

## 3Dfx Christmas - by Nicholas Klingaman

For the past few years, the Macintosh platform has not exactly enjoyed a plethora of 3Dfx cards. The company's popular Voodoo and Voodoo 2 chipsets had remained almost exclusively for Windows users. TechWorks' Power3D card tried to bring Voodoo technology to the Mac, but just as many people downloaded the drivers for use with a Windows card as actually bought it. And it wasn't exactly cheap either. With little or no hardware support, few software makers ventured to release games that utilized 3Dfx technology, and the Mac game market continued to shrink.

For those of you who are not intense gamers, 3Dfx is a company that makes a series of chips (which it named Voodoo) that rapidly accelerate 3D games that support them. 3Dfx's cards have sold so well in the Windows market that they have become the standard for interactive 3D gaming. The cards work through something called a "pass-through cable" which connects your Macs regular video output to the 3Dfx card. This way your regular card handles all of the 2D work (running the Mac OS, Netscape, and any other program that does not need to simulate three dimensions) and the 3Dfx card handles all of the 3D work (running Quake, Myth, etc.). There are three major flavours of Voodoo: the original Voodoo chipset, Voodoo 2, and Voodoo Banshee (usually just called "Banshee"). The first two work in the way I just described, using a pass-through cable. The Banshee, however, works in a different way. It combines both 2D and 3D capabilities, so that you only have to use one card. It is not as powerful as Voodoo 2 in rendering three-dimensional objects, but the difference is not all that noticeable.

This holiday season, however, promises to be different, as a number of 3Dfx cards have been released for the Macintosh platform. MicroConversions <<http://www.MicroConversions.com/>> claims that it has resolved many of the issues that plagued early production of its GameWizard (Voodoo 2) cards, and recently cut the price of its 12 MB card from \$349 to \$199, a whopping \$150 drop which puts it within \$50 of similar Windows cards.

f they can indeed produce enough product to meet demand, this promises to be a blessing for both the Mac gaming hardware and software markets. A company called VillageTronic <<http://www.VillageTronic.com/>> has just recently released two 3Dfx cards, one based on the original Voodoo architecture and one based on the new Voodoo Banshee.

hile it may not offer the fastest and best looking graphics around, the MacMagic, VillageTronic's Voodoo card, is attractively priced at \$99. It includes 8 MB of video memory, more than many other cards based on the same chipset. The MacPicasso 850, based on the Banshee chipset, includes 16 megabytes of memory and is priced at \$299. It should be available very shortly, although the drivers to enable the 3D side of the card (remember that the Banshee can do both 2D and 3D) will be delayed for a few weeks to finish testing. Any Power Macintosh with an open PCI slot (consult the manual that came with your Mac if you're unsure about your expandability) can use any one of these cards. There have been some interesting reports that MicroConversions may soon be making a Voodoo 2 card for the iMac, which would dramatically increase the attractiveness of that computer for a lot of people.

ome Macintosh gamers in the past have tried to use a sneaky (and in fact illegal) way to get around the lack of 3Dfx cards for the Mac. By buying cards designed for Windows and then downloading "reference" drivers (drivers that will work with just about any card on the market) for their Mac, they found they could save a few dollars and get a wider selection of cards. While this "solution" may seem like a good idea at the time, it actually comes back around to hurt both the purchaser and the Mac game market in general. By scorning companies like MicroConversions and VillageTronic who work hard to produce Mac 3Dfx cards at the lowest

price possible, the purchaser ensures that the cards will never come down in price. If the companies producing Mac-only cards do not sell enough product to remain profitable, they will go out of business, and the next company that comes along may think twice before entering the market. Also, software companies that produce games that use the 3Dfx standard may pass over the Mac platform because there would be no hardware to support their games. And a lack of games is something that no sane Mac gamer would want.

So this Christmas season, if you're still looking for the perfect gift for that Mac gamer on your list, consider one of these cards and help support the Mac gaming market. They come in three distinct flavors and at three different price points, so there's sure to be one to fit your budget. And with the current selection and competitive pricing, there really is no need to search for one of these so-called "solutions." Remember that while you may be spending an extra \$50 or so, you are telling the hardware companies that you support their support of the Mac platform, and you are helping to ensure that 3D hardware and software will be around for the Mac for years to come.

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