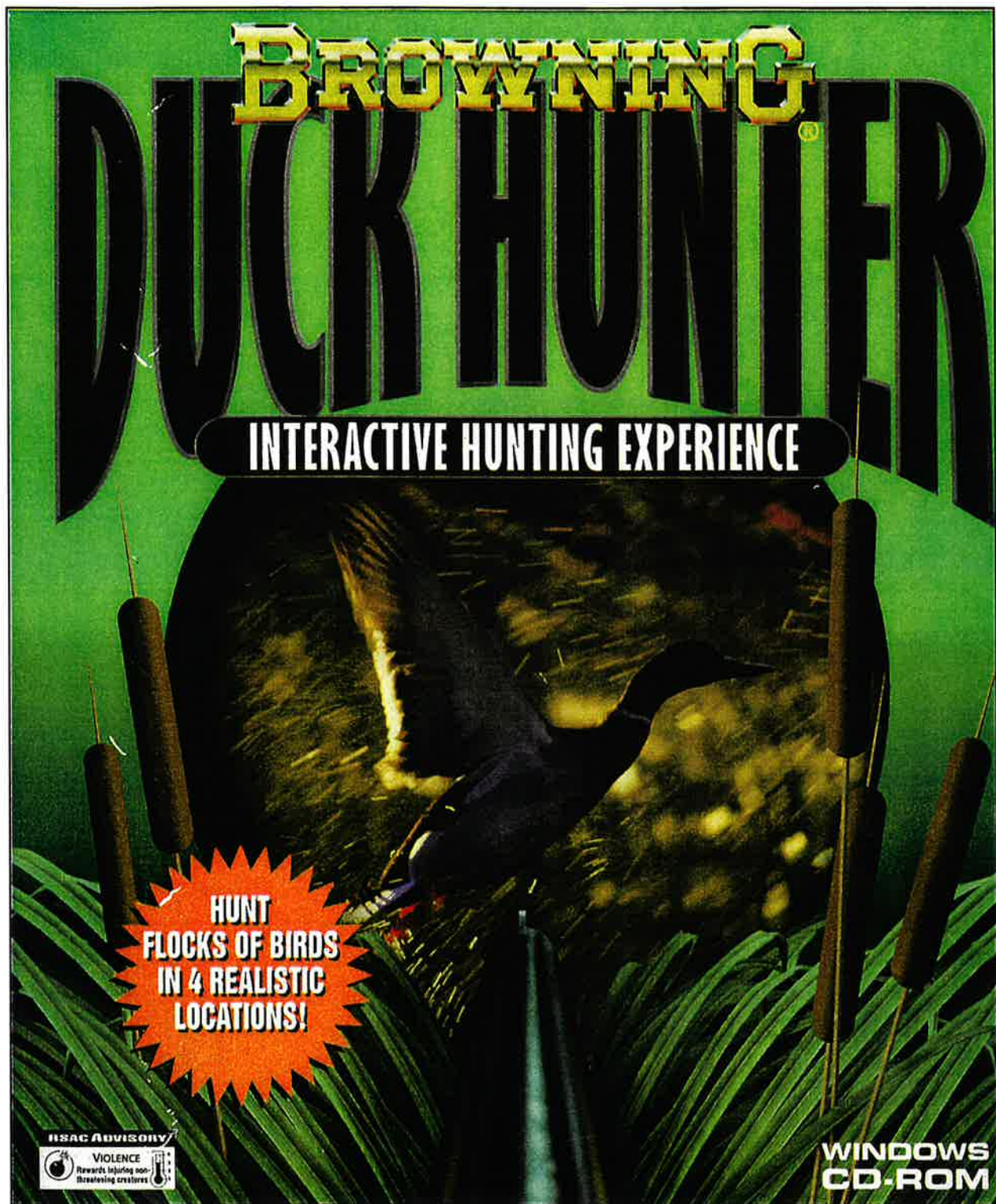
Remington shotguns (six models including pump action and semiautomatic).

### Rating

None



Browning Duck Hunter





### Browning Duck Hunter

### **Description**

The shooter takes aim at different species of ducks. Each duck is worth a set number of points known as Browning Bucks which can then be used to “buy better equipment, and go hunting at more prestigious duck clubs.”

## Firearms Featured

Browning Single Shot Shotgun, Browning Auto Gold Hunter Shotgun, and Browning Citori Shotgun.

### **Rating**

This game is not rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, but does contain a violence advisory as it "Rewards injuring non-threatening creatures."





Soldier of Fortune

# SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

**WARNING!**  
Violent subject matter.  
Low-violence  
installation option  
included.

OFFICE OF FILM AND LITERATURE CLASSIFICATION  
**MA-RESTRICTED**  
(15 YEARS & OVER)  
HIGH LEVEL ANIMATED VIOLENCE

**"PROMISES TO BLOW THE DOORS OFF THE FIRST-PERSON ACTION GENRE." -C/NET GAMECENTER**

## Soldier of Fortune

### **Description**

Based on the magazine published by National Rifle Association Board Member Robert K. Brown, the objective is, "Use any means necessary to find and secure four stolen nuclear warheads. Dispatch as many terrorists, skinheads and enemy soldiers as necessary to complete your mission."

### **Firearms Featured**

A variety of pistols, assault weapons, shotguns, and sniper rifles, as well as rocket launchers, grenades, and flame throwers.

### **Rating**

Mature ages 17 and older. In other countries, such as Australia, this game is recommended for children as young as 15 years old (see classification on opposite page).







## Endnotes

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2. Advertisement, New England Firearms, *Shooting Sports Retailer*, September/October 1998.
3. For more information on these marketing efforts, see *Start 'Em Young—Recruitment of Kids to the Gun Culture* (Washington, DC: Violence Policy Center, 1999); *Young Guns: How the Gun Lobby Nurtures America's Youth Gun Culture* (Washington, DC: Violence Policy Center, 1998); *Joe Camel with Feathers: How the NRA with Gun and Tobacco Industry Dollars Uses its Eddie Eagle Program to Market Guns to Kids* (Washington, DC: Violence Policy Center, 1997); and, "Use the Schools"—*How Federal Tax Dollars are Spent to Market Guns to Kids* (Washington, DC: Violence Policy Center, 1994).
4. Scott Farrell, "SHOT Show '99 Writers' Picks," *Shooting Industry*, April 1999, 46.
5. "Computer and Video Game Industry Data Updated for 2000," Interactive Digital Software Association, downloaded from [www.idsa.com](http://www.idsa.com).
6. *1999 State of the Industry Report*, Interactive Digital Software Association, 4-5, downloaded from [www.idsa.com](http://www.idsa.com).
7. "Computer and Video Game Industry Data Updated for 2000," Interactive Digital Software Association, downloaded from [www.idsa.com](http://www.idsa.com).
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10. Laurie Goodstein, "Teen-Age Poll Finds a Turn to the Traditional," *The New York Times*, 30 April 1998, A20.
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12. Promotional blurbs, *Remington Top Shot*, Head Games Publishing, 1998; *Colt's Wild West Shootout*, Encore Software, 1999; *Soldier of Fortune*, Activision, Inc., 2000.