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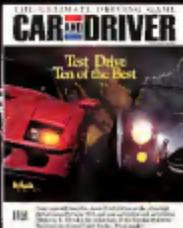
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# Stepping Into The Battler's 'Bots

A Sneak Preview of Electronic Arts' *UltraBots*

by Johnny L. Wilson

During the last incursion of the alien cometoid, that 60 year cycle of conquest and destruction where robots (straight from the minds of Japanese screenwriters) destroy everything in their paths (faster than "The Dirty Pair" can even manage to destroy whatever they are trying to "save" in a given episode), earth's survivors were able to assemble 120 nuclear devices and direct 10 of them at each alien base. The nuclear devastation was great enough to conquer the conquerors and the gigantic 18 meter tall Humanoids, 22 meter tall Net Builders (Scorpions) and smaller Scouts (15 meters high) sat silent. Now, humanity has assembled clones of the alien robots, clones which give humanity an equal playing field with the cosmic threat.

## This Is Not Your Father's Centurion

Naturally, the player is given the responsibility for defending the survivors of Earth against the alien threat. Of course, careful readers of *CGW* will remember that *UltraBots*, a game which NovaLogic was originally developing for Data East and is now releasing under the Electronic Arts label, uses some of the hottest 3-D rendered technology we have seen in the last couple of years. They will also expect a game where the players will enter the cockpits of these 3-D robots in order to engage in battle with these similarly armed alien forces as in a half-dozen games before it. Further, the player is apt to be reminded of: the robot battles of a dozen Japanese episodes/films; the "B" movie *RoboJax*; the "people and paper" and/or miniatures games of *RoboTech* and *BattleTech*; or the computer games, *Multi-*

*Player BattleTech* (on GENie), *MechWarrior* (available in Activision's new *BattleTech* value-package) or perhaps, even *RoboSport* or *CyberEmpires*. Yet, both the fictional set-up and the style of play is different than one finds in these similar tributes to Japanese visions.

*BattleTech*, in all its permutations, reflects the feudal ideal that still has adherents in modern Japan. Chivalry's code of honor, loyalty to one's house and the glory of battle are all part and parcel of the entire package. Though strategy may be coordinated (particularly in a *Multi-Player BattleTech* battle), the battles are more like a series of one-on-one encounters in a far-future list than a set-piece battle. *RoboSport* emphasizes more of the sport of one-on-one encounters against one's opponents and *CyberEmpires* features a different style of play (overhead view action-style)

Sneak Previews are not designed to be reviews. They are feature articles based on "works in progress" that *CGW's* editors have deemed worthy of early coverage. These articles are not intended to provide the final word on a product, since we expect to publish appropriate review coverage when the game is finished.



in its cyber-tribal warfare. Naturally, *RoboSport* (like *Muse Software's RoboWars* and *Origin's Omega* before it) stresses programming one's robots in advance of the attack. In *UltraBots*, the emphasis is on the aspect of participating in a fluid military operation where one makes dynamic decisions and can even control the robots via a remote console





influence, it will automatically be repaired. This means that one can have a robot shot up early in the battle and have it return to the fray in a little while after the enemy 'bots have moved on. Since the repairs can only take place within the influence of one's own net, there is a definite strategy regarding how one places the laser relays that cause the net to function.

Where the battles really work is where the player struggles to expand the net (the power grid), then draws the enemy robots into a minefield or ambush. In the preview version, the enemy AI is just aggressive enough to blunder into these traps and one gets the satisfying experience of a well-planned victory. Where the battles can get

frustrating is when a light probe is taking place and the player is frantically jumping from cockpit to cockpit in an attempt to locate the enemy. Then, every time the targeting computer locks onto a robot, the gamer gets the warning message that he/she has locked onto a friendly target.

## 'Bots Before My Eyes

Whatever one's feeling about the gameplay in *UltraBots* (and it is certainly different than we originally expected it to be) may ultimately be, it is clear that the game features: the most impressive terrain and robot graphics ever seen in the genre; tactical considerations (as well as some limitations) that are distinctive from other games in the genre; and more of a feeling of small unit military actions than has been seen in other robot games. NovaLogic (developers of the game for first, *Data East*, and then, *Electronic Arts*) has raised the stakes for simulation graphics and has proven, with both *UltraBots* and their upcoming *Comanche: Maximum Overkill* helicopter simulation, that they are going to be a major player in first person perspective, three-dimensionally rendered simulations from this time forward. **caw**



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## The Puzzling Plight of a Princess in Peril



### King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow

by Chuck Miller

Following a very successful series of installments, the latest chapter in one of adventure's most popular game series is ready to unfold. **Sierra's King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow** looks to outdo all previous installments in quality of story line, graphics and audio, sheer number of puzzles, player amenities and overall game play.

#### An Heir Raising Experience

As the story unfolds, Prince Alexander, heir to the throne of Daventry, finds himself shipwrecked and washed ashore on The Isle of the Crown, one of several mysterious islands which provide the backdrop for this quest. It seems that young Alexander was on his way to visit Cassima, Princess of the Green Isles, when his ship went down. (It was when King Graham rescued her from the evil wizard, Mordack, that Alexander and Cassima first met, apparently, with more than a passing interest in each other.)

However, upon his arrival at the Royal Palace, Alexander finds events have taken a turn for the worse. While Cassima was away, her parents became ill and died. Now, he finds her sequestered in mourning, taking no visitors. At least, that is the sequence of events according to Vizier Albazred, the man in charge and Cassima's recent intended. His inhospitable stance toward Alexander and refusal to allow him to even see Cassima, seems more than a little strange. Determined to see the Princess, Alexander sets out to discover the true nature of the events that have transpired. Thus, the stage is set for yet another *King's Quest* or, in this case, that of a prince.

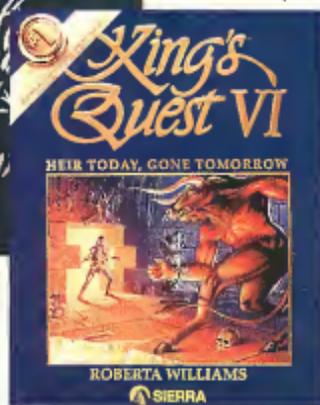
#### Get That Heir Out of Your (Inter)Face

One of the most difficult acclimations I have ever undergone is the transition from Sierra's old text parser to their new icon-driven one. This is not, of course, because it is more complex, but because of the loss of some of the conversational interaction and depth of personality (if only perceived as such) found in the characters resident in the game world. It seems that the move from a textual to a graphical parser has forever changed the nature of the puzzles and interactions of the past. Yet, with its demise, the textual parser has taken with it the last vestiges of the multifaceted difficulties and cumbersome nature associated with pre-graphic adventures, and replaced it with a more intuitive, user-friendly window to game interaction.

It has taken some time on the part of seasoned adventurers (those who cut their teeth on text parsers) to become acclimated to the new interface, and for Sierra to begin to really exploit its possibilities. However, the new parser seems to have finally come into its own with *King's Quest VI* in a way beyond that of any previous offering. This is a result, in part, to the increased overall scope of the adventure and the many optional puzzles included. Such additions serve to provide a more expansive, and consequently more enjoyable, playing environment (it is nearly twice the size of *King's Quest V*, weighing in at 18MB). Indeed, this is the first of Sierra's newer adventures where I actually did not miss the character interaction of old.

#### An Heir of Distinction

It seems almost redundant to speak of good graphics in a Sierra game. The graphics are up to Sierra's usual high standard of quality, beautifully rendered in 256-color VGA and featuring some intriguing and picturesque locales to visit. Background music is also very good, providing a rich, atmospheric environment in which to explore this new world. However, I'm most impressed with

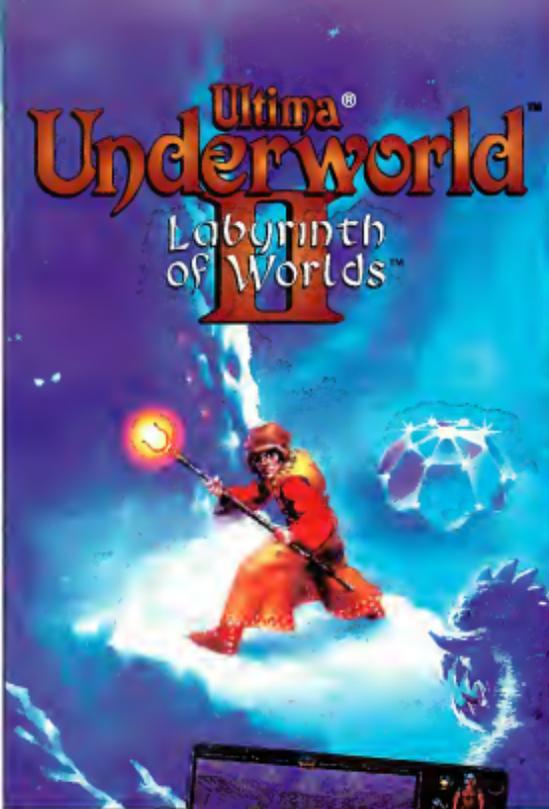


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SYSTEM IBM  
PRICE \$39.95  
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the advancements exhibited in the animation department. Character movement is improved over previous efforts, offering a more life-like appearance. Especially effective, though, is the spot animation provided throughout this newest *King's Quest*. Leaves on trees and ferns move realistically, indicative of a "digital breeze," and water appears to lap against the shore. These little touches all help bring the game world to life.



## Only Her Heir Dresser Knows

Many stylistic additions accent *King's Quest VI*. A unique introduction created by Stanley Liu of **Kronos** (best known for his work in *Batman Returns* and *Lawnmower Man*) features realistic 3-D perspective animation and incorporates powerful "camera angles" to provide dramatic effect. This six megabyte animation (based on an original design that used 1.2 GB of hard drive space) does a more than ample job of setting the background for the story that is about to envelope the player. Art and animations employed in inset boxes have also received significant attention.

Other new and notable additions include a built-in help facility for the novice gamer, a brief history of past *King's Quest* games, playing hints for *King's Quest VI* and a beginner's walkthrough for the first few puzzles — all available on-line from within the game. The help feature, in actuality, is an animated tutorial that walks the player through the use of the game interface and the exploration of the opening game screen. Use of icons, insets and object manipulation are fully explained, as are the mechanics of the graphic interface.

Information is also provided about the song *Girl in the Tower*, a love ballad from *King's Quest VI* that will be one of the first computer game songs to be played on the radio (DEVO's "Some Things Never Change" was digitized for *Neotrance* prior to its being released on the *Total DEVO* album). As part of a special marketing effort, 1000 radio stations have been provided with a copy of the ballad to play by request. A listing of these stations with their request line numbers is included in the game box. All the player need do to hear the full rendition of the song is call a local station and request it.

## Heir Apparent

As mentioned previously, *King's Quest VI* benefits significantly from a larger game world, featuring more puzzles and sub-plots than actually need to be completed in order to finish the quest. Nearly 50 percent of the total puzzles in this adventure are optional, with many having multiple solutions.

Due to an open-ended game world, no fixed order is imposed on most puzzles encountered. The player is free to move on to solve other conundrums when

faced with an overly perplexing puzzle, and then return to solve it at a later time. Up until the end of the game, the player is relatively free to travel between the four islands making up The Land of the Green Isles. There are even two possible ways into the Royal Palace at the game's conclusion — an easy and a more difficult route. The choice made determines the parts of the palace seen by the player.

## Neither Here Nor (T)Heir

Since I had played beta versions of the game prior to playing the finished release, I ran across a particular bug early on which necessitated running the game without sound and music to keep a certain action from locking up the computer (it, of course, has been corrected). This left only the IBM speaker available for sound. Gag!

Ptooiie! Yuck! It has been so long since I played an adventure without a quality sound card, I had forgotten how bad the emanations from a IBM speaker sounded. I could not believe what I heard, or rather, did NOT hear. Players still without a sound card should install one before playing *King's Quest VI*. It will be money

well spent, and will greatly enhance the playing experience.

The only area where Sierra adventures still lack polish and professionalism is that of digitized speech. Though there is little speech encountered in *King's Quest VI*, what speech there is suffers from the contrived and corny sounding voices exhibited in the CD-ROM version of *King's Quest V*. Professional voice actors are desperately needed. Hopefully, Sierra will make use of trained professionals, rather than their staff personnel, in the CD-ROM version of *King's Quest VI* that is scheduled for an early 1993 release.

Though *King's Quest VI* supports both 256-color VGA and 16-color EGA on the same set of disks, there is no contest between the two versions. All serious gamers should have a VGA card installed by this point in time, as well as a quality sound card. It is the only way to get the greatest enjoyment from the playing experience.

## To Heir an Opinion

It is evident that a great deal of time and talent was invested in this animated adventure, which is, in my humble opinion, the best of the *King's Quest* games to come out of Davenport, and Sierra's finest adventure to date. The game world is intriguing and entertaining, and the puzzles are varied in difficulty and style, providing a rich and enjoyable playing experience for gamers of all skill levels.

*King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow* has all the signs of becoming a classic. I guess it would be fair to say that *King's Quest VI* has a certain heir about it. **cmw**



# Before you play *Special Forces*, you'd better put on your game face.

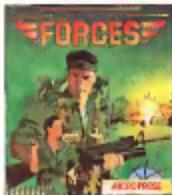


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# Islands In A Screen

## The Misadventures of Johnny Castaway

TITLE: Screen Antics: Johnny Castaway  
 SYSTEM: IBM  
 PRICE: \$34.95  
 REQUIREMENTS: Windows 3.1 and VGA graphics support  
 DESIGNER: Jeff Tunnell Productions  
 PUBLISHER: Dynamix  
 Eugene, OR

by Alan Entrick and Johnny L. Wilson

Billed as the world's first story-telling screen-saver cartoon, *Johnny Castaway* is a great launch (and subsequent shipwreck) for Dynamix' Screen Antics series. We weren't sure what Jeff Tunnell intended when he formed a smaller creative group under the aegis of Dynamix, but the first few products we've seen from Jeff Tunnell Productions look very different from the award-winning designer's other works.

Gamers who enjoy the Johnny Hart style art and humor of the *B.C.* comic strip



should enjoy this randomized film clip of tried-and-true sight gags in a fresh new environment. The artists obviously emulated the Hart style, as the background is minimalist (the tiniest imaginable desert island, decorated by a single coconut tree). The design team also must have been inspired by *Gilligan's Island* re-runs in that the title character, a marooned seafarer who regularly misses opportunities to be rescued, has an unending supply of accoutrements with which to make his island more "civilized." He fishes, goes diving, builds sand castles, goes jogging (in his "three hour tour" style jogging suit) and even entertains a lovely mermaid for dinner (in his clairvoyantly packed tuxedo).

The concept behind this style of screen saver is, of course, that the computer user is often surprised by the animation that appears on the screen. As the user talks on

the phone or works off-line for a while, there are supposed to be enough animated sequences that the antics will be entertaining for months. Johnny will always be



looking in the wrong direction or doing the wrong thing whenever potential rescuers (whether yachtsmen, aviators, ghost ships or whatever) pass by. Whether all of this actually works as a screen saver or not is debatable. Only a portion of the screen is used for the animated sequences and much of the background is static. Of course, the same might be said about the entire category of screen savers, whether fireworks or aquariums.

Gamers who want to boot the screen saver and simply view a few hours of gags

may find themselves disappointed. Johnny usually ends up pausing after each sequence and, if the gamer doesn't touch a key, will read the disk and start another round of animated slapstick. This staggered pacing shouldn't bother the casual viewer who occasionally glimpses a sequence or two while performing other tasks, but it could be distracting to someone merely wanting to view the computerized cartoons.

Also, computer users who use *Photo Styler*, or any other program that requires the computer to work for long periods without keyboard input, should avoid installing *Johnny Castaway*. Those cute animated sequences can certainly play havoc with a .TIF file conversion. (Wonder how we know that?)

All in all, *Johnny Castaway* is proof positive that Jeff Tunnell is thinking outside established lines. A screen saver that tells a story, no matter how disjointed or random, is a fascinating concept and Jeff Tunnell Productions has brought it to the computer in an artistic fashion. Fans of Johnny Hart-style comics and sight gag lovers everywhere should love it. **CSW**



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# Athlete's Feats



## Accolade's Summer Challenge

by Gordon Goble

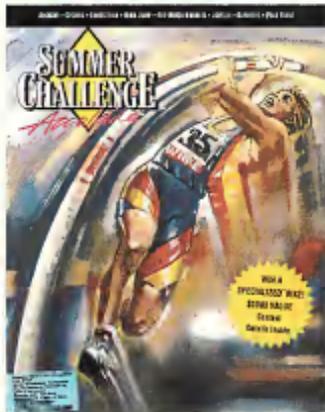
TITLE:	Summer Challenge
SYSTEM:	IBM
PLAYERS:	1 - 10
PRICE:	\$54.95
PROTECTOR:	Code Wheel
DESIGNER:	Jeff Scriber, Mike Berry
DISTRIB:	Mindtap Technology
PUBLISHER:	Accolade
	San Jose, CA

It was a searing summer afternoon as American ironman Brock Studley strode confidently into competition. Days of exhaustive and repetitious training had led to this moment... but that was all behind him now. Once in the heat of battle, there was no turning back.

Less than 45 minutes and eight events later, it was all over. Studley had performed well, perhaps better than anticipated, and in the end was bested only by Canadian super-athlete Richard DeReux.

The day had begun on a high note on the archery range. Studley's 107 point total after the 12 required shots had topped his own tournament record of 103, as he hit a golden bull's-eye. The American's winning ways were to continue next on the cycling oval and the standings after the first two events showed Studley with a dominating lead.

Hopes were high for three in a row as the javelin competition began. Yet, Studley would crack under pressure on this day, foot-faulting twice and tossing the sleek missile almost straight up and back down through his own head on his third and final try. His woes continued on the kayak course, as the rattled American missed 10 gates on his way to finishing last. A better result than his training sessions, when an overturned kayak would most often signal his presence on the course.



The main stadium was the sight for the next event, the 400 meter hurdles, and although the stumbling Studley would knock no less than three hurdles to the ground, his inherent speed propelled him to the silver medal. Studley found himself clinging to a slim overall lead as he mounted his trusty steed in preparation for the equestrian competition.

Less than one minute later, a bruised and battered Studley was picking himself from the ground, being thrown viciously from his uncooperative horse. Another last place finish in the books, this feat would be duplicated in the penultimate event, the pole vault, as Studley twice ran past the take-off area and straight into the cushioned mat without ever getting off the ground. Embarrassed but undaunted, Studley knew he'd have to be perfect in the day's finale, the high jump, to have a chance at a top three finish.

Indeed, he was up to the task, being the only competitor to clear 2.15 meters. A triple gold medal winner at this challenge, Studley finished the competition a strong second.

He turned off the computer, all the while mulling over the fact that in the future, he would be going up against professional, then world class athletes. He had timidly watched them before, and although he knew performance enhancing drugs were banned from

# Trade Up!

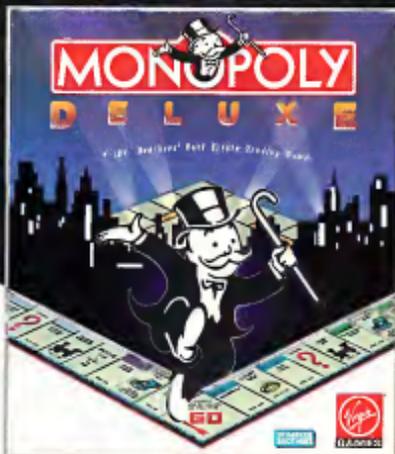
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# Review

any rank of competition, he did not think these competitors were natural humans.

So goes Accolade's *Summer Challenge*, a game in which the technical aspect is quick to master, but the possibility of actually beating the computer athletes at any level past the amateur ranks is another story altogether. Fortunately, Accolade has designed this game to encourage head-to-head human competition, and that is where *Summer Challenge* really shines.

Although the task of defeating the defaulted computer competition is interesting, long term intrigue is definitely enhanced by challenging up to 10 human friends or foes in any given tournament. Because *Summer Challenge* doesn't require the talents of the proverbial rocket scientist to get the basics under control, those not fond of thumbing through pages of documentation can have a lot of quick fun.

After the initial fluffery and the joys of the code wheel, a *Summer Challenge* session opens with a screen allowing players to pick their on-screen persons — various male and female athletes — from a host of competing countries. Up to 10 players can then each pick a name, choose a country, and decide on the appropriate facial graphic. The ceremonial lighting of the flame follows, then it's down to business.

Dirty rotten scoundrels who want to win at all costs may not want to inform their buddies of this, but there are training sessions available in which a player has unlimited time and attempts at becoming world caliber. In most events, experience and natural coordination really help, an example being the javelin throw.

Entering the javelin arena (training and event views are the same, with the "camera" positioned directly behind the current competitor), the armchair Olympian will quickly find that a number of operations must take place — in quick succession and in perfect harmony — in order to taste the thrill of victory. As in real competition, the speed of approach, timing of release and trajectory of the javelin's ascent to the heavens are all critical to a satisfactory result.

*[A quick nod to the venerable keyboard. Here, and in many of the Summer Challenge events, use of the keyboard seems to achieve better results than incorporating the joystick. In Summer Challenge, speed is often attained through a quick tapping of either a specified key or joystick button. Simply put, ol' Brock seems to go a darn sight faster when using the keyboard for this repetitive*

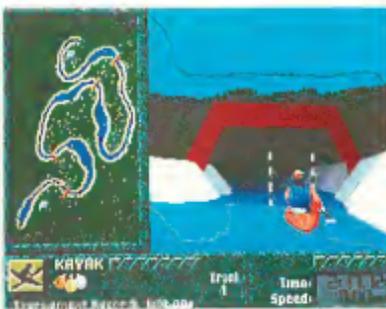


*(and, believe it or not, somewhat tiring) tapping motion.]*

While one hand is furious tapping, the other lies ready to depress the space bar, which will inform Brock to bring his throwing arm back in preparation for the strenuous pitch forward. Careful attention to the release angle graphic on the starboard base of the screen is important; the longer the throwing arm is cocked back, the higher the trajectory will be. And Brock doesn't want to toss it too high, or too low.

Nor does he want to foot-fault, which he will do if one lets him run too far without letting go of the javelin in question. Complete these operations in a proper manner, and Brock's toss will exceed 82 meters, a distance which brings an ovation from the gathered throng. Do it wrong, and Brock feels the wrath of thousands as a mutual groan of sorrow (maybe disgust?) is heard.

The javelin is certainly a challenging, almost addictive event. So is kayaking (wherein the sensation of being buoyed on water is most definitely evident), archery (the speed of preparation between shots counts almost as much as accuracy) and the equestrian competition. Unfortunately, the 400-meter hurdles, cycling, high jump and pole vaulting events suffer somewhat simply because there just isn't enough *stuff* to them. As well, the inclusion of other athletes on the track in the biking and hurdling events would have added a welcomed sense of realism.



To their credit, Accolade does provide replays for all performances in all events. These can quickly be saved for future bragging rights (such as Brock's 92 meter javelin toss!), but are somewhat limited, providing but a single camera angle (although reverse and stop action special effects are present).

Musical accompaniment is somewhat lame — typical Accolade computer Muzack (hmm...what does the percussion sound like? How about a very under-powered

little guy beating on an empty *Spaghetti-Os* can with a small twig).

Installation is as quick and painless as to be expected, mouse support is present, and *Summer Challenge* can be successfully run through Windows via Accolade's own little icon.

*Falcon 3.0* it's not, nor does *Summer Challenge* attempt to mimic the complexity of such megagames. Refreshing or too simplistic — that depends on one's viewpoint — but for quick and easy good times (and head-to-head at that!), Accolade has succeeded.

One final thought for those with a warped sense of humor, we harken back to the high jump pit as Brock makes his first attempt. Unfortunately for our hero, he jumped a little too early (about 20 feet before the bar!), did his mandatory flop, and impacted the ground squarely on his back. Rising slowly and in obvious pain, the tortured athlete massaged his aching spine and exclaimed quite succinctly "That hurt!" It was so painful to witness that he did it again and again! This guy don't learn too quickly, do he? **eww**



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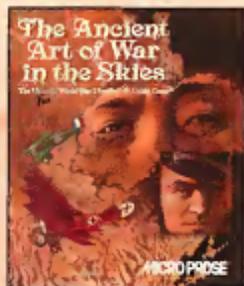
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# Three Moe Stooges



## Coktel Vision's Goblins

by Chris Lombardi



TITLE	Goblins
SYSTEMS	Amiga, IBM
PRICE	\$14.95
PRODUCTION	None
DESIGNERS	Franz Gbrosch, Manfred Trems
PUBLISHER	Sierra Oakland, CA

I remember the morning my youngest sister, then four years old, made the first step out of the egotism of the toddler years and grasped a higher human truth. Two Sesame Street furries, the Geepie and the Gonk, were in a dilemma. In a tree, high above their heads, hung a delicious fruit which neither creature could eat. The Geepie had arms naturally stuck high above its head; while the Gonk's arms were stuck down below its waist. The Geepie could pick the fruit from the tree, but it couldn't bring the fruit to its mouth — while the Gonk could hold things at

mouth level but couldn't reach the fruit. The two independent characters thought a moment and struck upon an answer — cooperation! Through a series of contortive maneuvers they found that each could taste the nectar of shared victory over their cruelly conceived genetic endowments. Geepie! Gonk! Nectarines!

Like these Sesame Street characters, the *Goblins* of Coktel Vision ("Part of the Sierra family") creation have set out on a task that only the cooperative use of their individual talents can accomplish. You see, the king of the Goblins is being terrorized by a mysterious voodoo-magician prankster. The silly animated introduction to the game shows the poor king poked, prodded and terrorized into a psychotic state, to the horror of his previously peacefully dining family. Three Goblins stooges, Hooter, Dwayne and BoBo, have been sent out in search of the wizard





NIAK, whose magic could counteract the voodoo curse and restore the king's state of mind.

This Goblins Quest will take the zany trio through a dozen or so puzzle-filled screens of the standard Sierra graphic adventure style. Mastering the puzzles on each screen requires the use of each Goblin's gift. Hooter, a graying lesser magician, casts a general sort of spell that has unpredictable effects. Bobo, a horn-helmeted ruffian, is a pugilist and all-around athlete who can climb ropes and land a solid right jab when required. Dwayne, a spry young technician, is the only one of the three that can pick up items and use them appropriately. Thus, with a punch, some item manipulation, and a little magic, the Goblins are on their way.

When the Goblins find themselves on a new screen filled with items, creatures, and pathways they have little to tell them what exactly is the goal they seek — so, a little exploration is in order. The player will pick a character by clicking on him and proceed to punch, zap, or pick up everything he can. Sometimes this hunt-and-click procedure yields fruit — a new object or a change in the environment — and the overall gist of the screen's puzzle will begin to unfold. More often, the Goblins will end up doing something silly, like causing something to fall on their head or invoking the wrath of some creature or another.

Like the old "Three Stooges" short subjects, it is not only the offending Goblin who reaps whatever punishment is due, but the whole lot of them ends up paying the price. You see, the group has a general allotment of collective energy, represented by a bar on the screen, and when one member screws up, the energy is sapped. When this karmic well has run dry, the level is over and must be started

again. This is one world where one does not want to use the Force.

When one Goblin commits such a flub, the others in the group don't hold it against him. No, they hold it against you, the player. They realize that the player holds the puppet-strings and they'll let him or her know what's on their minds. They'll gesticulate wildly, hold fingers to their heads to encourage the player to think, and non-verbally plead with the player to get his or her act together. While the player takes their advice and carefully considers the situation, these goofs will wait impatiently for the next



move — yawning, shrugging their shoulders, turning back flips, chewing gum, playing with yo-yos and whatnot. All of this is entirely too cute — and thus, endearing to the soft soul.

The world of the Goblins is a cleverly created one. The puzzles mostly involved discovering strange contraptions in the bizarre fantasy landscape which will enable the Goblins to bypass some obstacle. Most steps toward a puzzle's solution are accompanied by a short, simple and funny animation, and one can always be sure of getting a non-verbal haranguing after every wrong step.

Interacting with the Goblins is quite easy; facilitated by an interface

very much in line with the Sierra protocol. The game is entirely mouse-driven and the individual actions of the goblins are represented by different mouse icons (a fist, an arrow, an open hand) which the player can cycle through by clicking the right mouse button. A good deal of work has been done to ensure that the player can make a single click with the arrow button and thereby move a Goblin to any point on the screen, regardless of whether he will have to walk in a straight line or traverse an intricate path of several ladders. A small feature, but appreciated by those who have played the earlier graphic adventures without such "path tracing."

The overall feel of *Goblins* — it's simple interface, it's "click-around" exploratory nature, the goofball antics of the trio and the silly animations that abound in their world — suggests a younger audience appeal. However, many of the puzzles can be quite sticky, and some require a very careful eye — occasionally causing even this salty gamer to pause and think. Younger gamers might get a bit frustrated going this one alone, but the game would make great "lapware," where the older gamer makes suggestions about the next move and the younger does the clicking and enjoys the animated results. This is not to say that older gamers won't get anything out of *Goblins* — far from it. There is plenty of good fun here for the graphic adventurer enjoying a respite from the more plot intensive quests. Of course, like most graphic adventures this is a "crack it and rack it" game, where there is little replay beyond the few nights one will spend the first time through the game. Even so, Hooter, Dwayne and Bobo will entertain a variety of light-hearted gamers so long as these players remember that cooperation is the name of the game, and that the best fruits of labor are those that are shared. Nectarines! **eww**



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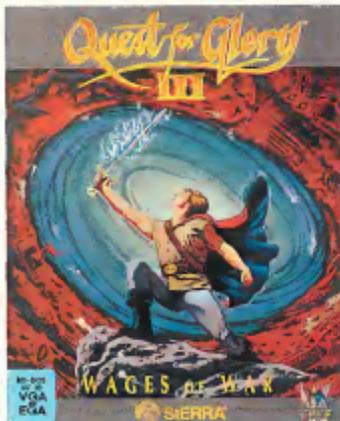
# The Wages of War

## Quest For Glory III



by Jeff James

In the original *Quest for Glory*, Lori and Corey Cole proved that a hybrid adventure/role-playing game could be successful. In *Quest for Glory III*, the husband and wife design duo challenge our assumptions about culture in the same way they challenged our beliefs about game design. Gamers are likely to discover enlightenment in "Darkest" Africa when they boot *Quest for Glory III: Wages of War*.



TITLE	Quest for Glory III
SYSTEM	IBM
PRICE	\$29.99
PROJECTION	Documentation Look-up
DESIGNERS	Lori & Corey Cole
PUBLISHER	Sierra Goldmead, CA

In *Quest for Glory II (QG2)*, players were introduced to Rakeesh the Liontaur (a leonine variation on the traditional centaur) and Uthara the Simbani tribeswoman. The player adventured with them in the city of Shapcir and its sinister sister city, Raseir. In *Quest for Glory III: Wages of War (QG3)*, the homeland of these characters is the land darkened by the threat of war, so the player is soon whisked off to the land of Tarna by way of a magical portal. Upon arrival in the city of Tarna, the player learns that evil is indeed afoot. A hidden power — presumably the demon released as the result of the demise of Ad Avis in the thrilling finale to *QG2* — seems to be trying to get the Liontaurs, Simbani and the jungle-dwelling leopardmen to go to war. The player arrives on the scene and assumes the role of a fantasy role-playing secretary of state, shuttling between the involved tribes as a peaceful mediator and trying to bring peace to the region.

*QG3* takes Lori and Corey Cole's popular adventure series to new heights with an exotic fantasy setting littered with difficult obstacles and malevolent monsters. Gamers can bring along their favorite adventurers from the first two games in the series or start anew with one of three characters: fighter, magic-user or thief.

The story begins with the player assum-

ing the role of the hero who vanquished the evil wizard Ad Avis in *QG2*, thwarting the evil spellcaster's attempt to unleash the evil djinni, Iblis. While the passing of any evil magic-user should give



gamers ample cause to rejoice, it seems that the death of the evil wizard has released an even greater evil in the *Quest for Glory* gameworld. Specifically, a demon was released when Ad Avis met his death, and is believed to be the instigator of a war brewing in another part of the *Quest for Glory* gameworld.

### Exotic New Landscape

While *QG1* was based loosely on a medieval European setting and *QG2* opted for an exotic Arabian tableau, *QG3* offers perhaps the most exotic and intriguing backdrop in the *Quest for Glory* series to date. *QG3* takes place on the sprawling continent of Fricana, a land patterned heavily after the real-world African continent. In this land, a humid tropical jungle skirts a large, sweltering savanna of grasslands. In the midst of the jungle are the crumbling ruins of a lost city, filled with dark, foreboding secrets of its own. The city of Tarna itself is a cosmopolitan center of activity, where a variety of fantasy and real-world cultures collide. Honor-bound Lionsurs mingle in the streets with Arabian shopkeepers, while Simbani warriors, strongly patterned after traditional African Zulu, observe with watchful eyes. The world of *QG3* is a rich and alluring one; a world where Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan would feel right at home.

Indeed, *QG3*'s exotic treatment of different cultures proves itself to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the game. Role-playing adventures have traditionally been centered around medieval European culture, using the same western batch of monsters (dragons and ogres), backdrops (castles and hamlets) and conflicts (dwarves vs. elves, orcs vs. everyone). I especially enjoyed *QG3*'s treatment of African culture, complete with a list of verbal greetings and other terms taken from actual Swahili. Non-European cultures such as the African tribal empires, Chinese dynasties and Japanese shogunates have been traditionally underrepresented in fantasy RPG's; this reviewer would like to encourage game developers to explore the rich, relatively untapped material for adventure gaming in these and other cultures. With *QG3* proving that a RPG based upon a non-European gaming world can be just as enjoyable and entertaining as one that is, one can hope that this tradition contin-

ues (I would love to see an RPG based upon the ancient Aztec civilization in South America).



Moving the character about this rich gameworld involves Sierra's tried and true point and click interface which displays all of the commands the player can use in the game. These controls can be perused by toggling through them with the right mouse button or accessing the pop-up control panel at the top of the game screen. Icons for looking, grabbing, checking inventory and accessing disk functions are all present.

Three aspects of the interface have been modified considerably in *QG3*. First, the speech icon has been given additional flexibility. Conversation with non-player characters in earlier Sierra titles (such as *King's Quest V*) were frustratingly one sided—often little more than dead-end dialogues where the only control the player had over what was being said was how fast it could be read off the screen. Clicking the "talk" icon on a character in the game now brings up a menu of topics. Speaking about some topics may bring up other topics of discussion, allowing the player to modify the course of discussion to some degree. While a far cry from a full-blown text parser, *QG3*'s expanded dialogue is definitely a step in the right direction.

The second modification is the special action bar, which contains all of the specialized commands particular to the *Quest for Glory* series. This menu allows the player to access special character actions, such as sleeping, character information, fleeing combat and sneaking up on an opponent.

Finally, *QG3* offers a specialized menu of combat actions. Closer in appearance to an embossed tablet than a menu, it is divided into three areas corresponding to three types of combat options. Tailored individually for the Fighter, Thief and Magic-user classes, these combat menus make navigating the pseudo-arcade combat sequences an exercise in point and click simplicity.

*QG3*'s sumptuous hand-painted graphics make the exotic backdrop of Tarna come to life. Most of the art-





work excels at presenting the world of *QG3* in a grand scale, with towering pyramids, sphinx-like statues and thick green jungles all rendered in 256-color VGA. Adding to the visual display, *QG3* sports a sound track with a broad scope of styles, ranging from driving passages filled with jungle drums to sprightly Persian bazaar music, reminiscent of snake charmers and spice sellers.

### Blemishes on the Landscape

As polished a product as *QG3* is, a few blemishes need to be mentioned. Traveling across the open savanna seems to be more difficult than it should be, with monsters attacking the player's character from all quarters. True, the character can opt to flee, and *QG3* offers three levels of playing difficulty to dial down the difficulty of the arcade sequences, but regardless of the difficulty level, combat seems to occur more often than necessary. I also encountered a few minor bugs regarding conversation with some



NPC's. During a nighttime encounter with Amie Saknoosen — a gregarious, diamond-hunting swordvark — the game ghosted out all of the action icons, preventing me from leaving the area.

### Visions on the Horizon

Minor program foibles aside, *QG3* is yet another excellent product from the creative characters at Sierra. With every new release in the *Quest for Glory* series, designers Lori and Corey Cole have been steadily improving the line, offering gamers an exciting mixture of hard-core fantasy role-playing and traditional graphic adventure games. *QG3* is far and away the most satisfying and entertaining game yet in the series. With such a commendable tradition, we can hardly contain our expectations for *Quest for Glory IV: Shadows of Darkness*. It will be tough to surpass the expectations generated from the excellence already found in *Quest for Glory III: Wages of War*. **EW**

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Circle Reader Service #103

# Scorpion's View

## New World's Clouds of Xeen

as told by Scorpia

*Scorpia is an experienced and respected adventure game expert. CGW is pleased to provide this forum for her distinctive and often controversial perspective.*



Fourth in the *Might & Magic* series, *Clouds of Xeen* bears a strong resemblance to its predecessor, *Isles of Terra*. Character creation, interface and game play are pretty much the same as in the previous *M&M*. If you played *Terra*, you'll have no trouble at all jumping into *Clouds*, with perhaps a quick glance through the manual as a refresher.

However, *Xeen* is a stand-alone (of sorts; more on that later). If you've been hanging on to saves from *Terra* in the hopes of transferring your characters over, you're out of luck. A new party will have to be made for this one or you can use the pre-created group that comes with the game.

All the usual classes are available: Knight, Paladin, Archer, Sorcerer, Druid, Cleric, Ninja, Robber and Ranger. Six characters is the maximum, though, so you will have to choose carefully which professions you want in the party. Dice are rolled for all the starting stats and you can swap values between them if you have

good rolls, but they are not quite allocated where you need them in order to create a particular class. This is a very nice feature and helps to cut down on creation time.

Characters you create come with no equipment at all, but the pre-created group is outfitted to a limited extent. You can save some money by using the traditional canard of stripping the original group of all their items and giving them to your own people. That will require a couple of trips into and out of the inn, since exchanging items is no longer possible once you've "checked in." No doubt this was done to get around the problem of the previous game, where any object could be duplicated endlessly with a little judicious trading around. That doesn't work any more, so remember to do all your trading outside the inns.

### A New "Day" In Magic

Many of the old familiar spells from *Terra* are here, along with some new ones. Particularly welcome are the Day

of Sorcery for mage types and the Day of Protection for cleric types. These are packages that cast multiple spells at once. No longer is it necessary to cast individual Heroism, Holy Bonus spells or a mass of several Elemental protection spells. One dose of Day of Protection from a clerical character provides light, protection from all elements, and group Holy Bonus and Heroism, simultaneously.

In the same fashion, Day Of Sorcery casts Wizard Eye, Power Shield (for the entire party), Levitate and Clairvoyance, all at once. Clairvoyance is a new spell, handy for little tips when deciding whether or not to attempt opening a chest or similar object. Two heads on the display will nod "yes" or "no," depending on the situation. Both say yes when a chest is safe and has goodies inside. One says yes and the other no when the chest is trapped but contains treasure, and when both say no, it's best to leave the item alone.

Of course, you can still purchase the individual spells of Light, Heroism,

Wizard Eye, etc., so you can tailor your spellcasting to the exact situation. As you might expect, those Day packages require a lot of spellpoints (75 for Protection, 40 for Sorcery), and it would be silly to use up that many points when all you need is light or Wizard Eye. However, for those occasions when you need it all, you can have it all without a lot of fuss.

Another new feature that is sure to bring cheers is the appearance of the auto-note utility. The game automatically records for you all the important information and clues that you come across during play. This includes the locations of all those neat little wells/fountains that give temporary boosts to stats, and shrines that provide daily protection against elemental powers, as well as the passwords, obscure hints, and whatnot that turn up as you ramble around the world.

So you don't need to make any notes of your own, at least as far as those items are concerned. With the quests, it's a little different. The game does keep track of quests for you, what you have to find (or do) and where the person is who sent you out. However, the quest-tracking utility often does not record the place where you're supposed to go to complete the errand.

This can be a problem if you take on several quests at once, which is an easy thing to do. People who want some mission accomplished are all over the place and there seems to be no limit to the number of errands you can accept. The quest notes faithfully record all of them, but when you look at those notes, they might just say "Find the lost Book Of Foober and return it to Fred at A1, X3, Y9" with no mention of where Fred told you to look for it. Therefore, you'll have to do some note-taking of your own for the quests, at least as far as errand locations are concerned.

### Quests On "Spec"

Quest items are clearly marked as such when you find them, and they go into a special inventory where you can see them, but can't touch them. There is no worry that you might inadvertently drop, sell, or use up a special object. Once you find such an item, it's safe until you return it to the proper person.

There are, however, a couple of problems with the quests. One is the fact that you can find a quest item, or complete a quest errand, without having been sent out to do the task. For instance, in Castle Basenji, I came across a Scroll of Insight, which was clearly a quest item, and it was a long time after that before the party stumbled on the person who wanted it.

Similarly, the group cleared an area of monsters, and only much later came across the person who had wanted those monsters cleaned out. In all these situations, you *do* get the rewards for the item or actions performed, even though you hadn't been asked to perform the quest, so "jumping the gun" doesn't cheat you out of anything. Still, it is unsettling, and sometimes annoying, to find yourself on these "unknown quests." It would have been far better if



the requisite items did not appear in the game until after the party had been commissioned to find them.

The other problem is that the quests, by and large, have little to do with the main action of the story. Yes, you do get experience, spells, money, etc., which help to build up your party for the end game, but this is fairly indirect. The quests themselves, in most cases, do not advance the plot. There are a few that must be completed in order to finish the game, but the rest exist on their own, with no connection to anything else.

### Where's Monte Haul?

One thing you'll soon notice is that the mega-goodies have been scaled way, way back. There are no longer any mountain alcoves with treasures or little caches buried under the snow or sand. The items you do pick up will come mostly from combat and chests in dungeons and castles. Indeed, even

their contents tend towards the lower end of the potency scale. Don't expect your party to be decked out with obsidian weapons and armor by the end of the game; you'll be lucky to have so much as an obsidian cape (the only such item I ever found). This is not to say there mightn't be a few floating around, but they will be hard to come by. This is all to the good, since it makes the better stuff you do find all that more valuable to you, and keeps the party from becoming too powerful too quickly.

Using the town teleporters to get around is much more sensible now. In the previous game, you had to find out the "codeword" for each town, and certain other areas, before you could 'port to them. That's been done away with, and you only need to type in the name of where you want to go to arrive there.

The party can travel to any named dungeon, castle, or town on the map that comes with the game. Some places, while shown on the map, have no names, so you'll still have to trek there on foot, but you can usually 'port to some other location nearby to cut down on travel time.

Perhaps the most interesting addition to *Xeen* is the choice of "Adventurer" or "Warrior" mode. Adventurer mode is described in the manual as being "less combat-intensive." What that means is,

monsters are a bit easier to kill and you don't have to fight quite so many of them in most areas. There is still plenty of combat in this mode, however, so don't think you'll be able to waltz around without fighting anything. There are a lot of critters out there lustering for your blood. You'll just be able to get rid of them with (usually) a bit less trouble, that's all. Adventurer mode is a good choice for people who shudder at the very thought of anSSI "gold box" game.

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned that *Xeen* was a stand-alone game "of sorts." *New World* is planning an add-in sequel, *The Dark Side of Xeen* (sometime in Spring of '93). In preparation for this sequel, there are certain places in the game your party cannot enter: the southern sphinx, the Dragon and Darkstone towers, a dungeon in the vicinity of Nightshadow and all the pyramids.

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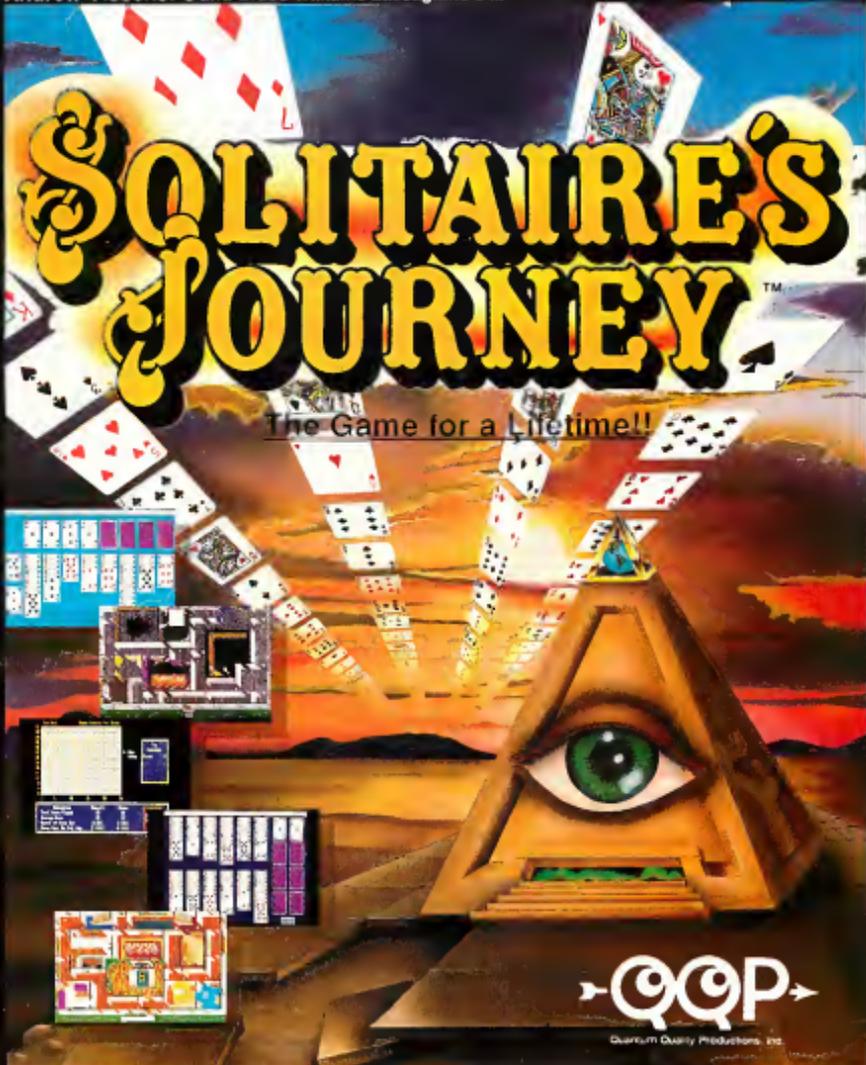
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# Scorpion's View

Also, for the first time in a *Might & Magic* game, the advancement of your party is limited. No one can go beyond the 20th level of experience. This is to ensure that the characters will not become all-powerful prior to the arrival of *The Dark Side of Xeen*. They can, of course, accumulate extra experience before the game ends, but it won't be useful to them here.

## It's A Plot! (Or Is It?)

There isn't much plot to *Clouds of Xeen*. Your job is a straightforward task of building up the party, finding where Xeen lairs and then going there to kill him. This marks a departure from the previous games where the ultimate goal was not to engage in a Fozzie fight, but to do some other non-violent action.

Given how the big showdown goes, *New World* would do well to consider sticking with non-violent endings, or at least doing something to make the combat confrontation a little more interesting. In the case of *Xeen*, it goes this way: if you have the right item, Xeen is toast; if you don't have it, your party is toast.

This is ultimately unsatisfying, as dragons and diamond golems are apt to give you a lot more trouble than Lord X ever will and the "one shot and it's over battle" makes the confrontation seem almost pointless. This is a problem with many CRPG's — not just *Might & Magic IV* — where getting to the last battle is often more difficult than taking on Mr. Big himself. It's a pity that *New World* fell into this well-worn rut, when up to now they had been doing quite nicely with non-Fozzie endings.

Even more irritating, after the elaborate auto-ending sequence, you have no opportunity to save the game, or go back to check out things you might have skipped over in your haste to destroy Xeen. If you plan on doing the game thoroughly, you must complete all the quests and all your exploring before you approach the mirror in Xeen's castle (this triggers the automated ending, so you're safe until that moment). Otherwise, you may find that *Might & Magic IV* has ended a little abruptly and much sooner than you ex-

pected. Of course, you will be able to return after you've been to the *Dark Side*.

On the bright side, other than some problems in getting the game to run initially (see sidebar), I encountered no technical difficulties with *Xeen*. The game did not crash even once and all the quests were in place and operating properly. A rare event in the game market these days (and a sad commentary when you have to mention specifically that a game ran cleanly, sigh), *Clouds*

in particular the addition of the auto-notes, reducing the number of "super items," the separate inventory for quest items, and the choice of two modes of play, as well as others mentioned above. Game play moves along more smoothly, and with less frustration (and fewer lost notes) than in prior entries in the series.

What still needs work, however, is integrating more quests into the plot and having an actual story that develops as the game progresses. The *Might and Magic* series has always been weak in this area. For instance, in every *M&M* game, the towns seem to be inhabited only by shopkeepers and monsters. If the residents moved out, where did they go? The world is rather empty of everyday people, and this in turn makes it hard to have anything beyond a barebones story. A more populated world, with a more solid foundation, would go a long way to beeping up the enjoyment of the game.

For all that, *Clouds of Xeen* is likely, particularly with the new features, to please the hard-core *Might & Magic* fan and (thanks to Adventurer mode) some who might otherwise pass the game by. **EW**



of *Xeen* deserves a gold star to *New World*'s quality assurance and playtesters for this outing.

## Cloud's-Eye View

Overall, *Clouds of Xeen* has many improvements over the previous game,

## Technical Difficulties, Please Stand By

Things did not get off to a good start when the game refused to run after installation, complaining there wasn't enough expanded memory. After many frustrating attempts to free up more expanded RAM (my current machine has 2 megs), I obtained from *New World* a patch that was supposed to make the game require less memory.

Unfortunately, that didn't help very much; I still couldn't get *Xeen* to boot. Finally, in desperation, I created a separate boot floppy that put DOS, the mouse driver and *Rapidio* into the lower 640K. That made conventional memory rather crowded, and I was afraid there wouldn't be enough, but amazingly, the game *did* come up, and I even managed to sneak in a small (128K) SMARTDRV.SYS cache. A good

thing, too, since disk access (especially restoring) is a bit slow.

So, if your machine has only 2 megs of RAM, and you're having trouble squeezing out enough expanded memory to run the game, try booting your system from a floppy that puts the necessities into the standard 640K, and be sure you have no TSR's lurking in memory. Do not put DOS into the High Memory Area.

If that doesn't work, you should obtain the patch from *New World*, and try again. One way or another, the game ought to run. Note that this problem does not affect all computers, as some handle memory differently from others and there may also be differences among the various expanded memory managers that contribute to the problem.



# Aliens, Hippies, And Ghouls = Oh, My!

## Konami/Gremlin's *Plan 9 From Outer Space*

by Charles Arday

It is in the nature of shoddy films, if they are sufficiently shoddy, to acquire the reputation of being "so bad, they're good." Enjoying these films is not a matter of enjoying their intrinsic merit; nor even of affectionately indulging in a calber of entertainment which, however obvious its flaws may be today, once passed muster with less sophisticated audiences. Rather, it is a matter of smirking at the shoddiness, of sharing a knowing wink and nudge with one's fellow smirkers in a peculiarly contemporary ritual of condescension. To say that a movie is a "cult classic" often means that, while it offers so little to enjoy that it invites mockery, one can, if one is so inclined, at least enjoy the mockery.

So it is that, 34 years after its release, director Ed Wood, Jr.'s shoestring genre stinker, *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, has won what passes for acclaim (in the same circles that watch such gems as *Santo Claus Conquers The Martians* and *Rock-ethipij X-M* and howl till tears stream down their faces at how rotten they are) as "The Worst Film of All Time."

That *Plan 9* is the worst film ever made is open to debate, but not much. It is a perfect example of what will happen if an atrocious script, a tenth-rate director, wooden performers, and a virtually non-existent budget all get assembled for a single project. Add a star, Bela Lugosi, who dies after completing only a few minutes worth of footage and a prop crew that thinks cardboard, tarpaulins, and pie-plate flying saucers can get viewers to suspend disbelief and you've got a major flop in the making. As Leonard Maltin accurately put it, *Plan 9* is "mesmerizing in its awfulness."

However, even if *Plan 9* is the worst film ever made, it is not clear that it is the "Worst Film of All Time," with all that those capital letters imply. Is it, for instance, so bad that it is funny? Some people think so, but I am not one of them. To me it just seems pitiful and headache-inducing.

How one responds to Konami/Gremlin's new computer game based on the film depends largely on how one responds to the movie. People who find the movie a laugh riot will probably find the game equally engaging. People who stare in bewilderment at the film's popularity will

still find much to enjoy in the game — but they probably won't "get" it any more than they "get" the movie.

### Game Plan

The game is adaptation, homage, and spoof all rolled into one. The player is a private eye hired by the head of Cheapflik Studios to recover six reels of the movie "Plan 9 From Outer Space" which have been hidden around the world after having been stolen by Bela Lugosi's double. (Tom Mason, the poor chap who was saddled with the thankless task of finishing Lugosi's scenes after the star died, played all of his scenes with a cape over his face.)

The player also has to screen the film, piece by piece, in Cheapflik's editing room to make sure that the rascally thief hasn't harmed it in any way. (The joke, of course, being that it is impossible to imagine the film getting worse as a result of being re-edited. Still, one wants to retain its auteur's original "vision." Ho ho ho.)

Actors from the film make cameo appearances throughout the game: Vampire appears as a clerk in a shopping mall, Lugosi's corpse turns up in a crypt, and most of the living male characters bear a suspicious resemblance to huge, pug-ugly Tor Johnson. The game's plot also has some overlap with the movie's, since the theft of the film is in some way connected with the appearance on Earth of aliens who can only be appeased by gaining ownership of the sole remaining print of the movie.

None of this makes much sense; nor, one suspects, is supposed to. The storyline is a glorious mess, reveling in its own incoherence. Things happen, and as a result, other things happen and a lot of jokes are made along the way. Then, the game is over. Playing *Plan 9* is a dizzying experience, though not, for the most part, an unpleasant one.

The game's worldwide conspiracy of aliens will remind some players of Lucasfilm's *Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders*, another would-be zany adventure. The biggest difference is that this game has an excuse for being a mess — also, that *Plan 9* is funnier and has more of an edge to its humor. (For instance, there's the bit with Lugosi's corpse, which



TITLE	Plan 9 From Outer Space
SYSTEM	Amiga, MS-DOS
PRICE	\$39.95
GRAPHICS	VGA 256 Color
SOUND	Ad Lib/Soundblaster, Roland
PROTECTIONS	Documentation, Lock-Up
DEVELOPER	Gremlin Graphics/Software
PUBLISHER	Konami
	Bullfrogs Cove, IL

will make some players cringe. The game also skates on thin ice with references to Ed Wood's transvestitism and sequences in which the player tangles with hippies in Australia and Fidel Castro in Cuba.)

*Plan 9* is a genuinely, intentionally funny piece of work, which puts it several notches above the movie (in my opinion). Sardonic descriptions and running gags abound and, while the atmosphere is sometimes sordid ("This is a small... office that smells a bit like somebody's dog got sick in it"), the game is thoroughly enjoyable.

### Grave Reservations

Where *Plan 9* falls short is in its implementation. To begin with, while it uses a fairly standard point-and-click interface, it looks like it was made on the cheap. The most noticeable shortcoming is that only a small portion of the screen is used for the graphic window that shows what is going on. The rest of the screen is taken up with an ugly blue background, a hard-to-read inventory list, a gravestone displaying possible actions (one has 10 to choose from), and a small text area. The graphics are acceptable, but never more than that, and the soundtrack that goes with them is grating.

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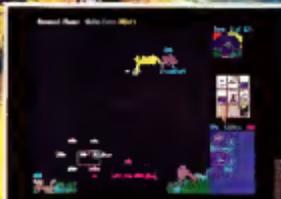
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The writing is at a high level, full of acid wit and self-referential fun, but it could have used a once-over by a good proofreader to catch missing words and punctuation. Along similar lines, place names



have been poorly thought out: it is bad, especially in a game with no directional commands or mapping, for there to be two different locations, side by side, called "the street." (It is also confusing that inside an airport one of the movement choices is to "the airport," by which is meant "the runway.")

One wishes that the game were better designed in other respects as well. For example, there is no consistency in how it responds when the player does something wrong — sometimes a response appears in the text area, sometimes nothing happens at all, and sometimes a new window appears in the middle of the screen saying, "Nope, sorry, dead end that."

The game is not very successful at letting players know when they have done something right, either. When one finds Bela Lugosi's house, one can enter if one is carrying a certain key, but one is never told that this key is the reason one has been allowed in. Most games would contain a sequence in which the player has to use the key on the front door in order to get in, rather than simply be carrying it. This type of problem, which might so easily have been corrected, crops up over and over again in the game.

Another problem concerns the way the game handles the player's inventory. That one is allowed to carry no more than eight or nine items at a time is bad enough — I much prefer unlimited inventories, even if they aren't realistic. (What else in this game is realistic, after all?) Worse by far, however, is that any items one drops are instantly snapped up by "a little creature" and returned to the place where they were first located.

The problem is threefold. First, it is not immediately obvious that the little creature is returning the dropped objects to their starting points (as opposed to, say, swallowing them), so one goes through the first half of the game terrified to drop anything for fear that dropped items will be irretrievable.

Second, the game contains a large num-

ber of items that can be taken, but only a few that are actually useful. One is never sure what to take away from a scene; and since one cannot take everything, one is likely to take the wrong things and be forced to replay large sections of the game to correct such mistakes.

Finally, there are times when it is extremely inconvenient to return to an object's original location to retrieve it. For instance, if one makes it to Cuba but accidentally drops the Spanish dictionary, one cannot just pick it up; one would have to go back to the studio's storeroom in the U.S. to get it again.

Granted, any approach to handling inventories has its tradeoffs. Giving the player an unlimited inventory would make the game easier, and therefore shorter. It would also make the on-screen inventory



more cumbersome to use, since one might have to cycle through a list of 30 or 40 items. On the other hand, eliminating all non-essential items from the game would take away some of the game's flavor, while leaving them in but making them non-acquirable would frustrate the gamer in an entirely different way. No system is perfect.

Nevertheless, I doubt that the system the designers chose for *Plan 9* was the best they could have come up with. Or, if it was, they might at least have warned players about its idiosyncrasies.

## Other Idiosyncrasies

*Plan 9* has other peculiarities as well which, because they mirror flaws in the movie, may have been put into the game intentionally. In the movie, for instance, the background occasionally changes from day to night and back again within a single scene. In the game, a taxi driver appears to be bald and bearded when one looks at him from outside the cab, yet grey-haired and clean-shaven from inside. Also, while the movie studio is called "Cheapflk Studios" repeatedly, the front door says, "DCA Films." These "continuity errors" may be deliberate, but the fact that it is ambiguous makes it difficult to decide whether to laugh at them or with them.

More generally, it is unclear how one is supposed to take the game. Is it supposed to be as shoddy as the movie? (Since it

isn't nearly as shoddy, does this make the game a failure?) Are the game's flaws calculated or accidental? Which would be funnier?

Similarly, is there some sort of hyper-obscure in-joke buried in the fact that the game's instruction manual looks amateurish and is riddled with typos, even to the point of transposing the last two digits of the publisher's hint line? ("HINT" does not come out to "-4486." After all, 'N' tends to precede 'T' in the alphabet.) Is this mock sloppiness or the real thing? If it's a joke, I'll say without embarrassment that I don't get it.

One thing that can be said in defense of *Plan 9 From Outer Space* is that while Ed Wood was apparently a nut, he seems at least to have been a sincere, dedicated and original nut. As Bill Warren writes in *Keep Watching the Skies!*, his encyclopedic analysis of B-pictures, "[Wood] lies somewhere in the twilight zone between idiocy and inspiration, between genius and hopelessness ... *Plan 9 From Outer Space* ... is testimony to Wood's guilelessness — he can't even make a cheap bad movie right, but he makes it his own way."



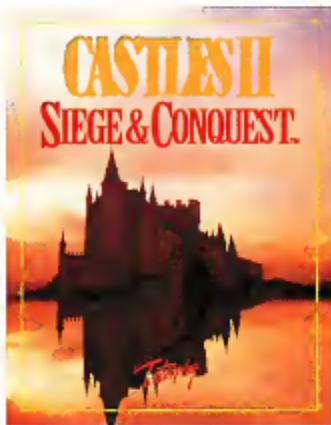
The game, with its smirking digs at this rather pathetic relic of a movie, is funny, but it sometimes has the tone of a schoolyard bully taking cheap shots at a defenseless victim. If a person is going to mock something for being lousy, that person had better be pretty sure that the same charge can't be applied to their work. Since, despite its good qualities, there are things about *Plan 9* that are pretty lousy, some of its digs at the film that inspired it do nothing so much as highlight its own weaknesses.

Yes, that's part of the joke and yes, it's worth a chuckle, but there is a level of irony underneath the laughter. The movie, crappy as it was, had elements of honesty, innocence and integrity that the game — a licensed product, parasitic on an original work, full of self-aware sarcasm — cannot approach.

In this respect, the game attains a degree of cheapness that even the movie didn't reach, which is quite an accomplishment. Maybe 30 years from now people will sit around and laugh at it.

It would be fitting — and might even be intended. **eww**

# Do You Have What It Takes To Win The Crown?

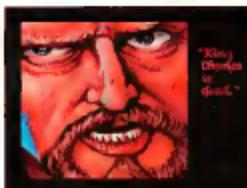


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MS-DOS Screens Pictorial

Circle Reader Service #83

# All Terrain Software

## The Third Part in a Series on Course Design

by Mark Alan Willett

**G**et those electronic bulldozers ready, because this issue's installment looks at the construction of terrain features from tee to green for the *Jack Nicklaus Golf and Course Design (JNSE)* software.

Of course, once a gamer gets ready to do some heavy duty construction, there is always a need for on-the-job safety. JNSE construction is no exception, so I always keep two copies of the course I'm working on, one of them as a backup. When I start each work session, I decide if I want to keep what I did from the session before or copy in the backup. It's a good practice to develop.

### Crossing Your Tees

With rare exception, tees need to be flat horizontally. Since JNSE takes pitch, left or right, into account on its shots, a tee which slopes across its width will affect play. In JNSE, a ball which is beneath the golfer will tend to push to the right, and a ball which is above the golfer's feet will tend to pull left. So, flatness at the tee is critical and fair. After that, tees can have a downhill slope for visibility or an uphill slope that matches an uphill tee shot, but that's a matter of designer preference.

In terms of appearance, designers may wish to outline their tees with a row of fairway and maybe consider a row of rough (particularly if a tee is in heavy rough terrain). This simply assists the appearance of the neatly-manicured tee which is found at most courses.

### Fairways: The Straight & Narrow?

Ever wonder how the designer decides where and when to narrow the fairway? Many fairways on new courses seem so often scalloped that it is not apparent what the logic is behind the design.

In fact, there are many reasons for the scalloping that should be known to the designer of home computer courses:

-  First, stands of trees or other objects which intrude on the course are usually based in rough or heavy rough.
-  Second, hills at the side of the fairway which may be so steep as to be considered impediments to a shot may be covered in rough. The point here is to help distinguish the good shot for the golfer.
-  Third, the narrowing or widening of the fairway can add simple visual variety to the hole and to shot-making.
-  Finally, there is the important idea of using typical shot-length to determine the narrows on the hole.



Flat tees mark this tee shot from the 11th at The Victorian.

Let's use a moderately-long 535 yard par-5 as an example. Most tee shots fall in the 250-yard range and fairways tend to widen at about 210 yards from the tee. After 250, fairways tend to narrow. This makes long-ball hitters consider accuracy from the tee and whether they are going to shoot beyond the 250-yard point or not.

At 250 yards, I may put in the broadest part of the fairway to give room for the tee shot to land. Since a 3-wood typically plays to 235 yards, my next broadening of the fairway usually comes 485 yards from the tee. If the area around the green is heavily protected by sand, water, and/or woods, I may wish to leave a "safe harbor" for the golfer on the approach — usually at about 70 yards from the green. So a third widening of the fairway might be put in at 465 yards from the tee. Again, this widening may be offered instead of the widening at 485, making the approach more dangerous and encouraging the golfer to pull-up short.

The same idea can be applied to typical length shots from the ladies' tees. JNSE uses 225 yards for a driver and 211 yards for a 3-wood as typical shots for the ladies. The ladies' tee is often set at 85% of normal. (Pro tee at 95% of Champion, Men's tee at 90% of Champion, and Ladies' tee at 85% of Champion.) So the ladies' tee, in this example, would be set at 455 yards. A 225-yard tee shot would indicate that the fairway should normally widen at the 280-yard range from the Champion tee, and again around 490.

So now our par-5 broadens at 250, 280, and/or 465 and 485-490. In addition, computer designers may wish



Setting elevations on a fairway bunker in ZOOM mode.

to narrow other areas that don't typically come into play.

Again, nothing is written in stone here. With an easy, downhill drive, it might be considerate to extend that widening at 250 yards to allow for the roll that will be gained. One could even put traps or water that affects play on the sides at the 250-yard range. This would make the golfer have to decide whether to play short of the trouble, hit over the trouble or be very accurate at the 250 yard range. Not a bad idea on a short par-4.

So, by the time designers have made allowance for scalloping according to variety, hills and impediments, each JNSE fairway should be just as scalloped as the most modern of courses.

## Head in the Sandtraps

Sandtraps are often defined by their placement or their construction. Here are some general definitions:

Traps which are placed across the fairway or in front of the green are called "cross bunkers."

"Fairway" bunkers are, to no one's great surprise, those which are placed in or alongside the fairway. Most tend to be placed to the outside edge these days and they are usually shallow enough to allow the golfer to play out of them and make progress with their shot.

"Pot bunkers" are rounded, deep traps that are often, but not always, located near the green on courses in the British Isles. Because of their depth and close walls, they can be fearsome to play out of.



The heavily-trapped area in front of the green may cause the golfer to play short.



Note the smooth waterline on this tricky tee shot from the 5th at Mulligan's Point.



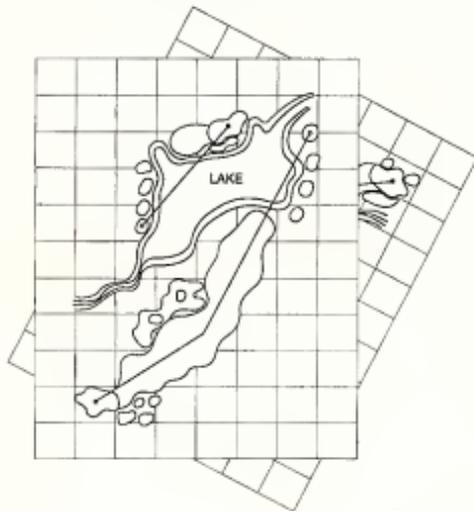
Railroad ties front the green on the 5th at The Victorian.

"Waste bunkers" are usually huge expanses of sand and, often, reeds and scrub. They are not formal bunkers because a formal bunker must have a clear beginning and end. Waste bunkers may extend for hundreds of yards. In golf rules, the golfer may not set the club head down in a formal bunker, but may do so in a waste bunker. Though you can build waste bunkers in JNSE, the software does not distinguish between shots from a waste bunker or formal bunker.

"Sod-wall traps" are typical British Isles creations. They are the opposite of the favored American sand-wall trap. Sod is stacked in layers to build the walls. Because the walls are green, and sand kept to the floor of the bunker, sod-wall bunkers can be difficult to see unless carefully placed. These can be easily simulated in JNSE.

"Bulkhead bunkers" are those with walls lined in redwood or railroad ties (or even stone). JNSE has no mechanism for the construction of bulkhead bunkers.

Sometimes JNSE bunkers seem to have spikes of



Placing a pin into a gentle slope at the 4th at The Alhambra.

fairway or rough going down into a trap. This is caused by extreme elevation changes. You can correct this in ZOOM mode by leveling out the terrain next to the trap.

## Hazarding Guesses On Water

No matter how one decides to use water, elevation changes at the water/land interface may make the waterline appear jagged. The secret is to keep the elevation change between land and water at the same level *and* make that level three units or less in difference, creating a smooth waterline along any coast or pond. This usually must be done in Zoom mode.

When elevation changes are at eight units or more (the land being higher, of course), it is best to opt for fronting the coast or pond with railroad ties or stonework. This is an option selected from the "Build Hills" option menu. Creating that eight unit difference can be done either in Zoom mode or by using the "Sheer Cliff" function to assure a clean drop.

## Greens That Create Envy

Since the standard unit of course construction in JNSE is an 8' x 8' cell, it is very difficult to create subtle and elaborate elevation changes on the green. Nevertheless, here are a few quick tips which should help:



Think of the green as being laid in with two to four planes of height. Keep variations within those planes at one to two units of elevation.



Raise the outside edge of the green at least 1-unit to help prevent the ball from rolling off. To stop the green from having visual spikes (like the traps), make terrain immediately adjacent to the green at the same height or higher than the outside edge of the green.



To keep things fair, only place pins that are Flat or Gentle. Do not place pins on Medium or Steep grades. Remember that the areas around those pins affect the fairness of the play also. It is entirely possible to create a Gentle pin setting that is virtuously surrounded by Alps!

Next month, we'll do an overview on creating objects and backgrounds. Until then, here's wishing all our readers only have aces and double eagles! **EW**

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Circle Reader Service #104

## Don't Touch That Volume Dial!!!



### What's Wrong With This Picture?

by Donald S. Griffin

Donald S. Griffin's Company — Computer Music Consulting in San Francisco, CA — provides multimedia consulting to bay area businesses and has composed music for computer games from *Virgin, Strategic Simulations, Compton's NewMedia and Software Sorcery*. He also has business relations with *MediaVision, Creative Labs and E-MU systems*. Don has played several musical instruments for over 20 years; composed for live instruments for 15 years; and composed for MIDI for over 5 years. He likes small, furry animals with big fangs and explosive religious artifacts.

**T**he Scene: Two computer game developers chatting over the industry standard brain food ... pizza. "Hey Tom, have you heard the music in *The Super Great Space War Adventure Where Some Nerdy Battles Medieval Bad Guys With Brain Teasing Puzzles While Looking For A Date?*"

"No, Harry you know I always turn the volume down when I hear music in computer games."

"Oh I know, Tom. Believe me I do the very same thing. I just heard that the music was really good. I had the game and had just bought a *Super Whizzo Everything Sound Card*. So, I wanted to hear how it sounds. Well, at least I did at first. Then, it all started to sort of drive me crazy. I couldn't concentrate on the game, so I just sorta turned it down until it didn't bother me anymore."

"Harry, why don't you just say what you really mean. You turned the sound down until it was all the way off!"

"You know that's what I meant, Tom. It's just that I told the boss that I needed a *Super Whizzo Everything Sound Card* and now I've heard just about every game I can find that supports it. Frankly, they're all pretty disappointing and now I feel kinda depressed about our project. I mean, I just don't see how we can come up with a great game-enhancing musical score for *The Scratch And Sniff Kill The Sewer Rat Arcade Game* if those seasoned experts that did *TSGSWAWSNBMBGWBPWLFAD* couldn't come up with music that I didn't want to turn off! It just looks hopeless."

Although the preceding conversation is about fictitious characters and, hopefully, fictitious products, it does sound like conversations I have witnessed between real computer game developers. The real issue here is music. This article will suggest some philosophy and background concerning the problem of music in computer games.

### Let's Go Hollywood!

Currently, there is a lot of talk about whether computer games should "Go Hollywood." Some think this should be a giant step backward. Others say, "Why not? Their stuff sounds better than ours." I say that following the Hollywood model would do a little of both.

First of all, Hollywood has created a sense of cultural expectation. It is pretty tough to compose music that doesn't borrow from our collective past. When one watches *Ben Hur* and sees the chariot race, does it ever occur to anyone that most of the instruments in the score didn't exist

during the time frame of the story? When viewing a space battle in *Star Wars*, does it ever occur to anyone that sound can't travel in space? And that Native American music in the old westerns, does anyone ever think about what great violinists those Native Americans would have had to have been to generate those sounds? The answer to nearly all of these questions is probably "No!"

In order to make computer game soundtracks that really touch the gamer's emotional center, computer game composers simply must take advantage of this cultural pre-conditioning. They shouldn't play disco during the death scene and shouldn't launch space ships to reggae.

Another problem is what I call the tune mentality. Most game developers think of music in simple, convenient, compact units that they call songs or tunes. They think of each situation as needing a simple, unique and, often, all-too-short tune. This leads to a lack of continuity throughout the game. It seems that each tune stands alone and has no reference to anything else in the game. This also leads to music being thought of as an "easter egg" — industry slang for an amusing but non-essential piece of fluff that adds delight to a game but could just as easily be left out. The tune mentality also leads to an expectation that a piece of game music must be able to stand on its own and still be entertaining. Frankly, if anyone listens to a movie soundtrack album, they tend to hear the music edited to sound like individual tunes, but in the actual movie there are times when the music would seem downright boring if there wasn't plenty of action

Trevor  
Sorensen's

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Circle Reader Service #105

taking place on-screen which that boring music just happens to fit perfectly.

Anyone who ever views a traditional (1920-1970) stage musical has probably noticed how often musical themes come back over and over again (reprise). This is partly because of the familiarity syndrome. The first time a person hears a melody, they are almost certain not to like it as much as they will *after* they've heard it a few more times. Part of this effect is due to the fact that people like to sort of hum a tune in their head as they are listening to it. Naturally, they can't do this until they have heard the tune enough to remember what comes next. By playing all of the basic musical themes in the opening music (overture) and touching on them a few more times before the point in the show where the song is actually sung, they are setting up the audience to be more familiar with the tune when it is finally presented to them with full force.

In computer games, both the familiarity syndrome and the tune mentality must be taken into consideration. Can the music be planned as an integrated part of the whole (i.e. with a beginning and, maybe, several alternate endings)? Can the music be hinted at several times before the big scene happens? Developers must start thinking of how the music will fit in all through the game and whether the music and the game are stepping on each other at points. The music must not be listened to as a tune but as another shadow or flash of color that adds that little bit of mood that a silent game lacks.

Game developers ask for tunes. Hollywood directors ask for scores. A score is, literally, the sheets of music that the conductor uses. These pages have every note of every instrument. Scoring a movie means creating a full package of music that encompasses every moment where music is appropriate from the beginning to the end of the movie. This is very important to have.

Hollywood learned their lesson about scoring a movie versus just playing a few songs at key places. For awhile during the 70s, it looked like the movie score composers would soon be out of work. It was discovered that a popular tune in a movie would boost sales of the movie as well as the record. For awhile, they went crazy. Then they realized that they had drained the emotion out of their movies just like pulling the drain plug from a bathtub. That is, it left them feeling cold and uncomfortable (and soapy). Today, the most popular Hollywood formula is to put pop tunes wherever possible and to fill in the rest with a good old fashioned movie score. *Disco Duck* just doesn't cut it in a suspenseful courtroom scene or during an encounter with aliens.

Computer game developers should learn these same lessons. Score a game, don't tune it. Use music that plays off cultural conditioning. Don't be afraid to make the music very simple and thin in parts and heavy and thick in others. If it works well in the game, it will seem perfectly natural for a 9 or 18 voice sound card to be using only one or two of its voices at a time. The generally excepted rule (which means it's okay to break it) is that the density of the activity in the scene and that of the music should be opposite. "Did he say opposite!?" Yes, I did. That's one big reason that people turn the music off. When the movie or game demands most of one's concentration, busy music is a distraction — an irritation. Movie directors will say, "This is an important scene in the movie, but it is also kinda' dull and slow, can you add some music that is interesting?" or they will say, "There is a lot for the audience to follow during this chase scene, so make the music exciting but keep it out of the way."

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## Music? What Music?

Although I want to stress that the *quality* of the music is crucial, the quality of the sound hardware through which the music is played is also very important. Most gamers today listen to their games with the benefit of a sound card based on Yamaha's OPL-2 or OPL-3 FM synthesizer chips. *Adlib* and *Sound Blaster* music cards use these chips. More recently, the *Creative Labs Sound Blaster Pro* card switched from using two OPL-2 chips to one OPL-3, as did *MediaVision* when they brought out the *ProAudio Spectrum Plus*. The OPL-2 and OPL-3 are, however, very similar and sometimes the software support for an OPL-3 chip ends up using

it more or less like an OPL-2. *Roland's MT-32 Synthesizer Module* and *LAPC-1 Synth Card* essentially improve the quality of the synthesizer, resulting in a sound that is roughly twice as good but still uses the same idea. In all these cards, sounds are being built from scratch by generating simple waveforms and modulating them with other simple waveforms. Using this method to try to get the score to sound like it is being played by real instruments is not only difficult, but it is essentially a hit-or-miss operation.

Many sound cards now have PCM sampling at various resolutions in stereo or just mono. This means that they come with the ability to record real sounds as numbers that are stored on a harddisk or floppy disk and can then be converted back to real sounds at a later time. This is the same technology that makes music CDs work, only at a much more economical level. Though this technology has been around, at least since the first *Sound Blaster*, it is not used very much. The reason, as is almost always true in computer games, is space.

The OPL-2 and OPL-3 mentioned above create the sounds themselves. Obviously, they only need to be told what notes to hit and when to hit them, using a particular instrumental sound. This data takes very little space on either disks or in memory, since a typical MIDI file is between 5K and 50K. MIDI files or something similar are used to contain the tunes or instructions to tell the OPL-2 or OPL-3 or LAPC-1 which notes to play and when. This takes an acceptable amount of disk and memory space for most game developers. PCM, that is Pulse Code Modulation, is very different. PCM files, called VOC files by *Creative Labs* and WAV files by *Microsoft*, are actual recordings of sounds and they are very, very big. The data required to play a hit tune on a standard CD player is about 10 MB per minute, 200 times the size of a large MIDI file! In fact the original *Wing Commander*, still one of the largest games around in terms of disk space usage, is about the same size as just one minute of CD quality music. Using the upper limits of the *Sound Blaster* and cutting the 16-bit down to 8-bit, 44 KHz down to 22 KHz, and stereo down to mono, that same one minute of music is still 1.25 MB or a whopping 25 times the size of a large MIDI file. This all means that PCM isn't being used much because it just takes too much space. So much for VOC or WAV file music.

## So, What's Next?

New sound cards and technologies are arriving in the marketplace all the time. *Roland's Sound Canvas* card was the first  
*(Continued on Page 78)*

# SIEGE

The hordes approach! Are the archers on the battlements? Are there cauldrons full of boiling oil atop the towers? Are the castle gates fiercely guarded? Are your concealed wizards in place? Can your castle withstand the *Siege*??

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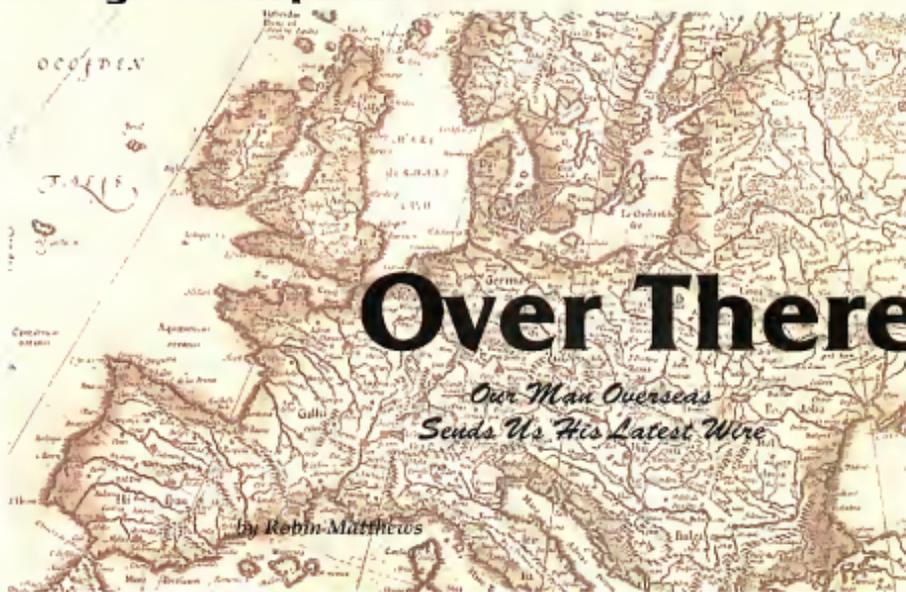
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Actual screen photos from the IBM VGA version.

Circle Reader Service #126



# Over There

*Our Man Overseas  
Sends Us His Latest Wire*

by Robin Matthews

There is an old saying that goes something like, "The French have a word for it." Lately, the saying could almost read, "The French have a game for it." Virgin has recruited a French programming team to flesh out the super-duper CD version of their popular *Dune*, as well as to create *Dune II: The Battle for Arrakis*. The CD-ROM version will include fully digitized speech and clips from the actual film. Indeed, since the original film was soundly criticized because of its editing and not its breathtaking cinematography, the film clips may be better received in the computer game than they were in motion picture theaters. Virgin's Caroline Stokes was very enthusiastic about this product, stressing that it will be much more than a straight conversion of the disk-based product. Though the original had very impressive sound and graphics, the company expects the CD version to be absolutely mouth-watering. If all goes well, both the new CD version of *Dune* and *Dune II: The Battle for Arrakis* (sneak previewed in *CGW* #101) with its warring households, the fight for spice, and deeper strategy game elements, should be released around the turn of the year.

Another French release coming up is **Ubisoft's** follow-up to its sci-fi "adventure" game *B.A.T.* The new game is called, strangely enough, *B.A.T. II* (Although it is expected to



Jimmy White's Snooker



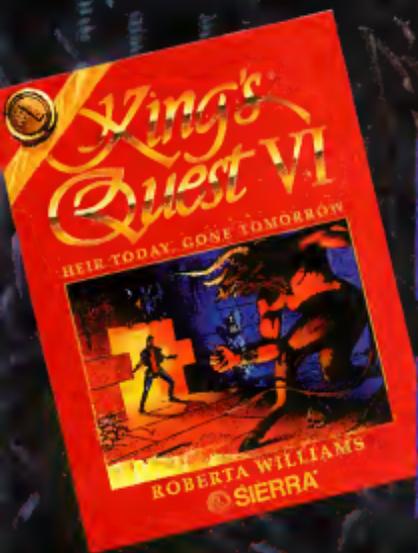
Jimmy White's Snooker

be called *The Koshan Conspiracy* in its U.S. incarnation). *B.A.T. II* is basically a CRPG with strategy and action options. The latter include: three playable arcade games, four flight simulators and 'High Tech Paradox.' HTP is a separate 'bio-game' with some 200 odd characters.

*B.A.T. II* takes a similar theme to its predecessor, but is set in Roma 2, the capital city of Shedishan, a planet in the BB system (I'm sure something was set there, or was it in the CC system???). The player assumes the role of Jehan Menasis, veteran agent of the Bureau of Astral Troubleshooters, and his mission is to defeat the dreaded Koshan who are manipulating the market of Echiatone 211! Although it may sound like fairly standard fare, one thing gamers can be certain of with regard to **Ubisoft** is that their products are *not* run of the mill. They normally have some ingenious touches. *B.A.T. II* should be released for the Atari ST, Amiga and IBM by the time this column goes to press.

**Ubisoft** has also published another very interesting game — *First Samurai*. This is really an arcade-type game but seems likely to cause quite a stir. So, it definitely justifies a quick mention in this column. Simply put, it has excellent graphics, a

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# Foreign Correspondence

superb control system, and amongst the best scrolling seen in any IBM game. It is, in essence, a horizontal and vertical scrolling arcade martial arts game. It's all been done before, but never to this standard. If you want a couple minutes of relaxation from *Crosseders of Might and Magic IV*, or you can't find the dog to kick, give this a look.

We don't want to give CGW readers the feeling that we're slacking on our side of the white cliffs, however. Impressions continues to be a prolific UK publisher. Their latest offering is *Discovery*, which is part-celebration of the finding of an obscure continent by some Columbus fella' and part strategy game. The player starts in 1480 and has to raise islands, buy, equip and crew a fleet and then sail off into the blue yonder. It feels very much like a development of their fairly successful *Merchant Colony*, and uses a similar system. Not bad, but I just can't see this New World thing taking off <grin>. Hope it does better for them than the movie on the same theme did for Paramount.

Mirage Software of the UK is well into the development of a



First Samurai



First Samurai

*Lenings* beater in their forthcoming release *The Humans*. This is an arcade-style strategy game, where the player guides a tribe of cavemen through an evolutionary cycle to the present day and beyond. Think of a cross between *Lenings* and a scrolling platform game and one has both a headache, and *The Humans*!

Finally, snooker is an invention of a British Prime Minister, one Neville Chamberlain ("peace in our time", etc.), and has a large multi-million dollar, world-wide professional circuit. One of the best known players is a Londoner called Jimmy White, nicknamed 'The Whirlwind' because of his speed of play. Now, Virgin has released *Jimmy White's Snooker* on the Amiga (several months ago) and on the MS-DOS machines. It is without doubt the best MS-DOS snooker game released, with superb floating camera views and a very versatile control system. The graphics are crisp, sound support is OK, and there are some hilarious touches — not to be spoiled here! For a short diversion, or if your normal break on the green baize is below 10, this could be one to 'cue' up for. **eww**

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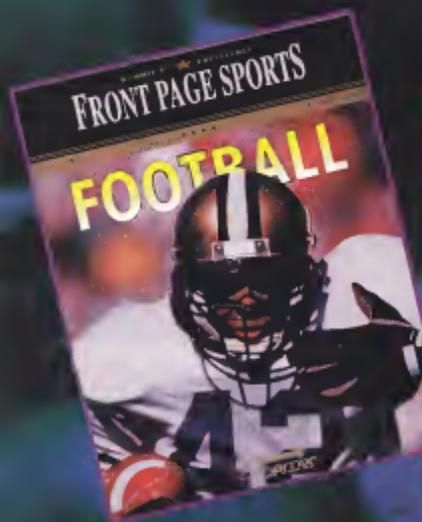
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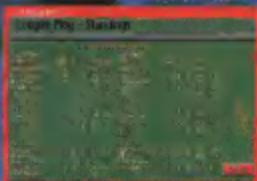
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# REALMS OF POSSIBILITY

## Virgin Games' Fantasy Wargame

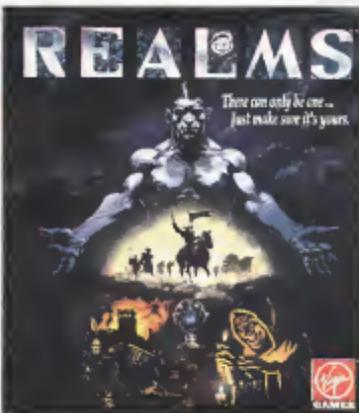
by Jeff Labrecque

An ambitious attempt at combining the isometric control scheme of *Populous* with a Tolkienesque tableau of warring humanoids, *Realms* offers a challenging twist on simulated world domination. With *Realms*, publisher Virgin Games and designer Graftgold are attempting to draw both strategy gamers and role-playing fans into a narrow niche of computer entertainment: fantasy wargaming. While SSI's *Sword of Aragon* and SSG's *Warlords* proved that fantasy wargames could be successful, *Realms* attempts to take this gaming genre to new heights with sharper graphics and an increased emphasis on resource and city management.

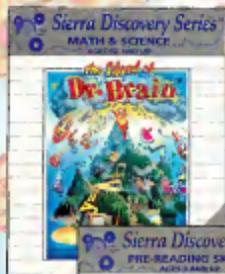
According to the hackneyed storyline presented in the book and in the game's animated introduction, the player has been given a "divine mandate" to rule over the *Realms* gameworld by a powerful Nordic god. The player will soon discover that

TITLE: REALMS  
 SYSTEMS: IBM  
 PRICE: \$39.95  
 PROTECTION: Discs, no in-line booklet  
 DESIGNER: Graftgold  
 PUBLISHER: Virgin Games  
 Irvine, CA

divine endorsements serve as poor armor indeed against the sharp weapons of an aggressive, warmongering enemy. In other words, nothing in *Realms* is a sure thing. Every kingdom in *Realms* goes to war at the drop of an iron helm so that borders and cities constantly change hands. As if keeping foes at pike's length wasn't enough, however, the player must also assume the role of a medieval city planner, making tough decisions about city and resource management. A challenge in



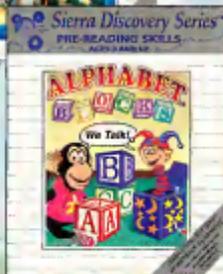
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# Review

any genre, the arduous decision of guns or butter is particularly important in *Realms*.

The game begins with the player choosing one of ten increasingly difficult scenarios, each with a unique landscape. Some scenarios take place on large landmasses, while others will force the player to do some island-hopping in order to

an enemy city. A small helm indicates that the army in question has camped out in the rough, forsaking the comforts of city life. Finally, a small sailing ship indicates an army that is attempting to cross a body of water. Armies can be ordered about by simply clicking on the unit in question then clicking upon the desired destination or an enemy unit to be engaged.



reach the enemy and emerge victorious. Residing upon each of these landscapes is a variety of the six humanoid races used in the game. These include three traditional fantasy races (Dwarves, Orcs, and Elves) and an equal number of human tribes (Vikings, Amazons, and Barbarians). To begin, the gamer selects one of the races included in that scenario to govern, using it to forge an empire worthy of ruling the known world.

Developing the overall strategy to accomplish this feat is best developed on the screen encountered during the initial moments of gameplay: the fortress screen. On this screen, a large world map displays armies and cities from all of the kingdoms currently involved in the scenario. Here, taxes can be raised, tax routes can be viewed, and the more mundane disk functions for loading and saving games can be accessed. A focusing icon on this screen allows the player to select any point on the world map and zoom down for a closer look. After magnification, the view shifts to a down to earth, isometric view of the landscape. At this level of magnification, individual armies can be seen moving about the landscape, each identified by a color which indicates the kingdom the unit hails from. The status of each army — which can be up to 1000 soldiers strong — is represented by a variety of small icons. A tiny foot soldier or cavalryman indicates that the army is on the move, a stationary flag indicates that the army is currently barracked near a city, and a siege tower means that the army is currently attacking

Double-clicking upon a city displayed on the landscape map brings up the city screen, which displays the current city and offers the player a list of options at the base of the display. If the city is friendly, the player can toggle through such options as buying grain, building city walls, improving the health of the city's inhabitants, and recruiting soldiers. If under siege, enemy cities can be influenced to pay tributes to avoid being destroyed.

Outfitting soldiers recruited from the city screen involves accessing the army screen, where the player can equip new troops with varying degrees of armor and several types of missile and melee weapons. Each humanoid race excels with particular types of weapons, although the



*Realms* game manual is rather vague on the subject. Dwarves get bonuses for using hammers and axes, Elves are masters of the bow, and Orcs have an affinity for blunt bashing weapons. Finally, after a new army has been created, it will appear as a barracked unit outside the city which created it.

Possibly, the most enlightened design feature of *Realms* is the combat system.

When combat is joined, the player may zoom in with a close-up view of the armies currently engaged. Each army can be individually commanded, using a control system somewhat similar to the ones used in *Lords of the Rising Sun* (Cinemaware) and *Centurion* (Electronic Arts). The topography of the battle field is taken into



account (units on higher ground have combat advantages) and each army can assume one of four battle formations (wedge, phalanx, line and square). This flexible combat system allows players to use actual medieval tactics — such as outflanking the enemy with a quick cavalry maneuver — and see the animated results.

*Realms* offers crisp, although somewhat dimly colored, graphics, but the animation of marching armies and battling soldiers is a treat of animated minutiae. Music and sound effects are acceptable through an Ad Lib or Sound Blaster, although the victory and defeat sequences could use a little more aural enhancement.

As for gameplay, *Realms* is a decidedly difficult game. Even during the simplest scenario, the computer-controlled enemy is always on the move, reacting quickly to any actions the player makes. The interface can take some getting used to, so players should expect to be re-educating themselves in their first few tries. As it stands, *Realms* should appeal to tenacious fantasy wargamers with the perseverance to learn the game system and master the included scenarios. The difficulty of the game, augmented by the awkward interface, makes playing *Realms* more of a challenge than it should be. As a fantasy wargame, *Realms* advances the genre but doesn't quite usurp SSG's *Warlords* as the quintessential fantasy wargame. **cow**



# The God's Namesake Must Be Crazy



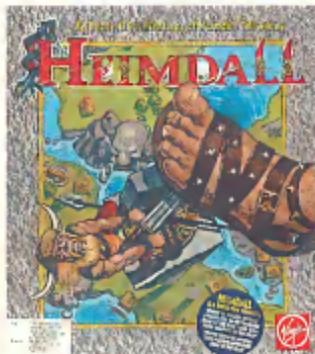
## Virgin's Heimdall

by Allen Greenberg

Missplaced objects are among the most sacred and revered items known to our species. Indeed, they have been so throughout recorded history. Just as modern man or woman may often be found wandering through their living quarters, silently mouthing "car keys ... car keys ..." one can also imagine an ancient cave-dweller pacing a cluttered, suburban cave chanting "hunting spear ... hunting spear ..." It is also common knowledge that each culture creates its mythical figures in its own image. Given this information, it is by no means unreasonable for us to conclude that Thor, Norse god of thunder, may have indeed searched the halls of imperial Asgard as he moaned "enchanted hammer ... enchanted hammer ..." While the loss of an earthly object may result in the mere absence of an animal to cook over the evening's campfire or a missed dental appointment, the loss of more godly paraphernalia could have severely affected the outcome of Ragnarok. Ragnarok, the focal point of all Norse and Germanic mythology, is the battle in which the gods were destined to perish in a battle against the foul progeny of the evil god, Loki. Could there be a more inspiring quest than to aid the gods by tracking down Odin's sword, Frey's spear and Thor's hammer? Maybe.

*Heimdall* is the warrior chosen by the gods to find their weapons, as well as the name of the action/role-playing game imported by Virgin Games depicting his adventures. Mythically knowledgeable readers will recognize that name as also belonging to the sensitive guardian of the rainbow bridge, Bifrost, which linked Earth to Asgard. This, however, is not that Heimdall. In fact, despite the names and events which are mentioned in the game, *Heimdall* is in no way a serious representation of Viking legends.

TITLE:	Heimdall
SYSTEMS:	IBM, Amiga, IBM version reviewed
PRICE:	\$39.95
COPY PROTECTION:	None
DEVELOPER:	Coe Design, Ltd.
PUBLISHER:	Virgin Games Irvine, CA



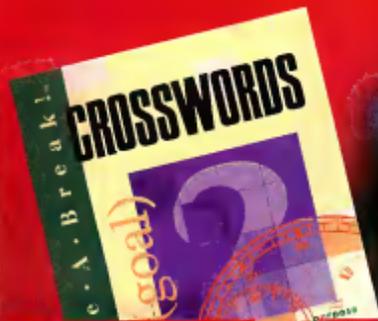
This *Heimdall* represents a desperate effort by the gods to hire a trustworthy mortal hero to command the search. Using a particularly potent lightning-bolt, one of the gods has caused a mortal girl to go directly from virgin to a state of full-term pregnancy, overnight. Less there be any immaculate misconceptions, this is strictly a mortal child, despite his electrifying origin.

*Heimdall* qualifies as extremely light weight role-playing, during which most experienced gamers will find little to hold their interest. Newcomers to the genre may, however, be intrigued by this opportunity to gather an adventure party, develop their skills and explore a multi-tiered world. The program includes an optional trilogy of arcade sequences and the player is required to guide the on-screen character through three-dimensional scenery, traps and mazes.

While the title character plays chieftain to the others, each member of the party has a profession which will determine his usefulness throughout the game. Each member is either a fighter or a spellcaster and there are occupational subdivisions within each category. Five crew members are selected by Heimdall from a gathering of up to 30 pre-defined characters. The characters available to form this party will depend on Heimdall's attributes at the beginning of the game and there is no opportunity to trade in for new characters later on. As Heimdall sails his ship to search

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# Review

various islands, he is permitted to select two adventurers from the five to join him. Of those three, the player then chooses one to be the active hero while the other two simply tag along, apparently protected by some undisclosed arrangement.

The optional arcade sequences are available at the game's beginning, and give the player an opportunity to determine Heimdall's starting attributes. A higher rating at this point not only provides for a greater hero, but also allows the player to recruit the more advanced and powerful characters for his party. First, Heimdall must prune a local girl's hair using several throwing-axes. Catching a greased pig is the next task, while an old-fashioned sword fight is the final challenge. The catch, however, is that Heimdall happens to have had too much to drink prior to accepting these challenges. Players who reject this arcade action will simply be assigned default and mediocre ratings.

Experience and attribute points rapidly increase in the game, but only for the active hero. It is easy for the player to progress through a significant portion of the quest without realizing that most of his party have been left at their starting levels. While attribute points rise, a character's health may suffer from damage and fatigue unless frequently nourished by food, spells and other magical restorative procedures.

*Heimdall's* universe consists of three progressively difficult worlds: Earth (the men's room), Utgard (land of the giants) and Asgard (gods' country). Within each world are a series of islands which are also arranged according to difficulty. The various locations appear to be uniquely decorated, but each contains a similar series of passages containing traps, treasures and grim-faced guardians. Although no auto-mapping feature is available, the layout is simple and the goal is familiar—keep the party fighting in order to proceed to the next room.

Spells are printed on pay-per-cast parchment. A scroll containing the desired spell must be found and read by a character with a sufficient rating in "tune-lore." A sufficiently strong character is then required to cast the spell.

The party must locate another scroll containing that spell in order for it to be cast again. The discovery of other scrolls and objects containing special runes are also necessary in order to progress beyond certain key points in the game. Unfortunately, the party may only carry a limited number of items while the number of scrolls, objects and weapons seems without limit. Adding to the



complexity of inventory management are supply shops scattered throughout the various worlds.

Many players may be unhappy with the awkward control they are given over the hero while he is exploring. The distant, three-dimensional view of the action is often confusing. While attempting to guide a character around certain traps or obstacles, a figure's exact position is often difficult to judge. A mouse, keyboard or joystick may be used to input movement instructions, but this choice does not affect the awkward response of the character.

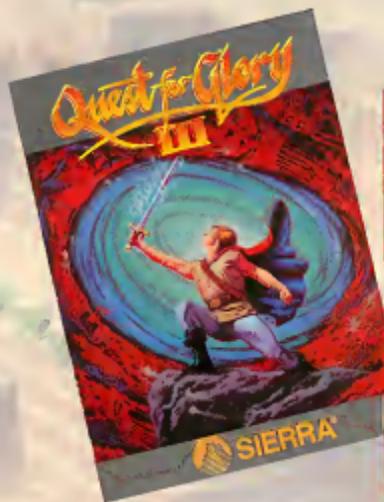
Combat provides *Heimdall* with its most entertaining animation sequences, during which the normal view is replaced with a close-up view of the hero's adversary. Within several seconds, the player must select either a weapon or a combat spell, followed by an action command. If successful, the player will witness the creature's occasionally moving and dramatic death. Victory during these encounters will depend on the character's experience and the potency of the weapon in use, as well as the speed of the player's attack.



*Heimdall* is yet another in a long line of European imports whose instruction manual lavishes more space on a humorous short story rather than the game itself. Defying common sense, a major portion of those instructions are used to describe the short-lived arcade sequences. Certain important information regarding crew selection is missing from the documentation—both a warrior and a druid are necessary in order to pass through a certain gate on earth. Also, the "X" and "Y" keys are indicated as character movement controls when it is actually the "X" and "Z" keys which are used. To Virgin's credit, their instruction book is far better than certain others which have unjustifiably been allowed into the United States.

A player who has never before experienced a computer role-playing game may find some enjoyable hours with *Heimdall*. While the program is by no means a flawed or unplayable product, its uninspiring appearance and simple game-play will fail to earn it a place alongside the more sophisticated role-playing games which are now popular. Experienced players will find a search for their cur-keys somewhat more rewarding than this exercise. **CWB**

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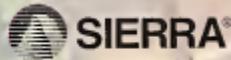
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SSI's

# The Summoning

as told by Scorpia



Ah, long winter nights. The perfect time to be huddled around a hot computer, indulging in the finer things of life: mayhem, bloodlust and destruction (I see Fred is nodding his head vigorously, hehe). So just sit right down by the fire and warm up. What's that? Fred tells me there's a call for you...

*The Summoning* is deceptive. Open the box: two disks. Install the game: three megs on the hard drive. Hah! A weekend, something to while away the hours on a rainy afternoon as you wait for an epic to come along. That was my first reaction after it was up on my drive. Boy, was I in for a surprise!

In spite of its (relatively) tiny size, this is a *big* game. Very big. In its entirety, *The Summoning* totals 32 levels and they are *not* empty ones by any means. How so much could be packed into so little space is a mystery, and certainly an amazing accomplishment.

There is, however, a down side to that. While the game takes up little

space, the save files are another matter. They start off small and grow like a cancer. Beginning at a modest 80K, the files rapidly ballooned to where they were more than 750K *each* by the time I reached the end game, and some people had larger files yet. So, in spite of the small game size, you're still going to need a lot of room on the hard disk to play this one.



*The Summoning* is a single-character dungeon crawl, so this Tale will be more in the nature of a strategy guide than the usual game tour, although we will, of course, be looking at the entire game. You start off with one of the most elaborate character-creation sequences around. It is woven into the game's introduction and is actually part of the story background, making it a lengthy process. Fortunately, the game designers also provided a way to get into the creation quickly via the "Escape" key, but do sit through the whole thing at least once.

There are three methods for creating a character: random dice rolls, a

Jack wasn't nimble.  
Jack wasn't quick.  
So Jack became a candlestick.



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# Game Hints

random pool of points, and a random set of starting attributes plus a random number of points. You can "re-roll" in any of these methods as much as you want, and you can even switch from one method to the other. Try all three and see which one works best for you.

Typical for a single-character game, your alter ego is both a fighter and a mage. This means that almost all your stats will be important. The one I found least useful was Accuracy, which governs missile weapons. Since the critters in this game move around (some of them rather quickly!), and you have to be in a direct line with them to shoot with a bow (or throw a knife), I found missiles to be limiting weapons. They were only good against the creepers, the slowest-moving monsters in the game.

Your other stats, however, are really important, especially Strength. You can never be strong enough in this game. Each point of Strength allows you to carry 5 kilos (all weight is measured in kilos) of stuff. I recommend a starting Strength of at least 18, and higher if you can manage it (20 is the max for any starting attribute). As you begin to accumulate items, especially armor, you will appreciate the need for lots of muscles.

Don't skip on Agility, either. You want to be able to move fast, and that means a high score here, at least 15. Ditto for Endurance. In the latter stages of the game especially, fighting is going to be a fatiguing exercise, so prepare for it now.

On the magic front, Talent and Power need good scores, too. Spellcasting is an important part of this game, and you'll want to (a) be able to memorize as many spells as you can, and (b) cast spells that are potent or long-lasting. So, take your time in character creation to get the best numbers you can; it's worthwhile in the long run.

Choosing your weapon and magical specialties finishes creation. I favored Hacking/Clubbing weapons because that skill gives you a nice, powerful axe with which to start the game, and Healing, because starting without armor was a little nerve-wracking.

That doesn't mean you're stuck with just your specialties. *The Summoning* operates on the "use it or lose it" principle. As you cast spells, or fight with different weapons, your abilities with that class of weapon or spell increase. So, fight with different weapons, and cast spells from all the disciplines whenever you can.

As you go through the game, you'll be finding all sorts of things: weapons, armor, magical runestones (one-shot spells), amulets and necklaces, etc. Lots of neat items. The trick is, most of these are going to wear out after a while. Weapons break, armor degrades, magical amulets get used up, and so on. Very little is permanent in *The Summoning*.

So, at the start, your main consideration is going to be accumulating a small army. Pick up weapons whenever you can, and keep a couple near the top of your inventory at all times for easy access...it's in battle that they break, and you will want to get your hands on a replacement quickly. Remember also that you can fight two-handed, so two one-hand weapons are usually better than one two-hand weapon.

Armor is heavy (some of it very heavy indeed). So, until you find at least one Bag of Lightness, you're better off not lugging spare

armor around. When you come across new armor, just swap your old set for the new one (the old one is likely to be in bad shape by that time anyway).

## Your Foozle, Should You Decide To Off Him

Okay, so your job is to make it through the labyrinth and do something about the evil Shadow Weaver, who, in the time-honored fashion of all Foozles, is out to conquer the world. How to foil those plans is what you learn as you go through the underground, since you're tossed into the area without much preparation.

You'll certainly be doing a lot of trekking (you may end up feeling like the pink funny bunny, just going, and going, and going, and...). After the three beginner levels, there are the five broken seal levels, followed by the three elemental barrier levels, followed by the domains of the five knights, and then the five end levels, until you get to Weaver's citadel (four levels, plus basement). I almost hesitate to mention a few underground levels here and there (beh). Like I said, it's a big game.

There's more than just fighting here, too. You'll come across a fair number of NPCs. Many are helpful. They'll give you information or teach you spells, so talk to everyone who isn't immediately hostile. It is *not* necessary to kill everyone you meet (so curb your bloodthirsty instincts).

There are also, of course, puzzles. Lots of puzzles. The majority of them involve doing tricky things with floor plates and/or teleporters, and sometimes levers. This is where that neat-o autopmap is very helpful. It's almost as good as the one in *Ultima Underworld*, lacking only a feature for writing notes on it. On the other hand, it has the virtue (ahem) of being printable, and some important features are put on the map for you: locations of teleporters, pits, rune floors, portals (doors to another section of the game) and stairs.

This map is your most important tool in figuring out puzzles, because it always represents the current state of the level. As I said earlier, many puzzles revolve around floor plates. Suppose you stand on one. Did it do anything? May be a door out of vision range opened, or a teleporter appeared. How can you tell? Look at the map! (The on-screen map, of course). If you triggered something, it will show up. Keep in mind, though, that multiple plates may have to be weighed down before something is opened or turned on.

Naturally, the map only shows those areas you've actually explored, so it's possible something happened in a blank area. If there appears to be no result from stepping on a plate, or pulling a lever, leave it and go wandering around some more. This will be critical when you are in the Blue Knight's domain and fiddling with the levers (*many* levers) in the Control Room. Your map will be particularly vital here.

Also important are the bodies. Critters don't vanish when killed, they leave a corpse behind. These are wonderful for weighing down plates. Finally, a use for a dead monster! Pushing them around can be tricky though, so move carefully. You want to avoid walls, and especially corners; if a body ends up in a corner, it's almost impossible to get it out of there.

Teleporters have their own little tricks. The most common is the double: one behind the other. The front teleporter is usually a



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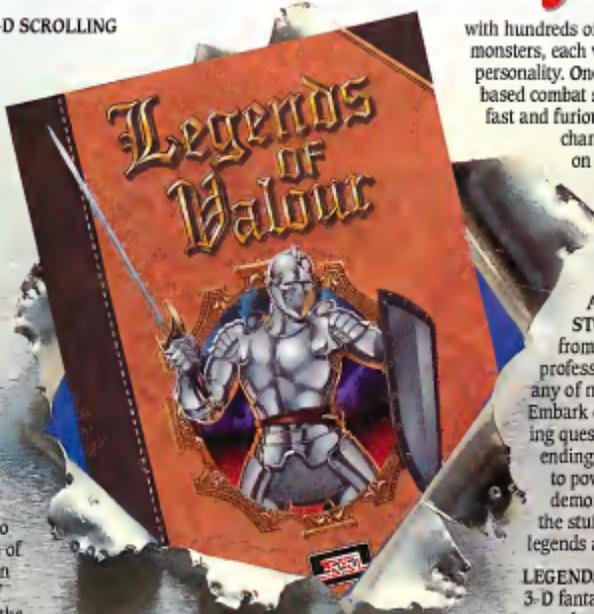
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# Game Hints

knockback, sending you back a few steps when you enter it. The rear teleporter usually goes to a plate somewhere that needs to be weighed down. That means throwing items over the first one to reach the second.

Weight considerations are the major factors in determining which items to throw. Different floor plates have different thresholds. For some, almost anything will do. For others, you need really heavy weight. Any item you can hold in your hand can be thrown. When faced with a double, save the game, then start tossing objects, checking your map in-between to see if anything is happening.

Remember to try every teleporter twice. Sometimes, on the second entry, they will send you to a different location.

## Let's Game At The Very Beginning

The beginner levels are just that: a sort of training ground devised to give you a bit of challenge and allow you to become familiar with fighting and spellcasting. Puzzles are few and easily solved. Opponents are not too tough, so long as you don't get overconfident. Remember, unless you're boxed in, you can always run.

The best technique overall is "divide and conquer." When faced with multiple opponents, try to lure them away one at a time. This generally works well, except with spiders. Spiders are very fast and can be deadly (poisonous, you know). Spiders show up in the broken seal levels. Expect to be poisoned regularly here. Until you learn the Cure Poison spell, you'll have to depend on Cure potions, and there aren't many of them. Sometimes, you may have to run around poisoned (it's slow poison, you don't drop dead right away), using healing spells to keep you alive.

In Broken Seal 4, you will find some white pearls. **PICK UP THESE PEARLS AND HOLD ON TO THEM, THEY ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!!** Didn't mean to shout, but this is critical, and you'll understand why when you read about the Citadel further along.

Occasionally, especially in the later levels, it may seem you have nowhere to go and a lot of empty space on the map. This is when you try the three teleport runes of Raido, Thurisaz and Gebu. Some floor spots are inscribed with these runes symbols. Invoking the companion rune will send you to the spot immediately (be prepared for a "welcoming committee"). If there is no such rune symbol in that section, nothing happens and the rune is not used up.

Some of your most difficult opponents will be the knights. You have to kill four of them (Groemie is honorable), and of those, by far the toughest is the Black Knight. In our first encounter, two shots and it was time to restore the game. Ouch! Try to find the Invisibility spell before you take him on. Going toe-to-toe with this guy is simply suicide. He's also fast, so don't stay in one place for very long.

Beyond the Knights are the end levels. Of these, End Level 3

(where Raven the Assassin hangs out) and End Level 1 (the lava level where the fire giants live) are completely optional. You don't need to do these to finish the game. The fire giants do have some Neat Things in their treasure rooms, though, so you may want to pay them a visit (they aren't friendly).

End Level 5 is the most important. This area has a small castle in the center, surrounded by skulls that ask for donations. Each donation opens a door in the center of the castle, most leading to small rooms with a little treasure. It is not necessary to feed all these skulls. Only a couple of them are really important. As you make your way through the castle, be on the lookout for skull-requested items; these are the crucial ones.

A word about the sewers: stay out of them! We all know what sewage is, and unless you enjoy walking up to your waist, your neck, or over your head in sludge (taking damage, too!), there's no point in going through them. Entering Shadow Weaver's citadel by the front door is really the better way.

The Citadel is four levels high and you-know-who lives on the top level. To get there, you must explore the first three, picking up black and white pearls, until you have five black and five white. It is here that the designers really slipped up. Until now, whenever you needed a door key or a special item, it was found either on that level or somewhere nearby.

Amazingly, while you need ten pearls, only *nine* are in the Citadel. The tenth white pearl is...way, way back in Broken Seal 4. How this got by two sets of playtesters is unimaginable, but there it is. Hence my big notice earlier to grab the pearls. **Event Horizon** (the people who did this game) are working on a fix so that all the pearls will be in the Citadel, but just in case, grab those pearls in Broken Seal 4.

On level 4, your best bet is to go up invisible and kill everything in sight before going through the skull teleporters. You must go through all of them to reach Shadow Weaver (a token entry, you might call it, hehe). Shadow Weaver is not immediately hostile, so take time out for a chat...it may clear up a few things.

And then it's time for—*The Summoning*. Did you think that referred to your call to glory? Hah! Nothing so mundane. It's something quite different, and we'll hope the right choice is made at this dramatic moment.

It isn't quite over yet, though. There's still a little something you have to do and you may find the actual end of this game...interesting. Short, but in one way, very sweet. Get there and decide for yourself.

Whew! Well, that's it for now. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

On **Delphi**: stop by the GameSIG (under the Groups and Clubs menu).

On **GEnie**: visit the Games RoundTable (type: Scorpio to reach the Games RT).

By **US Mail** (enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you live in the United States): Scorpio, PO Box 338, Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028.

Until next time, happy adventuring! **csaw**



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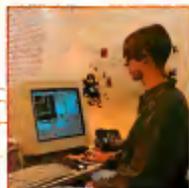
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*The world of shareware*

# That Gooney (GUI) Feeling

by Chuck Miller

Last month, I introduced CGW's new column focusing on shareware gaming and looked at several DOS based games for the PC. This time I want to focus on games with a graphic interface, specifically for *Windows* on the PC and *Workbench* on the Amiga. First, let's check out an offering for the Amiga.

## Beware the Mad Bomber

There are not all that many Amiga games designed to be played on the *Workbench* screen; however, one in particular that I recently ran across deserves some special recognition. Based on a Macintosh game called *Bombs*, *Bomber 1.2* is an addictive little time-gobbler in the tradition of *Minefield*, designed by Michael Balzer. The goal, in this game of logic, is to locate all of the hidden bombs on a field of tiles without setting off any one of them — all in a set period of time. It is a very simple concept that, nonetheless, results in quite an addictive playing experience.



Bomber

*Bomber* is very easy to play. Four difficulty levels are available: Easy, Medium, Hard and Alien (read the latter as impossible). Practice mode lets one play without writing scores to the highscore table. When play starts, a field of tiles will be displayed. Then, as the player makes correct selections, spaces with numbers will appear telling how many bombs border that area. The player must then figure out the next tile to uncover without setting off any bombs. When the location of a bomb becomes certain, a flag can be placed on that tile. The number of flags provided indicates the total number of bombs hidden on the screen.

*Bomber* does include a few bells and whistles (make that digitized sounds). Select the wrong tile and an explosion is

heard. Locate all the bombs in the given time and the "crowd" will respond with a round of applause (unless playing in practice mode). The playing field is also variable in size from 23x2 tiles to 50x28 tiles on a standard interlaced screen (103x28 on a Superlincs Interlaced screen).

*Bomber 1.2* is an excellent public domain release (classified as "HappyWare" — if you use it, remember to smile!) that requires *Workbench 2.04* or greater. It multitasks well and only consumes about 40K of RAM. There is no direct address for ordering, though it is available on many bulletin boards and in numerous freely redistributable software libraries.

## Yes, I Do Windows

Two *Windows* games that I want to look at this month are *Canfield* by Daniel Thomas and *Castle of the Winds: A Question of Vengeance* by Epic MegaGames. Both are quality offerings for Microsoft's popular GUI.

Game players who enjoy a good hand of Solitaire will want to procure a copy of *Canfield*. It is far superior to the version of Solitaire supplied with *Windows*, and offers enough extras to make the game truly enjoyable. Excellent graphics and spot animations provide an attractive playing environment. However, one of the most unique aspects of *Canfield* is the animated card backs. At preset, user-definable intervals, the player is greeted by famous celebrities such as Batman, Bill the Cat, the Simpsons and the Flintstones. Each appear, one at a time, peering through the window on the back of the deck of cards.

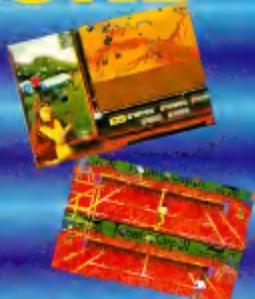
*Canfield* offers more, though, than just an entertaining backdrop to a time honored game. Options include the ability



Canfield

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## Shareware

to play at different levels of difficulty from Real Easy to Brutal, vary the playfield color, turn on and off card drag, animated draw, auto-hints and auto-play. Multiple undo operations are also available, plus all game options can be altered, enabled or disabled. Full documentation with exhaustive on-line help support is provided, and game scores are maintained for each level of play.

*Carfield* is shareware and can be registered for a very nominal fee of \$17.00, plus \$3.00 shipping and handling (U.S. and Canada, \$6.00 elsewhere). The author can be reached by writing to: Daniel Thomas, 2301 N. Huron Circle, Placentia, CA 92667 or by phone at (714) 524-5625 (Pacific Time).

*Castle of the Winds: A Question of Vengeance* is part one of a two part fantasy role-playing game (FRP) very reminiscent of *Moria* and the early *Ultima* games. The interface, of course, is designed for *Windows* and, as such, it is required.

As the quest begins, the player finds that his home has been destroyed and that both of his godparents have been killed. Thus, he must locate the culprit(s) and avenge the brutal murder of his loved ones. In the process he must also recover a very important possession stolen from his house, an amulet left to him by his father.

Inspired by Norse mythology, *Castle of the Winds* is a well designed FRP with many player amenities. All documentation, including background and extensive help files, are available on-line. Multiple windows provide the overhead map view, text display and player stats during movement, while an inventory window pops up upon request and when entering stores. Object management and combat are handled simply and easily with the drag-and-drop, point-and-click ease *Windows* provides. Save games are limited only by available disk space, and one can create and import his or her own character icon.



Castle of the Winds

Overall, game play is quite good, with many hours of dungeon delving in store (most of the game transpires below ground). While simple, graphics and animation are effective and well designed. The lack of any sound effects, though, is noticeable. Some simple groans, thuds and clanks would have helped enhance the game's atmosphere. Still, for the modest asking price, *Castle of the Winds* is an enjoyable way to open a window to adventure.

*Castle of the Winds: A Question of Vengeance*, a shareware game, is available from **Epic MegaGames** for \$25.00, plus \$2.00 shipping and handling. Upon receipt of payment, the player will be sent a registered copy of *A Question of Vengeance* and a copy of the sequel, *Liftransir's Bane*. This second volume is almost

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\*Actual Links 386 Pro Super VGA Screen

twice the size of the first and will import one's previous character. In addition, Epic MegaGames will send a hint sheet to *Castle of the Winds* and a disk of their other current releases with the registered version. Orders can be placed by mail to: Epic MegaGames, 10406 Holbrook Drive, Potomac, MD 20854. Orders can also be placed by phone with Visa or Mastercard by calling (800) 972-7434.

While not a Windows game, I can't pass up the opportunity to talk about another fine shareware release from Epic MegaGames — *Jill of the Jungle*.

*Jill of the Jungle* is not new to shareware gaming, but it has been especially popular among those who enjoy side-scrolling arcade adventures. Crisp, attractive 256-color VGA graphics and a catchy Sound Blaster soundtrack with digitized sound effects all combine to provide an excellent atmosphere. Character animation is extremely smooth, as is the side-scrolling of levels. Jill's movement as she runs, jumps and climbs is especially fluid and lifelike. Players familiar with game releases from Apogee (*Commander Keen* and *Duke Nukem*, for instance) will be pleasantly surprised by the quality of *Jill of the Jungle*. This is a very high caliber product.

Volume One of *Jill* is available as a freely redistributable

game. However, it is a shareware product and should be registered if played for any length of time. Besides a clear conscience, registration provides the player with all three volumes in the series, plus a hint sheet and bonus game, all for a fee of \$32.00 (including postage and handling). Game requirements are CGA, EGA or VGA graphics, 512K RAM, DOS 3.0 or later and a 286 or better CPU. *Jill* can be ordered from Epic MegaGames at the address and phone number given above.

Games reviewed in this column are available through numerous distributors of shareware and public domain software, as well as on many national and private telecommunication services. If you do not have access to these services, you can, in most cases, write or call the game developer for an evaluation copy. Remember, if you find a shareware game enjoyable, please register the product with its author.

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Jill of the Jungle

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"...represents a new generation of computer game. Just play it and love it."

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### Computer Gaming World:

"...if you have a fast 386 or 486, think of LINKS 386 Pro as a Ferrari or a Corvette."

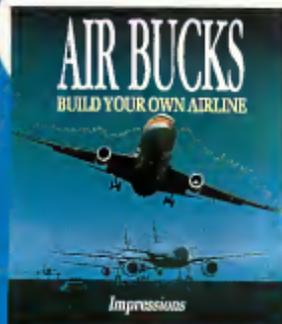
"...the ground texturing is dramatically realistic."



## NEW!

# RUNWAY TYCOON OR AIR DISASTER

Impressions' *AIR BUCKS*



NAME	Air Bucks
SYSTEM	IBM
PLAYERS	1-4
PRICE	\$49.95
PROTECTION	None
SOUND CARD	16-bit
GRAPHICS	EGA
DESIGNER	Edward Crilwell
PUBLISHER	Impressions Farmington, CT

by M. Evan Brooks

**A**ir Bucks was the subject of a "sneak preview" in *CGW* #98. Alan Emrich was impressed with what he christened "Railroad Tycoon with Wings." Other magazines have rated the simulation highly, so I was looking forward to an entertaining and educational experience. Were expectations fulfilled? Was this a product that makes *Railroad Tycoon* "hard drive-deletable?" The quick answer, at least for this reviewer, is a resounding negative (even if it doesn't correspond with the, pardon the pun, impressions of my editors).

The simulation of civilian airline growth from the post-World War II period to the mid-80s is a subject that is inherently fascinating. Impressions has done an excellent job of whetting one's appetite, but a less-than-satisfying job of satisfying such appetite.

## In-Flight Reading (Documentation)

The documentation comes in two manuals: a main instruction manual and a technical support/tutorial book. A new version (1.01) is available to registered users and it includes a strategy guide. However, as of the date of this review (mid-October), neither was available.

The manual was written by the British designers, thereby giving proof to the adage that we are "one people separated by a common language." While all major aspects of the game are covered, deciphering what actually happens is an exercise in cryptology and one must often rely on actual playing experience.

The actual instructions are only 15 pages, while the remaining

half of the manual is an interesting, albeit brief, overview of the historical evolution of civilian airlines. Overall, the manual is a decent "prop job" when a Mach-1 Concorde would have been more appreciated.



### Noise Abatement (Graphics and Sound)

The sound and graphics are obviously from the minimalist school of game design. A melody provides background music, while the graphics are limited to a colored world map during play. A black line between cities will illustrate routes and way points. A problem exists with Pacific routes in that the routes do not "wrap-around." Thus, a San Francisco-Wake Island-Tokyo route is graphically (and incorrectly) illustrated by the eastern route (San Francisco-cross country-cross Europe-Far East).

All user input will be made through drop-down menus which consist of tabular entries a la Lotus. Each year begins with a banner newspaper headline (which gives appropriate flavor) and, occasionally, a new airplane will be announced with an attractive screen shot of it coming out of wraps. (The remaining graphics consist of a banker (used for securing loans), an airport site (for securing landing rights) and four or five other colorful screens. However, 90% of the game will be played in the world-map view and the only thing appearing on this will be the current route selected plus a bank balance changing at the bottom of the screen.

Initially, the game did have a plane traversing its routes. However, both Johnny Wilson and Alan Emrich suggested that it was "too juvenile" and it was deleted from the final product. Maybe so, but if there is a resemblance to *Railroad Tycoon*, it is in the strategic map—there is nothing else to entertain the player while the program is running. A game like this shows why Sid Meier is such a creative designer. Gamers, like rats in a maze, like their "cheese" screens; here, internal satisfaction is the only "rat pellet" offered.

### Hangar Time (Game Mechanics)

Game mechanics are selectable by keystroke or mouse. The mechanics themselves are easily understood; it is only experience that will show how cumbersome the play can become. With four competing airlines, a total of 400 airplanes can be flying. One should ensure that his fleet is at least the size of his closest competitor; remember, once a player's fleet exceeds the magic number, he is literally stealing airlift from his competitors. Of course, even 100 airplanes can become difficult to manage (for those who criticized *Railroad Tycoon* for its number limitation, this is a good answer).

What is most critical is fare management. One must determine which air route and aircraft he needs to adjust (generally from the "Planes Listing") and then switch to the financial analysis to determine how profitable a route is. From there, it is back to the

"Planes Listing" to alter the ticket prices. Luckily, game time is frozen whenever any pull-down menu is accessed.

One must also be careful in switching a particular plane from one route to another; it is all too easy to switch the entire route. Also, a command for merging duplicate routes would have been appreciated.

### Plane Speaking (Game Play)

Initially, one begins in Miami, Florida. I found an initial short route (e.g. Palm Beach or Orlando) to be necessary to obtain a positive cash flow. Quickly, one should obtain landing rights to New York City and then, the sky's the limit.

As play progresses, landing rights take more and more time to obtain. So, it would seem logical to go after the large cities. Despite a 40 year passage of time, the sizes of the cities do not change, so one can quickly determine the long-haul routes. Due to aircraft range, trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific flights will have to use Wake Island and the Azores, respectively, so their acquisition should be emphasized. No more than two airlines can have landing rights in any city, so optimal planning is mandatory. Fortunately, one can actually acquire virtually every large city by 1950. Then, the remainder of the game consists of maximizing profits and routes.

A sub-phase allows sale and acquisition of stock in the various companies, but the computer opponents are notoriously reluctant to issue shares in their companies. Follow their example; as Woody Owl the Investor says, "Give a Hoot, Don't Dilute!"

Each year, an overall performance appraisal is issued in three areas: turnover (number of passengers), fleet size and number of routes. Victory goes to the company with the highest performance rating. Beginning with a DC-3, one can quickly upgrade to the DC-6 (with a corresponding range change from 1,000 to 3,000 miles) while this occurs within two years of the game start, the next major aircraft (Boeing 707) will not appear for a decade. (Actually, the Vickers Viscount appears soon after the DC-6, but its short range and relatively high cost do not make it attractive).

By 1950, one should be turning over a tremendous profit. The air fleet should be completely upgraded to DC-6s, and everything appears optimal. Wrong! In 1951 and 1953, aircraft occupancy will drop to virtually nothing unless one increases worker's salaries. Access the "Research" option, and ensure that the flight crews are not growing surly. Even dropping the rate from New York to Tokyo to \$30.00 will not increase passenger occupancy! Fortunately, increased salaries will soon have one's airliner back in the

CARGO	JOB	AVAILABLE	Value	Landing Rights
Salt	12	12	12	FD
Houston	12	12	12	FD
Detroit	6	6	6	FD
Los Angeles	320	320	320	FD
Waco	87	87	87	FD
Paris	8	8	8	FD
Madrid	8	8	8	FD
Bangkok	172	172	172	FD

black, although the user might well question the validity of the economic model.

The economic model has other vagaries. While one can modify particular aircraft in terms of first class, passenger and cargo

capabilities, determining an optimal mix is a case of a tempest in a tea leaf. With the rapid build-up of a passenger fleet, one should simply seek to have a relatively profitable route and make up in size what he loses in incremental adjustments.

Actual fares can vary tremendously even on the same route, and passenger occupancy percentages do not seem to be in cohesion. Yet, setting fares is a problem in and of itself — the input is via keyboard, and the program accepts typed numbers like a primitive word processor, that is, *slowwwwlllyyy!* There is a (R)uplicate command, but in Version 1.0 it merely copied the chosen price to all classes (first class, passenger and cargo), thereby obviating its use. Version 1.01 modifies the (R)uplicate command to copy the same price only for the class involved; a welcome change!

The game plays in slow, normal, fast and turbo speeds. Since normal speed seems to be almost equivalent to real time, I found myself playing at turbo speed and, even here, one feels like a real Howard Hughes simply staring at a relatively static screen and watching his hair, finger- and toenails grow to 18-inch lengths. Ostensibly, Version 1.01 speeds the game up to two-and-a-half times faster and it will be a welcome relief.

The computer opponents are not overly aggressive. In fact, one can save a game and restart it with the computer in all positions so the player's airline will be "optimized." DO NOT DO THIS AT

HOME! (sounds like a warning from Mr. Wizard, right?) My strong save position was rapidly depleted by the computer AI with a rapid sell-off of virtually all overseas routes.

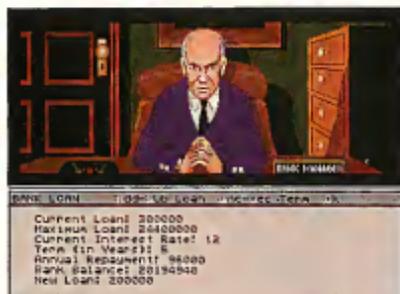
There are nice touches; one can choose his own logo, but overall, the economic model was sufficiently confusing to cause a rapid loss of interest.

Finally, there is a paucity of historical feel to the program. While the newspaper headlines each year give some period feeling (e.g. "Ghandi Dies," "Marylin Remembered") [these minor spelling errors as well as "Caracus" will be corrected in Version 1.01], the airlines themselves are amorphous. Where is the young and vibrant Howard Hughes? What of "Slim" (Col. Lindbergh), who virtually single-handedly surveyed and laid out the trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific commercial air routes in the

beginning of commercial aviation?

## The Final Approach

There are some real pearls in *Air Bucks*; the problem is that one must open a number of oysters in order to find them. The strengths of the program are its concept and customer support. Impressions is active on Prodigy and EFinic and listens to its consumers. Many of their suggestions will be incorporated into later revisions. Right now, my feeling is that this flight has been delayed. **caw**



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# Soaring Profits

## Strategy for Impression's Air Bucks

by Jennifer Schlickbernd



At first, *Air Bucks* can be pretty overwhelming. One follows the tutorial, gets an airline started, and then, what next? It's easy to go bankrupt in this game, but with a little knowledge, it's also really easy to make lots and lots of money. For starters, set the computer players to the Hardest difficulty level. This will stop them from being too aggressive in the site acquisition race.

### Introduction To Airline Management

Be aware of how the computer weighs the various elements of the simulation. The main element is the ticket pricing. Price the fares right and more than half the profit battle is over. Price them wrong and bankruptcy will be stepping on one's coattail. In order for ticket pricing to be effective, the pricing must reflect the demand for the plane's services and routes. So what factors are important? Here's a chart:

Most Important	Very Important	Special Circumstances
Size of Sites	Customer flow	First Class Travel
Plane Speed	Seasonality	Cargo
Wages	Age of planes	Comfort Level
	Competition	Length of plane route
	Advertising	
	Reliability	

The simulation interprets these factors to mean that the bigger cities will generate more demand and customers will gravitate toward faster planes, even if they aren't as comfortable (or are old or even have a grouchy staff). Seasonality means that certain places can be more popular at different times of the year. Exclusive or monopoly routes are more profitable. The computer players will generally avoid competitive routes, so competition is usually not a big problem in solitary games. If an airline's staff feels as if they are not being paid on a scale commensurate with profits, the demand for the airline will go down, since the staff will be crankier and won't service people as well. The older the model of planes flown, the less passengers will want to ride on them, perceiving that they are out of date. Old planes make good cargo planes, but don't be afraid to sell them if costs get too high.

First Class travel is special. Don't bother with it on any route other than a large city to large city (large-large) route, but on a large-large route, it is crucial. On a large-large route, one should make 30% of the space available for first class in order to guarantee a profit. (It is always wise to check the Service Income menu item to be sure).

Cargo can only be picked up when it shows up in the Jobs Available report. If there isn't much cargo in the cities the plane flies to, don't bother fitting planes with cargo space (though one can still make a little money on cargo even though no cargo shows up in the Cargo Report).

### Office of Operations (Route Management)

The next major part of the battle is site acquisition. Until many hours of play are spent with the game, concentrate on large cities, only picking up small or medium cities where they allow for connection to a large city, such as the Azores or Wake Island. It is more difficult to make money using small/medium city routes. Acquire sites at the beginning of each month. At the beginning of the game, go for New York. Put two or three planes on the DC-6 when it is available. After New York, acquire Los Angeles and San Francisco. Make the first transcontinental runs Miami-Los Angeles and Miami-San Francisco runs with DC-6's. Soon after LA and San Francisco are acquired, get either the Azores or Wake Island, otherwise Europe will be unreachable until the big planes become available.

When planning routes for planes, try to maximize the plane's range in the route. This means that if the plane can travel 3000 miles before re-fueling, put it on routes that are as close as possible to 3000 miles to ensure maximum efficiency. If long range planes are put on short routes, extra cost will be incurred. Every stop on a route increases costs. Full planes are needed to make multi-stop routes profitable. Finally, remember that faster planes are more popular planes, since time inevitably means money to some people.

Costs for each plane are basically equal to (plane mileage)/10 (Fuel Costs). Any comfort factors increase the cost, along with a poor plane size-to-route-length ratio. Maintenance costs and landing fees are paid at the end of the year; all other fees and fuel costs are paid at the end of the month.

Keep a very close eye on the cost/income ratio of each plane. If it is poor (i.e. the plane is incurring more cost than its return on investment), check the percentage of the plane's capacity that is being utilized and adjust ticket prices as necessary. If the percentage of the capacity in use is greater than 50%, try raising ticket prices. If the percentage is lower than 50% (particularly if it's lower than 25%), lower ticket prices and lure in more people with a fare war.

Another approach is to re-examine the plane's route. Obviously, it is not economical to fly planes outfitted with plenty of cargo



space on routes where the cargo jobs are limited. So, planes with excess cargo capacity should either be reassigned to other routes or refitted to get rid of the excess cargo space.

One must also monitor the service income. If the first class seating isn't generating much money, it is definitely worthwhile to reduce it and add more economy seating. Under other conditions, there may be excess cargo along the route and one must, consequently, consider reducing the first class seating and increasing the cargo space.

If all of a given airline's planes are doing badly, then (assuming the other advice has been followed) the best strategy is to raise ticket prices across the board and/or increase comfort levels. Each comfort level increases the demand accorded to comfort level by twice as much as the previous comfort level. For example, Quality of Staff increases the comfort level by 1%. Meals increase the comfort level by 2%. Radio increases the comfort level by 4% and so on up to a Lounge Area, which increases the comfort level by 128%. All comfort level increases also increase the commensurate cost dedicated to comfort levels by the same percentage.

### Accounting Office (Money Matters)

Whenever there's enough money to buy a new plane, buy one. If an aggressive route acquisition strategy has been pursued, there should be plenty of potential routes to put new planes on. Also, there

PLANE	YR TO BLD	LAST YR
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will be more demand for all of the planes in the airline if the airline flies to many places.

Avoid selling stock for additional money. The stock probably will never be available again and profits will be reduced as the hypothetical shareholders receive their dividends on future earnings.

Further, putting maintenance fees on Low can be done in an emergency, but soon, demand and income will drop since planes will be "In Service" more often (not making money) and customers will perceive the airline as being unreliable. Reducing wages paid to staff will also reduce demand for the airline's planes.

### Marketing Department (Conclusions)

Last, but not least, keep an eye on Market Research. It will help when deciding what factors need to be changed to increase demand for the entire airline. Note that in version 1.0, advertising costs are not reflected properly in the Market Research report. This has been fixed in version 1.01.

Remember, this is a simulation and, since it's not a real airline, don't be afraid to experiment. In version 1.0, there were a few ways to make money by bending the simulation model severely, but those have been fixed in 1.01. (Damn!). If puzzling things happen, an explanation can usually be found by examining the factors discussed in this article. **cmw**



# Star Quest

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(Continued from Page 46)

PC sound card to use General MIDI; a list of instruments and ways of organizing MIDI files that would allow some level of portability of MIDI music files between synthesizers made by different manufacturers. Built-in PCM sampled instruments that sound very much like the real thing (because they are actually the real thing recorded and manipulated) make this class of synthesizer a giant step-up music-wise from anything that existed before. One problem with this kind of sound support, however is the difficulty it has in providing flexibility for sound effects.

**Turtle Beach** has a sound card called the *Multisound* based on what E-MU Systems, a well established professional synthesizer maker, calls *Proteus Technology*. With both PCM instruments and the ability to do custom PCM recording and playback, this is a great sounding card like the *Sound Carvas*, but the \$800 street price is still too much for even most serious gamers.

Although their price may soon come down, there are now other shanks in the waters. **Yamaha** now has the *TG-100*. With sound in the same league with the *Sound Carvas* and a special connection for direct connection with a PC or MAC as well as the standard MIDI connections. This card has a distinctly DX-7 flavor although the technology is PCM. Meanwhile, **Roland** is planning a new version of their *Sound Carvas* card with the instrument list reduced to the General MIDI list, but with the welcome addition of PCM recording ability at a more competitive price.

**Roland** also has their new *SC-7* module which will connect to the serial port of a Mac or PC or to the MIDI port of anything MIDI. This module will be essentially a *Sound Carvas* on General MIDI instruments and **Roland** says it will sell for about half the price of the *Sound Carvas*.

**MediaVision** has its *Audioport Card* which is similar, internally, to a base level *Sound Blaster*. It fits easily into a shirt pocket and plugs into the parallel port of any PC. It is battery powered with a small built-in speaker and volume dial. This means very portable OPL-2 and PCM for laptops.

CD-ROM is essentially just like a music CD that contains different information and requires a special CD-ROM drive to use. CD-ROM drives came into the market at over a thousand dollars but I have seen ads for \$199.00 CD-ROM drives. *Caveat emptor* — price tends to beget quality. Some CD-ROM drives are just enough below standard that they perform simple functions okay, but cannot feed a WAV or

VOC file to a sound card efficiently enough that it could be played properly.

Still, the existence of cheap CD-ROM drives signifies the existence of many CD-ROM drives which, in turn, means potential for many new CD-ROM products. CD-ROMs can hold quantities of data near 900 MB, but more typically around 500 to 600 MB. This is a staggering figure when one considers how it compares to the capacity of a 3.5 inch high density floppy at just under 1.5 MB.

Of course, everything that goes onto a CD-ROM has to be paid for by somebody, so most current CD-ROM games tend to be anything from the same old game — but on a CD-ROM, to the same old game again but with the MT-32 music recorded in normal audio format (called *Redbook*) which just plays the music out of the CD-ROM drive. This may sound okay, but it's hardly a bargain for those who already have an MT-32 or LAPC-1.



Rock recording engineer Bob Clearmountain uses QSound to mix music. He says QSound "enhances the music and its emotional power a lot."

Frankly, the CD-ROM approach has a vast potential for providing fantastic sounding music for computer games, but it is expensive to pay people to do real studio quality music compared to just asking for a composition in the form of a MIDI file for an OPL-2 type sound card. This form of sound is also difficult to coordinate with events in the game. Using the vast space available on the CD-ROM for WAV or VOC PCM recordings which then must be sent to a sound card for playback is seen by some as a more workable solution but requires one to own both a CD-ROM drive and a sound card. **Creative Labs** and **MediaVision** both sell kits for just this purpose with new 16-bit sound cards which use OPL-3 synth chips and SCSI interfaces for a CD-ROM drive which they include in the kit. Needless to say these kits are *not* cheap.

E-MU Systems is providing their previously mentioned *Proteus Technology* to **Creative Labs** for a daughter card PCM synthesizer similar to the **Yamaha TG-100**, **Roland Sound Carvas** or **Turtle Beach Multisound**. The good news here is that this small card plugs into a *Sound Blaster Pro 16* card and uses some of its circuitry for amplification and such in order to reduce the cost over adding an entirely separate PCM synthesizer card. This type of approach may be what finally puts good music and sound effects in the hands of the gamer-on-a-budget without having to give up good old **Adlib** or *Sound Blaster* compatibility in order to do it.

## Other Neat Stuff

Newer technologies are always being developed and, strangely enough, computer gaming is often at the cutting edge. There are a lot of very creative people in this industry and a mistake in a computer game never kills someone, so taking chances is acceptable. FM and PCM synthesis are not the end of the road for synthesizers. Research is going on in many corporations and universities to find new ways of creating sound. New methods for processing and controlling the sound already available are also being developed. **QSound Ltd.** recently announced that **Virgin** was licensing **QSound's** full 3-D sound processing technology for use in **Sega CD-ROM** systems. **QSound** processes and reproduces sound for the gamer in a full, wrap around world, using only existing stereo equipment. Using just two speakers, **QSound** tricks the gamer's ears into thinking the sound is all around him/her. Award winning music from Madonna, Paula Abdul, Sting and Luther Vandross, as well as **Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves** (the film, not the game) have used the **QSound Technology**. With real-time software control of this kind of technology, gamers could well hear jets screaming up from behind them or cannons firing from their right *without* major hardware expenditures.

## The Meaning of Life (Or, at least, a Conclusion)

Gamers — don't touch that volume dial! Listen to the music in computer games, then talk about it, complain about it or praise it. It can and will get better when developers know that we care.

Developers — make the music a part of each game, not a last second add-on. Remember that the competition is Hollywood. I don't remember who it was, but a very wise composer once told me that all the equipment in the world didn't matter if I couldn't write good music for it. Now, that's where the state of the art is. **eww**

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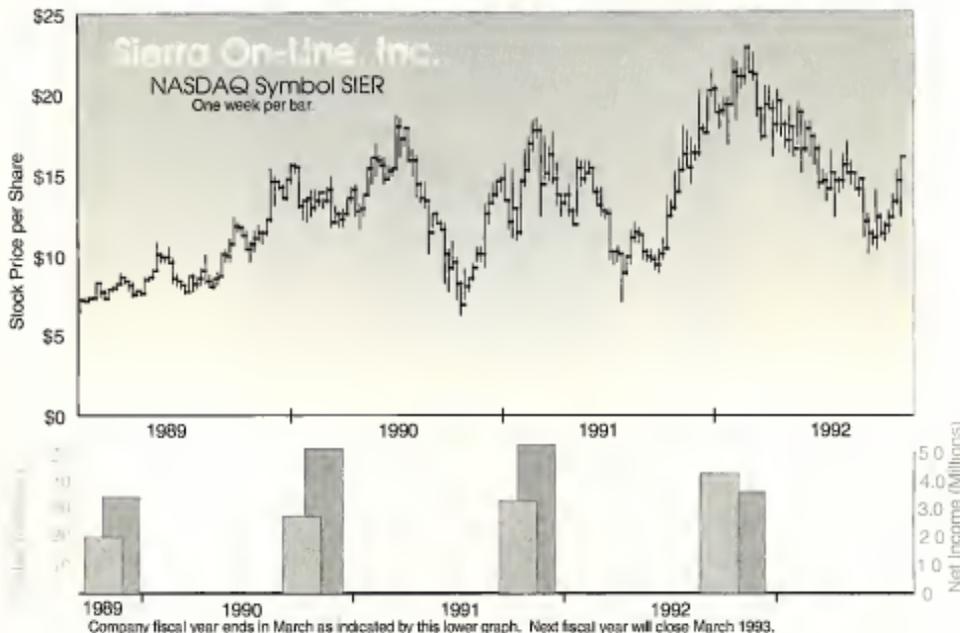


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Circle Reader Service #63



A monthly look at the  
Computer Entertainment  
Stock Market



## Sierra Stock Rebounds From Slough of Skepticism

Sierra On-Line's common stock (NASDAQ: SIER) recently recovered from a disappointing low in August. That low was believed to be the result of investor disappointment with *The Sierra Network* on-line service and an announcement that the latest addition to the company's flagship series, *King's Quest VI*, would not ship during the fiscal quarter ending in August. Since the company could estimate sales of over 250,000 on the *King's Quest* title (based on the performance of past titles) and had anticipated a much more positive response on TSN by the present time, investors feared that TSN had become a "black hole" and *KQVI* would not perform as well as its predecessors.

A few short weeks later, the stock experienced a significant recovery. Sierra CEO Ken Williams believes that the rebound was directly related to both the successful launch of and response to *King's Quest VI*, combined with a very optimistic earnings picture for the last six months of the fiscal year. Williams observed that the company shipped 15 products during the previous fiscal year with eight of those products shipping during the first half of the

fiscal year. He estimated that the company would ship 27 products by the end of the current fiscal year and, even though only seven of those products shipped during the first half of the fiscal year, revenue was up 17% over the same period.

Though revenue was up, Sierra reported a loss per share in earnings for the second quarter (ending in September, 1992). The loss per share was the first in, at least, 13 quarters (dating back to June of 1989 in the Standard & Poor's summary). The loss can be laid directly at the feet of *The Sierra Network*, but the company has high expectations about the network's future. Since the nadir in stock price, *TSN 2.0* has begun to penetrate the market and the subscriber base is growing at a rate of 300-500 per day (seven days per week). So, though it has been slower than expected in reaching its desired user base, many investors are seeing renewed hope in the project.

Sierra is circa 71% institutionally owned and 13% insider-owned. There were approximately 2,500 shareholders of record at the end of June, 1992. **cgw**

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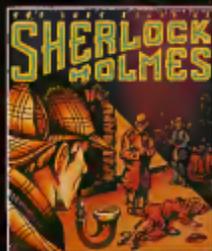
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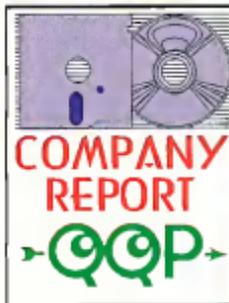


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## Little Things Mean A Lot At QQP

### How Bruce Williams Zaccagnino Went From Hobby Store To Publisher

From 1972 until 1982, lots of people would have thought of Bruce Williams Zaccagnino as a musician. He played in supper clubs in the New Jersey area and later performed concerts in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Music has always been one of Bruce's passions, but it is only one. This story is about a man who specializes in the improbable, whether it is in building the world's largest model railroad or founding a computer game company from scratch without even knowing how to program a computer. This is the story of how *The Perfect General* was transformed from a miniatures game to a computer game company's flagship product.

In 1972, long before most of us ever dreamed of the personal computer, Bruce was following the bliss of one of his non-musical passions — model railroading. He built his house that year and designed the basement to contain a large model railroad set-up. Today, that basement is equal to one wing of his model railroad. In 1974, Bruce and his wife, Jean, had experienced so much weekend foot traffic from the local aficionados that they decided to excavate a new entrance to the basement. Of course, Bruce builds structures and models extremely fast, so they decided to dig out an additional 40 feet to serve as what would become the second wing of the railroad.

Now, Bruce admits that he was having grandiose ideas during the construction of the second wing and decided to build the third and largest wing. But that wasn't the end of it. Three years later, he added the fourth wing, after which he finally had what the *Smithsonian Magazine* billed as "The World's Largest Model Railroad." In full operation, it takes 81 people to operate the railroad. At a scale speed of 60 MPH, it takes a train about three and a half hours to travel from start to finish. The layout uses

more than 13,000 feet of track, contains 400 bridges (some with more than 12,000 pieces of wood) and has 13-14 ft. high mountains that consist of more than 75,000 pounds of plaster. Bruce says that there is enough lumber in the set-up to build six ranch houses, and the entire set-up contains literally thousands of scale buildings and over 1,000 switches.

In 1977, Bruce was able to combine his obvious interest in model railroading and his longtime wargaming hobby (Bruce states that he began playing *Avalon Hill* wargames in 1966) by opening a hobby shop. At this point in time, he was managing the hobby shop by day and performing music by night, a pace that he kept up through 1982. Dovetailing with his hobby interests, he formed the Flemington Wargame Society and *The Perfect General* was born. At least, the game which was played over a permanent hexgrid protected by polyurethane and had terrain and point values painted on top of the coating was born in 1978.

According to Bruce, most of the club's members became so engrossed in their custom miniatures game that many of them stopped playing "boxed" wargames. When we visited Bruce, we met some of the old wargaming crew and they all still played *The Perfect General*, though they now play the computer game version, while the old table-top sits idle.

Yet, as if all of this activity was not enough, Bruce elected to pursue yet another hobby. In 1983, he purchased a theatre pipe organ from a small mansion in Connecticut. Naturally, with his penchant for building, he had to customize the historic instrument with parts from other classic organs. So, in its current configuration, Bruce's concert organ is about half-Wurlitzer and half-hybrid from other organs. It has nine ranks of pipes and has had three different custom consoles over the span Bruce has owned it.

The organ resides in a special recital hall adjoining the Zaccagnino house. It has an exterior entrance for concert attendees, a balcony for special guests and a custom-made chandelier. Though the recital hall has an exterior entrance, it can also be reached via a secret passage from the Zaccagnino residence. (Now we know of two award-winning game designers with secret passages in their house.)

By 1986, Bruce sold the hobby shop and was prepared to devote himself full-time to the study of music. The organ was finished and the recital hall was in ship-shape. His intent was to become an even better concert organist and to compose. But in 1987, Bruce discovered computer games. He played several, including the original *The Bard's Tale*, but kept coming back to the same game time after time. It was *Empire* that intrigued Bruce

and, over the years, it was *Empire* that inspired him. What if he could get Mark Baldwin, the designer of the personal computer version of *Empire*, to program *The Perfect General*?

Bruce put together the plan and followed through. Advised that it was hard to get distribution for a one product company, he went into simultaneous production with Thurston Searfoss on *The Lost Admiral*. Both games were received with considerable acclaim when they burst



Zaccagnino's organ is one of a kind.

onto the scene in late 1991. *The Perfect General* had a more up-to-date interface and flashier graphics, but gamers tend to think of *The Lost Admiral* as having a more sophisticated artificial opponent. The tactical scale of *The Perfect General* seemed extremely attractive to many wargamers and it became a phenomenal first product, especially for a wargame. Wargames were supposed to be the marketing kiss of death when *TPG* and *TLA* hit the shelves. Now, they are experiencing a rebound due to the success of several titles.

Several things happened with the success of *TPG* and *TLA*; one was that they hired Steve Cohen to serve as vice-president of operations. The second was that they accepted an unsolicited submission from Andrew Vischer, a card game which had more solitaire variants than any game they had ever seen. The third was that they learned from their simultaneous release of two quality products that it pays to offer a nice graphic look in addition to gameplay. That's why they hired graphic artist Tim Cuccolo to spruce up the look of their upcoming *Conquered Kingdoms* (see the related story in this issue) and Gary Stephens to provide a more polished touch to the box and manual art for all **QQP** products.

The addition of Steve provided a competent and personable "jack of all trades" for both the marketing and development of all the **QQP** products. There is an exuberant, all-out "go for it" quality in Steve that lets one know that things are going to be done and they are going to be done quickly. Bruce tends to work quickly and quietly. Steve tends to be the pacing coach on the sidelines. The duo make for a solid management team.

The solitaire product, *Solitaire's Journey*, was solid, but Bruce wanted it to have a little something extra. He conceived of the quest ideas and Andrew put them together, even though he concedes that he wasn't entirely convinced in the usefulness of that approach. Again, Bruce's instinct proved to be right and *Solitaire's Journey* proved to be a bigger hit than *TLA* and, at last report, was moving up on *TPG* in sales. Now, both Andrew and Bruce are happy. Indeed, so happy that Andrew is hard at work on a complete remake of *TPG*.

The acceptance of Cuccolo's and Stephens's work remains to be seen, but we definitely think they will help make *Conquered Kingdoms* yet another **QQP** hit. Indeed, the boxes are looking better all the time and Cuccolo is learning new tricks on the computer every day. This bodes well for the company's future.

## The Perfect Game Design

Speaking of the company's future, it is not about to put four fascinating titles on the shelves and disappear. The company is making big plans for the future. For one thing, they still accept unsolicited submissions like that of Andrew Vischer's solitaire program. An Atlanta-based developer has recently sold *Battles of Destiny* to **QQP** and it looks like it is getting the same type of playtesting and design effort as any of their other products. Vischer, as noted earlier, is hard at work on a remake of *TPG*, and *Conquered Kingdoms* is nearing completion.

In addition, CEO Zaccagnino states that he has design notes for 30 unique new games and expects to produce them over the next decade. He wisely admits that the company may have to stay small in relation to other computer game companies in order to continue molding games into his overall philosophy, but he is willing to do



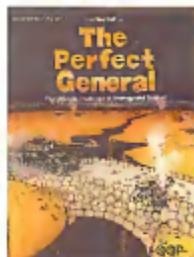
Scenes from "The World's Largest Model Railroad."

so in order to reach his life's goal. "I'm on a quest to make one of the best games ever built—a Monopoly or Bridge or Chess that will last a person a whole lifetime."

Asked the secret of **QQP**'s successful game designs, Bruce summed matters fairly succinctly. Likening the process of creating a game to that of writing a novel, he stated that he felt more people knew about the Napoleonic era due to Tolstoy's *War and Peace* than from the history books. "You have to write the historical romance as opposed to just the history." His goal, then, is to be the historical romance writer of computer games, one who offers just enough flavor of an era, a style of warfare or strategy, to capture the imagination and pull the gamer into the alternate universe. To Bruce, the game itself is more important than the details, but the details have to fit together smoothly to build the game right.

Part of his five year plan blends many of his accomplishments together. The success of **QQP** has allowed Bruce to acquire property on a highway, rather than off the rural road where the company is currently quartered. **QQP** plans to build a large three-story facility that will serve as a permanent (and more accessible) home for "The World's Largest Railroad", a doll museum, a new and larger recital hall for a larger version of the restored theatre organ, a residence for the Zaccagninos and, of course, a new headquarters for **QQP**. The variety of talents pull together to create enough income to be able to both build the new facility and give the railroad and the organ to the world. Bruce will have to charge some admission to be able to maintain the railroad, but he thinks considerably more people will be able to experience it than the four or five thousand people who used to attend his rare, open house weekends.

For computer gamers, the good news is clear. **QQP** will be adding three or more programs per year to its product line, and each will have that magic touch that Bruce Williams Zaccagnino puts on every product. Then again, what less could we expect from a fellow gamer?<sup>SM</sup>



## OUT OF TSR'S SHADOW?

### SSI's *Prophecy of the Shadow*

by Jeff James

Since 1988, Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) and TSR, Inc. — publisher of the famous *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* people and paper role-playing game — have enjoyed a mutually propitious partnership. The products of that creative union have been slaking the adventuring thirst of thousands, if not millions, of adventure gamers since then. While this partnership can undoubtedly be considered a success, SSI's latest role-playing offering, *Prophecy of the Shadow*, is a solo effort. Far from signaling a breakup in the TSR, Inc./SSI partnership, *Prophecy* can be viewed as SSI's attempt to have "it's own space."

*Prophecy* represents a number of firsts for SSI. Other than being the first adventure game published solely under the SSI label since the *Phantasia* trilogy, *Prophecy* is also SSI's first single-character adventure. Most notably, *Prophecy* also breaks new ground by being the first fantasy role-playing game to use digitized animation of costumed human actors. All of these aspects combine to make *Prophecy* a refreshingly enjoyable adventure, targeted primarily at role-playing neophytes.

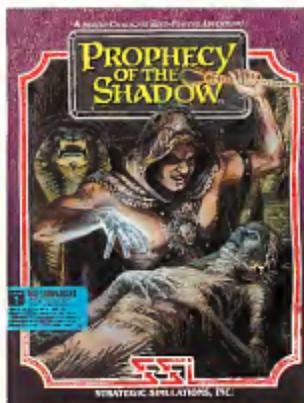
*Prophecy's* storyline is nothing new. The player-character's master has been slain, a princess must be rescued, an evil ruler must be deposed, and an even darker evil lurks in the shadows. While seasoned RPG'ers may almost disregard the masterfully redundant storyline, tenderfoot adventure gamers should find it a welcome background for adventuring. SSI is aiming

TITLE	<i>Prophecy of the Shadow</i>
SYSTEM	BM
PRICE	\$39.95
REQUIREMENTS	Document look up
DESIGNER	James R. McEntee
PUBLISHER	SSI San Jose, CA

this product squarely at rookie role-players and most of *Prophecy's* characteristics reflect this. Character generation is a prime example of the *Prophecy* design philosophy. After choosing a name, a gender, and answering three short questions about the character's childhood, the player is ready to play. Instead of the lengthy list of character ability scores found in other adventures, *Prophecy* relies on only three attributes: health, agility and magic. No equipment to buy, no spells to memorize, and only one character to keep track of. Gamers fond of token-sized adventuring squads which must be equipped, fed, washed and scrubbed before hitting the trail would be well-advised to look elsewhere.

Most of the game is controlled by accessing a strip of icons which vertically divide the *Prophecy* screen in half. These ten embossed icons control all of the actions in *Prophecy*, ranging from saving games to casting spells. While this interface works best with a mouse, SSI has thoughtfully included a full set of keyboard equivalents for stubborn keyboard users.

The left side of the screen is devoted to listing character statistics and character



inventory, while the right displays an isometric, overhead view of the action, much like the vantage point offered in *Microillusion's Faery Tale Adventure* or *Origin's Ultima VI*. Underneath this display is a text window which reports the results of searches and lists damage to both your character and any engaged enemies. The remaining space at the bottom of the screen is used as a text display.

This sense of frugal simplicity exhibited in *Prophecy's* interface reveals itself in other aspects of the game as well. Conversing with NPCs requires that the player move next to the NPC, click on the talk

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icon, then choose from a list of topics on the conversation screen. Clicking on one of these topics elicits a response from the NPC; occasionally, a response will add a new topic to the conversation window. After the NPC has responded to the topics, no further questioning is possible.



The magic system is similarly straightforward. Casting a spell involves finding a "catalyst," which is then used to cast one of up to a dozen different spells. No need to fumble with bizarre ingredients or bother with spell memorization here; in *Prophecy*, magic-use is a "point and shoot" operation.

Undoubtedly, the most noticeable feature of the game is the use of real actors, dressed in medieval garb and filmed for use in the game. Seen while conversing with the character in question, a short animation of perhaps 4-12 frames is seen of the character posturing, turning, walking

or otherwise making movement for the camera. Backgrounds behind the character are hand-drawn, reflecting the location in which the conversation is taking place. For the most part, the quality of the digitized animation is surprisingly good. A few sequences verge on tackiness, with a few actors appearing as if they're attending a Halloween bash for ex-Shakespearean thespians, replete with plastic halberds and polyester robes. Overall, though, the quality is impressive and adds a realistic dimension to gameplay.



The music is appropriate, with a sprightly marching tune for overland travel, and a collection of creepy dungeon ditties for subterranean travel. Some of the tunes can become overly repetitious, although the music can be toggled off if the player desires. Sound effects are also well-done, with the blood-curdling scream of a fallen foe sounding almost too real; I pity the poor SSI staffer induced to emit such

a painful cry for digitization! SSI has plans to release more single-character role-playing adventures along *Prophecy's* lines, trying to carve out a market primarily composed of adventuring novices. *Prophecy* does prove that SSI is more than able to create an adventure game on its own, without the help of long-time business partner TSR.



*Prophecy* is a solid, albeit limited, offering from SSI and designer Jaimi McEntire. Seasoned adventurer gamers who demand huge game worlds, multi-character parties and difficult puzzles might frown at the design philosophy behind *Prophecy*. *Prophecy* is not, nor does it intend to be, a replacement for SSI's AD&D series of role-playing games. However, gamers looking for something new and refreshing — where byzantine game mechanics take a back seat to ease-of-use and an engaging storyline — should find playing *Prophecy* to be well worth the quest. **cow**

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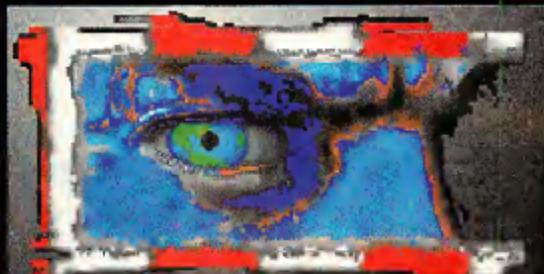
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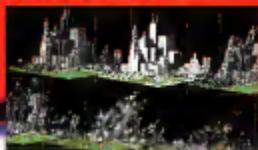
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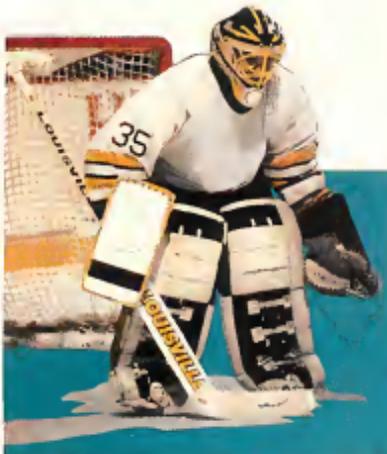
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by Alan "Slap Shot" Emrich  
and Chris "The Goon" Lombardi

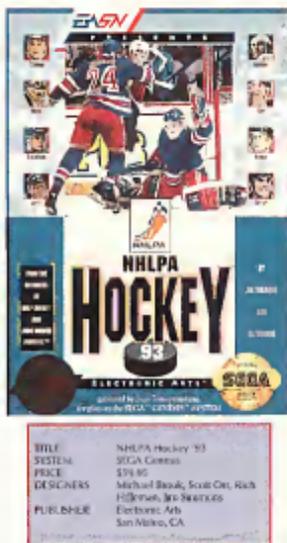


Though CGW's primary emphasis is on games for personal computers, we occasionally run across a quality game on a cartridge game system which we think would be of interest to our readers.

## EA's NHLPA Hockey Scores With Two CGW Editors

The blades, the ice, the crack of the slap-shot off the glass. The speed, the grace, and the wicked crunch of a brutal check in the corner. The throngs in their sweaters and caps exploding with release as the overtime shot careens off the goalie's shoulder and into the net. There's nothing to match the passion, pulse and power of hockey.

As certified and institutionally committed hockey nuts, we have been looking for a game that captures these sights, sounds and emotions of the sport. As equally rabid strategists, we needed a game that would capture the sport's tactical elements without sacrificing the visceral 'oomph' of the play. When Electronic Arts released their *NHL Hockey* for the SEGA Genesis, we were so impressed that a couple of CGW editors broke down and bought a system...in the name of their kids, of course. When we heard that EA was upgrading *NHL Hockey*, getting a National Hockey League Players Association endorsement contract, and renaming the game *NHLPA Hockey*, we heard little sirens in our heads, raised our edi-



tor's pens high in the air and formed a circle of cheering, macho celebration.

*NHLPA Hockey* improves on its predecessor in many ways, but the most exciting is the inclusion of real hockey teams and player names. All 24 NHL teams are represented — including the Tampa Bay and Ottawa expansion teams — and each team fields a near complete roster of players as they stood near the end of the '91-'92 season. Unfortunately, since the sport's general managers love to play 52-pickup with the league during the off-season, many of the rosters are inaccurate (i.e. there is no Lindros and Philadelphia still has the half-dozen players that are now Nordiques). Still, it's fun to look on the scorecard and see listings like, Lemieux from Jagr and Stevens; or Oates from Neely and Bourque.

### Like Wayne, I Want To Be Like Wayne

More interesting than the names is the fact that the players will play somewhat like their

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## Impressions

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flesh counterparts. Each player is rated in a dozen significant categories: from energy level, to skating skill, to shot and passing accuracy, to fighting propensity and skill. One knows by the player's strength and shooting skill that they are controlling Mario Lemieux, the passes are almost always on target when controlling the Great One, and one certainly isn't surprised to see Marty McSorley skating to the box for a roughing penalty.

The game play in general is quite realistic as well. With the "Penalties" option on, the refs will call the full gamut of infractions, and in a fairly realistic way. "Offsides" and "icing" create their usual headaches for the team on the offensive; players committing major penalties will be slapped with five minutes in the box; "interference" will be called on a player who invades the goalie's crease; and the ref will even signal delayed penalties (and the goalie will even come off the ice!) until the offending team takes control of the puck. The only rule omission we were able to find, besides some of the new rules for the '92-'93 season, was the "two line pass" — which would have been a problem given the somewhat skewed scale of the rink-to-player size in the game.

## The Goon Squad

Defensively, *NHLPA Hockey* is a whole new puck game compared to its predecessor. Goalies have become much more intelligent and more difficult to score against. The animations have them diving, lunging and kicking away slapshots like their real-life counterparts. Players also have a wider variety of defensive commands to choose from. Hooking other players or hip checking them off-balance is easily done (perhaps too easily), but the refs will only let so much go by before blowing the whistle. Vicious body checks can be thrown with a combination of a speed burst (button C) and a "check" command (button B). If the check is vicious enough, the victim may be knocked for a loop and forced to leave the game for a period or two. This capability lends naturally to goon or "enforcer" tactics wherein a coach assigns a barly Neanderthal to rough-up the opposing team's finesse men. With the line changing feature, players can set up such a "checking line" (in addition to 6 other lines) and put that line into the game with the flick of an "A" button. Each team's lines can be edited by the player and saved to the battery powered cartridge for future play.

These features make *NHLPA Hockey* a more strategic and defensive game, though the scores between practiced players will tend to be a bit inflated

— mostly because there are far too many break-aways on the tiny rink, and in part because excited players tend to put an enormous number of shots on goal. Though not terribly realistic, these factors make the game that much more dynamic.

## Frills and Chills

Beyond the hot game play, *NHLPA Hockey* has a rink full of features and cute fluff that really fleshes out the excellent core game. Cheers and boos from the crowd correspond with the home team's play, and there is a Crowd-Meter that records the decibel level of the crowd to give players a gauge as to how much the crowd is into the game. A high crowd rating will even give the home team a psychological shot in the arm advantage. An arena organist will play the cliched sound-bites during appropriate game situations. During line changes and at the end of penalties, the players will hop over the bench wall or come out of the penalty box. During period breaks one can view other scores from around the league and can even view highlight films of the game's exciting goals! The net can be dislodged from the posts and the rare slapshot will break a pane of the plexiglass. The game offers a replay feature that will not only allow one to rewind and review 10 seconds of game-play, but one can even focus on a player or section of the rink so as to better visualize how a goal-scoring play developed. The replay feature is a great "in your face" feature as one can illustrate to their grumbling opponent how to properly run a power-play or set up a "trailer man" for a rebound goal. *NHLPA Hockey* is as littered with cute features as a rink after a hat-trick.

Single games can be played between two players or the computer, or players can enter a play-off tree that is structure like the NHL play-off system. As players progress through the four "best of seven" steps in the tree their statistics are compiled and saved to the battery-powered cartridge. If players power-down, they can come back to the saved position on the play-off tree at any time. We should also point out that, though we didn't use it much, there is an option that allows two players to play on the same team against the computer.

## The Parting Shot

As we wind up for a last blue-line slap at *NHLPA Hockey*, we must first tip our helmets to EA for an excellent upgrade to a decent game. The addition of real players, the refinement of the play action and the inclusion of detail that only true hockey fans could program and appreciate, all combine to create one of the best action-oriented sports games we've seen. While it's no *Wayne Gretzky Hockey* in terms of statistics and league play capabilities, it is a great time and just about as realistic and detailed as one could hope a cartridge game to be. With hoarse voices from a night of too much noisy fun, we give *NHLPA Hockey* two red and blistered thumbs up. **cow**



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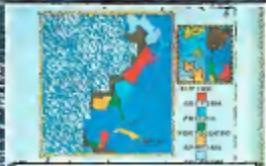
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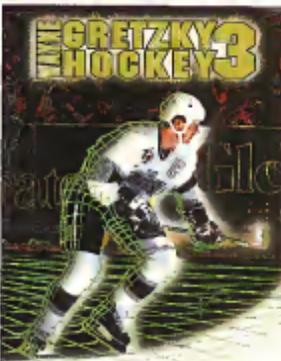
### Impressions

# The Icing On The Puck

## Bethesda's Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3

by Gordon Goble

TITLE	Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3
SYSTEM	IBM (U.S. disk version requires 585K Base Memory and an additional 512K Expanded Memory)
PLAYERS	1-2
PRICE	\$39.95
PRODUCTION	Documentation Lock-Up
DESIGNERS	C. Walton, D. Gregory
PUBLISHER	Bethesda Softworks Rockville, MD



I grew up watching hockey, playing street hockey and really enjoying a good game of table hockey. I guess you could say I like hockey. The first electronic hockey I ever played was a marginally more complex adaptation of "Pong," nearly twenty years ago. Engaging in interactive entertainment on my family's television set was, at that time, an unbelievable sensation.

Bethesda's *Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3* (*WGH3*) represents just my second experience with computerized hockey, and I was drooling (like Homer Simpson over a good steak) in anticipation. The box was torn open in a frenzy of cardboard and shrink wrap, and my assessment had begun.

*WGH3* is a slightly flawed attempt at the perfect sports simulation. It looks like the real thing and, at first, seems to play like the real thing. But after a little experimentation, it becomes apparent that as far as *definitive* computer hockey goes, the Great One should have waited a little longer before lending his name.

The sheer magnitude of *WGH3* is the first surprise. At 9 megs of installed size (13 megs of free disk space are required for a full load), it is indeed a fat little fellow. Yet once installed, running *WGH3* to its full potential involves two somewhat annoying procedures; adding the name of your sound card to the command line each and every time you play (batch this to save time), and the initiation of your computer's expanded memory facilities.

There are two main interfaces to *WGH3*; a press box view of the rink, wherein specific team, roster, coaching and mode-of-play choices are presented; and the game view itself. It is abundantly clear that game designers have poured a tremendous amount of effort into the former.

Decisions, decisions...pre-game options are indeed plentiful. Game action can be viewed from two angles; the nosebleed overhead roof cam, or the new (and infinitely superior) "3/4" view.

Length of game, duration of game (for those fitting a little pro hockey between appointments), choice of referee, fights on/off, penalties on/off...these are but a sampling of available variations. Last, but definitely not least, the teams involved in the upcoming tilt must be decided.

Choices of those teams include all NHL rosters from the 1992 season, Bethesda's own makeshift squad made up of *WGH3* programmers and designers, or any new powerhouse group that comes to mind. Once participating teams (and, if desired, the color of their uniforms) have been decided, any player can be modified by enhancing or detracting from up to ten of his on-ice strengths and weaknesses. Even his name can be changed (somehow Wayne Gretzky became Gord Goble, for instance).

Having gotten this far, an important decision must be made — to coach or not to coach, that is the question. If coaching is defaulted to the computer, *it* will make the decisions as to which players are thrown into the fray at what times and which of a variety of pre-set plays will be put into action in given circumstances. However, if the armchair Gretzky elects to coach himself, these time-consuming, yet possibly very effective options can be tailored in any fashion he wishes.

One more important stop before the action commences — the Coach's Clipboard. Here, deep in the bowels of the locker room, in the coach's own sloppy handwriting, certain critical options are decided. Will the overall team plan include frequent "dumping-in" of the puck or is this going to be a tic-tac-toe passing unit? Which player will be under human control? This is one area *not* to be skipped, for it involves a most important choice, requiring a little preliminary explanation.

Once on the ice, Mr. Armchair Gretzky will be in total control of just one of his team's players at a time. This will never change. While a set of standard plays can be preconceived generalizing his chosen team's style, there will always be one player *only* responding to his human coach's signals (via keyboard, joystick or mouse).

The player under human control operates in one of two ways, and that decision must be made now. Choosing the "Puck Hog"

(Continued on Page 98)

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## "Wolfing Down" Takes On New Meaning In id Software's Latest

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**PROJECTION:** Documentation Look-Up  
**DESIGNER:** id Software  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** FormGen Corp.  
 North Andover, MA

by Bryan A. Walker

With *Wolfenstein 3-D*, (reviewed in CGW #98) id Software sounded a clarion call to gamers who thought that entertainment software of exceptional quality came only from the established publishing leaders. Whisper-smooth first-person graphics, great sound, nail-biting game play and violence o' plenty set the first episodes apart from the gaming crowd. Now, fearless hero B.J. Blazkowicz returns in this, the stand alone finale of the *Wolfenstein 3-D* saga, *Spear of Destiny*.

The prelude to the mission reads as so; Hitler, notorious occultic artifact collector, has acquired the weapon that was used to stab Jesus Christ as he was crucified. The possessor of this legendary Spear of Destiny is said to be invincible, prompting the Allies to send B.J. on a suicide mission. The objective: steal the Spear away from the Third Reich. Rules of engagement: kill 'em all, let God sort 'em out. And everyone knows that when B.J. takes on a "suicide mission," it's murder on the Nazis!

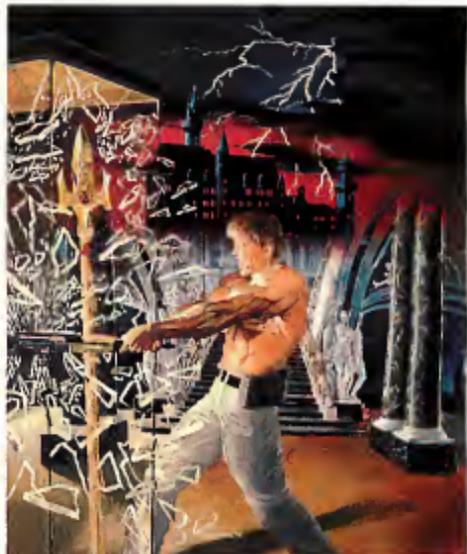
Those familiar with the earlier

*Wolfenstein 3-D* episodes will be right at home. The regular troops — SS, killer dogs and mutants — still prowl around in droves. However, there's now a variety of new scenery, devastating new bosses, and smart, fast SS Officers. Sound effects are generally the same, with some great new "death rattles" added. Very good new mu-

sic adds atmosphere to the proceedings, particularly on the final levels.

What *Spear of Destiny* really offers the player is additional challenge and even more of the trademark violence and gore of the earlier episodes. New players might be advised to start on a lower difficulty

setting. Having played through on the "Death Incarnate" level, I encountered many areas absolutely jam-packed with enemies. The resulting exchanges of gunfire were so intense and visceral, I could almost smell the cordite! If Mack Bolan fans find out about this game, id Software will have the biggest cross-over hit in software history! As with the earlier *Wolfenstein 3-D* episodes, gamers who expect the slain enemies to "de-res" while dying neatly and quietly will be wooing their milk and cookies. Be that as it may, there's an appeal to mowing down a line of Nazis with a sweep of a red-hot minigun that just can't be found in other games.







The four new Bad Guys, along with a surprise Ultimate Bad Guy, are tougher than those of previous episodes. Even worse, they're often surrounded by their own escort of regular enemies. Standing toe-to-toe against these ugly chumps, or trying to fight them and ignore the escorts will rapidly result in a severely ventilated B.J.

After gunning down hundreds of enemies for a score of levels, the Spear of Destiny is within reach. The Penultimate Bad Guy, surrounded by SS Officers and mutants, provides more than enough reasons for B.J. to load up on ammo and medical supplies repeatedly. However,

those who think that obtaining the Spear of Destiny is the final step are going to be thrown a curve. I won't spoil the surprise, but be prepared for an environment and enemies that would scare the bean dip out of Clive Barker. This surprise final-level endgame is an excellent touch!

The only real weakness of the game is that there are no technical improvements over the earlier episodes. *Spear of Destiny* has many situations that cry out for new weapons and equipment. Proportional joystick response alone would have been a huge improvement in gameplay. Joe Garagiola might say "*Spear of Destiny* is more of the same, only a lot more so." While suggesting these features for future *Wolfenstein 3-D* episodes to Jay Wilbur of id Software, I was informed that *Spear of Destiny* is the final installment of B.J.'s adventures against the Third Reich. Fortunately, fans of the *Wolfenstein 3-D* titles can take heart. id is working on a new title called *Doom*, which Mr. Wilbur enthusiastically described as "Wolfenstein times a million!"

Now becoming almost obligatory in the MS-DOS gaming world is the laundry list of bugs encountered. Mercifully, I found only one glitch during play, arising, wouldn't you know it, at the moment I

took the Destiny Spear. A system lock-up was the result, but turning off the Soundblaster digitized sound option provided the fix.

There are those sensitive people who are going to be scrambling for the smelling salts after seeing *Spear of Destiny*. It's brutal and bloody, no doubt. It's also a well-executed and enjoyable game. The real gaming warriors who like a lot of "oomph" in their entertainment will find *Spear of Destiny* can rock 'n roll with the best of 'em. Girly-gamers need not apply!

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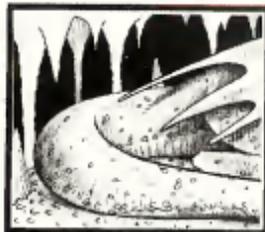
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# Bringing Enlightenment To The Darklands



by Samuel B. Baker II

## A Player's Guide to Darklands -- Part II

**D**eep in the dark forests of medieval Germany, a wise alchemist unveiled arcane secrets regarding the world of "Darklands." Unfortunately, too few people could read those secrets, so we published them in *Computer Gaming World*. Since the wise scholar has continued to disseminate the ingredients of successful role-playing, we have acted as the custodians of said knowledge and elected to publish another installment in our continuing effort to bring enlightenment to the "Darklands."

After further experimentation on unwilling dwarves and other nasties, we discovered that a longsword seems to be the best all-around weapon choice. It is fast and can deliver 20-30 points of damage when strong edge and deadly blade are applied. Medieval vivisection also indicates that long bows with Trueflight spell enhancements are also quite effective. In addition, adventurers who plan ahead might consider buying darts to improve the throwing skills of the party. In this way, when the crunch comes, potions may be delivered with lethal accuracy.

As parties can afford it, it is wise to train, train, train. One should pay particular attention to increasing religion and alchemy skills, since ineptitude can have incendiary consequences and townspeople tend to have little patience with parties that dissolve the inn and the like. The party's religious specialist may prove to be a good secondary alchemist for making the easy potions, such as Sunburst, Stone Tar and Essence of Grace, since that character will most likely have some brains.

Some consideration should be given to marching off to Nurnberg. Nurnberg is a wonderful city. Its shoppes have very nice hand weapons and armor (37 quality) and it also has a university. Universities are expensive places to train, but they teach Healing. Physicians teach Healing as well, but most of the time they are much less willing to give instruction. Since the higher the party's

local rep goes the less things cost, a move to Nurnberg will bear good fruit as the party increases their local rep.

Remember, when moving about in a city, never sneak out or stay in the ghetto areas, as it messes up the local rep. Always try to charm the guards or sneak into a city. Both of these will increase skills, and if one has success talking with the guards, the party's local rep will go up.

Virtue seems to be one of the things that new players have problems with. Once the party has some cash (say 10 to 15 florins),

start donating at village churches (that aren't devil worshippers!) and well-known churches in town. This will work better as the character's religious skill goes up. Escorting caravans and pilgrims also may give an increase. When the party has chain or better armor and has primary weapon skills in the 40s, start looking for evil lords. They live in the same sort of keeps that the Raubritters do. They can be found out by talking to the peasants. If the peasants are reticent, keep trying; eventually they will talk. It will be obvious from what they say whether all is well or not.

When confronting the problem of getting inside an evil noble's castle, the best way is to sneak inside. However, most of the time, the party member selected for this task will blow it and fall, thus alerting those inside. If the party has the money, bribe the guard. This way the party starts out on the ground level and should be able to

fully loot the castle before encountering the lord of the manor. Most of the time, if one of the party asks politely, a Raubritter will let the party in and feed them dinner, planning to kill them later. If the party retires to their rooms, they can sneak out and pillage at their leisure, facing only one or two of the Raubritter's men at a time instead of eight men at once and the Raubritter himself in plate. In either of these cases, if the party accidentally runs into the head honcho early, they will get booted out of the castle after



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killing him, and a message will say that the party has looted the castle. Lies, lies, lies! An industrious party can easily make 20 florins cash and items if allowed to work their way completely through a castle. If the party gets booted out early, simply make note of where that bad old boy is and load the game from the saved position players created prior to entering the castle. (Guild regulations require CGW readers to save prior to entering castles, dungeons, mines, caves and software stores with no exchange privileges.) The Raubritter will be in the same place, so that location may be left for last on the itinerary. Also, if the party runs



into him in a large room with several doors, some of the party can run to the doors and open them, giving the party more bodies to loot.

Mines are a decent source of loot and may provide a few items of quality. The party should have a good supply of potions of various sorts to ease the burden of fighting. If the party should stumble upon a chest that is trapped, consider long and hard whether the party's EOD fellow can dispose of the device. Water-walk will not work on a trapped chest. It will be the skill of the individual that will determine the outcome. The penalty for failure is an explosion that is triggered *each time* the disarm attempt fails on that device. This can quickly lead to tattered armor and tattered bodies as the dangerspace is quite large. After such an experience, one may be forced to withdraw. This may be done in some safety, as the mines do not reset for several weeks. What is killed will stay dead if one returns in a matter of days. I would not recommend an extended interruption, because part of the mines may change and some creatures may return to life.

When the party has defeated several Raubritters and evil lords and has been through one or more mines, it may be time to consider finding and wrecking a witches' sabbat. If the party cannot find a village that has turned to witchcraft, it is possible to find out the date of the next sabbat by praying to a saint at a sabbat location. These look like lopsided monasteries in grey stone. Once the date and place is known, the party will most likely have to hustle to get there in time.

Having superb quality horses and sticking to the roads will save lots of time. To use horses, give one to each party member. They cannot be equipped. And remember to give one to Hansie when he offers to help. I forgot to give one to Hansie myself. One of my friends pointed this out to me and suggested that I tie a rope to Hansie and drag him along behind. When encountering pilgrims on the way to a sabbat, giving them money may return a virtue increase and save the party valuable time. The party might also consider boats. There are few encounters on them and they make good time.

Defeating a sabbat will produce a raft of skill and virtue in-

creases. My party's virtue went up by six points at the conclusion alone. Victory over the witches will require about a dozen New Wind potions and several Sunbursts or Eyeburns.

Of course, the other means of improving the party's reputation is to slay a dragon. Basically, going after a dragon is an exercise in pain management. Many pitfalls await the player in the forms of mists and rains that tend to degrade the quality of all weapons and armor that the party is carrying and zap the party's store of alchemical components. Dragons are most easily found in forests during the winter. Those with a sound board who have left the music on will hear a prolonged gong note repeating when the party is near. One should expect to spend at least two months searching for one of these beasts. Fighting a dragon is easy. Use Firewall on every party member or pray to a flame-retardant saint when the party is on the battlefield. Throw something to discommode the beastie, walk forward and wail away. The party will be rewarded with 50 florins and a 100-point increase in fame.

Before the party enters the Templar's abode, be sure that it has a couple of dozen or more Stone Tar potions and an equal number of Sunbursts. Throwing a Sunburst or two at the same time a Stone Tar is tossed in the doorway slows down their reactions long enough for the Stone Tar to deploy. One can then set up the two best fighters in the doorway or hallway while the other characters find a good line of sight into the room and ply their bows. With the use of potions it is possible to kill a Templar with three bowshots. With Stone Tar blocking their path, the fighters in front can use their bows for one or two shots before having to engage in hand to hand. Any Templars that make it into melee should go down quickly since they have all probably gotten hit by at least one arrow.

In the large courtyard, one can station the three best shots of the party in one corner of the courtyard and have the other fellow run up to rooms on the opposite side and open doors. This usually attracts the attention of those within, but some bashful beasties

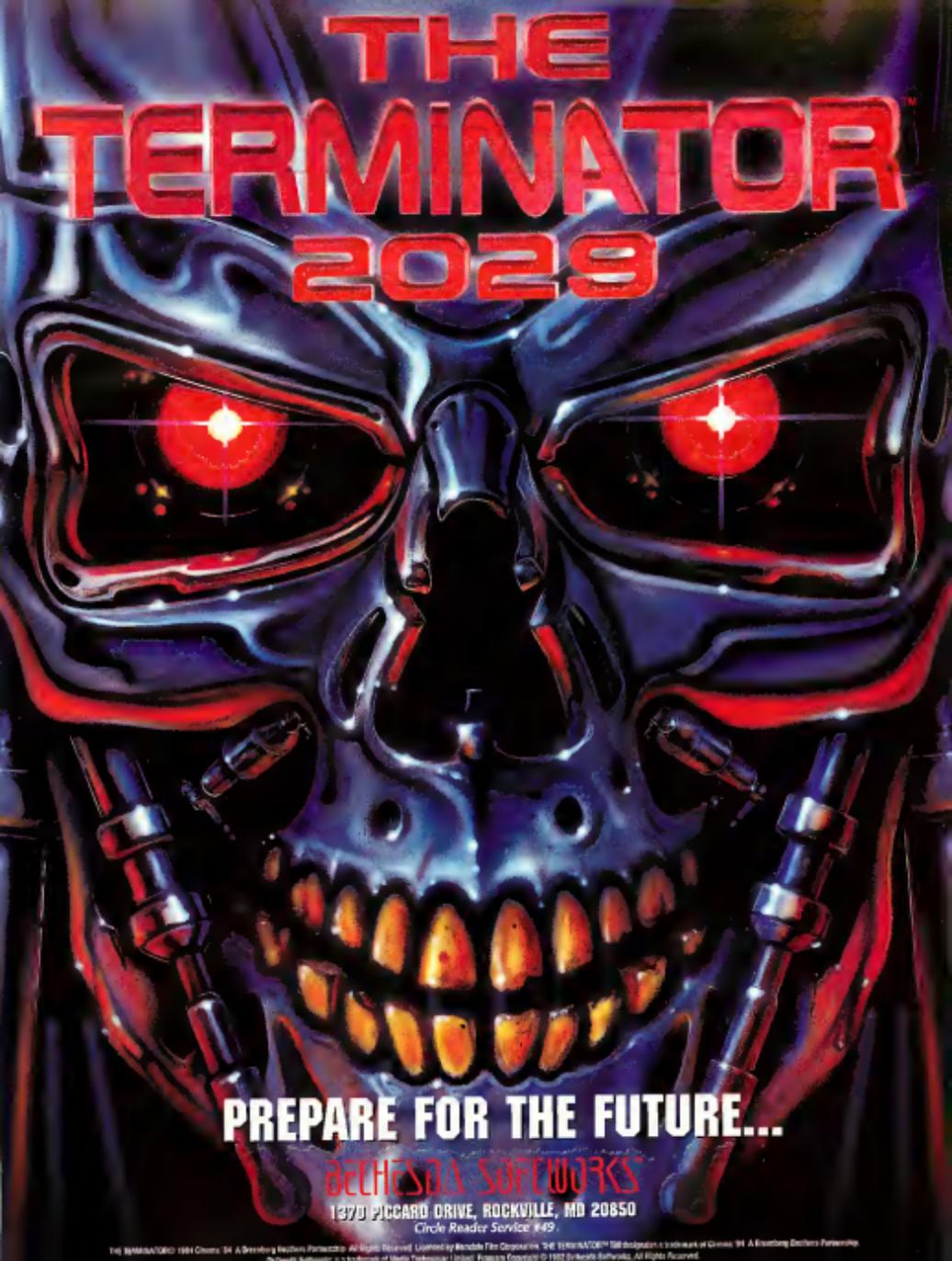


may have to be enticed to come out and play by darting into the room and shooting them to attract their notice. When they give chase, the track star of the party can run around, staying out of harm's way while the three stalwarts make colanders out of their armor.

While wandering the halls of the Templars and delving in the mines, the lead character should not wear his or her Sunday best as it may soon be ruined by the odd booby trap. One may always change into the good armor when fighting draws nigh.

We can only hope that dispensing such wisdom will enable characters to survive and succeed. Here's hoping our readers find the light of victory rather than a dark demise in *Darklands*. **eww**

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Megafortress: Operation Sledgehammer  
(Three-Sixty) - not pictured

## MS-DOS VGA:

Police Quest 1: In Pursuit of the Death Angel  
(Sierra)

## MS-Windows:

Tetris Classic (Spectrum HoloByte)

## Macintosh:

Ferrari Grand Prix (Bullseye Software)  
Harpoon Challenger Pak (Three-Sixty)  
The Dark Queen of Krynn (SSI) - not pictured

## SEGA Genesis:

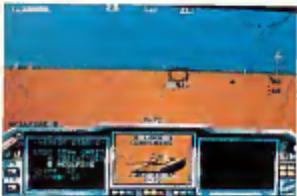
LHX Attack Chopper (Electronic Arts)  
Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?  
(Broderbund)

## Super Nintendo (SNES):

Rampart (Electronic Arts)  
Desert Striker (Electronic Arts)



Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?



LHX Attack Chopper



Tetris Classic for Windows



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Ferrari Grand Prix



Harpoon Challenger Pak



Police Quest



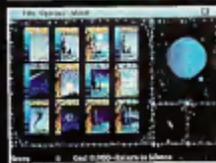
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by Charles Ardai

In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

—Tennyson

Ah, the spring. Season of renewal, of the Earth's rebirth, of effervescence and delight; of balmy breezes, hot beaches, cool beer, loud music; string bikinis, tanned bodies and well-oiled muscles; of adolescence in full, ribald flower. It is about this season that Alan Jay Lerner once wrote, "It's wild! It's gay! A blot in ev'ry way./The birds and bees with all of their vast/Amorous past/Gaze at the human race aghast"—and boy, was he right. Can anyone who has ever tuned in to the Spring Break reports on MTV or "A Current Affair" doubt that Messrs. Lerner and Tennyson knew whereof they spoke? In recent years, Spring Break has even eclipsed Mardi Gras to become the defining annual event of American hedonism.

TITLE	Spellcasting 301: Spring Break
SYSTEMS	IBM
PRICE	\$59.95
PRODUCTION	None
DESIGNER	Jason Meretzky
PUBLISHER	Legend Entertainment Cherry Hill, VA

Of course, it should be noted that Mr. Lerner put his words into the mouths of the Knights and Ladies of the Round Table in "Camelot" and that Mr. Tennyson wrote his paean to youthful excess way back in 1842. So, while the phenomenon of Spring Break is a decidedly modern one, it clearly has its buccinic antecedents throughout history. It is true that one can hardly imagine a proper Victorian lad cannonballing into a pool or Merlin the wizard hanging ten in the Fort Lauderdale surf—but then, not all Victorian lads were proper and not all wizards were Merlin. That springtime frolics know no cultural or temporal bounds—and that all wizards are not Merlin, by a long shot—is demonstrated most effectively in *Spellcasting 301: Spring Break*.

In this latest installment of Legend's *Spellcasting* series, the incomparable Steve Meretzky imagines what his nerdy, fledgling wizard, Ernie Eaglebeak, would do over one particular spring break from arcane, old Sorcerer U. What Ernie would do, according to Meretzky, is scope girls, drink beer, attend odd wrestling matches and wet t-shirt contests, body surf, run weird errands for a local Sorcerers' Guild, and lose money in a crooked casino (not to mention have dalliances with any number of willing young women).

With activities like these to adapt, it was probably inevitable that someone would eventually turn Spring Break into a computer game. We should be grateful that *this* adaptation has one of the best crews in the business at the helm. *Spellcasting 301* is vintage Meretzky, up there with his earlier classics such as *Planetfall*, *Sorcerer*, and *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*. Everyone else who



writes interactive fiction should take a good, hard look at what Meretzky is doing, because he is doing it right.

### Those Are The Breaks, Kid

After what Ernie went through in the first two games, the poor boy certainly deserves a break. (In case anyone has forgotten exactly what he did, the new game offers an irresistible recap to start things off. Irresistible mainly because it is delivered by a bodacious babe wearing a mortarboard, an open graduation gown, and very little else.)

A break is not what Ernie gets, however, mostly because he has to spend Spring Break defending his manhood and the manhood of his equally geeky frat brothers against the assaults of the manly men of rival frat Gotta Loda Yu. As in the movie "Revenge of the Nerds, Part Two: Nerds in Paradise," which this game occasionally resembles, the plot revolves around the battle between the amiable schluhs of the good-guy frat and the brain-dead, muscle-bound he-men of the bad-guy frat. The player's job is to use Ernie's ingenuity and magic to balance out the natural advantages the G.L.Y. brothers possess, such as good looks and muscles.

The story is divided into a number of separate challenges, with Ernie having to tackle a few every day. This plot device helps keep the story fresh and the action moving—as long as the player keeps doing something (time doesn't advance between moves), the story keeps progressing. This means that it is possible to do almost everything wrong and still get fairly far into the game. It is also possible to win the game without beating every individual challenge.

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Because of this "open" design, and the fact that Meretzky does not throw in some grave threat to humanity that Ernie has to thwart while on his break, the atmosphere of the game is relaxed. Appropriately enough, it has something of a vacation feel to it: the player samples the sights, chats with the natives, has a great time, and leaves feeling refreshed.

This is not to say that the game is easy. It's just not difficult in any of the irritating ways that adventure games often are. The parser is friendly (even when it doesn't understand a command one enters, it says so in a witty way); the game draws its own map; there are a number of well-thought-out dedicated interfaces for special activities (flying a magic carpet, getting around one's hotel, playing the casino games); and the puzzles demand reasoning on the part of the player, not just an easy association of ideas.

This last point is worth emphasizing, especially in light of the growing trend toward point-and-click adventures in which a player's possible actions are limited to a small number of verbs set out as buttons on the screen. Of necessity, these games typically require the player to do little more than pick up an object on one screen and deposit it in the appropriate location on another. (Some games even have a catch-all "Use" command, but it is the computer that figures out what "Use" means in any given situation, not the player.)

In *Spellcasting 301*, one enters commands in plain English and must come up with detailed, step-by-step solutions to the game's intricate puzzles. Except in one instance (which is clearly a parody of similar scenes in other games), there are no quests doled out along the lines of, "Young man, I will give you the sword you seek, but only once you have brought me the Lost Lariat of Laredo." Here, instead, each situation embodies a unique set of obstacles, subtly presented, which can only be overcome through the use of one or more of the objects and spells Ernie has collected along the way.

The spells, in particular, are interesting because each is, in effect, an additional verb: one casts a spell by typing in its name followed by the name of the object on which the spell is meant to act, exactly the same way one "invokes" a verb. This means that the player not only has a wide range of English verbs to choose from outside of the usual, boring "Push," "Open," "Take," and so forth, but a wide range of exotic verbs as well. There's "Spunj," for instance, which means "Enlarge tree roots" and "Voy," which means "Create dungarees." Adding to the fun is a spell which mutates other spells (effectively doubling the number of spells in the game) and the fact that spells can be cast on themselves. The result is that *Spellcasting 301* is command-rich. There are a lot of different things one can do, and one can do them in such a large set of locations that the game really succeeds in doing what only the best interactive fiction does — creating the sense that one is exploring a roomy, well-simulated alternate reality.

Capping things off is a large dose of Meretzky's devious and imitable wordplay. (Who will ever forget the "T extractor" in Leather Goddesses that turned a rabbit into a rabbit?) Puns and gags enliven all the puzzles and are central to one or two of the best.

Picture, for instance, what Meretzky would want done with the stuffier Ernie finds in a hardware store. Picture what solution he'd devise for winning in a casino where the house is crooked. Go ahead, Picture.

## Too Darn Hot

Speaking of pictures, *Spellcasting 301* has an advantage over older Meretzky hits in that it is not a pure text game. Though the text is delicious, the graphics here are half the fun. All the *Spellcasting* games have featured sexy scenes, but this installment really goes over the top (becoming "topless?"), with few locations lacking in specimens of feminine pulchritude. There are even a handful of full-screen digitized images of beach bunnies in pin-up poses and bikinis which would do credit to any edition of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. While there is nothing more raunchy than might be seen on, say, "The Benny Hill Show," that still leaves plenty of ground to be covered (or uncovered, as the case may be).

Two display modes are available. In "Nice" mode, black censorship bars cover particularly risqué portions of the graphic window. In "Naughty" mode, anything goes. The graphics are sometimes stunning and sometimes just okay, sometimes erotic and sometimes not, and there is very little outright nudity. Players apt to be offended by the next closest thing, or by the relentless (though all-in-fun) portrayal of women as sex objects, should think carefully before booting this one up.

Be prepared that the Naughty mode also features some fairly salty dialogue, including one memorable catfight after an oil wrestling match, and a good deal of matter that the more prudish among us might find objectionable. At one party, for example,

Ernie's frat brothers pass around a plate of magic mushrooms (though in this game, who knows, maybe they really are magic mushrooms). In another scene, a hundred men line up for a go at insatiable nymphomaniac Hillary Tickingclock (you might say Hillary swings like a pendulum). When Ernie's turn comes, he can take the encounter as far as he wants, to the accompaniment of digitized heavy breathing on the soundtrack. The parser understands every obscenity I could think of (and I'm from New York), responding appropriately to one's explicit instructions and requests.

My position on the issue of adult content such as the above is one of indulgence, both in the sense that I enjoyed indulging in the shameless, bawdy material myself and in the sense that I think those who don't enjoy it should at least indulge those who do. It is a harmless enough pleasure; and no one who sees this game in a store, with its cover painting of a nearly naked spring breaker, could possibly mistake it for the latest addition to the *Carmen Sandiego* line. Also, while Meretzky is well on his way to being a dirty old man, he is no pornographer. More explicit material abounds at any newsstand. Still, the *emtpor* should get his *caveat* and I feel obliged to make this point clearly: gamers should not buy this game if they would not want sexual matter on their hard drives. (Anyone who snickered after reading the preceding sentence should have no problem with the game.)





## Spring Break Errs

Even Homer nods, or so the saying goes, and as talented as he is, Steve Meretzky is no Homer. The game does have a handful of flaws which, if they had been corrected, would have made playing *Spellcasting 301* an even more enjoyable experience.

The most striking flaw is a technical one: if one is impatient with the game, it crashes. Specifically, if one tries to alter one's bet when playing Blockjock after typing "Play Blockjock" but before the special Blockjock screen comes up, the computer goes haywire, beeping endlessly until rebooted. Also, if one tries to sell a second item at the pawn shop before the first sale has been fully processed, the result is an on-screen memory dump followed by the player getting kicked out of the program. Fortunately, there is a simple way to avoid these bugs: slow down a little and wait until a command is requested before typing one in.

More trivial, but also fixable, are vocabulary quirks such as the fact that when trying to heave a sack of gold off a flying carpet the player can say "Throw sack" or "Throw bag," but not "Throw gold." Then, there are occasional throwbacks to the old days of adventure gaming which I wish would be thrown back: if I never again see questions of the form, "Which door do you mean, the front door, the back door, or the refrigerator door?" (when the best choice is obvious) and comments such as "You are not holding your spellbook" (when it is stashed in a valise one is carrying), it will be too soon.

Other gripes could be raised as well, but these are mostly matters

of taste. For instance, there is a bit too much attention given to exactly how much money Ernie has at any given time and how many items he is carrying for my taste. If I had written the game, I would have removed all instances of the response "You are holding too much to pick that up," because it serves no useful function.

For the most part, though, gameplay is extremely smooth. The game understands a lot of synonyms, many puzzles have multiple solutions, and the plot is structured with enough care to make it almost impossible for the player to slip accidentally into a no-win situation. In the 30-or-so hours it will take the average player to finish the game, problems will crop up only sporadically, maybe three or four times in all. The rest of the time, *Spellcasting 301: Spring Break* offers great entertainment and nothing but.

There is more creativity and cleverness evident in a typical sequence of *Spellcasting 301* than there is in some entire games; when you play this game, you are constantly aware that you are in the hands of a master. The game may not have much about it that is socially redeeming, but as low comedy goes, it is peerless. And now that Benny Hill is gone, we need Steve Meretzky more than ever.

It comes down to this: I can think of no better way to while away some cold winter nights than with this sexy, funny, nutty little treasure of a game. Or, at least, none that could be printed in a family magazine. **CGW**



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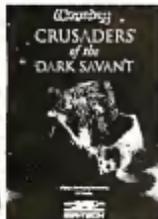
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## Long Time Passing

I would like to congratulate you and your staff on your 100th issue. It is remarkable considering the tremendous changes that have taken place since your magazine was established in 1981.

I picked up a copy of your first issue in some forgotten computer store in Costa Mesa in December of 1981 — I subscribed without hesitation and my subscription has run without interruption for 10 years. I am not sure how many of us there are, but I have every issue, 1.1 through 100.

However, I have not collected them for sake of collection alone. I would like to compliment you by stating without reservation that I enjoyed every issue.

Although I am a wargamer at heart, growing up with Avalon Hill boardgames in the mid-late '60s, I want to let you know that I enjoy reading about all the various facets of the industry. I don't play the role-playing, sports or arcade games, but still enjoy reading the reviews and articles because I want to know what direction the industry is heading.

I entered the computer age partially due to the vision that someday I could sit down and play *Third Reich* without having to coerce an unwilling friend, travel umpteen miles through rural Arizona to find another gamer, or endure the necessary delays of PBM. I have owned and enjoyed an Atari 800, an Amiga 1000 and currently own a 386/25 clone. I am now laying down the specifications for my next generation of computer. Although it will be used for business purposes on my Arabian horse breeding farm, I will also ensure that it has the state of the art technology to keep me entertained. After all, what is the fun of growing older if you can't afford to indulge yourself now and then. Even if I get less and less time to game on the computer, I can at least make it "quality" time!

Although, the research is incomplete, I will generally be looking at a 486/33 local bus with 32-bit hard drive controller and video card. A 16-bit sound card to tie into my stereo system at 100 watts/channel. An oversized monitor. CD-ROM to position myself for future advances in that technology. 8 MB RAM, 256K cache, 340 MB hard drive, etc.

With all of the advances in computer technology, it is hard to climb to the crest of the technological wave and ride it very far

without having the wave pass by quickly. But for a brief moment in time ...

One article I have not seen in 100 issues was how each of your gaming staff would purchase a computer given a reasonable amount of money, and what features they would insist on and why. Would M. Evan Brooks insist on the same speed as Scorpio? Would Johnny Wilson buy the same sound card as Russell Sipe?

While on the subject of sound cards, a few years ago, you published an article on picking the "right" sound card. With the technological changes, is it time for an update?

It was interesting to re-read Chris Crawford's article in Volume 1.1 to see how clearly he could see through time. I hope to be able to write you a letter after your 200th issue with the same enjoyment it gives me to write this one.

Bruce Johnson  
Buckeye, AZ

*The truth is that Scorpio is faster than Evan (just kidding Scorp, I was talking about your machine, could you put down that axe? Please? Preferably somewhere besides in my head). Actually, Evan upgraded to his present 386 prior to Scorpio's upgrade, but Scorpio increased her processor speed very recently. Wargames do not usually require as much processing power as graphic adventures and CRPGs, but Evan also likes simulations and they require the faster processors. Evan is looking to upgrade. Also, while Johnny and Russell both like the Roland, Johnny's too cheap to buy one. As for the sound card article, we had intended to publish one in this issue. Unfortunately, we are still waiting for several manufacturers to release some of the cards we were getting excited about. We'll have to give you the same answer they give us, our next sound card article will be RSN (Real Soon Now).*

## Bomber, Man!

In the October, 1992 article by Mr. Brooks, "Carrier Strike: A Campaign Replay II," he laments that the Japanese dive bombers can only deliver a 250 lb. bomb (as opposed to the American 1000 pounder). It should be noted that in the game it is a 250 kilogram bomb (one kilogram = 2.2046 pounds), so the bombs he laments are equivalent to 551.15 pounds.

Keith Machren  
Tigard, OR

*Gee, no wonder his deck crew had hernias.*

## Hundred Years Score

The HYW review in *CGW* #100 was nicely done, but I have a few comments on some of the erroneous statements made.

Ken went on about the value of the ducat and the cost of things in the game. Apparently he missed the item in the documentation (specifically the glossary) that stated:

"Ducat — A currency invented for this game because of the multiplicity of different currencies used during the period. One English Pound is worth 600 Ducats, one French Livre is worth 132 Ducats. All prices in the game are expressed in terms of Ducats (which, coincidentally, are also worth one dollar US (1992 period). A common unit of currency in the game is the kDucat (1,000 Ducats)."

AI [Nof] and I really dissected the medieval economy, which was possible because they kept a lot of financial records during the period and used vellum (which does not rot) rather than paper. We built models for individual farmers as well as noble house-

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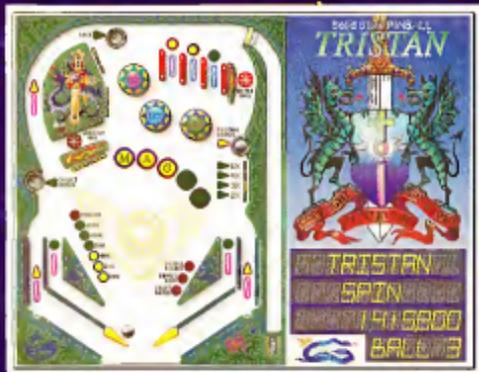
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holds. A lot of that is transparent to the players, but the fact remains that mercenaries were expensive and there was no way of getting around it and still remaining historical.

He also mentioned how long it took to do things. He mentioned this in the round table (forum) and other players were astounded that it took him so long. I played a large position in the alpha test (the Count of Armagnac) and had 16 fiefs to manage, plus I was running around with an army most of the time. I kept track of how long it took me to take care of business each day and it averaged 20-30 minutes. Not only that, but I was tinkering with my fiefs to test new routines and seducing every female in sight to test the pregnancy routines. He was told that he probably had a slow node and there was nothing the HYW crew could do about that. The game was designed to be cheap to play (at least, compared to the other on-line games). We only have a few players who are spending \$100 per month and many who are spending less than \$50. We have constantly tweaked the menus (and even added an "expert" mode) to cut down on time needed to do things. Ken was the only player to make a big stink about this and we never could figure out what his problem was.

As for there being too much in the game, you don't expect grognards to come on-line and be happy with electronic Chutes and Ladders? The game is modular, you don't have to play every aspect of it in order to play. You don't even have to manage your fiefs (some players don't), but rather hire themselves out as hired swords or live off plunder. Some of the non-grognard types pay more attention to the social aspects of the game. Since email is free on GENie, they spend most of their time "in the game" at no charge by writing a lot of email. Even the round table can be very cheap if you download and reply to messages off-line (particularly, if using GENie's *Aladdin* communications program).

Johnny questioned the play balance in the game. The beta game has been going for over two months and neither side shows any sign of imminent victory. He mentioned the inattentive French king, but didn't mention that several of the major French nobles, in effect, deposed the king a few weeks into the game. In the beta game, the well-organized French are currently raiding and pillaging throughout England (using a historically accurate scheme I cannot divulge at the moment, as the English could make use of such information...).

In another area, Johnny wondered why all his pillaging and storming fiefs did not increase his stature. The fact is, those two activities decrease stature. He didn't look at the Stature list to see those actions that will increase Stature (taking a keep through negotiation, winning pitched battles, etc.) The same thing is true about the use of many skills. The beta does point out that not all skills are implemented yet, but the system for generating them is. About half the skills were live during beta and, every week or so, a new one would kick in and an announcement would be made.

Other than the above, it was a nice review.

James F. Dunnigan  
New York City, NY

*Would you believe we only said those things so we could list Jim Dunnigan as a contributor to CGW? The sneak preview (we try not to review games until they are fully implemented) was designed to let readers get a glimpse of a work in progress. If we waited to cover the game until it was finished, a lot of gamers would miss out on a fascinating experience. Note that Johnny Wilson also disagreed with St. Andre about the deacets during the latter portion of the article in question ("If he thinks the game is complicated*

*now, just imagine how it would be with crude auctions at border marketplaces for foreign exchange and having to deal with all sorts of traveling moneychangers" — p. 149). Also, Johnny Wilson insists that the file he downloaded only had definitions of characteristics (pages and pages of them) and nothing about how to raise or lower them. You didn't expect him to download more than one file did you? You think he has enough room on his cheap little hard drive for all your documentation?<grin>*

## GOY Not So Polloi

You gave Sid Meier the Game of the Year award again. It took guts to recognize brilliance. It would have been easy (in the cigar smoke filled back rooms) to say, "Well, we already gave this guy Game of the Year awards, let someone else have it for a change (spread it around so to speak)." You didn't. My hat's off to you! Putting my hat back on, can't you make the awards ceremonies longer and more detailed? Also, announce the month before that the awards are coming. It's a big deal!

Steve Gatewood  
Brownsville, TX

*What guts? Our readers would have destroyed Civilization as we know it if we hadn't. If you thought the L.A. riots were something, imagine what would have happened if we had denied Sid on this one. By the way, Sid also has the most titles of any designer in the CGW Hall of Fame.*

## Duty Full Observation

I am in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany. If it wasn't for CGW, I wouldn't have a clue to what's going on in the gaming world. Thank you for being there for US so far away from home. Love those reviews and previews.

Michael Davila  
45th Med Co (AA)

*We think it's fair enough. You folks wear fatigues, these massive issues are giving us editorial fatigue.*

## What's New in a CPU?

I'm just a guy who reads your magazine and doesn't even own a computer. Could you tell me how to find out what would be the best computer investment for me. I need something that plays all the fantastic games in your magazine and, at the same time, can put up with those business programs nobody I know ever uses. Money is an object, but I might win the lottery.

By the way, your magazine makes excellent written entertainment!

Darin Kalpakoff  
Bellflower, CA

*We think it would be a mistake to get anything less than a 386 clone with, at least, a clock speed of 33 mhz. If possible, get a 486 clone with a faster speed. Get four megabytes of RAM and at least 100 MB on your hard disk. If you've never dealt with a C> prompt before, do yourself a favor and put Windows on the machine as your primary interface. If you're comfortable with the same DOS that you see on your friends' machines, go with DOS 5.0. Get a mouse, if you can afford it, and a sound card that is either AdLib or Soundblaster compatible. If you do win the lottery, throw in a CD-ROM, too. That's the basic game machine for today's games.*



## The Darker Half

First, congratulations on *Computer Gaming World's* 100th issue. Your magazine is a continuing force in our industry and you all are to be commended.

Next topic: THE HORROR-ible review of *The Dark Half* in your November issue. We greatly appreciate publicity from reviews of our products, respect the opinions expressed and try to learn from reviewers' remarks. However, in the case of Charles Ardai's review of our graphic adventure, *The Dark Half*, we believe he went too far in his criticism.

We sent a beta version to you for pre-release analysis. The accompanying letter stated that it was only a beta version and that there were bugs in the program. Apparently, Mr. Ardai used this beta version in writing his article. Except for the "double" Thad in one screen, after the save/restore menu is used at the restaurant (which is being fixed), none of the bugs mentioned are in the master version of the program. Mr. Ardai spent an inordinate amount of space in his article citing bugs that do not exist in the final product.

Of even greater concern is Mr. Ardai's complaint about the changes from the novel's storyline. Our license is for the Orion movie based upon Stephen King's novel so we were obligated to follow the Hollywood script.

Yes, in retrospect, there are changes we would like to incorporate into *The Dark Half*, but as our first entry into the graphic adventure genre, we believe that we have delivered a solid game faithful to the King tradition. Isn't it also a tradition of die-hard King fans

that they despise any adaptation of his work? Could this be at least a partial motivation for Mr. Ardai's scathing comments?

Fortunately, there are lots of other King fans who have purchased the program and are enjoying it. We only hope that Mr. Ardai's zealous remarks will not discourage others from giving it a try.

Angie Niehoff  
Director of Marketing, IntraCorp, Inc.

*Why, yes. It is a tradition of die-hard Stephen King fans to despise any adaptation of his work. It also seems to be a tradition of software publishers to object to any of Ardai's reviews (grin). Maybe the fact that Charles (as editor of the Great Tales of Madness and the Macabre anthology from Galahad Books) likes King well enough to have purchased the most non-King-like King short story ever should have disqualified him from writing this review. In all honesty, however, we thought his knowledge of King would provide a wonderful perspective from which to view The Dark Half.*

*Of more concern to us, however, from your remarks is the fact that you believe that the review was based on a beta version. Unless the beta version came in a box with the actual shrink wrap on it, Charles did not review the beta. It is our policy to only sneak preview beta versions (in which case we give the benefit of the doubt to such bugs) and to review only released versions of the game.*

*We are glad that there are people who are enjoying the game and realize that not everyone is the same type of literary purist that we consider Charles Ardai to be. Of course, what would one expect from a published fiction writer in both the science-fiction and mystery genres? caw*

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Circle Reader Service #67

# Channeling in Kulthea

## GENIE's GemStone III

by Johnny L. Wilson



Things are looking better in Kellfour's Landing — considerably better. Even though the red dragon high atop Iorak's Reach seems to be awakening from his Lool the Enchanter induced sleep; even though there are hints that indicate there may be a cult of dragon worshippers nearby; even though the unlife threatens to permeate the kingdom with undead once again; and even though the dwarven messenger has prophesied that there are only 13 days before "THE END," things are looking better. In fact, things are looking better all over Kulthea since the last time I ventured there.

Kulthea is the realm, the cyburb, that one visits on GENIE after typing "m930" or "Gemstone" from any prompt. The last time I entered Kulthea, I was filled to brim with high expectations. I had undergone a rigorous character creation (using the *RoleMaster* "pen and paper" method published by *Iron Crown Enterprises*) and created a bard character. I had tried to read the documentation as it scrolled down the screen (rather than cogently printing it out or copying it to disk for a later print out) and entered the realm. As *CGW #79* (p. 53) recounts, I could not get shopkeepers to talk to me; I could not attract the attention of experienced adventurers to help me; I could not get the universe (i.e. the parser) to understand me; I could not examine items which were present in the rooms I explored; and I left with very atypical, but hostile feelings toward the game. I noted that the documentation was available, but pointed out that the "meter" was running while it was being downloaded and many gamers would not take the time to get into it. I suggested that they needed some kind of on-line help.

It was a very frustrating commentary to write. Since I didn't really get into the game very much, I could not cull the article a review, but I had promised readers and game designers alike that there would be an article on *GemStone* in that issue. I had heard of the marvelous bard contests, the special quests and the *Info-com*-style puzzles, but I was able to experience none of it. I knew there must be some good experiences there, because the room descriptions were the most well-written I had ever encountered in a text adventure. Still, good descriptions don't accomplish very much if one cannot get into the action.

Fortunately, as good is occasionally born out of the bad and dawn regularly breaks forth from the dark, *Sinutronics* (designers of the game) were frustrated about my experience (or lack thereof) and did some redesign. They urged me to return to the environs of Kulthea. "We heard you," they told me.

I am glad that they did. This time, my sojourn in Kulthea was a rewarding experience. Oh, my character was simply along for the ride with a bunch of more powerful adventurers, but what a ride it was. First, by printing out the documentation, I discovered that I

needed to type the command, "Order," to bargain with the merchants. The command opened up an entirely new menu. Yet, what would have happened if I had acted as before and simply perused (rather than read) the documentation? An experienced character or one of the design team's NPCs would have come along and explained everything, even as I observed occurring with other novices on my very first foray into the land.

Plus, I was approached, during a time when I was trying to get my bearings, by either a more experienced adventurer or a member of the design team in NPC guise. The character politely informed me that he could see I was exploring and hesitated to bother me, but if I needed any help, to type the "Assist" command. The "Assist" command is a wonderful addition to the command list which enables novice players to get a quick instruction about the parser or important locations. It is essentially an on-line hint service with a heart. I particularly liked the unobtrusive way I was informed about the command. That is the friendly touch of humanity I needed to feel during my first venture.

On that last sojourn, I lamented the fact that I had created a bard character and could not find a place to perform. This time, I was matched to a master bard. After some preliminary training, he took me to a small tavern and showed me the "Sing" command. With that command, bards can type long verses with each phrase separated by a semicolon. For example:

*Sing She must have been pretty, her destiny starred; Before her complexion was marred; Here's a warning to orcs, trolls and kobolds and fiends; To beware of fair Megan the Scarred.*

Then, the program will print out the verse to read:

*She must have been pretty, her destiny starred,  
Before her complexion was marred,  
Here's a warning to orcs, trolls and kobolds and fiends,  
To beware of fair Megan the Scarred.*  
(For masochists, the full text of the song is printed in a sidebar within this article.)

Another welcome sight I observed during this peregrination was that experienced characters were taking novice adventurers on training expeditions. One particularly important aspect of training was the explanation of "Parry Tag." In the *GemStone* (*RoleMaster*) combat system, characters can rob Peter to pay Paul in order to modify either their offensive or defensive stances. As in many systems, characters are given combat bonuses based on attributes, superior weapons, skill ratings and magical enhancements. There are bonuses for offense (OB) and defense (DB) which are, in turn, affected by adverse conditions (e.g. being knocked down, stunned, or seriously injured). The nice touch is that gamers can set their



# Review

Parry Percentage from 0% (absolutely no protection/berserk mode) to 100% (super cautious).

In what the veterans call "Parry Tag," an adventurer sets the Parry Percentage to 100% and ventures into a part of the forest where the vicious furred torkaans reside. When the torkaan tries to bite the character, usually failing because of the added defense, there is a time lag before the beastie can attack again (the game calls this round time). If the player adjusts his/her Parry Percentage to 0% and types ATT TOR (all commands can be abbreviated to their first three letters) fast enough (most experienced players create macros for combat commands), there is a good chance of stunning the torkaan before it can renew the attack. By bouncing between 100% and 0%, the player gets the best of all possible worlds.

Thanks to Llorien, my master bard mentor, I was actually able to encounter some of the Infocom-style puzzles. One was a diabolical set of runes in which one served as a cipher and stone steps were raised or lowered according to a tricky little formula. Even Infocom veterans are liable to spend a while trying various systems with that one. Another was a variation on the original Zork's puzzle with the dam. This time, we needed the water from the dam to work the paddlewheel to power our conveyance. As lousy as I am at solving puzzles, I managed to solve this one ahead of my colleagues. Finally, we encountered the most unique variation on a maze. This time, the twisty little passages all looked alike, but they were filled with rushing water and swept us down the stream. We could lean forward, left, right or back to adjust speed and direction. It was the only time I've really enjoyed a maze puzzle, even though it took entirely too long for me to get through it.

So, the upshot of my experience is that *Gemstone III* is no longer a "Gem in the Rough" as I called it in that earlier opinion column. If one can match up with the right parties (and *Simutronics* is making a spectacular effort to help gamers do so), the classic-style

puzzles are there and the possibilities for using one's skills are realistic. There is more to this on-line CRPG than combat. Indeed, I cannot wait for the next bard concert. I want to regale listeners with some of my exploits (I'm a bard. It's my job to have an ego!).

*GemStone III* is available to all GEMe users and costs \$6.00 per hour. It is one of the most popular games on the service and, at last, I know why. **eww**

### *Megan the Scared*

*She is light on her feet, on a path or the street,  
And she turns torkaans into mixed meat.  
And herelian blood she will turn into mud  
For she kills without missing a beat.*

### Chorus:

*Oh, she must have been pretty, her destiny starred,  
Before her complexion was marred,  
Here's a warning to you, trolls and goblins and fiends,  
To beware of fair Megan the Scared,  
She don't run unless through in the clank,  
And when dragons dash swoop, Megan serves dragon soup.  
For dealing with Megan's too much!*

### Chorus:

*So, you are why I love her and I can't resist,  
Though I know I am taking a risk,  
If she found me unfaithful, she'd call me ungrateful  
And rip out my heart with her fist.*

### Modified Chorus:

*Oh, she must have been pretty, her destiny starred,  
Before her complexion was marred,  
Here's a warning to you, trolls and mixers and fiends  
To beware of fair Megan the Scared.*

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## Computer Gaming World's



**W**elcome to the Fifth Annual Computer Gaming World Top Ad Awards. Every January we ask the most discerning gamers in the computer gaming world (i.e. our readers) to pick the best computer game ads.

Last year's full page winner, *Strategic Simulations* (with their *Eye of the Beholder II "Bigger... Better... Meaner Than Ever"* ad) faces some tough competition. The undead cast from last year's ad were the first to record repeat victories in the CGW Top Ad awards. You see, those lovable undead fellows were featured in the prior year's winner as well. However, the competition this year is better, meaner, louder, funnier, more colorful and, in some cases, sexier than ever. All computer gamedom awaits to see what the readers of the premier computer game magazine declare to be the best ads in this year's contest.

As always, we ask you to determine the best ads. On the CGW Poll post card is this

year's ballot. Remember you are judging the ad, not the game. Here are the rules.

### THE RULES

1. Use the Ballot Section of this month's Reader Input Device card located opposite page 16, or a facsimile thereof, to cast your votes.
2. In the "Full Page and Spreads" category, vote for three different full-page and/or two-page spread ads.
3. A two-page spread ad would be an ad that appears on adjoining and facing left- and right-hand pages and is one continuous advertisement. A two-page spread ad counts as a single ad for voting purposes.
4. Select a first place, a second place, and a third place ad.
5. In the "Fractional Page" category, vote for three different ads. These are ads which are less than a full page in size.
6. On the ballot, list the company names and page numbers of the ads you are voting for. For example: to place a first place vote for Acme Company's one-half page ad on page 345, write "Acme pg. 345" on the line for first place in the fractional ad column.
7. The criteria for evaluation are very simple: consider the graphics, copy, and overall impact of the ad.
8. The votes will be weighted, added and then averaged.
9. The reader that comes closest to picking the final correct order of winners will win \$250.00 cash and a lifetime subscription to *Computer Gaming World*.
10. Entries must be postmarked by February 1, 1993. No purchase is necessary. Winners will be notified by mail. **enw**





I don't really think I look anything at all like a burglar, even with the bag on. Yet, it didn't matter where I waited in the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art, the ubiquitous security guards were watching my every move. I wanted to point at that empty space where the Matisse exhibit (that had been loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art) usually rested and tell them I wasn't responsible. They kept looking at me as though I were going to bag a Degas. I know my head is supposed to be big, but the bag still won't hold one of those ballet dancer paintings I've always wanted.

I turned the corner and came face-to-face with one of the ugliest monstrosities I have ever seen. I mean, I don't understand these off-white canvases with one big black stripe on them. Give me Surrealism, Pointilism or Impressionism, but don't give me this. Of course, I could almost say the same thing about RAW Entertainment's upcoming experiment. It seems they are going to put out a platform-style arcade game on the Amiga, IBM and (believe it or not) C-64. The game was probably named after the canvas I had just seen, *Ugh!* Anyway, that's the way that company is. Just when you think you've got them pegged, they try something else.

Needless to say, the camouflage green smudge on the canvas next to it didn't offer much more encouragement. It did serve to provide a mental reminder that Steve Jackson Games' *Awful Green Things From Outer Space* is being converted into a computer game. It seems that QQP has retained a developer to program the conversion and it should come out sometime in '93. I know QQP is working to improve their graphics, but as I looked at yet another canvas I didn't appreciate. I sure hoped they weren't going to retain the artist responsible for that piece of art.

Instead of hanging around in an alcove where I wasn't impressed, I walked over to where I was supposed to meet a source. I hoped she was going to tell me about Nintendo's new raster chip that fits right into the cartridge and makes it possible to do vector graphics, terraced shading and all that stuff you couldn't do on SNES before. Maybe she'd even tell me if Activision plans to use those chips in *MechWarrior II*. It'd could take the action from the newest BattleTech Centers and offer graphics significantly better

## The Artful Bagman

by Andy Pollack

than the ones in their upcoming *MechWarrior*, I could be in absolute heaven.

As I was thinking, I stopped in front of the 30 soup can paintings by Andy Warhol and tried to figure out their significance. It was an incredible amount of work to be positioned in front of my unappreciative eyes. Then again, there were plenty of people who really liked his visual statement that common items could be elevated to art. Maybe that's why so many construction set products sold in the computer game world. Even though gamers might spend months of their lives creating scenarios that only a few friends would play, they got a chance to make their own personal statements. "It's like SSI's *Unlimited Adventures*, the gold box construction set I had written about in an earlier column," I thought. "They're giving gamers the chance to make masterpiece CRPGs from the heart."

Then I was looking at another masterpiece. She was dressed in white like the protagonist in one of those gothic romances and that served to emphasize her ebony black eyes and rich, full lips. In fact, she looked a lot like a mature version of Winona Ryder and she mesmerized me just like a vampiress in Sony Imagesoft's new multimedia *Dracula* game, to be published for multimedia platforms. It's supposed to use actual footage from the Francis Ford Coppola film and I was anxious to see both. As usual, though, I didn't expect to see the game until at least six months after the movie was to open.

We greeted each other with our traditional kiss and she turned to look at the soup cans. "So, how do I look?" she asked with that breathless way she has of speaking out the side of her mouth. I told her that she looked like something out of a gothic novel and she said that was appropriate. She had wanted to tell me about Strategic Simulations, Inc.'s *Vell of Darkness*. It's a new CRPG from the makers of *The Summoning*. The player's character is a WWII pilot who gets shot down over the Transylvania Alps. Naturally, the character encounters some pretty strange creatures.

"Well," I countered, "if they encounter anyone who looks like you, O undead where is thy sting?"

She laughed graciously and I gave her the line about how she ought to be in pictures. "Any particular ones?" she asked. "After all,

I just saw some of the most beautiful Renoir portraits upstairs."

"He couldn't do you justice," I flattered, although I couldn't think of a time I had ever seen a Renoir without wondering how he had captured so much of the vivaciousness in every model's face, "and I didn't mean you should be in paintings. I meant you should be in film." I told her that I had just visited the set where Activision was filming footage for *Return to Zork* and was very impressed. They hadn't cast Winona Ryder, but they had cast Jason Hervey (Wayne on "The Wonder Years"), Ernie Lively (Cooper from "Dukes of Hazzard") and Robyn Lively (who appeared on "Twin Peaks") in the roles of troll, adventurer and fairy, respectively.

"You're so sweet!" she responded. (Well, actually, she said that I was so full of something that started with the same syllable as what my meddling, censoring editor put into this column.) "Actually, I wasn't quite sure where we should meet for this month's rumors," she told me. "We could have met at the Natural History Museum and I could have told you about Sega's upcoming *Jaws-ite Park* title. It's supposed to be multimedia, but it's very hush-hush. We could even have met at the Air & Space Museum and talked about Microsoft's *Flight Simulator 5*. Of course, they haven't even announced either one of them and I don't have the faintest idea when to expect them to be released, but I knew you'd be interested.

"Interested?" I shouted vigorously enough that two security guards immediately began to converge on our position. "Why, I'd let you bite my neck for those kinds of rumors!"

"Sorry," she laughed as the guards drew nearer. "I'm afraid I'd get paper cuts." One of the guards asked us to keep our voices down and, as they departed, she giggled. "You should have seen your face! I thought you were going to make like *Tearaway Thomas* and zip up those stairs faster than Sonic."

"*Tearaway Thomas*?" I asked.

"Sure," she answered, "it's from RAW Entertainment and it's like Aceolade's SNES game, *Busy in Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind* or Sega's *Sonic the Hedgehog*, only it's going to be on the Amiga."

Then, she left me standing beside the soup cans as she began to glide up the stairs faster than, well, Sonic, Bubby or Thomas. Was it something I said? **RAW**

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# COMPUTER WARGAMING WORLD

"I Came, I Played, I Conquered"



Art by Rodger MacGowan; Copyright 1992

## Broadsides & Gripeshot

**SSG'S ROGER KEATING  
TELLS ALL!  
(well, some...)**

*Interview by Alan Enrich*

**CGW:** Welcome to *CGW*, Roger. It's a long way from Sydney to here. We're all glad that you stopped by while you were sightseeing in Southern California.

**RK:** It's always good to stop off at *CGW*. After spending the last six months working seven days a week on *Carriers at War I* I thought I needed a break and what better place than here?

**CGW:** Right now, there's a great deal of excitement and anticipation about the *Carriers at War Creation Kit*. Can you tell us, specifically, what it will do?

**RK:** The *Creation Kit* is basically made up of the three separate sections that are needed to make a *CAW* scenario. First, the data section allows you to enter all the fixed forces in the game such as ships, planes, carriers, etc. The second section allows you to type in the messages about the forces in the game. Each ship in *Carriers* carries with it a breakdown of its armament, complement and a brief history (mostly where it was sunk or when it was broken up).

The last and, to me, the most interesting section is *WarRoom*, the place where the AI is added to a scenario. The intelligence for any scenario is carried in a kit which allows the shifting and changing of forces within the scenario data, and any number of various plans to go out and destroy the opponent. Two friends could design each side separately and then merge them to see which will win in a best out of 10 contest. All the graphics from the original game will be provided but the user will have to



have their own graphics program, such as *DPaint*, to generate original ships, planes, etc.

**CGW:** Naturally, the legion of *CAW* players want more information about taking the game to the Atlantic Ocean. Any plans for that in the future?

**RK:** We programmed the surface action module into *CAW* so that scenarios potentially could be created with only a few real carriers around. This would allow several of the North Atlantic battles to be represented within the *CAW* system. At the moment we are working on a number of North Atlantic scenarios although we will wait until we see the reaction to *CAW* before proceeding with the extension kit.

**CGW:** When and where is the Macintosh version of *CAW*?

**RK:** When *CAW* was originally designed, I tried to keep the interface compatible with the Mac interface. During its development, I was given considerable advice as to changes that would make the conversion easier. It still surprised me when we discovered that the whole conversion project took about two months, considering the *Warlords* project that took about nine months. Our one compromise is that only a color version will be done. Most computer companies now have a policy of only producing color Mac games and the extra effort to support black and white would not be justified.

**CGW:** Are there any plans to do a new version of *Warlords* in the future?

### COMPUTER WARGAMING WORLD

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**RK:** We have been working on an improved version of *Warlords* for about 12 months now and will be putting it into a final development cycle soon. All of the design work has been finished and only a few minor points have to be cleared up before we will announce the game and dates to the world. We expect to have it on sale next year but I do not want to be too specific, only to say that anyone who enjoyed *Warlords* will have to buy this program.

**CGW:** What new features can we expect to see in this, the *CGW* Wargame of the Year for 1991? Will the revisions be minor, or is it a complete overhaul of the *Warlords* system?

**RK:** Originally we looked at setting the game in a completely different format but decided to go back to the basic *Warlords* look. There are many new features in *Warlords II* including random maps, diplomacy, and different hero/army structures, but anyone who has played the original game will quickly cope with these new features. I don't want to be more specific about these at the moment. Official statements from SSG will announce these soon.

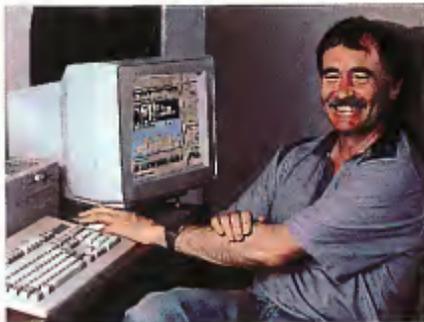
**CGW:** How about the navies? They were the weak link in the original *Warlords* game. Will you be doing something with the AI so that there will be naval campaigns?

**RK:** We have changed the way boats

operate. Due to the fact that a map may be random, a boat is now produced in cities and moved to the surrounding sea, but it is a warship only; it cannot be used for transporting armies. If you wish to transport armies you must go to a port (something similar to temples in the original game) and hire boats (the details here are still to be finalized) and each army will maintain their "boat" status until it recovers a land area. As each army is equipped with its own boat, it will be easy to break up stacks at sea for maximum flexibility, but using boats to ferry armies will not be allowed.

**CGW:** What other wargame projects are pending at SSG?

**RK:** At the moment, we are starting development on a new land based wargame, but have not defined the scale or area to be developed. After completing the WarRoom system for *CAW*, we would like to incorporate it into a land based design. One of the ideas I am currently working on is an intelligence system that learns from game to game even to the extent that the computer could learn the system by playing itself



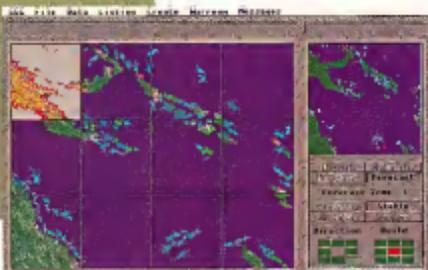
Roger Keating

over and over again. This system is still in initial development, so don't expect to hear much about it till the middle of next year.

**CGW:** Okay, everyone has been asking about the 10-year-delayed *Road to Appomatox Civil War* game. Well...?

**RK:** Well, the project has never been abandoned! We did a lot of work on the game before we realized that we just did not have the necessary ability at that time to do it justice. We merely put that project on hold while proceeding to do others. It is still a topic that is very close to the people at SSG and, when possible, it will be resurrected.

**CGW:** Unbelievable! Thanks, Roger.



# Building on Success

## The Red Baron Mission Builder



by Doug Fick

Dynamix has released the first of their expansion disks for the Great Warplanes Series of flight simulators. Using the *Red Baron* program as the basic vehicle, the *Red Baron Mission Builder* (RBMB) adds a lot of chrome and accessories to what is already a hot-rodded simulation.

### What's "Nieu"

Tired of shooting down the same aces in the same planes time after time? *RBMB* provides some relief to the dogfight blues with several new aces and five new aircraft. "Nieu" for the allies are the nimble early war Nieuport 11 and the mediocre Nieuport 28 (which was outdated even before making its first combat appearance). The Germans can take to the skies in the (fragile) Fokker DVIII, the excellent Siemens Shuckert DIII or the early-war Halberstadt DII.

By themselves, these new birds are a nice addition, but it is what can be done with all these aces and planes that makes *RBMB* really fly.

As can be surmised by the program title, *Red Baron Mission Builder* allows one to create unique air combat scenarios. In its original form, *Red Baron* gave quite a few options when selecting single missions —



Red Baron Mission Builder  
 IBM  
 1.2 MB  
 Clark Shaw, Garwood Nye  
 Sierra/Dynamix  
 Oakland, CA

everything from dogfighting a single ace through busting balloons and on to taking a four ship formation against an enemy formation of four.

Hmm, that number four keeps popping up and only one ace and one type of aircraft could be selected for any one mission. A lot of *Red Baron* fans asked Dynamix to open up the single mission options and *RBMB* is their response.

To get a feel for what the *RBMB* is all about, I'll jump in and design a mission. When the 'Fly a Single Mission' option is selected, two new choices appear: 'Build a Custom Mission' and 'Fly a Custom Mission.' The program does come with several custom missions included, but for now, I'll build.

The build menu is very easy to use. With the mouse and just a few minutes of experimenting, the interface and options are easily mastered. Five different maps are user selectable and for my mission, I selected a hypothetical battle over the city of London. I'll be heading eastbound with my four planes, two SE5a's and two Sopwith Camels, at the tree-hugging altitude of 200 feet. To my northeast are two observation balloons that I've been assigned to protect. To my southeast, and set to intercept my flight, are two Fokker DR1's and two Albatross D5's led by the Red Baron himself.



This group will be at 5,000 feet in order to set up a good bounce on my formation. A little farther to the east and set to enter the fight about a minute after the first battle is joined are two more DRT's led by Carl Degelow. His job will be to take out the balloons while the Baron keeps my flight busy. Lastly, the 'fat man', Hermann Goering will enter the fight in one of the 'flying razors' otherwise known as a Fokker DVIII.

Taking a look at the totals shows 11 aircraft, five types of aircraft, two balloons and three aces. I could elect to have every aircraft flown by an ace if I'd wanted. This whole mission took 20 minutes to build. If I want, I can add briefing text so when someone else plays the mission, they'll know what to expect and what they're tasked to do.

These numbers are typical of the maximum levels the program will allow in any one mission. The flight planning menu shows a bar at the top that lets me know how much more I can add until exceeding the capabilities of computer memory. This limit is a function of the basic 640K and expanded or extended memory seemed to make no difference to the size of scenario available.



### What's Not Nieu

Career game play is identical to the basic *Red Baron* game. The only changes are that the player can choose one of the new aircraft as their personal steed once the rank of Captain (Hauptmann) is achieved. Although I didn't have a chance to play through too many careers, I did not see any of the new aircraft in enemy formations nor any of the new aces show up. Additionally, the missions are all the same. It would have been nice, seeing how flexible the mission builder is, to have added a lot more variability into the career option.



Graphics, adversary logic and overall game play are also unchanged. No gripes here, as all areas were already excellent and a redesign would have required writing a whole new program.

### Summary

What *RBMB* offers is the capacity for devout *Red Baron* fans to design and play their own missions, as well as those designed by others. There is no doubt that bulletin boards around the country will soon be filled with custom missions available for anyone to download. While the program is not essential to enjoy an already excellent program, it sure does a nice job of spacing the game up for the true connoisseur. As *CGW* has said, "Two flaps up! *Red Baron Mission Builder* is an addition to an already great product and worthy of a medal." **CGW**

## A NATIONAL WILL



"A National Will" is a computer moderated play-by-mail game where each player runs an economy of a country. Players make decisions on production, labor allocation, revenue, trade, ect. The strength of a country's military depends on the vitality of its economy.

To order the rule book and take your first turn, please send \$6.50 or \$3.00 for the book only with your name and address to

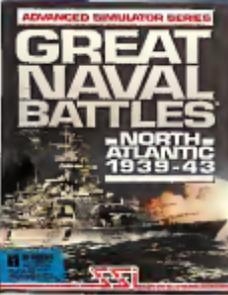
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Turn fees are \$3.50



By William D. Wilson

### Contemplating My "Naval"



TITLE:	Great Naval Battles
SCREEN:	North Atlantic 1939-43
PRICE:	\$69.95
PRODUCTION:	None
DEVELOPER:	IG Design Group
PUBLISHER:	Strategic Simulations Inc., Sunnyvale, CA

*GNBNA* has managed to convey to this miniature gamer something of the thrill of watching several ships maneuver in action. The tactical screen enables me to access and command each ship of my fleet, as well as to observe them engaging the enemy in much the same way as I used to observe my fellow-gamer captains in the Falls of the Ohio Wargame Society maneuvering their ships across a large floor. *GNBNA* allows the satisfaction of resolving large naval actions and allowing gamers to see the overall battle without having to gather human skippers. But that's not all!

*GNBNA* offers a view in the gunnery station of each ship that allows the gamer to see the full deck and superstructure of that ship. The deck views of the ships are beautifully rendered (better than we ever painted our miniatures — some said we painted our ships, others called them "primed") as though they were colorized versions of those drawings we studied so intently in *Jane's Fighting Ships*. The best part, however, is that these deck views are animated so that the guns swing into full broadsides and there is a sequence where the barrels belch flame and smoke after they are fired. One has, in essence, the sense that the miniatures have come alive.

Now, of course, any person can easily object that the perspectives from which the gamer is allowed to view the battles (on the tactical screen) and the actual broadsides of a given ship (at the gunnery station) are unrealistic. After all, no one (except, perhaps, a pilot flying overhead) is going to see the battles from these perspectives. Both fleet commanders and gunnery directors see a much more limited portion of the action. Yet, these are satisfying perspectives for those of us who like the aesthetics of miniatures along with the challenge of tactical wargaming.

For those who are more concerned with a realistic portrayal of the target ships, *GNBNA* offers a satisfying aesthetic, as well. The target ships are depicted in a similar way to those in *Silent Service II*, but the resolution seems better and the animated explosions (and resulting smoke) are much more satisfying. I even liked the way that smoke was realistically used by the computer as a smokescreen in order to cover destroyer movements in some scenarios. Though some gamers would like to see more variety in the way the ships actually sink, it is clear that the overall presentation of the battles is superior to products which have come before.

### What's So Great?

As a game, *GNBNA* is satisfying on many different levels. It has a nice variety of ships (with more on their way via add-on disks),

I have spent my share of time crawling about on the floor with protractors and tape measures as we moved scale model ships about and rolled percentage dice to determine whether or not we had managed to "hit" our targets. I can remember purchasing said models and avidly reading about each ship in *Jane's Fighting Ships* in order to find strengths to exploit and weaknesses to avoid, as well as a sense of history regarding my ships. I remember the pain of placing an "X" in each box as the referee ruled that a shell had penetrated the armor of my ships. With fondness, I remember the times I was commanding a fleet and watched the gamers serving as my captains turn simultaneously out of "Line Ahead" formation or when one of my captains managed to "cross the T" on a larger ship (allowing both a better chance of hitting the target ship, while reducing the number of guns which the enemy could bring to bear on himself).

As one can readily tell, tactical naval miniatures gaming has always been very satisfying to me. Unfortunately, it is not as easy as it used to be for me to be able to locate two fleets worth of captains. So, regular readers to *CGW* may remember how that I said that *Simulations Canada's* series of tactical level naval wargames (*Long Lance*, *In Haru's Way* and *Grand Fleet*) had something of the feel of naval miniatures, yet they did not have the tactile satisfaction of holding a model in my hand or the visual satisfaction of seeing two fleets spread out over a large floor space. *RAW Entertainment's* *Action Stations* offered a more realistic combat and command model, even down to the handling of damage control, but did not possess anything like the aesthetic appeal to be found in a miniatures battle. Some may note that I felt a certain amount of satisfaction in *MicroProse's* *Silent Service II*. I thought the digitized ship (i.e. target) images offered something of the visual thrill I had experienced in miniatures battles. Yet, I've never come as close, in a computer game, to experiencing that "joy of miniatures" as I have with *Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic 1939-43* (*GNBNA*).

eight set-piece scenarios, three "tour of duty" style operations (extended scenarios) and a campaign game where the player can take on the role of grand admiral. Whether one is playing the scenarios, operations or the campaign, one can play either side of the conflict.

Further, it is a layered game that allows players to control as much or as little of each battle as they desire. Every portion of the interface has a control to toggle between automatic (computer-controlled) and manual (player-controlled). This is marvelous because it allows one to see how the game is supposed to operate without feeling like one used to feel in Epyx' classic *Destroyer* (on the C-64) where the player was required to jump from station to station so often that ships often went aground (the fate which occurred whenever one left the limited map). In the old game, one often felt alone on the ship. In *GNBNA*, the player gets enough feedback from the computer-controlled subordinates to feel like there really is a crew under his/her command.

In addition, most naval games seem to emphasize either air battles or tactical surface battles, but rarely both. In *GNBNA*, I managed to turn more than a few surface battles around with a judicious amount of air power. Indeed, most of the battles in the North Atlantic involved capital ships, but its doubtful if the Allies could have sunk the *Bismarck* without those Swordfish torpedo planes. It is nice to have the air assets available as they did in the Pacific theater of operations. To me, it makes for a more exciting battle to require both capital ships and air assets in order to win certain decisive victories.

Game play is similar to that in *Silent Service II* in one sense. Once an encounter occurs, it uses a tactical screen in which dynamic ship images are presented on a grid. From this screen, the player could handle almost everything about the battle except for air attacks. Players have to manually commit the desired amount of air assets into any battle. Nevertheless, this screen is efficient and allows: the game speed to be set anywhere from normal to eight times normal speed; enemy ships to be targeted; movements of all ships and planes to be charted; course corrections to be ordered and battle results to be reported in pop-up windows.

From the tactical screen, players can jump to the bridge, gunnery station, damage control command or flight deck of any appropriate ship. One simply pulls down the menu and clicks on the desired ship and station. Frankly, I find myself regularly drawn to the gunnery station of the flagship in order to view the action I've ordered and the havoc our gunfire is causing on enemy ships.

### Multi-Task Forcing

The campaign game adds an entirely new dimension to the game. It allows gamers to assume the role of the theater commander and coordinate all of the assets for either the British or German navies. One can create, reform and assign task forces according to any desired mix. Then, one can plot the task force movements or assign patrol areas with a quick point and click. The goal, of course, is to protect or disrupt merchant shipping.

As in the tactical battles, players can let the clock tick at "nor-

mal" speed or cruise at up to eight times that speed. When one is in the Admiralty, one views a campaign map of the North Atlantic with color-coded convoys and task forces steaming across the ocean from port to port. There is also an outside window which changes from a light sky to a dark sky behind the flag in order to simulate the changes from night to day. This can be important when determining whether or not to follow-up on an aerial or surface sighting of enemy task forces or convoys. The sightings themselves are displayed in two different ways.

The player-admiral can be informed by a pop-up message window of either a surface sighting or a report from the intelligence branch and a color-coded enemy task force symbol will appear on the campaign map. Sometimes, the player as admiral must consider which of several contacts to prosecute in terms of what assets he has at his disposal and how vulnerable the merchant shipping may be at another map coordinate. That's when the game really starts to come to life, when the admiral makes his decision and starts maneuvering his forces to encounter the enemy. Then, when contact is made and battle is imminent, it really gets good.

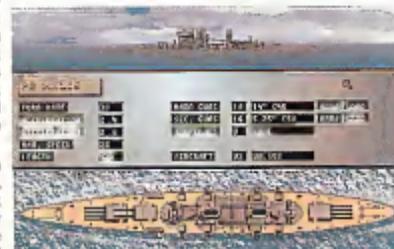
At least, the point of surface combat is when it *should* get good. It does and it doesn't. It does get good because the admiral gets to choose between engaging in tactical combat, avoiding combat or shadowing the enemy task force until one is reinforced with more capital ships. It is possible to do this, but that's where the first major problem with the campaign game comes into play. The "Shadow" command does not work. Even on the main screen, task forces can "lose" their target (according to messages that flash on the screen), but maintain station on the enemy force. In tactical combat, the command doesn't work at all.

Unfortunately, the "Form" command, which is supposed to have all ships in a task force form up with the active ship directly commanded by the player, doesn't work either. This means that the player will have to quickly scroll through ships and take manual control of the entire force if he wants to form a serious line of battle. It is an unfortunate bug (as is the "Shadow" one), but one which the company is expected to fix eventually.

### The AI Mutiny

In general, the computer-controlled subordinates are fairly competent, but there are occasions when they play well need to toggle ships or stations under their control. The damage control teams *usually* work on the most important systems, first. There may be times, however, when they opt to be dealing with minor damage when the ship is sitting there like a duck decoy. The gunnery crews are usually fairly efficient, but there were plenty of times when I needed to order them to take low percentage shots because I was outnumbered enough that I had more ammunition than I did armor. I needed to take the chance.

The most bizarre experience I had with AI occurred when a convoy was intercepted by a large German task force. The escort immediately began to flee, intending to leave the merchant vessels to their fate. I had to toggle every vessel to manual control and switch between ships in order to change their courses. I would have thought it was a freak event, except that I kept reading notes on *GENie* and *Compuserve* from other users who were experiencing this phenomenon, even when they were playing the Germans and



came across British convoys. My theory is that this is an AI routine which performs threat evaluation as part of the combat module for every fighting ship. Ships are probably ordered to flee when they are outgunned. Unfortunately, if my theory is correct, someone forgot to write some code to override that threat evaluation when the ships are escorting convoys.

Another frustrating experience when dealing with computer-controlled subordinates is their inability to follow certain orders that should be undertaken without question. This refers to glitches which keep the computer-commanded ships in a task force from "forming" on the flagship (even though there is a "Form" command listed on the interface screen) and which, likewise, keep computer-controlled ships from being able to "shadow" enemy ships until reinforcements arrive. Once I discovered the two commands did not work, however, the omission did not concern me. I'm enough of a control freak to want to give orders to each individual ship, anyway.

Finally, one must be careful when plotting routes for the task forces in the campaign game. Once, I almost let a task force run completely out of fuel because I had clicked carelessly on the port to which I had ordered it to return, refit and refuel. Even though I had told the task force to return to base, it stopped outside the port and the program kept giving me messages that the task force was nearly out of fuel. Also, if one intends for the ships in a given task force to be repaired, one has to give the order manually (contrary to the manual, this does not occur automatically).

Naturally, the same limitations one encounters in the AI routines for the computer-controlled subordinates work to one's advantage when facing the computer-controlled enemy. Escorts can run away; air assets can be underutilized; a particular vessel's strengths can be ignored (e.g. the more maneuverable and faster Goussier faces the heavier armored Rodney in one scenario, but the computer commander does not take advantage of its speed and allows the human player to close at will in the slower Rodney); and smaller ships always seem to be targeted first (as opposed to

lowering the combat capability of the larger capital ships). Hence, gamers who are expecting sophisticated AI routines can safely give *GNBNA* a wide berth.

## GNBNA's Contribution to the War Effort

The truth is, however, that for all the problems in *Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic 1939-43*, there are a half-dozen very nice features. For every minor disappointment, there seem to be several glitzy positives.

Frankly, I'm spending a lot of time playing it. The campaign is testing me to the logistical limit and I love getting those commendations from Churchill after each successful engagement (and when I temporarily quit the game). Right now, it's more convenient and more compelling than even crawling around on meeting room floors and holding 1/2400 scale models in my hands. Of course, I miss all that cotton ball smoke and having clumsy gamers step on my ships <grin and winks>.



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# GREAT NAVAL BATTLES

## North Atlantic, 1939-43

*Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic* originated when Roy Gibson, the designer/programmer, and Kim Biscoe, the artist, both happened to see a National Geographic special on Robert D. Ballard's undersea explorations in search of the battleship Bismarck. At the time that it aired, they were in the midst of discussions with SSI, searching for a topic for a new project. When they saw this TV special, the same inspirational spark touched them both. When they, together, thought Ballard's beautifully illustrated book *The Discovery of the Bismarck*, that cinched it for them. SSI was equally enthusiastic when the suggestion reached them and soon work began on "The Bismarck Game." SSI assigned Ken Humphries as associate producer to the project and iO Design Group added Edward Bever to ensure the historical accuracy of the scenarios. Then, the team was complete.

### Defining the Challenge

To focus on a single ship made sense given that the goal was to create a simulator. Simulators, by nature, focus on command of a single vehicle. Unlike a fighter, however (which is controlled by a single pilot), or a tank (which is controlled by a handful of men), or even a submarine (in which all activity is essentially focused on a single goal), a battleship contains thousands of sailors manning hundreds of stations — from multiple big-gun turrets to innumerable secondary and anti-aircraft batteries to the navigation and engine rooms — all engaged in diverse and often disconnected activities. It became clear from the beginning that this would be a simulator *with a difference*. One in which players would have to be able to jump from station to station; not just to man different controls but, quite possibly, to fight different enemies.

Of course, the same program and graphics that simulate one vehicle can be easily modified to simulate other, similar vehicles, so it became the logical next step to enable players to command not just the Bismarck, but any of the battleships that fought in the same general area (the North Atlantic) on both sides. Working from that reasoning, if one can control a battleship, there is nothing



to prevent controlling cruisers. Even destroyers are not that different, so they were included as well.

### From Simulator to Campaign Game

Naturally, inexorably, the logic of being able to control multiple ships in battle led to the idea of *commanding* multiple ships over time. In other words, of being able to take the role of task force commander as well as ship captain. This step in the progression of ideas, however, led to two of the greatest design challenges.

The first was the technical problem of designing mechanics to make this diffuse perspective manageable. The player would have to be able to tell at all times which systems were under his control and which were on automatic pilot, as well as be able to adjust them easily. Thus, the program would have to be able to keep track of these constantly changing settings and seamlessly reconcile the controls at multiple stations. While this may sound simple enough (the programmer's lament), as we got into the nitty-gritty of codifying the program, it proved to be anything but simple. In the

end, there were simply too many possible ways of doing things. We went back and forth between approaches that gave players so much leeway that they became downright confusing and other approaches that seemed far too restrictive. Gradually, though, we evolved the mechanisms that ended up in the final version. A player can jump from the admiral's "Flag Bridge" to any station on any ship in his task force and back again at will. Furthermore, each ship can be tailored to any combination of automatic and manual (player controlled) systems desired. This proves the programmer's adage

that elegant solutions for the user often create programming nightmares for the developer.

The second way this leap to the multiple command perspective created difficulties was that it tempted us to a further leap — to simulate command of the surface forces as a whole, either for the duration of a single major operation or even for the decisive first years of the war. From the beginning we had wanted to give some feel for the overall strategic situation of the German navy, but so





long as the focus was on command of a single ship this could only be done by implication (i.e., by setting up battle scenarios with "typical" situations). Once the single-vehicle barrier was broken, however, it was easy to envision how to give the player control of the whole campaign. Or so it seemed.

This aspect of the simulation proved the most challenging of all to develop. The simple reason was that this portion of the game had to be much more abstracted, partly because we didn't have the time or disk space to simulate the entire Atlantic Campaign in detail equal to our simulation of individual ships and, partly, because that much detail would have been more than everyone but the most dedicated players would care to handle anyway. For both reasons, we had to choose carefully which aspects of the situation to give the player control over, which to handle automatically, and which to handle abstractly. In the end, we chose to keep the game tightly focused on the operations of major surface vessels, keeping other aspects of the naval campaign in the background. Thus, land-based air operations, both reconnaissance and airstrikes, are handled automatically, as are assignments of ships to patrol stations and convoy escorts. Submarines are abstracted completely since subs almost never cooperated directly with surface units, with attacks on major warships handled as random events. Land combat, too, happens in the background, conveyed via periodic news reports. We feel that this disciplined focus pays off in spades since it makes possible a clean, manageable game with plenty of strategic options and exciting tactical interludes.



## Problems in Miniature(s)

While the strategic game posed many of the most serious challenges, it would be a mistaken impression to think that the tactical game posed none. The ships, in particular, posed two very different problems: how to represent them internally (as data structures and game elements) and how to represent them graphically when the player is aboard. On the first aspect, we started with the conventional wargame approach of treating the ship as a series of boxes, which get checked off as hits are sustained until all the boxes are gone or a "critical hit" occurs by chance.

However, it quickly became apparent that this approach squanders the strengths of the computer (i.e., its ability to hold lots of data and manipulate it quickly). Therefore, we switched to a much more sophisticated conceptualization based on compartments, each of which represents an actual (albeit abstracted) location in the ship. Some of the compartments contain portions of the ship's vital systems and "critical hits" can occur when one is penetrated by a shell. This penetration is not a random or arbitrary occurrence but, instead, is based on a careful calculation

of the armor thickness of the bulkheads at the point of impact and the caliber of the shell. Additionally, if the shell's warhead does not go off, its path is tracked from compartment to compartment until it either explodes or passes through the ship. If it *does* explode, the effect of the blast is calculated on the compartment it is in and, where appropriate, on adjacent compartments as well. This conceptualization of the ship's compartments can be seen on

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the game's Damage Screen. Here, players can even select an option that enables them to watch the progress of each shell as it penetrates a ship, if so desired.

While the solution to the first problem of representing the ships came early and easily, the solution to the problem of graphical representation came relatively late. In fact, it came only after we completed the alpha version of the game (the software equivalent of a rough draft). The core problem was how to give a feeling of immediacy to the training and firing of the big guns when they were actually controlled by operators encased in heavy armor far removed from the turrets that housed them. The solution we hit upon was to partially abandon the first person perspective in favor of a "bird's eye" view. By combining on a single screen the "out the window" view generally associated with simulators with an overhead view more reminiscent of table-top gaming, we realized we could have the best of both worlds. Now, one can look through the director at the target in the top portion of the screen while below seeing the turrets trained in the appropriate direction. Then — boom! — players can watch the blast of fire and smoke as the guns fire.

### It is Written...

Another feature of *Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic* that was added around this same time was the historical section. We knew that SSI was interested in including some of the background

information within the game itself (rather than just in the manual) and, when we happened to visit an archive overflowing with old photos, we knew we had struck gold. We digitized a slew of the pictures, matched them to the historical material we were preparing, and the result was the on-line historical information included in the program. We think that by deepening the player's knowledge of this era of naval warfare, it would add to their overall enjoyment of the game.



The material that we uncovered in creating this game was so rich, in fact, that it proved impossible to include everything we would have liked. In particular, we were intrigued by the many "what-if" possibilities in the situation, both on the strategic and the tactical levels. On the strategic level, we wondered how different the contest would have been if the Germans had stuck to the "Z-Plan," the strategy by which they were to delay hostilities until the mid-1940s in order to build up a fleet of massive warships. Tactically, there are a host of ships that could have

fought but didn't, particularly if the hypothetical ships and the Americans are considered (an Iowa class battlewagon versus the Bismarck, for instance, is a fascinating duel). All of these possibilities, as well as a "personal career" role-playing game, are under development right now to be released as a series of Expansion Disks over the course of the coming year. Thus, we plan to keep *Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic* on people's hard drives indefinitely (or at least until we finish its full-blown successor). **eww**

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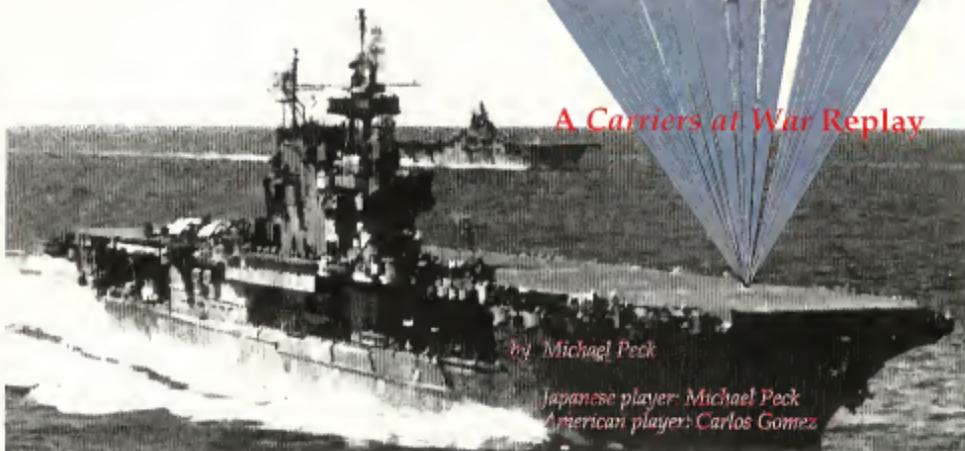
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## A Carriers at War Replay



by Michael Peck

Japanese player: Michael Peck  
American player: Carlos Gomez

The following article is a replay of *Carriers at War* by Strategic Studies Group. The article describes a random Midway scenario in which the computer secretly chooses whether the scenario will follow the historical battle or whether the starting positions of the American ships will be changed.

### Prologue

The early summer of 1942 was a glorious time for the Imperial Japanese Navy. Fresh from their attack upon Pearl Harbor and a naval blitzkrieg throughout the Pacific which succeeded beyond imagination, the Combined Fleet was eager to destroy the last remaining obstacle to Japanese naval supremacy — the American carrier forces. Admiral Yamamoto's plan was to send a strongly escorted invasion force to the island of Midway, forcing the U.S. Navy to commit the last of its outnumbered fleet to defending the vital outpost.

Unbeknownst to Yamamoto, deciphered Japanese codes had warned Admiral Nimitz that the Combined Fleet was sailing for Midway. The extra intelligence gave Nimitz an edge in surprise but could not make up for his lack in numbers. He had only three carriers — one of which was still damaged from the recent Battle of the Coral Sea. This was pitted against four heavy and two light Japanese carriers, backed by an overwhelming battleship fleet.

### Advance to Contact (P.M. June 3, 1942)

As the battle commenced on the night of June 3, the Japanese fleet was split into several task forces scattered to the west and northwest of Midway. The Japanese plan was to bomb the Midway airfield into dust and then destroy the American fleet by exploiting the greater range of their carrier-based aircraft. [Ed: A masterpiece of simplicity in military planning.]

A few hundred miles away, the American fleet waited south of Midway [Ed: Historically, they were deployed to the north]. The

American plan was to stay out of range until the Japanese carriers had been sighted, then close in and attack in concert with Midway's airplanes. During the night, Admiral Spruance's carriers steamed to the northeast of Midway to put some distance between themselves and the approaching Japanese carrier-led armada.

First contact came shortly after midnight (around 0100), when the Japanese submarine I-166 attacked a task force near French Shoals, far to the south of Midway. Though the sub commander reported the group contained two carriers, its position made it likely it was a minor force whose size had merely been exaggerated. Commanders must expect to deal with a lot of inaccurate reports and try to find the kernel of truth which they might contain.

Midway's planes were fueled and armed at night to be launched immediately the next morning. The stage was set for the curtain (and dawn) to rise...

### Dawn of Decision

As dawn broke, the Japanese were quickly spotted by Midway's search planes. With Nagumo's force about 200 miles southwest of Midway, the Japanese elected to launch a coordinated strike from all four carriers (which takes longer to launch, but has a more devastating effect on the target and preserves the attacker's

forces). The all-or-nothing nature of carrier warfare discouraged keeping a reserve, and it seemed more important to the Japanese commander to concentrate on immediately destroying Midway's aerial threat. Meanwhile, part of Midway's planes were launched at the Japanese carriers, while the remainder flew to Pearl to sit out the initial enemy blows which the Yanks rightly expected would come.

As the veteran Japanese air crews launched into the rays of the rising sun, inspired by the significance of the sight, their commander shuddered when he realized with horror that he had forgotten to strengthen the Combat Air Patrol (CAP) over his carriers. Lacking radar, Japanese task forces required stronger standing CAP than their American counterparts. But it was too late



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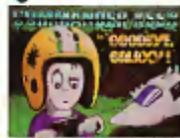
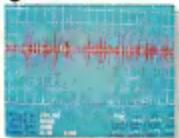
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# Replay

— the strikes could not really be aborted without enormous disruption of their mission (an unacceptable option). The Japanese commander could only rub his temples, light some incense and pray that the Americans would simply miss their opportunity and not come.

## Apocalypse (A.M. June 4)

Divine intervention was not forthcoming for the Japanese on this fateful morning. Concurrent with the Japanese bombers hammering Midway, the first Midway strike planes were spotted by lookouts on the Japanese carriers (this would be at 0650). Amid the puffing gray bursts of flak, the obsolete Vindicators and their green pilots dived toward the Imperial Japanese Navy with a vengeful purpose—and hit with effect. Soon geysers of flame and smoke billowed from the pale orange flight decks. (How can this be explained to the Emperor?) Meanwhile, the Japanese planes bombing Midway found only empty tarmac—their targets busy destroying the Japanese fleet.

By 7 a.m. the heart of Japanese naval aviation was smoking into the blue Pacific skies. The Kaga and Hiryu had suffered critical damage which closed their flight decks, while the Akagi had taken substantial damage. Most of the Japanese squadrons were out of commission for lack of working carriers to operate off of. Stung and shaken, the Japanese commander decided to throw caution to the wind by steaming towards the American fleet in the faint hope of forcing a night surface action.

Buoyed by their success, Spruance's carriers reversed course and sailed to finish off Nagumo's battered force. But the day was waning, and his planes would not be in range for hours. The Americans elected to do a risky strike transfer, in which they would fly to their targets, land at Midway that night, then return to their carriers the following morning. A logistical exercise of daunting proportions, the "can do" attitude of the Yanks, however, set them eagerly to task.

## Running the Gauntlet (P.M. June 4)

Swiftly, the Combined Fleet changed course and increased to flank speed; the heavy battleships bore in from the northwest while the carrier force and Admiral Kondo's cruisers headed east in an attempt to catch the Americans in a nautical pincer. Soryu and the two light carriers were still operational, so a limited air strike was still possible should the opportunity arise. Hoping for the best, Soryu paused to launch her aircraft while the remaining ships sailed on.

The American response was not long in coming. By 1600 the Midway air forces had returned, reinforced by bombers transferred from Pearl Harbor. Although the hammer was set to deal a finishing blow to the Japanese fleet, this time the damage was only minimal. However, at 1800, the American carrier strike planes arrived to finish the job. Again bereft of CAP, Soryu, Hiryu and Kaga finally succumbed to the repeated American attacks, while hits were scored on the battleship Kirishima and the cruiser Mogami. Akagi's Kate torpedo planes found the carrier Hornet, only to fall victim to the CAP screen of American Wildcats.

As prophetic as the dawn of this day seemed to Japanese pilots who set off to bomb Midway, so the sunset felt prophetic to Nagumo. Was this to be the Imperial sunset?

## Revenge (A.M. June 5)

Japan's battered hopes grew as search planes reported the range to the American fleet narrowing during the night. The American fleet was hovering off of Midway awaiting their planes' return. The Americans tried night strikes with their B-17's and torpedo-armed PBY search planes, but with no effect. The Japanese scored around 2000 when a cruiser force wrecked Midway's airfield and aircraft. Fortunately for the Americans, their carrier planes landed after the attack. By 0200 both sides had lost contact with each other while the Japanese continued to hasten to the surface battle they were hoping for.

The question for the Japanese was whether the Americans would slip away during the night; for the Americans, it was whether they could escape the Japanese net they saw closing around them. Unfortunately, carriers which have aircraft in the air cannot move, and once the carrier planes took off at dawn from Midway (as per the plan from the previous late afternoon attack which finished off the three Japanese carriers), Spruance's carriers could not leave the area until they retrieved them. The Americans would, in effect, be nailed in place with Japanese rapidly closing. It would be a deadly race at sunrise.

Just after dawn, Nagumo's cruiser escorts spotted the main American force containing the Enterprise and Hornet. A game of tag ensued in which pursuit was difficult; American carriers (built on battlecruiser hulls) were almost as fast as the Japanese destroyers, and could actually launch CAP and recover planes while retiring at full speed. Hornet's luck finally ran out, however, when the Japanese battleships caught up with her; the awesome 18.1-inch salvos of the Yamato pulverized the American carrier. Two light cruiser forces dogged with the American escorts with the result that the U.S. lost

three heavy cruisers to torpedo attacks while the Japanese lost two light cruisers and several destroyers.

At this point, the combatants called a truce, although the surviving American carriers could still have been hunted down. It had been a wild battle with air, surface and underwater combat all playing their part. The carnage had been frightful; three Japanese and one American carrier, as well the cream of the remaining American surface fleet. It was a battle that neither side could rightfully call a great victory.

## Assessment

Both the Japanese and American admirals would have been shot for incompetence when they returned home. A brief moment of haste and oversight regarding CAP had gutted Nippon's naval aviation, while the precious American carriers and cruisers had been squandered in a surface battle. [Ed: Historical losses were, for the US: 99 carrier aircraft, 38 Midway-based aircraft, the Yorktown and one destroyer—for the Japanese: four fleet carriers, a heavy cruiser, an oiler and an entire air group of over 250 aircraft and crews. Thus, the results of this replay were not too far off from history, despite the radically different way in which the battle developed.] With the war six months old, both sides had learned some important lessons about naval warfare, each taught by the enemy "the hard way."

To begin with, timing is everything, particularly in carrier warfare. Unlike in the gargantuan European conflict, Pacific battles were decided by handfuls of ships and a few score airplanes. Even a small strike has a chance of inflicting a devastating hit on a





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Circle Reader Service #98

# Replay

carrier, so the best and only defense is to get the enemy flatpigs first. The worst thing for a carrier is to be hit while its planes are being armed and fueled, so it may be better to launch a strike too soon rather than too late. A major Japanese advantage in CAW is that their carrier-based planes have a much longer range — as much as 100-miles — than their American counterparts. A hundred miles may not sound like much, but for a 25-knot American carrier, it means steaming for four hours within enemy air range without being able to reply to hostile action. Worse, the American Wildcat fighter's range is so poor (170 miles each way) that the Americans are better off keeping all their fighters on CAP and letting the bombers fend for themselves.

The second lesson is to keep a strong CAP screen up. This is particularly true for the Japanese, whose lack of radar means less warning time. Also, Japanese carriers are more prone to damage and less likely to self-repair than their American counterparts. Although escorting friendly bombers is important, it's more important to keep an adequate screen; if one's bombers are on the way towards the enemy, count on an enemy strike heading back to counterstrike.

A third lesson is that carriers are often sitting ducks. When they have launched planes or have transferred them to land bases, they cannot move out of the local area until the planes return. Given that four or five hours might elapse before an air wing returns from

a strike, players must consider where the enemy will be later in the day, or even if the targets will be in range once the planes arrive.

This is compounded by CAW's limited intelligence system. Put simply, most search reports are erroneous in the numbers and types of ships they report. A task force that previously had two cruisers and three destroyers can abruptly mutate into a reported force of carriers and battleships. Nor are pilots able to distinguish well between seaplane carriers and aircraft carriers. The only way to increase certainty is to wait 15 or 20 minutes for several consistent reports to confirm the sighting.

Finally, the weaker side should beware of surface combat. Surface combat might seem easy to avoid but it happens with surprising frequency. A 300 mile gap at dusk between a friendly carrier group and enemy battleships may seem vast, but when ships are steaming at 30 knots and darkness lasts 10 hours... Worse, both sides normally lose contact with each other at night, so fleets could be steaming towards each other and not know it until the disconcerting sights and sounds of gun flashes erupt.

*Carriers At War* requires players to focus on only a few key decisions which must be made regarding movement and combat — particularly as to their timing. Yet, battles will rest upon these plainly obvious choices and victory will go the admiral who makes the best prediction as to his enemy's intent. **CAW**



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# The "Belles" of Alcanbury

## MicroProse UK's *B-17 Flying Fortress*

by William J. Shefski

TITLE	B-17 Flying Fortress
SYSTEM	IBM
PRICE	\$49.95
PROTECTION	Documentation Look up
DESIGNER	Mike Beamon
PUBLISHER	MicroProse Software Heard Village, Maryland

Some believe, and apparently the designer of *B-17 Flying Fortress* is among them, that the U.S. Eighth Air Force missions in World War II had little effect on the war effort, except to reduce the Luftwaffe (this game comes from MicroProse's UK division, Devaluing U.S. contributions to the war is more common outside the U.S.). If this led to the stated intent of the game — to concentrate on the crews and not their effect on the big picture — then the right choice was made for the wrong reason.

The strength of the game is its depiction of "crew management." More romantically, the human player can be regarded as the crew's heroic spirit or guardian angel. Jumping into the body of any of the 10 crew members, the player can direct the bombardier to look through his bombsight or his gun sights. The navigator can consult the charts to estimate the formation's position or he can control his own gun. The pilot or co-pilot can choose to look out the cockpit windows, or at one of three views of the crowded instrument panel.

The 10 crew members are rated poor, fair, good, excellent or superb in seven areas: morale, health, medical, navigation, piloting, bombing and gunnery. The manual mentions technical ability, but is nowhere to be seen in the program. The crew's abilities in these categories can improve with experience.

The player, alternately, may also choose to let the computer do just about everything, including fly the plane and shoot all the guns. However, there are certain times when it is imperative for the human player to interfere. The bombardier won't push the button himself and the computer-as-pilot tends to stay in formation, even at the risk of overheating and, eventually, incinerating what remains of the engines.

The player can toggle between controlling a crewman and viewing the crew from well-rendered perspective views of five cutaway sections. This third person mode is where the controls for crew-juggling are found. Occasionally a gun will need fixing or the



bomb doors kicking open, but most actions in this mode will be in the cause of first aid for the overwhelmingly minor wounds of other crewmen. These scratches, oddly, are serious enough to knock a crewman off his job, but rarely do they require more than a few minutes of attention. The waist gunners, manning the least effective gun positions, soon become the player's medics of choice and triage becomes paramount. It is a distinctly non-lethal environment. On rare occasions a man is hurt enough to be sent to the hospital upon landing, perhaps never to return. More likely he'll be back in a few missions.

The only death in the game occurs when the plane hits the ground with all hands, achievable solely through willful negligence on the part of the human pilot, most times involving unfortunate use of the time compression feature.

### The Bombs-Eye View

The look of the game is engaging. There are a wide variety of highly individualized targets. Target detail is sometimes startling (i.e. the cranes in the shipyards). Also, a player may opt, during the mission briefing, to view a reconnaissance fly-by film of the target. The realism of the effect gives a pleasant jolt. It is detailed down to the stray hair fluttering on the projector lens.

There are some dramatic outside views of the action available, including a god-like overview centered on any aircraft, enemy or friendly, on the screen at the time. In addition, the "chase view" from behind any of the closing enemy fighters is particularly chilling.

It soon becomes painfully obvious, though, from these outside views, that the player's bomber is the only one in the group firing its guns. The five other B-17's, while they last, are little more than target dummies, serving to absorb fire that would otherwise be directed at the player-controlled bomber.

### The Poverty of the Written Word (Documentation)

The designer confesses to a preference for keeping game features hidden. In the long history, now apparently a proud tradition, of unhelpful computer game documentation, this package may be the

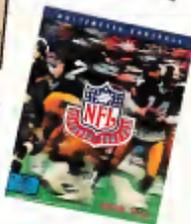


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# Review

standard by which all future products are judged. The 230-page manual is scattershot and, at times, seems to serve merely to pad out the copy protection scheme. There is a totally useless bomber identification chapter. The section on German fighters omits an important type, the BF-110, that is abundant in the skies of the game. A player unfamiliar with German craft of the era may think he has come up against a huge German trove of captured De Havilland Mosquitos — the only small, two-engine craft identified in the booklet.

As is common these days, there are discussions of features in the manual that did not make the final cut. Two are acknowledged in the README file. For example, a player can no longer let the computer land the plane. Apparently, allowing this meant that the human player might be able to go through an entire flight without putting his/her mitts on the aircraft controls. The change is a pedantic one. Landing correctly, as in most other flight simulators, is a tedious and pain-staking process. Here, the player can, at least, choose an easy landing mode, in which putting the plane down becomes a kind of horse-shoes-and-hand-grenades affair (close is good enough). However, this reduces the rewards for the mission, such as they are.

Those rewards, of course, consist of medals and promotions for the crew, and the knowledge that the human player is one step closer to a 25-mission goal. There are no numerical ratings or measures in the game. It is a worthy notion and a tip of the hat to simulated realism, but may not be gratifying enough to the average, possibly more number-oriented computer bomber jockey.

More pertinent to the theme of the game, however, is the problem of fighting fires inside the aircraft, or lack thereof. Described in the manual, this occurrence has been summarily excised from the final design. Additionally, problems with the crew oxygen and heating systems, also mentioned in the manual, never arise (or didn't, in the nearly fifty missions flown by this reviewer.). Last-minute changes are understandable, but this book shows much that might have been. One yearns for the game that the inaccurate manual hangs teasingly before the player's nose rather than the limited one which was actually published.

## Career Decisions

The most important deficiency is the inflexibility of the campaign game. A campaign consists of following one bomber crew from 1 NOVEMBER 1943 until they are either killed, captured or fly 25 missions. There are no collateral crews to follow and there is no skipping ahead. That is, if a player wants to start a new crew, that crew travels mysteriously back in time to 1 NOVEMBER '43, even though the player will be working from the same "campaign" file that contains a bomber that has flown missions. If the player dares to set up more than one bomber at a time, strange things happen when the file is saved, and then, loaded later — like the loss of entire bombers, along with their accumulated missions. Again, the documentation is not forthcoming on this facet of the program. Perhaps too much was read into line on page 38 that states there are "six Flying Fortresses available to your squadron." Perhaps it was just wishful thinking.



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Even when one manages to get a crew through 25 missions, the next crew starts back on I NOV 43. This is a bit of a comedown and tends to discourage repeated play.

## Limping Home

This flight simulator points the way for future designs in the genre with its character-oriented approach. The player gets a sense of what a lovely sight those (yes, white) cliffs at Dover must have been for a crew limping home out of formation and pursuing two engines. It will not, however, satisfy those who expect a comprehensive, flexible treatment of the subject.

### B-17 Flying Fortress: Playing tips

✦ Do not "time skip" while any engine is losing oil. It is possible to come out of the time warp with burning engines or the ground "rising" toward the plane at an uncomfortably fast pace.

✦ Take care of any medical problems before landing or the affected crewmen will go to the hospital for one or more missions.

Remember that the reverse tactical view (looking out from the target, or other nearby ground feature) can be a great aid in navigation, as can Shift-F10, the god-like overview. Pinpointing location is a cruel exercise in pattern recognition.

✦ Stay in formation on the bombing run by radioing "Bomb on my command."

✦ If jolted by flak or otherwise failing to make a successful bomb run, make an improved second run

by deactivating bombsight, then radioing "Abort bomb run. Go around again." Pinpoint location on navigation map when directly over target. After turning around, radio "Bomb on my command." Go to bombardier. Activate bombsight.

✦ Navigator needs more help at "Good" or less rating. Don't time skip past coastlines, use them and major cities to navigate.

✦ There is one minor glitch in the game. The very top of the map is not available during the flight (it can only be accessed during briefing). This makes the mission to Penne-munde a blind mission (or an impossible one). If the peninsula that contains the town of Sasaitz does not show an airfield to the northwest, the Penne-munde rocket site may be out of reach.

✦ Yes, there is a key to the navigator's map. It is at the upper left corner.

✦ The IBM sound is not worth installing. There are no engine sounds or chatter on the inter-coms, only guns and explosions. One will only want to reinstall without it because the wacky tunes that accompany the title sequences cannot be shut off otherwise.

✦ With regard to landing, the best technique I found was to: stay in formation, time skip at five minute intervals until the



formation has reached rock bottom, a little over 1,700 feet. Then, time skip one minute, or just accelerate game (Alt-A), until the formation is on the leg of the pattern with the 60-degree heading. Go to manual control. Descend a bit to let the formation pass overhead (there's a mid-air collision danger here) as they reach the end of this leg. Travel straight out until you've lost sight of them. Then, hold down the Alt-A combination

for about twenty pulses. Turn sharply right until the 230-degree heading is achieved. This should put the bomber roughly on course for Alconbury Airfield and allow the player to start the descent.

✦ The Shift key not only gives the gunners fine tracking of targets, but also locks onto them, as if one's B-17 were equipped with radar-guided guns of the modern era.

✦ On two engines or less, keep the computer pilot from committing arson on engines by getting into the skin of one of the pilots.

Switch to manual control and cut the throttle. This will enable the computer-controlled target drones that serve as the rest of the bomber formation to fly ahead. Let them. If one is over enemy territory and the gunners are rated excellent or better, it won't increase the danger too much and it is better than the inevitable burning engines. When the formation is out of sight, the computer can be trusted to drive the plane again. Forget the charted course and take the shortest heading home.

✦ Fly the single available "training mission" once or twice, no more, to get the feel of the controls and the bomb run. Players

shouldn't expect any gunnery practice unless they break formation and head for France (and there, it's for real!). A training crew on a joyride to the Continent could very well end up as POW's.

✦ Wise players will make sure they drop bombs on something, even some target not originally assigned for the mission. This provides credit for hitting a "target of opportunity."

Note also that the game will count as aborted any mission where bombs fall far from a target, even though the crew fought it way there, made a good faith effort to put the bombs on the target and made its way back to Alconbury airfield.

✦ Sightseeing in England can be fun, particularly with a load of 500-pound bombs in one's luggage. Vicious players can "tour" the sights in England to their heart's content. One successful "visit" along these lines — a direct bit on the Houses of Parliament — drew the simple admonition "Not a valid target." No court martial or firing squad. Buckingham

Palace, by the way, is a particularly fat — and tempting — "point of interest." **CSW**



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NEW WORLD COMPUTING

## Unfurl The Banners,

### There's a New King in Town

## A Sneak Preview of QQP's Conquered Kingdoms

by Alan Emrich



Imagine a wizard, eyes blazing with inner vision beneath furrowed, wizened brows and crowned by a pointy hat with a crescent moon on it.

Now, picture that wizard mixing together the arcane ingredients required to make powerful magic; not the commonplace conjurer's confectionery like eye of newt or lizard's tongue (rescuing some helpless princess won't bring *this* story to a happy ending). No, this is a *great* wizard pulling out all the stops for the mighty task ahead — bowel of ogre and a necklace of dragon's teeth will be required for him to teleport entire armies and cast fireballs the size of meteors onto his foes. After all, there are kingdoms to conquer this time!

Powerful magic, like powerful games, usually requires the blending of strong, proven elements in order to get the results which will become the stuff of legend. No one knows this better than one of the hobby's newest game wizards, Bruce Williams Zaccagnino. While he might look a bit comical wearing a pointy hat bearing a crescent moon (but then, who wouldn't?), the magic in the games his company, QQP, has released to date tells an undeniable success story. Bruce has had his hand in the cauldron as each of his games has stewed to perfection, and now his latest conjuration is ready to once again enchant strategy gamers.

*Sneak Previews are not designed to be reviews. They are feature articles based on "works in progress" that CGW's editors have deemed worthy of early coverage. These articles are not intended to provide the final work on a product, since we expect to publish appropriate review coverage when the game is finished.*

### Brain of Admiral & Brawn of General

Within the ever-improving graphic look of the QQP game box (be sure to look for the tiny giraffe hidden in the cover art of *Conquered Kingdoms*), a fine set of standard QQP game components resides. Players familiar with *The Lost Admiral* or *The Perfect General* will recognize the black and white manual and attractive color battle map cards.

More importantly, veteran strategy gamers will quickly decipher the gaming ingredients which were sprinkled into *Conquered Kingdoms*. Personally, it appears to me to be three parts *Lost Admiral*, two parts *The Perfect General* and a pleasant dash of SSG's *Warlords* thrown in for atmosphere. Describing how all these elements have been combined, of course, will be this gourmet gamer's delicious task.

Naturally, having many flavored ingredients does not a delicacy make. Faithfully assisting Bruce Williams is his programming sidekick extraordinaire, Thurston Searfoss, whom many will remember as the programmer behind *The Lost Admiral* and its challenging levels of computer opponent skill. Fortunately for strategy gamers, the team of Bruce & Thurston is at it again, doing what they do best.

### Put Out The Cascadia

In *Conquered Kingdoms*, players fight battles over one of eight different, finely-crafted game maps. Varying in size and complexity of terrain, through repeated play one will become familiar with many of their nuances and see that each was carefully designed to prohibit "perfect plans" from emerging. There are multiple ways to siege and sally across each one and, to add to the need to do so, every new game finds the game's crucial resources — gold, coal and wood — randomly scattered across the map. Thus, opting to fight from a favored position on, say, map #2, might leave a player at an economic disadvantage. Successful *Conquered Kingdoms* players will have to maintain skills and flexibility rather than

relying on set, "perfect plans." To further add to the adventure, there is even a random map scenario where *anything* can happen! Topping off all this variety are the varying ways to adjust the game set-up options: single city starts, normal two to three city starts, etc. Basically, one is never playing the same game twice, even though it might be on a familiar map.

Besides the economic objectives and a wide variety of terrain types (oceans, rivers and bridges), the two key objectives are cities and castles. Cities, naturally, are straight point generators, as in *The Perfect General*. They must be garrisoned and the points flow in every turn that they remain under unchallenged control.



Castles, too, produce points (in geometrically increasing amounts as one acquires more of them — similar to owning multiple railroads in *Monopoly*). More importantly, however, castles are one's recruitment centers. Newly produced units (which all take two turns to arrive) are placed in friendly controlled castles. Finally, castles are tough nuts to crack. There are a variety of ways to try to capture them, but none are particularly easy and each requires a fairly powerful force to attempt their liberation while an enemy resides there.

At the end of a prescribed number of turns (game length may vary by player selection of either the short, normal or long play game option), both player's points are compared, modified for game length, and then displayed in terms of "notches." These notches will adjust a player's rank, which begins at "serf" and rises through "marquis," "duke," and so on. Naturally, in the best QOP traditions, map scores, player scores, averages, and such, are all stored so that one can reference them later. A player's legacy in the land of Cascadia will continue as long as the game remains on his or her hard drive (which, in the case of *Conquered Kingdoms*, could be a very long time).

### Fantasy Chess

The pieces used in the game give it the same distinctive boardgame-on-a-computer feel that the three games *Conquered Kingdom* emulates happen to possess. Players may opt to use either of two sets of pieces, normal or advanced. The normal set includes all of the various human army units, including: swordsmen, lancers, knights, cavalry, archers, catapults, ships, spies and officers (the latter only being available when playing a campaign game). The advanced set adds gargoyles, trolls, ogres, rogs, phantoms, wizards and dragons (the latter two being the much dreaded "heavy" units in the game).

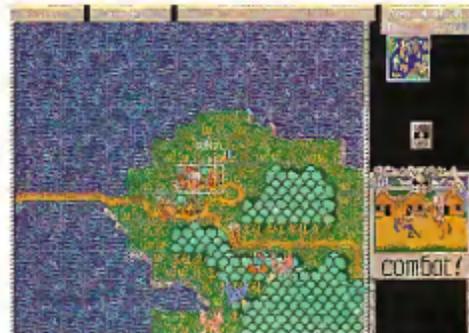
In the tradition of *The Last Admiral*, each unit has almost a *Scissors-Rock-Paper* combat quality against certain other pieces, particularly when playing with fixed combat results (as opposed to random — an excellent choice of features borrowed from *The*

*Perfect General*). For example, spies can assassinate officers with considerable ease, but are themselves quite vulnerable if caught (fortunately, they have a sighting range twice that of other units and can only themselves be seen if the enemy happens to blunder into their exact square). Likewise, the antidote to enemy cavalry is friendly lancers; enemy lancers are best dealt with by friendly swordsmen; enemy archers by friendly gargoyles; enemy gargoyles by friendly catapults, and on and on.

In other words, no piece is invincible or singularly decisive. There is an antidote for every problem and keeping a combined arms force is invariably a key to victory. Combining the right blend of exotic abilities is another important element of success in playing *Conquered Kingdoms*. Having spies scout out enemy strength, phantoms amidst friendly forces to scare enemies within three space to doing only one half damage, trolls as front line fodder to blunt enemy cavalry and regenerate four (of their 16 maximum) hit points back per turn, catapults and archers for missile support from the rear, ships and rogs for amphibious support or gargoyles, and dragons for air support can all be decisive "combined arms" elements in every battle. There are many ways to fight and win each battle with such a wide variety of pieces to choose from and much of the replayability comes from this very delicious diversity of combat units. Thus, the most routine element in the game has been made one of the most intriguing.

### Conquered Campaigns

While the game maps use the hex-brick pattern found in *The Last Admiral* (where each space has a stacking limit of two units), this hexagon pattern is also found on the eight different campaign game maps. These are the Cascadia campaigns which can range from a reasonably short number of games that are required to win the campaign, to outright epics. Each area on the campaign map has two pieces of information on it. The first character indicates which battle map is used when fighting for that area (numbered one to eight or "R" for a random selection). The second character denotes what special bonus is afforded the owner of that area in future battles ("D"ragons, "W"izards, "S" for gold and "H" for additional officers).



A campaign is decided by either conquering a certain number of areas on the campaign map or by capturing all of the "throne" hidden upon it. A player begins with a single area and selects an adjacent region upon which to fight the first battle. When that game is over, the winner receives a new fic on the campaign map with additional ones awarded for achieving more decisive victories. Basically, this system works fine between two balanced players, but once things start to snowball from less evenly matched opponents. A campaign could really go downhill fast!

# Sneak Preview

In the Cascadia campaign games, officers are introduced into each player's unit mix. Both players get a king, who is a reasonably tough humber and the player's first officer piece (others are acquired through conquered provinces on the campaign map). Like the flagship in *Lost Admiral*, officers improve from battle to battle (should they survive — if not, they begin anew as lowly squires). Officers have a special ability to heal human units in their "command range" and heal themselves (slowly) in castles. Furthermore, as officers rise in rank between battles, they gain more hit points. Regrettably, officers can only command/heal the standard human troop types. Exotic units, including wizards, cannot be healed by officers since, in the land of Cascadia, they follow no king.



## Conquered Companions

Besides creating levels of solitary play that are supposed to rival *The Lost Admiral* (although, I admit, I'm doing much better against the computer opponent in *Conquered Kingdoms* than I ever did against the AI in *The Lost Admiral*), *Conquered Kingdoms* also offers what has become a delightful strategy gaming standard — modern play. Although the action is not real time (a la *Command HQ* or *Global Conquest*), even with the "Igo, Hugo" (I go, you go)

turn based play system, *Conquered Kingdoms* still moves fast enough to maintain player interest. Whereas *The Perfect General* afforded the passive player a chance for opportunity fire, no such phase exists in *Conquered Kingdoms*. However, one can always peruse the turn-by-turn graphs showing victory point earnings, casualties and the various resource income levels (and possibly more, as features were being added to the beta version I previewed regularly as this article was written). Additionally, writing messages to one's opponent is a snap; this is important for guys like me who enjoy engaging in the "propaganda phase" while waiting for my turn.

## The Wizard's Familiar

If Bruce Williams is some sort of rising game wizard, then *Conquered Kingdoms* would have to be his "familiar." A familiar, of course, is the wizard's companion which is often a shape-changing creature of infinite help and amusement. Since *Conquered Kingdoms* keeps shifting shape in my mind between appearing as *The Lost Admiral*, *The Perfect General*, *Warlords* and a refreshingly new game, I can never be too sure which game it most resembles. However, one thing is certain; if there is a magic that can compel players to spend countless hours of repeated play with a game, Bruce Williams and Thurston Searfoss have combined once again to cast such a spell — this time upon QQP's *Conquered Kingdoms*. **caw**

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moval as well as Excessive Speed Breakdown for vehicles.

20. Tracks the Terrain Effects Modifier on the Infantry Fire Table, which greatly helps prevent applying an incorrect modifier.



## GAP as Peacemaker/Educator

The above list constitutes a considerable investment in rules questions and die rolls that players won't have to worry about. For instance, if a novice ASL player shoots at an enemy squad in a building, there are three empty boxes where the player can click in the terrain modifiers. If the novice player clicked on Stone Building and Wall, as the two terrain effects modifiers, the program automatically dismisses the wall as a terrain effects modifier as it knows that a squad in a stone building cannot get both the wall and the stone building as modifiers. Neat, eh?

Equally appealing as what the program does is what it doesn't let the player do. If one attempts an illegal action, the ASL GAP not only prevents it, but cites the Chapter and Section of the ASL rules the player is violating! This allows players to read up on exactly what has gone wrong. It is a great idea, well executed.

Having used this GAP for a few weeks now, I cannot recommend it highly enough. For ASL players, it is simply a must. Allowing players to concentrate on the game, rather than trying to remember

the rules or flip through charts, everything is at one's fingertips and can be summoned with the click of a mousebutton or stroked in with a keyboard command.

Novice ASL players who are hesitant to get involved in the game because of the vast rules book will now find that they have a tremendous ally in this program. It easily cuts the learning curve in half, if not more. Virtually all of the number crunching has been taken away and aptly dealt with by the computer.

For example, tank-versus-tank combat becomes as easy as clicking a mouse button on the type of tank firing and the type of tank being fired at. Click in the range and whether the target is moving or not and presto, one has either hit or missed. The program also states if one has a multiple Rate of Fire, and asks the player if he wants to shoot again and if he has retained his rate of fire (which, in turn, is also tracked by the program). If a tank hits, the program automatically brings on another page where players will see the results of the hit. Nothing could be easier.

Here is where to get this ingenious little bit of programming:

On GENIE, M:805, "Games Libraries," DOS games. File number 4186, ASL-GAP.ZIP. Alternately, one can contact Steven Zundel on Prodigy at his email address there, which is SRBJ13A. Finally, one can use the U.S. Postal Service and write to Steven Zundel, 128 Jewel Street, Enumclaw, WA, 99022.

This product is a real bargain, too. Shareware this good begs to be programmed for other monster boardgames out there. Who knows, Steve Zundel might start a trend and the wargaming hobby will be all the better for it.

According to designer/programmer Steven Zundel, the ASL GAP was three years in the making (and is constantly being upgraded). The \$20 registration fee covered the Russian and German Orders of Battle (OOB) which I initially downloaded from GENIE. For \$10 more apiece, Mr. Zundel sends registered users the British and American OOBs. Right now, he's hard at work with the Japanese OOB, which mates up with the Code of Bushido supplement. To put the frosting on the cake, Mr. Zundel is also working on a play-by-email version of the ASL GAP. **cw**

## QQP's

### Strategies of the Month

Vol. 16

A monthly column to improve the quality of play

**SOLITAIRE'S JOURNEY:** The key to winning the game "Eight Off" as quickly as possible is to clear one of your tableaux.

**THE LOST ADMIRAL:** Just got the Strategy Game of the Year Award (CGW Nov. 92). If you tried the game earlier and had difficulty beating levels 1 or 2, give it another chance. It's a powerful game with great depth, worthy of some practice play.

**THE PERFECT GENERAL:** (Greatest Battles of the 20th century scenario disk) - In the Battle of "Kursk", artillery can and should win the day.

**BATTLES OF DESTINY:** Do not underestimate the naval aspects of this game. Naval dominance makes taking an island much easier. Try not to send an un-escorted transport to take an enemy city. Many a game, here at Q.Q.P., has been won by using a strong naval contingent.

**CONQUERED KINGDOMS:** Spies, though expensive to buy, make great units to quickly take towns at the start of a game. They move 6, (faster than any other unit). They are not very useful in combat though. When playing a Cascadia campaign (and officers are used) spies are invaluable in sneaking through enemy front lines and attacking officers. Spies kill 12 of an officer! Spies have many other important (and sneaky) attributes. See if you can discover them.

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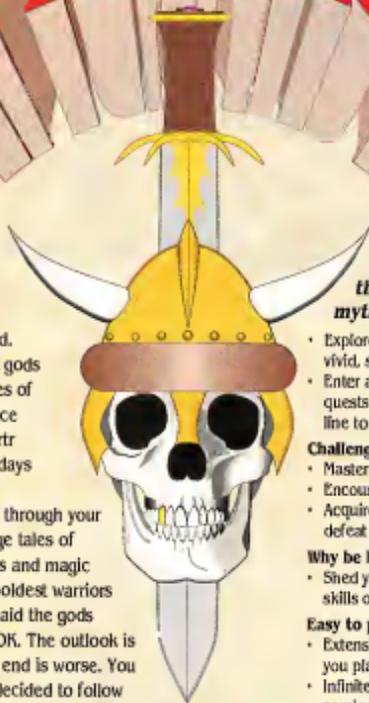
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## Return to Target

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GUNSHIP  
2000

Scenario Disk

by David A. Wolfe

An old computer game has flight simulator fun, the author writes. It's not a new title, but the I&I version is a return of the Gulf War, he is currently enjoying. The author says he can be reached via e-mail on GEM@IB.M.I.A. but he is currently offline.

(Views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the United States Government.)

Since my initial review of *Gunship 2000* appeared in the December 1991 issue, MicroProse has released several revisions and patches for the game. The most significant of these releases is the new *Islands and Ice Scenario Disk (I&I)*, which contains all of the previously released patches and much more. This review focuses on the effects of upgrading the initial release of *Gunship 2000* (Version 2) with the new scenario disk.

### Installation

*I&I* is painless to incorporate into *GS2000*. The excellent documentation explains the new features and provides detailed histories about the new theatres. After a disk swap or two, and perhaps changing some settings to take advantage of the new hardware options, the player is ready to enjoy the following new features:

### Improved Flight Model

Perhaps the most offensive fault of Version 2 was the atrocious flight model the player was forced to deal with. A smoother and more flyable model was fortunately incorporated into *I&I*. I'm sorry to say that the acrobatic capabilities of a combat helicopter are still missing, making air-to-air engagements trying at times. Nonetheless, the improvement over the original *GS2000* is pronounced.

### More Control Options

While evaluating Version 2, I longed for

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SCENARIO:	Airix Island, Soundblaster, ATI Stereo
DESIGNER:	James M. Day, Darrell Dennis, Dennis Packer, Chris Clarke
PUBLISHER:	MicroProse Software East Valley, MD

a two-stick control option. *I&I* provides this and much more. Additional control choices include joystick emulation for the keyboard, foot-pedals and the popular Thrustmaster control system. (Designer Jim Day advised me that there have been hardware conflicts when using the Thrustmaster and Soundblaster together.) These new control options take some getting used to, but significantly reduce the player's workload and increase the enjoyment of the game.

### More Fuel

With most combat helicopters having a two hour endurance on internal fuel, I was irritated to find the helicopters in Version 2 running dry after a mere 30 minutes of game time. *I&I* provides more endurance, which helps, but still not nearly enough. If the designers insist on leaving the internal fuel endurance at its current level, then players should be allowed to equip the helicopters with the "Zippo" configuration

of additional external fuel tanks. AH-64 in the Gulf War used this configuration extensively.

### More Sound-Card Support

Owners of Soundblaster and ATI Stereo cards will be pleased to know that *I&I* acknowledges their hardware. A glitch I encountered with my ProAudio Spectrum in the Version 6 upgrade has apparently been eliminated in *I&I*. While the sounds presented with the different cards are still, in my opinion, anemic, at least a broader base of hardware owners can enjoy them. Of course, I am used to hearing sounds in a specific decibel range when it comes to this aircraft. I don't know if other gamers would consider the sounds anemic or not.



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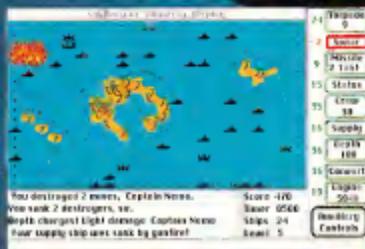
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Macintosh 16 color screen shown.

## Improved Sights

Most-mounted sighting systems are the hot ticket with today's helicopter designers. *I&I* makes the most-mounted sights of the game's AH-6G, OH-58D and Longbow Apache helicopters much more effective. Using this improved feature, the player can provide remote target designation for other helicopters in the flight. Hovering behind a hilltop with only the MMS peering over and designating for a sister ship's missiles is the way to dispatch a 2S6 on high troop-quality settings.

Trusting an NPC pilot to perform a SAR or evacuation mission autonomously was an act of parast optimism in Version 2. Fortunately, the NPCs in the update have enhanced search capabilities. This means less frustration for the player while accomplishing the primary and secondary missions simultaneously. This feature could still be improved upon, but it's a big help nonetheless.



## Easier Opponents

A major problem with Version 2 was the exaggerated enemy capability, particularly at the "Poor" and "Average" troop-quality settings. *I&I* reduces the response time and accuracy of the low-grade enemies, helping the new player to avoid getting flamed in every mission. Unfortunately, even in *I&I*, enemy units such as infantry or AML-90s still have a supernatural ability to detect and engage helicopters at night and at extended ranges. I've found my vocabulary skidding into the gutter more than once when encountering this howling inaccuracy. Real wartime experience clearly shows that enemy units such as these would be "meat on the table" after the sun went down.

## More Time

*I&I* also extends the previous 20 minute mission time constraints to 30 minutes. However, as with the artificially low fuel endurance, I can't find a solid reason why the time constraints are there at all. Using

any caution, particularly in rugged terrain, can take 45-60 minutes of game-time. Urgent missions make nice variant scenarios, but there's no need to be rushed every time.

## Fire Support

Considerable help in accomplishing the tougher missions comes via the addition of friendly Close Air Support (CAS) and artillery fire support. Easily activated from the map screen, the player simply places a cursor over the target location and lets the friendly assets carry on from there. This feature is a nice touch, even if not particularly realistic.

There are many other minor improvements to the game's mechanics, including an improved map screen, in-flight mission changes and "hot key" commands to other helicopters in the flight. However, the biggest selling points to *I&I* have yet to be addressed — the new theatres of conflict, terrain and the mission builder!

## A Double Main Event

Advertised during the early gestation of *GS2000*, the mission builder makes its debut with *I&I*. Players will find the mouse- and icon-driven mission building system simple and powerful. Auto-scrolling maps of various scales allow pinpoint placement of a tremendous range of single and group targets. The terrain models literally become easels for the player to paint on!

Moving targets can easily be integrated into the scenarios. Various inactive objects can be added to each scenario, adding flavor or even humor to the proceedings. (Can the player stop the advancing armored forces before the penguin rookery is overrun?!) The ability to display weapon-range overlays and moving target paths helps considerably in seasoning a mission to the player's taste. Even the weather can be altered. After working with the mission builder for only a few minutes, I could recreate missions from my own wartime experience with surprising accuracy. A topnotch feature, the mission builder could be improved even further with a terrain builder/editor.

In addition to the excellent mission builder, players can now enjoy action in new theatres of conflict. The Philippine and Antarctic theatres present a wide range of new challenges. New enemy equipment is plentiful, and the terrain models are reasonably well-rendered.

The Antarctic region can be particularly challenging, with heavy winds, haywire compasses and superb white-out effects. (I would still like to see similar brownout effects added to the Persian Gulf region during low/slow flight profiles.) Besides the new theatres, the player will also face action in the new Persian Gulf rugged terrain model and the Central Europe urban (city) terrain model. The rugged terrain model strongly resembles the Northern Iraq region, while the urban environment subjects the player to close-range combat in the claustrophobic confines of a large city's streets. The rugged terrain is very challenging, but the urban model steals the show. Images of the movie "Blue Thunder" are going to be prancing in many a player's head when taking the mission downtown.

## Being All It Can Be

As gamers are notoriously difficult to satisfy, I can't suppress the urge to request further features that would help vault *GS2000* to the next level:

— Add modem play, with cooperative and competitive modes.

— Create a "living battlefield" a la *Falcon 3.0*.

— Take full advantage of 386, 486 and SVGA power.

— Flesh out the campaign game with realistic units, personnel considerations and news updates.

— Add some "oomph" to the sound effects.

MicroProse's dedication to the cus-



tomers has helped transform what was a mediocre title into a much better gaming value. *GS2000* fans will be ecstatic with the new improvements. Gamers disappointed with the original *GS2000* could very well find *I&I* to be just the shot in the arm the game needed. Regardless of my previous observations, the *Islands and Ice* scenario disk is an excellent product, earning *GS2000* my vote as "Most Improved Game of the Year." **EW**



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## FULL OF SOUND AND FURY, SIGNIFYING NOTHING

Three-Sixty's *Theatre of War*

by Tim Carter

**T**heatre of War is Three-Sixty Pacific's latest foray into the strategy gaming market. It is an abstracted chess type game that plays in real time. *Theatre of War* looks a little like a project where the designers took the game of chess and added on everything they could think of to make it more interesting and more accessible to the casual wargamer.

### The Plot Thickens

The game offers three different sets of pieces, depending on the era being simulated: Ancient, World War I and Modern. Each set has distinct capabilities based on an abstraction of the nature of warfare during that period. Although the interface remains the same for each set of pieces, this is about all that does. The board, the commands, and the nature of the game changes with each set.

A key word here is "abstraction." While each set generally reflects the capabilities of units in each era, *Theatre of War* is not a wargame in the sense that it seeks to replicate specific battles or even specific types of battles. Rather its objective seems to be to present different sets of theoretical problems for the player to solve, based on the weaponry available.

Each set of pieces is accompanied by a series of scenarios, none of which takes longer than 30-45 minutes to play. The emphasis is on playability and action, rather than realism



TITLE	Theatre of War
SYSTEM	IBM
# PLAYERS	1-2
PRICE	\$49.95
GRAPHICS	VGA HARK, EAGLE, SVGA (2MB RAM)
SOUNDING	Rock Band, Paul Walker
PUBLISHER	Three-Sixty Pacific Campbell, CA

and the micro-management of tiny details. Orders can be given through the mouse, the keyboard, or a combination of both (using "hot" keys). In addition to simple movement and fire orders, units can be commanded to alter terrain, retreat and recover, or simply hold their position and fire at any targets of opportunity.

### Skillful Cinematography

*Theatre of War* also boasts an artistic approach to the strategy game, using SVGA capabilities and smooth flowing graphics. The SVGA graphics are impressive; a combat information screen can be called up with displays of the combative pieces swinging away at each other in incredibly smooth animation. Unfortunately, I think the designers took the approach too far when they present the game board in three dimensions. While this looks good, it is not particularly functional.

In 3-D mode it is very difficult to properly see the battlefield; orders are difficult to coordinate and group planning is hindered. Fortunately an overhead mode is provided which makes planning and order-giving considerably easier. Unfortunately, however, some of the auxiliary screens provided in 3-D mode are unavailable when operating from overhead. Two key items which are missing would be the status of the active unit and the radar-like screen which provides a rough understanding of the enemy's movements. Furthermore, in order to get a reading of the combat status of one's

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own army, it is necessary to click on an entirely different screen. When numerous battles are taking place and the clock is running, this is not necessarily a cost-effective option.

## Plot Twists

One of the most interesting elements of the game is the addition of logistics. Pieces exhaust energy and health through movement and combat. Many pieces are capable of missile fire and may run out of ammunition. Pieces can only be eliminated when they are out of both health and energy. Keeping one's army healthy and armed is, therefore, one of the primary keys to victory. Logistics are different for each set, but can make the difference between winning and losing in each. For instance, in the Ancient set, the catapult unit can destroy any enemy unit on the board at (relatively) long range. However, it loses energy with each shot and too many consecutive shots will result in it becoming immobile and highly vulnerable. Since damage is never permanent, logistics emphasize the need to keep one's army intact, fighting limited engagements and retreating units when they have become weakened.

The use of real-time, however, reduces the decision making role of the player. There are simply too many things happening at once to effectively control the flow of battle. The game is set out in such a way that operational planning requires one to establish a battle plan and organize one's forces based on this plan. Once battle is joined, there is little that one can do to alter the overall nature of the melee, at least until the initial uproar has died down. In one sense this is more realistic than most wargames, since they usually allow unlikely levels of micromanagement, but in another sense, it is less enjoyable to play.

## A Predictable Ending

By far the most critical weakness of this program is its artificial intelligence. Simply put, the game is much too easy to win. If scenarios are going to be only 30 minutes long, they have to be challenging or at least have serious replay value. Neither is evident here. For each set of pieces a few experimental games should reveal the most effective deployment

strategy. Once this has been determined, the scenarios become both easy and repetitious.

Furthermore, a generic strategy for each set of pieces is effective regardless of the scenario. For instance, using the Great War set, the most effective strategy revolves around the use of missile units. While the computer opponent advances, I deploy my machine guns and cannon so as to have clear lines of fire and to be easily supplied. Then, all of them are set on auto-fire and the rest of my army is held in reserve. The enemy attack is usually broken up by massed fire before it can mount an effective counter-attack. Compounded with the fact that the computer does not make effective use of its missile units

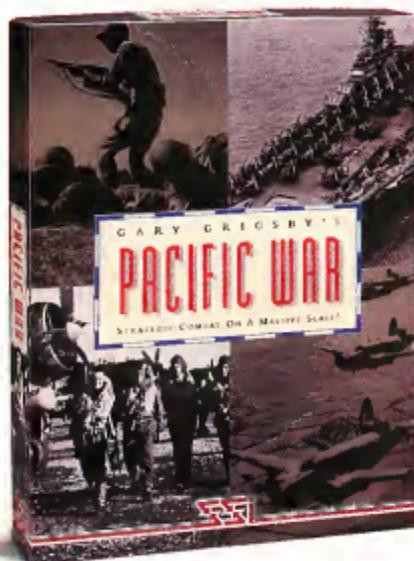
in any of the scenarios, this means that all of the Great War scenarios can be fought and won in a single evening.

One note when using missile units. For some reason, when missiles are fired over the heads of friendly units those units suffer damage. Therefore, it is important to leave missile units up front, and to stop firing if enemy forces get behind the firing line. When using the Modern set, this can lead to some innovative tactics. Because of the speed of aircraft and the slow rate of fire of missile units, a clever player can cause enemy units on auto-fire to shoot at their own pieces. This is done by flying over squares onto which the enemy is advancing. Enemy missile units will fire at the aircraft when it is in the square. However, unless the aircraft lands, it will not be in the square when the missile arrives. Instead, advancing enemy forces will take the hits.

In the process of adding so many options to the game of chess, the designers have inadvertently removed the element of chess that makes it so attractive to so many people — a variety of structured strategic approaches. This game represents the triumph of style over substance. It looks impressive and, with a few minor quirks, the interface is effective. However, it is simply not enough of a challenge to hold the serious gamer's attention for any amount of time. Once the basic commands are understood, there is very little to actually do. **crw**



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# Taking Falcon 3.0 to the Next Level

## Spectrum HoloByte's Operation Fighting Tiger

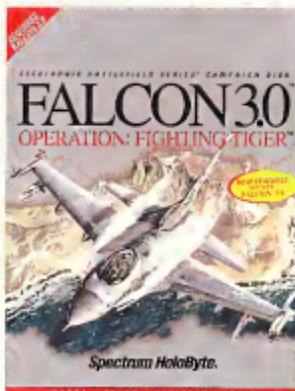
by Loren Rashbach

**S**pectrum HoloByte's latest addition to the Falcon family, the *Operation: Fighting Tiger* add-on package (also called *Falcon 3.01*), is composed of two major components: bug fixes and new features. Regardless of which version of *Falcon 3.0* one currently owns, *Operation: Fighting Tiger* will upgrade it to version 3.01. At the time of this writing, Spectrum HoloByte has released one patch to *Operation: Fighting Tiger*, entitled version 3.01.1. This patch is free, and can be obtained directly from Spectrum HoloByte. Despite the introduction of such an odd numbering scheme, *Operation: Fighting Tiger* and its associated patch hold many nice surprises for *Falcon 3.0* pilots. Unfortunately, *Operation: Fighting Tiger* has many incompatibilities with prior versions; any campaigns one has in progress will be wiped out, and one will need upgrades to the user-made utilities, *Falcon* and *F3maps*.

Originally, Spectrum HoloByte stated that the bug fix portion of *Operation: Fighting Tiger* version 3.01 would be made available as a free upgrade to registered owners. This patch, entitled *Falcon 3.0e*, would not introduce the new campaign theaters and features of *Operation: Fighting Tiger*. However, immediately after the release of *Operation: Fighting Tiger*,



Spectrum HoloByte announced that it would take at least 30 days to generate version 3.0e. At the time of this writing, Spectrum HoloByte has made no further indication of when version 3.0e will be released.



### Bug Killer

In the category of bug fixes, *Operation: Fighting Tiger* version 3.01.1 corrects the majority of problems associated with landings that remained in version 3.0d. For example, the ILS system now has two modes of operation: the previously incorrect "beacon" mode, and a new, correct, "directional" mode. Beacon mode ILS still operates incorrectly, simply directing the pilot toward base, while the new directional mode ILS actually aligns the pilot with the runway like an ILS should. Also corrected is the extremely annoying forward view shift whenever the ILS is engaged or the gear is lowered. By default, the view shift still occurs, but users may disable it. Finally, VASI approach lights have been added to runways in new theaters, but not to runways in the original three theaters.

Communications mode has been vastly improved. While some instabilities still exist, direct serial port connections and modem-to-modem play is highly reliable. After several hours of modem-to-modem play, no lockups have been encountered.

TITLE	Operation: Fighting Tiger
SYSTEM	IBM
PLAYERS	Supports direct connect, modem, and network play
PRICE	\$19.95
PROTECTION	None
DISTRIBUTOR	Criticon Inc.
PUBLISHER	Spectrum HoloByte Alameda, CA

Furthermore, the *Operation: Fighting Tiger 3.01.1* communications mode is compatible with version 3.0d, provided that the player with 3.0d originates the call. During a several hour, direct-connect, allied play session several glitches were encountered and both the calling and answering machine experienced an occasional lockup. Overall, the allied play was highly successful. Be warned however, due to the large amount of data being transmitted, 2400 baud is the minimum usable data transmission rate. Below 2400, screen updates are simply too slow. Users at 2400 baud will want to reduce the graphics detail levels to the Medium setting to ensure playability. Despite the problems, *Falcon 3.01.1* has what this reviewer considers to be the best multi-player flight system currently available for the IBM.

Campaign debriefings have been overhauled, but still fail to be reliable, unfortunately. The briefing is much more informative, giving detailed stats on kills,



friendly pilots and aircraft survival information, but is often inaccurate. It is not uncommon for the debriefing to report more F-16s were shot down on the mission than were present. Kill stats are often in-

accurate, often reporting close range kills as Beyond Visual Range (BVR) kills. It appears that anytime a BVR weapon strikes an enemy aircraft, no matter what the range, the kill is listed as BVR.

### Fighting Chance

Beyond fixes, *Operation: Fighting Tiger* has many new features and three new theaters of conflict: the Kurile Islands, Pakistan and Korea. All three theaters place the United States in the "limited warfare" role, with only a handful of units in the region to fulfill political promises. Between these theaters, both friendly and enemy forces are equipped many new weapons, aircraft, ground forces and ships. By far, the most interesting theater is the Kurile Islands, where the player must take a single squadron and support Japanese troops on the islands which are under assault by the Russian Fleet.

A new, upgraded F-16 called the FSX is available in the Kurile Islands scenario. Although it does have improved performance, most pilots will probably find the improvements negligible during combat. However, with the FSX comes many new weapons, including improved AIM-120 missiles, the AIM-9R Sidewinder and the AGM-86 Harpoon anti-ship missile.

These new weapons and platforms, however, do not make the Kurile Islands an easy place to fight. The player is equipped with only a single 18-plane squadron and ordered to protect Japanese forces in the Kurile Islands against a formidable Russian naval task force led by the aircraft carrier, *Admiral of the Fleet Kuznetsov*. To further complicate matters, the player's squadron is not permitted to start a war between the US and Russia. Instead, strict rules of engagement (ROE) prohibit the player from firing on targets in many circumstances. Violating ROE can result in escalated levels of conflict and/or the court martial of the offending pilot. Based on the ability scores, computer pilots (both friendly and enemy) can occasionally lose their nerve, and either run for home or open fire and violate ROE. This sets the stage for some very intense air combat where the participants are constantly jockeying for position, waiting for the enemy to run for home.

Version 3.01.1 greatly improves sound support. Although some glitches still exist for IBM speaker users, anyone equipped with a soundboard will be greatly pleased with the new performance. Many new digitized voices have been added, vocalizing the text of old messages as well as announcing new messages. *Factor version 3.01.1* is clearly the industry leader in terms of digitized sound effects; no other simulator product on the market inter-

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mixes such complex digitized phrases during real-time combat.

Campaign mode has received some attention, also. First, users now have three choices of campaign difficulty level (at easier levels, enemy units receive fewer supplies at longer intervals, limiting their offensive potential). Many new types of missions have been added, especially in the Kurile Islands theater, such as suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) and anti-shipping strikes. *Falcon 3.0* pilots should be warned that the Russian fleet has heavy surface-to-air defenses, and attacking the Russian warships will usually result in heavy allied casualties.

The High Fidelity Radar (HFR) has also been modified. The problem with radar locks being broken when the auto-ranging function resets the elevation scans has

been fixed. The auto-range function is still present (this is an actual feature of the APG-66 radar), but no longer resets the elevation scans. Also, ACM mode now has two user-selectable scan patterns for different combat situations.

The dusk missions at 1900 hours have



been removed and replaced with night missions at 2100 hours. The night missions use a very nice dark palette, rendering most objects invisible except at extremely close ranges. Pilots are forced to rely on their HUD and their instrumentation to fly and fight.

## Termite Inspection

*Operation: Fighting Tiger* does still have some serious flaws, though. The AWACS still do not provide useful infor-

mation regarding bandits, and the Hi-Fidelity flight model is still unflyable when the aircraft is loaded over 30,000 pounds. G-limits are not enforced when the aircraft is heavily laden (pulling 9G with 30,000 pounds of ordnance on the wings would rip them off). Most notably, no flight path information is provided for other friendly aircraft in the area, not even for aircraft the player is assigned to escort.

Overall, despite the weaknesses *Operation: Fighting Tiger* makes *Falcon 3.0* a stable, reliable platform, correcting most technical problems and adding new challenges. Based on technology available in *Falcon 3.0*, the features available, and the



general user-interface, *Operation: Fighting Tiger* earns a high commendation on its performance review. **COM**

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# Homegrown Flight Simulation Enhancements

by Mike "Moondog" Weksler

Currently, entertainment software companies are hard at work pushing the envelope for state-of-the-art flight simulation software. The following, however, represents what is being done by an elite few in their garages and basements during their spare time. They represent the vanguard of flight simulation enthusiasts and the genre as a whole will benefit from their endeavors.



Jeff Heeszel sitting in the nearly completed Hellseat 2000.

## Home Cockpit: The Hellseat 2000

Recently, out of the clear blue sky, we received a communication from Jeff Heeszel which described an inexpensive home-built cockpit for flight simulations. This is, by far, the most significant attempt (as the accompanying photos disclose) at a realistic fighter cockpit that we've seen. Not just a cheezy car seat setup, the *Hellseat 2000*, as Jeff refers to it, is based on the plans for a 1/12th scale model kit of the F-16 cockpit and ACES II ejection seat (manufactured by AMT). On either panel, one can see the **Thrustmaster** equipment mounted at a forward angle of 30 degrees for comfort. The rudder pedals, seen in the accompanying photographs, are entirely of Jeff's design. The sound system Jeff has installed is thundrous, consisting of a 12" kicker woofer, a base speaker (installed in the lumbar portion of the seat), and a boombox for the mids and highs. To quote Jeff, "Sitting in this thing with the bass pounding you in the back as you fire your cannons cannot be described!" With a sound rig like that, Jeff's roof probably raises a few inches and blasts the entire neighborhood with air combat sounds and explosions. I can't help but wonder how well it would play *Metallica* or *Guns 'n Roses* <grin>. One key fires up the rig with all its peripheral equipment, using a sophisticated array of timers, sequencers and



latching relays. The panels light up and provide switches and sound amp controls.

The materials, in addition to the sound equipment and other electronics, merely consist of a good deal of plywood and over 1,000 1.5" screws. As for the cost, Jeff sums it up best: "For the basic cockpit, maybe \$45 in lumber. Paint, \$25 or so. The Kicker woofer, \$125. The bass amp was purchased at a garage sale for \$40 and I had the other amp as a boombox with detachable speakers. It is most costly in manpower to build, which is free, but might cost a few sixpacks to get your buddies to help you."

For more information regarding the *Hellseat 2000*, contact:

Jeff Heeszel  
5946 W. Feemster Ct.  
Visalia, CA 93277

## Steve Edwards' HOTAS, The Next Generation Joystick Controller

Of the more innovative products I've had the privilege to try out here at the CGW Labs, Steve Edwards' and Ralph Robinson's *HOTAS* (Hands-on Throttle and Stick) system seems to be the most promising. It is a system of hardware and software that allows one to use multiple analog joysticks and controllers. It is unique in that one may program any button to perform any function in a given simulation. Additionally, the analog devices may be programmed to reproduce keypresses—in other words, one can program an analog joystick to return keyboard values to control an aircraft in simulations which do not allow for analog joystick control. I received a *HOTAS* prototype system in an alpha state. That is, it was very rough, had no Graphical User Interface for software, featured no cases for the hardware and arrived with almost no documentation. Even so, it was impressive! At the heart of the system is the proprietary controller card. The keyboard plugs into it, and then another connector runs from the card to the keyboard input on the motherboard. The joystick connector (attached by ribbon connector to the controller card) has connectors for the provided modified *Thrustmaster Weapons Control System* (throttle), the modified *Thrustmaster Flight Control System* (joystick), and even a rewired video game controller which was included as an additional device for more optional buttons. Two more connectors would allow for rudder pedals and another joystick.

One can select the *Thrustmaster FCS* as joystick #1, the throttle on the *Thrustmaster WCS* as the Y axis of joystick #2, and the rudder pedals as the X axis of joystick #2 (joystick mapping), and still have extra connectors for more buttons or another joystick. To accomplish this, the *HOTAS* system has eight analog channels allowing the user up to four joysticks, rudder pedals and up to 40 buttons!

While Ralph was the hardware virtuoso who actually built the system, Steve (known online as "Auger") performed the software wizardry. Button mapping is accomplished with the *HOTAS* programming language and events may be triggered based on button pressing and button releasing. Once functions are defined, the following actions may be assigned: key press, key release, delay, and flag setting, allowing for an almost limitless combination of keyboard commands. The most notable feature of the *HOTAS*



Boyd Rowman

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# Hardware Review

system is the extensive macros capability—the ability to program a series of commands such as a custom radar search routine in *Falcon 3.0* that could be executed with the mere keypress of an arbitrarily assigned button on one of the controllers. The HCL (*HOTAS* command language) allows for an almost unlimited size to these command macros. Included were several HCL files for various air combat simulations and the *Aces of the Pacific* and *Falcon 3.0* files worked quite well. The HCL files are easily modified, the HCL syntax resembling that of the C programming language. Before entering a simulation, one must upload their compiled HCL files (.DEF files) to the controller card with a quick DOS command. Since these .DEF configuration files are uploaded directly to the *HOTAS* hardware, there are no TSRs to take up precious conventional (lower 640K) memory!

Another unique feature of the *HOTAS* system is the ability to create Progressive Rate controls for the joystick. This allows one to customize the rate at which a joystick controls one's simulation. Ordinary analog joysticks increase the rate at which they control as the distance from the center increases. The *HOTAS* system would allow one to place the change of control rate *anywhere* along the throw of the joystick, allowing the gamer to customize the sensitivity of the device for his/her needs. Developers are urged to look into this new technology to support not just flight simulations, but driving simulations as well. Even in its alpha state, the hardware proved to work as promised. *HOTAS* is years ahead of anything currently available. One can only hope that Steve and Ralph license or market their truly innovative system. Until then, the only way to get one of their *HOTAS* rigs is to obtain a custom setup from them. This is not off-the-shelf compatible and even regular joysticks such as the CH flightstick are in need of a minor modification. Also, one's *Thrustmaster* equipment will have to be sent in for a permanent modification (converting the *Thrustmaster* WCS into an analog device).

For more information regarding the *HOTAS* system, contact:

Steve Edwards,  
Ralph Robinson  
R&R Electronics  
4009 Parkwood St.  
Brentwood MD 20722  
(301) 699-5277  
CompuServe 71610,2736

*HOTAS*.ZIP information file is available on CompuServe, in the Flight Simulation Forum in Library #13.

## Voice Commander: Voice Recognition With An Off-The-Shelf Soundblaster

The *Voice Commander* is an innovative TSR utility which gives voice recognition capability to anyone with a soundblaster and a half way decent microphone. So far, designer John Donovan has implemented the software to be compatible with *F-117A Stealth Fighter* from *MicroProse*. The program executes and prompts the user as to whether or not he/she is new to the software. A "no" answer will allow the user to test the default voice file, while a "yes" response will allow the user to enter the voice training mode. The gamer is prompted to speak the list of program commands words three times. Then the program allows the gamer to test his/her voice against the stored voice file. I achieved a 95% success rate by speaking calmly and clearly. Multiple words are spoken as one word. For instance, "landing gear" is pronounced: "landing-gear" with no pause. The following is a list of words for *F-117A Stealth Fighter*: rear view, target, forward, landing gear, ahead, missile, video 1, video 2, tactical view, inverse, new target,

navigate, full power, missile view, instrument, repeat, left, right, infra-red, chase plane, autopilot, exit. Occasionally, I would speak one word and the software would misinterpret me. Most often, the software would mistake my "navigate" command with "landing gear," resulting in my ripping said equipment clean off the aircraft. At other times, I would give the command "new target," only to be switched to a rear-looking view. But these problems were few and far between, and I generally found using the *Voice Commander* software to be extremely enjoyable and, while not as flexible as the *Covax VMkey* voice recognition software, it was more user-friendly and reliable in its interpretation of my voice commands. (I would imagine that the reliability factor would vary upon a given individual's voice.)

The voice commands are entered by holding the tab key down while speaking. This is analogous to a pilot holding the mike button in a push-to-talk manner. One thing that comes to mind would be to use the *Voice Commander* software with the *HOTAS* system. A button on one of the controllers could be configured to emulate a tab key, allowing one to use that button to push-to-talk with the *Voice Commander* software and an off-the-shelf *Soundblaster*. If John writes modules for use with such sims as *Falcon 3.0* and *Aces of the Pacific*, when combined with the *HOTAS* system, one may set it up so that the keyboard is not even needed! One could use buttons for flight tasks, and the push-to-talk button for voice commands to his/her wingman or other members of one's flight! Perhaps the only drawback to the *Voice Commander* software is that it requires 71K of RAM. With such a high memory requirement, it is doubtful that the software would be able to work with many of the current crop of flight simulations. The software does, however, come with a boot disk for those who are not comfortable with the arcane workings of creating a clean boot configuration. Of the items discussed in this article, this is the only one commercially available (from *Chips and Bits* for \$29). John plans to have modules available for *Wing Commander* soon, as well as for *F-15 Strike Eagle III* as it becomes available.

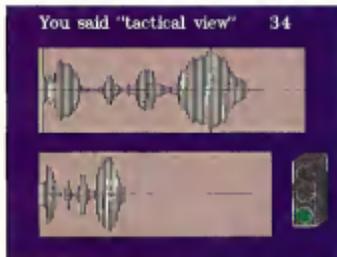
For more information regarding the *Voice Commander*, contact:  
John Donovan  
Island Imaging  
201-Plantation Club Dr. #1012  
Melbourne, FL 32940  
(407)255-9327  
CompuServe 71223,3661

## "Shaken Not Stirred"

So far, I've discussed these innovative flight simulation items separately. Imagine if these guys got together and built the ultimate flight rig!

We'd like to welcome letters from anyone who enjoyed this article and has some software or hardware related to computer gaming that they've hacked together. We know there are more of you basement hackers out there dreaming up the next advance in the state-of-the-art. This irregular column is a great forum for you to expose your ideas to your fellow hackers. Think of it as the HomeBrew Computer Cockpit Club. Remember to include photos.

Send all submissions to:  
Mike Weksler  
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Testing the Voice Commander prior to flying F-117A.

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# Taking A Peek

## Access

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**AMAZON — GUARDIANS OF EDEN:** As previewed in issue #98, this campy adventure takes the episodic adventures of early TV and the Saturday afternoon movie serials as its inspiration in creating a story built of self-contained scenarios that end with "spine-tingling" cliff-hangers. As in previous Access adventures, *Amazon* makes extensive use of digitized images for its backgrounds, digitized video footage of live actors for its characters, and a speech track, in addition to a nice jungle-rhythms score. Unlike previous Access adventures, *Amazon* offers an SVGA reduced-screen graphics mode, in addition to a standard full-screen VGA mode. The story is, of course, set in the lush jungles of South America and can easily be compared to a "B" *Romancing The Stone*. The puzzles are very involved and some are real-time, but frustrated adventurers can access the tiered on-line hints to help them along. IBM (\$69.95). Circle Reader Service #1.

## Accolade

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## Activision

Los Angeles, CA  
(310) 207-4500

**POWERHITS MOVIES:** In a word—showtware. This first of several repackaging efforts by Activision includes four older titles developed from big box office movie licenses. All four games are graphic adventures with a heavy action emphasis. *Die Hard* is, of course, based upon the intense action-thriller starring Bruce Willis; *Hare Raising Havoc* upon the animated extravaganza starring Roger Rabbit; *The Rocketeer* upon the film interpretation of the popu-



Amazon - Guardians of Eden



Hardball III MLBPA Players Disk



Powerhits Movies



Spellcraft - Aspects of Valor



Terminator 2029

lar comic book hero; and *Ghostbusters II* upon the block-buster movie series featuring Bill Murray and Dan Akroyd. None of these games made much of a stir upon their original release, but they may be worth a second look with their new budget price tag. IBM (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #3.

## ASCIIware

San Mateo, CA  
(415) 570-7005

**SPELLCRAFT — ASPECTS OF VALOR:** Wizards, warlocks and witches take note. This role-playing/action gaming hybrid offers the most extensive magic system we've ever seen in a game. Fifty-six ingredients combine in an unlimited number of combinations to create 100 spells of varying effect and quality. Magic users will hop back and forth between planes of existence as they seek out ingredients and spell recipes in both the real world and in the planes of an alternate dimension. With the proper supplies, players enter their workshop to experiment with their ingredients, searching for the combinations that generate the most powerful spell. Then, with spellbook in hand, they venture forth into realms teeming with nasties and battle with them in real-time. Of course, the 50+ hours of game time all leads up to a battle with the Ultimate Evil Wizard Dude. IBM (\$59.95). Circle Reader Service #4.

## Bethesda Softworks

Rockville, MD  
(301) 926-8300

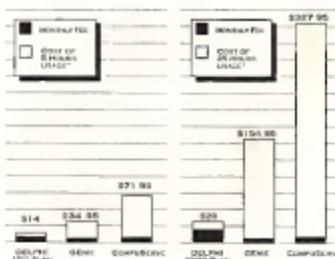
**THE TERMINATOR 2029:** When Dark Horse Comics does a graphic novelization, each page is crammed with exhaustive detail, particularly when the subject matter involves a dark future with cyberpunk edges where technology has gone awry or violent aliens from an inhuman society present a horrendous threat. So, when Bethesda Softworks optioned *Terminator 2029* from the comic publisher, it is no wonder that they created an impressive dark blue palette in finely detailed VGA graphics with plenty of pyrotechnic special effects to convey the hard-hitting fast-paced violence of that epic. The perspective is first-person; the scrolling is fast; the tactics and strategy are as reminiscent of a simulation as of an action game; and the story is tied closely to the universe of the Terminator films. Colonel John Connor assigns the player to perform the first operational field test of a new prototype A.C.E. (Advanced Cybernetic Exoskeleton) Assault Ar-

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# Taking A Peek

mor. The whole feel of the game is something like *MechWarrior* meets *Terminator*, except that the graphics are much more lavish than the former's polygon-filled graphics and the latter's combination EGA/VGA pastiche. IBM (\$69.95). Circle Reader Service #5.

## Compton's NewMedia Carlsbad, CA (619) 929-2500

**USA WARS: DESERT STORM WITH COALITION COMMAND:** If one bought a CD player with the justification that he or she wanted a fact-filled, multi-media encyclopedia at their fingertips, then this product could easily relieve any buyer's remorse. The database covers a vast array of Gulf War topics, is well presented (although less well organized), is crammed with meticulous detail, and provides a fairly unbiased presentation of its topic with sterling clarity. The *Coalition Command* game, however, is not up to the encyclopedia's standards. Looking like the rushed product it was, the game element of this CD leaves a lot to be desired. IBM CD-ROM (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #6.

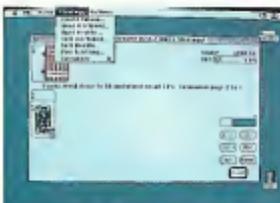
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**BLACKJACK TRAINER 2.0:** This program is here to pump — you up! The serious card player should come to this product prepared for an intense card-tossing workout. It will not only teach its pupil the basics of good "21" play, but it offers tutelage in several card counting techniques and will drill the player until those flabby mental muscles are pumped to perfection. In addition, one can design their own playing strategy and run the strategy through an extended simulation to test its long term outcome. Girly-gamers need not apply. (\$75.00). Circle Reader Service #7.

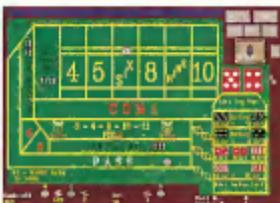
**KEN ELLIOTT'S CRAPSIM 1.0:** There are plenty of entertaining craps simulations on the market, but this simulation allows bets that casual gamers don't even know they can make. Many do not know that in addition to "placing" bets to win (i.e. taking 9 to 5 that the 4 or 10 will win rather than getting the true 2 to 1 odds) or to lose (i.e. risking 11 to 5 that a 7 will be rolled before the 4 or 10) on the numbers, it is possible to buy bets (i.e. getting 2 to 1 odds on a 4 or 10 after a 5% commission is paid) or lay bets (i.e. offering 2 to 1 odds plus the same 5% commission that a 7 will be



Desert Storm with Coalition Command



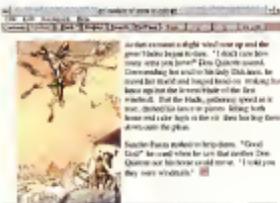
Blackjack Trainer 2.0



CrapSim 1.0



Stunt Island



Don Quixote

rolled before the 4 or 10 is rolled). Another feature which most craps simulations have not used in the past is the ability to "work" or call off bets during the "come out" rolls. This is a common question at any table and it is nice to see it in the game. With its statistical features and excellent documentation, this is definitely the craps sim for serious gamblers and interested gamers. IBM (\$60.00). Circle Reader Service #8.

## Disney Software Burbank, CA (818) 841-3326

**STUNT ISLAND:** For the player who has ever wanted to fly a crop duster through a barn or a Mig 29 through a tight canyon, or for those who wanted to film such daring feats, there's *Stunt Island* from Disney. The player assumes the role of stunt pilot, director, film editor, or dons a mixture of roles for a Hollywood production company. As the pilot, the player can compete in a Stunt Pilot of the Year contest, fly various stunts in front of the camera, or just explore the island setting. There are 40 different planes to try out, including an F-16, U2, F117 Stealth Fighter, 747, Cessna 172 and a pterodactyl! As director, the player will build sets and scenery, position cameras and choose the type of stunt to be flown. And finally, as film editor, players will put together scintillating action shots using an editing deck that may set the standard for future VCR features. IBM (\$59.95). Circle Reader Service #9.

## Ebook e/o Electronic Arts San Mateo, CA (800) 245-4525

**AESOP'S FABLES:** The Tortoise and the Hare, The Fox and the Grapes, The Gnat and the Bull, along with 50 other aesopic tales come fully illustrated and narrated for owners of MPC or Mac CD-ROM systems. To help out young readers, the Ebook story-viewing system highlights difficult words which can be clicked upon for a definition, and offers small audio surprises in each story. The CD is designed so that owners can play the narration on an audio CD-player as they would a music CD, if they do not want to use on the computer. (Not Pictured) IBM CD-ROM (MPC), Mac CD-ROM (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #10.

**DON QUIXOTE:** Some might call publishing CD-ROM titles a quixotic venture, and this product goes to show how right they are. Miguel de Cervan-

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Circle Reader Service #84



# Taking A Peek

tes' classic tale of romance, honor and idealism has been outfitted with beautiful illustrations, music, and full voice narration for its incarnation on electronic media. Of course the story has been seriously abridged and rewritten for a younger audience, though the general spirit of the tale remains the same (sort of like the *Classics Illustrated* graphic novels). IBM CD-ROM (MPC) (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #11.

**THE ELECTRONIC LIBRARY OF ART:** Students of art will fall in love with this series of multimedia databases which are divided into eras and sold separately. The two disks we saw, Renaissance Masters I and Renaissance Masters II, were jammed full of images (1300 in the second package!) that one can index and browse by artist, title, medium, school and subject. Most of the 256-color images have weathered the transition from print to digital media quite well, appearing crisp and colorful. Though a bit pricey, the complete set of disks would make an invaluable reference for the art lover. IBM CD-ROM (MPC) (\$99.95 each). Circle Reader Service #12.

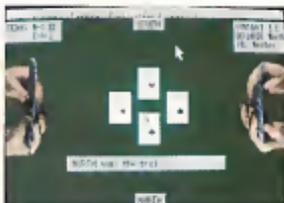
**Electronic Arts**  
San Mateo, CA  
(800) 245-4525

**GRAND SLAM BRIDGE II:** This simulation of the classic variation on Whist is for gamers who enjoy bridge but are tired of having their partners slam down their cards and say, "Don't you even know the Italian Blue bidding convention?" With simple mouse- or keyboard-driven interface, gamers can set up themselves and their partners, as well as the computer opponent pair with one of seven different bidding conventions (including: cue bid, four or five card major, Jacoby Transfer and Weak two-bid, among others) and one of three levels of aggressiveness. Serious bridge players can even load in special hands from a separate *Mike Lawrence Bridge Dealer* program sold through Electronic Arts. Those of us less patient, can use the dealing options to get strong two-bid hands (expected to make game or slam bids) and work on our play, as much as on our bidding (the predominant exercise in random hands). The "*creme de la creme* of bridge games," as the Washington Post once called it, has risen even higher with the latest release. IBM (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #13.

**THE LOST FILES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES:** Gamers who would look to look for Mycroft Holmes at the Diogenes Club should enjoy the flavor of **Electronic Arts'** first foray into the



Electronic Library of Art



Grand Slam Bridge II



Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes



Campaign



Lords of Time

graphic adventure category, *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes*. The adventure features a rich use of Holmes trivia and attempts to reward the gamer for keeping the game afoot in true Sherlock fashion. Travel is handled via a delightful map of the London of the 1890s that functions similar to the map in *Rise of the Dragon*. Interior locales are handled via a modified SCUMM-style interface (instead of the icon-based menus of the present LucasArts products, EA has opted for the original one word commands, placed on wooden drawers). Finally, the game uses a journal as a device for auto-notating a la *The Magic Candle* to make it easy for gamers to keep track of "the story thus far." All in all, the Jack the Ripper-style mystery looks like an intriguing entry into the genre. IBM (\$59.95). Circle Reader Service #14.

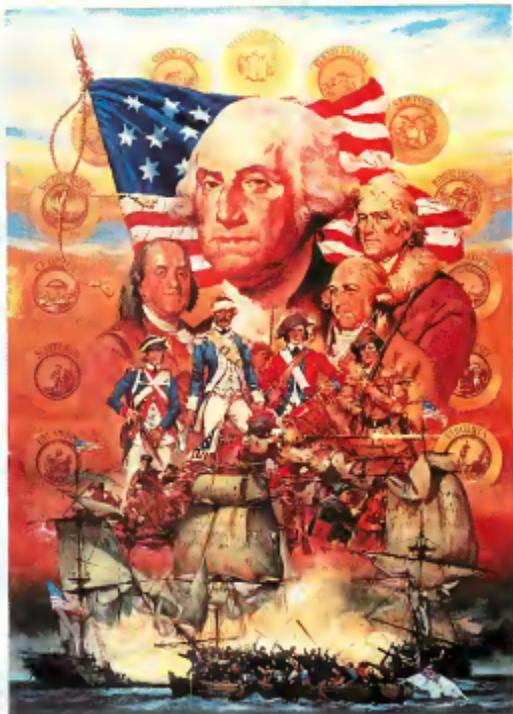
**Empire Software**  
c/o Readysoft Software  
(416) 731-4175

**CAMPAIGN:** From England to the US via Canada, *Campaign* looks and feels so much like a Euro-Amiga game that one can almost forget their interfacing with the IBM. While the game doesn't live up to all of its promises, *Campaign* does offer both a decent, operational-level wargame and tactical arcade vehicle simulator "shoot 'em up" (the later with some interesting panache). Unfortunately, the interface is very European. American wargamers will find symbols where they might expect text and vice versa. Furthermore, there is no joystick support for the many vehicles which one can operate. An amusing diversion, *Campaign* tries hard to deliver on so much, but comes up a bit short. IBM (\$59.95). Circle Reader Service #15.

**HOLLYWARE Entertainment**  
13464 Washington Blvd.  
Marina del Rey, CA 90291  
(310) 822-9200

**LORDS OF TIME:** Straight out of the Lord British Academy of Adventure Design comes this all too typical role-playing game. From the hokey time-portal fiction, in which test pilot Major Tom is sucked through a space-time anomaly into a world of fantasy, to the 3-D isometric overhead view, this CRPG is reminiscent of many other titles. Though the solutions to the puzzles are randomly selected to encourage replay, this game may not even have enough originality to get hard-nosed adventurers to play it all

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- \* 640 K
- \* EGA Color



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\*Pre-Release Version Screenshots

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Circle Reader Service #87

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# Taking A Peek

the way through the first time. Amiga (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #16.

**Interplay**  
Irvine, CA  
(800) 969-GAME

**BATTLECHESS ENHANCED CD-ROM:** Interplay's latest edition to its award-winning animated chess system improves upon the original CD-ROM release by adding more animations (there are now 31 megs in all), 45 minutes of digital CD audio and a 25 minute tutorial in which each chess piece explains its function and suggests strategies on its use. These new improvements should, for a while at least, reserve this game's distinction as one of the showcase CD-ROM products on the shelves. IBM CD-ROM (\$79.95). Circle Reader Service #17.

**CASTLES II — SIEGE & CONQUEST:** While *Castles* was born a simulation game (SimMason?), *Castles II* was conceived from the start as a strategy/wargame, and so it has become. Players must unite a medieval land torn apart by civil war in an attempt to get themselves crowned king by the Pope himself. While castle building still plays an important strategic part, the emphasis of the game is management — management of one's economy, army recruiting, campaigning, spying and trading. Players will also have to deal with a bunch of jazzy new storylines which will increase the already heavy burden of the player's crown. With the inclusion of ambient video, player controlled battles, and truly interesting siege battles, *Castles II* deserves a fresh look from both *Castles* fans as well as strategy gamers. IBM (\$59.95). Circle Reader Service #18.

**Konami**  
Buffalo Grove, IL  
(708) 215-5100

**LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS:** This European import appears to be an attempt at a mix of *Ultima VI* and a graphic adventure. Like *Ultima VI*, the story occurs in a dynamic world (which they call *Virtual Theatre*) where the daily life of the world's characters proceeds in spite of the player's actions. The NPC interaction system allows one to ask fairly complex questions of NPCs and to recruit them for important tasks requiring their help. As for the story and setting, it's rather typical; the player must stop the evil doings of a seductive enchantress who has made it her aim in life to make everyone's life miserable. Amiga,



Battlechess Enhanced CD-ROM



Castles II



Lure of the Temptress



Multimedia Tarot



Cobra Mission

IBM (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #19.

**Lifestyle Software Group**  
63 Orange Street  
Saint Augustine, FL 32084  
(904) 825-4922

**MULTIMEDIA TAROT FOR WINDOWS:** For everyone who ever enjoyed palmists, horoscopes or reading tea leaves, this experience in *Tarot* is a journey well worth taking. Using a traditional *Tarot* deck (from which users select cards by using their mouse as a Ouija-like device), it offers prophetically vague advice on the question of one's choice. The graphic presentation of the cards and their detailed explanations really steal the show. For those who know there is magic in 3s, one is pleasantly rewarded with three different computerized soothsayers (Nostradamus, Queen Victoria and Solitaire — the Southern Belle) and three different spreads to choose from (including the traditional Celtic Cross). Though the title uses the nearly meaningless term "multimedia," the game has none of the properties usually assigned to "true" multimedia titles (i.e., CD-ROM, extended music, digitized video), though it does have nice sound effects to match each card. Admittedly, persons using this software will probably have little more luck telling their future than with most lottery programs, but then why spoil a good time with reality? IBM with Windows (\$39.95). Circle Reader Service #20.

**Mallard Software**  
P.O. Box 292606  
Lewisville, TX 75029  
(800) WEB-FEET

**AIRCRAFT AND ADVENTURE FACTORY:** If one knows their IFR from their DME, this latest development from the Bruce Artwick Organization (BAO) might get their props rotating. The package comes in two parts; an aircraft factory in which amateur aerospace engineers can design, build and paint their own birds, adding personal insignias and tail numbers; and an adventure creation kit that enables one to program very specific *Flight Simulator* scenarios using a BASIC-like programming language. A perfect product for the irrepresible armchair pilot. (Not Pictured) IBM (\$39.95). Circle Reader Service #21.

You stumbled back to your office after a long day of detective work. But before you can get cozy with a whiskey bottle, there's a message waiting on the phone machine.

"This is a life and death emergency!! Young ladies have been disappearing left and right, and now, Donna is missing!! We need your help!!

Please come quickly!!!

Donna's rescue is only the beginning of this sizzling adventure. There's dozens more tantalizing women held against their will. Free them from the evil clutches of General Kaiser, Cobra's psychotic master criminal overlord, and they will thank you in ways that will leave you screaming in ecstasy.

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**System requirements:**

286 or faster machine  
with 640K RAM,  
hard disk with min.

8 megabytes of available space required, mouse recommended. Graphics compatible with EGA, MCGA and VGA (VGA highly recommended).

**Sound support:** Sound Blaster Pro, AdLib Gold

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Circle Reader Service #95

# Cobra Mission

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SO WAS ARNIE.  
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# Taking A Peek

Megatech Software  
Torrance, CA  
(310) 539-9177

**COBRA MISSION:** Ja'porn'imation has finally made its way to the U.S. in this package oozing with repressed adolescent sexuality. Voluntarily rated "R" by the manufacturer and promising "nudity in graphical and text (?) form", this game seems typical of the pitifully executed smutware we've seen in the Japanese software magazines for years. The stated objective of this wretched quest is the destruction of an international sex slavery ring, but the real point, it seems, is to break into houses to steal women's underwear so that one can trade the articles with the town pornographer for photos of naked young girls. The graphics take one back to the early days of the Apple II, the interface and combat system are primitive, the story is absolutely horrendous, and the game's text reads like it was translated in Japan by a first year student of English ("J.R. take 14 damages!"). Though we usually try to reserve such strong criticism for full reviews, this game begs for a beating, IBM (\$79.95). Circle Reader Service #22.

MicroProse  
Hunt Valley, MD  
(410) 771-0440

**REX NEBULAR AND THE COSMIC GENDER BENDER:** MicroProse's first launch into the universe of graphic adventures will put players into the boots of space stud, Rex Nebular. Rex's search for pottery of universal importance will lead him to the planet Terra Androgena — an ego-testicle daydream infested with undersexed and overwilling women — where he may take his cross-dressing fantasies a bit too far. This promises to be a bawdy romp in its Naughty mode and a goofy, though still suggestive, game when played on the Nice setting. It features rotoscoped animation, hand-painted backgrounds, sprite scaling motion, digitized speech and other gee-whiz flash that will ensure its competitiveness in the graphic adventure arena, and may well give that Larry guy a run for his honey. IBM (\$69.95). Circle Reader Service #23.

NEC Technologies  
Wood Dale, IL

**LORDS OF THE RISING SUN:** Cinemaware's 1988 action-adventure release, has found it's way onto the CD-ROM platform after undergoing a mostly unflattering facelift. The most impressive thing about this product is the ten minute, sparsely animated intro-



Rex Nebular



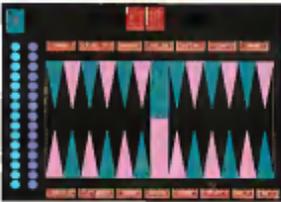
Lords of the Rising Sun



Cribbage Master



Sportcard Organizer



World Champion Backgammon

duction that feels very much like watching a cartoon. As for the game mechanics, they have been dumbed-down a bit to become more Nintendo-like and the graphics have lost some detail, but the game still plays much like the original Amiga/IBM release. The most disturbing thing about this, the most interesting title of any we've seen on the platform, is the sound track, which is an absolutely inappropriate, generic video game theme that clashes horribly with the game's ancient Japanese setting. The games on the TurboGrafx-16 with CD-ROM have a long way to go before they will draw much interest from hard-core computer gamers. TurboGrafx-16 with CD-ROM. Circle Reader Service #24.

Ninga Software  
#330, 736 Eighth Avenue SW  
Calgary, Alberta T2P 1H4  
(800) 265-8555

**CRIBBAGE MASTER:** Cut for crib and peg the points. This straight-forward translation of the strategy/card game classic is solid and playable, with few added embellishments. Besides the requisite computer opponents, it offers a simple on-line tutor for new players, and the option to play with the "Muggins" feature, where players must count their points correctly or else the other player can claim them. IBM with Windows (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #25.

**SPORTCARD ORGANIZER:** Topps, Bowman, Fleer, Dondruss, UpperDeck. If these names mean anything to you then this simple database system may help you get that card collection in order. Casual hobbyists will be able to catalogue their collectibles and print out "Wish Lists" for cards they're missing from their sets. Serious investors will be able to track the value of their collection and keep a tally on the profits and losses accrued over time. New price information is available through periodic update disks. IBM, Mac (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #26.

**WORLD CHAMPION BACKGAMMON:** While it would be hard to miss with a simple translation of this classic parlor game into a computer medium, there is less to this game than meets the eye. While a fascinating *Backgammon* variant scenario is included (along with a "design your own" kit for player generated situations), this supposedly "world champion" product simply doesn't have a "world champion" look or feel to it. The AI plays a decent game, but *Backgammon* aficionados will probably beat it most of the time. Still, it is a faithful translation, although offering little of the computerized glitz which might compel

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# Taking A Peek

one to play this product over its leather bound counterpart in everyone's hall closet. IBM (\$39.95). Circle Reader Service #27.

**Oolong Games**  
1641 N. 201 Street  
Seattle, WA 98133  
(206) 546-2242

**TANGRAM:** This homespun program is a rather crude computer version of the Tangram puzzle. The Tangram is simply seven pieces of basic geometry formed by the dissection of a square. Players are given a model figure formed of the pieces and are challenged to create that form with their pieces. It is a very simple puzzle system that is currently used by many grammar school teachers to educate their young pupils about geometric relationships and fractions, in the guise of creative play. Why anyone would feel the need to create a computer version of this simple puzzle is beyond us. Rather than fighting the cumbersome interface, it seems it would be infinitely easier to get a physical version of the puzzle and play with it on the kitchen table. IBM (\$15.00). Circle Reader Service #28.

**Psygnosis**  
Brookline, MA  
(617) 731-3553

**SHADOW OF THE BEAST III:** Psygnosis continues to be one of the few remaining oases in the desert of Amiga releases. Action gamers will twitch with paroxysms of delight when they get a load of the intense action and incredible graphics in their latest Roman numeral in their popular series. Players battle a relentless onslaught of baddies as they parallax scroll their way through many levels of puzzles on their way to the final joystick joust with the Ultimate Incarnation of Naughtiness. A pumpin' musical score accompanies players on the entire journey to game's end. Amiga (\$59.99). Circle Reader Service #29.

**Sierra On-Line**  
Oakhurst, CA  
(209) 683-4468

**TAKE-A-BREAK CROSSWORDS:** Anyone who doubts the appeal of this product needs to look at the number of crossword magazines that hit the newsstands every month, or try to pick up an airline magazine where the crossword isn't at least partially filled in. *Take-A-Break Crossword* provides Windows users with 375 puzzles out of the Dell crossword collection and allows puzzle-



Tangram



Shadow of the Beast III



Take-A-Break Crosswords



Wizardry VII



Battle Isle Scenario Disk 1

solvers to try their cruciverbalist skills at three levels of difficulty; compete against other players by time and score; get on-line hints; enjoy cheese screens full of congratulatory animation sequences; and print out blank or partially completed puzzles to be completed away from the computer. Unfortunately, the program doesn't include a crossword construction utility, though it is rumored that a construction kit add-on disk may be on its way. IBM (\$49.95). Circle Reader Service #30.

**Sir-Tech**  
Ogdensburg, NY  
(315) 393-6633

**WIZARDRY VII:** David Bradley's merger of fantasy and science-fiction (began in *Bane of the Cosmic Forge*) continues in the seventh installment in the famous *Wizardry* series. *Bane* players will be able to start the game from any one of the three possible endings to that episode, and new players will begin from a special starting position for novices. As Bradley continues to massage the role-playing system, skills are becoming more and more important for the party ("swimming" in particular for some of the dungeons in the game). Further, the reputation of the party among different races can affect the type and quality of information received and the likelihood of an alliance between the party and other NPCs. We also think of having the player's party competing against computer-controlled parties should be extremely interesting. Computer gamers will also appreciate the fact that *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* uses a maximum of 6.5 MB (including all saved games) on the hard drive. IBM (\$79.95). Circle Reader Service #31.

**UBI SOFT**  
1505 Bridgeway  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
(415) 332-8749

**BATTLE ISLE SCENARIO DISK VOL. 1:** One computer wargame that has carved out a bit of a niche is the *Herzog Zwei*-like *Battle Isle*. For those who have the original and have plowed through all the software and two-player scenarios, listen up! *Scenario Disk Volume 1* not only adds 25 new software and nine new two-player scenarios, but increases the map size as well. New terrain features — tundra, deserts and rivers — add some interesting tactical and strategic elements to battles, making the initial board set-up stickier. Now the only question is, who's up for another toe-to-toe shoot-out? Amiga, IBM (\$34.95). Not shown Circle Reader Service #32.

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## Top Adventure Games



Indiana Jones  
Temple of Doom

Monkey Island 2  
LeChuck's Revenge

Ultima Underworld

## Top Role Playing Games

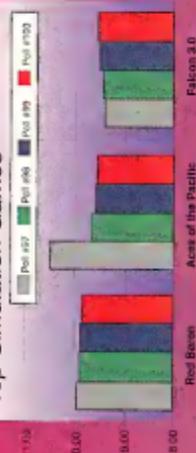


Indiana Jones  
Temple of Doom

Monkey Island 2  
LeChuck's Revenge

Ultima Underworld

## Top Simulation Games

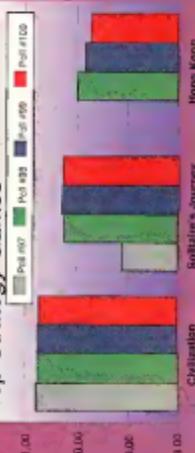


Indiana Jones  
Temple of Doom

Monkey Island 2  
LeChuck's Revenge

Ultima Underworld

## Top Strategy Games



Indiana Jones  
Temple of Doom

Monkey Island 2  
LeChuck's Revenge

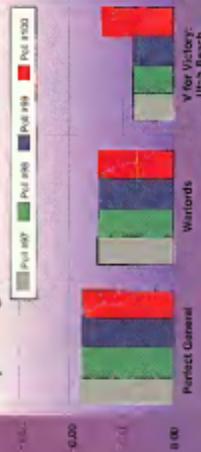
Ultima Underworld

# Top 100 Games

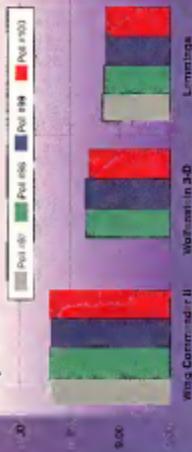
Bundle Price \$100  
**COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**  
The Magazine of Computer Game Enthusiasts

1	Civilization	MicroProse	ST	10.72
2	Links 365 Pro	Activision	RP	10.56
3	Ultima Underworld	Origin	AC	10.56
4	Wing Commander II	Origin	AC	10.49
5	Software's Journey	QQP	ST	10.29
6	Indiana Jones, Fate of Atlantis	LucasArts	AD	10.11
7	Monkey Island 2, LeChuck's Revenge	LucasArts	AD	10.11
8	Red Baron	Dynastars	SI	9.87
9	The Perfect General	QQP	WG	9.77
10	Hong Kong Mahjong Pro	Electronic Arts	ST	9.77
11	Hardball III	Accolade	ST	9.71
12	The Secret of Monkey Island	LucasArts	AD	9.70
13	Eye of the Beholder II	LucasArts	RP	9.69
14	LeChuck's Revenge	SSI	RP	9.63
15	Tetra Classic	SSI	ST	9.59
16	Academy of the Pacific	Dynastars	SI	9.58
17	Wolfenstein 3-D	Id Software	AC	9.48
18	Falcon 3.0	Spectravision	SI	9.46
19	Might & Magic III	New World Computing	RP	9.51
20	Warlords	SSI	WG	9.48
21	Virtua Fighter	Sega	WG	9.46
22	Chameleon 2000	SSI	WG	9.42
23	Ultima VII	Origin	RP	9.39
24	Rocky Balboa	Accolade	SI	9.34
25	Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe	Accolade	SI	9.33
26	LeChuck's Revenge	SSI	RP	9.32
27	High Guard	SSI	WG	9.32
28	Wings	Championship	AC	9.22
29	Legend of Kyrandia	Virgin	AD	9.21
30	Conflict: Korea	SSI	WG	9.21
31	Second Front	SSI	WG	9.18
32	The Dagger of Amon Ra	Serra	AD	9.16
33	Eye of the Beholder	SSI	RP	9.12
34	Gamma 2000	MicroProse	SI	9.12
35	Quest for Glory II	Serra	AD,RP	9.11
36	The Castle of Dr. Brain	Serra	AD	9.11
37	Clint Eastwood: A Man Called War	SSI	WG	9.09
38	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	Electronic Arts	SI	9.08
39	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	Electronic Arts	SI	9.08
40	Red Baron	MicroProse	SI	9.03
41	Conquests of the Longbow	Serra	AD	9.03
42	Quest for Glory	AD,RP	AD,RP	9.02
43	Ultima V	Origin	RP	9.00
44	Space Quest IV	Serra	AD	8.98
45	Western Front	SSI	WG	8.98
46	Space Quest III	Serra	AD	8.97
47	The Last Admiral	QQP	ST	8.97
48	Police Quest 3	Serra	AD	8.97

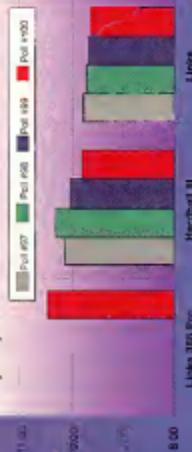
### Top Wargames



### Top Action Games



### Top Sports Games



51	Bathsheba, 1942	Electronic Arts	8.96
52	The Adventurers of Wilby Swamp	AC/SL	8.96
53	Mash Warrior	ST,SH	8.95
54	Wasteland	RP	8.95
55	Peaks of Darkness	RP	8.94
56	Sword of Aragon	SS	8.93
57	Overrun	WG,ST	8.93
58	Gh. No! More Learnings	WG	8.92
59	Fakon	AC	8.92
60	Jack Nicklaus Ultimate Golf	SI	8.90
61	FLITA	ST	8.90
62	Clayton's Adventure	SS	8.89
63	Martin's Medieval	AD	8.89
64	STB Challenge	AD	8.89
65	Remnants of the 3 Kingdoms	XOR	8.87
66	Indanapohs 503	ST,RP	8.86
67	Super Tactics	SP	8.85
68	Peppinos	AC,ST	8.85
69	Command HQ	RP	8.84
70	Might & Magic III	ST	8.82
71	Rules of Engagement	WG,ST	8.81
72	Timon	RP	8.81
73	The Magic Castle	ST	8.81
74	Indanapohs Revenge	ST	8.81
75	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
76	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
77	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
78	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
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95	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
96	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
97	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
98	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79
99	Mad Max on Savage Frontier	RP	8.79

# The Computer Gaming World Poll

A monthly survey of the readers of Computer Gaming World Magazine.

# What's Hot

## PC Research Hits List

September, 1992

### PC Games (MS-DOS)

- | Rank | Title and Source  |
|------|---|
| 1.   | Falcon 3.0 Operation Fighting Tiger (Spectrum HoloByte) |
| 2.   | Darklands (MicroProse)                                  |
| 3.   | Wing Commander (Origin)                                 |
| 4.   | Might & Magic: Clouds/Keen (New World Computing)        |
| 5.   | B-17 Flying Fortress (MicroProse)                       |
| 6.   | Civilization (MicroProse)                               |
| 7.   | Birds of Prey (Electronic Arts)                         |
| 8.   | Quest for Glory III (Sierra On-Line)                    |
| 9.   | Hardball III (Accolade)                                 |
| 10.  | Links 386 Pro (Accolade)                                |
| 11.  | Quest for Glory I (Sierra On-Line)                      |
| 12.  | Police Quest III (Sierra On-Line)                       |
| 13.  | Aces of the Pacific (Sierra On-Line)                    |
| 14.  | GunsHIP 2000 (MicroProse)                               |
| 15.  | F117A Stealth Fighter 2.0 (MicroProse)                  |
| 16.  | Monopoly (Virgin Games)                                 |
| 17.  | Police Quest (Sierra On-Line)                           |
| 18.  | Indiana Jones: Fate of Atlantis (LucasArts)             |
| 19.  | SimCity (Maxis)   |
| 20.  | Star Trek 25th Anniversary (Interplay)                  |

### Amiga Games

- | Rank | Title and Source  |
|------|---|
| 1.   | Civilization (MicroProse)                               |
| 2.   | 688 Attack Sub (Electronic Arts)                        |
| 3.   | AD&D Dark Queen of Krynn (Strategic Simulations)        |
| 4.   | AD&D Gateway to Savage Frontier (Strategic Simulations) |
| 5.   | AD&D Eye of the Beholder II (Strategic Simulations)     |

### Macintosh Games

- | Rank | Title and Source                    |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| 1.   | SimCity Supreme (Maxis)             |
| 2.   | Award Winners (Sierra On-Line)      |
| 3.   | Prince of Persia (Broderbund)       |
| 4.   | AD&D Pools of Darkness (Activision) |
| 5.   | Tristan Pinball (Amtext)            |

### Home Education (MS-DOS)

- | Rank | Title and Source                                     |
|------|--|
| 1.   | Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? (Broderbund)  |
| 2.   | Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing (Software Toolworks)     |
| 3.   | Your Personal Trainer for the S.A.T. (Davidson)      |
| 4.   | New Math Blaster Plus (Davidson)                     |
| 5.   | AlgebraStar Plus (Davidson)                          |
| 6.   | Mario Teaches Typing (Interplay)                     |
| 7.   | Reader Rabbit (Learning Company)                     |
| 8.   | Mickey's ABCs (Disney)                               |
| 9.   | Playroom (Broderbund)                                |
| 10.  | Where in the U.S.A. is Carmen Sandiego? (Broderbund) |

This list is based on units sold by Software Etc., Babbages, Waldensoftware and Electronics Boutique. For more information, please contact PC Research at (703) 435-1025.

## What You Have Been Playing Lately

### The Feedback Forum of Reader Response

Every month our mailbox fills to capacity with hundreds of Reader Input Cards from hundreds of our most loyal and outspoken readers. Over the years we've found these cards to be an invaluable source of feedback. Within 10 days of the release of our latest issue we can expect to see dozens of cards begin pouring in with comments, suggestions, encouragements and tirades, in addition to the data for our game poll. Through our reader's efforts we know which articles were hits, which flopped, how many typos an grammatical errors we've let slip through — in addition to the many well-articulated opinions on anything and everything related to gaming.

This page is set aside to give these readers a voice and to display the results of our "Playing Lately?" field on the Reader Input Card. Thanks for taking the time to fill out these cards — and keep 'em coming!

### Feedback from CGW #100, November 1992:

1. Civilization (MicroProse)
2. Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant (Sir Tech)
3. Clouds of Xeen (New World)
4. Darklands (MicroProse)
5. V For Victory: Utah Beach (Three-Sixty)
6. Ultima VII (Origin)
7. Links 386 Pro (Access)
8. The Perfect General (QQP)
9. Wing Commander II (Origin)
10. Aces of the Pacific (Dynamix)

### Interesting responses of the month:

Capture the Flag (Carr Software)  
Yserbius (The Sierra Network)  
Super Nintendo "God help me!"  
BroadSides — on my Apple II

### Games You'd Like To See

"My First Spreadsheet: Zap the numbers into the spread sheet, avoiding the animated green alphabet characters.

Senior Citizen Spreadsheet: Extra large characters, pulse monitor, asks "Are you sure?" 3 times and "Don't you remember?" when you forget a file name."

- Houston, TX

"A wargame requiring a 486-33 with 8 megs of RAM and 30 megs of HD space based on the invasion of Grenada."

- R. Faust, No. Hollywood, CA

"Where in Hell is Carmen Sandiego: Based in the netherworld of Dante's *Inferno*, you learn about the various circles of hell and meet the famous people in them! Recover the missing minutes of the Watergate Tapes, Jimmy Hoffa and Howard Hughes's true will! Fun for ages 12 and up."

- Sacramento, CA

"An RPG that my wife could relate to."

- Hampton Roads, VA

"SimCat (mouse optional)."

- Miles K. Goosens, Nashville, TN

"1. Aces of the Pacific: George Bush Expansion Disk

2. Lemmings: Bill Clinton Scenario Disk

3. Ding Commander II: Ross Perot's Secret Missions"

- James Silsby, Jr., Ellsworth, ME

"How about 'Squirrels' where the player must (a) keep an army of squirrels out of his birdfeeder, or (b) get the squirrels into the feeder? First person perspective?"

- Paul Green, Wheeling, IL

"Wolfenstein 90210: Take your mini-gun to Beverly Hills and rid the world of obnoxious mall rats!"

- Dave Stumme, Rochester, NY

Stay tuned for more Games You'd Like To See next issue...



# COMPUTER GAMING WORLD HALL OF FAME

The games in *Computer Gaming World's Hall of Fame* have been highly rated by our readers over time. They have been noted for their impact on the computer gaming hobby during their peak period of influence and acceptance by our readership. Note that the dates listed for each game are the copyright dates and may precede the actual release dates. Specific formats listed are those which *CGW* has in its possession. Each month, we will highlight at least two of these games as part of the listing.

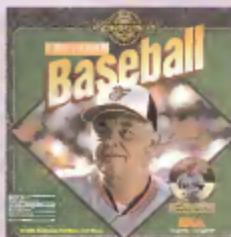
- The Bard's Tale** (Electronic Arts, 1985)  
Many formats
- Chessmaster 2000** (Software Toolworks, 1986)  
Many formats
- Dungeon Master** (FTL Software, 1987)  
Many formats
- Earl Weaver Baseball** (Electronic Arts, 1986)  
Amiga, IBM, Macintosh
- Empire** (Interstel, 1978)  
Many formats
- F-19 Stealth Fighter** (MicroProse, 1988)  
IBM
- Gettysburg: The Turning Point** (Strategic Simulations, Inc., 1986)  
Many formats
- Gunship** (MicroProse, 1989)  
Amiga, C-64, IBM
- Harpoon** (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)  
Amiga, IBM, Macintosh
- Kampfgruppe** (Strategic Simulations, Inc., 1985)  
Many formats
- King's Quest V** (Sierra, 1990)  
Amiga, IBM
- M-I Tank Platoon** (MicroProse, 1989)  
Amiga, IBM
- Mech Brigade** (Strategic Simulations, Inc., 1985)  
Many formats
- Night & Magic** (New World Computing, 1986)  
Many formats
- M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)  
Atari 8-bit, C-64
- Pirates** (MicroProse, 1987)  
Many formats
- Railroad Tycoon** (MicroProse, 1990)  
Amiga, IBM, Macintosh
- SimCity** (Maxis, 1987)  
Many formats
- Starflight** (Electronic Arts, 1986)  
Amiga, C-64, IBM, Sega
- Their Finest Hour** (LucasArts, 1989)  
Amiga, Atari ST, IBM
- Ultima III** (Origin, 1983)  
Many formats
- Ultima IV** (Origin, 1985)  
Many formats
- Ultima VI** (Origin, 1990)  
Amiga, IBM
- War in Russia** (Strategic Simulations, Inc., 1984)  
Apple
- Wing Commander** (Origin, 1991)  
IBM, Sega
- Wizardry** (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)  
Many formats
- Zork** (Infocom, 1981)  
Many formats

## **Dungeon Master** FTL Software, 1987 Many Formats



*Dungeon Master*, originally introduced on the Atari ST, virtually established its own genre of first-person perspective dungeon romps. With state-of-the-art graphics that moved away from the "windowed" screen look, as well as realistic sound effects to set the tone of the adventure, *Dungeon Master* became a showcase product that has been much emulated within the CRPG genre.

## **Earl Weaver Baseball** Electronic Arts, 1986 Amiga, IBM, Macintosh



In its original form, *Earl Weaver Baseball* was the quintessential sports game. It offered reasonable statistical accuracy, was the first to use a "physics" model as opposed to strictly using a statistical model in resolving plays, featured both an action and manage-only mode, allowed complete flexibility in drafting and editing players, and was the first to allow customization of stadiums and team uniforms.

# Back to the Retailer

by Johnny L. Wilson

**State of the Industry:** Gamers say that the publishers have dug their own graves with "buggy" and unsatisfying software. They claim they are sending a message about quality to the software publishers in a language they will understand, sales. Publishers say that consumers are stealing from them by copying the software and returning it. Retailers and distributors claim that they are stuck in the middle.

Who is right when it comes to software returns? It seems reasonable to expect that a gamer could return a game that doesn't do what he/she wanted it to do. Yet, there is something more than the age-old "satisfaction guaranteed" ideal at stake. Some retailers, even in major chains, are willing to take returns and re-shrink wrap the products for resale. Other retailers are concerned about the possibilities for virus infections and wisely refrain from "reshrinking." Is it to the gamer's advantage for a retailer to be so free with software return policies that it may put the gamer's computer system at risk after a future purchase? Probably not.

In the early '80s, gamers who had a defective product were inevitably referred back to the manufacturer for satisfaction. The retailers functioned under a "We just sell the stuff" attitude. This meant that it was difficult for consumers to get defective disks replaced or get a refund on games they didn't like. Fortunately, customer service and discounts eventually put stores like *Egghead*, *Babbage's Software Etc.*, and *Electronics Boutique* on the map and the cornerstone of this pro-consumer revolution was the ability to return unsatisfactory software.

Unfortunately, open return policies have led to retailer expenses in handling returns (they must be physically sent back to the distributor or publisher) and publisher fears that gamers are copying their products, keeping them on their hard drives and then returning them for a full refund. For the publishers, this means reduced sales and extra shipping expense. For the retailers/distributors, this means extra employee hours to tabulate, package and ship returns.

Like the retailer, the publisher cannot resell the copy of a returned game (if it has been on a consumer's machine), so the

disks are degaussed and used as extra disks in-house and the package materials are usually destroyed. This is a wasteful procedure and now one current marketing strategy has been suggested where publishers cough up an additional percentage discount to retailers/distributors in order to cover returns. Then, the retail end would destroy the game and the publisher would save on the shipping charges.

Publishers, naturally, are afraid that the retailers may claim higher returns than they really receive. What this means is that publishers would receive affidavit returns (the retailer tells the distributor that they had X amount of returns and the distributor tells the manufacturer that the total from all of his/her retail accounts was many times X). That's the way it is in the magazine business. As it is now, the software publisher can physically count returns, but must pay for the shipping in order to do so. Further, the return percentage is going up. Retailers estimate a 5% increase this year alone. Of course, this may relate to more complex games (where more can go wrong) and an economy, of late, where every consumer dollar must count.

What this proposal means, of course, is that the retail end of the market is going to, in effect, charge the publishers for having to deal with returns. In turn, the publishers are going to be unsure of the reasons behind the returns. If consumers are trying to send publishers a message about quality, it isn't working because the publishers simply believe their products are being used at no charge. As a result, the publishers will simply pass along the extra charges to the consumers. In turn, raising the prices for everyone where, ultimately, the honest users end up paying for the dishonest ones.

We have had reports of consumers purchasing games that were obviously resealed, even from major chains. They complain that a "new" price for "used" software is not fair and, worse yet, that they don't know where that software has been. Perhaps, it has been corrupted while with its previous owner. Even more alarming might be the spread of a potential computer virus. If a consumer picks up a consumer virus in this manner, we would

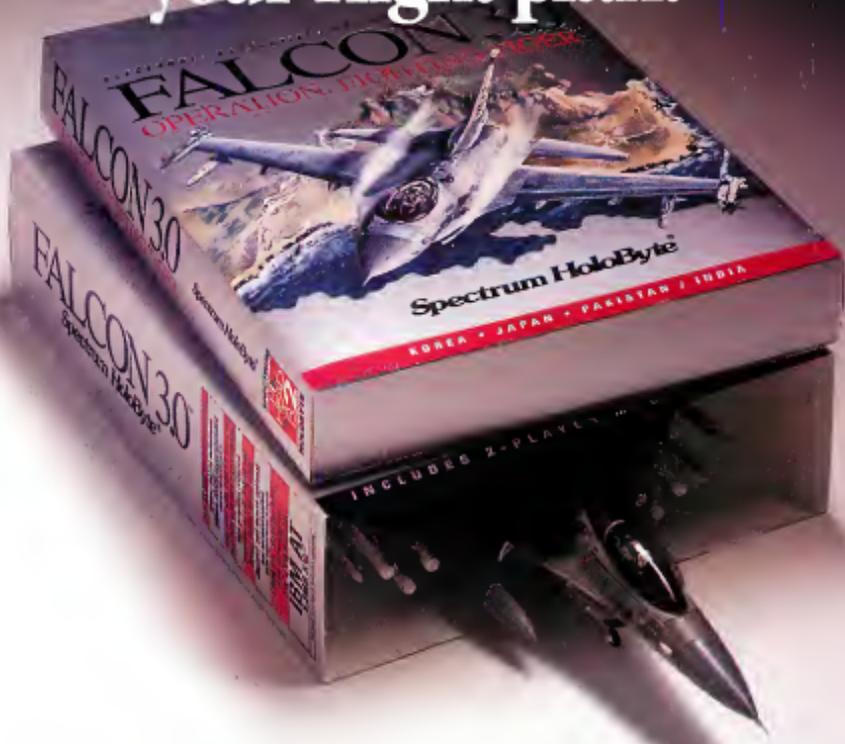
venture to think that there could be a stink like this industry has not seen in a long time — imagine the potential law suits as deep pockets are picked from all directions!

For publishers, besides having the possibility of being hit for their deep pockets in the case of such a law suit, there is another major problem. Since they have to back up that software to the bit, they must answer customer service calls the same for a pirate as they would for a legitimate owner of their game. They must also offer an olive branch to the retailer. Plans such as stock balancing, fixture allowances, marketing development funds, shelf talker fees, etc. to extend both the economic viability and shelf life of computer games, but these mean that the manufacturer has to accept a reduced profit for the game(s) involved.

So, it seems, where there is a software return to the local retailer, the store's policy may create something of a *consumer crisis* if the product is resealed and sold again; a cash flow and employee time crunch for retailers if they follow established return procedures; and an economic crisis for the software publishers if they have to accept additional discounts and affidavit returns to assuage the feelings of the retailers. Naturally, one can see that the additional discounts to retailers come out of the publishers' profit so that retail prices will be raised to cover the new expenses and are passed on to the consumers.

So, we would like to urge consumers to think about the chain reaction that is beginning in this industry the next time they are tempted to return a product just because they don't care for it and decide to keep something on the hard drive (just for their trouble). We would like to urge retailers to provide that "satisfaction guaranteed" for each customer by following the proper procedure. Those re-shrink short-cuts are a disaster waiting to happen. We would further urge publishers to choose whether to opt for better and more comprehensive quality assurance from the beginning or to get ready to bite that bullet of affidavit returns. It's everybody's problem! **eww**

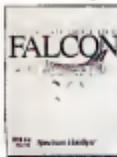
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