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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.

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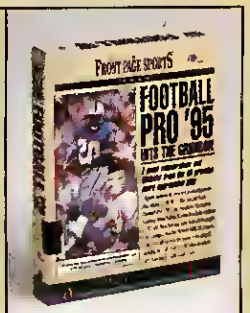

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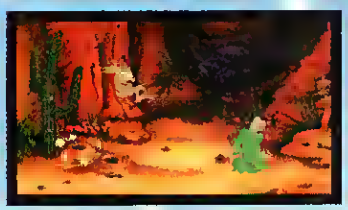

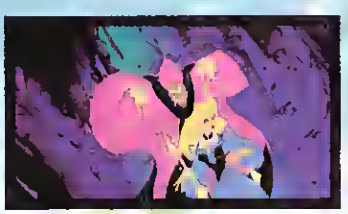

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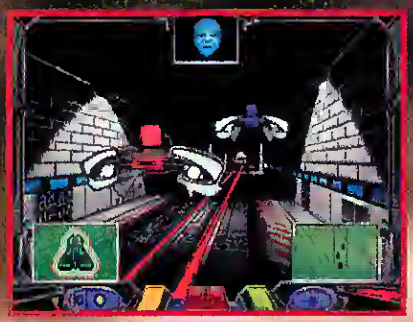

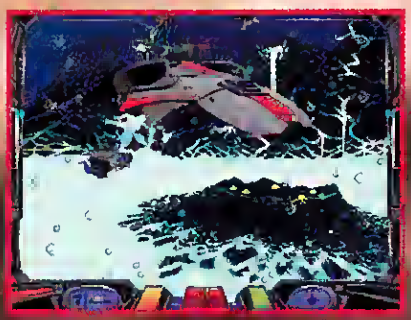

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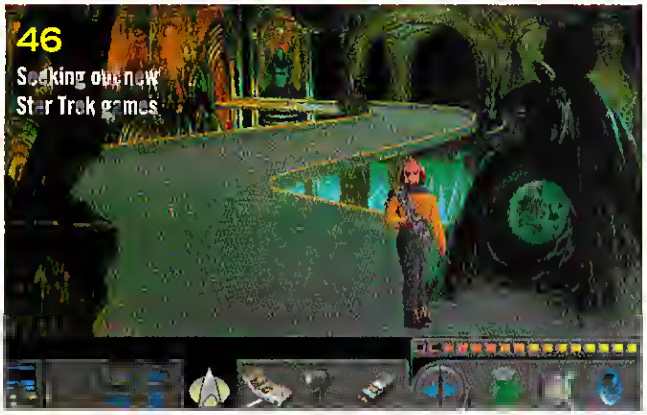
36
Virtual Reality

124
Loderunner —
The classic returns

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

NOVEMBER 1994



46
Seeking out new
Star Trek games

98
DOOM II

FEATURES

32 LUCASARTS' NEW REBEL It's hard to tell if CGW's Johnny Wilson is dizzy from the exhaust, the thrill of the ride, or just the intense, darkly humorous world of FULL THROTTLE. Check out our Sneak Preview of **LucasArts'** new adventure, filled with tough men, beautiful women, a murder mystery, and the toughest motorbikes ever to grace a PC screen.

36 VIRTUALLY REAL The seductive voice of virtual reality promises many things. Louis Brill shows us what's real and what's not about virtual reality.

46 WHERE ND PC HAS GONE 8EFORE Charles Ardai explores strange new worlds with a variety of *Star Trek* entertainment products sure to make any Trekker "game long and prosper."

ADVENTURE/ ROLE-PLAYING

57 PETRA'S PUNCH *CGW*'s guest enchantress summons those most irascible of conjured creatures, game designers, and instructs them in the virtues of structure, interesting characters, storyline and above all, fun.

60 SCORPIA'S TALE Lost in HOBOKEN? Our super-heroine has the cure for rabid sheep, limburger bombs, or whatever slings and arrows assail your party of mutant misfits.

68 PREVIEW! 0EATH GATE Weis and Hickman's fantasy novels travel to the silicon dimension, leaving Johnny Wilson to ponder the differences in this Sneak Preview of **Legend**'s latest adventure.

72 8ENEATH A STEEL SKY Charles Ardai finds that this pungent British dish from **Virgin** lingers on the adventure gaming palate, helped by a large dash of humour.

80 ROBINSON'S REQUIEM According to Martin Cirulis, Crusoe would have exhausted his supply of save games in this science fiction adventure.

ACTION

86 STRATEGY! OARK LEGIONS Bard Martin Cirulis spins a tale of bygone days, when fantastical armies clashed in horrific battles, and Water Elementals tried in vain to quench the flames of Demons.

98 DOOM 2 Chris Lombardi shoots, blasts, and chainsaws his ways through the toughest levels in **id Software**'s dark, demented and addictive sequel.

104 DOOM TOOS Every shoot-em'-up game aspires to be DOOM when it grows up. Chris Lombardi surveys the clones to see which of them are stuck in gameplay puberty.

116 STAR CRUSAOER Beset by polygonally incorrect alien ships, Jeff James fights through a deep galactic plotline.

120 DELTA V Mark Clarkson relives the *Star Wars* trench run in Bethesda's new joystick jammer.

124 LODERUNNER Like a Broadway revival of an old favorite, this rejuvenated classic leaves Paul Schuytema filled with nostalgia and guilty pleasures.

SPORTS

138 **ULTIMATE FOOTBALL** Despite its need for ultimate hardware, Terry Coleman finds that this **MicroProse** game carries the ol' pigskin with pride.

146 **PREVIEW! FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO '95** Although still in training camp, Terry Coleman's scouting report shows **Dynamix** is set for another championship run.

156 **SOCCER GAME ROUNDUP** Former pro Lawrence Norman rates the latest group of World Cup contenders.

160 **INTERNATIONAL TENNIS OPEN** Terry Coleman serves up the latest from **Philips'** line of sport games.

164 **FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL** George Jones gets down in the dirt to catch the **Dynamix** fastball release.

170 **'ROUND THE BASES** Jim Gindin finds that four text-based baseball simulations still earn their base hits the old-fashioned statistical way.

SIMULATION

177 **BOGEY'S BAR & GRILL** Tom "KC" Basham feels the pull of TORNADO's roll inertia, as he speculates on why this realistic sim from **Trimark** is under-rated.

180 **PREVIEW! US NAVY FIGHTERS** Mike "Moondawg" Weksler flies the SVGA skies to get the scoop on this detailed **EA** flight sim.

186 **STRATEGIC FALCON** Tom Basham edits his flight group, changes the weather, and promotes himself to theatre General in FALCON 3.0.

190 **STRATEGY! 1942: PACIFIC AIR WAR** The sun sets on the Japanese, as Michael Rymaszewski shows pilots how to ride the Pacific winds to victory.

STRATEGY/ WARGAMES

203 **BROADSIDES & GRIPESHOT** Alan Emrich has an identity crisis, but comes out with his wargame pride intact.

206 **IRON CROSS** Josh Bruce kicks sand on **New World's** new game of "toy soldiers in the dirt."

210 **STRATEGY! TIGERS ON THE PROWL** Gregory Smith builds a solid defense in **HPS'** tactical wargame.

216 **LORDS OF THE REALM** **Impressions'** latest puts Johnny Wilson in a marvelous medieval mood.

222 **BATTLE BUGS** Robert Hayes finds there's more to this strategy game than meets the antennae.

226 **SABRE TEAM** Crisp graphics lure Jeff James into **MicroLeague's** tactical world, but not even his expert team can save the design from its own schizophrenia.

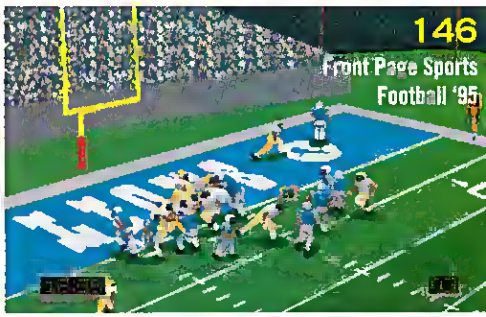
230 **STRATEGY! GENGHIS KHAN 2** Josh Bruce and Terry Coleman plot the conquest of all Eurasia.

236 **STRATEGY! HARPOON 2** In our second installment, Tom Basham offers counseling to misguided missiles.

242 **STRATEGY! X-COM** Robert Mayer looks at alien eradication from a squaddie point of view.

32
Full Throttle

116
Star Crusader



146
Front Page Sports Football '95

Cover Inset - Art from the Star Fleet Academy Game courtesy of Interplay Productions, Inc., Artist Scott Everts. Star Trek photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures.

DEPARTMENTS

12 **FROM THE PUBLISHER** Love, Honor & Upgrade

14 **EDITORIAL** The Rise Of Siliwood

16 **INTERFACE** The Gamers Have Their Say

22 **READ.ME** The Latest Buzz, Whir, And Click

252 **OPPONENTS WANTED** Personal Ads For Gamers

254 **SHAREWARE SHOWCASE** New Shareware Action

258 **HEX, BUGS, ROCK 'N ROLL** People, Programs, PCs

264 **UNDER THE HOOD** Hardware Tips

272 **ADVERTISER INDEX** Where To Find Games

274 **NOW PLAYING** What's On The Shelves?

283 **HALL OF FAME** All-Time Great Games

284 **THE TOP 100** Readers Rate The Top Games

286 **PATCHES** Game Files To Kill Bugs Dead

288 **THE RUMOR BAG** Ipso Flatfoot Hardboilum

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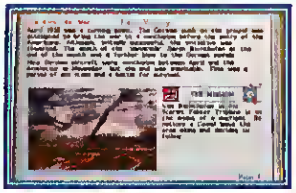

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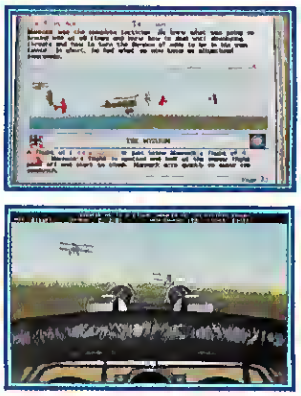

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Monday April 9

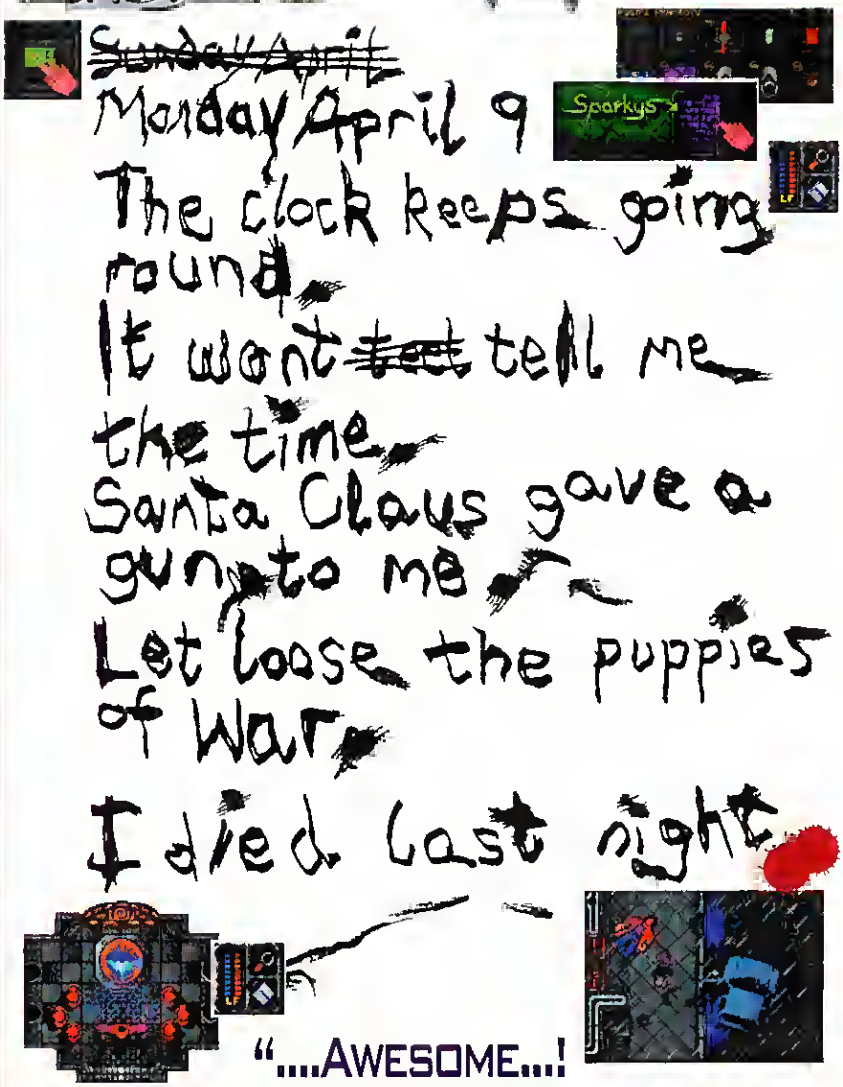
The clock keeps going round

It won't ~~feel~~ tell me the time

Santa Claus gave a gun to me

Let loose the puppies of War

I died last night



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From the Publisher

Do You Promise to Love, Honor, and Upgrade?

by Russell Sipe

As we wade through the more than 10,000 responses we received from our recent reader survey, we are learning a lot about *CGW*'s readers. Most of it is boring statistical information that would only excite publishers and sociologists. But once in a while some data scrolled by these eyes that made me stop and say, imagine that!

For example the marital status of *CGW* readers proved to reveal some interesting statistics: 50% single, 45% married, 5% divorced. Now the average *CGW* reader is 29.92 years old and is 97% male. Well, I guess I should say 97% of our readers are 100% male. Does that sound better? What is so interesting about these numbers? It's the way in which the divorced readers break down (no pun intended).

For example *CGW* readers owning more than 20 computer games were nearly twice as likely to be divorced than those that owned less than 20 games. I guess that shouldn't surprise us. However, there was *no difference* in the divorce rate among those that played more than 10 hours per week and those that played less than 10 hours per week. That's curious. Our technical editor offered up a quack theory that this was attributable to what he called the Config.Sys Syndrome. The more memory management hassles and configuration conflicts a gamer has to deal with, the more likely he will be divorced. It's not a matter of how long you play, it's a matter of how long it takes you to get the game running and how frustrated you become.

Others felt it was an economic thing. Divorced guys have more money on their hands than married guys. But why don't they play games more? Are Friday nights date nights instead of gaming nights? Are girlfriends not as tolerant of gaming as wives?

It really gets interesting when you look at the divorce statistics by game type. Those who consider themselves primarily simulation and wargamers are nearly twice as likely to be divorced than those that think of themselves as adventure and strategy gamers. The statistics show that age and sex do not play a role in this difference. The combined average age of sim/wargamers is 31.5 while the combined average age of adventure/strategy gamers is 30.5. The number of women respondents was too small to affect any of the ratios. It just seems that the sim guys and wargamers had more difficulty holding onto their wives. So to all of you lovers of X-WING, which *CGW* recently moved into the action game category, rejoice—we may have saved your marriage!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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Circle Reader Service #23

Will "Siliwood" Learn From The Past?

by Johnny L. Wilson

I often hear the same question asked in different ways. Folks in the computer gaming biz ask if I think the Hollywood studios and new multimedia companies (combined, sometimes called "Siliwood") can "make it," and folks outside the industry want to know what differences I see now that the film industry has become a player in interactive entertainment. My answers to both groups are generally pessimistic. Unfortunately, I'm becoming increasingly convinced that my pessimism is appropriate.

I constantly study both industries for insights and comparisons that may help me understand what is happening and likely to happen in the future. Here are some interesting parallels between Hollywood in the '30s and computerdom in the '90s.

1. Paying The Piper: In the '20s, Hollywood overleveraged itself. By the '30s, as John Izod recounts in *Hollywood and the Box Office: 1895-1986*, "The industry had more than merely the old profit motive to drive it: it had massive debts to repay, both of capital and interest on the loans it had taken to finance theatre purchases and the installation of sound systems." The creative personnel at the studios lost more and more control to the financial personnel. The industry created a new economy of production by taking stock approaches to storytelling. This is one reason why you can look at production styles, story genres, and a roster of actors/actresses and know which studio made a film from that era, even without seeing the credits. Recycling of sets, costumes, lighting schemes and editing techniques (Can you spell "multimedia?") combined with formulaic production as a hallmark of the '30s.

In the '90s, software publishers have leveraged their companies to investors, and publishers have been acquired by huge media corporations. What is the result? Financial considerations override creative considerations and, as a result, we hear, "It will ship before the end of the quarter, regardless of whether it's done or not." Publishers seem less willing to take creative risks on niche genres or experimental forms of storytelling. Instead, there is an attempt to standardize production and create an assembly line of creatives to stock the products with rendered images and video footage that give almost every product a bit of sameness.

2. The '30s featured studio specialization. Warners equaled gangster movies and social drama. Paramount meant romantic comedies. MGM was known for costume dramas. Republic meant serials and westerns. Universal meant horror films. Columbia made its living on westerns and its reputation on high class films like those by Frank Capra.

Today's software companies often specialize. **LucasArts**, **Sierra** and **Legend** are best-known as graphic adventure houses. **Spectrum HoloByte**, **MicroProse** and **Dynamix** are primarily known as simulation companies. **Interplay** and **Origin** built their reputations on role-playing games.

3. The '30s production economies required more advance planning in terms of storyboarding and pre-production, as does the '90s computer game. It means less flexibility for artists and design teams, however.

4. To reach a "broader audience," '30s film characterization was reduced to a more melodramatic level. Characters could not be too intellectual or radical and their personalities had to be simple with clear-cut loyalties. In '90s game development, characters tend to be bland and no anti-heroes need apply. Also, the number of character choices available in games have been largely reduced to save on production (read art) costs and to simplify user input (mass market interface design).

5. B movie producers appeared in the '30s to handle the burgeoning double feature market. Small affiliated labels with limited resources and lots of imports are emerging to handle the growing demand for products to provide stock rotation (and quick revenue) while major products slip.

6. Merchandising characters took hold with **Walt Disney** in the '30s (**Disney** made a third of its net profit, $300,000 in one year, during the '30s). Almost every software publisher has at least one product where it is maintaining merchandising rights for its characters.

7. There was a call to censorship in the '30s. Cagney and Robinson became FBI agents instead of mob leaders. Mae West's career faltered due to sexual constraints. Unless the content rating system (RSAC) works, we can expect programmed blandness in future computer games, as well.

The parallels between the '30s and the '90s may not be perfectly illustrated, but they should provoke thought from both publishers and consumers. Do we want the same stylized formulae? Do we want the same basic genres out of the same publishers? Do we just want product to ship or do we want it to be good? Siliwood had better figure out the answers or it's liable to experience the same problems that Hollywood experienced in the 1930s.

The iconic ratings symbolize the following editorial verdicts:

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

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LETTERS FROM CGW READERS

DISCIPLINE OF STEEL

This is in response to the invitation to those who have finished the game DISCIPLES OF STEEL by **Megasoft Entertainment**, to comment on it. I think Petra Schlunk's review in your July, 1994 issue was too critical. The game has a number of good points and it provides a welcome change to the recent emphasis on graphics at the expense of character development and complexity.

I play almost all computer RPGs, although I lose interest in many of them before finishing them. DISCIPLES OF STEEL was an exception. Combat in this game is the most balanced I have seen. Magic users do not become overwhelmingly powerful and the game succeeds in making minor spells such as magic armor important. Character development involves some genuine tradeoffs, as it should. Assigning experience points as they are received, instead of waiting for arrival at some location later, is a nice touch.

There were several features of the game that should be improved. The most significant is that, although the game is non-linear, departing from the "script" has some unfortunate consequences. For example, by the time I received quests to "kill the ogre at the crossroads and return the remains," or "kill the knight that has been troubling travelers and bring me his body," those unfortunates had long been dispatched and their bodies decomposed. Substitute ogres and death knights wouldn't do, so the possibility of getting more quests from that ruler seemed dim. The only thing I could see to do in such cases was to knock off the ruler in question, since one has to unify the land and there is a time limit. Unfortunately, having done that sets up another problem. If you get a quest to "deliver X to the ruler of Y" and you are already in control of Y by dint of having deposed its former monarch, there is no means to fulfill that request. So, you must assassinate THAT ruler, and on and on.

Finally, having been forced by circumstance to knock off every ruler and regent in the land (not my favorite occupation; I like mucking about in dungeons and doing heroic quests), I was ready for the big invasion—which didn't arrive. At that point, I called the company (who responded right away and were very helpful) with the question, "How do you know when you've won this thing?" The answer was, "You'll know, but try the dungeon in the NW corner, and be ready for a long fight."

I went there, plodded around for a while and then left to take a break (one of the party members was dead). Outside, a messenger arrived, said the invasion was here, do something, and I found myself (short one party member) in the end game. This consisted of 10 waves of baddies, one after the other. My two survivors of all this were congratulated and I was offered the opportunity to save.

I may actually replay this game and follow the prescribed order. It would give me the opportunity to try to develop some characters differently, and see how the game might develop without having to kill off all my friends among the ruling classes.

As your reviewer said, this game takes a long time to play. But we are paying for entertainment, and if we can get it for $1/hour instead of $5/hour, why not?

If a sequel is planned, I hope Megasoft improves the graphics and adds some of the features that Scorpia advocates such as less reliance on pure combat. I'd also like to see experience for wearing armor or casting spells as well for killing things, and more variety in architecture (the castles all had the same interior arrangement). But for those of us who RPGs instead of adventures or arcade emulators, DISCIPLES OF STEEL is a welcome product.

Tom Sciance
Hockessin, DE

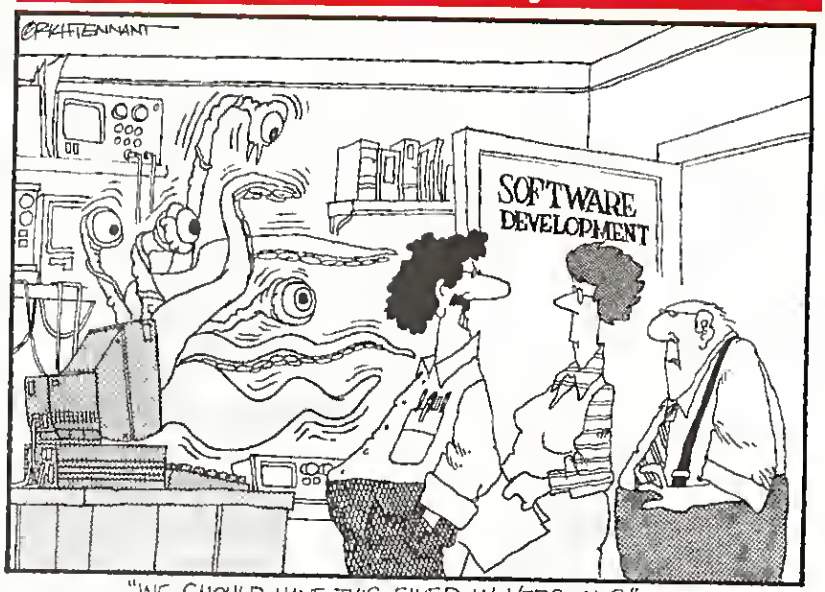
Your letter is an example of the precise reason we invited those who had the patience to finish DISCIPLES OF STEEL to respond. As Petra Schlunk indicated, she had spent more than 50 hours in the game and was far from finished. The major detraction which kept her from finishing the game was the excessively repetitive nature of some of the tasks. If the game is excessively repetitive, then $1 per hour may not be a bargain compared to $5 per hour of fresh exploration. You suggest that it is a bargain, and that is why we invited other comments.

Finally, we commend you for finishing the game and herewith dub thee Sir Thomas, Knight of Steel. Go ye forth in quest of great, non-repetitive gameplay.

DOOM, DOOM, DOOM, DOOM!

One more DOOM spin-off and I'll lock up my IBM, shred

The 5th Wave **By Rich Tennant**



"WE SHOULD HAVE THIS FIXED IN VERSION 2."

Slow moving, "choppy" graphics cost lives.

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Circle Reader Service #141

my game boxes, douse gasoline on my printer, and sleep soundly that night using my Atari 2600 as a pillow....

Tim Royal
Renton, WA

The fire department has been put on alert. They'll be needed after you read this issue's feature on DOOM-alikes.

BEA$PORT!

With all the sports games having all the statistics available, why hasn't any publisher included finance management. Think about it, a football game also including buying/maintaining stadiums, player contracts, revenue from tickets/merchandise, etc. They should make it an all-out simulation.

Anonymous
Gainesville, FL

Prior to leaving ***Electronic Arts****, Trip Hawkins dreamed of making such a game. Unfortunately, for people like Hawkins, yourself, and CGW's sports-loving editors, the video game model for sports games (lots of action) has been much more lucrative for* ***EA****. Actually, unless you are an EA stockholder, I guess it's only been unfortunate for you and me. I'm sure Hawkins liked those cartridge game profits.*

RANTS & REVISIONISM

John Wilson, in his September "Rants and Raves" column, seems to have forgotten that the primary purpose of a game is to entertain. Computer games routinely engage in drastic alterations, simplifications, and omissions of history. RAILROAD TYCOON omitted Chinese labor and union strife. In SIMCITY, the mayor is an absolute dictator who can blithely bulldoze residential neighborhoods and churches with a mere click of the mouse, and build the Golden Gate bridge in weeks instead of decades. In SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION, Abraham Lincoln is immortal, phalanxes can sink battleships, and religious strife, arguably the single most important factor in the history of international relations, is totally omitted. And yet, *CGW* gave those games its highest praise, placing all of them in its Hall of Fame!

It is hypocritical of *CGW* to criticize SID MEIER'S COLONIZATION in the same issue in which it effusively praises SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION. *CGW* used to know that computer games shouldn't be held to the same standards of historical accuracy as a textbook.

Ken Fishkin
Redwood City, CA

Is it hypocritical? The same Johnny Wilson that wrote the "Rants and Raves" column had an entire chapter in The SimCity Planning Commission Handbook *(Osborne-McGraw Hill, 1990) which talked about the realities that were not simulated (along with some elaborate workarounds that would enable gamers to see how much had been abstracted) and he also questioned certain historical abstractions in* Sid Meier's Civilization or Rome on 640K a Day *(Prima, 1992). Do these citations seem hypocritical? Different games have different levels of perspective and different levels of abstraction. Their success or failure will always depend on the merit of their gameplay, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't consider their historical/factual underpinning, as well.*

Even if certain historical/real aspects have to be abstracted for the sake of gameplay, the designers have a responsibility to acknowledge, tip their hat to, or clarify those conditions which they have abstracted. When it comes to orders of battle and dominant practices, they should be addressed in some way and not ignored because they are inconvenient. We agree that a game should be balanced enough to play well, but the lessons of history should not be totally glossed over. We fear that there is a tendency, of late, to do just that. Here's another, wordier, take:

Your theses in "Revisionist Computer Games" are very well-taken. Computer games become nothing less than schlock entertainment (at best) or broadsides of propaganda for the current and unthinking orthodoxy (in this case, the "Progressive") if, for the sake of Political Correctness, they strip realism from historical recreations. There is no point in presenting any simulation of world-envelopment referring to WWII Germany without presenting Nazism in all its symbology, nay, without including the imagery which ensorcelled those desperate and gullible Germans of the time into surrendering themselves *mit ganzem Willen* to Hitler's blandishments.

Correctly and most correctly, you call to our attention that the sins of the past are not eradicated by repression, that in fact (*a la* Freud and Augustine), they become all the more fascinating for having become forbidden fruit. Only critical confrontation can clarify such atrocities as occurred in the 1940's and can tutor those of us who wish to achieve humanity and reconciliation how best to strive to resist such temptations again, in ourselves, as well as in others.

If, therefore, a computer game should truly aspire to become a work of art, it must fulfill both the recreative and the didactive functions inherent in all serious aesthetic productions: like any mature effort of [depiction] and literature, it must present horrible conflicts with all their nasty details (within the scope of financial and technical competence, of course); and, taking the second step—which mere legislation, even the supposedly well-meaning legislation of the Nazi-banning German Republic cannot achieve—it must show that although evil is evil, evil can be sublated through the agencies of wisdom, perception, and understanding (this the wise counsel of that wisest of Germans, G.W.F. Hegel).

Computer games cannot be expected to perfect these exalted goals, but in a country where Free Speech is a Constitutionally guaranteed right, game publishers deserve our contempt when, having surrendered to the zealous crusades of the currently vociferous political orthodoxy of the Left, they censor the historically accurate representations that have been generated by the conscientious efforts of their own creative staff.

Gilbert L. Brahms
Richmond, CA

Whew! We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

REVOLTING DEVELOPMENT

Game developers need to stop catering to action-philes and go back to the days of truly immersive role-playing games such as WIZARDRY and previous ULTIMAS, games more worthy of the label "virtual reality" than anything in present times.

Paul Dewey
Alhambra, CA

Here, here! We definitely feel that more thought should be put into the game world and the story than is currently being done in most role-playing games. However, we're also very careful with the term "virtual reality," which, in the words of the inventor of the term, Jaron Lanier, "is so abused it should seek asylum from a relief agency." In contrast with many advertising and marketing people of software companies, we like to reserve the term for simulated environments where one is fully immersed in the experience, usually by means of a head-mounted display. See our VR feature in this issue for the "virtual" story.

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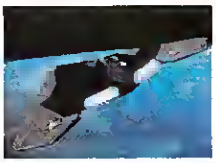

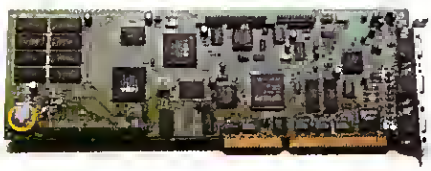

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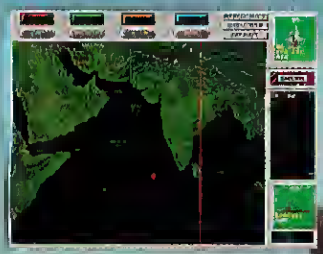

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As a fleet cammander, you've gat better things to worry about than the endless details of running a ship. Don't warry—yaur camputer will handle the non-essential work, leaving you to worry abaut strategy and command. If you're gaad enaugh, the sea lanes remain apen, the Russians dan't get their client states, and America's interests are served. Fail, and yaur ships are sunk, along with the future af the free warld.

5th FLEET gives you a new engine—a new design—and a new standard far Modern Naval warfare. Hi-res graphics give you crisp, vivid maps and screens. Play against a wily camputer opponent at variable levels af aggression and difficulty, "hat-seat" a friend on the same computer, ar play via E-Mail.

Whichever way you play the game, you'll agree that *5th FLEET* splashes the competition!

Circle Reader Service #234

READ.ME

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GAMING WORLD

Random House Buys Into Legend's Story

Book And Game Publisher Unite To Make Beautiful Stories Together

Random House, Inc., monolithic publisher of science fiction and fantasy novels, has announced its intention to make a minority investment in **Legend Entertainment**. The two companies wish to intensify the synergy established between them when Legend published games based on Frederick Pohl's *Gateway* and Piers Anthony's *Xanth* books, and develop integrated plans for future titles, according to Bob Bates, president of Legend.

LEGENDARY MERGER The Random House acquisition might mean starring roles in computer games for more than just our scaly friend.

Bates believes the partnership is ideal for the two companies, as Random House is interested in maximizing profits from its published properties and Legend has been successful at adapting those works for computer games. Random House offers tremendous opportunities for access to such high-calibre authors as Anne McCaffrey, Jack Chalker, Terry Brooks and Alan Dean Foster.

Owen Lock, editor at **Ballantine Books** and the original editor of Pohl's *Gateway* and Anthony's *Xanth* books, is expected to continue to act as liaison/catalyst between the two companies. Mike Verdu and Bob Bates will stay in place as Legend's executive core. Legend's overall strategy is not expected to change. As Bates explained, "The goal is simply to make it possible to do more of the right titles and, of course, the opportunities for cross-promotion are tremendous."

Bates said the Random House deal would not preclude Legend from pursuing other literary properties. When asked if the Random House deal would open up other genres, such as mystery, to Legend, Bates replied, "The future is wide open and we have discussed all kinds of publishing possibilities, but have decided to focus in the near-term on the strengths of science fiction and fantasy." As yet, there are no announced plans for games using Random House properties.

—Johnny Wilson

So You Wanna Be A Game Programmer?

750-page Tome Explains Intermediate Game Programming Techniques

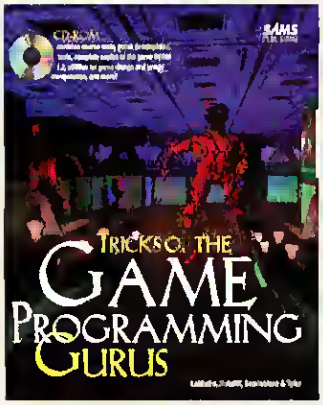
Prospective filmmakers have the USC film school and the American Film Institute. For US Navy fighter pilots, there's the Pensacola flight school. But where can computer game programmers learn their trade? The only formal training available consists of computer science courses at universities—which aren't exactly structured for computer games. With the only clues coming from obscure books steeped in assembly language, you could almost wish for a game-programming genie in a silicon lamp.

Those with a degree of programming experience may have their wish granted. *Tricks of the Game Programming Gurus* is an ambitious attempt to condense real-world computer game development techniques

into 750 pages. The writing cast is impressive, with 3D graphics engine guru Andre LaMoth, SEAWOLF designer and sound driver alchemist John Ratcliff, computer graphics mage Denise Tyler, and C++ raycasting engine maestro Mark Seminatore.

The book assumes that the reader has some C programming experience and exposure to assembly language. Although this puts the book at the intermediate to advanced level of game hacker, an enthused beginner could still garner basic concepts without being overwhelmed by pages of assembly language listings.

Most books of this sort focus on 3D programming in C++. "Gurus" deals with the



techniques for creating action games, but also offers itself as a serious primer for developing any game. This most thorough work covers all the essentials from hardware to sound programming, AI to 3D sprites, and even high-end graphics engines that employ raycasting (the techniques used for creating games like WOLFENSTEIN-3D and DOOM). The bundled CD-ROM comes loaded with source code that ties into each chapter's lesson.

For $45, roughly the price of a game, the reader will obtain real-world computer game programming skills. Until now, this kind of knowledge, a must for the game programmer's library, would have taken up an entire bookshelf. If it doesn't serve as a cutting-edge guide, it will surely find its place as an indispensable reference. *Tricks of the Game Programming Gurus*—$44.95 from SAM'S Publishing, (800) 428-5331.

— Mike Weksler

PLAYING LATELY?

Here are the games that your fellow players are blowing the most time with. Let us know which game you've been playing the most by writing the name of your current addiction in the "Playing Lately?" blank of the *CGW* Top 100 ballot (page 257).

Readers' TOP 10

Results for *CGW* #122, September 1994

1. **X-COM: UFO Defense** (MicroProse)
2. **TIE Fighter** (LucasArts)
3. **Doom** (id Software)
4. **Master of Orion** (MicroProse)
5. **The Elder Scrolls: Arena** (Bethesda)
6. **Outpost** (Sierra)
7. **The Grandest Fleet** (QQP)
8. **Civilization** (MicroProse)
9. **Privateer** (Origin)
10. **Alien Legacy** (Sierra)

Notable Quotes

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

"X-COM is the best strategy game to come along for years. I think it should be considered for the coveted CGW Hall of Fame."

Michael Tang Naperville, IL

"Not being much of a strategy fan, I took a gamble with X-COM. I wish I would be so lucky with the lottery."

Mind Controlled Minion Buffalo, NY

"Too many great games, too little time. Can I get a time arrestor peripheral that will plug and play?

K. Miller Windsor, CT

"I waited months for OUTPOST, then returned it after a week. Sierra needs to look to Maxis next time it tries a game of this type. And nice try on the manual, guys."

Brad Eng-Kohn, New York, NY

"Let's not put OUTPOST in the grave yet. There's quite a game in there...when it is finally FINISHED! I hope the programmers and game designs are listening."

Doug Bongo Rochester, NY

The End Of Sound Card Installation Hassles?

New Mediatrix Sound Card Leaves Hardware Jumpers Behind

A new 16-bit sound card from Quebec, Canada, may relieve many a hardware configuration headache. The AUDIOTRIX PRO from **Mediatrix** features wavetable synthesis, installs in an ISA slot, and, after a brief software configuration, plays Sound Blaster/SB Pro-compatible sound and OPL4 General MIDI-compatible music. In a departure from often-frustrating sound card installation, there are no physical jumpers on the card that have to be configured to a user's machine. All hardware configuration is done with the configuration software, and only two lines are added to the AUTOEXEC.BAT file. Best of all, these commands set up the card without invoking TSR (terminate and stay resident) programs, which take up the same lower memory games often need to run. The AUDIOTRIX PRO uses drivers that reside on chips and download to a microcontroller.

Musician George "Fat Man" Sanger, famous for his many game soundtracks (WING COMMANDER, THE SEVENTH GUEST, SEAWOLF, among many others), has tested the card at his labs to ensure that its implementation of General MIDI wavetable synthesis will play music the way composers intend it to sound. The card passed the test and became the first sound card to receive the "Fat Seal" of approval.

In a preliminary test in the CGW Lab, we found the sound card to live up to its promise. The only difficulty we experienced with the AUDIOTRIX PRO was with REEL MAGIC versions of RETURN TO ZORK and THE HORDE that failed to play sound or music. Still, this is a small obstacle when compared to the mountain of incompatibility, memory management, and configuration hassles normally faced by novice users.

The AUDIOTRIX PRO is now being shipped with drivers for Windows, Windows NT and OS/2, and later editions should include drivers for Chicago, Windows NT for Power PC and Next Step for Intel processors. With a MIDI-connector cable kit, lots of bundled software, and digital audio capable of handling 16-bit 48KhZ sound, the AUDIOTRIX PRO delivers General MIDI- and Sound Blaster Pro-compatibility both hassle-free and at a reasonable price. Watch next month for a more detailed look at the Audiotrix Pro in our December Sound Card survey. For more information, call Mediatrix at (819) 829-8749.

—Mike Weksler

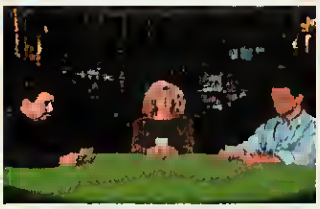
Hollywood In Spades

Poker-Faced Stars Play Their Cards In New CD-ROM Poker Game

Soon gamers will be able to take some celebs for all they're worth in a game of high-stakes poker. **New World Computing's** new CD-ROM game, MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER, will feature full-motion video performances from Jonathan Frakes (Star Trek: The Next Generation), Morgan Fairchild (Flamingo Road) and Joe Piscopo (Saturday Night Live).

Players may choose from a number of different poker games, and opt to play one, two or all of the stars. According to New World, the celebrities engage players in a battle of wits and try to distract them with slapstick comedy and sex appeal.

New World's Scott McDaniel says, "MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER incorporates the newest video technology, so players can truly interact with the stars. This is going to be the most outrageous poker game on the market." The game is expected to be released in November.



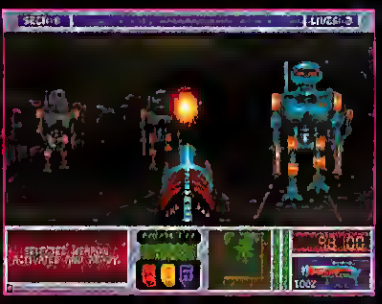
FULL-SCREEN FLUSH Try to bluff stars in Multimedia Celebrity Poker.

As an aside, McDaniel mentioned that Joe Piscopo, who had never played a computer game, was so impressed by what he saw that he ordered a high-end multimedia computer with the help of the New World staff and submitted some ideas for a game starring himself.

PIPELINE

ESTIMATED RELEASE DATES BASED ON THE LATEST INFORMATION FROM GAME DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME	COMPANY	RELEASE DATE
11TH HOUR	Virgin	1/95
1830	Avalon Hill	1/95
BATTLEDROME	Dynamix	12/94
BEYOND SQUAD LEADER	Avalon Hill	1/95
BIOFORGE	Origin	12/94
CELTIC TALES	Koei	11/94
COLONIZATION	MicroProse	11/94
COMMAND & CONQUER	Virgin	2/95
CYCLONES	SSI	11/94
CYBERIA	Interplay	12/94
DARK FORCES	LucasArts	11/94
DESCENT	Interplay	11/94
DUNGEON MASTER II	Interplay	12/94
ELDER SCROLLS: Daggerfall		2/95
FLIGHT COMMANDER	Avalon Hill	11/94
FPS: FOOTBALL '95		12/94
FULL THROTTLE	LucasArts	2/95
HARDBALL 4	Accolade	11/94
HARVESTER	Merit	11/94
HEROES OF M & M	New World	11/94
HIGH SEAS TRADER	Impressions	11/94
INCA II	Sierra	12/94
INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2	Dynamix	11/94
JOURNEY: ALIEN LOGIC	SSI	11/94
KINGS QUEST VII	Sierra	11/94
LEMMINGS 3	Psygnosis	12/94
LOST EDEN	Virgin	1/95
MEGADEATH	SSI	11/94
MM CELEBRITY POKER	New World	11/94
NASCAR RACING	Papyrus	11/94
PANZER GENERAL	SSI	11/94
PHANTASMAGORIA	Sierra	2/95
RENEGADE	SSI	12/94
STALINGRAD	Avalon Hill	11/94
STAR REACH	Interplay	11/94
STAR TREK: TNG	Spectrum	11/94
STONEKEEP	Interplay	11/94
THIRD REICH	Avalon Hill	11/94
US NAVY FIGHTERS	EA	11/94
WARCRAFT	Blizzard	11/94
WING COMMANDER 3	Origin	11/94
WINGS OF GLORY	Origin	11/94



New!

Blake Stone: Planet Strike!

"... tops the original Wolfenstein™..."
— PC Review

Features

- ✓ 20 thrilling new levels!
- ✓ Realistic, detailed VGA graphics!
- ✓ Auto-mapper that helps you move through levels!
- ✓ Heart-stopping hazards!
- ✓ New enemies with cloaking and morphing abilities!
- ✓ Awesome weapons arsenal!
- ✓ Dramatic, heart-racing soundtrack and digital sound effects!

Welcome to the 22nd century! The future is here in the form of Dr. Goldfire, a brilliant bio-scientist whose ghoulish genetic research has spawned a battle-thirsty horde of military mutants. Poised for attack, they await his command to unravel the universe! Only you, as Blake Stone, the galaxy's most intrepid agent, can infiltrate Goldfire's secret fortress on a remote planet and kick these creeps out of the cosmos!

Powered by an advanced, fast version of the 3D engine originally used in *Wolfenstein 3D*™, this game has the fast, fluid graphics you love and ultra-realism that will keep you spellbound!

The reviewers are already in orbit over *Blake Stone*:

"Did you like Wolfenstein 3-D™? If you did, you'll love Blake Stone." –PCM Magazine

"There's more of just about everything . . . Plenty to keep you on the edge of your seat!" –Electronic Entertainment

"The first-person viewpoint and smooth movement will have you peering sideways into the monitor to see if there's another monster around the corner." –PC Magazine

Get ready to launch the new galactic mission that will make or break Blake . . . *Planet Strike*!

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Available on disk and CD.

Wolfenstein 3D is a trademark of id Software. Planet Strike was not developed or produced by Id Software.

APOGEE

Circle Reader Service #57

BETA BITS

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

Metal Marines

The introductory cartoon and background set-up of **Software Toolworks'** METAL MARINES strategy game has a distinct Japanime bent to it, as do the hilarious angry threats from the computer-controlled opponents. Even the missiles flying from window to window have a decidedly anime flavor in this fast-playing strategy game.

The game setting is the far future and the world has been balkanized into small independent islands because of the ultimate weapons: anti-matter missiles. You must make your island safe for the inhabitants by annihilating your opponent's base. To do so, you'll have to build-up your offensive capability via a point and click interface that looks right out of **Maxis'** SIM-CITY or **Gremlin's** UTOPIA.

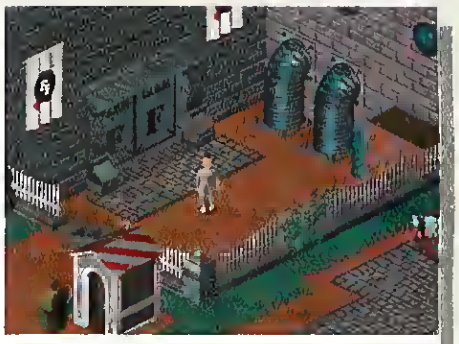
As the game begins, your island can be seen in one window and your opponent's island in another. Initially, you see no military/industrial installations on your opponent's island until launching your first missile as blindly as if you were playing BATTLESHIP. Then, each missile "sends back" reconnaissance information so that you can "see" where the enemy's installations are located. You'll want to take out your opponent's anti-missile installations first to reduce the likelihood of your missiles being shot down. After that, hitting vital targets will be a breeze, and you'll get those delightful messages where the villainous opposition cries, "You'll never get away with this!"

Projected release: November

Relentless

3-D action blends with puzzle-solving in this unique new action/adventure game from Europe's **Delphine Software**. You play the role of a Quetch, one of four races on a relatively new planet on the periphery of the galaxy. Each race is an intriguing animated being that looks roughly like a computer-controlled marionette bobbing about the screen.

The Quetches are an oppressed race, and your character is the one who is going to have to gather together bits of arcane magic in order to rescue the beautiful princess, Sendell, and defeat the evil Dr. FunFrock. To do so, you'll have to escape from an insane asylum (a beautiful tiled environment that looks a lot like some of the cityscapes in SYNDICATE) and navigate across several continents using the four means of encounter at your disposal: Normal, Athletic, Aggressive, and Sneaky. If you encounter a person while you are in Normal mode, you will usually initiate conversation, in Aggressive mode, you will end up fighting; in Normal mode, you will usually manipulate a lever or push a button; in Athletic mode, you might try to jump over it. So, a large part of the game is solving the puzzle of which mode is most beneficial in a given circumstance. **Electronic Arts** will publish RELENTLESS in the United States.



Projected release: November

Hodj 'n' Podj

Steve Meretzky, prolific creator of adventure games (SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN), is trying something a little bit different in his next design. HODJ 'N' PODJ is structured like a traditional board game with an adventure game motif, but with several dozen subgames. The game's twin characters, Hodj and Podj, are in a race to rescue two princesses, Mish and Mosh, lost somewhere in the land of Po-Poree. Two players can compete with one another on this quest, or one player can play Hodj and the computer Podj. The players roll the digital equivalent of dice and move around a beautiful Super VGA map, set up something like a fantasy Candyland.

The subgames are mostly traditional brainteasers, puzzles, and games, but with a Meretzky twist. For instance, the old Battleship game resurfaces as Battlefish, played with seafood in the place of ships against an octopus opponent that sounds like Mae West. There are cryptograms, riddles, arcade games, graphic puzzles, card games and more along the road to victory, most of them tweaked, bent, and twisted in some strange Meretzkian way. A narrator describes the successes, failures, and mishaps that befall the characters, and each game screen is filled with "Easter Eggs," making the game seem like an adult version of GRANDMA AND ME. HODJ 'N' PODJ has a little bit of everything, and is anything but uninteresting.

Projected release: November

WACKY WHEELS

Coming October 15, 1994

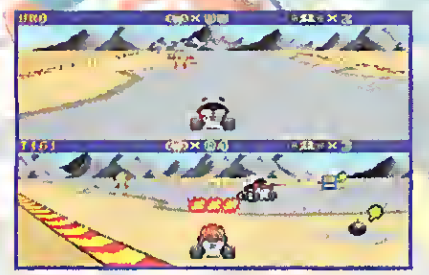
MODEM PLAY

"*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.
- RemoteRidicule™ feature allows you to send a funny, distracting message to your opponent during modem matches.

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508-365-4035 @ 28.8k v.fast (v.fc)

Or, to order directly from Apogee, call 1-800-APOGEE1. Price: $24.95 plus shipping. (Ask about our Upgrade Edition.)

If you're looking for genuine action games with boundless energy and playability, look into Apogee. As our slogan says, "Apogee means Action!"

Star Wars Saves Your Screen While Your Brain Is Far, Far Away

A true Jedi knight must resist the evil Emperor and destroy his Imperial Windows screen savers before its flying logos scrambles the brain. The rebellion will be better served by smuggling a copy of LucasArts' new STAR WARS SCREEN ENTERTAINMENT aboard your Millenium PC.

Befitting the size and detail of George Lucas' far away galaxy, this SCREEN ENTERTAINMENT pack is probably the biggest screen saver ever released. Fourteen modules with almost 10 megahytes of graphics and sound will lure new recruits to the Rebellion. When your brain drifts off into far away galaxies, the screen follows suit with scenes such as the now-cliche X-Wing trench run on the Death Star.

You can watch Han Solo and Chewie making the jump to lightspeed from the controls of the Millenium Falcon. Or write your own text in the scrolling type receding into the stars at the beginning of each movie ("Imperial scum caught tampering with this control system will be entombed in Gazfluvian hogspit for 1,000 years...").

SCREEN SAVER WARS LucasArts fights back at the Imperial Windows screen savers.

Sound effects and digitized audio are included in the package, enabling our favorite dark helmeted one to menacingly intone, "I have decided to terminate your hard drive. Reformat will commence immediately."

There are blueprints of Imperial battleships, as well as biographical readouts of your favorite bizarre creatures from the Mos Eisely Cantina.

If the droids you're looking for carry flamethrowers and cycle around your desktop shooting at Jawas, call the Rebel Alliance at 1 (800) STAR WARS and order your own copy for $35.95.

Connection Established

New Software Allows Gamers To Play Network Games—Without A Network

Multiplayer gaming, a sleeping giant in computer entertainment, has received a wake up call from **Sirius Software** and their GAME CONNECTION software. GAME CONNECTION is a game-link program that allows users to play multiplayer games via a local BBS. The software provides a routing mechanism that allows gamers to call into a BBS using THE MAJOR BBS software and play games without taxing the resources of the host BBS. The number of people allowed to play in a single game is limited only by the game and the number of phone lines in the BBS.

The software currently supports four-player DOOM, eight-player SPECTRE VR, six-player EMPIRE DELUXE, four-player GLOBAL CONQUEST, in addition to supporting 30 two-player games, including FALCON 3.0, GRANDEST FLEET, and INDYCAR RACING. The Game Connection software currently sells for $199, but the price will increase as support for new games is added.

For more information on GAME CONNECTION or to find a BBS using THE MAJOR BBS software, call Sirius Software at: Voice (307) 237-0065, BBS (307) 237-2112.

AFFAIRS IN THE CYBURBS

MASTER OF MAGIC Summons Gamers; Pass, Run & Punt in GEnie's Football League

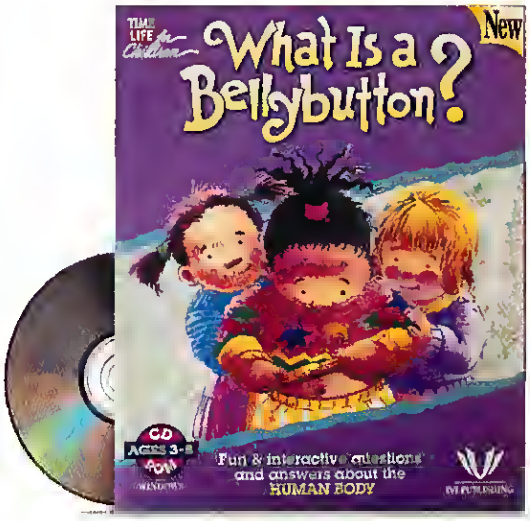
Conquest, exploration, magic, annihilation—if you can't get enough of this at work, we've got a game for you. MASTER OF MAGIC, brought to you by the people who created MASTER OF ORION (**SimTex Software**), not only looks a lot like CIVILIZATION, it offers similar possibilities for world expansion, with battles decided as much by magic as by swordplay. If our cover story on MOM in the September issue left your crystal balls blue, you can download a playable demo of MOM from the **MicroProse** library on CompuServe. Head to the Game Publishers B Forum [GO GAMBPUB] to find the MOMDEM.ZIP file in Library 2 (MicroProse). Follow the prompts for installation.

Would you prefer tackling something a little more visceral? While waiting for the '95 version of FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO, you can stay sharp by joining an on-line league. The most unique league we've seen is on GEnie, which runs similar to a fantasy football league, including a draft of NFL players.

The action each week comes not from actual NFL results, but from each league owner's coaching decisions. Over 40 offensive and defensive game plans allow you to employ an aggressive passing attack, or blitz the opposing quarterback into oblivion. The commissioner then has the FPS FOOTBALL PRO program play all the games, using the submitted coaching profiles, and publishes the results both on-line and via e-mail, complete with updates on injuries and free agents. Ownership of FPS FOOTBALL is not necessary to play—unless, like any good coach, you want your team to practice during the week. To check into a league, try category 37 in Scorpia's Games RoundTable on GEnie.

Smart parents have an answer for everything.

Smarter parents help their kids find the answers.



"Why do I have to go to the doctor?" "What happens to the food I eat?" Next time your kids ask you questions like these, we have the answer – What Is a Bellybutton? Memorable characters, colorful animations and health based learning activities make this story book format CD-ROM come to life. See your favorite software retailer or call (800) 432-1332, Dept. 190.

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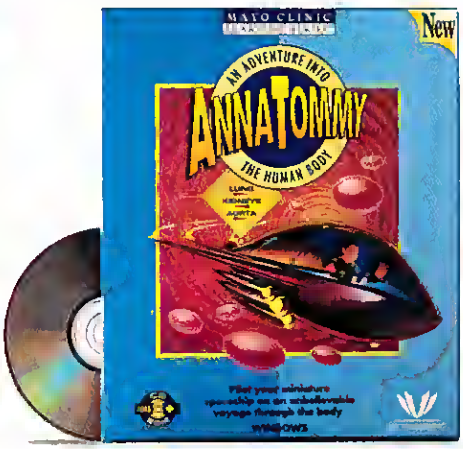
ONE WRONG TURN AND YOU COULD BE LUNCH.



Introducing ANNATOMMY – an incredible CD-ROM learning adventure that teaches your kids all about the human body as they navigate through it. Part of the MAYO CLINIC LEARNING SERIES. See your favorite software retailer or call (800) 432-1332, Dept. 190.

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They're Not Just Games...

The Elder Scrolls ARENA

"... may well be the game that establishes the new formula in CRPG's."
—Johnny Wilson, Computer Gaming World

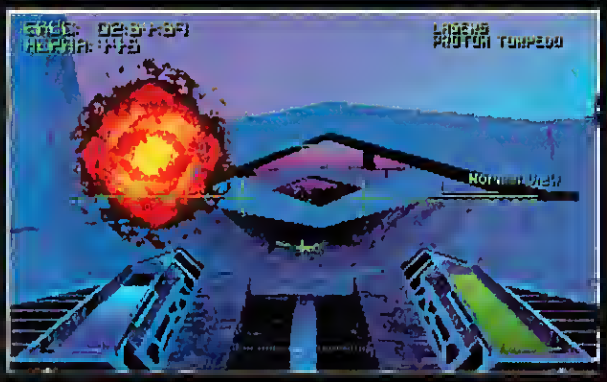
"TES: Arena surpasses all other role playing games in depth and realism! A must buy for RPG fans!"
—Russ Ceccola, Electronic Games Magazine

"...a must-have, huge role playing adventure. TES:Arena is the best RPG of the Year."
—Strategy Plus Magazine

DELTA V

"One of the best flight sims I have ever seen."
—Steve Honeywell, Computer Game Review

"there is nothing out there on the market that compares ... or even comes close"
—Ed Dille, Electronic Games



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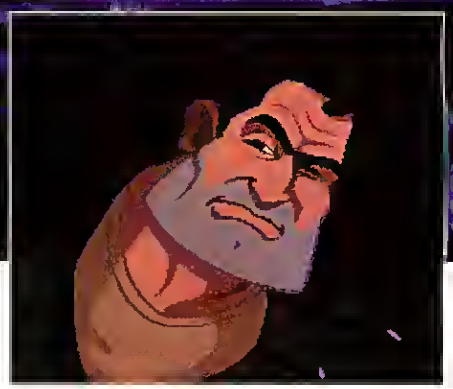
Circle Reader Service #40

Hawg Heaven

Behind The Screens Of LucasArts' Full Throttle

by Johnny L. Wilson



"Basically, it's the coolest game ever," says game designer Tim Schafer. "That's pretty much the synopsis." Schafer dances nimbly on the saber's edge of self-deprecating humor, his eyes sparkle with enough mischief to make you suspect they've been enhanced by George Lucas' nearby special effects mavens. The grinning project leader's hands toy with one of San Francisco's own "Flying Camel" yo-yos as he throws machine gun-paced barbs, supplements the game animation with verbal sound effects that would have made Mel Blanc proud, and deftly convinces everyone around that he loves what he does.

Of course, Schafer might *occasionally* want to do something else with his time. He did seem a little envious when a friend got back from a lengthy cross-country motorcycle trip and began to regale him with Hunter Thompson-like tales of incidents along the road and encounters with other bikers. So, he decided to do his own biker story by concocting a weird recipe that uses familiar ingredients (*Rebel Without A Cause*, *Bronson's People*, *Every Which Way But Loose*, *The Fugitive* and *Route 66*) while containing some of the bent angles we've come to expect from Schafer since he teamed with Dave Grossman and Ron Gilbert on the LeChuck's Revenge: Secret of Monkey Island II and with Grossman on Day of the Tentacle. In Full Throttle, Schafer gets full range to explore the darker side of his humor and even create puzzles that satirize the entire genre of graphic adventures in order to bite the hand that feeds him. Sprinkle in some new artistic techniques with some new and modified technology, and you should got a recipe that doesn't seem like traditional **LucasArts**' fare.

Full Throttle puts you in the role of Ben, a biker on a mission: a mission to clear his name (he's been framed for murder), to find a mysterious woman (not only is she better looking than a "one-armed man," but she has an interesting past, as well) and reach the heavenly exhaust fumes of the happily ethyl after. You start out in a dumpster and your first series of tasks is to get out of the trash, recover your keys, and hop on your bike in order to become the avenging Hell's Angel you need to become. Each simple puzzle is designed to familiarize you with the interface. The interface is similar to the pop-up interface used in Sam & Max, but all of the iconic commands are placed on an oversized biker gang medallion. The medallion interface pops up on the screen so you don't have to click/sort through the series of options like you do in the earlier game.

As in any graphic adventure game, you'll be required to use your brain to get Ben out of scrapes, but sometimes you'll be able to use Ben's brawn to get out of other tight situations. Even so, the design team hasn't forgotten that many of us who play graphic adventures do not like reflex-based puzzles. So, as in the insult-fencing in the original Secret of Monkey Island, they have added a tactical element to the "combat" and, just to make it that much more interesting, that tactical element is often displayed in 3-D perspective with camera angles you aren't used to seeing in a LucasArts graphic adventure.

DARK SPEED

Ben's world is a bleak, futuristic setting. Although the backgrounds and dark settings would suggest a post-holocaust world, both artists and designers insist that there has been no disaster, no series of wars that has led to this grungy future. Rather, they were attempting to portray an unspecific future—sometime when entropy would have caused much of the planet's infrastructure

to decay and economic circumstances would have caused a polarization between the wealthy and the ordinary. Indeed, Lead Artist Peter Chan introduced a visual cue that runs all the way through the product—the "have"s have hovercraft and the "have-not"s have wheeled vehicles.

Yet, for all of its darkness, the artwork is both lush and stunning. The special effects are more impressive and there seems to be more visual variety in the game. Why? There are four reasons: 1) the dark palette makes it easier to do more animation; 2) the use of cinematic close-ups and cut-scenes allow for more backgrounds and less detailed "rooms" than earlier games; 3) the addition of 3-D vehicles to 2-D scenes provides for additional variety; and 4) the use of a modified REBEL ASSAULT engine provides modified pacing and a first-person perspective.

The use of the dark palette allows the artists to use hard lighting and long shadows. This automatically limits the palette in terms of color which, in turn, simplifies color matching/contrast issues. Instead, the animators, led by Lead Animator Larry Ahern, can concentrate on the motion and simple dichotomy between light and dark rather than dealing with all the in-betweens. As a result, the dark palette gives the screen a more gritty, realistic look and, as an added bonus, saves time in animating movement sequences.

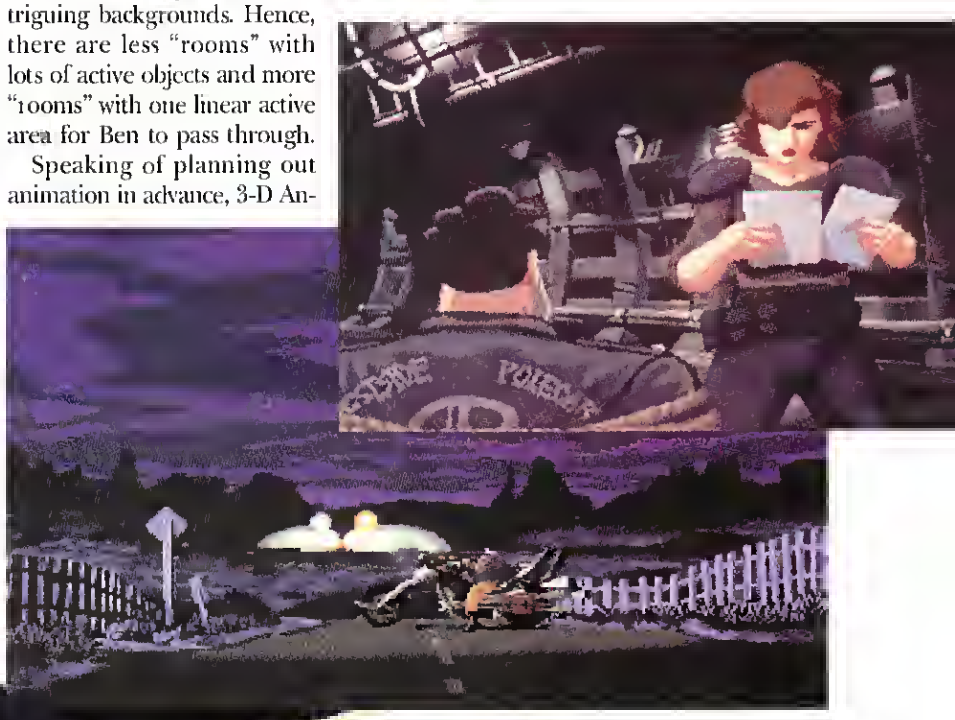
Using cinematic close-ups and cut-scenes originated out of the team's desire to emphasize both characterization and action. Close-ups and cinematic camera angles enable the artists to bring out more emotion and feeling in the characters, giving the product more of a graphic novel than cartoon feel. Ironically, the use of cinematic cuts and angles has meant less gross animation work for the artists than in the older products, since many of the animated sequences of old were merely functional set-pieces to get the character from one room to another. Now, you can adjust the interface so that an arrow points off-screen in the direction you wish Ben to travel and, with one click, Ben teleports into the next scene. That one feature may speed gameplay considerably. Gamers will like the new approach to transitioning between screens because it speeds play; the artists like it because they are spending less time on gross animation and more time on fine animation. "Now," says Ahern, "every action has a reason."

The only downside to the addition of so many new angles and cut-scenes is that the work had to be planned out further in advance with greater detail. The key frame storyboards that show key animation cels from each major juncture in the story have become roughly the thickness of three or four large encyclopedia volumes, and there is less room for making changes "on the fly."

Also, the emphasis on action has called for more medium shot backgrounds than usual. Instead of walking from place to place, Ben zooms through the world on his motorcycle. To make that convincing, he has to blast past more than a few intriguing backgrounds. Hence, there are less "rooms" with lots of active objects and more "rooms" with one linear active area for Ben to pass through.

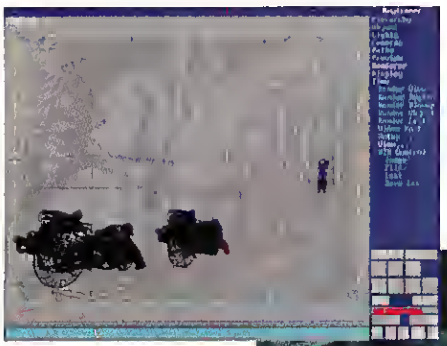
Speaking of planning out animation in advance, 3-D Animator Dave Vallone says, "80% of animation is thinking about the shot and knowing what you want to do before you execute it." It's a good thing Vallone, an alumnus of traditional cartoon animation at several independent studios, believes that the major task of an animator is cerebral since he has been challenged with the monumental task of creating 3-D vehicles that blend into 2-D backgrounds. That may not sound tough, but it is a definite challenge. 2-D art uses tricky little techniques in perspective in order to fool you into thinking that a traditional picture is three-dimensional. 3-D software tools model their subject matter from a true three-dimensional perspective. So, sometimes Vallone has to trick the 3-D model into conforming to the 2-D parameters.

There are several ways Vallone can do this. First, the dark palette and use of shadow is as advantageous for his animation as it is for Ahern's animators. In one



A BRUTE, HIS BIKE AND HIS BROAD
A dark game with a dark subject matter, FULL THROTTLE looks more like a graphic novel than an animated adventure game. Cinematic close-ups and cut-scenes dramatize Ben's leather-clad quest.

scene, he is able to transform a 3-D Ben and his bike from 3-D to 2-D as the biker moves from a shadowed environment to a lighted environment. In the light, 3-D Ben's arms would have to move realistically and elongate to animate his moving of the handlebars. The extra animation of his body movements would have been very time-consuming and was unnecessary to the scene. Instead, the eye is fooled by the transition from dark to light and the gamer will be left with the impression that Ben and bike actually are three-dimensional all the way through the scene.



Second, Vallone takes the backgrounds crafted by the two-dimensional artists and creates three-dimensional models of light sources so that he can get the lighting just right when 3-D vehicles flash across the scene. In the dramatic "Cave Fish" scene, where a rival motorcycle gang crashes several bikes in a cave, Vallone set up three different angled spotlights based on the lighting in the background. Then, he ran wire-framed models of the rival gang's bikes through the scene and made notations as to the lighting effects. Then, he figured out the physics for the pivot points of the bikes as they crashed and ran the light test again. Finally, he rendered the entire scene, only allowing the vehicles to become two-dimensional again in time for Ahern's special effects animators to paint the crashes in DELUXE PAINT ANIMATOR.

BORN TO BE WIRED Conforming 3-D wire-framed art to a 2-D background was one of the biggest challenges in creating FULL THROTTLE. The designers used physics to determine where the 3-D bikes and their pieces would land when they crashed.

REBEL ASPHALT

One of the biggest new looks in FULL THROTTLE will come through the use of Vince Lee's REBEL ASSAULT game engine to handle some of the first-person action scenes. The interesting challenge involved in using this game engine alongside the venerable, but always evolving, SCUMM (Story Creation Utility for MANIAC MANSION) graphic adventure engine is that Lead Programmer Stephen Shaw and his compatriot Mark Crowley must be able to get one program to shut down while the other one works, and then get the former to start back up with all of the previous information. That's harder than it sounds because both programs have their own calls to the processor and means of handling data. Fortunately, the REBEL ASSAULT sequences are discreet and that program can completely shut down after those sequences are completed. The SCUMM engine is able to multi-task, so it can essentially freeze with all of its variable states in their location while the REBEL ASSAULT engine allocates its own memory locations. The team has managed to overcome the logistics of integrating the two programs, though, and all will seem seamless to the gamer.

Using the REBEL ASSAULT engine has also caused some interesting problems in the art department. The original engine was intended to be as photo-realistic as possible. The game world of FULL THROTTLE is a graphic novel-style environment. The concept was to use Peter Chan's drawings as texture maps to place over the 3-D hillsides in the REBEL ASSAULT program. They were even able to enhance the look of the action by adding a parallaxing sky and optimizing the data flow for double-speed CD-ROM access.

Yet, when the programmers started getting 15-20 K of data per frame of animation, a new danger appeared—over-rendering. When the terrain starts looking too realistic, the coherency of the entire game world begins to unravel. Since the goal of the team is to create, as Shaw observes, "one fluid interactive experience" in spite of the mixture of technologies, the artists occasionally have to tell the programmers to limit the resolution on the REBEL ASSAULT-style sequences.

MADE LOUD TO BE PLAYED LOUD

Another new element in FULL THROTTLE that will enhance your enjoyment of the game is the effort in sound design. Taking a page out of Skywalker Sound's playbook (where the digital division of LucasFilm managed to create the dinosaur sounds for *Jurassic Park* with strange combinations of existing animal sounds and hi-tech sound tricks), Clint Bajakian has used his talent to make the sounds in FULL THROTTLE something really special. Not only did Bajakian take digital sound samples of monster Harleys on location, but all motorcycles in the game have signature sounds. That isn't the end of the story, however. For one hawg, he enhanced the motor's natural roar with a lion's roar. For another bike, he took a sound effect of bees in a jar, sped up the bees' buzzing and mixed in a dentist's drill on top. For another, he took the bee sound, slowed it down and mixed in a chain going over a chain link fence.

Prior to Clint's efforts, most sound effects for LucasArts' games came off archive CDs of cartoon sound effects or merely out of the LucasFilm archives. Now, with sound design, LucasArts' games may well have a unique new sound signature that will set them apart from other computer games.

COOL BIKES, COOL SOUND, COOL STORY

As Tim Schafer would say, "That's pretty much the synopsis." He was kidding. The game's plot is intricately interwoven, the look is different from any previous LucasArts game, the technology is better than ever, and even the sound is distinctive. FULL THROTTLE could very well be the interactive graphic novel that many of us have longed to play. Just remember, it's a dark game with a dark palette and a dark subject matter. Play it in the dark to make sure you see all the detail and get the maximum impact. It might not be "the coolest game ever," but it might be in the running.

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

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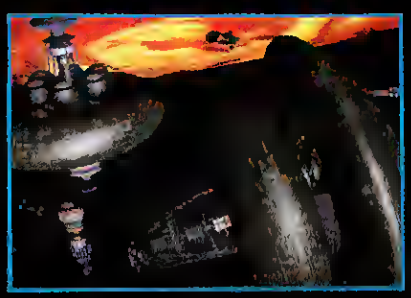

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GATEWAYS

BY LOUIS M. BRILL

TODAY'S CYBERSPACE

Finally, there is some reality to virtual reality.

The Cybertron from the Strayfight Corporation

Imagine stepping through the looking glass of your computer monitor and into your favorite game world. No longer are you a flight sim fan, viewing your world through an awkward set of keyboard commands and viewing modes: now, you are a fighter pilot who can track a bogey by turning your head. No longer are you a puppet master in a role-playing game, controlling your avatar's movements from a god-like perspective in the sky: now, you are the avatar, walking through a game world and meeting other characters face to face. No longer do you play golf by using an arcane series of mouse clicks: now, you are on the fairway, and you swing the club.

This is the promise of virtual reality—the opportunity to wrap your senses in technology and become completely immersed in a computer generated environment. This promise has been hanging in front of gamers' noses since the late 1980s when the concept and immense possibilities of this new technology began circulating among the technologically aware. But while the concept of VR has spawned several movies, shelves of books, and lots of talk, the technology required for a true VR experience has remained in the hands of research groups and pioneers. This is due in large part to technical issues: the bark of VR's promise was simply much greater than the bytes available to pull it off.

Of course, as is technology's wont, it has been improving. VR pioneers are slowly ironing out difficulties and the technology is becoming cheaper to create. Now, at the end of 1994, we find ourselves on the crest of the first wave of VR technology that you and I can actually touch. This holiday season will find several VR helmets on the shelves of your local computer hardware store, and a virtual reality theme park may be under construction at your local shopping mall.

VR GAME DESIGN

VR games are taking on many different forms in this open and vaguely defined territory. The types of gaming experiences range anywhere from tried and true shoot-em-ups and virtual variations on capture the flag, to exploratory experiences that put you in a hang

glider or on the back of a dragon. No matter what form they take, VR games all have a few core elements in common that distinguish them from traditional 2-D computer games. VR gaming is "immersive" in that it totally involves the player visually, either with a VR helmet or a large cockpit that envelopes the player. VR games also typically have multiple players simultaneously involved within a single game. In some cases, VR games allow players to collaborate with computer "agents" that talk and advise participants on their gaming techniques.

Gilman Louie, CEO and founder of **Spectrum HoloByte**, notes the clear distinctions between conventional computer gaming and that of a VR vintage, "A lot of people think VR games are just 3-D computer games—they really aren't! A good VR experience is a combination of environment, hardware and software. In VR, we're creating environments, not just stories, so here VR entertainment demands a different structure, one of offering an experience, not a narration. Thus we as game designers are not just scripting stories, but building computer generated worlds with rules of action. Once completed, we put people in these worlds and allow them to interact."

While it is evident to all VR game designers that immersion and interactivity are key elements of a good VR experience, there is much current experimentation with regard to the balance of the two quantities. On one extreme of this balance, you have the traditional computer game, which has a high degree of interactivity. As you participate in a computer game you move yourself and other things around or shoot at other objects, changing the environment as a result, but it is done more in the form of an indirect participation where players watch the results of their actions from a distance. There's lots of interaction, but no deep sense of participation.

On the other hand, a person could be totally immersed within an event and not encounter any interaction within the environment at all. Such is the case with current leisure-ride simulators (Disney's Star Tours, for example) where riders have a very convincing sense of moving through an environment, but only as passive observers with no control over their situation.

Ultimately, the answer to the question of "Interactivity vs. Immersion" will depend upon what each game design is trying to accomplish. The current crop of VR games fall everywhere along the interactivity/immersion spectrum, and one would expect that the truly successful VR games of the future will strike a harmonious balance between the two.

ON LOCATION WITH VR

While VR in the home is the fantasy of many computer gamers, home VR technology is coming along very slowly. The best bet for those who want a quality VR experience in the next year is to visit an arcade, bar, or Location Based Entertainment center (LBE) featuring a VR attraction.

Generally located in a suburban community, an LBE center typically offers such diversions as bowling alleys, miniature golf courses and batting cages. It is also usually accompanied by a cafe, bar, or restaurant, and a gathering place or lobby for its participants to collect together before or after their gaming experience. The dynamics of a conventional LBE are more than perfect for a VR game, and almost every major VR entertainment player including **Virtual World Entertainment**, **Magic Edge**, **Virtuality**, **Fighter Town**, **Edison Brothers Mall Entertainment**, and **Iwerks Entertainment**, are building VR attractions at LBE centers.

These VR companies have taken to the LBE concept for many reasons, not the least of which are financial. In virtual reality attractions, players find themselves dealing with a slew of cyberwear accoutrements, including a head-mounted display (HMD) and joysticks, or, if it is a cockpit-based experience, various control boards, throttles, and several viewing screens. Obviously, the price of such hardware would be prohibitive, to say the least, if someone wanted the same experience at home. The LBE environment also allows these companies to have a dedicated support staff that briefs participants on game play and equipment use, and generally ensures that players have a good time. Furthermore, the VR companies can enhance the VR experience by designing their lobbies and playing areas such that they look like a movie set. Flight simulator LBEs, like **Magic Edge** or **Fighter Town**, have the look and feel of an Air Force training center, for example, and fantasy-oriented Virtual World Entertainment describes their look as "Jules Vern meets Blade Runner." Here Victorian drawing rooms are down the hall from VR cockpits which act as portals to other world adventures. Thus with special gaming equipment and visually themed lobbies, VR companies can turn their sites into exciting digital theme parks.

Location based VR attractions are definitely the wave of VR's short term future, with VR attractions being installed into shopping malls, movie multiplexes, theme parks, and anywhere else people gather to have some fun. Currently, cockpit-based VR simulators seem to be the front-runner attraction, although donning HMD cyberwear with a handheld joystick offers a bit more cumbersome, though more immersive experience. Cockpit or HMD, players are definitely dancing in the digital domain within some of the following electronic playgrounds.

Strapped into a device that would have thrilled the Marquis De Sade (left), users of Evans and Sutherland's Virtual Hang Glider steer their soaring spirits through a futuristic L.A. (right).

VIRTUALITY ENTERTAINMENT

With over 400 systems worldwide, Virtuality Entertainment's brand of VR attraction is definitely the most pervasive. Virtuality, which calls their product by the same name, offers both sit-down and stand-up play stations. In each version players don a Visette—a slim, lightweight HMD viewing goggle which visually portrays any one of 10 different VR games, including shoot-em-ups (ZONE HUNTER), aircraft simulators (FLYING ACES) and fantasy adventures (LEGEND QUEST). Interaction in these games is through a joystick which acts as a weapon or steering device in the virtual world.

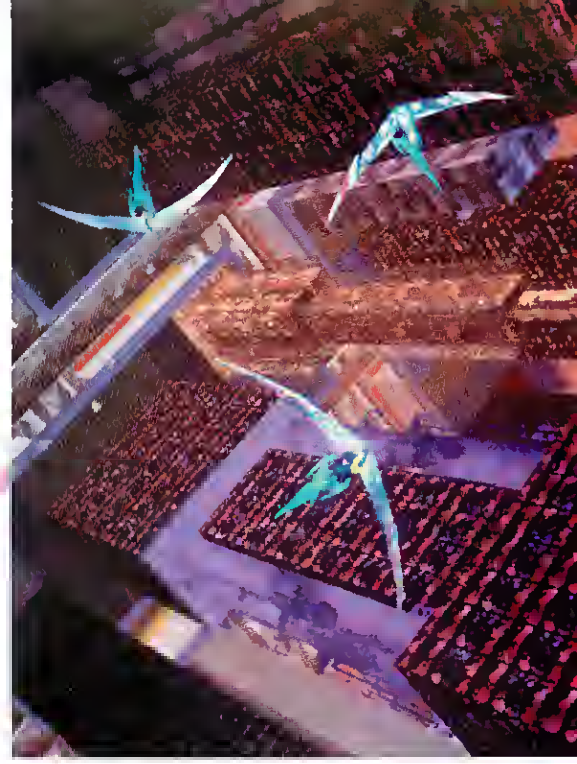
Virtuality's LEGEND QUEST is a D&D-like adventure played out through a Virtuality HMD environment. Players take on the forms and personas of either a wizard, elf, dwarf, or human warrior and, armed with swords, daggers and axes, pit their skills against skeletons, goblins and wraiths. Fighting against injustices, players are challenged to free a beautiful princess and save the world from demonic creatures. Game play is on many continuing levels, so finishing one level of the game does not necessarily mean the game is over. Like D&D, LEGEND QUEST has its following who gather together at regular intervals.

ALTERNATE WORLDS TECHNOLOGY

Alternate Worlds Technology is the creator of fully immersive HMD systems (both stand-up and sit-down) known as the Reality Rocket. According to John Persaud, AWT's director of marketing, "we think VR is growing by the interest we're seeing in the technology and how that's reflecting in our increased sales. It's obviously a good part of the future of out-of-home entertainment and part of the next step of game involvement that arcade players are looking for." Currently AWT offers three VR games, WOLFENSTEIN-VR, based on **id Software**'s WOLFENSTEIN 3D, BLAKE STONE, based on **Apogee**'s WOLFENSTEIN copy-cat, and CYBERTAG.

EVANS & SUTHERLAND

Former defense contractor Evans & Sutherland offers participants the VIRTUAL HANG GLIDER, giving them a chance to climb into a hang glider frame while resting in a body support that carries the player parallel to the ground. Players see their visual landscape by peering into a viewing scope in front of them. Launched into an urban landscape of skyscrapers, monorails and freeways, players grasp the hang glider's glide bar and, by watching the viewing scope, gingerly navigate through aerial alleyways flying, floating, or chasing loop-the-loops in the friendly cyber skies of a futuristic Los Angeles. Although built as a prototype, it was so well received by theme park and arcade owner/operators that Evans & Sutherland is considering the transformation of their prototype into an equivalent theme-park ready VR attraction.



CYBERMIND

San Francisco's CyberMind is dedicated to new interactive and virtual reality entertainment attractions, and has built LBE centers in San Diego, CA, Atlanta, GA, Toronto, ON, and two sites in San Francisco. Currently CyberMind presents Virtuality as their major attraction, but as other competitive VR games become available, they will appear at various CyberMind sites.

Eric Lewis, president and co-founder of CyberMind sees virtual reality entertainment as much, much more than just an arcade attraction. "We are pioneering concepts in developing immersive entertainment as an 'experience' related attraction. As such, we present it in a high-end, focused entertainment center where attendees can he properly acquainted with a VR

situation. This means an introduction as to how to use VR gear, and at the very least, a pre-show briefing on how to participate within a VR attraction. And, of course, creating every opportunity for them to have a quality VR entertainment experience."

Lewis has found ongoing attendance of his various LBE centers to be in direct proportion to people's willingness to accept computer entertainment as a valid form of play. Ultimately managing VR attractions is about getting audiences used to it as a form of entertainment and learning how to have fun doing it. He has found that in urban areas people tend to more easily adopt to VR games. In more rural areas there is a greater amount of computer and VR education necessary before the players will accept virtual reality as a form of entertainment and fun.

VIRTUAL WORLD ENTERTAINMENT

Virtual World Entertainment of Chicago, IL is the oldest and most successful LBE operation in the world. Begun in the Spring of 1990 with their first site in Chicago, VWE is rocketing along as its audience and empire of centers continues to grow. Over one million tickets have been sold from their nine currently active VR centers. Between the centers operating in Chicago, Walnut Creek (CA), San Diego, Houston, Las Vegas, and Japan, VWE now maintains a fleet of over 232 pods. By year's end, three additional centers will open in Dallas, Pasadena and Boston.

VWE's feature attraction is BATTLETECH, a multi-player 'mech shoot out based upon FASA's BATTLETECH game universe. Players jump into 'mech cockpits outfitted with footpedals, joystick and several panels of realistic switches and buttons that have real function during play. BATTLETECH has been played in Chicago for a few years now, but several new locations have opened up across the U.S. No matter where the location, it seems that player enthusiasm is universal, as summarized by VWE San Diego promotions manager Paul Tierney: "The lines around the block here at our site bode well for a great future. We already have a few die-hard pilots who have gone on over 100 missions." VWE has recently added another game to its repertoire, RED PLANET. Another cockpit-based game, RED PLANET is a demolition derby set at a Martian mining colony, and it seems to be gathering almost as much interest as BATTLETECH. Certainly, players are carefully choosing which game they would rather play first.

Gaming options are diverse, and include team play where two groups of four go at each other, intramural league play-offs between centers, and free-for-alls where anything goes. There are even competitions between centers across the globe, a Virtual World Cup. The best United States players compete with their Japanese counterparts for the title of International Grand Master. The title of the first championship was won by a Japanese player who had played 400 games to hone his skills.

What kind of "life span" does VWE think its games will have? Company co-founder Jordan Weisman replies, "it is too early to tell because the games are still in full play, but generally games that represent sporting metaphors [BATTLETECH—hunting and RED PLANET—car racing] will probably have longer life spans than exploration-type games. Even so, we expect by 1995 to have our own first explorational game in some of our centers."

MAGIC EDGE

In another take-off on cockpit-based VR, Magic Edge, Inc. has created an LBE center to house a VR cockpit that moves about to player commands. The cockpit is named Hornet X-21, an F/A-18 jet simulator incorporating an enclosed cockpit, communications gear, appropriate throttle and weapons control joysticks, and a windshield almost as big as that of a small car. The cab is a motion platform with three axes of motion: pitch, roll and yaw. As participants engage the throttle, the cab physically moves in corresponding ways.

The combat zone is a computer-generated landscape that is projected to the cockpit's large viewing screen. Via a headphone and microphone, players communicate with a control tower that guides each player in their brief, but engaging aerial mission—usually an encounter with one or two enemy targets. Once they have completed a mission, the pilots are guided back to their airfield for a landing and return to base.

KINNEY AERO

Kinney Aero's Fighter Town in Lake Forest, CA is another popular LBE operation where participants become involved with fixed and motion-based interactive flight simulators and undergo continuous training in jet operations. Enthusiastic wannabe flyers are provided with a choice of 10 different jet planes to explore the wild blue yonder, including the F-111, F-104, F-16 and F-14. Fightertown's success can be charted in the same direction as their aircraft on take-off—up, up, up. Since opening their doors in June of 1992 membership has steadily increased, and their simulators are used at nearly 100% capacity with an estimated repeat play as high as 65%-70%. Attendance was consistent enough that, within a year of opening, Fightertown moved to a bigger

VWE has a future-industrial setting for their one-man BattleTech cockpits (left), while Iwerks' Loch Ness Expedition is designed for a cooperative group experience (right).

facility and expanded the number of jet trainers from four to ten aircraft with the inclusion of added realism by placing several simulators on motion-based platforms.

IWERKS ENTERTAINMENT

In Iwerks Entertainment's VIRTUAL ADVENTURES: THE LOCH NESS EXPEDITION, players become involved with egg rustlers and evil alligators, each intent on stealing Loch Ness eggs. The adventure's theme directs players to find and protect "Nessie's" eggs by capturing them for replanting in a safer part of the lake. Participation involves a high-tech simulated submersible vehicle with a 3-D video display screen offering a six player cockpit-like environment. To participate, each crew member dons a pair of 3-D glasses transforming the virtual world into a three-dimensional landscape of images that seem amazingly real. Players operate specialized workstations either controlling the submersible's periscope or robot arms, or driving the sub through an underwater seascape. Already there are at least two planned VR installations with the first at Nauticus, The National Maritime Center in Norfolk, VA and the other to be placed in Foxwoods Casino in Ledyart, CT.

GREYSTONE TECHNOLOGY

Most of the first VR game offerings have been crude imitations of arcade shoot-em-ups, but now VR game designers are beginning to create a new level of VR attractions that more closely match the entertainment interests of a much bigger audience, including women, older adults, and families. "There is a large population of audiences equally attracted by explorational adventures, as others are by combative game experience," says Dave Klaugh, communications director for GreyStone Technology, a former creator of military simulators and now designer of entertainment landscapes.

In the interest of showcasing a total VR encounter, GreyStone developed THE PTERANODON EXPERIENCE. The experience is a combination of how participants get to visit that world and what they see when they get there. The virtual world portrays a horseshoe-shaped canyon with a waterfall creating a river that flows around an island of rock-like spires with a castle on top. Participants enter this world by climbing onto the back of a pteranodon which is actually a fiberglass replica of this prehistoric flying reptile. The pteranodon faces a wide screen video rear-projection system (using three screens: a center screen and one on each side) and on top of its body is a saddle and a set of reins. Climbing into the saddle, participants carefully grasp the reins and, as their adventure begins, the bird's head appears in the front screen cawing and screeching as it flies over waterfall, river and canyon escarpments. With the pteranodon's head continuously bobbing and wings flapping, participants are able to control its direction and height by leaning into the saddle and pulling on the reins to navigate.

The PTERANODON EXPERIENCE was first presented at the prestigious SIGGRAPH computer graphics show in the summer of '93, where just about every person who flew it walked away impressed with the experience, says Klugh. "Essentially, people seem to really like flying around in non-threatening, explorational environments. We were pleased enough with the public's reaction to our PTERANODON EXPERIENCE that we are improving upon it to a point that we expect it will eventually appear as an attraction in a suitable entertainment location."

THE VIRTUAL CLUBHOUSE

While VR game content may have its entertainment roots in arcade attractions and certainly has taken more than a couple of frames from Disney's TRON, VR entertainment is actually very far removed from arcades and is much closer in gaming and social dynamics to tennis or bowling. Virtu-

al World Entertainment founder Jordan Weisman, whose initial VR game, BATTLETECH, has been continually attended for more than three years, attributes as much of his company's success to player enthusiasm as he does to game content. "The background fantasy helps to attract players, but ultimately it's a social situation of people getting together and having a good time. It's not unlike a tennis court where the basic facilities of net, racket and ball are provided, and then it's up to the players to make the tennis game happen as they can. So the success of BATTLETECH is that it offers limitless replay as long as there are people to challenge."

As LBEs are being designed and established as major urban attractions, they are taking on the presence of an entertainment facility not unlike a movie theater with a renewable attraction periodically released either on a seasonal basis or when attendance drops. Over time players can look forward to established LBEs offering any number of game choices from single play to intramural competitions as more advanced players seek out their counterparts from other teams or LBE centers. Already VWE has set the pace by beginning these competitive challenges between all their centers throughout the United States and Japan.

VR COMES HOME

As much as virtual reality is trying to established itself as a public recreation, it also seeks inroads into that most private and most wealthy of entertainment landscapes: the living room. Home VR is certainly the most talked about and desired, but least developed VR arena to date. Home VR, once successfully launched, could easily compete with television, music, board games, and whatever else people do for living room fun. Home VR's emergence is dependent upon three primary factors: affordable hardware components, a large library of VR experiences, and an interested public.

As yet, home VR is not seen as a replacement for television or electronic games as much as it is seen as a niche market of computer enthusiasts who enjoy wearing an HMD for full game immersion. As virtual reality becomes part of the living room scene, its presence is expected to emerge via two formats: a closed loop (CD-ROM access) and a connected loop (modem access). The closed loop is distinguished by the fact that much of the equipment required to create a practical VR entertainment system is already in place via pre-existing home computer and CD-ROM gaming systems. Missing are the final components of an affordable HMD and complementary position tracking system to help participants navigate through a virtual landscape. Computers and CD-ROM players exist in the millions, and certainly the emergence of a quality low cost HMD unit will go a long ways in launching a successful home VR market.

The home HMD is an elusive VR peripheral device subject to stringent price/performance pressure. The high costs come in with complicated and expensive electro-optics devices needed for head tracking and image display. A parallel comparison is to review the emergence of camcorder products where the price point for home consumer models ranged from $500-$1000 and "prosumer" models from $1500-$3000 (and up!). With HMDs there is a wide selection of prosumer models ranging from $5000-$9000 per single unit and in the home consumer range, there has been nothing as yet.

The history of home HMDs to date includes an abortive attempt by SEGA to design a unit as an add-on peripheral to their existing electronic gaming equipment. Slated for Christmas, 1993 the SEGA unit was pulled for further engineering and improved game compatibility with a new release date for Fall, 1994. The current word says that it has been put on a long-term back burner. On the horizon, there are several HMDs coming this Christmas, the most interesting of which is **Forte Technologies'** VFX-1. This

Greystone wants to get people out of the house and into The Pteranodon Experience (left), while Forte hopes to bring the technology home with their VFX-1 head mounted display (right).

WHERE THE VIRTUAL THINGS ARE

CALIFORNIA

CYBERMIND, One Embarcadero Center, Lobby Level, San Francisco, CA, (415) 693-0861, (Virtuality center)

MAGIC EDGE, INC., 1625 Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View, CA 94041, (415) 254-5500, (Motion-based cab simulators)

FIGHTER TOWN, 8 Hammond / Suite 100, Irvine, CA 92718, (714) 855-8802, (Static and motion cab simulators)

VIRTUAL WORLD ENT, 1375 N. Main Street, Walnut Creek, CA 94596, (510) 988-0700, (BattleTech, Red Planet)

7510 Harzard Center Drive # 211, San Diego, CA, (619) 294-9200, (BattleTech, Red Planet)

CYBERMIND, Belmont Park, 3136A Mission Blvd , Mission Beach, CA 92109, (619) 488-1957, (Virtuality center)

FLORIDA

Disney World, Pleasure Island, Lake Bueno Vista, FL, (Cybertron)

GEORGIA

CYBERMIND, Gwinnett Place Mall, 2100 Pleasant Hill Road, Duluth, GA 30136

ILLINOIS

VIRTUAL WORLD ENTERTAINMENT, North Pier Festival Market, 435 East Illinois # 334, Chicago, IL 60611, (312) 836-5977, (BattleTech, Red Planet)

VIRTUALITY, North Pier, 435 East Illinois , Chicago, IL 60611, (312) 527-3002, (Virtuality center)

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TECHNO GAMES, 8190 Beechmount Avenue, Cincinnati, OH, (513) 474-6770, (CyberTron)

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VIRTUAL WORLD OUTPOST, Memorial City Mall, Exhilarama, 303 Memorial City Mall, Houston, TX 77024, (713) 827-0381, (BattleTech, Red Planet)

9330 N Central Expressway # 105, Dallas, TX 75231, (214) 265-9664 (BattleTech, Red Planet)

DAVE & BUSTER'S, 6010 Richmond Avenue, Houston, TX 77057, (713) 952-2233, (Virtuality center)

VIRGINIA

NAUTICUS, THE MARITIME MUSEUM, 1 Waterside Drive, Norfolk, VA 23514, (804) 664-1000, (Iwerks Entertainment-Virtual Adventures).

unit was recently introduced at interMEDIA '94, in San Jose, CA, and presented in conjunction with Knowledge Adventure's CD-ROM products SPEED and THE DISCOVERERS, which will be rolled out this fall as a bundled package.

The initial VFX-1 is slated to be PC compatible, and already there are at least 30 software developers including Origin, Interplay, New World Computing and Looking Glass all preparing or revising CD-ROM games to be compatible with the VFX-1 HMD. The VFX-1, which was tested by the author, was found to be comfortable and light-weight, with an easily accessible HMD viewscreen complete with a flip-up viewer design. Unfortunately, the quality of the visual display is just not up to snuff, and may not be worth the rather stiff asking price of $1,000.

Another consideration for home VR is the "connected loop" where perhaps the single most important component for a home VR system would be a modem. With a modem, the home user literally has the world at their fingertips in creating access to expanded home VR opportunities. For one thing, home users could dial up via a conference connection, creating a situation allowing several people to participate in a simultaneous VR encounter. Another possibility would be a dial-up to an LBE where a player could become locked on board an existing LBE-VR game and participate within the virtual world along with on-site participants. Of course, your 9600 baud modem couldn't quite handle the amount of data needed for a VR experience, so we probably won't have remote VR until we have fiber optic cables running into our homes.

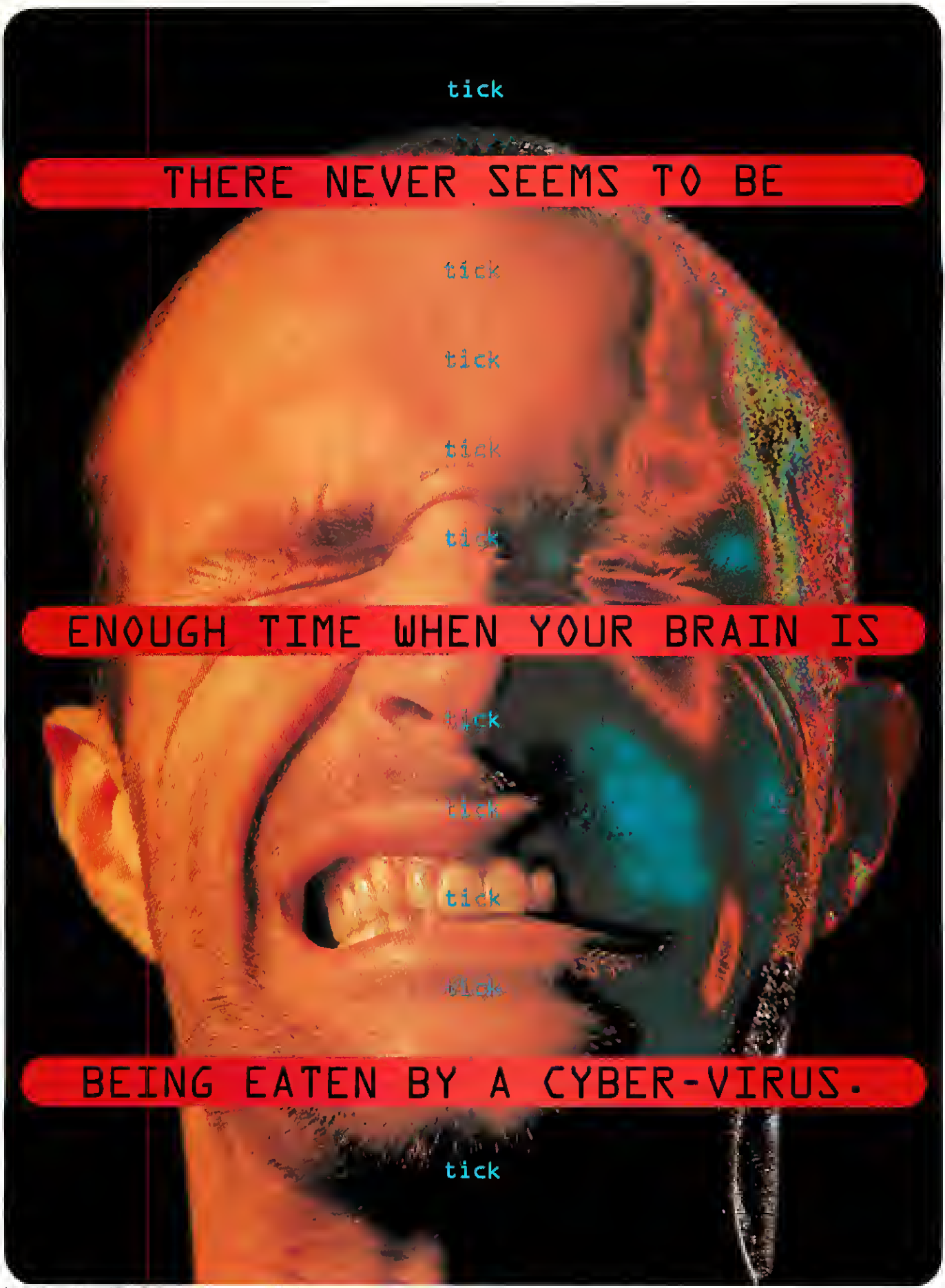
The emergence of the home VR marketplace is not expected to occur all at once, but rather become a market that will grow in spurts as more VR compatible software and HMD units appear at consumer price points. Home VR, like other consumer product developments, depends upon compatible software for its specialized viewing equipment, which in turn cannot be necessarily built until the proper hardware is in place. This is the classic "the chicken or the egg?" dilemma and, as confusing as it is, this is the basis of how home VR will most likely come about.

With software in place, the impetus is on HMD manufacturers to create practical home VR viewing goggles of a comparable quality. An ideal home HMD should be affordable ($200-$300), low weight (look and feel like fancy Ray Bans), maintain good to excellent image resolution, and have multi-user capabilities. With a tremendous existing base of home computers coupled with an equally massive number of CD-ROM attachments, and a very large existing group of computer game players, home VR may be a lot closer to living room entertainment than people imagine.

The keys to virtual reality's future are improved technology, more photo-realistic computer graphic imagery, and certainly more compelling games to play. Game design will always be the challenge, and certainly the first VR entertainment "killer ap" will go a long way in building VR entertainment as a mass market. As much as VR is an interactive and immersive experience, so is it a social one, and ultimately the single most important component to successive VR attractions will be network set-ups allowing many people to simultaneously play the same game, both from their homes as well as from local LBE centers. Ultimately, physical location won't matter, as players will be able to log into common cyber playgrounds and have a virtually good time—and that's for real!

Louis M. Brill consults and writes about high-tech media systems for theme park and entertainment applications. He is also writing a book on the history of film exhibition.

Circle Reader Service #246

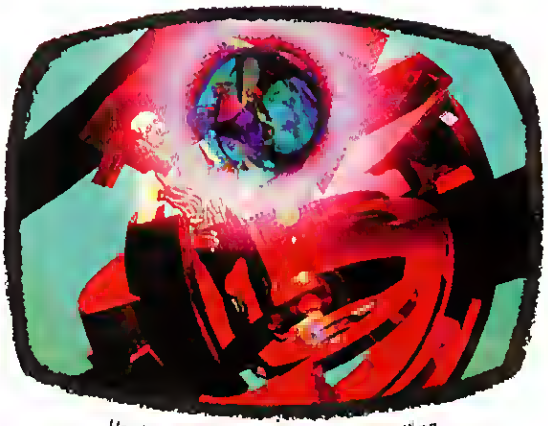


Limited first editions of BurnCycle contain a separate original hardcore rave soundtrack CD. *Suggested retail price. International Tennis Open ©1992 Philips Interactive Media France and Pathe Interactive. All rights reserved. Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia ©1992 Compton's New Media, Inc. All rights reserved. ©1994 Philips Media. All rights reserved. Both the copywriter and the art director of this ad would like to say hi to their respective moms. They'd also love to get CD-i players for Christmas.

CD-i

Prepare for total immersion. Burn:Cycle fuses a cyberpunk action-adventure movie with a frenetically paced role-playing game. Sound easy? Don't make us laugh.

Every nanosecond counts. Burn:Cycle is your wit and marksmanship meeting all the physical and mental challenges we throw your way. Be fast. He who hesitates is toast.



Hardwire your neurons. Critics are calling Burn:Cycle "a totally synthesized, fully transcendental, bio-controlled, electronic rush." Man, what an understatement.

Click forward to the year 2063 tick where you've become a jaded tick nihilistic data thief named Sol Cutter tick with a neural implant jack in your neck tick and one day while downloading corporate secrets tick into the software inside your skull tick you also contract a nasty little tick computer virus called Burn:Cycle tick which is basically gonna corrode your brain tick like battery acid in two hours unless you can tick outwit and outshoot relentless enemy agents tick find Doc the only guy who may know how to save you tick then make peace with your personal demons tick and somehow God help you tick locate the party responsible tick in this cold harsh neon-lit world tick before you bite the oh what a bummer tick your time's up

Magnavox 450 CD i player now $299.99* includes 2 free titles

PHILIPS MEDIA

Interactive

Illustration by Albert Stark

Faster Than Tribbles In Titles Are Popping Up

The Star Trek game I really want to play has not been written yet. This is largely because holodecks haven't been invented yet.

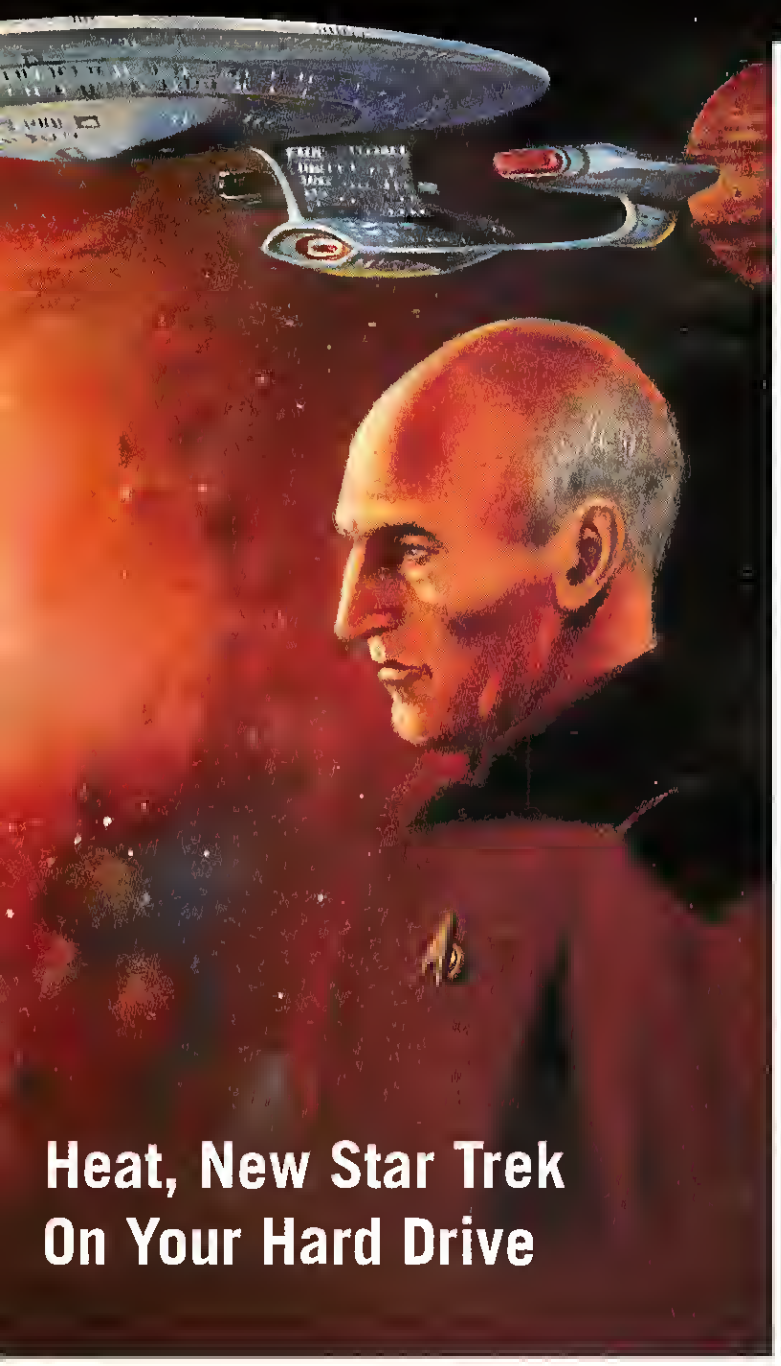
Let's face it: until there's a game that can literally plop you down in Captain Kirk's command chair (or maybe Picard's, it looks more comfortable), no Star Trek game will be completely satisfying. I, for one, am less interested in playing Star Trek than in living it. I want to feel the deck planks of the Enterprise shiver under the stresses of Warp 9 acceleration. I want to hold the compact weight of a communicator in my hand and hear it chirp as I flip open its lid. I want to deliver a Vulcan neck pinch. I want to open an overhead bin full of quadro-tritucale and loose a torrent of tribbles upon my head. Somehow, seeing tribbles pile up inside a monitor just isn't the same.

Unfortunately, short of landing a role in the new TV series ("Star Trek: Voyager," scheduled to hit TV screens next year), I don't see how I'll have a chance to have any of these experiences in real life; and unless we are blessed with a sudden quantum leap forward in virtual reality technology, I wouldn't count on experiencing them in a simulation either, at least not any time too soon. Under the circumstances, Star Trek computer games offer the best alternative.

Luckily for connoisseurs, Star Trek is in the midst of an unprecedented renaissance. Not only is there a new Trek film debuting at the box office and a pair of TV series in production (plus another pair cycling through what one imagines will be eternal re-runs), but more than half a dozen new pieces of Star Trek-related software have either just shown up at, or are on their way to, your neighborhood computer store. Even more exciting, the quality of these titles is consistently high, something that has not always been true of Star Trek games in the past. Whatever the reason—better technology, designers who know their source material and believe in being faithful to it, good luck—this year's crop offers both ardent and casual trekkers a richer harvest than any they've had to look forward to in the past quarter century.

Enterprises

by Charles Ardai



Heat, New Star Trek On Your Hard Drive

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

The first Star Trek games, programmed in the 1970s, were very simple affairs: graphically bland exercises in navigation and combat set against the backdrop of a grid that was meant to stand in for outer space. In some you got to choose between playing a Federation ship or a Klingon ship; in others you had no say in the matter. Some offered gravitational threats, such as black holes, for added intrigue. Most just offered an inexhaustible supply of enemy ships to battle. There were no frills; the computers these games ran on didn't have enough memory for frills.

Star Trek games entered the second phase of their development a decade later when two pop-culture phenomena happened to coincide: the release of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* in 1979 and the videogame boom of the early 1980s. In 1982 **GCE** came out with a Star Trek cartridge for the Vectrex, their vector-graphics home videogame system. As in the earlier Trek games the theme was combat, but this time it was combat viewed from a first-person perspective rather than from overhead, in part, one assumes, because of the impact of the trench scene in "Star Wars" (which around the same time became a popular vector-graphics arcade game in its own right) and in part because of the success of **Atari**'s seminal first-person space combat game, STAR RAIDERS. To spice things up, GCE threw in space stations for "power link refueling" and allowed players to avoid plasma bolts from attacking Klingons by throwing up ASTEROIDS-style shields, but there was no story to speak of and very little other than the logo splayed across the bottom of the screen to indicate to players that they were visiting the Star Trek universe. Nevertheless, the game was well received, getting kudos from most reviewers.

In 1985, **Simon & Schuster** tried a different approach: they hired award-winning science fiction novelist Diane Duane to pen the script for a text-only adventure game called THE KOBAYASHI ALTERNATIVE. Duane deliberately steered the game away from combat, positing an alternative test for Starfleet trainees to replace the Kobayashi Maru combat simulator shown at the beginning of "Star Trek II." Instead of rescuing a ship under attack, cadets would have to track down a ship that had vanished, the U.S.S. Robert A. Heinlein.

It wasn't one of Duane's best yarns, but her writing was as good as ever, which is to say significantly better than the writing in any Star Trek game before or since.

Unfortunately, few people got to read much of it because the game's interface, which involved spawning separate text windows for each person in a room, was impossible to figure out. Under your control, the normally resourceful Captain Kirk kept bumping into walls, stumbling over his tongue, and getting lost on his own ship. Most players gave up before ever finding the transporter room; some never even made it off the bridge.

The experiment had sufficiently encouraging results, however, that Simon & Schuster held onto the Star Trek license and released four more titles over the next four years: THE PROMETHEAN PROPHECY, about the Enterprise crew almost starving to death when their food replicators go on the blink; FIRST CONTACT, about Kirk racing the Klingons to make contact with a newly discovered alien species; THE REBEL UNIVERSE, about mutinous Federation crews mysteriously allying themselves with the Klingons after passing through an unusual region of space; and THE TRANSINIUM CHALLENGE, the first-ever Next Generation game, in which a beardless Will Riker has to investigate incidents of terrorism on a backwater planet. None of these games were especially good, although the interfaces improved and bit by bit graphics crept in, Diane Duane did not return for any of the later games and the level of writing plummeted.

A few years passed during which the only new release was **Mindscape**'s lair-to-middling collection of action games based on "Star Trek V." Then, almost without warning, the modern era dawned: in 1992 **Interplay** (714- 553-6665) released STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY and **Berkeley Systems** (510-540-5535), makers of AFTER DARK, released STAR TREK: THE SCREEN SAVER. Both titles captured players' nostalgia for the original series, both were smart and funny, both were extremely well designed—and both promptly shot to the top of the sales charts.

I'M TIRED OF TALKING Although normally the diplomatic sort, the Enterprise crew is sometimes forced to resolve situations at phaser point in SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE'S A FINAL UNITY.

Is it any wonder then that two years later we are faced with a deluge of Star Trek software, including new entries from both Interplay and Berkeley? Not really. What *is* something of a surprise is that after so long a history during which excellence was the exception rather than the rule, the new titles live up to—and in some cases exceed—the standard set two years ago.

THE DOOMSDAY MACHINE

The most eagerly awaited of all the new games, and probably the best, is **Spectrum HoloByte**'s (510-522-2584) Next Generation game, A FINAL UNITY. Terry Coleman previewed it in detail in our April issue, and the basic game hasn't changed much since then. The plot is still intricate, the map is still huge, and the graphics are still good enough to make you wonder, occasionally, whether you are watching a videotape instead of a computer game.

Since April, though, there have been a couple of new developments. For one, Spectrum has refined much of the animation, particularly in close-ups of the characters, to make the resemblances even stronger. (Previously, Data and Picard looked more like wax museum effigies of Patrick Stewart and Brent Spiner than like the actors themselves.) For another, Spectrum has inked deals with all the primary actors in the series—Stewart, Spiner, Jonathan Frakes, Marina Sirtis, Gates McFadden, LeVar Burton, Michael Dorn, and Majel Barrett—to lend their voices to the game. The recordings weren't finished when we went to press, but the snatches we heard bode well. Unlike the cast members from the original series, whose delivery on the CD-ROM edition of Interplay's 25TH ANNIVERSARY game was somewhat flat and unenthusiastic, the Next Generation cast gave Spectrum a set of rousing performances, snapping their lines out with all the vigor and urgency the crisis-laden script demands.

"I was worried because of the size of the script," says Mathias Genser, the game's lead designer and Executive Producer, who estimates that the game will take around 75 hours to complete. "Patrick Stewart's script is about two-and-a-quarter inches thick, several hundred pages. His is the largest, but everyone else's is pretty large, too. But it went very well. One of the wonderful things is that they are all really fresh from the show. When we started, I felt like I needed to direct, but then when they delivered their lines so well, I felt guilty about not having to do anything..."

With 75 hours to fill up, it is inevitable that A FINAL UNITY contains more than one story. At its core are two interlocked quests: the search for a set of legendary Garidian scrolls, the existence of which could provoke social unrest on Garid, and the subsequent search for the even more legendary Chodak "Unity Device," a mammoth doomsday machine capable of creating or destroying entire solar systems. Along the way, the player will stumble onto subplots featuring Romulans, Ferengi, and at least one Vulcan (no, not *that* one), plus several new alien races.

There are roughly 10,000 locations in the game's universe—2,000 stars, each with an average of five planets and moons, plus a smattering of starbases—at least half of which the player could conceivably travel to. Five of the planets are the sites of major away team missions that unfold

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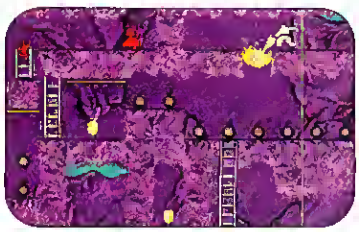

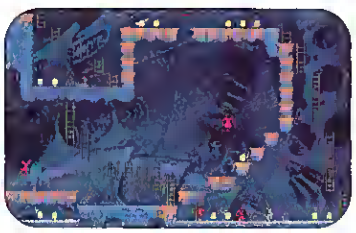

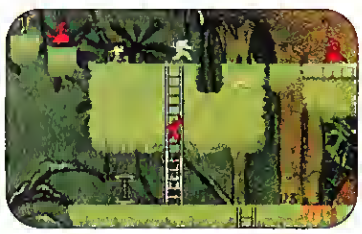

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in conventional adventure game fashion. Numerous others host brieler encounters.

"The way that I approached it when I started out," says Genser, who is currently sketching out both a sequel to A FINAL UNITY and a game based on the new movie, *Star Trek: Generations*, "was that I looked at the series and asked what most people's expectations are of what Star Trek is all about. Several things were obvious; it's not a shoot-'em-up, for example. So what we set out to create was a big suspense/mystery story, where you are exploring and figuring things out. And saving all of humanity, saving the Federation, saving the galaxy. I mean, why not?"

To make sure that fans' expectations are met, the designers lavished a lot of care on details. "We are very happy with Picard's shirt tug," Genser says, "and the little Worf face came out very nicely." Michael and Denise Okuda, graphic designers and official historians of The Next Generation, consulted on the look and feel of the game, and a story editor from the series was brought on to edit the script "for dialogue and content." How the final product hangs together remains to be seen; though the game should be in the stores by the time you read this, Spectrum was still putting the finishing touches on it as of this writing. Judging by what we have seen so far, though, A FINAL UNITY seems certain to be the most faithful Star Trek game, in look and spirit, produced to date.

HOW MUCH IS THAT ALIEN IN THE WINDOW? The plot of JUDGMENT RITES offers more intriguing puzzles than its predecessor, and should be even more interesting when INTERPLAY finishes adding the cast member's voices.

ARENA

One of the nice features in A FINAL UNITY is the animated ship's tour that introduces players to the major functional areas on the Enterprise: the bridge, the transporter room, the holodeck, and so forth. The 3-D animation is smooth and the idea of walking around the Enterprise, peeking here and there, is enormously appealing. However, as good as the animation is, it is still animation rather than video; and though the tour does take you to several of the places one would most want to see, you have very little control over where you go and what you look at once you get there.

For those who would like a fully interactive video tour of the Enterprise, this season's software of choice will be the NEXT GENERATION INTERACTIVE TECHNICAL MANUAL from Simon & Schuster (212-698-7114). Due to be released first for the Macintosh, the program uses Apple's latest QuickTime technology to stitch together some 15,000 photos shot on the sets at Paramount Studios into more than a dozen nearly seamless interactive video segments. There is no game attached to the tour and only a whiff of a storyline ("You are following a survey probe on a tour of the ship," chief designer Peter Mackey summarizes), but within the constraints of their assignment—which was to create a computer edition of the best-selling Simon & Schuster book—the designers have done a thorough, and thoroughly satisfying, job.

"The thing that's wrong with a book," says S&S's Keith Halper, "is that it's a book. I want to put you in the fiction." Designer Mackey echoes the sentiment: "All of the CDs [based on books] to date are really just a book on the screen. This is a new way of conveying the information to people. Instead of a traditional database with line drawings, we were intrigued by the idea of using a location as a metaphor for conveying a story."

Why did they choose the technical manual as their starting point? "The technical manual is like the Trek bible," Mackey says, "the technology base for the whole thing. And we were able to put much more in the CD than there is in the book. For example, if you are in Engineering you can click on the impulse engine display and see it in more detail than anyone ever has before." The ubiquitous Mike Okuda wrote some (and vetted all) of the disk's new material, including behind-the-scenes tidbits about various props and sets and the shooting of the series.

In what way is the disc interactive? In addition to being able to choose which of 14 locations you would like to explore—besides Engineering, you can prowl through Sickbay, Ten Forward, Picard's ready room, the ship's exterior—you get to click on hotspots within each screen to activate mini-animations. "Things that would logically move do move," says Mackey, "especially in terms of looking inside things." So if you have always wondered what Dr. Crusher keeps inside her medical cabinets, this will be your chance to find out.

Ambient sounds and music add atmosphere and texture to the tour, and voice-overs by Jonathan Frakes as Riker and Majel Barrett as the ship's computer complete the package.

Assuming that this title is a success, which it can hardly not be, what's next for Simon & Schuster Interactive? Well, for one thing, they hold the license to produce software based on Voyager.

"We are considering ideas for other Star Trek products," admits Mackey, who works for Imergy, the firm S&S contracted to put the Interactive Technical Manual together. "But I couldn't tell you about those."

Halper is a bit more forthcoming. "Think Klingon," he says, mysteriously.

A PIECE OF THE ACTION

Not to be outdone by its various licensees, Paramount has started its own interactive media division, and to no one's surprise, one of its inaugural ventures is its own Star Trek game, based on the only license left, Deep Space Nine.

"The Hunt" plants players in the middle of a murder investigation—Duridio Lot, a Bolian archaeologist, is found dead in a back room at Quark's not ten minutes into the game—and the implications of the crime are far-reaching. Not only does Constable Odo have an obligation to restore order to the station and to see justice done, but he has to get to the heart of two separate plots, one Ferengi and one Bajoran, and nab a thief who has made off with a device of extraordinary destructive potential. (Maybe it's the Unity Device, stolen from Spectrum HoloByte's game...)

In an interesting twist, you do not play Odo, nor any of the other familiar characters from the TV series. Instead, you choose one of four "guest stars": a female Federation officer, newly assigned to the station; a male Bajoran who knew Major Kira back in their Resistance days; a male

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Ferengi on a hush-hush mission to heist some valuable trinket; or a female Klingon, out to restore her tarnished honor.

Where in the station you enter the game depends on which character you select. Lt. Delgado starts in Ops, where she is briefed by Sisko, Kira, and Dax; Garrudan, the Klingon, starts in Quark's, fending off the owner's lascivious advances. Bixtur, the Ferengi, and Salu Marr, the Bajoran, start in the station's labyrinthine tunnels, where they would appear to have all the privacy in the world to hatch their plots—were it not for the fact that they start the game in adjacent tunnels to each other. The game's plotting is clever, setting up lots of tense encounters and pitting each character against the others in a tightly wound dance of deception.

The bulk of the game consists of conversations with the various characters you meet, and it is in this context that the game unveils its main gimmick. As you wander around questioning people and gathering information, you have to select "postures" from a "personality wheel" which allows you to adjust the way you come across in a conversation. Choose the right balance between appearing "Bold" and appearing "Cautious", between "Curious[ity]" and "Circumspect[ion]", and between seeming "Greedy" and seeming "Generous", and you will win your interlocutors over. Strike the wrong balances and you'll get nowhere. Just what the right balances are change according to who you are and who you are speaking to, of course, as do your motives and goals.

The gimmick is interesting, so it is a pity that it doesn't really work; the fact is that it's too hard to figure out how to use the personality wheel or just what its effects are, except in the most obvious cases. Also, since in all other respects the game is a normal adventure game, it is awfully easy to forget that the personality wheel, which is tucked away in an unlabeled corner of the screen, even exists.

On the other hand, if you do forget about the personality wheel, the game is quite good. Especially good are the sets (though they are currently too brightly colored—Paramount promises to tweak the palette before releasing the game "to

WHO AM I TODAY? While you can't portray a series character in DEEP SPACE 9, playing a Klingon is still quite different from a Ferengi—especially when talking to station security.

[better] capture the gothic, sinister nature of the station") and the dialogue, which hits exactly the right note for each character. Quark's exasperation with his dimwitted relatives and snide asides to Odo, Dr. Bashir's breathless wonder, Sisko's restrained but loaded manner of speaking—all of these are captured perfectly.

The effect should be even stronger once audio is added; the "pre-alpha" version I played was silent. Paramount tells us that not only will the final game contain the Deep Space 9 theme music and sound effects, but that in keeping with the latest trend, a number of Deep Space 9 cast members, including Armin Shimerman (Quark), Avery Brooks (Sisko), and Rene Auberjonois (Odo), will be performing their characters' lines.

Also still to be added are several puzzle sequences and a horde of non-player characters to fill the currently underpopulated hallways of the station. Once this work is done, a fresh look at the game will be in order. For now, it looks to be a solid effort, less impressive a game than "A Final Unity" and less of a technical achievement than the Interactive Technical Manual but still an attractive, well-scripted, and thought-provoking game.

With all of the work remaining to be done of Deep Space 9, it seems that Paramount's original fall release date was a bit ambitious. Look for the game sometime in the spring of '95.

THE MENAGERIE

What's left on the slate for us to consider? Plenty. As I mentioned earlier, both Interplay and Berkeley have new Star Trek titles hitting the stores. **Sound Source Unlimited** (800-877-4778) is offering a pair of new "AudioClips" collections. **Bitstream** wants to sell you Star Trek "Font Packs." And the **MCS Group** (605-344-6775) has transferred all three volumes of GREENBERG'S GUIDE TO STAR TREK COLLECTIBLES to CD-ROM.

First thing's first: Interplay recently wrapped up production on the CD-ROM edition of their second Star Trek title, JUDGMENT RITES. Similar to the first game in most regards, JUDGMENT RITES presents eight "episodes" in the style of, and starring the characters from, the original series. The CD-ROM edition is scheduled to feature the voices of all the original cast members (just as the CD-ROM version of STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY did), which should be even more exciting this time around since in JUDGMENT RITES characters other than Kirk, Spock, and McCoy get to participate in landing parties, which is where the stories

WHERE NO MAGNIFYING GLASS HAS GONE BEFORE The fine print on this plaque from THE STAR TREK INTERACTIVE TECHNICAL MANUAL reveals that Michael Okuda and Gene Roddenberry are still alive and well in the 25th century.

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Circle Reader Service #226

tend to unfold. So this time George Takei should have more to say than "Shields up, captain" and "Impulse power, sir."

Berkeley Systems, the firm behind the extremely popular and clever Star Trek screen saver, is hoping to make lightning strike twice by releasing a similar package based on The Next Generation. Everyone remembers the falling tribbles from the first screen saver, but that was just one of many scenes; there were also burrowing hortas, flying brain cells, spaceships galore, and more sketches of planets, hardware, and other arcana from the series than anyone could really want.

My favorite gag from the original had Spock strolling onto the screen and obliterating your windows with his phaser; the Next Generation edition promises to offer a similar encounter with Lt. Worf (whose skill with weaponry, after all, exceeds even Spock's) and—perhaps to offset the violence—a counseling session with Deanna Troi. Plus spaceships galore, and more sketches of planets, hardware, and arcana from the series than anyone could really want.

If that's not enough, Berkeley is also offering STAR TREK SCREEN POSTERS, a collection of 35 stills from the movies that can be used as a screen saver or as Windows background art, and STARDATE, a version of their Expresso calendar/scheduler/address book package that will feature Next Generation-inspired layouts and graphics.

Sound Source Unlimited, the firm that even Berkeley recommends to its customers as the best source of Star Trek audio collections, has two new compilations of sound bites to add to its already substantial catalogue. Virtual Data, currently only available on the Mac, is a handsome package featuring a mix of sound effects from The Next Generation and custom recordings, made expressly for Sound Source, of Brent Spiner in character as Data. STAR TREK: THE MOVIES, currently only available for Windows systems, offers sound effects and dialogue from the first six features.

The idea behind these and earlier packages (which include THE FINAL FRONTIER, THE LOGICAL COLLECTION, ENCOUNTER AT FARPOINT, and THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS) is not merely to listen to the clips, but also to assign them to play when events such as disk ejection or system shutdown occur. This works better with some clips than with others; one knows what to do with Kirk saying "Disengage this computer now," but it is less clear what one is supposed to do with "Your species has great curiosity." It is also unclear why the editors who picked the clips have such a fascination with the episode "Spock's Brain"—I don't see why it is necessary to include all of "What have you done with Spock's brain?", "Where is Spock's brain?", and "His brain is gone" in one package.

But no matter. I have no doubt that hard-core trekkers will be delighted to have their computers say "Welcome aboard" in Patrick Stewart's commanding tones when they enter Windows and "You are dismissed" when they leave. Or vice versa, if they really want to confuse people.

Another potentially handy tool for confusing the masses is **Bitstream**'s pair of PostScript font packs, LI'L BITS STAR TREK and LI'L BITS STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION. Each contains six fonts derived from the TV series for use in word processors and other applications, which means that not only can you produce cool, Starfleet-style letters to mail to your to your favorite actors ("Dear Mr. Shatner, please send me an autograph and a lock of your hair"), but you can also print out documents that they look like they come from the Paramount backlot. If you're trying to pass off your treatment for the pilot episode of Voyager as the real thing, don't you think you'll have better luck if it's printed out in "Star Trek Next" than if it is in Helvetica or Courier? All I ask is that you leave my name out of it when Paramount catches up with you.

KLINGONS MAKE BAD NEIGHBORS While the story is interesting in STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY, those with joystick phobia beware—the combat scenes can't be turned off.

Finally, for those of us who still own our Mego "Phaser Battle Game" and occasionally wake up in the middle of the night wondering what we could get for it, there is GREENBERG'S GUIDE TO STAR TREK COLLECTIBLES, which can answer that question and many, many more like it. Ever ask yourself how much it would cost to buy a complete set of Star Trek trading cards? Greenberg knows. How many jigsaw puzzles did H-G Toys release between 1974 and 1976? Greenberg knows. How many issues were there of the "Star Trek Poster Book"?

Greenberg has the answer. About the only question the software doesn't answer is who the hell Greenberg is—I checked the credits in the scant documentation and there was nary a Greenberg in sight.

A few other caveats: the database is only as current as Star Trek V; installing the software successfully can be tricky; the package incorrectly says it requires "Windows version 3.2 or higher"; and for one-sixth the price you can buy the Official Price Guide to Star Trek and Star Wars Collectibles in paperback. Of course, then you wouldn't get the color photos or the cross-referencing features of the computer version. Your call.

THAT WHICH SURVIVES

When fans in the 1970s wore buttons saying "Star Trek Lives," they didn't know how right they were—or, looking at it another way, how wrong. Star Trek was less alive then, by far, than it is today. There are more Star Trek products available now, including games, than at any other point in history. And there is no sign that the flood is about to let up in the near future.

How about the far future? Will the turn of the millennium bring me face-to-face with my ultimate simulation, the Star Trek game of my dreams? The cynical side of me says no; but the side of me that loves Star Trek, and has repeatedly been astonished by the rate at which technology improves, says "Why not?"

Of at least this much I am confident: if there ever are virtual reality games at all, there will be Star Trek virtual reality games. However much gaming technology improves, Star Trek will be there to take advantage of it. And who knows? Maybe one day we will not only have holodecks to run such games but also starships to put them in.

Just a salutary thought to hold in the back of your mind as you explore these latest evocations of the final frontier.

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NOCTROPOLIS. It glitters before you, with menace and allure. Does the Succubus bend to you in tenderness or carnal rage? Will you escape the corrupt longings of the surgically sadistic Master Macabre? Can you keep the Sovereign of darkness from the light? Come into the city. And enter a nightmare only consummate evil could conceive.

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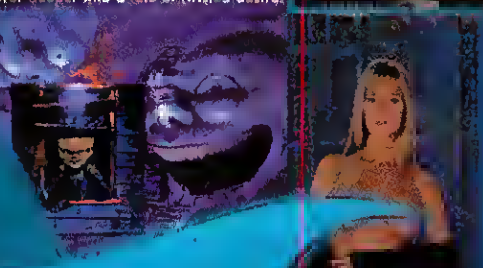
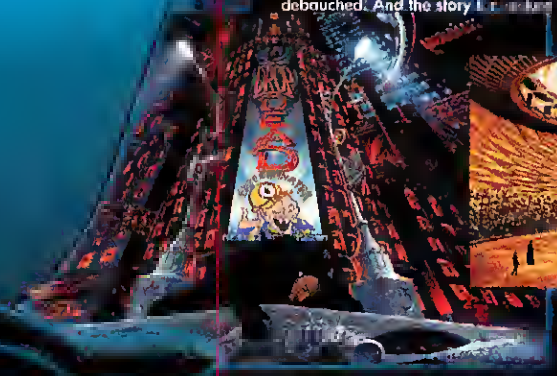


The graphics are gorgeous. The characters, devious and debauched. And the story [illegible] audiences only.



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... a new angle on the classic role-playing adventure..."

– PC Gamer, September 1994

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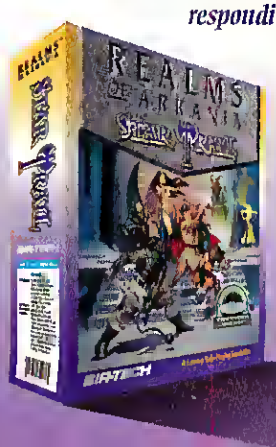
– Electronic Entertainment, September 1994



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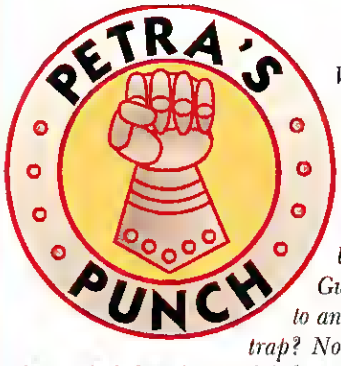
Circle Reader Service #112

We Must Have Structure!



WHAT? HAS SCORPIA BEEN GIVEN THE BOOT? HAS SHE finally succumbed to an Ultimate Bad Guy? Fallen victim to an adventure game trap? No, no. Scorpia is taking a little breather to alphabetize her adventuring maps, take a few of her useless +3 broadswords to the Salvation Army, and sandblast the floor of the Grue cage. She'll be back next month with her Sting cleaner and sharper than ever.

In the meantime, please welcome our guest columnist for the month, a recent addition to the CGW reviewing staff, and another woman who knows her way around the dungeon—Petra Schlunk (applaud now).

I happen to be of German descent and, being afflicted with a heavy dose of German genes, I get a little obsessed with structure at times. Okay, I get obsessive about it a lot. So, inspired by the paucity of good role-playing games released in the last year, I spent some time composing a list of rules (notice I did not say "guidelines;" that word is too sloppy) for computer role-playing game designers.

Rule Number 1: In the arena of computer role-playing games, bigger is not necessarily better. I realize I am stating something completely obvious here, but this concept seems to be eluding game designers. In my opinion, the ideal game should take somewhere between two to seven days of full-time gameplay to finish. Anything less, and the gamer feels robbed; anything more and the gamer may get bored or discouraged. This makes sense when you think about the sorts of things that tend to make games longer: no automaps; huge worlds that often have little internal variety; endless numbers of NPCs, most of whom exhibit similar conversation styles; overly difficult battles that you have to restart many times until you succeed; lots of niggling details to wrestle with; expecting an unusual amount of coordination from your average computer athlete; and so on.

Rule Number 2: Automaps are almost *de rigueur* now. The only games for which it is excusable not to include an automapping feature are ones in which the worlds can be easily mapped with graph paper; that is, those games in which movement is via the old one-square-per-step system. Games that do not use this simple geometry require automaps. It is too frustrating to have to remember the relative locations of a large number of places in a huge game world, or worse, to have to hand map a world with a complex geography (especially for those of us

A FRUSTRATED GAMER LAYS DOWN SOME HARD AND FAST RULES FOR ROLE-PLAYING GAME DESIGNERS

by Petra Schlunk

SCRY SIGHT

The grapevine of the spirit world is a'buzz with talk of a newly discovered realm in ULTIMA 8: PAGAN. Apparently, a wayward Avatar stumbled upon a forgotten valley created thousands of years ago by the Titans of Earth and Water. This new region is accessible by any Avatar who purchases THE LOST VALE add-on disk from Origin Systems. Like the SILVER SEED add-on for ULTIMA VII, THE LOST VALE will give Avatars a few new quests, monsters, and magic items, in addition to allowing them to pump up their stats to demi-god-like proportions. The rumor mill is not clear on whether or not the new quests will involve any running-jumping-dying-a-lot puzzles, but all oracles indicate that the probability is slim. The disk is available from Origin or your local purveyor of adventuring goods for $29.99.

who kept failing our elementary school art classes).

Rule Number 3: Worlds should be smaller, but more interesting than they are now! We do not need games with hundreds of towns and thousands of "people." While in some ways such a large size promotes an illusion of reality, it also promotes repetitiveness and a corresponding ennui. Instead, why not try building fewer towns and locations, constructing fewer people, but adding more complexity and variety to what is there.

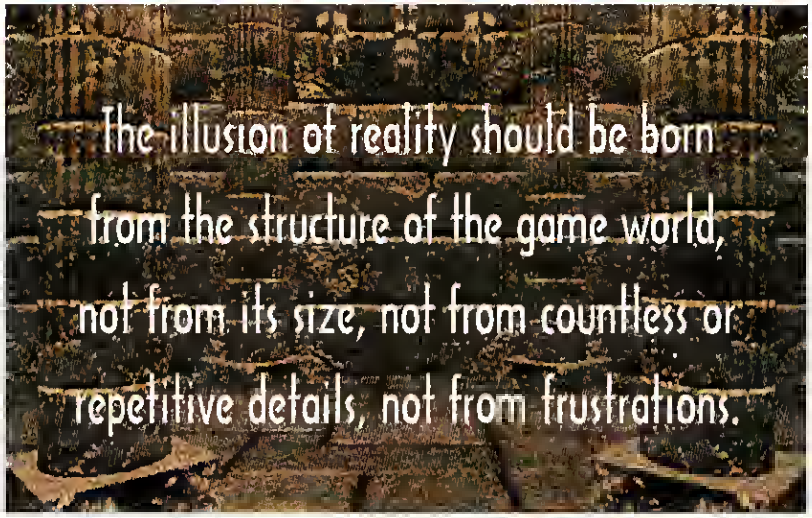
Rule Number 4: If there is a part of a game that requires more than five attempts by an average gamer to complete or to get past, then that part is probably too difficult and should be eliminated, changed, made optional or there should be another way around the problem. This category includes battles against excessively tough monsters and areas where too much coordination (hand-eye) is required. There are enough games that test our frustration tolerance in these areas. If we were interested in this sort of thing, we would go play one of those games.

Rule Number 5: Make most details and romps through fields of statistics optional! There are role-players who love numbers and who can happily spend hours planning how to develop a character. But for each of them, there are many more who would prefer not to bother with this! The same rule applies to "realistic" aspects of these games (feeding, resting, hunting, fixing weapons and armor, etc.). Go ahead and put in these realistic touches, just make them optional. This gives detail-oriented players the things they like, yet leaves more story-oriented folk a way to enjoy the game as well.

Rule Number 6: If there is an aspect of the game that requires one to fritter away game time or to perform an action repeatedly to move on with the game, it should be removed or a shortcut offered! I have had quite enough of games during which I can have dinner while my characters either heal or wait for stores to open. After all, it is not as if I am going to continue exploring with a half-dead party or as if I will skip anything that might be important! Honestly, I have never understood the fascination with specific business hours for stores or taverns in computer role-playing games. What is a necessity for most businesses in real life is just not interesting or fun in a game setting. Similarly, if I have to spend large quantities of time repeating something to get it "right," I do not get enthusiastic and think, "Gee, how realistic!" I get bored, frustrated and irritated.

WHY FANTASY MATTERS

Well, I have one more area that I want to discuss. Rules do not really apply here (did I say that?!), but if I were to make a rule it would be this: spend a little more time on the story. A role-playing game should be a magical interlude. It should transport us to another world and make it easy for us to forget our own world for a time. The more beautiful or interesting the story is, the more "realistic" touches the game has, the more we can get involved. These realistic touches do not have to be (and should not be) repetitive or intrinsically boring things that our characters do. Instead, they might be the ways in which NPCs interact with us or in how the game world evolves separately from us and how it changes when we do things. The touches may be in how we affect the NPCs we meet, by our reputation, actions and words. Instead of increasing the number of otherwise similar places and NPCs in a game, realistic features may be incorporated by increasing the richness of detail within fewer places and by portraying fewer NPCs in greater detail.



Realism might even extend to having our characters grow old and retire with succeeding generations of characters going on new quests, as in DARKLANDS; maybe, as in THE ELDER SCROLLS, the world could offer limitless opportunities for character building and achievement. However it is done, the best games take us outside of our own worlds. This does not happen the same way for every game or for every gamer, but we are all open to the power of nuance and we have a desire to make a difference somehow. The more we can do this in the game world, the more we may feel one with it. The illusion of reality should be born from the structure of the game world, not from its size, not from countless or repetitive details, not from frustrations.

GAMERS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

Finally, we should not forget the most critical thing of all: games should be fun! That is really the reason for this obnoxiously authoritarian article. Too many of the games I've played recently have, in my opinion, left out the fun. I don't think this was intentional. Instead, I think that the designers meant to make games that were more interesting, realistic, and fun than previous games had been, but somehow failed. The rules I listed so blithely here are an attempt on my part to identify both why I think they failed and what I think works and does not work in computer role-playing games.

It falls onto all of our shoulders, those of us who love this genre of games, to determine what we really want from role-playing. We need to figure out what we do and do not like, and why. Then we must ask for it. After all, the designers can only work from their own instincts and experience and from our feedback. While we will not all agree on which features an "ideal" computer role-playing game should have, as long as we clearly state our preferences, the game design community will at least have a direction to follow. Let's give them something positive to think about.

Ages ago,
In the damp passages of
the Old World
Evil was defeated
And Chaos was cast into
the shadows of time...

In darkness
It waits

This Christmas, the Master of all Dungeon Games Returns

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Interplay

Circle Reader Service #258

Hoboken's Heroes

Scorpia Tours The Atlantic Seaboard With THE SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN

Ahhh, Fall is in the air, at last! I thought that hot, gameless summer would never end. Now, of course, we have to hope that the cool weather will bring with it a lot of cool games to play. Or at least a few. Things are a little desperate around here at the moment. And when the situation is desperate, heroic measures are needed!

So you always wanted to be a superhero, huh? Running around in a skin-tight costume, showing off a beautiful bod, doing amazing things like eating spicy foods without distress or refolding road maps in the blink of an eye. Oh, and maybe saving the world a few times in the process. Well, **Legend Entertainment**'s SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN gives you the chance to accomplish all those marvels and more.

Yes, in the role of Crimson Tape, fearless leader of the Hoboken Superhero League, you get to perform all sorts of good deeds, and stop the nefarious Dr. Entropy at the same time! In fact, that's pretty much what it's all about: foiling Dr. E's evil schemes before they come to foul fruition. So let's get on with the show before it's too late!

The game is divided up into seven parts. In the first six, you do five missions apiece, each segment ending with the heroes wrecking one of Dr. E's insidious plots. You have to do the other four missions first (usually in any order) to get all the things you need to reach Entropy. The seventh segment is the big showdown with Dr. E.

Who you have in your party, aside from the Crimson Tape, is up to you most of the time. There are occasions when you will need a specific hero in the group for a particular problem. However, you can return to the SHL headquarters any time to drop one person off and take on another temporarily. Also, keep in mind that you can strip the stay-at-homes of their equipment.

One reason you may want to keep the same heroes in the party is the "mil marker." This is a special award presented by the Commissioner of Superhero Leagues to any character that reaches one million experience points. It's a nifty award that stops all physical damage to the hero during the first round of combat. Should the hero manage to reach the exalted two million point plateau, he gets a second marker, so that he is protected for the first two rounds of combat.

While the heroes will be using weapons most of the time in combat, super powers are important. The best ones to have for combat are Increase Cholesterol, Induce Rust, Put Animals to Sleep, and Induce Root Rot. Some heroes come with these as a primary or secondary power; other heroes can acquire these powers by drinking isotopes.

It isn't necessary to bring a secondary power up to 100%; even 40-60% can do wonders against the opposition. I found it best to spread the isotope-gained powers around the party so that most of the members had two or three useful abilities. Don't be in too much of a hurry to guzzle those isotopes, though; remember that new heroes show up every new segment, and you may want some of them in the group with extra abilities.

PART 1: WHAT'S YOUR SIGN?

Okay, it's time to save the world again! After choosing your party and taking anything useful from the cabinet, head upstairs and listen to the chatterbox. Be sure to do that at the start of every new segment. Sometimes you will get valuable information or clues on where to go. Next, of course, you turn on Matilda for a list of the missions to be completed.

Now you can begin exploring the big, bad world (or what's left of it). Bad is the word for it, all right. There's a limburger cheese bomb sitting in the middle of the Jersey City market, and East Orange is overrun by rabid sheep (no, there's too many even for Captain Excitement to handle). These aren't any trouble at all, however, once you spend some money in the right place.

Newark is nasty, with plenty of tough fights, so take your time here (you may have to go back to HQ once or twice to renew supplies for sleeping out). Fortunately, it's also small, so finding the hot peppers won't take too long. What to do then is, well, rather obvious (heh).

Likewise the temple with the computer malfunction. Sometimes, ya just gotta be destructive, superhero or not. After that, it's time to visit Dr. E (you've got everything you need by now, right?). One thing's for sure, this guy is no Felix Unger. What a mess! You can handle it, though, and before long, Entropy's scheme to change all the road signs will be history.

PART 2: HOLY PIGEON POOP!

So the old guy in Hackensack won't give you the formula for silly putty. Well, we can't have this valuable recipe lost to the world, but not to worry. I'm sure that somewhere in your wanderings you'll come across something suitable to help change his mind again.

Helping out the Scranton Superhero League is a little different. Sure, you found what you need practically at your feet, but can you use it? Probably not; you guys are all the same (hehe). I don't read those kinds of magazines myself.

That warlord who's causing trouble can make a lot of it if you don't stop him. Of course, you carefully read the description when you entered the room, so you know about the special properties of his

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beloved toupee, right? Heavy metal, and all that. The solution to this one is something of a bust, you might say.

Then there's the guacamole situation. Can't get any guacamole while the workers are on strike. Ah, that nasty management, using a 98W light bulb when the contract calls for 100 watt bulbs. For shame! No wonder the workers are striking. Maybe you can light up their life a bit and get them back on the job.

Looks like it's just about time to take on Dr. E again. This time it's worse; he's training bombardier pigeons (anyone who lives in New York understands the horrible implications of this scheme). Maybe you noticed that the stuff you picked up along the way won't help with this. Quite so. There's something you need to buy (always check those pawnbrokers), and something you need from HQ. If you don't have that little item yet, pay a visit to the museum on the lower level, and look at everything carefully. Once again, good triumphs over evil!

HAY FEVER BLUES A couple of Ragweeds, the nastiest nasties in the game, try to pollinate the SLH. Time to ramp up on the Root Rot superpower.

PART 3: RATS! BIG ONES!

Now this one starts off tricky. The key to the Washington museum is in the storage cabinet, but if (like me) you have a lot of junk stored there, you might not notice it right away. So page down to the bottom of the list and take the key.

The stuff in the museum you can leave for another time. Just notice the unfaded circular spot on the carpet, which is all you need to do here for now. Then it's off to beautiful downtown Piscataway to look into a little corruption and bribery. The view will be better if you can't be seen.

Now, what about those poor, irradiated folks in Mineola, huh? Gotta help them out somehow. No, they aren't willing to move, either. But no doubt someone, somewhere, is selling something that will do the job.

Somehow, we haven't gotten much further in solving the museum theft. Maybe you didn't pay attention to the chatterbox this morning? Look around that area, and who knows what you might find? (Well, I know, but I'm not telling; some things you just gotta do for yourself!)

So, have you been to Philadelphia yet? There's a poor little kitty trapped under the Liberty Bell. Actually, a poor little man-eating tiger. No doubt it wouldn't mind being released, but it's confused and upset and likely to take an arm off if you aren't careful. Personally, I found this one funny. A real gas, in fact.

Wow, is it time to beat on Dr. Entropy again already? Sure looks that way. You have all the tokens to get into Belmont Park, where he's crossbreeding rats and horses. Now that's vicious stuff! What to do, what to do? Whistle while he works? No, I don't think that will help here. What's really needed is sign language to communicate with the horses. Voila! Another vile scheme down the tubes. Good work, gang!

PART 4: MY FAVORITE MARTIN

With a feeling of déjà vu, you rush off to help the Flushing Superhero League. This bunch is having a small problem with big mice. Really big mice (hmmph, some heroes!). This one is so simple to do, though, that it hardly needs mentioning.

Then there's more déjà vu as you return to Philly, to rescue King Midas and poke around under the city, thanks to a recent earthquake. Sure is nasty down there. Just keep going until the place is cleaned out and you have what you came for.

New York, New York, it's a waterlogged town. Fortunately, there are still some dry spots midtown and downtown. Speaking of which, better hustle over to Times Square and find out what the problem is there. Hmm, someone stole the famous New Year's Eve Ball, eh? From the description, sounds like he might be a baseball fan, which gives you only one possible place to check.

And when you get there, you learn the details of Dr. E's latest extravaganza, a plot so unspeakable, I say about it only this: if nothing else, it nets Steve Meretzky the "Chutzpah of The Year Award." However, you're here for something else at the moment. Check out that safe carefully. Unlike most, it isn't made of steel.

Now it's time to help Princeton beat Yale. A quick trip to New Haven is in order, along with a lot of eavesdropping. Don't be afraid to be pushy in this instance. While in New Haven, explore it thoroughly.

It's just about time for Dr. E again, but you may be lacking an important ingredient of the solution. If so, you'll want to stop off in Poughkeepsie first (and somewhere else afterwards). Then it's off to Yankee Stadium and another victory!

PART 5: DON'T LEAF ME!

We're making progress here, but Dr. E (slippery villain) is still at large, so let's get going and do the easier missions first. These would be the missions involving the two warlords. In Huntington, you just have to use your eyes. In Poughkeepsie, it's simply of matter of correct clothing.

Then it's off to Freehold, and the shaman whose prices have gone through the roof. By the time you finish talking to everyone, you may feel you're going in circles, but never fear, the shaman is agreeable to an exchange of services with the town's, ah, happiness establishment. King Midas may come to mind here. If so, just remember: if at first you don't succeed....

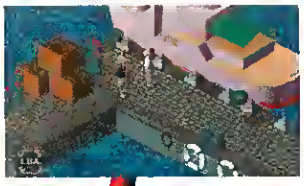
Only one mission left, and for that, you have to get to Carnegie Hall. How? *Everyone* knows the answer to that. Just exercise your fingers, and before long, a nasty gang war has been averted.

And by gosh, here we are again, about to put the kibosh on another fiendish scheme. Actually, something more useful than a kibosh is needed; something more like recent software (we all know how buggy new releases are, eh?).

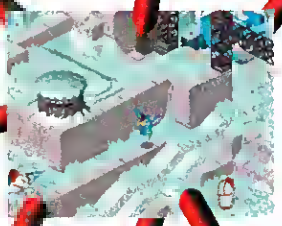
PART 6: LUVIN' LADY LIBERTY

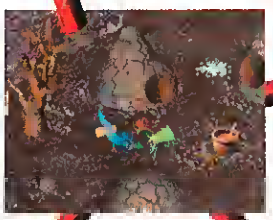
Courage! The end game is almost in sight, but there are still some great deeds to be done. For instance, the little hotel problem in Staten Island. This requires a rather obvious super power. The alligators in the NYC sewers are also simple; it's just a matter of cleaning them out of there.

The World's First Over-The-Counter Hallucinogenic.



The AI keeps things as unpredictable as your own life. If your life included assassin elephants and holomaps, that is.





Dynamic, fluid animation lets you wield a laser sword, master a snowboard and ride a Dino-Fly. Not exactly your average weekend, huh?

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Tons of SGI cinematic sequences and countless chapters full of mind-altering tasks keep things rolling. This ain't little kids stuff.

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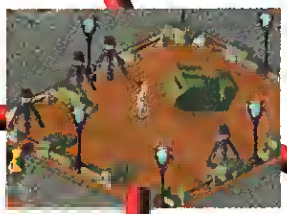

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RELENTLESS TWINSEN'S ADVENTURE

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If you listened to the chatterbox, you'll want to be in on a big media event. Hmmph. Some event. What a letdown, even if you did get something from it.

Speaking of media events, there's a real one (kinda) at the temple, where true believers see Elvis' likeness in a coffee stain. Sorry, Robomop can't help here. While you consider the foibles of mankind, pay a visit to the market, and think things over.

Winding up this set of heroic acts is a visit to scenic Three Mile Island in Harrisburg (check the hotel for a very handy item, too!). Those cultists aren't up to anything good, so you better stop them. If you can't fix the tube, you may have missed something under Philadelphia.

Then it's off to the Statue of Liberty. Getting past the android guard is no trouble for anyone who's read the manual. Alas, this is a downer, as Entropy has no scheme on hand this time (very odd). Well, I suppose that sometimes even the bad guys get "villain's block."

LE GRAND FINALE

However, that doesn't last long, and this time our boy IS up to something really vicious. Before you can get to him though, you'll need to shuffle off to Buffalo. Ah, the mighty thunder of Niagara Falls! And is this a barrel I see before my eyes, its hoops floating just out of reach? Yep, sure looks like it. Fortunately, there is a dam good solution for the problem.

CURIOUS GEORGE Dr. Entropy and his evil sidekick, George Steinbrenner, plot another nefarious scheme. Perhaps it's time to test the mettle of that safe.

You're not done yet. Walk around a little, because old Ben won't hand over his precious key for nothing. And when you do have it, remember the chatterbox. Another situation needs your attention first. There must be thousands of them! 10 to the, umm, 4th? 5th? 6th? power? Well, math was never *my* strong point.

At last, the great moment, the final showdown, the ultimate confrontation is upon us! There, at the top of the Empire State Building, Dr. Entropy puts into motion his most horrible scheme, a veritable king among fiendish plots! Will our heroes prevail? Will the world be saved for a sequel? Only you can provide the answers to those questions. I sure hope they're the right ones!

Whew! That seems to be it for now. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

Delphi: Visit the GameSIG.

GEnie: Visit the Games RoundTable.

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

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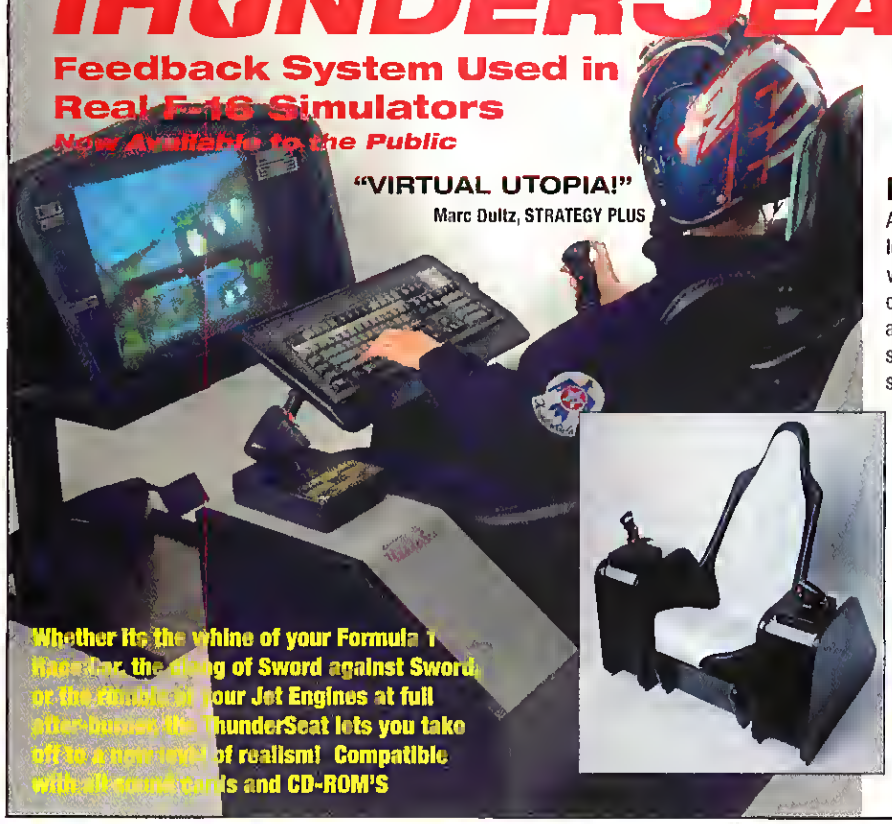

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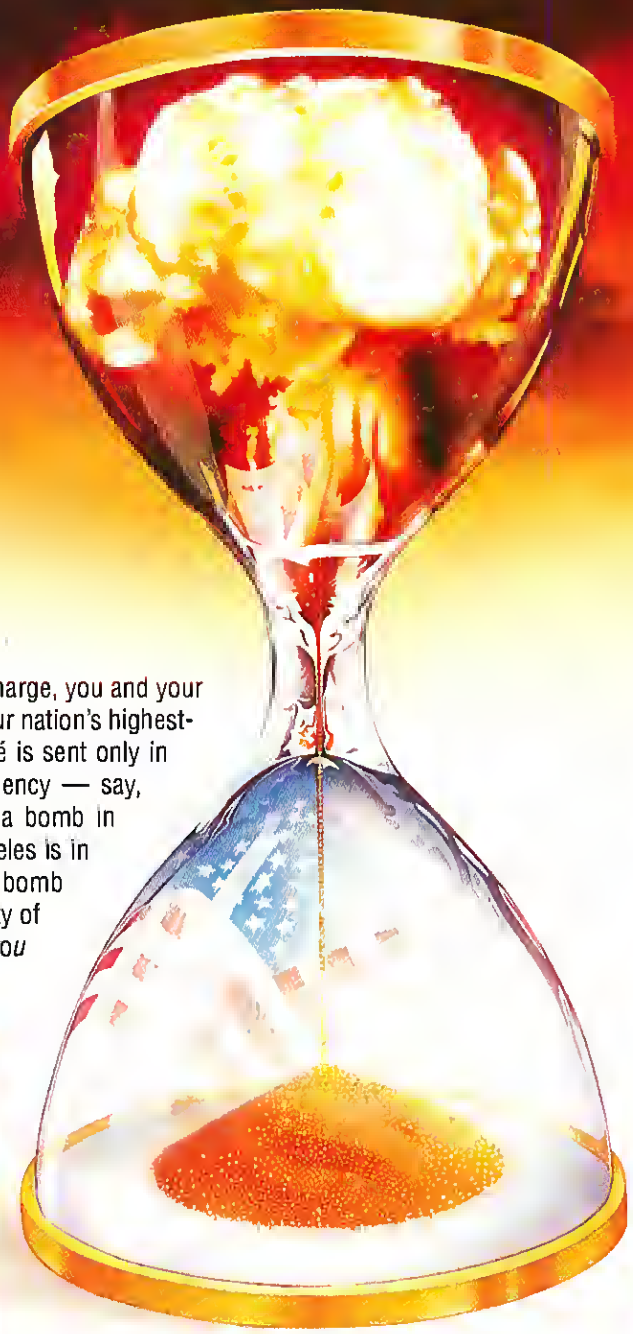

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Sartan Death

Legend's DEATH GATE Offers A Novel Approach To Adventure

by Johnny L. Wilson

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU LEFT A MOVIE THEATER AFTER ENJOYING A PARTICULARLY entertaining film based on a novel and heard someone complain, "I wish they'd stayed more faithful to the book!" or "I never pictured [fill in the star] as [fill in the character]." Fans of particular books are seldom satisfied with the adaptations of their favorite works. For every *The Princess Bride* and *Misery* that seem to catch the spirit of a book, there seem to be a dozen of *The Firm* or *Bonfire of the Vanities* that miss that spirit. The truth is that a film can only be "based on" a book. It is an adaptation to another medium, not a literal translation or visual photocopy. Screenwriters and directors have to make choices in order to make a film work. The same is true of computer games based on popular literature.

That's why I feel somewhat uncomfortable with Legend Entertainment's upcoming DEATH GATE. It is an excellent game with beautiful art, satisfying puzzles, and animated sequences far advanced over the company's previous games. However, fans of Weis and Hickman's *Death Gate* series may be somewhat disappointed with game designer Glen Dahlgren's portrayal of Haplo as an innocuous Dr. Who-type protagonist, nobly exploring the known worlds in his Dragon Ship (a pseudo-Tardis, transporting him through a dimensional gate instead of time) to locate the magical artifacts necessary to reunite the demi-worlds left over from the Sartan race's sundering of Earth. The *novels* cast a darker hue, a near malevolence toward existing cultures at worst and a moral ambiguity at best. The *game* offers little doubt that you are a hero, an agent of restoration. It hints of darker matters, but you are essentially a good guy who has been duped by Xar, your master.

In the novels, your lord and master wants you to foment dissension and rebellion so that he can conquer the weak kingdoms after the coming restoration. In the *game*, you fix the Kicksey-Winsey and drive off the oppressive elves on Arianus. This is directly antithetical to *Dragon Wing*, the first novel of the series, where Haplo strives to set up a potential war. In the novels, the rune magic works off sigla, blue and red tattoos on Haplo's hands. In the game, all magic is rune magic, but there is no need to hide your hands. In the novels, Haplo doesn't really care about other people (or mensch). In the game, you give

PLUMBER'S HELPER An elbow joint in the right place might put this grumpy dwarf in a better mood.

ARCANE MYSTERIES Unlocking the secrets of Rune magic is the key to many of the game's puzzles, as well as the final solution.

a doll to an elf child and rescue a dwarf child.

At times, the game appears to be a marvelous adaptation of the rich *Death Gate* universe; at other times, one wonders why there are none of the rich details that keep Weis and Hickman's readers coming back for more. One trades gems for coins rather than barls or stones (the currencies of Arianus and Pryan, respectively); a fiery coal is used to set something afire rather than the expected khadak (a magical elven firebrand); a traditional magical arrow is the solution to another puzzle rather than the wooden dragon-figure projectiles of the dracos; and you explore the three locations in the world of Pryan without encountering any of those treetop carriages that are described in *Elven Star* as something like the elven version of the Sky Tram at Disneyland. Nonetheless, when you're working from the well-constructed worlds of seven different novels, you have to make some hard choices and I don't envy the task.

BARBARIANS AT THE DEATH GATE?

A computer game has to stand on its own as a game. It is an adaptation to another medium and no one is going to be satisfied if it doesn't work in the new medium, no matter how slavishly it may conform to the original. A game has to work as a game. If you could solve all the puzzles by having read the novels, what would be the point of playing the game? The gamer is looking for new experiences in a familiar world, new encounters with familiar characters, and new challenges with familiar limitations and powers. Legend's DEATH GATE does a wonderful job of providing this.

For one, DEATH GATE succeeds in the realm of puzzles. The puzzles are more fair than those in COMPANIONS OF XANTH. Designer Dahlgren has honed his craft, and there is more logic to the puzzles and they fit better into their world than those in the weird, wacky world of Xanth. The game is particularly good at foreshadowing puzzle solutions with clues in books or conversations with other characters. Dahlgren should also be commended for having an interesting mix with regard to those puzzles that are solved by using physical objects and those that are solved by resorting to rune magic.

Conversation is another strong point in DEATH GATE. Gamers are offered lengthy lists of conversational gambits, and these lists are layered so that conversational threads can be covered as lightly or in as much depth as desired or possible. Then, one can return to the original subject list and start through a different maze of phrase. Subjects that have already been covered will disappear from the selection list in order to make it easier to navigate as you "talk" longer.

More than functional, some of the conversations are positively delightful. Zifnab, the daffy wizard from the second novel, is every bit as entertaining to talk to in the game as he was to "hear" in *Elven Star*. In addition, Dahlgren has used the disoriented nature of the walking dead in *Fire Sea*, Weis and Hickman's third novel in the series, to provide comic relief throughout the sequence on Abarrach.

Also, since the game is based upon a series of books, it's nice that Dahlgren has taken the time to place virtual books at various points in the game. Whether love poems, the journal of a merchant, a wizard's book about the Brotherhood, or a handbook for fixing one of the old Sarten machines, these books offer extra atmosphere and information to help the game world cohere, as well as vital clues for solving some of the tougher puzzles.

Naturally, rune magic is yet another strong point to the game. Dahlgren has obviously studied the appendices on rune magic in the original DEATH GATE novels, and the game blends runes together in a delightful visual effect where rune patterns are built upon basic runes. The handling in the game underscores those moments in the novels where a character says something like, "I can

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read the rune, but I'm not sure of its placement." The magic fits together with a grammar of its own.

However, whereas the Haplo of the novels has the bulk of his magic in place before the series of novels began, the Haplo of the game leaves the Nexus (location of the first scene) with only four basic spells: Identify (for determining the use of magical artifacts), Heat (for warming himself or objects temporarily), Cold (for cooling himself or objects temporarily), and Rune Transfer (so that, as he discovers the runes for various worlds, he can transfer the rune to the steering stone and move successfully through the Death Gate). Each time Haplo sees a spell performed or learns a new rune construct, a new spell is added to his magical inventory.

For those who like interesting animation, the cinematic opening credits are also quite impressive. This is **Legend**'s first, but not last, foray into 3-D STUDIO work, and the credits have a John Boorman feel to them. They are mysterious and magical, and they establish the game's pre-history.

Further, the pacing of the game is just right. Except for the first planet, Arianus, with its extended play experience at the Tower of the Brotherhood, you spend equivalent puzzle-solving time on each of four planets and return for the final endgame in the Labyrinth. The planets correspond to each of the four novels in the *Death Gate* cycle and the final sequence corresponds with a later novel, *Into The Labyrinth*. The set-up should not only inspire those who haven't read the novels to do so, but provides variety throughout the game.

UNTIDY WIZARD Sneaking into the wizard's quarters on board ship, you find a number of unusual magic objects.

INTO THE LABYRINTH

Again, I feel like I'm leaving the theater and saying, "I wish they'd been more true to the book." I *know* a game is supposed to be an adaptation and I *know* that DEATH GATE succeeds very admirably as a game, but I just wish Haplo had a little more anger in him, and more of the details of Weis and Hickman's world-building could have been interwoven into the game's text. I also know my preferences won't matter to most gamers. Like the tons of moviegoers who don't care how close a film is to the book as long as it works as a movie, most gamers are only going to care about DEATH GATE as a game. And DEATH GATE is an excellent game. It simply isn't a perfect incarnation of the novels.

BALM FOR MY PALM An unusual wall fresco seems to reach out—could those parched hands, trapped in stone, use some healing salve?

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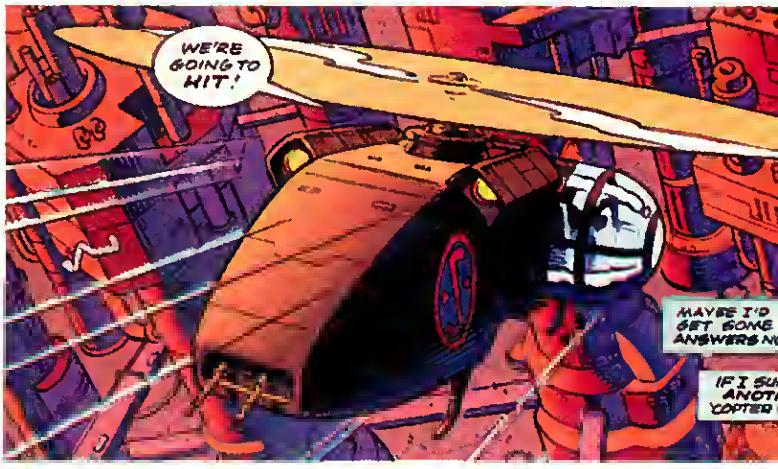

by Charles Ardai

IF YOU EVER HAVE A CHANCE TO TRY MASHED POTATOES LACED WITH GRATED TRUFFLES, YOU WILL TASTE THE culinary equivalent of BENEATH A STEEL SKY. At first, all you taste is potato—nothing spectacular since, however well prepared, a potato is just a potato. Just before you swallow, though, the mushroom tang sneaks in, sluicing over your taste buds and tickling the back of your throat. By your third mouthful, all you can taste is the incomparable, heady truffle musk.

It's the same story with BENEATH A STEEL SKY. (Well, not exactly, but you'll see what I mean.) The game opens with a slideshow presentation of comic book-style panels. These tell the tale of young Robert Overmann, adopted and reared by a band of Noble Savages after his mother's airplane crashes in a no-man's land called "The Gap," who one day is dragged back into Civilization, for Purposes Unknown, by an Agent of the State. If this sounds heavy-handed to you, you're right; it's heavy-handed and then some. Plus, the art is crude, the zooms and pans employed to mask the lack of animation are embarrassing, the sound effects are amateurish, the voice actors are poorly cast, the writing is pitifully trite ("He was only a robot," one character laments over a metal corpse, "but...I loved the little guy"), and the story being told is tired stuff.

To me, this shabby opening seemed virtually guaranteed to lead into a decidedly minor game, a boiler-room brew skimming superficially from *Brave New World*, *Mad Max*, and *The Prisoner* and mixing in the worst aspects of such recent dystopic computer games as **Merit Software**'s KRONOLOG and **Psygnosis**' INNOCENT UNTIL CAUGHT. Why? Because games are almost always at their best in their opening sequences and then go downhill from there. Downhill from the opening of BENEATH A STEEL SKY would be downhill indeed.

Happily, in this regard as in so many others, BENEATH A STEEL SKY is one of the exceptions. The body of the game improves so dramatically on the opening sequence that it's astonishing. The art is no better than in your average **Sierra** or **LucasArts** title—but that's plenty good. There is lots of animation, the music is catchy, and the voice-overs turn out to be really enjoyable. (They will be especially appealing to players who, like me, relish British accents.) Best of all, the writing becomes clever, edgy, and almost entirely devoid of pretension. No more mashed potatoes; once the opening is finished, STEEL SKY is truffles all the way.

BENEATH A STEEL SKY

Price: $ 69.95, CD-ROM only
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-25MHz or better, 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 1MB hard drive space, CD-ROM, mouse; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, AdLib Gold, and Roland sound cards
Protection: None
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
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NOBODY KNOWS THE TRUFFLES I'VE SEEN

Robert Overmann's first task upon fortuitously escaping from the clutches of the sinister Commander Reich is to flee the ecologically and morally polluted Union City, where the State rules every aspects of its citizens' lives and gun-toting security agents patrol every corridor. His second task would be to make his way either to a rival city-state called Hobart, where his mother was born, or to the Gap, where she died, leaving him to be raised by aborigines.

Somehow, however, he never gets to task number two. Though a handful of scenes take place in an imaginatively rendered version of cyberspace, the vast majority of the game consists of leading Robert through the buildings and passageways of Union City. And since Union City is a vertical city, with units stacked on top of one another in the fashion of some kind of mutant apartment complex, the feeling one gets is that one spends the entire game caught inside a single building.

Claustrophobic? Paranoia-inducing? Yes, to an extent—but also no. What enables you to spend so much time in as tightly constrained a space as STEEL SKY

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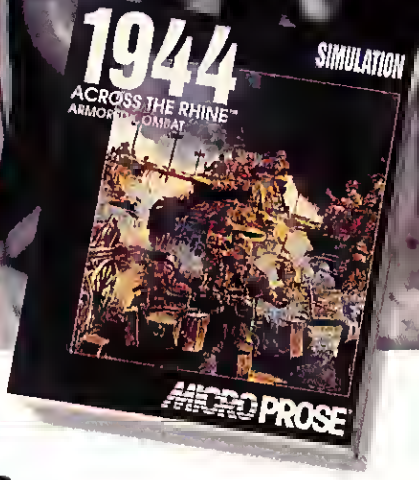

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YOU TALKING TO ME? Conversations with the inhabitants of Union City's close quarters are played out with full speech. The acting and dialogue are very British, and smashingly good.

occupies without going out of your mind is that the game is not nearly as bleak as its storyline might suggest. In fact, the game is extremely funny, dabbling from time to time in outright farce, risqué puns (one that sticks in my mind is a reference to "Onan the Barbarian"), and dead-on satire.

Sam and Norville, the two yawning functionaries who obstruct justice over at the Union City police station, could have been dreamt up by Jonathan Swift or Douglas Adams. The game's bevy of cockney engineers, all either dotty or deaf as a post, and the oversexed Widow Piermont all come from a lower tradition of British comedy; you could imagine any of them, including the widow, being played by Benny Hill. Even the robot sidekick with whom Robert trades insults throughout the game gets off some good lines.

Of course there are situations in the game that are quite serious and are therefore not adulterated with humor, but they are not the ones you might expect. When Robert walks into a surgeon's office and finds the doctor standing with one arm immersed to its bloody elbow in a patient's chest cavity, it's an occasion for still more comedy, though this time of a fairly grisly variety. (How many games can claim to have a scene in which the main character trades his testicles to an unscrupulous doctor in return for the doctor's carving a hole in his skull? Few, I'm sure. How many can claim to play this scene for laughs? Fewer still.)

Probably because it comes from the U.K., where people are less uptight about such things, STEEL SKY will strike American audiences as a daring game in a lot of ways: it skirts the margins of acceptable content, flirts with nudity, startles you with occasional snatches of dialogue that would get bleeped off a network broadcast, and generally has hints of having been intended for the pleasure of players well past adolescence. More games could use such hints. It was a joy playing a game that, for much of the time, was not talking down to me.

A DRAMATIC DROP The graphic novel style art has its moments, as in this scene of a precipitous drop with futurescape backdrop.

This is not to say that one can't pick holes in the game's design or execution or storytelling. It is fair to ask, for instance, why you are able to go around Union City posing questions that clearly indicate that you are the fugitive for whom Security is looking without anyone you talk to ever putting Security on your tail. (They can't *all* be closet insurgents.) On the technical side, one might ask why the audio track changes certain Briticisms to their American equivalents (i.e., "jumper" becomes "sweater") while the on-screen text remains unchanged. But these quibbles don't detract from the game in serious ways; they are no more than you would find to criticize in any game.

In the final assessment, though the game has strengths and flaws in both dimensions, what makes STEEL SKY so enjoyable is less its technical sophistication than its writing. The game not only builds suspense well with its basic get-out-of-the-city-before-it's-too-late plotline, but also cuts the tension with abundant comic relief and conjures up the texture of a good pulp novel through well-timed revelations about your character's true identity (he starts the game thinking his name is Foster and searching for the oft-mentioned, mysterious Overmann) and the world in which he is trapped. By the end of the game, Overmann has discovered a lot about himself in addition to having done the usual sorts of adventure game things (swinging across a chasm on a rope, getting past locked doors and uncooperative guards, solving numerous puzzles), and this makes the game feel that much richer than most I have played.

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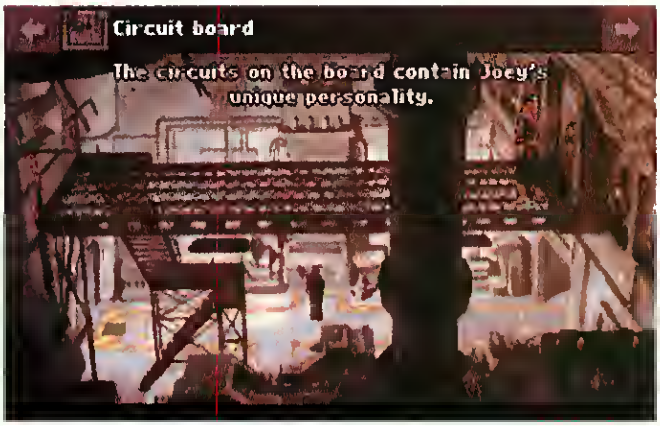

THE INCREDIBLE VANISHING INTERFACE The interface of STEEL SKY is what all interfaces should be—practically invisible. One click is all it takes to perform almost any action.

OVERMANN AND OUT

One matter which I haven't touched on at all so far is the game's control system, and there is a reason. It barely has one. Like other adventure games, STEEL SKY has you move your character around the screen with a series of mouse clicks; unlike most other games, though, it has no menu or icon bar listing actions the character can take. Here, clicking on another character starts a conversation, left-clicking on an object calls up a description of it, and right-clicking on an object (either in inventory or the main window) causes you to interact with it in some manner of the computer's choosing. That's it.

This stripped-down, bare bones control scheme has the advantage of utter transparency and the obvious disadvantage of reducing the scope of the player's options in any given situation. The game's puzzles aren't all easy, but heaven knows that limiting the number of possible actions a player can perform makes them considerably easier than they would otherwise be. A good gamer will plow through the game in something like four or five hours, an expert gamer in two or three.

Normally this would bother me; but normally we would be talking about a game that was much less fun than STEEL SKY is. Good writing can make up for almost any other shortcoming, and it certainly does here, where even the simple puzzles are deliciously eccentric and even the least interactive dialogues are extremely funny.

BENEATH A STEEL SKY is not a very tough nut to crack. On the other hand, at the risk of extending our food metaphor past the breaking point, I would say this: it is a tasty nut, scrumptious and meaty, and well worth the attention even of finicky game gourmets.

EDITORS SPEAK

BENEATH A STEEL SKY

RATING ✸✸✸✸

PROS Very funny, very British, and very well written.

CONS Not very hard, and as enjoyable as the story is, it's not terribly original.

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Circle Reader Service #223

ABANDON ALL HOPE
YE WHO ENTER HERE
Photo: Paul O'Connor
Dennis Hopper
Stephanie Seymour
Grace Jones
Geoffrey Holder
SINNED
Available in IBM PC CD-ROM and Mac CD ROM. ©1994 Take 2 Interactive Software, Inc.

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Circle Reader Service #184

Shipwrecked And Not A Starship In Sight

The Game Is Survival In ReadySoft's ROBINSON'S REQUIEM

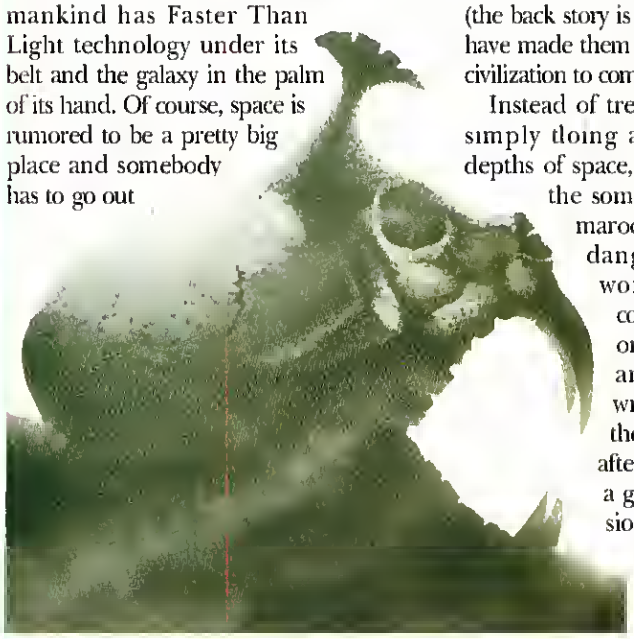
by Martin E. Cirulis

A SAVAGE, UNEXPLORED PLANET OPENS BELOW AS YOU TUMBLE OUT OF THE DIVING SCOUT SHIP. AS YOUR CHUTE snaps open and winds cease to scream past your head, strange animal cries reach your ears. Alien smells assault your nose, and the ground, packed with unfamiliar colors, rushes up to meet you. Two questions keep spinning through your mind while you try and relax to absorb the impact of landing: "How am I going to survive? And will I ever see the stars of home again?!"

This is the initial scene as you start **ReadySoft**'s new entry into the role-playing game market, ROBINSON'S REQUIEM (REQUIEM), and from it you would think that a world of possibilities await you. Unfortunately those far horizons are a lot closer than you think.

"AND ME WITHOUT MY PENKNIFE!"

REQUIEM is set in a far future where mankind has Faster Than Light technology under its belt and the galaxy in the palm of its hand. Of course, space is rumored to be a pretty big place and somebody has to go out and explore strange new worlds. These hardy individuals are nicknamed Robinsons (though one wonders about naming explorers after a guy who got himself stranded), and if a person manages to survive a tour of duty, they receive a big welcome home/retirement party called a Requiem, and thus, the title of our little piece comes in. In REQUIEM's reality, explorers aren't always rewarded with movie series, a girdle and a hairpiece; a somewhat darker bureaucracy has decided that some Robinsons have encountered organisms or ideas (the back story is a little vague on this) that have made them too dangerous for human civilization to come in contact with.

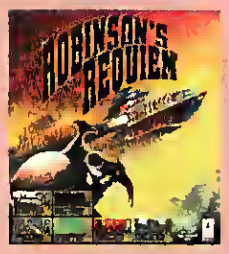


Instead of treating said Robinsons or simply doing away with them in the depths of space, the bureaucrats provide the somewhat dubious mercy of marooning them forever on a dangerous, undeveloped world where every step could be their last and the only immediate resources are their wits and the wreckage of their ship, if they can manage to find it after bailing out. Not exactly a gold watch and a fat pension, is it?

Upon landing, your first thoughts as a luckless Robinson are of your survival, both immediate and in the long term, but your first night's sleep adds a twist. Trapped on the same world is a woman with telepathic powers who knows of a way off this prison world but needs another person's help to pull it off. Well, if that doesn't sound like a quest for your hapless Robinson, then you are just in the wrong line of work.

ROBINSON'S REQUIEM

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-16Mhz, 4MB RAM, VGA graphics; 6.5MB hard drive space, Sound Blaster compatible
Protection: Documentation look-up
Designer: Silmarils
Publisher: Readysoft
Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada
(905) 475-4801



SHADES OF MACGUYVER

The perspective for REQUIEM is a first-person view window with a surrounding movement and activities interface driven from a mouse, a setup similar to the current rage in fantasy role-playing games, but hearkening back to the days of DUNGEON MASTER in its look and feel. A nice touch is a graphic inventory list which allows you to combine separate items into new tools and clothing; for instance, selecting reeds and feathers in combination will give you arrows, while selecting needle, thread and animal skins provides clothing. With the dearth of actual modern tools (you must fight for your first knife), a large part of your success involves figuring out what objects may be useful, and then how to build even more useful things from them. This is certainly a pleasant departure from the usual RPG routine of finding your tools pre-made and hidden in booby-trapped chests.

Another nice touch is the effort to try and model how an actual body might work and suffer under extreme conditions. No

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rugged barbarians wearing fur speedos in a blizzard and laughing it off here. If you get wet and the weather is cold, expect the flu. Don't take care of yourself properly in the desert areas and heatstroke or dehydration is a likely result. Even the much accepted idea that wounds are hit point losses and not much else is thrown out in REQUIEM; wounds can result in deadly infections if not treated, and poisonous bites can even lead to the joy of amputating one of your own limbs to survive. Life is serious here and death is easy, though sometimes far too easy.

In something that is becoming an unfortunate trend in science fiction computer games these days, detail is pushed toward reality, but getting the appropriate information to the player in a useful way seems to be getting left behind in the shuffle. While I fully understand the danger of dying from dehydration, I resent the fact that my only clue to this condition is a small bar graph on a sub-screen. Since any interface is nowhere near the information you actually get from your own body, some less subtle way of warning you is required. Condition subtitles running at the bottom of the action screen would have been very helpful here. Perhaps a "You feel incredibly thirsty!" blurb somewhere along the line would help instead of simply dying on the spot like an unlucky golfer on a stormy day, followed by the message, "Cause of death: Dehydration."

Sometimes it's the graphics package that fails to measure up to the level of reality the game designers are inflicting on you. Having to worry about fatal falls while poking around hills and cliffs might be realistic; but when all I can see on the screen is rough ground around me that gives no clue as to the severity of the drop coming, then detail becomes random death and the urge to explore is squashed by unrealistic cautions like, "Don't step anywhere that isn't grass." While I appreciate the attempt at full environmental immersion, the sophistication of the program fails to inform you enough to make intelligent choices.

KNEE DEEP IN IT The automap is just the thing for the murky swamps.

AND ALL THE WORLD... A DUNGEON?

While REQUIEM does try to make the player character realistic, it is in the portrayal of an alien world that this game starts to break down badly. The initial appeal of this game is the thought of actually having a world to explore and wander through. Freedom of movement is what should have made this product stand out from other first-person RPGs, at least the older ones. Unfortunately the freedom here is an illusion, and your character is hemmed in only slightly less than if they were hacking through a dungeon. Instead of walls, you're stopped by terrain. While a 20 foot cliff is a reasonable barrier, I found it extremely frustrating that my intrepid explorer was incapable of climbing 20 degree inclines and was stopped dead by four foot ridges of rock, forcing me to travel literally miles to get around these things. The illusion of a world to explore is permanently shattered as soon as you try to leave the beaten path.

Even the grand concept of terrain is abstracted badly, with the territory to explore divided up into a number of discrete zones, usually separated by an underground zone of tunnels. As another blow to the suspension of disbelief, these zones couldn't be more diverse if you were sharing an artificial world with a reborn Spock. While I don't have too much trouble with going from plains to swamp, the transition from jungle to high desert within a few miles of caves was a little silly. And, while the detrimental effects of these environments is well thought out, the benefits have been completely ignored, creating such annoying things as swamps with no source of water and no ways for your Robinson to even dig for it.

SNACK TIME FOR KITTY Robinson will soon come to find that he is not top dog on the food chain. This tiger-thingy will have his lunch if he doesn't fly or fight.

Finally, this world is just not exotic enough. The menacing tiger-like animal looks pretty much like a tiger. The vegetables look pretty much like giant cabbages. The killer eagle-thing looks...well, you get the idea. Even the actual monsters are uninspired, 50s drive-in fare with far more interesting things to be seen in any D&D inspired hole in the ground. REQUIEM is from the SF school where dinosaurs are the scariest things in the universe and everything tastes pretty much like chicken.

It's coming.

CHRISTMAS OF '94.

Interplay

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Circle Reader Service #175

PLANETFALLS AND FALLING SHORT

While the premise for REQUIEM is a good one, the actual story and execution are full of nagging flaws and annoying dialogue. Some of the actual writing seems flawed to the point that I suspect this game was originally French and then translated into English, but it could be overlooked if the story was more solidly grounded in the standards of this quarter of the 20th century. The lack of choice when it comes to interactions gives you little alternative but to follow along with poorly thought out ideas. After the first few encounters with other beings you begin to realize that you are not only trapped on another world, but also trapped in the ultimate libertarian fantasy, where it's every being for themselves and no consequences for the strong. One of your first acts of survival is to beat a hostile fellow Robinson to death and take his stuff—not exactly a brave new world.

Even the fair maiden to be rescued begins to come off as some sort of harpy/trollop combination that would raise the hackles on the most incorrect male gamer, never mind their female counterparts. Of course, the fact that you have no choice in the sex of your character in this game gives a strong clue as to the assumptions the programmers have made even before you reach the references to "skirt-chasing" and encounter the tribe of savage women called "Fridays."

ROBINSON'S REQUIEM is a good try at a subject that has been woefully ignored in gaming so far: first-person role-playing in universes based on Science instead of Fantasy. Had it come out in the era of DUNGEON MASTER, instead of one where CRPGs have achieved the level of detail of BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR or ARENA, this product perhaps would have found a following in spite of its flaws. But by today's standards it is probably only suitable for newcomers, or the dedicated gamer who must conquer every RPG world in existence. As it is, I'm afraid I can only wish Robinson better luck next world.

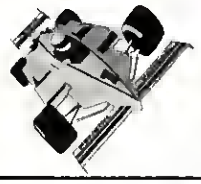
DEATH BECOMES HIM Your Robinson will see this screen a few too many times. Death comes quickly in this game, whether from starvation, dehydration, infection or casual exploration.

EDITORS SPEAK

ROBINSON'S REQUIEM

RATING ✸✸

PROS A refreshing and novel approach to the role-playing game.
CONS The writing is sub-par and the world has the fictional consistency of tapioca pudding. A lot of holes in the purported canvas of reality.



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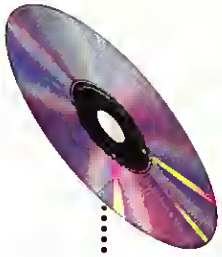

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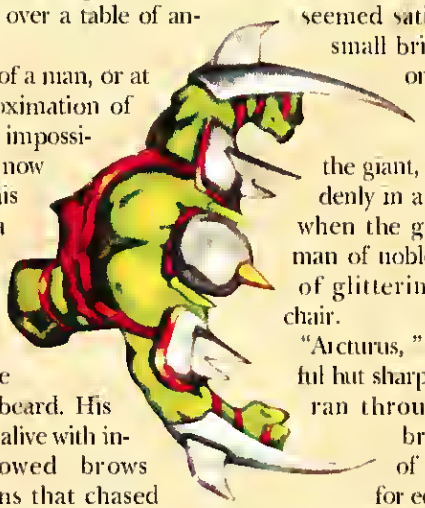
Dark Debates

Conversations In Combat By Leaders of DARK LEGIONS

by Martin E. Cirulis

THE WIND BLASTED PAST A LONE, CRACKED TOWER, HIGHEST TURRET OF A SMALL CASTLE NESTLED DEEP in the granite peaks which enclosed the broken plain of Tahr Carog. Weird cries scratched on stone, trying to find a way in, each more piercing and full of despair than the last; but whether they were mere creations of the wind or actual lost souls carried from the nearby plain none could, or would, say. A steady light shone out against the dark, spilling from a rough window spelled with a barrier both stronger and clearer than glass. Inside a lone figure could be seen, hunched low over a table of ancient blood-oak.



This was a giant of a man, or at least a close approximation of one, his shoulders impossibly broad but bent now by age and effort, his head topped by a great brown mane, streaked with hard-won silver, that flowed in an unkempt tumble to meet his black beard. His face was bestial but alive with intelligence; furrowed brows capped expressions that chased lightning-fast thoughts to the music of dark mutterings. In his huge hands, gnarled and scarred like those of a laborer or blacksmith but sculpted by an older, darker task, he shuffled a deck of ornate cards. Each one bore the painting of some subtle or terrifying figure on one side, cryptic runes on the other.

The man studied them for a moment longer and then tossed them down on the table where they spread into a perfect arc. He glanced into the corner of the room to the hourglass, its sand trickling down from one barrel-sized crystal globe to another. It was nearly time for the meeting to take place. One would be early, trying to catch any traps before they were set. The other would be carefully late to let another trip any surprises first. A brilliant flash at the window confirmed his prediction and he allowed the rough crack of a smile to crease his face. His primary strength lay in knowing his foes very well, and though they were here tonight as peers rather than adversaries, he still knew them better, probably, than they did themselves.

The burst of light was neither transitory nor stationary, and as the old man sat it flashed around the room, from surface to surface, corner to corner, as if it were trained lightning sniffing for some dust-mote fox. After a few seconds the light seemed satisfied and hovered as a small bright sphere over a chair on the opposite side of the table. As if in response to a small nod from the giant, the globe expanded suddenly in a great flare of white, and when the glare had died, a young man of noble features clad in armor of glittering scale had taken the chair.

"Arcturus," he said in a voice youthful but sharp as steel. A slight tension ran through the tone, as if the bright youth were unsure of the posture appropriate for equals.

"Gwynf," the owner of the Tower growled in return.

"I decide to answer your invitation."

"So I see."

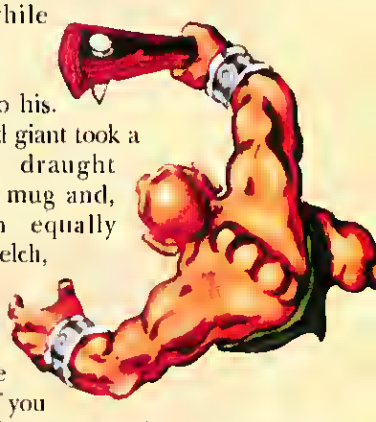
They were interrupted by a sound from far below, echoing up through the stairwell. Unlike the distant wind this was a sharp and precise sound designed to strike fear in the heart of any leader. It was the sound of a thousand booted feet, marching in perfect unison, to hell or glory; it grew in strength and power as something climbed the stairs until Gwynf, his senses battered by the unceasing pounding of order, leapt to his feet and made to raise his defenses, a liquid, silver dagger in each weaving hand. The wave of a massive paw, impossibly swift from a man of Arcturus' size and age, convinced the young Warlord to hold his seat.

The thunder rose to a shattering crescendo, broke and died away on a single impact as a third man entered from the stairwell arch, alone. He took in the scene with a single, piercing glance and then, satisfied, removed his plumed helm to reveal a chiseled middle-aged face. Placing the helm under his arm, he approached the table, his arm extended towards the Tower's owner. Arcturus rose ponderously with another smile, this one somewhat rueful, and extended his own arm clasping the other man's forearm as his own was grasped.

"General MerCorum. It is good to see you still alive."

"At least until you can do the deed yourself, eh?" laughed the General as he gave one, precise shake of his arm and then broke the contact.

Arcturus made some noise that might have been favorably considered a chuckle and indicated a third chair at the table. With another gesture three huge mugs of ale appeared on the table, crackling with cold and fogging the polished surface underneath. The General grinned, made a perfect half bow to his host and took his seat while Arcturus thudded down into his.



The old giant took a healthy draught from his mug and, after an equally healthy belch, began to speak. "I am sure the two of you are acquainted. The plains of Tahr Carog that make blood brothers of us all." The other two exchanged brief nods. "First, I would like to thank you both for taking the time from your busy preparations to visit an old man in his lonely—"

Your clues are hidden in the whispers of floating apparitions. Eerie piano music could be a sign of danger. Warnings come to you through strange murmurs. So, if you want to unravel Old Man Stauf's bizarre secrets, keep your eyes peeled, your

One by one the guests arrive. Then the party really starts howling.

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"Your courier said something about a discussion of strategy and tactics," interrupted Gwynf, impatience getting the best of him as he eyed the contents of his mug uncertainly. "But why should I share my thoughts with the two of you? Surely I will be fielding an army against you sooner or later."

General MerCorum scowled at him. "Don't treat our host as if he were a fool, boy. He has been fighting for the prize since before your Grandfather knew there was more to women than teasing and pigtails."

Arcturus raised a massive paw to forestall an argument. "Again, thank you, General. Yes, my young friend I am well aware we will meet in combat someday, should the Gods grant we live that long, but I also know that the two of you have recently lost large armies on the plain over the short."

"I thought much the same," added the General.

Gwynf appeared to think it over as candlelight flickered into stars across his scale armor. "Very well," he said finally, with a young man's desire to make every obvious choice seem like a grave decision on his part. "Let us talk, though I'm afraid the two of you have been at this war so long there is probably nothing a relative newcomer like I can add you have not considered."

Arcturus laughed and allowed no quarter. "No, my little friend, it would serve little for you to sit silently and only learn; fresh insights are always useful to jaded old soldiers such as we." He took another long swallow from the ever-flowing Stein. "Now let us begin by discussing the various beings available to us in our quest for ultimate power." And with that he grabbed a card from the table, seemingly at random, and flipped it high in the air above the table.

"Of course we all know it is foolish to keep your Conjurer/Templar core deep in your backfield."

The card soon reached the arc of its flight, stopped and then began to change until it became the hand-sized figure of a man clad only in a breechcloth and helmet. Sweat seemed to be dripping from the tiny figure and its sword waved menacingly at some unseen enemy.

"The **Berserker**, my friends. Simple and cheap cannon fodder? Or do these poor, committed beings have some subtler uses?"

Gwynf laughed. "Only a fool uses them simply as fodder; money is money. I find they should be used for destroying crippled or wounded monsters. They are last enough to get in that single blow that can finish off even a demon."

"Good, good," rumbled Arcturus. "I agree their speed should be used to the best effect, even supplying one with the odd ring of protection is an efficient surprise. It gives them the ability to survive the first blow, be it luck or skill."

The General frowned, "You have hit on their strength and weakness in the same breath. If you are good at manipulating your troops in single combat then the Berserker is a useful tool, but if your skills in puppeteering are low then your money is much better spent elsewhere. They will only die like fools with no return except to feed your opponent's Vampire."

"Interesting," said Arcturus as the berserker collapsed back into a card and fluttered to the table top. A flick of the wrist and another card flipped up to take its place. The beat of tiny leather wings could be made out and the other two men visibley recoiled from the twisted little figure. Even as a simple image, it radiated unholy hunger. Arcturus seemed to find it highly amusing. "And speaking of our distinguished Captains of the Undead, what about **Vampires**?"

"Powerful, but the same limitations as Berserkers," offered the General, almost too quickly. "If you lack the proper puppetry skills they are a very expensive target."

Gwynf nodded. "I must agree, though all armies must have at least two initially. In combat you must be careful to fire their paralyzing blast only in single, careful shots. There is no point hypnotizing your foes if you lack the endurance to drain them dry—a mistake I have made too many times myself."

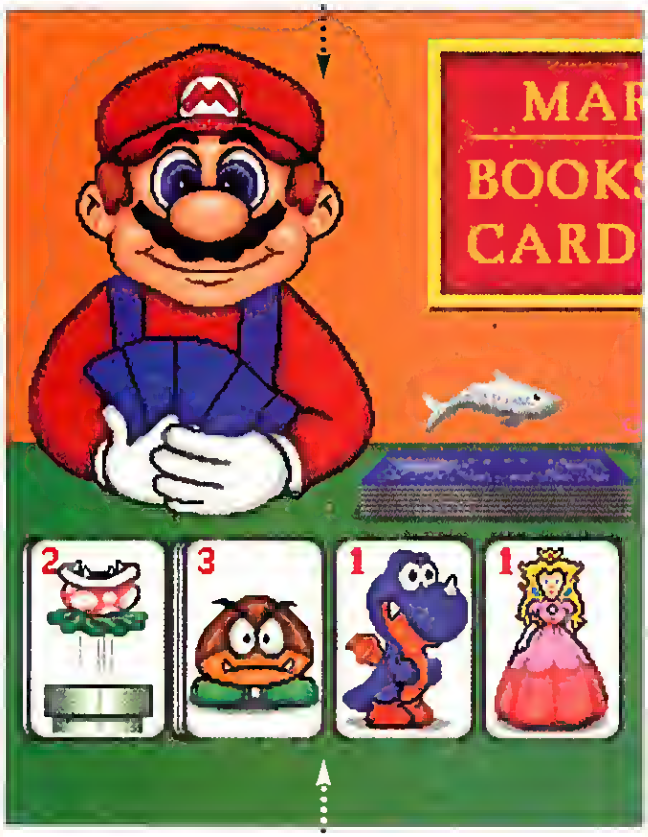
"But assuming you posses the skills," said Arcturus thoughtfully, "that problem is easily defeated by a ring of stamina, while a ring of speed can give them unexpected range and the power to strike far behind your opponent's defensive line. An opponent who thinks he is sure of the natural abilities of the monsters facing him is especially vulnerable. Your initial force of Vampires should always hold at least one of these rings each; otherwise they may indeed prove to be nothing but expensive targets. And a Vampire should always race in, try and subvert three or four quick victims and then retreat to gain strength from his zombies."

"Yes, yes," grumbled the General. "Too bad I learned that trick only after you flew over my line of Elementals and turned my conjurers into slaves when we fought in the Month of the Viper."

and that your personal finances will not allow another to be purchased for many months." The other two looked angry at this observation but neither saw fit to deny it. "Most unfortunately, I find myself in the same condition."

"Yes," said Gwynf, "I think I remember the Lady Minos crowing that she nearly had your skin in front of her fireplace."

Arcturus gripped the arm of his chair until the oak groaned in protest but his crooked smile remained in place. "Yes. Be that as it may, we all find ourselves in a position of forced reflection. I thought it might be wise to take advantage of the situation to discuss the great game to our mutual benefit. By the time any of us fight again, a host of new lessons will have made this conversation obsolete; so, my friends, we have nothing really to lose in the long run and everything to gain



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A few more mutterings and the Vampire fell to be replaced by malevolent quicksilver, shifting easily from form to form. "Now these beasts," offered Arcturus, "I have always considered to be expensive baubles, novelties on the battlefield but hard to find a real use for. Of course, I may have overlooked some application of the **Shape Shifter**."

Gwynf shrugged. "Other than the obvious move—lure a monster close disguised as a seer and then attack as a Demon—I haven't been able to divine any use for them either."

"I wouldn't have believed it," laughed General MerCorum. "Both the old and the young making the same mistake! The plains of Tahr Carog are not won solely at the moment of combat; what units you choose versus your opponent is crucial. If you know your foe well, this is not a problem, but if you are fighting a new enemy or suspect a sudden change of tactics, then a half-dozen Shape Shifters give you the ultimate flexibility." He smiled at the surprised looks from the others.

Arcturus obviously didn't care for comeuppance but acknowledged the point. The skulking **Thief** replaced the shifting monster.

"Bah, a trap remover not fit for combat." MerCorum shook his head in disgust and took another drink.

"Agreed," said Arcturus. "They are path-clearing tools; the expense of one or two rings can make them barely competent. The perfect Vampire-bait if you are not careful."

"Hah!" shouted Gwynf, perhaps not noticing the stein in front of him had been refilling itself. "The old are so conservative. The Thief is wonderfully fast already and the ring to give him is protection! If you are careful to fight only on open ground they make excellent skirmish troops for a skilled commander." He sobered a bit and nodded to Arcturus. "Of course, they should run away from Vampires as far and as quickly as possible."

Now a blazing **Fire Elemental** hovered above them, squeaking and crackling in its tiny voice.

"A fine standard troop for any commander," stated the General. "All armies must have at least a pair on either wing of the battlefield to hunt down Vampires. They leave no corpse behind to become a zombie if the attack fails—and any Vampire coming close enough to drain their essence will receive at least one Mini-Nova attack if their commander is disciplined enough not to drain their stamina with hasty fireballs."

"Yes, as many of your original Fire Elementals as possible should carry rings of stamina; as their slow recharge rate often dooms them in combat." Gwynf smirked at their host. "And a speed ring will help them to defeat any augmented vampires they may encounter."

"That may be, my young friend, but both of you have failed to mention an interesting use for the conjured form of Fire Elemental. Apart from their ability to shore up any defensive line quickly, they are fairly cheap to conjure; if you have a large group of Conjurers who are unpressed for a moment, these lesser Elementals make excellent bombs. Their Nova attacks are weak usually, but two or three going off in quick succession can devastate all but the most powerful groups of attackers." Arcturus took another drink as if to punctuate the statement.

The general looked at him curiously. "Isn't that rather...flamboyant strategy for one as experienced as yourself, Arcturus?"

Gwynf grinned, warming either to the conversation or the ale or more likely both. "Leave him. I think it's a very interesting idea. Let's get on to another." But his pleasure was cut short by the next figure taking its place above them. "Oh, not **Wizards**! They are feeble in battle, and move so slow! The war for Power isn't a game for old men!" Suddenly he realized to whom he was speaking and pulled up the reins on his outburst. "Uhhm, no offense, Arcturus," he finished sheepishly.

"None taken," muttered the giant across the table, but there was no reassuring smile under the beard.

"The lad is right in this though, Arcturus," said MerCorum. "The Wizard's life force is too low for their freezing ability to be useful for more than a couple of rounds. I only employ them as guards around any water holes in my backfield. They can serve to freeze an intruding Water Elemental solid until help arrives or vulnerable personnel can move away."

"I have used them thus as well, but I think old men can serve in another way as well." Arcturus' glare forced Gwynf to study his ale intently. "If you can afford it, any offensive grouping should contain one or two Wizards whose job is to freeze any initial counter-attack the enemy may launch. With two or three crucial guards frozen into place, an attack group can push through to devastate vulnerable magic users."

Cold magic folded the Wizard back into two dimensions while Arcturus tossed up four more cards all at once, four robed figures rotating solemnly in space.

"Now let us discuss the rest of the Wizard's magic-using compatriots," said Arcturus, "the **Conjurer**, the **Templar**, the **Illusionists** and the **Seers**. All powerful strategic assets and deadly liabilities in personal combat. Of course we all know it is foolish to keep your Conjurer/Templar core deep in your backfield."

"And why do we know that again?" asked the General dryly.

"Because what use is a conjured soldier if he is nearly dead by the time he reaches the front? Conjurers are valuable, but fear of losing them shouldn't drive a commander to neutralize their strength."

"Of course, I had forgotten. I am fond of having one or two Templars roving close to the front. They usually die horribly, but by the time that has occurred they have returned one or two key

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monsters to fighting health."

"I don't care for those Illusionists myself," pointed out Gwynf. "I mean, other than the fact they are little weasels to deal with, I find they are nearly useless in the face of enemy Seers. I usually only hire one for my armies and save her strength until I eliminate my foe's Seers on one flank or another—and even then the only piece worth creating is a fire or water elemental that can get a few lucky shots in before dissolving."

"Ah yes," said Arcturus. "The vulnerable, but oh-so-useful Seers. Best to hire one or two extra and assign them some kind of fast bodyguard when they work close to the front."

"Ahhh," grumbled MerCorum. "By the time you finish assigning bodyguards to these soft fools you haven't any army left to fight with."

"True, true, but all part of the hard choices of a commander, my friend." Arcturus pulled down the four and replaced them with two dark shadows; the **Wraith** and the **Phantom**.

"Speaking of soldiers I don't like to hire," chuckled Gwynf.

Arcturus laughed. "You can't succeed in this crusade if you're squeamish, pup."

"I'm not! I just expect to do business in a hiring hall, not in a graveyard at midnight with a necromancer."

"Perhaps, but what matters is how they fight."

"And the answer to that," interrupted the General, "is not very well. They are difficult to use and expensive to hire, but of the two I prefer the Wraith. I can use one as a stationary guard, teleporting only once to the attack and hopefully coming away with more life than it went in with."

Arcturus shook his head, "You are ignoring the fact that when the Gods smile, your Phantom is visible to you and not your opponent in single combat. It is extremely deadly."

"Yes, yes, but if you are not on good terms with the dark god, Mo-Dem, those times are rare indeed."

"Too true! But enough of these rotters and on to the backbone of any successful army, the nigh unstoppable **Demon**." The miniature figure fairly tore its way from the card, spitting fire and swinging its four deadly limbs as if even this tiny representation of its kind were enough to defeat the three commanders.

"I only employ Wizards as guards around any water holes in my backfield. They can serve to freeze solid an intruding Water Elemental until help arrives."

None of them could resist smiling in pleasure at its unabashed ferocity.

"The perfect warrior for Tahr Carog and for novice commanders. No subtlety here, just raw power. Drive straight in and claw any opponent to shred," said General MerCorum almost wistfully. "If you can afford it, they should travel in threes; one scream from each will cripple an entire section of the enemy line."

Gwynf nodded. "And in combat, rely on their claws, they are faster and more efficient than the breath. Save the fire for the foolish opponent who cowers behind obstacles. These beasts are the premier Vampire killers."

"But even they are vulnerable," cautioned Arcturus, "especially to the great wave of the Water Elementals. And it is a short-sighted commander who thinks one or two of these great beats can hold an entire flank by themselves."

They reluctantly agreed as a new subject appeared, a snorting green monstrosity that would be comical if it weren't for the gleaming, razor-sharp cesti on either arm. "Ah, our lucid soldiers, the **Orcs**. Now, I find these fine beings to be the embodiment of the term cannon fodder. One good charge and they have earned their investment and a quick death. Any contrary thoughts, gentlemen?"

"None." said Gwynf. "Charge and don't bother to dodge. If you want to get fancy try and herd an opponent into a corner first."

"Charge it is." concluded General MerCorum. "Just avoid the damn Vampires."

Arcturus grinned, a sight not altogether comforting given the number of sharp teeth revealed. The Orc figure gave up its brief moment in the spotlight with nary a struggle and the sounds of an angry sea presaged the arrival of the next soldier, the **Water Elemental**.

"Now here is another good, all-purpose warrior for the plain," barked the general. "He shoots fast, regenerates quickly and his charge makes the Orc look pathetic. Unfortunately the ability to travel from one body of water is over-rated for the health price the elemental must pay. I find a teleport of any real value leaves them too weak to be anything more than an annoyance."

"Now it's you who limits his options!" said Gwynf, once again letting his voice rise too loud for the small chamber. "Here's a trick to consider. First you augment a single Water Elemental with enough rings to make him truly devastating: at least one Life, Rejuvenation and Speed. Then teleport it into your enemy's backfield along with three or four conjured Elementals to provide distrac-

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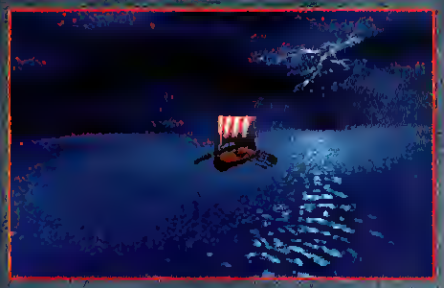

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tion and draw the fire from any of those annoying Wizards. Once the dust settles you have a very powerful assassin deep in your opponent's lines, while they mistake it for a simple elemental teetering on the edge of exhaustion. If nothing else, you will easily kill the first couple of water Elementals that rush in to finish you off."

The General rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You may have something there after all, pup. I can see why the oddsmakers have noticed you."

Gwynf accepted the praise as the final card took its place in the center of attention. For a moment it appeared to be only a stone but then, with a groan, it unfolded into a hulking brute and his beloved club.

"And the last of our happy brood, the ever-cheerful **Troll**. Now here is a creature rife with possibilities."

"Now I know you are toying with us, Arcturus!" bellowed the General. "These plodding beasts are just a poor man's Demon. They need a ring of speed just to be minimally useful."

"I don't know if I would say so much against them. In rock form they make very deadly roadblocks when the terrain provides a natural choke point for walking creatures. I just rarely conjure them, as they tend to be almost dead by the time they reach the front."

At this, Arcturus slammed his mug down on the table a trifle too loudly, and presented his view of the beast's potential. "We all have our favorite troops to modify, my friends, and the Troll is mine. A ring of speed or two makes them as fast as any other given beast; a ring of power gives them the strength of a demon, and they recover endurance far faster, with their blows landing more quickly. And, for those who care to notice these things, their clubs have a slightly longer reach than a Demon's claws in combat. A skilled puppet master can use this advantage to land one or two critical blows on the demon before his opponent can react to the danger and close that extra half step. By that time it is too late for the Demon to make up the difference and the strongest warrior of the plains falls to a "poor man's" imitation."

"A ring of speed can give Vampires an unexpected range, and the power to strike far behind your opponent's defensive line."

The General objected and the debate raged good-naturedly for the rest of the night turning eventually to the recital of one old war story after another. By the time ruddy sunlight touched the shattered cliffs, the three commanders had exhausted their wisdom and opinions but agreed they would meet again someday, perhaps in another decade or so when all three found themselves down on their luck again. Then they would argue over such things as traps or the best mix of creatures. Dawn ended the spell of replenishment on their steins and, somewhat shakily, the two commanders left the Tower the way they had come, leaving Arcturus to stare at the huge timepiece, at the pile of sand mounded in the lower sphere.

The old commander knew his two guests were much closer to recovery than they had admitted; both would probably field armies by the next blood moon, eager to put their new insights into practice. Arcturus allowed himself a thunderous laugh and, at the wave of his hand, the sand lost its gray illusory hue and the massive pile of gold dust was revealed. Yes, they would be ready soon; but he would field a new army by the end of the day, and perhaps the secrets he had learned this night would give him the ultimate victory they had all been chasing for so long.

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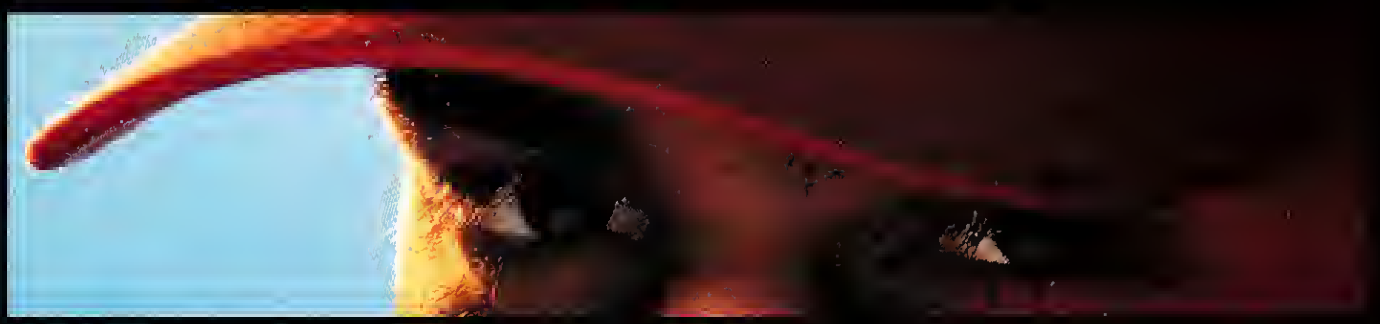

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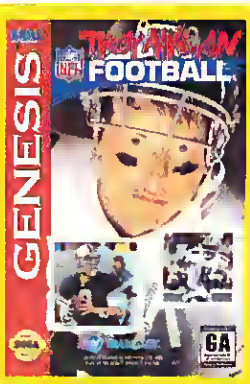

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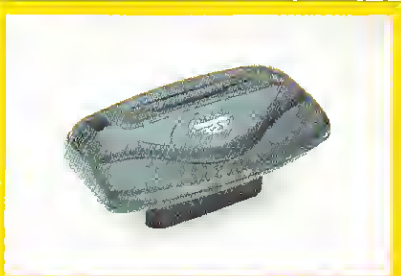

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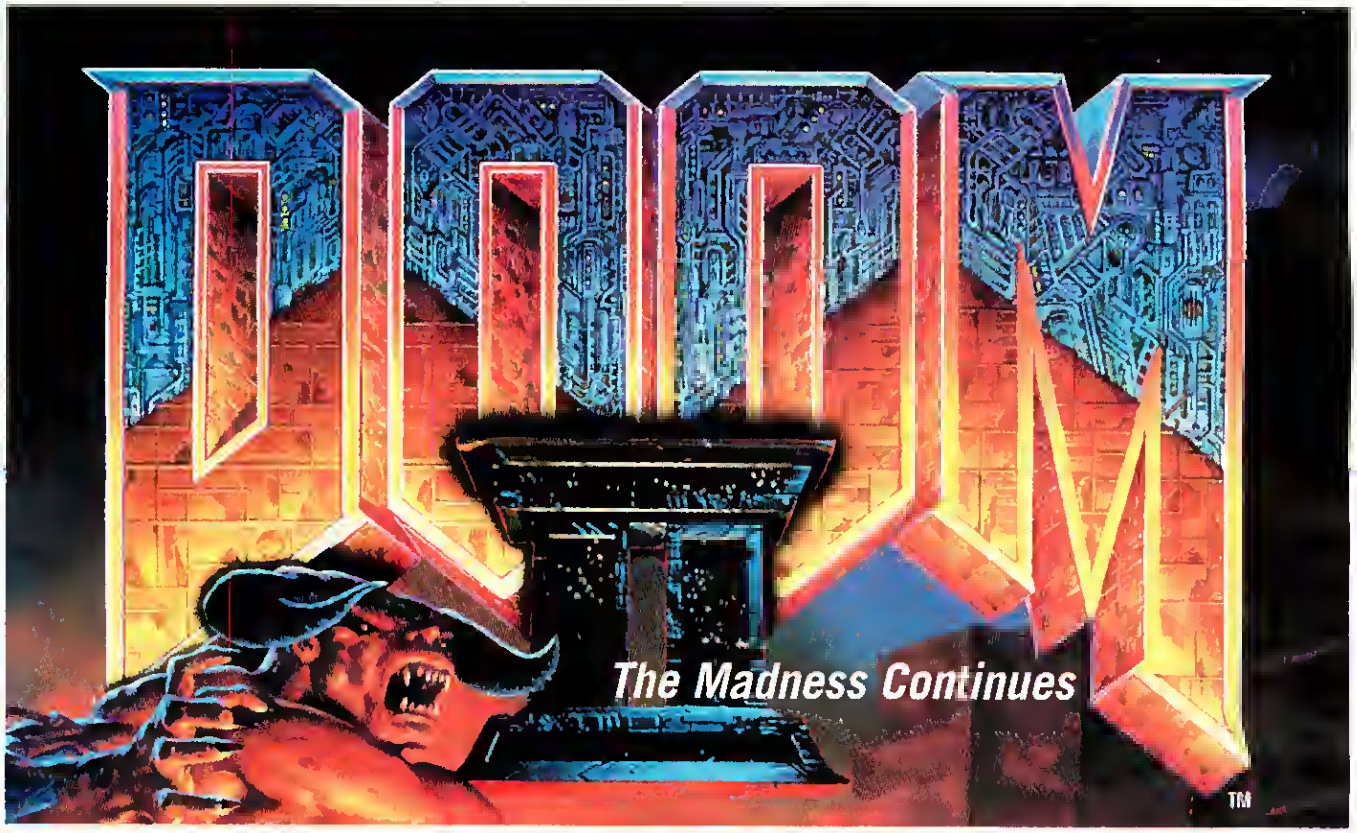

by Chris Lombardi

DOOM, DOOM, DOOM, DOOM. WHEN SUNG TO THE TUNE OF BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH, THE SOUND can be music to many gamers' ears. To others, it can irk like an advertising jingle that refuses to leave the brain. Whether sweet or sour, there's little doubt that the DOOM tune is one of the most oft-hummed ditties of '94.

Like any extremely popular phenomenon, DOOM has garnered no small number of detractors. Beyond those who complain that it's too violent for society's good, people criticize DOOM for being overly-simplistic in gameplay, for being essentially a 90s version of Pac-Man. **id Software**'s level designer Sandy Peterson freely admits that DOOM is little more than a souped up version of Whack-a-Mole, the arcade attraction in which rodents pop out of holes and the player whacks 'em down with a mallet as fast as they spring back.

To most DOOM fans, the response to these criticisms is "What's your point?!" If I might presume to translate, they're saying, "Yes, DOOM is simplistic in the nuts and bolts of its gameplay...but it's one hell of an *experience*!" DOOM's beauty is not in rich character interaction, resource management, or realistic physical modeling; DOOM's beauty is in the frantic action and sinister atmosphere of its world. The gritty, gory, graphics, the lighting effects, the sounds all combine to create an atmosphere that can actually elicit fear, or at least a few startled jumps of surprise. Think about it: a game that elicits an emotional response (albeit a low level, base-of-the-brain response). When was the last time you were brought to tears by the sad song of an NPC in a role-playing game? (Even an NPC voice-acted by a well-paid Hollywood star?) Were you ever truly hurt when a leader broke a truce and back-stabbed you in CIVILIZATION? (Even if it was Abraham Lincoln?) Have you ever given an adrenaline-fueled war cry as you moved your stack of 8-6-6 Panzers against a well-defended Russian hex?

I know most of us don't play computer games to be emotionally moved (probably because we've been conditioned to think that games aren't capable of it). But when a rare game comes along that can move us—be it to tears or to terror—it's no surprise when gamers go friggin' bananas.

So we had DOOM, a game that occasionally startled us and enabled us to safely vent repressed violent urges. Now, as of October 10th, we have DOOM 2, which is more—much, much more—of the same. More Doom, more gloom, more room in which to kill or be killed. DOOM II, a set of 30 new levels,

DOOM II

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 4 MB RAM (486 with 8MB RAM strongly recommended), VGA graphics, CD-ROM; supports most major sound cards; floppy disk version is also available. CD version includes shareware version of the original DOOM.
# of Players: 1-4 (modem and network play)
Protection: None
Designers: id Software
Publisher: GT Interactive
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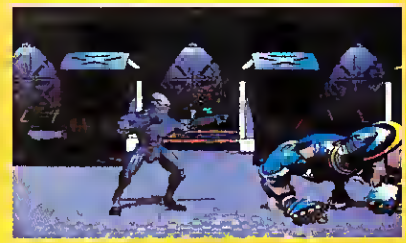

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new monsters, new wall textures, and new music has been released as a retail product by id via **GT Interactive**.

Now, before we get into details, we should probably clear up some misconceptions that have been bandied about in Doomish conversations. From what I've heard through the ether, some people may be disappointed with DOOM II. The hype surrounding the game may have built it up to be more than it actually is. DOOM II is not the next action game revolution; it is not a brand new engine that will startle players with its innovations; it is not what DOOM was to WOLFENSTEIN 3D. It is simply more DOOM. The innovations are being saved for id's next project—the mysterious QUAKE. What can you expect from DOOM II? New creatures to battle, one new weapon (the double barrel, double your death-dealing pleasure shotgun), some extremely devious level layouts, and slightly higher system requirements.

The background story of DOOM II begins when.... Nah, let's not bother. id Software didn't waste much time writing a story, so I'm not going to waste ink on the flimsy piece of work they did create. Know this: you are still a space marine, there are still legions of hell spawn to slaughter, and rather than battling through a military base and a demonic fortress, you'll be battling through a military base, an urban cityscape, and a demonic, trans-dimensional something or other.

As for the design of the levels, here is where id spent some time. Level designers Sandy Peterson and John Romero were just warming up when they designed the levels of the original DOOM. In DOOM II, they pull out the stops and every trick in the book. There are more cleverly hidden and fiendishly devised traps in the 30 levels of DOOM II than a ream of Hollywood contracts. When you flip a switch at the end of a dead-end hallway and hear a door open behind you, you can bet your brimstone-baked bottom that a Baron of Hell will be smiling at you when you turn around. When you see a fabulous weapon sitting out in the open air, begging you to snatch it up, you can be as sure as Satan's suntan that it's NOT going to be that easy. When you see a level composed of razor-thin, elevated walkways bordered by that noxious green goo, you'll have a few choice words to scream in the direction of id Software's Texas office. Is it frustrating? Yes. Do I keep replaying the levels until I get them right? Yes. Why? Dunno. That's a question for greater minds than mine.

The wizards of id have also spent some time devising new creatures—new moles to whack. The starting line-up for the evil team includes the assortment from the original game—imps, mutant soldiers, shotgun sergeants, those pink things that like to gnaw on your shoes, cacodemons, Barons of Hell, and Mastermind Spiders—all in large quantities. New to the scene are some inventive creations. Among these is a chaingun bearing soldier whose cranium does an interesting dance when ruptured. There's a baby spider—Son of Mastermind Spider—who spits a flurry of green plasma globules when provoked (or even when not). There's an obese fellow who fires erratic puffs of flame. There's a skeleton who launches small flaming asteroids that can track you around corners (he also swings a mean left hook). And finally, there's a sorcerer who not only conjures hellfire from the ground, turning the slow-of-foot into Kentucky Fried, but who can also raise fallen baddies from the dead as fast as you can knock them down.

As I've said, all of these creatures come in hordes; it's not uncommon to have 25 or more creatures on your tail at one time. One particular level comes to mind, a level that begins in an octagonal room with eight doors. The level is a bit like a nightmarish version of Let's Make a Deal: You pick a door and see what you've won, although none of the doors have a new car or a washer and dryer behind them. Instead, you've got a choice between a dozen Barons and a Cyberdemon, a herd of Demons, a battalion of imps, etc—all a pretty raw deal. Open one door and you've got quite a firefight; open two at once and you've got Armageddon. The upshot of the sheer number of creatures, aside from bursts of sheer panic, is that your silicon has to work harder to keep up, and so the system requirements for a full screen, full graphic detail DOOM session have crept up. Whereas owners of very fast 386s and low-end 486s could get a halfway decent frame rate out of DOOM, they won't with the sequel. I tested the game on several machines, starting with a Pentium 66 and working down. When I reached a 486-33 with 4MBs of RAM, I found the minimum for a full screen good time; any lower and you begin dragging pixels through the molasses.

If you've got the hardware, then you've got a good time coming in DOOM II. The

SCENES FROM A MAULING

A CARNAGE LINE Here they come—a platoon of damned dogs looking for a fresh chew-toy.

GIVE ME YOUR BEST! Sluggin' it out with Skeletor in the basement of Hell.

WOW! Sometimes you've just got to take time to smell the brimstone.

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THE BIG BOYS It's a nice day for a tango with twelve, two-ton truckers.

music of Bobby Prince has the same style and pacing as before, alternating between hard-edged guitar riffs and the quiet, atmospheric sounds of a haunted, New Age relaxation tape. The graphics are familiar, but there are some stunning surprises in store in the later levels. And, again, the level designs are expansive, intricate and fiendish. Some are almost like adventure game puzzles, where you'll spend many a minute staring at the automap wondering just how in Hell you can reach that visible, though inaccessible, BFG.

And let's not forget the element that truly lit the fires of gamers—multiplayer play. (If you are a DOOM fan and have not tried a multiplayer game—do so. You're missing out on half the fun.) The difficulty of the levels very much lends itself to cooperative exploration. Not only can you use the extra firepower in handling Hell's overpopulation problem, but it's nice to have more than one head working on some of the puzzle problems you'll face. As far as DeathMatch goes, the *CGW* Doom Association (the Hell's Rangers) has yet to find a DOOM 2 level to match the balance and elegance of Episode I, Level 5 of the original game, but that may be for lack of trying; we've been busy enough playing tag-team wrestling with a Cyberdemon.

The conclusion for fans of DOOM is, of course, yes, by all means—the next time you're traipsing through the aisle of your computer store, put a little Hell in your hand basket. If you know what to expect from DOOM 2, which I hope you do by now, you won't be disappointed. By the time you've battled your way through DOOM 2's levels and met the ultimate incarnation of Evil at the end, you'll have sucked out the essence of the DOOM experience, swirled it around in your mouth, gargled and spit. If you are like me, you will feel a bit wrung out, spent, satisfied, and ready to leave the corridors of DOOM behind you and move on. Next stop, QUAKE.

EDITORS SPEAK

DOOM II

RATING ★★★★ 1/2

PROS More, more, more of what you came to DOOM for.

CONS Higher system requirements may keep some gamers locked out of the experience.

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Doom

Ten First Person Action Games Are Fighting Which Will Earn Your

by Chris Lombardi

In waves they come, these gibbering, slobbering creatures. They lumber forward in a trance, arms held forward, seeking anyone who might have the scent of a first person action game player. When they find a victim, they pounce, pelting the unlucky soul with garish game boxes and marketing hype. "3D Virtual Cyber Gameplay!" they scream, "New supercombobulating technology!" and the dreaded, "Like DOOM, but BETTER!"

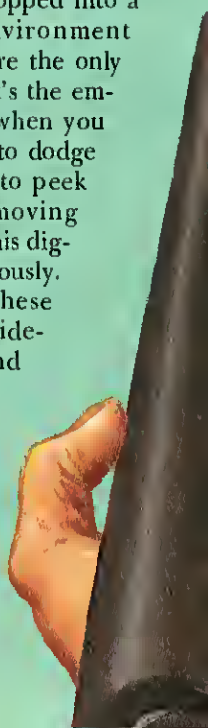
These beasts are the denizen of many computer game companies who want to jump on the bandwagon towed by **id Software** and their 3D, first person, action games. These programmers, designers, and marketeers have seen the shining gem of DOOM's success, have been bewitched by its gleam, and have known lust—lust for the fame, the acclaim, the financial success of id Software.

But perhaps we paint too grim a picture of the situation. Imitation is a part of the computer gaming world, and in some cases, it has been a good part. SIMCITY's concepts have worked their way into several good designs, and many others have benefited from the ideas in Sid Meier's RAILROAD TYCOON and CIVILIZATION. If good ideas can be improved upon while retaining the power of their original incarnation, then game players reap the benefit.

So here we have no less than ten games that are trying to improve upon the DOOM concept and introduce some ideas and features that might add to the game play of the genre. Nearly every one of these games has a different spin, angle, technological enhancement, or gadget. Do they all, then, improve upon the DOOM concept?

Hardly. As we'll see, it has been very easy for other programmers to put together a 3-D graphic engine like DOOM's, but it has proven much more difficult to create a coherent game that captures the essence of the DOOM experience. What is that essence? It's the sense that you have dropped into a truly threatening environment where fight or flight are the only acceptable behaviors; it's the embarrassment you feel when you catch yourself ducking to dodge a fired missile, trying to peek around a corner by moving your head, and taking this digital fantasy far too seriously.

Let's turn then to these games, hold them upside-down, shake them, and see what comes out of their pockets. Will it be the diamond they promise, or a cheap Cubic Zirconia replica? Will they be DOOM-like, or will they be, like, doomed?



Toos

For Your Attention.

Undying Ammunition?

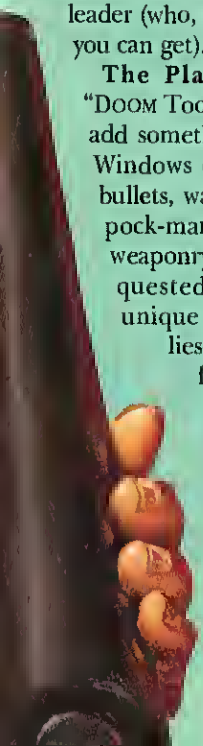
Illustration by Brian Clarke

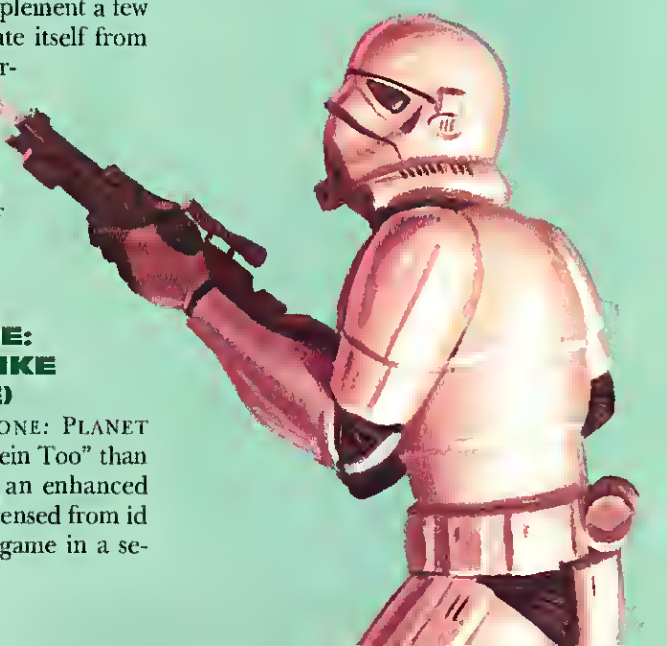
OPERATION BODY COUNT (CAPSTONE)

The Pitch: It's like we never left those golden 1980s. That decade's purveyors of free-floating anxiety, the ubiquitous Terrorists, have taken over the U.N. Tower, and they won't give it back. It's up to you to clear out the 40 levels of the Tower and rescue the hostages. The cliché Arabs, shouting "Allah!" and other unintelligible expletives in a Middle Eastern tongue, are hiding in every cubicle and bathroom stall in this monstrous office-plex, so there is much blood to be shed on the way to the terrorist ringleader (who, strangely, is as Aryan as you can get).

The Play: Like all of these "DOOM Toos," BODY COUNT tries to add something new to the milieu. Windows can be blown out with bullets, walls can be riddled with pock-marks, and the arsenal of weaponry includes the much requested flame thrower. Also unique is the inclusion of allies—computer-controlled fellow commandoes who will give you a hand in tbe mission. New features are great, but it all comes down to execution and integration, and it is here that BODY COUNT, like many of its compatriots, fails. The game engine itself feels like a cheap imitation, like a Hong Kong-made rip-off of a fine Swiss watch. The bad guys are flat and cartoonish, like wooden ducks at a shooting gallery, and the setting, graphics and level designs are drab (you can only endure so many hallways, offices, and executive wash rooms). To top it off, there are gameplay problems, like the fact that you cannot kill or be killed while standing in a doorway, and there are pointless additions like booby-trapped health packs and ammo that cannot be identified as such, and cannot be disarmed.

The Inevitable Comparison: If OPERATION BODY COUNT were a weapon in DOOM, it might, on a good day, be a chaingun. It does try to implement a few new features to differentiate itself from the pack, but when its overall quality is compared to the other "DOOM Toos" in the group, BODY COUNT may as well lie down and count itself among the fallen.





BLAKE STONE: PLANET STRIKE (APOGEE)

The Pitch: BLAKE STONE: PLANET STRIKE is more a "Wolfenstein Too" than a "DOOM Too," as it uses an enhanced WOLFENSTEIN 3D engine licensed from id Software. It is the second game in a se-

ries that pits British agent Blake Stone against the evil Dr. Goldfire and his genetically engineered mutants. PLANET STRIKE is 20 levels deep with new monsters and weapons and nasty traps, but no multiplayer options.

The Play: Technically, PLANET STRIKE is a well done game. The art, mechanics, and movement are nicely integrated, lending the experience a coherent feel. It, too, adds a few novel tidbits to the mix, like creatures that initially appear in a sedate state (in a cocoon, a statue, or a moving pool of goo), but then "morph" into an active creature when disturbed. The automap has several levels of magnification, with the lower levels enabling you to see baddies in the area or locate secret doors, but you must first seek out energy to power the map. The game also tries to make its environment more "interactive" by introducing things like food dispensing machines into which you must insert coins, and "Fission Detonators" that must be located, picked up, and placed next to another object to destroy it. All of these things are fine, but all the features in the world don't mean a thing if a game doesn't have that "immersion factor," and it is here that PLANET STRIKE is somewhat lacking. It just doesn't draw you in. The color schemes are simple and bright, the creatures are exaggerated and cartoonish, and the sound effects are either silly or muted or both. The result: you don't feel as if you're in a threatening environment, which is the key ingredient of first-person action games.

The Inevitable Comparison: If BLAKE STONE were a creature from DOOM, it would be a standard issue Demon, but a Demon by way of Warner Brothers, not Hell. It would be a kinder, gentler kind of Demon, one that you might learn to like, perhaps even tame and turn into a pet. If you've got a child or younger sibling that has been bugging you to play DOOM, but you're afraid of the nightmares that might result, you might give the kid BLAKE STONE, in spite of its "Parental Warning: Graphic Violence" label.

CYCLONES (SSI)

The Pitch: A global economic collapse, a world thrown into anarchy, a timely alien invasion, and one last chance for the human race—you. (NOTE: This fictional set-up contains 100% recycled ideas from post-consumer waste.) You, in this case, are a cybernetically enhanced soldier outfitted with fancy, hi-tech hand-to-hand weapons and the standard arsenal of range weapons. You'll do battle with other cybernetically enhanced beings, mutant fauna, and aliens, all straight out of a Saturday morning "mechanoid" cartoon.

The Play: CYCLONES is a pretty game with pretty standard "DOOM Too" mechanics, although, unlike DOOM, it does allow you to look up and down and jump. CYCLONES' most original idea is in the weapon interface. Rather than having to aim your weapon by turning your body, you can actually control your weapon independently from your body. Using the mouse, you can sling your plasma weapon, gauss pistol, or other weapon of destruction around the screen and point it directly at your target. This interface is also used to pick up various items (weapons, health packs, and ammo) that are strewn about the alien complex. The object of the game is standard fare: find keycards that open doors, open doors to reveal secret switches, and flip the switches to reveal passageways or stairs that lead to some objective. It is all good, clean, though a mite mundane, fun. CYCLONES' one problem is a problem common to many of these games: the bad guys aren't threatening. Rather than being creatures that you really want to avoid, the bad guys are just something you line up in your sights and mouse-click on until they go away.

The Inevitable Comparison: If CYCLONES were a weapon in DOOM it would be a really slick chaingun with some neat doodads and gadgetry. It would be good at what it does, but you'd throw it away in a second if you found something more powerful or more novel.

DARK FORCES (LUCASARTS)

The Pitch: The game designers at **LucasArts** have it pretty easy. They could hack out a second-rate spreadsheet program, call it Star Wars: The Imperial CPAs Strike Back and sell a million of them. Thankfully, they haven't taken advantage of their position or their license, and have produced some terrific games.

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DARK FORCES, which is essentially DOOM set in the *Star Wars* milieu, is yet another terrific *Star Wars* product. For those whose brains were indelibly stamped by the films as youngsters, DARK FORCES may prove irresistible.

Ever wonder how the Rebel Alliance got a hold of the Death Star plans they used to find that oh-so-convenient exhaust vent? Apparently, a Rebel Agent stormed through several levels of a Star Destroyer, single-handedly wasting the waves of troopers aboard, and stealing the plans. Guess who plays this solitary hero in DARK FORCES?

The Play: LucasArts has done an amazing job of reverse engineering DOOM and adding their own spin to the first person model. The mechanics of DARK FORCES work exactly like DOOM, except that you can look up and down and jump. The graphics are powerful (check out the holographic projection of the Death Star in the screen shot), the sound comes right out of the movie, and the implementation of laser fire is perfect. The levels have intricate layouts, with elevators, garbage chutes, and streams with an actual current, so the transparent automap overlay is often helpful. Put this all together, and you've got a game that captures the ineffable DOOM essence. When you're running down a corridor with laser blasts whizzing by your ears and smacking the walls around you, you become Han Solo running through a Star Destroyer with a Rebel yell. Unfortunately, LucasArts still has the nasty habit of not including multiplayer options.

The Inevitable Comparison: If DARK FORCES were a DOOM creature it would be a Cyberdemon in a Dark Helmet with a bad case of asthma. From its duel rocket launcher arms it would fire a 3D graphic engine and a mythos that gamers couldn't resist.

DESCENT (INTERPLAY)

The Pitch: Imagine DOOM on Benzedrine in a vacuum, and you've got a decent picture of DESCENT, **Interplay**'s take on the first-person shooter. You take control of a flying robotic ship that must clear 30 levels filled with other robotic ships, rescuing captured pilots, and derailing some evil plot or other. The game will initially be released as shareware, giving users the chance to fly it around the block before throwing down the cash.

The Play: DESCENT is a DOOM Too with a twist, and a turn, and a gravity-free flip. It offers an excellent 3D graphic engine that communicates a terrific sense of speed while allowing the player as much freedom of movement as one would expect from a space combat simulation. Without the constraints of gravity, you can careen down corridors at will, spinning, turning, and bouncing off the

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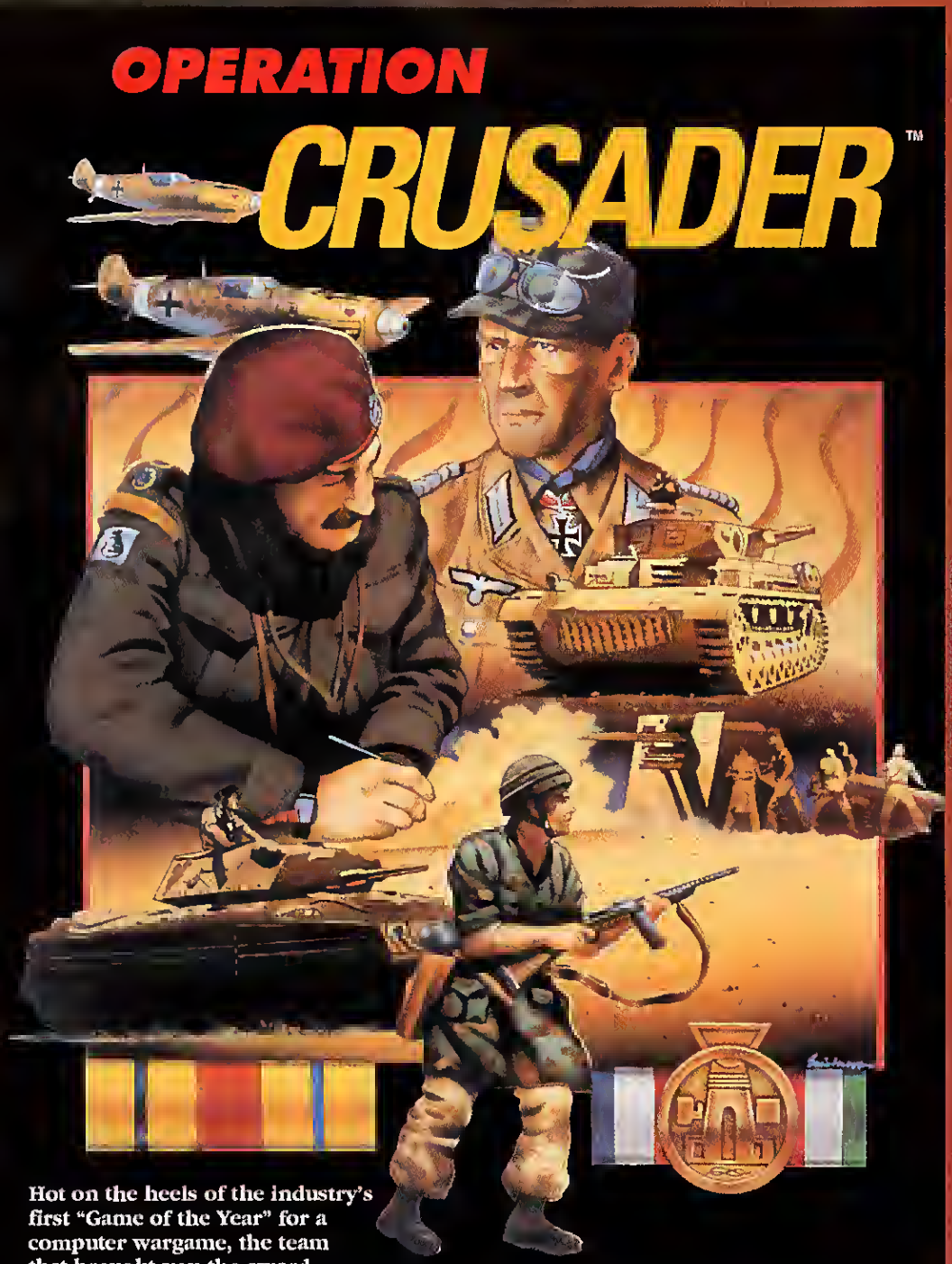
OPERATION CRUSADER™



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walls. The sense of speed and freedom can be fun, but *very* disorienting. If you experience even a hint of queasiness when playing other first person games, you should steer clear of DESCENT. As far as the gameplay goes, it's all standard issue here. Aside from bashing baddies, there's only the matter of navigating the maze of tunnels, picking up access cards, and unlocking doors until you've found the exit. Not that DESCENT needs anything else: just figuring out where you are is tricky enough. Although the map is very interesting and unique (when invoked the level map appears as a 3D projection that can be rotated along several axes), it too can be disorienting and difficult to read. DESCENT's weak suit could be its enemy ships—they're small, nondescript, and anything but menacing. This may change, however, since I looked at an early version, and the design team was still trying to improve the baddies before they sent the shareware version of the game to the networks. And speaking of networks, DESCENT will support net games with up to eight players, and it is here that the game may shine.

The Inevitable Comparison: If DESCENT were a weapon in DOOM, it would be the plasma gun—rapid fire, pyrotechnic, though perhaps not doing a lot of damage for all the noise it makes. Take a look at the shareware version to see if you can stomach the ride, and if the combat is your cup of tea.

THE FORTRESS OF DR. RADIAKI (MERIT)

The Pitch: Why must we always look to the future to find an apocalyptic milieu in which to set our games? Why not just postulate an apocalypse in one of our possible pasts? The year is 1963 and the world is being blackmailed by a mad scientist with communist connections who may just have the ol' A-Bomb in his britches (that, or he's just happy to see you). You take the role of a U.N. agent who must fight through the 15 levels of Dr. Radiaki's fortress before your final showdown with the madman himself.

The Play: The FORTRESS OF DR. RADIAKI oozes daffiness from every pore. Between the background fiction (which describes Dr. Radiaki as "a man known by both Dalai Lamas in Tibet and the Regular Llamas in Peru") and the cast of characters (Cuban soldiers with Spanish curses on their tongues, silly Samurai warriors, robots made out of kitchen appliances, etc.) you know you've got a game that doesn't take itself very seriously. From appearances, you might think it would be a breezy break from weightier matters, but, sadly, we've got yet another game that chokes when the game is on the line. The 3D engine is sub-par, and the graphics (which are slick and high-res in the ads and press materials) are drab, drab, drab. The wall textures are halfway decent in spots, but a single texture is often used exclusively for large chunks of real estate, lulling one to sleep with their monotony. Combine the lousy 3D engine and the mediocre graphics with level designs that are labyrinthine in a random way, a clumsy movement system (especially for keyboard users), and a dreadful automap, and you've got a game that most gamers might laugh at, not with.

The Inevitable Comparison: If THE FORTRESS OF DR. RADIAKI were a character from DOOM, it would probably be a Cacodemon wearing Groucho glasses. You could never take it seriously, even if it was trying to tell a joke.

HERETIC (RAVEN)

The Pitch: If any game has a chance of matching, or even surpassing, the quality of DOOM, it is HERETIC. Of course, it does have a big advantage in that it uses the actual DOOM 3D technology and was designed in consultation with id Software. HERETIC is essentially DOOM with wizards, although the only thing you might recognize from DOOM is the general feel of the world; the graphics, the weapons, and the monsters are all very different...and very wonderful. HERETIC will be released as shareware, and the registered version will include 27 very large, very ornate, levels.

Tbe Play: When you step into the enchanted realm of HERETIC, you step into a world of tremendous beauty and prodigious power. The pixels have been swabbed on this canvas with great artistry; "Wow!" was about all I could muster when I saw the quaint villages with ornate houses and flowing streams, the antique haunted-house hallways, and the marvelous stained glass win-

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dows. There's little time for sightseeing, however, as this enchanted realm has been overrun by all sorts of magical ghoulies. The monsters in HERETIC can be roughly equated with those in DOOM: there are flying griffons that shoot single fireballs (DOOM's imps), there are large, stone golems that can pummel you into pudding in hand-to-hand combat (DOOM's pink demons), there are wraith-like things that throw flurries of magic axes (DOOM's Barons of Hell), as well as many new magic-wielding creatures with interesting properties and weapons. To handle these hordes, you've got your own magic, channeled though six different weapons, ranging from the unmagical stave to a pea-shooting wand on up to artifacts with roughly the power of Doom's BFG. What's more interesting is that each weapon has a "superstate" that can be invoked by certain items. One weapon that fires plasma gun like bursts will also call down a rain of fire from heaven when in its superstate; another turns into a very effective flamethrower. So, in effect, HERETIC has 12 weapons—six weapons plus their six enhanced states. New to the DOOM system is an inventory where you can store magical goodies for later use. These items can make you invisible, restore health, give you the power to fly, supercharge your weapons, and, my favorite, turn creatures into chickens. Then, the world has cool new features, like streams with current, wind that might blow you off of a high turret, and all sorts of switches and gadgets, teleports, and secret doors to complicate navigational matters. The automap is exactly like Doom's, except that it appears on a parchment—much like in ULTIMA UNDERWORLD. In a final flourish of its wand, HERETIC supports two player modem play and four player network play.

The Inevitable Comparison: If HERETIC were a weapon from DOOM, it would be a semi-automatic, magically enhanced BFG. It truly packs a whollop, and is the pick of the "DOOM Too" litter.

ISLE OF THE DEAD (MERIT)

The Pitch: The hero of ISLE OF THE

DEAD set out on what seemed like a pleasant, South Pacific Island hopping flight (a three hour tour?). It's not bad enough that the plane crash-landed on a small island rock and he was the only survivor, but this island just so happens to be the home of a race of zombies and the evil scientist who lords over them. Now, fictional set ups are not a strong suit of this type of games, but this is the worst among bad. To be fair, ISLE OF THE DEAD was designed to be campy—a spoof of first-person action games, perhaps—but it doesn't have the wit nor the technology to pull it off.

The Play: ISLE OF THE DEAD isn't a pure 3D action game. It mixes the worst of adventure games and the worst implementation of a 3D engine that we've seen. There are two interfaces: the standard first-person action game interface, and a simplistic adventure game interface with an inventory of items that you can "Look" at, "Get," "Use," etc. The adventure game portion takes us back to the earliest days of graphic adventures, and the 3D engine is just plain awful. The graphics are crude, the sound limp-wristed, and the feel of the world is hollow, tinny, and cheap. Sure, you might get a chuckle from the undead, over-weight sun bathers who attack you with their own amputated arms, but cheap laughs give way to boredom in about as long as it takes to boot the game. The game does have some nice, campy graphics in the non-interactive scenes, and it promises multiple endings to the game, but halfway interesting art and two extra endings are just not worth the suffering endured to reach them.

The Inevitable Comparison: If ISLE OF THE DEAD were a weapon in DOOM, it would be a pistol with one bullet. If it took a moment to look around at the competition, it would probably put that pistol to its temple.

QUARANTINE (GAMETEK)

The Pitch: QUARANTINE is the least DOOM-like product in this list. It is about armed vehicles, drive-by shootings, flattened pedestrians, and cash management. Why do we include it, then? Well, it's a scrolling, 3D game and, even though you are driving a car, you feel no more

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like you're piloting a vehicle than you feel like you're piloting a human body in DOOM. QUARANTINE is also about weapons (bigger, better, more deadly weapons) as well as slaughter (bloody, messy, gory slaughter). So, like they say, "If it scrolls like a DOOM, shoots like a DOOM, and kills like a DOOM, then, by God, it must be a 'DOOM Too,' even if it is on wheels."

The Play: In QUARANTINE you play a cabby in a very rough town. The streets are filled with gun-toting cars and pedestrians who love to pop off a few rounds just for kicks. While under this rain of fire, you must pick up fares, but these people don't want a ride to the airport; rather, they want you to perform a "hit" on one of the many city gangs. While the clock ticks down, you must locate the target of the hit in the very large town, and then perform the hit while the passenger enjoys the show. While the 3D engine is a bit crude (as said, the sensation of actually driving a car is slight), the game is surprisingly entertaining, if you've the stomach for very intense action and sophomoric silliness. Your car can be outfitted with a bevy of weapons and defensive gear, and there is plenty of scenery to gawk at as you whiz by at 100mph. There even seems to be something of a plot thread that runs through the game, though I only saw the beginning strands in the pre-release version tested.

The Inevitable Comparison: If QUARANTINE were a creature from DOOM, it would be a mutant soldier with an earring, a skateboard, and Beavis and Butthead sensibilities. If you're one to "hang" with the likes of this mutant, you might find some good yucks and enjoy the original ideas.

RISE OF THE TRIAD (APOGEE)

The Pitch: Fascism is on the rise in the RISE OF THE TRIAD, and your team of five commandos is just the group to put it back in its place. Arriving at the fortified isle of San Nicolas, you choose a character from a quintet of killers and drop in on the Black Shirt's picnic. RISE OF THE TRIAD will be released as shareware with 10 levels of play, and the registered version will contain 30 more. This game is the most multiplayer-friendly product we've seen, supporting both two-player modem play and 11-player network-fests. In addition, there are nine types of multiplayer games available with many customizable options. DeathMatch will never be the same again.

The Play: RISE OF THE TRIAD is a very ambitious game. When you jump into its crisp, clean, texture-mapped world and begin to explore all the goodies it offers, you can almost feel the designers' minds at work, almost hear their thoughts above the competently composed music: "What cool features can we add to this game to make it better than DOOM?" Cool features are what this game is all about; indeed, at times it seems that the game is only an excuse to show off all the neat things that the designers' minds devised—like an action movie built around The Big Stunt. Among these features are: a very cool glass shattering effect; beautifully rendered whirling turbines of death; incredibly realistic fire and explosion effects; trampolines that bounce you around until you're blue in the face; powerful weapons with terrific recoil; even a bizarre magical weapon that enables you to discharge voluminous volts of magical energy from your hands. Toss all this together with some bad guys that are only a goose-step away from Nazis, and you've got RISE OF THE TRIAD, a mixture of DOOM and WOLFENSTEIN with some new special effects.

The Inevitable Comparison: If RISE OF THE TRIAD were a weapon in DOOM II, it would be every space marines best friend—the double barrel shotgun. It's got kick, it's got power, and, with its double load of buckshot, it's sure to hit the target, especially when multiple targets (and multiple players) are involved.

THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION

So there you have it, the first wave of "DOOM Toos" to come our way. Between them you've got more firepower than what was used at the Battle of the Bulge, endless waves of creatures from every fantasy genre, and enough wrist-wrenching action to give an entire secretarial pool the Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. There is some quality stuff in this bunch, and you're sure to find one or two games to keep your household filled with the sounds of gunfire and the screams of the dying right through the holiday season.

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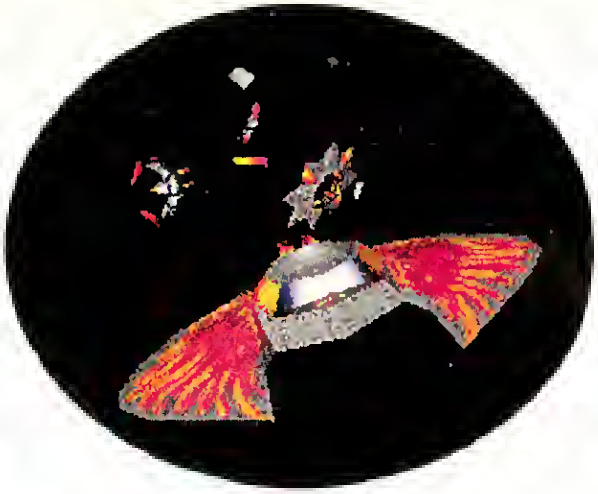

Take 2's STAR CRUSADER Borrows From The Best And Adds Some Zest

by Jeff James

YOU'D THINK IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CROWD THE INFINITY OF SPACE, BUT CROWDED IS EXACTLY how you'd describe the traffic lanes of the space combat genre. Between the *Star Wars* games, the WING COMMANDER series, and things like ELITE, there are more craft buzzing around the void and more burnt out hulks of unfortunate ships than the Milky Way has stars.

Into this standing-room-only crowd comes a new space combat game from **Take 2 Interactive** via **GameTek**. STAR CRUSADER warps into the established star wars market and unabashedly announces a list of novel features. While it does borrow more than a few bars from the tune of other games, it does in fact follow through on its boasts with features that are either truly novel or more refined than most.

STAR CRUSADER

Price: $69.99 (CD), $59.99 (Floppy)
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 2 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 8 MB hard drive space, mouse, CD-ROM; supports AdLib, Roland and Sound Blaster sound cards. Floppy and CD-ROM versions available.
Protection: None
Developer: Take 2 Interactive Software
Distributor: GameTek
N. Miami Beach, FL
(8DD) GAMETEK

Unlike other space combat sims in which there are definite Bad Guys and Good Guys, Take 2 made a special effort to paint both sides of its conflict with liberal dabs of moral ambiguity. You begin the game as a hotshot pilot for the Gorene Empire, an expansionistic race patterned loosely after the Roman Empire. The Gorenes are expanding across the known universe, spreading their values and civilization in the process. While the Gorenes see themselves as "saving the savages from themselves" (shall we hum "Hail Britannia?"), some alien races have begun to despise the Gorenes and their attempt to influence their culture. In a sector of space known as the Ascalon Rift, a group of aliens have banded together to repel the Gorene "invasion." The aliens aren't exactly peace and freedom fighters, either. The Tancreds are a warlike race of savage barbarians, while the Zemuns are religious zealots who see all outsiders as "infidels" and worthy of destruction. The Mazumas are greedy traders and capitalists, and the Amien are afflicted with a sentient bacteria that threatens to drive the entire race insane.

As the game begins, you'll fly combat missions for the Gorenes, but as the story develops, you'll eventually have the option to switch sides and champion the alien cause. The storyline is even richer than those found in some **Origin** offerings and is filled with back-stabbing, infighting, and secret plots against different factions. At the outset you're limited to flying assigned missions and must carry them out as to the best of your ability. As the game progresses, you'll acquire a greater degree of control. You'll eventually get to select your own wingmen and spacecraft, and if you need more highly trained pilots, you can send some of your best fliers off to the pilot academy to train others. Once you've been given your primary mission, you can assign other pilots both offensive and defensive missions, such as patrol duty, invasions of alien space or the theft of alien ships and supplies.

FLOWN ONE, FLOWN 'EM ALL

The heart of any space combat simulator is the flight engine, and STAR CRUSADER's is quite good. On a 486-33 with 4 MBs of RAM, the frame rate is acceptable with all the playing option knobs pegged at their maximum values. On faster 486 and Pentium machines, the game responds with alacrity and smoothness. Flight controls are similar to other games in the genre, making it a snap for experienced X-WING and WING COMMANDER pilots to learn the ropes. STAR CRUSADER also adds a few unique and intelligent features to an otherwise conventional control system. Some ships have an auto-repair system that will repair damage in flight, and you can manually prioritize the efforts of the repair system, making it repair shields before the ejection system, for example. The power system can also be customized, allowing you to use most of your energy for weapons and the remainder for less vital ship duties. In the ultimate nod to user customization, STAR CRUSAD-

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ER also allows you to create a default flying environment for your favorite ships, with pre-set display, repair and power-management features.

The flight engine is a good one, although several of the vessel designs are very odd-looking. Granted, vessels built by a wide variety of alien races will have their own unique appearance, but some ship designs struck me as downright goofy. The Gorene Scorpion fighter looks like—you guessed it—a flying scorpion. Other vessel designs seem like nothing more than a collection of incongruous shapes stuck haphazardly together. To make matters worse, most vessels are painted in bright, garish colors, making their unusual shapes seem even more bizarre. It seems that, in an attempt to distinguish the game as much as possible from its competition, the designers took the artistic design to clownish extremes.

RAY-TRACED STARGAZING Whether you're viewing star-shaped alien bases or close-ups of other characters, you'll be impressed with the 3D STUDIO work throughout the game.

I'M IN COMMAND NOW!

There are over 100 missions in the game, distributed among a number of plot and story branches. As in WING COMMANDER, the missions in STAR CRUSADER don't have to be repeated until they have been successfully completed; win or lose, the story will advance and you'll be placed into a new situation. Lose too many missions and the game will end in failure, but there is always opportunity to fight your way back to the winning track after one or two failures.

When you reach a certain level of success, you'll be given complete control over combat resources. Your pilots are rated numerically (from 1-5) in a variety of skill categories, including pilot skill, courage, discipline and weapon skills. This information allows you to tailor your strike force to the mission at hand, matching suitable pilots with appropriate ships and weaponry. While you and your wingmen are on the main plot mission, you can assign other pilots to both offensive and defensive missions, allowing you to accomplish more than one goal during each mission. Finally, if space combat is grinding up your rookie pilots like cheap knockwurst, you can assign a few veteran pilots to the space academy. Once there, their training will increase the skill levels of replacement pilots. These strategic elements add a previously unseen depth of play to a combat space simulator, serving to slake the combat thirst of joystick jockeys while simultaneously exercising the gray matter of more strategically-minded gamers.

When creating missions for other pilots to carry out, one of your options is a resource acquisition mission. If successful, this mission will net you new spacecraft to replenish ships that have been destroyed during combat. You can also grab enemy ships during combat by disabling them with disrupter fire and using your tractor beam to draw them close. Regardless of how you obtain them, each of the 13 ship types in STAR CRUSADER have their own unique strengths and weaknesses. In addition to more mundane weapon types—such as lasers, disrupters and torpedoes—a few ships sport unique and powerful weapons. The Tancreds use the vector cannon, a weapon that does no damage but can cause the target to momentarily spin out of control. Some Amien craft employ the neutron cannon, which has the nasty capability of bypassing a ship's shields and harming the pilot directly. One of the most novel pieces of weaponry is the energy siphon, a vampiric device used to drain energy from an enemy ship and add it to yours.

BUFFED CHROME

In the CD version, superlative voice acting helps move the plot along. Most characters have a unique voice, spoken with conviction by a well-cast crew of professional voice actors. The guttural speech of the Tancreds is especially well-done, with a gravel-throated tone the equal of any Klingon extra on "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Amazingly enough, STAR CRUSADER is able to simultaneously play digitized speech and sound effects with no degradation in playability or sound quality. During several combat sessions with enemy and allied ships whirling around my craft, I heard radio chatter from not one, but two of my wingmen simultaneously. This happened while both the music and sound effects where playing, too. Take 2 reportedly spent a great deal of time developing new technology to shuffle multiple streams of data from the CD-ROM drive, and it shows.

When presenting the plot to the player, Take 2 opted to create the most important characters in the game by using ray-tracing techniques traditionally reserved for inanimate objects, such as ships and planets. The 3D-Studio-rendered cast gives STAR CRUSADER a distinctive visual appearance, resulting in a unique look not unlike that of the characters portrayed in **Eidolon**'s MILLENNIUM AUCTION. Combined with the top-notch voice talent, STAR CRUSADER becomes an audio-visual experience not to be missed.

WORMS IN THE WARP DRIVE

STAR CRUSADER does suffer from a number of mostly minor shortcomings. Aside from the aforementioned goofiness of some ship designs, the overall graphic quality is somewhat hard to define. While the ray-traced graphics, ships and characters are undoubtedly top notch, I question some of the artistic design choices used in the game. On one hand, the artwork affixed to some Gorene structures—such as the golden eagle used as the main game interface—draws upon such strong artistic themes as ancient Roman and Greek architecture. Yet instead of embracing the artistic richness that these sources provide, the game seems to skirt along the edges, mixing such artistry with bland and dreary color

SAMURAI STRANGE No matter how you look at them, many of the spaceship designs, like the *Samurai* pictured here, are more bizarre than indicative of alien cultures.

schemes which lessen the visual impact. The playing interface is a bit unwieldy, as well. A prime example is when you're using the computer in the computer room to select pilots, ships and missions. If you look at an item in the general topics section, exiting the current category will return you to the uppermost level of your selection, forcing you to wade through the menus again to reach another topic. When selecting repair and energy priorities in your spacecraft, the system used seems overly unfriendly, exhibiting what can only be described as interface "stiffness." Providing more visual and audio feedback would have been helpful, such as seeing an option flash or sink into the screen when selected, or attaching a descriptive icon to the pointer when the user is "dragging and dropping" information.

THE RIFTS OF ASCALON

So how does STAR CRUSADER fare in the crowded field of space combat simulators? With its impressive audio, in-depth strategic elements, and other features, STAR CRUSADER emerges as a prominent product in the category, worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as X-WING and WING COMMANDER. While the genre in which STAR CRUSADER is firmly rooted may be verging on bathos, Take 2's designers have infused their creation with enough depth and originality to make it stand out from the horde of "me-too" clones. If you've traded away PRIVATEER, tied up the loose ends of TIE FIGHTER, or are waiting impatiently for WING COMMANDER III, STAR CRUSADER should be the next game on your playlist.

EDITORS SPEAK

STAR CRUSADER

RATING ✸✸✸✸

PROS Impressive depth of play and an engaging storyline teamed with incredible audio and a top-notch 3D flight engine.

CONS Bizarre spacecraft designs, garish color schemes and a bit of interface roughness preclude STAR CRUSADER from true greatness.

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Reader Service #187

Trench Warfare

Blitzing The Cyber Byways In Bethesda's Arcadish DELTA V

by Mark Clarkson

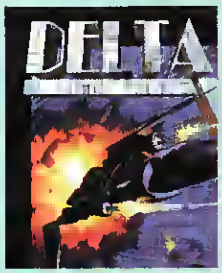
IF YOU BOUGHT X-WING JUST TO FLY DOWN THE DEATH STAR TRENCH, IF ALL THE PERSNICKETY DETAIL IN REALISTIC flight simulators turns you off, if you're looking to drive your eye-hand coordination to new heights, and if you've got a big wad of cash burning a hole in your pocket, then I might just have the game for you.

DELTA V from **Bethesda Software** is a member of that class of action games I call "trench runners." The premise is simple: you rocket down a ditch or tunnel at high speed, dodging obstacles and blasting enemies. At the end of the trench there is some big baddie to be destroyed, or some special gizmo to be snagged.

As trench running games go, DELTA V is a gorilla, with obstacles and bad guys coming at you fast and furious. As to what Bethesda wants you to think DELTA V is, that's another matter. It's hard to tell, from the ads, the box, or the documentation, what kind of game it purports to be. The ad promises a "new type of virtual reality" on your PC. The designer notes tell you to prepare for "a lightning ride down the cyberspace data matrix using the latest in quantum flight dynamics merged with the ultimate in hi-tech weaponry," but I don't know what the hell that means.

Two different blurbs on the box refer to DELTA V as a "flight sim"—but a flight simulator it is not, at least by the standards of most gamers. Worst, the packaging almost seems designed to deceive. The four screen shots on the back of the box disguise the fact that DELTA V is a trench running game; the omnipresent trench walls are hidden in the shadows, or behind laser bolts or obstacles.

DELTA V



Price: $69.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-25Mhz, 4MB RAM, 17MB hard disc space, VGA graphics, mouse or joystick, supports most major sound cards; 486DX66Mhz or better recommended
Protection: Documentation look-up
Designer: Greg Kreafle, Chris Weaver
Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
1370 Piccard Dr., Ste. 120
Rockville, MD
(301) 926-8300

IT TAKES A THIEF

DELTA V wants to be more than an arcade-issue trench running game. To that end, they've wrapped the basic arcade heart of the program in a futuristic cyberspace scenario. The game manual begins with a bad knock-off of a William Gibson story, and all of the enemy ships sport Japanesque names like the Ichi-Tec Sentinel and the Mushitsu A/H Netblade.

It is the far future, the year 2306. The world's computers are interconnected into the vast Global Internet. With the aid of a special computer called a "sense deck," you can jack into the 'net—entering a virtual world where data and programs appear as solid objects and colored lights, painted directly into your mind. With the right combination of hardware, software and skill, you can ride these visible data pathways, firing programs, probing databases, moving information from here to there.

You are Cazimar Connery Enuvian, a.k.a. CazCade Failure and CazPer the Ghost: renegade, hacker, cybernetic data rustler. You make your living with a black market deck, riding the data channels of the 'net, invading corporate computer systems, evading their countermeasures, and making off with data and code to peddle on the black market—until the day you try to crack the ICE (Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics) around Black Sun corporation's databases and are trapped like a bug in a jar.

Now, you are at the mercy of Bosco Tasman, big wig of the Black Sun corporation. He has crashed your deck and plucked your soul from the Galactic Internet to do his bidding. Accept Tasman's offer and you'll go to work doing just what you've always done: crashing ICE and stealing data and code. Only now you'll be targeting Black Sun's corporate rivals and enemies. Serve your corporate masters well and you'll be well rewarded. Refuse and die.

GET READY

Every mission begins in the office of your boss, Bosco Tasman, who stares continually out of his window at the vast, futuristic cityscape beyond. The mission briefing itself appears as a text overlay atop the office scene. You can enter the mission directly, or do a little practice first in the simulation area. Enter the mission, and you receive a further, technical briefing on your objective. You can view the ICE you are to destroy, or the item you are to capture.

Next you equip your trace—the virtual vehicle in which you ride the 'net—with your choice of weapons, armor and power plant. As you gain money and experi-

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The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki is a thrilling adventure, mixing carnage with a biting sense of humor.

You will confront scores of different adversaries including sword wielding samurai, stealthy ninja warriors, robots with toasters for heads, mutated alligators and many more.

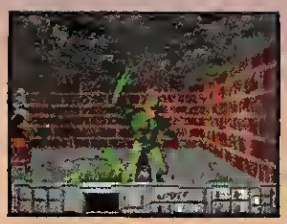
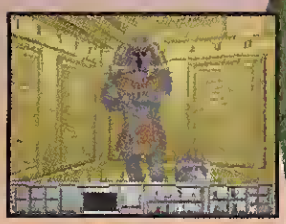
You must use all your wits to find your way through the cavernous fortress and defeat the Machiavellian designs of the horribly deformed Dr. Radiaki.

The Fortress of Dr. Radiaki is a landmark in computer games. You are free to move in any direction and blast anything that tries to do the same in this virtual reality, 3-D world.

Backgrounds are rendered on the fly and unbelievably detailed characters move smoothly through the labyrinth.

Enter at your own risk... you may never be the same again!

THE FORTRESS OF DR. RADIAKI™

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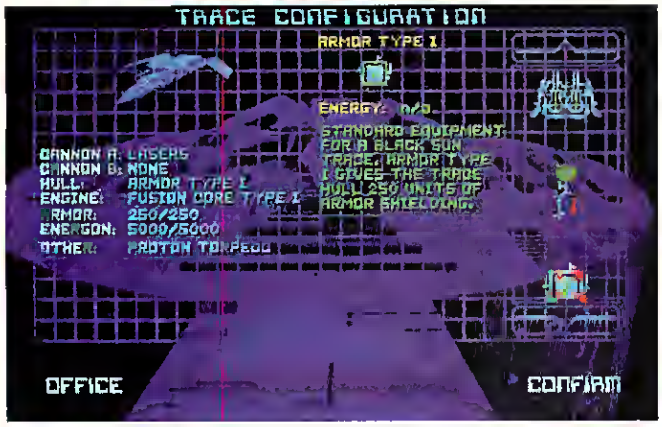


CYBER-BIRD OF PREY This *Black Sun* Trace craft packs a good punch with its lasers and proton torpedoes, but is robbed of maneuverability by the confines of the trenches.

ence, you get to choose from an increasingly powerful and expensive selection of goodies: particle cannons, proton torpedoes, de-rez shields, afterburners and graviton blasters. Fully briefed and equipped, you're ready to jack in.

FLY ME

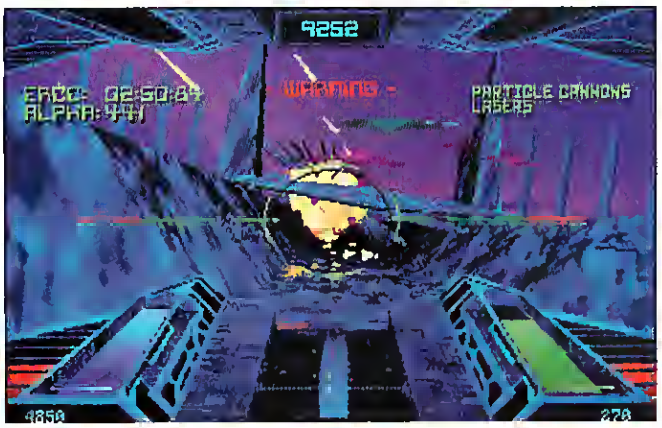
To complete your mission, you must pilot your trace from its starting point, down the trench to whatever objective lies at its end. Along the way, you must evade and avoid enemy ICE. Most ICE is strictly defensive and passive, and takes the form of pillars, walls, slabs and balls that block your way down the trench. Most of them stay put, but some of them move, dropping down from above to seal off the passage just as you arrive. This stuff reminds me of ancient roman ruins, looking more like stone or concrete than either ice or the inside of my computer.

There is also proactive ICE: spaceship-like objects that try to shoot you down before you reach your objective. They obligingly fly in front of you and shoot backwards, so you don't have to bother with any pesky side and rear views. Shoot them if you can, without letting them shoot you, or running into any obstacles, walls, or weapons fire from the cannons mounted along the rim of the trench.

The lower you fly, the laster you go. But as you begin to brush the floor or walls of the channel, your trace builds up heat, which can eventually sap your armor and destroy your trace.

Delta V doesn't feel much like cyberspace to me—it's more like flying down a drainage canal by moonlight. It makes me wonder why, since the scene is virtual anyway, we can't throw a little more cyberlight on things. I guess that's to give the game that dark, gritty, cyberpunk feel.

The flight model is pretty limited. You can't get out of the trench very far, either above it or to either side. You can't turn around. You don't have—or need—side, back, up or down views, although you can toggle to an outside view of your 'trace' that some might find easier to fly. (I personally didn't.)



VIRTUAL REALITY? No, it isn't. But there is a blistering-fast action game underneath Delta V's "cyberpunk" trappings.

SIZE AND SPEED

The box copy promises a game that runs laster than the eye can follow and, on a very fast PC, it does. On a 486DX66 the simulation is seamless. On a 486DX25 the frame rate drops to around five frames a second, loosing the illusion of fluid motion; on a 486SX25, you're down to three fps. You have to turn off the sky and Gouraud shading to speed things back up again.

Delta V wants, nay, demands 17 megabytes of hard disk space. Unlike some games, Delta V offers no limited installation, without the digital speech, for instance. If you don't have a spare 17 megabytes of space, Bethesda suggests you "back up your current files and delete those you do not need." Thanks.

It's the cyberpunk shell around the game that I have the biggest problem with. It seems as though it was grafted on, after the fact, in an attempt to make Delta V into an interactive adventure, instead of a shooter. I wonder how much of those 17 megabytes of hard disk space, and how much of that $69.95, is taken up by electrically crackling menus and shots of the boss's office.

WHERE IT SHINES

It can be hard to find good, old-fashioned action games for the PC—games that achieve immersion by sheer dint of speed. And it's as an action game that Delta V really shines, providing arcade action at its pure, unadulterated best. I feel like I should shove a quarter into my disk drive every time I fire it up.

On a fast machine—a 486DX50 or better—this game screams. It has what one friend calls the 'duck factor'—it'll have you sweating and ducking your head to clear on-screen obstacles. If you're looking for this kind of fast-paced arcade-style action for your PC, you might want to give DeltaV a try.

If you're looking to drop 60 or 70 bucks on a realistic, challenging flight simulator and immersion in the cyberpunk world, buy yourself a copy of MiG29 (Spectrum HoloByte - $54.95) and a paperback of William Gibson's "Neuromancer" ($4.99 - Berkeley Books).

EDITORS SPEAK

DELTA V

RATING ✸ ✸ ✸

PROS On a fast PC, offers fast-paced arcade style action that will have you ducking.

CONS The VR business is hokey and artificial, and the trench running can get monotonous. Requires a lot of space (17megs) and a fast machine to get the full effect.

Ride like a maniac. Without becoming a kidney donor.

5 ROADS, 1 AMBULANCE AND 400 MEGABYTES OF REAL, LIFE-THREATENING ROAD FOOTAGE ON CD-ROM. OPEN IT UP. IT'S TIME TO SPREAD YOUR BRAINS ALL OVER THE ASPHALT.

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Take The Money And Run

Dynamix Digs For LODERUNNER's Classic Gold

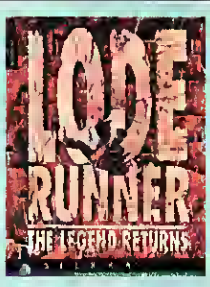
by Paul C. Schuytema

AH, THE 80s. IN A DECADE THAT SEEMS A MILLION YEARS AGO, I THOUGHT I KNEW EVERYTHING. Reagan was going to be President forever, everybody loved old Jethro Tull, the Chicago Bears kicked butt, and I was a god at LODERUNNER. So much has changed since then. Clinton. Well, what can I say? Does the youth of today even know Jethro Tull (have they ever heard of Bouree?), or is it all Nine Inch Nails now? Where's Ditka? And where, dare I ask, is **Broderbund**'s LODERUNNER?

Happily, LODERUNNER now lives on my 486-66, playable and pausible in that wonderful but much maligned living space we all call Windows. Where's my old LODERUNNER? I still have the disk, though it is now yellowed and sports a ring of indents from my daughter's seven teeth. But sadly, it is unplayable. I just don't have a computer slow enough to boot it up. My old Mac Plus, which saw me through grad school and my first *CGW* column, is even too sophisticated for this dinosaur; I need a Mac 512 for the first LODERUNNER. I loitered on the phone one dark night to *CGW* World Headquarters, and I found they had the same problem. They still held tightly, reverently to the old LODERUNNER disks for the Apple II and Commodore 64, but nary a 6502 was to be found.

So just what is LODERUNNER? Once, it was nearly as ubiquitous as DOOM is now. It was *the* game, but more than just the game for PCs; it lived on Macs, Apples and Commodores. The concept was simple: run your little miner around, gathering up gold and avoiding the nasties. Gather up all the gold and a ladder appeared to whisk you off to the next level. While gold-digging, you could blast the earth, run, climb and fall. All good clean fun.

LODERUNNER: THE LEGEND RETURNS



Price: $45.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 2 MB RAM (4 MB recommended), VGA graphics, Windows 3.1; supports Windows-compatible sound cards
# of Players: 1-2 (same computer)
Protection: None
Developer: Presage
Publisher: Oynamix
Eugene, OR
(800) 757-7707

Now, **Dynamix** has resuscitated the classic game for Windows, but is it a poor waif born out of time? Or it is the classic game it once was, ready to suck up bits on every PC from here to Istanbul? In a world of grayscale judgment, it is neither. It is a great game, but it arrives in a world which might have already passed it by.

First off, it is one of the new breed of playable, great looking games under Windows. It may have taken several years to get a handle on the ungainly operating system on top of an operating system, but games like LODERUNNER, OUTPOST and MICROSOFT ARCADE prove that great graphics can live within Windows. And brother, does LODERUNNER look sweet. The colors, done in a nice jungle/cyberpunk palette, seem to leap off the screen, and the Loderunner, well, he runs and he runs very well.

One of the neatest things about the original game was that it was the first third-person game that I actually bought into. Sure, arcade classics like GALAGA and DEFENDER put you in the third-person role, but there was always some sort of abstract insulation between you and ship, person or car you were controlling. LODERUNNER changed that for me. I became that little runner, blasting, running and leaping. For hours, I would peer into that little 9-inch monitor and believe that I really was him.

Now, it's a full decade later, yet many of the games still insulate me from the experience. While I was "in there" at times in PAGAN, for the most part, I felt like the Avatar was someone else. But, thankfully, the new LODERUNNER pulls me in. Now, my little miner is more detailed: dark boots, a pulp-sci-fi set of coveralls, jet black hair and a healthy gate. When I play the Loderunner, I'm him.

LODERUNNER is a unique combination of action game and puzzle game. I liken it to the classic LEMMINGS, but I find it much more satisfying. In LEMMINGS, there was always a feeling of chaos, of the Lemmings' brownian motion which I could not control. In LODERUNNER, there is an elegant order. You have time to consider each level and the puzzle it presents. Just how will you go about it and get all of the gold? As you ponder, mysterious monkish-looking creatures seek you out for lunch. Looking like underlings from the Spanish Inquisition, these "red cloaks" are the impetus to just get out of there.

READYSOFT INCORPORATED & EPICENTER INTERACTIVE PRESENT

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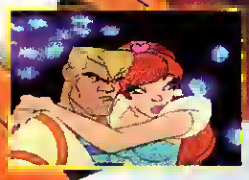
SPACE ACE®

The evil Commander Borf has kidnapped Ace's girlfriend, the beautiful Kimberly, and is plotting to enslave the Earth by means of his dreaded "Infanto Ray", a weapon that changes everyone it blasts into a helpless baby.

Armed only with a laser gun, Ace must seek out and destroy the Infanto Ray, rescue Kimberly and save the Earth. All in a day's work for a superhero, right?

Featuring full screen animation and crisp, powerful sound from the original laser disc arcade classic, Space Ace plunges you into intense, non-stop action.

The fate of Earth is in your hands.



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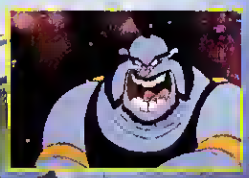

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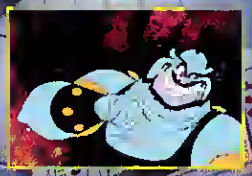

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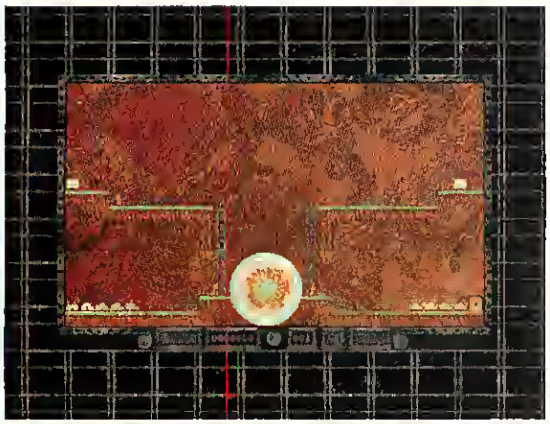


STAY CLEAR OF GROUND ZERO A bomb blast can take out a whole gaggle of cloakies—and you, too, if you don't get out of the way quickly enough.

The game's first two levels are devoid of the cloakies, but they appear in level three and every level after that. They run after you constantly, but part of the fun in evading them is to figure our their AI. Basically, they are "proximity sensitive," meaning that they try to get as close as they can to you. They are not intelligent enough to realize that sometimes they will need to take the long way around some of the mossy green obstacles to gobble you up. They can be on the other side of a wall, but if they are close, then they are happy. I really like this limit on their intelligence, and it lets me really play around with them while I'm trying to stay alive. Level seven, merely a collection of ladders with gold at the top of each, illustrates their AI perfectly. Climb to the top of a tall ladder and hang out. The cloakies won't take the extra effort to figure out that they need to climb that ladder. Instead, they will swarm up the neighboring ladder and hover there, like moths around a flame.

At times, avoidance isn't enough. You'll have to use your mining blaster to blast a hole in the ground. They'll fall in and you can run over them to escape (be sure to give yourself enough space to blast, or they'll simply rush you and gobble you up whole).

Moving around the various levels is a treat. You'll use ladders constantly, but at times you'll need to make suicidal leaps (a fall from ten stories won't hurt your tough little miner), or scale hand over hand on ropes strung across chasms.

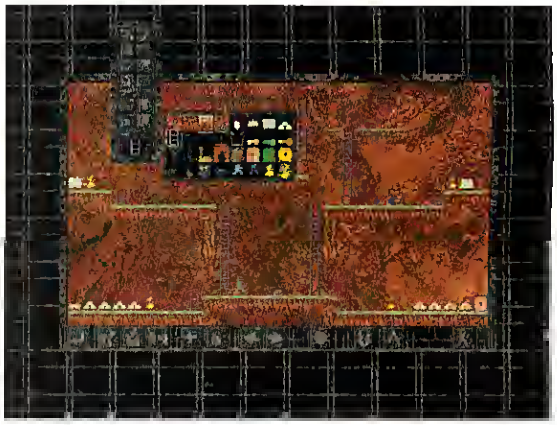
Simply run over all of the gold, and the escape ladder to the next level will appear. This can get tricky, since sometimes the cloakies will pick up and carry the gold. At other times, there will be a lode where you just can't reach it. You'll have to lure a cloakie over to pick it up for you and then trap him to retrieve the gold

In later levels, you can gather up wonderful little bombs. Just light the fuse and run, because these puppies pack a mean fireball. There are also other treats like jackhammers, pick axes, locks, keys and more. A veritable treasure trove for your diminutive spelunker to discover.

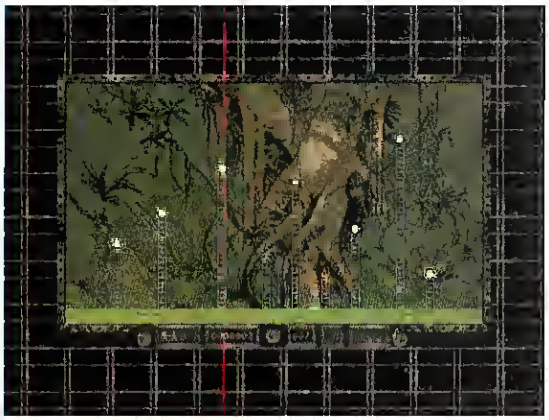
There are levels a-plenty to keep you running, zapping and climbing for months, but if you get tired of them, or want to try your own hand at game design, LODERUNNER comes complete with an elegant level design program. Using the familiar paint program metaphor, the level builder lets you craft entire games, modify levels, or just play around. The interface is solid, intuitive, and a "lode" of fun. Soon, levels spawned from demented minds will find their way onto BBSs everywhere.

Because LODERUNNER is such a clean, sharp reincarnation of the original Broderbund classic, it makes reviewing the game somewhat tricky. Do I review it as if it's the first time I've ever seen LODERUNNER (as I'm sure will be the case for many of those who will end up buying this version)? If so, then it is a wonderful, wonderful product, a true benchmark of sleek, elegant and simple game design. If I'm to review the game in the context of late 1994 game design, then it falls a little short, being only a rehash of an earlier design, and not pushing the gaming envelope for action/arcade games one bit.

Perhaps I'm searching for an answer in purely analytical terms when the answer is much more simple, much more "from the gut." The true measure of any game is how fun it is. That's really all you need: just a fun game to while away the hours. I've seen countless games over the past years, yet only a few rise to the occasion of being games I want to play after the review is over. LODERUNNER is one of those games. Analysis aside, LODERUNNER will live on my hard drive long after this issue of *CGW* gets dog-eared and coffee stained. And now I can buy the 80s, packaged in a handsome and kitchy two CD set. What more could I ask for?



MORE RICH LODES TO MINE The intuitive interface of the level editor allows you to make new levels, or tinker with existing ones.



WHO'S AFRAID OF HEIGHTS? Climbing tall ladders will help to keep unwanted company at bay.

EDITORS SPEAK

LODE RUNNER

RATING ★★★★

PROS A classic game is reborn, and it plays like a dream. The graphics and play interface are very impressive.
CONS More of a rehash than a reinvention. Doesn't push the envelope.

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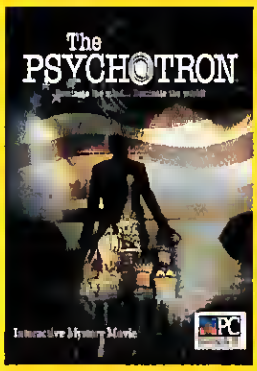

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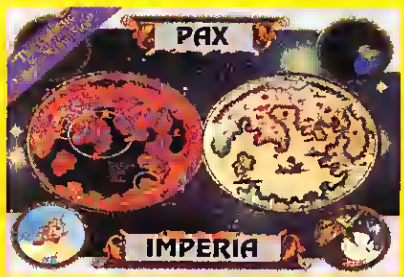

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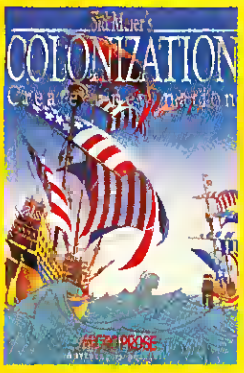

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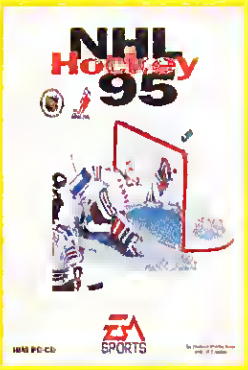

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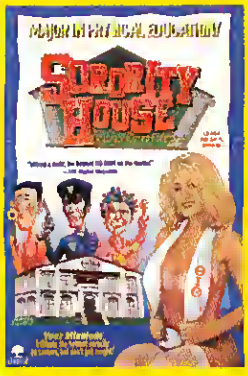

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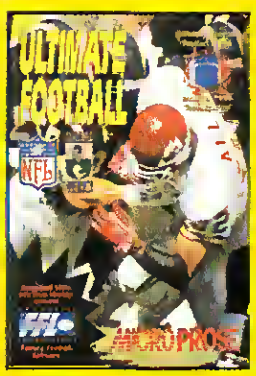

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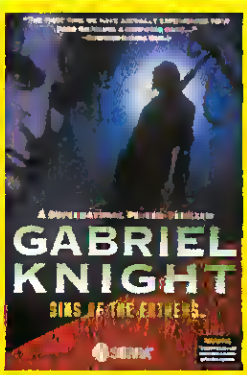

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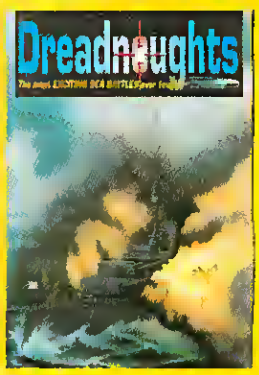

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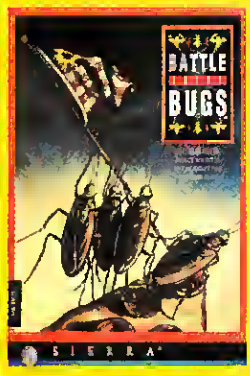

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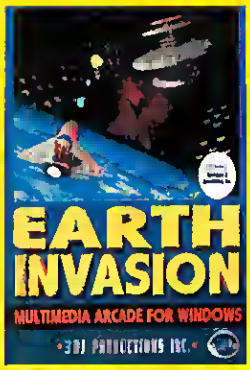

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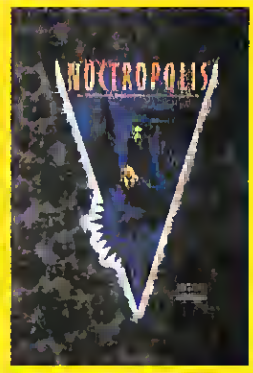

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MicroProse's Mad Dog Blitz

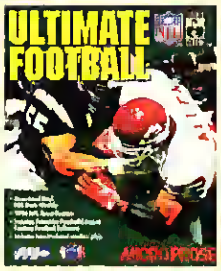
Ultimate Football Puts The Pressure On Its Competition

by Terry Lee Coleman

Even counting end zones, a football field is a mere 120 yards in length. Contained within this relatively small space is the much larger turf of our football fantasies. What young fan hasn't secretly wished to play for the No-Name Defense, to make the Immaculate Reception, or to meet the Monsters of the Midway on their home turf? Computer simulations have helped fulfill our pigskin fantasies, allowing us to hit the hole with Bronco Nagurski, break tackles in the guise of Emmitt Smith, and steal interceptions as Night Train Lane.

Computer football games enjoy instant recognition. But well-informed fans are often intolerant of inconsistencies, as Doug Whatley found with his Coaches Club Football design for **MicroProse** in 1993. What we have here is a much revamped program, with Coach Whatley and MicroProse promising that Ultimate Football will not only make the playoffs, but grab the championship ring.

Ultimate Football



Price: $69.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386, CD-ROM drive, 4MB RAM, VGA graphics, 3MB hard drive space, mouse or joystick; supports most major sound cards
 # Of Players: 1-2 (modem), more in league play
Protection: None
Designer: Doug Whatley
Publisher: MicroProse, Inc.
Hunt Valley, MD
(410) 771-1151

A PRE-SEASON LOOK

In Ultimate Football, MicroProse has imported graphics technology from their 1942: Pacific Air War simulation, resulting in a huge improvement over the look of CC Football. The opening credits feature some of the best animation work on the market, as the figure running down the field "morphs" from Jim Kelly to John Elway to Barry Sanders, in a seemingly endless tour of famous NFL players. Once in the game, the turf has much more visual depth and detail than before, with the team logo easily discernible in the painted end zones. Team uniforms are faithful to their real-life counterparts, down to the logo on the helmet.

The player sprites themselves are nicely rendered, although lacking jersey numbers, and are much larger than those found in other football games. A variety of camera angles allow you to track the play, isolate on certain players, or simply follow the ball. The biggest problem I have with the animation is the MicroProse contention that the game "runs fine" on a 386. Actually, Wing Commander 2 runs better on a 286 than Ultimate Football runs on a 386. If all the graphic details are cut back, the play is still jerky on a 386, like bad stop-action photography in a Harry Harhausen film rip-off.

Furthermore, the game only runs well on a low-end 486 if you have a video card that can push pixels quickly. Four megabytes of RAM are the absolute minimum, but eight are required for anything near smooth play. Prospective coaches should also recruit a double-speed CD-ROM so they don't pass out from boredom during access time. A sound card doesn't matter all that much, because the game's sound effects simply don't compare to the lovely graphics. Crowd noise is conspicuously absent, which tends to diminish the reward when scoring touchdowns. The groans and crunches as bodies slam to the turf are OK, there just aren't enough of them (a real surprise, given that TV Sports Football had this much sound five years ago). MicroProse has acknowledged the sound problems and is promising a forthcoming patch. Lame sound notwithstanding, I had only one crash in some three dozen games played on five different machines.

THE DREADED SALARY CAP

While playable on a 486-33, the game comes alive on high-end systems, and on a Pentium runs as smooth as Tony Dorsett eluding tacklers on his way to the end zone. Line play actually resembles a television perspective, with the pocket closing around the quarterback. Punts, kickoffs and returns are pretty fluid, but field goals and extra points are embarrassing, with what looks like a square brownie going through the uprights. Pass patterns have the proper look, with Jerry Rice running much more precise routes than say, Eric Green. When Montana

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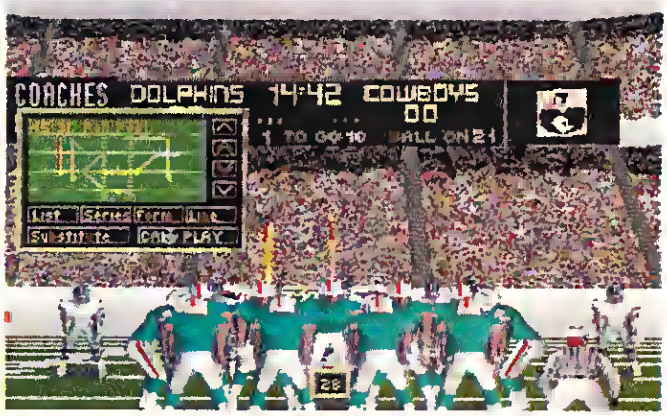
lofts one of his trademark soft passes, you can see Birden leaping and making a fingertip grab for the reception. And that is perhaps the most charming thing about ULTIMATE FOOTBALL: with the Coaches Club and NFL Players' Association licenses, all your football heroes run for glory under their real names.

As in CC FOOTBALL, the design philosophy of ULTIMATE FOOTBALL is to show differences in style and abilities of players at all positions. For instance, players are rated separately for fatigue and injury, so that the oft-injured Jim Kelly may realistically play well throughout a long, grueling game—provided that The Fragile One doesn't take too many hits. Offensive linemen are rated separately for pass and run blocking, resulting in realistically poor results if you attempt to pass 50 times per game with the run-oriented Bears. Punters and place-kickers are rated for distance, accuracy and even hang-time. Backs are rated for good hands, quickness and breaking tackles. Quarterbacks are judged by their overall passing ability, with separate ratings for rolling out to the left or right, which makes a huge difference in pass rushing routes. As one might expect, QBs are also rated by their ability to handle pressure situations, so that the last-second heroics of Marino and Montana may be accurately recreated.

All players are rated for size, quickness and the ability to play their specific position. Instead of assuming that a given player may switch to another position and perform well, the design includes a unique rating for athleticism, which quantifies a player's overall abilities. Thus, an offensive lineman with great athleticism can play any line position, and is therefore more valuable than a player who can only play center. Players such as the versatile Eric Metcalf are easily portrayed by the system, and are essential to fill slots open due to injury. An NFL scout for the San Diego Chargers, Jeff Mann, worked with Whatley on the ratings, adding to the authentic feel. My only quibble is that Mann's AFC West rivals might be a little better than their other NFL foes, but this is an understandable bias for anyone who must face John Elway twice a year. Rest assured that the ratings are accurate enough for even the most diehard of fans. Best of all, the rating method used is easily adaptable to classic teams of yore. So, even though players of the past were generally smaller than the steroid giants of today, the Packers of the mid-60s may still succeed on their patented power sweeps because their superior blocking techniques are factored in. Such classic teams aren't included in the package, but MicroProse hopes to have a classic teams add-on disk, and one can create teams with the team editor.



WHAT'S MY NUMBER? Despite the featureless jerseys, there's a lot of detail to assimilate before you break out of the huddle.

MY OWN PRIVATE L.A. If you're tired of the Raiders being the most penalized team in pro football, just change their tendencies with the Team Editor.

A big plus for this game is its modem capability, provided both players' hardware has enough pep to keep the frame rate up and running. Playing head-to-head at the same computer works fine, although one player must use the mouse while the other calls plays with the keyboard.

Unlike the murky interface of CC FOOTBALL, calling plays in ULTIMATE FOOTBALL is fairly simple. Clicking on the formation brings up a standard pro-set, double tight end, I-formation, or shotgun, all of which include dozens of stock plays. From this window, the coach chooses running plays, short, medium or long passes, play-action passes, draws, screen plays, reverses and the like. Plays may be selected from a diagram, or simply by name, such as "28 Sweep Right," with an asterisk marking those plays and formations that don't require player substitutions. As the team breaks from the huddle and approaches the line of scrimmage, you find yourself torn between the desire to call an audible (simply by a couple of mouse clicks) and the pressure of the 40-second play clock. After playing ULTIMATE FOOTBALL, it's hard to criticize a real NFL quarterback for calling an "unnecessary" time out.

Defensive options work similarly, with all of the expected stunts, blitzes and varieties of zone coverage. The new 1994 rules are modeled accurately enough that if defensive backs practice "hands-on" defense beyond the five yard area, they will be flagged with a penalty, just as they were in the real NFL at the beginning of the season. The linebackers are quite active, and the pass rushers are very fluid, with Charles Haley powering through blocks and Derrick Thomas blasting by offensive linemen with sheer speed.

Though most computer football players prefer to coach, there are those who would like to take control of Troy Aikman and heave the old skin themselves. This is where ULTIMATE FOOTBALL's Action Mode comes in. Problem is, the Action Mode works best with runners and receivers, because they simply run routes and break tackles after getting the ball. Quarterbacks must move around in the pocket or roll out in addition to throwing. The otherwise elegant interface flounders here, as the manual suggests that both mouse and

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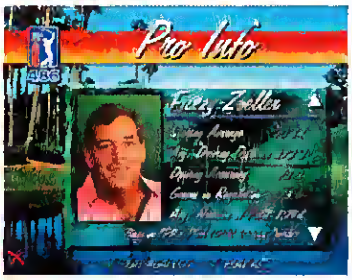

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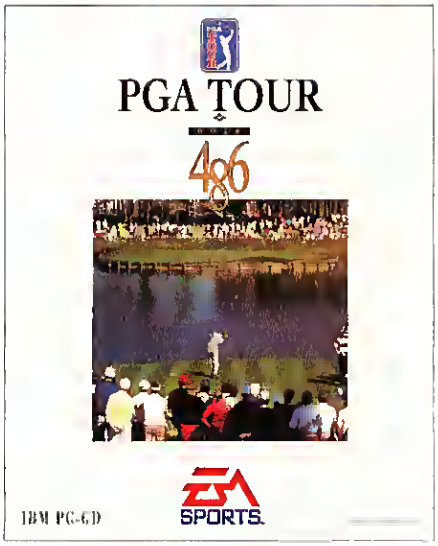

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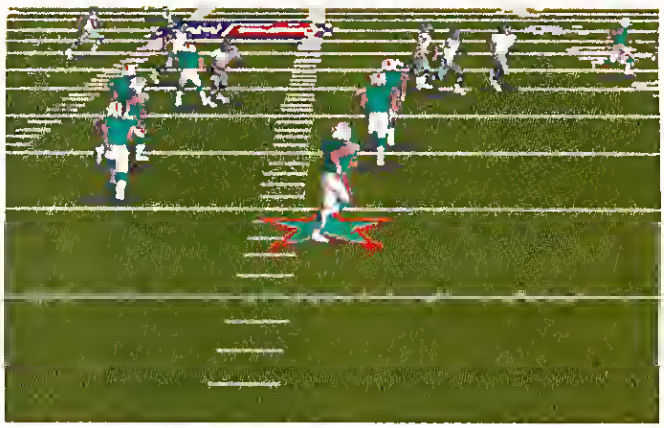
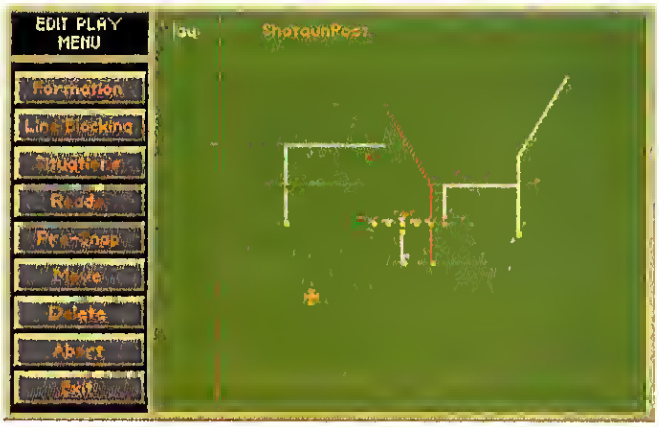
joystick be manipulated simultaneously to throw on the run. If most computer gamers were that coordinated, they would have played football for real. Far better than the action mode in UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS, this isn't up to the similar mode in FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO, although it is much easier to learn.

Despite the difficulties of the action mode, ULTIMATE FOOTBALL is a very good football simulation in Coach Mode, combining the accuracy of a text game with excellent graphics. Because the players are rated by abilities rather than statistics, you don't have to wait for the season to be over to simulate your own 1994 season. In a test, I had the computer play out all of the games from week one of the NFL season, and it correctly predicted the results of all but three games. In one, Arizona was successful on a two-point conversion that it missed in real life. In another, Atlanta beat Detroit in a game that, in real life, was won by the Lions with a field goal in overtime.



STUDENT BODY RIGHT Special teams play is correctly emphasized in ULTIMATE FOOTBALL.



GO LEFT AND CUT TO THE FIRE HYDRANT Design new plays and test them against a variety of defenses with the Play Editor.

Realizing the tremendous crossover potential, ULTIMATE FOOTBALL includes a Fantasy Football League book. While this massive tome is quite informative for the casual or hard-core fan, the FFL tie-in is somewhat tenuous. For instance, there are no free downloads for the FFL bulletin board service. Worse, the stats you download may not be imported directly into an existing ULTIMATE FOOTBALL league. Their main use is keeping track of the status of traded, waived and injured players—still useful, but the advertising implies much more.

DOWN, SET, HUT!

The coach design menu offers eight different coaching categories, ranging from whether the coach uses a two-back set to his tendency to go for a first down on 4th and short late in a game. Coaches who always run a 4-3 defense are pretty easy to simulate, but ULTIMATE FOOTBALL can even handle Buddy Ryan's high-risk "46" defense. This system works as well as it does because it does not get bogged down in statistical details. The system defines tendencies, fits them to the specific game situation, and allows the simulated players to execute. What some players find frustrating is that their players sometimes make mistakes—cornerbacks bite on a fake and give up a long gain, receivers drop passes, QBs fumble snaps. Even the pros screw up, as any weekend fan can attest, and ULTIMATE FOOTBALL seems to do so in the right way—related to the player ratings.

The most die-hard of control freaks will find themselves in pigskin heaven with the play and team editors. The documentation takes you through the intricacies of play design and formation editing with few difficulties—provided you have a good basic understanding of football. If your knowledge of a Jerry Rice touchdown pass is limited to Steve Young throwing him the ball, you can spend some time reading the sections on offensive and defensive philosophies, illustrated by diagrams from championship teams. Players who start by designing realistic plays instead of all-out touchdown bombs will soon become very comfortable with the system, as they see their pet plays succeed on the field. The team editor is also very intuitive, using sliding bars to rate everything from team penalties to ability to block kicks, and does a good job of simulating something so often overlooked in football games—the quality of special team coaching.

THIRD AND LONG

So, is ULTIMATE FOOTBALL a true contender? It has some weaknesses in the action mode, the sound support is minimal, and it requires a high-end machine to truly enjoy the animation. If all this game had to offer was a new graphic look, I'd target it for a losing season. But good coaching can overcome a lot of deficiencies, and it's obvious that this design has been rebuilt from the ground up by Doug Whatley and the rest of the design team. More accurate and enjoyable than its predecessor, and much easier to use, ULTIMATE FOOTBALL is a real player's game. Ultimate? Hardly—but football fans finally have a reasonable alternative to FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO. Best of all, they can play out the season as it happens, instead of waiting until after the Super Bowl.

EDITORS SPEAK

ULTIMATE FOOTBALL

RATING ✸✸✸✸

PROS Good graphics and animation. Line play, receptions and blitzes that really look like football. Nice play-calling interface, with ability to design your own plays and teams. Solid design focuses on players rather than just statistics.

CONS Requires more high-end hardware to run well than some flight simulators. No numbers on jerseys, and the sound support is weak. The action mode is frustrating and awkward.

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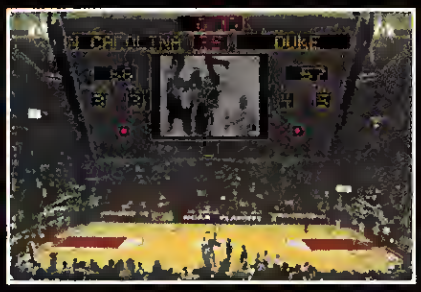

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Second Round Picks

While Front Page Sports and Ultimate Football may be the division favorites, there are several other games striving for a wild-card berth in this hectic season of football simulations. While hardly state-of-the art in graphics or sound, they offer a chance for the football fan to get down in the trenches—without getting mud on his virtual jersey.

APBA PRO FOOTBALL

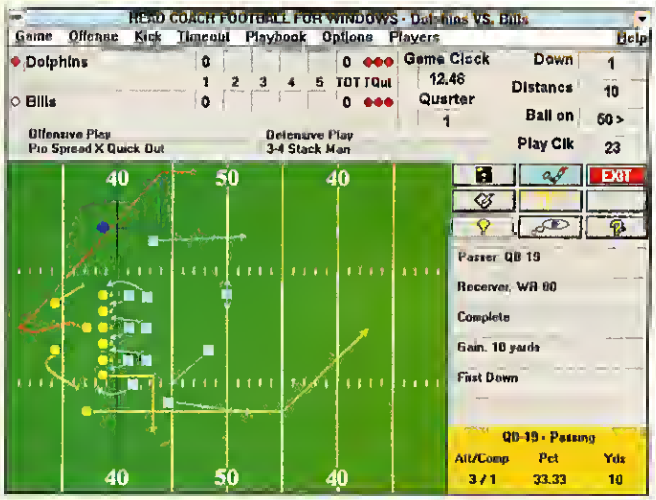
The grandfather of sports simulations, APBA is still plugging away, having converted its stat cards and dice-rolling to the silicon playing field. This latest version offers a football-shaped cursor moving down a Green Bay-green playing field, albeit with one hash mark instead of two. Oespite the attempt to breathe graphic life into the interface, it has an unfortunately clunky look and feel, making the game hard to get into. For the statistics nut, compiling box scores can be done fairly easily, and they include such minutiae as average yards per pass attempt and length of scoring drives. While

the schedule-maker is fairly flexible, the documentation is more difficult to get through than the Oallas Cowboys' defensive line. The AI opponents are called "robots," which adequately describes their style of play. While better with two players, this game is best utilized by statistical replay fanatics who wish to recreate the glories of their favorite team from 1993. IBM, $39.95.

AP8A Game Company Inc., 1001 Millersville Ro., Lancaster PA 17603, (800) 334-2722.

HEAD COACH FOOTBALL

Unlike many Windows products, this program actually does a good job of executing its game plan. While still basically a stat-based game, the graphic overlays will make it accessible to the average game player. The formations seem fairly authentic, and the plays work as they should. Still, play selection seems limited, and it's hard to tell when the quarterback throws to a secondary receiver, or when a busted play results in a big gain, as often happens in actual competition. The touted Smart Coach Mode isn't the cutting-edge of AI technology, but it plays a fairly challenging game. Meanwhile, opponent tendencies are flashed on screen (the virtual Assistant Coach never rests, it seems). This is a good laptop game, with each team rated for injuries, penalties, and substitution tendencies. For those who wonder how much the 2-point conversion or the 30-yard line kickoff has affected play, this new version allows



you to switch from 1993 to 1994 rules at will. Not so much for the grognard as the casual strategy gamer who happens to enjoy football. IBM Windows, $39.95.

Quorum 5025 Arapaho Ro., Suite 415, Oallas TX, 75075, (214) 789-2938

3-IN-1 FOOTBALL

Like most of its competitors, 3-In-1 Football has minimal graphics. Still, the sparse field of Astroturf green has a clean, uncluttered look which adds to play rather than getting in the way. The statistical accuracy is still the leader in this competitive genre, and the game system is a breeze to learn. All of the latest rules, formations and plays are included in a game that can be completed in under an hour. One great feature of the stat-based system is that historic teams, such as the undefeated '72 Oolphins, can be easily matched against current powerhouses. The season replay feature works the best of any we've seen. If this weren't enough, the game includes over 300 great pro and college teams, including obscure AFL, USFL and minor college teams. Great with two-players, 3-In-1 has the best AI of the lot and will give any football fan many hours of enjoyment—as long as they aren't subject to graphics cravings. IBM, $39.95.

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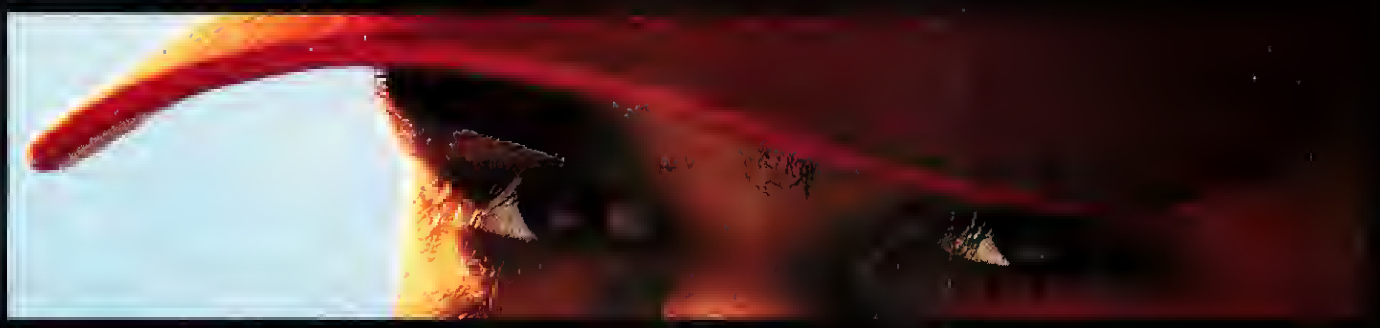

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Three-peat?

FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL '95 Tries For Its Third Championship In A Row

by Terry Lee Coleman

Photo by Jim Gund © ALLSPORT USA

AFTER ALL THE ATTENTION, THE ACCOLADES, THE FAME THAT COMES FROM WINNING TWO CGW TITLES back-to-back, you have to question whether the desire is still there. Can they win an unprecedented third consecutive championship? What will Dynamix do about the NFLPA license question? How well will the new rotoscoping techniques translate on the playing field? Lots of questions to be answered, in this, our first look of the new season at FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO '95. Of course, it's hard to count out a team like Dynamix, with so much depth and talent to burn. Patrick Cook has a fine team assembled again this year, but he's going to have to prove his coaching abilities all over again if he expects to beat out this year's challengers.

When you evaluate any legitimate contender, the first place you have to look is the skill positions. It is here that FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL has dominated its category, especially in the graphics department. Strong, fluid and more lifelike than its competition, the animation of individual players appealed to a wide range of gamers. So realistic was the movement that people began to see things that weren't really there—imagining a defensive tackle stripping the ball loose, or a wide receiver short-hopping the ball on an incomplete pass.

SNEAK PREVIEW Game Still In Development

Long-time FPS FOOTBALL fans were understandably nervous when they learned that game designer Patrick Cook was juggling his all-star animation lineup. While hard at work on FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL, the decision was made to incorporate the rotoscoped animation techniques of that game into a new version of FOOTBALL PRO. At least in the preseason, the experiment has met with complete success. Quarterbacks have more hand motions now, and the best of them can "pump-fake" a pass well enough to freeze any linebacker in his tracks. Running backs boast more spin moves and seem to hesitate and change direction even more fluidly than before. Blitzes enjoy more raw power and energy, and defensive players continue to go after the ball (or the quarterback) even after they have been knocked down. Collisions are handled differently than in earlier versions of FPS FOOTBALL, with backs sometimes sliding over or under the tackle for extra yardage. Consummate hitters like Ronnie Lott are simulated very well, often knocking ball-carriers back on their cans with realistic bone-jarring tackles. The ferocity of the bodies slamming into each other may account for more fumbles, which now seem to happen with more frequency, but are still within realistic boundaries. The background has more visual depth, especially the texture-mapped playing field, which helps highlight the newer animation. For the final version, Dynamix plans to include painted team logos in the end zones for even more football flavor.

One of the few legitimate criticisms that could have been leveled at FPS FOOTBALL during its championship run was a relative scarcity of user-oriented bells and whistles. Now, such small things as changing the colors of stripes on the uniforms allow each gamer to give a team that personal touch. Licensing agreements with the NFL mean that actual team helmets will be included, a big plus for anyone who had to suffer playing the Dolphins in *orange* headgear last year.

New camera angles, also from FPS BASEBALL, are a welcome addition, and compare favorably to those used by other programs, such as ULTIMATE FOOTBALL. Would-be Monday Night Football directors may isolate on any individual player when in VCR mode, regardless of where the ball might be, and favorite camera angles can even be programmed as hot keys. The real treat, though, is watching a play unfold in slow motion, where the quality of the new animation style is quite evident.

The biggest off-season maneuvers were made off the field, where licensing

BROKEN-FIELD RUNNING With the variety of camera angles, you can get a sideline view of Barry Sanders leaving tacklers in the turf.

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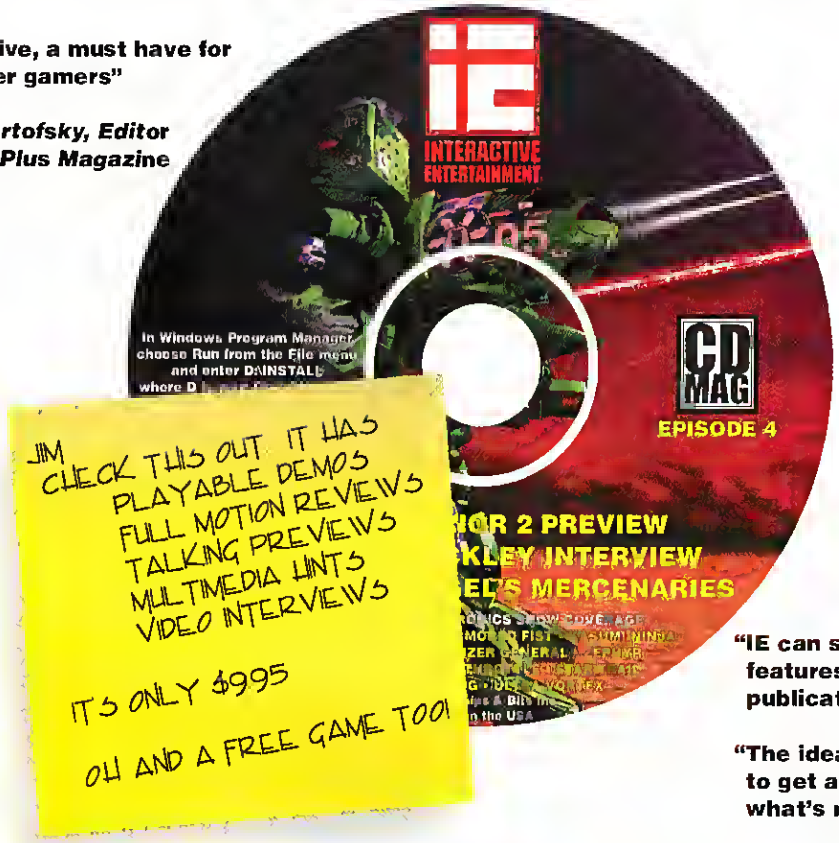
"Impressive, a must have for computer gamers"

Steve Wartofsky, Editor
Strategy Plus Magazine



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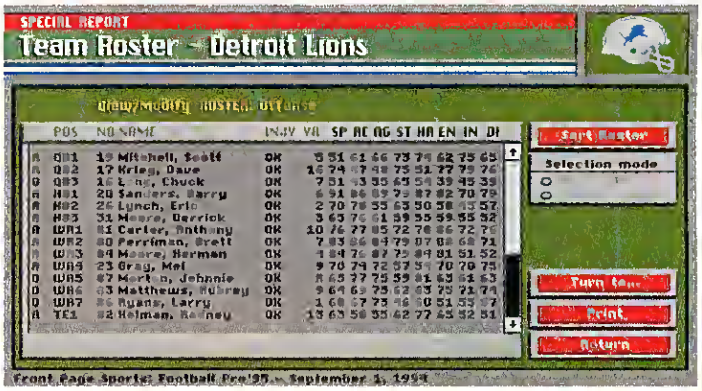
(still in negotiation at press time) should give FPS FOOTBALL '95 General Managers access to actual 1994 NFL players and teams. Team Profiles will allow users to define coaching tendencies for computer-coached teams. You could then see how Jimmy Johnson would realistically fare in Miami, or if Don Shula could win another Super Bowl with San Francisco. Individual player stats are even easier to input than before, with a draft pool option available for players who wish to start a new league from scratch. For those gamers who fancy themselves NFL scouts, draft profiles may be created to rate prospects, especially important since the '95 version includes the expanded 53-man NFL roster as standard. Existing teams may be sorted by any rating, so that if you want all your players with good hands on the field to receive an onside kick, you would simply sort by their hands rating. Who would imagine that spreadsheets could be so entertaining?

Once a team is selected, the actual player stats work just as before, with the difference that the AI is improved tremendously from a year ago. Players who beat their computer opponents soundly will have to come up with some new plays this season. Offensively, the computer uses the clock more efficiently and has a wider range of stock plays from which to choose, making it less predictable. Defensively, a "read" com- mand has been added for linebackers and defensive backs, which means they play the run a lot tougher now. For the human coach, man-to-man pass defense allows you to select which individual to cover, setting up those classic Deion Sanders-Sterling Sharpe matchups. A "block/next" command fills a big hole in the FPS design, as it makes blocking for sweeps, traps and screen passes more realistic, and really helps those teams with big, mobile linemen.

I always found it irritating that I couldn't access statistics whenever I wanted in FPS FOOTBALL. Now I can, with expanded line scores available at half-time and the end of each game. Substitution preferences can be set prior to the start of a game, making it a lot easier to get players in and out before the play clock expires. Penalty outcomes are flashed on screen so that you can easily decide between 2nd down and two yards to go, or 1st and five. The officials are even better animated than the players—but then, they don't run quite as fast.



I CAN START, COACH Making depth charts and selecting starters and substitutes is much easier with the new roster interface.

The fatigue ratings seem to be more accurate than before, and on-screen reports tell coaches when tired and injured players are ready to return. Momentum is even modeled, with hot and cold streaks of players not only included, but spelled out explicitly. Field-goal kicking is portrayed full-screen, reminiscent of the old **Cinemaware** TV SPORTS: FOOTBALL, except that the graphics in FPS '95 are much more detailed. Several times, I came close to blocking a field goal, with the incentive that in this version, I could potentially return it for a touchdown.

There are other perks—kicking off from the 30-yard line means fewer touchbacks. Quarterbacks actually throw the ball reasonably well on roll-outs. I was disappointed that I couldn't go for two points in this preview version, but Patrick Cook assured me that 2-pointers would be ready for the regular season release. New championship animation is promised, for those who can handle the newer, tougher, opponents. For those frantic two-minute drills, the clock may be stopped by spiking the ball (and losing a down). The play library has been expanded to well over 3,000, with some 10,000 plays planned for the CD release. Making your league's Pro Bowl selections is much easier, yet has many more options. You may determine criteria based on yardage, fewest interceptions, or whatever. The new player editing utility allows you to rate players for the upcoming season based on their previous year's performance, age, or experience, with up to 70 different criteria used to evaluate each team position. Best of all, Dynamix says that existing leagues from FPS FOOTBALL will be compatible with the new version.

GOAL-LINE STAND The read command makes for better defensive pursuit, while the new blocking commands allow a sweep to develop as it should—all of which combine to create the explosive play seen here.

Of course, even an all-star team has some weaknesses. The action mode seems even tougher to master than before—hardly a problem for joystick jockeys, but more cerebral coaches may want to stick with the basic action option. The advanced play-calling mode is still not as intuitive as I would like, but those intimate with their playbooks will probably not even raise an eyebrow. As excellent as the new animation is, there is still the question of how the 3-D stadiums for each team will turn out. Nevertheless, with all the improved graphics, editors and league options, it would be hard not to consider FPS FOOTBALL '95 a must for any football fan. The improved AI opponents and greater variety of coaching and team styles would seem to make this game more than just another rehash of past glories. We'll know for certain when the playoff run starts, appropriately enough, with a December release.

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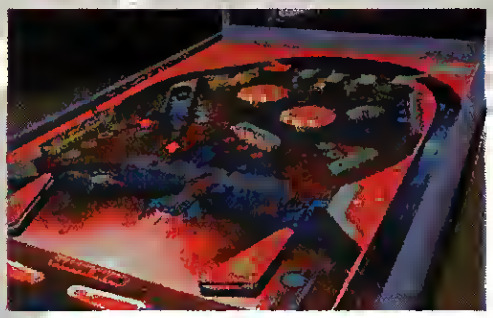

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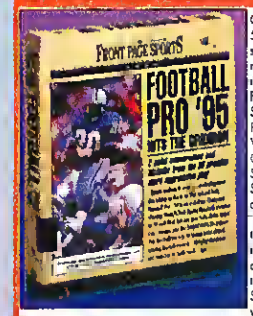
FRONT PAGE FOOTBALL PRO '95



Order your 50-yard-line seats to the new and improved Front Page Sports Football Winner of CGW's Best Sports Simulation award in both '93 and '94, this best seller is set for another goal-to-goal run. Starts you out with all the 1994/95 lineups New rules promise more aggressive play Exclusive Camera Angle Management lets you review plays from all angles and new 3-D stadium bring the crowd into the game Upgrade available for previous owners Call for DOS pricing

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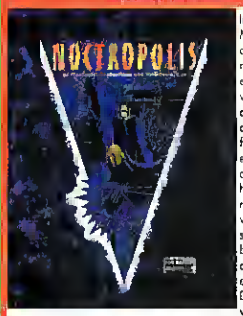

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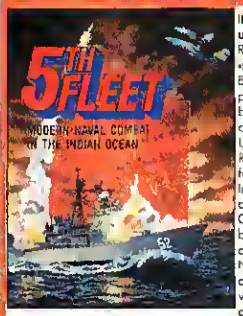

It's 1999 and the Russians are back! Based on the popular board game, command the U S or Russian naval forces in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf A naval battlegroup can include Nimitz aircraft carriers with a full complement of Tomcat, S-3B Viking and Hornet aircraft as well as Aegis carriers destroyers, and other support vessels Ground-based support includes F-117A Stealth Fighters P3C Orion and other vital support elements Play solitaire head-to-head or via E-Mail!

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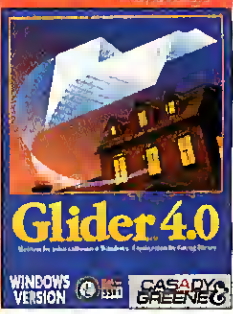

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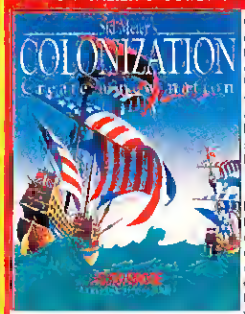

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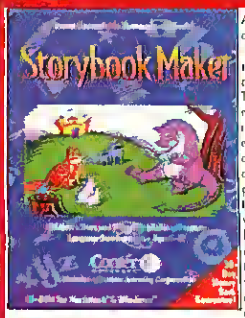

All that your child can imagine, stories, pictures and sound. These elements are all in the computer for your children to create stories, paint, or add their own voices. Use hundreds of different picture cards with animals, objects and colors. All of the stories can be printed out to make your child the star, the director or the creator of their own stories... post-cards or live narratives. A delight for the imagination. MAC CD available. CALL $

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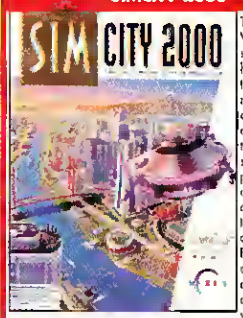

The exciting Windows version is now here! Get all the realism of running the city of your dreams. Raise taxes, build solar power plants, zoos, or push education bills through the city council. Fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, or an alien invasion will make your job a challenge or a disaster. Bring the city to life, get SIMCITY 2000 the ultimate city simulator. Another SIM Challenge!

MAXIS - WIN #34246 **$39**

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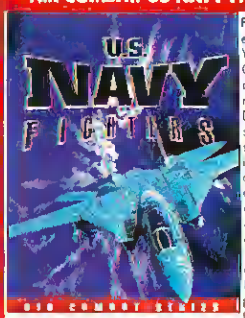

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33703 Great Naval Battles II ..40
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31362 Iron Helix ..58
36388 Jagged Alliance ..46
32128 Journeyman Project ..45
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31132 Jutland ..50
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32904 King's Quest VI Upgrade ..26
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32526 Lands of Lore ..42
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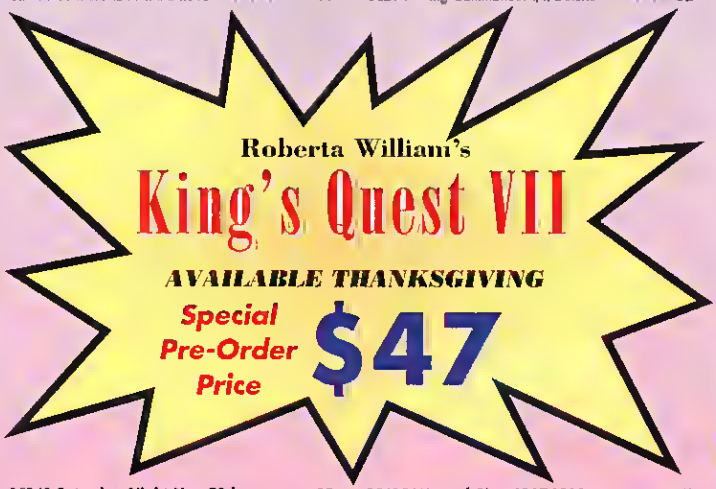

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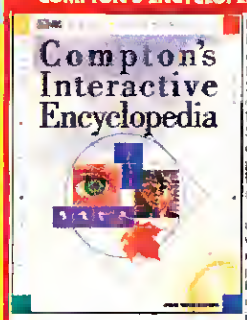

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Definitive and original guide to the computer underground. Includes information on lone phreaking, computer hacking, satellite communications, ATM technology, voice mail systems, cellular phones, virus engineering, spy techniques, explosives, alarm systems and much more. Reveals the underground as through the eyes of the actual people who committed these insidious acts. Viewer discretion is advised.

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The gold is gone, greed runs rampant and gallantry will prevail! The legend of Zorro lives on in a whip and blade adventure of swashbuckling proportions. Featuring full-motion video, 3-D rendered graphics, digitized speech and full CD music and sound effects. Brave the desert and its man-eating plants and circling vultures. Explore ancient ghost ships and battle bandits. Don the marks, wear the cape and climb astride your trusty steed to take on the timeless mantle of Zorro.

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A graphically violent experience in terror, combining role playing action and arcade style combat with an intense, cinematic story line. You've been plunged into a nightmare suffering from amnesia. A horrible homicide has happened and no one seems to care. The only clue left behind is an engraved invitation for you to enter the Order of the Harvest Moon, an exclusive organization that controls the town in ways you don't understand. This is your invitation to enter the realm of Harvester. Are you fearless enough to accept it?

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31636 Cyrix CX486SRX2 20/40 386SX 20 217
34409 Cyrix CX486SRX2 25/50 386SX-25 249
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33501 Math Co-Processor 387SL 80
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36120 Micronics 486DX2 50 VLB 561
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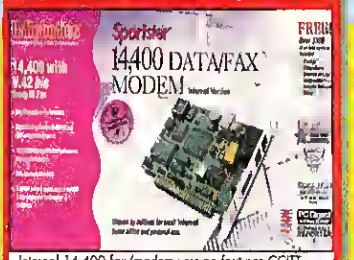

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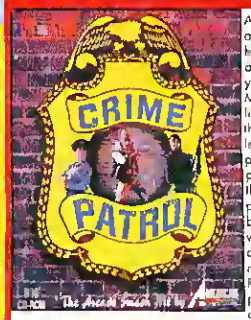
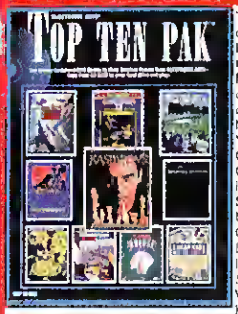


A top ten arcade smash hit is now available for your PC! Multi-level live-action thriller challenges the player to progress through police ranks, battling a variety of criminal elements As a Rookie the player takes on gang members armed robbers and other street criminals Be prepared to confront bank robbers and terrorists once you're selected for SWAT team assignment Features live motion picture act on with many hours of suspenseful game play

AMERICAN LASER - IBM CD #35100 **$38**

TOP TEN CD PAK



Ten widely acclaimed DOS games in their original format now available on one CD Includes Chuck Yeager's Air Combat, Wing Commander II, PGA Tour Golf, Seal Team, Ultima VII, Grand Slam Bridge II, Indianapolis 500, Financial Workshop, Kasparov's Gambit and Ultrabots. Select one or all of your favorite titles, load them to your hard drive and play A $250 value! Treat yourself this Halloween.

ELECTRONIC ARTS-IBM CD #36496 **$32**

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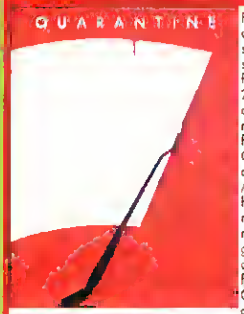

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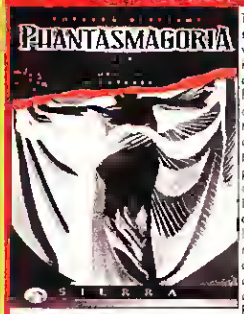

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Fascinating game of exploration, spell casting, combat and strategy set in an ever changing fantasy world, brought to you by the makers of Master of Orion. New fantasy worlds and mystical planes of existence. Includes fantastic races, monsters, heroes and treasures. Five difficulty settings. Economic and political decisions are as important as spell research. Cast powerful spells that affect whole armies and cities.

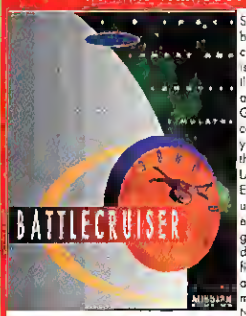
MICROPROSE - IBM #35741 **$41**

DARK FORCES

Take on the role of Kyle Katarn, Rebel agent, in this first person action game set in the Star Wars Universe. Dark Forces takes you to over 15 different worlds where you'll encounter a wide variety of enemies in your adventures. Superb graphics brings extra realism to the virtual world around you. Added features such as looking a direction other than your gun is facing and a heads-up display indicating your current armor, health, and weapons status keeps you informed. If you like Doom, you'll love Lucasarts new action game!

LUCAS ARTS - IBM CD #36302 **$46**

BATTLE CRUISER 3000 AD



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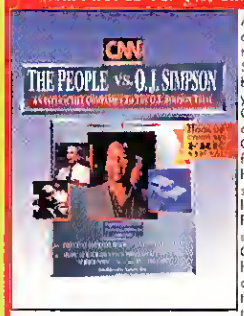
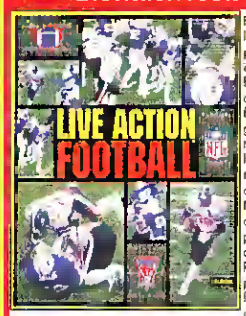
THE PEOPLE VS. O.J. SIMPSON



An interactive companion to the O.J. Simpson trial brought to you by CNN. Contains over one hour of CNN video footage. No hype, no gossip, no speculation, just the facts presented as only CNN knows how. Covers all aspects of the case, from the crime and the investigation to the arrest and legal proceedings. Stay up-to-date by accessing a special file on CompuServe to obtain up-to-the-minute information about the trial. Create your own investigation and get the facts surrounding this fascinating case.

TURNER - IBM CD #36538 **$19**

LIVE ACTION FOOTBALL



Football simulation incorporating original video footage into an interactive football game. Up to two players have the ability to "coach" a team of NFL All-Stars and select plays just like a real game. Results are played out in full-motion color video, utilizing the full capabilities of the CD-ROM drive, and using original footage shot specifically for inclusion into the game. Play-by-play commentary will be by legendary sportscaster Al Michaels with pro and college football analyst Pat Haden.

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12069 Mind Castle . . . 34
14313 Multimedia Workshop . . . 46
11464 Odell Down Under . . . 34
15297 Oregon Trail . . . 30
15292 Peter Pan Story Painting Adv . . . 32
15293 Ping & Kooky's Cuckoo Zoo . . . 32
11869 Playroom 2.0 . . . 30
13660 Puff Puff Goes to the Moon . . . 32
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11145 Ready, Set, Read . . . 26
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29631 Aladdin and His Lamp . . . 32
34013 Alphabet Blocks . . . 30
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31353 Dinosaurs! MPC Encyclopedia . . . 46
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32012 Fatty Bears B'Day Surprise . . . 32
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27220 Greatest Book Collection . . . 32
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35098 Human Calculator . . . 26
36072 Jets! . . . 34
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Circle Reader Service #56

Three Shots To Score

The World Cup is Over, But the Rush of Computer Soccer Games Is Not. A "Football" Expert Kicks Around The Latest Lineup.

by Lawrence Norman

Photo by Al Bello © Allsport USA

I SETTLED DOWN HAPPILY IN FRONT OF MY COMPUTER, IN MY ALAN GILZEAN, TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR, center forward, #9 shirt. It had been proudly pilfered from his locker in 1968, and only washed once (in order to ensure that it lasts forever). I was ready. I had three chances to score, three games to review, and I felt certain that one of them would satisfy my soccer deprivation.

Unfortunately, I've found that the state of computerized soccer is not a healthy one. Although each of these games is easy to play, difficult to master, and has an almost infinite replay life, they all have serious flaws.

As a person who really cares about soccer, I'm one of those people who thought Bill Shankley didn't give the game enough respect when he said, "Soccer (actually, he said, "Football") is not a matter of life or death, it's more important than that." So, you aren't likely to be surprised that my take on this crop of computerized soccer games is that they are only nominally about soccer. The reality is that the nature of the sport is rather unstructured. Soccer is a tapestry of flowing innovation where, within a real game context, a player of great skill, strength and speed will almost invariably lose to a player of great experience and knowledge. This is because knowing what to do *with* the ball is one thing, but knowing what to do *without* the ball is the real test. How do you program that into artificial players? As a sport, soccer is a lifestyle that gets under your skin almost by osmosis and is learned in that same way. In my opinion, these games need a few more seasons under their belts before they are part of that lifestyle. Here, from the perspective of a retired pro and active fan, is my scouting report.

PLANET SOCCER

Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 4MB RAM, VGA graphics, 20MB hard drive space, mouse; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards. Amiga version available in Europe.
# of Players: 1-2
Protection: None
Designer: Condor Software
Publisher: I-Motion
Santa Monica, CA
(800) 443-3386

MY EMPIRE FOR A GOAL

To anyone who hung around the coin-op arcades in 1984, EMPIRE SOCCER '94 is the same old game in a new uniform. The trappings may have changed, but the game play is awfully (and I do mean awfully) familiar. I had very little patience with this game, and wading through the Training, Exhibition and World Cup formats, as well as the different skill settings, did not keep my attention. With all the spectacular action that soccer offers, it was unfortunate that even the odd little animated insets that show up to punctuate moments of excitement seemed drab and uninspired.

The substitution patterns and formation changes resulted in no serious tactical difference in game play. For the uninitiated, the 4-4-2, 4-5-1 or 4-3-3 formations are all very different. Certainly at the World Cup level, one would expect to see that difference. Would it even be too much to ask that the team move as a unit? Most college teams can get that

EMPIRE SOCCER '94

Price: $39.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, VGA graphics, 2MB hard drive space; supports AdLib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards. Amiga version available in Europe.
# of Players: 1-2
Protection: Documentation Check
Designer: GraftGold, Ltd.
Publisher: Empire Software
Gaithersburg, MD
(800) 216-9706

A GOALIE BY ANY OTHER NAME Defensive team play is a crapshoot at best in EMPIRE SOCCER '94, as this over-worked goalie can attest.

GET IN LINE! Actually, the different formations of EMPIRE SOCCER '94 make little difference in play.

right and sometimes, even youth teams will get the idea. In this game, we have World Cup teams that can't do it.

This segues nicely into what really bothered me about this game, and why this engine is so terribly out of date: intelligence. Since you only control one player, you are forced to rely on the program to handle the business of getting players off the ball to do what it takes to follow through on a play. There seems to be no sensible running off the ball, no covering back, no decoy runs, no field vision, nothing. It's ironic that the only player invested with what seems to be intelligence is the goalkeeper and, having never played goalkeeper, I'm not averse to spreading a bit further the old canard that a goalkeeper with any intelligence is seriously over qualified.

At the very simplest level, soccer is about team play. Games such as this completely ignore that concept. The most obvious problem lay on defense. Defensive errors result in goals, mistakes made elsewhere tend to be less important. It didn't seem to matter what I did or what any other of the throng of ex-pats lining up to play against me did to the tactical sense of our players at the back; they simply did not cover for each other. Or if they did, they always arrived too late to make a tackle or block a shot. If not for the aforementioned goal-keeping by the Mensa member in the net, the results would have been embarrassing.

RATING (out of 5):

SON OF SEGA

Even in the PC version of my son's favorite SEGA game, FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER, the off-the-ball play was substandard to an average youth team. The handling, in terms of control and maneuverability, were light years beyond EMPIRE SOCCER '94. The player with the ball responds well enough to minor changes in direction that he can actually dribble past the competition, rather than simply trying to outrun it.

Unfortunately, my off-the-ball players still lacked initiative and only occasionally got into position to receive a pass. Different formations do change the focus of a team in FIFA, but there is no real improvement in play. On defense, the coverage problems surfaced once again. While the primary defender is easy to control, none of the other players ever cover for

RUN, PASS AND KICK It's not a stat game, but PLANET SOCCER does rate players for a variety of abilities, including intelligence and experience.

FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 4MB RAM, VGA graphics, 8M8 hard drive space; supports joystick, mouse, and most major sound cards.
# of Players: 1-2
Protection: None
Designers: Kevin Buckner, Tim Ansell
Publisher: Electronic Arts
San Mateo, CA
(415) 571-7171

FIELD OF GLORY The behind-the-net view of PLANET SOCCER is more realistic than any other soccer game.

their mates. As a team, this group resembles a sieve. I switched to a very negative five man defense at one stage in order to encourage some sort of cohesion back there. It made no difference, though; they still tackled one at a time.

Purists will lament the fact that goals are too easy to come by. In some games, my son and I managed to get both sides into double figures, even though we hadn't placed any real talent in the games. Another feature that bothers the purist in me is the fascination with statistics. Soccer is not a game that lends itself to any kind of statistical explanation. Time of possession is meaningless, number of shots, corners, saves or anything else other than goals simply doesn't have any significance. The stats page is just further evidence that the people making these games have no clue of what soccer is about and are equating it to baseball, football or basketball. They have no idea how you determine success or failure or what constitutes domination on the field. It's not how long you have the ball, it's where you have the ball that matters.

RATING:

C'MON GUYS, GET OPEN! Your teammates lack initiative and rarely look for a pass in FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER.

THE SHOT HEARD ROUND THE PLANET

The perspective provided in PLANET SOCCER was the most notable difference between this game and the others. Its 3-D behind-the-goal view is terrific and gives a sense of field vision that a 2-D game cannot offer. It goes a little further by showing the full field in a window on the upper left side of the screen, thereby addressing one of my major concerns. Since the Dutch and German sides of the 70s, the concept of total football has been a permanent feature of the international game. As a strategy, it demands the involvement of all players and, since you can't use them if you can't see them, you need this full field window.

On a purely aesthetic level, this game is marvelous. It propels you into the action in a way that the others can't. In fact, its visual splendor almost makes up for the fact that you can't do much with your players. Getting the goalkeeper to kick instead of throw the ball can be done, apparently, but even the folks at **I-Motion**'s Customer Support Department couldn't tell me how. Passing works, but not consistently. Indeed, sometimes your controlled player will show off that initiative I had rather hoped to get from the other players.

A rather strange problem that I encountered was that free kicks in certain parts of the field are an automatic goal. They cannot be defended by the computer opponent. These aren't just penalty kicks, either. These goals score from 40 yards or more.

PLANET SOCCER needs more memory than either EMPIRE SOCCER '94 or FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER and interferes with Microsoft WINDOWS. However, all that aside, this game looks so good that, in the absence of a chance to play real soccer, it was a terrific substitute.

RATING:

KNOWING THE SCORE

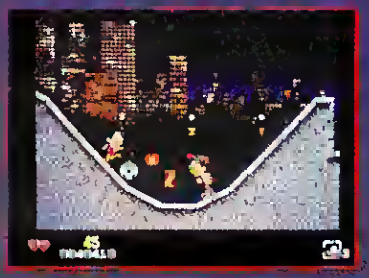
In summation, EMPIRE SOCCER '94, as Monty Python said about Australian wine, is one for laying down and avoiding. This game simply doesn't compare to the other two. FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER isn't too bad. The look of the game falls somewhere between EMPIRE SOCCER '94 and PLANET SOCCER, but it is easier to play and more responsive than either. It's still playing one-on-one in shorts, but it's the best of the three in terms of the game itself. Finally, while PLANET SOCCER is an absolute delight to look at, the gameplay is simply not as smooth as the play in FIFA, and your players are not as consistently controllable.

SWISS CHEESE DEFENSE Regardless of how many defenders are around the ball in FIFA, they tackle one at a time.

Frankly, until the business of programming the players off-the-ball is seriously addressed, playing computer soccer games will continue to be a facile and unrewarding experience. Hopefully, that will change in the future, but right now, soccer fans will have to settle for a scaled down version of their favorite sport.

Lawrence Norman has been a soccer player or a coach for as long as he can remember. He has played and coached on three continents and currently has a youth team in Los Angeles. Though his professional career was ended by ankle injuries, and he is still trying to recover from the absence of England in the 1994 World Cup, he remains a lifelong fan. When not on the soccer field he consults for a number of entertainment software companies.

SOCCER KID



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Circle Reader Service #214

Jimmy Connors, Where Have You Gone?

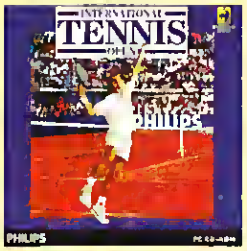
International Tennis Open Goes For The Grand Slam On The PC Tour

by Terry Lee Coleman

Baseball fans have a number of computer simulations to let them see how the 1994 season might have ended without a strike. Football fans can stage goal-line stands in Front Page Sports Football Pro or Ultimate Football, and hockey fans can skate with Wayne Gretsky on their home computer. So why aren't there any good tennis games for the PC? The argument that solo sports aren't as easy to design as team sports is belied by the existence of Links 386. Certainly tennis can't be that much harder to simulate than golf.

The sad thing about this is that tennis is finally beginning to show signs of life, and even some personality, in the real world. Moreover, one of the great achievements in all of sport, Rod Laver winning his second Grand Slam, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Perhaps sensing the void in the market, **Philips Interactive** has released International Tennis Open for the PC.

International Tennis Open



Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-33 or better, VGA graphics, 8 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM drive, Windows 3.1, mouse, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
# of Players: 1-2
Protection: None
Designers: Infogrames
Publisher: Philips Interactive Media
Los Angeles, CA

LOOKS GOOD, BUT CAN HE RETURN SERVE?

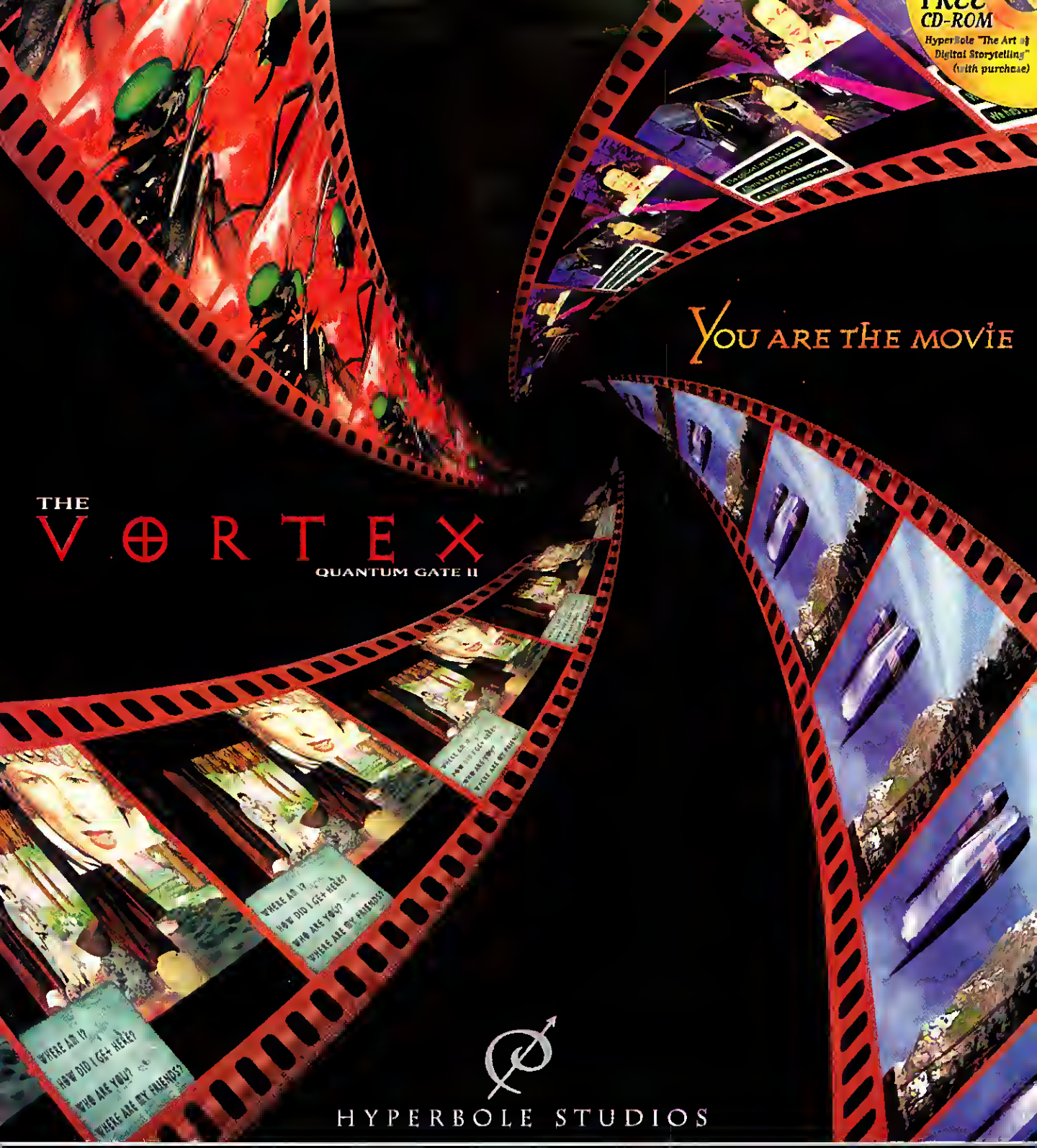
The cover photo makes this appear to be the Davis Cup of tennis simulations. That hard-baked clay court isn't Roland Garros, but still has that distinctive European look. The tennis racquet poised to strike bears the unmistakable Head logo, and the player looks ready to spring forward into the court after hitting his serve. If only the player wasn't so obviously superimposed onto the picture, you'd be less likely to notice the wrong body position, the feet all wrong for what is purportedly a pro serve. Not a big thing in and of itself, but indicative of what is wrong with this game—everything is off just enough to ruin your suspension of disbelief.

The documentation is scanty, but can be forgiven to a degree. After all, at its core, tennis is a simple sport. The first hint that all is not well in Denmark (or the US Open), is that the directions tell you to load the program through Windows, and play it through the MS-DOS prompt! Don't try this unless you need time to grab a sandwich between points.

ON-COURT ETIQUETTE

The main interface allows you to decide whether to control player movement, control hitting the ball, or all of the above. If you choose to control player movement, then the timing of your shot determines where it will go. If you have selected ball control, you may, by hitting a movement and stroke key simultaneously, direct the ball to various parts of the court. Sounds OK in theory, but there are only two shot selection keys, one for "normal" shots, the other for "special" shots. While it's nice for the player to be able to select which keys are for hitting the ball, tennis cannot be adequately summed up by two stroke keys.

What's worse is that the joystick may only effect ball control or player movement. Thus, if you allow the computer to move you around the court, you miss out on half the action, especially since



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Circle Reader Service #268

the computer seems to be weak on chasing down wide serves. When you tire of being aced and choose to move your player about the court, you are subject to the whims of the program in how deep your shots go, and there's no easy way to judge the pace of your shots if you aren't controlling the ball.

The game plays better via keyboard, but the whole design smacks of console game confusion, perhaps due to the fact that this game was developed concurrently with the CD-i version. A tennis game designed for the PC should have numerous hot keys for rushing the net, hitting topspin, sidespin, underspin, and hard, flat drives. There should be some strategy in when to use dinks, drop shots, touch volleys and lobs, when to block back a power serve and when to go for the angled return. A shoestring volley should feel different than a shoulder-high backhand. Why must you always serve from the same spot, when other tennis games allow you to change position?

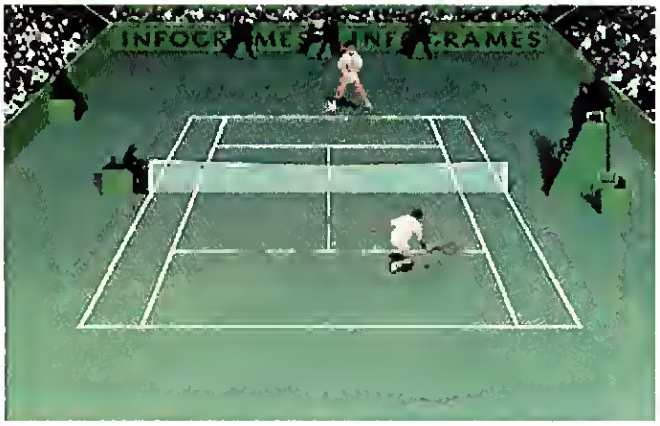
EAT TO WIN? No wonder my opponent lacks endurance—he eats marshmallows on the changeovers.

Perhaps it's because the design team spent so much time on graphics. INTERNATIONAL TENNIS OPEN certainly looks the best of any tennis game ever done, especially on the dark green cement courts. The animation isn't bad, but it seems strange that two players on a static tennis court can't look as realistic as football games with 22 players on the field, all moving in different directions.

GRAND SLAM, NO THANK YOU MA'AM

The hype on the packaging states that you are on "a whirlwind tour of the international professional tennis circuit," implying that you will play several events on your way to the coveted Grand Slam tournaments. The tour is pretty brisk, all right. It consists of three stops, one short of the four actual Grand Slam sites! Now, the idea of having three different surfaces—clay, grass and cement—is one of the charming things about tennis, but no self-respecting pro would ever try for a coveted title without playing some warm-up events first. While the game does allow for practice matches, these exhibitions don't count. In the real world, pros put their ranking on the line in lesser events week after week. Part of the drama for the fan is to see if Joe Local can knock off the new Wimbledon champ, all of which is missing here. What makes all this so disappointing is that JIMMY CONNORS PRO TENNIS TOUR, despite its lackluster graphics, provided a year-long

Communicate with *terrorists* in the *only* language *they* understand.



BEND THOSE KNEES Low volleys actually look like tennis rather than PONG, but that's as far as the simulation value goes.

schedule of singles *and doubles* events for the player to pick and choose between, and it was released over two years ago.

There are other bells and whistles to consider, in particular, the actors who play the roles of your various opponents. They look good toweling off and don't embarrass themselves pantomiming strokes—but then, they never really make it to the tennis court. A good thing, too, for these guys would get crushed by any hacker at the local club, being more concerned with how they look than in how they hit the ball.

Not that their computer-controlled counterparts fare much better. Once the awkwardness of the controls wears off, the game really isn't that tough to beat. Even your main rival, Robert Garett, can't beat you if you have decent reflexes. A big problem with the game system is that net-rushing simply works too well, once you have the timing down. There is no real need to come in behind a good serve, as long as you hit a decent first volley. The art of the approach shot, so crucial to good tennis, is ignored. Another irritation is that first serves have a lower trajectory, but don't seem to have any more zip for all the extra faults they generate.

When these criticisms are boiled down, this fact is left: INTERNATIONAL TENNIS OPEN doesn't provide the feel of being on an international tennis tour, or even on a court. Most noticeably missing are the people and playing styles that give tennis its panache. Other designs have at least rated players with statistics, given them cannon-like serves, big topspin forehands—something to give the opponents, and the game, some character. Here, the players are all hype, their differences in style superficial. There are no McEnroes to move the ball artistically around the court, no Lavers with every shot and spin in the book. The result is a lifeless tour, bereft of any understanding of the history, style or personalities of tennis.

EDITORS SPEAK

INTERNATIONAL TENNIS OPEN

RATING ✸✸

PROS Best graphics ever in a tennis game, complete with play-by-play commentary.

CONS Only three events in the "world tour." Digitized sequences fail to tie in properly, and opponents lack real personality. Awkward controls give no feeling of what tennis is all about, and game is too easy to beat. Basically, a glorified version of PONG.

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Circle Reader Service #237

Destined For Greatness

The Scouting Report On FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL '94: This Kid's Got Talent

by George Jones

Photo by Steven Dunn © ALLSPORT USA

HOW DO YOU REDEFINE A SPORTS GAME? ASK THE FOLKS AT DYNAMIX. TWO YEARS AGO THESE people re-wrote the book on computer football with FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL (FPSF), a benchmark game that combined graphic realism with statistical power. In its updated "Pro" form, FPSF is *the* computer football sim, and probably will be for some time. Soon after they released FPSF, plans for a FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL game were disclosed, and computer managers have been drooling ever since. But while computer football was a category waiting for a facelift, the baseball market is crowded with some very good games. How does this rookie compare?

Quite simply, Dynamix has done it again. FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL '94 (FPSBB) provides all the excitement of the majors, sans sniveling players and owners, plus statistical power. (Ironically, Sierra released the game on the very day commissioner Bud Selig declared Major League baseball's season over.) This game combines the best aspects of graphical games, like TONY LARUSSA II and HARDBALL III, with the best features of the stat-based crowd, and then gives it that special Front Page Sports flavor. FPSBB redefines the game in its own way with the most powerful, you've-got-to-see-it-to-believe-it baseball sim the market has seen in a long time.

I MUST BE IN THE FRONT ROW!

Ever seen a shortstop knock down a hard grounder with his body, then pick up the ball and throw the runner out at first? Sure you have, but in a computer game? Sierra has taken their rotoscoped character animation to new heights here. Time and time again I found myself wondering, "Did that just happen?" On one play, "Neon" Deion Sanders slid into home and knocked the ball out of my catcher's glove. On another, an outfielder lost the ball in the lights and shrank away from the fly. That's in your face realism. Even the umpires get into the act, moving into position to make calls and signaling with authority whether balls are foul or fair.

Sierra isn't just blowing smoke when they say: "Ballflight is based on a real physics model." Pulled balls sometimes spin foul, and at other times they skip just inside the bag to a far away corner of the stadium. Compare this with TONY LARUSSA II, or any other game on the market for that matter, where batted balls fly arrow-straight paths.

FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL

Price: $54.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-33 or better (486 strongly recommended), 4MB RAM, 21MB hard drive space; CD-ROM and floppy versions available; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: Documentation Check
Designer: L. Allen McPheeters
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Coarsegold, CA
(800) 757-7707

Step up to the plate and you'll step into a gorgeous, high resolution pitcher-batter interface. Each stadium offers a unique view in this mode, so at Camden Yards you can see the "Hit it Here" bulls'-eye in right centerfield. The batter's and the pitcher's vital signs are on display, as well as the names and speed ratings of any runners on base.

The 12 stadiums included with the park are accurately modeled, although they aren't nearly as graphically impressive in some views as they are in the pitcher-batter screen. What *is* impressive is the detail, from the hand-operated giant scoreboard in left field of Fenway Park to the local weather that affects each stadium, like the 26-mph wind at Candlestick that can turn homers into pop flies. Even rain delays occur, but the manual doesn't give any indication as to what effects this has on your players.

FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL's innovative Camera Angle Management System (CAMS) allows you to watch all your favorite plays over and over from many

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HIT IT HERE The SVGA batting screen is gorgeous, and the 12 stadiums are modeled to a 'T'. Here, the sign on the fence of Camden Yards begs for a long ball.

unique perspectives. You can zoom in that third base camera to watch the base runner take out the third baseman with a hard slide. This feature alone tends to increase my playing time by 50%, as I inevitably end up replaying play after play. CAMS is easy to use, too, which is a good thing because neither the manual nor the on-line support describe its function very well; it was only after four games that I realized I could change the camera angles during gameplay.

THE PLAYER-MANAGER

Gameplay is divided into two modes, action and manage-only. Three difficulty levels for each mode dictate how much control you have within the game.

The Action mode puts you at the plate, and while you can still make managerial decisions, your skills will decide the outcome of each game. Hitting one out of the park in a game can give you goose bumps, as the perspective truly gives you a sense of just how far that ball is traveling. If you have a hitch in your swing, you can take some BP in one of the 12 stadiums.

Fielding in Action mode, like in all computer baseball games, can be tricky. In the beginning I found myself making more errors than humanly possible. The first few games I saw several instances where my first basemen dove out of the way of a throw to him! It was only after a trip back to the manual that I realized the problem: you can't hold down the button after a throw because the same button that throws the balls makes fielders dive. This is a slightly awkward interface decision, but can be overcome quickly with a little practice.

FPSBB '94 certainly won't disappoint the managerial crowd. Armchair managers have complete control over their teams, from starting rosters to defensive positioning to warming up relievers in the bullpen. The double-switch even works. Call your plays and watch the action unfold. Tommy Lasorda would be proud.

Want to know how well your shortstop hits against lefties in August with men in scoring position in the late innings of a game? Believe it or not—it's in here. If you're the fan who reads the numbers in Baseball Today like a morning meditative mantra, you've found nirvana. Statistics for virtually every game situation are present. Unfortunately, you can only see a puny eight columns of statistics at a time. I would give up half the numbers to be able to see 16 columns; at least that way I'd be able to see the most important of my teams' stats all at once.

VIOLENCE AT HOME Using the replay functions, you can enjoy your favorite plays over and over. Here, a catcher and base runner meet head to head at home plate.

As incredible a computer game as FPSBB '94 is, I noticed a few flaws while playing. The first, and most serious, is in the fielders' artificial intelligence. Infielders will almost always forsake a sure force-out at first base in order to get the lead runner at third or home. With one out, my team up by two runs, and a man on second, my pitcher got Jeff Blauser to ground to the second baseman, but instead of taking the easy out at first, the fielder unsuccessfully tried to get the guy at third. That's bad baseball. Another statistical improbability is that two or three batters are hit by pitches in every game. If that happened in real life, baseball would quickly replace boxing as the major contact sport.

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER

FPSBB '94 has a lot to offer, but what really sets it apart in this crowded market is the way it handles leagues. Career leagues offer managers the chance to build a last place team into a championship dynasty over several seasons. No other game on the market offers this, the challenge of the long-term franchise strategy and the heartbreak of watching your superstars grow old and retire. Orel Hershiser might crush you, as he did me, when he retires after your first season together, but there's always fresh talent down on the farm, and every June an amateur draft is held. You can pluck those talented youngsters right out of their high schools and colleges and send them to the low minors, where they'll hopefully develop into major league prospects. Single season play is also offered for managers who don't want to deal with amateur drafts and free agency.

FPSBB '94 comes with real-life rosters from all 28 major league teams. Instead of deriving players' performances from their previous years' statistics, the designers chose

SACRIFICE THE BODY The animation in FPS Baseball is tremendous, and the variety of motions unprecedented, with leaping grabs at the wall, head-first slides, and all-out dives at hot grounders.

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to give each player a series of numerical ratings. Based on a scale of 1-100, these ratings improve with spring training, but deteriorate with old age and injuries. The younger a player is, the more dramatically his abilities will improve.

Injuries can play a large role in managerial decisions. Some guys tough it out and play hurt, while others need to go on the disabled list. All of this is accurately simulated in FPSB '94, sometimes with blood-chilling descriptions. In the third game of my second season with the Dodgers, my second baseman got drilled in the head with a high inside fastball. He suffered a broken skull, and was lost for 6 months. (Good thing he wore his batting helmet; without it he might have lost his head.) While injuries this severe are rare, sprains and bruises happen all the time. Players can play through these injuries for the most part, although you can put them on the disabled list for quicker healing. Placing a player on the D.L. means they are out of action for at least 15 days.

FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL permits trading throughout most of the season, and when it comes to making deals, the computer General Managers are heartless sharks. (Cold-blooded transactions come naturally when you're a computer, I guess.) Human GMs will develop bonds to certain players, whereas anyone is fair game for the computer. The computer AI isn't foolish, however, so don't get any hopes of trading that chump right fielder for Barry Bonds. Every now and then, though, a computer general manager will shoot itself in the foot by trading away all of its players at one position. Twice I had to manually switch a shortstop to second base because of a boneheaded deal the computer made.

My only problem with league play is that it takes far too long to play through a complete season. Since the computer actually plays each game (without the graphics), "quickplay" seasons, like in TONY LARUSSA II, do not exist. At up to 45 minutes per simulated day, plus 30 minutes for every player-controlled game, a 162-game schedule is not a short term commitment.

THE BOX SCORE

FPSBB '94 is a lot of game. As a consequence, you are going to need a lot of machine to run it. Don't expect to get full value from this game with anything less than a 33 MHz 486-based machine. Even then you'll spend a lot of time waiting around because of slow disk access and tedious number crunching. I would recommend a 66 MHz 486-based system as ideal. Two and a half megabytes of EMS are also required, so start reconfiguring your memory manager, or you'll have to use a boot disk. And don't forget to enable SmartDrive, *without* the write-behind caching, which has been known to cause some spectacular crashes.

It's not so much the on-field action that suffers with a slow system; you can lower graphical detail levels until the game runs fairly smoothly on a 386DX40. League play, however, will take a long time without a fast system. Consider this: on an optimally configured 66 MHz Pentium machine, playing through a 162-game season took a full 36 hours. It seems that in pushing the technological edge, Sierra might have pushed some users right off the table.

THE CPA'S DREAM All the stats in FPS BASEBALL could give an accountant an apoplectic fit. Unfotunately, you can only view a limited number of numbers at one time.

In my experience with FPSBB '94 so far, I've found a few glitches, most related to hardware configuration. The game seems to have a problem detecting certain sound cards. Avoid the auto-detection option in the setup if you don't have a standard Sound Blaster. This is especially important if you have no sound at all, as the auto-detect program will randomly assign interrupts and DMA settings that will consistently crash the game. Other early-users have reported some display problems with certain video cards, but I had no problems of the kind.

FPSB '94, much like its football counterpart, will be *the* baseball sim once a few glitches are ironed out. I'm a die-hard TONY LARUSSA II fan, but I'll be switching to this game. Every time I play I see something new, from the yahoo in the stands yelling "You ain't nuthin'!" to the incredibly detailed play in the field. Although there was no World Series this year, FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL will be able to satisfy the cravings of fans well through the off-season.

YOU MAKE THE CALL The managerial interface is sleek and facilitates quick play, shown here with Fenway's Green Monster looming large in the background.

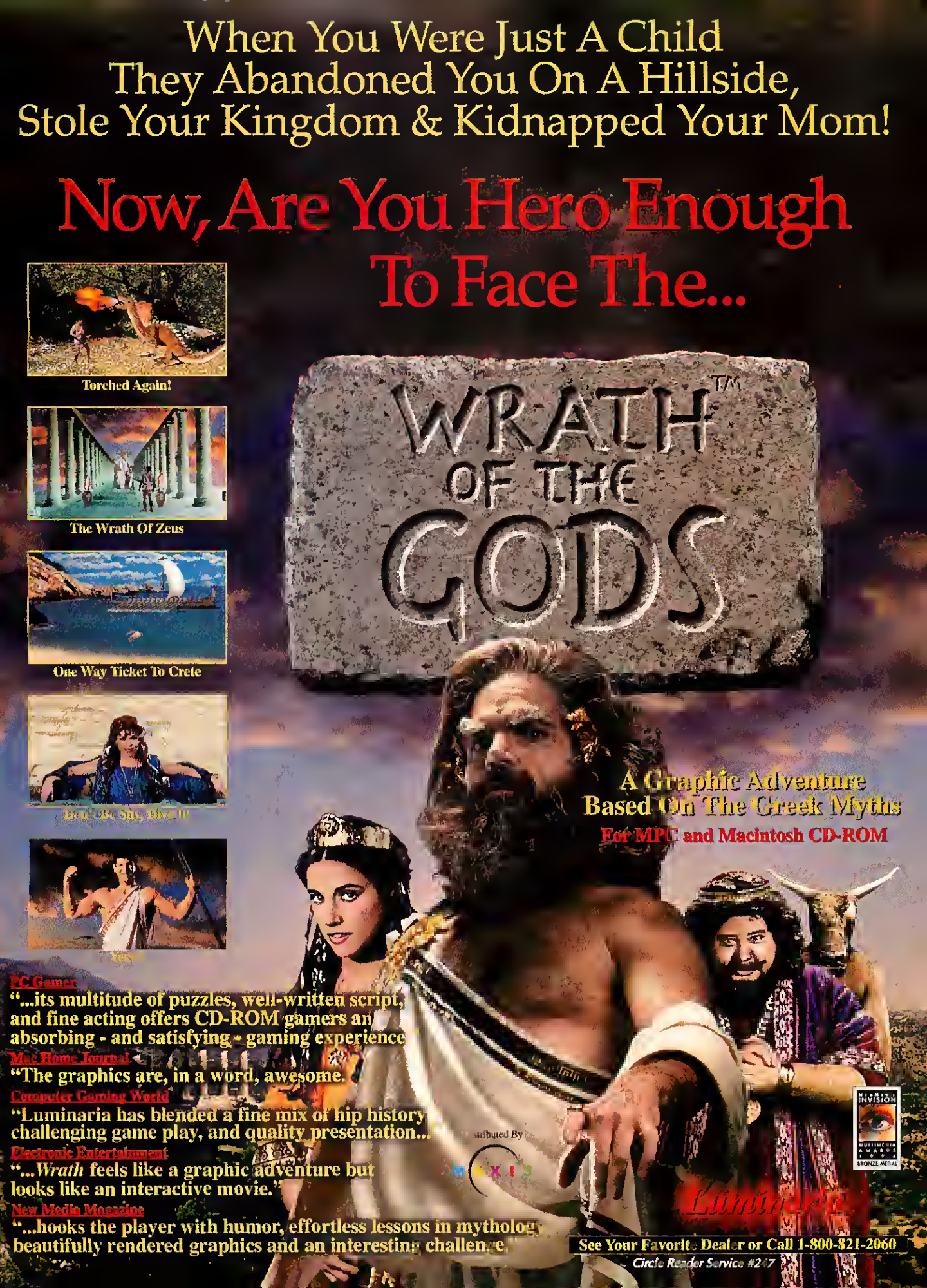
THE EDITORS SPEAK

FRONT PAGE SPROTS BASEBALL

RATING ✸✸✸✸ 1/2

PROS Could become the best graphic baseball simulation—perhaps even sports simulation—ever created. Aside from the tremendous graphics, the game is about as deep as it gets. Between the drafts, farm teams, multiple season play, and more stats than you could ever use, gamers will be batting this one around for a long time to come.

CONS 36 hours for a season replay on a Pentium?! A little ridiculous, no? Beyond that, there are some bugs to fix and adjustments to be made before this game has a chance at The Hall.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The Top Of The Lineup

Photo by Otto Greule © ALLSPORT USA

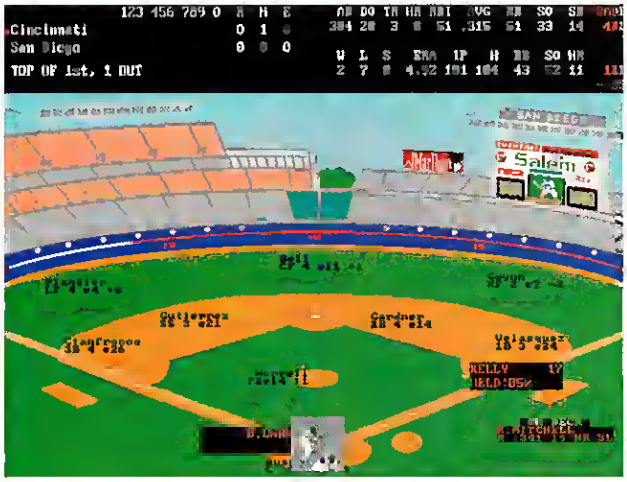
A Comparision Of Four "Text-Based" Baseball Games

by Jim Gindin

ALAS, BASEBALL DID NOT RETURN TO THE PLAYING FIELDS IN 1994. BASEBALL FANS, OR AT LEAST computer gaming baseball fans, have one small consolation, however: they can still power up their PCs and settle in for an evening with a baseball simulator.

No, it won't replace watching Tony Gwynn chase the .400 mark and Ken Griffey Jr. dodge falling ceiling tiles while setting records in Seattle. But your CPU can't go on strike, and the only salary issue you'll have to worry about is whether yours can cover the purchase of yet another software gem.

Baseball's wealth of available statistical information as well as its leisurely pace makes it a perfect candidate for computer simulation. It's no surprise then that there are more simulations covering baseball than any other sport. Traditionally, these baseball simulations are divided into two categories: graphic-based games, which put emphasis on pretty ballyard graphics and animation, and often include an action mode, and text-based games, which put their energies into the statistical modeling of the sport and display the game information textually. Lately, this distinction has been muddied as many of the traditional text-based games have begun to include graphics. Before this distinction fades away completely, we'll take a last look at the crowded field of competitors in this category. Among these competitors, four baseball simulations have risen to the top of the pack: STRAT-O-MATIC 5.0, BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS, PURSUE THE PENNANT 5.0 and LANCE HAFFNER'S FULL COUNT 6.0. Let's take each of these program, break them down into their components, and see how they compare.



SNAPSHOT SLUGGERS In addition to VGA stadiums, STRAT-O-MATIC now offers digitized pitchers and batters.

THE INTERFACE

All four games display their action through text boxes that read like a radio broadcast. STRAT-O-MATIC is a shining example of how programmers don't necessarily need a fancy graphic user interface to provide functionality. Using VGA renditions of Major League ballparks as its backdrop, the game uses icons to guide the player through game play. Apart from a rather poor attempt at animating play resolution, this quick and easy-to-use interface is a model for all DOS game designers. PURSUE THE PENNANT doesn't provide graphics, but it uses the screen very well, providing a lot of information without crowding the screen or rendering the text unreadable. FULL COUNT is a combination of the other two games, using VGA ballparks as a backdrop for text. BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS provides almost picture-quality fields, as well as all the interface benefits of a well-designed Windows application. Of course, you also get the disadvantage of slow game speed.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

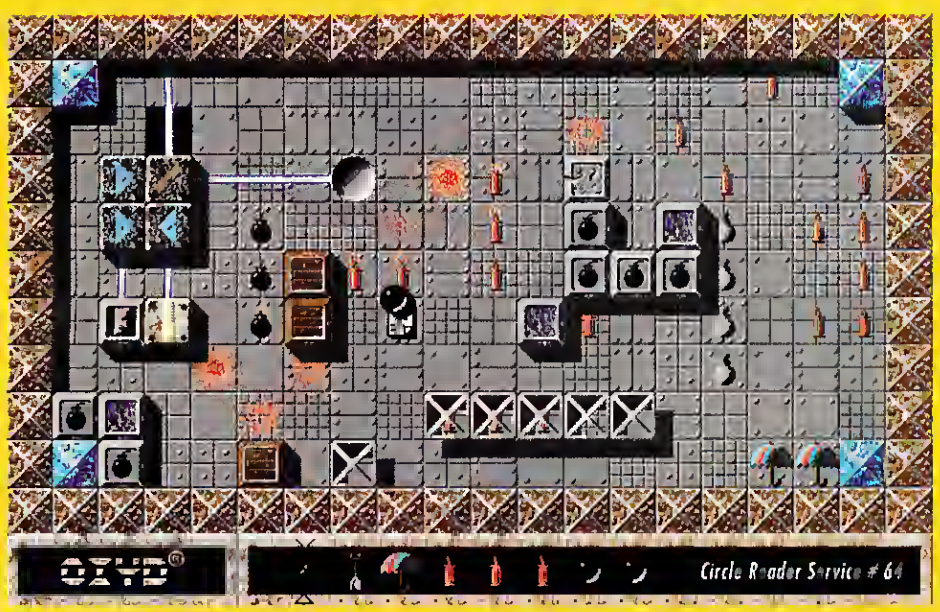
Whether you're challenging the computer to a contest or letting it simulate a full season on its own, the game's computer manager must know how to manage a baseball team. STRAT-O-MATIC has a slight edge in this category, with PURSUE THE PENNANT not far behind. Both games provide a worthy opponent for managers who know the game well. BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS does some things very well, but has a lot of trouble with pitching staffs. FULL COUNT is a little unpredictable and sometimes makes serious mistakes in key situations. On the whole, though, all of the games do very well in this category.

BASE RUNNING

This is a pet peeve of mine. How should a simulation handle a single to left field with the tying run on second base? Who can forget Sid Bream charging around

My son and I love this game!!! Great work!!

Robert Strouss, Burbank



My daughter (11 years old) and I have become "Oxyd" addicts. 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. Tonty

One of the most elegant games I've played. Jeffrey Jandoli, 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 Wescott, Minneapolis

I'm really impressed with your game, Oxyd. Congratulations on a unique and fun product, and best luck to you all. John M. Dodd

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. Jeffrey R. Harrow

Wow! That's all I can say about Oxyd. What an incredible game! I'm completely hooked! The game is really slick, well designed. It is rare to find such a visually appealing, addictive and playable 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

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 04/93

"A" rating - Wow! Exquisite. A must for your games library.
AmigaWorld 06/93

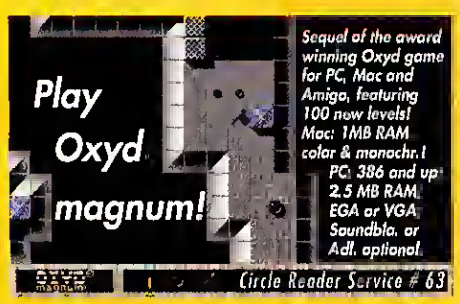
Game of the Month.
MacWelt 02/93

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

Life after Oxyd?!



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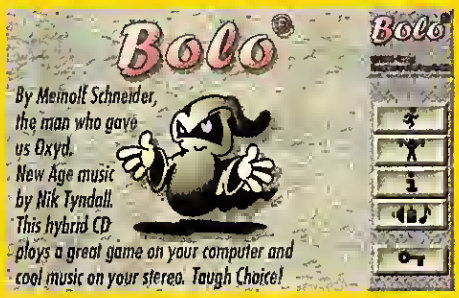

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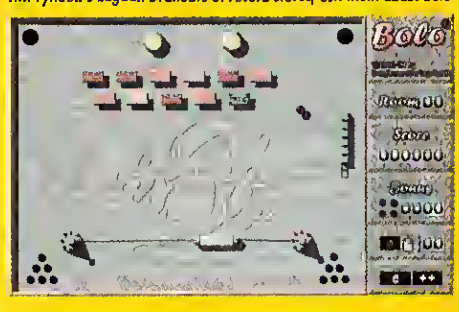

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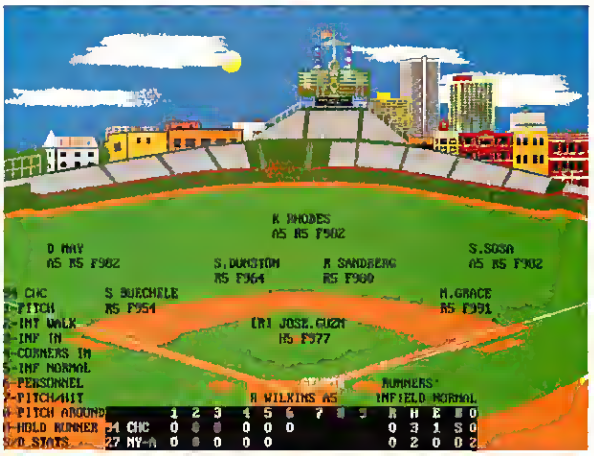
third base and barely beating the throw home as Atlanta won game seven of the 1992 Championship Series? This type of play should be equally dramatic in a baseball simulation. Yet it isn't, because most games do a poor job of providing information about where the runner is when a fielder reaches the ball. STRAT-O-MATIC has perhaps the best current solution. It gives you the option of seeing the runner's chance of being safe at the next base. The designers of BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS saw the need for some solution, so they give you to a certain amount of time to decide whether to advance the runner. Given the 20 seconds allotted to make this decision in the "novice version," Deion Sanders would have scored from second base and would be off in the locker room changing into his football uniform by the time the outfielder made the throw. PURSUE THE PENNANT doesn't address this issue at all, which is probably the biggest flaw in that simulation.

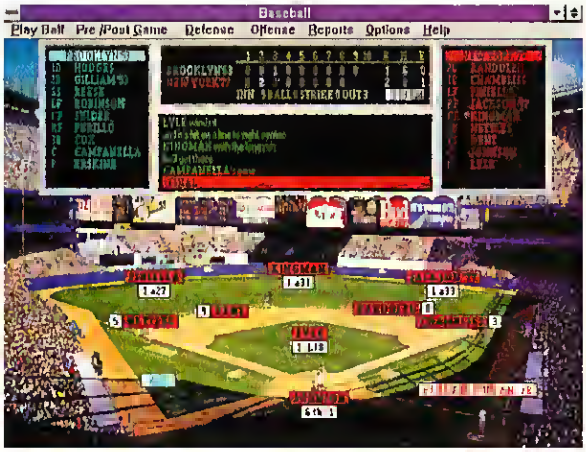


WHERE'S THE OIGITAL POPCORN? FULL COUNT BASEBALL can now give you a sunny afternoon at Wrigley Stadium with Lou Gehrig at the plate to go along with its statistical accuracy.

STATISTICAL ACCURACY

Statistical accuracy is the core of any simulation. Rather than give each game an overall evaluation, I have divided accuracy into key concepts.

League Norms: The goal here is to recreate a season with results as close to real-life as humanly (or computationally) possible. STRAT-O-MATIC provides the most exact statistics, but it is also the least flexible. PURSUE THE PENNANT is slightly less accurate with a little more variance; it also tends to provide a little too much offense. FULL COUNT is more defense-oriented and pursues statistical accuracy through recreating individual performances rather than approaching the problem at a league level. BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS is solid, but not quite at the level of the other three games; this could be related to the problems the AI has with managing a pitching staff.



PUMPED-UP VIEW BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS takes APBA's engine and puts it on visual steroids, adding pull-down menus and a much more friendly interface.

The "Ozzie Factor": Some players approach extremes in statistical categories. Ozzie Smith almost never strikes out. St. Louis teammate Bob Tewksbury rarely walks batters. A flexible game design allows players like these to perform at extreme levels. FULL COUNT passes this test with flying colors. STRAT-O-MATIC and BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS fail the test, and PURSUE THE PENNANT falls between the two extremes.

Fielding I (The "Griffey Factor"): Begin this discussion in a room full of baseball fans and watch the arguments fly. Many baseball fans believe a fielder's worth is inversely proportional to the number of errors he commits. I think this is nonsense. Any manager would gladly trade 20 errors for a shortstop who can reach 50 more ground balls over the course of a season.

Measuring a fielder's ability to cover his territory is baseball's most inexact statistic. STRAT-O-MATIC assigns ratings by discussing players with expert baseball analysts. PURSUE THE PENNANT assigns ratings through a formula based on the percentage of balls a player fielded out of those hit to his area of the field. Griffey, a center fielder, has a reputation as a tremendous defensive player. He often makes diving catches and rarely makes errors. He also has very limited range and makes an astonishingly low number of catches. But STRAT-O-MATIC, FULL COUNT and BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS all give him top ratings for range because of his reputation.

Fielding II (The Implementation): PURSUE THE PENNANT is far and away the best at implementing fielding. STRAT-O-MATIC gets good results, but has some design flaws. It is also the only game that does not keep conventional fielding statistics, so evaluation is difficult. BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS has a couple of quirks, with second and third basemen not seeing enough action, but it's basically a solid system. FULL COUNT trails the field in this category, with center fielders and third basemen not seeing enough action while the second basemen and the shortstops have far too many ground ball attempts. Fielding range does not appear to be a factor in FULL COUNT.

SIMULATION SETUP

Many PC baseball players enjoy playing full seasons. The computer can quickly play all the games on its own, or all the games except for those of a human-managed team. The best simulations allow you to quickly and easily control player usage for the computer-managed teams. PURSUE THE PENNANT has the best system by far. It allows exact control over pitching rotations and a good system for getting the right distribution of playing time at each position. STRAT-O-MATIC allows less control, but is still effective. FULL COUNT has all the tools to provide the function of the other games, but it requires an enormous amount of work. BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS does not provide an effective interface.

RUNNING A SEASON

Both PURSUE THE PENNANT and STRAT-O-MATIC shine in this department. Both games can quickly and accurately run through an entire season. PURSUE THE PENNANT has a slightly more realistic injury system, though catchers are too frequently hurt. Both games would benefit greatly from a system that allowed you to pre-program roster moves over the

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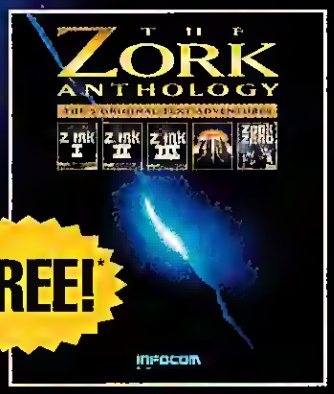

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- Fielding (10)	4	10	2	8
Base Running (8)	6	1	1	2
Simulation Setup (10)	8	10	8	3
Running a Season (12)	11	11	7	1
Statistical Display (8)	5	6	2	8
Documentation (5)	3	5	1	5
Value/Price (5)	5	3	5	1
Total (100)	81	81	56	60

The design of this chart and its figures reflect the authors personal preferences and observations over many hours of game play. The numbers are based upon opinion, not science.

course of a season. FULL COUNT is much slower with season simulation, but is as accurate as the other games when you take the time to set the lineup profiles properly. BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS fails miserably here, forcing the player to set up a league schedule game by game. While PURSUE THE PENNANT autoplays a game in about five seconds on a 486-based machine, BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS churns for at least a minute. A full season takes days of dedicated churning, and you really can't simulate without turning off player fatigue and injuries, as autoplay will stop and wait for human input whenever its first choice for a position is ineligible—an unacceptable constraint.

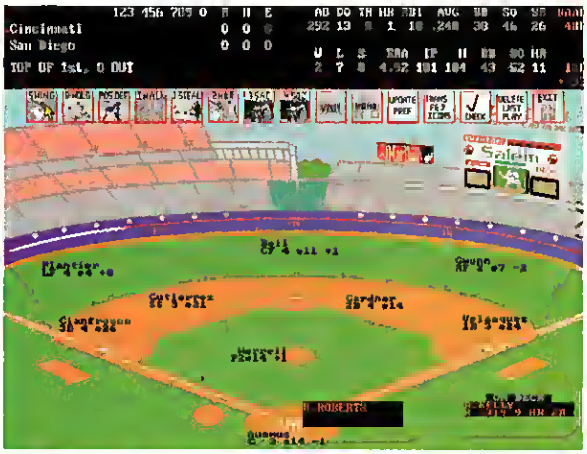
STATISTICAL DISPLAY

BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS shines in this category, offering a wealth of statistics and control over the reports in an easy-to-use windowed environment. PURSUE THE PENNANT and STRAT-O-MATIC both keep a good set of statistics, as does FULL COUNT. The FULL COUNT interface is difficult to use, however.

IN SHORT

Pursue The Pennant: This game is strongest for season simulations. It has an intuitive interface, so leagues are easy to set up and maintain. The designers have a wonderful understanding of baseball concepts. PURSUE THE PENNANT has a good game interface with a rich set of play descriptions. The game has a tendency to generate ninth-inning rallies in head-to-head games, so closers often post terrible statistics.

Strat-O-Matic: The user interface makes this program ideal for single-game play. STRAT-O-MATIC is also excellent for playing the role of one team in a league. The play descriptions don't quite match up to PURSUE THE PENNANT's, but having a decent base running system more than makes up the difference. STRAT-O-MATIC also includes a computer draft module and a function that acts as an opposing General Manager, allowing you to propose trades.



BATTER UP! The best addition to the latest version of STRAT-O-MATIC is the mouse-driven graphic interface, unusually intuitive for a stat-based game.

Full Count: Lance Haffner's game provides top-notch statistical accuracy at a budget price. While FULL COUNT is a little harder to use and a little slower, you can get full function out of the game if you have the patience. Its text library isn't as full as the other games, and the software is a little buggy right now.

Baseball For Windows: The Windows environment allowed programmers to put together a good-looking game and set a new standard for statistical reports. This game is ideal for a leisurely game against a friend, but the AI and the lack of full league setup function are evidence that the designers knew this game is too slow for competitive season simulation.

Baseball enthusiasts are lucky to have this much variety and quality available. STRAT-O-MATIC and PURSUE THE PENNANT are both excellent, well-designed, complete software products. BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS is a glimpse of the future, but not quite a finished product. FULL COUNT is not as well designed as the other games, but it does a good job simulating baseball. It's too bad we can't just cut and paste the best features from all of these products; combined they would make something close to the perfect simulation. Until that mythic beast is born, we've got several excellent, though imperfect, games to keep us playing ball.

For more information about these products, contact:

Full Count Baseball 6.0—$39.95
Lance Haffner Games, P.O. Box 100594, Nashville TN 37224, (800) 477-7032

Strat-O-Matic Baseball 5.0—$59.95
Strat-O-Matic Game Co., Inc., 46 Railroad Plaza, Glen Head, NY 11545, (800) 645-3455

Baseball For Windows—$69.95
Miller Associates, Inc., 11 Burtis Ave., Suite 200, New Canaan, CT 06840, (800) 654-5472

Pursue The Pennant—$74.95
Pursue the Pennant, P.O. Box 19703, Greensboro, NC 27419, (800) 765- 4787

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Tornado Strikes Again

IT WAS DARK. A PITCH BLACK, MOONLESS, FOG covered night somewhere in central Europe. I could tell you the exact location, but then I'd have to incapacitate you, permanently. Screaming along at 450kts, a mere 200 feet above the ground, my stomach was suddenly shoved downwards as the AFDS (autopilot) engaged the afterburner and raised the nose to avoid a rapidly approaching hill. Glancing at the MFD, I saw that we were three seconds late for the next waypoint. I ordered the auto-throttle to increase speed to 525kts. Seconds later, my stomach lunged toward my throat as AFDS crested the hill and pushed -2g to keep the aircraft only 200 feet above the ground. The additional speed worked; I was now less than one second late for the waypoint. As my Tornado GR.4 passed the waypoint, the AFDS banked the aircraft right and turned toward the target. The additional speed would cause my turn to be a little wider than originally planned, but that wasn't going to be a problem.

The lights and strobes of the enemy runway beckoned us as we broke over the last hill. AAA tracers greeted us as well, and the RWR lit up like a Christmas tree. I activated ECM and began pumping chaff and flares. I could feel vibrations from AAA hitting the airframe. With a slight adjustment I was perfectly aligned over the enemy runway. As I crossed the threshold I hit the "commit" button, and the JP-233 dispenser issued its deadly load, causing the airframe to shake violently. It takes only four seconds to deliver a JP-233 load, but it seemed like an eternity. I couldn't tell how many AAA hits we'd taken, but I knew it had to be a lot. As we cleared the runway and I began the egress, our luck ran out. An enemy SAM struck us dead center, destroying the port engine. Diving behind the next hill, the radar altimeter indicated we were a mere 70 feet above the ground. After a few tense seconds, it appeared we had escaped. One engine down, ECM gear knocked out, and one MFD destroyed. Getting home on one engine would require a lot of afterburner, and I wasn't sure we had enough fuel. Even if we got home, there was the matter of a one-engine, crosswind landing at night in heavy fog. They may have stopped shooting at me, but the mission was far from over...

That's what a typical hop in **Digital Integration**'s TORNADO is like. This British import first hit US shelves in 1993 with **Spectrum HoloByte** handling distribution and technical support. For some reason, though, sales were less than spectacular, and TORNADO never really caught on in the US. TORNADO could quite possibly be the single most un-

TORNADO MAY BE TOUGH TO CONTROL, BUT YOU DIDN'T COME TO THE BAR & GRILL TO PLAY KIDDY GAMES, DID YOU?

by Tom "KC" Basham

ON THE RADAR

Hard-core sim pilots will be glad to hear that Spectrum HoloByte is in the early stages of the design for FALCON 4.0. But what about the not-so-hard-core gamers, those who would like to fly a jet but could do without the umpteen keyboard commands and 100-page manuals? Spectrum HoloByte plans to fill this need for speed without the need to read with TOP GUN, a guns and glory flight sim for the novice user based upon the *Top Gun* film. Pilots take the role of "Maverick" with the faithful "Goose" in the back seat and test their mettle against other young pilots at the Top Gun air combat school. The game will use a lot of footage from the movie in both transition screens and in flight. The flight controls and cockpit systems will be simplified to the point that anyone who can wiggle a joystick can fly. It's going to be a light one, but it might be just the thing for gamers put off by the complexity of current sims. Look for TOP GUN in the early part of '95.

der-rated flight simulator of all time.

How good is TORNADO? What about it is under-rated? Four main aspects have worked in unison to keep TORNADO on my system while many other combat flight simulators come and go: avionics, flight model, landings and the overall experience.

FLYING BY THE BUTTONS

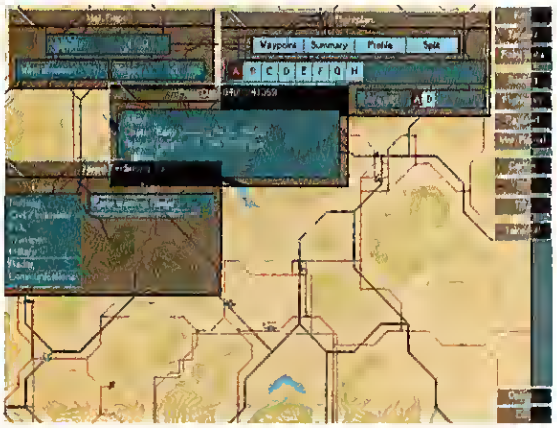
The term "avionics" was apparently coined by *Aviation Week & Space Technology* to refer to aviation-related electronics. Most modern combat jets are computer-filled technological marvels that are greatly oversimplified by PC-based simulations. Most game publishers do not believe the demand exists for a complex avionics simulation. To date, **Spectrum HoloByte**'s FALCON 3.0, **MicroProse**'s F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III and F-14 FLEET DEFENDER stand alone alongside TORNADO as serious attempts to model the electronics inside the jet. But even these sims omit most navigational and radio equipment found in **Microsoft**'s FLIGHT SIMULATOR.

With four different multi-function displays, dozens of instruments, numerous weapons delivery modes, and no "cheat" messages (such as, "You just lost your right engine" scrolling along the top or bottom of the screen), TORNADO is an avionics fan's nirvana. During flight, no one tells you which systems are damaged and which ones are functional. Like the real world, you have to scan your instruments and warning panels and make that determination for yourself.

TORNADO's avionics suite, therefore, is a rare gem in the simulation arena. One common misconception haunting TORNADO is "you fly the buttons more than you fly the aircraft." In one sense, this is true. When all systems are fully operational, you do spend your time pressing buttons and configuring the autopilot (the AFDS). But, when one of those systems takes damage, you must manually take control and perform the relevant tasks. That may mean flying a bulky jet at 200 feet above the deck at 500kts, that may mean landing a damaged jet, that may mean manually calculating pull-up cues for loft-bombing attacks. You have to know much more than what buttons to push; you must also know how to fly the aircraft without the computer gadgetry.

UNREAL HANDLING REALISM

What's so great about TORNADO's flight model? In short, it does everything that FALCON 3.0, F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III, and F-14 FLEET DEFENDER do, while making few of the mistakes these make. Like FALCON 3, TORNADO delivers a wonderful sense of momentum and inertia. If you haven't felt TORNADO's roll inertia, make sure you're using high joystick sensitivity by pressing SHIFT+Y. Like the MicroProse products, TORNADO handles differently with different weapon and fuel loadouts and performs differently at different altitudes. TORNADO accurately models angle of attack (AOA) effects, making for some incredibly realistic landings. TORNADO still lacks the critical but often-overlooked stall buffet, but includes buffet for other aerodynamic effects, such as when the wings are set at the wrong sweep angle.



OVERVIEW TO A KILL Tornado has one of the best mission planning systems of any flight sim on the market.

TORNADO handles the entire AOA/lift/drag relationship wonderfully. It even includes a particularly nasty spin, although anti-spin flight controls generally protect you from this unless you're heavily damaged.

Obviously, TORNADO doesn't handle like an F-16. It shouldn't. It handles like a low altitude, high-speed, interdiction-strike aircraft designed to fly fast and low, not crank 9g in dogfights. TORNADO, although primarily a mud-moving simulation, does include an F.3 Air Defense Variant (ADV) for air-to-air fans. Keep in mind, though, that TORNADO was designed more for long-range bomber intercepts than knife fights.

PERFECT LANDINGS

Landings are my personal favorite. Combat is good. Avionics are good. Graphics are good. Digitized voices are good. But landings can make or break a sim. Tornado's landings are incredibly detailed and realistic. Because of TORNADO's flight modeling, landings can be made with realistic approaches, speeds and behavior. The old rule, "Pitch for speed, power for altitude" rings true here. Although TORNADO's autopilot includes an automatic approach mode, you can bring the bird in manually any time you like. In fact, during crosswind landings, you must land manually. I'm aware of no other combat simulation that really models crosswind landings except for carrier-based simulations such as FLEET DEFENDER. Even then, the crosswind component is always a fixed value based on the carrier's motion. TORNADO is more akin to FLIGHT SIM 5 in this regard, possessing dynamic, variable crosswinds. Finally, how many other simulations out there actually model single-engine failures in twin-engine aircraft? A single-engine landing is challenging enough, but try it at night, in heavy fog, with a crosswind. F-14 FLEET DEFENDER comes close with bad weather landings, and FLIGHT SIM 5 comes close with crosswind landings, but neither incorporates the whole effect found in TORNADO.

MORE MISSIONS IN STORE

These are just a few of TORNADO's finest points, and I haven't even touched on topics like mission planning, weapons delivery, situational awareness, etc. TORNADO is one of those rare sims that delivers that incredible "you are there" sensation. If a couple of JP-233 runs on enemy airfields don't lill you with admiration and awe for the men who fly real Tornadoes on real combat runs, nothing will. No, TORNADO isn't the last word in PC-based flight simulation. Yes, TORNADO does have some flaws, most notably the inability to fly two-player mode in a single aircraft as front-seater/back-seater. Nonetheless, TORNADO can't be shot down when compared with the rest of the simulation market. Hopefully, the re-release of TORNADO with new Desert Storm missions will spark new interest in dis often-overlooked product. When the CD-ROM arrives, don't try to reach me. I'll be out making some "deliveries" to a few Iraqi airbases. Check six.

At press time, the Tornado CD-ROM with Desert Storm missions was released by Trimark Interactive with an SRP of $29.95. Tom Basham was not answering his phone. -Ed.

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run in was 640x480 with full texture mapping for the sky and the sea. It runs a little jerky on a fast 486/66, but the result is amazing. Flying over beaches and coastal regions is incredible, and the ocean is rendered with amazing detail—complete with whitecaps. The sky depicts high stratus clouds with a separate layer of fluffy cumulus. Aircraft are rendered in real-time using texture-mapped, Gouraud-shaded 3D polygons to the nth degree. These puppies look like they were done in 3D studio, but they're actually synthesized on-the-fly.

While the frame rate was acceptable with this detail and a few enemy aircraft in the air, most gamers will be flying in the 320x400 double buffered mode. You'll get some of the high res imagery as in AGES OVER EUROPE, but you won't take quite a hit on the frame rate. Beware, though—once you go high-res, you can never go back, no matter how high the frame rate and smoothness of the animation at lower resolutions.

CALLING THE BALL

The carrier landing screen shots displays the real simulation running at 640x480. That's not retouched artwork—the detail is superb, with trucks on the deck, the "meatball" fresnel landing system, even animated deck crew. For launches, there's a Cat Officer who will actually touch his hand to the deck to signal the deck crew to launch your aircraft. If you think the landings look hot, wait until you launch from the catapult; JET, JETFIGHTER, FLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER, FLEET DEFENDER and HORNET all launch you from the cat, but nothing looks quite like this.

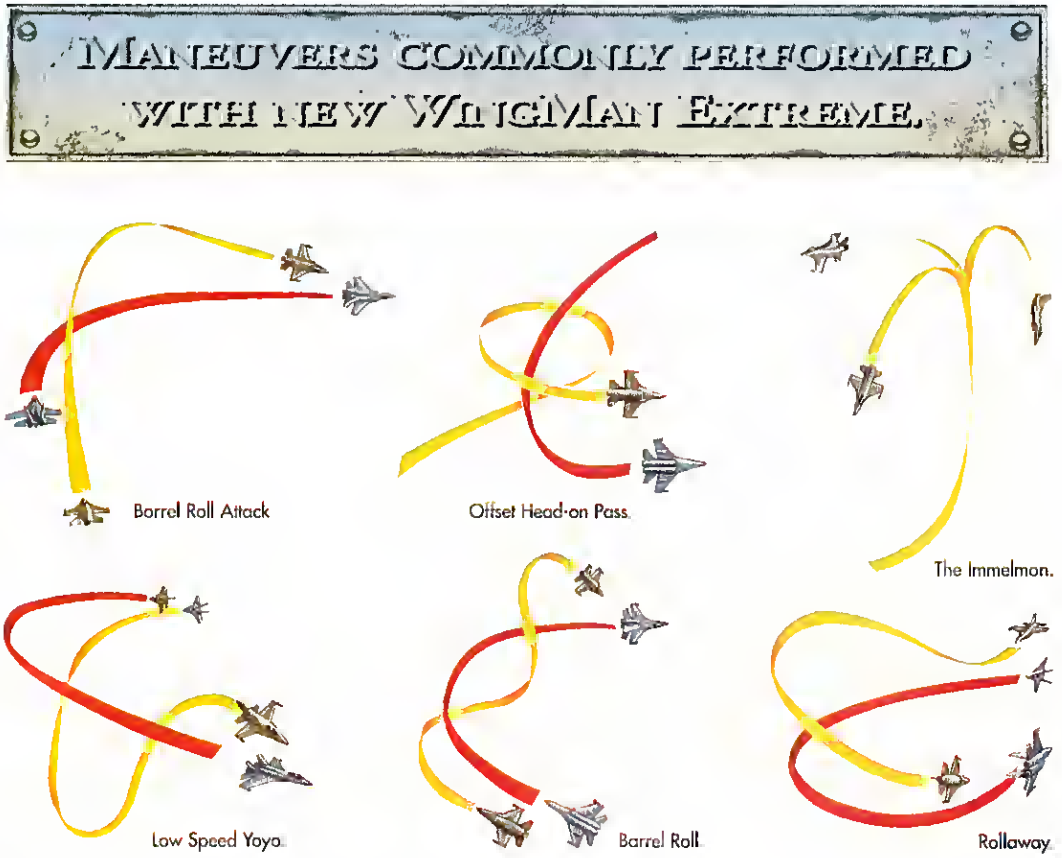
While a great deal of detail went into the 3D objects and terrain, the cockpits (at least as far as I've seen in this early version), are only rendered above the canopy. While you can look side to side and up (taking in the working rear-view mirrors on the F-14 and F-18), there's no lookdown "bathtub" view of a cluttered instrument panel. In fact, the entire "cockpit," which is really a canopy frame and HUD, can be toggled off as in YAC. Iverson clearly wants to keep your head out of the cockpit and looking at your adversaries—something real pilots spend a lot of time doing. When engaging the enemy you'll spend a great deal of time looking out the top of the aircraft, trying to "drive" him down into your HUD.

To keep the pilot workload down to a minimum (and to allow you to concentrate on the fun stuff), there are small user-configurable windows that, like YAC, show various functions such as flight envelope, navigation info, fuel info, and weapons data. Additionally, the two most useful items are the RWR (Radar Warning Receiver) and an over-simplified radar. Anyone overwhelmed in F-14 FLEET DEFENDER will welcome this, but the serious sim driver may miss a comprehensive radar display.

The tracking view is the easiest to use of any flight sim I've seen. They've taken the "floating X" that designates targets from YAC and combined it with a tracking "padlock" type view. If you designate a target and he flies out of your field of view, you'll see an X. Fly the X to the center and apply backpressure, and you'll bring the target right into your view; subsequently, your HUD will come into your field of view (simulating bringing the nose of the aircraft up to the target), where you'll be able to bring your weapons to bear.

KNIFE FIGHTS AND FLIGHT MODELS

Iverson and Grace have gone to great lengths to provide satisfying flight models that meet or exceed those of YAC.



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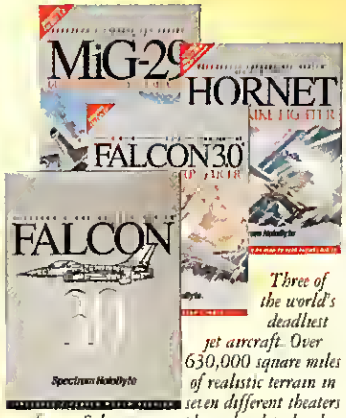

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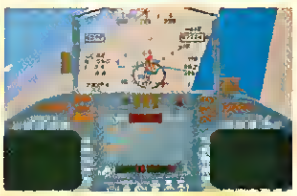

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Into The Danger Zone

A Preview of Electronic Arts' U.S. Navy Fighters

by Mike Weksler

EACH NEW AIR COMBAT SIMULATION TAKES US EVER CLOSER TO AN EXPERIENCE SO CONVINCING IT SEEMS *REAL*. Flight models, graphics, and artificial intelligence continue to push the envelope of technological possibility within the constraints of conventional hardware. Simulations like **Domark**'s pioneering FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT (and its add-ons) showed what was considered impossible only a year ago—a 3D polygon-filled simulation running in high resolution (1024x768) at a fast frame rate on a 486 with 64-bit local bus graphics card. Additionally, sims like **Origin**'s STRIKE COMMANDER and **MicroProse**'s FLEET DEFENDER and 1942 PACIFIC AIR WAR demonstrate how texture mapping, even at low resolution, can transform crude shapes into sleek aircraft, life-like cockpits, and detailed targets and buildings.

SNEAK PREVIEW Game Still In Development

Now, with the advent of U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS (USNF) from **Electronic Arts**, it is clear that a new generation of air combat simulations has arrived. One flight at the controls of an aircraft in the texture-mapped U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS in 640x480 resolution, and you'll never want to go back to low-res. The game's designer and 3D programming impresario Brent Iverson and producer Paul Grace are like the Sigfried and Roy of air combat simulation, performing feats of sheer magic with their products. Many of you may be familiar with this team's last product: Chuck YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT (YAC), which showed that a simulation could appeal to both hard-core types and novices alike. After co-authoring a book on YAC, I remember asking Iverson "What's next?" to which he replied in a low-key manner, "I think I want to do something with modern naval aircraft."

That was over two years ago, and since then, I've been dying to see what Iverson and Grace have been working on. It appears that the two have stayed on target and, by building upon what they learned from YAC, the pair set forth to create yet another thrilling air combat experience.

CAMPAIGN IN THE UKRAINE

USNF is a modern naval air combat simulation in a near-future scenario that takes place in the Ukraine. Hard-line radicals have given Yeltsin the boot and want to take back the territories that are, by and large, ethnically Russian. The U.S. has decided that it's in its best interest if the Ukraine stays out of Russian hands. This sets up an important item that was missing in YAC—a campaign. The aircraft carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower is dispatched to the area, and you are assigned to fly in a capture-the-flag-style campaign that pits Russia against the Ukraine in a variety of missions. In addition to traditional carrier-based aircraft such as the F-14 Tomcat and the F/A-18 Hornet, you may fly the Su-33 Flanker—serious Ukrainian earth-moving equipment. For those who rip through the first campaign, Electronic Arts plans to release subsequent campaigns on CD-ROM.

PREPARE FOR PENTIUM TAKE-OFF

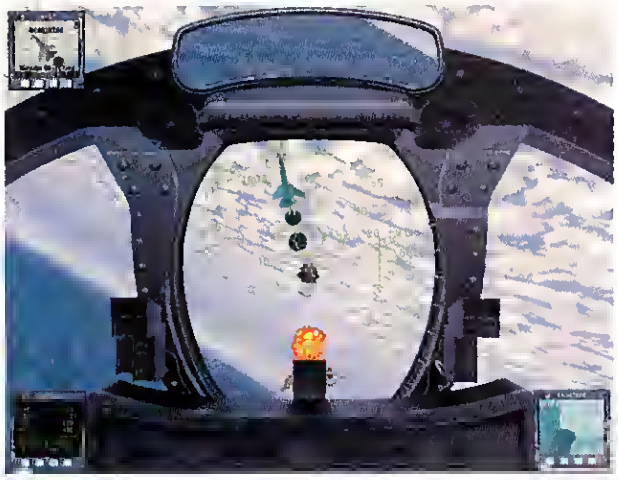
Iverson once told me that the more he found out what air combat entailed, the more he was amazed that it really took place. Similarly, the more I find out what game designers do with 3D graphics, the more I'm amazed. USNF is hands-down a graphical feast.

I took this baby up for test flights on three different screaming machines, a Pentium 66 and two hot-rod 486s. A CD-ROM-only product, USNF will run with either a 15 megabyte hard drive installation, or the minimum install that only copies a few meg onto the hard drive. Even with a beta copy, I didn't notice much of a difference between the two. At this point, 320x200, 320x400 double buffered, 640x480 and up to 1024x768 resolution modes are supported.

I found that the most pleasing mode to

WYSIWYG A real F-18 about to hook the arresting gear (inset) looks almost as good as the aircraft simulated in U.S. Navy Fighters.

Photo by Michael Angelino © ARMS COMMUNICATIONS



DANCE OF DEATH. An Su-27 meets its fate under a superbly detailed mackeral sky.

They have taken into account energy bleeding, drop tanks, stalls, spins, and ordnance loadouts. Additionally, I have noticed distinct handling differences when doing traps (carrier landings).

Dogfighting in USNF should give you a good run for your money. Enemy maneuvering is more intense than in YAC, with bandits trying their damnedest to make you overshoot. On the defensive side, they've modeled things like heat-seaking missiles which lose a lock on your aircraft if you fly towards the sun (the glare of which makes this the first air combat sim I've had to wear my Ray Bans to fly). Also, you'll see enemy chaff show up on your radar when bogies try to counter one of your radar guided missiles.

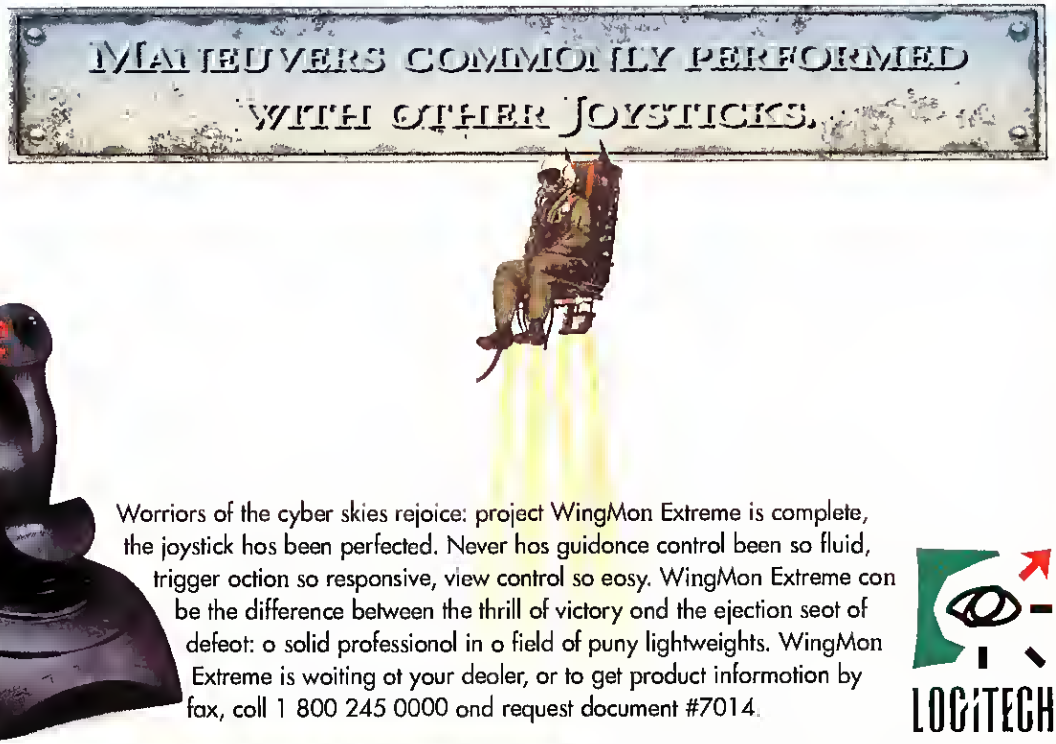
USNF, even in this early version, has superb sound support including Roland SOUND CANVAS and General MIDI drivers. Even the Gravis Ultrasound and Creative Labs AWE32 are supported in native mode. A symphony of sound effects like wind rushing past the canopy, droning jet noises, and aircraft sounds (gear, flaps, arresting gear hook, speed brake) reveal the designers' attention to detail and desire for an aurally authentic experience. The menacing side-winder growl was music to my ears.

The most interesting audio features are the voices of my RIO, wingman, various controllers and battle chatter. It really sounds like you're in the middle of the action with all these voices. You'll even hear a controller reading off the heading and altitude to you when you get vectored to a waypoint.

FULL-MOTION MISSION PLANNING

As much attention went into the interface as did the other portions of USNF. A flight sim first is the use of full-motion video for campaign mission briefings. The production I've seen is actually quite good, and the dialog is the stuff movies like "Top Gun" are made of. Missions are described in the ready room, followed by more meetings in smaller rooms with just a few people (and in a slightly better resolution). While a novel approach, seasoned sim veterans may just skip the vids and go right for the map. Here, the mission planning interface looks like a board wargame. While not as sophisticated as TORNADO, the mission planner is sufficiently flexible to handle waypoint settings and yet not put off the rookies.

The interface is at its best in the Quick Mission and Pro Mission modes. Face it, sometimes you want a quick fix, and some-



times you want to earn your wings. In USNF, you get quickie missions *a la* YAC, or more intense mission planning for those times when you have several hours to plow Ivan's fields with his own wreckage.

TOP GUN SCHOOL

One of the most noteworthy features in USNF is the "view aircraft" mode that lets you check out the different aircraft, get stats, and then click and instantly fly the aircraft around. Once you've viewed all the aircraft and flown a few quick loops, you'll find some very serious documentation that takes you through Basic Training, Training Academy, Training Squadron, Operational Deployment, and then off to Fighter Weapons School. The thorough docs are a welcome addition to the product.

FINAL APPROACH

At this stage, the air combat doesn't seem too difficult. What is missing is a sense of pilot workload (i.e., the situation awareness required to fly and fight is nowhere near that of FALCON 3.0). With your head out of the cockpit, mostly looking up, there's little need for working the radar. The attention to flight models, graphics, and such things as night traps may make up for any lack in pilot workload (and such perceived lack may be due to my early version of the code).

It appears that Iverson and Grace have decided to keep things simple and fun. Helpful assistance comes in the form of vectors to troublespots and heads up from your RIO and wingman from time to time. Instead of a game like FLEET DEFENDER where you can spend much of the mission as a radar weenie, this game seems designed to keep your head out of your lap and looking out of the aircraft.

Overall, this product seems like it will bridge the gap between light flying-by-the-seat-of-the-pants sims and severe, flying-by-the-buttons, micro-managing sims. While you won't be preflighting the aircraft or fiddling with radar gear, you will have resource allocation and robust mission management. For some, it will be like flying in their own "Top Gun" movie. It brings worthwhile new features to the genre as a whole, and it should open up possibilities to those new to the silicon skies. The big question is whether or not most users will have the screaming machine necessary to make the game soar.

LAUNCH! The cat officer signals the deck crew and an amazingly detailed F-14 is shot down the catapult with afterburners blazing.

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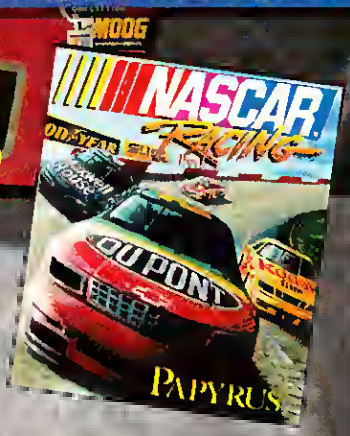

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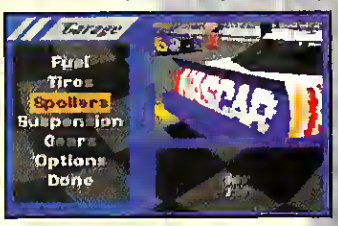

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Circle Reader Service #153

The Air War Escalates

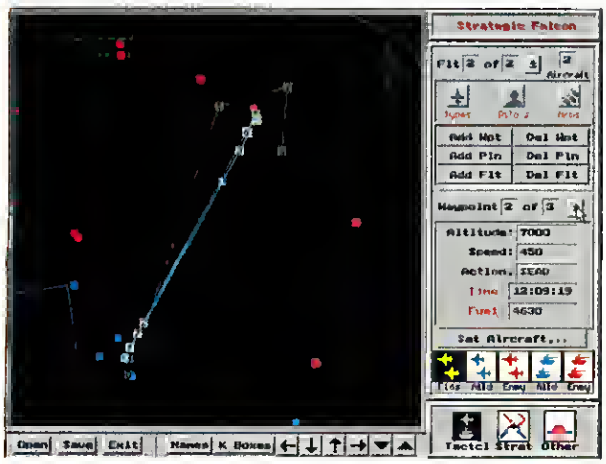
STRATEGIC FALCON Promotes FALCON 3.0 From Colonel To General In One Fell Swoop

by Tom "KC" Basham

HACKING GAMES HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FAVORITE PASTIME OF THE TECHNICALLY SAVVY GAMER. THE MOST popular games give rise to a slew of little programs, "hacks" if you will, that enable players to meddle with a game, tweak its numbers to their advantage, or even create new scenarios. Before DOOM spawned its tidal wave of level editors, hacks and cheats, FALCON 3.0 could claim the most user support of any product, with a bevy of both "unofficial" and "official" third-party support products.

Among the many FALCON supporters is Bill White, author of the FALCCALC utility from **Keyboard Commander Corps**. FALCCALC is a popular utility that enables pilots to calculate fuel use for mission planning. While FALCCALC is a handy little tool for serious sim-heads, White's latest project, STRATEGIC FALCON, may be the single most interesting support product yet. STRATEGIC FALCON effectively promotes you from a mere Colonel controlling a single squadron to a General commanding the entire theater. STRATEGIC FALCON opens hidden doors and lays bare the inner workings of FALCON 3.0 campaigns.

The program begins with a few commandments: Thou must use an included TSR when running FALCON 3.0 after using STRATEGIC FALCON to edit missions; Thou shalt not assign allied flights to accomplish your assigned task; Thou shalt not view non-F-16 aircraft from the load armament screen; Thou shalt not get too rambunctious when adding and deleting ground forces; Thou must enter and exit the cockpit for each mission before editing it with STRATEGIC FALCON; and finally, thou must own a mouse. Although these commandments seem a bit stringent at times, if you obey them, STRATEGIC FALCON has the power to shower you with unlimited blessings.



CHANGE IN FLIGHT PLANS After fine-tuning the orders of a support CAP flight of A-4s, a second F-16 flight is added to handle the primary task—but these pilots will actually be flying F-111s!

Basically, STRATEGIC FALCON allows you to edit a flight group ("Ever have a B-52 for a wingman?"), edit any allied flight groups ("Let's send those stray F-117s somewhere useful"), edit any enemy flight groups ("There's too many MiG-29s over the target. Let's delete a few"), edit allied ground forces ("Baghdad here we come!"), or edit enemy ground forces ("How about a few less SA-7s at Republican Guard Base 5?"). Using STRATEGIC FALCON within the specified guidelines, you can either make current FALCON 3.0 campaigns easier or more interesting with slight modifications, or you can assume command of the entire theater and control the whole war, basically transforming FALCON 3.0 into a miniature wargame.

FALCON 3.0 campaigns are basically driven by nodes. Every site in a theater is a node. Each side has some set of nodes it must capture to win the war and some set of nodes it must not lose or it will lose the war. Campaigns track two major factors: supply lines and momentum. If a node is completely surrounded and cut off, eventually it will "starve" and die. Momentum is generated by your mission success rate: win three missions a day and your forces will advance; lose three missions a day and your side will lose. After enough days, the campaign will automatically end. Besides controlling forces, STRATEGIC FALCON lets you cheat. In its "Strategic" mode you can edit each individual node (such as a bridge or airbase) in a FALCON 3.0 theater. You can make the node stronger, weaker, add defenses, remove defenses, and even change how often it produces new units. The Occupation command allows you to edit node ownership and edit supply line connections. Further, you can edit "victory nodes," or the list of nodes either side must capture to win the war. FALCON 3.0 supports up to 15 victory and 15 defeat nodes. By changing these you change the direction of the entire war.

STRATEGIC FALCON lets you change many other, relatively mundane things. Tired of overcast weather? Change it.

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Need a resupply flight today? Arrange it. Want to go backwards in time a few days and keep fighting the war even though the campaign should be a stalemate? Turn the clock back. Tired of flying from the same base far behind friendly lines? Redeploy to a new base.

In short, STRATEGIC FALCON provides most of the functionality users wish FALCON 3.0 had included. Be warned, though, STRATEGIC FALCON is a dangerous tool. Although it has safety checks designed to prevent any catastrophic corruption of your FALCON files, it makes FALCON operate differently from the designer's intent. STRATEGIC FALCON's changes dig deep and often impact other, seemingly non-related items. As long as you observe the safety checks described in the very thorough manual, STRATEGIC FALCON will serve you well. Ignore those guidelines and you may find yourself giving your PC the three-fingered reboot salute on a regular basis.

PEEKING AT THE CARDS Has intelligence around the target area been a bit spotty? With Strategic Falcon, you can see exactly what you're up against.

STRATEGIC FALCON provides an incredible amount of insight into FALCON 3.0. For example, ever wonder about the grid lines on the campaign map? They define what Mr. White calls "Kill Boxes." All units in a campaign are normally in a standby, non-active state unless they're within the same kill box as you, the player. Ever wonder where some of those SAMs come from without warning? They were probably in the next kill box, just across the border. They were inactive until you crossed the line, then they suddenly came alive and started shooting at you! STRATEGIC FALCON doesn't give you unlimited powers, though. By design, FALCON 3.0 allows a maximum of only 16 planes in a given mission, a maximum of five different aircraft types in a single mission, and a maximum of eight total flights of both enemy and friendly aircraft. STRATEGIC FALCON cannot exceed these limits.

STRATEGIC FALCON is a very well-written program which, as so many user-written utilities have done, broadens the FALCON 3.0 world and provides new avenues of enjoyment. With excellent documentation explaining the program's capability and limitations, STRATEGIC FALCON is a worthwhile addition to your FALCON 3.0 collection.

STRATEGIC FALCON is available from Keyboard Commander Corps for $24.95. (800) 262-6066. Requirements: FALCON 3.0 (not compatible with HORNET or MIG-29), Mouse compatible with latest version (CD) of Falcon.

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The Day Of The Wildcat

How To Go From Being A Target To A Double Ace In 1942: PAW

by Michael Rymaszewski

A FEW WEEKS AGO, WHEN I WAS WORKING ON AN EARLIER 1942: THE PACIFIC AIR WAR STRATEGY article, I had an opportunity to talk to Ed Fletcher, head of the 1942 design team. At one point, I complained that the planes in 1942 were a little too easy to shoot down, and that the maximum number of kills shown on the plane's fuselage is 15. Mr. Fletcher gleefully told me that this particular moan was totally unjustified; **MicroProse** had been receiving e-mail from people who had flown as many as a dozen fighter sorties without getting a single kill.

The article in September's *CGW* dealt largely with how to avoid getting killed through one of the game's design flaws. This time, we'll deal with combat tactics that should make you an ace twice over by the time you've flown eight missions.

The easiest way to become a 1942 ace is to fly the Zero, since it's better than the Wildcat. However, it was the Wildcat that turned the tide of the Pacific War in American favor, and I'm sure there are many sim pilots out there who like the extra challenge.

To show convincingly how tactics work in practice, I've chosen to describe two missions. The first one is escorting TBDs off Midway in a strike against the Japanese carriers. There are sorties over Guadalcanal that are more difficult, but to get that far, you'll first have to survive the Midway mission. Remember, becoming an ace involves getting many kills, and getting many kills involves not getting killed. The second mission is against Bettys attacking the American invasion fleet off Guadalcanal. I've never failed to get less than five victories in this one—ace in a single sortie, if you like—*and so should you.*

AMERICAN KAMIKAZE

As I sit in the cockpit waiting for my turn to take off, I feel a helpless bewilderment. What are those boys upstairs smoking to send us off on a mission like this—a handful of obsolete torpedo bombers with a weak fighter escort against the main Japanese battle fleet? The briefing officer was smiling when he said enemy opposition was going to be heavy—no doubt from relief he isn't flying himself.

As my Wildcat roars down the carrier deck, I reflect that at least the weather's decent—a cumulus here and there, some cirrus wisps, but mostly blue sky. We are escorting torpedo boys, which means going down to the deck; and Zeroes, with their pale grey camouflage, are extremely hard to spot against clouds.

The flight to the target is short—the Japanese ships are just over 100 miles away. We've barely reached cruising altitude when it's time to descend for the Devastators' approach run.

A slow minute passes by, then another. I'm starting to wonder whether my earlier worries were justified when the leading Wildcat suddenly shoots forward. The reason is a single grey dot, higher than us, approaching fast. It's them—the enemy.

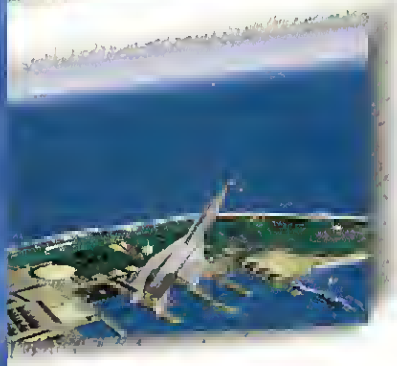
I slap on full throttle, turn away from the other Cats and climb. To hell with formation flying—rule number one in combat between fighters is to have a height advantage. Ideally, you should be climbing away from the enemy, but it's not possible this time.

Two more grey specks appear below the first one; I decide to leave them for the other Cats. I switch my guns to four; it's only too easy to run out of ammo when fighting Zeroes, they have this talent for dancing out of your line of fire the moment you press the trigger.

I'm still too low to engage the topmost Zero when the two others pass below my wing, going hell for leather at the Devastators. My Zero is not getting any closer—in fact, it seems to be moving away—then suddenly it turns in my direction and dives after its friends. I stand the Cat on its wingtip, rolling into a sharp turn, and cut the throttle. Never go in fast unless there's someone on your tail; Zeroes can turn on a dime, and it's easy to overshoot. I'm doing around 250 knots faster than he is, and that's just right. To make things perfect, there's a rattle of defensive machine gun fire from the Devastators—we're just passing over them, and my boy's attention is focused on evading their bullets, not me. He goes into the standard Zero evasive maneuver, a steep climbing turn. I cut inside.

There's only one way to hit a plane that's turning and that's the old Hans Joachim Marseille method. Hans Joachim Marseille is quickly making a name for himself over the Sahara as one of the most lethal opponents around; he gets as many as six victories per sortie, using just two-three cannon shells per plane. His trick is to turn inside his opponent and hold fire until his prey disappears under the nose of his Messerschmidt.

I pull sharply back on the stick and the Cat slows down, turning tighter. The



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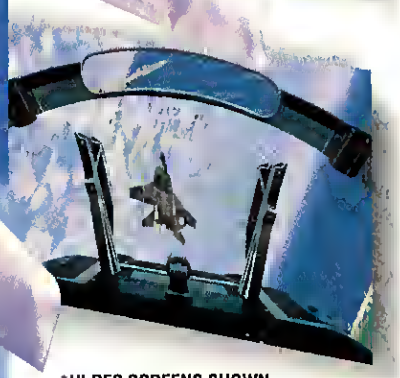

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gunsight slides over the rising sun on the Zero's fuselage, past the cockpit, past the black cowling, with me furiously kicking alternate rudders to maintain the same line through the turn as the one he's taking. The Zero disappears under my nose, count one, two, now! I fire a two-second burst at the empty blue sky and drop my nose to see what's going on. First time lucky! The Zero flies past, still turning and climbing, but trailing a streamer of brown smoke.

The Cat's losing speed rapidly—I put on emergency throttle, and in my excitement fire another burst, hopelessly wide this time. Rule number two: don't fire when you want to, fire when you're sure you'll get him—you'll miss half the time, anyway. The Zero's losing speed, turning tighter and tighter, first this way, then that, and in spite of all my frantic work with the throttle and the rudder, I lose him.

I check my six—nothing there. I cut the throttle and sweep to the right, then to the left—there he is! I quickly tell myself that the other two Cats are keeping the Jap fighters busy, and that the torpedo boys won't get hurt in the meantime. All the same, I've got to hurry—other Zeroes are bound to appear any second.

I try to burst from about 300 yards and miss miserably. Now I've alerted him, and he goes into a climbing turn again—he knows it's hard for a Wildcat to follow. I cut inside going much too fast. This realization makes me spray a wild, ragged burst—then I whiz past. I dip a wing and glance over my shoulder and almost shout with joy—instead of the Zero, there is a vertical column of smoke.

I take a look around and see all is well. A Zero is being kept busy by a Wildcat, and all three Devastators are still there. I decide to lend my friend a hand with his Zero but even as I turn, another trio of grey specks appear over the Japanese ships. More Zeroes! Hang on: there were three Zeroes in the first flight, too, weren't there?

Suddenly, there are Zeroes everywhere. The missing Zero from the first flight slides into sight, diving on the Devastators. I go after him full throttle; before I can blink, another Zero flashes by right in front—those guys from over the ships are already here. I whip round to the right, but he's going too fast—I turn left, and see another two Jap fighters streaking towards the Devastators. I feel hopelessly confused.

LIGHT MY FIRE An F4F on patrol from the VF5 squadron wastes no time making sure the skies above the aircraft carrier Saratoga stay friendly—from the CAP mission.

When in doubt, climb—an extra couple of hundred feet can come in very handy. I ignore a Zero that's not doing anyone any harm, keep turning, keep climbing—I'm up to 3,000 feet, and I see a Zero chasing a Wildcat. The moment I go after it, it rolls away. A quick look at the Devastators—they're still doing okay. I follow the Jap fighter, still climbing as sharply as I can without losing too much speed. I check my tail for the fifth time in the last minute; amazingly, the sky behind me is still empty. Someone should be shooting at me by now.

BLIND SPOT This Zero pilot fails to "check six" in time, and a Wildcat from the Yorktown's VF3 takes care of the rest during a bomber escort mission.

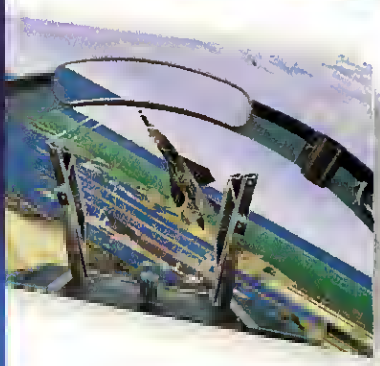
The Zero in front is making a wide, sweeping turn in preparation for a fast pass at the bombers. I push the stick forward and almost immediately another Zero zooms by right in front. He's in no position to hurt the Devastators, so I keep going after my boy. Another two Zeroes flash by! Ignore them. But I can't, not totally, and open fire on the one I'm chasing way too early, hitting the water behind him. That's why you've got to climb whenever you get the chance; a moment ago I was at 3,000 feet, now I'm down to a few hundred.

All the lead I've just fired into the Pacific didn't go to waste, however, because I've given my Zero a scare. Predictably, he pulls up into a turn. Stick back and to the left, hard rudder—the gunsight slides along the grey fuselage until it disappears from view—wait two seconds, fire! That's it—no smoke, no band, just a quick glimpse of the Zero spiraling down and, seconds later, a splash. Number two!

Quick check on the Devastators—they're still okay. There's a single Zero about 1,000 yards in front, quick, check the six—there is a Zero there this time, but he's being kept busy by a Wildcat. I give chase after the one in front, but he's already turning round, diving at the Cat behind me. I give him a short burst across the nose at an impossible angle as he whips by, so fast there is no sense in trying to follow; I climb in a spiral instead, looking around. Yeah, you do a lot of climbing and looking around if you want to stay in the fight.

I see a Wildcat spewing smoke, and a white parachute; the three Devastators are being attacked by a single Zero that's already on fire. The smoke turns from brown to black, and the Zero dives into the water—but one of the bombers is smoking, too; a parachute blooms. The Devastators are close to the ships by now, and I'm not going in there; I hate flak. Better to stick around where I am and help that other Wildcat. Check the tail for the twentieth time—there's a Zero, but

SEE MIG DIVE



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pretty far away, and I'm doing 230 knots.

I dive, turning gently, and I see that this earlier maximum-deflection burst of mine was well aimed after all—the Zero chasing my friend is trailing smoke. I give him a "scare" burst from too far away. He does the standard stuff, that climbing turn, and he's going so slow that even though I've throttled back, he turns inside me easily. I spiral up until I see him again, then glide down in a shallow dive at minimum revs. Even then, I'm closing on him too fast: I'll have to get him in that single pass. I have a feeling the ammo in the four guns I've been firing is all but finished, so I switch to six, step on the rudder, and take him from wingtip to wingtip. The Zero sags and drops like a bird shot in mid-flight. Number three!

AERIAL GUNNERY 101 Notice that the gunsight is slightly above and leading the target, just before destroying it.

Full throttle, stick back. Whenever you're not actually going after someone, or evading fire—climb, climb, climb. By the time I've gained some height and turned 180 degrees, the other planes are just tiny specks, and it's impossible to tell friend from foe. I fly towards them, watching carefully. There is a single Wildcat doing remarkably well with a Zero—and what I assume to be the two Devastators, until one of them breaks towards me and I see it's painted grey. I give him a short, hopeless burst as he goes by, already starting the turn that will put him on my tail. He's going fast, but so am I; by the time he finishes his turn, I'll be a mile away, and the mission's over—that single Devastator is going home. I just keep climbing at a steady 200 knots. When it's over, it's over—it's senseless playing the hero, especially when short on ammo.

The two remaining Zeroes give chase half-heartedly, turning back fairly quickly. I get home to three confirmed kills, the DFC, and promotion to Warrant Officer. Skill or luck? Both; throughout that fight, I didn't even get shot at once.

A DATE WITH BETTYS

I am patrolling the skies above Guadalcanal; there is a lot of cirrus at high altitude, but the visibility is fine. Being a much decorated Warrant Officer, I am leading the flight. I confess I am a little scared of my wingmen; I don't want them near me. I've seen whole flights go down in a burning tangle because they were flying too tightly. War is a risky business and all that, but I'd prefer to die from an enemy bullet than through the mistake of some clod who isn't fit to drive a tricycle.

For this reason, when an excited shout comes over the radio about bandits at six o'clock, I don't turn left or right. Instead, I roll over and pull on the stick, simultaneously cutting the throttle with my other hand: the Wildcat dives like a brick, and I have no wish to land among the fish. I lose a couple of thousand feet, but end up going at 320 knots right in the direction of the Japanese raiders I am going forth so bravely because I know there is another flight of Wildcats patrolling the skies, and that they are closer to the enemy than I am. If I were in their shoes, I would hang around and wait so that both flights could attack the Japs together; however, these boys are trigger-happy, and they are already going towards interception point at full speed. It's no skin off my nose; they'll get to tangle with the escort, while my flight gets to knock down the bombers, claiming kills left, right and center.

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT An F4F Wildcat pilot separates to avoid overshooting his target.

Ideally, all the bombers should be knocked down before they reach the ships, so I keep the Cat buzzing along at top speed—accelerating in a shallow dive, then regaining lost height in an equally shallow climb. Fly straight and level, and the Cat won't go faster than 260; I'm doing over 280.

A couple of minutes pass before I see tracer flicker in the distance. The other flight has arrived already, and is mixing it up with the Zeroes. I go to cruising speed, keeping eyes peeled, and make sure all six guns are switched on. I'm going to get things going with a frontal pass; it works well against the Bettys.

There they are! A spattering of green spots against the bluish grey water; they are a good thousand feet lower than I am. I throttle back and go into a steep dive. The trick is to approach them from below and climb before opening fire with the engine barely ticking over; that way, I'll be going as slowly as possible, reducing the closing speed to minimum.

I pull out of my dive and start climbing and see I've misjudged things; I'll be attacking from three quarters front, and that's a difficult deflection shot. I don't have time to do anything but hit the throttle for 70% power and take the Cat up in a steep climbing turn. I aim the nose at the middle bomber—that way, I'll get a decent shot at the last one. I let the nose drop for a fraction of a second to get a fix on that last Betty—damn, it's real close—I just have time to haul the stick back and let rip with two one-second bursts. A moment later, the fat green fuselage with the rising sun fills my windscreen—I roll away as fast as I can—I've got him all right, he's streaking smoke!

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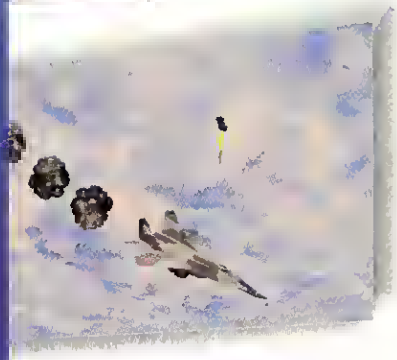

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Full-throttle, dive, then go round, climbing. I come out of my turn behind and below the Bettys, which is fine. I like to tackle the bombers from below; that way you can slow down sharply when you get within range, and have that extra second to shoot him full of holes. As I close up, the smoking Betty spews out a couple of parachutes; moments later, it tumbles towards the sea. One down, four to go. I switch to four guns to conserve ammo; there's plenty of shooting to be done.

I approach the bombers cautiously; a quick check reveals that while no Zeroes are after my hide, there is a single smoking Jap fighter above and to the left of the bombers. He can't see me—I'm below and behind—and by the time he does, it'll be too late for him to do anything.

Without fighters to worry about, flaming Bettys is easier than shooting a pig in a barrel. They're big, so you don't have to get close to hit them—which is just as well, because concentrated fire from several rear gunners can be lethal. I open up with short bursts, making constant adjustments to the deflection angle I don't notice the Wildcat coming in from the side until it's 50 yards to my right—fortunately, he curves away towards the bomber I am shooting at. He's too late; my last burst has knocked it out of the sky. I roll away unscathed; that second Cat is drawing all the defensive fire.

The third Betty takes a long time to go down; I keep firing for several second, but only get the job done with my very last burst from about 50 yards. This time, the rear gunners manage to hit me several times, and I vow to myself I'll not get that close again. There are still two bombers left, and you can't count on the others to do as well as yourself; I've seen Wildcats maul defenseless Kates for what seemed like hours without getting any results.

My next pass is no good; although pieces fly off the Betty I'm firing at, it resolutely flies on. I promptly forget what I just promised myself and approach closer than I should, and instantly the rear gunners get me—the cockpit echoes with pings and smacks. I break away to the right just as a large piece of metal flies off my cowling—and very nearly collides with my wingman, coming in yet again from that side. Those bloody wingmen—I wish they were tailmen instead, and kept behind at all times.

Down, up, and round, and I'm behind the two remaining bombers again. I fire at that bulletproof Betty, and this time it spins downward almost instantly; I had damaged it after all. Only one Betty left now; I switch back to six guns.

As I close up on the last bomber, I see a Cat diving at it from above and left, pursued by that smoking Zero. The idiot misses, leaving me my fifth kill on a plate, and oddly enough the Zero gives up its pursuit. It takes station over the bomber's wing. Silly sod; he deserves everything he's got coming to him, as soon as I've dealt with the Betty. I fire a short burst at the bomber—it obligingly streams black smoke and goes into a death dive.

I roll away for that final circle that will put me behind the Zero. When I see him again, he's already turning for home in a gentle dive. I throttle back and approach him in a very leisurely manner—there are no other Jap fighters around, and he's a sitting duck.

My first, careless burst misses. It turns out he's not a sitting duck after all; he's one wily bird, and I'm quite sure that if I overshoot, he'll turn out to be an expert shot as well. He's constantly turning: left,

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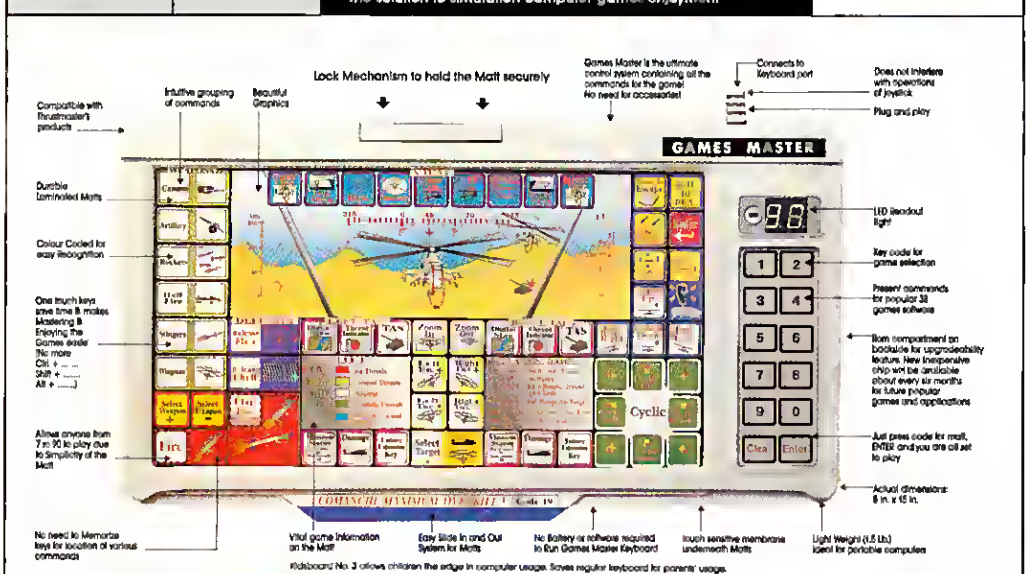

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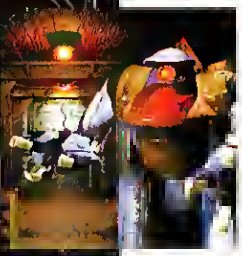

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now right, now up, now down. I lower my flaps and weave behind him at 50% power, firing short bursts from time to time. I'm close—I can see tracers passing between his wing and tailplane—but somehow, no cigar.

Finally, I get angry. I pour on the coals, get close, throttle back, and fire from 40 yards—he jerks away from the tracer passing right in front of his cockpit and does a falling leaf, neatly sliding below my nose. I dive after him, and the whole dance begins again—up, down, left, right. In spite of full flaps, the Cat stalls when I'm firing at him from maybe 40 feet away, and it is only when I'm diving that I discover I'm at 400 feet. If it weren't for flaps...

I pull out just in time to see a parachute opening; the smoking Zero, still doing the falling leaf, goes into the drink. Number six. Or did someone damage him more badly than I did?

At the debriefing, it turns out he's mine, all right. Six kills—and the Navy Cross, plus promotion to Ensign. That makes it 20 kills in eight sorties, my best Wildcat performance so far. Now if only there was space for more than 15 victories on that fuselage.

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- If you're going low and slow: slam down full flaps, pull on the stick, and use the rudder to wriggle left and right at the verge of stalling. Your opponent will overshoot, and there you'll be, shooting at him. Important: keep an eye on where he is. He'll be twisting and turning, too, trying to stay on your tail, and sometimes he'll be right alongside, or under you, or above. It's easy to crash into him if you don't watch it.
- Sometimes things are truly hopeless: there are three Zeroes on your case, you've got no ammo, and every time you shake the one that's firing at you, another one takes its place. If there are friends around, get near them as fast as you can—they'll attack the enemy once you get close enough. If there's just you, run home—on a CAP mission, friendly flak will drive the Zeroes away; if you're over an enemy target, they'll eventually turn back to resume patrolling their patch of sky. Don't fly in a straight line for a single second—do an imitation of a car fishtailing wildly on a wet road. You should be changing altitude all the time as well, now climbing, now diving. The risky moment is when reversing your turn in order to keep on course—you have all this tracer passing to your left, say, and yet it's left you have to go. Apply full rudder and dive under the enemy's line of fire while turning. You'll often catch a couple of slugs, but nowhere vital, and a hit that doesn't do any significant damage is as good as a miss.
- Finally, never try to outrun a Zero, unless all you want is the extra half minute to say your last prayers.

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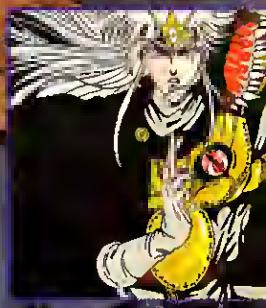

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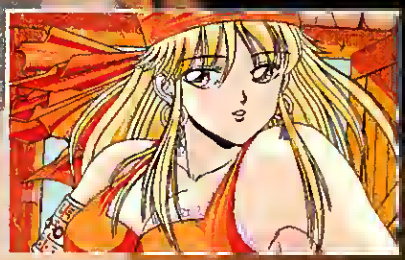

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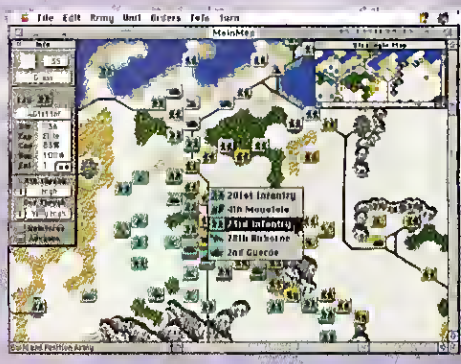

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Circle Reader Service #267

Oh Genre, My Genre!

As my office desk drawer fills with Halloween candy (you know, the good stuff you buy for yourself with no intention of giving it away) and the nights grow longer, there is time to reflect upon one of my favorite subjects, wargaming. (Please, save the sarcastic gasps of surprise at that revelation.)

At a recent game convention here in the Los Angeles area, I found myself involved in a discussion with a respected group of people from the boardgame side of the wargaming hobby. One topic we discussed really stuck with me, and that was the *true identity* of wargamers. The question was, how *pure* are the so-called wargamers among us? Do they play historical wargames almost to the exclusion of all other genres, or are they a more eclectic bunch?

Now, this group of gamers had among them Jon Compton, who is the editor of a new boardgame journal, *GameFix* magazine (the title refers to its gimmick of including a small, easily learned boardgame in every monthly issue, providing readers a "game fix"). Jon's take on wargamers is that, while they vocally endorse the more "hard core" elements of their hobby, wargamers are also a subset of a broader group of gamers that we call *strategy gamers*. Hence, every wargamer is also a strategy gamer.

Upon reflection, I bought into his argument. While it might be fatuous to say "Man does not live by wargames alone," there is wisdom in it. After all, even the groggiest grognard I know will "stoop" to playing a good business simulation or other game where strategy supersedes luck and tactical skill is often the deciding factor. Heck, most of my wargaming friends, both board and computer, love empire building/god games of every historical or fictional genre you can name, be it with cards, counters or computers. Give them the game, and they will give you a challenge at it. Best of all, they're thrilled whenever their spouse, child or non-gaming friend shows the slightest interest in any game in which they are even peripherally interested. Usually these "meeting ground" games are less wargamey and more strategy or luck oriented. "Still," they'll tell you, "the family that plays together, stays together." Now there's a pleasant thought for the coming holidays....

Still, as the sugar from all of that Halloween candy kicks in, and I reflect upon losing my identity as a wargamer, only to be known as a *strategy gamer*, I just don't see myself adjusting comfortably to that new title. For all the times that I've had to defend this

WARGAMER OR STRATEGY GAMER? A COLUMNIST HAS AN IDENTITY CRISIS

by Alan Emrich

G-2

- Speaking of *GameFix* magazine, there's a double dose of good news there for computer gamers. Not only are the boardgames it includes portable and playable enough to broaden the gaming horizons of even the most hardened silicon strategist, but they're fully supporting the Aide de Camp play-by-e-mail system. Game Publications Group is expressly granting the rights to translate all of their games into ADC format and freely distribute them. Finally, there will be some "public domain" ADC software out there to download from the networks! For more information on *GameFix* call (916) 362-0875.
- Scott Hamilton of HPS Simulations has released a newsletter announcing many of the new features under consideration for Aide de Camp 2.0. While everything from art, to engine, to interface is being up-gunned, the project will not be started until after Hamilton completes a Western Front/Desert version of Tigers on the Prowl. Anyone with a brilliant idea for a title of said game (*Shermans on the March?*) or seeking more information should call (408) 241-6886.

(continued on page 204)

wargaming hobby of ours to those who know nothing of it but who only assumed the worst of us, well...I've earned my scars in those debates and am proud of them. I still want to be called a "wargamer." Knowing the lessons of history that wargamers learn, and our studied appreciation for the losses that wars produce, I'm proud to be counted among the wargamers, first and foremost (although that doesn't stop me from playing card games with my wife and son).

Were I in the armed forces, I would prefer to be called a "soldier," not a "peace keeper." I really wouldn't want that kind of euphemistic job title, just as I don't want to be known as a "strategy gamer" in preference to being a "wargamer." And while I'll read *GameFix*, playing and enjoying both the war and strategy games in it, just don't forget that I'm a *wargamer* first and foremost. Now, where's my silver helmet? I feel a need to do my Patton imitation..

G-2 *(continued from page 203)*

✒ And while I'm still on the subject of the purity of wargaming, one product to keep an eye out for is QQP's THE PURE WARGAME. The first installment will cover airborne operations during WWII, but this appears to be only the beginning of a series of operational level wargames. While QQP has done many fine, abstract, military-oriented games (such as THE PERFECT GENERAL), this one is targeted at history lovers. Those less historically inclined can look for BATTLES IN TIME, an abstract strategy/wargame of the future, and QQP's computer translation of the fine, chess-like boardgame CONQUEST.

✒ The lineup at Three-Sixty Pacific has changed with the departure of Carl C. Norman. Carl has been overseeing Three-Sixty's Texas operations and, in particular, the HARPOON projects. He's off to Silicon Valley to join ranks with SSI. In the meantime, we're still watching the possible IntraCorp, Inc. buyout of Three-Sixty as mentioned in last issue's READ.ME column.

✒ Bill Stealey, former CEO and ramrod at MicroProse, has been hailed as the big investor behind Interactive Magic, a new neighbor to MicroProse in Hunt Valley, MD. Their president, Paul Lombardi, indicates that the company's main thrust will be in flight sims. They will also be putting some energy behind other types of vehicle simulators and military strategy games.

✒ Speaking of games that fly, Big Time Software's Charles Moylan became a popular guy with game publishers when they learned he was preparing his Macintosh FLIGHT COMMANDER game for Windows. He has signed a deal with Avalon Hill, and FLIGHT COMMANDER 2 should be out later this year. After this substantial upgrade to their well received FLIGHT COMMANDER modern jet era strategy game, Charles plans to fly this engine over to WWII where the air war over Germany will be the subject of his next design effort.

✒ And while we're at Avalon Hill, they seem to be having an identity problem with BEYOND SQUAD LEADER. For the umpteenth time, this game will not be a computerized version of the mega-hit Advanced Squad Leader boardgame. BSL features real-time action (as opposed to the turn based boardgame), and the scale is smaller—the units of maneuver will be teams of 4-5 men (20 per side, plus AFVs and other vehicles). The game will also include a campaign element where you can take your teams from battle to battle, gaining experience every step of the way. Specs are currently 486 or Pentium, plus 8MB of RAM, SVGA only, and probably a CD-ROM by the time it's released next year.

✒ Avalon Hill has also lost two of their top in-house wargaming talents, Rex Martin (who is going back to school) and S. Craig Taylor, Jr. (who has left for MicroProse). While their boardgame release schedule for next year remains ambitious, their computer games keep rolling along too. Their Computer Third Reich, for example, while long delayed, is having neural net concepts implemented to supplement the game's AI. Also, computer players will have about 20 to 30 strategic plans per side to help insure less predictable gameplay for solo gamers. AH also wants to put in a play-by-e-mail system, but that would mean allowing the computer player to handle some defensive "reaction" moves that the boardgame allows to speed up play. Who knows, maybe the variants will return in the play-by-email version and an editor can be developed to create computer play strategies and new scenarios.

✒ Incredible Simulations of DEFEND THE ALAMO! fame is well into its Little Big Horn campaign. Apparently, it will be company level with 150' per hex and feature a large, scrolling map. Take no prisoners, guys!

✒ One man who will never be a prisoner in this industry is Jeff "Johann" Johannigman. He's been with just about every software publisher you can name (rumor has it that a complete set of his business cards has become a collector's item), and is currently involved in a new enterprise with several ex-Origin folks and working on a project called LITTLE WARS. Johann describes it as "sort of a SIMCITY with toy soldiers."

✒ Johann is not the only cowboy in Austin, though. The shooters at SimTex (MASTER OF ORION, MASTER OF MAGIC) are busily putting together several games for several publishers. Among them will be a project for Avalon Hill which will be a computerized version of their 1830 railroad building boardgame. Rumor also has them outlining a MASTER OF ORION DELUXE (MOOD) project for MicroProse.

✒ While I'm in the mood, did you know that SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION is being ported over to the Super Nintendo system? Maybe there's hope for that next generation of gamers after all....

✒ While SSG's Ian Trout might seem fishy, his next project, THE LAST BLITZKRIEG, won't be. While SSG would like to release it on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge (that's December 16th, 1994), the release might slip a little. The game boasts an entirely new game system, complete with devious artificial opponents, six scenarios and a campaign game. The filmed replay and PBEM features sound terrific.

✒ In the meantime, fans of SSG's WARLORDS II who want to relive their glory days on the original WARLORDS map can send away for their Illuria scenario disk. The price, $10 plus $1 postage and handling. Send it to SSG, P.O. Box 30085, Pensacola, FL 32503-1085 or call them at (904) 469-8880. (And I bet the Sirians are *still* tough to win with!)

✒ Tough to win also describes the last few games of COMMAND HQ I played. While Robert E. Lee works feverishly on a new version of the game, our readers are reminded to contact the CHQ Player's Club BBS at (407) 736-1205 for more information on beta testing its next incarnation. You can also contact Robert E. Lee via CompuServe at [72124,707].

✒ Fans of SSI's TANKS! will want to note that Novastar Game Company is in the process of unleashing a whopping 20 scenario disks for that game. These are the same people who recently rereleased 18 out-of-print SSI wargames. For more information, contact them at (916) 624-7113.

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Soldiers In The Sandbox

New World's IRON CROSS Plays Fast And Loose With World War II

by Josh Bruce

IN THE MINDS OF MOST GAMERS, NEW WORLD COMPUTING HAS BEEN TYPECAST AS THE ROLE-PLAYING COMPANY responsible for the Might and Magic series. But while New World has cut more than a few slices of their loaf from the M&M games, they have also published many light-weight, fun, and playable strategy games including KING'S BOUNTY, SPACEWARD HO!, and EMPIRE DELUXE, one of the most commercially successful and enduring introductory wargames. It's no surprise, then, that IRON CROSS, their latest strategy game, is obstensibly a fun, fast, and furious real-time game. Rather than in a fantasy, space, or abstract setting, however, the action takes place in the France of World War II, offering two dozen scenarios and flexible unit choices.

IRON CROSS

Price: $69.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better (486 recommended), 4 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 10 MB hard drive space, mouse; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
Designer: Phil Steinmeyer
Publisher: New World Computing
Woodland Hills, CA
(800) 325-8898

The battleground is displayed in a top-down perspective that will immediately remind players of either the view from the Goodyear blimp, or David Letterman's sky-cam, as ant-like infantry crawl across the screen and planes circle beneath the player. While this view might be a little disconcerting at first, it is extremely functional and visually pleasing once you become adjusted to it. The maps are extremely well done, with terrain laid out as it would naturally appear, without the constrictions of a hex grid. Woods are a deep, realistic green, and buildings (both wood and stone) are laid out with multiple levels and a very textured appearance. It's very pretty, until the action starts; then, the terrain gets pot-holed, charred, and mangled in every which way.

BURN, BABY, BURN

Not since CRUSH, CRUMBLE, AND CHOMP have forests burned and cities been reduced to rubble in such visually violent fashion. Every time a weapon larger than a machine gun fires into a building, forest, or field, there is a chance that the area will be destroyed. In the heat of battle, with flamethrowers spewing and artillery rounds speeding overhead, anything standing probably won't be when the battle is over. And while you don't get any victory points for completely depopulating woods and leveling villages, you do get a guilty sense of satisfaction.

Fires are particularly devastating, since not only will they spread to other areas of the map, they will also destroy anything that happens to get in their way. While it is an interesting tactic to set fire to one section of a building and watch as the enemy units quite literally "bake off," it is really overdone. The flame-thrower is far too prevalent in IRON CROSS. This special weapon was only used by certain elite infantry in World War Two; yet in IRON CROSS, any formation can possess one, which leads to some wild fire fights, quite literally, but is completely unrealistic.

The units firing these potent weapons of destruction are either individual tanks or guns, with infantry squads numbering about 20 men apiece. Each individual tank type has its own top-view profile, making unit identification easy. As with the buildings and forests, tanks perish in dramatic fashion—a graphical explosion covers the unit, as smoke and fire pour from within its confines, and finally an explosion sends the turret skyward. Between the flame throwers and the demise of tanks we begin to get a sense that IRON CROSS is more about balls of flame, thundering explosions, and playground war drama than historical simulation.

OK, MEN, MOVE OUT!

Units are accessed by simply clicking on the unit you want to give orders to. You can then select what mode you want the unit to be in, either attack only, move only, attack and move, or move and attack. Once a unit is accessed, all enemy forces that the unit can see are encompassed in a square, and combat is initiated by clicking on any of the available targets.

Movement is handled in a similar fashion, with the player simply clicking on where they want the unit to move to. Once your orders are entered, you can sit back and watch as your fearless disciples carry out your plans. The interface is extremely intuitive, and players should be able to leap right into the

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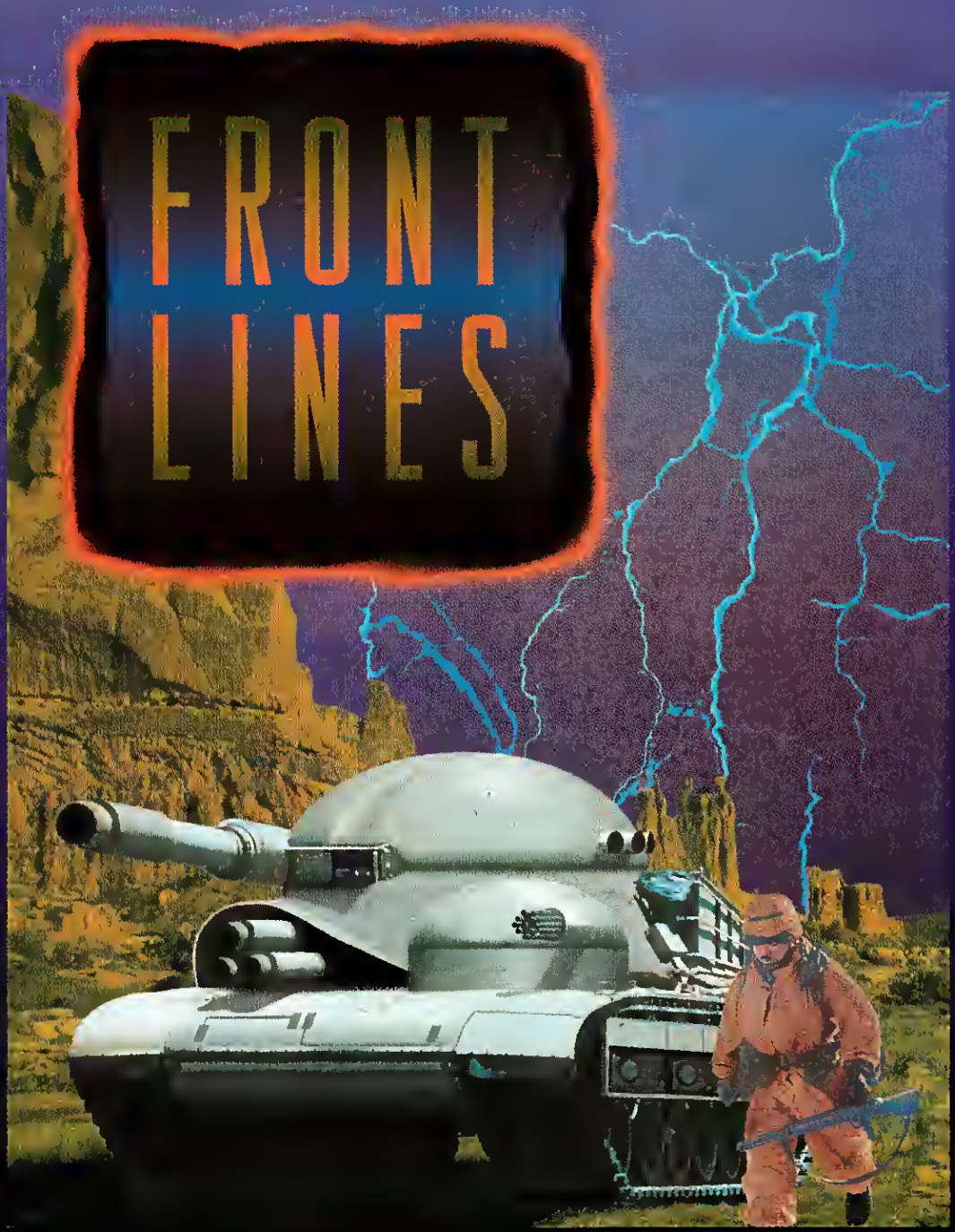

Impressions

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IBM PC SVGA Screenshots may vary

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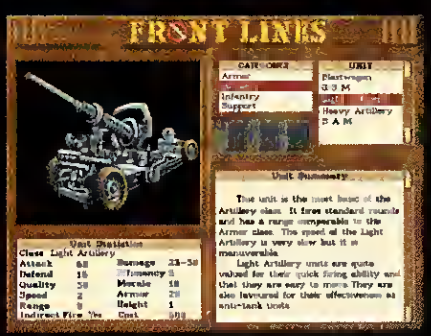

Pull up information on any class of units

Combat! Animated units defend HQ

Circle Reader Service #78

game with only a brief glance at the rulebook. However, if players do skip the rules, then they will also be skipping one of the best features of IRON CROSS. While the instructions are pretty standard, IRON CROSS truly shines in its historical commentary. Each scenario comes complete with a full explanation of the battle, orders of the day for both sides, and a listing of recent events. While members of the "Let's Kill it Because it's Big" fraternity may skip over this section, most wargamers will enjoy the historical perspective.

There are 12 historical scenarios, and a custom design option that allows players to modify any of the original scenarios, or to create their own with another 12 maps that have such heroic titles as Town 5 and Valley 2. Upon selecting a scenario to play, you are allotted a given number of points with which you must purchase your forces. Certain types of units are unavailable in certain scenarios; for example, in *Prelude*, a commando-style raid which takes place right before D-Day, no armor or artillery may be purchased by either side—fair enough. But most scenarios give players far too much flexibility in selecting their starting forces. While you can certainly get some perverse joy at Omaha Beach by playing the Germans and picking nothing but *JagdPanthers*, if Rommel had actually had these behemoths on hand, then Eisenhower would never have landed at Normandy in the first place! Further, in *Easy Company's Hard Day*, a battalion of American paratroopers is attacking a German-held village; yet with this system, the paratroopers can be completely equipped with Pershing tanks. How'd they get there? Oh, yes, of course, really big parachutes!

In addition, there is no campaign game. The only thing remotely linking the scenarios together is a primitive role-playing element. Before a scenario begins, you are asked to create a character by choosing a name, which side to play, and a difficulty setting. Then you have to access one of these characters before you can pick a scenario, with promotions or demotions dependent upon how well you do with this character. Unfortunately, there is nothing to prevent you from achieving the highest ranking possible by simply continually playing the same scenario until it is mastered, or from playing the same character in 300 battles until enough points are accumulated to make you a General of the Army. Further, if your character chooses to fight for the Allies, then you can find yourself commanding an American corps in *Avenging Malmedy*, a battalion of American tanks in *Bridgehead at Remagen*, or a couple of companies of British paratroopers at Arnhem in *A Bridge Too Far*. And I thought *I* didn't have any job security....

THERE GOES THE CHALET Allied troops move in on a German-occupied village. There won't be much left of the architecture by the time the fighting is through.

MILITARY FIRE SALE You can choose from a wide variety of troop, armor, and artillery types when forming your force. Load up on flamethrower units if you're into pyrotechnics.

IRON CROSS also has some glaring omissions in its system. The worst has to be the lack of indirect fire. Artillery cannot shoot over terrain in IRON CROSS. Ever since the Great Gods of Wargaming decreed that movement points could not be transferred from one unit to another, nor saved for use on a later turn, the ability of artillery to blow large holes in small things very far away has been one of the basic credos of wargaming. This design decision makes artillery units virtually useless in the game. The absence of such details really leaves you feeling that IRON CROSS has none of the historical flavor so necessary for enjoyment, and you have little sense that you are learning anything about the conflict. The historical commentary in the manual, as good as it is, fails to find voice anywhere in the game.

Ultimately, this game is far too unrealistic, even for a low-complexity wargame. It is the wargaming equivalent of playing soldiers in the dirt: you pick your men, set them up and knock them down. And while pushing units around and watching things burn might be fun for a while, it's not going to hold a wargamer's attention for long—especially with so many other more playable and historically interesting toys in our toybox.

EDITORS SPEAK

IRON CROSS

RATING ★★ 1/2

PROS Great graphics, slick interface, and wonderful historical wrappings.

CONS Unfortunately, when you tear off the wrapper, there isn't much inside. The gameplay has only the loosest ties to history, and the excitement of the crash'em bash'em action fades quickly.

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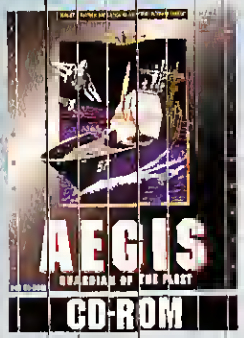

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Circle Reader Service #186

Make Your Stand!

Using US Army Principles To Plan A Sound Defense

by Gregory M. Smith

Little minds try to defend everything at once, but sensible people look only at the main point. They parry the worst blows and stand a little hurt, if thereby they avoid a greater one. If you try to hold everything, you hold nothing.—Frederick The Great

AS AN OFFICER IN THE US ARMY AND AS A WARGAMER, ONE OF MY FAVORITE OPERATIONS TO PLAN IS A good defense. Whether on the field or in front of my favorite game, I've found that the principles used by the US Army to plan a defense have served me well. In order to pass on these principles to fellow wargamers who haven't had the benefit of officer training, I'll discuss them using Scott Hamilton's TIGERS ON THE PROWL game, which offers a good tactical model of the modern battlefield.

The US Army uses four main defensive planning steps which you can adopt to form a systematic winning approach. These are:

1. Analyze the terrain by using the OAKOC process, discussed below. (This is not a typo; the acronym used to be OCOKA for years, but was doctrinally changed in 1994).

2. Decide on where to kill the enemy, and place Target Reference Points (TRPs) and Engagement Areas (EAs).

3. Position weapons systems to cover Target Reference Points and Engagement Areas.

4. Integrate Combat Support and Combat Service Support systems.

The main problem most people tend to have is that they put steps 2 and 3 out of order. They'll see some good terrain and start putting units on that terrain—this is totally wrong! You must decide where the enemy will most likely approach, and then decide what areas will become your killing grounds. Once you decide where to take on the enemy, then it becomes much more readily apparent where to place units to get the most out of the terrain.

I'll use the "Adamow" map from the basic TIGERS ON THE PROWL set as the basis for this discussion, with a "from scratch" scenario of one German tank company and two infantry companies against a Soviet brigade. Although I am using TIGERS ON THE PROWL, this process can be used with virtually any tactical game—provided it models real-world tactics with reasonable accuracy.

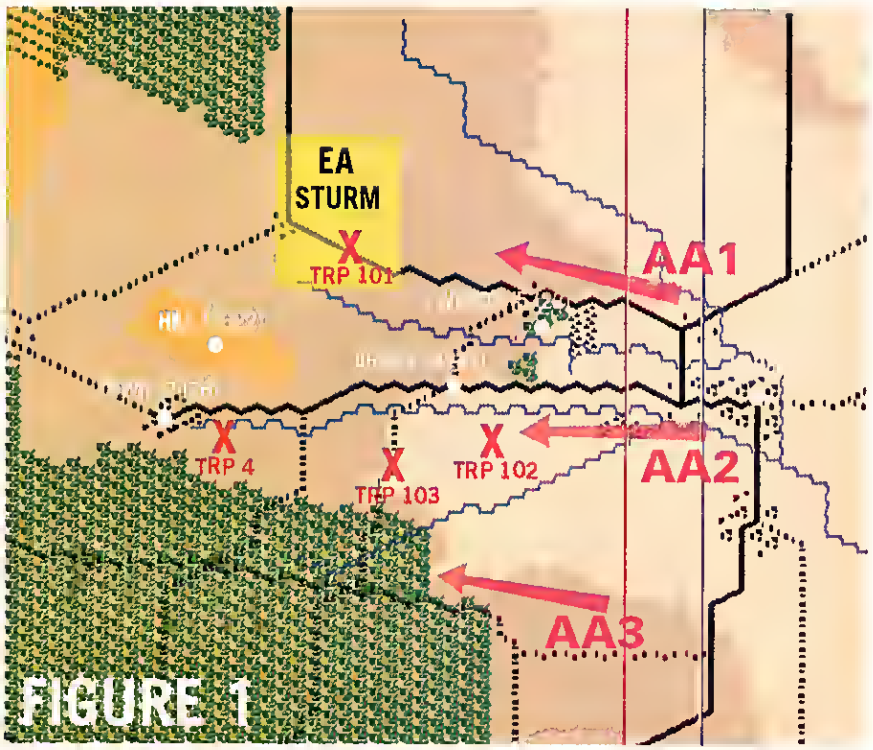

FIGURE 1

THE ABC'S OF TERRAIN ANALYSIS

OAKOC is an Army acronym that stands for:

Observation—What are the best places from which to observe enemy movement, and to discern the enemy's intentions?

Avenues of Approach—What are the high speed approaches to the defensive area? Are there flanking entry points? Hidden approach routes?

Key Terrain—What terrain features dominate the area through fields of fire or as observation points?

Obstacles—What natural obstacles exist, and what man-made barriers can be easily placed or already exist to impede the enemy's progress?

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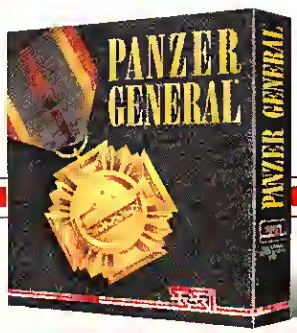

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Cover and Concealment—What defensive terrain, natural or man-made, can shield my units from harm, or hide them from the enemy?

Looking at the Adamow map (fig. 1), we can see that the terrain gently slopes upward from right to left, giving the defenders somewhat of an advantage. A large wooded area slows the attacker to the south, while a smaller wooded area does so to the north. The road network runs generally east-west throughout the sector, with smaller trails running through the wooded area in the south. The river network will tend to channel the enemy into corridors which run east-west, hampering his lateral movement. Now it's time to put the OAKOC process to work in analyzing the scenario.

Observation: The small hill centered on hex 3622 gives an excellent view of force movements to the east, as does the larger plateau further west. The small woods near the center of the map (around hex 5722) are one level higher than the low eastern terrain, and provides a good vantage point to view the large town centered at hex 7027.

Avenues of Approach: There are basically three routes which could be used by an attacker, the first two of which could handle a full battalion each, and the third along which a company-sized unit could reasonably maneuver. Our first Avenue of Approach (AA1) is about 10 hexes wide and runs along the road network to the north of the small hill, basically centered on hexes 6722-5819-4115-2021. The second Avenue (AA2) is about 5 hexes wide and runs along the center road, around hexes 6727-4625-3328-2021. The final Avenue (AA3) is the smallest, and is essentially comprised of the trail that runs east to west through the large wooded tract. Notice how the river network prevents the attacker from getting south of the center road unless he crosses at the bridge at hex 4927.

Key Terrain: Without a doubt, the prime real estate is the center hill. From this commanding location, units can observe and fire on any enemy approaching from either of the two larger approach routes. Further, armor on the hill can easily re-deploy to better engage a threat from either direction. Other key terrain would include the town at hex 4116, the woods around hex 5722, and the town at hex 3426. Finally, don't forget the plateau on the northwestern edge of the board, as it tends to negate any enemy penetration in that direction.

Obstacles: Obviously the river itself is a major natural barrier to movement, as are the large woods in the south. As previously mentioned, the river network channels any enemy attacks along the center road, and also prevents any easy north-to-south re-deployment of forces.

Cover and Concealment: There are plenty of woods hexes to provide cover and concealment for mortar and infantry units. The center woods (around hex 5722) is a near-perfect spot for a well-hidden forward observation post. Of course, the town near hex 3426 and the woods to the north would also provide good defensive cover. Beware of the enemy infiltrating into the southern wooded tract, where his units will have excellent concealment—although his progress would be greatly slowed there. Enemy indirect units may be housed in the two eastern towns, which provide good concealment for infantry as well. Emplaced armor units will likewise find some cover from the elevation of the center hill.

The best of intentions are wrecked by the weather.—Heinz Guderian

During your terrain analysis, you should of course include the weather. In TIGERS ON THE PROWL, this can range from great to terrible, from snow to rain, from day to night, all of which influence your defensive planning differently. What might be a wonderful daylight defense might fall apart under limited illumination. A defense that depends on the ability of a tank reserve to react to a hole in the line might be severely limited in a muddy scenario. Minimize the effects of weather as much as possible with illumination flares and the like; but mostly, know your unit capabilities, and know how the weather will affect them.

Agitate the enemy and ascertain the pattern of his movement. Determine his dispositions and so ascertain the field of battle —Sun Tzu

Now that we have a good feel for where the enemy is coming, we should decide on where we want to kill him. The best engagement area is near hex 4316 in AA1 and hex 5225 in AA2, therefore we'll call those hexes Target Reference Points, or TRPs, 101 and 102 respectively.

Another type of direct fire-control measure is the engagement area (EA). We could, in addition to the TRPs, call the rectangle marked by hexes 3910-3918-4618-4610 "Engagement Area STURM," or "EA STURM" for short. The doctrinal definition of an EA demands that at least two sub-units be able to fire into it. The advantage is that any enemy unit finding itself in the kill zone should be open to flanking shots from

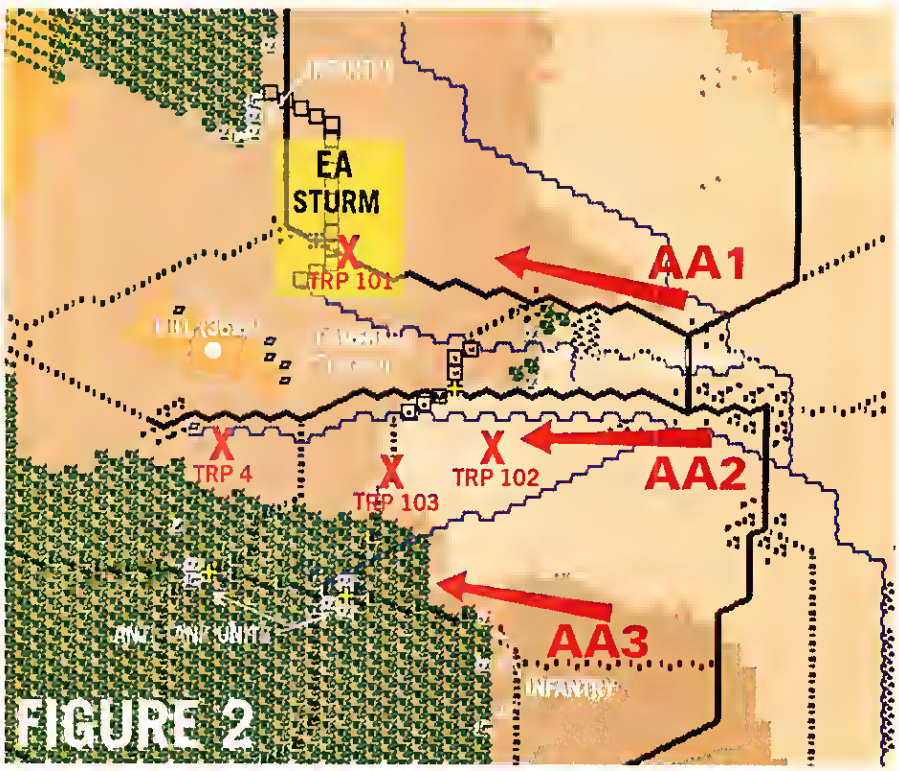

FIGURE 2

Sabre Team

Four hostages are being held at the American Embassy in London's West End. You are in control of the smallest and most secretive fighting unit in the British Army - The Sabre Team. It is your duty to infiltrate the embassy, rescue the hostages, and treat the terrorists with extreme prejudice. Complete this mission successfully, then proceed on to four more scenarios: rescue British prisoners from a jungle POW camp, destroy a subversive underground nuclear installation, rescue a hijacked ocean liner, and destroy a hostile nuclear weapons center deep in the desert.

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one of the two friendly units, exposing more vulnerable armor. In AA3, we'll need to ambush any penetrating units. So we'll put TRP 103 at hex 4539 and TRP 104 at hex 3637.

Now for the fun part—placing] units! Assuming we have one Panther company and two infantry companies to stop a Soviet brigade, how can we best place the units?(Fig. 2)

The Panther company should have positions on the center hill, possibly along hexes 4022, 4023, 4124, and 4125. From there they can cover EA STURM and also pour fire into TRP 102. Notice that the range to TRPs 101 and 102 is about 1200 meters, which is a good firing distance for the Panthers (depending on enemy armor thickness).

The first infantry company should provide fires into EA STURM. Several platoons can cover it from hexes 3908 and 3909, and possibly a platoon at 3809. Another prudent move is to place some detachments to provide early warning at hex 4116 and hex 5722.

Since AA3 is heavily wooded, anti-tank ambushes at point-blank range would be most effective. Place one infantry company to cover the south, with a few detachments to provide observation along the wood's edge. Most of the company should be deployed in depth to cover TRPs 103 and 104. Any other direct fire AT weapons should be used to help cover EA STURM, the major threat. If they are very short-ranged (such as an AT platoon) they'll probably be better served blocking off AA3.

Closely allied to the confidence which is due to good leadership is that which is caused by the feeling of being supported.
—Sir Basil Liddell Hart

Now is the time to place all those neat additional units and assets, such as improved positions, wire, mines, artillery, and pre-planned targets. The objective is not to place them haphazardly; rather, they should be integrated into your plan and used as a "combat multiplier" for your forces. Obstacles should be tied into your engagement areas and TRPs, and should be covered by direct fire. Obstacles are not intended to kill the enemy, merely to slow him down so that your other weapons are more effective. Each TRP ought to be a pre-planned artillery target, coordinated with wire and mine emplacements.

Planning a successful defense is a tough but rewarding job. Usually the defender is outnumbered, sometimes badly, and there never seems to be enough artillery to go around. Our analysis of the scenario includes an accepted risk in the far north area of the map. An enemy thrust along this route would require a tank movement to the northern plateau to counter it. Our final lesson then, is that planning not only brings risk, but also requires that you respond to the enemy. While it won't guarantee victory, sound planning based on the four steps listed above, will both minimize risks and increase your options in dealing with bold maneuvers from large enemy forces. Good luck—and good defense.

Gregory M. Smith had over 12 years experience as an Armor officer with the US Army, serving as a tank platoon leader, XO and company commander. He taught military history and leadership at the US Army Armor School, and is currently a Professor of Military Science at California University of Pennsylvania. During Desert Storm he served with the 1st Infantry Division in an M1A1 tank battalion. Greg has been playing wargames since 1973.

Q.Q.P.'s Strategies of the Month

The Grandest Fleet

For an interesting and often winning game of Grandest Fleet, try a lopsided fleet set-up. What I mean by lopsided is that your initial fleet would consist of 80% subs - or 85% carriers - or 90% cruisers. You will be amazed at what can happen with this type of set-up, cruisers especially, have a lot of fire power for their relatively low buy points. A lopsided set-up will prove challenging and usually a lot of fun. If you choose mostly subs, for instance, they will be deadly and stealthy, but you must carefully plan your moves to stay away from ships most destructive to subs. Go for it!! You will be intrigued.

In the random maps, don't shy away from the small maps. They may not be the big macho game that the humongus maps render, but these small ones are challenging, especially at the higher levels. In any of the random maps start with one, possibly two, strong bases of operation and strike out offensively from there. It is very tempting to spread your forces over the map to get those victory points quickly. My suggestion is, don't spread out. Have that big attack fleet (or 2) and roll over your opponent.

If you don't use bombers - use bombers!! They are infininitly valuable. a)To reinforce an offensive, b) Help defend a thin defense, c) Bombard enemy towns, and d)To keep your opponent constantly off guard.

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SUPER NINTENDO

SEGA GENESIS

Circle Reader Service #81

Dungeons & Donjons

Impressions' LORDS OF THE REALM: A Holistic Strategy Game

by Johnny L. Wilson

IF YOU ONLY THINK OF CASTLES AS ANTIQUATED FORTRESSES THAT SERVED AS THE DRAFTY DOMICILES OF A PRIVILEGED class, you probably won't like **Impressions'** LORDS OF THE REALM. If you think of castles as centers of political, military and economic influence which could block invasions and control entire populations, LORDS OF THE REALM is likely to be your kind of game. Like **Interplay's** CASTLES series, LORDS allows you to control a fief and build castles (both historical floorplans and custom designs) on your way to becoming king. In LORDS, however, you strive to become the king of a particular country, England, and must do considerably more micro-managing to be successful. The really good news for strategy gamers is that you can compete against human-controlled opponents, either by hot-seating at the same computer or by playing via modem.

LORDS OF THE REALM

Price: $69.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 386, VGA graphics, 10 MB hard drive space, mouse; supports most major sound cards
# of Players: 1-2 (modem)
Protection: None
Designer: Chris Foster and David Lester
Publisher: Impressions Software
Cambridge, MA
(617) 225-0848

Even a rural castle could not safely be bypassed, because its garrison could cut the invader's supply lines. The mobility of the garrison—nearly always supplied with horses—conferred a large strategic radius for many purposes.

—Joseph & Frances Gies,
Life in a Medieval Castle, p. 187.

The first thing I discovered about LORDS was that it offered a considerable amount of historical realism. In one of my first sessions with the game, I tried to conquer as many different counties as quickly as possible. I was reasonably successful, too. Yet, as soon as I spread myself slightly too thin (probably due to a megalomaniac's naivete that my artificial opponents were "too dumb" to notice), one of the computer players recaptured a recently conquered county, and an unwelcome message flashed on the screen: I didn't simply lose that county, I lost all the counties on the other side of that county. The game graciously allows you to keep playing the counties where you have the most population, but such a miscalculation can really mess up a game plan. Yet, that feature vividly illustrates the point that the Gies were trying to make in the above quotation from their book.

I also appreciated the provision for creating a combination mercenary and raised army, as well as the realistically small numbers of combatants. In LORDS, you are much better off hiring mercenaries to do the bulk of your fighting for you, since your vassals are usually much more willing to pay scutage (funds paid in lieu of military service) than serve in your army. Since the game monitors the Happiness Index in each county quite carefully, mercenaries seem relatively inexpensive. Unfortunately, they are not always available in the quantities that you need. Fifty knights aren't going to do a lot of good if they're facing 250 enemy archers. So, I find myself doing two things: 1) choosing the "Raise Army" icon regularly in order to check the availability of mercenary troops (you don't have to raise the army if you don't find the units for which you're seeking) and 2) drafting some cannon-fodder from the county to accompany any elite mercenary troops I hire (since I can use them to deflect enemy fire from the more effective elite troops). On occasion, I've had units of mercenary archers defeat armies that vastly outnumbered them because the computer's armies were chasing the foot-bound peasant cannon-fodder while my archers whittled them down to size.

Another positive factor is the way in which combat is handled. Whenever a knight icon (representing an army) touches a peasant icon (representing popular resistance), the town cross icon, or an opposing knight icon, a dialogue box pops up and asks if you want to attack. If you reply affirmatively, the screen dissolves into a tactical battle screen reminiscent of **Impressions'** Micro-Miniatures series or the tactical battles in THE SWORD OF THE SAMURAI from **MicroProse**. You just point and click to set formations, indicate objectives, and establish targets. It was particularly nice to see that there were terrain effects on the randomized battlefields and that it was possible to take advantage of the terrain by luring enemy soldiers into swampy areas and mowing them down at long range with my archers (a tactic you may have used in the land battles of PIRATES!).

In siege warfare, you have the option of trying to take out the castle with a full-

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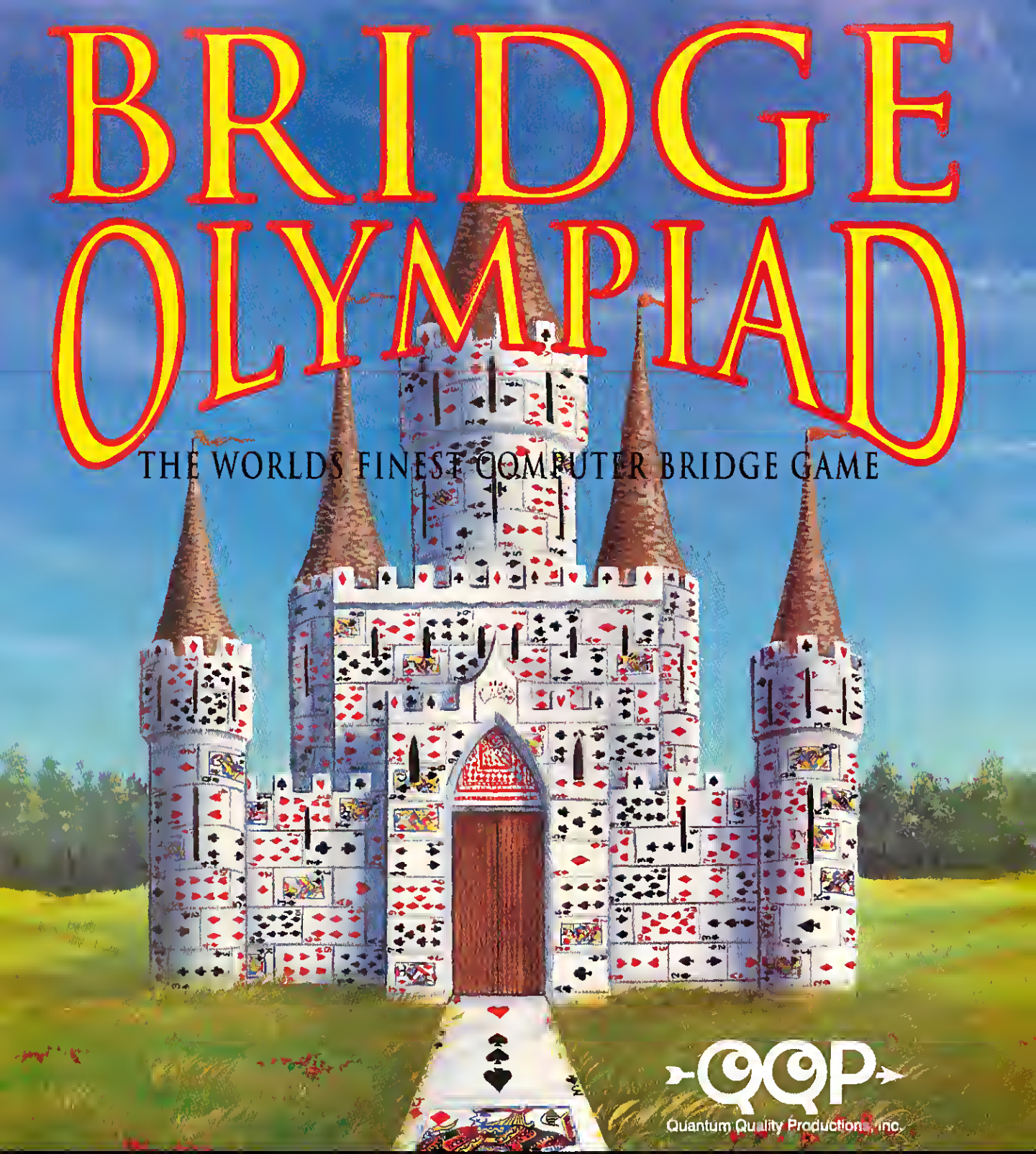

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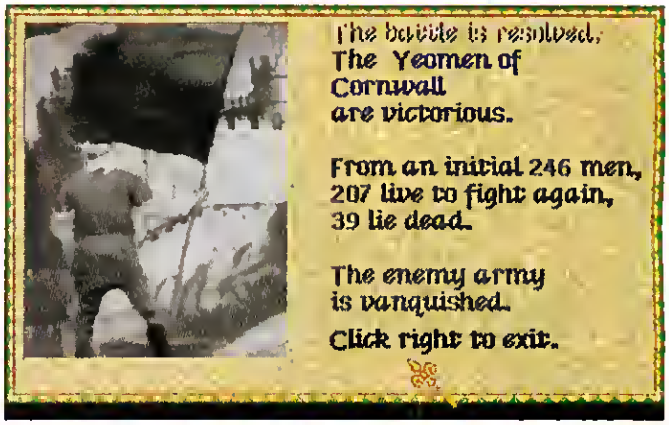
fledged siege or, as in real life, surrounding the place and starving the opposing army to death. The first option is much more entertaining, since you use the mouse to divide your total forces into foragers to locate food, builders to create up to five different types of siege engines (ladders, towers, catapults, trebuchets and rams), and fighters to start using those siege engines. The only thing missing seems to be an option for having your miners dig tunnels under the castle walls so another group could gather some obese pigs together and use their lard to light a fire so hot that it would destroy all the timbering and undermine a section of the keep. The undermined keep wall would then, of necessity, fall. Of course, the assumption may be that all of the castles in LORDS are built on a solid rock foundation such as Chepstow, in Wales.



EAT YOUR HEART OUT, HENRY V Digitized heralds hail your greatest victories.

THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY Even while he drops empty compliments, your advisor feeds you invaluable information.

No lord, however fond of fighting, could afford to neglect his estates. Many twelfth- and thirteenth-century lords passed up perfectly good wars and even stubbornly resisted participating in them because it meant leaving their lands.

Life in a Medieval Castle, p. 39.

In LORDS OF THE REALM, it is vital to manage your fiefs properly. It is up to you to be certain that your serfs and pledged men can be fed, because in the days before there were fixed marketplaces, you couldn't just open your treasury and feed the masses. You will have to set aside an appropriate amount of your fields for agriculture, both for growing grain and for raising cattle and sheep. You even have to decide how to rotate crops. In the medieval period, most farmers used the three field method. They would sow one field with winter wheat, the second with spring oats, barley or beans, and allow the third to lie fallow. The next winter, the third field would be planted to winter wheat and the first field to spring oats or barley and the second field would lie fallow. Fortunately, **Impressions** has simplified this process. Now, you only have one growing and harvesting season (Spring and Fall, respectively) and it is pretty easy to manage your crop and livestock rotation with a ripple effect going from the fields displayed on one side of the crop rotation screen to the other.

Human resources, however, are as critical to your success in LORDS as agricultural management. You get to be a centralized Labor Department and determine how the workforce in each county shall be apportioned. The labor management screen divides peasants into nine task areas: four for agriculture (field maintenance, cattle raising, sheep herding, and grain growing) and five for nascent industrialization (construction labor for the castle, miners to produce iron for weapons, quarryers to cut stone for building the castle or for sale, foresters to cut wood for castles or sale, and armorers who make the weapons). Each task area is represented by a sliding scale on the screen. Above each scale are two sets of numbers. The numbers on the left represent the number of laborers currently assigned to that task, and the numbers on the right represent the number of laborers needed for maximum efficiency in that task.

On my first playing of the game, this seemed deceptively easy. Later, I came to realize that it is inefficient to move laborers from jobs that need one skill set to jobs that need another. That's when I noticed that the skilled labor positions had a percentage listed that vacillated up and down as I tried to move laborers away from that sector into another, or as I tried to add laborers to that sector. This simulated economy is set up so that you have to make tough choices.

Count Robert was to receive a "money fief" of 500 pounds a year to fight on King Henry's side with 1,000 knights, or, if he was simultaneously summoned by King Philip, to fight on both sides at once, taking the field in

THOSE LIPS, THOSE EYES Don't be fooled by the Countess' appearance. She is a tough-as-nails negotiator.

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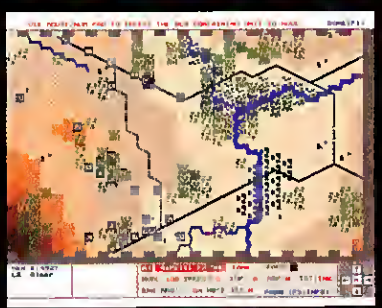

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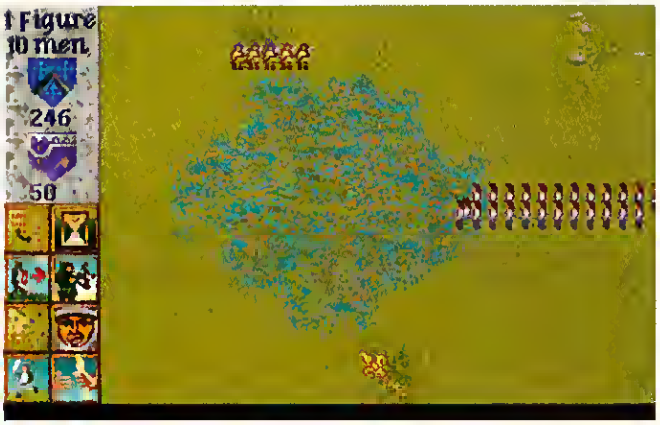

FOLLOW ME, MEN! You are free to lead your faithful soldiers anywhere—even into a formation-breaking swamp.

person for Philip, but with only 20 knights, while sending 980 knights to fight for Henry.

Life in a Medieval Castle, p. 53

As the incident just related indicates, diplomatic skill was extremely useful in the medieval period. As in Interplay's CASTLES 2, diplomacy is extremely important in LORDS OF THE REALM. Provision has been made for the artificial opponents to keep track of any sleights or overtures you make toward them, and those maneuvers can either bless or curse you in the remainder of the game. Naturally, there is provision for diplomatic messages between human opponents, as well. Unlike CASTLES 2, you have more ways to signal disregard for an opponent. It is not simply a matter of being for or against a given opponent—your actions and attitudes add up over the course of a game.

A characteristic feature [of a successful harvest day] was the "sporting chance;" at the end of the working day the lord gave each hay-maker a bundle of hay as large as he could lift with his scythe, or a sheep was loosed in the field, and if the mowers could catch it, they could roast it.

Life in a Medieval Castle, p. 155

In summary, what Impressions has given gamers in LORDS OF THE REALM is: 1) the joy of castle-building with an added dimension of economic management; 2) the strategic challenge of a wargame, complete with tactical resolution; 3) KINGMAKER-style diplomatic maneuvering with more options; and 4) two different multi-player options in which to experience these challenges. David Lester and Chris Foster have given strategy gamers a "sporting chance" to win at a game at which too many historical personages have lost.

EDITORS SPEAK

LORDS OF THE REALM

RATING ★★★★ 1/2

PROS Nice graphics and excellent balance between economic, diplomatic and military strategy, with added bonus of multi-player options.

CONS In spite of historical detail, needs scenarios with historical opponents and situations.

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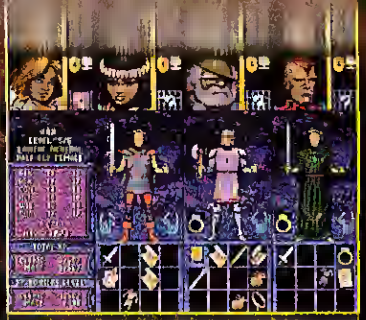

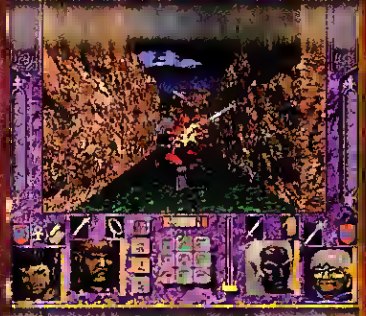

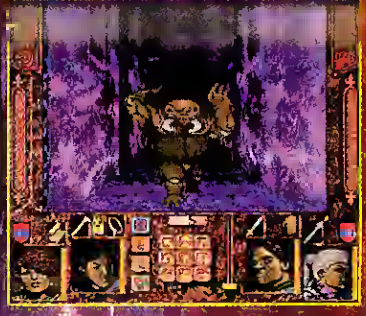

A Few Good Bugs

Entomology Infests The Wargame In Dynamix' BATTLE BUGS

by Robert L. Hayes, Jr.

"I love the smell of leftovers in the morning. It smells like victory."
—Sergeant Cock E. Roach

It's war here in the trenches between kitchen tiles. Heavily armed and pincered insects ask no quarter and give no mercy. They sting, they hop, they fly and they swim, and if you're in the way of their next meal, you might become one yourself. The best you can do is train well, move, and defend in coordinated swarms, and be the first with the most at Cola Lake or Watermelon Hill #39.

You might think a combat game about bugs would be pretty light fare, the gaming equivalent of a wine and fruit picnic instead of a typical wargaming ox roast. But before strategy gamers squash **Dynamix'** BATTLE BUGS with a Kleenex and flush it down the toilet, they should give this game a look; there's actually more here than meets the antennae.

BATTLE BUGS is a detailed wargame of tactical combat between warring insect tribes, complete with traditional hexagonal movement (though you don't get to see the grid). The game combines a reasonably good combat system with a deeply disturbed sense of humor to produce an experience that is playable, quick and fun.

BATTLE BUGS

Price: $44.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 2 MB RAM, SVGA or VGA graphics, 8 MB hard drive space, mouse; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards.
Protection: Documentation Check
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Publisher: Sierra On-Line
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FOOD, FLAG AND GLORY

BATTLE BUGS is organized around a series of battles (56 in all) which make up a campaign. The goals of each battle are simple, either the slaughter of your opponent's army or the capture of all the food on the battlefield. There are no branches in the campaign; if you lose a battle, you simply play it over again until you win. If you lose a given battle enough times, you will be given the option to skip it and move ahead. Results of previous battles do not affect future battles; each fight is a set-piece affair that does not change. Naturally, the battles increase in complexity as the game proceeds, with the two-on-one introductory scenario building up to massive battles involving dozens of insects on a side. Good performance wins medals, but otherwise there is no scoring system. The designers evidently feel the play is the thing, so players in need of ego massage from their games will not find such suasion here. Each battle is named, usually with a pun so foul that good taste prevents me from repeating them.

The BATTLE BUGS interface is slick, polished and reasonably intuitive. A handy on-line help feature means that the manual can be read once and tossed aside. You can control your insect army individually or in small groups if controlling packs of little pests is more your thing.

Each type of bug has a range of standard abilities (attack strength, hit points, defense strength, movement speed), and many insects have special powers or abilities. Ants and pill bugs (what I believe scientists call "rolly-pollies") can throw bombs, for example, while grasshoppers and fleas can jump; the special ability of the bombardier beetle need not be explicated in a family magazine. The various insects are artfully rendered, and visual puns are everywhere. Wasps, for example, wear tuxedos, carry G&Ts, and stagger about intoxicated when stunned by an enemy bomb blast. The insect animations are clever in the extreme; unlike most cute cartoon characters, these do not soon pall.

TROOP INSECTION

The wargame aspect of BATTLE BUGS has not been neglected, fortunately, and tactical wargamers will feel right at home ordering their insects about the tabletops. The game is played in real-time, but can be paused at any time for inspection of troops or changes in orders. It is generally easy to move units about the playfield, with a few exceptions. One particularly glaring problem is that a small bug can become "lost" behind a larger one in the non-rotating isometric view that is the player's window on the game world; if the larger bug is immobilized for some reason (combat, bomb blast effects, etc.) then the smaller bug cannot be accessed for orders or information gathering, occasionally with highly troublesome results. On the whole, however, the control system works fluidly and well, and players will not spend much time trying to get their units to behave properly.

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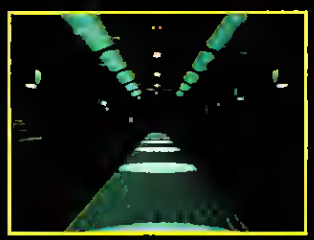

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THE BUG BUNKER Operatives report enemy movement near this vital Plop Tart. General Beatlebug orders you to quash their forces and hold the pastry at all costs.

When units fight, they do so one-on-one. Additional insects can pile into the melee, assailing the enemy while being unmolested themselves, since their target is already engaged in a life-or-death struggle. Aerial units (flies, bees, wasps, etc.) can drop a variety of ordnance into masses of enemy troops, while grenadiers can throw some bombs while safe on the ground. Firecrackers and plain old bombs will wreak havoc over a large area, while rocks will smash one bug at a time. Skyrockets shoot down flyers, while limburger cheese generates a long-lasting odor that nauseates and confuses any unit which passes through it. Poison can be laid down to reduce the energy level of bugs that need energy to fly or jump. Some units are immune to some of these effects; cockroaches laugh at poison, for example, while pill bugs are immune to explosives.

A variety of terrain types makes the tactical decision-making process much more interesting. Should your rhino beetle start plodding through the match-covered middle of the battlefield, or take the longer route over the soup spoon? The various food items which often comprise the victory conditions for the game also have varying terrain effects. Some cannot be climbed at all, and battles will be fought around them, while others can be captured easily by fast-moving fliers skimming over the dismayed enemy defenders. Insect generals who ignore terrain will soon share the fate of their larger brethren who do the same, and their enemies will enjoy the spoils of victory.

SAY YOUR PRAYERS, MANTIS A tiny command interface gives bug soldiers their marching orders, in this case to crawl over and kick that mantis' thorax.

BUGS IN THE MACHINE

Game speed is adequate on even a lowball 386 clunker, so players should have no difficulty keeping up the pace. The music and sound effects aren't bad, but will suffer the "listen to it once then turn it off forever" fate of most wargame soundtracks. The game uses 256-color VGA graphics for the basic screens, though players with SVGA cards will find them utilized with an 800x600 mode which displays considerably more battlefield terrain (and which doesn't slow the game unplayably, even on the aforementioned lowball machine). Requiring only two megabytes of RAM and a piddling eight megs of hard drive space, BATTLE BUGS will run on practically any computer made this decade. It is refreshing to find a quality game with good graphics and sound that will run even on slightly older machines.

The manual is clearly-written and tells you everything you need to know to get playing the game, making the also-excellent on-line help feature somewhat superfluous, though still useful during those 3 AM gameplay sessions when digging around for the manual would disrupt a carefully planned offensive. Miracle of miracles, BATTLE BUGS includes a two-player mode (though, regrettably, not a modem play feature) that works remarkably well and which minimizes "hot seating." Players play the ordinary scenarios, with one player taking on the role of the computer's side. Each player has a user-configurable amount of "orders time," but the time they can spend is limited. Once the time is gone, the game ticks down to its conclusion with no further input allowed from that side. This is a unique and workable way to handle a real-time game, and it has the side benefit of allowing for easy handicapping. Your little brother keeps slaughtering you? Simply reduce his orders time by half and watch him scramble to try and keep up.

THE LAST BITES

All the above discussion of terrain, unit movement, and tactical finesse should not deter the gamer looking for a simple good time. BATTLE BUGS is nothing if not an enjoyable game to play. The manual and graphic elements of the game are uniformly hilarious, from the radar display running on a "No Entiendo Lame Boy" to gruff spiders whirling into battle in a Tasmanian-devil-like tornado. BATTLE BUGS manages to achieve that rare fusion, a meaningful tactical game which is funny as well as fun to play. No one will lose their job or spouse to an overdose of BATTLE BUGS playing, but plenty of gamers will have many enjoyable evenings of conquering cheese wedges and slaughtering spiders.

BEE BOMBARDIERS Flying insects with firecrackers or bombs are fleet and pack a whollop. Pirated electricity powers the tactical CRT displays at bottom.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BATTLE BUGS

RATING ✸✸✸ 1/2

PROS A whimsical and challeging strategy game that runs well on low end machines. Nice implementation of the two player mode. Fortunately, no bad "bug" puns are needed, since the program runs flawlessly.

CONS In addition to one or two interface niggles, the game is not exceptionally deep and has little replay value. Definitely for the casual gamer or the wargamer on R&R.

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Hot Toddies With The Squaddies

British Special Forces Strike Terrorist Targets In SABRE TEAM

by Jeff James

WITH THE RELEASE OF SABRE TEAM, U.K. DEVELOPER KRISALIS AND STATESIDE PUBLISHER MICROLEAGUE **Interactive** have joined forces to send a strike team into American-held territory. In the testosterone-saturated field of modern infantry combat simulations, the Yanks have been getting all the computer simulated glory. Most of the elite U.S. forces (U.S. Navy SEALS, U.S. Army Rangers and the Green Berets) have been featured in a computer game of some sort, with **Electronic Arts'** SEAL TEAM being the most notable product of the bunch. In SABRE TEAM, the elite special forces of the British Army finally have a chance to make their mark.

SABRE TEAM

Price: $59.95 CD, $49.95 floppy
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 386 or better, 2MB RAM, VGA graphics, 8MB hard drive space; supports Sound Blaster sound cards. CD and floppy versions available.
Protection: None
Developer: Krisalis Software
Publisher: Microleague Interactive Software
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TALLY-HO!

The first thing you'll need to do after selecting a difficulty level is review the eight soldiers in your squad to decide which four you want on a particular mission. Each soldier is unique, rated in a wide range of skill categories—from marksmanship to movement—with a percentile rating of 0 to 99. After you've examined your grunts, you must equip each soldier individually, taking into account his strengths and weaknesses. A strong soldier can lug a lot of equipment, while a scrawnier—but more dexterous—trooper is destined to be a sharpshooter. A healthy variety of modern combat equipment is available, including tear gas, stun grenades, gas masks, bullet-proof vests and a wide range of rifles, silenced submachine guns and other weapons. Unfortunately, exchanging equipment between characters is a bit cumbersome, even when you're back at your base. Equipment can't be transferred without first manually dropping the item in question and then having the intended recipient pick up it up.

INFOCALYPSE NOW A squad member breaks into a supercomputing nerve center to foil a doomsday plot. Or perhaps to put an end to illegal software duplication.

X-COM MEETS SEAL TEAM

Once your squad is armed to its gritted teeth, you're ready to hit the combat zone. At the outset, you're given a limited number of insertion points. Once the team is in, the regular turn sequence begins where you alternate turns with the computer-controlled opponent. Your squaddies' movements are mediated by an interface not unlike the one found in **MicroProse's** X-COM. The upper two-thirds of the screen contains an isometric, overhead view of your troopers and their surroundings. The bottom third of the screen displays 14 blocky icons that are used to control your characters. Each of the icons animates when you move the mouse pointer over it, making it a boon for interface-phobic novices. All the action takes place on one level, so there are no stairs to climb or elevators to mess with. Everything literally lies at the same level, so hunting bad guys is a simple matter of systematically exploring rooms until you eliminate them all.

Central to the game is what Krisalis dubs "action points." As in X-COM, each of the soldiers in the game—friendlies and hostiles—have a set number of action points at the beginning of each turn. Every action a soldier undertakes, from changing facing to reloading a weapon, costs a certain number of points. If you manage to save some points at the end of your turn, there's a good chance your troopers may be able to fire on enemies if they wander into a line of sight. Even though only one opportunity move is possible per turn, mastering this feature is essential to winning the game.

THE U.N.'S MOST WANTED

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CHICKEN OF THE SEA A terrorist cowers by a bulkhead while a SABRE TEAM sniper tries to perform a remote tracheotomy with a 9mm slug.

Mission two takes you and your squad to a sweltering jungle venue to rescue NATO officials, while mission three sends you deep into a NORAD-like mountain fortress to destroy a batch of war-mongering supercomputers. The Achille Lauro hijacking is the theme in mission four, where you must board a cruise ship and eliminate all the terrorists on board. Finally, mission five pits the Sabre Team against a power-mad dictator in the Middle East.

Regardless of the mission, following sound tactics will usually see you through. Advancing in small increments will leave your soldiers enough movement points to fire during the opportunity move phase, while having them advance as a single group will limit your casualties. Splitting your squad up is always an option if you want to cover more territory, but it also increases the likelihood of an ambush. Sorting out which soldier is which is more difficult than it should be, as you must check a soldier's statistics or other menu option to see who he is: all your soldiers look the same on the screen, with the exception of having a different movement point value. Likewise, current weapons aren't displayed either—you'll have to open the inventory screen to see what your soldiers are armed with.

One novel aspect of SABRE TEAM is how the game treats hostages. If you've managed to find one, you have the opportunity to control his movement at the start of the next turn. Although you can't use them as extra soldiers (they're prohibited from using weapons), you can personally select their escape route. Using this feature you can form a protective perimeter around the hostages while your team escorts them from the mission zone. In some missions you'll see a constant influx of enemy reinforcements, so providing protection for your defenseless charges is a top priority.

A port from an Amiga original, the IBM PC version of SABRE TEAM features the same crisp, well-drawn graphics. Aside from looking a bit cartoonish, the overall visual appearance of the game is detailed and easily visible. Digitized sound effects are used to good effect throughout the game, with a strongly-accented English voice announcing when units are down, and alerting you to other important information. The audio worked flawlessly on a Sound Blaster Pro, although the game locked up several times when I tested it on a machine using a **Gravis Ultrasound** MAX using the SBOS emulator.

SHOVE OFF Soldier P.J. Roderick displays some proper British sense by dumping an M16 in favor of his country's renowned MP5 submachine gun.

FOIBLES IN THE FOXHOLE

In addition to meager audio support, SABRE TEAM seems to suffer from a case of design schizophrenia; it can't decide whether it's a realistic combat simulation or an arcade blast-fest. On the realistic side, there are loads of little details that grognards should love. Weapons are given a "radiated noise distance" which indicates how far each weapon can be heard when fired. Crucial to a stealthy approach, this feature allows you to pick and choose the quietest weapons at your disposal. Weapons are also given a 100% damage distance, with damage realistically decreasing with range. Yet these and other attempts at realism are marred by a number of glaring omissions. Some of the most basic infantry tactics taught to every soldier—such as assuming a prone, crouching or kneeling position to lessen the chance of being seen and fired upon—are impossible to use in SABRE TEAM. As is, your troopers go about their objectives in a full upright position.

Another curious glitch concerns the behavior of the hostages in the third mission, in which you must eliminate all the terrorists aboard a cruise ship. In this mission all the hostages are invincible, apparently able to endure unlimited amounts of damage and remain standing. On several occasions an obstinate hostage situated himself between my troopers and a terrorist, then proceeded to unflinchingly soak up dozens of hits from automatic weapons at close range, giving new meaning to the term "human shield."

MISSION MOSTLY ACCOMPLISHED

Quibbles notwithstanding, SABRE TEAM does emerge as a highly playable—if somewhat superficial—new entry into the tactical infantry combat arena. The playing interface is polished and easy to learn, making SABRE TEAM a perfect game for squad-leading novices. If you're looking for realism and attention to detail, look to **Electronic Arts**' SEAL TEAM to fulfill those mission requirements. If you like your gaming fare light and enjoyable, and if you've played X-COM for all it's worth, SABRE TEAM is worth a shot.

EDITORS SPEAK

SABRE TEAM

RATING ✸ ✸ ✸

PROS Easy to learn, easy to play and easy on the eyes—a perfect learning tool for neophyte squad leaders.

CONS Pays lip service to accuracy and detail. More akin to X-COM than to SEAL TEAM, and less interesting than both.

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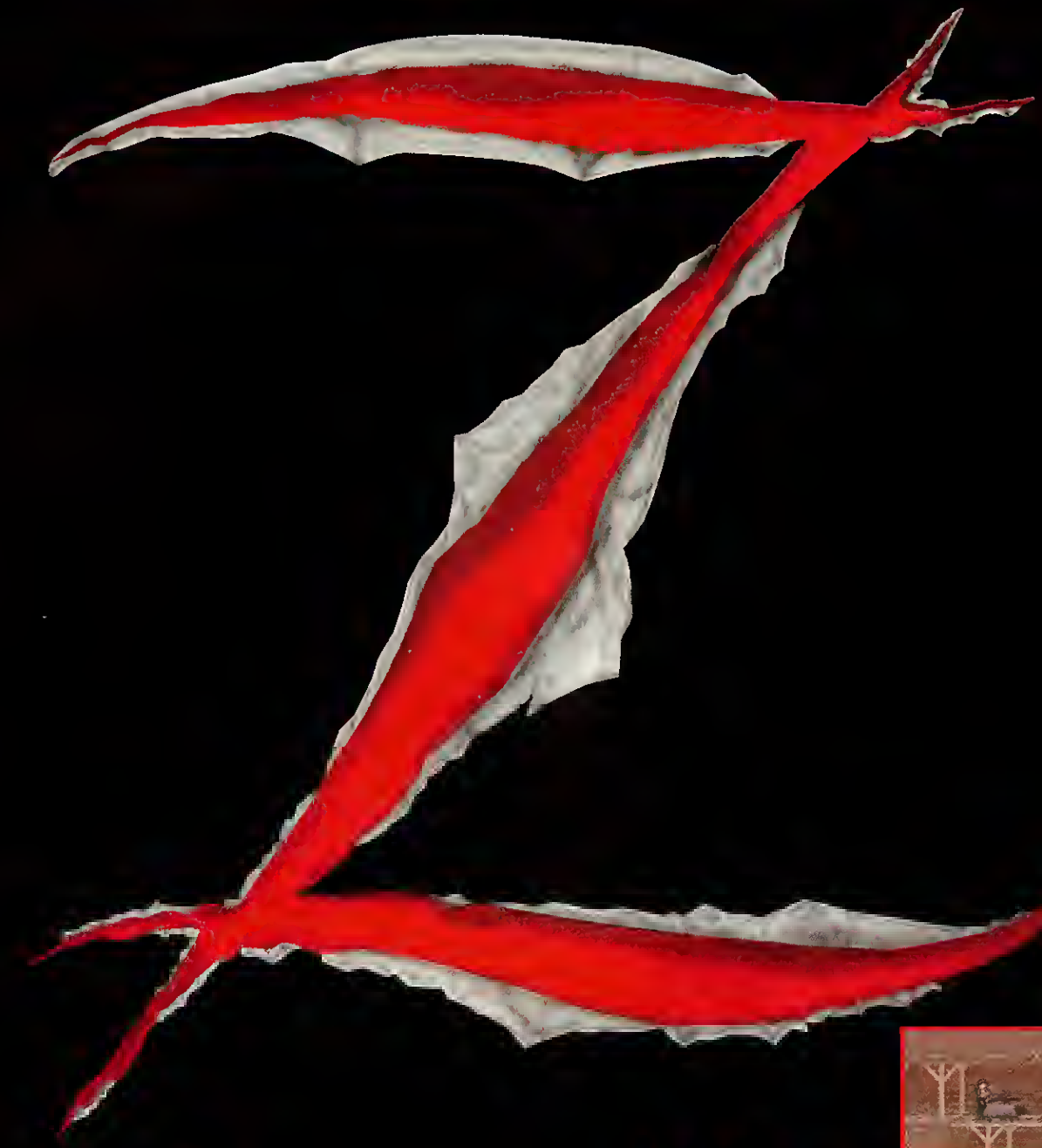

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Circle Reader Service #207

The Kublai Who Would Be Khan

Winning The World Conquest Scenario In GENGHIS KHAN II

by Terry Lee Coleman and Josh Bruce

GENGHIS KHAN II IS A GAME THAT IS EASY TO GET INTO, BUT VERY DIFFICULT TO GET OUT OF WITH YOUR wargaming pride intact. To become conqueror of all you survey requires not only a keen strategic mind, but a sound knowledge of battlefield tactics and diplomatic finesse. With the marquee value of Genghis Khan, we assume most players will tackle the conquest of Mongolia first. Mongolia is a harsh land, however, and this is not the simple introductory scenario that beginners might assume it to be. Carving out a meager existence on the Asian steppes is difficult enough without the constant threats from other Mongol tribes.

OO THE GENGHIS SHUFFLE India offers great targets for hit-and-run raids—just don't expect your enemy to stand idle while you pillage.

Buying time to build a nation of both economic and military might requires that you win friends and influence people through politics. Alliances keep you safe from attack (unlike sneak attacks in CIVILIZATION), but prevent you from jumping your neighbor as well. Making peace with everyone might make you a hit at Kashmir parties, but potential expansion will be limited. Always have an enemy to invade and avoid the Switzerland Syndrome.

By creating a four-year alliance with a nation several areas away, you will be able to invade the provinces in between without fear of much interference. Alternately, an alliance with a nation on your border allows you to turn your back without fear of getting a knife between your ribs.

In the Mongolia scenario, you should first ally with Jamuga, who is easily the biggest threat. Send an aide with at least a "B" rating in both Politics and Charm (weird hair and accent optional), as someone less well-equipped to negotiate will often insult opposing leaders. The old adage, "Never fight a two-front war," is just as true as always. Subjugate Torgural Khan's forces before other tribes conspire to eliminate you from the game, using alliances as needed. Afterwards, you must move against Jamuga, so time your alliance against him accordingly; your "sworn brother" has well-defended lands, but when you finally triumph, your power base will swell.

PATIENCE MARKS THE TRUE LEADER

Now consolidate for a few turns, focusing on making enough money to outfit your army. Tax to build up your war chest, since Temujin's "A" charm rating helps to prevent revolt. Funnel gold and troops into your home province and build 14-16 Mongols and Nomads. Don't launch an attack until Training and Arms are both above 90. You may have to take a few chances at this point due to the randomness of computer opponent responses. If an invasion force knocks at your door, note where the enemy legions are, especially its #1 legion. Watch to see if any of the enemy legions go into hiding in the hope of ambushing your legions, and maneuver your army around these forces. Remember that the objective is to defeat the enemy's #1 legion, so all efforts should be focused on attacking this unit while avoiding other forces.

If you are too weak to conquer a province outright, or merely want to hold on, invade a province and fight some of the lesser legions in the enemy army. Once these are destroyed, begin looting unoccupied towns with all of your troops. This has the dual benefit of increasing your own stocks of food and gold, while depleting the enemy province of resources and lowering popular support. Should the tide begin to turn against your forces, simply withdraw and watch as rebellion and revolution wrack the enemy province. An excellent means of disarming an enemy, this may even cause the province to form a new nation. In either case, the land is ripe for plucking. After conquering it, give some of your plundered goods back to the people to ensure their loyalty.

Beginning conquerors might get away with an economic policy of high taxation and pillaging, but to truly succeed in GENGHIS KHAN II, one must master the intricacies of trade. The ideal of course, is simply to buy low and sell high. However, as you conquer new territory, different merchants vie for your attention, with silks, fine porcelain, even armaments. In the Mongolia scenario, the fast buck is rare, but you should purchase arms whenever you can afford them. In World Conquest, you become almost a "Merchant Khan," as you have four traders who visit on a regular basis. Of these, the Uighur

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are the least useful thieves, with the Chinese playing the part of the local discount house. Regardless of market rates, it always helps to have a few Ming vases or Japanese silks around for the Islamic and Venetian traders. By playing various merchants off each other and making the best of high trade rates, a fortune can be made on the exchange—provided that your enemies leave you alone.

CROSS-BRED UNITS

A realistic aspect of this simple game is that troops must be trained and armed after purchase, resulting in high costs and time delays. While expensive, arms are critical to an effective fighting force, determining how many ranged attacks your missile units can make. Well-trained troops have better morale and take far fewer losses in combat.

An obvious strategy is to buy only the best unit types, such as Mongols, but even in the Mongolia scenario, this won't work 100% of the time. Lesser units bought at the army discount depot will wear down outnumbered elite units, a problem even more pronounced when attempting World Conquest. The availability of units varies with the culture of the region. Knights do not come from Japan, and elephants cannot be raised in Mongolia. Mercenaries can help circumvent this as unit types can be hired anywhere, but they are a costly substitute. The most efficient way of dealing with this problem is to let your army go native. After conquering a province and taking losses, it is often best to recruit local troops—strange as they may be—to serve as replacements.

TRAIN FOR TERRAIN

With the variety of terrain, approach is everything when attempting to gain control of all enemy cities in the province. Take plenty of supplies so that the morale of your troops remains high. Place your best troops with your king, and expect the enemy to do the same. Ambushes are most useful in picking off lesser formations, provided you make your #1 legion a tempting target. After other legions are defeated, destroy their best legion at your leisure. Keep backup legions nearby and reorganize freely to ensure constant pressure until the enemy cracks. Should you stand to lose an individual battle, retreat that force, as damaged units will return to full strength in the coming season.

One difficulty many new players have with GENGHIS KHAN II is that they try to conduct battles operationally, as in ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS 3, without considering the tactical nature of GENGHIS KHAN II. The battle board, despite its abstractions, gives a good overall view as to why the Mongols were such a fine mobile strike force. With high movement rates, Mongol and Nomad units can outrun slower units. If trained and armed well, they put out a tremendous rate of fire, allowing them to close, fire and then fall back, repeating the process on the following turn. In the Mongolia scenario, there are no heavy cavalry to counter Mongols, so make them your mainstay. There is little need for foot units, although Shortbows are reasonable (and cheap) defenders.

COMBINED ARMS, MONGOL-STYLE A coordinated attack from a balanced force finds Nomad and Elephant units moving in on enemy infantry that has been demoralized by artillery fire.

Regardless of the opposition you face, it helps to keep in mind a few simple tips. With terrain often varying greatly from one tactical board to another, use the lay of the land to your advantage. Trees inhibit enemy movement and shield you from enemy fire, while lakes slow down attackers, improving the effectiveness of defensive missile fire. Mobility is everything. Keep at least one half to two-thirds of your forces made up of Nomad, Mongol, Samurai or Horse Archers whenever possible. Know your troops: Training and arms are the most important factors in the game, and a single legion with skill levels of 90 will defeat twice the forces at 40 every time. Don't be too proud to retreat when necessary. Whenever one of your units is reduced to under 100 men, it should be withdrawn to the rear of the battlefield. In an extreme emergency, these units serve as a tactical reserve, but should be kept well away from any hard fighting. Any unit completely destroyed is lost forever; but if it survives the battle with even one man, it will be returned to full strength after the invasion.

In the endgame, you must think about not only defeating your last Mongolian enemy, but in how you will transition to the World Conquest Scenario. If you have not already done so, spend some time with your queen and produce an heir. She should provide you with information on potential traitors (who should never be given governorship of a province, but are perfectly fine to keep for battle generals). Female offspring should be married off to potential troublemakers to bind their loyalty forever. You can never have too many offspring.

Your sons are always born with high values and make excellent Generals or Governors. At least one of your relatives (or in-laws) should be made the Governor of any major conquest, such as China, Mongolia, or France. While you may have to wait a while for your offspring to get rolling, don't be too harsh. Joti, like his brothers, will be turning the world on its ear by the time he's ten years old—hardly a juvenile delinquent.

THE STORM IN THE CALM

When you move to the World Conquest map, all your hard-earned victories are reduced to a single space. Still, the rest of the world is unprepared for the force of the Mongols, so strike hard and quickly, using your mobility to utmost advantage. Both of your sons, especially Joti, are aggressive types and are best used for territorial expansion, but make sure to give each a good advisor, lest they mismanage funds and stunt provincial growth. Strike south first, as the Chinese have low arms and rich provinces. Capture Liaodong, Gansu, Tibet, Hopei and Dzungaria in roughly that order. Kao-Chang and Turkestan may follow if time, gold, and troops permit.

Japan is the most difficult early opponent. Samurai are second only to Mongols in versatility, and defeating them in the open is difficult (an overseas invasion

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GENGHIS KHAN II: UNIT VALUES

NAME	CLOSE COMBAT	CHARGE	LONG RANGE	DEFENSE	COST
Light Infantry	B	D	—	D	300
Heavy Infantry	B	D	—	C	400
Pikemen	B	B	—	D	400
Artillery	D	E	C*	E	800
Shortbow	C	E	B	D	500
Longbow	E	E	A	D	600
Crossbow	D	E	A	E	600
Elephant	B	B	D	A	1500
Catapult	E	E	A**	E	800
Nomands	C	C	C	C	900
Lancers	B	B	—	C	1100
Mongols	B	B	B	C	1200
Horse Archers	C	C	A	D	1300
Mameluke	B	B	—	B	1300
Knights	C	A	—	B	1400
Samurai	A	C	C	C	1200

* = high chance of causing immediate disruption
** = lesser chance of causing immediate disruption

is insanity early in the game). Instead, entice the Japanese into an unwinnable war in Korea or Hunan. Bleed them dry and strike into the weakened heart of Nippon. Execute all Japanese leaders: they are power-hungry and will betray you. Immediately recruit all the Samurai you can afford and send them to Hunan, where they will help you in a tough campaign against the Khmer in Annam. Reorganize and plunge into Burma and Hindustan, where you'll run out of steam. If threatened by the arrogant Indians, raid them to gain time, then build up units, as the Indians prepare to invade you.

The Indians are worthy opponents, but not at all subtle. Set ambushes and whittle them down before they reach your palace. Elephants are tough, but slow, so use artillery against them, with charges from Mongols when they start to waver. With luck, you can capture the enemy emperor. Even if he retreats, you should immediately follow with a thrust into the Punjab or Southern India. This is one leader you cannot intimidate into surrendering, so be resigned to a long struggle. Next, consider allying with either the Persians or the Kipchak so that you may defeat them in detail.

The problem you'll face is a great variety of opponents and tactics. While this is much of the appeal to the game, it can be frustrating in the short term. Horse Archers are very similar to Nomads and are better missile units. Mamalukes can give even Mongols a tough fight toe-to-toe. The best force to tackle these troublesome opponents is composed of one Elephant, one Artillery, one Samurai and one Mongol (or two Mongols if Samurai aren't available). The Artillery demoralize enemy units, the Mongols hit-and-run, and the Samurai and Elephant can charge the shaken enemy. If funds are a concern, Nomads are always a good alternative, with Shortbows good for defense, or for attrition shots versus Horse Archers.

Regardless of how organized you are, it becomes impractical to wait for units to trek from the far reaches of your empire. So you must adapt to a new type of warfare featuring cheap, dispensable units. Hoard your Mongol, Elephant and Nomad units, saving them for the death blow to the opponent. Play defensively in Africa, then counter-punch, as Catapults are not good offensive weaponry. Once Africa is subjugated, be wary about invading Spain. Iberia is tough in most scenarios, especially by sea. Instead, move on the northern front through Russia and the Baltic Coast. The situation is often to your advantage, with several petty lords vying for dominance.

PRODUCT PRICES BY MERCHANTS

PRODUCT	UIGHUR	ISLAMIC	VENETIAN	CHINESE
Fur	1.0	.8	.9	1.2
Silk	2.4	3.2	3.9	1.4
Gems	2.5	2.7	3.0	2.8
Jewelry	1.6	2.1	1.8	1.8
Medicine	1.5	1.0	1.8	1.2
Woodwork	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.0
Ceramics	1.6	2.1	2.6	1.2
Glass	1.2	.8	1.0	1.8
Textiles	1.9	1.6	1.4	2.0
Spice	2.8	2.2	3.6	1.8
Food	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
Arms	6.6	5.4	6.0	4.8

KHAN'S EUROPEAN VACATION

Western Europe is an enigma. A cornucopia of leaders are mixed with some very interesting units. Longbows are familiar to you from China, but here they are used in offensive fashion as well as in passive defense. Crossbows are superb "stoppers" and can even halt an elephant charge. Knights have good morale and are terrific close-in, like a boxer who moves to the body in the late rounds. More than units, the European mentality is defensive, with typical provinces having defenses of 20 or more, enhanced by the cumbersome, but hard-hitting Pikemen. Against a good computer opponent, starving out the enemy is unlikely, and raids are likely to be bloody for both sides.

The best siege method is to find a weak kingdom and overrun it, adding its European units to your stable. If you must assault a well-defended castle, use one Mongol, one Catapult (or Artillery), one Longbow and one Knight, realizing that you will need two or three assaults (and fresh units) before the citadel falls. The Catapult won't run out of ammunition, and Artillery is very effective at demoralizing enemy units. Longbows are the most expendable and may be replaced by Crossbows. Light Infantry are virtually useless for sieges, being decimated by missile fire before closing to effective shock range. Watch the approach lanes—especially the moats—and keep units out of enemy missile range until your attack is coordinated. Charge mercilessly with Knights, and be prepared for a real bloodbath.

Once you have developed an assault style you are comfortable with, your next task is to reach the Atlantic before you go to that great battleground in the sky. While probing for weaknesses, recruit Europeans as advisors and governors, as they love to play grand political games (perhaps they are all descendants of Byzantines and Medicis?). Iberia falls fairly easily once France is conquered, and England can be isolated and taken much easier than Japan, if only because Richard is hardly the equal of Minamoto. Even the great Genghis Khan failed to complete this epic task in his lifetime, so you are honored indeed in its completion.

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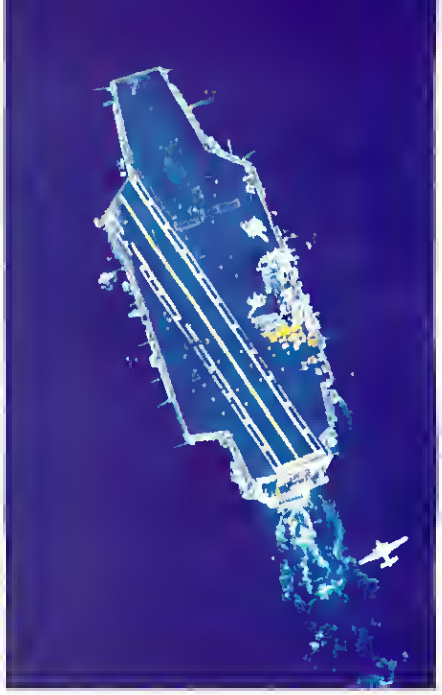
Circle Reader Service #33

TALDs: The Great Equalizer

Make The Most Of Your Missiles In HARPOON II, Part Two of Three

by Tom "KC" Basham



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MANY PLAYERS HAVE COMPLAINED ABOUT POOR MISSILE PERFORMANCE IN HARPOON II. MISSILES simply don't hit with the effectiveness that one expects from hi-tech, multi-billion dollar hardware. Take the game's namesake, for example. The Harpoon missile falls far short of McDonnell Douglas' manufacturer specifications. A few military contacts have criticized HARPOON II as being overly pessimistic, while other industry contacts have, without breaching security barriers, confided that they concur with HARPOON II's modeling algorithms and hit rates. Clearly, though, the U.S. Navy couldn't survive with such poor success rates; there must be more to the puzzle. In HARPOON II, the TALD is the great equalizer.

INSTANT RECALL It is often helpful to name the waypoints of a mission based upon the action you expect in a zone. Here, four reference points named CAP 1-4 define a combat air patrol zone.

The ADM-141 Tactical Air Launched Decoy, or TALD, is an extremely effective, but sparsely documented counter measure device. Proper TALD use not only protects aircraft from surface-to-air missiles, but greatly improves anti-ship missile effectiveness as well.

To understand the TALD, you must first understand HARPOON II's radar system. Every radar has some number of control channels. Basically, if a radar has 25 control channels, it can track 25 different targets at once. HARPOON II's virtual radar operators always give priority to inbound contacts following typical missile profiles. In other words, the radar operator will focus attention on contacts which present the highest threat. If, however, the radar operator is busy tracking 25 bombers (or however many control channels his radar has), then he has no additional channels available for missile tracking. Effectively, if you occupy his full attention with aircraft or other low-threat air contacts before firing missiles, he'll never "see" the incoming missiles.

Further, most radar operators are reluctant to actively broadcast and subsequently reveal their position. Accordingly, many virtual radar operators do not go active until a threat is detected via passive means, such as visual scans or infra-red systems. You may find it impossible to fire a first round of AGM-88 HARM anti-radiation missiles to soften the target up when he won't activate his radar.

This is where the TALD steps in. The TALD has two main functions: 1) overwhelm the radar operator and effectively blind him, and 2) entice the radar operator to use active missions, thus setting the stage for a HARM attack. To accomplish either of these goals you must manually control the TALD-equipped aircraft. Without manual guidance, TALD-carrying aircraft fly to the assigned station, then lazily release an occasional TALD whenever they feel threatened. To make TALDs fulfill their potential, you must take control.

OK, so what exactly does a TALD do? A TALD glides in a straight line. It doesn't maneuver, nor does it broadcast any signals. Its shape is designed to provide maximum radar cross section (RCS), causing it to appear on radar much larger than it really is. Since the TALD has no engine and only glides, the higher the altitude you launch it from, the farther it flies. The TALD glides at around 400kts, undoubtedly slowing as it descends. The combination of speed and RCS conform to a typical heavy-bomber flight profile, at least initially.

The A-6E can carry 26 TALDs, the F/A-18 only eight. TALDs are never actually visible on your screen, so you must have faith that they are really there! TALDs are fired using the bearing-only attack command, CTRL-F1. You pick an "activation point" as you would for any other bearing-only attack, and the TALDs fly in a straight line toward, and past, that point.

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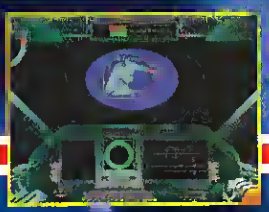

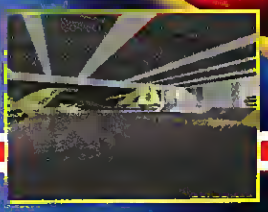

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BLINDING THE ENEMY

Blinding the enemy with TALDs is fairly simple. The A-6E makes the best TALD platform since a single aircraft can carry such a high number of TALDs. Generally, I determine how many A-6Es I need for an anti-surface (ASuW) attack, then allocate at least four A-6Es to TALD duty, even if that means reducing the number of A-6Es used in the attack itself.

I normally launch the four A-6Es in a single group just ahead of the strike package. I like the TALD flight to arrive on station about two to three minutes ahead of the strike package. Once on station I begin launching TALDs. I fire at least 30 when attacking a small surface action group (SAG) and over 60 against large battle groups per attack. I typically fire over 300 TALDs during the course of a scenario. I don't know exactly how many TALDs are sufficient, but these figures seem to work reasonably well. Positioning the TALD group at high altitude and 60 or 80nm from the target, I fire them in groups of three or five along multiple bearings toward the target. The large number of contacts, although probably considered "low priority bomber contacts" by the virtual radar operator, effectively fill all of the target's radar channels. As Mike Steele, the game's designer, put it: "If there are no control channels left when the missiles arrive, bummer."

The end result: you hide a barrage of missiles behind a virtual wall of TALDs. I found that most anti-air warfare (AAW) ships easily intercept 18 of 20 inbound missiles when TALDs are not used. Firing 18 or less missiles at an isolated ship usually resulted in all 18 being intercepted. Even 20 missiles usually failed to penetrate when multiple target ships provided mutual air defense. For decades the U.S. Navy's carrier aircraft posed the greatest threat to the Soviet surface navy. Soviet designers responded appropriately with heavy surface-to-air defenses designed to intercept waves of inbound Yankee missiles. In most scenarios against capable opponents, you can empty your magazines but still can't muster enough missiles to do significant (if any) damage. However, repeated experiments using only ten Harpoon missiles against a single, well-armed surface ship resulted in nine or even ten missile hits when a wall of TALDs were first used to blind enemy radar. The "cost of entry," or number of missiles required to achieve at least one hit, dropped from 20 missiles to achieve two hits to ten missiles to achieve nine hits.

HAILSTORM! A barrage of missiles heads toward a target. Using TALOs properly can reduce the number of missiles required to score a hit.

BUNKER IN THE BUNKER TALOs aren't just for surface vessels anymore. They can also increase the effectiveness ot attacks against high priority targets, like this command bunker.

Timing of the TALD attack and launch range are the most important variables in TALD effectiveness. TALDs must be launched two or three minutes before the missiles, and should be launched from high altitude to maximize their glide time. If the TALDs glide into the ocean and disappear, the enemy radar control channels are freed to search for missiles again.

ENTICING RADAR OPERATORS

What happens when you are severely limited on air assets, as in the "To The Death!" scenario? "To The Death!" contains no A-6Es and only a limited number of F/A-18s. Since the F/A-18 carries far fewer TALDs than an A-6E, you cannot muster a reasonable TALD force without using the entire F/A-18 force. This leaves you with no aircraft available for anti-ship missiles.

The solution, although less effective than a massed TALD attack, uses a smaller number of TALDs to "threaten" the enemy. Launching one or two TALDs at each ship in the target battle group often entices each ship to activate radar, apparently because the TALDs are detected visually. Once the ships are emitting a signal, your F/A-18s and EA-6Bs can launch a barrage of AGM-88 HARMs. Some, probably most, of the missiles will be intercepted, but any that get through will "poke out the enemy's eyes." It may take several HARM attacks, but you can eventually whittle down the enemy's radar resources, then launch a volley of Harpoon or TASM missiles and begin sinking ships.

TALDs never show up on your screen. Sixty or seventy TALDs would generate too much clutter and reduce the window's effectiveness, basically defeating the TALD's purpose. TALDs should confuse the enemy, not the user. Hiding missile barrages behind a curtain of TALDs significantly increases their likelihood of hitting as well as keeping surface-based radars too busy to engage the inbound strike aircraft.

Tom Basham and Ed Dille co-authored Harpoon II: The Official Strategy from Prima Publishing.

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Bug Hunting 201

More Man-to-Alien Tactics For MicroProse's X-COM

by Sgt. Robert R. Mayer

X-COM NEEDS GOOD TROOPERS, AND THAT MEANS LIVE TROOPERS. I DIDN'T MAKE SERGEANT BY BEING stupid, so listen up and you might learn something.

You can do a lot to ensure a successful X-COM mission before you ever lift off. That crashed UFO, enemy base, or counter-terror operation can wait a few minutes while you prepare. Mission planning involves balancing the time, place, and type of mission with available resources. You have to manage manpower and equipment; choose the soldiers you want and the weapons they'll need to complete the job.

Choosing soldiers isn't always a straightforward task. You don't always want to take just the best, most experienced troops. You want rookies to become veterans, so mix in some raw recruits with your squaddies. Using a standard eight trooper squad, two sergeants, two squaddies, and four rookies usually works well. With fireteams of two troopers each, every team can have one rookie (never pair rookies with rookies if you can help it). Once you get soldiers up in rank, don't take them along on every mission; use easy missions to build up the skills of your younger troops.

Once you've got your troops, you have to pick your weapons. Usually you'll keep a good variety on the Skyranger, so you don't have to choose until you get to the battle area. It's a good idea, though, to make sure you aren't forgetting anything essential before you lift off—like a HWP. Always take an HWP if you've got one. Early on, the cannon armed HWPs are my favorites. They aren't terribly powerful, but they have 30 rounds of ammo and are great scouts. Eventually you'll want to replace all HWPs with hovertank plasma throwers—just about the best there is.

Choose your weapons according to your soldiers' abilities and your mission. Loading up a weak, slow trooper with heavy weapons is worse than useless. Soldiers who are accurate but slow should get effective single shot weapons, while troopers with lots of action points deserve rapid fire rifles. Fast and accurate soldiers are what you hope to develop through successful combats. Check the stats for all your soldiers every once in a while; you might want to name them according to their specialties: Machine Gun Kelly, Rocket Man, Grenadier, etc. This makes equipping your squad easier when you begin a mission.

It doesn't do much good to load up on rocket launchers and high explosives on counter-terror missions; you'll probably kill more civilians than aliens that way. Don't bother minimizing destruction if you're going after a downed UFO (unless you need a live capture); there are no penalties for collateral damage here! No matter what the mission, make sure every one has armor. Get your lab boys on this quick. Armor can't cover for bad tactics, but it can save your life now and again.

At the landing zone, you should configure your troops to match the expected threat. Taking on an intact three-decker alien battleship? You'll need firepower and plenty of it. Terror raid? Well, load up on lasers and plasma for precision work. Do you need to capture an alien? Make sure someone has stun rods or stun bombs. Before you ever exit your vehicle, you should have a good idea of who is going to do what, and why.

MOVE EM' OUT Lead with your HWP—especially hovertanks—then follow with two-man fireteams, keeping a lookout for aliens.

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Know what you're getting into. Try to plan missions to take place during daylight; it's much easier to see when the sun is up, or so they tell me. Look at the battlefield map before you exit your vehicle. Sometimes, the UFO is already visible, and in a counter-terror raid, you can at least get some sort of feel for the landscape. Once you have an idea of the surroundings, move out carefully.

Your first priority is to secure the landing zone. Start out the door with your HWP, and follow up by fanning out your squad to either side of the Skyranger. Move out by teams, and don't bunch up around the ramp. Check the overhead map between each soldier's move. If you spot aliens, or they fire on you (aren't you glad the tank's up front?), you don't have to take them out immediately. Wait until you can get clear of the Skyranger's ramp and bring a couple of troopers and the HWP to bear. If you just blaze away with the first guy (or tank) out, you could use up all your action points and block the doorway for the rest of the squad. Aliens don't play fair, and they've been known to lob blaster bombs into a gaggle of green grunts gawking on the gangway.

Always operate in teams of two or three soldiers (see Table 1). When you advance, move so at least one member of the team can provide covering fire. Half of the team moves while the other half waits on overwatch to take care of surprises. Generally, move your rookies and leave veterans with enough points for a quick attack (green troops usually won't get to fire). This gets easier as your soldiers gain experience, action points and reaction ratings. When you spot an alien, let the overwatch soldiers take him out; if that fails, you still have other team members to try. Change your facing periodically to scout around you. If you can help it, never send a trooper to do a job alone.

Don't forget to crouch. X-COM doesn't pay extra for heroes. Kneeling behind walls and hedges is a great way to stay alive. Sometimes, you can exit an alien's line of sight this way. Using cacti, lamp posts, and stone walls for cover really pays off. You can even duck behind the wheels of your Skyranger if necessary. Just don't hide behind a gas pump; they blow up nicely when shot!

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL Effective positioning of X-COM soldiers allows their fields of fire to support the entire squad, which this unfortunate Muton soldier will soon discover, stone wall notwithstanding.

Be careful not to bunch up as you move out. Three or four troopers in a tangle make an inviting target and make it darn hard to shoot safely. Remember, your soldiers can shoot each other in the back by accident, especially when they're spraying autofire. In emergencies, soldiers with good accuracy can shoot over or around their buddies, but this is risky at best.

Once out and about, you've got to find the bad guys. Usually, they'll find you, greeting you warmly with a blast of plasma or a grenade. Unless you're on a counter-terror mission, where civilian casualties are possible, don't hesitate to perform recon by fire. The aliens can see farther than you can, especially at night. It's sometimes best just to spray the countryside with fire at the slightest hint of an alien. Lasers are excellent for this, as they use no ammo. As you advance your teams, they will come under fire. Often, your troops have limited sight of the alien positions, so have someone autofire towards the general origin of enemy fire. You'll be surprised how often this nails aliens. Area effect weapons like rockets work well for this, but be sure you have a clear line of fire to the target area; no one likes a rocket exploding in his face.

Don't forget psionics. Sectoids and Ethereals will try to panic your troops, or even take over their minds. If that happens, your buddy will start firing on you, leaving you to either take him out or wait and hope the mind control wears off. Another reason not to bunch up: a mind-controlled trooper can only kill people he can see. As soon as possible, put everyone through psi training to discover who is feeble minded, and thus, who should be left at home when tackling an Ethereal mission. You can use psi-amps to turn the tables on the aliens, but it's usually easier just to shoot them.

GALACTIC REPO MAN

The tactical choices you make depend largely on the type of mission, the most common being recovery of UFOs. These missions occur day or night, in every type of terrain. Free-wheeling destruction is the rule here, as there aren't any civilians to get in the way. Rocket launchers and grenades are always useful. While there will almost always be some aliens in the ship itself, don't forget to secure your perimeter. The aliens love to lurk in the dark corners of the map. Send some teams to sweep the map while others secure the ship. HWPs are great for scouting, as they tend to draw fire and can take a lot of damage.

When attacking a large (two or three story) UFO, be wary of aliens firing down lift shafts and through holes in the ceilings. You can fire back, of course; just use the ladder buttons on the tactical display to shift your view to the upper level when targeting. If it's impossible to explore a level because of floor damage, stand back and lob some rockets or grenades up

TABLE 1: FIRE TEAM MIXES

# Troopers	Teams	Sgt	Sqd	Rks	Hvy	HWP
8	4x2	2	2	4	2	1
9	3x3	1	2	6	2-3	1
10	5x2	2-3	2-3	5	2-3	1

Note: When you get the Avenger, you can take more than one HWP—do it!

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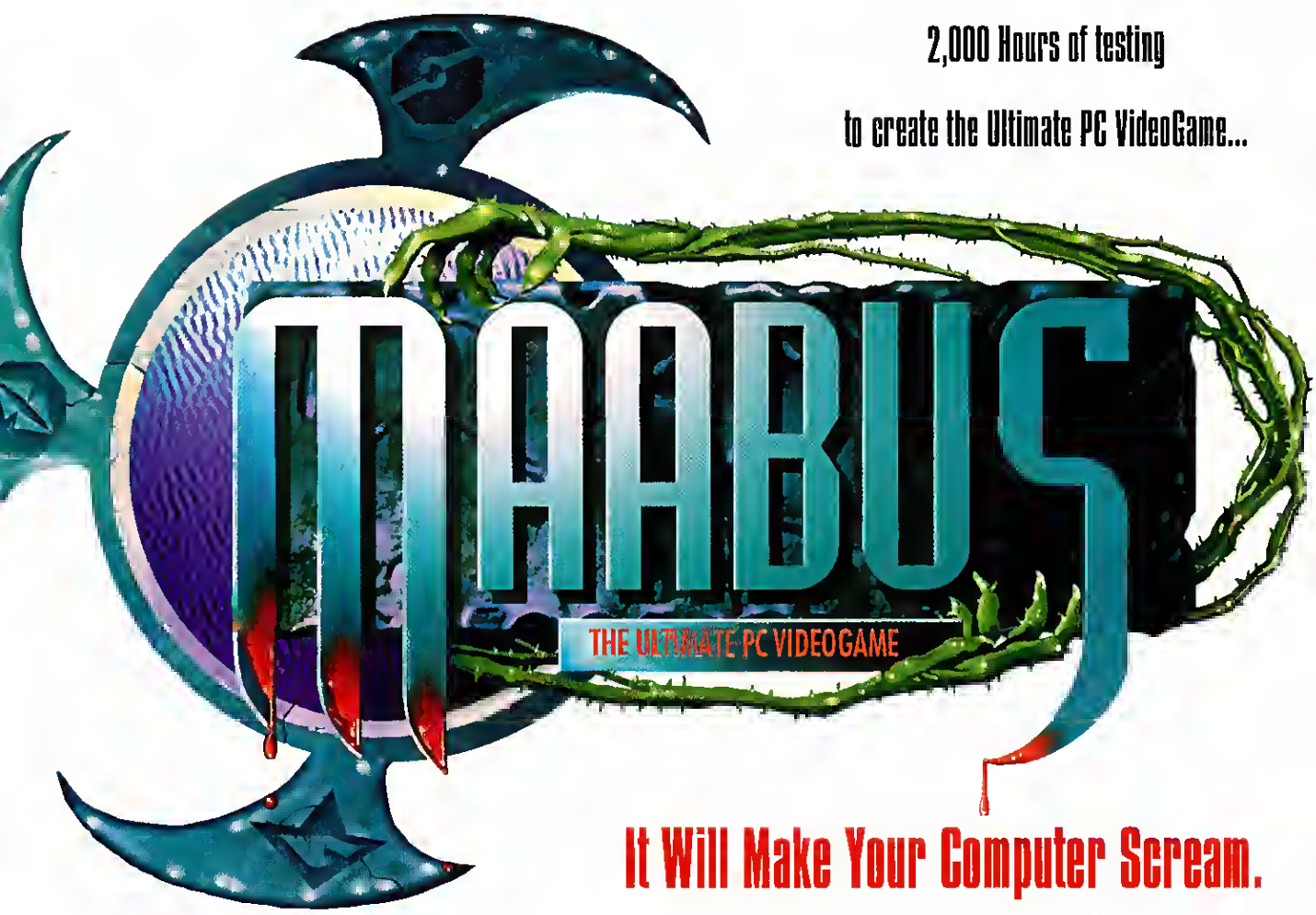

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there and the aliens will generally oblige by dying. Team tactics are a must inside ships, where every corner can hide a lurking Snakeman. With teams, one guy can spot while another shoots. Remember, a mission isn't over until the last Ethereal's dead....so be thorough. Aliens are sneaky by nature. Be absolutely sure you've cleared the ship or a building before you vamoose. Often, aliens will patiently wait by the door to get you as you leave.

MOVE ASIDE, THE GANG'S ALL HERE After snapping off a couple of shots, the astute sergeant will move away from the door so other squad members may crash the alien party.

Clearing UFOs is simple. A two trooper team can handle very small ships, but larger UFOs require two or three teams. Use alternate movement to insure against unpleasant surprises, and always check your back. You'll often find two or even three aliens clumped together at doors or lift shafts—grenade bait! Multi-level ships usually have one lift shaft that goes only to the second level, while the other shaft goes only to the third level. When using these lifts, never go up (or down, if the UFO isn't cleared) unless you've got a full complement (40 or more) of action points. You don't want to be surprised. Leave the heavy weapons boys outside; this is laser and plasma work, folks.

Much of your fighting will be among the fields and farms of bucolic Terra. Even there things can get tough. Hedges, fences, and stone walls make dead end courtyards; wheat fields hide sneaky Sectoids. Don't be afraid to blast a route through the farm. Desert is easy; just sand, snakes and hills. In the daytime, visibility is excellent and the cacti are good cover. In the arctic wastes, water will often impede your troops, so don't get caught in the middle of a lake without an escape route. You can hide behind ice ledges, but its better to have hover tanks and flying suits. In all cases, remember to use the vertical route. You can climb (or fly) to upper stories and even roofs to get a better view. Use the view keys to scan the tops of hills and upper stories periodically.

THE WAR COMES HOME

You can choose when to attack alien bases, but they don't give you the option of refusing to defend your home. Don't raid alien bases until you have a good, experienced squad, plasma weapons, and advanced HWPs. Sure, you can do it earlier, but it's risky. Unfortunately, you have to defend even if all you've got is four grunts with rifles. Defending a base is more complex than it looks. Aliens only appear via lift shafts or hangers, but in a large complex base this can still be confusing. Explosives are more dangerous to you than to the enemy, because of

HALL MONITOR When the bugs have breached one of your bases, keep your soldiers well-spaced in case of blaster bombs, and scout the corridors with a less-vulnerable HWP.

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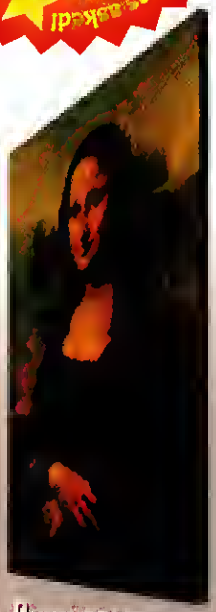

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the close proximity of your buddies. Use lasers and plasma guns. Stop, look, and listen! Spin your guys around at intersections and near lift shaft and hanger entrances. Often, you will start out staring down an alien. Kill him, look for more. As you advance, keep your soldiers together but spread out your teams to cover the whole base. Move on alternating sides of the hallway. Don't put your troops in a straight line, because the soldier behind won't be able to fire at targets to the front. End your move against a wall, facing the direction of most danger. As in all cases involving doors, don't spend your last action points opening a door to an uncleared room; it can be very unpleasant.

Watch out for exploding equipment. In X-COM bases, the mechanics love to leave oil drums around the hangars, while the aliens populate their bases with generators and other weird stuff that blows up nicely. Now, if the aliens want to lounge around by these things, fine, but don't you end your move near them. Be careful of long corridors; a missed shot can overshoot and hit a friendly. Lead with your HWP, more for scouting than firepower. Aliens will almost always target it instead of you. Old HWPs are fine for base defense, so keep some handy when you upgrade.

TABLE: 2 WEAPONS DATA

WEAPON	SNAP	AIM	AUTO	DAMAGE	AMMO
Pistol	60/18	78/30	—	26 AP	Clip (12)
Laser Pistol	40/20	68/55	28/25	46 laser	No
Rifle	60/25	110/80	35/35	30 AP	Clip (20)
Laser Rifle	65/25	100/50	46/34	60 laser	No
Plasma Rifle	86/30	100/60	55/36	80 plasma	Clip (28)
Hvy Plasma	75/30	110/60	50/35	115 plasma	Clip (35)
Hvy Cannon	60/33	90/80	—	56 AP	Clip (6)
				52 HE	
				60 I	
Auto Cannon	56/33	82/80	32/40	42 AP	Clip (14)
				44 HE	
				48 I	
Rkt Launcher	55/45	115/75	—	75 HE	Rocket (1)
				100 HE	
				90 I	
Hvy Laser	50/33	84/75	—	85 laser	No
Grenade				50 HE	
Smoke Grenade				60 HE+smoke	
Proximity Grenade				70 HE	
High Explosive				110 HE	
Alien Grenade				90 HE	
Small Launcher	65/40	110/75	—	90 Stun	Stun bomb (1)
Blaster Launcher	—	120/80	—	200 HE	Blaster bomb (1)

Note: #/# for Snap, Aimed, and Autofire are accuracy/Action Point cost, both as percentages.

COUNTER-TO-COUNTER TERRORISM

The most dangerous missions by far are raids on alien terror sites. These take place in populated, urban areas and involve lots of enemies. Speed and accuracy are paramount if you hope to wipe out the aliens before they eradicate the local population. Remember: killing civilians is bad. Your bosses won't be pleased. When in doubt, let the aliens do the killing and then kill the aliens rather than risk hitting a civilian. Think before you shoot.

Counter terror operations usually involve some of the nastier aliens, particularly the Chrysalids. These suckers don't shoot you, they turn you into an alien! Ugh. The newly minted extraterrestrials will then turn into Chrysalids when "killed." I've seen one of these creatures nail three unwary troopers all in a single move. Chrysalids die easy, but the things they turn you into can take three or four shots just to change into Chrysalid form. You might also meet big, ugly things like Reapers and Sectopods. Watch out for the little flying saucers the Sectoids keep as pets; they go boom when they die.

On the up side, there's good cover in cites. Lampposts, phone booths, picket fences, and buildings are great to hide behind. Unfortunately, the city is dark, and the aliens have a head start. Move fast, but carefully; a healthy squad is worth a few dead civilians. Stun bombs are great, as they are fairly safe area effect weapons. An HWP is almost essential, for scouting and drawing fire, and flying suits add tremendously to your maneuverability. Use your teams aggressively and you can clear successive blocks in a reasonable time. When facing Chrysalids, never get too aggressive. Always leave enough action points for defensive fire against surprise attacks.

When clearing buildings, use your team tactics. Scout through the windows, and go through the doors with enough action points to shoot or get back out and clear. Sometimes you just might want to blast the walls or toss a grenade through a window, if there are no civilians about. Be careful of stairs, as the aliens love to slide plasma bolts down the banisters. A soldier in a flying suit can shoot through the roof and come in from the top, preferably while another trooper comes in from the ground floor, making a Sectoid sandwich. Of course, you can always have your HWP just level the thing....

FLAK JACKETS AND FIREPOWER

Just as important as tactics are your weapons (see Table 2). At first, your choices are limited, but they improve with research. You've got two types of weapons: Point effect, like rifles and pistols, and area effect, like grenades and rockets. You use point weapons to kill aliens one at a time, and area weapons to kill multiple aliens at the same time. Three things matter with weapons: accuracy, speed and damage. All the weapons can hit whatever you can see, so range isn't an issue. What's important is being able to hit the target and kill it.

For most of your missions, the basic weapon will be some sort of rifle. Your basic autorifle is OK, but it lacks punch and ammo. With only 20 rounds and little stopping power, the standard issue is a stopgap measure. Your regular pistol is best used to give heavy weapons troopers a back-up. A squad armed with rifles, an autocannon, and a rocket launcher is decent, but you have to shoot carefully and hit aliens several times before they go

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TABLE 3: ARMOR DATA

ARMOR	Front	Right/Left	Rear	Under
Personal Armor	50	40	30	30
Power Suit	100	80	70	60
Flying Suit	110	90	80	70

down. Make sure you have more than one soldier firing on each target. Grenades are effective equalizers, if you remember to prime them with enough time left to throw, or enough fuse to wait until next turn to go off! Once you get laser weapons, your situation improves dramatically. Even laser pistols are better than regular rifles. They pack a wallop, they're fast, and their volume of fire makes up for their inaccuracy. Still, you'll want laser rifles soon. Laser rifles are usually the best bang for the buck. They hit hard, often killing Floaters with one shot, and they fire fast and accurately. Best of all, they don't use ammo, so they're great for spraying the countryside. Squads can be successful with just laser weapons much of the time.

Some aliens, like Mutons, shrug off laser blasts, so once your technicians figure out how the aliens make plasma weapons, you'll definitely want to snag some of those too. The heavy plasma rifle is one praiseworthy weapon for the hard-fighting squaddie. It's reasonably fast, reasonably accurate, and packs one heck of a punch. Its 35 shot clip is great, and the aliens conveniently leave lots of clips behind. The regular plasma rifle isn't that much better than a laser rifle, so don't bother with it. A squad equipped with a mix of heavy plasma and lasers is ideal. You want a mix of weapons, because some aliens are particularly affected by AP ammo, some by HE, while others hate lasers more than anything. Plasma is pretty good for just about everything, though.

Heavy weapons are a mixed bag. I usually ignore the heavy cannon, as it's, well, heavy, slow and runs out of ammo quickly. Go with the autocannon instead. It hits nearly as hard, has a good autofire capability, and holds enough ammo to make a difference. Not too accurate, but start spraying HE rounds and watch 'em dance! Heavy lasers aren't really much use; they can't autofire, and don't do that much more damage than laser rifles. Rocket launchers are tricky but useful in the early going. An incendiary rocket can torch a whole floor of a building, and HE rockets are great for reaching out and touching aliens behind a wall. Don't expect a soldier on overwatch to light off a rocket, however; they're sloooow to fire. The best HE weapon is probably the alien blaster launcher; it fires a humongous blaster bomb that you can actually guide to the target. Just be sure to plot its path around obstacles, not through them, as it tends to obliterate first and ask directions later.

Grenades are always good to have, but be careful—more than one trooper has fallen victim to his own pineapple. Demo charges are pretty lame. Grenades and rockets can blow up anything that can be blown up (don't bother trying to blast a hole in UFO's, it won't work). Stun bombs and stun rods are essential if you want to take an alien home to Momma. Using a stun rod requires nerves of steel and a bit of luck, however, as you have to whack the alien over the head with it.

Autofire is best. It's fast, high volume, and kills 'em dead at close range. Snap shots are your other option; you can engage two targets in a turn with careful shooting. Aimed fire is a waste of time. Your accuracy may go up, but that one shot is all you've got. Never shoot over or through your own guys unless 1) you can't help it, or 2) you've got a shooting accuracy like Sergeant York. This goes double for autofire; nothing ruins your day like plinking two or three plasma bolts into your buddy's back. Always remember, it ain't what you shoot, but how you shoot it.

Finally, always use the best armor you can (see Table 3). Get the techies working on this ASAP. Armor is the difference between rookies becoming veterans or corpses. Keep a lot of armor on hand, as you can't recover it from your departed comrades.

And that's it for 201, soldiers. Now its time to take these tactics to the field and bag a few bug-eyed buggers. Remember: work together, cover each other's tails, and have a damn clear idea of what you're going to do with a grenade before you pull the bleedin' pin!

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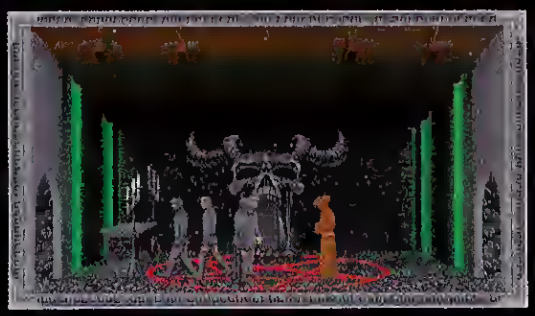
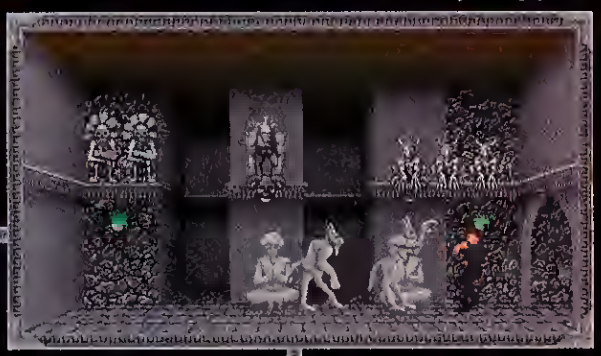


The wizard's tower is not a friendly place.



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Greetings, gamers! Call **Cybertech**, the new 8BS in Arcadia, CA. We offer a service called *DoomNet!* that pairs opponents for *Doom* death matches around Southern California. We have over 2 gigs of files and can support up to 57600 baud or as low as 1200. We're open all hours, except Sunday from 12am to 8pm. Your Sysop is "Cyber." Call (818) 446-7179.

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The **Image BBS** in Prospect Heights, IL welcomes all callers to a game of *Barren Realms Elite v.956* (an inter-league game), along with several other "door" games such as *Melee, The PIT, Food Fight, Tradewars 2002* (we have *two* versions!) and more. We also have many files available for download. FidoNet message areas, multi-node chat, Japanese Anime files. This is a very friendly-oriented board running Synchronet BBS software. Sysop: Savage Dragon. Call (708) 392-4838, 24 hours.

Opponents wanted for *Trade Wars 2002*! It has been registered, so great options are now available. Alternately, tackle the over 30 other online challenges, including role-playing, strategy, trivia, and casino games. Call **Dimension Z** in Queens, NY at (718) 381-1643 with up to 38400 supported. Over 400mb of files available to download and access to World Message Exchange and LobsterNet conferences. Free access, 24-hours, 7 days.

OPPONENTS WANTED BY AREA CODE

Doom!, anyone? I'm seeking local players in the Stamford, CT area. Call me at H-(203) 322-7472.

Red Baron fans who would like to share scores, career info, and anecdotes about your experiences with the sim, contact Charlie Kilbourne at 14706 Willoughby Road, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772, or call (301) 627-3741.

Seeking local opponents only in the Oahu, Hawaii area for *Doom! Seawolf* and *Falcon 3.0*. Call Scott in Waianae at (808) 695-9113.

I'm looking for some *Doom!* opponents in the Chattanooga, TN/ North GA area. Call Brandon at (706) 861-2029 (local call from Chattanooga).

THE NETWORKS

The following are voice contact numbers for many of the various on-line network services that connect gamers. Call them for more information.

America On-Line: (800) 827-6364
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Play Mystic For Me And All That Jazz

by Chuck Miller

AFTER EXERCISING OUR BRAINS LAST MONTH IN THE REALM OF STRATEGY GAMES, IT'S TIME TO put them away once again and revel in shareware's finer side: mindless action games. It's not only that my neurons need a rest, but also that a pile of good herky-jerky titles has hit the shareware LZ in the past 30 days, three of which were particularly captivating. Two of these are spanking new: MYSTIC TOWERS from those prolific folks at **Apogee Software**, and JAZZ JACKRABBIT from the fertile minds at **Epic MegaGames**. The third is a pinball pack from Epic featuring four new tables and some healthy improvements in game play and audio. Let's make some downloads from our local shareware BBS and see what we find.

THE TROUBLE WITH TURTLES Jazz Jackrabbit puts up a spirited defense against terrible turtles and killer bees.

LUCKY RABBIT MY FOOT

While not exactly endowed with an original plot (stomp the bad guys, save the world and rescue the girl), JAZZ JACKRABBIT succeeds in setting some new standards for high-speed, platform arcade games on the PC. Featuring some of the best cartoon animation I've seen on a computer, with a high-powered audio soundtrack to match, JAZZ brings the equivalent of SONIC THE HEDGEHOG to MS-DOS gamers. In fact, SONIC players who spend some time with JAZZ will think that the furry hedgehog has simply sprouted long ears and developed a craving for carrots.

Not only is the animation top notch and scrolling incredibly smooth, the music in JAZZ is fun, too. The soundtrack, which offers 20 original tunes, is upbeat and just as good as that accompanying Sonic's antics.

In JAZZ, you play the role of a little rabbit with a big gun on a mission to kick some turtle tail. Devon Shell and the Shellian Terrorists, a radical group of tortoises who want to kill the wabbitses, are bent on destroying the planet Carrotus while splitting all hares in the process. If that weren't bad enough, Devon has kidnapped the beautiful Eva Earlong, Jazz's heartthrob. (She's no Jessica Rabbit, but she's still too cute to kick out of the family cabbage patch).

In order to save the world and be reunited with Eva, Jazz is going to need some heavy firepower. Starting off with a lone blaster, Jazz quickly builds his arsenal with a Toaster, RF Missiles, a Launcher and TNT. Just make sure to watch his "carrotene" level. If it drops too low, Jazz is hasenpfeffer! This is no bunny hop; Jazz will have to survive six episodes with over 50 levels in the registered version. But there are five different difficulty levels to help keep this rabbit running.

JAZZ JACKRABBIT is definitely a winner. If you need a little target practice to spice up your nights, I suggest you jump at the chance to lay the Shellian Terrorists to rest. Though it won't improve your eyesight, Jazz will certainly test your reflexes and provide an enjoyable challenge.

A Brussee Belszinski Production, JAZZ JACKRABBIT is available from: Epic MegaGames, 10406 Holbrook Drive, Potomac MD 20854, (800) 972-7434. Episodes 1-3 and 4-6 are $25 per set. All six episodes can be had for $39 plus $4 shipping and handling. A 386 or faster CPU, VGA graphics and 4MB of RAM are required. Sound Blaster, SB16 and Gravis Ultrasound cards are supported.

HAVING A BALL WITH CYBORGIRL

Back in February (CGW #115), I reviewed EPIC PINBALL and found it to be among the best PC pinball games available. Since then, Epic has released PINBALL PACK 3 which ups the steel ante once again. Featuring four attractive new tables—Cyborgirl, Pangaea, Space Journey and Toy Factory—and incorporating Epic's Cybersound, a new surround-sound technology, PINBALL PACK 3 adds even greater depth and excitement to computer pinball.

Of the four tables included, Cyborgirl is my favorite by far. Not only does it provide the best play of the new offerings, but the audio is fabulous. The "cyber rock" score has a driving bass beat. Plus, the digitized sound effects (complete with moans from Cyborgirl when the player

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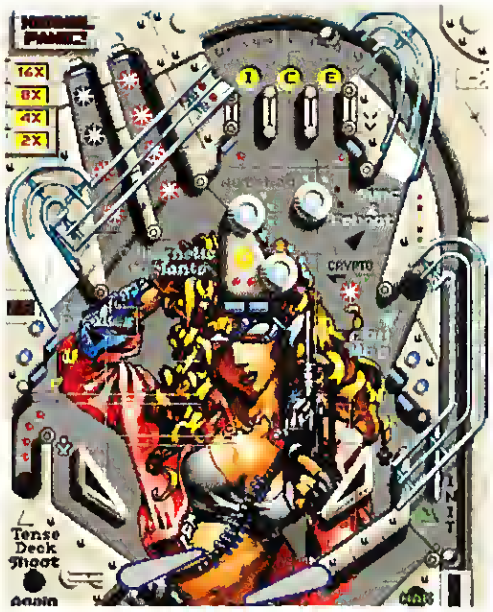

SYNTHETIC BUMPERS Epic's new Cyborgirl pinball game not only looks great, she sounds great, too.

outfits her with cyber implants) highly augment the game's atmosphere.

Those who already own EPIC PINBALL will certainly want this latest addition. Of the three packs available from Epic, PINBALL PACK 3 is the best of the bunch. This stand-alone product is available for only $29. Or, if you prefer, it can be had with one of the previous packs for $45. All three packs are $59, plus the traditional $4 shipping and handling. Send your order to Epic's address (given above).

STRONG WINDS BLOW IN DRAFTY OLD TOWERS

The aging Baron Baldric is the only person who can wield the Wolf-magic of his ancestors and, as such, is the only one who can save Rimm Village from utter destruction. So, with just his Lazarine Staff and a bad case of flatulence from this morning's breakfast beanfest, Baldric begins his task to rid the 12 Lazarine Towers of their accumulated contingent of unwelcome guests.

Such is the background for Apogee's latest digital wonder, MYSTIC TOWERS.

Reminiscent of **Electronic Zoo's** TREASURE TRAP, MYSTIC TOWERS is an action-puzzle game presented in similar 3D isometric perspective. Your first objective is to move from room to room to find a bomb and the tower's monster generator. When you find the bomb, it can be used to destroy the generator, but then you'll have to liberate the tower from all remaining creatures with good old-fashioned magical combat. When the tower is cleansed, you can leave it and move on to the next one.

Of course, the job of exterminating the pests of Lazarine Towers is not as easy as it sounds. The monsters in these spires are tough, tougher than the puzzles that must be unraveled. Though Baldric begins play with full health and a goodly number of lives, the denizen of these dwellings are no slouches at whittling away health points—too quickly, I might add, for my taste. Still, in spite of its overly powerful critters, MYSTIC TOWERS has the kind of gameplay that will devour entire evenings. I haven't yet been able to sit at the computer for less than an hour or two a session.

Weapons consist of a battery of spells, most of which must be collected along the way. Baldric can levitate, teleport and shoot sulfur, lightning, fire, venom and several other offensive spells at his attackers. He can also heal himself and reveal secret dangers. In addition, Baldric must get his hands on sufficient food and water if he intends to stay healthy and alive on this quest. When both expire, so does Baldric.

In contrast to the resilient and deadly creatures inhabiting the towers, the puzzles are rather simple. Four keys are hidden throughout each tower, all of which must be located in order to make these structures fit for human habitation. In most cases, they are hidden under some other object and can be obtained without too much trouble. The most difficult aspect is finding the correct path from level to level to cover all the rooms and wipe out all the unfriendlies. This usually involves climbing up and down ladders and transporting between levels. Expect a good deal of backtracking.

I don't think anyone could fault Apogee for the graphics, animation, music and sound effects in this game. You can expect such from an Apogee product, but what's refreshing to me is that the game has a sense of humor, as well. Baldric, who is a rather uncouth old gent, frequently sneezes, picks his nose and passes gas. In many ways, he reminds me of an elderly Homer Simpson.

Overall, I found MYSTIC TOWERS very enjoyable, though at times frustrating. Had it not been for some judiciously employed cheat keys, I may have given up in despair on a few occasions. If Apogee had included difficulty levels, I would have enjoyed the game more, and cheat keys would not have been necessary. Still, MYSTIC TOWERS gets my vote as a very worthwhile game, especially for those who like their games heavier on the action and lighter on the puzzles. Besides, the price is right at $24.95.

MYSTIC TOWERS requires a 286 or better PC with 550K free conventional RAM, VGA graphics, 3.5MB hard drive space and a Sound Blaster compatible sound card. To order the registered version including all 12 towers, send $24.95 plus $5 for shipping and handling to: Apogee Software, P.O. Box 496389, Garland TX 75049, (800) 426-3123.

A MAGICAL AIR With staff in hand and a bad case of flatulence, Baldric does battle in the Lazarine Towers.

Games featured in Shareware Showcase can be downloaded from ZiffNet both on CompuServe and on PRODIGY. On CompuServe, go to Computer Gaming World's own forum (GO GAMEWORLD), Library 8, 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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It's Alive...Alive!

How Game Artists Use 3D STUDIO To Bring Their Creations To Life

by Paul C. Schuytema

"SURE," YOU SAY, "THE IMAGES LOOK GREAT, BUT CAN THEY DANCE?" An image may be a wondrous thing, but it's nothing more than a static arrangement of colors, nothing more than simply a picture. But take that image and breathe life into it, make it dance across your screen, and then you really have something. As some B-movie Dr. Frankenstien has surely said, "then I will have created life, life I tell you!"

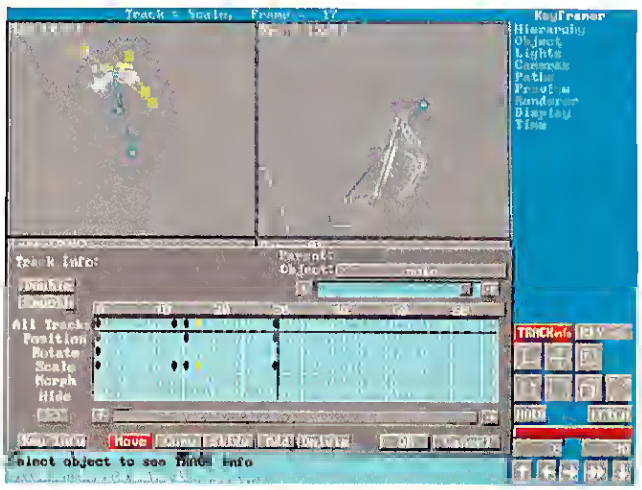
Last month, we went spelunking into the depths of **Autodesk**'s 3D STUDIO. We learned how savvy game artists created those magnificent 3D images in our favorite games, but we didn't make them dance. Read on, and we shall breathe life into lifeless wire mesh objects, spin cameras with the gracefulness of Barishnikov, and reveal even more mysteries.

While the 3D Editor and 2D Lofter are the heart and soul of object modeling in 3D Studio, the Keyframer program is the place where we can bring our objects out of the world of pixel stagnation. Featuring a massive deck of very cryptic controls, the Keyframer allows an animator to define "key frames" in an animation sequence.

ONE FRAME AT A TIME

Okay, let's begin at the beginning. An animated sequence is nothing more than a series of still images, each varying slightly, displayed one at a time in rapid succession. A speed of 30 frames per second is more than sufficient to fool our eyes into believing that we are watching "real world" movement. Unfortunately, you aren't going to run across many games that will animate at 30 frames a second—computers still aren't quite up to that task on an everyday basis. But even at eight frames a second, an animation sequence of a character leaping over a large tortoise will look quite convincing.

In the classic animated films such as *Snow White* and *Akira*, the animation was filmed a frame at a time. Each frame was a composite image made up of painted backgrounds and layers of hand-painted "cels." Animation artists used the "onionskin" process to create fluid animation. Basically, the artists used a stack of tracing paper, allowing them to see through several sketches and enabling them to draw fluid animation. The sketches (usually done in pencil) would then serve as the basis for the cels, which were inked, then painted, on clear acetate (the artists would work on the back side of the cel, so the surface was smooth for the camera).



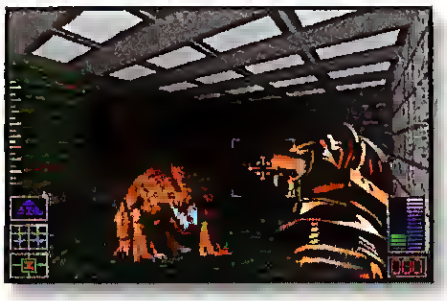
KEYFRAME COMMANDER Here is the Track Info box, which shows the location of the various key frames of the selected object. Here, we can see that there are position and scale keyframes for the bouncing note.

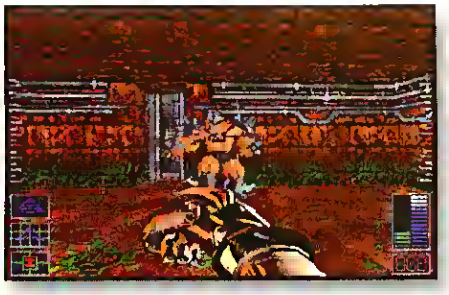
While this process created such wonderful moving images as the seven dwarfs working in the mine (singing "hi ho, hi ho") or Kanada's incredible motorcycle stunts, it doesn't translate very well into PC animation. Sure, programs such as **Disney**'s ANIMATION STUDIO let artists animate through an onionskin process, but that really doesn't take advantage of the computer's fantastic ability to crunch numbers. That's where the concept of key-framing comes in.

A key frame is a reference frame at the end point of some animated movement, such as a rubber ball at the apex of its bounce. Give the computer any two key frames worth of information (such as the ball on the ground and the ball at the top of its bounce), and it can figure out the rest. In a very crudely-crafted nutshell, this is what Keyframer does in 3D STUDIO. As an artist, you have created a wonderful mesh model of a tennis ball and a racket. Now, by using the Keyframer, you can animate the racket swinging to meet the ball and the ball flying off toward the net. Of course, there is much more you can do. You can squash the ball as it hits the racket and pan the camera to follow the ball as it flies off. The possibilities are almost limitless.

ROCK 'N ROLL BOUNCE

Let's turn back to our wonderful Hex, Bugs & Rock 'n Roll logo we created last month. I'd like to make the musical note bounce up and down. I load the whole scene in the 3D Editor, then switch to the Keyframer. In 3D STUDIO, the default animation length is 30 frames, though you can make it longer or shorter. Not wanting to bite off more than I can chew, I stick with the defaults and make sure that I am in frame zero. 3D STUDIO keeps a "master frame," frame zero, as a buffer to hold the default state of your 3D models. If you change the size of an object in the master frame, then it remains that size





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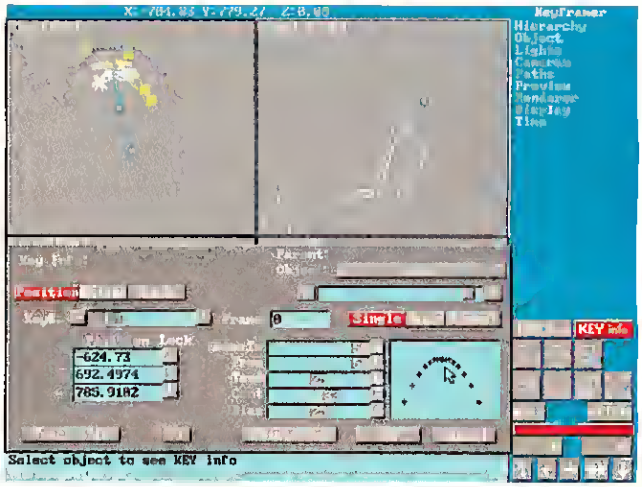
throughout the entire animation sequence.

I slide over to frame 15, right in the middle of the 30 frame animation, and then, just like in the 3D Editor, I can move the wireframe of my musical note. I drag the note up so that it's higher than in frame one and click to set the move. Rather than just moving the note, though, I have just created a key frame. The program now, without so much as the wave of my magic mouse, has created frames 2-14, moving the note from ground level to the apex of its bounce. I can play back the animation (all in frame or box view, since I haven't yet rendered the sequence, which will probably take the better part of Monday Night Football to complete). The note bounces up, sits there for a second, then "snaps" back to ground level. That's because I haven't yet created the frame to move the note back down from the apex. I select, click, and move—and presto!—in only a few operations I have created one of the world's most boring animation sequences: the bouncing ball *a la* Hex, Bugs and Rock 'n Roll.

I can bring up the Keyframer's Track Info box to view all sorts of information about my happy note. From this rather cryptic dialog box (which is actually beginning to make sense to me), looking somewhat like a display from some MIDI sequencer software, I can see at a glance all of the "keys" that I have created. I can create keys for position, rotation, scaling and morphing for any object, individually or in combination. This really does give the game artist incredible control over any object.

First off, even my rather dull animation tastes can perceive that a note simply sliding up and down in space does not a true bounce make. I need some squashing action, and I need it now. Moving to the frame where the note is touching our virtual "ground," I can vertically squash the object to simulate a rather rubbery note hitting what we'll pretend is a hard granite surface. Now, playing back the animation, I watch my note accordion up and down—but wait a minute, something is a little odd here. The Keyframer has extrapolated the animation from not-squashed to squashed over the entire length of the animation, making my little eighth compact before it even touches the ground. Now, it's details like this that really make 3D STUDIO animation more than just a part-time job. Those sweatshop animators have my utmost admiration for learning to think like no human is supposed to think, breaking up nature's fluid movements into a sequence of incredibly detailed intermediary steps. Common visual sense be gone!

Not to be beaten, though, I bring up the track box and copy the original frame zero scale information to frames 13 and 17, making the squash occur in only 2 frames instead of 15. Playing back my animation, I can see that I'm getting there, but not quite. As a 3D STUDIO animator, not only must I be privy to the subtleties of visual motion, but I must also play Isaac Netwon and take control of the physical laws of my virtual world as well. Bringing up a new info box, called the Key Info Dialog box, I can see that the amount of change (delta) from frame to frame is constant (the note moves x distance between frames one and two and again between two and three). This isn't how the real world works; the rubber note would slow slightly at the apex of its bounce. Using the dialog box, I can change the amount of delta between each frame, effectively slowing the note down at the apex of its bounce.



INSTANT GRAVITY The Key Info box, which allows us to manipulate the change (delta) between each frame. Here, we are slowing the note's speed at the apex of the bounce.

MICROMIND DIRECTOR This is a bird's-eye view of the entire animation area, shown in wireframe. Here, in red, we can see the path of a camera dolly and pan during the animation sequence.

Well fine, I've created the ultimate bouncing note animation, but I honestly don't think that a video of my four-second animation will nail me a job as a star animator, not just yet, anyway. Take a look at any of the animation sequences in OUTPOST, STRIKE EAGLE III, 11TH HOUR or the opening sequence to the 3DO application CPU BACH and you can see that there is much more to it than just a bounce and a squash.

For one thing, any serious animation, especially character animation, requires multiple objects to move simultaneously. Even more than that, these objects need to move as a unit. Consider an animation of a tennis player's arm swinging the racket to hit our little ball. The racket is connected to the hand, which is connected to the forearm, which is connected to the upper arm. You can animate each object separately, but keeping their positions all together would be a logistical nightmare that would surely lead to madness. Fortunately, 3D STUDIO can create linkage hierarchies (we touched on this last month), allowing "parent" and "child" objects to he linked together. You can then specify movement constraints on each object (so your hand, for example, doesn't just spin indiscriminately around your forearm).

Linking objects together and creating a fluid animation is still an incredibly time consuming task that requires you to set key frames for each object. They won't go

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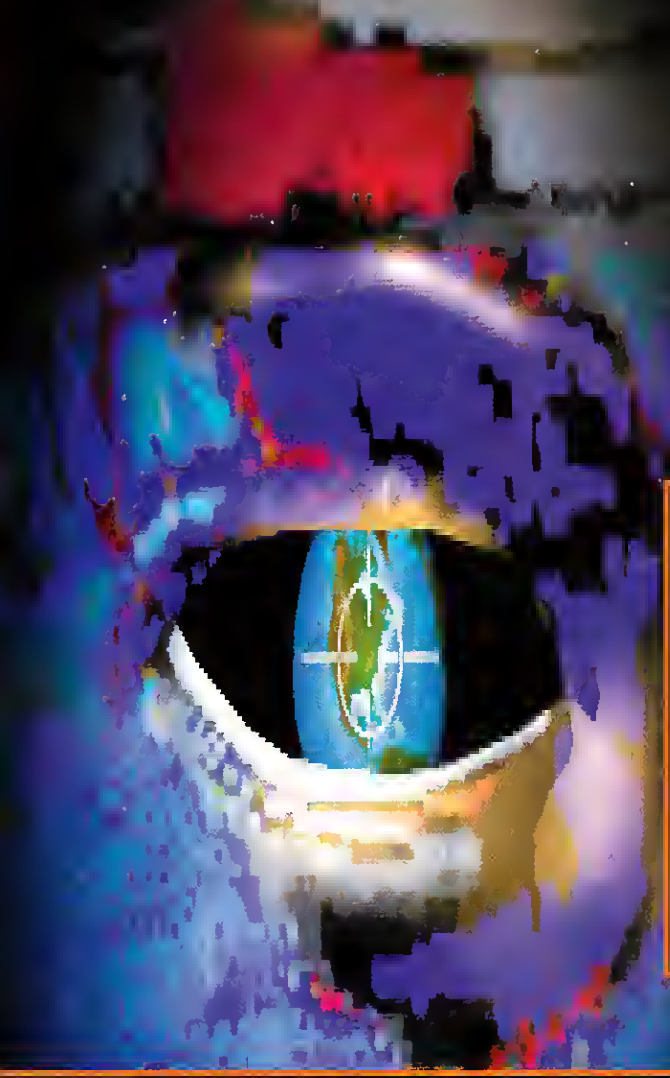

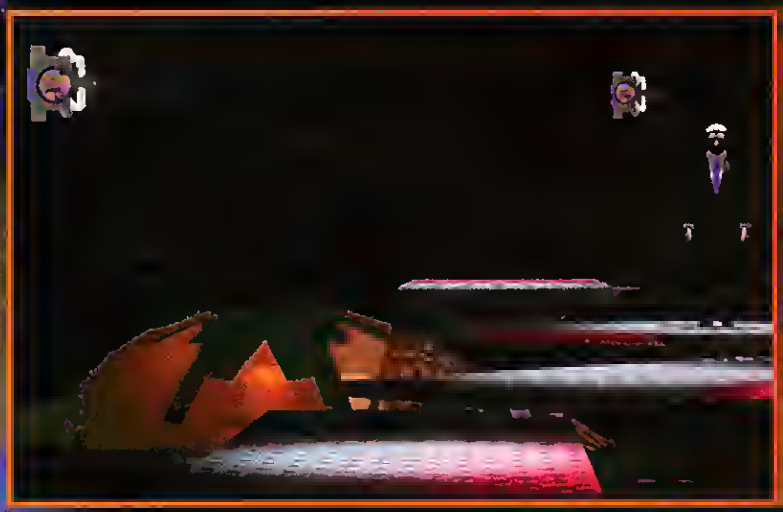

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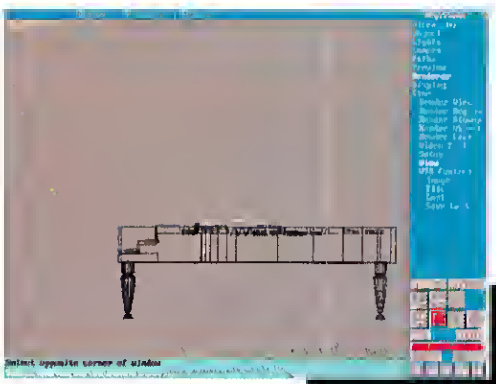
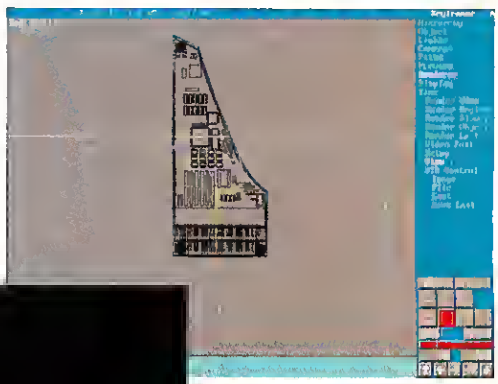
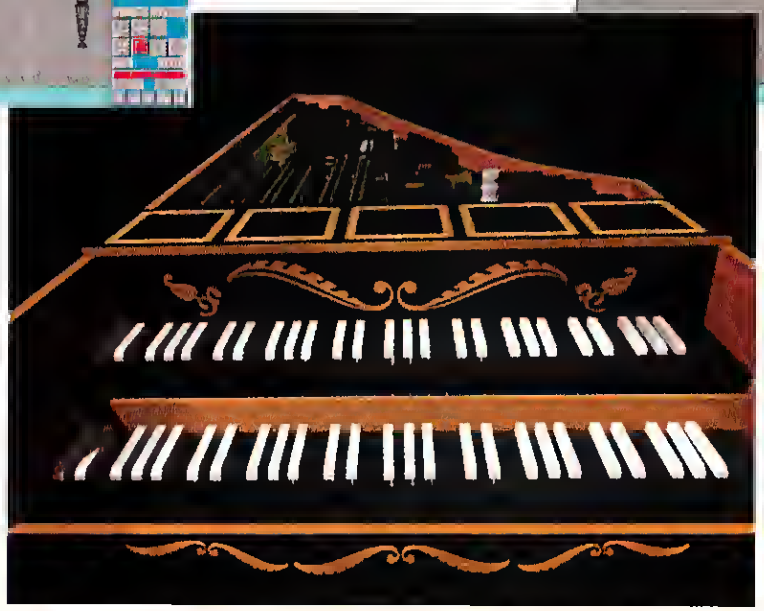
astray on you, but the amount of work to just animate a person walking is simply unbelievable.

VIVIRITO'S JETS

Frank Vivirito, a 3D STUDIO artist for **MicroProse**, reflected that several years ago, 3D animation was a novelty, used generally in "feel good" screens, short 30-40 frame animations that would reward the player for meeting some victory condition within the game. When Vivirito went to work on the animation in F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III, he wanted to create something spectacular. He wanted realism not yet seen in computer games, and after putting together several sequences of F-15s flying in formation, a lot of people were stunned. Vivirito remembered that "the brass just loved it."







MUSIC TO THE EYES Here's a scene from Frank Vivirito's work for CPU BACH. The view swoops down on the organ with a grace to match the music of Sid Meier's music creation algorithms. The wireframe 3D Studio images show how Vivirito defined the path of the animation "camera."

Putting together an animation sequence requires much more planning than just an eager artist sitting down as his or her decked-out PC. First come the storyboards to get a visual handle on the progress of the animation. Then comes the time-consuming task of building the 3D models (Vivirito came to MicroProse just to build 3DS plane models for F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III, but he ended up hanging around). After that, artists work in natural and electronic media to create the surface texture images (which can then be mapped onto the surface of the 3D mesh objects). Finally, the animator takes all of these parts and begins down the long road of crafting the animation sequence. Vivirito even brought in an actual F-15 pilot to critique the movement paths of his planes.

Once the animation is completed, then comes the painful work of cutting it down. The artists and programmers "have it out" over which colors should be included in the game's color palette. Then comes the daunting task of scaling down the animation so it doesn't eat up too much disk space. Vivirito reflected that the F-15 animation that was previewed at a Consumer Electronics Show weighed-in at 25 megabytes of data, but that had to be trimmed down to one megabyte for the published game.

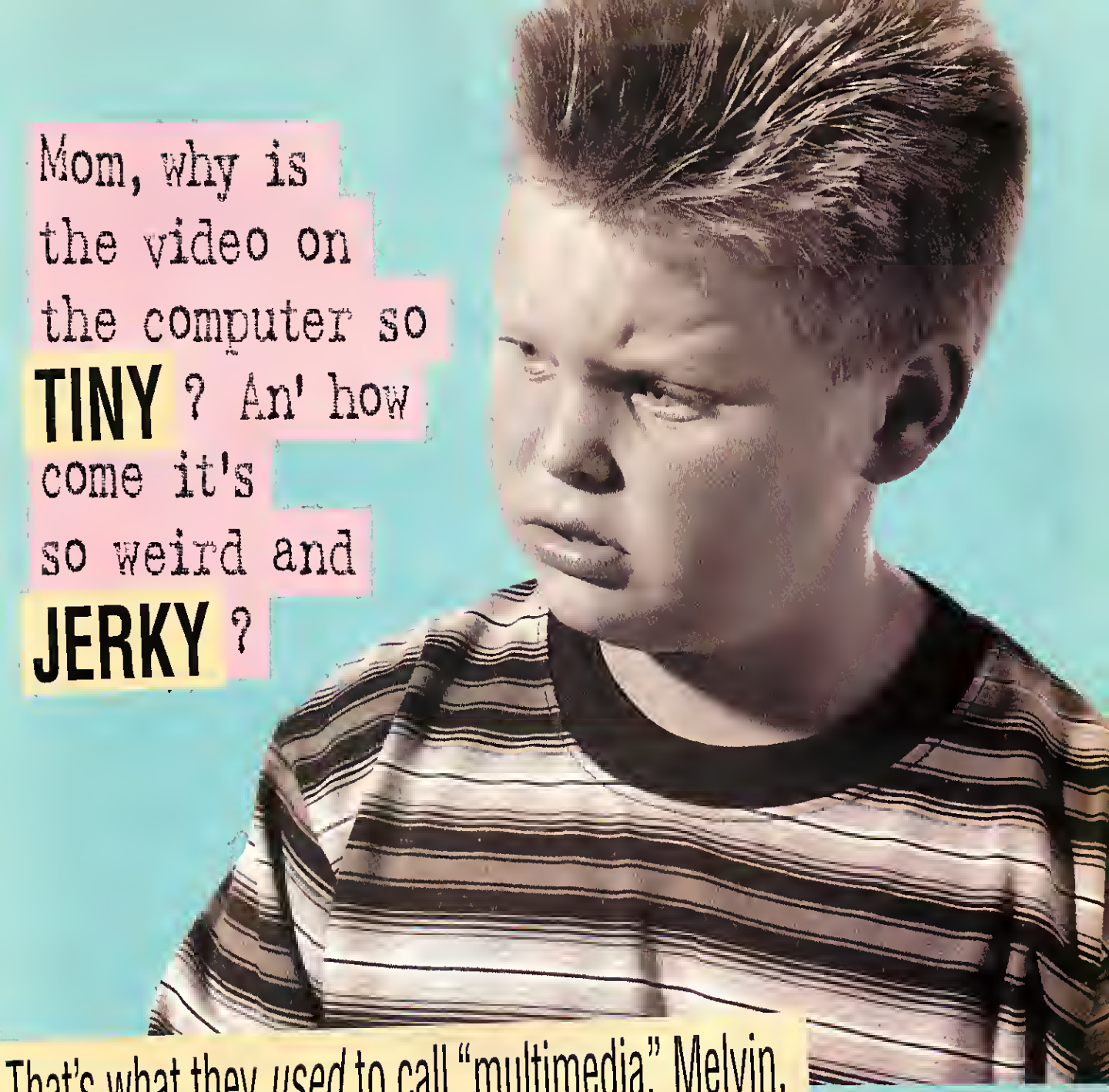
I asked Vivirito which animation he felt most proud of, and the answer came easily: the opening title sequence in CPU BACH. Since the "game" (or toy or application or whatever) was delivered on CD-ROM, the size of the animation file was not a problem, and it actually topped 60 megabytes for a single sequence. All around the industry, animation artists are very excited now that more and more games are seeing their initial release on CD-ROM, which means scores of megabytes available for their killer sequences.

KINEMATICS, ANYONE?

One of the newest concepts in 3D animation is inverse kinemation modeling. This term is used to chiefly describe human or organic animation. 3D STUDIO Release 3 is a powerful tool for inanimate animation (as we've seen these last two months), but the workload increases dramatically if you try to create fluid character animation.

Topflight animation packages (such as WAVEFRONT), which generally need a Silicon Graphics workstation to run, have had inverse kinemation modeling for some time now. The new 3D STUDIO Release 4, due out this fall, should bring this power to the PC. What is inverse kinemation (IK)? Basically, you can think of it as skeletal animation. Organic objects have an internal skeleton, its component parts linked in a hierarchal order, and a textured surface applied over the frame. Everything is "backward" linked. When setting an IK keyframe, you simply grab the hand and move it where you want it, and the rest of the body (arms, shoulder, spine, etc.) will all follow. The surface map also has properties which allow it to bind and bend appropriately, and some software packages, such as WAVEFRONT, can even allow you to specify muscle groups so that a bicep bulges when the forearm is brought up.

From the reports of this summer's CES, you can tell that 3D modeling is gaining inertia in the game industry, and I'm sure that we'll see even more slick 3D STUDIO and Wavefront demos at the winter CES in January. While the animation may look smooth as silk, just remember the incredible amount of work that goes behind every second of that animation sequence. Those artists out there are truly creating a new art form. I think it's only fair that we take a moment to lower our heads in silent reverence for their hard work; after all, they do make our virtual worlds dance.



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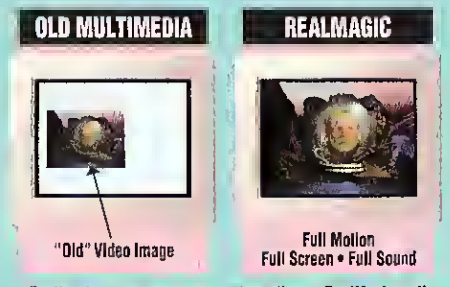

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Breaking The 3D Speed Limit

CGW's Mechanic Tightens The Wrench On Matrox' 3D Graphics Acceleration

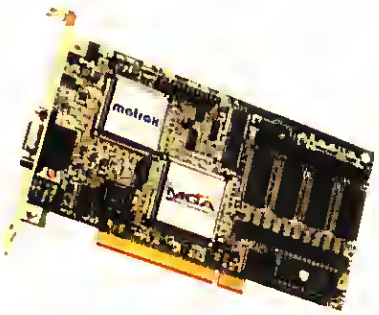
by Mike Weksler

Fans of realistic flight simulators are always crying out for more and better: more realism, better graphics, better flight models, and with it all, better frame rates. They've probably come to realize that to get more, they need more processing power, and have become resigned to being on the front end of the system upgrade cycle. Well, I'm here with some good news and some bad news for players of high-end simulations. The bad news is that the upgrade to the Pentium you've either made or planned may not be enough for the next generation of flight sims. The good news is that the solution will not be yet another new computer system, but a new graphics card.

The problem with high-end 486s and Pentiums is that they are single processor computers. They may have very fast processors, but they can only do so much, and with the next generation flight sims, there's going to be *a lot* to do. So many pixels, so little time, you might say.

The solution is multiple processors, with one processor chugging away on a flight sim's flight modeling and enemy AI routines, and another churning out the graphics data as fast as it can fling electrons. This division of labor would allow flight sim designers to do so much more at a faster frame rate. The first card to offer such a solution is **Matrox Graphics'** MGA IMPRESSION PLUS 3D graphics accelerator. Let's take a look at this card to see exactly what it does, why we need it, and how it will affect existing and future games.

But first, let me briefly explain how 3D graphics are generated on a PC. Most 3D games are built with polygons—shapes used to construct aircraft, structures in the game world, even the terrain. As you know from your high school geometry class, polygons consist of vertices, and these vertices are the elements a flight sim processes to reflect changes in its world. Without getting too technical, vertices that make up small polygons are calculated in three dimensions, and the computer calculates where to fill pixels and at what intensity. Then, these objects are sorted for depth, lighting effects are calculated, and the objects are mapped mathematically to 2D screen coordinates. The 3D gurus actually program perspective algorithms to draw distant objects smaller to simulate depth. Additionally, techniques such as Gouraud shading are used to smooth out the objects and add even more perceived depth in the 2D screen. Once the processor chokes all that information down, the image is drawn to the screen—which comprises only one frame of real-time game animation.



BUILT FOR 3D SPEED The Matrox MGA IMPRESSION PLUS could greatly accelerate 3D games—if there were any 3D games written for it.

The frame rate for all this graphical magic obviously depends on the speed of the machine and the number of polygons being generated. But it also depends on the number of colors in the game. To keep the frame rate at a convincing speed on a typical 486, designers usually limit the colors in a 320x200 resolution game to 8-bits per pixel (256 colors) and 3000 polys per frame. Depending on the game and the processor, this usually yields a frame rate of 11-25 frames per second, which compares well with cartoon animation speeds of 11 frames per second. To keep that frame rate at the higher resolution of 640x400, the number of polygons must drop down to around 2000. Increase the resolution, number of polygons, bits per pixel, or shading, and the demands placed on the processor—even a Pentium—begin to take their toll. The result is "real-time" 3D animation that slows to a crawl.

"Wait a minute," you might be thinking, "I know lots of 3D games that sizzle on my 486. What about games like DOOM and WING COMMANDER?" Although they might look 3D, these games are actually 2D, using pre-rendered or painted art that can be rapidly drawn to the screen. Forthcoming software libraries and products will make next-generation 2D games smoke, but we'll have to leave that topic for another month.

One last item to note before I get into the graphics accelerators is the use of texture maps. Texture maps are pre-painted tiles (called bitmaps) that are applied (or "mapped") to polygons in real-time during the rendering of an image. If you've played INDY CAR RACING, you've seen texture maps in the form of decals on the cars and signage along the tracks. The beautiful graphics in 1942 PACIFIC AIR WAR utilize texture maps to some degree, and games like STRIKE COMMANDER use Gouraud shading to smooth the corners on objects where the texture maps meet.

PUT ON THE 3D GLASSES

3D graphics acceleration on a PC typically involves an additional processor that does the 3D grinding and frees the CPU to do other things. Such a processor, when place on a bus card and dropped into one of your bus slots, could run a flight simulation at 640x480 resolution at 16-bits per pixel (65,536 colors), with Gouraud shading, just as fast as a conventional non-3D-accelerated machine could ever hope to

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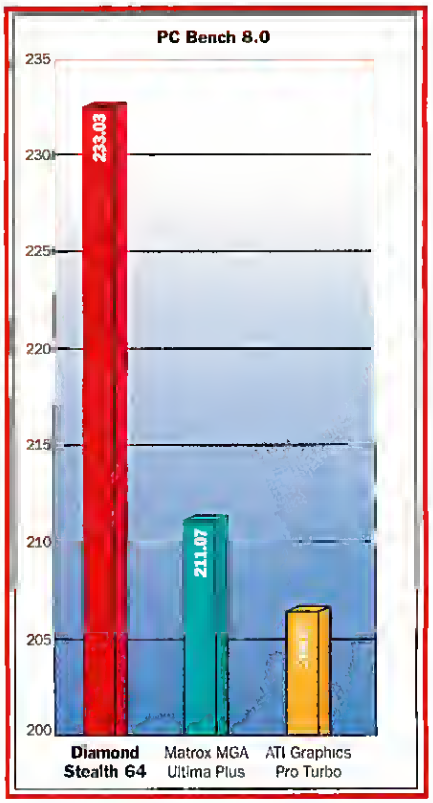

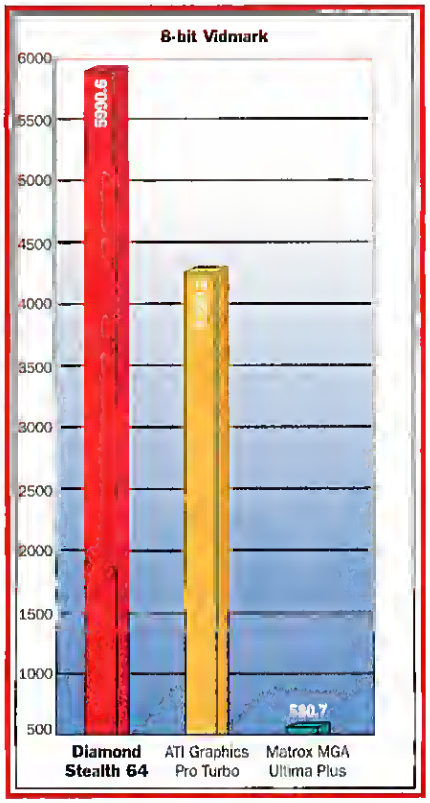

Source for test results: *Computer Shopper*, September 1994 using PC Bench 8.0 on a Diamond Multimedia Stealth 64 PCI using Micron Magnum 4100 486DX4-100MHz system with DOS 6.2, 32MB RAM, and 256k cache. *InfoWorld*, July 25, 1994 VidMark 8 bit test

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"Alright," you're saying, "where do I sign up?" Slow down, cowboy, because the current problem with 3D graphics acceleration is that it will not accelerate your existing 3D games. The current VGA 3D games will actually run slower with the Matrox MGA IMPRESSION PLUS, because Matrox used dated VGA technology in favor of producing better Windows acceleration at a low cost.

In order for a game to enjoy the benefits of the Matrox card, it will have to be designed to take advantage of the extra processing power the card provides. As yet, there aren't any compelling applications available that make use of the card's capability. Without exciting applications, gamers will have no reason to upgrade to the product—even if the hardware is phenomenal. By the same token, game publishers don't like to support a hardware device unless there is a significant user base. We've seen this hardware "Chicken or Egg?" problem before with sound cards, CD-ROMs, and most recently, the **Reel Magic** MPEG video board. If the technology is compelling enough, this marketplace deadlock is eventually broken by pioneering publishers. Fortunately, as far as 3-D graphics accelerators are concerned, there are already a few companies planning to support the Matrox card, including Domark with their forthcoming DOGFIGHT simulator.

So is the Matrox card the panacea for all flight sim ails? Should it be your next gaming upgrade? If you've been around the gaming block a few times, you know that being the first on the block with a new hardware device is not all it's cracked up to be. New technology changes quickly in its infancy (witness the speed with which single-speed CD-ROMs were junked for double-speed), and there are many compatibility and support issues to deal with. Many other companies, including **Artists Graphics** and **Diamond**, are working on 3D graphics accelerators, and these cards will be trickling out into the market over the next six months. The big question is not only whether or not the game community will jump in to support these cards, but also whether this first implementation of the technology will be the implementation that survives and thrives in gaming.

The answers to these questions can only be answered by time. Watch and wait is the advice of the day; watch and wait while this technology is refined, watch and wait to see which way the game designers' flags will blow. I'll be here, licking my finger and testing the winds...and praying for the day that I can play TIE FIGHTER in 640x480, 65,000 colors, and a frame rate to beat all.

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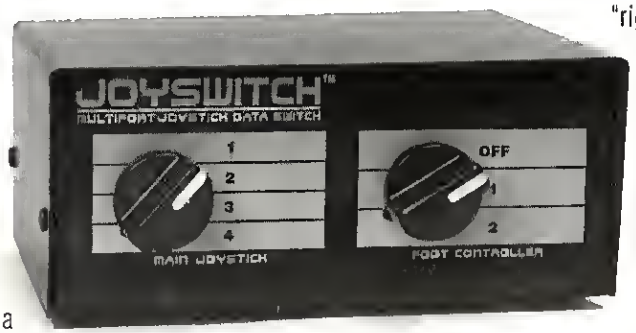

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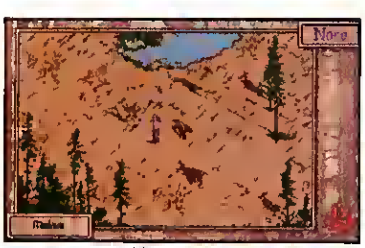

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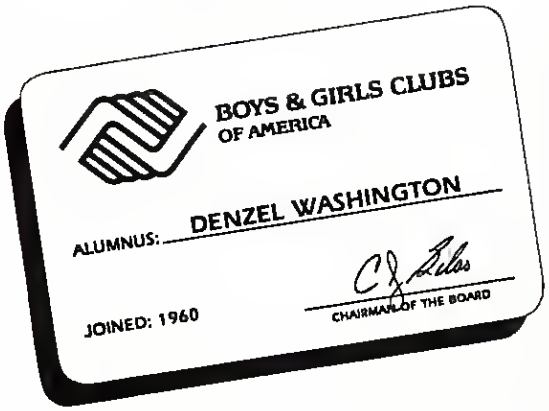

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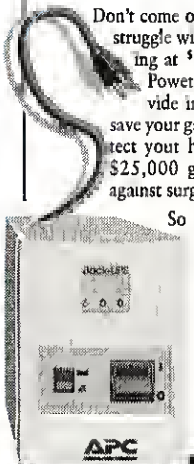

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221, 288, 289	Accolade	(800) 245-7744	95, 145, 123
256, 33	Accolade	(800) 245-7744	165, 235
34	Activision	(800) 845-8086	173
283, 114	Advanced Gravis	(800) 663-8558	Cover 3, 181
42, 260	AIVR Corporation	(800) 324-AIVR	94
236	American Laser Games	(800) 880-1718	287
233	American Power Conversion	(800) 800-4APC	27D
43	Apogee Software	(800) GAM-E123	27
234, 44	Avalon Hill Game Company	(800) 999-3222	20, 21, 109
45	Bare Bones Software	(800) 638-1123	271
40, 41	Bethesda Softworks	(800) 677-0700	30, 31, 143
264	Blizzard Entertainment	(800) 545-7677	112, 113
48	Blue Valley	(800) 545-6172	271
261	Brady Games Publishing	(800) 428-5331	282
50	Cape Cod Connection	(800) 548-2908	271
207, 237	Capstone Software	(800) 468-7226	229, 162, 163
190	CH Products	(619) 598-2518	189
54	Chips & Bits	(800) 699-4263	128-137
200, 209, 262	Chips & Bits	(800) 699-4263	96, 97, 147, 125
263	ComputAbility	(800) 896-1336	280, 281
56	Computer Express	(800) 228-7449	150-155
280	Creative Labs	(800) 998-5227	85, 87, 89, 91
131, 53,	Creative Labs	(800) 998-5227	243, 19
238	Delphi	(800) 695-4005	75
229, 286	Diamond Multimedia	(800) 4-MULTMEDIA	265, 267
132	Domark	(800) 695-GAME	66, 67
63, 64, 66	Dongleware	(617) 497-1130	171
222, 223, 254	Dynamix, Inc.	(800) 757-7707	1, 77, 49
*	Dynamix, Inc.	(800) 757-7707	Insert
239	Eidolon, Inc.	(718) 884-7095	247
227, 223, 254	Electromedia Productions, Inc.	(800) 57-CDROM	223, 279
138, 135, 51	Electronic Arts	(800) 245-4525	55, 141, 63
55	Electronic Arts	(800) 245-4525	191, 193, 195
136, 290	empire Interactive Entertainment	(800) 216-9706	10, 11
265	Enhanced Software Design, Inc.	(416) 492-0157	70
*	Epic MegaGames	(800) 972-7434	8, 9
141	Falcon Northwest	(800) 258-6778	17
266	Fenwick's	*	271
143, 57	FormGen, Inc.	(800) 263-2390	Cover 2, 25
267	Frontal Assaultware, Inc.	(800) 442-2805	202
67	Game Publications Group	(916) 362-0875	270
241	Gamer's Gold	(800) 377-8578	275
69	Gosselin Computer Consultants	(313) 229-2453	220
61, 257	Hi-Tech Expressions	(800) 447-6543	119, 117
242	Home Base Products	(800) 686-2523	198
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268	Hyperbole Studios	(800) MY-DEALER	161
*	ImagiNation Network	(800) 462-4461X746	Insert
78, 7	Impressions Software, Inc.	(617) 225-0848	207, 205
76, 174, 175	Interplay Productions, Inc.	(800) 969-GAME	103, 167, 83
258, 123	Interplay Productions, Inc.	(800) 969-GAME	59
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246	Looking Glass Technologies	(617) 863-5810	39, 41, 43
247	Luminaria	(800) 821-2060	169
269	Masque Publishing	(800) 765-4223	251
86	Megatech	(800) 258-MEGA	2D0, 201
88, 249, 252	Merit Software	(800) 238-4277	121, 261, 187
212	Micro Sports, Inc.	(800) 937-7737	139
89	Microforum	(800) 465-CDCD	245
213, 214	MicroLeague	(800) 334-6572	213
150, 171	MicroProse	(800) 879-play	73, 81
93	Mission Control	(800) 999-7995	233
216	Momby, Inc	(800) 636-6629	255
250	MPG -NET	(800) GET-GAME	240, 241
94	Multimedia Specialists	(800) 233-0010	225
270	Multiwave Innovation	(408) 379-2900	111
253	Nawu Triad Institute	(800) 784-1420	188
151, 217, 152	New World Computing	(800) 325-8898	4, 5, 93, 101
218	NovaLogic, Inc.	(818) 774-0812	15
219	Novastar Game Company	(916) 624-7113	271
97	Ocean of America	(408) 289-1411	231
99	Origin Systems	(800) 245-4525	Cover 4
101	Paper Mayhem	(815) 433-2047	271
153	Papyrus	(800) 836-1802	185
195	Philips CD-i	*	44, 45
271	Progeni, Inc	(514) 745-3508	271
103, 179	Quantum Quality Products	(908) 788-2799	217, 214
119	REM Software	(313) 457-1161	220
231	Rocket Science Games	(800) 98-ROCKET	13
291	S Software	(800) 243-1515	198
273, 274	Sanctuary Woods	(800) 943-3664	268, 269, 197
107	Sideline Software	(800) 888-9273	188
164	Sierra Direct	(800) 795-5979	253
120, 98, 111	Sierra On-Line	(800) 757-7707	71, 2, 3, 35
128	Sigma Design	(800) 845-8086	263
113	Simulation Systems	(800) 647-7623	84
112	Sir-Tech	(800) 447-1230	56
251	Software Support International	(800) 356-1179	184
115	Spectrum Electronics	(800) 983-4321	249
109, 224, 116	Spectrum Holobyte	(800) 695-GAME	179, 115, 76
230	Starlite Electronic	(800) 552-9880	250
225	StarPlay Productions, Inc.	(800) 447-9562	51
275	STD Entertainment	(410) 785-5661	257
*	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	(800) 245-4525	259, 61, 211, 221, 237
182	Suncom Technologies	(708) 647-4040	199
183, 184	Take 2 Interactive Software	*	1D7, 78, 79
161	ThrustMaster, Inc.	(503) 639-3200	176
185	ThunderSeat Technologies	(800) 8-THUNDER	64
186, 281, 282	Time Warner Interactive Group	(800) 482-3766	209, 65, 99
117	Titan Games	(800) 247-5447	246
226	Trimark Interactive	(800) 247-5447	53
277	Velocity Development	(800) VLOCITY	175
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FREE

INFO. #	PRODUCT	COMPANY	PAGE
53	300 Blaster	Creative Labs	19
234	5th Fleet	Avalon Hill Game Company	20, 21
*	Aces of the Deep	Dynamix, Inc	Insert
150	Across the Rhine	MicroProse	73
131	Advanced Wave Table by Sound Blaster	Creative Labs	243
283	Advanced Wavetable Sound Technology	Advanced Gravis	Cover 3
186	AEGIS	Time Warner Interactive Group	209
*	Anna Tommy-8 Button Stacked	IVI Publishing	29
40	Arena	Bethesda Sottworks	31
218	Armored Fist	NovaLogic, Inc.	15
*	ARYA VAIV	Oongleware	171
33	Battle Isle 2000	Accolade	235
278	Black Tower Computers	Zephyr Computer Corp.	277
123	Blackthorn	Interplay Productions, Inc.	127
261	Brady Games Strategy Guides	Brady Games Publishing	282
224	BreakThru!	Spectrum Holobyte	115
103	Bridge Olympiad	Quantum Quality Products	217
99	CD Range	Origin Systems	Cover 4
97	Central Intelligence	Ocean of America	231
190	CH Products	CH Products	189
270	Command 30 Sound Engine	Multiwave Innovation	111
72	Computer Sports	Lance Haffner Games	108
236	Crime Patrol & Space Pirates	American Laser Games	287
225	Crystal Caitburn Pinball	StarPlay Productions, tnc.	51
195	Cyber Virus Burn Cycle	Philips CO-I	44, 45
76	Cyberia CD-ROM	Interplay Productions, Inc.	103
249	CyberJudas	Merit Software	261
289	Cyclemania	Accolade	123
256	Cyclemania	Accolade	165
*	Cyclones	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	259
*	DarkSun: Wake ot the Ravage	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	61
136	Dawn Patrol	empire Interactive Entertainment	10
276	Deckmaster Games	Wargames West	227
238	Delphi Internet	Oelphi	75
40	Delta V	Bethesda Sottworks	30
174	Descent	Interplay Productions, tnc	167
290	Dreamweb	empire Interactive Entertainment	11
258	Dungeon Master tl	Interplay Productions, Inc.	59
50	Electronic Shopping Mall 88S	Cape Cod Connection	271
161	F16	ThrustMaster, Inc.	176
80	Falcon & MIG Commander Utilities	Keyboard Commander Corp.	102
109	Falcon Gold	Spectrum Holobyte	179
141	Falcon MACH V	Falcon Northwest	17
252	Fighter Wing	Merit Sottware	187
281	Flash Traffic	Time Warner Interactive Group	65
246	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass Technologies	39, 41, 43
88	Fortress of Or Radiaki	Merit Software	121
222	FPS Football	Dynamix, Inc	1
182	Friendly to Your Hand/ FX2000	Suncom Technologies	199
78	Front Lines	Impressions Software, Inc.	207
265	Game Wizard	Enhanced Software Oesign, Inc	70
67	GameFix	Game Publications Group	270
117	Games For Less	Titan Games	246
169	Games Master	Keyboard & Terminal Technology	196
42, 260	Girlfriend	AIVR Corporation	94
48	Growth and Adventure Sw	Blue Valley	271
217	Hammer ot The Gods	New World Computing	93
221	Hardball '94	Accolade	95
288	Hardball '94	Accolade	145
184	Hell	Take 2 Interactive Software	78, 79
152	Heroes ot Might and Magic	New World Computing	101
7	High Seas Trader	Impressions Sottware, Inc	205
*	ImagiNation Network	ImagiNation Network	Insert
275	Interact PC Games Accessories	STO Entertainment	257
209	Interactive Entertainment	Chips & Bits	147
116	Iron Helix	Spectrum Holobyte	76
*	Jazz Jackrabbit	Epic MegaGames	8, 9
211	Joyswitch	Lead Pursuit, Inc.	266
98	King's Quest	Sierra On- Line	2,3
86	Knights of Xentar	Megatech	200, 201
254	LOOE RUNNER	Dynamix, Inc	49
132	Lords of Midnight	Oomark	66, 67
89	Maabus	Microtorum	245
93	Mail Order	Mission Control	233
155	Mail Order Products	4th Oimension Entertainment	239
54	Mail Order Products	Chips & Bits	128- 137
263	Mail Order Products	ComputAbility	280, 281
56	Mail Order Products	Computer Express	150- 155
69	Mail Order Products	Gosselin Computer Consuttants	220
216	Mail Order Products	Momby, Inc	255
94	Mail Order Products	Multimedia Specialists	225

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INFO. #	PRODUCT	COMPANY	PAGE
107	Mail Order Products	Sideline Sottware	188
251	Mail Order Products	Sottware Support International	184
115	Mail Order Products	Spectrum Electronics	249
230	Mail Order Products	Starlite Electronic	250
241	Mail Order Software	Gamer's Gold	275
291	Mail Order Software	S Software	198
*	Manzoberranzan	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	221
271	Marketing Your Program	Progeni, Inc	271
171	Master of Magic	MicroProse	81
223	METALTECH	Dynamix, Inc.	77
239	Millenium Auction	Eidolon, Inc	247
61	Mortal Kombat	Hi-Tech Expressions	119
250	Multi - Player Games Network	MPG -NET	240, 241
153	NASCAR RACING	Papyrus	185
41	NCAAII	Bethesda Sottworks	143
212	NFL Pro League Football	Micro Sports, tnc	139
229	No Contest	Diamond Multimedia	265
138	Noctropolis	Electronic Arts	55
286	One Size Plays All	Diamond Multimedia	267
267	Onslaught	Frontal Assaultware, Inc	202
237	Operation Body Count	Capstone Software	162, 163
44	Operation Crusader	Avalon Hitl Game Company	109
81	Operation Europe	KOEI	215
111	Outpost	Sierra On - Line	35
64	Oxyd	Dongleware	171
63	Oxyd magnum!	Dongleware	171
*	Panzer General	Strategic Simulations, Inc	211
135	PGA CO ROM	Electronic Arts	141
120	Phantasmagoria	Sierra On - Line	71
114	Phoenix	Advanced Gravis	181
242	Pilot Control Stand	Home Base Products	198
35	Pinball Arcade CO-ROM	21st Century Entertainment, Inc.	149
57	Planet Strike	FormGen, Inc	25
101	Play By Mail Magazine	Paper Mayhem	271
45	Pre-owned Sottware	Bare Bones Software	271
231	Product Launch	Rocket Science Games	13
*	Renegade	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	237
128	Real Magic	Sigma Oesign	263
51	Relentless	Electronic Arts	63
34	Return To Zork , Zork Anthology	Activision	173
282	Rise of the Robots	Time Warner Interactive Group	99
143	Rise ot the Triad	FormGen, tnc	Cover 2
213	Sabre Team	MicroLeague	213
269	Shadows of Cairn	Masque Publishing	251
214	Soccer Kid	MicroLeague	159
266	Software	Fenwick's	271
240	Sorority House	Electromedia Productions, Inc.	279
280	SoundBlaster Compatibility	Creative Labs	85, 87, 89, 91
262	Space Ace	Chips & Bits	125
277	Spectre	Velocity Oevelopment	175
164	Sprint	Sierra Direct	253
183	Star Crusader	Take 2 Interactive Software	107
112	Star Trail	Sir - Tech	56
175	Stonekeep CO-ROM	Interplay Productions, Inc.	83
179	Strategy ot the Month	Quantum Quality Products	214
257	Super Street Fighter It	Hi-Tech Expressions	117
233	Surge Protector	American Power Conversion	270
119	The Infinity Machine	REM Software	220
274	The Journeyman Project Turbo	Sanctuary Woods	197
268	The Vortex	Hyperbole Studios	161
185	ThunderSeat Technologies	ThunderSeat Technologies	64
*	Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	219
226	Tornado	Trimark Interactive	53
253	Triad Campaign System	Nawu Triad Institute	188
66	Tubular Worlds	Dongleware	171
55	U.S. Navy Fighter	Electronic Arts	191
55	U.S. Navy Fighter	Electronic Arts	193
55	U.S. Navy Fighter	Electronic Arts	195
113	Universal Cockpit	Simulation Systems	84
200	Video Games	Chips & Bits	96, 97
227	Virtual Vegas	Electromedia Productions, Inc	223
43	Wacky Wheels	Apogee Software	27
264	WarCraft	Blizzard Entertainment	112, 113
219	Wargames	Novastar Game Company	271
82	WingMan Extreme	Logitech	182, 183
273	Wolt	Sanctuary Woods	268, 269
247	Wrath ot The Gods	Luminaria	169
151	Zephyr CO	New World Computing	4, 5
207	Zorro	Capstone Software	229

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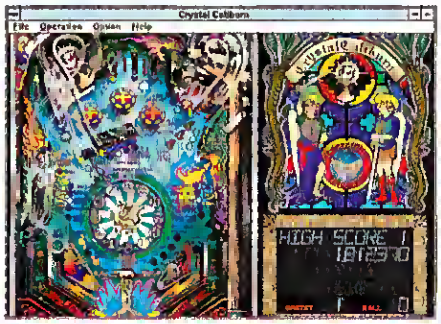
CRYSTAL CALIBURN is the latest computer pinball game from the Japanese programmers responsihle for TRISTAN and EIGHT BALL DELUXE. Like their earlier pinball designs, CRYSTAL CALIBURN is



modelled alter the pinball machines of the 80s, but adds a dash of pizzazz. Before you can bounce the silver ball around the world, you'll have to insert a virtual coin, at which point you are rewarded with flashing lights and appropriately cheesy arcade MIDI music. The action manages to capture that strong and fluid flipper feel, and the ball action is surprisingly realistic. With looping ramps galore, numerous spot targets, and more hells and whistles than you can count, this tahle is set up for high scores (if only the keyboard wouldn't get so upset over a little hip work!). The Windows operating system doesn't slow the action a bit, but having this program on your desktop could seriously hinder the working of other less interesting applications. Windows, $49.95. Circle Reader Service # 1.

STARPLAY PRODUCTIONS INC., 5188 SUNSHINE CANYON DR., BOULDER, CO 80302, (303) 447-9562

MAD DOG II: THE LOST GOLD

Belly up quick, pilgrim, or you'll be pushin' up daisies in a forgotten sagebrush grave. Mad Dog and his pack of scoundrels are back to test your reflexes and exhaust your ammo in a modern version of the OK Corral. The sequel to Mad Dog McCree returns with more full-screen digitized video that plays rather smoothly off a double-speed CD-ROM drive. The game has a realistic look with actors and stunt-men in dusty, beat-up chaps and ponchos hiding behind rocks and falling out of breik-away second-story saloon balconies. By comparison, the mouse-contiolled pistol icon that serves as your tai geting reticle is rather cheesy looking. Shooting scoundrels requires as much visual puzzle-solving as quick reflexes: even in beginner mode, quick-draw outlaws will kill you several times before you learn where they're going to shoot from. Fortunately, you've got three lives and three guides to help point you to the gold. But our initial impression is that, despite its attractive production values and technologically advanced full-screen video speed, the game is little

more than shooting cardboard ducks at a carnival. IBM CD-ROM, $39.95. Circle Reader Service # 2

AMERICAN LASER GAMES, INC., 4801 LINCOLN RD. NE, ALBUQUERQUE, NM, 87109, (800) 758-4663

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

For many moons indeed did the Prince labor in the desert sands of IBM screens. Now, cast out as a beggar, he must once again sharpen his scimitar and rescue the Princess from dangers sure to befall her in the lands of Mac. Let him not be swayed from his noble purpose hy the lush surroundings, for the journey has lost none of its many terrible dangers. Among the 15 levels of non-stop action

are secret doors hewn from solid rock, animated skeletons hidden in dark, dank caverns, and disembodied heads of the purest evil. Enormous slashing blades spring forth to cut down the hasty of step. Beware the hypnotic music, and the powerful magic of rotoscoping, which draw you into this award-winning world. Bewitched, you will find yourself hacking and leaping through the fiendishly difficult levels until you have mastered them, knowing that all the while, the time to rescue the princess is running out...and the Evil Visier is laughing. MAC, $29.95. Circle Reader Service # 3

BRØDERBUND SOFTWARE, INC., 500 REDWOOD BLVD., PO BOX 6121, NOVATO, CA 94948, (415) 382-4400

RETURN TO ZORK

Designer Doug Barnett's dream of returning gamers to the Great Underground Empire has been fulfilled again on Mac CD-ROM and IBM REEL MAGIC formats. While the Mac graphics are crisp, it is the REEL MAGIC version that finally offers the proper showcase for this

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BARDS TALE CONST SET	13
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BATTLE CHESS-WIN	14
BATTLE COMMAND	5
BATTLES OF DESTINY	9
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BATTLETECH 2	9
BICYCLE BRIDGE-WIN	14
BICYCLE POKER	14
BIRDS OF PREY	18
BLOODNET	28
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BLOODWYCH	7
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BLUE FORCE: NEXT OF KIN	25
BLUE MAX ACES GREAT	4
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CAMPAIGN 2	29
CAR & DRIVER	21
CARRIER STRIKE	18
CASTLES	9
CASTLES 2	19
CHALLANGE OF 5 REALM	18
CHAMPIONS OF KRYNN	9
CHAOS CONTINUUM	24
CHESSMASTER 3000	12
CIVILIZATION	28
CIVILIZATION WIN	28
COASTER	9
CODE NAME: ICEMAN	9
COLONELS BEQUEST	10
COMMAND HQ	8
COMPANION OF XANTH	27
CONAN	9
CONFLICT	4
CONFLICT: KOREA	8
CONFLICT: MIDDLE EAST	8
CONQUERED KINGDOMS	15
CONQUEST OF JAPAN	18
CONQUESTS OF CAMELOT	5
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DAVID WOLF-SECRET AGENT	10
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DUNE 2	28
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DUNGEON HACK	29
EARTHRISE	4
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FALCON AT	9
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HEROES OF THE LANCE	9
HIGH COMMAND	28
HORDE	28
HORDE-CD	34
HOUND OF SHADOW	11
HOVERFORCE	19
HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER	12
HYPERSPEED	8
IMMORTAL	11
INCA	14
INCA-CD	15
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INDY JONES FATE ATLA	18
INDY JONES FATE-CD	29
INTERPLAYS 10 YR ANTHOL	38
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ISLAND OF DR BRAIN	19
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JONES IN THE FAST LANE	14
JOURNEYMAN PRO-8 MEGA CD	26
JUMP JET	22
KASPAROV'S GAMBIT	29
KEYS TO MARAMON	8
KGB	11
KILLING CLOUD	4
KINGDOMS OF GERMANY	24
KINGMAKER	29
KINGS QUEST 1 ENHAN	10
KINGS QUEST 1-EGA	6
KINGS QUEST 2-EGA	11
KINGS QUEST 4-EGA	13
KINGS QUEST 5-CD	23
KINGS QUEST 5-VGA	15
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"LARD SEA, AIR TRILOGY 1"	10
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LEGACY: REALM OF TERROR	24
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LEGEND OF KYRANDIA	15
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MANHUNTER 2 SF	5
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MARTIAN DREAMS	10
MASTER OF ORION	31
MAXIMUM OVERKILL MISSION 1	12
MAXIMUM OVERKILL	27
MAXIMUM OVERKILL- CD	35
MLAR STREETS	5
MECHWARRIOR	13
MEGA LO MANIA	9
MEGA RACE-CD	32
MEGATRAVELLER 1 ZHOD	4
MEGATRAVELLER 2	11
MERCHANT PRINCE	25
MICHAEL JORDON FLIGHT S	14
MICROSOFT ARCADE: WIN	15
MIDWINTER	5
MIG-29 FULCRUM	14
MIGHT & MAGIC 1	10
MIGHT & MAGIC 2	10
MIGHT & MADIC 3	15
MIGHT & MAJIC 4 CLOUDS	19
MIGHT & MAJIC 5 DARK	21
MIGHT& MAJIC WORLD-CD	35
MIKE DITKA FOOTBALL	7
MILLENIUM	4
MIXED UP FAIRY TALES	19
ML FOOTBALL 2	8
ML FOOTBALL DELUXE	14
MONKEY ISLAND 2	17
MONOPOLY	8
MORPTIMAN-CD	21
MORTAL KOMBAT	28
MYST CD	39
NASCAR CHALLENGE	15
NFL 94 FOOTBALL	19
NFL FOOTBALL	5
NFL PRO LEAGUE FB 92	9
NFL VIDEO FOOTBALL	9
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NIGHTBREED	8
NIGHTSHIFT	8
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OVERLORD	6
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PATTON STRIKES BACK	7
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PGA GOLF	9
PIRATES	7
PIRATES GOLD	29
PLANET S EDGE	12
PLAYMAKER FOOTBALL	5
POLICE QUEST 1- VGA	9
POLICE QUEST 2	8
POLICE QUEST 3-VGA	18
POLICE QUEST 4	31
POOL OF RADIANCE	8
POOLS OF DARKNESS	13
POPOLOUS	8
POPULOUS 2	18
POWER HITS: BATTLETE	21
POWER HITS: SCI-FI	18
POWERMONGER	12
PRINCE OF PERSIA	17
PRINCE OF PERSIA 2	25
PRIVATEER	32
PRO LEAGUE BASEBALL	25
PRO LEAGUE FB 94	18
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PROPHECY OF THE SHADOW	4
PROTOSTAR	26
PUNISHER	5
QUANTUM GATE WIN-CD	32
QUARTER POLE	19
QUEST FOR GLORY 1 EGA	9
QUEST FOR GLORY 1 VGA	12
QUEST FOR GLORY 2 EGA	12
QUEST FOR GLORY 3	19
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RAVENLOFT-CD	39
REALMS	7
REALMS OF ARKANIA	15
RED BARON MISSION BU	12
RED BARON VGA	15
RED CRYSTAL	19
RED STORM RISING	9
RETURN OF PHANTOM-CD	29
RETURN OF THE PHANTOM	14
RETURN TO ZORK	29
RETURN TO ZORK-CD	35
REX NEBULAR COS GEN	19
RINGWORLD	15
RISE OF THE DRAGON	15
RISK	8
RISK WIN	17
ROAD & TRACK GRAN PRIX	15
ROAD TO THE FINAL FO	15
ROBOSPORT WIN	18
ROCKATEER	18
ROMANCE OF 3 KINGDOMS	31
ROME PATHWAY TO POW	19
ROTOX	9
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT	4
SAM & MAX: HIT THE ROAD	27
SARGON 4	5
SAVAGE EMPIRE	14
SEA ROGUE	11
SEA WOLF-CD	32
SEAL TEAM	22
SECRET OF SILVER BLA	5
SECRET WEAPONS EXP P38	8
SECRET WEAPONS LUFT	18
SFIGE & SWORD	8
SENTINEL WORLDS 1	3
SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD	18
SHADOW CASTER	14
SHADOW OF YSERBIUS	18
SHADOW SORCERER	8
SHADOWGATE WIN	17
SHADOWLANDS	13
SHUTTLE	12
SID & AL'S INCRED TO	15
SIEGE	9
SIEGE EXP:DOGS OF WAR	6
SIERRA ADV STARTER KIT	22
SIERRA ARCADE BUNDLE	19
SILPHEED	5
SIM CITY	17
SIM CITY 2000	29
SIM CITY 2000 GREAT OIS	10
SIM CITY GRAPHICS SETS	10
SIMEARTH	13
SIMLARTH WINDOWS	19
SIMFARM	23
SIMLIFE	22
SIMLIFE: WIN	22
SKATE OR DIE	3
SLEEPING GODS LIE	9
SORCERIAN	8
SPACE 1889	5
SPACE HULK	15
SPACE QUEST 1 VGA	10
SPACE QUEST 2-EGA	10
SPACE QUEST 3	12
SPACE QUEST 4-CD	17
SPACE QUEST 4-VGA	15
SPACE QUEST 5-VGA	19
SPACE WRECKED	9
SPEAR OF DESTINY	23
SPECIAL FORCES	14
SPEED RACER	19
SPEED CD	29
SPELLCASTING 101	13
SPELLCASTING 201	19
SPELLCASTING 301	24
SPELLCASTING PRTY PK	34
SPELLCRAFT: ASPECT OF	12
STAR CONTROL	14
STAR CONTROL 2	28
STAR TREK 25TH ANNIV	15
STAR TREK: JUDGEMENT	22
STAR WARS CHESS	24
STARFLIGHT 1	8
STARFLIGHT 2	11
SPECTRE VR	29
STELLAR 7	9
STELLAR 7-CD	17
STORMOVIK	8
STRATEGO	18
STREET FIGHTER 2	22
STRIKE COMMANDER	17
STRONGHOLD	24
STUNT ISLAND	18
STUNTS	10
SUBWAR 2050	21
SUMMONING	8
SWORD OF THE SAMURAI	8
SYNDICATE	21
TAKE A BREAK PINBALL	14
TANGLED TALES	9
TASK FORCE 1942	19
TEAM YANKEE	15
TEGELS MERCENARIES	5
TENNIS CUP	17
TERMINATOR	9
TERMINATOR 2: ARCADE	19
TERMINATOR 2029	19
TERMINATOR: RAMPAGE	19
TEST DRIVE 1	5
TEST DRIVE 2	12
TEST DRIVE 3	15
THE PROPHECY	10
THEATRE OF WAR	8
THEIR FINEST HOUR	8
THEME PARK MYSTERY	9
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THEXDER 2: FIREHAWK	10
THIRD COURIER	4
THUNDERHAWK	8
THUNDERSTRIKE	9
TIGERS ON THE PROWL	28
TOM LANDRY FOOTBALL	18
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TONY LARUSSA BASEBALL	19
TONY LARUSSA ULTIMATE 88	5
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TREASURE TRAP	7
TREASURES SAVAGE FRO	9
TUNNELS & TROLLS	8
TWILIGHT 2000-VGA	18
ULTIMA 5 WARRIORS O	16
ULTIMA 6 FALSE PROPH	11
ULTIMA 7 BLACK GATE	24
ULTIMA 7 5 SERPENT ISLAND	22
ULTIMA 7 5 SILVER SEED	13
ULTIMA 8: PAGAN	24
ULTIMA 8: SPEECH PACK	10
ULTIMA 8: PAGAN-CD	32
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 1	16
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	28
UNCHARTERED WATERS	21
UNNATURAL SELECTION	21
UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS	19
V VICTORY: VELIKIYE L	14
V VICTORY: MARKET GAR	14
V VICTORY: UTAH BEACH	14
VAXINE	8
VEIL OF DARKNESS	19
VENGEANCE OF EXCALIB	5
VETTE	9
VIKINGS 2	23
VIRTUAL REALITY STUDIO	28
VISIONS OF AFTERMATH	7
WAR IN THE GULF	17
WAR OF THE LANCE	5
WARLORDS	8
WARLORDS 2	25
WARRIORS OF LEGEND	9
WASTELAND	18
WAXWORKS	12
WEAVER COMM DISK VER	3
WHEN TWO WORLDS WAR	21
WHERE IN EUROPE CARMEN	18
WHERE IN SPACE CARMEN	24
WHERE IN TIME CARMEN	19
WHERE IN USA CARMEN	17
WHERE IN WORLD CARMEN	19
WING COM 2 SPEC OPERATIONS	15
WING COM/ ULTIMA 5-CD	18
WING COM/ ULTIMA UNDWRLD	29
WING COMMANDER 1	8
WING COMMANDER 1 DLX	20
WING COMMANDER 2 DLX	29
WING COMMANDER ACADEMY	18
WIZARDRY 4	8
WIZARDRY 5	11
WIZARDRY 7 CRUSADERS	19
WIZARDRY TRILOGY 2	32
WOLFENSTEIN 3D	19
WOLFPACK-CD	29
WONDERLAND	8
WORLD TOUR TENNIS	13
WORLDS AT WAR	8
WW2 AIR FORCE COMMAND	21
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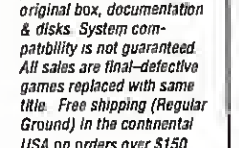

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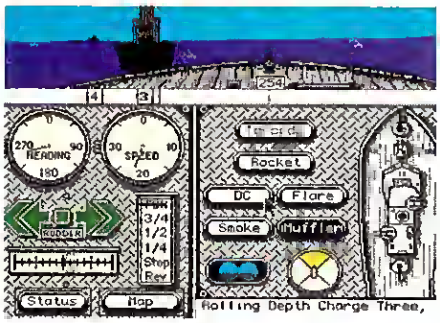
most cinematic of adventure games. The directorial choice of putting every character right up in your face is annoying, but the full-screen video actually pulls you into the action. Michele Em's script is as witty as ever, with more depth than is normally found in the genre. Despite some of the embarrassing acting jobs, the performances of professional actors add immensely to the overall experience, and make this one of the better Siliwood (Hollywood + Silicon) productions of the current lot. Mac, IBM REEL MAGIC, $69.95. Circle Reader Service # 4

ACTIVISION, 11601 WILSHIRE BLVD., LOS ANGELES, CA 90025, (800) 477-3650

SEA AND SKY

A ship sails on the horizon, its bow crashing through waves of product conversions. Hard to make out—is it a new flagship, flying high the flag of Mac graphic splendor? No, it's that salty old dog, PT BOAT, launching its torpedoes off our gaming shores yet again. JFK's famous quote about the importance of PT boats in WWII notwithstanding, most gamers have long since left this game behind in the shallow gaming waters it frequents. SUB BATTLE SIMULATOR, also included in this collection, looks dated as well, but its gameplay is still seaworthy, especially when compared with recent games of the genre. Another nice surprise is the fun little P-51 MUSTANG, more an action game than simulator, but still offering a few quick kills for the casual flyer. While simulators are still relatively scarce on the Mac, the big question is



whether 7-year old designs still have enough appeal, especially when the graphics are straight out of the old 8-bit days. Mac, $34.99. Circle Reader Service # 5

ALLIANCE INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE, 1895 N. PINE ISLAND ROAD #103, PLANTATION FL, 33322, (305) 423-4289

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION—MAC CD-ROM

For most people, the word Civilization brings to mind humanity in all its historical glory. To the gamer, the name conjures images of locked doors, unplugged phones, hoarded food, whatever was necessary to play Sid Meier's masterpiece of strategy gaming for days on end. From the dawn of civilization to the first stellar explorations, players compete against one to seven other civilizations in either historically-based or random worlds. Economics, global expansion, resource management, diplomacy, and warfare are bundled into the consummate strategy gaming experience. Best of all, the crisp Mac graphics take the rough edge off some of the art. Among the flood of

games being ported to the Mac, CIVILIZATION beckons like a safe harbor. For gamers who wonder what kinds of games make it into the *CGW* Hall of Fame, you could hardly find a better benchmark. Mac CD-ROM, $49.95. Circle Reader Service # 6

MICROPROSE SOFTWARE 180 LAKEFRONT DRIVE, HUNT VALLEY, MD 21030, (410) 771-0440.

TERRACE FOR WINDOWS

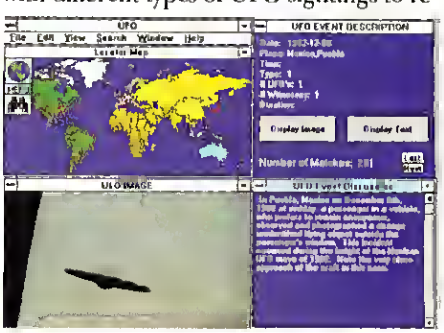
Sub-titled "The Future of Strategy Gaming," the board game version of TERRACE has won several awards from such disparate sources as the Mensa Society and *Games* magazine. A fixture in the ten-forward bar of "Star Trek: The Next Generation," the futuristic strategy game now makes its way to the Windows stage. While not much on sound, the game offers a lot of play, once the unusual rules are learned. Basically, pieces move up and down "terraced" levels, with movement on the same level unlimited unless blocked by an enemy piece. Winning the game requires capturing the main enemy "t" piece, or moving your t-piece to the lowest sector on the opposite end of the board. Less strategic than Go, tactically different than CHESS, there are enough subtleties to keep any strategy gamer thrilled, especially with the design-your-

own-board option included. Plenty of Windows informational screens will ease even novices into the action, and those tiring of computer opponents have built-in modem support with which to build their terraced strategies in cyberspace. Windows, $42.95 (includes S&H). Circle Reader Service # 7

COMPUTER TERRACE/SILER VENTURES, P.O. BOX 2405, LAKE OSWEGO, OR 97035, (503) 635-6333

UFO: THIS PLANET'S MOST COMPLETE GUIDE TO CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

With X-COM taking the top slot in this month's Top 100 poll, we thought a peek at this unusual reference was appropriate. UFO: THIS PLANET'S MOST COMPLETE GUIDE TO CLOSE ENCOUNTERS gives you a map locator, images, videos, and a descriptions of over 1200 cases of close encounters of various kinds. While it might sound information-rich, the coverage is not as in-depth as one would hope. A nice Windows interface and database search engine fails to make up for entry descriptions that sometimes seem briefer than the title of the product. For those eager to be convinced of the reality of extra-terrestrial visitors, the low-resolution images and video clips offer plenty of poorly lit and out-of-focus scenes to read mysteries into. The more serious investigator may find this useful as an index for further research into the phenomena. Motion picture clips, eyewitnesses, and the ever-popular topic of cattle mutilation may be cross-referenced with different types of UFO sightings to re-



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Zephyr Onyx Pentium - *very fast!*
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Zephyr

veal patterns. If someone is out there, let's hope they're peaceful. If not, we've always got X-COM. MPC CD-ROM, $34.95. Circle Reader Service # 8

SOFTWARE MARKETING CORPORATION, 9830 SOUTH 51ST ST. BUILDING A-131, PHOENIX, AZ, 85044 (602) 893-3377

WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET II: TANKS! SCENARIO DISKS

David Landrey and the prolific folks at **Novastar Games** have struck again with disks crammed full of scenarios sure to entice even the most particular of TANKS! fans. The first disk covers that hotbed of tank activity, the Eastern Front in WWII. Of the five battles included, KURSK SOUTH is a great deal of fun for the German player.

BERLIN offers a battle rarely seen in wargames, where the German tactical expertise was put to a severe test, vastly outnumbered by Russian forces closing in on the German capital. The other disk serves up nine battles from Desert Storm. RATS is the most exciting of these, with British Challenger tanks and Special Forces units trying to eliminate Iraqi divisions before massive reinforcements show up. The impressive graphics remain intact—but the best thing about the new disks is the new executable files. The insane lethality of mortars and airstrikes has been significantly toned down, and the morale effects have been adjusted to reflect more realistic outcomes. The scenarios seem to be better play-balanced than many of those found in the original release, and they will no doubt prove to be a treat for fans of the game, and perhaps give reason for critics to take another look. IBM, $15.00 each disk. Circle Reader Service # 9

NOVASTAR GAME COMPANY, P.O. BOX 1813, ROCKLIN CA 95677, (916) 624-7113

WARPLANES

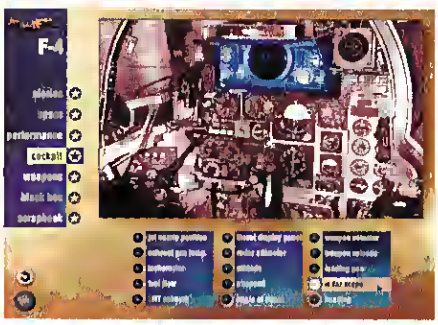
If most multimedia reference products have you reaching for the ejection seat button, this CD-ROM distributed by **Maxis** may be your ticket to a somewhat

smoother ride. **Maris**, the British company who delivered stunning galactic vistas in REDSHIFT, has taken a more down-to-earth approach here. Much more than pretty pictures, WARPLANES is a comprehensive look at over 500 of the world's combat aircraft. Hundreds of detailed photos can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, giving the impression that you are in the world's largest aircraft museum. In addition to learning about the weaponry of each plane, you may even arm aircraft to see the weapon loads carried on a particular type of mission. Detailed maps recount the history of large air battles, and you may even view airfields and aircraft carriers up close and personal—although you cannot fly off the digitized screens. For that, the designers have thoughtfully provided flight simulators of the A-10, C-130, and SU-27 aircraft. While these won't threaten FALCON 3.0's supremacy, the simulations will give you a feel for flight in the nimble Sukhoi and ungainly Warthog. A treat for anyone remotely interested in combat aircraft. MPC, Mac CD-ROM, $69.95. Circle Reader service # 10

MAXIS SOFTWARE, 2 THEATRE SQUARE, SUITE 230, ORINDA, CA 94563, (800) 33-MAXIS

WILO BLUE YONDER EPISOOE 1: 50 YEARS OF GS ANO JETS

Locking onto the tail of **Maxis**' WARPLANES is **Spectrum HoloByte**'s WILD BLUE YONDER, which offers the user an encyclopedic reference to 20 aircraft from four periods: The Jet Age (including the

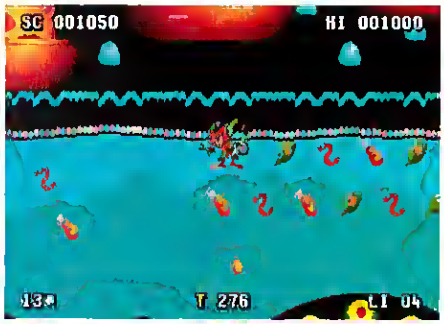


F-86 Sabre Jet), Vietnam (featuring the F-4 Phantom, A-6 Intruder and F-105 Thunderchief), Desert Storm (with the F-14, F-15, F-16, F117 and MiG-29), and Tomorrow (the experimental YF-22 and X-29). A great interface, full motion video, still images, and period sound bites of authentic cockpit chatter would seem to be almost an interactive episode of *Wings*—the only thing missing is the depth. There's a fair amount to look at, with close-ups of cockpit gauges, weapons (without specs), postage stamp-sized QuickTime movies, and narrated backgrounds of each aircraft. But once viewed, there's little impetus to fire it up again. The product could benefit from more information, or at the least more aircraft, which will evidently be forthcoming in later releases, THE GOLDEN AGE OF FLIGHT and SECRET AIRCRAFT. MAC CD-ROM, $39.95 Circle Reader Service # 11

SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE, 2490 MARINER SQUARE LOOP, ALAMEDA CA 94501, (510) 522-1164

ZOOL 2

That most foul of evil-doers, Krool—he who remains unseen—is angry at Zool. Seems that our intrepid hero managed to foil Krool's last attempt at ruling the Nth Dimension, so of course, a sequel was in-



evitable. This time, Krool's nefarious plot involves sending his chief henchman, Mental Block, to subjugate all who oppose Krool using the wicked weapon of Boredom. As Zool, or his plucky female companion Zooz, you use your Ninja skills in a variety of scrolling, leaping, running and fighting maneuvers to best your cartoon-inspired arcade enemies. All in fun, as it's hard to take a Ninja in tennis shoes too seriously. Besides, we loved using the *nunchucks* and Ninja throwing-stars. MPC CD-ROM, $34.95. Circle Reader Service # 12.

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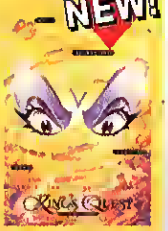
War Planes for Win	42
Where in the World Carmen Sandiego Deluxe	55
Who Shot Johnny Rock	39
Wiggins in Storyland	39
Wing Commander +2 Deluxe	29
Wing Commander 2 Deluxe w/speech and 1&2	29
Wing Commander I/Ultima VI	29
Wolf Pack	29
World Circuit	39
World Cup Interactive	31
Wrath of the Gods	43
X-Com	42
Zorro	36

King's Quest VII

NEW!



The best-selling adventure series of all time returns with the most spectacular episode yet! Told through breathtaking, cinema quality animation and accompanied by a dynamically beautiful score, King's Quest VII establishes a new standard for animated adventure games! In King's Quest VII, Roberta Williams spins an enchanting tale of mother and daughter caught in a world of fairies, trolls, and magical lands. This Holiday Season, share the laughter and excitement of this charming adventure game with your entire family.

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Doom II

NEW!

Sequel to the award-winning DOOM. DOOM II provides more levels, more nastier, deadlier demons to battle, more weapons, excitement and a whole new story line! Stunning graphics, pulse-pounding action and intense gameplay make this the ultimate action game. Rated #1 by all the critics! For one player, two players using a modem and up to four players on a LAN (IPX protocol).

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Cannon Fodder	24.95	Harpoon II	42.95	Sim City 2000	39.95
Civilization for Win & DOS	49.95	Heroes of Might & Magic	39.95	SNN 21 Sea Wolf	42.95
Colonization	49.95	Leisure Suit Larry 6	39.95	Star Wars Screen Entertainer	27.95
Crystal Caliburn for Win	29.95	Links 386 Pro	39.95	Strip Poker Pro SVGA	29.95
Doom 2	44.95	Lode Runner	36.95	Super Street Fighter 2	39.95
Dragon Knight III	44.95	Lords of the Realm	36.95	Tony LaRussa Baseball II	37.95
Earth Siege	44.95	More Incredible Machines for Win	29.95	Where...Carmen Wodd Deluxe	41.95
Even More Incredible Machines	29.95	MS Flight Simulator 5.0	43.95	X-Wing	39.95

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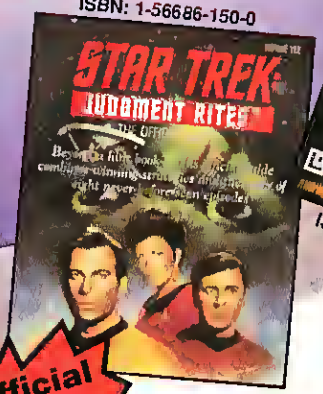

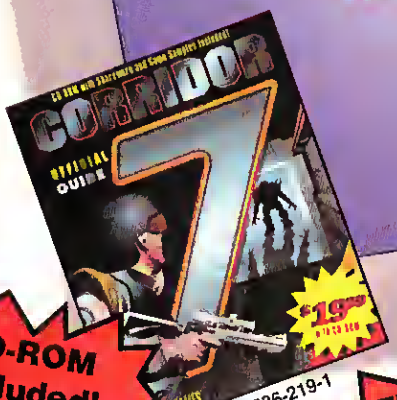

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Circle Reader Service #261

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, 1988)
Chessmaster (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)
Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987)
Earl Weaver Baseball (Electronic Arts, 1986)
Empire (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1988)
Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1986)
Gunship (MicroProse, 1989)
Harpoon (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
Kampfgruppe (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
King's Quest V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991)
M-1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse, 1989)
Mech Brigade (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
Might & Magic (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)
Pirates (MicroProse, 1987)
Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse, 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, 1983)
Ultima IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
War in Russia (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
Wasteland (Interplay Productions, 1986)
Wing Commander I & II (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
Wizardry (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
Zork (Infocom, 1981)

H.O.F. HIGHLIGHTS

INDUCTION CEREMONY!

WING COMMANDER II
ORIGIN, 1991

Game designer Chris Roberts had a dream: to bring the intense dogfighting scenes of the *Star Wars* films to the computer screen. But when discussions with LucasFilm went nowhere (they had other plans, apparently), Roberts decided to create his own grand-sweeping space conflict. Replacing stormtroopers and Imperial pilots with warmongering felines, and X-wings and TIE fighters with ships of his own design, Roberts beat LucasArts to the space-conflict punch and created WING COMMANDER, one of the most popular games of all time. Although it is rare for CGW to induct a sequel into the Hall of Fame (**Origin**'s ULTIMA games being the only exceptions), we couldn't deny WING COMMANDER II: VENGEANCE OF THE KILRATHI its much earned honor. WING COMMANDER did everything the original did, only better by tenfold. The wrist-wracking action got more wrist-wracking, with improved enemy pilots (although they were still somewhat predictable). The cinematic cut scenes took on greater prominence, accentuating the dark and deep storyline. The sound effects were so well done and integral to the game that they inspired many gamers to try out their first sound card. Now, the gaming world awaits WING COMMANDER III, a game that, with its Hollywood talent and redesigned polygon-based graphics engine, could be the next "star wars" sensation.

THE SCORE

READER POLL #122

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	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	9.30
9	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	9.25
10	Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes	Electronic Arts	9.20

TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Ultima Underworld	Origin	10.12
2	Betrayal at Krondor	Dynamix	9.50
3	Ultima Underworld II	Origin	9.42
4	Might & Magic III	New World Computing	9.39
5	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	9.37
6	Lands of Lore	Virgin	9.35
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	Indy Car Racing	Virgin/Papyrus	9.48
3	World Circuit	MicroProse	9.40
4	Aces of the Pacific	Dynamix	9.38
5	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	9.32
6	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	NovaLogic	9.27
7	Hornet	Spectrum Holobyte	9.12
8	Stunt Island	Disney	9.00
9	Aces over Europe	Dynamix	8.80
10	F-15 Strike Eagle III	MicroProse	8.65

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	X-COM	MicroProse	10.38
2	Master of Orion	MicroProse	10.32
3	Warlords II	SSG	10.02
4	Solitaire's Journey	QQP	9.97
5	Dune II	Virgin	9.82
6	Sim City 2000	Maxis	9.72
7	Conquered Kingdoms	QQP	9.53
8	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	9.52
9	Serf City	SSI	9.36
10	Merchant Prince	QQP	9.33

TOP 100 GAMES

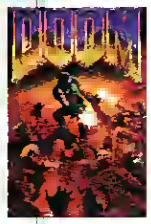
	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
✱1	X-COM	MicroProse	ST	10.38
✱2	Links 386 Pro	Access	SP	10.33
3	Master of Orion	MicroProse	ST	10.32
✱4	Doom	Id Software	AC	10.31
5	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	AC	10.26
✱6	Ultima Underworld	Origin	RP	10.12
7	Warlords II	SSG	ST	10.02
8	Solitaire's Journey	QQP	ST	9.97
✱9	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	AD	9.92
10	Monkey Island 2: Le Chuck's Revenge	LucasArts	AD	9.83
11	Dune II	Virgin	ST	9.82
12	Indiana Jones: Fate of Atlantis	LucasArts	AD	9.79
13	Sim City 2000	Maxis	ST	9.72
✱14	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	WG	9.68
15	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	SP	9.64
16	V for Victory: Utah Beach	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.63
17	X-Wing	LucasArts	AC	9.60
✱18	Falcon 3.0	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	9.59
19	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.58
20	Quest for Glory III	Sierra	AD,RP	9.56
21	Sherlock Holmes CD I	Viacom	AD	9.55
	Wolfenstein 3-D	Id Software	AC	9.55
23	Conquered Kingdoms	QQP	ST	9.53
24	V for Victory: Velikiye Luki	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.52
	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	ST	9.52
26	Betrayal at Krondor	Dynamix	RP	9.50
	NHLPA Hockey	Electronic Arts	SP	9.50
28	Indy Car Racing	Virgin/Papyrus	SI	9.48
29	War in Russia	SSI	WG	9.44
30	Ultima Underworld II	Origin	RP	9.42
	Gabriel Knight	Sierra	AD	9.42
32	World Circuit	MicroProse	SI	9.40
33	Might & Magic III	New World Computing	RP	9.39
34	Aces of the Pacific	Dynamix	SI	9.38
35	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.37
36	Serf City	SSI	ST	9.36
37	Lands of Lore	Virgin	RP	9.35
	Dark Legions	SSI	AC	9.35
39	Pacific War	SSI	WG	9.34
	Eye of the Beholder II	SSI	RP	9.34
41	Star Control II	Accolade	AO,AC	9.33
	Merchant Prince	QQP	ST	9.33
43	Tanks	SSI	WG	9.32
	Chessmaster 3000	Software Toolworks	ST	9.32
	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	SI	9.32
46	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	AO	9.30
47	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	NovaLogic	SI	9.27
	Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf	Accolade	SP	9.27
49	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	AO	9.25
	Ultima VII	Origin	RP	9.25

TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	9.68
2	V for Victory: Utah Beach	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.63
3	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.58
4	V for Victory: Velikiye Luki	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.52
5	War in Russia	SSI	9.44
6	Pacific War	SSI	9.34
7	Tanks	SSI	9.32
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	10.31
2	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	10.26
3	X-Wing	LucasArts	9.60
4	Wolfenstein 3-D	Id Software	9.55
5	Dark Legions	SSI	9.35
6	Privateer	Origin	9.19
7	Tetris Classic	Spectrum HoloByte	9.14
8	Out of this World	Interplay	8.57
9	The Horde	Crystal Dynamics	8.50
10	Prince of Persia 2	Broderbund	8.49



TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Links 386 Pro	Access	10.33
2	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	9.64
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 (see pg. 257). 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	V for Victory: Gold Juno Sword	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.24
52	Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes	Electronic Arts	AD	9.20
53	Privateer	Origin	AC	9.19
54	King's Quest VI: Heir Today...	Sierra	AD	9.17
55	Hardball III	Accolade	SP	9.16
56	Tetris Classic	Spectrum HoloByte	AC	9.14
	VGA Planets	Tim Wisseman	ST	9.14
58	Hong Kong Mahjong Pro	Electronic Arts	ST	9.13
59	Hornet	Spectrum Holobyte	SI	9.12
60	The Castle of Dr. Brain	Sierra	AD	9.11
61	The Dagger of Amon Ra	Sierra	AD	9.09
62	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpent Isle	Origin	RP	9.08
63	Syndicate	Electronic Arts	ST,AC	9.07
64	Les Manly in: Lost in L.A.	Accolade	AD	9.06
65	Quest for Glory I (VGA)	Sierra	AD,RP	9.05
66	Eric the Unready	Legend	AD	9.04
	Empire Deluxe	New World Computing	ST	9.04
	Conquests of the Longbow	Sierra	AD	9.04
69	Clash of Steel	SSI	WG	9.01
70	Stunt Island	Disney	SI	9.00
	Battles of Destiny	QQP	ST	9.00
72	Wizardry VII: Crusaders of Savant	Sir-Tech	RP	8.97
	Harpoon II	Three-Sixty	WG	8.97
	Carriers At War	SSG	WG	8.97
75	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharmacist	Sierra	AD	8.96
76	Alone in the Dark	I-Motion	AD	8.95
77	The Incredible Machine	Dynamix	ST	8.92
78	The Island of Dr. Brain	Sierra	ST	8.91
79	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	RP	8.82
	Carriers at War II	SSG	WG	8.82
81	Spellcasting 301: Spring Break	Legend	AD	8.81
82	Rex Nebular	MicroProse	AD	8.80
	Aces Over Europe	Dynamix	SI	8.80
84	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	SP	8.78
	Populous II	Electronic Arts	ST	8.78
	Hoyle Book of Games, Vol. 3	Sierra	ST	8.78
87	Myst	Broderbund	AD	8.76
88	Kasparov's Gambit	Electronic Arts	ST	8.75
89	Veil of Darkness	SSI	RP	8.74
	Dracula Unleashed	Viacom	AD	8.74
91	Gateway	Legend	AD	8.72
92	Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	WG	8.70
93	Genghis Khan II	Koei	WG	8.66
94	F-15 Strike Eagle III	MicroProse	SI	8.65
95	MiG-29	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.64
	Great Naval Battles	SSI	WG,ST	8.64
97	Amazon	Access	AD	8.62
98	Space Quest V: Mutation	Sierra	AD	8.60
99	High Command	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	8.58
100	Carrier Strike	SSI	WG	8.57

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. Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs.

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.

Red indicates new files.

AEGIS Patch: Eliminates the Electronic Book crash. 4/28/94.

Aide de Camp V1.15: Newest version uses 70 KB less RAM and has several interface modifications. 7/25/94

Archon Ultra V1.1a Update: For those with V1.1, cleans up modem difficulties. 8/16/94

Arena Upgrade V1.06: Latest version of Bethesda's role-playing game. 8/11/94

Battles of the South Pacific Upgrade: Latest patch for QQP's WWII naval strategy game. 5/24/94

Cactus League Pro Basketball Update: Corrects stats of 70-71 season disk. 6/23/94

Chessmaster 4000 Turbo v1.04: Newest upgrade for Software Toolworks' chess program. 6/28/94

Comanche Joystick Drivers: Adds Flightstick Pro support to Nova Logic's helicopter simulation. 5/24/94

Command Adventures Starship Patch: The latest fixes for Merit Software's science fiction game. 5/19/94

D-Day Patch: Includes missing text from game manual. 7/8/94

Detroit Patch 2.1: Upgrades this Impressions game to latest version. Make sure to consult the text file for info on saved game transfer to new version. 8/11/94

Disney Windows Patch: Contains Windows drivers and icons for Disney DOS programs. 7/28/94

Empire Deluxe V1.1 Mac: Latest version of New World's strategy game for Mac gamers. The play-by-mail feature has been cleaned up significantly. 6/1/94

Fleet Defender V1.2 Upgrade: Latest version of MicroProse's flight sim. Adds 41 new features. 5/17/94

Global Domination Update: Fixes modem play bugs and replaces Bismarck with Hitler, for those politically incorrect wargamers. 8/24/94

Goblins CD-ROM Patch: Fixes sound card and CD-ROM driver problems. 3/1/94

Great Naval Battles v1.1 Upgrade: Fixes several problems in SSI's simulation of naval warfare. 6/24/94

IndyCar Racing Patch: Improves AI and cleans up tracks. 6/23/94.

Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition Update: Removes the copy protection so that the infamous code wheel need no longer be used. 8/11/94

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

Legend of Kyrandia, Book 2, 1.04 Update: Fixes lockup problems on faster machines. 8/29/94

Lucky's Casino Update: Latest version of QQP's gambling game. 5/19/94

M4 for 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 Pacific Air War: Latest fixes including joystick enhancements. 7/8/94

Pacific War V1.1 Update: Official update from SSI, this will *not* work with the Grigsby "X" versions available on-line. 8/10/94

Pacific Strike V1.19: Contains 9 fixes for Origin's new flight sim. 5/27/94

Prophecy Patch: Solves graphics problems with faster systems. 6/15/94

Revenlolt 1.1 Upgrade: Latest version from SSI, floppy and CD-ROM. 4/29/94

The 7th Guest 1.30 Update: Lowers memory requirements to 450K, adds VESA support and more sound card drivers. 8/1/94.

Sierra Sound Patches: 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

Spectre VR Update: Newest version including latest editing files. 7/28/94

Subwar 2050 V2.02 Update: Corrects cursor drift, time and date problem. 4/28/94

Tigers on the Prowl V 1.3: New features include AI tweaks and combat routine enhancements. 7/25/94

Tony La Russa Baseball 2 Patch: Fixes stadium lockups. 5/3/94

Tony La Russa Baseball 2 CD-ROM V1.3: Latest version with numerous fixes. 7/21/94

U-Boat V1.5 Update: Latest version of Deadly Games' submarine game—*Mac only*. 8/11/94

Warlords II Update: 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 Enhancement: This TSR allows use of extra Thrustmaster buttons. 6/2/94.

LIVE ACTION

MOT
PIC

CRIME PATROL™

This multi-level live-action thriller challenges the player to progress through police ranks. As a Rookie the player takes on gang members, armed robbers and other street criminals. Promotion to Detective will mean working undercover against drug dealers and car thief rings. Confront bank robbers and terrorists once you're selected for SWAT team assignment. The better player will reach Delta Force and tangle with a criminal element threatening national security.

PC CD Available
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The Rumor Bag

Calling A Spade, A Marlowe

by Raymond Dashiell Gardner

I was dusting my keyboard with the old hunt and peck, trying to put together my thoughts on which computer game publisher **TCI** was planning to buy. The way I'd heard it, the cable television provider was planning to purchase a company with experience in developing PC-based games in order to offer story games on the installment plan. Each month or so, new areas to explore and new characters with which to interact would be introduced. I was frustrated. No one was talking. I reached in my bottom drawer for the journalist's muse, that bottle of *Old BugChaser* I'd carried away from a CES hospitality suite.

The grapevine was quieter than a snowy graveyard on Christmas Day. It had been easier to confirm that **Sega** was going back to the drawing board on the *Saturn* than to get any word on this potentially important event in interactive television. I thought about my deadline and slugged back a shot of the BugChaser. It burned my throat like **MediaVision**'s former executives had burned their shareholders.

And there she was, a doll with gams worthy of a Kenny G sax solo and an hourglass figure with more symmetry than Pachelbel's Canon. Somehow, I knew that this dame hadn't come to invite me to the opera or even to play the **Psygnosis** game on Wagner's Ring cycle that's being developed by **Maelstrom**. This dame meant trouble. She probably wanted the kind of RETRIBUTION as that character in **Northstar Studios**' current project. RETRIBUTION is already a **Gremlin** title in the U.K., so it's probably only a working title at **Northstar**, but the space opera features lots of 3-D rendered vessels of destruction and a cyber-courtroom scene that could become very memorable. Somehow, I figured a courtroom, cyber or otherwise, was where I was likely to end up if I spent much time with this dame.

I wiped out an extra glass with a clean handkerchief and poured her a stiff one. She looked as dizzy as if she'd just spent 24 straight hours on the Tilt-O-Whirl at the fair. I suspected she might be an artist on **Virgin**'s upcoming game for 1996, ECTOSPHERE. I hadn't heard very much, but I'd heard that Clive Barker was doing a lot of the design work. That's scary enough.

"I have to talk to someone," she blubbered past enough crocodile tears to make both Marc Antony and Shakespeare sue for intellectual property violations. "I think one of my favorite stories has been ripped off."

That was entirely possible. Intellectual property law still isn't real clear on the computer game front. "That depends," I slurred my words with the gravity of a Humphrey Bogart, "on who is working with that story."

She tried to garner the courage to tell me, so I prodded her with my info. "Is it **Interplay**?" I asked. I was sure I could ease her mind if she was talking about Interplay's upcoming horror series of first-person games based on classic monsters. FRANKENSTEIN is supposed to be the first in the series.

She shook her head. "It's not even a computer game. It's for a game machine!"

The light bulb went on—something that happens inside my head about as irregularly as the little bulb inside my refrigerator. "You aren't talking about **Northstar Studios**' PSX game, are you?" She nodded. "Nobody's ripping anyone off. Their in-house name for the game was entitled HARDWIRED, but it wasn't based on the Walter Jon Williams' book. It's sort of a Judge Dredd meets The Terminator game with a lot of Japanime overtones and cyborg combat. They won't be calling it HARDWIRED because **NovaLogic** has that license and should publish that game in '95."

She dried her tears and thanked me, wiping off enough mascara to fill a #3 lead pencil in the process. She crossed her legs provocatively and wanted to know about another friend. I admired the animation (and briefly wished I had a screen capture for real life scenes), then told her I'd answer a question if I could. "Whatever happened to David Bradley?" she asked.

She uncrossed and recrossed her legs as I tried to unmuddle my brain. What had happened to the designer of the last two installments of the WIZARDRY series? "He's working on a first-person perspective, science fantasy game for a different publisher. I think it's going to be called CYBERMAGE."

She stood up and offered me her hand. As I accepted it, she pulled me close and brushed her lips against my ear, sensuously pausing and allowing her hot breath to massage my lobe before she whispered, "I'm not supposed to tell you this." I waited, affected by a multitude of stimuli. "But you remember **Sanctuary Woods**' WOLF?" I nodded, breathing the sweet succor of her perfumed neck. "It's going to have a sequel called LION." She pulled away to leave and I found myself wishing that she'd known just a few more secrets.

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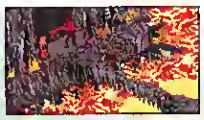
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