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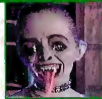
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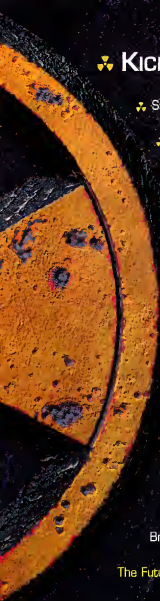
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**Warhammer:
Shadow of
the Horned
Rat
334**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

NOVEMBER 1995



**Computer Game
Horror
42**

FEATURES

- 42 ON, THE HORROR!** Some games send chills up your spine, while others make you want to howl at the moon in frustration. Arinn Dembo acts as cryptkeeper.
- 62 PHANTASMAGORIA** Will this gory, visually stunning game of horror destroy Roberta Williams' squeaky-clean reputation?
- 70 SNEAK PREVIEW! GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: A BEAST WITHIN** Grab your crucifix and explore the sequel.
- 76 HARDWARE: A FIELD GUIDE FOR THE PC STORAGE HUNTER** If today's 80 MB and 7-CD games have you at the end of your storage capacity, try these solutions.

ADVENTURE/ ROLE-PLAYING

- 101 SCORPIA'S STING** *CGW'S* role-playing ace looks out over the THUNDERSCAPE.
- 108 THE SCORPION'S TALE** How to bleach the bones of DUNGEON MASTER II: THE LEGEND OF SKULLKEEP.
- 120 BURIED IN TIME** Charles Ardai has much more fun time-travelling with the Sanctuary Woods sequel.
- 128 SNEAK PREVIEW! SHANNARA** Legend brings Terry Brooks' world to life.
- 136 LOROS OF MIDNIGHT** Peter Olafson explores the epic adventure.
- 142 SILENT STEEL** Tsunami tries to merge film and gaming in the submarine adventure SILENT STEEL.
- 146 STAR TREK OMNIPEDIA** "More than an encyclopedia, less than a game," says Allen Greenberg.

ACTION

- 150 SNEAK PREVIEW! CYBERMAGE** Martin Cirulis takes on David Bradley's latest.
- 156 PRIMAL RAGE** Time-Warner unleashes yet another side-scrolling fighting game.
- 164 THE NEED FOR SPEED** It isn't NASCAR, but Gordon Goble puts the pedal to EA's metal.
- 170 BATTLE BEAST** 7th Level bowls over Mark Clarkson with a combination of cuteness and savagery.
- 188 STRATEGY! MECHWARRIOR 2** Instruction from drill sergeant Martin Cirulis.

SPORTS

- 206 BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS 3.0** Baseball isn't the same after the strike, but this game is the same as before.
- 212 RUGBY WORLD CUP** EA Sports once again brings world-class sports to North America.

218 TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING Terry Coleman judges the latest slugger from **Comp-U-Sports**.

226 SPORTMASTER George E. Howard tries to beat the spread with this sports book software.

SIMULATIONS

229 BOGEY'S BAR & GRILL Denny Atkin gets caught with other pilots in a **TORNADO** on the World Wide Web.

236 FIGHTER DUEL Jaguar Software and Philips Media join forces to bring the realistic Amiga favorite to the PC.

244 WEREWOLF VS. APACHE Up to eight players can dofight in **NovaLogic's WEREWOLF VS. COMANCHE**.

STRATEGY AND WARGAMES

253 BROADSIDES & GRIPESHOT Alan Emrich tries to see how strategic elements work in tactical games.

260 ACROSS THE RHINE MicroProse' new game is part WWII tank simulator and part wargame.

266 PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS HPS Simulations puts forward after its **TIGERS ON THE PROWL** success.

272 FLIGHT COMMANDER 2 EDITOR Adding an editor makes **Avalon Hill's** flight game even more flightworthy.

278 CHESS SURVEY Terry Coleman sorts out the masters from the pawnpushers in this exhaustive roundup.

294 STRATEGY! CELTIC TALES How to keep from Hurling in our guide to magical artifacts.

304 STRATEGY! PERFECT GENERAL II Tactical tips from our own Perfect General, Patrick Miller.

SPECIAL WINDOWS 95 GAMING SECTION

318 WINDOWS 95 REVIEW We review the operating system from the gamer's perspective.

334 SNEAK PREVIEW! WARHAMMER Games Workshop and **Mindscape** bring the best-selling tabletop fantasy game to the computer.

350 PITFALL HARRY George Jones ducks, dodges, and swings from vines in this review of **Activision's** remake.

354 STRATEGY! PITFALL HARRY Eric Jones gives you the Magic Chili Pepper and more.

366 SNEAK PREVIEW! TRITRYST Finally, a puzzle game other than **TETRIS** with a semblance of strategy.

370 PRESSURE DROP JoAnne Springer blasts away with a Chromagun until she's pastel color-blind.

372 ACES OF THE DEEP: COMMANDO Kevin Turner is the voice of command in **Sierra's** award-winning submarine simulation, now in **SVGA** graphics.



Hardware: A Field Guide To PC Storage 76



MechWarrior 2 Strategies 188

DEPARTMENTS

- 14 **EDITORIAL** The Rebirth of Horror
- 18 **INTERFACE** The Gamers Talk Back
- 24 **READ.ME** The Latest Buzz, Whirr, And Click
- 374 **THE GAMER'S EDGE** The Hacks, Codes & Cheats You Need For **MECHWARRIOR 2**
- 378 **HEX, BUGS & ROCK N' ROLL** Writing Games
- 384 **UNDER THE HOOD** Afraid To Upgrade?
- 409 **ADVERTISER INDEX** A Guide To The Vendors
- 411 **HALL OF FAME** All-Time Great Games
- 412 **THE TOP 100** Readers Rate The Top Games
- 414 **PATCHES** Game Files To Kill Bugs Dead
- 416 **WHAT'S THE DEAL?** Arcade Sensibilities

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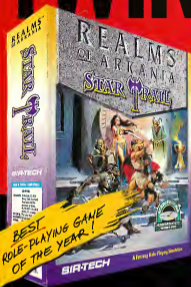
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The Rebirth Of Horror

Why The PC Has Become The New Playground For Horror

A Guest Editorial by Charles Arday

THEY'RE NOT BUYING HORROR NOVELS AT THE BIG PUBLISHING HOUSES, NOT LIKE THEY USED TO. OH, SURE, EVERY 10 months or so a new Stephen King yarn takes its predictable, leisurely stroll up and down the bestseller lists, and a few other big names still publish regularly, but if you're a new writer looking to put your stake in the ground, this is not the time to go planting it in a vampire's heart.

They're not making too many horror movies, either: a new *Halloween*, an occasional King or Clive Barker adaptation, very little else. Television? Something of a renaissance afoot there, spurred on by the success of *The X-Files*, but it's not like it once was, with seven or eight shows battling for viewers' attention.

In computer gaming, though, horror has never had it better. While other corners of the entertainment industry seem to be taking a breather, horror computer games are springing up like never before.

What's going on? Well, let's see. Over the past two years, *Virgin's THE SEVENTH GUEST* became one of the mega-successes of the field; *I-Motion's ALONE IN THE DARK* touched a nerve, inspiring two sequels and a flock of imitators; and *Sierra's* reigning high priestess, *KING'S QUEST* creator Roberta Williams, announced her intention to make *Sierra's* biggest title ever a horror game. In retrospect, anyone could have guessed that a game design cycle later horror would be the biggest trend in the field.

But is the horror boom just a case of ran-

dom trending, a confluence of accidentally similar events that has led the market to make the sort of faulty pattern-recognition call it made a few years ago when Hollywood produced three lambda movies, or a few years before that, when "Animal House" clones appeared on all three TV networks?

I don't think so. Or at least that's not the whole story. I believe there is a concrete reason that horror games, as opposed to science fiction or fantasy or mystery games, are now on the upswing.

First, the necessary condition: horror is a very game-like genre. But in this regard it is not unique—much of science fiction, fantasy, and adventure fiction shares horror's game-friendly focus on adrenaline, resourcefulness under pressure, puzzle solving, physical coordination, and strategic thinking in the face of unfamiliar rules. Unlike those other genres, however, horror also compels an attention to good storytelling by its insistence on evoking a certain emotional response in its readers.

Science fiction is still science fiction whether or not it amuses you, mystifies you or enlightens you. It ought to provoke some response, but need not provoke any one particular response. As a result, it's all too easy for an author to produce a piece of fiction that nominally has all the right parts to it but evokes no emotional reaction whatsoever.

Horror is different. If a story doesn't frighten you, it's not a horror story. This offers a simple feedback loop for game de-



Charles Arday is a member of the Horror Writers Association and is CGW's Contributing Editor for Interactive Fiction. He works on Wall Street and is also developing a free e-mail service for the Internet.

signers: if you're developing a horror game and players aren't getting scared, the game's broken.

Fortunately, fear is a comparably easy response to evoke, even in the somewhat circumscribed world of computer games. It may be a while before a PC game can deliver the punch of *Catch 22* or *A Passage to India*—but already today a good one might deliver the punch of *Frankenstein* or *The Shining*. If you have a player wandering around a simulated environment, as in *THE SEVENTH GUEST* or *ALONE IN THE DARK*, it takes very little to create a creepy atmosphere and only a few nudges in the direction of plot development to give the impression of having a vast and awful tale to tell. Inspiring a/dor or pity, envy or compassion, is very hard—scaring the bejebebers out of someone just isn't.

For these reasons, horror is the perfect "beginner's workout" for game designers who are just starting to realize how important it is that they engage the player's imagination and empathy as well as his trigger

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finger and cartographic sense. Even a weak horror game will generally immerse the player in its world—will make the player feel something about the events he participates in—more than a comparably weak game in another genre. And a strong one can grab hold of a gamer and cling like a pitbull, creating an incomparably intense gaming experience.

Before a game can do that, though, it has to have a good story. And for the last few years, storytelling in computer games has increasingly taken a back seat to gee-whiz technology. Games have come out by the cartload that look snazzy but make no sense, have slush pile-quality stories, and generally evoke little more from a gamer after the initial gut-level "Wow!" than a heuhy, mouth-level yawn. It should be obvious to everyone in the industry that this can't go on forever. A person will only buy so many \$59 disappointments before he throws up his hands in disgust. Publishers have to start offering gamers more than they have been, and not just more visual effects. It's time for the storytelling to catch up to the set design.

As for gamers, horror offers them a taste of what the experience of playing a game can be like when you are wrapped up in an engrossing fiction rather than skimming the surface of an abstract or mechanical one.

None of which the average gamer will think about when he or she sticks disk one of PHANTASMAGORIA into a CD-ROM drive, but no matter. Gamers will appreciate it when they experience it. And the publisher who offers that experience to him will discover what Stephen King knows but the rest of the publishing industry seems to have forgotten: that there's no quicker or easier way to pack the seats than with a good scare.

Johnny Wilson enjoyed a vacation this month. He'll return next month with another edition of Rants & Raves. ☼

HOW DO WE RATE?

The Guide To CGW's Review Rating System

★★★★★ Outstanding: That rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, interface, and, of course, the game play come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience.

★★★★☆ Very Good: A quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems, but is still worth your time and money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter/genre.

★★★☆☆ Average: A mixed bag. Can often be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in significant areas. Can also just be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.

★★☆☆☆ Weak: A game with serious problems. May be buggy, may not have much play value, may be ill-conceived—and you may want to think twice about buying it.

★☆☆☆☆ Abysmal: That rare game that gets it all wrong. Usually a buggy, incomplete, and/or valueless product.



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Interface

LETTERS FROM CGW READERS

AMIGA AMIGO

In addition to owning an Amiga computer, I am a subscriber because I like to know what the IBM gaming world is doing. You guys make your living from computer games, but you don't seem to know what is going on outside of the IBM market. For example, in your September 1995 review of

Commodore, is making more Amigas and is working on new models of the Amiga. You could even mention that *SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER* is a very good sports game and available only on the Amiga and that *SUPER SKIDMARKS 2* is a lot of fun to play, especially with two Amigas linked together. Just kidding, I know you would never do anything like that. You're too busy writing about your excitement with that convoluted, bloated monstrosity—**WINNERS 95**.

Judson Jones
Arlington, VA

Actually, Judson, we're not biased against the Amiga, because half of our current staff used to own one. However, we didn't cover the Amiga versions of THE CHAOS ENGINE and THE SETTLERS because they were only brought into this country through the gray market. We certainly prefer to cover games which are available to our readers. But, while we're talking about people who don't think their machines get a fair shake in our pages...

MAC ATTACK

Since I just got a renewal notice, I thought I'd write to let you know why I do not intend to renew my subscription. Basically, it is because you give no coverage to the Macintosh. I know, I've heard all the arguments before, but in fact there are good games out for the Mac, so that you should at least mention them. The only Mac games you nor-

mally reference in an article are those that also exist on the PC, though those which are ported to the Mac from the PC are often some of the weakest Mac games.

Some examples of Mac games that should have been worthy of discussion in CGW: Any of the Cliff Johnson games: *FOOL'S ERRANDS*, *AT THE CARNIVAL*, *3 IN THREE*. Any of Chris Crawford's games for the Mac: not all of them were perfect designs, but they were always distinctive and broke new ground. Any of Scott Kim's work; though *ILLUSIONS* doesn't quite fall into the "game" category, *HEAVEN AND EARTH* certainly does, and is breathtaking in both graphic and intellectual appeal. *STRATEGIC CONQUEST*: Now maybe this doesn't have the complexity of some wargames, but the fact remains that a friend and I have probably played this game

more times than any other (on all platforms, including paper). And *Delta Tao* is about to release a brand new version (that you should cover). Any of the French-developed games that were released in this country by *In-Line Games*, such as *S.C.O.U.T.* and *THE TINDS*, very well-designed games

with new approaches; *BATTLE OF BATAIN* and *M4* by **Deadly Games**. These were both very well executed, even though working from a Hypercard base. *M4* gave me a better feel of tank warfare, even with its simple design, than have numerous tank games I have seen on other platforms. Also, if you had covered their *U-BOAT*, I might have saved myself some money.

A whole passel of small games from small companies. Some worked, some didn't, but the companies were guaranteed to



THE CHAOS ENGINE, the reviewer states, "Three years ago, this would have been a good Nintendo cartridge..." *THE CHAOS ENGINE* is a port from the Amiga and it did come out two or three years ago. *SERF CITY* is another game your magazine reviewed and another port from the Amiga where it was released as *THE SETTLERS*. I can understand you not wanting to review Amiga games, that is a smaller market and most of the best games are written for IBM-type machines these days. We do, however, still get some new games (mostly from Europe) and *Escom*, the company that bought the assets of



fail if no one knew about their work. This could also lead to a discussion of the lack of shelf space for Mac games in software stores. The buyers for the stores ignore Mac games unless they are also on PC, which is why I have had to spend my hundreds of dollars each year

Tyrian



No amount of marketing hype could do this game justice. If you enjoy awesome arcade action then you owe it to yourself to download the shareware version of Tyrian and see it for yourself. Bring along a friend, because Tyrian features a two-player mode as well as network and modem support. We're sure you'll be hooked.

Here are just a few places you can find Tyrian:

Epic's web site: <http://www.epicgames.com>

Epic's official ftp site: <ftp.umt.edu> in
the msdos/games/epic directory

Exec-PC BBS (414) 789-4360

CompuServe: GO EPIC and
download Tyrian from the Epic Forum

AOL: keyword PCGAMES, in the software libraries

Epic's shareware games can also be found on many
BBS's and major online services around the world.



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through mail-order houses. Incidentally, this is also a flaw of magazines reporting sales popularity based only on stores, rather than mail-order—it gives biased sampling. Anyone who buys games at the price premium charged by the software stores seems nuts to me in any case; I get more knowledgeable stuff through mail-order, and next-day delivery for big cost savings. OK, I'm off that soapbox.

Some smaller games of note: HIDDEN AGENDA, KING'S BOUNTY, DARWIN'S REVENGE.

TACOPS: A noted board wargame designer (and publisher of information on military actions throughout the world) has said that TACOPS is "the computer wargame that we (i.e. boardgamers) have all been waiting for!" He then proceeded to a twenty-minute discourse on why TACOPS is better than any other computer wargame, outside of the War College, perhaps.

REALME: Sure it's shareware, but so was DOOM. Nevertheless, it is an outstanding role-playing game, especially in its registered form. So good, in fact, that it deserves coverage in your magazine.

So, I'll keep reading CGW until my current sub runs out. I love games, having spent a great portion of my life playing (and designing) them. But don't expect my check in the mail unless things change remarkably in the next couple of issues. I can spend that money on the new version of STRATEGIC CONQUEST instead!

Dennis Suture
Round Rock, TX

Well, Dennis, you're right about one thing—most of those games were worthy of coverage in

CGW. So much so that we reviewed nearly every one of them. I'll list them in the order you did with the CGW issue number and page number in parentheses: Cliff Johnson's FOOL'S ERRAND (#52, p. 18), AT THE CARNOVAL (#60, p. 40), and 3 IN THREE (#79, p. 6); Chris Crawford's BALANCE OF POWER (#34, p. 42), TRUST & BETRAYAL (#47, p. 18), and BALANCE OF THE PLANET (#72, p. 19); HEAVEN AND EARTH (#101, p. 60), STRATEGIC CONQUEST (#35, p. 33), THE TINIES (#105, p. 168), BATTLE OF BRITAIN (#123, p. 204), M4 (#121, p. 154), U-BOAT (#119, p. 146), HIDDEN AGENDA (#60, p. 24), KING'S BOUNTY (covered as an Amiga title), DARWIN'S REVENGE (if you mean DARWIN'S DILEMMA, we covered it), and TACOPS (#125, p. 318). We didn't cover REALME. We also reviewed OPERATION GRUNADER (originally on the Mac) months before it was released as an IBM product (#118, p. 146). As for saving you dough on U-BOAT, we're sorry. Our reviewer liked the product and played it for weeks.

We don't think a little thing like this should change your mind about not reviewing, though. People might think you were getting a clue or something.



ULYSSES REB

Is it my imagination, or is

that General Grant holding a rebel flag at the end of every Confederate victory in Empire's Civil War?

Ken Whittier
N. Attleboro, MA

It isn't General Lee.

PENTIUM DISABLED

Whenever one of your reviewers or editors mention that a Pentium is needed to run a game, please tell us which Pentium. There are so many.

Joseph Schenna
Winston-Salem, NC

The references to a Pentium are a shorthand for saying that a game uses a lot of computing resources. We started making those references back when Pentiums first hit the scene and haven't weaned ourselves of the habit. Let's just say that we're talking a minimum of Pentium 90 whenever we say that. Thanks for pointing this out; we'll try to be more specific in the future.

HOT SEAT, ANYONE?

Are there any computer games out there similar to AIR BECKS or the old Commodore 64 game, OIL BARONS, in which multiple players can play without a modem? I miss the old board games and I think there should be a few games out on the market that bring this kind of enjoyment. Any suggestions?

Nevada Prudhomme
New York City, NY

There are a few games where you can hot-seat in front of a sin-

gle computer. SPACEWARD HO! (New World Computing), LORDS OF THE REALM (Impressions), GENGHIS KHAN II (Koei) and 1830 (Avalon Hill) are four of the best.



Lords Of The Realm

CORRECTIONS

In the October issue we printed an incorrect publisher's name and phone number for DUST: A TALE OF THE WIRED WEST in the "Now Playing" section of READ.ME. The publisher of DUST is GTE Entertainment, and they can be reached at (800) GTE-TODAY.

We also made an error in the "Graphic Impressions" chart for the graphic accelerator article on page 71 of the same issue. The ratings are correct, but the column headers should say DOS Performance, Windows Performance, Documentation, and Setup, from left to right. We apologize for the mistakes and regret any confusion these errors may have caused. ☹

WARNING: The Host of This Game is *NOT* User Friendly.

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Capture a vicious killer by jumping from one suspect's mind to



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requires you to make life-saving decisions instantly. So if you sit



around and don't interact, someone's going to turn up dead. Which is

bad, since you're supposed to be collecting clues, not corpses.



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(COLOSSAL) PICTURES

READ.ME

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GAMING WORLD

MechWarriors Mass For Network Attack

Activision Prepares To Launch NETMECH, Spycraft, And A Hockey Game

Trying to recapture the magical days when the Atari 2600 was king and everything they did was golden, Activision has armed itself with some powerful new products. One title that appealed to our "007" side was **SPYCRAFT**. Developed with former head of CIA William Colby and former KGB agent Major-General Oleg Kalugin, **SPYCRAFT** certainly knows its way around the web of deceit, intrigue and counter-espionage. The chapter-oriented approach takes you from CIA training to *The Other Side* and back. Full-motion video advances the plot, which has an innovative post-Cold War storyline with all the twists and turns you'd expect from a spy thriller. CIA training starts in late November.

While stalking around in a trench coat can be great fun, some of us feel more at home



in the comfort of our very own 75-ton steel can. Heading the call of battle-starved MechWarriors everywhere (and perhaps further alienating spouses across the country), Activision is hastily putting together two add-on packages for this incredible game.

NET-MECH is the promised multiplayer game, and will allow up to eight players to duke

it out on an IPX network. Also nearing completion is a mission disk that will bring the mysterious Ghost Bear Clan into the picture. The standard assortment of



SPY AND DEMISE Activision's *SPYCRAFT* will take you into a world of intrigue, but *NETMECH* is far more straightforward about its intent.

missions will be included, in a variety of different environments, such as snow and water.

Another title that caught our eyes is a futuristic hockey game named **HYPERBLADE**. Basically, two-on-two roller hockey in a half-pipe, this Windows 95-based title has that ESPN 2, alternative sports feel to it. Gorgeously-rendered graphics and ingenious animation might help this game become one of the first successful "non-major" sports titles. And who knows, you might see it on ESPN in five years...

Activision also continues the famous **ZORK** series with **ZORK NEMESIS**, and has plans for a Windows 95 port of the popular 16-bit arcade title **EARTH WORM JIM**. They even managed to bring a tear to our cynical old eyes with the **COMMODORE 64 15-PACK**, a package they plan to release soon, which will include titles like **HACKER** and **LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE**.

—George Jones

New Chip Promises Stunning 3-D Graphics

Major Game Companies Line Up Behind The Verité 3-D Graphics Chip

Better detail, higher resolutions, more colors, and faster frame rates. These are the features that we all want to see in our computer games. However, with the current state of gaming, we're used to watching a beautiful, elaborate pre-ren-

dered 3-D introductory animation sequence, only to enter the game and settle into comparatively less spectacular graphics. Even the hottest games can't match the graphics of a pre-rendered animation sequence—or so we thought,

until representatives from **Rendition, Inc.**, showed us hot 3-D games running on their Verité 3-D graphics processor.

We were amazed—the game demos we saw looked even better than the hottest animated game intros. Finally, we'll be

gaming in environments that look much like the incredible graphic introduction to **MECHWARRIOR 2**, and at even higher resolution and more colors!

CGW editors played a special version of **id Software's QUAKE** running at 640x480 resolution





THREE AS FAST id Software's *Quake* will run faster in higher res with more colors on Rendition's Verité 3-D chip.

at a frame-rate faster than possible with even the fastest Pentium computer. As amazing as this high-res, 256-color demonstration was, Rendition's Jay Eisenlohr explained that the final art will be 16-bit (65,000 colors), to allow bi-linear filtering of the texture maps (a process in which texture maps are smoothed to eliminate the blocky, pixelated look they have when close up).

Rendition seems determined to work with top notch game companies, with a lineup of ported software from id Software (*QUAKE*), Papyrus (NASCAR), Looking Glass (FLIGHT UNLIMITED), Dornak (Simis Software's *TERRACIDE*), and Microsoft. It is important to point out that the Verité will require a special version of the given game for the gamer to realize any benefits. Additionally, the Verité is expected to accelerate such Microsoft Game SDK APIs as DIRECT DRAW and DIRECT 3-D.

According to sources at Rendition, Verité-based products will also function as fast, 3-D Windows accelerators with respectable DOS VGA performance. The Verité has built-in longevity over other 3-D graphics processors, because enhancements and features

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.

Readers' TOP 10

Results for CGW #134, SEPTEMBER 1995

1. MechWarrior II (Activision)
2. Panzer General (SSI)
3. Star Trek: The Next Generation—A Final Unity (Spectrum HaloByte)
4. X-COM: Terror From The Deep (MicroProse)
5. Dark Forces (LucasArts)
6. Jagged Alliance (Sir-Tech)
7. Descent (Interplay)
8. Tie Fighter (LucasArts)
9. X-COM: UFD Defense (MicroProse)
10. Wing Commander 3 (Origin)

"I can hardly wait for the modern version of *MECHWARRIOR 2*. My son thinks he's good; we'll see."

J. Coen, Brown, NY

"Was that 10 or 20 rockets coming my way? I lost count in the explosion of my Mech."

Eric Schwela, Chicago, IL

"*PANZER GENERAL*'s realism is outstanding, and the quality of the lead in the audio is top-notch as well. This from the son of a *Kurd* veteran from the Axis side."

Rivson Lapusk, Jr., San Antonio, TX

Notable Quotes

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

computer."

"X-COM overload defined: the nazimian looks like a Milton and my wife is a humpback Craylid zombie chasing me away from my

Rob Strling, VA

"I just bought *DESCENT*. After getting the controls down to a science, I played for an hour and got sick of the robots and lasers. Sorry, but *DOOM* held my attention a lot longer."

Ray Kover, Windsor, OH

can be downloaded directly to its embedded RISC core.

As an indication of the interest game developers have in this product, id Software's technical director (and master *DOOM* programmer) John Carmack has already thrown his

support behind it. "We expect that once *QUAKE* is fully ported to Verité," Carmack says, "it will often run twice as fast on Verité as on a more traditional accelerator. Verité will be the premier platform for *QUAKE*."

Number Nine is among the

first to announce a Verité based 3-D accelerator product. Boards are expected to become available at the end of the first quarter of 1996. Web surfers can find more info at <http://www.rendition.com>.

—Mike Walker

Virgin Knows How To Play Around

Publisher Goes House To House To Develop More Than 20 New Games

If Virgin were a sports franchise, they'd be the king of free agency. Through successful houses such as Westwood Studios and Papyrus, they've managed to build up quite a popular stable of games, without doing much in-house development. At their headquarters in Costa Mesa,

California, they recently let the press in on their future.

One of the more intriguing titles under development is TOONSTRUCK, an adventure game that can only be described as a collision between the worlds of Warner Brothers and *Ree & Stimpf*. Starring cartoon veteran Christopher

Lloyd (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*), TOONSTRUCK, which should hit stores in the late winter, boasts an amazing animated look and, well, rather bizarre gameplay (the psychotic clown is a trip).

Shifting gears, Virgin also has two new racing games coming our way. SCREAMER is a high-speed arcade racer that puts you behind the wheel of one of six race cars on a fast-paced, six-lap circuit. Texture-mapped graphics and network play round out this blood-pumping title. But if you're a frustrated commuter, ZONE RAIDERS might be more up your alley. Although it looks a little like Bullfrog's HIGH OCTANE, this isn't some hover-race—as an outcast member of society (a Zone Raider), you're sent out on fast-hitting missions with specific objectives, like destroying buildings or activating various items. Car buffs will appreciate the customized, souped-up classic cars; there's even a '37 Chevy.

Then there's the game everyone's waiting for—HEART OF DARKNESS. From the co-creators of OUT OF THIS WORLD and FLASHBACK, seven levels of mouth-watering graphics beckon. If they can seamlessly integrate the action and the cinematic elements throughout the whole game, this could be the runaway hit of 1996.

Also on the action front is TERRA NOVA, a kind of grand-scale, first-person perspective futuristic combat game. You'll command a group of powerful

units in a variety of different settings. What sets this title apart from most other games of its kind is the tactical setting. Instead of simply issuing orders to your squadron, you can actually draw out detailed battle plans in an in-depth, 3-D environment.

If you're all thumbs when it comes to action games, you might want to know about a few of Virgin's strategy titles. MONOPOLY is Monopoly is Monopoly—we all know that, but Westwood is taking the classic board game to new heights. Internet play is the key word here; gamers all around the world will be able to compete with each other in their native language and their native currency. We're excited by that, but trading could get a little tricky...

Also on the drawing board is a fascinating real-time strategy game, called Z (pronounced "Zed" by the folks on the other side of the pond). Z will offer a few unique twists, like a capture-the-flag based model of producing units that should intensify the pace of the game.

Virgin has so many titles in development we could fill three pages with brief descriptions (there are almost 20 titles on the burners right now). But the one we are perhaps most eager to play is a Dune II-style real-time strategy game called COMMAND & CONQUER, which might just be in stores by the time you read this.

—George Jones



IT'S NOT KANSAS ANYMORE In the works for Virgin is ToonStrike, an adventure game that's part Roger Rabbit and part *Ree & Stimpf*, starring the loony Christopher Lloyd.



GARAGE GAMES As an outlaw driver, you'll take souped-up classics out of the garage and into dangerous missions in Zone Raiders.



AMERICA'S LARGEST KILLER OF TIME™

ZOOP - YOU MAY ALREADY BE ADDICTED



No one is immune



A healthy Iris



The same Iris after Zoop

The stages of Zoop
(what to look for)



Level 28



Level 42

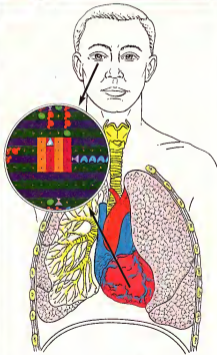


Level 71



Level 72

(this pattern continues on, and sooty always leads to one's demise)

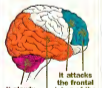


It looks like a harmless video game until it enters the bloodstream and mixes with your DNA. In order to eradicate this affliction we must learn its moves, understand its thinking and anticipate its next move. Only then can we begin to bottle and conquer this killer.

Known carriers of Zoop

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How Zoop affects the brain



It slowly eats at the **Cerebellum** restricting: movement, coordination, balance

It attacks the **frontal lobes of the Cerebrum** impairing: judgement, higher learning, reason

It mutates the **Medulla** causing **Irregular**: digestion, respiration, heartbeat



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All I Want For Xmas Is My New 3-D

Hot 3-D Graphics Technology Moves Computer Gaming into New Dimensions

Games like FLIGHT UNLIMITED and NASCAR RACING really push our game machines to the limit—even on a full blown Pentium 133 system. This Christmas, several companies will follow Matrox's lead and ship 3-D accelerator boards designed to take some of the load off your CPU. As a bonus, these products will run games ported to them at higher resolutions, with more colors, and—ultimately—at higher frame rates.

Creative Lab's 3D BLASTER is a VESA local bus add-in board that will work with your existing graphics card. Based around a Glint 3D accelerator chip, this Plug-and-Play card has garnered considerable developer support. Look for the 3D Blaster to come bundled with several enhanced versions of popular games including NASCAR RACING, MAGIC CAR-

PET PLUS, FLIGHT UNLIMITED, and Fenris Wolf's REBEL MOON. The price is \$349 for



ZONES This Nvidia technology demonstration, programmed for the Diamond Edge, runs at 30 frames per second at 1042x768—in Windows 3.11

the VLB version, with a PCI version expected by the end of the first quarter, 1996.

Diamond's EDGE MULTIMEDIA ACCELERATOR, using the Nvidia chip, accelerates both polygonal and curved surface 3-D rendering. It also offers digital audio, General MIDI

wavetable synthesis, and accelerated full motion video—all combined in a Diamond PCI graphics accelerator card. With all these features, the EDGE is, in essence, a platform within a platform. Diamond hopes to give the gamer hot-rod 3-D games and a chance to play ported versions of Sega Saturn titles on their PCs. Bundled software includes NASCAR RACING, DESCENT, and Domark's ABSOLUTE ZERO (and for you SEGA-heads: VIRTUA FIGHTER and PANZER DRAGON). A two megabyte version of the Edge is expected to sell for \$299.

Western Digital's PARADISE TASMANIA 3D GAME ACCELERATION BOARD is a PCI add-in card (similar to Creative's 3D BLASTER), that uses the Yamaha

RPA2 chip. Look for the Tasmania to ship with a bundled version of Domark's TANK COMMANDER. A two megabyte version of the TASMANIA 3D is expected to sell for approximately \$250.

Ultimately, when games are written to a common low level 3-D library such as the DIRECT 3-D component of the Microsoft GDI SDK, games will run at a basic level of performance and turn on various features according to a given 3-D accelerator in use. This will alleviate the need for one-off ports for each 3-D card in the market. While these products will be available by this Christmas, it may be worth the wait for products based on Rendition's Verité chip (see this month's "Read.Me" story for more info).

—by Mike Webster

GET A GRIP!

Gravis Prepares To Break 2-Joystick, 4-Button Barrier

Sega Genesis can do it, Sony Playstation can do it, but the PC can't. What we're talking about is the PC's limited joystick architecture, which prevents two players from using more than four control buttons between them. Thankfully, with the help of Windows 95, Gravis is going to change that soon. With their still-in-development GRIP

(Gravis Interface Technology Project), the walls should come tumblin' down. The best part about GRIP is that it's not just a technology—it's an actual product line, with its crucial component being the MULTIPORT ADAPTER, a device that will have four different joystick connectors, with no button limitations.

Also in the works are back-



ANY PORT IN A PC STORM Gravis' new Multiport Adapter, with four joystick connectors and no button restrictions, gives PC users the flexibility of their console counterparts.

ward-compatible, self-calibrating GRIP gamepads and joysticks. We can't wait for the moment when we can play head-to-head PRIMAL RAGE or

2 ON 2 NBA LIVE at the same console. And, although it'll be a while before the GRIP makes its way into the high-end market, flight sim fans can look forward to a time when they'll no longer have to emulate the keyboard in their aerial adventures. Keep your eyes open for the Gravis MULTIPORT ADAPTER and GRIP gamepads sometime around this holiday season.

—George Jones

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HARDBALL 5

Autumn and baseball go hand in hand (or at least they used to), so it's really a no-brainer that a preview copy of **HARDBALL 5** landed on our desks just as the California An-



PLAY BALL *Hardball 5's* graphics are even better than its predecessors. The option to see a larger batter and strike box is a good example of this.

gels started to go into their "we really don't want to win the pennant after all" plummets.

Accolade, knowing the competitive nature of a market that saw over half a dozen baseball games released in the last year, is swinging for the fences this time around.

HARDBALL 4 was praised for its innovative, effective graphical style and fun action-oriented gameplay. **HARDBALL 5** will be praised for much the same reason. The graphics, which are fine-tuned from last year, have been enhanced by camera zooms and pans. One nifty feature is the Big Batter option, which puts you behind the plate, but enlarges your batter and, consequently, the strike zone. Of course, league-

play options are available, although from the looks of things, it will be fleshed out a little more than before—the presence of a single-pitch



VIEW TO A KILL Perhaps the biggest danger in **TFX: EF2000** is getting shot down while admiring the scenery.

mode bodes well for those interested in the more cerebral aspects of the game. Gameplay will remain the same, which means that high scores will probably be the norm again. Thankfully, the AI is

being tweaked and will hopefully avoid the 162-0 seasons that were so prevalent last time around. All the major leaguers will be here with the now-standard portraits, although they still won't be representing real MLB teams.

TFX: EF2000

British Flight sims have in the past shared a reputation with British cars—they're often fast, good looking, and they have some really neat features, but they tend to have so many quirks that you give up in frustration and return to an old, reliable American model.

Ocean's TFX: EF2000 looks primed to change that reputation for the better. Developer



Digital Image Design got the cooperation of British Aerospace when designing the sim, and it shows. The Eurofighter 2000 aircraft is modeled with precision detail, down to the innovative radar section on the innovative multifunction displays.

The flight model on the beta had a good feel, although it seemed a bit too responsive

in some high-speed situations. (Then again, that could be a result of modeling the EF2000's advanced fly-by-wire systems.) Missions are divided into Quick Action, a series of start-in-the-air missions attacking both ground and air targets; Simulator, where you'll find free flight, training, and full takeoff-to-landing strike missions; and a Campaign mode. You're not up there alone, either. Up to eight players can engage in network combat. No obvious quirks here.

Where TFX truly shines, though, is with the best graphics this side of FLIGHT UNLIMITED. The effect as an island cliff begins to gain detail as

hits the shelves this winter.

ADVANCED CIVILIZATION

For those who aren't already aware, this is not SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION, but a conversion of the best-selling Avalon Hill board game (which, in all fairness, predates Sid's game by about a decade).

more than enough to keep you occupied for several hours, as you expand in population, explore the Mediterranean world, collect and trade commodities, and try to corner the salt, gold or other markets.

In addition to the usual diplomatic aspects of a multi-player game, each nation must



GIVE 'EM THE BOOT In *Advanced Civ*, as one of seven Mediterranean civilizations, you vie with your rivals for pre-eminence in the Old World.

you approach it through the fog is breathtaking. You're attempting to prevent Russian forces from invading Norway and Sweden, so look forward to combat over some very scenic glaciers, mountains, and fjords when TFX: EF2000

Up to seven nations, including Egypt, Assyria, and even Crete, build their civilizations, from little more than stone knives and bear skins, to reach the Iron Age. Even though the time-scale is much shorter than Sid's epic design, there is

deal with calamities—civil war, heresy, volcanoes, etc.—which can be secretly dealt to a player amidst a trade in commodities, thus ensuring a more balanced game. After trades, you buy "civilization cards" representing pottery (guards against famine), engineering (helps with floods), and so forth. The selection is varied enough to allow for many different styles of play—and plenty of replay value.

Our last look at *Advanced Civ* (the sneak preview in issue #128), saw a game in search of an AI. While the look of the boardgame had been captured, the feel was that of a pretender to the strategy throne. Now, the AI seems competent enough to sustain a coherent strategy, al-

PIPELINE

15 UNRATED RELEASES FORTHCOMING BY THE END OF THE YEAR OR BEFORE FROM LEAD DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME/COMPANY	APPROX. DATE
ADVANCED CIVILIZATION AH	11/93
ALLIED GENERAL SS	11/93
ALIENS Mindscape	11/93
CAPITALISM Interactive Magic	11/93
CHESHIREMASTER 5000 Mindscape	11/93
CRONKHAMSTER Capstone	11/93
CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD Interplay	11/93
CRUSADER: NO REMORSE Origin	11/93
CYBERMAGE Origin	11/93
DUNGEON KEEPER Bullfrog/EA	11/93
ELK MOON MURDER MYSTERY Activision	11/93
FRANKENSTEIN Interplay	11/93
FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL '96 Sierra	11/93
GABRIEL KNIGHT III Sierra	11/93
KINGDOM OF MAGIC SCI	11/93
SLIGHT MOVIES Spectrum/HotByte	11/93
INDYCAR RACING 2 Origin/Virgin	11/93
MASTER OF ANTARES MicroProse	11/93
MCKENZIE & CO. American Laser	11/93
METAL LORDS New World	11/93
NCAA FOOTBALL Mindscape	11/93
NAX IMPERIA II Blizzard	11/93
NOOL SHARKS Mindscape	11/93
OPPER Take 2	11/93
PANARRA Legend	11/93
PUMBLE Minds	11/93
TPYCRAFT: THE GREAT GAME Activision	12/93
STAR CONTRA III Accolade	11/93
STAR RANGER Interactive Magic	11/93
TEKWAR Capstone	11/93
TERRA NOVA Virgin	11/93
TFX 2000 Ocean	11/93
THE RAVEN PROJECT Mindscape	11/93
THIS MEANS WAR! MicroProse	11/93
TOP GUN Spectrum/HotByte	11/93
UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS '96 Accolade	11/93
VIRTUAL KARTS MicroProse	11/93
WARCRAFT II Blizzard	11/93
WARHAMMER Mindscape	11/93
WING COMMANDER IV Origin	12/93
WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN AH	11/93



TRAPPED LIKE A RAT Bad Mojo is a surprisingly realistic game that makes you experience life as a cockroach. It makes for an oddly intriguing game.

though (like many human players) it has trouble recovering from calamities. We have yet to see a really aggressive AI immediately purchase Military cards and expand. On the other hand, the computer does slip us calamity cards more often than it did before. All in all, *Advanced Civ* has managed to emulate, and in some cases, even surpass, the classic board game.

BAD MOJO

Once in a while, a game comes along with an environment so convincing it surprises us. *Bad Mojo*, by Drew Pictures, is the latest such game, although we're not sure this was the environment we had in mind.

You're an unscrupulous landlord who is changed into a cockroach by a magical, family heirloom. Now, you have to explore the world around

your apartment (from a roach's perspective, of course), trying not to get killed as you find some way to regain your humanity. We never thought life as a roach could be this hard; you have to carefully crawl around roach traps, escape predatory spiders, warily tread glue and oil, and manage to stay alive in a world that hates roaches.

This game is so real that you can see the antennae of the roaches twitch about, observe the sheen of their little shells, and hear them click eerily. You couldn't get a more realistic look at roaches if you opened your kitchen cupboard. Be warned, though, this game might make you sick. You'll see roach motels littered with dead insects and roaches squirming desperately to escape. You even get to crawl over the body of a huge dead rat caught in a mousetrap. If you find these things disgust-

ing, this game will definitely have your skin crawling. Despite that, or perhaps because of it, there is something eerily appealing about it.

T-MEK

Once again, your computer can be turned into a lethally-armed, monstrous, mechanized war engine. This time, it's Atari's *T-MEK*, where you get to climb into your choice of hovercrafts, each loaded with weapons and armor, and start blasting your way through a gauntlet of enemy craft.

T-MEK is actually a port of a hot arcade game. Basically, there are a dozen arenas, in various terrain, where you and three other hovercraft are

for your opponents. It looks like another mindless, button-pushing arcade game; just keep your finger on the button, slug it out with your opponents, and rack up points.

There is a "story," such as it is: an evil warlord has conquered the world, and rather than wage war against him, his enemies agree to battle it out in a tournament. Not very original. But, the action is fun. This port also offers an improved version of the arcade game, with more arenas, terrain options, and a bonus ending to the game.

The best thing about it is that you get to play over a network; so a group of people can get together and start blasting each other silly. For those gamers expecting



FIRE AWAY No matter how many times you kill them, your enemies keep coming back in *T-MEK*.

deposited. The objective is to blow up as many of the enemy as you can, before they send you to heaven. The catch here, though, is that if you die, you get to come back. Of course, the same holds true

more than a hovercraft-to-hovercraft slugout, this game will quickly lose appeal after the first few frenzied rounds of action. ☹

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Reorder Service #158

The Mists Of Avalon

AvalonCon Reveals Possible AH Sale

A trip to AvalonCon this year was both an uplifting and disturbing experience. The exciting part was that Don Greenwood and the Avalon Hill staff run the best convention for board gamers going. One fee gets you into all the events of the more than 100 tournaments, and AH is very generous in giving prizes and plaques for winners and runners-up. There are no seminars, lectures or peripheral events. Attendees go there for one reason: to game their brains out for four consecutive days while playing some of the best head-to-head strategy

games ever designed. The unsettling part was that we had heard rumors that Avalon Hill was looking for a buyout/partnership/restructuring deal (see Alan Emrich's column, page 253).

Instead of gloom and doom, however, the gamers present were cautiously optimistic that both the convention, and Avalon Hill, would continue. Part of the reason for such enthusiasm was the energy generated any time a group of gamers gets together. Yet, there were also signs that AH was looking ahead to the future. For example, there were tournaments

for computer games for the first time, notably 5TH FLEET, STALINGRAD and FLIGHT COMMANDER II. Sales were brisk, even on older titles.

Still, this couldn't hide the fact that AH didn't have many new games to sell. Their computer line has yet to produce a best-seller. Worse, rumors persist that Stanley Associates' last title with Avalon Hill will be WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN (see last issue's sneak preview), and that Atomic Games has left with the BEYOND SQUAD LEADER title, and plans on releasing it under another name with Microsoft.

Exactly how AH will hold up under the pressure remains to be seen, but a good indication should come from their next two titles, D-DAY (the last of the *World At War* series with Atomic) and ADVANCED CIVILIZATION (see *Beta Bits* this issue), to be released very near the time you read this. At the very least, the folks in Baltimore should be given credit for not panicking and flooding the market with unfinished product, as *Three-Sixty Pacific* did prior to its demise.

—Terry Coleman

The 64 Gigabyte QUESTION?

Jose Jensen's game designs may be surreal, but they're moving closer to reality with each release. She's gone from cartoon graphics in King's Quest VI (which she co-designed with Roberts Williams), to the voices of Tim Curry and other well-known actors in Gabriel Knight. With her latest release, Gabriel Knight 2 (see our Sneak Preview on page 70), Jensen has added live actors to the mix. But there are other Hollywood resources she'd like to get her hands on...

I always end up cutting some design due to budget, time, or technological limits—it would be nice not to have to have that happen EVER AGAIN! But I get away with a lot of plot in my games, so I don't feel too restricted there.

More relevant are production issues. GABRIEL KNIGHT 2 is set in Germany. We shot blue screen because we couldn't afford to take the actors and

crew on location for three-and-a-half months. I have a concept for a game right now that would definitely benefit from a limitless budget. It would ideally require the player to travel to a variety of exotic destinations such as Israel, Italy, Greece, South America, etc. Naturally, we'd want



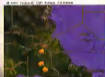
to have top actors in the roles (not necessarily big names, just great actors) and shoot live at all the locations. With loca-

tion shooting the lighting can be more dramatic than blue screen, the director can move the camera in any way they choose artistically, and the actor's performances are better supported. The plotline of this game concept also would require intensive special effects, on the order of *Total Recall* and such big-budget Hollywood Sci-Fi flicks. It would be great to be able to just hire someone like Industrial Light & Magic for nine months to put it together, and really "show" the effects visually in a realistic manner as opposed to trying to just "indicate" the concept of the effect as cheaply as possible. Naturally this would all be shot on digital film.

On the technical end of things we could stand a lot of improvements, too. We could display video at higher and 30 frames-per-second, with all Red Book music and 22-KHz audio. This probably wouldn't be coming off your PC at that point, you'll have a box connected to your high-definition TV (connected to your stereo) that will run the game—plug and play, with no configuration worries.



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Circle Reader Service 494



WITCHAVEN

You stand before the gates of a massive tower, the peel of thunder wracking the skies above you, your body steeped in the wet blood of a decapitated ogre. Kicking the dismembered head away in disdain, you smile upwards towards the spires of Ill-whyrin's fortress. Soon you will rid the world of the evil witchqueen's terror.

Capstone's *WITCHAVEN* is not your traditional role-playing game. Even though the stated purpose of the game is to complete a quest—the destruction of the witch queen—the game actually plays a lot like *Doom*: full of blood, music, and lots of many-edged weapons. There is a gore-meter you can adjust, so that the truly bloodthirsty can watch the skulls of witches explode, and see ears fly off of hapless humanoids. The music is gloomy, and combines with the detailed graphics to create an appro-

priately dark atmosphere. On your road to dispatching the hosts of Clatos, you can choose to wield a variety of weapons: from daggers and pikes to halberds and giant battle axes. And in typical RPG fashion—



PAINT THE DUNGEON RED TONIGHT *Witchaven* delivers great graphics, so you can see the monsters die terrible, gruesome deaths—not for the squeaky

tion, your weapons proficiency and hit points increase as you gain levels.

IBM CD-ROM, street price: \$50-55. Circle Reader Service #2.

Capstone, Miami, FL (800) 468-7226

MEGAMAN X

The future is a killing ground, populated by man-slaying robots. Mankind's only hope for survival is a tiny titanium fighting machine named X. The game's scenario is very familiar to Nintendo players, because X is none other than Mega Man, and this CD title is an exact translation of Capcom's Super Nintendo hit, *MEGAMAN X*.

MEGAMAN X was a good Nintendo game, with non-stop scrolling action. But as a PC game, it's somewhat less spectacular. The cartoonish animation comes off reasonably well, but the game control leaves a bit to be desired; it's hard enough playing this game with a keyboard, much less a joystick. Even though Capcom bundles a six-button gamepad

with *MEGAMAN X*, the controls still fall short of its SNES counterpart. Considering that ports such as *PIFFALL* take advantage of the PC platform to enhance the game, Capcom really missed an opportunity here. The game would have certainly benefited from better graphics and sound, and more intelligent bosses. For now, it's less fun than its SNES counterpart.

IBM CD-ROM, \$52.99. Circle Reader Service #1.

Capcom USA, Sunnyvale, CA (408) 774-0500

ROBOT CITY

In the experimental settlement of Robot City, a murder has occurred. Since the First Law of Robotics prevents a robot from harming humans, that leaves you, the only human in the city, as the prime suspect. Of course, you know

IN THE 1ST DEGREE

San Francisco, with its fog-shrouded, colorful ambience, has always played host to Hollywood's crime epics, from *The Maltese Falcon* to *Basic Instinct*. Now, **Broderbund Software** has arrived in the City by the Bay with *IN THE 1ST DEGREE*, a game that puts you at the center of the city's most sensational murder case in years.

A popular art dealer is found shot to death in his gallery, and his business part-



ON THE HOT SEAT Be discriminating in your line of questioning, or you'll never find the evidence to convict the murderer.

ner is the prime suspect. Thrust into the role of prosecutor G. Sterling Granger, your intuition and savvy are put to the test as you seek a guilty verdict for this first degree murder. As you build your case and bring it to trial, you must figure out how to milk statements from temperamental and deceptive witnesses, piece together relevant information from various sordid subplots

surrounding the case, and satisfy queries from the nosy, omnipresent news media. Despite some bad acting and an annoying soundtrack (which can be turned off), *IN THE 1ST DEGREE* offers seamless and crisp realtime video segments, exceptional camera-work and an intriguing game design that warrants repeated playtime.

IBM/Mac CD-ROM, \$69.95. Circle Reader Service #5.

Broderbund Software, Inc., Novato, CA (415) 382-7818

PLAYING

you didn't do it, but if you didn't, who did?

To find out, you'll need as much savvy as Asimov's crack detective, Elijah Bailey, to solve this case. You aren't totally alone, as you have a robot companion, who unfortunately, isn't the famous R. Daneel Olivaw. Problem is, while the two of you are trying to find the real killer, the local robot authorities are searching for you.

Any game based on the novels of Isaac Asimov has great potential to bring its players into an engrossing, wonderful science-fiction world. The designers went to great lengths

to create a futuristic atmosphere, right down to cheesy, period newscasts (on Super Bowl 500, no less). But before you can enjoy this sci-fi whodunit, you'll have to solve the mystery of the slow and cum-



ROBBIE NEEDS A DOCTOR One of the first mysteries in *Robot City* is how to fix up your robot companion, Robbie.

bersome interface, which sometimes leaves this well-meaning adventure somewhat out in the cold vacuum of

space. **IBM CD-ROM.** \$49.95. Circle Reader Service #3.

*BYRON PREISS
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BURN: CYCLE

Corporate data-thief Sol Cutter just put his hand in the wrong cookie jar and downloaded the deadly Burn: Cycle virus into his brain. This adventure game from **Philips New Media, Inc.**, a CD-i conversion, puts you in the unenviable role of Cutter. You now have two hours to lose the Burn: Cycle, before it turns your brain into bouillabaise.

Cutter can trust no one and nothing, not even his memory. That is why you have to navigate him through the game's perennially dark technopolis, bartering with cyberpunk denizens for tools and clues to counteract the virus. Periodic voice-over narratives and quicktime flashback segments



DRIVER'S SIDE AHEAD? Your Buick Coup transportation includes all the bits of bells and whistles.

from Cutter's inner thoughts offer additional clues.

BURN: CYCLE's plot bears several similarities to the movie *Johnny Mnemonic*, but unlike the game of the same name, this title has some qualities to recommend it. This game has decent acting, an intuitive interface, a good soundtrack and some amusing dialogue. Unfortunately, fuzzy, grainy graphics, ridiculously easy action segments and some annoying puzzles hamper sustained gameplay.

IBM/Mac CD-ROM, plus audio CD. \$59.98. Circle Reader Service #4.

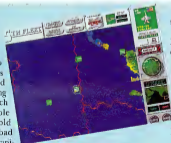
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FIFTH FLEET SCENARIO DISK

Avalon Hill's **FIFTH FLEET**, which suffered from a few bugs and limited scenarios, has now been upgraded with the **FIFTH FLEET SCENARIO DISK**. The upgrade fixes the old bugs, particularly the unlimited missile and empty magazine problems which plagued the heavy units in the original. Though the basic structure of the game remains unchanged, Avalon Hill did improve the AI of the game and also took out the unfair,

pre-emptive strike capability from the original.

The scenario disk also comes with 14 new and political intriguing scenarios, which add considerable value to the old package. New bad guys (like the Iranians), regional power struggles, and even a Russian civil war scenario give players



SET SAIL Return to the sea with the *Fifth Fleet Scenario Disk*, which includes some much-needed bug fixes and a better AI.

some much-needed variation. The **FIFTH FLEET SCENARIO DISK**, for all its merits, though, could have been better. It didn't improve the original's limited geographical settings or player options, and ignored some of the weaker aspects of the submarine operations.

IBM, \$24.95. Circle Reader Service #6.

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Things That Go Bump In The Byte

Game designers are so busy concocting tales of fear and suspense, horror fans are going to be as busy as an axe murderer in a summer camp. The depth and sophistication of many new titles suggests that horror games have finally come into their own.

by Arinn Dembo

Dearly autumn has arrived, and the sky is clouded with dark clouds like bruises on a swollen corpse. The chill winds have stocked the green foliage to brown. Leaves cloaked of their nourishment fall quickly, torn down by the rain. Unhealthy breezes blow. Fog comes up when you least expect it. It's a grim season, wet and miserable—but never quite cold enough to kill cleanly, as you walk the streets, the sidewalks stained dark with leaf mold and the sky hanging overhead like a nebulous threat, you can't help but smile. The specter of horror lurks everywhere.

But inside near the glowing hearth of the PC screen, the picture should be far more promising. Tribbyte has promised to deliver *11th Hour*, the sequel to *The 7th Guest*, some time before the spring thaw. Just to keep with the winter theme, *4-motion* has brought us *Prisoners of Ice*. *Interplay* is busily stitching up their *Fallen*, *Wc Tokai* could strike a previously untapped vein with their vampire western, *Suckerbox*, and if we are very far-

tunale, *landscape* may even unveil *The Dark Eye*.

If all these titles actually materialize this winter, horror fans are going to be as busy as an axe murderer in a summer camp for teenage sex addicts—good news in itself. But more importantly, the depth and sophistication of many new titles is an important indication that horror games have finally diverged far enough from their roots in other

treatise on the subject. As a long-time aficionado of all kinds of horror, I humbly offer my observations.

THE I'S HAVE IT

Of all the companies working on horror titles over the last three years, none has been more industrious than I-motion. They've put no fewer than four legitimate horror games on the shelves since 1993, all of them based, to one degree or another, on their first big success: *ALONE IN THE DARK*.

ALONE IN THE DARK is such a popular title that its virtues hardly need to be spelled; the game is a classic. The halls of Derceta, that crumbling manse in the middle of a Louisiana swamp—jam-packed with traps, zombies, ghosts and horrors unspeakable—are familiar to most of

us. This may be the most-played horror game of all time.

The game is a showcase of techniques and ideas, scoring big points in several areas. The graphics were a real innovation at the time. Although your character looked crude at first—a collection of polygonal chunks, rather than the usual prettily-painted sprite—that clumsy quality evaporated once you saw it in action. It wasn't pretty, but it was genuinely three-dimensional, and moved with natural grace. You could play a man or a woman—either detective Edward Carnby or heiress Emily Hartwood. Both were equally competent physically, which I found refreshing.

A great deal of *ALONE IN THE DARK*'s effectiveness as horror stems from the natural, human quality of the protagonist. It's easy to identify with the character and wonderful to move the little body around—the folks at I-motion captured, somehow, the sense that an awkward little collection of pixels was a living person. Which makes it all the more horrible to watch that person die.

The use of bizarre "camera" angles also contributed greatly to an atmosphere of paranoia and skin-crawling horror. This feature, more than any other, marks the influence of *ALONE IN THE DARK* on the games that have followed. The sense of the

computer screen as a cinematic camera, the disorienting shift of viewpoint, the sudden eerie shot of your character in extreme perspective from above or below, has proven to be effective in virtually every game that has used it. Although many gamers find it obstructive during combat, its virtues outweigh the flaws. It turns a computer game into a Hitchcock movie—never a bad thing.

The intellectual content of this game also wins a bonus. The use of books, letters and parchments was inspired; not only do they serve as traps and hints, but they are well-written and show the loving touch of a true H.P. Lovecraft fan. Also, most of the bogies in the game are recognizable monsters from the Cthulhu myths. The majority of gamers may not have spotted that snapping reptile duck as a Hound of Tindalos, or the formless thing in the library as a Dimensional Shambler, but the Deep Ones in the catacombs and the young Cthonian under the house tend to put things in context.

After all this praise, of course, I need to mention the down side of this game, and many other less successful games which have employed it as a model: the puzzles. *ALONE IN THE DARK* has many good qualities, but it also embodies the danger inherent in mixing two very different concepts such as "horror" and "game."

One of the problems with all horror is creating



A SKULL IN EVERY PIT Frightful things pop up in Trilobyte's upcoming *The 17th Hour*.

er game games—action, adventure, role-playing—to be considered a new animal, a species of their own.

THE EVOLUTION OF FRIGHT

How did it happen? It's been a long process of evolution, with many hybrid games scattered along the path, some successful, some not. Although some of the early successes in horror gaming took place in the late '80's—Infocom's old text adventure called *THE LIVING HEAVEN* springs to mind—the majority of important developments in the genre have taken place in the last three years. Jump to 1993, a watershed year for horror titles, with Trilobyte's *SEVEN GUYS* and I-Motion's *ALONE IN THE DARK* coming out within months of each other.

The majority of the games under discussion here are those that I felt could still give some pleasure to the jaded modern-day gamer (with one or two notable exceptions, which I've written about mostly by way of warning). I did leave out a few games that probably belong here—mostly because they were too old and/or rare for a modern gamer to find and enjoy. Honorable mentions include the old text adventures, like *Moosest* and the aforementioned *LIVING HEAVEN*, along with some venerable old chestnuts like *The Legend* from MicroProse (and a host of more forgettable titles that came out around the same time). Even Horner'soft's *ESSEX* games were fun to play, in their day—but I couldn't really include them here.

What you see here is just a few pages from the fairly registry of horror gaming, not an exhaustive



SLIPPERY ROCKS *ALONE IN THE DARK* makes extensive use of movie-style camera angles.

and sustaining a mood, an atmosphere of suspense and fear—and nothing shatters that mood more quickly than frustration. With the first irritated sigh, everything the author or game designer has worked for is lost. The audience is no longer scared, horrified or even interested. Instead, they're annoyed. If a gamer has to re-play a sequence more than a few times to get through it, the illusion collapses. A horror game suffers badly if the puzzles are too opaque, especially if, as is the case with *ALONE IN THE DARK*, there aren't



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enough bullets, clues or health bonuses to allow for any mistakes. This problem is bad enough in the first game, and only worsens in the sequels of the same name.

ONCE IS NEVER ENOUGH

Following *ALONE IN THE DARK*, we have *ALONE IN THE DARK II*, an action/adventure sequel. For those who haven't played it, the goal here is to rescue a kidnapped child. The bad guys are pirates, living in California since 1724. They've signed their souls over to Satan (or someone carrying his credit card), in return for eternal life. There are dozens of them, all heavily armed, and as the player, you have no choice but to fight them all. Unlike the original *ALONE IN THE DARK*, there is rarely a clever solution that enables you to avoid the most damaging combat.

The Lovecraftian sensibilities and myths monsters of the first game have been abandoned. You no longer have the option of playing an adult fe-

Either unravelling or unable to know a bad trend when they saw one, I-Motion followed the dubious *ALONE II* with an even worse game. *ALONE IN THE DARK III* is the third installment in the adventures of Edward Carnby. The premise—Carnby goes into the Mojave desert to search for a missing film crew—isn't bad, although it continues to ignore Lovecraftian sensibilities in favor of more ordinary horrors. Instead of undead swashbucklers, we're up against undead gunslingers who dissolve into red-eyed cats when killed. (Huh?)

Some work has been done to improve the most problematic aspects of the first two games. It's possible to adjust Carnby's health and his damage rating in combat, as well as the damage rating of his opponents, so that the game isn't quite so frustratingly lethal. As in *ALONE II*, there's an interesting viewpoint switch after the first two-thirds of the game; when Carnby is shot, his consciousness inhabits the body of a nearby cougar. All of this was interesting, but it isn't

enough to save this game.

Although years have passed since the first *ALONE IN THE DARK*, the graphics and the interface have not evolved at all, and the game quality has only deteriorated. If the puzzles in *ALONE* were opaque, and the puzzles in *ALONE II* were ridiculous, then the puzzles in *ALONE III* are completely beyond any logical description. Worse, the ease of play in the first two installments has been eroded. You now have to Open/Search in order to pick up objects in plain sight, which was never necessary before. Even the simplest physical aspects of the product haven't been nailed down: It's both bug-infested and crash-prone.

ALONE III violates its own setting, time period and internal logic freely, and the "big boss" ending is a real groaner. Not scary, not fun and not free, this game has nothing to recommend it. If you're looking for a new *ALONE* game to play, act as the tombstone for the series.

On the brighter side of things, I-Motion never did put all their eggs in one basket.

CYTHLUH'S COMET

Although the technological sequels to *ALONE IN THE DARK* have not been impressive, the philo-

sophical sequels—games which stick to Lovecraftian horror, but switched to a more relaxed style of gameplay—have been very effective.

SHADOW OF THE COMET was the first of these, released in the fall of 1994. The story is loosely based on one of the documents that turned up in *ALONE IN THE DARK*, a fragment from the journal of a Lord Alistair Boleskine, a British nobleman and astronomer who visited New England in 1824. The journal reads in part:

"The Milky Way shone like the fires of the Apocalypse from the ivory celestial vault. Certain distant stars, normally invisible to the naked eye, were clearly visible, glittering with a strange intensity. The heavy clouds that had settled above the village had no hold over that place. It would be pointless to offer here the names of the constellations we perceived in utter clarity; apart from the interminable length of such a list, one might conceivably risk being charged with exaggeration."

Boleskine's journal concerns a visit to a tiny fishing village in New England and to a very special clearing in the surrounding woods—a clearing "outside the common laws of time and space," in which celestial objects appear strangely magnified.

In *SHADOW OF THE COMET*, you play one John Carter, a young British astronomer, who has read Lord Boleskine's account of his voyage to New England. Armed with the newly improved art of photography, Carter intends to retrace Boleskine's steps from the village of Wismouth, Massachusetts, to that strange clearing in the woods—the clearing from which Boleskine stumbled, raving mad, after trying to observe the passage of Halley's comet.

The year is now 1910, and Carter hopes to make photographic plates of the comet during the summer of its passage, taking advantage of the clearing's unique atmospheric conditions. If he succeeds, he'll be able to publish his findings and make his career as a scientist. If he fails, he may



PHANTOM BUCCANEERS *ALONE IN THE DARK II* pits your character against a group of ghoulish pirates.

mate characters. The puzzles are often ridiculous, and weirdly fussy about your firing and position on the screen. And if you get hit more than once or twice during a combat, you'd be best advised to go back and try again. You can't afford the althron.

It isn't all bad news, of course. Documents are read aloud by interesting character voices. The graphics are a little more sparky than in *ALONE*, and there are some humorous touches, as well as an interesting viewpoint switch to Grace Saunders, the little girl, about half way through. The endless rain of gunfire is wearying, but you do get involved in the unfolding plot. This title is still playable, despite its high frustration factor, but there are very few chills involved—the violence is too thick and the ideas are too thin. In the course of an ordinary game, the player will have to save often and restart dozens of times, and a mood of horror can be impossible to create or sustain under such circumstances.



NOT AGAIN A posse of cowboy ghosts plays rough in *ALONE IN THE DARK III*.

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become a laughing stock. What he doesn't realize, at first, is that there is more than his own career—or even his own life—at stake.

SHADOW OF THE COMET is more recognizably related to Lovecraft's stories than *ALONE IN THE DARK*. The game was the first I-Motion title to be endorsed by Chaosium, the publishers of *THE CALL OF CTHULHU*, an excellent pen and paper RPG. The narrative, which involves the return of the Ancients from their plane of exile, is a familiar one to most horror fans, and the themes—the danger lurking along the paths to knowledge and the horrifying secrets that lie buried beneath the seeming tranquility of New England towns—are as well-worn and comfortable as an old boot.

Some aspects of the game are weak, and the graphics were a bit dated even at the time of its release. The voice acting is good, however, and the gameplay—exploration, interviewing, riddles and detection—is an extremely effective model for a horror game. Also, the game package included a variety of very cool simulated documents—death certificates, a sworn statement from a British sea captain, a note from the British Museum, etc.—

cursed city, encircled by massive walls, is believed to stand to this day. It contains fabulous treasures and is inhabited by the elegant descendants of those who instilled centuries of terror in the hearts of the people... These people, naturally placid, are seized with rage and honor at the very mention of the "Prisoners of the Ice." Were these desecrated captives to be freed from their frozen cells, they would reap a horrifying tribute of human flesh."

—from an Unfinished Chapter of *Yema Inognita*, by Jacob Van Dastade

Unlike *SHADOW OF THE COMET*, however, *PRISONER OF ICE* has strong action elements, and a premise that immediately grips the player in a fist of suspense. The game is set during the dire struggle of World War II. The action revolves around a secret Nazi base in the Antarctic, and a division of scientists reputedly performing extensive research into black magic and the occult. The player takes on the role of Lieutenant Ryan, a young American intelligence officer, stationed aboard a British submarine in the opening scenes.

Graphics, animation, sound and music are excellent, and the combination of Nazis and Cthulhu is a natural—two great evils which go great together. A more detailed examination of

plot will have to wait for a formal review next month, but I can certainly tell you that the horror of this game is bright and vivid. It may be the most intense horror title I-motion has ever released.

NOT QUITE HORROR

There are three games in this "not quite" category. Two—*BRAIN STOKER'S DRACULA* and *ESSENCE*—come from Paynesic. The other is from SSI: *VELVET DREAMS*. All three of these are decent games, taken by themselves, and all three of them integrate horror elements that make the game more entertaining. But none of them can be properly defined as pure horror.

True fright fans should not be deceived by the slick packaging of *BRAIN STOKER'S DRACULA*, nor by its association with the movie of the same title. What



WOLFPENSTEIN 3-D BRAIN STOKER'S DRACULA proves that adding vampires and other ghouls to the Wolf 3-D engine doesn't instill a sense of terror.

we are dealing with here is a first-person action game, based on the engine of ID's *WOLFPENSTEIN 3-D*. *B.S. DRACULA* is more about stabbing, shooting and collecting keys than it is about fear and suspense.

This is a fuzzy area, of course. There are strong elements of action in many horror titles, and all effective horror games depend on good visuals. In the end, however, what distinguishes an action game with horrific sprites and wall-paper from a true horror game is that a horror game must have some kind of a plot, no matter how weak. There must be a deeper mystery underlying the action, a dark purpose which will eventually be revealed.

If you've ever loaded the Barney patch for *Doom*, you'll know exactly what I'm talking about. When you suddenly find yourself shooting big purple dinosaurs rather than snarling imps, the tension completely evaporates. It's based on the visuals, not on substance. A real monster is always more frightening than a sprite, not because it looks scarier or can do more damage to your virtual body, but because it has dire implications beyond its own claws and teeth.

Ordinarily, I wouldn't mention *B.S. DRACULA* at all—except for the remote possibility that someone might buy it, thinking it's something it isn't. In passing, however, I should say that I wouldn't recommend it over more recent *WOLFPENSTEIN* sequels.

On the other hand, *Paynesic* hit closer to the mark with their release of *ESSENCE*, in the early months of 1995. *ESSENCE* is an odd little game, treading a narrow line between horror and humor. Although its plot and style are unique, it owes a great deal to the graphics and the combat engine of the original *ALONE IN THE DARK*. Strangely enough, this game is a more logical evolution of *ALONE*'s look and feel than either of the two sequels of the same name produced by I-motion.

Like *ALONE IN THE DARK*, *ESSENCE*'s characters and monsters are constructed by putting together 3-D shapes. However, instead of sharp-edged polygons, *ESSENCE* uses ellipsoids and spheres. The



SUB ZERO Nazis meet Cthulhu in *PRISONER OF ICE*, a horror game set during World War II.

which were all highly entertaining.

SHADOW OF THE COMET has never gained the popularity it deserves, which continues to surprise me. This is a smart, serious horror game, grounded in a noble tradition, and I would recommend it to anyone capable of appreciating the form.

FRIGID FEAR

To round off the discussion of I-Motion games, we have their most recent offering, *PRISONER OF ICE*. It's hard to put this game into a neatly-labeled slot. Like *SHADOW OF THE COMET*, *PRISONER OF ICE* is endorsed by Chaosium and employs a strong Lovecraftian premise, and, like *SHADOW OF THE COMET*, the plot is derived from a manuscript which could be found in the halls of Derogoth.

"Mysterious and cruel beings are thought to have ruled over the Arctic plains in times past. A



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resulting character is better-looking close up than the blocky constructions in *Alone*, and looks very much like a cunningly gaunt marionette. It doesn't move as naturally as the figures in *Alone*, because the attitudes of the body are exaggerated, harnessed up for comedic effect. But it's a graceful and responsive figure, and it can fight, walk, run, and even sneak around the screen on 8p-40s.

Unfortunately, the combat and camera switching in the game are even more annoying than they were in *Alone*: in the *Doom*, and given the presence of a high-invulnerable werewolf, this game can leave the player more outraged than ecstatic. It is a wildly frustrating game, a constant round of ambushes and pummeling. There are some puzzles to be solved, and a half-dozen extremely diverting red herrings to chase down, but for the most part, it's an endless struggle against a series of foul spheroid puppets.

The mingling of the homicidal and hilarious gives this game a strange edge, and the plot elements are good. It's funny, yes, but the laughter is laced with moral ambiguity, and the cartoonish attacks have a tinge of madness and genuine

horror. It isn't quite scary, but it is disturbing.

The third game that I place in the category of "not quite horror" will probably garner the most protest, this is *Yes or No*, released in 1993 by SSI. If we judged horror games by the premise or outward trappings, this one would certainly



BIG BIRD WOLF The nearly invulnerable werewolf in *Yes or No* is bound to inspire more frustration than ecstasy.

quality—it's set in Transylvania, for heaven's sake. The game manual has a 30-page fictional prelude, explaining how the villain in the piece became a vampire. There are big, nasty, bloody fangs on the box cover. What more do we want?

Even I have to admit that the game looked promising at first glance. During the intro, a sinister figure sits laughing as a cargo plane goes down in Romania, engines and windshield destroyed by kamikaze bats. The pilot's limp body is thrown over the shoulder of a mysterious hulking figure, carried from the crash site into a village in the mist-shrouded valley. He lies helpless, vision blurry, trying to focus on the lovely face of the girl bending over him. Her blue eyes are filled with concern, apprehension, and curiosity.

It's good material up to that point, and then suddenly the animation ends. You soon realize that this dramatic opening is the prelude to a much more traditional game. The beautiful girl, Dende, infers the player that her father wants to see him. The old man is in his study. And, as it turns out, he needs a favor. He wants you to go get his hammer. It's a perfectly ordinary hammer, borrowed by one of his neighbors in the village and never returned. Yes, he expects a battered man, fallen to earth from the very heavens in the most wondrous machine ever seen by his people, to go and fetch his tools.

In other words, the player has not really awak-

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ened in the timeless village of Csarda, lost in the shadow of an evil that defied death. This place is actually the not-so-mysterious land of ordinary adventure gaming, and you are lost in the tedious round of pointless little quests and painfully non-dramatic quandaries. True, people often die by werewolf attacks in these parts, and there is a vampire overlord—but don't be fooled.

Yes, *Darkness* is not a bad game, really. It's a highly entertaining CRPG with plenty of entertainment value on its own. If you need something to play on an older machine—one that isn't equipped for modern multimedia extravaganzas—I could certainly recommend it. But despite its setting, this game isn't all that horrifying. Horror elements don't mix well with a quest-based RPG, and the fetching of the hammer is a perfect example of why. A minute, irrelevant task like this is an irreparable breach of the premise. One of the provisions of a horror plot is that the action has to be taken seriously; after all, we're supposedly dealing with life and death situations.

INTERACTIVE MOVIES

High-end horror games, which enjoy the most expensive production values, the most skilled writing and most enjoyable plots, are always a joy to behold. There are three games which I put into the category of interactive movies. All of them en-



BAM SPLAT! Karmkaze bats send your plane spiraling down in *SSI's Vex of Darkness*.

joy professional actors, composers and sound technicians and use beautiful high-end graphics to produce the most sophisticated possible gaming experience.

The first of these is *DRACULA UNLEASHED*, released by **Wiacom** in 1994. *DRACULA UNLEASHED* is a sequel

to the action in *Bram Stoker's* gothic masterpiece. *Dracula*. The central character is Alexander Morris, who has come to London to investigate the death of his brother, Quincy Morris. True *Dracula* fans may recall that Quincy was killed in Transylvania, hiding off the Count's gypsy henchmen while Van Helsing and Harker did the ugly business with the stake. Ten years later, the vampire plague has returned to London, and young Alexander finds himself following his brother's footsteps in ways he never could have imagined.

The game employs the same engine used in *Wiacom's*, *SEASUCK HONES*, *CONSULTING DETECTIVE*. Informative, ominous and occasionally frightening film clips are interspersed with carnage rides and extensive journal entries. In order to win the game (that is, survive), you must go to the right places, in the right order, at the right times, and have the right thing in your hand when you arrive.

The upside is that the film sequences are well-shot and competently acted, using real movie sets. If things are going well, it can be a real pleasure to watch Alexander make his rounds, picking up al-



Yeah, right!



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lies and tools, killing vampires and saving lives.

The downside is that the mood established by the good film sequences is repeatedly snuffed. The gaily banter with the coachman during carriage rides was a fatal error. It interrupts the action and dissipates the mood over and over again, constantly destroying the delicate web of fright which is woven between movie clips and journal entries. It's as disruptive as an actor in a film turning to the camera and winking during a climactic scene, saying "Don't be alarmed, folks—it's just a computer game!"

Also, the game has a limited scope. The action begins at 7 a.m. on December 28th, 1895, and Alexander has only four days to work with—the plot will resolve itself for good or ill in the wee hours of January 1st. If you miss any of the necessary film clips, you generally won't live past the second day. You can stumble around for a very long time, forced to watch the same clip again and again, before figuring out what you missed. By the time you make a breakthrough, the only thing that horrifies you is how dull the whole exercise has become and how much time you're wasting.

DECELA UNESKATED is not all it could be. The designers have left out the one most important element in any story involving vampires: sex! They ignored the complex relationship between the

Guest. Released by Virgin in 1993, its SVGA graphics, original score, full-motion video and live dialogue were all grand-breaking innovations. Combined with sumptuous animation and a unique premise, these features have ensured the game's unflinching popularity to this day.

This is the first game I ever played which actually stunned me with its beauty. The presentation here transcended chrome. It was art—regardless of what was inside the box, they used a Rembrandt for wrapping paper. The interface is marvelous. Your cursor is an elegantly articulated skeletal hand, beckoning in the directions that you can travel. Film sequences are designed by an opera mask that's streaming blue ectoplasmic fog. The puzzle icon is a skull, brains pulsing and eyeballs rolling. Spectral animations are indicated by a pair of chattering teeth. The save-game screen is an old-fashioned Ouija board.

Gameplay consists of exploring the haunted mansion, witnessing ghostly animations and solving the 21 puzzles laid out in various rooms, while seeking clues to the larger mystery of the game. That is, who was the seventh guest, and what was his significance? When you solve a puzzle, you are rewarded with a scene that fills in part of the picture.

The horror sequences are some of the most effective and frightening in any game. Ghostly dramas re-enact themselves before your eyes as the hapless shades of the long-lost guests appear, acting out the scenes of their own destruction against the backdrop of empty rooms and darkened hallways. You don't know how creepy a computer game can be until you've heard the souls of murdered children cry out in Stauf's doll room, each one eternally trapped, terrified and alone. The actors are good, and the voices are especially chilling. Robert Hirschbuck gets special credit here for his performance as the mad

toy-maker.

On the other hand, the puzzles are a mixed bag. Some players like them, others don't. Hardcore computer gamers tend to find the play in *The Guest* a little thin. The puzzles are very compartmentalized, and the majority are very simple. Only



CHESS, ANYONE? To save your girlfriend in *The 7th Guest*, you must solve a number of diabolical puzzles.

one of them can be defined as a "game" of any sort (the microscope puzzle), and the rules of that game are so devastatingly simple that the AI is actually very hard to beat.

The Guest employs a self-contained hint system, an excellent feature for any game, and doubly so for a horror game. You can visit the library at any time while trying to solve a puzzle and consult a hint book lying on the coffee table. The first hint will tell you the rules of the puzzle. The second hint, should you need it, is broader, giving you a clue as to how to proceed. The third visit to the hintbook solves the puzzle, allowing you to go on, if you're stuck it penalizes you, however, by not letting you see the ghostly drama which would ordinarily reward you if you solved the puzzle yourself. Too many puzzles solved by the book will change the ending of the game, so the player quickly learns not to use it unless it's absolutely necessary.

The only problem with this game—besides the appeal of a puzzle-driven game in general—is that the program is notoriously finicky about running. The majority of gamers won't have trouble with it, especially once they load the available patches, but a very significant minority will be plagued by hardware conflicts and memory errors. Often the gamer has to make sacrifices—like losing the exquisite SVGA graphics in favor of much cruder VGA—or give up the ghosts completely.

For fans of pure horror, *The Guest* is a masterpiece. It isn't as suspenseful as titles with a more demanding game aspect, but the embedded drama is well worth experiencing. Even if you find the puzzles annoying, the rewards are substantial—once you finally get there, the ending will not dis-



LUCKY SEVEN? Six ghoulish souls appear in Stauf's mansion—but who was *The 7th Guest*?

vampire and his victim, which is really the most important element. This game is more Victorian and chaste than Bram Stoker's original novel was by a long shot, and for that reason, less effective. Overall, *DECELA UNESKATED* is enjoyable, if not terrifying, but I think it's too bad that an experience which could have been so potent was unnecessarily watered down.

A EVENING AT STAUF'S

For greater success with an interactive film, we have to turn to an earlier title, *Trilogy's The 7th*

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appoint! It's still one of the best multimedia experiences available, and one of the best horror titles ever made.

Soon to follow in its footsteps is *The 11th Hour: The Story of The 7th Guest*. Despite the hokey title, this is definitely not just a sequel slapped together to capitalize on the success of the first game. The action is set 70 years after *The 7th Guest*, in modern times. Journalist Robin Morales (your colleague and girlfriend) has disappeared while investigating Stauff's mysterious mansion. It's up to you to explore the mansion and rescue her.

And there's plenty to explore here. Not only does Stauff torment you with 13 logic puzzles and six AI games, but you're also sent on scavenger hunts, guided only by a mysterious hint as to which of the 250 selectable objects scattered about the mansion you're looking for. The puzzles and AI games here present a much higher level of challenge than the ones in *7th Guest*. As before, you're presented with a series of video vignettes as you solve each puzzle, which clue you into the mystery at hand. This time, however, the sequences are periodically tied together and shown as a whole. There's nearly three times as much video here as in *7th Guest*, beautifully displayed in true-color SVGA at 30 frames per second.

The hint book in the library has been replaced with a small pocket computer called the Game-Book, so you no longer have to trek back to the library every time you get stuck. There is still quite a bit of wandering around as you seek treasure hunt



HOUR OF JUDGMENT You'll have to crack *The 11th Hour's* puzzles if you don't want to end up like this hapless fellow.

objects, but the rooms are even more beautifully rendered than last time; also, a right-button click lets you skip past already-seen transitions and animations.

There's a definite element of horror here, and moving it into modern times seems to add an almost *X-Files* feel to the classic haunted house mystery. Fans of *The 7th Guest* definitely will not be disappointed.

A GOOD KNIGHT FOR HORROR

Sierra On-Line's *Ghost: Knowr: Sins of the Fathers* is, in my opinion, the best horror game ever made. Extremely well-written, both as a game and as a work of fiction, *Ghost: Knowr* is a solid offering. Its graphics are good, its sound and music are better than average, and—wonder of wonders!—its horror is brilliantly effective.

Jane Jensen, the writer and designer of the game, is without doubt the most important factor in *Ghost: Knowr's* success. The dialog she has written is of literary quality. The plot is dynamic. It's elegantly paced and complex, unfolding with into a crescendo of passion, dread and grief! The elements she uses to drive the action—sex, violence, love, sacrifice, betrayal, and worship both holy and profane—give the story incredible power, as well as a welcome maturity. She has also employed an interesting and blessedly original premise. The series of voodoo murders in this game are a welcome relief from the general run of vampires and Lovecraftian ramblings that other designers fall back upon when they need something spooky. All the occult elements are meticulously researched and presented with intelligence and grace.

The action takes place over ten days and ranges over half the globe. Although most of the game is set in New Orleans, entire days are spent in Germany and Africa. Accordingly, the game gets additional points for the care and attention given to setting. There are a variety of locations in the French Quarter of New Orleans, all of which are interesting to explore, as well as a beautifully rendered castle in Germany and an archeological site in West Africa.

There are numerous characters to talk to and important conversations to be had with all of them. In fact, the conversations are the heart of the game. Sierra employed a cast of talented voice actors, including Tim Curry in the title role, Michael Dam as a powerful voodoo doctor, and the ubiquitous Mark Hamill as a homicide detective. It has been persuasively argued that the voice acting is *Ghost: Knowr's* strongest feature. Even the interface has a delightful voice—the exquisite drawl of a Creole woman, so rich that it you could cut it with a knife.

Is there a downside to *Ghost: Knowr*? Yes and no. Until you complete the necessary actions each day, the plot cannot proceed. I know people who haven't been able to get past the first day of the game without calling the hint line, which is not a

good thing. It's often difficult to figure out what to do next, and there's a certain "wandering around, asking pointless questions" aspect of *Ghost: Knowr* which turns some people off. And there's always that old bugaboo about mood and frustra-



SIX FEET OVER This above-ground cemetery in New Orleans is one place you'll have to hunt for clues in *Ghost: Knowr: Sins of the Fathers*.

tion in horror games. When you run into a ridiculous puzzle or a sequence that kills you 40 times before you can get through it, it tends to spoil things. A built-in hint system, which would be nice for almost any adventure/role-playing game, is doubly necessary for horror titles, and *Ghost: Knowr* needs one more than most.

Overall, though, the strengths of this game far outweigh the weaknesses, and it stands as a prodigy in the annals of interactive fiction. Jensen's work here has set the high watermark for horror games to date.

FUTURE FRIGHTS

That brings us to the present and one final question: Is there a title out there that embodies all of the aspects of a horror game? A culmination of the form? A final word on what a horror game can and should be?

There will never be a final word on the subject, of course—there's always room for improvement, no matter what you do. But Sierra has certainly put together many elements of the most successful horror titles with their new release, Roberts Williams' *Phenomenon*, reviewed elsewhere in this section. It may be the purest, most refined horror game ever made.

And then, of course, there's always the impending release of *Ghost: Knowr II* to consider. Will Jane Jensen top her previous efforts in the field of horror? If she does, Sierra will have an impressive claim to the horror throne.

However it shakes out, players can't help but profit by a little in-house rivalry, not to mention the competition that other companies will be putting out on the shelves. It's going to be a grim, deathly-cold winter, folks. Enjoy it! ☠

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STEP 2
Insert fist into mouth and grab for mandibular tubes. When found, grab tightly and pull out through nose.



STEP 3

If an grabbing attacks one by hand, administer 4 sharp blows to victim's torso, with heel of foot. Note: A purple color on victim's face is desired as it indicates that choking is not entirely due to foot strike.



STEP 4

If victim is still not choking, turn upside down and choke vigorously until spleen is lodged in throat.

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Horror As Art

Uncover The Mysteries Of A Blood-Drenched Past In PHANTASMAGORIA

by Arinn Dembo

A theater was established on the Rue Chaptal in 1836 by a man named Metenier. Patrons made their way to the theater down a classic Parisian cobble-stone alley, and ducked into a place of dark gloom: black rafters above, gothic figures twisting in pain along the portals, the walls covered with the very same fleurs-de-lis with which the French Inquisition branded criminals and heretics before they were to burn. Sensuously carved cherubs and seven-foot angels looked down into the 300-odd seats of the audience. The cramped little building had once been a church, an irony which, I am sure, was lost on no one.

The patrons? A motley lot of every class and profession; such nasty entertainment as this made strange bedfellows. Here it was that young women would be thrown into gigantic lighthouse lamps and acid thrown into men's faces for your edification. On any given night you might see a girl's eyes put out with knitting needles, or naked actresses

raped, crucified or dismembered; sometimes—if you were lucky—all three. A great variety of surgeries, tortures and mutilations were performed, by villains ranging from gypsies to insane old women to men with flesh-ripping hooks instead of hands; and every act, no matter how outrageous, was accomplished with the greatest realism, using theatrical props and effects specially developed for the Guignol. They even had a secret recipe for stage blood, which was used in such copious amounts each night that it had to be kept hot in an enormous cauldron back-stage—hot, because it congealed very much like the real thing, and because the audience was splashed with it often enough during the performances that it must be kept at human temperatures for the sake of realism.

Such a spectacle had never been seen before and has not been seen since, save perhaps for

an occasional moment on film. Certainly, I never dreamed that a computer game would ever be able to achieve such an effect. But it has happened, in a game that pays open homage to the Grand Guignol, both in its title and its premise: **Sierra On-Line's PHANTASMAGORIA.**

SETTING THE STAGE

PHANTASMAGORIA is set in the present, but the game revolves around events long past: the life of a stage magician working before the turn of the century, an illusionist whose performances would have fit right in at the famous theater in Montmartre. He called his show the Phantasmagoria, and in it he simulated various acts of torture and murder, in a display designed to both titillate and terrify his audience. Now, over 100 years later, a young professional couple has bought the magician's estate—a beautiful mansion and grounds, all built in an isolated coastal region of New England—for a song.

This is a cliché so familiar that it needs no explanation. Cool old house at low price equals big trouble. If you tried to use this premise in a movie nowadays, they'd string you up and gouge your eyes out.

Strangely enough, it still works here; a computer game is different from a film. A certain alchemical transformation takes place when a member of the audience becomes a player; the transition from passive to active role is a kind of philosopher's stone, magically making old clichés new again. It's one thing to sit on your butt in a movie theater, with a tub of popcorn in your lap, watching things happen to someone else. It's something else entirely to actually be in

PHANTASMAGORIA

Price: \$69.95 CO-ROM
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Publisher: Sierra On-Line
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the situation yourself, with the sickening certainty that something terrible is going to happen, and have to try and do something about it.

Gameplay in PHANTASMAGORIA is exceedingly simple, designed to be as easy and unobtrusive as possible. The mouse-driven interface is based

discs full of stunning graphics, including gorgeous photo-real sets and a live actress who you can move to various hot spots on the screen.

Although we've seen some of these cinematic-quality game aspects before—professional actors, sound, original score and special effects—they have been put to the best possible use here. The video sequences are excellent, and there are hours of them. This game is an important technological leap, and represents a step forward for the whole industry.

PHANTASMAGORIA employs a female protagonist, which may be an even more important step forward than the challenge to the male-dominated computer game "establishment," which produces a vast majority

surrounding grounds, makes trips to a village on the shore a few miles down the road, and interviews a small cast of local characters. Meanwhile, strange and inexplicable events accumulate both in her house and in her relationship with her husband.

GENDER DIFFICULTIES

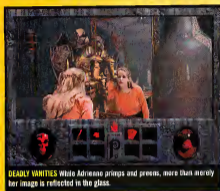
Is this character really a challenge to a sexist industry? Yes and no. Roberta Williams, the game's designer, has a previous history of using female characters. She's the creator of the Laura Bow mysteries, which have won a small following and a certain amount of critical acclaim. Her continuing work with female protagonists is unsurprising in a business where even the most brilliant female designers devote their best work to male characters.

On the other hand, Williams hasn't exactly upset the apple cart with her female characters; both Laura Bow and Adrienne Delaney are traditional girly-type girls, despite their good qualities. One of the annoying aspects of PHANTASMAGORIA is being forced to watch Adrienne preen herself in various mirrors around the house as she travels from room to room. You have to keep looking into those mirrors, because there are important dramatic sequences associated with them. But when I tried out the "hot cursor" spots in the bathroom, only to see Adrienne brush her hair, rub her hands with lotion, and put on make-up, all without advancing the plot at all, I actually let out a squawk of outrage—mortally offended, both as a woman and as a player, at this intersection of pointless "chick stuff."

I would certainly agree with anyone who said that there need to be more female characters in computer gaming, and that male players should have less trouble identifying with female protagonists. But I don't think that end will be accomplished by exaggerating the feminine in a character, and hamming up the differences between men and women. Even female players are turned off by that kind of thing, and rightly so.

BLOOD AND THUNDER

Identifying with Adrienne is the greatest difficulty with the game. In almost every other respect,



DEADLY VANITIES While Adrienne preens and preens, more than merely her image is reflected in the glass.

on "hot spots", the cursor turns red when it passes over an area where some action can be performed. Objects are picked up by clicking on them or interacting with them in a film sequence, and go into the inventory automatically. There are no "invisible" objects in this game—if an object that you need to pick up is small or might tend to be missed, it will be given a pulsing glow to attract attention to it. Puzzles, such as they are, are very simple, logical and straightforward. The game concentrates more on the mystery confronting the characters than on making things difficult for the player—a vital ingredient in the game's success as a horror title. Frustration and suspense are mortal enemies



THE BETTER TO SEE YOU Passing objects over the big scary eye will give you a closer look...and maybe some insight as well.

CHAINING THE LADY

There are two things that every gamer is going to notice immediately about PHANTASMAGORIA. First, it has achieved a new height of realism and beauty in a computer game; there are seven

of male protagonists for CRPC's

The player here takes on the role of Adrienne Delaney, a pretty young novelist, who has moved into this haunted mansion with her husband Dan and a cat named Spaz. In the course of the game, Adrienne explores the mansion and the

the hero?



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Phantasmagoria is excellent. Once the hurdle of Adrienne's pronounced femininity is overcome, the game becomes extremely involving. Although it isn't immediately obvious, most players will soon recognize that there is something else

the action reaches its horrendous, frenetic conclusion. The majority of players, especially those with some experience playing role-playing games, will find this game very easy. Those who don't will benefit from the hint feature, which keeps the plot advancing and frustration at a minimum.

The dialog, and scene construction are good and fairly consistent, without any distracting lapses of quality. The story of the demonic illusionist Carmo, in particular, is an achievement—scary, engaging, and terribly sad as well. Documents, interviews and artifacts are used to advantage, both to uncover the mysteries of the blood-drenched past and to advance the plot in the threatening present.

Pace and mood are extremely important in a horror game, and Phantasmagoria didn't blink once in the 23 hours it took me to finish it. It surpasses all the best horror CRPGs that came before it, if only by its avoidance of "brick-wall" puzzles and jolting departures into adolescent humor. The player is never let off the hook or invited to break off his identification with the character. The horror slowly grows as the tale continues, as more and more nightmarish scenes are piled one on top of another, until the final panic-stricken confrontation at the end is almost a relief.

The oppressive horror doesn't vanish the in-

stant the machine is turned off, either. I'm not what anyone would call the nervous or squeamish type, but I had a strong physical reaction to this game. After a long session, the weight in the pit of my stomach took hours to dissipate.

For a horror fan, that feeling is a good thing. It's a sensation always desired, but very seldom achieved, when you sit down to watch a fright flick or read a gory novel. It means that you are in the presence of greatness, that you have experienced a work of art. It's akin to one's reaction to a symphony, a powerful line of verse, or an extraordinary painting—a potent experience, one which cannot easily be put into words.

ADULTS ONLY

In the end, there is only one question: Is there anyone who shouldn't play this game? Very definitely, yes. Though Phantasmagoria has a "censorship" option, which cuts down on the graphic physical violence by painting the worst of the scenes, parents and potential players should not be lulled into complacency. There is no way to reduce the emotional and supernatural impact of this game. Anyone who dislikes this variety of intense horror will not enjoy the experience, and it should be kept away from children and young adults at all costs. I wouldn't let anyone under the age of 16 open the box, much less play it.

Other than that, I would say that Phantasmagoria has a great deal to offer. It's a beautiful program, well worth playing for its look and feel alone. Although it's a bit short, yielding only 20 to 30 hours of play for an average gamer, it can provide richly textured entertainment even to those who can't really appreciate its value as horror.

For horror fans, Phantasmagoria is a signal event, one of the most powerful titles ever released in the genre, and easily the most single-mindedly horrific. Like The Theatre du Grand Guignol, it is neither refined nor original—only moving. But blood and thunder has its own appeal. ☹

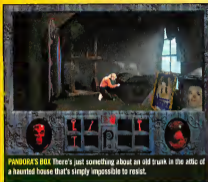
THE EDITORS SPEAK

PHANTASMAGORIA

RATING ★★★★★

PROS High production values; good acting, writing and direction; effective horror sequences.

CONS A bit short, with only 20-30 hours of gameplay; exaggeratedly feminine protagonist; unsuitable for children or young adults.



PANDORA'S BOX There's just something about an old trunk in the attic of a haunted house that's simply impossible to resist.

unique about this game: it's truly horrific.

The horror operates at several levels: Just for sheer visceral impact, Phantasmagoria has several sequences that will leave all but the hardest viewer shaken and more than a little sick, including several graphic murder scenes and a realistically disgusting rape. There is nothing fun, diverting or laughable about these scenes. I was left queasy and cold after each one.

That's not all there is, of course. There are very strong emotional horrors involved, which give the story a firm grounding in pain, fear, grief and betrayal. And there are supernatural elements as well, which take the story into a deeper realm of terror by introducing the strongest of all fears: the unknown.

This is a mature horror feature, the purpose of which is to frighten, repulse and disturb the player, rather than to challenge or amuse. The tone and the approach are the most serious any horror game has ever enjoyed, and some care has been taken to make sure that nothing gets in the way of a very profound, very dark emotional experience.

The plot unfolds slowly and easily, the pace picking up as days pass until



WEIRD SISTER Harriet may seem like a batty old wadbag, but she might inadvertently reveal important clues.



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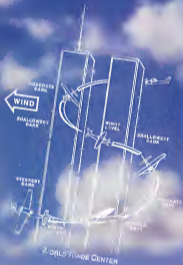
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Hunting A Beast Within

*A Sneak Preview of
the Psychological
Suspense
And Old World
Horror In GABRIEL
KNIGHT 2: A BEAST
WITHIN*

by Johnny L. Wilson

Shouldn't those be torches?" asks Gabriel Knight when a crowd of German citizens forms outside his door in the middle of the night, a scene reminiscent of both the original *Frankenstein* and the hugely popular semi-up, *Young Frankenstein*. Yet, the crowd gathered outside Gabriel Knight's door is not there to wreak havoc on the author of *The Woodoo Murders* and amateur sleuth from New Orleans. They have come



MASTER OF THE HUNT vonDowler is one of the sinister characters Gabriel will have to deal with to solve the supernatural mysteries in GK2.

for help, help in the form of the *schatzenjäger* (supernatural hunter) who has allegedly inherited from a distant relative the gift and responsibility of facing the manifestations of the netherworld on the behalf of its victims.

"Are you the *schatzenjäger* or aren't you?" asks one of the leaders of the community in this opening scene to *GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BLOOD WILL OUT* (GK2). Naturally, such a question sets up the mystery that Gabriel must solve and draws the gamer with an "I dare you" into the game. This time, however, as opposed to the award-winning *GABRIEL*

subject matter and seduce lovers of the dark side into its rich story, the latest version uses a mixture of photographic realism, digitized video and impressive acting to pull gamers into the deep realms of suspended disbelief.

PAWS TO REFRESH

GK2 picks up the story a few months after the end of the original GK. The *Woodoo Murders*, the book Gabriel wrote based on the events of the first game, has been successful, and Gabriel has moved into the ancestral manse in Germany in order to concentrate on his writing. Of course, purchasers of the game readily know that they are not going to be manipulating Gabriel across the screen in a story dealing with writer's block. So, by the time the opening video with its monster movie crowd scene and set-up story about a large wall is concluded, everyone knows that Gabriel is going to be investigating werewolf phenomena as opposed to the woodoo cult in the first game. Also, everyone knows that Bavaria is an ideal locale for hunting werewolves, considering the fact that there are early 18th century accounts which attribute deaths there to such supernatural manifestations. Hence, the German locale.

GK2 is an ambitious project. Not only does it feel bigger than its predecessor in terms of size, but the story is conveyed via a slightly different use of a familiar technology. Unsatisfied with the look of games that merely videotape actors and actresses against blue screens (Chromakey and

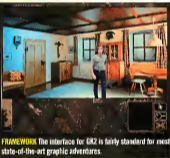
Ultimate) and fill in the backgrounds with virtual sets that were completely rendered on computers (THE 7th GUEST, THE DREAMS ESCORTER, and PAPERMOON), designer Jane Jensen elected to do some location shooting. Since the story takes place in Germany, it would have been prohibitively expensive to involve live actors and a full production crew on an international location, even given a *Wing Commander* 4-sized budget. So, Jensen and a photographer friend visited Germany during the pre-production phase of the game in order to simultaneously scout authentic locations, research local history and legends, and take more than 1,000 photos to be used

as scenic backgrounds.

In general, the backgrounds are extremely effective. They are lush, photo-realistic sets which are embellished by computer artists to meet the special needs of the script. They function for the game like matte paintings do for film, enabling the video production to take place on a sound stage and at domestic locations while giving an other world (or in this case, Old World) ambience. The actors are superimposed on the sets, and a minimum of 3-D rendering is imposed to provide depth. In the early version we saw, there were still some rough edges, since we occasionally observed the digitized Grace stepping on 2-D images of books or furniture in such an awkward way that it spoiled the scene. However, this was relatively rough footage and we doubt many of such lapses will escape the final blending of video, photo and game interface.

HUMANE INTERFACE

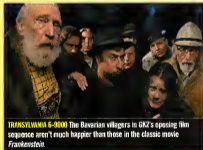
The game interface itself will be rather familiar



FRAMEWORK The interface for GK2 is fairly standard for most state-of-the-art graphic adventures.

to graphic adventure aficionados. The "rooms" or locations are presented on-screen in a picture frame. The arrow cursor is used to explore the locale and essentially give stage directions to the player's on-screen character (either Gabriel or Grace). The cursor is transformed into Gabriel's ancestral dagger whenever it crosses a hot spot. Double-clicking on the hot spot will either open a door/passage or call up a close-up view of an active object (a letter to be read, a weapon to be examined, a sign to be read, etc.).

Many objects will automatically be added to the player's inventory and will be pictured at the bottom of the frame. Then, icons on the right side enable players to manipulate these objects in order to examine or use them. There are some new icons in this interface which enable you to record conversations and splice them together to form a new conversation and solve a puzzle. As in *PAPERMOON*, using objects or solving puzzles will conjure video



TRANSYLVANIA 6-9000 The Bavarian villagers in GK2's opening film sequence aren't much happier than those in the classic movie *Frankenstein*.

Knight and the *Fallen* which relied upon a graphic novel look to tell its story, video sequences form the narrative exposition between chapters and offer important puzzles are solved. Whereas the original *GABRIEL KNIGHT* game used dark color palettes to convey the ominous nature of its sub-

sequences as both transition, exposition and reward, but unlike *Phantom*, Jane Jensen has no plans to add an on-line hint option. The puzzles flower out from simple in the beginning to complex at the end, and Jane has no intention of spoiling the fun for expert adventurers.

Players of GK1 will find the conversational interface familiar. Whenever Gabriel or Grace encounters a new character, a list of conversational



SPLITTING HAIRS Double-clicking on the proper object will evoke this scene of Gabriel uncovering a vital clue.

topics appears at the bottom section of the on-screen picture frame. Highlighting the desired topic and clicking will evoke a video scene of the character responding to Gabriel or Grace on the subject. Most of the dialogue is handled with video clips taken from a standard Number Two shot (named after the old #2 cameras which in traditional film work were almost always designated to film over the shoulder of the protagonist). Like GK1, the number of topics will expand based on new information received, but unlike GK1, the topics disappear after use, and there aren't quite as many topics overall. Why are there less topics when conversation was one of the great strengths of the award-winning program? Simply because video footage and sound files take up more room than the old text files. Yet there is plenty of conversation in GK2. It's just that much of it flows in the video without as much need for intervention on the game's part.

There is also a change in the way characters navigate from place to place. Since many of the background locations in GK2 are larger than real-life, gamers will no longer have to "walk" the digitized characters across every screen in order to get from one location to another. Rather, by raising the cursor to the top of the screen, moving it to the side of the screen where the character would eventually exit, and double-clicking, the scene shifts to the next street or the next room.

Fortunately, the designers have

not only kept the most friendly aspect to navigation from GK1, but enhanced it. Remember the *Rise* or the *Demon*-style street map of New Orleans in GK1 where new locations would arise as Gabriel uncovered clues? Superimposed over the map were cute little icons representing the active locations within the game, and players could move Gabriel from place to place with a quick point and click. In GK2 there is more than one such map. One is an actual city map of Munich (streamlined somewhat, but authentic nonetheless) where street names are highlighted as they become active. It is colorful and really gives the sense that one is trying to make one's way through a foreign city. The other is a map of Southern Bavaria which looks like an actual Michelin-quality map with picture postcard insets appearing to indicate actual locations.

THE PLOT AND THE HOUNDS

The writing in GK2 is as strong or better than that in GK1. Jane Jensen has that rare capacity to juxtapose fiction and reality, spiritual and profane, primitive and civilized, and male and female within characters and situations that we care about. *Genre: Known 2: A Bear With* is ostensibly about a hunt for a werewolf or werewolves. Yet, GK2 is also a story of identity—a coming to grips with self and destiny that one finds in most of the best literature. It places Gabriel in great danger

and, in the chapters where players control Gabriel, the pace is swift and danger is imminent. He must decide what kind of man he is. It also places Grace in a more leisurely, exploratory story. She faces identity and career crisis while attempting to solve the mystery and resolve jealousy on at least two fronts. She must determine whether she will accept who she is or transform herself in a

very different, but perhaps as painful, metamorphosis from that of the werewolves in the story.

Frankly, I was concerned about two things with GK2: Second novel syndrome, and the use of live actors. Second novel syndrome is what the late Lester Del Rey, perhaps the greatest acquisitions editor in fantasy and science fiction history, referred to when a talented newcomer started their second book. Essentially, one works on their first book all their lives. The first book has a uniqueness and a coherence all its own—in spite of having inevitable rough edges as the author hones his or her craft. Second books are composed in less time and often lose some of the coherence of that first book. I was afraid that GK2 would lack the focus of GK1. I was wrong.

I was also afraid that GK2 would lose something with live actors to replace our images of the characters. With Gabriel, my fears were allayed. Dean Erickson is marvelous as Gabriel. Watching him firing a scene from an alleged lost Wagnerian opera (a Francis Ford Coppola-esque juxtapo-



MASS TRANSEPT In some scenes, players will control Grace, such as this encounter with a priest at Rittersburg's St. George's Church.

sition of celebration/violence), I found myself amazed at his range of expression and emotion. He is better as Gabriel than Tim Curry was as the voice-over in the CD version of GK1. I could quibble about Grace's performance and a few of the character actors, but the reality is that Erickson's performance will overshadow them all.

Genre: Known 2: A Bear With is the kind of sequel that all sequels should be. Its story is improved, its technology is improved, and its interface is improved. I've only seen a couple of chapters within the game and pacing, post-production, last-minute marketing considerations and the like could change things, but my initial impression is very positive. If you liked GK1, you won't be disappointed. If you like sophisticated stories, you won't be disappointed. If you want more challenging puzzles than standard adventure fare, you won't be disappointed. Here's hoping that initial impression holds up. ☛



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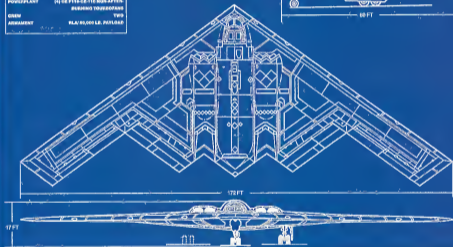




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THREAT
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Space Exploration

A Field Guide For The PC Storage Hunter: Hard Drives, CD-ROM Drives And Innovative Storage Solutions

by Loyd Case

It's frightening. The full install for *ACROSS THE RHINE* takes 90 megabytes. *MECHWARRIOR 2* consumes over 60 megabytes. *Windows 95* sucks up another 70 megabytes. After installing *EMPIRE 2*, I was surprised to see it took only 10 megabytes; I thought something was wrong, because no game today takes up a measly 10 megabytes.

The CD-ROM side isn't a lot prettier. Many games now require more than one disk to hold all of their graphics and audio. *WING COMMANDER 3* comes on four CDs, and *PHANTASMAGORIA* takes seven.

Clearly, the need for high-capacity storage, and quick delivery of said storage, is becoming increasingly important. While games have been consuming up to 8 megabytes or more of RAM, the games are gobbling disk space like a pack of crazed piranha. At the same time, mass storage isn't as sexy as, say, Pentium processors or fast graphics

cards. Yet these devices are just as much key parts of any computer system as RAM or a video card. So let's investigate the arcane world of storage devices and check out the latest hard disks, CD-ROMs and other neat goodies that promise to keep the piranha at bay.

HARD DISK DRIVES

The design and manufacture of hard drives has always been a black art, even more so than designing the semiconductor chips that go into computers. Hard disk designers live in a high speed world of magnetic domains, transfer rates, rotational speed and other arcane, sub-miniature mechanics. For awhile, it looked like the hard disk market was getting stagnant. Prices hadn't moved much for awhile, the 200 megabyte drive seemed eternal and the technology hadn't advanced much either. In the past two years, though, that's all changed. New technologies have enabled much higher capacities in smaller

drives at a greatly reduced cost. One year ago, gigabyte drives cost over \$1,000. Now they can be found for little over \$200. We looked at some representative, state of the art drives.

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR AC31600

In the past several years, **Western Digital CAVIAR** hard disks have won a reputation as some of the hottest drives in the PC market. Never the fastest in any single performance spec, the **CAVIAR** drives have a well-balanced spec sheet. The newest member of the line, the **AC31600** 1.6 gigabyte drive, is no exception. Sporting an average access time of 10 milliseconds, a 5200 RPM rotational speed and the ability to deliver mode 4 PIO transfer rates (see sidebar), the **CAVIAR** is one of the fastest IDE drives on the market. Its one failing is a meager 64 KB buffer (half that of some of its competition).

We checked out the upgrade kit ver-

sion, which comes complete with hard drive, mounting brackets, an extensive manual, software drivers for older PCs and a nicely laid out, quick install foldout. The software that's enclosed consists of a driver (**OnTrack's** DISK MANAGER) that enables older systems which don't support Enhanced IDE to make use of the full capacity of the disk. Overall, the upgrade kit is a nice, well rounded package, much like the **CAVIAR** drive itself.

Price: \$499. Call (800) 568-9272 for more information. Web: <http://www.wdc.com>

MAXTOR DURANGO 7000 1.6 GB HARD DRIVE KIT

Maxtor positions its hard drives as "high value." This is marketing speak; it means that Maxtor drives are not leading-edge performers—but neither do they cost as much as the other drives. We looked at the newest member, the **DURANGO 7000** 1.6 gigabyte EIDE drive. It lacks the high-end features, such as MR heads, and only rotates at 4500 RPM. It can only handle mode 3 PIO transfers, effectively limiting the maximum burst rate to 11 megabytes per second, and has a 128 KB buffer. It's available in a kit form, with accessories such as an adapter bracket for 5.25 inch bays, cables and screws.

Despite the seeming limitations in performance, the drive seems quick enough, and it's priced lower than the Western Digital **CAVIAR**. Maxtor offers additional value in its service and support. They offer a 48 hour advance replacement for defective drives and a toll-free technical support line.

Price: \$449 (street). Call (800) 2MAXTOR for more information. Web: <http://www.maxtor.com>

QUANTUM FIREBALL 1080AT

Unlike the Western Digital **CAVIAR**, you won't find the **Quantum FIREBALL** in a value-added retail kit. If you order one, it will arrive in a box with a manual (albeit a well-written one.) While some dealers may bundle disk manager software, it's not a given. Also, if you need a 5.25 inch adapter bracket, you'll have to get one separately. This one gigabyte drive can be

found as low as \$215, but don't let the low price fool you. This is one fast disk. In a recent survey of 120 and 133 MHz Pentium Computers, *PC Magazine* discovered that systems equipped with the **FIREBALL** yielded the fastest disk performance short of a 7200 RPM SCSI drive.

The **FIREBALL** gets its quickness from a high rotational speed (5400 RPM, currently the fastest available in IDE), 128 KB buffer and an arcane technology known as **Magnetoresistive Heads** (MR for short). Like any magnetic device, data is transferred to and from the disk by heads that float just above the surface of the disk. MR heads simply allow the data to be transferred more quickly and reliably. The **FIREBALL** is an incredible deal, and if you've got the patience to assemble the pieces, it's worth a look.

Price: Internal, \$230 (street). Call (800) 624-5545 for more information. Web: <http://www.quantum.com>

QUANTUM GRAND PRIX 4.3 GB SCSI DRIVE

Quantum's **GRAND PRIX** is the first generation of the "bleeding" edge of high performance SCSI drives. It sports an access time of 8.6 milliseconds, 512 KB of buffer and a rotational speed of 7,200 RPM. It is not available as an IDE drive. We've been using this drive for six months now, and while there are faster drives, we've been spoiled by the performance and cavernous capacity of the **GRAND PRIX**. Microsoft Word 6 seems to load faster than Windows Notepad did on slower systems.

The **Grand Prix** is available in SCSI and wide SCSI versions. The wide SCSI version can move data off the drive as fast as 20 megabytes per second! If you've got

the technical smarts to set up a SCSI drive, then the **Grand Prix** is worth a look.

Price: Internal, \$970 (street). Call (800) 624-5545 for more information. Web: <http://www.quantum.com>



CD-ROM DRIVES AND UPGRADE KITS

In the past year, double-speed CD drives have been largely supplanted by quad speed drives, although you can find double-speed drives quite cheaply (as low as \$75). Even quads have dropped in price: a good IDE quad speed drive can be had for under \$175 in some places.

The most cost effective way to buy a CD-ROM is in an upgrade kit. These kits typically bundle enough software to keep you going into the next century, a sound card and interesting toys such as microphones, speakers and joysticks. While the accessories are rarely premium stuff, if you're looking for a quick and dirty way to get your system up to speed, kits are the way to go. Both of the kits we investigated are interesting because they actually ship with some pretty hot games.

However, six-speed drives are currently available only as standalone drives (although Creative calls their "hex-speed" drive a "kit" because it contains an IDE interface and Grolier's encyclopedia).

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MAKING THE CONNECTION: HARD DRIVE STANDARDS

In the beginning, there was the ST-506. The ST-506 defined how hard drives would operate in early personal computers. Eventually, the old standard would evolve, first into ESDI (Enhanced Small Disk Interface), then finally into what we now know as IDE (IDE stands for Integrated Drive Electronics, which means that most of the smarts of the hard disk reside on the drive itself, not in the computer.) The most recent wrinkle in this evolution is Enhanced IDE (referred to as EIDE.) Enhanced IDE was created because of two critical limitations with the original IDE standard. First, hard disks could be no larger than 528 megabytes. This was originally proposed because of the limitations inherent in the way PCs are set up. While you could get drives larger than 528 megabytes, you needed special drivers; occasionally, incompatibilities would crop up. Later, PC vendors would figure out how to embed support for larger hard disks in the computer itself, but the IDE standard still limited the drives to a half-gigabyte.

Secondly, the IDE interface could only support two devices. This was fine when users were only concerned with hard disks, but now CD-ROM drives, removable hard disks, and tape drives are becoming increasingly prevalent. There needed to be a way to attach multiple devices.

Thus was born EIDE. Now, you can have two IDE parts in a system, each supporting two devices. Typically, one or two hard disks would be connected to one IDE connector (known as the primary connector) and a CD-ROM and perhaps tape drive would be connected to the second port. Currently, you can get EIDE disks as large as 1.6 gigabytes, with 2 gigabyte drives recently announced.

During the ten years that PC hard disks were evolving towards the EIDE standard, the world of UNIX workstations and servers brought into the world another interface standard, the Small Computer Systems Interconnect standard, or SCSI for short. SCSI is a more general purpose interface standard than IDE. In a standard SCSI rig, up to 7 devices can be attached, including hard disks,

tape drives and scanners. Also, SCSI devices can be external to the system, with integrated power supplies and cooling fans, if needed. There are even a few printers with SCSI interfaces. In the early days of PC SCSI interfaces, configuration became somewhat of a black art, but that's not true anymore. What is still true is that SCSI is an add-on for most systems; CD-ROM only controllers range between \$50 and \$100, while high performance SCSI adapters can run upwards of \$300 or more. There are a few Pentium systems appearing with built-in SCSI interfaces, but they're still pretty rare.

If you're a performance junkie, though, there are significant benefits to SCSI. For one, Win 95 has built-in support for SCSI. In the past, IDE drives have actually performed better in DOS and Windows 3.1. Now, however, software support for SCSI now allows the full potential of SCSI devices to be realized. SCSI is better at multitasking than IDE, which yields better performance than IDE in an environment like Win 95.

There are actually multiple SCSI standards, which can be confusing. Most current devices today support SCSI-II (also known as fast SCSI.) A more recent standard is wide SCSI, also known as SCSI-III. Finally, right on the horizon is ultra-SCSI, which promises to double the performance. A wide, ultra SCSI device (are you with me here?) can move data as fast as forty megabytes per second. That should minimize the load time for *Across the Rhine*. Finally, SCSI drives are the capacity kings. You can find individual drives as large as nine gigabytes, with four gigabyte drives not uncommon. You can also get SCSI disk arrays. These are external boxes that look like a single drive, but actually link together multiple disks in a single unit. Capacities exceeding 16 gigabytes are possible.

Of course, if you're really a performance geek, look into fibre channel. Fibre channel is an optical interface to fast hard disks, and is an evolutionary development of the SCSI standard. There aren't any fibre channel interfaces for PCs yet, but by next year, this will change.

DIAMOND ULTRA KIT 8000 WITH 8X CD-ROM DRIVE

While marketing managers are still scratching their heads trying to coin a nickname for the 6x CD-ROM drive, Diamond should be shipping the Ultra Kit 8000 by

the time you read this. It's similar in accessories to the MULTIMEDIA KIT 7000 (see below), except for the 8x CD-ROM drive, which rotates at 8 times the speed of a single speed CD and four times faster than a double speed drive! This is the fastest CD around, period. In fact, this CD is so fast,

we got the following message during the *WING COMMANDER 3* installation: "Your CD-ROM drive is reading CDs faster than is possible!" Normally, this message appears if a disk cache is loaded, but clearly the designers at Origin didn't anticipate 8-speed CD drives (and to think WC3 shipped less than a year ago). The *WING COMMANDER 3* installation routine reported a transfer rate of 1,236,219 bytes per second, just as you'd expect from an 8x drive (or perhaps "double quad" drive). WC3 loads in 12 seconds, tying the Plextor 6Plex (see below). There may be a couple of reasons for the identical scores of the Plextor 6x and the Diamond 8x. First, we may be running into overhead limitations; i.e., *WING COMMANDER 3* itself has to do some work as it's loading into memory. We may also be seeing the limitations of the IDE interface vs. the SCSI interface of the Plextor drive. MPC Wizard 3 reported only a 521 KB per second transfer rate at 60 percent CPU utilization, but we may be running up against the limits of the benchmark. The average access time is 221 milliseconds.

Do you need an 8x drive? As more titles actually have software load off the CD, this can be beneficial. However, titles optimized for quad-speed drives are only now beginning to hit the shelves, so an 8x drive is really a future investment, but it's probably a good one.

Price: \$649. Call (800) 468-5846. Web: <http://www.diamondmm.com>

DIAMOND MULTIMEDIA SYSTEMS MULTIMEDIA KIT 7000

The 7000 kit (basically, an 8000 kit with a 4x CD-ROM) from Diamond is pretty representative of the current crop of multimedia upgrade kits. When you open the box, you discover a SOUND BLASTER-compatible audio card with 1 megabyte of MIDI wavetable, a Quickshot joystick (don't use too much body english on this one), a tiny microphone and a pair of Quickshot speakers. The speakers, while not much to write home about, do deliver 15 watts per channel and the audio quality is a cut above the usual multimedia kit fare.

The 4x CD-ROM drive itself is manufactured by Hitachi, and plugs into the enhanced IDE port on the sound card. Conversely, if you have a newer system

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DIAMOND MULTIMEDIA SYSTEMS ULTRA KIT 8000



with EIOE connectors, you can attach the CD drive cable directly to the system board. This approach is not for the faint-hearted, however. If you have any doubts, attach the cable to the sound card. The CD drive was a middle-of-the-road performer. Our benchmark reported an average access time of 262 milliseconds, with a transfer rate of 40B KB per second, 60 percent of the CPU was dedicated to data transfer. The *Wing Commander 3* installation program reported a transfer rate of 612,724 KB per second. It took 21 seconds for the first *Wing Commander 3* screen to appear, the slowest time of the roundup.

The Diamond sound card is completely devoid of switches, jumpers, dials, knobs, levers and other devices which require a rocket science degree to set. Instead, the various card settings, such as IRQ, DMA, etc., are set by the software driver. This is a welcome relief. However, after this auspicious start, we discovered that the stereo mini-plugs on the back of the card were unlabeled.

We eventually got the card connected to our speakers by trial and error. The wavetable audio on the card is nothing special, but sounded a bit better than the Creative Labs **SOUND BLASTER AWE-32**. This may have been because the reverb was

turned way up. The MIDI sounds didn't come close to our **Roland SOUND CANVAS** OUGHTERCARD, however. We ran a few games, including *MECHWARIOR 2*, which delivers all of its music via Red Book audio (see sidebar on CD formats). Other games which worked without a problem included *HERETIC*, *US NAVY FIGHTERS* and *PANZER*

GENERAL. The card seemed to be fully **SOUND BLASTER** compatible, although it wouldn't run as a **SOUND BLASTER 16**.

Considering the wide host of CD titles in the box, including *MYST*, *HAROBALL III*, *REBEL ASSAULT*, *LEWINGS*, and a huge number of shareware titles. The Diamond Multimedia 7000 kit is a pretty good deal.

Price: \$399. Call (800) 468-5B46. Web: <http://www.diamondmm.com>

PLEXTOR 6PLEX 6 SPEED CD

Plextor's 6Plex was the first 6x CD-ROM drive to reach the market. The 6Plex is a SCSI unit, available as either an external or internal drive.

This drive is quick, both in terms of transfer rate and

access time. At 60 percent CPU usage, the 6Plex moves data at a quick 583 KB per second, the fastest in our roundup. *Wing Commander 3* loads in 12 seconds, and the install program reports a data rate of 927,164 bytes per second. Access time is quick, too, at 173 milliseconds.

The only thing we didn't like about the Plextor was the required CD caddy, but the caddy contributes to the quick access time, as does the use of SCSI as the interface of choice. Still, it's a nuisance to swap disks out of caddies. You can slip the caddy into the drive with one hand, but it takes some practice.

Price: internal, \$509; external, \$599. Call (800) 886-3935 for more information. Web: [NA](http://www.na)

CREATIVE LABS BLASTER CD 6X

The Blaster CD 6x (labeled "hex speed" on the bezel) is a caddyless, six-speed CD-ROM drive. It comes with its own EIOE interface card, but can also plug into a sound card IOE interface. You can also plug it into an EIOE hard disk interface, but it's questionable whether you'd want to share the hard disk bus with a much slower device like a CD-ROM drive. Luckily, most EIOE interfaces have twin connectors, so the secondary connector is ideal for a CD drive.

We ran into frustrating problems plugging the Blaster CD 6x into the secondary IOE port on our Pentium system's motherboard. The manual is poorly written, and the information about connecting the Blaster CD 6x was wrong. It turns out that you simply run the driver without supplying the IRQ and I/O address parameters specified in the manual.

What about performance? *Wing Commander 3* loaded in 15 seconds, a bit on the slow side (for such a speedy drive). The WC3 install program reported a data rate of 952,223 bytes per second. It moved 491 KB per second at 60 percent CPU usage. The average access time measured out at 211 milliseconds. This is a very cost effective upgrade if you've got an old single or double-speed drive.

Price: \$299. Call (800) 998-5227 for more information. Web: <http://www.creat.com>





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CREATIVE LABS PERFORMANCE PERFORMANCE 4X UPGRADE KIT

This quad speed upgrade kit ships with Creative Lab's latest volley in the sound card wars, the **SOUND BLASTER 32** (see last month's roundup on audio cards for more detail.) Suffice it to say the **SOUND BLASTER 32** wavelable is to Roland MIDI sounds what a Ford Escort is to a Shelby GT. The MIDI sounds on the SB32 sound-ed thin and uninspiring.

The other problem with the **SOUND BLASTER 32** is that it nearly requires a rocket science degree to set up. A veritable forest of jumpers exist on the card, and while the default settings work in most cases, if you need to make any changes, reading the manual is a must. The one saving grace is that most of the settings are silk-screened onto the printed circuit board of the card.

The speakers are small, but are a two-way design that actually deliver reasonably decent sound. There's also an included microphone, but no joystick.

The CD-ROM drive is a quad-speed, Sanyo-manufactured **EIDE** drive. The industry seems to be finally moving away from proprietary CD driver controllers; most new drives are either **EIDE** or **SCSI** now. The Sanyo unit delivers decent performance, demonstrating a transfer rate of 478 KB per second at 60 percent CPU utilization. The average access time benched out at 210 milliseconds. **Wing Commander 3** reported a transfer rate of 592,138 bytes per second, but the drive loaded **WC3** in 17 seconds, a bit faster than the Hitachi drive in the **Diamond** kit.

There are some serious games shipping with this kit, including **NASCAR RACING**, **SSN-21 SEAWOLF**, **ULTIMA VIII**, **SYNCHRONIC PLUS** and enough other titles to satisfy most tastes. When compared to **Diamond's MULTIMEDIA KIT 7000** (see above), the tradeoff is a better mix of games in the Creative kit versus an included joystick in the **Diamond** upgrade kit.

The 4x CD is available as a stand-alone

kit, with enhanced IDE interface, for \$199, if all you need is a faster CD.

Price: \$429. Call (800) 998-5227 for more information. Web: <http://www.creafl.com>

TURTLE BEACH QUAD SPEED 3CD CHANGER KIT

Turtle Beach has been long famous for the audio quality of their sound cards. Now they're hitting the market with an innovative quad-speed CD changer. **CD-ROMs** are placed in a caddy,



which is inserted into the drive.

When you boot the computer, three drive letters are assigned to each caddy slot. This is a mixed bag. It's a great solution if you obtain multiple caddies; you can store your CDs in a consistent manner. If you regularly swap out CDs, though, you'll need to remember which slot to use, so the drive letter will be correct. Unfortunately, most CD titles, especially games, fix the CD drive letter at installation time.

Despite these limitations, this is a compelling little device. It fits into a single, 5.25 inch drive bay, and plugs into any Enhanced IDE port (the package ships with an IDE interface in case you need one). The changer, manufactured by **Sanyo**, is a middle-of-the-road performer, posting a 440 KB per second transfer rate at 60 percent CPU usage and a 266 millisecond access time. **WC3** reported a transfer rate of 612,734 KB per second. It took 20 seconds to load **WC3**, about the slowest we've seen for 4x drives.

The kit ships with a pair of speakers (the same Quickshot speakers included in the **Diamond 7000** kit), an interesting microphone with a bendable, coiled stem and a pair of headphones. There are a few CD titles, too, but nothing to write home about. The whole kit retails for \$399, making it an interesting option if you already have a sound card.

Price: \$399. Call (800) 645-5640 for more information. Web: <http://www.tbeach.com>

NEC 4XC QUAD SPEED CD CHANGER

The **NEC 4XC** holds seven CDs altogether. Like the **Turtle Beach 3CD** changer, it uses a drive letter for each slot. Unlike the **Turtle Beach** changer, it is an external box. The CDs are loaded one by one from a top tray; there is no cartridge or caddy needed. **Wing Commander 3's** install program reported a transfer rate of 612,734 bytes per second. The drive moves 499 KB per second at 60 percent CPU utilization. We noted an average access time of 320 milliseconds, slightly faster than the rated 350 milliseconds.

This unit operates very smoothly. Despite holding 7 CDs, it has roughly the same footprint as a standard, single CD-ROM drive, but twice the height. Each slot has its own eject button. Since it uses a separate drive letter for each slot, there's no real advantage for multi-CD games, but it's still handy for having lots of different CDs on call. Price: \$349 (street). Call (800) 634-4636 for more information. Web: N/A

INNOVATIVE STORAGE SOLUTIONS

One of the really fun things about this business is getting to take a look at new, innovative ideas. Some of them are really nifty, slap-on-the-forehead "why didn't I think of that" ideas; others sometimes leave you scratching your head, wondering "why?"

Here are a few gadgets we found worthy of closer inspection. Most of them work as advertised, but some of them come under the heading of way cool.

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It's not just the sounds, but the superior control of them that sets the DB50XG apart. The new XG format takes control far beyond General MIDI (GM). And with major game developers implementing XG, you won't want to be stuck with a card that doesn't keep up with the times.

The DB50XG will play all of your favorite GM compatible software. And with its superior sounds, it will play them better than you've ever heard before.

It's amazing what a simple upgrade can do. The Yamaha Waveforce DB50XG sounds so good, you'll need to check your CD-ROM drive to make sure you're not playing an audio CD. But first you'll have to check with your favorite computer reseller.



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Glossary

If you're in the market for a new hard disk, and you've got the system to support it, take a look at your needs. Today, EIDE drives are very cost-effective, although it's worth checking out SCSI solutions if you're plugging together a new Pentium rig. Whether EIDE or SCSI will win in the market in the long run is subject to debate, but we'd like to point out that Western Digital, one of the strongest proponents of IDE, has recently shipped a line of low-cost SCSI controllers.

Whether you're looking for SCSI or IDE drives, here are a few things to look for:

Access Time: average access time is a measure of how fast the magnetic head that reads data of the disk moves to different parts of the disk. Today's slowest drives have access times of 14 milliseconds, which would have been considered incredible a couple of years ago.

Transfer Rate: measures how fast stuff can be moved off the hard disk and into your computer's memory. The current hot standard in IDE is called mode 4 P/D (PIO stands for programmed input/output). Mode 4 allows transfers of over 13 megabytes per second between the hard disk and computer memory. All the newest Pentium systems support mode 4.

Rotational Speed: how fast the disk spins. We mentioned transfer rate; transfer rate is kind of a fiction, because most hard disks can't really transfer data that fast, except in very short bursts. It's a law of physics. The actual, sustained rate that a disk can deliver data is dependent on two factors: how fast the disk spins, and how much data is packed into a given space on a disk. The fastest IDE drives spin at 5400 RPM; the bleeding edge of SCSI drives spin at 7200 RPM.

Number of Platters: the number of disk platters, all other things being equal, has an effect. The fewer the platters, the faster the drive. This is because the density of the information on the disk is very high. Remember that the disk is spinning at a fixed rate, so the more bits per millimeter, the faster the data rate.

Buffer Size: in general, the bigger the buffer, the better. Most IDE drives have buffers of 64 or 128 KB; a few have 512 KB. Some of the 7200 RPM SCSI drives have a megabyte of cache on board.

There are other, even more arcane, parameters for disk performance, but these are probably the most important ones.

ADAPTEC 1542CP PLUG-AND-PLAY SCSI CARD

The Adaptec 1542 series has a long history. It's also had its share of problems, mainly because it's difficult to configure, but the 1542CP promises to fix that—if your system handles plug-and-play. Otherwise, it's "hunt the configuration," which means trying to figure out which I/O address and memory addresses work for your system, not a task for the faint-hearted.

The 1542CP also pushes the performance envelope for the old, 16-bit ISA bus. While the card itself can handle high speed data transfers between SCSI peripherals attached to it, the ISA bus is fairly slow, so it's really a waste to attach one of the newer, high performance SCSI drives to the card. At the same time, at \$339, it's kind of overkill for CD-ROM drives. If you have either a VESA local bus or a PCI bus, there are faster solutions available. In a production environment, this card would be useful for attaching high capacity tape drives—but this is a magazine about computer games, so the 1542CP is interesting, but not well suited for most users.

Price: \$339. Call (800) 934-2766 for more information. Web: <http://adaptec.com>

ADAPTEC 2940 ULTRA WIDE /3940W PCI SCSI CONTROLLER

If getting the best possible disk performance is important to you, then it's worth checking out local bus SCSI adapters. If you want to notch up your performance a bit more, look into wide SCSI (see sidebar). The Adaptec 2940W/3940W are representative of the newer breed of local bus SCSI adapters. Both are capable of handling either wide SCSI or standard SCSI peripherals. (Note that if you want

to attach a normal SCSI device, you need a special adapter, since the 2940W/3940W use high density, 68 pin connectors. Note that these are very difficult to find currently.)

The difference between the 2940 and 3940 is the number of devices you can attach; the 2940 is limited to 7 peripherals, whereas the 3940 has two SCSI channels, and can handle 15; the 3940 is really better suited for a server. Other than the dual channels, they're the same. Like most PCI cards, these are very easy to configure. You insert them in the PCI bus, connect your disks and other SCSI devices and turn the computer on. Like any SCSI rig, you need

to make sure the device chain—i.e., the set of hardware connected together via SCSI cables—is properly terminated. Improper termination is probably the most common SCSI problem.

The 2940 series can handle the most demanding SCSI hard disks available with aplomb. Additionally, the 2940, according to an Adaptec spokesperson, is now an "Ultra" device (for more on Ultra, see the sidebar on SCSI v. EIDE). On top of that, you can attach SCSI CD-ROM drives, scanners, tape drives and just about anything else that supports a SCSI connection. If performance is your game, check 'em out.

Price: \$375 (2940W); \$599 (3940W). Call (800) 934-2766 for more information. Web: <http://www.adaptec.com>

PANASONIC LF-1000 PD/CD-ROM DRIVE

We didn't list this interesting SCSI gizmo under CD-ROM drives because of its schizophrenic nature. By day, the Panasonic LF-1000 is a sland, magneto optical (MD for short), 650 megabyte removable cartridge drive. You can read and write from the single-sided cartridges. While only roughly half the speed of an average

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hard disk, it's very useful for backups and storing less-frequently used data. Since cartridges for the LF-1000 only cost around \$50, this is a pretty cost effective way to store lots of stuff.

After the sun sets, though, this drive's identity changes. It becomes a sleek, quad-speed CD-ROM drive, capable of running the hottest games available. Interestingly, *Wing COMMANDER 3* reported a transfer rate of only 510,612 byte per second, and labeled it a triple-speed CD drive. However, WC3 loaded in only 15 seconds, making it one of the faster quad drives around. We suspect part of the reason is the custom CD-ROM extensions supplied by **Corel Corporation**. Corel-CDX, a replacement for Microsoft's MSCDEX, has CD caching built in.

MPC Wizard reported a transfer rate at 60 percent CPU utilization of 534 KB per second and an average access time of only 362 milliseconds, the slowest we've seen in some time. Nonetheless, if you need a rewritable optical drive and a CD-ROM in a single drive bay, this is worth investigating.

Price: Internal, \$895; external, \$995. Call (800) 742-8086 for more information. Web: <http://www.panasonic.com>

COMBYTE DOUBLEPLAY

ComByte is a new company, started up by a number of veterans in the PC storage business. The **DOUBLEPLAY** is their first product, and has a lot of appeal. It's a floppy disk drive and a DC2000 cartridge tape drive that fits into a single drive bay. The **DOUBLEPLAY** plugs into your computer's floppy disk drive interface. This is mildly interesting, but what makes this product worth more than a yawn is the fact that the floppy is a *double speed* floppy drive.

Does the double speed floppy work? Well, yes, but the caveat is that you need to load a small driver (about 6K) to enable the doublespin feature. Once that's enabled, it works like a charm. Loading multifloppy games takes noticeably less time,

but it still seems like a long wait, because we've been spoiled by the quickness of CD installs.

The **DOUBLEPLAY** comes with a neat utility that allows you to drag-and-drop files directly from the Windows file manager to a tape drive icon. You can move entire directories to tape, which is handy for backing up an entire project... or maybe to make room for



ACROSS THE RHINE. The

tape drive is smart enough to handle DC2000 style tapes of any length. By the time you read this, ComByte will be shipping a new set of utilities that allow you to treat the tape drive as a virtual hard disk, making quick-and-dirty backups even easier. There will also be Win 95 utilities and a parallel port version.

Is it worth it? If you're in the market for tape backup, this drive is a bargain; you get the floppy for free, and it's double speed to boot.

Price: \$199. Call (800) 990-2983 for more information. Web: N/A

OMEGA ZIP DRIVE

Everything about the **Omega ZIP** drive screams "I'm Cool!" From the lightweight indigo case, to the multimedia help files that ship with it, the **ZIP** drive is the hottest hardware accessory to come along since the mouse. The **ZIP** drive weighs barely over a pound. It has no power switch; it's on all the time, but doesn't use much juice. The case itself has a transparent window, so you can read the label on whatever cartridge is in the drive. It also has two sets of feet, so you can rest it horizontally or vertically. One very handy feature is that the connection information

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The Future Of Storage

GLIPS ON THE RADAR: NEW STUFF, WILD STUFF AND PURE SWAG

It's both fun and frustrating to follow the high technology business. The rate of change boggles the mind, and makes for an interesting life. It's often the case, though, that users can get left behind with hardware that becomes obsolete in remarkably little time. Also, there's the Betamax syndrome: no one wants to get saddled with gear that's useless in a couple of years.

With that thought in mind, let's look at some near term developments, then engage in some speculation about the future of mass storage.

CLOSE ENOUGH FOR LOCK ON

Ultra SCSI is the latest incarnation in the evolution of the SCSI standard. Ultra SCSI is backward compatible with both standard SCSI and wide SCSI devices. However, ultra SCSI disk drives will be capable of transferring information at twice the rate of the equivalent, older SCSI device. Ultra SCSI supports 8-bit wide and 16-bit wide gear. (Standard SCSI moves data 8 bits at a time, wide SCSI in 16 bit chunks.) This means that, in theory, a 16-bit wide, ultra SCSI hard disk can transfer data at 40 megabytes per second. In reality, no single hard disk can move data this fast, but a disk array of multiple drives could do it. Quantum will be delivering ultra SCSI hard drives by the time you read this; Adaptec will be first out the door with ultra SCSI host adapters.

In the area of removable drives, Iomega, the folks that brought you the innovative Zip drive, is poised to release the Jaz. Jaz is a 1.3 gigabyte, removable hard disk. The performance is likely to be a bit slower than fixed hard disks, but not by much. The packaging looks to be just as appealing as the Zip's package. The Jaz will probably cost between \$500 and \$700, and the gigabyte cartridges will be around \$100—definitely a cost effective way to keep up. Syquest is also working on a high capacity removable, but there wasn't much information available at press time. The Syquest

drive will probably be available in early 1996.

Another interesting device which should be shipping by now comes to us from Pinnacle Micro. Pinnacle is shipping a 4.3 gigabyte optical cartridge drive. Pinnacle claims that their optical cartridge is as fast as a hard drive, but that's questionable. SBLI, at \$1,695 (including one 4.3 gig cartridge) and \$199 per cartridge, it bears checking out.

OVER THE HORIZON

Disk drive technology marches on. A few months ago, IBM announced a technology which can increase disk drive capacity by ten times, with no added cost. In the same space taken up by a gigabyte, you could have ten gigabytes. Performance would go up, too, since a higher data density makes for faster transfers and accesses.

Another cool standard was developed by Apple (not exactly famous for its past participation in the standards process). Known colloquially as "Firewire," AKA, IEEE 1294, it's a serial interface that can move data at over 100 megabits per second (about 13 megabytes per second), and is supposed to be very cheap to implement.

An even higher performance standard already used in UNIX workstations is Fibre Channel. However, we're not aware of any development of Fibre Channel for the PC world in the near future. The neat thing about both Firewire and Fibre Channel is the distance factor. SCSI is limited to a few feet, but the newer standards have a lot more leeway. You could have your disk drives in a completely different room than your computer!

Another interesting development will be rewritable CD-RDMs. These are not to be confused with CD-RDM burners (which you can get, but once you burn a CD, it's there forever). Instead, you'll be able to use the same disk, over and over again. The technology exists, but paranoia in the music business and high costs have prevented these drives from entering the market. It's inevitable that someone will do it someday.

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CD-ROM STANDARDS: ACRONYM MAGIC

When you look at the side of a CD-ROM package, you're likely to see some gobbledygook that looks like this:

"Supports multisession PhotoCD, CD-ROM XA and MPC level 2"

What do these actually mean?

When CD-ROM was first developed, it was envisioned as a single storage platter, much like an high capacity floppy disk. Of course, you could only write to it once, but that seemed a small sacrifice for convenience and high capacity.

After CD-ROMs hit the streets, users and developers quickly discovered they needed more than just a floppy disk you couldn't write to. So some supporting standards were developed.

MPC LEVEL 2 AND 3

The Multimedia Personal Computer standard is developed by a committee, and really defines a host of standards, including graphics, audio, CD and processor standards. For CD-ROMs, MPC level 2 means a drive capable of delivering a minimum of 300 kilobytes of data per second. This usually means a double-speed CD. Also, a minimum average access time of 400 milliseconds is required. MPC level 3 moves the standard up to 600 KB per second.

MULTISESSION PHOTO CD

Several years ago, Kodak introduced the Photo CD standard. Photo CD defines a way of storing high resolution images on a CD-ROM in a specific format. There's even some room for audio tracks. From the beginning, Photo CDs were meant to be multisession. This means that all true Photo CD disks can have new images added to them later. Note that Photo CD, like any other CD-ROM, can only be written to once, so each new image or set of images uses up more space, up to a limit of about 100 total images. This capability to add data later was essential for the consumer market. For less than a buck, you can add a new photograph from your own library to your Photo CD. Note that while the first "session" can be accessed by older CD-ROM drives, you need multisession capability to read the images added later.

CD-ROM XA

XA stands for "eXtended Architecture". In a nutshell, XA defines a specific way of laying out audio and data (usually graphics) in a specific way (called "interleaving"), to help maintain

synchronization between the audio and the graphics. XA compatibility also means the CD-ROM drive itself has some additional smarts to manage the stream of data as it's being read of the CD, thus offloading the main computer somewhat.

RED BOOK

Red Book was the original CD audio standard, you know, the kind you play in your home stereo. Sometimes in computer games, the manual will point out that the sound is "red book audio." This is redundant, as red book implies audio. Some games, such as *MechWarrior 2* and *Reverend*, use red book tracks for the game's music. In a mixed mode CD-ROM such as these, track one is always the data track. You can actually put one of these CDs in your music CD player and play tracks 2 and greater, but don't play track 1 (see below).

DIGITAL VIDEO DISK (DVD)

DVD will be the successor to today's CD-ROMs and audio CDs. It will also probably replace the laserdisc for high definition video.

Initially, it looked like the industry was going to repeat the past. Remember Betamax? Remember the 8-track? Remember...well, you got the picture. Two competing consortia, one headed by Sony/Philips and the other led by Toshiba, were proposing divergent standards. In September, they finally agreed to converge their disparate technologies into a single standard. The DVD will likely be a double-sided disk, the size of one of today's CDs, but a bit thicker. It will be capable of holding 4.7 gigabytes of uncompressed data. It will also support MPEG-2 compression for video, which means that movies on DVD will be higher quality than today's super VHS and as good as the best laserdiscs.

The two rival camps were brought together by the computer industry. The information technology companies didn't want to get caught in the crossfire, so a committee of various computer industry companies (many of whom are competitors) brought the two sides together and brokered the agreement. The first DVD consumer drives will probably arrive in Fall of 1996.

CD PLUS

CD Plus is the latest candidate in the plethora of CD formats. CD Plus is a spin on multisession CDs (pun intended.) The goal of CD Plus is

"Hi, I'm Professor B. Maggio, the inventor of the Aura Interactor Cushion. After a career at the computer, I was looking for something a little more exciting to do—since bungee jumping's out (weak ankles), I invented the Interactor Cushion. Hook it up to your PC, TV, stereo, whatever, and the patented electro-magnetic actuation technology turns sound into impulses you can actually feel, adding an exciting 3D dimension to practically any medium. You'll want to be at your PC seven days a week, if you're ~~not~~ already. Call us at 800-909-AURA and find out where to get yours."

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to create a mixed CD format suitable for use by recording companies. The focus of the CD is music, but there would be multimedia data containing, say, interviews with the star, or other French material.

There have been mixed mod. CDs in the past, but almost all of them have used track one as the data track, with tracks 2 and on being the red book audio tracks. Inadvertently playing the data track (track 1) in a stereo system could potentially damage speakers, particularly at high volumes.

CD Plus is a multisession format, with the audio tracks recorded in the first session and the data track as the second session. CD Plus support will require new drivers, but not new hardware (if your drive is multisession capable.) Win 95 has CD Plus support built in. There is even work being done on a standard presentation format, so CD Plus disks could run in any computer. Overall, CD Plus looks to be an interesting format, but it's unlikely we'll see much use of it in the game community.

and also support telephone numbers are pasted to the underside of the case. It only comes in an external version, and with either a parallel or SCSI interface.

The cartridges look like slightly bloated 3.5 inch floppies. The performance of the Zip drive is on a par with hard disks of a few years ago - not particularly fast, but acceptable. You can't boot from the Zip drive. There are 25 and 100 megabyte cartridges. The power pack is a bit on the heavy side (albeit lighter than the EZ135's power pack), but you can order an international power supply that's much lighter for an additional \$30.

For PC users, the parallel version is the nifty one to use. It plugs in easily into the parallel port, and you only need to load a single TSR (which you can carry around on a floppy) to enable it. The 100 megabyte cartridges make for a terrific backup medium, and maybe to store less frequently used games. This is definitely worth check-

ing out. Now we finally have a way of transporting the multi-megabyte game demo downloads that seem to be all the rage.

Price: \$199 (SCSI or parallel port). Call (800) 697-8833 for more information. Web: <http://www.omega.com>

SYQUEST EZ135

The EZ135 (a scaled down, low-cost version of SyQuest's removable cartridge, 270 megabyte hard disk—the SQ217) is positioned squarely against the Iomega Zip Drive (see above). However, we found it to be a somewhat different animal, to wit: the EZ135 is really a removable, 135 megabyte hard disk. The cartridges are fatter than the Zip cartridges, and more fragile. Also, the drive is bulkier and heavier than the Zip drive. It's much quicker, though, with access times of around 14 milliseconds and transfer rates nearly as fast as today's hard disks. Since car-

Hard Drives and CD-ROM Drives

HARD DRIVES

Company	Product	Capacity	Interface	Transfer Type	Max Transfer Rate+	Avg. Access Time	Price
Quantum	Fireball 1080	1.08 GB	EIDE**	Mode 4 PIO	16.6 MB / Sec	12ms	\$230*
Maxtor	Darango 7000	1.6 GB	EIDE	Mode 3 PIO	16.6 MB / Sec	12ms	\$449
Quantum	Grand Prix	4.3 GB	SCSI***	SCSI	10 MB / Sec	8.6ms	\$370*
Western Digital	Caviar AC31600	1.6 GB	EIDE	Mode 4 PIO	16.6 MB / Sec	10.5ms	\$499

* Street price

** Available as SCSI

*** Wide SCSI version available

+ All transfer rates hard only, megabytes/sec

CD ROM DRIVES

Company	Product	Type	Interface	Access Time*	Transfer Rate+	Price
Creative Labs	Performance 4x Upgrade Kit	Kit	EIDE	210 msec	592,138 bytes / sec	\$429
Creative Labs	Blaster CD 6x	Drive	EIDE	211 msec	952,223 bytes / sec	\$299
Diamond	Multimedia Kit 7000 (4x)	Kit	EIDE	262 msec	612,734 bytes / sec	\$399
Diamond	Ultra Kit 8000 (8x)	Kit	EIDE	221 msec	1,236,218 bytes / sec	\$649
NEC	4Xc Quad Speed CD Changer	Drive	SCSI	320 msec	612,734 bytes / sec	\$349
Plextor	Plextor 6Plex 6 Speed CD	Drive	SCSI	173 msec	927,164 bytes / sec	\$509 / \$599
Turtle Beach	Quad Speed 3CD Changer Kit	Kit	EIDE	320 msec	612,734 bytes / sec	\$399

*As reported by MPC Wizard 3.0

+As reported by Win Commander 3.0 test

* Internal drive

+ External drive

Notes:

Creative 4X is also available as a stand-alone drive.

Creative 6X comes w/ EIDE interface.

Turtle Beach Kit does not have a sound card, but does have speakers, microphone & headphone.



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tridges are only \$20, it's not a bad way to add hard drive space. Unlike the Zip drive, you can boot from the EZ135. If you want to have unlimited hard drive space in 135 megabyte chunks, then the EZ135 is a nice solution for adding more disk space, but it's not as good as the Zip drive as a portable data transfer solution. On top of that, it just doesn't feel as, well, cool.

Price: Internal IDE, \$199.95, external SCSI, \$239.95. Call (800) 245-2278 for more information. Web: N/A

OMEGA ZIP DRIVE



that offer higher performance and more space and a price per megabyte that was unthinkable only a year ago. We've also taken a look at some creative, weird and cute solutions to the need for more space, not to mention better CD-ROM drives. Despite all this innovation, there's even cooler, new solutions waiting in the wings. Like all technologies, the pace of change is staggering.

The key is to evaluate your needs with an eye towards the future. It's probably better to spring for a slightly bigger, slightly faster drive now, so a future upgrade can be delayed a bit more. Hard disks and CD-ROM drives have finally reached performance points that will be good enough for the next year or two, anyway. At least, you won't have to upgrade until Across the Rhine II ships. ☹

CONCLUSIONS

Bigger games, bigger operating systems and heavier use of online services and the Internet all force the use of more and more storage space. The industry has stepped up to the plate, with disk drives

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December 8, 1995.



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Nocturnal Rhythms



WELL, THUNDERSCAPE, THE NEW NON-TSR ROLE-PLAYING SERIES is here from Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI), set in their *World of Aden*. Aden (to put it mildly) is not a great place to

live. Ten years ago, most of it was overrun by nocturnals, evil creatures of vicious disposition and bloodthirsty habits. Only the Northlands, protected by a magical barrier, were able to survive the onslaught. Now the nocturnals have brought the barrier down, leaving the Northlands defenseless. Your task is to travel to Vanguard Keep at Skelon's Pass and restore the magical shield before the monsters come pouring through.

You begin by choosing a party of four characters. For a quick start, go with the pre-created group that comes with the game, and play around with them to get a feel for the new system before making your own characters. Alter-

natively, the Quick Generation method lets you choose race and gender (gender has no effect on stats), and then pick a profession from a list of templates. Each profession comes with the stats and a set of skills already set up for it; you simply take whichever one you want.

If you want to flesh out every aspect of your character, go for Detailed Generation. Here, every race comes with a base number for each stat (strength, dexterity, intelligence, will, and health), and you have 25 points to allocate and increase them. Once set, the stats do not change unless magically augmented (this holds for all methods of creation). Then you decide on the skills you want the character to have. There are two types, combat and non-combat. Combat skills are by weapon class (sword, bow, axe, polearm etc.) and miscellaneous ones such as stealth, shield, acrobatics, and martial arts. Non-combat skills include spellcasting, fast talk, merchant, lockpicking, pickpocket, see secrets, and xenology (which tells you about the opponents you're fighting).

At the start, you have 100 points to put into the skills, which are lumped together. Afterwards, as new levels are gained, a variable number of points is given separately for combat and non-combat skills. Over time, skills can go up well over a hundred; there seems to be no limit to how far any skill can be advanced. For combat skills, extra attacks are gained every 150 points: one attack at the start, two at 150, three at 300, four at 450, and so on. Because points are doled out separately, over time every person in the party can develop into both a formidable fighter and expert spellcaster.

As the spellcasting rating of **by Scorpia**

THUNDERSCAPE,
SSI'S FIRST NON-
TSR ADVENTURE,
TURNS HACK &
SLASH INTO A LIFE-
LONG OCCUPATION

SCARY SIGHT

To whet our appetite while we patiently await the next game in the *Wizard* series, Sir-Tech will release a *Wizard* Gaus compilation set. Those not into nostalgia are better advised to check out Sir-Tech's upcoming *Duon*. Although the sumptuous graphics and near-invisible interface will make the game more accessible to novices, the depth of the game world bucks the current trend of short RPGs. The multiple subquests allow for a lot of gameplay in addition to the main plotline, and let you scope out five mysterious islands for the secrets behind those strange druidic rituals.

Zax is resurrected once again in *Zax Nexus*, but unlike *Return to Zax*, this time Michelle Em is not writing the script. The game is set in the time period of *Zax I-III* to entice fans of the classic, and is set in the uncharted *Forbidden Lands* beyond the Great Underground Empire, due in the Spring of '96.

a character becomes higher, more powerful spells are offered: with each level gained, one new spell can be chosen from the list. Regardless of how high the spell-casting skill goes, a character can cast only one spell per round. Spells require mana: for example, the basic Lightning Bolt costs eight points of mana, then each level of increased effectiveness costs an increment of four points. You can put as much mana into any spell as the character has at the moment. If combat ends before the spell goes off, the mana is not used up. Mana regenerates over time, and there are some potions that can speed up the renewal.

New skills can be learned at any level gained, simply by putting some points into the ones you want the character to know. Generally, it is best to stick with original skills until the character gains proficiency. Points at level gain are not overly generous, and advancement naturally slows down if you start splitting the points among too many skills. NPCs who join the party gain experience, advance their skills and are controlled in combat exactly the same way as your own party members.

A LITTLE MAN

While the game has 3D perspective, combat is in the MIGHT & MAGIC mode: it goes by turns, giving you time to decide on each character's actions. This includes striking a blow (there are several possibilities, depending on the weapon being wielded), dodging, casting a spell, using an item, switching weapons, or running (this applies to the whole party, not an individual). There is also an option to "repeat last command," a handy way of

speeding things up in multiple round combats. All fights are to the death, unless the party chooses to run.

Every character has four inventory bags, each bag having eight slots, allowing for thirty-two items per person, plus whatever weapons and armor are equipped on the character. Encumbrance



ROUGH & READY Detailed Generation characters take longer, but are more interesting. We've made our dashing male Faerkin a hard-working acrobatic xenologist, with a fondness for leather and big, nasty swords.

is not a factor; regardless of strength, party members can carry anything without penalty.

The game's automap is among the most horrible I have ever seen—difficult to follow or even describe. Even though you eventually get the hang of it, the map often shows walls where there are none, or no walls where some stand. Sometimes the party doesn't show up on the map, and—worst of all—the map shows areas you haven't really been to yet. So, more than once I had to waste time backtracking to find places I hadn't been to before, in spite of what the map displayed. The map's one good feature is that it shows the locations of monsters on the level.

THUNDERSCAPE is your basic linear, hack-and-slash game. The party travels through a variety of dungeons, slaughtering hordes of critters, finding the occasional Neat Item, solving some puzzles, and finally having it out with Foosle at the end. There's nothing wrong with that, and if the game had ended at Vanguard Keep, it would have been a good introduction to the new engine and new world. The beginning is well-balanced: the opposition is tough enough without being overwhelming, there are just enough Neat Things to

find, and several set combats that are challenging without forcing you to do them over and over again to win.

Unfortunately, Vanguard Keep is only about the first quarter of the game. Having restored the shield beacons at the Keep, you now have to get across the pass to the Radiant Castle and perform a similar task there. This is where THUNDERSCAPE descends from "good start" to "interminable bore." There were moments I despaired of ever finishing this one in time to write the article.

To reach the Radiant Castle, you must endure the following: Go through the Ogre Caves. Trek through the Steam Tunnels. March through three levels of the Dwarven

Mines, which brings you to the Dwarf city of Karegh-Konan, which is overrun by nocturnals. Here you wander around until you happen on the book with instructions for continuing your journey to the Castle.

This involves going from the upper city (where you entered), to the lower city, where you have to find the Founder's Gate, and pass through that into the Founder's Caves. The Caves lead you back to another section of Karegh-Konan, where you go looking for the Final Gates.

Despite their name, the Final Gates open onto *another* series of caves, which take you to the crypts. The undead Welcome Wagon generates zombies at an amazing rate, until you make it through to the sewers. Finally, reaching the Radiant Castle, you find four more levels to search.

All of these areas are large, many are complicated, and most have puzzles to solve before you can proceed to the next section. After a while, despite being different areas, everything begins to look the same, a feeling enhanced by the fact that a number of monster graphics are re-used for several critters.

I don't mind a long game, but all these

Thunderscape

Price: \$69.95

System

Requirements: IBM compatible 486/50 or better, 8 MB RAM, 20 MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, supports most major sound cards.

Protection: None

Designers: Chris Carr, Russ Brown

Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc.

Summerville, CA

(800) 243-4525



tunnels, caves, etc. are simply refreshes of each other, padding that stretches the game out to an exhausting length. If the

first one, you've already found much better equipment in the dungeons, and the second store has even less to sell than the other. The shops are really only good for identifying items you've picked up along the way. Speaking of which, this game needs some sort of identify spell the player can cast to learn about items. Once past the Dwarf city, there is no way at all to learn much about any of the Neat Items you

save directory), and going back up. That reset everything properly.

Both of those are "obscure" bugs. They don't happen to the majority of players, and SSI does not yet know exactly what causes them to occur, but it is possible you may run into one or both of them. Should that happen, call SSI about it for instructions on what to do.

Overall, THUNDERSCAPE is the type of game I find most irksome: good stuff gone wrong. I like the new engine, with its skill-based system, and the control the player has over character development. Turn-based combat was a pleasure to experience again, after so many games that require the digital virtuosity of an accomplished pianist. Monsters are generally balanced enough so that not every combat is a desperate fight for your life. A judicious selection of Neat Items is available for the characters. Up through Vanguard Keep, despite the flaws, I enjoyed the game.

However, the time put into designing the endless tunnels, etc. would have been better spent in cleaning up the engine and movement system. More thought should have gone into the non-combat skills, and some of them either eliminated or given more scope than they have. Much of the "treasure" in the latter part of the game is trash: gold has little use, and when everyone

is decked out in better than plate mail, who needs fur boots? Less jumping around (especially with the awkward controls) would also have been a great improvement.

Still, I'd like to see the series continue. It has possibilities, especially if they can get in some real role-playing elements, revamp the automap (desperately needed), and tighten up the overall play to avoid redundancy. In the meantime, THUNDERSCAPE is likely to appeal most to the devoted hack-and-slasher, who doesn't mind indulging in what could be a lifetime project. ☹



DON'T BUZZ ME The turn-based combat works well, including such unusual moves as shield-bashing.

designers wanted to give us our money's worth, that could have been accomplished with Ogre Cave/one level of mines/one level of Karegh-Konara/ either crypts or sewers/Radiant Castle. That, along with the Vanguard Keep section, would have been plenty without overdoing it.

The engine has its problems, too. Movement is by mouse or keyboard; I soon gave up on the mouse and used the keys. Even so, control is very imprecise and clumsy. Except in narrow corridors, it was impossible to keep the party moving straight for very long, and trying to maneuver the party exactly where I wanted it was often an irritating experience.

The software appears to have no sense of terrain or obstacles. It is possible to fight monsters on the other side of solid walls, behind closed doors, in the next room, and across chasms. On other occasions, the party was practically on top of monsters, but combat didn't start automatically as it should have. Obviously, the engine is in need of some serious overhauling here.

There are only four save positions, which is far too few for a game of this type. I'd gladly give up the little "position picture" of each save for six more slots. Some skills were totally useless: merchant, fast talk, and pickpocket. There are only two shops in the game, one at the beginning and one in Karegh-Konara. By the time you can afford anything at

find aside from equipping them, and that doesn't always tell you everything.

I ran into two serious game-stopping bugs, both in the Radiant Castle. On level one, after reading a certain scroll, you're



FIREWORKS DISPLAY Accumulate enough mana, and spells, pyrotechnics and mayhem are but scant mouse clicks away.

supposed to find a book sticking out on one of the library shelves. That book never appeared for me, regardless of what I tried, and without that book, you can't get to the next level. I ended up sending a save game to SSI so this could be fixed.

On level two, there are some crushing walls you have to run past, then make a quick turn to the south. Unfortunately, there was a large stone block to the south that just wouldn't go away. This time, I obtained instructions from SSI and performed the fix myself, which involved returning to level one, saving the game, deleting the data file for level 2 (in that

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A man's head is shown in profile, facing away from the camera. The head is illuminated from the side, highlighting the back of the head and the ears. The background is dark and textured, resembling water or a rough surface. The text is printed on the forehead in a yellow, sans-serif font.

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Dragoth's Demise

How To Keep Your Skull In *DUNGEON MASTER II*

by Scorpia

SO, WE MADE IT THROUGH THE SUMMER (NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON!), AND AUTUMN IS WITH US AT LAST. Fred's much perkier now that the days are growing short again—and who knows, perhaps even the game market might perk up a little, too. In the meantime, there's still a dungeon or two to delve in while we wait.

Not that *DUNGEON MASTER II* actually requires a lot of delving. The basic idea is to gather up the four clan keys, enter Skull Keep, get the machinery running again, and step through the Zo Gate to fight it out with Dragoth. In between, you spend a lot of time just building up your party for the final confrontation. There's a lot of make-work here, and it really can't be avoided if you want to be strong enough for the end game.



AMORPHOUS ENEMY For what is essentially a back-n'-forth, Tennessee throws a variety of critters at your happy crew. Avoid fights when you can, and use your min-max wisely.

HAVING A PARTY

The composition of the party is your first and foremost consideration. Given enough time, anyone can learn the four professions of Fighter, Ninja, Priest, and Wizard, so it's a good idea to bring the characters up in all of these. Each level

gained in each profession gives a character more hit points, and often raises the stats of strength, dexterity, etc., as well.

You should choose characters who begin the game with mana, as it's a little easier to bring them up in the spellcasting skills. Strength, which grows mainly from fighting skill, is equally important. Strong characters can cury more without being encumbered, and there are sections in the game (mainly the timed sequences) where encumbered characters can make life very difficult, if not impossible.

So, all the party members have to work on all their skills, right from the start. It is entirely possible to improve the overall ability of your team (especially in the early levels) just by hanging out somewhere safe and practicing. Put weapons in the characters' hands and have them swing away to build fighter skill. Punch and kick empty air (or throw rocks at the wall) to increase ninja levels. Cast as many priest and wizard spells as possible, and do more fighter/ninja stuff while you wait for the mana to return.

This is boring, but it does work if you have the patience to go through with it. Eventually, of course, you'll want to go out into the real world and fight real monsters. Buy the best weapons you can afford,

and worry about armor later. Save up so you can purchase Blue Steele and Excysmyr, the two best swords for this stage of the game.

RHINO DINO LAND

Once past the worms, you come to the



rhino-dino area. These critters regenerate constantly (as do most of the others from now on), and will probably be your main target for some time. They leave juicy steaks behind when killed (I prefer medium-rare) and can also get you extra cash at the village tavern. The bats down below don't bring as much money, but you can fight them when the dinos become boring. Some of the bat caves even have regenerating green gems, which help to build up the money pool.

Around behind the first bat-ladder in the dino area is the first clan key. The whirlwinds that guard this area throw a mean lightning bolt, and can only be damaged by the Harm Non-Material spell. The best thing to do here is run in, grab everything from the altar, and run out again. Repeat this process in the next area to get the second clan key. The wolves are expert at hit-and-run, slipping in from the rear or side to clonp on the party, so fast movement is a must. With advanced characters, try leaving some guard minions around to keep the wolves at bay while you look for the key.

You'll also encounter some short, red-headed thieves on the way to the wolves. These guys will steal anything that is held in hand. The simplest way to deal with this is to go by them empty-handed. If anything does get stolen, look around the area for their dropoff point, where you can reclaim the items.

The third clan key is in an area inhabited by axmen, who, like the redheads, steal whatever is held in hand. However, so long as you give the altar a wide berth, they won't bother you much. You'll want to explore this section to find the shops, so leave the clan key for later.

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DUNGEON DISCOUNT

While you're at the shops, buy two gears and two fuses. This will be a great timesaver later on in the Keep. Also, buy a Vorax: it's a good weapon, and useful in the end game against Dragoth. Better yet, this blue-light special is the only weapon you may buy in multiple quantities, so buy two if you have the cash (and, no, they don't take *Dungeon Express*).

The last key (finally!) is in a building past a graveyard (use Harm Non-Material for any ghosts) and a swamp (Attack Minions and Fireballs work well against the nasty tree monsters). You'll have to cross a floor with moving pits more than once to obtain the key. However, I found that the pits never opened directly below a scout minion (called up via the scout map). By sending the minion ahead, and moving quickly to its square, you can cross the floor without mishaps.

About now, Evil Attack Minions (EAMs) start showing up. Unlike other critters, these aren't bound to a particular area and will follow you anywhere, merrily blasting away at the party. Use your attack minions or hole up in a room/corridor and put up a guard minion.

Obtaining the fourth clan key is a little different: there is no altar here, only the key sitting on the table, always just out of reach. If you think for a bit, you'll realize you've been in this situation before. Doing the appropriate thing will get you the key.

VISIT GRINNING SKULL KEEP

Before you go bouncing into Skull Keep, there are some things to keep in mind. During your trek through the castle, EAMs will be coming after the party constantly—first solo, then later on in twos and threes. Use your own minions to deal with them, and post guard minions in corridors or doorways while you proceed through the castle.

You may need to leave from time to time to replenish supplies or rest up and restore mana. Using the tech shield on those stars/circles will bring you back to the village. Since EAMs can show up here, too, the safest place to rest is the house you started in. Simply go to the inner room, shut the door, and pull the key out of the lock (you may want to post a guard minion just outside the door, as



PARTY MAGES Clitus would be a good addition to your party, because he's a decent fighter and you can boost his mana later on.



ARMED FOR BEAR Sure, having Exocmyr is great, but don't forget to pick up some extra fuses—you'll need them after you take out the Slayer Archers.

well). As long as the key is not in the lock, the EAMs can't open the door, and you can take as long as you need to make potions, rest up, or whatever.

After the main door to Skull Keep is open, you must pass the first timed-sequence puzzle. Stand facing into the alcove, so all three buttons are reachable without turning. Push the buttons and listen carefully to determine which button controls which door. Cast a speed spell on the party, push all three buttons in the right order, and back up down the corridor as fast as you can. Be certain that no one in the party is encumbered. Drop stuff, or shift items around if necessary. You may need to go through this several times before making it past the doors.

The next area has a room full of mages. You'll have to kill them to open the door to the next section. The trident-wielder is extremely dangerous (that weapon shoots multiple fireballs), so isolate him in the other room—pushing the table out and then across the opening when he's in the room works nicely—and leave him for last. Poison spells are also good here.

You'll need a carry minion (created from the minion map) to help you past the next part, which leads to the fireball

corridor. This looks like a timed sequence, but really isn't. Check around for secret walls here.

The gear doors that come next are a pain, but the extra gears you bought earlier (plus one you should have found in the keep and the one that appears in the niche) make things a bit easier. A little experimentation will show you how the doors work (and the pits), and there will be much back and forth here before you get through the last door.

That brings you to the first machine room. Here you find a boiler, turbine, furnace gauge, and ladder down to the caves under the Keep. You must go down there and kill the extremely nasty Troll to release the rock men. They feed the furnace and keep the fires burning. Eventually, evil minions will show up to keep them away, and you'll have to return here to clear out the area. Don't worry about that now; you can save restarting the furnace for when you're ready to open the Zo Gate. Freeing the rock men is all you need to do at the moment.

Back upstairs and in the next section, you have to cross a pit that rapidly opens and closes. I found the best way to do this was to walk across the plate, stop just in front of the pit momentarily, then dash across when it closes.

Beyond is the ladder to the Slayer Archers, who regenerate, so trying to kill them all is a hopeless task. You're better off dancing around this area and avoiding them whenever possible. If fighting is necessary, use fireballs against them (weapons don't do a lot of damage). Go over this section carefully, as it is quite important. The annoying floating chest holds a fuse, but since you bought extras at the shop (I hope), you don't have to bother with it (sufficient damage will cause the chest to drop to the floor).

After you use the master key to unlock the door, take the key back (this is the only key that is used more than once in the game, and there is no way of knowing

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MATURE

M

AGES 17+

ORIGIN

that ahead of time...unless you're reading this article, heh). When you reach the room with the tables, just smash them with voraxes. This takes you to the annoying ram pits area. Long poles ending in ram heads push out from the walls, and will knock you into pits if you don't move past them quickly enough. Past those are the equally annoying moving teleporters. Luckily, you can pass them the same way you passed the moving pits from the fourth key region: with a scout minion.

In the room with the reflectors, the easy method is to send a scout minion over to the bulls-eye, then step on the fireball plate. That will close the pits. You can also push one of the reflectors across the doorway to keep out unwanted guests.

Beyond is the control room, where (with the help of a speed spell), you must run past the electrical arcs (yes, another timed sequence). The switch in the next room will turn the arcs off for a short time. The keys here give some people trouble. You can only take one at a time; trying to grab both will cause you to be permanently stuck. Use the onyx key first, then return it

to the niche and take the other one.

Now you've finally reached the Zo Gate room. After you get the reflectors set up properly (with a little trial and error), everything will be working except the electricity. This is the time to return to the caves and clean out all the evil minions so the rock men can get the furnace going again. On your way back up, stop off in the first machine room and start up the turbine next to the boiler. You may have to pull the switch several times before it starts. I suggest saving the game before opening the Zo Gate, just in case you aren't as prepared as you think for the final encounter. Once opened, the gate can't be closed again.

The void is a completely open area, with cloud banks to walk on. To your left, as you step through the gate, is the cloud where Dragoth waits. However, you must go north and cross the two disappearing bridges to reach him. Dragoth is tough. He has his own attack minions, a lot of hit points, and is very handy with spell reflection. You need to be very fast, very careful (one wrong step and over the side

you go), and probably very lucky, as well.

The best tactic is to divert his attention with your own minions (he really hates those), while you dance around and cast spells at his back, while avoiding shots from his minions. All your party members can go in with one ready minion spell, but after that, you'll have to create them on the fly (remember, this is all real-time). When Dragoth has been weakened enough, finish him off with voraxes. Or, if you still have some mana left, keep up with the minion spells.

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

On Delphi: Stop by the GameSIG (under the Groups and Clubs menu). On Genie: Visit the Games RoundTable (type Scorpio to reach the Games RT). By U.S. Mail (enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you live in the United States): Scorpio, PO Box 338, Gracie Station, New York NY 10028.

Until next time, happy adventuring! ☺

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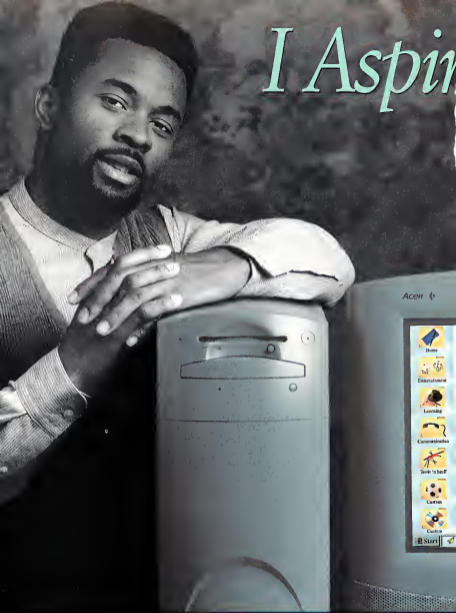
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Cover Reader Service #440



The Mysts Of Time

Sanctuary Woods' *BURIED IN TIME*
Leaves *THE JOURNEYMAN PROJECT* Far Behind

by Charles Arda

THOSE OF US WHO REMEMBER PONG CAN ONLY GAPE IN SILENT AWE WHEN FACED WITH A WORK LIKE *BURIED IN TIME*. The current crop of adventure games, with their graphics so rich it makes your saliva run and your fingertips tingle, are an inconceivable leap forward from what computer games used to be. How do you get from two white lines batting a

dot back and forth to...this? To walking through thousands of frames of exotic environments photo-realistically rendered, through the mud and stone and timber of medieval France, through the vaults and archways and millioned galleries of Leonardo da Vinci's Italy? Sooner ask a cave-man to imagine the Concorde, ask Gutenberg to imagine his bible inscribed on the head of a pin, than ask a boy in 1975 to imagine what he would see on his computer screen just twenty years hence.

Time travel. At one point in *BURIED IN TIME*, the era-hopping fugitive you play encounters an artificial intelligence trapped in the computers of a ruined

space station. It's seventy years in his past, two hundred fifty years in our future. The astonished AI, who calls himself "Art," scans the time traveller's chronosuit and recognizes just enough that's familiar to be properly dumbstruck. "The technology I'm reading in your suit is astounding," Art says. "It almost seems like an evolution of mine!"

Relativity. In the game's first scene, as you wander around the apartment of your future self (the year is 2328, and you're in his apartment for reasons too complicated to go into here), you find a toy on the kitchen counter. There are these two vertical panels, and suspended in the air between them is a sphere. When you touch the sphere it goes caroming back and forth between the panels, which bend and contort when it touches them like those famous sketches of space-time distortion in the presence of a black hole: Pong 2328. One is tempted to ape Art's awe: says the 1975 videogame to *BURIED IN TIME*, "The technology I see is

astounding...it almost seems like an evolution of mine."

QUALITY TIME

I didn't expect to like *BURIED IN TIME*. I didn't especially care for the first game of the series, *THE JOURNEYMAN PROJECT*, even though that game sold a lot of copies and impressed a lot of reviewers. You spent the better part of the game walking through claustrophobic, high-tech corridors, with heavy metal doors irising open and shut around you. The menaces you fought were Japanese-style robots, with all the clanking, grinding bother that is customary in the genre. Movement was cumbersome and clumsy: you lurched from location to location with heavy-footed steps. It was hard to get your bearings. I kept walking into walls.

BURIED IN TIME doesn't correct all these problems. You're still wearing a monstrosity of a spacesuit, making you look less like a chrononaut than a deep-sea diver. Movement is still a far cry from fluid. Unless all you want to do is move forward, in which case you can get a little animated momentum going, movement is a matter of turning left or right (and looking up or down) a number of times until you're facing the direction you want to go, and then moving forward.

There is no way to move backwards; there is no way to move



Buried in Time

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TIME-TRAVEL IN STYLE As you journey to medieval France and exotic Mayan temples, it's hard to believe that these gorgeous views are actual gameplay screens.

sideways. This is a pain. When you're trying to race out of Richard the Lionhearted's bedchamber before his guards discover you, it's a royal pain. And when you're in the castle stairwell with a knight waving his blade at you, I am afraid it can turn out to be a bloody pain.

But **BURIED IN TIME** is an enormously satisfying game in spite of all this. You know it as soon as the game starts, deep in your gut where such knowledge always lurks. It's the feeling you get ten minutes into a movie when you know the next hundred minutes will be sheer joy. **BURIED IN TIME**'s opening sequence, which results in your being catapulted ten years into the future while your future self is arrested for the crime of "time travel with the intent to change history,"

sets up an intriguing premise and a highly-charged level of suspense. And despite the game's weaker points, it never lets you down from this early high.

Not that every sequence moves at the opening scene's bewildering pace, of course; there are plenty in which you poke through deserted caverns and empty rooms more or less at your leisure. But that just means there's quiet suspense as well as loud. Tiptoeing through Leonardo's studio and King John's private cellar in search of clues that might lead you to the fellow agent who framed you can be both suspenseful and exciting—you never know when you might open a door and unexpectedly glimpse your nemesis, escaping into the mists of time an instant before you can grab him.



Then there are the settings, in and of themselves a source of excitement and suspense. In addition to France and Italy, the story takes you to outer space (where you find Art) and to the ancient Mayan empire. Your goal is to collect evidence that will convince the authorities that you are innocent—a time traveler's bootprint in

the soil by the French castle, some anachronistic litter left outside the entrance to a Mayan temple—while avoiding all contact with the natives. (This is not easy to do when you land in the middle of an invasion, as you do in France, or surrounded by Indians who want to worship you as a god, as you do in Mexico.)

Meanwhile, you are also kept busy collecting such items as you can (a bloody arrow, a Mayan bracelet, a skull) in the hopes that they might help you out of a scrape later in the game. Or else you aren't. If you're not the puzzle-solving type and feel you have your hands full just finding your way around and collecting evidence, you can play the game on "Walkthrough" mode. If you do this (as opposed to choosing "Adventure" mode), you still have to explore the same locations, but most of the hairier puzzles are taken out of your way.

For example, in Walkthrough mode, when you see the door that stands between you and your first meeting with Art, you, well, walk through it. In Adventure mode, you try to walk through it and hear, "Pressure variance too great. Door may not be opened until pressure is equalized." Then it's back to the docking bay to figure out how to equalize the pressure.

TIME TESTED

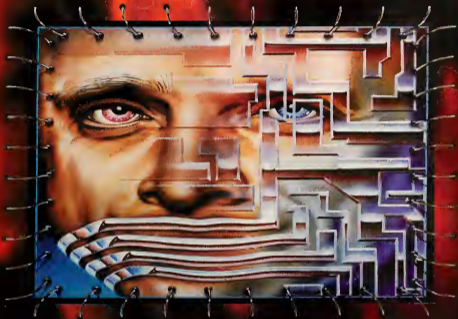
The decision to offer two modes of gameplay was a good one, though regrettably there is no way to switch from one to the other after you have started a game. You have to decide in advance: am I in this just for the view and the story, or do I really want to take the plunge?



WHO ARE YOU? One of the weirdest parts of the story is that you must travel in time to warn yourself of impending events. Strangely enough, the story is compelling.

HARLAN ELLISON

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If you do take the plunge, you aren't left entirely without a safety net. For one thing, you have Art there to offer you hints and other commentary. You lose points if you accept hints from him, but what the heck? Adventure games have never been about amassing points anyway.

And Art's commentary is one of the best things in the game. Although some of his snide asides are juvenile and ill-considered (in the king's bedroom: "I bet when Librice died he came here"), his comments on the periods and places you visit are otherwise well-informed — the authors' scholarship, on topics as wide-ranging as the history of the Crusades and the behavior of Mayan priests, appears authentic — and very well performed by voice actor Matt Weinbold.

The game's other performances are mixed. Todd McCormick plays the lead role (that is, you) amateurishly. Newscasters Ray Uhler and Melissa Tan deliver their lines well, but sound nothing like real newscasters; a better director would have taught them the proper cadences. On the other hand, Victor Navone is great in a minor role as one of your buddies on the Time



BE GLAD WHEN I CAN TAKE THIS OFF The biosuit construct is a little convoluted and clunky, but it does fit with the sci-fi theme.

Corps, and most of the other bit parts in the game are competently acted as well.

The sets on which the action take place are not all that large but somehow give the impression of being vast. This is partly because there can be as many as twelve views at each location; but even more it's because of the quality and nature of the art. Even the interior scenes feel grand and weighty and densely packed, while the exteriors include vistas that appear to

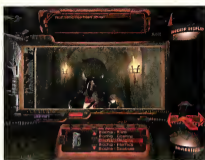
stretch for miles, edifices that tower above you, and a variety of environments (a weed-clogged moat, a torch-lit hallway, a misty battlement) for you to traverse.

In one sense, *BURIED IN TIME* comes from the same school of game design as *Broderbund's Myst* and *Virgin's The Seventh Guest*: a lot of the designers' effort seems to have gone into making it gorgeous to look at. But the designers of *BURIED IN TIME*

make sure that the art isn't an end in itself. Where the gorgeous scenes in other games often feel hollow and empty, *BURIED IN TIME*'s art is richly textured, the locations all feel very full and solid, and the visual artistry is clearly used in support of, not in place of, an equally full and solid storyline.

Given art and scripting that are so engaging, and acting which is better than the norm in the genre, it's a pity that the game isn't more inviting to play. Frankly, the game's technical and design flaws are the only thing that held me back from enjoying *BURIED IN TIME* unreservedly. For one thing, it took two system crashes before I could get the software installed and running properly. Then, during the game, the entire screen would occasionally flash three times, slowly, for no apparent reason. While it's doing this, you can't do anything but wait for it to stop.

My biggest complaint, though, has to do with movement. The directional arrows you have to click on to move don't store double- and triple-clicks, meaning that even if you know you want to turn left twice and look down, you can't just click Left-Left-Down; you have to click Left, wait until you've turned left, click Left again, wait again, click Down, and wait a third time. This, combined with the fact that in any locations you aren't



OH, HELLO THERE *Buried in Time*, unlike *Myst*, lets you encounter other characters, which can lead to some interesting plot twists—as when you run headlong into this sword-wielding fellow.

permitted to walk forward even though there appears to be no obstacle in front of you, makes moving around a sluggish and painstaking affair. It's not as bad as in *The Journeyman Project*, and the story and art you get as a reward for putting up with the interface are a lot better, so you put up with it. But you're still annoyed with it.

If only this game used the free-motion system *Access Software* developed for *Under a Killing Moon*. That, plus a few extra weeks of debugging the software would have made *BURIED IN TIME* a classic game. Criticisms notwithstanding, it's still an awfully good game, with a better storyline and acting than any of its high-profile competitors. There will be those without the patience to become accustomed to its quirks, but those who do take the time will find their investment amply rewarded. **C**

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BURIED IN TIME

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Stunning graphics that enhance rather than overshadow the plot. Mostly decent to good acting, and much more engaging story than *Myst*, *Killing Moon* or *7th Guest*.

CONS Interface makes it annoying to move around (important, since exploration is a big part of the game). Difficult to install.

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SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

Legend's SHANNARA Transports Us To Terry Brooks' Magical World

by Johnny L. Wilson

THE MAP IS FILLED WITH FAMILIAR NAMES: SHADY VALE, LEAH, TYRIS, ARBORLON, STRELEHEIM PLAINS, Storlock and Culhaven. The background history also conjures memories of old friends: Allanon the Druid, Shea Ohmsford, the wielder of Shannara's legendary sword, and Menion Leah, the King of the tiny village of Leah. The opening film launches with 3-D animation even smoother than that of Legend's DEATHGATE opener and recaps another legend, the tale of Terry Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara*. Yet, by the time that animation is over, another 3-D animated sequence with an eerie transparency effect boldly sets the stage for a new quest: a quest that takes place in the gap between *The Sword of Shannara* and *The Elfstones of Shannara*, Brooks' first two books—a quest that fills in a generation between Shea of the first book and his grandson Wil of the second.

Cory and Lori Cole, the husband and wife team who brought us QUEST FOR

GLORY (the adventure/role-playing series published by Sierra), have joined forces with Legend Entertainment (DEATHGATE), in order to produce SHANNARA. SHANNARA was not developed without initial misgivings by Terry Brooks (see the interview below), but it is now coming to life as a world that feels at once familiar, yet allows vivid rediscovery.

BRONA'S RETURN

SHANNARA takes place some 10 years past the climactic battle which concluded *The Sword of Shannara*, but the land is not totally at rest. The opening sequence reveals that the shade of Brona, the evil leader of the First War of the Races, who bears a name of mythic proportion from an archaic Gnome word meaning "Master," is exerting power once again. His shade has discovered the means of destroying the legendary sword that holds his evil in check. So it becomes the responsibility of another descendent of Shannara to stop him.

Of course, readers of the series know that the Ohmsfords were never ones to go looking for trouble or volunteering for quests, so such readers will instantly be on the alert for a plot con-



ALLANON'S CRUSTRINE SALDON You'll be able to converse with familiar characters such as Allanon the Druid by using the very functional conversational interface used in DEATHGATE.



MORE THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A STICK AT The familiar Legend graphic interface allows you to click on an object and receive a verb list of all the things you might be able to do with it.

plication to get things started. While you're waiting for something eventful to occur, the game authors let you get used to the typical Legend interface that allows exploration via pointing and clicking. Whenever a spot, object or character on the screen is active, a label pops up on screen and a verb list appears in the frame at the side of the screen. The puzzles in this section are of the straightforward "find the right object and use it" variety.

One of the pleasures of this opening section is that you also get to read a book, a delightful descendent of the books in DEATHGATE, in which 3-D tomes spin onto the screen and allow you to page through them to glean clues. This time, you get to read Jak's journal and discover that things are not that good at home. This isn't the only book you will encounter in the game, and, as in DEATHGATE, each offers important clues as well as adding plenty of richness and visual variety to the game.

GRAPHICS

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ALL OVER THE MAP You'll navigate cross-country *Descent*-style via this overhead perspective. The brown stripes are placeholders for monsters and the art for the adventuring party isn't final.

Once you are used to the interface and manage to discover an artifact that plays a key role later in the game, the peaceful day by the beautiful brook is disrupted by the appearance of a monster. In Terry Brooks' work, hordes of roaming monsters and appearances by deformed creatures are indicative of evil on the move. Indeed, this particular entity and his cohorts are rather reminiscent of some of the misshapen creatures who seem so ubiquitous in the later *Scions of Shannara* book series.

Gamers will be particularly pleased by the appearance of the monster because it serves to prove that the Coles have not lost their touch for surprise. A new combat interface pops up, and the gamer has to decide whether to attack, defend, retreat or give an order to another member of the adventuring party. Since the adventuring party consists solely of Jak Ohmsford (Shea's son) at this point (though another mysterious character appears at the bottom of the combat interface as an unexpected ally), the latter option is moot. Indeed, the whole combat sequence is moot, since the designers are merely introducing the idea of combat and allowing you to be saved by the near-miraculous intervention of the venerable Allanon.

Now that you know this is not your typical graphic adventure game and are prepared for the plot to advance, the Coles

appearance from Brooks' original descriptions and even from the Hildebrandt sketches in the hardbound book. Still, you get an overall sense that Allanon is going to be important to you and, as Jak Ohmsford, you receive your assignment to go to Lesh and warn King Menion that the monsters are on the move.

BIG MAP ATTACK

This introduces yet another interface transition. To travel cross-country, players navigate via a *Darlands*-style map view. From an overhead perspective, players watch small sprites representing the adventuring party and any observable threats in the vicinity. Whenever the party encounters a new adventure game location (the traditional "room" where one can meet people, manipulate objects and solve puzzles) or hostile enemies, this map

use the very functional multiple-choice

conversational interface from *DeathGate* which allows Allanon to explain the initial threat (hordes of roaming monsters) and to offer up your first miniquest. We personally wish Allanon had been portrayed on-screen with more of an air of danger and mystery. Legend's artists have toned down the Druid's

interface dissolves and the appropriate "room" or combat interface returns to the screen. The action is played out in the appropriate setting. Then, it's back to the travel map.

The good news about this approach is that it adds a strategic element to travel. If the party is, for example, hearing monster sounds in the woods, monster sprites appear on the map and close in on the party. So, the player gets to plan the party's route, based on regular and changing feedback concerning monster positions. The bad news is that, at press time, map navigation requires the player to point and click on the compass rose at the side of the screen in order to move about the map. It would certainly be preferable to be able to point and click on the map itself instead of the compass. The compass approach is awkward and counter-intuitive.

So far, the player has been manipulating only one character. During this initial journey, however, Jak will meet the offspring of another *SHANNARA* hero, Menion Leah's daughter, Shella, in a sequence that will require puzzle-solving in order to extricate her from danger.



MONSTER MASH One of the new elements you would expect from the authors of Sierra's *Quest for Quest* is a computer role-playing combat interface. In this early look, Jak and Shella have almost killed one monster.

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This is the same adventure game interface, but the puzzles advance to a "use the object with another object to do this" level of complication. That puzzle solved, the Coles very quickly prove that Shella is not a helpless princess but a co-equal adventurer in every way. This deft plot maneuver was extremely well-done.

This segment also introduces the fact that, as in *DEATHGATE*, you get to play from more than one character's perspective. Not only does this add variety to gameplay (meaning that some puzzles are best solved from one character's background and inventory, while others are better solved from another's), but it also adds interest from a storytelling per-

spective. Just as Brooks moves between the perspectives of characters and adventuring parties, so will the SHANNARA gamer.

Once Shella has been added to the party, map travel and potential monster encounters continue until Jak reaches Leah, the goal of his first mini-quest. Here, a mystery is unveiled, and a king is in mortal danger. Naturally, it will take consummate puzzle-solving skill to get to the bottom of this one. Also, quite naturally, the level of difficulty for puzzle solutions has jumped up another notch, as well. Now, players must not only manipulate the right objects to solve the puzzle, but the player must discover how to sub-

stitute the right object or combination of objects to compensate for missing inventory items.

HERITAGE OF SHANNARA

As you can surmise from this exploration of the early gameplay in SHANNARA, the game features some of the best elements of previous Legend efforts along with a new infusion of creativity from both the licensed characters/world of Terry Brooks and the award-winning design team of Corey and Lori Cole. Fans of the Brooks' works, Legend products or the Coles' games should not be disappointed. ☉

AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR TERRY BROOKS, SHANNARA'S MASTER DRUID

CGW: You seem to draw from a rich symbology of Judeo-Christian literature without being either overtly Jewish or Christian.

Brooks: One of the firm beliefs I have about being a writer is that when I tell a story, it shouldn't tell just one thing. It should have multiple observations that can be pulled out of it. Over and above the storyline itself, I try not to give anything away. It has books that preach at you.

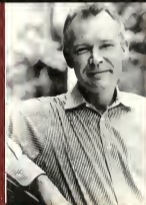
CGW: In the preface to the latest version of *The Sword of Shannara*, you mention that you wrote the book because you loved those teen-aged adventures like *Avonho*, *The Black Arrow*, and *The Three Musketeers*. Is that the age group for which you were shooting?

Brooks: I think you are most intense in your reading habits when you're in your teenage years. Magic is "real," your hormones are raging, and you're more open. When I'm writing, I'm always writing to that group of people.

I'm going into my second generation—parents who have turned their kids on to a book. You've got all these young readers and teachers who really want a good story with characters they can identify with. The impetus for the original story was that I wanted the main characters to be just like us—able to get through life and not looking for any trouble. They're not interested in the magic. They just have to deal with it. This denrends of them that they take a second look at who they are and their attitudes.

CGW: So, you deal with the idea of reality through the use of fantasy?

Brooks: The good thing about fantasy is that you can do anything, but you have to do it in a logical, reasonable way. It does allow us to look at this world



in a different sort of way. I can be talking about what I see happening in this world, but it doesn't come across as preachy. When you pick up the paper and read it in the morning, you're full of ideas.

CGW: Well, judging from your books, you must feel that evil is fairly strong in the modern world.

Brooks: I like the multicultural, multifaceted idea of projecting what is bad about the world. Evil manifests itself in so many different ways that you can never be sure that you're finished with it. This is a world where everything has gotten too big and too complicated. We're struggling to get a grip on it. We've got the nuclear threat as a side effect to the good which technology brings. Magic in the books and technology in the world have some real correlation.

CGW: That reminds me of a profound line in *The Wishsong of Shannara*. It goes something like "evil cannot be contained because when it breaks out it will be stronger and more vicious than before."

Brooks: That's right. We could take Sarajevo as an example. We've regressed 50 years and we're back where we were in the Balkan days.

CGW: I suppose we ought to get to the subject of computer games, though. Do you play computer games yourself?

Brooks: I don't, but my 12-year-old son is a computer whiz and speaks a different language. I don't know if he knows what he's talking about or not, but I enjoy watching him some.

CGW: What are his favorite games?

Brooks: [So Mike's] *Castles*, *Theme Park*, and *Sim City Classic*.

CGW: Since you don't play computer games, did you feel any anxiety about turning parts of your universe over to computer game designers?

Brooks: Of course, it's something like the idea of doing a movie. There's always the question of who you would cast as what character and the reality that whoever is cast in that role is indelibly in people's minds from then on. There's also the matter of losing control, but when I talked to those folks [Corey and Lori Cole] and realized how much they cared about the books and the characters, I felt better. I like the idea that I will continue to write the books and others will work on projects which surround the timeline, characters and settings I've established.

CGW: Spasaking of which, what is the next book?

Brooks: The next book is a prequel to the first trilogy. It deals with the forging of the sword.

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Misadventures At Midnight

Despite Loads Of Characters, A Huge World, And A Unique Blend Of Gaming Styles, LORDS OF MIDNIGHT Misses The Mark

by Peter Olafson

You can't go home again.

IN THE MID-1980S, MIKE SINGLETON RELEASED THE FIRST TWO GAMES IN HIS EPIC LORDS OF MIDNIGHT SAGA ON the Commodore 64 and England's beloved Spectrum computer. The original LORDS OF MIDNIGHT and DOOMDARK'S REVENGE immediately acquired legendary status. For a range of reasons, a planned third episode didn't appear. Singleton went on to form the Maelstrom development team and to create a trio of epic strategy/adventures: MIDWINTER and FLAMES OF FREEDOM for MicroProse and ASHES OF EMPIRE for Mirage. Now, this talented Englishman has finally returned to LORDS OF MIDNIGHT (LOM) and imbued it with some of the qualities of his later work. The multi-character structure, huge game world and synthesis of adventure and

strategy is still unlike anything else.

Unfortunately, the execution here is too inconsistent to do the design concepts justice. Domark's LORDS OF MIDNIGHT (technically, LORDS OF MIDNIGHT III: THE CITADEL) falls victim to a range of gross simplifications that are neither epic nor entertaining, proving that while you might be able to go home again, you'll probably have to pay rent.

MARCH OF BLOOD

The characters haven't changed. Initially, you control Prince Morkin and a handful of allies—augmented by a trickle of freed hostages—as they embark on a quest to rid Midnight's Bloodmarch region of the depredations of one Boroth Wolfheart. It's a CARBEE COMMAND-like structure with citadels in place of islands. Morkin and Boroth set out from the northwest and Boroth from the southeast. Somewhere in between, the forces clash and the fate of the Bloodmarch is written in blood. To make certain that it's Wolfheart's blood, you'll need to recruit allies, raise armies and find magical weapons along the way.

The environment is the best thing here; it's as though Maelstrom has taken the fractal-based overhead maps from FLAMES OF FREEDOM and fleshed them out. Your characters—textured polygonal figures



NO JOY IN MIDNIGHTVILLE You might muster an army of 35,000 combatants, but these troops just turn into hit points when you go toe-to-toe with Wolfheart in the endgame.

with sword and herakidic shield—travel this vast realm in smooth-scrolling 3-D on foot, on dragonback and in longboat.

When the game begins, this journey is a powerful and life-affirming experience. The lush green world appears to follow closely the terrain rules of a real one. Trees line ridges and cluster in groves between hills. The ground, never quite level, rises toward white peaked mountains and falls toward the water. The sky purples with dusk, the moon comes up in phase, the odd animal ambles across the scene. It is rich, it is lovely, and for a while, it is enough. Then you discover that there really isn't much more to it.

The key to LOM is its pyramid approach to conquest. You dispatch your comrades to enlist neutral characters to whom they are most similar. (There are 64 character traits in the game, evenly split between bad and good.) Then, switching among these new comrades, you send them off on quests to recruit more characters. The ones you aren't controlling or

Lords Of Midnight

Price: \$69.95

System

Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 or better (Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 1D MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse; supports Sound Blaster and General MIDI sound.

Protection: None

Designer: Mike Singleton/Maelstrom Software

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watching directly play out their trips on autopilot.

The actual game is very basic. Your would-be recruits either join you or they don't—it is that simple. On occasion, they get ticked off and try to do you in. In *FLAMES OF FREEDOM*, non-aligned characters invariably wanted something from you first, and those multiple sub-quests gave the story its dimension. But *LOM* doesn't have that dimension. Conversation is brusque and business-like. The magic weapons, which could easily have been made into a series of sub-plots, turn up on the map automatically when your units get close enough.

Combat is inexplicably simplistic for a multi-unit, multi-commander game. Troops follow their commanders across the 3-D world as if towed by a cable, but every battle is reduced to a personal combat between the two captains on a separate screen, with size of attending forces shown as a strength statistic. In other words, the forces that you may devote dozens of hours to accumulating—a force of around 35,000 is required for success in the finale—are ultimately represented by a stat in a sword fight.

In old, heroic movies, it's fun to watch the Good Guy and the Evil Adversary fight their way up the stairs, while everyone else looks on. But here, it isn't much fun at all. If the armies in *LOM* are simply grist for a number-crunching mill, why bother representing forces in the 3-D world at all? And what's this marvelous environment for, if it's not to be the setting for pitched battles? Sadly, it exists merely to give you something pleasing to look at while you walk around. Eye candy is fine as a spice, but making it the focal point of the design is simply a waste. At least the two original *LOM* games (included on the CD) enjoy a kind of parity between their 8-bit graphics and spare structure.

Worse, each part of *LOM* tends to resemble every other part. All the characters have perfectly symmetrical faces, for example. The result is that the campaign never builds to a crescendo. A full-fledged 3-D combat mode could have provided



ANYBODY HOME? The 3-D castles interiors and lush outdoor landscapes look wonderful, but they can't hide *LOM*'s lack of substance.

LOM a steady edge. Imagine wandering through these deep woods to find a clearing littered with bodies, or coming to the rescue of a band of fleeing survivors.

FAINT PRAISE

On a technical level, this isn't so bad. The realistic environment beats *DAGGERFALL* to the punch by a few months. The AI is quite good, and you will go against it at your peril. Maelstrom's trademark iconic interface is squeaky-clean; and while it could use a few extra shortcuts, never has a Singleton game offered so much online info, so easily available.

But even the good parts have rough spots. Apparently ordinary townspeople do not live in the Blood March—no cities, no towns, no villages—and travel consequently gets dull. Buildings, isthmuses and mountains wreak havoc with the autopilot AI. If a character finds a door in his way, he'll walk in regardless of what his current quest dictates and won't have the mental wherewithal to walk out again. Troops negotiating the exterior corners of buildings seem to bog down, as though dragging a whole castle behind them.

Unlike the original *LOM*, this game allows the multi-character format to get out of hand. As the game expands its borders, you will find yourself receiving a storm of messages as characters grow exhausted and shut down to recharge their batteries. While you can shut off these interruptions (which stops the active character's forward

movement), you won't learn anything about the other characters' progress, and will have to consult their status to re-direct them. This "either/or" approach needs some kind of happy middle ground in which you can shut down incidental reports on a character's status but still learn the results of the current quest, or perhaps an at-a-glance summary screen where you can see what every character is doing.

Finally, there's the matter of the indoor segments. In the *MIDWINTER/ASHES*-period games, you couldn't visit the interior of buildings in any meaningful way. You still can't. That is, you can go indoors and scroll through a

3-D environment with textured ceiling and floor and bare-bones furniture. But once again, there's nothing to do here, save in the Dark Citadel (where hostages can be rescued). The size and shape of a structure bears no relationship to the configuration of the maze within. Indeed, all the interiors appear randomly generated—a room-corridor-room structure that suggests experience with recent 32-bit console games—and they roll on endlessly, until you decide you can't stomach any more.

Randomness is often touted by gamemakers as a boon to playability. But when introduced on a global scale to augment a thin story, randomness can't replace the human touch. It sacrifices the shared experience on which gamers thrive, and reduces intimate design to soulless algorithm. One wonders why Maelstrom even bothered allowing the character to look up and down. At what, precisely, are we supposed to be looking?

Not much, I'm afraid. Not very much at all. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Lush graphics, lots of characters, huge game world and a unique adventure/strategy blend.

CONS Lacks emotional depth, and despite all the pretty pictures, ends up as cold, dispassionate and simplistic.

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AIR POWER

BATTLE IN THE SKIES

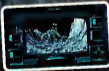


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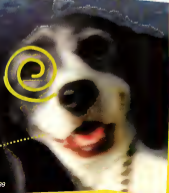
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Tsunami's *SILENT STEEL* Will Have You Diving For Cover Right From The Start

by Kevin Turner

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN A MODERN SUBMARINE SIMULATION AND YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF AT THE HELM OF THE world's deadliest sea vessel, with the keys to nuclear holocaust clenched in your fist. But Tsunami's *SILENT STEEL* is not a submarine simulation. It is more like a choose-your-own-adventure throwback from the '80s. The strategic thinking in *SILENT STEEL* is limited to three choices, presented every 15-30 seconds or so. These choices range from the mundane, such as whether to drink more coffee, to the choice of whether to fire weapons.

If anything, *SILENT STEEL* is a bizarre homage to the old text games, whose grandchildren can be found on your local BBS. These games (to which *SILENT STEEL* obviously owes its format) presented the player with a problem to be resolved. As choices were made, the player either reaped the rewards or faced the conse-

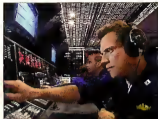
quences of his/her decisions. These games didn't use graphics, which meant that the player was forced to lean upon imagination. *SILENT STEEL*, unfortunately, tries to substitute great video for imagination, and its designers evidently assume that players won't mind a lack of story depth if they have nice pictures to look at.

As a veteran submariner, I had the added problem of trying to discern what was happening during play. Small things, like using sound-powered headsets in sonar, were easier to forgive than more major gaffes, like the game's basically flawed plotline.

YOU HAVE THE CONN

You begin the game as the skipper of the U.S.S. *Idaho*, on patrol in the North Atlantic. After that, reality and *SILENT STEEL* take separate paths. As the story unfolds, a threat presents itself in the form of a saboteur. This saboteur plants a noise-maker outside the hull, which, curiously, not even the sonar man is able to detect until later. Once discovered, the usual suspects are rounded up. Meanwhile, the saboteur closes in, and to thwart detection, magically changes the sound signature on the noise-maker.

Luckily, the cavalry, in the form of helicopters, arrives just in time to help you unmask your nefarious foe. Unwilling to surrender, he draws a pistol—conveniently hidden in his jumpsuit—points at a torpedo and threatens to blow everyone up. I didn't particularly feel threatened, although I might have if our villain had re-



WHO HAS THE HELM? The authentic uniforms and real submarine footage aren't enough to hide *Silent Steel's* poor plot and gameplay.

membered to point the pistol at the warhead. Ultimately, the crew is saved, thus preserving freedom and justice for all. The plot is not so much dramatic as silly, or often just plain boring, as you click endlessly on screen after screen, never really getting involved in the action.

What's so disappointing about all this is that the producers evidently spent a great deal of time and money to make the game look authentic. *SILENT STEEL* was shot in South Carolina using the ships at the *Proctor's Point* maritime museum. Most of the settings are realistically portrayed, the uniforms are accurate, and I found the actors surprisingly entertaining. Unfortunately, that's about as far as the "realism" goes.

From a technical standpoint, *SILENT STEEL* makes good use of MPEG technology to provide full-screen motion video with high-quality sound. But, before you purchase an MPEG board, you will probably want to wait for a better game. In the end, *SILENT STEEL*, for all its valiant effort at playing pioneer, falls flat as entertainment. Hopefully, the next attempted "interactive submarine movie" will focus more on content and less on pretty pictures. ☹

Silent Steel

Price: \$34.95

System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
486-66, 8 MB
RAM, 2 MB of
hard drive space,
256 color SVGA,
Windows 3.1 or
Win 95, 2x CD-
ROM; supports all 8-bit sample-playback
sound cards

Protection: None (CD-ROM)

Designer: Tsunami Media, Inc.

Publisher: Broderbund

Novato, CA

(415) 382-4530



THE EDITORS SPEAK

SILENT STEEL

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Lots of pretty MPEG pictures, filmed aboard a real sub. It is interactive, for what that's worth.

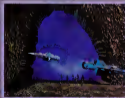
CONS Melodramatic plot, stereotyped roles, total lack of content.

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Trivial Pursuit... At Warp Factor Two

A visit to *Star Trek's* "Memory Alpha"

by Allen L. Greenberg

Star Trek trivia compilations have been multiplying faster than tribbles in a warp cargo hold. Today, there are several weighty tomes on the subject, but the most complete collection of *Trek* minutia comes in the form of a **Simon & Schuster Interactive** CD-ROM. The **STAR TREK OMNIPEDIA** boasts thousands of entries, photos and illustrations with nearly 100 video clips.

You may "seek out any listing" by using a "find" mode, where the computer will boldly go in search of entries to which you have typed say, four letters. You may click on associated photos to get a closer look, or on nouns, which are linked to other topics. Frequently, you will be informed that a "resource" is available for a particular subject. Resources include illustrations, drawings or animated drawings.

Just as a "subject" listing is available, so is a list of episodes. These are divided into *TOS* (The Original Series), *ST:TNG* (Next Generation), *DS9* (Deep Space Nine) and the first six movies. Although the *Shuttle*

Flyer figures prominently on the packaging, there are no references to that show in the data base. Similarly, while there are references to *Star Trek: Generations*, there is no separate heading for that film.

The episode guide is nicely cross-indexed, as is the "subject" listing. Thus, you can click on the word "Vulcan" and receive a listing of other subjects or episodes in which that word occurs in the description. The descriptions are not overly lengthy, but the listing is amazingly complete.

Along with an encyclopedia and episode guide, the **OMNIPEDIA** also includes a chronology which intertidally covers a time span ranging from 15 billion years ago up through the 27th century. Of course, the *Star Trek* years receive special emphasis, as do the years between our own 20th century and the launching of the first *Shuttle Enterprise*. However, the authors have impressively combed the episodes in order to find references to events which span the entire chronology.

The **OMNIPEDIA** features the voice of Majel Barrett, without whom the voice of any *Star Trek* computer would seem in desperate need of an upgrade. Five additional multimedia presentations cover various aspects of the *Star Trek* myths, and are narrated by Mark Lenard, best known as Spock's father, Sarek. These presentations are fast-moving and very enjoyable.

Unfortunately, the **OMNIPEDIA**'s most attractive feature is also its greatest failing. The program is set up to accept a limited number of voice commands. These include "Play video," "Scroll forward" or



CAPTAIN'S LOG Trekkers can immerse themselves in every aspect of the *Star Trek* universe, including the exploits of Vulcan's favorite son and the Federation's greatest captain.

"Begin word search." The program manual predicts a 70% success rate when using these commands. After quite a bit of experimentation, I would lower that expectation to about 40%. Often, one phrase is mistaken for another, sending the program off on some unrelated function. Most users will probably elect to turn the voice commands off, and stick to the more traditional point-and-click.

Obviously, **OMNIPEDIA** is not a game, although it could have benefited from a "quiz" mode. For the trivia-minded Trekkie, however, it's difficult to imagine a more complete treasury of information.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

STAR TREK OMNIPEDIA

RATING ★★★★★

PROS The program's extensive detail, photos and videos make the most complete collection of *Star Trek* information available.

CONS The voice recognition system is more trouble than it's worth. A "quiz" mode would have made it more enjoyable.

Star Trek Omnipedia

Price: \$69.95
System Requirements:
IBM Compatible
486-33 or better,
8MB RAM, 2x
CD-ROM,
Windows 3.1 or
Windows 95,
Sound Blaster
compatible
sound card.
Protection: None
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Interactive,
New York, NY, (800)-983-5333





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reaches so completely you'll forget it's just a game. Your hands will wield weapons of metal and magic. You'll battle disembodied foes, rescue your allies from evil, liberate a massive dragon from bondage and discover an experience more realistic than anything you've ever imagined.



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An epic production more than four years in the making, Stonekeep comes in a very special, limited-edition tombstone box with a hologram cover. It also includes the first chapter in the Stonekeep saga - *Thera Awakening*, a hard-bound novella, by Steve Jackson and David Pulver.

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Farzi looks trustworthy. He seems to be strong, slightly agile, and healthy. His skill with hammer is good and he is skilled in axe and shield.



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BSP1

Gem Heads Unite

A Peek Into The Crystals And Chaos of Origin's CYBERMAGE

by Paul C. Schuytema

Minding your own business, you mutter and grumble about the sad state of the world as you shuffle down a nearly empty street. Nations are gone—corporations hold all of the territory and have embraced a form a capitalistic barbarism, which leaves the "everyman" of society alone to fend for himself. That means you. You are a nobody, adrift in a world gone mad. Just ahead, an exotic, genetically enhanced human steps out onto the chipped concrete.

You wonder how you will ever compete against beings that are bred to be superior in every way. You loathe everything about the feline/human in his tailored suit when suddenly, a flash of light catches your eye. A sniper! Someone is going to take a shot at that exotic. Without thinking, you leap towards the cat-man, trying to warn him, trying to tell him to jump for cover just as you feel the hot rush of lead tear through your chest. As you fade to darkness, you can hear his tiger-like growl. You're unsure of its meaning.

A BAD DAY GETS WORSE

First, you take some lead for some genetic freak you don't know from Adam, then you wake up in a test tube with some weird gem grafted into your forehead. You ache and you're pissed off, but somehow you sense that you're different, better than before. Such is the enigmatic beginning of CYBERMAGE: DARKLIGHT

AWAKENING, a first person action and adventure game from Origin. D.W. Bradley, who brought us the last three WIZARDRY adventures from Sir Tech, has joined forces with Origin to craft a new spin on the first-person action-adventure. While others have been DOOMING and DOOM cloning, Origin has been pursuing the brass ring of melding first-person action with a rich and vibrant adventure story. ULTIMA UNDERWORLD I and II and SYSTEM SHOCK are all excellent attempts to bring these two forms of gaming together, but the CYBERMAGE



SUNDAY DRIVIN' That tanks looks like it might be fun to take out for a spin, but first we have to lose this pesky guard.

team is striving for an integration of plot and action that has never before been experienced.

Warren Spector, CYBERMAGE's producer, is very enthusiastic about this game. "Point of View games are the coolest games in the world," Spector says confidently. "CYBERMAGE is gonna kill people.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

This is as good as anything we've ever done."

PULP ACTION

CYBERMAGE strives to bring us an adventure of comic-book magnitude. That means a plot of gigantic proportions, tons of bad guys and a tons of superpowers. You begin the game with only an inkling that you have certain gifts. And you can see things that others can't, namely, the shadow clouds of mana that rise up from the steaming bodies of the newly killed. Making things weirder, for some inexplicable reason, your power seems to grow as you step through these ghost-like apparitions.

Right from the start, you're given a plate full of questions to ponder: what is the Darklight? Who is Necrom? Why is there a war? What is Sarcorp? Who is M. Cat? Why me? Searching for the answers to these questions provides the fictional foundation for CYBERMAGE, and it crackles with all of the pomp and circumstance of a great pulp comic.

Running around and shooting things is cool, but running around trying to grow and develop as a superhero is even cooler. In keeping with the comic feel, Bradley is making this game episodic rather than using the standard level by level approach. Each episode can be seen as roughly one issue of the CYBERMAGE comic.

CYBERMAGE's episodic levels throw

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myriad play opportunities at the player. You can run and shoot. You can climb into a tank and drive it (and it really feels like you're driving a tank). You can even steal a police hovercraft and soar through the city. You can climb down into the trenches and fight side by side with rebels who are trying to ward off the minions of Necrom. You can fight in a to-the-death arena combat match (provided you can come up with the \$2,000 entry fee). Or you can simply stand and watch the evening news as it plays on a news kiosk. Of course, you also have the opportunity to discover and learn all sorts of superpowers, as well as picking up over a dozen weapons (I just love the high-tech battle axe). The quantity of play variations is staggering and will surely prove to be one of CYBERMAGE's strengths.

DEJA VU?

Talking with D. W. Bradley about the game left me convinced that CYBERMAGE possesses one of the most original stories I have seen yet in a PC game. Translating that story to the small screen is quite another task however, and I certainly



SPIRITS RUNNING HIGH Deep behind enemy lines is a great place to siphon the souls of the dead.

hope that Origin and Bradley are up to the task of giving this game all it needs before they release it.

The version of the game I played, unfortunately, didn't quite match my expectations. The first level, a familiar "escape from the lab that's under attack" mission, felt too much like some of those other first person shooters out there, where everything is of the "hunt for switches" flavor of activity. I've done that drill to death already. Hopefully, this will be improved upon.

Visually, CYBERMAGE is a solid affair, offering SVGA graphics and a very detailed, very large game world.

The game engine, while very fast, is "old school" in that it is a purely horizontal construction. To be perfectly honest, DOOM 2 and HERETIC have better looking levels. True, the beautifully detailed texture tiles used in CYBERMAGE are almost three times that used in ULTIMA UNDER-

WORLD I, but the way the levels are laid out seems old and the lack of any real angles, slopes or curves really gives the world a stiff, static feel.

One thing that CYBERMAGE does have going for it is a sense of scale and a sense that the regions within the game are very real and active. When you wander around, you get the feeling that the world is chugging away, going about its business without you. Wars are being fought, arena competitions are being held, and I was even able to sneak under a bridge while a tank convoy rumbled by overhead.

HAVE INTERFACE, WILL TRAVEL

The play interface of CYBERMAGE is very nice, with a touch of originality thrown in for good measure. Your game screen is largely filled with your POV window (scalable, depending on the speed of your machine) and two smaller windows that display your health and armor rating. Your armor display is broken up into body regions, and shows clearly, numerically and through color shifts, the status of your armor. Your health display shows your health as well as your reserves of power (used to fuel your Darklight superpowers). Tapping the Control key brings up your hand, which operates under mouse control, and allows you to manipulate your inventory as well as objects in the world. I really like this attempt to bring the fiction of the gameplay seamlessly into the interface control.

CYBERMAGE has all the ingredients to be a killer game. The chance to role-play a superhero as he discovers his own powers and the mysteries of his world is a very exciting opportunity. The key challenge for Bradley and Origin lies in bringing this story to life for the player. If they can't, this game will be just another POV shooter with an interesting story. If they do, though, this will be one hell of a wild ride, courtesy of the powers of Darklight. ☛



DON'T AXE ME The battle axe may not be the best weapon against this fireball-fling' minion of Necrom, but nothing's finer than a nice slice-and-dice fest out on the battlefield.



AMERICA'S LARGEST KILLER OF TIME™

ZOOP - YOU MAY ALREADY BE ADDICTED



No one is immune



Resting



Output of the Heart
(gallons of blood per minute)
when man is:



Walking



Playing Zoop



(zoopx10¹⁰)



A healthy iris



The same iris
after Zoop

The stages of Zoop
(what to look for)



Level 3



Level 6

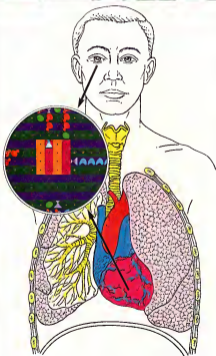


Level 7



Level 7.2

(this pattern confuses on, and adds
always leads to one's demise)



It looks like a harmless video game until it enters the bloodstream and mixes with your DNA. In order to eradicate this affliction we must learn its moves, understand its thinking and anticipate its next move. Only then can we begin to battle and conquer this killer.

Known carriers
of Zoop



Genesis™



Super NES™



Game Boy™



Game Gear™



Macintosh™



PC



PlayStation™



Saturn™

How Zoop affects
the brain



It slowly
ate at the
Cerebellum
restricting:
movement,
coordination,
balance

It attacks
the frontal
lobes of the
Cerebrum
impairing:
judgement,
higher learning,
reason

It mutates the Medulla
causing irregular:
digestion, respiration,
heartbeat



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INITIALS

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Jurassic Kombat

PRIMAL RAGE Faithfully Recreates The Combative Arcade Saurians

by Jason Kapalka

FIGHTING GAMES AREN'T GENERALLY KNOWN FOR THE ORIGINALITY OF THEIR STORYLINES (WHAT'S THAT—another martial arts tournament with the fate of the world hanging in the balance?), but Time Warner's PC translation of the coin-op hit *PRIMAL RAGE* does earn points for recombinant weirdness. It seems that sometime in the near future a meteor smacks into good of terra firma, rearranging the continents, destroying civilization and reducing mankind to loincloth-clad savages with a penchant for phonetic spelling...as in, "Who will rule the New Urth?"

Well, not these monosyllabic human leftovers. The meteor also releases from their underground tombs seven primitive gods who promptly take over what's left of the Earth, er, Urth. No Greco-Roman pantheon here—we're talking really primitive gods: an assortment of dinosaur deities and Kong-style giant apes. As divinities go, these "Draconians" aren't particularly benevolent, being interested primarily in



TERRIBLE SAURON Lose your brain energy and you'll be stunned; lose your life-force and you're done.

munching human worshippers and whomping on each other. But for those of us raised in the Catholic tradition there is at least a refreshing simplicity to it all.

LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE

Theology aside, what this all amounts to is a saurian version of your usual side-scrolling punch-em-up—call it *Dino Fighter* or *Jurassic Kombat*. If you've visited an arcade lately, you know the drill: using various punches, kicks and in this case, bites and tail-whips, you try to pummel the life-meter of your opponent (either human or CPU-controlled) down to nil, while avoiding a similar outcome for your own skin or fur. With skillful joystick handling, you can implement various special moves (fireballs, teleports, and the like), combos (sequences of blows that cannot be blocked or dodged), and fatalities (spectacular and typically gory *coup-de-grace*s executed upon fallen foes). As an extra incentive, tribes of human worshippers watch the dueling diets from the sidelines, cheering, praying and, not infrequently, getting eaten.

PRIMAL RAGE is perhaps one of the last of the side-scrolling fighters; three-dimensional games like *VIRTUA FIGHTER* and *TOMBHINDER* are swiftly becoming the standard. As such, *PRIMAL RAGE* may be—forgive me—a bit of a dinosaur itself. But if so, it's a noble and classy dinosaur, a fine

representative of a dying breed.

Getting down to technical affairs, it has to be said: *PRIMAL RAGE* is a memory pig. Although the game will theoretically run on a slow 4 MB machine, your game will resemble a turn-based strategy game rather than a non-stop action-fest. But on a reasonably fast 8 or 16 MB system it's virtually indistinguishable from the arcade version, though there are momentary pauses on an 8 MB PC when finishing moves are loaded. The gorgeous Chynathion-style dinos are smoothly animated, and every obscure facet of the coin-op game is included, right down to the hyper-secret "Worshipper Volleyball" and "Bowling for Humans" mini-games occasionally enjoyed by the battling beasts.

FATALITIES AND GROTESQUERIES

And the dinos and apes duking it out here are a motley crew indeed, ranging from Sauron, your basic T-Rex, to Talon, your basic raptor, to Blizzard, an icy hybrid of King Kong, and Sub-Zero from *MORTAL KOMBAT*. There's more variety in size and body shape, and hence in combat strategies, than in most fighting games—the button that triggers a powerful tail slam from Sauron will do something entirely different for Blizzard, who, as an ape, has no such anterior adjunct.

Also included are all the special attacks and finishing moves, and of these there are quite a few: at least six unique attacks and three fatalities per dino. Most of these are hideously violent—blood doesn't just spray in *PRIMAL RAGE*, it forms lakes—and some go right past "violent" to "grotesque." If

PRIMAL RAGE

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

486DX/25 or bet-

ter (33+Mhz rec-

ommended), 4 MB

RAM (8 MB rec-

ommended), CD-

ROM drive (dou-

ble-speed rec-

ommended), 2 MB

hard drive space,

VGA graphics, joystick

recommended; supports

Soundblaster-compatible

sound cards

Number of players: 1-2

Protection: none

Designer: Teiry Weery Games/Atari Games

Corporation

Publisher: Time Warner Interactive

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SPECIAL MOVES & FATALITIES

There are two different ways to accomplish special moves. The first listed is the sequence to use if you have a four-button joystick like the Gravis Gamepad, the second if you're using a two-button joystick or the keyboard.

FOUR-BUTTON JOYSTICK: HOLD DOWN the appropriate buttons, then press the listed joystick movements. 1=High Quick, 2=High Flare, 3=Low Quick, 4=Low Flare.

TWO-BUTTON JOYSTICK/KEYBOARD: For all moves, hold down 1 and 3 (High Quick and Low Quick) or both joystick buttons, then do the listed movements.

D, U, T, A=Down, Up, Towards, Away
 UA, DT, etc.=Up and away/down and toward, etc.
 X-Y-Z=Tap joystick in direction X, then direction Y, then Z

X->Y=Roll joystick from X to Y, i.e. for D->T, roll smoothly from D to T to T

Moves listed in CAPITAL LETTERS are fatalities—perform these from any location when your foe is still standing, stunned, at the end of a match.

Name	4 Buttons	2 Buttons/Keyboard
Armaddon		
Iron Maiden	2+3,1->U>T	A-U-T
Uppercut	1+2+3, DT-TUT	D-T-A
Tying Spikes	2+4, A>D	A-A-D
Chomp-a-Human	all, U>T	U-T-D
GUT PUMG	1+2+3, D-D-D-D-D	D-D-D-D
THE IMPALER	all, D, A-U-D	D-A-D-D
Wizard		
Mega Punch (Long)	2+4, A-T	A-T-T
Cold Breath	1+2+4, A-T	D-A-T
Ice Geyser	1+2+4, D-U	D-D-U
Thaw	2+3, A>D>T	T-D-U-A
BBQW BASH	1+2+4, D-D>A>D>T	D-D-A-T-U-A
REDEMPTION	all, D-T-U-D-U	D-T-U-D-U
Chaos		
Grab-and-Throw	2+4, TA	T-A-A
Power Pick (Fast)	1+4, U>T	U-T-T
Fart of Fay	2+3, T>U>A	D-T-U-A
Chomp-a-Human	all, T>D>A	D-A-U
GOLDEN SHOWER	+3, D-D, all, A-T-A-T	D-D-U-D-T
THE CHURL	all, T-T-T-A-A-A	T-T-T-A-A-A

Diablo		
Fireball (Fast)	1+3, D>T	D-T-T
Tech	1+3, U>T	U-D-D
Hot Foot	2+4, DT-DT	A-D-T
Widow Bash	2+2+4, U	U-U-U
INCUBATOR	all, U>D>D>D	D-A-D-D-T
EXTRA TOASTY	2+3+4, T-T-T	T-T-T
Saurus		
Primal Scream	1+3, D-U	D-U-A
Cranium Crusher	1+4, D-U	D-U-D
Stun Rear	1+3, A-T	A-T-T
CARRIAGE	all, A-T-A-T-A	A-T-A-T-A
Vertigo		
Venom Spit (Fast)	2+4, T-T	D-A-A
Wooden Hypnosis	2+3, A-A	T-A-A
SHRINK 'N' EAT+2, A-A-A, all, D-U		A-A-D-U
BOWMANLITY	all, A-A-A-D-T	A-A-D-T
INTERNET USERS: For a complete listing of moves and more information on Primal Rage, check the Computer Gaming World Web Site (http://www.zdnet.com/~gaming/).		

the spine-rippings in **MORTAL KOMBAT** made you vaguely queasy, **PRIMAL RAGE** will definitely set your stomach a-churning. Brains are squashed, guts get flung about like sausage, flesh is ripped, fried and eaten, and one combatant, Chaos (a.k.a. "Bodily Function Man"), has a finishing move known as the "Golden Shower." There is a "No Gore" toggle, but I can't imagine anyone ever using it. The gore is really the point of the game, and you'll either like it or go find something a bit more

meticulously faithful re-creation of the arcade game, and its faults and merits are the same as those of its coin-op parent. Some will love the extensive combo system, while others will chafe at getting smacked twice in a row without a chance to defend themselves. And some players may prefer the more "realistic" martial artists of **STREET FIGHTER** and **MORTAL KOMBAT 2** over **PRIMAL RAGE**'s saurian cast. Fighting fans sick of 2-D games altogether will probably be better off with **GTE Interactive's** 3-D **FX FIGHTER**, or a **Sony** Playstation with **TOMBIEN**.

On the other hand, if you're happy with dinosaurs, apes, and lots of gore, well, **PRIMAL RAGE** has the field locked up. Who will rule the New Urth? Me. As soon as I get that thirteen-hit combo down...

FINISHING MOVE

In overall guideplicity, **PRIMAL RAGE** is a

Other weak points include a non-existent joystick calibration program, which means that if your stick gets out of whack mid-game (and it will) you have to drop out to DOS and start over. And the manual is at best skimpy and at worst actively misleading. On the other hand, PC owners do get the bonus of two new head-to-head "games": **Tug of War** and **Endurance**. In the former, one beast's life-meter goes up whenever the other's goes down; the latter pits multiple critters against each other in rapid succession.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

PRIMAL RAGE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Flawless recreation of the arcade hit, with gorgeous animations, spectacular quantities of blood and all the special moves and fatalities.

CONS Weird two button joystick/keyboard controls, whopping memory requirements for optimum performance and a poorly written manual.



DEEP FRIED DIND **PRIMAL RAGE** has plenty of special moves, like **Diablo's** oven-roaster, however some of them are impossible with a two button joystick.

mellow to play.

While the designers have faithfully translated every grisly graphic nuzzle from the arcade, the control system has had a bumpy ride on its way to PC-dom. If you have a **Gravis Gamepad** or similar four-

Don't play Mind Games

Go head-to-head instead



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Auto Stimulation

NEED FOR SPEED Fulfills Lamborghini Dreams And Ferrari Wishes

by Gordon Goble

DEDICATED COMPUTER DRIVERS KNOW ABOUT "THE LINE." NO, NOT THE ONE THAT GETS YOU AROUND THE TRACK FASTEST, BUT THE ONE THAT SEPARATES "SIM" FROM "GAME." What's the difference? Well, in most cases there is no such thing as a driving line in a "game." Realistic elements like this are usually compromised for the sake of a quick learning curve and blazing arcade action. But *NEED FOR SPEED* is kind of an anomaly in this fashion—it borrows some from both styles and thrills the senses along the way.

This Electronic Arts title is the latest salvo fired on the PC racing front, and it's got more going for it than a cool name. Despite some installation and gameplay creepy crawlies that may or may not affect you (I'll get into that later), this is a happy amalgamation of driving game and racing simulation, with some appealing extras thrown in. Its slick appearance, professional approach and hefty fun factor more than satisfy my Requirement For Rapidity.

NEED FOR SPEED

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

486DX2/66 or better, 4 MB RAM (8 MB recommended), CD-ROM drive (2x recommended), 2 MB hard drive space, VGA

graphics, joystick recommended; supports Soundblaster-compatible sound cards

Number of players: 1-2

Protection: none

Designer: Distinctive Software

Publisher: Electronic Arts

San Mateo, CA

(415) 571-7171



REQUIREMENT FOR RAPIDITY Each car looks life-like and more importantly, performs realistically.

NEED FOR SPEED has been concocted by the old hands at Distinctive Software stable, the people who brought us *Test Drive I and II*, *STUNTS*, *GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT* and *BILL ELLIOTT'S NASCAR CHALLENGE* (by far the best of the lot, at the time making quantum leaps forward in both driving mechanics and on and off track visuals).

MOTOR OIL OF THE GODS

Essentially, *NEED FOR SPEED* gives you a taste of the automotive good life by putting you behind the wheel of one of eight high performance street cars. Transportation ranges from the relatively mundane Mazda RX7 to a Corvette ZR-1 to a Dodge Viper all the way to the elite ranks of the Ferrari 512TR and Lamborghini Diablo. And this ain't no Sunday drive either—you'll be pitted against other drivers in similar machinery trying their best to outrace you all the way to the finish line.

For the most part, each vehicle reacts in much the same manner as it would in real life. The unearthly Lamborghini is

far and away the top-end speed champ, while the Ferrari and Toyota Supra Turbo handle like a dream. Of course, being a "game," there're no mechanical modifications allowed here—just get in and drive. But the car physics, while certainly not on a par with those of *NASCAR RACING*, are quite admirable. Racing lines do exist; taking the proper line around a turn will result in a much faster time. Oncoming drifts can be felt and corrected, and jerky joystick movement will result in off-track adventures. *NEED FOR SPEED* is the first "game" I've played where a wheel/pedal combo works, let alone works well.

However, in keeping with arcade tradition, you can bounce off the invisible trackside border in lieu of braking, or punt the other guy off the pavement before he attempts to punt or block you. Likewise, warm tires have no advantage over cold ones, and the pack seems to tailor their driving skills to those of the human entrants. Like I said, this isn't a full-fledged sim. And that will certainly suit many a speed racer out there.


The driver's in-cockpit perspective sports realistic dashboards, working instrument gauges and a visually responsive steering wheel. Important performance info is redisplayed across the top of the screen, as are critical numbers such as current position, lap times and splits. It's a good look, although some may prefer the behind-car chase view or even the skycam view (I can't imagine why).

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MICROPROSE

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As car handling is individually reflective of its real life counterpart, certain vehicles are preferable on certain tracks, and there're no less than seven divergent circuits on which to test your skill. From basic circuits (the Rusty Springs tri-oval) to switchback-crazed routes like The Coast and the "my-god-this-is-insane" Vertigo Ridge, your driving skills will be taxed in every way. There's also the little matter of a course known as, well...I'll keep the name a secret, but once you manage to win a full tournament, you'll find it. Put simply, you'll know you've found it when you blast through a drive-thru casino at 170 mph and then hurtle through space for about five seconds under the veil of almost total darkness. Oh yes, you will know...

TRACK THIS

Your rubber will burn on seven tracks (four closed loop tracks and three open circuits), comprising three segments each. Depending on the selected race mode, these courses are populated by other racers, other racers and generic traffic, where you'll have to dodge Super Family Trucksters and cops who will halt your progress and issue tickets. You can also go it alone in Time Trial mode.



CRASH BANG BOOM! No this isn't an episode of C.H.I.P.S.—it's you totaling that \$80,000 Paracite in *Need for Speed*

Track scenery and graphics are nothing less than gorgeous; if this isn't the prettiest racing game going, I'm Rip Van Winkle.

Textured like the *Papyrus* stuff, yet with better clarity, richer colors and an



PURPLE MOUNTAIN'S MAJESTY *Need for Speed's* graphics are breathtaking—is the high-res mode at least.

ultra-smooth frame rate to boot (on a Pentium 90, of course—anything less is clunky and jittery), *NEED FOR SPEED* is a graphical delight. Add to this tire smoke, skid marks that stick around all race, and spectacular end-over-end 3D collisions that'll send your car pirouetting on its front bumper before toppling over, and you can see why I'm gushing.

Race winners are treated to some fast-paced original film footage of real life motorized thoroughbreds being put through their paces while "Winner" and "#1" graphics blaze across the screen. After each race, you'll see a surprisingly thorough statistic screen that details fastest laps, top speeds and overall times while an announcer barks out appropriate congratulations. Record holders on each track or segment thereof and top-ten times are permanently saved.

One spiffy innovation is the "Highlight Reel," a package of racing clips the computer chooses as stand-out moments from your recently completed race. Complete race replays are also available, and a VCR-type control panel gives access to such things as replay speed and camera angle (from a choice of five, which, save for In-Car, are merely variants on the standard chase view).

BREAKDOWN

Gameplay options include auto vs. manual tranny, ABS (if the car carries it), traction control, and a veritable deluge of display options—low-res (320x200), high-res (640x480), window size, image quality, car detail, and so on. As previously alluded to, low-res is as homely as high-res is gorgeous, so be prepared to run this baby on a Pentium.

But wait (to coin a phrase)—that's not it. *NEED FOR SPEED* isn't just an interactive hard

drive, it's also a haven for hot car voyeurs. Click on a car from Control Central and NFS ushers you into the Car Showcase, where you have access to video presentations, beautiful still images, performance numbers, history and mechanics. All of this is accompanied by polished narration and a driving rock score (if desired). Aerial track views, a la *LINKS 386* without the fly-by, can also be accessed here.

CHECKERED FLAG

Unfortunately, all is not perfect in this little autopia. I've experienced several installation and gameplay obstacles in my quest for *SPEED*. I was initially plagued by installation hassles, which was corrected by replacing my CD-ROM drive (kind of an expensive patch), and the game tends to crash when I'm racing in Time Trial mode. These problems have surfaced on a number of systems, although it ran fine on 7 of 10 different systems. EA has yet to isolate the problem. Will you face the same dilemma? Sadly, I don't know.

But potential bugs aside, *NEED FOR SPEED* is a silky smooth monument to PC racing, boasting mouth-watering graphics and fast action that refuses to be typecast as strictly arcade. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

NEED FOR SPEED

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Gorgeous graphics and a great mix between arcade action and racing simulation.

CONS Requires lots of processor power and has some technical quirks.

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Taking It To The Toadman



Toons And Toads Go Head To Head In *BATTLE BEAST*

by Mark Clarkson

IN THE BEGINNING, KARATE CHAMP WAS THE ONLY FIGHTER IN TOWN. THE PREMISE WAS SIMPLE, ALMOST A metaphor for "life" if you will: two guys went at it, toe-to-toe, punching and jumping and kicking until one stood alone. You controlled your alter ego with combinations of moves on two joysticks, and could pit yourself against a friend or the computer.

Now, of course, the game industry squeezes out a new *Mortal-Kombat-Fighter-2000* every nine-and-a-half hours. Most add something (or one thing) to the mix: blood, guts, sexy women, weapons, secret moves and increasingly exotic opponents. We've fought as robots, dinosaurs and ghouls, as guys made of clay and guys made out of balls.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Just when you thought—or hoped—you'd seen it all, along comes *BATTLE BEAST* from 7th Level, the people who brought you *MONTY PYTHON'S COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME*. With terrific cel animation and a real sense of humor, *BATTLE BEAST* reminds me more of *LucasArts' DAY OF THE TENTACLE* than *Acclaim's MORTAL KOMBAT*. But don't worry, you still get to duck, jump, grab, punch, kick and otherwise hammer away at your opponents.

The introductory briefing, roared at you by the riding crop-wielding General I. Yell Daily, paints a dire situation. The

sinister Toadman has been breeding poisonous, mutant toads and loosing them on the city. These killer toads are jumping out of ice cream cones, popping up in bathtubs, devouring mailmen and scaring little old ladies right out of their teeth, and it's only a matter of time before they'll be drinking your beer and riding your bicycle (lions and tigers and toads—oh no!). The only thing between the Toadman and world domination is—you guessed it—you and your joystick.

Lucky for you, the perfect anti-toad



FISH BATTER The Battle Beasts may be cute, but they're also fierce, programmed warriors.

weapons—Battle Beasts—are readily available via mail-order. They even come in six nifty styles. Unfortunately, Toadman and his sidekick, Wart, have sabotaged their programming; the Battle Beasts would rather fight each other than enemy toads.

"FLUSH ME DOWN, SCOTTIE"

There are six different arenas for beast-to-beast combat including an alley, a junk yard and a basement, to name a few. Rather than just popping into each arena, there's a bit of arcade action as you race your opponent through the murky brown waterside of the city's sewer system. Whee!

Beat your opponent into the arena and you'll get a few seconds to whack toads, grab power-ups and look around for secret doors.

In another twist on the fighting genre, if your opponent's kicking your bionic

Battle Beast

Price: \$49.95
System Requirements: 18M compatible 486 33 (486-66 or better recommended), 8 MB RAM, 256 Color SVGA, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, MPC-2 double-speed CD-RDM, Windows-compatible sound card
of Players: 1-2
Protection: None (CD-ROM)
Designers: George Grayson
Publishers: 7th Level
Richardson, TX
(800) 884-8863



The Elder Scrolls™



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Chapter 2



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SEWER SLIDER The front portion of each battle is choosing your arena and making it there before your opponent.



ANIMATED ACTION HEROES Battle Beast has loads of great animations, like this robot Powerizer room.

butt, you can head for an arena with a door to the Power Up Room, where you can (and will eventually have to) reload or upgrade your weapons and pick up special moves like hurling trash cans or coughing up exploding eggs. If you're behind on points, you can make for an area with a door to a Bonus Room for some extra-credit toad smashing.

MIGHTY MORPHING BATTLE BEASTS

Battle Beasts start out, well, cute, as happy little puppies or sweet little dinos. But a quick two-button combination morphs you into Spartacus the Great One, Nasator the Killer, or Kulkapesh the Razor Fish.

Don't be too quick to morph, though. There's still plenty to do while you're small. First, spend a few seconds squashing the toads that infect every area. Fully

morphed beasts frighten the toads away, and can't grab power-ups either.

Even in its cuddly, non-morphed state, your Beast is capable of inflicting some slight damage on the enemy. The dino spits its pacifier and hammers away with an oversized baby bottle while the tortoise goes upside opponents' heads with his own shell (you get the idea). Un-morphed, you're so small that most attacks from a morphed opponent go right over your head. And don't forget about those secret passages; a pumped-up Battle Beast is too big to fit through them.

HAVE AT YOU!

Even though you get to swat toads from time to time, the heart of the game is beast-to-beast combat. Pick a beast and head for Boot Camp, where you can practice your moves for as long as you want without effecting your score. Once you've mastered the subtleties of the Front Flip, the Upper Cut and the Leg Sweep, it's time to go to War!

The fight animations hearken back to classic Looney Tune cartoons. Characters reach behind their backs or down their throats, magically producing enormous hammers or fish hooks bigger than their bodies. Eyes pop and heads swell. Plus there are added treats, like when the turtle is knocked out of his shell and is wearing polka dot boxers. Just watching in demo mode is pretty entertaining.

HELLO? HELLO?

One of *BATTLE BEAST*'s features, prominently advertised on the box, is remote head-to-head play, over modem or network. Unfortunately, it ain't there. Instead you'll get a blurry letter to the effect that the evil Toadman had sabotaged remote play. 7th Level tech support apologized, but informed me the remote

module hadn't been up to their high quality standards, and so the product had shipped without it. Never mind the fact that their high quality standards didn't prevent them from putting an unfinished product on the shelves without any warning to the consumer. An update is promised (haven't we heard this before?). Check before you buy.

For a game that runs under Windows 3.1, the gameplay is surprisingly smooth. The animation lags a bit on a fast 486 with a plain vanilla video card, but rocks along quite nicely on a Pentium.

It's a little crowded getting four hands onto one keyboard in the two-player mode, but the controls are well laid out once your fingers are in position. You can also re-configure keyboard controls, and if you've got a joystick or gamepad, you can use those as well.

Parents bothered by *MORTAL KOMBAT* may be a more comfortable letting their kids bang away at a Daffy Duck. You can also adjust the amount of damage each beast can withstand, equalizing play for opponents of different skill.

Ultimately, *BATTLE BEAST* is another take on a game we've already seen dozens of times. The extra bits—sewer racing and whack-a-toad—seem a bit gratuitous, and don't add that much weight to the gameplay: it's still the best joystick jockey that will win the day. In the long run, it's the outstanding animation that sells the game. The backgrounds are great, the characters are wonderfully realized and the voice acting, what there is of it, is splendid.

And, best of all, *BATTLE BEAST* is fun to play. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BATTLE BEAST

RATING ★★★★★

PROS *BATTLE BEAST* offers several interesting additions to the standard fighting-game fare, and the game's Looney Tunes nature is a welcome breath of humor in an otherwise dark genre.

CONS Fails to deliver on promised network play; cartoon-like nature is amusing but may turn off the blood and gore crowd.



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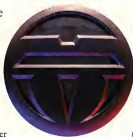


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Mel and Dok's Annoying Adventure

The First, And Hopefully The Last, DYNASTY Game

by Martin E. Cirulis

IT'S NICE TO KNOW THAT AFTER YEARS OF COMPUTER GAMING, THERE ARE STILL A FEW MYSTERIES THAT CONTINUE to elude me. The one on my mind today is why the span of the Atlantic Ocean has such a dire effect on the evolution of computer games. PC games that were primitive years ago here are hot stuff on the other side of the pond, and the European products that hit our shores have a tendency to be...a bit odd. Sure, English software has had some big hits the past couple of years—X-COM and MAGIC CARPET come to mind—but it seems that once you hop across the Dover ditch and start switching languages, things start to get a bit weird.

A case in point is THE LAST DYNASTY (TLD), the ads for which would have you think is a new space sim. Seconds after I booted this Sierra sci-fi title, though, I knew that I had one of those odd Euro-imports on my hands. And the more I got into things, the more I realized this game was not going to clear up any mysteries for this Colonial, but only deepen them.

CAUTION...ENTERING SILLY SPACE

TLD fairly drips with live-action video clips shot against painfully unrealistic computer-generated backgrounds. It begins with two gentlemen named Mel and Dok, engaged in some sort of satellite launch, from what looks like their Hamburg apartment. After a little snappy patter that doesn't match the lip movements, you, as the square-jawed Mel, try out a simulator helmet, which serves to introduce you to the space-com-

bat segment of the game.

After this dubious pleasure, you discover that Mel has beat out a decade of SETI and received an alien communique, indicating that the two of you should get ready for a long trip. The passage of a few hours finds our intrepid pair atop something suspiciously close to Glastonbury Tor in England, where Mel greets the historical arrival of an alien starship on Earth with the immortal words, "It's a flying cowpatty!" Of course, it's not all fun and sound bites, as the cowpatty has been followed by angry red fighters with poor aim. Amidst the din of alien vessels and exploding terrain, the faithful Dok clears up your confusion by shouting, "Into the white vessel! They're



DIE KILRA—OOPS! WRONG GAME At times, Last Dynasty looks like other cool space action games, but that's where the similarity ends.

Last Dynasty

Price: \$59.99
System Requirements:
IBM compatible
486-33 or better,
8 MB RAM, SVGA
graphics, 4 MB
hard drive space,
2x CD-ROM,
Windows 3.1;
supports Windows
compatible sound cards
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Coktel Vision
Publisher: Sierra On-line
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707



the good guys!"

From here, things actually get less interesting, as you are taken to some planet with a silly name, to meet a King with a sillier name, who announces that you are actually an abandoned Prince. It seems that the King of Planet Silly holds in his head the extremely powerful and stunningly generic "Ultimate Knowledge," which, while never quite described, gives its wielder the right to rule the Galaxy and wear that great "Holder of the Ultimate Knowledge" t-shirt. Unfortunately, it seems that all this power wasn't quite enough to hold off some Galactic Baddie with yet an even sillier name. Fearing it would fall into the hands of evil, your fairly gutless father split the Ultimate Knowledge in two (with the Cleaver o' Ultimate Knowledge, I guess), and placed it in the heads of you and your infant brother before sending the two of you into hiding out in the boonies of the

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galaxy. Your tech buddy, Dok, it turns out, is really an Imperial Squire sent to protect you in your ignorance on Earth.

Well, all good things must come to an end, and the Bad Guy with the even sillier name has found your brother and sucked out his half of the Ultimate Knowledge (probably with the Ultimate Knowledge *Sack-O-Matic* from Ronco). Your chronically Frightened Father has decided to yank you out of hiding and protect you in some stronghold, but before you can say "young hothead," you disobey orders and take Dok and your starship on a crusade to gather allies, rescue your brain-sucked brother and defeat the Bad Guy.

Yes, you've come a long way, Baby.

SON OF INCA-DINKA-DOO

While this Windows game claims no official connection to those odd, but pretty, INCA Euro-games, it would take OJ's defense team to quell my suspicions that we were looking at some pretty direct lineage. Almost all the things that made

and does try hard to mate adventure games with space sims. Their efforts should have yielded a game that lets you walk around, pick up stuff and solve puzzles between missions in WING COMMANDER. Unfortunately, the quality of the components really isn't up to the task, and together they just highlight their inherent weaknesses instead of complementing each other. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the game ships on two CDs, one for the space-sim and the other for the adventure game, which smacks you in the face every time the game switches gears. "Seamless" is not a word to be used here.

The space-sim portion looks good for a few moments. The ability to tailor the readouts on your HUD is really appealing, and it's nice to see a starfighter with a wealth of targeting data available, instead of the usual SPAD cockpit you get in other games. This feeling begins to evaporate once things start to move, and the great-looking enemy ships reveal themselves to be 2D cutouts that clumsily switch to a limited number of aspect views as you fly by. This is to sins as the old Spider-Man cartoon was to animation. If the stiff feel of things wasn't enough, you have a neon-erotic Bitching Betty for a ship's computer, who rapidly becomes tedious. Worse, just when the action starts to get heavy, you are suddenly yanked out of the game for a two-second animated replay of you blowing up the enemy that you already saw blow up from your cockpit.

In case this wasn't enough, there are also animation clips every time the enemy sends reinforcements, and when a fighter overshoots you. There may be a way of turning off this dislocating feature, but I couldn't find any reference to it; so it was teeth-gritting time every 20 seconds or so.

The adventure game parts are better, if uninspired. You travel about beautifully

rendered sets, achieving fairly clear goals for each "mission." The "puzzles" are generally straightforward and usually require only cleverness, as opposed to the clairvoyance of the usual adventure game. Movement is handled very much like in 7th Guest, where the mouse pointer shows which directions are available and scenes flow past in a cinematic way. Combat is virtually non-existent, and weapons only serve to solve certain situations; i.e., a laser can drop the guard at the door, but has no effect on a security-bot that must be disposed of using some clever trick. While adequate, I don't think the Internet will be burning up with talk of how fascinating the adventure portions of TLD are.

"JANE, GET ME OFF THIS CRAZY THING!"

If this game was a big hit in Europe, then I guess it all comes back to the mystery of different sensibilities and expectations of a game. For all the glitter, THE LAST DYNASTY doesn't offer anything more than you could have found on an Atari ST ten years ago, and the endless video clips leave the player feeling like flossam carried away on the raging current of unchecked multimedia. If a game is going to force you into a dorky, cliched character, the least it can do is give you some control over that character's destiny, instead of forcing you to watch him say and do dumb things.

While I am all in favor of experiencing other cultures, I am afraid this game remains so much fried snails and fish eggs for me. ☹



COMBATUS INTERRUPTUS Cinematic scenes, while very pretty, always interrupt the action sequences. All this eye candy, unfortunately, isn't nearly filling enough.

INCA annoying are present in TLD: long, boring, poorly written, live-action narrative phases, arcade sequences interrupted at the darndest times by superfluous animations, stunning graphics, and a weird save game system. To top it all off, a couple of the backgrounds looked suspiciously familiar.

To us credit, TLD is actually far more coherent than its stylistic predecessor,

THE EDITORS SPEAK

LAST DYNASTY

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Unlike some Euro-software, it does attempt to blend action and adventure elements. Starfighters have a nice HUD display.

CONS Combat is inexplicably interrupted by useless animation. The storyline and characters are loopy enough to play on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, though they're nowhere near as funny. Having to swap CDs whenever the game shifts to its alternate mode is a nuisance.

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Rhyme Of The Ancient MechWarrior

Revealing Tales Of A Star-Colonel's MECHWARRIOR 2 Tactics

by Martin E. Cirulli

Eighteen standard years of training and discipline had brought him to this place, to this scorched tarmac. An angry Red Giant filled one-fifth of the sky, and its tiny blue companion star burned brightly on the horizon. Strange gravity pulled at him, while the dust, the unending dust, blew by him. The horizon, far too close and narrow by the ancient Terran standard, still seemed impossibly huge—the flat dunes left nothing to hold up the sky. He longed for the perfect, walled world of the Generation ships where he was born.

His mood improved little as he strode across the huge staging base. Everything was in motion. Raids against the crazed Falcon would begin soon, and the Wolves were restless; he was no exception. There had already been skirmishes along the border worlds, but tomorrow, for the first time in nearly 300 years, there would be all-out war amongst the clans. Tomorrow, a lifetime of training would be measured out in crashing steel and plasma fire. Tomorrow, he would be good enough—or dead.

He didn't know which.

The warning call from a transport snapped him out of his brooding long enough to step out of the monster's way. Squinting against the dust kicked up by the flatbed, he stared at the transport's cargo as it rumbled by, less than a meter away. He only caught a glimpse of the fallen *Wolhammer*, but it was enough to catch the soot-blurred wolf insignia under-

"Hunker down here, Sparky, and I'll teach you some Inner Sphere tactics that are worth listening to. And don't be turnin' your Clan nose up at any of 'em; they work and they'll keep you alive. It's not like you get bonus points in Valhalla for dying with a high degree of difficulty."

neath the shattered cockpit. He didn't catch the Sibko glyph, though, and could only wonder if he had already lost a friend before the war had even been declared.

The young MechWarrior shook his head angrily and sprinted across the road-lines ahead. His destination, a scarred and dented *Thoberassif*, loomed over the prefab huts, but was itself dwarfed by the artificial mountain of the MechBay. Reclining against the ankle housing of this 75 ton metallic behemoth, reading a paperback instead of a complete, was the man he had come to see. This was the man who might be able to give him *The Edge*—or at least enough knowledge to see the War through to its end.

"Star-Colonel Hammeron, Sir!" he barked, executing the rigid clan salute.

The older man continued to read for a few seconds before turning the page and folding the corner over. He closed the book, his sigh lost in the roar of base operations, and slid down the foot of his Mech to tower over the junior officer. He returned the salute haphazardly. "Something I can help you with, pup? I booked off today, you know."

Confronted by the reality of this freeborn officer, the MechWarrior suddenly reconsidered his plan. The Star-Colonel was freakishly large for a Mech pilot; and the younger man wondered how he ever could fit into the cramped cockpit of a mech. He was far too old to be a combat officer—even



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taking into account the poor aging of Freeborn, this man had to be at least 50 years old. And yet he continued to win the rite of leadership, year after year. With his silver hair pulled back into a braid and the worn grey-on-grey fatigues he wore, no Truebirth ignorant of this man's identity would have thought twice about ordering him to start unloading the ammo trucks. Yet this man had taken down dozens of Clan Mechs, despite his age and the backward technology of the Inner Sphere.

The answers the young Warrior need-

If your ego can stand it, squeeze out the extra five tons and take a *MadDog*, kid. Those LRM-20's will tear the face off any incoming Bandits.

ed were here, but he suddenly felt ridiculous pestering this legend. He bowed in apology and began to step backward. "Forgive me, Star-Colonel. It was wrong of me to disturb you."

"I've been disturbed for a long time, pup. Now hold up a second." The Clan Warrior halted and came to attention. Hammerson studied him through narrowed eyes. "I don't know you, do I?"

"No, sir. I am MechWarrior Skyle of Canus Sibko." He was caught now; there was no path now except truth. "I am going out on my first mission tomorrow, and I thought—I hoped—you would honor me with your insights. It was a foolish idea. Forgive me." He bowed again and waited for dismissal.

"At ease, Sparky! Gods, you Clan types are wound too damn tight, you know that?"

Skyle wasn't quite sure what that meant, but agreement seemed the most respectful course.

THE EDGE

Hammerson locked eyes. "So...lookin' for an edge, eh, Sparky? Think the old Stravag Colonel can give you a leg-up on your tube-mates with some Inner Sphere tricks, eh? Make you a real little Ristar? Get to be Star-leader in record time?"

The words were harsh, mocking. Skyle's ego wanted to agree, to claim he only sought advantage, and deny the doubt that scratched at the back door of his mind—but again, the honor drilled into his very cells allowed him only one reply. "No, Star-Colonel. I...I do not want to fail at what I was born to do. I don't want my life to have been pointless."

Hammerson smiled. "You don't want to die."

The uncalled-for insult stung. "A Clan Warrior doesn't fear death. Only dishonor!"

"Spare me the propaganda, Sparky. Only outcasts aren't afraid to die; there's always something better to do than get yourself killed. Whether it's that little honey from the Assault Lance, or chasing Scotch with cheap beer—there's always something sweeter than a good eulogy."

Skyle nodded slowly, but "I don't want to fail," was as close as he could come to the sentiment.

"Fair enough. C'mon. I need to stretch my legs a bit anyway, and an old man likes to be listened to sometimes." He turned towards the Repair-bay, a line of Mechs arrayed in front of the 30-meter double doors.

"Yes, Star-Colonel Hammerson!" Skyle smiled involuntarily, burying to fall in beside his unlikely teacher.

"And I'm just a Colonel, Okay? I hate all this 'Star' crap. Makes me feel like I'm in some New Avalon musical."



TIMBER! Grizzled old veterans love the Timber Wolf, it's got plenty of fire power and can take the big hits.

"MECH"-ING THE GRADE

"If you gotta go light and fast, take a *FireMoth*, but make sure you get a tech to install jump jets in place of the SRM-4. You can't afford to take even a single missile salvo dead on. The *KillFox* is too damned slow for a recon Mech, and the *Jenner* is a bloody death trap. I never liked those little chickens, even after you wunderkinz upgraded the model."

Skyle looked at the extended cockpit of a nearby *Jenner* with a jaundiced eye. He had never been happy with the design that placed the pilot out in front of the Mech, and it was good to hear his bias confirmed. "What about the mediums, Sir? We were told the *StormCrow* is the best choice, if you are unsure of what opponents or task you are going to face."

Hammerson snorted. "Never been impressed with them myself. You sacrifice an awful lot for the extra ten clicks of speed. No, if your ego can stand it, squeeze out the extra five tons and take a *MadDog*, kid. Those LRM-20's will tear the face off any incoming Bandits. After that, you can finish them off with the lasers. That's the real meaning of versatility out in the field. Of course, if you know you've got a close-range, knife fight coming up, some place where the terrain cuts the line-of-sight way down, ask for a *Nova* and she'll bring you home every time—as long as you keep moving. Just remember that if you've only got a couple of spasms in you before you start to cook, make sure



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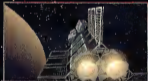
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you're close and behind your Bandit."

"Spasms, Sir?"

The Colonel looked back from where he had been studying the mass of twisted wreckage that hung from the shoulder socket of a nearby *HellBringer*. "Oh, Sorry, Sparky. You'd call it group. Definitely a twitch kind of decision—but a spasms at the right time, especially when you can execute a partial break *away* and cool off, can bring down an enemy Mech in record time. Just try and make sure it's a back shot that you can't miss. Having to choose between shutting down and burning

The two most important things to remember are:

a) LRMs are your friend.

Make sure to select them in the 15 or 20 rack. And b) the cycling time of a weapon is often more important than the amount of damage it does.

up, because you needed a second or third burst to finish the job, is never fun."

Skyle filed the tactic, and warning, in the back of his mind. "You always pilot the same *TinderWolf*, Colonel. Why?"

"Cause I like the way she fights and she takes the hits. To be honest, as we move into the 65- to 80-ton range, you and the Bird-brains are working some real horrible designs." Skyle looked at him in shock. "Get that Clan nose back in joint and listen, Sparky! You boys may have all the bigger, faster, and stronger toys, but us Inner Sphere grunts have had 300-odd years of warfare to work out the kinks in our designs. By now, most of our

bad ideas have been ground into rust on the battlefield.

"No, your *Sixsummer*, *HellBringer* and *Georgie* basic models should go back to the drawing board and lose those big guns in vulnerable spots. The *Riflesman* upgrade is nice but, damn, you better be a crack shot—that heat load won't exactly let you blaze away before you melt down your reactor core. Me, I'll take the *TinderWolf* every time. She's reasonably fast and packs the LRMs. She has enough lasers, spread over the body, that losing an arm doesn't kill you—and in case you ever start to overheat in a knife fight, you can cut to the dual machine guns and chew up some enemy armor plate while things cool down."

MechWarrior Skyle accepted the point and smiled carefully. "When I achieve the necessary rank, I will make a point of requesting my own *TinderWolf*."

"Now you're getting it."

METAL CASTE

As they approached the main doors of the Repair-Bay, they let the hurricane of industrial noise wash over them. Power hammers, riveters, arc welders and high-speed drills all performed in an orchestra of chaos, while Techs swarmed over damaged BattleMechs like monkeys searching for fruit in the crannies of steel trees. The air was thick with ozone and the bitter taste of vaporized alloy. Just inside the entrance, a Star of *Elementals* lifted the damaged foot of a *Marauder*, while a tech pulled off a buckled armor plate and began welding the new one in place.

Colonel Hammerson knew better than to try and yell over the wall of sound, and

motioned Skyle to pick up one of the many headsets and put the earphones on.

"—an you hear me, Sparky?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"You see this bay around you?"

"Of course, Colonel."

"Don't give me that snotty 'Caste' look. What's going on here is the real reason you've got a chance of reforming the Star League on Terra."

"This place?!" Skyle was incredulous. He was a MechWarrior, the highest caste in Clan Society. This was common work, done by those unworthy even to be Elementals. "These are just technicians!"

Hammerson looked as if he were about to take a swing at his charge. Skyle dropped back a step, half-raising his hands in an automatic defensive crouch. "Exactly, you little twerp. You guys didn't knock us silly for the first year 'cause of your spiffy little test-tube soldiers. You managed it because you've got Techs and spare parts out the yin-yang. Back in the old days of the Ghost Company, I was lucky if I could find somebody to help me reload, never mind tailoring my loadout for every mission. Adaptability is real power, and you Clan types have it in spades."



TURN AND BURN One tactic successful! Mech jockeys must learn to turn away from a target before contact and use the turret to do the tracking.

Skyle thought hard about it, but again, his cultural bias left him unable to come to terms with the truth. Weapon selection was something rarely discussed by Mech-

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Circle Reader Service #115

Warriors; the most they would deign to do was select what variant might be appropriate for the mission. The details of the weapons themselves were a lesser person's task.

The Colonel swore loudly. "Look, just try and remember what I'm gonna tell you here. The way combat works these days, the two most important things to remember are: a) LRMs are your friend. Make sure to select them in the 15 or 20 rack. And b) the cycling time of a weapon is often more important than the amount of damage it does.

"A medium pulse laser can fire four shots in the same amount of time it takes a PPC to come back on line."

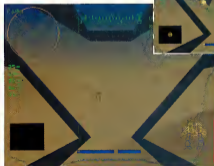
"I can see that, Sir, but that one shot can be enough to cripple a smaller mech."

"Only if you hit, Sparky. Sure, if you're duking it out with the big boys, you can be pretty much assured a hit with a slow-moving plasma bolt, most of the time. But against higher-speed opposition, you can get killed trying to maneuver for that perfect killing single shot. AC/20s may look good and reinforce your masculinity, but with a long cycle time and only five shots per ton, you better have a patient finger on that trigger."

"I think I see your point, Colonel Hammerson."

"No kiddin'."

They had to duck a dangling bundle of myomer cable that was being carried overhead by an auto-crane.



THE BIG ZOOM When bandits get within eyesight, zoom in and blast 'em with your Long Range Missiles.

"Given that I have a chance to assign some of these Techs to redesign work on my behalf, what kind of loadout do you suggest, Sir?"

"You want at least one big LRM rack



BACKSIDE MANEUVERS Instead of butting heads with your target, slip past him and deliver a group shot right up his tailpipe.

with 15 or 20 missiles—two of them if you got a chassis over 60 tons. Take a couple of large pulse lasers if you're expecting medium-sized trouble, and move up to PPCs if you expect bigger, slower opponents. If you're not sure, it's a good idea to pack at least one PPC for giant-slaying and turret removal. If you have the room



to spare, an SRM-4 Streak is handy, and you definitely want a couple of machine-guns so you aren't completely helpless in an overheat situation. Next, pack in at least four medium pulse lasers and enough heat sinks to keep fairly cool while



running steady chain fire. Try not to sacrifice much armor for this; stay within a couple of points of maximum for the body area. After all this, if you have a few tons of extra room lying around, put in jump jets, even if they aren't enough to lift you off the ground, they'll still add enough thrust to let you shake most of the

warheads in a locked-on missile salvo."

Skyle tried desperately to commit this all to memory, cursing himself for not bringing along a data-pad.

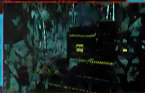
MIGHT VS. RIGHT

"And here's the tricky part, Sparky. I've found over the years that you clan types seem to enjoy concentrating fire on the right side of a Mech. Nine times out of ten, if you're gonna lose a limb or even a torso in combat, it'll be on your right side—so pack as many of your weapon systems and ammunition bays in your left side as you can. Also, just in case you end up losing both sides, try and put one of the medium pulse lasers in your center torso—at least it won't go until you do." Hammerson bent over and grabbed a discarded steel rod the length of his forearm. "Now lets get out of here before some bitter lower caste 'accidentally' drops a Gauss Rifle on you."

X'S AND O'S

Five minutes later, they were once again outside, where the noise level had dropped to the normal background roar of a Mech base. Hammerson found a patch of open dirt on the edge of a runway and squatted down beside it, tapping the ground with the metal rod he had

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WETLANDS



**MY PRINCE
HAS COME.**

**HE'S GOT
GORGEOUS
MUSCLES**

**A STRONG
PROFILE**

**A SPANDEX
WARDROBE**

**AND SOLID
CAREER
GOALS LIKE.."**

picked up.

"Hunker down here, Sparky, and I'll teach you some Inner Sphere tactics that are worth listening to. And don't be turnin' your Clan nose up at any of 'em; they work and they'll keep you alive. It's not like you get bonus points in Valhalla for dying with a high degree of difficulty."

Skyle wasn't too sure about that, but he squatted next to the patch of dirt anyway.

The old man began to scratch X's and O's into the dust. "These X's are you and your star, and these circles are the enemy."

He began to draw lines connecting the symbols. "Now watch. If you're in close quarters or protecting a static objective, then you want to keep your Star tight, but if you've got the freedom to move and some open terrain, use this. As soon as your targeting computer reads active bandits, order your Star-mates to attack separate Mechs through your own targeting system. Once they get into range of their weapons, change their orders to engage-at-will—that will let them mix it up freely and slow the enemy down. In the meantime, you'll be sitting there with your LRM racks cued up, just waiting for them to close to one kick. Select a bandit that probably won't have jump jets, go to maximum zoom to make sure your buddies aren't blocking the shot, and unload. Then, throw your Mech into reverse, wait for your racks to cycle, and unload again. Repeat as necessary."

"Now, you Clan boys are real good at straight-on, long-range shots with energy weapons, but your ability to lead a target sucks. The trick is to turn away from the attack at 45 degrees before you begin your retrograde movement, and then torso-twist to bring your weapons to bear. The Bandits will generally shoot at where you are, not where you're going. And make

sure to vary your speed as much as possible."

Skyle smiled. While this tactic didn't exactly conjure up the noble image of a full speed charge, it would win the battle quickly—or at least damage the Falcons badly as they tried to close. He said as much.

"Now you're getting it, Sparky."

BACK STABBING

"Once things end up in a knife fight, there are a couple of things to try. First of all, if you're in something relatively fast, like a *Nova*, try the old Spin-n-Spasm. Close on the enemy Mech at full speed,



AN ARM AND A LEG Disabling bandits by shooting their legs is a great idea, but an armless Mech can do you less harm.

trade a couple of shots, and then blow by him as close as possible. As soon as you're past, chop your throttle to zero and slam your stick over hard. This should bring you up against the back armor of your opponent before they can even turn to face you, especially if they are bigger and slower than you. Once in position, group-fire all your weapons twice and then get the hell out of there to cool off. If you can get this move down, you'll tear the back out of the heaviest Mechs nearly every time. Just don't miss, and make sure you have a good idea where open ground is, because this move will leave you a bit vulnerable.

Hammerston's impromptu student nodded. "Clan wisdom dictates that we concentrate fire on a Mech's legs, neutralizing the machine with a minimum of damage and time. Does the Inner Sphere agree?"

The Colonel rubbed thoughtfully at a



Games on

the Power Mac.

What's it like?"

You're standing over a 20-foot putt, and as an expectant hush falls over the crowd this huge 8-foot-tall guy with bionic arms walks out onto the green and does this like, windmill kick that shatters your jaw in 3 or 7 places and you're running low on lives so you jump in your T-80 tank and do 65 mph heading for the trees (slowing to 55 for the sand traps) wasting spectators and oops your caddie along the way and you're racking up the points and feeling pretty good when all of a sudden you hear this beep-beep-beep alarm go off and you've got a bogey on your tail so you drop some chaff and try some evasive maneuvers but to no avail and this explosion rocks you hard and both engines are out so you hit the eject button and suddenly you're floating and down below you see these trees start to materialize and your caddie, somehow miraculously back alive, says "bogey" and you look up but he just means you missed the putt and you missed it bad.

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couple of days' worth of unchecked facial hair. "Human...Yes and no. It's great to tear the legs off a target, but it's not an easy shot on the move, and you'll waste a lot of good fire tryin'. Plus, the target can return fire until the very last moment. On the other hand, if you're going to pick a target, the arms are easier to hit; and if you miss, half the time your shots will tear up the torso armor. Most Mech designs are toothless if they lose their arms. Remember, an enemy weapon lying on the ground is one less worry for you. An enemy Mech on one leg may be an easy target but it still shoots back."

BATTLE MASTER

"Now here's a trick that will bag you a *BattleMaster* every ti—"

Hammerson was suddenly cut off by the blare of klaxons followed by the command for various Stars to form up on the runway and board their Dropships.

Skyle looked stricken for a moment, but the older man merely shrugged. "I thought they might get you guys into position early."

Skyle managed a tight smile. "More Inner Sphere tactics, Sir?"

"Could be."

The ground began to shake with multi-ton footfalls as Skyle snapped off a salute. "Thank you for your time, Star-Colonel Hammerson! I will endeavor not to bring dishonor to my Sibko or you."

The salute was returned, this time with the same rigid control. "Good luck, MechWarrior Skyle of Casanus Sibko."

"Thank you again, Sir" And with that he spun on his heel and began racing for his Mech assignment. He was halfway across the tarmac when he heard a voice yell.

"Remember what I told you, Sparky and don't get your prissy Clan butt blown off. I need a junior officer in my Command Star!"

Not knowing if he had been heard or not, the Colonel shrugged and began the long walk back to his reading spot. He dug the ancient volume out of his back pocket and flipped through to find his spot. With the base half empty after the launch, maybe he'd have the time to figure out who the hell that damn bell was tolling for. ☹

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37452 Super 10 2 V 34 EXT FAX/Modem	204
24453 Super 10 2 V 34 EXT FAX/Modem	206
37614 Super 10 2 V 34 EXT FAX/Modem	187
40015 Super 10 2B 8 EXT V 34 FAX/Modem	234
40825 Super 10 2B 8 EXT V 34 FAX/Modem	234
40525 Super 10 2B 8 EXT FAX/Modem	147
33117 Super 10 2B 8 EXT FAX/Modem	195
39783 Super 10 2B 8 EXT FAX/Modem	195
32314 Super 10 2B 8 EXT FAX/Modem	195
34258 Super 10 2B 8 EXT FAX/Modem	218
38187 Super 10 2B 8 EXT FAX/Modem	218
38179 Super 10 2B 8 EXT FAX/Modem	182
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40281 Digital Software EX EXT	120
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39171 Diamond 4P12 EXT CDROM	319
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38190 HP DeskJet 220	103
40786 HP DeskJet 400C Printer	104
38192 HP DeskJet 320C MAC	104
39568 HP LaserJet 4E	126
39513 HP LaserJet	126
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34119 EX 72014 34 pin 2300pp Printer	146
39744 EX 72014 Inkjet 2200pp	194

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39022 ScanMaster 800 Color Flatbed	389
32000 ScanMaster II Color Flatbed	249
39754 ScanMaster 120 Color Flatbed	289
39152 ScanMaster 120K Color Flatbed	289
39752 ScanMaster 256	151
39753 ScanMaster Color	151
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36671 ScanMaster Powerpage 400 DP	630

SPEAKERS

36304 Jans J 511 Speakers	76
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36301 Jans J 722 Speakers	123
36302 Jans J 818 Speakers	145
35719 Koss HS 6 APC Speakers	94
39250 Koss HS 900 Speakers	94
34172 Koss HS 900 Speakers	94
39252 Koss HS 900 Speakers	94
32298 Koss HS 1000 Speakers	94
36473 Koss HS 1000 Speakers	94
30474 Pioneer 427 Speakers w/ Subwoofer	154
36403 Pioneer 700 Speakers	248
32349 Pioneer Stereo System YS1000 (Full)	248
39714 Pioneer Stereo YS2000 (Full)	137
39110 Roland MA 120P Powered Speakers	215
38108 Tascam	66
39712 Tascam	66
38163 Wadco PE	127
40400 Wadco PE FX	127
40402 Wadco PE Studio	127

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The Old Ballgame

BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS Boasts A New Sound, But The Same Old Gameplay

by Jim Gindin

WHEN APBA BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS HIT THE MARKET A FEW YEARS AGO, IT BOASTED A slick Windows interface, beautifully drawn stadium backdrops and robust, accurate statistics. Unfortunately, it was severely bogged down by some season-play issues that made the game practically unplayable for playing out complete seasons.

So I looked at *BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS 3.0*, the upgrade to this well-regarded series with great hope. Its promising points—new sound, improved graphics and even a comprehensive add-on encyclopedia—all matched my expectations. But guess what? It is still bogged down by the same annoying season play issues.

This new version sports two cool new features: Ernie Harwell's Broadcast Blast and the Bill James Electronic Encyclopedia. But not a whole lot else has changed.

The Broadcast Blast portion of the game features authentic-sounding play-by-play commentary by Ernie Harwell (who earned induction to Baseball's Hall of Fame through decades of radio work, most notably as the legendary voice of the Detroit



COLORFUL COMMENTARY You'll feel like you're actually at the old ballgame with Ernie Harwell's Broadcast Blast feature.

Tigers). Unlike the competitors' lagging, popping, stuttering attempts to add an announcer, this play-by-play voice comes pretty close to passing for an actual account of on-field action.

Harwell's voice throws out a seemingly endless array of phrases, which, when combined with an AI that can recognize clutch situations late in a game and enough filler material, give each broadcast continuity and entertainment value for longer than just a few games. Harwell even attempts to pronounce the names of players imported from other sources—getting pronunciations right on the money more often than not. Broadcast Blast definitely sets a new standard for sound in a sports simulation.

BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS 3.0's second major improvement—the Bill James Electronic Encyclopedia—is a terrific new product all by itself. This complete listing of players, from past to present, includes season stats, career stats and enough charts, graphs and numbers to keep a statophile happy for years. Better still, you can import these new players into *BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS*, assigning them standard APBA profiles.

On the downside, importing from the Encyclopedia is a little awkward, as is setting up leagues using these players.

Blame an awkward, non-intuitive interface for that. But with a little patience, it can be done. The best thing is, after purchasing this digital database you have access to every team in Major League history. Bye-bye, expensive season disks.

Aside from these enhancements, *BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS 3.0* is essentially the same APBA computer baseball simulation that hit the market about a decade ago.

Like most of its competitors, APBA is based on a board game. Board games lack, by necessity, the complexity that can be built into a computer simulation. As a result, APBA baseball produces accurate, but occasionally quirky statistics. The game is played over a beautiful VGA or SVGA picture of one of a handful of Major League ballparks. Players are represented by their name and either batting or fielding ratings. During the game, you select from a limited range of offensive or defensive actions.

The simulated gameplay comes off rather well, with a few exceptions. There's a little less offense in APBA than in real baseball, mostly because, in the APBA game model, starting pitchers who perform very well become even more dominant late in an APBA game. This might also explain why there are far more strikeouts. Fans of the juiced baseball will be happy to know that home runs also occur more frequently, although not so many as to significantly skew the game results.

On a statistical basis, *BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS* performs as well as *STRAT-O-MATIC BASEBALL*. But because of fielding and strikeout problems, it's a little bit behind *PURSUE THE PENNANT 5.0*. But that's still ex-

BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS 3.0

Price: \$49.95 (BILL JAMES BASEBALL ENCYCLOPEDIA sells separately for \$44.95)

System

Requirements: Microsoft Windows 3.1 or later, 485-33 CPU, CD-ROM, 4 M RAM (8 M recommended), 18 M hard disk space, 16-bit sound card

Protection: None

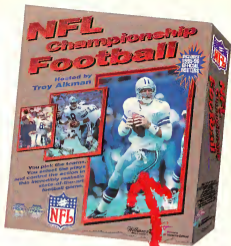
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cellent company. All three of these games are much, much stronger statistically than any of the action-based crowd.

THE LONG HAUL

Unfortunately, when it comes to simulating full seasons this baseball sim falls short. Many of the same problems that plagued **BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS 2.0** (this version's predecessor) remain unfixed. It still has the same old adequate, but non-programmable, Artificial Intelligence, which means you still have to spend a lot of time inputting lineups prior to simulated games if you want accurate playing time assigned to each player. Worse yet, if fatigue or injuries are enabled, the game will pause season simulation if an expected starting player is unavailable. This makes simulating a season an extreme exercise in patience, especially when combined with the fact that each game requires about a minute of dedicated file manipulation on a high-end machine. And, despite the ability to import encyclopedia teams, **BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS** has no tools that generate league schedules. If you want to replay a season

that's not straight from the season disk, you're going to need to create that schedule, game by game, by yourself. It's too bad **Miller Associates** couldn't have tamed up these much-complained-about problems for this new version of the game. It would have made a huge difference.

Once you've completed a season, **BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS** provides an excellent package for viewing accumulated and compiled statistics. Not only does the program allow you to view the entire schedule, including results and complete boxscores, but it keeps a thorough set of player and team statistics, making use of all the graphic advantages of multiple on-screen windows. **BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS** allows you to choose from standard statistics and the latest in sabermetric wizardry. It even provides a couple of advanced statistical tools you can use to generate optimal run-producing lineups. This product may trail the field when it comes to simulating a season, but it's miles ahead when it comes to analyzing what you've simulated. If you can make it that far.

BOX SCORE

BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS continues to lead the baseball peripheral market. It's got better sound, prettier ballparks and better stat-keeping than any simulation on the market. The **Baseball Encyclopedia**, too, is an excellent addition to any staffer's software library. But it continues to trail the field in other, more critical areas. Simulating full season play is more often than not, a huge exercise in frustration. For that reason, it's hard to recommend this game for any purpose other than an excellent medium for playing long, entertaining single-game contests against friends or the computer. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS

RATING



PROS Better sound than any sports game on the market, great graphics and a great baseball simulator.

CONS Season play problems (injury interruptions and lengthy autoplay) still haven't been fixed, limited in-play options.

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from spot of recovery

TD Redskins

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Sophisticated Violence

It Looks Great, But RUGBY WORLD CUP May Prove Little More Than Passing Fancy

by George Jones

GENTLEMAN'S VIOLENCE. THAT'S THE ONLY SIMPLE DESCRIPTION FOR THE SOPHISTICATED ROUGH and tumble sport of rugby I can come up with. It describes a sport where you attempt to violently tackle, kick and even punch your opponents into submission while you try and carry this bloated white pigskin across the goal line. So where does the gentleman part come in? I'm not really sure, but I think it's a preconceived notion that anything of European origin has a touch of elegance. Maybe it's just because, after a match, the players get really drunk together and sing raunchy rugby songs.

EA Sports, the Midas division of Electronic Arts (can you remember an EA Sports game that wasn't great?) with the help of The Creative Assembly is trying to bring the European excitement of the game to the PC with RUGBY WORLD CUP 1995. Have they succeeded? Well, partially. RUGBY WORLD CUP has great graphics and authentic gameplay. But it

RUGBY WORLD CUP 1995

System Requirements: 486DX2/33 or better, 4 MB RAM (8 MB recommended), CD-ROM drive (2x recommended), 2 MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, joystick recommended, supports Soundblaster compatible sound cards

Number of players: 1-2

Protection: none

Designer: The Creative Assembly

Publisher: Electronic Arts

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suffers from some uncharacteristically rough edges and the monotonous nature of the sport.

THE SET-UP

From the game's main menu, which looks exactly as it does in the cartridge version (nothing against 16-bit stuff, but we PC folk have been spoiled by en-

hanced ports like NBA LIVE) you can choose from several different play options including arcade and simulation modes, the quality of the "pitch" (rugby talk for the playing surface) and several other variables. Three different season play modes are available, from league play to world cup play to the 1995 World Cup, which will be held in South Africa. "Friendly" play (whatever that is) is also available.

Once you make it through this clunky interface—don't even think about using your mouse—it's time to get black and blue.

GRAPHICS GALORE

Once you hit the field, you'll be blown away by RUGBY's lifelike graphics, which spurred more than one person into asking me if I was watching video footage of a rugby game. This is a significant accomplishment: each of the 90 players on the field moves remarkably smoothly, individually running, kicking, jumping, and writhing on the ground in pain. Even more amazing is the fact that the game runs flawlessly on a 66 MHz 486 system.

Unfortunately, all is not exactly peachy keen on the graphical front. At times during the game (during kicks, in particular), the game switches to a high-resolution screen that just doesn't work right. On one system, the screen cut itself in half whenever the game jumped to high-res. On another system, the screen flickered as if possessed. On two other machines, the game simply crashed. Suffice it to say that this display mode is out of whack. Thankfully, this can be disabled upon startup from the command line (just type "GO -H" when you play).



YOU SCRUM BALL The scrum is one of the more recognizable formations in rugby.



Every

player dreams of it...



NICE TRY Moving that bloated white pigskin across the goal line results in a try, worth 5 points.

IN YOUR FACE (AND UP YOUR NOSE)

Rugby is similar to soccer in that it is a sport of continual motion. But rugby is a much more complicated sport, with its own vocabulary and all sorts of different rules for various situations.

Now I'm no expert, but I have seen and played the sport several times, and EA's version appears to be right on the money with accurate rules and accurate game flow. In fact, the gameplay is so au-

camera viewpoint that, for me at least, made heading upfield a lot easier for me (consequently, heading downfield was much harder). One other mild frustration I had was how difficult it was for me to form a maul (a way to protect the ball while gaining some ground), while the computer did it quite frequently. I

found myself learning how to play the game better each time around.

Unfortunately, as much as I found myself learning, I just couldn't get that excited about the game. As much as this is an action game, I found RUGBY lacking, well, action. Big hits and tackles didn't seem so big, and the exciting moments were few, far between and muted by the endless amount of ball control that is the nature of this sport.

The computer AI offers decent competition and a fairly knowledgeable opponent, although I did witness more than a couple of those notorious endgame breakdowns like kicking the ball out-of-bounds) deep in the opposing territory at the end of a match. If you get too good, you can artificially adjust the difficulty level

by choosing a relatively weak club as your squad. One other special treat is the announcer who, in addition to exclaiming "that was a crushing tackle" also pronounces the names of each player on each squad. Too bad this is the only way to distinguish player from player...

FULL TIME

Maybe, considering the stellar reputa-

RUGBY RULES

The object of rugby is to score as many points as possible by carrying, passing, kicking and grounding an oval ball into the scoring zone at the far end of the field (the in-goal area). The ball may not be passed forward (though it may be kicked forward) and players may not receive the ball in an offside position ahead of the ball, nor may they wait in such a position. Players may not be tackled without the ball. Play only stops when a try is scored, or the ball goes out of play, or an infringement occurs. When the ball goes out it is thrown back in at a line-out where the opposing "forwards" line up and jump for the ball. Infringements result in a penalty, a free kick or a scrum. In a scrum the opposing forwards bind together in a unit and push against the other forwards, trying to win the ball with their feet. Substitutions are only allowed in case of injury.

Grounding the ball results in a try (worth 5 points). A conversion kick through the uprights (after a try) results in 2 more points. Points may also be scored from a drop kick in general play and a penalty kick (both worth 3 points).



IT'S A TEAM GAME You've got plenty of teams at your disposal from all corners of the globe, each is rated in several different categories.

thentic that unlike FIFA Soccer, if you find rugby boring in real life, you'll probably find this boring as well. Line outs play like line outs and scrums play like scrums to a certain extent, although they're rather difficult to get the hang of.

Gameplay, which consists of continually laterallying the ball (see the rules sidebar) in an attempt to get into the "end zone," is appropriately detailed from an angled TV

viewpoint of EA Sports, I expected a little too much from RUGBY, especially considering their runaway success with FIFA Soccer. Don't get me wrong—rugby is a fun sport to play. Unfortunately it's not nearly as much fun to watch or to simulate. If you're a huge fan of rugby, or just have an idle curiosity in the "gentleman's" sport, you'll dig this game. Minor bugs and oversights aside, there's nothing really wrong with it. It just lacks that certain something that grabs you by the jock strap and keeps you glued to the monitor for hours at a time. I suspect that's just the nature of the sport itself (or my Americanized view of it), but playing RUGBY is loosely analogous to a trip to England: neat place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. ☹


THE EDITORS SPEAK

RUGBY WORLD CUP 1995

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Beautiful graphics and authentic rugby action.

CONS Some high-res bug problems, and authentic rugby action.



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Pixel Pugilists

TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING Ain't Pretty, But It Stands Victorious After 15 Rounds

by Terry Lee Coleman

IN AN ERA WHERE EVEN POP WARNER FOOTBALL COMES UNDER INTENSE SCRUTINY—IT'S BAD FOR YOUNGSTERS to develop motor and social skills at a young age, I suppose—the constant cries to ban boxing come as little surprise. Critics point to the severe injuries, even deaths, that occur in the amateur and pro ranks. What they ignore is that statistically, boxing has fewer critical injuries than skydiving, auto racing and (believe it or not) horse racing.

Worse, the critics hide behind the thin shield of "the civilized world," forgetting the significance boxing has had in our society. Where were they when Joe Louis, the great "Brown Bomber," knocked Max Baucus to the canvas, uniting Harlem in pride and infuriating Adolf Hitler and his boasts of "Aryan supremacy"? To millions of radio listeners half a century ago, a Dempsey or Tunney title defense was as eagerly anticipated as anything. Boxing is violent, yes; but it is also larger than life and full of excitement—a single punch can end a bout at any moment—attributes which fuel the sport's excitement as surely now as 50 years ago.

Problem is, there aren't a whole lot of titles to stake the gamer's competitive box-

TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING

Price: \$49.95

System Requirements: 486 compatible 386 or better, Windows 3.1 or Win '95, 256-color VGA graphics, 4.5 MB hard drive space; mouse and printer recommended.

Protection: None

Players: 1-2

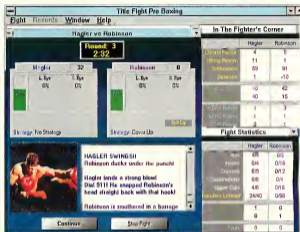
Designers: James V. Trunzo and Thomas Trunzo

Programmer: Mark Gamble

Publisher: Comp-U-Sports

Saltsburg, PA

(412) 845-7843



RINGSIDE SEAT Even with windows open for fight stats, boxer matchups and round-by-round scoring, *Title Fight* still runs quickly, right down to the digitized boxers in the lower left corner.

ing fire. Veteran designer Jim Trunzo (Avalon Hill's *TITLE BOUT* and Haffner Games' *TKO PRO BOXING*) wants to change all that, however, and has trained his new staffer, *TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING*, to exploit this gap and take advantage of the Windows format.

A TRUE CONTENDER

TITLE FIGHT is a remarkably realistic boxing simulation. Each boxer is rated in several categories, most importantly, his ability to land punches (affected by the other boxer's defense rating of course). Some boxers hug more than a pair of diapers, others float like winged insects. Still others have a tendency to foul. All of this is reflected in the ratings. Boxers with a "glass jaw" are simulated through a poor knockdown rating, while fighters who can take a good deal of punishment and remain standing have a good rating.

If you've ever wondered why Rocky Marciano was the most feared fighter of his day, *TITLE FIGHT* will show you how his combination of hitting power, aggression and killer instinct allowed "The Brockton Blockbuster" to retire as undefeated heavyweight champion. Similarly, you'll find out whether George Forman's right cross is really as devastating as it was 20 years ago (or is it just the quality of his opponents?). Best of all, the game crunches numbers as well as any other stats-based sports sim out there.

INTO THE RING

Don't be put off by the minimalist rules booklet. Fighting a bout is so simple you could probably figure it out from the menus, but the designers have thoughtfully provided extensive documentation in a Windows Help file. In a nutshell, you select a fighter from an exhaustive database

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Circle Review Service #173

neutral "color commentary" thrown in as well. Ali shuffles around the ring, Foreman leads up to throw his roundhouse right, Tyson stalks his outmatched opponent, and although the comments do occasionally repeat, they generally add a lot of flavor to the game.

As for the graphics, well...it's pretty obvious that this is a Visual Basic game. I'm not too thrilled about the two clip-artish boxers, who rotate around the main fight screen in time to the action. But it is functional, as the pixelated pugilists do slide to the corner when a boxer is pinned on the ropes, etc. One major beef: when each

round begins, it is introduced by a Victoria's Secret wannabe in skimpy undergarments. Now, the young lady pictured is attractive, and I probably won't be playing this game with my niece or nephew, but why can't I toggle this tasteless screen off? What were the designers thinking, anyway?

A KNOCKOUT

The fights themselves are fun and fast-paced. Punches come in all manner of flavors, from right crosses to fast jabs to stiff uppercuts to stunning combinations. And the fighters have lots of character—some guys seem able to fight their way off the

ropes, while others have trouble getting through a round without suffering a cut. The tension builds as you try to coax your fighter through another round, avoiding a technical knockout from too much punishment, or deciding that this is the round that you go for the big KO.

TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING is easily the best boxing game ever produced. The research is excellent, the interface is far better than Trunzo's earlier game designs, and the pace of play is brisk, brief and quite enjoyable. The best thing about TITLE FIGHTER, though, is that the blend of ratings and color comments actually gives

didn't hurt." Tyson becomes more frustrated as the round continues, and yanks a lefty whiff of a roundhouse blow. Seizing his chance, Ali lands a combination, followed by two quick head jabs and an uppercut. Tyson, who had derided Ali's punching power in pre-fight press conferences, is wobbly shaken. Pinned to the ropes, and with his trapper screaming wildly, Tyson clinches and covers up to avoid further damage. A wild round for Ali.

Round 3: An angry Tyson is browbeaten by Eddie Fitch into keeping his cool. Instead of a dangerous all-out knockout attempt, he hides his time and ignores Ali's taunts. Ali continues to rack up points with his pinpoint jabs, but can't really hurt Tyson. With only 30 seconds left in the round, Tyson ducks under a punch and tags Ali with an exploding right to the jaw. The ropes sag with Ali's weight as he desperately tries to fend off the dangerous Tyson assault. But with victory seemingly within his grasp, Tyson is unable to knock Ali out, and the round ends.

Round 4: Tyson is facing between rounds like a caged tiger, and Rudy Ortega has to motion him back to his corner. Ali thus gains a few more precious seconds of rest, and looks determined and reasonably fresh when the round begins. Tyson forces his way inside, but that only opens up his forehead for a crisp Ali combination. It seems that Ali actually gets stronger as the round progresses—even a hard left to the midsection doesn't slow him down. The round ends with both fighters warily eyeing the other, and is scored even.

Round 5: Ali turns Tyson's own tactics against him and moves to Tyson's body, scoring with an uppercut. Both men deal out incredible punishment, then Ali regains his sanity and moves off, staying just out of Tyson's reach. Increasing fatigue from both fighters reduces the rest of the round to a clinching contest, and one ringside observer commented, "Man, the way these two guys

hug each other, you'd think they were kindergarten brats!" Right in any case, despite all the damage, neither even hurt.

Rounds 6-8: Sensing Tyson's frustration, Ali comments, "Think you can outlast me? I'm going out on the town after I beat you." It seems that Ali is certainly ready for a sale, so while it is his dancing about the ring. Time and again Tyson lands a glancing blow or misses entirely, leaving himself open for Ali's precise counter-punching skills. It's apparent that Ali's strategy is to wear Tyson down and finish him off in the later rounds. The judges recognize that Muhammad is in control of the fight and reward him with two of the three rounds.

Round 9: Ali predicted that Tyson would go down in the 9th, so Mike would like nothing better than to turn the tables on his adversary. He calmly tells his corner "He's overconfident. This is the round." Turns out, he's almost right. A rare miss by Ali allows Tyson to squeeze a hammer of a left past Ali's defenses. Ali's head snaps back, sweat flying so far that it splashes people at ringside. But Tyson, like so many opponents, underestimates Ali's ability to take a punch. Splendid footwork and another miss by Tyson let Ali maneuver long enough to get off one good right hand—which opens a cut over Tyson's left eye. While he keeps pounding away at Ali, Tyson's momentarily impaired vision prevents him, once again, from landing the final killer shot. This fine round does move Tyson back into contention, however.

Rounds 10-12: Ali stays outside, targeting Tyson's damaged eye. By the end of round 11, it has swelled shut despite the cut-man's best efforts. "There wasn't no ice made that was gonna reduce that swelling," Futch states after the fights. Tyson is outscored in all three rounds (although one judge seems to be watching a different fight, as he rates two of the three rounds as even).

Round 13: "You Mike?" utterly exhausted, and rather dazed, Ali mercilessly punishes his bin, as Tyson misses right and left. But, as Ali moves to finish, Iron Mike takes a haymaker and Ali crumples to the mat. Ortega takes the count to five, but Ali somehow gets up and regains his composure during the standing-eight count. But once again, with only 15 seconds left in the round, Tyson just can't put Ali away.

Round 14: Any average fan knows by now that the fight is Ali's to win or lose, but the consummate pro has no desire to be robbed by the judges. Likewise, Tyson knows his only real chance is a knockout, and circles cautiously, trying to keep Ali away from his vulnerable left side. The crushing right scores only superficially, however, as its target continues to skip to and fro. Ali's superior footwork—the envy of any ballet star—has reduced Tyson to a desperate man whose labored breathing seems almost audible to people in the stands. The crowd senses that the bout nears an end, and begins shouting Ali's name with every punch he lands. Finally, Tyson's hands drop ever so slightly, and Ali summons his last reserves—12 consecutive punches land on Tyson's face, chest, stomach and chin. Tyson drags to the canvas: one...two...three... somehow he struggles up just before the count is over. Ali moves in again, and scores on five more punches. Rudy Ortega wraps his arms around Tyson to protect him from further damage. Ali wins by TKO!

After the fight, Tyson holds an ice pack to the size of Texas on his left eye and grumbled about his missed chances. Ali said that Tyson obviously needed a rest, and was welcome to join him at the Kentucky Derby for a mint julep—but only as his guest. "You see, Ali and his manager had already worked out a cable deal for a \$100 million fight against Rocky Marciano, with a certain 63-year-old grandfather waiting in the wings for the winner.

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Boxer	Class	Style	Control	Power	Defense	Endurance	Overall	Notes
Muhammad Ali	HW	B	great	7	0	102	15	Amazing punch, no push defense, terrific footwork
Jack Dempsey and Rocky Marciano	HW	B	great	7	0	102	13	Tough to take down, all round strength-stroke
George Foreman	HW	S	good	13	1	62	12	Needs to KO opponents early
Mike Tyson	HW	S	good	11	0	11	12	Lots More Punch, Moves
Jack Johnson	HW	B	great	4	-6	92	13	Quickest hands in boxing history
Harry Greb	MW	S	great	42	102	11	11	Fine counter-puncher
Marvin Hagler	MW	E	fair	18	1	92	11	Medium build, tough defense
Sugar Ray Leonard	MW	E	great	8	-5	92	11	Good technique in the ring
Thomas Hearns	MW	E	fair	10	-	72	10	Good punches, fair control
Henry Armstrong	WT	S	good	6	0	102	12	Significant
Burrly Leonard	LT	S	good	1	-2	102	13	Short on power, but solid defense
Gene Tunney	LHW	B	great	5	-6	92	12	Round will as a rule, too
Ed Chocolate	FW	E	good	4	-1	82	11	Good stance, good fighter

Weight Class: HW = heavyweight, LW = light to welterweight, MW = middleweight, LT = light-heavy, WT = welterweight, FW = featherweight
 Style: B = boxer, S = slugger, E = either Defense: the lower the better; a -1 = great, above zero is poor

THE EDITORS SPEAK

TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Pugilistic pundits will enjoy the number of prefight options, loads of information, and hundreds of realistically-depicted boxers. The game play is brisk, augmented by a good autoplay feature. Excellent computer opponent.

CONS Gamers who crave action will probably want to skip this one, and some of the screen shots are pretty tacky.

TOTAL:

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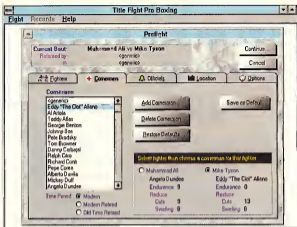
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After picking a fighter, you choose in which of 45 different cities your bout will take place. Then you decide on a referee, keeping in mind that each man, whether current or a famous retired referee, varies in how strictly he calls fouls and how early he tends to stop fights. Optionally, you may also select a cornerman, who can increase your fighter's endurance and might just keep that nasty gash on your fighter's cheek under control long enough to avoid a TKO.

Gameplay hinges on control ratings, which measure a fighter's ability. All fighters vary in their ability to fight against different styles. *TITLE FIGHT* breaks this down into sluggers (Tyson, Marciano), pure boxers (Ali, Holmes) and those fighters adept at either style (Joe Louis). The game even has special rules to cover southpaw fighters.

At the beginning of each round, you dictate a strategy. Based on your fighter's historical style, these include: fighting inside (can really lower your opponent's endurance) or outside, fighting offensively



STANCH THE BLEEDING The menus make preflight selections a breeze. When I go up against a class fighter, I want Eddy "The Clot" Aliano in my corner.

(scores more points) and defensively (safer), covering up (self-preservation) and going for the knockout (all-out or controlled). Each of these strategies have inherent risks to go along with their benefits. One unique feature I really like is a rule that limits certain fighters' options:

Ali, for example, may only go for a knockout twice during a bout.

The points scored for each punch are automatically recorded while comments such as "Did you see Ali's head snap back on that blow?" scroll by. These text files are color-coded for each fighter, with some

THE ULTIMATE BOUT

Muhammad Ali vs. Mike Tyson
Location: Las Vegas
Referee: Rudy Ortega (Strict Fouls, Normal Fight Stoppage...)
Cornerman: Angelo Dundee (Ali) 9-9-3 (Endurance-Cuts-Swelling)
Eddie Futch (Tyson) (10-7-8)



Muhammad's defensive skills are more than equal to the task, as the majority of the blows are caught by Ali's gloves. Finally, Tyson breaks through, landing a blow that elicits gasps from the crowd. Ali almost goes to one knee, but steadies himself just in time. Rudy Ortega looks at Ali closely, but when Ali goes into his famous shuffle, the referee backs off and lets the fighters continue. Ali is content to "Rape-A-Dope," covering up for the rest of

Tyson has the punching power, while Ali's defense and quickness are legendary. The cornermen are about the same, but Eddie Futch's calming influence on the fiery Tyson can't be minimized. Rudy Ortega is so in control of the bout that he seems nearly invisible in the ring, and the boxers respect his decisions.

Amidst endless prattle from the ringside announcer, the boxers finally arrive. Ali removes his robe to show off his trunks, gold lame' with "Ali" embroidered in metallic silver. Tyson, as usual is dressed in black trunks with no socks, his body

seemingly sculpted from the same stone Michelangelo used to carve Adonis. The two meet at ring center and stare into the depths of each other's soul, probing for any chink in the enemy armor. After they touch gloves and retire to their corners, the bell rings and pandemonium ensues...

Round 1: Tyson immediately comes after Ali, ignoring Ali's left jab with a disdainful sneer. Unbridled ferocity leaps from Tyson's fists, but

the round, and despite Tyson's best efforts, Mike can make no progress. Still, the round goes to Tyson.

Round 2: Realizing that trying to match Tyson inside is madness, Ali wisely moves outside, where his height and reach allow him a slight advantage. Surprisingly, Ali misses a right cross, and Tyson lands a crushing hook to Ali's ribs. Ali simply shakes his head, smiles to the crowd and says "It

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Pigskin Pick'em

SPORTSMASTER Is A Good Bet For Gridiron Gamblers

by George E. Howard

FOR ALL THE NOISE IN A LAS VEGAS CASINO—THE DISTINCT CLANK OF COINS, THE SCREECHING "WIN" SIFRS AND THE OCCASIONAL hollers of greedy glee—there are only two locations where you're likely to hear the crowd get vocal: the craps tables and the sports book. Slot machines are essentially anti-social endeavors and card games and the roulette wheel require a certain amount of decorum. But the sports books and craps tables are where many bettors (and sports fans) gather together, and almost everyone's money rests on the same pass, fumble, horse race or roll of the dice. Fortunes are made and lost at the same time, together. And that, combined with the spectator-driven nature of these two areas, usually creates a vocal, and sometimes even boisterous environment.

Those who gather at the sports books to play the ponies are already familiar with the **Axis Information Network**, whose **TRACKMASTER** program can turn a bum into a tout. Now they are attempting to help out the football gambler with **SPORTSMASTER FOR WINDOWS**. **SPORTSMASTER FOR WINDOWS (SM)** is a slicker version of what the company is already doing for thoroughbred handicappers.

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Protection: None

Players: 1

Designer: Axis Information Network
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around power ratings that evaluate the most common handicapping concerns numerically and allow the bettor to sort, compare and further analyze according to their own level of sophistication. In the case of **SM**, the power ratings are built on a football team's average margin of victory adjusted by factors such as strength of schedule and homefield advantage. **SM** allows you to seamlessly download update information (several times per week as game day approaches) in order to make sure you have the latest lines and up-to-date injury reports.

Once you've downloaded the data, you can look at an entire weekend's worth of match-ups (both professional and college) and examine them for betting possibilities. And it's easy to do so, since this program features a spreadsheet view of all of the week's match-ups. This tells you, at a glance, the power ratings for each team at game time, the Las Vegas betting line, and the overlay (the difference in power ratings between the two teams). You can quickly sort in either ascending or descending order by any number on the page. I like to select the overlay column and sort in descending order, which gives me, from top to bottom, the biggest disparities between the line and **SM**'s projected reality. Since, however, the power rating is built upon average margin of victory against other opponents, you will notice that the ratings become more and more accurate as the season progresses and those power ratings are fine-tuned by actual performance.

If you're relatively new to handicapping, a power rating sort may be all you need. If you're an old hand, however, you may also want to sort by record against the spread (how often a team wins or loses by a margin greater than the Vegas line)

Week	Date	Time	Strength of Schedule	Spread	Power Rating	Line	Spread	Power Rating	Line	Power Rating	Line
1	09/07	12:00 PM	0.72	6.10	10.22	6.20	6.10	10.22	6.10	10.22	6.10
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44
1	09/07	08:00 PM	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	5.44	10.81	5.44	10.81	5.44

NUMBERS DON'T LIE But they can be interpreted differently. **SportsMaster** helps bettors maximize their chances in several ways.

or examine a team's historical record versus the team against which they are matched on game day. **SM** assists you in performing all of these searches.

OVER-UNDER

SPORTSMASTER also covers another form of sports handicapping—the Over/Under, a form of betting where you wager whether the combined scores of both competing teams will be more or less than the casino-specified point total. **SM** gives you a column of Over/Under projections. In this way, you can sort and print the Over/Under projections from lowest to highest and look for disparities when you visit your favorite sports book. Then, you can bet on the most favorable margin.

SPORTSMASTER FOR WINDOWS is a powerful program. It is easier to use (since it comes with a mandatory subscription for download services) than the old **GOLD SHEET PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL** program from **Villa Crespo** and seems more versatile in its sort routines than any other package I've seen. Though it is by no means a game, it will give many sports fans a little insight, assistance and access to another game—one where you keep track of your score with dollar bills. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SPORTSMASTER

RATING Not Rated

PROS Regular data updates and enough betting information to keep most bettors happy.

CONS A funky Windows installation and overlapping buttons at some resolutions.



F-16 Fighter Stick
20 programmable functions



F-16 Combat Stick
14 functions, programmable when used with the Pro Throttle



F-16 Flight Stick
4 button joystick



Pro Throttle
20 programmable functions. Makes other standard joysticks programmable as well. For Mac and PC.



CH Throttle
12 programmable functions

OK, so the new F-16 Series costs a little more than the cheap stuff. But this is war. Program all the functions you want. ADD a throttle and fight with both hands. Get a grip on the most advanced, sensitive flight instrument you'll ever use. Or get accustomed to getting missiles up your tailpipe.

mission: DEADLY SKIES™

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NOT
INCLUDED**

Vertical loops...quick turns...speed bursts...air brakes. Flying by the seat of your pants in a one-on-one dogfight to the death can make a pilot kind of queasy. It doesn't matter that you're armed to the teeth with gun cannons, heat seeking missiles and guided missiles. You still have to keep the other guy in your sights using whatever moves you've got. Did you remember to save that dog from lunch?



JVC
JVC MEDIA SYSTEMS INC.

PC CD-ROM



SEGA SATURN

Circle Reader Service #109



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Twister Central



THERE ARE SIMULATIONS, AND THERE ARE *simulations*. Some let you boot 'em up, jump into the virtual cockpit, and start shoot-

ing everything in sight. Others require you to study up a bit on the real vehicles to get the most out of them. But occasionally, there comes along a combat simulation so sophisticated, so authentic, that you end up putting so much time into becoming proficient with it that it's more like moonlighting as a combat pilot than playing a computer game. **Spectrum Holobyte's FALCON 3.0** falls squarely into this category, and it looks like **SSI's** upcoming **SUKHOI SU-27** will soon join this exclusive club. While the followers of **Digital Integration's TORNADO** may not be as numerous as **FALCON** fans, they're at least as enthusiastic. If you don't believe me, grab a Word Wide Web browser and surf over to the Tornado Virtual Fighter Command at <http://www.mindspring.com/~cjoines/vfc/vfc.html> and check out one of the most detailed military operations this side of Operation Desert Storm.

CYBER COMMAND POST

The Virtual Fighter Command (VFC) is an amazing resource for **TORNADO** players. There are three main elements to its pages: a series of email-based strike campaigns, the **TORNADO COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE (TCSC)** help resource, and links to a variety of **TORNADO** patches and enhancements.

The gestation of the pages began after the late 1994 release of the first version of **TCSC**, a huge Windows Help file created by Basil Copeland, Heinz Bernd Eggenstein, and VFC host Eric Joiner. The three met and worked on **TCSC** on CompuServe, but they wanted to open their **TORNADO** resource to other members of the online community as well—thus was born the Web project. (Moving the project to the Web opens it up to players from various on-line services. Who would have thought that we'd see détente between hard-core sim flyers from different networks?)

This isn't a three-guy operation, though. The VFC is seeking not only **TORNADO** fans handy with a joystick, but also Admin Officers to join in and help run the coordinate battle campaigns. The only requirement is a serious dedication to this sophisticated simulation.

Actually, despite **TORNADO's** sophistication—among other things, it has one of the most sophisticated mission planner modules this side of a Pentagon mainframe—its built-in multiplayer support is ill-conceived. While it does support serial connections, this support is geared toward head-to-head play. However, the **TORNADO's** strengths in mud-moving, and PC pilots

TORNADO

PLAYERS TANGLE

ON THE WORLD

WIDE WEB



SOUND ADVICE The Tornado Command and Staff College is packed with tactical information, and even includes a boomier RealAudio soundtrack.

ON THE RADAR

Look out, Franklin Mint. ThrustMaster is coming out with an expensive, precision crafted collectors edition of its own. The Limited Edition **F-16 FLC3** joystick offers the same functionality as the standard **F-16 FLC3**, but it uses a heavy steel-and-aluminum base, much better tension springs, and a certificate of authenticity signed by Maj. Gen. Joe H. Engle, Lt. Col. Robert Shaw (author of the famed *Fighter Combat*), and Capt. "Buzz" Hoffman. Each of the 5000 controllers is serialized and backed by a two-year warranty. At \$499.95, it's not an impulse buy, but think of how good it'll look sitting between the power **U.S.S. Enterprise** and the **Civil War** Chess Set when you're not using it.



by Denny Atkin

raised on Falcons and Eagles aren't likely to be impressed by this bird's air-to-air performance.

VFC ignores the built-in multiplayer ca-



COOL VIEW Among the Tornado enhancements you'll find online is the snow-packed Winter Operations add-on.

bat, more time is often spent doing paperwork (than flying the mission.) The results of that mission affect the targets the next pilot receives—if a primary target was



pabilities and instead uses the mission planner and save game features to support a play-by-email game. This has a number of advantages: Strikes can be primarily against ground targets, a more realistic role for the Tornado; up to 12 players can participate instead of just two; and it allows players from all over the world to join in without running up sky-high, long-distance charges.

The campaign is a team effort against computer players, with the only competition being good-natured attempts to outperform your squadron mates. The campaign commander issues a pilot a Zipped set of files with a situation and a set of targets. The pilot creates his own mission plan, flies the mission, and then sends the files back to the squadron commander. He also posts a detailed debriefing on the

missed, it has to be taken out the next time. After everyone has flown, the results are tallied and the campaign is declared a victory or a loss. (Pilots are on their honor not to attempt to rely on a botched mission.) "Some [campaigns] have been won and some have been lost," Joiner points out in the VFC frequently-asked questions (FAQ) list, "and we have had a good time doing both."

SENIOR IN SIMULATION

With your squadron mates depending on your aptitude to help them win the campaign, you'll need to be a pretty proficient pilot and tactician. Don't get performance anxiety, just grab the TORNADO COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE from <http://www.nimdspring.com/~cjoines/tsc.html>. Appropriately billed as "The Ultimate TORNADO FAQ," this 2MB-plus download unzips into a huge Windows Help file.

But this isn't just a collection of TORNADO trivia tossed haphazardly into hypertext. In fact, this is one of the most professional looking Help files I've ever seen, looking more like it was created in a program like DRECHOR. Although the text contains the nuts of the TCSC, there are lots of bells and whistles to keep things interesting as you scroll through screen after screen of mission-planning and tactics information. Along with photos and illustrative screen grabs, you'll also find some fascinating AWAY files such as chilling conversations between forward air controllers and Tornado aircrews over Bosnia. Even if TORNADO isn't your sim of choice, you'll still find lots

of useful information in the TCSC.

Among the "courses" you'll find well-written treatises on threat evasion, effective use of terrain masking, SAM suppression, using weather to your advantage, and aircraft assignment and weapons load selection tips. Thorough writeups about TORNADO's quirks—and workarounds for them—are included, as well as a section reviewing the various shareware and freeware patches and enhancements available for the sim.

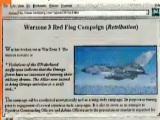
If all this information were rolled into a book/disk combo, it would be well worth \$20 to \$25. But registration is only \$10, which buys you not only TCSC updates, but also access to TORNADO add-ons created specifically for registered users. These include new campaigns and custom missions, mission-exchange utilities, and new weather pattern files.

TORNADO TOOLS

Check out the VFC's Supply Depot page to download the TSCS tools once you've registered the program. Here you'll also find links to tools that any TORNADO flier will appreciate. These include a log file editor, bomb-damage assessment tools so you can see how well you *really* performed, and patches for bugs such as the Sound-Blaster 16 lockup problem.

These enhancements can help make TORNADO a more enjoyable sim. Ever rely a mission, knowing darn well nothing exciting's going to happen for the first seven minutes? Download the TORNADO Time Compression utility, which lets you speed through the dull parts. My favorite add-on, though, is Winter Operations. Although it's not really much more than a redone set of ground palettes, the snowy terrain adds a completely different flavor to combat, and makes the simplicity of TORNADO's graphics less glaringly obvious.

You'll find lots of other neat stuff on the VFC web pages, including a great collection of photos of real Tornados in action, as well as links to other sim-related pages. It's collections like this that point to the real promise of the Web as a gamer's resource. If you're still an active TORNADO player, you'll love this resource. If not, this might be just the incentive to break your copy out of mothballs and join the action. ☺



MISSION BY MAIL Play-by-email campaigns let you give multiplayer Tornado a whirl.

web page (and possibly on GEnie and/or CompuServe as well), often packed with creative and exciting descriptions of the events of the mission. (Just as in real com-

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Thinking I Could surf on
Red clouds all day, then
a worm hole ripped and
twisted my thoughts
into toxic waste.

How I



Dispersion cannon missiles
came toward me
like a school of Angelfish,
metallic, all gleaming.
Hey, they almost
looked edible.



HallucinAtions begaN to
happen aLL aroUnd me.
Then I realiZed thOse
Rockets weRe Real and
they thouGht my flyiNg
suckEd. Big tiMe.

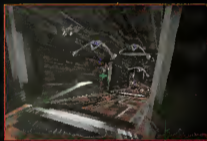
dIEd.



A thouSand plasMa rockEts
taPPed on mY winDshield.
I didn't hEar them knOcking
so they taPPed harDer.



SPINNING my head around
in a billion directions.
Bad move. As I was
seriously violated in a
cross fire from a cloud
that looked as innocent
as a kid holding candy.



Doing a little tunnel spying,
picked the wrong tunnel
obviously as the DOM rockets
heading my way decided to do
some exploring themselves.
I'll leave their intended
destination to your imagination.



DOing IOOp the IOOp
like a moNkey on a trEE,
then shraPnel, buildiNgs,
and funky stuFF all hit
Me on my nOse like a
wEt thiCk moUnd of sPit.

You plummet from the sky. You hit your cockpit with bulging eyes.

This is no demo, it is you flying that warship. Eight planets await your twitching trigger finger, a spot on your satellite map and the brush of your metallic wings: Terrain, L24-D, Aps, New Kroy, Sébek, Vestra, Tiamat, and the ultimate eye twitcher, Fury. Look around your cockpit using your virtual head and fly the impossible with six degrees of freedom. Your joy erupts into a wry smile. A servo laser is your best friend, a customized cockpit and an energy shield the only barrier between you and a sharp jolt back to reality. The reality being, Fury[®] is one of the first games optimized for Windows[®] 95. Kill stuff, fry stuff, fry, fry some more until it's as natural as breathing. Fight Fury[®] to the death on multiple missions. In the clouds, on the ground, and in netherworld tunnels.

Death comes like grains of salt out of a spaker in Fury[®]. Enjoy them or at least die trying.

Fly the "Trial version" of Microsoft Fury[®] at <http://www.microsoft.com>.



Thinking nothing BLEEDS on
this pyramid-infested
planet, then 30 or so bOMbs
explained to me why.
There's no time to BLEED.

Microsoft

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TODAY?[™]

Pistols, Swords Or Spitfires?

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

FIGHTER DUEL: 100 Percent Pure Air Combat From The Jaeger Masters

by Denny Atkin

RAW, UNADULTERATED AIR COMBAT. THAT'S THE FIGHTER DUEL CREDO. THIS SIM DISPENSES WITH mission planning, bomber escorting, ground strafing, and flying to the target, and concentrates on the dogfighting experience. This is the game to load when you just want to take to the air and shoot somebody.

That's not to say this upcoming sim from Philips Media Games isn't realistic. The planes look and fly great—it's just that developer Jaeger Software has dispensed with the details of war to concentrate on basic air-to-air combat.

Although FIGHTER DUEL is new for the PC, it actually began life years ago on the Amiga. If you played that version, though, you'll find the PC adaptation is a completely different animal. Gone are the Amiga version's 16-color graphics and bizarre giant polygon obstacles; the only thing carried over is the realistic full-force flight model. FIGHTER DUEL has been recorded in 486 and Pentium assembly language, and now sports beautiful 640x480, 256-color graphics.

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

FIGHTER DUEL offers two modes of play: You can fly against one to eight computer-controlled pilots, or against a human opponent via a modem or direct serial link. Thirteen planes are featured, all of which can be flown or flown against: the F4U-1D and F2G Corsairs, F6F Hellcat, P-51D Mustang, Spitfire MK I, MK IX, and MK XIV, Seafire MK II, A6M5 Zero, Me-109E-1, Me-109G-6, and Me-109K-4 and the FW-190A-8.

While there aren't any missions per se (other than shooting down everyone in sight), the single-player mode does let you start in a variety of situations. You can take off from the carrier *U.S.S. Lexington* (launching by catapult or doing a rollout take-off from the end of the deck) or from an island airstrip. Or you can go right into action with the Flying Circus (appearing in the middle of a wild melee of bad guys), Boom 'N Zoom (where you start above and behind the enemy), or Head-On Pass situations. Seek out the other planes from a distance by choosing Combat Air Patrol, or try the ultimate challenge, the Surprise Attack. Here, you start in a high-speed dive, coming in as your enemies are taking off from the deck of an aircraft carrier. Sound easy? It's not, as the carrier's guns are doing their best to put a wall of lead in your way, and if you don't watch your speed you'll dive right into the deck. For the missions that begin in the air, you can choose starting altitude, and optionally set up an overcast layer if you want to add a hide-and-seek element.

You can fly against any mix of up to eight planes. Each pilot can have an individual skill level between 1 (complete



AERIAL MELEE Sure, you blew up the Spitfire, but now the Mustang and Corsair are really annoyed with you.

novice who'll fly defensively or turn and run) and 8 (Ace, a top-notch pilot who's likely to stay glued to your tail). Even in the beta version with incomplete AI, the Ace pilots present quite a challenge, with pilots executing Immelman, split-S, wing-over, barrel roll, and even hammerhead stall maneuvers as you try to get on their tails. The computer-controlled planes are restricted by the same flight model as you, which makes for much more realistic combat than some sims where the computer-controlled baddies can perform zoom climbs and amazing last-second pullouts. (In fact, one of my favorite tactics against novice pilots in heavy planes is to get into a high-speed dive, pulling out at the last second. There's a good chance he'll plunge right into the drink.)

REACH OUT AND SHOOT SOMEONE

The solo mode is a blast, unlike some

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Circle Reader Service #117



multipayer sims where it seems an afterthought. That said, the real fun and challenge in **FIGHTER DUEL** comes in when you go up against a human opponent. **FIGHTER DUEL** supports both modem (9600 BPS and higher) and null-modem cable connections. Modem fliers will appreciate the phone book feature, which lets you store pilot names, numbers, and comments for auto-dialing. The caller sets the realism options for both players, so your opponent can't cheat by turning off realism features. A chat window at the bottom of the screen allows the opponents to communicate the parameters of the duel and toss a few last-second barbs at each other.

There are three situations available for multiplayer flight: Standard Start, where each pilot appears at a random location and altitude; Tournament Start, where both players start at the same altitude at the beginning of a head-on pass; and Tournament Start (Same Aircraft), where each pilot flies the same plane of the caller's choice.

Once you're in the air, combat proceeds fairly trouble-free. The program is set up to time-compensate whenever possible—that is, if the program slows down due to a heavy graphic load it will compensate time-to-distance, eliminating virtually all the warping problems common in online sims. This also means that if you're flying a Pentium 90 and your opponent is on a DX2/50, you won't get an unfair performance advantage. Jaeger hopes to add support for modem error-correction and compression before the program is released. This will not only make connections more reliable, but it will also enable opponents to use the new DSVD (Digital Simultaneous Voice Data) modems for voice communications while flying. Time to practice those taunts!

Once you complete a duel, you can check the flight log to see exactly how well you did. This handy stats screen not only tells you how many hits each plane inflicted and received, but it also lets you

know exactly what destroyed each plane: combat damage, collision, aircraft malfunction, or crashing into something. You can also view a cumulative score, showing how many planes you've shot down or lost since you installed the game, broken down by one- and two-player modes.

TEST FLIGHT RESULTS

Although the preview copy wasn't completely fine-tuned, even the preliminary flight models were very promising. The Corsair's giant radial engine is a torque monster, and the Zero loses much of its



REALISTIC ROLLOUT An F4U-1D rolls down the deck of a beautifully rendered U.S.S. Lexington.

snappiness at high speed. **FIGHTER DUEL** uses a force model, rather than a table-based model, so you shouldn't find any unrealistic maneuvering restrictions. Roll rates, dive and climb speeds, and turning radius all seem authentically modeled. While the models seem realistic, the planes aren't as difficult to control as in the beta of **CONFIRMED KILL**; accelerated stalls and such are modeled, but the planes don't tend to spin at every given opportunity. Engine effects are authentic, with torque forces and throttle lag where appropriate; and flying planes such as the Spitfire MK I inverted or in a negative-G situation for more than a few seconds will cause the engine to seize, just like the real thing. Even the weight of fuel and ammo can affect performance. The realism is very evident when you're landing; you can actually pull off a three-point landing in many of the planes.

Realism levels are adjustable. You can fly with a simpler flight model, and stalls, crashes, mid-air collisions, combat damage, gun realism, blackouts, and ammo limits can all be disabled.

The planes don't just fly great, they look great as well. The texture-mapping on the hi-res, 3-D rendered planes looks fantastic. There are none of the perspective distortion or pixel-splatter effects common in other texture-mapped games. Don't expect to get a good look at the enemy without going to the plane viewer screen, though. Some sims increase the visible size of planes to make combat easier or increase the visual interest factor. Not **FIGHTER DUEL**—you have to get right on a plane's tail to get a solid ID on it, and even then it's likely only to take up an inch or two on your monitor. Terrain is sparse; it's mostly water, with a couple of islands and a beautifully rendered aircraft carrier.

By far the most amazing graphic achievement is the instrument panel, one of the most realistic graphics achievements ever seen on a personal computer. All the planes use the same panel, but when you see it in action

you're not likely to gripe about that. Jaeger digitized a P-51 instrument panel and slightly rearranged the instruments to fit the screen. Then, each needle and ball was prerendered in every possible position, resulting in instruments that look absolutely 100-percent realistic as they spin and turn. Many of the needles even jitter realistically from the plane's vibrations. It's an absolutely remarkable effect, like watching video of a real P-51 instrument panel. The panel can be toggled off if you prefer a full-screen combat view.

CONTROL AND PERFORMANCE

The keypad can be used to shift the in-cockpit view to any of nine directions, including overhead; Thrustmaster and FlightStick Pro view hats are also supported. Unfortunately, there's no virtual

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cockpit or padlock view available.

The CH FlightStick Pro, Thrustmaster FCS and WCS, and CH and Thrustmaster pedals are all supported. FIGHTER DUEL is the first program I've seen that supports the toe-brakes on the CH Pro Pedals; however, you'll need a game card

Plane	Alt Level	Max Vertical Speed Level	Max Roll Level	Max Yaw Level	Max Pitch Level	Max Bank Level	Max Turn Rate
Fw 2 F2D Corsair	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fw 3 P-400	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fw 4 P-51 Mustang	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fw 5 Zero	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fw 6 Fw 190	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fw 8 Spitfire Mk I	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fw 9 -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fw 10 -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Game Cards:
 SP1411 - Greater hit loss or less damage
 SP1412 - Greater hit recovery or ship
 SP1413 - Greater falling collision
 SP1414 - Greater falling aircraft reduction



HISTORIC MISMATCH The Fw-190 and Zero never met in real life, but *Fighter Duel* lets you pit any combination of planes against each other and view the results.

better with the instrument panel up. Systems with DX2 and DX4 chips should approach 25 fps, and Pentiums should all run at a smooth 30 fps. An auto-resolution feature will drop the detail level down a hit to help maintain frame rate.

MISSION DEBRIEFING

I only have a few gripes with this sim. Enemies would be easier to locate if there were scrollable views in and out of the plane. Also, the engine sound was rather anemic in our beta version—right now it sounds like a lawn mower on steroids. Finally, some more control over your guns would be nice; I'd like to be able to select four of six guns to conserve ammo, and to adjust the convergence of fire to suit my combat style. These are minor gripes, though, and overall this is a top-notch game. In the competitive arena of pure air-to-air combat simulation, FIGHTER DUEL looks ready to walk away a winner. ☺

such as CH's upcoming joystick interface to take advantage of this feature.

Although FIGHTER DUEL runs in Super VGA, you won't need a Pentium to enjoy it. A local-bus 486DX/33 system easily manages about 15 frames-per-second in full-screen mode, and even a bit

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PC CD-ROM



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THE AH-64D LONGBOW AS SEEN BY AN ENEMY TANK.

HI
100
LO



ARM 10

55

THE RADAR DOME POPS-UP ABOVE TREE LEVEL. YOU SPOT AN ENEMY TANK. IT DOESN'T SPOT YOU, UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE. THIS IS AS CLOSE AS YOU'LL EVER GET TO FLYING AN AH-64D LONGBOW WITHOUT SECURITY CLEARANCE.

30



20

SVGA RESOLUTION GIVES THE ROLLING TERRAIN A LOOK AND FEEL THAT PUTS YOU THERE, RIGHT THERE. PROBABLY CLOSER THAN YOU WANT TO BE. AND DEFINITELY CLOSER THAN YOUR ENEMY WANTS YOU TO BE.

HI
100
HI

40



76

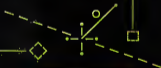


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AN ENEMY TANK AS SEEN BY THE AH-64D LONGBOW.

97



57

THE DESIGN TEAM MET UP WITH AN APACHE PILOT, AND USED ACTUAL MANUFACTURER'S FLIGHT MANUALS, SO YOU GET PRECISION AVIONICS AND ACCURATE FLIGHT MODELING. IN OTHER WORDS, LEARN THIS GAME AND YOU COULD FLY THE REAL THING.

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Head-2-Head Helos

WEREWOLF VS. COMANCHE Lets You Go For A Whirl With Your Friends

by Jack Rodrigues

WHILE JET JOCKEYS AND DOOM COMMANDOS HAVE BEEN TERRORIZING EACH OTHER WITH NETWORK AND modem play for a while now, helicopter pilots have been left hovering in single-player mode. Now, with NovaLogic's WEREWOLF VS. COMANCHE (WvC), up to eight players can fly the unfriendly skies together.

This is basically an updated, multiplayer-capable version of COMANCHE: MAXIMUM OVERKILL with a big bonus in the box: another helicopter simulator. A second disc contains WEREWOLF, a simulation of the Russian Kamov KA-50 (NATO designation Hokum).

The enhanced COMANCHE 2.0 included with the package improves on the original with better memory management (it now works with memory managers such as EMM386 and QEMM) and Pentium compatibility, as well as enhanced features like ground hulks and translucent smoke.

New to the NovaLogic arsenal is the Werewolf, an advanced helicopter that evenly matches the Comanche—system for system and weapon for weapon. No excuses about losing to more sophisticated Western weaponry here. You won't have a hard time identifying it, either, with its distinct co-axial counter

rotating main rotor system, a single pilot cockpit, and the lack of a tail rotor. WEREWOLF sports 30 solo missions, the new COMANCHE comes with 60, and there are 30 shared multiplayer missions where you can join up with seven of your friends in a chaotic melee.

PLUG AND FLY

As computers have grown powerful enough to more realistically simulate air combat, simple sims

have, for the most part, gone by the wayside. Some long-time gamers will remember the days when you could "kick the tire and light the fuse," jumping into the midst of battle after memorizing a couple of keypresses and learning the functions

of your two-button joystick. WvC harkens back to those days, letting you climb into the cockpit for instant head-to-head combat.

The flight controls are simplified; for instance, the collective and cyclic controls are coordinated. As a result, flight control is similar to the arcade mode in APACHE from Interactive Magic. While realism is reduced,



A VIEW TO A KILL The cockpit layout differs from the Comanche, but the controls and systems are identical in function. Most notable change is the frame around the Heads Up Display (HUD).

you're relieved of the weeks of intensive flight training needed to master more advanced sims. What the game lacks in realism, however, is offset not only by its multiplayer capabilities, but also by the great graphics for nape-of-the-earth flights.

THE KEYS TO DESTRUCTION

It's easy to master controlling your helicopter and its armament, as there are only a few command keys you'll need to learn. You can engage in combat with just a standard joystick, using the Tab key to select targets and the bottom row of keys for weapons selection. There are other commands to control the Tactical Information Displays and your views (panoramic, drop cam, and chase cam), but adjusting these can be hazardous to your health when you're up to your neck in hostile targets. Indeed, prior to takeoff you may want to set the Auto Flares and Chaff in the Options menu.

The game works with any joystick, and

WEREWOLF VS. COMANCHE

Price: \$69.95
System Requirements:
 IBM compatible 386 or greater (486 or Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 2 MB hard drive space (32 MB recommended), CD-ROM drive, Sound Blaster or 100% compatible board, standard joystick

of Players: 1-2 as shipped, up to 8 supported

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Kyle Freeman and John Garcia

Publisher: NovaLogic
 Terzans, CA
 (818) 774-0600





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has built-in support for joysticks with throttle control, Thrustmaster FCS and WCS, CH Flightstick Pro, and rudder pedals (which you may find particularly helpful).

THE BATTLEFIELD

The world of WvC, like its predecessor, is still small—circumnavigating the wrap-around world takes only about a minute. The terrain has lots of variety, though, providing ample cover and concealment for head-to-head combat. You can speed down river valleys and pop up from behind hills to surprise your opponent. NovaLogic's Voxal Space technology still makes for some impressive terrain, but it's not as dazzling now that it's been eclipsed by the graphics in sims such as *FLIGHT UNLIMITED*. (Then again, there's no Pentium required here.) The small world actually pays off in multiplayer mode, since you don't have to wait long to see action. Unlike more realistic sims, where you spend a long—and rather bo-



rons eventually feel repetitive, because you're shooting at the same things in a different place. When playing against real humans, however, the game transcends the monotony of single-player mode and becomes a battle of wits as you hunt down your quarry.

FRIEND OR FOE

WvC comes on two CD-ROMs, one for each helicopter. You can install both games into the same directory, saving a lot of hard disk space, as both games share many of the same files. By including two CD-ROMs, WvC is ready for head-to-head play right out of the box. The package even includes no manuals, so if players are in separate locations they won't be left without reference material. All the software you need for head-to-head combat is included.

You can also fly cooperatively in the same model helicopter, but to do this you'll need a second boxed copy of the game, because each player must have the CD in their drive in order to play. To meet a variety of needs, the game provides for four multiplayer options. For a two-player session, you can connect over phone lines using a modem, or direct-connect using serial or parallel ports. The modem setting only consists of selecting a modem port and an initialization string (the default should work for most modems). Direct connection requires a null modem cable (LAPLINK or compatible cable) for serial or parallel ports. For really hot and

hectic action, eight players can engage in combat via a network. The network setup requires an IPX socket number, and all players in the group must use the same socket number. The menu provides a test utility to verify correct network initialization.



SPINNING DOWN

Like its single-chopper predecessor, *WEREWOLF VS. COMANCHE* isn't for the flight-sim purist. But the simplicity that will make some hard-core sim fans scoff at the package will appeal to newcomers of helicopter sims, who are more interested in getting into the sky with a group of friends and blasting at anything that moves than getting an education in authentic tactics and rotor-wing physics. Played alone, the package may not have a lot of staying power, but when you mix it up with a friend or seven, these programs really shine. ☺



A TIME FOR REFLECTION *Comanche 2.0* sports a number of subtle graphic enhancements, including reflections in the water and translucent smoke.

ing—period of time traveling to the target before you finally achieve a few short moments of terror, here you jump right into the action. It's almost like playing *DOOM* strapped into an eight-ton weapons platform. You'll see instant combat in all the post-training missions.

Unlike *DOOM* levels, though, the WvC missions are often homogeneous, distinguished only by changes in climate and terrain. In single-player mode, the mis-

THE EDITORS SPEAK

WEREWOLF VS. COMANCHE 2.0

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Detailed terrain provides a convincing arena for battle, with hills to hide behind and canyons to buzz through. An easy learning curve gets beginners into the action quickly. Good multiplayer options, including two-player mode right out of the box.

CONS Hard-core air combat sim buffs will scoff at the game's simplistic flight model. Missions are too similar and quickly become monotonous in solo mode. No high-resolution mode.

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Beat Seat

Hold Onto Your Britches When You Ride The THUNDERSEAT

by Gordon Goble

YOU SAY THE ROAR OF NASCAR HAS DULLED TO A PURR? DOOM'S JUST NOT CRANKING THE OLD fear-o-meter anymore? Well, listen up, troops, while I tell you about a monster peripheral that will put the zip back in your limp BFG 9000.

Take one molded plastic chair, hollowed out for maximum reverberation and shaped in best cockpit styling, plunk it on a sturdy wooden base, affix a 100-watt eight-inch subwoofer directly underneath the old rear end, and you've got the makings of a device that's gonna thump your skin off. Sure, you'll still hear the impact of that missile on your chest, but the THUNDERSEAT will have you sensing it in your bones, too.

SITTING ON A THUNDERHEAD

The THUNDERSEAT works on the philosophy that you can create your own, very personal earthquake, and that's very much what it feels like. Once the heavy-duty THUNDERSEAT woofer has been wired for sound, audio bursts such as gunfire, explosions, or the dull growl of a stock car are funneled up from the speaker and through the hollow chair molding. The result? Well, since a low frequency/high volume mixture moves one heck of a lot of air, you'll be shaking, rattling and rolling from head to toe. It can all be quite invigorating.

Certainly the level of THUNDERSEAT enjoyment depends somewhat on the games you play. Rolling along in my NASCAR, for instance, had always been a gas (so to speak), but the physical sensation afforded by the THUNDERSEAT's subwoofer took

the entire procedure

to new heights. Likewise, taking a hit at the hockey rink, on the football field, or in a 3-D room with some odd mutant will never be the same.

HIGHS AND LOWS

On the downside, the THUNDERSEAT hungers for more power than the average soundcard has, and that means an external amp can be considered mandatory. Also, since a subwoofer reproduces only low frequencies, you won't hear or feel high-end stuff like the whine of an IndyCar or the hum of a jet fighter unless separate mid-range and/or tweeters are hooked into your sound system.

It also must be remembered that the THUNDERSEAT functions on audio signals, so whatever low-end sound the woofer reproduces will be felt as well as heard. The slamming of doors, various musical interludes, and even deep speech (i.e. FULL THROTTLE's Ben) will hammer home just like an impacting missile—not too realistic an experience. Finally, because the very sounds that move you will most probably be moving the neighbor's walls as well, apartment-dwelling Thunder-Seaters may well be forced to upgrade their digs in a hurry.

BELLS AND WHISTLES

Although the THUNDERSEAT may be purchased all by its lonesome, you should check out available options. Option One, the "Deluxe Pad Set", is a must for any-



THUNDERSEAT

Price: \$159.95 for chair
\$34.00 for chair padding
\$119.95 for side consoles

System Requirements:
Computer with sound card,
external amplifier.
Manufacturer: ThunderSeat
Technologies
Los Angeles, CA
(310) 410-0022

one without much natural body padding, as this ride can get bumpy. Option Two consists of a pair of free-standing side consoles that bring peripherals such as a Thrustmaster's FLCs and WCS within convenient reach. The third option is a retractable, swiveling keyboard holder that should be considered, since the THUNDERSEAT sitting position is far too low to reach the average desktop.

As an added bonus, the THUNDERSEAT can be wired to virtually anything that produces sound. The question is: How badly do you want to feel "Dark Side of the Moon?" Personally, I'll get my ears do the walking through my CD collection.

The THUNDERSEAT requires some assembly, and since most of its components are big and weighty, it may take two to put this thing together. But if its sound effects you want, the THUNDERSEAT puts the bow in "boom and zoom." ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THUNDERSEAT

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Offers a healthy boost in game realism with tactile feedback via your spine and derriere. You can actually feel it when you fire a rocket launcher or shift into afterburner.

CONS A pricey toy, and it doesn't have its own amplifier. Undesirable sounds can reverberate from the subwoofer. Maximum effect may not be feasible in certain environments.

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Turning The Telescope Around

LET'S FACE IT, WE WANT IT ALL. WHEN WE PLAY A STRATEGIC GAME WHERE MILITARY UNITS ARE PRODUCED, we want a more tactical combat module in that game to experiment with our own battlefield maneuvers or to try out newly developed technologies. Conversely, when playing a detailed tactical-level game, we get attached to those forces and want to see them go from battle to battle in a huge strategic campaign. It seems that no matter what end of the telescope a war or strategy game tries to focus on, there are gamers who want the other end, too!



THE HYBRID SYNDROME

Take *Impressions*' original *CAESAR* game, for example. When combat occurred, players could plug in their *LEGION* game and resolve battles tactically. While the con-

cept was sound, blending these two games simply didn't come off well in practice, largely due to the fact that *LEGION* was not designed to be the tactical module for anything—and it showed. Another ancient game, *LEGIONS* from *Mindscape*, suffered greatly from not having a tactical module at all—showing that avoiding the issue is definitely not a solution.

At least with their upcoming *CAESAR II*, *Impressions* has evidently learned its lesson, blending the tactical module in with the more strategic aspects of the design. What's impressive about this is that, at one point in the creative process, the tactical module threatened to overwhelm the rest of the game. Since *CAESAR II* is primarily a city and empire-building game, this would have caused the product to lose focus—and be less fun, to boot. It took a lot of courage for the design team to stick with the original concept, and in my opinion, it makes *CAESAR II* more likely to stand the test of time. (For a sneak preview of *CAESAR II*, check out last month's CGW.)

G-2

* Once upon a time, there was a rumor about a computerized version of the hit boardgame, *World in Flames*. Well, it's more than a rumor now. Appearing at Origins in the Australian Design Group booth was Chris Marinacci, the lead programmer on the project. He sat beside a monitor showing off the latest work-in-progress version of the game, in Windows. He proudly told everyone who would listen that the computer version of *World in Flames* is being programmed in Delphi. "It's a great development environment for Windows games. I hate to see people who don't know any better suffer with developing in C++."

Interestingly, the map covers the entire planet, hex-by-hex. There are no more "off map boxes" to represent the US (or South America, or anywhere else, for that matter). The map has been completely redone for the computer version (using the boardgame's European map scale), and there are now new lands for the Axis to conquer. Talk about your German-Japanese handshake!

(continued on page 254)

HOW SOME
GAMES
INCORPORATE
TACTICAL
ELEMENTS INTO
STRATEGIC
COMMAND

THE DISORIENTATION FACTOR

Often, flipping ends of the telescope between a strategic game and a tactical battle is disorienting. Take, for example, the lesson of *Sid Meier's Civil War*. As this game languishes on a back burner somewhere on Sid's hard drive, many are left to wonder whatever happened to such an anticipated title. Having pushed the pieces around a bit on it, I could see that there was both a patented Sid Meier "cool" strategic-level game covering

by Alan Emrich

Veteran Wif-er's will be happy to hear that, in addition to an artificial opponent, play-by-email is also being supported—most of a player's reaction movement performed during an opponent's turn will now be delegated to the AI. For more information, send your e-mail to: wifames@stonet.org.

* The upgrade for **SIO MEEK'S CONQUEST** to the new **CvMcr** will be available through Micro-Prose Direct for \$28.97. **CvMcr** will be released only for Windows CD-ROM, and is slated for modem, network and Internet play. To order from MPS direct, call (800) 879-PLAY.

* Our custom scenario of the month award goes to **Will Michael** [72623.630@compuserve.com], whose **Warlords II** variation of the **Thirty Years War** variation up on **CompuServe** is a piece of gamer-as-designer at its best. The **Thirty Years War** was a dynastic and religious struggle for European hegemony in the first half of the seventeenth century, and the play of events is well suited to **Warlords II**'s game engine. This scenario features 70 cities, 40 ruins, and is intended for 8 players. New army and city sets have also been custom designed for this scenario. Will also guarantees that you will go broke unless you sack and pillage.

* Speaking of **WARLORDS II**, **SSG's WARRIORS II QUEST** should finally be reaching the states by the time you read this. This should put **SSG's A-Team** back on their long-anticipated **Ardenas** project that (hopefully) will be released in the fourth quarter of this year. One new deal rumored out of **SSG** is a collectable

trading card game based on football ("That's 'soccer' to you, Yank"), designed by **Ian Trout**, and featuring teams from **Down Under**. Chances are we won't be seeing much of that product here in the States, though. Too bad.

* Late word from **New World Computing** cites **SPACEWAR, HE! IV** as having the following new features: enhanced AI with a new level dubbed "diabolical," two new ship types, flight paths (so you can tell where your fleets are going), alliances between players, a new galaxy pattern, and an **Armageddon Device** that helps players get metal when the universe runs out. Presently, the release is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 1995.

* At **SimTex**, now owned by **Spectrum HoloByte**, those "Masters of Magic" (and **Orion**) have shifted their **Master of Xenos** (working title) game into beta mode and are hoping for a fourth quarter release through **Micro-Prose** this year.

* The scenario list is in for **Empire II: The Art of War**, produced by **White Wolf** and published by **New World Computing**. The battles include: **The Afrika Korps**, **Agincourt**, **Antietam Creek**, **Arbela-Gaugamela**, **Austerlitz**, **Blenheim**, **Battle of the Bulge**, **Bunker Hill**, **Cannae**, **Chess (for 2)**, **Chess (for 4)**, **Conquest**, **The Allied Command**, **Penn Forest Defense**, **Good vs. Evil**, **It Came From The Sea**, **From The Sea II**, **Guadalcanal**, **Hampton Roads**, **Military Invasion**, **Isandlwana**, **Lepanto**, **Marines**, **Ragnarok**, **Sands of Time**, **Battle of Shiloh**, **Battle of the Clouds**, **Modern Warfare**, **Tutorial Scenario**, **Waterloo II**, **Grouchy**, **Wa-**

terio, **Wizards & Warriors**, **Moontase Zeta**, **Moon Zeta Surface**. Interestingly, boardgame impresario **Keith Pautler (3W)** will be writing the strategy guide for **Prima Publishing**.

* **QGP's** biggest hit in quite a while, **THE PERFECT GENERAL II**, now has a scenario disk which should ship by the time you read this. It includes ten new battles and, best of all, a complete editor so players can create both scenarios and campaigns.

* Many rumors this month center around **Avalon Hill**. Many of these started soon after the 7/11/95 edition of **The Baltimore Sun** ran a story entitled **Game Company for Sale**. Needless to say, when the **Origins** convention kicked off in Philadelphia two days later, the exhibitor hall was abuzz with rumors and speculation.

Bill Levy, Director of Software Development at **Avalon Hill**, comments: "Monarch-Avalon (the parent corporation of **Avalon Hill**) is not in debt, as reported in **The Baltimore Sun** newspaper. In fact, it has a cushion of \$1.1M." So what's all this news that **Avalon Hill** is in distress? "That article was about **Monarch-Avalon**. The writer decided to frame the story from the angle that **Monarch-Avalon** is a game company [only]. Why? Because **Avalon Hill** is known internationally for its games."

What has brought the company under fiscal scrutiny these days is a year old publication **Monarch-Avalon** launched called **Girl's Life**. This magazine, for pre-teen girls, is distributed en masse to grocery stores and news-



GAME OVER...WELL, NOT QUITE *Conquest of the New World* is a good example of the new "hybrid" game, with a tactical combat component integrated seamlessly into the overall strategic game.

the Eastern Theater of the war, as well as an absorbing tactical module. The trouble, **Sid** explained to me, is the disorientation factor of concentrating on a battle for 20 to 30 minutes, and then being thrown back upstairs and trying to remember what your strategy was in winning the war. (Were you about to maneuver that corps toward the valley, or along the river?) **Sid** decided that

he had to emphasize one scale over the other; so, until he wins his internal civil war, this title is doomed to languish in gaming purgatory.

Disorientation is at its highest when the tactical elements are more involved. In games like **Adman's THE ROAD FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX**, **Blizzard's PAX IMPERIA II**, or any of **Impressions** games featuring their **Micro Miniatures** system (where the battles are very detailed and truly games in their own right), the disorientation problem has been largely solved by the designers offering more options to the gamer. Players overwhelmed by the amount of tactical detail can always use the "quick fight" strategic combat system, but particularly in the case of **PAX IMPERIA II**, they risk missing a treat.

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stands. As a start up venture, it has been a considerable expense on the company's books. "If one thing is true in the publishing business," Mr. Levay added, "it is that a magazine with that kind of reach takes a number of years to make a profit." Mr. Levay went on to add that "Monarch-Avalon would primarily like to find a business-partner, not buyer."

Rumors remain rampant, however, that Monarch-Avalon is seriously considering selling off its Avalon Hill Game Company assets, either in part or, more likely, lock, stock, and barrel. Apparently, Monarch-Avalon has already selected an investment banker to handle negotiations for them in any event.

While Avalon Hill continues to work on its many boardgame projects in the pipeline (*Gerontimo*, *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader*, and *Empire of the Rising Sun* were recently published, with titles such as *PanzerBlitz II*, *Across 5 Aprils II* and some unannounced collectible card games waiting in the wings). Their computer game schedule, however, has had a bit rougher time.

* Work continues at Avalon Hill with their computer game titles *O-Day: America Invades* (Atomic Games), *Advanced Civilization* (see *Beta Bits* this issue) and *Wooden Ships & Iron Men* (check out last issue's Sneak Preview). The 7th Fleet computer game has been shelved, with the future of developer's Stanley Associ-

ates relationship with AH much in doubt. Over the years, by *FLEET COMMANDER 2* designer Charlie Moylan, remains on AH's production sched-



WAY BEYOND SQUAD LEADER It seems that the real-time realism (or not) of BSL will be debated on some other forum than Avalon Hill's, as Atomic has found greener pastures elsewhere.

ule for next year.

Said Bill Levay on future computer game projects in development at Avalon Hill, "I have four titles under contract for next year (work has started already) and will sign four more in the next week. All save one should be out in '96, with that last one due out in '97. We've had to put a moratorium on submissions, though, because we are fully booked for computer game projects in the coming year." Those who wish to impart their thoughts to Mr. Levay are urged to contact him via email at [yobeowulf@aol.com] or call (410) 426-9600 x108.

* So, how does Avalon Hill's rumblings shake out for Atomic Games? That's a good question. To say there was no love lost be-

tween AH's former Computer Games Director Jim Rose and Atomic's Keith Zabalau would be a gracious understatement. However, they did manage to work together well enough to release *OPERATION CRUSADER* and *STALINGRAD* from the *World at War* series. Now, it appears, *O-Day: America Invades* will see both the end of that series and Atomic's relationship with AH. Both sides have stated that this development is purely a business decision. Said Keith Zabalau, "Every person at Atomic and even my parents and grandparents feel very close to the Ootts (Eric and Jackson, Chairman and President, respectively, of Avalon Hill) and the other AH

folks. Bill Levay and I have been acquainted for years and hope to remain in touch for years to come. There is no anger or malice involved here."

The most notable title affected is *Beyond Squad Leader*, which should still be released next year, but under a different name and through a different publisher. (Everything except for the name belongs to Atomic.) Even after *O-Day: America Invades* is released, Atomic has announced that they will shelve the *World at War* system for "at least a year." Instead, Atomic will devote its time turning the game engine developed for *Beyond Squad Leader* into fantasy and sci-fi derivatives. Those seeking official word from Atomic should check out their Web page at [<http://www.atomic.com/>].

Thus, gamers willing to make some sacrifices can't quite "have it all," but they can come close.

THE FASTER SUB-GAME SOLUTION

A better solution for games determined to look through both ends of the telescope is to emphasize one scale over the other, and make a relatively fast sub-game covering the other scale. *PANZER GENERAL* offers about the fastest strategic-level sub-game around. Between operational-level battles, you get the news as to where you're fighting next (and equally important, why you're fighting there). Occasionally, players reach a decision

point about their career or can spend their hard-won Influence Points to alter a strategic plan, but these are matters of mere moments between the long, engrossing battles in between.

Games that spend a bit more time on their opposite scales have done well, too. The battles resolved in games like *CASTLES II*, *MASTER OF ORION*, *MASTER OF MAGIC*, and *THE SWORD OF ARAGON*, are quick, clean, and very playable little affairs.

At several recent trade shows, I saw many gamers playing just the tactical combat module from *Interplay's CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD* for extended periods of time, enjoying a quick five to

ten-minute battle fix. Both *CONQUEST* and *CAESAR II* strike a good balance, providing a quick tactical thrill, without distracting you from your overall strategy.

Of course, when I need just a tactical fix, I'll be playing *STEEL PANTHERS*, or maybe *PACIFIC WAR*, when I really feel like immersing myself in grand strategy. Still, it's clear that this new breed of "hybrid" games offers a fresh approach to gaming through their use of multiple scales. I salute designers who force us to look through both ends of the telescope. It challenges our perspective, and isn't "playing what if" a lot of what strategy/war gaming is all about? ☛



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Empire's First Battles 523	Dragon Lords 528
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Pippenhammer War 523	Dragon Quest 516
War Elephant 517	Dragon Strike 520
	Dragonheart 518
	Dungeons 526
	ElQuest 526
	Hero Quest 528
	Iron Dragon 525
	Magic Realm 523
	Man O' War 542
	Merlin's Maze Game 510
	Talisman 544
	The Hobbit Adventure 528
	Tran 523
	Warhammer Fantasy 547
	Warhammer Quest 548
	Wizard's Quest 517
	Xanth 521

MEDIEVAL	SCIENCE FICTION
Age of Chivalry 2 527	Alpha Omega 519
Black Prince 525	Ballistics, 2d Edition 519
Henry V 526	Blood Battle 528
Ironclad 528	Blood Bowl 545
The Crusades II 526	Cosmic Encounter 519
	Federation/Kingship De 538
	Fury of the Glaciers 529
	Gateway to the Stars 522
	Hacker 1 or 2 49
	Humans DeKors 525
	Impetus, 2d Edition 530
	March of Venus 525
	Mighty Empires 542
	Neoplas 519
	Space Monks 540
	Starforce Terra 510
	Starship Troopers 520
	Stellar Conquest 540
	Warhammer 40K 547

WORLD WAR 2	PG CO-ROM
Advanced Squad L... 538	1300 P.R. and Regions 534
Advanced Third Reich 538	Advanced Civilization 534
Africa 521	Jir Combat Pacific 532-540
Akita Corps 519	Kaifuge 544
Arushu 527	Mad Dowry 537
Arks & Allies 533	Gasar 540
B-17 538	Civilization Newsday 547
Battle of the Bulge 518	Civil War, 1861-1864 539
Eights Air Force 525	Command & Conquer 546
Mad Front 533	Conquered Kingdoms 538
Olympic Schmidt 527	Conquer A.D. 1986 536
Operation Crusader 529	D Day America Invades 539
Operation Sea Lion 535	Exploration 540
Panzerblitz 2 535	Jewel of the Oracle 539
Panzer East 523	Last Advent 2 539
Saika 1 or 2 525	Mechwarrior 2 540
Second Front 533	Phoenicians 539
Stark Blitzkrieg 533	Pomerec 3 Kingdoms 538
Squad Leader 530	Star Trek TNG Unity 542
Third Reich 519	Steel Panthers 546
Victory in the Pacific 517	Stellar Hunter 545
	Third Reich 534
	Worlds 542

CIVIL WAR	MODERN
1862: Queen Game 523	6th Fleet 527
1863: A.C.W. 530	7th Fleet 523
3 Days of Gettysburg 540	Across the River 525
Antietam: Four Armies 2 529	Angon Strike 519
Autumn of Glory 521	Attack Sub 510
Bloodst. Day 521	Back to Iraq 512
Bloody Roads South 526	Ballfield Europe 528
Blue & Gray 525	Cross: Korea 1950 529
Bobby Lee: Civil War 537	Dark Strike 528
Brother Against Brother 535	Harpoon 529
Chancellorsville 524	IDF (Great Def. Peace) 529
Civil War 519	Iron Division 524
Date: 1861 1st Bull Run 89	Main Battle Tank 524
Embrace 1 Angry Wind 524	Mid-East Peace 516
Gettysburg 516	Modern Naval Battles 519
Guns of Cedar Creek 532	Nets 515
Hallowed Ground 552	Angon Strike 519
Here Comes the Rebels 525	Phase Line Smash 525
In Their Quilt Fields 2 526	Sinal Front 520
Lee Takes Command 525	The Air 519
No Better Place To Die 524	Team Yankee 530
Read on Richmond 521	The Speed of Heat 526
Saint Grant 542	
Shore Comes the Rebels 525	
Thunder of Gettysburg 527	

RAILROAD	STRATEGY
1830 Pennsylvania 520	Advanced Civilization 525
1826 525	Bloodbeard 527
1856 527	Britania 519
1870 526	Calzation 529
Asaphian Rails 526	Civilian Diplomacy 542
Battle Field 521	Deluxe Diplomacy 542
Empire Builder 525	Diplomacy 519
Europe 525	Enemy in Sight 512
Express 511	Feudal 518
Nippon Rails 521	Flora 525
North American Rail 521	Guerrilla 519
Rail Baron 519	History of the World 527
	Imperial 519
	Lords of 17 Sierra Madre 534
	McIntosh 523
	New World 519
	Next Britannia 518
	Republic of Rome 529
	Rise 527
	Supremacy, 3rd Edition 542
	The New Aquans 525
	Tourament Terrace 529
	Warays 525
	We the People 529

BOOKS ON TAPE	3DD
Churchill's Own Voice 518	Center: Fortress of Sea 552
Clear & Present Danger 516	Dreadnought 548
Del. of War 525	Crusades: General 558
Delta of Honor 523	Peasor: Planet 552
Lincok 510	Rebel Assault 552
One More Mission 517	
Red Badge of Courage 515	
Step in their Course 515	
The Civil War 516	

LEISURE / FAMILY
Circus Mearns 511
Cut 510
Dads of the Lost Worlds 523
Gangsters 523
Grand Box 57
Manopoly 50th Anniversary 54
The Boardgame 520
Wild Spots 534

PLAYSTATION
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Shiny Wheels, Busted Ideals

MicroProse's ACROSS THE RHINE Loses Sight Of Its Target

by Patrick C. Miller

ONE MORNING AT BREAKFAST, MY FOUR-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER ASKED FOR A CEREAL THAT SHE'D NEVER tried, but thought she might like based on the name alone. When a bowl of the stuff, a non-sugared, healthy cereal for grownups, was placed before her, she took one look at it and declared, "I didn't know this is what I wanted." I think many gamers will have the same reaction to **MicroProse's ACROSS THE RHINE**, a game of World War II armored combat set in Western Europe.

What armor aficionados hoped for was a World War II first-person tank simulation on the order of MicroProse's highly popular M-1 TANK PLATOON, released back in 1989. There hasn't been a simulation since then that compares to M-1, and it looks as if armor sim fans are going to have to wait even longer to get the game of their dreams. If you were expecting M-1 on steroids, **ACROSS THE RHINE** isn't it. What it tries to be is two games in one: a first-person simulation and a real-time strategy game.

The bad news is that only one of the two games, the strategic as-

pect, is playable and it probably isn't the one in which most gamers are interested.

There's also some role playing built into **ACROSS THE RHINE (ATR)**. However, the role you're playing seems to come straight out of a cartoon called "Mr. Magoo Joins the Army," in which everyone but you is capable of seeing enemy tanks beyond a few hundred yards. As Lieutenant Magoo, you're constantly grabbing the controls from your tank crew, shouting, "Let me have a crack at the scoundrels!" In response, the crew screams, "Get away, you old coot! You're blind as a bat! You wanna get us all killed?" Despite the manual's lengthy instructions on how to fight from the first-person view, the concept of **ATR** as a simulator comes off looking like more of an afterthought rather than a key part of the game. In fact, you can easily play **ATR** with the first-person view turned off and not miss it a bit. Unfortunately, this window serves as a constant reminder of what the game could, and probably should, have been.

LET THE BUYER BEWARE

Perhaps the easiest way to help gamers decide whether **ATR** is for them is to list who should not buy it. First, there are those whose

PCs lack the horsepower or who are short of space on their hard drives (a whopping 90 megabytes is required for the full installation). On a 486-66 with 8MB RAM, **ATR** will play (without some sounds!)—but it is terribly slow. Also, you must take into account that like most first releases from MicroProse, **ATR** contains its share of bugs.

Likewise, "control freaks" should steer clear of **ATR**, lest they go insane as their little tank icons head off in the wrong direction. Watching your tank company suddenly halt just short of taking the enemy in the flank as platoons begin to pirouette about and switch places, you can imagine a grimy, unshaven captain shouting

over the radio, "No, no, no! Fred's platoon goes on the right, Bud's platoon is in the middle and Ralph's is on the left. Shape up people! We're not moving until you get it right!"

Avoid **ATR** if you have little patience for games with big learning curves. The strategic aspect of the game, which is playable and can be entertaining (especially as a campaign game), requires a thorough understanding of the confusing, multi-windowed interface, as well as the command and control structure used to give units orders. You might find your-



Across The Rhine

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 System Requirements: IBM compatible 486DX-33 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-RDM, 20 MB hard drive space, mouse; Windows 3.1 for supplemental video disk; supports most major sound cards.
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Across the Rhine: The Video and Booklet

It wasn't that long ago that when you bought a computer game the most you could hope to find in the box was a covert player's manual. In the era of multimedia, *Across the Rhine* offers not only a game and manual, but also a CD containing a 60-minute video documentary and a 164-page illustrated booklet crammed with historical background.

The quality of the World War II black-and-white footage in the video might not be on par with current technology, but it does get you fired up to re-fight the armored battles in Western Europe in 1944 and 1945. The CD runs under Windows 3.1 and requires at least a 486 DX-33 PC, a double-speed CD-ROM drive and 8 megabytes of RAM. Partition systems can play the video nearly full screen, although this degrades the quality of the images. The documentary is divided into five parts, beginning with the D-Day invasion and ending with the fall of Germany.

While the video sets the stage for ATR, the booklet provides more in-depth information on the Western Front campaign and the key events which shaped it. Here, players can learn more about differences between American and German strategies, weapons and equipment, tactical doctrine, and vehicle design philosophies. Orders of battle and statistics on tank guns and ammunition performance can be found in this well-done, informative volume.

sure to learn about such things, you'll be bored to tears by this game. Veteran wargamers will find that tactical combat in ATR lacks realism. For example, tanks can fire on the move just as accurately as they do when stationary; there's no way to take advantage of half-down positions; and no units, not even infantry, can enter woods.

HISTORY FOR THE MAKING

So is there anything to like about ATR? As a matter of fact, yes. If you're willing to invest the time and effort in understanding the interface and learning the game's command and control system, it's possible to immerse yourself in a historical or hypothetical campaign. You have the option of beginning your command at either the platoon, company or battalion level. After creating a character who fights in either a German or an American division, you can track his progress as he attempts to defend the Fatherland from hordes of attacking GIs or battles the hated SS to rid the world of the Nazi scourge. Do a good job and promotions and medals will come your way. Screw up and you'll get your Purple Heart or Wound Medal posthumously. At the end of each battle, a map shows how well or how poorly your unit is performing compared to the historical record.

ATR also accurately portrays the differences between the American and German armies during World War II. The Americans are equipped with vehicles that are more numerous and more reliable, but less heavily armed and armored than their German counterparts. The U.S. Army also relies heavily on air and artillery support and its efficient logistical system. In contrast, the Wehrmacht generally possesses superior equipment, better organization and higher morale, but is less mechanized and also faces chronic shortages of men and materiel to replace its losses. Commanders for both sides must pay close attention to supplies of am-

munition and fuel and the state of their troops, or they risk having units slowly bled dry by constant combat. As an added bonus, excellent World War II combat photos adorn the game, and a battle builder enables you to create your own scenarios.

Most people hate to see a game fail in which so much time, effort and resources have been invested, a game that has been eagerly anticipated by so many for so long. While MicroProse deserves some credit for its bold attempt at blending two different genres into one game, it also deserves some harsh criticism for trying to pawn off ATR as something it clearly is not. It isn't so much that MicroProse "went a genre too far," but that it



90-07-07008 There's plenty of data on vehicles and weaponry in ATR—it's just a shame the poor game system renders most of the detail superfluous.

sell reading parts of the manual several times before all the pieces of this rather complex puzzle begin to make sense.

Finally, if you have little or no knowledge of World War II tables of organization in the American and German armies, no understanding of how the chain of command operates and no de-



VIEW TO A KILL It's tempting to use the view from the gunner's sights, but the best place to conduct combat is on the zoom map at the right. If you ever actually see an enemy tank in your gun sights, you're probably too close.

betrayed the trust of gamers by creating false expectations. It might have helped if MicroProse had listened to its customers, since, aside from any marketing claims, it's obvious that *ACROSS THE RHINE* isn't half the game—or the simulation—that *M-1 TANK PLATOON* was. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

ACROSS THE RHINE

RATING ★★☆☆☆

PROS Nice graphics. The battle builder, historical manual, and documentary CD video make a good package.

CONS No simulation value. The confusing command structure, bad interface, lack of tactical realism, and bugs keep it from being much of a game, either.

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Williams **MIDWAY**

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THE OTHER CHEEK.

AND IT WILL BE

RIPPED FROM

YOUR FACE.

mk3 for the pc



Another Cat Joins The Menagerie

HPS Takes Up Where It Left WWII Off With PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS

by Robert Mayer

LAST YEAR, SCOTT HAMILTON'S HPS SIMULATIONS RELEASED AN EASTERN FRONT TACTICAL GAME CALLED *TIGERS ON THE PROWL*. Groggnards everywhere loved it, but even serious wargamers balked at the rather primitive graphics and interface. Over the last 18 months, *TIGERS* has evolved into a much more polished product, although it is still spartan—appropriate perhaps for one of the most uncompromisingly hard-core wargames on the market. For all of its lack of visual appeal, *TIGERS* has been a delight, offering a decent computer opponent, good play by e-mail capability, and infinite variability. All of this comes in a package stuffed with more details and information on WWII armored combat than anyone has a right to expect from what is essentially a one-man company.

HPS has followed up the success of *TIGERS* with *PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS*, which takes the *TIGERS* engine and moves it to the Western Front. The graphics are better

(though still austere), the interface is enhanced somewhat, and a tremendous number of additional features necessary to simulate World War II battles in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Northwest Europe have been added.

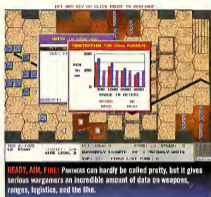
As with *TIGERS*, the database in *PANTHERS* is extensive and accurate, representing American, Commonwealth, German, French, Italian, Belgian, Dutch, and Canadian forces in all their martial glory. Air drops, fieldworks, engineering operations, bridge demolition, and carpet bombing all make an appearance, as do naval gunfire support, pillboxes, casemates, and landing craft. If the devil is in the details, *PANTHERS* is positively demonic.

PANTHERS benefits from the improvements the designer has recently incorporated in *TIGERS*. The most significant change is in the interface. *PANTHERS* adds a staff officer system which gives the player access to detailed—if somewhat complex—summaries of opera-

tional, logistical, and intelligence information; you can display your order of battle, see what your staff thinks the enemy is up to, plan fire support, and check the status of your command and control net at a glance.

Map scrolling, line of sight determination, and orders are smoothly integrated into the mouse-driven interface, and the mechanics of gameplay—while sometimes stiff—do not distract from tactical planning. Combined with an excellent and detailed manual, *PANTHERS* makes it easier for skilled novices to jump right in and start playing. Green recruits to wargaming, however, will still find themselves swamped in the minutia of angles of impact, dust clouds, and ammunition selection. This is a game for folks who like to wrestle with the trade-offs between AP, APC, and APCBC anti-tank ammunition and who lose sleep wondering

whether horizontal or vertical volute suspensions made a better Sherman.



Panthers in the Shadows

Price: \$69.95

System:

Requirements:
IBM compatible
485 recommended,
VGA, 550K
RAM, 5 MB free
hard drive space,
mouse.

of Players: 1-2

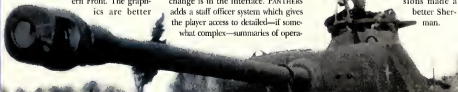
Protection: Document Check

Designer: Scott Hamilton

Publisher: HPS Simulations

Santa Clara, CA

(408) 554-8381



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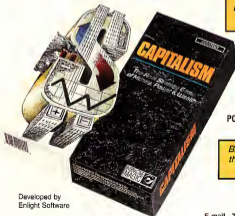
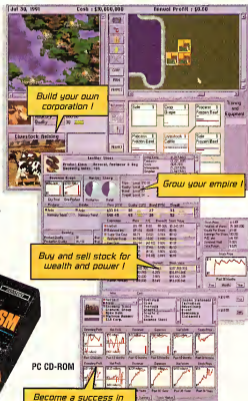
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WHAT'S NEW IN PANTHERS

New Obstacles

Tank Ditch
Bocage
Abatis
Barricades

New Unit Functions

Parachute Landings
Beach Assaults
Bridge Demolition
Amphibious Tractors

New Units

M4 Sherman Tanks (21 types)
French Recon (20 types)
Italian Aircraft (13 types)
German Amphibious Armor (7 types)

MORE LEAD, MORE TREADS

The sheer variety of unit types and characteristics in **PANTHERS** is staggering. Shermans with rocket launchers, German amphibious armor, flail, crab, and plow tanks, Volksgrenadier bicycle troops—it's all here. **PANTHERS'** scenario creation system makes it as easy to design battles from 1940 as from 1944, and even parachute drops and amphibious assaults are easy to set up. The process could be more streamlined, and there are too few opportunities to abort a mistake in game set up, but overall gamers should find **PANTHERS** makes an excellent construction set. Unfortunately, no map builder is included, but one is available from HPS for about \$15. Users of HPS' **AIDE DE CAMP** can also use that product to make **PANTHERS** maps, and some **TIGERS** maps work well, albeit without new terrain features like blowable bridges. **PANTHERS** includes a fair number of interesting maps, but fewer than ten scenarios; more scenarios and campaigns are promised.



SERIOUS TALK TO HPS This close-up screen shows how **PANTHERS** allows you to arrange troop formations with a reasonable chance of historical accuracy.

MORE SHELLS
MORE VELOCITY

The weight of data pays off in game play, which is long on cerebral stimulation and short on visual appeal. Like **TIGERS**, **PANTHERS** calculates angles of impact, effective armor thicknesses, different types of penetration and damage effects for every shot fired. Results are displayed textually, with such information as penetration vs. armor, accuracy, kill percentage, and damage reported in the combat phase. Maneuver units are usually platoons or sections, organized into companies and battalions. The game ruthlessly punishes those who deviate from good tactical practice, and grudgingly rewards players who use good sense.

I say grudgingly, because **PANTHERS** is a convincing demonstration that warfare is organized and lethal confusion. Like real combat, the best-laid plans often fall apart as soon as the enemy shows up, but in the long run good planning and execution will prevail. Battles generally turn out how you would expect them to, and gamers interested in historical simulation should be very pleased. In this respect, **PANTHERS** is heads above Norm Koger's **TANKS!** (SSI).

PANTHERS takes a certain investment of time and energy, as well as a bit of patience to master. After all, when was the last time you read about gravitational constants, induced drag, and modified Poncelet equations in a computer wargame? It also helps to have a good knowledge of WWII combat to make the most of the game. Eye candy is sorely lacking; gamers used to **PANZER GENERAL**'s marvelous SVGA screens may look askance at **PANTHERS'** paltry 16-color palette, while folks who invested in wavetable sound cards will listen in vain

for four-voice music or digital explosions.

Also, the game sticks too close to board game norms. You can't, for instance, name your formations, and the hex grid imposes limitations on artillery adjustment and movement that a more sophisticated, pixel-based system would eliminate. Irritatingly, the use of a fixed VGA font truncates some unit descriptions, and it can be hard to tell some units apart based on their descriptions. I found a few bugs, some rather irritating, but nothing fatal; HPS promises a patch by the time you read this, and their record in that regard has been stellar. Gamers need not fear buying **PANTHERS**; just be sure to get the latest version.

PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS continues the realistic historical journey that **TIGERS** began. A pity that HPS doesn't think it wise to bundle the map creation utility with the game; in this day and age that should be mandatory, and the game is much better when you can make your own maps to supplement the small included selection. That aside, experienced wargamers interested in tactical combat—and willing to sacrifice state of the art glitz for front of the pack accuracy—will find a true joy in this game. For those not devoted to WWII combat, it may prove too daunting and too austere for easy assimilation. Still, the chance to stalk big game in the bocage and hunt Shermans in the Ardennes is a compelling reason to dust off the check book. With **PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS** successfully following **TIGERS ON THE PROWL**, HPS itself has certainly emerged from the shadows. ☛

THE EDITORS SPEAK

PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Tons of weapons data, great WWII tactical feel. Despite the complexity, a better AI than most wargames.

CONS Although improved from **TIGERS**, the interface and graphics pale when compared to those of, say, **PANZER GENERAL**. Very complex, even for a realistic wargame.

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— *Computer Gaming World*

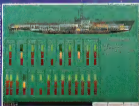


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No Limits, Ace

FLIGHT COMMANDER II—MISSION BUILDER Takes Off With More Missions And A Powerful Mission Creator

by Tim Carter

FLIGHT COMMANDER II, FROM THE AVALON HILL GAME COMPANY, REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST UNIQUE wargames on the market. The simple yet engaging way the game recreates air-to-air combat in the age of jet aircraft has captured the attention and admiration of many who would not otherwise be attracted to this genre. FLIGHT COMMANDER II has also won more than a few converts among the flight simulator crowd, most of whom would probably

BUILDER allows gamers to construct both individual battles and extended campaigns. The same range of aircraft and time periods provided in the original game is available, and terrain and other factors can be constructed by the players at will.

The MISSION BUILDER comes on a single 3.5-inch floppy, and installs quickly and flawlessly. The program appears to be bug-free, as well; I had absolutely no problems loading or playing battles.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Creating battles with the MISSION BUILDER is easy and intuitive. I was able to create a simple scenario without even using the manual. Overall, the documentation is quite good, although there are some aspects of campaign design that are not fully explained. For instance, setting victory conditions is not covered in much detail, and the requirements for proceeding through a campaign are somewhat difficult to understand from the documentation alone.

The design interface is so user-friendly, however, that any problems with the manual are easily overcome through trial and error with the MISSION BUILDER itself.

All of the commands are menu or icon driven, and most important functions are completed by clicking and dragging with the mouse. A simple scenario can be created in just a few minutes, played for about half an hour, then modified, and so on.

To begin designing a battle, simply de-



WHAT A MENU The Mission Builder allows you to choose aircraft from over 30 countries, in different time periods, to build your air forces.

cide on the era and principle combatants. The computer does not limit aircraft selection based on those fields, however, so a little research using the chart of aircraft and time periods may be necessary to ensure that the proper aircraft are used by each side (the chart is provided). While the chart does contain all of the information necessary to plan battles, it would have been nice to be able to select a country and time period and then have the computer automatically identify the aircraft eligible for the battle. On the other hand, the freedom to mix and match national enemies may appeal to some gamers, and a German air force of former Soviet and NATO aircraft is certainly possible.

One glaring omission in the country database is the lack of former Soviet countries like the Ukraine and Belorussia. Of course, with a little imagination, an Eastern European conflict is still easy to create, but having the correct flags would have been nice.

Once the battle parameters are set, the player then selects aircraft and places them in their starting positions on the map. Each plane can be armed, using the same basic choices available at the start of a cam-

Flight Commander II—Mission Builder

Price: \$24.95

System Requirements:
PC compatible
386SX or better,
4 MB
RAM, 9 MB hard drive space,
Windows 3.1, mouse; supports Sound
Blaster compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1-2 (e-mail and hotseat)

Protection: Document lock-up

Designer: Charles Moylan
Publisher: Avalon Hill Game Company
Baltimore, MD
(800) 999-3222

have scorned the very concept of a turn-based recreation of high speed flight before seeing FC II's interface.

When I originally reviewed FC II, the only flaws that I could find with the game were the limited number of scenarios and campaigns, and the inability of players to build their own battles. Right from the start, FC II was ripe for a scenario editor. Finally, I am happy to say, Avalon Hill has produced one.

The FLIGHT COMMANDER II—MISSION

DEADLINE

One Wrong Move And
He's Dead Wrong.

...the behind tear. After weeks of brutal captivity, the only thing he can feel is the numbness in his body. Reality has become just a blur. This is where you come in. You are in command of a crack group of anti-terrorist personnel, armed with the best weapons and technology that the government can buy. Your adversaries, however, are as prepared as you are. The only real edge that you have is your guile and guts, little comfort to the hostages whose lives are on the line. But before you get too cocky, remember, terror has no patience.

Circle Reader Service #178

PC CD-ROM

 **VIC TOKAI INC.**
22904 Lockness Ave., Torrance, CA 90509

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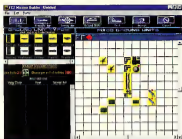
paign scenario. The designer can also set the range-to-base, which will dictate the amount of extra fuel the pilots will have, the theatre radar and pilot skills.

If the battle is to involve ground attacks, targets and air defense units can be placed in much the same way as aircraft. All units are selected from a menu to the left of the map; simply click on the unit and drag it onto the map. Everything can be moved, added, deleted or changed, until the designer is happy with the mix. The map itself remains blank. As terrain has no effect on combat, the computer will generate a random background map, based on pre-set characteristics, when the scenario is begun. Incidentally, the terrain generator does not handle bridges all that well. As a potential target, bridges may be placed by the designer when building the scenario.

However, when the computer creates the background map, it will often draw rivers that stop as soon as they reach the bridge. While this does not materially affect the scenario, it does look strange, and may detract from the willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the players.

Campaigns that string together battles, victory conditions and pilots, and aircraft, are also easy and fun to create. The designer can write virtually any situation he wants, and then tailor each battle to meet the needs of the story line.

Already, a Bosnia campaign has been uploaded onto CompuServe, demonstrating both the flexibility of the MISSION



KILLING FIELD If you want to create a shooting gallery, you can drag ground units onto your battle maps. This map looks like a cakewalk of a mission for an A-10 Warthog.

BUILDER and the potential for scenarios created by interested players.

MISSION REPORT

On the whole, the FC II—MISSION BUILDER is a fun and accessible addition to an already strong product, though I wish Avalon Hill had included some relevant historical background. It would have helped to have the computer provide a list of the likely aircraft combinations for various mission types in different eras.

I am sure that aspiring designers would appreciate additional information about the different doctrines that governed tactics and strategy among the world's major air forces, as well as some of the major shifts that occurred as a result of new technologies and ideas. Even a relatively brief overview of air combat history would have provided the MISSION BUILDER with considerably more depth, giving gamers more to go on than their imaginations when creating new scenarios.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FLIGHT COMMANDER II—MISSION BUILDER

RATING ★★★★★

PROS The mission builder is so flexible and full of information that campaigns are basically limited only by imagination. An intuitive interface means missions can be built quickly and easily.

CONS The country database omits former Soviet Republics, and the game would benefit from some historical background on air combat.

USING THE MISSION BUILDER



Mission construction begins by defining the battle parameters. The designer must choose the combats, as well as a time period. As with the original game, all major, and most minor air powers, are included, as well as a variety of time periods. Players may also select from specific conflicts, such as the Arab-Israeli wars or the Falkland Islands war.



Placing air and ground units, as well as bombing targets, is completed using simple mouse commands. Here, a NATO bombing raid over Bosnia is created by placing the strike aircraft at one end of the map, while the targets and their air defenses are clustered near the center. The Mission Builder provides a wide variety of ground, and even sea units, to choose from when creating your scenarios.



Each aircraft may be armed according to the designer's wishes. These planes are outfitted for strikes against SAM sites, while others may provide fighter cover or ground attack capabilities. You will have to balance your weapons load carefully, tailoring your munitions to specific missions.



Less than ten minutes after beginning, albeit with a fairly easy scenario, the first draft of this battle is ready for playtesting. Adding additional enemy units, including aircraft, would have taken two minutes at most. Create more designs and you could have a whole new wargame on your hands.

*It's Doom in its original entirety
along with the all new demogated episode four,
"My flesh Consumed."
It's called Ultimate Doom. It's simple.
It's kill or be killed.*

+HERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE

+ALLY OPPOSED TO

VIOLENCE.

+THEY'RE ALL DEAD.

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— PC Gamer



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of THE RIDDLE OF MASTER LU



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The Game Of Kings

Checking Out The Silicon Chess Masters

by Terry Lee Coleman

Chess, like love, like music, has the power to make men happy.—Siegbert Tarrasch

Pass to King four.

I MADE THE MOVE AND STARED AT IT FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE HOURS. HOW COULD THIS MOVE, PLACING A PAWN IN THE OPEN—naked, vulnerable to attack from all sides at his lonely post in the board's center—be the best opening move? On the other hand, pawns were, well, *passus*. Insignificant though they might be, I was reluctant to sacrifice *any* piece. How could you do that and hope to win? Of course, I was only eight years old and had no idea of gambits or even basic opening play; I just knew that in my *new Boys' Life* magazine, Bobby Fischer's column said that P-K4 was the best move. Who was I to argue? And so my chess instruction began...

SILICON MASTERS

Of course, I never quite became as proficient at chess as Bobby. Even so, I continued to enjoy the game for the next decade or so, until I ran out of time, opponents, and so forth. Then I saw a copy of *SARGON* in my local software store, and immediately rushed home to install it on my C-64. Looking back, it's amusing how weak the program's play was, but it rekindled my enthusiasm for chess.

The original *SARGON* is long gone, with even its most recent incarnation, *SARGON V*, pretty much having disappeared from store shelves. Its legacy lives on, however, as every season seems to bring another computer chess program, all boasting greater strengths, bigger databases and supposedly more features than the chess automatons of

mere months ago.

When buying a chess program, you should first decide exactly what features you need. The program with the best AI may have a mediocre opening repertoire, which won't help you much in preparing for tournaments. If you just want to push pawns and have a



BATTLE FROM STREAM TO STAR
Although BC4000 is the stranger program and *Genese Chess* is unique, the CD-ROM enhanced version of *Battle Chess* is still the most pure fun.



Battle Chess CD Collection

INTERPLAY (714-553-6655)

good, challenging game, then you'll need a computer opponent with a variety of simulated styles. Regardless of your playing strength, it helps to have a good tutorial program for brushing up on poisoned pawn middlegames, or figuring out whether to castle king or queen-side against the Ruy Lopez Exchange opening. In the following survey, we'll take a look at the gamut of chess programs currently on the market, to separate the software masters from the silicon pretenders.

A much better approach to "chess for fun" can be found in this four-game set, the most successful of Interplay's at-

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tempts to capture the mainstream market. When **BATTLE CHESS** first appeared, it was a revelation. Who would have thought that pawns bashing each other over the head with spears could be so entertaining? Of course, the AI is pretty

a piece captures another—the King pulling a concealed pistol, the Bishop twirling his staff as if he were Robin Hood, Rooks changing into Stone Golems—are still fresh and funny after all these years. The collection is worth buying for this game alone.



THE FISCHER MYSTIQUE Even if you don't need the tutorials, the thought of having 500 Bobby Fischer games on a single CD is reason enough to consider buying **Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess**.

lackluster, but that really isn't the point. A more robust bit of nostalgia is the **BATTLE CHESS** CD-enhanced version, one of the first CD-ROM entertainment products. Not only does this deserve its place in the *CGW* Hall of Fame, it has held up better than one might expect. The graphics are dated, yet nicely done, particularly the animation, where each piece takes on a unique persona: the Queen swishes around like a *femme fatale* trapped in a Tennessee Williams play, and the spells she casts often open holes in the chessboard itself. Even the humorous sequences, triggered every time

Those who desire a tougher opponent will feel more comfortable with **BATTLE CHESS 4000**, although the humor by this point in the series feels a little forced. The opening repertoire is much improved, and the computer opponent, while still repetitive at times, is a worthy adversary, all frills aside.

An extra treat for any strategy-minded gamer is the inclusion on the CD of **BATTLE CHESS II: CHINESE CHESS**. While many of the principles are the same as chess—this is another game that started as a wargame and developed into abstract strategy—the feel is totally different. A river runs through the middle of the board, and Cannon dominate, much as they did on the real Chinese battlefield when first introduced. On the other hand, the sound and music are eminently forgettable—a real shame, since that was one of the strengths of the Amiga version. Still, if you want to sharpen your tactics without having to memorize openings, this offers a reasonable chess-like alternative.

Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess

MISSION STUDIOS (708-991-0598)

About 25 years ago, Bobby Fischer wrote an introductory book on chess. Although generally forgotten because of his more famous *My 60 Memorable Games*, this smaller work has been transformed by **Mission Studios** into **Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess**, a title that deserves a truth in advertising award. Bobby deliv-

CHESSBITES

Ever wonder about the strange direct serious chessplayers converse in? Here are a few tidbits that may help you to find your way, lest you commit a *fingerfehler*, or something worse.

En Passant: Literally, "in passing." If you have a pawn on the enemy fifth rank, you may capture a pawn which moves two squares forward, immediately to your left or right, but the option must be exercised immediately. This rule came into being after a rules change in the Middle Ages allowed each pawn to move one or two squares from its starting position.

Fianchetto: No, it isn't a new coffee variation, but a simple development of the bishop to the flank (b2, g7, etc.), which occurs most often on the Kingside. If the bishop survives to the endgame, it is generally quite potent from this position.

Fingerfehler: While this sounds like something you could get arrested for, it really means that you touched/moved the wrong piece.

Stalemate: When a player has no legal moves, but his King is not in check. Like check and checkmate, this word has passed into the vernacular.

Zugzwang: A German term—basically, "He who moves first is lost."

ers what it promises: it's simply the best way to learn the Royal Game available, short of having Fischer himself drop in and show you the moves. The various lessons use a combination of programmed instruction, visual and audio feedback, and 500 actual Fischer games to teach everything from how to move pieces to recognizing different pawn structures. The game is pleasant to look at, and the sound effects are especially good for younger chess-meisters (you get shouts of encouragement and party noises for answering tough questions). While it lacks the production values of other chess programs, **Bobby Fischer** includes a multimedia version of Fred Wilson's



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A GLANCE AT OTHER CHESS PRODUCTS

Bookup isn't a game, but it is well-nigh indispensable to any serious tournament chess player. A very powerful database, Bookup is a tool for hard-core analysis of chess openings, endgames, middle game transitions, and any other aspect of the game you want to study. Basically, it reduces the complex collections of chess data to a manageable format, allowing you to focus on your given area of study. If you're tired of poring over chess tomes, several of them are available as books-on-disk in the Bookup format. Also, Bookup effortlessly imports data from popular master-level study programs such as *Informant* and *Chessbase*, so you don't have to miss out on the latest opening revelations from Karpov or Kasparov.

IBM DOS, \$149.95, Bookup, 2763 Columbus OH, 43202-2355.

Farther down the line, *Interplay* is planning not another *BATTLE CHESS*, but a more traditional chess program. *USCF Chess* has the official sanction of the United States Chess Federation, known as the only organization with strict procedures for rating computer chess programs. So, there's probably a grain of truth to the claim that *USCF Chess* will be the highest-rated commercial chess software. Still, a lot can happen between now and the release date—and *CHESSMASTER 5000* is but weeks away...

Picture History of Chess, a nice coffee-table-type diversion. If you're too experienced for this—after all, the computer opponent here pales compared to the competition—consider picking up a copy and introducing a friend to chess.

Chessmaster 4000 & Chessmaster 5000

MINDSCAPE (800-234-3088)

The only chess program in the *CGW* Hall of Fame, *CHESSMASTER* is the Cadillac

of Casting. Every game in the series has improved upon the design, adding new features without sacrificing what has made the line so successful. *CM 4000* still has the best graphics of any chess game ever released, and the wide range of classical MIDI sounds add to the cerebral experience. The documentation is thorough, and complements the natural language advice from the CD.

Of course, all of the multimedia trappings in the world wouldn't hide a poor AI, but *CM 4000* has the liveliest computer opponents in the genre. Not only are they strong, but many are based on styles of actual Grandmasters: from the classic attacks of Boris Spassky and the often awkward but effective defense of Sammy Reshevsky, to the near-effortless mobility of 19th-century American champion Paul Morphy, all of the portrayals are unique, giving the gamer a steady stream of fresh opponents.

CM 5000 takes the concept further, by offering 64 GM styles, each modified to play similar openings to those he would have played historically (augmented by modern openings analysis, of course). The multimedia chess tour is expanded, and the number of great tournaments and matches now rivals that of *GRANDMASTER CHESS*. The greatest improvement of *CM 5000*, though, is in the tutorials. These look to serve the intermediate to advanced player in the same manner



MODERN CHESS OPENINGS Chessmaster 5000's new features look to widen the gap between it and the other leading chess titles.

that *BOBBY FISCHER TEACHES CHESS* brings the novice along. Finally, the *CM* series has a reliable way to rate a human player's progress, linking it to specific exercises on backward pawns, Queenside majority attacks, or whatever else you choose to work on.

Windows 95 is a huge part of the new *CM 5000* interface as well. With the true 32-bit multitasking system, you could play up to five different games at once, with any combination of those played over modem. The program even supports three different kinds of chess clocks, including the revolutionary clock that Fischer unveiled for his 1992 rematch with Spassky. A rich, wonderful program that will challenge any player below master level.



COLOR ME PURPLE Chessmaster Chess has a strong computer opponent and a packed games library, but the color palate leaves something to be desired.

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Expert Chess

EXPERT SOFTWARE (305-448-2074)

Expert Software makes a living out of taking classic parlor and card games, and transforming them into quick, fun affairs for Windows. If only EXPERT CHESS performed anywhere near to club-level, much less expert level, this could have been a good introductory chess program. Where BOBBY FISCHER made all the right decisions, EXPERT CHESS embodies all that is bad about "budget software," cutting corners everywhere. While the sparse documentation can be somewhat forgiven because of the Windows help file included, the buggy software cannot. Two of the three copies CGW received for review had corrupted files, and even the one I got running crashed at the worst possible times (when I was winning, of course). The game looks terrible, sounds bad and takes forever to make pretty obvious moves. The opening library is limited, and the game doesn't work even as a teaching tool. There is a modicum of a challenge on the topmost level, but I was starting to gain weight from all the sandwiches I was eating waiting for the computer to move, so...sometimes, you get what you pay for.

Grandmaster Chess

CAPSTONE (800-468-7226)

The new Windows version of GRANDMASTER CHESS offers several advantages over its DOS predecessor. Not only does it run more smoothly, it ac-



SAY IT AIN'T SO, GARRY Even though the grandmaster advice is occasionally loopy, Kasparov's Gambit is still a fine chess program.

tually seems to play a better game than before. I put the AI through its paces and found to my delight that it actually understood the difference between an open and closed game. If I left it room to maneuver, it would sometimes go for the kill, and would also patiently work for an endgame advantage. My main frustration was that (as with so many other programs) it takes far too long to move on the higher levels. So, you either get good but slow competition, or brisk but merely decent.

The interface is familiar Windows 3.1, but I wish Capstone could straighten out their sound drivers. I had these annoying beeps—couldn't turn them off—going off every time either I or the AI moved, drowning out the MIDI music. Still, the weirdness can be forgiven, since GRANDMASTER CHESS supports not only modem, but network play as well. Moreover, the incredibly extensive database contains thousands of games from grandmasters and famous tournaments, with such gems as the best games of Harry Nelson Pillsbury and even a master game from the 1600s!

If the opening libraries were as extensive as say, CHESSMASTER, this could have been my top pick. But the engine relies far too much on its canned openings, without nearly the variety of natural styles that CM4000/5000 have. Veteran players will find that if they can get GM CHESS "out of book," they can win more often than not. All in all, though, a good chess program.

Kasparov's Gambit

ELECTRONIC ARTS (415-571-7171)

This game deserves bonus points for not having "chess" anywhere in its title. What it *did* have during development was the full co-operation of World Champion Garry Kasparov, and the quality shows throughout the product. What the producers did was to license the SOCRATES chess engine, a powerful program that once contended for the world computer chess title, and



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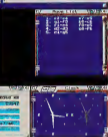
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augment it with VGA graphics and a slick interface. Videos and commentary from Kasparov were added, and the end result was a good program (a finalist for CGW's best Strategy Game two years ago) that plays a wide variety of opening styles. While no chess program



DON'T CROWD ME
VirtuaChess fails because it tries to pack too much game into too little organization and creature comforts.

can hope to pull off the controlled aggression that characterizes Garry's play, GAMBIT provides a more than passable imitation. When you play against the higher levels, you'll almost certainly sharpen your endgame technique, because the program doesn't miss much.

GAMBIT stopped short of being truly great, largely because the multimedia didn't quite work. For instance, you might make a fairly routine move and Garry would come to digitized life, say-

ing: "Oh! I didn't see that move," or even recommending losing moves

on occasion—hardly what one expects from the highest-rated chess master in history. Technically, the program was finicky about which sound and video cards it would work with; so if you pick up a copy, make sure you have the latest patch from EA. A worse problem was that SOCRATES' AI was emasculated, but the main effect (after the patch) is that the lower-rated computer personalities play much lower than their apparent strength. Despite the

flaws, GAMBIT is a very good game. It was the best teaching chess program available until BOBBY FISCHER TEACHES CHESS, and was the first to offer a reasonable way to rate human play versus the computer. It's a shame EA hasn't updated this for Windows 95 with SVGA graphics, because it deserves to be played.

VirtuaChess

TITUS SOFTWARE (818-709-3692)

VirtuaChess plays right off the CD, in DOS, no less. It has a fairly strong AI, though nowhere near the virtual master the marketing folks would have you believe. It has a tendency to play hyper-modern openings, which would be OK, except that it plays more conventional openings with far less felicity. VIRTUACHESS isn't bad; the average player will get a decent opponent. But the interface is nowhere near as elegant as KASPAROV'S GAMBIT, and CHESSMASTER's opponents leave those of VIRTUACHESS in the Zugzwang Zone.

There is neither a wonderful chess library to woo us with games of grandmasters past, nor a good teaching sub-routine to help elicit newcomers to the joy of castling. The packaging is awkward, the documentation stilted. The graphics are especially disappointing: when viewed in the 3D display, the pieces resemble wood-carvings



THE MAJOR PLAYERS

Game	Price	Company	VGA	SVGA	Windows	Min. Install	Optimal Inst.	CD-ROM	Network	Modem
Battle Chess	\$59.95*	Interplay	Yes	No	No	0	1.5MB	Yes	No	Null
Battle Chess CD-Enhanced	\$59.95*	Interplay	Yes	No	No	0	33MB	Yes	No	Null
Battle Chess II: Chinese Chess	\$59.95*	Interplay	Yes	No	No	0	5.5MB	Yes	No	Yes
Battle Chess 4000	\$59.95*	Interplay	Yes	Yes	No	0	13MB	Yes	No	Yes
Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess	\$49.95	Mission Studios	No	Yes	Yes	2MB	4.5MB	Yes	No	No
Chessmaster 4000	\$44.95	Mindscape	Yes	Yes	Yes	4MB	13MB	Yes	No	Yes
Chessmaster 5000H	\$69.95	Mindscape	No	Yes	Yes	8MB	18MB	Yes	Yes	Yes
Expert Chess	\$29.95	Expert Software	Yes	No	Yes	2.5MB	2.5MB	No	No	No
Grandmaster Championship Chess	\$69.95	Capstone	Yes	Yes	Yes	1MB	11MB	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kasparov's Gambit	\$44.95	EA	Yes	No	No	11MB	11MB	No	No	No
VirtuaChess	\$64.95	Titus	Yes	Yes	No	<1MB	<1MB	Yes	No	No

Notes:

* = All of the Battle Chess Games are available in the Battle Chess Collection for \$39.95

= Chessmaster 5000 ratings and information are based on a pre-release version of the game. See our Special Preview in CGW # 134

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CHECKMATE IN SEVEN: HOW THEY RATED

Let's take a quick look at the criteria used to evaluate the chess programs in our survey.

Audio: The quality of the sound effects and music. Is MIDI support included? Natural Language advice? How do they add to the experience?

Tutorials: This includes everything from teaching basics (how to move), to advanced chess themes, how well the program tracks your progress, gives feedback, and the potential for it to actually improve your play.

Library: Chess fans are a lot like baseball fans—except they have 400 more years of games and stats to drool over. Any chess game that ignores the "box scores" of Morphy, Kasparov and other masters, or doesn't have a lot of famous tournaments

in the database, is asking for trouble. Some games have multimedia histories of chess—CM 4000 even has GM Anatoly Karpov commenting on his favorite games.

Rating System: How realistically can the program rate human play, and also, how well do the stated ratings stack up for the computer personalities?

Opponent Variety: Essentially, this shows whether the computer has "multiple personalities" capable of giving the human player a stylistically different game. A high score here means a lot of replay value.

Fischer Factor: Like Ali with boxing or Agassi with tennis, fans of chess just can't get enough of Fischer, possibly the greatest player who ever

pushed a pawn. If a chess program ignores Bobby, it isn't as much fun as it could be.

Openings: The breadth and depth of knowledge specifically pertaining to opening theory. A program could score well in this category and still score lower on playing strength, due to poor endgame play, for example.

Strength: The combination of opening, middlegame and endgame play.

Natural: How well the program plays "naturally," with its opening library turned off. A good way to see whether the AI lives off of its "book" knowledge.

Overall: The synthesis of all the above ratings—the true measure of the chess experience.

HOW THE PLAYERS STACK UP

Game	Audio	Tutorials	Library	Rating System	Opponent Variety	"Fischer Factor"	Openings	Strength	Natural	Overall
Battle Chess	D	F	D	D	C	F	C-	C-	D+	C-
Battle Chess CD-Enhanced	C-	D	C-	C-	C+	F	B-	C+	C-	C
Battle Chess II: Chinese Chess	D-	D+	D	D	C+	N/A	B	B-	C+	C+
Battle Chess 4000	B	C-	C-	C-	C+	F	B	B+	B-	B-
Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess	B+	A+	A-	B	D	A	C-	C	C	B+
Chessmaster 4000	B+	B+	A-	C	A	B+	A-	A	A-	A-
Chessmaster 5000	A	A+	A	B+	A+	A-	A	A+	A	A
Expert Chess	D	D	D	D-	D	F	C-	D+	D-	D-
Grandmaster Championship Chess	C+	A-	A-	B-	B	A-	A-	B+	B	B+
Kasparov's Gambit	C+	A-	B+	B-	B-	C-	A	A-	A-	B+
VirtuChess	C-	C-	C-	D	C	F	B+	B	C+	C

from week one of scout camp. The game as a whole has a decidedly cramped feel—sort of like having a V-8 engine stuck in a Pinto—it's hard to imagine how all this potential chess horsepower could be so frittered away. With all the other fine chess software around, I'd recommend that you don't get caught exchanging pieces for a loss, as it were.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

If you are only going to buy one chess program, you should probably wait for CHESSMASTER 5000 (due to reach stores soon after you read this). Or, if you are still unsure about Windows 95, CM 4000 is still the best all-around program for

Windows 3.1. If your Knights checkmate enemy Kings only in DOS, KASPAROV'S GAMBIT is still a good buy, although it isn't quite up to the best that CHESSMASTER has to offer. GRANDMASTER CHESS is a good, solid program, but it finishes second in most categories. It does, however, run better on a 386 than the more high-octane titles. VIRTUACHESS is strictly bargain-bin material, while EXPERT CHESS is best left

unused, period. BOBBY FISCHER TEACHES CHESS scores high on the "gotta have Bobby" quotient, and is a great program for novices, or just anyone who likes replaying Fischer games. ☛



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Giving Balor *The Wink In Koei's CELTIC TALES: BALOR OF THE EVIL EYE*

by Arinn Dembo

ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, A STRANGE WOMAN ENTERED THE HALL OF MEDB, QUEEN OF THE SLIGO TRIBE. This woman stood tall, with eyes both dark and fierce, and wore the garb of a warrior. Beams of red light shone forth from the great shield on her shoulder and from the unsheathed sword she held in her right hand; in her left hand, she held an Ogham scroll.

"Who is this, that enters uninvited?" asked the queen.

"I am called Skatha."

A murmur swept through the champions in the hall; it was a name they knew well. Skatha, the forger of champions—at whose knee all the mightiest heroes were schooled! To train with her was a special honor, a privilege which might fall only to the bravest. The blade at her side was the Sword of Nuada; her shield was a gift from the Goddess Dana. But that scroll—what could it be?

"You are welcome here," said Medb.

"We have no quarrel with you."

"So I hope," replied Skatha. "I have brought you a gift...of wisdom." She raised her scroll. "I have made some study of this emerald isle and the best means of winning its throne. What I have learned is written here. Your tribe is strong; I think you might take the Lia Fail on your own—but with this scroll, it is a certainty."

Medb's hand closed on Skatha's scroll. "And what do you ask in return?"



PRESTIGE IS POWER To rally the other tribes of Eire, you'll need high prestige. Wage war to gain prestige, and then use your prestige to exact fealty oaths from your neighbors.



MY BATTLE AXE IS BIGGER If you have superior strength and dexterity, challenge the enemy leader to single combat; you'll save your troops from a protracted battle and also conserve the mana of your spellcasters.

scroll. "And what do

"When you sit on the throne at Teamhair, my Queen, I will come to your hall again. The sight of Balor's head mounted upon the gate will be payment enough."

THE ROAD TO TEAMHAIR

To take the Lia Fail, you must learn to think like a High Ruler—not like a tribal chieftain. Your goals are

simple ones: First, to unify all the provinces of the island under your rule, by whatever means necessary; and second, to prepare an elite cadre of champions to fight the final wars against Balor.

In your effort to unify the tribes, many will stand in your way. The rulers of other tribes will, on occasion, attack your lands, insult your heralds, and refuse your Trade and Tribute. Cultivate the virtues of a ruler: Strength, patience, courtesy, and mercy. Try to win smaller tribes to your cause without bloodshed. Send Tribute; practice the gentle art of barter when you can. Always receive heralds with grace, and reject no offer of friendship. And never, under any circumstances, exile champions from the island. If they will not join your tribe after you have defeated them in battle, simply

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release them. Better to cut off your own right hand than to deprive the island of its most able defenders!

In ruling your lands, make your champions strong, skillful and able. Have all champions, especially Warriors, train at least seven months out of every thirteen, until they have achieved a minimum level of 10. Thereafter, they can spend less time at Hurling and more time in battle, if that is your choice. When you see the Strength they have gained in their training, however, do not become complacent; remember that the minimum Strength of a Fomor champion is over 200! Your highest-level Warriors should never go a year without a full season spent at Hurling, especially as you move closer and closer to the High King's throne.

Of course, your Bards and Druids, although they do profit from their Strength in battle, have more need of Mana. Mana does not grow, as Strength does, from playing the Hurling game. There are only two ways to increase a champion's Mana: gaining a full level of Experience, or carrying one of the Godless Danu's Mana-increasing artifacts. Since the Stone of Prayer and the Three Magic Apples are difficult to come by, the best way to enhance your Bards and Druids is to send them on cattle raids. They gain 30 points of Experience per raid, regardless of whether they suc-

ceed—and if they do bring home some of your neighbor's cattle, so much the better! Cattle are the gold of Eire: there is no basic commodity more valuable.

Ultimately, the entire island will be represented by seven champions, a select group of the mightiest warriors, the wisest Druids and the most cunning Bards. When they set foot on the shores of Tory Island to do battle with Balor, the fate of thousands will rest on their shoulders—for everyone's sake, make sure they can bear the burden!

THE AGE-OLD QUESTION: WAR OR PEACE?

A ruler makes his choice with every passing moon: does he woo his neighbors with soft words and gifts, or does he bring them to their knees by force? In Eire, the best road to success in diplomacy is success in battle. Eventually, you will be able to draw the weaker tribes into your fold by peaceful means—but this option is available only when you deal with weaker tribes. You must be the stronger!

The measure of your tribe's Strength is Prestige. If you go to your Council

Chamber, the white-bearded old man in the center can give you a list of the tribes to whom you have sent tribute. By clicking on the white circle beside the name of each tribe, you can see its level of Prestige.

It is to your advantage to become the island's most prestigious tribe as quickly as

Benefits Of Domestic Crafts

Arm Bands	+10 Charm
Battle Axe	+10 Arms
Breech	+15 Charm
Club	+5 Arms
Dagger	+10 Charm,+10Arms
Ham	+15 Mind
Jewelin	+15 Arms
Mirror	+20 Mind
Ring	+25 Charm
Spear	+20 Arms
Staff	+5 Dexterity
Sword	+25 Arms
Toic	+10 Dexterity
Wrist Bands	+5 Charm

possible. There is no point in pursuing trade or alliances until you have done so. Other tribes will not accept your protection unless your Prestige is at least twice as great as theirs. Once you have become the most powerful tribe on the map, you can begin defying the Fomor tax-collector—you may not win a contest against the Fomor champion, but Danu will grant your tribe a magical item for the attempt. How can you tell if your tribe is strongest? The gray-haired councilor cannot always help you with this, but wandering champions can. Ask the weary heroes in your Champion's Tent about other tribes.

THE RAVEN'S PATH IS WAR

You cannot unite the tribes of Eire solely by peaceful means; diplomacy is a luxury that you will not enjoy until you have proven your prowess. Since you must fight, you may as well be cunning in the way you go about it.

Before you attack from any given province, you may want to have lower-level champions build up your Citadel. This will increase the number of soldiers in your armies, and is also a profitable pursuit for your champions: they gain 25 points of Experience per round spent building up the structures in your province, as opposed to the 20 per round for other province chores. Once you reach the maximum Citadel value (47), your champions can be assigned other tasks.



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On the battlefield, use combined arms both to attack and defend. It is unwise to go to war without at least one Druid among your host, and Bards are also quite helpful. Although the day will usually be won by Strength, the power of Mana cannot be underestimated since magic is the only way to make ranged attacks.

Combat ends when the battle chief of one side or the other is captured. The natural impulse, then, is to break through the line and quickly take out the enemy leader. Unless you're hard-pressed or badly outnumbered, you should resist this impulse—especially if your opponent controls more than one province. Postpone victory until you have achieved the most important objective—the capture of all enemy champions. Otherwise, the enemy champions will simply retreat their armies from the field when their leader falls, leaving you with very little net gain for your effort. The province itself is valuable—but the champions are more valuable still.

To reach this goal requires a different style of warfare, of course. The attacker uses tactics that more properly belong to the defender: deliberately prolonging the conflict, conserving Strength and soldiers until the job is done. The tactics of delay are three: rest, distraction, and the preservation of soldiers.

All champions on the battlefield should Rest whenever they can. If there

Benefits of Magical Artifacts

The Answerer	+25 Arms, +25 Dexterity
The Fruits of the Tree of Wisdom	+40 Mind
The Gae Bolga	+30 Arms, +30 Dexterity, and blinds Balor
The Harp	+20 Mind, +Charm
The Helmet	+20 Arms, +20 Dexterity
The Lia Fail	+20 Arms, +20 Dexterity, +20 Mind, +20 Charm
The Pig Skin	+20 Strength
The Pot of Daghda	Unlimited grain supply in war
The Seven Pigs	Grain bonus in war
The Shield	+20 Arms, +20 Dexterity
The Staff of Fenia	+25 Dexterity, +25 Mind
The Stone of Might	+30 Arms, +30 Strength
The Stone of Prayer	+30 Mind, +40 Mana
The Stone of Protection	+30 Mind, prevents province disasters
The Sword of Nuada	+50 Arms
The Three Magic Apples	+20 Mana, prevents cattle sickness
The Wheel	+20 Mind, +20 Dexterity

is fog, and your Bards and Druids cannot see far enough to cast a spell, let them rest to restore both Strength and Mana; they will be more useful to you when the fog lifts. The same is true of your warriors. Whenever they can't move, or don't strictly need to be doing something, let them snatch a few moments of sleep to restore their Strength—or, if there are enemy armies too near, stand on defense.

Druids can shore up your beleaguered champions, if necessary, with spells of healing—in some conflicts, you will find yourself casting very little else! Because

the healing spell is so crucial, you should not risk breaking the runes you need to cast it. If your living and ivy runes are made of wood, do not cast Tree Tangle, Glamour or Hurl Stones unless they are absolutely necessary. As you progress through all of

want to keep an eye out for stone runes of healing; your most powerful Druid should have them in hand before you face Balor.

Spells of distraction are especially valuable, since they keep an enemy army occupied for several rounds of combat. While they may be cast on enemy warriors whom you would prefer to engage later, they are better used against opposing Bards and Druids, preventing them from using magic to butcher your troops. Your Druids can cast Confusion, and Bards have two versions of the basic distraction spell, using very similar rune combinations: Smoke and Poison Cloud. If directly attacked, Bards can also cast Sleep—the enemy army then takes a short nap, rather than attacking.

The preservation of soldiers is a more subtle art. Your warriors must keep as many soldiers as possible working on the battlefield; a mighty champion with no soldiers can be cut down by lesser men who lead a full complement.

Never forget that your armies lose soldiers with every round of melee. Although a Druid can sometimes augment your armies by raising the dead, this action requires a great deal of Mana, with limited results. For this reason, your warriors should look for opportunities to challenge their opponents to hand-to-hand combat. A superior warrior, with high Strength, arms and dexterity will



SOMETHING IN MY EYE The evil Balor is otherwise invulnerable, but if you wield Gae Bolga and pierce his eye, you'll be able to defeat him.

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make hash of his opponents. If an enemy champion accepts the challenge, it may be possible to capture him or her in one round—not only sparing your men, but denying enemy Bards and Druids the opportunity to plague you for several rounds of melee. Keep an eye on that dexterity rating, though! A fighter with excellent Strength and arms can still be defeated by a quicksilver swordsman, who delivers four blows for every one that lands on him.

THE DOVE'S PATH IS PEACE

Once you have achieved a Prestige rating in the 800-900 range, you can begin to pursue peace more seriously. The key to success in peace-time is Charm, coupled with the wise use of your Bards. Bards don't necessarily have the highest Charm ratings, but they are capable of making artifacts that enhance this attribute in themselves and others, and they have an advantage in recruiting.

As with your Citadel, you should maximize your power and culture ratings at 47, which will make your trade and tribute more attractive to neighboring tribes. Any Bard in your service with a high dexterity rating should be put to work making high-level artifacts to increase the Charm of your tribesmen and traders and low-level artifacts for trade goods. A pair of wrist bands costs very little to make, but they are a valuable commodity in trade. The same is true for low-level artifacts crafted by your Druids. For reasons that should be obvious, trading in weapons is not advisable.

Reserve the champions with the highest Charm rating for diplomatic duties. The defeated ruler of a subjugated tribe makes an ideal herald, as rulers tend to have very high native Charm ratings. Arm your diplomats with brooches and rings, and be patient. Peace takes time. Also, keep your border provinces well-manned. Your neighbors are extremely opportunistic, and will not pass up any chance to expand their domain at your expense, regardless of how hard you've worked at diplomacy. If you want peace, don't tempt them.

When you have built a peace level of 25 or more with a tribe less than half your Prestige rating, you may attempt a

Recommendation. Don't expect much success, at first—your first few recruits will probably be very weak tribes, those controlling only one or two provinces. As you collect more oaths, however, your Prestige will grow, and the process should become easier—and if you do get tired of waiting, you can always force the issue! Keep in mind, though, that if you war against another tribe, you will not be able to make a recommendation for at least a full season afterward.

SCROLL'S END

There are many other small matters on which I should like to advise you, but I have come to the end of my scroll, and there is little room left. Don't pay wandering Bards for their poems and stories—you will waste your cattle! Also,

traveling Druids will rarely teach you the most powerful Bardic spells, but if you experiment in combat, you can usually intuit the rune order and the element necessary. By way of example, see the formula for Chaos, the ghost spell—a combination of Dead, Power, and 4th Energy runes, combined with the element of Air.

As for Balar, I have only one word of advice: arm your bravest champion with the Gae Bolga and attack the Fomor overlord as quickly as possible. You must pierce his eye. Once you have shattered that terrible orb, he will be nothing more than the mightiest of the Fomor champions—mortal, for all his dreadful Strength and skill.

Good luck, and may the Goddess preserve you. ☘

HURLING: SPORT OF CHAMPIONS

Hurling was a popular pastime among the Celtic warrior elite, and its inclusion lends adds to the authenticity of Celtic Tales. The game's rules have not come down to us in their entirety, but we do know that it was a team sport, played with a ball and "hurling stick." The object was apparently to get the ball down the field into the enemy team's goal, and the closest modern equivalent is probably field hockey or lacrosse. It was a fast, brutal game which demanded speed, dexterity and endurance, as well as the ability to take a hit—it seems there were no rules against tripping, elbawing and tackling.

When the Celtic hero Cuchulain was a young lad, he darted into the middle of 150 young hurlers. When Cuchulain scored a goal, the youths were so furious that they attacked him with their hurling sticks and balls; he not only dodged the missiles, but rushed into their midst, bowling several of the youths over. Cuchulain actually earned his name by using his hurling equipment to kill an enormous guard dog. The dog's owner was the blacksmith Culain, who demanded restitution for the loss of the animal. So, the boy was forced to spend a year guarding Culain's house and lands, as the dog had once done. Afterwards he was known as "Cu Cuchulain"—the Hound of Culain—Cuchulain

to you and me.

When you set your champions to play Hurling in Celtic Tales, you accomplish several things. As with all tasks on the "provincial chores" checklist, champions will gain 20 points of Experience for every month they spend at the game. But their maximum potential Strength will also increase, by either a full point or a half-point every month, and their ability will go up by varying degrees, from 2-3 points per turn up to quantum leaps of 14. A champion's maximum ability is 100, and since ability effects the outcome of so many conflicts, it's best to get it as high as possible, as quickly as possible. Hurling is the most reliable means to that end.



LOOKS READY TO HURL If your would-be hero is a bit of a wimp, Hurling is a great way to increase his strength.



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The General Rules

If You Want A Promotion In THE PERFECT GENERAL II, It's Time To Raise The IQ At Your HQ

by Patrick C. Miller

IN THE FINAL HOURS OF OPERATION DESERT STORM, U.S. GENERAL NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF WAS ASKED HIS opinion of Iraqi military leader Saddam Hussein. Schwarzkopf didn't hide his utter disdain for his counterpart's abilities. "He is neither a strategist, nor is he schooled in the operational art, nor is he a tactician, nor is he a general, nor is he a soldier," Schwarzkopf replied. "Other than that, he's a great military man."

Players of PERFECT GENERAL II (PG2) need not worry about comparisons to military history's greatest flops. Still, it is nice to earn respect from your opponents, both human and silicon. To win consistently at PG2 requires that you master the game's mechanics, and properly grasp both strategic concepts and combined-arms tactics. Learning to win at PG2 is considerably easier than planning Desert Storm, and unlike Schwarzkopf, you can become a better general simply by following the hints below.



PUNCHING THROUGH THE FRONT Red has ruptured blue's defensive line and seized a valuable city. One key to success in PG2 is using high-mobility units to take advantage of such opportunities.

ABOUT INTERFACE!

The first key to success in PG2 is doing what you want, when it's most advantageous for your forces. Although the computer makes suggestions about the order

in which your units move, the targets at which they shoot and the order in which they fire, it doesn't always give the best advice. Fire at the enemy units representing the greatest threat and take your highest percentage shot. Use the right mouse button to click on your units and select them in the order in which you want to move or fire. You can also use the right mouse

button to click on enemy units during the movement and firing phases, obtaining information on your chances to hit eligible targets with direct fire or to successfully conduct close assault attacks (see the *Close Assaults Chart*).

CLOSE ASSAULTS CHART

Percentage Chance For Successful Close Assault (Attackers Above, Defenders Below)

	Infantry	MG	Engineer	Boozaka	Arm. Car/MG	Arm. Car	LT Tank	Med. Tank	Heavy Tank	Elephant Tank	Mobile Artillery	Other Artillery
Armored Car	80	83	80	60	45	40	10	20	10	3	30	53
Light Tank	85	85	85	70	55	50	40	30	20	10	40	85
Med. Tank	90	90	90	80	65	60	50	40	30	20	40	90
Heavy Tank	95	95	95	90	75	70	60	50	40	30	50	95
Elephant Tank	97	97	97	95	85	80	70	60	50	40	60	97

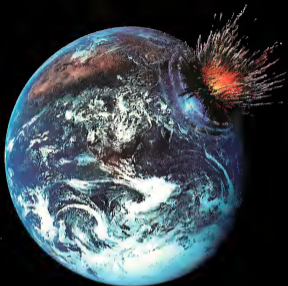
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There are some undocumented features in PG2 that can help you if you're aware of their existence. For example, if you control two or more areas in which you're receiving reinforcements, you have the option of spending some or none of your points in one area and then using the remainder to buy additional units for deployment in a more advantageous area. In addition, you can elect to bank your reinforcement purchase points from turn to turn. You probably know that during the movement phase, press-

ACHTUNG JABOS!

One of the biggest changes from *Perfect General* to PG2 is that you now have aircraft, which are best used for making pinpoint strikes against high-value enemy targets. Air attacks always hit the hex on which they are targeted, and they have a good chance (50 percent against elephant tanks and 66 percent against all other units) of destroying their target. In addition, even though air strikes must be plotted a turn in advance, you have the option of re-targeting the attack to within two hexes during the turn the attack occurs, providing added flexibility. Aircraft should be located at airfields close to your front lines. This makes

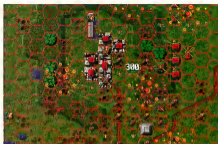
ing the L key will show all the hexes the selected unit can see from its current location. But did you know that from this same view, you can click on any other hex to see what hexes are visible from that location? This feature is useful in determining which hex provides the best view before a unit moves or to help determine what enemy units can see from their locations.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

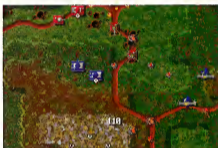
Throughout history, commanders have fought to take the high ground, and it's also a good idea in PG2. Always use terrain to your advantage by fighting from hills, towns and woods whenever possible. You'll have the edge when conducting direct fire

against enemy units in the open, because your chance to hit will be greater than that of your enemy. Firing from hillsides and hilltop hexes increases a unit's range and accuracy, while degrading the accuracy of enemy fire. Artillery's effectiveness can be reduced by using woods, sand, swamp and water hexes to your advantage, because they prevent shrapnel damage to units adjacent to the target hex.

Armored cars with machine guns are useful for quickly capturing or clearing hexes held by infantry-type units. If a hex is held by a bazooka, tempt it into taking opportunity fire by using a unit that can withstand the hit, such as a medium or light tank. Then bring your MG armored car forward to fire (pressing the A key) before it expends all its movement. You



SEE YOU CRATER In an intense artillery duel, the ability to predict where enemy units will end their moves is important. Playing with the hexgrid display turned on can assist in plotting your artillery fire.



GETTING HIGH Holding the high ground, blue's units can shoot farther with a higher percentage chance to hit, while the red units fire at their normal range with reduced chance to hit.

can often destroy the enemy unit and capture a victory hex in the same turn. Powerful units can be whittled down to size for a close assault attack. Once an enemy unit fires, it becomes more vulnerable to close assault, and if it has taken at least 50 percent damage, it's even more vulnerable. Although expensive, if you have units to spare, repeated close assaults can enable lighter units to destroy heavier units.

Artillery is nearly useless if you don't have units capable of sighting for it. Hide infantry units on the edge of woods or place them on hilltops for use as forward observers. Seek out and destroy your opponents' artillery spotters to reduce the effectiveness of their artillery. If your opponent has you heavily outgunned in artillery, attempt to neutralize its effect by



STAY UNDER MY WING Don't let your expensive aircraft fall prey to a marauding armored car. Place planes on airfields close enough to the front to be effective, but also provide a good defense for them.

them vulnerable to artillery and marauding enemy vehicles, so provide adequate protection. On airfields capable of providing aircraft reinforcements, make sure you have a friendly unit on the runway or the aircraft won't automatically be produced.

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Farms	1	x2	x2	Yes	Yes	No
Fields	1	x2	x2	No	No	No
Sand 1	x2	x2	No	No	Yes	
Ocean	NA	NA	NA	No	No	Yes
GrTop	NA	NA	NA	Yes	NA	No
River Mouth	NA	NA	NA	No	No	Yes
Cliff or Hillside	2	x2	2	Yes	Yes	No
Swamp	1/4 total	NE	NE	No	No	Yes
Fortification	1/2 total	NE	NE	Yes	Yes	No
Forest	1/2 total*	NE	NE	Yes	Yes	Yes
River (InL)	NE	x2	No	No	Yes	
Destroyed Bridge	1 (InL)	NE	NE	No	No	No
Light Bridge	1	NE	x2	No	No	No
Airport	1	NE	x2	No	No	No
City 1/2	NE	x2	Yes	Yes	No	
Road 1/2	NE	x2	No	No	No	
Road Bridge	1/2	NE	x2	No	No	No
Railroad	1/22	NE	NE	No	No	No
Railroad Bridge	1/22	NE	NE	No	No	No
Craters	2	x2	NE	No	No	No

NA = Not Allowed
 NE = No Effect
 *Light tanks 1/4 total

quickly closing with and intermixing your units with his. He'll have to decide whether the risk of friendly fire casualties is worth it.

MOVE IT OR LOSE IT

There's nothing prettier than a heavy artillery barrage splattered all

over an enemy tank formation, or an elephant tank about to feast on an armored car appetizer. However, as wonderful as heavy armor and artillery are, you're usually better off not buying these units during the initial unit purchase phase. Why? Because in PG2, mobility rules. Stationary or slow-moving units are sitting ducks for artillery bombardment and air strikes, and a direct artillery hit will kill an elephant tank just as easily as an armored car. Even more important, nearly all scenarios require you to hold victory point areas, so the faster you can occupy them, the more quickly you can start piling up points. In other scenarios, victory will go to the side that controls reinforcement areas, another good reason to opt for speed. When on the defensive, mobili-

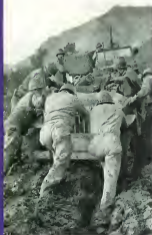


FIND 'EM, FIX 'EM, FLAME 'EM Red's light tanks have pinned down blue's defending units, as medium and heavy tanks ready for the knockout punch.

ty enables you to shift your forces to blunt the enemy's main attack, plug breakthroughs or, if the opportunity presents itself, to counterattack.

ECONOMIZE AND MAXIMIZE

One characteristic common among successful military commanders is their ability to effectively allocate available resources, enabling them to concentrate maximum force at critical points on the





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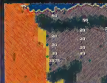

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Step One: Reconnoiter

The recon map screen available during unit selection is a good place to plan strategy. Here, it is easy to discern the proper avenues of attack from the major terrain features depicted on the map. We will strike in the valley between the twin forests, with a balanced force that will remain intact long enough to take the victory point sites.



Step Two: Operational Mobility

Along the long North African coastline, we place our strike forces. If you make the mistake of placing too much armor too far forward, they will outrun your infantry. Make sure that mobile infantry is well-protected, as your column is vulnerable on Turn One. Don't let the enemy get between you and the coastline.



Step Three: Coordinated Attack

The three-point assault is tricky to pull off, but less so because of our solid preparation. Notice how the artillery are well within support range, mercilessly shelling the enemy while staying out of their tanks' more limited range. Infantry follow close behind and take up positions in the woods.



Step Four: Mopping Up

Rather than waste time bashing on the retreating forces in the south woods, we circle north to capture the cluster of 100-point cities. Any potential danger to our flank is covered by the infantry to our rear. As the artillery moves forward, it is obvious that our position is unassailable—the scenario is ours.

battlefield. This concept is called economy of force, and it's as important in PG2 as it is in real-world warfare. Use cheap infantry units to garrison victory hexes behind your front lines and tanks as

your core offensive or defensive units. In most cases, you don't have to win everywhere on the battlefield, and usually, delaying or pinning enemy units is enough when the main part of your force is suc-

cessful where it matters most.

A WHIFF OF HIGH EXPLOSIVES

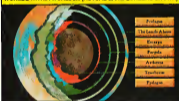
Artillery prevents the enemy from

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massing troops at the time and place of his choosing. However, artillery should be treated as a support element, not as a means to an end. Heavy and light artillery are difficult to use effectively, because of the requirement to select a target hex a turn ahead of when its fire actually arrives. To help you anticipate the possible locations of enemy units, play with the hex grid display turned on, learn the movement distances of the various unit types and how terrain affects those distances (see the accompanying *Terrain Effects Chart*).

Don't overlook stationary targets, such as bridges and enemy-occupied victory hex areas, and plot artillery strikes on your opponent's known reinforcement areas to destroy new units or delay their arrival at the front. While fire from mobile artillery arrives the same turn it's plotted, it also has the shortest range and



SLAMMING THE DOOR Red's initial success is met by blue with mines and a mobile defense, soon to be followed by a blue counterattack.

least accuracy of any artillery type and lacks barrage capability. Still, it is armored and self-propelled, making it more survivable and more useful as a direct-fire unit. Target mobile artillery units in pairs to increase their likelihood of hitting the desired hex. In scenarios where you know your opponent must de-

ploy in a confined space, plastering the area with mobile artillery fire on the first turn can sometimes provide a significant early advantage.

BE GOOD, NOT LUCKY

When German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was routinely trouncing the British in North Africa during World War II, Winston Churchill told Parliament, "We have a very daring and skillful opponent against us, and, may I say across the havoc of war, a great general." To become a great general in the *PERFECT GENERAL II*

reality, you must learn to objectively analyze your victories and losses, and learn from your mistakes. In the process, you'll develop better strategies, minimizing your tactical errors, winning more consistently and maybe, just maybe, garnering a little praise from those you defeat. ☺

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WINDOWS 95: The Road Ahead

Windows 95 arrived in stores on August 24, and sold four million copies within the first three weeks. In that same time period, almost four million new PCs shipped with Win 95 installed. The tidal wave has arrived.

As you've followed our Win 95 coverage, you've seen that the operating system has great potential to revolutionize gaming on the PC. Features such as AutoPlay CDs that start up automatically upon insertion, instant

recognition of sound and video cards, the elimination of memory management issues, and system-wide game controller support promise to eliminate the biggest headaches of PC gaming. The upcoming Game SDK will allow developers to create Windows games with faster video than their DOS ancestors, better support for digitized sounds, and easily-configurable networked play.

Despite all this promise, many gamers have found their initial experience with Win 95 to be one of discovery peppered with a fair amount of frustration. Converting your old MS-DOS or Win 3.11 system over to Win 95 often involves

digging into configuration files, hunting for new hardware drivers, setting up icons to run all your old DOS games, and sometimes even a trip to the corner computer emporium for another 4MB of RAM or a bigger hard drive.

Despite these difficulties, though, the quality and ease of setup of the initial wave of Win 95 titles indicates that the operating system will live up to its promises, and that 1996 will be a good year for gamers. Any initial difficulties are a hump that's worth getting over, because the road ahead offers a faster speed limit and a much smoother ride than the one we've traveled to get here.

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Smashing Windows

Windows 95 Is More Than Just A Pretty Interface

by Denny Atkin

NEVER IN THE HISTORY OF COMPUTERS HAS ANY PRODUCT ARRIVED WITH as much hype as Windows 95. The last major Windows revision, Win 3.0, was all the rage in computer stores and PC magazines. Win 95, on the other hand, is being pushed at Wal-Mart and on national TV. Millions of people who don't use computers or who only know how to load their word processor, don't even really know what Win 95 is—but they know they need it. At least, that's what their computer-using friends, Bill Gates, and the Rolling Stones tell them. But should the theme song for Win 95 be "Start Me Up," or "It's the End of the World as We Know It?"

ARE WE COMPATIBLE?

Although Win 95 is poised to change the face of PC computing, the product is as evolutionary as it is revolutionary. It's packed with advanced 32-bit code, but contrary to early folklore it doesn't do away with DOS. For

compatibility purposes, Win 95 is a 32-bit skyscraper built on a foundation of legacy 16-bit MS-DOS and Windows code. The end result is an operating system with some dramatic improvements, but also some performance sacrifices made in the name of compatibility.

Although purists have objected to those compromises, gamers should be very happy that they're there, because without them we'd lose access to most of our MS-DOS game library. By retaining a level of "DOSness," Win 95 becomes not only a good platform for running hot new 32-bit games and applications, but also the vast majority of your old Win 3.1 and MS-DOS programs. In fact, I've found a higher level of compatibility with MS-DOS games than with old Windows programs.

TO EXPLORE STRANGE NEW WINDOWS

The most obvious change to Win 95 is its revamped user interface. Program Manager has been replaced by a much more logical desktop interface. It's not as object-oriented as the OS/2 Workplace Shell, but it's far less confusing to new users than Program Manager. By default, most programs



MEAN SCREENS Most games designed for Win 95 can run full-screen, or in their own windows in case you need to check the old hint file.

are launched by clicking on the Start button, which activates a pop-up menu. This makes finding programs easy, but you may tire of wading through the four levels of submenus required to get to applications like CD Player. This isn't a problem, though. You can place commonly used icons directly on the Windows desktop so they're always a click away. One confusing aspect of the Shortcut feature is that it's quite possible to confuse a shortcut file with the actual executable program, so be very careful when moving or deleting Shortcuts. You don't want to accidentally disable the actual program. Also, there really should be an easy facility for moving items between the Start Menu and the desktop.

Win 95 attempts to do away with double-clicking, a feature that often confuses the bejezus out of novice computer users. A single click of the previously unused (by Windows) right mouse button now brings up a menu

WINDOWS 95

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of options, including opening an application, adjusting its properties, and so on.

Perhaps the handiest new feature, though, is the task bar. Sitting at the bottom of the screen (you can drag it to either side or the top if you prefer), this grey bar holds not only the start button, but also a button representing each application you currently have running. So if you boss walks in while you're playing *COMMANDER ACE'S OF THE DEEP*, you can quickly click the ENCEL button and make her think you're being productive, rather than Alt-Tabbing and hoping you don't end up on *MINI-SWHEER*.

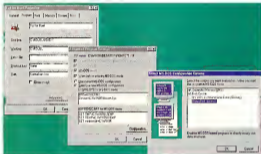
The right corner of this bar sports a clock and spot where you'll find small control icons, such as volume controls and modem status indicators.

File Manager has been obsolete by the Windows Explorer, which is similar in functionality but follows the new Win 95 practice of listing all available disk drives in a single collapsible list. This single-window approach takes a little getting used to, but you can always run two copies of it and drag files between them if you can't live without dual windows. More important, though, is Explorer's support for Win 95's Long File Name (LFN) feature. No longer are you stuck with only eight characters to describe a spreadsheet or a saved game—you now have 255 to play with. (In old Win 3.1 and DOS applications, though, you only see a truncated eight-character version of the long name.)

DOS, IT DO WINDOWS

You really begin to see Win 95's advantages when you install a game or application designed specifically for it.

If a CD-ROM supports Win 95's AutoPlay feature, then the install program will come up when you insert the CD. A couple of clicks to tell the installer where to put your program, and you're up and running. No more searching for the SETUP.EXE file, and better yet no more configuring your sound and graphics cards, as the drivers for both are built right into Windows. Once an AutoPlay-enabled program is installed, subsequent insertions of that CD-ROM will cause the program to start up automatically.



OLD FAITHFUL If a game won't run properly on Windows 95, you can set up a custom MS-DOS configuration for it.

This makes it easy for even computer-illiterate family members to load CD games.

Win 95's entertainment potential isn't only in ease-of-use. Games that take full advantage of the operating system's features and Microsoft's new Games SDK will actually be able to top the performance of MS-DOS games, since they can take full advantage of hardware features like accelerated graphics cards, and since they won't have to deal with 16-bit memory restrictions. Upcoming enhancements will also specify standards for joystick input and even network play, making it much easier to configure even advanced game features.

Another nice improvement is Uninstall. To remove all vestiges of a properly written Win 95 game or application from your hard drive, you need only select the Add/Remove Pro-

grams icon in the Win 95 Control Panel. Select the name of the program you want to remove, and it's gone, along with any DLL or other files it may have installed that aren't used by other programs.

Win 9.1 games and applications should run as before; compatibility here is very good, with the few problems being with programs such as WINFAX 4.0 that use custom device drivers. The biggest difference here is that you'll find that you can run many more applications at once, thanks to improved resource management.

Running MS-DOS games was never an issue with Windows. Win 3.1 did such a poor job of it that most of us just dropped to DOS before attempting to run any games. Now, though, you can create an icon to launch any DOS game, even if it won't function properly under Win 95.

In a best-case scenario, you can simply create a Shortcut icon

that points to the game's main executable file and use this to launch the game. Many games will run this way, taking only a minor performance hit. (Jaeger Software's *FIGHTER DUEL*, for instance, runs fine this way, taking less than a 10% performance hit.) If a game has problems running this way, you can pull up its Properties list (basically, an invisible replacement for the old .PIF files) and adjust various memory, multitasking, and screen-saver settings in an attempt to get it working. If all that fails (or if you don't have enough memory to run both Win 95 and your game simultaneously), rescue comes under the name of DOS 7.0, an updated version of the familiar standby that's integrated with Win 95.

DOS TO THE RESCUE

Games can be set to run in MS-DOS mode, meaning that Win 95 basically

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unloads itself, reboots with only DOS 7.0 active, and runs your game. When you exit your game, Win 95 reloads. You can even set up custom CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files for each game that are automatically loaded when you select the game's icon; this is much easier than hassling with multifconfig under DOS 6. Compatibility of this mode is nearly perfect—I tried about 20 DOS games new and old under DOS 7 and all ran flawlessly; at CGW we've so far only encountered a single problem getting a game to work properly under DOS 7.

The downside of this is that you'll need to set up a configuration for nearly every game you run in MS-DOS mode, so it's actually more hassle than under the old DOS/Win 3.1 combination. If you have a set of config files that worked under DOS 6.2, you can usually paste these into the appropriate boxes and all will work fine, but look forward to spending a bit of time testing and configuring all the games on your drive.

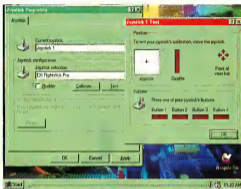
HARD TIMES GET EASY

Getting hardware up and running is fairly automatic. Win 95 not only supports Plug and Play cards, but it also includes drivers and automatic detection routines for most popular PC add-ons. If you're using fairly popular equipment, the drivers are probably included with Win 95. On the off chance that a 32-bit driver isn't available yet for your device, you can usually use the old 16-bit Win 3.1 driver, perhaps taking a small performance hit. Of the equipment installed in the laptop and two desktop PCs I use regularly, I was forced to use 16-bit dri-

vers only for the Acer Magic S20 sound card in my Pentium 100 system.

Speaking of Pentiums, you're probably wondering if your hardware has the oomph for the new OS. If you have a 386DX or better processor, you have the processing power necessary. (It actually ran smoother on a 386DX-

amazing—when I installed Win 95 on my system at work, it automatically detected my network card and found my server. All I had to do was supply my user name and password. There's also peer-to-peer and dial-up networking support, in case you want to connect a few computers at home or dial in to your PC while on the road. Fax send and receive capability is included, as is a capable terminal program with ZModem support. The anemic WRITE has been replaced by WORDPAD, a decent basic word processor that will load and save Word 6 and 7 files. There many other little utilities, including a quick file viewer, various system monitors, Internet support files, and the Microsoft Network client.



HAPPY HAPPY JOY JOY Finally, joystick support is a standard feature, so you should only have to calibrate your stick once for all your Win 95 games.

40 I tested than Win 3.1 did.) Of greater concern is the amount of memory installed in your system. While Win 95 is spec'd to work in 4 MB, consider 8 MB the minimum for reasonable performance. Just as with Win 3.1, Win 95 is at its best with 16 MB or more, as most swap-file access is eliminated. If you're still running an old 80 MB hard drive, it's time to upgrade, as Win 95 will take up 50 to 85 MB of space, depending on which options you install. (DriveSpace disk compression is built-in if you're really crunched for room.)

BUILT-IN BONUSES

One of the reasons that Win 95 takes up so much space is that it has a lot built in. The cost of stand-alone programs to perform many of Win 95's new built-in functions alone can more than make up for the operating system's upgrade price. You'll find built-in support for networking that's

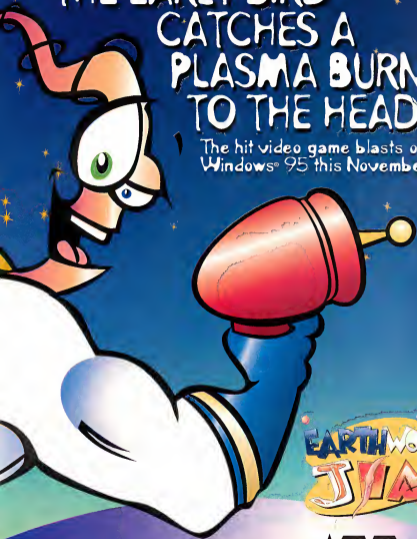
results from an attempt to make setting up the operating system easier, but which actually promises to lead to hundreds of thousands of installation problems or non-optimally configured systems. By default, Win 95 will install itself over Win 3.1. *Don't let it do this.* Doing so is likely to leave lots of outdated DOS and Windows drivers lying around, not to mention any other outdated files you had cluttering up your Windows directory. Installing over Win 3.1 does translate your Program Manager groups into Start Menu items, and it keeps you from having to reinstall all your Windows applications, but even if your system does start up properly after a 3.1 upgrade, any time you save at the beginning could potentially be lost debugging driver problems or optimizing your system's performance later. (Nearly every installation problem we've dealt with has resulted from attempts to install over Win 3.1.)

BEWARE THE INSTALL MONSTER

There is one critical flaw in Win 95, a flaw that

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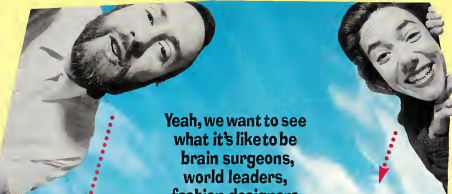


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There are two workarounds for this potential problem. First, you can wipe your old Windows installation and install Win 95 fresh, and then reinstall all your old applications. If you have lots of hard drive space, though, you might instead choose a different directory when installing, such as C:\WIN95. This will set your system up in a dual-boot configuration, where you can press F8 upon boot to restart in your previous version of DOS. This is handy if you want to be able to run your old DOS games without setting up Shortcuts for them all, or if you're using a Win 3.1 application that has

problems under Win 95.

Win 95 has other quirks and limitations as well. You can now change screen resolutions without resarting Windows, but altering color depth requires a Windows reload. The new proportional window scroll bars don't work properly in some Win 3.1 applications. Also, Win 95 has preemptive multitasking, which is a much smoother method of running multiple programs than the cooperative multitasking used by Win 3.1. With preemptive multitasking, you can perform operations such as high-speed downloads, processor-intensive

desktop publishing screen redraws, and copies to floppy simultaneously without fear. Unfortunately, when you load a Win 3.1 program, you're shifted back to the old cooperative multitasking model, where a program can hog the processor and keep you from doing anything else until it's finished. Win 95 is a much better multitasker than Win 3.1, but it's still no Amiga or OS/2.

SHUT DOWN

Despite its limitations and quirks, Windows 95 is a product you should definitely consider buying. It's not perfect, but it's generally more stable, and certainly more powerful, than Win 3.1. It finally offers the potential for high-performance PC games that are easy to get up and running, and its architecture will open a huge market for gaming peripherals that will require a single driver for universal support. Once the market shifts to Win 95 titles, gaming on the PC should have fewer headaches and more excitement. For the moment, the learning curve and the setup involved may make Win 95 seem like a pain, but it's set to usher in an entertainment software revolution.

Oh, and also it runs that boring productivity stuff a lot better than the old Windows. ☺

The Pluses of CDs

Microsoft Plus is a \$49.95 Win 95 add-on package for 485 and Pentium owners. Much of the space on the CD is taken up by eye and ear candy: a series of desktop themes, with event sounds, wallpaper, screen savers, and animated mouse pointers. More useful is the Internet access software. The Web browser won't force Netscape off your hard drive, but the Internet Installation Wizard makes getting your Win 95 system on the net much easier. There's also an improved version of the DriveSpace disk compression software; this one compresses files individually, and is more effective and offers better data integrity than previous versions.

Microsoft has also taken a shot at including games mildly more substantive than *Souaves* and *MacSweaver* with the operating system. (These are still there too, though.) Plus includes 3-D *Pinball* for Windows—*Smur* *Crazy*, a pinball game created by Maxis. It's not the most sophisticated pinball game I've ever seen; there's no multiball play, there are only two flippers, and there's only one table. However, what's there is very well done. The ball physics seem authentic, you can judge the

table from either side, and the graphics and sound effects are well done. It's not enough to justify Plus by itself, but pinball fans will likely enjoy it.

Such a statement can't be made of *Hover*, the bonus game that ships with the CD-ROM version of Win 95. It appears that Microsoft was trying to do a DOOM-style game without the violence, but it seems they also missed most of the fun as well. *Hover* drops you into a strange lecture-mapped world (some background on why these orb-filled medieval castles, checked-floor city mottos, and bizarre bamboo mazes exist might have been nice) for an exciting game of... Capture the flag! Yes, it's you and another hovercraft bumping into each other in a fast-paced competition to see who can grab three flags first. The textures are pretty, the hovercraft inertia physics are fun to play with for a short time, and the action is pretty fast-paced. But the situation is so ill-defined, the lectures so obvious slapped on just to say "look at the pretty textures," and goal so pedestrian, that the game gamers a resounding reaction of "huh? What were you thinking?"



MICRO GAMES How to create a Win 95 Game: 3-D *PINBALL*, included with Microsoft Plus. How not to: *Hover*, the bonus game on the Win 95 CD.

THE EDITORS' S. E. A.

WINDOWS 95

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Much improved user interface, yet still very compatible with older software. AutoPlay and universal video, sound, and joystick drivers make installation of Win 95 games a snap. Long file names and uninstall functions simplify file management, and Plug-and-Play promises easier hardware setup.

CONS Setting up DOS games requires even more steps than under MS-DOS. Installing using default choices can lead to problems or reduced performance. Multitasking improvements nullified when running Win 3.1 applications.



CD-ROM

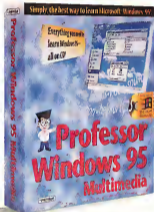


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Mindscape's *WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT*
Heralds Fantastic Fun

by Johnny L. Wilson

With ominous orchestration like a blend of John Williams and Tchaikovsky, the music wells from an undertow of string basses to a hornet's nest of high strings and percussion,

creatures, evil minions of the Grey Seers. The wizard's death is a catalyst for waves of brutal and destructive assaults, a campaign of universal import into which the gamer will be summoned with all the creative and technological magic that **Games Workshop** and **Mindscape** can respectively conjure.

The object of this combination of table-top and computer game wizardry is *WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT*. Based on the table-top battle system used in *Warhammer Fantasy Battles*, the best-selling miniatures rules/figures/world books/novels in the United Kingdom and popular the world over, *WARHAMMER* is neither a

direct translation of the table-top miniatures rules to the computer nor a disingenuous use of a valuable licensed property. It isn't an easy game to pigeonhole, either. Stylistically, *WARHAMMER* is a real-time wargame, but since it takes place in a fantasy universe, it is not historical. It has an unfolding story in which the gamer's character makes decisions and wins/loses battles which affect the exposition of the story. Yet, great care has been taken in the design to keep the plot as open-ended as possible: your character can oppose or assist

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

the dominant threat and the game will progress accordingly.

To me, *WARHAMMER* is *PANZER GENERAL* with 3-D/real-time battles, with a fantasy storyline in place of PG's retelling of history. *WARHAMMER* focuses upon the combat which begins in control and falls prey to the chaos of battle; PG allows full control of a calculated, relatively coherent campaign. Also, *WARHAMMER* is a series of connected tactical battles, while PG is a series of operational-level battles. Yet, both games follow narrative plots with consequences for both success and failure. *WARHAMMER* uses animated cut-scenes to unveil the plot, while PG uses a voice-over debriefing to rewrite history. Both games allow successful officers to purchase new units and beef up their armies while things only get tougher for less successful gamers. In *WARHAMMER*, however, all new units are "green" units, so it behooves commanders not to lose their forces by getting caught up in one big battle. Yet, the biggest difference between the two games is that an officer in the service of the Third Reich was not given near the inative in terms of where to strike and whom to fight next as a mercenary officer in a fantasy army.

SCOURGE OF THE BORDER

The game begins within a region known as the Border Princes. It is an ideal locale for the gamer's character to begin the campaign, since it features both a demand for mercenary units to provide border defenses against orcs, goblins, and other monstrous minions of the Ultimate Bad Guy, as well as to



forming a backdrop as the wizard's throat is cut by the monsters in the shadow. The monsters are the Skaven: humanoid/rat



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immerse you in a totally new world. (The future of which, unfortunately, is extremely bleak.)

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fight on the side of one lord or another during their constant internecine warfare. Naturally, such a region is perfect for providing training missions. Starting with the opportunity to defend a village, players learn how to operate one unit of infantry and one unit of cavalry. Soon, they learn how to operate archers. Eventually, you learn to cast magical spells while commanding several units.



FLAG UNFURLED In the deployment phase, units may be placed anywhere within those battle flags.



RING OF FIRE To the left is the tactical screen, where our bright wizard is busy torsting bad guys. To the right is the strategic overview, showing the battle flags of friendly and enemy formations, and below are the orders and control interfaces for the battle.

Though the pre-combat interface was not in place at the time we examined WARHAMMER, the system seems sound and efficient. Prior to a battle, you designate the units that will participate in a given battle and the marching

order. Then, just before the real-time battle is actually initiated, there is a deployment phase which simulates the initial commands for a battle. Units are positioned anywhere within a circle of flags and you may change the unit's facing using a compass button on the left side of the battle interface. At this point, the unit's tanks can be changed to better handle an enemy's charge or initiate your own.

Every unit has a basic combat AI that features a threat radius (see "Tactics of the Horned Rat" elsewhere in this article). The default setting for this AI is "On," meaning that if an enemy unit enters the circle of your unit's threat radius, your unit will ignore all previous orders and attack the adjacent enemy. Naturally, there are times when gamers don't want a unit to attack the closest enemy, particularly if said enemy is headed into a trap. So, turning the AI off will enable players to use certain units as decoys or reserves until you are ready to command the units directly and bring them into battle. Allowing the gamer to toggle important game functions on and off is a big part of why WARHAMMER works where a lot of real-time combat games do not.

Another important capability during the deployment phase is the "fly by" reconnaissance phase. The game allows you to scroll over every square inch of the battlefield (one battle is roughly 640 meters x 640 meters, a battle which would

take a 24-square-foot table to reproduce in miniature) prior to the battle in order to reflect the advance reconnaissance or maps that a commander heading into strange territory would be sure to gather together. "Cheating?" you contend. Not really. You can check out all of the terrain in advance, but not necessarily the deployment of the enemy units. This is because the icons for enemy units, like the units themselves, do not become visible until the program is able to trace a line of sight from a friendly unit to that enemy. This reconnaissance is highly recommended, since Karl Fitzhugh, the scenario designer for the game, takes great delight in using every possible terrain feature to its utmost advantage for concealment of the enemy and the use of wicked ambushes.

Once the battle begins, of course, everything happens in real-time. Players can order units to various spots on the battlefield by setting waypoints via point and click. They may command units to attack specific enemy units, with an engage order that leads to a blind charge, or with a charge order that, if units are within charge range, allows for a more effective charge. But unless your character is "with" a particular unit, everything depends upon WARHAMMER Fantasy Battles statistics, WARHAMMER AI and ye olde fog of war. The statistics determine movement rate, melee weapons skill, ballistic weapons skill, unit strength, unit toughness (tendency to rout or not), wounds (actual number of hit points), initiative, number of attacks (within a certain length of time), and leadership. So, the computer ends up handling all of the calculations for terrain, maneuver, formation, etc. that table-top gamers normally have to find by perusing detailed charts.

Should you take command of a specific unit, however, this signifies that the leader is with the unit. As in historical battles, that means that the men fight harder, knowing that the commander would only put himself at risk for a critical part of the battle. So,



Windows 95
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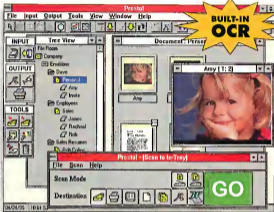
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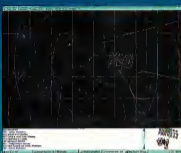
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TACTICS OF THE HORNE RAT

To make *WARHAMMER: SANDWY* of the Horned Rat, teams like the 3-D team (Mindscape's first to use Softimage tools with SGI workstations), Interface team, art team, animation team, and AI team built more complex tool sets than they ever had before. The 3-D team has rendered more than 70 races to be reduced and manipulated into sprites, and the animation team has developed its own compression/player technology to improve sound quality and lip synchronization.

We were very interested in how the battle logic worked. The AI team uses 2-D geometric representations to handle movement and combat. A purple circle on the flat map represents a collision area. This may represent something solid or magically repellent and calls the routine for a rough proximity check. Then, the routine decides whether to at-



DEEP PURPLE The purple circles represent possible collisions with objects, other units or the influence of a magical spell. Red circles represent threat perimeters, the white vectors represent test vectors, and the blue vectors represent a unit's current movement.

tack or avoid the area.

Unlike some games where the units decide about collision as they come right

my intervention, the cavalry unit would have taken the shortest path to get to the wolf riders, but lose the opportunity to hit the enemy unit from the rear. By forcing my cavalry unit to go a little out of the way, I was able to hit the nasties from the rear and rout them in short order. In order to make a charge effective, you'll have to make sure that your troops have room

Archers can either be ordered to cover a defensive position where they will automatically fire at any enemy within their expanded (over infantry and cavalry) threat radius or they can be ordered to fire at specific units or spots on the battlefield (Remember the archers in *Bansheer*? You get the picture.). The disadvantage of the latter is that the archers must be ordered to fire each time, as opposed to the autopilot of the former.

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Each unit also uses threat perimeters. These are the big red circles in the perimeter. Once the circumference of those circles are penetrated, the threat becomes real. Then, the unit will both defend itself automatically and ask you if you want to countercharge. All in all, a surprisingly sophisticated AI system, especially considering what passes for AI in most real-time computer games.

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CHARGE OF THE LIGHT PARADE During a charge, infantry units tend to get strung out, while Cavalry is *usually* more apt to break ranks.



helps you locate battles and monsters by sound cues. Indeed, the battle resolution is so realistic that I found myself having to take command of a cavalry unit that was moving in on a pack of wolf riders (monster cavalry). Without

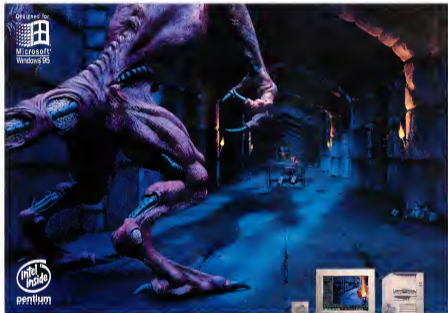
enough to charge (i.e. get up to a run or gallop) and to get maximum benefit from the charge, you'll want to guarantee they hit from flank or rear.

Archers are handled somewhat differently from the infantry and cavalry.

THIS MUST BE MAGIC

The biggest change in *Warhammer Fantasy Battles* is in the handling of magic. In the tabletop game, players may cast magic every round. Of course, in *Warhammer*, there are no rounds. Everything is happening simultaneously (see the comments from Games Workshop in "The Secret Of Nottingham" sidebar), so nothing would keep players from constantly casting their most powerful magic spells over and over to the exclusion of commanding their forces. So, Mindscape introduced the Winds of Magic, a feature more complex

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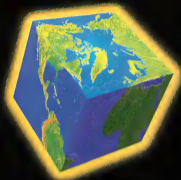


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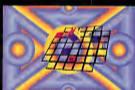
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THE SECRET OF NOTTINGHAM



Every new creation, from Orc Boyz to Troll Kings, begins as a sketch from one of GW's talented artists.



Games Workshop staff paint the completed miniatures themselves, because they like to collect and paint armies...



...which is hardly a secret, when you see their trophy case.



From this vast collection, the designers craft scenarios featuring their colorful creations of Order and Chaos, Nagas and Skaven.

"We get lots of submissions from people who say, 'Look! We've taken your rules and put them on the computer. Now, you don't have to roll dice or look up charts to determine the moves.' Well, we like to roll dice and we think you should look at charts to determine the moves. But when you have a chance to do something different, you need to do it," says Andy Jones, Projects Director of the Games Workshop Design Studio. "In WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNEDED RAT,

we wanted real-time because when we play the table-top version of Warhammer, we see it happening in real-time in our heads. In fact, the reason we

call it WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNEDED RAT is because we don't like to make copies of games. Instead, we try to make a new game out of our universe."

In the shadow of Nottingham Castle, the site (though not the actual building) of the legendary bandit's fall—the Sheriff of Nottingham—sits an office complex which houses the Games Workshop Design Studio. Here is where the company (once Britain's largest importer of U.S.-designed games) now keeps its creative brain trust. Since the success of WARHAMMER and WARHAMMER

40,000 (A.D.), Games Workshop has expanded to 80 stores in the U.K. with more in France, Australia and the U.S. Importantly for them, of the 10,000 officially registered Warhammer players, 90% have computers and play games on them.

"The secret of our success," suggests Jones, "is in our consistency. Instead of just adding new races as we think of new possibilities, we tend to explore our world in depth. We want depth, not breadth. We want new races or lost races which make sense in our world, not to end up as so many systems do with *Ainda*'s like ones and *Ainda*'s like trolls."



Fans of the series will be happy to know that many of the best scenarios have been converted into tactical battles in WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNEDED RAT.

than a mere timer. It requires gamers to build up magic resources by glean- ing them from the forces in the universe. In short, prior to casting a spell, players will have to check the Winds of Magic icon and see if there are enough points to cast a given spell. Each spell has a point value to make it clear whether that spell can be cast at a given moment. Even so, players may have to wait a while for the spells to actually take effect.

Once a spell is successfully cast, they offer splendid visual effects to rival those in MASTER OF MAGIC. Of course, no matter how powerful a given wizard, mage, or seer may be, that wizard is going to be no match for enemy units when it's time for melee combat.

That's where play balance comes in. Players will have to station archer units and/or guard units around their wizards to ensure that they make it through the battle.

SVENGALI CARLSSON

Once the game mechanics are mastered, your character will come to the attention of Lord Sven Carlsson, and the plot will accelerate. Winning and/or losing battles will enable new clues as to the plot line, and why what your character is doing may be important. Like WING COMMANDER, there is an optimal plot path, but unlike WING COMMANDER, it may not be wise to take it. Steve Leney, art director and co-author of WARHAMMER, tried to design

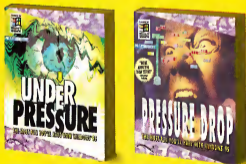
the path such that you sometimes have trouble figuring out whether you want a Pyrrhic victory or lost too many troops for nothing. He believes the least number of scenarios that will need to be fought is between 25-30, but that this will not be as fun as following the path as it falls.

WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNEDED RAT is a fascinating product. It looks like it will up the ante on mission-based strategy games and it looks like it will satisfy even gamers like me who have resisted the real-time fervor to this point. Play-balance and game polishing will tell. In the meantime, I'm looking forward to spending lots of hours with this epic. ☺

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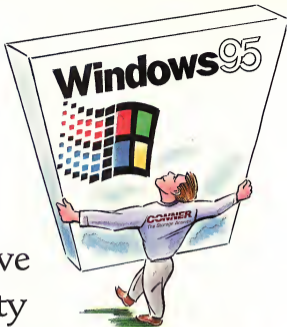
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Life In The Pits

PITFALL Was A Great Console Game, But Will It Play In PC-oria?

by George Jones

PITFALL HARRY'S BEEN ALL OVER THE PLACE—AMERICA, EUROPE AND ALL the major continents. He's run on the Atari 2600 and the Super Nintendo, heck, he's even been to the Commodore Amiga. Now he's taking his act to the modern PC and Windows 95. So we all know he's a big hit. The big question now is: Will Pitfall Harry play in PC-oria, the toughest crowd around?

For my money, the answer is yes. **Activision's** latest incarnation of the long-successful series, **PITFALL HARRY: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE** seems to hit the nail right on the head in providing the graphically appealing, action-packed epic that went over so well in the 16-bit world. And it should—this is an exact replica of that game with the addition

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

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System:

Requirements:

IBM compatible

486 33, 8 MB

RAM, 256 Color

SVGA, Windows

95, 2x CD-ROM; supports Windows-

compatible sound cards

of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD-ROM)

Producer: Scott Bracer

Publisher: Activision,

Los Angeles, CA

(800) 477-3650



WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

This Autoplay enabled CD-ROM (just pop your CD into the drive and *voilà!* you're up and running) starts off right where it should—in the pyramids of the Mayans where Pitfall Harry and his Pops are about to get their hands on what looks like an extra man power-up. Suddenly, Daddy-O gets nabbed by an unknown entity, leaving Junior alone to explore the Mayan wilderness and save his pop.

Without any further ado, you find yourself in the jungle (Atari 2600 PITFALLERS will appreciate the instant nod to the past). From this point on, it's non-stop action as you fend off snapping snakes, rock-throwing monkeys and other manner of obstinate beast.

There are 13 different levels in all, each demanding varying proportions of twitch reflex, patience and more twitch reflex. Make no mistakes: this is an action gamer's game, and while many newcomers to console gaming will be drawn in by PITFALL's charm, many more will be turned off by how hard the game is.

You'll wind your way up, down, right and left in classical platform game style. At the end of some levels you'll

face bosses before you pass on, while you simply walk through doors to pass others. At the end of the game, you'll have to beat The Ultimate Warrior in order to rescue Dad. You're fully loaded with an arsenal of whip, slingshot, boomerang and exploding rocks protecting you along the way. Four-button joystick owners need only food and water brought to them at six-hour intervals, because the game supports those controllers.

In terms of hardware support, this game comes with more configurable options than most business applications. Through the power of one window—Properties—I was easily able to play the game in full screen mode in a 320 x 200 window or a 640 x 480 window. I was also able to allocate processor time to the game.

The only technical problem I noticed was an occasionally jerky screen if Harry changed locations too quickly. But this is minor, and the game ran very well under Windows 95, which bodes well for future releases on this operating system.

If you loved the original game as much as I did, the new Windows version will prove more than enough to restart your obsession. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

PITFALL: MAYAN ADVENTURE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Authentic replica of 16-bit versions with beautiful graphics, great game play and the ability to save from anywhere in a level.

CONS Minor screen jerkiness, and the game may be a little too difficult for non-platform gamers.



SUPER GO KART Pitfall Harry, it is a man of action, whether he's riding mining carts or whipping thy monkeys into shape.

of three bonus levels and the added benefits of gaming in Windows 95. In fact, this game is such an authentic port that non-platform gamers might find it a bit too difficult for their tastes.

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Jungle Boogie

How To Avoid The Pitfalls And Keep Harry Running In PITFALL

by Eric Jones

WORLD EXPRESS TELEGRAM

9/28/95

FROM: Pitfall Harry

SUBJ: Mayan Adventure

Hells from the Bahamas STOP

My Mayan adventure were me out so much that I decided (after long hours of discussion with my friend Indiana) that enough is enough STOP

I mean am I going to spend the rest of my life continually running from one location to the next STOP

What about that special Pitfall Harriet that's out there for me STOP

And kids STOP

Anyways, have decided to take a little breather STOP

It may last indefinitely, so have provided some notes from my latest adventure STOP

Maybe someone else will prove themselves worthy STOP

Maybe it's time for a Pitfall Tom STOP

JUNGLE OF CEIBA

Far and away, this is the easiest level in the game, serving to acquaint you with Pitfall Harry and his abilities. There are plenty of snakes and monkeys here, but they're small potatoes, as long as you take your time. The really frustrating thing about this level is that it seems, no matter where you jump, you always land on a monkey, snake, or spike. There are also tons of goodies, such as life hearts, gold, and exploding rocks, so keep on the lookout.

Work your way to the right and you'll eventually run into the level boss (you'll need to fall down a tree stump first). The end boss is a tiger whose main attack is a mud charge at you. Beating

him is easy—simply fire away while jumping to avoid his mad rushes. Note that sometimes he jumps in the air to counter your own jumps over him. Thankfully, it's an easy pattern to learn. If you have too much trouble with this section, you're in for some serious challenges.

XIBALBA FALLS

The only way to approach this level is with patience, and lots of it—one slip and you're gone. You do learn another of Harry's never-ending bag o' skills: he can use his whip to swing from tree to tree. Don't worry, you'll automatically swing if you jump up to the peg. Beware of the annoying monkeys and mosquitoes; they're a source of constant irritation.

Even more dangerous, however, is the moss growing on the end of some of the rocks. Step on these and you'll slip to your death. There are tons of power-ups to be found in rather obvious places, including the magical chili pepper, which gives Harry the jumping power of an Olympic athlete, and allows him a little upward mobility.

TAZAMUL MINES

Upon entering this level, immediately go left and down to receive a life heart to boost your energy. Beware of the repeating cycle of bats and rats, which reappear if you kill them and then return to the scene. When you

come across mine carts, maneuver them into place and climb up to reach places that would normally be too high for Harry. For example, push the first mine cart to the right, until you get to a spot where the track is broken above you and stop. Jump on top of the cart, then jump left and you will find a boomerang. Continue to push the cart to the end of the track and jump off



TAIL THAT SCORPION In the Last City of Coban, look for a digitized white scorpion in the beginning of the level. Follow him into the past, to the Last City of the Atari 2600.

onto the rope. Once again navigate the barrage of spiders and bats and rats, who are harmless by themselves but pack a pretty mean punch when teamed up.

Take your time, gather all the life hearts, gold, and exploding pop rocks (you know, the ones that killed Mikey from the Life commercials) as you make your way along. At one point you'll notice a flunky-looking icon above you. That's the warp, and it leads to a room where you'll play the bonus game, a musical pattern repeter a la *Soww*.

Follow the tracks and the pointing bronze and eventually you'll find a

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lever. Pull it down to open up a hole in the floor, which will drop you onto a lower track. Start jumping immediately upon landing—you'll be hit with an onslaught of incoming mine carts that knock you closer and closer to the edge. Time your jumps between carts, and

slingshot. Take advantage of the fact that they attack only one at a time, but be careful when they are switching off.

COPAN TEMPLE

This board, one of the longest levels in the game, tests your timing skills to the utmost. Beware the fire-spewing walls, which cause major damage. When you bounce across the spider web, try to cut your jumps short, or at least control them a bit. Watch out for the bats, and be sure to pull on every lever you come across.

The key to solving this level is to navigate your way through the fire-spewing walls and swing across the top row of pegs. Climb down the rope, stopping only to pull the lever on the left. Follow the sequence of ropes, looking out for the warp (another musical bonus game) along the way. When you encounter the swinging spearsman, jump past him and fall down the hole. Find the

lever, pull it and jump down the hole to the second spearsman. Again, find the lever and pull it. This will open the hole to the left of the first spearsman (confused yet?). Zip down that hole, pull another lever to open yet another door, jump over the rolling wheel, and exit stage left. You're outta there!

LAKAMUL RAIN FOREST

This level is very similar to level one, except that it really puts your climbing skills to the test. Watch out for the mud pits, because they mean instant death. Time your leaps on the vines, if you whiff, you'll have to start all over at the beginning. (an extremely frustrating turn of events on this level). Look for tree stumps located within them are springs which can elevate your existence to higher places loaded with goodies. Also, avoid heavy combat with those pesky warthogs, who are extremely tough to

kill. Other than that, all you have to do is keep working your way gradually to the right. The exit will present itself before you know it.

YAXCHILAN LAGOON

Make a left immediately after starting this level, and you'll be replenished with a life heart. You've got two options. You can go the easy way by climbing up the rope, or you can try your luck with the crocodiles—definitely a shorter route but a lot more dangerous. As in other levels, watch out for the annoying birds and mosquitoes, now out in full force. And be careful when jumping from rock-to-rock-and-croc-to-croc; cutting a jump short will leave you a little wet in the pants...and back at the beginning. Although some crocodiles can give you rides, watch out; they have a nasty habit of diving underwater at the most inconvenient times.

BALANKANCHE MINE

This level is admittedly fun, but also exceedingly frustrating until you get the patterns down. The object is to avoid the red lights, which are easy to spot initially (as are the broken-down mine carts that alert you to the red lights).

NO BONES ABOUT IT The Lost City is one of the easiest levels; there is a minimum amount of danger but a lot of goodies. Make sure you explore every hole.

you'll eventually find yourself on a ledge leading to the end of the level.

LOST CITY OF COPAN

This board is more than the simple run-and-jump that it seems at first. If you find Pitfall Harry's old nemesis—the chunky, digitized white scorpion way up high near the beginning of the level—you can warp to the legendary Atari 2600 version of PITFALL. Take your time and explore the city; it's one of the few areas where you can find plenty of goodies with a minimum amount of danger. Swing across the mud pits, and drop down into holes. To climb up the hissing snake vines, simply hit them two times, and crawl under the wall-mounted enemies to avoid their lethal axes.

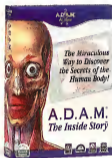
The block jumping is potentially very frustrating. I can't tell you how many times I made it to the next to last block only to fall all the way down. Take your time to learn the sequence and you'll save yourself a load of frustration. The end bosses, two spotted cats, are very similar to the boss in level 1. Get their pattern down, and kill them with your



THAT DARK CAT This tiger's a pussycat, but don't expect his big brother in the Tikal Ruins to be such a pushover.

But the further you get, the faster you go, and your control of left-right motion is negligible. Always keep your cart towards the far right of the screen. This gives you an extra split-second to spot

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the red lights, which could be the difference between survival and eating iron. As for the ghost heads that follow you periodically, all you have to do is jump back over them. To quote a famous Jedi knight, "Use the Force." As the level picks up speed, let your reflexes take over and guide you through. At the very end, stay in the middle track, or you'll

right and shimmy down that long rope. Make sure to whip the block on the right wall. Using the gold pieces, guide your jumps from tongue to tongue. Again—be patient when you confront the disappearing ledges. The end boss is once again a tiger, this time with a twist. After a few hits with your sling shot, the angered tiger gets up on two feet, at which point he proceeds to not only try and run you over, but to fling lightning bolts at the ground, shaking you up in the process. This enemy is one tough cat, but once you learn his pattern he turns into a pussy cat. Meow.

TIKAL TEMPLE

Don't worry; there is a way out of the first floor. Go behind the first column and jump up. A spring will elevate you to where you will pull down two levers; this will open up the floor. Float on the pieces of wood and scamper up the ledges. Make sure you time your jumps to avoid the big

green balls of destruction. Pop through the door and immediately start running to the right to avoid the blue wheel chasing you. Run through the gauntlet of green balls, jump up to avoid another blue wheel (or wait for it to fall down the hole), run right and jump over yet another blue wheel. Take a deep breath and go through the door. Jump from floating wood piece to floating wood piece, killing every pesky, face-sacking pesky bat that appears. Enter through the door, where you'll (again) run right and avoid still another blue wheel. This board is rather empty of baddies, but it will push your patience to the limits. Hey, if you want to get to the end, you've got to prove yourself worthy. Staying calm and tak-

ing your time is the key here.

WARRIOR SPIRIT

The end boss is a big, bad Stone Warrior. He has four attacks that he'll use to defeat you. His most common attack is when he jumps high in the air, hoping to land on top of you. The catch is that when he lands, he shatters into painful Warrior Spirit shards that come bouncing at you. Jump over the pieces to minimize the damage from this attack. His second attack is firing his stone fists at you. You'll know this attack is coming when he begins to kneel. Simply lay on your belly to avoid the fists. For his third attack, he picks up his leg and slams it to the ground, causing you to lose your balance and fall backward. Make sure you're in the air when you see those legs lift up. The fourth deadly attack is similar to the third; he jumps in the air and when he lands you are knocked to the ground. Once again, simply jump into the air to avoid the impact. The easiest way to beat him is to use these strategies to avoid his attacks, and fire away at his head with your

DON'T RUN THE RED Though this level can be addictingly fun, you must stay focused. Keep to the right of the tracks so you have more time to spot the red lights.

be back at the beginning of the level (or maybe a padded cell).

TIKAL RUINS

A snake automatically jumps out and attacks you in this level, so be on your toes from the get-go. To reach a life heart, angle your jump off the statue's tongue so that you bounce over to the left. Grab the heart, continue to the left and bounce off of the next statue's tongue to the top sections. While going through the safe mud pits, make sure you kill the birds. They're a big nuisance, and they only take two hits to kill. Jump into the holes and work your way to the right. Take your time with the disappearing ledges. Before, you'd simply fall to the ground—this time around it's life or death.

When you clear the second set of ledges, cruise left. Bag your limit of attack birds and cross a safe mud pit, where you will find an extra life. Once again you'll have to repeat the disappearing ledges scenario (ouch!). Head

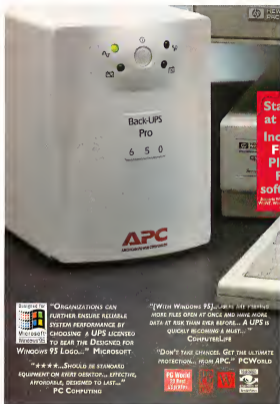


KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF When you see the stony end boss start to kneel, it means he's going to start hurling his fists at you. Lay low until the attack passes.

slingshot. Don't worry about running out of rocks—the game automatically replenishes your supply. With a little practice you'll be beating the ultimate four-armed baddie and winning the game with no problems whatsoever. ☺

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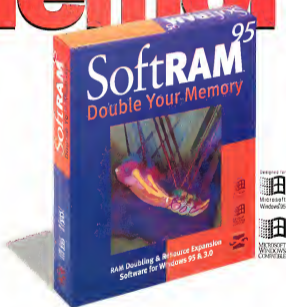


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Gem Dandy

TRITRYST Adds Some New Twists To An Old Puzzle Favorite

by JoAnne Springer

TRITRYST MIGHT WELL BE A CANDIDATE FOR A "WARNING: THIS GAME IS ADDICTIVE" label on the box.

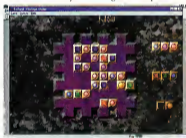
Although at first glance you might think that this new game from **Virgin Interactive** is just a Tetris wannabe, that doesn't mean the game has any less appeal. And it might even offer a little more glitter. The game starts you off with a grid-patterned square. As blocks of three gems appear on the screen, you move them into the grid by left mouse clicks. Clicking the right mouse button lets you rotate the direction of the gem block so you can place them vertically or horizontally. The object is pretty simple: match three of the same type of gems in a row. Arrange three glittering emeralds or three blue lapis in a row and those three blocks disappear from the screen, adding more points to your score and more space to your grid. Once you run out of spaces to fit the gems, the screen blocks out. So far, it's pretty familiar stuff.

ADDING SOME SPICE

Fortunately for those of us who like a little variety, there are different permutations of the game: Strategy, Arcade, and Timed. The first is leisurely, letting you map out a course of where to place what.

In the Arcade game, blocks of gems

fall from the top of the screen challenging you to clear them out as quickly as possible. If you're too slow, they start to pile up; once they reach to the top of the screen, the game freezes over. In this version, the controls are slightly different. If you don't click your left mouse button on a spot that can hold your gems, that block is lost, flying away off the screen. This has the advantage of eliminating blocks that you don't have time to deal with, but is also frustrating if you click the screen in the wrong place accidentally and lose a good block pattern.



GEM COLLECTING Tritryst is a simple puzzle game like Tetris where you match shapes and colors while avoiding actual work.

The Timed game option doesn't make you work against the clock in the traditional sense. Instead, a bar at the bottom of the screen starts scrolling down. Your goal, of course, is to get as many points as possible before it touches bottom. As a bonus, though, every time you clear a block of three gems, you're given a little more time; the faster you work, the better you do.

Other options enable you to choose

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

from over 100 different boards, ranging from a postage stamp with a "perforated" edge to a large X. If you're not into gems, you can change to other icons like leaves or butterflies. To make the game easier, set it to remove tiles when three are touching in any direction. Or, call for random appearances of two-gem blocks or one gem alone. Add L-shaped blocks or wildcards that match with any other color. To make the game harder, add blockers, or placeholders, that take up room on your grid.

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

The only complaint I have about TRITRYST is the scoring. Obviously, you can set the game to be significantly easier or harder, but making that change doesn't seem to affect the final score. If I set the game to give me one-gem blocks, which makes it much easier, I still get the same number of points each time I clear a series of three from the board. Realistically, though, TRITRYST doesn't strike me as the kind of game that would instill a sense of intense competition in anyone. With modem and network play, you can compete against friends, but it's the thrill of clearing the screen that will draw you in, not your final score. It's the kind of game you come back to when you're talking on the phone or, thanks to multitasking, when you're waiting for a file to finish downloading. I found it a delightful diversion that offers a convenient means of having fun without getting sucked into a full-blown gaming obsession. ☺

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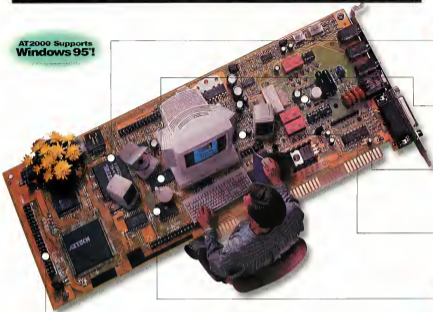
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Tetris With A Gun

PRESSURE DROP Tries To Put The Drop On Boredom

by JoAnne Springer

IF THE FOLKS AT STARHILL PRODUCTIONS HAVE THEIR WAY, Windows 95 desktops will soon be invaded by swarms of chromatic bricks. *PRESSURE DROP*, developed specifically for Windows 95, attempts to be *TETRIS* with more action. Blocks of multi-colored bricks fall from the sky, and you shoot them down. Thankfully, there is a little strategy thrown in: to blast a block from the screen, all the bricks must be the same color, and the same shade.

The gameplay is as simple as choosing the right color from your Chroma-gun and zipping around the bottom of the screen. *SPACE INVADERS*-style, blasting away at bricks. As the bricks drop down, they near the Pressure Ray, a bar that stretches across the screen. The more blocks you destroy, the lower the Pressure Ray drops, giving you more time to choose colors and scoot around the screen. As you might expect, when you miss a block of bricks and it hits the Pressure Ray, the bar is slightly raised, along with your stress level.

There are 20 zones, each with five levels, all painted with a different background screen. Once you've successfully shot your way through all levels, you receive a password; so if you're unlikely enough to get buried under a ton of bricks, you can continue

in that zone instead of starting from scratch.

FROM BRAINLESS TO BLASTING

The first zone started off as a kind of breezy point-and-shoot. Brainless. Blocks languished at the top of the screen, making it easy to maneuver. By level three, the speed cranked up considerably, and what's more, obstacles started creeping in. Suddenly, I found myself penned in by two walls, unable to move and helplessly watching blocks raining down. Fortunately, I was assisted by the Wind Cannon—two faces on each of the lower corners that "swallow" the Chroma-gun and then spit it out at high speed, giving me enough momentum to break through the walls.

As I progressed through the levels, different kinds of obstacles appeared. More walls penned me in, menaces pushed the Chroma-gun off target, enemies appeared in the sky and started shooting at me, and the bricks got shifter and trickier, making it harder to change the colors and destroy them. At the same time, though, I was offered power-ups, which do anything from destroying all the bricks on the screen in one shot, to increasing my score by 500 points. Naturally, you can't always expect power-ups to come to the rescue.

QUICK ADRENALINE

PRESSURE DROP has one- and two-player modes. In the latter, you can either compete against a friend or



UNDER PRESSURE The idea in *Pressure Drop* is to match up the color on the "ChromaGun" dial with the colored blocks in these falling bars. Who thinks up this stuff, anyways?

cooperate to blast away the invading bricks. Although the gameplay was good, the graphics were fuzzy and didn't have any overarching theme. The game we played came on two floppy disks, but a CD-ROM version is coming out soon for the same price.

So what's the final verdict? For a simple game, it's fun. It's easy to learn and quickly draws you in, making it perfect for those times you're sitting at your computer with a few extra minutes on your hands. However, it's not as incredibly addictive as some similar games, and, even though it's touted as "The most fun you'll have with Windows 95," it probably won't draw you back long after the shrink-wrap is gone. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

PRESSURE DROP

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Fun and easy to play. A good diversion if you have time at your desk.

CONS Average graphics, low replay value will keep this from being a permanent feature on your Win 95 desktop.

Pressure Drop

Price: \$29.95

System

Requirements: IBM compatible, 486/33 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, Windows 95, supports Sound Blaster compatible cards

of Players: 1-2

Protection: None

Publisher: Starhill Productions
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A Sub With Windows

COMMAND: ACES OF THE DEEP Gives Submariners A New Voice

by Kevin Turner

SIERRA'S ACES OF THE DEEP IS ACCURATE, CAPTIVATING, AND WONDERFULLY INTERACTIVE. It has a treasure trove of historical information on the CD version, and really submerges the player in the role of a German U-boat captain. The submarine simulation was popular enough to garner an add-on mission disk, which allowed players to venture into the Mediterranean and try out experimental submarines on Allied shipping. Now AOD's back again, enhanced and updated for Windows 95.

The latest release of AOD is called COMMAND: ACES OF THE DEEP (COMMAND). COMMAND incorporates the classic AOD, along with the Mediterranean scenario and a voice-recognition feature, on one CD. The game is now rendered with high-resolution SVGA graphics, which makes it all the more pleasant to play. And players now have the option of either having the crew live

the deck gun, or climbing down from the bridge and firing it manually.

I tried the gun at different ranges, and found that I could hit targets dependably out beyond 6,000 meters! The best use for the deck gun is during encounters with unescorted merchant ships during transits to operational areas.

RIG FOR WINDOWS 95

Unfortunately, for those who are presently Win 95 challenged, this game works only with that updated operating system. On my 486-66, switching between screens was slower than the DOS version, but on a Pentium it's relatively seamless. The game does seem to wait for you while the screens are shifting, so that the destroyer bearing down on your U-boat can't close while you go from periscope to tactical plot.

SPRECHEN SIE?

The most amazing thing about COMMAND AOD is that it is capable of responding to voice commands. There are many voice commands that AOD recognizes, and the manual uses three pages to cover them. From simple navigational commands to firing weapons and crash dives, there are a lot of different voice commands possible.

I used the voice commands, but found that my 486-66 with 8 MB of RAM was probably not adequate for this feature. Commands were recognized, but the game was very slow in performing them. Even when the command was not recognized, it seemed to take a few seconds for the game to let me know. Then again, the game box



DECK GUN KILL A lone Allied tanker suffers the wrath of a dead-eye U-boat captain with a big gun.

specifies a Pentium with 12 MB for voice recognition, so I was lucky to get it to work at all.

The second most amazing thing is the ease of installation. A couple of clicks and the game installs right away—without breaking sound cards, video modes or memory.

Finally, I have to admit that the first thing I did was check the music selection on the record player. Sure enough, it played *The Road to Tipperary*. This was one of my only complaints with the game. Now I'm going to have to find something new to complain about. Blast! ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

ACES OF THE DEEP

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Voice command, added sounds (in English and German), and improved graphics make an already superb game more realistic.

CONS No new missions. Although it requires Win 95 to run, it's not fully Win 95 compliant, and it runs on a Pentium-100 like the original does on a 486-33—adequately, but it won't set any speed records.

COMMAND: ACES OF THE DEEP

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

486-33 (486-66

recommended,

Pentium recom-

manded for voice

recognition); 8

MB RAM (12 MB r-

commended),

256-color SVGA, Windows 95, CD-

ROM, Sound Blaster or compatible

sound card

of Players: 1

Protection: None (runs without CD

after installation)

Designers: Mike Jones, Langdon

Beck

Publisher: Sierra On-Line

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Circle Reader Service #259

MechWarrior 2 Machinations

Hack Mechs To Shreds With These MECHWARRIOR 2 Utilities

by Jeff James

WHEN IT COMES TO ACTIVISION'S MECHWARRIOR 2, MOST GAMERS fall into one of two distinct camps. On one side, you have the die-hard Mech drivers: quick-fingered, steely-eyed killers weaned on FASA's original BATTLETECH and MECHWARRIOR boxed games, able to recite lines from the Remembrance while turning freethird newbies into scrap metal. On the other side of the equation, you have casual gamers out for an enjoyable romp through the war-torn vistas of the BATTLETECH universe; for these players, game accuracy takes a back seat to big explosions and frenetic gameplay.

To level the playing field for tenderfoot Mech jockeys, and to allow expert players to push the gaming envelope, we've rounded up a few cheats, hacks and hints to help you become master of the pixel-strewn battlefield. They may not help you become Khan overnight, but they will help even the odds. This month we take a look at three utilities: two named MECHEDIT (one for Windows and one for DOS), plus a cool patch file that allows you to take the field with the venerable Battlemaster Mech.

MECHEDIT v1.0

by James A. Sausville

Programmed by James A. Sausville, this DOS-based Mech-editing utility allows you to tinker with dozens of Mech configuration options. For example, you can increase the mass of a Mech up to 300 tons(!), allowing you to add vast amounts of armor and weaponry. You can also add jump jets, allocate heat sinks and perform



A BETTER MECH? MechEdit for DOS allows you to completely customize your Mechs.

several other operations on your walking war machines. You can customize user-created Mech variants only, (i.e. those found in the 'MEK' directory) but the tools provided should keep any mechophile happy. In addition to providing how-to-use instructions, a lengthy readme file is filled with tips, tricks and tactics on using MECHEDIT to your advantage.

to use, with a crisp, clean interface. Adding weapons and ammo to your custom Mech is only a few mouse clicks away, thanks to the clearly labeled list boxes and other design elements. On the downside, the included manual is a bit sparse, with minimal information on getting the most out of the utility. Like Sausville's DOS-based editing utility, this program allows you to cus-



WINDOWS BREAKTHROUGH MechEdit for Windows sports a clean, intuitive interface.

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tomize user-variant Mechs only.

You'll find MECHEDIT for Windows on America Online, as MECHEDIT.ZIP.

Battlemaster Patch

by Louis C. Hendricks

This program isn't actually a utility; it's an unauthorized patch file created with one purpose in mind—to allow MechWarrior 2 gamers to play the game using a "hidden" Mech, the Battlemaster. To use the patch, unzip the file contents to your MECH2 directory. Run the included batch file, and it will archive your original MW2SHELL.EXE and MW2PBJ files, replacing them with new, patched versions that allow you to choose the Battlemaster as your Mech in the Trials of Grievance. (To use the Battlemaster in combat, you must also follow the instructions listed in the MECHWARIOR 2 codes portion of this article.) Although I was able to use the Battlemaster in combat without any trouble, you may want to be a bit on the careful side when using this unofficial patch. You'll find the Battlemaster patch on America Online, filename BTLMSTR.ZIP

FINAL NOTE

As with all game cheats and hacking utilities, be aware that the use of these programs carries with it the risk of corrupted game files and other problems. Before attempting to use any of these programs, you should back up your saved game files to a safe location. Nothing can make a difficult game worse faster than a corrupted game file.

For more MECHWARIOR 2 hints and tips, check out the strategy guide on page 188 in this issue.

Jeff Jones, CGW columnist and Associate Editor of *The Electronic Roadhouse*, is available on CompuServe at 74774,1635 and through the Internet at 74774.1635@compuserve.com.

ZDNet

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 (CG WAREWORLD), and search in the Gamer's Edge library.

Cheat of the Month Club

MechWarrior 2 Cheat Codes

BLORB	Toggles invulnerability on/off
CIA	Toggles unrestricted ammunition on/off
COLDMISER	Toggles heat tracking on/off
DEI	Prints the letters "F E I P" at the top of the screen
DORCS	Displays info on and pictures of the MW2 programmers
ENLAGAGY	Drops the bombs; makes every enemy on the battlefield
FU*K	Prints "Freddy's vulgarly will not be tolerated!"
HANGAROUND	Allows you to linger on the battlefield after a mission has been completed
ICANTHACKIT	Ends the current mission
LOKFA	Prints "This ain't Doom, Bub" then ends current mission
WEEPWEEP	Enables time compression key
MICHELIN	Displays the bounding spheres on Mechs and Mech debris
NIGHTYHOUSE	Toggles infinite jumpjet juice on/off
SH*T	Prints "Freddy's vulgarly will not be tolerated!"
TINKERBELL	Provides a floating external camera
TLOFRONT	Switches the rear camera view to front view
UNWEEPWEEP	Disables time compression key
XRAY	Similar to enhanced imaging, but you can see through buildings and mountains
ZMAX	Enables line expansion

Recruiting Hidden Units

In MechWarrior 2, you can use three undisclosed units by following this procedure:

1. Select Trials of Grievance from the main menu.
2. Select the star configuration option (the five-pointed star) for the Mechs in your group.
3. In the configuration screen, erase your current call sign and replace it with the word ENZO.
4. Return to the Mech lab, and you'll be able to examine two new Mechs and a suit of combat armor worn by ten soldiers (the Tarantula, Battle Master and the Elemental combat armor).

The Elemental and the Tarantula can both be used in combat. Using the Battlemaster in combat will cause a program error, but this problem can be remedied by using Louis C. Hendricks' Battle Master utility (BTLMSTR.ZIP, described above) to patch the MW2 program files.



BATTEMASTER By using Louis Hendricks' unofficial patch and the appropriate cheat, you can broaden your Mech horizons.

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Circle Reader Service #95

The Writing Game

Exploring Game Writers And The Worlds They Create

by Paul C. Schuytema

"There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are."

—Somerset Maugham

SURE, WE CAN ALL SIT AROUND A CAMPFIRE AND SPIN TALES OF WIT, HORROR AND WONDER. IN fact, most humans, whether writers or not, are pretty good storytellers. Transforming a casual story into something deeper, a story that will really move your audience...well, that's a far more difficult task. As a writer, you need to be a student of human nature, an observer of our world, an anthropologist, psychologist and forensic pathologist. In short, a great writer must grasp the *big picture* before ever sitting down to write even the shortest of stories.

We also all possess some significant gifts as on-the-fly interactive storytellers. If you've ever made up a bedtime story for your tyke, you know what I mean. The story will grow and evolve in response to your child's input ("Was the teddy bear brown, daddy?" "Yes, as a matter of fact, the teddy bear was chocolate brown." "And his name was Gramboo, wasn't it?" "Yes, and Gramboo went for a walk through the woods..."). Yet even the most interactive and imaginative of these types of story sessions are very chaotic, plot-wise, and don't really present us with a story-world to inhabit.

That responsibility lies with the writers and designers of our best computer games. As players, we want our game worlds to be our playgrounds. We want to roam and explore freely, yet we want to be driven—to participate in exciting and enchanting quests, and we never, ever

want to become bored. That's a very tall order indeed.

In the most artfully crafted of novels, the writer has complete control. Plot, character and conflict are all pre-scripted, and therefore, they can be carefully and gracefully explored and investigated. But

great examples of on-the-fly story creation. Yet those stories, as opposed to a kid's bedtime story, tend to take place within a specific world with specific characters and specific quests. If, however, we were to transcribe a night's adventure session, we would have the text of a very



CHRISTY'S LAW OF INTERACTIVITY Designer Christy Marx (Cowen & Cowen) represents the old guard of "interactive story-tellers," while Katherine Lawrence (The News West) is a relative newcomer to the field. They both agree on one thing, however: Gamers represent Chaos, and always find clever ways around limits in any game design.

tell Fitzgerald that we'd rather play than read *The Great Gatsby*, and I'm sure that even F. Scott would blow a gasket.

WHAT ARE THE RULES?

There are no hard and fast rules for creating a great novel, and there is even less known about creating an interactive or role-playing story for a computer game. Many of us have played pencil and paper role-playing games, and those are

wandering and less-than-stellar story. Nonetheless, the excitement of participating in the adventure allows us to forgive plot missteps, hiccups in our quests and blatant inaccuracies.

So how do writers craft an interactive story? If there is one universal dictum, it is that an interactive story (or script) must pay homage to the technology and design limitations of the game itself. Sometimes this means working up a script for a game

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Circle Reader Service #1107

that is nearly complete, with just the story missing—a kind of literary "reverse engineering," according to writer Katherine Lawrence.

"Reverse engineering perversely liberates my creativity," says Lawrence. "When I can write absolutely anything, it's up to me to find the focus. When there's an existing structure, and I need to come up with the story logic, backstory and add the characters, I'm free to come up with anything that fits the structure."

A SHOTGUN MARRIAGE

On the other hand, this relationship between story and technology may begin as a shotgun marriage in the early moments of a game's gestation. "A constant point of debate," says Origin's Richard Garriott (a.k.a. Lord British), "is just how useful it is to write a scripted story or just let it evolve as we go. The nice thing about writing a script ahead of time is that it lets you make sure that your character development is good, lets you embellish your key characters, and lets you check your pacing. The bad part is that until you have built at least some part of the game technology, you just don't have a clue as to what kind of things your game engine can do well, and you always want to choose plot elements that your engine does well."

"When we began planning ULTIMA IX, we all sat down and made a list of objectives. For example, we wanted to bring back horses that you can ride, and we also wanted to let the players create their own magical weapons. We even debated the use of polygonal actors, so we wouldn't have to store as many frames of animation. Basically, it was a list of features, but a lot are technological in nature."

From there, the Origin team was able to brainstorm the "highpoints" of the

game, those places where the plot comes back together to advance the flow of the game. Armed with that plot structure and a solid technological foundation, Garriott set out to craft an oral tale, almost a folktale, of the adventure.

"As a storyteller, what I do is sit back and tell my story," he says. "I won't even have to wait for their feedback. I'm watching my audience well enough to watch when they're smiling or not paying attention, or bored or excited. Then the next time I tell the story, I use those reactions to modify the story. It stays a folktale for quite some time—until it becomes difficult for me to remember all of the parts."

Once the story seems rich enough to hold a player's interest, and the details

from the beginning of a tale through to the climax. In a movie or a novel, the plot can be tweaked, examined and modified to become the most exciting series of events possible. When talking about a computer game, things are different. We want to explore our game world freely, which necessarily throws a wrench in the ability of the writer/designer to craft a coherent, taut plot.

How often have we criticized a game for being too "scripted" or not allowing us enough freedom? The tension between the need for a decent plot and the need for player freedom—free will versus determinism, if you will—is quite often only resolved through compromise. If certain events must occur to move the player to the next portion of the game, the trick is to make the gamer feel that he or she has effected the change.

One method is to create a closed region that can only be escaped after the player has completed several sub-quests. In *Sierra On-Line's* venerable *CONQUEST OF CAMELOT*, writer/designer Christy Marx chose to limit the player to Camelot at the outset of the game. There was only one exit, and it would not open until the player fulfilled several conditions. This way was far easier for Marx, as a writer, to manage the player's actions. "I'd say the single most important thing I had to learn," Marx reflects, "is that players do not do things in a logical or sensible fashion. Players are the Force of Chaos. This came as a jolt, because I am such a logical person and I was so accustomed to modes of linear thought."

Another approach to creating adventure games is the infamous "branching tree," where the player has an option of choosing either option A or B many times during a game. From a writing and design standpoint, this just doesn't work. After only 12 decision points, a game would have to manage over 4,000 discrete plot threads, and this number soon gets so large that it becomes ludicrous. So writers and designers need to be a little more clever, providing a varied but controllable plot while maintaining a sense of limitlessness.

CHARACTER WITNESS

Plot is one thing, and it is a beast to



THE AVATAR OR THE EGG? Origin's Lord British says that writing a game's script cannot be successfully achieved until many of the technological decisions have been made.

are too cumbersome for Garriott to remember, the design team will sit down to craft their black book, "which is essentially an interactive script, or the bible, for the game, divided up by geographic regions rather than by linear plot elements."

"I really believe, though," states Garriott, "that you must complete a fairly significant amount of the technological decisions before the interesting and exciting plot details can evolve."

THE PLOT THICKENS

Plot is the driving force behind any exciting game or story or movie. It is, essentially, the sequence of events that takes us

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Below is a sample taken from the script of *Return to Zork* from Activision, written by Michelle Em. This sample clearly shows how an interactive script writer must not only write dialogue and actions, but must also write for the various player responses.

WITCH ITAM

FIRST MEETING

(absentmindedly dippy; putting a load in boiling water)

"Oh, hello. The potion's not ready yet but you could have a cup of tea. Frogs have to boll down a bit. I used too much water."

A THACATED?

(indignant)

"Some guest!" (turns player into a bog slug)

THEY ARE BORED?

"A little shy, huh? You just sit there and sip your tea until you feel better."

(continues adding disgusting things to pot: dirty roots, lizards, etc.)

BT:BORED!

"Bored, are you? A walk in the bog will cure that."

BT:SMILE!

(smiles back sincerely)

"Someone special used to smile at me like that."

(gets dreamy)

"But we haven't spoken in ages... forget why."

(quickly gets back to work)

manage; but all great storytelling does not revolve around plot, it uses plot. The heart and soul of story is character. It is the richness and struggles of characters that make a story linger in our minds. For a fiction writer, crafting characters is a task that requires great skill and an artful blending of creativity and insight. We all know the dissatisfaction we feel, as readers, if a character performs some action that just doesn't seem to "fit."

"A short story and a computer game can have identical depth of characterization," says Katherine Lawrence. "Characterization isn't dependent on the medium; it depends on the writer and the backstory. In *MicroProse's THIS MEANS WAR*, the characterization is almost entirely through dialogue, but by the end of the game, you understand the characters just as much as if you had read a short story about them."

Napoleonne is a computer-controlled general who opposes you in *THIS MEANS WAR*. After you deal her a minor setback, she responds with one of the dialogue snippets below, all of which give some insight into her personality:

a. Your technology has given you the advantage, for the moment. But the

woman of genius always gets back on her feet. I am back on my feet already.

b. This battle was not another Waterloo, merely a skirmish.

c. *C'est la Guerre*, Colonel. But the fortunes of war will change.

d. Your Alliance is strong, but the Fourth Empire must be stronger.

e. You caught me with my sword sheathed. Never again.

Occasionally, she responds randomly with:

a. Great leaders are meteors destined to burn up the earth.

b. Clever policy consists in making nations believe they are free.

A more famous game designer/writer, *Sierra On-Line's* Roberta Williams, admits, "I've probably written more adventure games than anyone, but *PHANTASMAGORIA* is a game in which the story, not the puzzles, is most important. The writing was one of the most, if not the most, important factors. As we were fleshing out the stories and the characters, we started talking about them as people. We began thinking about their motivations and their childhoods. That background really helped in the writing process. Comedy and horror are, I think,

the hardest to write. When you're writing horror, you're trying to tap into people's raw, untapped emotions. You want them to be shocked or scared in spite of themselves."

DID YOU SAY PROGRAMMING, TOO?

More often than not, today's computer game writers also have a hand in the design and flow of the game. This can occur at the outset, but frequently, the nature of a game script forces a writer to become a programmer of sorts. Instead of just writing fluid prose, game writers must write dialogue and exposition that matches decision points within the game. If you look at an object, for example, then a particular phrase will appear. Interacting with a character might elicit any one of several responses, depending on whether you smiled, kicked his shins or gave him a gold coin.

"The thing that's hardest to imagine, from a pure writing standpoint," says Williams, "is that most writers think in terms of plot and character, but don't think in programming terms. To write for a computer game, you need to have some object-oriented thought going on."

Writing fascinating stories, whether for a game or a novel, requires a blending of art and craft. Art is the portion of writing that comes from our creativity, experience and intellect, and enables the magic to happen. But to turn that flow of emotion and genius into a game script, a writer has to be very deft at the craft, at the nuts and bolts of writing.

A game writer needs to know what hooks us as players. We need rich characters, quests worth tackling, and, more than anything, we want to feel that the story we are participating in is larger than life. And, of course, we want to feel that we are guided by our own free will and not by the whims of the designer and writer.

That skill requires more than just great word-smithery and a knowledge of commas and semicolons. It requires a true understanding of the conventions of good game design, and a true appreciation for us, the players, those happy "Forces of Chaos." ☛

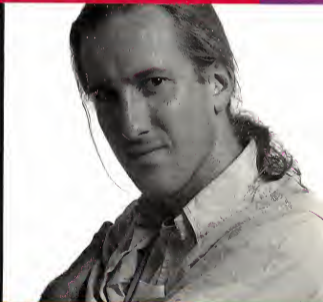
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Afraid To Upgrade?



Tips & Tricks For A Cleaner Windows 95 Installation

by Loyd Case

OKAY, SO YOU'VE TAKEN THE PLUNGE AND FLUNGED DOWN \$89 FOR WINDOWS 95. THE sky-blue box sits on your desk, beckoning you to install it, but you have this nagging fear that PANZER GENERAL won't run (or MECHWARRIOR 2 or...well, name your poison). Further, you've got Windows 3.1, and you're worried about keeping your old applications running, even though they take a back seat to your favorite game. All of these are natural fears (I had them, too), so here's a few thoughts on how to bring up Win 95 cleanly, and with a minimum of fuss.

WHAT TO BACK UP BEFORE YOU START

The first thing you must do, is back up your system. If you have a nearly full gigabyte drive and only a floppy for backup, then definitely back up your data files, such as saved games and documents—you don't want to spend another 80 hours replicating your ACES OVER EUROPE

SHORT CIRCUITS

Quarterdeck, a company synonymous with wringing out maximum conventional memory from DOS, is ready for Windows 95 with new versions of QEMM and CleanSweep. QEMM for Windows 95, according to Quarterdeck, adds 32-bit memory compression for Windows 95. CleanSweep for Windows 95 will "surgically remove" unwanted 16- and 32-bit Windows programs, or archive them for backup or re-installation into another directory. While QEMM For Windows 95 isn't scheduled for release until December, CleanSweep should be available by the time you read this for \$39.95. Call (310) 392-9851 for more information. Or visit Quarterdeck's web site at "<http://www.qdeck.com>".

veteran, or rewriting your master's thesis. Also back up the following key files: AUTOEXEC.BAT, CONFIG.SYS, WIN.INI (if you have Windows; it's in the Windows directory), SYSTEM.INI (also in the Windows directory), and any file on your disk with an extension of .INI, .GRP, or .CFG.

From DOS, you can check every directory for the presence of an .INI file by typing DIR /S /P *.INI. This will search your entire disk for files with an .INI extension and list them a page at a time. Similarly, you can then copy them off to floppy by using the command: XCOPY /S C:*.INI A: (where A: is your floppy drive).

This assumes you have a set of original DOS and Windows install disks, as well as the install disks for most of your applications. If you're running the QEMM or 386MAX memory managers, you might consider backing up those directories as well, although it's not necessary if you have the original installation disks. It will save some time if you have to beat a hasty retreat.

Okay, now your key information is fairly safe. Now let's think about how you want to install Win 95. There are three options. The best is to perform a full, fresh install, including formatting your hard disk. Next is upgrading your existing Windows/DOS installation to Win 95. Finally, if you have the space you can install Win 95 into a separate directory, maintaining your current Win 3.1 and DOS setups. I've survived all of these methods, so let's take a look at each in more detail.

FULL INSTALL

This is probably the cleanest option, if you can do this. It involves either backing up your entire hard disk and formatting the drive, or installing a new hard disk as the boot drive. There's nothing to re-

member, no worries about viruses, and no conflicts with memory managers. Win 95 should also cleanly detect all your devices, although our experience indicates that it will occasionally assume incorrect settings for the sound card. You'll need to restore your data files from backups and re-install your applications, but this will result in the cleanest setup with no scary remnants of Win 3.1

UPGRADING YOUR EXISTING WINDOWS 3.1 AND DOS

This option probably creates the most problems. Definitely back up all of your configuration files before doing an upgrade. If you tell Win 95 to back up your system files as you install it, its uninstall feature will let you remove Win 95 and restore your original Windows 3.1/DOS setup if you have problems.

Prior to doing the upgrade, take a little time to study your AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files. If you're like most game players, you're no doubt using a memory manager such as QEMM, EMM386 or 386MAX. Before upgrading, you want to set these memory managers to their most basic mode of operation. In other words, for EMM386, run MEMMAKER (unless you are running multiple configs) in manual mode. Read each choice carefully, and turn off the "Scan upper memory aggressively" feature. This turns off a feature called HIGHSCAN that can prevent Win 95 from finding all the hardware in your system. Similarly, for QEMM, you need to rerun OPTIMIZE and turn STEALTH off.

During the upgrade, Win 95 will bring over all of your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files intact, with some minor changes. After the upgrade finishes, edit your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files from within Win 95 and

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strip out most of the original DOS stuff. Specifically, remove your mouse driver, your SCSI driver if you have one) and your MSCDEX CD-ROM extensions. These drivers are replaced by 32-bit versions built into the operating system. If you run a game from within Win 95 that doesn't require rebooting into MS-DOS mode, then it will have access to all of the drivers. The only thing that's critical is to keep the sound card environment in your AUTOEXEC.BAT file. This command typically looks something like this: SET BLASTER=A220 I5 D1 H5 P330 T6.

For games that only run in MS-DOS mode, you'll want to set custom configurations for each game (see the article on running DOS games under Windows 95 in last month's issue). In case you're wondering where your groups went, you'll find them as menu items within the Start Button menu, under Programs.

One feature that many folks don't realize is still available under Win 95 is multi-config, originally added in MS-DOS 6. Win 95 can be set up to boot to any of a number of multiple configurations in CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT. If you have games that will run under Windows (as opposed to MS-DOS mode), but need the odd driver or special memory

manager configuration, then multi-config is very convenient. If you already had a multi-config set up for DOS 6, then it will be migrated over, with some drivers (such as SMARTDRV and MSCDEX) commented out.

One potential hazard of installing over Win 3.1 is the possibility that old drivers and system files may still be referenced in the SYSTEM.INI file, causing system crashes. So you're much better off choosing one of the other install options, as you'll need to be pretty knowledgeable about your SYSTEM.INI file to fix any crash or lock-up problems yourself.

THE NO UPGRADE UPGRADE

The final way to install Win 95 is to set it up in a separate directory from your old Windows installation. This assumes you have a spare 40 to 75 megabytes to install Win 95. You get the benefits of a clean Windows installation without the potential hazards of upgrading. The downside is that if you've been a heavy Windows user in the past, none of your program groups or software setups will migrate over, so you'll have to re-install all your old applications. (Note that they can be re-installed in the same directory, so you can access the apps from either

Win 3.1 or Win 95.)

If you don't want to deal with re-installing, several companies have products that will come to your rescue. We used a utility called the Upgrade Assistant, which comes with **Vertisoft's REMOVE-IT 2.0**, to migrate our applications. The Upgrade Assistant will convert over your program manager groups (including groups from third-party shell programs, such as **NORTON DESKTOP** and **PC TOOLS FOR WINDOWS**) to Win 95 start menu entries. It also will migrate key Win 3.1 configuration files. Unfortunately, this can cause the same kinds of problems as simply upgrading your Win 3.1 directory, with old driver entries in SYSTEM.INI causing system crashes.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The absolutely cleanest way is to install Win 95 into a separate directory and manually reinstalling your Win 3.1 applications. This will cause the fewest headaches, but is the most time-consuming method.

Upgrading to Win 95 can be a painful process, but if you take some care to back up your most critical information and have a little patience, then the process will go much smoother. ☺

THE PARTS DEPT.

Crank Up Your PC Sound By Tuning In On Your Stereo

by Loyd Case

Every now and then, someone comes up with a nifty, low-cost gadget that makes you say, "gee, why didn't I think of that?" Imagine a device that lets the sounds of exploding enemy mechs boom forth out of your home stereo—without all the wires and hassle! The H45 Technology CD-FM is a little box, about the size of a Twinkie, that transmits in the FM band. You tune your stereo to a free channel between 88.1 and 89.1 on your FM dial, and then adjust a wheel on the CD-FM to match the frequency. When you play a

game with audio, the sound comes out of your stereo, and if you have decent stereo speakers the fidelity is such better than typical multimedia speakers. If you have a boom box or stereo in your game-playing area, this your chance to retire those lousy multi-

media speakers for good. You can also listen to CDs on your car stereo with the CD-FM and a portable CD player.



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The CD-FM isn't perfect; for one thing, the range is limited. The stereo near the computer picked up the signal just fine, but a stereo in another room picked up the audio faintly, and with a lot of static. Still, at \$39.95 this is an ingenious toy for someone who's tired of tiny little speakers. For more information, call: (415) 961-9114.

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If you want to be able to play games on your laptop, you know what it's like to play a game without a CD-ROM drive, joystick or sound. Joy-less, in a word. There are some hot new multimedia portables coming out, but some of us have to make do. If your laptop has a free PC Card slot (formerly known as a PCMCIA slot), then you're in luck. Pop the Axonic ProMEDIA PLAYER PC Card into the free slot on the portable, and you have in-

stant audio, a CD-ROM drive, and a joystick port.



While this all sounds cool, the ProMedia falls short in some areas. Because of the lack of DMA with PC Cards, you can't have Sound Blaster compatibility, which is problematic for

most DOS games (but isn't a problem with Windows). Also, the CD-ROM is only double speed. We ran the Windows version of SPACE QUEST 6, and the sound was reasonably good, considering the small speakers, but occasionally the CD would stall. A dialog box would pop up telling us the CD-ROM had failed, but after clicking OK we got audio back. (Of course, we were trying to run a high-resolution game on a 33 MHz 486SX.) Grolier's MULTIMEDIA ENCYCLOPEDIA worked fine.

The other problem with the ProMEDIA is ergonomic. The parts fit together rather clumsily, and the battery door was nearly impossible for my fat fingers to replace once removed. On the other hand, if you're itching to play your latest CD title, then take a look at the ProMEDIA. Price: \$549 with audio; \$329 CD only. For more information, call (801) 521-9797.

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- 01 Less than high school or less
02 Completed High School
03 Some College or Technical school
04 Graduated College
05 Post-Graduate school

2. Computer currently owned is:

- 01 IBM compatible (not standard)
02 Macintosh
03 Amiga
04 Dedicated game machine
05 None

3. If total, what level? (Check one only)

- 01 Power PC
02 Pentium 386
03 486
04 386
05 286

4. Do you plan to plan to buy in next 6 months?

- 01 Yes
02 No
03 Plan to buy (6 months)

5. How often do you usually buy computer games?

- 01 Once a week
02 Once every two to three weeks
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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)
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02 Computer store chain
03 Computer electronic store
04 Direct from vendor
05 Mass merchandising store
06 Mail order

7. What is your usual rating in knowledge/skill/level of play? (Check one in each column)

	Novice	Other 1	Other 2
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1 What is the highest level of education that you completed? (Check one only)

- 01 Some high school or less
- 02 Graduated High School
- 03 Some College or Technical school
- 04 Graduated College
- 05 Post Graduate school

2 Do you own a computer? (Check one only)

- 01 IBM compatible (Intel standard)
- 02 Macintosh
- 03 Apple
- 04 Educational game machine
- 05 None

3 If male, what is your marital status? (Check one only)

- 01 Power PC
- 02 Pentium (586)
- 03 486
- 04 386
- 05 286

4 Do you ever plan to buy in next 6 months? (Check one only)

- 01 Yes
- 02 Plans to buy in 6 months

5 How often do you usually buy computer games? (Check one only)

- 01 Once a week
- 02 Once every two to three weeks
- 03 Once a month
- 04 Once every two to three months
- 05 Once every four to six months
- 06 Once a year

6 Where do you most likely purchase games? (Check all that apply)

- 01 Independent computer store
- 02 Computer store chain
- 03 Computer software store
- 04 Computer software store
- 05 Direct from vendor
- 06 Mass merchandising store
- 07 Mail order

7 What is your (and others in household) average type of game? (Check one or two columns)

	Research	Other 1	Other 2
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HIGHLIGHTS



SIMCITY MAXIS, 1987

Like so many "ultimate success stories," SIMCITY had its initial share of gloom. The premise—building your own town from scratch, then running every aspect of it—was so revolutionary that the game was actually *rejected* by a software publisher, because there "wasn't enough game to it." Undaunted, designer Will Wright continued to follow his muse, and from the humble beginnings of this simple "software toy" came the Maxis SIMEmpire of SIMEARTH, SIMFARM, SIMANT and SIMCITY 2000. These titles, and those that will doubtless come after them, are best-sellers because they tap into the sheer joy of discovery. SIMCITY may not be a game, but it's certainly a product that revels in creativity for its own sake. Challenging on many levels, it manages to critically evaluate your performance, even as you enjoy it. What more could you ask from any piece of entertainment?



STARFLIGHT ELECTRONIC ARTS, 1986

There haven't been very many good science-fiction role-playing games; but even if there were, STARFLIGHT would still be among the best. Designer Greg Johnson crafted a deep role-playing world and filled it with rich non-player characters that were truly *alien*, all driven by unique motives scarcely discernable to mere humans. For the first time in a computer RPG, players were forced to use diplomacy to win the game. Exploration was not only fun, it was so fascinating that many gamers chose to journey from one fractally-generated planet to another, sometimes ignoring the plot entirely. STARFLIGHT had depth, great characters and a good storyline, qualities that many of today's more gorgeous (but often empty) RPGs still can't match.

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 BARON (Dynamix, 1990)

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION (MicroProse, 1991)

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)

INDUCTEES PRIOR TO 1989

BATTLE CHESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)

CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)

DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)

EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)

EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)

F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)

GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)

KAMMPFENNE (Strategic Simulations, 1986)

MECH BROTHERS (Strategic Simulations, 1986)

MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)

M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)

PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)

SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)

STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)

THE BARR'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)

ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)

ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)

WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)

WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)

WIZARDRY (Se-Tech Software, 1981)

ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

RANK	GAME	PRICE	GENRE
1	Day of the Tentacle	9.87	LucasArts
2	Full Throttle	9.58	LucasArts
3	Gabriel Knight	9.42	Sierra
4	Wendell & Unsubtle	9.38	Sierra
5	LucasArts	9.33	LucasArts
6	Sam & Max Hit The Road	9.25	Virgin
7	The Seventh Guest	9.14	Spectra
8	Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	9.12	Electronic Arts
9	Behaviors	8.89	Playmates
10	Under A Killing Moon	8.84	Access



TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

RANK	GAME	PRICE	GENRE
1	Betrayer at Novador	9.64	Orion
2	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xos	9.37	New World Computing
3	Lords of Love	9.25	Virgin
4	Ultima VII: Part Two: The Scepter Isle	9.06	Orion
5	Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes	8.97	New World Computing
6	Overlord: The Inner Sanctum	8.96	SSI
7	Arms: The Elder Scrolls	8.64	Bethesda
8	Wolf	8.49	Sanctuary Woods
9	Wall of Darkness	8.49	SSI
10	Monobrotherhood	8.26	SSI



TOP SIMULATION GAMES

RANK	GAME	PRICE	GENRE
1	MicroProse	10.01	Playmates
2	US Navy Fighters	9.89	Electronic Arts
3	Wings of Glory	9.58	Orion
4	Flight Unlimited	9.46	Playmates
5	Isle of the Bep	9.38	Orion
6	Arm of the Bep	9.25	MicroProse
7	Planet Defender	8.84	Spectra
8	Barnet	8.66	Orion
9	Area Over Europe	8.64	Spectra
10	MB-28	8.64	Spectra



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

RANK	GAME	PRICE	GENRE
1	X-COM	10.37	MicroProse
2	Master of Orion	10.20	MicroProse
3	Warlords II	9.93	SSI
4	Jagged Alliance	9.81	Si-Tech
5	Master of Magic	9.66	MicroProse
6	Warlords	9.64	Buzart
7	Sea City 2000	9.51	Moss
8	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	9.38	MicroProse
9	Syndicate	9.07	Electronic Arts
10	Merchant Prizes	9.08	QIP



TOP 100 GAMES

RANK	GAME	PRICE	GENRE	DEV
1	Wing Commander 3	10.57	Orion	AC
2	Prince of Persia	10.46	SSI	WB
3	X-COM	10.37	MicroProse	ST
4	YIE-FUHER	10.26	LucasArts	AC
5	DDM4	10.24	id Software	AC
6	Master of Orion	10.20	MicroProse	ST
7	MicroProse	10.01	Playmates	ST
8	Warlords II	9.93	SSI	ST
9	Warlords	9.87	LucasArts	AO
10	NBA Live '95	9.86	Electronic Arts	SP
11	Jagged Alliance	9.81	Si-Tech	ST
12	Dark Forces	9.77	id Software	AC
13	Master of Magic	9.70	LucasArts	AC
14	Vernal Pool	9.56	MicroProse	ST
15	Front Page Sports Football 95	9.56	Orion	SP
16	Front Page Sports Football Pro	9.44	Orion	SP
17	Warrior	9.44	Buzart	ST
18	X-Wing	9.44	LucasArts	AC
19	US Navy Fighters	9.40	Electronic Arts	AC
20	V-19: Victory: Market Garden	9.38	Thorn-Studio Pacific	WB
21	Full Throttle	9.38	LucasArts	AC
22	Wings of Glory	9.38	Orion	SP
23	Scallegard	9.38	Orion	SP
24	Sea City 2000	9.37	Moss	WB
25	Sea City 2000	9.31	Moss	ST
26	NHL Hockey	9.49	Electronic Arts	SP
27	Magic Carpet	9.48	Electronic Arts	AC
28	Flight Unlimited	9.45	Locking Glass	SP
29	Betrayer at Novador	9.44	Orion	SP
30	War in Russia	9.44	SSI	WB
31	Isle of the Bep	9.43	Orion	ST
32	Gabriel Knight	9.42	Sierra	AO
33	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	9.38	MicroProse	ST
34	Arm of the Bep	9.38	Orion	SP
35	Wendell & Unsubtle	9.38	Sierra	AO
36	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xos	9.37	New World Computing	WB
37	Operator's Crusader	9.36	Anxon Hill	WB
38	Flight Commander 2	9.35	Anxon Hill	WB
39	Sam & Max Hit The Road	9.31	LucasArts	AO
40	Lords of Love	9.25	Virgin	EP
41	The Seventh Guest	9.25	Virgin	EP
42	Planet Defender	9.25	MicroProse	ST
43	System Shock	9.14	Orion	AC
44	Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	9.14	Spectra	AO
45	Behaviors	8.84	Playmates	AC
46	Red Faction	8.84	Electronic Arts	AO
47	Ecstacy	8.84	Playmates	WB
48	Merchant Prizes	9.08	QIP	WB
49	Merchant Prizes	9.08	QIP	ST
50	Ultima VII: Part Two: The Scepter Isle	9.08	Orion	EP



PATCHES

1830 July Upgrade: Fixes a minor bug with the C & SL (only occurred on 1st turn). Also upgrades to V & G hot keys, which will now turn on and off the city Values and hex Grids. 8/1/95

Bill James Encyclopedia Update: Eliminates bug that restricts you from accessing the biographies of non-players. 6/7/95

Blood Bowl Madmen Patch V1.1: Adds modem play and fixes a number of known quirks. 6/7/95

Colonization For Windows Update: Corrects some problems with the Win95 beta as well as other fixes for the original Windows version. 7/5/95

Confirmed Kill Beta Update: Brings versions 0.8.1 and 0.8.2 up to "0.3" status—the flickering view and other known problems are fixed. 6/3/95

Cyberia Save Game Patch: Corrects problems with the game not saving milestones after the conference room. 6/6/95

Descent Registered V1.4a Update: Fixes reported bugs. 6/23/95

Dungeon Master 2 Sound Fix: Patches both the demo and the retail version. 7/29/95

Flight Unlimited V2.0: Contains two physics fixes, two video fixes, fixes a couple of controller bugs, a mouse driver problem, and adds total energy compensation to the Grob's variometer. 8/30/95

Hardball 4 Gameplay Patch: Introduces 10 levels of difficulty as well as providing other repairs and fixes. Also fixes some playability and compatibility problems. 8/22/95

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common. Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs.

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major on-line networks (CompuServe, EMail, ZiffNet) and Computer Gaming World's Web Site (<http://www.ziff.com/~gaming/>), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's BBSes or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase. **Red** indicates new titles.

Klik N' Play V1.1y Update: Works only with the U.S. version, fixes several reported bugs. 7/7/95

Lords Of Midnight Update: Provides multiple fixes to Domark's RPG/strategy game. 9/5/95

Machiavelli The Prince V1.1 Update: Fixes several bugs. 6/23/95

NASCAR V1.2 Modem Patch: Addresses difficulties in playing NASCAR RACING via modem or null modem cable. This patch does not affect any other issues. 7/21/95

Osar Sharil Bridge Update: Corrects the "speech driver not found" error message, and allows Sound Blaster support at IRQ 5. 6/30/95

Red From Sumter To Appomattox Update: Improves the AI and fixes some combat results in e-mail mode, primarily making sure there is always counter artillery battery fire when artillery is available. Also units on a city unable to retreat will retreat into the city garrison. 7/15/95

SimCity 2000 V1.2 Update (Macintosh): This Power PC update only works with version 1.0 or the 68K V1.1. 8/29/95

Slipstream 5000 Update: Fixes some problems with

modem users not being able to properly connect. 8/2/95

Stalingrad Update V1.85: Fixes reported problems. PC and Macintosh versions available. 8/25/95

Super Street Fighter 2 V1.5 Update: Corrects music and sound problems, movement bugs and gamepad calibration problems. Also includes a FAQ with information, tips, hints and codes. 6/9/95

Tank Commander V1.2 Update: Contains several fixes including removing the sharing violation error and fixing the partial install routine. 8/1/95

The Perfect General 2 Update: Updates some scenarios and includes a resign feature, as well as fixing some other small bugs. 6/9/95

USS Ticonderoga Update: Adds the following enhancements: support for the GUS, PAS and Ensoniq sound cards. Additionally, weapons on board now display in a number format. 6/21/95

Virtual Pool Video Drivers Update: These are the latest batch of video drivers for the full or demo version. 6/23/95

Warlords II V1.0.7: Fixes multiple problems. 8/28/95

Wing Commander 3 Thrustmaster Hat Patch: Fixes problems associated with the Thrustmaster controller. 6/27/95

World Of Xeen For Macintosh V1.1 Update: Fixes many user-reported problems and adds a Power PC native mode. 6/2/95

X-COM: Terror From The Deep V2.0 Update: Numerous tweaks and fixes to X-COM 2. 6/3/95

Zephyr V1.1 Upgrade: Adds modem and network play as well as fixing a couple of video and headset problems. 6/20/95

Publisher BBS Numbers

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N=8-1.

Aculade (428) 256-8300

Ayeyee (508) 368-7036

Bethesda (301) 990-7552

Blizzard (714) 556-4602

Broadband (415) 883-6889

Capstone (305) 374-6872

Creative Labs (405) 742-6650

Id Software (508) 368-4137

Impressions (617) 225-2042

InterPlay (714) 252-2822

LucasArts (415) 257-3070

Maxis (510) 254-3859

MicroProse (410) 785-1841

Microsoft (206) 936-6735

NavLogix (813) 774-9528

Origin (512) 328-8402


Papyrus (617) 576-7472

Sierra Online (205) 844-0112

Spectrum Holobyte (510) 522-5909

SSI (408) 739-5137 or (408) 739-5623

Virgin Interactive (714) 833-3306



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What's The Deal With... Arcade Sensibilities?



by Martin E. Cirulis

IN THESE GLORIOUS DAYS WHERE THE THREE BLIND GODS, GATES, GEFFEN AND SPIELBERG, HAVE GATHERED TO THROW MONEY and personal assistants at each other while they determine what to do with the world of entertainment software (which they have "discovered" in the true Columbus-in-sense-of-the-word), it has become decidedly unfashionable to discuss the roots of our hobby. It's like digging under your family tree, only to discover that your ancestors actually worked in a restaurant called "The Mayflower." But as much as I would like to look forward to sophistication and respectability, I think we have to take a moment from time to time and look to our roots. Not in empty nostalgia (Please God, no more Atari Crap-Packs for Windows), but in an almost Darwinistic way, trying to spot bad design trends in modern games by tracing them back to their Neanderthal origins.

No matter how you cut it, computer games owe their existence to the dark, tacky depths of the video arcades of the early eighties, where twitch reflexes were married to new-born graphics, and an entire sunlight-deprived adolescence could pass in a wash of tinkling quarters and falling grades. In those days, the machines were simple, and the game designs even more so. Since the point was to draw you in and your allowance out, the player was responsible for everything; every action and result was dependent on you and your youthful reflexes.

Well, times change, and from that early love of chip-generated gameplay grew our diverse and complex hobby. But it still amazes me how many designers and

publishers cling to arcade sensibilities in any computer game that requires a joystick, ignoring the one true strength of programming a game for machines with number-crunching power to spare: Simulation. Now, this isn't necessarily simulation in the FALCON or NASCAR RACING sense—just a touch of reality, a nod to the implications of whatever premise I happen to be happily wasting my time with.

For example: deep in the throes of NHL HOCKEY '96, I am greenlining down the ice in control of the plucky Buré, trying to put right the cruel turn of fate that led to the Rangers defeating the noble Canucks in the '94 final. After dumping a hapless defenseman, I break the Russian Rocket down the side of the rink and prepare to let fly from about 12 feet out, but instead of Buré taking my command and using all his expansive skill to put the puck behind the goalie, I am suddenly faced trying to aim a tiny puck at a goal an inch across and choosing how high and to which side it should go...all in an arcade heartbeat.

What the heck is this about?

I like control as much as the next megalomaniac, but I've shelled out big bucks for this machine and don't want to be back in the arcade. When I press that button, I want a decent approximation of Buré's skill handling the actual shot—nothing fancy, just a quick probability model based on those endless stats you find in a hockey yearbook. If everything is going to be up to me, in true arcade fashion, then why bother to pretend the little figures have anything to do with reality? Forget the names and stats; just give them drone numbers.

And this happens everywhere there is action in a game, except in the most serious of sims—from starfighters with less useful HUD's than your average F-16, to Avatars who can save whole universes, but can't swim a bloody stroke. Arcade sensibilities pervade computer gaming, regardless of time or logic, as if we were still fishing in our pockets for another quarter. If there were more time spent modeling the action instead of handing it all over to the over-worked player, then perhaps we could have more games where success comes from fast thinking and less from "tricks" that score every time.

Of course, some designers are realizing that we have risen from the primordial ooze of the eighties and have traded fins for feet. Perhaps having learned from the klutzy Avatar, Origin now provides us with targeting computers that can lead a target aod, in the case of CRUSADER: NO REMORSE, arcade shoot-em-ups with real depth, like remote-control robots and scattering of the player's shots. This is one of the strengths of the computer game—to take something basic from the video-game world and give it that extra tweak of depth.

In the end, the essence of the modern Action Game should be something more than incredible graphics which cling to the sensibilities of an age that brought us arcades, rampant defense spending and *Loverboy*. We need more games that maintain the excitement and intensity of the good old days, while using the power of today's chips to provide the depth and cleverness an adult player needs to feel like they couldn't be out-performed by a climp on its fifth espresso. ☺

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