


COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The #1 Computer Game Magazine 

SPECIAL FALL PREVIEW

Hot, Hotter Hottest!

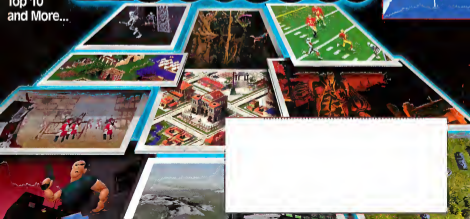
CGW Guides You Through the **150+** New Games For Fall
Our Top 10 and More...

X-Com Strategy

Sneak Previews

• Empire 2

• Top Gun



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•**Real-Time 3D.** FX Fighter is first to use BRender™ technology, the most advanced 3D rendering system ever developed.

•**Real Motion Capture.** We recorded over 350 actual sequences from martial artists and acrobats for this game. Roundhouse kicks have never been so smooth.

•**Flying Camera.** Forget side-only views. We've got every angle covered—in three dimensions.

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PC Gamer magazine described FX Fighter as "ground-breaking." And we're grateful. But to be honest, with all that power sitting on the desktop, we just felt that the last thing the world needed was another damn word-processor.

Flying 3D Camera, not just a highlight film, the point-of-view changes as you attack.



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Terminal Velocity

m...

"It's a 3D vehicle shooter that's part Star Wars and part Descent."

-Computer Gaming World, March '95

"This game could easily become the new king of the 3D first-person jungle of games."

"Terminal Velocity is a symphony of titillating action and G-force slurping excitement...resulting in an experience most gamers won't want to terminate because of its sheer speed and fluidity."

-Strategy Plus

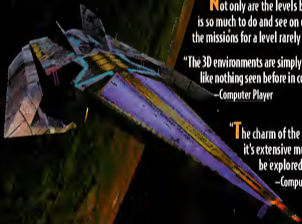
"Not only are the levels beautiful, they are huge. There is so much to do and see on each planet that completing the missions for a level rarely means being finished."

"The 3D environments are simply breathtaking...the worlds are like nothing seen before in computer games."

-Computer Player

"The charm of the game is its open-endedness, its extensive multi-stage levels...[which] can be explored and destroyed at will."

-Computer Gaming World, May '95



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Note: The shareware version of Terminal Velocity is a subset of the full game and contains only 3 of the planets. The shareware CD-ROM version does include instructions. Developed by Terminal Reality, Inc. Published by 3D Realms Entertainment. Published (coarsely) by FormGen Inc. All rights reserved. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners.



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answer the phone on Sundays.

The other day, we watched a video of the Apollo moon landing with our multimedia encyclopedia. Incredible. My PC actually gave me goosebumps. What kind of people design this stuff?"

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

AUGUST 1995



**Bike The Big One
In Full Throttle 80**

FEATURES

34 WHAT'S HOT FOR FALL '95? Everyone knows that computer entertainment software is now **BIG BUSINESS**. More and more new companies enter the fray, and older, more established companies put out more and more sequels to best-selling games, all trying to score that elusive Big Hit. With the number of new games planned for fall bordering on the incredible, *CGW* surveys the field to give you a sneak peek at the products most likely to set the gaming world on fire.

ADVENTURE/ ROLE-PLAYING

67 SCORPIA'S STING Neither black holes nor mysterious deaths will stop our interstellar sleuth from unraveling the shady doings behind **THE ORION CONSPIRACY**.

72 SCORPIA'S MAIL Spooked by the ghost song in **STONE PROPHECY**? **NOCTROPOLIS** just a little too dark? Let our bright light show you the way out of the adventure game mysts.

80 FULL THROTTLE Braving brawling bikers, rough roads and dastardly foes, Charles Ardiel finds that **LucasArts** hasn't lost their tale-spinning magic.

84 JOHNNY MNEMONIC William Gibson's vision arrives on the computer screen just as it leaves the silver screen. Thankfully, Keanu Reeves is conspicuously absent in this "interactive movie," but so is quality gameplay. Charles Ardiel jacks in and data dumps.

95 KINGDOM: THE FAR REACHES **Interplay** officiates the marriage of Saturday morning cartoons and adventure gaming. Allen Greenberg sends his best wishes to the happy couple.

ACTION

98 SLIPSTREAM 5000 **US Gold** takes Paul Schuteyema on an exhilarating, if brief, hovercraft ride.

104 FIRST ENCOUNTERS On the 8th day, David Bruben and **Gametek** created the vast heavens of simulated space in this open-ended cosmic opera. Jason Kapalku wishes they had waited until the 9th.

108 CLOCKWERX Like sands through the hourglass, so goes our free time with games like this, an abstract puzzle game endorsed by **TETRIS** inventor Alexey Pajitnov. Arinn Dembo <Alt-Tab> through Windows to see if it is time well spent.

SPORTS

110 TONY LA RUSSA 3 Is the third time the charm for **Stormfront Studios'** pitching staff? As much as Jim Gindin likes the chemistry of this graphical baseball game, he wonders if the team is pennant-worthy.

116 VIRTUAL POOL Rack 'em up, pretty boy! Paul Shayntema takes his cue and racks his brains to see if *Interplay's* got the chalk to match their talk.

122 BLOOD BOWL We've heard of playing rough, but this is ridiculous! *MicroLeague* applies their sports expertise to a rather unusual and bloody boardgame. Martin Cirulis counts the body parts to see if it all adds up.

SIMULATIONS

129 BIDGEY'S BAR & GRILL Old simulations never die if they have a dedicated group of hackers behind them. Denny Atkin hunts down tools and hacks that breathe new life into classic sims like *Dynamix's* *RED BARON*.

134 SNEAK PREVIEW! TDP GUN Can *Spectrum HoloByte*, creators of *FALCON*, really make a good "Flight Sim Lite"? Join veteran *CGW* joystick jockey Mike Weksler on this recon flight.

136 EXTREME COMPETITION DRIVING CONTROLS Racing junkie Gordon Goble gets his latest fix from this comprehensive racing wheel-and-pedal package.

STRATEGY AND WARGAMES

139 BROADSIDES & GRIPESHOT Alan Emrich examines *SSI's* New World Order and discovers that both *PANZER GENERAL* and Gary Grigsby have a lot of fight left in them.

142 SNEAK PREVIEW! EMPIRE II Both *EMPIRE* and *EMPIRE DELUXE* were classic games. Now, Terry Coleman tells you how the newest member of the Empire is different, and why it might be the longest-lived of the three.

144 THE PERFECT GENERAL II Can perfection be improved upon? *QQP* thinks so, as they've released a new version of a "perfect" wargame. Patrick Miller makes sure that *QQP* hasn't fixed what ain't broke.

150 THE ROAD FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX II *Adnan Systems's* new release not only has the longest title in gaming history, but may be the best *Civil War* game currently on the market. Josh Bruce fastens his bayonet and charges into the fray.

155 STRATEGY! X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP Wetsuit springing a few too many leaks? Study these excerpts from Jeff James' new strategy guide and you'll find new ways to plug breaches and plug alien.

166 RISE OF THE WEST Jim Dunnigan's *Empires of the Middle Ages* emerges as a Windows game from *RAW Entertainment*. Terry Coleman thinks it's about time.

STRATEGY! X-COM: Terror From The Deep

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Sneak Preview! Into The Danger Zone Of TOP GUN

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Sneak Preview! The Rise And Fall Of EMPIRE II

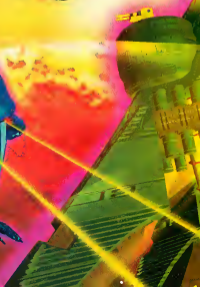
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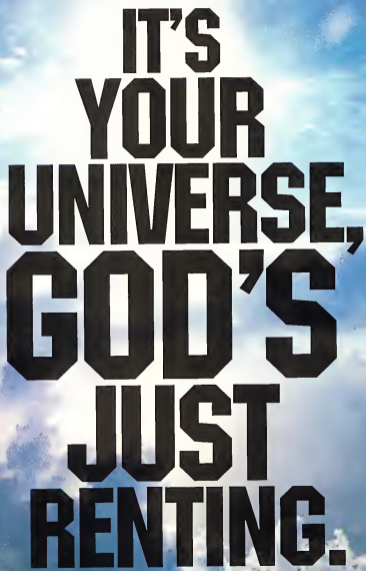


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Steve Honeywell,
Computer Games Review

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Bill Trotter, PC Gamer

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Peter Smith, Strategy Plus

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TAKE TWO
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Welcome To Donkey Kong Country

The Big Three—IBM, Intel and Microsoft—Must Think Gamers Are Idiots

by Johnny L. Wilson

SOMETIMES YOU WONDER HOW HUGE, MONOLITHIC COMPANIES SURVIVED LONG ENOUGH to become huge, monolithic companies. That's especially true when companies have been instrumental in forging an industry and then seem to suddenly lose sight of the basics. Yet, that seems to be what has happened with IBM, Intel and Microsoft.

NO INTEL INSIDE

How dare I ask that question, you probably wonder as you consider the billions made by this triumvirate of technological capitalism. Microsoft is dominant in the operating system market, as well as with many basic applications. Intel holds the lion's share of the processor market. IBM is still a power in the mainframe world and sure to have reasonable success in the Mac clone market.

Yet, when it comes to strategies involving computer games, these formidable powers seem to want to advance games which mean nothing to people in a variety of ways. Ask Intel what gamers want to do with a Pentium and they're likely to show SONIC THE HEDGEHOG running and jumping on a PC. Ask IBM what gamers want out of OS/2 and they'll give you BUNNY—Accolade's keline challenger to Sonic. Ask Microsoft what gamers want and they'll show you Activision's PITFALL HARRY jumping over alligators and swinging from vines in a new higher-res, better

sounding adventure. There are even rumors about Microsoft planning to market Win 95 versions of third-party license Sega Genesis games all over the world.

Yet, ask gamers what they want and you'll get an entirely different picture. Do these three techno-megaliths really believe gamers want to use their \$3,000 computers to play the same games you can play on a \$300 console? Do they really believe gamers will want Win 95 just to up the ante on tired old concepts by resizing the player's view window and making the games harder? Do they really believe that the game buying audience with a median age of 31 wants to regress back to playing the games that 14-year olds found popular five years ago? And what good does it really do to tout the Autoplay feature by converting games from a medium which has always had "autoplay"?

These companies must be using the kind of logic that Fred Schwab Jr. (*Where Are The Customers' Yachts? Or a Good Hand Look at Wall Street*) criticized stockbrokers for in the 1940s, "It is as though someone had invented Esperanto for saying nothing in a variety of ways." Their primary goal seems to be putting traditional video game designs on the computer. WINDOWS 95 stands to be a tremendous boon to computer gamers, but converting platform games to the PC doesn't make the

most of Win 95's strengths. Win 95's 3D DDI will allow point-of-view games and flight simulators to operate faster by taking advantage of new WINDOWS-based accelerator cards which assist the central processor with additional chips. Yet, what is Microsoft touting? A stripped down version of Apogee's TERMINAL VELOCITY (FURIOUS), re-runs of coin-op arcade games from the distant past, and cartridge games reincarnated. Do we really

need PITFALL HARRY to jump faster? Sure the extra power enables the sprites and backgrounds to become more detailed, but how many mature computer gamers will care? How many will even allow their younger offspring to play these visually en-

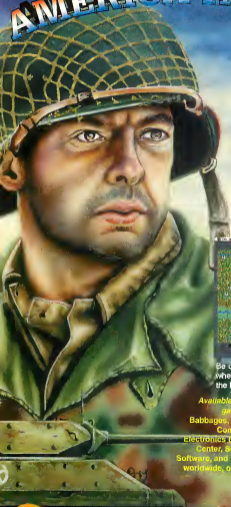
hanced video games on their Pentiums or upcoming P6s?

Another presumed Win 95 windfall to gamers will be the enhanced multitasking capability. While this may be ideal for multiplayer strategy gamers that want to play MicroProse's CIVNET or New World's SPACEWAR Ho! while they're updating a spreadsheet or answering their e-mail, and while it might be useful for fanatics of Maxis' SIMCITY 2000 or Impressions' CAESAR II who want to get positive cash flow and let their creations advance as they work, it doesn't do much good with regard to Sonic's dynamic, ever-changing world.



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Volume III

WELCOME TO DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

So, you're asking yourself, "Why does Johnny care? Why should he criticize the short-sightedness of these companies?" It's because these companies have enough marketing muscle to limit the selection of the kinds of games you have told us you really want (via the Top 100 Poll and other feedback), and because they have enough development clout to inhibit publishers from making the kinds of games you want to buy. With video game publishers like Acclaim and Sega coming into the computer game market as their market declines, making extra noise with their big marketing bucks as they further clutter shelves with their running, jumping, killing, die-a-lot games, the issue becomes even more acute.

If buyers in the retail channel and some people at these big companies don't wake up pretty soon, you're likely to walk into a CompUSA or Egghead sometime and see a huge banner welcoming you to "Donkey Kong Country," home of the world's largest collection of Win 95 conversions of video games. When you ask about FALCON 9, you may be told that the store doesn't stock it. When you ask about QUAK, you may be told to download it. And good luck to anyone who tries to find a niche product like a wargame or a reasonably difficult role-playing game.

Sound extreme? Maybe it is. But then again, Intel's own numbers indicate that consumers are buying Pentiums faster than corporate buyers. Intel, Microsoft and IBM should realize that people need Pentiums to play video game conversions like drivers need Indy cars to go to the corner market. And we don't want to see these companies pave over the games we really want with a Sonic on every corner. ☹

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.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The #1 Computer Game Magazine

AUGUST 1995, NUMBER 133

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Subscription Rates: The subscription rate is \$27.94 for a one year subscription (12 issues). Canada and all other countries add \$11.00 for postage. Annual subscriptions are \$78.00 per year. Canadian (S-I) registration number is R129696075. Payment must be in U.S. dollars made by check or money order drawn upon a U.S. bank. Visa, MasterCard, AMEX accepted.

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Editorial Offices: 125 Main St., 9th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105.

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I wanted to thank you for the excellent editorial on page 12 titled "What's An Honest Gainer To Do?" It was refreshing to see the stand that you took in regard to directing your readers not to buy unbundled software—even from one of your advertisers. The Software Publishers Association, a trade group representing over 1200 software publishers and developers has been very active in trying to get organizations to stop selling unbundled product.

A committee of approximately 40 SPA members was formed this past fall to discuss what could be done to control this serious issue for the industry. Since that time, and four meetings later, much has been accomplished.

One of those accomplishments has been the development of a policy statement and bundled software update. The policy statement is designed to facilitate the efficient and legal distribution of software products bundled with hardware products. We are encouraging everybody from publishers to resellers to sign on to this statement, at which time we would publicize it so that it would pressure other organizations to do the same. With an organization signing this, we hope that other interested resellers will be able to identify the "good guys from the bad" and make an intelligent choice as to where to lawfully acquire their products. The unbundled software update is geared towards resellers/retailers and is intended to educate their employees so that all parts of the chain know what is legal, and illegal.

I hope that through our mutual efforts that we will be able to bring a stop to this. Your fi-

nal two lines sum it all; "I've seen software piracy hurt publishers and computer platforms (Atari's ST is the most dramatic case). I believe debundling has the same potential."

Peter Bernik
Litigation Manager, SPA
Washington, D.C.

The SPA policy statement is available from Peter at Pberuk@spa.org. We believe that every software publisher and reseller, as well as every hardware assembler should sign it.

WHEN YOU WISH ...

First, let me congratulate your magazine for all the improvements you've made; a year ago I wouldn't touch it, now I never miss an issue! Now, I'd like to ask a question: how does a creative and talented high-school graduate like me go about becoming a game designer, a position coveted by millions of gamers??

Igal Vaisnsteyn
Toronto, ON, Canada

P.S. Keep up the excellent work!

Thanks! Now, for all you would-be game designers, let us suggest a course of action. First, learn to program in C++. Most game companies cannot afford to take a chance on would-be designers who have great ideas but don't know what it would take, programming-wise, to implement them. Second, start noticing the names of the developers who create the programs you enjoy—DEVELOPERS, not publishers. Try to find out where they are located and, if possible, find one that you admire near you and try to become acquainted there (developers aren't usually as big or well-known as publishers, so they're often willing to listen or talk to someone who understands some-

thing about the technical feats they have accomplished. Third, subscribe to Chris Crawford's Interactive Entertainment Design newsletter (5251 Sierra Road, San Jose, CA 95132, \$36 US per year), Miller Freeman's Game Developer magazine, and/or Morph's Outpost. Fourth, attend the annual Computer Game Developers Conference in Santa Clara, CA. (For more information write to 555 Bryant Street, Suite 330, Palo Alto, CA 94301, or call (415) 948-CGDC.)

BRING BACK OLD BAG HEAD

What happened to the Rumor Guy? We loved The Rumor Guy! Get him back, pay whatever you have to and get his head back in that bag. It was nice being able to hear about the games I want to play months in advance. I've been a subscriber for a little over a year now, and a reader a lot longer. Please bring him back.

Michael Smith
via the World Wide Web

The Bag Guy responds: I find myself trapped in this Looconfilium dimension, shackled by the logistical tentacles of Og Suggoth himself. I am not dead. I have not passed this veil as some have reported, as some have misunderstood by my disappearance. I intend to make good my escape from time to time. But be forewarned, I can only escape on brief occasions and then, this horrid cesspool of evil sucks me back into oblivion. Therefore, gentle readers, remember me with fond thoughts. Welcome me on those occasions when I reappear and peruse the columns associated with each genre for such prescient tales of the future which you desire.

Editor's Translation: The mail on old Bag Guy has always been

about 50/50. Some people liked the column. Others thought it was lower than stupid. When we began to departmentalize the genres, we decided that it would be easier for our readers to find the rumors they were seeking in those departmental columns than to wade through the preposterous fiction associated with the Bag Guy. We also started to run into logistical problems, because the back page is one of the first pages to go to the printer. So, the rumors were no longer as fresh as they could be.

So, such as he was close to the hearts of many of our editors, we retired him to a dimension from which we can release him from time to time. Expect a guest appearance in an upcoming issue in a non-obtrusive way. Meanwhile, we think you'll enjoy Caralis' coxometry and find his perspective to provide refreshing counterpoint to our Editor-in-Chief's perspective in *Rants & Raves*.

Finally, to slake your thirst for new games, you need only see our Fall Feature on page 35. More filling, without all the fiction.

BRANDISHED NAPOLEON

I'm a Napoleonic Wars fan. I would appreciate it greatly if you did a special on games of this topic.

Maxwell Hamilton
Baton Rouge, LA

Our Editor-in-Chief is a Napoleonic Wars fan. He would appreciate it greatly if there were enough Napoleonic videogames on which to publish a special. Except for two or three, none of the earlier games will work on the current IBM platform. **Spectrum** **HoloByte's** **FIELDS OF GLORY**, **SSI's** **WATERLOO**, and **SSI's** **BATTLES OF NAPOLEON** are the only hand games we can think of in recent IBM history. ☺



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THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GAMING WORLD

Starflight, Carfights, And Mega-Bug-Bytes

SSI's Ambitious Lineup Plugs Into An Online, Multiplayer Future

Strategic Simulations, Inc., the single most prolific publisher of computer games over gaming's 15 year history, is moving both literally and figuratively. As SSI's Sunnyvale, CA, offices expand, they are making room for an extremely ambitious project line-up.

Besides the evolutionary changes the company is going through, there also seems to be a scent of revolution in the air, perhaps fueled by the company's new owner, **Mindscape**. At just about every level, the new buzz around the company is "online, multiplayer play." All this is occurring just as the company is making a greater commitment to support Windows '95. Thus, the SSI gaming enthusiasts of the near future may find each other an

<Alt-Tab> keystroke away, modern lights a'blinking!

In the realm of action games, SSI has several multiplayer projects in the works, the first of which may be **RETURN TO JACOB'S STAR**. This sequel to **RENEGADE**, the space combat game released earlier this year, will have essentially the same graphics and game structure as the original, but with new missions, plus modern and network play. Hopefully SSI will flesh out the **RENEGADE** universe a bit more than they did with the original.

Next up is **ASSASSIN** (working title), an action-adventure game slated for release during the first quarter of 1996. This is a side-scrolling game that focuses on exploration and puzzle-solving, while still

containing strong action elements. The graphic elements of **ASSASSIN** are important components of the game; complex lighting will enhance the game's feel, and motion-capture technology is being used to give fluid movement to the player's character.

NECRODOME, developed by **Raven** (of **HERETIC** fame) and scheduled for release in the first quarter of 1996, is basically a multiplayer demolition derby game in the **Car Wars** boardgame tradition. The player's car will be equipped with various weapons as he or she peels around an arena, keeping guns trained on rivals all the while. By successfully surviving an arena combat, players will win prizes, gain prestige and be able to equip their vehicles with bigger, badder weapons.

NECRODOME will be even



FLESH & BONES! SSI's upcoming **THUNDERSCAPE** role-playing game will sport a lean-and-mean look, as these skeletal and demonic buddies cozy up.



GENERALS IN CIVVIES Relaxing in the command post from their **ALIAS** General's labors are (left to right) Jonathan Harmon, Chris Perry and Rick Martinez. For more info on forthcoming SSI strategy games, see page 138.

more intense as a multiplayer game. Up to eight people can fight as individuals or as teams. Players can even have two people per vehicle: one to fire the weapons, and one to do the driving. Finally, plans are in place for implementing a voice-over-modem and network feature so that players will be able to scream at each other during play.

Even in the midst of this multiplayer wave, SSI is not

straying from their roots, which are in wargames and role-playing games. Wargamers should see *Broadside & Grapeshot*, page 139, for the news on that front.

As for role-players, the word is "Aden." SSI is proud of their new fantasy world (which is *not*, for the record, a TSR AD&D product), and several games are being developed to take place in that universe. The first will be *THUNDERSCAPE* a first-person RPG set in Aden. Here, players will move and conduct ranged combat in real-time, while hand-to-hand combat will be phased. A party of up to six characters is helped along by the 3D rotating automap. These characters can improve *all* skills (including spell casting) use and experience. Better still, there is no experience level cap!

The world of Aden is also the setting for an SSI action-adventure game, *ENTOMORPH*, due in September for WINDOWS and January for the Mac. Designed and developed by **CyberLore Studios**, *ENTOMORPH* offers a dark vision of a world overrun by... (can you guess?)...bugs! The player is a hero whose job is to save an unexplored island from these pests. Unfortunately, the only way to do this is to undergo a gradual metamorphosis into an insect as only Franz Kafka and Jeff Goldblum have fully experienced. As the hero undergoes various levels of this transformation, he develops new abilities, including magic, to use in his battle to save the island.

A final dispatch from Aden is that this world will also form

PLAYING LATELY?

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

The CGW
Top

Results for CGW #131, JUNE 1995

1. **X-COM: Terror From The Deep** (MicroProse)
2. **Panzer General** (SSI)
3. **Dark Forces** (LucasArts)
4. **Master of Magic** (MicroProse)
5. **NBA Live** (Electronic Arts)
6. **Descent** (Interplay)
7. **Wing Commander 3** (Origin)
8. **X-COM: UFO Defense** (MicroProse)
9. **Jagged Alliance** (Sir-Tech)
10. **Tie Fighter** (LucasArts)

Notable Quotes

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

"Thank God the graphics in X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP are mediocre. Otherwise, with gameplay this intense, I'd have constant nightmares from the images."

Andrew Prescott, Queens, NY

"I've turned into Fidel playing JAGGED ALLIANCE. Leave me alone—I busy!"

Chp ryon Unsworth, New Orleans, LA

"I wonder what DARK FORCES could have been like with a multiplayer option and three levels?"

David Hayes, South Arden, NJ

"Thanks to LucasArts for another amazing release. DARK FORCES is outstanding and I can't stop playing it!"

J. Cole, Shelton, CT

"My prayers have been answered! Thanks to NBA Live! '95, I can play with the big boys...One thing: bring back # 23 in NBA Live! '96. I love this game!"

Cosy Lee, Seattle, WA

"All of the WING COMMANDER games are great, but they end too soon. Also, it is unrealistic to fly in two 95% of the time. Otherwise, I love 'em!"

Aaron Stollen, Albany, NY

the basis for a paper-and-pencil role-playing game to be released in early 1996 by **West End Games** (which have had success with their *Star Wars*

and *Panorama* paper role-playing games). These are also plans to release the world of Aden as an expansion set for an existing collectible card

game. Clearly, SSI's marketing department has found their Garden of Eden.

—Alan Emsch and Petra Schless

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

Have we met before? Well, yes and no. Gamers who have played *MIDWINTER*, *FLAMES OF FREEDOM* and *ASHES OF EMPIRE* will instantly recognize *LORDS OF MIDNIGHT* as a Mike Singleton game.

At the outset, you control Prince Morkin, who starts off at a castle in the far-

Morkin at the river."

Publisher **Domark** is well on their way to creating a rich, large real-world environment. The level of detail in *LOM* is simply astonishing. The polygons that made up the non-script landscapes in Singleton's 8-bit games are

gone, replaced by a rich, fractal-generated tapestry. The ground is almost never entirely level or linear. It's not drawn to scale, of course—this wouldn't be a fantasy game if the rocky peaks didn't look like unfathomably immense, jagged teeth—but things seem right when you're peering down through wispy clouds from your seat atop a dragon (that's right—you can fly a dragon).

Moreover, *LOM* gives the player the opportunity to enter and roam around the multitude of buildings littering the landscape, although how this will work in practice remains to be seen. In our early preview copy, they all seemed to be endless and randomly constructed mazes that bore little relation to the shape and size of the buildings as seen from outside.

The group combat system could also stand to be fleshed out a bit. You would think that epic battles would be handled

in epic fashion, but the troops you recruit don't fight *en masse*. Their numbers are simply lumped into the resolution of personal combat between leaders, a la *PRAXIS*, on a separate, static screen.

Although *LOM* is not yet a finished product, we're fascinated by the notion of a Mike Singleton world drawn in the kind of detail never possible in his previous games. And something tells us that, amidst the hype, this might be the next RPG to seriously push the gaming envelope.

FADE TO BLACK

Thrown in prison in the sci-fi future? No problem—there's always someone around to break you out and assist you in finding and destroying the ultimate evil. Of course you might die once or thrice along the way, but hey, breaking out of your prison cell's the only part we said was easy.

So it is with *FADE TO BLACK*, **Electronic Art's** sequel to the award-winning *FLASHBACK* (which incidentally has been recently re-released by

U.S. Gold). This sci-fi thriller, however, is looking to set itself apart from its predecessor and the rest of the pack with an entirely new approach, which includes some groundbreaking visual perspectives.

This is a sequel in storyline only—your trip home is hijacked and you are taken hostage on the moon, only to be broken out by a faction of human rebels that persuade you to join in their rebellion. After that, *FADE TO BLACK* is a whole new game. It's kind of like mixing the look of *ALONE IN THE DARK* with the atmosphere of *OUT OF THIS WORLD* and then using an over-the-shoulder point of view. Of course, this first-and-a-half person perspective is supplemented with the usual cinematic camera angles gamers



Wythan the Weaver



Lords of Midnight combines the makings of an epic fantasy adventure with several unique twists like multiple character control and a fully inhabitable environment

northwest with a small circle of friends. This circle expands as you make your way across the countryside, meeting all manner of friend and foe in a journey with all the makings of an epic fantasy adventure. Of course, the ultimate goal is putting down the evil intentions of Boroth the Wallheart. Players will be able to control up to 24 characters (not simply the hero) either directly or by setting specific missions for them, like "rendezvous with



Not everyone has deadly intentions, but you sure should—with it's cool texture-mapped polygons and eerie atmosphere, *Fade to Black* should have your trigger finger itchy.

are used to. And for the most part, this innovative approach works—as Conrad leans over to peer around corners, the camera perspective shifts accordingly, allowing the player to do the same. Rounding corners is still a little tricky—the resultant camera shift is a little disorienting—but we're counting on the folks at Delphine and EA to solve this problem.

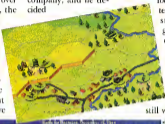
There are tons of mishapen, morphing green things out there who would just love to get their hands on you. That's where combat comes into play. Simply press the appropriate key, draw your weapon, and blast them as the camera zooms in a bit (don't forget to reload though).

The gameplay looks great, as do the graphics (which have three different resolutions, including 640 x 480) and sound. The environment has the right "creee alien spaceship" feel to it, and is plenty interactive, from opening secret doors to picking up tools and weapons. FADE TO BLACK should be moving to the forefront of gamers' minds this fall.

BATTLEGROUND: ARDENNES

Many companies rise and fall, but the hot topics in wargaming usually remain the same. Jim Rose realized this when he left his position as the

director of Avalon Hill's computer division to form his own company, and he decided



The grand old hexgrid gets a new lease on life in the tactical view of *Battleground: Ardennes*.

to concentrate first on recognizable battles, and to "do them up right, and in style." So, Talonsoft finds itself tackling nothing less than the Battle of the Bulge in *BATTLEGROUND: ARDENNES*.

The appeal of the subject matter is obvious: Nazis, the ultimate bad guys, versus the scrappy, plucky and green G.I. Joes. Without resorting to the hero worship or overly dry number-crunching of most Bulge games, *ARDENNES* finds a comfortable middle ground in dealing with slices of the Bulge at platoon level. The sequence of play will warm veteran boardgamers' hearts: a defensive fire phase

is followed by offensive fire and then assault. Don't be fooled—even with the interspersed phases, this is strictly a turn-based game. Yet therein lies one of *ARDENNES*' best attributes: It may be played as a step up for those who want something a little more serious than *PANZER GENERAL*, but who still want to avoid loads of rules and minutiae.

The interface helps the gamer along with user-friendly icons, like a vanishing tire to indicate that a unit has already moved, faded bullets to show that a unit has already fired, and binoculars that pop up when a unit is first spotted. *ARDENNES* runs well in Windows and shows

off the exquisite artwork of Charlie Kibler, probably best known for his work on *Advanced Squad Leader* and other Avalon Hill boardgames. Having Kibler's talent on board is probably the main reason that the tactical board, which combines the familiar hex-grid with 3D representations of slopes and valleys, works so well. Surprisingly, the view is clear enough that gamers can easily identify units and quickly ascertain the lay of the land. With its blend of solid historical research, narrow focus and unique visual perspective, *ARDENNES* could be an early fall wargaming hit. ☛

PIPELINE

TOP WARGAME RELEASES RATED BY THE EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS FROM GAME DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME COMPANY	RELEASE DATE
17TH HOUR Virgin	9/91
ACROSS THE BRINE MicroPhase	9/91
AGE OF IMPRES SSI	9/91
ANYFL GREEN THINGS GGP	10/91
BATTLES IN TIME GGP	9/91
BEYOND SQUAD LEADER AH	9/91
BURIED IN TIME Prosa Studios	9/91
CESAR II Impressions	9/91
CHESSMASTER 3000 Mindscape	9/91
CIV-NET MicroPhase	9/91
CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD Interplay	10/91
CRUSAADER, NO REMORSE Origin	9/91
CYBERMAGE Origin	10/91
DARKFALL Bethesda	9/91
DUNGEON MASTER II Interplay	9/91
DUST Cyclone	9/91
EMPIRE II New World	9/91
FACT ATTACK BOATS Time-Warner	9/91
FRANKENSTEIN II Interplay	9/91
G-ROME 7th Level	9/91
GLADIATORS OF BUSTINE Virgin	9/91
GHOST MOVES Spectrum Hobby	9/91
LAST BULTEMBER SSI	9/91
LEGEND OF MORNIGHT Domain	9/91
NACCI: THE GATHERING MicroPhase	9/91
MECHANAPTOR II Activision	9/91
MELLENIA GameTech	9/91
MISSION CRITICAL Legend	9/91
NAVY STRIKE MicroPhase	9/91
NCAA FOOTBALL Mindscape	9/91
PHANTASMAGORIA Sierra	9/91
PRESCHER OF ICE II Parson	9/91
THE FLEET Avalon Hill	10/91
SECRET HUNTER SSI	9/91
SIMULE Plans	10/91
SPACE DUKES Impressions	10/91
STAR CONTROL II Accolade	10/91
STEEL PANTHERS SSI	9/91
TERMINATOR Captzone	9/91
TRISIA ROMA Virgin	10/91
TRF 2000 Ocean	10/91
THE 030 LotusSoft	9/91
128 MEANS WAR MicroPhase	9/91
TOP GUN Spectrum Hobby	9/91
WARHAMMER II Mindscape	10/91
WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN Avalon Hill	10/91

News You Can Use From The Gaming Biz

Sierra On-Line recently purchased strategy/wargame publisher Impressions Software for an undisclosed amount. Impressions President David Lester points to the sale as further indication of consolidation in the industry, and says it was necessary to increase his company's "distribution clout." Although Impressions' design and

development will remain autonomous, no decision has been made yet whether its titles will be labeled as Sierra or Impressions products.

Struggling to cope with \$18 million in losses for fiscal '94, Spectrum HoloByte recently laid off approximately 10% of its worldwide force of 400 employees. The layoffs included key personnel on the FALCON

4 development team, but the product's development should not be delayed, company sources say. Spectrum President Lou Gioia says FALCON 4 will ship sometime in 1996.

Interactive Magic plans to publish Trevor Chan's CAPITALISM, CAPITALISM, a tremendously detailed business simulation with SVGA graphics and several scenarios in addition to the ran-

domized campaign game. ...

Chinon America Corporation, a manufacturer of CD-ROM drives and other computer components, has begun to manufacture stereoscopic glasses for use with computers under the name *CyberShades*. *CyberShades* will come bundled with an interesting program called DEPTH DWELLERS, a game that causes you to feel like you're playing DOOM inside a ViewMaster, as well as other games. ...

Amatec, known for its line of pinball games and its fishing program, is broadening its line to include: PUSION APPROXIM, a decaled landing simulation for the space shuttle; ATP 3-D GRAPHICS EXTENSION, an expansion of **SubLogic's** ATP: AIR TRANSPORT PILOT game with more up-to-date graphics; and SAILING SIMULATOR, a sailing simulation for smaller (non-America's Cup) craft that looks detailed in spite of its dated graphics. ...

Take 2 Software wrapped their film shoot for Ripper at the end of June. Hollywood star Karen Allen (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Avatar*) did 128 camera setups in one day, and screen veteran Burgess Meredith did 60 in one day to speed production. ... Remember **Prodigy's** grand experiment in multi-player gaming in 1992? **NEXT PRESIDENT? NEXT PRESIDENT?** **NEXT PRESIDENT?** **NEXT PRESIDENT?** allowed hundreds of gamers to participate in a simulated presidential election from pre-primary season through the November election. Now, developer **Crossover Technologies** and **Scholastic Software** are putting a **NEXT PRESIDENT** for the '96 election on their new **Scholastic Network** via the Internet.

The 64 Gigabyte QUESTION

Will Wright isn't an ordinary game designer (if there is such a thing). The genius behind *Sims-City* got involved with programming because of his fascination with robotics. When he realized that the greatest challenges in robotics were software-related, he turned to computers in earnest. He still builds robots for a hobby—he just finished something called "Kitty Puff Puff" for the RobotWar competition in San Francisco—which may have something to do with his answer to the 64 Gigabyte Question: what kind of game would you like to design given unlimited resources?

My ultimate game would not run on a desktop computer but rather in a small (cat-sized), fast, agile robot. This robot (let's call it Kitty) would exhibit highly adaptive behavior and respond (and adapt) to my verbal feedback (positive and negative).

Hardware: Pneumatic actuators, high current servos

and perhaps "memory metals" would provide the locomotive forces for Kitty. Sensor systems would be very



extensive including: visual, sonar, RF, laser-ranging, audio (with adaptive voice-recognition), tactile and thermal sensing capabilities. Power consumption will be too high for current battery (or fuel-cell) technology; therefore, Kitty will store energy in a flywheel/capacitor sub-system and recharge by plugging into an AC outlet for a few seconds every 15 minutes or so.

Considerable processing

power will be required for Kitty's intelligence. I envision a multi-processor subsumption architecture with extensive self-modeling capabilities (useful for honing adaptive strategies offline).

Software: Since Kitty will continually adapt, I can invent new games to play with it all the time. If I say "Kitty, bring me the ball," it will try different things until it has accomplished the task. Likewise, if I say "Kitty, bring me a beer," it might spend all night trying to open the refrigerator. I envision the failure modes for some tasks to be quite entertaining.

When I'm not interacting with Kitty, it will choose new tasks and skills for itself to learn (how fast can it get from point A to point B, what's the highest thing it can jump up on, etc.) After booting Kitty up in a new environment, the first task it will work on is mapping out all the available AC outlets (using visual and RF sensors).

One day, after I retire, I plan to build something like this. Really.

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MPR #110

A Tribute In Time

An Interview With Science Fiction Author Roger Zelazny About His Fantasy Adventure Game CHRONOSMASTER



Roger Zelazny, a speculative fiction author of the first magnitude (*Chronicles of Amber*, *Lord of Light*, *Roadmarks*), died of natural causes in June of 1995. He leaves a legacy of richly imagined worlds, vividly drawn characters and pleasant memories behind. At the time of his death, Zelazny had finished collaborating with Jane Lindskold on an original story called CHRONOSMASTER to be developed by DreamForge as a computer game for Intra-Corp. In spite of failing health, Roger's work ethic was such that he was planning a heavy schedule of public appearances, including one as Guest of Honor at the Gen-Con Gaming Convention this August, to promote the game.

Computer Gaming World had the privilege of interviewing Zelazny shortly before his death. We were struck by his dedication to life-long learn-

ing and his willingness to stretch his art beyond the conventional bounds with which most writers are familiar. We offer the text of that interview in memory of a brilliant, inspirational and imaginative man.

CGW: First, why did you decide to risk designing a computer game?

Zelazny: To learn what could be done. I didn't want to come along five years from now and find that everything had passed me by. Capstone gave me an opportunity, so I sat down and thought up a story that I thought would lend itself to this medium. My girlfriend, Jane, is a lifetime gamer. She read the story and came up with beautiful decision points that just added so much to the story it was unbelievable.

CGW: So, what's CHRONOSMASTER about?

Zelazny: CHRONOSMASTER involves a chase through a number of pocket universes with two protagonists who misunderstand each other at the beginning. One wants vengeance upon the providers of the pocket universes because his home planet was victimized.

CGW: That sounds something like Philip Jose Farmer's *World of Tiers*. Any homages to *Tiers* in the game?

Zelazny: Not directly, but I

am an admirer of Farmer and knew the concept was similar. In CHRONOSMASTER, most of these guys in the pocket universes were pretty nasty in their time. So, they pretty well cover up their residences and only a few places are known to each character.

CGW: *Interdimensional travel and time travel are recurring themes in many of your works—the Amber books, Eye of Cat, and time travel in Roadmarks. Is this a Minter Cheever-esque way of indicating your disappointment in current reality?*

Zelazny: It's simply a mixed bag to increase the number of colorful environments I can use.

Lindskold: It's because his imagination simply doesn't hold any bounds. These pocket universes run the gamut from cyberpunkish high tech with Dysonspheres and futuristic biker gangs to high fantasy in its most delicate form with unicorns and mythology.

CGW: Is it a difficult transition between writing a linear story and an open game?

Zelazny: I had a computer game back in '85, based on the Amber series, that was very linear. With this one, working with Jane and DreamForge, there are new possibilities with every new wrinkle in the plotline. So, refinements are not like laborious rewrites, and Jane helps with the gaming part.

Lindskold: We went through Roger's first design

together and talked over the differences between a story and the game. Roger is used to being able to make a character do anything he wants. In a game, that just doesn't happen.

CGW: Jane, had you written games before?

Lindskold: I had played Chaosium games and GURPS adventures. So, I used those modules and a DreamForge design document for another game as models. Working in the same house/office with Roger, I could always ask him how he would solve a given problem.

CGW: So, what is the game-play like?

Lindskold: It's very open. You don't have to start at "A"—you can choose any point. Or opt out of a tough universe if your character isn't ready for it. I designed a lot of puzzles, but if a person doesn't want to think, they can always fight their way through it. Of course, like in many of Roger's novels, the combat won't always be useful. His heroes have to be persons of both action and intelligence.

Zelazny: That's because there is a lot of moral ambiguity in the game. I think the longer you live and the more you see, the less black and white things appear and the more shades of gray they become. So, there is even a villain who turns out to have a sense of honor in the game which he didn't have in the earlier years.

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Looking Glass Technologies, Cambridge, MA (800) 360-7455



HI OCTANE

Fight or flight? That's the defining question in **Hi OCTANE**, the latest release from the wacky chaps at **Bullfrog Software**. Bullfrog has taken the beautiful graphics engine of **MAGIC CARPET**, given it some gravity, and turned it into a thrill-a-millisecond hovercraft racing/combat game. The feel of hovercraft control is perfect: momentum will slam your greening craft into

CAR JACKING 101 The Maco Core engine has been customized into a missiles-and-mayhem hot-rod in **Hi Octane**.

walls on tight turns, and you'll float slowly down to earth after jumping off a high ramp. The six courses are varied and challenging, and the car-to-car machine gun and missile warfare is intense. The standard VGA mode graphics are as impressive as **MAGIC CARPET**'s, and the display options even include a crisp Super VGA

GONE FLYIN' Life in the skies of Funer Unwars is gorgeous, relaxing and unbelievably real.

Technologies comes as close as you can get. It does so by rendering photo-realistic terrain on the fly—at resolutions up to 1024x768!—and

MULTIMEDIA

CELEBRITY POKER

"Morgan Fairchild, Jonathan Frakes and Joe Piscopo walked into a casino to play some cards, Joe says to Morgan..." Sound like the lead of a Hollywood joke? It's actually the premise behind **MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER**, a Windows poker simulation where your opponents are the digital versions of the aforementioned actors. While those looking for fast-hand poker should



THREE JACKERS Vegas and Hollywood join decks in **MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER**

probably look elsewhere—this is not a 20-hands-in-5 minutes kind of game—card players who like a little visual spice with their gambling should enjoy it. Surprisingly, the flow of the game is smooth, as is the digitized video and sound, although

the way the players stare at you between play can be a little unnerving. As you play seven standard variations of poker, from 5-card draw, deuces wild to 7-card stud, you'll be entertained by your celebrity hosts, particularly Joe Piscopo, who seemed to have entirely too much fun during the filming. IBM CD-ROM, \$49.95. Circle Reader Service #397.

NEW WORLD COMPUTING, HOLLYWOOD, CA, (800) 325-8898

PLAYING

mode, although a very high-end Pentium (or P6) is needed to run it smoothly. Multiplayer network support is provided, allowing up to eight players to face and race each other. IBM CD-ROM, \$59.99. Circle Reader Service #394.

ELECTRONIC ARTS, SAN MATEO, CA, (415) 571-7171.

POWERHOUSE

Control the energy, control the world—that's the grim thesis underlying **POWERHOUSE**, the latest business strategy game from the folks who brought you **AIR BUCKS** and **DETROIT**. In a power-starved world, you and three computer opponents will use every natural resource available (there are nine) to vie for



LIKE A SHMESTACK Powerhouse provides ample opportunities for the power-hungry.

financial superiority. The turn-based gameplay consists of sending out survey teams to ascertain which regions will yield what natural resource (coal, oil, nuclear reaction fuel, etc.), then building the means to convert that resource into power. Along the way you'll have to deal with changing governments, environmental disasters and dwindling resources, not to mention hostile takeovers and war. With scrappy graphics and

lots of bells and whistles (live video, great sound and a random world generator), this Windows title looks like it might be the ticket for gamers looking for economic kicks. We only wish network or modem play was included... IBM CD-ROM, \$69.95. Circle Reader Service #395.

IMPRESSIONS SOFTWARE, CAMBRIDGE, MA, (203) 676-9002

WORLD HOCKEY '95

"Do you believe in Miracles?" Anyone familiar with the 1980 United States Olympic Hockey team does. And they also know the joys of International Hockey, which **Merit Studios** is trying to capture with **World Hockey '95**. Unfortunately, this hockey sim doesn't even come close to challenging EA's **NHL Hockey** line, or any other hockey

game on the market for that matter. Poor graphics, subpar gameplay and a clumsy interface all join forces to put this game out of championship contention in the first round. Which is too bad, since the game offers some innovative ideas, like a training facility for practicing offensive and



HOCKEY HOCKEY World Hockey '95 has some great ideas, but never really gets past the blue line.

defensive skills, as well as multiplayer international tournaments. IBM CD-ROM, \$49.95. Circle Reader Service #398.

Merit Studios, Dallas, TX, (800)238-4277

THE CIVIL WAR

Where is Ken Burns when you need him? The producer/director of PBS's highly-acclaimed mini-series *The Civil War* could definitely teach game designers and producers a thing or two about how to properly capture the scope of the greatest conflict in U.S. history. **The Civil War**, a new attempt from **Empire**, certainly tries to push all the right buttons. A huge database gives more biographical information than details on units, and *Battle in the Civil*

War, a 48-page booklet by British historian Paddy Griffith is also included. The game itself is ambitious—some might say too ambitious. The strategic game requires that you deal with Army organization, supply, morale, blockade running, building ironclads and riverine units...you get the idea. While the effects of these options



BEAUGRAND'S BANE There's plenty going on in *The Civil War*, but the real-time action can get frustrating for any commander.

may be lessened, most cannot be turned off. All of this would be less of a problem if the game weren't played in daily turns! For individual battles, the real-time system is not that different than **Impressions' THE BLUE AND THE GREY**, although morale is more of a factor. And the usual caveats concerning the AI definitely apply here. IBM CD-ROM, \$69.95. Circle Reader Service #396.

EMPIRE SOFTWARE, GAITHERSBURG, MD, (800) 216-9706



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Autumn Avalanche



CGW's Guide To The Biggest Fall Season Ever

When you think of autumn, you probably think of New England's fall season with its kaleidoscopic panoply of foliage. In the world of computer games, autumn signals the annual flood of graphic plumage and crisp game play which begins in September and continues to warm you through the cold winter months. Just as movie studios try to wow you with their early summer and Christmas releases, computer game publishers feel it's necessary to win your attention as the leaves change in order to own your mindshare throughout the rest of the year.

So, every year the software publishers target the latter part of the year for their hottest new technologies, most promising movie/gamebook licenses, and latest concepts from their top game designers. The fourth quarter of each calendar year is considered a "make or break" fiscal quarter for most companies, and shipping by "Christmas at the latest" is the heartfelt desire of every developer. Of course, not all of the "Christmas" products actually become available for that special "under the tree" delivery service, but nearly every software company shoots for the holiday season.

This month, we forecast the upcoming Fall and Holiday seasons with our annual summer coverage of computer games in development. This is, to our knowledge, the biggest avalanche of new game titles ever. So, as an added bonus, we decided to choose our favorites for the Top Ten computer games expected to ship between August and December of 1995 and describe them in the accompanying story, as well as offer a few short descriptions of titles within the hobby. We hope you'll find them as interesting as we do.

Action In Autumn

Pinball wizards, virtual video, car crashes, space debris and cool 3D will pave the way for computer game action during the coming months. Judging by how much larger this section is than all the others, this Fall should produce a bumper crop of action titles for grinning reapers.

The 3-D Score: Of course, when you think of action, you probably think of 3-D. And when you think of 3-D, your mind turns to DOOM. For you hard-core DOOM fanatics, *D1Zone 2* from WizardWorks should be dishing up 1,000 new levels for DOOM and DOOM II shortly before this issue hits the stands. A new interface will let bloodthirsty DOOM-nators change skill levels, challenge another player, select turbo, accelerate monsters, start levels without monsters, respawn them, and more. And, if *Deathmatch* is your bag, keep your BFG aimed at WizardWorks' *D1Moo*, their latest offering of 500 new levels for DOOM and DOOM II that lets you practice your most tendering on three unsuspecting friends.

In case you're still not DOOMed, *GT Interactive* plans to take care of that by releasing a retail version of the original *Doom*, complete with a brand new level, *The Flesh Consumed*. The package will include five free hours on DWANGO, the multiplayer game system. They also plan to release *Moonlit Doom*, a collection of 1000+ new levels for *Doom* and *Doom II* created for the most part by fans of the game.

If that's still not enough, consider *Capstone's* *Witch-Haven*, a very close sibling of *Raven Software's* *Hexen*. This violent, first-person action game is set in a fantasy universe ruled by a coven of witches who must be eradicated from their lairs. As the player slaughters the witches' hordes, they gather more power and more powerful weapons to do yet more of the same.

Of course, the game many action fans want to know about most is *id Software's* *Quake*, the spiritual sequel of *Doom*. *id* is still being very secretive about this one, though they have shown us some of the technology. *Quake* will be set in a true 3D, high-res environment. The coloring and lighting effects in the gothic environ-

ment are beautiful, but the true measure of this game is in the gameplay, which we haven't seen. Yet, if *id* can make the environment as immersive and haunting as *Doom*, this could be yet another mega-hit.

Delphine Software, the French creators of the side-scrolling action game *Fushack*, have discovered the third dimension in their spin-off, *Face to Black*. In the new game, the violent, far-future world of *Fushack* has been rendered in full 3D to create something like a SF version of *Alone in the Dark*. Players will battle hideous creatures with their lasers; view the mayhem from many shifting camera angles; and manipulate plenty of high-tech gadgets to solve object-oriented puzzles and add new cinematic splash.

Of course, DOOM-style games aren't the only types of 3D action games that grab gamers. **Bullfrog Software** has already gleaned great success from *Magic Carpet II*: The Netherlands and *Crimson*, a *Magic Carpet*-style game that unfolds under the sea. The sequel includes underground and night levels, as well as new creatures, spells, landscape effects, and extended level goals.



Bullfrog's *THE INDUSTRIALS*

The underwater game has terrific graphics that give you a real sense of being submerged. Plus, *Crimson's* gameplay looks to be hot and heavy, with network play as a key feature. Indeed, net play appears to be a key element in Bullfrog's product strategy across the board.

For something completely different, the Bullfrog team is working on a very exciting project called *The Industrials*. In this game, players will create their own superhero—determining physical and mental attributes, designating home town, etc.—

Autumn Avalanche

and then bash their way through a 3D cityscape from a first-person perspective. The cities/battlegrounds are very detailed, with realistic traffic patterns, pedestrian traffic, and all sorts of objects like lamp posts and mailboxes to be used in combat with a supervillain. Eight-player network play is the goal for this ambitious project.

Naturally, supervillains aren't the only opponents who can create havoc in an urban environment. Can you say, "Japanese monster movie?" Fans of the old Japanese monster movie genre will find two products stamping their way later this year. One is 47-Tek's *Go-Nin Team 47*, a giant monster fighting game in true 3D that pits different hero robots against menacing Japanese monsters. The battles will take place in several full-fledged city environments including San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and a futuristic downtown Tokyo. Another is *Masters*

Isoun from Magnet Interactive (now distributed by 20th Century Fox Interactive), a 3D action/strategy game where up to eight players compete in attempting to become the Godzilla of the Net in the tradition of the classic *Cyber, Crumble and Chew*.

Some other 3D titles seem to be enhanced versions of old friends. *Cyber Conno* (developed by I-Motion for Philips Media) looks something like *Simutronics' CyberSpace*, except with more detailed 3D villains and, not being hampered by network latency, a faster frame rate. Fans of *Interplay's Descent* may enjoy *Virgin's Zone Raiders*. This game features similar 360-degree movement and network play, but adds mission-based challenges to futuristic outlands known as zones. *Argonaut's Alien Axi*, published in the U.S. by Philips, is fully rendered 3D action in the style of *Interplay's Cyberia*. *Alien Axi* also features an interesting dimension as you try to decide whether to trust the alien you encounter or not.

From the designers of last year's action/adventure hit, *Ecstasia*, comes *Psygnosis' Urban Decay*. It uses an enhanced, SVGA version of the *Ecstasia* engine, and it looks fantastic. Your character blasts his way through a dark-future New York and a thin sci-fi storyline. Buckets of gore and quick-draw mechanisms should have action

gamers dancing to a semi-automatic beat. Also, the next *Lemmings* game will take away the familiar side view of the action and replace it with a full 3D environment where players can look at the puzzles from



Magnet Interactive's *Masters Isoun*

any perspective they choose, even a first-person *Lemmings* view. The level puzzles will be in the same vein as previous games, but will take on a new character. Our concern is that the simplicity of the original might be lost in the new 3D complexity.

VEHICULAR MANSLAUGHTER: This fall, the store shelves at your local software shelves may be an exaggerated version of L.A.'s freeways from a few summers back. Southern California's freeways became notorious for freeway shootings during that summer. To gamers, it reminded us a lot of *Steve Jackson's Car Wars* boardgame where you aim your vehicles and proceed to terminate everyone else's transportation with extreme prejudice. *Origin Systems*, publishers of *Arcades* (the original computer version of *Car Wars*), is thinking about an updated version of *Car Wars*, and *Apogee* is considering a monster truck game with weaponry. While you wait, though, you can still be trading bullets and more potent missiles with your fellow drivers in games



Psygnosis' *Urban Decay*

The CGW

Top 10

In sifting through the upcoming autumn avalanche of games, we picked the entire staff on the upcoming games which we are most looking forward to playing. By having two rounds of voting and using the college football poll system, we came up with the following "Top 10," presented in descending order.

- 1 ALLIED GENERAL (SSI):** If there was anything questionable about the progenitor of this game, *Planet General*, it was taking the parody-style of the *Kral General* in the title role. Nonetheless, the game offered lovely graphics, a unique role-playing aspect to its combat game, solid play balance, exciting sound effects and a-rally play. *Allied General* provides all the play value and thrills of its predecessor with new units and a "heart-on-lining" perspective.



with names like **MAXIMUM ROADWALL**, **SCREAMER**, **DEAD END**, **RAPID ASSAULT**, **DESTRUCTION DERBY**, and **TWISTED METAL**.

Psychosis' Destruction Derby, a multiplayer racing game where the object is to smash or be smashed, is essentially the old Saturday night speedway event. The graphics look terrific, and the gameplay will be bruising, especially with several humans going bumper to bumper on a network. **WipeOut** is another networkable combat/racing game from **Psychosis**, but set in a future milieu. Players will battle over 10 tracks using 8 different craft and 9 weapons. **WipeOut** will offer league play options for extended multiplayer competition. Also in the multiplayer vein is **Assault Rix**, sometimes described as a filled-polygon version of **Spectre**. In **Assault Rix**, players pilot tanks within a maze and blast each other with a variety of projectile weapons.

Sony will counter with **Twisted Metal**, a vehicular gladiatorial combat game designed by **SingleTrak Software**. The game, which allows you to climb up from the training arena to the killing fields of urban

streets, will originally appear on the PlayStation. EA's calmer race game is **Road & Track: The Need For Speed**, a non-violent game where you drive exotic sports cars like the Lamborghini Diablo, Dodge Viper, Porsche 911, and others in head-to-head modem play and solo competition.

Automotive assault fans should also watch out for **Screamers**, a **Road Racer**-style game from **Virgin** where you race through an urban environment, and **Maximum Roadwall** from **Take 2**, where you play a cyclist of death out to kill your opponent.

Finally, don't forget French developer **CRYO's** 3D rendered racing game, **Dead End**. Published by **Philips Media**, this is a car chase game to the death that suggests what a driving test for James Bond ought to be like. So, there certainly ought to be plenty of screeching tires and catastrophic car crashes for action gamers before the end of the year.

Virtual Vice: Two thrillers and three space operas will point the way for action games with full-motion video. **Philips' Thunder In Paradise** uses footage from the television show (an episode entitled "The Major" and the Minor") to integrate interactive movie segments with arcade-style sequences. Meanwhile, **Capcom** has hired a former James Bond, George

Lazenby, to perform in **Fox Hat**, an interactive spy thriller which uses streaming video to handle its fast-moving action sequences.



LucasArts' **Rebel Assault 2**

In space operadom, **Origin Systems** is currently hard at work shooting the cinematic footage that will provide segues during **Wing Commander IV**. The Christmas release will bring back the same star-studded cast to the familiar universe. The cinematics are being shot on 35 millimeter film to slightly improve the look on the PC and to take advantage of the **Sony PlayStation's** advanced color palette on that version. It will also use more physical sets than **Wing III** in order to enhance the visual texture.

At **LucasArts**, **Vince Lee** hopes these are the droids you're looking for as he films **Rebel Assault II** with full-motion video (FMV) sequences of actors in actual **Star Wars** costumes, including old **Dark Holmet** himself. The FMV sequences give the game a **Star Wars** movie look and help tie the game's 15 different levels together. In addition to flying **Rebel fighters** through elaborate levels, gamers will get to shoot at real-looking **Storm Troopers** and buzz through a boggy terrain on speeder bikes. Best of



Electronic Arts' **Road & Track: The Need For Speed**

2 CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD (AtariPlay) Promising non-endless variety, strategic planning with economic micromanaging and tactical battle sequences which graphically put either "militaristic-like" battle scenes to shame, **Conquest of the New World** may well be a strategy gamer's dream game. Naturally, the proof is in the play-balancing, but we think this may well be the steepest hill of the fall season.



3 CivNet (WarePlanet) What can we say? You asked for it, you got it. **CivNet** is the multiplayer version of Sid Meier's **Civilization**. With capacity for both Play-By-Email (PBEM) and network play, this new approach to Meier's designs will offer new opportunities for diplomacy and double-cross.



4 QUARKER 04 Software Everyone is anxious to see whether **Quark** will offer the same seismic bang for the buck as its predecessor, **Quark**, if graphics are any indicator, the public setting may well envelope gamers in a gaming environment that is even richer than **Quark's**. We're definitely impressed with the art and lighting effects you've seen, but unfortunately if **Quark** released source shots yet.

Autumn Avalanche

all, you'll be able to save the game after each level.

Finally, in *Digital Picture's* futuristic action/adventure game, *Maxim Suvaz*, your 21st century protagonists will have to see both their masters and their minds in order to survive. Yasmine Bleeth (of *Baywatch* fame) and Walter Koentig (Chekov in the original *Star Trek* series) will co-star in the game.

Space Blasters: In the early years of computer gaming, space games were a staple. So, it's not surprising that there were games like Atari's famous *Star Raiders* and games based on science fic-

defending them against outside aggressors. The *Berserker* game will feature Super VGA graphics and a detailed astronomical model. Players fly space combat missions against the mechanoid alien threat of *Saberhagen's* universe and fight hand-to-hand in *Doom*-like boarding sequences. The light-sourced and texture-mapped hi-res graphics look great, and should run quickly as well, especially with graphic accelerator cards.

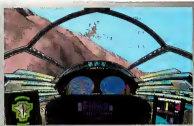
Bethesda Softworks will soon unveil *10th Planet*, a networkable space shooter developed in conjunction with Hollywood special effects house *Centropolis* (*StarGate*, *Universal Soldier*) that reverses a common graphic trend. Instead of the ships' textures being more detailed at a distance and pixelating as you close range, the ships' textures get even more detailed as you close. **Microsoft's** *Fury 3*, a Windows 95 game where players duck and dodge a horde of enemies while making attacks on ground installations with their futuristic aircraft, uses the same graphic engine as *Apogee's* *Terminal Velocity*. The two



Bethesda Softworks' 10th Planet

tion author Fred Saberhagen's *Berserker*. It is also not surprising that both are getting new looks from new publishers. *Interactive Magic* will pay homage to the Atari 2600 classic with *Star Raiders*, a traditional first-person space combat game where players will race around a collection of space stations,

games are nearly identical, except that *Terminal Velocity* will offer network play and will not be Windows 95 compatible. In addition, *Virgin* and *Orbital Studios* will present a space game called *Alien Alliance* that could surprise a lot of gamers. It is a space combat game in the *X-Wing* and *Wing Comm-*



Orbital Studios' Alien Alliance

on traditions, but it has a much more robust structure to it. Gamers will work their way up through the ranks of a space navy, starting with wingman and working up to fleet commander. Each stage will give the player more power to direct the war as they see fit.

Those who want to keep their futuristic bottles on the ground may opt for *Warner Interactive's* fast action tank-style "combat simulator" adapted from their own hit, *T-10s*. The game places you into an arena of buddies vying for the title. Modem play and possibly network play will be supported. Another option, for those who enjoy *Activision's* *MicroWarrior II* stand-alone, is the full set of network options that allow LAN players to square off against each other. *Net-Mech*, an add-on package for *MWII* with support for up to eight players, will be released early this fall.

Heavyweight Fighters: Since the action genre was virtually built upon fighting games, it's appropriate that there are plenty of new ones expected in the Fall. *Capcom* is adapting their mega-hit, *Street Fighter*, for two new venues. *Super Street Fighter II* is a new animated contest for the PC, and *Street*

5 CASSAR II (Impressions): The original *Cassir* had plenty of gameplay to offer, but some gamers thought the graphics were less than inviting and that the "Spartan" economic model needed to be tied closer to military/historical considerations. Those objections are definitely met in *Cassir II*. Each potential edifice is rendered in incredible detail and the game feels less like an empire in a vacuum.

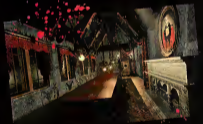


6 TFX-2000 (Doran): TFX showed us that *Doran* could build a simulation, as well as the motion games for which they were previously well-known. This latest grabber, based on the *NASA Earthfighter 2000* takes it over the top. The flight model and instrumentation is significantly more accurate than the earlier version of the game and the hi-res terrain steals the show.



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7 CDs

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FEAR: The *Movief* is a Sony PSX product that takes advantage of the machine's superior capacity for handling video.

At the same time, **GT** will put the moves on the fighting game market with *Movief Komor 3*, a faithful translation of the coin-op hit. The third game in the series will offer eight new characters, two new bosses, new backgrounds, and network/modern play. Another coin-op port is Warner Interactive's *Pinball Rival*, the highly acclaimed head-to-head fighter that pits prehistoric creatures against one another.

Epic Megagames will release the sequel to *One Must Fall*, the fighting robot game that surprised the action game world last year. The sequel will offer more detailed robots, extra moves, a parallax scrolling background and five or six new 'bots. This game is Epic's intermediate step toward a full 3D fighting game to follow in 1996.

Pinball Wizards: 21st Century made its name through a strong line of pinball games. The company's new *Pinball World* combines 20 thematically distinct pinball games into one, giant, contiguous pinball adventure. *Pinball World* features lots of arcade-style subgames and enough connected tables to give pinballers more than a few quarters worth of fun.

Empire Interactive has his own interesting take on a PC pinball. *Pinball!* is a 3-D pinball game played from the player's-eye perspective (you

can see the whole table from a 3/4 view). The "camera" will zoom around the table and follow the ball (a neat effect which certainly won't help your score), and there will be a "dot-matrix" display on the scoreboard that will show bonus animation and provide for bonus video game sequences.

Virgin is also entering the pinball deathtrap with *Hexes 3-D Pinball*, a beautiful looking game with six different tables and a choice of 2D or 3D perspectives for each. **Epic Megagames** will follow their pin-

ners, and *Monkey Mayhem*. The tables will be of the familiar scrolling variety with a few extras including "dot-matrix" animation at bottom of screen, and music videos playing on the table of *Rock Makers*. Look for *Extreme Pinball* to be released through **Electronic Arts** this fall.

Triumphs, Fate: In a more traditional vein for action games, **Activision's Pinball** Hexes sports lush graphics and surprisingly authentic gameplay. It looks just like the SNES version, a platform game remake of the old Atari 2600 classic, but is much longer and allows you to size the play window to add to the challenge if you become too expert.

Acclaim, a fixture in action on the video game side, is promising a host of new titles, most being console-based ports. *Avon Tazooz* looked more complex than the usual side-scrolling action game and features graphics that put it up a notch. The company is also using its strength in licensing to unleash *Genesis Forever* and *Jazz Dazz* as standard platform games.

Fans of *Jazz Jackrabbit*, the cute side-scrolling action game from **Epic Megagames**, should be delighted to learn that a sequel is in the works. The next game will feature *Jazz* and a new character, *Spaz*, *Jazz's* whacked-out brother. The character sprites will be 30% larger, and the animation, created by traditional animators, will be superb. Look for the sequel as a Windows 95 product this winter.

Microsoft's Return of Arkose is a collection of much-loved coin-op arcade games from the 80s, including *Pac Man*, *Dig Dug*, *Pole Position* and *Gaussin*. These games will all appear in Win 95, faithfully recreated in all their glory. Perhaps the most stunning action game, however,



21st Century's *Pinball World*

ball success with *Extreme Pinball*, a collection of four tables: *Medieval Knights*, *Urban Chaos*, *Rock-Mak-*

7 TOP GUN (Spectrum Hobbyco): The interactive movie wrapping that surrounds this cocky level flight simulator is somewhat *Wing Commander*-esque since these classic star segments roll up for each mission. Yet, the flight simulation itself is an attempt by the noted arc publisher to introduce everyone to the exciting joys of hotrod combat.



8 DUNGEON Keeper (Bellfrog): If there is one thing that ball-gaming has done well throughout its history, the developer has been successful at getting gamers to look at situations from new perspectives. From the legendary look of the original *Panorama* to the 3D voices of *Meat Cancer*, the minds of Bellfrog have challenged us with new ideas and visual experiences. Now,



instead of boring 3-D dungeons will be forced to see if gamers will find the error on the other side as they try to defend their dungeons from would-be heroes and heroes.

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will be *Virgin's Heart of Darkness*, a Prince of Prasi-style side-scrolling game with incredible graphics. You play the role of a young boy pulled into a nightmare world of his own imagination. The gameplay is similar to other side-scrolling titles, but the action and visuals are terribly imaginative. Add the best animation we've ever seen on a PC to the mix, and we may have an action game mega-hit on our hands. Keep your eye on this one late this year.

Smarter And Purer: Looking Glass Technologies, the techno-wizards behind *SYSTEM Shock* and *FUDER UNLIMITED*, are applying their 3D skills to a game of tactical man-to-man combat, *Terra Nova*. Players will personally control one member of a three-person squad, while giving "wingman" orders to the other

two. Players can equip their squadmates with three types of battle-suits, determine their combat attitude, and lead them into combat on beautiful "voxel" terrain. *Terra Nova* will come with 40 scenarios plus a scenario builder.

CRUSADER: NO REVERSE is the first game in a new line of action products from Origin. *CRUSADER* is a mission-based action game where players assume the role of a Silencer, an elite killer for a consortium of opera-



Origin Systems' **CRUSADER: NO REVERSE**



Virgin Interactive's **HEART OF DARKNESS**

tors, who breaks away from his day job in order to join the Resistance. The missions take place in a 3D world seen from an overhead perspective, and the player must run, crouch, jump, roll, and blast his way through waves of evil. Ninety minutes of full motion video are thrown into the mix for flavor.

Virgin also has a game that blends standard arcade fare with elements of strategy and adventure. **AGE**

WARREN: F-111X is a shooter that puts you in the cockpit of a hybrid aircraft and sends you off to various global hotspots to solve one mission after another. **AGE WARREN: F-111X** will appear first on Sony's PSX and then the PC. Another exciting concept is Bullfrog's upcoming **DUNGEON KEEPER**. Players assume the persona of an evil creature protecting his lair from square-jawed, straight-faced good guys who want to rid the world of your evil. Players hire creatures, create traps, determine treasure hoarding sites, and place them strategically around their dungeon. You can jump to any creature and fight from a first-person view. Management of evil creatures will also be key, as players must maintain creature loyalty by playing off of greed or fear, i.e., you have to either bribe creatures whose loyalty is flagging or hold ritual sacrifices to keep them in line. Bullfrog is shooting for 32-player(!) net play on this one.

Virgin also has a game that blends standard arcade fare with elements of strategy and adventure. **AGE**

9 MAGIC THE GATHERING (MicroProse): We are curious to see if the table-top phenomena of the decade will translate well to the computer milieu. As observed in our June cover story, the boardgame giant will have an adventure game wrapping which serves as a tutorial, as well as offer access to a broader on-line world of competition and reputation.



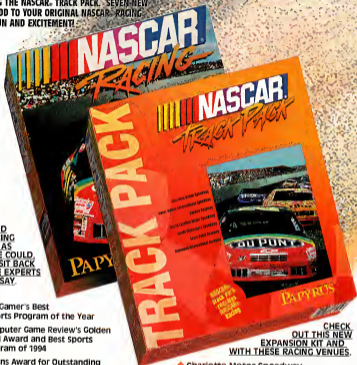
10 THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGONFALL (Bethesda): If *DAGONFALL*'s story even measures up to that of the new role-playing aspects and significantly enhanced visual genre, it will far eclipse its successful predecessor, the *ELDER SCROLLS: Arena*. Character advancement/disadvantages, attributes, object-oriented possessions and customizable characters are just part of the new improved package.



That's the Top 10 from the CGW Editors. Now, it's your choice. Participate in our week-long ZiffNet event on CompuServe, August 17-18, and vote for the games you are most anxious to play this fall.

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Autumn Avalanche

A New Season Of Adventure

Medieval fantasy, a perennial in the garden of adventure gaming, will still be a presence in the latter part of 1995, but supernatural detectives, real-world thrillers, gothic horror, time travel, sci-fi scenarios and cartoon heroes seem to be the order of the season.

SUPERNATURAL SENSATIONS: Jone Jonser, the creator of the schattenjager (supernatural hunter) *Gaean*. Next for Sierra, has written another terrific story where you are not quite certain whom the supernatural ends and the psychological begins. *Gaean*: *Hour 2: The Beast Within* uses photographed backgrounds with video-taped actors to convey the suspense when the schattenjager returns to his ancestral homeland, Germany. Another blend of supernatural and psychological occurs when *21st Century* breaks out of the pinball mode and sets *Swirex* in the near future. Tim Machin is a re-

porter investigating the death of a friend. As Tim, you begin to be visited by dark visions and end up experiencing a rich fictional world in the "Sierra-style" side view. There will also be FMV scenes sprinkled throughout this game which is expected to implement a workable branching story structure that could lead to several different endings.

WE TALK TAPS INTO THE SUPERNATURAL, as well, with *Swirex*, a point and click "vampire western" where you visit a ghost town in the role of a supernatural bounty hunter. Another approach to the supernatural detective is in *Electronic Arts' Psychic Detective*. It's an FMV game where players take the role of a PI with the power to jump into other people's minds. Naturally, said PI must use that power to solve a grisly murder. The game features visual effects that look almost pinched from MTV, but the gameplay may not meet the needs of experienced adventurers.

The most ambitious detective project, however, has to be *Ripper* from *Take 2*, an FMV production with a \$2.5 million budget. With Karen Allen, Burgess Meredith and Christopher Walken in the cast and a soundtrack by Blue Dyster Cult (Don't Fear The Ripper, indeed!), this horror game seems to capture gothic and cyber at the same time.

Interplay's McRaven won't ship till early next year, but it looks like sort of a cyberpunk *Twin Peaks* with a Robin Hood twist. Finally, though it isn't a supernatural detective, *GameTek* opts for a gunsh-

spoo with *Star Shooter*, a satire with somewhat lower production values than *Under A Killing Moon*.

WELCOME TO MR. REAL WARRIOR: Real-world adventure seems to be garnering more interest among adventure game designers. Sierra's latest *Police Quest* features SWAT team tactics and is a mixture of puzzle-solving and small unit tactics. Again, former L.A. Police Chief Gates and former *Cops* producer Tammy Dargan are designing the game with cooperation from the L.A.P.D.

ACTIVISION OPTED FOR "SPOOKS" OVER "COPS" in *The Great Game*, a high-tech spy adventure which the company is developing in conjunction with ex-CIA big cheese William Colby. The game was shot in 35mm film, and gameplay will involve point-of-view navigation through photo-realistic environments, a



Sierra On-Line's *Gaean: Hour 2: The Beast Within*

strict, non-looping conversation system, and puzzles that involve high-tech gadgets like spy satellites, wire-tapping, and photo manipulation technology.

CUSTOM CUT-UPS: Virgin's *Tomesback* features the digitized video of Christopher Lloyd as a Saturday

LITTLE SHOTS OF HORROR

Gothic horror fans will find Mary Shelley *Walpolecraft's* ghost howling over the industry, as Interplay unleashes *Frankenstein*. Appropriately subtitled *Tombs of the Undead*, the game lets you view the 3D world without the benefit of memory or experiences (you are, after all, freshly resurrected from the dead). If the plot really turns on the ethical and moral choices which the designers are describing, *Frankenstein* should be a winner.

In some ways we feel like *Buffy* in the old Rocky circles ("This time for sure!") when we write about the next two games: *Phantoms* and *The Hunt*. Both were expected no later than last fall season, both have yet to ship as of press time. *Robert Williams' Phantoms* features some new wrinkles in the Sierra graphic adventure interface

and an eerie game atmosphere that vividly captures the Shirley Jackson house-possessed flavor of the story. *Triplay's The Hunt* is the sequel to *The Ten Quest* and offers much better video and a significantly better sense of story/suspense/pacing than its best-selling ancestor.

Finally, we are extremely curious about *The Dark Eye*, a graphically rich adventure game from Inscap, a new player in the gaming world. *Admiral Doug Bowick (Brooklyn, Atlanta, Cosby)* has added his stop-frame animation talents to the 3-D rendered worlds of this Poe-inspired macabre adventure. Adding further spice, *William S. Burroughs* contributes his voice and *Thomas Dolby* his musical talents.



continued on page 48.

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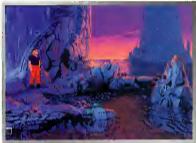
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Autumn Avalanche

morning cartoonist who is sucked into the world of his own creation. So, the player ends up interacting with a cartoon environment and cartoon characters represented by voice talent such as Don DeLuise, Tim Curry and others. The basic story deals with a war between King Hlugh and his "Fluffy Fluffy Bun Buns" and the evil King Nefarius.



LucasArts' The Doo

Triobyte has taken their 3D rendered backgrounds, a la *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour*, and integrated them with Hanna-Barbara-style Saturday morning cartoon characters for their upcoming *Don DeLuise*. The game is a humorous little romp where a U.S. family goes back to the Scottish homeland and discover it's haunted. Did someone say "Scoobie Doo Meets 7th Guest?"

Even Germany's *Blue Byte Software* hired an animation studio to bring to life *Genm*, a cross between *Sesame Street*'s "Cookie Monster" and the short-lived sit-com alien "ALF." The delightful cartoon protagonist goes crazy for outer space food. The flip side is the case for the baddies in *Sanctuary Woods*: *Demon Burger*. They chase your character over dozens of worlds, while you try to convince them you're more than Purina Alien Chow in a cartoonish plot with better sound and animation than the typical Saturday morning fare.

ADVENTURE BY THE CLOCK: *Vic Tokai's The Sphinx* allows you to play either an Egyptologist or an occultist in this point and click adventure. *Knowledge Adventure* aimed their *Pyramid* at a younger crowd, but it's a fascinating game which sets the clock back to 1908. From this point, you're transported back into time to build a Great Pyramid for the ancients. Think of it as part adventure/puzzle game, part educational game, and

part "software toy" in the *SimCity* sense. If Egypt isn't your nostalgic passion, *Miniscap's Aztec's Tear* may offer you a new challenge. It's a scientific whodunnit where you compete against other teams of archeologists in a race to grab ancient treasures in a beautifully-rendered neo-Aztec world.

If you don't have time for a full-scale excavation, though, there may be time for some mini-adventures. *Worm Jones and His Desktop Adventures* from LucasArts is a *Worms* program that creates varied, short games, each one playable in about an hour. The player controls Indy as he battles treasure hunters, Indians and the obligatory Nazis to rescue precious artifacts of ancient Indian tribes.

SPACE PERIOD: Sequels will appear soon on 1995's list of space operas for 1995. *Accolade's Star Control III* is fast nearing completion. Designed by *Legend Entertainment*, but not radically changing a successful formula, this sci-fi action adventure will have all the features we loved and then some: different perspectives for space combat, animatronic style aliens, and what has been

promised as a truly non-linear plot. Also, new player *Vic Tokai* is hard at work on the sequel to *ALIAS VESPA: THE HIDDEN AZTEC*.

LucasArts is finally preparing to release *The Doo*, an imaginative adventure originally created by Steven Spielberg for his short-lived *Amazing Stories* television series. The adventure follows a team of three astronauts who stumble upon an alien artifact that launches them deep into space. On a desolate planet, the player must guide the team to discover

what its immortal inhabitants require in order to return them to Earth. Although George Lucas' *Industrial Light & Magic* created several of the game's special effects, the animated characters look a bit dated in the style of an earlier Sierra game.

New player *Magnet Interactive* will offer a 3-D rendered space station with incredible visuals and on-screen performances by *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s LeVar Burton in their *BUESTAR*. *BUESTAR* is the eponymous name of the story's space station where players will be able to assume the identity of a dolphin who is a computer programmer.

Finally, while not space-oriented, sci-fi themes will permeate both *Capstone's TexWit* and *Virgie's Blue Runner* (probably not available until 1996). *TexWit* is an action/adventure game set in William Shatner's near-future Los Angeles. Players take the role of an agent seeking to break up a ring of narcolepsy-dealing gangsters. Although *TexWit* uses first-person, *Doom*-style technology, it won't be all shoot-to-kill. Using strategy and stealth, the player will be able to get through the game's missions with a very low body count. *Blue Runner* will be based on the universe of the movie and will allow players to assume the role of a bounty hunter in 2019 who has been hired to search out and destroy a terrorist group of sentient robots who have seized a space station.

NEWBORN: A recent graduate from the school of Sega Genesis game development, *Scavenger* (RED ZONE, SARTORIANA, X-MEN and BATTLES FOREVER) offers a treat for PC owners. Into *THE SHOWBOYS* is a medieval romp which takes place in a sophisticated 3-D graphic environment. Players must find magic weapons, solve puzzles and eradicate a necromancer's nasty minions in a rich, beautifully ray-traced castle, while the viewer's perspective swivels around like a movie camera on a boom.

...continued from page 48

White Wolf and BT Interactive will be teasing up in the release of *Warzone: The Magesword*, an adventure game set in the public universe of *White Wolf's* hit *pen and paper* role-playing game. Players become a vampire talk-radio DJ in a New York gothic smex, searching for the knowledge that leads to more power and survival. The game will feature traditional adventure-style gameplay along with some full-motion video footage and a branching story structure.



Sierra On-Line's *Warzone: The Magesword*

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In a more familiar universe, Legend Entertainment will take advantage of the resources of their investor, Random House, in their upcoming *Sword and Sorcery*. This is a graphic adventure based on Terry Brooks' best-selling fantasy novels and which takes place during a little gap within the popular novels. So, it does not attempt to duplicate the action of the

graphics and sound.

Combine the action-adventure gameplay of *Sir Isaac Stork* with graphic novel sensibilities and you've got *Origin's Crucible: Devious Answers*. Set in a dystopian future, the player must take on an evil corporate entity while uncovering the secrets of his or her awakening psychic powers. The first-person, VGA graphics are very strong, and designer David Bradley (formerly of *Sir Tech* and the *Wormy* series) isn't known for disappointment with regard to puzzles and gameplay.

THEME PARK: Two new adventures will rely upon amusement parks for a background. *WarnerActive's Park in the Park* is primarily puzzle-driven, but the story unfolds with full motion video sequences by 3D different

actors, including the beautiful Erika Eleniak (*Under Siege*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Deerly Humbled*). Eleniak stars in two roles, as good and evil twins with conflicting interests in their father's amusement park. To save the park, the player guides the good twin in playing a variety of nostalgic carnival games: water gun races, bumble ball, the balloon dart boss, etc. The other amusing theme park adventure is *The Residents' Bad Day on the Moon*, set in a 3D animated carnival that was birthed from a collaboration between *The Residents* and animator Jim Ludke.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH: If you like games based on other media, you'll have quite a variety this year. *Viacom* is developing a computer game adaptation of

Michael Crichton's novel (and movie) *Congo*. Sporting a lush 3D environment, *Congo* will be an adventure game modeled after the movie plot.

Musical groups *Devo* and *Queensryche* both have interactive adventures in development. For those who understand the ways of devolution, *Inescape* has *Devo Presents: Adventures of the Seven Pines*, a surrealistic adventure mixing full motion video and animation that pits *The Smart Patrol*, a musical group of countercreatures, against corporate evil. The game is being created by *Devo's* Gerald Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh. *Virgin* has *Promised Land*, a

game in which you join with one of the five band members of *Queensryche* to explore some wild environments in a puzzle-driven environment. The band likes to characterize *Promised Land* as a value-driven, eco-based game.

MicroPrase doesn't have a celebrity license for its *Neknomis* adventure, but it looks to us like *7th Guest* meets *Timothy Leary* on a psychedelic binge. This puzzle game is bizarre, even as the genre goes, but it's also gorgeous.

If you think it's time the fairer sex was given its own genre, you will be happy to hear that *American Laser Games* is launching a *GAMES FOR HER* series. The first offering is *McKENZIE & Co.*, a game where girls choose which hunk to take to the prom. It beats the "let's go to the mall" mentality of *The Babe* game, but we can't help wondering how the tone of this game will come across to young women who actually play games like *Myst* or *Terra*.

Gamers who like the western genre have also felt short-changed over the years. Now, *DUST-A TALK OF THE WILD WEST* shows *Cyberbit's* fascination with rickety



Legend Entertainment's *Sword and Sorcery*

longevity book series (unlike Legend's successful *DEAD GARDEN*). *Sword and Sorcery* will have stunning VGA graphics, a simple point-n-click interface, and a rich story. Lori and Corey Cole, designers of the *Quest for Glory* series, are doing the design for *Sword and Sorcery*, so the puzzles and gameplay should be on the money.

THE LANE: *I-Motion* continues in the cinematic 3D adventure tradition established by their *Alone in the Dark* games in *Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare*. Players take the role of a time traveler who must return to the Middle Ages to recover his kidnapped love. As the player adventures through a 3-D castle in search of his nemesis, Wolfram, and his love interest he must fight baddies and solve puzzles in the *Alone in the Dark* mode.

Another time travel game is *Sanctuary Woods: Bases in Time*. The sequel to *The Journeyman Project*, *Bases in Time* unveils an involved plot which has you trying to restore your good name after being framed for mucking about with history. The live actors are much better than in most games, and the puzzles actually relate to the storyline.

The late Roger Zelazny's *CrossedMistral*, designed for Capstone in conjunction with *DreamForge*, will feature pocket universes that will move players through many dimensions, having something of the effect of time travel. For more details, see the interview from a few weeks prior to the great writer's demise in this month's *READ ME* section. Finally, in *MUZUMBA* from *Take 2* you are expected to alter the timeline to benefit your race. Meanwhile, you buy and sell technology, negotiate with alien races and cavort around the galaxy, enjoying the spectacular



Capstone's *Congo*

saloons, horses, six-guns and characters ranging from an annoying hick to sophisticated ladies at the big house down the street. With some three dozen digitized actors, we half expected James Arness to put in an appearance as Marshal Dillon.

For something really different, *Knowledge Adventure* has *Steven Spielberg's Movie Maker*, an intriguing title, casting the gamer as director and allowing him or her to film their own movie. Using pre-supplied full motion video, gamers place the cameras, choose which angles to clip, and give sound effects and style to the overall product.

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Role-Playing Comes Out Of The Cold

It looks to be a comeback year for traditional role-playing games. As always, the fantasy genre completely dominates the landscape and, as one might expect, these large games have many titles on the vaporware velum.

Out Of Fanner Pass: Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall* looks better all the time, but the ambitious sequel to the Premier award-winning *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* seems to have a long way to go before the beautifully crafted product reaches the market. Whether Interplay's *Starkeep* will release this fall (after promises the two previous seasons) is a mystery, but even with the aging graphics, this looks to be a



Virgin Interactive's *Lords of Lore II*

real player. Speaking of real players, Interplay also has the much anticipated *Dungeon Master II: Skullkeep*. The long-awaited sequel has an improved interface designed with tactical combat in mind; a new spell system using a combination of power and elements; an improved critter AI whom monsters will howl to get help and use player character arrows against the party; and the expected mix of mages, thieves and steroid-slayers from the Hall of Champions.

Perhaps, the most long-awaited role-playing

game this side of *Starkeep* is Demark's *Lords of Lore II*, a monster of a role-playing game that will throw players into an incredibly large, marvelously detailed 3-D world where strife and intrigue are rampant. By assuming the role of one of many different characters, it is possible to see the rich story unfold from many unique perspectives. Possible activities

include the raising of an army, full-scale battles seen from a strategic perspective, dragon flight across the fractal-generated landscape, the exploration of huge citadels, and more.

Lords of Lore II from Westwood Studios and Virgin Interactive has been at the top of gamers' wish lists for some time now. The project is proceeding steadily, but it will still be the very end of '95 before we expect to see the final product. This sequel to the highly acclaimed *Lords of Lore* contains some of the best graphics we've seen. Like the original *LOL*, the sequel's gameplay will have a lighter touch, but you can expect lots of graphically-oriented puzzles and a fair share of hack-n-slash monster bashing.

Meanwhile, SSI's *ThroneSpace* is coming along nicely with its steampunk background becoming fully fleshed out (see the related story in this month's *READ.ME*) and SSI continuing its trend back toward story and characters. *Bowman* is a typical Xael product: it looks as though it might have a reasonable amount of play, but the puzzles are straight out of a C-64 game. In fact, *Bowman* is obviously designed for the SNES/Sega crowd—with graphics to match. Also, watch out for Axiom, Blue Byte's fantasy game with 3D point of view play, but two-dimensional overhead perspective when inside rooms.

DreamForge and *New World* are joining forces to create *Avon* or *Dino*, a single character adventure/role-playing game targeted at newer gamers. The game's presentation mixes 7m Quest-style cinematic "staps" while outdoors, and quicker *Starkeep*-style steps indoors. The game mechanics feature a very simple character attribute system, a unique spell system where a character must "write" magic runes in the air, and mechanical logic puzzles. Voice-acting for all characters and an extensive help system round out a package that is sure to hook new players into role-playing.

Sir Tech, publishers of the *Wizard* and *Realm* of *Avatar* series, have always been known for fantasy

role-playing. This year, they will deliver *Realm of Avatar: Swords Over Riv*, the third game in the hard-core Arkania role-playing series. The game-engine is very similar to that of the previous game, but with subtle improvements. *Dungeon* and outdoor environments will be seen in an enhanced first-person 3D perspective, with the same isometric view in combat.



Sir-Tech Software's *Dino: Deities of the Moon*

SVGA cut-scenes, additional manual and automated combat options, two difficulty levels, and the same rich character creation system are some of the features to expect.

Players put off by the complexity of the Arkania games can look forward to *Dino: Deities of the Moon*, a single character, isometric perspective role-playing game. This game might be everything *Ultra 8* wanted to be. Gorgeous SVGA graphics combine with an elegant magic system, an invisible interface, and an excellent story to make this game simple, hot, and deep.

Woe La Difference: Those looking for a different kind of role-playing might find it in *Sanctuary Woods' Lon*—the follow-up to last year's *Woe*. Another approach might be the less interactive *Swave* from The Discovery Channel. Cub-raising, human avoidance, and antelope chasing can give you insight into how this noble, endangered species lives.

Avon is an attempt by *Windscape* to animate the *Dark Horse Comics* view of Ridley Scott's universe—not for the squeamish. In addition to the inevitable baghant, you find that there's something that even the *Aliens* shy away from. I-Motion will give *Citrihu* fans another reason to be squeamish with *Proven* or *ix*, the latest *Lowcraft*-inspired tale. This one features submarines, arctic wastes and the usual assortment of multi-tentacled beings in more traditional adventure game form.

If you want exotic adventure of a different kind, *MicroProse* has *Vortex: Probes of the North*, cut from the *So Many Pawns* mold. It features exploration of 3D landscapes and economic development along with ample opportunities to loot and pilage.

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Simulated Journey

Autumn is the time of falling leaves. This is particularly appropriate to simulation buffs, for whom a "Falling Leaf" is a World War I aerial maneuver. This autumn should provide plenty of opportunities for more sophisticated maneuvers as flight sim games will again dominate the genre.

Fuser Desc: Two helicopter sims are preparing to engage in air-to-air combat during the coming months. **Domark Software's** upcoming Apache helicopter simulator will offer high-fidelity flight models and some interesting twists on the mission-based combat simulation. Not only must you fight and fly well in the 2-18 day campaigns set in Colombia, Bosnia, the Middle East, and Russia, but you must also manage your team of pilots, making combat assignments, while carefully tracking fatigue and supply levels. At the same time, **Interactive Magic** will introduce a mission-based helicopter sim called *Avocet*. Developed by **Datata**, *Avocet*, best known for their realistic *Torpedo* sim, you'll have to plan out your missions in advance and see how well you worked your plan and how well you went with the flow.

Early next year, **Interactive Magic** and **Digital Integration** will also take a shot at the fighter market with *F-16 Fission Falcon*, a high-end simulation of modern jet combat. **Digital Integration's** *F-16 Fission Falcon* will attempt to realistically simulate the Air Force's *F-16C*, but it will also offer a simple arcade mode to the

newbie. Gameplay will involve detailed mission planning and, on the multiplayer side, the sim will support eight players in two teams on a net or modem.

Bob Carter of Thrustmaster fame has also gotten tone on the *F-16* market and is ready to fire a missile from his new company, **Military Simulations, Inc.** Their *Fission Falcon: Back to Backtwo* game will strap you into an *F-16C* and send you back into Iraq to take care of business. Using actual terrain data of Iraq, declassified *F-16* flight models, and real weapon models, this sim promises not to let you go into combat "with one arm tied behind your back." Hard-core en-



thusiasts take note: a declassified model of the *F-16C's* APG-68 radar will work on a separate monochrome monitor!

Domark will also be following up on the success of their Macintosh air combat simulation, *Fission Novawars*, with a sequel for both the PC and the Mac. *Fission Novawars 2* will put players in the cockpits of the

Harrier, SuperCobra, and **LAW-25** in combat scenarios against Cuban and North Korean forces. The sim will offer a well populated electronic battlefield with naval support and infantry movement, and will support graphics modes up to 1024x768 (with certain accelerated graphics cards including the new breed of 3D accelerators).

Those who are looking to jump into a quick tutorial within moments will also want to look at **Spectrum** **HotByte's** *Top Gun: Fire At Will*. What sets this sim apart is that you not only strap into an *F-14*, but you actually become "Maverick" Mitchell from the movie *Top Gun*. Simplified displays, next generation

graphics, and an easy interface will get you into the heart of the action where you'll fly carrier operations in Cuba, Korea, and Libya. Screw up and you'll be flying cargo planes out of Hong Kong with the proverbial cargo.

Ocean's *TFX 2000* is a new air combat simulation, based upon the NATO Eurofighter 2000. In it, you'll fly



VENI, VIDI, VICI.

(I came, I saw, I looked great in a toga.)

S
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Autumn Avalanche

hard-core
peacekeeping
missions in post cold-war northern Europe against a

Russian force. Highlights include flight and weapons models taken from de-classified British Aerospace data (the Eurofighter's manufacturer), crisp hi-resolution terrain that uses information from military charts, and an eight player network option.

Finally, although not a true simulation, **The Discovery Channel's Wings: Korea to Vietnam** picks up where TDC's earlier **Wings Over Europe**

guided missiles, and the use of computers to identify and target enemy aircraft and missiles. The CD also includes more than 1,000 full-screen photos, technical data on more than 200 weapons systems, and war reports explaining the role of aircraft in modern warfare. The new reference is available now, and if it lives up to the standards of its respected predecessor, it will be a valued addition to any cockpit jockey's library.

DIVE PLANES: Three very different submarine products are cur-



The Discovery Channel's Wings: Korea to Vietnam

rently under development. **Alliance Interactive** and **Interactive Magic** will team up for **War Patrol**, a WWII submarine simulation set in the Pacific theatre. This series simulation will offer SVGA graphics in Windows, 40 missions, and the ability to command both American and Japanese subs. The modeling seems sophisticated enough and the graphics so sharp that **Acce of the Deep** may finally have some competition.

Tsunami's Silent Steel is essentially an interactive movie which places you in command of a U.S. Navy Ohio class "boomer," loaded to the teeth with nukes. Whether you play it straight or decide to barbecue the planet, the maturing of software video playback tech-

nology lets you experience **Silent Steel** in full-screen, full motion without an MPEG card (although the MPEG version should be noticeably crisper). Those new to computer games can really show off their Pentiums to their friends with this one!

Germany's **Blue Byte Software** is working on a near-future submarine game that uses 3D modeling, nice lighting effects and fractal generated landscapes to convey the idea of the game world. Called **The Deep**, the game is mission-based and is expected to appeal beyond the **Submarine 2020** crowd.

Kurz Racing. For those who find the traditional Formula 1 and NASCAR styles of racing to be too strenuous for simulation play, **MicroProse** will drop the starting flag on **Virtual Karts** during the fall season. Seasonal play, which lets you move up in class as your ability improves, adds to the challenge of this SVGA game with tracks built around detailed digitized photos. You'll also be able to compete against human drivers via the game's network support.



Interactive Magic's War Patrol

left off, as an aviation reference for 1945 to 1975. Using 3-D renderings, animation, video sequences, music and sound effects, **Korea to Vietnam** traces the development of supersonic jets, precision air-launched

which places you in command of a U.S. Navy Ohio class "boomer," loaded to the teeth with nukes. Whether you play it straight or decide to barbecue the planet, the maturing of software video playback tech-

TEMPUS FUGIT

(Time flies, or my sundial is fast)



CARPE DIEM

(Seize this game)

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Impressions

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Autumn Avalanche

Workshop, publishers of the *Warhammer 40,000 AD* boardgame and miniatures game series. As the current game stands, it will consist of a linear plot line that flows and loops (a la *Wing Commander*) according to your successes and failures in various tactical battles. More exciting than the campaign, however, is the capacity for creating your own scenarios to play in head-to-head mode. The



Bullfrog Software's Gen Wars

graphics look great and the AI concepts for both opponents and subordinate units seem solid.

Much the same may be said for *Warlord II*, which has more magic spells, increased economics (oil must be drilled for at sea), and even flying units and submarines (!) for up to seven players. *Warlords* fans might keep an eye out for *Warus* or *Warlocks*, a fantasy strategy game in the *Warlords* tradition that will be released as shareware. Cities, heroes, armies of fantasy creatures, campaigns—it's all here for fantasy strategists this winter.

In a different kind of fantasy, *Time-Warner's Anaxeron* is a roll-the-die (literally seen on the screen) and move game with gothic horror overtones. Up to six may



MicroProse's This Means War!

contest the sadistic gatekeeper for keys to other mystical dimensions. Essentially, this is a VCR game with a dash of creepiness to go.

Teamwork And Descent: In addition to traditional board and parlor game conversions, many companies will introduce sequels and spin-offs to their most successful strategy games. **Bullfrog Software** will continue the line of "Theme" products begun with *Time Peak* by challenging players to transform a lowly health clinic into a profitable hospital in *Time: Hospital*. Fans of *Sir Tech's* recently released *Jacko Avalanche* will be able to use their squad combat skills against other humans this fall. *Sir Tech* will release *Jacko Avalanche: Hero-To-Hero*, a two-player modern and network version of the game. The package will include a new sector map plus a scenario editor, additional weapons and graphics. *Gen Wars* will keep **Bullfrog's** *Panoramic* legacy alive. Four races will vie for supremacy by bio-engineering deadlier and deadlier creatures in this "god game" that could be described as *Panoramic* meets *Unwinnable*. Selection. Up to eight players can wage bio-warfare on a network.

Chessmaster 5000 from **Mindscape** builds on the *CGW* Hall of Fame design with better tutorials, chess problems and the best artificial opponents of any strategy game. **Interplay's** U.S. Chess Federation Chess, however, may have the best e-mail and networking capacity, as well as the capacity for offering sanctioned ratings.

Puzzle gamers should enjoy **Capcom's** *Treasures*, a computer version of the traditional Chinese puzzles where gamers take different shapes and transform them into animals or objects. Also, **Viacom** will present one of the more intriguing puzzle games at the show. *Zooz* is a colorful game where you have to zap (or is it "zooz"?) amoeba-like shapes of the same color before they infringe upon your safe zone. Addicting is the code word here. It may not be the next *Tetris*, but it's pretty good.

A family-oriented game hails from **Blue Byte Software** in Germany. *Dr. Doom's* *Niceor Chess* is a delightful game that is reminiscent of the television cartoon

how to wage war. With society threatened by an alien invasion, players must travel back in time to reclaim the art of playing from the masters of apocalypses from prehistoric times to the present, preparing for the final climactic battle against the alien menace. In certain situations, 3D technology may be used exclusively for the most impact. For example, dinosaurs will well exploit the alien's magnetic weapons.

The spiritual sequel to *Dune 2*, **Virgin's** *Command & Conquer*,



Virgin Interactive's Command & Conquer

comes over *Dota's* *Warcraft* for stand-alone publisher with its 3D rendered, high-tech, sci-fi and real-time warfaring. We also found the turn-based warfaring in *Parloria II*. Finally coming to IBM courtesy of **Blastnet**, the new version has a lot of ships, interestingly rendered in *SWGA* (sprites of G2). It's the number of strategic options that will keep world-warfare supporters busy diplomatic options, trade, council meetings and media public events. *Parloria II* allows up to 16 to compete via network play.

The House That from **MicroProse** may sound like a *Dogs* *Bunny-able* war game, but even this is a re-visit of *A. G. Wolf's* *Land Wars*, in a fully space-age kind of way with elements of *StarCraft* and *Dark Throne II*. Of course, silly puns begin to describe "The House That" *Space Wars* from *Quake* *Shore*, converted to the globe universe by **3DP**. The *Zooz* new have to defend even more ships with everything from friendly units and zap guns to *Sm* *outgashers*—there's even a *Crash*! *Equally* light-hearted is *Blood*, a wacky strategy game from **Sansatak** which suggests to us the idea of the *Cabbage Patch Kids* going to war.

show *Wacky Racers* crossed with *Mutts* *Bunnies* and *Mixosaur*. The random events are hilarious and there are plenty of sabotage cards with which to victimize your friends.

Finally, **Berkley Systems**, previously known for the *Arnie* *Dave* screen savers, might have a sleeper on their hands with *You Don't Know Jack*, a hilarious pop culture quiz-show game with a hilarious emcee with an attitude and questions on subjects ranging from *Scooby Doo* to *Human Sexuality*.

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War! What Is It Good For?

Historical battles/campaigns which put you in command have always had a place in the wargaming hobby, whether prior to this century or more modern combat. Games like **GameTek's** resurrected **Universal Military Simulator**, now known as **War College**, try to handle all eras, but most wargames zero in on a particular time period.

Avalon Hill's **Interplay** may well offer the hit in this arena with their **CONQUEST** of the **New World**. The tactical battles look like gloriously painted miniatures upon a detailed terrain and the strategic decision-making has plenty of decision points. This one has lots of custom options and creates random map designs so that you don't have to play the same game over and over.

For those of us who revel in the C.S. Forester and Alexander Kent novels of Napoleonic sailing glory, **Avalon Hill's** **WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN** is nearing completion by **Stanley Associates**. **WS&IM** will have a completely different engine than the developer's **5th FLEET**, and will include all the data from the board game, including various types of shot, tactics, morale and even boarding parties.

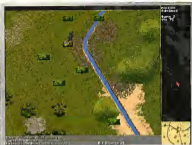
Transitioning from Napoleon to the U.S. Civil War, **Empire Software**, the British publisher, will release **Civil War**, a grand strategic campaign game of the U.S. Civil War. The system is strategic as in **Impressions' Blue & Gray**, but features miniatures level bat-

ties akin to **Spectrum Hobby's** **Fields of Glory** (developed by this same team). If you're tired of waiting, though, you could design your own Civil War battle scenarios with **New World's** **Event II**.

Closing out this era is **Norm Kruger's** latest installment in his **Wargame Construction Set** series from **SSI**. **Anc** or **Rites** will cover a wide variety of lesser-known battles and **Kruger** promises that this should reflect 19th century battlefield more than **Texas** did for the 20th century.

Twentieth Century Snacks: The most anticipated release in this era has to be **Alamo Games**, which puts the award-winning engine through its paces with some high-powered US and Soviet hardware. You may take the part of either a British, Russian or US general on the Eastern, D-Day or North African fronts in 30-plus scenarios. The campaigns have a nice twist: if you win in North Africa, for instance, you would have the choice to move on to France, or retive as a war hero. More archival film clips, voice-overs (although it's doubtful **SSI** will hire **George C. Scott** as Patton) and **SVG** explosions make this a must for any WWII aficionado.

In addition to **SSI's** **Allied General**, new player **TalonSoft** will debut with **Jim Rose's** **Battlezone: Aces**, featuring multiple scenarios for the Battle of the Bulge. If that's not enough **Bastogne** for you, **SSG**



SSI's Steel Panthers

and interface. This may well be **Kamronum's** closest spiritual descendant for the '90s.

Atomic is finally updating **UW: Beach** as **D-Day**, but it is the impending release of **Beyond Spazio Lectora** which the industry anxiously awaits. Can a historical WWII game be done in real-time with good play balance and AI? If looks are any indication, maybe so, but there are some horrendous design pitfalls to overcome.

On the most modern front, **Stanley Associates** is just wrapping up **7th FLEET** (with improved CAP and detection routines) and a **5th FLEET** scenario disk for **Avalon Hill**, as **IntraCorp** prepares to launch a deluxe edition of **Heroes II**.

SOME MUST FALL

We know that some of the games in this autumn avalanche will disappoint gamers. Yet, we can't over-remember such a jam-packed release schedule. We're particularly excited because it looks like there are potentially more hits than misses. If we're right, this winter may not seem as long or as cold for computer gamers.



Avalon Hill's Wooden Ships & Iron Men

will counter with **The Last Battles**, offering the usual **Keating AI** magic. Both **Aces** & **Bastogne** are strict about modeling the traffic jams and fuel difficulties faced by the Germans in their desperate attack towards **Bastogne**. **Gary Grigsby's** **Steel Panthers** clothes the designer's talents for distilling the essence of tactics with the newfound **SSI** love for graphics, sound

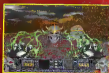
Ziff

Find out more about this Fall's hot new games during Computer Gaming World's

special Fall Press Preview online discussion on ZiffNet in CampusServe. Join game developers and executives and their best, CFWEditor-in-Chief Johnny Wilcox, plus other CGW Editors from Saturday, August 12 through Friday, August 16. Plus, download demos not set from some of the games mentioned in the Fall Preview.

The working special event will be organized as follows: Saturday: action, Sunday: adventure, Monday: Lords of Lore II from Westwood and Virgin Interactive, Tuesday: Top Gun from Spectrum Hobby, Wednesday: **Madagascar's** NCAA Football, Thursday: **Interplay's** **Conquest of the New World**, and Friday: **Gary Grigsby's** **Steel Panthers**.

Type GO ZIFF-GAMEWD to find out more details on the event in the Computer Gaming World forum on ZiffNet.



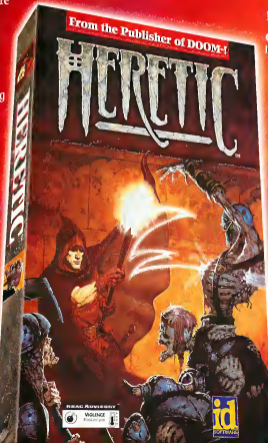
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Circle Reader Service #81

Conspiratorial Tones



SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE, AFTER INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL became common, the Kobayashi Corporation set up research station

Cerberus on an asteroid to study a mysterious black hole. Danny McCormack,

one of the technicians, went out to perform routine maintenance on a probe and never came back: the power on his ship suddenly failed and he was pulled into the hole. A tragic accident.

His father, Devlin, is flown to Cerberus to attend a memorial ceremony. Afterwards, as he broods over the death in his guest quarters, a note is pushed under Devlin's door. A note claiming that Danny's demise was no accident, but outright murder.

So begins *THE ORION CONSPIRACY*, a science fiction mystery adventure game from **Domark Software**. As Devlin McCormack, you snoop around the Cerberus Facility, talking to peo-

ple, poking into corners, trying to determine if the note is true or false, as well as who sent it, and why.

With 14 Kobayashi people on board, plus five from Mogami-Hudson (they're doing mineralogical research, or so they say; can you trust anyone around here?), there is no lack of suspects, but motivation is obscure. Everyone seemed either to like Danny or had nothing at all to do with him. At least, that is how it appears on the surface, but what might be lurking below is another matter.

OUTER SPACE INTERFACE

Interacting with the game through the mouse interface is simple. The cursor (in the form of a crosshair) is moved around the screen, lighting up various hot spots; clicking the mouse button causes Devlin to give a description of the item. If he can do something with it, one or more action icons appear in the bottom left corner. For example, clicking on a person usually brings up two actions, one to look and one to talk. On occasion, a third option, "give," will also appear.

When dealing with objects, Devlin never uses anything unless it's appropriate to do

so. Therefore, you don't have to worry about using up something important or handing off a critical item to the wrong person. Nothing can be dropped, so nothing can be lost, and Devlin's inventory

space is apparently unlimited; I never ran into a "you're carrying too many items" message, no matter how many

SCORPIA LAUNCHES

INTO THE ORION

CONSPIRACY'S

SCI-FI WHODUNIT

SCRY SIGHT

Remember the good old days? The days when gargoyles were gargoyles, ren were men, and an adventurer had to slay tens of thousands of baddies just to earn his daily crust of bread? You can relive that bygone era with an upcoming Windows role-playing game called *Mexxon*. This shareware release is no graphic feast (it looks a lot like the Internet's *Nrfflux*), but it got plenty of classic hack-n-slash fun, and dungeons with loads of traditional tricks



and traps, weapons, magic items, and other treasures. Hundreds of hours of traditional role-playing fun await those with active imaginations and a healthy bloodlust. For more information call TDA Help! at (800) 624-2101.

by Scorpius

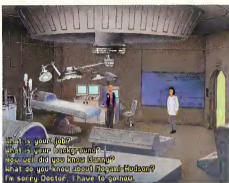
things he was hauling around with him.

The inventory and controls appear at the bottom of the screen; they can be brought up by pulling the cursor there or hitting the space bar. Using the space bar automatically positions the cursor at the first box, which is handy. The cursor can be moved across the options manually, or by cycling through the choices using the right mouse button, and then left-clicking on the one you want.

Talking to people is mainly a matter of clicking on them, then running down the conversation topics presented on the screen. There is a standard set of questions that appear only once, plus some others that show up as the investigation progresses, based on what Devlin has learned so far.

In several instances, asking about something will bring up an extended conversation. For example, Devlin may ask a person what it's like to work on Cerberus, and the two of them will trade comments back and forth automatically, without any prompting from the player. This gives a nice feeling of actually talking to someone, as opposed to many other games where interaction is usually just question-answer. Devlin's quasi-independence here is a good touch.

Graphically, the game is good, if some-



WHERE'S MY ALIBI? Orion Conspiracy is a sci-fi whodunit where conversations with potential suspects are key. The game features quality voice-acting throughout.

what dull. Since the action takes place in the Cerberus facility, most locations look well, just like each other, especially the corridors, of which there are many, and which you will be walking through plenty during the game. I recommend mapping the place out so you don't become confused (you can't become lost) and so you can find your way to important areas quickly.

Everyone has a speaking voice, and each (along with the character graphic) is distinct enough that you shouldn't have much trouble telling people apart. A good thing, since you have to talk to 15 people during the game. For those who may not have a supported sound card, subtitles are available.

SPLIT PERSONALITY

ORION CONSPIRACY can be thought of as having two parts. The first section deals mainly with looking into Danny's death, and is the more adventure-game oriented portion. Midway, the story changes direction rather dramatically, as Devlin's investigation crosses the path of something else that has been going on, unsuspected by anyone. This segment is more action-oriented; Devlin runs around doing a lot of things, many of them not requiring much puzzle solving, and those are mostly obvious ones, such as figuring out where to go to obtain the right item.

The midpoint is also where people start dropping like flies. They get shot up, shot down, blown up, blown apart, carved up and ripped to shreds. While none of that is actually too gory (especially not for anyone who has played DOOM, et al.), the death toll mounts rapidly. I kept expecting the ghost of Agatha Christie to pop up, shouting, "And Then There Were None!" It certainly felt that way, and indeed, not many will be leaving Cerberus at game's end.

ORION CONSPIRACY does have its problems, although these are in the design rather than the programming. Overall, the game ran quite cleanly, except for a couple of sound problems. One was with the voices, which seems to be specific to the Gravis sound card. Often, syllables of words were echoed, such as "It's set for automautomatic control." This was irritating, but in most cases did not interfere much with understanding what was said.

The other was with the game forgetting the music volume settings. Often, the volume would become louder when switching levels via the elevator, and on occasion when leaving or entering some areas on the same level.

The characters are somewhat depressing. From the "redneck security chief," to the "tough as nails, oversexed feminist," to the "namby-pamby, never grew up, whining mama's boy," they're all blatant stereotypes. Even Devlin fits into the "embittered middle-aged man who has lost all" mold.

We don't expect great literature in a computer game, and complex personalities for 15 or 16 people would be expecting too much. Still, there was certainly room here to develop at least a few of the characters beyond the superficial collection of knee-jerk responses that make up their personalities.

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

ORION CONSPIRACY is presented as an adult game. Typically, "adult" tends to mean (a) sex/nudity or (b) strong language or (c) both of them. In the case of

THE ORION CONSPIRACY

Price: No SRP

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

486-25MHz,

4MB RAM (8MB

recommended),

SVGA graphics,

10 MB hard drive

space, CD-ROM;

supports most

major sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Andy Blandell

Publisher: Domark Software

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ORION CONSPIRACY, it's strong language, and plenty of it. Not simply mild expletives such as an occasional "hell" or "damn," but words that many parents would probably rather not have their children hear.

Even mature gamers might not care to hear them, as these expressions are

not merely used, but overused; the engineer alone is one of the most foul-mouthed characters you will ever come across in a computer game. He can hardly open his mouth without uttering at least one obscenity per sentence. The other characters (Devlin included) aren't quite that bad, but they certainly aren't shy about peppering their conversations with "forbidden words." It is a sad thing when designers think that adding such language to the product somehow makes it more "real" or more "adult," when in fact it does neither.

What bothered me most about this one, though, is how the game

changes direction in mid-stream. Up to that point, it was fairly intriguing, with some tantalizing clues, a few red herrings, and the feeling that the research station was more than it appeared. I was really getting interested.

Then, with what amounts to one scene, it all becomes something else. The mystery suddenly turns into "grade B" SF movie fare. It's as though the designers became tired with the initial story and characters halfway through, so they switched to a new line, killing off almost everyone else in the process. This is ultimately unsatisfying, especially as there isn't much connection, plus, between the first and second halves of the game.

Overall, the ORION CONSPIRACY is one of those iffy products: it starts with good intentions and good execution, then spirals downward into mediocrity, and the addition of too much "adult" language does nothing to improve the situation. Gamers who are looking for a gripping SF adventure, or who dislike strong expletives, aren't likely to be happy with this one. ☹



ANOTHER ONE BITES THE BUST At mid-game, Orion Conspiracy takes a strange turn, and people start dropping like flies at a Raid factory.

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Circle Reader Service #25

Hints For The Asking

Scorpia Dishes Up Answers For Questioning Gamers



Well, the trend towards older games continues. The letters coming in are mostly about less recent products, and even the little rush of new games at the beginning of summer hasn't changed that. Either the newer games are easier, or they don't have much to interest CGW readers. Or it could be a little of both. It seems the best we can do is hope the coming Christmas season will change that, because the summer has never been noted as a time of major releases.

Before getting to the mail, I'd like to remind everyone again: *Please Do Not Send Money*, even if you live outside the US. It isn't necessary, and I'll only send it back. Just enclose an SASE with your questions (not required from foreign countries). That's much more important. Now we have that settled, let's get on to the good stuff.

Discworld: Some gamers are having a problem on the "nightside" (or last night). They find an unexpected hammer in place of the more expected gate pass. Even worse, the hammer doesn't appear in the inventory. Well, of course it doesn't; Rincewind put it back in the safe. You'll just have to go ask someone about that in the daytime.

Death Gate: Several adventurers are seeing double, and it's giving them fits. Namely, a double of themselves that just won't get out of the way. Very annoying. Besides, you can't reach the endgame, and that's worse than annoying. This is really a simple matter. By keeping in mind that the doppelganger always reverses your motions, and running a careful eye down the spell list, you should have the traffic jam burned out in no

time at all.

Return To Zork: Almost everyone likes dogs, except perhaps those playing this game. They can't seem to get anywhere with the killer poodle guarding the bedroom. Well, I'll tell ya a secret: there's just no way past

the mutt. He does, however, have another purpose besides keeping your nose out of private places. Noisy little barker, isn't he?

Ultima VII—Serpent Isle: Some people are having a hard time in Moonshade after the banquet. Nothing much is happening, and they can't get anywhere with Pothos, even though they know what he needs and have it in their inventory. The way around this impasse is to have a little chat with Bucia again. After that, the pace should pick up considerably.

Lands of Lore: The giant slug guarding the mine entrance can be a giant headache. One method of dealing with it is to beat on it, run out to heal up, beat on the critter some more, run out, etc. This is time-consuming and a little tedious, but it does work. A much faster and better method, however, is to use the green skull from one of the locked tree stumps in the woods. If you have sufficient magic power (the skull does eat up the points), you'll be able to kill the slug in one combat session.

Stone Prophet: Getting into the Royal Burial Hall (that place in the desert with the male statue and slab in the ground) requires a couple of things. One of them is hearing the ghost's song. The other is an item you'll find under the Harvest Temple (big hint: the statue needs something to pull). When you have both, you'll be able to enter.

Clouds/Darkside of Xeen: You need

both games installed (i.e., the full World of Xeen) in order to enter all places on the Cloudside. Several dungeons are part of the Darkside story, and it's only there that you will obtain what you need to enter. If you're playing CLOUDS as a stand-alone game, you won't be able to get into those places (and of course, if you're playing DARKSIDE, there's certainly no way!).

Alone In The Dark 3: This adventure has a lot of nasty puzzles, where the solutions only come after a lot of trial and error. One of these is in the jail, after you make it out of the cell: there is a pentagram in one corridor that is instant death if you cross it. The thing to do here is to not be in too much of a hurry to exit the jail cell. Look around, and you'll find what you need. You still have to do something with that item, however; just pretend it's the CD for the game and see what ideas come to mind (hehe).

Noctropolis: Some players have found that this game seems to come to a halt after reaching the butcher shop. There appear to be no other leads, and nothing much is happening otherwise. That's because you missed something in the shop. Don't just stand around like a side of chilled meat. There are moments when being pushy can provide unexpected developments.

And that's 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: Stop by the GameSIG.

On GEnie: Visit the Games Round-Table (type: Scorpia).

By US Mail (remember that SASE if you live in the US!): Scorpia, PO Box 338, Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028.

Until next time, happy adventuring!

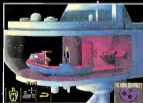
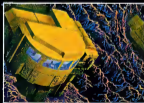
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Hawg Heaven

Burn Rubber (and Bridges) in LucasArts' FULL THROTTLE

by Charles Ardai

YOUR NAME'S BEN AND YOU'RE A BIKER: RIDE TO LIVE, LIVE TO RIDE. THEY SAY A MAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE, BUT THAT'S NOT EXACTLY TRUE IN YOUR CASE. YOUR CASTLE'S YOUR HOG, YOUR CHOPPER, YOUR WHEELS—and your kingdom's the open road. Anyone ever took either of those away from you, what would you have left?

Three choices: nothing; one hell of a score to settle; or FULL THROTTLE, the latest from the folks at LucasArts who previously brought you such adventures in comic mayhem as DAY OF THE TENTACLE and SAM AND MAX HIT THE ROAD.

The answer, of course, is "all of the above." When you wake up in a dumpster behind a biker bar called the Kickstand after FULL THROTTLE's opening sequence, you've literally got nothing to your name. (You can click on your right mouse button to check your inventory if you don't believe me.) Even after

FULL THROTTLE

Price: \$69.95

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

486DX/33 or

better, 8MB

RAM, 2x CD-

RDM drive,

mouse; supports most major sound cards.

RSAC Rating: Violence 2, Language 2

Designer: Tim Schafer

Publisher: LucasArts

San Rafael, CA

(800) STARWAR



you force your way into the bar and tussle with the bartender, you've got nothing but the keys to your bike—that, and a vague recollection that just before the goons who beat you up tossed you in the dumpster they were

discussing
setting

up an ambush down the road for the Polecats, the biker gang of which you are the leader. This gives you your first score to settle.

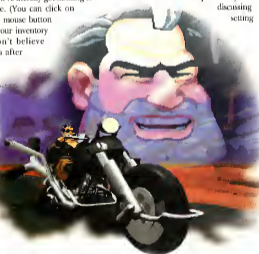
Then, on your way out of the Kickstand, you run across a member of a rival biker gang and a bit of sabotage that leaves you spinning out across the desert flats. You end up a pile of blood and bruises, while your bike ends up a smoking, twisted heap of metal.

It's more or less at this point, ten minutes and maybe 50 acts of violence into the game, that you realize the folks at LucasArts weren't kidding when they named this baby FULL THROTTLE.

BEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE

In real life, spinouts at 90 miles per hour tend to do some lasting damage to a man's vehicle. In this case, however, neither Ben nor his bike turn out to have been fatally wounded in the crash. Both were found and have been nursed back to health by Mo, a local tomboy in greasy overalls who, true to the biker movie ethos this game strives to emulate, might best be described by the adjective "spunky."

The first thing Ben's got to do after coming out of his coma is to help fix his bike. The only piece that Mo wasn't able to replace on her own was the bike's forks, but to complete her repairs she also needs some gas and a welding torch. These three requirements, set forth as a kind of adventure game shopping list, give Ben his first quest. It's a little artificial, to be sure, but at least designer Tim Schafer has made an attempt to work his puzzles into the storyline. It's much better than all



those adventure games where the hero has to find the Red Orb, the Blue Orb, and the Green Orb...

The town of Melonweed, on the outskirts of which Mo has her garage and chopshop, consists of three locations. It

and at the gas tower, if you've brought a can and a hose, you should be able to get some—yes, there are obstacles at each location. You've got to get rid of the dog at the junkyard, for instance, and

some nosy security guards at the gas tower. None of these puzzles demand a very complex solution, though. The door to the gas tower is locked, but you find a lockpick lying around in the trailer.

The trailer's got a fridge inside which

couldn't see the steak inside it. Later on, there's a crowbar hidden under a pillow, but you'll need better eyes than mine to make it out.

Find all the incidental items and the major items pretty much fall into your hands. Then you can sit back and watch a series of fairly lengthy cut scenes that give Ben his second score to settle: the founder of Corley Motors (the company that makes the Pockets' bikes) gets offed by his hulking assistant, Adrian Ripburger, who wants to see Corley Motors move into the yuppie ninivan market. Meanwhile, Mo turns out to be Mo Corley, heir to the Corley fortune and now the owner of the company. Ripburger tries to kill her, too, and she wisely goes on the run. It's up to Ben to find her and to foil Rip's nefarious scheme.

There's more, plenty more, before Ben and Mo finally turn the tables. There's a demolition derby Ben has to win. There are about a dozen high-speed fistfights on wheels between Ben and enemy bikers who get in his way. There's a gorge to be jumped a la Evel Knievel, a minefield to be crossed, and a shareholder's meeting to crash. There's also an action-packed finale which may remind you of the truck sequence in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. And when it's all over there's a sort of grim coda in which Ben stays true to the biker code and rides off into the sunset.

NOT-SO-GENTLE BEN

Except for the coda, there isn't a whole lot of quiet time in *FULL THROTTLE*. This is the main thing that sets this game apart from earlier works in the LucasArts oeuvre: the sheer amount (and type) of action it contains. It's a tough little mother of a game, and though the tone is comical throughout, it's a heavy-metal-and-leather-jackets kind of comedy that springs from a whole different well than either *TENTACLE*'s cartoon buffoonery or *SAM AND MAX*'s ironic hipster satire.

You're always racing somewhere in *FULL THROTTLE*, and as often as not when you get where you're going you have to beat someone up or see to it that he blows up, drives off a cliff, or both. Sometimes you don't even wait to get where you're going before getting into a fight: bikers waylay you on the road, and



HOW YOU BEN? Rendered in inimitable LucasArts style are the biker Ben, the soon-to-be-murdered Corley of Corley Motors, and Corley's ambitious aide, Ripburger.



IN YOUR FACE INTERFACE The flaming biker emblem/interface gives you your four basic commands: look, taste/talk, punch and kick.

doesn't take a genius to figure out that the three items Ben has to find will be located, one apiece, at these three sites. Once you check out the sites it won't even take much to figure out which item can be found where. Next to the abandoned trailer, you can see that someone's welding in an underground cellar; at the junkyard, a mean dog's patrolling some piles of automobile and motorcycle parts;

holds a nice bit of steak. Think a hungry doggie might like it?

The big-gest difficulty in all of this, actually, is that since the scenes are painted so dark, in thick layers of blues, blacks and purples, it can be hard to see some of the items you need when you find them. The first time through, I couldn't see the refrigerator; then, when someone told me where it was and I opened it, I

while steering left and right with the mouse, you've got to punch, fluff, and chainsaw your way to victory. What gives these action sequences a unique flavor is not that the action itself is so much fun—even when you are in control of what's going on (and you aren't always), what

exceeding anything you'd expect to see in a piece of interactive fiction. To spice things up further, the designers have also made use of dramatic camera angles and cinematic effects that heighten the excitement. You can tell that someone involved in *FULL THROTTLE*'s creation has a good

Ben. His Ben is Clint Eastwood cubed. I could listen to him all day.

Mark Hamill, of *Star Wars* and *WING COMMANDER III* fame, contributes three fine voices here, including Rigbarger's sinister snarl. Kath Soucie's Mo sounds sane and companionable, which is just what the part needs—a lesser actress would have taken her cue from the greasy overalls and veered off into caricature. And as for the game's bit parts, how wrong can you go when your voice talent includes LucasArts veterans like Nick Jameson and Denny Dalk?

EASY RIDER

No, *FULL THROTTLE* is great to listen to and even better to look at. Ironically, its weakest point is its gameplay, and its gameplay isn't even all that weak, just somewhat less challenging and more obvious than it might have been. The puzzles are fine, but on the whole they are overshadowed by all of the game's extended movie and action sequences.

On the bright side, this makes *FULL THROTTLE* an ideal starter game for someone new to interactive fiction or who, for whatever reason, might be put off by more taxing gameplay. As for expert gamers, all they have to do is look at *FULL THROTTLE* as a highly interactive interactive movie rather than as a perhaps overly simple traditional adventure game, and it all falls into place.

FULL THROTTLE offers an easy ride, but the scenery's terrific, the story's exciting, and even at its simplest the game's not a pushover. All but the most demanding gamers will find much here to enjoy. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FULL THROTTLE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS LucasArts has the best writers, artists, and voice talent in the business, and they're all in top form here; extra points for tackling a whole new genre.

CONS Experienced gamers may find the game too short and the movie-to-gameplay ratio a bit high.



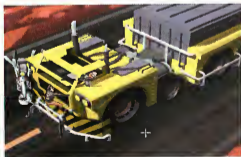
ROAD WARRIORS There are a lot of action-oriented scenes in *Full Throttle*, like this mounted, mano-a-mano, ass-kicking competition.

you have to do is pretty basic. It's the look of the scenes.

All the vehicles and some of the characters in *FULL THROTTLE* were modeled three-dimensionally rather than as flat, cartoon-style drawings, and it has a real impact on how the game comes across. As the game's various semis and cycles and hovercrafts zoom around the screen, they have a solidity and a sense of motion far

grounding in what an action movie is supposed to look like—which is what you'd expect from a company that has ties to George Lucas, but until this game it hasn't really been the case.

What has always been the case for LucasArts adventures is that their voice talent is impeccably cast, and it's never been more true than here. Some of the credit has to go to the writers, who have come up with good banter for the characters to exchange, as well as to other participants in the game's creation, but to a large extent the game works because of Roy Conrad's gravelly, deadpan delivery as



GRILLED MEAT The use of 3D vehicles and innovative puzzle design combine to create gaming scenes like you've never seen.

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Circle Reader Service #39

Don't Let It Go To Your Head

Take a Brain Dump From Sony Imagesoft's *JOHNNY MNEMONIC*

by Charles Ardai

JOHNNY MNEMONIC IS NOT THE FIRST OF WILLIAM GIBSON'S STORIES TO BE MADE INTO A COMPUTER GAME. YEARS ago, when much talk was circulating about his seminal cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer*, being turned into a movie, **Interplay** produced a **NEUROMANCER** adventure role-playing game. The movie never got made, the game only made it as far as to gain a small cult following, and for a while people stopped talking about how well suited William Gibson's works were to the electronic media.

Flash forward: it's 1996, the Internet is hot and hip, any number of hacker-themed films are in production (*The Net*, *Hackers*, *Strange Days*), and, wouldn't you know it?, it's time for William Gibson to get trotted out again for another go at adaptation heaven.

Or hell, as the case may be. "Johnny Mnemonic," a short story from his *Burning Chrome* collection, was recently novelized by science fiction author Terry Bisson, filmed by artist-turned-director Robert Longo, and turned into a CD-ROM computer game by the clever folks at **Propaganda Code**. The film starred Keanu Reeves, fresh off his popular turn as the bus-rescuing police guy in *Speed*. Alas, Keanu's popularity wasn't enough

to save this bomb: following the publication of unanimously savage reviews, the movie died a quick and ignominious death.

What does this portend for the computer game version? Nothing good. The game doesn't star Keanu Reeves, but that's more or less the best thing you can say about it. In Keanu's place is an actor named Christopher Gartin, who struts around, bags his eyes out, and delivers lines like "I've got to get this data out of my head, Ralfi!" with more gusto than talent. In the co-hero role of J-Bone, played in the movie by rapper Ice-T, Isaac Hayes glowers and does his best to look the picture of urban menace. Jane,

Johnny's nerve-damaged love interest, is played here by sitcom starlet Clare Carey, who fills Jane's requisite tank top better than she fills the role itself.

The game is all done in full-motion video that unfolds in front of you in non-interactive full-screen chunks followed

by interactive segments that are distinguished by being shown letterbox-style. When you're in full-screen mode, all you can do is watch as the actors go through their paces. When you're in letterbox mode, you've got until a given video clip

finishes to press one of six keys to either turn Johnny left or right, maneuver him through various locations (there are six in the game), or, when facing off against the murderous yakuza, make him throw a punch or a kick. There's also a "Use" key, which causes you to pick objects up and manipulate them, and a "Download" key which comes in handy when Johnny finally gets all the codes and the hardware he needs to get rid of the package he's carrying in his hotwired cranium.

Whichever action you choose causes a new video clip to play. If you choose wisely, the next clip to play shows Johnny progressing one step closer to his goal. If you choose poorly, Johnny bites the dust in one of several increasingly violent ways. If don't choose at all, what happens depends on the situation you're in at the time. If things are calm, the video loops around for a second go, and then a third, and then a fourth; you can cycle indefinitely through the same video clip before making your move. If things are not calm, you find that in this game as in life, you only get one shot at glory. He who hesitates is lost, as is he who presses the right button at the wrong time.

LITTLE MNEMO IN SLUMBERLAND

What is this data that Johnny's got in his head? I wouldn't want to give away any secrets, but...what the hell. It's the cure for "NAS," which stands for "Nerve Attenuation Syndrome." There is no question that you're supposed to think "AIDS," just as there is no question that the ghetto-dwelling, anarchist "LoTek's"



JOHNNY MNEMONIC

Price: \$69.95,
IBM CD-ROM
and Mac
System
Requirements:
IBM compatible
486-66MHz or
better (Pentium
recommended),
8MB RAM, SVGA
graphics, 2MB hard
drive space, 2x
CD-ROM (3x
recommended),
Windows 3.1;
supports Windows
compatible sound
cards.
Protection: None
Developer: Propaganda Code
Publisher: Sony Imagesoft
Santa Monica, CA
(800) 922-SONY



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Circle Reader Service #87



REST YOUR SWEET CHIP ON MY SHOULDER Our synthetically enhanced heroes limp through the subway after working out on one of Ralfi's thugs.



SPIDER'S LAB Spider helps Jane get spliced out of those uncomfortable zones. The video plays constantly, even when a letterboxed image gives the player an opportunity to make an action.

of whom J-Bone is the leader are supposed to suggest the oppressed denizens of inner cities today, or that the sadistic thugs who, on instructions from a Big Corporation, pursue Johnny to recover the corporation's intellectual property, are meant to suggest Big Business and its fascist lackeys. It's all a pretty crude caricature, unredeemed by any of Gibson's cleverness or freshness.

There are some differences from the movie in terms of how the story is set up, but they're not substantial. Instead of waking up in a hotel prior to receiving his clandestine upload, Johnny wakes up already in the custody of a pair of bodyguards who work for Ralfi, the cyber-sleaze who pimps out Johnny's medulla oblongata as a data storage device.

Within moments, Johnny finds himself with a third bodyguard, Jane; only she's on his side since she, too, has an ax to

grind with Ralfi. An attack by the yakuza gives Johnny and Jane the chance to escape—if you're fast. (Otherwise, it's a chance for them to die.) The rest of the game is a lot of running followed by a lot of fighting, followed by a lot more running, some of it in real space, some in cyberspace. Also, a lot of emoting by overheated actors who look vaguely claustrophobic in the game's dark and confining sets.

Along the way there are some nominal puzzles to solve; mostly, these relate to finding the objects you need first to enter cyberspace and then to accomplish your download. These objects are scattered around at random each time you start a new game. The designers say this random element gives the game "infinite replayability." Nice try, but in my opinion the variations just make things annoying.

The fighting has all the peculiarities typical of games that limit themselves to full-motion video, what I like to refer to as "DRAGON'S LAIR syndrome." At each stage in each fight, you get only one chance at success: one punch, one kick, or one block, and you've got to push the right key at exactly the right time. Select and time your move right and you get rewarded with a video clip showing your opponent falling down. Click an instant too soon or too late and you're dead.

People running the game on slow machines (anything slower than a Pentium, basically) will find themselves at a real disadvantage, since the system's various delays make timing a matter of pure guesswork. Even on a Pentium, players are forced to undertake much too much trial and error, which is to say too much error. In the manual, the designers write that you should "wait a beat or two before attacking," but there is a fine line between a beat and a beating, and I was never able to find the right rhythm.

It wouldn't be so bad if the game had a normal "save" function which allowed you to save at any point, but it doesn't: you can only save the game at certain locations and at certain times. This means

that if you don't get your punches and kicks just right at each stage in a given fight—and you won't, I promise you that—you're kicked back to an earlier point in the game and then forced to fight your way through scenes you'd thought you'd never have to see again.

The capper is that even if you make the right move at the right time, it's anyone's guess what happens next. I don't mean that the game is unpredictable—that would be good. I mean that it's anyone's guess what actually happens, since the scenes go by so quickly, and are filmed so artfully, that it can be hard to tell just who is doing what to whom. Someone's shooting; someone's beating down a door; something's racing through a subway tunnel. Everything is dark and hard to follow. Cinematically it's all very stylish and mysterious, but in terms of gameplay, stylish only goes so far and mysterious is not necessarily a good thing. Add in the endless video loops, which sometimes can be hard to exit, and you've got—what's the kindest way to put this?—a mess.

OUT OF MIND, OUT OF SIGHT

Eventually, if you struggle through enough scenes, you get to watch Johnny discharge his duties and save humanity. Don't bother. It's not worth it. The movie was bad enough, and there you only had to see each scene once.

JOHNNY MNEMONIC is yet another valiant but failed attempt to deliver on the promise of interactive movies. Eventually someone will get it right, just as eventually someone will probably produce a good adaptation of a William Gibson story. But not this time. JOHNNY MNEMONIC is, I hate to say it, thoroughly forgettable. ☹

THE CRITICS SPEAK

JOHNNY MNEMONIC

RATING ★★☆☆☆☆

PROS Two hours of somewhat interactive full-motion video, decent acting, artful set design and filming.

CONS The story and the video are both murky, and the controls will leave you with the urge to hurl your keyboard out a window.

DAGGERS

RAGE



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COMES A TIME OF WAR.
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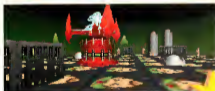
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The King's Kartoons

Interplay Finds A Line Of Light Animated Adventures With
KINGDOM: THE FAR REACHES

by Allen L. Greenberg

THERE IS AS MUCH CHARM TO THE PROPER TELLING OF A STORY AS THERE IS TO THE STORY ITSELF. Such is the case with *KINGDOM: THE FAR REACHES, BOOK ONE*, the first in a series of animated adventure games from Interplay. It is the familiar story of an evil wizard whose power can only be overcome by the recovery of certain magic items which were manufactured and hidden long ago for just such a purpose. Now it's your job to find them and defeat the evil rulers.

The story unfolds as a series of brief movies, the quality of which may not rival Disney, yet is as good as anything on Saturday morning television. Characters such as the hero, a princess (with the nightclub-worthy name of "Grace Delight"), good and evil wizards plus various

supernatural creatures are all imbued with a classical quality which, if they would not exactly impress J.R.R. Tolkien, might at least make him smile. The voices for these character are provided by actors who have clearly done this type work before, and they play their roles to the hilt. The background music, a combination of renaissance and romantic, also fits in perfectly with the story's action and events.

You are Lathan, descendant of a race

of deposed kings, and heir to a great deal of magic. That magic now resides within five hidden relics while the kingdom is dominated by Torlok, an evil wizard who is not particularly anxious to relinquish authority. Under the guidance and generosity of the *Obi-Wan*-like wizard Daelon, you begin the quest to recover those hidden objects and put Torlok out of business. This episode of *KINGDOM* follows Lathan's recovery of the objects, but leaves Torlok's defeat for future offerings. However, lest we be deprived of a victorious conclusion, Lathan must also remove the current king from office and rescue Princess Grace (Delight). Many of

the supporting cast are easily recognized as part-timers from *The Lord Of The Rings*. These include a friendly and helpful race of wood-elves, mischievous yet cooperative fairies, water nymphs, a mountain-dwelling wizard-lord, and an amicable huntsman in the woods. There are also a group of frightened villagers and an evil spirit known only as "The Plague Magician" whose purpose is (so-called) life is to follow Lathan and bring about his death.

The presentation of the mini-movies is similar to the *DRAGON'S LAIR* and *SMEL*.



ACE laser disc arcade games. Once each film clip concludes, it is your turn to make a decision. Often, these are life and death confrontations so that should you make the

wrong decision your life will be forfeit. However, where the solution to the arcade games often seemed random or even meaningless, *KINGDOM* presents a series of events which are logically connected. These are puzzles with solutions leading back to earlier parts of the story, thus making the game something far more than a lesson in hamster-like training.

You have up to three lives to finish the game, although there are ways of restoring yourself to full capacity. With certain important exceptions, you may take all the time you desire to make your decision. In some instances, however, an hour-glass appears which indicates that you have only a few seconds to make the right move.

For the most part, the story moves along at an undemanding pace. Yet, like a traffic-free road trip which suddenly comes to an abrupt halt at a clogged intersection, the story's endgame suddenly imposes an almost impossible time-restriction on the last few tasks. Unfortunately, it leaves one with the impression that the designers were suddenly desperate to increase the game's difficulty by several notches at the last moment.

The movies are a delight to watch, and the colorful animation is quite smooth, even when viewed on a 33MHz processor. The text is spoken clearly and refuses to

KINGDOM: THE FAR REACHES

Price: \$69.95

System:

Requirements:
IBM compatible
386SX or better,
VGA graphics,
CD-ROM mouse;
supports Sound
Blaster and Pro
Audio-Spectrum
sound cards.

Protection: None

Developer: Virtual Image Productions

Publisher: Interplay Productions

Irvine, CA

(800) 969-GAME





A PLAGUE ON THREE! The "Plague Magician" follows Lathan, ready and able to shorten his life.

be buried under the program's abundant sound-track. Unfortunately, there is no text display, and the hearing-impaired will therefore be unable to play the game.

The program allows only one game to be saved in progress at a time and it is a good idea to save after each success. Unfortunately, this makes trial-and-error a very awkward means of solving each puzzle.

The program features a highly intuitive, mouse-guided interface. The majority of the screen is taken up by the action scene, with a small group of icons along the side. You may replay the previous movie if you wish, or cut it short if you

have seen it before. For traveling purposes, one icon switches the action scene to a map of available destinations, the names of which appear as you pass the cursor over each one. Travel to distant areas of the kingdom is also magically possible, but only when you are well-rested and have not been damaged.

Along the bottom of the screen is your available inventory. The program will allow you to use only certain of your items in a particular situation, while the others remain hidden. These are embedded in a tree branch which, like instant fruit, appear when their use should at least be considered. An open hint, to be sure, but not always an unwelcome one.

KINGDOM may be played at either a beginner or an advanced level, and the two versions are sufficiently different so that completion of the former should make most players anxious to try the latter. The novice version simply omits several tasks, and provides the hero with a less deadly path. Although much of the game requires that you run simple errands, finding one item here in order to get by a



"I DON'T DO IT!" Well, maybe you did. You can't expect the guards to take kindly to attempted assassination, can you?

barrier there, making someone happy someplace else, the charm of these characters, their setting and their music, easily makes up for the generic quality of their adventure. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

KINGDOM

RATING ★★☆☆☆☆

PROS Lush sound and graphics, charming characterizations.

CONS Generic story and a sudden crush of events at endgame.

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P.C. Hovercraft

SLIPSTREAM 5000 Turbo-Boosts To The Finish

by Paul C. Schuytema

THIS MAY SOUND STRANGE, BUT FOR YEARS I HAVE HAD THIS INCREDIBLE LONGING TO PLAY A GREAT SCIENCE-fiction hovercraft racing simulator. Odd, I know, but I've been known to lock on to wacky concepts now and again—I can't help it. The thought of hovering alone makes me drool, not to mention high speed racing while hovering. Last year, I jumped at the opportunity to review *CYBERRACE*, *CyberDreams'* voxel-graphics racing sim, hoping that it was my dream game. It wasn't even close.

But back in January, I caught a glimpse of *SLIPSTREAM 5000*. At that point it was still in development, but its potential grabbed me. I knew then and there that, when it was finished, it would be mine. Well, *SLIPSTREAM 5000* is out now, and I've logged hundreds of miles in my hovercraft. Has my thirst for hovering speed been quenched?

SLIPSTREAM 5000, from Software Refinery, part of Gremlin Interactive and published by U.S. Gold (whew!), is one good high speed, blasters-out-the-yazoo hovercraft racing simulator. Make no mistake—this is a gorgeous game, capturing high speed races in various locales around the globe. It's only drawback is a lack of depth.

SLIPSTREAM 5000 lets you join the Slipstream world circuit, which in the future has replaced Formula One racing. A slipstream racer is a high-speed (maximum speed of over 400 mph) hovercraft that relies on anti-gravity for lift and a turbocharged power plant for forward thrust.

The game has a lighthearted comic-book tone to it, from the renderings of the pilots and their silly names (like Ted "Malibu" Beech, surfer dude, or Rysko, the Tokyo bike gang leader) to the off-the-cuff television commentary during the championship races. But the humor really doesn't add much to the game, which is ultimately about action.

Ten courses vie for your hovercraft's attention in the single race mode, but initially, you'll only be able to select from the Grand Canyon and Chicago courses. Perform sufficiently well (that is, place in the top three), and you'll unlock more tracks.

Although you're able to choose your persona and his or her slipstream racer, each hovercraft performs identically, at least until you start adding on extra goodies later in the championship season.

AIN'T THAT CANYON GRAND

Once the countdown starts, you're off on the high-speed joystick thrashing of your life as you attempt to control your ship at 350+ mph through the environment of your choosing, be it canyon, pyramid or jungle. *SLIPSTREAM 5000* has really hit upon an amazing adrenaline pumping balance. You'll need full 120% concentration and the hand of a surgeon if you want to keep your slipstreamer under control. I quickly discovered that if I took my eyes off the screen for even an instant (like to switch weapons), I found myself getting up close and personal with Pleistocene sedimentary rock.

The graphics, which feature masterfully rendered texture maps, provide an ample sense of reality on almost every course. One case where things don't work out so well, though, is the Amazon. Here the jungle textures are so mottled that drivers will have a hard time picking up the visual cues they'll need to successfully navigate the course.

Racing is the heart and soul of *SLIPSTREAM 5000*, and Gremlin has done an excellent job creating a nicely balanced play environment. Generally, you fly your ship flat out, decelerating only in the tightest of corners. The sensation of speed is incredible, and the banking effects look great. So what if the designers took a few liberties with the flight physics—George Lucas, who modeled the flight of the X-Wing after a WWII fighter rather than a real gravity-defying spacecraft, did the same thing. The bottom line is entertainment, and when you mix in the turbo boosters and the in-



SLIPSTREAM 5000

Price: \$59.99

System

Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 (Pentium recommended), 4 MB of RAM (8 MB recommended), 8 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM, supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1-8 (modem and network)

Protection: None

Developer: Software Refinery/Gremlin Interactive

Publisher: U.S. Gold
San Francisco, CA
(415) 693-0297



flight combat, you've got the foundation for a hell of a game on your hands.

THE 400 MPH POWER-UP

The presence of power-ups throughout a race is one of the best design aspects of SLIPSTREAM 5000. Scattered about the race course, they come in several flavors: turbo recharger, booster (a free and instant acceleration boost), engine/control repairs, cash (only in the championship races), or my favorite little nasty, the blood red "reverse control" power-up, which will reverse your controls for a few seconds, sending you crashing into a wall at exceptional velocities.

SLIPSTREAM 5000 also handles combat nicely—it really provides an extra dimension of gameplay. The blaster, basically a low-power laser, is the default weapon, and although you can upgrade to a better weapon, it can carry you all the way to a championship, provided you move like Speed Racer. Hitting your opponents with blasters damages them only slightly, but it does slow them down a bit. One of my favorite tactics is to come up behind a competitor, take an inside line through a

tained enough damage that your top speed isn't what it should be, or your joystick will appear to be mired in rice pudding. As a drawback, on nearly every course the magic tunnel of regeneration will slow you down, maybe even causing you to drop back a few places.

The competition, I've got to admit, is pretty stiff, and unlike some other "real world" racing sims (where you feel that you never have a chance to make up any ground), you can really cook on these courses. But beware: no matter how slick you are, you almost always have some anti-gray hothead dogging your tail.

Of course, the usual cockpit and chase views monitor the action, but there is also a TV view that switches camera angles on the fly, as well as a fully customizable exterior view. Obviously, the latter two views are best reserved for replays. I had mixed feelings

about SLIPSTREAM's replay feature: I could replay a race in its entirety, but couldn't fast forward through it to see my brilliant finish. And there was no way for me to save my best races.

RACING FOR THE GOLD

Just like our modern-day racing championships, each racer earns points during the Slipstream season depending on what

place they finish in. At the end of ten races, the driver with the most points wins the spiffy gold Slipstream 5000 trophy.

In addition to racing for the championship, you're also racing for dollars. Cash



RUSH HOUR Sliding around at 290 mph blasting foes in your path will make travel-weary commuters smile.



SLIDING ALONG IN MY HOVERMOBILE Slipstream races take place in a variety of locales, including the Grand Canyon.

big turn, lay in half a dozen shots on his or her hull, and then blast past. For those hell-bent on destruction, it is possible to completely annihilate your opponents, but you'll need to purchase some of the more exotic weapons to do this.

Each course has a "pit row" or tunnel that provides access to an energy field which fully repairs your racer. This is important because at times you'll have sus-

plays an important role during the championship season; each \$50 power-up grabbed during a race and each contest won puts extra money in your pocket, and ultimately into your car. Unfortunately, the payouts are pretty paltry, even for a first place finish. Thankfully, you don't need that many add-ons to win races—you just need to drive like a bit out of hell and have a good turbocharger.

Racing the circuit is a ton of fun, and I've got to say that my wrist often felt like a string of wet spaghetti after driving more than two races in one sitting. But I must confess that I was disappointed with the fanfare I received when I captured the coveted trophy of champions: there wasn't any. After driving that hard, that well, I expected something a little better than nothing; I sure think I earned it.

GET YOUR HOVERCRAFTS

SLIPSTREAM 5000 also offers multiplayer play in two formats. The first, whereby two racers compete on a split screen on the same machine, is fun once or twice, but the screen is just too small and the graphics too slow.

Network play is another story. The head-to-head racing is great; although the action doesn't move as fast, racing against your friends is a lot less pre-

dictable and consequently more enjoyable. I would recommend at least a 486-66 if you want to get four players racing simultaneously. Move up to Pentiums and you'll be able to invite more friends.

TO THE MARROW OF THE BEAST

All in all, SLIPSTREAM 5000 is a riot to play. This action racer really captures



WEAPONS 'R US Depending on your race performance, you'll have the opportunity to upgrade your ship with turbo boosters, targeting systems and 11 different weapons.

the fantastic feel of whipping through a canyon at 400 miles per hour, and the graphics are well done indeed. It captures the feel of "near future anti-grav hovercraft racing" to a "T."

But it is not without its flaws. I would like to be able to qualify for races. I'd like a little more uniqueness in the performance of the various racers, and the ability to tweak them a bit more. And there's the already mentioned championship reward, or lack thereof. I know that these are minor quibbles, but they'd still make the game better.

But I don't think that's the heart of the matter. I'm concerned that this game just won't provide as deep a gaming experience as gamers are used

to seeing. As one CGW editor told me, "After four or five hours, I had sucked the marrow out of it." For me, the time was considerably longer, but in the long run I had the same reaction. Sure, SLIPSTREAM 5000 is a barrel o' fun, but for how many hours? Do gamers really want to drop their hard-earned money on a game that they'll master in a week, even if it is a week of high-speed fun? I guess that just depends on how badly you've been yearning for a good 3D sci-fi hovercraft simulator. You already know my answer. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SLIPSTREAM 5000

RATING ★★★★★

PROS The races are exciting and visually breathtaking, communicating a great sense of speed. Loads of fun.

CONS There's not much depth to the whole package, and there are few rewards for racing well.

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First Encounters Of The Worst Kind

GameTek Tries To Create A Universe, But Ends Up With A Fistful Of Bugs

by Jason Kapalka

IS IT MY IMAGINATION OR DO COMPUTER GAMES APPEAR TO BE GETTING SHORTER AND SMALLER? THE SPRAWLING, hundred-hour role-playing epics of yore have given way to "interactive movies" that exhaust their potential in a few evenings. Games with the scope of CIVILIZATION and SIMCITY have been succeeded by exercises in micro-management like COLONIZATION and SIMTOWER. The era of the epic game, some might argue, has passed.

But the free-form epic has a certain grandiose charm, doesn't it? The idea is appealing: a completely immersive artificial world where you're forced into no particular role or situation, a world where you forge your own crises, triumphs and failures. One where you can play hero or villain or both as you see fit, shaping and being shaped

by a constantly changing milieu? Only a few products have even dared to stab at this awesome ideal: Sid Meier's PIRATES was one, CGW Hall-of-Famer STARLIGHT another. And then there are the most ambitious attempts of all, David Braben's ELITE, its sequel FRONTIER, and now the third installment in the series, FIRST ENCOUNTERS.

THE GALAXY IS YOURS

FIRST ENCOUNTERS, like its predecessors, is an open-ended game of space trading, exploration and combat set in an environment almost too vast to comprehend: the Milky Way galaxy, modeled down to the individual buildings, bridges, rivers and mountains on each planet orbiting each sun in each of several thousand star systems. As in ELITE and FRONTIER, there is no way to "win" *per se*. Sure, there are some goals, but they're loose, ambiguous ones any space ace would want: a huge fortune, a really big ship (usually with a really big gun), a combat rating of "Elite," higher military rank within the Federation and the Empire, or just space drifting. FIRST ENCOUNTERS does add a plot of sorts, involving the alien Thargoids from the first game, but it's relatively unobtrusive and you're free to ignore it if you like.

ROCKET MAN

You start the game with a small one-man fighter and via trading, smuggling, bounty-hunting, piracy, assassinations, mining, courier and military duty, try to upgrade your ship and reputation in or-

der to get better ships, more money and more respect. Cut-throat bounty hunter or honest trader—it doesn't matter. Both approaches have their repercussions, and thankfully the game doesn't force you into any particular role.

The galaxy's political balance, defined by three blandly-titled galactic superpowers (Empire, Federation, Alliance) is now in constant flux. Five separate newspapers now give you the skinny on the latest skirmishes and intrigues, along with various human interest stories, classified ads and scientific tidbits. Dozens of opportunities for profit are contained between the lines of these stories. If a plague breaks out in the Sohofia system, for example, traders will find they can charge the Sohofians exorbitant prices for shipments of medicine. When civil war engulfs a contested system, the mercenary-minded can undertake missions to assassinate rebel leaders or, failing that, get contracts on pilots who successfully perform such hits.

As a result, FIRST ENCOUNTERS' universe feels more alive than either of the previous games: events march on independent of your own agenda, but your actions alter the course of those events. But while this is the deepest change in the engine, it's not the most obvious. Most players will immediately notice the improved texture-mapped polygon graphics. While not on par with high-end sims, the graphics are quite spiffy and incredibly detailed. And you have the freedom to check out any planet, base, ship or star from any angle or distance. Those who liked the idea of

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

Price: No SRP
System

Requirements: IBM compatible 486/33 MHz or better (486/50 MHz with Local Bus recommended), 5 MB RAM, 10 MB free disk space, CD-ROM; supports Advanced Gravis, Sound Blaster and 100% compatible sound cards.

Protection: None
Developer: Frontier Developments
Publisher: Gametek
(800) 426-3835



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Microsoft's *SPACE SIMULATOR* but thought it could have used a little more *Star Wars* in it will love *FIRST ENCOUNTERS'* astronomically accurate universe and realistic space-flight model. Even gamers like myself, who'd rather just turn on the autopilot and snooze till they reach the next port, will be awed by some of the "natural" spectacles. I was blown away when I witnessed a beautiful daybreak over the icy blue surface of Turner's World framed by a baleful ringed gas giant hanging in the sky beyond.

but it works. Bobbing and dodging through a forest of laser lances, trying to get a bead on an elusive pirate fighter while jamming or outrunning missiles, is as tense and exciting as any flight combat game on the market.

THE ATMOSPHERE THICKENS

On paper, *FIRST ENCOUNTERS* looks like it has achieved the Holy Grail of near-infinite replayability.

On paper, this game looks like a sure-shot. However, far from being the last game you'll ever need to buy, it's almost the last game you'll ever want to. How, you ask, could the publisher take something that looks so good—like a classic in the making—and screw it up so badly?

The recipe is simple. For starters, the designers hired eight programmers, seven writers, five artists, two dozen video-clip actors and so play-testers. For the fact that the North American release of *FIRST ENCOUNTERS* is playable at all we have a legion of unpaid beta-testers to thank: the entire game-playing population of the UK, who were sucker-punched by an initial release version so brutally, unplayably buggy that doing something as simple as looking at Mars could crash your computer, corrupt your save files, and dial up two hundred dollars worth of bills to a phone-sex line in the Dominican Republic.

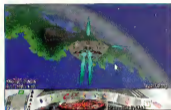
Even with the "improved" version unleashed on the US, there are so many bugs, glitches and twitches of so many flavors that it's frankly impossible to count them all. Suffice it to say that I discovered a new bug practically every time I played.

Next, some cryptic and unbelievably bad design decisions were made. Decisions so bad, in fact, that the quote, "it's not a bug it's a feature," is particularly applicable.

And finally, the designers seriously threw the game balance out of whack. Boring, relatively safe trade routes are the most profitable in the game; tough assassination jobs that require patience,



RIDE 'EM, SPACE COWBOY Although the flight controls have been made a little easier, novices will still find *First Encounters'* space combat a little perplexing.



PLANETFALL Entering planetary orbit without your autopilot is a risky proposition.



TRES CHICA! A space cop displays the elegant clothing styles of the 33rd Century.

Although a few new toys make navigation and piloting easier, if you've never played *FRONTIER* or *ELITE* the learning curve is a pretty steep hill. Not the sheer cliff of, say, *FALCON 3.0*, but you still wouldn't want to park your car on it. There are now nearly 50 ships you can fly in or fight against, each with significantly different flight characteristics. Furthermore, the physics of space combat have been fudged slightly in favor of playability; you'll no longer go flailing past your opponent at three-quarters the speed of light. It's still quirky and it feels nothing at all like most other space-combat sims,

split-second timing and cunning pay less than moving a hold full of tomatoes to the star next door. Mining, piracy and bounty-hunting, theoretically all possible careers, are particularly difficult and unremunerative. Practically every star system is filled with pirates, so that the player has to blast past more than half a dozen space rogues on each and every visit. And the climactic Thargoid missions, the "story" at the heart of the game, are thoroughly tedious.

OH HEAVENS!

It really is a crying shame. Peeking out from under all these grotesqueries is the game Braben and Co. were aiming for, and it's a gem—perhaps the closest anyone has yet come to that mythical, epic dream of an entire simulated universe. It's still possible *FIRST ENCOUNTERS* could achieve that dream, but it'll take a mighty fix-up effort from Gametek, who so far has been more interested in denying and rationalizing these errors than in repairing them. In its present state, this game is not completely unplayable, but it is definitely unfinished and unenjoyable. If ever you were to heed the advice, "Wait for the patch," do it with this half-cooked game.

THE EDITORS' SPEAK

FIRST ENCOUNTER

RATING ★★☆☆☆☆

PROS Almost the greatest open-ended space trading/exploration/combat game ever. Almost.

CONS The biggest complement of bugs, glitches, twitches, and design oversights since *OUTPOST*.

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PC
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Tough As Timex

Spectrum HoloByte's *CLOCKWERX* Disbes Out A Lickin' And Keeps On Ticking'

by Arinn Dembo

ALWAYS APPRECIATE A LITTLE COSMIC IRONY. SURELY WE ALL REMEMBER ALEXEY PAJITNOV—ONE OF THE industry's few celebrity designers, a man whose name holds rank with that of the nefarious Rubik. It was Pajitnov who, in the mid-80's, unleashed TETRIS on the unsuspecting world. In an age of ergonomics and maximum productivity, TETRIS was one of the most popular and addictive time-wasters ever devised. People sat goggle-eyed in front of the screen and played it for hours at a time until their corneas turned to corn chips. TETRIS became the bane of every corporate bean-counter and efficiency expert, every concerned parent and retentive boss—anyone, in short, who would prefer to open a vein rather than see someone wasting time.

That's why I find it ironic that in 1995, Alexey Pajitnov has endorsed *CLOCKWERX*. I say "endorsed" because, despite the fact that his name and face are all over this product, Pajitnov seems to have had no involvement whatsoever in its design, programming or conception. *CLOCKWERX*, by Spectrum HoloByte, is a new action puzzle game. The playing piece is a clock hand which flips, revolves, bounces and swings across a field of anchoring dots. And the fact that the game is based on the mechanism which marks the passage of time is quite appropriate, considering how much time I happily wasted playing it.

The object of the game is to guide your clock hand through a gauntlet to the

"goal dot," a shining beacon of safety on the other side of the playing field. Time is of essence; if the timer runs out, you'll self-destruct and will have to start over at the beginning of the level. Furthermore, if you do make it in time you'll get extra points based on the number of seconds left. On the other hand, you'll be tempted to dawdle a bit and pick up the "bonus dots" which are scattered in a variety of homicidal locations around the board.

There are, of course, some hazards to navigation: spikes, bombs and doors that can suddenly crush you; oil globs which, once activated, will pursue you across the screen; and enemy clock hands that don't signal before they turn. Touching any of these will destroy your clock hand and force you to start over. The key to avoiding them

is timing. Dodging past an enemy clock hand, for example, requires the same sense of the moment as skipping rope on the playground—you have to jump in and jump out at precisely the right interval to make it.

CLOCKWERX has a number of features that make it a joy both to load and to play. It installs completely from CD-ROM or floppy disk, doesn't require outrageous power from your system, and uses its copy protection only once per installation. It plays from Windows without a hitch, although you might need to shut down the larger applications and any other apps which want to access your sound card. And it offers a "time limit" feature which I can't recall seeing in other games of this type: before you begin,

CLOCKWERX

Price: \$26.95
3.5" floppy and CD-ROM System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
486/33 MHz or better, Windows 3.1 or better, CD-ROM, Windows-compatible sound card
Protection: Documentation Check
Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Alameda, CA
(800) 879-PLAY



DON'T MOCK THE CLOCK *Clockwerx* gets frenetic fast, but unlike games like TETRIS, it doesn't get fast frenetically.

you can set a limit, any interval from 5 to 55 minutes, to the duration of the game. At the end of the time allotted, the game will pause and ask if you'd like to continue (the idea, of course, is that you say "no"). Anyone who has ever looked up from a game of TETRIS into the eyes of a disgruntled supervisor will realize that *CLOCKWERX* is the perfect office companion, ideal for a 15-minute coffee break.

As action puzzle games go, this one is a cut above average. It requires both analysis and hand-eye coordination, but avoids the trap that the majority of arcade games fall into—it actually gets harder, rather than just faster. I recommend it for anyone frivolous enough to keep a Games menu in Windows, and for anyone who needs a little diversion...without wanting to lose track of time. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

CLOCKWERX

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Smarter than most arcade games, faster than most puzzle games, and you can limit the duration of play.

CONS Gets hard fast. Doesn't like to have any other big applications open in Windows.



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Circle Reader Service #68

ACTIVISION

Swinging For The Fences

Stormfront Studios Goes For The Long Ball With **TONY LA RUSSA 3**

by Jim Gindin

BOSTON RED SOX FANS REMEMBER WELL THE AUTUMN OF 1986, THOUGH THEY'D CERTAINLY LIKE TO FORGET IT. THEIR TEAM HAD TAKEN THE AMERICAN LEAGUE pennant, and they were confident going into the Series. They had every reason to—they had an excellent team with talent in crucial areas, especially at the bat. But when the cleats hit the clay, two key components—pitching and fielding—broke down, and the Sox were refused the crown. Is it cruel to Sox fans to revive the images of Bill Buckner's booted "routine" ground ball and the wild pitches that immediately followed?

Perhaps so, but it is done for a reason.

There is an analogy here between the '86 Red Sox and Stormfront Studios' latest baseball simulation,

TONY LA RUSSA 3. Here is a game that has a lot of talent, especially in the realm of graphics, but it also suffers from some design weaknesses. Those weaknesses are, in keeping with our analogy, in the areas of pitching and fielding. It's still a fine, fine game, but, like the '86 Sox, is just a few critical outs away from being a World Series Champ.

A BEAUTIFUL DAY FOR A BALLGAME

On the visual front, it's clear that Stormfront paid attention to details. Unlike other simulations, when your outfielder sprints into the gap to make a play, he gets a little smaller because that is how he would look from your box seat behind home plate. The runner sliding into second kicks up a little dirt. Players have realistic shadows cast by a definite light source instead of the conventional little gray circles most other games use. And the 28 major league stadiums, rendered in AutoCAD, are simply gorgeous.

All of this combines to make **TONY LA RUSSA 3** look more like a real baseball game than anything previously produced. **HARDBALL IV**, released early this year, is also easy to look at, and even features better artwork in some places. But it is a cartoon-like environment with the feel, dimension, and gameplay of a company softball game. With its outfields drawn to scale and its realistic motion-captured player animations, **LA RUSSA 3** looks and feels like the genuine article.

TONY LA RUSSA III

Price: \$69.95,
CD-ROM only
System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
386-40MHz
(486 recom-
mended), 4 MB
RAM (8 MB RAM
recommended),
SVGA graphics, 6
MB hard drive space, CD-ROM; supports
Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards
Protection: None
Developer: Stormfront Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
San Mateo, CA
(800) 245-4525

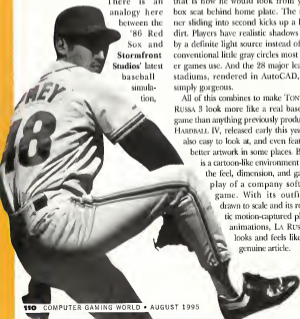


PITCHER, PITCHER

LA RUSSA 3 excels as an action game, largely due to its luscious graphics. But a gorgeous pitcher-batter screen and sharp animations are counterbalanced by a couple of significant flaws in the pitching and fielding models.

My biggest beef lies with the way pitching has been implemented. Like most games, you select a pitch from a menu of four and then select a location. But, unlike real baseball (and **HARDBALL IV**, whose pitching model is great), you can redirect a pitch in midair as it approaches the plate. While some might argue that this feature enhances the action, I can't for the life of me figure out how. My suspended disbelief is ruined completely when I can throw an inside slider that breaks back outside at the last minute.

Unfortunately, the pitching problems don't end on the mound. From the batter's box, all pitches look so similar that it's hard to determine what type of pitch is approaching until it gets within a few feet of the plate. This excludes knuckleballs, which wave back and forth in a



rather picturesque, but ludicrous manner. One other discrepancy I noticed is that every once in a while, the pitching simply falls apart. A few times, I've witnessed opposing pitchers walk more than 30 batters in a game, failing to hit the strike zone even once until the bases were loaded.

After hardwood meets tightly wound leather, it's time to move your fielder into position to make the play. The standard "colored circle of catch" is your guide; maneuver your fielder to the center of the circle to make the play, but beware the wind, which in some ballparks can really move the ball. Although fielding felt much more comfortable than pitching did, I was still a little frustrated by a couple of things. Instead of throwing the ball to the base, your men in the field throw to the baseman, regardless of his location. So your shortstop makes a nice play in the hole and fires quickly to first just in time. But the first baseman never made it over the bag; consequently he catches the ball completely out of position. End result: base hit.

A GAME OF NUMBERS

Statistically speaking, LA RUSSA 3 is, for the most part, excellent. Hands down, it beats most other games on the market (certainly the action-based crowd) and even comes close to matching the performance of the statistically solid STRAI-O-MATIC. While ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT, Stormfront's other baseball project, lacked depth, TONY LARUSSA has plenty of numbers for the stat-based junkie. Plus, (FRONT PAGE SPECIAL: BASEBALL fans take note) playing through an entire season only takes a couple of minutes on a high-end machine, and not much longer than that on a slower system.

That's not to say that a few categories—stolen bases, putouts and errors—could use a little fine tuning. It's also a tad too easy for a batter to bat .400 or hit 65 home runs. I even saw 46-year-

old pitcher Charlie Hough, who didn't have a stolen base in 25 seasons, swipe second ahead of a pretty good throw. But still, this game's statistical engine is miles ahead of HARDBALL IV, FRONT PAGE SPECIALS BASEBALL and most of the other baseball sims currently on the market.

There is one big problem however, albeit not a game-tilting one. This flaw is not a result of broken down algorithms or stilted probabilities. Instead it seems to be the results of several rules mis-

BYE, BYE, MR. AI

During the course of a season, the AI will, in general, make the proper roster assignments, replace injured players and distribute playing time in a realistic fashion. But during the game, despite the wealth of La Russa advice available just a module away, Mr. Computer Manager can't make even simple decisions properly. I like the idea of creating managerial profiles by assigning percentage points to about a dozen game situations, but it just doesn't work out the way it should. This results in not-so-smart managerial decisions like pinch-hitting for a Cecil Fielder at the end of a game with your team down by a few runs.

VOICE-OVER

Instead of hiring just one famous announcer to do the play-by-play, Stormfront decided to hire three: Mel Allen, Lon Simmons and Hank Greenwald. Sadly, this is a metaphor for the rest of the game—more is not necessarily better. Each announcer reads the same script, which is limited, repetitive and

often out of synch with the on-screen action. Even HARDBALL IV, which only uses about 24 MB and one announcer, has more variety, and at least AI Michaels mentions the players by name. LA



GRASS ROOTS MOVEMENT Tony La Russa III's graphics are the most attractive to date, with real shadows, AutoCAD-rendered stadiums and nicely mod-elled fielding.

interpretations. The game changes errors when it shouldn't (like when a fielder makes a throwing error that doesn't result in an advanced base) and none when it should. And forget about counting earned runs properly. Furthermore, very simple rules, like awarding a single rather than a double when the batter advances to second on a throw and the infield fly rule are overlooked entirely. Problems like these make me wonder if the designers completely understand how to score a game.



DELIVERANCE The pitcher-batter screen is excellent, with two separate views, but realistic ball players will want to avoid tossing triple curve sliders down the plate.

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Russa's announcers do not. I got really tired of hearing, "at bat, the speedy outfielder. He's hitting .298 against right-handers," before every pitch to Barry Bonds. But this is more of a problem with voice play-by-play in general. Thankfully, the narration can be turned off.

GM CHALLENGE

In TONY LA RUSSA 3's defense, it does extend the genre a bit with two unique modules. A fantasy draft module allows you to pool together a group of players and conduct a draft, and the "GM Challenge" module allows you to take a team years into the future by calling up minor leaguers and making other forward-thinking roster decisions. It even rates your performance as a GM over time.

Both of these are wonderful ideas, but they are incompletely executed. The AI in the fantasy draft module, which has been around since TONY LA RUSSA 2, is disappointing; the computer is completely dwarfed by human intelligence. With no preparation whatsoever, I drafted a team from the number 26 position and took it to an unheard of 117-65 season.

The GM Challenge is more complex. You choose teams and set scouting preferences by position. Each year, new players arrive in your minor league system, and based on scouting reports, you decide whether to let them join your 40-man roster, languish in the minors, or be given the fast bus out of town. This is a great concept, one that I've been waiting for someone to properly implement for years. It is simple in scope, easy to keep track of, and fun to play. Unfortunately (this word seems to be frequently popping up), the design is a bit strange. Players don't really develop in your minor league system, they just stick around until you move them up to The Show or cut them. One other small problem with the GM Challenge is that practically every

TEAM	PLAYER	POS	F	T	Cl	W	IP	ER	SH	BB	SO	HR
COLORADO	Thomas E. Johnson	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Lonnie Proctor	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
LONG BEACH	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
SEASIDE	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
COLORADO	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Tim Lincecum	P	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

BY THE NUMBERS Tony La Russa III's statistics are accurate and easy to get into.

Major Leaguer has a career that lasts 17-22 years. Still, though, the ingenuity of this module can not be denied.

BOX SCORE

LA RUSSA 3 represents a monumental programming effort. It resembles baseball more than any other game on the market, and pushes the envelope in a few areas, which should be applauded. However there are a number of niggling flaws which, when combined have a marked effect on the game and allow Stormfront IV to retain its arcade action penant. Although it is unfortunate that Stormfront can't figure out how to effectively connect La Russa's managing ideas to the computer AI, no problem in the game is severe enough to fatally frustrate gamers. This is the best graphical baseball strategy game out there, and if Stormfront can fix some of the flaws (which incidentally plague most other games on the market) TONY LA RUSSA 3 will be a classic. **C**

THE EDITORS SPEAK

TONY LA RUSSA BASEBALL 3

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A complete baseball simulation with beautiful graphics and better-than-average statistical accuracy.

CONS Weak pitching model and defensive quarks. Does not run very well on minimum configuration.

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ACTIVISION.

Circle Reader Service #33

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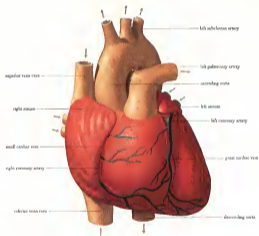


FIG. 34.—The Human Heart.

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Circle Reader Service #04

On Cue

*Interplay's VIRTUAL POOL Is
The New King Of The Billiard Green*

by Paul C. Schuytema

FOR ME, POOL IS ONE OF THOSE OCCASIONAL JOYS OF LIFE. I'M AWFUL AT THE GAME—NO POOL TABLE FACED THE BASEMENT of my childhood home—but I'm still of the opinion that one of the best things in life is to pull on a frosty mug, shoot the breeze, and shoot some lame-o 8-Ball with a buddy.

Virtual Pool

Price: No SRP
System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
386 or better,
2 MB RAM, VGA
graphics, 2 MB
hard drive space,
CD-ROM; sup-
ports Sound
Blaster and com-
patible sound cards.

of Players: 1-2 (modern and network)

Protection: None

Developer: Celeris

Publisher: Interplay Productions

Irvine, CA

(800) 969-GAME



As a kid, I had that quirky little pool game, the one advertised by Don Adams (of *Get Smart* fame); I think it was called "Pivot Pool." On my Atari 800, I also remember having a pretty decent pool game cartridge. Both were fun, but they really weren't pool—they were games based on pool. And that is the difference between any other computer pool sim and Interplay's VIRTUAL POOL—everything else roughly approximates pool; VIRTUAL POOL is pool.

NO SMOKING ALLOWED

The first thing you notice in VIRTUAL POOL is its elegant shooting interface. To

shoot, you use your mouse just like a cue: a little back and forth jiggling action to prepare for the shot, then a quick slide forward and—crack!—you send the cue ball on its course. I can't overemphasize the brilliance of this simple interface. Sliding your mouse doesn't provide all the tactile feel of a real cue, but it does provide the same basic range of motion. All of this adds up to extreme believability and playability which, when combined with the dead-on sound effects (you've got to hear it to believe it), will almost totally suspend your disbelief. Only a green, felt-on-slate mouse pad could make the experience any more convincing.

VIRTUAL POOL is a complete multimedia package, but the meat of the game is the 3D pool engine. The pool table is modeled in real-time 3D at resolutions up to 1024 x 768, depending on your video card. The table is the only object in the virtual world, which is good; it would have been very easy for Celeris (the designers) to toss in a useless and annoying background scene. By using the mouse you can rotate and zoom anywhere on the table, from a distant, bird's eye view of the whole slate bed to a myopic close-up of the nine-ball's ochre stripe.

Shooting, as previously mentioned, is simple as can be: just aim your stick with

the mouse, hold down the "S" key (for "shoot"), and slide your mouse forward to take the shot. Total learning time for a basic shot: about three and a half seconds. Of course, you can get as Minnesota Fats as you want with your shots. Since VIRTUAL POOL's 3D engine not only models the position of the ball, but the rotation as well, you can raise up the butt of your cue, move the strike point off center, and execute a flawless masse shot (yes, it's as hard to do in VIRTUAL POOL as it is in real pool).

There is one problem with the mouse interface. I found it increasingly frustrating using the mouse for a power shot, like a break shot. When I really needed to whack the cue ball, I would just end up spinning the mouse ball and getting some very odd results. I tried both a cheap-o mouse and a hefty Microsoft



EYE OF NEWTON *Virtual Pool* has a tracking option to help you get just the right angle on tough shots, like this bank.

mouse, but both suffered the same power shot problem.

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Circle Reader Service #111

THE DEFINING MOMENT

The defining moment of my experience with VIRTUAL POOL was in my first game. I had an across-the-table shot to sink the seven ball, which was nesting deep in the corner—an easy, easy shot for anyone who has played even a modicum of pool. But as for myself, well, I can sink this shot about five percent of the time. I just don't have the steady hand needed to send the cue ball along the proper path. So I tried the shot and I missed, just like I would on a real table. Any simulation that can accurately model my short-comings has my respect.

For the casual pool gamer, or those who just want to mess around, you can just play slop, or you can rack the balls in any game formation you want (8-Ball, 9-Ball, etc.). In this practice mode, you have at your fingertips a plethora of helpful little goodies. The Tracking option can show all of the ball path vectors for any shot you care to make, an indispensable aid when you are first learning how to nail a bank shot. You can also undo your last shot, or replay a particularly exciting shot (this is available within a game too) at varying speeds: in super slow motion, I finally understood how putting english on the ball really works.

Pool is one of those great games, like darts, in which you can have just as much fun screwing around by yourself tuning up your game as you can with some friendly competition. VIRTUAL POOL's computer opponents range in skill level from drunk and blind to Willie Mosconi. My only quibble with the computer opponents is that their names are hideously stupid (Mrs. Offen? Come on!) and to make matters worse, you can't edit their names. The AI isn't bad, and there is no way I'm even close to besting "Dead-Eye Dan", but it appears to be based on some sort of scaling of shot ability, rather than pool ability. Even the lamest of the lame computer players always go for open combination shots, showing tactical skill and knowledge far beyond their shooting ability.

Of course, it's always more fun to play against a flesh and blood opponent, to heckle and be heckled while trouncing or getting trounced. Thankfully VIRTUAL POOL has more options than anyone

could want. All the standard games are available: 9-ball, 8-ball, rotation and straight pool. You can horseat, each taking turns on the same system, or you can hook up over network or modem. Strangely enough, in this day and age of network gaming, I found horseating the most effective and the most fun—pool's a social game after all.

VIRTUAL POOL also comes with a multimedia reference section. There is a nice humorous animated history of pool, and I didn't mind the small video presentation window. I actually learned quite a bit. Some decent tutorials, using the VIRTUAL POOL engine, are also included, but they are non-interactive. It's as if the designers simply did a video capture of someone playing around in the sim portion of the game and then compressed it into a PC movie format. And there's also

some neat footage of "Machine Gun" Lou Bateria (in one clip he runs a table in under 90 seconds, hence the name) in action. I would have liked these clips much better if, after each demonstrated shot, I was given a chance to do the same thing.

MIS-CUES

Despite its sparkling nature, I do have a few problems with VIRTUAL POOL. For starters, the music is just awful. With the game shipping on CD-ROM, and no real need for iMuse type compose-on-the-fly music, there is no reason for such abysmal FM renditions of *The Entertainer* and other "pool hall classics." It just gives me a headache.

One glaring annoying error exists in the "call your pocket" games. You don't actually call your shot; VIRTUAL POOL as-

What A Masse!

The masse shot is the way the pros sink a pool ball. In fact, many pool balls use the shot because beginners will more than likely miss the cue ball entirely, and slam the cue into the felt, leaving a nice six-inch gash. Fortunately, *Virtual Pool* isn't so picky, and the simulation, while realistic, doesn't model tom felt.

A masse shot is a controlled curve, giving an expert player an open shot in even the most tricky of situations. In games such as 9-Ball, when you must hit the lowest ball first, no matter what it can mean the difference between a championship trophy and a box of off-brand mac and cheese.

The secret to making your ball curve is to put an incredible amount of spin, or english, on the cue ball. To do this, you must raise up the butt of the cue, so that you are shooting down at it. You want to strike a glancing blow, so you have to adjust the strike point in *Virtual Pool*. You probably need a cue angle of at least 70 degrees. In masse shots, the balls curve to the side that you are striking. That means, in our example, since we want a right curve, we want to strike the ball on the right side. Because of the odd way a spinning ball moves, you also need to strike towards the front of your ball, instead of behind, as common sense might dictate. You have to hit a masse shot very hard to get the right spin, but only practice can tell you how to precisely aim your shot. Good luck!



ACCELERATED MASSE The top screen shows the path the correctly performed masse shot will take: skirting around the 4 and 11 balls to sink the eight ball. In the bottom screen we observe the cue a little closer, just before the shot. Notice the strike point (the blue dot) is to the right and front of the ball. Also note that the angle of the cue to the table is a hefty 75 degrees.

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sures it knows which pocket you're looking for. This works just fine about 90% of the time, but I encountered more than a few situations where the sim's assumptions were dead wrong. Worse yet, you'll end up with a foul if you sink the shot you would call.

I also found myself wondering why In-

terplay chose to use such a complex video setup system as opposed to a simple universal VESA driver like UniVBE. I spent the first 15 minutes after the initial installation trying out numerous cryptic drivers, none of which precisely matched my video card. I finally did manage to find a high resolution driver that worked with my card, but it was needless frustration—a universal VESA driver would have taken up a lot less time and is a lot more user-friendly.

EIGHT BALL IN THE CORNER POCKET

Limitations aside, VIRTUAL POOL is an elegant product that has the unique ability to be both an exciting game in its own right and a truly useful tutorial for the

real game (for those of us with a several thousand dollar computer in our basement, rather than a several thousand dollar pool table). I did test out this hypothesis. Before I began "working" on this review, I went down to the local pub for a brew and a game. As expected, I was awful. After a week of hard play with VIRTUAL POOL, I tried my luck again on the felt and slate. I was by no means perfect—I still couldn't even make a decent imitation of a masse shot—but I did manage a run of six bags in a row, which is unheard of for yours truly. Ah, the values of virtual education. ☺



DOWN AND DIRTY You can also get up close and personal with the balls to check angles or the placement of the cue tip on the cue ball.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

VIRTUAL POOL

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Fluid, intuitive simulation of billiards with an excellent control interface. Great 3D representation of a pool table and ball movement.

CONS Inspid music, non-interactive multimedia tutorials, and minor gameplay problems.

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INTERACTIVE QUARTERLY
AMERICA'S PREMIERE ADULT CD-ROM MAGAZINE

Ghouls Of The Gridiron

BLOOD BOWL, The Brawl-Ball Boardgame, Blitzes Its Way To The PC

by Martin E. Cirulis

LONG AGO, WHEN TSR INC. WAS STILL CONSIDERED A BENEVOLENT ENTITY AND *DRAGON* MAGAZINE WAS MORE FUN TO READ, AN ODD LITTLE GAME WAS discovered amidst the monthly pages of Tolkien worship/exploitation. It involved a field, a ball and a bunch of monsters who could barely decide between killing each other and scoring a touchdown. A few years later, the fledgling **Games Workshop** group from jolly old England took the idea and combined it with a very basic version of their *Warhammer* fantasy combat system to produce *Blood Bowl* (BB). Now, ten odd years and three major incarnations later, the boardgame has made that nigh-inevitable leap to the computer screen with the help of **MicroLeague** and **Subway Software**.

THE GORIEST YARD

BLOOD BOWL bills itself as "The Game of Fantasy Football," and while it is certainly rooted deeply in the realm of fantasy—the teams consist of Dwarves, Elves, and the like—the term "Football" is used somewhat liberally.

When you get right down to it, *BLOOD BOWL* is more like monster-rugby than Bo's sport. Coaches move their players across a 15 x 25 grid unimpeded by any notion akin to downs, yardage or plays. All that counts is getting the ball into the opposition's end-zone. And don't worry

about the kick through the crossbars; touchdowns are worth a single point and there are no field goals in sight. Even so, there are still plenty of forward passes to be thrown, dropped and intercepted, and the "blitz" is still in effect.

While *BLOOD BOWL* is actually a mish-mash of the two major pigskin disciplines, the computer game does embrace the sensibilities of more "serious" sports sims. Variable weather conditions such as rain and snow come into play with the expected effects on gameplay. And in a nice

touch, stadiums have different field surfaces, allowing the game to be played on not only traditional grass but exceedingly painful stone and annoyingly slippery ice. The game play itself is like a traditional

sports game, but played on a turn-based schedule wherein you control each player's moves in sequence.

THE HUNCHBACKS OF NOTRE DAME

And speaking of players, what a monkey crew they are. Unfortunately, the variety is more cosmetic than real. Players are rated in only four categories: Movement Allowance, which rates how many squares a

player can move per turn; Strength, which dictates how well a monster dumps and maims other players; Agility, which governs the realms of throwing, receiving and dodging; and finally Armor Value, which indicates the durability and thus the life expectancy of your players. While four stats do not do much to set species apart, there are a number of special skills and physical abilities that flesh things out a little.

A coach's turn consists of selecting a creature with the mouse and moving it across the field. Each player has a zone-of-control (ZOC) that extends into the eight squares surrounding it; it is in this area that the player can interact with other sods unlucky enough to be sharing the field with him. Offensive contact generally takes the form of blocking, which takes up a player's full turn; this means that there must be an opponent in your player's ZOC at the beginning of the turn in order to throw a block. Blocks can result in any or all of the following outcomes, based on a comparison of strengths and a simulated die roll: you could push your opponent back a square; knock your enemy down or get knocked down yourself; hurt or kill the other player or get your own player hurt or killed; or nothing at all could happen. If a player is not lucky enough to start off face-to-whatever with the enemy, a move-and-then-block maneuver called a "blitz" may be performed with the same grab bag of results. This is an extremely handy maneuver for exploiting a hole made by your front line, but a team is allowed only one blitz per turn, so you must plan the attack carefully.

If the player is fortunate enough to have the ball, he has the option at any

Blood Bowl

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System

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Protection: None
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time of either handing the ball off to a friendly player in his ZOC or passing the ball multiple hexes in any direction to another player. Passing and receiving are pursuits best left to the highly agile, but any player is capable of doing the job and



THAT'S THE WAY THE HEAD BOUNCES The ultimate goal in *Blood Bowl* is to score, kill, and maim, not necessarily in that order.

sometimes a lowly lineman will be the one to make that perfect pass that gets you out of trouble and into the end-zone.

In theory, once you have moved and abused all the players under your command, you then hit the end-turn button and hand things over to the other player. Unfortunately, there is another way to end your turn, one which is almost completely out of your control. Certain failed maneuvers, like dropping the ball, missing a pass, or getting tackled end your turn automatically and turn things over to the other player. For some reason, the too-clever-for-their-own-good kids at Games Workshop decided that the game had a tendency to last a bit long, and introduced this "feature" as a mechanism to speed things up in the latest edition of the boardgame. Most computer gamers will wish they had left it out of the computer version, or at the very least made the rule optional.

NAVYSAVERS AND CHEERLEADERS

While *Blood Bowl* is a faithful rendition of the boardgame and retains much of the wacky nihilistic post-punk humor that Games Workshop products are so famous for, it still has some fundamental flaws in presentation and gameplay.

Regardless of how non-standard the

subject matter is, *Blood Bowl* is basically a sports game and it really should have benefited from the vast amount of work that has gone into developing that genre. Instead, we get strange omissions and difficulties that were ironed out of most football sims years ago. For example, valuable gameplay information is poorly presented or even omitted in some cases. When a player is blown off the field by an injury, there is no information on the screen other than a quick graphic of blood squirting out of a prone figure. To find out the particulars of who got whacked and how badly, you have to interrupt the action and check your roster.

Visual information is also lacking. The prime example is that there is only a single icon for each character on a team. If I'm playing as the human team, all my players look identical on the field, even the free agent Minotaur I purchased the game before.



DRCS VS. HUMANS The on-field action resembles rugby a lot more than it does football.

You'd think they could have come up with different icons for different types of players on a single team. It would be nice if I could tell at a glance if I am about to try a block against a fragile skeleton or a massive mummy.

At the gameplay level, *BLOOD BOWL* is hampered largely by the incarnation of the boardgame it emulates. The newest version may be the one on game store shelves, but it also is the least play-tested, and obviously bad ideas like the involuntary turn end should not have been inflicted on computer gamers. Quick and simple might be good when you're doing

everything by hand, but the glory of computers is that they can handle all the tedious aspects of detail while leaving you to enjoy all the good parts. I would like to have seen an older version of the boardgame computerized.

Other things detracting from a good game include: the haphazard treatment of league play (there are only 8 teams to spread over 64 conference and division slots); computer teams whose statistics belie their success, like players rushing for 500 yards and passing for another couple of hundred on the losing side of a 1-0 game; and a rulebook straight out of the Vague-Guys School of Manual Writing. The teams themselves are also hopelessly unbalanced, with the Halling and Skaven (giant mutant rat) teams being completely outclassed.

Although *MicroLeague* failed to ship modern play with *Blood Bowl*, they've already released a multiplayer patch. Gamers who found the "Sorry, we fooled you" note inside of the box can find this patch in various places on-line.

POST-MORTEM

In the end, what it comes down to is history. Those of us who have been *Blood Bowl* fans through the years will find ourselves enjoying the computerized version, with its clever morsels of eye-candy and dedication to the boardgame. Of course we'll be griping all the way. Newcomers, especially sport sim fans looking for a little diversion from their usual fare, will probably get a big kick out of their first few games, but ultimately they'll become frustrated with *BLOOD BOWL*'s clumsy mechanics and gameplay. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BLOOD BOWL

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Great subject matter and easy play will draw players into the stadium.

CONS Poor choices in design and presentation may have some screaming for blood by the fourth quarter.

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The Red Baron Lives!



THE MAJORITY OF SIMULATIONS ARE FLASHES IN the pan—they're hot for a few months, but soon they're gone and forgotten.

As PCs get faster and more capable, new sims come along that look, sound, and act more like real vehicles. Few of us take the time to remember, much less replay, older sims. Sure, you occasionally find folks still playing CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT, SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE, and F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III, but when was the last time you heard someone mention flying around in BLUE MAX, SOLO FLIGHT, or even PACIFIC STRIKE?

On a very rare occasion, though, a simulation comes along that's so good that it stays available on store shelves not for weeks or months, but for years. Ahead of their times, these sims pack so much realism and play value that they're able to stay competitive with their younger counterparts. This short list includes sims such as Spectrum

HoloByte's FALCON 3.0, Sublogic's ATP and Dynamic's RED BARON.

These classic simulations remain fun, but they can be frustrating once you've gotten accustomed to the bells and whistles of newer simulations. Many don't support alternate input devices, while others don't run well on fast machines, and some just suffer from a limited number of missions or gameplay options.

If nostalgia strikes, don't let these setbacks keep you away from the cockpits of your favorite old flight simulators. Thanks to the efforts of some code-savvy flight sim fans, there are add-ons galore in the freeware and shareware arenas that can bring old sims up to speed.

BARON DOWN

Take, for example, RED BARON. Released in the dark ages of 1990, this sim from Dumon Slye's team at Dynamic featured a revolutionary flight model complete with realistic spins and energy bleed. Amazingly, RED BARON is still selling today as part of CD-ROM bundles with other Dynamic flight sims.

In the five years since RED BARON's release, only Origin's WINGS OF GLORY has challenged it

for the title of best World War I sim. But RED BARON does have some problems on today's PCs. It runs too fast on Pentium systems, which not only affects realism and gameplay, but also screws up the program's AI calculations. Also, its support of enhanced control devices isn't up to par with modern sims, rudder support isn't proportional, and extra buttons and view hats are ignored on non-programmable devices.

Programmers have poked around in RED BARON's programs and their files over the years and found workarounds

SOFTWARE

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ON THE RADAR

This month in simulation news...

Spectrum HoloByte's Falcon 4, the next sim in the popular air combat series, will probably be slightly delayed by personnel changes on the project's development team. Spectrum recently laid off several key managers in the group, and will be restructuring the team.

In other personnel news, Frank Savage, the lead programmer of Origin's Wings of Glory 3, has moved on to a new interactive division of FASA, the company that made its name with the BurnTux line of games. Will Savage be using his experience with space simulations to create new BurnTux projects?

Papyrus Software, creators of IronCue and NASCAR Racers, are working on a new, enhanced version of IronCue. IronCue Racers 2.0 will essentially bring the original game up to the graphic and realism levels of NASCAR. SVGA graphics, new sound effects, more realistic handling, and the ability to connect to Papyrus' new multiplayer online service will be key features.

And while we're on-line, Donark has finally launched Conquest KII, the multiplayer WWII combat game, on the Internet. For more information on how to get

www.donark.com/ConquestKII.html or call 1-800-333-0026.

by Denny Atkin

for these limitations. Checking CompuServe's flight sim forum (FSForum) I found dozens of patches, TSRs, and mission files designed to bring RED BARON up to par. While we wait for RED BARON II, these enhancements can make the golden oldie fly like a factory-fresh sim. After application of a few of these patches, about the only thing missing from RED BARON is SVGA graphics.

THE X FILE

The simplest way to bring RED BARON up to speed is with Bob Church's XBARON patch. The most recent version as of this writing, XBARON 1.46, addresses nearly all of RED BARON's problems on fast machines. Most significant is the Frame Rate Limiter, which keeps screen updates from taking place so fast that the program doesn't operate properly. RED BARON does flight model calculations between screen updates, and if those updates take place too quickly, then the program doesn't have time to complete its calculations, making aircraft control difficult and causing computer-controlled enemies to fly strangely. XBARON limits the frame rate so that your Sopwith Camel won't speed over

the landscape like an F-15. The screen updates still look silky smooth, though.

The Frame Rate Limiter also works in RED BARON's VCR mode and fixes a problem that's plagued all the Dynamic flight simulators. If

you record a mission on a Pentium 90 and display it on a 486/33, the tape doesn't play back properly. If both systems are running an XBARON-patched version of RED BARON, though, everything plays back at the proper speed. XBARON also adds new functions for manually accelerating or decelerating tape playback.

XBARON also adds one of the most flexible joystick configuration screens I've ever seen. You can set a dead zone where stick

movement has no effect (great if your joystick doesn't center precisely), and adjust joystick sensitivity by altering the response curves for each axis.

RED BARON does support an analog throttle and rudder pedals, but only in a very limited fashion. The inputs work as if they're coming from the keyboard—moving the throttle jumps the setting by 10 percent, and hitting the rudder pedals

programmed for a variety of functions, including setting various views, "blipping" the engine power, and unjamming the guns. XBARON 1.46 also supports the Thrustmaster-style view hat, but not the one on the CH Flightstick Pro.

Once XBARON is set up by patching the RED BARON executable and running XBARON SETUP, it's completely transparent. The freeware program works on both the original lousy version of the program, as well as the slightly enhanced CD-ROM update.

CASTING A HEX

XBARON makes some changes to RED BARON to make it smoother running and easier to control, but it doesn't alter the gameplay. If you want to dive into RED BARON's guts and change how it works, Joe Scoleri's RB-HEX 3 is the package for you. It includes a hex editor and a full explanation

of the various values in RED BARON's data files so that you can go in and change almost any value in the simulation. You can alter aircraft performance, gun field of fire, service ceiling, wing strength, and a host of other values. If you don't feel one of the planes really performs like the real thing, change the performance. You can even use the patches to alter an existing aircraft so it simulates another fighter not included in RED BARON. One warning: Hex editing is a bit dangerous. If you alter the wrong value, you can cause the program to malfunction or even crash. But the program is pretty easy to use, and if you follow the detailed instructions you should have no problems.

Along with the editor, RB-HEX includes a number of prebuilt patches. You can use these to lessen the likelihood of mid-air collisions, make wing strength more realistic on some of the fighters, turn some single-gun planes into twin-gunners, and adjust some improper performance values. My favorite additions, though, are the Blitz Machine fighter and Blitz Bomber, ultra-powerful and completely unrealistic



SNOOPY VS BARON X Bob Church's XBaron utility makes Red Baron playable on today's machines through such features as a frame rate limiter and an advanced joystick configuration utility (pictured).



THE ART OF FLYING Devise your own aircraft color schemes with Joe Scoleri's RB-HEX utility.

makes the rudder deflect 100 percent. XBARON patches the throttle to work as a true proportional throttle, making for smooth engine adjustments. It also supports proportional rudder response, so you can kick the rudder over a little or a lot. You can even set up a partial aileron-rudder linkage so the plane will realistically roll a little when the rudder pedals are depressed.

Up to four joystick buttons can be pro-

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ORIGIN

planes thrown in just for fun. The Blitz Machine is a blast to fly when you want to mow down everything in your path (irregardless of flying an A-10 in the first World War). Like XBARON, RB-HLX is freeware.

A PLANE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

Also from Joe Scereri comes RB COLOR, a neat little utility that lets you customize aircraft color schemes. If you've always wanted to fly a Sopwith Snipe with yellow wings and a blue fuselage, now you can. You might want to duplicate a particular ace's color scheme, or perhaps change both enemy and allied aircraft to the same color scheme to make combat even more challenging. The unregistered version only lets you fly color-altered Sopwith Snipes and Fokker D.VIIs, but the \$10 full program lets you alter the paint job on any lighter.

There are a host of other patches available. You can turn a Sopwith Camel into the later Sopwith Dolphin, use ACE-CONTROL to revive dead pilots and edit your pilot roster, and even fix improper plural-

izations in the MISSION BUILDER. History buffs can use Graham von Cree's RICHTH patch to change RED BARON to reflect that Richtofen flew a Halberstadt in January, 1917 when his Albatros was damaged, and a Pfalz in February, 1918 when his airframe failed grounded Fokker Dr.1s.

Once you've fine-tuned the sim, check out the dozens of custom missions for the RED BARON MISSION BUILDER available online. Some of these recreate historical battles, while others simply create challenging tactical scenarios.

UPDATES ABOUND

RED BARON'S not the only sim with unofficial patches. Break out your modem or browse your local PD/shareware library and you'll find fixes and enhancements for FALCON 3.0, SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE, ACES OVER EUROPE, and a host of other sims. Even recent sims have already been enhanced by enthusiastic programmers—there's a patch floating around the Internet that lets you fly any of the planes in EA's U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS. Happy hunting! ☺

RED BARON PATCH ROSTER

The filenames listed here are listed as they appear in CompuServe's F\$Forum. You should also be able to find them on most online services with similar names.

XB14S.ZIP	Xterm 1.46
RBHX3.ZIP	RB-Hlx 3
RBCOIT.ZIP	RBColor 1.3
DOLFIN.ZIP	Patch Sopwith Camel to perform as a Sopwith Dolphin
ACCR.ZIP	Ace-Control, for reviving dead pilots and editing rosters
RBJUNT.ZIP	GIF maps showing ground unit and landmark placement in Red Baron
RBCD.ZIP	View hot and extra button TSRs for the CD-ROM version of Red Baron
RBSTM.ZIP	View hot and extra button TSRs for the floppy release
RBMSP.ZIP	Fixes pluralization errors in the Mission Builder
RBCONF.ZIP	Official Dynamos patch to fix problems with saving coalition information
RICHTH.ZIP	Alters the planes Richtofen flew during 1917 and 1918
R-DVEP.ZIP	Turns the Fokker D.VII into the D.VII with a 185 hp BMW engine
RBPTCH.ZIP	Enables new aircraft and aces from the Mission Builder in Career Mode
RRENT.ZIP	Lets you edit pilot status

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The Danger Zone

Spectrum HoloByte's *TOP GUN* Targets A New Squadron Of Mavericks

by Mike Weksler

AT THE ONSET OF THE VIETNAM WAR, U.S. FIGHTER AIRCRAFT WERE ARMED WITH AIR-TO-AIR MISSILES capable of shooting down targets outside of a pilot's visual range. U.S. military tacticians assumed that with the new long-distance capability of these missiles, the days of close-in dogfighting were long gone. So confident were these tacticians that the earliest F-4 Phantoms weren't even equipped with guns. Pilots of these F-4s found themselves in an odd situation. The restrictive rules of engagement required them to visually identify targets prior to attack. However, once a fighter was close enough to visually identify a MiG, he was often too close to use his missiles, yet close enough to engage with guns. When U.S. air losses grew at an alarming rate, guns were quickly returned to the Phantoms, and "old-fashioned" dogfighting skills were

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

recognized as being just as important as the newfangled missiles. As more pilots engaged in dogfights, and as U.S. air losses mounted, the Navy recognized the need to teach the fine art of dogfighting to a new generation of fighter pilots. It was out of this need that a new type of air combat training program was born, a program called *Top Gun*.

When Spectrum HoloByte set out to design yet another modern air combat simulation, they recognized a similar need to train new pilots. The software shelves are stocked full of complex, realistic simulations with manuals as thick as bricks, all of which are daunting to the newcomer to flight. So, like the Navy did more than 20 years ago, Spectrum set out to design a new type of air combat training program, a simulation designed to teach new pilots the fine art of modern air warfare. The new sim is *TOP GUN: FIRE AT WILL*, based upon the mid-80s film, *Top Gun*. By retaining the slightly reckless, seat-of-the-pants flavor from the movie and combining it with a detailed



LIGHTS, CAMERA, COMBAT *Top Gun* actor James Tolkan recaptures his role as your hard-arsed, take no b.s. squadron commander.

F-14 Tomcat sim, the design team did two things. First, they took a hot genre for air combat and made it approachable for the novice, without insulting the experienced player. Then, to ensure they captured the essence of the popular film for a strong "tie-in," Spectrum HoloByte procured the talents of actor James Tolkan to reprise his role of Hondo: the bald, tough-talking, cigar-chomping, commanding officer. Why no Tom Cruise? Simple—when you sit down to fly in *TOP GUN*, you are Maverick.

"HEY, COUGAR, YOU SEEN ANY CARRIERS AROUND HERE?"

The *TOP GUN* action takes place in three hot-spot theaters: Cuba, Korea, and Libya, with approximately 40 missions for you to show your stuff. Throughout the game, a subplot will pit you against a nefarious antagonist who is behind most of the "fires" your carrier is assigned to stamp out.

There are both cinematic and static (i.e., map view) briefings and debriefings with over 20 actors to keep the level of interest and flash appeal high, and cine-



NEED A LIGHT? You don't want to be on the receiving end of "Maverick's" F-14 Tomcat. Notice the pop-up windows with the "God's-eye" radar on the left and a missile camera view on the right, depicting the action as seen from another enemy aircraft.

natic CNN-style news briefs to keep you informed of the world situation. The individual missions are the core of the game, and they deal primarily with the F-14's mission: fleet defense. That includes flying lots of BARCAP (Barrier Combat Air Patrol) missions, where you protect your carrier from all airborne threats. There are also TARCAP (Target Combat Air Patrol) missions, where you escort strike aircraft to their target and keep the MiGs off their back.

Individual missions are designed to keep the action level high with enough MiGs, Bear Bombers, enemy shipping, SAM (surface-to-air missiles), and anti-aircraft guns to keep you mighty busy. To handle the various threats, you'll be packing some serious heat, from short range Sidewinder heat-seeking missiles, longer range Sparrow radar-guided missiles, and very long range Phoenix missiles that can reach targets over 100 miles away.



DETAILS, DETAILS In addition to outstanding terrain, the 3D objects are amazingly realistic. On this F-14, the wings swing according to your airspeed, and you can even see the control surfaces move!

As with both WING COMMANDER III and STRIKE COMMANDER, you are given navigation waypoints via in-flight maps, and you may encounter hostiles at any point along the way. In our pre-release version, there is also a "complete mission" option. This is a handy feature that lets you skip to the next mission or re-do the current one if you find yourself in over your head. TOP GUN won't have robust mission planning like U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS, but you will have several instant action scenarios with which to practice carrier landing skills or dogfighting techniques.

HEADS UP

In air combat terms, "pilot workload" refers to the task-load that a pilot must manage in order to accomplish his mission. Managing various radar, HUD (Heads Up Display), communication and weapon systems all contribute to this workload. Most "realistic" simulations, like MicroProse's F-14 FLEET DEFENDER and Spectrum HoloByte's FALCON 3.0, try to simulate all of these systems, creating a moderately realistic workload for the player to manage. Of course, the TOP GUN designers want to reduce the pilot workload in order to ease new pilots into the genre. But, unlike previous "simplified" simulations that completely eliminate such things as radar and various HUD modes, TOP GUN will include all of the instruments and radar equipment—they'll just be simplified. There will be some form of targeting radar, detailed HUD modes, and a threat warning receiver, enhanced to provide a "God's-eye view" of the surrounding threats. Additionally, there is a suite of analog gauges and displays which distinguish the product as a serious, albeit less complex simulation. Additionally, there are innovative pop-up target camera windows, reminiscent of MicroProse's F-117A STEALTH FIGHTER.

"TALK TO ME GOOSE!"

TOP GUN appears to be designed less to simulate the actual F-14 Tomcat than the experience of strapping into "Maverick's" F-14 from the TOP GUN movie. The game's rock soundtrack (including a decent re-recorded version of Kenny Loggins' hit title song) is digitally recorded onto the CD, so you can enjoy genuine music regardless of your installed sound card. Additionally, the cinematic se-



"CALL THE BULL!" Borrowing carrier landings are all in a day's work for Maverick. Top Gun has several cockpit views, but this one gives you a good field of view to get your bird back on the ship in one piece.

quences and digitally recorded radio chatter help keep you suspended in the TOP GUN universe. In the high-resolution mode, the graphics are nothing less than state-of-the-art, like U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS, but with excellent terrain and well-rendered 3D objects.

Even more compelling, however, is the aggressive multiplayer support in TOP GUN. For network play, up to 16 players will be able to fly simultaneously, break off into smaller groups, and yes, even enter or leave a battle *without* restarting the game. Modem play should also be incorporated. While our beta copy of the game ran okay on a hot-rodded 486DX4-100, it really took the full-dress Pentium 90 to run the game in 640x480 without a hitch.

RETURN TO BASE

With its emphasis on cinematics and instant action, it looks like TOP GUN may appeal to action fans who enjoy games like STRIKE COMMANDER and WING COMMANDER III. Additionally, it looks like it will be ideal for those who want to experience jet combat but have been put off by the notorious complexity of other sims. With adjustable difficulty levels for both the flight models and the enemy AI, it might even lure a few seasoned cockpit jockeys into its targeting range, but that's uncertain. What is certain is this: with its potential for instant gratification, only one aircraft to master, and the chance to play the high-flying hotshot, TOP GUN will, like its namesake, train a whole new generation of gamers for simulated jet combat. ☺

Reinventing The Wheel

Extreme's COMPETITION DRIVING SYSTEM Takes The Checkered Flag Of Driving Controls

by Gordon Goble

MV ASSOCIATION WITH COMPUTER GAMING WORLD USUALLY PUTS ME IN THE FORTUITOUS POSITION OF TESTING some of the most advanced, sophisticated controllers on the market. This suits me just fine. Being an admitted PC racing addict, I'm always searching for the best wheeled devices, and have played with quite a few. So it stands to reason that my forays into the world of "The Big Three" (NASCAR, INDCAR RACING and WORLD CIRCUIT) are performed with steering wheel and pedals, right?

Wrong.

Until last week, the steering devices I've tried have been shelved time and time again. I say this not as an affront to their manufacturers, but simply because nothing I have tried has matched the simple precision of the CH FLIGHTSTICK. But my driving environment recently experienced a radical, almost revolutionary, alteration.

Extreme Competition Controls had just delivered their COMPETITION DRIVING SYSTEM, and after quickly freeing the CDS from its cardboard constraints, the unit was ready for some serious testing. So was I. I took it from the grueling NASCAR circuit, where a steady hand is key, to the infinitely more responsive world of INDCAR RACING, and finally to the reflex-mad, lock-to-lock tracks of WORLD CIRCUIT. And when the dust settled and the smoke cleared, my new cockpit had set records, carved the uncarvable corner, and opened my eyes to a new level of realism. Without a doubt, Extreme's pedal and wheel combo is the best driving system I have ever tried. My FLIGHTSTICK has been sulking in the corner ever since.

The complete CDS features two distinct components: the steering and pedal units. Both are amazing, but the wheel assembly really steals the show. Like

something torn from a Formula 1 racer, the steering unit features a comfortable, thick, 11-inch custom-made steel wheel wrapped in black suede. Mounted to the wheel are four thumb switches (two for each thumb) that, if the system is used with a dual joystick port, can be set for four different game functions. Although the buttons are a little small, I had no problem reaching them, even in the huriest of corners. The CDS wheel offers 180 degrees of motion, but never turns so far as to make hitting the buttons inconvenient.

The wheel action was quiet and the graduated resistance near the edge of the throw effectively mimicked real life. Throw stops were solid and unwavering, the centering notchless and smooth. The base, a cool-looking angled steel cylinder with an adjustable rear foot, weighs a good solid 14 pounds. You won't need a clamping device with this baby!

But look and feel aside, what ultimately made me a believer was taking my CDS-controlled INDCAR to the skinny oval at Nazareth; even my beloved FLIGHTSTICK has trouble handling this track's frightening corners. To my amazement, within minutes I was not only keeping on the track and off the walls, but holding an inside line as well! Even with opponent strengths set at 100%, it didn't take me very long to nimbly move through the pack from a last place starting position into the lead. Soon I was setting both INDCAR and



Price: \$439.00 for complete system (wheel and pedals), \$299.00 (wheel), \$179.00 (pedals)

Manufacturer: Extreme Competition Controls
Minneapolis, MN
(612) 824-6733

WORLD CIRCUIT personal track records. CDS designer Andy Cers maintains that much of the precise, solid control offered by his product comes from the ball bearing suspended hub and shaft, not to mention some really hot potentiometers.

The pedal unit, much like the CDS wheel, should also be recognized as the top of its class. The unit remained quite immobile during testing (which in itself advances pedal technology), largely due to its 12-pound weight and non-slick rubber feet. Essentially a big black metal wedge with two metal pedals protruding from it, the CDS pedal unit is angled to work best in an environment where you can really stretch your legs out. I stomped all over these babies and, aside from an almost imperceptible *spooing* sound that crept up and then quickly disappeared, the pedals came through with flying colors. It's probably important to note that these are not driving/trudder pedals; they're purposely built for driving, with a two-inch throw and a heavier brake than accelerator.

Aspiring Extremists should be warned of the COMPETITION DRIVING SYSTEM's hefty price tag. It's not cheap. Thankfully, for those of us on a budget, each unit can be purchased separately. The manufacturer offers a two year warranty on the mechanical components and one on the electrical.

If you've got the dough then drive, don't walk, to get the CDS. This is what you've been waiting for. ☺



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The New World Order At SSI

WHEN THE CAMPAIGNING SEASON IS LESS THAN FAVORABLE, WARGAMERS TEND TO HUNKER in the bunker and replay their favorites, until newer challenges arrive and allow us to go on the offensive. Wondering which upcoming wargames may actually allow us to resume our offensive

forays against the evil empires of artificial and authentic opponents, I donned my Forward Observer garb and headed for SSI, to see if their battle plan was sound. Infiltrating the SSI War Room, I found that their major offensive thrusts will emphasize playability and multi-player play on a variety of gaming fronts.

PANZER SPAWN

The base of operations for SSI's attack on the market is the well-received PANZER GENERAL, the first wargame to hit #1 in



our Reader's Top 100 Poll in seven years. While SSI is busy porting the original PANZER GENERAL to Windows, 3DO, and Sony PlayStation formats, there will also be sequel products.

Of course, the ALLIED GENERAL is expected to lead the pack. This game is being designed for a simultaneous Windows, Power PC, and Macintosh release in September, and will feature several minor (but important) improvements over PANZER GENERAL. Notably, the play-by-email (PBEM) saved games will be compressed and encrypted, a record of the opponent's turn will be available, and some improvements in the AI will be noticeable. New units are expected to include motorcycle troops, Russian Guards, and British Commonwealth units.

ALLIED GENERAL will present the campaigns in WWII Europe from the Allied perspective. So, there will be several campaigns included, each featuring a varying number of stand-alone scenarios.

The Russian campaign alone features some 17 scenarios.

The first scenario in each campaign (say, Finland from the Russian campaign) is a tutorial scenario, with a smooth learning curve much like Poland in the original PANZER GENERAL.

Overall, ALLIED GENERAL's scenarios will feature larger maps and fewer pieces per side—creating greater possibilities for maneuver. Also, the average scenario length will be shorter, with a ceiling of 24 turns and an average of 12 turns per scenario, even late in the campaigns. This has the advantage of making both play via e-mail and modem play more

WILL PANZER

GENERAL'S

CHILDREN

CONQUER THE

WARGAMING

WORLD?

G-2

* Multiplayer war and strategy game enthusiasts will want to check into CRIS, a service that features a variety of modem-playable gaming opponents from around the world. The rub is the savings on long-distance phone charges. Users with telnet access to the Internet pay only \$10/month, and those without it pay \$30/month for local dial-in access. Gaming time is unlimited from there. Recent tournaments include GLOBAL CONQUEST, DOOM, DESCENT, COMMAND HQ, EMPIRE DELUXE, WARCRAFT, PERFECT GENERAL II, and many others. For information on CRIS, call them at 1-800-745-CRIS (in the USA) or email them at custserv@cris.com.

* SSI's DEFINITIVE WARGAME COLLECTION is a welcome bit of wargame nostalgia. Titles include: SSI's BATTLES OF NAPOLEON (with 26 extra scenarios), THE SWORD OF ANANON, and WARGAME CONSTRUCTION KIT II: TANKS! (with 40 extra scenarios); SSG's DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL

(continued on page 140)

by Alan Emrich

War (all three volumes, with 27 extra scenarios from their *RUN 5* magazine), **REACH FOR THE STARS**, **GOLD OF THE AMERICAS**, **WARLORDS**, and **PANZER BATTLES** (with 37 extra scenarios, also from *RUN 5* magazine), and **Impressions' WHEN TWO WORLDS WAR**, **GLOBAL DOMINATION**, **CONQUEST OF JAPAN**, and **D-DAY**. Whew! That should keep us busy for a while reliving our glory days!

* SSG is being mysterious about **Warlords II Deluxe**. We have discovered, however, that gamers will gain the ability to make new terrain tile sets. So, in addition to custom units and shields (from the **Warlords II Construction Kit**), players can fight on terrain limited only by their imagination. There will be no ascend/descend function anymore, but walls (and any other terrain element) may be flagged as impassable.

attractive to connected generals, both in terms of time and money.

ALLIED GENERAL is also slated to have some kind of scenario editor (using the existing game maps). There was even talk in the War Room of providing some geomorphic map boards for players to create their own custom scenarios with. These maps would come in flavors such as Western Front, Desert, and Russian Front. While not decided upon, old *PanzerBlitz* players would probably give a month's rations for that little feature.

The role-playing element of the game's engine has been expanded in **ALLIED GENERAL**, as well. While the fate of the world is not in your hands as it was playing the Germans in **PANZER GENERAL** (you can't lose the whole war for the Allies), you can gain more personal rewards in **ALLIED GENERAL**. Finally, there will be less duplication and overlap between the scenarios in **ALLIED GENERAL** and **PANZER GENERAL** than you might expect. Except for the Allies' *Operation Jupiter* (their planned pre-emptive invasion of Norway in 1940), players will see all new maps and many previously explored battles from a whole new perspective.

Not to let a good engine idle, the second **PANZER GENERAL** sequel will be, brace yourselves, **FANTASY GENERAL**. Yes, in-

stead of tanks there will be knights and trolls, instead of airplanes there will be balloons and dragons. Even powerful but brittle mechanical contraptions can be sent to battle, along with summoned and conventionally mustered forces.

Although **FANTASY GENERAL** is still in its early stages, the world (with art by Dave Jensen) will be made up of about a half-dozen continents, each with distinctive terrain characteristics (volcanoes, ice, etc.). Each continent represents a campaign of several scenarios and, of course, the world is yours to conquer in the name of freedom, goodness, and Elven pie. With the success of SSG's **WARLORDS** series, can the heroes, items, spells, summoned units, and "metal tech" monstrosities of **FANTASY GENERAL** find their niche among us? Probably...

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ...?

On other fronts, Gary Grigsby (**KAMPFGRUPPE**, **WAR IN RUSSIA**, **PANZER STRIKE**, and **PACIFIC WAR**) has not faded away like the old soldier that he is. Instead, his **STEEL PANTHERS** is due out in early fall and looks like a miniatures micro armor battle on the computer. The SVGA graphics and sound surpass anything that Grigsby's legions of fans are used to, and the CD-ROM holds a gigabyte of compressed video footage to add to the miniatures-like feel. Grognaards will be comforted to know that the **Tables of Organization & Equipment** cover all European and Asiatic major powers, along with most of the minor nations—over 230 unit types in all. Units represent infantry squads and single vehicles, which




DEAR MR. FANTASY Wargamers expecting *Civil War General* will have to wait, because the next game in the series after **ALLIED GENERAL** will be **FANTASY GENERAL**, akin to **Warlords II** from SSG.

can be grouped together to ease the issuing of commands. Terrain sets include desert, jungle, steppe, etc. and—get this—**STEEL PANTHERS** is towing the line with SSI's new battle plan by including both modern and e-mail play (granted, modern play could be tedious with the I go/you go turn system, but gamers will have the choice).

Not to be outdone by **PANZER GENERAL**, **STEEL PANTHERS** will feature six different campaigns linked from among its 30 to 40 scenarios, in addition to randomly generated battles. Finally, some shocking news for Grigsby grognaards—the interface is almost completely mouse-driven!

Also joining in formation is **WARGAME CONSTRUCTION KIT III: THE AGE OF RIFLES**. No! It's Koger's (**STELLAR GRUSADE**, **RED LIGHTNING** and **TANSS!**) latest covers the era between the Mexican-American war (1847) and the Russo-Japanese war (1905), where the range and accuracy of rifled firepower made cavalry charges obsolete. Battles from the Sudan, the Boxer Rebellion, the Zulu and Boer Wars, the Crimean War (go Light Brigade!), the Wars of German Unification and, of course, the American Civil War, are all featured. **RIFLES** features PBEM and, if things work out right, modem play at two different, 15-minute-per-turn scales: regiments maneuvering among 200 yard hexes, or brigades maneuvering on 400 yard hexes.

The reserves of the SSI battleplan are provided by boardgame publisher **GMT** and their **GREAT BATTLES OF ALEXANDER**. Converting the award-winning boardgame to a **WINDOWS '95** environment is taking longer than expected, so this product is likely to be bivouacked until '96. When complete, it should have modem and network support for head-to-head and multiplayer play. The miniatures look gives the appropriate feel and the extensive online help also lists the many statistics of units (morale, training and combat effectiveness) which so enriched the boardgame. Of course, while you are waiting for the computer version, **GMT** has just released a deluxe version of the boardgame, available at your local wargame-savvy hobby store. (Or contact **GMT** directly at 800-523-6111.) ☺



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Circle Reader Service #168

Designing Warfare

EMPIRE II Lets You Rewrite History—One Battle At A Time

by Terry Lee Coleman



SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

THE GAME OF EMPIRE HAS A LONG AND DISTINGUISHED CAREER WITH COMPUTER GAMERS. THE ORIGINAL EMPIRE, a strategic world conquest game programmed on a mainframe computer in the 70s by Walter Bright, was adapted by Mark Baldwin in the 80s for PCs. Its simplicity and depth earned it many honors from gamers and the gaming press, and was one of the founding members of CGW's Hall of Fame.

After the success of EMPIRE, Baldwin partnered with fellow designer Bob Rakosky to create EMPIRE DELUXE, a deeper game with better graphics that sacrificed none of the original game's charm or playability. Many strategy/wargamers considered EMPIRE DELUXE the simplest, most elegant wargame around. So what's in store for the third game in the trilogy? Well, if you suspect that EMPIRE II will just be EMPIRE DELUXE with a facelift, guess again.

SCALING DOWN & DIRTY

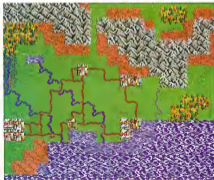
EMPIRE II is not a strategic game, but "grand tactical," similar to SSI's BATTLES OF NAPOLEON, or the board game *Napoleon's Last Battles*. At this scale, those old wargaming standards, Zones of Control, are still applicable, although they only slow movement rather than stop it outright. Unlike most wargames, normal combat occurs in the same space rather than between adjacent units. Certain units are rated for ranged fire, and if their technology is sufficient, they can target a particular unit instead of just a given location (see accompanying chart).

While the scale allows for some ma-

neuver and finesse, it also requires that the players get down and dirty to achieve their victory conditions. The victory conditions, like those in EMPIRE DELUXE, are generally concerned with the occupation of strategic points, such as towns. But whereas the world of EMPIRE DELUXE was spread over entire continents, EMPIRE II is confined to a single battlefield at a time. This doesn't limit the replayability of the game, however. Built into the game system are models for every conceivable weapon from rocks and javelins to jet bombers and flying saucers. Thus, any battle in (or out) of history may be re-created using the handy terrain and unit editor.

For instance, the game supports 12 different terrain types, plus varying weather effects. You could use a combination of arctic terrain, broken ground and snow to simulate the confusion Napoleon faced at Eylau. If you've ever wondered why the English longbow was the dominant weapon of the Hundred Years War, simply have the French knights advance over narrow, muddy terrain into the archers' teeth.

The editor itself is a paintbrush of sorts: hills, forests, rivers and towns are but a brush stroke away, and the editor is fairly intuitive and easy to use. The terrain details are subtle enough to differentiate fordable creeks from rivers suitable for Civil War gunboat navigation, so there's little worry about each scenario you create being too similar.



SPARTAN VACATION I designed this map for a Persian-Greek War scenario with the EMPIRE II editor. Notice how the gap in the northern mountains allows the Spartans to make their famous stand at Thermopylae, protecting the Greek city-states to the south.

BUILD YOUR OWN GAME

Construction kits for wargames are nothing new. Norm Koger's TANKS! has spawned a cottage industry of sorts with dozens of new scenarios. But as much as I admire what David Landrey and Novastar games have done with old SSI games, I can't get too excited about their TANKS! scenarios. Most are simply too unbalanced to be interesting from a gaming standpoint,

and the game engine itself still needs serious adjustment (although Koger has issued an unofficial patch—see The Patch File, pg. 202). SSG's WARLORDS CONSTRUCTION SET is much better, but has to overcome the stigma (for historically-minded gamers) of the game system being designed first for a fantasy game.

What **EMPIRE II** brings to the table is a better mix of realism and playability. The morale rules are particularly well done, without the excesses of **TANKS!** When a unit reaches a certain loss threshold, there is a probability that the unit will become demoralized, which increases as it takes greater casualties (but not, as in **TANKS!**, affecting other units far removed). Conversely, a previously demoralized unit may recover its will to fight, modified by the leadership factors present. The line-of-sight rules are easy to understand and have the right feel for a game at this scale. Supply is elegantly handled by a combination of supply sources and supply units (a Civil War scenario would have Sutler's wagons, for example). When out of supply, units may not use indirect fire, their zones of control disappear, and their ability to attack and defend is severely hampered.

The turn sequence is similarly straightforward and effective. Each player's turn is divided into a planning phase, when orders are given, and an execution phase, when the orders are carried out. With a "Move To" order, for example, a unit could be given a destination several turns' march away. As the AI improves, your unit will sup-

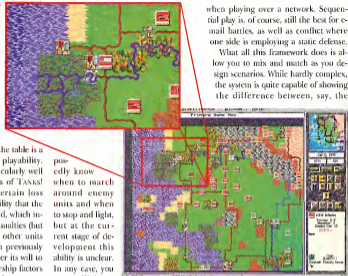
posedly know when to march around enemy units and when to stop and fight, but at the current stage of development this ability is unclear. In any case, you may still issue orders anew each turn for every unit, from pursuing enemy units to assaults on their positions. One reason this all works so well is that normal combat is a function of movement, which keeps the action fluid.

ONE GOOD TURN

In what I hope is a trend, turns in **EMPIRE II** may be either the old-fashioned sequential kind, or they can be parallel, where both sides issue orders, then movement and combat ensue simultaneously for both sides. The latter does a great job of simulating the uncertainty of the battlefield, and is particularly fun

when playing over a network. Sequential play is, of course, still the best for e-mail battles, as well as conflict where one side is employing a static defense.

What all this framework does is allow you to mix and match as you design scenarios. While hardly complex, the system is quite capable of showing the difference between, say, the



UNDER THE MICROSCOPE **EMPIRE II** has five different zoom levels. The median view (zoom 3) lets us see the whole battlefield, and looks a bit like **EMPIRE DELUXE**. But the SVGA graphics are clean and clear even at maximum magnification.

armies of Napoleon and Frederick the Great. If you tire of playing Luetzten, it also lets you pit wizards versus bug-eyed aliens with zap guns. The historian who wants exacting detail is advised to return to **PACIFIC WAR**, as **EMPIRE II** is really only good for the "big picture."

Of course, Messrs. Rakosky and Baldwin will provide many scenarios from all eras of history in the finished product to keep the interest of both veteran and occasional wargamers. Nonetheless, I suspect that many amateur game designers are itching to try their hand at forging Gettysburg, Roarke's Drift, or some other battle they've always been fascinated with. You never really know until the shrink wrap's on the box, but odds are, Baldwin and Rakosky have another hit on their hands. And if **EMPIRE II**, with its do-your-own-wargame feature, actually has more replay value than even **EMPIRE DELUXE**, why, what a wonderful problem to have! ☺

Unit Type	Normal Combat	Forged Combat	Target Specific Unit
Roman Legion	Short Sword	Javelin	No
Mob	Club	Rock	No
Civil War Infantry	Bayonet, Musket	Musket Volley	No
WWII Bomber	Machine Gun	Bomb	No
Jet Plane	Cannon	Missile	Yes
Flying Saucer	Laser	Death Ray	Yes

This chart shows some of the weapons types available for scenarios in **EMPIRE II**. Note that as the technology improves, so does the ability to target specific units in combat.

Perfect General II Breaks Out

Treading New Ground Or Virtual Retread?

by Patrick C. Miller

"Never mind what Clausewitz thought, what do you think?"

—Erwin Rommel

LONG BEFORE HE BECAME LEGENDARY AS THE DESERT FOX, ERWIN ROMMEL TAUGHT THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF WARFARE TO MILITARY ACADEMY CADETS. His ability to sketch battlefield maps and troop maneuvers riveted his students' attention on his lectures. Rommel believed that knowing the principles of warfare developed by legendary Prussian general Karl von Clausewitz in the early 1800s was of little value to his students if they didn't understand how to apply them to the command decisions they would one day have to make on the battlefield.

Rommel might have been amused at some of the liberties that *THE PERFECT GENERAL II* takes with history, but he probably would have appreciated the game's ability to show some basic principles of warfare in a manner that's both entertaining and interesting. QQP's long-awaited sequel to *THE PERFECT GENERAL* (originally released in 1991) is played on vibrant,

high-resolution hex maps; relies on an easy-to-learn turn-based system that's ideal for those just breaking into war and strategy games; and, if you can accept PG2's sometimes tongue-in-cheek approach to wargaming with its weird little video clips of "generals" giving pre-battle advice, even veteran wargamers can find plenty to enjoy.

NEW AND IMPROVED?

Upon opening the box, PG2 initially appears to be the original game with glitzier graphics and more scintillating sounds. After several hours of playing various types of scenarios, however, it becomes clear that QQP's efforts extend beyond a mere facelift. The most impressive aspect of PG2 is its 98 new scenarios, the vast majority of which are fun and interesting to play. If you haven't played the original version of this game, you're in for a treat; and if you have, you'll find yourself rediscovering the joy of dropping a well-placed heavy artillery barrage squarely on top of an enemy heavy tank group.

The new bells and whistles are impres-

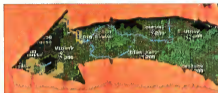
sive. Colorful SVGA graphics include a zoom-in mode, and when viewed up close, the units recall PG2's origin as a tabletop miniatures wargame. Heavy tanks project ominous rumbblings, armored cars purr as they swiftly scoot along and infantry units cry "Medic!" or "I'm hit!" as they're eliminated from play.

The new toys include armored cars, super-heavy Elephant tanks and machine-gun infantry that may fire while on the move. Some scenarios include aircraft that are useful for taking out those pesky artillery units tucked securely behind enemy lines or for interdicting your opponent's transportation routes. Since units moving along rail lines can cover long distances in a single turn, railroads are great for moving your troops quickly to the front or deep into your opponent's territory.

There are four campaigns based on World War II that string together a series of scenarios. The campaigns include island hopping in the Pacific, Kursk on the Eastern Front, the Battle of the Bulge, and North Africa. You'll want the variety, because while the AI is improved from the original game, it's still nothing to get excited about, even when set to the highest level of difficulty.

ADVANCE TO CONTACT

PG2 is only available on CD. While this may initially upset some gamers, I suspect many without CD-ROM technology will finally see a need to upgrade. Even if



Perfect General II

Price: \$64.95

Requirements: IBM compatible 386 DX33 or better, 4 MB RAM, CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics, mouse; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1-2 (modem and hotseat)

Protection: CD-ROM

Designers: Bruce Williams and Andrew Vischer

Publisher: QQP, Inc.

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you elect to install the majority of the game to your hard drive (some 40 megabytes), you'll still need the CD to play the game. So, you might as well go with the quick install of 4 MB. PG2 includes two full-color guides containing maps and brief descriptions of the scenarios, as well as a poster of the scenario maps used in campaign games. The manual adequately covers the basic mechanics of the game, but QQP's terminology and organization are, as usual, somewhat confusing.

Each scenario consists of a map, background on the situation portrayed, the turn length of the game, the number of points available for purchasing initial forces, information on reinforcements, and other pertinent facts. One side is designated as the attacker (red) and the other side is the defender (blue). These designations can be misleading, as in some scenarios the "defender" can win only by attacking. Both sides use their points to purchase infantry, tanks, artillery and aircraft, which they deploy to designated areas on the map. Once that's done, the battle begins.

The turn sequence consists of plotting artillery and air strikes, conducting artillery fire and air attacks, and engaging in movement between two direct fire phases. At the end of each turn, the computer determines a score based on the number of victory-point hexes each side occupies. At game's end, the computer calculates the final score, determines whether the victory conditions have been met and then assigns the players a military rank based on their battlefield performance, ranging from First Lieutenant to Perfect General. This information is recorded in a data base that charts your performance over the last 25 games.

RECON IN FORCE

Those adept at playing the original will

have no trouble diving right into PG2. There is no tutorial, so new players should consider selecting a small scenario and playing at the easiest level of difficulty until they learn the basics. Fortunately, the learning curve isn't that steep and the interface is fairly intuitive with its mouse-driven point-and-click commands and pull-down menus.

The scenarios are designed to be played "balanced," meaning in QQP's parlance that you fight

the battle twice: once as the attacker and once as the defender, arriving at an average score and skill rating for the two battles.

This is important, because some scenarios are purposely heavily stacked in one side's favor, the idea being that players must attempt to minimize their losses and maximize their victories to gain a higher overall score than their opponents. You do, however, have the option of playing each scenario individually as either the attacker or the defender.

Fire and maneuver are the keys to success. With the exception of machine gun-armed units, all units can fire only once per turn. Learning to anticipate the most opportune time to fire (and resisting the urge to shoot just because you can) usually marks the difference between a seasoned



STAY OUT OF MY SANDBOX This close-up shot gives a good look at the detail of PG2's graphics. Notice the detail of the craters and burning buildings, as well as the tanks.

veteran and a rookie commander. Maneuver is more difficult to master, but learning to take advantage of cover and concealment and knowing how and when to mass forces at the critical point are vital skills.

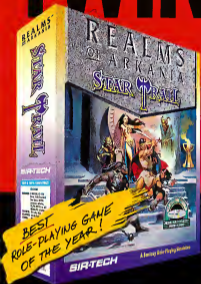
Without the ability to play against a human opponent, PG2 would qualify as merely an above-average game. The two-player head-to-head capability really makes this game shine, however. Even a reasonably-skilled human opponent will provide far more challenge than the computer opponent set on its highest level of difficulty. Two-player games can be set up either through a modem connection, a direct serial link between two computers (a null modem connection) or by playing the game in a



WINTER BLUNDERLAND It may not be realistic, but the German forces have every bit as much to contend with at Bastogne as did their historical counterparts—a good, tense scenario.

TWIN

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BURNED MY BRIDGES BEHIND ME After capturing the city, the Red attacker begins to systematically torch the avenues of approach and to set up artillery for defense of "Water Central."

"hotseat" fashion with two players sharing the same computer. For those with Internet access, PG2 can be played via the 'Net using a program called Internet Head-to-Head Daemon (IHHD), available at the cactus.org FTP site (pub/IHHD/dialer1.6.4.shar).

FRIENDLY FIRE

QQP has injected new life into an old

tail. Both the manual and the on-screen scenario descriptions have numerous errors, and there are annoying bugs in several scenarios. Although video clips of pseudo-generals give advice concerning specific scenarios, these tips run randomly, limiting their usefulness.

Still, those disappointed that PG2 isn't more stridently historical are missing the point. Despite its ragging flaws, PERFECT

favorite by providing a larger, more diverse group of scenarios. Even so, the novelty will eventually wear off, and a scenario editor is currently in the works to help extend the game's long-term playability. More troubling is the lack of attention to detail.

GENERAL II, like its progenitor, is a fine example of how to have a fun, easy-to-play game with historical flavor (if not exacting realism). Dramatic changes to this successful formula risked turning the game into something it was never intended to be. PERFECT GENERAL II manages to illustrate the fundamental principles of warfare while it entertains and makes you think. While Rommel might have quibbled about the particulars of the former, he would certainly have been pleased by the latter. ☹

THE EXPERTS SPEAK

PERFECT GENERAL 2

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Excellent graphics and sound, stimulating head-to-head play, nice campaigns and a wide variety of well-designed, fun-to-play scenarios.

CONS Lack of a scenario editor, mediocre AI and irritating documentation errors.



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Civil War Redux

THE ROAD FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX II
Issues A Call For Ninety Hour Volunteers

by Josh Bruce

HERE NEVER SEEMS TO BE A SHORTAGE OF WARGAMES COVERING THE CONFLICTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY, but for whatever reason, Civil War games are becoming increasingly hard to find. SSI's GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT is still the definitive Civil War battle simulation nine years after its release. Strategic-level Civil War games, such as NO GREATER GLORY (SSI) and Avalon Hill's CIVIL WAR, were dismissed almost as soon as they hit the market, the former for its overly ambitious scope (often more political than military) and the latter for its abominable graphic presentation and imbecilic AI. Even Impressions' best-selling THE BLUE AND THE GREY looked, at times, as out of place as a new Union general facing Lee across the Potomac, due to its poor AI and interface weakness.

However, for those who long to don the epaulets of Jackson and Sheridan, new hope has arrived in the form of THE ROAD

The Road From Sumter to Appomattox II

Price: \$49.95

System:

Requirements:
 IBM-compatible
 386 or better
 processor, 3MB
 RAM, VGA/SVGA
 graphics, 8 MB
 hard drive space,
 mouse.

Protection: None

Designer: Frank Hunter

Publisher: Adaned Command Systems

Vancouver, BC, Canada

(May be ordered through HPS Simulations

(408) 654-8381)



FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX II. Like its predecessor, SUMTER II is a massive strategic-level Civil War game. The game strives to be comprehensive: the map stretches from Philadelphia to Mexico City at a scale of only 14 miles per hex. Each game turn is one week, land units are brigades and

naval units are flotillas. The detail is certainly there, and designer Frank Hunter has revamped the interface to make the immense amounts of data more readily available to the player.

MARCHING THROUGH GEORGIA

The movement system is vaguely reminiscent of SSG's BATTLEFRONT series. Instead of giving specific paths for units to take across the map, objectives are selected for all units and the computer uses AI routines to execute both sides' commands simultaneously. Despite some unfortunate bags (such as the entire Army of the Potomac getting stuck behind the Chesapeake Bay), play is generally tense, as armies grope toward one another trying to gain the advantage. This is an excellent alternative to the "I move/You move" school of wargame design, particularly since the sheer magnitude of SUMTER II makes a real-time simulation impossible.

When your forces encounter enemy troops while trudging across the map, combat occurs and can be resolved in one of three different ways: inputting your own results; using the quick resolution system; or entering a tactical battlefield. The tactical map is reminiscent of THE BLUE AND THE GREY, as the computer generates a random battlefield and the brigades are scattered across it at a scale of 400 meters per grid point. Unfortunately, the AI is so inept at the tactical level that a lot of the drama is lost simply because it is so easy to win the battles. Thankfully, the game supports modern play



FOG OF WAR If you can see the Union units, the Peninsula campaign is a bit of a bore. With the hidden units option on, Bragg's 1862 march through Tennessee and Kentucky offers plenty of foist, maneuver and tension for both sides.

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versus other human generals.

Brigades are rated individually for manpower, number of guns, morale, training and commander, and they may be organized into corps or armies. A lot of the flavor comes from the armaments of the individual units, which vary from simple caplocks to Springfield, Spencer or Sharps rifles for both infantry and cavalry. Artillery units are similarly armed with Napoleons, Whitworths and the deadly long-range Parrot guns. Creating your own Iron Brigades is a treat, and watching them in action on the tactical battlefield—where the differences in weapons, training and morale levels really take effect—is so interesting that it almost makes up for the lame computer opponent.

WE ATTACK AT DAWN

Of course, armies require leaders, and the Civil War had a wide diversity of ge-

nerals and incompetents on both sides. SUMTER II goes to great lengths to model the affect these often charismatic men had on their forces. Over one hundred different leaders are represented in the game, each rated for aggressiveness, combat ability,



enough, how many men should we draft, and which type of unit should each state produce? While the strength of the Northern economy allows the Union player more latitude with his economic decisions, the Southern economy is extremely limited, with half its production comprised of cotton. However, the cotton can be traded in Europe for munitions if a blockade runner can make it there and back again. Hence, the blockade and naval war become paramount, since even the best-laid plans depend on that shipment of Springfield arriving in time for the battle.

Political events also play a vital role in *SUMMER II*, and range from the French invasion of Mexico to conflict between the Union and Great Britain. Random events may allow you to bargain with Mexico, giving up part of Texas for Mexican intervention; or perhaps the French might be willing to offer aid for concessions in New Orleans. Unlike many wargames, where conflict seems to take place within a vacuum, the political tensions of the mid-19th century world are a large part of *SUMMER II*. Even so, the politics do not dominate

the game, as they did in *NO GREATER GLORY*, but serve to enrich the gameplay, and add a nice mix of historical "what-if" twists.

BUT DO WE FIGHT ON GOOD GROUND?

Unfortunately, the incredible depth of gameplay is not matched by either the graphics or sound support—the latter being non-existent. Admittedly, for most wargamers, "the play's the thing." Still, recent games such as *PANZER GENERAL* have shown that appropriate music, sound effects and graphics do enhance the experience. As popular as the American Civil War is (even among non-wargamers), it's a shame that *SUMMER II*'s inadequate sound and visuals might keep it from being played.

As it stands, this is the only strategic-level Civil War game worth playing. While *SUMMER II* shares some of the deficiencies of its competition—why can't a strategic Civil War game have decent AI?—the overall depth of the design allows it to rise above its shortcomings. Miniatures enthusiasts will enjoy playing out large battles

such as Shiloh or Antietam, then simply inputting the results into *SUMMER II*, and even hardcore gamers will find themselves pulled in by the number of strategic, political and economic options available. Frank Hunter continues to refine his design, and it shows in a much more focused and enjoyable game than the original *ROMAN FROM SUMMER TO APPOMATTOX*. This isn't the definitive Civil War game, but it is a worthy effort. And besides, if we wait for Sid Meier to finish his *War Between The States* game, it might be the next century before we stand atop Lookout Mountain. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THE ROAD FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX

RATING 

PROS Lots of depth. Leadership, logistic, economic, and political factors are well-integrated.

CONS The dated graphics, lack of sound support, and weak computer opponent rob from the firepower of this otherwise well-designed musket.

THE GODS ARE ANGRY.



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Anti-Alien Tactics

Fire Teams And Formations In X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP

by Jeff James

This collection of tips, tactics and advice for MicroProse's X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP has been excerpted with permission from the book Totally Unauthorized X-COM: Terror From the Deep by Jeff James and BradyGAMES Publishing.

IN ORDER TO MAKE MANAGING YOUR TROOPERS A BIT EASIER, IT MAY BE USEFUL FOR YOU TO ADOPT THE TWIN principles of fire teams and formations. These principles are loosely based upon the tactics and strategies employed by real-world infantry commanders. If you've ever seen combat footage of an elite infantry team in action, you'll see that they deploy and move into the

two soldiers then take turns covering each other, making sure that any enemies don't sneak up on them. Granted, attempting to make your way through a large battlefield crawling with aliens with just two troopers would be utter lunacy. Ideally, you should enter the battlefield with around 8 to 12 soldiers. Take less than that, and you risk not having enough firepower for the mission. You

in formation tend to spot and fire upon enemies as a unit, making a formation a dense concentration of firepower which you can use to blast through the enemy. One soldier may see an alien but not have enough time units to fire at it. However, the two soldiers next to him in formation may be able to fire and hit the alien.

3. Defense. A formation also imparts extra defensive value to your troopers. Instead of hunting for aliens with only one set of eyeballs, working in a formation gives you many more vantage points with which to spot the enemy. Most formations also have a trooper dedicated to guarding the rear of the formation, ensuring that you won't be surprised by aliens sneaking up on you from behind.

4. Movement. When you put your soldiers together in a formation, it becomes much easier to move your soldiers as a group. Far too often I've been tempted to send a solitary soldier off on a wild

Tip! Instead of moving through doors to open them, simply stand in front of the door, move the cursor one space beyond, then right click. The door will open, costing the aquanaut who opened the door no TU points at all!

combat area with precision and in a particular formation. You won't see elite teams of Navy SEALs or Army Rangers casually streaming onto the battlefield in rag-tag fashion. Likewise, your X-COM troopers should be deployed and moved about the battlefield with some overall tactical plan.

FIRE TEAMS

Fire teams are important because they allow soldiers to give each other support, both in terms of spotting and firing upon any enemy soldiers they encounter. At the most basic level, a fire team can consist of two soldiers. While one soldier moves forward, the other covers his advance from a concealed position. Once the first soldier has reached his objective, the second soldier moves forward. These

can — and should — take more soldiers in some missions, but I've found that having too many soldiers means that they're often getting in each other's way.

1. Formations. Once you've divvied up your troopers into self-supporting fire teams, you can next think about giving those fire teams a formation (see sidebar, "Marching In Formation"). Organizing your soldiers into formations gives you three primary benefits: concentration of firepower, improved defensive strength and ease of movement.

2. Firepower. Soldiers



TERMINEX 2050 If you look closely in the cracks, you can sometimes peer into the next room and exterminate a few alien bugs.

goose chase to hunt for a wounded alien, only to see him end up another casualty. If your soldiers aren't in formation, it becomes far too easy to overlook a solitary trooper standing where he shouldn't be.

the Geoscape screen indefinitely. Use this tip to your advantage by keeping the terror site active longer than normal, allowing you to enter combat at a time of your own choosing — in the

Tip! During most combat missions, your aquanauts may be able to spot aliens in other rooms by looking directly into the corner of a wall or submarine. A harmless program glitch, this "feature" sometimes allows you to spot aliens hidden in rooms and subs that you normally might not see.

A formation provides a visual device which prevents you from overlooking individual soldiers.

TERROR SITE TIPS AND TACTICS

1. **Attack Only in the Daytime.** Using the tip described earlier in this chapter, you can use your interceptors and transports to keep a terror site on

daytime. Terror missions fought at night are very difficult, and you should avoid them if at all possible.

2. **Save the civilians.** Keep an eye out for the civvies — they have the bothersome tendency to position themselves right between your soldiers and the aliens during a firefight. Aliens tend to ignore civilians that are unconscious, so carry around a Thermal Tazer or a Ther-

Marching In Formation

TWO-MAN

The smallest formation available, it isn't a formation per se, but simply two soldiers covering each other as they advance. Regardless of the terrain, mission type or any other factors, you should always move your squaddies in groups of at least 2 soldiers.

Advantages: The easiest to set-up and maintain, it is by far the best formation type for close-quarters fighting, where large numbers of soldiers can lend mutual support by covering passageways and other avenues of alien approach while other soldiers advance.

Disadvantages: Whereas formations with three or more soldiers have a substantial reserve of firepower to draw upon, the soldiers in a two-man formation are woefully outgunned. Since the two soldiers can only watch two directions, the chance of an ambush is increased.

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nal Shok Launcher to zap all the civilians you find into the land of nod. The aliens will ignore them, and you'll be given credit for saving them at the end of the mission.

3. **Easy on the explosives.** High explosives such as sonic pulsers and HE ammunition have the tendency to damage creatures and objects with a certain range. Chucking a sonic pulser at a Deep One may quickly end his viability as a legitimate threat to your forces, but it will also blow the half-dozen civilians standing next to him to bits as well. You get a big negative point bonus for killing civilians yourself, so use grenades and other area effect weapons only when you're sure there are no civilians nearby.

4. **Speed is the key.** While you're busy hunting down the aliens, the aliens are busy hunting down the civilians. Although you should still move your soldiers with care, a bit more haste is recommended. If you wait too long to hunt down all the aliens in the area, you won't have any civilians left to protect.

5. **Take to the Skies.** In port and is-

land terror site missions, the Displacer/Sonic SWS platform can be an invaluable asset. Unlike the Coelacanth tanks, the Displacer can fly, allowing it to scout above, behind and around any terrain or structures in the area. The Displacer also has more TUs than most soldiers, allowing it to cover vast amount of terrain and find civilian-killing aliens quickly. However, any SWS platform is a liability in a ship terror site, as they are simply too large to fit through most of the doorways and passageways on any ship. The moral? Always try to take at least one Displacer/Sonic on every port and island terror site mission you go on. Leave them behind on ship terror site missions!

MOLECULAR CONTROL COMBAT DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES

Whenever an alien attempts to affect one of your aquanauts with molecular control, the screen will center on the affected soldier and you'll see a yellow-flash briefly appear on the soldier. If the alien

One soldier may spot an alien, but the other soldier usually won't be facing the same direction to lend any fire support.

DIAMOND

A four-pointed star, with one trooper facing each compass position. Normally, your point man would face towards the direction of your advance, while the troopers occupying the left and right positions would look forward, angled slightly to the left and right, respectively. Finally, the trooper in the rear position would face towards the rear.

Advantages: Since a soldier is covering each compass point, the diamond formation is ideal for a defensive posture. This formation is usually adopted when establishing a perimeter around a landing craft, defending a fixed location and/or escorting a wounded soldier to a safe location.

Disadvantages: Since each soldier is usually facing a different direction, this formation is of little use in an offensive

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Tip! Sonic pulsers are not destroyed by the explosion of another Sonic Pulser. Try this strategy: give one soldier nine sonic pulsers. Have him prime each grenade to "0" then have him stuff each primed grenade into his backpack. After all the grenades are primed, charge him towards the nearest concentration of aliens. The aliens will shoot him, and he'll fall to the ground, spilling out the grenades. End the turn. You'll see the first grenade explode, followed by the second, the third, and so on! Since the sonic pulsers aren't destroyed by the explosions, each grenade in the backpack will explode in turn, doing massive damage to everything in the area. Since a sonic pulser does 120 points of damage, this quickly adds up to over 1000(!) points of damage to anything nearby.

attack was successful, you'll see a screen appear which may state something like "Bernard Revenu is under molecular control" or "Bernard Revenu has gone berserk." If a soldier is repeatedly controlled or panicked by alien molecular control attacks, chances are that the soldier has a low molecular control Strength rating. Sack the soldier at the first available opportunity.

Perhaps nothing is worse than having your best soldier controlled by the aliens and used against you. How do you deal with molecular-controlled aquanauts? If a soldier is at the receiving end of a large number of molecular control attacks, you should have him drop his weapons at the first available opportunity. If a soldier remains under molecular control, you should try to stun him with a Thermal Tazer or Thermal Shok Bomb. Finally, as a last resort, you may have to resort to

shooting the molecular controlled soldier to keep your other soldiers from harm.

Unlike aquanauts, SWS platforms are totally immune to alien molecular control attempts. This can be particularly important if you're facing large number of



REPHILIUS IRRITATUM EST A molecular-controlled Triscone makes for a great gate-crasher at any alien party.

aliens which are proficient in molecular control combat. In these cases, an extra SWS platform or two — especially the Displacer/Sonic — can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

If you're facing molecular control-savvy aliens without molecular control attacks of your own, the best strategy is an aggressive one. The faster you kill the aliens, the less time they'll have to conduct molecular control attacks on your soldiers. The more aliens you kill, the lower their morale will become, increasing the chances that they will panic and flee. Killing aliens also bolsters the morale of your own troopers, making them less likely to panic, freeze or go berserk.

MOLECULAR CONTROL COMBAT: OFFENSIVE STRATEGIES

Once you have molecular control capability, you should attempt to capture live aliens. Using a Molecular Control Reader to identify aliens as you spot them, you should be able to locate a high-ranking alien officer, such as a commander or navigator. Once you've determined the identity of the alien, use a molecular control Disrupter to control the alien and move it close to you. Have the alien move towards a team of aquanauts equipped


role. Soldiers are also grouped more closely together than in any other formation, making them especially susceptible to area effect weapons such as grenades, torpedo launchers and other powerful weapons.

ECHELON

This formation places your soldiers in a staggered line, with each soldier positioned successively to the right or left of the foremost unit in a diagonal line. The echelon formation is ideal if you expect to face an enemy presence either to the front and/or one of your flanks. When using this formation, it is a good idea to position a map edge or obstacle to the flank opposite the echeloned flank. For example, a team of aquanauts in echelon right formation should have either the map edge, impassable terrain or a secured area of the battlescape to their left.

Advantages: This formation has very good firepower and spotting ability to the front and to the echeloned flank. Using the suggestions outlined above, this can be a very effective formation when em-

Tip! If you don't have enough soldiers to tackle a terror site, you have yet another option. Load your transport with one soldier and send the transport to the terror site. As soon as the transport touches down and the combat begins, abort the mission. You'll still lose a few hundred points, but nowhere near as many as you would have lost if you ignored the terror site entirely by not sending a transport. The same strategy can also work for artifact site missions.



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Tip!

Allens do not need to maintain line of sight (LOS) in order to conduct molecular control attacks. So no matter how well your soldiers are hidden, a molecular control-capable alien will be able to find them!

with Thermal Tazers and Thermal Shock Launchers. Wait one turn for the alien to revert back to normal, then stun it.

In some missions — particularly two-stage missions like artifact sites and alien colonies — running out of ammunition can be a real problem. The answer to this ammunition shortage may be closer than you think. Instead of killing aliens outright, you can molecular control them. Once controlled, simply have the alien throw his weapon to you. After you've picked up the alien's weapon and un-

played along map edges and next to large structures.

Disadvantages: This formation can be hard to control, and soldiers in this formation have poor line of sight and firepower to the rear and on the non-echeloned flank.

Instructions:

In this formation, all of your troopers walk abreast in a ragged line. The point man should walk slightly ahead of the rest of the unit, with heavy weapons personnel placed on the extreme ends of the formation.

Advantages: This formation provides the most powerful forward field of fire available. Since all your troopers are basically facing the same direction, you can lay down a withering barrage of fire towards anything that crosses your path. Since your soldiers are walking next to one another, the chances for friendly fire casualties are all but eliminated. This formation works well as a moving screen, serving to shield less heavily-armored soldiers following to the rear from enemy



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Tip!

Don't use molecular control on civilians! Once they've been controlled, they switch to the alien side, moving alongside their alien attackers. Since these traitorous civilians count as aliens for the purposes of finishing the mission, you'll have to stun or kill them to proceed.

loaded the ammunition, you can then dispatch the alien at your leisure.

Some aliens are so tough and deadly that they make invaluable additions to your X-COM squad when they have been molecularly-controlled. Lobster men can be particularly tough against other aliens, as their tough exoskeletons prevent them from taking most damage. Bio-Drones are also useful, but their bothersome tenden-



fire. This formation works best when you're facing a large concentration of aliens grouped together in one map location. This formation works best with a large number of soldiers, especially when sweeping across vast expanses of terrain.

Disadvantages: Line of sight and fire-power to the left, right and rear of this formation is very poor, making this a poor formation for use in combat areas where aliens may be attacking from a variety of compass points. This formation also requires a goodly amount of soldiers to work to its full potential, so this formation may not be an option in all cases.

WEDGE

One of the more popular formations, the wedge configuration is a good all-around



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cy to explode when fired upon can endanger other members of your squad. For that reason Bio-Drones make excellent "kamikaze" troopers — simply charge one towards the largest group of aliens and hope they destroy it. The undisputed favorite of most TFD commanders is the Tricorne. Blessed with a thick hide, a powerful sonic cannon and gobs of health and stamina points, this massive monstrosity (it occupies four squares on the battlescape) can be used much like an SWS platform, absorbing and meting out vast amounts of punishment.

While it's true that X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP is more difficult than the original X-COM, these tips should go a long way toward helping you once again overcome the insidious alien threat. Good luck, and keep those fields of fire open!

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combat posture. Soldiers are arranged in the shape of an inverted "V". This formation will be used more often than most, as it is well-suited for many different types of combat situations.

Advantages: The vee-wedge provides good, overlapping fields of fire to the front, left and right. This formation can project firepower best to its front and both flanks, with poor firepower to the rear. The wedge formation is arguably the most effective formation for most combat missions.

Disadvantages: The wedge can be difficult to control at times, and soldiers arranged in wedge formation are somewhat more susceptible to area effect weapons such as Sonic Pulsers and Disruptor Pulse Bombs.



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Medieval Mayhem

RAW Entertainment Traces *The RISE OF THE WEST*

by Terry Lee Coleman

JAMES F. DUNNIGAN IS AS CLOSE TO A MYTHIC FIGURE AS BOARD WARGAMING COULD PRODUCE. THE DESIGNER OF OVER 100 GAMES, he is better known these days for his best-selling books and his TV analysis of the Gulf War. Still, anyone who has played board wargames recalls Dunnigan, and his former company SPI, that boardgaming giant which gave rise to the quaintly anachronistic phrase "An Historical Simulation."

Empires of the Middle Ages was unique among Dunnigan's designs, because it took chances with scale and focus—even using cards in a 1980 wargame!—and largely succeeded. *Empires* is out of print now (worth \$100-200 at game auctions), but the game has been revived in computer form as *RISE OF THE WEST*, its rules loopholes nicely sewn up, and its game systems adapted for Windows. The unassuming graphic palette will hardly thrill any gamer exposed to the SVGA lushness of *PANZER GENERAL*, and there are no digitized explosions or clashing of swords to impress you with the sounds of the era. What the game does offer, however, is a broad yet elegant look at the forces of change in medieval Europe.

As the head of an empire, you are rated for administrative, diplomatic and military prowess, where the abilities are either: 1 (incredibly inept); 2 or 3 (various states of mediocrity); 5 (good); or 9 (incredible). At the beginning of each scenario, the leader of each empire has values based on his historical abilities. Thus, Charlemagne is excellent across the board, while the

Byzantines are generally more effective at warring off enemies with the olive branch than the sword.

This version retains the boardgame concept of playing "cards" to perform operations, except that the number of operations now varies with the size of the empire and initiative of the leader involved. To attempt conquest of an area, for instance, one must first raise an army with Administration, then attack with Military. Assuming the attack is successful, Administration will again be necessary to get the newly-won province out of a state of unrest. In order to get victory points for a province, you must have a diplomatic tie and/or a claim to an area, showing that your "national will" is recognized throughout the lands. It is even possible to take adjoining lands diplomatically, if all the conditions are

right. In order to win, you must get the most out of your strengths and weaknesses—the heart of any good strategy game.

Before expanding your empire, you must weigh several factors, such as religion, mineral/gold wealth, even language differences between your lands and those you covet. Fortunately, you may access all of this information through pull-down menus, a huge advantage over looking them up in a thick manual. Similarly, the chance of success for each endeavor is clearly marked in the operations window, relieving players from the tedium of solving the complex formulas involved.

Even though the computer does the dirty work, the flavor of the boardgame is everywhere evident. Players fight civil wars, engage in trade, parley, attempt as-



A YEAR IN PROVENCE Empire management is a delicate balance in *Rise of the West*. Taxing the populace to raid enemies can result in revolts at home.

sassinations, raid enemy lands, and suffer from corruption, heresy, and famine. You may even be excommunicated or die heirless, and watch helplessly as your charismatic 9-9-9 leader is replaced by a 2-1-2 puppet. Special "holding cards" increase your chances (military advance) or damage that of your neighbor's (subversion).

The computer opponents are strong, and enjoy trading cards—or (almost gleefully, it seems) playing nasty cards on human players. It's hard to accuse them of cheating, either, when none of the info, not even the cards, is hidden from any player. It's a shame network play isn't provided, but there are work-arounds for those who wish to play over lunch in the office.

Ultimately, *RISE OF THE WEST* is a real player's game, simple to learn and difficult to master. It covers a neglected period of history with good scenarios, a great campaign game and more than a little charm. It even goes beyond the boardgame by including a scenario editor, that new empires may rise and fall on your computer screen until the next millennium. Dunnigan himself would no doubt be proud. ☺

THE CULTURE SPEAK

RISE OF THE WEST

RATING ★★★★★

PROS The best game on the subject, with good AI and challenging scenarios. The editor gives unlimited replay value.

CONS Gamers needing sexy graphics, sound, and *jeppers* might want to stay in the modern era.

Rise Of The West

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Hints: The Universal Gaming Language

Jason Strautman's *UNIVERSAL HINT SYSTEM* Speaks To The Adventure Gamer In Need

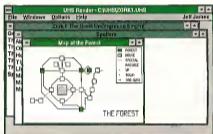
by Jeff James

If you've played many adventure games, you've undoubtedly come across a puzzle, trap or other tenacious conundrum that simply refuses your best attempts to solve it. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to bypass the obstacle, you throw up your hands in frustration, remove the game from your hard disk, and toss it into the dusty recesses of your software library, never to be played again.

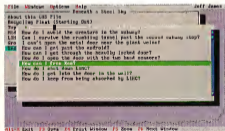
If you're determined to see your way through to the bitter conclusion of the game, you can take a trip to your local software shop and spend \$20 for a clue book, or you can dial up the game publisher's 900 hint line—usually at a buck a minute—for yet another pricey solution to your gaming dilemma. Thankfully, there is a far less expensive—and more effective—solution to your adventure

UHS hint file. The UHS reader is shareware, and is available for a wide range of computer platforms and operating systems, including DOS, Windows, Macintosh and Amiga. Once you have the UHS reader, you can find and download the appropriate UHS hint files. There are over 100 UHS hint files available, ranging from classic adventure games like the first *ZORK* to new titles like *MYST* and *ALONE IN THE DARK 3*.

After you've loaded the correct hint file into the UHS reader, you're presented with a list of subjects. For example, the UHS hint file for *MYST* lists eight initial topics, including "Finding the books," "Channeewood," "Mechanical age" and "Stoneship age." For information about any of the topics listed, you use your mouse or cursor keys to select the one that interests you. If you select "Channeewood" in our *MYST* example, you're taken to another window which offers a short list of puzzle topics. After you've clicked on a



GET THE PICTURE? The Windows version of UHS supports image files, like this crude but effective map of a crude but effective game—the original *Zork*.



TIPS ON MY WINDOW The Universal Hint System has a tiered hint structure, allowing you to get as much or as little help as you want.

gaming difficulties: Jason Strautman's *UNIVERSAL HINT SYSTEM* (UHS).

The UHS is a software system consisting of two parts: the UHS reader and the

particular topic, you're given a very vague hint about how to solve the puzzle. If you still can't figure it out, another mouse-click will reveal even more information. This process continues until you get enough information to solve the clue on your own or until the program gives you the correct answer. This allows you to tailor the hints to meet your need for help, ranging from a gentle nudge in the right direction to smacking you over the head with the answer.

In addition to providing text solutions to adventure game puzzles, graphic images—whether maps or screenshots—are supported in the latest revisions of the UHS hint system. If you want the ultimate cheating tool, Strautman also offers a terminate and stay resident (TSR) version of UHS that runs in the background while you're playing the game. When you get stuck, simply press the ALT key plus the "?" key to activate UHS and get the clues you need. The latest shareware revision

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(version 95a) of UHS locks out several features, so you'd be well-advised to register the shareware version as soon as possible. The registered version is available for a small fee of \$10, and is highly recommended.

To register the shareware version of the Universal Hint System Reader for MS-DOS or Windows, Version 3.00, Revision 95a, send \$10 US to Jason Strautman, P.O. Box 591481, Cambridge, MA 02139-0015.

The shareware version of the UHS can be found on most commercial on-line services, including America Online and CompuServe. It can also be found on the Internet at the following FTP sites: <ftp.gmd.de> or <wuarhive.wustl.edu>.

XCOMUTL 1.2

The X-COM and TROOP FROM THE DEEP Game Editor by Scott Jones

Although dozens of cheat and hacking utilities exist for X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP, few can accomplish what Scott Jones' XCOMUTL 1.2 can. This utility allows you to fiddle with certain parts of X-COM and TROOP FROM THE DEEP that

Cheat of the Month Club

Terminal Velocity
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 Type these codes at any time during play. Note that several of these cheats will work only with the registered version of the game.

3OREALH Prints "Smokin'" on the screen and give you rapid-fire.
MANIACS Refuel the afterburner.
TRFRAME Adds a frames-per-second counter in the corner of the screen.
TRIFRO Renders you invincible.
TRIFR1 Instant plasma assault cannon (P.A.C.) and full ammo.
TRIFR2 Instant ion burst gun (I.B.G.) and full ammo.
TRIFR3 Instant rapid-targeting laser (R.T.L.) and full ammo.
TRIFR4 Instant manual-aimed missiles (M.A.M.) and full ammo.
TRIFR5 Instant seek and destroy missile (S.A.D.) and full ammo.
TRIFR6 Instant shock wave torpedos and (S.W.T.) and full ammo.
TRIFR8 Gives you full afterburners.
TRIFR9 Renders you invisible.
TRIGD5 Also renders you invisible.
TRINEXT Jump to the next stage in the current level, or to the first stage of the next level.
TRISHLD Restore full shields.
TRSCOPE Adds a sound oscilloscope to the screen. (Why?)

are normally off-limits to other editors. Using XCOMUTL with TFTD, you can

change the firing accuracy of all the aliens you encounter to an absurdly high level, or you can replace their pistols with disrupter pulse launchers to make the game more challenging. Using the wide range of command-line options, you can make entire levels visible, rearrange your troops in the Leviathan transport, and perform dozens of other functions. XCOMUTL works with both the original X-COM and the sequel. It is available in versions for DOS and OS/2, and it can be found on CompuServe, America Online and ZiffNet. Internet users can find this utility at <wuarhive.wustl.edu> in <pub/msdos_uploads/xcom> and <pub/msdos_uploads/xcom2>.

Jeff Jawus, CGW columnist and Associate Editor of The Electronic Roundhouse, can be reached at 74774.1635@compuserve.com.



To locate these files on-line, tune in to the CGW headquarters on ZiffNet. Files featured here can be downloaded from ZiffNet on CompuServe. On CompuServe, go to Computer Gaming World's own forum (GO GAME-WORLD), and search in the Gamer's Edge file library, library 16.



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Calculus Unlimited

A Look Into The Mathematical Mind of Scamus Blackley, Designer Of FLIGHT UNLIMITED

by Paul Schuytema

BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL, WHEN I WAS STRUGGLING THROUGH THE TRIGONOMETRIC nightmare that was pre-calc, one of my best friends said, "Hey, just wait until calculus. Then the math gets fun!" He was serious. So I waited, and anxiously trotted to my first calc class my freshman year in college only to be met by an entire semester of mind-numbing confusion. There was nothing fun about calculus at all!

That reaction has dominated my "math psyche" until I recently had the opportunity to chat with Scamus Blackley, director of Looking Glass Technology's FLIGHT UNLIMITED aerobic flight simulator. Blackley is passionate about math, and over the course of our conversation, he actually helped me to slough some of my hatred for differential calculus.

CALCU WHO?

Calculus, for those of you who were sleeping off hang-overs that semester, is the mathematics of change. While algebra will let you find the values of x and y , calculus will give you some solid information about how x changes through time, if x represents something like the velocity of an airplane as it launches into the air from a dusty Arizona runway. Calculus is all about limits, about the minimum and maximum possible values for a variable. Since calculus deals with variables that are constantly in a state of flux, calculus applies very well to the more dynamic things in our world, such as a bullet shot out of a gun, a spaceship on the way to Mars, or a Sukoi aircraft snarling 50 feet above a rocky plateau.

The latter example is what FLIGHT UNLIMITED is all about. When Blackley set out to design this flight simulation, he wanted the armchair pilot to get that "yummy, visceral, fluid feeling that you get when flying

a real airplane." To do that, Blackley and the FLIGHT UNLIMITED team had to dive head-first into the Navier-Stokes equations, which, according to Blackley, are "horrible, complicated partial differential equations" that model the way a fluid behaves when it moves around a solid object.

OF TABLES AND NEWTONS

As far as Blackley can tell, FLIGHT UNLIMITED is the first consumer flight simulator to utilize "computational fluid dynamics" to model the way in which the air flows around an airplane. Prior to FLIGHT UNLIMITED, most flight sims used a table-based approach to modeling flight. Essentially, these sims replicated the real world by accessing massive tables of real-world data, gathered either from real flight (in a plane loaded to the gills with sensors) or from wind tunnel tests.

This approach can lead to a very accurate sim, but only within the bounds of the aircraft's table-data. It is impossible to execute complicated aerobatic maneuvers in most sims because the data for those maneuvers just isn't there.

Some of the more advanced PC sims, such as CONFIRMED KILL, utilize a "Newtonian" approach. These sims calculate the force vectors acting upon a plane using essentially college-level physics equations (very algebra-intensive), and from these vectors, the sim can calculate the change in a plane's position.

Neither of these approaches do a perfect job of translating the flight experience into the computer, Blackley claims. He points to



Microsoft's FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5 as an example. While he is quick to acknowledge that the Microsoft sim is technically very tight, it just doesn't impart that exhilarating feeling that a real pilot feels when banking tight over Mieg's Field. Blackley explained that everybody, pilot or not, has an intuitive sense of force and movement. We all experience it every time we hop into our car for a late summer Slurpee run. We all know how a car should behave, how it leans when we go around a corner, how our control inputs differ depending on our speed (it's only a quick flick of the wheel to avoid flattening a possum at 80 mph, but a huge yank at 20 mph).

A MATHEMATICAL ODYSSEY

When Blackley came aboard Looking Glass, they were already gearing up to do a flight sim. Looking Glass wanted Blackley to give FLIGHT UNLIMITED something special, and as he thought about the problem, he realized that he wanted to create that true "feeling" of flight that he felt was absent from every other sim he had flown. (Blackley is also a real pilot; the German carbon-fiber sailplane in the game is mod-



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eled directly from the sailplane he has out on Cape Cod.)

Blackley decided not to take the table-based approach because he felt that he wasn't up to the task of dealing with such massive quantities of numerical data. "I'm not smart enough," he joked. More importantly, he wanted whatever flight model approach he took to enable his plane to do a knife-edge spin, just like he'd seen at airshows.

So Blackley embarked on a mathematical odyssey to create the most realistic flight sim ever to appear on a PC. Blackley, through his numerical sorcery, was able to create a flight model that uses differential equations to determine the reaction of the air, moving as a fluid, over the surface of an object (any object: from an airplane to a lawn chair). From that, he is able to use

the data to then figure out where and how a plane is moving in the sky. Basically, the air is modeled instead of the airplane.

"In FLIGHT UNLIMITED," said Blackley, "flying straight and level is fun, because an airplane isn't perfect—all sorts of stuff is going on."

Using the complicated Navier-Stokes equations as a foundation, Blackley was able to create a mathematical approximation of them which works in real time on a PC. The Navier-Stokes equations are used to determine the velocity and density of an active fluid. When a plane is in flight, some interesting changes occur in the air moving around the plane. Of course, lift is of primary concern for a flight simulator. Lift is created when the air pressure above a plane's wing is significantly less than below the wing. This favorable condition is created by the shape of a wing, or its airfoil, which makes the air move at a higher velocity over the top of the wing than the air moving underneath. According to Bernoulli's Theorem, air pressure decreases as velocity increas-

es. So we are left with a low pressure region above the plane, and this creates a "force imbalance" that pushes the plane into the air.

While this explanation may seem a little complicated, in truth, it trivializes the whole process. So many more things are going on as the air moves across the surface of an airplane: the propeller creates turbulence and a torque imbalance; the air eddies and curls as it comes off the



SIGHTS UNLIMITED Fusion Systems's German model sailplane, modeled after Blackley's own sailplane, soars over the beautiful Alaskan landscape.

back of the wing; the air "sticks" to the surface of the airplane, causing drag; and bumps in the plane's shape, such as the pilot's canopy, cause turbulence in the moving air. All of this adds up to one hell of a mathematical nightmare, but all of those little blips in turbulence and pressure are calculated by the Navier-Stokes equations.

Blackley's goal was to approximate these equations, to make them "feel" right. He didn't care if he was 20% off in the results, as long as they worked correctly, worked consistently, and the sim felt right.

The FLIGHT UNLIMITED system is intelligent enough to know where to look for "something interesting" happening in the mathematical simulation of the airflow. Essentially, the program must compute the air pressures over the entire surface of the airplane, and convert those pressures into a series of force distributions, which are then used to calculate where and how the plane is moving.

"When I have a Sukoi pilot come up and bug me at trade show," said Blackley, "and

exclaim 'I can't believe this!' then I know that I've hit it pretty close."

OF BANDS AND BOUNDARIES

Blackley explained that "boundaries drive dynamics" in our world. He used the example of a rock group trying to put together a killer album, but their basement studio doesn't even have one tenth the equipment of Michael Jackson's all-digital Sony studio. They're just recording on a cheap Tascam 4-track, but those limitations, those constraints, push the band's creativity and energy, and more often than not (if they have the talent, of course), they come up with something much better and visceral (i.e., with more *swif*) than a megabuck-studio recording.

It's those boundaries, those limitations, which cause interesting and exciting things to happen. In FLIGHT UNLIMITED, those boundaries are the surface of the airplane, and the "interesting things" are the turbulence and changes in air pressure around its surface.

IT'S FLYING, FLYING I TELL YOU!

Blackley's first step in the development process was to plow through his real-time physics model, creating a math system that used some sophisticated concepts of "group theory" to take the three-dimensional airflow data and transform it, to "warp it," into a more "math friendly" space. He then performs his modified Navier-Stokes integrations, and then transforms the data back into a three dimensional model.

"That's the most efficient way to use CPU time," explained Blackley, who estimated that his transformations of the data sped up the math-intensive calculations by a factor of 100, with almost no loss in precision.

Once he had the physics equations in place and running in real time, he created a model of a flat plate (using a handful of wireframe programs to check movement and to visualize the airflow), and tweaked the equations until the flat plate fluttered down to earth just as it should. Then he built a wing, and finally added a fuselage.

Next, Blackley built a "really bad airplane." He was studying "pinhead books" which offered him formulas and counter formulas, but it wasn't until he picked up a book on actual aircraft design that he began to understand why his plane wasn't

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working quite right—the tail was stalling and the center of gravity was all off.

"FLIGHT UNLIMITED runs just on the geometry of the shape," explained Blackley "Toss in the shape of a lawn chair, and it will fall, tumbling to earth, just like a lawn chair would. When you apply ailerons in the game, the only thing that happens is that you change the geometry of the wing. Everything else derives from that."

Once he had confidence in his physics model, Blackley spent about three days entering the point-by-point geometry for the Extra 300 stunt plane. The plane was "rocket powered" since he still hadn't worked out the complicated forces involved in a propeller and its component torque and turbulence. Once in his "virtual air," he put the Extra through its paces.

"It strap-rolled like a mother#\$%&^!", recalled Blackley with genuine enthusiasm.



THE EVIDENCE, MR. SHAPIRO Dr. Ascher H. Shapiro, professor of engineering at MIT in 1960, illustrates how the shape of an airfoil generates lift. Air flows over the top of the airfoil faster than the bottom, reducing the air pressure above the airfoil and thus generating lift.

A CALL TO SERGEY

Blackley worked with Mike Goulian, a member of the U.S. Aerobatic Team and 1990 U.S. National Aerobatic Champion, to nail down the performance of the vari-

ous stunt planes in the game. When they were testing the Sukoi, they just couldn't get it to break into a controlled spin properly. Blackley was anxious, unsure if he would have to go back and wrestle with his math yet again. Before tearing apart the code, Goulian put in a call to a friend, a Russian pilot named Sergey, who said, in his broken English, "only half aileron." They took the advice and attempted the stunt once more, and it worked perfectly. The ailerons on the Russian-built Sukoi were so big that they were just pushing the wing too hard. The physics weren't wrong—instead, the pilots just weren't taking the idiosyncrasies of the plane into account.

"You get everything for free," reflected Blackley, "once you get the air's fluid dynamics right."

For Blackley, and the rest of the crew at Looking Glass, the FLIGHT UNLIMITED experience is "all about exploiting your hind brain—it provides a real visceral experience of flying."

"I don't really understand it," confessed Blackley, "but thank God it's right." ☼

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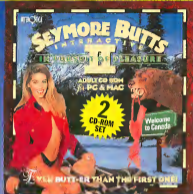
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A Lean, Mean Gaming Machine



What Do You Need For A Good Gaming System?

by Mike Weksler

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS I HEAR ASKED IN COMPUTER STORES IS, "SHOULD I buy a new computer or upgrade the one I own?" This is usually followed by, "If I upgrade it, what component should I buy first?" Unfortunately, there are as many answers to these questions as there are different types of users.

A good rule of thumb for determining how your machine stacks up can be found in the new MPC level 3 specification for multimedia computers (see chart, next page). The new Multimedia PC Council level 3 specifications outline the minimum criteria for a state-of-the-art multimedia PC. I'd consider the level 3 spec to be a good minimum to shoot for if you're shopping for a new gaming computer, because game developers are great at pushing the envelope of computer performance.

SHORT CIRCUITS

1995 will be the year that you learned, in true Orwellian fashion, that the number which immediately follows 16 is 32. That's because **Creative Labs** has begun shipping its new **Sound Blaster 32**. This latest generation sound card is equipped with 16-bit Sound Blaster digital audio (for sound effects) and a General MIDI wavetable synthesizer (for music). As an entry-level wavetable synthesis sound card, you can upgrade the quality of synthesis by adding a daughtercard like the **Roland Sound Canvas DB-10** or a **Creative Lab's Wave Blaster II**. Price: \$169.99. For more information, call (800) 998-5227.

Since we're going to be talking about components, it will help if you have a basic understanding of their functions and their overall level of importance to your upgrading strategy—particularly as it relates to computer gaming.

ARE YOU A MACHINE OR A MOUSE?

First, let me distinguish between two kinds of gamers. There are gamers who like action/simulation games, and there is everyone else. Action/sim gamers require powerful computers to continuously update all the graphics in their virtual world. I find it amazing that the computers they need would otherwise be suited for running company-wide networks!

For the rest of you, well, it would be hard to justify a 120MHz Pentium for playing games like *Myst* and *Civilization* when the DOS version of *Civ* still runs well on a 586!

Let's start with the CPU (Central Processor Unit, like a 486-53MHz). It's the crankcase of your multimedia engine. This is where the horsepower is generated, but that engine is only as good as the other components. If you have a 90 MHz Pentium running with only 4MB of RAM, a lame CD-ROM drive, a slow hard drive, and a poor video card, you're not getting the most out of your CPU. On the other hand, if you take a 486-based machine and augment it with the MPC level 3 components, it can really scream!

If you do decide to go with a Pentium, consider this: with 133MHz Pentiums just announced, 150MHz Pentiums around the corner and the P6 (Intel's next-generation CPU) slated for this fall,

your biggest decision is to figure out how fast you really want to go and how much you want to spend. There are CPU upgrades, but the only one that gave us significant results is the Intel DX4-100. It really enhanced a 486/66 computer, and we did not have problems with it like we had with other upgrade chips.

RAM is the only computer add-on that remains scarce, so it hasn't come down in price like other components. It's expensive, and you gotta pay to play. You should consider 8MB to be a minimum for action games and simulations, and 16MB for Windows gaming. You can stay with 4MB of RAM for DOS games, but it limits the kinds of games you can enjoy. Some games now require you to have up to 7MB of free extended memory! RAM gives your PC the ability to store huge worlds for flight simulations or lots of textures for games like *Doom*.

YOU NEED SPEED

Keeping the frame rate high for intense action games and simulations is very important to your gaming experience. Slow frame rate can usually be traced to an outdated video card—especially when you're dealing with Windows. When you shop for a new video card, be careful. Many video cards will tout their high-end Windows benchmarks on the packaging and advertisements, but good Windows performance does not mean good DOS performance—they're two separate issues. So check out the DOS benchmarks before you buy. One red flag for video cards is that 3D acceleration cards are around the corner. If you're an action/sim gamer, you should save up

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5/5 Rating

Computer Gaming World—February 1995

94% Rating, Golden Triad Award Winner

Computer Game Review—February 1995

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This chart highlights the difference between specifications for the older MPC 2 and new MPC 3 computers as of June, 1995

	MPC Level 2 Minimum Requirements	MPC Level 3 Minimum Requirements
RAM	4MB	8MB
CPU	25MHz 486 SX	75MHz Pentium
Hard Drive	160MB	540GB
CD-ROM Drive	Double Speed (300KB/second) average seek time 400ms	Quad Speed (600KB/second) access time of 250ms
Audio	16 bit digital sound	16 bit digital sound and Wavetable synthesis
Video Playback	N/A	MPEG (Software or Hardware) with OM-1 compliance
Input/Output Ports	MIU, joystick, serial, parallel	MIDI, joystick, serial, parallel
System Software	Windows 3.0 plus multimedia ext.	Windows 3.11

Source: Multimedia PC Working Group, Software Publishers Association
 Complete specifications are available at <http://www.spa.org> and from the Multimedia PC Working Group: (202) 452-1600 x330 or spcinfo@spa.org

some cash, because you're going to want one of the killer 3D video cards that will be out by Christmas.

Also, if you're still on an ISA bus motherboard, it's time to upgrade to a local bus motherboard like VLB (for your 486) or PCI (for a Pentium). These technological marvels provide more bandwidth for the video data, and will speed up video performance.

HARD DRIVING

Even though most games ship on CD-ROM, they still copy many files to your

hard drive to speed up access time and execution. How do you know when it's time to purchase a hard drive instead of another more glamorous component? If you are constantly shuffling data from your drive to a stack of floppies and tapes, then it's time to think about a new hard drive.

Whether you decide to go SCSI or EIDE, a good interface card from the computer to the hard drive can make a huge difference in performance. SCSI is convenient if you have several other SCSI peripherals; otherwise, if you just want a big fat hard drive, the EIDE (Enhanced

Integrated Drive Electronics) drives are less expensive and perform like champs.

When it comes to the CD-ROM drive, you should probably buy a quad speed if you're into games that use a lot of full motion video, or games that require high performance all around (again, action games or simulations).

LISTEN TO THIS

After addressing performance and storage considerations, upgrading your sound hardware is one of the best ways to enhance your gaming experience. If you're going to get a sound card, spend the money and get one of the new 16-bit sound cards that supports General MIDI and has wavetable synthesis. Wavetable synthesis provides music that sounds like real musical instruments, while General MIDI ensures compatibility with a popular wavetable standard.

If a game includes audio tracks on the CD (such as LucasArts' FULL THROTTLE), you can hear real music playing out of your speakers instead of synthesized music. So be sure to hook up the audio cable from your CD drive to your sound card.

Last but not least, I'd heartily recommend you have a modem. With this one device, you'll be jacked into the world. Spend the money and get a fast one—V.34 28.8 bits per second—and you won't be sorry. You'll be able to really get into some fast on-line gaming as a result. ☛

THE PARTS DEPT.

Matrox Millennium Delivers Screaming Windows And DOS Speeds

by Loyd Case

High-end games require high-performance systems. The problem is, even a 120 mhz Pentium won't let you play NASCAR RACING or US NAVY FIGHTERS in high resolution with all the options on at a smooth frame rate. Can't do it. That's why companies like Diamond, Creative Labs and Matrox are working on 3D graphics accelerators, so their card can crank out the graphics computations and free your

processor to handle the rest. The only hitch is that the game you want to play has to be written for the card to take advantage of the 3D acceleration.

Until recently, the only graphics card that had built-in 3D acceleration at an affordable price was the IMPRESSION line from Matrox. Unfortunately, the DOS performance of the Matrox cards was abysmal (and we're being charitable), so it was ill-suited for games. The IMPRES-



sion also didn't have features considered essential by game developers, such as texture mapping in

hardware.

Because of these issues, Matrox developed the MILLENNIUM. The MILLENNIUM features a new 32-bit VGA core, which offers screaming DOS performance. Matrox also added support for texture map-

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ping, though it's not fully accelerated. (Texture mapping is a technique that applies a bitmap to a polygon to make it look realistic.) Basically, texture bitmaps are now stored in video memory on the MILLENNIUM itself.

The MILLENNIUM has some nice features, too. Matrox uses a new kind of video memory, WRAM ("Window" RAM). WRAM is as fast as VRAM (a kind of memory used in high-end graphics adapters), but almost as cheap as DRAM. There are also converters for an MPEG card for fast, high-quality MPEG video.

The MILLENNIUM, like any new hardware, isn't fully supported yet. For example, we couldn't get FLIGHT UNLIMITED to run at all. However, this was the only

game we had problems with. Other SVGA games we tested included U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS, PANZER GENERAL, SIM CITY 2000, FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5.0A and THE GRANDEST FLEET. The only glitch was in US NAVY FIGHTERS: the opening menu would not "paint" properly, but moving the mouse cursor to the top of the screen fixed the problem.

The MILLENNIUM is one fast card, too. The MILLENNIUM tied the DIAMOND STEALTH 64 on Steve Wigington's FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5.0A frame

rate benchmarks and was just a bit faster using Ziff Lab's PC Bench 9.0 and Winbench 95—which makes the MILLENNIUM faster in WINDOWS than any other card with similar DOS performance.

What about game support? As a demonstration vehicle, MATROX will be shipping to MILLENNIUM buyers an optimized version of the NASCAR RACING CD-ROM. This release won't support the full 3D features, but will take advantage of Matrox's superior 2D acceleration, which should still enhance performance. Of course, the MILLENNIUM will fully support the Windows 95 platform, including 3D-DDI and DCI drivers.

All in all, we'd say the MILLENNIUM is a winner, if you've got the bucks. Price: \$379 for the 2 MB version. For more information, call (800) 361-1408.



Card	Chipset	Cygspeed (frames/sec)	PCBench 9.0 (Graphics)
Stealth 64 VRAM	S3 Vision964	35.1	4023
Matrox Millennium	MGA 2064W	38.3	6078

Tested on a 100 MHz P54C w/ Intel Degaon Motherboard (33 MHz Chipset), 32 MB RAM, S-3 GBK Bus Adapter 2906A/PC 3200 Controller. Winbench 95 run on Windows for Macintosh 3.1.2. QEMM 7.5 memory manager was also installed.

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- 03 Some College or Technical school
- 04 Graduated College
- 05 Post Graduate school

2 Computer currently owned to (Check all that apply)

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- 02 Macintosh
- 03 Amiga
- 04 Dedicated game machine
- 05 None

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- 03 AHS
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- 03 Once a month
- 04 Once every two to three months
- 05 Once every four to six months
- 06 Once a year

6 Where are you most likely to purchase games? (Check all that apply)

- 01 Computer store
- 02 Computer store chain
- 03 Computer electronics store
- 04 Computer store chain
- 05 Direct from publisher
- 06 Mail order

7 What is your (and others in household) favorite type of game? (Check one in each column)

01 Strategy	02 Action	03 Other 1	04 Other 2
05 Adventure	06 Simulation	07 Role Playing	08 Brain Teasers
09 Card	10 Sport	11 Educational	12 Educational
13 Educational	14 Educational	15 Educational	16 Educational

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- 03 Amiga
- 04 Dedicated game machine
- 05 None

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- 04 386
- 05 286

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- 04 Once every two to three months
- 05 Once every four to six months
- 06 Once a year

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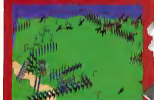


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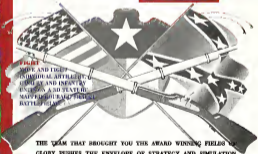
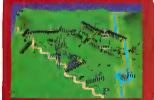
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HIGHLIGHTS



M.U.L.E.

ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1983

When Trip Hawkins asked Dan Buxton to create a *CARTELS & CUTTHROATS* clone, he decided to throw out the template and start afresh. Fortunately for gamers, this resulted in a seminal design still unique a dozen years after its initial release. Up to four humans would attempt to explore and exploit the resources of distant planets with the help of robotic "mules." With no bombs, guns or rocket ships anywhere evident, *M.U.L.E.* became a strategy classic. Surprisingly, gamers were enraptured by manipulating supply & demand and balancing production & storage—especially when competing against other players. Aided by a funny yet elegant interface, *M.U.L.E.* was the landmark work for multi-player "hotseat" gaming. We can only speculate on how immensely popular the game would be today if revamped for network and modem play.

PIRATES!

MICROPROSE, 1987

Perhaps the truest measure of Sid Meier's greatness is the wide range of gamers to which his designs appeal. Nowhere is this more evident than in *PIRATES!*, a game which has a bit of everything: resource management, desperate swordfights, dodging cannonades from enemy shores, dancels in distress, hidden treasure, and scalmrags seemingly everywhere, waiting to follow you to fame and fortune. Especially on the higher levels, the life of a buccaner takes on a keen edge of excitement and danger, as you attempt to appease colonial governors and scurvy crewmates alike. Both the tactical and action-oriented combat sequences do a fine job of immersing you in the action, as you juggle men, material, and morale to achieve your ends. Whether you call this a role-playing, adventure, strategy or even an action game, *PIRATES!* is simply the most successful hybrid game in gaming history.



CIVILIZATION (MicroProse, 1991)

FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)

GUNSHIP (MicroProse, 1989)

HARPOON (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)

KING'S QUEST V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)

LEMMINGS (Psygnosis, 1991)

LINKS 386 PRO (Access Software, 1992)

M-1 TANK PLATOON (MicroProse, 1989)

RAILROAD TYCOON (MicroProse, 1990)

RED BARRON (Dynamix, 1990)

THEIR FINEST HOUR (LucasArts, 1989)

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (LucasArts, 1990)

ULTIMA VI (Origin Systems, 1990)

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD (Origin Systems, 1992)

WING COMMANDER I & II (Origin Systems, 1990-91)

WOLFENSTEIN 3-D (id Software, 1992)

INDUSTRY PRIOR TO 1983

BATTLE CHIEF (Interplay Productions, 1985)

CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)

DUNDEE MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)

EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)

EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)

F-15 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)

GETTINGBY: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)

KAMPFGRUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)

MICH BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)

MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)

M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)

PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)

SIMCITY (Mesa, 1987)

STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)

THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)

ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1985)

ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)

WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)

WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)

WIZARDRY (ISI-Tech Software, 1981)

ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

Rank	Game	ESRB	Year	Score	Genre
1	Day of the Tentacle	ES	1997	9.87	Adventure
2	Gabriel Knight	ES	1994	9.47	Adventure
3	Sam & Max Hit The Road	ES	1996	9.30	Adventure
4	The Seventh Guest	ES	1995	9.12	Adventure
5	Under A Killing Moon	ES	1997	9.17	Adventure
6	Redwall	ES	1995	9.05	Adventure
7	Exile	ES	1995	8.95	Adventure
8	Freddy Phurkin: Fenrir's Phantasm	ES	1996	8.95	Adventure
9	Alma in the Dark	ES	1995	8.95	Adventure
10	Legend of Balthazar 3	ES	1994	8.54	Adventure



TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

Rank	Game	ESRB	Year	Score	Genre
1	Battleground	ES	1994	9.44	Adventure
2	Blackthorn: Stone Prophet	ES	1997	9.40	Adventure
3	Night & Magic: Darklands of Xaos	ES	1997	9.37	Adventure
4	Lord of Lore	ES	1995	9.25	Adventure
5	Night & Magic: Clouds of Xaos	ES	1997	9.11	Adventure
6	Ultima VII: Part Two: Serpents Breathe	ES	1996	9.08	Adventure
7	Welf	ES	1995	8.88	Adventure
8	Arms: The Elder Scrolls	ES	1995	8.83	Adventure
9	Vault of Darkness	ES	1994	8.74	Adventure
10	Minotaur	ES	1995	8.25	Adventure



TOP SIMULATION GAMES

Rank	Game	ESRB	Year	Score	Genre
1	MASSCAR Racing	ES	1995	9.57	Racing
2	US Navy Fighters	ES	1995	9.56	Simulation
3	Wings of Glory	ES	1994	9.48	Simulation
4	Ass of the Day	ES	1995	9.43	Simulation
5	Jelly Car Racing	ES	1995	9.23	Racing
6	Frost Defender	ES	1995	8.96	Simulation
7	Harvest	ES	1995	8.66	Simulation
8	Ass Over Eggs	ES	1995	8.64	Simulation
9	MID-28	ES	1995	8.39	Simulation
10	1942 Pacific Air War	ES	1995	8.39	Simulation



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

Rank	Game	ESRB	Year	Score	Genre
1	X-COM	ES	1993	10.37	Strategy
2	Jagged Alliance	ES	1994	10.36	Strategy
3	Master of Orion	ES	1993	10.21	Strategy
4	Warlords II	ES	1995	9.95	Strategy
5	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	ES	1995	9.73	Strategy
6	Master of Magic	ES	1997	9.67	Strategy
7	Warcraft	ES	1995	9.63	Strategy
8	March of the Titans	ES	1995	9.58	Strategy
9	Warcraft II	ES	1995	9.03	Strategy
10	The Grandest Feast	ES	1995	9.08	Strategy



TOP 100 GAMES

Rank	Game	ESRB	Year	Score	Genre
1	Prince of Persia	ES	1989	10.66	Adventure
2	Wing Commander 3	ES	1999	10.55	Simulation
3	X-COM	ES	1993	10.37	Strategy
4	Jagged Alliance	ES	1994	10.36	Strategy
5	YIE Fighter	ES	1995	10.29	Adventure
6	DOOM	ES	1993	10.24	Action
7	Master of Orion	ES	1993	10.21	Strategy
8	Dark Force	ES	1993	10.01	Adventure
9	MASSCAR Racing	ES	1995	9.97	Racing
10	Warlords II	ES	1995	9.95	Strategy
11	Day of the Tentacle	ES	1997	9.87	Adventure
12	DOOM II	ES	1994	9.83	Action
13	Final Fantasy: Tactics	ES	1997	9.75	Adventure
14	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	ES	1995	9.73	Strategy
15	Magicka	ES	1997	9.71	Adventure
16	Master of Magic	ES	1997	9.67	Strategy
17	Final Fantasy: Tactics Advance	ES	1997	9.64	Adventure
18	Warcraft	ES	1995	9.63	Strategy
19	US Navy Fighters	ES	1995	9.52	Simulation
20	X-Wing	ES	1997	9.50	Simulation
21	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1997	9.48	Action
22	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	ES	1998	9.48	Action
23	Star Wars: Battlefront	ES	1999	9.44	Action
24	Star Wars: Battlefront II	ES	1999	9.43	Action
25	Wings of Glory	ES	1994	9.40	Simulation
26	Star Wars: Jedi Academy	ES	1999	9.38	Action
27	Ass of the Day	ES	1995	9.44	Simulation
28	Battleground	ES	1994	9.44	Adventure
29	Star Wars: Jedi Knight II	ES	1999	9.43	Action
30	Jelly Car Racing	ES	1995	9.43	Racing
31	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
32	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
33	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
34	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
35	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
36	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
37	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
38	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
39	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
40	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
41	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
42	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
43	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
44	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
45	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
46	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
47	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
48	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
49	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action
50	Star Wars: Jedi Knight	ES	1999	9.43	Action



TOP WARGAMES

Rank	Game	Score
1	Panzer General	10.66
2	Shogun	9.59
3	War Victory: Market Garden	9.58
4	War in Heaven	9.44
5	Carriers at War Construction Kit	9.35
6	Operation Crusader	9.32
7	Flight Commander 2	9.21
8	V for Victory: Cold Steel Sword	9.18
9	Tanks	9.10
10	Tigers on the Prowl	8.57



TOP ACTION GAMES

Rank	Game	Score
1	Wing Commander 3	10.55
2	THE Fighter	10.29
3	BMX+	10.24
4	Dark Forces	10.01
5	BMX II	9.93
6	Magic Carpet	9.71
7	X-Wing	9.60
8	System Shock	9.39
9	Beretic	9.24
10	Prezador	9.15



TOP SPORTS GAMES

Rank	Game	Score
1	NBA Live '95	10.23
2	Front Page Sports Football 95	9.15
3	Dynars	8.64
4	NHL Hockey	8.49
5	PGA Tour Golf 485	8.09
6	Tony La Russa Baseball II	8.78
7	Front Page Sports Baseball	8.64
8	Kardball IV	8.64
9	Jordan In Flight	7.85
10	Microsoft Golf 2.0	7.43



You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CGW Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CGW Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.

Rank	Game	Score
53	Merchant Prince	8.68
54	Ultima VII Part Two Savage Isle	8.68
55	Defunct	8.62
56	Incredible Machines 2	8.61
57	Tanks	8.60
58	VGA Planets	8.57
59	Tigers on the Prowl	8.56
60	Warrior	8.56
61	Clash at Steel	8.56
62	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharmacist	8.56
63	Alone in the Dark	8.55
64	Legend of Heroes 3	8.54
65	Transport Tycoon	8.54
66	Wall	8.54
67	Incredible Tennis	8.53
68	Armenia: The Elder Scrolls	8.53
69	Empire Deluxe	8.52
70	Carriers at War II	8.52
71	Sea City	8.51
72	Starbase II	8.51
73	Tony La Russa Baseball II	8.48
74	Front Page Sports Baseball	8.48
75	Scaphis Khan II	8.47
76	Verd at Bayreuth	8.47
77	Dracula Unleashed	8.47
78	Acas Over Europe	8.46
79	Hardball IV	8.46
80	NHL '95	8.44
81	Night's Dawn VII	8.44
82	Superheroes of Babylon	8.42
83	Marble Madness II	8.41
84	Space Quest V: Maelstrom	8.40
85	Head of Fins	8.39
86	Great Naval Battles 3	8.35
87	Mangarav's Island	8.34
88	Roller of Engagement 2	8.34
89	Lords of the Hand	8.30
90	The Herds	8.30
91	Beach Gate	8.29
92	Star Trek: Judgment Rites	8.19
93	Prince of Persia 2	8.19
94	The Last Vikings	8.16
95	Slid n' All's Incredible Texas	8.16
96	Dark Legions	8.15
97	Beachy	8.12
98	Sea City CB-100M	8.10
99	1993 Pacific Air War	8.09
100	Flashback	8.08

Games on unranked lists have scores equal to the line above. * = Top game of type. Dark Tool = New Game. AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports

The Computer Gaming World

A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

PATCHES

1830 Update: The game will now run with 2,700 KB of EMS and will no longer lock up when trying to buy a train from the bank when the bank has no trains. 5/11/95

1942: Pacific Air War V1.5b AI Update: Provides AI enhancements. For use with Version 1.4 or later. 5/24/95

Alien Logic V1.1 Update: Fixes several problems, including the "Cleash General *Null Jig Tokens* Crash," as well as adding command line switches for many sound boards. 5/2/95

Big 3 for Windows Update: Updates Big 3 to the latest version and fixes problems in the retreat function, defender retreating function, control array element errors, and several other problems. 4/6/95

Blood Bowl Modem Patch V1.1: Adds modem play and fixes a number of known quirks. 6/7/95

Cyberia Save Game Patch: Corrects problems with the game not saving milestones after the conference room. 6/6/95

Damnable Encounter V1.1: Fixes most of the sound card-related crash problems with lower-end sound cards. Several other new bug fixes are also included. 5/15/95

Descent V1.2 Update: Includes several bug fixes

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.

Ziff These patches can usually be downloaded from the major on-line networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZiffNet), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's own BBSs or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase. **Red** indicates new files.

and adds support for multiple sockets during netgames, hooks for SPACEBALL controller, and alternate joystick reading methods. 3/24/95

F-14 Fleet Defender V2.0 Update: Updates the flight sim to version 2.0. 5/24/95

FrontLines V1.02: Includes modem play as well as several other enhancements and bug fixes. 4/2/95

Grand Naval Battles III V1.1 Update: Fixes reported bugs, provides some gameplay enhancements. 5/13/95

Haryoon Classic for Windows V1.55a: Corrects several reported GPF errors. 6/6/95

High Seas Trader Sound Update: Should fix any soundcard related crashes. 4/4/95

Jagged Alliance V1.10: Fixes a few problems, including keyboard lock-out and offers several enhancements to the interface, AI and gameplay. 4/14/95

Legions Windows Update: Allows LEGIONS WINDOWS to run under WINDOWS NT and corrects a very rare problem with later scenarios. 3/29/95

Links: The Challenge of Goliath Update: Fixes lockups with Soundblaster 16 cards. 3/22/95

Master of Magic V1.31 Update: Latest upgrade with numerous fixes, new features, and major AI enhancements. Updates all versions. 3/07/95

Pacific Air War Gold CD-ROM Update: Corrects a problem if your copy of the game has a volume label of PAW_1942 instead of 1942_PAW, where the game will not run from a minimum installation. 3/16/95

Stein Prophet V1.1 Update: Fixes reported problems. 5/23/95

Tank Commander V1.1 Update: Fixes reported problems on faster PCs with serial/modem data loss. Also fixes a few other minor quirks. 5/19/95

Tigers on the Prowl V1.23 Update: Fixes all reported problems with versions 1.2x and adds a few new options that can be selected to speed up gameplay (at a little loss in accuracy). 5/14/95

World of Xeen for Macintosh V1.1 Update: Fixes many problems some customers have run into and adds a Power PC native mode. 6/2/95

X-COM: Terror From the Deep V2.0 Update: Numerous tweaks and fixes. 6/3/95

Publisher BBS Numbers

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem party settings at N-9-1.

Accede (408) 296-8800

Agave (508) 368-7036

Bethesda (301) 990-7552

Blizzard (714) 556-4002

Broderbund (415) 883-5889

Capstone (305) 374-8872

Creative Labs (405) 742-6660

Id Software (508) 388-4137

Impressions (617) 225-2042.

InterPlay (301) 252-2822

LucasArts (415) 257-3070

Maxis (510) 254-3668

MicroProse (410) 785-1841

Mircusell (206) 936-6735

NavalGic (818) 774-9528

Origin (512) 328-8402

Papyrus (617) 576-7472

Sierra Online (206) 644-0122

Spectrum Holobyte (510) 522-8909

SSI (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739-6623

Virgin Interactive (714) 833-3305



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"What's the Deal With... Playtesting?"

by Martin E. Cirulis

LONG AGO IN THE AGE OF TABLETOP GAMES, WHEN HUMANS HAD TO CALCULATE GAME RESULTS themselves instead of getting a machine to do it, new game designs went through a period called playtesting. A bunch of folks, usually hapless buddies of the designer, played game after game trying to see how the rules meshed and whether anything unforeseen and unbalanced had slipped into the design. Now, in today's gleaming world of silicon and CD's, the word "playtesting" has come to mean something completely different, and this little mutation in definition is making a lot of great games into just good ones.

If you ask most computer game companies about playtesting—and we're talking mostly about strategic and tactical games—they will assure you that countless hours have gone into making sure the game is bug-free. Unfortunately, that isn't the question. Bug-free is nice, but when you play-test a boardgame, you aren't checking for dice that won't stop rolling or counters that explode, and while the computer part of a game is very cool, somebody has got to start making sure the actual game is up to speed when that master CD is burned in.

It's not to say that nobody is paying attention. I'm sure there's always a clever kid around trying to point out stuff like this. When Impressions put out *WHEN TWO WORLDS WAR*, there must have been somebody asking if they really wanted to have transports fly as well as fighters. And, surely, a lone voice on Sierra's *OUTPOST* team must have cried out, "I don't think the last 400 humans in the Universe, clinging to life under the surface of a hellish, radiation-blasted alien world, would get so bent out of shape about hav-

ing a red-light district next door as to abandon their shelters."

As you may have noticed, dumb rules are pretty easy to spot and they usually occur in SF strategy games, though CRPG's have their own version of the "What were they thinking?" syndrome. Though I can't prove it, I'm pretty sure the cause is some business wretch with the attitude of, "It's all made up anyway, the geeks'll never notice. Now stop wasting time and money and get this puppy out the door and on the shelves by the end of



this quarter!" Of course, we do notice, and games that could have been cool suffer early deaths, and some designer's good idea is wasted because publishers are in such a hurry that they've forgotten that the rules as well as the program have to be "bug-free."

Of course, all is not cynicism and labled games. There are still designers who take the time to make a game right, even if they don't always get the chance before it hits the shelves. Witness the endless tweaking by the designers of games like *TANIS!* or *WAR IN THE PACIFIC*. These guys are still pouring time into their games, not just getting rid of bugs but adding new rules or balancing others in unofficial upgrades—as if an update of a game by the guy who created it could

ever be "unofficial." Who the heck is more official than the designer? The kids down at SimTex also deserve a nod for the spasm of updates that follow the release of a *MASTER OF ...* game; a lot of it is bug-fixes, but they do try to tweak out the faults in their AI routines, which improves their games markedly. Forget the overworked, underpaid people on help lines—this is the kind of support gamers really remember. (Of course, those of us without the access or inclination to the online world rarely see this side of the industry, except on those chilly days in Hell when a company is conscientious enough to send registered users the upgrades they deserve.)

Designers need the time to get a game right, and maybe we are a little to blame for the time pressure. It's no shocker that every time a hot (read as: really huge and complicated) game falls behind schedule, we, the buying public, begin to snivel and demand our new game *NOW!* with lower lip all a'tremble—and all it takes is a few pieces of impatient e-mail to justify some Suit's "Get it out the door!" agenda. Lord knows, nobody hates waiting more than this boy, but as the years go by I think it's safe to say that I'll gladly wait an extra few months for a new toy if it's not only bug-free, but bad-idea-free as well.

One rant isn't going to change anything, I know, but perhaps a few of those memos that go back and forth so furiously between testing and programming could have a few bits about the game itself instead of just the code. I'm thinking that Game Designers have to be a lot like Writers: we both want each new baby to be The Next Big Thing. Maybe somebody should start giving those designers the time and resources to get things right, and do their ideas justice. ☺

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