Covering Interactive & Multimedia Entertainment

OCTOBER 1994

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

THE #1 COMPUTER GAME MAGAZINE

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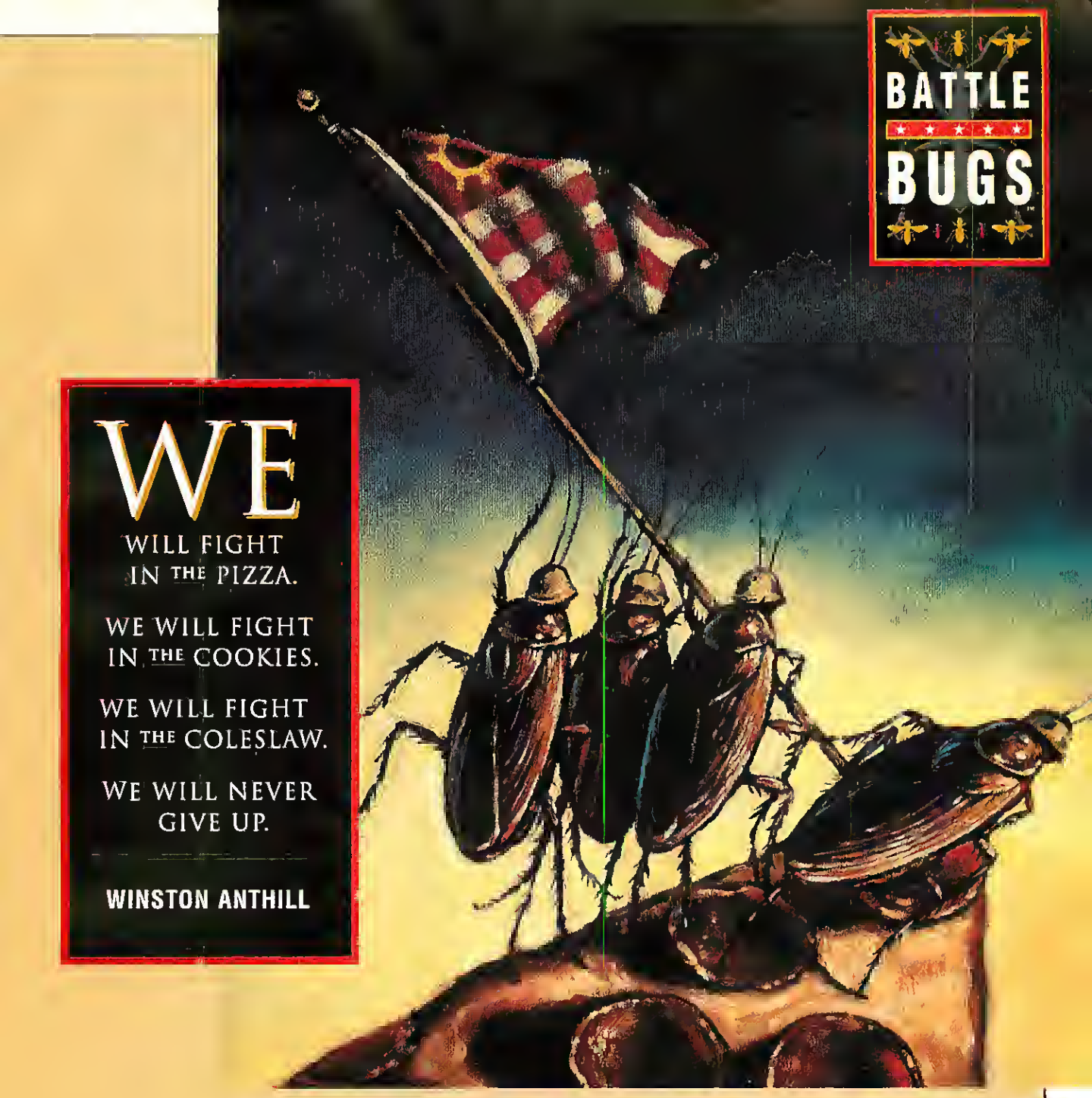

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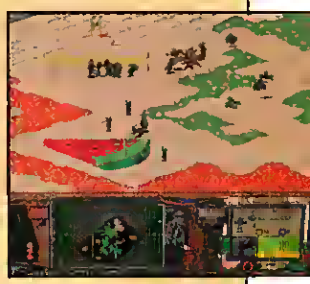

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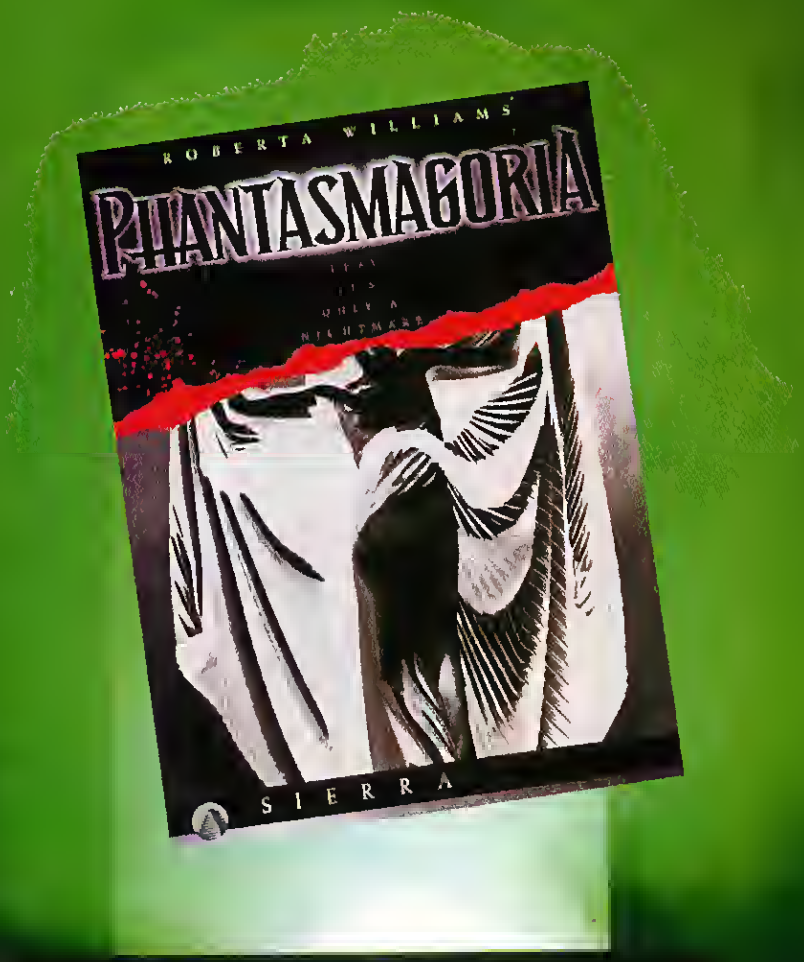

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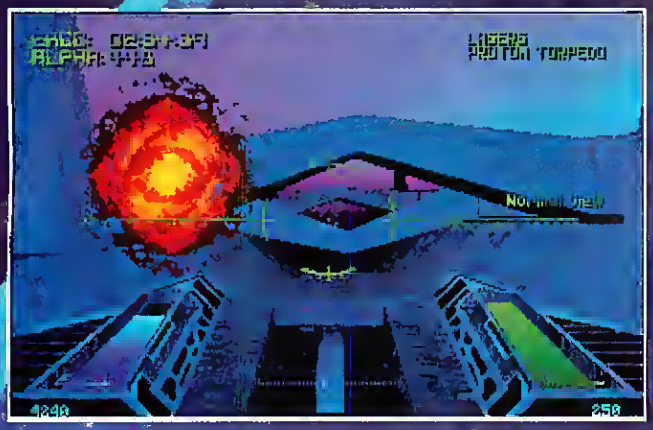

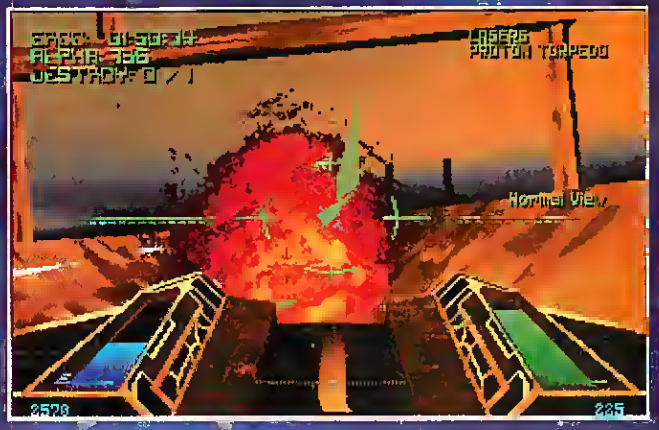

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"So chummer, you want to know about runnin?

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END

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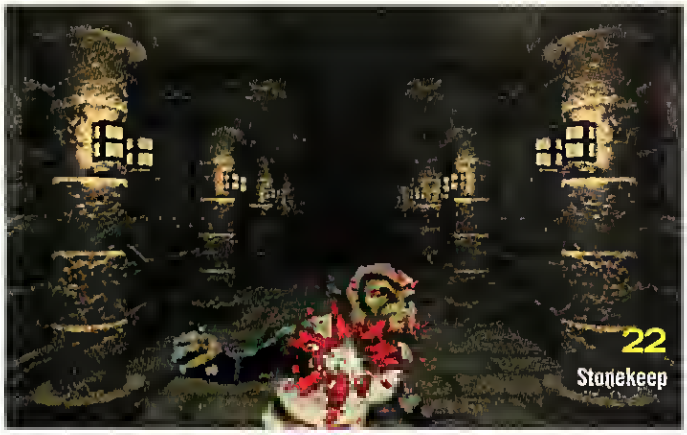

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Petey wants to play with you in the MUD

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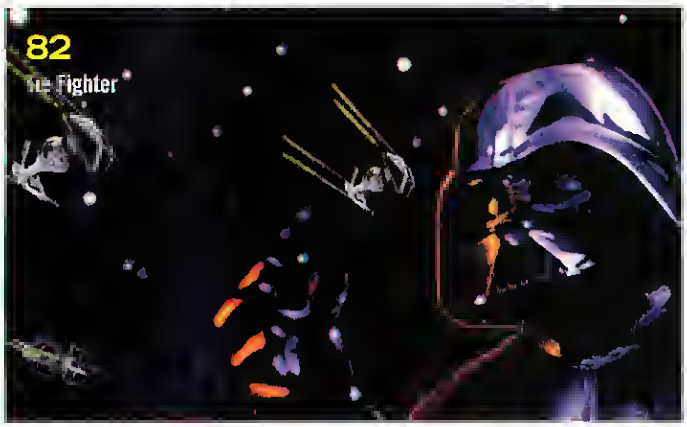

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138 PREVIEW! 5TH FLEET Naval war buffs may now enjoy Joe Balkoski's award-winning boardgame design on the PC battlefield. Terry Lee Coleman surmises that it might end up as the best board wargame yet converted to the PC.

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158 ALIEN LEGACY In yet another journey to a far-off world, Martin Cirulis finds that even at sub-light speeds, this game offers a lot more alien adventure than its over-hyped sibling, Outpost.

164 BRIDGE DLYMPIAD The bidding conventions seem to come at times from another world, and the documentation is missing in action. Still, Terry Coleman finds that while not a Grand Slam, this game manages to capture its share of tricks.

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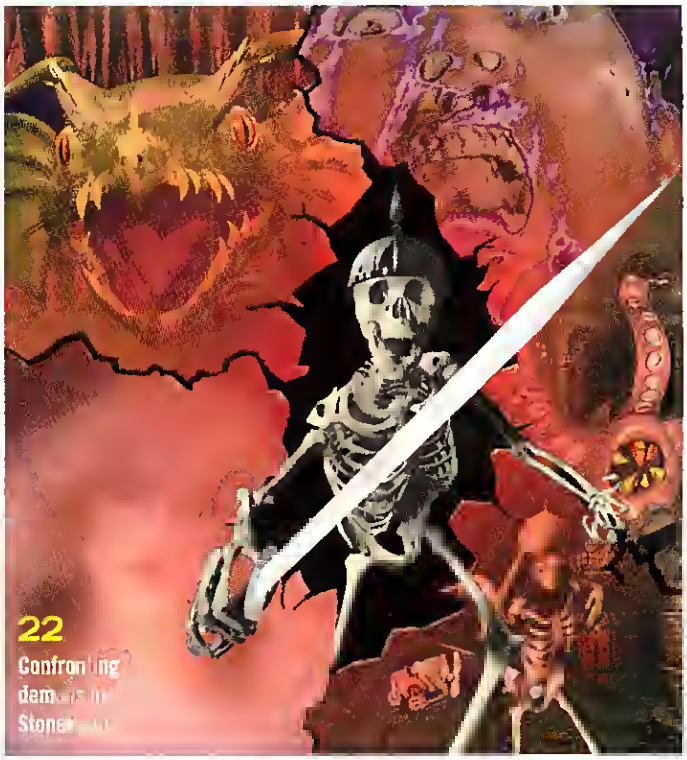

Cover design and illustration by Larry Fukuoka

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From the Publisher

Who *Are* Those Guys?

by Russell Sipe

That's my all-time favorite movie quote. Do you remember what movie it came from? I did an informal poll of our office on the question. Our baby boomer employees all knew the answer. Our X-Generation employees didn't. I imagine if I were to poll our readership there would be a similar result. The average reader of *CGW* is 30 years old (actually it's 29.92), which I guess would put about half our readers in the so called X-Generation or below and half in the baby-boomer generation or above.

So, that was the question we wanted to ask when we did our reader survey in the May issue "who are those guys." And we did mean "guys," since it turns out that 97 percent of you are male.

It also turns out that more than three out of four of you play computer games six or more hours per week, while an amazing 44 percent of you play more than ten hours per week. You own an average of 28 computer games, and three out of five of you buy a game every month. Thirty eight percent of you buy at least two games a month. There is no question, *CGW* readers are the heart and soul of the computer game hobby.

One reason for *CGW*'s success over the years has been that you, our readers, are not only the best customers in the market, you are the "evangelists" who turn others on to our exciting hobby. According to the survey, the average *CGW* reader recommends games to friends *nine times per month*. He also makes hardware recommendations seven times a month.

As to what your computer looks like: 79 percent of you run Windows. The most common configuration is a 486 (61 percent). Sixty eight percent of you run SVGA graphics. Sixty percent of you own a CD-ROM, half the remaining 40 percent are planning to buy one in the next 12 months.

Who *are* those guys? They are you, the cutting edge gamers that force the companies to create great games and push the creative envelope in an all-out campaign to win your patronage. Oh, and who are those guys mentioned at the start of this letter? They were the posse that relentlessly dogged Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, causing Robert Redford and Paul Newman to ask the question again and again....who *are* those guys?

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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Circle Reader Service #102

Showdown On The Electronic Frontier

by Johnny L. Wilson

Rumors abound as software publishers, on-line services, and information providers try to survey the route of the proposed info superhighway. As with actual highway construction, you can expect a certain amount of cyburban land speculation prior to the determination of the final route. Everyone wants those ideal sites for the cyberspace equivalent of fast food restaurants, gas stations and mini-marts.

Intellectual property is a key issue in this cyberspace claim rush, and some publishers are trying to use their copyrights as a bludgeon to ensure that they get prime real estate. It's as though some believe that, in order to protect their automobile copyright, they need to make sure that owners of their make of automobile keep their cars off the highway. It's a confusing issue, so let's try to clarify it.

Assume I purchase a Ford Mustang. The Ford Motor Company does not tell me where I can drive that automobile. Yet, some boardgame and role-playing game publishers believe that if I purchase their game, they can tell me where I can play it. If I purchase a Mustang, it's none of Ford's business whether or not I use that car as a delivery vehicle in order to make money by selling my services as courier, delivery boy or cab driver. Some game manufacturers believe, however, that I would be wrong to make money by selling my services as a referee or game master for any games that I've purchased.

Our belief is that individuals who have purchased games, like individuals who have purchased cars, have the right to use them. If I give a friend a ride in my hypothetical Mustang, it's not only none of Ford's business, but it is actually a free advertisement for Ford's product. If, to follow the thought, I host a game of **FASA**'s BATTLETECH boardgame via Joe's BBS or an Internet site, it isn't any of FASA's business (since I own a copy of the game) and it is actually a commercial for a great product.

So, imagine my irritation when I discovered that **TSR**, owners of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS copyrights, were sending letters to System Administrators along the Internet, telling them that the use of those game systems and custom modifications thereof for on-line role-playing is a violation of their copyrights, and that they intend to start charging a licensing fee to referees, as well as to creators of help files and rules modifications.

TSR's letter was specific about custom modifications to the games. The letter read: "As we have begun to explore the on-line community in depth, we've found many avid gamers and fans. We're interested in providing you with the best in gaming products that meet our own standards of quality, as well as suiting other materials entirely for our own use. We think this is great! However, when gamers begin sharing their creations with the public, whether for profit or not, they are infringing our rights. If we don't make an earnest attempt to prevent this infringement of our trademarks and copyrights, our ownership of these extremely valuable assets may be jeopardized."

It went on to say, "A gamer in this situation has a few options. He can strip every TSR trademark and all copyright from his creations before putting them in public. Or, he can share his creations with the public in a way that is licensed and approved by TSR. This is the more desirable solution, as it protects our rights, and still leaves room for gamers to share their creative expressions."

The letter explains that such terms as "Hit Dice" and "Armor Class" are part of their valuable assets and that any use of those terms infringes on their copyrights.

"Sometime very soon," reads the letter as it explains TSR's intent, "we're going to create a place where gamers can legally upload and share their creations, including modules, stories, and software." Well, there you have the real motive. TSR sees the Internet as the key to the info superhighway, and this letter is the foundation for a MENZOBERRANZAN Mini-Mart or a DARK SUN Burger on that superhighway.

While we laud the foresight that enables game companies to visualize a profitable future on the info superhighway, we hardly think that this type of excessive diligence is the best way to bring about that profitable future. We present this editorial as a cautionary observation with regard to the future. As gamers who have played our share of play-by-email games and BBS role-playing experiences (and who have modified rules and created our own scenarios), we wanted to express our collective alarm in print. Anyone agree? Either write us or join our discussion during the week of October 10-14 on the CGW Forum (On Ziffnet, Go GAMEFORUM, Section 16 — Frontier Showdown). We would like to make that a gold-plated invitation to TSR representatives.

The iconic ratings symbolize the following editorial verdicts:

- ★★★★★ Potential Benchmark
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★ Average – Mainly For Genre Enthusiasts
- ★★ Weak – Has Significant Problems
- ★ Abysmal

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Interface

LETTERS FROM CGW READERS

OUTPOST-MORTEM

I have been an avid reader for 6 years now and have found your reviews unfailingly to be "on the mark" and informative. However, the comments concerning OUTPOST are ludicrous when compared to the real game. For the last few months I have been anxiously awaiting getting OUTPOST only to find it is an extremely shoddy work of software pushed out the door in an obvious hurry. What is distressing is that your magazine, (and many others) published review after review claiming this to be the best thing since sliced bread. It is, in fact, basically a glorified screen saver, and an ineptly documented one at that. I am astonished that a magazine of *CCW*'s caliber could possibly positively endorse this product. I will remain an avid reader of *CCW* but I would like to see an explanatory note in some future issue retracting the glowing praise that was issued for OUTPOST. Keep up the (otherwise) great work!

Brad Wallace
Gilbert, AZ

I don't know if you are aware of all the outrage being expressed over **Sierra**'s new release, OUTPOST. Since you have editorialized in past issues over a trend in computer games to go for high end graphics while neglecting game play, this seems to me to be a horrible example of exactly this condition. As a sorry owner of OUTPOST who bought it from a store (Egghead) that does not accept returns, I had awaited this game for months. I even bought the hint book which came out three weeks before the game did. However, the final product is incomplete, extremely poorly documented, poorly put together and designed, and a horror to play (it is nice to look at, but as one angry purchaser said on-line, I thought I was buying a game not a screen saver!).

The whole thing looks like it was rushed out the door before it was close to being finished. Many of the features that were given prominent space in the hint book and in what passes for a manual, such as trade, diplomacy, roads, monorails, AI management of daughter colonies, etc., (items that appeared to be vital to making the game dynamic), were left out and are now promised in a future module for which we must spend more money. And this to get what was originally promised us!

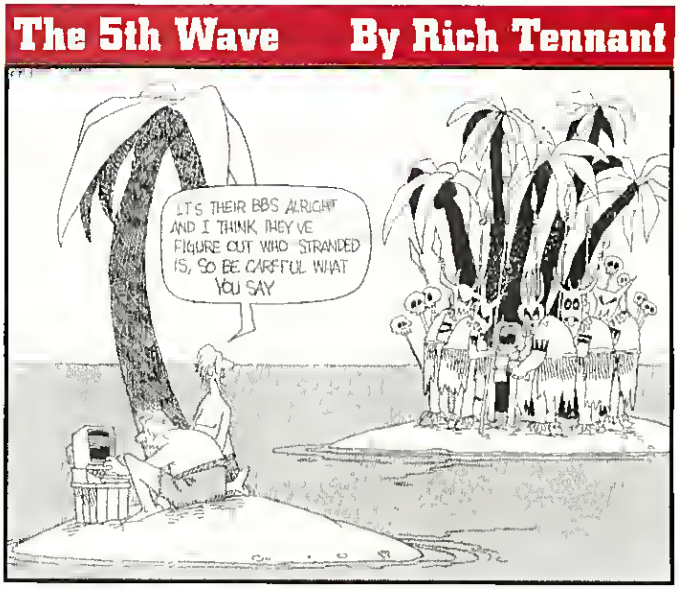
There is an on-line help feature, masquerading as your assistant AI, but all it is is a text-reading program that reads word-for-word (and slowly) the text that appears on your screen. Unlike SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION, there is no advice from this so-called AI, no hints, no help in actually playing the game, only a description of each item you can build. Neither the manual nor the AI tells you how to build or acquire some of these things, resulting in needless frustration.

The game itself — the game system, that is — appears to be the main puzzle the player must solve in order to succeed; even the save game feature will not work unless certain conditions are existing on the screen (for example, you cannot save the game if any robodozers are on-screen), but nowhere in the manual nor in the README file does it spell this out. It simply says that the simulation is so complex that you can only save at certain points when internal processing is complete, but it doesn't say when or where those points are!

After some struggle, I did figure out this game, only to discover that it is actually very boring. It *is* "SIMCITY in Space," but not done anywhere near as well as SIMCITY. And since almost everything gets built underground, it is really "SimCity in a Hole." All the planets you can colonize are the same, game after game, and important data about the planets (such as their Hostility rating) is left out of the information you are given on-screen (though it is given in the Hint book). Since the manual tells you how important it is to refer to such information and the only place to get it is in the Hint book, is this a suggestion you must buy the manual? The planets all look alike. There is no sense of wonder, no discovery, no humor (except for sophomoric comments by the AI, such as, "Your colony is in trouble...have a nice day!"). There are no announcements to alert you to trouble, no easy way to find out what the trouble is, no clear instructions on how to get your robots working, how to find new mines, just the tedium of figuring out a faulty game design.

In fact, the one word that most describes this turkey is "boring." All the factors that could make it interesting—and more importantly for a game, fun—are left to future modules, which, if the game is returned to stores at the rate suggested by the comments on-line, will never be created. To top it off, instead of using CD space to add more features to the game (including the ones that had been promised), there are advertisements and promos for future modules, and a set-up program for INN, Sierra's on-line network!

I feel this product is an in-



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Available for PC 3.5" and PC CD-ROM

NOVA LOGIC

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sult to the gaming public. What the computer game press has been ballyhooing as the next "Game of the Year" is nothing but junk. If an asteroid does hit the earth, it will be welcome to end the tedium this game provides, but I hope it lands on Sierra first! On second thought, never mind, since I live only five miles from their new headquarters in Bellevue, WA!

David Spangler
Bellevue, WA

CGW previewed an early version of ***Sierra****'s* OUTPOST *in our November, 1993 issue. Although our Sneak Previews are based on actually playing the games we cover (even if, as in this case, the amount of code and options provided were rather limited), we took particular care to let our readers know exactly how early and limited the Sneak Preview was, and clearly labeled the piece with our "SNEAK PREVIEW: Game Still In Development" stamp. We ran the Sneak Preview because we were very excited about the concept of the game, the people who were working on the design, and the early materials from the game that we were seeing. We perceived that* OUTPOST *was going to be "big news" and to be the kind of game that our readers could really get excited about. It is safe to say, from reading many letters and on-line messages like yours, as well as Martin Cirulis' actual review in this issue, that the game fell far short of the initial vision.*

We run previews because you, our readers, have told us that you value early coverage as an indicator of what's coming on the horizon. In selecting games for preview we try to pick out what we think is going to be the cream of the crop. We have a fairly good track record, but there is always the occasional exception. Would that we could be correct on every count. Unfortunately, that isn't the way life or even journalism works.

WELLS-SPOKEN

Concerning the imposition of a government mandated set of standards into gaming, I am reminded of some of the criticisms the classic science fiction writer H.G. Wells ran into with the publication of his book, *Little Wars*, which documented for the first time rules for wargames, in this case using toy soldiers. Yes, true 3-D gaming, rather than virtual anything, right on the front parlor floor in 1913. Incidentally, in that sense Wells was the father of modern popular wargaming both on hardwood and hardware. Despite the fact that Wells was in real life something of a pacifist, the nascent hobby managed to get stereotyped as somehow leading its practitioners to a predilection for actual rather than virtual slaughter. Post WWI British manufacturers duly and almost literally beat their swords into plowshares by cutting back on toy soldier production and launching into the production of model farms, etc. And, thank God they did, for surely if they had continued their old lines a newly brainwashed generation might have found themselves in yet another World War. Yeah, sure.

Perhaps, if erstwhile lawmakers would betake themselves into the city streets and talk to gang members, maybe they would find that street violence did not suddenly dawn upon some otherwise happy child while playing video games or while venturing onto his parent's PC to putz around with his father's DOOM file. To them I say, please get your reality out of virtuality, FAST.

Thomas Jefferson's remarks, on the idea of a state religion, may have some application here, "It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself. Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible me; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons." Tom always had good feel about would-be morals regulators.

Dave Schneider
Pittsburgh, PA

BASHIN' BASHAM

ATTN: Tom Basham, [In reference to your column, "What's in a sim?" *CGW* #121.] Is it a simulation or not? I don't care! Is it enjoyable, fun, entertaining? I care!

The armed forces spend years and millions training pilots to fly these babies. A "true" sim would be unflyable, unusable and unsuitable for 99.9% of players. Lighten up, bud!

Todd Repke
Owatonna, MN

PC'S PLAYHOUSE

When are game makers going to realize that animation and scanned photos are not a replacement for good solid game play? Players are only going to wait so long to see those glitzy images.

Todd Parker
Centerville, UT

Please explain the evolution of role-playing to the Hollywood crowd. They don't understand what it's all about. We don't need well-known actors to portray us or upstage us in a game. We are our worst and best partner. Marketeers are trying for the mass market and I'm afraid, for us role-players, it's back to the graph paper. At least, give us credit for some imagination.

Russ Reed
Brandon, FL

Dear Mr. Goldwyn, Zanuck, Warner, Wasserman, et. al, of Hollywood, CA:

At our reader's request, we'd like to explain a little about role-playing to you. Role-playing is about pretending to be someone else, usually in a world somewhere else. In a movie, you identify with a hero or heroine. In a role-playing experience, you are that hero or heroine (or, if you're so inclined, the villain/villainess). In a movie, you watch the stars figure out how to get out of scrapes. In a game, you try to figure out how to get out of scrapes. In a movie, you admire the protagonist's ingenuity. In a game, you get to brag about your own creative solutions.

If every solution has to be filmed, that's either going to be tremendously expensive for your studios or you are going to have to severely restrict the number of solutions available. If every conversation requires union-scale actors, you are going to film an incredible number of permutations that will make movie-making seem cheap, or you are going to severely limit the scope of conversations within the game.

That's what our readers want us to explain to you about how more can be less. You can give them more and better images, but actually offer less game play. Maybe even some of the software publishers will understand that, too.

INFORMATION CATTLE PATH

The information highway is great except for one thing. There are too few on-ramps. Living in Northern Indiana, there are 3-4 lines of access that are free. Only 3-4 small areas that have free access. The rest have to pay for long distance charges. At that cost, I can afford the car (computer), but can't afford to drive on the road (information superhighway).

Ted Hiner
LaPorte, IN

Ted, don't panic! (Hmm! Seems like we read that somewhere before.) The so-called superhighway isn't here, yet. Right now, brave souls like you are still four-wheeling on some telecommuting cattle paths. If you're adventurous, you may enjoy this issue's survey of some of the toll roads and turnpikes in today's world of telegaming, but we have a long journey ahead of us before we reach the superhighway.

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THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GAMING WORLD

The 'Magic' Is In The Cards

The Magic: The Gathering Card Game Goes CD

The amazing success of MAGIC: THE GATHERING, an innovative collectable trading card game, has spawned an electronic offspring. Magic's publisher, **Wizards of the Coast**, has teamed up with **MicroProse** to put the craze on computer.

In the card game, each player builds his or her own deck of spells and magical power (mana) which is tapped to cast spells (for summoning minions, enchanting things, wielding sorcery, etc.). Since players often build custom decks in the five colors of magic, artifacts and lands, and since some cards are more scarce than others, the game has a reputation as a ruckus head-to-head experience, as well as a terrific collectable.

The design team for the computer game faced the challenge of keeping "rare" cards rare, while allowing players to trade them electronically. Their solution is to produce the game on CD-ROM and to allow card "trading" on an on-line service. In addition to solitaire play against a computer opponent, on-line multi-player duels will also be possible. Each CD-ROM will have some cards from the Revised Edition of the card game, plus its four expansions (Arabian Nights, Antiquities, Legends and The Dark). Players will be able to buy, trade and collect their own unique set of cards to build their decks, and future releases will offer expansion sets.

Both Wizards of the Coast and MicroProse see graphics as the key to success for the MAGIC: THE GATHERING CD. The card game featured top fantasy art, much of which will be scanned and used in hi-res (640 x 480). The computer game will also feature special forms of player advancement, quests, and tournaments to spark more interactive player interest. Stay tuned to see if MicroProse creates new magic cards that could only work in a computer gaming environment.

—Alan Emrich

AFFAIRS IN THE CYBURBS

FPS Football Pro Coming To INN, DOOM II Conference Files Downloadable

Tailgate Party! 'Scuse us. We're rootin tootin excited over **ImagiNation**'s announcement that they are building a virtual stadium for **Dynamix**' FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO. The game will go into testing sometime around the end of tbe year, and will include all the game's usual features, plus chat. The on-line version of *CGW*'s Sports Game of the Year for '93 will be in 640x480, perfect res to go with hotdogs, cold beer, or the sports attire of your choice. For more information, use your ImagiNation.

DOOM II's long-awaited release is October 10th, but to keep you occupied until then check out the DOOM conference round up in the Computer Gaming World Forum. A full transcript of the conversation between **id Software** and ZiffNet members is available, as well as the winning program in our ROOM of DOOM contest. GO GAMEWORLD and search library 17, DOOM Files, for all the goodies.

Doomed to Win

PC Magazine & CGW Shower DOOM With Awards At ONE BBSCON

Since *CGW*'s philosophy about shareware has undergone a dramatic change over the last few years, this year's Summer Shareware Showcase, sponsored by Ziff-Davis and held in Atlanta, gave Editor-in-Chief Johnny Wilson a chance to clarify the magazine's position about shareware. Once relegated to second-class status as eccentric budgetware, shareware now fits the model of films by independent film makers and auteurs, Wilson suggested.

"The differences between shareware and commercial software are no longer of perceived quality, but merely differences in distribution and budgets," he said. "The disparities in budgets between the traditional software houses and small shareware designers

can be largely described in terms of special effects and expensive production values."

He went on to challenge the designers to take advantage of their limited financial exposure to create games that take risks in subject matter and/or innovative gameplay.

At the 1st Annual Ziff-Davis Shareware Awards, Wilson pointed out how, in the film world, quality independent films sometimes capture the imagination of movie-goers and outperform big budget films. Given his analogy, he found it appropriate that DOOM should win both *CGW*'s Premier Award for Game of the Year and the Game of the Year award in the special shareware presentation.

It was no surprise to most attendees that DOOM was a winner. However, not even Jay Wilbur, business manager for **id Software**, had a hint that he would walk away with *four* awards before the ceremonies were complete. In one day, DOOM became the most highly awarded shareware game in the history of computer entertainment.

Qualifying titles for the awards were selected from hundreds of nominees, programs representing the best new or significantly upgraded shareware released between January 1, 1993 and June 1, 1994. Six *CGW* staffers and nine members of *PC Magazine* judged the 19 finalists, awarding prizes to only six games. The judges based their decisions on originality, creativity and entertainment value.

Winners selected by *CGW*'s judges included **id Software**'s DOOM, for best action/adventure, EPIC PINBALL by **Epic MegaGames** for best arcade game, **MVP Software**'s MVP BRIDGE for best card game, ANIMATED VGA MEMORY GAME by Tom Guthery for best puzzle game, and HEXXAGON from **Software Creations** for top strategy release. DOOM took the award for Best Game Of The Year.

The winners of the Shareware Awards can be downloaded from ZiffNet on CompuServe (GO ZDAWARDS).

—Chuck Miller

PLAYING LATELY?

Here are the titles that gamers are spending the most quality time with. Let us know which game you've been playing lately by writing the name of your current addiction in the "Playing Lately?" entry of the *CGW* Top 100 poll card (page 208).

Readers' TOP 10

Results for *CGW* #121, August 1994

1. **Doom** (id Software)
2. **X-COM: UFO Defense** (MicroProse)
3. **TIE Fighter** (LucasArts)
4. **Master of Orion** (MicroProse)
5. **X-Wing** (LucasArts)
6. **Sim City 2000** (Maxis)
7. **IndyCar** (Papyrus)
8. **The Elder Scrolls: Arena** (Bethesda)
9. **Ultima 8: Pagan** (Origin)
10. **Outpost** (Sierra)

Notable Quotes

Wit, wisdom and caustic quips from gaming's harshest critics

"There once was a game called DOOM/ That kept me busy in my room/ from dusk to dawn/ With Brams and Brawn/ id is a winner/ va-va-va-voom!"

Chris Herold, Milwaukee WI

"X-COM is the best game I have ever played. Not one bug—so far, no flaws—and it's addictive. Cheers to MicroProse."

M.B. Greene, New York City

OUTPOST—*frustrating*. The hardware requirements are more than actually represented. It's too hard to get around in the program. The so-called "manual" is an abomination—obviously, a half-baked, prematurely released project. Serves me right for getting version 1.0!"

Jim Sylvester, Austin TX

"X-COM is great, and the playability is very high. Also, the 3D battlescapes are fantastic. If this game doesn't make you xenophobic, I don't know what will...a real winner!"

Ray Kelly, Omaha NE

Plextor Makes The Jump To Lightspeed

Introduces 600kb Quad Speed CD-ROM Drive

The "Year of the CD-ROM" hasn't quite been as momentous for CD-ROM drives as it has for software. The 1994 crop of entertainment on CD-ROM requires at least a double-speed drive, but even "deuces" make for frequent periods of clock-watching. Triple speed drives accelerate the installation and viewing of video off of CD-ROMs, but they don't offer a noticeable improvement in most games, which need to be written to take advantage of the higher throughput. Now **Plextor** has answered the call of those who are waiting for "something better" by leapfrogging the triple-speed drive and heading straight for the quad.

The 4PLEX' 220ms access time and a blistering 600kb throughput far exceeds that of a typical double-speed CD-ROM drive's 180-350ms access time and 300kb throughput. A 1MB on-board buffer keeps video streaming from the CD smoothly, without the pauses and skipped frames that plague games running off of slower units.

In our preliminary test, we attached the internal half-height 4PLEX PX-43CH to a 16-bit Adaptec AHA-1522 SCSI adapter, and the installation was a snap. Plextor does not recommend attaching the 4PLEX to an 8-bit SCSI host, as it would reduce performance by at least 25%.

The unit goes beyond MPC level 2 specifications with SCSI-2, XA and Kodak Photo CD multi-session compatibility. At $549 for the internal unit ($599 with Future Domain 16-bit SCSI card), it would be hard to justify a triple-speed CD anymore. For Mac owners, 4PLEX also makes an external unit, the 4PLEX PX-45CH for $649 ($699 with the 16-bit SCSI card).

For more information, contact Plextor at (800) 4PLEX-TOR (475-3986).

—Mike Weksler

Byte Sized Biz Bits

The entertainment industry is shaking like a California earthquake with all the recent corporate moves and high-level personnel changes. **MediaVision** has been forced into Chapter 11 bankruptcy, largely due to the concerns of two banks. As reported earlier in *CGW*, the company had successfully negotiated an understanding of terms with 90% of the outstanding creditors that would have kept the company out of a Chapter 11 filing. The action of the two banks (whose exposure represents less than 7% of the company's outstanding debt) has forced **MediaVision** to file for Chapter 11 protection. It has also encouraged the company to begin shopping high profile titles like THE DAEDALUS ENCOUNTER to other software publishers. Such auctions may indicate that work is slowing on the project, pending further financing. ... **Intra-Corp, Inc.**, parent company of **Capstone**, has filed their intent to purchase **Three-Sixty Pacific** with the latter's bankruptcy referee. The judge is not expected to make a decision on the purchase until late September. ... **3DO** has just officially announced their new *64-bit M2 Accelerator*. The new system is based on the *PowerPC* microprocessor and is expected to be backwards compatible with the current **3DO** system. ... Trip Hawkins has resigned from the Board of Directors of **Electronic Arts**, where he served as Chairman, and Larry Probst, President and CEO of **EA**, has succeeded Hawkins as Chairman.

—Johnny Wilson

PIPELINE

ESTIMATED RELEASE DATES BASED ON THE LATEST INFORMATION FROM GAME DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME, COMPANY	RELEASE DATE
5TH FLEET AVALON HILL	10/94
ACES OF THE DEEP DYNAMIX	10/94
ACROSS THE RHINE MICROPROSE	10/94
LIVE ACTION FOOTBALL ACCOLADE	10/94
BIOFORGE ORIGIN	11/94
BLACKBEARD AVALON HILL	10/94
BREACH 3 IMPRESSIONS	10/94
BRETT HULL HOCKEY ACCOLADE	10/94
US NAVY FIGHTERS EA	11/94
CELTIC TALES KOEI	11/94
COLONIZATION MICROPROSE	11/94
CYBERIA INTERPLAY	11/94
CYBERJUDAS MERIT	10/94
DARK FORCES LUCASARTS	11/94
DESCENT INTERPLAY	11/94
DUNGEON MASTER II INTERPLAY	11/94
FRONT LINES IMPRESSIONS	10/94
FPS: FOOTBALL '95 DYNAMIX	11/94
FULL THROTTLE LUCASARTS	12/94
HAROBALL 4 ACCOLADE	11/94
HARVESTER MERIT	11/94
HELL: CYBERPUNK THRILLER MERIT	10/94
HEROES OF M&M NEW WORLD	11/94
HIGH SEAS TRADER IMPRESSIONS	11/94
INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2 DYNAMIX	10/94
ISLE OF THE DEAD MERIT	10/94
JORUNE: ALIEN LOGIC SSI	10/94
KING'S QUEST VII SIERRA	11/94
LEMMINGS 3 PSYGNOSIS	11/94
LORDS OF MIDNIGHT DOMARK	10/94
MASTER OF MAGIC MICROPROSE	10/94
MENZOBERRANZAN SSI	11/94
NOCTROPOLIS EA	10/94
PANZER GENERAL SSI	11/94
PHANTASMAGORIA SIERRA	12/94
SPACEWARD HO! 4.0 NEW WORLD	10/94
STALINGRAD AVALON HILL	10/94
STAR TRAIL SIR-TECH	11/94
STAR TREK: TNG SPECTRUM	11/94
STONEKEEP INTERPLAY	11/94
WARCRAFT BLIZZARD	11/94
WING COMMANDER 3 ORIGIN	11/94
WINGS OF GLORY ORIGIN	10/94
ZEPHYR NEW WORLD	10/94

BETA BITS

Short takes on games undergoing beta testing and soon to be released.

Warcraft: Orcs and Humans

It's a tough life, being an orc—pillage and plunder, bash skulls and abduct slaves, year after year. And those pesky, soft, irritating humans! How they meddle and tresspass on what everyone *knows* is sovereign Orc territory. Why, it's enough to make you want to annihilate

the entire useless race! Thus do the folks at **Blizzard** give wargamers a view from the Orcish perspective, as well as the Human. WARCRAFT is a real-time strategy game with several twists. In addition to battles and the inevitable side trips for magic items and gold, players must also construct a medieval town and manage its growth in an almost SIMCITY style. Mining for gold, harvesting lumber, developing military units in barracks bring to mind CIVILIZATION as well, especially since the technology does evolve (although you end up with magic missiles instead of nuclear weapons). Taking either the Human or Orcish race, you play through a series of scenarios depicting an interspecies war spanning five decades, interspersed with dramatic cut scenes. The CD-ROM format contains sonorous voice-overs from confident actors. We're waiting to see how the Orc voices fare in the finished version—some of those consonant-heavy names are pretty tough. Certainly, with over two dozen unit types ranging from clerics and catapults to giant spiders and semi-intelligent slime, there is plenty to bash about for any wargamer. Those only marginally interested in the combat aspects may yet be hooked by the many intriguing quests, which include chasing down outlaw Ogre hombres in the Icebone Peaks, visiting Kobolds in abandoned salt mines, and even ending a plague of lycanthropy. Projected release: November.

Quarantine

Not since HELL CAB have we seen such an unusual automotive game as this. The opening interface "checks your ID" in order to allow you entry into a bizarre world of armed-to-the-teeth taxicabs. The object of this action-filled game is to eliminate the various vehicles which stand in your way of picking up a fare. The enclosed texture-mapped town where you ply your trade looks very much like DOOM meets CAR WARS, complete with land mines, tire spikes, rapid-fire machine guns and a host of other wicked weaponry.

For those who find themselves locked into a frenzy of killing, the program allows you to shoot at anything—even your potential passengers. The tires squeal as you make high-speed turns, and the feeling of acceleration is definitely there, but collisions with walls and other cars feel almost elastic, and the entire town has an eerie, empty feel to it. With perhaps even less of a storyline than DOOM, it will be interesting to see how the final version of QUARANTINE fleshes out. Projected release: October.

Wolf

You can thank your lucky stars, game fans: this is not a Hollywood-tainted, barely-interactive, multimedia version of the Jack Nicholson movie. It is actually a unique simulation of life as *canis lupus*, the loved and feared wolf. Much like a combat sim, the play options in WOLF are divided between scenarios with specific objectives and what would be equivalent to a "career" or "campaign" mode in a sim. In the 40 different scenarios, you have specific wolf-like goals: begin as a young wolf and challenge the alpha male; kill a requisite number of caribou; or out-fox a pack of hunters. In the career mode, you simply live out the life of a wolf, hunting, sleeping, mating, caring for the young ones, and terrorizing little girls in red capes. The environment of WOLF is customizable, allowing you to select climate, food supply, proximity to humans, and type of wolf (timber, arctic, plains). Behind the game is an info-rich database of wolf images and facts, ready to leap forward if you should have questions about any aspect of the wolf and its environment. Created by **Sanctuary Woods** in conjunction with Wolf Haven International, WOLF exudes a love for its subject matter, and will no doubt be received with same by fans of the beasts and those looking for an unusual simulated experience. CD-ROM only. Projected release: October.

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COMMIT TO ★ EXCELLENCE

FRONT PAGE SPORTS®

FOOTBALL PRO '95 ★ ★ ★ ★ ALL PRO

SANDERS CONVERTS FOR TWO IN FOOTBALL PRO '95

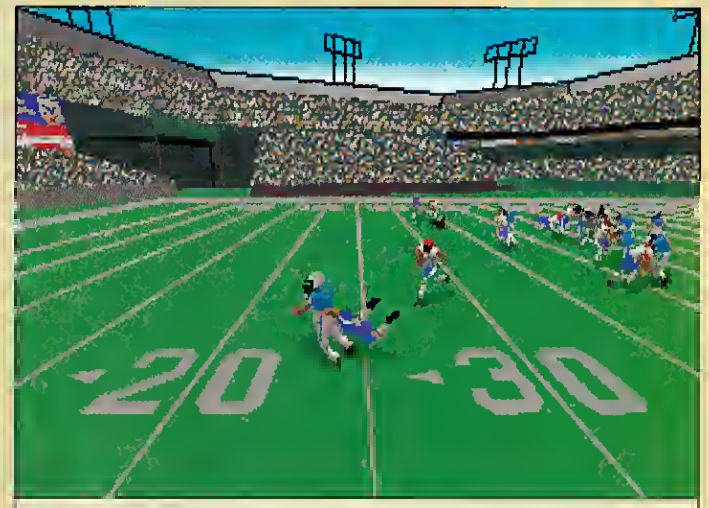
NEW RULES PROMISE MORE AGGRESSIVE PLAY

Expressing excitement about the addition of 2-point conversions and kickoffs from the 30-yard line, running back Barry Sanders said today to watch for "higher scoring games, more risk-taking and plenty of bone-crunching action" The hottest action will be wherever the nation's best, *Football Pro '95* is played. Winner of Computer Gaming World's Best Sports Simulation award in both '93 and '94, this best-seller is set for another goal-to-goal run In addition to the rule changes, the game kicks off with exciting new features. Players will be able to use existing team lineups or build their own league from scratch starting with a common player draft pool. A new fast simulation mode will generate complete game statistics before you can make it to the refrigerator and back.

See plenty of bone-crunching hits as players spin, flip and dive in 2-point conversion attempts.

LAST YEAR'S CHAMPS SACK COACH FOR ROOKIE

In a move that surprised everyone, last year's winners were taken over by a complete unknown. Amidst the nationwide uproar, analysts said it was only to be expected in a game like *Football Pro '95* where anyone can become a coach. Coaches decide play-calling logic for over 2,500 play situations depending on what down it is, yardage, score, time-remaining or other play conditions. What's more, with 3,000 stock plays on the floppy version (over 10,000 on the CD) and a powerful play editor, there's plenty for a coach to draw on. The secret to winning is a good strategy, a great team and a whole lot of luck—just like the real game.



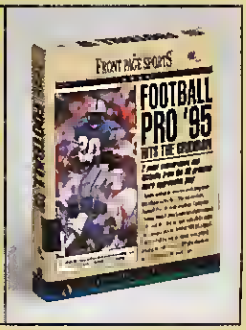
Front Page Sports' *exclusive Camera Angle Management System (CAMS™) lets you review plays from all angles. New 3-D stadiums bring the crowd into the game.*

FINAL TEAM ROSTERS ANNOUNCED

With the first game just hours away, coaches announced their final 53-man rosters. For some, it was an easy choice. New *Football Pro '95* starts you out with all the 1994/95 lineups and lets you put up to 6 players on injured reserve. Many coaches admitted, though, that the inclusion of these NFLPA players and their latest statistics made last-minute trades inevitable At press time, rumors were flying of a trade involving several top quarterbacks.

SEASON TICKETS ON SALE NOW

Reserve—or renew—your 50-yard-line seats to the game that sets the standard for football action. *Football Pro '95* makes it first and goal for the entire season! (Available on CD and floppy disk for IBM PCs and compatibles.) Upgrades are available for registered owners of *Football Pro.* See your local retailer for details, or call 1-800-757-7707 and ask for D860.



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SIERRA®

What's Keeping Stonekeep?

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

The Reality Behind Interplay's New Role-Playing Game

by Johnny L. Wilson

In the first installment of the 1993 Winter CES Report, *CGW* mentioned the unobtrusive pop-up interface design used in **Interplay**'s STONEKEEP. In the role-playing section of the second installment of that report, CGW commented favorably on the rotoscoped monsters, interesting approach to real-time combat, and impressive special effects. We said, "If the story has as much punch as the special effects, this game is likely to be the true heir to THE BARD'S TALE series."

At the time, we were expecting the game to be ready for Fall '93 release and planned for the game to be one of our Fall cover stories. We knew that designer Peter Oliphant wanted the game to be a real technological showcase and, when progress on the game was agonizingly slow, we attributed the delay to integrating Oliphant's video advances and full-screen dungeon views with the traditional world building problems inherent in the design of any role-playing game. So, we booked a Spring '94 cover. Again, there was a delay. So much of a delay, in fact, that we wondered if the game wouldn't look like old technology when it was released. The game was "old news," and we were beginning to wonder if it would even appeal to role-players in light of the new graphic glitz appearing all over the industry. Not only was the game moving from a floppy-disk release to a CD-ROM-only product, but we heard rumors of stripping out the old technology and rebuilding STONEKEEP. Of course, we weren't entirely sure that the result would be a "six million dollar man"—better, stronger, faster.

Then, as the game began to enter "crunch time" and the company devoted a full quarter of their resources toward finishing STONEKEEP, we took another look. This other look makes us wonder if our early comments weren't correct after all. STONEKEEP may well become the true heir to THE BARD'S TALE series.

THE FOUNDATION

STONEKEEP is a first-person, 3-D perspective role-playing game. It is most similar to **Bethesda**'s THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA in terms of combat, but the action is full-screen and uses both digitized video monsters and rendered characters in pre-rendered environments (almost like a fast-moving THE 7TH GUEST) rather than the more traditional, real-time generated environs of ARENA. It also uses a less obtrusive command interface, since STONEKEEP's cursor changes to reflect the player's options: a hand to grab, a targeting star for combat, a scroll for the inventory, a mirror for the player's image, and a book for character statistics, rune spells, notes and auto-mapping. This offers more of a full screen feel than having to work

from a command panel. There is a price to be paid, however, since STONEKEEP forces you to use both keyboard and mouse rather than being totally mouse-driven like ARENA.

The story is set in a vividly conceived alternate earth where The Devastation, a cataclysm of apocalyptic proportions, was caused by magick rather than nuclear power. The events within the game take place about one thousand years after the holocaust caused by the ominous magick of the two rival cabals: The Lord Sorcerers of Atlantis and the Dark Warlocks of Ys. The background story, a novella by veteran role-playing authors Steve Jackson and David Pulver, is called *Thera Awakening*. In these few pages, gamers will glean hints as to: the Ithark (the rune-based magick system used in the game); the races to be found in the game (Human/Dwarf; Throg/Sharga; Faeries/Elves); the mythology behind the orbs that you must retrieve in order to win the game; and a better understanding of the goddess Thera and the Shadow King Khull-Khuum—two of the gods who play significant roles in the game world.

Yet, the well-tapestried underpinning of the novella merely sets up the cinematic opening of the game where the player's character, a hero named Drake who is presumably some offspring of the two lovers in *Thera Awakening*, is nearly destroyed by Khull-Khuum in a juxtaposition of light and darkness. The safe, secure environs of STONEKEEP are ravaged by the Shadow King, buried in a deep gorge, and Drake alone has escaped to redress the balance. As the cinematic introduction reaches its denouement, an older and wiser Drake is recruited by Thera to continue the quest started by his ancestors in the novella—freeing Thera and the others of the Youngest Gods from their imprisonment within an assortment of ten different orbs.

In order to accomplish that goal, you will have to explore 13 dungeon levels, representing everything from ruins through sewers and mines to ice tunnels, a necropolis and the inner sanctum of the Shadow King himself. At the beginning, you only control the character of Drake. As you progress from level to level, however, you'll meet new and interesting NPCs to add to your potential for success. **Interplay**'s Chris Taylor (whose writing serves as creative counterpoint to Oliphant's technological expertise) has added a fascinating cast of non-player characters. One character who plays a major role in the game is known as Wahooka, the great prankster. Philip Jose Farmer fans should not confuse this prankster with Kickaha, the human prankster of the *World of Tiers* series, but should recognize this King of the Goblins as being more akin to the more perverse of those the Irish call, "the good people." Like many of the leprechauns of Irish folklore, however, Wahooka is both tricky and trickable, often falling victim to his own machinations. In addition, Drake will befriend two dwarves, a frightened Sharga, one of the elves that had presumably disappeared during The Devastation, and a Tinkerbell-esque faerie named Sparkle.

Finally, composer Charles Deenen has added the tapestried effect of musical themes which correspond to the dominant cultures present in the game, an operatic technique of associating aural signatures with various characters.

MIRROR, MIRROR IN THE MARGIN

As mentioned earlier, you always have a full-screen view of the dungeon. If you need to equip your character, you move the cursor to the side until it becomes a mirror icon and double-click. A digitized video image of your character appears and you can point and click in order to place armor on him or place weapons in his hands as easily as dressing a paper doll. If you need to make notes about a rumor you've heard or clarify the nature of a rune, you can move the cursor until it becomes a book and double-click to open it, and type notes in your own mysterious "book of many things." This diary provides for auto-mapping, auto-note taking, character updates, and your own personal notes. If you need to check your inventory, move the cursor until it becomes a scroll and open it to divulge the contents of your bag of tricks. The basic interface seems to work extremely well.

In addition to the standard assortment of medieval weapons, STONEKEEP also offers the following slings and arrows for your enemies' outrageous misfortune: icesword, shadowsword, icehammers, shadowhammers, shadowdaggers, black

MR. BONE JANGLES Drake checks his inventory for more firepower in order to turn this undead into a spineless toothpick.

seeking arrows, and stoneshooters. Naturally, these special weapons are relatively rare and deliver significantly more damage than the usual place settings of hackware. Yet, the most interesting part of combat in STONEKEEP is not its weapons assortment, but its combat resolution.

Close combat is resolved via an interesting design in STONEKEEP. First of all, the cursor changes into a targeting star. You move the star onto the target, aim for the general area in which you wish to hit your opponent, and click on the left mouse button if you want to attack with the weapon in your left hand, or the right button if you want to attack with the weapon in your right. Then, Drake's basic attributes and familiarity with the weapon (as well as any magickal attributes which the weapon may have and the quality of the weapon) are factored in to determine how closely the weapon struck where it was aimed, or if it struck at all. As you successfully use each weapon, you progress to the next level of "familiarity" with that weapon. This design means that weapons, as well as characters, have experience levels in this game. Naturally, as you accumulate weapon expertise, you will hit the exact spot where you aim more frequently.

Missile combat is similar. If you wanted to shoot a Throg with a Sharga crossbow, you would click the mouse button for the hand in which you held the crossbow. The crossbow will then appear on the screen. Then, you use the mouse to aim the crossbow and click again to fire the quarrel.

THIS MAGICK MOMENT

As noted earlier, STONEKEEP's magick system is rune-based. To cast a spell, you must have the appropriate rune placed into a slot on your magick wand—a Runecaster. There are five levels of Runecasters—Runewand, Runescepter, Throg Runecaster, Elfstaff and Silver Runestaff—each holding progressively more mana points and runes.

Stonekeep doesn't have a particularly large tome of spells (28 total), and they are the usual mix of area spells (wards and teleport circles), duration spells (those which last a limited length of time to provide light, enhance defense, endow special knowledge, reduce noise or slow time), and instantaneous spells (throw firebolts and icebolts, teleport, or any other spell which you would expect to create an immediate impact.

In addition to the rune-based portion of the magic system, there are ten orbs to be located and retrieved from the ruins. As noted earlier, it is Drake's job to retrieve these orbs which contain the imprisoned souls of the Youngest Gods. Hence, the addition of each orb to Drake's inventory will also give him added magickal capabilities. For example, one orb ensures that the party will not take any damage from falling into pits. Another increases Drake's strength. Another provides a proximity map, complete with active monsters. Of course, half the fun will be determining which orbs help the party in what ways.

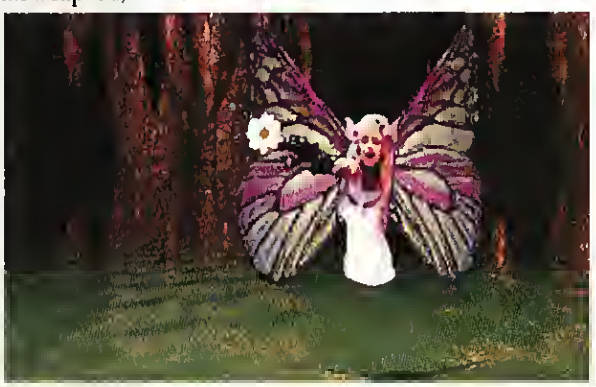
NOT WHAT YOU SAY THAT COUNTS

Perhaps the weakest role-playing element in the game is the conversational aspect. The designers opted early in the design for full digitized speech. They didn't want menu-based or icon-based conversation to interrupt the dramatic flow of the conversational encounters, so they pre-set all the conversations to run uninterrupted by the player. The good news is that there is no interface interference to disrupt the dramatic nature of each encounter, but the counterpoint is that there is also no real interaction taking place in these encounters.

TAKE THIS YOU FRIGID WITCH Drake meets the Ice Queen's freeze attack with some cold steel.

To us, this seems unnecessarily limiting and is a problem that all designers using digital video and speech must iron out.

Naturally, successful completion of the quest will mean the release of the Youngest Gods and the resurrection of the fortress-town of Stonekeep from its cavernous cenotaph. This means that, assuming this release is successful, there is plenty of room for a sequel that would enable you to venture into the fascinating countryside depicted in the novella. If our experience with STONEKEEP is any indication, we can only hope the next installment won't take nearly as long.



THANK HEAVEN FOR LITTLE GHOULS Sparkle's daisy wand might improve Drake's odor in the sewer level.

WACKY WHEELS

Coming October 15, 1994

MODEM PLAY

"*Wacky Wheels*: A fun, action-packed 3D racing game you can play alone *or* against friends via modem!"

That's right, nothing beats the excitement of playing against other human racers. You really *feel the thrill* of racing when you blast by your opponent, slam their car into a water trap, and beat them by a hair to the finish line. It's so fun, you'll hate to finish!

Two players can compete on the same computer (split–screen mode) or on separate computers using modems to race each other or battle in one of the six Comm–bat™ zones that are included.

The wild kingdom of racing!
You can play any of eight wacky animals in Wacky Wheels. Each animal has its own colorful antics, sounds and animations, including a tiger, elephant, racoon, panda, shark, and more.

The Split–Screen mode allows two players to race on the same computer.

You get 15 original race tracks
After you select your wacky race character, you get to select any of fifteen unique race tracks (30 if you have the Upgrade Edition). Each track has a distinctive winning strategy. It's up to you to figure out the best way to race each one.

There are three classes of tracks, from novice to expert, as well as two racing car speeds.

All tracks have special obstacles and dangers: Water traps (you can race underwater!), lava lakes, jump ramps, posts, turbo lanes, ice, oil slicks, bushes, and many other hazards.

Wacky weapons help you win!
But what you're not expecting is the hedgehogs! Grab all the track-populated hedgehogs you can and hurl them like baseballs at the other racers to send them spinning out of control – giving you time to pass 'em by. Other weapons to collect include bombs, oil slicks, and flame balls.

High–speed racing action
Apogee games are action–packed, and Wacky Wheels is a perfect example. From start to finish you get edge–of–your–seat excitement and action. When playing, you'll grit your teeth, lean your body into the corners and scream "EAT MAGMA!" as you launch a hedgehog that sends the racer in front of you spinning into the lava!

Speed across a narrow bridge to avoid the bubbling lava!

Once you play *Wacky Wheels*, you just can't stop. Ask yourself: Is that a bad thing?

You get all the winning features
- High–speed, 3D point–of–view racing!
- Large variety of race tracks.
- 16 songs with multi-channel digital sound effects, with native support for the GUS, PAS–16, Sound Canvas, SB 16/Pro, WaveBlaster, and General MIDI.
- Two-player, head–to–head modes via modem connection, serial link, or at the same computer.
- Time trial mode allows you to go for a record time on each track.
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If you're looking for genuine action games with boundless energy and playability, look into Apogee. As our slogan says, "Apogee means Action!"

Baudy Tales From The Cyburbs

A Guide To On-Line Games

On-line games aren't just text-based games for multiple players anymore. But even if they were, they would still fill the desire of some of us to play games where we can socialize with real people—even if those real people are at the other end of a telephone wire, mediated through modems at each end and a mainframe in the middle. The world of on-line network games is continually expanding, and it has begun to provide something of the same variety we have come to expect in retail software.

Now, you can play maze-based exploration games, turn-based strategy games, real-time simulations, card games, sports games, and role-playing games. Some are, indeed, merely text-based games. Others support a text-based mode, but also offer a graphic interface of sorts (usually ANSI graphics). Others have a complete graphic interface via front end software (software which resides on your computer's hard disk and expedites the handling of a graphic interface between your computer and the mainframe where the game is provided). In this special section, the *CGW* staff shares its impressions of, experiences on, and descriptions of the commercial on-line services and the games they offer.

Neverwinter Nights on America Online

NO LONGER AMERICA ON HOLD (AMERICA ON-LINE)

Be careful if you reach out to touch **America Online**—it's very hot. **AOL** has made a lot of news recently with the introduction of Internet access and, as a result, its membership has skyrocketed to about one million users.

AOL is one of the largest full service on-line networks. It sports a clean and friendly interface, and has an active group of users. AOL's game support hasn't been terrific, but it does offer some interesting sights. The most popular is NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, a fully graphical multi-user role-playing game. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is based on **SSI**'s early series of role-playing games set in **TSR**'s ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS universe. Players of SSI's solo games (the "Gold Box" series) will find the system *very* familiar, right down to the font used for the game's text. The difference is, of course, that many people can explore this fantasy land together. The graphics are a bit crude and the level of interplayer communication is limited compared to other on-line RPGs, but NEVERWINTER NIGHTS makes a great starting point for the adventurer new to multi-player games. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS can also be a friendlier place than most, as combat between human players is somewhat restricted by the system.

Another interesting AOL locale is RABBITJACKS' CASINO. Here, players can get together for fun and/or competitive

games of FIVE-CARD STUD, BLACKJACK, and BINGO, or yank the arms of slot machines. The tables and machines are displayed graphically, and players can kibitz with each other as the cards are dealt and their fortunes lost. There are regular competitions and special events hosted by the area Sysops to keep things hoppin'.

Access Fees: $9.95 per month (first month free) for five hours of access, $3.50 for each subsequent hour. For more information, contact America Online at (800) 827-3338.

GRANDFATHERED IN (COMPUSERVE)

When the commercial on-line services of the world gather for Thanksgiving dinner, **CompuServe** usually sits at the head of the table. One of the oldest, largest, and well-established systems around, it is the Granddatldy of the on-line world. It offers a wide variety of services for the general user, and has a streamlined and easy to use Windows interface. The good and the bad news for gamers is that it treats gaming like a grandchild: it will love and nourish them while they sit nicely at the table and behave, but sends them out of the house if they start horsing around.

Without question, CompuServe is one of the best out there for gamer support. The system has lively gamer message areas, terrific support from game publishers, and a file transfer area (with shareware, patches, and other game support files) that is well-kept. Live role-playing groups, flight sim squadrons, modem-to-modem competitors, and play-by-email gamers all call CompuServe home and use it as a telecom clubhouse. Oddly, however, multiplayer games are not are part of the CompuServe game plan. They have a few games, which they've had for years, but they've invested very little in improving those games and have no plans to expand in the multiplayer direction. Indeed, it took a few fanatical users with programming skills to develop graphic interfaces for their older text-based role-playing games.

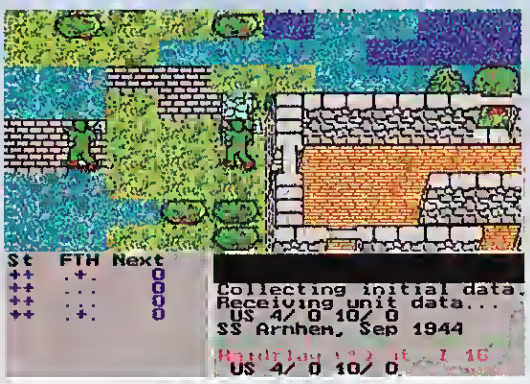
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER may ring a bell with veteran gamers. The air traffic controllers' strike during the Reagan administration inspired several such simulations, and this one is fairly representative of the lot.

BRITISH LEGENDS is a text-based multi-player role-playing game with an emphasis on magic. The major goal of the game is to become a Wizartl antl use special powers like invisibility. Indeed, some unscrupulous wizards like to slink about the world invisibly and wreak all sorts of havoc.

ISLAND OF KLSMAI is the text-based role-playing game that put **Kesmai Corporatioo** on the map. Soon to be available on more than one network, it has always been one of CompuServe's anchor products. The game consists of two segments: a basic game for novice through intermediate players and an advanced game for veterans. Kesmai even adds occasional new locations to sweeten the pot.

MEGAWARS III is a space combat game that looks a lot like **Interstel**'s out-of-print STAR FLEET I.

SNIPER!, a head-to-head game of WWII squad combat, is based on the **TSR/SPI** board wargame, but the on-line version is even more fun, as the software takes care of the often complex rules. A fairly simple graphic package allows two players to lead a squatl of soldiers in firefights through small European towns in 1944. Victorious commanders are promoted, antl even losers complain little (despite bigger telephone bills). There is no other game which captures quite so well the eerie feeling of having only one soldier left, with the enemy closing in around you...with the opportunity to turn the tables the next time around.



Hit the dirt in CompuServe's Sniper!

Access Fees: $8.95 per month for basic services and $4.80 per hour (2400 baud) or $9.60 per hour (up to 14.4) for extentled services (which include game areas). For more information, contact CompuServe at (800) 848-8990.

CONCENTRIC INFLUENCES (CRIS II)

At first glance, **Concentric Research**'s **CRIS II** looks like a very slick BBS that uses ANSI graphics. This is somewhat appropriate, since it incorporates technology that allows its users to connect with 60,000 independent bulletin board services and the Internet. However, the initial impression does not reflect the attractive graphic user interface which allows for point and click navigation, or the fact that the service connects with **Kesmai**'s **ARIES** system in ortler to

allow gamers to challenge the users of other services at AIR WARRIOR, HARPOON, ISLAND OF KESMAI, MUD II: THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY and STELLAR EMPEROR. At press time, the Kesmai gateway was in testing.

Even without the Kesmai gateway, CRIS II offers a formidable list of games, most of which are ANSI graphics or text-based, but there are several that require their own graphic front ends. The game list for CRIS II is so extensive that it is divided into eight different categories: wargames, space games, adventure games, card games, board games, casino games, miscellaneous games and flash games (action games).

Wargames: ANDROIDS is a game of arena combat in the far future. It can be played with ANSI graphics or in pure text mode. It would probably be more accurately named "Cyborgs," since gamers become hybrid human/machine warriors playing a high-stakes, real-time scavenger hunt with combat. The goal is to pick up as many valuable objects as possible by passing over them, while avoiding the violent onslaughts of your human-controlled opponents.

BLADEMASTER is a game of arena combat in the past. The game is purely text-based and features a simple fantasy town environment where you can purchase better weapons/armor and get healing and rumors between death matches. The only way to make money and move up in prestige toward the ultimate goal of becoming *the* BLADEMASTER is to fight more and stronger opponents (both computer- and human-controlled) in the arena.

EMPIRE OF THE PEASANTS has mechanics similar to a classic PBM game called FEUDAL LORDS. Both games require you to build up your fief as an economic base before you can be successful as a conquering lord. EMPIRE OF THE PEASANTS has less complex game mechanics, however, with the added benefit of allowing you to play as many turns as you like on a given phone call. Each turn, you get a production report and have the ability to buy/sell land and commodities, as well as purchase industries, soldiers and the nobility. Once the economic base is established, you can then attack the opposing lord or lady of your choice.

SUB STRIKER is a real-time submarine strategy game. Portraying a struggle between two global superpowers in a fictional sea, the gameplay is something like a simulation, but without a graphic interface. The submarines are based upon thorough research, the command set is very rich, and the game supports several human players at one time. The graphics are limited to ANSI, but the simulation aspects seem solid.

RING MASTERS is a boxing strategy game where you try to take your boxer to the championship. There is a ladder of computer- and human-controlled contenders to be defeated in order to reach the championship level. All commands are entered via a text parser, and there are occasional lapses in the interface due to the latency problem inherent in many telegames. For example, the referee threw our staffer's boxer out of the ring because of fighting between rounds, but the illegal blows were actually the result of communications latency. Yet, it is still an interesting, albeit slow, game.

Space Games: TRADE WARS is similar to a pure strategy version of PRIVATEER or ELITE, except that there is no real-time combat and no elaborate graphic effects. Gamers merely try to build their fortunes and prestige by buying low and traveling to the right planets to sell high. You can earn your way into an elite group of overachievers with extra power to wield in the game.

NOVATREK is actually GALITREK, almost a STARFLEET BATTLES campaign with a map of 38 x 12 sectors and 350 bases hidden within those sectors. Players build and improve their own bases while trying to blast their opponents into history.

Usenet Message Groups For Gamers

by Andy Patrizio

So, you've found your way onto the Internet? Or your local BBS is now carrying Usenet newsgroups? Welcome to the fun. Although Internet was designed as a research network, people who work hard also play hard. Among the gigabytes of research in theoretical physics and the Human Genome Project, you'll find plenty of message groups for hard-core game players.

Here is a list of the most popular PC games groups:

comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.action
comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.adventure
comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.announce
comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.flight-sim
comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.misc
comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.rpg
comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.strategic

You'll notice that the topics are usually divided by game genre. So far, there's only one Usenet news group dedicated to a single company or product: alt.games.doom. The number of messages for **id Software**'s DOOM was becoming too much for the strategy games group, so a special group was started.

Most of the people posting on these groups are college students who have the time and money to devote to gaming. The day a game hits the shelves, you can be sure there will be messages about it on the appropriate group.

Requests for help are the most common message posted. Just ask how to get past a certain spot in an adventure game and you'll have a reply soon enough. More popular games often have a complete help file written and maintained by one dedicated person who posts it when requested. As new tips and information are posted to the net, those tidbits are added to the file.

Requests for files are also common. People ask for walk-throughs, cheats, character editors, patches, and more. Users-in-the-know point to the file transfer (FTP) site where the file can be found. One of the most popular is ftp.uwp.edu, which has a very large games directory, but there are many more in the US and around the world. If you're familiar with Archie, the FTP database, do a search on "games" and see what comes up. I guarantee the result will be one huge file!

The comp.* game groups are also a great marketplace for second-hand games—something you never see on the commercial services. It's an opportunity to make some good deals or clean out your shelves.

As for deals, I recently picked up MIGHT AND MAGIC 4 &5, CLOUDS OF XEEN and DARKSIDE OF XEEN, for $25 each. That's half the retail price! Unfortunately, the DARKSIDE disks are bad. Caveat emptor. You roll the dice, and sometimes you lose.

That caveat extends to just about every facet of the Internet, especially for new modem users. It's a wild and woolly place out there, but as far as networks go, it's the only place to be.

SUPER NOVA is an intergalactic BATTLESHIP-style game. You hide five different Doomsday devices within a grid and then try to destroy the other player's devices.

TK-WARS IV is the most elaborate space game offered on **CRIS II**. You not only get to build starships and starbases *a la* MASTER OF ORION, you also get to explore, expand, exploit, and exterminate the space hulks of your fellow human admirals. Detail is the name of the game in this cosmic slugfest.

Adventure Games: FAZUUL is an adventure game set on a once lavish pleasure planet. Now, anyone who embarks on FAZUUL is doomed to remain. That doesn't mean there isn't plenty to do in this text-adventure, just that the exploration is often enlivened by encounters with human-controlled characters and strange casino games left over from the planet's previous incarnation.

KYRANDIA is not to be confused with **Westwood Studios'** lavish graphic adventure series. It is a traditional, text-based multi-player environment where the goal is to become the most powerful mage in the kingdom. You explore forests, towns and temples in order to be able to cast such spells as noouch (a mild healing spell) and clutzopho (make an enemy less coordinated). Much of the game is like playing an old version of ADVENTURE, but there is always a chance of running into human player characters.

CROSS ROADS is a text-based game that offers occasional ASCII maps. Set in a fantasy world, characters follow the path of one of the four elements of the ancient world (Earth, Fire, Water, and Air) in order to master the game's magic system.

WILDERLANDS is a traditional "guess the parser" adventure game with some fantasy role-playing elements. Characters are generated with regard to race, sex and attributes, but have to join a character class (druids, rangers, etc.) and successfully complete a class quest before they can advance in the game.

SWORDS & SORCERY is a traditional RPG with a "guess the parser" interface and multiple attributes for each character. The command line is supplemented by a statistics display at the bottom of the screen and a limited color ANSI map.

Card Games: CRIS II supports a poker ladder of sorts called CARD SHARKS, but it requires a separate fee to enter the tournament. Without a separate fee, players can compete against live opponents in AUTO WARS (similar to the **Parker Brothers** card game, MILLE BOURNES) and the traditional HEARTS game.

Board Games: This area contains the big four which are available on most online networks: CHESS, CHECKERS, BACKGAMMON and OTHELLO.

Miscellaneous Games: TRIVIA PURSUIT bears no similarity to the boardgame, *Trivial Pursuit*, nor the NTN TRIVIA games which appear on other networks. It offers real-time questions and then begins to fill-in-the-blanks of the answers HANGMAN-style as two or more players try to answer and ring up the highest score.

ASSIGNMENT: WALL STREET reminds us of the space-trading game, FEDERATION II. You get to explore, interact, trade securities and move up in society. In Fed II, you get to explore the real solar system and lots of star systems that aren't so real. In this game, you get to navigate five areas of New York City: airport/shopping, hotel district, uptown, the downtown business district and Central Park.

Flash Games: The following are real-time arcade-style games which require their own software to play: FLASH ATTACK, FLASH MAZE, FLASH SPACEWAR, and FLASH TANK. All offer several variations of play (time-limit battles, grudge matches, etc.) and all require full-screen ANSI support.

Access Fees: The pricing structure for Kesmai games had not been determined at press time, but the overall service is available for a flat rate of $30.00 per month. Call (517) 895-0500 for more information.

ORACLE OF ASCII (DELPHI)

The only way you'll find a "Page Three Girl" (one of those ubiquitous bare-bosomed beauties on page three of most British tabloids) on Rupert Murdoch's **Delphi Internet Service** is to find the right .GIF file on one of the Internet FTP sites. It can be done, but you'll need to be computer literate enough to accomplish it. In fact, you have to be somewhat literate to do anything on Delphi, because the first thing you see when you actually connect is a menu and a command line. You need to type in keywords to go anywhere on Delphi and that becomes increasingly necessary as you use Telnet and FTP commands to navigate the Internet. This is especially true when you Telnet into such locales as **Steve Jackson Games'** Illuminati Online service which uses a UNIX

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command line. The upside, however, is that Delphi provides a true Internet gateway, a forum moderated by *CGW*'s own Scorpia, and an area known as Electropolis. In Electropolis, you will eventually be able to gateway directly to **Kesmai**'s **ARIES** system and play AIR WARRIOR, FEDERATION II, ISLAND OF KESMAI, MUD II, and STELLAR EMPEROR with gamers on other networks.

AIR WARRIOR was described in *CGW* #120, p. 80. It is a moderately easy simulation of air combat for multiple players which allows you to select a theater of war, choose one of three countries (teams) to join, and enter the constantly on-going campaign. Featuring polygon-filled SVGA graphics, AIR WARRIOR requires its own front-end software and is literally what Tom Basham calls, "the largest electronic furball you have ever seen." Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities for training to help you get over the steep learning curve.

STELLAR CONQUEST is reminiscent of, but simpler than, the STAR FLEET BATTLES boardgame, and more akin to **Interstel**'s out-of-print STAR FLEET I.

Multiplayer furballs in GEnie's Air Warrior

TQ TRIVIA is a challenging trivia game area where you can usually find a few human players with which to compete. It is more challenging than TRIVIA PURSUIT on **CRIS II** or YGI! on **CompuServe**, but it lacks the boldness of **Prodigy**'s all-or-nothing GUTS quiz or the huge participation level of NTN TRIVIA on GEnie, ImagiNation, and various hotels and bars.

Access Fees: The 10/4 plan costs a minimum of $10 per month (including the first four hours of usage) and $4.00 per hour beyond that basic usage. The 20/20 plan costs $20 per month (including the first 20 hours of usage) and $1.80 per hour beyond that. In addition, there is an additional charge of $3.00 per month for Internet access. At press time, AIR WARRIOR gateway was the only Kesmai game functioning, and the additional charge was $.96 per hour. Call (800) 695-4005 for more information.

GAMES IN A BOTTLE (GENIE)

A former games manager at **GEnie** once told us that the company would never move to a graphical user interface because they felt that text transmission was both machine independent and an effective way to reach the visually impaired through voice emulation software. Whatever the rationale, **GEnie** is a rather unique mix, both in community and technology. The interface is distinctly archaic. You navigate by keywords, page numbers and, once you arrive in a particular forum, by menu selection.

Yet, GEnie has been at the forefront of the major commercial services in adapting new front ends to older games and paying developers to create games with their own front-end software. Besides offering the wide variety of games described here, GEnie has a multi-player HARPOON in testing, a multi-player MEGATRAVELLER game in development, and MODUS OPERANDI, a murder mystery game being developed in cooperation with **Mysterious Press.** There are also rumors of a high-profile role-playing game that has just been signed.

In addition to multi-player games, GEnie also hosts two roundtables which are important to computer game players. One roundtable is for computer game designers, and the other is hosted by Scorpia, CGW's contributing editor for role-playing games. Both offer interesting discussions of everything from current games to magazine reviews.

AIR WARRIOR is the original Kesmai product described in the discussion of Delphi games.

CYBERSTRIKE is the sim-like action/strategy game where teams of 'mechs attempt to increase their stranglehold on cyberspace by building up a power web of towers (essentially booster stations) and destroying the opposition's 'mechs. There are role-playing elements as you strive to build up your 'mech's capabilities by upgrading weapons and technology, tactical elements as you communicate with your teammates on the best way to take out the competition, and reflex-determined elements as you dodge incoming attacks and try to aim at the 'mechs fighting on other teams.

Harpoon is coming soon to GEnie

DRAGON'S GATE is a text-based fantasy role-playing game set in a world defined by a massive crater. One hour of "real-time" equals two hours of game time within the game, and DRAGON'S GATE has some of the most interesting races we've seen in an on-line (or any) role-playing game. It also features a fascinating mythology. Those who play the people and paper version of RUNEQUEST should feel right at home with some of the detail in this game.

Wreck robots in GEnie's CyberStrike

FEDERATION II is, ostensibly, a space trading game where gamers purchase, build and outfit ships for cosmic exploration and exploitation, but it is also appropriately billed as a game for adults. The game has relationships between characters (marriages, textual intercourse and blood feuds) that represent almost any lifestyle, and the players are so close-knit that they even have informal face-to-face "FedCons" whenever there is a critical mass of Fed addicts in the same area. There is even an on-line newspaper called *UnderFED* that is available on e-mail which details the dirt on the prominent characters to be found in this alternate reality. There is also traditional "guess the parser" exploration, interaction and puzzle-solving.

Captain mercenary 'mech brigades in GEnie's BattleTech

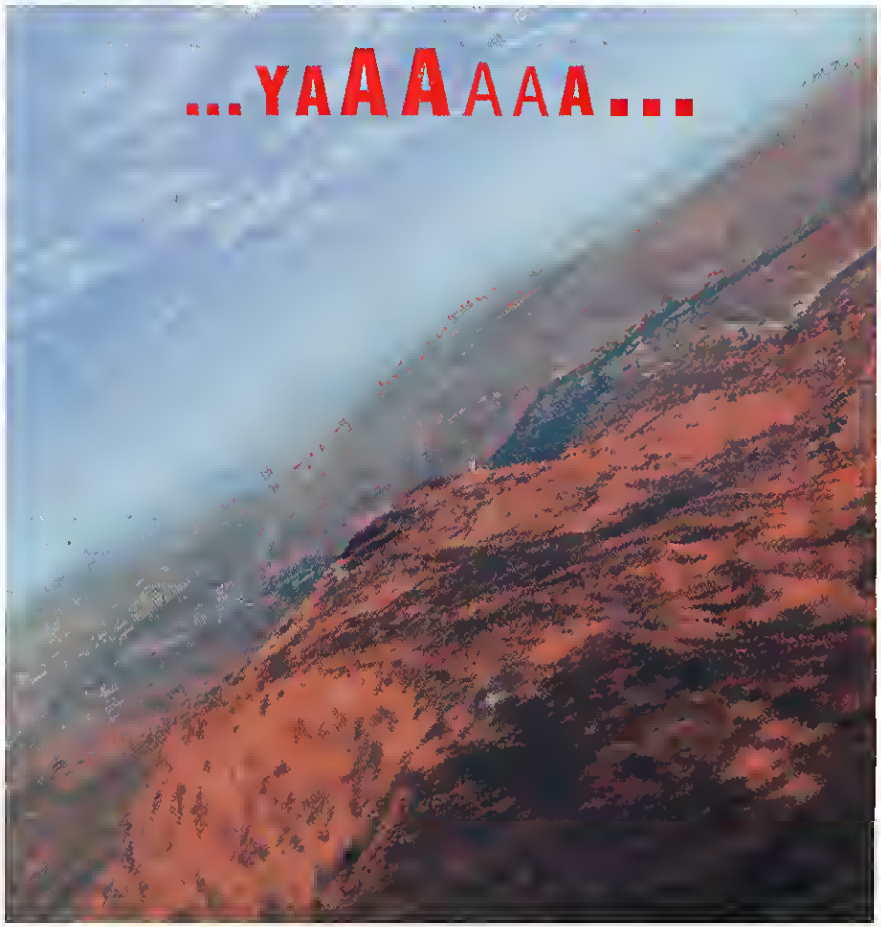
GALAXY I is a PBEM game of space exploration, expansion, exploitation and extermination where you input orders and wait to see the results. The goal is to build up your empire so that your score, an amalgamation of the number of ships and the quality levels of your planets, will be higher than anyone else in the game. Unlike many such space empire games, this one is detailed enough that you often need to print-out reports of your fleets, planets and moves. The graphics support VT100 and ANSI terminal emulation and it does not require a graphic front end.

GEMSTONE III is a text-based role-playing game with rules based on **Iron Crown Enterprises'** ROLEMASTER series of games. It features lots of active players, live game masters, and plenty of new quests which crop up on a monthly basis. GEMSTONE III emphasizes role-playing, and each character class has its own particular benefits/liabilities. Though the game has a graphic front-end (more of a graphic wrap for the text), the joy of this game is the textual interaction with like-minded gamers and the continual freshening of the environment by creative designers.

HUNDRED YEARS WAR is based on a monster game of medieval strategy/role-playing which was conceived years ago by the Dean of Wargame Design, James F. Dunnigan. You take on the role of a French, English or Independent aristocrat (or the Pope) during the circa one hundred years of French/English strife. Fief management, delicate diplomacy, and solid strategy are the necessary elements for being an integral part of the winning side in this game. Game mechanics are something like a highly-advanced version of the FEUDAL LORDS PBM game described elsewhere, but there are many more sub-elements to this game that nobles can access on a daily basis. A graphic front-end is currently being developed which may shorten game time by assisting players with travel and navigation.

MULTI-PLAYER BATTLETECH is an on-line universe that offers sim-style combat *a la* the BattleTech Centers of **Virtual World Entertainment** and a role-playing setting that is, in our opinion, superior to the one-shot combat experiences of the amusement centers. Characters enlist in the service of a particular house (the dynasties in the BattleTech Universe) or function as part of mercenary units and fight real-time battles as they try to climb upward socially in the service ol their liege lords. The game requires a graphic front end which looks similar to the interface used in **Activision's** original MECHWARRIOR product.

NTN TRIVIA has been available on GEnie for a long time, but it no longer supports text-only mode. If you've ever played a trivia game against other on-line players in a bar or hotel room, it was probably this game. The most common game is COUNTDOWN, where players try to get the most points out of a series of multiple-choice questions covering general knowledge, but there are also separate competitions with regard to Music, Movie and Sports trivia. What is truly interesting is the fact that you are competing against opponents all over the country, including those on ImagiNation and in the



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hotels/lounges.

ORB WARS is a real-time role-playing game where mages compete across an ASCII landscape. After a traditional character generation which determines the wyzard's major attributes and the style of magic he or she will employ in the game, gameplay consists of the fast typing of commands to cast spells, collect objects, move in the compass directions, and change orbs to the color of your team. Scoring is handled on both an individual and team basis, since the goal is to advance up the ladder of wyzardry and become the most prestigious mage prior to the occasional game resets at the end of a campaign.

QBI is another NTN game that is not only available on GEnie, but in hotel lounges and sports bars throughout the country. It is played simultaneously with the telecast of an NFL game and requires gamers to call plays ahead of the action depicted on the TV. Serving as both a test of strategy and of the knowledge of the tendencies of professional football coaches, QBI allows you to compete against spectators all over the country.

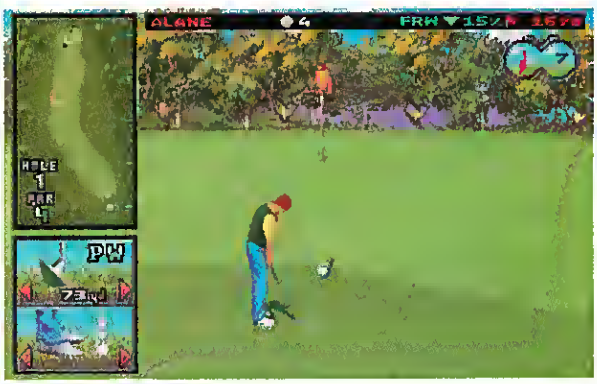
STELLAR EMPEROR is a space combat game divided into two basic activities: exploration and economic management. Exploration requires you to be in charge of your individual spaceship and to react to what you encounter. Economic management is handled via menu screens. The game's objective is to build up your empire to the point where you become one of the Lords of Empire and attain one of two titles at the end of a four week campaign. If you are the greatest founder of space colonies, you may become the President of the Imperial Senate. If you are the greatest warrior, you may become Lord Emperor of All The Galaxies. A graphics front end is available for Windows users.

STELLAR WARRIOR is a strategy game that plays like something in between the old STAR FLEET I from **Interstel** and the boardgame, STAR FLEET BATTLES, from **Task Force Games**. The goal is simply to amass the highest possible score by destroying enemy ships and bases.

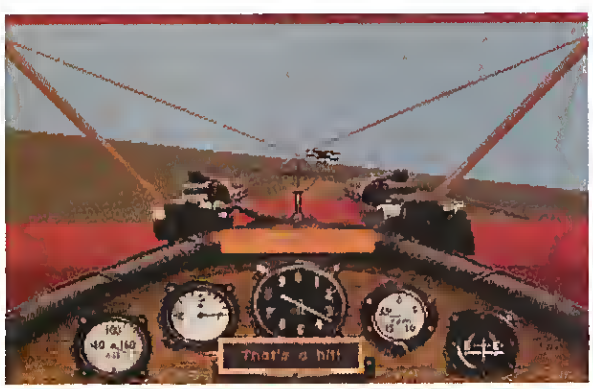
Access Fees: $8.95 per month for four free hours, plus $3.00 (2400 baud) or $9 (9600 baud) for each subsequent hour. Call (800) 638-9636 for more information.

THE ROOMS AT THE INN (IMAGINATION)

The cartoonish graphic interface for **The ImagiNation Network** (**INN**) only sets the tone for part of this on-line network. It's as easy to get from place to place as it is to navigate a children's boardgame, but the action and interaction is more equivalent to an on-line gaming convention where the action never ceases. The emphasis for this friendly looking cyburb is community. In fact, before entering any area of the network, you must create an on-screen persona, including a self portrait and some personal information. With these "ice breakers" in place, **INN** becomes largely a matter of enjoying games and making friends (*lots* of 'em!). It is a simple matter to find others on-line with a common **INN** gaming interest: just invite an interesting (and interested) person to play, and the game is afoot. The system is perfectly suited to "table top conversations" in this competitive, though relaxed, atmosphere. In addition, **INN** is probably the least male dominated of all the networks covered in this survey.



ImagiNation's 3-D Golf is in the green



Check your six in ImagiNation's Red Baron

The Clubhouse is the "parlor" where traditional games are offered. This area includes BRIDGE, CHESS, CHECKERS, BACKGAMMON, CRIBBAGE, HEARTS, FLIP FLOP (Othello), GO, SPADES and EUCHRE. The ClubHouse also offers bulletin boards and hint boards, but these are usually less extensive than the other, more information-oriented computer networks. Spontaneous conferences, along with regularly scheduled ones, are held in the ClubHouse. Members receive their notifications of such activities through e-mail and the system's colorful newsletter regularly sent to every member.

The SierraLand Castle represents family fun. It's the amusement park of the service and features a wide variety of games. The star attraction is an on-line version of the excellent WWI flight simulation, **Dynamix**' RED BARON. The difference is that this version allows two to four players to enter on-line furballs with considerable variation in the scenarios. This program was reviewed in *CGW* #120, p. 79.

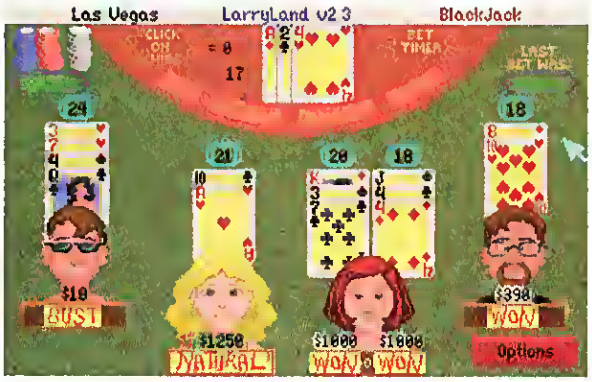
3-D GOLF also takes a stand-alone product and transforms it into a multi-player experience. Based on **Konami**'s WILSON PROSTAFF GOLF, it allows you to play 18 holes with an on-line foursome. Those seeking a different slice of golf may want to try MINI-GOLF, an extremely wacky miniature golf course.

PAINT WARS is an interesting two-to-four player game that resembles the live-action paint gun battles that appear to be sweeping the country. This on-line game features a more structured playing area and some interesting computer gaming twists to enhance the experience.

The Castle also contains an eclectic group of games. These include the classic **Milton Bradley** boardgame STRATEGO, SNEARATAC (a four-tiered, four-in-a-row Tic-Tac-Toe game), BOOGERS (a wild 2-4 player variation of FLIP FLOP), and GRAFFITI (a multi-user paint program with lots of amusing features for the artist inside everyone).

Trivia fans will also enjoy the lightly played ROCKET QUIZ math trivia and the heavily trafficked NTN TRIVIA game.

MedievaLand is the home of the network's resident dungeon crawl, THE SHADOW OF YSERBIUS. This role-playing game uses an interface familiar to DUNGEON MASTER players and veterans of many other similar games. In YSERBIUS, however, you play a single character in a party of up to four players. The others have to be found (usually at the tavern), organized into an effective team (based upon each character's attributes) and lead into battle. In addition to the dungeon's larger quest, a number of smaller side quests are available for building up characters to the higher levels of performance they'll need to complete the adventure. That accomplished, TWINION, the newest RPG area, awaits for further adventuring!



The poker action is fast and loose in ImagiNation's CasinoLand

CasinoLand is the on-line version of the ribald world of Leisure Suit Larry and Passionate Patty. Donning caricatures with a Larry-esque cartoon look to them, mature gamers can romp in this area where adult language and themes are standard. While the gaming focuses on gambling games such as SLOTS, ROULETTE, BLACKJACK and several varieties of table POKER, it is the people who drop in on LarryLand that make it what it is. Most visitors really let their hair down in this red light district of Cyberspace. Here, cross-dressers, homosexuals, bisexuals, make out artists (and would-be ones) freely converse with those who are comfortably more mundane in their sexual habits. While a more lurid type of fun can be had by all, this is definitely a "better class of riff raff" than can be found on many BBS' dedicated to sexual matters. Often with a wink and a smile, visitors to LarryLand are obscene *and* heard as they gamble their fictitious LarryBucks.

LEFTY'S LOUNGE, a meeting room with a particularly tacky bar-like atmosphere, is where it all hangs out. Conversations flow very freely here, and people can buy each other flowers or give kisses (which, if accepted, adorn that giftee's self portrait for the remainder of their session in LarryLand). In LEFTY's there are "bar" games, including liars poker and several games along the theme of *TRUTH OR DARE*, allowing players to really get to know something about each other. While this is the kind of place you would never visit in "that part of town" where you live, here in the cyburbs, LEFTY'S LOUNGE is just the opposite of *Cheers* (in that, here, *nobody* knows your real name).

Access Fees: $9.95 per month for five hours, and $3.50 for each subsequent hour. Although the software lists for $5.95, it can often be found free in game and magazine promotions. For more information, contact **The ImagiNation Network** at (800) 695-4002.

RAILS AND GRAILS (MPGN)

As you connect with the **Multi-Player Games Network**, you feel something like an honored guest in a medieval castle. The entire network functions as a graphic interface where you select one of four currently active games. In addition to those games currently available, future plans include multi-player versions of **GDW**'s DARK CONSPIRACY RPG of dark tech/horror and **R. Talsorian**'s CYBERPUNK 2020, as well as MEKTON II (an RPG based on Japanime). Also, work is progressing toward offering: FIEFQUEST (economic and military strategy *a la* HUNDRED YEARS WAR), MUD II (Richard Bartles classic multi-player dungeon which allegedly started it all), and WARLORDS (a post-holocaust empire building game where you try to become the lost planet version of John Carter, Warlord of Mars).

EMPIRE BUILDER is the fastest way to play the computer version of the popular boardgame from **Mayfair Games**. Reviewed in *CGW* #108, p. 88, the game re-

(Continued on Page 182)

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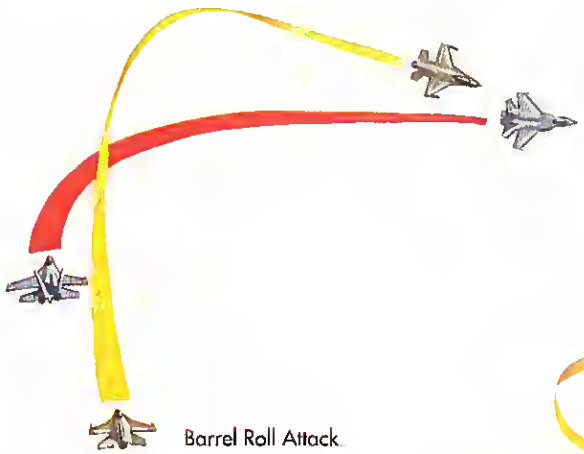
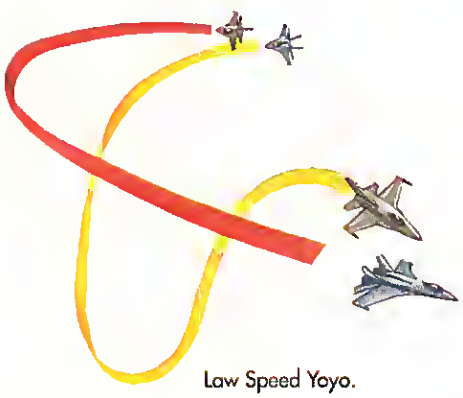
Maneuvers commonly performed with new WingMan Extreme.



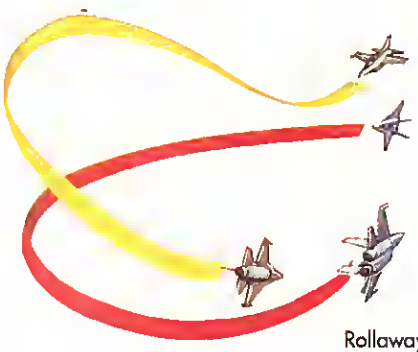
Barrel Roll Attack.

The Immelman.

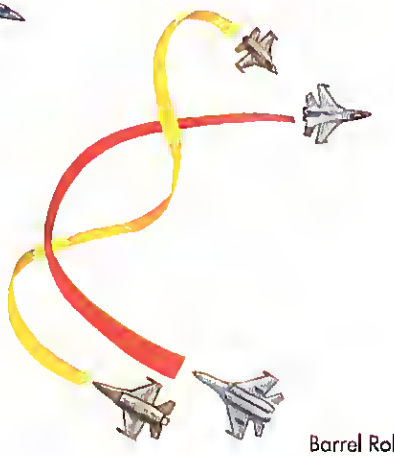
Offset Head-an Pass.



Law Speed Yoyo.



Rollaway.



Barrel Roll.

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Welcome To My Fantasy

Illustration by Brian Clarke

A Personal Tour Through "Shared Consensual Hallucinations" On The Internet

by Mark Clarkson

Looking for some fun on the information superhighway? Does the notion of trying on different bodies, personalities, even genders, intrigue you? Perhaps you'd enjoy hanging out in a hot tub discussing philosophy and William S. Burroughs novels with a disembodied head and a talking race horse. Or maybe you'd just like to bash some trolls or slay some demons.

Whichever way you swing, I think I've got what you're looking for right here. Wait a second while I log on...

```
*** Connected ***
Cyd's Place

A dim room, black with red velvets, accented by twisting strands of light that crawl slowly over the walls, the ceiling, you.

A stand-up desk in one corner holds a pile of books and an oddly-shaped keyboard. A flat screen monitor hangs on the wall, displaying a Modigliani nude.

There is a teepee in the opposite corner, its door-flap tied open. To the north, heavy, blood-red curtains undulate slowly in a breeze of unseen origin.
```

Oh, you say, a text adventure—been there, seen it, done it. Well, it is a text adventure and it isn't. There are two major differences between this place and other text adventures you've seen. Number one, I made Cyd's Place and almost everything in it, myself. Number two, if you have access to the Internet, you can join me there. We can talk, I can show you around. We can enter the teepee and smoke the peace pipe together, or have at each other with swords, as is your wont.

Cyd's Place is more than text deep. There

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is a structure that underlies the words, one that's far richer than any text adventure. For example, that computer in the corner of the room actually works. I can use it to send and receive e-mail from others. It's "voice-actuated" and controls the light, heat and security systems in my rooms.

Cyd's Place is my home in LambdaMOO, a thriving cyberspace community housed inside of some computers in Palo Alto, California. Thousands of people live here, sort of, depending on how you define the term. People are building new objects and rooms every day and adding them to the mix.

There are about 300 MUDs, MOOs, MUCKs, MUSHs, MUSEs in operation, mostly running on university computers. The actual number fluctuates as new worlds are created and old ones are destroyed, or sometimes shut down by irritated university officials.

THE PRIMORDIAL MUD

It all started way, way back, in 1980, or maybe even a little bit before, when Dungeons and Dragons was an extraordinarily popular game. Two students at the University of Essex in Great Britain, Richard Bartle and Roy Trubshaw, wrote the original MUD, which stood for Multi-User Dungeon. It ran on a computer at the university, and was very popular with its users...when they could get on-line.

Today, there are a couple of dozen MUD derivatives out there, with as many names: MUSH, MUCK, MOO, MUSE, etc. For the purposes of this article, I'll refer to them, collectively, as MUDs. A MUD of any sort is really just a text adventure that can be shared by many people at once. If you've ever played an Infocom game like ZORK or PLANETFALL, you'll feel right at home.

You navigate as you would in a text adventure, typing commands such as "go up," "go south," and "pick up the penguin."

```
>enter teepee
The Teepee
A cozy little teepee, with just enough room for two or three friends to sprawl on the fur rugs. The air smells faintly of smoke and leather. You see a buffalo skin rug and a peace pipe here.
>sit
You sit down on the buffalo skin. The fur is surprisingly deep and thick. You can't resist stroking it.
>stroke buffalo skin
Ooooh. Soft.
>smoke peace pipe
You cough and choke as the smoke hits your lungs. Pale face!
```

You can also move about following another player, or teleporting directly to your desired location with a go or teleport command.

```
>go alternative living room
Alternative Living Room
The first thing you notice is that it is not so bright, open, or airy here--but that is fine, 'cause you were looking for a dark, quiet place, weren't you? Every time you come here, you seem to notice new things inside, and new exits to explore. Dilettante, Peaches, Christo, Ultraviolet_Guest, Nearco, and Schizophrenia (listening to the voices in her head) are here.
Nearco puts a leather muzzle on Ultraviolet_Guest carefully avoiding snapping jaws.
Nearco asks, "Is there a verb for giving people tracheotomies?"
```

You can communicate with your fellow players by speaking or by emoting, which is sometimes called "posing."

```
>say Hi, all!
You say, Hi all.
>emote smile and bow.
You smile and bow.
Nearco [to you] Hi.
```

THE 31 FLAVORS OF MUD

There are in the neighborhood of 300 MUDs, MOOs, MUCKs, MUSHs, MUSEs in operation, mostly running on university computers. The actual number fluctuates from day to day as new worlds are created and old ones are destroyed, or sometimes shut down by irritated university officials. They range in size from LambdaMOO, with nearly 8000 users who connect 200 at a time, to the little MUSH-clone running on the one-line BBS in my brother-in-law's basement. There are MUDs where people pretend to be speaking animals, sign up with the Klingon empire, or play themselves in 18th century London.

For the most part, MUDs come in one of four flavors: savage, sweet, surreal, serious. The original MUD, and most MUDs to this day are built around the sword-and-sorcery motif, with magic, rippling thews, broadswords, and lots and lots of blood

```
[*chat*] Corwin: I like hacking tissue from skeletons. That, and spraying blood everywhere. :)
```

The object in these MUDs is to gain experience points and thereby advance through the levels, perhaps eventually to join the immortal gods of the MUD and gain the power to create dungeons and monsters of your own.

You gain experience by killing things or by finding treasures, which usually involves killing things. As you rise in experience and levels, you take on tougher and tougher foes, including, perhaps, your fellow players.

To keep from running out of monsters and treasure, most of these MUDs are reset every day or so. Dead demons rise from the grave. Pilfered treasure is restored to its chests, and so on. Put your gold in the bank before you log off, or you may lose it.

Next come the all-in-good-clean-fun role-playing school of MUDs, such as TrekMuse MUD based on the Star Trek universe, or MUDs for kids. The MIT MediaLab runs a whole slew of MUDs especially for kids K-12 and those who love them. You can spend an entire night logged onto one of these without seeing a single person experience virtual sex, virtual drugs or virtual death.

Then there are the make-it-up-as-you-go-along MUDS, like LambdaMOO, with little theme and few rules. Logging onto one of these is like taking an acid trip. Instead of entering rooms through the door, people walk through the walls, or arrive atop flaming meteors. They sport names

Slow moving, "choppy" graphics cost lives.

If this guy owned a MACH V, he'd still be here.

It's a cruel fact of computer gaming: better graphics demand more computer power. Smoother animation requires a higher frame-rate. Your eyes can see 30 frames every second. If your computer is doing anything less, your aircraft won't roll smoothly, your axe will miss the dragon right in front of you, and your shotgun won't put a dent in the demons. And if you think today's games are demanding, just wait until you see tomorrow's!

The Falcon MACH V and MACH Vp are not your average computers. They were specifically designed with the needs of gamers in mind: extreme frame-rates, brutal amounts of CPU power, unreal hard disk transfer rates, and all of the multimedia and gaming extras that you'd normally have to add yourself. Sure, they're great for spreadsheets, word processing, and general business -- any computer can do that. When you're ready for something more, you're ready for a MACH V.

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like nivek.ogre, Hate, and Little-Bunny-Foo-Foo. Players seek fulfillment, not by killing monsters, but by making friends and collecting ever-cooler feature objects—programs written in MUD-code that give your character new abilities, such as morphing from one body to another, or bonking other players.

```
Frisbee bonks you on the head and you dance and sing: Fish heads, fish heads!
Kanani quickly morphs into Orphic_Machine.
You see a man's severed head floating in the air. His eyes are half-closed, face twisted into a painful sort of ecstasy, and you hear him say, "To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking." He is awake and looks alert.
Carrying:
Snow_Crash's Friendship
Nearco says, "That's one fine morph...."
```

People here spend a lot of time showing off newly-acquired goodies. "Check out this plate of oatmeal-raisin cookies...try one!", "Look, I made a litde flying pig to deliver messages for me," or the time honored, "Hey, pull my finger."

Finally, there are serious and semi-serious MUDs where professionals meet to share information and work on joint projects ranging from astronomy to artilicial life.

As you can see, you can't really shove every MUD into a convenient pigeonhole. The lines between types are blurry at best. LambdaMOO, basically a social interaction MUD, contains a full-blown combat and magic oriented MUD within itself. And even the most combat oriented MUD relies in large part on social interaction for its success. Widiout the other players in there, hacking and slashing wich or at you, it's just a circa 1979 text adventure game, played long distance. With people behind the text, the environment becomes a fantasy play-ground more vibrant and creative than any fantasy computer game ever created.

GETTING YOUR FEET WET (AND MUDDY)

There are two ways to experience a MUD: as a guest or as a permanent character. If you connect as a guest, you usually can't describe yourself, create objects, or do much of anything except observe. Instead, you're there to wander around and drink in the atmosphere. If you find a MUD that interests you, play tourist for a while and see if it is the kind of place you'd like to spend time in.

When you reach the log-on screen, you can usually enter as a guest with a command such as "@connect guest." The log-on screen should give you the particulars.

Once you decide to make a MUD your permanent hang-out, you'll need a character. Some MUDs allow you to create a new character as soon as you connect. Just type in a character name and password and you're off and running. Some MUDs require you to send e-mail to the system administrators, requesting a character. Most allow guests to request a character on-line, from within the MUD, with some sort of request, or register command. Some MUDs don't accept guest connections, so you'll have to obtain a character before you can visit them at all.

What comes next differs from MUD to MUD. At first, your character is only a name and a password; you'll have to fill

MAKING YOUR WAY THROUGH THE MUD

There are hundreds of MUDs to be discovered on the Internet, but here are a few you might start out with.

MUD	Internet Address
CyberMUSH	146.227.102.4 6250
Apocalypse IV	sapphire.geo.wvu.edu 4000
DeeperTrouble	alk.iesd.auc.dk 4242
LambdaMOO	lambda.parc.xerox.com 8888
TrekMUSE	laurel.cnidr.org 1701

Once you're logged into a MUD, here are some useful commands you might try:

join: moves your character to the same location as another character

```
>join Corto
There is a flash of light and you appear on the Tennis Court.
Corto is here.
```

follow: starts your character automatically following another player around the MUD.

```
>follow Avatar
You are now following Avatar.
```

say: say something to another player

```
>say Yo, Avatar, what s up?
You say, Yo, Avatar, what s up?
```

emote: show actions and expressions to the other players

```
>emote smiles and bows to you.
Mark smiles and bows to you.
```

pose: show actions and expressions to the other players - see emote

look/look at: look at an object in the MUD

```
>look chair.
It looks uncomfortable.
```

examine: sometimes provides you with more information about an object than just looking at it will.

```
>examine chair
The Balanz Chair (aka chair, and Balanz) is owned by Cyd
It looks uncomfortable
```

Other verbs:

sit on chair

show map to <anything>

get/take chair

drop/throw chair

give/hand chair to <anything>

go/@go: sometimes, you can teleport directly to a place if you know its name

```
>@go The Coat Closet
You teleport to The Coat Closet.
```

get/take: pick an object up

wield: get a weapon ready for use

: - common abbreviation for the emote or pose keywords.

"/ - common abbreviations for "say" command

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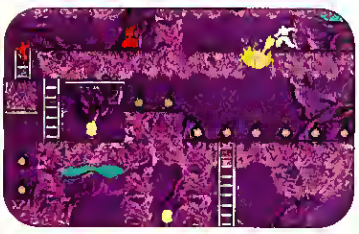

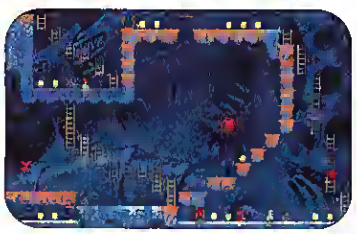

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in the blanks.

The first time you connect to a sword and sorcery or science fiction MUD, you'll probably begin by selecting a race. You might get to choose from among Dwarf, Fairy and Elf for example, or Human, Klingon and Romulan. Next you'll choose a profession, or a guild such as warp drive mechanic, or runesinger.

Now, you'll probably want to set your gender. Your choice is usually limited to male or female, but three or more genders are not uncommon, and I know of at least one MUD with twelve. (No, I'm not going to elaborate.)

Finally, the MUD may allow you to enter a description of yourself, which other players will see when they look at you. For example, describe me as tall, dark, and handsome with a winning smile and luxuriant fur. In some MUDs which lack this kind of description facility, players convey extra information through their names, becoming "Cleo the Beautiful but Confused," or "Sir Roderick who wants to sell an OrcHelm, cheap."

Suitably described and gendered, you're ready to enter the MUD.

```
On the big road to Tweeple.
The great town stands before you, its walls shining in the sun. There is an open portcullis to the north. Above you is a hot, moving, clear night sky. There is a brisk wind.
A scrawny dog is here. It is very thin, and looks to be on its last legs.
```

If this is a hack-and-slash MUD, you'll have to build up experience points by killing things. There's usually a beginners' area where you can gain experience by killing bunnies and dogs. With each dead fido, you become stronger, richer, smarter.

When in doubt, type "help." All MUDs offer you some form of on-line help. Some even provide on-line tutorials to walk you through the early stages of becoming a MUDer. And don't overlook your most valuable on-line help resource—your fellow players.

```
>shout Will someone please help out a newbie?
Corto the legion commander arrives to aid you!
Corto hates the scummy New York Rangers and is really depressed he can't chant "1940" anymore. Corto belongs to the orc race. His conscience will not stop him from killing other players. Corto looks fierce and frightening.
Corto bows gracefully.
Corto says: hi wassup?
>say How do I gain experience?
You say: How do I gain experience?
Corto says: kill some monsters
The scrawny dog lifts its back leg and pisses on a building.
>kill scrawny dog
You failed to penetrate Dog's armor.
Dog scratched you on the right arm.
Dog barks loudly and howls in pain!
Dog grazed you on the right arm.
You failed to penetrate Dog's armor.
Corto rolls his eyes.
```

PLEASE WIPE YOUR FEET

Be forewarned: not every MUD is looking for new players. As a MUD gains in popularity, it can succumb to lag—the delay between my typing a command and its execution. The last time I logged on to LambdaMOO, 179 other users were connected, and the lag was 96 seconds. That is, between the time I said something and the time others heard it, more than a minute and a half transpired.

```
Peaches says, "Lag here becomes torturous"
Nearco says, "Oh, when it nears 200 seconds it becomes sort of fun, like being stoned on cough syrup..."
Schizophrenia giggles at Nearco.
```

Upon arrival as a guest at one MUD, I was bitten repeatedly by one player and, when I explained that I was visiting in connection with this article, was told by another player to "go away—we don't like publicity." Luckily, soon thereafter my head was bashed in by a Hill Giant, who presumably did not care for guests either.

Realize that many people, when logging on as a guest, are rude and annoying. So be nice. Be friendly. You'll find people willing to give you a hand. When I first began visiting LambdaMOO, Legion took me into his apartment so my character wouldn't have to lie around in the coat closet when I logged off. At almost every MUD, I've been given advice, encouragement, even weapons and gold, by people who didn't know me at all.

As I finish this article, it's 4:00 a.m. in Wichita, Kansas. I'm alone, in my underwear, with no one to talk to. But with the aid of my trusty 14.4 modem, I can enter a magical world where I can fashion my own insane monkey and carry it around in a Dr. Seuss book bag—where some of my best friends aren't even human.

Gotta go. I'll see you, or some phantasmagoric, telecommunicated ghost of you, on-line.

Mark Clarkson is a full-time writer and game player. He ranges the Internet from his home base in Wichita, Kansas, where he lives with his wife, daughter and a host of furry animals. His new book on artificial life, WINDOWS HOTHOUSE, *is hot off the press.*

A (VERY) INCOMPLETE GLOSSARY OF MUD TERMS

MUD: Multi-User Dungeon

MUSH: Multi-User Shared Hallucination

MUSE: May mean Multi-User Shared Environment, may not mean anything at all.

MOO: MUD, Object-Oriented

Tiny or Teeny: smaller versions of larger MUDs, as in TinyMOO and TeenyMUSE.

bonk: to hit someone in the head and make them do or say crazy things. As in, "Cyd *bonks* you and you sing, Fish heads! Fish heads!"

toad, or @toad: in some MUDs, it means that the player's character is literally turned into a toad. In others, it means that the character is killed, destroyed, recycled...never to return. People are toaded for being jerks. Don't be a jerk.

spam: to throw huge quantities of text onto the screen, filling up other's terminals and washing away all other conversations away on a wave of text.

whuggle: to hug affectionately, to really like, as in "Tarmac *whuggles* Billy Holiday."

ugh: to dislike, the opposite of whuggle, as in "I *ugh* Michael Bolton"

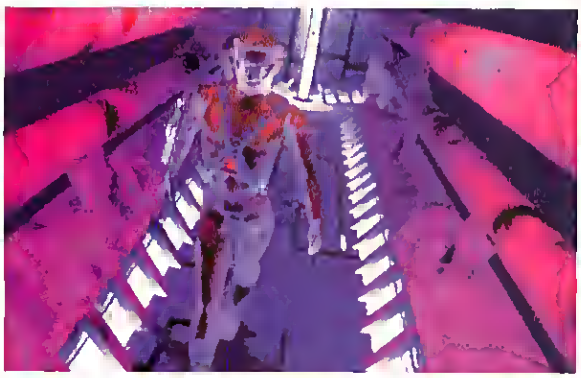
newbie: a new player, fresh meat. You, until you learn your way around.

Circle Reader Service #98

Where Will Hollywood And Somewh

For the last year or two, we've been following what some have been calling the "digital convergence" of Hollywood and Silicon Valley. The goal of this convergence is a heightened financial state of mind, a sort of marketing bliss where computer games and Hollywood merge together like a river confluence that flows out to the sea of the mass market. So far, about the only tangible thing to come out of this convergence, aside from a huge ball of hot air, is the addition of Hollywood acting talent to a few traditional computer games—a small, but very welcome addition.

Xatrix Interactive, a development group out of Burbank, CA, is one of the first boats to come down the Sillywood river that can demonstrate seaworthiness with its very first title, CYBERIA. CYBERIA is a cinematically rich action-adventure game set in a dark near future, and it may well be indicative of what computer gamers can expect to inherit from the marriage of computer games and film.



ARMED & DANGERDUS This is how you'll look in 2027—cybergoggles, a gun strapped to your arm, and out of control.

That CYBERIA is a spectacular cinematic experience comes as no surprise considering the credentials of the designer, Drew Markham. Markham is one of the early breed of "crossover designers" who, in addition to being an award-winning TV director, editor and sound engineer, has also been involved with game design for PC and cartridge titles. As a result of his broad experience, he is as adept with high-end Silicon Graphics equipment as with a film camera.

Which Way To Cyberia?

Cyberia takes place in 2027, five years after the world economy takes its long expected swan dive and collapses in flames. The player wears the cybershades of Zak, a hacker with a flair for cybernetics, nanotechnology and murder. Zak's got a job to do: find and destroy a nanotechnology doomsday device buried in the frozen wasteland of Siberia.

The story unfolds in linear fashion as Zak, rendered in 3D, navigates bizarre futuristic settings, solves puzzles, shoots bad guys with a wrist gun like Spiderman's web shooter, and flies "TransFighters" in some of the most spectacular cinematic action sequences yet created for the PC.

The opening set is an oil drilling rig somewhere in the North Atlantic. There is a low throbbing hum and echoes of dripping water as Zak exits a hovercraft and walks stiffly into the station like an inflatable man with an attitude. Your view of Zak is from a third-person perspective, and his world is built using a blend of techniques seen in games like **I-Motion**'s ALONE IN THE DARK and **Virgin**'s 7TH GUEST. At key intervals, like when a puzzle must be solved, the player's perspective shifts to Zak's cybershades which have a HUD-style readout to help identify objects and targets. The oil rig is dark, dramatically lit, and densely furnished with pipes, platforms and strange controls. Your objective, as in most adventure-style games, is not to get killed while trying to solve a few puzzles, whack a few bad guys, and get the hell out.

But Zak is in for more than adventure. One of the more interesting action sequences occurs when he hops into the cockpit of an anti-aircraft gun and starts blasting helos and jets with percussive canon rounds. The experience is very reminiscent of the *Star Wars* scene when

Han Solo and Luke fired at incoming TIE Fighters in the Millennium Falcon.

Yet the most visceral experiences in CYBERIA, the ones for which many gamers will pay the price of admission, are the "TransFighter" sequences that unfold between adventure segments. These are beautiful, pre-rendered scenes which look better than a REBEL ASSAULT canyon run and almost as good as the rushing, computer-generated terrain in the IMAX film *Blue Planet*. Unlike REBEL ASSAULT, the view is first-person, and you are not in control of the ship. You sling around a gunsight trying to turn enemy craft into pyrotechnically perfect flameballs, while the craft flies a pre-determined path. Zooming past all the voluptuously con-

toured 3D terrain is unquestionably thrilling and will be proudly shown and re-shown on many a gaming machine, but without the flight control of most action games, replayability may suffer.

Playmate Dream Date

Playing CYBERIA is like a dream date with a playmate: Gorgeous to look at, but with interactivity likely limited to things physical. Likewise, CYBERIA is, graphically, one of the hottest games alive, but its flying sequences are in the same interactive league as the submarine ride at Disneyland. On Walt's submarine, you travel through various undersea regions, replete with beautiful scenery, but the submarine is on a track and you can only sit there, glassy eyed, along for the ride. If you had a big gun mounted on the sub to dispatch nefarious sea creatures, then you'd approximate the level of interactivity in one of CYBERIA's flight sequences.

To be fair, designer Drew Markham planned it that way. His goal was to create a lush visual experience that non-gamers could easily play and enjoy without spending a lot of time learning. "We recognize there is a large schism between mass appeal games and the hard-core gaming audience," he says. "We're trying to convert non-game players into game players. At the heart of it, what we're trying to do is get more people into gaming. I am a true hard-core gamer, and I know it's tough to convert people to our point of view."

Silicon Valley Meet?

RE IN

Cyberia

by Mike Weksler and Ken Brown

In The Can

The graphics are amazing, and they should be considering the machinery and talent involved. Everything is created on high-end **Silicon Graphics** Reality Engines, while texture maps for aircraft, settings, and even the uniforms worn by people in the game are all meticulously hand-painted by talented Photoshop artists. These textures are placed into a library where the Silicon Graphics gurus apply them to 3D settings to create hangars, the oil rig, corridors, people, etc. The technology used makes other game development techniques seem bronze age by comparison. Rendering of the 3D scenes is done "on the fly" in the SGI's native mode 1280x1024 resolution in 32-bit color. Using a proprietary tool called Tracker, Xatrix hackers can have non-technical designers "fly" real-time through a rendered scene at 30 frames per second and then record their journeys as "canned" footage that can be played back like a virtual home movie.

Getting the same sort of canned footage on a PC requires much more effort. Using traditional means, a wireframe drawing must be created, texture maps must be assigned to the wireframes, "cameras" (or viewing perspectives) must be set up at the proper angle, and finally the scene must be rendered frame by frame. If something is wrong with the final rendered scene (something's out of place, there's an incorrect texture, or the designer simply doesn't like the way it came out), the process begins all over again. With the Xatrix system, things are much more flexible. The Xatrix gurus can set up a scene and apply texture maps to polygon shapes *in real time*! Then, effects like lighting and atmospheric haze can be added instantly, and the entire scene can be viewed from any angle almost instantaneously. A Pentium running 3D STUDIO

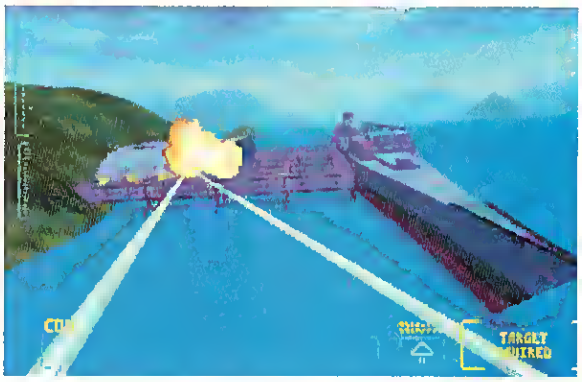
would be taxed to produce a single frame of the animation we saw running at 30 frames per second.

The Tracker technology was developed by Xatrix for location-based virtual reality and for a new technique of computerized set building for next-generation animated TV shows. It enables the designers to create a scene like a tunnel or a verdant valley and fly through it using a 6-axis Space Ball controller. Once a path has been flown to the designer's liking, he or she merely saves the sequence to a file and—blammo!—instant TIE FIGHTER-like cut scene, KING QUEST VI introductory animation, or REBEL ASSAULT-like flight path. The images are anti-aliased (the edges smoothed out) with the Reality Engine, scaled down to 320x200 (what Xatrix refers to as "taking an 8 bit dump"), and are then ready for use in the game.

Although the resulting game sequences aren't very interactive, the beauty is that, since the imagery is "canned," it doesn't take much processing power to run. So while it might take a 486-66 to run the latest flight simulation, CYBERIA will run on a 386 with 4MB of RAM.

Character movement was handled differently to offer the player greater control. The method Xatrix chose is similar to that used in ALONE IN THE DARK. The polygon character in ALONE IN THE DARK was generated on the fly using real 3D shaded polygons, so you could completely control your character's actions. In CYBERIA, the action is, again, a bit more "canned." If you hit the left arrow key, an animation will run of your character walking to the left—backgrounds and all. Press an "up" key, and an animation will run until it reaches a "node," or the next point where another move can be made. Think of it as if Don Bluth's DRAGON'S LAIR game was rendered in 3D, rather than with cel animation. Like ALONE, different camera angles are used to bring out a cinematic quality. This technique avoids the graphic limitations of ALONE's "on the fly" technique, while still providing a semblance of character control.

To get the animation of the characters, actors wear a special suit and are "captured" via Optical Motion Capture equipment. While they move, real-time shaded 3D characters correspond to their movements in real life. Once someone does a suitable combination of maneuvers, such as walking or ducking, then the sequence is captured and the Reality Engine artists dress the characters with texture map clothes. This is all blended with backgrounds and saved into animation files.

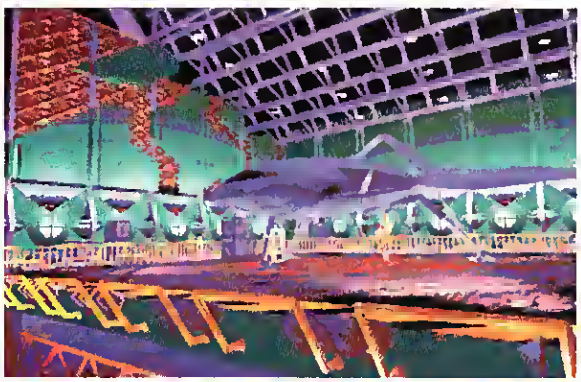


MISSED A SPOT Your TransFighter swoops in to attack an enemy munitions dump. Don't be overhead when she blows!

Since the characters and settings are both computer generated, they blend together well, avoiding the "cookie cutter" look associated with the blue screen techniques used in 7TH GUEST and RETURN TO ZORK.

Who's This Drew Dude?

Drew Markham can trace his roots in computer gaming back to SPACEWAR on the DEC PDP-1. In 1982 Markham flew an American Airlines 747 simulator and was smitten with dreams of building them for the masses. He founded Xatrix with computer animator Barry Dempsey, and the two trooped down to the local SGI office for a little friendly arm twisting. They somehow managed to persuade the SGI people to let them have a Crimson VGXT (a Reality Engine precursor), and the two started building a simulator in Markham's living room.



AIRCRAFT, CHECK Zak pre-flights his TF-22 TransFighter before heading out and smoking stogeys... er, bogeys.

It soon became apparent to Xatrix that the technology for location-based entertainment wasn't yet affordable enough to make a viable business, so they switched gears and began working on CYBERIA in the summer of '93. It was a natural progression for Markham, who had consulted on other interactive entertainment products, and had so many interests he was sometimes considered "aimless and unguided," he says. To which he replied, "Well, that's multimedia!"

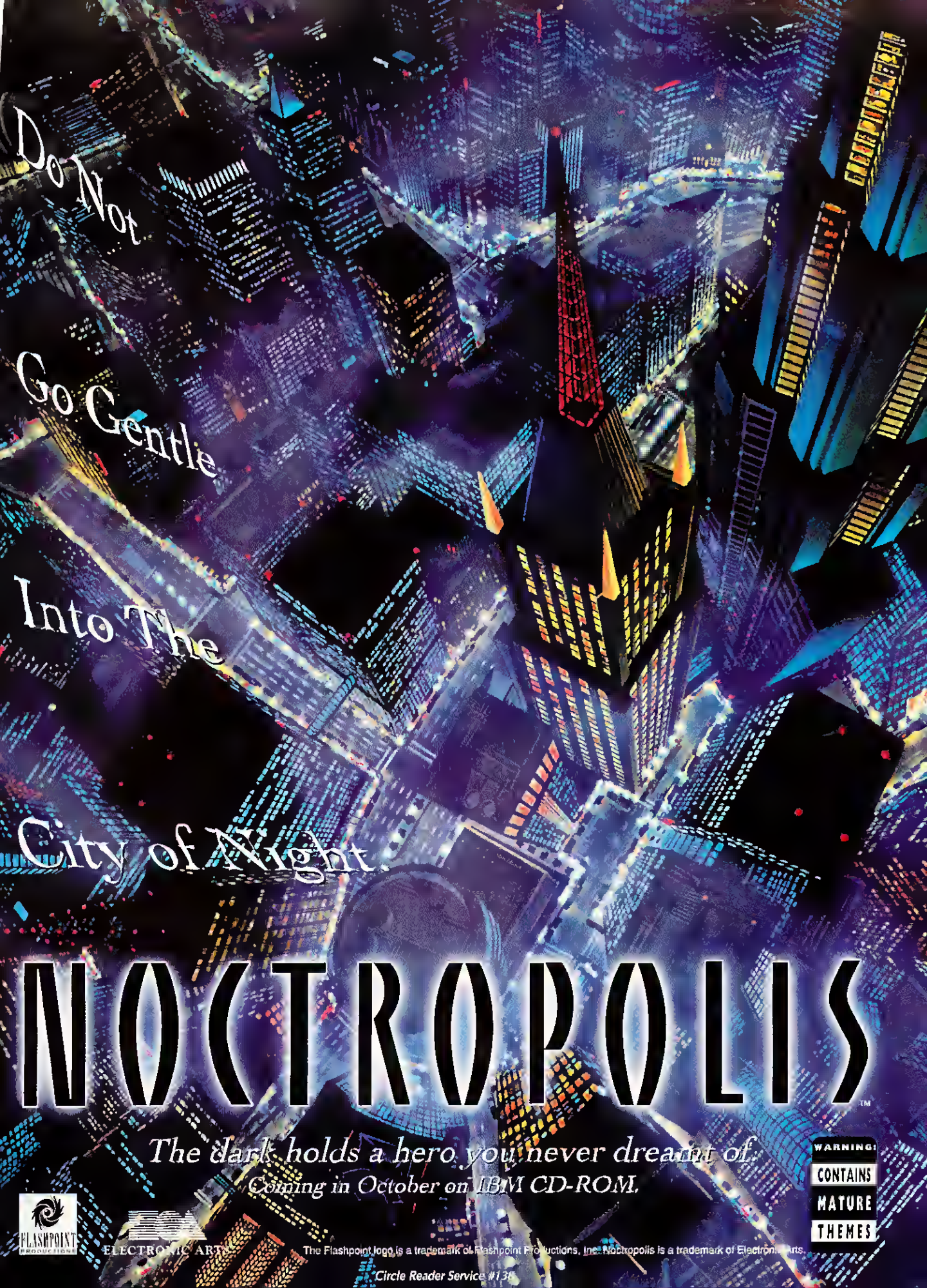
Since Markham was going after a graphic look similar to ALONE IN THE DARK and OUT OF THIS WORLD, he went out and hired three French programmers who had worked on those projects: Franck DeGirolami, Michel Royer, and Pierre Schiro.

Now with a company roster approaching 20 people, Xatrix is hurriedly finishing CYBERIA for a Christmas release. Whether it will appeal to experienced gamers or not, one thing is clear: this product was not slapped together. There are over 25 *gigabytes* of Cyberia files parked on Xatrix machines and storage media, from which they are determined to distill a "mere" 650 megs to fit on one CD.

Love It, Baby, Love It

If Hollywood *must* have a hand in computer games, it's best left with guys like this rather than the status-seeking, barracuda stereotypes associated with the movie industry. Xatrix's first release, with technology spun-off from their real focus—location based virtual reality entertainment—will attract a lot of neophytes and people who want to show off their new multimedia machines. Titles like REBEL ASSAULT, with their enormous, record-breaking sales figures, have proven that they can appeal to a wider audience than traditional gamers. But games of this nature are like umbrella-toting tropical drinks: they might be tasty, but if you want something with more of an interactive kick, you'll need a stronger tonic.

There's little doubt that CYBERIA will fit the bill as a good entry-level action/adventure experience. The "convergence" will be good to the new gamer, but it remains to be seen what Hollywood will do for the real gamer. We look forward to subsequent Xatrix products which might exploit this rich technology to give more experienced gamers more bang for their cyberbuck.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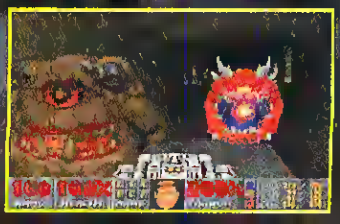

Hell on Earth is here. Rejoice.

In the annals of computer entertainment, there's no game that had the rave following quite like DOOM.

There's also no game that's quite as breathlessly awaited as its sequel.

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Red Tape And Rubber Chickens

SCORPIA EXPLORES THE MAD, MAD, MAD WORLD OF STEVE MERETZKY'S SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN

by Scorpia

SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN IS THE LATEST creation from the warped mind of Steve Meretzky, already infamous for such games as LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS and the SPELLCASTING 101-301 series. Anyone who has played any of those games will have some inkling of what's in store with this one.

The superheroes are a collection of human, partly-human, and non-human crusaders for good with such powers as Eat Spicy Foods Without Distress, Clean Almost Any Mess, Induce Rust, and Refold Road Maps. Right there, you know these aren't your typical comic book heroes and heroines.

Their opponents aren't typical, either. Dr. Entropy, the main villain, is a jack-in-the box; other nasties include Terrible Twos, Glowing Bean Eaters, Samurai Welders, Albino Dinos, Unrepeatable Bugs, One-Armed Bandits, Cruise Missiletoes, and Steroid Men, to name but a few.

All these wacko good guys and bad guys inhabit a future world slowly rebuilding from the devastation of various ecological disasters. Ordinarily, that would be a grim scenario. In this game, however, it merely serves as the springboard for a number of bizarre and hilarious missions, while incidentally poking fun at modern life.

Our dauntless band performs such heroic actions as defusing limberger cheese bombs, rescuing cats trapped under the Liberty Bell, dispensing lead-lined longjohns in high radiation areas, and similar feats of derring-do. A hero's life is a busy one, indeed.

STOP ENTROPY!

SUPERHERO is divided into seven segments, with the first six composed of five missions each, and the seventh being the big finale showdown with Dr. Entropy. That doesn't mean you wait until the end to see him, though, as each collection of missions ends with your team of super heroes foiling yet another of his dastardly schemes.

Each segment begins with Matilda, the computer, detailing the current assignments. You generally have a choice as to the order in which they're completed, but Dr. Entropy is always the last one. That's because finishing the others always gives you the four special items you need to stop Entropy's latest fiendish plot.

All his schemes are, like him, totally demented. Who

SCRY SIGHT

This month's gaze into the crystal reveals high energy transactions on the Ethereal Plane between two role-playing giants: TSR and Interplay Productions. It seems that Interplay has picked up TSR's ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS license, which had been dropped by SSI earlier this year. The agreement grants Interplay the exclusive right to produce computer, home video, coin-op and on-line games for TSR's FORGOTTEN REALMS and PLANESCAPE product lines. Northstar Studios will produce two Forgotten Realms games for Interplay: one PC game that will be a traditional AD&D computer game; the other will appear on a console system and will be modeled more like Nintendo's ZELDA 3. Interplay is developing a strategy game set in the PLANESCAPE universe.

else could conceive of radio-guided bombardier pigeons, or cross-breeding rats and horses, or inventing a machine to mix up road signs? Obviously, someone like this needs to be stopped and put away (far away, and lose the key, too).

That's where the Crimson Tape and his buddies come in. The Tape is the party leader, and must be present at all times in the group. The other members are pretty much up to you, and can be swapped in and out as desired. All are pre-created; you simply enter the SUPERHERO lunchroom and choose the heroes you want at any time. The only restriction is that you must always have a full party; you can't leave headquarters with any empty slots.

At the beginning of the game, there is room for four in the group. After each batch of missions is finished, another slot opens up, and usually one or more new heroes arrives in the lunchroom. On a couple of occasions, potential members must be rescued before they're available.

Each hero comes with a primary superpower, and can learn up to four secondary ones as the game progresses. Heroes also come with four physical stats: brawn, brains, health and toughness. All these stats increase automatically as the heroes gain experience from combat and completing missions. They can also be enhanced by eating certain foods: fish increases brains, beef increases brawn, and vegetables increase health. Those are all permanent gains. Toughness can be improved by wearing armor.

New powers can be acquired by drinking special isotopes. These are usually available from the pawnbrokers in the markets scattered across the countryside. The effects are cumulative, so drinking, say, an isotope of Cause Root Rot at 10% followed by one at 15% will give a character the power at 25% total. This is important, because it's the only way to increase secondary powers; they are the one thing that does not go up at level gain time.

As you might expect, weapons and armor are, at times, a little odd. Modified jet engines, arsenic-tipped deer antlers, the Slinky of Death, bullet-proof briefs, asbestos fanny packs, and fortified Groucho glasses may not be typical gear for a role-playing game, but they get the job done.

THIS TOWN GOT AN ENEMA The downtown area of Hoboken has been flooded due to global ecological disaster. Only the Superheroes can nurse society back to health.

COVERING THE TURF

With 30 missions plus endgame, you'd expect to cover a lot of territory, and that is certainly the case here. Aside from nipping around the immediate New Jersey/New York area, you also get to take trips to Scranton, Poughkeepsie, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Harrisburg, New Haven and Atlantic City. Throw in Manhattan (uptown and downtown), part of the subway system, and underground Philadelphia, and you'll have taken quite a tour of the northeast coast by the time you're done.

The map of each area starts off obscured by a black cloud of ignorance, and the landscape is revealed as you walk across it. Much of the outdoor areas are ruins, woods, hills, and radioactive spots, but there are a few remaining civilized places, mostly market towns, mansions of warlords, temples, and other structures of interest. When your team has completely explored a section of the map, it receives an experience point bonus.

Of course, these perambulations are not without hazard. Everywhere lurk hordes of vicious and improbable monsters, with apparently nothing better to do than chow down on superheroes. However, unlike many CRPGs, these critters have limits. There are only so many of them wandering around in any one area, and eventually your hearty crew can completely clean up a sector of nasty intruders, which will also net you an experience point bonus.

To help determine how deadly an area might be, you have a most useful item, the dangerometer. The readout displays ten levels of danger, starting with green (not too bad) to bright red (really deadly) to off the scale (really, REALLY, deadly!). With this handy device, you can keep your fledgling team from going into areas where they would be trashed in no time flat. When an area has been cleaned out, the dangerometer is not lit up at all.

Combat is a fairly simple procedure. Unless the team is surprised, the heroes will go first in a fight. The current members are displayed in a row along the bottom of the screen, and they act in that order (monsters are displayed in a similar row at the top of the sreen). A superpower can be used any time. Otherwise, the first three heroes in line usually engage in melee combat, and the rest use distance weapons. There are no multiple actions; a hero can only do one thing per round.

Aside from fighting, you can also try begging for mercy, cowering (to improve defense), bribery, rallying other party members, or running away. My philosophy tends to be aggressive: kill 'em all, let the computer sort 'em out! So, no surprise, my team never ran, or begged for mercy, or tried bribing the critters to leave (I had better use for the cash).

Apparently, superheroes don't die, they just get zonked. Taking a short rest after combat will restore to full health anyone who was knocked out during the fight. Of course, if everyone gets zonked, the game ends and you'll have to restore. You can, in fact, restore in the middle of a combat if your team is being trounced. This is a nice feature that should be in every CRPG. Why waste time sitting there to the bitter end when there's no hope? Far better to just break out and go back to the last save position.

After the last monster has run away or

SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-20MHz or better, 2MB RAM, VGA graphics, 8MB hard drive space, mouse; supports AdLib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards.
Protection: None
Designer: Steve Meretzky
Publisher: Legend Entertainment
Chantilly, VA
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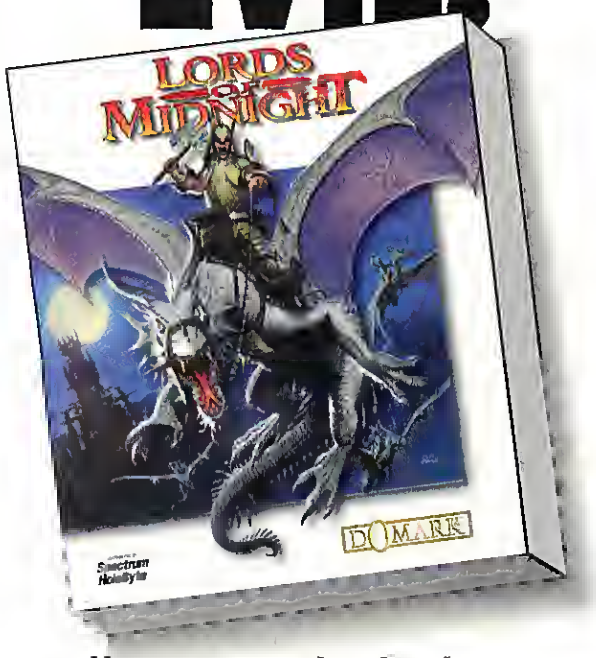

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been killed, a little treasure usually shows up, typically in the form of a mysterious pizza box or sinister-looking water cooler. Often they contain money, sometimes also a weapon or piece of armor, or other goody. Once in awhile, these things also blow up in your face, causing damage or irradiating the party. Opening a "treasure chest" is always something of a gamble, but it's safe most of the time.

The combat is pretty well-balanced. The dangerometer keeps the party from venturing into areas that are too difficult early on, and the fights in the "low danger" places are about as much as a low-level group can handle. As the party gets larger and more powerful, they can start exploring the more deadly sectors, and by the time the end game is reached, you will be glad to have nine people in the group (this is where the dangerometer overloads, and for good reason).

YOU TALKING TO ME?!

There isn't much in the way of character interaction here. You (in the person of Crimson Tape) can ask silly questions of your party members or merchants in the markets, but that's about it most of the time. There is definitely nothing of ULTIMA-style conversation or involvement in this game.

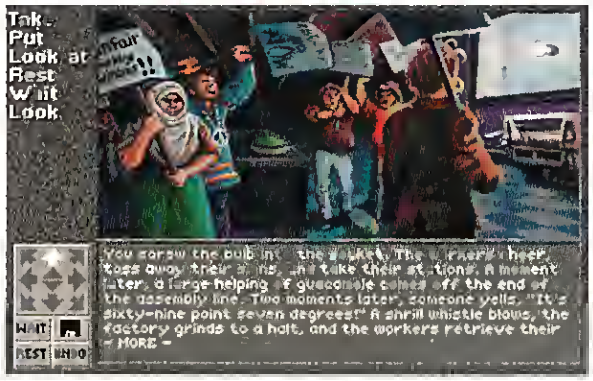
My one real quarrel with the CRPG portion is the fact that zonked characters get no experience points at the end of combat. Since these heroes are not dead, there is no reason to deny them a share of the victory. Consider this: a hero in the back might spend the whole fight doing nothing except cowering, and he will get points at the end, just because he's still standing. Meanwhile, a hero up front, who has been fighting hard and dispatching nasties, receives nothing, even though his contribution to the victory was the greater one.

Considered from a purely adventure perspective, most of the puzzles are absurdly simple. Many important items are just lying around, waiting to be picked up or purchased from a pawnbroker, and once you find such an item, its use is generally quite obvious. For instance, the East Orange Market is overrun by a flock of rabid sheep. At another market, you come across a can of sheep spray for sale. There are many such trivial situations in the game.

At the same time, you can also become frustrated if you overlook something. This happened to me a couple of times. On one occasion, I had forgotten to listen to the chatterbox (news of the day) at headquarters. Later, after finding the case of nitrous oxide, and being unable to open it (shades of the Zork egg!), I had no idea what to do. There followed a long boring period of traipsing around, revisiting places to no avail, until I finally went back to HQ and remembered the chatterbox. After that, everything was simple.

So while the puzzles are not at all difficult, finding the right item or place to go can be aggravating, especially as more of the game opens up to you. Therefore, you really have to be extremely thorough when meandering around the outdoors, and always remember to listen to that chatterbox first thing when a new segment begins, as one or two items are usually important.

STRANGE DAYS INDEED! The Superheroes must battle all sorts of mutations, like this cross between Frankenstein and a Televangelist who walks with a distinct Swaggart.



GUACAMOLE WORKERS UNION When saving the world, you've got to start small. Here, the Superheroes must end a strike at the guacamole factory, lest there be no dip for the Superheros' next bash.

The game ran quite cleanly; it never crashed or did other unexpected things. However, Gravis Soundcard owners will have to play this in Sound Blaster mode; I couldn't find a way to get Roland emulation to work with SUPERHERO, even though Roland MT-32 is supported.

Actually, there is one technical problem with the game, although not everyone may run into it. SUPERHERO is incapable of handling more than 199 saves. I discovered this when, after finishing the game the first time, I went back and played again, this time taking detailed notes. Everything went well until, far into the game, I noticed that new save games weren't registering, the position was being saved, but it never showed up on the "Restore" screen.

Deleting some of the older saves didn't help, and I also found that overwriting earlier saves caused *them* to vanish from the restore screen, as well. The only safe position to save to was the most recent (top) one. Examination of the directory showed me that the save files were being numbered sequentially, starting with HOBO001.SAV and going on from there, up to HOBO200.SAV, but 200 was not being picked up by the program. I got around this by renaming all the save files, starting with the oldest, as 001, 002, etc. After that, I was able to save again properly.

Naturally, I reported this to Legend. There isn't much to be done about the current floppy version, so there you'll have to be careful about save games (especially if you decide to replay with a different team mix). However, Legend will also be bringing out a CD version later this year, and in that one, the problem will not occur.

Those matters aside, SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN is much like a summertime action movie: fast, furious, and not too hard on the brain. It is lightweight fare, and as such, may disappoint those looking for challenging puzzles. On the other hand, this zany melange makes up what is the first true comedy CRPG ever, and that alone is worth the price of admission.

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The Ultimate Hints

SO HERE WE ARE, POISED, WE HOPE, ON THE VERGE OF A FLOOD OF NEW games for the Holiday Season. There better be some, because overall it hasn't been a great (or even good) year for new releases in the role-playing/adventure areas. Most of the mail coming in is about older games, but then, there isn't much else to play at the moment.

A fair number of letters have come in recently about the Ultimas. Perhaps that's because **Origin** recently brought out the complete ULTIMA VII set (BLACK GATE, FORGE OF VIRTUE, SERPENT ISLE, and SILVER SEED) in one package—a handy way of getting everything at once. Also a handy way of getting stuck in multiple places at once (heh).

Ultima VII—Black Gate: Every so often, a flurry of letters comes in asking about Quentin's murder, and how it can be solved. Simply put, there ain't no way of doing that. The whole business is there mainly as window dressing, so to speak. You can't talk to Quentin (no, not even with the spell), and regardless how sure you are of "whodunit," there is no evidence anywhere to prove it. So, just ignore the poor ghost, and get on with playing the game (disappointing, but that's how it is).

Ultima VII—Forge of Virtue: This is a two-question game. People ask about either the Amulet or the helmets. Right now, it seems helmets are popular. The whole thing is really quite simple. They're not doing much good where they are, so maybe they should be someplace else. Just think in reverse, and the little light bulb in your brain may switch on.

Ultima VII—Serpent Isle: Continuing with the ULTIMA questions, folks are wandering around in the Mountains of Freedom, stuck in the endless corridor. Not a great place to be, and it really is "endless," thanks mainly to the teleporter that keeps sending you back down the passage. So, going backwards or forwards doesn't work, but there are other directions. Horace Greeley had it backwards—keep that in mind.

Ultima VII—Silver Seed: Some adventurers have been surprised (and a little dismayed) that, after finishing this segment, nothing has changed in the greater world of SERPENT ISLE. Yup, that's how it is (kinda like Quentin, huh?). SILVER SEED is mainly an add-in designed to give you some new commands and Neat Items. Nothing you do here will affect the main game, including planting the seed. It's a nice gesture, but otherwise ineffective; nothing can undo the work of the Banes of Chaos. Pity about that.

Ultima Underworld II: Another question that comes in cycles is the void and the pyramid. Anyone out there remember Q-BERT? That's what we have here. You must follow the four colored paths to the pyramid, one at a time, of course, and jump all over the thing until it's the same color as the path you took, and you end at the top, so you can jump through the moongate. It gets a little harder with each visit, maybe even a little tedious, but unfortunately it has to be done. Happy jumping!

Ultima VIII—Pagan: Hey, I really wasn't kidding about the ULTIMA mail, eh? Anyway, not surprisingly, people are having a bit of trouble with the test questions on Argentrock Isle. Not surprising, because the material in the library (which is supposed to help with this) is all on the air spells, and not the philosophy of the healers. This is where you have to reach back in memory to the good old days when you were a real Avatar, and recall the precepts of Honesty, Compassion and Humility. Whatever question comes up, look over the answers and see which of those three applies (Honesty above all). After that, it shouldn't take too long to pass the test.

Lands of Lore: Some folks are having a bit of difficulty in the Catwalk Caverns. They've found only one key, and it takes two to tango, that is, two of them to open the doors to the next section of the game. Well, if you go back to where you opened up the first section of caves (hand print) and look around at the other walls, you just might find the entrance to the other half of the caverns. Also, the duplicator is an optional event. If you use the glove to herd three of the electrical critters into the machine, you can duplicate any one item you desire (but only once).

Eye Of The Beholder II: A number of dungeon-delvers have collected all four horns, and now they don't know what to do with them, or at least, where to use them. This one isn't really too hard. Maybe you've come across something somewhere that is related to the four elements? I don't really have to draw you a picture of this, do I?

The Elder Scrolls—Arena: It is an extremely rare event for me to tell anyone how to cheat in a game (in fact, this is only the second time in 11 years). However, ARENA is so unbalanced in favor of spellcasters (who are well-nigh invulnerable with the right mix of spells), that we do want to do something for the poor fighters and thieves (having played a fighter, I know all too well how hard it is, especially in the latter stages of the game!). So, it is possible to have more than one artifact at a time. Put the one you have in for repairs. Then go talk to people until you hear about another artifact that you want. Pay for the information (to fix the dungeons), then retrieve your artifact from the weapon store (you must do this or it will vanish), and go alter the second one. Note: no guarantees here, as this is second-hand info. I only learned about it after finishing up and taking the game off my drive. Caveat emptor, and all that.

And that does seem to be it for this look into the mailbag. Until next time, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

On Delphi: visit the GameSIG.

On GEnie: Stop by the Games Round-Table.

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

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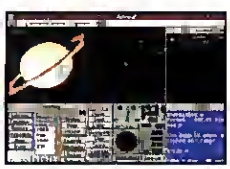

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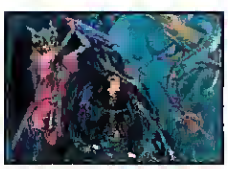

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Circle Reader Service #238

Creeping Shadows

Lovecraft's Legacy Finds Its Way To The Silicon Screen

by Allen L. Greenberg

BY ASTOUNDING COINCIDENCE, THE ADVENTURES OF THE YOUNG, HEROIC WRITER IN SHADOW OF THE COMET mirrors many of my own early experiences in the field of journalism. I first joined *Computer Gaming World* in 1934, during which time the world was experiencing one of its greatest shortages of recreational computer software. I had stumbled onto a theory which proposed that the current abundance of nonexistent software, or "vaporware," was due to mysterious astrological reasons (as opposed to the more popular hypothesis that no one, as yet, owned a computer). I studied the night sky with obsessive enthusiasm for nearly half a century, until *CGW*'s kindly old editor had come to fear for my sanity and moved me on to some other assignment.

SHADOW OF THE COMET

Price: $79.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-16MHz, 2MB RAM, VGA graphics, CD-ROM; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
Publisher: I-Motion
Santa Monica, CA
(800) 443-3386

In the first of their CALL OF CTHULHU computer adventure games, based on the writing and mythology of H.P. Lovecraft, a young journalist, obsessed with stars and comets, may not find himself so lucky.

Attached to such cult films as *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*, H.P. Lovecraft's name has become closely associated with 20th century supernatural-based entertainment. Computer game players have often been treated to glimpses of Lovecraftian horror in such games as **MicroProse**'s LEGACY, and paper game players have had a faithful adaptation of CALL OF CTHULHU available to them for some time now. However, as popular as that author's name may be, it is actually quite rare for one of Lovecraft's stories to be transferred to some other media without major alterations to its characters and setting. Along with the paper CTHULHU, SHADOW OF THE COMET (COMET) easily ranks among the truest representations of his work. Slow moving at times, the program eschews the eviscerating gore associated with modern horror in favor of Lovecraft's brand of spiritual terror. Once again, we are told the story of a race of unspeakably horrible god-like creatures who once occupied our Earth. To return here, all they need are certain natural conditions, and a corrupt human soul to take advantage of them.

COMET is a supernatural mystery adventure in which a humble British journalist, Jonathan Parker, must battle forces set in motion by Lovecraft's race of angry, outcast gods. Employing their usual hard-sell tactics, the gods have offered power and immortality to any human who is willing to reopen the passageway that connects their universe of exile with that of our own. For this venture, they have settled on certain occupants of the small New England town of Ilsmouth. The mechanics of opening this doorway are strictly mystical in nature, and are closely linked with the appearance of Haley's Comet. One hundred and sixty years ago, the appearance of that comet was observed from Ilsmouth by another Englishman, Boloskin, who went insane shortly thereafter. In the year 1910 Jonathan Parker, equipped with the newly invented art of photography, returns to the town in order to track Boloskin's quarry. Waiting for him in Ilsmouth are a series of mysterious occupants and enigmatic settings, all of which conspire to defy inspection.

While the threat of supernatural consequences hangs ceaselessly over Parker, COMET spends much of its time as a conventional mystery game before it finally emerges as an occult thriller. Faded messages, obscure diary entries, and a vague Biblical reference are the main instruments with which you, in the role of young Parker, will save the human race. The town is filled with a variety of individuals, most of whom appear to share more than a few features with modern Hollywood personas.

Nearly every town member appears defensive and eccentric to the wide-eyed, young Englishman. After several interviews some begin to appear as friendly, while others do little to hide their distaste for outsiders. These townspeople are not mere window-dressing for the game, and it will be necessary for you to know each

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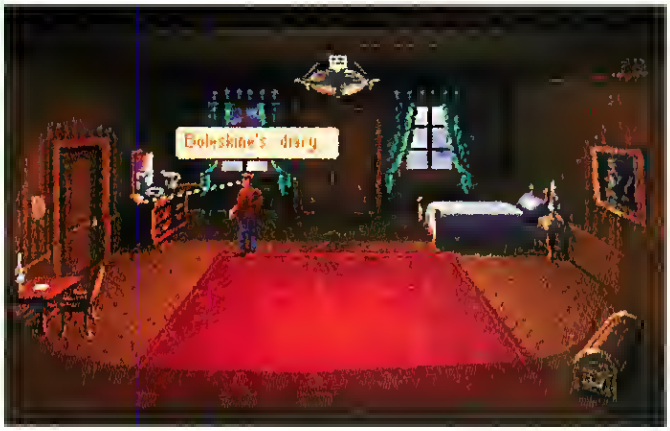


BLESS MY PERIPHERAL VISION From the corner of his eye, Parker spots an important clue.

of them well in order to finally put to rest the evil in Ilsmouth.

As Parker first assembles his clues, the game proceeds very slowly. Often, events come to a standstill until the hero stumbles on some useful material tucked away on a book shelf or inside a dresser drawer. At one frustrating moment, you are called upon to examine a drawing. "Useless!" declares Parker, as the game comes to a screeching halt. It is only when you attempt to examine that same drawing while standing next to a desk that events are once again allowed to proceed. Often, characters throughout Ilsmouth will be caught in an endless loop of repeated activity in one location until Parker unravels a puzzle or makes his next discovery. The most useful indicator of your success is a diary in which the hero's thoughts are automatically entered. It not only contains a record of what has happened, but often that which Parker considers his next objective as well.

For the most part, you may take your time as you carefully assemble each piece of Parker's puzzle. However, there are several moments when anything except rapid-fire action will lead to Parker's death. What is easily the most claustrophobic and stressful moment of the game occurs midway through the story, as Parker descends below the town cemetery and discovers a cryptic maze, the home of one of Ilsmouth's major demons. Like some Lovecraftian version of Indiana Jones, Parker finds himself dodging traps and triggering hidden doors in order to claw his way through. It is important to map this maze, because the hero will then be forced to find his way out following a high-speed chase in which there is virtually no time allowed for exploration or error.

Parker is often called upon to engage in multiple-choice conversations. Unfortunately, you must occasionally base your choice on a sentence fragment that does not necessarily indicate the nature of the entire sentence. Should you be unhappy with your choice, the only solution is to go back and replay that section of the game, this time choosing another sentence fragment. Needless to say, frequent game saves are strongly advised.

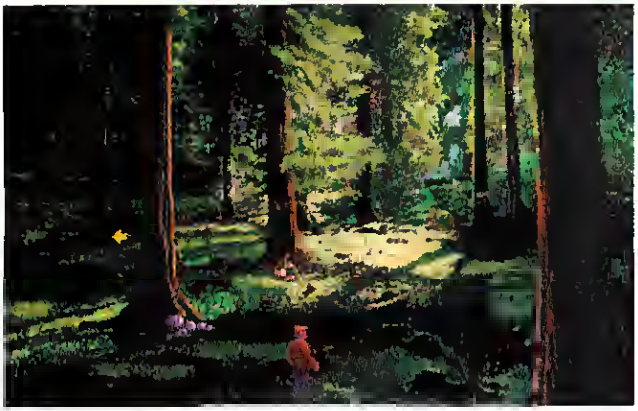
THIS OLD HOUSE If warning lights aren't going off in your head as you approach, then you're probably playing the wrong game (or should seek employment as a witless victim in a B-rate slash movie).

As the game progresses, Parker discoveries become increasingly bizarre, and the solutions to his puzzles increasingly supernatural, and therefore far less obvious. Finally, Boloskin's spirit, mysteriously restored to sanity, is forced to make a return appearance on Earth in order to drop some clues that will help his successor make the right decisions. With his help, certain words must be spoken in a specific order, and a collection of color-coded gems must be manipulated in a highly specific fashion in order to set free Ilsmouth's trapped souls and close the doorway on the unwanted intruders.

COMET was originally released in Europe as a somewhat conventional game on floppy-disk only. For its American release, the game has been upgraded to CD-ROM featuring enhanced mouse support and digitized voices. The voices are provided by a competent group of actors who easily embrace their Hollywood stereotypical characters. Young Parker faces his challenges with a resolute "veddy well" as would make any respectable British hero proud. The real talent show, however, occurs as this unsuspecting group of thespians are called upon to articulate some of Lovecraft's demonic names which are as unpronounceable as the author often claimed they were unspeakable. As you enjoy such phrases as "...f'thangnh cthulhu iaeeh..." you may look forward to the showering burst of saliva which accompanies each syllable.

A DEGREE OF DANGER Perusing Doctor Cobble's diplomas, you find that he learned his craft at Miskatonic University—hmm.

Graphically, this adventure game may fall slightly short of expectations. Each scene is painted somewhat two-dimensionally, and animation is minimal. The characters are likewise flat in appearance, and little effort has been spent to allow them any range or expression of feelings.



SYLVAN MYSTERIES UNFOLD Not all of your discoveries take place in cold, dark places. Is that a light at the end of the forest?

Close-up views of the character's faces are occasionally used as they deliver their dialogue, although these are equally flat and somewhat repetitive. The game's beasts and other horrors will not deprive even the most squeamish players of any late night sleep.

Nonetheless, these creatures are drawn in classically Lovecraft fashion, so that they somewhat resemble a sea-food dinner that has suddenly turned on its would-be eater. Rather more impressive than its graphics are the game's sound effects, which make for an effective background to the drama. The game's music is also quite effective, although its harsh ringing quality may convince many players to take advantage of the game's software-controlled volume control.

COMET's interface is its most noticeable weakness. While the mouse may be used to guide Parker, it is necessary to move the cursor from one side of the character to another, rather than simply point out where you wish him to go. Use of the keyboard requires less effort to move Parker, although the mouse is somewhat less confusing than the keyboard when it comes to inventory and object manipulation. Either the right mouse button or the Tab key brings up a set of icons including "speak," "examine," "take" or "use" as well as commands to save or restore a game in progress. "Examine" works only when something unusual enters Parker's narrow field of vision, and is usually, though not always, indicated by a visible line between the character's eyes and an object of interest. "Use" is a poorly defined command which generally applies to whatever object has been previously selected from the hero's inventory. The game would have greatly benefited from a clearly defined process for using one object in conjunction with another. As is, you must experiment by "using" objects in various locations until you stumble on that which the program is expecting.

A bonus program, "Visit to the Lovecraft Museum" is also included on the COMET CD-ROM disk. This program is related to the game by theme only, and contains no hints or information which pertain to it. The Museum program follows a casual observer through several hallways filled with paintings, manuscripts and various testimonials to unsolved mysteries. A stern, mysterious voice, in the tradition of *Ripley's Believe It or Not,* describes each item on command, pointing out some baffling quality which may or may not be related to Lovecraftian legend.

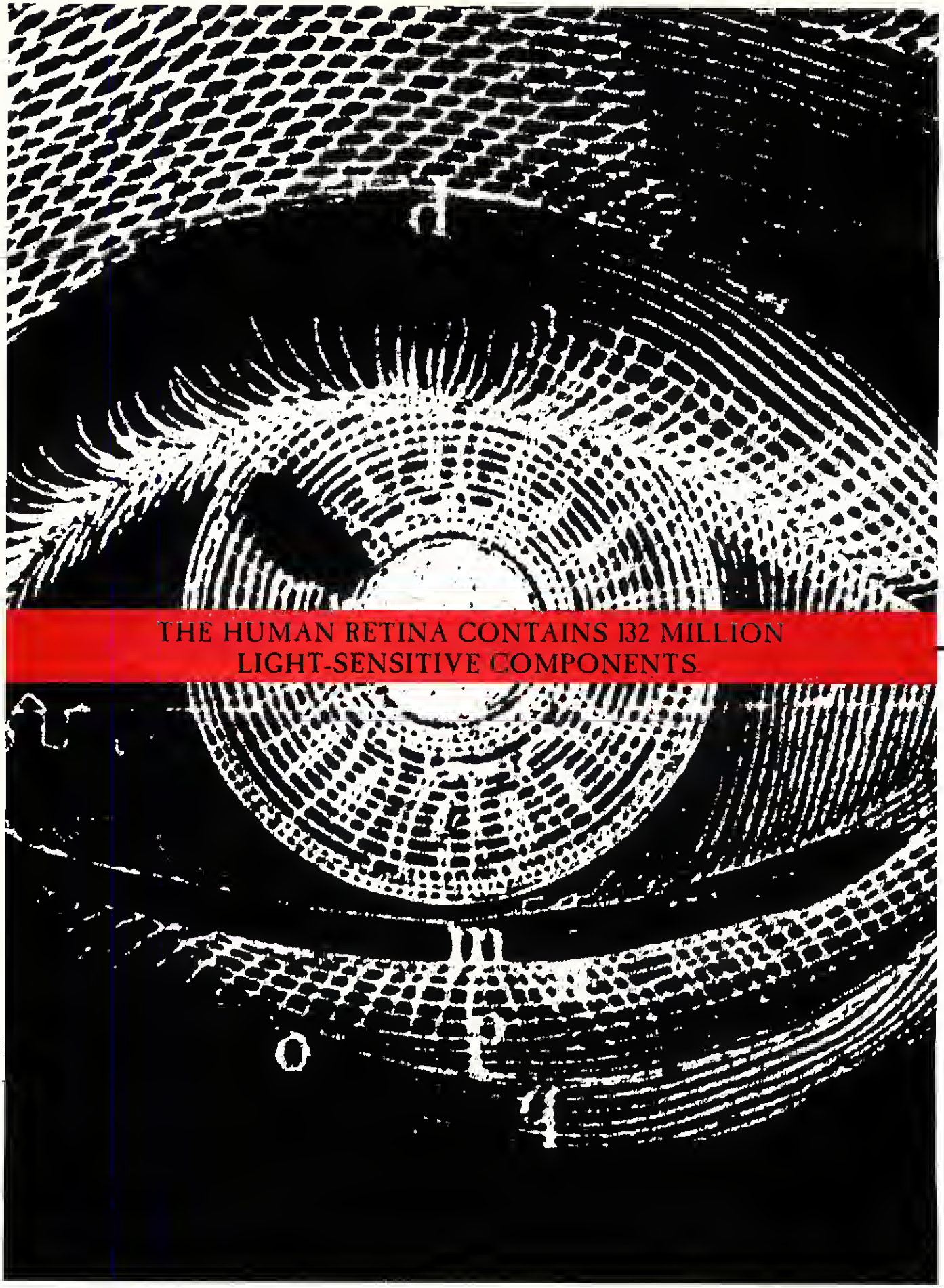
COMET is a difficult game which will probably frustrate any novice who does not have access to a seasoned gaming "coach," or at least a generous supply of hints. Experienced players who either feel at home with Lovecraft's lore, or who have enjoyed the CALL OF CTHULHU paper game, will find themselves more at home with the adventure, although they too will doubtless endure several frustrating moments. While not an eye-popping, page-turner of a story, COMET is a challenging test of adventurer skills. Please be advised that a conglomeration of grotesque, other-worldly gods may very well be observing you as you attempt to solve this game, and that these creatures are quite experienced at recognizing human obsession and taking full advantage of it. Don't sign anything until you have completed the game and are once again thinking clearly.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SHADOW OF THE COMET

RATING ✸✸✸ 1/2

PROS Long, challenging and extremely loyal to Lovecraft's fiction. The voice acting is very convincing.
CONS Weak interface, weak graphics, and, yes, yet another back-breaking arcade chase through a maze. Note To Designers: We are gamers, not mice!



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The 7th Guest

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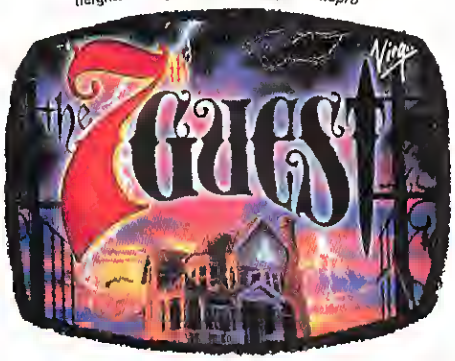

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"Space Ace is a blast to play and is truly faithful to the original coin-op. The digital video is perfect and the game controls great." *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

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PHILIPS MEDIA

One For The X Files

Conspiracy Abounds In Merit Software's THE PSYCHOTRON

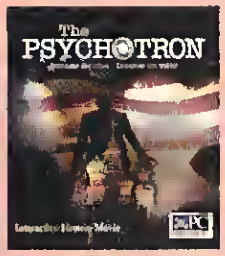
by Charles Ardai

FORGET J.F.K. IF CONSPIRACY THEORIES ARE YOUR CUP OF TEA, I'VE GOT A DOOZY FOR YOU. THE CUBANS aren't part of this one, but the Russians are, and so are the Mafia, the C.I.A., and the media. At the heart of the affair is a machine that endows its user with psychotronic powers. The Russians built this machine and we bought it, but somewhere between their hands and ours it vanished. The Director of the C.I.A. thinks his people might be involved in the heist, so he's brought you, an outsider, on board to investigate.

Just who you are is never entirely clear, nor even how many of you there are. (Some characters refer to you in plural terms, as in "Did you people come to clean up our barn?") What is clear is that there is more going on than any of the characters you meet realize. The Mafia is being psychotronically manipulated into giving free assistance to a renegade C.I.A. agent. The President of the United States is manipulating the C.I.A. to shore up his flagging popularity in an election year. The media is being fed stories about clandestine arms deals with Russia to cloak the even more clandestine transactions being conducted regarding E.S.P. technology. And so on.

You uncover the details of the story layer by layer, starting out in the offices of four C.I.A. agents who (apparently) died in a plane crash. The Psychotron was on the plane in question and might have gone up in flames along with the passengers, but if it did, why is there no trace of it in the wreckage? Why is one of the bodies missing? And why is there a still-undetonated bomb tucked away in an overhead compartment?

THE PSYCHOTRON



Price: $69 95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-25Mhz, 4MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 8MB hard drive space, Windows 3.1, double speed CD-ROM; supports all MPC compatible sound cards.
Protection: None
Designer: Rick Gonzales
Publisher: Merit Software
Dallas, TX
(214) 385-2353

Interrogating relatives and friends of the deceased agents gives you some information, as does a high-stakes poker game with some of the rogue agent's unsavory cohorts. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, C.I.A. Director Darin Bird pulls some strings to help you out. Between his work and yours, you should be able to track the Psychotron down—assuming that you don't get yourself shot along the way.

PSYCHO PATHS

THE PSYCHOTRON is divided more or less evenly between two types of activity, investigation and interrogation. When you're in an investigation scene, your job is to move a cursor around the screen until it passes over "hot spots" and turns into a question mark. Click on these locations and you get a closer look at the object you've clicked on, which usually contains a clue of some sort. In interrogation scenes, you select from a menu of dialogue choices and watch actors playing the parts of witnesses, grieving widows, television reporters, and so forth as they respond to your questions.

These video sequences are what make the game appealing. We are still at a stage in the evolution of computer gaming where the mere fact that a game contains footage of human actors is enough to get a rise out of the average player. Never mind that the actors are mostly awful and never better than mediocre, or that the script is packed with caricatures instead of characters and clichés for dialogue, or that the footage is grainy and jumpy, especially if you choose to view the scenes at full-screen size instead of set into a quarter-screen window; it's still a thrill to play a game in which actors talk to you in response to the choices you make. Unfortunately, the interaction THE PSYCHOTRON offers is extremely limited, which means, for one thing, that the game is quite short and, for another, that the thrill of interacting with the actors is considerably less intense and shorter-lived than it might otherwise be.

At first glance, and even from my description of it above, THE PSYCHOTRON appears to be a highly interactive game. What isn't evident until you start playing it is that the game allows the player no control over what path the story takes or what events occur—or much at all, really. The opening screen presents the player with four offices to search, each containing three clues; find these (and it's essentially impossible not to, since there's only

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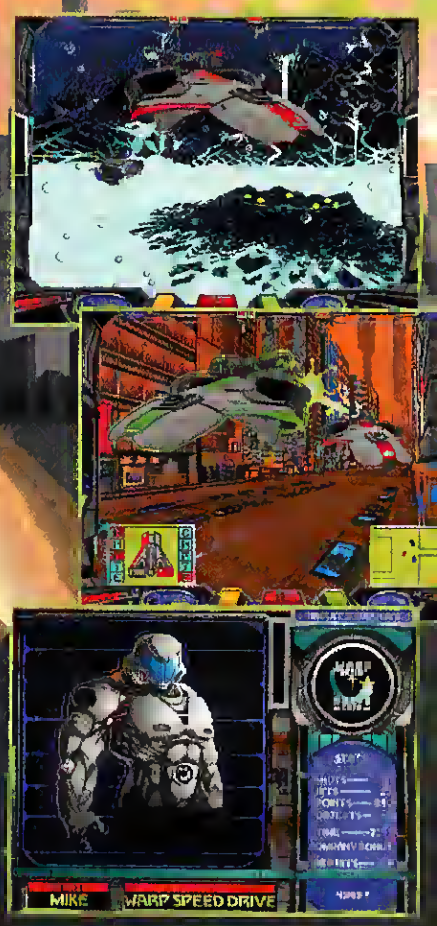

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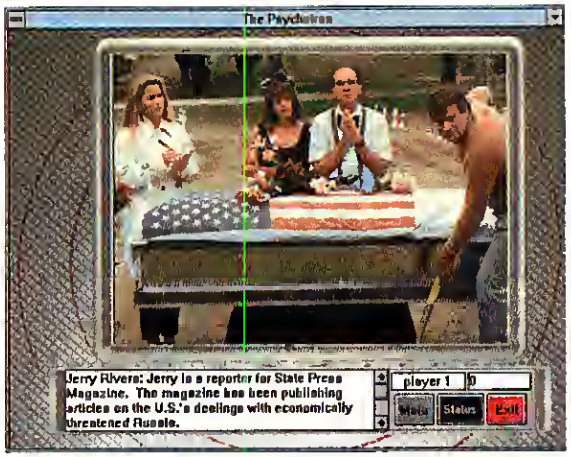
Circle Reader Service #151

one puzzle and it's trivial) and the game automatically moves you to a memorial service. Have four conversations with attendees and the game automatically moves you to the crash site. Talk to the three witnesses and explore the wreckage and you're automatically moved to the poker game. Play four hands of poker and you're moved to the compound where the game reaches its climax.

That's it—that's the entire game. Offices, memorial service, farm, poker game, compound. And none of these sequences are especially long or complex. Until the poker game, there isn't even any threat to the player's safety. There are better and worse questions among those you can ask, and you do have some influence over which direction a particular conversation takes, but none of this affects the progression of the overall story. There are also a handful of puzzles, but these are so insubstantial that it's almost deceptive to use the word "puzzle" to describe them. There is an arcane point scoring system intended to give you feedback on the choices you make, but no one going through a piece of interactive fiction ever pays attention to their score (except possibly as an indication of how close to the end of the game they are, which THE PSYCHOTRON's system doesn't permit since it doesn't reveal the maximum score for which you are striving).



THE INVESTIGATOR WORE BLACK Crashing a memorial service is an unfortunate necessity, if you want to uncover the hidden conspiracy.

In short, THE PSYCHOTRON gives you very little to do and very little free space in which to do it. The whole game takes no more than two or three hours to play, less if you apply common sense to the few choices you are given. (Which is the right choice, saying "My condolences" to a woman at her husband's grave or saying "What's your problem"? During the card game, choosing "Bet reasonably" or "Bet all you've got"?)

PSYCHO LOGICAL

If you do plow through the game at top speed, what do you come away with? Memories of bad acting, no better than decent animation, and an annoying rock soundtrack, plus the feeling that you've been shortchanged, since the designers clearly only put a cursory effort into making the game coherent.

Asking that a game about an E.S.P. machine be believable is, to be sure, asking too much—but is it too much to ask that when you spend a hundred dollars to buy one character's watch and shovel he not still be holding the shovel and wearing the watch when you see him in the next

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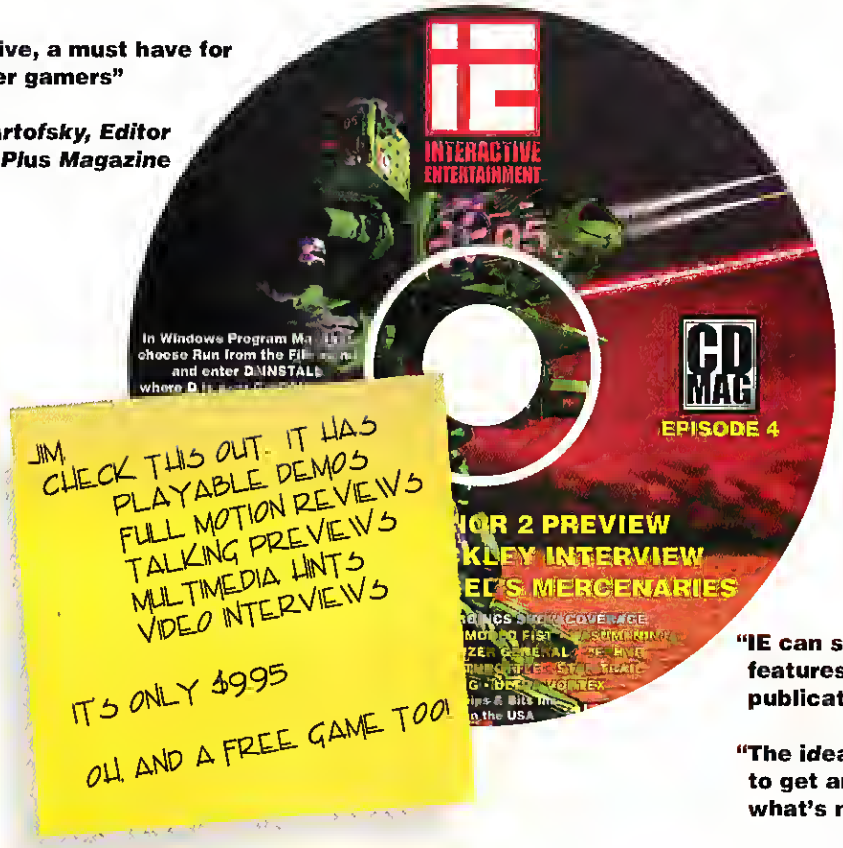
FORGET READING

"Impressive, a must have for computer gamers"

Steve Wartofsky, Editor
Strategy Plus Magazine



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DAMSEL IN DISTRESS? With wiretaps and other covert surveillance techniques coming up zero, it's time to get info the old-fashioned way—by interrogating Steve's friends.

scene? Is it too much to ask, when interrogating a hick who makes Jim Varney's "Ernest" sound like Bertrand Russell and one of your choices is "Correct his English," that the game not contain a good number of language errors itself? (In that very scene, "wasn't" is spelled "was'nt"; elsewhere, "breach" is spelled "breech" and there is a reference to "diseased," instead of "deceased," President Roosevelt.)

It is certainly not too much to ask that the game work, but it doesn't even do this consistently. The save game function appears to work, for instance, but when you try to restore any of the games you've so diligently saved, you discover that it is impossible to do so. Why? I don't know, but instead of a list of your saved games, the game gives you a blank menu and an error message saying that it can't find a file it needs. Fortunately, it's not too hard to get to the end of the game without dying, making the save game function somewhat superfluous anyway; still, it is possible to regret some of the choices you make, and it is distressing to find that you have to replay the whole game from scratch.

It is especially distressing when you realize that there is not all that much new to see the second time through. The investigation scenes are the same every time—the same couple of clues sprinkled in the same locations—and the interrogations offer only token variety. The performances are not worth watching once, much less twice, and there are no hidden pleasures for you to uncover as you play the game for the tenth or eleventh time.

In THE PSYCHOTRON, **Merit Software** has produced a game of fleeting interest at best. It wants to be a computer game version of *The Manchurian Candidate*, or something along those lines, but in the end has more in common with such downmarket fare as G.I. Joe cartoons and Get Smart—or, worst of all, those TV announcements of days gone by: "We are experiencing technical difficulties. Please stand by."

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THE PSYCHOTRON

RATING ✸✸

PROS Plenty of live action video, a fun card game sequence.
CONS Too few sequences, too few puzzles, too little that is under the player's control.

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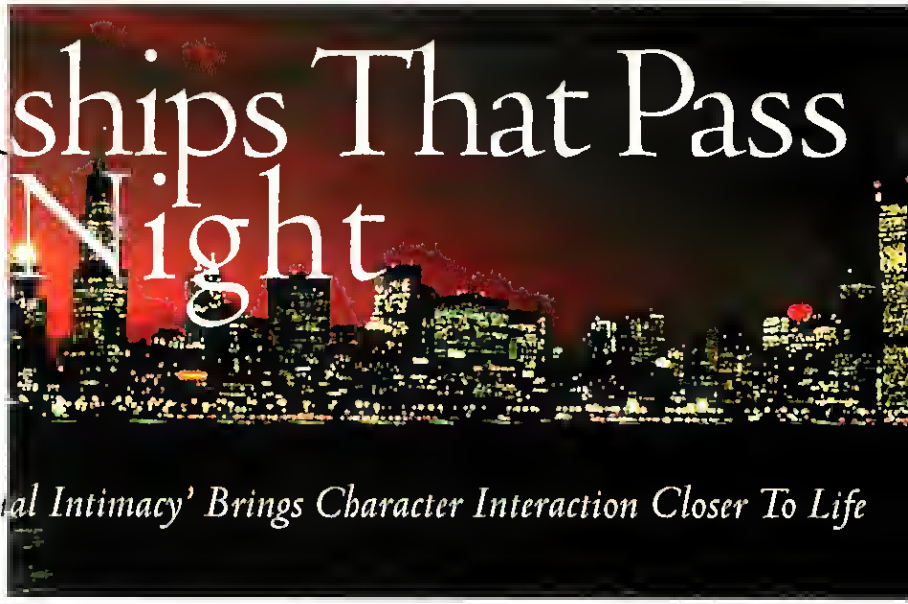
Relationships That Pass In The Night



MIDNIGHT STRANGER's 'Virtual Intimacy' Brings Character Interaction Closer To Life

by Eden Maxwell

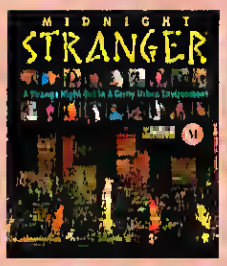
MATURE AUDIENCES WILL FIND THEMSELVES CAPTIVATED BY MIDNIGHT STRANGER FROM THE opening screen, since it doesn't play any games with sophomoric introductions. When you're dropped into this dark and digitized world, get ready to land on your social skills with your conscience on the firing line and your values up for grabs.

Imagine waking up in a strange, sprawling, dangerous, compelling, gritty metropolis without a friend or a clue as to where to go or who to talk to. Unlike other such hackneyed plot devices, you don't have amnesia, and you aren't running from gangsters or the law because you've murdered someone—at least, not yet. You're free to be yourself, or act out deviant behavior hidden behind that suit of propriety inside your psychological closet.

Through an innovative approach to first-person interaction, you control the plot, where you go, and inevitably how the story plays out. You are both director and performer. Visit a cafe, nightclub, restaurant, movie, the theater, or haunts of fringe elements and the very weird. As you roam freely from one location to another, you can connect with up to 18 different people. Certain individuals are critical to the core story, others supporting, still others merely backdrop. After encountering several of the main players, subtle links evolve and involve you as you become part of the plot, which has hundreds of variations that depend on your mood and rapport with those you encounter.

The cast of characters includes men and women from a variety of backgrounds, interests and persuasions: a hood, a comedian, a lesbian, an actress, a party girl, a woman with multiple personalities, an artist talking about John Lily and aliens, and an Albert Camus and Tom Robbins-quoting bum, to name a few. Some characters are open, others cautious, others appealing, still others dangerous. What are their motives, and what secrets, if any, do they have to hide? Things are often not what they appear to be, which is the point and strength of the game's value. Then, there's the issue of the player's own behavior. How much can you be influenced by others? Will your values and better judgment wane under pressure? Will you commit a violent crime? Will you avert a murder? Will you meet the lady of your dreams?

MIDNIGHT STRANGER



Price: $69.95
System Requirements: Color Macintosh (68030-25Mhz or better recommended), 8-bit 13" monitor or larger, 8MB RAM, CD-ROM
Protection: None
Audience: Adults Only (18+), contains some nudity and strong language
Designer: Simon Goodwin, Jeff Green
Publisher: Gazelle Technologies, Inc.
San Diego, CA
(800) 237-6675

FACES COME OUT OF THE RAIN

A sense of realism within a complex plot of varying possibilities is achieved by combining muted, color photographs for locations with live motion QuickTime videos for interactive conversations and key action sequences. There are also funky touches within the story such as a film, performance art, stand-up comedians, plus an original musical soundtrack, and a live rock band with a catchy nihilistic tech-noir beat.

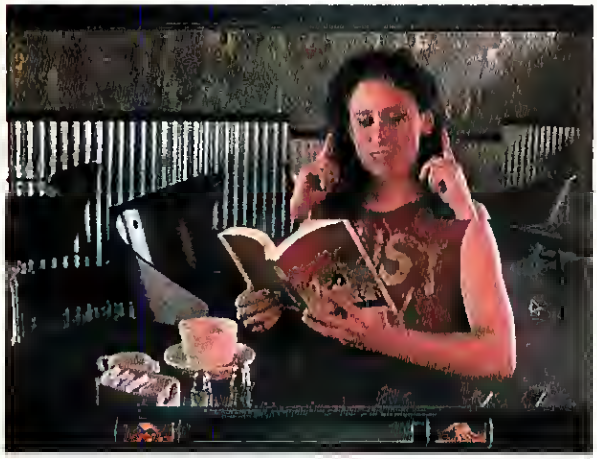
What distinguishes STRANGER from a superficial multimedia offering is an intelligent script that elevates key characters from objects to people you develop feelings for—positive and negative. As you move from one location to another, each still does a slow dissolve into another scene, as does your suspension of belief. As you slowly become a thread in the tapestry of events, this dark, artificial world becomes eerily lifelike. You make emotional decisions and guide conversations, which may involve you in experiences that might turn violent, sensual, bizarre or amusing within a framework of adult themes: love, sex, philosophy, profanity and criminal behavior. To add a sort of "X Files" effect to the goings on, there's a lost alien artifact that some would kill for. Strange powers may be within your grasp if you can find the off-world object.

Circle Reader Service #184

STREETS ARE UP EVEN WHEN YOU'RE DOWN

Opening screens vary, showing a location photo within the cityscape, with traffic, sirens, horns, and other sounds filling the night air. To get around town, you position the cursor on the scene (a door, down the street, a building, etc.) until it becomes a directional icon: go, enter, exit, and so on. Once you enter a situation, you move about (within the still photo environment) and find a character of interest. If the cursor says "Talk," then clicking activates a rectangular portion of the picture into live motion video. The character begins speaking while the surrounding scene remains a photo still. Although not the most elegant solution to current technological limitations, this trade-off approach works well enough to maintain the intended illusion.

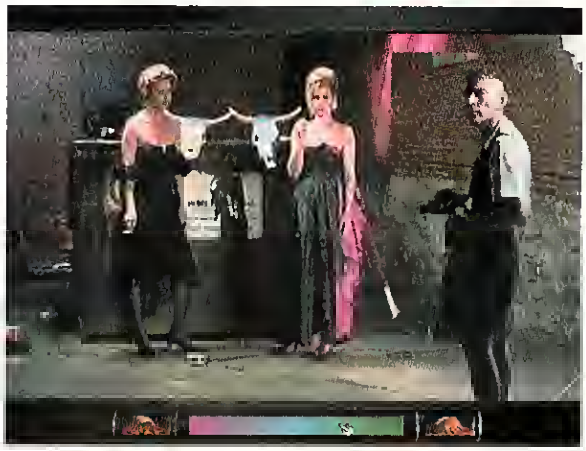
Realistic communication with virtual characters in real time has been the essential missing byte in interactive games. STRANGER has partially succeeded in overcoming this hurdle with what the developers call "Virtual Intimacy." The simulation projects the subjective atmosphere of reality; the characters appear as if they're actually talking to the player,



CAFE SHIVA Despite gestures in QuickTime that conflict with the still image, this actress' performance is top notch.

and there is no finite duration, conclusion, or solution.

A Mood Bar, a color scale on the bottom of the screen, is the pump of the Virtual Intimacy engine that beats interactive life into this simulation. Instead of selecting from pre-written textual questions or replies to make conversation, the Mood Bar represents an emotional expression. You respond by clicking along a color scale (ranging from red negative to green positive) that suggests your dialog based on feeling, which remains abstract. The premise is that you are saying something appropriate to the exchange, determined by the degree and shade of color selected.



YOU'RE PERFECT, HOP IN With no history and no identity, your character can comfortably jump into many scenarios, like this back-alley guerrilla photo shoot.

Characters say and do things based on how you steer the conversation. As characters speak to you, they invite a response. Dialog can be sophisticated, strong, intellectually stimulating, and sometimes sexy. The experimental, fun part is not knowing how a character will react to your mood. For example, will a young lady you've just met respond to keen interest, mild interest, or a "who cares?" attitude? Occasionally, a character's response indicates you have made a clear-cut statement, which supports the illusion of conversation and may call for creative reflection on your part.

Although non-specific (you really don't know what you said, only how you feel), typical instances along the Mood Bar scale might reflect mild interest to distaste, casual encouragement, passive neutrality, and nuances of negative indifference in between. Responses can also swing from joy to anger to fear, or a simple yes or no. The range and number of these emotions varies from situation to situation; the idea is to play with your moods and see what happens. Some characters are fickle as they may respond differently from game to game, even though your mood is consistent.

If enough real time has elapsed, you might happen upon an "ending," a statement or action by the character(s) you are with that triggers a cue for a conclusion and for the credits to roll. This isn't a limitation, but a reinforcement of the mode of play. An ending represents an experience, a finished work that might be viewed as winning in the traditional gaming sense. Players wishing to re-experience a film with another attitude from a particular point, or resume the action at another time, can save games. At any time from within a film session, players can opt for starting a new game, and be transported to a new location to begin with.

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One thing's for sure, it's going to be a long and bumpy night.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

MIDNIGHT STRANGER

RATING ✸ ✸ ✸

PROS An interesting experiment in rich, character-based storytelling. The acting and writing stands out in the current sea of multi-mediocre performances.

CONS Limited replay. The "mood bar" interface still leaves us looking for an elegant solution to the problem of "interactive dialogue."

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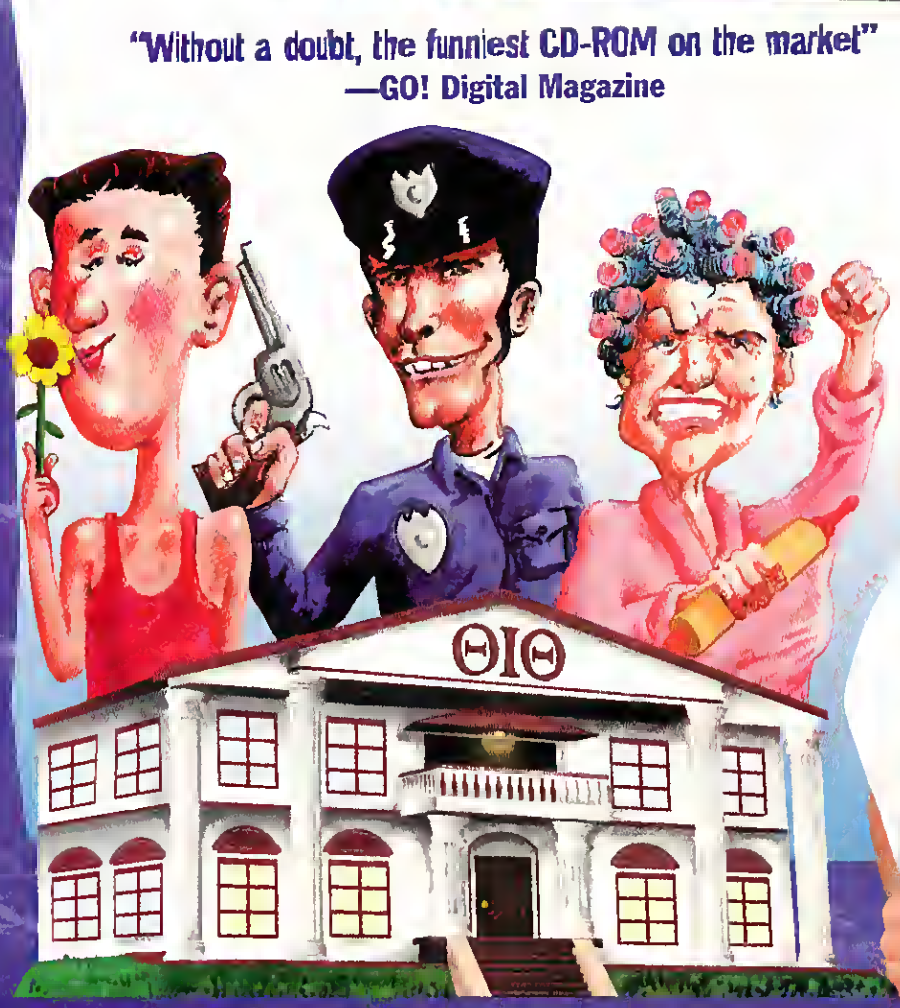

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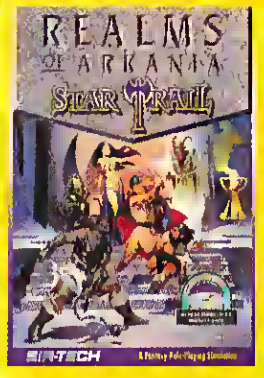

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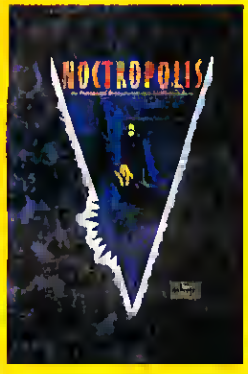

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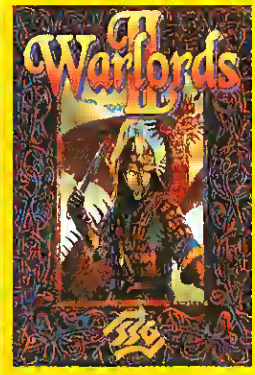

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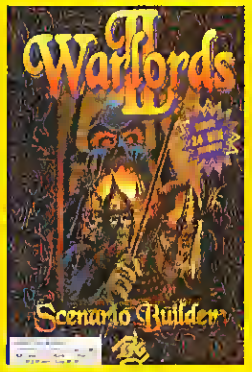

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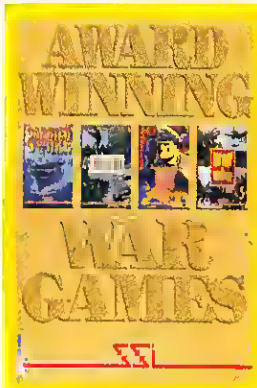

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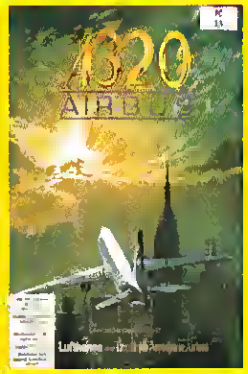

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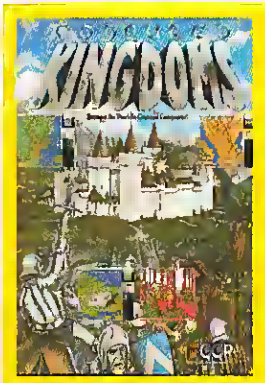

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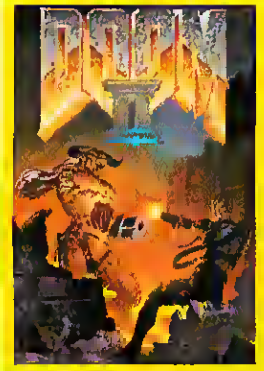

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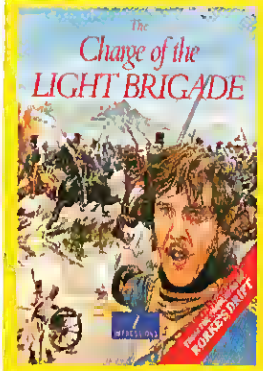

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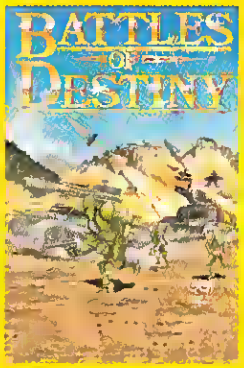

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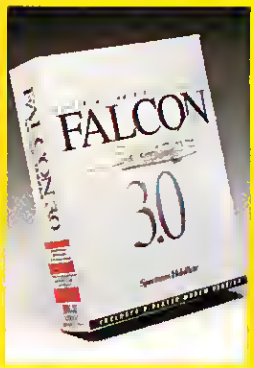

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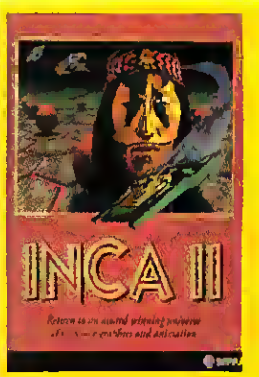

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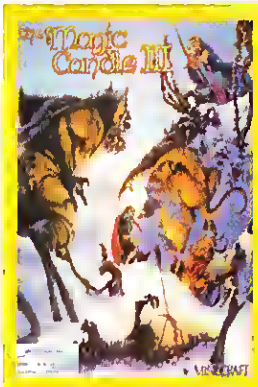

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The TIEs That Bind

Unify The Galaxy Under The Emperor's Iron Hand In LucasArts' TIE FIGHTER

by Jeff James

THE WORLD OF FICTION IS FILLED WITH DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED FORCES: KING ARTHUR AND Morgan LeFay, Robin Hood and Prince John, Gandalf and Sauron. In the world of George Lucas' *Star Wars* trilogy, those irreconcilable positions are held by Darth Vader, as evil representative of the Empire, and Luke Skywalker, the fair-haired poster child of the Rebel Alliance. In X-WING, **LucasArts'** first attempt at bringing the Star Wars saga to computer gamers, the player was cast as a young starfighter pilot fighting for the Rebels. With the release of TIE FIGHTER, LucasArts has made an enormous shift in the Force, giving gamers the chance to take the controls of an Imperial TIE fighter and become the Empire's agent of retribution against the Rebel Alliance.

TIE FIGHTER

Price: $63.95
Requirements: 18M compatible 386-33Mhz (486 recommended), 1M8 RAM (2M8 recommended), VGA graphics, 15 M8 hard drive space, joystick, supports PAS, Roland, Sound Blaster (Pro, 16, AWE32) sound cards.
Protection: Documentation check
Designers: Lawrence Holland and Edward Kilham
Publisher: LucasArts
San Rafael, CA
(800) STAR WAR

UNIONISTS AND TERRORISTS

In casting the player as an agent of the Empire, LucasArts created an interesting moral dilemma. How can players fight against the Rebels—heroes of the Star Wars films—and cozy up to the Empire? Presenting the Empire in a positive light is a task that would make even the most accomplished of political spin doctors blanch, but LucasArts has handled this delicate issue with aplomb, casting the Empire in a new—yet ultimately baneful—light. Instead of being the band of goose-stepping intergalactic thugs that movie-goers saw in the three Star Wars films, the Empire in TIE FIGHTER is portrayed as a unionist force promoting law and order throughout the galaxy. Much like the North during the American Civil War, the Empire is attempting to restore order to a war-torn society and keep the Empire in one piece. The rebels are painted in broad, blood-soaked strokes as ruthless terrorists and pirates. The player is thrown into the mix as a fresh recruit in the Imperial Navy, ready to risk all to rid the galaxy of those pesky Rebel scum.

Unlike X-WING, which held more closely to the original concept of the films, TIE FIGHTER incorporates data from many sources. In addition to the three *Star Wars* films, TIE FIGHTER draws inspiration from Timothy Zahn's *Star Wars* novels which, among other embellishments, introduce the nefarious Admiral Thrawn. This commingling of creative sources results in a deeper game world than that of X-WING, filled with the gritty detail that Star Wars fans will appreciate.

FIT TO BE TIED

The heart of TIE FIGHTER is what ultimately made its progenitor so successful: an addictively playable polygon-generated flight experience. TIE FIGHTER brings a mound of new features and improvements to the venerable flight model used in X-WING, with the most noticeable being the improved graphic quality. Each of the objects in TIE are Gouraud shaded, making each appear more defined and realistic. Computer-controlled ships react more intelligently during combat, performing intricate maneuvers and appearing to fly as if their pilots actually wanted to survive to see another mission.

TIE FIGHTER also brings a number of welcome improvements to the cockpit. In X-WING, a static picture of the selected target provided a limited amount of information on the currently targeted craft. In TIE FIGHTER, that display has been re-

placed by a real-time, 3D, angled view of a target, with more detailed information on the shield, hull and system strength of the craft. For even more info, pressing the "Z" key will bring up the threat display, which offers detailed information on the weapons, target and status of the selected ship. One irksome foible in X-WING concerned the defense of mission-critical craft: in a swirling melee of fighters and other vessels, it was difficult to determine which ships were actually attacking the vessel you were attempting to defend. In TIE FIGHTER, you simply target the craft needing protection, then press the "A" key. This will immediately highlight and target the nearest attacker of the targeted craft, which is extremely useful for defending weak-shielded transports and the like. In the map department, the flat 2-D map in X-WING has been replaced with a 3-D flight map in which you can use the mouse or joystick to zoom in, zoom out and circle around all the craft in the vicinity.

GOT THOSE HEADHUNTER BLUES A TIE Advanced pulls escort duty for a Star Destroyer and tries to stay intact despite losing its front shields in a scrape with Rebel forces.

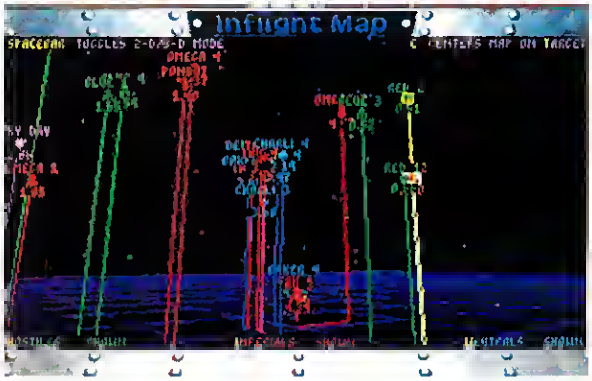
JUST LIKE SHOOTING BEGGARS BACK IN REBEL'S CANYON

One of the most controversial aspects of the original X-WING was the migraine-inducing difficulty of some of the missions. While some missions where relatively simple to complete, others required an almost supernatural level of coordination and reflexes, leaving some players practically ripping their joysticks to splinters after repeated mission failures. Thankfully, TIE FIGHTER provides a number of solutions to this problem. First, there are three difficulty levels: "easy" for novice players, "medium" for standard play, and "hard" for masochists. Playing at the easy level will cause a 25% point penalty to be allotted in each mission, while playing at the hard level adds a 25% point bonus.

Second, no TIE fighter is an island; you can usually call for reinforcements during a battle by pressing "SHIFT-S." Supply vessels are usually available if you need to reload your missiles or torpedoes during the battle. Finally, a flight officer provides you with a helpful menu of advice and information, both before and after the battle has been fought.

Just as in X-WING, TIE FIGHTER provides a number of training and mission options. In the training simulator, the player must navigate an Imperial craft through a series of obstacle-filled tubes. Accomplish four training levels in the same craft and you're awarded a training patch. Next up is the combat chamber, which gives players the opportunity to put each of the craft through their paces in a variety of combat missions. The combat chamber can also be used to replay battles that have already been fought in actual combat missions. As the player progresses through combat after combat, the completed missions will appear here, ready for replay. The tech room provides a rotating 3D image and a variety of stats on each craft in the game, while the film room allows you to view your latest exploits on tape. Finally, the battles section—similar to a Tour of Duty in X-WING—puts you into front line action.

At the outset, there are only four battles available covering expected Imperial conflicts: pursuing rebels, quelling civil war, building a base on the galaxy frontier, and battling pirates on the outer rim. As the player advances through the storyline, more battles become available.



FRIEND OR REBEL SCUM? The flight map shows the position of bogies, friendlies, and neutrals in both 2- and 3-D.

Perhaps the most impressive element of TIE FIGHTER is the plot and setting. The Empire is filled with intrigue and rife with treachery, with secret societies and other factions vying for ultimate control of the Empire. This complexity of plot and setting goes several steps beyond the storyline presented in the X-WING series, in which the comparatively ho-hum story always pitted the player against the forces of the Empire. In one battle, an opportunistic Admiral decides to defect from the Empire and side with the rebels, which ultimately results in a

conflict in which TIE fighters and star destroyers are battling one another. For faithful X-WING pilots who consider themselves to be Rebel to the core, this engagement gives them the opportunity to finally give in to the good side and blast some TIEs.

In keeping with the layered storyline, players can choose two paths of advancement in the Imperial Navy. In the first, players can simply accept the missions given by their officer and advance through the ranks normally. But in addition, the player can join the Secret Order of the Emperor, a secret society of Imperial officers dedicated to the Emperor and his aims. As expected, the Empire is extremely intolerant of incompetence: fail too many missions, and your pilot is likely to be shipped off to a sweltering jungle Gulag for an indefinite vacation.

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE IMPERIAL WAFFEN

A rich game world amounts to nothing if you don't have a speedy craft equipped with laser cannons to explore it. TIE FIGHTER doesn't disappoint, giving players an impressive number of Imperial craft to pilot. In addition to the standard TIE fighter, TIE FIGHTER give players the chance to sit behind the controls of the TIE interceptor, TIE bomber, Assault Gunboat, and the very latest in TIE technology: the TIE Advanced. If the player chooses to delve into the campaign games, an even more powerful TIE fighter will be developed and placed into service: the TIE Defender, a three-winged terror that is sure to give Rebel pilots the jitters.

LOAD IT FOR BEAR Unlike X-WING, you can equip your Imperial craft with armaments like advanced torpedoes and tractor beams to fry Rebel craft like a womp rat in a reactor vent.

At the beginning, however, the player must make due with the standard TIE, a flying deathtrap that tends to rupture like a thin-shelled piñata at the first sign of trouble. Thankfully, the standard TIE is generally employed in missions where the opposition is mediocre at best.

In addition to new craft to fly, powerful new weaponry becomes available through the course of the game. Advanced missiles and torpedoes fly faster, track longer and inflict more damage than their less-advanced counterparts. Still further into the game, advanced secret weapons—such as a pint-sized tractor beam to lasso a fast moving target and reel it in for the kill—become available.

In addition to new fighters, the world of TIE FIGHTER is filled with more than a dozen new types of support craft. New mine and container types provide an endlessly diverse mix of obstacles to destroy and avoid, while new transport and attack craft are given for both the Rebels and the Empire. Even the ship class to which the notorious Millennium Falcon belongs is included—the speedy Corellian transport. Included among the new Imperial capital ships is the Interdictor Star Destroyer, a deadly craft which has the nasty capability of preventing hyperspace travel within a certain range, perfect for capturing enemy vessels.

Every pilot fights better with a rousing fight song filling his ears, and Imperial pilots are no exception. The music is artfully crafted, with a driving, martial tempo not unlike a forceful Red Army marching tune crossed with a heroic John Williams soundtrack. As in X-WING, LucasArts has reproduced the unique sounds of the Star Wars universe—such as the screeching wail of a TIE fighter and the sizzling "blat" of a Rebel laser cannon—with remarkable accuracy.

DEBRIEFING

As polished as TIE FIGHTER is, a few blemishes are apparent. Although the graphics are improved over X-WING, they fall short when compared to the texture-mapped objects found in other products. LucasArts opted for the more responsive gameplay that polygon graphics provide, resulting in greater playability. The argument between graphics quality and playability is a heated one, and TIE strikes a nearly ideal balance. TIE shares a few limitations with X-WING: players can't choose their spacecraft when fighting in battle missions—you fly what you are assigned. TIE also does not allow players to assign their own wingmen. In the Orwellian world of the Empire, your wingmen have been chosen for you. Finally, X-WING grognards may find many of the missions—even at the "Hard" difficulty setting—to be a bit on the easy side.

These quibbles detract little from what is a clearly superlative product. There simply isn't much to dislike about the game. With its addictive game-play, pulse-pounding soundtrack and engrossing storyline, TIE FIGHTER is clearly the best space combat game yet released from the creative folks at LucasArts. Modem and serial support would have been welcome, but enough said. The Empire will have you, young one; serve well, and you will have your reward.

DON'T SHOOT OR I'LL MOVE A TIE Defender spot welds a Rebel Corvette with quad laser cannon. A couple more shots like that and the crew will be sucking vacuum.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

TIE FIGHTER

RATING ★★★★★

PROS An excellent sequel to a gaming classic. TIE FIGHTER brings loads of new and improved features, and a great story to a proven game system.

CONS Veteran X-Wingers may scoff at the easier mission difficulty.

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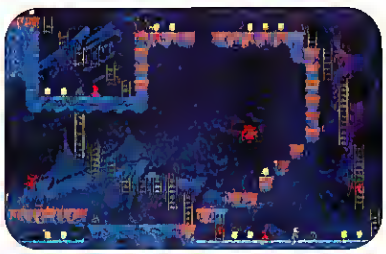

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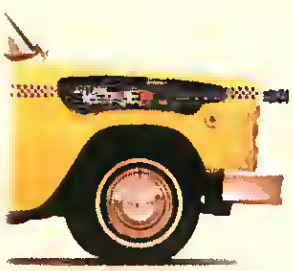

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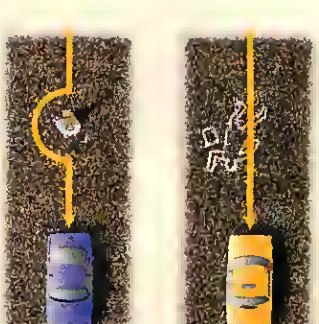

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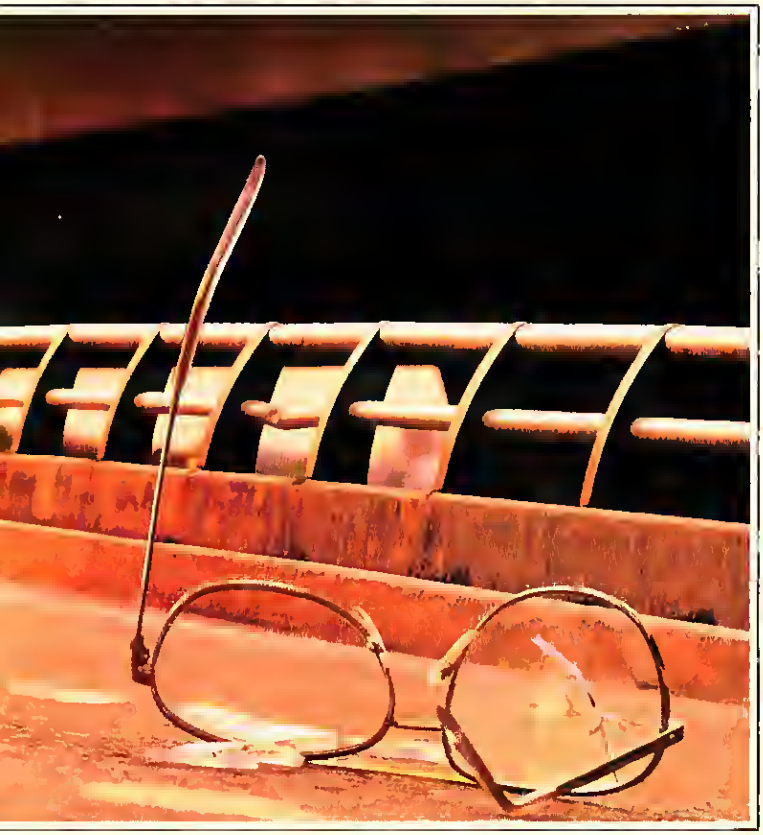

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Fighting With The Rank And Vile

SSI's DARK LEGIONS Combines Good Graphics, Bad AI, And Ugly Creatures

by Dave Pyron

THE ENEMY MINIONS ADVANCE, THEIR GROTESQUE SHAPES SILHOUETTED AGAINST A BLOODY SUNSET. Although we've maneuvered well and are prepared for battle, our front ranks are caught by surprise as a Scream of Terror, the battle cry of a Demon, rattles the teeth of our stunned troops. Horrible to behold, the Demon quickly dominates the battlefield with its supporting ranks of foul mouthed, flatulent Orcs. My front legions show signs of breaking—I can wait no longer, and I unleash my own legions of darkness. A Fire Elemental, swift and deadly, dances its fiery flamenco within the Orcish ranks, sending the survivors fleeing for cover in which to lick their smoking wounds. Adding to the confusion is an Illusionist who makes the Fire Elemental appear to be everywhere at once. My Shapeshifter transforms to fight fire with fire, and catches the elemental by surprise, sending it back to the Netherworld in disgrace. With the enemy in disarray, I send in my Berzerkers to finish off the scattered troops. Even before the last Orc skull has been bashed, I give thanks to the appropriate deities and begin the ritual cleansing, for my mind is already far from the battleground, searching for the final hiding place of the mysterious Orb of Power. It is said that he who controls the Orb, has all the world at his command.

DARK LEGIONS

Price: $69.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 3B6-33 or better, 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 40MB hard drive space (full CD installation), CD-ROM drive, supports most major sound cards. Floppy and CD versions available.
# of Players: 1 or 2 (modem)
Protection: Documentation Check (floppy), None (CD-ROM)
Designer: Silicon Knights
Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc.
Sunnyvale, CA
(800) 245-4525

THE DARK SIDE OF ARCHON

SSI's DARK LEGIONS is a hybrid game of strategy and action that owes no small debt to the first such hybrid game, ARCHON. Like ARCHON, DARK LEGIONS can be bloodlessly cleaved in half, leaving two distinct parts: the strategic portion, where players carefully maneuver their characters much like a game of chess; and the action screen or battle map where two "pieces" duel to the death. In this way, the game is a well rounded exercise that demands both reflex and reflection, muscle and mind.

Before engaging in a battle, you must choose between several "quick start" scenarios or a "setup" game. The quick start scenarios make good introductions for novice players, since the difficulty settings are set on the "hopeless" or "weak" scale. Of course, most players will soon find these pre-fab skirmishes lacking in depth, and will graduate to the recruiting and map selection that is the strategic core of the "setup" games.

Customization is the key, as up to 50 characters may be purchased and distributed strategically about the battle map alongside deadly traps and magical rings. Players will find themselves up to their waist bands in options and possibilities, with potential terror and mayhem limited only by their imagination.

The rings, of which up to five may be given to any of your valiant soldiers, increase character attributes such as power, stamina, speed, life-force and rejuvenation. Skillful allocation of these magical aids will prove invaluable to your fantastic forces, often giving your chosen warriors the extra edge needed to survive even the deadliest armed encounter. Strategically placed magical traps can bring the most deadly of opponents to an ignoble end: pushed over the brink to insanity, immolated by an uncaring flame, or perhaps sucked into a vortex and flushed into the sewers of space-time.

Victory in DARK LEGIONS is achieved by killing the enemy's Orb-Holder, the character you have designated during game setup. The bearer of the Orb doesn't actually lend any strength other than his presence to the battlefield, but he must be protected at all costs; in this way, he is much like a king in Chess. Generally, it is a good idea to assign suitable escorts to the Orb Holder lest a fast moving Wraith or Water Elemental execute a surprise attack and "grope" or flood his way to victory. Although a strong warrior such as a Demon is often given the Orb, particularly crafty opponents may seek to deceive an unwary rival by giving the Orb to an orc or other lesser creature.

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COMING SOON

Impressions

IMPRESSIONS SOFTWARE INC.,
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LIVE BY THE SWORD, DIE BY THE DEMON

After selection and placement of warriors, rings, and traps in the starting zone, your characters will advance, move by move, across the battlefield and engage your opponent in a mortal duel. Mastery of the particular strengths and weaknesses of each of your characters is essential in battle. Fire Elementals sling fireballs faster than a Roman Candle, but are powerless when confronted by their nemesis, the Water Elementals. Lumbering across the landscape, Trolls carry a vicious-looking club that can crush an opponent with one swing, yet are slow to evade attacks by an adept Vampire. Perhaps the most fearsome, however, are the Demons. Four clawed arms combine with searing fire-breath, allowing Demons to fillet and fry their opponents as if they were Satan's master barbecue chef.

Other battlefield denizen rely far less on brute force. Thieves' gymnastic abilities give them a defensive advantage, but their small throwing daggers are of little effect in most encounters. Vampires flit about serenely, then suddenly swoop to drain the life-force of their victims. Wraiths reach out to unwary prey, with bony hands clutching vital energy from their foe. Their cousins, the Phantoms, use the cloak of invisibility to sneak in close and taint the living flesh of their victims with their leprous appendages. While expensive, Conjurers are invaluable if your forces are thinned in battle, as they summon additional creatures to the party.

UGLY SONS OF WITCHES The forces of light (Berserker and Fire Elemental) face the fearsome forces of darkness (Demons, Berserker, Orc and Troll) on the strategic map.

YOU SHALL DROWN (IF YOU DON'T CLOBBER ME) The player's Water Elemental mounts a Tidal Wave Attack against a Troll in combat mode.

YOU SHALL BURN

The graphics and sounds of DARK LEGIONS are as finely tuned as the balance between action and strategy. During individual battles, both combatants grunt, wheeze, scream, and hiss in keeping with the action. At the moment of death, a cry of agony gurgles forth from the vanquished. Each piece also has a trademark challenge or remark that it makes upon entering into battle. The demon growls, "You shall feel pain," while the sub-mental troll drools out, "Me crush you." These audio bits and blurbs added so much to the quality of the game that I found myself looking forward to a fight, if only to hear the war cry of the Fire Elemental, "You shall burn!"

Also noteworthy is the attention to graphic detail. Each warrior appears as an artful fantasy of vibrant colors and subtle shading. Demons are drawn in hell-fire red, wizards wear rippling cloaks of dark blue, and the putrid mauve of Orcs makes one think of carrion. The characters move in accord with their physical form: Trolls clump clumsily, humanoids hulk, elementals warp and twist in supple slitherings, and Vampire Bats flap through the air like pteranodon. At the same time, like a musical motif, a sound characteristic of each creature accompanies its moves. Just slightly overdone, this aspect could become tedious after several days of play, but it provides an element lacking in so many games of this genre. The battle map undergoes a daily cycle of daylight, dusk, and dark, with no small effect on the strengths and weaknesses of the combatants, and through it all, lightning and thunder crackle, providing percussion for the haunting music. The presentation, on a whole, is captivating; even after many hours of play, I am still intrigued by DARK LEGION's spectacles.

A SIDE TOO DARK

Unfortunately, DARK LEGIONS has some unintentionally dark corners. The prolonged setup time when playing by modem requires players to have monumental patience. Worse is the unfairness of the computer intelligence at higher difficulty levels. During setup matches, the computer can be awarded up to twice as many points as its human counterpart to allow for the presumably inferior intellect of the computer. Good computer intelligence is crucial to any strategy game, and I looked forward to a cunning and shrewd opponent. It was with dismay that, instead, I faced a numerically superior force, but with the same klutzy moves used in the "easy" levels. One also feels cheated when dueling in the arcade portion of the game at upper levels. Again, the computer pieces are given extra skill points, supposedly to deal with the superior reflexes of we humans. This becomes especially frustrating when your lethal, almost godlike, demons are defeated handily by the likes of mere orcs or berserkers.

If the design team had spent some quality time with the computer intelligence, DARK LEGIONS could have been an all-time winner. As it is, it's a beautiful game that offers a lot up front, but quickly peters out.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

DARK LEGIONS

RATING ★★★1/2

PROS A great mix of strategy and action that requires both brains and brawn. Hot graphics and sound.

CONS Modem play is oppressively slow. Computer opponent is weighted unfairly. Higher difficulty levels grant the computer more "numbers" rather than more smarts, making the arcade action frustrating.

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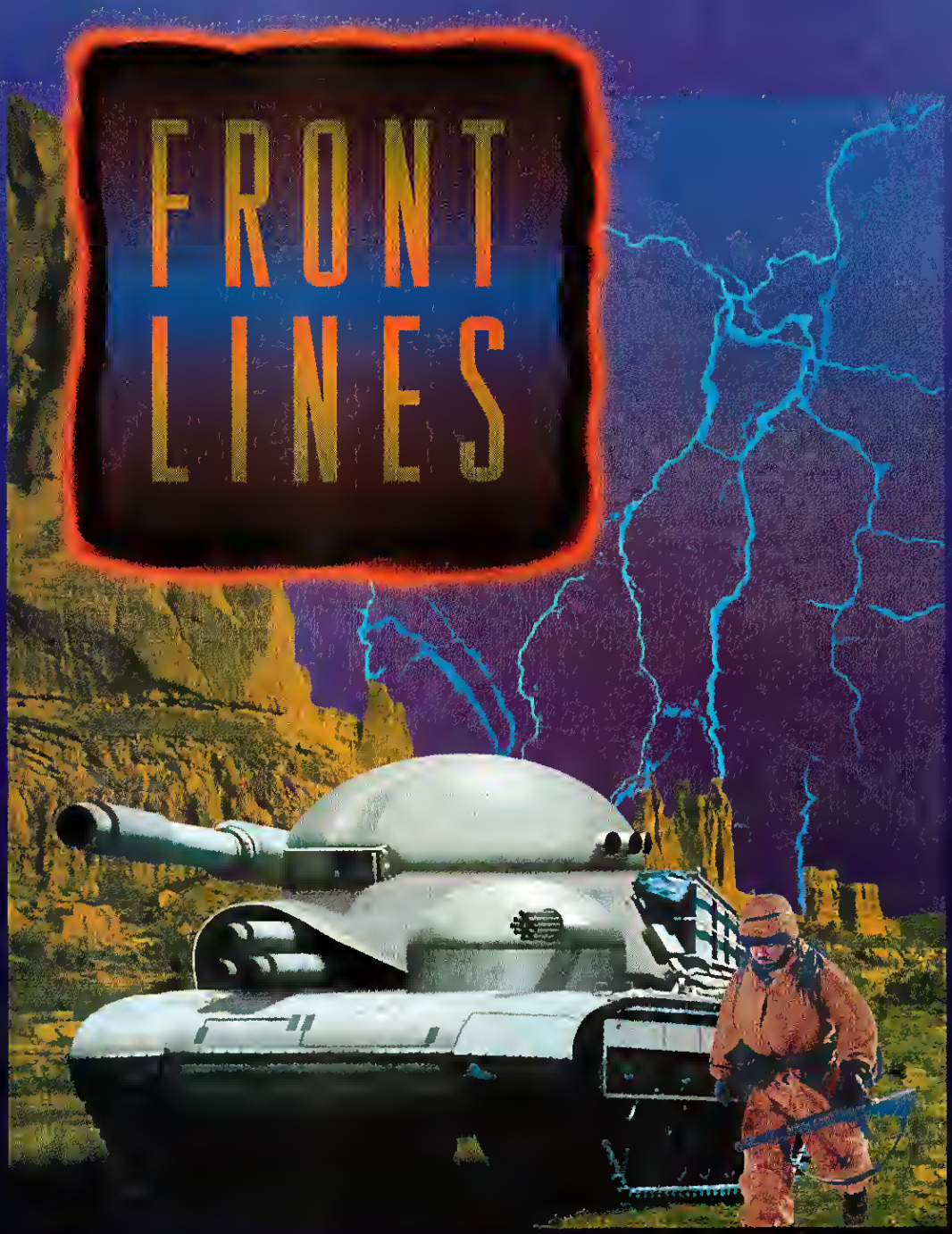

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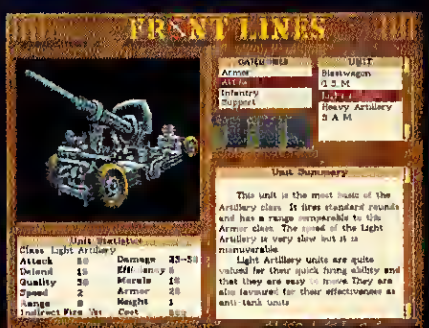

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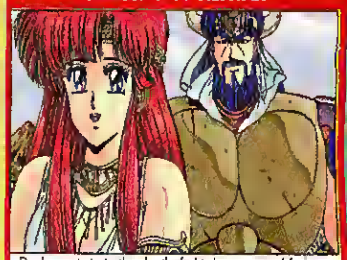

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36045 Unnecessary Roughness '95	34
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35812 ESPN: Let's Play Tennis	29
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34613 FreeLancer 2120	41
35312 Front Page Sports: Baseball	45
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35737 Lost Eden	56
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33703 MPEG - Dragon's Lair	40
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GRAVIS IBM #35133 **$92**

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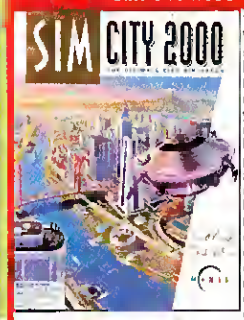
JUST SOFTWORKS IBM CD #35841 **$29**

SIM CITY 2000



The exciting Windows version is now here! Get all the realism, run the city of your dreams: raise taxes, build solar powerplants, zoos, push education bills through the city council. Fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, maybe an alien invasion might make your job a challenge -or a disaster. Bring this city to life, get SIMCITY 2000 the ultimate city simulator. Another SIM Challenge!

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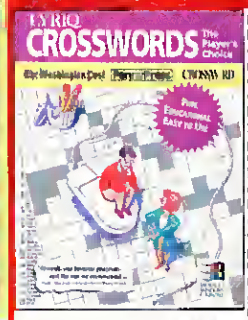

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34987 AD&D: Genie's Curse	43
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28445 Aces over Europe	37
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35740 Across the Rhine Scenario	30
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33809 Alone in the Dark II	34
33371 Arena Elder Scrolls	39
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25445 Battle of Britain 2 - WINDOWS	35
34742 Big One - WINDOWS	30
34762 Blitzkrieg	41
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33602 D-Day: Operation Overlord	30
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34765 Down Patrol	41
30897 Day of the Tentacle: Man ac II	34
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32010 Detroit	41
34307 Disciples of Steel	35
33894 Doom I: Knee-Deep in the Dead	7
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29854 Spear of Destiny	30
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35723 Star Crusader	34
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34341 Star Trek: DSN - The Hunt	41
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36041 Unnecessary Roughness '95	34
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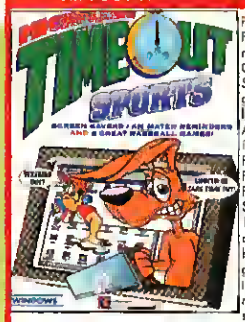

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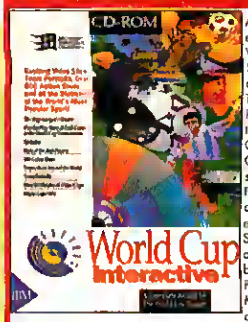

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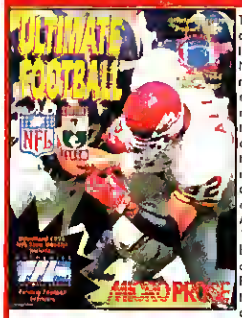

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34167 Astrochase	35
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30493 Carriers At War	41
27185 Castles II	35
30891 Citadel of the Dead	18
29214 Civilization	45
34304 CyberRace	41
32714 Dark Seed	39
34027 Detroit	41
33534 Empire Deluxe	35
34610 Evolution	30
33089 F117A Stealth Fighter	40
33737 Flight Commander	41
26045 Flight Simulator 4.0	44
21495 Flying Nightmares	41
34612 FreeLancer 2120	35
34883 G-Nelix	46
34172 Gabriel Knight	42
25497 Harpoon II	41
35351 Incredible Toons	34
29667 Indiana Jones Fate of Atlantis	35
35440 Inherit the Earth Orb Quest	35
33995 Jeopardy Sports Edition	26
32703 Jeopardy with Alex Trebeck	25
30832 King's Quest VI	42
30705 Legend of Kyrandia	35
33398 Leisure Suit Larry VI	37
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35374 Links Pinehurst Country	21
35321 Lode Runner	34
31684 M4 Sherman Tank	35
32969 Mac Attack	21
32970 Mac Full O Humans	26
32841 Mare Incredible Machines	27
33466 Oxyd Magnum	37
33824 PGA Tour Golf II	40
32172 Pathway into Darkness	37
34174 Police Quest IV	38
35289 Populous II	25
33826 Powermonger	32
35135 Prince of Pers a II	41
34863 Quest for Glory IV	38
34597 Raiden	30
31560 Royal Flush	37
26522 SimAnt	30
32616 SimCity 2000	40
33916 SimCity 2000 Great Disasters	15
31456 SimCity Classic	26
34799 SimCity Classic Graphics	15
28383 SimLife	30
22090 Solitaire Antics	18
35447 SpaceWard Ho! IV	30
33391 Spectre VR	35
31474 Star Trek 25th Anniversary	34
34342 Star Trek: DSN - The Hunt	41
35360 Strat-O-Matic Basketball	30
33465 Sword of Sodan	30
35159 TacOps	40
34915 Theme Park	40
35775 Tom Landry Football Deluxe	26
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33912 U-Boat	35
32971 Valkyrie	30
25515 Vegas Games Entertainment Pack	21
33635 Virtus VR	60
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34450 World at War: Operation Crusader	41
34160 Zig Zag	30

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34592 3 Balloons	30
31472 7th Guest	50
36046 All-Pro Football	35
34723 Labyrinth of Time	47
33353 Lawnmower Man	39
36026 Leisure Suit Larry VI	42
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34560 Maniac Sports	30
35443 Might & Magic World of Xeen	41
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35398 No World Order	25
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34720 Police Quest IV	42
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35942 Saturday Night Live 20th	45
35755 SimTown	CALL
25473 Sting on the Farm	32

35766 Castles II Siege & Conquest	35
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26459 Cyberplasm Formula	33
33919 Dare to Fly	41
33689 Dark Seed	39
34595 Evolution	30
35138 Firehighter	21
26874 Flying Nightmares	38
34614 FreeLancer 2120	41
34722 Gabriel Knight	45
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32951 Indiana Jones Fate of Atlantis	39
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33553 Spectre VR	42
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29639 Total Distortion	75
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32133 Virtual Tarot	30
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34224 Digital Sound Pro 16	112
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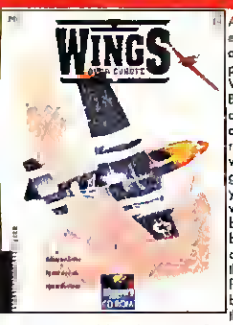

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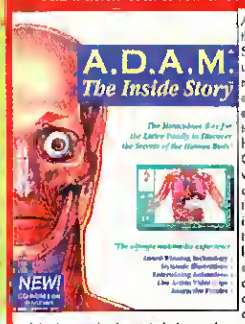

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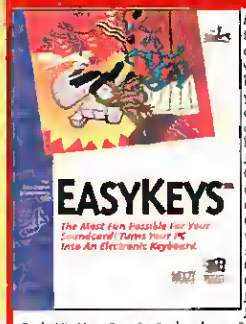

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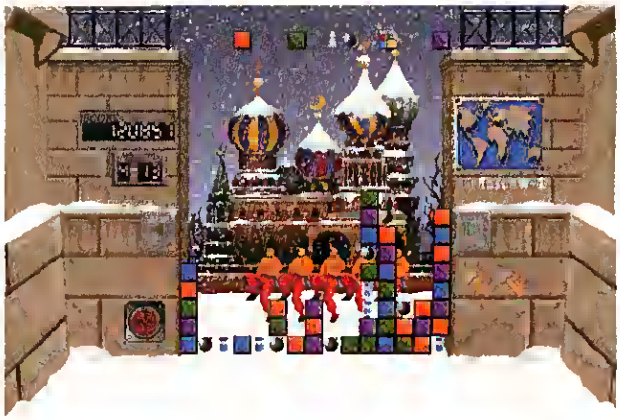
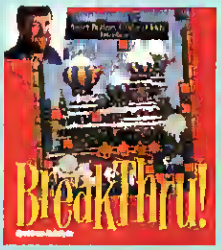


Spectrum HoloByte's BREAKTHRU! Follows In The Ideological Footsteps of TETRIS

by Charles Ardai

THE FIRST TITLE IN A NEW LINE OF TETRIS-INSPIRED PUZZLE GAMES, BREAKTHRU! SHOWS ITS LINEAGE from (you'll pardon the expression) square one. Not only does it come with an endorsement from the creator of TETRIS, Russia's Alexey Pajitnov, but it looks and sounds remarkably like its illustrious ancestor. There is the rectangular play-area set into a sketch of an international setting; there are the blocks feeding in from the top of the screen, filling up the play area as you frantically work to empty it; and there is the tinny music, goading you on to ever-greater feats of geometric obliteration.

BREAKTHRU!



Price: $39.95
System Requirements: IBM 386 or better, VGA graphics, 5MB hard drive space, Windows 3.1; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: Documentation Check
Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Alameda, CA
(510) 522-1164

So where's the difference? Unlike TETRIS, BREAKTHRU! starts with a screen already full of bricks—a wall, if you will. (It is no accident that the first backdrop is Berlin.) Your job is to deconstruct the wall, brick by brick, the gimmick being that there are four different colors of brick, and that you can only remove a brick when it is adjacent to other bricks of the same color. Click on an orange brick and it vanishes, along with all the orange bricks that share an edge with it, and all the orange bricks that share an edge with those. All bricks that were on top of the eliminated bricks fall to fill the empty spaces, thus creating a new pattern and possibly permitting additional bricks to be removed.

You can remove as few as two bricks at a time, but this is a time-consuming way to go about things, and one which tends to leave you with a lot of unremovable, solitary bricks peppering the screen: a green here, a blue there, an orange sandwiched in between. Better by far is the strategy of searching out large complexes of bricks that can be removed with a single click—or, better still, arranging for such complexes to be created as other sets of bricks are removed.

JUST ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

With plenty of time to think about what to do, you could presumably chart the optimal set of moves to get you from a full to an empty screen. However, you don't have plenty of time: there is a timer counting down the seconds on the left side of the screen, and when it reaches zero you lose one of your three lives and have to start the current screen over from scratch. You also have the new, incoming bricks to worry about. These suckers crawl along the top of the screen from right to left and then drop into the play area either when you click on them or when they decide to plummet.

Helping you clear the screen are bombs, which can only be set off if they are in the bottom row (or if they are struck by another bomb), and which destroy the contents of the squares immediately surrounding them. There are also rockets which can be set off anywhere on the screen, and which take out any bricks in their path. Finally, there are "superbricks," which look like tiny Rubik's Cubes and which, when clicked on, allow you to eliminate all bricks of a chosen color at once.

That's the nut of the game, the set of basic elements that will either hook you or not, depending on your propensity for this sort of thing. There are other elements that turn up in later screens and act as obstacles (spiders that dangle and prevent bricks above them from dropping, soda cans that can only be destroyed by an explosion); there are also a variety of gameplay options, such as the option for two players to go head-to-head in separate, half-size windows, or to compete on the same screen, or to work cooperatively to empty a single play area. These are worth enumerating and they do add variety to what would otherwise be rather static gameplay, but it's the basic game that you will either dislike or

It's coming.

CHRISTMAS OF '94.

Interplay

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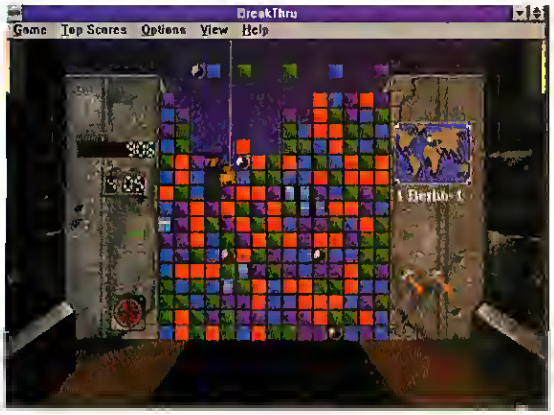
like, shelve after a single session or wake up in the middle of the night craving.

GIMME A BREAK

My reaction fell somewhere in between. BREAKTHRU! is good, old-fashioned fun, but I would not mind especially if I never played it again. In some ways it is more enjoyable than TETRIS, since it offers a greater variety of things to do and more rules and more game "pieces," but it is less of an intellectual challenge, lacks TETRIS' elegant simplicity, and is considerably less addictive.



THE BERLIN WALL Click on groups of blocks of the same color to tear down the walls of Berlin. Bombs and rockets are handy for taking out "tin cans" and other trash.

There are so many bricks on the screen when each level starts that one's first impulse is just to click blindly in the hopes of whittling the task down to size. Unfortunately, this approach works—sometimes better, sometimes worse—but it always makes the task at hand more manageable. I think any game that encourages you to start each screen with a routine or random activity diminishes itself. You have to make each move with care in TETRIS; not so here, where you sometimes have four things going on at once and too large and chaotic a pattern on the screen for you to hold in your head. It is natural to decide to click here and there and see what happens—but to the extent that this (or any) game pushes you to make that decision, it has failed to engross you and to convince you of its value as a purposeful, rule-based activity.

After a few games, obvious strategies emerge. It is a good idea to start by moving all bombs and soda cans to the bottom of the screen, since that's the only way you'll be able to get rid of them. Having done that, you watch for the superbricks; you'll always get one pretty quickly, and they make your task considerably easier. (Minimum odds of adjacency leap from 58% to 70%.) Get a second superbrick and it's all over—shooting fish in a barrel would be harder than the mop-up work you'll have left.

Is every screen easy? No. Sometimes the starting pattern is especially thorny, or you miss your chance at a superbrick, or you accidentally blow up your superbrick with a rocket. But the game's not brain surgery. On the whole, it reminds me of those place mat puzzles you used to find in diners: fun while you're waiting for your pancakes to arrive, but it doesn't break your heart if you spill syrup on them.

BREAKTHRU! hasn't got the TETRIS magic. Then again, how many games do? BREAKTHRU! is a B-grade brainteaser, an electronic fidget toy. For Windows users who have grown tired of SOLITAIRE and MINESWEEPER, it should provide an inoffensive enough way to kill some time.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BREAKTHRU!

RATING ✸✸✸

PROS Easy to learn, easy on the eyes.
CONS Easy to master, easy to forget.

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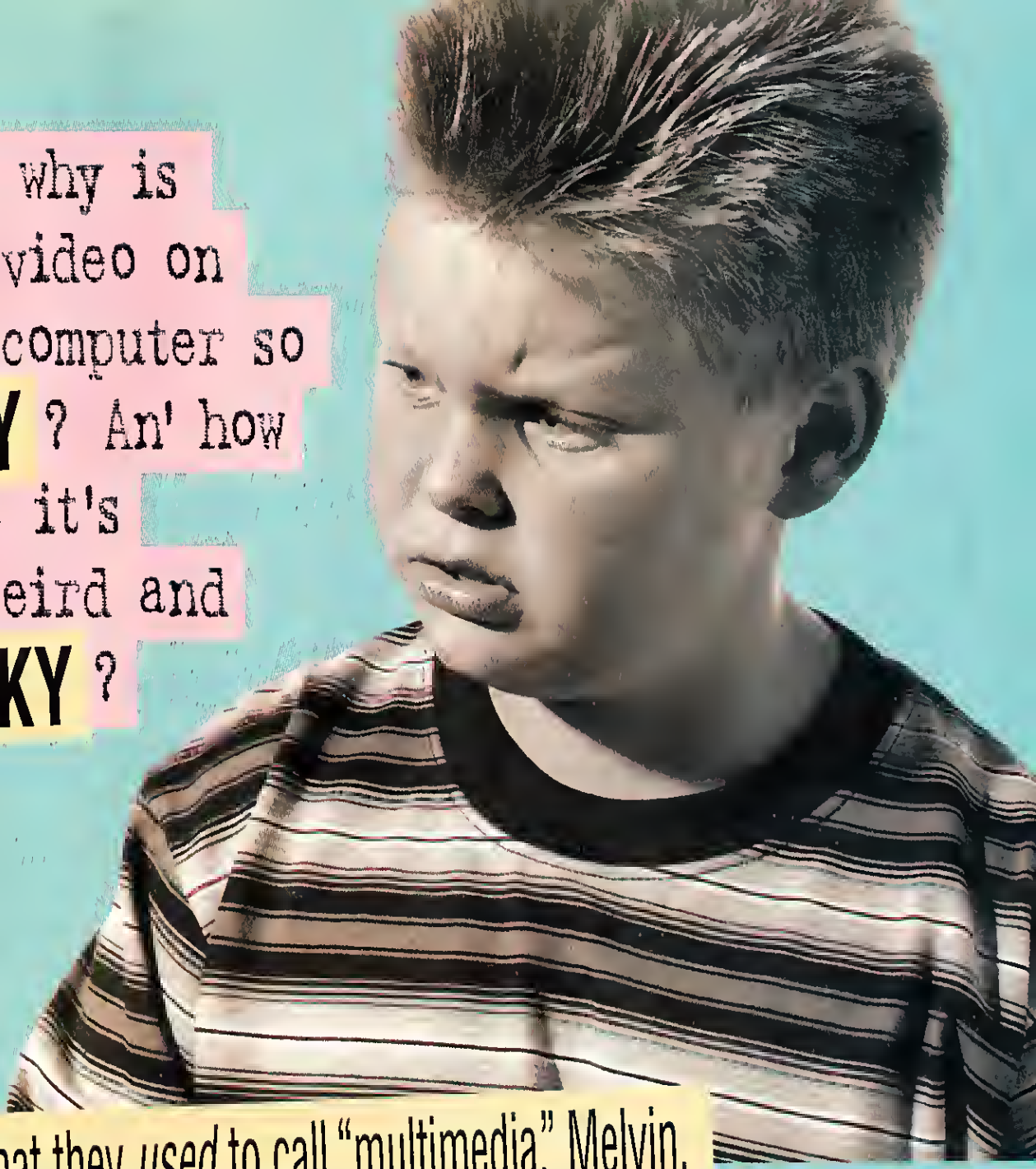

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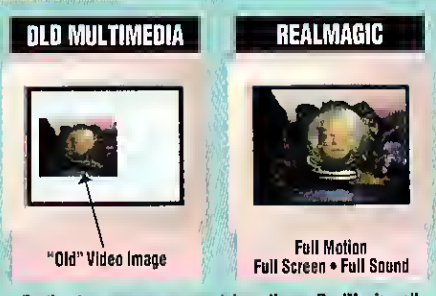

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As Big As It Gets

A Wolf In Mac Clothing

Reality Bytes Sinks Its Teeth Into 3D Action For The Mac

by Christopher Breen

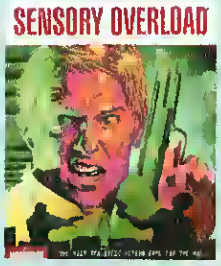
IF YOU WERE TO HAPPEN BY THE HOME OF A MACINTOSH GAME DEVELOPER LATE AT NIGHT, YOU'D BE LIKELY TO HEAR these words spoken during a pre-slumber prayer:

"Dear Lord, please allow us to release our fine, first-person-perspective 3-D shoot-'em-up before those rascals at **id Software** come up with a way to port DOOM to the Mac and make our game look less wonderful in comparison. Oh, and please consider an eternity of hell-fire for the paper-boy if he misses the porch again. Amen."

So far, the Almighty seems to be paying attention: MacDOOM is still in development and is rumored to be slated only for the Power Macintosh. That leaves the Wolfenstein-Has-Been-Done-To-Death-In-The-PC-Fresh-On-The-Mac-Because-The-User-Base-Is-So-Comparatively-Tiny-That-Most-Game-Developers-Won't-Waste-Their-Time-On-It market to **Bungie Software**'s 1993 release, PATHWAYS INTO DARKNESS, and the premiere product from **Reality Bytes Software**, SENSORY OVERLOAD.

SENSORY OVERLOAD

Price: $69.99
System Requirements: Macintosh 68030-20MHz or better, 2.5MB RAM (2.8 for music), 8MB hard drive space, System 6.07 (System 7 for music), 13-inch color monitor and 256 colors.
Protection: None
Designers: David Chait, Jon Chait, Jason Davis
Publisher: Reality Bytes, Inc.
Cambridge, MA
(617) 621-1555



HE'S GOT A GUN!

If a) you've been overly busy catching up on your correspondence during the past five years or b) you're a Macintosh user who shuns all things PC and are only dimly aware of the WOLFENSTEIN concept, here's the idea:

The player views a three-dimensional world from the perspective of an on-screen alter-ego. There is some bad mojo in the air and, to discover its source, one must travel through a maze-like environment and quickly dispatch anything that moves. To aid in this bloody work, a variety of progressively more-deadly weapons are strewn about along with ammunition, healing kits, body armor, and such tech toys as radar and communication devices.

SENSORY OVERLOAD's spin on this popular concept finds the player awakening in the hospital of the Biotex Research Labs to a room-full of dead guys who, inexplicably, all wear white shirts, brown pants, and large red blood stains across their mid-sections. The sound of gunfire is heard in the distance, and there is the most gosh-awful stench about the place. Fortunately, this particular alter-ego is an undercover CIA agent who is investigating Biotex's AlphaChannel project and who possesses many of the instincts and skills necessary to wantonly obliterate unfriendly human life. This expendable life takes the form of the nefarious Dr. Craven and his band of buffed henchmen.

The game requires the player to run around various levels of the lab; search what seems at times like an endless number of tiny rooms for ammo, MedKits, and weapons; annihilate innumerable ruffians; disable deadly security systems; and finally expose and defuse the dangerous plot of the craven Dr. Craven.

FACE THE FACE

SENSORY OVERLOAD's interface and controls are laid out logically. Gun-like weapons are displayed on the left side of the screen and held with the left hand. Lobbed weapons, flares, and the right fist are relegated to the screen's upper-right border. To choose any of these weapons, either click on it with the mouse or use a keyboard shortcut. To get an overview of the action, apply a single keystroke to toggle the Automap window on or off.

Players who prefer to fling their character about via the mouse are likely to be disappointed. The mouse is used solely to select items in the inventory and to click such objects in the main viewing screen as switches and buttons. All movement is controlled via the keyboard or with one of the supported game controllers. Because I generally prefer to use the keyboard or a joystick rather than the mouse for games, I didn't find this to be bothersome. And it was a pleasure to find that, although the boys at Reality Bytes don't allow one to customize their keyboard controls directly, they do provide five keyboard layouts that should cover just about every player's requirements.

REALITY DOES BITE

As Mac users are all too aware, in the past few years Apple has released a plethora of CPUs that range in power from the modest LC series to the monstrously robust PowerPC-based Power Macintosh. This situation has caused more than a

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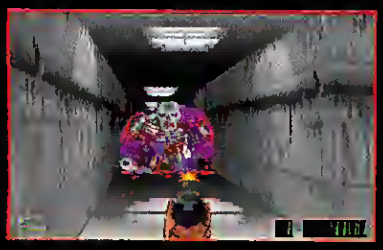

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few problems for game developers. Naturally, these developers want to take advantage of the power of the new processors and add complex texture mapping and 3-D environments to their products, but they can't afford to leave users with less-zippy computers out in the cold. Somewhere compromises must be made.

Reality Bytes has addressed this situation admirably. To begin with, SENSORY OVERLOAD allows one to turn off certain elements of the game that require more processing power and therefore can cause choppy movement when the processor is overloaded. These elements include game sounds and background music as well as the display of floor and ceiling textures. For Macs that are considered dinosaurs by today's standards, such as the IIci and IIsi, there is even an Emergency Speed Option that temporarily turns off all texture mapping when the action gets particularly fast and furious. In addition, the game provides nine different screen sizes and three levels of resolution. Sure, on slow Macs the view window will have to be mighty tiny and the graphics jagged, but at least overall movement is maintained at a somewhat acceptable level. Lastly, SENSORY OVERLOAD is among the first games to include code specifically written for the Power Macs. Running on a Power Mac 8100, the game operates very smoothly on a large monitor with the Viewport expanded to full screen in high-resolution mode.

UZE IT OR LOSE IT If your Mac can run the software, the game will deliver the hardware, like this Uzi used to terminate a mutant muscleman.

BUT IS IT DOOMED?

I'm sorry to dash Mac gamers' hopes as well as paraphrase a failed Vice Presidential candidate in such a trite way but, "I know DOOM, and SENSORY OVERLOAD is no DOOM." Then again, as far as Mac folks are concerned, DOOM doesn't yet exist in a usable form and when it does, it may be available only to the Mac elite who can afford the high-priced spread. Even then it may not run as well on a PC. Here's why:

DOOM runs under DOS in VGA mode, which sports a screen resolution of 320 x 240. Mac games run at 640 x 480, which is four times the resolution of DOOM. Therefore—if I've done the math correctly—it would take four times the processing power for a Mac to run DOOM at a pace comparable to that of a PC. What does this have to do with SENSORY OVERLOAD? Just this: Producing a game featuring 3-D environments and texture mapping that runs acceptably at 640 x 480, using a variety of processors, isn't easy. Here's where the ragged edges show.

The graphics are not up to the quality

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SMOKING IN THE BOARDROOM This adventure will lead you through the halls and offices of the BioTex Research Lab. Here, we've caught Dr. Craven with his evil henchwoman.

of most Macintosh games. Even in high-resolution mode, telltale jaggies are evident everywhere. When one shifts to low-resolution mode, the graphics are nearly as jagged and blocky as—*shudder*—older PC games. In addition, the enemy terrorists look a lot like strangely-out-of-focus characters from that holier-than-thou animated show, "Davey and Goliath." And although the furniture and bodies are rendered in 3-D, their shapes are uninteresting and tend to be monotonous over a number of levels.

Even on Power Macs, the movement of the bad guys is jerky and robotic. This can be a problem not only aesthetically but also strategically. For example, when one waits at an angle to plug a baddie as he emerges from a room, the evil one appears to turn from the side- to full-frontal view in an instant rather than gradually. This allows the enemy to squeeze off a shot long before he should be able to.

Yet despite these obvious blemishes, there are things to like about SENSORY OVERLOAD. Although the game relies heavily on quick reflexes, there are a few puzzles to chew on, some secret passageways to discover, and an element of strategic planning required to survive the unrelenting firepower of the enemy. And of course, there's the fun factor—regardless of how often I prayed that the enemy was a little more in focus, I couldn't quite manage to suppress my heart rate while I prepared to storm Weapons Lab B. I would be remiss if I didn't report that I spent several more hours playing the game than necessary for the purposes of this review.

Reality Bytes has made a decent start with SENSORY OVERLOAD. Mac purists will justifiably gripe about the graphics and motion, mouse-fiends will mourn the loss of their favorite controller, and folks expecting DOOM will be underwhelmed. However, players willing to overlook these foibles in exchange for an exciting game that can be played reasonably well on nearly every Mac—and extremely well on the most Powerful Macs—will have a bloody good time.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SENSORY OVERLOAD

RATING ✸✸✸

PROS A decent, first-person-perspective shoot-'em-up in a market where few of these games exist. If you own a PowerMac, you're loving life.

CONS It ain't DOOM. Jagged graphics, clunky movement, and an overabundance of exploration may have Mac gamers going back to MYST.

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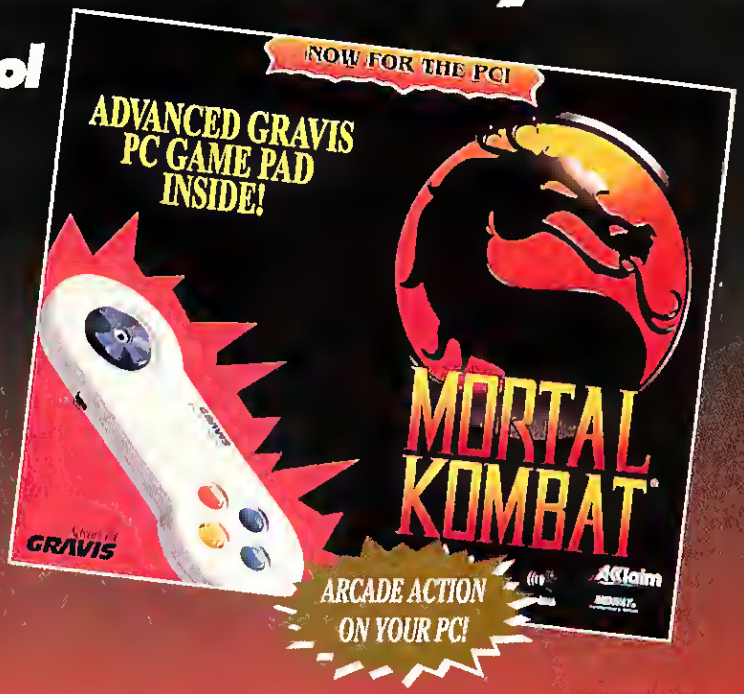

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Circle Reader Service #61

British Racing Genes

Wizard Games' GOOD TO FIRM Presents British Flat Racing

by Johnny L. Wilson

DONCASTER, NEWCASTLE, AND EPSOM—THE NAMES MAY NOT BE AS FAMILIAR TO NORTH AMERICAN ears as Churchill Downs, Belmont Park and Santa Anita, but the former are just as important to fans of English thoroughbred racing as the latter are to U.S. aficionados of the Sport of Kings. I first heard the magic names of English racetracks when I began to read the best-selling mystery novels by the Queen's former jockey, Dick Francis. As a result, I soon became enamored with the differences between our system and theirs.

GOOD TO FIRM

Price: $39.00
System Requirements: IBM compatible 286 or better, VGA graphics
Protection: None
Designer: new era software
Publisher: Wizard Games
Wilmington, MA
(508) 658-2209

THE BRITISH ARE RUNNING

The British have two types of horse racing: flat racing and steeplechase. Flat racing is similar to the U.S. style, but each course is laid out to take advantage of its natural terrain. So, where most U.S. courses are elliptical ovals which all look very similar to each other, each British course is quite distinctive.

The British do not have pari-mutuel betting system where the odds are the same at every betting window. Instead, each bookie has a stand and they set their own odds for each horse. So, one can do a little comparative shopping here. British racing provides an abundance of exotic betting schemes. Instead of Win-Place-Show, they have Win and Each Way. The latter is often equivalent to a Place bet, but when the field is large enough, it can pay off like a Show bet. In the British Isles, parlay bets are labeled according to the number of races in which you are continuing to "let it ride" by selecting a horse to win in each race. That is, a treble is a three-race parlay, a fourfold is four all the way up to an eightfold. There is even one bet called a Goliath that includes one eightfold, eight sevenfolds, 28 sixfolds, 56 fivefolds, 70 fourfolds, 56 trebles, and 28 doubles. Whew!

Speaking of betting, I'll bet you wonder how a person who has never attended a British racing event in his life knows anything about this. In addition to the aforementioned Dick Francis novels, I learned a lot about British flat racing by playing GOOD TO FIRM, a sports strategy game where you become an owner/trainer for a stable of British flat racing thoroughbreds. **Wizard Games**, that purveyor of delightful little sports games, has created a menu-driven text interface with lively animated racing sequences. In many ways, it is closest to the Stable Owner's Module that was published as an add-on to Ed Ringler's out-of-print OMNI-PLAY HORSE RACING. Fortunately, however, GOOD TO FIRM offers you more control of the training/racing process than you had in the out-of-print game. Also, GOOD TO FIRM allows you to continue training and racing your stable in season after season as the horses grow older.

You begin the game by purchasing horses at auction. British racing ranks each horse in one of three performance groups. So, observing the ranking and past performance of both sire and dam should enable you to have an idea where the horse currently up for bid is going to perform. The auction is largely abstracted, since you only have the current top bid on the screen and don't know who you're bidding against, but if the auction were the main interest, you'd be playing MILLENNIUM AUCTION instead of GOOD TO FIRM, wouldn't you?

Then, you determine the intensity and distance of each horse's training. This is also fairly abstract, but very important. Your goal is to build your horses up to peak fitness (100%). You use a spreadsheet-like screen to adjust intensity level (50% is the default maintenance level, with less representing rest and more representing training for improvement), to determine the number of hours of training per week (0-6 with 3 being the maintenance setting), and the distance which you are preparing the horse to run.

Next, you enter your horses in the week's races. This is a very fast and user-friendly screen. When a horse's name is highlighted, all of the races in which that horse is eligible to run during the turn (a week in game time) are highlighted as well. You merely choose the ones where you think your horse can win and move on. Finally, you're off to the races.

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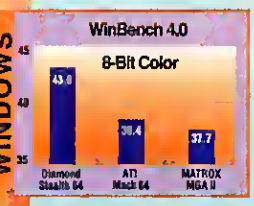

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Windows WinBench 4.0 performance performed by Diamond Computer Systems, Inc., using ZiffDavis WinBench 4.0 for Windows. Pentium PCI 90MHz motherboard with 256k cache, 16MB RAM, 540MB IDE hard disk, Windows 3.1, MS-DOS 6.2, and DOS 6.2. The Stealth 64 VRAM was configured in 24-bit color, VESA 1024x768 non-interlaced mode using driver release v1.06. The Matrox Ultima Plus (Matrox MGA II) was configured in 24-bit VESA mode using driver release 1.42. The ATI Graphics Ultra Pro Turbo (Mach 64) was configured with 2MB VRAM in the same mode using driver release 1.30. All trademark names referenced are the service mark, trademark, or registered trademarks of their respective manufacturers. Specifications are subject to change without notice. © 1994 Diamond Multimedia Systems, Inc. 408-736-2000, Fax: 408-730-5750.

DOWN THE STRETCH! Your horses always have the post position at the front of the screen so that you can see them easily.

The other reason I'm so addicted to GOOD TO FIRM over both OMNI-PLAY HORSE RACING's Stable Owners' Module and QUARTER POLE is that the British game seems much more open-ended. It isn't simply about making the most money or winning one particular sweepstakes race; it is about becoming the most successful trainer by using your entire stable to its fullest potential. For example, since the seasons are connected, I have had seasons where I was the last-place trainer in the standings followed by seasons where my stable came into their own and I entered the exotic world of the Top 5 trainers. If I had been playing one of the earlier games, I would have quit and started over. Since I had a lot of time invested in my stables, I kept working toward the right mix of horses, distances, and training so that I could keep improving. I haven't won the championship yet, but I'm having a wonderful time trying.

I also liked the way it handled claiming races. If you opt to run your horse in a claiming race, you are likely to receive an offer from either an independent stable or one of your computer-controlled competitors. If one of your closest competitors is trying to buy one of your top-performing horses, you will most likely choose not to sell at any price. Offers will also come at the end of each simulated season. Sometimes, this is a great time to unload an aging performer. At other times, you might want to pay attention to how well your rival fared in the last season before you sell a potential moneymaker to him or her.

What I consider the biggest weakness in the game was actually a design decision. Wizard Games wanted you to observe the overall performances of your horses in order to determine their relative strengths and weaknesses, while the older games provided fractions (statistics showing how fast horses were running at various points on the track) that helped me know at which distance to train each horse. GOOD TO FIRM opts for training by the seat of one's pants rather than using the hard statistics of racing fractions and workout fractions. You have to watch when horses fade back and when they make their move in order to determine how well-suited they are for each distance.

RACING FORM All decisions are made via text input on screens like this one. Highlighting the horse and the action puts your jockey in the saddle and you in the winner's circle before you know it.

AND THEY'RE OFF!

The racing is most like **Micro-League Sports'** QUARTER POLE, except that you navigate via text menus, and the actual animation for the race is much faster. GOOD TO FIRM gives you lots of choices on how to view the races. You can simply get the final results, watch the finishing post, observe the last furlong, or enjoy the complete race. QUARTER POLE's racing sequences are only superior to GOOD TO FIRM in one regard: It allows you to use function keys to toggle back and watch your horses as they trail the pack. The "camera" in GOOD TO FIRM only follows the lead horse.

As for betting, GOOD TO FIRM offers more variety than QUARTER POLE, both on and off-track. It's conceivable that only the wildest gambler will actually place a Goliath, for instance. The best news is that all of the betting is handled via a spreadsheet-looking screen where numerous bets can be placed at one time without taking as much time as the U.S. game.

AT THE FINISH Even if you don't want to watch an entire race, you can catch the exciting climax. It's like watching the highlights on the telly.

GOOD TO FIRM is one of those games that serves its audience well. It doesn't spend so much on production values that the program runs too slowly. Indeed, if you only watch the races in which you have runners, you can play through a season in less than two hours. I highly recommend this game to anyone who loves horse racing and prefers good game play to chrome.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

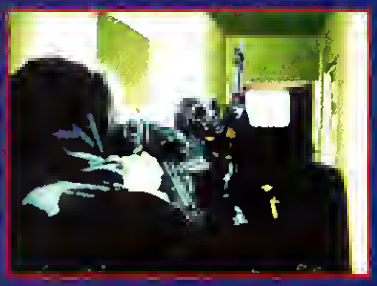
GOOD TO FIRM

RATING 2½

PROS Fast animation and an uncluttered interface bring GTF's unusual subject matter to life.

CONS Limited viewing angles on races and sparse statistical information often leave the stable owner in the dark.

Sabre Team



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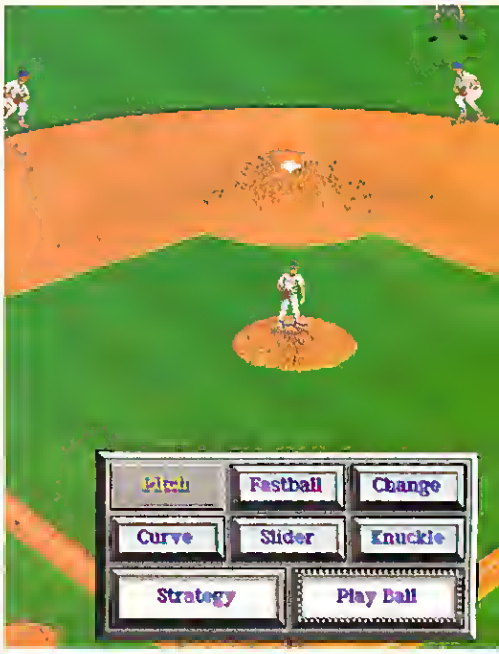
It's All In The Follow-Through

Micro Sports Makes A Pitch For The Big Time With PRO LEAGUE BASEBALL

by Jim Gindin



THE ADVERTISEMENTS AND BACK-OF-THE-BOX TEXT ON COMPUTER GAMES ARE ALWAYS BOASTFUL. A game is always "the best," a "benchmark," or "the most accurate ever." As savvy consumers, when we read such things we reach for that special grain of salt we keep on hand for such marketing hype and White House press releases. We've come to expect it, and we ignore it. But when you buy a game, rip open the shrink-wrap, get into the guts of the game, and find big talk in the manual, the game had better deliver.

PRO LEAGUE BASEBALL

Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 286 (386 recommended), 4MB RAM (8 recommended), VGA graphics, 15.5 MB hard drive space, DOS 5.0 or higher, mouse supported.
Protection: Documentation check
Players: 1 or 2 (modem support)
Designers: David Holt, Alan Stephenson, Brent Johnson, Paul Immekus
Publisher: Micro Sports Inc.
Chattanooga, TN
(800) 937-7737

The manual of **Micro Sports'** PRO LEAGUE BASEBALL makes some huge claims. The first sentence reads: "You've played the competition, now it's time to move to the majors! Welcome to Pro League Baseball—the most comprehensive simulation of major league baseball ever created!"

Hmm....that's big talk. Does it have the goods to back it up? Well, let's just say that PRO LEAGUE is the first baseball simulation I've encountered where, with the bases loaded and none out, I've been able to smack five bunt singles with a pair of walks on my way to a seven-run rally, all off the same pitcher! If this were the exception, it would be merely irritating, but realism takes a comprehensive beating in nearly every aspect of this game.

PRO LEAGUE is primarily a text-based baseball simulation overlaid with a graphic environment. Included are several nicely drawn ballparks, each about one megabyte in size. When the batter hits a ball, PRO LEAGUE scrolls smoothly through the selected stadium backdrop to follow its flight.

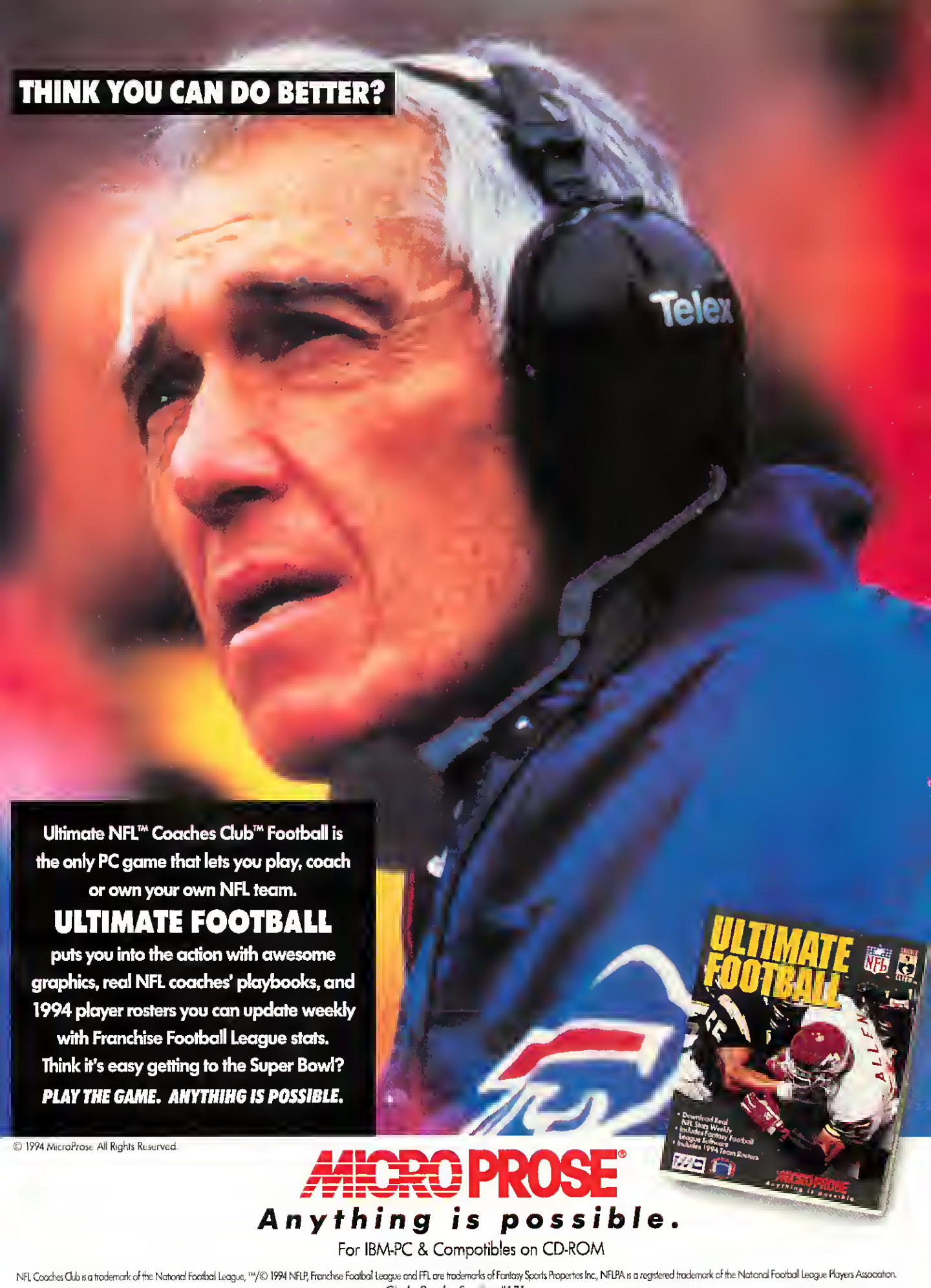
Sadly, the same care that went into providing pretty playing fields failed to make it into the animation. Regardless of position, players have just a handful of poses. With only a couple of animations depicting the ball in flight, it's often difficult to tell a fly ball from a grounder. While you can consult the text description of each play, what purpose then does the animation serve? Worse, fielders chasing high fly balls closely resemble a frog springing vertically, tongue extended to snatch an errant insect.

PRO LEAGUE also includes an arcade option for those who wish to time mouse clicks with the swing of the bat or the curve of a pitch. The problem is, you don't control bat or pitch location and you don't control fielding, throwing or running. Aside from seriously reducing the number of strikeouts and walks in a game, arcade action adds little to game play.

Even in strategic-level play, I watched a double roll through the right-field wall. Then, the fleet-footed Mickey Tettleton raced to a triple on a one-hop line-drive to the left fielder. I longed for a non-graphic strategic play mode, or maybe just a long, thundering rain delay.

THROWING CURVES

Despite the animation difficulties, I thought that I could at least settle down to a challenging game, and in one early contest, the computer led 9-1 in the seventh inning. Comebacks are enjoyable, but when I scored seven runs in the seventh, the starting pitcher for the computer remained in the game! In another matchup, the computer refused to pinch hit for a middle reliever late in a tie game with a runner on second base. The AI had not a clue of how to try the famed "double-switch" when changing pitchers—if you're lucky, you'll figure out how to do this yourself without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crashing the game. The lack of a decent computer opponent is a tremendous flaw.

Human managers are hardly so limited. On offense, a manager may select from several options, including some not often found in baseball simulations. You can try to hit behind the runner moving to second base, or even loft a sacrifice fly to advance a runner at third base. The hit and run is possible, though the runners don't head to the next base when they should.

FASSERO'S BLUES Real-life league leaders such as Jeff Fassero often have trouble recreating their achievements in PROLEAGUE BASEBALL.

Defensive options allow you to select the pitch type and position each fielder separately, but these options appear to have little correlation with actual play resolution. Even when infielders are placed literally on top of each other, they spring back to normal positions as soon as the batter makes contact with the ball, invariably fielding the ball properly. Runners from third base will rarely try to score no matter where the infield is positioned.

Pitch selection revealed even less forethought. The game's READ.ME file states that each pitcher's profile contains a code indicating which pitches he can successfully throw. A nice idea, except that it doesn't appear to have been implemented. In one test game, Dennis Martinez and John Wetteland completed a victory throwing exclusively sliders and knuckle balls. According to their profiles, neither pitcher is proficient with either pitch, yet between them, they didn't allow an earned run.

A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

PRO LEAGUE supports league play, though setting up anything other than a standard league is a tedious process. The game produces realistic statistics to a certain extent, but has a real dislike for certain players. Montreal averaged 78 victories in test leagues, producing an ERA of one point higher than its real-life counterpart. The Expos had 94 victories in 1993. Cincinnati Reds outfielder Kevin Mitchell averaged just eight home runs per 600 at bats, posting a .424 slugging percentage. His 1993 numbers were 19 homers in 323 at bats and a .601 slugging percentage.

PRO LEAGUE ERA's are consistently .40 higher than real life. World Series champion Toronto won 104 games with a 4.77 ERA in one simulation, Jose Guzman leading the way with 20 wins and a 5.54 mark. In 1993, the Blue Jays won 95

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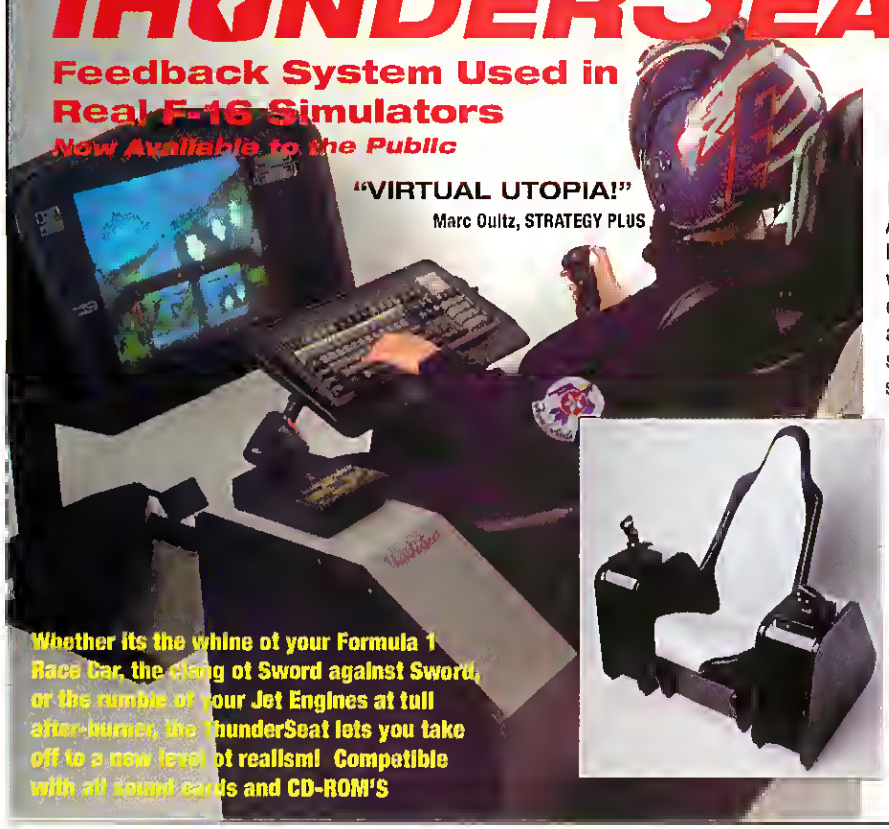

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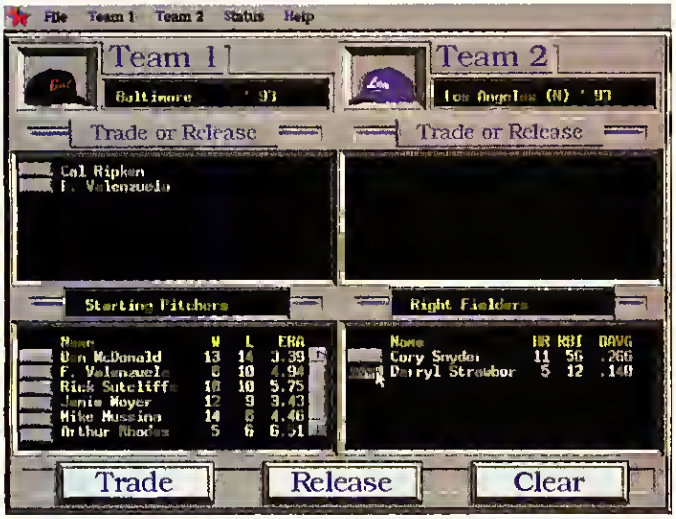

TRADE DEADLINE Feel free to swap Strawberry for Ripken, but remember that defense has little effect in this game.

times, posting a 4.21 ERA. Guzman won 14 times and had a 3.99 ERA.

Some players weren't even close to their 1993 performances. A scan of Montreal's statistics revealed PRO LEAGUE's dislike for Jeff Fassero. In 1993, he was 12-5 with a 2.29 ERA, which would have led the league had Fassero thrown a few more innings. In PRO LEAGUE seasons, he was 5-6 with a 4.43 mark and 6-10 with a 6.10 ERA. Teammate Kirk Rueter likewise ballooned from 8-0, 2.73 to 6-4, 5.10.

The game doesn't necessarily increase offense, as batting averages are about the same as in real-life. Slugging percentages, however, are about ten points too low, while on-base percentages are about five points too low. More singles occur in the average game, whereas extra-base hits, particularly home runs, are much less frequent. The only hypothesis I can devise to explain how this results in .40 extra runs per game is that base runner advancement in the autoplay module may be too frequent.

Players are numerically rated for defensive abilities, but once again, this seems to have little effect on gameplay. I gave the Indians top-notch range ratings at every defensive position and watched their win total decline from 75 to 73. I gave the Chicago White Sox Dave Kingman-like ratings at every position, and their win total dropped from 81 to 80.

THE DRAFT BOARD

PRO LEAGUE also provides a draft module. Since it can't be used competitively, however, it looks to be basically an afterthought. The first time I tried to run it, it hung the machine in the 20th round trying to access an empty list of designated hitters. I got through 25 rounds on my second attempt, disgusted to find All-Star caliber players still available in the 18th round. When I tried to run a season using these teams, fully expecting the team I drafted to win the pennant by 40 games, the autoplay module repeatedly hung the computer three games into the season.

PRO LEAGUE represents an attempt to provide as much function as any baseball simulation previously released. It fails, however, to perform any of these functions anywhere near the level its competition has reached. The game is unfinished, the number of serious bugs spotted increasing every time I reboot my computer. It is, quite simply, a piece of software that should never have reached the marketplace.

I think MICRO SPORTS knows this. No program with this many errors could ever have passed beta-testing. Still, for a game in such a competitive market, it is a most difficult and frustrating experience from the moment you attempt to install the program. Even with all the effort expended, it seems that PRO LEAGUE is headed back to the minors, at least until they pitch their games with a bit more control.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

PRO LEAGUE BASEBALL

RATING 1

PROS Beautiful ball yard graphics and a nice selection of offensive options.

CONS The statistical model produces unrealistic results. The action mode play has limited value. The game as a whole is buggier that a hot summer night. We installed this game long enough to do the review, but now it's going, going...gone!

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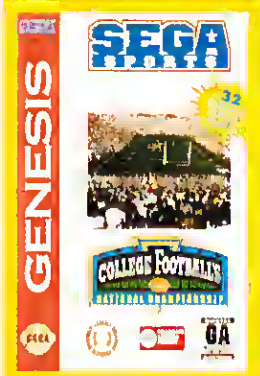

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Can We See Clearly Now?

SEEING THE 3D WORLD OF AIR COMBAT THROUGH A 2D SCREEN CAN LEAVE YOU FLAT

by Tom "KC" Basham

WHICH ASPECT OF MODERN FLIGHT SIMULATORS LEAST accurately represents real world flight? In my opinion: the view systems. Flight models often have weaknesses, but many game publishers have admitted that flight model omissions and inaccuracies result more from game play concerns for the casual user than for actual technical reasons. The current generation of PCs can support fully realistic flight models, but the designers decide not to build them for cost, schedule and game play reasons. While I might not agree with some of the decisions they make regarding flight models, I can understand their reasoning.

I see view systems in a different light. No flight simulator currently available for home use remotely approaches real-world visibility. Having flown a few mock engagements in T-34 trainer aircraft, I've found the PC view systems lacking on two counts: Resolution and Scope.

Monitor resolution, even at 1024x768, pales compared to the human eye's visual acuity. Flight simulators must portray aircraft as amorphous, multi-colored pixel conglomerations as range increases simply because the display technology is inadequate. In PC simulations, you often cannot tell what the other airplane is doing or which way it's banking until it moves drastically across your screen or you move in very close. The real world, though, is significantly easier; a pilot can visually identify a target's flight attitude at much greater ranges, allowing quicker responses to the opponent's actions. This is an inherent limitation of today's hardware, and a limitation PC pilots must learn to live with.

"Scope" is a broader category meaning "how well the view system works in general." Assuming a sudden miracle breakthrough in monitor technology allowing eye-quality display resolutions, how well would the built-in view controls of current simulations work? Let's examine the techniques used by various flight simulation publishers and analyze their respective advantages and disadvantages. We will not be discussing external views–the views which position the player outside the aircraft. Such views are often useful in light of restricted cockpit views, but their inclusion and use do not promote realism. For our purposes here, we're going to examine how the cockpit views work and how they could be made more realistic.

Dynamix begins the discussion since the view con-

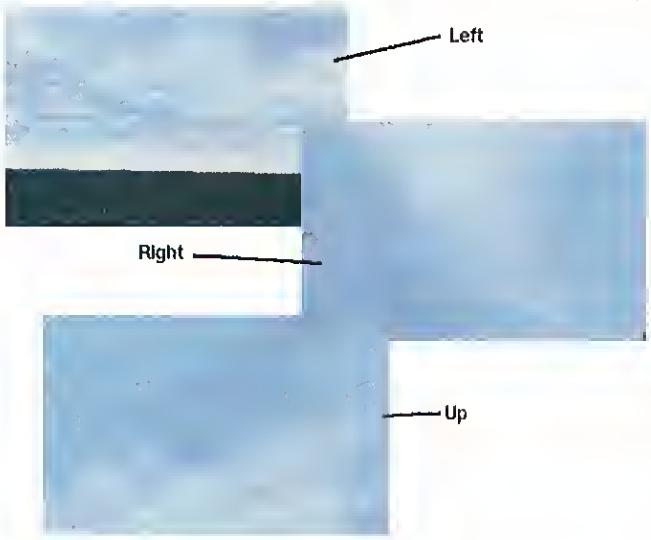
ON THE RADAR

Last month's Radar reported that a bogey named CARRIER WING was being tested in the air space around Electronic Arts. Intelligence sources now suggest that the project has been renamed U.S. NAVY FIGHTER. Our agents were also able to attain positive visual identification (as seen in the provided screen shot) along with further performance specifications. U.S. NAVY FIGHTER will incorporate a "Track View" that will simulate a pilot's rotating head, while still leaving control of the craft in the pilot's hands. More information as our agent (code name: Air Sickness Bag Guy) uncovers it.

trols in RED BARON, ACES OF THE PACIFIC, and ACES OVER EUROPE are relatively simple. Using the F1-F5 function keys, **Dynamix'** sims allow five views: *forward, left, right, back* and *up*. These views do not overlap, and objects can become "lost" between the front and side views or back and side views. The limited views and visible zones create a fairly restrictive view system which limits a player's situational awareness. The **Dynamix** system has one main advantage: the "up" view. The "up" view is probably the single most important view during a dogfight. The side and back views are for situational awareness; the more you can see around you, the better you understand the tactical situation. The front view is for shooting; put the gunsight on the badguy and pull the trigger. The "up" view, though, drives (or controls) the fight. During most of the fight, until the attacker reduces angles enough to get a shot, the target is visible only in the "up" view. The attacker spends considerable time looking through the top of the canopy at his prey as he maneuvers for the shot. In short, *if you ain't using the "up" view, you ain't driving the fight.*

In a one-on-one fight, the "up" and "forward" views are probably sufficient as long as you remain in control of the fight. **Dynamix** sims do not allow good situational awareness, though. **Dynamix** needs to expand the scope of their view control, broadening the areas visible from the cockpit.

Next, let's look at **MicroProse** products. The view systems in their sims vary greatly. F-14 FLEET DEFENDER includes standard *front, left, right* views as well as *left+back* and *right+back* over-the-shoulder views, and it inherited a rudimentary *padlock* view from the STRIKE EAGLE series. The standard and shoulder views offer wide view ranges and good situational awareness. The simple padlock view keeps the pilot's eyes locked on a specific target during maneuvering, mimicking the movements of a real-world pilot's head during combat. FLEET DEFENDER suffers from two omissions. First, the lack of an "up" or "forward+up" view is sorely missed while dogfighting. As stated above, if you're on the offense then the target will appear in the "up" or "up+forward" view until the very final stages of the fight. Second, the padlock view lacks any usable information during a fight, and it's quite easy to lose orientation. In the real-world, a pilot knows where his head is pointed and can physically feel what his aircraft is doing. FLEET DEFENDER's padlocking system accounts for neither of these factors. Look at the three screen images on this page. Can you tell which one is looking left, right, or up? Can you tell what the aircraft is doing while looking at any of these views? The typical argument is, "Real pilots get disoriented during combat so we're modeling that." Real pilots do become disoriented, but they do know which way their head is turned. It does the sim-jock little good to track the target when unable to determine which way the "simulated head" is pointed. A padlock view that does not adequately describe the situation is useless.



WHICH WAY MIDWAY? Without the notation, could you tell which view was left, right, or up in 1942: PACIFIC AIR WAR?

FLEET DEFENDER is an excellent simulation, but its view control needs some modification. The addition of an "up" (and preferably an "up+forward") view would greatly improve close-in, knife-fight dogfighting. Second, the padlock view needs dressing up. Some minimal flight instrumentation must be present. A small artificial horizon with speed and altitude discretely tucked in the corner would be enough. With peripheral vision, a real-world pilot can flick his eyes and see the HUD or instrument panel with little or no head movement. Padlock views must somehow simulate the pilot's ability to "feel" the aircraft and quickly glance at the instruments without losing track of the target either by a "fast glance at the instrument panel" key or by providing critical flight information in the padlock view. Padlock views must never leave any doubt which way the head is turned. A small 'L' for left, 'R' for right, and 'U' for up scribbled on the virtual canopy in virtual grease pencil at strategic points would provide sufficient visual cues without being overly distracting.

1942: THE PACIFIC AIR WAR shares most of FLEET DEFENDER's flaws, but also takes a new approach to the view problem. First, 1942 also lacks the crucial "up" and "up+forward" views. Since the F-14 doesn't emphasize dogfighting, such omissions are somewhat understandable. In a flight simulation focused on dogfighting, though, such omissions are unfathomable. Second, 1942's padlock view suffers the same problems, along with FLEET DEFENDER and the F15 STRIKE EAGLE series before it. Again, simple reference marks on the canopy would do wonders for the padlock's effectiveness.

1942 introduces some snazzy new technology: the virtual cockpit. The virtual cockpit allows complete user-controlled view panning. You have complete control over where the pilot's head looks. The only "blind spots" are those caused by the airframe itself. The virtual cockpit panning requires practice and coordination to use smoothly. It also significantly reduces frame rate, becoming unplayably slow on low-end machines. The virtual cockpit, however, presents a new approach to an old problem. Despite interface and CPU limitations, the innovative virtual cockpit is a step in the right direction and opens the door to even better solutions in the future.

Spectrum HoloByte introduced the first, and still the most functional, padlock view system in FALCON 3.0. Outside padlock-mode, FALCON 3.0 offers *right, left, back, forward, up+forward,* and *up* views. The restrictive side and back views provide little combat or situational awareness value, but the combinations of "up," "up+forward," and "up" provide the most critical views needed during a knife fight.

FALCON's padlock view is often criticized as "not being realistic." Certainly, four "windows" splashed across the screen are not a realistic view of the real

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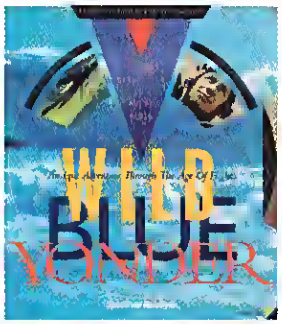

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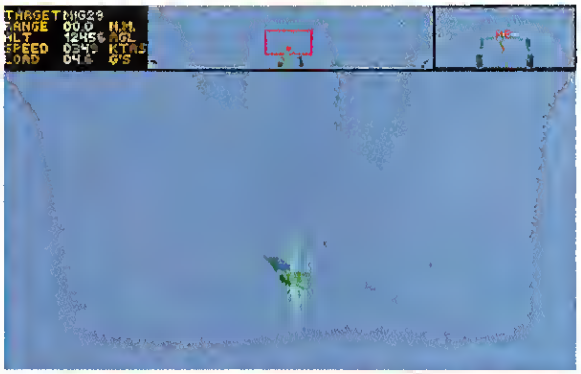
world; however, FALCON's padlock is the most realistically functional padlock view currently on the market. "Realistically functional," you ask? The information provided by FALCON's padlock most accurately represents what a real pilot knows during a dogfight. Critical flight attitude information is tucked in the corners, only a glance away at all times. The upper-middle window graphically shows where the pilot's head is pointed at all times, and the lower "3D" window displays what the pilot's eyes are actually seeing. Learning to read the padlock view takes time and practice (see "*Mastering the Padlock View*," Issue #106, May, 1993), but once mastered provides unequaled visual feedback. Nearly three years after FALCON's initial release, no other game publisher has seriously challenged **Spectrum HoloByte**'s padlock view.



THE FALCON'S EYE VIEW The Padlock view in FALCON 3.0 still offers the best overall situational awareness.

FALCON's view system suffers from limited side and back views as well as quirks in the padlock system. The padlock's flight attitude information is split into a text window and a mini-HUD in two separate corners. The padlock would be well served to combine these two into a single, reasonably functional mini-HUD. A more serious problem is that the padlock tracks targets that the pilot shouldn't be able to see. When the target passes below the aircraft, the padlock view distorts itself and continues tracking the target instead of losing lock. In addition, the "point of view" moves in padlock view, roughly akin to the pilot moving his head up and down. Although this effect may be realistic, it causes problems with the HUD. The HUD is "calibrated" for a particular viewing angle, and must be viewed from that specific angle. When padlock's "virtual head" goes bobbing around, it messes this angle up. The result: targets appear in the gunsight when they really aren't. Most FALCON pilots fly in padlock until the final moments of a dogfight, then switch back to the standard "forward" or "up+forward" views to get a clean shot. Padlock's viewing angles should be kept consistent with non-padlock viewing angles.

Kesmai's SUPER VGA AIR WARRIOR approaches the view problem very differently. Rather than provide panning or padlocking, AIR WARRIOR uses a building-block approach. The basic blocks—*up*, *down*, *front*, *back*, *left*, and *right*—may be combined to create many other views. AIR WARRIOR includes a utility called *keymap.exe* which allows the user to edit (to some degree) how the view keys work and combine. Without any editing, the user can always press two keys at once to generate new views. With *keymap* editing, the user can build 3-key sequences, such as "up+front+left" allowing a total of 26 view angles. The recent 1.16b upgrade to AIR WARRIOR increases flexibility and even allows user-defined macros that can perform flight-oriented or view-oriented tasks.

CUSTOM KEYS The basic views in AIR WARRIOR can be combined to create new views as you desire. It's flexible but difficult to use.

Fully using this scheme is rather difficult unless you have a programmable interface like the **Thrustmaster** WEAPON CONTROL SYSTEM MARK II. You generally don't have time to type complex view sequences while fighting, so most players use the WCS Mark II and program the **Thrustmaster** FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM's hat switch for view control. This view system works well because you always know which view you just selected, unlike padlock views that move around without user input. As usual, though, the more flexible the interface, the more cumbersome it is to use.

My perfect view system would include elements of all the publishers listed here. I'd start with **Kesmai**'s "constructor" system to allow all possible discrete view angles. Then I'd add **Spectrum HoloByte**'s padlock system, but add various modifications to restrict the viewing angle, as per **MicroProse**'s system. In short, no single game publisher offers a single, perfect viewing system. Each has advantages and disadvantages. As users, we can only hope that the next wave of flight simulations will incorporate the various advantages into a single system.

Where will the future take us? "Virtual Reality" has become a household phrase, but I'm a bit skeptical of the claims that it will transform entertainment technology. At the summer Consumer Electronics Show several vendors had head-mounted displays. **Looking Glass** demonstrated a new non-combat flight simulator entitled FLIGHT UNLIMITED with a VR helmet. The stereophonic headset fully tracked head motion; FLIGHT UNLIMITED panned smoothly to anywhere I moved my head. The concept and immersion into the product was quite interesting, but not without hitches. First, the video resolution inside the display was quite coarse, making the instrumentation blurry and unreadable. Second, you couldn't see the keyboard, making it difficult to control without a full **Thrustmaster** rig. Third, and most importantly, the head-mounted displays were *slow*. FLIGHT UNLIMITED ran smooth as glass without the helmet, but using the helmet brought a 90Mhz Pentium machine to a crawl. The flight simulator itself ran fine; the helmet's display hardware was the bottleneck. The immersion was certainly entertaining and the out-the-window graphics were enjoyable. The frame rate, the instrumentation's video resolution, and the inability to see the real-world controls made the system unusable for intensive applications, such as dogfighting. Of course, this is the first generation of home VR technology. We'll see what will follow on the first generation's tail. Check Six.

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Is This Some Kind Of Yoke?

Suncom's G-Force Flight Yoke Takes Simulations Seriously

by Gordon Goble

Suncom Technologies may not be as well known as Thrustmaster or CH Products, but they have been a major producer of joysticks, game cards and other peripherals for the PC gaming world since 1983. Responsible for such noteworthy offerings as FlightMAX, My Joystick, and Gameport 2000, Suncom's dozen years of experience have not been lost on their latest development, the G-Force flight yoke.

The G-Force is a desk-mountable control device that, although shaped in the mold of a flight yoke, serves virtually any vehicle-oriented software. It combines precise guidance and a futuristic appearance in what appears to be a durable package.

Featuring a swiveling column fore/aft axis and U-shaped yoke handle that pivots at the base and arcs from side to side, the unique G-Force design may take a little acclimation, but begins to feel natural after just a few minutes in the air or on the track. A short and sweet turning radius means the unit is perfectly suited to exacting flight simulations, the most realistic auto racing software such as World Circuit and IndyCar Racing, and perhaps even tank simulators. G-Force handle stems are comfortably contoured to the hand, and the entire unit makes a lot of ergonomic sense.

Depending on personal preference and desk style, the G-Force may be affixed to the desktop via the four suction cups on its underside, or edge-clamped by hand tightening the two built-in thumbscrews. While the former presents a fractional problem with skidding (although as far as suction cups go, these little guys are pretty good), the latter offers total stability on square-edged desks of less than 1 5/8" thickness.

Four fire buttons (two per handle) allow for both right and left-handed trigger finger and thumbtip access to critical controls, and a column-mounted signal selector instantly reverses the functions from thumb to index finger. A smooth sliding throttle is also column-mounted, and both Y- and X-axis trimmers (elevator/rudder control for flight games) are present for "on the fly" adjustments. The G-Force also offers a column lock-out that prevents fore and aft pivoting during the operation of land-locked simulations, yet the rocking motion for analog throttle and brakes feels quite natural in auto racing sims, and many drivers may find they don't want the column movement locked out at all.

Just like a joystick, the G-Force is plugged directly into the game port, with no further connections necessary. The yoke is spring-loaded and self-centering, while its very design makes finding all four corners a snap, and all this translates into easy calibration. Made of ABS plastic with a steel shaft, the G-Force is just short of one foot in height and nine inches deep, so prospective users may want to clear away some of their desktop clutter before testing begins.

Speaking of testing, the G-Force was taken to the skies in Flight Simulator 5, Falcon 3.0, and Chuck Yeager's Air Combat (still a personal favorite), and driven vigorously through the simulated race tracks of World Circuit, IndyCar Racing and Lotus. It didn't take long to discover just where the G-Force excelled.

In all programs, the unit provided accurate response and functioned at least on par with the excellent CH Products' Virtual Pilot (albeit with very distinct differences in movement). But it became obvious that the more realistic a program was, the better G-Force worked. Although Flight Simulator 5 and Falcon felt superb, the fast action of Chuck Yeager (and most probably other yank-and-crank shoot-em-ups) might better suit a rough and tough joystick. In a like manner, G-Force took on both World Circuit and IndyCar Racing with aplomb, but the wild left to right maneuvering involved in the more arcade-like Lotus didn't translate quite as well.

For gamers with a taste for realism, there is none better. Using the G-Force with IndyCar, for instance, I found negotiating even the most trying of corners while mired in traffic easier than with any other non-joystick gadget I've had the pleasure to use. As a bonus, the darn thing actually stays in calibration!

The best simulations require the best input devices. Suncom's G-Force is perfectly suited to high performance simulations, and I plan to keep it awfully busy well after this review has been published.

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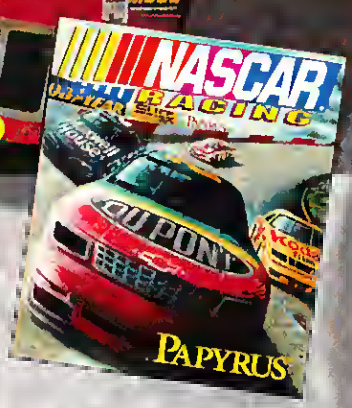

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World War II

Domark and Flight Sim Toolkit Travel Back To The Big One

by Tom "KC" Basham

Having designed a flexible, open-ended architecture for SVGA Harrier and Flight Sim Toolkit, **Domark** adds another branch to their flight sim family tree with a new simulation, the succinctly entitled World War II. World War II consists of two components, an upgrade to Flight Sim Toolkit (FST) that includes numerous World War II objects, and a stand-alone game designed entirely using the upgraded FST. You don't need FST to play the stand-alone game, but you must already own FST to use the upgrade.

World War II

Price: $25.00
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-33 (486-33 recommended), 2MB RAM, SVGA/VGA graphics, 11MB hard drive space, joystick; supports Sound Blaster sound cards; supports Thrustmaster and CH flight equipment.
Protection: None
Producers: Darren Anderson and Matt Miller
Publisher: Domark
Distributor: Spectrum HoloByte
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FST UPGRADE

For owners of FST, there's both good and bad news in store. First, the bad news. The upgraded FST engine is not exactly backwards compatible with the first version. Because revised objects, such as hangars which generate new aircraft types, required definition structures, the old FST cannot understand files created with the new FST. Thankfully, Domark provides instructions on editing old FST files to make them compatible with new technology.

Now, the good news. The new FST engine includes many features requested by players. First, there are two new object properties, "red team" and "blue team." Units marked as "blue" are your allies and work with you to achieve mission objectives, "red" units conspire against you and your holy forces, while units marked as neither red nor blue are "neutral." No more you-versus-the-world suicide missions. There are limitations, including the fact that units cannot inadvertently damage friendly units, there are no wingman communications, and red units only attack blue units and vice versa, but opposing teams are a welcome addition.

World War II introduces torpedoes, a necessity for the WWII Pacific scenarios. Designed to simulate their historical counterparts, the torpedoes are not very accurate, not very reliable, and must be gently dropped from under 100 feet and below 100 knots. Also necessary for naval aviation, U.S. and Japanese aircraft carriers roam the digital seas. Aircraft can begin missions in the air, you can edit aircraft generated automatically by hangars, and hangars now create three classes of aircraft: Fighter, Transport and Bomber. You have control over bomb loads, and can create both carpet bombing and tactical bombing sorties.

FLIGHT IMPROVEMENTS

Numerous references in World War II's manual indicate that the flight model has seen significant improvement over its predecessors, though the thin manual fails to mention the specific improvements. A quick call to Domark helped me get to the meat of the matter. The new simulation engine differentiates between wing-tip and wing-root stalls, prop wash effects, induced yaw from aileron deflection (requiring the use of rudders for coordinated turns), induced roll from rudder inputs, and "ground effect" (an increase in lift at extremely low altitude).

The manual mentions that Domark wrote World War II entirely using the upgraded version of FST. FST was a conceptual breakthrough, opening a new arena—world design—to flight sim enthusiasts. FST does many things wonderfully, but interfacing with the player in a friendly way is not one of them. World War II's interface is a very rough, very simple menu system that looks much like a design afterthought, something akin to a graphical version of a DOS batch file. FST lets you create worlds, aircraft, and battles, but not campaigns. As such, the interface has no pre-flight briefings, no post-flight debriefings, and no VCR mode. World War II is an upgrade to FST, first and foremost, and a stand-alone flight sim with limited options and rapid action, second.

The package includes two scenarios, Midway and D-Day. The Midway scenario offers five missions; D-Day offers six. You may play missions for either Axis or Allied forces in any order. Most missions include multiple aircraft types, and you choose which type you wish to fly. Across both scenarios, World War II includes four countries (the USA, Britain, Germany and Japan) with three aircraft types for each country. For example, the D-Day scenario includes the Spitfire, Mustang, or Typhoon for the Allies and the Ju-188, Fw-190 or BF-109 for the Axis. The "Invasion Strike" mission in the Midway scenario includes the Zero, Val, or Kate for Axis forces and only the Wildcat for the USA. The manual gives a concise briefing for each aircraft type for each mission, such as "Fly a heading of 090 and watch out for enemy fighters. Midway Islands should be in visual range

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in 5 minutes." Although I feel many aspects of the interface and manual were too vague, I liked this touch. WWII pilots didn't have radar and AWACS to direct them around the sky, or Global Position Satellites to guide them to their targets. I found the briefing's economy to add a touch of authenticity to the mission orders. The briefings give only general orders, such as "do as much damage as possible." The D-Day scenarios are gigantic; at maximum detail settings, D-Day missions track over 2,000 objects spread across all of northern France. Because of their size, some users may experience memory problems.

TAGGED, AND THAT'S IT No more you-verses-the-world in FST. A new feature of FST allows you to fly with wingmen and create competitive team scenarios.

WORLD WAR II excels at flight. Like SVGA HARRIER before it, it includes the best inertial and momentum effects in any flight sim today. Its improved flight model includes analog rudder support, analog throttle support, torque effects, and additional flap settings. It simulates the basic angle-of-attack (AOA) effects, including the ability for realistic, nose-high landings. Wingmen fly a very smooth ingress, and during longer missions I began to practice formation flying. Having flown formation in prop-engined aircraft, I find WORLD WAR II provides, without question, the most accurate sensation of formation flight of any prop-driven aircraft simulation currently available. I found myself making identical mistakes as during my real-world practice, as well as reaping identical benefits of smooth formation flight when heeding the advice of my instructors. I found all the advice about when to reduce power, when to apply power, and how to gently stir the stick to provide extremely realistic results. I believe this indicates a very stable, very accurate underlying flight model.

As with all simulations, the flight model isn't perfect. The real A6M Zero, for example, became exceedingly stiff at high speeds, but WORLD WAR II's Zero remains as nimble at 320kts as at 200kts. Stall buffet and spins are disappointingly absent. The aircraft does stop turning as speed reduces and eventually departs, but the progression into a stall is too smooth, providing no physical indication of the approaching stall. The result: the aircraft can conform quite well to its real-world performance specifications, but because of the lack of buffet you have almost no indication that you've reached the edge of the performance envelope. What's more, because of the lack of spins you have no motivation to avoid the edge of the performance envelope. These limitations are inherited from the

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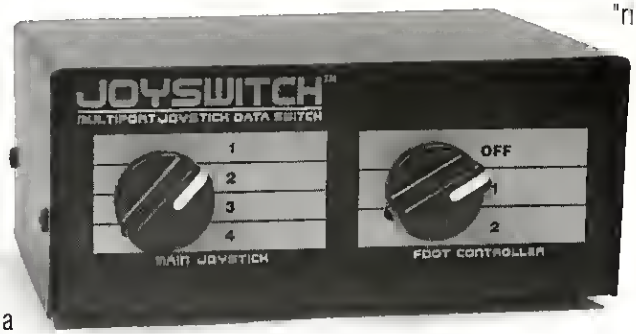

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original SVGA HARRIER flight engine. Domark has considered these factors and is already planning a follow-up sim, DOGFIGHT, which advances the technology further by introducing modem play, more accurate stall symptoms, and a more accurate flight model editor.

IN THE COCKPIT

Graphics are the same, incredibly crisp, 640x480 graphics inherited from SVGA HARRIER. I usually prefer such clean, crisp, easily distinguishable graphics over the style used in STRIKE COMMANDER. During a dogfight, it's more important to distinguish how the bandit's wings are banked and when the bandit commits his nose than to read the number on his tail fin. Ground detail is still very sparse, but the aircraft are very sharply displayed, more accurately portraying the image one sees during real-world flying than many current, "flashy" graphics engines. WORLD WAR II also includes the same wonderful hazing effect over the ocean and in tropical islands. Without seriously limiting view, as does the hazing effect in STRIKE COMMANDER, WORLD WAR II still creates a wonderful "horizon at sea." The sim also includes the same basic views found in its predecessors, in addition to introducing a padlock view. Unfortunately, this padlock view conforms to the current standard of a useless display of your target. In other words, you see the aircraft, but you have no indication where your head is turned, making it impossible to fly using this type of padlock view.

In summary, WORLD WAR II is a significantly improved descendant of SVGA HARRIER designed primarily for FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT users. At a list price of $25.00, the stand-alone game provides quick action and a realistic sensation of flight without requiring a large outlay of cash or months of training flights. Most importantly, WORLD WAR II's improved performance lays a foundation for even more realistic flight modeling in the near future.

THE LONG SHADOW OF VENGEANCE A US medium bomber takes off for targets in Germany. The detail in its design is apparent even in the shadow it casts below.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

WORLD WAR II

RATING ✸ ✸ ✸ 1/2

PROS A nice, well-priced package for the FST nut and the WWII flight sim fan. Improved flight modeling over previous releases. Crisp, clean graphics.

CONS Still suffers from limitation of the FST package: poor interface and sound, with a few flight model omissions.

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Circle Reader Service #190

On A Wing And A Player

Spectrum HoloByte Delivers The Entire FALCON Strike Package On One CD

by Tom "KC" Basham

IN THE THREE YEARS SINCE ITS RELEASE, FALCON 3.0 AND ITS VARIOUS ADD-ON PRODUCTS, OPERATION: FIGHTING TIGER, MIG-29: DEADLY ADVERSARY, and HORNET: NAVAL STRIKE FIGHTER, have developed an enormous following. Nearing cult-like fervor, the FALCON 3.0 family has spawned numerous "electronic fighter squadrons" around the country, created a niche market of after-market hooks and software utilities, and provided the cornerstone for at least three national conventions. Now, as its technology begins to show its age, **Spectrum HoloByte** offers what will probably be the final chapter in the FALCON 3.0 story: FALCON GOLD on CD-ROM.

If you haven't met the FALCON 3.0 family, FALCON 3.0 is an F-16 flight simulator based on Spectrum HoloByte's prior products, FALCON and FALCON-AT. Using 320x240 graphics at 256 colors, FALCON 3.0 offers instant, shoot 'em up situations, a complex and flexible mission editing system, and an incredibly detailed campaign mode. In the last case, you command a squadron of 30 pilots fighting in places like Iraq, Israel and Panama. You are in charge of mission planning, pilot allocation, and weapons management as well as flying combat missions. FALCON 3.0's world is one of the most dynamic virtual worlds available on the PC. Even after flying daily for months I still encountered surprises: new aircraft, Easter eggs, mountain climbers in the Grand Canyon, and more. The simulation introduced a new level of avionics sophistication which only **MicroProse** and **Digital Integration** have matched.

As for the many add-on products: OPERATION: FIGHTING TIGER added new theaters, weapons, and aircraft to the basic world; MIG-29 reversed polarities, putting the player in command of a Russian MiG-29 squadron in any of the theaters; and HORNET added a third service, the US Navy, to the war, adding carrier-based F/A-18s and even more theaters.

HURLED INTO THE WILD BLUE YONDER Players new to the FALCON world will find that there is nothing quite like the first time you catapult off a carrier deck in an F-18.

FALCON GOLD

Price: $60.00
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 (486 recommended), 2MB RAM, VGA graphics, CD-ROM; supports AdLib, Roland and Sound Blaster sound cards.
Protection: None
Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Alameda, CA
(510) 522-1164

IT SLICES, IT DICES...

Those of you who have held out for three years and those of you that religiously followed every patch and upgrade are all probably asking, "What does FALCON GOLD offer me?" In a nutshell, FALCON GOLD distributes the latest (and probably final) versions of FALCON 3.0 (version 3.05), MIG-29 (version 1.04), and HORNET (version 1.02) along with all documentation, technical notes and maps.

Additionally, the CD-ROM includes the ART OF THE KILL instructional video featuring combat pilots Pete Bonanni and Phil Handley. This video is a thorough, detailed instructional course that discusses air combat basics, all illustrated using FALCON 3.0 footage. In this 70-minute video, Pete Bonanni, who teaches air combat tactics for the U.S. Air Force, describes the basic ACM geometry and tactical considerations. By illustrating maneuvers with "planes on a stick" and FALCON 3.0 footage, Bonanni provides excellent insight and training. Although discussed in the jet-age context, the bulk of the video applies equally well to historical air combat arenas.

But wait, there's more! **Thrustmaster** includes a version of their popular utility, "tmstick," which edits FALCON 3.0 joystick response to user-defined values. Unfortunately, the version of "tmstick" shipped on the CD-ROM is incompatible with the software also on the CD-ROM. The correct version is available at no cost from Thrustmaster and is also

available in CompuServe's GAMEDPUB forum and other BBS sites.

As usual, the new software versions make all of the existing utilities and patches obsolete, including the KGG utilities (F3MAPS, etc), Ken Richardson's V.42 communication and padlock TSRs, and just about any other user-made add-on product. Richardson has released upgraded versions of his patches on CompuServe's FSFORUM which are spreading through the BBS circuit. KCC has a free upgrade in the works for their utilities which should be available by the time this article sees print.

IT HOLDS MORE CHICKEN THAN A HEN HOUSE

How much disk space will this monstrosity require? If you install everything to the hard drive, you'll need roughly 35 megabytes of free space. Fortunately, all static data files can be accessed on the CD, and using the "partial" installation still gives full access to all features, but requires under 10MBs for the whole package. Using a double speed **Toshiba** 3401 CD-ROM, I noticed no significant delays during flight when using the partial installation, but menus appeared noticeably slower.

ERASE THOSE UGLY WARTS A MiG-29 uses its superior speed and maneuverability to close in on a disadvantaged A-10 Warthog.

How much would you expect to pay for all of this? The four floppy-based software packages, FALCON, FIGHTING TIGERS, MiG-29, and HORNET will easily run between $75 and $100 retail, and the VHS version of ART OF THE KILL retails at $29. FALCON GOLD retails around $60 at most chain software stores. Spectrum HoloByte recently announced an upgrade price for previous customers which discounts the price of FALCON GOLD even further based upon the number of FALCON products you already own. Contact Spectrum HoloByte for details.

What about those loyal customers that already own all the products, have all the current updates, and/or don't have a CD-ROM drive? Spectrum HoloByte plans to release a patch that will upgrade any prior versions of the games to the CD-ROM versions. Over the past three years, the FALCON 3.0 family has supported 16 different software versions; writing and verifying upgrades for each of these versions has proven quite time consuming. Spectrum HoloByte hasn't set a firm release date for the patch other than "in a few weeks."

SNAP THE PADLOCK SHUT Falcon's heralded padlock view allows pilots to track bogeys--like this Soviet Mig-29.

THE CATCH?

FALCON GOLD doesn't contain much in the way of bug fixes. Although FALCON 3.0 has been immensely popular, users have written volumes of complaints and bug reports. The program's stability has always been questionable at best, working flawlessly on some machines and requiring hours of installation tweaking on others. Although I didn't suffer any serious setbacks during FALCON GOLD installation, quite a few other users have.

The only significant change in the CD version is in thrust levels. The F-16 in FALCON 3.0 is significantly more powerful than the real world F-16, resulting in an unfair advantage during modem-play sessions against the MiG-29 or the F/A-18. FALCON GOLD engine thrust levels have been adjusted to balance modem-play.

Many users have had problems viewing the ART OF THE KILL video. Spectrum has released a patch to the AOTK video player which solves most of the problems. I encountered display errors during playback which caused one frame to display outside the normal display box about every 10 seconds or so. I was never able to resolve the error, but it didn't seriously impact the viewing of the video. Finally, many MiG users have reported invisible F/A-18s in some of the scenarios. It appears that some Red Flag missions pitting a MiG against an F/A-18 create invisible aircraft. You can't see them, but they can see you....

Sound Blaster 16 users be advised: simply selecting sound options from FALCON's configuration menu will not properly initialize game sounds. You must set the sound options, exit the game, reboot the PC, then re-enter the game. After that, sounds function normally.

DOES THIS GOLD GLITTER?

In the end, FALCON GOLD is more a final packaging of the FALCON family for those who prefer the CD-ROM format than an advancement of the product line. FALCON GOLD offers a convenient storage medium for CD-ROM equipped enthusiasts and an opportunity to complete the whole series at a bargain price.

Perhaps the best news for air combat fans is that Spectrum HoloByte is finally turning their attention to the next generation of flight simulation. FALCON GOLD probably represents the caboose of the highly successful FALCON 3.0 train. The FALCON family still holds adventures galore, but its fans will now start turning their eyes to the skies to see where Spectrum HoloByte will fly next.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FALCON GOLD

RATING ★★★★

PROS For the FALCON newcomer, this is a steal. You'll get months worth of hard-core flight combat action for the price of one game.
CONS Doesn't offer much to the weathered FALCON fan beyond the convenience of CD-ROM storage.

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Circle Reader Service #81

SUPER NINTENDO

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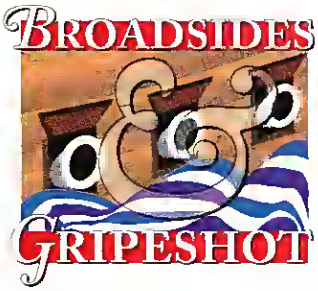
History Repeats Itself...

...BUT WHAT ABOUT HISTORICAL GAMES?

by Alan Emrich



According to our recent demographic survey, the average reader of *Computer Gaming World* has been with the magazine for about two years. I suspect that much of our wargaming readership has been around much longer than that. My experience in talking to you via e-mail and at gaming conventions is that most wargamers have had a computer at least since the mid-80's, and so names like Mech Brigade, Eastern Front, and the Battle Front system might just ring a bell. Thinking back on these golden oldies, I can't help but think what a shame it is that many of the classic games that we "grew up on" will never again leave their dusty slot on the shelf and see action on the screen.

In a recent email discussion I had with CGW reader Ed Morris [EMORRIS5@delphi.com], we pondered why so many computer game companies keep reinventing the wheel all the time. After all, there are some good *old* games that could be made better and brought before the new influx of computer gamers that pour into this hobby every day.

For example, tell me if I'm wrong, but I still think **SSI**'s Kampfgruppe is a great game. Sure, there are other wargames out there on the same topic and scale, but they're *different* than Kampfgruppe. I dream of a cleaned up, polished "90's version" of this game. Ditto Chris Crawford's Eastern Front, a strategic level WWII game released in 1981. I remember keeping my Atari 800 around for years beyond its usefulness just to play this very early classic. Gee, the miracles he did with that game and 32K of memory!

Of course, any such wish list is limited only by personal taste and the amount of time you've been in the hobby. SSI's Battles of Napoleon and the games in the Gettysburg: The Turning Point series are classics that could be republished with a face lift. Likewise, could Action Stations!, Lords of Conquest or Colonial Conquest be revived.

No doubt the publishers holding these titles can cite numerous reasons not to proceed with projects like these. (Why spend money redoing old games when they could be making new games? Nobody

G-2

Our own M. Evan Brooks has this tidbit about our tax dollars at work. He's been affiliated with the military's National Defense University/Wargaming & Simulation Center (NDU/WGSC) for the past six months as an IMA (basically, an unpaid drilling Reservist). Apparently, the military has been looking more and more into commercial wargames, but they have little idea of what's really out there.

Recently, Evan hooked up with the Defense Modeling & Simulations Office (DMSO) as a proper and responsive agency. Interestingly, he adds, that not even 20 minutes after he had talked with DMSO, he was called by a "Beltway Bandit" (a euphemism for military contractors in general because of the prices that some gouge out of the armed forces) interested in obtaining a copy of his anthologies of wargames published here in *CGW*.

Wargamers "Mo" Morgan and Matt Caffrey at Maxwell Air Force Base have reminded us about their interest in a*nything* to do with air

(continued on page 136)

wants those old titles any more!) However, for every SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD or PIRATES! GOLD update that fails to sizzle in the marketplace, a WARLORDS II or EMPIRE DELUXE is born. What I mean to say is that companies don't have to reinvent the wheel with every new strategy game they produce (although I certainly don't want to discourage innovation!). Many clever designs litter the vaults of our hobby's history awaiting a face lift and new life among a new generation of players.

Besides, how is the next generation of computer wargamers ever to experience this hobby's great games when they drop out of print with every new technological standard? Glitz aside, their guts are still good. Old computerized soldiers should never die (at least, not the ones in the good wargames most of us remember from "back when"). Neither should they fade away.

G-2 *(continued from page 135)*

power. One place they recommend as a contact point for those of you with design ambitions is *Airpower Journal*. This publication can be reached at: Airpower Research Institute, 401 Chennault Circle, Maxwell AFB, Alabama 36117-B930.

Jim Dunnigan, who has recently been quoted as saying: "I really believe we won the Cold War because the Soviets developed a larger and more incapacitating bureaucracy," often helps out the military with his expertise in military matters and game design. His HUNDRED YEARS WAR design, presently featured on the GEnie network, is taking another leap forward. Presently, Jim is working on a book-length "help" based item for the game (the purely historical part of it will be over 70,000 words long!). This is all part of a new graphic front end for the game that, when distributed, is supposed to allow users to run it as a world-wide, multiplayer on-line simulation. Lack of ambition has never been one of Jim's problems....

Of course, many wargamers remember Jim Dunnigan for his tenure at SPI during the 1970s, but now that SPI is owned by Decision Games, they're seeking to license the SPI line for computer gaming. Taking them up on it is RAW Entertainment. RAW should be releasing RISE OF THE WEST (a computerized version of the popular SPI title EMPIRES OF THE MIDDLE AGES). Others interested in licensing the SPI line can contact Decision Games at (B05) 943-6B32.

That telephone number also works for those seeking AIDE DE CAMP files for SPI boardgames. These computerized PBEM kits using HPS Simulations' AIDE DE CAMP program include many recent *Strategy & Tactics* magazine games (at $5 each), and several old SPI "monster" wargames, including WAR IN EUROPE ($40). Call for details.

Speaking of AIDE DE CAMP, a quick glance at the features being considered for version 2.0 include geomorphic maps, hidden units with detection routines, on screen line-of-sight, "cut and paste" symbol editing, single key "flip" command for counters and a lot more. All this is tentative, but it looks like the revolution started by this product will move into high gear when v2.0 arrives.

Another popular boardgame, CONQUEST from Oonald Benge, is heading for computerization. This chess-like strategy game will be produced by QQP, certainly a publisher noted for their line of similar strategy games. The programming is being done by Puuao Software in Honolulu. The computer game will be based on the 2-player version of CONQUEST, with the 4-player version awaiting the first game's success.

One boardgame slated for computer conversion is having a rough time. Avalon Hill has taken their plans for producing an IBM version of PATTON'S BEST off the front burner. The final fate of the project is not yet known.

A more successful boardgame/computer game conversion is HARPOON. With Three-Sixty Pacific doing well with HARPOON II and HARPOON ONLINE entering Alpha testing on GEnie (for up to 32 players!), we only await the future release of both HARPOON CLASSIC and scenarios and editors for HARPOON II.

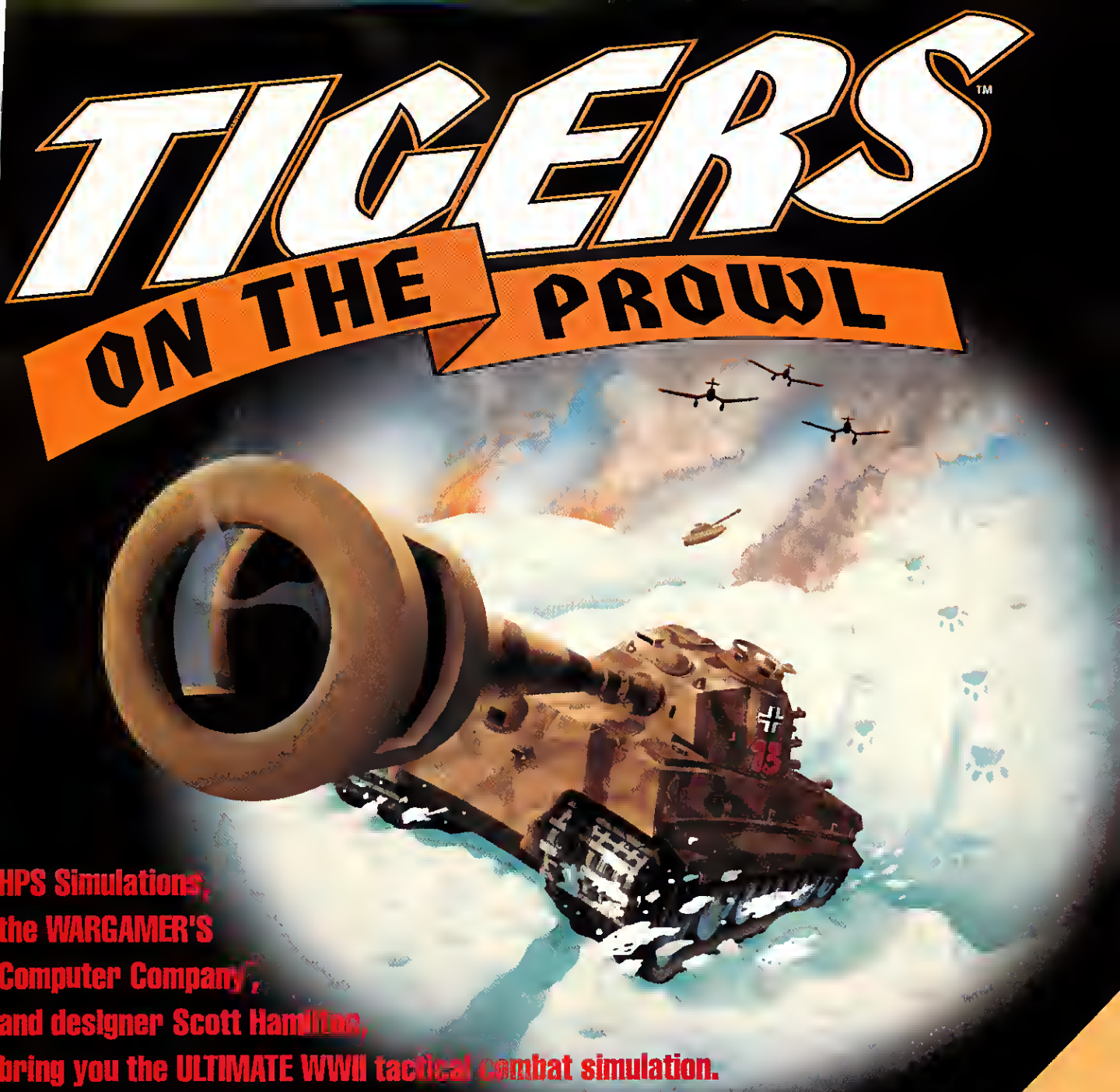
Speaking of Three-Sixty, what's the story on JIM DUNNIGAN'S VICTORY AT SEA? Apparently, the "final patch" (dubbed v1.5) is well into playtesting for the Macintosh version. Gary Osborn, the VAS Team Leader expects another interim patch out before the final one has finished testing in the Fall. The AI is rumored to be VAStly enhanced, too, and with virtually no "cheating" built in for the computer players.

Although "cheating" rhymes with Keating, no one should feel cheated to hear that Roger Keating's next game from SSG will be entitled THE LAST BLITZKRIEG (i.e., the Battle of the Bulge, due out early next year) and features a new engine for operational level WWII era campaigning. While SSG is pretty mum on the details, games in this series won't be "linked," thus freeing SSG up to play with the rules, scale and graphics a bit between future releases. Expect this game to, at the very least, feature 256 color, 640 x 4B0 SVGA graphics.

In the "Where Are They Now?" Department, ultra-nice guys Gregg Carter and Joey Nonnast of CCC, the people who created HIGH COMMAND, are rumored to have had the rights to that game revert back to them after Three-Sixty's recent reorganization. Once Joey is back to 100% (he'll be off to the Mayo Clinic to solve a chronic ailment—well-wishers should drop him an e-mail via CompuServe at 71231,1327), the dynamic duo will consider their options. Of course, they'd like to continue supporting HIGH COMMAND, but they are seeking another publisher for several new projects.

Dispatches from this department's Rumor Bag Guy (The Body Bag Guy?) indicate that a scenario editor for GARY GRIGSBY'S PACIFIC WAR is currently in testing. Designed by Dave Yeager, this is likely to be an unofficial "shareware" style release. MULTI-PLAYER CIVILIZATION continues at MicroProse with a Spring release slated. Apparently, in addition to head-to-head and network play, various on-line services are being considered as "hosts." Finally, players who enjoyed the miniatures feel of Spectrum HoloByte's FIELDS OF GLORY will be glad to hear that the game's engine is being adapted to the Civil War era with a product ready for the first half of 1995, or so our Body Bag Guy reports. We'll have more from the digital trenches of computer wargaming next issue....

TIGERS™ ON THE PROWL



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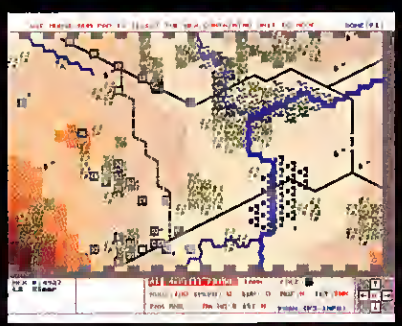

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CIC Is The Life For Me

Avalon Hill's 5TH FLEET Offers Naval Warfare Minus The Complexity

by Terry Lee Coleman

FOR THE MICRO-MANAGING ARMCHAIR ADMIRAL, HARPOON AND HARPOON II WERE THE ONLY FISH in the computer gaming sea. Now, with Joe Balkoski's award-winning 5TH FLEET board game freshly converted to silicon, its fluid movement mechanics, sound logistical model, and accurate combat results intact, naval enthusiasts can enjoy all the flavor with half the fat. This is not to mislead—5TH FLEET is not your typical diet wargame. Mike Innella and Stanley Associates bring years of experience in software design for the military, and worked closely with **Avalon Hill** on the computer version. In addition to the expected AH graphic and production touches, the best news for gamers is that Balkoski was heavily involved in the computer game design. The end result is shaping up as a classic example of how to properly convert a board wargame to the computer.

The opening bridge screen is quite reminiscent of HARPOON. Moving to the strategic overview is a bit of a shock, however. Modeled after satellite photos, the view shows known friendly and enemy forces in the Indian Ocean region. This satellite's-eye view is central to the game design, which has as its basis the time-worn naval adage of "find the enemy before he finds you." Thus, when moving to the main operations map, units are hidden until discovered through radar, sonar or other means.

SNEAK PREVIEW Game Still In Development

Unlike the stark minimalism of the strategic screen, the main operations map offers a crisp VGA palette. The expected blue seas are nicely contrasted by the crisp green and brown hues of the richly detailed land areas, and are divided into movement areas, with the hex-grid on or off as individual taste decrees. The units look exactly like cardboard wargame pieces, but actually work well against the graphic background—those gamers seeking units rendered in 3D STUDIO may apply elsewhere. During each turn, the player moves and attacks with either air, surface ships or submarines in a given phase, followed in later phases with one of the other types, until all forces have moved. While subs operate individually, surface vessels are moved in task forces and air units in squadrons, hex-by-hex, or with a simple drag of the mouse to their final location. In addition to being realistic, this elegant system relieves players of tedious micro-management, allowing them to concentrate on maneuver and tactics.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVERSARY The 5th Fleet is matched against a variety of enemies in over a dozen scenarios, described in detail. This screen also allows you to tweak the AI's aggressiveness and difficulty level.

MY AIM IS TRUE

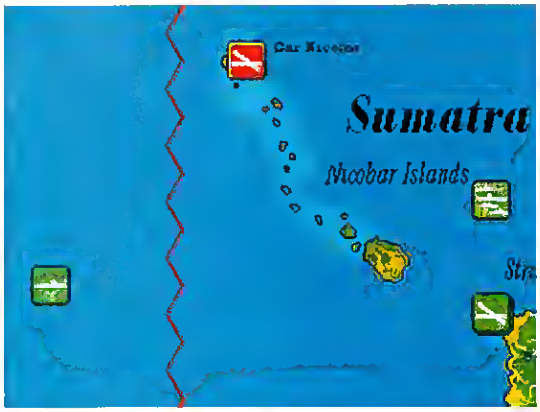
When in the attack portion of each phase, a mere click on the unit you wish to pummel immediately highlights all eligible weapon systems. For instance, if a task force of destroyers and cruisers were attacking a sub, only their ASW would be used. If they were attacking an airbase, each ship would use Harpoons, Tomahawks or guns, with you deciding how many of each to fire, and the kill and damage ratios displayed clearly as you add each weapon to the attack. Damage is based on the destructive load of the weapon, angle of impact, critical system hits, and flotation value of the target (bigger ships are harder to bring down). Missiles are animated on the way to their target, with small graphic explosions on top of the enemy ship counter upon impact. Following is a rather tame screen which gives details on hits, misses, kills and units aborted.

Unlike the board game, the computer version of 5TH FLEET also employs a tactical map. An individual task force is laid out on the tactical map in concentric circles, each comprising a defensive fire zone, with the most important ship, such as an aircraft carrier, located in the center. Incoming aircraft or missiles have to brave the collective fire of the escorts in order to reach the most critical targets. This provides the attacker with another dilemma—does he go for the prize, or try taking out the escorts for riper harvesting later?

Unlike naval vessels, air missions are assigned to areas rather than specific hex paths, simulating their operational radius. Not so abstract as it may sound, this works well in the game, as air units have the most mobility and the most flexibility in the game. They may perform combat air patrol, recon, intercept missions, even lay mines (although as expected, the US is pretty poor at minelaying), provided the particular unit has that capability. Although Electronic Warfare planes are sitting ducks when flying solo, when assigned to intercept missions, they really add to the intimidation factor of F14s. Overall, another simple system for the player which nonetheless offers a lot of strategic and tactical choices.

HOW MUCH IS THAT BIRDIE IN THE WINDOW? The Tactical Reference Module provides detailed information and digitized photos of ships, subs and aircraft from around the world—even the elusive Stealth Fighter.

Much of the game's tension comes from assigning recon flights, positioning subs in sea lanes, etc., all the while attempting to close within attack range. In some scenarios, unidentified ships may even be civilian vessels, with particularly nasty victory point deductions for those admirals who shoot first and count bodies later. Once the enemy is found, using units in the proper sequence is essential. If subs detect an enemy out of their effective attack range, air units which have already been committed are useless. Successful torpedo or gunfire attacks (hardly recommended) require creeping up stealthily to within one hex of the target. Air strikes and vessels armed with cruise missiles may rain death on enemies from farther away, but risk giving away their position. Land-based air are vulnerable, since their position is always known, but pack a lot of firepower. Those players baffled by the number of strategic and tactical options, or who simply wish to play a waiting game, may even pass the initiative to the opponent in place of moving a unit type. As with most good wargames, 5TH FLEET demands a sense of timing and a willingness to take risks. Those players who understand the fundamental nature of modern naval conflict will fare better than the gamer who is accustomed to counting combat factors for a 3-to-1 attack.



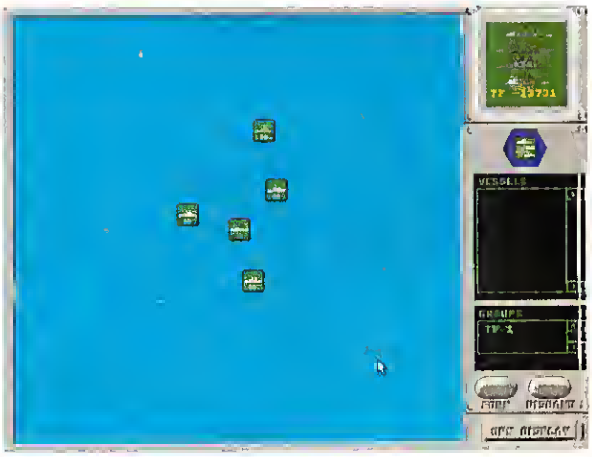
TRAPPING THE RAT OF SUMATRA US surface and sub forces move to missile-launching positions off the coast of Car Nicobar.

BELLS AND AI WHISTLES

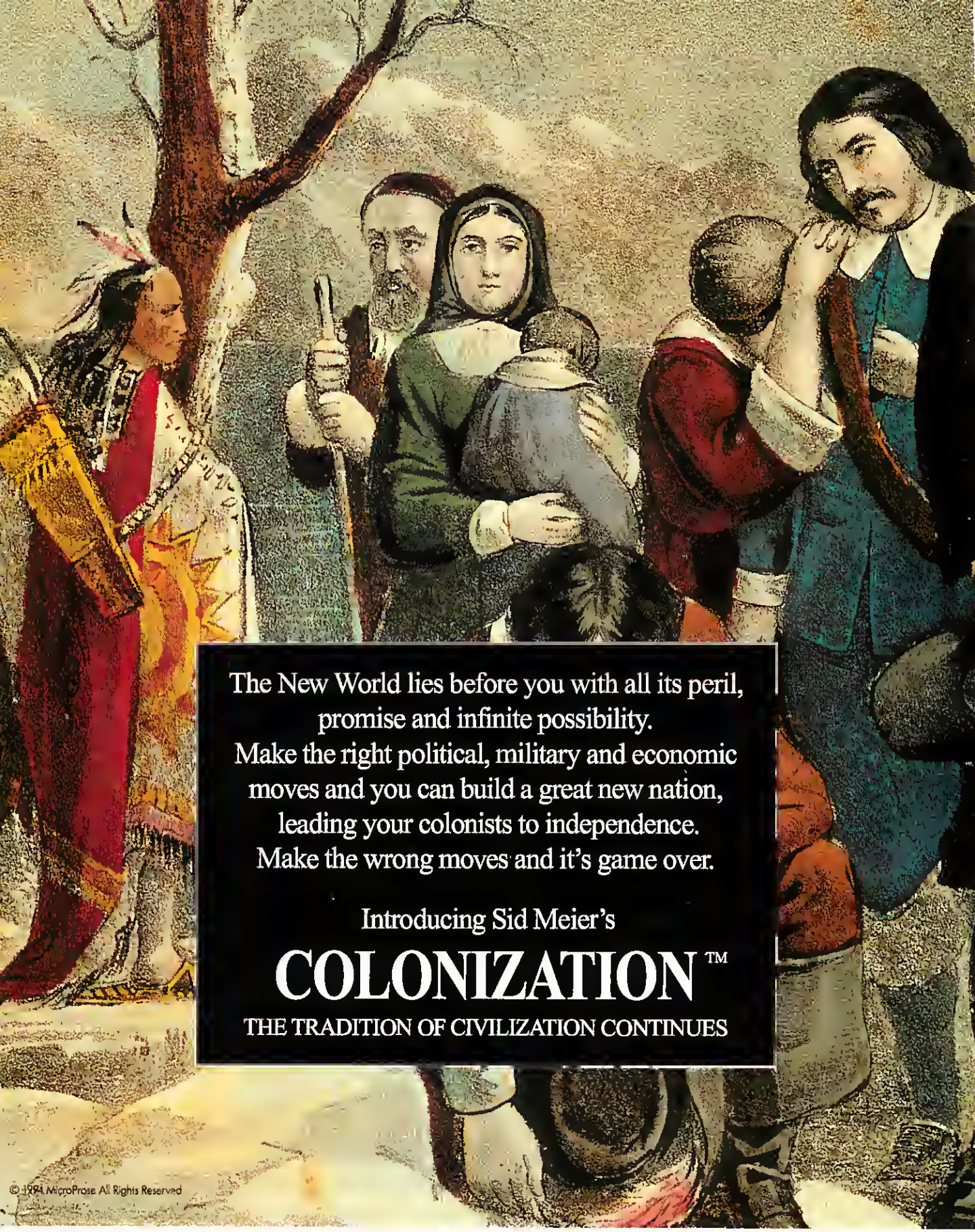
In addition to providing a fun, challenging game, 5TH FLEET has a good online database. It features digitized photos of dozens of ships, aircraft and submarines, along with data on armament, speed and just about anything else a naval hardware junkie could desire. It can be accessed from the opening screen, or merely by clicking on an individual unit. Other nice touches include e-mail play, and (unlike KINGMAKER) hot-seating two players is allowed.

But the real question is, does the AI flounder at sea? On a tactical level, the AI has little difficulty deciding which weapons to use, and it defends well in the task force setup, being a veritable mother hen to its carriers. The three levels of AI are very different, with the highest setting most likely to give a veteran gamer a good fight. The option to set the AI to aggressive is welcome, since it generally sends the computer player on missile-firing extravaganzas sure to deplete its stockpiles—and send a few of your ships to the bottom of the Indian Ocean. In the final version of the game, the ships are to be placed randomly each new time you play a scenario, which adds a lot to replayability. Since the AI is already competent, the tweaks between now and the release date should only enhance the product.

Those who worship at the hallowed alter of HARPOON—offering handfuls of niggling details to the gods of Micro-Management—may not find 5TH FLEET particularly appealing. All it offers is a good simulation of operational-level naval warfare with design elegance and plenty of player decisions, minus the excess of minutiae. Plus, it's playable in a few hours, despite all the data wrapped up in the design. For those who have limited gaming time, 5TH FLEET is like riding the crest of a wave: you may not stay up for long, but it's exciting enough to keep you coming back time after time for the thrill of the quick ride.



CIRCLE THE WAGONS, BOYS! Incoming Tomahawks will have a tough time reaching this flattop, secure in the center of the tactical display.



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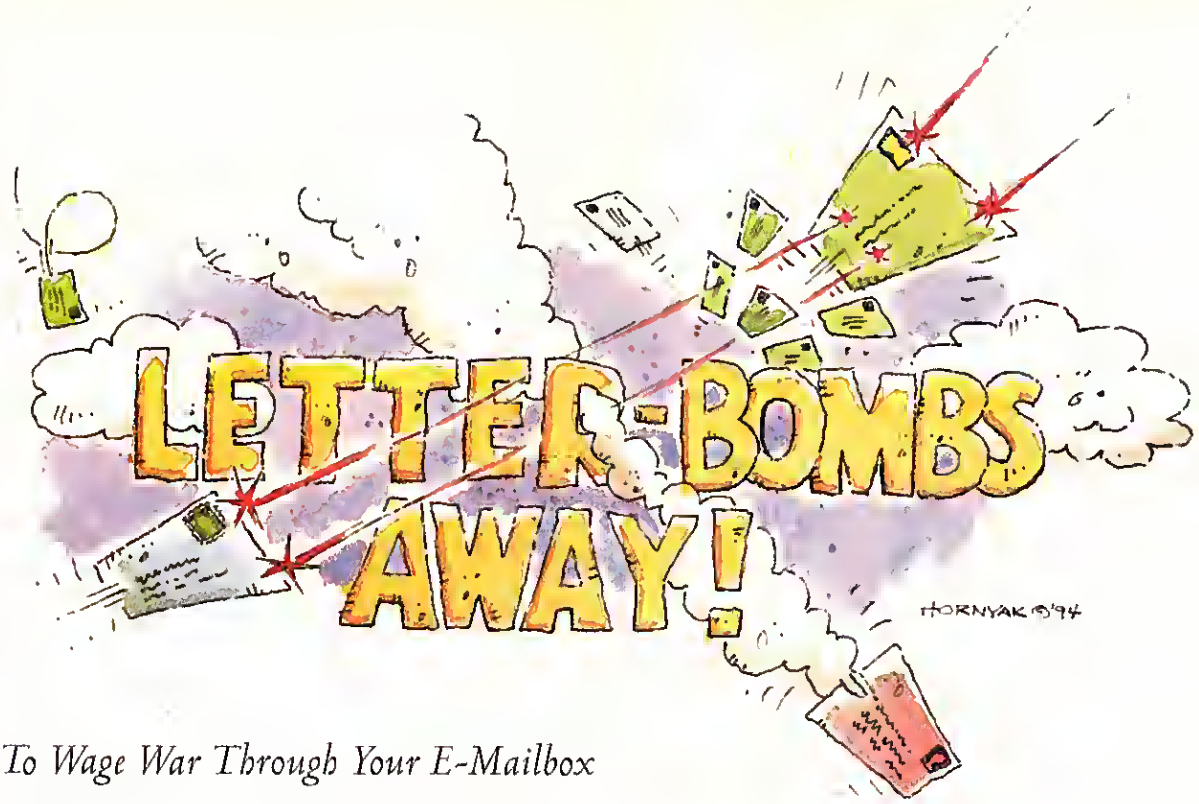

How To Wage War Through Your E-Mailbox

by Robert Gurske

"Can't stand to see your opponent cry? Humiliate him by mail!" This call to battle from long distance, issued by boardgaming pioneer **Avalon Hill**, is nearly as old as wargaming itself. It offered players the opportunity to combat against opponents from all over the country and the world.

The joys of gaming by mail came with their share of disadvantages, however. Moves had to be painstakingly logged by hand, with game boards and cardboard panzers reduced to dust magnets, subject to the pedestrian pace of the Postal Service. As games dragged on for months or years, the chances increased that the battlefield would fall prey to a curious toddler, a sleepy cat, or an errant soft drink.

Electronic mail has breathed new life into this noble concept, allowing wargamers to test their strategies against opponents from all over the globe. The powerful combination of modem and telephone lines transmits turns in a fraction of the time taken by the letter carrier and almost as cheaply.

Even though it uses the same transmission device, modem gaming differs sharply from e-mail gaming. Modem gaming offers real-time competition for gamers separated by time and distance. The downside is that it obviously requires all parties to be available for play at the same time, and unless played in a local phone area, can be costly, since the modem is used constantly during play. Finally, direct connections are just as subject to disaster as boardgames in your family room or study, as periodic line crashes can cause games to go "belly up" just when they're getting interesting.

TURN, TURN, TURN

E-mail gaming, on the other hand, uses a turn based system, which minimizes the amount of time spent online. Ever-resourceful computer gamers discovered that saved game files could be transmitted to an opponent, who would load the saves into his game directory and pick the game up from that point. From this humble beginning, e-mail gaming has evolved to the point where companies now include "ready for e-mail" options as an incentive to purchase the game.

To war by e-mail, armchair generals will need not only modems to transmit the saved files, but compatible computers and identical versions of the game to be played to avoid a nightmare of compatibility problems. Although not strictly necessary, also recommended are a compression program, such as PKZIP, and a neutral bulletin board or online service where files can be sent and "parked" so opponents can download at their convenience.

Because it is turn-based, the basic steps to playing an e-mail game are fairly familiar to wargamers. First, a turn is played and saved after inputting orders. For instance, a V FOR VICTORY game saved under the name IKE would have the file IKE.V4V created in the game directory. If the game allows, it's helpful to save it under the player's side and date. Thus, the opening June 22,1941 turn of SECOND FRONT could be labeled GE62241 by the German player, making it easy for the opponent to know which turn it is—

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very handy if you have multiple E-mail games going.

There may be cases where you have to deal with more than one save game file. (Gary Grigsby's PACIFIC WAR, when saved under option A, creates the files SaveA, SaveA.MD and SaveA.CD in the game directory.) Multiple files having the same name but different extensions can easily be "zipped" together into one file for transmission. A zip program merely takes a file and compresses it into a smaller amount of space. Most wargames have save files of between 75k-140k and will zip to around 30k. Smaller file sizes can be transmitted more quickly, which in turn will save money. Zip programs are available on all major on-line services and most private bulletin boards, with the most commonly used being PKZIP 2.04G, a shareware program. It matters little what program is used, so long as all players in a game use the same version. Although it is possible for two players to transmit their files directly to each other, the most efficient way is to transmit the zipped files to a third party location. The opponent can then be notified the turn is ready for pickup by phone or electronic mail. Zipped files may be named and dated just as any other saved game file.

Regardless of zipped file contents, when downloaded and unzipped into the opponent's current game directory, it reconstitutes into a full-blown game in progress. In this manner, the game is transmitted back and forth, using the speed and convenience of electronic mail to contest a game much more quickly than is possible via "snail mail." Typically, transmitting by e-mail takes five minutes or less even at 2400 baud. During off-peak hours, this comes to less than 60 cents a transfer, making e-mail wargaming very economical as well.

BATTLEFIELD ETIQUETTE

In games like SECOND FRONT and WAR IN RUSSIA, each player moves and has combat sequentially, resulting in two movement and two combat rounds per turn. Generally the procedure is to input orders, save the game, and then transmit, allowing your opponent to resolve the combat phase. You can still run through the combat on your end *after* sending the saved turn to your opponent, realizing that these "pseudo-results" don't count. At least, you'll have an idea of how the battles will turn out.

PACIFIC WAR and the V FOR VICTORY series use a different approach, where each side inputs orders and one joint combat resolution ensues. The most common practice here is to take turns resolving combat. Some games, such as PACIFIC WAR, include battle or action reports which may be reviewed by the player who did not see the actual combat resolution. Essentially anything that the participants can agree to is a valid way to play, so feel free to experiment. I once had a terrific time in an 8-player game of SECOND FRONT, which hooked me forever on multi-player e-mail games. The larger the group, the more simple courtesies, such as logging combat results or informing players of actions that cannot be seen on the other end, will be appreciated.

Since most computer games weren't specifically designed to be played by e-mail, there are some idiosyncrasies which must be dealt with. The Grigsby SF/WF/ WIR system has a supply recalculation every time the game is saved and reloaded, which tends to change unit strengths a bit. The effect is more pronounced in large multi-player games where during one turn the game is saved and reloaded multiple times. The V4V series has a battle report function, but unlike the information in PACIFIC WAR, the V4V report is a specific phase which cannot be reviewed later on. HIGH COMMAND has a different problem—multiple phases for each turn. It is e-mail playable, but players will have to come up with a number of ground rules on game play.

If a game is turn based, has separate save game files, and saving the game and restarting it retains orders put in previously, odds are it can be played via e-mail. The keys to successful e-mail wargaming are creativity and flexibility. Above all, e-mail wargaming is a true "gentleman's game." Anyone who wishes to violate the honor system may very easily circumvent the few safeguards. Indeed, with many games (such as PACIFIC WAR) it's very hard not to load e-mail games and get an inadvertent glimpse of enemy ship and sub deployments. Fortunately most players are interested in a challenging game brought on by a human opponent and not the thrill of victory at any price.

I've found e-mail wargaming to be a fascinating and rewarding experience, be it battling a wily Texas lawyer on the steppes of Russia or a midwestern school teacher in carrier battles out in the Pacific Ocean. It allows people of completely different backgrounds and geographical locations to come together not only to share the common joy of wargaming, but to get to know one another as well. Games that became boring against an AI easily tamed, now take on a whole new level of play value. Give it a try, you won't be disappointed.

Finding opponents for e-mail wargaming is the first step in becoming an e-mail warrior. The best place to find players in on-line. Nearly every large network (CompuServe, GEnie, Internet, etc.) has a bulletin board dedicated to linking up gamers. If you are not connected to a network, try running an ad in the CGW Opponents Wanted page.

THE E-DITORS' E-MAIL PICKS

You can play just about any turn-based game by e-mail, but there are some games more suited to the task. Here are ten titles that either have built in e-mail features, or have save game files that are easy to transmit over the wire. So pick one up, find a foe, and start trading blows!

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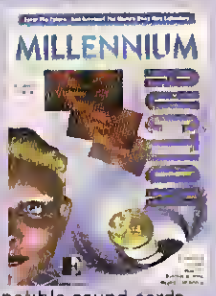
New Bids On The Block

MILLENNIUM AUCTION Hosts The Unholy Marriage Of Money And Art

by Allen L. Greenberg

LONG BEFORE ROBIN LEACH TOOK UP VOCATIONAL YACHT HOPPING IN *LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH & FAMOUS*, the leisure activities of the world's wealthy were a rich source of commentary and fascination. It is the rich, of course, who make it a point never to ask the price when purchasing their yachts. It is the rich who have the unique ability to evoke laughter from a joke despite how badly they might butcher the punch line. When it comes to art, the rich have always stood as proof that beauty resides within the wallet of the heholder. In Eidolon's MILLENNIUM AUCTION, you have the chance to be counted among these privileged few. Joining a handful of eccentric and very wealthy collectors, you will gather in the world's most exclusive auction facility to try to become Earth's most highly praised art collector and dealer.

MILLENNIUM AUCTION



Price: $59.95
System: I8M compatible 386SX or better, 4MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 10M8 hard drive space, mouse, CD-ROM, Windows 3.1; supports MPC compatible sound cards
Protection: None
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AUCTION is a light-hearted strategy exercise whose play is very nearly eclipsed by its multimedia presentation. The program features extensive use of video clips, three dimensional animated modeling, still photos, digitized voices, and classical and neoclassical music. The game takes place in a hypothetical 21st century in which many of the catastrophes we had fervently hoped would go away have actually happened. The world's economic system has begun to collapse, as has much of its ozone layer. Earthquakes, disease and other natural disasters have robbed humanity of many of its cultural and historic treasures. To the cold-hlooded, well-to-do who collect various *objets d'art*, these are not actually crises. Each incident simply serves as a dramatic background against which the treasures of the world either increase or decrease in value. The tragic loss of a large percentage of a particular artist's work may cause the value of his or her remaining creations to skyrocket. Likewise, the discovery that a certain type of work has been illegally forged casts doubt on all creations of its type, thus deflating their value.

To participate in this circus, you must first choose a character from a multiracial, international group of strongly motivated and highly successful entrepreneurs. Each character is accompanied by a brief description and a dossier with interviews, newspaper and magazine clippings. As far as game play is concerned, this material becomes more valuable when you wish to study your computer-controlled opponents than when choosing your own character. The sensuous tones of Nuria the narrator guide you through each step of the selection and registration process. She also provides a generous quantity of on-line audio help throughout the game on request. Up to four live players may participate in AUCTION, provided they are able to crowd around a single keyboard.

AUCTION's goal may be slightly ambiguous the first time around, and some players may be confused whether it is art or money they seek. The answer is that you are playing to increase your "net worth." To begin, you will be allowed only $8.5 million of your character's holdings, but this is enough to buy and sell art throughout the game. Each art object is assigned an appraised value, and the sum total of each of these values, in addition to your remaining cash, represents your net worth.

LET'S START THE BIDDING AT ONE MILLION DOLLARS

The game opens in what is apparently a posh portion of cyberspace set aside for the exclusive use of AUCTION's participants. Here, each item available in the upcoming auction is listed, along with its appraised value and some offers for it from the outside world. Although they may not participate in the auction themselves, various institutions and collectors will have offers posted for each item on the auction block. Often, particularly high offers are made for certain items provided they are secured as a group. If it is cash you are looking for, it will often

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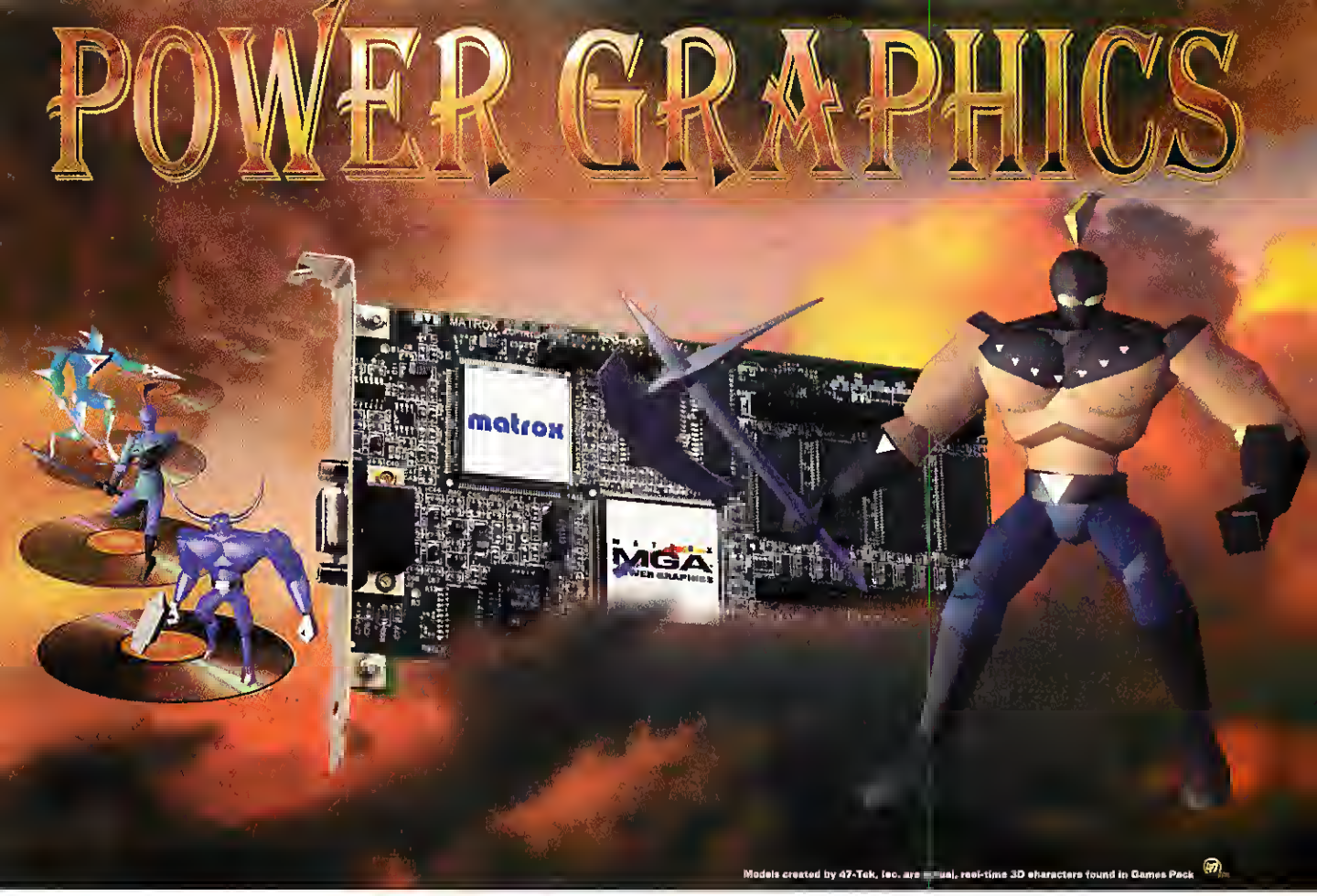

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be to your advantage to make sure you obtain each of the items listed in that group. Since there are a total of 12 items being auctioned in each game, it is imperative that you write these offers down, and the AUCTION package includes a notebook just for this purpose.

The package also includes two CDs, only one of which is used to play the game. The other disk contains a short history lesson so that players in the 1990s may catch up on events from the next century. There is also a non-interactive demo which gives the novice player an idea of how the game flows.

The game's instruction book alludes to certain moral questions regarding some offers you will receive. Museums and institutions are trying to take items out of the hands of private collectors, thus ruining some of the "fun" for those who like to collect 'em and trade 'em. One collector is noted for his love of torching his privately acquired masterpieces in public, thus depriving the world of their beauty forever. However, that same collector will frequently offer you far more money for certain works than any other source. Strangely enough, there are no repercussions for selling anything to this person, and no mention is even made of it once you have done so.

Away from cyberspace, you enter the gallery where you will be confronted by your fellow bidders. Holding drinks which are doubtlessly both expensive and intoxicating, participants share their thoughts and artistic opinions. It is also here that the game's designers have obviously had the most fun in creating AUCTION. Each conversation is embellished with nightmarish imagery and grotesque animation. Watching each speaker's figure oscillate between normal and bizarre, one can only wonder exactly what was in those drinks, or at the very least, what the programmers might have ingested at the time they assembled this portion of the game. Above the heads of the bidders is a television set which, when selected with the mouse, displays a cheery, well-fed newscaster. He will be reporting one or more stories which may or may not have something to do with one of the objects for sale at the auction. World interest, for some reason, may have shifted to one particular item. Or, some earth-shaking event may have just taken place which will affect the value of another. Down the hall is yet another television set, along with a newspaper and radio. Each source may contain news events that will affect an item on the auction block. It is important to check out the conversation amongst the bidders, who may very well be reacting to the news you have just heard.

THE PRICE ISN'T ALWAYS RIGHT The Bob Barker-esque auctioneer takes bids from four players in the auction room. Make sure you've done your research before his gavel falls and you're stuck with a turkey.

After you've finished gathering news and gossip in the gallery, it's time to proceed into the auction room. Nuria will warn you if there is anything you might have missed in the gallery before you proceed.

MUSEUM MAINTENANCE MAN In addition to a cush job, Zeke, the janitor, has a newspaper, radio and TV to find out what in the world might impact art prices tomorrow.

SENSUOUS SALESWOMAN

In the auction room, Nuria's lush voice describes each item with unabashed bias. The fervent passion in her voice as she describes Raphael's painting "The Three Graces" is, by itself, enough to arouse decency censors in more conservative communities. Even when she is describing more modern and less graceful pieces of art, this woman deserves high praises for her cunning salesmanship. The bidding proceeds in a natural, stop-and-go fashion. The auctioneer, a friendly, upper scale Bob Barker type, respectfully urges his patrons on to higher offers. Players bid in $100,000 increments using either the mouse or a pre-selected key, and are allowed some small extension of credit should they bid beyond their on-hand cash. An audience breaks into polite applause each time a bidder offers more for an object than its appraised value. Meanwhile, the screen displays shifting views of the auction room and lists the item's appraised value along with the current high bid. Only four items are auctioned at a time, after which you are returned to the gallery.

Back in the gallery, net worths are reevaluated based on local and world events. The painting you just purchased may have plummeted in value due to a paint-eating virus that was tossed on it earlier by some bio-technical vandals. Or, the government may have taken a sudden interest in the information stored in an antique computer you purchased, thus greatly increasing its value. This is the time to once again check out the news sources, listen in on conversations, or reenter cyberspace in order to cash in any of your acquisitions. Each game includes three rounds of bidding, after which a winner is declared.

Computer-controlled players treat their human-controlled adversaries as equals. The same information that you uncover through television, radio and newspaper becomes available to computer players as well. You will also note that these artificial opponents will be responding to outside offers, and will attempt to assemble those groupings of objects that are worth so much extra cash. Fortunately, they also seem happy to bid well beyond an item's appraised value, so that it is often possible to watch the poor creatures load themselves up with objects at inflated prices.

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"The graphics are, in a word, awesome.
Computer Gaming World
"Luminaria has blended a fine mix of hip history, challenging game play, and quality presentation..."
Electronic Entertainment
"...*Wrath* feels like a graphic adventure but looks like an interactive movie."
New Media Magazine
"...hooks the player with humor, effortless lessons in mythology, beautifully rendered graphics and an interesting challenge."
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The news stories that appear on television are usually the most significant, and merit more attention than those appearing elsewhere. Unfortunately, the most tempting strategy is simply to cheat. By saving the game early, then waiting to discover which items have changed most dramatically in value, you may simply replay the game with your new, insider knowledge.

A BULL MARKET The player's character throws his two-million-dollar bidding spear at a cave painting from Lascaux.

GOING, GOING...

AUCTION's intuitive, mouse-oriented interface is well designed. The game uses icons for control, and a number of short-cut commands are also available. As is the case with any of the new breed of "multimedia" programs, loads of free memory, in addition to the most powerful processors, work wonders for keeping the program flowing happily. The instruction manual also insists that your sound and video drivers are up to date.

It is unfortunate that AUCTION lacks a network or modem option. Playing the game with several people gathered around one keyboard is an awkward situation, and some players may wish to contemplate their art sales in private.

Although the program deserves some praise for its originality, AUCTION's greatest problem may be its lack of replay value. After a dozen or more sessions, its videos and news items become repetitive, and even its catalog of 135 treasures may be too small to keep the game vital for many more sessions. Beyond replay, hard-core strategists will find AUCTION much too simple, but beginners and less serious players will probably have some good times with the game. In fact, MILLENNIUM AUCTION might be good bait to lure family and friends who have been unimpressed with gaming thus far. The great graphics, charming writing, light weight strategy, and the allure of playing global bigshot with an unlimited credit line may pull some away from the TV and its tired reruns of Robin Leach.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

MILLENNIUM AUCTION

RATING ★★★

PROS An imaginative multimedia presentation with impressive art, amusing stories, and sensuous art descriptions. Very easy to learn. A terrific buy for a new or casual gamer.

CONS Players who value deep strategy and extensive replay over graphic "chrome" might let this piece of multimedia art go to another bidder.

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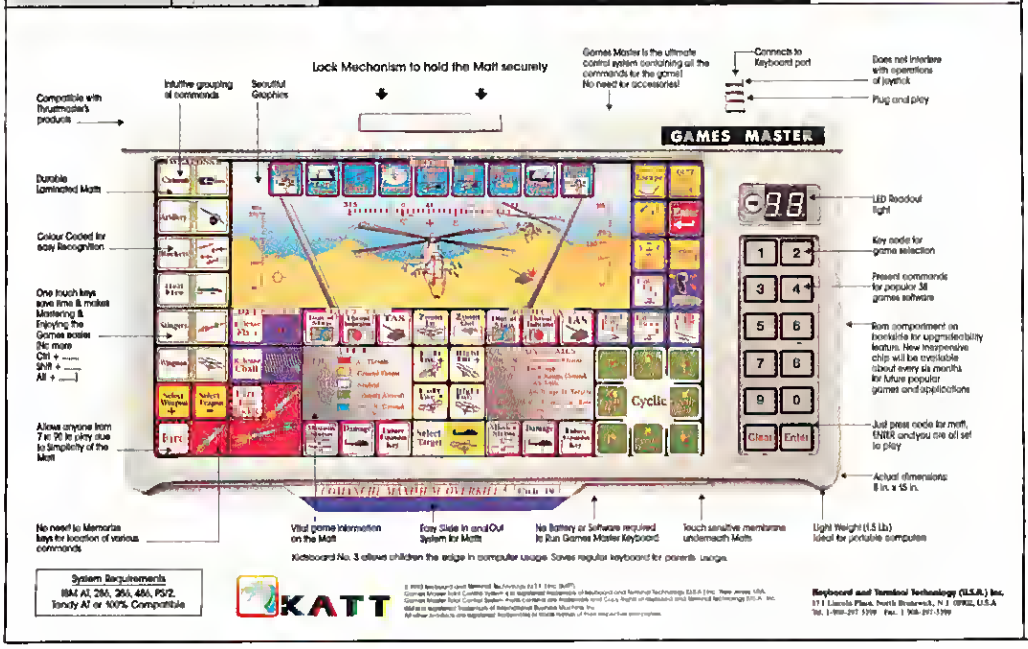

System Requirements
IBM AT, 286, 386, 486, PS/2, Tandy AT or 100% Compatible

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		14. F-15 II	
		15. F-15 II	
		16. Gunship 2000	
		17. Jetfighter II	
		18. Matrix	
		19. Comanche Maximum Overk II	
		20. Megafortress	
		21. Red Baron	
		22. Red Storm Rising	
		23. Secret Weapon of the Luftwaffe	
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		25. Special Forces	
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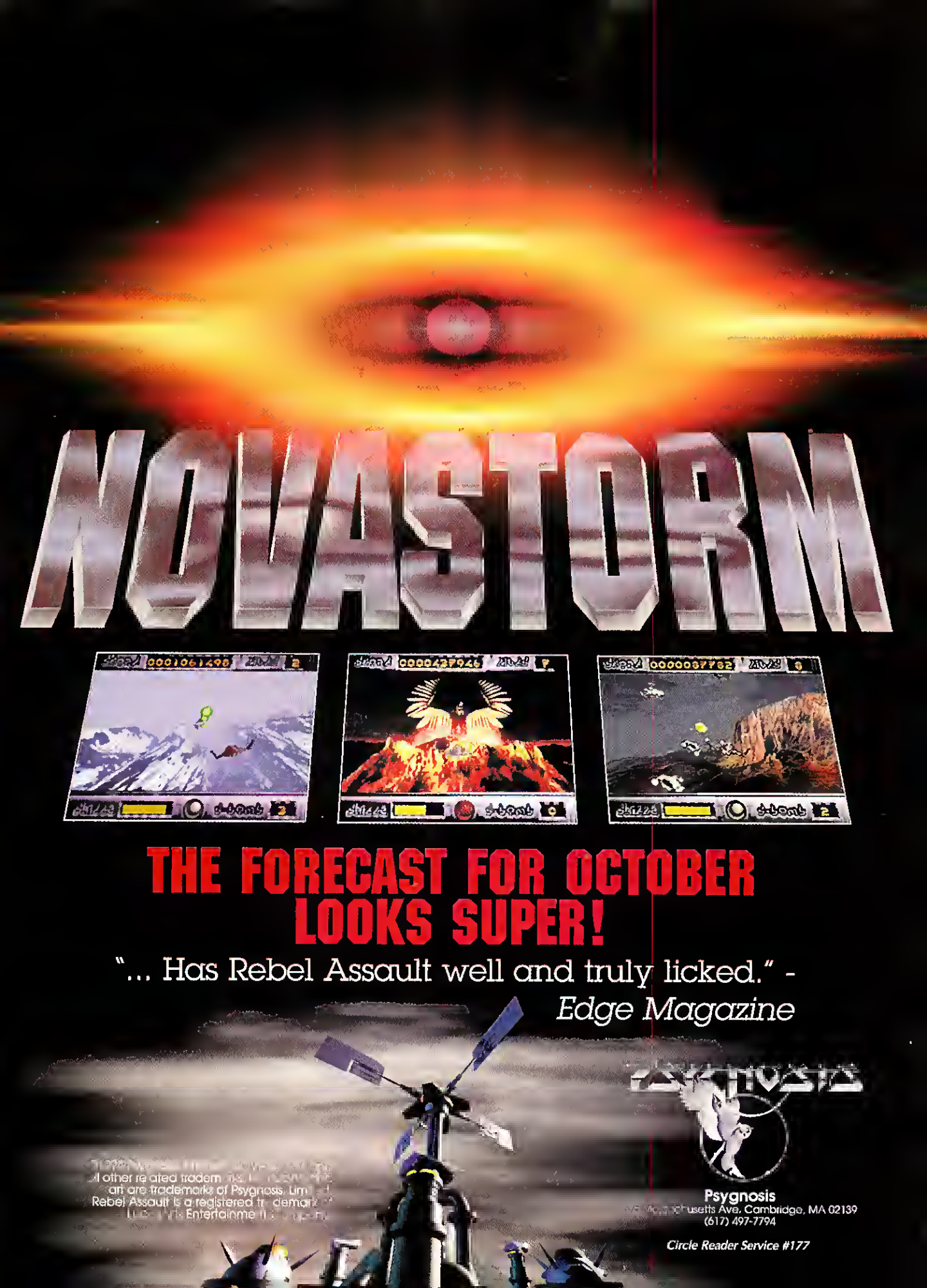
		27. Task Force 1942	
		28. Ultima Underworld	
		29. Wing Commander	
		30. World Circuit	
		31. X-Wing	
		32. Air Warrior	
		33. A-10 Tank Killer	
		34. ATP	
		35. Harrier Jump Jet	
		36. Mig-29	
		37. Spectre	
		38. Strike Commander	
		39. Tornado	
		40. Ultima Underworld II	
		41. Ultra Bots	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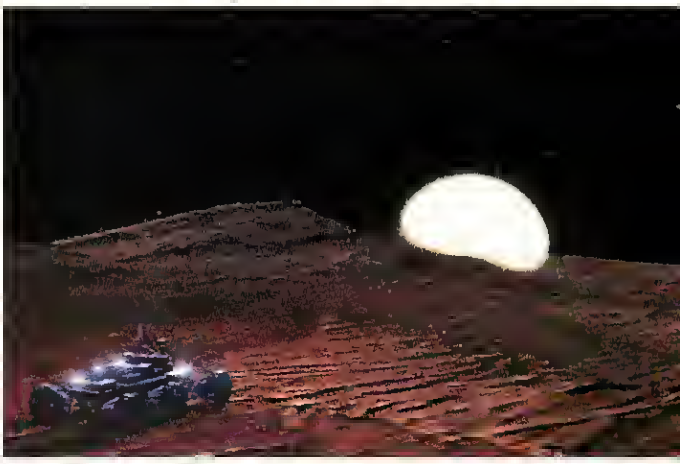
False Dawn

Humanity Has No Tomorrow In Sierra's OUTPOST



by Martin E. Cirulis

"UNLIKE MOST COMPUTER GAMES, OUTPOST WAS DESIGNED TO EXPAND AND grow. To make this strategy possible, there came a time when we had to stop adding features to the current installment and release it into the world, much as any other parents (game developers) who must release their offspring (digital children) to lead their own lives when they reach maturity (when they're ready to kick them out the door). With this approach in mind, the following items mentioned in the Outpost manual did NOT make it into the final version of the game...."

The preceding paragraph is a direct quote from the READ.ME file that accompanies OUTPOST and your first big clue that all is not what it seems in this much awaited strategy game. Perhaps the powers that be at **Sierra** should have made sure that their child was fully clothed before they kicked the poor thing out the door, a tribute to the proverb, "Haste makes waste." In this case, the haste turned a game that should have been a milestone into a very pretty wreck. To be honest, the READ.ME quote, a slick combination of rationalizations and omissions, sums up the OUTPOST experience and the forces behind it with such eloquence and irony that it could stand alone as a review. On the other hand, the editors at *CGW* insist that details are important to allow the reader to make a fair decision of their own, and so I shall hold forth on OUTPOST, regardless how much it may pain me.

OUTPOST

Price: $69.95
System: 386-25MHz or better (486-33MHz strongly recommended), 4MB RAM, 5MB hard drive space, mouse, CD-ROM, Windows 3.1; supports most major sound cards. Floppy version also available.
Protection: None
Designer: Bruce Balfour
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Coarsegold, CA
(800) 757-7707

CHICKEN LITTLE'S REVENGE

The premise for OUTPOST is both sound and fascinating, especially in light of Jupiter's recent cosmic fender-bender with a broken-up comet. In the near future of OUTPOST, just as Carl Sagan has been warning us, a large comet makes an illegal lane change and heads straight for Earth. This multi-kilometer wrecking ball promises to ruin an entire afternoon with a gigaton explosion that causes enough environmental fallout to make our planet look like a Union Carbide training film. But before it does, a few industrialists who still have faith in the space program and have obviously been watching "When Worlds Collide" on the Late Show decide to build a giant colonization ship to save a handful of humans and, hopefully, a heck of a lot of frozen genetic material. Oddly enough, they pick you to captain this enormous back-door clause, save humanity from its own short-sightedness, and re-establish the species on some other world orbiting a strange and distant star.

Now what distinguishes this game from others that have worked the "ragtag fleet of humans" theme is the background. OUTPOST doesn't just hand you a bunch of cool looking spaceships and buildings from the generic SF backlot; instead you are graced with actual designs and plans, beautiful renditions straight from NASA think tanks to your CD-ROM. None of those dubious faster-than-light drives or transporters for you; this quest is undertaken with engineering governed by the strictest of scientific laws, a tribute to humanity's ingenuity and achievements instead of a simple flight of fancy.

"LET'S PUT THE MALL OVER THERE"

If you've managed to pack well and choose the right destination, you'll be lucky enough to make planetfall on some hard little rock pile that will probably resemble one of the more inhospitable real-estate locations in our own Solar System. (Oh yes, you had to go far away to be as miserable as you could have been on some planet in our own system. Some clever scientist pointed out that the same event that had dragged the earth-killer into our lives was going to cause an eon's hard rain of comets all throughout the Sol System, and therefore nothing merely interplanetary was going to be much safer than poor doomed Terra Firma. A somewhat questionable rationale, but if it were the only logical shorthand in the game it could be easily overlooked.) Unfortunately, given the state of Slower-Than-Light travel, you and your crew were frozen for the long relativistic trip, and a nasty surprise awaits you upon awakening.

In a dubious triumph of dysfunctional personalities over common sense, (warning: another logic shorthand event approaches) you discover that some bozo and half your crew have buggered off with half your precious equipment, having decided that seeding humanity again

256-color VGA displays

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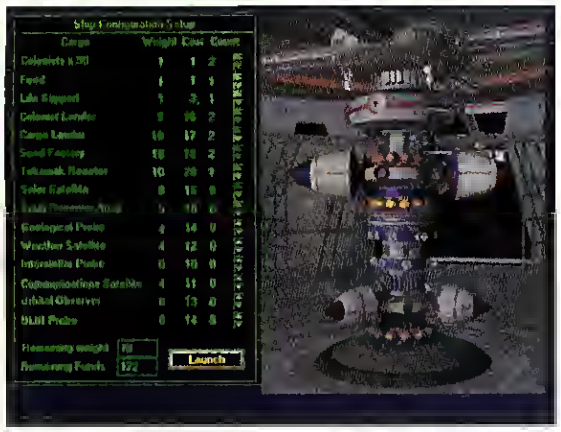
This ad uses actual images from the game, a preview of Cyclones' awesome graphics. © 1994 Strategic Simulations, Inc. All rights reserved.



GALACTIC GAVIN'S USED STARSHIPS The ship configuration setup allows you to select a variety of accessories, from Tokamak reactors to geological probes—racing trim not included.

with 200 or less people on a hostile world isn't quite difficult enough to make us all forget our petty differences and show some solidarity. Although this suspicious plot twist does provide you with your competition—a "rebel" colony—some other premise, such as a second colony ship, could have provided the same development without straining the player's credulity.

From this point on, OUTPOST is intended to run as a hard-edged, complex, open-ended developmental simulation in the tradition of **Maxis**' classic, SIMCITY. The player places tiles on the terrain that represent various high-tech facilities and habitats, along with mines to supply your colony with raw materials and labs to supply you with discoveries that will make your life easier and perhaps some of your decisions harder. There is no free lunch here: resources are vitally important. Without resources, life-sustaining facilities can grind to a halt, and with them, your life. Development always has to be balanced against survival, research against day-to-day needs. And all the while, you live in fear of the meteor strike, solar flare or some other unpredictable disaster that could spell the end for what's left of humanity.

Sounds great, doesn't it? Unfortunately, in the tradition of the quote that opened this review, this description, while truthful, leaves out much of what could be considered the truth.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

OUTPOST is supposed to be, according to the marketing pitch, a game of details and decisions, and as such the player could reasonably hope to be well-informed of his options and capabilities, at least for his initial state. Your exploration, colonization, and conquest of an alien world is supposed to be full of mysteries and surprises, but one of them shouldn't be trying to figure out how your own equipment and facilities work. This is what a clear, concise and large rule book should be for. Unfortunately, Sierra decided that this was an unnecessary luxury for a colony manager. The OUTPOST manual is barely bigger than the CD case and is actually thinner, making for 90-odd pages of large type and even larger margins, with 20 pages given over to chrome or marketing information and another ten pages dedicated to features not even supported by this version of the game. This leaves the player with a very thin wafer of information indeed.

This manual is so incomplete and unhelpful that the fact that there is a very large strategy guide available on the market for another 20 bucks might just make OUTPOST owners very angry and paranoid. They will gladly pay money to find out the hidden workings and subtle strategies of a game, but they should not have to add to the cost of a $50 piece of software just to find out how it actually is used. Given the reaction to this tactic, which is used by both OUTPOST and **Electronic Art**'s SEAWOLF, this is a trend best left at the feet of the marketing whiz who dreamed it up so he/she will be in the perfect position to be booted out the door when he/she bends over to pick it up.

"WHAT BUG THROUGH YON WINDOWS BREAKS?"

Designing OUTPOST as a Windows application from the ground up seemed like a great idea in a game that wanted to immerse you in the data stream of a simulation, giving you the feel that you actually are in control of a vast facility through a computer control desktop. Unfortunately, as is the case with most other good ideas in this game, it has either been shafted or just not given the chance to be refined to an acceptable level. Without question this is one of the worst Windows applications I have ever seen. OUTPOST seems almost deliberately to be wallowing in all that is bad about the interface while scrupulously avoiding any of the advantages.

Before you think I am being terribly unforgiving about this, please consider the following: OUTPOST runs dreadfully slow on most 486-66s with 4MBs of memory: literally five seconds to execute the average command or update the graphic window, and this is with 30MBs of info dumped onto a fast hard drive; some 16MBs machines barely run faster. The various graphic and information windows are non-scaleable and cannot be reduced to icons to speed things up. The whole simulation hogs so much processing power that running the game without remembering to close all background applications such as the AFTER DARK screen saver is a guarantee of some kind of fatal crash. Unless it has all of your system to itself, OUTPOST will violate system integrity more often than a busload of Senators at a Gullible Young Thing Convention. This kind of sloppy utilization should only be found in a program under development, not a marketable program. Even if all else in OUTPOST was up to specs, this interface would make the sim unplayable to many consumers, unless there is a big market of people who enjoy staring at the screen while their drives access for an hour and a half out of a two hour session.

ALIEN METROPOLIS The colony on Beta Hydri 1 may not resemble Hometown U.S.A, but its domes provide an Earth-like environment for the Terran expatriates who dwell on this faraway planet.

Q.Q.P.'s

Strategies of the Month

By:Steve Cohen

The Grandest Fleet

There are many strategies for defense. One of the most popular methods is to put a submarine in the harbor and anchor it there. This works quite well in many cases, but remember there are many other defensive methods. One of my favorites is to use damaged ships to defend ports that have shipyards. This way the damaged ship, repairs itself, and the city is defended as well. Another method is, having a string of carriers anchored at a crucial passage, thus sighting the incoming ships won't be too much of a problem. Be cautious, the ruthless computer opponent can overcome these strategies!

QUOTES FROM THE EXPERTS

"The Grandest Fleet is a fun game, and one that should live a good long life on many gamer's hard drives."

-M. Evan Brooks, Computer Gaming World

"This game[The Grandest Fleet] is hot and QQP deserves to reap what it has sown"

-Ted, Computer Game Review

This is what great gaming is all about.
-M. Evan Brooks, Computer Gaming World

...it's relatively easy to get into, thanks to a well-designed interface. And once you are into it, you'll have a hard time stopping.

-William R. Trotter, PC Gamer

Bridge Olympiad

"Bridge Olympiad" is receiving rave reviews from customers across the world as one of the best new bridge games on the market. I could not begin to give strategies on bridge, for this would take volumes. There are many fantastic books that teach the nuances of this "Easy to play, tough to master" card game.

QQP's reputation for producing top-notch strategy games gets another boost with Bridge Olympiad- another winner. *-Joe Novicki, PC Gamer*

Great graphics, and smooth interface makes for quick play against strong opponents.

-PC Gamer

PGII The Pure Wargame

In the soon to be released Perfect General II wait until you see the Elephant Tanks. They are moving fortresses and we're having a lot of fun with them.

"The Pure Wargame" has many subtleties. When moving pieces, it is an excellent idea to move in smaller steps. This enables you to keep an eye on the fatigue level of your troops and their remaining movement points.

We encourage people to post their strategies and comments in the various forums on the computer networks. There are many great strategies on the networks.

Quantum Quality Productions
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Flemington, N.J. 08822
(908)788-2799
Compuserve 75300,3223 Genie QQP Delphi QQP

Circle Reader Service #179

THE THREE FACES OF OUTPOST

Apart from these technical problems, the game itself seems to have suffered from some sort of identity crisis since the last time I saw it. *(Martin Cirulis wrote a Sneak Preview of Outpost for the December 1993 issue of CGW. For a discussion of that preview and our preview policy in general, see the Interface column in this issue—Ed.)* Instead of being a straightforward, no-nonsense simulation of life on your own in the great void, OUTPOST seems to start to waffle at every turn. Be it from either technical problems or some desire to "lighten" the game up to make it more accessible, this game is suffering from a multiple personality syndrome that would make Freud weep.

In a game intended to get you to care about the outcome of the mission, you are suddenly presented with "wacky" bits of humor that seem misplaced and tend to pull you out of the simulation for a quick, "Well that was stupid" chuckle. Some of these events are merely questionable, such as the choice of reply for your AI assistant or news reports that are sillier and far less useful than the SIMCITY 2K Daily News (i.e. when my colony is suffering brownouts, I need to know what facilities are being affected and how bad, not that the citizens are putting together an assassination committee to remove me from office.) Even worse are the times when the humor actually disrupts the sim itself; for example, when your colony breaches 400 citizens or so and, if you have not created a police station, a Red Light District suddenly pops up. Now it is bad enough that nobody on the design team realized they were making a plausibility error by a factor of ten or more, but can you possibly imagine people living on the edge of survival all leaving their relatively safe underground living areas to crowd into the barely livable command center on the surface merely because there were some bad girls living next door? Ridiculous, no? Yet totally normal for the citizens of OUTPOST, who are obviously from the radical fundamentalist division of NASA. Humor is good, but this kind of poorly thought out game play is worse than useless.

WHO NEEDS A BULLET TRAIN? Cargo lander #4 is ready to roll, strengthening the economy of this budding colony.

HEAVENLY BODIES While the gameplay in OUTPOST is half-baked at best, the same cannot be said of the art. This exquisitely detailed probe was lovingly rendered in 3D STUDIO.

Another critical contradiction in OUTPOST is how it handles information. Specifically there is a lot of information, but none of the things you really need to know are there. Six months ago, this game was sold to me as an intricate dance of needs, wants and disasters where resource management would be the key to success and information would be the player's best ally, better than in any sim of this kind seen so far. Guess what? Even though the ads and documentation for this game give you the idea this might still be true, it isn't. Imagine running the last hope of mankind with the help of an advanced AI and still you have no idea of the following: what your total resource consumption in critical minerals is versus what your resource production is; where your supply trucks full of these minerals are or what their status is; what exactly is killing your citizens and where they are dying (i.e. during construction work or peacefully in their sleep, or from lack of air during lunch); or even what the exact implications of your scientific discoveries are, other than what you can infer from the name of the discovery.

But most ironically, this game that has been billed for months as a tough, heartless simulation of just how hard it would be to survive in the cold universe is not really very hard at all. Oh, there are bad mistakes in game play bordering on bugs that make it almost impossible to win (for instance, mines burn out at a ridiculous rate given how small your manpower is), but as far as toughing it out against the elements goes, life ain't so bad. Even at the hardest level, disasters are not even close to being as tense as they should be, especially in the first 200 turns of your colony's life. It's tedious and frustrating, not a nail-biting thrill.

PREMATURE BIRTH

I will make no qualms about it. I had some high hopes for OUTPOST, shared by others, that were not ridiculously high, but represented an optimism that the game would be something deeper and more involving than what had been seen so far. Instead, the word "OUTPOST" and the phrase "What went wrong?" are conversational Siamese twins. What did go wrong? Anybody who might know is refusing to acknowledge anything is wrong at the time of this review. Stuff happens, I guess, and the world isn't a fair place. Puppies continue to get run over, "Full House" is still a popular TV show, and publishers continue to wreck good games by sending them to market far too soon.

Personally a part of me still has hopes for this game, and maybe a year or more from now we may find ourselves laughing about the rocky start of a truly exceptional simulation. But for today, I can't recommend this game to even the most die-hard space game enthusiasts for anything but the idea and the quality of the artwork. Otherwise, all we can do is keep our ear to the ground, our money in our wallets, and wait to see what the inevitable tide of patches and add-on disks will bring.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

OUTPOST

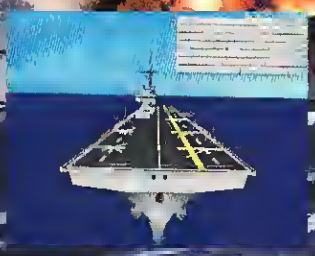
RATING 💥

PROS Great graphics, great concept, great promise, but....

CONS ...its great ideas were botched in the execution phase. Buggy, incomplete, and with grossly insufficient documentation, this game is to Sierra what the Challenger disaster was to NASA.

THE GRANDEST FLEET

OUTSTANDING DESIGN WINTER CES 1994 GAME BYTES MAGAZINE



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Quality Productions, Inc.

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- City Economics-Cultural and Industrial aspects
- Campaign Play
- Player History
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- Random Maps-unlimited variation
- A truly challenging AI
- Battles Include: Falkland Campaign, Battle of Northcape, The Bismark-Tirpitz Connection, Surigao Straight, Yamamoto's Trap, etc.
- Plus some "What if" Battles
- A tactician's and strategist's delight!!!

"The Grandest Fleet" computer game is for IBM PC. It can be obtained through your favorite retailer or call:

1-908-788-2799

or by writing to:
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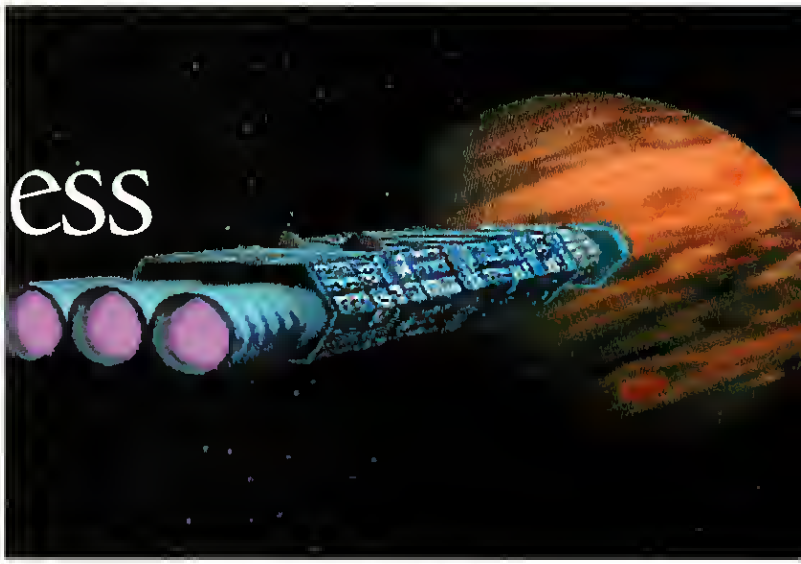
On Target, More Or Less



Sierra's ALIEN LEGACY Quests For A Place To Hang Humanity's Hat

by Martin E. Cirulis

WHEN A HOUSE IS BEING BUILT, THE CARPENTERS INVOLVED AGREE AHEAD OF TIME HOW accurate their measurements must be in terms of what is sometimes referred to as the Fudge Factor. This factor is expressed as how close to perfect a measurement has to be, as in, "This hall is twenty feet, give or take half an inch." Trump Towers is probably "give or take a sixteenth" while a tree-house might be built along the lines of "give or take a couple of inches" depending how tired the adult in charge is. As it turns out, Sierra's runner up SF colonization game, ALIEN LEGACY, epitomizes the same idea in software design and storyline. Interestingly enough, it carries off its intentions much more successfully than its close company relative, OUTPOST, which was meant to have a much higher degree of accuracy. Sometimes it's better to have a tree house you can have fun in, rather than a gleaming office tower where somebody forgot to put in the plumbing and the elevators don't work yet. ALIEN LEGACY is a solid game that reflects the adventure and danger of trying to colonize an alien star system...give or take a little.

ALIEN LEGACY

Price: $45.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-20MHz or better, 4MB RAM, VGA graphics, 24MB hard drive space, mouse; supports AdLib, PAS, Gravis Ultrasound, and Sound Blaster sound cards.
Protection: None
Designer: Joe Ybarra
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Coarsegold, CA
(800) 757-7707

IF IT AIN'T ONE THING, IT'S ANOTHER

Once again the poor old Earth has been closed for renovations, but this time it isn't a cosmic wanderer that does the job; instead, it's a bunch of aliens from Alpha Centauri who decide to simplify Galactic diplomacy by making sure they are the only ones left to inherit the stars. Humanity's response is to build a massive war fleet to grind out towards Alpha C in order to explain our wants and needs. At the same time the UN decides to hedge its bets and builds two huge, slower-than-light colony vessels to send in the opposite direction just in case these Centaurians are tougher than they look. The Beta Caeli System looks the most promising to the collected minds of the UN, and the plan is to create a bolt hole for the species just in case.

You are chosen to captain the first vessel, the UNS Calypso. A second vessel, the UNS Tantalus, takes another 16 years to be built, but thanks to better engine technology the second ship will arrive 21 odd years ahead of your vessel. So in reality, your job should be pretty cushy as you will be functioning more as a re-supply vessel than a colonization ship. Unfortunately for you, things are even worse than you could have imagined. When you are awakened from suspended animation, it may as well be a Monday morning, because the first two pieces of news to greet your blurry eyes are the last transmission from a beaten Earth and a scanner report stating that not only is there no sign of your sister-ship in the Beta Caeli system, but there's no trace of any human presence in the system at all. Yes, it's going to be one of those centuries.

SIMSPACE WITH A TWIST

In ALIEN LEGACY you are faced with two things: an open-ended game of colony creation and a mystery that directly affects your survival. Whatever happened to the UNS Tantalus could just as easily happen to you unless you get some answers in a hurry. Even if you solve this enigma, there are other plot threads hardwired into this game that will keep you on your toes until you achieve the goal of faster-than-light travel. At this point the game grades your performance by how many colonies you have founded, how prosperous they have been, and how many new discoveries you have made.

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"VOYEUR IS A MARVELOUS CREATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT." — COMPUTER GAME REVIEW

"THIS GAME BRINGS OUT THE VOYEUR IN ALL OF US...AND TRULY SHOWS HOW MUCH FUN A MURDER-MYSTERY/INTERACTIVE MOVIE CAN BE. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED."
— COMPUTER PLAYER

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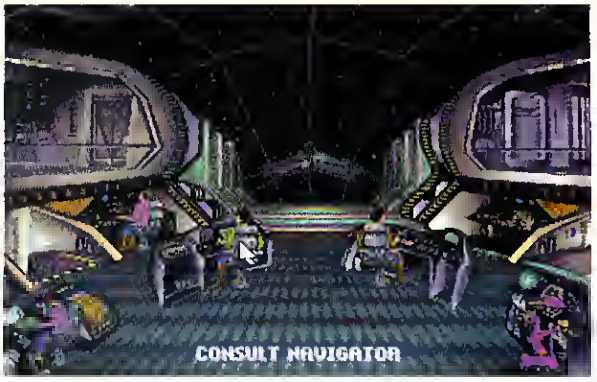
You are free to continue playing after uncovering the final secret of FTL travel, but without a goal, the colony simulation isn't detailed enough in itself to keep most gamers interested.

To help you run the salvation of humanity, you can fall back on the advice and observations of the department heads of your crew. There are five departments, Navigation, Engineering, Science, Military and Computing, and they are available anytime to give their spin on the current crisis. As an aid to the player they are more or less effective. Their advice is a little obvious and sometimes bad calls are pretty easy to spot (i.e., your Military commander seems to have studied diplomacy and race relations at Klingon U.), but this aspect of the game helps to give you a better sense of being in charge, as opposed to simply doing everything yourself.



COMMAND CENTRAL Once the Calypso has made planetfall, it becomes the headquarters and warehouse of your new colony.

TOTING THEM BALES

Regardless of the demands of the plot line, your real job is the exploration and colonization of the Beta Caeli system, and your single tool for this job is your shuttle craft. Your shuttles will comb the surface of worlds and asteroids looking for raw materials and clues, erasing annoying life forms, and building new colonies. And once these colonies are built, it is the shuttle craft that will transport supplies from the haves to the have-nots. In fact, much of the game hinges on the construction, maintenance and improvement of your shuttle fleet. When your Science advisor suggests any kind of research that may help to improve your shuttle design, jump right on it. The manual states that your fleet should only be as big as you need it to be; it fails to mention that you will always need it to be as large as possible.

MAYORS IN SPACE You design your colony like you would in SimCity, but urban planning is much less a concern in Alien Legacy than in Maxis' city simulator.

Your interface between worlds and your shuttles is a form of Mercator map divided into a simple grid system. To get there, you simply order a ship into orbit around a planetary body; once it's there, you will be given a view of the Mercator map for that world. Pick a square and your ship will drop from orbit like IBM stock and hover above that area. From there you can either scan the surrounding areas for the presence of resources or anomalies, or click on the same quadrant again to send your ship even lower and the screen will switch to a skewed 3-D detailed view of the surface. From here you can pick up scientific insights or find clues to the fate of the Tantalus, or even retrieve individual chunks of minerals or energy.

Although you do travel over the surface of a world, and some of the terrain and backdrops are interesting, don't be expecting any kind of flight sim experience. Your interaction with the world at this level is highly abstract. All items of interest on the surface are represented by icons, and you can either pick them up or blow them up with the touch of a mouse button; they exist purely as targets and nothing on the surface will shoot back at you or run away. It's not the most exciting thing in the world, but this interface will still serve to give you a sense of exploration and sight-seeing.

The Calypso's job is done just getting you to this choice vacation area and now it has become a living-platform and warehouse, the center of your new home but in need of raw resources to keep going. The game recognizes three consumable needs of a thriving colony: Minerals, Power and Life Support. While extra power plants and habitats can be built to provide the latter two resources, minerals can only be found on worlds, and you will need ground based mines to provide raw materials to the Calypso and any other orbital platform you might build. Ferrying supplies, people, and robots around your system is the most involving and possibly tedious part of your job, but luckily, Alien Legacy provides a pipeline mission for shuttles to run the same route carrying the same set of supplies for multiple runs.

SIM-PLY SIM-PLE SIMS

The model you work with for the colony map is a very simple "pick your tile, place your tile" system. Power plants, habitats, labs and factories are your main structures, while defense lasers and shields can be built if the necessary technologies are researched. Transport lines and starports are provided automatically. Even though factories are able either to mine raw materials or build items, not much time will be

KICKING UP MOON DUST Your shuttles can go in low, scanning a planet's surface for resources and signs of the Tantalus, your missing sister ship.

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spent sweating the fine points of urban planning. Your primary concern will be supply and demand as each new structure you build requires resources for its initial construction and then a yearly supply amount to maintain it. As technology improves you will be able to increase the power and efficiency of your facilities, but their increasing resource demands and limited building space will drive you to increase the number of your colonies and specialize their function in your grand plan to save humanity.

With labs hard at work generating research points in various disciplines, your advisors will come to you from time to time with inventions they think should be researched. Again, the model here is very simple; if you have enough research points in the right areas you can order them spent on a certain technology. After a set number of turns, the technology will be yours. The only nice touch here is that sometimes there will be no practical application for the resulting technology or it may require another breakthrough to become useful. Just don't bother trying to figure out which is which, as the game rarely will stress your research budget to the point where you have to make hard decisions about what to research and what to let lie. Discover them all and let Einstein sort them out.

DONT CALL US... As high commander of the colony, you must rifle through resumes to decide which crew members will be assigned the crucial missions.

EYEBALLING IT

ALIEN LEGACY's reliance on the "close enough" philosophy is both its strength and weakness. It keeps a high level of playability, but sometimes the simplicity robs the game of satisfaction. Nail-biting interplanetary combat is a matter of ordering a shuttle with a missile on board to go to a planet and wait; if an alien ship arrives, one of them will blow up with a bang sound and no graphic except for a puff of smoke. Being a combination of relatively simple elements might be a drawback, but the story is interesting enough, especially for the first half, to drive away any sense of boredom in all but the more jaded of space-gamers.

This is a space game that delivers almost all of what it promises. That alone marks it as a superior product to the far more technically advanced OUTPOST, which in a better world would have been to ALIEN LEGACY as *The Abyss* was to *Leviathan*. The documentation is clear and expansive, the game runs quickly, and I only had one crash throughout the entire 100 plus hours I put into it. The story entertains and, while the level of "hard" SF is only a little higher than your average Next Generation episode, it does manage to instill a sense of reality to the proceedings in spite of some of the rationalizations that are provided.

If you are looking for an action-packed and graphically stunning extravaganza that will leave you grasping for your heart medicine, or a highly technical descent into the trials and tribulations of humanity's future in space, then perhaps this game isn't for you. On the other hand, if you are interested in an enjoyable game and a mystery that stretches across an alien solar system that will take the average gamer better than 40 hours to get through, then this could be the next on your play list.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

ALIEN LEGACY

RATING ✸✸✸ 1/2

PROS An entertaining, straight-forward, easy to learn strategic adventure.

CONS Due to its linear storyline (the second half of which is a bit weak), this is probably not a game that will get more than one play-through.

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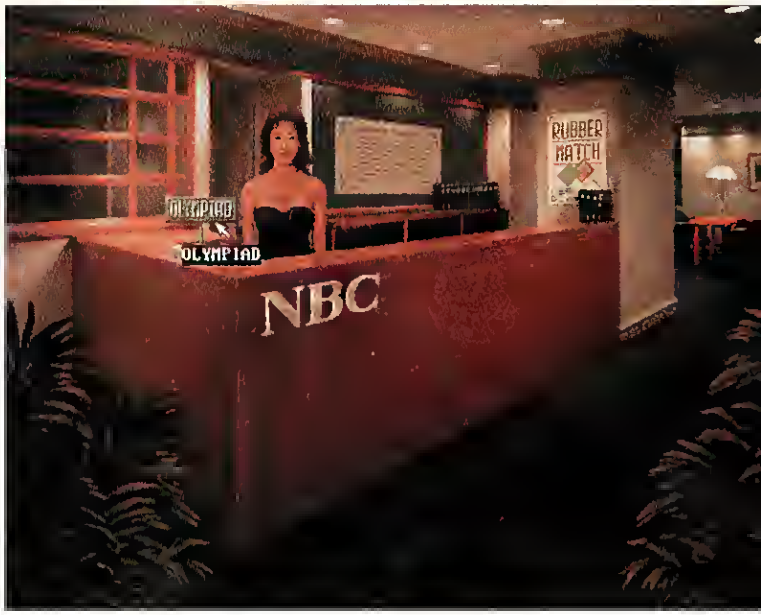


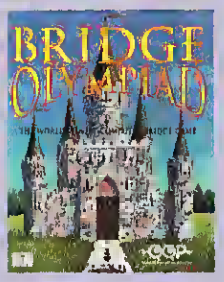
QQP's BRIDGE OLYMPIAD Turns Bridge Into A Team Event

by Terry Lee Coleman

When I first started playing Bridge, Charles Goren was King and Omar Sharif was still a leading man on the silver screen. More difficult than Spades, less natural a game than Rummy, the cerebral aspects of Bridge appealed to me in a manner similar to chess. After all, here was a game with a *history*, and one that required teamwork filled with nuance and subtlety galore.

Of course, like many games which require patience and have a fairly steep learning curve, Bridge lost popularity in the hectic 70s and 80s, its decline helped by bizarre products like Goren's *Bridge for Two* card game. The first Bridge products for the PC were similar to early chess programs, fairly easy to beat, often confusing, and even obviously cheating at times. The last couple of years, however, have brought a new generation of Bridge games, with much stronger AI and enhanced features. It is only fitting that **QQP**, long known for its strategy game line, should attempt to outbid its competitors with BRIDGE OLYMPIAD.

BRIDGE OLYMPIAD



Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, VGA graphics, 2MB hard drive space, mouse; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards
 # Of Players: 1
Protection: Documentation check
Designers: T-Time
Publisher: QQP, Inc.
Flemington, NJ
(908) 788-2799

OFF TO THE CONVENTION

When Will Shakespeare coined the phrase "The play's the thing," he obviously wasn't thinking of Bridge. While the world's best can do much more with a given hand than the average weekend player, in Bridge, the bidding is really the thing. It often seems that WWII cryptologists had less difficulty breaking the *Ultra* code than a novice has with learning new bidding conventions.

BRIDGE OLYMPIAD does attempt to smooth the transition for new players. On the opening interface screen, just to the right of the prim, proper, lovely and totally non-interactive National Bridge Club receptionist, OLYMPIAD offers a practice mode. As the cards sporting the official OLYMPIAD logo are dealt, you can acquaint yourself with the 12 members of the NBC. They will be your partners in every aspect of the game, and it is on their shoulders you will ride to victory or fall in disgrace.

Each of these nicely drawn computer players are rated for how well they bid and play—fair enough. But two other ratings are a bit strange. "Aggressiveness" is a reasonable rating, as it measures how often your computer partner will attempt to outbid the opposing team when they are "vulnerable" (a bridge term for being a game ahead in a rubber match). Then there is a separate rating for "cheating," which pertains not to their ability to see opponents' cards—as one would expect an AI to cheat—but how often the computer personality will bluff during bidding.

Admittedly, bidding is all-important, but wouldn't it have made the game more exciting if the cheat rating was an attempt by your partner to deliberately play the "wrong" card, thereby deceiving the opposition? The occasional finesse which is not there, the partner who plays the last trump too soon, is a part of Bridge in the real world. While these ploys do occasionally surface in OLYMPIAD, they seem serendipitous rather than planned, and are generally too little, too late to affect the outcome of a given hand.

Finding a reasonable partner proved most difficult, because most of the NBC team were loose cannon in the bidding

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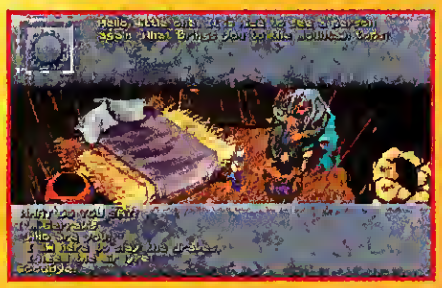

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NO TRUMP IS A GOOD TRUMP Once you and your partner are on the same betting page, you can hone your finesse and power play skills.

wars. I cannot begin to recall the number of times we followed one convention or another, only to have my partner bid a hand which simply wasn't there. The game proved this to me beyond any doubt, due to the ability in practice mode to replay the hand with all the cards face-up. Eventually, I teamed with Stan, the practice room tutor, who looks like someone nabbed Ben Franklin, fresh from a night on the town, and crossed him with a card shark. Ironically, I found Stan's play to be the most sober of the lot, despite his disheveled appearance. After a few practice rounds, we were off to the rubber matches where I had a rollicking time whipping up on the pasty-faced Dave, the businesslike Janis and the free-wheeling John, with Stan and I finishing in a dead heat for first.

The rubber matches involve playing a series of games, switching partners at regular intervals, so that one player ends up with the single highest score. OLYMPIAD captures this essential Bridge competition very well, and learning to adapt to the dilferent styles of your partners and opponents will sharpen anyone's play. This takes much longer than it should, however, due to the dismal documentation. Using the excuse that there are hundreds of good Bridge books on the market, the manual gives only the most cursory explanation of how to play and bid. The scant useful information available is so terribly disorganized that even veteran Bridge players can get confused. Pity the poor novice exposed to the American, Natural and Precision bidding conventions on pages 8-9, when the point system for evaluating a hand is not explained until page 38, after a rambling discourse on the history of Bridge! A sample rubber game does help, but by then the damage is done. OLYMPIAD is no where near the Bridge

STAN'S THE MAN This lineup is OK for a rubber match, but make sure you leave Eric on the bench when you go mining for Olympic Gold.

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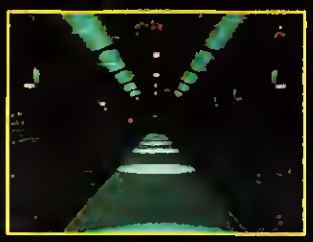

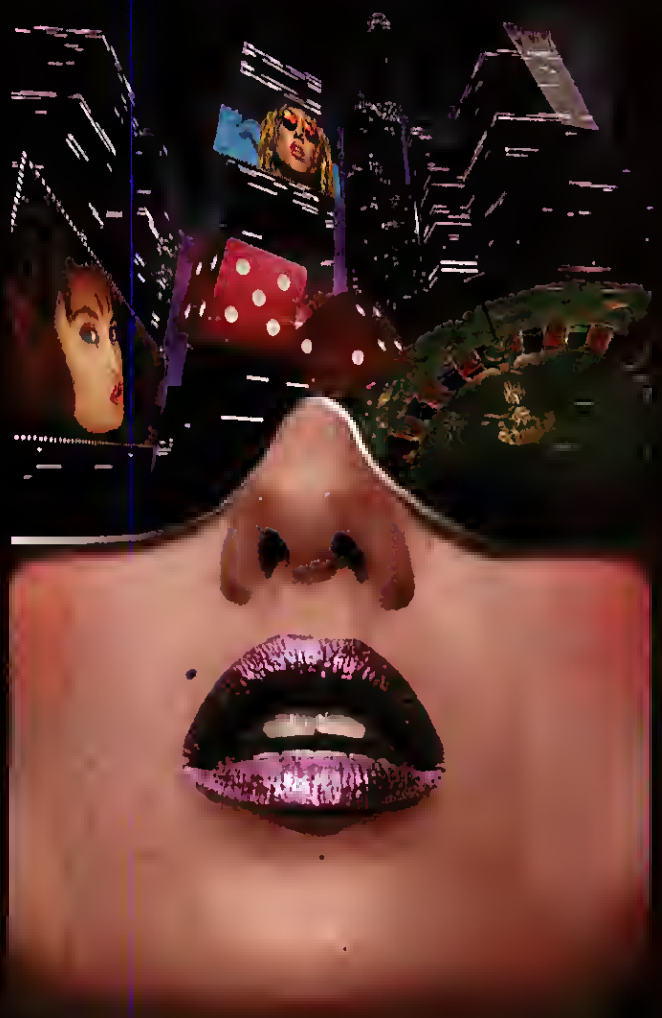

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teacher that Alfred Sheinwold's *Bridge Baron* is. On the other hand, this game was designed with stiff competition as its goal. So, as soon as you're tired of bouncing around fellow club members in rubber matches, it's off to the big show—the Olympiad.

PILLARS OF STONE, HOUSES OF CAROS Reaching the pinnacle of Bridgedom requires timing, teamwork, and a little luck at this level of competition.

THE SPIRIT OF THE GAMES

The real Olympiad is often held in Palma de Mallorca, Baguio, and other exotic locales, but the entrance for this competition shows a virtual Parthenon (artistic license knows no boundaries). The competition is all-world, with teams from China, Canada and other Bridge behemoths. The graphics of the actual gameplay are as clean as the rest of the game, but it would have been nice to see digitized pictures of the opponents, along with their traits. A scouting report on *Crocodile Kelly* from Australia would no doubt lean towards maniacal risks, as he wrestled opponents to their knees.

The format is simple, a refreshing change from the rest of the game. Each team plays every other team in a round robin, with the top team emerging as the World Champs. After you and your partner have played a hand, your other team members play the third and fourth members of the opposing team, using *the exact hand you just played,* but playing opposite sides from that of you and your partner. Since the only effect you have on the outcome of the duplicate hand is which team members represent the NBC during the Olympiad, you must choose wisely.

The International Match Point (IMP) scoring system is used, with total points, rather than just wins, counting toward victory. The chance is always there to come back, as my team once went from near-last to fourth in one round, defeating the Spanish team by 42 points. Similarly, a huge defeat will almost always knock you to the lower rung of the competition. Overall, it's fairly realistic, tense and very exciting.

The computer teams are quite different from each other, making OLYMPIAD eminently replayable. I never did beat the English in five tries—must be all those centuries of Whist experience they enjoy. In the end, whatever the documentation lacks is made up for in some degree by the tremendous strength of play by the AI. Much stronger than POSITRONIC BRIDGE, OLYMPIAD is more varied in style of opponents than OMAR SHARIF, and is harder to pin down than even BRIDGE BARON.

Would that I could recommend OLYMPIAD whole-heartedly. Beginning players will be lost, and veteran Bridge enthusiasts will scoff at the documentation, which seems to exist more for irritating copy protection than insights into play. Until the bizarre amalgamation of bidding conventions used by your computer partners is puzzled out, expect to play the game system as much as the cards. Once these difficulties are surmounted, however, BRIDGE OLYMPIAD becomes a typical QQP game—strong on strategy, with a refreshing and unusual angle.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BRIDGE OLYMPIAD

RATING ✸✸✸ 1/2

PROS Best-looking Bridge game out there. A lot of play value for the intermediate to veteran Bridge enthusiast, with solid and varied computer opponents. Like SOLITAIRE'S JOURNEY, it takes an age-old game and adds new spin.

CONS Lacks some bidding conventions, and fails to adequately explain those it does include. Documentation is very poor, which might cause this bridge to collapse on the novice player.

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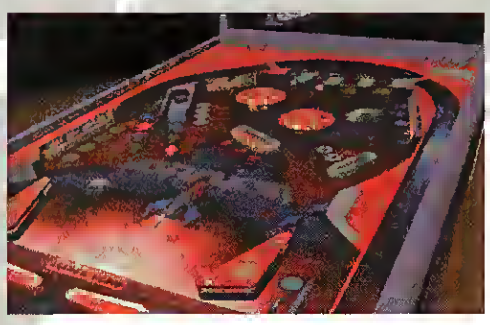

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SimCity Goes Hollywood

Interplay's SimCity CD Brings The Big Screen To The Little Monitor

by Neil Harris

© Archive Photos

HORDES OF HOLLYWOOD TYPES DESCEND ON THE COMPUTER GAME INDUSTRY. THEY COME BRINGING money, a certain arrogance, an unparalleled publicity machine, a discipline toward the development process, and a world-class sense of production values. They come seeking an escape from the problems they've made in the movie business thanks to inflated budgets and the stringent demands of the unions. With revenues projected to soon exceed the movie business, entertainment software is fertile ground for Hollywood sharpies. The promise is a new wave of multimedia entertainment combining the best elements of software with Hollywood productions.

SIMCITY CD is one of the vanguard of the new software resulting from this media convergence. It's easy to imagine a scene right out of *The Player:* "It can't miss, C.B. We take one of the most popular computer games ever and take it back to the studio. We add video, audio, real actors and even some writers. We put it on a CD and make millions."

SIMCITY CD

Price: $59.96
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 4MB RAM, 2MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, CD ROM; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
Designer: Will Wright
Publisher: Interplay
Irvine, CA
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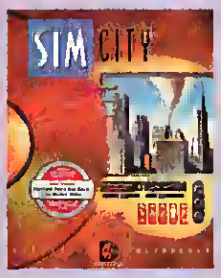

SCPD BLUES Had to cut the police funding to finance new development? Bad move, says the Police Chief. Now you'll need some self defense training to walk your own simulated streets.

SIMHISTORY

SIMCITY IS A CLASSIC. HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PLAYERS LOVED THE CHALLENGE OF building and managing cities. As much a toy as a game, there was no predetermined objective. Some people tried to get the city to grow as much as possible, others had more specific goals based on their own conception of the ideal city. The program was non-judgmental. All it did was provide the tools and handle the modeling based on the actions taken.

For those who wanted more detail in the simulation, Maxis eventually provided SIMCITY 2000. It was much more complex than the original, with many more factors to concern the city designer, right down to the city's plumbing. There was a certain sacrifice in design elegance that went along with the additional detail, made up for by a great improvement in the graphics. If the player could handle the fine details, there was a real sense of a city growing.

SIMBUREAUCRACY

Now for the CD version. The folks at **Interplay** took the original game with the original graphics and went to the studio to add video and audio sections using real actors. When the city needs more police stations, the police chief pops onto the screen to have a little chat with the mayor. In fact, the player gets to meet with a gaggle of babbling city bureaucrats, all pushing their own agendas. This must really be what being a mayor feels like, with demands coming from all sides.

At first, it's interesting. The videos are well done as a whole, and several (especially some of the disaster scenes) are quite funny. The bureaucrats are probably scripted a bit snottier than their real-life counterparts, but this is in keeping with the slightly campy spirit of the entire production. As the game goes

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dungeon master of The Shadow of Yserbius.™ But don't bring it up, James is kind of sensitive about it. And talk about cool. The interface is full color and easy to understand.

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on, though, it starts to get repetitive. The same audio and video clips start to reappear. After all, while a CD has lots of room, it's still limited, especially by the demands of multimedia. Audio and video clips take many megabytes of disk space.

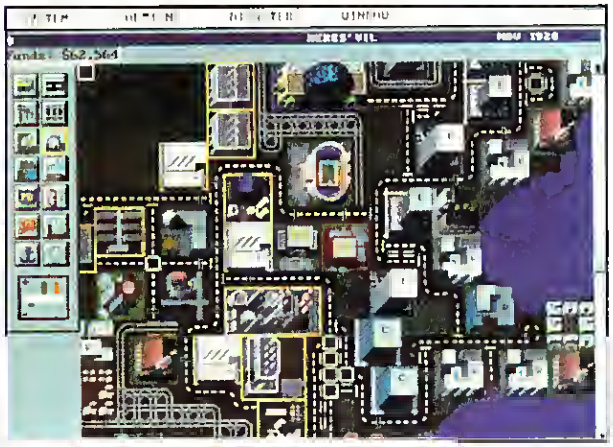
WE REPEAT: THIS IS THE DEPARTMENT OF REDUNDANCY DEPARTMENT

For elements of a game—or any computer software, for that matter—to be repetitive is normal. The type of interactive experience in a computer requires the player to choose from a limited list of options under constantly changing circumstances. It's the context that makes things interesting. As the game progresses, the choices constantly lead to new and not-altogether-predictable outcomes.

For Hollywood productions, though, repetition is death. Movies are great but not over and over again. Film directors are constantly seeking that new stunt, to put something up on the screen that's never before been seen. That's one reason why there are so many movies out there. Most are seen only once per customer. Very few hold up well to repeated viewing. They get boring.

In SimCity CD, the smug bureaucrats are in your face altogether too much. The video clips interrupt the flow of the game and their repetitive nature takes a dynamic environment and makes it irritating. There were some audio clips that just wouldn't go away; they kept asking me to build more roads, for instance, but I was using the trains-only strategy to minimize pollution). The obvious solution is to use the options provided by the programmers and turn off the video.

What's left at that point is—you guessed it, the original SimCity. A good product, tried and true, but not quite what was expected. Let's hope the next wave of multimedia entertainment finds a better use for Hollywood's skills.



SAME OLD CITY Aside from a few graphic and game play tweaks, SimCity CD looks and plays the same as the original.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SIMCITY CD

RATING ✸ ✸ ✸ ✸

PROS The original game was a classic. If you haven't played SimCity yet, this would be the version to buy.

CONS The video clips are nice the first few times; after that, you turn them them off. If you've played the original, there's little reason to buy this version.

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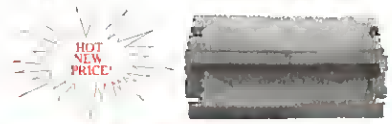

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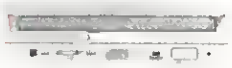

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Master The Harpoon

Giving Orders That Get Results In HARPOON II, Part One of Three

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by Tom "KC" Basham

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MISSION EDITOR AND A FORMATION EDITOR? WHY ARE there four categories of threat zones? How come aircraft leave the mission zone? How come aircraft sometimes disappear? If you've been playing HARPOON II from **Three-Sixty**, these questions have probably crossed your mind, along with how do you use TALDs, where did my submarine go, and why didn't this @#^%& thing do what I wanted?

Winning HARPOON II scenarios boils down to two things: 1) Developing sound tactics and strategies and 2) successfully executing those strategies. The best-laid, most-detailed plans will fail every time if you are unable to effectively communicate your intentions to your field units. Therefore, before we discuss how to win, let's examine how to give orders that get the job done.

There are three ways to order units and groups: 1) Give units and groups direct orders, 2) assign units and groups to missions, and 3) deploy units in the formation editor.

ASSIGNING ORDERS DIRECTLY

Some tasks require micro-management, that is, the tactical situation demands your full attention and control. The computer's artificial intelligence is either inadequate or incapable of performing the required task in the necessary time frame with the available resources. Such tasks include ordering evasive maneuvers, optimizing a search pattern, plotting courses, and firing weapons. The key is repeatability. How many times will you need to order this particular unit? Will you give it identical orders over and over again? Will you give identical orders to multiple units? Is this order a one-shot deal?

If the order is going to be a one-shot, then specifically ordering that unit or group is probably the most efficient. If you need to dispatch a single tanker to assist a fuel-starved fighter, order the tanker manually; creating a mission for a single rendezvous is overkill and generates unnecessary work. As Commander-in-Chief, you have more than enough work to do. Don't complicate matters unnecessarily.

A target of opportunity may require unit micro-management. Say you launch an A-6E strike package with F/A-18 escorts. Two-thirds of the way to the target you detect an enemy unarmed recon plane. You don't want to disrupt the strike, but such an opportunity should not be ignored. Using the "intercept" function, dispatch a single F/A-18 from the flight group to prosecute the enemy aircraft. Perhaps you stumble on an enemy transport transiting unescorted a little later? Dispatch a single A-6E, assuming it carries appropriate weapons and dispatching it does not jeopardize the primary mission, and attack the tanker.

USING THE MISSION EDITOR

Use the mission editor to give groups or units repeatable, standing orders. Do this for any mission you want repeatedly executed, or any task you want repeatedly executed such as Combat Air Patrols (CAPs), Airborne Early Warning patrols, and (under certain conditions) some types of strikes.

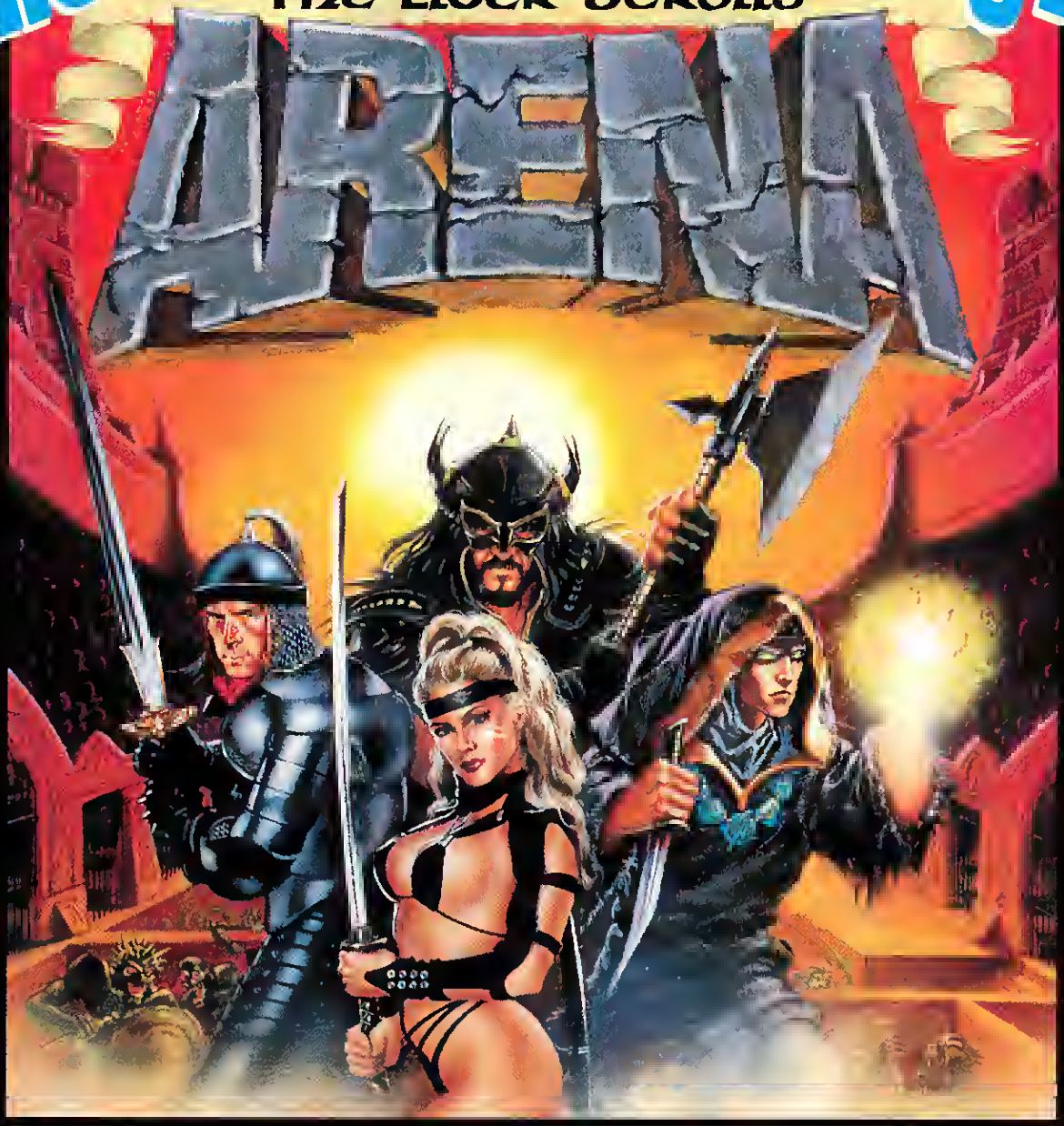
First, outline a patrol zone with reference points. Keep in mind that patrol zones are not overly restrictive; in most cases, units will cheerfully abandon the patrol zone to execute their assigned task. For example, CAPs will leave a patrol zone without hesitation to investigate air contacts within weapons or detection range. Using the AWG-9, an F-14 Tomcat may leave its station and investigate contacts 80 or 90nm away. When an air contact approaches within the Tomcat's detection range, it forgets about the mission patrol zone and heads for the contact. After completing the intercept, the F-14 will return to the patrol zone. If you want to make absolutely certain the assigned units remain in the patrol zone, place appropriate threat zones along the patrol zone's borders, leaving the border closest to your base or aircraft carrier "unfenced." This will prevent units from straying, but you can manually order units to ignore the threat zone and leave the patrol zone if the need arises.

A mission is only as good as you design it, and good mission design begins with the mission type. From the mission creation screen, you choose various options which define the mission's parameters, primarily flight behavior and sensor usage. A "recon ship" patrol, for example,

"Sum it up in three words: GO GET ARENA."—Zach Meston, *Computer Player*

The Raves Keep Rolling In!

The Elder Scrolls ARENA



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executes a specific flight pattern and utilizes only surface-search radars. AEW patrols, on the other hand, execute a different flight pattern while utilizing all available sensor suites. It is crucial, therefore, to choose the appropriate mission types. Here's a brief summary of each mission type:

AAW Patrols: Anti-Air patrols engage only airborne contacts.

ASuW Patrols: Anti-Surface patrols will engage any hostile contact, but engage ships first.

ASW Patrols: Anti-Submarine patrols will engage any hostile contact, but engage subs first.

Recon Missions: Recon units "hang out" in the mission zone, leaving it every so often to search for the specified target type. Recon units will shadow a contact long enough to positively identify it, then return to the "hang out" zone. They loiter there until the contact ages, then repeat the procedure. As such, these "hang out" zones must be well protected.

Transit Missions: Transit missions basically tell units to move to a specific point and remain on station there. Units will engage any hostile contacts within range.

Strike Missions: Strike missions are not the most effective way of executing combat. Generally, players are better served by hand-running the attack rather than using a strike mission. If a strike mission is created with a target, associated units will only attack that target. When that target dies, the mission ends. If the strike mission is created with a mission zone, units will proceed to that zone and look for something to attack that is not already being attacked by a different strike mission. The mission lasts indefinitely; if a detected target is destroyed, units continue looking for more targets in the area.

Aircraft assigned to strike missions launch whenever they are in range of the target or patrol zone. Thus, different aircraft types with different ranges will launch at different times. After acquiring a target, the strike units will lob all of their capable weapons at the target and go home. Unfortunately, strike missions do not coordinate individual units, so each unit within the mission conducts an individual attack. When attacking a heavily defended force, like a Russian battlegroup, most of these attacks will fail because of the lack of coordination. Strike units will always follow the shortest path they can find to the target, even if that path presents a clear threat.

FENCE THEM BOGIES If your patrol craft are straying from their patrol zones, use threat zones to fence them in.

Next, you assign units to the mission. Whenever you assign a mission to an aircraft carrier or plot a course, all aircraft receive the same orders. Before you can re-assign them, you must manually remove them from the first mission. Therefore, it's usually best to assign aircraft to various duties before ordering their host ship.

The mission editor lives by one simple rule: Keep units, preferably 1/3 of the total assigned units, on station at all times. Ships and submarines, naturally, remain on station continually, but aircraft must land to rearm and refuel occasionally. If you assign one aircraft to a mission, it launches as soon as possible. If you assign two aircraft, one remains on station while the other refuels. If you assign three or more aircraft to the mission, the mission editor will keep one-third the assigned units on station at all times. When an aircraft runs low on fuel or runs out of weapons, the mission editor sends it back to base and launches a replacement. Please note, the mission editor does not utilize aerial refueling; when an aircraft reaches bingo fuel, the mission editor sends it back to base. However, if you manually order the aircraft to refuel before the mission editor sends it home, it will return to duty and remain on station until exhausting the new fuel load.

NAVAL CHOREOGRAPHY Use the formation editor to position units within a battlegroup.

THE FORMATION EDITOR

The formation editor is designed to position units within a battlegroup. You create patrol zones within the formation and assign individual units to those patrols. All patrol zones are tied to one of three Threat Axes: AAW, ASuW and ASW. You start by choosing the desired threat axis, drawing a patrol zone, specifying patrol parameters (similar to using the mission editor), then assigning units. Patrol zones are always relative to the specified threat axis. If the threat axis moves, either because you move it, the formation changes course, or the threat axis is tracking a target and the target moves, then the patrol zone moves with it to retain the same relative positioning. In accordance with standard U.S. Navy doctrine, the ASW threat axis is always tied to the formation's course.

The formation editor always tries to keep a patrol staffed regardless of the number of units you assigned. If you assign a single S-3 to an ASW patrol, when that aircraft lands the formation editor looks for other unassigned S-3s. If it finds one, it immediately launches it to cover the vacant patrol zone. Otherwise, the patrol remains unstaffed until the original S-3 has refueled and rearmed. This automatic unit assignment sometimes appears as if aircraft have disappeared. If you seem to have lost a few aircraft somewhere, try checking the formation editor.

Tom Basham and Ed Dille co-authored Harpoon II: The Official Strategy from Prima Publishing.

Lessons In Naval Life

First Class Strategy For QQP's THE GRANDEST FLEET

by Tim Carter

© Archive Photos, with Grandest Fleet screen inset

"GOOD MORNING CLASS, WELCOME TO STRATEGY 101. TODAY'S TOPIC: GRAND FLEET operations. If you will open your notebooks, we will begin with the basic concepts..."

THE GRANDEST FLEET from **QQP** is the latest in a lengthening line of strategy games that are fun, replayable, and challenging both as one player and two player games. One of the main reasons for the success of QQP products such as THE LOST ADMIRAL and CONQUERED KINGDOMS is the demands they put on players. To win, it is necessary to think; planning and strategy are vital.

In THE GRANDEST FLEET, strategy goes beyond combat operations, as players must consider the development of their cities, as well as their military forces. The benefits of a well planned building campaign can be as great as a well planned military campaign.

SIM-ADMIRAL?

"Points win games. Everybody got it? Good. Now that the obvious is out of the way, why else should admirals care about cities? The answer is power. City construction is an exercise in power projection; for anyone interested in building for building's sake, the class on SimSandcastle is down the hall."

When playing a long scenario, build universities early. While they will cost you points, the extra "culture" plus the ability to build missile bases is well worth it. The extra building power universities provide can be used in later turns to construct operas, downtowns and hospitals, thereby regaining lost points.

Decide early which cities need shipyards and airfields to mitigate the time lag in construction. When building shipyards keep in mind that the more open ocean squares there are adjacent to the port, the greater the shipyard's building capacity will be. Try to keep shipyards in ports that can handle three or more ships per turn.

The most powerful and often overlooked city improvement is the flight deck. When supported by a flight deck, aircraft carriers become the queens of the sea. A carrier (range 5) based in a city with a flight deck (replenishment range 6) can bomb enemy cities or units 11 spaces away with impunity.

A CORNERED TIGER Hotly pursued by a British flotilla, the Super-Battleship *Tirpitz* cripples one of its antagonists.

Convoys are a wise long term investment, as they assure growth and increase the city class. However, keep in mind that increasing the class of a city also increases the resources and technology necessary to build it. It is wise to consider the cost of building before a convoy is constructed; if you can afford it, build the city to size 30, then put in a convoy.

THE LAWS OF ZONING

"To refer back to an earlier lecture: For everything there is a seazone; a seazone to attack, a seazone to defend, a seazone to build, a seazone to ignore."

One way to make city planning easier is to divide the map into zones: attacking zones, defending zones, building zones, and zones that can be ignored. Once you know what you need to accomplish in each zone, devising a strategy becomes easier.

Attacking and defending zones are where the action is, the difference between them being that an attacking zone is currently held by the enemy, while a defending zone is held by you.

Building zones are areas where it is difficult for the enemy to reach, and which therefore require less defensive effort. The goal here, as the name suggests, is to build cities as much as possible, increasing their points output. "Ignore zones" are simply out of reach, either because they are too strongly held or are too far away.

Zones guide the development of cities by giving priority to both the type of construction and the order in which it should be implemented. Defending zones

should get priority in city building, unless an attacking zone holds such a high potential yield that losing a defending zone will not matter.

Cities in defensive zones should concentrate on construction which builds size, airfields, missile bases and early warning systems. A big city is a safe city, or at least as safe as it is possible to get. No city is impregnable, but a well guarded one can force attackers to pay a high price for conquest.

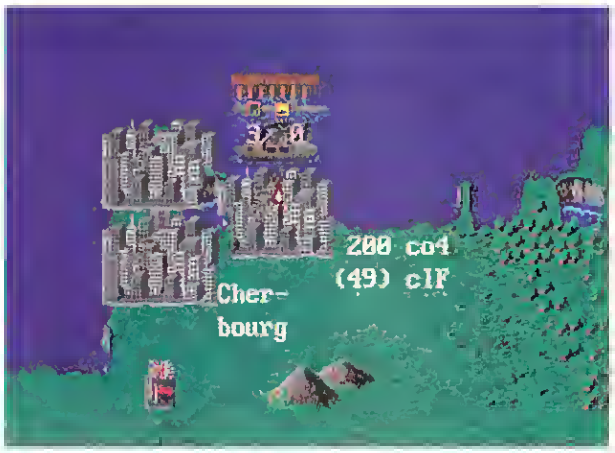
Next, cities bordering on attacking zones require attention. Shipyards, airfields and flight decks are needed to support major offensive efforts. Finally, cities in protected areas ought to build operas, downtowns and other point building features. The key is to put the points where they are not in danger, while putting combat facilities where they will do the most good.

FLEET OPERATIONS

"The teaching assistants tell me that some of you are complaining that your opponents are cheating by starting off with more forces than you have. Some students have even gone so far as to suggest that your opponents even get better starting positions as well. Hmm, let's perform a small exercise... Everyone who agrees with these complaints, put up your hands. Right, thank you. Now, everyone who insists on playing the Germans in W.W.II games put up your hands. I thought so."

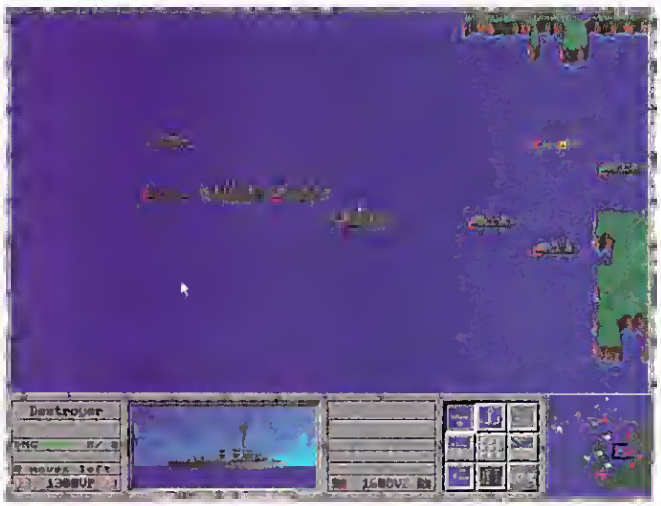
To win THE GRANDEST FLEET it is necessary to defeat enemy forces stronger in numbers than your own. In some random scenarios it may be possible to gain a quick numerical advantage, but you can usually expect to be fighting larger forces for at least the first 10 to 20 turns.

The key to tactical success under these conditions is combined operations. Whether attacking or defending, a layered deployment of forces is usually the best way to begin a battle. When attacking, the first rank ought to be made up of PT boats or transports (transports being the cheapest type of scout). The purpose of the first rank is to identify the location and disposition of the enemy, particularly submarines. The second rank should be made up of submarines, followed by battleships and cruisers and finally aircraft carriers. If time allows, it can be useful to move submarines and scouts 3-4 squares in front of the main fleet.



DEFENSE FROM THE DEPTHS Submarines make excellent point defenses for cities, as this flaming wreck of a transport can attest.

The layered approach not only maximizes anti-aircraft defense, it allows the fleet to attack as a single entity, as most units should be in range at the same time. A smaller but well organized fleet can defeat a much larger force if the larger force is committed piecemeal. This is the greatest weakness in the artificial intelligence: it rarely waits for a complete fleet to develop before committing itself to battle.



HOLY BATTLEGROUP! Two destroyers on scout duty find more than they anticipated, as they sail up to a huge enemy task force.

According to several players I have talked to, the consensus out there seems to be that the strongest ship in THE GRANDEST FLEET is the battleship. While battleships are both durable and versatile, they are not always the rulers of the waves. If you know that your fleet will be operating in range of a flight deck (and you should try to make this happen as often as possible), aircraft carriers and submarines become the most cost effective units in the game.

Ah, veterans of THE LOST ADMIRAL will say, use those subs to take out enemy battleships. No, no, no, no, no, no, no and no. Battleships are too durable for submarines to effectively neutralize, unless they are on their own and one has an abundance of time. Instead, use your subs against the enemy's aircraft carriers, then use your carriers to attack everything else.

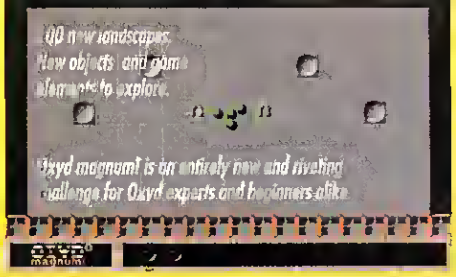
This tactic is a direct spin-off of the only truly ironclad (he he) rule in THE GRANDEST FLEET: never use carrier aircraft to attack aircraft carriers. This rule can be generalized to read: never use carrier aircraft to attack targets with heavy anti-air coverage.

Consider the following common situation. You have a fleet of battleships, destroyers and carriers with submarines strategically placed 4 or 5 squares in front of your main force. The enemy is approaching with a similar fleet. If carrier aircraft are sent to attack enemy carriers, while submarines target battleships, at the end of the turn you will have scratched the paint on a few battlewagons, sunk a few carriers, and lost your entire naval air arm in the process. On the other hand, if submarines are operating far enough in front of your main fleet, they may be able to dispatch a carrier or two before they come within range. If not, then at least they will be able to sink carriers while the naval air force attacks more lightly defended battleships, cruisers and destroyers. In this case far more damage will be done to the enemy's heavy ships, while your carriers will still have aircraft left for round two.

It is possible, and very desirable, to

My son and I love this game!!! Great work!!

Robert Strauss, Burbank



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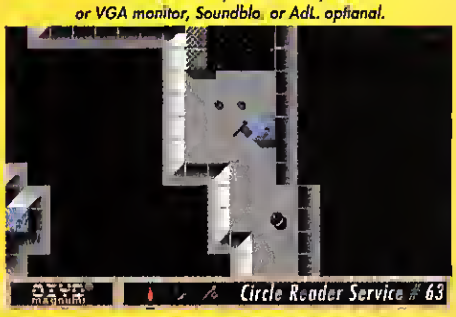

My daughter (11 years old) and I have become "Oxyd" addicts. We cannot wait to begin exploring the many other levels. Thanks for creating such an excellent product. R. S., Germantown

This is, without question, the most impressive game I have ever seen. I am amazed at the audio, visual and action George L. Tanty

Wow! That's all I can say about Oxyd What an incredible game! One of the nicest games I have seen in a long time Thanks for creating such a challenging piece of software. I'm completely hooked! The game is really slick, well designed. Those first 10 levels alone were worth paying for! It is rare to find such a visually appealing, addictive and playable game.

One of the most elegant games I've played. Jeffrey Jandahl, San Diego

I enjoy this game a great deal and so do my children and their friends. It is just what I have been looking for !! Jerome Wescatt, Minneapolis

Oxyd has to be the most artistically superb piece of programming that I have seen. From my position of having completed about one third of the single-player levels, the landscapes have been continuously varied with a marvelous attention to graphic and audible detail that makes each new one a continuing delight. I especially appreciate how the marble interacts in seemingly realistic but different ways when rolling over or bouncing against different "natural" (or unnatural) substances like stone, wood, swamp, freefall etc. At this point, I'm already worrying that I'll run out of levels. Jeffrey R. Harrow

Even our 3yr old enjoys the game.

I just had to write to tell you how much fun I've had playing Oxyd. The attention to detail - the sounds, the textures of the surfaces - really adds to the fun of the game. It invites the imagination for a ride. Thanks also for making all of the landscapes challenging but not impossible. Tom Phoenix, Portland

I'm really impressed with your game, Oxyd. Congratulations on a unique and fun product, and best luck to you all. John M. Odd

Oxyd Credits

Game of the Year 1993
Australian MacWorld

Best Brain Game 1993
MacWorld Game Hall of Fame

Game of the Year 1992
Computer & Pädagogik 06/93

Game of the Year 1992
Display Computer Club e.V., Germany

The variety of play is literally, incredible. Score this game a solid 10
Current Notes 06/93

"A" rating - Wow! Exquisite. A must for your games library.
AmigaWorld 06/93

Game of the Month.
MacWelt 02/93

Top of the Charts
Brain Teaser Category, PC Games German edition

Treat of the Month
Atari Roundtable in GEnie 12/92

Editor's Choice
PC Games German edition 12/92

Some fine comments about Oxyd magnum!
I like Oxyd magnum because it's different in every landscape, surprising, challenging, compelling and fun! Every landscape is like a new game It's so tricky! It drives my wife crazy. More levels and just as good as Oxyd. You have challenged me! Thanks. My wife and I like to play puzzles together. It's unique. Great puzzles It's aesthetically pleasing and exercises the mind It makes me and my kids think and we don't have to punch or kill anything.

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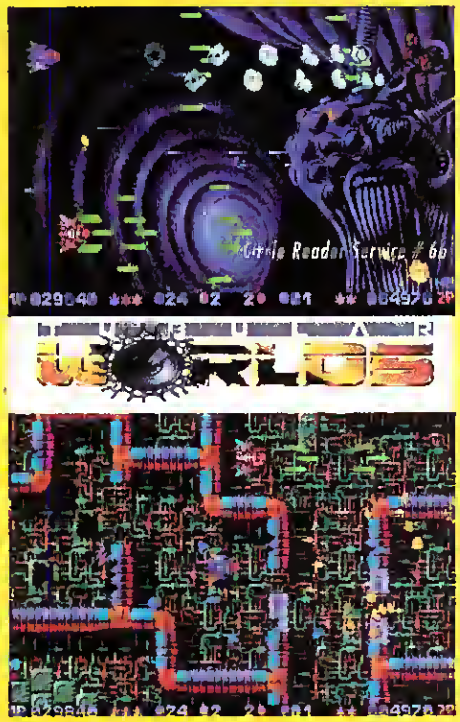

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reverse this situation and strip an oncoming force of all of its aircraft at the cost of one or two battleships. This is ideal, as you are then left with your carriers pummeling enemy capital ships while your remaining battlewagons have the enemy's defenseless carriers for breakfast.

A final note on submarines: because they are so vulnerable, they work best in packs of four or more. A sure fire way to eliminate those awesome super BBs and CVs is to meet each one with about six subs long before they get into range of anyone else.

Shore emplacements and missile bases are a lot of fun, under the right conditions. A key factor is usually geography. Random maps with a lot of narrow straits are perfect for shore emplacements. One or two can slow up a major enemy advance.

Both missile bases and shore emplacements can also be used to bash nearby enemy cities. When many cities are close together, a few emplacements in the right place can give opponents a real headache. Tricky players will even place guns around friendly cities they expect to fall or which they don't intend to defend. Unlike airfields, guns do not change owners when the city falls. In a few situations it is even possible to position shore emplacements so far inland that the conquering navy cannot shoot back; these guns are then free to bash the city at will.

WRIGGLING ON A HOOK Caught in a pincers between a submarine wolfpack and a high-powered battleship, this carrier will be easy prey once it runs out of planes.

A final consideration regarding tactics is maneuvering. If the enemy can be lured or positioned so that on his turn the combat favors your fleet, a significant advantage may be obtained. Consider again the example of two fleets on a collision course with battleships in the fore supported by aircraft carriers. If you are able to determine exactly where the enemy will move, it is possible to set an ambush for his forward elements. Simply place your carriers on squares that will put the enemy's front rank within range, while keeping his carriers out of range. This can provide carriers with a free shot, although it is important to keep your carriers within range of a flight deck to ensure that they don't run out of aircraft.

In conclusion, THE GRANDEST FLEET rewards players who take an holistic approach to planning. Combined operations are crucial to attaining tactical success, while grand strategy, tactics and city planning must all be integrated to defeat that level 21 computer or a wily human opponent.

Class dismissed.

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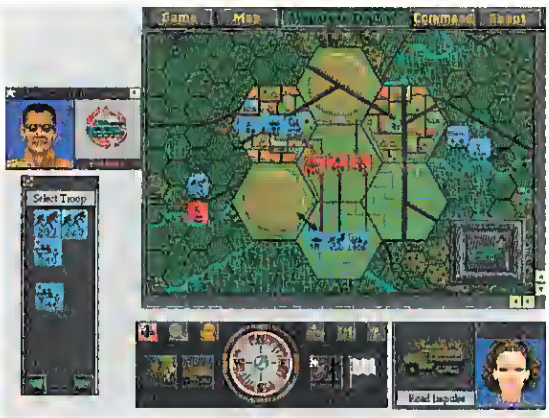
quires would-be rail tycoons to build transcontinental (or trans-island) rail networks that will enable them to pick up and deliver the most profitable of the nine possible loads available at one time. It uses a Windows-based front-end and allows gamers to be planning their moves while other players are executing their own turns.

KINGDOM OF DRAKKAR is the showcase game of MPGN. KINGDOM OF DRAKKAR is a fully graphic fantasy RPG with a colorful setting, interesting human-controlled citizens, and an easy-to-use interface. Just to encourage human interaction, the world of Drakkar has existing guilds for those gamers who want to cooperate on various quests. When characters build up enough experience, they can create their own guilds. A new version is now in place that offers new scenarios.

OPERATION MARKET-GARDEN is the computer version of **GDW**'s boardgame of the same name, and the graphic presentation looks just like that of the boardgame's colorful map. Since the original game used relatively intricate rules to handle fog of war, the computer is the ideal referee. Reviewed in *CGW* #119, p. 164.

STAR CRUSADER is a space combat game where you fly through a polygon-filled universe. It is now being overhauled from its current 16-bit status into a new 32-bit engine. MPGN's plan is to keep this product in testing until they are ready to unveil the new, improved version.

Access Fees: MPGN charges $4.00 per hour, but some surcharges may apply when you connect through telecommunications carriers. Call (800) GET-GAME for more information.



Defend Arnhem in MPG-Net's Operation Market-Garden

CONNECTIONS OF FUTURE PAST (NOVALINK)

If **America On-Line**, **CompuServe** and **Prodigy** were large, full-service department stores on virtual Main Street, the **Novalink** network would be a boutique off a small side street. **Novalink** may not have all of the services and support that the large systems offer, but the goods it does sell are handmade crafts for the distinguishing buyer.

Novalink's flagship game is LEGENDS OF FUTURE PAST, a multi-user role-playing universe that won a special award from CGW in 1993 for excellence in game mastering. It is a text-based system, similar in approach to many text-based games, but the difference comes from its people. Novalink employs two full-time game masters, in addition to several part-timers, whose sole job is to plan special events, create new features, host nightly quests, and bring the LEGENDS world to life. You can play a character from one of several races and live out a full role-played career of swords, sorcery, politics and intrigue. Your character can specialize in a number of different skills for combat, magic, and trade, and can join one of the many Guilds in the land. The game masters have recently added such non-combat skills as weaving, weaponsmithing, woodslore, and alchemy, all of which have special functions in the game. As an example of personal service provided by the game masters, if you've been on the system for a year, you can design and build your own house to your specifications.

Capture the crystals in Novalink's Cyber Corps

CYBER CORPS, a fast-paced team sport that plays on the Capture the Flag theme, is Novalink's latest addition. Two teams of "borgs" go head to head, running through labyrinthine hallways in search of crystals to tag. The graphics are slick, the sound even slicker, and the pace can be frantic, with very little in the way of system delay. The system can support 10 games with 10 players each, though they're hardly hitting max capacity at this time.

Novalink's second most popular pastime is similar to LEGENDS, though much more free-form. The VIRTUAL CAFE is a MUD-like environment that serves as a playpen in which people can talk, role-play, and have some yuks on-line. The area is modeled after the Atlantic City boardwalk, with the usual casino sights and unusual additions (like a "Holodeck"). Here, users can play trivia games, stage an event they call "Virtual Talk" (a sort of telecommunicated Oprah Winfrey show), and they've even had "slumber parties" until the wee hours of the morning.

Access Fees: $9.95 per month for five hours access, and $3.60 for each subsequent hour ($1.80 per hour if accessed through the Internet). For more information, call **Novalink** at (800) 274-2814.

PRODIGIOUS PRESENCE (PRODIGY)

Prodigy, like its IBM and Sears Roebuck predecessors, offers a forceful presence. It quotes the largest base of users and is heavily e-mail oriented. Though its interface is graphically presented, it has always had the reputation of being slow. For gamers, *CGW* provides review coverage and hint files for Prodigy's Game Center, but there are relatively few multi-player games available on the network.

BASEBALL MANAGER is the ultimate fantasy/rotisserie style baseball game. You draft players and set rosters for both left- and right-handedness. Then, as the actual players perform in real life baseball (assuming they aren't on strike, of course), they are factored into your custom team's performance. Each day, you receive a customized sports page screen with your team's results and statistics from the previous day's game. As

The ground has been broken on TEN's SimCity Online

a "Custom Choice" on the service, BASEBALL MANAGER costs $100 beyond the basic pricing for a full season.

GOLF TOUR allows you to participate in a golf tournament using **Accolade's** JACK NICKLAUS UNLIMITED GOLF product. Special tournament courses can be downloaded for off-line play. You have one opportunity to get a good score on the course before you upload your results to the service and find out if you've made the leader board.

GUTS puts you in a nerve-wracking trivia challenge where you try to answer seven questions in seven minutes and every question is an "all or nothing" risk. Weekly competitions are held for bragging rights across the network.

REBEL SPACE is a space conquest game where you control four ships which can be customize according to tactical considerations. It is a very simple, turn-based PBEM-style game which can be played with daily, weekly and bi-weekly turn schedules.

Access Fees: the basic fee package is $14.95 per month, plus $3.60 per hour. Call (800) PRODIGY for more information.

NETWORK MTV (TOTAL ENTERTAINMENT NETWORK)

Style, flair, attitude—adjectives that are rarely used to describe on-line systems. Most deserve words like functional, flat, businesslike. While ImagiNation has managed a colorful motiff for its system, it gives one the impression of skipping through a telecommunicated CandyLand. Hardly hip. **Optigon Interactive's** new **Total Entertainment Network** (TEN) is out to inject some attitude into the on-line world. The mission, in the words of founder Daniel Goldman, "...to do for the on-line world what MTV and Fox have done for the TV world: cater to our audience's specific interests—and break the rules."

What rules do they plan to smash? Visual and interface rules, for a start. The graphic environment of TEN will be very customizable, with a half-dozen graphic templates that can be swapped like Swatch watches to fit your mood, and the system itself will change its graphic look regularly. You will also be able to create a graphic representation of your on-line persona much like in INN, but the tools will be more funky and flexible. They describe the interface as "gestural," which simply means that they've tried to avoid a menued interface in favor of a 2-D layout. Commands are placed around the periphery of the screen, making the options more accessible and easy to memorize. TEN will go live in November, and they hope to start slowly, beginning with a core group of users interested in helping them shape the environment. They also hope to provide their users with tools to do their own publishing on-line.

TEN wil promote community through virtual hangouts that will function much like an Internet MUD, but will be more powerful. They hope to implement a meta-programming language that will enable people to create virtual objects, like chairs and motorcycles, that have interesting properties.

The biggest news, though, is that TEN will be the home of SIMCITY ON-LINE. **Maxis'** classic city simulator has been adapted to a multi-player environment, resulting in what TEN describes as a mix between MONOPOLY and SIMCITY. Games of SIMCITY ONLINE will be played with several players involved with one city. As the game begins, players will bid for land which they can then develop as they please. As their plots of land grow, players will earn rental income and take a chunk of taxes. So, rather than playing a city mayor, players will be more like land owners and developers.

Like the system itself, all of the specifics for SIMCITY ON-LINE have yet to be worked out. TEN will let things evolve, relying heavily on user input to shape the final state of the game. They may eventually introduce politics to the game, either basing mayoral elections upon the sheer number of SimCitizens you "control" or weighting the votes based upon your constituents' opinion of you as a landlord.

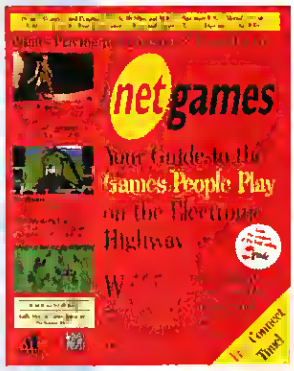
In addition to SIMCITY ONLINE, TEN will launch with several other games. WIZWAR is a computer version of a popular board game of wizards and mazes. The eight different wizard types quest to capture treasure using 75 different spells to aid them along. The system will also offer CHESS and BACKGAMMON, and Optigon is currently trying to license six other popular computer games for on-line use.

Aside from the games, TEN will feature the usual assortment of e-mail services, chat groups, message areas, and software libraries, in addition to limited Internet Usenet access. The Usenet area will be unique in that it will organize and filter the Internet information to make it more accessible and easy to use.

Access Fees: $10.95 a month for 5 hours of access, plus $3-4 for each subsequent hour. For more information, contact Optigon at (800) 867-8446.

Further Reading Dept.

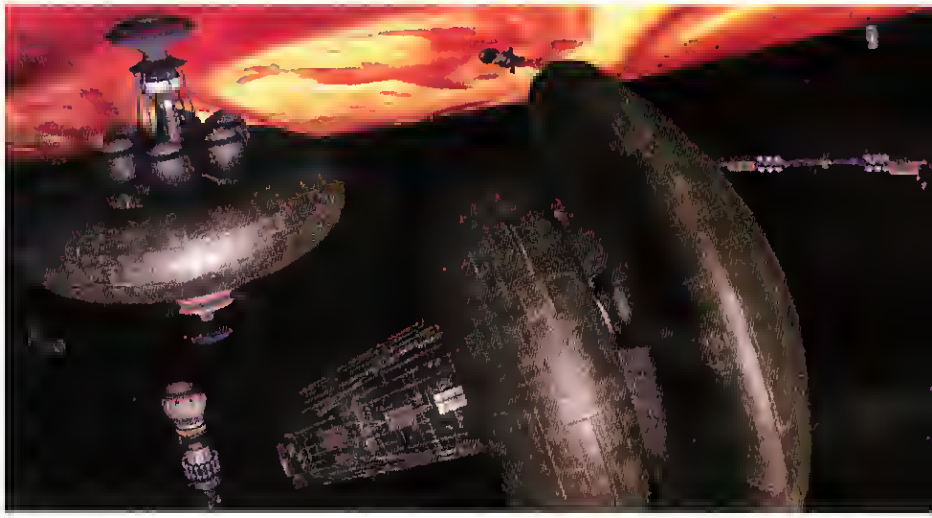
Cyberspace is big. Very big. Although this article has walked down the well-lit streets of Cyburbia, there are many other gaming hangouts and happenings tucked away in dark corners of the net. If you'd like to sniff out the more obscure gaming fare, we'd recommend *netgames*, a new book on on-line gaming from the author of the popular *netguide*. Crammed between its fluorescent covers you'll find a ton of info on gaming and network basics. Reach the MAGIC THE GATHERING archives on the Internet. Find out where SHADOWRUN role-players thrash to cyberpunk rock. Get involved in AXIS AND ALLIES play-by-email games. Just about anything and everything that matches the keywords "gaming" and "on-line" gets at least cursory mention in this handy reference. Random House, $19.00.



Art In The Third Dimension

Take A Trip Inside 3D STUDIO, The Program That Is Truly Changing The Face Of Gaming

by Paul C. Schuytema



DON'T RENDER THIS AT HOME! 3D STUDIO can be pretty dangerous in the hands of a professional, as this magnificent image from Sierra's OUTPOST can attest. Note the use of spotlights to create the "hot spots" and reflectivity of the fuel "bladders."

With the release of Version 3, Autodesk's 3D Studio suite of modeling and animation programs have taken the world of PC game design by storm. Just wandering from booth to booth amid the mayhem of the Summer Consumer Electronic Show, I counted untold demos of games that all shared one common element: incredibly sexy, complicated 3D animation, all courtesy of 3D STUDIO.

3D STUDIO is only one of a growing regiment of sophisticated modeling and animation programs finding a home in the world of the game designer and game artist. While there have been 3D systems around for several years, most require UNIX workstations as a minimum platform, and the cost for a single module of a modeling program can easily run over $10K. 3D STUDIO, in its 2.0 incarnation, was the first truly affordable, truly functional 3D modeling tool for game design. It could run on a PC and generate animations at nearly any imaginable resolution. **Trilobyte**'s 7TH GUEST was the first major hit that relied heavily on 3D STUDIO's ability to build realistic sets that could be seen on a PC. 3D STUDIO Version 3 is a significant improvement, and nearly every major design house now boasts at least one 3D STUDIO guru.

3D THINK

3D STUDIO is not just a single program, but a bundle of five core programs: 2D Shaper, Lofter, 3D Editor, Keyframer and the Materials Editor. But before a game artist reaches into this powerful toolbox, he or she needs to learn how to think in compartmentalized, discrete steps. When learning to program a computer, one needs to learn how to break a project down into individual steps and operations—to build a solid foundation—then expand by adding other procedures and subroutines. This programming analogy reflects very accurately the manner in which an artist creates images in 3D STUDIO.

While programming is fairly abstract from the get-go, creating an image isn't necessarily so. For Jonathan Bock, the art director for the graphically stunning OUTPOST, the initial stages of the OUTPOST art design involved drawing storyboards to nail down the initial image ideas. These drawings were even further refined before the artists even booted up 3D STUDIO. Then things got tricky. The 3D modelers had to turn a very intuitive 2D drawing into a virtual three-dimensional object. While this may seem straightforward, it requires rather obtuse and non-commonsensical thinking.

To create the exhaust cone for a starship's engine, for example, 3D STUDIO allows several approaches. If the cone will be a literal cone, you can create a circle in the Shaper, then extrude it in the Lofter with a cone restraint. If it is scalloped or ribbed, the artist may choose to create one half of a cross-section (imagine the right half of a cross section of a wine goblet), then rotate and copy the shape to create the ribs of the shape.

To create something as complex as the Mothership in OUTPOST, this process is used to create the basic shapes (or primitives). These shapes can then be assembled and grouped into an object hierarchy in the 3D Editor. The Mothership 3D STUDIO model took the entire OUTPOST art team over two months to create. "We went nuts on that one," remarked Bock.

This grouping is one of the most interesting aspects of model design in 3D STUDIO. Basically, shapes are attached together to create larger and more complex groups which are then linked together. Picture a wire-frame model of a

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human hand. Each finger is constructed of a multitude of shapes: the nail, the tip of the finger, the knuckle, etc. All of these parts can be grouped together to create, say, an index finger. Then all of the fingers, the thumb and the palm may be grouped together as a hand.

3D CRASH COURSE

With a basic understanding of the process, I decided to try my hand at creating an animated logo for this column. Fueled by delusions of becoming the next gaming graphics star, I loaded up 3D STUDIO to begin a crash course, for your pleasure of course, in 3D design. I had high hopes of sending my final animation, priority mail, straight to George Lucas' front door. Instead, even the local public access cable channel would probably turn it down.

My project began where most 3D STUDIO designs begin—the Shaper. The Shaper is a vector-based drawing program that allows you to create silhouettes of the shape you are working on. After drawing the initial shape in the Shaper program, you transfer that outline into the Lofter, where you can create a three-dimensional object out of it. The basic extrude commands are very intuitive: you can make a cylinder by extruding a circle. You also have a multitude of other lofting options, such as lofting to a path or distorting or rotating the shape as it gets extruded. This, for me, was the trickiest part of the whole deal. Using the Lofter requires you to access some deep dark neural circuits in your brain, those which allow you to visualize shapes as evolving out of other shapes (3D STUDIO may be advanced, but it can't think for you). Creating just the right shape takes quite a bit of trial and error.

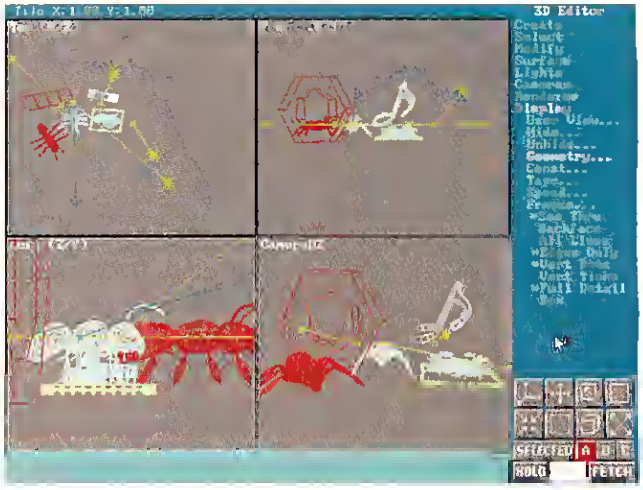
The 3D Editor is where artists spend most of their time. It is here where you rotate, place, join and adjust your shapes. It is also here where you assign textures, place lights and cameras, and render an image.

When creating my rather busy *Hex, Bugs & Rock n' Roll* logo, I created the hex shape and the musical note in the Shaper, and then gave them some 3D "life" in the Lofter. In the Editor, I imported those objects, as well as the ant and the drum set, and copied, rotated and placed them to create the scene I wanted.

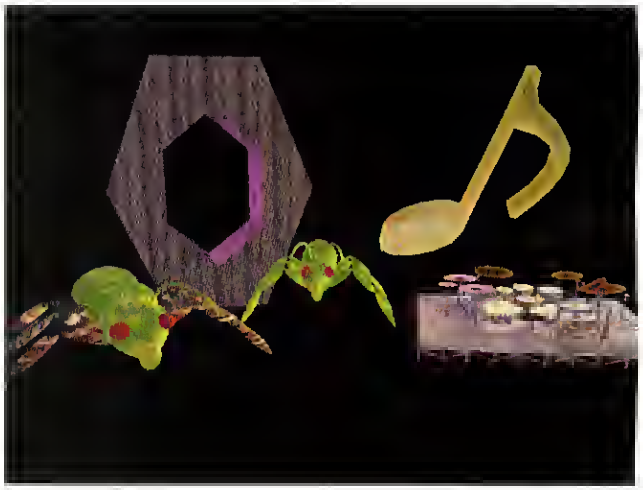
Since we aren't working in virtual reality here, the Editor provided me with four windows on my wireframe word. The first three allow for 3D manipulation: top, side and front views of the scene. The fourth window can be assigned to a camera to give you an idea of how your rendered scene will look.

After placing my wireframe models, I then needed to assign them a surface texture. 3D STUDIO comes bundled with a large palette of material textures, and the Materials Editor allows you to create even more. All I had to do was select an object and assign one of the materials to it, be it oiled walnut or bright orange plastic. Each material has a distinctive color, texture and reflectivity.

An object's surface can be as simple as a solid color, or very, very complex. Some of the surface textures included with 3D STUDIO are mapping surfaces (such as the mottled and pitted surface of granite). These surfaces are actually highly detailed bitmap images which are then applied to the surface of whatever object you choose. To give even more control, you may apply a texture by planar, cylindrical or spherical projection.



GET WIRED Objects appear as wire frame structures in the 3D Editor. The lower right viewport is the "camera view" of the Hex, Bugs, & Rock n' Roll logo.



MY MASTERPIECE The final, rendered version of my "cutting edge" logo. Note the highlights on the inside of the hex. This was created by placing a spotlight directly behind the image and shining it through the opening.

You can even apply several different textures to a single object. This technique was used by Trilobyte in constructing the dilapidated version of the Stauf mansion for the 7TH GUEST sequel, 11TH HOUR. While an original object may have had a wallpaper texture applied to it, the look just wasn't "dirty" enough to give a sense of real age. By applying a "grunge" texture, dirt and grime could be accurately simulated. If only redecorating a living room could be this easy!

The Materials Editor program allows a designer to edit or create a unique surface for an object. If your design called for weathered barnboard for example, you could go out into the field, take a Kodachrome of a nicely weathered board, scan the image into a TIFF or GIF file format, and you're ready to create your texture.

To allow a designer to more accurately create a real world texture, the Material Editor can be used to assign a lot of extra information to a material, beyond just the bitmap of weathered wood. You can assign reflectivity, transparency, blur and other material properties to most accurately recreate a surface texture.

Being the wily, creative designer-to-be, I messed around with a wood texture and was able to give it quite an odd set of reflective properties. In fact, I was able to

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this one wants to rip your lungs out.

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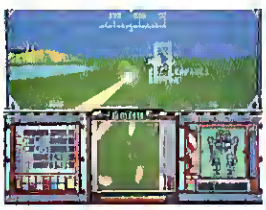

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create a wonderfully eroded metal look (I like to think of it as my "Apollo 11 reentry blast plate" texture).

After nailing down my surface textures, I returned to the 3D Editor to place a few dramatic spotlights. I then created a camera, placing it just like the spotlight. You have to use at least two of the view windows to get the camera placed just where you want it, and you can use the camera view to check your work. I could then select the field of view as well as the lens on the camera.

THE PAYOFF

Just like that, in only six weeks of hard work, I was ready to render my first image! I selected the render command, selected my view, and we were off! As I watched the red bar indicate the progress of my render, I came to the conclusion that this was a very time consuming process indeed. Just imagine sitting at your PC as you wait for the program to render some of the 22,000 frames of ultra-detailed animation in **Virgin**'s 11TH HOUR. Time enough to take a trip to the Cannes Film Festival and still have time for a two double-decaf lunch.

When you consider what's going on as 3D STUDIO renders a scene, the time seems quite reasonable. 3D STUDIO performs true ray tracing, which is an algorithmic process that traces a light beam from its source to its conclusion. Ray tracing is necessary to create cast shadows and reflective surfaces, but brother does it push a computer to its limit. That is why 3D STUDIO allows a designer to use a "rendering farm" approach to speed up the process. Basically, 3D STUDIO will take control of a LAN (which can be PCs on a few desks or a rack of monitorless 486s) and distribute the frames to each computer. When one computer completes rendering a frame, it is passed another frame to render, thereby speeding up the entire process by many times.

After heading out for a brisk, late-night constitutional, I returned to find my image waiting for me. The composition looked great, but the second spotlight was way off its mark. I guess I should have taken a lesson from the pros and rendered the image at low resolution first to make sure everything was in order. Ah well, you learn as you go....

Next month, we'll spend some time in the Keyframer program, exploring the ways in which game artists create animated images that "shake, rattle and roll."

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8razen's Hell! BBS is *the* place to be for both on-line gaming and contacting other for modem game play. We are *OOOM* Headquarters East with special message areas just for meeting other players to establish modem games. Also, being an official distribution site for companies such as Apogee, Id, Epic, etc., we always have the latest creations the day that they are released. We specialize in *OOOM* external levels, too, with 200+ available. 5 CD-ROMS and over 2.8 gigs of files, 28800 BPS access, 24 hours, 7 days, 2 nodes and over 50 on-line games. We're in Laurel, MD at **(301)** 776-8259. Your SysOp is 8razen.

The Mr. Blollo BBS is Chicago's home of great on-line battle and war games. Come check us out! Conquer the universe with *VGA Planets* or lead your empire to glory in *Imperium*. Can you take over the world in *Global War* or would you rather indulge in tome head-to-head combat in *The Pit*. Loyal game players receive extended access. 2400 to 14.4 BAUD, with 2 lines. Call **(312)** 725-662B or **(312)** 725-7474. Leave a message for verification to SysOp Brian Waddick.

The 14th Chapter BBS is Seattle, WA would like to invite all those interested in gaming and related topics to give us a call at (206) 721-0462. We have a good variety of door games such as *VGA Planets v3.15, Solar Realms Elite, Yankee Trader, Usurper, Legend of the Red Dragon* and others. We also connect callers with like minded individuals from modem playable games such as *Falcon 3.04, OOOM, Seawolf, Conquered Kingdoms, Indycar Racing, World Circuit* and many others. We support 1200 to 19,200 baud speeds on one line. 24 hours, 7 days, year round. Your SysOp is SAVIOR, and I hope to "see" you around.

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Wanted: *Cartels & Cutthroats*. I am seeking an IBM version of this 1981 SSI game. I will pay a reasonable price for a new or used copy. Thanks in advance! Contact Stephen Bell, 417 W. 21st Street, New York, NY 10011 or call me at home **(212)** 691-5424.

OPPONENTS WANTED BY AREA CODE

Ooom!, anyone? I'm seeking local players in the Stamford, CT area. Call me at H-**(203)** 322-7472.

Opponents wanted for *VGA Planets* in the Los Angeles area. Also willing to host the game, if need be. I have a registered copy and can play either regular or registered. If I host, I will play and employ the password option to insure that I am not cheating. I am using *VGA Planets 3.0*. Call Mike between 6pm and 9pm Pacific Time at H-**(213)** 222-6011. (Please don't call at any other time!)

I'm seeking local opponents in the Clarksburg, WV area who are up for just about any type of modem game. Call Jason at H-**(304)** 783-5228.

Wanted, a modem opponent in Northeast Maryland for *The Perfect General, Command HQ, Empire Deluxe* or other PBM games. Call Josh in Hanford county, MD at H-**(410)** 939-1021.

I'm looking for some intense competition in the local Pittsburgh, PA area for *Ooom!* death matches. Contact Jim at H-**(412)** 884-7197.

OOOM death match players wanted in the New Orleans, LA area. A 14,400 V42BIS modem is required. Call me at H-**(504)** 838-6129.

Seeking local opponents in the Vancouver, BC area to do battle in playing *Seawolf, Ooom!, Command HQ, 688 Attack Sub* or any other games by modem. Call David in the lower mainland area anytime at **(604)** 264-799B and let's do battle!

San Diego area gamer looking to connect with *Indycar, World Circuit, Seawolf* and *OOOM*. I have a Viva 14.4 modem. Call anytime after 4pm or on weekends (which are best). Ask for Gary in El Cajon, CA at H-**(619)** 579-6575. See you at the races...

Looking for a play-by-mail game of *Front Page Sports Football* or modem games of *Empire Deluxe* or *Falcon 3.0*. Call Mark at H-**(703)** 777-1749 after 6pm EST. I'm in the northern Virginia area.

Seeking opponents in the Chicago area (708 or 312) for *Command HQ*. Call Joe at **(708)** 782-6272.

I am looking for people in the Illinois area for a round or two of *The Perfect General*. I'll call you if you are afraid of high phone bills. You can reach me at home at **(708)** 438-2073 (be sure to leave a message on the answering machine) or email me on the GEnie network at J.Goldbogen.

Local opponents sought in the Chicago/Peoria are for any modem gaming, especially *The Grandest Fleet, Conquered Kingdoms, Empire Deluxe* and any that you think you can win at (hehehe). Call Bill at H-**(708)** 599-6558. Be sure to leave a message.

Julius Caesar seeks noble ghost-testers for play-by-transom gaming of a new product based on the hit song, *I Only Have Ides for You*. Call him at 555-40BC. No Gauls!

Opponents sought for modem (up to 14.4K baud) and PBEM gaming. I enjoy *The Grandest Fleet, Merchant Prince, World Circuit, Operation Crusader, Mech Warrior II* or anything else new and fun. Call Allen at H-**(713)** 690-3226, or write to me on CompuServe at 72460,2664 or on the ImagiNation Network (INN) at: Box 94717.

Opponents wanted to get involved in play-by-mail type games, particularly *Merchant Prince, Empire Deluxe* and others. Call Keven at H-**(717)** 645-9757 or write to Keven Faenza, 54 West Miner St., Coaldale, PA 18218.

Seeking opponents for modem play in the Colorado Springs, CO area. I would love to play *The Perfect General, Empire Deluxe, Modem Wars* or just about anything else you've got a hankering to lose at (hehehehe). Contact Steve Woodcock at H-**(719)** 392-2975 or by email via the InterNet at: swoodcoc@oldcolo.com.

I'm seeking statewide opponents for the following games: *OOOM, F-15 III* and *Falcon 3.0*. Please, call Gladden at H-**(803)** 283-1082 or 283-1092 if you are in South Carolina or southern North Carolina. Other modem games possible. I am in Lancaster, SC. On Prodigy (MDBD43F) or the InterNet (MDBD43F@prodigy.com).

I'm looking for a local gamer that would like an opponent for flight sims such as *Falcon 3.0* and *F-16 Fighter Pilot*. Also, *Ooom!* players wishing to find a good opponent have one here. Call Sean in Simi Valley, CA at **(805)** 527-2031, or write to me on Prodigy at XJTR11C.

Opponents wanted for network DeathMatch gaming in Goldsboro, NC for *OOOM*. Show up every Sunday at 1pm at MCS Computer, 309 N. Spence Avenue, or call **(919)** 751-5777.

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The Ancient Art Of Wari

by Chuck Miller

IN SHAREWARE, UNLIKE COMMERCIAL SOFTWARE, ACTION GAMES FAR OUTWEIGH THOSE OF OTHER GENRES. Whether this is due to the dynamics of the gaming market, the amount of work necessary to create titles that offer more than twitch-and-shoot activity, or both, it is nonetheless true that arcade games dominate the shareware scene. So, when occasional strategic games emerge, they don't capture much of the spotlight. That's why when I come across good strategy games, I like to give them a run for their money. Two titles that ran and are worth the money are BATTLES IN A DISTANT DESERT and WARI: THE ANCIENT GAME OF AFRICA from **ImagiSOFT**.

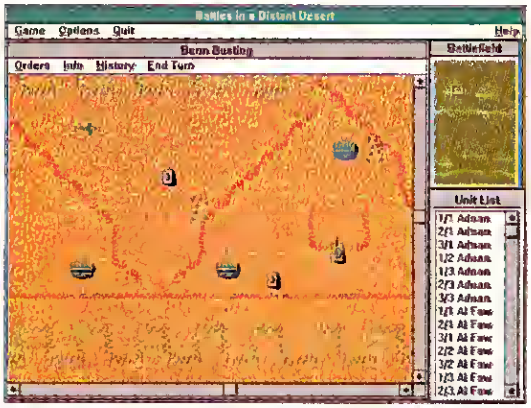
DESERT BEFORE DINNER?

Strategists who enjoyed playing BATTLES ON DISTANT PLANETS (reviewed in *CGW* #103, February 1993), **Glacier Technology's** previous offering, will feel right at home tackling BATTLES IN A DISTANT DESERT. Game play and design are identical in this new release, with the exception that the action takes place on the Kuwait/Saudi border rather than on some distant world. As such, robots and transports are exchanged for rifle squads and a mixture of tanks and choppers.

Like most strategic wargames, the battle action is turn-based. The battlefield, comprised of a series of defensive earthen works, barbed wire, oil pits and tank traps, was constructed by the Iraqi army commanded by Saddam Hussein. In the context of this game, and based upon the actual conflict, the air war has taken its toll on Iraqi forces, though reinforcements are expected to arrive in the form of Republican Guard divisions. The overwhelming firepower of the Coalition in this conflict gives them the decided advantage if they act quickly. This is the background for Scenario One, Berm Busting, the shareware scenario that accompanies the game engine. Two additional scenarios—The Streets of Khafji and The Al Zibayir Road—are available to registered users.

In this first campaign, your company, a Coalition force, is charged with securing a sector of Iraq comprised of numerous berms or bunkers while waiting for oncoming forces to arrive. At your disposal are Apache assault helicopters, M1A1 tanks, M2 IFVs, HMMWVs and several rifle squads. With these you must meet elements of several Iraqi divisions, plus some mechanized reinforcements due to arrive during the scenario. The action lasts for 50 turns.

Of course, should you choose, you can take the Iraqi side. To meet victory conditions for Iraq, you must destroy 12 Coalition units, leaving them insufficient forces to secure all the bunkers along the line of advance. Iraqi forces consist of T72-T55 Tanks, BMP-2s and thousands of troops.



BERM BUSTING Apache choppers support ground units attacking Iraqi bunkers in BATTLES IN A DISTANT DESERT.

Though game play is relatively straightforward, the documentation is a bit sparse for a tactical title. A more thorough description of the conflict and an expanded help file, with additional play instructions and strategic tips, would have rounded out the package well. Still, veteran wargamers will have no problem slipping into their role as tactical commander for either the Coalition or Iraqi military.

Installation was a breeze, and I experienced no technical problems during play. Sound effects are minimal but not wholly insufficient. The graphics aren't bad, but some color combinations make identification of friendly and opposing forces difficult. Hopefully a different color scheme will be adopted for future releases.

All in all, BATTLES IN A DISTANT DESERT offers the military strategist some quality tactical exposure. Play is challenging, yet not overbearing. Still, by nature of the scenarios presented, this title is better suited to staunch wargamers than genre-crossover players. For armchair generals, this game definitely merits a download.

BATTLES IN A DISTANT DESERT (Release 1.8, May 1, 1994) requires a 386 or better PC with VGA graphics, Windows 3.0 or higher and a minimum of 4MB RAM. Sound support is provided for sound boards offering Windows audio compatibility and the PC speaker. Registration of $15 gains you scenario two, while $25 provides you with both additional scenarios (include $3 shipping for USA destinations and $5 outside the US). Orders should be sent to: Glacier Edge Technology, 4820 East Kentucky Ave. Suite E, Glendale CO 80222. Please indicate a 3.5 or 5.25-inch disk preference when ordering.

THE WARI GAMER

You need not approach WARI: THE ANCIENT GAME OF AFRICA with undue trepidation. For, while it's a deceptively simple game, it's also a user- and system-friendly one. WARI, often called Mancala, is up and running without a hitch. Though no specifics were given as to system requirements, it should run on most 286 or better systems with minimal RAM (it only uses 16-color graphics). AdLib and Sound Blaster compatible sound cards are supported.

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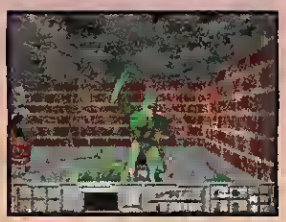

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NILE-ISTIC TENDENCIES "Thing" does the Giraffe's bidding in WARI, an ancient African game (with LED counters?).

and ancient African royalty. A two-player game of logic and skill, WARI allows you to compete against another human player or against the computer (with varying levels of AI competence). The goal is to be the first to capture 25 or more stones. Surprisingly, though a game of WARI only takes a few minutes to play, there are some very sophisticated strategies you can try once you get the hang of it.

WARI takes place on a board containing 12 bowls called houses. Each side of the board has six bowls filled with four stones apiece for a total of 48 stones. After selecting a house (bowl), the player picks up the stones in it and drops them into other houses one at a time, moving in a counter-clockwise direction. If the last stone you drop is in one of the houses on your opponent's side of the board, and it has only two or three stones in it, you capture all the stones in that house. The game continues until you or your opponent has 25 or more stones, or until no moves remain and a stalemate is reached. Of course, these are just the fundamentals, and there are more rules involved in playing the game successfully.

While WARI is easy to learn, developing winning strategies takes some real effort. Players may turn up the difficulty level of opponents, represented by animals—novice (The Giraffe), intermediate (The Lion and Zebra) and expert (The Elephant, only available in the registered version). In addition to basic moves, multiple moves are possible. You can reinforce your own houses, take "flight" to avoid impending capture, and employ several additional twists on play. All these contribute to making this game a rigorous exercise for the mind.

Though WARI is "primitive" in appearance compared to many of the newer shareware titles being released (16-color graphics look drab in a 256-color world), it is nonetheless a charming and challenging game. You'll soon forget about the game's modest look once you're hooked on the gameplay. Like many games I have tried of a similar nature, WARI should be listed as an electronic narcotic due to the digital dependency it spawns.

To register WARI and play The Elephant, the toughest AI opponent offered, send a registration fee of $16.95 (plus $4 shipping and handling) to: ImagiSOFT Inc., Computer Games Division, P.O. Box 13208, Albuquerque NM 87192. Credit Card orders can be placed at (800) 767-1978.

ZiffNET To locate these games on-line, tune in to the *CGW* headquarters on ZiffNet. These games can be downloaded from ZiffNet both on CompuServe and on Prodigy. On CompuServe, go to Computer Gaming World's own forum (GO GAMEWORLD), Library 7, Shareware Sizzle. On Prodigy, jump ZiffNet and Search by Title for the games listed here, or Search by Category to browse the entire Games Library.

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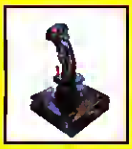
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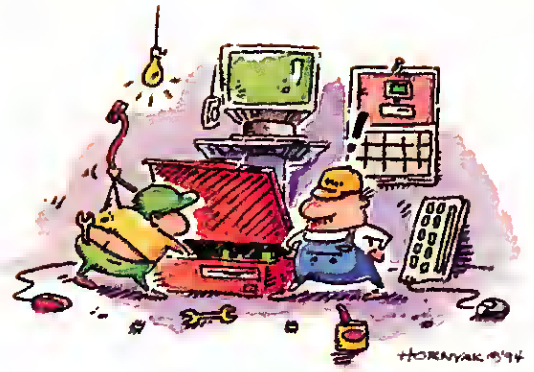

How to Handle a Sound Card That Just Won't Behave

by Mike Weksler

Of all the hardware complaints we get, the majority deal with two topics: sound card configuration, and getting a game to run when there's not enough conventional memory. How convenient, then, when a single product can generate frustration in both areas! No matter which sound card you own, you're sure to find some great memory management tips in this discussion of the Creative Labs AWE32.

BOOT THREE TIMES AND CALL ME IN THE MORNING

What's the deal with Creative Labs? You would think that as an industry standard, they'd have a clue as to the requirements of their core market—GAMERS! I heard a General MIDI music demo and wanted to upgrade from the lame FM synthesis of my Sound Blaster Pro. I had a choice of getting a Sound Blaster 16 and a Wave Blaster, but I was told that Creative's new AWE32 has both Sound Blaster sound and Wave Blaster music built in. I checked out the AWE32 and it looked like a good value with lots of software, so I sprung for it. Now, after installation, DOOM crashes and there's not enough memory to run my other games—this thing installed a ton of TSRs and my CONFIG.SYS is all screwed up. It took me the whole weekend to get it figured out. I must admit, when it works, it sounds great, but that's in Windows—I want something that will run with my MS-DOS games!!

Lee McCarter
Corinth, MS

Configuring the AWE32 with MS-DOS should be taught as a graduate course in computer science. I feel your pain. I too spent an evening configuring AWE32 drivers, and while I was able to get the card running with various games, well, let's just say I've had more fun at the dentist.

This is a monster of a sound product with some amazing utilities and really useful software. For the musician, you can add up to 32MB of RAM and upload MIDI patches to the card (like the 1MB **Gravis** ULTRASOUND). It even emulates a **Roland** MT-32, a **Roland** SOUND CANVAS, and does on-the-fly Qsound; however, it's a nightmare for the gamer. Specifically, there are a ton of drivers, little info regarding what they do, and the most important feature—the General MIDI MPU-401 interface (for selecting General Midi in your music setup)—is implemented in software. What's the big deal about that? Well, this MPU-401 driver, AWEUTIL.EXE, is a huge TSR taking up 44K! Combine that with your CD-ROM drivers and you've got no memory left for games. Additionally, the biggest flaw is that AWEUTIL.EXE will not work with protected mode games (like DOOM or other games where you see a DOS/4G when running them). **Logitech**, **Ensoniq** and **MediaVision** have all figured out how to use a hardware implementation of the MPU-401 to avoid this problem, and I'm amazed that **Creative Labs** didn't follow suit on this product.

Anyway, maybe I can help you out. Let's check out the deal with the drivers. The install program placed a number of drivers into my CONFIG.SYS (see Figure 1).

The first line is for the CD-ROM. The rest is all AWE32 stuff. As if this weren't enough, the installation added several lines into my AUTOEXEC.BAT file (see Figure 2).

The first three lines are environment stuff and don't take up any precious lower 640K. The first executable is the Microsoft CD-ROM extension, and it's pretty huge.

DIAGNOSE and SB16SET are not loaded into memory. They make adjustments to the card and then unload. AWEUTIL however, is the big one. If you set the /EM flag to General MIDI, then it takes 44K. You need this TSR to select between the MT-32, General MIDI, and

FIGURE ONE

```
DEVICE=C:\AWE32\DRV\SBCD.SYS /D:MSCD001 /P:220                    (11K)
DEVICE=C:\AWE32\DRV\CSP.SYS /UNIT=0 /BLASTER=A:220                (7K)
DEVICE=C:\AWE32\DRV\CTSB16.SYS /UNIT=0 /BLASTER=A:220 I:5 D:1 H:5 (26K)
DEVICE=C:\AWE32\DRV\CTMMSYS.SYS                                   (10K)
```

NR 13

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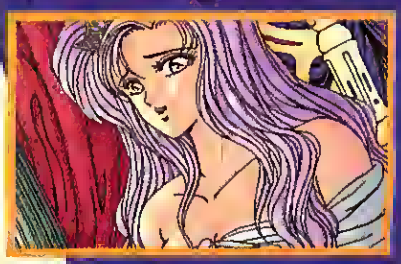

KNIGHTS *of* XENTAR

Circle Reader Service #86

Roland Sound Canvas GS patches. You can also use the /R and /C commands to add Reverb and Chorus effects, which are pretty cool but not worth the hassle.

So, what we have is 87K of AWE32 drivers added to 56K of CD-ROM drivers for a grand total of 143K! Add to that, disk cache and mouse drivers at 28K and 17K respectively for a grand total of 188K worth of stuff to somehow load high, tweak, and otherwise sweep under the rug to get your games to run. Quite a daunting task considering that loading a mouse driver high will bring most users to their knees! In other words, installing the AWE32 with a CD-ROM and your existing MS-DOS configuration makes installing a standard Multimedia Upgrade Kit look as easy as swapping a spark plug.

So, if you want to stick it out with the AWE32, first you have to reconfigure your system and you have three choices. First, you could start by loading MSCDEX.EXE high and fiddling with MS-DOS's MEMMAKER utility, but it probably won't make a dent in this configuration scenario, and unless you're a good DOS hack or want to become one (the subject of future articles and many a book), you can skip to choices two and three.

Third party memory managers like **Quarterdeck**'s QEMM, **Qualitas**' 386MAX, and **Helix**'s NETROOM all have features that will optimize your configuration. QEMM's OPTIMIZE will give you around 580K on the first try. If you just had CD-ROM drivers, you can get that figure up to around 634K with a few deft keystrokes, but 188K worth of drivers will just about choke anything out there.

As an innovative approach to the above problem, **Helix** has released "cloaked" drivers for your disk cache, mouse and CD-ROM. The normal drivers for the above take up 86K. The cloaked versions take up a mere 10K (loading the remainder into extended memory, thus freeing up 76K of lower RAM and the Upper Memory blocks for the AWE32 drivers). These cloaked drivers are a great way to configure your rig for games, period.

Unfortunately, if you want General MIDI music out of your AWE32 with a protected mode game like DOOM, you need to boot your machine without AWEUTIL.EXE resident (it can be disabled by typing "REM" in front of it in your AUTOEXEC.BAT file). Then, you need to use a daughtercard like **Creative Lab**'s WAVEBLASTER or **MediaVision**'s PROFESSIONAL WAVETABLE UPGRADE to attach to the feature connector on your AWE32. While slinging on a daughter card is one way to get the board to work with protected mode games, this approach defeats the purpose of having the AWE32 in the first place. (You'd be best off with the SOUND BLASTER 16, **MediaVision** PREMIUM 3D, or **Aztech** PRO-16L for use with daughter cards). The other option is to boot your computer without AWEUTIL.EXE and hope your game runs with sound and music drivers from John Miles. He has written drivers that should work with the AWE32 in protected mode. By the way, the DOOM 1.5 update supports the AWE32, but it still won't work with AWEUTIL.EXE loaded.

FIGURE TWO

```
SET BLASTER=A220 I5 D1 H5 P330 T6
SET SOUND=C:\AWE32
SET MIDI=SYNTH:1 MAP:E MODE:0

C:\AWE32\DRV\MSCDEX.EXE /D:MSCD001 /V /M:15                    (43K)
C:\AWE32\DIAGNOSE /S
C:\AWE32\AWEUTIL /R.50 /C:50 /EM:GM                            (44K)
C:\AWE32\SB16SET /P /Q
```

Of course, you could have just added a stand-alone wave table synthesis card to your SOUND BLASTER PRO (like the **Turtle Beach** MONTEREY, **Roland** SCC1 SOUND CANVAS, or the **Ensoniq** SOUNDSCAPE), but that's assuming that you had an extra bus slot available and that you can handle the extra wiring of multiple sound and music outputs.

Is there hope for the AWE32? More games are beginning to support it in its native mode and there are Miles drivers available. It's the first product from **Creative Labs** with great utilities and, when it runs with a game, it's OK; but, it's doubtful that a game will really exploit all the features of the AWE32 in the future. The main reason to purchase an AWE32 is the ability to store MIDI patches in up to 32MB of onboard RAM. However, with the price of RAM being what it is, and the card coming stock with only 512K of RAM, don't expect (m)any game developers to support the AWE32 for onboard configurations exceeding 512K of RAM. It's a shame because this is what the product was designed to do from the start. Alas, gamers are probably better off with a sound card and wave table daughter card combo, their old SOUND BLASTER PRO and a stand-alone wave table card, or an all-inclusive card such as the GRAVIS ULTRASOUND or the LOGITECH SOUNDMAN.

If any of you out there want the easy out, and your sound card can handle it, the daughter cards are looking mighty fine.

At press time, according to a **Creative Labs** spokesperson, there wasn't a protected mode MPU-401 TSR available. I can't imagine that Creative would ignore this problem and I hope they get one out soon. One tip they suggested was to comment out (i.e., type REM in front of the line that you want to remove) the CPS.SYS driver out of the CONFIG.SYS file. Weighing in at a mere 7K, CSP.SYS drives the on-board DSP chip which has yet to be utilized by an MS-DOS game. This could make the difference between getting a game to run or getting that all too familiar "You Do Not Have Enough Memory To Run This Game" message. So while the AWE32 is one helluva sound card, expect to go to hell and back to get it installed for MS-DOS games.

Finally, for all you seasoned DOS hacks out there who think I caved in and was too quick in reaching for the QEMM disk, send me your best CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT (preferably rigged for the AWE32) and I'll run the pair that frees up the most conventional memory as an example of how to do it right in a forthcoming memory management article—and as an enduring monument to your genius!

For memory managers, contact:

Helix: Netroom, Multimedia Cloaking (718) 392-3735
Qualitas: 386MAX (301) 907-6700
Quarterdeck: QEMM (310) 392-9851

Why don't you share your technical adventures with your fellow CGW readers who may have the same problems? Send your questions, cool hacks, and tips to Under The Hood, c/o Computer Gaming World, 130 Chaparral Ct Suite 260, Anaheim Hills, CA 92808, or at any of our e-mail addresses (Internet: 76703.622@compuserve.com).

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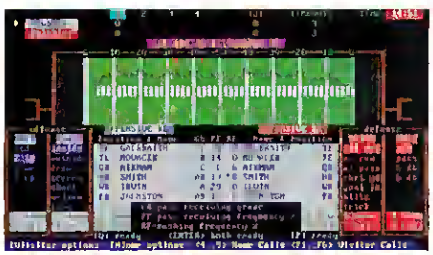
These Just In

Here are our quick takes on games that arrived just before press time. You can be sure that the more prominent titles will be given a full review in the next issue.

APBA FOOTBALL

For over three decades, APBA has simulated the mighty contests of the gridiron through player stat cards and rolling dice. This version of APBA FOOTBALL is the latest attempt to transfer the savvy and authenticity of the venerable boardgame to the world of silicon sports simulations. As with most stat-based text games of late, some graphic life has been injected, with a "football" cursor moving up and down a Green Bay-green field. The textual de-



scriptions of play scroll by on a colored background, and have a degree of variety, although it's doubtful they'll ever replace Pat Summerall. Box scores and statistics galore are compiled, and may be viewed on a game-by-game basis as the season progresses, with such details as length of scoring drives included for the fanatic. Scheduling is fairly flexible, as is the option to save in the middle of a game (for those coaches who really hate to lose). Some oddities are also included, such as the computer making substitutions for you unasked, and the AI opponents being called "robots" (will the next version be called Isaac Asimov's Gridiron Fantasy?); but overall, this recreation of the board game looks ready to break from training camp. The 1994 schedule and players are on a separate disk, which should be available by the time you read this. IBM, $39.95. Circle Reader Service # 1

APBA GAME COMPANY, INC., 1001 MILLERSVILLE ROAD, LANCASTER, PA 17603, (800) 334-2722

BATTLE OF BRITAIN II

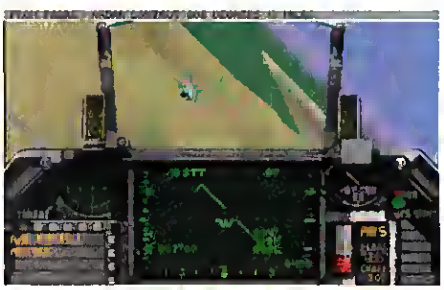
We shall fight them on the beaches. We shall fight them in Macintosh-generated skies, and in the Windows format. We shall never surrender! Then again, we might, since Rene Vidmer and the folks at **Deadly Games** have the tendency to create addictive games with more than a touch of historicity. Unlike other Deadly titles such as U-BOAT and M4, BATTLE OF BRITAIN II is less a simulator than a straight-up wargame. Boardgame enthusiasts will recognize the influence of John Butterfield's classic RAF design, which Vidmer thoughtfully lists in the bibliography to BOB II. By keeping tactical detail to a minimum, the operational aspects of the crucial WWII air campaign are effectively simulated with a minimum of complexity. In your role as Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, you must commit the meager resources of the Royal Air Force against the massive forces of the *Luftwaffe* who outnumber you by 5-to-1. Your only information comes from observers in the field and RDF reports, an early form of radar. Although this newest version fails to fill up the entire screen in Windows, there are plenty of blips on the RDF to

keep even veteran air commanders biting their nails, making the difficult decisions of where and when to risk your overworked pilots. Have the Observer Corps keep a sharp eye, and keep those Spitfire squadrons on standby, because failure means that Hitler will launch Operation *Seelowe*, and the Swastika will fly over the Thames! IBM, $59.95. Circle Reader Service # 2

DEADLY GAMES, 38 WAYAAWI AVE, BAYVILLE, NY 11709, (516) 628-1039

FALCON GOLD

Flight Sim fanatics confused by the plethora of FALCON 3.0 disks, scenarios, patches and other add-ons, may rest easier now, as Spectrum HoloByte has packaged the entire series on a single CD. Included are the latest versions of FALCON 3.0, MIG-29, HORNET: NAVAL STRIKE FIGHTER, and OPERATION FLYING TIGER, complete with new flight models for both



the MiG-29 and the F/A-18 Hornet. The *Art of the Kill* video enclosed will be a boon for those intimidated by the program's complexity, offering a short course in the basics of air combat maneuvering. Installing the entire CD takes up 29 MB on the hard drive, and even playing "directly" from the CD-ROM still uses some 11MB of space. Still, newcomers to FALCON will appreciate having all of the upgrades and bug fixes in one place. Add in the network, modem and enhanced AI for solitaire play, and you have as close to the ultimate flight package as is possible—at least until FALCON 4.0. IBM, $69.95. Circle Reader Service # 3

SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE, 2490 MARINER SQUARE LOOP, ALAMEDA, CA, (510) 522-1164

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CYCLEMANIA®

A RACING GAME BY SPORT ACCOLADE

Circle Reader Service #256

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INTELLIPLAY COWBOY CASINO

This CD-ROM product is steeped in *nouveau* Hollywood Western traditions, complete with saloon, multi-ethnic cast, and of course, a poker game. One traditional touch which would have been better left out is the attempt to make the multimedia views look old-fashioned and "grainy," which is something the medium rarely needs help with. Here, the results are gray pixels which stick out like a sore dealer's thumb. The various computer opponents run the gamut from badly overacted to genuinely amusing, but none of them will threaten Bret Maverick on a good day—at least as far as playing

strength is concerned. The minimal help from the bartender and a poker "book" on-screen, tells only what to do—fold, raise, etc.—without any reason *why*, though this is ameliorated somewhat by the inclusion of a beginner's poker book, *The Basics of Winning Poker*. Worst of all, the manual implies that these crusty old AI bushwhackers may even be cheatin'. It's enough to send an honest poker player back to AMARILLO SLIM'S. MPC CD-ROM, $49.95. Circle Reader Service # 4

INTELLIMEDIA SPORTS, INC., TWO PIEDMONT CENTER, ATLANTA, GA, 30305, (800) 269-2101

LINKS BIGHORN GOLF

Gorgeous though all the LINKS 386 courses might be, this deserves the subtitle of "Delightful Desert SVGA Vistas," so stunningly has the beauty of the course been captured. The towering Santa Rosa Mountains form a backdrop for the variety of flora found in this surprisingly green arid climate. The back nine is fairly typical of courses found on the pro tour, with perhaps fewer water hazards (as one would expect in the land of cactus). The first few holes offer a set of unusual challenges for the LINKS golfer. Missing the fairway often puts you in the rough, as you hit your second shot from the side of

a mountain. Greens are often small and hidden in natural coves, making the approach much more dependent on touch and accuracy than sheer power. Chipping from the rough desert terrain means that you'll never be quite so afraid of normal traps again. What a shame that on the course famous for hosting the PGA's *Skins Game*, we can't have a proper AI opponent. Nonetheless, a fine rendition of a great course by Arthur Hills, BIGHORN is right up with PEBBLE BEACH as the best course released to date for LINKS. IBM and Windows, $24.99. Circle Reader Service # 6

ACCESS SOFTWARE, INC., 4910 WEST AMELIA EARHART DR., SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84116, (800) 800-4880

NORMANDY: THE GREAT CRUSADE

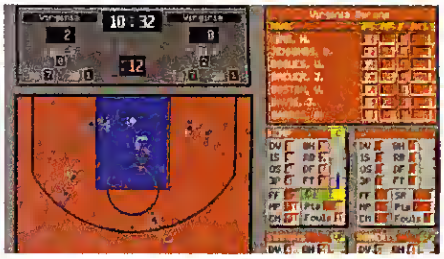
Even though it lacks a game, this is one of those rare CD-ROMs that does justice to both the subject and the medium. Produced by The Discovery Channel, this package lives up to TDCs fine standards in writing, editing, use of footage and the ability to weave all the pieces into a mean-

ingful whole. There are 13 major subjects here, covering everything from the home front to Operation Fortitude to the liberation of Paris, with video clips, detailed narration, and photographs to help tell the story. In addition, each subject is fleshed out through articles, original radio broadcasts, maps and personal letters from soldiers and commanders at the front. The program may be run in "Auto Pilot" mode, taking you through the entire story, or jumped into and out of at the user's preference. Hitler's nightmare of a second European front comes alive, as you cruise through this accurate and well presented look at the greatest amphibious operation in history. IBM CD-ROM, $49.95. Circle Reader Service # 7

DISCOVERY COMMUNICATIONS, INC., 7700 WISCONSIN AVE., BETHESDA, MD, 20814-3579, (301) 986-1999

NOTHING BUT NET

Clock ticking...he moves inside...goes up for the jump hook...the ball rattles around...it must be another text basketball game! But wait—there's more to this



one than statistics on a screen. From personnel screens to shot selection zones, the players are actually graphically depicted on a brown parquet floor background. And even though the animations will never win a Most Fluid Movement award, the intent here is to provide some visual interest in this simulation of professional basketball. Unlike many of this game's competitors, you may not select shots for individual players, as the focus is strictly on coaching and developing a team. The depth is impressive, with a pro playbook for designing your own plays, a draft module, even algorithms for how well players *interact* with one another. So make the pass, sports fans, pick & roll, and move it inside with this engaging, easy-to-play and thorough game. IBM $49.95. Circle Reader Service # 8

STRATEGIC GAMING DESIGNS, 659 CARY TOWNE BLVD #176, CARY, NC, 27511, (919) 552-1807

PREHISTORIK 2

Those who fondly remember *Caveman* with Ringo Starr may don their leopard skins and leap right into this silly prehistoric arcade title. "Hungerland" looks every bit as much the prehistoric fast-food strip as it did in the first game of the series, offering plenty of action as you try to fill your ever-grumbling caveman belly. In addition to scrolling and jumping from

DO YOU HAVE THE GUTS TO PLAY WITH THE BIG BOYS?

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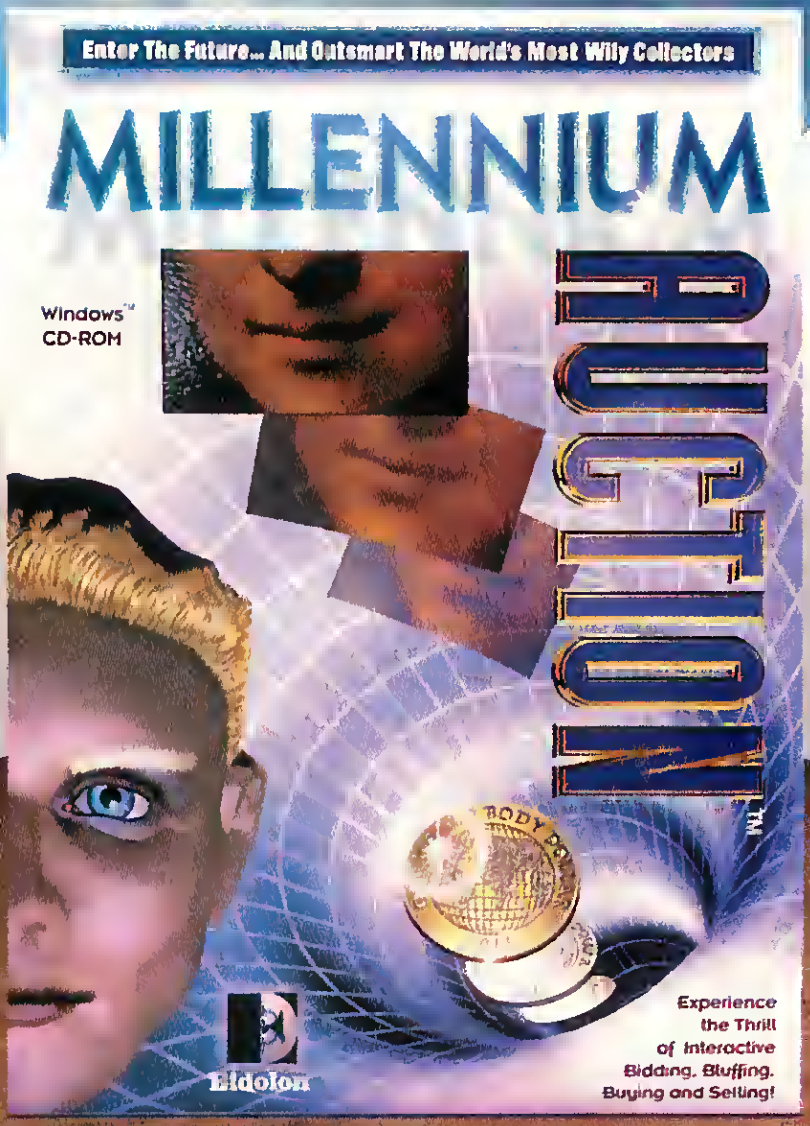
TOO BAD IT'S JUST A GAME.

2 CD'S FOR WINDOWS



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Eidolon

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one screen to another, you may employ that wondrous invention of the Mesozoic era, the hang-glider (obviously invented by a distant ancestor of Leonardo da Vinci), to speed you on your way through the various levels. While it's obvious that the dinosaurs who oppose you are a bit out of their time period, anyone who is worried about that won't pick up this game in the first place. IBM, $44.99. Circle Reader Service # 9

Titus Software, 20432 Corisco St., Chatsworth, CA, 91311, (818)709-3692

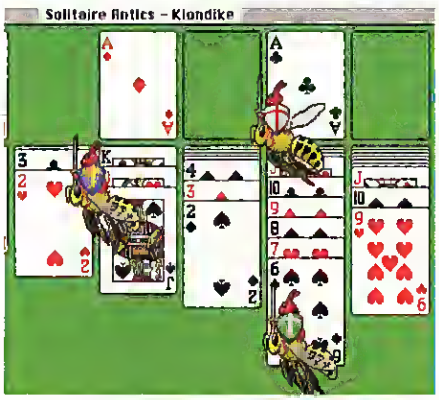
REBEL ASSAULT

In a galaxy not so far away, digitized video and state-of-the art computer graphics were combined to create a visceral *Star Wars* feast on the IBM computer. Now, the mysterious powers of The Force have made this experience available for Macintosh star-pilots as well. Screaming down canyons, being chased

by TIE fighters and ambushed by Storm Troopers never sounded or looked so wonderful. The John Williams soundtrack, along with the film footage from the *Star Wars* trilogy of films, are almost seamlessly integrated, to the point where this game has a very cinematic feel throughout. The only problem is that would-be Luke Skywalkers don't have any more freedom to move around in this richly-generated Mac world than their PC counterparts enjoyed. If you like computer cinematics and enjoy repetitive and limited arcade action, you might want to take a ride on this X-Wing with training wheels. IBM, $63.95. Circle Reader Service # 10

SOLITAIRE ANTICS

Just when you thought it was safe to shuffle the old virtual deck, another version of Solitaire crawls out of the woodwork. Using their expertise garnered from developing screen savers, Ant Software (and Masque Publishing) unleashes insects on your well-laid tableau, fleshed out in over 50 animations. Other than the parade of crawling, flying and otherwise animated ants, however, the card-flipping is much the same as any other solitaire product—although the games do have three modes of difficulty, a bit strange for this genre. Realizing that solitaire is a relaxing pastime, the designers have



thoughtfully included a control to play audio CDs at the same time you are searching for that three of diamonds. All in all, amusing enough, with the main question being how long solo entomologists will be enthralled by the relatively scant number of games—21 in all. IBM Windows, Mac, $24.99. Circle Reader Service # 11

Gametek, Inc., 2999 N.E. 191st Street, Suite 500, North Miami Beach, FL, 33180 (305) 935-3995

TUBULAR WORLDS

The fiction used to justify most arcade games is largely rubbish, but the story for this Amiga/IBM/Mac shooter wins this month's Silly Setup crown. Your final test as a space cadet is described as a tour through four *virtual cyber-worlds*. It's hard to decide if this is a sly comment on the

industry, or merely shows that the designers have a good sense of humor. Even if your fictional world-within-worlds is only virtually a virtual reality, it still manages to throw a lot of action at you in the usual scrolling and shooting fashion, complete with expected boss starships at the end of each level. Very European in style, it resembles an Amiga shooter from about 1990. Amiga 1200, IBM, Mac, $59.95. Circle Reader Service # 12

Dongleware Publishing, Inc., 35 Howard Street, Cambridge MA, 02139, (617) 497-1130

WOODSTOCK 25TH ANNIVERSARY CD-ROM

The festival that brought together so many people for music, drugs and mud, has now been re-rolled onto a CD-ROM that by its very nature can't really do justice to the event. But it's the 25th anniversary of the ultimate love-in, with *Woodstock II* hype still ringing in our ears, and **Time-Warner** knows a good marketing angle when they see it. Basically a collection of video clips, photos and eight songs from the original concert, the CD also includes back-stage interviews, "raps" with some laid back cats, news clippings, performer bios and album anthologies. There is also an amusing trivia game that relates little gems like the fan who floated

away one night on an air mattress and woke up lodged under a truck, and a "Groovy Paint Feature" where you can spiral trippy 60s clipart over strobing backgrounds until your corneas supernova. Far out! We had trouble getting the IBM version to run Quicktime movies, but the Mac version ran well. A cool program for the countless millions of fans who thought they were there, but for the rest of us, probably not worth the trip. Mac and IBM CD-ROM, $59.99. Circle Reader Service # 13

Time Warner Interactive, 2210 W. Olive Avenue, Burbank, CA 91506, (800) 482-3766

Never Lose Sight Of How Pinball Should Be Played.

A truly great pinball game is more than great graphics and spectacular sounds, more than the latest arcade features like 3D ramps and three multi-ball play, more than fast ball movement and precise flipper control, and it's more than being able to see the whole playfield at once so you can aim your shots. A great pinball game has that unique quality of playability and never-ending challenge that keeps you coming back for...*just one more game* and a shot at your new high score!

Washington Post– "Crystal Caliburn perfectly captures the essence of a great pinball machine."

New York Times–"The realism is striking... [Crystal Caliburn] will be at the top of Silicon Santa's gift list this year."

Inside Mac Games– "ARCADE GAME OF THE YEAR"

Computer Game Review– "Crystal Caliburn sets a new standard. For realistic pinball on a computer, there's nothing like this game."

Electronic Entertainment– "Crystal Caliburn is simply the best, most realistic, most challenging pinball simulation for the Macintosh yet." (Rating: 9 out of 10)

GAMES Magazine–"You'll forget you're playing on a two-dimensional computer screen... the realism is astonishing."

MacUser–"Electronic pinball's Holy Grail." (Rating: 4 1/2 out of 5)

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

MACINTOSH: 13" or larger monitor, 256 colors, and 4MB RAM.

WINDOWS: 386 or faster processor, Windows 3.1, 256 SVGA monitor, 4MB RAM. Supports SoundBlaster® and other Windows compatible sound cards.

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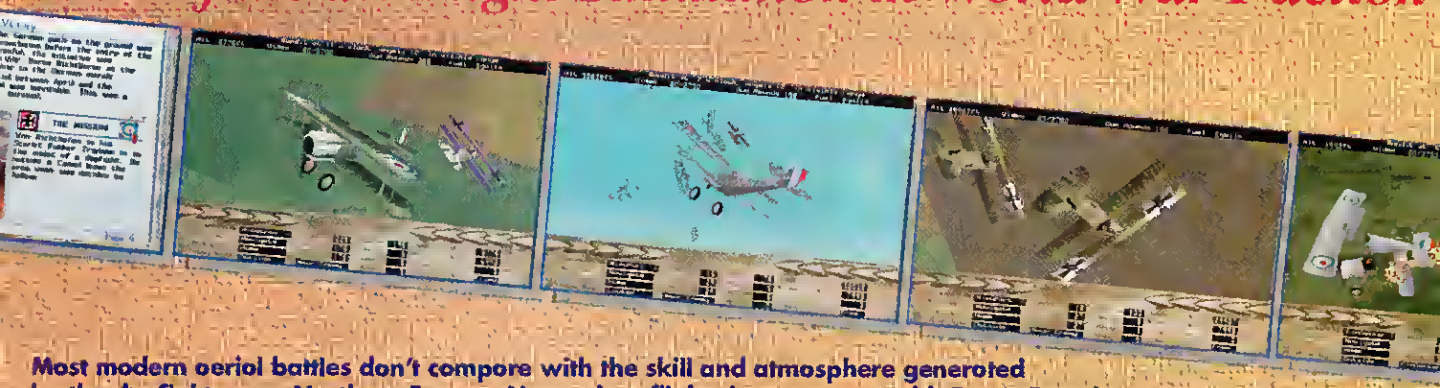
Circle Reader Service #225

DAWN PATROL

The First Air War

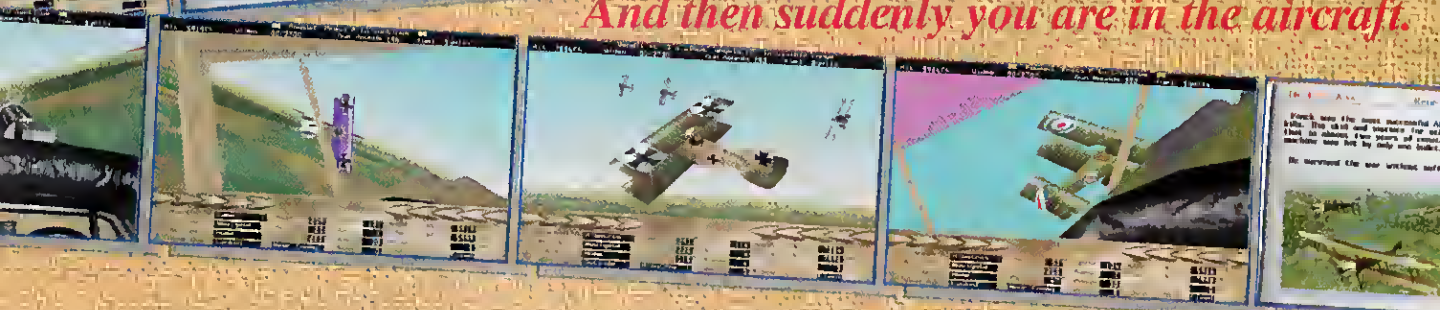
State of the art Flight Simulation in World War 1 action



Most modern aerial battles don't compare with the skill and atmosphere generated by the dogfights over Northern Europe. No modern flight sims compare with Dawn Patrol.

Dawn patrol takes a detailed look at dozens of actual situations from WW1. Background information on real-life Aces and planes provide a fascinating insight. Superb digitized photographs and animated action sequences add to the experience.

And then suddenly you are in the aircraft.



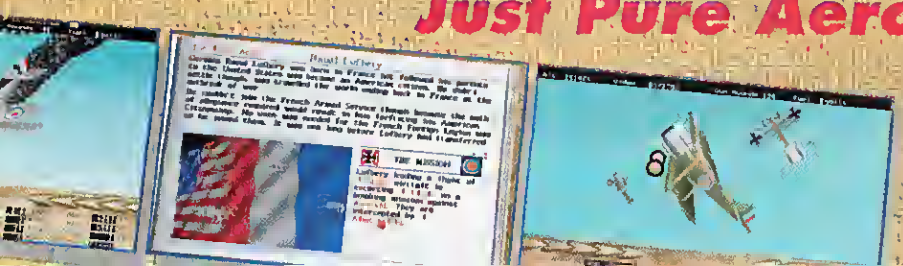
Each event can be played out in superb 3D with full control of 15 aircraft taken from both sides each with their own aerodynamic model. With a resolution of 640 x 400, texture mapping, Gouraud shading, light sourcing and depth shading the screen looks more realistic than anything seen on PC so far, the beauty of these aircraft is that, unlike modern equivalents, they fly slowly enough for you to appreciate the detail – unless you happen to be being attacked by 3 Fokkers that is!

Not only can these individual missions be adjusted to tilt the balance for you or against you, but there are also specific pilots for you to become through a series of missions, attempting to emulate or even outshine the achievements of Von Richthofen!

Circle Reader Service #136

No guided missiles,no laser range-finders,

Just Pure Aerodynamic Skill.



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THE SCORE

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games.
Here, raised upon pedestals, you'll find the games that broke the records,
established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

CGW HALL OF FAME

The Bard's Tale (Electronic Arts, 1985)
Battle Chess (Interplay Productions, Inc., 1988)
Chessmaster (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
Civilization (MicroProse, Inc., 1991)
Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987)
Earl Weaver Baseball (Electronic Arts, 1986)
Empire (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, Inc., 1988)
Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1986)
Gunship (MicroProse, Inc., 1989)
Harpoon (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
Kampfgruppe (Strategic Simulations, Inc., 1985)
King's Quest V (Sierra On-Line, Inc., 1990)
Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991)
M-1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse, Inc., 1989)
Mech Brigade (Strategic Simulations, Inc., 1985)
Might & Magic (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)
Pirates (MicroProse, Inc., 1987)
Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse, Inc., 1990)
Red Baron (Dynamix, 1990)
SimCity (Maxis, 1987)
Starflight (Electronic Arts, 1986)
The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990)
Their Finest Hour (LucasArts, 1989)
Ultima III (Origin Systems, Inc., 1983)
Ultima IV (Origin Systems, Inc., 1985)
Ultima VI (Origin Systems, Inc., 1990)
War in Russia (Strategic Simulations, Inc., 1984)
Wasteland (Interplay Productions, Inc., 1986)
Wing Commander (Origin Systems, Inc., 1991)
Wizardry (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
Zork (Infocom, 1981)

H.O.F. Highlights

INDUCTION CEREMONY!

LEMMINGS
PSYGNOSIS, 1991

Ever since Walt Disney promulgated the romanticized image of lemmings as a species that would blindly follow the crowd over a cliff edge and to their watery deaths, the species has become a well-worn metaphor for the mindless followers of any leader. In its initial release over three years ago, LEMMINGS placed gamers in the role of such a leader, but added an intriguing twist. Instead of leading the cute little creatures to their demise, the gamer was expected to save them from their peregrinating selves. While much of the game's appeal is due to the endemic cuteness of these little furry creatures, it is also apparent that LEMMINGS is a "god game," at least in a broad sense. Cast in the role of the LEMMINGS' savior, the player must remove barriers, yank the lovable Lilliputians from dangerous precipices, and save them from all sorts of aquatic, fiery and otherwise calamitous ends, primarily by assigning various lemmings to certain tasks. Much like TETRIS, this game gave a new twist to the puzzle game genre.

Successful on many levels, LEMMINGS transcended the gender barrier and appealed to women as much as it appealed to men. For most of us, the bottom line is that there always seemed to be time for *just one more* level of this insidiously addicting game. Now that LEMMINGS has migrated to the hard drives of every major platform, we'll probably never know how many hours have been and are being spent watching LEMMINGS shimmy up cliffs, bash through mountains, or float to safety with umbrellas. And we'll probably never know how many more hours will be spent with the planned string of sequels.

Look for LEMMINGS 3 to fall helplessly down your chimney this Christmas.

NEXT MONTH: Wing Commander II

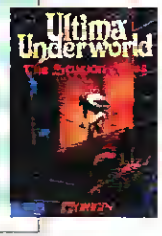
THE SCORE

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	9.92
2	Monkey Island 2: Le Chuck's Revenge	LucasArts	9.83
3	Indiana Jones: Fate of Atlantis	LucasArts	9.79
4	Quest for Glory III	Sierra	9.56
5	Sherlock Holmes CD I	Viacom	9.55
6	Gabriel Knight	Sierra	9.42
7	Star Control II	Accolade	9.33
8	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	9.32
9	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	9.30
10	Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes	Electronic Arts	9.20

TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Ultima Underworld	Origin	10.22
2	Betrayal at Krondor	Dynamix	9.50
3	Ultima Underworld II	Origin	9.42
4	Might & Magic III	New World Computing	9.41
5	Lands of Lore	Virgin	9.38
6	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	9.37
7	Eye of the Beholder II	SSI	9.34
8	Ultima VII	Origin	9.25
9	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpent Isle	Origin	9.08
10	Wizardry VII: Crusaders of Savant	Sir-Tech	8.97



TOP SIMULATION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Falcon 3.0	Spectrum HoloByte	9.59
2	World Circuit	MicroProse	9.44
3	Indy Car Racing	Virgin/Papyrus	9.40
4	Aces of the Pacific	Dynamix	9.38
5	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	9.33
6	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	NovaLogic	9.27
7	Hornet	Spectrum HoloByte	9.12
8	Stunt Island	Disney	9.00
9	Aces Over Europe	Dynamix	8.78
10	F-15 Strike Eagle III	MicroProse	8.65

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Master of Orion	MicroProse	10.32
2	X-COM	MicroProse	10.00
3	Warlords II	SSG	10.00
4	Solitaire's Journey	QQP	9.97
5	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	9.88
6	Sim City 2000	Maxis	9.83
7	Dune II	Virgin	9.82
8	Conquered Kingdoms	QQP	9.53
9	Merchant Prince	QQP	9.40
10	Chessmaster 3000	Software Toolworks	9.32

READER POLL #121

TOP 100 GAMES

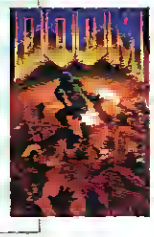
	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
✱ 1	Doom	Id Software	AC	10.44
✱ 2	Links 386 Pro	Access	SP	10.33
✱ 3	Master of Orion	MicroProse	ST	10.32
✱ 4	Ultima Underworld	Origin	RP	10.22
5	Warlords II	SSG	ST	10.00
	X-COM	MicroProse	ST	10.00
7	Solitaire's Journey	QQP	ST	9.97
✱ 8	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	AD	9.92
9	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	ST	9.88
10	Sim City 2000	Maxis	ST	9.83
	Monkey Island 2: Le Chuck's Revenge	LucasArts	AD	9.83
12	Dune II	Virgin	ST	9.82
13	Indiana Jones: Fate of Atlantis	LucasArts	AD	9.79
✱ 14	V for Victory: Velikiye Luki	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.73
15	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	WG	9.68
16	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	SP	9.65
	X-Wing	LucasArts	AC	9.65
18	V for Victory: Utah Beach	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.63
✱ 19	Falcon 3.0	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	9.59
20	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.58
21	Quest for Glory III	Sierra	AO,RP	9.56
22	Sherlock Holmes CD I	Viacom	AD	9.55
	Tanks	SSI	WG	9.55
	Wolfenstein 3-D	Id Software	AC	9.55
25	Conquered Kingdoms	QQP	ST	9.53
26	Betrayal at Krondor	Dynamix	RP	9.50
	NHLPA Hockey	Electronic Arts	SP	9.50
28	World Circuit	MicroProse	SI	9.44
	War in Russia	SSI	WG	9.44
30	Ultima Underworld II	Origin	RP	9.42
	Gabriel Knight	Sierra	AD	9.42
32	Might & Magic III	New World Computing	RP	9.41
33	Merchant Prince	QQP	ST	9.40
	Indy Car Racing	Virgin/Papyrus	SI	9.40
35	Lands of Lore	Virgin	RP	9.38
	Aces of the Pacific	Dynamix	SI	9.38
37	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.37
38	Pacific War	SSI	WG	9.34
	Eye of the Beholder II	SSI	RP	9.34
40	Star Control II	Accolade	AD,AC	9.33
	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	SI	9.33
42	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	AD	9.32
	Chessmaster 3000	Software Toolworks	ST	9.32
44	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	AD	9.30
45	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	NovaLogic	SI	9.27
	Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf	Accolade	SP	9.27
47	Ultima VII	Origin	RP	9.25
48	V for Victory: Gold Juno Sword	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.24
49	Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes	Electronic Arts	AD	9.20
50	Privateer	Origin	AC	9.19

TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	V for Victory: Velikiye Luki	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.73
2	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	9.68
3	V for Victory: Utah Beach	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.63
4	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.58
5	Tanks	SSI	9.55
6	War in Russia	SSI	9.44
7	Pacific War	SSI	9.34
8	V for Victory: Gold Juno Sword	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.24
9	Clash of Steel	SSI	9.01
10	Carriers At War	SSG	8.97

TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Doom	Id Software	10.44
2	X-Wing	LucasArts	9.65
3	Wolfenstein 3-D	Id Software	9.55
4	Privateer	Origin	9.19
5	Tetris Classic	Spectrum HoloByte	9.14
6	Out of this World	Interplay	8.57
7	The Horde	Crystal Dynamics	8.50
8	Prince of Persia 2	Broderbund	8.49
9	The Lost Vikings	Interplay	8.46
10	Rebel Assault	LucasArts	8.44



TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Links 386 Pro	Access	10.33
2	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	9.65
3	NHLPA Hockey	Electronic Arts	9.50
4	Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf	Accolade	9.27
5	Hardball III	Accolade	9.16
6	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	8.78
7	Wayne Gretzky Hockey III	Bethesda	8.30
8	MicroLeague Baseball 4	MicroLeague	8.23
9	All American College Football	Micro Sports	7.98
10	Mike Ditka Ultimate Football	Accolade	7.97

Vote!

You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CGW Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CGW Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.

51	King's Quest VI: Heir Today...	Sierra	AD	9.17
52	Hardball III	Accolade	SP	9.16
53	Tetris Classic	Spectrum HoloByte	AC	9.14
54	Hong Kong Mahjong Pro	Electronic Arts	ST	9.13
55	Hornet	Spectrum Holobyte	SI	9.12
56	The Castle of Dr. Brain	Sierra	AD	9.11
57	The Dagger of Amon Ra	Sierra	AD	9.09
58	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpent Isle	Origin	RP	9.08
59	Syndicate	Electronic Arts	ST,AC	9.07
60	Les Manly in: Lost in L.A.	Accolade	AD	9.06
61	Quest for Glory I (VGA)	Sierra	AD,RP	9.05
62	Eric the Unready	Legend	AD	9.04
	Empire Deluxe	New World Computing	ST	9.04
	Conquests of the Longbow	Sierra	AD	9.04
65	Clash of Steel	SSI	WG	9.01
66	Stunt Island	Disney	SI	9.00
	Battles of Destiny	QQP	ST	9.00
68	Wizardry VII: Crusaders of Savant	Sir-Tech	RP	8.97
	Carriers At War	SSG	WG	8.97
70	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharmacist	SierraD	AD	8.96
71	VGA Planets	Tim Wisseman	ST	8.95
	Alone in the Dark	I-Motion	AD	8.95
73	The Incredible Machine	Dynamix	ST	8.92
74	The Island of Dr. Brain	Sierra	ST	8.91
	Sim City CD-ROM	Interplay	ST	8.91
76	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	RP	8.88
77	Carriers at War II	SSG	WG	8.82
78	Spellcasting 301: Spring Break	Legend	AD	8.81
79	Rex Nebular	MicroProse	AD	8.80
80	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	SP	8.78
	Aces over Europe	Dynamix	SI	8.78
	Populous II	Electronic Arts	ST	8.78
	Hoyle Book of Games, Vol. 3	Sierra	ST	8.78
84	Kasparov's Gambit	Electronic Arts	ST	8.75
85	Veil of Darkness	SSI	RP	8.74
	Dracula Unleashed	Viacom	AD	8.74
87	Gateway	Legend	AD	8.72
88	Harpoon II	Three-Sixty	WG	8.69
89	1942 Pacific Air War	MicroProse	SI	8.65
	F-15 Strike Eagle III	MicroProse	SI	8.65
91	Star Trek: Judgment Rites	Interplay	AD	8.64
	MiG-29	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.64
	Great Naval Battles	SSI	WG,ST	8.64
94	Amazon	Access	AD	8.62
95	Space Quest V: Mutation	Sierra	AD	8.60
96	High Command	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	8.58
97	Genghis Khan II	Koei	WG	8.57
	Carrier Strike	SSI	WG	8.57
	Out of this World	Interplay	AC	8.57
100	Hand Of Fate	Westwood Studios	AD	8.56

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above ✱ = Top game of type. Dark Teal = New Game.
AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports

The Computer Gaming World Poll

A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

PATCHES

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common. Patches for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs ("Close your eyes, Dorothy...")

ZiffNet These patches can usually be downloaded from most major networks (CompuServe GEnie, Ziffnet), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's own BBSs or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase. We continue to urge publishers to keep us informed of the latest patches for their games.

Red indicates new files.

AEGIS Patch: Eliminates the Electronic Book crash. 4/28/94.

Aida da Camp V1.1S: Newest version uses 70 KB less RAM and has several interface modifications. 7/25/94

Archon Ultra V1.1 Updata: Latest version of SSI's action/strategy game. 7/14/94

Bane ol tha Cosmic Forga Patch: Replacement file for players who get a divide overflow when starting the game. 3/23/94

Battlas ol tha South Pacilic Upgrada: Latest patch for QQP's WWII naval strategy qame. 5/24/94

Cactus Laagua Pro Baskatball Update: Corrects stats of 70-71 season disk. 6/23/94

Chassmastar 4000 Turbo v1.04: Newest upgrade lor Software Toolworks' chess program. 6/28/94

Comancha Joystick Drivers: Adds Flightstick Pro support. 5/24/94

Command Advanturas Starship Patch: The latest fixes for Merit Software's sci-li game. 5/19/94

Companions ol Xanth Points List: Complete point totals for Legend's adventure game. 5/25/94

D-Day Patch: Includes missing text from game manual. 7/8/94

Dotroit Upgrade: Fixes include finances, the December crash and the 255-worker bug. 5/31/94

Diamond Draams Upgrada: Fixes all known bugs, and features greatly improved AI for computer manager strategies. 3/29/94

Empire Deluxe V1.1 Mac: Latest version of New World's strategy game for Mac gamers, fixes include cleaning up PBM play. 6/1/94

Fleet Delendor V1.2 Upgrade: Latest version of MicroProse flight sim, with 41 new features. 5/17/94

Global Domination Updata: Fixes modem play bugs. 6/23/94

Gobliins CD-ROM Patch: Fixes sound card and CD-ROM driver problems. 3/1/94

Graat Naval Battlas v1.1 Upgrada: Several corrections listed in readme file. 6/24/94

The Horde V1.1 Revision: Now supports Media Vision Pro Audio sound cards. Fixes lockups on some Sony drives, dead knights not disappearing after snowball hits, and also slows down the end credits. 4/28/94

IndyCar Racing V1.04 International: Different patches for owners of INDYCAR Spanish, Italian, German or French language versions. 5/19/94

IndyCar Racing Patch: Improves AI and cleans up tracks. 6/23/94

IndyCar Racing Modam Patch: Cleans up difficulties with modem play, and fixes scrolling menus for steering devices with no y-axis. 4/7/94

Jutland V1.1 Upgrade: Allows non-penetrating shells, adds more graphics, runs smoother, and most significantly, includes time compression. 3/30/94.

Jutland Patch: The game will now recognize different sound card addresses, rather than just the default 220 address. 5/3/94

Kingmaker V1.51 Upgrade: Latest version of Avalon Hill's strategy game with many fixes. 5/25/94

Lands ol Lore Floppy V1.23 Upgrade: Fixes "Dawn's Key" problem and Pentium lockups when choosing a character. 4/28/94

Lucky's Casino Update: Latest version of QQP game. 5/19/94

M4 lor Windows V1.04: Latest upgrade fixes sound problems, especially with Media Vision cards. 7/15/94

Megarace v1.1 Upgrade: Solves Sound Blaster difficulties. 6/28/94

MicroProse Sound Drivers: New AdLib sound drivers for many older games which had problems running with 486 and Pentium machines. 4/7/94

1942 Pacitic Air War: Latest fixes, including joystick enhancements. 7/8/94

Pacilic Strika V1.19: Contains 9 fixes for Origin's new flight sim. 5/27/94

Polica Quast 4 Patch: Fixes all known problems and speeds up restoration ol saved games. Disk version only. 4/5/94

Prophacy Patch: Solves graphics problems with faster systems. 6/15/94

Ravanlolt 1.1 Upgrade: Latest version from SSI, floppy and CD-ROM. 4/29/94

Red Baron Patch: Configuration fix for IBM only. 3/29/94

Siarra Sound Patchas: A variety of fixes and drivers for Sound Blaster, Gravis Ultra Sound and General Midi users, for a number of older Sierra games. 5/19/94

Subwar 2050 V2.02 Updato: Corrects cursor drift, time and date problem. 4/28/94

Tigars an the Prawl V1.3: New features include AI tweaks and combat routine enhancements. 7/25/94

Tony La Russa Basaball 2 Patch: Fixes stadium lockups. 5/3/94

Tany La Russa Basaball 2 CD-ROM V1.3: Latest version with numerous fixes. 7/21/94

Ultima 8 Patch: Fixes AdLib prblem with some machines. 4/15/94

Warlords II Updata: Latest version, for those who don't have the construction kit. 6/17/94.

Warlords II Copy Utility: Allows you to copy armies and cities between WARLORDS II scenarios. Includes documentation. 7/4/94

X-Wing Enhancamant: This TSR allows use of extra Thrustmaster buttons. 6/2/94

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The Rumor Bag

Beating Rumors Into Plowshares

by Cyrus Ferguson Deere

THE SKY WAS THE BLUE OF WEDGWOOD STONEWARE WITH FLUFFY CLOUDS PROVIDING THE CREAMY WHITE TRIM. I WAS CROSSING THE country, trying to find out about **Crystal Dynamics**' unannounced baseball game and had ended up in my dad's hometown in Oklahoma. As we stopped beside the high school baseball diamond to watch the locals play, I remembered hearing that **Crystal** was going to be using lots of digitized video in order to create a realistic-looking action game.

As the game finished, my dad wanted me to join him at his small Oklahoma town's version of "Cheers"—the local coffee shop. Now, you have to realize that my dad makes fun of me for being such a city boy, and I didn't help as I made my entrance into his hangout. It seems that one of the farmers had placed a pitchfork beside his truck and someone had knocked it to the ground. Naturally, I managed to step on the tines of the fork and propel the handle up toward my head. It didn't hit me, but I sure looked stupid. I tried to save face by telling everyone at my dad's table that a pitchfork is one of the weapons of choice in BLOOD, a 3-D first-person action game from **Apogee Software** which uses the DOOM engine and puts the player in a horrific world like Stephen King might create. The engine has been advanced to the point where entire rooms can "morph" and platforms can move as though the player was traveling on them.

As we sat down in the coffee shop, one of the men asked my dad if this was the son who went to parties and played games for a living. Being close to the land, they couldn't imagine anyone getting paid to find out rumors and write them down once a month. They asked about my latest rumor and I showed them my September column with the info about **Delphine**'s project with **Electronic Arts**. I had since found out that the game was going to be called RELENTLESS, and that the 3-D action/adventure where you escape from an insane asylum in order to rescue your true love looked like it was going to have a lot of puzzles. The only other 3-D game I'd recently seen that would use that many puzzles was the one **Apogee** was going to call RUINS. RUINS has an Egyptian theme, but follows the premise that the Egyptian civilization was inspired by aliens. The game uses the DOOM engine, but has added translucent special effects, parallaxing skies and floors, round walls, revolving doors and moving vehicles.

One of the good ole boys at the table suggested that I belonged in an insane asylum for actually writing about "stuff like that" and another got up to leave, saying that he intended to burn the brush off his field that day. Since his field was right next to one of my uncle's places, I listened with interest as the other farmers tried to convince him that the wind was too strong to burn anything safely. He left, anyway. What we didn't know at that time was that the fire would get so out of control that it would have taken most of the liquid in **Interplay**'s future WATER WORLD game to put it out. Even if I'd told them that *Water World* was the title of an upcoming **Universal** film starring Kevin Costner and Dennis Hopper, I'm not sure that they would have been impressed. So, I didn't even tell them that the game could become the foundation of an entire series of role-playing games.

Another fellow said he didn't know much about computer games, but his oldest son played a shareware program called DUKE NUKEM. I told him that **Apogee** had a first-person version coming out called DUKE NUKEM 3D that was built off the DOOM engine. I told him about the great special effect in the game where you can shatter glass, and he just laughed derisively. "Why, my son can shatter glass just trying to carry up his mom's canning from the cellar." After that, I didn't bother telling him about **Apogee**'s SHADOW WARRIOR, the 3D ninja game where the AI is smart enough to know when to ambush you and when to run away. It just seemed superfluous. So, the table talk returned to the idea of how I make my living. "You mean they pay you to go to parties?" asked one grizzled tiller of red clay. I explained that I needed to be where people in the industry were in order to find out what was happening.

"For example," I told them, "I might go to the Mesquite Rodeo with the folks from **Merit Studios**." For the first time, they seemed interested in the conversation. "They might tell me in between the calf roping and the Brahma bull riding that they're working on an ice hockey game."

"Really?" asked the farmer, meaning that he wanted to know what I thought about the calf roping and bull riding.

"Really!" I wrongly assured him. "They have a U.K. team working on the project and, since it's based on Olympic ice hockey, they have a former Olympic coach consulting on it."

About that time, a fellow came in and told us that a fire was out of control at my uncle's place. We all rushed out and drove over just in time to see the fire consume the last of my uncle's fence posts.

I realized I could be quickly drafted to dig post holes for replacement fence posts, so I mumbled something about **Merit**'s TUNNEL RAT. For the first time that day, the locals' disinterest in my profession had worked to my advantage. I meant I was going to my dad's house to play an early version of the first-person 3-D shooter from the ISLE OF THE DEAD team, and they thought I was going to sit out in my dad's garden and shoot rats and rabbits. Instead, I was shooting two-legged rats, the imaginary kind. Somehow, I didn't think they would approve.

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