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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The #1 Computer Game Magazine **ZD**

Star in
William
Gibson's
Cyberpunk
Thriller



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Fifth Fleet, Legions,
Hammer of the Gods

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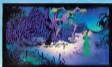
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FEATURES

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38 MULTI-PLAYER GAMES Tired of playing with yourself? Does the AI in your favorite game resemble a limp disgruntled? Find out how more can be merrier when Martin Cirulis unlocks a rich world of head-to-head competition in his distinctive feature on modem, e-mail and network games.

ADVENTURE / ROLE-PLAYING

57 SCORPIA'S STING Role-playing's most eminent authority offers her travelogue on the Underdark capital of *MENZOBERRANZAN*.

62 SCORPIA'S MAIL The "Dear Abby" of *Adventure* helps you avoid the pitfalls set for the unwary in *NOCTROPOLIS*, offers an important key to the *DEATH GATE* and keeps the *Drow* off your heels in *MENZOBERRANZAN*.

64 KING'S QUEST VII: THE PRINCESS BRIDE Charles Ardaï pulls the neo-Disney sword from the Rosella stone, as he takes you on a fairy-tale tour through Sierra's cel-animated world.

68 DEATH GATE Peter Olafson goes looking for that old Rune Magic in *Legend's* version of Weis & Hickman's fantasy novels.

74 NOCTROPOLIS Sumptuous graphics, a dark and moody atmosphere...What more could you ask from EA's new graphic novel-style adventure? Charles Ardaï suggests something in the way of plot.

84 JORUNE: ALIEN LOGIC Even with all its resplendent graphics, Paul Schuytema still sees clouds in the *Skyrealms* of *Jorune*.

90 THE VORTEX: QUANTUM GATE II Greg Roach, the alleged "Steven Spielberg of Multimedia," is back with more surreal science-fiction imagery. Charles Ardaï bravely plunges into the maelstrom.

102 ECSTATICA Allen Greenberg decides *Psygnosis'* *Alone in the Dark*-style adventure is worthy of its title.

ACTION

106 WING COMMANDER III Big-name movie stars, incredible cinematics, and terrific action sequences are but a part of Chris Roberts' magnum *Origins opus*. Martin Cirulis looks into the Heart of the Tiger to find why this game is so compelling.

112 METALTECH: BATTLEDROME Zap data through the phone or network lines as you literally smash your opponents to "bits." Jeff James comments on the latest anthropological combat vehicle.

118 NOVASTORM *Psygnosis* enters the 3-D combat sweepstakes with plenty of pyrotechnics. Gordon Coble takes control as *CGW* enters the fray.

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Dial Up And Duel
Other Players For
The Ultimate Gaming
Challenge



COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

FEBRUARY 1995



122 MAGIC CARPET Mark Clarkson weaves the appropriate spells, lest his manna run out before he is allowed to explore all of **Bullfrog's** detailed landscapes, in this addicting first-person action/strategy game.

128 CREATURE SHOCK Ed Wood would be proud. In a schizophrenic science-fiction world from **Virgin**, Jeff James survives space combat worthy of *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, but finds the tense first-person shoot-'em-ups true to his vision.

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132 SNEAK PREVIEW! ESPN BASEBALL Sony gets its glove on a hard grounder from **CGW's** George Jones, but can **ESPN's** Chris Berman make the double play?

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154 U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS Even when the action gets intense in **Electronic Arts'** new flight sim, Denny Atkin is never tempted to use the ejection seat.

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164 SNEAK PREVIEW! CONQUEROR: AD 1086 Time-Warner's new strategy game evokes memories of **DEFENDER OF THE CROWN**. Johnny Wilson acts chivalrously for a change and jousts his way through the graphic spectacle.

168 5TH FLEET Despite some annoying bugs, Commodore Tim Carter finds that this wargame remains solidly afloat for **Avalon Hill**.

176 HAMMER OF THE GODS If you've ever wanted to sit at the right hand of Odin, **New World** will show the way to move up the Tree of Gods.

182 LEGIONS **Mindscape** journeyed to the ancient world, and left General M. Evan (Scipio Mindscapamus) Brooks waiting for tactical reinforcements.

188 REUNION According to Martin Cirulis, this title is appropriate, since he finds this European import from **Merit** reuniting themes from several sci-fi sources.

197 DOMINUS Overlord Jason Kapalka mixes a Mesomorph or two in the kitchen-sink design of this ambitious import.



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The Editor As Surgeon

by Johnny L. Wilson

Writing is a lot more fun than editing. Even rewriting is more fun than editing. Editing is surgery. In writing, you get to share what you find interesting—everything you find interesting. Editing, however, focuses on what's important, not just what's interesting. To edit is to select, emend, and refine for a particular purpose. The selection process is a two-edged sword—when you select the good stuff, you are hopefully slicing away the peripheral, the irrelevant and the uninteresting.

Sometimes, though, you have to trim away the amusing, colorful or detailed portions of a carefully crafted work. Sometimes, you yourself bleed as you send prose to word processor limbo or film to the celluloid graveyard on the cutting room floor. To fit the space available, the audience you want to reach, or the view of the director, you often have to surgically remove material that you personally like.

So it is with the evolution of a magazine. You have to focus on the needs of your audience and adjust your editorial lens to meet those needs. As editors, we listen and do our best to respond to what we hear from our readers.

That's why there are a couple of new looks this issue. Cosmetically, we've given *Now Playing* and *Beta Bits* a facelift. Both changes give the new products featured there the exposure they deserve.

You told us that *Beta Bits* needed more screen shots. Guess what? Now, *Beta Bits* will have more and bigger screen shots

games. In addition we have moved the section to the front of the book to afford it more prominence.

The changes to *Now Playing* should make it more interesting and useful than ever. Of course, the section will continue to feature final, shrink-wrapped games which we received prior to press time.

This will also help you to know what major reviews are likely to be on tap for the next issue. So, *Now Playing* will not only tell you what's on the shelves at retailers and distributors, it will also serve as a "Coming Attractions" for our upcoming feature coverage.

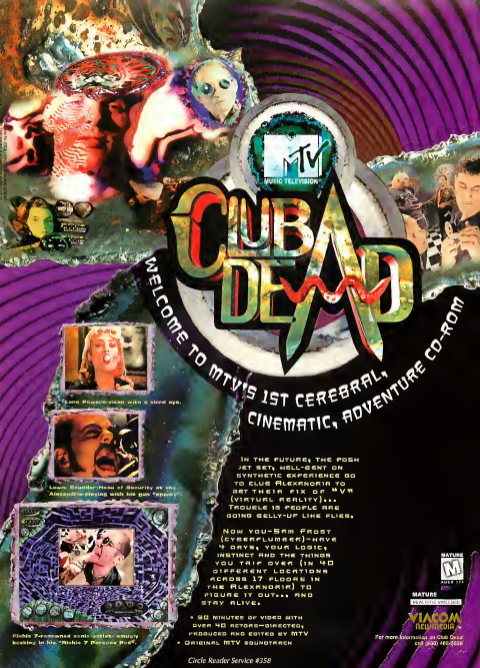
But that's not all! We're also phasing out our *Opponents Wanted* page. Your letters have indicated that this is the least read page in each issue. Also, we think that the best place to have an *Opponents Wanted* section is in our Ziff-Net forum and in the on-line version of *Computer Gaming World* on the new Interchange Network. Eventually, we visualize an on-line *Opponents Wanted* where you should be able to add your classified directly to the database and search for fresh victims by searching for area code.

These changes are a reflection of what you told us you wanted. We're listening to what you like and don't like about the magazine. Incidentally, based on your feedback to our Reader Poll in the December issue ("New Years Wish"), we

Editing focuses on what's important, not just what's interesting. The selection process is a two-edged sword—when you select the good stuff, you are hopefully slicing away the peripheral, the irrelevant and the uninteresting.

to go with the text describing our early experiences with alpha and beta versions of the games. You told us that our minicatalog of new games, *Now Playing*, included too many less significant titles and got lost in the back of the magazine. Starting this issue, *Now Playing* will have a more graphic look and will be restricted to a half-dozen of the most important

PHOTO: MICHAEL O'NEILL



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will be adding a Game Hints column to supplement Scorpi-a's adventure and role-playing hints. We'll even have more hardware coverage on a regular basis at your request. Here's hoping that these changes will better meet your needs. By the way, if you're a CGW reader and you aren't sending in CGW Poll votes on a regular basis, we probably aren't hearing from you.

Important Correction: In case you aren't a regular reader of either our letters column or any of the on-line services where we posted this correction, we had a problem with regard to the game ratings in two of issue #126's *Editor's Speak* boxes. See the note in Interface (Letters) under "Swingin' On 5 and 1/2 Stars" for more explanation. ☹



Now Playing will not only tell you what's on the shelves at retailers and distributors, it will also serve as a "Coming Attractions" for our upcoming feature coverage.

HOW DO WE RATE?

The Guide To CGW's Review Rating System

- ★★★★★ **Outstanding:** That rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, interface, and, of course, the game play come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience.
- ★★★★☆ **Very Good:** A quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems, but is still worth your time and money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter/genre.
- ★★★☆☆ **Average:** A mixed bag. Can often be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in significant areas. Can also just be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.
- ★★☆☆☆ **Weak:** A game with serious problems. May be buggy, may not have much play value, may be ill-conceived—and you may want to think twice about buying it.
- ★☆☆☆☆ **Abysmal:** That rare game that gets it all wrong. Usually a buggy, incomplete, and/or valueless product.

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Interface

LETTERS FROM CGW READERS



REVOLUTIONARY OBSERVATION

On your December cover, you have a picture of a Ticonderoga class cruiser, but it is not the Ticonderoga. It is the USS Couperns. I looked for the photo credit, but could not find it. Give credit where credit is due. Besides, Couperns has the VLS and the Ticonderoga does not.

Bill Gillespie
Cambridge, MA

What's all this about a VLS during the Battle of Couperns? Okay, we neglected to inform folks it was the USS Couperns. Now that you've thoroughly embarrassed us about the cover, how did you like the rest of the issue?

A ROM-ING MIND

I have not yet upgraded to CD-ROM (soon!) and there is something which has been puzzling me—and, I expect, others.

One CD holds as much as many (450?) floppies, and my understanding has been that games then play directly from the disk, thus saving your hard drive from being filled up. (I know that many games transfer a little bit of information to the hard drive, and that some games use the CD

only as a transfer medium—such games thus offer no advantage over their floppy version, I suppose.)

Now, I read that some games are coming on more than one CD: WING COMMANDER III apparently uses four. My question is: how do you play them? Since the computer only holds one CD at a time, what happens

when the game needs information which is stored on one of the disks not in the machine? Do you interrupt the game to change disks? Surely these mega-games don't transfer all of the data to the hard drive—what hard drive would be big enough?

By the way, your December issue was nonpareil. The

guides to hardware will be of great use to all of us faced with upgrades—and who isn't, these days? But I was a bit surprised that in your surveys of upcoming games you did not mention the mission disk (#2) for PAVATEER. BUT, even Origin themselves didn't mention it in their recent flyer advertising their latest products. Is it vaporware?

Brian A. Libby

Come on over here Brian and sit on Grandpa's knee. Ya see, back in the olden days of computing, games came on multiple floppy disks and computers didn't have hard drives. So, in order to play these games, you'd have to swap the disks when the games asked you to. Unfortunately, for all the advantages that CDs bring, they also

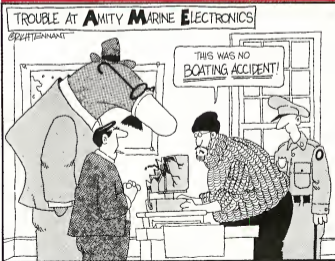
take us back to those disc-swapping days, unless you can afford \$800-\$1,000 for a Pioneer multiple CD drive. As for the PAVATEER Mission Disk #2, our intergalactic spies report that Origin has no intention to release such a disk; however, there is considerable internal discussion about developing a full-blown sequel to PAVATEER.

HATE MAIL TO DIE FOR

Boy, do I detest you! I hate you and all you stand for and everything associated with you!! You get these extremely knowledgeable and accurate writers to preview/review games in such a trustworthy manner that I don't give games with poor reviews a second look. And games that are given good

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



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reviews (4 "stars" and above), I feel compelled to buy.

I've been reading your magazine for over two years now. My addiction has grown to where I *have* to buy your magazine every month and read it cover-to-cover! I don't smoke, drink or do drugs. Thanks a lot for introducing me to my only addiction... besides my wife, that is.

With the dozens of boring PC and game magazines out there, thanks to the entire staff at *CGW* for consistently putting out *THE WORLD'S BEST MAGAZINE!* *CGW* has recognized a seemingly little known fact...that is, for many...the only reasons to upgrade is to play games. Last month, that was my main reason for moving my 386 to the attic. Let's face it, one doesn't need a 486/66 with 17" monitor, double-spin CD-ROM, joystick, one-half gigabyte drive and 16-bit sound card to process words! Virtually, every aspect of your magazine is SVGA—(Sensational, Vibrant, Grandiose, Awesome).

My New Year's Wish, as requested from *CGW* #125's questionnaire—a new feature I'd like to see in *CGW* 1995—profiles on your writers, editors, etc., what are their technical backgrounds, favorite games, home towns and such? But, then again, how do you improve perfection?

Wishing you continued success and all the best in the new year.

R. Wayne Gilmour
Clarence Creek, Ontario,
CANADA

Easy, Wayne! You can knit yourself gushing that much. As for the contributor profiles, are you aware of how many pages our editor-in-chief's profile alone would take up? Perhaps we will put him on a diet and give your suggestion some serious consideration.



IT'S MYST OUTSIDE MY WINDOWS

Broderbund Software, Inc. Product Manager Matt O'Hara's response to a *CGW* letter writer, regarding *MYST* MPC version game design anomalies, was appreciated, and in particular, the company's offer to replace the affected CDs (#125 *CGW*, 12/94). However, game anomalies aside, my experience with the Windows version has been less than stellar, due to frequent system lock-ups and general protection faults.

Contrary to system requirements as stated on the box, no mention is made of Windows *FOR WORKGROUPS* 3.11 special circumstance that requires changing 386 Enhanced section settings by disabling 32-bit file access, and restarting Windows each time before running the game. Additionally, screen savers must be disabled and, if running with 65,000 color resolution, changing back to 256 colors. (The initial setup also requires loading updated Sound Blaster drivers and files, which fortunately, are provided on the CD.) These system configuration changes, each and every time the game is played, are in my opinion beyond the scope of novice computer users, as is the case of my wife, who refuses to deal with the hassle and thus, will not play the game. Even if she was capable, the frequent system hang-ups and/or general protection faults are a further detriment to the potential enjoyment of game play. I know

it was for me. For the record, I ran the game on a 486 DX2/50 VLB system that meets MPC-2 requirements and then some. From a graphics, plot and play function standpoint, *MYST* is one great game. But, the platform flaws kill it for joy of playability.

As for the magazine itself, the December issue was outstanding! Especially informative and useful was the assemblage of hardware articles covering sound card wave table daughter boards and graphics cards. Nuts and bolts like these complement gamer needs for game play, satisfaction and enjoyment. Thanks to all concerned and keep up the good work!

Vernon Craig
Flint, MI

Apparently, our mention of the Windows conversion of MYST tormented a nerve among several readers. You weren't the only one to write us about encountering technical difficulties in MYST, but we hope that sharing your experiences may help a few of our readers know some of the reasons behind the conflicts they may have been having.

CYBERCIDE

If I never see another game with "cyber" somewhere in the title or the generic definition, it will be too soon. I'd like you to publish a regular column making a mockery of anything with "cyber" in it.

Peter Hickman
Raleigh, NC

We suppose this means you didn't like the Johnny Mnemonic story in this issue. Ah, well. Take solace in the fact that famed science fiction writer Norman Spinrad proclaimed cyberpunk dead over four years ago.

TIMELY OBSERVATION

As a computer gamer who hates all real-time games, I would love to see some indication added to all reviews, now playings, and articles related to games as to whether said game is real-time or phased (turn-based). I will not buy nor play a real-time game. I depend on *CGW* heavily for any info I can get before I buy anything. Thanks!

P.M. Patterson
Merriam, KS

We're well aware that there's a split among gamers between those who love real-time and those who don't. We even have a split opinion on the staff. You can be sure that if a game is real-time, we'll be very up-front about it in our coverage.

SWINGIN' ON 5 1/2 STARS

*(To be sung to the tune of "Swingin' on a Star") A scapegoat's an animal that must take the fall, he gets blamed for anything at all... Unfortunately, we don't have a scapegoat for the two 5 1/2 star errors that so many of you noticed in *CGW* #126. Our graphics template had 5 1/2 stars as its default because it was apparently easier to delete the stars than to add them. Unfortunately, too games received impossibly high 5 1/2 star ratings on a five star scale when the template was not adjusted. We goofed. End of story. Please forgive the misprint that gave impossible ratings to *RISE OF THE ROBOTS* (should have been two stars) and *BATTLE ISLE 2200* (should have been three stars).*

THE EDITORS SPEAK

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

RATING ★★☆☆☆ 1/2

PROS Comprehensive coverage, solid reviews by experienced gamers, ultra-realistic flight model.

CONS Ratings have silly squashed-bug "star" symbols. Too big to read in one sh—, er, sitting.

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READ.ME

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GAMING WORLD

The Hero, The Mechanoid, The Cowpoke, And The Dick

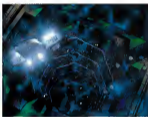
Meet New World's Eclectic Cast For '95

From the depths of the ocean to the frozen reaches of space, from the distant mists of fantasy to the far future battles of mechanized monsters, New World Computing has assembled another eclectic lineup for gamers this year.

The company's showcase strategy game is **HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC**, the spiritual descendant of **KING'S BOUNTY**, **HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC** is a fantasy strategy game that looks a bit like **MASTER OF MAGIC** on a diet. New World plans to release it sometime around March.

From there we dive into **WETLANDS**, a graphically stunning action-adventure hybrid designed by a talented group of artists known as **Hypnotix**. In an underwater Atlantean universe, a spreading virus threatens to wipe out the civilization. Players fill the role of a psychic detective trying to stop it. **New World** tells us that the adventure game sequences will be connected by running and vehicle action scenes similar to those in **LucasArts' REBEL ASSAULT**.

New World is also working on a project with the prolific game developers at **SimTex**



WET WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT Players race to save an underwater civilization in **New World's Wetlands**.

Software. Headed by Steve Bacula, the rising star designer of **MASTER OF ORION** and **MASTER OF MAGIC**, **SimTex** is building **MECH WAR**, a real-time wargame in the "mech" genre. Look for battling teams of anthropomorphized steel in the second quarter of this year.

Meanwhile, those eagerly awaiting the next great galactic



roundup will be happy to learn that **SPACEWARD HO!** 4.0 is almost ready to lasso. **Delta Tao**, developers of the wild and

woolly **SPACEWARD HO!**, are finishing up the new Macintosh version for a February release. This tongue-in-cheek game of "How the West(ern Spiral Arm of The Galaxy) was Won" will have the same basic structure of the original game, with several new additions. Investments in technology have made possible two new ship classes (tanker, dreadnought), two new star classes, and a revamped diplomatic model. **HO!** 4.0, like its predecessor, will support multi-player network games, but now humans will be allowed to send real e-mail messages to facilitate the



KNAVES IN THE WOODS **Heroes Of Might & Magic** features a **Knave's** **Boomer**-style combat (above) and a new strategic map (left).

formation of alliances and dirty back-stabbing ploys. A hardly turn clock will help pick up the pace of network play. **New World** says the 4/4 Windows scouts have

enough fuel to hit retailers in April. Owners of 1/1 versions of **SPACEWARD HO!** will be offered a special discount to scrap their old model and trade up.

Finally, **New World** President **Jon Van Caneghem** is working on the design for the next game in the epic **MIGHT AND MAGIC** role-playing series, tentatively titled **MIGHT AND MAGIC 6**. He is doing the basic design work while two authors from **Del Rey's** ranks are working on the storyline. The game is still early in the design stage, but **New World** has told us that they plan to

create a free-scrolling, 3-D environment for the adventure. Big deal, you say? Well, perhaps not, but **New World** is trying something that has not yet been attempted with 3-D RPGs—bringing back the party of adventurers. Has anyone noticed how lonely these 3-D RPGs have been without the barbarian out in front of the party and the magic users/archers in the back ranks? **New World** hopes to implement a party system with turn-based combat. But don't expect to see the vanguard of this party until sometime in '95.

Riding High On Wing III, Origin Begins Plans For Wing Com IV

With WING COMMANDER III barely off the flight deck, the initial buzz is so positive that Origin Systems is already reported to be moving forward with plans for WING COMMANDER IV. Sources at Origin say they will complete WING COMMANDER IV more quickly, because it will build upon WING COMMANDER III's existing technology, just as the second WING COMMANDER was built upon the original game. Origin could release the program by



Christmas of 1995, but Origin's David Swofford, Public Relations Director, said that it is too early to confirm any release date for the project. Instead, he cautioned that even a sequel using existing technology still depends upon: delivery of an acceptable script, efficient filming and post-production, and potential negotiations with on-screen talent.

WING III producer Chris Roberts is expected to serve

PLAYING LATELY?

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



Results for CGW #125, December 1994

1. Doom (id Software)
2. X-Com: UFO Defense (MicroProse)
3. Master of Magic (MicroProse)
4. TIE Fighter (LucasArts)
5. Colonization (MicroProse)
6. Aces of the Deep (Dynamix)
7. Front Page Sports Football '95 (Sierra)
8. MetalTech: Earthsiege (Sierra)
9. Panzer General (SSI)
10. Under A Killing Moon (Access)

"There are so many DOOM wannabes around that I can't remember what the Hell DOOM was like."

Lost with a shotgun, Sacramento, CA

"MASTER OF MAGIC is another hit for MicroProse and another sleepless night for me."

Brad Gejer, Morton, IL

"Thanks to Dynamix for a truly exceptional, fun submarine simulation in ACES OF THE DEEP."

Ed Eisler, Mission Viejo, CA

"My wife recently gave me an ultimatum:

Notable Quotes

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

"Either I go or you give up FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL. PRO! Well..."

*Michael Crutcher,
Phoenix, AZ*

"It's been a long dry spell for SSI, but I think they finally got it right with PANZER GENERAL."

Derek Hight, Hawthorne, CA

"I agree COLONIZATION does get long because of micro-management, but it is still a good game. X-COM is still the best game I've played in '94."

Mike Dorn, Leviston, MI

as Executive Producer for the next game with veteran television/software producer Mark Day, and Dallas Snell acting as co-producers in leading the project day-to-day. Asked if any of the cast

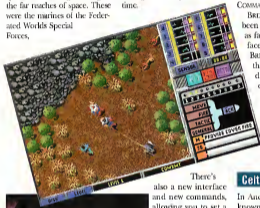
members from WING COMMANDER III were already signed for the next game, Swofford indicated that he was not privy to the contracts. He did indicate, however, that there were current nego-

tiations in place with some of the existing cast members. The good news for WING COMMANDER fans is that the next project appears to be on target for a delivery much sooner than most expected.

Breach 3

Long before X-COM squadfies were squashing aliens in Algeria, there were other teams of space marines bug hunting in the far reaches of space. These were the marines of the Federated Worlds Special Forces,

action takes place in quasi-real-time: multiple soldiers can move simultaneously while the clock is running, but the clock can be stopped and orders changed at any time.



ONCE MORE INTO... Breach 3 will bring a new slant to xenophobia, but it may not thrill X-COM vets.

and theirs was the game system called BREACH.

BREACH was a tactical, turn-based, squad-level game that gathered something of a cult following after Impressions Software released it in 1987. The game underwent one revision in BREACH 2, and now another in BREACH 3, although its basic structure remains the same. Players still role-play as a squad leader whose rank and skills improve with continued success in combat. But now the

There's also a new interface and new commands, allowing you to set a marine's speed (walk, run, dash) and his or her firing posture (hold fire, return fire, fire at will). Of course, the marines might not follow your orders to a "t" since they each have their own personality and will respond accordingly in combat. Other new features allow marines to follow one another, making movement a little easier, and the ability to call for artillery support in a pinch.

One of the secrets of BREACH's fanatical following was its inclusion of scenario creation tools, and BREACH 3 upholds this fine tradition. Players can now design their own fire-fights from the introductory scenario animation (using anims from a stock supply) to the last mission objec-

tive, and then string these scenarios together in campaigns with win/loss branches as in WING COMMANDER.

BREACH games have always been slightly behind the times as far as graphics and interface go, and this is true of BREACH 3. Players used to the large, articulating soldiers and slick interface of X-COM will probably not be very impressed with it, but those willing to sacrifice looks for scenario creation power may want to enlist for a tour of duty.

Celtic Tales

In Ancient Ireland, they were known as "the good people," the Tuath De Danan, and the Marra Shee. They are the heroes of old—known as giants, fallen angels, men and fairies, depending on the story or the tradition. In CELTIC TALES: BALOR OF THE EVIL EYE, Koei allows you to re-create the legends of the Emerald Isle by mixing together some of the standard game mechanics of both strategy games and role-playing games.

The game begins with the selection of a tribal ruler. Kudos to Koei for allowing you to select either a male or female ruler—after all, there are both patriarchal and matriarchal tendencies within the Irish. Then, you move your character around on a screen that looks similar to the isometric playing fields of POPULOUS and POWERMONGER. You use an iconic interface to choose whether to farm, herd live-

stock, perform magic, create magical items, harvest trees, forge weapons, practice hurling (a Gaelic sport akin to field hockey), construct buildings, and explore other provinces.

In many ways, CELTIC TALES is like other Koei games. It places you in an ancient era, gives you a legendary persona and requires you to build up the economy and population of a historical geography until you are strong enough to defeat your enemies and unite the entire gameboard. Unlike previous games, however, this one features both clear-cut enemies to be defeated and natural allies to be united. Further, the rune-based magic system that allows you to cast spells adds an interesting touch with its dozen combat spells and four beneficial spells.

The options are essentially the same as in earlier games. However, the menu structures are well-integrated in graphic screens. Should you want to send tribute or go to war, you double-click on the location of your stronghold. A picture of a castle throneroom opens, and clicking on various objects lets you perform the desired tasks. If you want to recruit a new hero, you double-click on the hut and you are confronted with a picture of heroes around a table. If a hero is available, you encounter said hero in brief conversation. To create an item for your use or for trade, just double click on the town and choose the correct option from the hot spots figured on-screen.

In short, CELTIC TALES is a refined presentation of the traditional Koei strategy game in

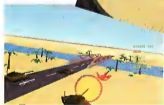


SILICON SHILLELAGH *Kool's Celtic Tux* features lots of heroes and villains, while generously blending history and myth.

an occidental rather than oriental milieu. It offers more variety and detail than the earlier games, but may suffer from an over-designed interface.

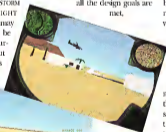
Tank Commander

What do you get when you combine *Psygnosis'* arcade space-shooter *NOVA* and *Domark's* *FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT*? Wags may answer that it would be something like a turret-mounted 747, but the real answer is **TANK COMMANDER**.



STORM THAT BEACHFRONT PROPERTY You can lead the fight in *Tank Commander* from the traditional third-person, or a more "up close and personal" view.

TANK COMMANDER, from *Domark*, allows you to search and destroy armored vehicles as the leader of an elite panzer squadron amidst texture-mapped desert sand dunes, valleys, and arctic tundras. Although the version we played was an early beta, we were able to see enough to realize that if all the design goals are met,



including network and modem play, this game is loaded with potential. **TANK COMMANDER** will consist of 40 different missions

with varying objectives, in which panzer generals can switch between several different vehicles in the heat of the battle, *a la* *Three-Sixty Pacific's* *SANDS OF FIRE*. If you don't like the looks of your T-72, you'll be able to instantly switch to an M-1 Abrams, or even a jeep or motorbike. In addition to switching between tanks, there are also a number of "in-vehicle" views, including turret view, gunner view, chase view, and helicopter view. A radar screen and tactical map provide instant readouts of the locations of enemy forces and geographical features.

In this age of Voxel-Spacing and 3-D-rendered graphics, we were concerned that *Tank Commander's* polygon-based graphics might look dated, but the game's texture mapping provides a great sense of realism and is so attractive that, at times, it looks like non-playable animation. The gameplay looks fast, fun, and easy to learn—we mastered the controls and were blasting away bogies within minutes. Computer tank drivers who want more complexity

in their game will have plenty of "realistic" options, like the ability to rotate the turret independent of the tank body. Also, since gamers will be controlling multiple forces at the same time, there will be some added strategic depth, particularly in the multi-player modes. Although on-line play is often scrapped at the last minute, *Tank Commander's* designers are said to be committed to network and modem play in the final version. We hope that they do, because the capability to play with or against more than one person at a time is high on our network play wish list.

PIPELINE

RECOMMENDED RETAILER PRICES BASED ON THE LATEST PRICES FROM GAME DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME COMPANY	RETAILER PRICE
Absolute Zero: Demark	3/95
Airship: Mindscape	6/95
Battles In Time: OGP	60/95
Beyond Squad Leader	
Avolon: HPI	60/95
BioForge: Origin	2/95
Keyboard Avolon: HPI	61/95
Blood Bowl: MicroLeague	2/95
Breach 3: Impressions	2/95
Barca: 13 GameTek	01/95
Celebrity Poker: New World	3/95
Civil War: Empire	2/95
Command & Conquer: Virgin	4/95
Daggerfall: Bethesda	3/95
Eclipse II: New World	5/95
Frontier: First Encounter	
GameTek	01/95
Full Throttle: LucasArts	2/95
Goblins 4: Sierra	2/95
Great Naval Battles 3: SSI	2/95
Hornet: Sierra	5/95
Hercules: Night & Magic	
New World	3/95
High Seas: Trader Impressions	2/95
Jagged Alliance: Sir Tech	3/95
Lands of Lore 2: Virgin	01/95
Lords of Midnight: Demark	01/95
Lost Admiral 2: OGP	01/95
Lost Eden: Virgin	1/95
Magic: The Gathering	
MicroPress	6/95
MoonWar: New World	4/95
Navy Strike: MicroPress	3/95
Perfect General 2: OGP	2/95
Perfect World: EA	3/95
Phantasmagoria: Sierra	3/95
Powerhouse: Impressions	3/95
Ravenloft: Slave Prophet: SSI	3/95
Renegade: SSI	1/95
Spaceward: Vol 5.0: New World	2/95
Star Net: Mindscape	4/95
Stonekeep: Interplay	01/94
Tank Commander: Demark	3/95
The Pure: Wargame: OGP	2/95
Third Reich: Avolon: HPI	01/95
Wetlands: New World	5/95
World Croquet 2: MicroPress	01/95
Zero: Capstone	2/95



TRANSPORT TYCOON

Remember playing SIMCITY and wishing that you could actually control the routes of the cute little planes, trains and automobiles that were zipping around the screen? Thanks to TRANSPORT TYCOON, you can finally get that experience. Reminiscent of RAILROAD TYCOON, this game lets you

build a variety of commercial transport systems and give sequentially-based orders to your units ("1-Load at Newbridge, 2-Unload at Wollingsham", etc.). Instead of just having trains at your disposal, though, you'll now have boats, trucks, airplanes, trains and even monorails to dispatch with alacrity. The SVCA, isometric viewpoint provides a clear, attractive, three-dimensional view, although having to raise and lower landscapes before building roads and structures can be a (click and) drag. Another minor nitpick: while computer competitors' AI routines are better than average, we do miss the characters other games like RAILROAD TYCOON and CIVILIZATION have.

These two complaints aside, our initial impression is that TRANSPORT TYCOON is an addictive mover and shaker. IBM CD-ROM, \$59.95. Circle Reader Service #1.

MICROPHONE, HUNT VALLEY, MD, (800) 879-7529



Rail magnates like Vanderbilt would be small fry in the intensely competitive world of Transport Tycoon.

build a variety of commercial transport systems and give sequentially-based orders to your units ("1-Load at Newbridge, 2-Unload at Wollings-

THE LEMMINGS CHRONICLES

Lemmings don't know when to stop, or so goes the popular myth about their cliff diving habits. *Psygnosis* and *DMA Design* seem to have the same problem, as they've released *LEMMINGS CHRONICLES*, the third game in the popular *LEMMINGS* series, and they've radically changed the interface. As in the previous games, players lead a tribe of ditzzy but endearing creatures through levels fraught with peril. But



things are a bit different this time around. Now, the lemmings aren't assigned skills by the player; instead, all the lemmings are generic and acquire

ZEPHYR

Pilots on the Interplanetary Battle Circuit often have a shorter lifespan than mayflies, and advancing on the Battle Circuit is even more brutal. In order to accumulate the highest points, you'll have to dust off the most laps and, more than likely, the most enemies during a six race circuit in your corporate-sponsored Zephyr hovertank. 3-D graphics, incredible sound and lots of humorous, appetizing ex-

tras like race commentators and corporate sponsorships make *ZEPHYR* sound appealing. In spite of all the strategy and tactics, though, the steep learning curve and the, at times, frustratingly fast action may completely overwhelm gamers and turn *ZEPHYR* into a simple arcade shoot-'em-up.

Contrary to New World's advertisements and *Zephyr's* game box, network and modem play are not included. A future patch has been promised, however. IBM CD-ROM,

\$79.95. Circle

Reader Service #2.

NEW WORLD COMPUTING, AGORA HILLS, CA, (800) 325-8898



Who needs corporate lawyers, when you can settle your differences in the hectic counterbalancing world of Zephyr?

The lovable Lilliputians face new dangers in *Lemmings Chronicles*.

skills by picking up tools. While the puzzles are still challenging with this new system, the play seems to have

lost some of its elegance. Other new additions include "monsters" like a vulture that swoops down and rips little lemming heads off, and Potato Beasts

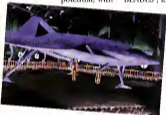
that punch in little lemming teeth. The lemming antics are just as cute, in fact a bit more so since they are a few pixels larger, but the package as a whole was put together with a little less care. *LEMMINGS* lovers may be unable to resist 90 more levels of brain-draining fun, but they should be aware that all is not as blissful as it once was in the land of lemmings. IBM CD-ROM, \$49.99. Circle Reader Service #3.

PSYGNOSIS LTD, CAMBRIDGE MA, (800) 438-7794

LAYING

CYBERIA

The year is 2027, and guess who's been "volunteered" to go to Russia and recover the ultimate doomsday device? **Interplay's** action/adventure hybrid is full of potential, with



Hollywood splash and splendor meets arcade gameplay in *Cyberia*.

futuristic, **Silicon Graphics** imagery and an innovative game design. **CYBERIA** combines puzzle-solving, 3rd person perspective adventuring, and arcade action. The arcade ac-

tion consists of blasting away enemy fighters as your ship flies a predetermined route through Rebel-Assault looking terrain. Get through that and you'll encounter puzzles, roadblocks, and blockheaded enemy guards that will test both your mind and your mouse. Particularly unique is **BLADES**, an image recognition system built into your glasses that detects infrared, bio-

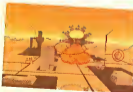
organic, and mechanical footprints. The cinematic graphics give this game lots of style, but we suspect that

some gamers will have little patience with the incredibly high number of times Zak (our cyberpunk hero) will die before finishing the game. IBM CD-ROM, \$79.95. Circle Reader Service #4.

INTERPLAY, IRVINE, CA, (800) 969-4263

INFERNO

Ocean's new combat action adventure is another sci-fi title full of potential, combining great graphics, a great soundtrack, and a compelling storyline. 3-D graphics that reminded us of those *Thunderbirds* puppet shows on television, and cheeky British dialogue like "I just got out of the regeneration chamber, chief, and I feel



like a new man...in more ways than one!" give the game some personality. On the upside, your ship comes

FLIGHT COMMANDER 2

Designer **Charlie Moylan** had long enjoyed playing board games on air combat, and he knew the computer could quickly handle the complex rules of those games. So, he created what is primarily a



No joysticks required—but tough bogies in *Flight Commander 2* may have you reaching for the eject button.

wargame for anyone fascinated by jet-to-jet combat, but who lack the reflexes to fly or patience to learn simulations like **FALCON 3.0**. This new version by **Avalon Hill** features the same game engine as its Macintosh predecessor, and makes good use of Windows, with nary a bug in sight. The graphics have been enhanced, featuring

crisp aircraft silhouettes (which, not surprisingly, resemble cardboard game counters). AH artist **Charlie Kibler** provides gorgeous terrain maps, which some may prefer to flying through empty blue skies or cloud cover. Meanwhile, audio clips like radio chatter, explosions and the roars of afterburners lend a convincing feel to strafing runs and Immelmans. The reference manual gives a good overview of air combat tactics, and the step-by-step tutorials will have even novices taking out

bogies quicker than you can say "check six." Still, even the veteran pilot will find plenty of action in the numerous scenarios, especially since the game will generate random historical missions from Korea in the '50s up to the late 1990s. Five campaigns are included, along with an extensive on-line database. IBM, \$54.95. Circle Reader Service #5.

AVALON HILL GAME COMPANY, BALTIMORE, MD, (800) 999-3222

A pulsating soundtrack drives *Inferno*, the latest British action import from Ocean.

equipped with a bundle of weapons and even has three different autopilot settings. However, the space combat action might take some getting used to and overly sensitive controls will have to be dealt with before you'll be blasting bogies

with any frequency. Also, although the combat graphics are attractive enough in the planetary dogfight sequences, the space combat graphics are so simplistic and two-dimensional that they often remind us of **ELITE**. IBM CD-ROM, \$50.95. Circle Reader Service #6.

OCEAN OF AMERICA, INC., SAN JOSE, CA, (408) 954-0201

Local Gamer Makes Good

CGW Reader Wins Domark Contest And A Job In Game Design

When Joe Marullo read about the flight sim creation tools in **Domark's FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT**, he was immediately moved by creative visions, but not of the Spitfires, Harriers, and Tomcats that the toolkit typically inspires in sim fans. Marullo's mind ran to the stars, and a galaxy far, far away.

Marullo had long been a Star Wars fan. In fact, it was **LucasArt's X-WING** that inspired him to give up his Amiga and buy an IBM computer. Hooked on X-WING, he snatched up the **IMPERIAL PURSUIT** and **B-WING** expansion disks as fast as LucasArts could create them.

"LucasArts seemed to be taking their Star Wars games in the same direction as the movies, using the expansion disks to fill in the gaps between each film," Marullo says. *"The Empire Strikes Back* was my favorite of the trilogy, and the battle between the Imperial and Rebel troops on the ice planet Hoth was a scene I could watch a million times."

He eagerly looked forward to fighting in that battle in the next game of the series. But when LucasArts announced that the next game, **TIE FIGHTER**, would skip his favorite scene and begin immediately after the Battle of Hoth, he felt cheated: "I'd be lying if I said I

wasn't a little upset," he said.

Then he read a magazine article about **FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT** and how its 3D shape editor could be used to create and pilot functional jets and tanks on any type of terrain. "I questioned why tanks had to look like tanks, and planes like jets," said

shipped his creation a week before the contest deadline.

Domark received a full recreation of the Battle of Hoth in which the player flies a Rebel Snow Speeder. Marullo had created a complete soundtrack and sound effects package by splicing in sounds from the movies, and he had created shapes for every character and craft in the scene, from the Millennium Falcon to the Rebel-mounted TonTon creatures to Darth Vader and his Stormtrooper escorts. The player's Snow Speeder could even fire a grappling hook to trip the AT-ATs, just as Luke Skywalker did in the film.

"Everyone at Domark was amazed," recalls spokesman Paul Baldwin. "Joe had done things that we thought were only remotely possible."

Marullo won the contest handily and was given the grand prize: a trip to the Farnborough Air Show in England and a visit to the offices of SIMIS, the developers of **FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT**. While in England, Marullo was offered a game development job in Domark's California offices.

Although he found it hard to leave family and friends in Florida, Marullo accepted and shipped out to the Golden State. He is now working on Domark's upcoming space combat game, **ABSOLUTE ZERO**.

"So what do you know," mused Marullo. "Sometimes dreams do come true after all."



HELL HOTH NO FURY A scene from Joe Marullo's prize-winning FST design of the Battle of Hoth.

Marullo. "Why couldn't the terrain look like a ball of ice, where Rebel troops fought impossible odds against Imperial war machines?"

He bagged FST first thing the next morning.

Marullo began working on his dream game, slowly learning the FST tools and building more and more complex 3D shapes. His first completed shape was a giant Imperial AT-AT "walker," which he learned how to animate in a program that doesn't offer animation.

For the next few months, Marullo worked feverishly on the "Hoth" project, and as the deadline drew closer, his life consisted of nothing but "Hoth-Work-Sleep." He finished and

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Computer Gaming World

"I can't think of any reason why every DOOM nut won't flock to this game. It's beautiful, fast, and challenging."

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"Blistering action and a sense of humor make Rise of the Triad one of the year's favorites."

Computer Game Review

Who are we to argue?

RISE OF THE TRIAD

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Rebel Scum Don't Stand A Chance With New TIE Fighter Strat Books

LucasArts' *TIE FIGHTER* is one of the hottest action games of the year. It comes as no surprise, then, that publishers are launching strategy guides like proton torpedoes.

The Fully Authorized Battle Manual for Imperial Pilots, from Brady, is probably the flashiest of these. With about 140 glossy, magazine-sized pages, this guide's high graphic flair puts an issue of *Wired* to shame. Unfortunately, style seems to come first here, and author Corey Sandler's tips tend to get lost amidst the graphics. Without the glitz, you get somewhat less than 50 pages of hard information.

After 40-odd pages equivalent to the game instructions, each mission is given a big glossy page, with a couple of relevant screen shots from the mission, a list of friends and foes, some general advice on what to look out for, and a list of mission objectives. Apart from the advice paragraph and listing of secret mission objectives, there is very little here that a gamer could not get from the game itself. It may be authorized and extremely pretty, but it falls short on usefulness.

In *Tie Fighter: The Official Strategy Guide*, substance takes a clear priority. The book, written by well-known authors Russel DeMaria, David Westman and David Maxwell, comes in at a hefty 400 pages. The first 40 pages are spent going over the basic tools and

maneuvers available to a pilot. Then, lengthy tables detail and compare the various craft encountered in the game. Readers are guided through each mission by young Imperial pilot Maarek Stele, who provides a kind of storyline to the game's linked scenarios. Stele also offers a kind of Cliff's Notes for each scenario, telling the player what button to push, which direction to go and what ships to blow up for optimal success. Finally, it finishes off with a 125-page appendix, de-

scribing every single ship group to be encountered in the course of the game, along with its weapons load, tactics and starting position.

Prima's guide may be a little thick for the casual player. Also, players who rely on Maarek Stele's play-by-



play could end up feeling that they are being flown instead of the fighter.

The 64 Gigabyte QUESTION?

What kind of a game would you design if there were literally no limitations? We wondered the same thing and we asked some prominent computer game designers, "With unlimited computing resources, an unlimited budget and no user hardware constraints, what kind of interactive experience would you create?"

This month we take flight with Larry Holland, designer of such classics as *THEIR FINEST HOUR*, *SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE*, *X WING* and *TIE FIGHTER*. Watch this space each month for a different designer's answer.

"I would create a high-fidelity virtual world experience that would satisfy my penchant for exploring the Earth.

Based in a scientific research vessel with the freedom and capability to move through the entire span of Earth's history, over any geography and operate on any scale down to the molecular level, the player could travel to his/her favorite world. This 'fantastic voyage' craft would have the unique power to 'morph' its size and functions to the needs of the current environment. It could change to a heat-resistant craft capable of flying down the neck of an erupting volcano, or to a thin protective skin that thinly covers one's body. Given this free range of movement, complete protection from any environmental hazards and the power to study and experience any event from close-up, all that remains



is to create an immense detailed database of places and times to explore.

I would start by creating an environment database for Lake Turkana in Northern Kenya about 1.5 million years ago, with the intention of joining a band of proto-humans as they struggle for survival on the African savannah.

Next, I would create a world from the scale as an insect sees it, and fly into a beehive...

Then, recreate the Trojan war..."

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GAMES Magazine—“You'll forget you're playing on a two-dimensional computer screen... the realism is astonishing.”

MacUser—“Electronic pinball's Holy Grail.” (Rating: 4 1/2 out of 5)

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

MACINTOSH: 13" or larger monitor, 256 colors, and 4MB RAM.

WINDOWS: 386 or faster processor, Windows 3.1, 256 SVGA monitor, 4MB RAM. Supports SoundBlaster® and other Windows compatible sound cards.



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JOHNNY MNEMONIC

Jack Into The Dark, Futuristic World Of William Gibson. JOHNNY MNEMONIC Looks Like A Feature Film And Plays Like Nothing You've Ever Seen.

by Johnny L. Wilson and Ken Brown

SNEAK PREVIEW!

DATA—THE IDEAL CONTRABAND. DATA—GOLDEN VEINS OF BINARY FILES MAINLINED INTO THE bitstream for profit, power, prestige. Ideas and unlimited knowledge packed into the bookah pipe of the net, sucked out by cyberjunkies jacking in for a fix. Data—power liberating and corruptible. The symbol of our time and the dark, near future.

When vital information can be stolen

remotely or corrupted by viruses, where is it safe? Maybe in your head. Maybe in the head of someone willing to be implanted with silicon storage and precious cargo, for a price. A biological data unit.

When William Gibson wrote "Johnny Mnemonic" back in 1981, he postulated just such a carrier. His cyberspace-capable, circuit-headed courier of the future, the Johnny of the title, shuttles the building blocks of empire between the information pambrokers of a dismal future.

Johnny uses his head to get ahead. Ahead, that is, until a capricious code broker opts to dispense with Johnny rather than pay him. Then, he's in danger of losing his head entirely.

Such is the shadow world of information smuggling in which Gibson's short story takes place. The dark, dehumanized world of an all-too-possible near future: A world whose images of deadly data and info assassins will be artistically splashed across both theater and computer screens

by mid-1995. Thanks to the persistence of visual artist and video director Robert Longo, Gibson's haunting vision will reach the big screen—complete with elaborate multi-million dollar sets. Thanks to the vision of Sony Imagesoft and some high-powered directing and writing talent, quite a different experience will be available to computer gamers.

In the theatrical presentation, you'll sit in a darkened theater in a dream-like trance and watch Keanu Reeves portray Johnny on the silver screen. In the computer experience, you will find yourself pulled *into* the screen. You cannot passively observe the lesser-known actor who plays Johnny; you must direct him. Left, right and forward through the video stream—you control the action. If the on-screen focus shifts to an object, you direct Johnny to use it. When pro basketball star Kurt Rambis (aka "Superman") looms menacingly over our hero enough to completely fill the screen, you direct Johnny to punch, kick or block Rambis' fists. Both "Johnny Mnemonic" as presented on film, but they are entirely different experiences.

JACK-IN THEATRE

The first thing you notice about the CD-ROM version of JOHNNY MNEMONIC is that it looks like watching a movie on a PC. It might be a little pixelated, but the video plays full-screen, using new Quicktime 2.0 compression software. Johnny, played convincingly by Christopher Gartin, wakes up in his apartment and soon lapses into haunting flashbacks. You soon realize why he has a lot on his mind—he was implanted with information that will kill him within 24 hours if he doesn't upload it. Johnny better get moving.

And move he does. This game rockets along like a good Ridley Scott film, characters rushing from room to room, place to place, getting in fights, racing from gun-battles, and trying to survive in a kaleidoscopic spectacle befitting a Gibson vision. And all the while you are interacting with it, deciding where to go, when to jack in, and instantly changing the course of the

game in ways both subtle and profound. The game play sucks you into a freaky movie-game gestalt you never thought possible, but sure don't mind experiencing.

Though Johnny gets in fights, he is no meekball. As in the short story, he is a very technical boy, finding strange electronic gadgets and pocketing them for later use. These can take the form of multi-language readers, VR glasses, sim/stim-style implant devices and other toys, all of



JOHNNY & JANE Johnny gets a real kick out of unwelcome visitors. Fortunately, his tattooed bodyguard Jane helps keep him out of trouble, sometimes. These scenes were shot during the game's filming.

which enhance the game's futuristic feel and give Johnny a rogue hacker mystique.

OPEN FILE

When computer games are spun off of major motion pictures, the development path is usually more complex than the traces on a circuit board. JOHNNY MNEMONIC is no exception, having begun

device known to man, they own Columbia Pictures and Tri-Star Productions, the latter of which is releasing the movie. Starting to get the picture?

Once Sony Imagesoft decided to produce a game based on the movie, they hired an experienced film unit to shoot all new footage just for the game. In this way, they wouldn't have to work around the movie's production schedule, or pay stratospheric rates for show-biz talent.



TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES The leader of the La Teks (Isaac Hayes) breaks into news broadcasts to warn the hacker community of a deadly viral threat.

life as a video game first and then a PC game. Most computer game publishers couldn't afford the rights to a feature film property, but Sony Imagesoft is a game developer like no other. The parent corporation not only makes every electronic

Sony didn't script when it came to selecting a production outfit, though. Propaganda Films, the leading-edge company chosen to film the game, is notable for filming the movie *Wild At Heart*, as well as producing high-end TV commercials for AT&T, Coca-Cola and Nike.

Propaganda Films, by no small coincidence, was moving toward the multimedia film business themselves and had formed a unit called Propaganda Code. The result is that Propaganda not only shot the footage but also developed the code for DOS, Macintosh, and MPEG-capable machines (equipped with a Reel Magic card). Playing JOHNNY MNEMONIC on an MPEG-equipped machine promises to be so perfectly crisp it will make even non-gamers sit up and bark to be able to play.

Propaganda Code procured the now defunct Ambassador Hotel for their 15 days of camera work. The hotel infamous for the assassination of Robert Kennedy was transformed by Jean Philippe Carp, designer for the film *Delicatessen*. Carp's wild adornments include aquarium end-table lamps whose occupants cast moving shadows on the walls and neon-adorned vid-screens that give the set its distinctly futuristic look.

Using an original script by writers Douglas Gayeton and John Platten, the actors and production crew did 70 camera setups per day (compared to approximately six per day for a feature film) to capture

the 145 page script. Producers Mary Ann Norris and Connie Booth supervised the project and tracked the myriad details to ensure continuity in the game. Norris credits Gayeton's directorial sense and Platten's gaming sense with much of the success in producing the project. Platten's *TOMCAT ALLEY* was a best-selling Sega CD game in '94.

FILE DESCRIPTION

The team of writers and producers didn't want *JOHNNY MNEMONIC* to be a conventional shooter or a passive viewing experience. Instead, they wanted players to relive the Johnny Mnemonic experience through three modes: exploratory, action and combat. Producer Norris, a graduate of MIT's media lab, didn't want an obtrusive cursor or conversational interface popping up in the middle of the video and spoiling both the pacing and the suspension of disbelief. Her solution was elegant. She would use the letterboxing technique familiar to many film buffs (the black frame that surrounds the film itself when a non-standard-sized display format is used) to indicate Windows Of Opportunity (WOOs). Whenever a WOO would appear on-screen, the video would be flowing continuously at the same pace, but it would give the player a chance to interact.



FEMME BRUTALE Jane's vicious fight with Pretty is entirely interactive, like all of the fight scenes in the game.

Within the game context, you can always direct which way Johnny needs to go. If the video should suddenly appear in letterbox format during the exploratory mode, you have a chance to do something. You can USE an object and,

depending on the object, you may get a clue necessary to solve some of the simple puzzles in the game or solve a puzzle merely by using that object. For example, if you have found the translator device prior to finding the Chinese FAX, you will be able to USE the translator on the



GIBSON GIRL Depicted holographically in her boss's office, Pretty is a somewhat synthetic kinesthetic deconstructionist (otherwise known as a bodyguard) for Johnny's treacherous data broker.

FAX and gather vital information. To make things more interesting, however, the objects and other characters do not always show up in the same order. There is enough randomness to keep you off guard for a few playings.

If you are in combat mode and the view changes to a letterboxed view of your antagonist, you have the opportunity to punch, block or kick. In most games using streamed video or animation, you merely need to memorize the order and timing of these moves and you can win the fight every time. In *JOHNNY MNEMONIC*, the hot-spots change enough that you cannot win the fight by memorizing the moves. You must react as though you were in the situation, yourself—waiting for the optimal moment and choosing from your limited options. The combat sequences certainly offer a different feel to combat than all those animated, hori-

zontal-scrolling fighting games. With the video, it suddenly becomes personal.

The action mode features a wider field of vision in which you have to move quickly to get to a usable object (thus, shifting to combat mode) or find an exit through which you can escape. This mode

generally occurs when you've spent too long exploring one place or you inadvertently kick a tripwire leading to the bad guys. This is the mode that will really make you feel like you're trapped in a movie and have to do something to get out. It's an extremely interesting perspective.

FILE SUMMARY

The one incontrovertible feeling about *JOHNNY MNEMONIC* is that the pace won't let up. Just as it is vital for the Johnny of story

and film to solve his dilemma within very restrictive time constraints, so does the pacing of the computer experience force you to keep moving, thinking, watching and reacting. When the game controls were first described to me, I didn't think there could possibly be enough to do in order to keep me playing the game. I was wrong. The continuous video stream and the constant assortment of action opportunities kept pulling me in deeper.

Whether the combat mode will be satisfying to hard-core gamers remains to be seen. I liked feeling that my tactics were impacting the fight on-screen and enjoyed replaying those which were available to me at press time. I do think that the four distinct endings and the possibility of winning in more than one way will add to the game's depth and mystique. But, as in many adventure games, replayability may be limited.

What I do know is that the game looks different and feels different than any computer game experience I've ever had. If the interactive movie concept has any validity at all, *JOHNNY MNEMONIC* is a watershed product. Within the limits of digitized video, it puts you as close to Gibson's dark future vision as you can probably get without injecting a chip into your skull. ☺

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Take Ten Steps,

Tired Of Beating Up On That Bits-For-Brains Computer Opponent? Take On A Real Challenge By Taking On Real Opponents In Network-And Modem-Capable Games

by Martin E. Cirulis

There are many odd things about the world of computer games, but one of the oddest is the fact so much time is spent discussing something that doesn't really exist. No, no, I'm not talking about *Champions*, the CRPG; I'm talking about something that probably will not be achieved in the lifetime of anybody reading this article—the true computer game Artificial Intelligence (AI). Though there have been valiant attempts to refer to this maligned field of programming as the Computer Opponent, or Artificial Opponent, the term AI has stuck. And this in spite of the fact that, even though it is artificial, there is no way that intelligence has anything to do with the situation. At best, all of us have been competing against primitive (mostly) expert systems, no smarter than the rig some mechanics use to diagnose your car's ills. While computer games continue to expand in power, glory and detail, the science of providing a strong opponent to make things interesting for the human player has lagged far behind. In fact, you could make a pretty good case for the fact that things

aren't much different than the good ol' days of M.U.L.E., when it comes to computer players.

Not that this is really anybody's fault. Contrary to various overly optimistic magazine articles, modeling human thought is fiendishly difficult. It's not easy to make a working model of something when you're not very sure how it works. Now, game designers have never claimed to have made the greatest computing breakthrough since IBM said, "Hey, what if we put holes in the cards *before* we run them through the machine!", but the use of the term AI has given rise to unfair expectations. Some gamers are crying over something that often can't be helped. So, in the interests of fairness, and to set the record straight, here's *The Law of Opposites*: "No computer opponent will ever be as interesting to play as a human one." The sooner this is realized and accepted, the sooner great games will stop falling short by only having a single player mode.

Of course, once you have gotten into human competition, the question is how to pull it off. Sure, "hot seating" (taking turns at the same computer) is fine for sequential turn wargames, though you can wear out a couple of computer chairs before a five-player game of WARLORUS II is over, but any game involving real-time or simultaneous turns is right out on a

Illustrations by Brian Clarke



Turn, And Dial

single computer. There have been some valiant attempts at split-screening and shared keyboards, but these are ad-hoc solutions at best. For true human vs. human competition, each mammal really needs its own computer.

"That's great, Mr. Wizard, but how do you put two computers together?" I can hear you asking, out there in PC-Land.

Well, currently, and probably far into the future, there are three ways to connect computers in the realm of gaming. The first two are our old kissing cousins, The Modem and The Serial Port, and they have been around almost as long as Computer Gaming herself. There have been and will continue to

be wildly successful modem games, but the problem is that modems and serial ports are only two-way connections—leaving the hobby without much of an edge over board games, except that our pictures move. The third type of connectivity is called Networking. No, I'm not talking about gathering together a bunch of yuppies over cappuccino. Networking is when two or many more computers link up and share systems with one another.

Regardless of what demographics say about the lone gamer and the lack of two computer households, the industry seems to have finally figured out that humans enjoy competing against other humans and that we are willing to go a little out of our way to do it. For those of you who missed this trend, and are just thinking about getting connected and are wondering what you missed, I'll be going over all the Network-capable games published to date, as well as some of the more popular Modem/Serial titles.

WEBWARS (NETWORK GAMES)

Networking has been around a long time, but it was once purely the domain of dreaded business software, since usually it was only businesses who had more than one PC at a time in the same area. So, while network technology offered the greatest potential for group computer gaming, it was largely ignored.

Ignored until there came a little game you might have heard of...DOOM.

Yes, DOOM, a game that surely would have been a huge successor to the old WOLFENSTEIN 3-D even if it had remained a single player shoot-em-up. But those wonderful kids at id Software added something that guaranteed its passage into gaming legend—they made DOOM networkable, up to four players. And with the explosion of DOOM came not only a horde of clones, but a burst of interest in networking by the industry. In '93 there were only three titles with network capability; in '94 that jumped by ten and '95 promises to be even better.

Many of the titles I'll be discussing benefit greatly from what I've come to call *Martin's First Law of Networking*, which states, "The Lameness Co-Efficient of any game varies inversely with the number of players capable of Networking into it." Or to put it less pretentiously, any "OK" game can be redeemed by adding network play, the more players the better. This is not to say that only the weak need networking—even great games benefit from The First Law. FALCON is a first-rate simulator, but when six human players are tied up in a dogfight, it becomes truly incredible.

THE TRADITIONS OF WAR

The first Networking game I encountered in the distant mist of early '92 was a strange little game called ROBOSPORT from Maxxis. The idea here was to give a



group of little robots orders that would cover 15 or so seconds on the battlefield, against up to three other teams. While it was possible to play the game with multiple humans in hotseat mode (if you didn't mind playing four rounds an hour), the nice thing about this game was that

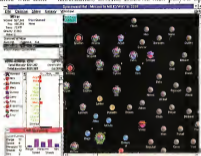
players could do their turns on their own computers and then the "master" program would merge the files and spit the results back to the players. This would allow you to speed the game up four-fold, and since ROBOSPORT was a Windows application, you could get some work done or just play some TETRIS while you waited, instead of bugging the Tail-End-Charley. (Martin's *Second Law of Networking*: In any game that allows simultaneous turns, some poor

sod will inevitably be yelled at for consistently taking too long.) Unfortunately, time, technology and a seeming lack of support from Maxis for one of its earlier children has doomed this classic far too early: some aspect of the latest version of Windows for Workgroups (3.11) triggers the copy protection system on ROBOSPORT, making the network mode and anything but the basic game inaccessible. Perhaps it's time for ROBOSPORT 2?

The next title to have the Networking Frontier was from *New World Computing*: this company seems to have a genuine commitment to network gaming, a commitment the gaming public is starting to take notice of. This first game was a humorous spaceplotation game called *SPACEWARD HO!* which allowed you to conquer worlds and research technology in a universe with a wacky cowboy motif. A quick, playable game, it might have passed into obscurity fairly quickly if not for the fact it could accommodate up to 21 players on a Net. It was another Windows-based game, and became the go-to-off of choice in many office buildings until DOOM arrived. It's still fairly popular, enough so that there is an eager audience waiting for the long-promised upgrade. *New World's* latest net offering, *HAMMER OF THE GODS*, is another idiosyncratic wargame, this one has an interesting take on the Age of the Vikings and most of the anti-social behavior that entails. While

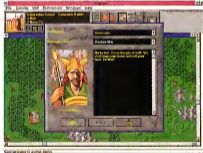
novel and enjoyable, its networking aspect suffers from lack of a Windows interface and sequential turns.

New World also turned to networking when it looked to improve the classic *EMPIRE*. Along with new weapons and refined mechanics, *EMPIRE DELUXE* also played up



THE WIERD WIRED WEST *Spaceward Ho!*'s strange cowpokes-in-space motif is a great setting for an office-wide round up.

to six over a network, and while it was still hampered by sequential turns, it did come in a Windows version. Interestingly enough, a game that could politely be called a "tribute" to *EMPIRE*, called *CONQUER FOR WINDOWS*, actually improves on the basic concept by allowing players to



ANCIENT ART OF THE KIBITZ Tactically worded messages are an essential element of diplomacy in network games like *LEAGONS*.

make their moves in real time—so instead of a dry, derivative game of production and destruction, you have a nerve-racking, fast-action little wargame where a player must watch all fronts at once and pray he isn't attacked by two players at once.

The latest net-capable wargame to incorporate both simultaneous turns and a

Windows interface is *LEAGONS* from *Mindcraft*. Supporting up to five human players and 14 odd computer opponents, *LEAGONS* is an historical wargame covering human history from ancient China up to the wars of Charlemagne. With diplomacy, trade and individual Generals involved as well as straight combat, this game is a much needed fix for those of us who have waited so long for NetCivilization.

Back in the DOS arena: long ago, in a time when *MicroProse* still believed in multi-player games, there was a nifty little strategic game called *GLOBAL CONQUEST*. It was the sequel to an earlier nifty game called *COMMAND HQ*; both were in the tradition of *EMPIRE*, but with a slightly tighter focus and a better sense of humor. What made *GLOBAL CONQUEST* such an improvement was that it eventually featured network drivers that made it the first DOS-based network game. Even after *MicroProse* moved on, dedicated fans created a networkable version of *COMMAND HQ*, making it a fine example of a multi-player game that is always fun to go back to.

Recently, *Accolade* has imported *BARTELLE 2200* from England and added net capability to an interesting SF wargame, which has some of the most diverse and interesting vehicle and weapon types I have ever seen. Unfortunately for social gamers, the network routine is very primitive and requires a dedicated server machine, meaning there has to be a computer doing nothing else but managing the network. This means the only people playing this one on the net will be after-hours office types.

As if to compensate for the former disappointment, the latest DOS-Network game to cross my desk is a true jewel. *WAR-CRAFT* from *Blizzard Entertainment* is kind of like *DUNE 2* meets *D&D*. Players pit Human forces against truly despicable Ores, each race having roughly analogous units with some unique twists. Part of the novelty of this product is that your ability to grow your village and produce the army you need to crush your foes is directly tied to your population of peasants, who actually move about the landscape mining, harvesting forests and building structures. The warfare is always

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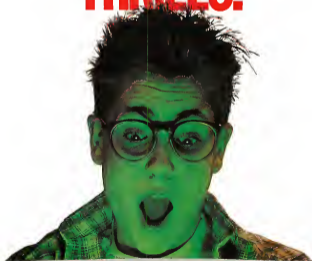
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DIAMOND

Plug And Play?

The Trials, Tribulations, And Thrills Of

Setting Up A Home Network

by Loyd Case

So you've grown tired of computer opponents and want a real challenge? Or maybe you got a taste of the multiplayer fever while playing DOOM on the office network? If you've got a few computers at home, a little spare cash, and some patience, you might be able to turn your home into a Local Area Network (LAN).

How? Well, we'll get to that, but first let's introduce you to some jargon.

Computers communicate with each other over a network using a well-defined set of communication instructions collectively known as a protocol. Network protocols allow data to be broken up in discrete packets that are transmitted over the network. Protocols also allow the receiver of those packets to assemble them in the correct sequence. More complex pieces of the protocol allow programs to be run remotely as well (i.e., I can run a program on Joe's computer from my computer), but most of today's networked games don't take advantage of this. The two most common protocols used today are NetBEUI, from Microsoft, and IPX from Novell. A third one, TCP/IP, is common on UNIX networks, and often is used in some PC networks as well. (It's likely that Microsoft will move away from NetBEUI over time to TCP/IP).

Almost all LANs these days run over a set of copper cables that use a communications technology called "ethernet". There are two main types of ethernet: 10-BaseT, which uses a twisted pair cable that looks a lot like the cable you plug into your telephone, and 10-Base2, which uses a coaxial cable similar to the cable that is fed to your TV from the cable company. 10-BaseT is somewhat easier and the cables are more robust, but it



requires an additional box, called an ethernet "hub."

Hubs can run several hundred dollars (for up to 8-10 computers, typically), so add cost. On the other hand, the coax cables used in 10-Base2 networks are more expensive and more fragile than the 10-BaseT cables. Also, with coaxial, you need to worry about issues such as the terminator (no relation to Arnold Schwarzenegger), which mark the end nodes of the network.

So how much does all this cost?

Each PC needs a networking card. Networking cards are available in a number of flavors. There are cards that support twisted pair (10-baseT), coax or what's known as a MAU (media attachment unit). Stay away from cards that use a MAU, because you then need a transceiver, which is an additional cost (sometimes more than the card!). A typical ethernet card will run from \$80-\$200, depending upon configuration, features, bus type, etc. (Note: some cards will support both twisted pair and coax, although the network itself must be configured for one or the other.) A cheap hub for twisted pair LANs will cost between \$150 and \$300.

Now comes the NOS.

That's NOS, not nose. NOS stands for Network Operating System. Like the normal DOS or Windows operating systems on PCs, the NOS is the software and hardware resource manager for the

(Continued on page 44)

lively, and a human opponent extends the lifespan of this game almost indefinitely. The only complaint is that it is only a two player game, at the moment—and gamers being the way they are, they want more. An expansion disk adding more players and scenarios would be very well received.

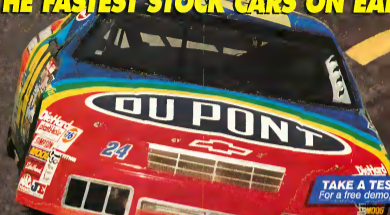
And finally, the farther you go, the closer you get to the beginning; the most connectable strategy game I have seen this year is one of the oldest games around. CHESSNLS3 from Masque takes the old checkerboard into the 90's by providing an excellent Chess game that is not only playable over networks and modem/serial links, but can even connect directly through the Internet! Ahhh, if only other games would take this path. I can see it now...2500-player games of SPACEWARD HO! Yee ha!

SIM-MACHINES...REAL PILOTS

We now enter the category of computer gaming that benefits the most from *Martin's Third Law of Networking*: "The best method of play for a Network game is in real-time." The addendum to this Law, for those of you out there looking to score high on the bonus quiz, is "Simultaneous turns are the next best form of network play, while Sequential Turns are just like playing a boardset except your chair doesn't end up not smelling like you." Games best imitate reality when they put us into the driver's seat. Be it airplane, tank or even giant robot, in simulations your tactical choices are unlimited, and the weakness of computer opponents is usually glaring; silicon still has problems with freedom of choice. Almost every simulator out there gets "figured out" fairly quickly. Within a month of a sim's release most of us will have bumped into somebody, either in real life or on a BBS, who says something to the effect of, "Oh (insert name of game), fun game but I know how to beat it now. When the (insert combat man) does (insert offensive maneuver) I just (insert retentive maneuver usually perfected due to player's time not being taken up by things like dating) and rack up a billion points." Well, the application of networking technology puts these types in their place—because you can simply look at them and say, "Gee, you should try playing me sometime; I'd never fall for that."

FALCON 3X is still one of the best flight simulators around, even after almost three years of shelf time, and it is still the only serious flight sim around that allows network

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play. The computer flies your enemies with some competence, and the deadliness of the weapon systems involved compensates for any lack of tactical originality, but **FALCON** becomes an art form when up to eight players are ranging the battlefield at the same time, either together or in two oppo-

sing teams. This kind of group play has led to many players forming their own "Squadrons" with a few friends, and brag/challenging their way across any BBS that will take them. With the ability to support both networking and modem/serial play, **FALCON** showed the way to the future,

a way other flight-sim companies have been slow to perceive. The only downside to **FALCON** is the high memory demands of the program itself, which makes it hard finding room for network card drivers.

The only other networkable "real vehicle" simulator is **SEAWOLF** by **Electronic Arts**. Unfortunately the lameness factor of this particular sim (in my humble opinion at least) is so high that a two-player limit is too low to redeem it. Next time someone thinks multi-player sea sim, think fleet work and wolfpacks.

From the extremely arcade side of simulators comes **Velocity**'s **SPECTRE** and **SPECTREVR**. The basic game and its successor are basically **BAITLZONE** on some serious chemical enhancements. The pace in **SPECTRE** is furious, as up to eight players skim over the vector graphic landscape blasting away at each other in no-holds-barred combat. Though the game is very simple, it can be as much as two hours before you come out of your combat-induced adrenaline-haze, and then only because your fingers and wrist are no longer responding to commands. **SPECTREVR** upped the ante by giving limited flight capability to the tanks, adding weapons and quadrupling the number of different "games" to be played—unfortunately, neither version allows players to join forces against the computerized foe.

While both games epitomize networking action at its wildest, **Velocity** has made a poor choice in copy protection; each computer needs a distinct copy of the game. While I am sure this discourages common piracy, it unjustly penalizes multi-computer households. Home users are not businesses, and they can rarely afford to buy multiple copies of the same game. I'm not sure what the correct answer to net-piracy is, but I am sure this is the wrong one.

The Science Fiction arena is not empty of net brew-ups either. Both **Dynamix** and **Origin** have dipped their toes in with products that bring multi-player action to already developed game "universes". **BAITLDRONE** offers Mech gladiatorial combat set against **Dynamix**'s **METALTECH** realm, where "Two legs Good! Tracks or wheels Bad!" has become the military slogan of choice. Players can operate the metal juggernauts against computer opponents or human ones, in pit fights where virtual money is wagered. Big winners can not only afford repairs to their cybernetic steeds, but also better weapons, or a bigger mech altogether.

(Continued from page 42)

network. It manages the links between PCs, remote file access, remote program access, logons, and a host of other issues that are important to network administrators and system managers. Typical network operating systems used in most large companies include Novell's **Netware** and Microsoft's **NT Advanced Server**. Unfortunately, they are expensive. A five user version of **Netware 3.12** will cost \$500-\$800. This does NOT include network cards, cables, hubs, etc.

However, the network folks have realized that there's a need for small networks that are simpler to install and run. These small fry set ups are perfect for small businesses, departmental networks and, yes, for setting up a game network. These include Microsoft's **WINDOWS FOR WORKGROUPS**, Novell's **PERSONAL NETWARE** (formerly **NETWARE LITE**) and Artisoft's **LAN TASTIC**.

For gamers, **PERSONAL NETWARE** or **WINDOWS FOR WORKGROUPS** are the two best solutions. They both can support **NetBEUI** or **IPX**, and they can both run as DOS-only networks (this may sound odd for a product called **Windows for Workgroups**, but you create DOS-only clients). There are several advantages to these products:

- You only need to pay for one network node at a time.
- They are cheaper. I've seen **Personal Netware** for as little as \$42 per copy. If you're running **Windows** already, the **Windows for Workgroups** upgrade is around \$49.
- They are far easier to set up and administer, although Microsoft doesn't do a good job of documenting the DOS-only setup.
- They are popular. This is important, because it means that almost every network card has drivers for these two systems.
- Finally, you can buy starter kits that contain from 1-5 network cards and the appropriate number of NOS li-

censes for much less than buying them individually.

That last point is important. For example, **PC Zone**, a mail order house, offers the **Personal Network Info** overview bundle for \$268.98, which includes 2 NE2000-compatible, 16-bit ethernet cards and a 2-user **Personal Network** license. You can also find five-user packs. **Microsoft Windows for Workgroups** can be found in similar bundles.

How difficult is it to set up a network? Most of the modern networking cards use software setups, so there aren't any jumpers to set. However, you still need to worry about I/O addresses and IRQ settings. Network cards are every bit as finicky as sound cards, but once you have a setup that doesn't conflict, then it usually runs fine. **WINDOWS FOR WORKGROUPS** has the easiest installation, but even **PERSONAL NETWARE** is reasonably straightforward. To avoid headaches, however, read all the way through the installation instructions, preferably twice! It's much more critical to read the manual than in other applications. I recently set up a **PERSONAL NETWARE** network to run **DOOM**. I've set up several PC networks in the past, but it still took me a good two days to set up a four-node network. Part of the problem was that I had three different types of networking cards and four dissimilar computers. Had all the hardware been identical, my setup time would have been cut in half.

Is it worth it? That's for each gamer to judge. The hard part is the first installation. After you've done that, then it becomes a matter of getting all the computers together. A lot of the **FALCON** jocks will have networking weekends, for example. They save all their configurations, so installing the second and subsequent times are a snap. Once you've done it, the thrill of playing against (or with) several other human players ranks right up there with the feeling you had when you played that first game that sucked you into this insanity called gaming.

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WING COMMANDER: ARMADA is **Origin's** attempt to add a twist to the highest profile game reality of the Fall of '94. A head-to-head dogfight using the standard WING COMMANDER starfighter philosophy has been merged with a light space/operation strategy game that is SPACEWARD HO!'s simpler cousin. Though the game is lightweight, the combat is resolved from the cockpits of the fighters you produce, making every game a series of duels to the death. This game has remarkable flight graphics but is marred by a devastatingly bad computer opponent. Hopefully, **Origin** will consider a patch that brings the flight routines from WING COMMANDER 3 to this intellectually challenged AI.

The downside of both these games is the fact that they only offer two players the joys of futuristic combat. While one can sympathize with the horrors of programming network routines to handle the intricacies of multiple unit movement and interaction, it obviously can be done—as the final net-sim of the year shows, with such dazzling skill.

Definitely the oddest flight sim I've seen, surpassing in strangeness even the UFO simulator from a few years back, is **MAGIC CARPET** from **BullFrog**. As you may have guessed, the player is a powerful wizard,

flying around a beautifully detailed and rendered world on a few-square feet of Bazaar-bait. As a two-fingered, fireball-shooting, Mana-collecting hombra of the desert, you face down some of the nastiest opponents to ever grace the screen of a sim. Rock-throwing trolls to fire-breathing flying worms to giant killer bees, this game is a blast. And, even though it is one of the most graphically complex flight games I have ever seen, it still offers Network play for up to eight Ali-Babas. Though the idea sounds a little strange, trust me; there is nothing like following an unsuspecting fellow carpet-jock and giving him a hotfoot by raising a volcano under him!

"YOU WANT ME TO GO WHERE?!"

We come around full circle on the Net and end where the New Age of Networking began, with those instant classics DOOM and DOOM II from those stunningly wealthy kids at **id Software**. As I've said, these guys are responsible for single-handedly bringing network gaming from an obscure novelty to a trend on the cusp of becoming a permanent fixture of the industry...and all with the graphically stunning shoot-em-up adventures of a little Marine and his afternoon in Hell.

What **id** really deserves recognition for is the fact that they added networking to DOOM, not because they studied the demographics and thought there was a viable market return on networking, but simply because they thought it would make DOOM a better game—a lesson lost on most of the companies rushing to clone DOOM in a dazzling display of originality second only to that of Lemmings choosing a vacation spot. Here's a news flash, folks: if you leave out the networking, you haven't cloned DOOM; you've made a prettier WOLFENSTEIN 3-D.

id Software is not only licensing the DOOM engine to various folks, but has, in association with **Raven Software**, developed an interesting variant itself called HERETIC where up to four players are wizards hunting through the depths in a kind of full-contact DUNGEON MASTER. Though it is still basically DOOM in a new suit, the graphics have been tweaked enough to give a greater sense of reality to the proceedings; waters splash, monster corpses slide down stairs in chunks instead of single rigid sprites, and other such touches. The monsters are more interesting and the weapons are simply amazing. Though they both read flesh like nobody's business, Gauntlets of

Martin's Matrix Of Network Games

Game	Type	Turn Mode	Skill	Players	Net Protocol	Win?	Modem?	MPV	SPV	Stability
Wing Armada	St/Act	Real	Med.	1-2	IPX	no	yes	B	D	B+
Battledrome	Sim	Real	High	1-2	IPX	no	yes	B	C+	B
Battle Isle 2200	Strat	Seq	High	1-4	N/A	no	no	B	C	C
ChessNet3	Strat	Seq	Med	1-2	NetBios	yes	yes	A	B	A
Conquer For Windows	Strat	Real	Low	1-4	NetBios	yes	yes	B	C-	A
Corridor 7	Act	Real	Low	1-11	IPX	no	no	B	C-	B+
DOOM 2	Act	Real	Low	1-4	IPX	no	yes	A	B	A
Empire Deluxe	Strat	Seq	Med	1-6	NetBios	yes	yes	C+	C+	A
Falcon 3.0	Sim	Real	High	1-6	IPX	no	yes	A+	A	C
Heretic	Act	Real	low	1-4	IPX	no	yes	A	B+	A
Legions	Strat	Simul	Med	1-5	IPX	yes	no	A	B	C-
Magic Carpet	Act	Real	Med	1-8	NetBios	no	no	A	B+	C
RoboSport	Strat	Simul	Low	1-4	IPX	yes	no	B	C+	A
SeaWolf	Sim	Real	High	1-2	NetBios	no	yes	C-	D	C-
Spaceward HO!	Strat	Simul	Low	1-21	IPX	yes	no	A	C	A
Spectre	Act	Real	Low	1-8	NetBios	yes	no	B	C-	C+
SpectreVR	Act	Real	Med	1-8	Both	yes	no	B+	C	C+
Syndicate	St/Ac	Real	High	1-8	NetBios	no	no	C	C	B
Hammer of the Gods	Strat	Seq	Med	1-4	IPX	no	yes	B	C+	B
WarCraft	Strat	Real	Med	1-2	IPX	no	yes	B+	C+	A

Turn Mode = Type of turn structure, either real-time, simultaneous or sequential turns

Skill = Skill level of game

MPV = Multi-Player Value

SPV = Single-Player Value

Stability = Reliability of network connection

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Interplay

Necromancy beat a chainsaw any day of the week.

The award for best use of the DOOM concept should go to Apogee for their *Rise of the Triad* game, which offers everything multiplayer but the kitchen sink and maybe that too. *ROTT* not only boosts the number of network players to 11, adds some incredibly destructive weapons, and offers 24-odd levels dedicated totally to DeathMatch struggles (or COMM-BAT as they so cleverly call it), but it even offers many different "types" of games for players to participate in, from team fire-fights to "monster hunts." This game is a great example of trying to make something better instead of simply optimizing profit margins. Unfortunately, all this power does come with a price and it is kind of steep: for network play, one must dedicate a machine to act as server and not use it for actual play.

Capstone's entry into the first-person shoot-em-up sweepstakes is actually based on the old *Wolfenstein* engine, but does it justice by letting up to 8 players pop in and out of the fun. Though graphically simple by today's standards, *Command 7* is something like the *Structure* of the DOOM world. It's fast, easy and won't strain your processor. It even lets players take the shape of various monsters from the single-player game. Of course, it is so simple that it only allows DeathMatch-type play, leaving co-operation far behind.

For those of you who enjoy that being-to-being combat thing but get a little nauseous watching everything bob around, another title from BullFrog that has network capability might be your answer. *Syndicate* is a kind of Cyberpunk meets the combat engine of X-COM, and comes out with tiny figures but real-time combat. Instead of controlling a single person,



FANTASY LEAGUE DOOM With Hexetic, Raven Software has injected a little magic into the Doom engine.

players use entire squads of augmented Cyberthugs armed with everything from rocket launchers to lasers. The game takes a more serious wargamer's approach to action and uses a skewed 3-D perspective; the interface asks a lot of a person, and players will find most of their soldiers dying from their attention being elsewhere for a few seconds. This, combined with the small

scale, makes this game a real test of the First Law of Networking.

NOTES ON THE NET

Network gaming is a difficult hobby sometimes. First, if you don't have access to a network at work, there is the issue of log-



BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE When it comes to the sensation of raw speed and power, *Music Cooper* surpasses even *Doom*.

ging your entire PC over to a friend's, or some other central location. A full PC multimedia rig isn't exactly pocket-sized; on the other hand, once you get the hang of it, transport is not as daunting as it looks—although those restricted to public transit might want to stick with modems. I find that most people who get together with a group for Network play usually do it once or twice a month, filling the same social

niche that the old poker game once did.

Then there is the business of setting up the network itself (See the *Plug and Play?* sidebar)—and this is no small matter, thanks to the bizarre behavior of the PC hardware industry, where "compatibility" is like communism; it looks good on paper but the reality is something less than per-

fect. Network cards are as easy as any other card to bolt in, but there are an incredible array of things that can go wrong after that, mostly to do with interrupts, motherboard compatibility and evil things like that. If anything, you learn a lot about your PC by setting up and maintaining a network.

But all things being equal, the extra effort one must put out for the Network experience is returned ten-fold. Short of paying ten bucks an hour on the on-line networks, this is as good as computer gaming gets. And, once you get things set up and working, it is pretty much a snap to keep your own little net maintained. I'm sure some real dogs will come out in the future, as networking becomes more of a gimmick, but the vast majority of the games I've covered are worth the going price when you play them against other people—and definitely, the more the merrier.

Games like *FALCON*, *DOOM* and *SPACEWARD HO!* should serve as models of the ideal networked game. They all have sophisticated, reliable network routines that require very little technical know-how (though *FALCON* can be a little temperamental), they allow more than two players and, most importantly, they offer players the choice between competition and co-operation. To be honest, I think most gamers get a little shot to the old species pride by ganging up on and defeating the silicon bodes. When you have friends, who cares if the AI cheats?

TOWING THE PARTY LINE (MODERN GAMES)

While using a modem or serial-link to play games isn't as trendy as networking, and nobody is beating the concept to death with endless bad driving metaphors involving the Info-Turnpike, this mode of social gaming is by far the most prevalent, hence the one almost all players are familiar with. In fact, I would be surprised if anybody reading this with more than ten games in their possession didn't have at least one that was modem capable. Of course, there is a big differ-

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ence between modern-ready and modern-appropriate. Some games reveal a new aspect under modern play, while others lie there connected to your modem like roller skates on a fish.

THE Q.O.P. PLAN

Although it is unusual to cover a company instead of just a title in this kind of article, I thought that the bunch at **Quantum Quality Productions** had done such a good job of putting modern play in almost everything they did that it wouldn't be fair to deny them the recognition they deserve. Though all of their games strive for playability above all else, and usually achieve it, a few have found a special niche amongst phone gamers.

It all started with **THE PERFECT GENERAL**, the quintessential computer wargame. Simple rules, a variety of units covering wars across the 20th century, and fast play. Every scenario has a turn limit, and victory points are achieved by taking and holding cities or map objectives; since these point values are accrued every turn, the game has a nice built-in sense of urgency to it. It would be nice to wait until every unit is in optimal position for an attack, but that usually means your opponent has racked up enough points that when you eventually get possession of the objective, it will be too little, too late. Interestingly enough, the mechanics are simple enough that a fairly challenging expert system has been programmed to be your opponent.

This successful formula was then applied to **Naval Combat in THE LUST ADMIRAL**, and then again in its quasi-sequel, **THE GRANDIEST FLEET**. **THE GRANDIEST FLEET** keeps to the simple mechanics but offers a nice little development system that forces players to develop the cities they capture in order to increase victory points and production—you could

even gain the ability to produce nuclear-powered vessels of devastating power. **THE LUST ADMIRAL** and **GRANDIEST FLEET** both offered random maps and the ability to link up to three scenarios together to form a campaign, a lop-sided victory in a previous battle would give you an advantage in

Martin's Matrix Of Modem Games

Title	Type	Turn Type	Skill	SPV	H2H	Stability
Merchant Prince	Strat	Seq	Med	C+	B+	A
Perfect General	Strat	Seq	Med	B	B+	A
Grandest Fleet	Strat	Seq	Med	B	B+	A
Conquered Kingdoms	Strat	Seq	Med	C+	B	A
Battles of Destiny	Strat	Seq	Med	C+	B	A
Indy Car	Sim	Real	High	B+	A	C
Tom Landry Football	Sport	Simul	Med	C+	B+	B
Ultimate Football	Sport	Simul	High+	B	B+	C+
Dark Legions	Strat	Seq	Med	C	B+	C-
Metal Marines	Strat	Real	Low	C+	B+	B
World Circuit	Sim	Real	High	B	A	B

Turn Type = Type of turn structure, either real-time, simultaneous or sequential turns.

Skill = Skill level of game

SPV = Single Player Value

H2H = Head to head Value

Stability = Reliability of network connection; stability

the current scenario. Modern play allows for the hidden movement of subs to be used to full effect, and there is no chance they will be spotted "accidentally" as sometimes happens in hotspot play. This game is a big hit for players who love the sea but don't quite have the time or sustained effort to be "Harpooned."

And, in what might be considered pressing one's luck or perhaps just doing what they are good at, **QQP** has taken their formula into the realm of Fantasy

pecting Officers with a single blow) do quite a bit to distinguish this game from its close relatives. **CONQUERED KINGDOMS** is great for people looking for a quicker game of **WARLORDS**.

The two **QQP** games that have distinguished themselves without being in "the basic mold" are **BATTLES OF DESTINY** and **MERCHANT PRINCE**. While both are designed by **Several Dudes Holistic Gaming** (which has evolved into the **Holistic Design Inc.** with the release of their **HAMMER OF THE GODS** game), they differ radically from each other. **BATTLES** is in the tradition of **EMPIRE DELUXE**, but offers a few more interesting choices in unit type and tends to be a little more fluid. **MERCHANT PRINCE** is truly a treat in the world of strategic gaming, as one to four players take the role of wealthy Venetian families during the Renaissance, trying to build a hemisphere-spanning trade empire while avoiding storms, pirates and brigands who eat ships and caravans like bears eat picnic baskets. Players must not only work the wiles of capitalism upon the unsuspecting natives in distant portions of the world, but also contend with power and politics at home, maneuvering to become either the Doge of Venice or even the old Pope Himself—Popedom being a somewhat more cynical affair during the Middle Ages.

All these games support an extremely reliable communications program that connects you quickly and easily with your opponent by phone or serial port, and they have become the staple of gamers in isolated areas who still want to wage war against



THE CLASSIC GENERAL QQP has become the patron saint of modem players since releasing their first, and some would say best, modem game, **The Perfect General**.

wargaming with **CONQUERED KINGDOMS**, where players have the choice of playing with strictly historical pieces or using a full range of mythical creatures. Subtleties like Officers who enhance the power of units around them and spies who can move without being seen (as well as kill unsus-

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Folks don't come to Silverload much anymore. A'int been no silver here in years. And when they do come, they don't stay any longer than they have to. Missing persons? No, mister, a'int never seen no missing persons. Of course, folks here don't pay much attention to strangers. Have a look around? Can't say anybody will stop you from looking around, mister. Except the last man who came here looking for kin is buried over there on that hill.



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real intelligence. Now, while some could say QQP has only added modern play to some fairly beer-and-pretzel wargames and that is no big deal in programming, let's be honest: most games with sequential turns

would be fairly easy to modern-link, but publishers with far more resources at hand than QQP routinely refuse to do so—probably because some marketing whiz has optimized the sales projections, and modern-play is a few decimal points shy of being relevant (according to some really old marketing data). As long as companies like QQP continue to support the actual needs of gamers, I'll continue to applaud while muttering darkly about any wargame that is not at least modern-capable.

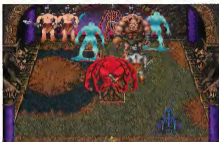
MANO-A-MANO

Part of the appeal of Modern-linked games is the potential for friendly (mostly) grudge matches—the type of game where you and your opponent both know the game and each other well, and come back again and again to try out your next great idea. Players who never get any closer than a thousand miles can still cultivate great relationships based on respect and aggravation, and gaming BBS' create almost as many relationships as the boards dedicated to the Singles scene.

The modern support of network games like WING COMMANDER, ARMBIA, BATTLEDRONE and FALCON means you will always find them mentioned prominently on Boards with dedicated challenge areas. Other sims with modern support only (no net capability) are popular as well, with F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III from MicroProse being a close contender for sim competition of choice; while in the realm of WW2, MicroProse is also providing modern support through a downloadable patch for 1942: PACIFIC AIR WAR and Kesmai is planning to produce yet another home version of AIRWAROR, this one with modern support as well.

As far as challenge-rated strategy games goes, the current favorite is DARK LEGIONS from SSI, the true successor to the old classic ARCHON, where players move mon-

sters across a chess-like board. But when king jumps pawn, it's no longer a sure thing; the contested square expands into a quick and deadly battlefield ideal for joystick jockeying. DARK LEGIONS is actually



MONSTER MASH Dark Legions is a decent single-player action/strategy game, but when you get two humans on a line, the game breaks wide open.

meant to be played by modem, and there is a phantom-monster that is actually invisible to the other player until it strikes. Holy cloaking device, Batman! Given this propensity for modem play, it is unfortunate that DARK LEGIONS performs sluggishly under all but the highest baud rate.

For a slightly lighter strategy game, there is a Japanese import called METAL

MARINES, brought to us by Mindscape. In the tradition of Anime, this game could be called *Scorched Earth meets the Son of SinCity*. Players build up their own bases by laying down tiles representing headquarters, command centers, defense cannons, anti-missile systems, etc. while simultaneously trying to blow their opponent's base from the face of the Earth using Multi-Warhead Missiles and giant robot Marines. A mindlessly fun game using Windows, it sure beats Hearts for a quick fix for your competitive streak during lunch time at the office.

THE OL' PLAY BY PLAY

Spot simulations have been slow to pick up on the whole connectivity thing, but this is slowly changing and they seem to be doing it in pairs. In the flood of football titles available this year, two have them decided that head-to-head play might be the novelty to distinguish them from the pack.

TOM LANDRY STRATEGY FOOTBALL: DELUXE EDITION is the perfect resolution to all those long-distance football arguments between old college buddies. Now, you can really see if who is the best coach coach by running games over the modem from the play-calling perspective. While the action after the snap is resolved automatically, coach coaches make every other call from designing your own plays to pulling a bum off the field. And of course, the ever congenial Tom Landry is hovering in virtual space ready to give you pearls of wisdom should your friend push you to the edge. It's a solid modem game that plays something like a sports wargame and is a respectable entry from Merit Software.

ULTIMATE FOOTBALL from MicroProse covers much the same ground, but allows a little more interaction after the snap and severe control-freak coaches can actually seize control of players on the field as the play progresses and move them to positions not in the selected play. Apart from this, the players still do their own jobs automatically when the opportunity arises, and players don't have to worry about timing passes themselves. A CD-ROM game, ULTIMATE FOOTBALL has some beautiful graphics, and the detailed and distinct stadiums for every team are a real treat. This game also supports an elegant drafting and trading system and allows games to be played on other computers, with the results uploaded and re-integrated into a master database. Of the two games, ULTIMATE

Mo' Modern Games To Try

Archon Ultra	SSI
Battlechess 4000	Interplay
Battles of Destiny	QQP
The Blues & The Grey	Impressions
Buzz Aldrin Race Into Space	Interplay
Command HQ	Microplay
Conquered Kingdoms	QQP
Dark Legions	SSI
Detroit	Impressions
F-15 Strike Eagle III	MicroProse
F-16 Combat Pilot	Electronic Arts
Global Domination	Impressions
Greens Golf	MicroProse
Knights of the Sky	MicroProse
Lords of the Realm	Impressions
The Lost Admiral	QQP
Pro League Baseball	Micro Sports
Powermonger	Electronic Arts
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FOOTBALL is definitely for the football fan, allowing serious players to download real stat updates from on-line services, while TOM LANDRY is for us more casual types without the expertise or time for a full immersion into the complex world of pro coaching.

The other pair from the sports world are INDCAR RACING from Papyrus and WORLD CIRCUIT from MicroProse. To be honest, both these games are great racing simulators and play great under serial connections and fairly well under the old modems, though a high transmission speed (9600) is a must. INDCAR has the definite edge in graphics, but many swear by WORLD CIRCUIT's smoother action over the modem. Racing pros have argued the relative realism of these two

titles over the past year, but a driving school cadet like me finds it to be a "six of one, half-dozen of the other" situation. I greatly enjoyed both, but as a neophyte racer, if I had to come down on one side or another, I would probably go with the "Pretty pictures...gonood!" school of Cromagnon reviewing and pick INDCAR.

NO' MODEMS!

Though Networking is certainly on the hipper side of this whole InfoBahn jive, I suspect head-to-head modem play is in no danger of disappearing, and is actually far more secure than networkability, which could become nothing more than an industry flavor of the week in some dark future. In fact, the Data Turmpike and InterNet will enhance the popularity of these modem contests by making sure there will always be somewhere to find a player. On the other hand, there may not be one willing to pay the phone bill...but that is another matter. All you have to do is wander through the DOOM challenge discussion on the Net to see how many people are reaching out to crush someone.

PEERING INTO THE FUTURE

Perhaps with the growing trend in networking, War and Strategy game designers will see the wisdom of adding multi-player capability; these games, of all the other categories, have the easiest time adapting their data structures to a file-sharing format. Unfortunately, this past year has seen

a step backward from reality, with much-awaited games like MASTER OF MAGIC or

drivers from a dialogue box.

Of course, this solution won't work for powerful and complex sims, (unless Windows/95 turns out better than it looks) so DOS will remain the domain of choice. This next year promises some very sweet networkable sims, including a couple of flight games working 10 or more players at once; those of us who covet the AIRWARRIOR experience on GEnie will get a chance to indulge in some epic dogfights without the credit card bill. At the time this article is being written, FIGHTER WING from Merit promises this experience and is just entering stores for Christmas.

ZLPIER from New World, a game that should offer fighting action on the level of SPECTRUM and graphics in the neighborhood of DOOM, promised Network capability but shipped without it. A network patch is promised for the New Year. Let's hope that it works out and is hot enough to keep the Networking trend going.

Networking is rife with disappointment; it is one of the first capabilities mentioned and usually the first one dropped when the deadline doom approaches...and let's not even talk about the poor souls who stare mournfully at their MECHWARRIOR2 demo every night before sleep. Connectivity is a hip word in the media these days, but at least it seems to be leaking into the consciousness of the industry; that computer gamers are social animals after all. This, combined with the realization that the Network is the one true advantage computers currently have over those annoying game machines, may keep a good trend going. With a little luck, maybe, in a couple of years true multi-player capability will be the rule, instead of the exception.

The author would like to thank the Network Gang—Ken, Merit, Tony, and Troy—for their help in testing these games, and Craig Reese for his generous contribution of networking technical expertise. ☺



HIGH ON SPEED Papyrus' InDCar and NASCAR Rivals (pictured) both support modem play, although you'll need both a fast modem and fast computers to play at full speed.

the computer translation of KING-MAKER appearing as a single player games. With all the talk of the survival of the Waagame, making the experience more singular and isolated is probably a bad idea. A few months back, Alan Emrich said that he thought the Windows interface was good one for wargaming; not only do I think he is correct (and like Alan, I could care less about inane arguments about operating



READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL? Tom Landry Strategy Football was one of the first modem-capable football games, and is still good for a quick head-to-head match up.

systems), but products like SPACEWARD HO!, EMPIRE DELUXE and ROBOSPORT show exactly how useful it is for a network game to be based on a system where all the net programming is already done. These games don't require the user to have any more net knowledge than it takes to install

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As you sit down on the docking pad in the shuttle hangar, you are a little puzzled. You remember that on Starling Venus there must be at least a hundred crew members, and not one is here. As the mystery begins to unfold, the clues, like the shattered remains of some poor souls, may not be very easy to digest. In the meantime, an unimaginable terror waits for the "spare" you that you have left behind in the past.



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Strategy Plus (September 1994) observed, "...massive improvements on both graphics and sound fronts."

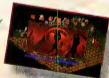
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Beware Of The Under Drow



Menzoberranzan, for those unfamiliar with R.A. Salvatore's novel *The Legacy*, is the underground capital city of Dark Elves, the Drow. Although normally comfortable in their dank and damp realm of Underdark, the Drow are rampaging on the surface of the Forgotten Realms, looking for a traitor to their cause. You see, Drizzt, the traitor, is an anomaly in the Dark Elf world, a black sheep, an outcast. He's a good guy.

Not able to find Drizzt the good Dark Elf, the Drow make off instead with a selection of human villagers, hauling them to the underground city for slavery or worse. Your job, if you choose to dive into SSI's MENZOBERRANZAN role-playing game, is to penetrate to the nethermost reaches of the Underdark, infiltrate the city of Menzoberranzan, and rescue the captives.

Those who've played SSI's earlier RAVENLOFT game will find much that is familiar in MENZOBERRANZAN. While the party has room for four characters, you create only two of your own; the remaining slots are filled by other characters you meet along the way and invite to join the group.

For that reason, most players will likely prefer to create the typical two-person party of Elven Fighter/Magic-User and Dwarfen Fighter/Cle-

ric. Only Elves wearing Elven chain mail can cast spells in armor; all others must forgo armor if they want to do any spellcasting. Dwarfs are handy not only for being able to read Dwarfish (important in one section of the game), but they are absolutely tops at spotting illusory walls, and there are plenty of them in this game. A Dwarf in the group makes life much easier.

Thieves aren't necessary; there is little use for their ability to pick locks (all locked doors require special keys). If you feel happier with a thief in the party, pick up Voron the Kenku; he's a triple-class Fighter/MU/Thief and handy to have along. He can also cast spells while wearing his special Kenku armor.

You can probably also get by with letting Voron handle the mage stuff and putting a Fighter/Paladin/Ranger/etc in place of the Fighter/Magic-user. I didn't use much offensive magic in the game; the fighting contingent was generally able to handle anything we came up against.

360 DEGREES OF FREEDOM

The basic game mechanics are similar to RAVENLOFT, which in turn came by way of EVE OF THE BEHOLDER. The view is 3D and the party moves as a whole. Movement can be either in step mode or free-scrolling mode. Step mode is just that: one click is one step forward, with turns of 90 degrees. Free mode is the full

360 degree range, as in ULTIMA UNDERWORLD. If that sort of thing makes you dizzy, stick with step mode. There are some places where free

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DREAMFORGE'S DARK
TALE OF DARK ELVES

MENZOBERRANZAN

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System:

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(486-33Mhz

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13 MB hard

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major sound cards.

Protection: None

Developer: DreamForge

Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc.

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mode is necessary, but they are few and brief and not likely to upset anyone.

Character portraits are strung along the bottom of the screen, with icons for the left and right hands. Clicking on these icons causes the characters to attempt a strike with a readied weapon. This means swinging the cursor back and forth, clicking away madly, during a fight.

An alternate method is to put the cursor on the target, where it becomes a small sword. Clicking this causes readied weapons to strike out, but only once per weapon, so you still have to keep clicking during the combat. Ranged weapons will fire with this method, except Spiritual Hammer. For some reason, the hammer icon itself must be clicked to make an attack.

Fighters in the rear can engage in melee if they have long weapons, such as two-handed swords and halberds. These are better than most missile weapons which, as usual, have to be retrieved after combat. There is a magical throwing axe

and a magical knife which return after being thrown, but their damage potential is rather small.

Outdoors, everyone is considered in melee range and can fight with any readied weapon. Indoors (which is most of the game), only the two front rank characters are close enough for melee. Those in the rear can only use long weapons or missile weapons to attack. Naturally, spells can be cast from any position.

Spellcasters do not have to hold a book or holy symbol to cast spells. You simply click the special icon on the character portrait to bring up a list of spells, or special abilities, for that person. Spells are not cast automatically in a fight; you have to bring up the list and choose a spell from it. This can be a pain in real-time combat, even with the list readied beforehand, and was another reason I didn't use a lot of offensive magic.

Once killed, monsters do not regenerate. This makes life much easier, since you

can clear out a level, then go back over it more carefully looking for illusionary walls or elusive buttons without a horde of critters breathing down your neck.

ADVENTURING AMENITIES

MINZO features a very nice auto-mapping system. You can call it up anywhere, anytime. Among other things, it shows where the party has been, where it is now, nearby monsters (but only those that are close), illusionary walls (once you know about them), locations of nearby non-hostile characters, and perhaps most importantly, locations of items to be picked up.

The maps are scrollable, and you can always look at maps of previous places the party has been, in that dungeon or another. In addition, you can write your own notes on this map, and even print it off on a printer. Maps can also be saved to a separate file for viewing in any word processor.

The inventory screen shows what items

Scorp's Shorts

stance. Werner Von Hallerod, having reached 18 years old, sets off to prove himself worthy of joining the Dragon Knights, and incidentally discovers the truth about his father's death.

He needs votes from current Knights to be accepted. Some Knights exhort him to be bloodthirsty, others to take the path of wisdom. One refreshing character will accept a bribe in return for a positive vote. A bar graph measures Werner's actions, growing towards violence or wisdom depending on his

er speaks in any way. Perhaps he should have been christened Noel, the Silent Knight. Whatever, Werner heads out, kills some monsters, picks up a few spells, and finally arrives at Von Wallerod castle.

The rest of the game is taken up with a scavenger hunt in the castle, finding various objects and figuring out what to do with them. Some items are not easy to see, and every room must be scanned thoroughly to ensure not missing something important. "Boring" gains new meaning here, especially as you are likely to revisit many rooms, looking for things that might not even be there.

While there is some fighting, it is similar to **I-Motion's ALONE IN THE DARK**. Werner has no stats or skills, only a bar measuring his life force. Combat is simply equipping a weapon and bashing away, hoping you can outlast the monster.

Magic is minimal. Two spells are one-time-only, fireball can be handy if you have time to bring up the runes for it. Teleport, when finally obtained, allows Werner to move around the castle easily, and later the countryside, when he receives the magic map. This is the best feature of the game.

Apparently, Scorpia was a very good girl this year. Santa filled her stockings with all sorts of adventure and role-playing goodies, and Scorp went on a game playing binge to beat all. When she emerged from her dungeon this month, besmudged with the blood of several Fozzles and wearing several hero's crowns, even she was amazed to find that she had hacked and slashed through four full games in two weeks. Here are her interrogation reports from a few of her adventure game victims.

DRAGON LORE

Published by **Mindscape**, this is a game with pretty graphics and not much sub-



actions in certain circumstances.

There are no conversations, only monologues from NPCs, as Werner nev-

Amazingly, there are only four save slots, and you can't even give them your own titles. Games are saved as "Saved Game 1", "Saved Game 2", etc. This is not really helpful in trying to recall where all those saves are in the game, or which is the most recent.

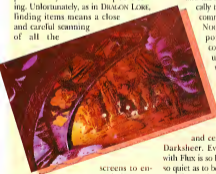
Only Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards are supported. For Gravis owners, SBOS works well; I hope other soundcard owners have something similar, or the game will play silently. At least you can turn on text so you won't miss the monologues (some of which actually have importance).

Bottom line: To quote a friend of mine (commenting on a game many years ago): "It's like diving into a beautiful pool, and finding the water is only two inches deep."

NOCTROPOLIS

Grim and moody, NOCTROPOLIS is set in a fictional comic-book world of eternal night. Perennial loser Peter Grey is magically transported there from our world to take the place of Darksheer, a superhero who recently retired.

Despite the setting and the comic book that comes with the game, this is an adventure, and getting through it depends mostly on traditional puzzle solving. Unfortunately, as in DRAGON LORE, finding items means a close and careful scanning of all the



screens to ensure not missing anything, which is all too easy to do, given the mainly dark scenes.

Also on the downside, this game is nothing like a comic book adventure. Aside from chucking some holy water at Succubus, Darksheer doesn't actually fight any of the five "games" villains, nor even the evil masermind Flux. No, the only person he beats up is his partner, Stiletto.

First he knocks her around, then he makes love to her. This proves he has what it takes to be a superhero in the Darksheer mold. After that, she follows him around like a tame sheep, not doing much beyond vamping a couple of men in the most crude and embarrassing fashion, and managing to kill Master Macabre (well, he cut off her finger, so she's probably entitled). Otherwise, she contributes nothing at all as a supposed "partner." With a little editing, Stiletto could have been left out entirely and it would have made no difference to the game (aside from lowering the TR&A factor).

Considered strictly as an adventure without comic book trappings, it's about middling difficulty, most of that coming from aggravating conversational trees and hard-to-find objects. Graphically the game is good. I can't comment on sound/hausic, as NOCTROPOLIS does not support Ultrasound, and I couldn't get any of the emulations, even SBOS, to work with it.

Bottom line: Considered as a comic book adventure, this one just doesn't make it.

There is no pace, no action, no excitement, and certainly no heroics from Darksheer. Even the final encounter with Flux is so low-key, so anti-dramatic, so quiet as to be a passive experience. If superheroes in the real comics were like this, comic books would have vanished long ago.

DEATH GATE

This one comes from Legend Entertainment, the people who gave us COMPANIONS OF XANTH. Fortunately, while using the same interface and engine, DEATH GATE is a better adventure than XANTH.

Centuries ago, the Sartans split the world into five realms: Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Nexus. They imprisoned their enemies, the Patryns, in the Nexus, in a nasty construct called "The Labyrinth." Your character is Haplo, a Patryn rescued from the Labyrinth by Lord Nar, who wants to reunite the world. With Haplo's assistance, he might be able to do that.

So Haplo goes off in a magic ship through the DEATH GATE, the only connection between the realms, to find the four sections of the World Seal.

Along the way, he pieces together more of the story of the Sundering, and finds that things are not always as they seem.

The game is very linear. Once Haplo leaves a realm, he can never go back. This makes it vital to pick up every obtainable item, or you could be stuck in a later realm for lack of an important object and have to replay part of the game (which happened to me on one occasion).

This is not a hard adventure, although some puzzles are tricky. Most of them can be figured out logically; it usually isn't necessary to go through the "try everything" routine if you think about the situation a little.

What set my teeth on edge was the bright and bouncy, "cutesy-fun" overtone of the game, with its cute but glibble Dwarfs and lovesick princes, among others. The story of DEATH GATE is too important for that and should have received a more serious treatment.

I had problems with the game crashing in VGA every time I talked to the merchant; switching to SVGA cleared that up. Besides, SVGA graphics are much better; play in that mode if you can.

Bottom line: Of the three games covered in these short articles, DEATH GATE was the least irritating overall, and the closest to traditional adventuring. If you can put up with the cute stuff, you may find this one worth playing. ☺

characters are wearing/carrying, and is the place to check on stats, experience levels, health, and current spell effects (if any). These are handled very neatly with pop-up menus off of icons. Moving items from character to character is easy and simple: just pick something up from one slot and put it in another.

The standard inventory is 12 slots, but more can be carried through the use of bags, boxes, and scroll cases. The downside is that weight matters, and a heavily-encumbered character will be at a disadvantage in combat. A small scale for each character measures the encumbrance level; keep an eye on that and be sure weaker party members aren't loaded down with a lot of heavy stuff.

Happily, if you dismiss one party member in favor of a new one, the departing member hands over all items not his own to the newcomer. If the joining character doesn't have enough room for everything, the excess is placed on the ground for redistribution. This is a good system, and one I hope other designers will keep in mind for games with similar add/discard-character features.

NO NEW TALE TO TELL

Moving to the game itself, unfortunately the best that can be said about *MENZO* is that it is mediocre. Much of your time is spent on getting to the city, plodding through caves and tunnels that follow each other in dreary succession.

When you finally arrive, everything that follows is laid out for you in a neat, linear path. The party is carefully directed from point to point, event to event, like you're riding on a sightseeing tram at Disneyland. Go here, see him, get this, do that; after a while, you begin to wonder whether you're playing a computer game or connect-the-dots.

This is a shame, because so much could have been done with the material at hand. Here we have three major Drow houses scheming with and against each other, jockeying for power and possession of a potent artifact, teetering on the edge of all-out war. Into this melnstrom of chicanery, double-dealing, and assassination comes the party, all unknowing.

What an opportunity for a well-developed, involving story—and what a dismal



DON'T FEED THE BUG BEARS Combat is a snap. Simply click on the enemy you wish to attack, and your fighters will strike with their readied weapons.

hash was made of it. We could have had an exciting, nerve-wracking excursion into the murky waters of Drow politics, with treachery and surprise at every turn, and interesting choices to be made. Instead, we end up with a ho-hum, "just follow the plan" express railroad route to the endgame and inevitable showdown with Foodee.

The dialogue doesn't help matters. It's grandiose, overblown, melodramatic in the extreme. People don't so much speak as declaim everything they say, giving an unintended farcical overtone to the game.

MENZO runs relatively clean, but does have some programming problems. Most are trivial, such as some magical figurines that don't work, and the busi-



NOMINEES FOR BEST DRESSED IN A QUEST The character inventory screen sports a drag-and-drop interface and can provide information on each character's vitals.

ness with the Spiritual Hammer mentioned earlier. One that isn't so trivial is the "monsters in the wall" problem. You can see monsters stuck in the walls on the automap, and if you stand in front of the wall and swing away, you can kill

whatever is in there.

Where this becomes a very nasty problem is in the end game. Here you break in on Matron Malice, in the middle of a sacrifice. Naturally not pleased, she attacks, along with a Drow priestess and several monsters. Killing her and the priestess initiates the endgame sequence of congratulations and "once again, great heroes, you have saved the day, etc."

You must kill Malice and friend to get that sequence, and it is entirely possible for your party to walk into that room and she won't be there. The monsters are there, but no Malice, no priestess. You can kill off everything in sight, but the game doesn't end.

Current thought at SSI is that the game is placing Malice halfway in the wall or altar. When a monster is stuck in that fashion, the game "kills it off" to avoid problems (apparently fully in a wall isn't a problem). So the software gets rid of her for you, but that doesn't trigger the ending animations.

Unfortunately, there is absolutely no way of knowing if this will happen until the party enters the room. This is one of those "transient" bugs that doesn't happen to everyone, just some players. More bizarre, it could occur and not occur in separate games.

I had three teams altogether that went through to the finale. The first two did not see Malice when they entered the altar room, no matter how many times they tried it. However, the third team walked in, and there she was, standing behind the altar! I was so startled, the monsters got in a few hits before I recovered from the amazement.

So you could have one game that will never end, and another where a different party goes through properly all the way. SSI is working on a patch, and it will likely be available by the time you read this. In the meantime, it's the luck of the draw as to whether Malice will be around or not when you get to her.

Overall, *MENZO* KRANZAN is a disappointment. It has some nice features, but nice features must be supported by a strong story. Sadly, what could have been a superior entry in the CRPG field comes off as just another hack-n-slash product, suitable mainly as a time-filler when nothing better is available. ☹

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Actual VGA graphics shown. Distributed by Accolade, Inc.

Letters From The Dark Side

WELL, THE HOLIDAY SEASON TURNED OUT to be not so bad after all. A few companies were able to get a few games on the shelves, and though none of those games were really, really good, at least

we got something. It was especially interesting to see the large number of adventure games (from companies other than Sierra) that made their appearance. It's been a long time since so many came to the shelves at once.

The mail on the newer games is just now trickling in, but I've gotten some interesting letters in that small batch. So we have some new titles on the list for a change. By the way, did you notice that almost all the new games are showing up on CD first (or exclusively)? If you don't have a CD ROM drive, better plan on getting one soon, or you won't have much to play in the coming months.

And now, on to the hints...

Noctropolis: You might have a hard time at the start of the game when dealing with the gargyle outside the cathedral. A coil of wire is necessary to complete your little death device, but finding it — that's tough! This is one of those situations where you have to scan slowly and carefully across the screen to find the item, because it's so easy to miss and nearly impossible to see. I suggest concentrating on the left side.

Death Gate: Arriving on the water world of Chelestra, you don't find much to work with. There's a cave you can't enter because of a fear spell, and a city you can't get into because of the Ward (Keep Out: This means you!) in the front gate. However, if you recall what was mentioned in the book where you



learned the Possession spell, the ward will soon be ruined.

Menzoberranzan:

While mucking through the tunnels is mostly straightforward, adventurers could have a bit of trouble in the beginning section, where you have to

go up and down between the two levels to find your way to the exit. The important thing is to be on the lookout for illusory walls that open the way to other areas. Generally, you can figure that such a wall is as far as possible from the way you came in.

Dragon Lore: Once you arrive at Van Wallenrod Castle, what to do becomes somewhat obscure. On the entry level, your job is to find the three pieces of the Von Wallenrod seal to open the door at the bottom of the stairs. These are hidden in different rooms on this level, and everything you need to get them is also in the rooms (so in this case, you don't have to worry about not having something with you already). Be sure to pick up everything you come across, as some things are needed later on. If your inventory is getting full, you can dump the canteen (which is not needed) and the rope.

Malcolm's Revenge: All you need to do at the start is get off the island. There are six ways of doing this, and all the puzzles at the start are related to one or more of them. Try not to get too tangled up or involved in following multiple paths, which can be very confusing. Once you find a way off, just keep going, because all the methods will take you to the Isle of Cats anyway (you just end up in different locations depending on how you did it).

Dark Sun II: People find the secret

door in the Old Digs and can't get it open. There's a good reason for that: it can't be opened directly by the party. This particular door will only open after you've tracked down and killed those responsible for the murder spree in the mines. If you have an early version of the game, you should go directly to Old Digs after doing that, because otherwise a bug will prevent you from passing through the door. A patch is available from SSI and on various online networks to fix this and some other problems in the game.

Ultima 8-Pagan: Can't find the Breath of Wind? It's right up there with Stratos. All you need is one spell to see it and another to get it. However, since taking the Breath will deactivate all spells except Air Walk, you may want to wait until you're ready for the end game before nabbing it. Some of those Air spells come in handy.

Superhero League of Hoboken: Some folks are having a hard time shuffling off to Buffalo. That's because they need the gold tube car pass and haven't been able to find it. Well, there isn't one. However, there is a master tube car pass, which allows you to ride any of the trains, including the gold line (and therefore you can sell all the others once you have it for extra cash). Just pay a visit to Harrisburg, and check out all the establishments there.

And that's about it for this look into the mailbox. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

On Delphi: Visit the GameSIG.

On GEnie: Type "Scorpia" to reach the Games RoundTable.

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

Until next time, happy adventuring! ☺

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The Bride With The Disney Dowry

Sierra Creates Their Own Magic Kingdom
in KING'S QUEST VII: THE PRINCESS BRIDE

by Charles Arday

CONSIDER THIS GAME TO BE KING'S QUEST I. THIS IS WHERE IT ALL OUGHT TO HAVE STARTED; OR, TO LOOK AT IT ANOTHER WAY, THIS IS WHERE IT ALL STARTS. YES, KING'S QUEST VI got a lot of attention for its snazzy opening cartoon, crammed with swooping camera movements and full-screen characters rendered three-dimensionally; but once you got past the opening, the game was just another KING'S QUEST. Decent graphics, but nothing to stand up and cheer over—the graphics even felt like something of a letdown after the outstanding animation of the introduction.

KING'S QUEST VII, on the other hand, is a visual marvel from beginning to end. I tried this game on my mother (a big fairy tale fan), who asked, "Is that a game from Disney?" When I replied in the negative, she said, "But they're trying to do Disney, right?"

They are indeed. From the opening frames, where drops of dew in an enchanted forest drop on the tummy of an enchanted ladybug, to the scene a few seconds later in which lovely Princess Rosella sings her royal heart out in a tuneful psalm to her about-to-be-lost adolescence,

KING'S QUEST VII exudes Disney-like quality from each of its cel-animated poses.

Every frame is beautiful, every line is neat and pert, the camera soars and glides, and the notes of the musical score tinkle out in bounding effervescence like the fizz out of a bottle of soda pop. This is the Disney of *The Little Mermaid* or *Beauty and the Beast*, or *Aladdin*, if you deduct that film's adult-targeted sense of irony. It's the Disney of *The Sword In the Stone* and of *Alice in Wonderland*, light and fluffy as a soufflé. It's not the Disney of *Bambi* or *Snow White*; here even the menaces are adorable bits of whimsy. If the villains ever frighten, it's only for a brief time, and then everyone gets together again

King's Quest VII

Price: \$79.95.

CD-ROM

System

Requirements:

IBM

compatible

386-33Mhz or

better (486

recommended),

4 MB RAM (5

MB RAM rec.),

SVGA graphics,

Windows 3.1, CD-ROM,

mouse, supports

Windows compatible sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Roberta Williams

Publisher: Sierra On-Line, Inc.

Belleue, WA

(800) 757-7707



for one more song.

It matters not at all that the game is from Sierra rather than Disney. It is true to the Disney spirit, just as any movie about a rugged hero who wears a leather jacket and gets out of one scrape after another is really Indiana Jones, and any movie about a suave secret agent is essentially James Bond. At the same time, KING'S QUEST VII is also KING'S QUEST

through and through, meaning (among other things) that it cribbs from other sources left and right. A bit of a familiar fable here—is that Chicken Little running about the streets of the town called Falderol?—a bit of a legend there, a bit of a modern fairy tale two screens over.

Rosella falls down, down, down into a magical pool like Alice down the rabbit



hole, and when her mother, Valance, follows her, she actually meets a rabbit and goes through a number of tiny doors. "The Wizard of Oz" is in the game, too, in Rosella's opening song about being transported to "a land beyond dreams." So is Guinevere's soliloquy from Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot*, when Rosella sings, "[I'm] about to be a bride[But] I want to run and hide." (Guinevere sang, "I won't be bid and bargained for like beads at a bazaar...I've run away, eluded them and fled..." Same idea, KING'S QUEST VII just eliminates those nasty, complicated words like "eluded" and "bazaar.")

What else is lurking in this game? For one thing, a Halloween land that suspiciously resembles the town from Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas*, and even uses the name "Ooga Booga." (The bad guy in that flick was a heavy named "Oogey Boogey." A subtle distinction.) Anyone else? Sure: the three Fates from Greek mythology, Titania and Oberon from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a comi-



JACK'S FLAT Princess Rosella's journey will take her through a Halloween land reminiscent of Tim Burton's *A Nightmare Before Christmas*.

cal carnivorous Venus flytrap, and a headless horseman, all lifted from other sources and jumbled together in the mythic hodgepodge that is KING'S QUEST VII.

Everyone you meet gives you a quest to carry out; that's tradition, too. It wouldn't be KING'S QUEST if you actually had to go out and look for puzzles to solve, now would it? It never struck me before now just how mercantile a world-view the KING'S QUEST series presents: everyone wants something, everyone's got something you want, everyone's willing

to make a trade. The jeweler troll in the caverns wants a jewel to buy new tools with, and he'll give you his old tools if you bring him same; the crystal dragon wants a spark, and if you bring her one she'll give you a nice big ruby. You have a lantern that can carry a spark, and you need a hammer and chisel to chip off one of the dragon's scales while she's asleep.

Do I smell trades in the offing?

Trades are at the heart of this game, an ironic subtext for a story whose stated topic is the marrying off of a nubile girl, and not just any nubile girl, a nubile royal, in whose person is presumably vested some claim to political authority over and ownership of her father's lands. But enough of that—this is neo-Disney, remember. This is KING'S QUEST, where the closest you get to sexual politics is Rosella going "blech!" after being kissed by a troll. This is magic and wonder and happily ever after, and the crew of designers and artists who worked on the game have pulled it off so well that, by gosh and begorrah, it really does cast the spell a good animated movie does. It's the first computer game to do so, certainly the first KING'S QUEST. The puzzles may be the familiar sorts of puzzles and the characters may be the usual sorts of characters, but in another sense nothing is the same. A new era begins now.



FISH OR FOUL? Valance will encounter a number of colorful characters with "fishy" motives while looking for her princess daughter.



HANDS, LANDS, AND SHIFTING SANDS

It must be the result of inbreeding, these four-fingered hands that Rosella and Valance have. If you never noticed them before, it's not cause for a trip to the ophthalmologist.

They've never had hands before, at least not like this, with fingers and everything. Now you can see their fingers move, and their eyes, and their facial expressions. You can see Valance stick her finger in her tiny mouth when she samples a piece of birthday cake and Rosella's yellow tongue unfurl in the mirror after she's been turned into a troll.

It's every bit as good as the animation in the last adventure game to win acclaim for its cartoon-style animation, LucasArts' *THE DAY OF THE TENTACLE* (where the characters also had four-fingered hands—go figure).

Denny Delk, *DAY OF THE TENTACLE*'s Hoagie, turns up here as the voice behind King Otar, Lord of the Trolls, who snatches Rosella out of the magic pool, transforms her, and claims her as his fiancée. (The versatile and wonderful Delk also turns up as a badger in *Falderol* and a shrunken head in *Ooga Booga Land*.) While Rosella goes about getting herself un-trolled and then labors to escape Ooga Booga's creepy environs unmolested, Valance searches for her through an endless desert and a cursed forest where she encounters a snake oil salesman (Roger Jackson) who outdoes *The Music Man*'s Robert Preston for sheer oiliness, and a mockingbird in the best Don Rickles tradition (Jim Cranna), among other interesting creatures. With the exception of Chicken Little and one or two of the trolls, all the characters' voices are extremely well done. It is a pleasure to think about how far we've come from the days when Sierra used to corral random staff members to do the voices on the CD-ROM editions of their games.

The game's story unfolds in six chapters, alternating between Valance and

Rosella as on-screen heroine. First, Valance has to struggle through the desert to get a stone idol to open its mouth; when, upon pulling this off, she finds herself menaced by a giant gila monster, the game suspends her story and turns its at-



OUT OF CONTROL Rosella had better watch her tongue around the grumpy trolls lest she find herself turned into one.

tentation to Rosella's travels in the land of the trolls. When Rosella finds herself clinging to the edge of a graveyard sinkhole by her fingernails, the game leaves her to return to Valance. A bit of cleverness gets Valance past the gila monster and into Falderol, where after much ado she ends up on trial for stealing the moon. (Don't ask.) Before we get to see Valance exonerated, we return to Rosella; then it's back to Valance, and so on, until you've made it through the last chapter.

Or, if you prefer, you can jump around instead, starting a new game at any chapter you like. This is one of several nice touches that make *KING'S QUEST VII* easier and more user-friendly than most adventure games on the market. Also, if you "perish" or "expire" in the game you have the option of retracting your fatal move and trying something else.

Other nice touches don't necessarily make the game easier, but do make it more fun. For instance, clicking an object from your inventory on the eye icon in the command line calls up a window in mid-screen that displays a fancy 3-D rendering of the object, which you can rotate to examine it from all angles.

There are some unfortunate weaknesses, too. The eye icon in the command line, for instance, can only be used to look at inventory objects, not at anything in the graphic window. This confused me, and I imagine it might confuse younger gamers

even more. Also, there is a large, ornate letter 'K' at the end of the command line, which looks like it ought to do something, but turns out not to have any function at all. Another peculiarity is that the game has no save game feature and only saves your position in the story when you quit.

These are minor complaints; the only major one I have is that the copy of the game I had crashed several times as a result of internal errors. I had been warned that this might happen, but the warning didn't make the fact any easier to take. It's no fun when your game stops dead and displays an arcane error message like "Error 48: myCursorView is not a selector for plInventory," especially when the lack of a save function means that if you haven't quit recently you'll have to replay a good-sized chunk of the game.

It's a shame that in order to get the game into stores in time for the holiday season, Sierra had to release it with bugs still present; the silver lining is that at least this is one of the rare games that, because of its great animation, is fun to replay. Nevertheless, you may want to wait until Sierra has all the kinks worked out and new copies on the shelves before taking the plunge.

LUCKY SEVEN

Whether sooner or later, though, gamers who like their gaming light, and certainly gamers with kids, will want to take the plunge. Even if this is not the sort of game you typically enjoy, even if earlier installments in the *KING'S QUEST* saga have left you yawning or bristling at their interminable cuteness, *KING'S QUEST VII* is one game you'll have to see. Not so much because of the puzzles, which are negligible, or the brilliance of the writing, but simply because its execution and the quality of its presentation make this game one of the landmark titles in the field. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

KING'S QUEST VII

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Animation as good as you'd get from a middle-quality Disney feature, with voices and writing to match.
CONS Sierra's quick left turn at Mass Market Street may have left some hard-core gamers in search of a challenge. Also, there are a few crash bugs in the initial release.



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A World In Runes

Legend Animates The Pages Of Weis And Hickman's DEATH GATE

by Peter Olafson

IF ITS PREDECESSOR, COMPANIONS OF XANTH, WAS A GAME ENGINE IN SEARCH OF A GAME, THEN DEATH GATE IS A GAME in search of a game engine—and a consistent voice. This CD-ROM-based graphic adventure from Legend Entertainment offers a colorful, and occasionally affecting, excursion through the fantasy world based on the *Death Gate* novels by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, but sacrifices some of its appeal to disparities of content and style.

You're cast as Haplo—a recent Pryan refugee from the Labyrinth, a large and dangerous maze to which your human-like race was consigned 2,000 years earlier by the Sartans in the Sundering. In a final, desperate act in their losing battle with the Pryans, they split the world into five realms—the Labyrinth and the usual Air, Water, Fire and Stone—and then made themselves scarce.

Lord Xar, a labyrinth retriever (groom) who saved Haplo's hash in the maze, would have him believe the Sartans are demons. (Haplo will learn, by turns, that they're not all that bad.)

The sovereer is out for revenge, and to reform the world, but lacks the necessary knowledge to perfect his plan. So he's designated the young man to be his

instrument in the realms. Haplo is to venture through the Death Gate to the four divided worlds, retrieve the scattered pieces of the World Seal used in the Sundering, and learn what he can of the Sartans' whereabouts. So off you go, in a sort of winged Viking ship, armed with four basic spells. On Arianus, you'll help the dwarves shed some unwanted "Gods." On Pryan, you're a matchmaker. On Abarrach, you'll help put down a tyrant. And so it goes.

COUSIN OF XANTH

The game engine from XANTH is back for DEATH GATE—surrounded by a court of splendid speech and animations—and that's basically a good thing. XANTH itself was so frothy that you could almost sense the machinery

laboring beneath the fabric of the game. DEATH GATE's a weightier creature, and the engine here is simply an engine. Giving orders is a matter of pointing and clicking. There's no guesswork to finding the right verb—seven common verbs are nestled in the upper left corner, and clicking on an object calls up any others unique to it—and certainly no typing. It is simple, easy, and it is even fun in itself.

The content is another matter. In

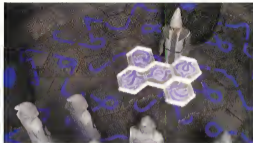
games, as in literature, it is important to strike a tone and stick to it—if only in the interest of atmosphere. DEATH GATE doesn't quite manage that. It seems to want to be an airy SPELLCASTING 401 and a brooding TIML QUEST at the same time, and it never really settles down in either world.

The intro is promising—a majestic affair heralded by the white crackle of magic and set on an island floating above a vast, dusky drain called the Vortex.

We've come to the Vortex to destroy the world!" the white-robed leader tells his followers grimly, the camera passing behind a pillar into darkness, and the credits begin. It's the sort of moment that makes you think, "Ah, I'm onto something special here."

And so you are, if only in fits and starts. DEATH GATE is at its best when it is serious. That apocryphal tone is echoed in Xar's lust for revenge and reaches a pinnacle in the fire realm of Abarrach. This lava world is largely peopled with the undead, and in one spot you'll need to put two half-wits together to make a whole one: one zombie ceaselessly reading a child's poem, and another zombie ceaselessly obeying the verses. It suits the player to a mixture of compassion and horror that doesn't have a name, and how many games do you know that tap into any emotion (except maybe frustration)?

That's one of the more modest puzzles. The game isn't all that tough, but it relies heavily on the player's powers of close observation. And that may occasionally have you scratching your head raw. Especially clever is the entry code to the treasure room in the Brotherhood tower, and the use of a dog—the world black and white



DEATH GATE

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

386-33MHz or better,

4 MB RAM, SVGA

graphics, 5 MB

hard drive space

(minimum),

mouse, CD-ROM;

supports Roland (MT-32/Sound Canvas)

and Sound Blaster (AWE32) compatible

sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Glen Dahlgren

Publisher: Legend Entertainment

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through its color-blind eyes—to identify and retrieve an antidote. You get fond of that dog, too. And there **DEATH GATE** goes, getting into your heart again.

A TOUCH TOO SWEET

But the game has this cute side, and it just doesn't belong. The dwarves you'll find in Arianus service a vast and ill-understood machine named, in a blast of Anglophilia, the Kicksley-Winsley. (Was Douglas Adams a consultant?) Zifnab, a voluble and eccentric Sartan wizard who turns up on Pryan and again in the endgame, carries on a monologue laden with decidedly modern Earth references. Haplo's options in verbal responses often run to the snotty-sarcastic. Even though this comic relief worked in the books, it seemed distracting and inappropriate in the game.

Perhaps Legend didn't want to make the game too heavy, but this leavening only sends mixed signals. Happily, this light touch did not affect the amount of text in the game.

An enormous quantity of information changes hands here—most of it really, in conversation, but a good deal in books, some of them quite extensive. Finding and reading these tomes—which appear as full-screen animations—is delightful, but it's also a thoughtful way to shepherd a newbie into the **DEATH GATE** cycle. It has the effect of showing you what this world is like, rather than telling you, and you come to understand it more intuitively, rather than being entirely force-fed.

And that's good, because the minimalist game manual barely mentions *Death Gate* after the title page. Not a word of background. No glossary. No character sketches. Was **DEATH GATE** intended simply for already-in-the-know fans of authors Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman? It's hard to imagine the uninitiated making much of "Forever Falling," a new *Death Gate* short story included in the package.

Unfortunately, it's only rarely that the conversations have any palpable effect on the course of the game. Oh, occasionally, you can slip up. For instance, revealing himself to the Sartan necromancer Balthazar as a Pryan immediately earns Haplo a job feeding worms, and certain characters will turn over items upon your



DRY DOCKED Haplo travels from realm to realm in his ship, recovering parts of the World Seal.

request. But basically the conversational options are a series of hierarchical lists to cycle through, with no real threads (or impact) in the game's fabric. There's no art to conversing in **DEATH GATE**; it's a



WHAT UP, WIZARD DUDE? Zifnab looks like a wizened elder of an ancient age, but he talks like the wise-ass who lives next door. Consistency is not **Death Gate's** strong suit.

good tool for passing on information, but, in terms of the game's ebb and flow, a relatively meaningless feature.

THEY RUINED IT

Spells are handled in a similar fashion. You click on the "Cast" icon and on the person or object you want to magically



MIX-N-MATCH MAGIC Spells are created by combining basic rune tiles on this screen.

manhandle and, on a separate screen, select the incantation and watch the spell runes assemble themselves. Neat. Spells are the meat of **DEATH GATE**; watch the rune written in the air, and they're yours. But if you're going to create a whole separate interface for magic, then you'd expect the game to justify its existence. This one suggests you should be able to build spells yourself. Well, that may be. But only once, and only late in the game, did I have occasion to even fine-tune an existing spell. (You need to toy with Self-Immolation so you don't burn yourself up.) One spell adjustment does not an interface justify. It's pretty but effectively useless, and unhappily recalls XANTH's setting up a whole "Companion" structure simply for the sake of one inane puzzle.

Technically, it's a very clean game. It booted, it saved, it didn't crash. For all the voices, **DEATH GATE** is happily free of audio oddities and dropouts. Indeed, the only inconsistency I found was when Haplo, imitating a long-dead wizard, switched back and forth between his own voice and the imitation, depending on which line you had him use. (On the other hand, I'd really like to see a hero who doesn't sound as though he works as an AM radio DJ on his day off.) For all the accompanying text, I didn't spot even one typo. The animations ran more or less smoothly on a 486 DX2/66.

But I occasionally was haunted by a feeling that **DEATH GATE's** technology has outstripped its genre. All the amenities lavished on the game—the enormous reservoir of digitized speech, the SVGA graphics, the animated cut scenes—build expectations for a game mechanism to

complement them. And as agreeable as the engine may be, the game proper is essentially the same old object-oriented adventuring: Take everything that's not nailed down and use it in a conspiracy to take everything that is. There is something inherently trivial about inhabiting a lavish world and being stranded simply by want of a certain item. Melding a rather typical graphic-

You can hear your breath,
your boots pounding on metal stairs.
There's only one way out.

20 more feet...15...10.

You're almost there when suddenly
from out of nowhere
an 8-foot-tall green alien drops down
and lunges at you with a spear, leaving you
approximately .08 seconds to act.

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and-text adventure to the resources of 3D STUDIO or AMAS is rather like having an orchestra play "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

I'd put up with a little messiness for greater depth and interconnectedness of these fancy-looking pieces. The endgame, for example, is thin on several counts. It's simply not a good idea to take control out of the player's hands, but that's precisely what DEATH GATE does in one of Haplo's confrontations with the evil dragon, Sang-Drax. The player can only summon Zifnab and his good dragon, and it's this dragon, not our hero, who fights the necessary fight.

Finally, the game ends relatively cold with a short and predictable 3D animation of Sang-Drax getting a *real* close look at the inner workings of the Vortex, and a digitized reading of three congratulatory paragraphs. The thing is, Sang-Drax is a relatively late addition to the tale and, as we don't have a history with him, his un-



INTERFACE BY XANTH The DEATH GATE interface is sweet simplicity. Seven verbs, a compass rose, and an accessible object inventory.

doing is not nearly as momentous as it might have been had he been introduced early on. (Or if he'd turned out to be disguised as, say, Xar.)

Instead of this weak ending, it might have been nice to go back and see what changes the ending has wrought on the divided worlds, especially since the game's linearity prevents you from seeing the results of your efforts. Once you've reached

a new realm, you can't leave until you've finished your task—shades of a finicky child at the dinner table—and once you've completed your task and reported back to Xar, you can't return. That's doubly inconvenient because the game does let you move on to a new realm without getting everything you'll need for future use. (Fortunately, the only restriction on saves seems to be hard drive space.)

And that's not a bad metaphor for DEATH GATE itself. It is, in a sense, a series of nicely-appointed but closed realms which raise interesting possibilities for adventuring, but don't really explore them. If it did, I'd be back in a second. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

DEATH GATE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Bullet-proof interface, some clever puzzles, and quality voice-overs. A big step up from COMPANIONSO FAN TR.

CONS The game is schizophrenic, trying to be both serious and whimsical. Ends with a whimper.

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See You In The Funny Papers

Electronic Arts'

Dark "Comic Book" Adventure, *NOCTROPOLIS*

by Charles Arday

IT USED TO BE THAT LIKENING SOMETHING TO A COMIC BOOK WAS A WAY OF PUTTING IT DOWN. "COMIC BOOK" meant two-dimensional, episodic, unsophisticated, and juvenile.

These days, if you compare something to a comic book it's a compliment. Some of the biggest movies of the last few years have been based on comic books (*Batman*, *The Mask*, *TimeCop*), while others might as well have been, they resembled comic books so closely. Today "comic book" means mythic, dark, and resonant, or else cynical, self-aware, and hip. And profitable—it means profitable more than it means almost anything else.

Little wonder, then, that after a hiatus of several years computer game designers are once again looking to comic books for inspiration. (There was a brief flurry of titles around 1987; gamers with long memories may recall ACCOLADE'S COMICS, "featuring Steve Keene, Thrillseeker," and DAN DARK, PILOT OF THE FUTURE from Electronic Arts.)

NOCTROPOLIS, EA's latest attempt at a comic book-inspired game, comes closer to the mark than the earlier titles did, by combining the characteristics that have made the new generation of comic books so popular—stylized visuals, grotesque characters, bloody violence,

sporadic nudity, moral ambiguity—with such features of modern multimedia gaming as full-motion video and a moody orchestral soundtrack. At first glance (and first listen), *NOCTROPOLIS* appears snazzy indeed.

Unfortunately, one rapidly discovers that *NOCTROPOLIS* is also comic book-like in the old sense: it's flat, episodic, poorly written, technologically crude, and juvenile. It's also highly derivative, both of actual comic books and of other computer games.

NOC, NOC, WHO'S THERE?

You're a down-on-his-luck bookstore owner who gets in over his head in a city brimming with dark rituals and ancient evil. Ultimately you come to terms with your own mystical destiny and assume the heroic mantle you were always fated to wear. Quick: what game are you playing? GABRIEL KNIGHT from Sierra? Wrong. *NOCTROPOLIS*.

You're the city's champion, a Dark Knight bringing justice to the shadowy underworld.

One day, an arch-villain out for your blood breaks an army of psychopaths out of a house for the criminally insane, and now you've got to face them one by one in progressively deadlier encounters.



Quick: who are you? Batman, in last year's "KnightFall" storyline? The Shadow, in his "Seven Deadly Fins" storyline of a few years earlier? No. You're Darksheer, the costumed anti-hero of *NOCTROPOLIS*.

And who, pray tell, do you have to fight in the course of the game? Greenthumb, a mutant plant creature who is sort of like DC Comics' Swamp Thing, only evil; TopHat, a sexy magician who is sort of like DC's Zatanna, only evil; and The Dreamer, a mischievous dream-invader who is sort of like Freddy Krueger, only shouter. What ally do you have fighting by your side? Stiletto, a blade-swinging, cat-suited babe who is sort of like Marvel Comics' Elektra, only blond.

Some people say there are only six plots in all of literature, which would mean that authors since Homer have been retelling familiar yarns about familiar types of characters and ought not to be criticized for doing so. Even if you accept this idea, though, there is a difference between good stories and bad ones. If good stories are never wholly novel, at least they aren't wholly familiar either. *NOCTROPOLIS* is familiar stuff from beginning to end. There is not one scene in the game that doesn't instantly remind you of a dozen similar scenes in other games, films, and books.

NOCTROPOLIS

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

386-33Mhz or

better (486-

33Mhz

recommended), 4

MB RAM, SVGA

graphics, 500k

hard drive space,

CD-ROM;

supports General MIDI, PAS, and Sound

Blaster compatible sound cards.

Protection: None

Designers: Brent Erickson, Shaun Mitchell

Publisher: Electronic Arts

San Mateo, CA

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trigger." "God help me," cries the priest, "I can't do it!") The narration, on the other hand, far from indulging in clichés, is a singular example of peculiar and pompous over-writing.

Windows don't just break in NOCTROPOLIS, they "shatter in a deafening shower of corrosion."

You aren't just sorry your favorite comic book series has been cancelled—oo, "an unexpected anxiety irritably competes for your attention [as] you swallow the bitter acknowledgment that this will be the last time you may enjoy the novelty of a Darksheer adventure. Annoyed by your inability to affect the publisher's decisions, you ...resume your review of the last installment of the ...saga." When, during your adventures, you stop

by a strip joint, you don't just restrain yourself from whistling at a stripper, you "overcome the desire to vocalize a number of degrading catcalls toward the exotic dancer."

If this isn't bad enough, there is over-writing of another sort in evidence as

well. Like comedians who point out their punch lines so you'll know where you're supposed to laugh, authors Brent Erickson and Shaun Mitchell insist on filling the screen with text boxes that tell you what you are about to see. "The Succubus' attack is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Stiletto," says one text box, which then adds, "who is fitted in her stylized black cat suit and heels." Sure enough, the text box vanishes and there comes Stiletto; and sure enough, she's wearing her cat suit and heels. But why did we need to be told this in text when we could just have watched it happen?

Another text-related complaint: although the game comes on CD-ROM, and although the designers managed to find room on the CD for more than 20 minutes of music, they somehow neglected to find room for spoken renditions of most of the text in the game. In a typical conversation between Darksheer and another character, only the first few lines of the other character's dialogue are spoken out loud; all of Darksheer's lines and the bulk of the other character's responses

are printed out on the screen. The result is that NOCTROPOLIS feels old-fashioned, like an adventure game from the DAN DARE era of computer gaming, when players would put up with a less-than-satisfying gaming experience because technical limitations meant they had no choice.

Contributing to this behind-the-times feeling is a



In an attempt to break with the familiar, the story tries to pull off a big twist at the end, but players who bother to read the miniature comic book that comes in the game box will guess it before the game even begins. Even players who somehow fail to anticipate the twist will not care about it when it comes, since it is hard to care about anything that happens to characters who act not like normal human beings or even super-powered human beings, but like characters in bad action movies—or bad comics.

Not helping matters much is the actual text of the game. The dialogue consists almost exclusively of hoary clichés. ("Not another step," says a priest menaced by a nun who is possessed by a demoness. "Any closer and I'll send you back to Hell!" "Go ahead, holy man," says the demoness, "pull the



PYRAMID POWER? The adventure interface looks cool in all of its 3-D triangularity, but it's so "idiot proof" that it inhibits intelligent puzzle-solving.

poorly designed user interface that makes playing this game about as comfortable and convenient as playing the piano in mittens. For example, the command menu you call up with a click of the right mouse button includes the command "Use," but it turns out that "Use" only functions on items in your character's inventory. If you want to use an object that is not in inventory, you have to select the "Move" command, which only occasionally makes sense in context. (If you want to turn on a motor, you have to "move" the motor. If you want to pick up a phone, you have to "move" the phone.)

If you do want to Use an item in inventory, you can—but you can't tell the computer what you want to use it with, or in what way you want to use it. If you are in the right room to use the object, it will be used correctly; if not, not. This means that players not only don't have to but can't demonstrate any puzzle-solving ingenuity.

In a good adventure game, if you wanted to smash a hole in a wall by tying one end of a rope to a sack of bricks and throwing the other end into the blades of a giant fan, you would have to use the rope first on the bricks and then on the fan. Not here. Here, you stand in the middle of the Fan Room, select "Use," and then click on each object

you're carrying. Eventually you get to the rope, and as soon as you click on it, you're done—you can sit back and watch while Darksheer goes about implementing the specific solution to the puzzle.

Similarly, when, at the end of the game, Darksheer has to build some tool by combining objects in his inventory, you would expect to have to indicate which objects you want him to combine. Instead, as soon as you indicate one object, the game automatically combines it with the others you need to produce the tool Darksheer requires.

SHEER AND SHEER ALIKE

The weak gameplay doesn't diminish



O SOLO NEATO Noctropolis has at least one thing going for it—the graphics. Each scene is meticulously rendered in a palette caked in grit and dried blood.

Noctropolis' good qualities, of course. The surreal background art is elaborate and dramatic. The music is evocative. Some of the performances are fun, especially Nathan Oventhal's as the phlegm-



TUNE IN TO FMV Live actors do their thing in small video windows. The full motion dialogue is limited to the first verbal exchange in most encounters.

spewing Greenthumb and Anthony Russell's as a playful sadist named Dr. Macabre, Julie Simper's work as a widow and David Jean Thomas' as the beleaguered priest, though minor, are also worth a glance.

Unfortunately, even in these areas, NOCTROPOLIS tends to disappoint. As usual for a multimedia game intended for "mature" audiences, the quality of the acting in the game declines in direct proportion to how much skin an actor has to show. Jessica Youngblood is quite good in her incidental role as a hooker wearing a teddy under a trenchcoat; the Succubus (Britney Lewis), who flashes a nipple in the first scene, seems to be

reading her lines off of misspelled cue cards; and as for Stiletto (Hope Marie Carlton), who shows off an obvious pair of implants in a bizarre topless scene, all I can say is that this is an actress whose career is unlikely to take off unless they start making "Porky's" movies again.

Aside from the gratuitous nudity, the designers also

demonstrate questionable taste in a scene in which TopHat conjures up a bunny and then burls it to the floor with a bloody splat, and another in which Dr. Macabre slices off one of Stiletto's fingers and flings it in the player's face. There's nothing wrong with a little sex and violence, but when a game needs to use cheap shocks and cheap thrills to hold a player's attention, it's usually a sign that there isn't much else to notice.

Indeed, there isn't. The music's decent, the art's better than decent, the weak interface makes the game pretty easy to get through, and gamers whose tastes run that way can replay Stiletto's strip-tease to their heart's content, but if gamers are looking for a substantial or challenging game to play, they'd better look elsewhere. As good as comic books can be these days, they used to be (and often still are) slight and mediocre affairs. NOCTROPOLIS is as slight and mediocre as they come. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

NOCTROPOLIS

RATING



PROS The artists had a field day painting atmospheric settings to make the City of Night come to life; this makes the environment an appealing one to explore.

CONS The writers have filled the environment with familiar characters, hokey dialogue, and a meaningless plot, plus they've stuck the player with a third-rate interface.

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Gene Weaver

ALIEN LOGIC Splices Bio-Tech, Magic, Great Graphics, and Dreadful Dialogue Into A Strange New Adventure

by Paul C. Schuytema

OVER THREE THOUSAND YEARS AGO, THE HUMAN SPECIES WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE XENOCIDE OF THE shantha race on the colony planet of Jorune. Now, time has healed some, but not all of the wounds. Red Shantha, a renegade shantha, sees humans as an unacceptable evil. Four years ago, he raided your village and placed the inhabitants in containment crystals. Somehow, through a strange series of accidents, your crystal ended up in the Mountain Crown of Tan-Iridic, home to the inquisitive Thriddle. You were released, told of the fate of your people, and set out on the quest to find your fellow villagers and free them from the Red Shantha's enslavement.

ALIEN LOGIC, an adventure game from SSI in the SkyRealms of Jorune game world, is the first computer game set in this formerly pencil and paper role-playing universe. Jorune, a fantastic, semi-Earthlike planet, has a wondrous history. It is rich in powerful crystals and other compounds, and its strange magnetic field generated by tension along crystal lattices gave rise to the SkyRealms, massive floating land masses which dot the globe. Some SkyRealms float near the ground, rarely moving, casting dark

shadows and leaving the land below barren and desolate. Other SkyRealms float freely in the crystalline currents, circumnavigating the globe.

Jorune was once the home world for the shanths, a race of sentient, blind humanoids whose culture and technology was based on the knowledge of Isho. Isho is not magic, but an energy force flowing through Jorune's crystalline structures. This force can be "woven" into tools, defenses or weaponry. One who knows the Isho, who can weave functional dyshas from the energy, is very powerful indeed.

Beyond the almost magical energy forces on Jorune, biotechnology is very sophisticated. Strange giant melons called incupods dot the landscape, containing the raw matter to grow and hatch all manner of strange creatures. DNA clusters, called corks, can be inserted into the incupods to instruct the matter to congeal and accrete into a utilitarian life form called a reco. Citizens of Jorune may buy pre-engineered corks to create stubby creatures, or skilled artisans can use raw, color-coded corks and a



laser scalpel to cut and modify the DNA manually to create other unique reco forms.

The history, culture, flora and fauna of Jorune are simply wondrous. As a pencil and paper role-playing game, the SkyRealms of Jorune garnered many followers who bought into the fiction of Jorune. SSI had a major challenge on their hands when they decided to bring this world to the PC. In some respects, they have created a wonderfully sophisticated game world. In others, ALIEN LOGIC falls flat.

SCENES FROM A SCHOOLYARD

The biggest problem is that the character interaction and dialogue in ALIEN LOGIC is a joke. Never have I seen such a contrast between a beautiful game world implementation and absolutely ridiculous writing. The characters, one and all, speak like snotty pre-teens. It's hard to take the game seriously when our hero, who grew up in a wholly alien culture 40 centuries in the future, describes another character as "a real jerk." It gets worse when the "jerk" tells the hero, "You piss me off." Throughout the game, whether encountering humans or a myriad of other races, the characters all sound like this: immature, idiomatic and clumsy.

RPG and adventure game publishers

ALIEN LOGIC

Price: \$50.00,
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486-33Mhz
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should have learned this lesson by now: pretty graphics and a detailed game world are great, but it's the characters and plot that sell the story. While playing ALIEN LOGIC, I could allow my imagination to become transported to that alien world. Slicing the DNA to create a digger reco was a wonderful challenge that was wholly believable. But as soon as I ran into another sentient being, the horrible writing simply shattered the illusion.

Perhaps the most infuriating example of this was when I ran into a woman in the human city of Ardoth who used to be one of the villagers my character had grown up with. She hadn't seen my character in years and she had no idea of the fate of the village (which was presumably home for her family). Here we have the setup for a great dramatic scene, one of those interactive gems that could really pull a player into the fiction of ALIEN LOGIC. But the woman is absolutely unconcerned with the village. In fact, her only purpose in the first trimester of the game is to serve as a "trigger" to allow you to pick up a free laser scalpel from the "jerk" mentioned above. Beyond that, she is a totally empty personality.

ALIEN LOGIC is an adventure game as opposed to a role-playing game. There is really no character development; your game-world alter ego is merely a tool



SHAZAAM! When push comes to shove in *Alien Logic*, our hero weaves a web of offensive and defensive "dyshas," which bear a striking resemblance to magic spells.



CITY LIVES The game has a number of unique and beautiful interfaces, like this city map. A bio-scan of the city shows several shining points of life.



BUTT OF THE JOKE The conversational system in *Alien Logic* is of the old choose-your-response school. Sadly, the responses are rarely worth choosing.

with which to interact with the game world. True, your character does have health and isho levels which are variable, and one of your tasks in the game is to learn to weave a variety of functional dyshas, but they are mechanical, albeit interesting tasks. There is no sense of a well-rounded character, no personality quirks or moral dilemmas to work through. You must simply quest, moving from task to task as you seek to free your fellow villagers from stasis.

Perhaps what this game really lacks (and this is a trait shared by far too

many games) is a sense of pressure. The foundation blocks of the plot create no innate sense of tension, urgency or desire in the player. As I was zipping back and forth between the "field" and Ardoth, gathering crystals with my reco digger for cash and dysha luring, I easily forgot that I had this other "meta quest" to perform. I was as unconcerned about the fate of the villagers as my game alter-ego seemed to be.

THE UNIVERSE IS BIG

To be fair to ALIEN LOGIC, there is a lot to this game. You follow a string of quests, picking up location clues from dialog and artifacts you find, and along the way, you explore and interact with Jorane and its very unique denizens. The game is not

difficult, but it is not overly easy. It possesses just the right blend of challenge, encouragement and opportunity, making it a game far less frustrating than many in the adventure genre.

In fact, I simply loved the game interface. As a player, you work through seven distinctly different and flawlessly implemented interfaces. The primary interface is the side-scrolling view in which your character

interacts most closely with the world around him, and can control and weave dyshas. Beyond that, there are a handful of travel interfaces, from a photo-realistic overhead map, for moving to specific sites within a sector, to a meta-movement device, which allows you to travel larger distances, to the warp world interface, which allows you to enter another dimension of Jorane and travel instantly across vast distance to the various warps you have activated.

When you encounter a nasty sentient or beast, there are times when fighting is the only recourse. For those situations, you invoke your isho power to weave dyshas for offense or defense. The offensive dyshas can be as simple as a fireball (whose intensity will increase as your dysha knowledge increases) or as passively complex as a sphere of suspension

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PHOTO REAL The hand-held tracker is a primary navigational tool in the SkyReams. At this level of magnification, the landscape appears beautifully photo-realistic.

which surrounds your opponents. Combat is fairly straight-forward, but it moves a little too quickly at times for you to really spend any time considering which dyshas to use. As in most games, it is best to save just prior to the encounter, allowing you to restore your game until you can nail down the proper strategy.

In addition to the movement and en-

counter interfaces, you interact with a laser scalpel device, cutting cork to create just the right blend of DNA to create a stable and functional reco, or bio-robot, which will assist you in your endeavors. These recos can dig for crystals and minerals or serve to heal the player. Eventually, these little buggers simply use up their life force and die.

You also have the opportunity to enter "weaving world," another mysterious alter-dimension of Jorune in which you will find raw dysha

powers. You must enter weaving world under the tutelage (and often for a fee) of a kerning-bay master. Once in the translucent dimension, you place crystals (which you must either find or purchase) to lure dyshas to the exit portal. Like attracting a rabbit, each crystal brings the dysha a little closer. Run out of crystals and you're out of luck, but get the dysha

to the exit portal and that power becomes yours.

The craft displayed in the implementation of the game's interfaces and the world dynamics only makes me more frustrated. SSI has crafted one hell of a game engine, which would have been eminently capable of presenting us with an unforgettable playing experience. Instead, they deliver plot and writing which are nothing more than an embarrassment, leaving the player only going through the "point and click" motions rather than becoming absorbed in an alien world and culture so painstakingly thought out. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

ALIEN LOGIC

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Vivid SVGA graphics and a powerful multi-interface game engine.

CONS The dialogue is abysmal and the plot drags its tail.

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Circle Reader Service #279

I'll Have The Roach He's Smoking

Greg Roach Leads A Long, Strange Trip Into *THE VORTEX*

by Charles Ardal

IF, AS HE CLAIMS, SELF-STYLED "VIRTUAL CINEMA" PIONEER GREG ROACH WANTS INTERACTIVE MOVIES TO ATTAIN THE level of mainstream success and acceptance long since granted to movies, television, and novels, he'll have to start making interactive movies you don't have to be stoned to appreciate.

Swirling colors, melting faces, blood-hued mandalas, quick-cut collages of Disturbing Images and Meaningful Symbols—these are Roach's stock in trade. And in his newest title, *THE VORTEX: QUANTUM GATE II*, he splashes them across the screen with abandon. Add in bongos puk-pukking in the background, avant-garde musicians keening on the soundtrack, dialogue full of shallow Zen drifts drawn from fortune cookies, and lots of woolly-eyed talk about "the ka, the soul" and you quickly realize where Roach's *QUANTUM GATE* has deposited you: an alternate universe where the '60s never ended.

How did this happen? *THE VORTEX* is a sequel to one of last year's most impressive multimedia titles, *QUANTUM GATE*. Like *THE VORTEX* and Roach's first title, *THE MADNESS OF ROLAND*, *QUANTUM GATE* con-

tained more New Age sap than I would have liked, but it also had an anti-war science fiction storyline that hit you with the force of a Mack truck and the best acting, bar none, ever seen on a CD-ROM.

For once, Roach also disciplined himself and made sure that every video clip he ran had a function in the story. There were plenty of questions posed about the nature of reality: What is real? Am I seeing what's really out there, or is the government showing me something else for its own sinister ends? But these were also set into an environment that was very concrete and definitely real, a military base established on an alien planet for the purpose (allegedly) of mining a rare ore that could save the Earth from self-inflicted environmental disaster.

You played Drew Griffin, an innocent caught up in a struggle he wanted no part of, fighting desperately to learn the truth about the bloody mission he had been assigned. You knew who and (more or less) where you were. There were plenty of horrible secrets for you to uncover and confusion galore, but you were not

floating in a miasma of sheer visual and conceptual chaos.

In *THE VORTEX* you are still Drew Griffin, and you are still caught up in a struggle you don't comprehend—indeed, the game picks up the cliffhanger with which *QUANTUM GATE* ended—but this time the tone and the storyline are aggressively hallucinogenic. Before the game starts, you've already taken a Virtual Reality drug and an anti-Virtual Reality drug. Now, having been pulled out of the wreckage of your crashed hovercraft, you see giant bugs hovering over you. You also see your commanding officer; you see winged women with concerned expressions; you see bright lights; you see a padded cell. As the images fill the screen you face your first choice: on which of these versions of reality do you want to settle? The selection you make determines which of its many possible paths the story sets off on.

Choose the giant bugs or the padded cell and you are taking the first step on a path that will point you toward a cynical, dark storyline in which Drew ends up back at the base, working for the evil Colonel Saunders. Choose the picture of the winged woman and you launch Drew toward a more harmonious story, in which he comes to form a bond with the angel-like Aylude and fight on their side against his fellow humans, who are, after all, vicious colonizing pigs.

Any lingering doubts about the tone of this adventure are soon wiped away by the dialogue. "Greed is the most powerful force on Earth," says Drew, just before



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mouse, supports Sound Blaster and
compatible sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Greg Roach

Publisher: Hyperbole Studios
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Circle Reader Service #161



REALITY BUFFET In the opening sequence of the game, different versions of reality spin off from a dreary near-death experience. Cynical, deranged, or optimistic—you make the call.

teaming up with the long-lost Dr. Marks. "People...have sold off their humanity for a few stock options." "How can a culture value profit more than truth?" asks an alien. "We are corrupt," replies Drew. I'm sure you share my relief at hearing that Greg Roach, who charges \$79.95 for his computer games and just struck a deal with Warner Brothers, despises profit so.

THE INTERACTIVE PART

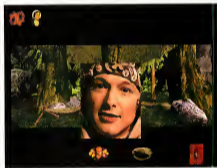
Within each scene, Drew is able to walk around his surroundings and look at various objects. When he meets people, he can ask them questions by clicking on question icons lining the top and bottom of the screen, and answer their questions by selecting from dialogue menus that pop up as needed. In some cases there are also actions Drew can take and thoughts he can ponder.

The choices you make do affect how the story proceeds, though in most cases the effect is gradual and cumulative. The same basic events occur in every replaying of *THE VORTEX*: you wake up in the Aylinde camp; you face the Aylinde council; you have hallucinations and bizarre dreams; you meet an old friend whom you'd thought was dead; you search for Dr. Marks, the Quantum Gate's creator; you face Saunders in a final showdown. But just what happens within each of these sequences, and even such details as what soundtrack and color scheme the scenes employ, are modified depending on the emotional state you've constructed for Drew through your choices.

Unfortunately, most scenes are interrupted two or three times by disjointed hallucinations which tend to take the form of meaningless six-second video

clips recycled from the first game, and are connected to one another by mysterious non-interactive flying scenes.

With all this going on, it's hard to get a handle on what's happening and why. And while that is supposedly the effect Roach is striving for, it's a lousy excuse for incoherent storytelling. *Ed Wood* was a movie about a bad film maker, but it was not badly filmed.



TALKING HEADS The characters in the game come packaged in small Quicktime boxes. Even so constrained, Paige Witte as Illyra can capture your heart.

The Silence of the Lambs is a novel about insanity, but it doesn't try to drive its reader insane. *QUANTUM GATE* inspired just the right amount of paranoia and disorientation, without falling into the vortex of confusion that was central to its plot. In *THE VORTEX* Greg Roach has, sadly, gone over the edge—and, worse yet, he insists that the player go with him.

TRIPPIN' THROUGH DREAMLAND

As noted above, *THE VORTEX* offers three ways to pass the time: you can explore, converse, or hallucinate. Hallucination is the easiest of the three, since you don't actually have to do anything, just watch the video clips and wonder what the hell they mean. Exploration consists of clicking on directional pointers in the horizontal location window that takes up

most of the screen, and then watching as Drew's view shifts. Most locations in the game are explorable, from the treetop village of the opening to the dark, gothic human base of the finale.

Unfortunately, other than walking around and enjoying the nicely scrolling graphics, there is hardly anything to do here either. You can look at a rock and hear a comment like, "It's a big f***in' rock," or at a shelf of pots and hear, "Oh, boy, my very own pots." That's about it.

Conversations are more enjoyable, if only because they aren't so aimless. There are always at least a half-dozen subjects to talk about, and most offer you a chance to shape Drew's character in interesting ways. However, these encounters are hampered by the fact that they usually

take the form of "talking heads" sessions in which the character you are speaking with faces the camera in extreme close-up and says something intense. Excellent scripting helped distract the viewer from this quality in *QUANTUM GATE*; here, alas, the scripting is yet another thing from which you need to be distracted.

Weak throughout, the script reaches a ghastly low point at the end of the first of

the story's three days, when Drew is called before the Aylinde council for "the Sounding," a grilling that is part P.C. catechism ("Do you consume without thinking?" "Do you see beyond appearances?" "Do you respect the bodies of others?") and part self-lacerating hot tub EST session ("Can you love yourself?" "Are you happy?" "Do you follow the light?"). It goes on in this vein for at least five minutes and then, when at last you think you are done, the computer replays the entire encounter from beginning to end while assembling a cryptic collage—an astrological symbol, a Masonic emblem, a squalling baby, a snake, a pamphlet titled "Hurting Someone You Love Is Against the Law"—slowly, didactically, on the screen.

Even if you set this episode aside, there is more than enough embarrassing writing in *THE VORTEX* to go around. Between re-

**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**

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religious/mystical proclamations like "The Great Mother teaches us each soul, each ka, is the pilot of the world" and woozy, druggy statements of awe such as "Ooohh, man...that was sooo intense...it was like I was being slung around in time or something." Roach shamelessly piles up enough self-actualizing tripe to make Timothy Leary and Werner Eckhardt look like a couple of pikers.

EARTH ANGEL

The actors do what they can to rescue the script, but they can only do so much. Paige Witte gives a stunning performance as Drew's delectable Aylinde benefactor, Illyra. She delivers her lines with such ease and naturalness that you forget that she's wearing big angel wings and a headdress covered with scraps rummaged from the five-and-dime, not to mention the fact that she's speaking arant nonsense.

The other actors, though, all fall short of the high marks set by the first product. Jamie Callahan, whom I consider one of the best young actors around, in or out of computer games, gives it all he's got as renegade Private Michaels, but when your lines include such retro hippie gens

as "This is so freaked out...here it's cool, it's, like, totally acceptable," you're doomed—even if your director hasn't painted your face red and dressed you in a Gypsy girl's harem outfit, as Roach has done here.

Since along with the new scenes so much footage is reused from the first game, you get to see great performances side by side with poor ones by the same actors. This is cruel to the actors, but instructive for the customer. In effect, by releasing *THE VORTEX*, Roach has just created a very bad five-hour-long commercial for his much better *QUANTUM GATE*.

THAT'S ALL SHE ROACHED

Alternately glib and self-satisfied, long-winded and too abrupt, *THE VORTEX* is



HE TALKS TO ANGELS Most of the interaction in *Vortex* takes place through conversations. What you say and how you say it can literally change the complexion of the game.

genuinely insufferable. The story doesn't hang together, the characters' motivations are murky, and the vaunted interactivity is quite slight. Replay value is low, in part because no one will want to get caught in the Sounding a second time, and in part because there is no point in replaying a game that failed to engage your interest and passion the first time. In addition, it has the uncomfortable tone of a street-corner evangelist who corners you and insists on telling you, Ancient Mariner-like, his philosophy of life.

Greg Roach, who has the habit of referring to himself as "the Spielberg of multimedia," seems unaware of what makes a director like Spielberg such a popular artist. Spielberg tells stories people want to hear in a form that is easy to digest. Roach offers something most people do not want, and frankly I think even his fellow travelers will have a hard time digesting his message in the form he presents it here. ☹

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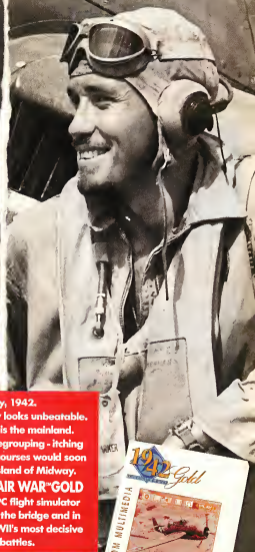
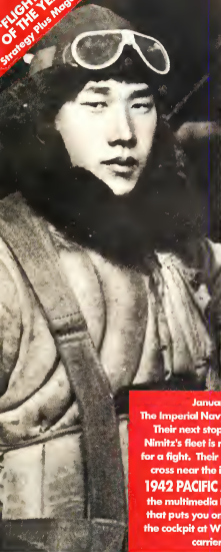
THE VORTEX: QUANTUM GATE II

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Paige Witte is terrific as a winged alien you want to take home to Mom; Jamie Callahan brings fevered energy to his rather unfortunate role.

CONS The script reads like a cobbled-together reject from the Age of Aquarius.

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I Dream The Body Elliptic

ECSTATICA's Ellipsoid Technology Takes The Edge Off ALONE IN THE DARK

by Allen L. Greenberg

FOR A MOMENT, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH PIGLET, WIELDING A MINIATURE HATCHET, HAS ESCAPED FROM A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Several yards down the road, Lon Chaney Jr., suffering from an overdose of the full-moon, drops in from an unseen roof-top with claws drawn and a deep, guttural growl. If you are lucky, you might duck into the barn where a tantrum-throwing bratler screams for her teddy-bear and lets loose with a final Bronx cheer.

Deep within the maze of a wizard's castle, a young, would-be sorceress named Ecstatica has unwittingly dreamed this menagerie of monstrosities into existence, and thus enslaved a small medieval village. *ECSTATICA*, an action-adventure game from *Psygnosis*, depicts your encounters in that village, and your efforts to free what is left of it from a hidden demonic overload.

Cast in the mold of the *ALONE IN THE DARK* games, *ECSTATICA* features either a hero or heroine who walks, crawls, dodges and fights like a marionette

whose strings are attached to your numeric keypad. The cursed village in which the adventure takes place is a dangerous and intricately-designed playground whose every alley and building holds some new challenge. Like the

ALONE IN THE DARK games, the program features a series of constantly shifting three-dimensional perspectives, as though hundreds of cameras had been planted throughout the village, all of which are now under the control of some mad movie director who cannot decide which view he likes the best.

Graphically, *ECSTATICA* is far more refined than the *ALONE IN THE DARK* games. Rather than the patchwork appearance of animated polygons, it uses a system of "ellipsoids" to generate its characters and provide them with a more graceful and natural appearance. Each character's actions are rendered with a great deal of care and fluid animation. Likewise, the village, as well as its buildings and castles, have all been treated with the same attention to detail. *ECSTATICA* also features an outstanding music score and remarkable sound effects. The dialogue may be somewhat sparse, yet is masterfully mixed in with the action. It is

also presented by some very talented speakers who manage to take their roles seriously, yet not without a touch of irony.

There is quite a bit of combat in the game, and this will definitely frustrate those players who enjoy exploring with-

out having to worry about watching their back. Uncovering the village's arcane secrets depends on successful combat at least as often as it does on solving the game's puzzles. There are a handful of weapons lying around the village, as well as a variety of objects which may or may not be integral to successfully completing the game. In addition to surviving the game's many battles, you will also need to endure the indignity of several red-herrings and misleading, yet nonetheless intriguing, pathways and special objects.

As if to emphasize the importance of combat over object manipulation, the hero's skin-tight, reveal-all clothing allows him or her to carry not a single object in a pocket, or even under a convenient arm-pit. Not even the adventure-standard carrying-sack is available. Using both hands, you are limited to carrying only two objects at a time. In a pinch, any item, even a small prayer book, may be used to smack an enemy. Normally, your ability to manipulate an object is limited to picking it up, putting it down, or using it to smash an enemy in the face. However, provided you are able to carry certain key objects to their proper destination in the game, the program will take over and ensure that your character uses the object in a more precise and appropriate fashion. Fortunately, even with all its red-herrings, the number of objects in the game seems somewhat less than most adventures.

There are moments, unfortunately, when combat in *ECSTATICA* seems as though it were placed there merely to impede progress in the game. Several of the creatures are nearly impossible to



ECSTATICA

Price: \$69.95

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Requirements:
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486SX-25Mhz
or better, 4 MB
RAM, VGA
graphics, 1-70
MB hard drive
space, CD
ROM, mouse;
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compatible sound cards

Protection: None

Designers: Andrew Spencer, Alain
Maillard

Publisher: Psygnosis
Cambridge, MA
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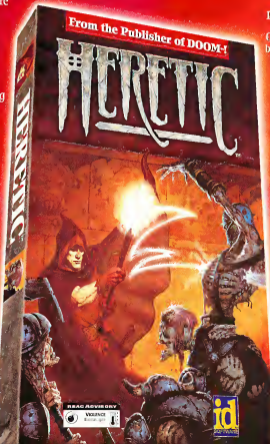
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kill, although they may be intimidated into backing off so that you can explore more freely for a short time. The Wolf-Man creature alluded to above is particularly noticeable for his habit of pouncing from off-stage straight onto



CAN I SPEAK TO MY LAWYER FIRST? The Demon-In-Chief gives our hero two options: become his partner in crime, or fight him to the death.

your hero's back. When this happens, there is generally no choice but to hit "escape" and restart the game at some other point. It is only when the creature has the decency to approach from a visible section of scenery that you stand a fighting chance of walking away from battle. You should, however, take some comfort from the fact that the Wolf-

Man often guards an important part of the story. Though you may perish in your path, at least you know it was a path worth taking. There are also several mechanical sudden-death traps scattered throughout the village. Needless to say, taking advantage of the program's elaborate game-save system is the only way to maintain any progress in the game.

There appears to be a role-playing aspect to *ECSTATICA* in that your hero or heroine seem to become more capable of dealing with the enemy demons each time a battle is completed. However, the character's progress or condition generally remains a mystery. There is no nu-

meric or graphic representation of either development or even injury, so that you are often left to guess at what these might be. It is only when the character becomes severely injured that he or she will begin to limp, painfully cradling an injured limb, that you may safely assume that he or she is in need of some immediate care. Healing takes place at special locations in the game where the hero can flop onto a comfortable surface, and awaken with all wounds mysteriously mended.

Once you've managed to explore the entire village, *ECSTATICA*



CHURCH OF THE DAMNED A priest meets an ignoble end, strang from the rafterers of his temple. Apparently, the new worshippers in his congregation don't appreciate his theology.

quickly becomes a somewhat simple exercise to solve. Once you have eliminated the false-leads, there are relatively few puzzles to be solved, and these, you will find, are clearly defined at some point in your explorations. Even so, there is a seductive quality to the game as well as its story, so that finishing the adventure is still a satisfying experience.

ECSTATICA is made a somewhat unique experience by its inclusion of several moments of moral ambiguity. Although you come upon this village already butchered and largely desecrated, there are still some survivors who have yet managed to cling to their lives, if not necessarily to their sanity. Though they

are clearly motivated by religious beliefs, some yet stand in the way of the hero and his or her task. You don't need to slaughter these innocents, although you are certainly free to do so. Whatever action you decide, however, you will remain free of blame or even reprimand. A far more important decision awaits you towards the game's ending in which the hero is asked to reconsider his or her relationship with the game's demon. However, the most profound question arises when you realize that you are fighting to rescue Ecstatica, the woman who deliberately, though somewhat naively, brought about the village's great misfortune to begin with. It is difficult to tell if it is the game's moral dilemmas which inspired *ECSTATICA*'s "age 17" warning, or whether it was actually the program's extreme violence. Most likely, it was the flatulence and urise.

Players may find that the constant shifting of the three-dimensional views become confusing. Exploration, for example, can be frustrating when a particular section of the room refuses to stay in place. During combat, it is also sometimes difficult to judge the exact position of the hero in relation to his enemy. The problem may correct itself when the program switches to a different camera angle. However, as often as not, the new view can compound the problem by obscuring one or both combatants. Some small degree of control over these sudden shifts in perspective would have been greatly appreciated.

While its story may be simple, and its play-time brief, *ECSTATICA* is nonetheless a difficult adventure to resist. Both its characters and its surroundings are full of charm, imagination, and just enough wickedness to make the entire encounter interesting. Hard-core adventure gamers may be less than ecstatic with the program, but less serious players will probably have a good time with this one. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

ECSTATICA

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A seductive story with bright graphics and expressive characters.

CONS The game is a bit brief, and what length it does have is often a result of excessive combat rather than more puzzles and exploration.

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A New Star Is Born

Origin's *Wing Commander III*
Fathers A New Gaming Form

by Martin E. Cirulis

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE THINGS CHANGE—SOMETIMES SLOWLY, SOMETIMES IN A MOMENT. COMPUTER gaming tends to evolve in small steps, many of them in a year, so that when you look back across a decade it makes you feel like checking into an old age home, but the steps themselves can be hard to notice while they are happening. And sometimes they aren't.

For the thousands of times a product is labeled as revolutionary, there is the one time the use of the word is justified.

This is one of those times.

WING COMMANDER III: HEART OF THE TIGER, from the technology-pushing nuts at Origin, has to be one of the most hyped programs to come down the pipe in the history of the field. From the amount of money spent on production to conversations with stars who wouldn't be caught

dead doing TV but are now on an even smaller screen, WCS has already been loved, hated, mocked, honored and dismissed by various talking heads...and all before a even hit the shelves. Well, now it's finally here and what's a poor reviewer supposed to do?

Just play it, I guess.

Well, after having spent enough hours playing to have gotten myself a degree in brain-surgery from the Sally Struthers TV College, I can honestly say I have no idea what to say. It's simply incredible and the annoying thing is, I'm not even sure what

the heck to call it. It's not really a movie. It's insane to treat it as just another game. I'll choke on my own arm before I'll use the word "interactive," "virtual" or any other media catch-word that really doesn't mean anything. I'd call it a "software experience" but I'm afraid people would start asking me to tune their crystals.

From the "When in doubt, stick to what you know" school of journalism, let's start looking at WCS as if it were just another game....

ANOTHER GAME, ANOTHER CARRIER

Once again it's time for you to journey back to the troubled Universe of *Wing Commander*, where space combat is as visceral and exciting as going up against *The Red Baron* over the Somme, except there's no air to blow through your hair.

Unfortunately, humanity is still at war with the feline Kilrathi, who want the wind to blow through your body. If you've played through the previous two WCS, then be prepared for bad news; once again you've had another carrier blown out from under you. In scintillating retaliation, your old pal Admiral Tobyn, who holds you personally responsible for every hu-

man ill all the way back to Beverly Hills 90210, assigns you to an old Carrier, the TCS Victory.

Well, wouldn't you know it? Once you arrive at your new home and meet the crew, you realize that perhaps this ship should have been called the USS Caine. Morale is in the gutter, personal disputes are rife amongst the crew, and the worst-kept secret in the galaxy is that, contrary to glowing press releases, Humanity is less than a year away from being Kitty food. And then there is the matter of your lover being shot down behind enemy lines while on a secret mission....

There's more woe unto you, but that's enough to get the gist of the story and besides, any more would be telling. The point is that this is definitely another *WING COMMANDER*, a starfighter game with a storyline spliced through it. Each mission affects the course of the story in a success/failure pattern. Fail too many missions and you end up being pushed back while world after world is ravaged by the Kilrathi. Kick butt and you could be pounding on the door of the Kilrathi Throne room.

Each mission is flown from the cockpit of one of a half-dozen types of fighters, ranging from a light scout to a heavy bomber. Flight mechanics and controls are virtually unchanged from the previous WCS, with a few useful additions like the ability to unleash all your missiles in one salvo and to turn your ship independently of your direction of flight. Ships are still protected by energy shields (visible when they are struck as in *WING COMMANDER: ARCADE*) that must be blasted away before you can start chewing up the hull itself. Also unchanged are your fellow pilots, at least one of which is at your wing on every



Wing Commander III

Price: \$79.95

System

Requirements:

486-50Mhz or

better (Pentium

60

recommended),

8 MB RAM,

VGA/SVGA

graphics, 20

MB hard drive

space, 2x CD-

ROM; supports most

major sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Chris Roberts

Publisher: Origin Systems

Austin, TX

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mission, and they still fly with their own personal, and effective, styles. One change, though, from previous games, is that since you are a commanding officer now, you get to pick your own wingman for each mission, and sometimes the storyline may influence those choices.

Graphically, the space combat portion of the game is stunning and superior to anything out there now, including those from the galaxy Mark Hamill used to fly in; shields light up when hit, capital ships have clean crisp lines even when you are flying through the superstructure, and explosions are varied and realistic. Combat has also become more detailed in response to those graphics; fighters can now fly into landing bays under the pilot's control—a great but dangerous way to devastate an enemy carrier is to fly in, blast away and try to get out. Capital ships no longer fire from vague positions on the hull; anti-fighter fire comes from visible turrets along the hull, which can be destroyed independently of the ship they are protecting. Oddly, though, the space backdrop is not as convincing as it was in previous WCs—I guess something had to be shaved down to keep the frame rate up.

DETAILS FOR THE RETENTIVE

For the person who has failed to see anything in this game but the space combat portions, all is not sunshine and roses. Due mainly to the cinematic sequences and super-detailing of the ships in combat, WC3 pushes the resources of the most powerful PCs out there, and it is not just central processors that are being worked: hard drive interfaces, local busses, video cards and memory must all be near state-

of-the-art or things will suffer.

Your first clue that you may not have a faultless experience is the amazingly long time it takes to load the sim part of the program. Once you commit to a mission, it can be upwards of a minute before the sharp sights of space greet you. Also, with "only" 8 megs of RAM and no local bus, players may experience half-second "freeze-ups" while cinematic explosions are loaded, but the action is usually furious enough that all but the most hard-to-please gamer can get used to it.

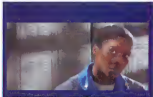
And speaking of the action, it is very fast, very exciting and very cinematic—and I am not talking about the quality of the images, as beautiful as they are. I use the word cinematic in the sense that combat has been tweaked to make it feel more like a movie instead of a flight sim. The fighting is always at very close range, except for closing; you will spend half the time with enemy ships filling a good portion of your view. Things blow up a lot faster now. While 15-minute turning duels may be realistic, most directors would rather eat their own spleen than let one take up that much film, and that philosophy is present here.

The combat model has changed to the point that instead of fighting two Kiltrathi that are hard to kill, you are wrapped up in a furball with ten enemy fighters that are pretty easy to kill. The danger is about the same, it's just the action that has increased to make things more interesting to the casual gamer, and there are now five skill levels for enemy pilots, so things may be further tweaked to your own personal level of sim-competency. While most would see this as a good

thing, those that don't notice the paradox of demanding extreme realism in a starfighter may feel things have gotten a little fluffy. But have no fear, the incompetent flying in WING COMMANDER: ARMA-DA is gone, hopefully never to return. Computer pilots fly well and style is dictated by fighter type, as it should be.

"I'M READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP NOW, MR. DEMILLE."

All this being said, I'm afraid I've come to the conclusion that the space-



Can you risk flying with Gabra, who hates Kiltrathi (including Robbes) or Maniac, who is up to his old tricks?



Jason Bernard makes a strong and fair Captain of the USS Gaine, while Malcolm McDowell is eerie and unreadable as Admiral Telys.



"Nasta" Rutkin offers unbiased information, and Rachel, the Chief Engineer, can configure more than just your weapons loadout.



YOU PATNETIC DESCENDANT OF MONKEYS Your Kiltrathi opponent will fling a few less insults when he feels the sting of your twin ion cannon.



I'M BRINGING HER IN Unlike previous Wing Commander games, you must land your fighter on the carrier, where the hangar walls resemble those of Doom, but with even better perspective and depth-of-field view.

combat aspect of Wing Commander is almost incidental to playing the thing. The story you are moving through is so interesting and the characters so well detailed that you almost wish you didn't have to strap into the fighter just see what happens next. The storyline of a Wing Commander game used to be a gimmick to make what was basically a space combat game seem more interesting, especially to people who weren't dedicated sim-pilots; but things have come full-circle now, and it's the story that is the point and the flight-sim that is the gimmick.

You move through the story in a series of cinematic sequences and conversations that arrange themselves according to your actions on the field of combat. Often in conversation you will have one opportunity to choose a type of response that affects the course of things, or how a character relates to you for the rest of the game. Sometimes these choices are unsatisfying, boiling down to either being a jerk or kissing up, but for the most part, your own personality can guide events.

While I lack the film course credits and salary to be a film critic, I am qualified to judge writing, plot and the SF element itself, and I can tell you without an ounce of hesitation that Wing Commander is at least as good as any SF movie made in the past two years, and superior to any given episode of Star Trek: Any Generation (unfortunately, that's not much of a compliment). From the opening sequence to the finale, if you aren't driven to find out what happens next, you must have the imagination of a newt. In essence, plot development is your reward for going out on a mission.

Now this isn't MacBeth by any means; it's a good B-movie that is marred by only a couple of excruciating lines of dialogue. But this is so superior to what passes for writing and plotting in the industry that in context, it is MacBeth. Perhaps the best part of the "Cinema" portion of WC3 is the fact that it is crafted with some care and attention to the material. The Victory actually looks like a military ship, cramped, utilitarian and no wall-to-wall carpeting on the bridge. Characters, while not completely free of clichés, are at least passionate and dynamic. And the acting is good enough that you almost find yourself interested in your wingmen as people and not just as victory points.

The cast is strong and while my job isn't to critique acting, all the big names do a good job; but, to be honest, it is some

CONFEDERATION SHIPS



ARROW: Swift as its name implies, this ship turns almost effortlessly, even on high game difficulty settings. A good ship to start with, since the lasers and ion cannons allow it to strike quickly and run if necessary.



RESPONDER: The spiritual descendant of the old Responder class, the Responder is an excellent all-around fighter. Reasonably fast and very maneuverable for its size, it is good for any mission except taking on capital ships.



THUNDERBOLT: An experimental fighter which outclasses nearly every other ship in the game. Almost as fast as an Arrow, the Thunderbolt sports two Responder Guns and four Tachyon Cannons, which allow it to rip through an enemy's shields in one or two bursts. Fly this whenever opportunity arises.



THUNDERHAWK: A good heavy fighter, this craft is less ponderous than it first appears. Eight gun mounts (six in front) make short work of other fighters, and the Thunderhawk can even hold its own against small capital ships.



LONGBOW: Despite the arrowhead shape of the fuselage, this heavy bomber moves like a mossa. Although it works best with a fighter escort, the Longbow is well-shielded and armored, and can put up quite a fight versus enemy fighters using its complement of laser, particle and neutron guns.

KILRATHI SHIPS



BARKED: A typical Kilrathi light fighter, this opponent is lightning-fast, with incredible maneuverability, especially on high difficulty levels. Barked tend to operate in packs, where their light armament is less of a liability.



DRAKE II: The terrific enemy has been enhanced twice WCII to include both Mezon and Particle Cannons. But if you can survive the four infrared missiles the Drake carries, it is easy prey for any Coiled ship.



PAKSTAK: Confederation pilots wish that their beakers were this good. Four Plasma Guns and two Ion Cannons are augmented by a Miss Driver in the tail section—a preach with caution! The Pakstak's odd shape makes it difficult to target as well.



STRAKKA: Wing Commander II pilots may not even recognize this deadly adversary. While it has a plentiful array of guns and missiles, it is the improved stealth ability of the Strakka which has caused many a Coiled pilot to meet an untimely demise.



VAKTORN: The best fighter of the Sons of Kilrath is capable of handling any Confederation craft. These jump-capable vessels can pop up anywhere, and generally feature some of the best Kilrathi pilots. The Thunderbolt, although slower, has the firepower to go toe-to-toe with this enemy.

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of the unknowns who really make an impression on you. For smaller rolls, Cobra and Vaquero make very lasting impressions and of them all, big names included, the most enjoyable actor to watch is Tom Wilson, portraying our old unstable friend, Maniac. I don't know where they found him, but I have to party with this guy someday; he deserves a long and successful career, hopefully in SF movies.

The weakest point is the Kiltrathi themselves, who suffer from the "Alien culture?... hm... Let's make 'em Japanese!" philosophy, and visually it takes a while to get past their muppet-esque behavior. But once the words "Dark Crystal" stop running through your head, the big cats make fine villains who only need a bit more fleshing out to become truly interesting.

EPIPHANY

I realize that there will be those who think that I have been blinded by chrome and taken in by pretty pictures and have failed to "critique the game," even now, I'm sure there are lonely guys, using techniques from the Rush Limbaugh School of Getting Attention, crowding the nets to be the first ones to say that WC3 is only a glorified pop-up book, and some technicality or another has ruined gameplay, and they are returning the whole thing tomorrow. Well, more power to them, there are always those who miss a paradigm shift and go on believing the sun revolves around the earth. The reality is that we are witnessing the birth of something new in gaming, something the term "interactive movie" is woefully inadequate for.

Origin should be applauded for taking this kind of a risk, and believing enough in their personnel to let a bankroll of this size ride the wheel. Chris Roberts himself, though no Orson Welles, gets much of the credit here—and may be put this much love and attention into all of his projects of this type. Whatever weird future reward is given for these things, I'm sure he will receive one retroactively. No matter what damage the "Hollywood" in-

fluence wreaks upon the software world, if it has brought us this, then it has been worth it...so far.

I may indeed be blinded by the novelty of it all, considering the only per-



THE SHARP EDGE OF COMBAT Up close and personal, this Vaktovh heavy fighter looks like a ceremonial Kiltrathi hunting blade. But don't stare too long at the impressive markings, or you'll fall prey to the fighter's rear-mounted meson guns.

sonal complaint I have of the game is there should be an option, when you get to the end, of watching all of the video sequences you made it through strung together into an actual movie. I'm finding it hard to be coldly critical when the kid inside is jumping up and down, but so be it, I've made sure I'm not just weird. Of the literally dozen-and-a-half friends and associates who have stolen my computer chair and watched the opening and first few events unfold, some of whom wouldn't play a computer game to save their lives, none have failed to be wowed—in that same way that they were wowed the first time we saw that tiny rebel freighter being chased down by the giant StarDestroyer. Whatever we end up calling this kind of beast, the computer gaming world will never be the same again, and I couldn't be happier. ☺

THE EDITOR'S SPEAK

WING COMMANDER III

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A classic space combat game is mated with a competent movie—and a new breed of gaming beast is born.

CONS Configuring your computer for this game can be a challenge in itself.

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Net Profit

Battling For Bucks In Dynamix'
Multiplayer METALTECH: BATTLEDROME

by Jeff James

AFTER LETTING YOU SMASH THE BYTES OUT OF THE EVIL, BIT-BRAINED CYBRIDS IN METALTECH: EARTHSEIGE, Dynamix now uploads you into cyberspace for a chance to earn some respect—and cash—in METALTECH: BATTLEDROME. Whereas EARTHSEIGE had you battling the computer-controlled Cybrids for squatter's rights to the radioactive rubble that used to be Earth, BATTLEDROME takes place on a field of glory wrought from the luminiferous phosphors and coruscating data streams of cyberspace. Forget lofty goals and noble struggles for survival: BATTLEDROME replaces those tedious ideas with the singular goal of amassing as much fame and fortune as possible for you and your HERCULAN (HERC) fighting vehicle.

CRASHING THE NET

The game begins with you "logging in" to the BATTLEDROME network, creating a pilot in the process. After creating your pilot (which simply involves entering his name), you can choose between local or remote play. Local play is play versus the computer, while remote play gives

you access to network, modem and serial link play with other gamers. If you're itching to blast someone, an instant action option tosses you into a randomly generated arena with a computer-controlled HERC in a fight to the death; the only option you need to select is a difficulty level. In both single player and multiplayer modes, your pilot's results are recorded from match to match.

The better you do the higher you'll advance in a hierarchy that is roughly similar to the system used to rank professional boxers. There are ten tiers in the ranking system, plus five ranks. Your goal is to challenge players in the higher tiers until you've emerged as the top BATTLEDROME player. Your tier and rank position are both determined by the number of matches you've won. At the first rank—cadet—you can only buy and use the lightest of HERCs, such as

TARGET: HERC DIST: 32



METALTECH: BATTLEDROME

Price: \$49.95,
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Requirements:
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(486-50Mhz
recommended),
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graphics, 9 MB
hard drive
space, mouse; supports PAS, Roland, and
Sound Blaster compatible sound cards;
supports Thrustmaster FCS, WCS, Rudders,
and Flightstick Pro.
Protections: None
of Players: 1-4 (modem and network)
Developer: Dynamix
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707



the Stryder, but as you progress through the ranks, you'll get the opportunity to pilot ever more powerful vehicles, up to and including the mighty Hammer, a massive engine of destruction that can lay waste to lesser HERCs wholesale.

You begin the game with a single Stryder HERC, a two-legged vehicle with a loping, ostrich-like gait. It can't tote much weaponry, so you'll want to upgrade to a more powerful HERC as soon as possible. Once you've chosen your HERC, you can outfit it with a wide variety of armaments. In addition to the usual weaponry (lasers and missile launchers) you can sample from a smorgasbord of destructive devices, including autocannons, blasters, plasma cannons, missiles and a healthy assortment of mines and probes. Some probes can be used as TV-guided smart bombs, ferreting out your foe from his cowardly hiding place.

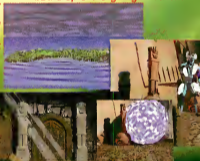
When you're satisfied with the weapon loadouts of your HERC, you can hit the challenge board and start fighting some battles. All the currently available players are listed in the challenge board, with the best players at the top of the board and the poor or inexperienced

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starting at the bottom. To challenge a player to a match you simply point and click on his name and then the challenge button.

After your opponent has accepted your challenge, you enter the negotiations window. Here, you can set the parameters for the match with your opponent. In addition to agreeing on a monetary wager, you can negotiate certain special terms. For example, you can propose that your opponent only use his lasers and missile launchers in the fight. Likewise, he could propose that you use only your autocannons. You can also decide on the layout of the arena, ranging from a dimly-lit cavern devoid of obstacles or a tiny, bright one filled with obstacles and gun emplacements. If you don't want to spend a fortune on costly HERC repairs, you can cause the match to end when your vehicle attains a certain damage level. Once you've both



TECHNO LUST The name of the game is more power and a higher rank. Cash from successful fights can be converted into new, more powerful hardware.

agreed to the terms, you're teleported into the BATTLEDROME arena.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

You begin the match at a randomly determined location in the arena. All the vital information on your HERC, such as speed, heading, shield strength, etc., is displayed in HUD-fashion around the edges of your view screen. Depending

on the settings you selected during the negotiations screen, you may see obstacles and gun emplacements scattered throughout the arena. Your opponent also starts in a random location, and will soon come looking for you. If you agreed to a small arena size, you'll get into combat almost immediately. Larger arenas allow for more tactical flexibility and some sneaking about. Hovering above the battlefield is your probe, essentially a piloted camera that allows you to see different parts of the arena, usually used as recon vessels. Buzzing high above the fray is the referee, a computer-controlled judge that makes sure both players follow the rules and don't use any illegal weapons or run out of bounds.

After the match, you'll get the opportunity to repair and upgrade your HERC in preparation for the next battle. Once

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YAMAHA

your HERC is all fixed up, you can go back to the challenge board and seek out another opponent. This process continues as you claw your way up the ranking system in an effort to become the biggest, baddest HERC pilot in cyberspace.

TWO IS A PARTY

Gameplay in single-player mode is a bit on the weak side. Compensating for this is the excellent network and modem play. I did have some initial trouble at getting **BATTLEDRONE** to work over a modem and a computer network, but a few hours of analyzing my modem initialization strings and the network configuration granted me success. When playing via a network, all the current players logged in to the network will be listed in the player list. Although only two players can compete in each match, the network mode supports multiple match play. For example, if you have six players attached to the network, three sets of head-to-head games could be played.

Dynamix took the minimalist approach to several aspects of **BATTLEDRONE**'s design. The graphics are crisp and clean, with detailed texture maps applied to each of the HERCs. The on-screen pyrotechnics are also well-done: blast an enemy HERC and you'll see a burst of flame, followed by an explosion of tiny HERC fragments. The arena itself is a bit on the plain side, but the gun towers and obstacles serve to alleviate that problem. Granted, staying alive in the arena doesn't allow for much sightseeing, so Dynamix has concentrated its graphic efforts on what you will see: hopefully, your opponent's HERC—in its texture-mapped glory—smashed into wreckage. The music is top-notch, complete with a hard-driving medley of techno-pop and rock tunes that accentuate the action on-screen. I did find the controls to be a bit unwieldy—a

problem shared with **EARTHSEIGE**—especially when playing with the keyboard. Using the joystick helps to some degree, but the ultimate control experi-

ers—that be at Dynamix obviously felt that the computer gaming public is divided into two separate camps, those with and those without the desire or



HEY, THAT'S MY BAD KNEE A few more shots like this and it'll take more than orthoscopic surgery to get this mech back onto the court.

ence can only be had using a Thrustmaster joystick and throttle control. I also would have liked to see more play-

ability to use a modem. Games like **DOOM** and **FALCON** have proven that multi-player support is now an integral part of the computer gaming scene, regardless of whether a player's gaming genre of choice is high-end flight simulators or arcade blastfests. I can't help but think that a single Metaltech product sporting the graphics, realism and campaign options of **EARTHSEIGE** combined with the multi-player options and directness of **BATTLEDRONE** would have had gamers lining up in droves. Dynamix may have stretched its development resources a bit thin by developing such similar combat simulations in the same time frame,

a policy which unfortunately has hurt both products.

In single-player mode, then, **BATTLEDRONE** is an average game. But jump onto a network with some buddies and start blasting each other with abandon, and **BATTLEDRONE** quickly becomes an addiction (it's very similar to **WING COMMANDER: ARMADA** in this respect). Despite my griping and whining about the difficult controls and wimpy single player options, **BATTLEDRONE** still packs a solid entertainment punch. It won't push **DOOM** off your network, but it will entice you to fritter away your office productivity by blasting your co-workers into glowing piles of virtual debris. ☹



TOO Every match doesn't have to end with a mech in a heap. During negotiations, you can set a damage limit to avoid overly costly repairs.

ers allowed in each match, but the challenge board system is a good substitute.

SPLIT DECISION

So how does **BATTLEDRONE** compare to its METALTECH stablemate, **EARTHSEIGE**? **EARTHSEIGE** is the more visually attractive, but **BATTLEDRONE**'s addictive modem and network play push it out ahead. As an avid fan of the whole anthropomorphic combat vehicle concept, I can't help but feel a bit disappointed by Dynamix's decision to split Metaltech into two separate games. The pow-

THE EDITORS SPEAK

METALTECH: BATTLEDRONE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Lean, mean and loads of fun over a network, serial link or modem connection.

CONS Awkward controls and a weak single player mode.



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What Happens When Arcade Games
And CD-ROMs Meet? —

Novastorm

by Gordon Goble

FROM THE LAND OF CHUCK AND DI, FAWLTY TOWERS, AND A JOPLY GOOD TALLY-HO COMES THE LATEST offering from those Lemmings-lovers, **Psygnosis**. NOVASTORM is a throwback to those arcade days of yesteryear, following in the footsteps of such classics as *SPACE INVADERS*, *GALAGA*, et al, giving space cadets with a quick trigger finger and a distaste for extensive storytelling and complex gamery an arena in which to blow stuff up real good.

Any good gamer has probably heard it all before, nevertheless the NOVASTORM introduction goes something like this: The human race has expanded its reaches throughout the galaxy. Colonies have sprung up on dozens of planets in dozens of solar systems, and man, in his infinite wisdom, has built a computerized web of machinery and electronics to watch over and operate the (...yawn...) entire thing. But something goes horribly wrong, and the massive computer network gains its own form of (...yawn, stretch, yawn...) reasoning and intelligence. It revolts against its animate master and begins eliminating the populace of entire planets in its quest for freedom (...stop me if I'm keeping you awake...). The few human survivors quickly band together and create an armed rebel force to regain control from the evil circuitry and save mankind (...zzz...).

Sound somewhat overdone? Well, it is...just about as much as my wife's roast beef, and to make matters worse, this re-

dundant yet smart looking NOVASTORM prelude (including 27 MB worth of slideshows) is simply window-dressing for the very typical arcade shoot-em-up that follows. That's right, space commandos, there is no storyline from here on in—it's just you watching a rear view of your spaceship (sort of an upside down Klingon-type offshoot), while you blast madly away at anything that moves.

Save for some decent cutscenes, credible explosions, and a few graphically interesting surprises thrown in at the end of each level, NOVASTORM cannot be called more than just a mid-grade exercise in arcade-ism. The only consistently exceptional thing about this game is the graphic quality, which will wow gamers from the moment they set out across the surface of the volcanic planet "Callinhor." Other planets will follow, as will, at the very end, a sequence flying *inside* a space cruiser of gargantuan proportions.

Enemy squadrons will attack in a pre-set sequence (that will never vary, in accordance with *The Law Of The Arcade*), and even though you'll get to know when and where they'll show up, nailing these little suckers is not nearly as simple as in the arcade games of old. To NOVASTORM's credit, layers of targets will not simply

cascade from top to bottom, and a relatively decent 3-D effect is achieved as targets will either sneak up from behind, pass by, and scoot off into the distance, or vice-versa. Your cannons and rockets, therefore, blow off into the great beyond, and are quite difficult to accurately aim. That makes things interesting.

Yet keeping an eye on your ship while steering it away from imminent danger as hordes of bad guys swirl around the screen shooting zillions of rockets at you, all the time trying to shoot at them, is probably a darn good reason for us all-too-human game players to develop a second pair of independent eyes. Things happen very quickly during a NOVASTORM session, and if lightning reflexes are not your forte, you'd better stick with something a little more relaxed.

Adding to a lack of long-term intrigue, players cannot control the speed of their craft, nor its overall direction. Although the ship may be steered within a limited radius, when it reaches the edge of the screen, that's as far to the left, right, up, or down as you may go. It's just aim, shoot, avoid, aim, shoot, avoid...at least this won't cost you a quarter each time you play.



NOVASTORM

Price: \$39.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 or better, 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, CD-ROM, supports Gravis Ultrasound and Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
Protection: None
Designers: Oh Wright, John McMurray
Publisher: Psygnosis
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TURNING AND BURNING While you dodge and fire at ships, you'll zoom over 3D landscapes with terrain features like lava rivers and boiling pools.



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work as stand-alone games, you can give them out to friends—and watch their heads spin.

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MAXIS

As the game begins, planet jockeys will leave a given number of lives (chosen by the player at the outset—either 3, 5, or 7). It almost goes without saying that a forcefield surrounds the ship providing some protection, and that the more hits taken, the less of a forcefield will remain. Once said forcefield has evaporated completely, one more hit means you're toast and the next life will begin—if you have any left. You'll be sent back to the opening of that particular level once again, and there you will stay until your prowess moves you to the next.

Wiping out an entire squadron of enemy craft will conjure up the appearance of a weird floating token that, if flown directly over (thereby being "picked up") scores big bonus points with your space-bosses. Enough of these collected tokens and soon the single-shot cannon will be a double shot, then a treble-shot, then more powerful, and so on. More tokens means better stuff with which to play, and good pilots will soon be sporting a cooperative wingman or drone, homing missiles and other tools of the trade. But tiny enemy spacecraft will be the least of your worries.

At the end of each level lies a "Guardian," a particularly tough killing machine that may take the shape of ma-

chine, beast, or both. From multi-pointed star shaped ships to Phoenix-like bird-terrors rising from molten volcanic pits (these are the little surprises to which I alluded earlier), and are definitely the high point of NOVASTORM. The bird-guy, especially, adds to the good graphic quality of the game, and is an awesome entity to behold.

NOVASTORM is a CD-based product, one of the few games I've ever played that installs absolutely no files to the hard drive, so a space hog it is not (although nearly 100 MB of files do reside on its single disc). It must be mentioned here that NOVASTORM comes without a save game feature (and seemingly nothing that allows one to exit a current game without finishing it first), and that means budding saviors of humanity have to do awfully well from start to finish in order to ever see that finish, and it ain't easy, even at the lowest level of difficulty.

For quick action lovers who relish the idea of reliving those days when they stockpiled quarters throughout the week



OPEN WIDE, MOWMA SHIP Each level ending has a "Guardian" to get past, like this twisted metal monstrosity whose molten middle is its only unarmored surface.

for a Friday beer'n'video game night, NOVASTORM might be a nice blast to the past. But to repeat an earlier warning, it's all been done, better, before. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

NOVASTORM

RATING



PROS Nice 100 megabyte paint job.
CONS Underneath the paint, it's the same old, same old. Will someone please educate the Europeans about save games?

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A Magic Carpet Ride

It's Easy To Get Carried Away With Bullfrog's Beautiful *MAGIC CARPET*

by Mark Clarkson

THE WIND ROARS IN MY EARS AS MY FLYING CARPET SKIMS JUST INCHES ABOVE THE ROILING OCEAN WAVES. Before me rises the castle of my enemy. Readying the appropriate spells, I accelerate and sweep over the castle wall so rapidly that I am momentarily disoriented and might lose my footing on the carpet were that possible. Then I am over the parapets and among a mass of startled, black-clad archers. They recover quickly and drop to their knees, taking aim. Arrows whiz by, inches away, but none strike home. In return, I unleash a rain of fire, killing many of the archers where they stand, and burning ugly scars onto the pristine white walls of my enemy's castle. In seconds I am over the far wall again and accelerating out over the ocean in a sweeping curve to approach the castle from another direction.

I glance into the all-seeing eye and note a tall-tale spear of red fire approaching me. Another wizard, known to me only as Vodor, has felt my attack on his castle and I am seeing the dissipation of magical energy as he rushes to its aid. He will be too late.

I invoke my most powerful spell. A flaming meteor roars over my head and falls to strike the castle. The explosion is fantastic and when it clears the outer walls have disintegrated, blasted down to bedrock. Lustrous red globes of mana, the source of all my enemy's wealth and power, spill unprotected into the sun. Mine for the taking, if I'm quick.

But as I advance I hear the dreaded

'click' of a magical trap being sprung and a trio of sinuous dragons materializes in the air before me. They turn, bellowing with rage, and my world fills with fire.

HELP ME! I'M ENCHANTED

Forgive me if I seem to have lost my grip on reality, but I've been playing Bullfrog's new first-person action/strategy game, *MAGIC CARPET*. I've been spending all my time lately flying around on my magic carpet, blasting badies with fire and lightning. I haven't had a computer game suck me in like this since



WIZARD DOGFIGHT Three wizards blast each other with deadly magic while their drone balloons harvest mana to increase their power.

DOOM. *MAGIC CARPET* is simply marvelous.

You are an apprentice wizard whose quest is to visit the 50 "shattered worlds" in turn, restoring each to magical balance; monsters, traps, and other wizards stand in your way.

MAGIC CARPET takes you outside, where few first-person games dare to tread, into island landscapes of oceans



MAGIC CARPET

Price: \$54.95

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible 486-33 or better, CD-ROM, 8 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 2 MB hard drive space, mouse; (recommended: 486-50 or faster, 2x CD-ROM) supports Sound Blaster compatibles and most major sound cards.

Protection: None

of Players: 1-8 (network)

Designer: Peter Molyneux of Bullfrog

Publisher: Electronic Arts

San Mateo, CA

(800) 245-4525

and palm tree forests, featuring castles, monsters and grotesque, mysterious monuments. Lowly hot-air balloons dot cloud-filled skies.

The quality of the landscapes is always

convincing and sometimes downright beautiful, especially if you have the hardware to run the game in high resolution mode. Ocean waves roll and pitch. Objects cast shadows and are reflected in the water. Fly low over a village and you hear the background chatter of voices. Hover above the water and you hear the lap of the waves. Pick up speed and the waves are replaced by the sound of wind.

The landscape itself shifts during play. Fireballs dig furrows in the ground and ignite palm trees into blazing iki torches. The scene of a battle can quickly come to resemble the closing seconds of *Apocalypse Now*. Potent earthquake spells rend the earth, sometimes cleaving entire landmasses. Other spells gouge out great craters or raise erupting volcanoes that spit out burning boulders.

The monsters and enemy wizards are acceptably nasty and shrewd, but the civilian population is downright zombie-like. They take no notice of your flying over their heads, losing lightning storms and meteors. It would be nice if they'd at least turn and point.

I CAN FLY!

The experience of flight is the single most engaging part of *MAGIC CARPET*. It will have you bobbing your head and applying heavy doses of body english. My

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I AM THE WIZARD KING Amidst a hail of flameballs and lightning spells, a wizard flies over his besieged castle, his enemy's bones drying in the sun.

wife, who's never shown the slightest interest in any flight sim or DOOM clone, pronounced it "neat." Even my six-year-old daughter loves to fly around and explore the worlds, once I've rid them of monsters and traps.

You drive the carpet with both mouse and keyboard. The mouse (or joystick, if you prefer) controls the carpet's attitude. You use the mouse to pitch up or down,

and to roll left or right. The keyboard controls your direction of travel and speed. Press the up arrow key once and you'll slowly move forward; press it again and you'll pick up speed. Now move the mouse to the left and you'll bank left. Pull back on the mouse to climb; push forward to dive. You can't fall off and you can't crash into anything. Hey, it's a wagic carpet.

Using keyboard and mouse in combination, you can execute any number of artful flying maneuvers. By moving left while simultaneously banking right, for example, you can circle an enemy. Or you can charge in going forward, swing around a monster, and depart flying backwards, firing all the time. It seems as though it would be hard to use two control devices at once, but it becomes natural in a surprisingly short time.

and to roll left or right. The keyboard controls your direction of travel and speed. Press the up arrow key once and you'll slowly move forward; press it again and you'll pick up speed. Now move the mouse to the left and you'll bank left. Pull back on the mouse to climb; push forward to dive. You can't fall off and you can't crash into anything. Hey, it's a wagic carpet.

Using keyboard and mouse in combination,

MANNA, HOW I LOVE YA

Battles in *MAGIC CARPET* are fought with magic. You will eventually have 32 different spells to choose from, if you can find them all. You begin the game with naught but the magic carpet of the game's title. You'll have to pick up power, spells, and experience as you go along. Spells are found in urns scattered around the various worlds, which at first are obvious and above ground. In later levels, the spells lie hidden, waiting for you to trip an invisible, magical switch before they materialize, usually with an accompanying slew of monsters. As you progress through the worlds, the spells get more powerful, going from simple fireball to rapid-fireball to the horrific Global Death spell.

To use those spells, you'll need manna. Manna is to magic what gasoline is to the internal combustion engine. The more manna you have the more spells you can cast, and the more damaging those spells will be. Without manna you are powerless.

Manna appears as shiny globes, sometimes found lying loose on the ground or floating above the water. By casting a "possess" spell, you can claim it as your own. Manna left lying around loose will be possessed by enemy wizards, or consumed by monsters. But most of the worlds' manna is locked away in the form of unholy monsters who threaten wizard and peaceful civilian alike.

There are vultures who peck your flesh, giant worms, fire-breathing dragons, huge tasked apes who hurl flaming boulders, and swarms of deadly killer bees. (I hate the killer bees!) These monsters aren't natural; they're magical. Destroy them, and they give up the manna that went into their creation.

A WIZARD'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE

One of your first tasks on every world is to build yourself a castle. The castles provide you with thick walls to hide behind and a place to store your manna. A castle has hot air balloons which drift over the landscape, gathering up the manna you've possessed and returning it to your castle for safe keeping. A small castle can only hold a small amount of manna. When your castle fills, you must enlarge it.

You'll need to keep a close eye on the strength of your castle's walls. If monsters or other wizards succeed in reducing or destroying it, all of your hard-won manna will spill out. When you have gathered



The Scroll

Some Things Are Better Left Dead And Buried.

Its spell enthralls a city's population, enjoining a prince of Ancient Egypt to spread the cult of the dark god, Hyskothore, and ensured that the blood of the serpent people ran through the veins of all his descendants. Centuries would pass, and it would be buried at the end of a long, lost tunnel in a temple beneath the unsuspecting city of Alexandria. But in 1920, one Yusuf Al-Badid begins to dig a hiding place for his ill-begotten money and uncovers the 2,000 year old magical scroll which sets in motion an adventure which begins with death and could finish with the end of the world.



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sufficient manna within its walls, the world is restored. You can then move on to the next world, or fly around gathering up manna and spells you may have missed, or just enjoy the scenery. Restore all 30 worlds and the game is won.

You'll need eight megabytes of RAM to experience *Magic Carpet* in its unabridged form, although you can play it with six or even, Bullfrog claims, four megabytes by turning off ambient sounds and some of the effects like sky and shadows.

With *Magic Carpet*, Bullfrog is pushing the edge of the hardware envelope, and only those with the fastest machines need apply. The game is optimized for play on a Pentium, and to run it on even the fastest of 486 PCs requires compromise. On a 486/66 PC without local bus video, I had to turn off some of the video effects (sky, motion blur, etc.) to get smooth motion. And that's in low resolution mode. Don't even consider the high resolution mode unless you've got an 8 megabyte Pentium with a fast PCI bus video card. *Magic Carpet* also provides two 3D modes: red/blue 3D (glasses provided), and Stereogram (those random dot pictures that some people can't see). It also supports the VFX 1 Virtual Headset, although I didn't get a chance to test it. Finally, the game can be played on a network with up to eight wizards vying for supremacy. Unfortunately for most of us, it does not support modem play.

Magic Carpet provides a wonderful blend of first-person shooter and strategy game. You'll need both eye-hand coordination and resource management skills. You must know your spells and keep them programmed for easy access at a second's notice. You must learn to keep your eye on your castle, your balloons, your manna, and the other wizards, while simultaneously dueling with dragons. Captured by its spell, *Magic Carpet* will keep you busier than a Sorcerer's Apprentice. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

MAGIC CARPET

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A fevered first-person shooter with real strategic depth; amazing visual effects for the spells; a cutthroat network mode.

CONS A game that will push your hardware to the limit, and then some.

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It's Not A Bug, It's A Creature

*The Incredible And Regrettable Unite
In Virgin's CREATURE SHOCK*

by Jeff James

IT IS THE 22ND CENTURY AND CIVILIZATION IS ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE. DECADES OF OVERCROWDING AND POLLUTION have irreversibly damaged the Earth's ecosystem, forcing humanity to look to the stars to escape a choked planet. (Stop me if you've heard this before.) The United Nations—now a form of unified world government—sends three ships out into the solar system to search for the best world to colonize. But en route to the moons of Saturn, the survey ship UNS Amazon is attacked and enveloped by a mysterious, tentacled space creature. The U.N. turns to you, Commander Jason Barr, swaggering John Wayne of the 22nd Century, to learn what happened to the Amazon and free its stricken colonists.

Welcome aboard Virgin's new CD action/adventure game CREATURE SHOCK. If the storyline sounds familiar, that's probably because it draws inspiration from a number of classic science fiction tales, such as Isaac Asimov's *Fantastic Voyage*, Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the *Alien* films.

After fighting your way past waves of enemy ships to reach the Amazon, you'll soon find there are two game modes in CREATURE SHOCK. The first involves moving Commander Barr through the tunnels, chambers and pas-

sageways of the game world all from a first-person 3-D perspective, using your laser pistol to discourage or destroy any hostile critters you stumble across. The second play style puts you at the controls of your speedy spacecraft, equipped with a pair of cannons to help you blast your way through waves of enemies to reach your goal. Interspersed between these two are dozens of animated segues which serve as the glue holding the story together.

DR. JEKYLL...

Easily the most impressive aspect of the game is the first-person exploration. I could describe it as a cross between DOOM and 7TH GUEST, but that doesn't begin to convey the game's amazing visual appeal. You experience the world

through Commander Jason Barr's eyes, seeing everything through the visor on his space helmet. Everything happens full-screen, with ray-traced animation. Using the mouse, you move an on-screen pointer to your desired



CREATURE SHOCK

Price: \$59.95,
CD-ROM

System
Requirements:
IBM compatible
486SX-25 or
faster, 4 MB
RAM, VGA
graphics, CD-
ROM, 9MB
hard drive space, mouse

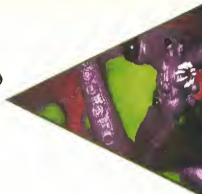
Protection: None
Developer: Argonaut Software
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Irvine, CA
(714) 833-1999

location and press the left mouse button to walk in that direction. You navigate through the world in this fashion, point-

ing and clicking through wonderfully rendered passages and chambers. At certain points during the game, the viewpoint will shift to a dramatic, exterior viewpoint, not unlike something you'd see in I-Motion's ALONE IN THE DARK. This usually occurs when something bad is about to happen, such as when a giant alien worm-thing tries to snap open your shiny space helmet and suck out the contents. It's done with an artistic flair that reflects an attention to detail rivaling commercial cinematography.

Eventually you'll run into something large and vicious with a tendency to eat unwelcome intruders, so you'll have to shoot your way to safety. The combat sequences can best be described as a polished version of OBSERVATION WOLF, with your on-screen movement symbol turning into a targeting reticle for your laser pistol. Using the mouse, you must take aim and blast away at some special location on the creature's body (usually the exposed eyes or some other part of its anatomy) until it stops moving, retreats or raptures into a feid cloud of yellowish gas.

On a 486DX2-66 machine with a double-speed CD-ROM drive, the action moves along briskly, with disk activity generally occurring during an appropriate lull. The animation is a little cithered, and the color palette seems reduced in the walking sequences, but the smooth animation more than compensates for these shortcomings. Unfortunately, there isn't a save game feature. Once you've successfully completed an episode (there are five in all) you can start from the beginning of that episode at any time. That



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Circle Reader Service #315

doesn't help much when you've invested several hours navigating through a treacherous level only to be gobbled up in the last few seconds by a fearsome end-of-level beastie.

The moody music, polished animation, and dramatic camera angles in these walking, exploring sequences combine to create one of the most engrossing game atmospheres I've seen yet. As I moved down dimly lit passageways I was literally sitting on the edge of my seat, anxiously waiting for some unseen alien to spring out and smack my character around.

...AND MR. HYDE

Unfortunately, the rich, engrossing atmosphere so laboriously created in the first-person sequences is all but obliterated when you

take the controls of your space vessel in the flying sequences. In the first of two sequences, you must pilot your canary-yellow spacecraft through waves of adversaries to eventually reach the Amazon, which lies helpless in orbit around Saturn. To get there you must contend with a menagerie of hostile spacecraft, from floating gun emplacements to space-faring giant jellyfish. After defeating several waves of aliens and dodging the occasional asteroid, you eventually destroy the "Boss" alien to gain access to the next level. Although the audio-visual portion of this sequence is acceptable, the mouse-only control makes this aspect of the game a chore at best. This design flaw is exacerbated in the second flight sequence, in which you must race through the narrow canyons of Tethys (a moon of Saturn) at high speed, dodging obstacles and blasting enemies while tailing a speeding probe that will lead you to your destination. After repeated attempts, all unsuccessful, at trying to maneuver past the obstacles, I somehow managed to complete the mission. In retrospect, I'm not sure whether my success was due to my skill or dumb luck. I'd put money on luck.

What's even more perplexing about

the terrible flight sequences is that **CREATURE SHOCK** is developed by the same company that crafted such wonderfully playable titles as **STARGLIDER I** and **II** (for the Amiga) and **STARFOX** (for the Super NES). None of the addictive playability found in those titles is present in the flight sequences of **CREATURE SHOCK**, a fact



SLUG OF FRANKENSTEIN As you shoot it out with creatures, your digital readout in the corner displays how much strength your enemies have left, your health rating, and your battery level.



TURBULENCE AHEAD Some of your missions will take place above ground, where the action is reminiscent of a weak *Fract Asterix*.

that should come as a surprise to the many admirers of Argonaut Software's previous efforts. This curious combination of stunning first-person sequences and embarrassingly mediocre flight segments can possibly be explained by Virgin's attempt to make **CREATURE SHOCK** appeal to the widest range of gamers, from Sega CD owners to users of multimedia Pentium systems. This philosophy may have looked good on paper, but in practice it spoils the appeal of an otherwise exemplary product.

CREATURE SHOCK isn't a long game, either. After approximately 12 hours of play, I found myself staring at the end-game animation and the scrolling production credits. The last mission is exceptionally well-done, complete with a climactic gun battle aboard the alien mother ship for the destiny of the Earth, but the reward for completing that battle, and the game, was weak. It was a bit on the short side compared to

the animated segue sequences used throughout the game, and it left too many loose ends flapping in the solar wind. I can't help but think that Argonaut was forced to cut the ending short for lack of time or space. Whatever the reasons, some may find the ending to be a bit disappointing.

PASSING JUDGMENT

If **CREATURE SHOCK** were picked apart by a psychoanalyst, the doctor would suggest treatment for a split personality disorder. It's really amazing that the same group of people could produce, on one hand, a virtual world incredibly rich in atmosphere, and on the other, arcade flight sequences so completely devoid of value. I felt a bit manic-depressive myself while playing it, thoroughly captured one second, and thoroughly bored the next. I certainly hope Argonaut/Virgin can pull itself together for a sequel, one that includes more first-person exploration, a save game option, and improved (or reworked) flight sequences. With those elements, we'd have a clear winner; right now, we've got a split decision. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

CREATURE SHOCK

RATING ★★★★★

PROS First-person fighting scenes are stunning and convincing.

CONS The disappointing flight sequences, the short game length, and the lack of joystick control and save-game options cripple what might have been a compelling game.

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HARDBALL™ 4

ESPN Baseball Tonight

Chris Berman Charisma, Tony LaRussa Design

by George Jones

WHEN I FIRST HEARD THAT ESPN WAS GOING TO BE PUTTING THEIR NAME ON A Sony Imagesoft computer baseball game, I had ambivalent feelings. Visions of Chris Berman and other ESPN personalities doing the play-by-play ran side-by-side with images of the shoddy gameplay that usually accompanies television and movie tie-ins.

Then I learned that Stormfront would be designing the game.

Stormfront is the design group responsible for what many consider to be one of the better computer baseball sims around: TONY LARUSSA II. Although dogged by AI problems and other bugs for most of its history, TONY LARUSSA II definitely raised the bar in terms of what graphically-oriented baseball sims could and should be. By combining a decent statistical model with gorgeous graphics, it has earned a good deal of quiet respect from many players, and is still in the *CGW* Top 100 poll after almost two years.

With great enthusiasm I realized, as I played the preliminary version of ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT, that ESPN had a good chance of succeeding on two fronts. Not only does the game include many of the elements that made TONY LARUSSA II a good game, but it also adopts an accessible interface the likes of which I've never seen in a baseball simulation. From the slick, TV production-quality graphics to the easy-to-read, albeit less versatile, statistical displays, it looks like Stormfront is on the right track towards building another contender.

The simulation itself fills somewhere

between the other computer baseball league leaders. The highly touted HAMBALL series has tended to focus primarily on player-controlled action, with statistics coming as a second thought, while the incredibly powerful FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL '94 is so comprehensive that some people have complained it is overly so. ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT seems to be reaching for the middle ground by providing entertaining, quick-hitting gameplay with a more serious, yet less demanding, statistical model.

"THIS IS BASEBALL TONIGHT!"

The game begins in true ESPN style, with full-screen digitized video clips. Lou Pinella fans (anyone...anyone?) will be happy to know that one clip features his infamous base-chucking incident. I swore I was watching "Baseball Tonight" as the television show's theme song and video bumper began to play. Dan Patrick's familiar voice introduced the game, promising to bring me all the play-by-play action. And—get this—Chris Berman does pre-game and post-game video clips, although without his trademark nicknames.

One of Stormfront's more radical departures from their LARUSSA design is in the interface. All the selection screens are rendered in high-res, and all buttons are clearly defined; pull-down menus are a thing of the past. In the opening screen, you can either play ball, take batting practice, check the players' statistics, or enter the league play options. Choosing to play will take you to the game selection screen, where you can choose teams, stadiums (from among 14 ball-

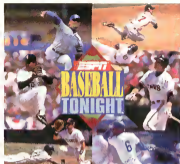
parks), and set your starting lineups and control configurations. As in TONY LARUSSA II, you can play in managerial mode or action mode, with the computer controlling the fielding and/or running if you wish.

HIT THE DIRT

On-field action looks a lot like LARUSSA II with two important differences: the screen actually pans up and down to follow the ball, which means that I was actually able to see some of the upper features of all the ballparks; and the behind-the-catcher camera angle has been lowered closer to the ground than before. Of course, this wouldn't be an ESPN game if there were no instant replay. You can tinker with the tilt of the camera, and even zoom in, although it will still be a far cry from FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL's CAMS viewing system. Fans who like to change camera angles during gameplay will be disappointed, however, as there's no such feature in BASEBALL TONIGHT.

The players are nicely rendered and can dive, jump and do all the things that baseball players do, with the exception of grabbing their crotch. Lifelike players bustle around in a realistic fashion, which they should, since real players were filmed against blue-screen for most of the animation. As for licenses and player names, all the Major Leaguers are here, from Roberto "Remember The" Alomar to Fred "Crime Dog" McGriff.

Play selection works just like it does in TONY LARUSSA II: pressing left, right, up, or down on your keypad or controller selects plays. All the standard options, like bunting, stealing, pitching away and intentional walks should be there. However player substitution, bullpen action, and



SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In
Development



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SWINGIN' FOR THE FENCES Attractive graphics are the norm in ESPN Baseball. Notice the television style, ESPN mini summary in the bottom right corner of the screen.

defensive positioning is all handled through a drag and drop interface. I was able to simply pick a player from the bench and drag him to the position I wanted him to play! The same goes for warming up players in the bullpen, where each player has three different levels of fatigue, all of which are graphically illustrated; I no longer have to guess at the warm up status of my lefty in the pen.

ESPN's touch on the game is also comfortably obvious during gameplay in a few more ways. For starters, each time a batter steps into the box, his up-to-the-moment stats are displayed, including how he did in his last at bat. Furthermore, the first time each player bats, most of his season stats are displayed; if he leads the league in a category, the number is highlighted in red. Balls, strikes and outs, will be displayed at all times in the lower right hand corner of the screen. Dan Patrick's play-by-play is professionally done, with many of his characteristic comments ("Whiff") included. Unfortunately I have yet to see the sports sim on any platform whose play-by-play announcer can keep up with the action. Hopefully, once this game is fine tuned, things will be in sync.

STATMAN

I have very mixed feelings about ESPN Baseball's statistical displays in the version I previewed. On one hand, the high-res graphics, a much-needed departure from the spreadsheet look-and-feel of other games' stat screens, made the numbers a lot easier to read and interpret. I was able to sort players by team, name, and all the various statistics. Statistically speaking, however, I was a bit concerned

with a noticeable lack of depth. While all the major categories are maintained, from home runs to strikeouts to innings pitched, there were some glaring omissions, like batting performances versus lefties and righties.

Although the stats are a bit limited, they seem to be reasonably accurate. Player performances seemed to be on the money.

entire season in under 6 hours on my Pentium system. Let's say I want to play a game three days down the road. All I have to do is skip ahead to that day and click on the game I want to watch or play. **BASEBALL TONIGHT** will "quick play" all the unplayed games before mine. This feature will be much appreciated by players who don't like growing old while **FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL** simulates its games. Unfortunately, player drafts and career modes are non-existent. Trades are permitted, although there was no computer manager AI evident.

BOX SCORE

In a nutshell, ESPN Baseball Tonight looks like it has a lot of potential. On my wish list are improved statistical depth and the ability to view the on-field action from different angles. The latter is an icing-on-the-cake kind of thing, but the former could really give this game the skills it needs to compete in a crowded field. With a little more work, **BASEBALL TONIGHT** could easily make the starting line up, perhaps batting third between the speedy, base-hitting **HARDBALL III**



SPREADSHEETS ON STRIKE While the players' stats are much easier to read than in most games, apparently some statistical depth will be sacrificed.

After playing through a season, John Olerud led the league in batting, with Frank Thomas, Matt Williams, and Junior Griffey all in contention for the home run and RBI titles. Jimmy Key was leading the league in wins and ERA.

LEAGUE PLAY

ESPN **BASEBALL TONIGHT**'s league play is fairly typical of baseball simulations. In no time at all, I was able to set up a three division league that included injuries and a double tie playoff schedule. But more importantly, I was able to quick-play an

leading off the order and the heavy-hitting **FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL** batting clean up.



TO THE WALL Fourteen accurately rendered stadiums are included in the game, and players will actually be able to see all of a ballpark, as opposed to just the ground level.

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2

TO GO

24

AFC #

10

PLAY

36

BALL ON

AFC 31

NFC 31

QTR

1

NFC

14

13:00

TIME OUTS LEFT

2



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Team 



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FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL

Tries Once Again To Break Away From The Pack

by Dennis McCauley

ARE YOU, LIKE MANY FOOTBALL FANS, ALREADY LAMENTING THE END OF THE SEASON? WELL, DON'T UNSNAP your chin strap just yet, because Sierra/Dynamix has released a new version of their award-winning FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL. The new version, FPS: FOOTBALL PRO '95 offers enough enhancements to shake the most ardent football fan out of his post-season depression.

Gamers will instantly be drawn into FOOTBALL PRO 95 by its excellent graphics. Using rotoscoped animation technology borrowed from FPS: BASEBALL, Sierra has come up with the best looking football game ever to break the pane of a graphical goal line. The players are remarkably fluid and lifelike in their movements. A quarterback's head swivels from side to side as he barks out an audible at the line of scrimmage. Ball carriers execute some nifty spin maneuvers, often straight-arming would-be tacklers. Players who score a touchdown execute a nice slapping spike, or kneel and offer thanks to the big coach in the sky. On defense, tacklers "stick" ball carriers convincingly in the open field, sometimes flipping them completely over.

Your million-dollar quarterback can now throw on the run, although not with as much precision as he does from the

pocket. Pass-happy coaches will enjoy how the offensive interface leads the QB to cycle through his primary, and then his secondary receivers, with the last option being to throw the ball away to avoid a sack.

GLAMOUR BOYS AND GRUNTS

NFL team uniforms in FOOTBALL PRO 95 are nicely rendered, with only the lack of helmet insignia standing as a drawback. One of the program's useful features is the ability to customize uniforms, right down to the striping. This comes in handy for creating original teams in league play, or for those who feel the urge to have their favorite team take the field in this season's popular "throwback" regalia.

Player numbers aren't displayed on the jerseys, but this seems to be a common shortcoming among most football sims, more a limitation of the current state of technology than a flaw in design philosophy. As in past versions, FOOTBALL PRO 95 displays the number of the ball carrier or other player under human control via a small box above the player. Coaches who feel the need to see every player's number can hit the F5 hot key, which



causes numbers to appear above all of the players' heads.

Playing surfaces are accurately modeled in FOOTBALL PRO 95, with realistic looking grass, mud, snow or turf. What's not accurate is the crowd—there isn't one! In an era when NFL teams play in packed houses of rollicking fans, the stands in FOOTBALL PRO 95 are empty. What's even more disconcerting is that crowd sounds are featured in the game's audio package. Who's making those noises, anyway? Admittedly, the game strives to simulate professional football, not crowd control, so the lack of fans really makes not a whit of difference in the outcome. Yet in a game with such attention to detail, it's a surprising omission.

One area in which Sierra didn't cut any corners is the CAMS (Camera Angle Management System) feature. Combined with the game's VCR, CAMS may be the best viewing and replay setup in the sports sim field. CAMS offers unlimited camera angles, while the VCR permits a variety of replay modes, including ball-carrier tracking, isolation, and selected player views. Couple that with the game's superior animation, and there's enough good looking action in FOOTBALL PRO 95 to keep your CAMS and VCR busy for a very long time.

A LEAGUE OF YOUR OWN

FOOTBALL PRO 95 shines in a lot of areas, not the least of which is league management. The default leagues offered are the NFL of 1992, 1993 and 1994, thanks to Sierra's licensing agreement with the NFL and NFLPA. Some gamers might be surprised to find that a few of their favorite stars don't appear on the rosters. That's because not all the players are NFLPA

Front Page Sports Football Pro '95

Price: \$59.95.
CD-ROM &
3.5" floppy
System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
386-33Mhz or
better (486
recommended),
4MB RAM, VGA
graphics, 10
MB hard drive space; supports PAS and
Sound Blaster compatible sound cards. CD
version requires a 2x CD-ROM.

Protection: Documentation check
(floppy only)

Designer: Patrick Cook
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Bellingham, WA
(800) 757-7707



members, and their names are therefore not covered by the licensing agreement. It's easy enough, though, to use FOOTBALL PRO 95's sophisticated player editor to make any required name changes.

Single season leagues are a fun way to simulate an actual NFL year, while career leagues constitute the heart and soul of FOOTBALL PRO 95, featuring annual drafts, player retirements, trades, and even career-ending injuries. Training camp remains an important part of the season, allowing coaches the opportunity to allocate workout time for improvement in areas of their choice. The user-friendly league management interface makes it a simple matter to start and run a league from eight to twenty-eight teams.

Teams can be either human or computer-owned, with custom game plans generated by players or stock plans provided by the program. Once the league is underway, games can be played manually or simulated by the computer in either "fast" or "slow" mode. The latter takes around five minutes per game on a 486-50, and offers a scoreboard-like readout of how the game is progressing—generally more enjoyable for league play. While some players have complained of wild variances in stats between the sim modes, my experience was that the different modes yielded similar results.

HOW ARTIFICIAL IS THE INTELLIGENCE?

Some gamers claim that the computer opponent in FOOTBALL PRO 95 cheats, allowing the computer opponent to stay close or mount big comebacks. Frankly, this just wasn't seen in review play. One seeming AI failure that was observed, however, was an odd tendency of computer-controlled teams to offer strangely lopsided trades. It seems fairly common for the computer-controlled teams to propose to trade a valuable player for your mediocre kicker or punter. This is an area that will have to be addressed in any patch released by Sierra.

Is FOOTBALL PRO 95 a game of a simu-



OPTION PLAY With plenty of protection from his offensive line, Marino sees (in the inset window) that Irving Fryar is open downfield. The ability to cycle through eligible receivers and throw the ball out of bounds is one of the biggest improvements in Football Pro '95.

lation? Will FOOTBALL PRO 95 re-create a near-perfect copy of the NFL statistical leaders? Not likely. Is this a minus? Not necessarily. Players in FOOTBALL PRO 95 are rated over eight categories: Speed, Agility, Acceleration, Strength, Hands, Endurance, Intelligence and Discipline. Real-world statistics are influenced by the players' abilities, how they are utilized,



BE YOUR OWN CAMERAMAN With the CAMS interface, you could view this great over-the-shoulder catch from any number of angles.

play selection, and the personnel and coaching characteristics of their opponents. Even the weather plays a factor. So although Barry Sanders gained 1,115 yards in 1995, your results may vary.

In one simulation of the 1991 NFL season I ran for this review, Steve Young, Dan Marino, and John Elway all finished among the league's top ten passers, but so did Scott Mitchell, Dave Brown, and Craig Erickson. Few would argue about the big stars doing well, but the younger quarterbacks are questionable. But then, who could have predicted that Drew Bledsoe

would have an all-pro year in the real NFL this season? One thing that can be said about the stats in FOOTBALL PRO 95 is that, while they won't provide carbon copies of the NFL (what's the fun in that, anyway?), they will furnish realistic-seeming results.

Combing through my simulated league's stats, I found no hint of statistical bugs. Touchdowns from special teams' play, blocked punts, and just about every other statistical category was consistent with league averages. The only flaw I noticed here was a tendency of computer coaches to call an excessive percentage of passing plays, but again, this could be moderated by simply adjusting the coaching profiles.

XS AND OS

FOOTBALL PRO 95 features an outstanding play editor, perhaps the best in any of the computer football genre. Easy to use, the system allows coaches to design their own custom offensive, defensive, or special teams plays, or to modify any of the 10,000 stock plays included on the CD-ROM version.

Designing or modifying a play is simple, using the mouse, joystick, or keyboard. Coming up with a play that works is a much more complex matter, just as it should be. FOOTBALL PRO 95 allows coaches to practice their creations against various opposing formations to see if it has long gain potential or whether it's a disaster waiting to happen. If your new gadget play is going to

get you toasted, it's better to find out in practice than in that big game against your hated rival.

Also included is a sophisticated Player Ratings Profile Editor that allows you to reassign player ratings based on your personal ranking philosophy. This feature permits hard-core coaches to establish their own system within a system for ranking players. There's also a tried and true module for setting coaching profiles, useful in games when your team is under computer control, as well as an option to establish game plans of up to 64 plays on

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Circle Reader Service #161

The Way Of The Air Warrior



There I was at 30,000 feet when suddenly... That was a popular way for WWII pilots to begin

boastful tales of exaggerated flight exploits. While reaching 30,000 feet in an F-16 is a trivial matter, climbing a Spitfire or P-51 Mustang to that altitude took a bit of time. And given how cold and thin the air is up there, I don't imagine it was a particularly comfortable altitude to fly in at the other night I found myself in a Spitfire at 30,000 feet...

I was flying SVGA AIR WARRIOR on the GENie network. I fly as "Group Commander" of a band of over 30 simulation pilots organized into two squadrons. These two squadrons collectively form the 94th Composite Group, FSAF, and we adorn our callsigns with the "<FS>" insignia.

We were executing a series of runway-denial missions against the enemy, the abominable "A Landers." We'd knocked out a couple of their runways and had settled into a "home defense mode" flying a series of BARCAPS (barrier combat air patrols) along the border waiting for the inevitable counter-attack. The counter-attack came in the form of four A-26s staggered over a few square miles and at fairly low altitude. When the A-26's first became visible, I was the only lighter airborne in the area. Calling their position to my countrymen over the "radio" (you type messages on a "radio channel"). I dove toward the first bomber. Apparently, the lowest A-26s panicked as I dove on his wingman and he crashed his aircraft. That's a mission kill. I split-Ed onto my intended target and shot it down quickly. Two down. Spotting the third ahead and below me about one o'clock low, I fired all the throttle and dove in chase. The A-26, when not carrying bombs, maneuvers quite well, and there are several Air Warriors who fly them like

fighters in the arena, usually to the engaging fighter's dismay. I'm not sure what this particular bomber pilot intended to do, but he executed a break turn. So far, none of the A-26s appeared to have any gunners. Maybe he was turning to engage me, maybe not. Either way, his turn toward his homeland allowed me to catch up.

LESSON 1: PREVENTING OVERSHOOTS

He was at least 100kts slower than me, so I had to execute a series of barrel rolls to remain behind him. The barrel rolls converted my speed from the "horizontal" plane to the

A VETERAN OF
SIMULATED AIR
WARS OFFERS
LESSONS IN
STAYING ALOFT AND
STAYING ALIVE

ON THE RADAR

The radar has picked up a signal identified as SLEET HUNTER, a WWII sub simulation being developed at SSI by Carl Norman. SLEET HUNTER is a high-resolution simulation of the US submarine fleet in the Pacific theater. According to Norman, technical and historical accuracy

are prime concerns of the design, and to that end he has hired a WWII sub skipper as a technical advisor. Look for this boat to surface later this year.



by Tom "KC" Basham

"vertical" one. Without necessarily wasting undue amounts of energy, I managed to remain behind the target despite his slower speed. The barrel roll, executed by pulling the stick back and to one side while usually applying a little rudder in the intended direction of the roll, is a typical form of "using the vertical" and is a good way to prevent an overshoot during a dogfight. If you find yourself rapidly closing on a bandit from astern, you've got to find a way to slow the closure or you'll overshoot into his gunsight. You have the usual choices, slow down and waste your kinetic energy away or maneuver out of plane, thus conserving your overall energy state. The bomber had either no gunner or a very poor gunner and I managed to down it as well. Three down.

The fourth bomber was too far away and headed for a different friendly airfield. I was low on ammunition and at low altitude. There was no way I could catch him. Fortunately, my countrymen had been scrambling during the two minutes I was strafing the other bombers, and my wingman, <FS>Padlock, was rapidly approaching a firing position. I landed my Spitfire at the nearest field and relaunched. Seconds after I was airborne, <FS>Padlock killed the last bomber before it could destroy any of our airfields.

<FS>Padlock and I became separated as I continued to patrol the same area. A few minutes later I realized the enemy had given up attacking those particular airfields and had moved the war to another area. Since I was all alone and in friendly territory, I decided to screw around. I didn't know exactly how high a Spitfire could climb, so I decided to find out. It took a while, but I eventually found my self at that legendary altitude, 30,000 feet. I hadn't been paying much attention to my surroundings and suddenly noticed I had crossed into enemy airspace. Naturally, I figured being at 30,000 feet would place me safely above any enemies I might encounter.

I soon noticed an ally, another C Land pilot, heading below me into enemy territory. Coming toward him, also below me,

was an enemy P-51. This looked like an easy kill. Most P-51 pilots I've come across aren't interested in dogfighting. Although the P-51 Mustang handles well, its high speed is usually its greatest attribute. In fact, among AIR WARZONE pilots the plane



NOT A CHANCE! Without a tail-gunner, this A-26 can't do a whole lot about the fighter on its tail. All the fighter has to do is match speed with the target, line it up, and rip it apart.

is called the "Runstang," since most P-51 pilots prefer to keep it at high speed and use hit-and-run tactics against their targets. Although slow to accelerate, the P-51 can sustain speed well and is very difficult to catch. Unless, of course, you're at 30,000 feet and looking down at the Mustang. A Spitfire can easily exceed 450kts in a power dive from high altitude, giving a "Runstang" a run for its money. All I



ROLL OUT THE BARREL If you are rapidly approaching a slower-moving target, barrel rolls help keep you behind the target without wasting kinetic energy.

had to do was wait until the P-51 dove onto my ally, then I'd dive onto him. Even if the P-51 decided to engage me, I had several thousand feet of altitude advantage. He probably wouldn't have the energy to climb to me. His nose would fall off,

I'd roll onto his six, and gun his brains out. Nothing to it.

I radioed a warning to my ally, then prepared my attack. As I watched the P-51's movements I noticed something was wrong. Although my ally was moving away along his original heading, the P-51 made no attempt to engage it. As I began a gentle turn at 150kts (and all turns at 30,000 feet and 150kts better be gentle) to keep the bandit in sight I realized he was coming toward me. Not only was he coming toward me, but he was gaining angles and altitude on me in a hurry. I had seriously misjudged his altitude and his speed; he was higher and faster than I anticipated. Now he was bearing down on me in a hurry. The Spitfire doesn't handle well at those altitudes, especially compared to a fast P-51. My world of advantage was becoming a world of hurt in a hurry.

LESSON 2: FIGHT ON YOUR OWN TERMS

The most important thing in any fight is to fight on your terms, using your strengths to exploit your opponent's weaknesses. I had built a huge potential energy advantage but was being confronted by an adversary with a huge kinetic energy advantage. Staying at that altitude would have been suicide. The Spitfire held the maneuvering advantage at lower altitudes; I needed to be either 10,000 feet higher and dive on the Mustang, or be 10,000 feet lower and out turn him. I rolled into the attacker, buried the nose below the horizon, and shoved the throttles forward. Maintaining a spiral dive, I kept the P-51 just enough off my tail to prevent him from shooting. Watching the rear view I saw that he remained firmly camped on my six. As speed increased, I increased g-loading until the screen began to darken from "blackout" and prayed I'd find some way out of this fix.

Somewhat, I got back down to 19,000 feet without getting any enemy lead in my airframe. My speed was now over 300kts, giving me ample kinetic energy to work with. I started a 6g pull-up toward my opponent figuring it high time I turned the fight back to my terms. Not surprisingly,

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the P-51 refused to follow my pull-up. He leveled his wings and continued his dive at high speed, taking him deeper into enemy territory. He obviously recognized the fight was about to switch to my terms and decided not to play anymore.

LESSON 3: KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT QUITS

But the story continues. I was still around 19,000 feet and over 250kts when the P-51 decided to run, and I decided to give chase. A dive from that altitude presented a reasonable chance of catching the Mustang. At first, I closed within gun range and scored a couple of hits on the P-51, evidenced by debris flinging from his airplane. Before I could finish him off, though, the P-51 pulled out of gun range. Figuring he'd outrun me I prepared to break off the attack when, suddenly, we stumbled on that lone ally that I thought the P-51 intended to attack earlier. I don't know exactly how it happened, but the P-51 and this ally started dogfighting. I made a couple of high speed runs past the fight, but couldn't get a decent shot at the Mustang. By this time we were down to 8,000 feet and my fuel gauge approached "empty." A quick glimpse at the "radar" screen indicated a large number of enemy aircraft in the adjacent sector, more than likely *en route* to our position.

Although I dearly wanted to kill that Mustang, I still had to cross a lot of enemy airspace to get home. There could be other bandits waiting to ambush me on the egress path. I still had enough altitude left to make a diving run for home, but a protracted fight with the Mustang might suck us down below 2,000 feet. The P-51 had already tried to disengage from me and now found himself in another fix; I could find myself in a similar position if I wasn't careful. No, it was time to go. I pointed the nose at the nearest friendly base. Diving at full throttle, I accelerated and passed uneventfully back into friendly territory. From what I could tell in my rear view mirror, the P-51 dove away in the opposite direction and likewise escaped my ally.

FAILURE OR SUCCESS?

When I landed, I received a meager allot-

ment of points for damaging the P-51, but I received no kills. This mission might be considered an utter flop by some, but I consider it reasonably successful. First, when at 30,000 feet I seized the opportunity and planned an attack on my terms. Although unable to execute the attack, I learned a valuable lesson on judging the enemy's energy status. I tried to decipher his capabilities and intentions too early and made a drastic error. Second, although on the defensive, I didn't let the enemy dictate the fight. I correctly chose to take the fight to my arena rather than push a bad position and I knew my own energy status well enough to reach "my arena." Third, I successfully shook the bandit and escaped a defensive posture. Fourth and finally, I knew when to



THE HEIGHT ADVANTAGE The Mustang has the speed, but the Spitfire has the altitude. With a diving pass, the Spit might put some hurt on the Mustang before it can run away.

get out of Dodge. In simulations it's easy to take chances or run risks you wouldn't take with your real life. Although AIR WARRIOR lets "dead" pilots immediately re-launch, a similar "death" can end careers in campaign-oriented flight sims. That I "survived" may have little merit in the AIR WARRIOR arena, but such survival requires judgmental skills applicable to many other simulation arenas.

The point is: air combat isn't just about maneuvering. The one-versus-one maneuvering skills which are so important in the various modern contests are only part of the equation. Surviving the environment—from FALCON 3.0's Kuwait to AIR WARRIOR's Europe to RED BARON'S France—requires additional skills. If you want to survive campaigns, you've got to be a great dogfighter, but you must also accurately assess the entire environment and know when to say, "It's time to go home." Good hunting! ☺

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Circle Reader Service #117

Road Hog!

*We Look To The Digital Circuits
And NASCAR RACING Is All We Can See*

by Gordon Goble

OK, I ADMIT IT—I'M NO MECHANIC. I CAN PUMP GAS, GAP A SPARK PLUG, AND CHANGE A TIRE OR TYRE, BUT that's about it. Everything important under the hood seems to be too hard to reach, oil gets my clothes dirty, and stuff gets too hot to work on when the darn thing's been running. Yet I've got a working knowledge of the way things fit together, and I definitely take pride in being a pretty good driver.

The same holds for my experience in the world of computerized racing. No one loves a good racing sim more than I do, yet my experience has always come behind the wheel, not under it. When **WORLD CIRCUIT** came along, I was in my element—a little more wing here, a little less there, then off to the races. **INDY CAR RACING** taxed my limited knowledge further, but rarely did I need or want to further explore the intricacies of advanced car set-up. Even at full race distance, a default "Ace" machine with a mild tweak or two and a ton of on-track experience seemed to be more than enough to garner a flattering result.

My how times have changed.

The hottest new rod in the racing sta-

ble of **Papyrus Design Group**, **NASCAR RACING**, in addition to being a monumental leap forward in simulation graphics, has forcibly turned this garage geek into a masked mechanical marvel. It has compelled me to come to grips with such foreign terms as "weight jacking," "camber," "caster," and the myriad of forces at work on a car during each of its runs from full to empty. It has been an eye-opening and ultimately rewarding experience, and one very much based in reality. Fortunately, this mysterious self-transformation has not been at the expense of a ripping good racing experience, for it is in the heat of battle that **NASCAR RACING** reaches its pinnacle, and what a lofty perch it is.

Graphics, mechanics, and the racing experience: this trio of elements work hand-in-hand to push **NASCAR RACING** into the realm of gaming immortality. Surely it must be considered the best total racing experience ever created. But let's take a step back for a moment...

ANCIENT PYPYRUS

It was little more than a year ago that

Papyrus brought **INDY CAR RACING** to the personal computer, and almost immediately, digital racers across the globe were heaping generous portions of deserved praise on this new racing gem. But nowhere was **INDY CAR** more stunning than in its textured "3-D" visual presence—it was a fitting conclusion to the years of work that went into its creation, even if its low screen resolution (320 x 200) kept it looking a bit ragged around the edges.

To the average game player with the average computer, **NASCAR RACING** will look pretty much the same as **INDY CAR**: the same textured format, the same sense of depth, and the same rough edges. But, for the lucky people with a screaming CPU and fast video card, there is another, very distinct, version of **NASCAR RACING** set aside just for you. **NASCAR RACING** in **SVGA** (640 x 480 palette, available only on CD) will take you fortunate few into a new dimension of visual racing pleasure, one that combines the depth of **INDY CAR** with the clean lines of **WORLD CIRCUIT**, then adds a clarity and attention to detail that is rare indeed in this, or any other genre of computer gaming.

Suffice it to say that once **SVGA NASCAR** has been witnessed, there just ain't no goin' back. But before you take a peek at its high resolution glory, make sure you're willing to invest in the hardware required to handle the software. Although **Papyrus** recommends a minimum 486-66, rumors have it that even some Pentium 66 owners don't have quite what it takes. Testing for this review was performed on a Pentium 90-powered



NASCAR RACING

Price: \$59.95 CD-ROM, 3.5" Floppy

System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-33MHz, 4 MB RAM for VGA graphics; 486-66MHz, 8 MB RAM for SVGA graphics; 15 MB hard drive space; supports most major sound cards
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of Players: 1-2 (modem)
Designers: Adam Levesque, John Wheeler, David Kaemmer
Publisher: Papyrus Design Group
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What's That Tune?

computer with an ATI Graphics Pro Turbo (2 MB VRAM) video card, and eight MB 70 ns RAM. This combination of equipment really had NASCAR racing, although even at such a level of computing prowess, little bits of detail and/or numbers of opponents had to be reduced in order to keep the frame rate up. Is it all worth it? Well, just how much of a racing fan are you?

WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS...

NASCAR RACING ships with nine tracks: the superspeedways of Talladega, Michigan, Atlanta, and Darlington; the smaller ovals at Phoenix, New Hampshire, Bristol and Martinsville, and the sole road course at Watkins Glen. In Papyrus tradition, all circuits are faithfully recreated, as are the included NASCAR cars. While some of the big guns are curious in their omission (you won't find a Dale or a Bill), there is sure to be some logical reasoning behind their absence, and the extremely authentic recreation of the Mark Martin, Rusty Wallace, and Geoff Bodine cars are more than threatening enough. Completely variable detail is available at each and every track, as is minimum and maximum frame rates, and the number of cars that are actually drawn ahead and behind. Removing the grass texture at Watkins Glen may be just what it takes to get the game running smoothly on your machine, and after all, it is only grass.

The ultimate goal of the NASCAR Racing racer would have to be a full race distance victory against top notch opponents, but before one runs, one must learn how to walk, and it is advisable to drop the opponent skill level to say 90% or so, then begin by checking out the feel of a NASCAR in a practice session. Pull up a relatively easy track such as Talladega, and you'll quickly discover that you're in command of a big, rumbling, sliding, land whale. Meet Mr. Wall. Meet Mr. Tire-On-Fire. Have fun. Get pissed off. It's all a learning (and deprogramming, for you INDYCAR fans) procedure. But, gradually, it will come together. Soon you'll be truckin' along with some back markers, then attempting a big, looping pass, then recognizing the facets that make NASCAR RACING such a popular pastime for both racers and fans alike. Hit the "F10" key and take an "arcade" view of things...but you'll quickly go back inside the cockpit. With a little seasoning,



The way to the winner's circle lies straight through the garage. Wrench work is quick and easy, which is good because you'll be doing a lot of it if you want to win.



Adjusting shock stiffness should be an early priority, since the defaults are uniformly lousy. The left front shock often has the greatest default stiffness, yielding terrible handling on left-turning ovals.



Greater downforce also increases resistance, and only testing reveals the best solution for each track.



Even fuel capacity must be considered, since each gallon weighs almost seven pounds. But empty tanks make the car tend to understeer.



You can adjust the gear ratios to suit the track, using taller gears for greater top speed and shorter gears for faster acceleration.



NASCAR costs nearly ten feet, increasing weight on the right front tire. You can redistribute weight to the left and rear, restoring rear axle stability and grip.



Underinflating tires increases grip, while overinflating them enables higher speeds, but properly inflated tires will wear the slowest.



You adjust camber depending on how the tires heat up on the track. If temperatures aren't the same on the outside, middle and inside, camber needs adjusting.



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OVAL OF MADNESS Bristol's mere half-mile length will constantly test your car setup, your driving skills and your sanity. The steepest slopes on the circuit (36 degrees) barely keep you out of the grandstand.

you'll be ready for an experimental race, and that's where the boys take a backseat to the men.

The NASCAR train. Drafting. Cooperative driving. Learning that tucking in behind another car for a few laps might just keep one's tires from morphing into boiling, burned-out pancakes. Pitting. Ordering your pit crew to change one tire only, while forgetting the body damage—that'll take too much time. The 55 mph pit lane speed limit. Assorted parts that fly off and lay dead on the track—a dormant monument to foolish driving. Realizing that some body damage is better left unrepaired. So you've lost your hood—keep on keepin' on. But most of all, learning that driving smoothly is driving to win.

The NASCAR RACING racing experience is unlike anything ever presented on computer. The car is big and slow off the mark but filled with momentum, yet contains a certain consistency that takes a lot of acclimation. By the time most successful passes are finalized, one may be well under braking, and wa-a-ay into a four wheel drift. But the wacky thing is, such drifts can be controlled, and there is a certain beauty in controlling the monster. It'll take quite a few hours of driving to realize just when and where such moves can be pulled off and when and where they can't, but there is most definitely a method in the midst of madness. You see, NASCAR comes with something else that certainly ranks with the other innovations mentioned earlier—unbelievable artifi-

cial intelligence. In short, the AI is A-1. Let me explain...

So far, I've managed to complete two half races, at Atlanta (a second place finish on what must be the most perplexing of all tracks for both driver and mechanics) and Bristol (a win in the bullring to end all bullrings). Both were strong finishes, albeit against opponents at 98% skill level, and both were the result of a happy marriage of smooth driving and pit and pre-race strategies (which I'll explain in a moment). But the one common thread lies in the amazing AI shown by the



FLOORING IT AT TALLADEGA Serious speed freaks will steer towards Talladega, the biggest, fastest NASCAR track. You can reach speeds of 200 mph here, but you'll need a Pentium to run it in high-res like this.

computer-driven battery of opposing drivers. Dueling brake zones is a common practice in NASCAR, yet fortunately, the other drivers consistently realize the need to keep their own machines intact for any chance of a decent finish. Without exception, if the human driver shows a healthy respect for the laws of physics, the computer opposition will show that same respect for the player's deep braking. "Slotting in" between two cars under braking is both gut-wrench-

ing and thrilling, but if you've got a door "covered," they'll always know you're there. If this is an accurate representation of real life, and I have every reason to believe it is, there is no wonder that the NASCAR fraternity is such a close knit bunch.

FOR WANT OF A WRENCH...

But it was in Atlanta that I came to understand fully the relationship between a smart car set-up and a good finish. One hell of a taxing track, Atlanta is two huge turns and two very short straight-aways. Preparing a durable car here is necessary, puzzling, and wonderful when you get it right. The default "Ace" set-up was great for say, 30 laps or so, but then came the frustration as that corner carving ability that propelled me from 21st to 1st began to dissipate. Lap after lap, my speed dwindled and I watched in horror as my lead evaporated. Sinking further and further into the pack, I realized my mission wasn't just on the track but back in the garage too. More stagger, more weight in the rear

to compensate for a lessening fuel load, more nitro in the front right tire because it was burning up after 25 laps. Take the car out with a full tank, take it out with a half tank, then an empty tank. What does it do differently? So many questions... so little time.

In the end, I had a car that was almost undrivable in the first half-dozen laps, got going pretty good after a couple dozen circuits, and managed to catch pace as each pit stop approached. I never had to change a setting at any stop, even though NASCAR RACING allows one to "radio" ahead to the pit for desired alterations. Fortunately, I didn't hit a thing all race, so the question of repairing or not repairing body damage never came up. Oh, the final set-up, the one that did the trick? Well, you start off by putting just two pounds of pressure in *all* the tires, then you stick all

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DELAY OF GAME The replay mode is great for checking out those multi-car wrecks you cause. Turn off car damage, steer into traffic and—voilà!—instant position advancement.

the weight on the right hand side, yeah, that's it...

For those of you with a lot of racing to do, and only little bits of time in which to do it, NASCAR RACING permits the saving of races, but just one at a time. (Curiously, during one save/restart at Bristol, the entire pack slowed to a

crawl for its final *twenty-two laps!* This occurred only once, yet may be a future concern.) As is always the case with Papyrus racing products, the replay mode is exceptional, and viewable from or centered upon any car. This means that with 40 cars on the track, over 300 replay angles are available! As well, replays may be cut and saved to disk. Printable statistics are also available from within the program, although a more detailed report would be welcomed. Having been disqualified *after* winning at Michigan, I wanted reasons, dammit! Perhaps it was my 150 mph post race flier down pit lane? Or was it driving backwards around the track? I dunno. One final "should have" concerns the

victory celebration: there is none. Are you listening, Papyrus?!

Finally, NASCAR RACING includes a paint kit that permits customizable visual alterations to one's own steed. Again, as with INDCAR, my resulting graphical image defies description in a classy publication such as this.

As you can see, NASCAR RACING is loaded with more features than you can pump a piston at. For the die-hard auto-racing fan, it has no peer. If you've got the hardware and the tenacity to tame a 3000 lb. beast, NASCAR will see you to the winner's circle. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

NASCAR RACING

RATING



PROS Jaw-dropping graphics in SVGA, impressive opponent AI, and ground-breaking physical modeling; in sum, the most comprehensive racing experience in gaming.

CONS Hefty hardware demands for SVGA graphics and maximum detail. The victory celebration is nothing to cheer about.

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Bird On A Three Wire

Electronic Arts' U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS

by Denny Atkin

IN AN OCTOBER OF LAST YEAR I GOT A RIDE IN THE BACK SEAT OF AN F-15 EAGLE. IT WAS A FLIGHT SIM FAN'S DREAM, AND AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE THAT NO SIM WILL EVER COMPARE TO—unless they develop a way to project eight G's of force from a VGA monitor. (I'm sure Thrustmaster's working on it.)

I did find a way to relive much of the excitement of that experience without having to consume my way back into an F-15's ejection seat, thanks to **Electronic Arts' U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS**. High-resolution graphics and some of the best sound yet to grace a flight simulation help USNF provide a realistic combat environment, but it's the top-notch flight model and wicked enemy artificial intelligence that round out the experience. Such realism does come at a price: while USNF will run on a 486SX-25 system, it has options that can bring even a Pentium-100 to its knees.

THE RUSSIAN FRONT

The geographic setting is the Ukraine in the near future. Hard-liners have regained control in Russia, ousting Boris Yeltsin and threatening to retake control of former Soviet territories. The U.S. has pledged to defend Ukrainian sovereignty, and has sent the carrier *Enterprise* to help shore up Ukrainian defenses. You'll

fly the A-7 Corsair II, F/A-18 Hornet, F-14 Tomcat, and Su-33 Flanker (on loan from the Ukrainians) on a variety of missions; towards the end of the campaign your carrier will also be equipped with a navalized version of the stealthy F-22 Lightning II advanced tactical fighter. There's also a fictional naval version of the F-104 Starfighter that's not used in the primary campaign, but can be flown elsewhere in the simulation. Twenty-nine

other aircraft types appear in the game, under computer control. These range from the Ka-50 Hokum and Mi-24 Hind helicopters through the KC-135 and IL-96 transports to the B-52 and Tu-95 bombers.

Along with the campaign, USNF also features 50 single missions (14 training and 36 combat), as well as two custom mission creators (Quick and Pro). The Single Missions feature 14 training missions—covering basic flight, stalls and spins, and air combat—as well as 36 combat missions. The Quick Mission creator is great for those times you just have the urge to blow something up. Select one to three allied aircraft (all must be the same type), as well as up to 15 enemy aircraft (up to five each of three types), and an optional ground target. Then arm your plane and take to the skies. You can also choose the

altitude, weather, distance from the enemy, and whether the situation is neutral, offensive, or defensive. If you're itching for a close-in dogfight, you can also select guns-only combat.

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

The campaign mode is where USNF really shines, though. Each mission is introduced with a full-motion video briefing (the CD-ROM contains over 40 minutes of video); some missions also feature pilot banter in the ready room that includes important clues on how to tackle some of the more challenging missions to come. The missions are much more interesting than the "attack the primary and secondary target" variety seen in many sims. Your first challenge is to escort an airliner carrying Boris Yeltsin as he attempts to escape the new Russian regime. Later missions involve attacking ground and sea targets, escorting friendlies, and protecting your carrier group.

Unfortunately, the missions are fixed, and your success or failure doesn't affect what mission comes next. You can run out of aircraft and weapons, though, so if you destroy all your F/A-18s, you may end up flying your attack missions in rust-bucket A-7s.

If you fail five missions, the campaign ends. If you're killed, you can choose to retry a mission or end the campaign. You should never end up in a situation where you have to retry the first dozen or so missions, though, as USNF includes a feature to back up your pilots, and you can keep a failed mission from being logged by backing out to the main menu after the mission ends.

You won't be fighting a one-plane war



U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

486-25 (486-66

recommended)

4MB RAM (8MB

recommended)

SVGA graphics,

CD-ROM, mouse,

joystick, supports

most major sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Brent Iverson

Publisher: Electronic Arts

San Mateo, CA

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in USNF. In fact, because of weapon-load limitations, most of the missions aren't winnable without the help of your wingmen. A number of targets will be flagged as mission objectives, so you'll want to make sure you don't waste your weapons on peripheral targets and find yourself Winchester when faced with a flight of four fighters that must be destroyed. If that does happen, you can command your wingmen to attack particular targets, so all may not be lost.

The challenge doesn't have to end after you've completed the campaign. The Pro Mission Creator lets you create combat situations with multiple allied and enemy aircraft, ground targets and vehicles, and complex mission objectives. Missions can be as sophisticated as those included with the game. Individual planes or wings of up to six aircraft can be given commands to patrol, attack, or defend an objective. You can set up multiple waypoints for both air and ground forces.

A MODEL FLIGHT MODEL

Coming from a team led by Brent Iverson, creator of CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT, USNF doesn't disappoint in the flight modeling department. Aircraft performance differences are modeled accurately—you'll do much better in a close-in knife fight if you're flying an F-

spins, and lift failure. The flight envelope changes with altitude, and corner (best turn rate) speed varies with each aircraft. Spins can present a particular challenge in some of the planes; recovery from a flat spin in an F-14 is difficult, and nearly impossible in an F-104. The only annoying deficiency in the flight model is roll rate, which is far too slow. The designers were forced to compromise the roll rate in order to get a decent video frame rate. But while roll rates are slow, they're proportionally slow, so an F-15 will still dramatically out-turn a E-2C. The damage model is well done, with subsystems such as elevators and hydraulics subject to failure when you're hit. There's a large selection of weaponry for arming your aircraft, but weapons system modeling is less than stellar—I've destroyed bombers with air-to-ground Maverick missiles.



DEAD TO RIGHTS! A lone MiG-29 pilot says his last prayer before this F-14 Tomcat ventilates his cockpit with some cannon rounds.

Carrier operations are the best yet seen in a PC sim. On one take-off I experienced a catapult failure and was forced to eject as my plane crossed the ship's bow. Landing using an authentic nose-up approach is difficult; you'll have to extend both flaps and brakes to maintain any sort of sink rate. If you're willing to sacrifice authenticity and point the nose at the deck until you're nearly down, it's much easier. An ILS display on the HUD simplifies lining up the approach. If you'd rather, you can activate the autopilot and just sit back and enjoy the ride.

USNF has complete support for the Thrustmaster control devices, including

the FCS and F-16 FLCS sticks, WCS Mark I and II throttles, and RCS rudder pedals. Unfortunately, the designers ignored the popular CH FlightStick Pro, so you won't be able to use the view lat or extra buttons on that stick. I ended up completing most of the missions with a Gravis Phoenix, which was easily programmable to offer full throttle, rudder, and stick control for USNF.

Enemy AI is nothing short of fantastic. Computer pilots seem to recognize the strengths of their particular aircraft. On one flight I decided to take on a MiG-29 in an A-7; as I tucked in behind the enemy plane I heard "He's going vertical!" and looked to see the bogey taking advantage of his plane's better climb rate to get some distance from me. Other aircraft will use horizontal extension or superior turning ability to evade your fire. Watching a wingman engage an enemy plane is an amazingly intense and realistic experience—there are none of the jittery movements and unrealistic turning fights you see in less-sophisticated sims.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMMERSION

USNF not only has a great personality, but a pretty face as well. The simulation sets new standards for graphic detail and realism, and the sound has to be heard to be believed. Graphic resolutions in the game include 320x200, 320x400, 640x480, 800x600, and 1024x768. Detail is enhanced with texture-mapped surfaces and gouraud shading. The aircraft look fantastic, sporting not only camouflage but full



QUICK TOUR OF THE UKRAINE The theatre map allows for careful mission planning and resource allocation.

22 than an F-14. The biggest complaints—no accelerated stalls and the lack of inertia in rolls—are actually a testament to the realism and complexity of the flight model. While flying you'll deal with energy bleeding in turns, difficult high-speed pull-outs, slow engine spool-up,



AWRIGHT, LISTEN UP! Full-motion video briefing sequences greatly add to the feeling that "you are there."

squadron and national insignia as well. The models look very authentic, except for the E-8 J-STARS jamming plane which has somehow sprouted an AWACS-style radome. USNF's higher resolutions eliminate most of the messy-pixel effect you see in many texture-mapped games. The sky and water textures are dazzling; the ground looks good, but won't make you forget you're playing a computer game. Unfortunately, combining this level of detail with sophisticated flight models and good enemy AI makes for a program that can tax even the most powerful microprocessors. Even on a Pentium-100, I found it necessary to turn off the cloud texture (which is only eye candy anyway) to get a smooth frame rate at the highest resolutions. A 486/56 ran the game smoothly at 640x480 with sky and water textures turned off—with them on it was like watching a slideshow. On a slower 486 you'll want to play in 320x200 mode with all textures off.

There's no instrument panel in USNF. Instead, you use a combination of the heads-up display and pop-up windows to monitor navigation, radar, systems, and weapons. Although this may annoy purists, the system works

very well in 640x480 resolution. Unfortunately, the pop-ups are fixed in size: They obscure too much of the screen in 320x200 mode, and are too small in 800x600 and 1024x768. USNF does feature a canopy railing, equipped with a functional rear-view mirror in some planes, but only in the



COMIN' IN HIGH AND CLEAR The view from this F-14 Tomcat on final approach looks great in 640x480, with pop-up windows clearly visible.

views. The F4 key padlocks the current target as long as it remains in your field of view; however, with no cockpit graphics for reference, it's too easy to lose track of what direction you're looking when the HUD isn't in view.

USNF sports ground-breaking sound support. Sixteen-bit digital stereo sound abounds, and most major sound cards are supported in native mode. The steady rumble of your engine, the whining of a missile lock warning, and the "swosh" of a missile launch are to be expected, but you might be surprised when you switch to an external view and hear the growl of a tank's engine as it moves across the landscape—USNF has a wondrous variety of vehicle sounds.

Best of all is the voice support. In the heat of combat you'll hear your wingman or radar intercept officer chime in with comments like "I'm takin' a shot" and "Get this guy off me!" The pilot chatter hasn't been toned down for the general audience; while you'll probably be amused when your RIO yells "C'mon, do some of that pilot shit," you might not enjoy explaining to your kids why he yelled "I'm gettin' a hard-on" when combat got particularly intense. The background music by The Fat Man and Team Fat is well done, supporting both native sound cards and General MIDI.

FINAL APPROACH

USNF is superb, but it's not perfect. There's no VCR replay feature—surprising given the development team's experience with **CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT**, which had an excellent flight recorder. You'll be playing solo, as the game doesn't feature modem or network play. The Mission Creator is well done, but because only aircraft can be grouped, setting up waypoints for a group of ground targets such as tanks can be tedious and time-consuming. The careless omission of support for the CH FlightStick Pro is particularly irritating. And while it was unavoidable given the sophistication of the program, the steep hardware requirements (4MB minimum, 8MB to get all graphic features) may lock out gamers with older systems.

Those complaints aside, though, USNF is a stand-out simulation that should impress all but the most demanding sim players. Whether you have last year's 486-53 or next year's Pentium-135, the game can push your system to its limits. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

US NAVY FIGHTERS

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Superb graphics and sound, good flight model, great dogfighting AI, and a mission builder that insures continued playability.

CONS No FlightStick Pro support and minor compromises in the flight model will annoy purists. Requires some serious hardware to get the most out of the graphics.

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GENESIS

Wargaming Alchemy

CONVERTING BOARD GAMES TO THE COMPUTER HAS ALWAYS BEEN SOMETHING OF A WARGAMER'S NIGHTMARE. As long ago as the 8-bit days, for example, *Avalon Hill* attempted to bring *GULF STRIKE* to computer shores. Frankly, if the real *Desert Storm* had been so ill-conceived, *Schwartzkopf* would have been run out of Kuwait on a rail. The garish color palette nearly glowed in the dark—a real shame, given the gorgeous maps found in the boardgame. Worse, the familiar hexagon-patterned map was gone, along with the combat results table. Yet, units still moved in the same six directions, but without any sense of distance or perspective available to the player. The lack of information on combat left players adrift, but the supply rules were so over-emphasized that only a maniacal logistician could love them. Overall, a dismal failure.

"So what?" you may well ask. After all, AH's early computer troubles are well-documented. But, unlike such abominations as *B-1 NUCLEAR BOMBER*, *GULF STRIKE* should have been better, since it was based on an award-winning boardgame from talented design-



er Mark Herman. With the computer taking care of the tedious aspects, this title seemed a sure winner. Its celebrated failure meant that AH spent years with only minimal effort in developing their extensive board wargame line to the computer.

A similar problem occurred with GDW's *WHIRL DEATH*, which covered the battle of *Velikoye Luiki* years before *Atomic Games'* design on the same subject. Frank Chadwick and other design talents at GDW were shamelessly wasted, as the computer version bounced from publisher to publisher. Ironically, the clumsy interface and snow-blind graphics made the game nothing short of tedious.

How did such high-profile titles die the "slow death" on store shelves? Part of the problem was that the companies involved were trapped in a hobby-type mindset. A board wargame which sells more than 10,000 copies is a big hit, while a computer wargame could lose money with similar sales. In an effort to minimize risk, boardgame companies cut corners with programmers and artists, leading to lackluster and even unprofessional computer games.

Other publishers and developers came to the seeming defensible conclusion that if *Avalon Hill* and GDW couldn't pull off computer conversions of their successful boardgames, such efforts simply weren't worth the trouble. Companies such as SSI (after being successfully sued for the similarities between *Avalon Hill* boardgames in both *COMPUTER BISMARCK* and *RINGSIDE SEAT*), SSG and *Simulations Canada* began to try different approaches. SSI began to experiment with command control rules and (optional) randomized orders of battle; SSG emphasized the command perspective of the simulation and forced gamers to depend upon the AI of subordinate commanders; and *Simulations Canada* emphasized the nature of limited in-

CAN TRADITIONAL
BOARD GAMES
TRANSMUTE INTO
COMPUTER GAME
GOLD?

G-2

* Well, *Avalon Hill* sprang *FLIGHT COMMANDER II* on the gaming public with virtually no fanfare, but the on-line buzz is very good. Since it's an improved Windows version of the *FLIGHT COMMANDER* game that we loved for the Macintosh, we're not surprised a bit. This jet warfare game with a distinct board game feel does not test player's reflexes, but rather tests their ability to plan and conduct missions. This one is well worth a look.

* Charles Moylan, designer of *FLIGHT COMMANDER II*, has credited J.D. Webster's *Air Superiority* and *Air Strike* board games as an inspiration for *FLIGHT COMMANDER*. Rather than seeking legal action against Mr. Moylan, J.D. will be teaming up with him on the World War II follow up to *FLIGHT COMMANDER*, which will be based on J.D.'s *Over the Reach* board game. These two are a team to watch.

* Speaking of teaming up, HPS Simulations has formally teamed up with other small computer wargame publishers. Both *Adanac (The Row)* and

(continued on page 160)

by Terry Lee Coleman

telligence within any combat situation (most successfully with naval combat and with lesser satisfaction in land combat). Whatever the approach, everyone seemed to agree that wargames on the computer needed to take advantage of what the computer could do (bookkeeping, fog of war, artificial opponents, etc.) and that boardgame conversions were the wrong strategy. So, ironically, just as the board wargame industry was undergoing a creative renaissance, producing several clever and innovative designs, the computer game industry had given up on its boardgame antecedents.

SHOT FIRED ACROSS THE BOW

Then, three products surfaced to turn around some of this perception: HAR-

BOON, V FOR VICTORY, and THE PERFECT GENERAL. All were games which owed much to boardgame ancestors, yet they all brought additional computerized features to the party. Much of **Atomic Games'** success was a direct result of their stunning emulation of the look and feel of board wargames. They managed to make **UTAH BEACH**, the first release in the **V FOR VICTORY** series, seem fresh and exciting by improving the interface and offering more detail than previous efforts. **HARBON** (see this month's Hall of Fame) took a different tack by using the computer to run the micro-management aspects of the detailed simulation and using the data retrieval/graphics capabilities of the computer to enhance the on-line help. It was still the miniatures level

game that wargamers loved, but the computer helped them play and, as a result, get more bang for the buck. **THE PERFECT GENERAL** was based on a tabletop game and, as a result, it offered near-perfect play balance and a clear, understandable game structure. Movement, game phases, terrain rules, line of sight and every other rule was handled transparently by the computer so that all the gamers had to do was make their moves via easy mouse input.

As a result, these three wargames proved that there was still a market that wanted colorful, accurate and helpful versions of their boardgame favorites. Sadly, that wasn't what they received when another long-awaited conversion, **AH's THIRD REICH**, hit the market.

G2 (continued from page 139)

SUMMER TO APPROPRIATE and Incredible Simulations (**DEFEND THE ALAMO!**) will join forces with Scott Hamilton at HPS to combine their marketing and distribution resources. Meanwhile, HPS Simulations has announced the title for their West Front version of **TIGERS ON THE PROM**. Dubbed **PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS**, Scott is hoping for a late Spring release. It will feature the new (and considerably improved) **TOP** interface and game engine.

* Jeff Lapkoff of Incredible Simulations contacted us. He was pleased as punch to say that their **DEFEND THE ALAMO!** game is now being sold at that historic landmark. Meanwhile, Incredible Simulation's work continues on **CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND**.

* Another alliance is being formed at Alliance. The rumors are that they will be publishing the new Windows version of Steven Jones' **BIG THREE**. This time, this strategic level WWII European Front game will feature improved graphics and some artificial intelligence. It will still be playable by modem and e-mail.

* Attention **PANZER GENERAL** players. The early rumors on a follow up product indicate that it will *not* be an expansion disk. Instead, a full sequel product is on the drawing board with the working title of **TANK COMMANDER**. It is shaping up to include about nine scenarios for a British desert campaign, 14 for a British/US Western Front campaign, and about 17 scenarios for a Russian Campaign

(including some fighting in Finland!). Conspicuously absent from the list of scenarios were **Khal-kin Gol** (the Russo-Japanese battle in 1939), **Dunkirk**, and a **Red Star/White Star** campaign on that great Berlin map from **PANZER GENERAL**. Also, note that the Windows '95 version of **PANZER GENERAL** (whenever it becomes available) will feature some of the improvements being made in the game's engine for **TANK COMMANDER**.

* One of our favorite board games, **West End Games' JUNTA**, is being converted to an on-line format for The Multi-Player Games Network. David Oldis at Tantalus software is heading up the project and is considering some of the board game's more interesting variants for an on-line appearance. **JUNTA** is fun at about one revolution per hour as players assume the roles of leading families in a corrupt banana republic. After the back stabbing, threats, and revolutions sweeping through the streets of the capital, the winner is the player who has skimmed off enough money to have the largest Swiss Bank account.

* Here's a note from Brian Walker, former editor of "another computer game magazine," who reports the following from the UK: "Empire Strategy have announced the forthcoming release of **CIVIL WAR**. This is their follow up to **FIELDS OF GLORY**, the Napoleonic game published by MicroProse in the US. (A game that proved remarkably popular considering the almost total ab-

sence of any AI). Many of the features that were slated to be in **FIELDS**, such as modem and network play, will definitely be included in **CIVIL WAR**. There should also be a 3D action battlefield with texture mapping, unlike **FIELDS'** tile-based maps. While the thrust is the campaign game, there will be scenarios (historical, random, and custom). They're still debating whether to make the game CD only, because the floppy version cannot include all of these features." Thanks for the update, Brian.

* News abounds concerning **TACOPS**. A scenario disk for the Mac version of the game has been released with some quasi-historical Desert Storm scenarios. Sometime in the Summer, says Arsenal guru Jim OeGoey, a Windows version of **TACOPS** will be gracing PC gamer's computers. Their WWII version of the game (**PANZERS EAST**) should be released soon thereafter. For more information, call Arsenal Publishing at (800) 247-1877.

* A more **PERFECT GENERAL?** As many of you who walk the wargaming side of cyberspace know, an industrious computer wargamer/programmer has hacked a **PERFECT GENERAL** scenario editor and map maker. Well, it was pretty good, but has been markedly upgraded and is well worth a new look. The interface and power of the tools provided are excellent. Internet jocks should check out: oldcolo.com/pub/uploads/pged15.zip; or warchive.wustl.edu/pub/MS005_UPLOADS/games/PerfectGeneral/pged15.zip. <

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Impressions

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Circle Reader Service #7

When released for the Amiga and Atari ST, it failed for several reasons. First, while the artwork matched that of the board game, this was one of the few cases where the boardgame map was so devoid of color and detail that, when compared to VGA games, it was akin to watching color film on a black-and-white TV. Worse, the AI was simply one of the most inept in gaming history. The computer was incapable of forming a cohesive plan of attack against anything resembling a competent defense. But the very worst was that the game didn't follow the boardgame's special rules faithfully. So, the standard strategies could be nullified or ignored. And you couldn't use the optional rules.

FOG OF OBSCURITY

Among the many reasons why conversions fail, lack of focus is the biggest offender. Many board wargames give an insight into why Caesar routed Pompey, or why McClellan cowered in fear of Robert E. Lee, despite the restrictions of cardboard. And while it's true that computer games offer easier ways to do things like hidden movement, tracking supply, and handling line of sight, some-

times programmers and designers go too far. One thing I hear constantly from designers is "We have to get away from the old board wargame paradigm." Whether they are correct about this is quite another story.

For wargamers who yearn for their favorite boardgames on the computer, less may actually be more. Avalon Hill's recent 5TH FLEET (reviewed on page 168) is a good example. While unlikely to be mistaken for HARPOON II, it is very accessible and features an excellent interface. The whole game—in VGA, not SVGA—has a crisp look and feel, accentuated by the colorful game manuals. Finally, rather than throwing reams of data at the player, the game holistically shows kill ratios, fuel consumption, etc., in game terms—which is, after all, what most gamers really want to know.

Where many computer games seem to think that the kitchen-sink approach to design is better, 5TH FLEET chose to stick with designer Balkoski's original intent. The result is a focused game on naval operations, with enough tactical nuance to keep the game interesting, but which never slows the brisk pace so crucial to excitement. While such devices as hidden

units are evident, they add to rather than detract from the rest of the design. In 5TH FLEET, you always have a good sense of the situation as it develops, which leaves you able to concentrate on strategy and tactics, rather than struggling with the game system.

ON THE HORIZON

While computer wargaming has produced its own stars, such as Gary Grigsby, the influx of talent from the boardgaming arena can only help spark creativity—all of which is great news for wargamers. Although AHP's upcoming 1830 (see the sneak preview in CGW #125) is a strategy game rather than a wargame, it features a strong AI, courtesy of MASTER OF OCEAN'S Steve Barcia. Stanley Associates and Joe Balkoski are ready to follow the success of 5TH FLEET with the conversion of WOODEN SHIPS AND IRON MEN, due late in '95. Several other boardgame companies are signing deals to convert classic designs, most notably GMT, which recently signed SSI to publish THE GREAT BATTLES OF ALEXANDER. As a result, wargamers wait anxiously, hoping that these high-profile conversions become computer gold, rather than dying on store shelves. ☺

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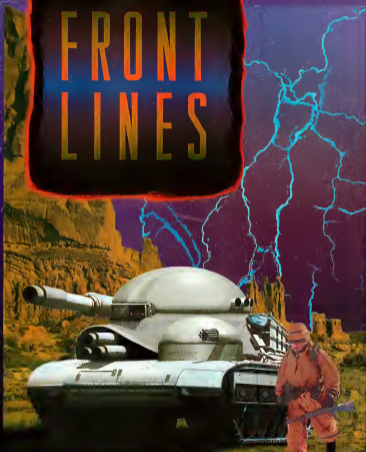
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The Age Of Gallantry And Chivalry Return
In *Conqueror: AD 1086*

by Johnny L. Wilson

AT FIRST GLANCE, CONQUEROR: AD 1086 SOUNDS LIKE ANY OTHER CASTLE AND CONQUEST GAME. IN order to win, you must become...surprise!...King of England. Along the way, you get to build...another surprise!...castles. To build up your holdings, you'll have to...can you guess?...defeat other forces in tactical battles. To increase your resources, you'll also have to manage your initial fief and, later, your conquered fiefs, with capitalistic fervor. The war cry sounds familiar so far.

Yet CONQUEROR isn't exactly your run of the mill game of medieval conquest. For starters, it adds stunning graphics, a rich musical score and exciting action sequences to a sound strategy game. Furthermore, if you get strong enough, you can try an alternate route to success in the game: searching out and destroying a dragon that has been devouring cows and men, terrorizing the English and Welsh countryside. These 3-D dragon

hunting and fighting sequences are lavishly rendered and, though colorful, are just as deadly as trying to overthrow the king by fighting the experienced armies supporting him. You can win either way, but it's going to take a lot of game time before you're ready to face *either* master of England.

Of course, no piece of entertainment can rely on one special effect. So CONQUEROR doesn't waste its powerful 3-D graphics on dragons alone. It offers two extremely beautiful tournament sequences, a joust and a mock battle. The joust is magnificent, with an action sequence reminiscent of the classic DEFENDER OF THE CROWN from Cinemaware. Better than DEFENDER, however, CONQUEROR allows you to prepare for the joust like real knights prepared, using the quintain, a target mounted

on the crossbar of a post. This helps you get used to moving the lance up, down, left and right with the mouse. What adds more color and charm to the tournament is that you may engage in courtly love, eliciting a maiden's favor and carrying her token into battle.

**SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In
Development**

The mock melee is proof that the powerful 3-D engine isn't strictly invested in bouts with dragons. Each knight is formed of polygons and overlaid with colorful texture-maps for added detail. So the animation is fluid and fast, convincing enough to keep you coming back for more. This is extremely important, because mastering the first-person real-time combat action is essential before you besiege a castle. A good performance in the tournament will also give you an opportunity to receive additional land. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to test the AI for opposing knights because it wasn't ready at press time. Given any competitive level at all, though, it should be very satisfying.

CONQUEROR: AD 1086 is named for the year prior to William the Conqueror's death in which he ordered an elaborate survey of his conquered



A CASE OF CONSCIENCE Character is an integral part of the game. Piety counts, just like Strength and Dexterity, and it is determined by how you respond to a series of dilemmas in the moral "Arena."

This one you won't want to miss.

It's been nearly three years in the making with a budget we won't even talk about. It employed a team of over a hundred people, including programmers, artists, musicians and writers as well as Hollywood make-up and special effects houses (we liked the flames in *Bockdroff*[™] so we hired the movie's special effects house to bring in a little heat). As the creators of *Wasteland*[™] and *The Bard's Tale*[™], our goal was to produce a game every bit as innovative and unique. We think you'll like the results.



Art and Stuff

Graphically, the game is state-of-the-art stunning (we're a little biased but check out the screen-shots for yourself).

We used a combination of live actors and computer generated creatures with Silicon Graphics environments and magical effects which were painstakingly rendered down to the finest crack, doorway and magical lightning storm.

The Game's the Thing

A combination of traditional role playing and interactive storytelling, *Stonekeep* mixes a detailed



storyline and character interaction with puzzle-solving, magic systems, character attributes and combat. It all comes together in a system that allows for quality storytelling combined with a powerful, yet easy-to-use control system (intuitive without being watered down).



The Box, the Book and Story

The packaging is every bit as cool as the game. Shipping in a special tombstone-shaped, hologram box, the package starts you on your quest "through dark corridors, treacherous sewers and subterranean realms of faeries, magick and the living dead." (We had to throw a bit of marketing hype in here somewhere.) Along with the skeleton hologram cover, you also get a limited edition, hard-bound *Stonekeep* novella by Steve Jackson and David Pulver.



Interplay[™]

"By Gamers. For Gamers."[™] is Interplay's slogan and *Stonekeep* is the kind of game we've always wanted to play.

It looks cool, sounds great and tells a good story. It's one of those games you'll stay up playing until three in the morning on a work night. Basically, it's just a lot of fun.



A CD-ROM, Role-Playing Experience for IBM and Compatibles.



realm; the results were reported in The Domesday Book, sometimes referred to as The Domesday Census. This is appropriate since the theme of the game is amassing enough wealth and power to bring "doomsday" to your neighboring nobles. You begin the game as a second son of a wealthy noble. As

such, you can either select a pre-generated character with built-in abilities and debilities, or create your own by going through a sequence akin to creating a character in THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA. In this case, you consider six moral dilemmas before your character is set and the moral die is cast. The attributes thus assigned (Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, Piety and Stamina) will affect your performance in battle and diplomacy, among other factors. Once this phase is com-



JUST DESERTS Entering the tournament without training on the quintain is likely to result in this askew view.

The map is even seasonally sensitive, since icons change with the calendar. The map is important because, assuming you conquer other fiefdoms, it will offer hints suggesting the best method

of economic exploitation for each parcel. As of press time, it was not clear how dynamic the economic model for CONQUEROR was going to be (it appeared that you could sell anything at any given time and all of it for the same price). However, it was clear that there were many more products to mine or harvest than in the other games within the genre.

Just as the game began with an emphasis on character, though, it also allows your character to develop. As in role-playing games, strength and dexterity are improved by practice. In this case, performing well in tournaments will increase dexterity and strength. Similarly, building a church or monastery will add to your piety, and completing a quest on behalf of your overlord in-

creases honor. Naturally, winning battles also increases your fame rating and enables you to recruit armies at a reduced rate.

Add to this heady mix the further game ingredients of conversations with villagers, special weapons of varying capability, and the medieval blessings of the church. With such additions, CONQUEROR becomes a rather alluring hybrid action/strategy game with role-playing elements.

CONQUEROR: AD 1086 will be a visual feast. For me, it recaptures



those Saturday afternoon experiences of my childhood where I watched brightly colored knights battle across movie screens in Technicolor and Cinemascope. Whether it was Sir Lancelot, Sir Ivanhoe, Robert Louis Stevenson's Black Arrow, or Taras Bulba signaling the end of Eastern Europe's medieval heritage, I relished the pageantry, gallantry and chivalry of the period. With regard to pageantry, CONQUEROR has it right. The gameplay will determine the rest. ☺



IT TAKES A FIEF Quality fief management is required in Conqueror: AD 1086. The game features more terrain types and a greater variety of products than other castles and conquest games.

pleted, a nifty animated movie has your liege lord dub you as a knight of the realm and the actual play begins.

Tournaments, quests, battles and economic decisions await your noble command. You journey across a map of England with richer detail than any of the other medieval games to date.



QUEEN FOR A DAY A chivalrous knight has the opportunity to wear the colors of a lovely lady, assuming his courtly conversational grace is worthy of her winsome wit.

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OF

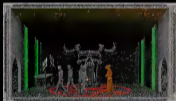


City guards protect the treasures of Cairn.

When cornered, be prepared to fight.



Wizards and assassins plot to kill the Duke—and you've been set-up to take the fall.



The wizard's tower is not a friendly place.

Unfortunately neither is his hedge maze.



Shadows of Cairn is the story of a young thief named Quinn, who has a serious problem. He's too honest to steal anything. Worthless to his guild, his own master has set him up to take the blame for the murder of the Duke of Cairn. His only hope for survival is to make sure the assassination fails.

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Sailing From Cardboard To Silicon Seas



Avalon Hill's 5TH FLEET Offers A HARPOON Alternative

by Tim Carter

A FRIEND OF MINE WITH A MASTER'S DEGREE IN PHYSICS LOVES NOTHING MORE THAN POINTING OUT the logical and scientific flaws in *Star Trek*. The response of his roommates to these verbal barrages is almost invariably, "It's television; it's meant as entertainment, not science. Besides, we like it—so shut up or you'll be wearing this bowl of popcorn."

Why would I introduce a game of modern naval combat with a not particularly original anecdote about a science fiction TV show? Well, 5TH FLEET has a host of logical, scientific and political shortcomings. Both movement and combat are far from realistic, and who in their right mind believes the Russians are likely to start another world war—least of all in the Indian Ocean? Still, having said that, let me pick the kernels out of my hair and explain why 5TH FLEET is a darn fine game (albeit with a bug or two) and a lot of fun to play.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF NAVAL COMBAT

Avalon Hill's 5TH FLEET is another in a growing line of computer products from the acknowledged masters of

board wargames. The subject is modern naval warfare, the setting is the Indian Ocean, and the objective is a fun and entertaining gaming experience.

Players may control either the Western navies and their local allies or the Russians and their allies. A complete range of ships, submarines and aircraft are available, including units from most

of the indigenous navies in the Indian Ocean. All of the scenarios involve at least one external power, however, and most involve major surface forces from both Russia and the US. 5TH FLEET may be played against either the computer or a human opponent, and the built-in e-mail system works well for those admirals interested in more long-distance conflict.

As one might expect from AH, 5TH FLEET looks, feels and plays like a board game. Units are graphically represented as cardboard counters like those in OPERATION CRUSADER, while the map is divided into a hexagonal grid. 5TH FLEET is not limited by the designer's loyalty to the board game original, as the game takes full advantage of the traditional strengths of computer games: hidden movement, fog of war and information management. Impor-

tant information is layered; for example, clicking on an airbase counter will allow players to cycle through the air units stationed there. If you require details on one of the air units, a second click of the mouse will pull up the unit database, which provides a graphic and specifics about the aircraft.

The rule book and supporting documentation is structured to provide easy access to important concepts, rather than a comprehensive explanation of every possible detail. While some gamers have expressed dissatisfaction with this style, I found it to be quite useful. The game was easy to learn and easy to play. It is true, however, that some details can only be learned by playing the game.

For instance, logistics is important in the longer scenarios, when units may run out of both fuel (in the case of ships) and ammunition (ships, submarines and carrier-based aircraft). While the rule book notes that ship speed affects fuel consumption, there is no detailed information on how this is modeled, or what the speed/fuel tradeoff is. Players will have to develop a feel for how fast their units burn fuel by playing the game. As each ship class uses fuel at a different speed, and has a different storage capacity, this requires players to pay careful attention to logistical planning.

A related complaint that has been made frequently on the bulletin boards is that neither the documentation nor the database provides detailed "to hit" information for the various weapons systems. In fact, this information is provided in a more holistic nature when an

5th Fleet

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System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
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4 MB RAM, 11
MB hard drive
space, VGA
graphics,
mouse;

supports Sound
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Protection: None

Designers: Joseph Balkoski and Stanley Associates

Publisher: Avalon Hill
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attack is planned. Attacks are prosecuted through the attack menu, which allows the player to select the attacking unit, a target unit, and an appropriate weapons system. The computer then provides data on the percentage change of damaging or destroying the target. This percentage takes into account the defensive capabilities of the target, as well as other relevant factors.

In terms of game play, this information is both more useful and more immediate than a chart of basic to hit values. It allows players to make the important decisions (such as whether to whittle away at the defensive elements of a task force or take a crack at the key protected ships—like aircraft carriers) with a reasonable knowledge of how sizable a gamble they are taking.

Number-crunchers and HARPOONISTS may not be impressed, but the style of the interface is more attuned to game play than to realistic detail. In addition to handling information, the computer also takes care of most of the minor details involved in naval operations. The player sits in the chair of the theater commander, rather than task force leader or ship's captain.

Turns in 5TH FLEET are divided into phases, based on unit type. In each phase, only one type (air, surface, submarine) may move and/or fire. The computer determines at random which player will move first at the beginning of each turn. The selected player then decides which type of unit he wishes to move. At the end of this phase, the computer again picks a player at random, and so on until all units on both sides have moved.

Aircraft may attack, fly combat air patrol (CAP) or strategic missions such as reconnaissance and zone interception, all of which is resolved simultaneously. Surface and subsurface operations are subdivided into movement and combat; however, units may launch attacks both

while moving and after all movement has finished. While this amounts to two attacks per turn, no unit may launch the same type of attack (i.e. ASW, SSM, etc.)



ONCE SPOTTED, TWICE SHY As one would expect in modern naval combat, victory is largely determined by firing your enemy before he finds you. This US destroyer is easy prey, pinned between an attack sub and the approaching Russian guided missile cruiser.

more than once per turn. The number of weapons each platform may launch per phase is also strictly limited. While unrealistic, this limitation adds considerably to the tension and playability of the game.

The rotating phase system creates constant uncertainty, making for more than a few bitten fingernails. Success depends upon early detection and com-

promise of add-ons in the future. Replayability is enhanced by random placements of units each time a scenario is begun anew. The scenarios grow in complexity and size, with the final scenario representing a full-scale slugging match that ranges from Indonesia to the Red Sea.

The larger scenarios allow players to experiment with everything from fast attack craft through two and three-carrier battle group (CVBG) operations. There is nothing more fun than taking apart an entire CVBG with missile boats and the odd diesel submarine—unlikely in real life, but a thoroughly enjoyable challenge in the game. Fortunately, simulation purists will probably have stopped playing the game long before they get to the last few scenarios, leaving the game to those of us who enjoy these kind of tactics.

ROUGH SEAS

There is one glaring flaw built into the very fabric of 5TH FLEET. The very first phase of the very first turn of any scenario allows the active player to launch pre-emptive airstrikes on as many enemy bases as he can reach. Until the second player gets a turn, he cannot launch CAP or zone interceptors, and all of his units are at the mercy of the enemy air force. While a pre-emptive strike may be realistic for some scenarios, the fact that it is built into all of the game's missions is a glaring error.

In addition, the artificial intelligence for 5TH FLEET, while competent, cannot provide more than a moderate challenge, once the tendencies of the AI opponent are learned. (Admittedly, this problem is lessened by the random setup for each scenario.) I had little difficulty winning as either side in most scenarios—except when the computer used the Pearl Harbor flaw to annihilate my entire air force before I could even move. In particular, the computer doesn't seem to be too interested in anti-submarine warfare—I didn't lose a single submarine in more than 20 games.



FINDING THE SEAM IN THE ZONE US defenses are unable to prevent the loss of merchant vessels to Russian air units off the coast of Sri Lanka. Notice that even sunken ships look like cardboard counters.

combined attacks. However, you can never be certain that, for instance, a unit spotted by aircraft will still be in the same place by the next phase. 5TH FLEET comes with ten scenarios and the

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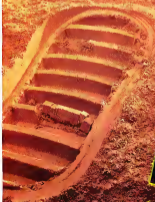
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Circle 4 on Reader Service



COMM-NET CENTRAL While the radar display is only decorative, this screen does offer a unique way to alter sound card settings. And it's hard to beat the simple but effective controls for modem play.

While many gamers can accept the flaws of the computer opponent, they may be less inclined to put up with the bugs in the system (which seem all but inevitable with products released these days). While I was only kicked out of the program once or twice, I was nagged by a series of smaller glitches which seriously marred game play, particularly in the big-

carrier group, but the entire flavor of the game was ruined.) Other bugs include aircraft squadrons that lock in place, missions that cannot be canceled or reassigned, and wandering graphics (ship counters that float over top of other information). Occasionally, a hostile task force will be identified on the strategic map but will not appear on the tactical teardot.

COMMANDER'S LOG

Despite these annoying bugs, 5TH FLEET is a well-designed, challenging game, particularly against a human opponent. It is simple to learn, yet complex enough to require considerable thought in order to win. The design stays true to its board game origins, falling more on the side of playability than realism, but with enough detail to give a good over all feel for naval operations. Most of all it is even more fun than its paper ancestor (especially with the computer performing all the tedious chores). A very good alternative for those who don't have the time or the inclination for HARPOON II. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FIFTH FLEET

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Expands on the popular board game without getting bogged down in minutiae. Great fun!

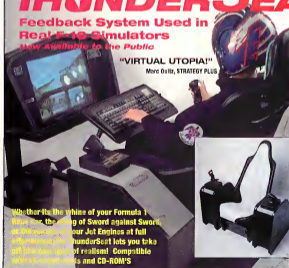
CONS Serious micro-managers will be happier with the more detailed and realistic HARPOON II.

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New World Computing's HAMMER OF THE GODS*

by Martin E. Cirulis

STEEP INTO THE WAYBACK MACHINE WITH ME NOW...BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN MEN HAD HORNS, WOMEN WERE miserable, and a guy could really develop a long-term relationship with his body lice. Yes, Sherman, I'm talking about the golden age of the Vikings when books and human compassion were for sissies and helping to bring in the dark ages was considered one's civic duty. This vaguely embarrassing period in western civilization is rarely covered in computer strategy games; adventure games, yes, because you can tune out the barbarity and concentrate on the Nordic propensity for epic quests, dramatic gods and singing whilst standing atop dead dragons. But strategy games tend to want to appeal to a gamer's sense of being the "Good Guy." So, while there are a few games of "Hold back the Viking Horde," the "Be the Viking Horde" concept has been neglected.

Well, thanks to those several dudes at **Holistic Design** (whose former credits, **BATTLES OF DESTINY** and **MERCHANT PRINCE**, each have carved themselves a respectable niche in the strategy game market), you can now fill the shoes of a Viking Chieftain out to ravage Europe for Gold and Glory in an enjoyable but surprisingly nasty offering called **HAMMER OF THE GODS**.

TAKE THE VIKING BY THE HORNS

In **HAMMER OF THE GODS**, you become the High Chief to a tribe representing the four major Races: Human, Elves, Dwarves and Trolls. You begin with a single village, one Hero and a couple of brave followers who can see the gleam of a true world-beater shining out from under all that grime. Part of the reason they do believe is because you're not just another long-hair out to express his artistic side in various shades of other people's blood. No, they follow you because you are a Viking with a plan! And what a plan it is...

It seems that you, along with three other Chiefs from the various races inhabiting the Arctic Circle on this Alternate Earth, are called to Valhalla, home of Thor, Loki and their One-Eyed Dad, Odin All-Father. As his last name might imply, Odin has quite a bit of power at his disposal and offers the four of you a shot at Valhalla now, while you are still alive. This is much preferable to the tedious technicality of having a Saxon longsword run through your midsection in a demonstration of early home-defense techniques. In-

evitably, there is a hitch, and it is a big one; in order to prove your worthiness, you must complete a quest, not just for Odin himself, for almost every god in your particular version of the Nordic Pantheon. Taking the most direct "task path" means you must please 10 gods, and realistically you will find yourself taking on far more quests for far more gods, up to 20; all this in order to achieve your ultimate quest of pleasing the Old Man and receiving the privilege of asking him to pass the ribs and having all assembled honor you as "The Hammer of the Gods." A little pretentious, sure, but it looks good on a Viking T-shirt.

What is this "task path," you may well ask? Well, it's kind of like this: Gods, like office staff, exist in a hierarchy, from the lowliest Squirrel God all the way up to Odin. Everybody answers to the being above them and is more powerful than the being below. In office terms, this means you must kiss up to the copy room boy long before you have a chance at spending the weekend at the Big Boss' summer cabin. In **HAMMER OF THE GODS** terms, this means you have to please one god before getting a chance to do a job for someone further up the power chain, and this means a lot of work because the more powerful the god, the harder the quest will be. Some piddling god who doesn't get invited to the really good parties may only ask you to explore a certain amount of terrain or find a city, while a god that really rocks, like Loki or Saga, will only be pleased by you knocking over four or five big cities. With Saxon castles near most of them, filled with brave



Hammer of the Gods

Price: \$69.95

System:

Requirements:
IBM compatible
386, 4 MB
RAM, 2 MB
hard drive
space,
VGA/SVGA
graphics, CD-
ROM, mouse; supports most major sound
cards.

of Players: 1-4 (e-mail, modem and network play)

Designers: Holistic Design, Inc.
Publisher: New World Computing, Inc.
Woodland Hills, CA
(800) 325-8898



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knights ready to rush out and greet you, you may get caught with your ears out of the water, so to speak.

But a career of kissing up can bring good results as well, and each god you complete a task for rewards you with something good—sometimes something really good. Rewards range from followers to land improvements to magic weapons, artifacts and boats. And this is why you will find yourself questing more than is absolutely necessary.

NORSE IS NORSE OF COURSE, OF COURSE

Now, if all this just sounds like another Nordic adventure game, and you find yourself turning back to *WARLORDS II* for your strategy fix, relax; there is warfare a-plenty in this game. A lot of those quests require you to do unto others, then split. Most of the time it is computer-operated settlements that you abuse for fun and profit, but some of the more powerful gods require you to do things that annoy your fellow players: little things like wipe out another player's capital, or kill ten heroes belonging to your fellow Viking Chiefs. All in all, a sure recipe for trouble.

Strategic movement and exploration is done on a large overhead map identical to the one found in *MERCHANT PRINCE*; in fact, *HAMMER OF THE GODS*

uses the same graphic engine and game play template as *MERCHANT PRINCE* with a few, small improvements in the interface and ability to look up information on your world and what you are doing. You move about and explore in a *CIVILIZATION*-style checkerboard scale, but instead of just removing the black cloth of ignorance from the map, you have a map of what you think the world looks like. As was the tradition at the time, your map is pretty accurate in the vicinity of your home town, but gets more and more distorted with every mile until the Mediterranean ap-

pears to be somewhere on the outskirts of Paris. Each time you move, a region around your unit is transformed from your less-than-perfect map into the real thing. This nice twist on exploration worked nicely in *MERCHANT PRINCE* and it works just as well here.

Units move in stacks of up to eight, and movement follows traditional wargame philosophy: each type of unit has a certain number of movement points which are consumed by crossing

terrain. Certain units have the traditional advantages in certain terrain, like our friends the dwarves, who can stroll through mountains like side streets, and Elves, who can traipse through thick forest like crabgrass. Ocean movement is the fastest, but players must beware of going too many squares away from the mainland, for there are killer storms and Sea Serpents waiting over the horizon.

Once you actually decide to invade a town or engage another player's stack out in the open, you simply move your stack over your target and wait for the fun to start. Fun in this case is defined by a slanted 2-dimensional side view of the battlefield, approximately 15 movement squares long and 5 deep, where your units line up on one side and your opponents on the other. One side

moves and attacks with all their units and then the other side follows suit. Ranged weapons types, such as archers and slingers, fire out to a certain distance while ground-pounders must hack away at their targets up close. All units have a cer-



LADDER OF THE GODS The quest tree is central to the game. As you complete different gods' quests, you'll be richly rewarded (see inset), and will progress higher up the chain. The first hero to finish Odin's quest wins the game.



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Combat is always *mano-a-mano*, though several units can attack a single adjacent unit one after another. The pattern of close combat is Attacker swipes, then defender, repeat, and then the Attacker gets the last swipe in as well. If both parties survive they return to their original squares and the next guy gets to take his



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DRAGON SKIN SHOES You'll have to wade into several dragon lairs in order to find favor with the gods and protect your own assets.

shot. As you can see, the advantage is with the attacker in personal combat, and playing defensively will get you killed more often than not—which sort of makes sense in a game from the Viking point of view. Though this combat is very simple, it does model some aspects of combat, such as storming walls, rather elegantly, without getting bogged down in detail. Unfortunately, as is the case with any simple, "point-the-mouse-move-your-man" combat system, it can start to get a little repetitious over the course of a long game, and full-length games of HAMMER tend to be very long indeed.

The game also acknowledges that Empires are not carved from a vacuum. As you busily gather stuff, sooner or later it becomes apparent that you must take it from somebody else. Until that time, however, a wise Chief learns how to cultivate friends until he is too powerful to need them any longer. HAMMER OF THE GODS has a nice little diplomacy system that remains true to the Viking mindset, with players being able to ask for treaties and trade with each other, while arranging for marriages between available progeny or, for the less romantic, an exchange of hostages. Attacking other players without warning or sacrificing your own relatives violates the Viking code of honor, and Vikings have long memories.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF CONQUEST

HAMMER OF THE GODS is pretty much full-contact MERCHANT PRINCE, with less trading, but with the addition of Norse gods and plenty of pointy things. In a stunning display of bucking a trend, HAMMER OF THE GODS, despite its mythological trappings, doesn't really attempt to sugar-coat or edit history in order to

make a game more palatable for the market. Make no mistake, you are a Viking in this game, and you do Viking things—most of which would get you kicked out of the local Rotary Club.

This aside, HAMMER OF THE GODS is a light, enjoyable strategy game that will appeal more to newcomers or casual gamers far more than it will with the hard-core types. And, while this

has become a pretty generic euphemism for a weak game, this is not quite the case here. In the quest for the mythic "Introductory Strategy Game," I believe this game is a contender for the title. Seasoned players looking with a hard eye will find all sorts of little weaknesses in the game, and unless you play it fairly cat-throat with your friends, it isn't going to strain your tactical skills.

On the other hand, more casual players aren't casual about strategy/wargames because they are dumb and need simpler rule systems. They are casual about the whole thing because they could care less about which unit was where at the Battle of the Bulge, or any other war that has been done to death. What a casual player is looking for, initially, is an interesting or quirky subject matter with mechanics that don't leave them swearing because they forgot to buy arrows for their archers. HAMMER OF THE GODS fills this niche almost perfectly and should be applauded for it. If you only feel the need for detailed wargames, look elsewhere; but if you are looking to pass a few hours with friends having fun, then hop into a boat, slap your horns on your head and leave your civilized conscience behind. The Gods are waiting and they have TOYS!!! ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

HAMMER OF THE GODS

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A nice introductory strategy game. Its "quest tree" concept is unique and keeps the game moving. Network and modem play.

CONS Micor hiccups and design flaws will annoy seasoned strategists.

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System requirements: 286-20 or faster machine (386 recommended) with 640K RAM, hard disk, joystick recommended. Operating Sys: MS DOS 3.3 or above, Windows 3.1. Graphics compatible with VGA. Sound support: Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, Thunder Board, Pro Audio Spectrums, AdLib Gold and Speed Master.

NR-13

This game is not for the faint hearted. Contains violence and some material inappropriate for minors.

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MEGATECH

Circle Reader Service #86

When In Windows, Do As The Romans Do

Mindscape's LEGIONS Puts A New Spin On Ancient Warfare

by M. Evan Brooks

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS CHRIS CRAWFORD'S LEGIONAIRE, BUT THERE WERE VERY FEW OTHER SIMULATIONS OF ancient warfare. Now, **Mindscape** has attempted to rectify this with a design covering over 2,000 years of history (1200 BC to 926 AD). Optimistically previewed by editor-in-chief Johnny Wilson in *CGW* #125 (December '94), **LEGIONS** was described as a "full-blown miniatures campaign brought to the computer." Now that the final version has been released, it is clear that the description was half right. It provides both the rationale for movement and acts as campaign referee. Unfortunately, the tactical battles are abstracted and, since that is the level at which most ancient aficionados like to play, that is **LEGIONS**'s biggest weakness.

THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

LEGIONS is an extremely user-friendly game. It runs smoothly in a Windows environment, it is easy to install and has no protection scheme, a very welcome touch on the designers' part. The Windows environment not only sets up all of the drivers efficiently, but also provides a relatively rare feature—the ability to print out maps. Playing a multi-screen game often leaves one without an adequate visualization of the entire game area. A print option is thus welcome, and I was able (on a 486-66 with an HP LaserJet III) to print out the visible map area in under one minute. Printing the entire

gaming surface, however, took over five minutes. Still, it is a useful tool for those tired of endless scrolling. The only downside was trying to read the manual's references to printing from Windows which were, if not Greek, Etruscan B to me. So, even if one doesn't want the advantage of multi-tasking, a very valuable feature when playing against other human opponents at work via network or at home via modem, there is a rationale for playing under Windows.

Where the game is not so user-friendly is the documentation. While all of the commands and hot keys are explained therein, they lack historical justification and concrete game application. The tutorial is weak and disorganized, while the "game play/basic strategy" section is limited to ten additional meager pages. This omission could have been ameliorated by allowing you to observe the computer playing against itself, but no such option is available.

THE TIME HAS COME TO SPEAK OF COHORTS AND KINGS

Obviously, a title like **LEGIONS** would lead you to expect scenarios from the Roman Empire period. Oddly enough, of the ten historical scenarios included, the Romans take center stage for only three. In choosing ten scenarios over 2,000 years of history, **LEGIONS** makes

LEGIONS

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements: Macintosh and IBM compatible 386-33Mhz or better, 4 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 15 MB hard drive space, Windows

3.1, mouse; supports Sound Blaster, AdLib and most other major sound cards.

Protection: None

of Players: 1-18, with network support

Designers: Briscoe Rodgers and Manny J. Granillo

Publisher: Mindscape
Novato, CA
(800) 234-3088



some conspicuous omissions. For a product whose title evokes images of the Roman Empire, there are only three scenarios of Rome: Cincinnatus against the Aequians (509 BC), Caesar's Conquest of Gaul (58 BC), and the Late Roman Empire (443 AD). In particular, scenarios depicting the development of the Roman legion are missing. Where is the Fall of the Republic (Sulla versus Marius), The Roman Civil War (Octavianus vs. Antony), or at the very least the Falling Out of the Triumvirate, pitting Caesar vs. Pompey vs. Crassus?

Also, while the Battles of the Diadochoi (Alexander the Great's successors) are present, the actual campaigns of Alexander and his father Philip are nowhere to be seen; neither is the Persian Empire, that scourge of classical Greece. Instead, the

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designers opted to focus on the development of infantry in a variety of classical military systems. So, gamers have the rare opportunity to fight in exotic locales such as ancient Cush, pit the Caliphate versus the Byzantines, or create an empire that is neither Holy nor Roman. If that isn't enough, there are random versions of every pre-built scenario, as well as a completely random option.

The unit mix is quite detailed. It takes over ten pages to describe military units, ranging from peltasts to cohorts to the heavy phalanx. Even more interesting are the use of convicts (forced labor), berserkers (described as naked and blue; the latter referring to dye rather than temperature) cattle and even flaming pigs (good for stampeding enemy elephants and possibly lunch).

Each type of unit requires economic assets such as wood, metal, textiles and technology. Technology represents an abstract level of effort required in knowledge or training in order to develop a certain type of unit. Technology units are expended proportionally to the value of a unit. For example, a Roman cohort will require twice as many tech points because of their training as those of an equivalent

number of archers in their auxilia. Also note that you can mass produce barbarian units due to their low tech costs. Yet, while ferocious on attack, these units will provide easy prey when placed upon defense. Simply put, tech points represent the effort expended in a level of expertise.

Movement of units is swift and smooth via a typical Windows interface. Units are assigned movement points as in a boardgame, and you move them by clicking on a unit and dragging the cursor to where you want that unit to go. When you let go of the mouse button, the line shows you each movement point to be expended on that trip. If you don't like the original route, you can cancel and check out other possibilities. No terrain chart is given, but you can easily infer how efficient a given route will or will not be



WHITHER SHALL I GO, SIRE? Although outnumbered by enemy forces, this unit can easily be pulled to the safety of nearby city walls.

for a particular unit. Moving a unit onto a town or enemy unit naturally precipitates combat.

Ancient aficionados who prefer gaming from a detailed tactical perspective will immediately be frustrated with the abstract level of combat. When combat is joined, one merely chooses a battle strategy (withdraw, outflank, refuse right or left flank, assault, echelon, defend), and the result is determined automatically. Because of this abstraction, it is difficult to determine the efficiency of the legion versus the phalanx or the reasons that cavalry eventually usurped the role of infantry. While the abstract combat has the advantage of allowing you to play through campaigns rather quickly, a near perfect design would be to integrate an additional tactical module into the game itself or allow miniatures results to be entered into the game's database. Still, the combat results have the right historical feel, since, for example, neither elephants nor phalanxes perform as well in rough terrain as on a plain.

APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING

The biggest deception within the game is the relatively weak economic environment. For instance, one can easily sell assets (food, textiles, etc.) each turn, but any sale depresses the market by a fixed amount, and each additional sale has the same market depression value rather than dynamic incremental changes reflecting actual supply and demand. Further, the economic marketplace is limited and does not reflect the strengths and weaknesses of actual geographical locations.

Further, the diplomatic frenzy of the game often works correctly for the wrong reasons. LEGIONS is often a game of form



Fritz the heavy thinker

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over substance where diplomatic shifts and military alliances occur for ahistorical reasons. Yet, the fluid political landscape of the historical periods are reasonably well-portrayed. For example, the epic struggles between the city-states of Ancient Greece are

accurately captured in the Peloponnesian War scenario, where the lesser states such as Argos or Corinth jump from the Athenian to the Spartan camp almost on a whim—much as they did historically.

Diplomacy itself is handled via pop-up menus. As in reality, diplomacy is often a matter of sending off proposals and waiting for replies. It can serve as a delaying tactic and can also be used to determine a given tribe or city-state's disposition toward your empire. In addition to official propositions, you can enhance your position through the age-old tradition of gift-giving. In addition to jewels or gold, you may even erect monuments in your would-be ally's honor. It isn't clear how much impact this gift-giving really has, but it isn't clear in real life, either.



MARKET MADNESS If you're having trouble figuring out the Athenian stock market, *Legions* offers an easy-to-read graph, which will also track your military expenditures and overall economic health.



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Circle Reader Service #307

BWARE OF GEEKS BEARING GIFTS

As regular readers will understand my tendency to prefer games which teach authentic historical lessons, I found some of the design trade-offs in *LEGIONS* to be so unacceptable as to present a mishmash of pseudo-history and economic forces which simply do not meet my criteria. Simply put, I was less than pleased with *LEGIONS*, finding it obtuse, economically unrealistic, historically incorrect and not much fun to play.

However, this seems to be a minority opinion at *CGW*. Editors Wilson and Coleman have found this to be an enjoyable and stimulating game of ancient warfare. For the user wishing a challenging game of ancient warfare without a historical basis, *LEGIONS* should do nicely.

For those wishing to learn about the realities of ancient warfare, I would recommend curling up with Thucydides or Xenophon, and the boardgames from GMT (CAMPAIGNS OF ALEXANDER, SPQR).

THE EDITORS SPEAK

LEGIONS

RATING



PROS Easy-to-learn, easy-to-play campaign level game with a colorful mix of ancient units. Nice Windows implementation and network options.

CONS Ancients fans will miss their tactical battles, and fans of economic games will hate the bland economic model used here. Ahistorical.

Battlestar Recyclica

The Mission: Save Humanity (Again)
In Merit Software's REUNION

by Martin E. Cirulis



THE FIRST LESSON A WRITER LEARNS IS THAT THERE ARE A LIMITED NUMBER OF STORY PLOTS TO BE USED. Deconstructionist types claim that there are only three; the rest of us believe in a slightly higher number.

Even Science Fiction, so closely linked to the vast reaches of the universe that you can hardly swing a dead Ewok without hitting upon an original angle, is subject to this limitation. As a result, the next lesson a writer learns is that it's not whether a plot has been done before, it's how well you pull it off that counts. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* may not have been high art, but nobody was complaining that they had seen it all before during a Saturday Matinee in the '40s. REUNION, a British import brought to these shores by Merit Software, definitely fails to break new ground in terms of plot. In fact, saying the game is in the tradition of Accolade's STAR CONTROL 2 would be pretty charitable. Unfortunately, it seems the creators of REUNION were a little fuzzy on lesson two above.

MISSING PLANETS BULLETIN

In a vague introduction filled with dra-

matic music and mostly line drawings (somewhat reminiscent of the opening of *Robotech*), we hear a tale of an Earth dragged back from the brink of war and eco-disasters, and ushered into a new golden age by the UN. Everything is wonderful except for the clothes, which look worse than they did in the '70s. At the height of Earth's neo-Renaissance, hyper-drive technology is discovered,

and though this is probably the greatest travel invention since the shock-absorber, only two explorer ships are built to explore the Galaxy. The first is lost very quickly, although not before sending an extremely cryptic final message that nobody on Earth seems to find relevant at

the time. The second scout returns after finding several inhabitable worlds far across the Galaxy.

At this point, Earth's golden age begins to tarnish somewhat, as humanity rediscovers guns and finds that breaking up really isn't all that hard to do. With violence on a mysterious surge and the Balkan Shuffle being the most popular political dance step, the second explorer ship is hastily refitted as a colonization vessel and is sent off just as

the UN falls and anarchy sets up shop on the old Big Blue Marble. As is often the case with these humanity-saving missions, somebody forgets to check the weather report and a big meteor reduces the ship's hyper-drive to hash, making this a one-way trip. One bumpy landing on an alien world later and a new lost colony of Humanity is formed and given the pleasure of rebuilding civilization.

Jump 500-odd years into the future, and you find yourself the sole leader of this world. Things have ended up in pretty good shape. So good, in fact, that the populace charges you with not only keeping them happy, but with developing an interstellar space technology to track down the old neighborhood as well. It seems that when the hyper-drive on the old ship went, the glove-compartment with all the maps in it went along with it; so you have no choice but to find Earth the old fashioned way, by looking for it. Fortunately, this version of the Milky Way seems pretty small, and there are plenty of aliens around to ask directions from once you start flying about. Of course, there is all that weird stuff that was happening on Earth, which, in hindsight seems to suggest some devious alien plan. Unimaginable distances to be traveled, unending darkness, violent adversaries and doubtful allies at every stop, fear, loathing, suspicion...yup, sounds like a reunion to me.

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REUNION

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JUST WHO IS THE ALIEN HERE, ANYWAY? An evening spent with these saucer beings could task even Cary Grant's legendary charm, so be careful in conversation.

and exploration with a little combat thrown in to fiven things up. Unfortunately these elements seem to have been taken from other games and combined in an uninspiring way. Colonies and your own home planet are based on the old "build tiles and place them" system that seems to be all the rage these days. Your facilities to choose from run the usual gamut of power plants, homes, hospitals, mines, etc., and their build times are amazingly fast. Don't be too worried about underestimating your food consumption rates, as an entire farm can be built in a day or so; in fact, money is a far more limiting factor for getting what you want when you want it.

In another slave-to-fashion move, you must also hire "advisors" to get things done for you in the fields of Research, Development, Construction, Warfare and Flight. The more money you spend on these advisors, the more efficiently things will get done, and every so often they will have something to say, but not often enough to justify their pay. As you may have inferred by the presence of a Research division, there are quite a few amazing discoveries to be made, but, as with construction, the actual act of research passes so quickly as to be irrelevant. Basically the issue is how long it takes (i.e. what events you've triggered in the plot line) for somebody to tell you something is possible; from there it's usually less than a couple game-days before you're punching your new widgets out on an assembly line.



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He ruled the auto industry.



Henry Ford Photo: UPI/Bettman



ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER PLANETARY BASE *Star Control 2* will find plenty of familiar landmarks in *Rogue*.

Ships must be organized into fleets in order to move, and they are basically grouped into fighting, transport and satellite-dispensing fleets. Once you get things rolling, your homeworld production facilities will need greater and greater amounts of minerals from off-world, so a healthy set of mining colonies are vital to success. Unfortunately, there is no way to create automated trade routes, so fleets must be manually lifted off, sent to their destinations, landed, and then loaded/unloaded. Except for the flight between worlds, when the player can switch to some other aspect of the game, ship movement consumes the player's attention and effort. Automated trade, as in Sierra's *ALIEN LEGACY*, would have been very useful here.

Combat has little to do with the player: it is simply a matter of numbers, quality of equipment, and how good—or rather, how expensive—your Military Advisor is. Battles occur first in space between ships in the same system; then in the planetary atmosphere between surviving attackers and those defense ships assigned to the world in question; and finally between ground forces which fight it out—winner takes all. Your only real insight into the combat is a display of colored lights representing ships which blink out as they die, some graphics of stuff flying around and exploding, and a tally screen at the end that tells how many ships took the next great step in spiritual development.

The story itself is pretty standard and is definitely from the *BattleStar Galactica* handbook of "How to wander the Galaxy and get into trouble." While you must discover the reason for Earth's downfall, as well as the planet herself, the plot isn't on par with the *STAR CONTROL 2* drama of finding the place quickly, and then cracking the force-field before things get really ugly in that section of the Galaxy. The alien races you encounter are pretty mundane, and they behave simply as plot points with pretty masks on. Most of your actions will not alter their behavior, short of the "help them or kill them" choice. Early in the game you find little saucer aliens sharing your star system, and even if you help destroy the enemy fleet harassing them, their base is destroyed anyway. The only effect is to reduce the presence of the enemy fleet. If you do help, you are not bothered for a while; if you don't, then they come after you soon after the saucer aliens bite it. Not exactly subtle, but it does move things along, I guess.



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SPEED KILLS

It seems that REUNION relies on speed to cover up the weak points of the game. Everything from combat to movement to research happens so fast that you end up doing things, not in the order of occurrence or importance, but when you can get around to them. Ships wait in orbit until you have time to unload them, and colonies sit undeveloped until you have a moment to pay for the buildings that were finished in an afternoon. The only two



WE ADVISE YOU TO INCREASE OUR SALARY Paying more to your advisers increases operating efficiency, but their advice isn't very profound.

things a player must quickly respond to are combat and StarCrystic demands from your population for hospitals and stadiums. Actually, combat develops so quickly that there is little a player can do to prepare if he hasn't already done so. Once you're warned that an enemy fleet has entered a system, you have about ten seconds real-time until the actual attack takes place. And there is no option to change the rate that time passes. The player is stuck at a speed that gives everything a feel of superficiality.

In taking elements so blithely from other SF games, REUNION has lost any soul of its own, especially when these elements are all less detailed than players are used to finding in other games. The appeal of technology research is well-known to anybody who has ever discussed CIVILIZATION or MASTER OF ORION with a gamer. But when the treatment is so superficial that a player can actually watch a Starship design being developed in half a minute, much of the potential appeal is lost.

REUNION is probably not for the gamer of even average experience, who will find it too simplistic and derivative for the time involved. Younger audiences or adventure game fans who must conquer every plot may enjoy it, as well as those looking for some light entertainment. While the design does have a few

dozen hours of play packed in to it, most SF fans will find the technical aspects so thin as to be distracting. As it stands, everything here has been done before and, unfortunately for REUNION, it has been done better. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

REUNION

RATING ★★☆☆☆☆

PROS Quick and simple game play that might make for a good introduction to strategy games.

CONS In a crowded field of similar space-faring games, REUNION, with its uninspired story and game mechanics, finds itself running at the back of the pack.

He ruled motion pictures.



© C.S.G. Mayer Photo: UPI/Selman

Harried Is The Head...

...That Wears The Crown Of U.S. Gold's *DOMINUS*

by Jason Kapalka

"My liege, the Raiders have breached the palace gates!"

The Overlord scowls behind his iron mask and turns away from the wretched figure in chains before him. He knows the Sea Devil will soon yield to the ministrations of the torturers and give up his leader's name... but there is no more time.

Ascending from the dungeon, the Overlord barks orders to his waiting Generals, who hurry to deploy monsters and lay traps in a perimeter around the castle. Gazing into his sonorous crystal, the Overlord sees, as if from high above, the red-haired hordes of Raiders rushing into the castle's corridors. One trips a near-invisible wire, and a razored pendulum scythes through three of the interlopers. The Overlord gathers his powers and hurls mystic havoc down upon the rest. A half dozen die by fire, another three warp into hideous beasts. Still more come. He summons a group of Wolf Warriors and Brimstoneers, but they swiftly fall beneath the Raiders' axes.

Cursing, the Overlord seizes his mace and leaps to the chariot: the invaders will feel his wrath personally! As he descends to the battlefield, the Raiders look as one in his direction and charge...

SO GOES THE FIGHT IN U.S. GOLD'S NEW ACTION-STRATEGY HYBRID *DOMINUS*. IN A BID TO BECOME perhaps the most hyphenated of cross-genre games, *DOMINUS* is billed as a real-time tactical-strategic resource-management-based creature-breeding role-playing-arcade-wargame, or in other words, *GAUNTLET* meets *WARLORDS* on *DUNE II*, with the magic reagents of *ULTIMA* and *SINLIFE*'s gene-mixer.

Confused? You haven't even played the game yet.

DOMINUS puts you in the boots of the

Overlord, a masked mesomorph who makes the heroes in Frank Frazetta paintings look like pencil-necked geeks. Your job is to drive out the eight invading clans bent on stealing your kingdom's resources, using only your vast array of spells, an arsenal of traps, an army of mutants, and your own winning personality. The "role-playing" aspects of the game are admittedly nominal; your moral decisions are pretty much limited to choices like, "Should I torture Uzuzibar here for more info, or send him to the kennel to be mated with a Bog Wraith?"

While the role-playing elements are slim, *DOMINUS* manages to incorporate the style and interface of just about every other game genre into its frothy mix. While your overall goals are strategic in nature, you can, indeed must, delve into tactical-level command and even one-lone-dude-against-all melees in your quest to eradicate the invading clans.

These nasty intruders appear as little color-coded flags and arrows on your kingdom map, creeping ever-inwards from the frontiers towards your strongholds and castle. You can zoom in on any one of the 72 territories and scroll around for a closer look at the various forests and huts, but what you're really here for is some good old-fashioned

bloodletting. Selecting one of the 50-odd spells, you can unleash elementals, earthquakes, destructive mists or various mind-altering agents on the interlopers. Alternately (or simultaneously) you can set down one or more of the 30 varieties of beasts in your kennels to watch them duke it out with the bad guys.

If any turf-stealers are still moving, or if you're just not into task-delegation, you can descend personally into the fray and whomp monsters with fireballs and mace in simplistic *GAUNTLET* arcade style. Keep an eye on your life-meter, or be treated to an up-close view of your castle exploding like a gas-soaked munitions dump.

If your testosterone level is a little low after all that hand-to-hand work (or was never that high to begin with), you can take a more cerebral approach to the carnage, ordering your four Generals to perform wor-

risome jobs like building and laying traps, deploying beasts, spying and gathering spell components.

Alternatively, you could jaunt over to the dungeon and see if a hot poker can pry useful information from captured invaders, like what resource their clan is after, what variety of beast they fear most, or the ingredients to a secret spell. If you capture an enemy commander, you can even try to negotiate a peace treaty.

Once you've wrung all the info from a



DOMINUS

Price: \$34.95

System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
386 SX-25 or
better (33 Mhz
or better
recommended),
4 MB RAM,
VGA graphics,
30 MB free disk space, CD-ROM drive,
mouse; supports Sound Blaster, Roland
Sound Canvas, General MIDI sound cards.

Protection: None

Designers: Visual Concepts

Publisher: U.S. Gold

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captive, why not send him to the Mixing Room, along with up to five more critters, to be magically crossbred into a fearsome new beast? (Well, hopefully fearsome.) Afterwards, you can return to the field and turn your dastardly creation loose to wreak havoc on your enemies.

If all of the above sounds chaotic and bizarre, well, you've caught the spirit of the game. *DOMINUS* is not for armchair generals who like to ponder their every move. There are few well-oiled offensive thrusts or flanking maneuvers to be seen; rather, the typical Overlord will find himself hurling everything but the kitchen sink in the clans' path in a hurried, whatever-works panic. Only in the endgame, when the invaders have been reduced to one or two of the most powerful clans, do you have the luxury of contemplation.

KITCHEN SINK, INC.

"Everything but the kitchen sink" is a good description for *DOMINUS*' blend of multifarious gaming styles, and it applies to the game's visual style as well. D&D-inspired medieval fantasy worlds are not noted for their consistency and believability, but *DOMINUS* takes this trend to an extreme—everything is garish and random, with no apparent internal logic. For example, a captured Raider might tell you he fears "creatures created by magic." But which are those? Oculauruses? Ungorotas? Arachners? Who knows? They're all weird, and neither the game nor the manual helps distinguish one brand of weirdness from the other.



KINGDOM COME The colored flags on this kingdom map represent the invading clans that are burning and pillaging their way toward your castle.

Time pressure is another element that will either please players or annoy them to no end. The clock doesn't stop ticking while you're mixing spells, building traps, or tormenting prisoners, and you're likely to emerge from an extended interrogation session to behold dozens of invaders cavorting happily through your kingdom's gardens. You can set the game to alert you to the invaders' movements, but this can backfire, continually interrupting your spell research attempts with warnings of new troop movements.

The bewildering array of things to do, combined with the lack of predictability and the time constraints, ensure that *DOMINUS* is never boring. Frustrating, yes. Aggravating to the point of madness, yes. But never boring. It's not the type of game you play for ten hours straight. It's the type of game you play for an hour before dropping to the floor, mouse hand a-twitching.



Art by Charles C. Smith. Photo: GFI/Dutton

THINGS OMINOUS

There are, sadly, some problems. DOMINUS promises randomly-generated clans for each game, and so you expect randomly-generated clans. But in every game I played, many clans retained the same characteristics over and over again. The Fire Demons were always deathly afraid of spinners, the Raiders were always terrified by "creatures created by magic" (whatever those are), and the ill-named Ravens were scared of *everything*—they were usually wiped out by their braver brethren before I ever had to come to terms with them.

If you opt for the CD version, be aware that it supports no limited installations. All 30 megabytes are dumped directly to your hard drive, including many graphic cut-scenes that one would think could be accessed from the CD, since the game requires the disc be in the drive at all times anyway.



A BREED APART Five beasts in the Mixing Room are about to be magically combined into a new creature, which will hopefully possess all of their best qualities.



CRITTER COMBAT From your overhead vista you can watch a troop of Drakes and Reptons engage the Raider clan.

Then there are more deeply-rooted flaws. The secret spells, for instance, are a complete waste of time. Not that "Death Cloud" and "Acid Flood" don't sound like handy spells... it's just that in over a dozen games I was unable to get even a single hidden spell mixed. Suffice it to say you need to interrogate literally *dozens* of the rare enemy mages to have even a chance at getting one of these spells, by which point the invading hordes will be dancing a jig in the throne room, if you haven't already abdicated in disgust.

The Monster Mixing feature is similarly useless. By carefully arranging

creatures on the appropriate pedestals, you can, indeed, create a beast with all their best qualities. *One* beast. A quick look at the nearly 800 invaders reveals that monster-breeding is a novelty with limited use. The Clone spell can help you get more mileage from your mutants, but it uses rare reagents and is in short supply at all times.

There are other flaws and quirks, like the awkward mouse + keyboard controls used in the GAUNTLET-style melees, or the fact that most of the invading clans have ranged weapons, while only one of your 30 beasts (the Drake) has such capabilities.

But the most serious problem of

DOMINUS is simply this: for all the options available, you still feel like you lack control. Clans are often eliminated without any apparent action on your part. Even on the easier difficulty levels, the invaders swarm over your kingdom too quickly for any sensible holding action, leaving the most inelegant strategy as the most successful: wait for the massed invaders to get to your castle and then dump everything you've got on top of them. Too often you get the feeling that you're wasting your time with all the fancy doo-dads, when a crude bludgeoning approach would work better.

Still, at its frenzied, confusing best, DOMINUS can indeed be thrilling; and it's a pleasure to see a game that takes chances with an innovative design. It's a shame that the few design problems make the game play exasperating as often as it is exciting. Perhaps with a revision or two this game could live up to its potential, but for now, masked mesomorph fans should approach this castle with caution. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

DOMINUS

RATING



PROS A radically unique blend of gaming styles and features.

CONS The mad pace and the cool features just don't get very well into a balanced, challenging game.

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A Pair Of Perplexing Puzzlers

by Chuck Miller

AS GAMES BECOME HYDRA-HEADED MONSTERS OF DIGITAL VIDEO AND MULTIPLE CDs, IT'S IMPORTANT to remember that good games can still be very simple. This month's shareware games offer two perfect examples (well, nearly perfect) of simplicity without compromise. *STREET SHUFFLE* by MaxWare is an easy-to-play tile-based puzzle game for Windows, and *BOPPIN'* from Accursed Toys and Apogee Software is a DOS-based puzzler for the borderline masochist. Both demonstrate that you don't need megabytes of storage space and high-end, state-of-the-art hardware to have some good, clean, addicting fun, at least when it comes to brain-teasers.

HEY, TAXI!

Computer games with Taxes in them are becoming standard fare, if you don't mind the pun. Following *HELL CAB* there was *QUARANTINE*, and now *STREET SHUFFLE*, a game about fleecing your fares. The idea is to take your passengers on the "scenic tour" through town, the longest ride possible to their desired destination. Hey, 2105 AD is a tough time for honest cabbies. The highways are fully mechanized and automated by the CABMASTER system (Computer Assisted Bypass Mechanism for Automated Street Traffic Elimination or Reduction), a computer controlled "street mover" designed to ensure that each trip you make is by the

shortest route possible. Fortunately, you're not constrained by petty virtues like honesty. Since you get paid by the mile, you've invested your last cent to install a HACKMASTER (Human Assisted Console Keying of Mechanism for Automated Street Traffic Elimination or Reduction) in your cab, allowing you to take back control of the road, and boost your earnings in the process.



THE LONG WAY HOME In 2105, honest taxi-cab drivers can't survive, so you need to take your passengers for a long ride and rack up a big fare.

In *STREET SHUFFLE*, the object is to re-connect street segments to form an unbroken path from your cab to its destination before time runs out and your taxi begins its trek. If the path is incomplete before your vehicle starts moving a crash is very likely, an event that translates into costly repair bills. However, by finishing the path and reaching your destination, you'll be rewarded with a fare based on miles

traveled and advancement to the next level. As your funds increase, a trip to the service station affords the opportunity to buy special equipment and, of course, gas up your vehicle prior to its next jaunt. With 50 levels of escalating complexity and shorter time allotments, *STREET SHUFFLE* soon becomes as desperate a challenge as hailing a real inner-city cab.

Creating a path in *STREET SHUFFLE* is much the same as rearranging the squares in those sliding plastic puzzles you destroyed at birthday parties when you were six. You slide the street tiles around the screen so that the route created is the longest possible one from start to finish. However, you'll be lucky on some levels to get any path created before your cab starts moving. Often, you may find the need to move one or more tiles into position while your taxi is in transit to make sure it arrives at its destination safely.

While most levels begin with the street tiles already positioned on the board, bonus levels require you to place them in vacant squares yourself. In these cases, you are provided tiles one at a time and must determine the best place to drop them (a window at the left shows you several tiles at once to aid in placement). If you're not careful, though, you'll end up with a path that leads to a dead end and costly repairs. In addition, once a section is placed, it can't be removed. However, the reset button will allow you to restart the level up to the point when the cab begins moving.

ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

Running cabs involves some degree of risk. You're asking for trouble if you run into a dead-end or blank space, return to your starting point, drive over icy roads without snow tires, or drive on dirt roads without four-wheel drive. Each crash results in a 25% loss to your



BOP TILL THEY DROP Yeet and Boik's "bopulation" frees a monster in Bopn's. Hurray, free the monster! Gamers need more creatures to kill.

cab's structural integrity, a very costly occurrence. Drop below 1% integrity and it's time for Jake the junkman.

The gameplay here is, without question, very addictive. The mix of logical tile placement and the time limitation make for a challenging gaming experience. You'll gain a healthy sense of satisfaction as your taxi weaves its way gracefully around the screen toward its appointed destination, ringing up the dollars on the meter all the while.

shipping and handling. Registering STREET SHUFFLE furnishes you with new levels (Easy for children and Genius for even greater challenge), SVGA levels for those with higher resolution monitors, additional graphics files for a change of scenery, and the level editor that allows you to create your own levels to distribute to other registered players. Send your payment to: Street Shuffle Registration, 4645 East Glen Ridge Circle, Winston GA, 30187.

JUST BOPPIN' ALONG

Those with a background on the Amiga should be familiar with Bopn's and its designers. Accursed Toys (programmers of a great Dr. Who game for the Amiga). Though it has taken several years, Accursed Toys has finally released a PC version of BOPPIN', their cute and sadistic strategy game.

As the story goes, Arcapaedia is one of trillions of little universes, pockets in spacetime, that drift through the Absolute Elsewhere. It's also the home of Yeet and Boik, triangle-headed, stick-figured arcade gamers. But wait! Something's terribly wrong in Arcapaedia. All the monsters have disappeared from the arcade games—every single one! If there are no monsters to kill, there can be no high score and, worst of all, no one to save. Who could have done such a rotten thing? Why, that goody two-shoes, Hunnybunz, a gaggy sweet, candy cane toting, singing bear (no, not purple dinosaur, but they're equally despicable). As events would have it, Hunnybunz has imprisoned all the monsters and hidden them throughout the land in the guise of simple patterns and designs—

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The Dream Job

How To Get Your Start In Computer Game Programming

by Paul C. Schuytema

MANY MONTHS AGO, I POLISHED UP MY RESUME, COMPLETED WORK ON A 10-PAGE game design prospectus for a flight-sim/adventure called "Pylon Racer," and sent off a packet to Origin Systems in Texas, looking, like so many of you, to break into the nuts and bolts side of the computer game industry. The game design would be so brilliant, I hoped, that the "Creators of Worlds" would offer me a six figure salary and a window office next to Lord British. The weeks passed and I finally received a little post card which thanked me for my application and informed me that Origin would be in touch.

It was shortly after receiving that "Don't call us..." postcard that I began this column, figuring that the next best thing to designing games was writing about them and the people who create them. Still, the dream of creating computer games remains, and I hope someday to have a crack at it.

I know I'm not alone. Every month, CGW receives several letters from young hopefuls looking for a way into computer game design, programming, and art. This month I decided to poke my nose around the game industry in search of the answer to the eternal question: "How can I get a job as a game programmer?"

THEY GET PAID FOR THIS?

There's no mystery to the lure of game programming. Computer science majors the world over spend countless hours learning data structures and the importance of linked lists (I should know—I spent several years in PDP-11 purgatory, before the writing bug claimed my educational energies). After working zombie hours to get that semester project of a C++ x86 disassembler coded, you pop back into your dorm room, flare up your 486 and kick some demon butt in DOOM 2. Hexadecimal table lookups or roaring

subterranean hell-spawn? The choice is obvious.

(Note: Just to shatter any misconceptions, life as a game programmer will involve countless hex table lookups, binary shift operations and variable length data structures, so pay attention to those classes: you'll need those skills even when crafting a Cyberdemon.)

Ten years ago, breaking into the gaming industry could be seen as a solo affair driven by the "hacker mentality." You loved programming, you crunched code in your sleep, you created a game, and then, if it was good enough, you were off. You could market the game yourself, in the old ziplock style of packaging, or use the game as a lever to get you into a larger company. Rarely was a diploma a required powerup, it was long hours of self-taught programming that brought the rewards.

Today, the rules have changed. PC, Mac and cartridge games are a multi-billion-dollar-a-year business. Now, game publishers have whole human resources departments, and a well written resume is a handy powerup indeed. One tool can still help you land that first job, according to DC True's lead software engineer Glenn Doen, and that is writing your own game.

"I actually learned some of my first hard-core game programming techniques from Bruce Webster's old CGW column," said Doen. Doen was a game addict from his early years, addicted to D&D and

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hacking away on an Apple II and Atari 400 computer all through high school. He started out with Apple Pascal, and did the requisite "hello world" application in 6502 assembly language, but found the cryptic semi-machine code too difficult.

Doen made his way to the University of Illinois to major in computer science, and began working on his magnum opus, a tactical combat game he called "Melee." Several years after college, he found himself on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, wearing one of those funky, color-coded, polyester blazers and trading bond futures. When he would go home at night, his escape was working on his Melee game. On July 4, 1992, after two years in The Pit, he had had enough. Doen declared his own independence day; it was time to follow his dream into the world of game programming.

He first turned to CGW's own Alan Enrich, who provided a few addresses of Chicago-area game publishers. Enrich also suggested that Doen take a trip to the April Game Developers Conference in California

(continued on page 210)

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(continued from page 206)

for some of the required "networking."

Several months later, Doen was interviewing at Virtual World Entertainment (which operate the Battletech Centers around the world), Kinnesoft and DC True. He was surprised when DC True asked if he had any game work to show them. So he headed off to the interview with his Melee on Boppy, and landed a job. "I'm convinced that it was the game that got my foot in the door," said Doen.

As we talked, Doen and the other programmers at DC True were running a crunch schedule, preparing for the January CES in Las Vegas. "That's where we're unveiling *CYBERJUDAS*," said Doen. "Last Sunday, I actually got to have a bath; I can't remember the one before that." Doen is working 80-hour weeks, with the "easy day" being a six-hour Sunday.

"It's still fun. At work, I'll complain that I hate computers, but I'll go home after a 12 hour day and play a game or read a computer magazine," said Doen.

Nicholas Fullager, a software engineer for Electronic Arts, got his job in a similar way. He studied the hottest games, but instead of writing a game of his own, he created several demos which showcased his

mastery of the techniques. He studied the original *WING COMMANDER*, and created a demo to quickly rotate and scale 2D bitmaps, just like the Kilrathi ships. When it was time for his interview, he disassembled his home PC so that it would fit into an easily carried case, and then presented his demos to the EA team.

MORE B.S.?

Several of the letters I've received ask the rather blunt question: is an undergraduate degree in computer science worth it? Nana Chambers, the Director of Software Development for Simulations and Interactive Movies (the division which produced *U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS*) at Electronic Arts thinks that a degree is an essential ingredient for getting an entry-level position as a game programmer. "College teaches you about tenacity," she remarked.

When she interviews a candidate, she is looking for some computer engineering classes, computer science classes, and working knowledge of C and C++. I asked if assembly language was a plus. "Definitely," was her reply. "We're looking for programmers with a little more of a hacker style as opposed to a die-hard computer science student, someone who really knows the machine and has a lot of

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Game programming is a highly technical art requiring a ton of reading and a ton of programming practice. Below are some resources which will help you learn some of the vital skills you will need to make it into the world of professional game programming.

Books to take a look at:

Arcade Action Set by Diana Gruber, Corvix Group Books—how to create scrolling arcade games in C.

Gardens of Imagination by Christopher Lampton, Waite Group Press—programming DOOM-like 3D maze games in C and C++.

The Black Art of Windows Game Programming by Eric Lyons, Waite Group Press—creating DOOM-like 3D and other 2D games in Windows using the WinG drivers and the Cartoon Engine.

Flights of Fantasy by Christopher Lampton, Waite Group Press—creating a 3D, polygon based flight simulator in C++.

Tricks of the Game Programming Game by LaMothe, Ratcliff, Seminare and Tyler, SAMS publishing—primarily a book on how to craft DOOM-like 3D games, but more encyclopedic in nature with tons of background techniques.

Game Designer's Handbook by multiple authors—executable hypermedia encyclopedia, available on the Internet via ftp at ftp.wwp.edu (in the pub/games/game-dev directory).

The Art of Computer Game Design by Chris Crawford, Osborne/McGraw-Hill—a book about game design theory, not programming. It's a bit out of date (c. 1984), but it still provides good food for thought. It's also out of print, but I've seen it in a few libraries.

Magazines of interest:

Game Developer, 600 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107-9602

Interactive Entertainment Design, 3251 Sierra Road, San Jose, CA 95132



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interest in gaming."

Fullager reflected that, if he had his education to do over again (he was a computer science major at the University of California at Santa Cruz), he would be a math major instead. "Math remains pretty much constant, while computer science techniques can quickly become old news. Whenever I really get stuck on something, it's generally the math."

Fullager also credits college with giving him the skills needed to read professional journals and research papers. He picked up the WING COMMANDER bitmap routines from a General Electric research paper written in 1980.

THE HACKER AND THE C

C and C++ are becoming tools of the trade, so knowing your way in and out of "main()" loops is an essential skill. "It didn't mean squat," illuminated Chambers, "if you knew C a few years ago. Now, it's required knowledge."

"I've found that liberal arts graduates are a little more well rounded," says Chambers. "After all, it isn't about sitting around and building a

database; it's about free-form programming. Make it cool, make it fun and make it fast."

Don McCasland, a programmer for Cyberflex, feels certain that "a lot of programmers dream about working in the

when coding a game, and as a programmer, you have to find the quickest and most interesting solutions to what are really research-level topics."

So you know the code, you've played the games and you've even written one of your own. How do you get your foot in the door? "You have to do your homework," says Chambers. "That means knowing who does what at a company, reading the credits of a game, and sending your resume to those people."

From the people I've spoken to, there seem to be a few common traits: most have been game addicts and programmers for years, often crunching code before puberty set in. They have all studied computers extensively, many in college. And they all have the willingness to make the proper connections to make sure their talents get the attention they deserve.

What about my resume? Well, as of yet, Origin's human resources office still hasn't returned my call. Anyone out there interested in a killer 1920s-era pilon racing simulator? ☺

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Caddy Hack

Selecting The Right DOS Clubs For The Gaming Green

by Mike Weksler

IMAGINE STROLLING UP TO THE FAIRWAY AT PEBBLE BEACH AND TEeing OFF ON A 450-YARD HOLE WITH A SAND WEDGE. Even if you tee off like a gorilla on PCP, that Topflight isn't going to fly anywhere near the green. Of course, it doesn't matter how hard you swing because the problem isn't power, it's in your choice of driver.

We have a similar situation in the world of PC games. You can have all the computing power in the world—a screaming Pentium and RAM coming out of your ears—but if your memory is not configured correctly for a specific game, you're not going anywhere. What makes matters worse is that no two games have the same memory configuration requirements—this one wants extended memory (EMS) and the other wants expanded (XMS)—and no two computer systems are exactly the same. So, just as the golfer has a selection of clubs for different situations, so the savvy computer gamer requires a selection of configuration files that will arrange his system memory to run different games.

In this article, we won't concern ourselves with altering configurations for specific purposes; many columns (including many of my own) and entire books have been written on the subject. Instead, I'd like to address how you can organize multiple configurations for different games. We'll look at three solutions: the boot disk, configuration batch files, and the DOS 6.0 boot menu.

But first, let's clarify terms. When I talk about "memory configuration" I'm talking about two files on your computer, the CONFIG.SYS and the AUTO-EXEC.BAT. These files contain instructions telling the computer how to organize your memory and which "drivers" to load. "Drivers" (also known as TSRs for Terminate and Stay Resident) are special programs that are loaded into your computer's memory and stay in memory in case they are needed. Drivers often serve as an interface between the peripherals in your system (mouse, sound

card, CD-ROM) and the main part of the computer. Without the drivers, your Sound Blaster Pro wouldn't know how to communicate with your processor and vice-versa. Unfortunately, with too many drivers, your brand new game will often refuse to communicate with you!

FIGURE 1: BASIC STRUCTURE FOR DOS 6.0 BOOT MENU

CONFIG.SYS

```
[MENU]
MENUITEM=ENTRY1, Menu Entry Title 1 Here
MENUITEM=ENTRY2, Menu Entry Title 2 Here
MENUITEM=ENTRY3, Menu Entry Title 3 Here
(You may have a total of 9 menu entries.)
```

```
[ENTRY1]
Stuff for a config.sys entry goes here
```

```
[ENTRY2]
Stuff for a config.sys entry goes here
```

```
[ENTRY3]
Stuff for a config.sys entry goes here
```

```
[COMES]
Redundant stuff that you'd find in each paragraph.
```

AUTOEXEC.BAT

```
@ECHO OFF
PROMPT=$P$G
PATH=C:\;C:\DOS;
(You'd also put things like SET commands and other "environment" commands here that aren't specific to any one configuration entry.)
```

```
GOTO %CONFIG%
```

```
[ENTRY1]
Stuff for an autoexec.bat entry goes here
GOTO END
```

```
[ENTRY2]
Stuff for an autoexec.bat entry goes here
GOTO END
```

```
[ENTRY3]
Stuff for an autoexec.bat entry goes here
GOTO END
```

```
END
```



In the simplest of terms, memory problems often arise because your sound card, CD-ROM, and other peripheral drivers are eating up too much of the 640K of lower memory in your machine. If you have a game that requires 580K of the 640K of lower memory in your machine, and you've got 80K worth of software drivers loaded into that lower 640K, then you've got problems.

There are many ways to handle these problems—including little tricks that enable you to load some of your TSRs into a region called "upper memory" and memory management software like QEMM that will do the dirty work for you—but as I've said, we'll leave that discussion for another day.

BOOTING UP

With a typical DOS installation, you probably have one set of configuration files (AUTOEXEC and CONFIG). If you were to view these files in any text editing program, you would see several lines of text in each one. Some of these lines include commands that execute programs. Most programs that end with .SYS, .COM, and .EXE are your TSRs. You'll need them for your mouse, sound card, CD-ROM, and whatever else you have running.

Of course, as soon as you have your configuration ducks in a row, a new game will come along that will require a new configuration. Now, you could edit your configuration files with a text editor in order to run the game, but then the new configuration might not work with Windows or another program that you often use. Do you want to change your configuration every time you want to run a different piece of software?

Of course not. One simple solution is to create a "boot disk" for each game you play. A boot disk is simply a floppy disk that holds the two configuration files (AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS). When you want to play a specific game, you insert the boot disk into your computer and start it up. The game-specific configuration will



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then be used to configure your memory. Many game installation routines will make a game-specific boot disk for you, but these disks are also fairly easy to create on your own.

You make a boot disk by formatting a floppy for your A: drive and then typing the magic code "SYS A:" to make it "bootable." Then you edit your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT to your liking, save the new files to your boot disk, and you're done.

Boot disks are easy to understand, easy to make, and work fairly well. Most customer support people suggest boot disks because they're easy to explain how to make over the phone, and they don't screw up your configuration. The down side is that you must have a boot disk for just about every game in your library, and boot disks are notoriously easy to misplace and crush under the wheels of your office chair.

MIXING UP A BATCH

There are other solutions that are more efficient, but they are a little more difficult to implement. If you are a DOS 5 or earlier owner and are adept at creating batch files, you can make copies of all of your favorite configuration files on your hard drive and write batch files to copy them back and forth on your whim. I like to create batch files that I call "RIG4's." I have RIG4-QEMM which "rings" my system with the QEMM memory manager. I have a RIG4VAN which gives my system a standard "vanilla" setup. And then I have RIG4's for my favorite games, like RIG4FALC (Falcon 3.0) and RIG4NET (for network DOOM-fests). All these batch files do is copy a specific set of configuration files (AUTOEXEC.QEM and CONFIG.QEM) over my current set of

FIGURE 2: SAMPLE DOS 6 BOOT MENU FILES

```

CONFIGSYS

[MEMO]
MINUTEM=MEMO, The DOS 6 Iron (DOS 001, CD)
MINUTEM=MEMO, The Windows Wedge (DOS 001, CD)
MINUTEM=QEMO, The Silver Bullet (QEM, CD)

[MSCD]
DEVICE=C:\DOS\HIMEM.SYS
DOS=HIGH
SHELL=C:\DOS\COMMAND.COM C:\DOS\ /e:512 /p
DEVICE=C:\MOUSE\MOUSE.SYS /SYS
DEVICE=C:\CDROM\IBCD.SYS /D:IBCD001

[QEMO]
DEVICE=C:\DOS\HIMEM.SYS
DEVICE=C:\WINDOWS\SYSTEM36.EXE RAM 4096
DOS=HIGH,UMB
SHELL=C:\DOS\COMMAND.COM C:\DOS\ /e:512 /p
DEVICE=C:\MOUSE\MOUSE.SYS /SYS
DEVICE=C:\CDROM\IBCD.SYS /D:IBCD001

[QEMO]
DOS=HIGH
DEVICE=C:\QEMM\QEMM.SYS
SET LOADHIGH=C:\QEMM\LOADHI.RP
DEVICE=C:\QEMM\QEMM386.SYS RAM 3P ST:K
DEVICE=C:\QEMM\QEMM-UP.SYS /C:\QEMM\QEMM-UP.DAT
SHELL=C:\QEMM\LOADHI.COM /P C:\DOS\COMMAND.COM C:\DOS\ /e:512 /p
DEVICE=C:\QEMM\LOADHI.SYS /P DEVICE=C:\MOUSE\MOUSE.SYS /SYS
DEVICE=C:\QEMM\LOADHI.SYS /P C:\CDROM\IBCD.SYS /D:IBCD001

[CONSOLE]
SETFILES /P
LASTDRIVE=Z
STACKS=9,256
BUFFERS=40
FILES=40

AUTOEXEC.BAT

ECHO OFF
PROPPY=PROG
PATH=C:\;C:\DOS;C:\QEMM;C:\WINDOWS
SET TEMP=C:\TEMP
SET MOUSE=C:\MOUSE
SET BLASTER=A220 I5 D1 T4
SET SOUND=C:\SOUND
C:\SOUND\BSP-SET /M:15 /VOC:15 /CD:15 /TR:15 /LNR:15

GOTO %CONFIG%

:MSCD
SMARTDRV C
C:\CDROM\MSINDEX.EXE /D:IBCD000 /M:12
GOTO END

:QEMO
SMARTDRV C
C:\CDROM\MSINDEX.EXE /D:IBCD001 /M:12 /E
GOTO END

:QEMO
C:\CDROM\LOADHI /P SMARTDRV C
C:\QEMM\LOADHI /P C:\CDROM\MSINDEX.EXE /D:IBCD001 /M:12 /E
GOTO END

:END

```

configuration files. Once the batch file is run, I can reboot the computer and the new configuration will be applied to it.

THE BOOT MENU

With the introduction of MS-DOS 6.0, managing multiple configuration files has become much easier. A new feature of DOS

6.0 is a function that allows you to create a boot menu, which essentially consolidates all of your configuration files into one big AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS. Once you've created a boot menu, you will be given various configuration options when you boot your computer. All you do is select the configuration appropriate for the current task, and you're all set for the day's gaming activities.

Setting up the boot menu is the tricky part. Basically, you have to create a CONFIG and an AUTOEXEC file with a special structure. Figure 1 shows a basic skeleton for the structure of the boot menu. The menu allows up to nine different configurations.

Figure 2 is a piece of my own boot menu configuration as an example to work from. Many of the details of the configurations are specific to my machine; you will have to create configurations that work for your own system.

One word of warning: Before tinkering with your configuration files, make sure you back up your original CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files to a bootable floppy disk. This way, if you mess up the configuration, you can still boot your machine with the floppy disk.

Using my examples and your DOS 6 manual, you should have a boot menu running in no time. Then, you'll be able to switch configurations with ease, test your configurations with new games, and, if necessary, add a new configuration when needed. Then, you'll be like the well-equipped golfer who has a club appropriate for every

shot situation. Fore! (or RIG-It!)

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- HP 5 Meg Flash Cdl \$369
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FRANKLIN LANGUAGE MASTER

- Franklin French Professor FP-650 \$109
- Franklin Language Master + Math LM-2020 \$94
- Franklin Pocket French Professor FP-615 \$79
- Franklin Pocket Spanish Master DBS-110 \$64
- Franklin Pocket Spanish Master SW-915 \$79
- Franklin Spanish SW-6081-9 \$79
- Franklin Speaking French Professor FP-610 \$209
- Franklin Speak German Professor GP-620 \$209
- Franklin Speak Language Master LM-6000 \$229
- Franklin Spelling Organizer Mixer Special Edition LM-6000SE \$499

FRANKLIN WORDMASTER

- Franklin Desktop WordMaster WM-1065 \$56
- Frank Nxt C Webster Pklt Thesaurus NCT-102 \$36
- Franklin Pocket Language Master LM-2015 \$56
- Franklin Pocket WordMaster WM-1015 \$44

FRANKLIN SPELLING

- Franklin Elementary Spelling Ace ES-90 \$44
- Frank Nxt C Webster Pklt Spcl Cnt NCS-101 \$26
- Franklin Pocket Spelling Ace S-100 \$36
- Franklin Spell BP-105 \$36
- Franklin Spell Ace SA-48 \$36
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FRANKLIN BIBLE

- Franklin International Version Bible NV-30 \$94
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FRANKLIN ENTERTAINMENT

- Franklin Bartender's Guide BTO-400 \$64
- Franklin Big League Baseball Encyclopedia BLR-84 \$59
- Franklin Desktop Crossword Puzzle Solver CW-90 \$54
- Franklin Old Scramble Pkts

FRANKLIN ENTERTAINMENT

- Dictionary SCH-30 \$24
- Franklin Parker's Wise Guide WNG-400 \$74
- Franklin Pklt Baby Cooker's Cookbook BCC-400 \$64
- Franklin Pklt Crossword Puzzle Solver CW-40 \$46
- Franklin Pklt Horoscopes AST-110 \$44
- Franklin Pocket Movie Guide FLX-110 \$44
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DIGITAL BOOK SYSTEMS

- Franklin Digital Book System 2 DBS-2 \$129
- Franklin DBS DBS-2 \$149
- Franklin Bartender's Guide DBS IC-130 \$49
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- book Adverse Drug Interactions DBS IC-104 \$99
- Franklin Merck Manual DBS IC-115 \$129
- Franklin Merriam-Webster Dict. Plus DBS IC-101 \$49
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- Franklin Spelling French Professor DBS IC-123 \$69
- Franklin Speak German Professor DBS IC-124 \$59
- Franklin Speak Spanish Master DBS IC-122 \$59
- Franklin Video Companion DBS IC-102 \$39
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- Check Printing Accountant KXK-PC105 \$349
- CWA KXK-PC95 \$249
- CWA Battery Pack \$32
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- CWA Interface Cable \$19
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- HP 200LX Palmtop PC F1050A Palm \$549
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THE SCORE

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games.

Here, raised upon pedestals, you'll find the games that broke the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

CGW HALL OF FAME

- THE BARD'S TALE** (Electronic Arts, 1985)
- BATTLE CHESS** (Interplay Productions, 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)
- KAMPFGROUPE** (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

GUNSHIP MICROPROSE, 1989

For several years, MicroProse was the undisputed champion of the simulation market, and it was games like GUNSHIP that got them there. MicroProse's simulation of the AH-64A Apache helicopter, though outshined graphically by such games as *COMANCHE MAXIMUM OVERKILL*, remains the most accurate simulation of helicopter combat in gamingdom. The polygon-filled graphics moved quickly, even on the 8-bit Commodore 64, and the keyboard controls, aided by a keyboard overlay, offered enough realistic options to satisfy even the most demanding of sim buffs. GUNSHIP was the first to offer character continuity through a linked series of missions, even including R&R for fatigued pilots. Although it spawned a host of imitators, none of them—even GUNSHIP 2000—has managed to strike as fine a balance between realism and playability.



HARPOON THREE-SIXTY PACIFIC, 1989

When Tom Clancy needed to simulate the naval battles in his novel *Red Storm Rising*, he turned to Larry Bond's HARPOON, then in miniatures format. When Three-Sixty and crew brought the tabletop game to the computer, gamers found the digital version to be just as accurate, with a thorough and accessible database to boot. Bond's experience as a retired naval officer and NATO wargames referee was reflected in the quality of play, which was more intense and involving than anything this side of the Naval War College. HARPOON was proof that hard-core wargames could still sell in big numbers. And while HARPOON II has since arrived to carry the naval simulation flame, those who wish to experience the original can check out the excellent re-release of HARPOON CLASSIC by Alliance, which features new scenarios and a new interface along with all the bug fixes known to wargaming-kind.



TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

RANK	GAME	SCORE
1	Day of the Tentacle	9.92
2	Sherlock Holmes CD I	9.53
3	Galibard Knight	9.42
4	Sims & His Hit The Road	9.30
5	Star Captain II	9.30
6	The Seventh Guest	9.25
7	Quest for Glory I (WAV)	9.03
8	Eric the Unready	9.04
9	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharrnacht	8.95
10	Alaska in the Dark	8.95



TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

RANK	GAME	SCORE
1	Behrday at Kronator	9.50
2	Ultima Underworld II	9.42
3	Night & Magic: Darkside of Eden	9.37
4	Leads of Lara	9.25
5	Wolf	9.19
6	Night & Magic: Clouds of Jen	9.11
7	Ultima VII: Part Two-Serpent Isle	9.00
8	Ultima VII: Crusaders of Svent	8.97
9	Arma: The Elder Scrolls	8.91
10	War of Empires	8.74



TOP SIMULATION GAMES

RANK	GAME	SCORE
1	Acas of the Deep	9.58
2	Body Car Racing	9.43
3	World Circuit	9.36
4	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	9.27
5	Fleet Defender	9.25
6	Stunt Island	9.09
7	Hanet	8.99
8	Acas over Europa	8.69
9	F-19 Strike Eagle III	8.65
10	HC-29	8.53



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

RANK	GAME	SCORE
1	A-10M	10.36
2	Master of Orion	10.21
3	Warlords II	9.95
4	Bure II	9.82
5	Master of Magic	9.77
6	Sin City 2000	9.58
7	Conquered Kingdoms	9.53
8	The Braveest Fleet	9.46
9	Marchant Prince	9.08
10	Synthetic	9.07



REVIEW BY PETER FISHER

TOP 100 GAMES

RANK	GAME	SCORE
1	A-10M	10.36
2	THE Fighter	10.24
3	DOOM	10.24
4	Master of Orion	10.21
5	Warlords II	9.95
6	Day of the Tentacle	9.92
7	DOOM II	9.84
8	Dune II	9.82
9	Master of Magic	9.77
10	Acas of the Deep	9.58
11	Conquered Kingdoms	9.53
12	Carriers at War Construction Kit	9.48
13	Front Page Sports Football Pro	9.44
14	A-Wing	9.40
15	Sin City 2000	9.38
16	Y for Victory: Market Garden	9.38
17	Sherlock Holmes CD I	9.30
18	Conquered Kingdoms QQP	9.25
19	Y for Victory: Valkyrie Lake	9.25
20	Behrday at Kronator	9.20
21	War in Heaven	9.19
22	Body Car Racing	9.43
23	Ultima Underworld II	9.42
24	Galibard Knight	9.42
25	Night & Magic: Darkside of Eden	9.37
26	World Circuit	9.36
27	Pacific War	9.34
28	Star Control II	9.34
29	Sims & Max Hit The Road	9.30
30	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	9.27
31	Leads of Lara	9.25
32	The Seventh Guest	9.25
33	Fleet Defender	9.25
34	Y for Victory: Gold Java Sward	9.24
35	Wolf	9.19
36	The Grandest Fleet	9.16
37	Pharos	9.16
38	Night & Magic: Clouds of Jen	9.11
39	Operative Crusader	9.10
40	Merchant Prince	9.08
41	Ultima VII: Part Two-Serpent Isle	9.08
42	Synthetic	9.07
43	Quest for Glory I (WAV)	9.05
44	Eric the Unready	9.04
45	Front Page Sports Baseball	9.04
46	System Shock	9.02
47	Stunt Island	9.00
48	Battles of Ostyria	9.00
49	War Planets	9.00
50	Tanks	8.99



TOP WARGAMES

RANK	GAME	AGE	ESRB	SCORE
1	Corners of War: Destruction Mt.	10	ES	9.68
2	V for Victory: Desert Garden	10	ES	9.38
3	V for Victory: Volkye Lull	10	ES	9.32
4	War in Russia	10	ES	9.44
5	Pacific War	10	ES	9.34
6	V for Victory: Gold Jump Sward	10	ES	9.24
7	Operation Crusader	10	ES	9.10
8	Tasks	10	ES	8.95
9	Crash of Steel	10	ES	8.56
10	Tigers on the Prowl	10	ES	8.57



TOP ACTION GAMES

RANK	GAME	AGE	ESRB	SCORE
1	1E1 Fighter	10	ES	10.34
2	0019 II	10	ES	10.24
3	0019 II	10	ES	9.84
4	1-Wing	10	ES	9.60
5	Privateer	10	ES	9.16
6	Spirit Shock	10	ES	9.02
7	The Herds	10	ES	8.50
8	Price of Persia 2	10	ES	8.49
9	The Last Vikings	10	ES	8.46
10	Robot Assault	10	ES	8.44



TOP SPORTS GAMES

RANK	GAME	AGE	ESRB	SCORE
1	Front Page Sports Football Pro	10	ES	9.64
2	HL Hockey	10	ES	9.45
3	Front Page Sports Baseball	10	ES	9.04
4	Tony La Russa Baseball II	10	ES	8.78
5	PGA Tour Golf 486	10	ES	8.54
6	Wayne Gretzky Hockey III	10	ES	8.30
7	Microsoft Golf 2.0	10	ES	8.29
8	Microsoft Soccer 4	10	ES	8.23
9	Ultimate Football	10	ES	7.86
10	Jordan II Flight	10	ES	7.85



You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CGW Poll 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CGW Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. **PURGE ALERT!** This month we've purged all games over two years old from the list. More than 30 games were retired, all of which are now eligible for the Hall of Fame.

The Computer Gaming World

A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

51	Crash of Steel	WG	8.58
52	Warcraft III: Crusaders of Saxat	RP	8.57
53	Tigers on the Prowl	WG	8.57
54	Hornet	SI	8.56
55	Fredy Phatkas Frazier Pharmacist	AD	8.56
56	Alone in the Dark	AD	8.55
57	The Incredible Machine	SI	8.52
58	The Island of Dr. Brain	SI	8.51
59	Sea of Cortez	SI	8.67
60	Incredible Toys	SI	8.55
61	Empire Deluxe	SI	8.52
62	Lords of the Realm	WG	8.82
63	Carriers at War II	WG	8.82
64	Myt	AD	8.82
65	Antaris: The Elder Scrolls	RP	8.81
66	Her Rebuilder	AD	8.80
67	Narpsan II	WG	8.78
68	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SI	8.78
69	Garfield Khan II	WG	8.74
70	Wall of Darkness	RP	8.74
71	SSI	RP	8.74
72	Viccom	AD	8.74
73	Axis over Europe	SI	8.66
74	Dynacore	SI	8.65
75	Spectrum Baseball	SI	8.64
76	SSI	SI	8.64
77	SSI	SI	8.60
78	SSI	SI	8.59
79	SSI	SI	8.55
80	SSI	SI	8.55
81	SSI	SI	8.55
82	SSI	SI	8.54
83	SSI	SI	8.54
84	SSI	SI	8.52
85	SSI	SI	8.52
86	SSI	SI	8.52
87	SSI	SI	8.52
88	SSI	SI	8.52
89	SSI	SI	8.52
90	SSI	SI	8.52
91	SSI	SI	8.52
92	SSI	SI	8.52
93	SSI	SI	8.52
94	SSI	SI	8.52
95	SSI	SI	8.52
96	SSI	SI	8.52
97	SSI	SI	8.52
98	SSI	SI	8.52
99	SSI	SI	8.52
100	SSI	SI	8.52

Games on unranked lines have scores equal to the line above. **AD** = Top game of year. **RP** = New Game, **WG** = Adventure, **SI** = Role Playing, **SI** = Strategy, **WG** = Warcraft, **AC** = Action, **SP** = Sports

PATCHES

Asses of the Deep V1.1: Updates floppy version of Dynamic's sub sim. Fixes reported problems, including random lockups, faulty time decompression, and others. 10/27/94

Blake Stone V3.0 Patch: Updates V2.1 to V3.0. Users must have Blake Stone 2.1 currently installed. Works with registered version only. 11/3/94

CyberRace V1.22P CD-ROM upgrade: Includes all previous fixes plus Pentium/PCI fix. 11/8/94

Dark Legions V1.1 Update: Adds native sound support for UltraSound/UltraSound Max, AWE-32, ESS488/688 Chipset, and Ensoniq SoundScape. CD and floppy versions available. 10/13/94

Dark Sun II: Wake of the Ravager Update: Fixes reported problems. Works with CD-ROM version only. 10/26/94

Falcon 3.0 V3.05: New Upgrade for floppy users of Falcon equivalent to the new Falcon CD release. (See also MIG-29 and Hornet upgrades below.) 9/29/94

Flight Commander 2 V1.01: Patch fixes PBEM feature and reported problems with some video drivers. IBM compatibles only. 12/2/94

Flight Commander 2 V1.01: Macintosh only patch addresses PBEM problems and other minor bugs. 12/2/94

Front Page Sports: Baseball '94 V1.01: Upgrade fixes many reported problems, including crash bugs and General Manager AI. 12/2/94

Harpoon Classic V1.55b: CD-ROM update corrects some bugs with setting aircraft speeds, air-to-air fuel, and some other long standing bugs, as well as using less memory. Missiles launch

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.

These patches can be usually be downloaded from the major online networks (CompServe, 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.

against bases correctly. Works with all previous versions. 12/1/94

Red Runner Windows Upgrade V1.03: Corrects problems listed in the Readme file of the initial release. For Windows versions only, not DOS. 11/18/94

Red Runner CD-ROM Upgrade: Corrects a problem with restoring saved games with the small installation option. For CD-ROM only. 12/2/94

Lords of the Realm V1.01: Update to latest version, allows for modem play, CD-ROM and floppy versions available. 11/1/94

Master of Magic V1.2: Latest upgrade to MicroProse strategy/magic game with numerous fixes, new features, and major AI enhancements. 12/1/94

NCAA2 V1.02: Fixes S3 chipset problems and excessive fouling. Also, inbound-ing players no longer receive assists. 11/22/94

Outpost V1.1: Fixes for many of the problems in Sierra's science-fiction title. 10/3/94

1942 Pacific Air War Modem Patch: Provides modem play and fixes some bugs. 10/13/94

PGA 400 Update: Updates PGA.COM file and elimi-

nates GOLFVM.EXE error message. Also allows use of Universal Vesa Driver. 12/4/94

Quarantine V3.5 Update: Latest update for all previous versions of Quarantine, floppy and CD-ROM versions available. 11/1/94

Quarantine 00S4GW.EXE update: Simply an updated DOS4GW.EXE for commercial version owners. 10/21/94

Rebel Assault Macintosh Patch: Corrects "no CD in drive errors", and improves game speed when playing full screen. Also features direct Power PC support. 10/19/94

Shadows of Cobra Update: Fix for fantasy/adventure DOS/Windows game adds joystick calibration profile, help for character movement, new dungeon sound effects and fixes DOS sound setup. 12/8/94

SinCity 2000 for DOS V1.1: Fixes problems reported, including crashes; also includes some minor cosmetic fixes. 10/28/94

Tanks V1.23: Latest patch fixes reported problems. 11/18/94

Tigers on the Prowl V 1.15b: Latest patch fixes problem accessing multiple units and adds some new features. 11/29/94

Ultimate Football V1.31 Update: Replaces previous update V1.3. Adds crowd noise, fixes reported problems. 11/8/94

Under a Killing Moon V1.04: For use with the Cyrix microprocessor. 11/8/94

Under a Killing Moon GUS driver update: Works with Gravis UltraSound and Gravis UltraSound Max. 11/8/94

Publisher BBS Numbers
Many of these patches are available direct from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N-8-1.

Accolade CA (408) 296-8800

Activision CA (310) 820-1276

Agepe MA (508) 368-7036

Bethesda Software MD (301) 990-7552

Broderbund CA (415) 883-5889

Captone FL (305) 374-6872

Creative Labs OK (405) 742-6660

Impressions Software MA (617) 225-2042

InterPlay Productions CA (714) 252-2822

LucasArts CA (415) 257-3070

Maxis CA (510) 254-3860

MicroProse MD (410) 785-1841

Microsoft WA (206) 896-6735

Origin TX (512) 328-8402

Sierra Online CA (209) 683-4463

Spectrum Halobyte CA (510) 522-6180

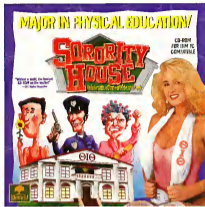
SSI CA (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739-6623

Virgin Interactive CA (714) 833-3305

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The Rumor Bag

Days Of L'Chaim And Roses

by Yosef Ben-Yehudah



If you ask me, it was a little much. Arguing, my friends were, over the bride price, and here I was sweating like you wouldn't believe with this *shpil* sack covering my face, steaming up my glasses. Grossberg, sitting next next to me, says the bargaining sort of reminded him of **Impressions'** up and coming **SPACE BUCKS** game. He called it **SPACE BUCKS** because it's sort of like **AIR BUCKS**, only this one deals with intergalactic commerce and transport. Much like **Spectrum-HoloByte's** **GAZILLIONAIRE**, except what you can do is attack and literally demolish the opposition something terrible instead of just beat them up in market share. At the moment **Impressions** calls it **GALECTIC EXPRESS**.

Windbag Grossberg finally shuts up when the mothers get ready to break a plate. I missed hearing the exact bride price and I didn't dare ask Grossberg, who would've shouted out "Tradition!" and begun singing from *Fiddler on the Roof*. If it was tradition I wanted, it would be **Activision's** upcoming multimedia version of **SHANGHAI** I would play. This is supposed to offer some beautiful video pictures of great moments in history, famous inventors and such like.

Anyway, next thing I know, the groom is veiling the lovely bride. Suddenly Grossberg, fiddling with his personal programmable whatchamacallit, shows me what a wonderful marvel this device is. I tried to ignore him, but he goes on about programmability being the next wave in hardware, and uses a new joystick from **CH Products** as proof. I, skeptical, demand more information, to which Gross-

berg tells me this **PRO THIRDLE** is supposed to have more buttons (20) than the rabbi's Lexus, and every one is supposed to be customizable.

"Pshaw," I say, "that's meshugah." Meanwhile, the musicians have started into the obligatory rendition of "Sunrise, Sunset" and, before we know it, the beautiful couple is under the huppah, the canopy symbolizing their spiritual and physical house. If it symbolized my house, it would be full of papers, magazines, disks and dirty dishes. Also it would be something of a beehive of activity. I whispered this to the nice lady sitting on my other side, and since she also in the industry works, she whispered back that **Trimark Interactive** was working on a **REBEL ASSAULT** or **CYBERIA**-type game called **THE HIVE**. The lady tells me that the game is more interactive than the others, and that it features artwork done by some of the **WING COMMANDER III** team, with multimedia animations running under **WINDOWS '95**.

The rabbi began to chant in Hebrew and I suddenly realized how wonderful faith really is. It made me contemplate the Creator, and the so-called "god games" on the computer. **MicroProse** in England is working on such a game what could add new spirit to this category. Their working title is **LITTLE PEOPLE**, but in this game you are the deity who has to influence the citizens of your world to do what is best for them. Such a unique game concept, I wondered how my friends of faith and friends without would take it.

But, before daydreaming could capture me more, the ceremony was over. We were ushered to the reception hall and everyone

joined in a hora. We danced in a great circle—programmers, designers, friends and family all swaying and singing and making a wonderful ruckus. We lofted up the happy couple in a chair dance, burning more energy than a pro basketball team. I shouted to a fellow chair hoister that **Sony** was working on an **ESPN NBA BASKETBALL** product. He dropped his leg of the chair to roll up his trousers and show me a pair of **NBA Basketball** socks, grinning like an idiot while we struggled to keep the groom from crashing down on him.

After the Hora was over and we began to calm down, the crowd gathered for the ceremonial cake cutting. The best man began to make some touching comments about how sweet should be the life of this couple, hushing the room and bringing a tear to my eye, when I noticed Grossberg curiously maneuvering behind the best man. Then, before the best man had even finished, to my utter horror, that meshugenah Grossberg stabs his long-nailed finger into the cake's frosting, smearing it along his beard and in his mouth. Enraged, I blurted out, "icing penalty!" and lunged for him, but fortunately the crowd prevented me from tearing his beard off. To calm me down, the kind lady I'd spoken with earlier told me that the incident reminded her that **Sony** is working on **ESPN NHL Hockey**.

I didn't get a chance to apologize for the disturbance that night, so I'd like to take this chance to say mazel tov to them, God bless, and congratulations. And when you prepare your first reunion, don't put me at the same table as that fat-head Grossberg. ☺

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