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The #1 Computer Game Magazine

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34 SNEAK PREVIEW: JOHNNY MNEMONIC While there are still limitations to the "interactive movie" concept, two CGW editors find that jacking into this version of William Gibson's cyberpunk world is both eerie and strangely compelling.

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

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62 SCORPIA'S MAIL The "Dear Abby" of Adventure helps you avoid the pitfalls set for the unwary in Noctropolis, offers an important key to the Death Gate and keeps the Drow off your heels in Menzoberranzan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

118 NOVASTORM Psygnosis enters the 3-D combat sweepstakes with plenty of pyrotechnics. Gordon Goble takes control as CGW enters the fray.
122 MAGIC CARPET  Mark Clarkson weaves the appropriate spells, lest his mana run out before he is allowed to explore all of Bullfrog's detailed landscapes, in this addicting first-person action/strategy game.

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

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138 FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO '95  Prognosticator Dennis Macauley quotes the odds on Patrick Cook leading Sierra to another title.

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143 BOGEY'S BAR AND GRILL  The way of the Air Warrior is made clear by a mysterious *Genie* and mystic Tom Basham.

146 NASCAR RACING  Correspondent Gordon Goble takes the spin of his racing career as *Papyrus* and *Virgin* try to out-perform *IndyCar Racing*.

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

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

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

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

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

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224 THE RUMOR BAG  Rabbi in Disguise
Your heart is racing.
Th-thump. Th-thump.
It's pumping as fast as your legs.
You don't notice the gentle breeze, the noon-day sky.

You are totally focused.
On the smell.
Just the smell.
Could be the first thing you sink your teeth into, in days.
Dust, pebbles, sticks.
They're flying.
Then you pounce.
Suddenly. Stealthily.
You break its neck.
You're hungry.
You are such an animal.
MAL, YOU.

Really.
In this wilderness survival adventure,
that's exactly what you are.
A wolf.
And you experience all the sights,
sounds...and smells...firsthand.

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any other.
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So realistic that it just might blow
you away.
(Or maybe a predator will.)
Will you survive?
You'll have to hunt.
Fight.
Mate.
(Hey, maybe it's not so hard after all.)
See your retailer or call 800-943-3664.

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“Leading horror adventure game of the year!”
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Russ Ceccola, Electronic Games

Phantasmaria's stunning setting was created using the most advanced cinematography and computer graphics techniques ever for a computer game.

An experience in terror like nothing ever seen or heard before on PC.

The fate of a young woman rests in your hands in this shocking cinematic tour-de-force.
PRAY IT’S ONLY A NIGHTMARE

ROBERTA WILLIAMS

PHANTASMAGORIA

MULTIMEDIA CD COMING SOON
The Editor As Surgeon

by Johnny L. Wilson

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

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

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

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

You told us that Beta Bits needed more screen shots. Guess what? Now, Beta Bits will have more and bigger screen shots to go with the text describing our early experiences with alpha and beta versions of the games. In addition we have moved the section to the front of the book to afford it more prominence.

The changes to Now Playing should make it more interesting and useful than ever. Of course, the section will continue to feature final, shrink-wrapped games which we received prior to press time. This will also help you to know what major reviews are likely to be on tap for the next issue. So, Now Playing will not only tell you what’s on the shelves at retailers and distributors, it will also serve as a “Coming Attractions” for our upcoming feature coverage.

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

These changes are a reflection of what you told us you wanted. We’re listening to what you like and don’t like about the magazine. Incidentally, based on your feedback to our Reader Poll in the December issue (“New Year’s Wish”), we 
WELCOME TO MTV's 1ST CEREBRAL, CINEMATIC, ADVENTURE CD-ROM

In the future, the posh jet set, hell-bent on synthetic experience go to club Alexandria to get their fix of "V" (virtual reality)... Trouble is people are going belly-up like flies.

Now you—Sam Frost (cyberplumber)—have 4 days, your logic, instinct and the things you trip over (in 40 different locations across 17 floors in the Alexandra) to figure it out... and stay alive.

- 90 minutes of video with over 40 actors—directed, produced and edited by MTV
- Original MTV soundtrack

Circled Reader Service #358

Circle Reader Service #358
will be adding a Game Hints column to supplement Scorpia's adventure and role-playing hints. We'll even have more hardware coverage on a regular basis at your request. Here's hoping that these changes will better meet your needs. By the way, if you're a CGW reader and you aren't sending in CGW Poll votes on a regular basis, we probably aren't hearing from you.

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

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

**HOW DO WE RATE?**
The Guide To CGW's Review Rating System

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

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

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

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

**Abysmal:** That rare game that gets it all wrong. Usually a buggy, incomplete, and/or valueless product.
The graphics in today's games look just like photos. If you'd rather play movies than watch a slide show, you'd better get them developed on a Falcon.

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—Paul C. Schuytema, Computer Gaming World

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Circle Reader Service #141
REVOLUTIONARY OBSERVATION

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

Bill Gillespie
Cambridge, MA

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

AROMING MIND

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

One CD holds as much as many (450?) floppies, and my understanding has been that games then play directly from the disk, thus saving your hard drive from being filled up. I know that many games transfer a little bit of information to the hard drive, and that some games use the CD guides to hardware will be of great use to all of us faced with upgrades—and who isn't, these days? But I was a bit surprised that in your surveys of upcoming games you did not mention the mission disk (#2) for PRIVATEER. But, even Origin themselves didn't mention it in their recent flyer advertising their latest products. Is it vaporware?

Brian A. Libby

Come on over here Brian and sit on Grandpa's knee. Ya see, back in the olden days of computing, games came on multiple floppy disks and computers didn't have hard drives. So, in order to play these games, you'd have to swap the disks when the games asked you to. Unfortunately, for all the advantages that CDs bring, they also take us back to those disc-swapping days, unless you can afford $800-$1,000 for a Pioneer multiple CD drive. As for the PRIVATEER Mission Disk #2, our intergalactic spies report that Origin has no intention to release such a disk; however, there is considerable internal discussion about developing a full-blown sequel to PRIVATEER.

HATE MAIL TO DIE FOR

Boy, do I detest you! I hate you and all you stand for and everything associated with you!!! You get these extremely knowledgable and accurate writers to preview/review games in such a trustworthy manner that I don't give games with poor reviews a second look. And games that are given good
Welcome to the 19th Century!

With immigrants pouring in, America is poised for explosive westward growth. Magnates famed for their greed and business acumen rush to cash in. Can you handle the challenge? Lay track, build stations, purchase trains, and manipulate stocks to build an empire of iron and steel. History's greatest Robber Barons will try to stop you by undercutting your lines and buying out your stock. Your only weapons are money and trains. Will your empire succeed or fall under the wheels of the competition?

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Circle Reader Service #295
reviews (4 “stars” and above), I feel compelled to buy.
I've been reading your magazine for over two years now. My addiction has grown to where I have to buy your magazine every month and read it cover-to-cover! I don't smoke, drink or do drugs. Thanks a lot for introducing me to my only addiction... besides my wife, that is.

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

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

R. Wayde Gilmour
Clarence Creek, Ontario,
CANADA

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

IT’S MYSTY OUTSIDE MY WINDOWS

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

Contrary to system requirements as stated on the box, no mention is made of WINDOWS FOR WORKGROUPS 3.11 special circumstance that requires changing 386 Enhanced section settings by disabling 32-bit file access, and restarting Windows each time before running the game. Additionally, screen savers must be disabled and, if running with 65,000 color resolution, changing back to 256 colors. (The initial setup also requires loading updated Sound Blaster drivers and files, which fortunately, are provided on the CD.) These system configuration changes, each and every time the game is played, are in my opinion beyond the scope of novice computer users, as is the case of my wife, who refuses to deal with the hassle and thus, will not play the game. Even if she was capable, the frequent system hang-ups and/or general protection faults are a further detriment to the potential enjoyment of game play. I know it was for me. For the record, I ran the game on a 486 DX2/50 VLB system that meets MPC-2 requirements and then some. From a graphics, plot and play function standpoint, MYST is one great game. But, the platform flaws kill it for joy of playability.

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

Vernon Craig
Flint, MI

TIMELY OBSERVATION

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

P.M. Patterson
Merriam, KS

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

SWINGIN’ ON 51/2 STARS

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

THE EDITORS SPEAK

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

RATING ★★★★★ 1/2

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

CONS Ratings have silly squashed bug “star” symbols. Too big to read in one sh— or, sitting.

18 COMPUTER GAMING WORLD • FEBRUARY 1995
The realms of Might and Magic are expanding! New lands have been discovered, and you must vie for their control against three other warlords. Now is the time to summon your heroes, recruit your armies and lead them to victory. Control every resource in your empire from your castles, docks and guilds to your archers, dragons and ogres. Keep a level head and an iron fist as you strive for total domination in the world of Heroes of Might and Magic.

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

Meet New World’s Eclectic Cast For ’95

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

The company’s showcase strategy game is Heroes of Might & Magic, the spiritual descendant of King’s Bounty, Heroes of Might & Magic is a fantasy strategy game that looks a bit like Master of Magic on a diet. New World plans to release it sometime around March.

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

New World is also working on a project with the prolific game developers at SimTex Software. Headed by Steve Barcia, the rising star designer of Master of Orion and Master of Magic, SimTex is building Mech War, a real-time wargame in the ‘mech genre. Look for battling teams of anthropomorphized steel in the second quarter of this year.

Meanwhile, those eagerly awaiting the next great galactic roundup will be happy to learn that Spaceward HO! 4.0 is almost ready to lasso. Delta Tao, developers of the wild and woolly Spaceward HO!, are finishing up the new Macintosh version for a February release. This tongue-in-cheek game of “How the West(ern Spiral Arm of The Galaxy) was Won” will have the same basic structure of the original game, with several new additions. Investments in technology have made possible two new ship classes (tanker, dreadnought), two new star classes, and a revamped diplomatic model. HO! 4.0, like its predecessor, will support multi-network games, but now humans will be allowed to send real email messages to facilitate the formation of alliances and dirty back-stabbing plots. A handy turn clock will help pick up the pace of network play. New World says the 4/4 Windows scouts have enough fuel to hit retailers in April. Owners of 1/1 versions of Spaceward HO! will be offered a special discount to scrap their old model and trade up.

Finally, New World President Jon Van Caneghem is working on the design for the next game in the epic Might and Magic role-playing series, tentatively titled Might and Magic 6. He is doing the basic design work while two authors from Del Rey’s ranks are working on the storyline. The game is still early in the design stage, but New World has told us that they plan to create a free-scrolling, 3-D environment for the adventure. Big deal, you say? Well, perhaps not, but New World is trying something that has not yet been attempted with 3-D RPGs—brining back the party of adventurers. Has anyone noticed how lonely these 3-D RPGs have been without the barbarian out in front of the party and the magic users/archers in the back ranks? New World hopes to implement a party system with turn-based combat. But don’t expect to see the vanguard of this party until sometime in ’96.
Playing Lately?

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

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

“Playing Lately?”

There are so many Doom wannabes around that I can’t remember what Hell Doom was like.”

Lost with a shotgun, Sacramento, CA

“Master of Magic is another hit for MicroProse and another sleepless night for me.”

Brad Gyer, Morton, IL

“Thanks to Dynamix for a truly exceptional, fun submarine simulation in Aces of the Deep.”

Ed Fister, Mission Viejo, CA

“My wife recently gave me an ultimatum: “Either I go or you give up Front Page Sports Football Pro.” Well…”

Michael Grudler, Phoenix, AZ

“It’s been a long dry spell for SSI, but I think they finally got it right with Panzer General.”

Dave High, Hawthorne, CA

“I agree Colonization does get long because of micro-management, but it is still a good game. X-Com is still the best game I’ve played in ’94.”

Mike Dorn, Lewiston, MI

Notable Quotes

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

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

With Wing Commander III barely off the flight deck, the initial buzz is so positive that Origin Systems is already reported to be moving forward with plans for Wing Commander IV. Sources at Origin say they will complete Wing Commander IV more quickly, because it will build upon Wing Commander III's existing technology, just as the second Wing Commander was built upon the original game. Origin could release the program by Christmas of 1995, but Origin’s David Swofford, Public Relations Director, said that it is too early to confirm any release date for the project. Instead, he cautioned that even a sequel using existing technology still depends upon delivery of an acceptable script, efficient filming and post-production, and potential negotiations with on-screen talent.

Wing III producer Chris Roberts is expected to serve as Executive Producer for the next game with veteran television/software producer Mark Day, and Dallas Snell acting as co-producers in leading the project day-to-day. Asked if any of the cast members from Wing Commander III were already signed for the next game, Swofford indicated that he was not privy to the contracts. He did indicate, however, that there were current negotiations in place with some of the existing cast members. The good news for Wing Commander fans is that the next project appears to be on target for a delivery much sooner than most expected.
Breach 3

Long before X-COM squad leaders were squashing aliens in Algeria, there were other teams of space marines bug hunting in the far reaches of space. These were the marines of the Federated Worlds Special Forces, action takes place in quasi real-time: multiple soldiers can move simultaneously while the clock is running, but the clock can be stopped and orders changed at any time.

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

One of the secrets of Breach’s fanatical following was its inclusion of scenario creation tools, and Breach 3 upholds this fine tradition. Players can now design their own fire-fights from the introductory scenario animation (using anims from a stock supply) to the last mission objective, and then string these scenarios together in campaigns with win/loss branches as in Wing Commander.

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

Celtic Tales

In Ancient Ireland, they were known as “the good people,” the Tuatha De Danann, and the Marca Shee. They are the heroes of old—known as giants, fallen angels, men and fairies, depending on the story or the tradition. In Celtic Tales: Balor of the Evil Eye, Koei allows you to re-create the legends of the Emerald Isle by mixing together some of the standard game mechanics of both strategy games and role-playing games.

The game begins with the selection of a tribal ruler. Kudos to Koei for allowing you to select either a male or female ruler—after all, there are both patriarchal and matriarchal tendencies within the Irish. Then, you move your character around on a screen that looks similar to the isometric playing fields of Populous and PowerMonger. You use an iconic interface to choose whether to farm, herd livestock, perform magic, create magical items, harvest trees, forge weapons, practice hurling (a Gaelic sport akin to field hockey), construct buildings, and explore other provinces.

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

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

In short, Celtic Tales is a refined presentation of the traditional Koei strategy game in
with varying objectives, in which panzer generals can switch between several different vehicles in the heat of the battle, a la Three-Sixty Pacific’s Sands of Fire. If you don’t like the looks of your T-72, you’ll be able to instantly switch to an M-1 Abrams, or even a jeep or motorbike. In addition to switching between tanks, there are also a number of “in-vehicle” views, including turret view, gunner view, chase view, and helicopter view. A radar screen and tactical map provide instant readouts of the locations of enemy forces and geographical features.

In this age of Voxel-Spacing and 3-D-rendered graphics, we were concerned that Tank Commander’s polygon-based graphics might look dated, but the game’s texture mapping provides a great sense of realism and is so attractive that, at times, it looks like non-playable animation. The gameplay looks fast, fun, and easy to learn—we mastered the controls and were blasting away bogies within minutes. Computer tank drivers who want more complexity in their game will have plenty of “realistic” options, like the ability to rotate the turret independently of the tank body. Also, since gamers will be controlling multiple forces at the same time, there will be some added strategic depth, particularly in the multi-player modes. Although on-line play is often scrapped at the last minute, Tank Commander’s designers are said to be committed to network and modern play in the final version. We hope that they do, because the capability to play with or against more than one person at a time is high on our network play wish list.

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

**Tank Commander**

What do you get when you combine Psygnosis’ arcade space-shooter NovaStorm and Domark’s Flight Sim Toolkit? Wags may answer that it would be something like a turret-mounted 747, but the real answer is Tank Commander.

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

Remember playing SimCity and wishing that you could actually control the routes of the cute little planes, trains and automobiles that were zipping around the screen? Thanks to Transport Tycoon, you can finally get that experience. Reminiscent of Railroad Tycoon, this game lets you build a variety of commercial transport systems and give sequentially-based orders to your units ("1-Load at Newbridge, 2-Unload at Wollingham", etc.). Instead of just having trains at your disposal, though, you'll now have boats, trucks, airplanes, trains and even monorails to dispatch with alacrity. The SVGA, isometric viewpoint provides a clear, attractive, three-dimensional view, although having to raise and lower landscapes before building roads and structures can be a (click and) drag. Another minor nitpick: while computer competitors' AI routines are better than average, we do miss the characters other games like Railroad Tycoon and Civilization have. These two complaints aside, our initial impression is that Transport Tycoon is an addictive mover and shaker.

IBM CD-ROM, $99.95. Circle Reader Service #1.

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

ZEPHYR

Pilots on the Interplanetary Battle Circuit often have a shorter lifespan than mayflies, and advancing on the Battle Circuit is even more brutal. In order to accumulate the highest points, you'll have to dust off the most laps and, more than likely, the most enemies during a six race circuit in your corporate-sponsored Zephyr hover tank. 3-D graphics, incredible sound and lots of humorous, appetizing extras like race commentators and corporate sponsorships make Zephyr sound appealing. In spite of all the strategy and tactics, though, the steep learning curve and the, at times, frustratingly fast action may completely overwhelm gamers and turn Zephyr into a simple arcade shoot'em-up. Contrary to New World's advertisements and Zephyr's game box, network and modem play are not included. A future patch has been promised, however. IBM CD-ROM, $79.95. Circle Reader Service #2.

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

THE LEMMINGS CHRONICLES

Lemmings don't know when to stop, or so goes the popular myth about their cliff diving habits. Psygnosis and DMA Designs seem to have the same problem, as they've released Lemmings Chronicles, the third game in the popular Lemmings series, and they've radically changed the interface. As in the previous games, players lead a tribe of ditzy but endearing creatures through levels fraught with peril. But things are a bit different this time around. Now, the lemmings aren't assigned skills by the player; instead, all the lemmings are generic and acquire skills by picking up tools. While the puzzles are still challenging with this new system, the play seems to have lost some of its elegance. Other new additions include "monsters" like a vulture that swoops down and rips little lemming heads off, and Potato Beasts that punch in little lemming teeth. The lemming antics are just as cute, in fact a bit more so since they are a few pixels larger, but the package as a whole was put together with a little less care. Lemmings lovers may be unable to resist 90 more levels of brain-draining fun, but they should be aware that all is not as blissful as it once was in the land of lemmings. IBM CD-ROM, $49.99. Circle Reader Service #3.

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

CYBERIA

The year is 2027, and guess who's been "volunteered" to go to Russia and recover the ultimate doomsday device? Interplay's action/adventure hybrid is full of potential, with a plot that consists of blasting away enemy fighters as your ship flies a predetermined route through Rebel-Assault looking terrain. Get through that and you'll encounter puzzles, roadblocks, andblockheaded enemy guards that will test both your mind and your mouse. Particularly unique is BLADES, an image recognition system built into your glasses that detects infrared, bio-organic, and mechanical footprints. The cinematic graphics give this game lots of style, but we suspect that some gamers will have little patience with the incredibly high number of times Zak (our cyberpunk hero) will die before finishing the game. IBM CD-ROM, $79.95. Circle Reader Service #4.

Interplay, Irvine, CA, (800) 969-4263

FLIGHT COMMANDER 2

Designer Charlie Molyan had long enjoyed playing board games on air combat, and he knew that the computer could quickly handle the complex rules of those games. So, he created what is primarily a wargame for anyone fascinated by jet-to-jet combat, but who lacks the reflexes to fly or patience to learn simulations like FALCON 3.0. This new version by Avalon Hill features the same game engine as its Macintosh predecessor, and makes good use of Windows, with nary a bug in sight. The graphics have been enhanced, featuring crisp aircraft silhouettes (which, not surprisingly, resemble cardboard game counters). AH artist Charlie Kibler provides gorgeous terrain maps, which some may prefer to flying through empty blue skies or cloud cover. Meanwhile, audio clips like radio chatter, explosions and the roars of afterburners lend a convincing feel to strafing runs and Immelmanns. The reference manual gives a good overview of air combat tactics, and the step-by-step tutorials will have even novices taking out bogies quicker than you can say "check six." Still, even the veteran pilot will find plenty of action in the numerous scenarios, especially since the game will generate random historical missions from Korea in the '50s up to the late 1990s. Five campaigns are included, along with an extensive on-line database. IBM, $54.95. Circle Reader Service #5.

Avalon Hill Game Company, Baltimore, MD, (800) 999-3222

INFERNO

Ocean's new combat action adventure is another sci-fi title full of potential, combining great graphics, a great soundtrack and a compelling storyline. 3-D graphics that reminded us of those Thunderbirds puppet shows on television, and cheeky British dialogue like "I just got out of the regeneration chamber, chief, and I feel like a new man...in more ways than one!" give the game some personality. On the upside, your ship comes equipped with a bundle of weapons and even has three different autopilot settings. However, the space combat action might take some getting used to and overly sensitive controls will have to be dealt with before you'll be blasting bogies with any frequency. Also, although the combat graphics are attractive enough in the planetary dogfight sequences, the space combat graphics are so simplistic and two-dimensional that they often remind us of Elite. IBM CD-ROM, $59.95. Circle Reader Service #6.

Ocean of America, Inc., San Jose, CA, (408) 954-0201
Local Gamer Makes Good

CGW Reader Wins Domark Contest And A Job In Game Design

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

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

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

He eagerly looked forward to fighting in that battle in the next game of the series. But when LucasArts announced that the next game, Tie Fighter, would skip his favorite scene and begin immediately after the Battle of Hoth, he felt cheated: “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t a little upset,” he said.

Then he read a magazine article about Flight Sim Toolkit and how its 3D shape editor could be used to createand pilot functional jets and tanks on any type of terrain. “I questioned why tanks had to look like tanks, and planes like jets,” said Marullo. “Why couldn’t the terrain look like a ball of ice, where Rebel troops fought impossible odds against Imperial war machines?”

He bagged FST first thing the next morning.

Marullo began working on his dream game, slowly learning the FST tools and building more and more complex 3D shapes. His first completed shape was a giant Imperial AT-AT “walker,” which he learned how to animate in a program that doesn’t offer animation. For the next few months, Marullo worked feverishly on the “Hoth” project, and as the deadline drew closer, his life consisted of nothing but “Hoth-Work-Sleep.” He finished and shipped his creation a week before the contest deadline.

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

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

Marullo won the contest handily and was given the grand prize: a trip to the Farnborough Air Show in England and a visit to the offices of SIMS, the developers of Flight Sim Toolkit. While in England, Marullo was offered a game development job in Domark’s California offices.

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

“So what do you know?” mused Marullo. “Sometimes dreams do come true after all.”

Diamond Kit Offers Blazing Speed, 3 CD-ROM Games

If state-of-the art DOS-based games require a faster PC than you can afford, you can give your Intel-based machine a steel-toed kick in the pants with Diamond Multimedia’s new Games Accelerator Kit.

The kit combines a new 1MB version of Diamond’s fast Stealth 64 DRAM video card, a sampling of CD-ROM games, and a “starter” joystick.

Gamers who need even higher performance for games like Wing Commander III, NASCAR and U.S. Navy Fighters may want Diamond’s 2MB DRAM card, an $80 upgrade. It offers excellent performance in both DOS and Windows, nailing high benchmarks in the December issues of PC Magazine and CGW.

The Games Accelerator Kit has a suggested retail price of $219 and includes three CD games: an enhanced version of Domark’s high-res Flight Sim Toolkit, LucasArts’ Rebel Assault, and Mindscape’s Mega Race.

Contact Diamond Multimedia for more details at (408) 736-2000.
“Rise of the Triad is sure to hit the target, especially when multiple players are involved.”

Computer Gaming World

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

Interactive Entertainment

“★★★★ ‘Four Diskettes’—A must buy.”

Hot Disk!

“Blistering action and a sense of humor make Rise of the Triad one of the year’s favorites.”

Computer Game Review

Who are we to argue?

Rise of the Triad

As part of the High-risk United Nations Taskforce (HUNT), it’s your assignment to devastate and destroy...to ensure peace on Earth. You’re equipped with the most vicious weaponry ever seen. But have you got the guts to blaze through hundreds of deranged terrorists and slaughter their sinister masters of death? Yes!

- Fierce Combat™ zones, ideal for massacres during modem and network play.
- Cruelly taunt your opponent with live RemoteRidicule™ during multi-player games.
- Did we mention tons of gut-spewing graphics and blood-curdling digital sound?

Created by Apogee Software, Ltd. and distributed by FormGen Inc. 7641 E. Gray Rd, Scottsdale, AZ, 85260 (800) 263-2390
Available on disk and CD (body bags not included)
Circle Reader Service #143
Rebel Scum Don't Stand A Chance With New TIE Fighter Strat Books

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

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

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

In TIE Fighter: The Official Strategy Guide, substance takes a clear priority. The book, written by well-known authors Russel DeMaria, David Wessman and David Maxwell, comes in at a hefty 400 pages. The first 40 pages are spent going over the basic tools and maneuvers available to a pilot. Then, lengthy tables detail and compare the various craft encountered in the game. Readers are guided through each mission by young Imperial pilot Maarek Stele, who provides a kind of storyline to the game's linked scenarios. Stele also offers a kind of Cliff's Notes for each scenario, telling the player what button to push, which direction to go and what ships to blow up for optimal success. Finally, it finishes off with a 125-page appendix, describing every single ship group to be encountered in the course of the game, along with its weapons load, tactics and starting position.

Prima's guide may be a little thick for the casual player. Also, players who rely on Maarek Stele's play-by-play could end up feeling that they are being flown instead of the fighter.

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

This month we take flight with Larry Holland, designer of such classics as Their Finest Hour, Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe, X Wing and TIE Fighter. Watch this space each month for a different designer's answer.

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

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

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

Then, recreate the Trojan war..."
Never Lose Sight Of How Pinball Should Be Played.

A truly great pinball game is more than great graphics and spectacular sounds, more than the latest arcade features like 3D ramps and three multi-ball play, more than fast ball movement and precise flipper control, and it's more than being able to see the whole playfield at once so you can aim your shots. A great pinball game has that unique quality of playability and never-ending challenge that keeps you coming back for... just one more game and a shot at your new high score!

*Washington Post*—“Crystal Caliburn perfectly captures the essence of a great pinball machine.”

*New York Times*—“The realism is striking... [Crystal Caliburn] will be at the top of Silicon Santa's gift list this year.”

*Inside Mac Games*—“ARCADE GAME OF THE YEAR”

*Computer Game Review*—“Crystal Caliburn sets a new standard. For realistic pinball on a computer, there's nothing like this game.”

*Electronic Entertainment*—“Crystal Caliburn is simply the best, most realistic, most challenging pinball simulation for the Macintosh yet.” (Rating: 9 out of 10)

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

*MacUser*—“Electronic pinball's Holy Grail.”
(Rating: 4 ½ out of 5)

Crystal Caliburn

From the creative genius of LittleWing™, developer of TRISTAN™ and Eight Ball Deluxe™ for Macintosh. Available from your favorite retailer or mail-order catalog. Interactive DEMO on AOL® and CompuServe®.

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The survival of civilization is at stake.

You command mechanized warriors.
You decide which resources to use.
You decide what to do next.
And you better do it, before your enemy does it to you.
Mindscape just changed the strategy of action games. There's never been anything quite like Metal Marines™. Combining non-stop action, precision-edge strategy, and just plain guts, it's a first in Windows™ entertainment.

You’re in a high-tech war in the far future, and your side’s fate is in your hands.

Every decision is crucial. Muster your Metal Marines and launch waves of raids and missiles to bring your enemy to its knees. You have to act fast. Or else.

The game play is in real time, with ferocious consequences. Build arsenals of high tech weapons, perform surgical missile strikes, lead your Metal Marines into combat—and on Windows™, leap from one window to another, and bomb your opponent while he's doing a spreadsheet!

With the artificial intelligence built into Metal Marines, 20 levels of intense action give you endless challenges and possibilities. Metal Marines, from the new Mindscape. It's no time like the present.
JOHNNY MNEMONIC

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

by Johnny L. Wilson and Ken Brown

SNEAK PREVIEW!

DATA—the ideal contraband. Data—golden veins of binary files mainlined into the bitstream for profit, power, prestige. Ideas and unlimited knowledge packed into the hooah pipe of the net, sucked out by cyberjunkies jacking in for a fix. Data—power liberating and corruptible. The symbol of our time and the dark, near future.

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

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

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

Such is the shadow world of information smuggling in which Gibson’s short story takes place. The dark, dehumanized world of an all-too-possible near future. A world whose images of deadly data and info assassins will be artistically splashed across both theater and computer screens.
by mid-1995. Thanks to the persistence of visual artist and video director Robert Longo, Gibson's haunting vision will reach the big screen—complete with elaborate multi-million dollar sets. Thanks to the vision of Sony Imagesoft and some high-powered directing and writing talent, quite a different experience will be available to computer gamers.

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

**JACK-IN THEATRE**

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

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

The game play sucks you into a freaky movie-game gestalt you never thought possible, but sore don't mind experiencing.

Though Johnny gets in fights, he is no meatball. As in the short story, he is a very technical boy, finding strange electronic gadgets and pocketing them for later use. These can take the form of multi-language readers, VR glasses, sim/stim-style implant devices and other toys, all of which enhance the game's futuristic feel and give Johnny a rogue hacker mystique.

**OPEN FILE**

When computer games are spun off of major motion pictures, the development path is usually more complex than the traces on a circuit board. **Johnny Mnemonic** is no exception, having begun Sony didn't scrimp when it came to selecting a production outfit, though. Propaganda Films, the leading-edge company chosen to film the game, is notable for filming the movie *Wild At Heart*, as well as producing high-end TV commercials for AT&T, Coca-Cola and Nike.

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

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

Using an original script by writers Douglas Gayeton and John Platten, the actors and production crew did 70 camera setups per day (compared to approximately six per day for a feature film) to capture
the 145 page script. Producers Mary Ann Norris and Connie Booth supervised the project and tracked the myriad details to ensure continuity in the game. Norris credits Gayton's directorial sense and Platten's gaming sense with much of the success in producing the project. Platten's TOMCAT ALLEY was a best-selling Sega CD game in '94.

FILE DESCRIPTION

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

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

VITAL STATISTICS NOMINAL
MTBF 1000YRS
ISOLATED KINESISTHETIC DB'S POLYMORPHIC SKIN

Within the game context, you can always direct which way Johnny needs to go. If the video should suddenly appear in letterbox format during the exploratory mode, you have a chance to do something. You can USE an object and, depending on the object, you may get a clue necessary to solve some of the simple puzzles in the game or solve a puzzle merely by using that object. For example, if you have found the translator device prior to finding the Chinese FAX, you will be able to USE the translator on the FAX and gather vital information. To make things more interesting, however, the objects and other characters do not always show up in the same order. There is enough randomness to keep you off guard for a few playings.

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

The action mode features a wider field of vision in which you have to move quickly to get to a usable object (thus, shifting to combat mode) or find an exit through which you can escape. This mode generally occurs when you've spent too long exploring one place or you inadvertently kick a tripwire leading to the bad guys. This is the mode that will really make you feel like you're trapped in a movie and have to do something to get out. It's an extremely interesting perspective.

FILE SUMMARY

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

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

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

by Martin E. Cirulis

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

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

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

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

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

Well, currently, and probably for a long time, there are two ways to connect computers in the realm of gaming. The first two are our old kissing cousins, The Modem and The Serial Port, and they have been around almost as long as Computer Gaming itself. There have been and will continue to be wildly successful modem games, but the problem is that modems and serial ports are only two way connections—leaving the hobby without much of an edge over board games, except that our pictures move. The third type of connectivity is called Networking. No, I'm not talking about gathering together a bunch of yuppies over cappuccino. Networking is when two or many more computers link up and share systems with one another.

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

WEBWARS(NETWOK GAMES)

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

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

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

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

THE TRADITIONS OF WAR

The first Networking game I encountered in the distant mist of early '92 was a strange little game called ROBOSPORT from Maxis. The idea here was to give a
group of little robots orders that would cover 15 or so seconds on the battlefield, against up to three other teams. While it was possible to play the game with multiple humans in hotseat mode (if you didn’t mind playing four rounds an hour), the nice thing about this game was that players could do their turns on their own computers and then the “master” program would merge the files and spit the results back to the players. This would allow you to speed the game up four-fold, and since ROBOSPORT was a Windows application, you could get some work done or just play some TETRIS while you waited, instead of bugging the Tail-End-Charley. (Martin’s Second Law of Networking: In any game that allows simultaneous turns, some poor sod will inevitably be yelled at for consistently taking too long.) Unfortunately, time, technology and a seeming lack of support from Maxis for one of its earlier children has doomed this classic far too early; some aspect of the latest version of Windows for Workgroups (3.11) triggers the copy protection system on ROBOSPORT, making the network mode and anything but the basic game inaccessible. Perhaps it’s time for ROBOSPORT 2?

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

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

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

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

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

Windows interface is LEGIONS from Mindcraft. Supporting up to five human players and 14 odd computer opponents,

LEGIONS is a historical wargame covering human history from ancient China up to the wars of Charlemagne. With diplomacy, trade and individual Generals involved as well as straight combat, this game is a much needed fix for those of us who have waited so long for NetCivilization.

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

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

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

ANCIENT ART OF THE KIBITZ Tactfully worded messages are an essential element of diplomacy in network games like Legions.
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Plug And Play?

The Trials, Tribulations, And Thrills Of Setting Up A Home Network

by Loyd Case

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

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

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

Almost all LANs these days run over a set of copper cables that use a communications technology called "ethernet". There are two main types of ethernet: 10-BASE-T, which uses a twisted pair cable that looks a lot like the cable you plug into your telephone, and 10-BASE2, which uses a coaxial cable similar to the cable that is fed to your TV from the cable company. 10-BASE-T is somewhat easier and the cables are more robust, but it requires an additional box, called an ethernet "hub." Hubs can run several hundred dollars (for up to 8-10 computers, typically), so add cost. On the other hand, the coax cables used in 10-BASE2 networks are more expensive and more fragile than the 10-BASE-T cables. Also, with coaxial, you need to worry about issues such as the terminator (no relation to Arnold Schwarzenegger), which mark the end nodes of the network.

So how much does all this cost?

Each PC needs a networking card. Networking cards are available in a number of flavors. There are cards that support twisted pair (10-BASE-T), coax or what's known as a MAU (mediation attachment unit). Stay away from cards that use a MAU, because then you need a transceiver, which is an additional cost (sometimes more than the card!). A typical ethernet card will run from $80-$200, depending upon configuration, features, bus type, etc. (Note: some cards will support both twisted pair and coax, although the network itself must be configured for one or the other.) A cheap hub for twisted pair LANs will cost between $150 and $300.

Now comes the NOS.

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

(Continued on page 44)
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network. It manages the links between PCs, remote file access, remote program access, logons, and a host of other issues that are important to network administrators and system managers. Typical network operating systems used in most large companies include Novell's Netware and Microsoft's NT Advanced Server. Unfortunately, they are expensive. A five user version of Netware 3.12 will cost $500-$800. This does NOT include network cards, cables, hubs, etc.

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

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

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

That last point is important. For example, PC Zone, a mail order house, offers the Personal Netware Infomover bundle for $268.98, which includes 2 NE2000-compatible, 16-bit ethernet cards and a 2-user Personal Netware license. You can also find five-user packs. Microsoft WINDOWS FOR WORKGROUPS can be found in similar bundles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"YOU WANT ME TO GO WHERE??!!"

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

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

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

### Martin's Matrix Of Network Games

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**Turn Mode** = Type of turn structure, either real-time, simultaneous or sequential turns  
**Skill** = Skill level of game  
**MPV** = Multi-Player Value  
**SPV** = Single-Player Value  
**Stability** = Reliability of network connection

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46 COMPUTER GAMING WORLD • FEBRUARY 1995
STATE-OF-THE-ART JUST BECAME HISTORY...
NOW, EXPERIENCE THE FUTURE.

Rebel Assault™ was pretty. The 7th Guest™ had fun puzzles. But, technology advances. Gamers demand more and more. And the time comes when even the best products are moved aside to make way for the future. That time has come and the future is Cyberia™. Featuring full-screen, full motion video, digitized speech, synthetic actors, music and sound effects by Thomas Dolby’s Headspace and all of the most unbelievable arcade sequences your eyes (and your computer screen) have ever seen... it’s so stunning that we’re even willing to put our money where our mouth is. If you own Rebel Assault or The 7th Guest, send us the manual cover from either game along with a Cyberia sales receipt and we’ll send you $10.00 cash back. If you don’t own either of these titles, you’ve already saved a hundred bucks so stop waiting for a hand out... just go to your local software retailer to buy Cyberia or call 1-800-999-GAME to order direct. (Offer expires 3-3-95)
Necromancy beat a chainsaw any day of the week.

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

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

For those of you who enjoy that being-to-being combat thing but get a little nauseous watching everything bob around, another title from BullFrog that has network capability might be your answer. Syndicate is a kind of Cyberpunk meets the combat engine of X-COM, and comes out with tiny figures but real-time combat. Instead of controlling a single person, players use entire squads of augmented Cyberthugs armed with everything from rocket launchers to lasers. The game takes a more serious wargamer's approach to action and uses a skewed 3-D perspective; the interface asks a lot of a person, and players will find most of their soldiers dying from their attention being elsewhere for a few seconds. This, combined with the small

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

NOTES ON THE NET

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

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

out in the future, as networking becomes more of a gimmick, but the vast majority of the games I've covered are worth the going price when you play them against other people—and definitely, the more the merrier.

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

TOWING THE PARTY LINE

(MODEM GAMES)

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

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

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE When it comes to the sensation of raw speed and power, Magic Carpet surpasses even Doom.
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In the next three months, more than 30,000,000 PCs will be hit by power problems...

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Free 60-page handbook What are the causes and effects of power problems? The most common power protection mistakes. Call for your free handbook today! Please reference Dept. XX.
ence between modern-ready and modern-appropriate. Some games reveal a new aspect under modern play, while others lie there connected to your modern like roller skates on a fish.

**THE Q.Q.P. PLAN**

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

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

This successful formula was then applied to Naval Combat in The Lost Admiral, and then again in its quasi-sequel, The Grandest Fleet. The Grandest Fleet keeps to the simple mechanics but offers a nice little development system that forces players to develop the cities they capture in order to increase victory points and production—you could even gain the ability to produce nuclear-powered vessels of devastating power. The Lost Admiral and Grandest Fleet both offered random maps and the ability to link up to three scenarios together to form a campaign; a lopsided victory in a previous battle would give you an advantage in wargaming with Conquered Kingdoms, where players have the choice of playing with strictly historical pieces or using a full range of mythical creatures. Subtleties like Officers who enhance the power of units around them and spies who can move without being seen (as well as kill unsuspecting Officers with a single blow) do quite a bit to distinguish this game from its close relatives. Conquered Kingdoms is great for people looking for a quicker game of Warlords.

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

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

Folks don’t come to Silverload much anymore. A’int been no silver here in years. And when they do come, they don’t stay any longer than they have to. Missing persons? No, mister, a’int never seen no missing persons. Of course, folks here don’t pay much attention to strangers. Have a look around? Can’t say anybody will stop you from looking around, mister. Except the last man who came here looking for kin is buried over there on that hill.
real intelligence. Now, while some could say **QQP** has only added modem play to some fairly beer-and-prezel wargames and that is no big deal in programming, let’s be honest: most games with sequential turns would be fairly easy to modem-link, but publishers with far more resources at hand than **QQP** routinely refuse to do so—probably because some marketing whiz has optimized the sales projections, and modem-play is a few decimal points shy of being relevant (according to some really old marketing data). As long as companies like **QQP** continue to support the actual needs of gamers, I’ll continue to applaud while muttering darkly about any wargame that is not at least modem-capable.

**MANO-A-MANO**

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

**The modem support of network games like **Wing Commander: Armada**, **BattleDrome**, and **Falcon** means you will always find them mentioned prominently on boards with dedicated challenge areas. Other sim games with modem support only (not net capability) are popular as well, with **F-15 Strike Eagle III** from **MicroProse** being a close contender for sim competition of choice; while in the realm of WW2, **MicroProse** also providing modem support through a downloadable patch for **1942: Pacific Air War** and **Kesmai** is planning to produce yet another home version of **AirWarrior**, this one with modem support as well.

As far as challenge-rated strategy games goes, the current favorite is **Dark Legions** from **SSI**, the true successor to the old classic **Archron**, where players move monsters across a chess-like board. But when king jumps pawn, it’s no longer a sure thing; the contested square expands into a quick and deadly battlefield ideal for joystick jockeying. **Dark Legions** is actually meant to be played by modem, and there is a phantom-monster that is actually invisible to the other player until it strikes. Holy cloaking device, Batman! Given this propensity for modem play, it is unfortunate that **Dark Legions** performs sluggishly under all but the highest baud rate. For a slightly lighter strategy game, there is a Japanese import called **Metal Marines**, brought to us by **Mindscape**. In the tradition of **Anime**, this game could be called **Searched Earth meets the Son of SinCity**. Players build up their own bases by laying down tiles representing headquarters, command centers, defense cannons, anti-missile systems, etc. while simultaneously trying to blow their opponent’s base from the face of the Earth using Multi-Warhead Missiles and giant robot Marines. A mindlessly fun game using Windows, it sure beats **Hearts** for a quick fix for your competitive streak during lunch time at the office.

**The Ol’ Play by Play**

Sport simulations have been slow to pick up on the whole connectivity thing, but this is slowly changing and they seem to be doing it in pairs. In the flood of football titles available this year, two have been especially notable: head-to-head play might not be the novelty to distinguish them from the pack.

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

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

In the year 2055, life is just another word for chaos. Sure, your music has given you some moments of escape, but your rock superstar status has also given you too many nights locked away in hotel rooms, away from the din of crazed fans. Virtual Reality is the only reality that means anything anymore. In the world of Virtuoso you'll blast cyborgs in cavernous, sub-Martian passages, encounter the living dead in a Haunted House and submerge yourself with strange life forms in an Underwater Biosphere. Now, isn't that just what you needed?
Football is definitely for the football nut, allowing serious players to download real stat updates from on-line services, while Tom Landry is for us more casual types without the expertise or time for a full immersion into the complex world of pro coaching.

The other pair from the sports world are IndyCar Racing from Papyrus and World Circuit from MicroProse. To be honest, both these games are great racing simulators and play great under serial connections and fairly well under the old modem, though a high transmission speed (9600) is a must. IndyCar has the definite edge in graphics, but many swear by World Circuit's smoother action over the modems. Racing pros have argued the relative realism of these two titles over the past year, but a driving school cadet like me finds it to be a "six of one, half-dozen of the other" situation. I greatly enjoyed both, but as a neophyte racer, if I had to come down on one side or another, I would probably go with the "Pretty pictures...gooodd!!" school of Cro-Magnon reviewing and pick IndyCar.

MO' MODEMS!

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

Peering into the Future

Perhaps with the growing trend in networking, War and Strategy game designers will see the wisdom of adding multi-player capability; these games, of all the other categories, have the easiest time adapting their data structures to a file-sharing format. Unfortunately, this past year has seen a step backward from reality, with much-awaited games like Master of Magic or the computer translation of KingMaker appearing as a single player games. With all the talk of the survival of the Wargame, making the experience more singular and isolated is probably a bad idea. A few months back, Alan Emrich said that he thought the Windows interface was good one for wargaming; not only do I think he is correct (and like Alan, I could care less about inane arguments about operating systems), but products like Spaceward HO!, Empire Deluxe and RoboSport show exactly how useful it is for a network game to be based on a system where all the net programming is already done. These games don't require the user to have any more net knowledge than it takes to install drivers from a dialogue box.

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

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

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

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

Ready for Some Football? Tom Landry Strategy Football was one of the first modem-capable football games, and is still good for a quick head-to-head match up.
As you set down on the docking pad in the station hangar, you are a little puzzled. You remember that on Station Zeus there must be at least a hundred crew members, and not one is here. And while the mystery begins to unfold, the clues that the shredded remains of some poor souls may not be very easy to digest. In the meantime, an unimaginable terror makes the few colleagues that you have left aboard Station Zeus.

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

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*Coming this spring, JAGGED ALLIANCE.* Watch for it!
Beware Of The Under Drow

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

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

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

For that reason, most players will likely prefer to create the typical two-person party of Elven Fighter/Magic-User and Dwarven Fighter/Cleric. Only Elves wearing Elven chain mail can cast spells in armor; all others must forgo armor if they want to do any spellcasting. Dwarfs are handy not only for being able to read Dwarvish (important in one section of the game), but they are absolutely tops at spotting illusions walls, and there are plenty of them in this game. A Dwarf in the group makes life much easier.

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

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

**360 Degrees of Freedom**

The basic game mechanics are similar to *Ravenloft*, which in turn came by way of *Eye of the Beholder*. The view is 3D and the party moves as a whole. Movement can be either in step mode or free-scrolling mode. Step mode is just that: one click is one step forward, with turns of 90 degrees. Free mode is the full 360 degree range, as in Ultima Underworld. If that sort of thing makes you dizzy, stick with step mode. There are some places where free

**SCORPIA CASTS A DARK GLANCE AT DREAMFORGE'S DARK TALE OF DARK ELVES**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Once killed, monsters do not regenerate. This makes life much easier, since you can clear out a level, then go back over it more carefully looking for illusionary walls or elusive buttons without a horde of critters breathing down your neck.

ADVENTURING AMENITIES

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

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

The inventory screen shows what items

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

DRAGON Lore

Published by Mindscape, this is a game with pretty graphics and not much substance. Werner Von Hallenrod, having reached 18 years old, sets off to prove himself worthy of joining the Dragon Knights, and incidentally discovers the truth about his father's death.

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

There are no conversations, only monologues from NPCs, as Werner never speaks in any way. Perhaps he should have been christened Noel, the Silent Knight. Whatever, Werner heads out, kills some monsters, picks up a few spells, and finally arrives at Von Wallenrod castle.

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

While there is some fighting, it is similar to 1-Motion's Alone In The Dark. Werner has no stats or skills, only a bar measuring his life force. Combat is simply equipping a weapon and bashing away, hoping you can outlast the monster.

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

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

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

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

**NOCTROPOLIS**

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

Despite the setting and the comic book that comes with the game, this is an adventure, and getting through it depends mostly on traditional puzzle solving. Unfortunately, as in DRAGON LODE, finding items means a close and careful scanning of all the screens to ensure not missing anything, which is all too easy to do, given the main dark scenes.

Also on the downside, this game is nothing like a comic book adventure. Aside from chucking some holy water at Succus, Darksheer doesn’t actually fight any of the five “cameo” villains, nor even the evil mastermind Flux. No, the only person he beats up is his partner, Siileteo.

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

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

Bottom line: Considered as a comic book adventure, this one just doesn’t make it. There is no pace, no action, no excitement, and certainly no heroes from Darksheer. Even the final encounter with Flux is so low-key, so anti-climactic, so quiet as to be a passive experience. If superheroes in the real comics were like this, comic books would have vanished long ago.

**DEATH GATE**

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

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

So Haplo goes off in a magic ship through the DEATH GATE, the only connection between the realms, to find the four sections of the World Seal. Along the way, he pieces together more of the story of the Sundering, and finds that things are not always as they seem.

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

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

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

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

Bottom line: Of the three games covered in these short articles, DEATH GATE was the least irritating overall, and the closest to traditional adventuring. If you can put up with the cute stuff, you may find this one worth playing.
characters are wearing/carrying, and is the place to check on stats, experience levels, health, and current spell effects (if any). These are handled very neatly with pop-up menus off of icons. Moving items from character to character is easy and simple: just pick something up from one slot and put it in another.

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

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

NO NEW TALES TO TELL

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

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

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

What an opportunity for a well-developed, involving story—and what a dismal hash was made of it. We could have had an exciting, nerve-wracking excursion into the murky waters of Drow politics, with treachery and surprise at every turn, and interesting choices to make. Instead, we end up with a ho-hum, “just follow the plan” expression route to the endgame and inevitable showdown with Fooze.

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

MENZO runs relatively clean, but does have some programming problems. Most are trivial, such as some magical figurines that don’t work, and the bus-
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Actual VGA graphics shown. Distributed by Accolade, Inc.
Letters From The Dark Side

W ell, the Holiday season turned out to be not so bad after all. A few companies were able to get a few games on the shelves, and though none of those games were really, really good, at least we got something. It was especially interesting to see the large number of adventure games (from companies other than Sierra) that made their appearance. It's been a long time since so many came to the shelves at once.

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

And now, on to the hints...

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

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

Menzoberranzan: While mucking through the tunnels is mostly straightforward, adventurers could have a bit of trouble in the beginning section, where you have to go up and down between the two levels to find your way to the exit. The important thing is to be on the lookout for illusionary walls that open the way to other areas. Generally, you can figure that such a wall is as far as possible from the way you came in.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On Delphi: Visit the GameSIG.
On GEnie: Type "Scorpi" to reach the Games RoundTable.

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

Until next time, happy adventuring!
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The Bride With The Disney Dowry

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

by Charles Ardai

I consider this game to be KING’S QUEST I. This is where it all ought to have started; or, to look at it another way, this is where it all starts. Yes, KING’S QUEST VI got a lot of attention for its snazzy opening cartoon, crammed with swooping camera movements and full-screen characters rendered three-dimensionally; but once you got past the opening, the game was just another KING’S QUEST. Decent graphics, but nothing to stand up and cheer over—the graphics even felt like something of a letdown after the outstanding animation of the introduction.

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

They are indeed. From the opening frames, where drops of dew in an enchanted forest drop on the tummy of an enchanted ladybug, to the scene a few seconds later in which lovely Princess Rosella sings her royal heart out in a tuneful paean to her about-to-be-lost adolescence, KING’S QUEST VII exudes Disney-like quality from each of its cel-animated poses.

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

It matters not at all that the game is from Sierra rather than Disney. It is true to the Disney spirit, just as any movie about a rugged hero who wears a leather jacket and gets out of one scrape after another is really Indiana Jones, and any movie about a suave secret agent is essentially James Bond. At the same time, KING’S QUEST VII is also KING’S QUEST through and through, meaning (among other things) that it cribbs from other sources left and right. A bit of a familiar fable here—is that Chicken Little running about the streets of the town called Faldor!—a bit of a legend there, a bit of a modern fairy tale two screens over.

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

What else is lurking in this game? For one thing, a Halloween land that suspiciously resembles the town from Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas, and even uses the name "Ooga Booga." (The bad guy in that flick was a heavy named "Oogey Boogey." A subtle distinction.) Anyone else? Sure: the three Fates from Greek mythology, Titania and Oberon from A Midsummer Night's Dream, a comical carnivorous Venus flytrap, and a headless horseman, all lifted from other sources and jumbled together in the mythic hodgepodge that is King's Quest VII.

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

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

JACK'S FLAT Princess Rosella's journey will take her through a Halloween land reminiscent of Tim Burton's A Nightmare Before Christmas.
HANDS, LANDS, AND SHIFTING SANDS
It must be the result of inbreeding, these four-fingered hands that Rosella and Valanice have. If you never noticed them before, it's not cause for a trip to the ophthalmologist.

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

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

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

The game's story unfolds in six chapters, alternating between Valanice and Rosella as on-screen heroine. First, Valanice has to struggle through the desert to get a stone idol to open its mouth; when, upon pulling this off, she finds herself menaced by a giant gila monster, the game suspends her story and turns its attention to Rosella's travails in the land of the trolls. When Rosella finds herself clinging to the edge of a graveyard sinkhole by her fingernails, the game leaves her to return to Valanice. A bit of cleverness gets Valanice past the gila monster and into Falderol, where after much ado she ends up on trial for stealing the moon. (Don't ask.) Before we get to see Valanice exonerated, we return to Rosella; then it's back to Valanice, and so on, until you've made it through the last chapter.

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

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

There are some unfortunate weaknesses, too. The eye icon in the command line, for instance, can only be used to look at inventory objects, not at anything in the graphic window. This confused me, and I imagine it might confuse younger gamers even more. Also, there is a large, ornate letter 'K' at the end of the command line, which looks like it ought to do something, but turns out not to have any function at all. Another peculiarity is that the game has no save game feature and only saves your position in the story when you quit.

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

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

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

The Editors Speak

King's Quest VII

Rating

Pros Animation as good as you'd get from a middle-quality Disney feature, with voices and writing to match.

Cons Sierra's quick left turn at Mass Market Street may have left some hard-core gamers in search of a challenge. Also, there are a few crashes bugs in the initial release.
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Legend Animates The Pages Of Weis And Hickman's DEATH GATE

by Peter Olafson

If its predecessor, Companions of Xanth, was a game engine in search of a game, then DEATH GATE is a game in search of a game engine—and a consistent voice. This CD-ROM based graphic adventure from Legend Entertainment offers a colorful, and occasionally affecting, excursion through the fantasy world based on the Death Gate novels by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, but sacrifices some of its appeal to disparities of content and style. You're cast as Haplo—a recent Pryan refugee from the Labyrinth, a large and dangerous maze to which your human-like race was consigned 2,000 years earlier by the Sartans in the Sundering. In a final, desperate act in their losing battle with the Pryans, they split the world into five realms—the Labyrinth and the usual Air, Water, Fire and Stone—and then made themselves scarce.

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

The sorcerer is out for revenge, and to reform the world, but lacks the necessary knowledge to perfect his plan. So he's designated the young man to be his instrument in the realms. Haplo is to venture through the Death Gate to the four divided worlds, retrieve the scattered pieces of the World Seal used in the Sundering, and learn what he can of the Sartan's whereabouts. So off you go, in a sort of winged Viking ship, armed with four basic spells. On Arianus, you'll help the dwarves shed some unwanted "Gods." On Pryan, you're a matchmaker. On Abarrach, you'll help put down a tyrant. And so it goes.

Cousin of Xanth

The game engine from Xanth is back for Death Gate—surrounded by a court of splendid speech and animations—and that's basically a good thing. Xanth itself was so frothy that you could almost sense the machinery laboring beneath the fabric of the game. Death Gate's a weightier creature, and the engine here is simply an engine. Giving orders is a matter of pointing and clicking. There's no guesswork to finding the right verb—seven common verbs are nestled in the upper left corner, and clicking on an object calls up any others unique to it—and certainly no typing. It is simple, easy, and it is even fun in itself.

The content is another matter. In games, as in literature, it is important to strike a tone and stick to it—if only in the interest of atmosphere. Death Gate doesn't quite manage that. It seems to want to be an airy Spellcasting 401 and a brooding Time Quest at the same time, and it never really settles down in either world.

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

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

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

That's one of the more modest puzzles. The game isn't all that tough, but it relies heavily on the player's powers of close observation. And that may occasionally have you scratching your head raw. Especially clever is the entry code to the treasure room in the Brotherhood tower, and the use of a dog—the world black and white.
You slide into the cockpit, ease the throttle forward, and prepare for a good old-fashioned dogfight. But suddenly, you come to a grinding halt. What's this? Not enough disk space or RAM?

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

**A TOUCH TOO SWEET**

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, it's only rarely that the conversations have any palpable effect on the course of the game. Oh, occasionally, you can slip up. For instance, revealing himself to the Sartan necromancer Baltazar as a Pryan immediately earns Haplo a job feeding worms, and certain characters will turn over items upon your manhandle and, on a separate screen, select the incantation and watch the spell runes assemble themselves. Next, spells are the meat of Death Gate; watch the rune written in the air, and they're yours. But if you're going to create a whole separate interface for magic, then you'd expect the game to justify its existence. This one suggests you should be able to build spells yourself. Well, that may be. But only once, and only late in the game, did I have occasion to even fine-tune an existing spell. (You need to toy with Self-Immolating so you don't burn yourself up.) One spell adjustment does not an interface justify. It's pretty but effectively useless, and unhappily recalls Xanth's setting up a whole "Companion" structure simply for the sake of one inane puzzle.

Technically, it's a very clean game. It booted, it saved, it didn't crash. For all the voices, Death Gate is happily free of audio oddities and dropouts. Indeed, the only inconsistency I found was when Haplo, imitating a long-dead wizard, switched back and forth between his own voice and the imitation, depending on which line you had him use. (On the other hand, I'd really like to see a hero who doesn't sound as thought he works as an AM radio DJ on his day off.) For all the accompanying text, I didn't spot even one typo. The animations ran more or less smoothly on a 486 DX/2/66.

But I occasionally was haunted by a feeling that Death Gate's technology has outstripped its genre. All the amenities lavished on the game—the enormous reservoir of digitized speech, the SVGA graphics, the animated cut scenes—build expectations for a game mechanism to complement them. And as agreeable as the engine may be, the game proper is essentially the same old object-oriented adventuring. Take everything that's not nailed down and use it in a conspiracy to take everything that is. There is something inherently trivial about inhabiting a lavish world and being stranded simply by want of a certain item. Melding a rather typical graphic.

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

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

**THEY RUNED IT**

Spells are handled in a similar fashion. You click on the "Cast" icon and on the person or object you want to magically good tool for passing on information, but, in terms of the game's ebb and flow, a relatively meaningless feature.

**MIX-N-MATCH MAGIC** Spells are created by combining basic rune tiles on this screen.
You can hear your breath, your boots pounding on metal stairs. There's only one way out. 20 more feet... 15... 10. You're almost there when suddenly from out of nowhere an 8-foot-tall green alien drops down and lunges at you with a spear, leaving you approximately .08 seconds to act.

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

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

Finally, the game ends relatively cold with a short and predictable 3D animation of Sang-Drax getting a real close look at the inner workings of the Vortex, and a digitized reading of three congratulatory paragraphs. The thing is, Sang-Drax is a relatively late addition to the tale and, as we don't have a history with him, his un-doing is not nearly as momentous as it might have been had he been introduced early on. (Or if he'd turned out to be disguised as, say, Xar.)

Instead of this weak ending, it might have been better to go back and see what changes the ending has wrought on the divided worlds, especially since the game's linearity prevents you from seeing the results of your efforts. Once you've reached a new realm, you can't leave until you've finished your task—shades of a finicky child at the dinner table—and once you've completed your task and reported back to Xar, you can't return. That's doubly inconvenient because the game does let you move on to a new realm without getting everything you'll need for future use. (Fortunately, the only restriction on saves seems to be hard drive space.)

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

**INTERFACE BY XANTH**

The Death Gate interface is sweet simplicity. Seven verbs, a compass rose, and an accessible object inventory.

---

**DEATH GATE**

**RATING**

**PROS**

- Bullet-proof interface, some clever puzzles, and quality voice-overs.
- A big step up from [companions of Xanth](#).

**CONS**

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

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Electronic Arts’
Dark “Comic Book” Adventure, NOCTROPOLIS

by Charles Ardai

It used to be that likening something to a comic book was a way of putting it down. “Comic book” meant two-dimensional, episodic, unsophisticated, and juvenile. These days, if you compare something to a comic book it’s a compliment. Some of the biggest movies of the last few years have been based on comic books (Batman, The Mask, TimeCop), while others might as well have been, they resembled comic books so closely. Today “comic book” means mythic, dark, and resonant, or else cynical, self-aware, and hip. And profitable—it means profitable more than it means almost anything else.

Little wonder, then, that after a hiatus of several years computer game designers are once again looking to comic books for inspiration. (There was a brief flurry of titles around 1987; gamers with long memories may recall Accolade’s Comics, “featuring Steve Keene, Thrillseeker,” and Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future from Electronic Arts.)

NOCTROPOLIS, EA’s latest attempt at a comic book-inspired game, comes closer to the mark than the earlier titles did, by combining the characteristics that have made the new generation of comic books so popular—stylized visuals, grotesque characters, bloody violence, sporadic nudity, moral ambiguity—with such features of modern multimedia gaming as full-motion video and a moody orchestral soundtrack. At first glance (and first listen), NOCTROPOLIS appears snazzy indeed.

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

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

You’re the city’s champion, a Dark Knight bringing justice to the shadowy underworld. One day, an arch-villain out for your blood breaks an army of psychopaths out of a home for the criminally insane, and now you’ve got to face them one by one in progressively deadlier encounters.

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

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

Some people say there are only six plots in all of literature, which would mean that authors since Homer have been retelling familiar yarns about familiar types of characters and ought not to be criticized for doing so. Even if you accept this idea, though, there is a difference between good stories and bad ones. If good stories are never wholly novel, at least they aren’t wholly familiar either. NOCTROPOLIS is familiar stuff from beginning to end. There is not one scene in the game that doesn’t instantly remind you of a dozen similar scenes in other games, films, and books.
In an attempt to break with the familiar, the story tries to pull off a big twist at the end, but players who bother to read the miniature comic book that comes in the game box will guess it before the game even begins. Even players who somehow fail to anticipate the twist will not care about it when it comes, since it is hard to care about anything that happens to characters who act not like normal human beings or even super-powered human beings, but like characters in bad action movies—or bad comics.

Not helping matters much is the actual text of the game. The dialogue consists almost exclusively of hoary clichés. (“Not another step,” says a priest menaced by a nun who is possessed by a demoness. “Any closer and I’ll send you back to Hell!” “Go ahead, holy man,” says the demoness, “pull the trigger.” “God help me,” cries the priest, “I can’t do it!”) The narration, on the other hand, far from indulging in clichés, is a singular example of peculiar and pompous over-writing.

Windows don’t just break in Noctropolis, they “shatter in a deafening shower of corrosation.” You aren’t just sorry your favorite comic book series has been cancelled—no, “an unexpected anxiety irritatingly competes for your attention as you swallow the bitter acknowledgment that this will be the last time you may enjoy the novelty of a Darksheer adventure. Annoyed by your inability to affect the publisher’s decisions, you ... resume your review of the last installment of the ... saga.” When, during your adventures, you stop by a strip joint, you don’t just restrain yourself from whistling at a stripper, you “overcome the desire to vocalize a number of degrading catcalls toward the exotic dancer.”

If this isn’t bad enough, there is over-writing of another sort in evidence as well. Like comedians who point out their punch lines so you’ll know where you’re supposed to laugh, authors Brent Erickson and Shaun Mitchell insist on filling the screen with text boxes that tell you what you are about to see. “The Succubus’ attack is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Stiletto,” says one text box, which then adds, “who is fitted in her stylized black cat suit and heels.” Sure enough, the text box vanishes and there comes Stiletto; and sure enough, she’s wearing her cat suit and heels. But why did we need to be told this in text when we could just have watched it happen?

Another text-related complaint: although the game comes on CD-ROM, and although the designers managed to find room on the CD for more than 20 minutes of music, they somehow neglected to find room for spoken renditions of most of the text in the game. In a typical conversation between Darksheer and another character, only the first few lines of the other character’s dialogue are spoken out loud; all of Darksheer’s lines and the bulk of the other character’s responses are printed out on the screen. The result is that Noctropolis feels old-fashioned, like an adventure game from the Dan Dare era of computer gaming, when players would put up with a less-than-satisfying gaming experience because technical limitations meant they had no choice.

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

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

In a good adventure game, if you wanted to smash a hole in a wall by tying one end of a rope to a sack of bricks and throwing the other end into the blades of a giant fan, you would have to use the rope first on the bricks and then on the fan. Not here. Here, you stand in the middle of the Fan Room, select “Use,” and then click on each object you’re carrying. Eventually you get to the rope, and as soon as you click on it, you’re done—you can sit back and watch while Darksheer goes about implementing the specific solution to the puzzle.

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

**SHEER AND SHEER ALIKE**
The weak gameplay doesn’t diminish reading her lines off of misspelled cue cards, and as for Stiletto (Hope Marie Carlton), who shows off an obvious pair of implants in a bizarre topless scene, all I can say is that this is an actress whose career is unlikely to take off unless they start making “Porky’s” movies again.

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

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

**THE EDITORS SPEAK**

**NOCTROPOLIS**

**RATING**

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

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

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

**NOCTROPOLIS’** good qualities, of course. The surreal background art is elaborate and dramatic. The music is evocative. Some of the performances are fun, especially Nathan Oventhal’s as the phlegm-spewing Greenthumb and Anthony Russell’s as a playful sadist named Dr. Macabre. Julia Simper’s work as a widow and David Jean Thomas’ as the beleaguered priest, though minor, are also worth a glance.

Unfortunately, even in these areas, NOCTROPOLIS tends to disappoint. As usual for a multimedia game intended for “mature” audiences, the quality of the acting in the game declines in direct proportion to how much skin an actor has to show. Jessica Youngblood is quite good in her incidental role as a hooker wearing a teddy under a trenchcoat; the Succubus (Brittney Lewis), who flashes a nipple in the first scene, seems to be
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ALIEN LOGIC Splices Bio-Tech, Magic, Great Graphics, and Dreadful Dialogue Into A Strange New Adventure

by Paul C. Schuytema

Over three thousand years ago, the human species was responsible for the xenocide of the shantha race on the colony planet of Jorune. Now, time has healed some, but not all of the wounds. Red Shantha, a renegade shantha, sees humans as an unacceptable evil. Four years ago, he raided your village and placed the inhabitants in containment crystals. Somehow, through a strange series of accidents, your crystal ended up in the Mountain Crown of Tan-Iricid, home to the inquisitive Thriddle. You were released, told of the fate of your people, and set out on the quest to find your fellow villagers and free them from the Red Shantha's enslavement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE UNIVERSE IS BIG
To be fair to Alien Logic, there is a lot to this game. You follow a string of quests, picking up location clues from dialog and artifacts you find, and along the way, you explore and interact with Jorune and its very unique denizens. The game is not difficult, but it is not overly easy. It possesses just the right blend of challenge, encouragement and opportunity, making it a game far less frustrating than many in the adventure genre.

In fact, I simply loved the game interface. As a player, you work through seven distinctly different and flawlessly implemented interfaces. The primary interface is the side-scrolling view in which your character interacts most closely with the world around him, and can control and weave dyshas. Beyond that, there are a handful of travel interfaces, from a photo-realistic overhead map, for moving to specific sites within a sector, to a meta-movement device, which allows you to travel larger distances, to the warp world interface, which allows you to enter another dimension of Jorune and travel instantly across vast distances to the various warps you have activated.

When you encounter a nasty sentient or beast, there are times when fighting is the only recourse. For those situations, you invoke your isho power to weave dyshas for offense or defense. The offensive dyshas can be as simple as a fireball (whose intensity will increase as your dysha knowledge increases) or as passively complex as a sphere of suspension...
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which surrounds your opponents. Combat is fairly straightforward, but it moves a little too quickly at times for you to really spend any time considering which dyshas to use. As in most games, it is best to save just prior to the encounter, allowing you to restore your game until you can nail down the proper strategy.

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

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

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

**THE EDITORS SPEAK**

**ALIEN LOGIC**

**RATING**

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

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

---

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I’ll Have The Roach He’s Smoking

Greg Roach Leads A Long, Strange Trip Into THE VORTEX

by Charles Ardai

If, as he claims, self-styled “virtual cinema” pioneer Greg Roach wants interactive movies to attain the level of mainstream success and acceptance long since granted to movies, television, and novels, he’ll have to start making interactive movies you don’t have to be stoned to appreciate.

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

How did this happen? The Vortex is a sequel to one of last year’s most impressive multimedia titles, Quantum Gate. Like The Vortex and Roach’s first title, The Madness of Roland, Quantum Gate contained more New Age sap than I would have liked, but it also had an anti-war science fiction storyline that hit you with the force of a Mack truck and the best acting, bar none, ever seen on a CD-ROM.

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

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

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

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

Any lingering doubts about the tone of this adventure are soon wiped away by the dialogue. “Greed is the most powerful force on Earth,” says Drew, just before...
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The silence of the Lambs is a novel about insanity, but it doesn't try to drive its reader insane. QUANTUM GATE inspired just the right amount of paranoia and disorientation, without falling into the vortex of confusion that was central to its plot. In The Vortex Greg Roach has, sadly, gone over the edge—and, worse yet, he insists that the player go with him.

TRIPPIN' THROUGH DREAMLAND

As noted above, The Vortex offers three ways to pass the time: you can explore, converse, or hallucinate. Hallucination is easiest of the three, since you don't actually have to do anything, just watch the video clips and wonder what the hell they mean. Exploration consists of clicking on directional pointers in the horizontal location window that takes up most of the screen, and then watching as Drew's view shifts. Most locations in the game are explorable, from the treetop village of the opening to the dark, gothic human base of the finale.

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

Conversations are more enjoyable, if only because they aren't so aimless. There are always at least a half-dozen subjects to talk about, and most offer a chance to shape Drew's character in interesting ways. However, these encounters are hampered by the fact that they usually take the form of "talking heads" sessions in which the character you are speaking with faces the camera in extreme close-up and says something intense. Excellent scripting helped distract the viewer from this quality in QUANTUM GATE; here, alas, the scripting is yet another thing from which you need to be distracted.

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

Even if you set this episode aside, there is more than enough embarrassing writing in The Vortex to go around. Between re-
Ages ago, In the damp passages of the Old World Evil was defeated And Chaos was cast into the shadows of time...

In darkness It waits

_Dungeon Master II_

This Christmas, the Master of all Dungeon Games Returns

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

**EARTH ANGEL**

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

The other actors, though, all fall short of the high marks set by the first product. Jamie Callahan, whom I consider one of the best young actors around, in or out of computer games, gives it all he’s got as renegade Private Michaels, but when your lines include such retro hippie gems as “This is so freaked out...here it’s cool, it’s, like, totally acceptable,” you’re doomed—even if your director hasn’t painted your face red and dressed you in a Gypsy girl’s harem outfit, as Roach has done here.

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

**THAT’S ALL SHE ROACHED**

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

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

---

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**The Editors Speak**

**The Vortex: Quantum Gate II**

**Rating:**

**Pros:** Paige Witte is terrific as a winged alien you want to take home to Mom; Jamie Callahan brings a very real energy to his rather unfortunate role.

**Cons:** The script reads like a cobbled together reject from the Age of Aquarius.
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ECSTATICA’s Ellipsoid Technology Takes The Edge Off ALONE IN THE DARK

by Allen L. Greenberg

For a moment, it seems as though Piglet, wielding a miniature hatchet, has escaped from A.A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh. Several yards down the road, Lon Chaney Jr., suffering from an overdose of the full-moon, drops in from an unseen roof-top with claws drawn and a deep, guttural growl. If you are lucky, you might duck into the barn where a tantrum-throwing bratlet screams for her teddy-bear and lets loose with a final Bronx cheer.

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

Cast in the mold of the ALONE IN THE DARK games, Ecstatica features either a hero or heroine who walks, crawls, dodges and fights like a marionette whose strings are attached to your numeric keypad. The cursed village in which the adventure takes place is a dangerous and intricately-designed playground whose very alley and building holds some new challenge. Like the ALONE IN THE DARK games, the program features a series of constantly shifting three-dimensional perspectives, as though hundreds of cameras had been planted throughout the village, all of which are now under the control of some mad movie director who cannot decide which view he likes the best.

Graphically, Ecstatica is far more refined than the ALONE IN THE DARK games. Rather than the patchwork appearance of animated polygons, it uses a system of “ellipsoids” to generate its characters and provide them with a more graceful and natural appearance. Each character’s actions are rendered with a great deal of care and fluid animation. Likewise, the village, as well as its buildings and castles, have all been treated with the same attention to detail. Ecstatica also features an outstanding music score and remarkable sound effects. The dialogue may be somewhat sparse, yet is masterfully mixed in with the action. It is also presented by some very talented speakers who manage to take their roles seriously, yet not without a touch of irony.

There is quite a bit of combat in the game, and this will definitely frustrate those players who enjoy exploring without having to worry about watching their back. Uncovering the village’s arcane secrets depends on successful combat at least as often as it does on solving the game’s puzzles. There are a handful of weapons lying around the village, as well as a variety of objects which may or may not be integral to successfully completing the game. In addition to surviving the game’s many battles, you will also need to endure the indignity of several red herrings and misleading, yet nonetheless intriguing, pathways and special objects.

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

There are moments, unfortunately, when combat in Ecstatica seems as though it were placed there merely to impede progress in the game. Several of the creatures are nearly impossible to
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kill, although they may be intimidated into backing off so that you can explore more freely for a short time. The Wolf-Man creature alluded to above is particularly noticeable for his habit of pouncing from off-stage straight onto the hero's back. When this happens, there is generally no choice but to hit "escape" and restart the game at some other point. It is only when the creature has the decency to approach from a visible section of scenery that you stand a fighting chance of walking away from battle. You should, however, take some comfort from the fact that the Wolf-Man often guards an important part of the story. Though you may perish in your path, at least you know it was a path worth taking. There are also several mechanical sudden-death traps scattered throughout the village. Needless to say, taking advantage of the program's elaborate game-save system is the only way to maintain any progress in the game.

There appears to be a role-playing aspect to Ecstatica in that your hero or heroine seem to become more capable of dealing with the enemy demons each time a battle is completed. However, the character's progress or condition generally remains a mystery. There is no numerical or graphic representation of either development or even injury, so that you are often left to guess at what these might be. It is only when the character becomes severely injured that he or she will begin to limp, painfully cradling an injured limb, that you may safely assume that he or she is in need of some immediate care. Healing takes place at special locations in the game where the hero can flop onto a comfortable surface, and awaken with all wounds mysteriously mended.

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

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

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

The Editors Speak

**Ecstatica**

**Rating:** 3/5

**Pros:** A seductive story with bright graphics and expressive characters.

**Cons:** The game is a bit brief, and what length it does have is often a result of excessive combat rather than more puzzles and exploration.
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EVERY ONE IN A WHILE THINGS change—sometimes slowly, sometimes in a moment. Computer gaming tends to evolve in small steps, many of them in a year, so that when you look back across a decade it makes you feel like checking into an old age home, but the steps themselves can be hard to notice while they are happening. And sometimes they aren't.

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

WING COMMANDER III: HEART OF THE TIGER, from the technology-pushing nuts at Origin, has to be one of the most hyped programs to come down the pipe in the history of the field. From the amount of money spent on production to conversations with stars who wouldn't be caught dead doing TV but are now on an even smaller screen, WC3 has already been loved, hated, mocked, honored and dismissed by various talking heads... and all before it even hit the shelves. Well, now it's finally here and what's a poor reviewer supposed to do?

Just play it, I guess.

Well, after having spent enough hours playing to have gotten myself a degree in brain-surgery from the Sally Stuhiers TV College, I can honestly say I have no idea what to say. It's simply incredible and the annoying thing is, I'm not even sure what the heck to call it. It's not really a movie. It's insane to treat it as just another game. I'll choke on my own arm before I'll use the word "interactive," "virtual" or any other media catch-phrase that really doesn't mean anything. I'd call it a "software experience" but I'm afraid people would start asking me to tune their crystals.

From the "When in doubt, stick to what you know" school of journalism, let's start looking at WC3 as if it were just another game....

ANOTHER GAME, ANOTHER CARRIER

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

Unfortunately, humanity is still at war with the feline Kilrathi, who want the wind to blow through your body. If you've played through the previous two WC's, then be prepared for bad news; once again you've had another carrier blown out from under you. In seeming retaliation, your old pal Admiral Tolwyn, who holds you personally responsible for every human ill all the way back to Beverly Hills 90210, assigns you to an old Carrier, the TCS Victory.

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

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

Each mission is flown from the cockpit of one of a half-dozen types of fighters, ranging from a light scout to a heavy bomber. Flight mechanics and controls are virtually unchanged from the previous WC's, with a few useful additions like the ability to unleash all your missiles in one salvo and to turn your ship independently of your direction of flight. Ships are still protected by energy shields (visible when they are struck as in Wing Commander: Armada) that must be blasted away before you can start chewing up the hull itself. Also unchanged are your fellow pilots, at least one of which is at your wing on every
mission, and they still fly with their own personal, and effective, styles. One change, though, from previous games, is that since you are a commanding officer now, you get to pick your own wingman for each mission, and sometimes the storyline may influence those choices.

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

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

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

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

The combat model has changed to the point that instead of fighting two Kilrathi that are hard to kill, you are wrapped up in a furball with ten enemy fighters that are pretty easy to kill. The danger is about the same, it's just the action that has increased to make things more interesting to the casual gamer, and there are now five skill levels for enemy pilots, so things may be further tweaked to your personal level of sim-competency. While most would see this as a good thing, those that don't notice the paradox of demanding extreme realism in a starfighter may feel things have gotten a little fluffily. But have no fear, the incompetent flying in Wing Commander: Armada is gone, hopefully never to return. Computer pilots fly well and style is dictated by fighter type, as it should be.

"I'M READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP NOW, MR. DEMILLE."
All this being said, I'm afraid I've come to the conclusion that the space-

YOU PATHETIC DESCENDANT OF MONKEYS
Your Kilrathi opponent will fling a few less insults when he feels the sting of your twin ion cannon.
I'M BRINGING HER IN Unlike previous Wing Commander games, you must land your fighter on the carrier, where the hangar walls resemble those of Doom, but with even better perspective and depth-of-field view.

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

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

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

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

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

CONFEDERATION SHIPS

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

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

EXCALIBUR: An experimental fighter which outclasses nearly every other ship in the game. Almost as fast as an Arrow, the Excalibur sports two Reaper guns and four Tachyon cannons, which allow it to go through an enemy's shields in one or two bursts. Fly this whenever opportunity arises.

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

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

KILRATHI SHIPS

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

DRAITHI X: The familiar enemy has been enhanced from WC2 to include both Mono and Particle Cannon. But if you can survive the four Infrared missiles the Draithi carries, it is easy prey for any Confed ship.

PAKTAM: Confederation pilots wish that their bombers were this good. Four Plasma Guns and two Ion Cannon are augmented by a Mass Driver in the tail section—approach with caution! The Pakthain's odd shape makes it difficult to target as well.

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

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

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

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

**EPIPHANY**

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

Origin should be applauded for taking this kind of a risk, and believing enough in their personnel to let a barnkroll of this size ride the wheel. Chris Roberts himself, though no Orson Welles, gets much of the credit here—and may he put this much love and attention into all of his projects of this type. Whatever weird future award is given for these things, I'm sure he will receive one retroactively. No matter what damage the "Hollywood" influence wreaks upon the software world, if it has brought us this, then it has been worth it...so far.

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

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Net Profit
Battling For Bucks In Dynamix’ Multiplayer METALTECH: BATTLE DROME
by Jeff James

Af ter letting you smash the bytes out of the evil, bit-brained Cybri ds in Met altech: E arthiseig e, Dynamix now up loads you into cyberspace for a chance to earn some respect—and cash—in Metaltech: BattleDrome. Whereas E arthiseig e had you battling the computer-controlled Cybri ds for squatter’s rights to the radioactive rubble that used to be Earth, BattleDrome takes place on a field of glory wrought from the luminiferous phosphors and coruscating data streams of cyberspace. Forget lofty goals and noble struggles for survival: BattleDrome replaces those tedious ideas with the singular goal of amassing as much fame and fortune as possible for you and your HERCULAN (HERC) fighting vehicle.

CRASHING THE NET
The game begins with you “logging in” to the BattleDrome network, creating a pilot in the process. After creating your pilot (which simply involves entering his name), you can choose between local or remote play. Local play is play versus the computer, while remote play gives you access to network, modem and serial link play with other gamers. If you’re itching to blast someone, an instant action option tosses you into a randomly generated arena with a computer-controlled HERC in a fight to the death; the only option you need to select is a difficulty level. In both single player and multi-player modes, your pilot’s results are recorded from match to match. The better you do the higher you’ll advance in a hierarchy that is roughly similar to the system used to rank professional boxers. There are ten tiers in the ranking system, plus five ranks. Your goal is to challenge players in the higher tiers until you’ve emerged as the top BattleDrome player. Your tier and rank position are both determined by the number of matches you’ve won. At the first rank—cadet—you can only buy and use the lightest of HERCs, such as the Stryder, but as you progress through the ranks, you’ll get the opportunity to pilot ever more powerful vehicles, up to and including the mighty Hammer, a massive engine of destruction that can lay waste to lesser HERCs wholesale.

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

When you’re satisfied with the weapon loadouts of your HERC, you can hit the challenge board and start fighting some battles. All the currently available players are listed on the challenge board, with the best players at the top of the board and the poor or inexperienced...
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starting at the bottom. To challenge a player to a match you simply point and click on his name and then the challenge button.

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

**LET THE GAMES BEGIN!**

You begin the match at a randomly determined location in the arena. All the vital information on your HERC, such as speed, heading, shield strength, etc., is displayed in HUD-fashion around the edges of your viewscreen. Depending on the settings you selected during the negotiations screen, you may see obstacles and gun emplacements scattered throughout the arena. Your opponent also starts in a random location, and will soon come looking for you. If you agreed to a small arena size, you’ll get into combat almost immediately. Larger arenas allow for more tactical flexibility and some sneaking about. Hovering above the battlefield is your probe, essentially a piloted camera that allows you to see different parts of the arena, usually used as recon vessels. Buzzing high above the fray is the referee, a computer-controlled judge that makes sure both players follow the rules and don’t use any illegal weapons or run out of bounds.

After the match, you’ll get the opportunity to repair and upgrade your HERC in preparation for the next battle. Once
your HERO is all fixed up, you can go back to the challenge board and seek out another opponent. This process continues as you claw your way up the ranking system in an effort to become the biggest, baddest HERO pilot in cyberspace.

**TWO IS A PARTY**

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

Dynamix took the minimalist approach to several aspects of BATTLE-DROME's design. The graphics are crisp and clean, with detailed texture maps applied to each of the HERCs. The on-screen pyrotechnics are also well-done: blast an enemy HERC and you'll see a burst of flame, followed by an explosion of tiny HERO fragments. The arena itself is a bit on the plain side, but the gun towers and obstacles serve to alleviate that problem. Granted, staying alive in the arena doesn't allow for much sightseeing, so Dynamix has concentrated its graphic efforts on what you will see: hopefully, your opponent's HERC—in it's texture-mapped glory—smashed into wreckage. The music is top-notch, complete with a hard-driving medley of techno-pop and rock tunes that accentuate the action on-screen. I did find the controls to be a bit unwieldy—a problem shared with EARTH-SIEGE—especially when playing with the keyboard. Using the joystick helps to some degree, but the ultimate control experience can only be had using a Thrustmaster joystick and throttle control. I also would have liked to see more players allowed in each match, but the challenge board system is a good substitute.

**SPLIT DECISION**

So how does BATTLE-DROME compare to its METALTECH stablemate, EARTH-SIEGE? EARTH-SIEGE is the more visually attractive, but BATTLE-DROME's addictive modem and network play put it out ahead. As an avid fan of the whole anthropomorphic combat vehicle concept, I can't help but feel a bit disappointed by Dynamix's decision to split Metaltech into two separate games. The power-stretched its development resources a bit thin by developing such similar combat simulations in the same time frame, a policy which unfortunately has hurt both products.

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

**THE EDITORS SPEAK**

**METALTECH: BATTLE-DROME**

**RATING**

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

**CONS** Awkward controls and a weak single player mode.
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What Happens When Arcade Games And CD-ROMs Meet?

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Novastorm

by Gordon Goble

From the land of Chuck and Di, Family Towers, and a jolly good tally-ho comes the latest offering from those Lemmings-lovers, Psygnosis. Novastorm is a throwback to those arcade days of yesteryear, following in the footsteps of such classics as Space Invaders, Galaga, et al, giving space cadets with a quick trigger finger and a distaste for extensive storytelling and complex game play an arena in which to blow stuff up real good.

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

Sound somewhat overdone? Well, it is...just about as much as my wife's roast beef, and to make matters worse, this re-
dundant yet smart looking Novastorm prelude (including 27 MB worth of slideshows) is simply window-dressing for the very typical arcade shoot-em-up that follows. That's right, space commandos, there is no storyline from here on in—it's just you watching a rear view of your spaceship (sort of an upside down Klingon-type offshoot), while you blast madly away at anything that moves.

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

Enemy squadrons will attack in a pre-set sequence (that will never vary, in accordance with The Law Of The Arcade), and even though you'll get to know when and where they'll show up, nailing these little suckers is not nearly as simple as in the arcade games of old. To Novastorm's credit, layers of targets will not simply cascade from top to bottom, and a relatively decent 3-D effect is achieved as targets will either sneak up from behind, pass by, and scoot off into the distance, or vice-versa. Your cannons and rockets, therefore, blow off into the great beyond, and are quite difficult to accurately aim. That makes things interesting.

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

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

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

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

At the end of each level lies a “Guardian,” a particularly tough killing machine that may take the shape of machine, beast, or both. From multi-pointed star shaped ships to Phoenix-like bird-terrors rising from molten volcanic pits (these are the little surprises to which I alluded earlier), and are definitely the high point of NOVASTORM. The bird-guy, especially, adds to the good graphic quality of the game, and is an awesome entity to behold.

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

For quick action lovers who relish the idea of reliving those days when they stockpiled quarters throughout the week for a Friday beer’n’video game night, NOVASTORM might be a nice blast to the past. But to repeat an earlier warning, it’s all been done, better, before.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

NOVASTORM

RATING ★★★★

PROS Nice 100 megabyte paint job.

CONS Underneath the paint, it’s the same old, same old. Will someone please educate the Europeans about save games?

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Get all six at your local software store... NOW!
A Magic Carpet Ride

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

by Mark Clarkson

The wind roars in my ears as my flying carpet skims just inches above the rolling ocean waves. Before me rises the castle of my enemy. Readyng the appropriate spells, I accelerate and sweep over the castle wall so rapidly that I am momentarily disoriented and might lose my footing on the carpet were that possible. Then I am over the parapets and among a mass of startled, black-clad archers. They recover quickly and drop to their knees, taking aim. Arrows whiz by, inches away, but none strike home. In return, I unleash a rain of fire, killing many of the archers where they stand, and burning ugly scars onto the pristine white walls of my enemy's castle. In seconds I am over the far wall again and accelerating out over the ocean in a sweeping curve to approach the castle from another direction.

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

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

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

HELP ME! I'M ENCHANTED

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

You are an apprentice wizard whose quest is to visit the 50 'shattered worlds' in turn, restoring each to magical balance: monsters, traps, and other wizards stand in your way. Magic Carpet takes you outside, where few first-person games dare to tread, into island landscapes of oceans and palm tree forests, featuring castles, monsters and grotesque, mysterious monuments. Lovely hot-air balloons dot cloud-filled skies.

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

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

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

I CAN FLY!

The experience of flight is the single most engaging part of Magic Carpet. It will have you bobbing your head and applying heavy doses of body english. My
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and to roll left or right. The keyboard controls your direction of travel and speed. Press the up arrow key once and you’ll slowly move forward; press it again and you’ll pick up speed. Now move the mouse to the left and you’ll bank left. Pull back on the mouse to climb; push forward to dive. You can’t fall off and you can’t crash into anything. Hey, it’s a magic carpet.

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

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

You drive the carpet with both mouse and keyboard. The mouse (or joystick, if you prefer) controls the carpet’s attitude. You use the mouse to pitch up or down, to roll left or right. The keyboard controls your direction of travel and speed. Press the up arrow key once and you’ll slowly move forward; press it again and you’ll pick up speed. Now move the mouse to the left and you’ll bank left. Pull back on the mouse to climb; push forward to dive. You can’t fall off and you can’t crash into anything. Hey, it’s a magic carpet.

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MANNA, HOW I LOVE YA

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

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

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

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

A WIZARD’S HOME
IS HIS CASTLE

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

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

Its spell petrified a city's populace, exiled a prince of Ancient Egypt to spread the cult of the dark god, Iyathotep, and ensured that the blood of the serpent people ran through the veins of all his descendents. Centuries would pass, and it would be buried at the end of a long, lost tunnel in a temple beneath the unsuspecting city of Alexandria. But in 920, one Yussuf Al Rashid begins to dig a hiding place for his ill-begotten money and uncovers the 2,000 year old magical scroll which sets in motion an adventure which begins with death and could finish with the end of the world.
sufficient manna within its walls, the world is restored. You can then move on to the next world, or fly around gathering up manna and spells you may have missed, or just enjoy the scenery. Restore all 50 worlds and the game is won.

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

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

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

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**THE EDITORS SPEAK**

**MAGIC CARPET**

**RATING**

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

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

---

**A RAVINE RUNS THROUGH IT** The bigger the castle or landmass, the more spectacular is the destruction from the Earthquake spell. Marked only by that little sphere at left, the spell slices through the castle and carves through the entire continent, instantly, in real time.

**LIGHTNING STRIKES AGAIN** A handy way of dealing with a cluster of enemy forces, such as these Demons, is to cast the Lightning Storm spell. The spell floats above, stabbing any living creature with scorching lightning fingers, often killing everything in its reach.

**BURNIN' DOWN THE HOUSE** Why use that puny one-shot flameball when you can unleash a firestorm like this? The Meteor erupts in a torrent of fire that can denude hillsides and burn castles to their foundations in seconds.

---

**YOU'LL POMPEII FOR THIS!** Here we've installed a lovely, active volcano in the living room of an opposing wizard. Sadly, it didn't fit very well, so we had to burn the castle walls to the ground.
It’s not just a game.
The Elder Scrolls ARENA

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—Johnny Wilson, Computer Gaming World

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—Strategy Plus Magazine

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—Zach Meston, Computer Player

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

The Incredible And Regrettable Unite
In Virgin's CREATURE SHOCK

by Jeff James

It is the 22nd Century and civilization is on the verge of collapse. Decades of overcrowding and pollution have irreversibly damaged the Earth's ecosystem, forcing humanity to look to the stars to escape a choked planet. (Stop me if you've heard this before.) The United Nations—now a form of unified world government—sends three ships out into the solar system to search for the best world to colonize. But en route to the moons of Saturn, the survey ship UNS Amazon is attacked and enveloped by a mysterious, tentacled space creature. The U.N. turns to you, Commander Jason Barr, swaggering John Wayne of the 22nd Century, to learn what happened to the Amazon and free its stricken colonists.

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

After fighting your way past waves of enemy ships to reach the Amazon, you'll soon find there are two game modes in CREATURE SHOCK. The first involves moving Commander Barr through the tunnels, chambers and passageways of the game world all from a first-person 3-D perspective, using your laser pistol to discourage or destroy any hostile critters you stumble across. The second play style puts you in the controls of your speedy spacecraft, equipped with a pair of cannons to help you blast your way through waves of enemies to reach your goal. Interspersed between these two are dozens of animated segues which serve as the glue holding the story together.

DR. JEKYLL...

Easily the most impressive aspect of the game is the first-person exploration. I could describe it as a cross between DOOM and 7TH GUEST, but that doesn't begin to convey the game's amazing visual appeal. You experience the world through Commander Jason Barr's eyes, seeing everything through the visor on his space helmet. Everything happens full-screen, with ray-traced animation. Using the mouse, you move an on-screen pointer to your desired location and press the left mouse button to walk in that direction. You navigate through the world in this fashion, point-and-click through wonderfully rendered passageways and chambers. At certain points during the game, the viewpoint will shift to a dramatic, exterior viewpoint, not unlike something you'd see in I-Motion's ALONE IN THE DARK. This usually occurs when something bad is about to happen, such as when a giant alien worm-thing tries to snap open your shiny space helmet and suck out the contents. It's done with an artistic flair that reflects an attention to detail rivaling commercial cinematography.

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

On a 486DX2-66 machine with a double-speed CD-ROM drive, the action moves along briskly, with disk activity generally occurring during an appropriate lull. The animation is a little dithered, and the color palette seems reduced in the walking sequences, but the smooth animation more than compensates for these shortcomings. Unfortunately, there isn't a save game feature. Once you've successfully completed an episode (there are five in all) you can start from the beginning of that episode at any time. That...
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doesn't help much when you've invested several hours navigating through a treacherous level only to be gobbled up in the last few seconds by a fearsome end-of-level beastie.

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

...AND MR. HYDE

Unfortunately, the rich, engrossing atmosphere so laboriously created in the first-person sequences is all but obliterated when you take the controls of your space vessel in the flying sequences. In the first of two sequences, you must pilot your canary-yellow spacecraft through waves of adversaries to eventually reach the Amazon, which lies helpless in orbit around Saturn. To get there you must contend with a menagerie of hostile spacecraft, from floating gun emplacements to space-faring giant jellyfish. After defeating several waves of aliens and dodging the occasional asteroid, you eventually destroy the "Boss" alien to gain access to the next level. Although the audio-visual portion of this sequence is acceptable, the mouse-only control makes this aspect of the game a chore at best. This design flaw is exacerbated in the second flight sequence, in which you must race through the narrow canyons of Tethys (a moon of Saturn) at high speed, dodging obstacles and blasting enemies while tailing a speeding probe that will lead you to your destination. After repeated attempts, all unsuccessful, at trying to maneuver past the obstacles, I somehow managed to complete the mission. In retrospect, I'm not sure whether my success was due to my skill or dumb luck. I'd put money on luck.

What's even more perplexing about the terrible flight sequences is that Creature Shock is developed by the same company that crafted such wonderfully playable titles as Starglider I and II (for the Amiga) and Starfox (for the Super NES). None of the addictive playability found in those titles is present in the flight sequences of Creature Shock, a fact that should come as a surprise to the many admirers of Argonaut Software's previous efforts. This curious combination of stunning first-person sequences and embarrassingly mediocre flight segments can possibly be explained by Virgin's attempt to make Creature Shock appeal to the widest range of gamers, from Sega CD owners to users of multimedia Pentium systems. This philosophy may have looked good on paper, but in practice it spoils the appeal of an otherwise exemplary product.

Creature Shock isn't a long game, either. After approximately 12 hours of play, I found myself staring at the endgame animation and the scrolling production credits. The last mission is exceptionally well-done, complete with a dramatic gun battle aboard the alien mother ship for the destiny of the Earth, but the reward for completing that battle, and the game, was weak. It was a bit on the short side compared to the animated segue sequences used throughout the game, and it left too many loose ends flapping in the solar wind. I can't help but think that Argonaut was forced to cut the ending short for lack of time or space. Whatever the reasons, some may find the ending to be a bit disappointing.

PASSING JUDGMENT

If Creature Shock were picked apart by a psychoanalyst, the doctor would suggest treatment for a split personality disorder. It's really amazing that the same group of people could produce, on one hand, a virtual world incredibly rich in atmosphere, and on the other, arcade flight sequences so completely devoid of value. I felt a bit manic-depressive myself while playing it, thoroughly captivated one second, and thoroughly bored the next. I certainly hope Argonaut/Virgin can pull itself together for a sequel, one that includes more first-person exploration, a save-game option, and improved (or removed) flight sequences. With those elements, we'd have a clear winner; right now, we've got a split decision.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

CREATURE SHOCK

RATING

PROS First-person fighting scenes are stunning and convincing.

CONS The disappointing flight sequences, the short game length, and the lack of joystick control and save-game options cripple what might have been a compelling game.
So, you want a perfect game. Get Hardball 4. Get cutting-edge graphics that are incredibly real. We're talking about wake-the-neighbors-and-call-your-friends kind of real. Get stat compilation that would make any sports bureau envious. Get all 28 stadiums with different altitude, field, and wind conditions. Throw in an add-on disk with over 700 major league players. And you've got a masterful gem that compelled Computer Entertainment News to label it One of 1994's Ten Best Games. Now, to get a perfect game you don't have to be in the zone. Just the right software store.
When I first heard that ESPN was going to be putting their name on a Sony Imagesoft computer baseball game, I had ambivalent feelings. Visions of Chris Berman and other ESPN personalities doing the play-by-play ran side-by-side with images of the shoddy gameplay that usually accompanies television and movie tie-ins.

Then I learned that Stormfront would be designing the game.

Stormfront is the design group responsible for what many consider to be one of the better computer baseball sims around: Tony LaRussa II. Although dogged by AI problems and other bugs for most of its history, Tony LaRussa II definitely raised the bar in terms of what graphically-oriented baseball sims could and should be. By combining a decent statistical model with gorgeous graphics, it has earned a good deal of quiet respect from many players, and is still in the CGW Top 100 poll after almost two years.

With great enthusiasm I realized, as I played the preliminary version of ESPN Baseball Tonight, that ESPN had a good chance of succeeding on two fronts. Not only does the game include many of the elements that made Tony LaRussa II a good game, but it also adopts an accessible interface the likes of which I've never seen in a baseball simulation. From the slick, TV production-quality graphics to the easy-to-read, albeit less versatile, statistical displays, it looks like Stormfront is on the right track towards building another contender.

The simulation itself falls somewhere between the other computer baseball league leaders. The highly touted Hardball series has tended to focus primarily on player-controlled action, with statistics coming as a second thought, while the incredibly powerful Front Page Sports Baseball '94 is so comprehensive that some people have complained it is overly so. ESPN Baseball Tonight seems to be reaching for the middle ground by providing entertaining, quick-hitting gameplay with a more serious, yet less demanding, statistical model.

"THIS IS BASEBALL TONIGHT!"
The game begins in true ESPN style, with full-screen digitized video clips. Lou Pinella fans (anyone...anyone?) will be happy to know that one clip features his infamous base-chucking incident. I swore I was watching "Baseball Tonight" as the television show's theme song and video bumper began to play. Dan Patrick's familiar voice introduced the game, promising to bring me all the play-by-play action. And—get this—Chris Berman does pre-game and post-game video clips, although without his trademark nicknames.

One of Stormfront's more radical departures from their LaRussa design is in the interface. All the selection screens are rendered in high-res, and all buttons are clearly defined; pull-down menus are a thing of the past. In the opening screen, you can either play ball, take batting practice, check the players' statistics, or enter the league play options. Choosing to play will take you to the game selection screen, where you can choose teams, stadiums (from among 14 ballparks), and set your starting lineups and control configurations. As in Tony LaRussa II, you can play in managerial mode or action mode, with the computer controlling the fielding and/or running if you wish.

HIT THE DIRT
On-field action looks a lot like LaRussa II with two important differences: the screen actually pans up and down to follow the ball, which means that I was actually able to see some of the upper features of all the ballparks; and the catcher's camera angle has been lowered closer to the ground than before. Of course, this wouldn't be an ESPN game if there were no instant replay. You can tinker with the tilt of the camera, and even zoom in, although it will still be a far cry from Front Page Sports Baseball's CAMS viewing system.

Fans who like to change camera angles during gameplay will be disappointed, however, as there's no such feature in Baseball Tonight.

The players are nicely rendered and can dive, jump and do all the things that baseball players do, with the exception of grabbing their crotch. Lifelike players hustle around in a realistic fashion, which they should, since real players were filmed against blue-screen for most of the animation. As for licenses and player names, all the Major Leaguers are here, from Roberto "Remember The" Alomar to Fred "Crime Dog" McGriff.

Play selection works just like it does in Tony LaRussa II: pressing left, right, up, or down on your keypad or controller selects plays. All the standard options, like bunting, stealing, pitching away and intentional walks should be there. However, player substitution, bullpen action, and
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defensive positioning is all handled through a drag and drop interface. I was able to simply pick a player from the bench and drag him to the position I wanted him to play! The same goes for warming up players in the bullpen, where each player has three different levels of fatigue, all of which are graphically illustrated; I no longer have to guess at the warm up status of my lefty in the pen.

ESPN’s touch on the game is also comfortably obvious during gameplay in a few more ways. For starters, each time a batter steps into the box, his up-to-the-moment stats are displayed, including how he did in his last at bat. Furthermore, the first time each player bats, most of his season stats are displayed; if he leads the league in a category, the number is highlighted in red. Balls, strikes and outs, will be displayed at all times in the lower right hand corner of the screen. Dan Patrick’s play-by-play is professionally done, with many of his characteristic comments (“whiff!”) included. Fortunately I have yet to see the sports sim on any platform whose play-by-play announcer can keep up with the action. Hopefully, once this game is fine tuned, things will be in sync.

STATMAN
I have very mixed feelings about ESPN Baseball’s statistical displays in the version I previewed. On one hand, the high-res graphics, a much-needed departure from the spreadsheet look-and-feel of other games’ stat screens, made the numbers a lot easier to read and interpret. I was able to sort players by team, name, and all the various statistics. Statistically speaking, however, I was a bit concerned with a noticeable lack of depth. While all the major categories are maintained, from home runs to strikeouts to innings pitched, there were some glaring omissions, like batting performances versus lefties and righties.

Although the stats are a bit limited, they seem to be reasonably accurate. Player performance seemed to be on the money.

BOX SCORE
In a nutshell, ESPN Baseball Tonight looks like it has a lot of potential. On my wish list are improved statistical depth and the ability to view the on-field action from different angles. The latter is an icing-on-the-cake kind of thing, but the former could really give this game the skills it needs to compete in a crowded field. With a little more work, Baseball Tonight could easily make the starting line up, perhaps batting third between the speedy, base-hitting Hardball III leading off the order and the heavy-hitting Front Page Sports Baseball batting clean up.

LEAGUE PLAY
ESPN Baseball Tonight’s league play is fairly typical of baseball simulations. In no time at all, I was able to set up a three division league that included injuries and a double tie playoff schedule. But more importantly, I was able to quick-play an entire season in under 6 hours on my Pentium system. Let’s say I want to play a game three days down the road. All I have to do is skip ahead to that day and click on the game I want to watch or play. Baseball Tonight will “quick play” all the unplayed games before mine. This feature will be much appreciated by players who don’t like growing old while Front Page Sports Baseball simulates its games. Unfortunately, player drafts and career modes are non-existent. Trades are permitted, although there was no computer manager AI evident.

SPREADSHEETS ON STRIKE
While the players’ stats are much easier to read than in most games, apparently some statistical depth will be sacrificed.

After playing through a season, John Olerud led the league in batting, with Frank Thomas, Matt Williams, and Junior Griffey all in contention for the home run and RBI titles. Jimmy Key was leading the league in wins and ERA.

TO THE WALL
Fourteen accurately rendered stadiums are included in the game, and players will actually be able to see all of a ballpark, as opposed to just the ground level.
It’s not just a game.

It’s an infection.

Your name: Sol Cutter. Occupation: data thief. The bad news is you’ve just down-
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Circle Reader Service #289
A ARE YOU, LIKE MANY FOOTBALL FANS, ALREADY LAMENTING THE END OF THE SEASON? Well, don't unsnap your chin strap just yet, because Sierra/Dynamix has released a new version of their award-winning Front Page Sports: Football. The new version, FPS: Football Pro '95 offers enough enhancements to shake the most ardent football fan out of his post-season depression.

Gamers will instantly be drawn into Football Pro '95 by its excellent graphics. Using rotated animation technology borrowed from FPS: Baseball, Sierra has come up with the best looking football game ever to break the pane of a graphical goal line. The players are remarkably fluid and lifelike in their movements. A quarterback's head swivels from side to side as he barks out an audible at the line of scrimmage. Ball carriers execute some nifty spin maneuvers, often straight-arming would-be tacklers. Players who score a touchdown execute a nice slamming spike, or kneel and offer thanks to the big coach in the sky. On defense, tacklers "stick" ball carriers convincingly in the open field, sometimes flipping them completely over.

Your million-dollar quarterback can now throw on the run, although not with as much precision as he does from the pocket. Pass-happy coaches will enjoy how the offensive interface leads the QB to cycle through his primary, and then his secondary receivers, with the last option being to throw the ball away to avoid a sack.

GLAMOUR BOYS AND GRUNTS
NFL team uniforms in Football Pro '95 are nicely rendered, with only the lack of helmet insignia standing as a drawback. One of the program's useful features is the ability to customize uniforms, right down to the striping. This comes in handy for creating original teams in league play, or for those who feel the urge to have their favorite team take the field in this season's popular "throwback" regalia.

Player numbers aren't displayed on the jerseys, but this seems to be a common shortcoming among most football sims, more a limitation of the current state of technology than a flaw in design philosophy. As in past versions, Football Pro '95 displays the number of the ball carrier or other player under human control via a small box above the player. Coaches who feel the need to see every player's number can hit the F5 hot key, which causes numbers to appear above all of the players' heads.

Playing surfaces are accurately modeled in Football Pro '95, with realistic looking grass, mud, snow or turf. What's not accurate is the crowd—there isn't one! In an era when NFL teams play in packed houses of rollicking fans, the stands in Football Pro '95 are empty. What's even more disconcerting is that crowd sounds are featured in the game's audio package. Who's making those noises, anyway? Admittedly, the game strives to simulate professional football, not crowd control, so the lack of fans really makes not a whiff of difference in the outcome. Yet in a game with such attention to detail, it's a surprising omission.

One area in which Sierra didn't cut any corners is the CAMS (Camera Angle Management System) feature. Combined with the game's VCR, CAMS may be the best viewing and replay setup in the sports sim field. CAMS offers unlimited camera angles, while the VCR permits a variety of replay modes, including ball-carrier tracking, isolation, and selected player views. Couple that with the game's superior animation, and there's enough good looking action in Football Pro '95 to keep your CAMS and VCR busy for a very long time.

A LEAGUE OF YOUR OWN
Football Pro '95 shines in a lot of areas, not the least of which is league management. The default leagues offered are the NFL of 1992, 1993 and 1994, thanks to Sierra's licensing agreement with the NFL and NFLPA. Some gamers might be surprised to find that a few of their favorite stars don't appear on the rosters. That's because not all the players are NFLPA
members, and their names are therefore not covered by the licensing agreement. It’s easy enough, though, to use FOOTBALL PRO 95’s sophisticated player editor to make any required name changes.

Single season leagues are a fun way to simulate an actual NFL year, while career leagues constitute the heart and soul of FOOTBALL PRO 95. Featuring annual drafts, player retirements, trades, and even career-ending injuries. Training camp remains a very important part of the season, allowing coaches the opportunity to allocate workout time for improvement in areas of their choice. The user-friendly league management interface makes it a simple matter to start and run a league from eight to twenty-eight teams.

Teams can be either human or computer-owned, with custom game plans generated by players or stock plans provided by the program. Once the league is underway, games can be played manually or simulated by the computer in either “fast” or “slow” mode. The latter takes around five minutes per game on a 486-50, and offers a scoreboard-like readout of how the game is progressing—generally more enjoyable for league play. While some players have complained of wild variances in stats between the sim modes, my experience was that the different modes yielded similar results.

HOW ARTIFICIAL IS THE INTELLIGENCE?

Some gamers claim that the computer opponent in FOOTBALL PRO 95 cheats, allowing the computer opponent to stay close or mount big comebacks. Frankly, this just wasn’t seen in review play. One seeming AI failure that was observed, however, was an odd tendency of computer-controlled teams to offer strangely lopsided trades. It seems fairly common for the computer-controlled teams to propose to trade a valuable player for your mediocre kicker or punter. This is an area that will have to be addressed in any patch released by Sierra.

Is FOOTBALL PRO 95 a game or a simulation? Will FOOTBALL PRO 95 re-create a near-perfect copy of the NFL statistical leaders? Not likely. Is this a minus? Not necessarily. Players in FOOTBALL PRO 95 are rated over eight categories: Speed, Agility, Acceleration, Strength, Hands, Endurance, Intelligence, and Discipline. Real-world statistics are influenced by the players’ abilities, how they are utilized, and what team they play for. Would you have an all-pro year in the NFL this season? You might see a trend in the stats in FOOTBALL PRO 95 is that, while they won’t provide carbon copies of the NFL, they do furnish realistic-sounding results.

Combining through my simulated league’s stats, I found no hint of statistical bugs. Touchdowns from special teams play, blocked punts, and just about every other statistical category was consistent with league averages. The only flaw I noticed was a tendency of computer coaches to call an excessive percentage of pass plays, but again, this could be moderated by simply adjusting the coaching profiles.

XS AND OS

FOOTBALL PRO 95 features an outstanding play editor, perhaps the best of any in the computer football genre. Easy to use, the system allows coaches to design their own custom offensive, defensive, or special teams plays, or to modify any of the 10,000 stock plays included on the CD-ROM version.

Designing or modifying a play is simple, using the mouse, joystick, or keyboard. Coming up with a play that works is a complex matter. As it should be. FOOTBALL PRO 95 allows coaches to practice their creations against various opponents to see if it has long-term potential or whether it’s a disaster waiting to happen. If your new gadget play is going to get you toasted, it’s better to find out in practice than in that big game against your hated rival.

Also included is a sophisticated Player Ratings Profile Editor that allows you to reassign player ratings based on your personal ranking philosophy. This feature permits hard-core coaches to establish their own system within a system for ranking players. There’s also a tried and true module for setting coaching profiles, useful in games when your team is under computer control, as well as an option to establish game plans of up to 64 plays on...
COFFIN-CORNER KICKS
The new rotoscoped animation translates into much more fluid movement. Here, the punt sails out of bounds before reaching the texture-mapped end zone.

offense and defense. In short, FOOTBALL Pro 95 is a deep, layered gaming system that can be played by both the football fanatics on one level and the casual gamer on another.

POST GAME SHOW
FOOTBALL Pro 95’s journey to the end zone is not without some trouble along the way. In addition to the missing spectators and questionable trades, there are must be changed manually using DOS commands if you wish to edit them. This is a critical snafu that Sierra has indicated will be handled with a forthcoming patch. To a lesser degree, the game can be knocked for its lack of modern play capability, and the fact that the plays mentioned in the manual’s tutorial are nowhere to be found in the game.

I really enjoyed FOOTBALL Pro 95, so much that this was a difficult review to finish. I found myself continually starting up the game to make notes for this article, but instead getting sucked in by the engaging graphics and superior game play. Many nights I wound up coaching when I should have been writing. The game’s few flaws, while annoying, are hardly fatal. And even with these small problems, FPS: FOOTBALL Pro ‘95 is deep enough, solid enough, and good looking enough to pull even the most ardent football fan out of his post-Superbowl depression. With this game, Sierra has once again broken away from the pack of competitors trying to tackle the secret of its success, diving in for another big score.

THE EDITORS SPEAK
FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO ‘95
RATING ★★★★★
PROS Great ratings editor, more play selection options, and roto-scoped player animation improve what was already the best football game available.
CONS Minor bugs, and the AI has trouble with player trades.

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Circle Reader Service #161
The Way Of The Air Warrior

There I was at 30,000 feet when suddenly... That was a popular way for WWII pilots to begin boastful tales of exaggerated flight exploits. While reaching 30,000 feet in an F-16 is a trivial matter, climbing a Spitfire or P-51 Mustang to that altitude took a bit of time. And given how cold and thin the air is up there, I don’t imagine it was particularly comfortable altitude to fly at in an aircraft of the era. Nevertheless, just the other night I found myself in a Spitfire at 30,000 feet....

I was flying SVGA AIR WARRIOR on the GENie network. I fly as “Group Commander” of a band of over 30 simulation pilots organized into two squadrons. These two squadrons collectively form the 94th Composite Group, FSAF, and we adorn our callsigns with the “<FS>” insignia.

We were executing a series of runway-denial missions against the enemy, the abominable “A Landers.” We’d knocked out a couple of their runways and had settled into a “home defense mode” flying a series of BARCAPs (barrier combat air patrols) along the border waiting for the inevitable counter-attack. The counter-attack came in the form of four A-26s staggered over a few square miles and at fairly low altitude. When the A-26’s first became visible, I was the only fighter airborne in the area. Calling their position to my countrymen over the “radio” (you type messages on a “radio channel”), I dove toward the first bomber. Apparently, the lowest A-26 panicked as I dove on his wingman and he crashed his aircraft. That’s a mission kill. I split-Sed onto my intended target and shot it down quickly. Two down. Spotting the third ahead and below me about one o’clock low, I fired all the throttle and dove in chase. The A-26, when not carrying bombs, maneuvers quite well, and there are several Air Warriors who fly them like fighters in the arena, usually to the engaging fighter’s dismay. I’m not sure what this particular bomber pilot intended to do, but he executed a break turn. So far, none of the A-26s appeared to have any gunners. Maybe he was turning to engage me, maybe not. Either way, his turn toward his homeland allowed me to catch up.

LESSON 1: PREVENTING OVERSHOOTS
He was at least 100kts slower than me, so I had to execute a series of barrel rolls to remain behind him. The barrel rolls converted my speed from the “horizontal” plane to the
"vertical" one. Without necessarily wasting undue amounts of energy, I managed to remain behind the target despite his slower speed. The barrel roll, executed by pulling the stick back and to one side while usually applying a little rudder in the intended direction of the roll, is a typical form of "using the vertical" and is a good way to prevent an overshoot during a dogfight. If you find yourself rapidly closing on a bandit from astern, you've got to find a way to slow the closure or you'll overshoot into his gunsight. You have the usual choices, slow down and waste your kinetic energy away or maneuver out of plane, thus conserving your overall energy state. The bomber had either no gunner or a very poor gunner and I managed to down it as well. Three down.

The fourth bomber was too far away and headed for a different friendly airfield. I was low on ammunition and at low altitude. There was no way I could catch him. Fortunately, my countrymen had been scrambling during the two minutes I was strafing the other bombers, and my wingman, <FS>Padlock, was rapidly approaching a firing position. I landed my Spitfire at the nearest field and re-launched. Seconds after I was airborne, <FS>Padlock killed the last bomber before it could destroy any of our airfields.

<FS>Padlock and I became separated as I continued to patrol the same area. A few minutes later I realized the enemy had given up attacking those particular airfields and had moved the war to another area. Since I was all alone and in friendly territory, I decided to screw around. I didn't know exactly how high a Spitfire could climb, so I decided to find out. It took a while, but I eventually found myself at that legendary altitude, 30,000 feet. I hadn't been paying much attention to my surroundings and suddenly noticed I had crossed into enemy airspace. Naturally, I figured being at 30,000 feet would place me safely above any enemies I might encounter.

I soon noticed an ally, another C. Land pilot, heading below me into enemy territory. Coming toward him, also below me, was an enemy P-51. This looked like an easy kill. Most P-51 pilots I've come across aren't interested in dogfighting. Although the P-51 Mustang handles well, its high speed is usually its greatest attribute. In fact, among Air Warrior pilots the plane is called the "Runstang," since most P-51 pilots prefer to keep it at high speed and use hit-and-run tactics against their targets. Although slow to accelerate, the P-51 can sustain speed well and is very difficult to catch. Unless, of course, you're at 30,000 feet and looking down at the Mustang. A Spitfire can easily exceed 450kts in a power dive from high altitude, giving a "Runstang" a run for its money. All I'd roll onto his six, and gun his brains out. Nothing to it.

I radioed a warning to my ally, then prepared my attack. As I watched the P-51's movements I noticed something was wrong. Although my ally was moving away along his original heading, the P-51 made no attempt to engage it. As I began a gentle turn at 150kts (and all turns at 30,000 feet and 150kts better he'd be) to keep the bandit in sight I realized he was coming toward me. Not only was he coming toward me, but he was gaining altitude and attitudes on me in a hurry. I had seriously misjudged his altitude and his speed; he was higher and faster than I anticipated. Now he was bearing down on me in a hurry. The Spitfire doesn't handle well at those altitudes, especially compared to a fast P-51. My world of advantage was becoming a world of hurt in a hurry.

LESSON 2: FIGHT ON YOUR OWN TERMS

The most important thing in any fight is to fight on your terms, using your strengths to exploit your opponent's weaknesses. I had built a huge potential energy advantage but was being confronted by an adversary with a huge kinetic energy advantage. Staying at that altitude would have been suicide. The Spitfire held the maneuvering advantage at lower altitudes; I needed to be either 10,000 feet higher and dive on the Mustang, or be 10,000 feet lower and out-turn him. I rolled into the attacker, buried the nose below the horizon, and shoved the throttles forward. Maintaining a spiral dive, I kept the P-51 just enough off my tail to prevent him from shooting. Watching the rear view I saw that he remained firmly camped on my six. As speed increased, I increased g-loading until the screen began to darken from "blackout" and prayed I'd find some way out of this fix.

Somehow, I got back down to 19,000 feet without getting any enemy lead in my airframe. My speed was now over 300kts, giving me ample kinetic energy to work with. I started a 5g pull-up toward my opponent figuring it high time I turned the fight back to my terms. Not surprisingly,
the P-51 refused to follow my pull-up. He leveled his wings and continued his dive at high speed, taking him deeper into enemy territory. He obviously recognized the fight was about to switch to my terms and decided not to play anymore.

**LESSON 3: KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT QITS**

But the story continues. I was still around 19,000 feet and over 250kts when the P-51 decided to run, and I decided to give chase. A dive from that altitude presented a reasonable chance of catching the Mustang. At first, I closed within gun range and scored a couple of hits on the P-51, evidenced by debris flinging from his airplane. Before I could finish him off, though, the P-51 pulled out of gun range. Figuring he'd outrun me I prepared to break off the attack when, suddenly, we stumbled on that lone ally that I thought the P-51 intended to attack earlier. I don't know exactly how it happened, but the P-51 and this ally started dogfighting. I made a couple of high speed runs past the fight, but couldn't get a decent shot at the Mustang. By this time we were down to 8,000 feet and my fuel gauge approached "empty." A quick glimpse at the "radar" screen indicated a large number of enemy aircraft in the adjacent sector, more than likely en route to our position.

Although I dearly wanted to kill that Mustang, I still had a large lot of enemy airspace to get home. There could be other bandits waiting to ambush me on the egress path. I still had enough altitude left to make a diving run for home, but a protracted fight with the Mustang might suck us down below 2,000 feet. The P-51 had already tried to disengage from me and now found himself in another fix; I could find myself in a similar position if I wasn't careful. No, it was time to go. I pointed the nose at the nearest friendly base. Diving at full throttle, I accelerated and passed unevenly back into friendly territory. From what I could tell in my rear view mirror, the P-51 dove away in the opposite direction and likewise escaped my ally.

**FAILURE OR SUCCESS?**

When I landed, I received a meager allotment of points for damaging the P-51, but I received no kills. This mission might be considered an utter flop by some, but I consider it reasonably successful. First, when at 30,000 feet I seized the opportunity and planned an attack on my terms. Although unable to execute the attack, I learned a valuable lesson on judging the enemy's energy status. I tried to decipher his capabilities and intentions too early and made a drastic error. Second, although on the defensive, I didn't let the enemy dictate the fight. I correctly chose to take the fight to my area rather than push a bad position and I knew my own energy status well enough to reach "my arena." Third, I successfully shook the bandit and escaped a defensive posture. Fourth and finally, I knew when to get out of Dodge. In simulations it's easy to take chances or run risks you wouldn't take with your real life. Although Air Warrior lets "dead" pilots immediately re-launch, a similar "death" can end careers in campaign-oriented flight sims. That I "survived" may have little merit in the Air Warrior arena, but such survival requires judgmental skills applicable to many other simulation arenas.

The point is: air combat isn't just about maneuvering. The one-versus-one maneuvering skills which are so important in the various modern contests are only part of the equation. Surviving the environment—from FALCONS 3.0's Kuwait to Air Warrior's Europe to Red Baron's France—requires additional skills. If you want to survive campaigns, you've got to be a great dogfighter, but you must also accurately assess the entire environment and know when to say, "It's time to go home." Good hunting!
Road Hog!

We Look To The Digital Circuits
And NASCAR RACING Is All We Can See

by Gordon Goble

K., I ADMIT IT—I'M NO MECHANIC. I CAN PUMP GAS, GAP A SPARK PLUG, AND CHANGE A TIRE OR TWO, BUT THAT'S ABOUT IT. EVERYTHING IMPORTANT UNDER THE HOOD SEEMS TO BE TOO HARD TO REACH, OIL GETS MY CLOTHES DIRTY, AND STUFF GETS TOO HOT TO WORK ON WHEN THE DARN THING'S BEEN RUNNING. YET I'VE GOT A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE WAY THINGS FIT TOGETHER, AND I DEFINITELY TAKE PRIDE IN BEING A PRETTY GOOD DRIVER.

The same holds for my experience in the world of computerized racing. No one loves a good racing sim more than I do, yet my experience has always come behind the wheel, not under it. When World Circuit came along, I was in my element—a little more wing here, a little less there, then off to the races. IndyCar Racing taxed my limited knowledge further, but rarely did I need or want to further explore the intricacies of advanced car set-up. Even at full race distance, a default "Ace" machine with a mild tweak or two and a ton of on-track experience seemed to be more than enough to garner a flattering result.

My how times have changed.

The hottest new rod in the racing stable of Papyrus Design Group. NASCAR Racing, in addition to being a monumental leap forward in simulation graphics, has forcibly turned this garage geek into a masked mechanical marvel. It has compelled me to come to grips with such foreign terms as "weight jacking," "camber," "caster," and the myriad of forces at work on a car during each of its runs from full to empty. It has been an eye-opening and ultimately rewarding experience, and one very much based in reality. Fortunately, this mysterious self-transformation has not been at the expense of a ripping good racing experience, for in the heat of battle that NASCAR Racing reaches its pinnacle, and what a lofty perch it is.

Graphics, mechanics, and the racing experience: this trio of elements work hand-in-hand to push NASCAR Racing into the realm of gaming immortality. Surely it must be considered the best total racing experience ever created. But let's take a step back for a moment...

ANCIENT PAPYRUS

It was little more than a year ago that Papyrus brought IndyCar Racing to the personal computer, and almost immediately, digital racers across the globe were heaping generous portions of deserved praise on this new racing gem. But nowhere was IndyCar more stunning than in its textured "3-D" visual presence—it was a fitting conclusion to the years of work that went into its creation, even if its low screen resolution (320 x 200) kept it looking a bit ragged around the edges.

To the average game player with the average computer, NASCAR Racing will look pretty much the same as IndyCar: the same textured format, the same sense of depth, and the same rough edges. But, for the lucky people with a screaming CPU and fast video card, there is another, very distinct version of NASCAR Racing set aside just for you. NASCAR Racing in SVGA (640 x 480 palette, available only on CD) will take you fortunate few into a new dimension of visual racing pleasure, one that combines the depth of IndyCar with the clean lines of World Circuit, then adds a clarity and attention to detail that is rare indeed in this, or any other genre of computer gaming.

Suffice it to say that once SVGA NASCAR has been witnessed, there just ain't no goin' back. But before you take a peek at its high resolution glory, make sure you're willing to invest in the hardware required to handle the software. Although Papyrus recommends a minimum 486-66, rumors have it that even some Pentium 66 owners don't have quite what it takes. Testing for this review was performed on a Pentium 90-powered...
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computer with an ATI Graphics Pro Turbo (2 MB VRAM) video card, and eight MB 70 ns RAM. This combination of equipment really had NASCAR racing, although even at such a level of computing prowess, little bits of detail and/or numbers of opponents had to be reduced in order to keep the frame rate up. Is it all worth it? Well, just how much of a racing fan are you?

**WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS...**

NASCAR RACING ships with nine tracks: the superspeedways of Talladega, Michigan; Atlanta, and Darlington; the smaller ovals at Phoenix, New Hampshire, Bristol and Martinsville; and the sole road course at Watkins Glen. In Papyrus tradition, all circuits are faithfully recreated, as are the included NASCAR cars. While some of the big guns are curious in their omission (you won't find a Dale or a Bill), there is sure to be some logical reasoning behind their absence, and the extremely authentic recreation of the Mark Martin, Rusty Wallace, and Geoff Bodine cars are more than threatening enough. Completely variable detail is available at each and every track, as is minimum and maximum frame rates, and the number of cars that are actually drawn ahead and behind. Removing the grass texture at Watkins Glen may be just what it takes to get the game running smoothly on your machine, and after all, it is only grass.

The ultimate goal of the NASCAR Racing racer would have to be a full race distance victory against top notch opponents, but before one runs, one must learn how to walk, and it is advisable to drop the opponent skill level to say 90% or so, then begin by checking out the feel of a NASCAR in a practice session. Pull up a relatively easy track such as Talladega, and you'll quickly discover that you're in command of a big, rumbling, sliding, land whale. Meet Mr. Wall. Meet Mr. Tire-On-Fire. Have fun. Get pissed off. It's all a learning (and deprogramming, for you INDYCar fans) procedure. But, gradually, it will come together. Soon you'll be truckin' along with some hack markers, then attempting a big, looping pass, then recognizing the facets that make NASCAR Racing such a popular pastime for both racers and fans alike. Hit the "F10" key and take an "arcade" view of things...but you'll quickly go back inside the cockpit. With a little seasoning,
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The NASCAR Racing racing experience is unlike anything ever presented on computer. The car is big and slow off the mark but filled with momentum, yet contains a certain consistency that takes a lot of acclimation. By the time most successful passes are finalized, one may be well under braking, and w-a-a-a-y into a four wheel drift. But the wacky thing is, such drifts can be controlled, and there is a certain beauty in controlling the monster. It’ll take quite a few hours of driving to realize just when and where such moves can be pulled off and when and where they can’t, but there is most definitely a method in the midst of madness. You see, NASCAR comes with something else that certainly ranks with the other innovations mentioned earlier—unbelievable artificial intelligence. In short, the AI is A-1. Let me explain...

So far, I’ve managed to complete two half races, at Atlanta (a second place finish on what must be the most perplexing of all tracks for both driver and mechanics) and Bristol (a win in the bullring to end all bullrings). Both were strong finishes, albeit against opponents at 98% skill level, and both were the result of a happy marriage of smooth driving and pit and pre-race strategies (which I’ll explain in a moment). But the one common thread lies in the amazing AI shown by the ing and thrilling, but if you’ve got a door “covered,” they’ll always know you’re there. If this is an accurate representation of real life, and I have every reason to believe it is, there is no wonder that the NASCAR fraternity is such a close knit bunch.

FOR WANT OF A WRENCH...

But it was in Atlanta that I came to understand fully the relationship between a smart car set-up and a good finish. One hell of a taxing track, Atlanta is two huge turns and two very short straightaways. Preparing a durable car here is necessary, puzzling, and wonderful when you get it right. The default “Ace” set-up was great for say, 30 laps or so, but then came the frustration as that corner carving ability that propelled me from 21st to 1st began to dissipate. Lap after lap, my speed dwindled and I watched in horror as my lead evaporated. Sinking further and further into the pack, I realized my mission wasn’t just on the track but back in the garage too. More stagger, more weight in the rear to compensate for a lessening fuel load, more nitro in the front right tire because it was burning up after 25 laps. Take the car out with a full tank, take it out with a half tank, then an empty tank. What does it do differently? So many questions... so little time.

In the end, I had a car that was almost undriveable in the first half-dozen laps, got going pretty good after a couple dozen circuits, and managed to keep pace as each pit stop approached. I never had to change a setting at any stop, even though NASCAR Racing allows one to “radio” ahead to the pit for desired alterations. Fortunately, I didn’t hit a thing all race, so the question of repairing or not repairing body damage never came up. Oh, the final setup, the one that did the trick? Well, you start off by putting just two pounds of pressure in all the tires, then you stick all...
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the weight on the right hand side, yeah, that's it...

For those of you with a lot of racing to do, and only little bits of time in which to do it, NASCAR RACING permits the saving of races, but just one at a time. (Curiously, during one save/restart at Bristol, the entire pack slowed to a crawl for its final twenty-two laps! This occurred only once, yet may be a future concern.)

As is always the case with Papyrus racing products, the replay mode is exceptional, and viewable from or centered upon any car. This means that with 40 cars on the track, over 300 replay angles are available! As well, replays may be cut and saved to disk. Printable statistics are also available from within the program, although a more detailed report would be welcomed. Having been disqualified after winning at Michigan, I wanted reasons, dammit! Perhaps it was my 150 mph post race flier down pit lane? Or was it driving backwards around the track? I dunno. One final "should have" concerns the victory celebration: there is none. Are you listening, Papyrus?!

Finally, NASCAR includes a paint kit that permits customizable visual alterations to one's own steed. Again, as with INDYCAR, my resulting graphical image defies description in a classy publication such as this.

As you can see, NASCAR RACING is loaded with more features than you can pump a piston at. For the die-hard auto-racing fan, it has no peer. If you've got the hardware and the tenacity to tame a 3000 lb. beast, NASCAR will see you to the winner's circle.

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**NASCAR RACING**

**RATING**

**PROS** Jaw-dropping graphics in SVGA, impressive opponent AI, and ground-breaking physical modeling; in sum, the most comprehensive racing experience in gaming.

**CONS** Hefty hardware demands for SVGA graphics and maximum detail. The victory celebration is nothing to cheer about.

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Bird On A Three Wire

Electronic Arts’ U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS

by Denny Atkin

In October of last year I got a ride in the back seat of an F-15 Eagle. It was a flight sim fan's dream, and an unforgettable experience that no sim will ever compare to—unless they develop a way to project eight G's of force from a VGA monitor. (I'm sure Thrustmaster's working on it.)

I did find a way to relive much of the excitement of that experience without having to consume that way back into an F-15's ejection seat, thanks to Electronic Arts' U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS. High-resolution graphics and some of the best sound yet to grace a flight simulation help USNF provide a realistic combat environment, but it's the top-notch flight model and wicked enemy artificial intelligence that round out the experience. Such realism does come at a price: While USNF will run on a 486SX-25 system, it has options that can bring even a Pentium-100 to its knees.

**THE RUSSIAN FRONT**

The geographic setting is the Ukraine in the near future. Hard-liners have regained control in Russia, ousting Boris Yeltsin and threatening to retake control of former Soviet territories. The U.S. has pledged to defend Ukrainian sovereignty, and has sent the carrier Eisenhower to help shore up Ukrainian defenses. You'll fly the A-7 Corsair II, F/A-18 Hornet, F-14 Tomcat, and Su-33 Flanker (on loan from the Ukrainians) on a variety of missions; towards the end of the campaign your carrier will also be equipped with a navalized version of the stealthy F-22 Lightning II advanced tactical fighter. There's also a fictional naval version of the F-104 Starfighter that's not used in the primary campaign, but can be flown elsewhere in the simulation. Twenty-nine other aircraft types appear in the game, under computer control. These range from the Ka-50 Hokum and Mi-24 Hind helicopters through the KC-135 and IL-96 transports to the B-52 and Tu-95 bombers. Along with the campaign, USNF also features 50 single missions (14 training and 36 combat), as well as two custom mission creators (Quick and Pro). The Single Missions feature 14 training missions—covering basic flight, stalls and spins, and air combat—as well as 36 combat missions. The Quick Mission creator is great for those times you just have the urge to blow something up. Select one to three allied aircraft (all must be the same type), as well as up to 15 enemy aircraft (up to five each of three types), and an optional ground target. Then arm your plane and take to the skies. You can also choose the altitude, weather, distance from the enemy, and whether the situation is neutral, offensive, or defensive. If you're itching for a close-in dogfight, you can also select guns-only combat.

**ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL**

The campaign mode is where USNF really shines, though. Each mission is introduced with a full-motion video briefing (the CD-ROM contains over 40 minutes of video); some missions also feature pilot banter in the ready room that includes important clues on how to tackle some of the more challenging missions to come. The missions are much more interesting than the "attack the primary and secondary target" variety seen in many sims. Your first challenge is to escort an airliner carrying Boris Yeltsin as he attempts to escape the new Russian regime. Later missions involve attacking ground and sea targets, escorting friendly vessels, and protecting your carrier group.

Unfortunately, the missions are fixed, and your success or failure doesn't affect what mission comes next. You can run out of aircraft and weapons, though, so if you destroy all your F/A-18s, you may end up flying your attack missions in rust-bucket A-7s.

If you fail five missions, the campaign ends. If you're killed, you can choose to relive a mission or end the campaign. You should never end up in a situation where you have to relive the first dozen or so missions, though, as USNF includes a feature to back up your pilots, and you can keep a failed mission from being logged by hacking out to the main menu after the mission ends.

You won't be fighting a one-plane war...
in USNF. In fact, because of weapon-load limitations, most of the missions aren't winnable without the help of your wingmen. A number of targets will be flagged as mission objectives, so you'll want to make sure you don't waste your weapons on peripheral targets and find yourself Winchester when faced with a flight of four fighters that must be destroyed. If that does happen, you can command your wingmen to attack particular targets, so all may not be lost.

The challenge doesn't have to end after you've completed the campaign. The Pro Mission Creator lets you create combat situations with multiple allied and enemy aircraft, ground targets and vehicles, and complex mission objectives. Missions can be as sophisticated as those included with the game. Individual planes or wings of up to six aircraft can be given commands to patrol, attack, or defend an objective. You can set up multiple waypoints for both air and ground forces.

**A MODEL FLIGHT MODEL**

Coming from a team led by Brent Iver son, creator of *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*, USNF doesn't disappoint in the flight modeling department. Aircraft performance differences are modeled accurately—you'll do much better in a close-in knife fight if you're flying an F-16 than an F-14. The biggest complaints—no accelerated stalls and the lack of inertia in rolls—are actually a testament to the realism and complexity of the flight model. While flying you'll deal with energy bleeding in turns, difficult high-speed pull-outs, slow engine spool-up, spins, and lift failure. The flight envelope changes with altitude, and corner (best turn rate) speed varies with each aircraft. Spins can present a particular challenge in some of the planes; recovery from a flat spin in an F-14 is difficult, and nearly impossible in an F-104. The only annoying deficiency in the flight model is roll rate, which is far too slow. The designers were forced to compromise the roll rate in order to get a decent video frame rate. But while roll rates are slow, they're proportionally slow, so an F-15 will still dramatically out-turn a E-2C. The damage model is well done, with systems such as elevators and hydraulics subject to failure when you're hit. There's a large selection of weaponry for arming your aircraft, but weapons system modeling is less than stellar—'I've destroyed bombers with air-to-ground Maverick missiles.'

Carrier operations are the best yet seen in a PC sim. On one take-off I experienced a catapult failure and was forced to eject as my plane crossed the ship's bow. Landing using an authentic nose-up approach is difficult; you'll have to extend both flaps and brakes to maintain any sort of sink rate. If you're willing to sacrifice authenticity and point the nose at the deck until you're nearly down, it's much easier. An ILS display on the HUD simplifies lining up the approach. If you'd rather, you can activate the autopilot and just sit back and enjoy the ride.

USNF has complete support for the Thrustmaster control devices, including the FCS and F-16 FLCS sticks, WCS Mark I and II throttles, and RCS rudder pedals. Unfortunately, the designers ignored the popular CH FlightStick Pro, so you won't be able to use the view hat or extra buttons on that stick. I ended up completing most of the missions with a Gravis Phoenix, which was easily programmable to offer full throttle, rudder, and stick control for USNF.

Enemy AI is nothing short of fantastic. Computer pilots seem to recognize the strengths of their particular aircraft. On one flight I decided to take off a MiG-29 in an A-7; as I tucked in behind the enemy plane I heard "He's going vertical!" and looked to see the bogey taking advantage of his plane's better climb rate to get some distance from me. Other aircraft will use horizontal extension or superior turning ability to evade your fire. Watching a wingman engage an enemy plane is an amazingly intense and realistic experience—there are none of the jittery movements and unrealistic turning flights you see in less sophisticated sims.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMMERSION**

USNF not only has a great personality, but a pretty face as well. The simulation sets new standards for graphic detail and realism, and the sound has to be heard to be believed. Graphic resolutions in the game include 320x200, 320x400, 640x480, 800x600, and 1024x768. Detail is enhanced with texture-mapped surfaces and gouraud shading. The aircraft look fantastic, sporting not only camouflage but full
AWRIGHT, LISTEN UP! Full-motion video briefing sequences greatly add to the feeling that "you are there."

Squadron and national insignia as well. The models look very authentic, except for the E-8 J-STARS jamming plane which has somehow sprouted an AWACS-style radome. USNF's higher resolutions eliminate most of the messy-pixel effect you see in many texture-mapped games. The sky and water textures are dazzling; the ground looks good, but won't make you forget you're playing a computer game. Unfortunately, combining this level of detail with sophisticated flight models and good enemy AI makes for a program that tax even the most powerful microprocessors. Even on a Pentium-100, I found it necessary to turn off the cloud texture (which is only eye candy anyway) to get a smooth frame rate at the highest resolutions. A 486/66 ran the game smoothly at 640x480 with sky and water textures turned off—with them on it was like watching a slideshow. On a slower 486 you'll want to play in 320x200 mode with all textures off.

There's no instrument panel in USNF. Instead, you use a combination of the heads-up display and pop-up windows to monitor navigation, radar, systems, and weapons. Although this may annoy purists, the system works very well in 640x480 resolution. Unfortunately, the pop-ups are fixed in size: They obscure too much of the screen in 320x200 mode, and are too small in 800x600 and 1024x768. USNF does feature a canopy railing, equipped with a functional rear-view mirror in some planes, but only in the 640x480 and lower resolutions. Situation awareness is easy to maintain with a variety of internal and external views, smooth panning, and missile and target views. The F4 key padlocks the current target as long as it remains in your field of view; however, with no cockpit graphics for reference, it's too easy to lose track of what direction you're looking when the HUD isn't in view.

USNF sports ground-breaking sound support. Sixteen-bit digitized stereo sound abounds, and most major sound cards are supported in native mode. The steady rumble of your engine, the whining of a missile lock warning, and the "swoosh" of a missile launch are to be expected, but you might be surprised when you switch to an external view and hear the growl of a tank's engine as it moves across the landscape—USNF has a wondrous variety of vehicle sounds.

Best of all is the voice support. In the heat of combat you'll hear your wingman or radar intercept officer chime in with comments like "I'm takin' a shot" and "Get this guy off me!" The pilot chatter hasn't been toned down for the general audience; while you'll probably be amused when your RIO yells "C'mon, do some of that pilot shit," you might not enjoy explaining to your kids why he yelled "I'm gettin' a hard-on" when combat got particularly intense. The background music by The Fat Man and Team Fat is well done, supporting both native sound cards and General MIDI.

FINAL APPROACH
USNF is superb, but it's not perfect. There's no VR replay feature—surprising given the development team's experience with Chuck Yeager's Air Combat, which had an excellent flight recorder. You'll be playing solo, as the game doesn't feature modem or network play. The Mission Creator is well done, but because only aircraft can be grouped, setting up waypoints for a group of ground targets such as tanks can be tedious and time-consuming. The careless omission of support for the CH FlightStick Pro is particularly irritating. And while it was unavoidable given the sophistication of the program, the steep hardware requirements (4MB minimum, 8MB to get all graphic features) may lock out gamers with older systems.

Those complaints aside, though, USNF is a stand-out simulation that should impress all but the most demanding sim players. Whether you have last year's 486-33 or next year's Pentium-135, the game can push your system to its limits.

THE EDITORS SPEAK
US NAVY FIGHTERS
RATING: [ ]

PROS: Superb graphics and sound, good light model, great dogfighting AI, and a mission builder that insures continued playability.

CONS: No FlightStick Pro support and minor compromises in the flight model will annoy purists. Requires some serious hardware to get the most out of the graphics.
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CONVERTING BOARD GAMES TO THE COMPUTER HAS ALWAYS BEEN SOMETHING OF A WARGAME’S NIGHTMARE. As long ago as the 8-bit days, for example, Avalon Hill attempted to bring Gulf Strike to computer shores. Frankly, if the real Desert Storm had been so ill-conceived, Schwarzkopf would have been run out of Kuwait on a rail. The garish color palette nearly glowed in the dark—a real shame, given the gorgeous maps found in the boardgame. Worse, the familiar hexagon-patterned map was gone, along with the combat results table. Yet, units still moved in the same six directions, but without any sense of distance or perspective available to the player. The lack of information on combat left players adrift, but the supply rules were so over-emphasized that only a maniacal logistician could love them. Overall, a dismal failure.

“So what?” you may well ask. After all, AH’s early computer troubles are well-documented. But, unlike such abominations as B-1 Nuclear Bomber, Gulf Strike should have been better, since it was based on an award-winning boardgame from talented designer Mark Herman. With the computer taking care of the tedious aspects, this title seemed a sure winner. Its celebrated failure meant that AH spent years with only minimal effort in developing their extensive board wargame line to the computer. A similar problem occurred with GDW’s White Death, which covered the battle of Velikiye Luki years before Atomic Games’ design on the same subject. Frank Chadwick and other design talents at GDW were shamelessly wasted, as the computer version bounced from publisher to publisher. Ironically, the clumsy interface and snow-blind graphics made the game nothing short of tedious.

How did such high-profile titles die the “slow death” on store shelves? Part of the problem was that the companies involved were trapped in a hobby-type mindset. A board wargame which sells more than 10,000 copies is a big hit, while a computer wargame could lose money with similar sales. In an effort to minimize risk, boardgame companies cut corners with programmers and artists, leading to lackluster and even unprofessional computer games.

Other publishers and developers came to the seeming defensible conclusion that if Avalon Hill and GDW couldn’t pull off computer conversions of their successful boardgames, such efforts simply weren’t worth the trouble. Companies such as SSI (after being successfully sued for the similarities between Avalon Hill boardgames in both Computer Bismarck and Ringside Seat), SSG and Simulations Canada began to try different approaches. SSI began to experiment with command control rules and (optional) randomized orders of battle; SSG emphasized the command perspective of the simulation and forced gamers to depend upon the AI of subordinate commanders; and Simulations Canada emphasized the nature of limited in-
intelligence within any combat situation (most successfully with naval combat and with lesser satisfaction in land combat). Whatever the approach, everyone seemed to agree that wargames on the computer needed to take advantage of what the computer could do (bookkeeping, fog of war, artificial opponents, etc.) and that boardgame conversions were the wrong strategy. So, ironically, just as the board wargame industry was undergoing a creative renaissance, producing several clever and innovative designs, the computer game industry had given up on its boardgame antecedents.

**SHOT FIRED ACROSS THE BOW**

Then, three products surfaced to turn around one of this perception: HARPOON, V for VICTORY, and THE PERFECT GENERAL. All were games that owed much to boardgame ancestors, yet they all brought additional computerized features to the party. Much of Atomic Games' success was a direct result of their stunning emulation of the look and feel of board wargames. They managed to make UTAH BEACH, the first release in the V for VICTORY series, seem fresh and exciting by improving the interface and offering more detail than previous efforts. HARPOON (see this month's Hall of Fame) took a different tack by using the computer to run the micro-management aspects of the detailed simulation and using the data retrieval/graphics capabilities of the computer to enhance the online help. It was still the miniatures level game that wargamers loved, but the computer helped them play and, as a result, get more bang for the buck. THE PERFECT GENERAL was based on a tabletop game, and as a result, it offered near-perfect play balance and a clear, understandable game structure. Movement, game phases, terrain rules, line of sight and every other rule was handled transparently by the computer so that all the players had to do was make their moves via easy mouse input.

As a result, these three wargames proved that there was still a market that wanted colorful, accurate and helpful versions of their boardgame favorites. Sadly, that wasn't what they received when another long-awaited conversion, AH'S THIRD REICH, hit the market.

**G2 (continued from page 159)**

SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX and Incredible Simulations (DEFEND THE ALAMO!) will join forces with Scott Hamilton at HPS to combine their marketing and distribution resources. Meanwhile, HPS Simulations has announced the title for their West Front Version of TIGERS ON THE PROWL. Dubbed PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS, Scott is hoping for a late Spring release. It will feature the new and considerably improved TOP interface and game engine.

* Jeff Lapkoff of Incredible Simulations contacted us. He was pleased as punch to say that their DEFEND THE ALAMO! game is now being sold at that historic landmark. Meanwhile, Incredible Simulation's work continues on CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND.

* Another alliance is being formed at Alliance. The rumors are that they will be publishing the new Windows version of Steven Jones' Big Three. This time, this strategic level WWII European Front game will feature improved graphics and some artificial intelligence. It will still be playable by modem and e-mail.

* Attention PANZER GENERAL players. The early rumors on a follow up product indicate that it will not be an expansion disk. Instead, a full sequel product is on the drawing board with the working title of TANK COMMANDER. It is shaping up to include about nine scenarios for a British desert campaign, 14 for a British/US Western Front campaign, and about 17 scenarios for a Russian Campaign (including some fighting in Finland!). Conspicuously absent from the list of scenarios were Khal-kin Gol (the Russo-Japanese battle in 1939), Dunkirk, and a Red Star/White Star campaign on that great Berlin map from PANZER GENERAL. Also, note that the Windows '95 version of PANZER GENERAL (whenever it becomes available) will feature some of the improvements being made in the game's engine for TANK COMMANDER.

* One of our favorite board games, West End Games' JUNTA, is being converted to an online format for The Multi-Player Games Network. David Oldis at Tantalus software is heading up the project and is considering some of the board game's more interesting variants for an on-line appearance. JUNTA is fun at about one revolution per hour as players assume the roles of leading families in a corrupt banana republic. After the backstabbing, threats, and revolutions sweeping through the streets of the capital, the winner is the player who has skinned off enough money to have the largest Swiss Bank account.

* Here's a note from Brian Walker, former editor of "another computer game magazine," who reports the following from the UK: "Empire Strategy have announced the forthcoming release of CIVIL WAR. This is their follow up to FIELDS OF GLORY, the Napoleonic game published by MicroProse in the US. A game that proved remarkably popular considering the almost total absence of any AI. Many of the features that were slated to be in Fields, such as modem and network play, will definitely be included in CIVIL WAR. There should also be a 3D action battlefield with texture mapping, unlike Fields' tile-based maps. While the thrust is the campaign game, there will be scenarios (historical, random, and custom). They're still debating whether to make the game CD only, because the floppy version cannot include all of these features." Thanks for the update, Brian.

* News about concerning TACORS. A scenario disk for the Mac version of the game has been released with some quasi-historical Desert Storm scenarios. Sometime in the Summer, says Arsenal guru Jim DeGoey, a Windows version of TACORS will be gracing PC gamer's computers. Their WWII version of the game (PANZERS EAST) should be released soon thereafter. For more information, call Arsenal Publishing at (800) 247-1877.

* A more PERFECT GENERAL? As many of you who walk the war gaming side of cyberspace know, an industrious computer wargamer/programmer has hacked a PERFECT GENERAL scenario editor and map maker. Well, it was pretty good, but has been markedly upgraded and is well worth a new look. The interface and power of the tools provided are excellent. Internet jocks should check out: oldcolo.com /pub/uploads/pged15.zip; or wuarchive.wustl.edu /pub/MSDOUS_UP LOADS/games/PerfectGeneral/pged15.zip.
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Impressions

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IBM PC Screenshots may vary
When released for the Amiga and Atari ST, it failed for several reasons. First, while the artwork matched that of the board game, this was one of the few cases where the boardgame map was so devoid of color and detail that, when compared to VGA games, it was akin to watching color film on a black-and-white TV. Worse, the AI was simply one of the most inept in gaming history. The computer was incapable of forming a cohesive plan of attack against anything resembling a competent defense. But the very worst was that the game didn’t follow the boardgame’s special rules faithfully. So, the standard strategies could be nullified or ignored. And you couldn’t use the optional rules.

FOG OF OBSCURITY
Among the many reasons why conversions fail, lack of focus is the biggest offender. Many board wargames give an insight into why Caesar routed Pompey, or why McClellan covered in fear of Robert E. Lee, despite the restrictions of cardboard. And while it’s true that computer games offer easier ways to do things like hidden movement, tracking supply, and handling line of sight, sometimes programmers and designers go too far. One thing I hear constantly from designers is “We have to get away from the old board wargame paradigm.” Whether they are correct about this is quite another story.

For wargamers who yearn for their favorite boardgames on the computer, less may actually be more. Avalon Hill’s recent 5TH FLEET (reviewed on page 168) is a good example. While unlikely to be mistaken for HARPOON II, it is very accessible and features an excellent interface. The whole game—in VGA, not SVGA—has a crisp look and feel, accentuated by the colorful game manuals. Finally, rather than throwing reams of data at the player, the game holistically shows kill ratios, fuel consumption, etc., in game terms—which is, after all, what most gamers really want to know.

Where many computer games seem to think that the kitchen-sink approach to design is better, 5TH FLEET chose to stick with designer Balkoski’s original intent. The result is a focused game on naval operations, with enough tactical nuance to keep the game interesting, but which never slows the brisk pace so crucial to excitement. While such devices as hidden units are evident, they add to rather than detract from the rest of the design. In 5TH FLEET, you always have a good sense of the situation as it develops, which leaves you able to concentrate on strategy and tactics, rather than struggling with the game system.

ON THE HORIZON
While computer wargaming has produced its own stars, such as Gary Grigsby, the influx of talent from the boardgaming arena can only help spark creativity—all of which is great news for wargamers. Although AH’s upcoming 1830 (see the sneak preview in CGW #125) is a strategy game rather than a wargame, it features a strong AI, courtesy of Master of Orion’s Steve Barcia. Stanley Associates and Joe Balkoski are ready to follow the success of 5TH FLEET with the conversion of WOODEN SHIPS AND IRON MEN, due late in ‘95. Several other boardgame companies are signing deals to convert classic designs, most notably GMT, which recently signed SSI to publish THE GREAT BATTLES OF ALEXANDER. As a result, wargamers wait anxiously, hoping that these high-profile conversions become computer gold, rather than dying on store shelves.

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The Age Of Gallantry And Chivalry Return
In Conqueror: AD 1086

by Johnny L. Wilson

At first glance, CONQUEROR: AD 1086 sounds like any other castle and conquest game. In order to win, you must become...surprise!...King of England. Along the way, you get to build...another surprise!...castles. To build up your holdings, you'll have to...can you guess?...defeat other forces in tactical battles. To increase your resources, you'll also have to manage your initial fief and, later, your conquered fiefs, with capitalistic fervor. The war cry sounds familiar so far.

Yet CONQUEROR isn't exactly your run of the mill game of medieval conquest. For starters, it adds stunning graphics, a rich musical score and exciting action sequences to a sound strategy game. Furthermore, if you get strong enough, you can try an alternate route to success in the game: searching out and destroying a dragon that has been devouring cows and men, terrorizing the English and Welsh countrysides. These 3-D dragon hunting and fighting sequences are lavishly rendered and, though colorful, are just as deadly as trying to overthrow the king by fighting the experienced armies supporting him. You can win either way, but it's going to take a lot of game time before you're ready to face either master of England.

Of course, no piece of entertainment can rely on one special effect. So CONQUEROR doesn't waste its powerful 3-D graphics on dragons alone. It offers two extremely beautiful tournament sequences, a joust and a mock battle. The joust is magnificent, with an action sequence reminiscent of the classic DEFENDER OF THE CROWN from Cine-maware. Better than DEFENDER, however, CONQUEROR allows you to prepare for the joust like real knights prepared, using the quintain, a target mounted on the crossbar of a post. This helps you get used to moving the lance up, down, left and right with the mouse. What adds more color and charm to the tournament is that you may engage in courtly love, eliciting a maiden's favor and carrying her token into battle.

The mock melee is proof that the powerful 3-D engine isn't strictly invested in bouts with dragons. Each knight is formed of polygons and overlaid with colorful texture-maps for added detail. So the animation is fluid and fast, convincing enough to keep you coming back for more. This is extremely important, because mastering the first-person real-time combat action is essential before you besiege a castle. A good performance in the tournament will also give you an opportunity to receive additional land. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to test the AI for opposing knights because it wasn't ready at press time. Given any competitive level at all, though, it should be very satisfying.

CONQUEROR: AD 1086 is named for the year prior to William the Conqueror's death in which he ordered an elaborate survey of his conquered

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE Character is an integral part of the game. Piety counts, just like Strength and Dexterity, and it is determined by how you respond to a series of dilemmas in the moral "Arena."

SNEAK PREVIEW Game Still In Development
This one you won’t want to miss.

It's been nearly three years in the making with a budget we won't even talk about. It employed a team of over a hundred people, including programmers, artists, musicians and writers as well as Hollywood make-up and special effects houses (we liked the flames in Backdraft so we hired the movie's special effects house to bring in a little heat). As the creators of Wasteland and The Bard's Tale, our goal was to produce a game every bit as innovative and unique. We think you'll like the results.

Art and Stuff
Graphically, the game is state-of-the-art stunning (we're a little biased but check out the screen shots for yourself).

We used a combination of live actors and computer generated creatures with Silicon Graphics environments and magical effects which were painstakingly rendered down to the finest crack, doorway and magical lightning storm.

The Box, the Book and Story
The packaging is every bit as cool as the game. Shipping in a special tombstone-shaped, hologram box, the package starts you on your quest “through dark corridors, treacherous sewers and subterranean realms of faeries, magick and the living dead.” (We had to throw a bit of marketing hype in here somewhere.) Along with the skeleton hologram cover, you also get a limited edition, hard-bound Stonekeep novella by Steve Jackson and David Pulver.

The Game's the Thing
A combination of traditional role playing and interactive storytelling, Stonekeep mixes a detailed storyline and character interaction with puzzle-solving, magic systems, character attributes and combat. It all comes together in a system that allows for quality storytelling combined with a powerful, yet easy-to-use control system (intuitive without being watered down).

Interplay™ “By Gamers. For Gamers.™ is Interplay's slogan and Stonekeep is the kind of game we've always wanted to play.

It looks cool, sounds great and tells a good story. It's one of those games you'll stay up playing until three in the morning on a work night. Basically, it's just a lot of fun.

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realm; the results were reported in The Domesday Book, sometimes referred to as The Doomsday Census. This is appropriate since the theme of the game is amassing enough wealth and power to bring “doomsday” to your neighboring nobles. You begin the game as a second son of a wealthy noble. As such, you can either select a pre-generated character with built-in abilities and debilities, or create your own by going through a sequence akin to creating a character in The Elder Scrolls: Arena. In this case, you consider six moral dilemmas before your character is set and the moral die is cast. The attributes thus assigned (Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, Piety and Stamina) will affect your performance in battle and diplomacy, among other factors. Once this phase is completed, a nifty animated movie has your liege lord dub you as a knight of the realm and the actual play begins.

The map is even seasonally sensitive, since icons change with the calendar. The map is important because, assuming you conquer other fiefdoms, it will offer hints suggesting the best method of economic exploitation for each parcel. As of press time, it was not clear how dynamic the economic model for Conqueror was going to be (it appeared that you could sell anything at any given time and all of it for the same price). However, it was clear that there were many more products to mine or harvest than in the other games within the genre.

Just as the game began with an emphasis on character, though, it also allows your character to develop. As in role-playing games, strength and dexterity are improved by practice. In this case, performing well in tournaments will increase dexterity and strength. Similarly, building a church or monastery will add to your piety, and completing a quest on behalf of your overlord increases honor. Naturally, winning battles also increases your fame rating and enables you to recruit armies at a reduced rate.

Add to this heady mix the further game ingredients of conversations with villagers, special weapons of varying capability, and the medieval blessings of the church. With such additions, Conqueror becomes a rather alluring hybrid action/strategy game with role-playing elements.

Conqueror: AD 1086 will be a visual feast. For me, it recaptures those Saturday afternoon experiences of my childhood where I watched brightly colored knights battle across movie screens in Technicolor and Cinemascope. Whether it was Sir Lancelot, Sir Ivanhoe, Robert Louis Stevenson’s Black Arrow, or Taras Bulba signaling the end of Eastern Europe’s medieval heritage, I relished the pageantry, gallantry and chivalry of the period. With regard to pageantry, Conqueror has it right. The gameplay will determine the rest.

Queen for a day A chivalrous knight has the opportunity to wear the colors of a lovely lady, assuming his courtly conversational grace is worthy of her winsome wit.
Shadows of Cairn is the story of a young thief named Quinn, who has a serious problem. He's too honest to steal anything. Worthless to his guild, his own master has set him up to take the blame for the murder of the Duke of Cairn. His only hope for survival is to make sure the assassination fails.

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**Avalon Hill's 5TH FLEET Offers A HARPOON Alternative**

by Tim Carter

Friend of mine with a master's degree in physics loves nothing more than pointing out the logical and scientific flaws in *Star Trek*. The response of his roommates to these verbal barrages is almost invariably, "It's television; it's meant as entertainment, not science. Besides, we like it—so shut up or you'll be wearing this bowl of popcorn."

Why would I introduce a game of modern naval combat with a not particularly original anecdote about a science fiction TV show? Well, 5TH FLEET has a host of logical, scientific and political shortcomings. Both movement and combat are far from realistic, and who in their right mind believes the Russians are likely to start another world war—least of all in the Indian Ocean? Still, having said that, let me pick the kernels out of my hair and explain why 5TH FLEET is a darn fine game (albeit with a bug or two) and a lot of fun to play.

**THE LIGHTER SIDE OF NAVAL COMBAT**

Avalon Hill's 5TH FLEET is another in a growing line of computer products from the acknowledged masters of board wargames. The subject is modern naval warfare, the setting is the Indian Ocean, and the objective is a fun and entertaining gaming experience.

Players may control either the Western navies and their local allies or the Russians and their allies. A complete range of ships, submarines and aircraft are available, including units from most of the indigenous navies in the Indian Ocean. All of the scenarios involve at least one external power, however, and most involve major surface forces from both Russia and the U.S. 5TH FLEET may be played against either the computer or a human opponent, and the built-in e-mail system works well for those admirals interested in more long-distance conflict.

As one might expect from AH, 5TH FLEET looks, feels and plays like a board game. Units are graphically represented as cardboard counters like those in *Operation Crusader*, while the map is divided into a hexagonal grid. 5TH FLEET is not limited by the designer's loyalty to the board game original, as the game takes full advantage of the traditional strengths of computer games: hidden movement, fog of war and information management. Important information is layered; for example, clicking on an airbase counter will allow players to cycle through the air units stationed there. If you require details on one of the air units, a second click of the mouse will pull up the unit database, which provides a graphic and specifics about the aircraft.

The rule book and supporting documentation is structured to provide easy access to important concepts, rather than a comprehensive explanation of every possible detail. While some gamers have expressed dissatisfaction with this style, I found it to be quite useful. The game was easy to learn and easy to play. It is true, however, that some details can only be learned by playing the game.

For instance, logistics is important in the longer scenarios, when units may run out of both fuel (in the case of ships) and ammunition (ships, submarines and carrier-based aircraft). While the rule book notes that ship speed affects fuel consumption, there is no detailed information on how this is modeled, or what the speed/fuel tradeoff is. Players will have to develop a feel for how fast their units burn fuel by playing the game. As each ship class uses fuel at a different speed, and has a different storage capacity, this requires players to pay careful attention to logistical planning.

A related complaint that has been made frequently on the bulletin boards is that neither the documentation nor the database provides detailed "to hit" information for the various weapons systems. In fact, this information is provided in a more holistic nature when an
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attack is planned. Attacks are prosecuted through the attack menu, which allows the player to select the attacking unit, a target unit, and an appropriate weapons system. The computer then provides data on the percentage change of damaging or destroying the target. This percentage takes into account the defensive capabilities of the target, as well as other relevant factors.

In terms of game play, this information is both more useful and more immediate than a chart of basic to hit values. It allows players to make the important decisions (such as whether to whittle away at the defensive elements of a task force or take a crack at the key protected ships—like aircraft carriers) with a reasonable knowledge of how sizable a gamble they are taking.

Number-crunchers and Harpooniacs may not be impressed, but the style of the interface is more attuned to game play than to realistic detail. In addition to handling information, the computer also takes care of most of the minor details involved in naval operations. The player sits in the chair of the theater commander, rather than task force leader or ship's captain.

Turns in 5TH FLEET are divided into phases, based on unit type. In each phase, only one type (air, surface, submarine) may move and/or fire. The computer determines at random which player will move first at the beginning of each turn. The selected player then decides which type of unit he wishes to move. At the end of this phase, the computer again picks a player at random, and so on until all units on both sides have moved.

Aircraft may attack, fly combat air patrol (CAP) or strategic missions such as reconnaissance and zone interception, all of which is resolved simultaneously. Surface and subsurface operations are subdivided into movement and combat; however, units may launch attacks both while moving and after all movement has finished. While this amounts to two attacks per turn, no unit may launch the same type of attack (i.e. ASW, SSM, etc.) more than once per turn. The number of weapons each platform may launch per phase is also strictly limited. While unrealistic, this limitation adds considerably to the tension and playability of the game.

The rotating phase system creates constant uncertainty, making for more than a few bitten fingernails. Success depends upon early detection and combinations of add-ons in the future. Re-playability is enhanced by random placements of units each time a scenario is begun anew. The scenarios grow in complexity and size, with the final scenario representing a full-scale slugfest between the US and Soviet 5th Fleet operations. There is nothing more fun than taking apart an entire CVBG with missile boats and the odd diesel submarine—unlikely in real life, but a thoroughly enjoyable challenge in the game. Fortunately, simulation purists will probably have stopped playing the game long before they get to the last few scenarios, leaving the game to those of us who enjoy these kind of tactics.

ROUGH SEAS

There is one glaring flaw built into the very fabric of 5TH FLEET. The very first phase of the very first turn of any scenario allows the active player to launch pre-emptive airstrikes on as many enemy bases as he can reach. Until the second player gets a turn, he cannot launch CAP or zone interceptors, and all of his units are at the mercy of the enemy air force. While a pre-emptive strike may be realistic for some scenarios, the fact that it is built into all of the game's missions is a glaring error.

In addition, the artificial intelligence for 5TH FLEET, while competent, cannot provide more than a moderate challenge, once the tendencies of the AI opponent are learned. (Admittedly, this problem is lessened by the random setup for each scenario.) I had little difficulty winning as either side in most scenarios—except when the computer used the Pearl Harbor flaw to annihilate my entire air force before I could even move. In particular, the computer doesn't seem to be too interested in anti-submarine warfare—I didn't lose a single submarine in more than 20 games.
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COMM-NET CENTRAL. While the radar display is only decorative, this screen does offer a unique way to alter sound card settings. And it's hard to beat the simple but effective controls for modem play.

While many gamers can accept the flaws of the computer opponent, they may be less inclined to put up with the bugs in the system (which seem all but inevitable with products released these days). While I was only kicked out of the program once or twice, I was nagged by a series of smaller glitches which seriously marred game play, particularly in the bigger scenarios. In scenario 10, for instance, an entire Russian task force, including a Kirov-class missile cruiser, was not allowed to launch long-range missile attacks. According to the computer, the Kirov had some 225 surface-to-surface missiles on board—but all of them had a range of zero. (Of course, NATO was in big trouble once I charged the cruiser straight into a US carrier group, but the entire flavor of the game was ruined.) Other bugs include aircraft squadrons that lock in place, missions that cannot be canceled or reassigned, and wandering graphics (ship counters that float over top of other information). Occasionally, a hostile task force will be identified on the strategic map but will not appear on the tactical readout.

COMMANDER'S LOG

Despite these annoying bugs, 5TH FLEET is a well-designed, challenging game, particularly against a human opponent. It is simple to learn, yet complex enough to require considerable thought in order to win. The design stays true to its board game origins, falling more on the side of playability than realism, but with enough detail to give a good overall feel for naval operations. Most of all, it is even more fun than its paper ancestor (especially with the computer performing all the tedious chores). A very good alternative for those who don't have the time or the inclination for HARPOON II.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FIFTH FLEET
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"A DOUBLE MUST-HAVE. Anyone who plays computer games will want this AMAZING CHAIR!"
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Envy Thor No More

Wield Your Own Magic Mallet In
New World Computing’s HAMMER OF THE GODS

by Martin E. Cirulis

Step into the WayBack Machine with me now...back to the days when men had horns, women were miserable, and a guy could really develop a long-term relationship with his body lice. Yes, Sherman, I’m talking about the golden age of the Vikings when books and human compassion were for sissies and helping to bring in the dark ages was considered one’s civic duty. This vaguely embarrassing period in western civilization is rarely covered in computer strategy games; adventure games, yes, because you can tune out the barbarity and concentrate on the Nordic propensity for epic quests, dramatic gods and singing whilst standing atop dead dragons. But strategy games tend to want to appeal to a gamer’s sense of being the “Good Guy.” So, while there are a few games of “Hold back the Viking Horde,” the “Be the Viking Horde” concept has been neglected.

Well, thanks to those several dudes at Holistic Design (whose former credits, Battles of Destiny and Merchant Prince, each have carved themselves a respectable niche in the strategy game market), you can now fill the shoes of a Viking Chieftain out to ravage Europe for Gold and Glory in an enjoyable but surprisingly nasty offering called Hammer of the Gods.

Evitably, there is a hitch, and it is a big one; in order to prove your worthiness, you must complete a quest, not just for Odin himself, for almost every god in your particular version of the Nordic Pantheon. Taking the most direct “task path” means you must please 10 gods, and realistically you will find yourself taking on far more quests for far more gods, up to 29; all this in order to achieve your ultimate quest of pleasing the Old Man and receiving the privilege of asking him to pass the ribs and having all assembled honor you as “The Hammer of the Gods.” A little pretentious, sure, but it looks good on a Viking T-shirt.

What is this “task path,” you may well ask? Well, it’s kind of like this: Gods, like office staff, exist in a hierarchy, from the lowest Squirrel God all the way up to Odin. Everybody answers to the being above them and is more powerful than the being below. In office terms, this means you must kiss up to the copy room boy long before you have a chance at spending the weekend at the Big Boss’ summer cabin. In Hammer of the Gods, this means you have to please one god before getting a chance to do a job for someone farther up the power chain, and this means a lot of work because the more powerful the god, the harder the quest will be. Some piddling god who doesn’t get invited to the really good parties may only ask you to explore a certain amount of terrain or find a city, while a god that really rocks, like Lokir or Saga, will only be pleased by you knocking over four or five big cities. With Saxon castles near most of them, filled with brave...
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NORSE IS NORSE OF COURSE, OF COURSE

Now, if all this just sounds like another Nordic adventure game, and you find yourself turning back to Wargords II for your strategy fix, relax; there is warfare a-plenty in this game. A lot of those quests require you to do unto others, then split. Most of the time it is computer-operated settlements that you abuse for fun and profit, but some of the more powerful gods require you to do things that annoy your fellow players: little things like wipe out another player’s capital, or kill ten heroes belonging to your fellow Viking Chiefs. All in all, a sure recipe for trouble.

Strategic movement and exploration is done on a large overhead map identical to the one found in Merchant Prince; in fact, Hammer of the Gods appears to be somewhere on the outskirts of Paris. Each time you move, a region around your unit is transformed from your less-than-perfect map into the real thing. This nice twist on exploration worked nicely in Merchant Prince and it works just as well here.

Units move in stacks of up to eight, and movement follows traditional wargame philosophy: each type of unit has a certain number of movement points which are consumed by crossing terrain. Certain units have the traditional advantages in certain terrain, like our friends the dwarves, who can stroll through mountains like side streets, and Elves, who can traipse through thick forest like crabgrass. Ocean movement is the fastest, but players must beware of going too many squares away from the mainland, for there are killer storms and Sea Serpents waiting over the horizon.

Once you actually decide to invade a town or engage another player’s stack out in the open, you simply move your stack over your target and wait for the fun to start. Fun in this case is defined by a slanted 2-dimensional side view of the battlefield, approximately 15 movement squares long and 5 deep, where your units line up on one side and your opponents on the other. One side moves and attacks with all their units and then the other side follows suit. Ranged weapons types, such as archers and slingers, fire out to a certain distance while ground-pounders must hack away at their targets up close. All units have a cer-

LADDER OF THE GODS The quest tree is central to the game. As you complete different gods’ quests, you’ll be richly rewarded (see inset), and will progress higher up the chain. The first hero to finish Odin’s quest wins the game.

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make a game more palatable for the market. Make no mistake, you are a Viking in this game, and you do Viking things—most of which would get you kicked out of the local Rotary Club.

This aside, HAMMER OF THE GODS is a light, enjoyable strategy game that will appeal more to newcomers or casual gamers far more than it will with the hard-core types. And, while this

shot. As you can see, the advantage is with the attacker in personal combat, and playing defensively will get you killed more often than not—which sort of makes sense in a game from the Viking point of view. Though this combat is very simple, it does model some aspects of combat, such as storming walls, rather elegantly, without getting bogged down in detail. Unfortunately, as is the case with any simple, “point-the-mouse-move-your-man” combat system, it can start to get a little repetitious over the course of a long game, and full-length games of HAMMER tend to be very long indeed.

The game also acknowledges that Empires are not carved from a vacuum. As you busily gather stuff, sooner or later it becomes apparent that you must take it from somebody else. Until that time, however, a wise Chief learns how to cultivate friends until he is too powerful to need them any longer. HAMMER OF THE GODS has a nice little diplomacy system that remains true to the Viking mindset, with players being able to ask for treaties and trade with each other, while arranging for marriages between available progeny or, for the less romantic, an exchange of hostages. Attacking other players without warning or sacrificing your own relatives violates the Viking code of honor, and Vikings have long memories.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF CONQUEST
HAMMER OF THE GODS is pretty much full-contact MERCHANT PRINCE, with less trading, but with the addition of Norse gods and plenty of pointy things. In a stunning display of bucking a trend, HAMMER OF THE GODS, despite its mythological trappings, doesn't really attempt to sugarcoat or edit history in order to

has become a pretty generic euphemism for a weak game, this is not quite the case here. In the quest for the mythical “Introductory Strategy Game,” I believe this game is a contender for the title. Seasoned players looking with a hard eye will find all sorts of little weaknesses in the game, and unless you play it fairly cutthroat with your friends, it isn't going to strain your tactical skills.

On the other hand, more casual players aren't casual about strategy/wargames because they are dumb and need simpler rule systems. They are casual about the whole thing because they could care less about which unit was where at the Battle of the Bulge, or any other war that has been done to death. What a casual player is looking for, initially, is an interesting or quirky subject matter with mechanics that don't leave them sweating because they forgot to buy arrows for their archers. HAMMER OF THE GODS fills this niche almost perfectly and should be applauded for it. If you only feel the need for detailed wargames, look elsewhere; but if you are looking to pass a few hours with friends having fun, then hop into a boat, slap your horns on your head and leave your civilized conscience behind. The Gods are waiting and they have TOYS!!!

THE EDITORS SPEAK

HAMMER OF THE GODS

RATING  

PROS A nice introductory strategy game. Its "quest" concept is unique and keeps the game moving. Network and modem play.

CONS Minor hiccups and design flaws will annoy seasoned strategists.
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System requirements: 286-20 or faster machine (386 recommended) with 640K RAM, hard disk, joystick recommended. Operating Sys.: MS DOS 3.3 or above, Windows 3.1, Graphics compatible with VGA. Sound support: Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, Thunder Board, Pro Audio Spectrum, Adlib Gold and Speed Master.

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NR-13 This game is not for the faint-hearted. Contains violence and some material inappropriate for minors. NOT RECOMMENDED FOR PLAYERS UNDER 13.
When In Windows, Do As The Romans Do

Mindscape’s LEGIONS Puts A New Spin On Ancient Warfare.

by M. Evan Brooks

In the beginning, there was Chris Crawford’s Legionnaire, but there were very few other simulations of ancient warfare. Now, Mindscape has attempted to rectify this with a design covering over 2,000 years of history (1200 BC to 926 AD). Optimistically previewed by editor-in-chief Johnny Wilson in CGW #125 (December ’94), LEGIONS was described as a “full-blown miniatures campaign brought to the computer.” Now that the final version has been released, it is clear that the description was half right. It provides both the rationale for movement and acts as campaign referee. Unfortunately, the tactical battles are abstracted and, since that is the level at which most ancients aficionados like to play, that is LEGIONS’ biggest weakness.

Legions

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: Macintosh and IBM compatible 386-33Mhz or better, 4 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 15 MB hard drive space, Windows 3.1, mouse; supports Sound Blaster, AdLib and most other major sound cards.
Protection: None
# of Players: 1-18, with network support
Designers: Briscoe Rodgers and Manny J. Granillo
Publisher: Mindscape
Novato, CA
(800) 234-3088

THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

LEGIONS is an extremely user-friendly game. It runs smoothly in a Windows environment, it is easy to install and has no protection scheme, a very welcome touch on the designers’ part. The Windows environment not only sets up all of the drivers efficiently, but also provides a relatively rare feature—the ability to print out maps. Playing a multi-screen game often leaves one without an adequate visualization of the entire game area. A print option is thus welcome, and I was able (on a 486-66 with an HP Laserjet III) to print out the visible map area in under one minute. Printing the entire gaming surface, however, took over five minutes. Still, it is a useful tool for those tired of endless scrolling. The only downside was trying to read the manual’s references to printing from Windows which were, if not Greek, Etruscan B to me. So, even if one doesn’t want the advantage of multi-tasking, a very valuable feature when playing against other human opponents at work via network or at home via modem, there is a rationale for playing under Windows.

Where the game is not so user-friendly is the documentation. While all of the commands and hot keys are explained therein, they lack historical justification and concrete game application. The tutorial is weak and disorganized, while the “game play/basic strategy” section is limited to ten additional meager pages. This omission could have been ameliorated by allowing you to observe the computer playing against itself, but no such option is available.

THE TIME HAS COME TO SPEAK OF COHORTS AND KINGS

Obviously, a title like LEGIONS would lead you to expect scenarios from the Roman Empire period. Oddly enough, of the ten historical scenarios included, the Romans take center stage for only three. In choosing ten scenarios over 2,000 years of history, LEGIONS makes some conspicuous omissions. For a product whose title evokes images of the Roman Empire, there are only three scenarios of Rome: Cincinnatus against the Aequians (509 BC), Caesar’s Conquest of Gaul (58 BC), and the Late Roman Empire (443 AD). In particular, scenarios depicting the development of the Roman legion are missing. Where is the Fall of the Republic (Sulla versus Marius), The Roman Civil War (Octavianus vs. Antony), or at the very least the Falling Out of the Triumvirate, pitting Caesar vs. Pompey vs. Crassus?

Also, while the Battles of the Diadochoi (Alexander the Great’s successors) are present, the actual campaigns of Alexander and his father Philip are nowhere to be seen; neither is the Persian Empire, that scourge of classical Greece. Instead, the
A millennium ago, the peaceful Flinarj were nearly wiped out by the Quarrian Empire. Fortunately, from within their capital city and last stronghold, the Flinarj developed a massive machine which ripped up twenty-five huge chunks of land from the Planet Zarg and raised them into the skies above. The Flinarj have long lived safely on their islands in the sky. Now, however, there is a threat. The Zargon Mineral Trading Authority (ZMTA) is intent on capturing the Flinarj machine to dig deeper into the Zargon crust to mine for precious jewels. After several years of development, the ZMTA Flying Machine is ready. But so are the Flinarj.
designers opted to focus on the development of infantry in a variety of classical military systems. So, gamers have the rare opportunity to fight in exotic locales such as ancient Kush, pit the Caliphate versus the Byzantines, or create an empire that is neither Holy nor Roman. If that isn’t enough, there are random versions of every pre-built scenario, as well as a completely random option.

The unit mix is quite detailed. It takes over ten pages to describe military units, ranging from peltasts to cohorts to the heavy phalanx. Even more interesting are the use of convicts (forced labor), berserkers (descended as naked and blue; the latter referring to dye rather than temperature) cattle and even flaming pigs (good for stampeding enemy elephants and possibly lunch).

Each type of unit requires economic assets such as wood, metal, textiles and technology. Technology represents an abstract level of effort required in knowledge or training in order to develop a certain type of unit. Technology units are expended proportionally to the value of a unit. For example, a Roman cohort will require twice as many tech points because of their training as those of an equivalent number of archers in their auxilia. Also note that you can mass produce barbarian units due to their low tech costs. Yet, while ferocious on attack, these units will provide easy prey when placed upon defense. Simply put, tech points represent the effort expended in a level of expertise.

Movement of units is swift and smooth via a typical Windows interface. Units are assigned movement points as in a boardgame, and you move them by clicking on a unit and dragging the cursor to where you want that unit to go. When you let go of the mouse button, the line shows you each movement point to be expended on that trip. If you don’t like the original route, you can cancel and check out other possibilities. No terrain chart is given, but you can easily infer how efficient a given route will or will not be for a particular unit. Moving a unit onto a town or enemy unit naturally precipitates combat.

Ancient aficionados who prefer gaming from a detailed tactical perspective will immediately be frustrated with the abstract level of combat. When combat is joined, one merely chooses a battle strategy (withdraw, outflank, refuse right or left flank, assault, echelon, defend), and the result is determined automatically. Because of this abstraction, it is difficult to determine the efficiency of the legion versus the phalanx or the reasons that cavalry eventually usurped the role of infantry. While the abstract combat has the advantage of allowing you to play through campaigns rather quickly, a near perfect design would be to integrate an additional tactical module into the game itself or allow miniatures results to be entered into the game’s database. Still, the combat results have the right historical feel, since, for example, neither elephants nor phalanxes perform as well in rough terrain as on a plain.

**APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEPTION**

The biggest deception within the game is the relatively weak economic environment. For instance, one can easily sell assets (food, textiles, etc.) each turn, but any sale depresses the market by a fixed amount, and each additional sale has the same market depression value rather than dynamic incremental changes reflecting actual supply and demand. Further, the economic marketplace is limited and does not reflect the strengths and weaknesses of actual geographical locations.

Further, the diplomatic frenzy of the game often works correctly for the wrong reasons. LEGIONS is often a game of form
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accurately captured in the Peloponnesian War scenario, where the lesser states such as Argos or Corinth jump from the Athenian to the Spartan camp almost on a whim—much as they did historically.

Diplomacy itself is handled via pop-up menus. As in reality, diplomacy is often a matter of sending off proposals and waiting for replies. It can serve as a delaying tactic and can also be used to determine a given tribe or city-state’s disposition toward your empire. In addition to official propositions, you can enhance your position through the age-old tradition of gift-giving. In addition to jewels or gold, you may even erect monuments in your would-be ally’s honor. It isn’t clear how much impact this gift-giving really has, but it isn’t clear in real life, either.

Markets are single as well, with a single, easy-to-read graph, which will also track your military expenditures and overall economic health.

**BEWARE OF GEEKS BEARING GIFTS**

As regular readers will understand my tendency to prefer games which teach authentic historical lessons, I found some of the design trade-offs in *Legions* to be so unacceptable as to present a mishmash of pseudo-history and economic forces which simply do not meet my criteria. Simply put, I was less than pleased with *Legions*, finding it obtuse, economically unrealistic, historically incorrect and not much fun to play.

However, this seems to be a minority opinion at CGW. Editors Wilson and Coleman have found this to be an enjoyable and stimulating game of ancient warfare. For the user wishing a challenging game of ancient warfare without a historical basis, *Legions* should do nicely. For those wishing to learn about the realities of ancient warfare, I would recommend curling up with Thucydides or Xenophon, and the boardgames from GMT (CAMPAIGNS OF ALEXANDER, SPQR).

---

**NOT YOUR FATHER’S BOOT CAMP** All 43 types of units available in *Legions* can benefit from additional training. But don’t invest too much time in your Skirmishers—they’re as expendable in the game as they were historically.

Over substance where diplomatic shifts and military alliances occur for historical reasons. Yet, the fluid political landscape of the historical periods are reasonably well-portrayed. For example, the epic struggles between the city-states of Ancient Greece are

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The Mission: Save Humanity (Again)
In Merit Software's REUNION

by Martin E. Cirulis

The first lesson a writer learns is that there are a limited number of story plots to be used. Deconstructionist types claim that there are only three; the rest of us believe in a slightly higher number.

Even Science Fiction, so closely linked to the vast reaches of the universe that you can hardly swing a dead Ewok without hitting upon an original angle, is subject to this limitation. As a result, the next lesson a writer learns is that it's not whether a plot has been done before, it's how well you pull it off that counts. Raiders of the Lost Ark may not have been high art, but nobody was complaining that they had seen it all before during a Saturday Matinee in the '40s. REUNION, a British import brought to these shores by Merit Software, definitely fails to break new ground in terms of plot. In fact, saying the game is in the tradition of Accolade's Star Control 2 would be pretty charitable. Unfortunately, it seems the creators of REUNION were a little fuzzy on lesson two above.

MISSING PLANETS BULLETIN
In a vague introduction filled with dramatic music and mostly line drawings (somewhat reminiscent of the opening of Robotech), we hear a tale of an Earth dragged back from the brink of war and eco-disasters, and ushered into a new golden age by the UN. Everything is wonderful except for the clothes, which look worse than they did in the '70s. At the height of Earth's neo-Renaissance, hyper-drive technology is discovered, and though this is probably the greatest travel invention since the shock-absorber, only two explorer ships are built to explore the Galaxy. The first is lost very quickly, although not before sending an extremely cryptic final message that nobody on Earth seems to find relevant at the time. The second scout returns after finding several inhabitable worlds far across the Galaxy.

At this point, Earth's golden age begins to tarnish somewhat, as humanity rediscovers guns and finds that breaking up really isn't all that hard to do. With violence on a mysterious surge and the Balkan Shuffle being the most popular political dance step, the second explorer ship is hastily refitted as a colonization vessel and is sent off just as the UN falls and anarchy sets up shop on the old Big Blue Marble. As is often the case with these humanity-saving missions, somebody forgets to check the weather report and a big meteor reduces the ship's hyper-drive to hash, making this a one-way trip. One lumpy landing on an alien world later and a new lost colony of Humanity is formed and given the pleasure of rebuilding civilization.

Jump 500-odd years into the future, and you find yourself the sole leader of this world. Things have ended up in pretty good shape. So good, in fact, that the populace charges you with not only keeping them happy, but with developing an interstellar space technology to track down the old neighborhood once and for all. It seems that when the hyper-drive on the old ship went out, the glove-compartment with all the maps in it went along with it; so you have no choice but to find Earth the old fashioned way, by looking for it. Fortunately, this version of the Milky Way seems pretty small, and there are plenty of aliens around to ask directions from once you start flying about. Of course, there is all that weird stuff that was happening on Earth, which, in hindsight seems to suggest some devious alien plan. Unimaginable distances to be traveled, unending darkness, violent adversaries and doubtful allies at every stop, fear, loathing, suspicion...yup, sounds like a reunion to me.

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and exploration with a little combat thrown in to liven things up. Unfortunately these elements seem to have been taken from other games and combined in an uninspiring way. Colonies and your own home planet are based on the old “build tiles and place them” system that seems to be all the rage these days. Your facilities to choose from run the usual gamut of power plants, homes, hospitals, mines, etc., and their build times are amazingly fast. Don't be too worried about underestimating your food consumption rates, as an entire farm can be built in a day or so; in fact, money is a far more limiting factor for getting what you want when you want it.

In another slave-to-fashion move, you must also hire “advisors” to get things done for you in the fields of Research, Development, Construction, Warfare and Flight. The more money you spend on these advisors, the more efficiently things will get done, and every so often they will have something to say, but not often enough to justify their pay. As you may have inferred by the presence of a Research division, there are quite a few amazing discoveries to be made, but, as with construction, the actual act of research passes so quickly as to be irrelevant. Basically the issue is how long it takes (i.e. what events you've triggered in the plot line) for somebody to tell you something is possible; from there it's usually less than a couple game-days before you're punching your new widgets out on an assembly line.
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Ships must be organized into fleets in order to move, and they are basically grouped into fighting, transport and satellite-dispensing fleets. Once you get things rolling, your homeworld production facilities will need greater and greater amounts of minerals from off-world, so a healthy set of mining colonies are vital to success. Unfortunately, there is no way to create automated trade routes, so fleets must be manually lifted off, sent to their destinations, landed, and then loaded/unloaded. Except for the flight between worlds, when the player can switch to some other aspect of the game, ship movement consumes the player's attention and effort. Automated trade, as in Sierra's Alien Legacy, would have been very useful here.

Combat has little to do with the player: it is simply a matter of numbers, quality of equipment, and how good—or rather, how expensive—your Military Advisor is. Battles occur first in space between ships in the same system; then in the planetary atmosphere between surviving attackers and those defense ships assigned to the world in question; and finally between ground forces which fight it out—winner takes all. Your only real insight into the combat is a display of colored lights representing ships which blink out as they die, some graphics of stuff flying around and exploding, and a tally screen at the end that tells how many ships took the next great step in spiritual development.

The story itself is pretty standard and is definitely from the BattleStar Galactica handbook of “How to wander the Galaxy and get into trouble.” While you must discover the reason for Earth's downfall, as well as the planet herself, the plot isn't on par with the Star Control: 2 drama of finding the place quickly, and then cracking the force-field before things get really ugly in that section of the Galaxy. The alien races you encounter are pretty mundane, and they behave simply as plot points with pretty masks on. Most of your actions will not alter their behavior, short of the “help them or kill them” choice. Early in the game you find little saucer aliens sharing your star system, and even if you help destroy the enemy fleet harassing them, their base is destroyed anyway. The only effect is to reduce the presence of the enemy fleet. If you do help, you are not bothered for a while; if you don't, then they come after you soon after the saucer aliens bite it. Not exactly subtle, but it does move things along, I guess.
SPEED KILLS
It seems that Reunion relies on speed to cover up the weak points of the game. Everything from combat to movement to research happens so fast that you end up doing things, not in the order of occurrence or importance, but when you can get around to them. Ships wait in orbit until you have time to unload them, and colonies sit undeveloped until you have a moment to pay for the buildings that were finished in an afternoon. The only two things a player must quickly respond to are combat and SimCity-esque demands from your population for hospitals and stadiums. Actually, combat develops so quickly that there is little a player can do to prepare if he hasn’t already done so. Once you’re warned that an enemy fleet has entered a system, you have about ten seconds real-time until the actual attack takes place. And there is no option to change the rate that time passes. The player is stuck at a speed that gives everything a feel of superficiality.

In taking elements so blithely from other SF games, Reunion has lost any soul of its own, especially when these elements are all less detailed than players are used to finding in other games. The appeal of technology research is well-known to anybody who has ever discussed Civilization or Master of Orion with a gamer. But when the treatment is so superficial that a player can actually watch a Starship design being developed in half a minute, much of the potential appeal is lost.

Reunion is probably not for the gamer of even average experience, who will find it too simplistic and derivative for the time involved. Younger audiences or adventure game fans who must conquer every plot may enjoy it, as well as those looking for some light entertainment. While the design does have a few dozen hours of play packed in to it, most SF fans will find the technical aspects so thin as to be distracting. As it stands, everything here has been done before and, unfortunately for Reunion, it has been done better.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

REUNION

PROS Quick and simple game play that might make for a good introduction to strategy games.

CONS In a crowded field of similar space-faring games, Reunion, with its uninspired story and game mechanics, finds itself running at the back of the pack.

WE ADVISE YOU TO INCREASE OUR SALARY Paying more to your advisers increases operating efficiency, but their advice isn’t very profound.
Harried Is The Head...

...That Wears The Crown Of U.S. Gold's DOMINUS

by Jason Kapalka

“My liege, the Raiders have breached the palace gates!”

The Overlord scowls behind his iron mask and turns away from the writhing figure in chains before him. He knows the Sea Devil will soon yield to the ministrations of the torturers and give up his leader’s name... but there is no more time.

Ascending from the dungeon, the Overlord barks orders to his waiting Generals, who hurry to deploy monsters and lay traps in a perimeter around the castle. Gazing into his sorcerer crystal, the Overlord sees, as if from high above, the red-haired hordes of Raiders rushing into the castle’s corridors. One trip a near-invisible wire, and arazed pendulum sethys through three of the interlopers. The Overlord gathers his powers and bursts mystic horac down upon the rest. A half dozen die by fire, another three warp into hideous beasts. Still more come. He summons a group of Wolf Warriors and Braineaters, but they swiftly fall beneath the Raiders’ axes.

Cursing, the Overlord seizes his mace and leaps to the chariot: the invaders will feel his wrath personally! As he descends to the battlefield, the Raiders look as one in his direction and charge...

So goes the fight in U.S. Gold’s NEW ACTION-STRATEGY HYBRID DOMINUS. IN A BID TO BECOME perhaps the most hyphenated of cross-genre games, DOMINUS is billed as a real-time tactical-strategic resource-management-based creature-breeding role-playing-arcade-wargame, or in other words, GAUNTLET meets WARLORDS ON DUNE II, with the magic reagents of ULTIMA and SIMLIFE’s gene-mixer.

Confused? You haven’t even played the game yet.

DOMINUS puts you in the boots of the Overlord, a masked mesomorph who makes the heroes in Frank Frazetta paintings look like pencil-necked geeks. Your job is to drive out the eight invading clans bent on stealing your kingdom’s resources, using only your vast array of spells, an arsenal of traps, an army of mutants, and your own winning personality. The “role-playing” aspects of the game are admittedly nominal; your moral decisions are pretty much limited to choices like, “Should I torture Uztabar here for more info, or send him to the kennel to be mated with a Bog Wraith?”

While the role-playing elements are slim, DOMINUS manages to incorporate the style and interface of just about every other game genre into its frothy mix. While your overall goals are strategic in nature, you can, indeed must, delve into tactical-level command and even one-on-one-duel-against-all melee in your quest to eradicate the invading clans.

These nasty intruders appear as little color-coded flags and arrows on your kingdom map, creeping ever-inwards from the frontiers towards your strongholds and castle. You can zoom in on any one of the 72 territories and scroll around for a closer look at the various forests and huts, but what you’re really here for is some good old-fashioned bloodletting. Selecting one of the 50-odd spells, you can unleash elementals, earthquakes, destructive mists or various mind-altering agents on the interlopers. Alternately (or simultaneously) you can set down one or more of the 30 varieties of beasts in your kennels to watch them duke it out with the bad guys.

If any turf-stealers are still moving, or if you’re just not into task-delegation, you can descend personally into the fray and whomp monsters with fireballs and mace in simplistic GAUNTLET arcade style. Keep an eye on your life-meter, or be treated to an up-close view of your castle exploding like a gas-soaked munitions dump.

If your testosterone level is a little low after all that hand-to-hand work (or was never that high to begin with), you can take a more cerebral approach to the carnage, ordering your four Generals to perform w transmission jobs like building and laying traps, deploying beasts, spying and gathering spell components.

Alternatively, you could jaunt over to the dungeon and see if a hot poker can pry useful information from captured invaders, like what resource their clan is after, what variety of beast they fear most, or the ingredients to a secret spell. If you capture an enemy commander, you can even try to negotiate a peace treaty.

Once you’ve wrung all the info from a
captive, why not send him to the Mixing Room, along with up to five more critters, to be magically crossed into a fearsome new beast? (Well, hopefully fearsome.) Afterwards, you can return to the field and turn your dastardly creation loose to wreak havoc on your enemies.

If all of the above sounds chaotic and bizarre, well, you’ve caught the spirit of the game. DOMINUS is not for armchair generals who like to ponder their every move. There are few well-oiled offensive thrusts or flanking maneuvers to be seen; rather, the typical Overlord will find himself hurling everything but the kitchen sink in the clans’ path in a harried, whatever-works panic. Only in the endgame, when the invaders have been reduced to one or two of the most powerful clans, do you have the luxury of contemplation.

KITCHEN SINK, INC.

"Everything but the kitchen sink" is a good description for DOMINUS’ blend of multifarious gaming styles, and it applies to the game’s visual style as well. D&D-inspired medieval fantasy worlds are not noted for their consistency and believability, but DOMINUS takes this trend to an extreme—everything is garish and random, with no apparent internal logic. For example, a captured Raider might tell you he fears "creatures created by magic." But which are those? Oculaurus? Ungorota? Arachners? Who knows? They’re all weird, and neither the game nor the manual helps distinguish one brand of weirdness from the other.

Time pressure is another element that will either please players or annoy them to no end. The clock doesn’t stop ticking while you’re mixing spells, building traps, or tormenting prisoners, and you’re likely to emerge from an extended interrogation session to behold dozens of invaders cavorting happily through your kingdom’s gardens. You can set the game to alert you to the invaders’ movements, but this can backfire, continually interrupting your spell research attempts with warnings of new troop movements.

The bewildering array of things to do, combined with the lack of predictability and the time constraints, ensure that DOMINUS is never boring. Frustrating, yes. Aggravating to the point of madness, yes. But never boring. It’s not the type of game you play for ten hours straight. It’s the type of game you play for an hour before dropping to the floor, mouse hand a-twitching.
THINGS OMINOUS
There are, sadly, some problems. Domi
nus promises randomly-generated clans
for each game, and so you expect ran
domly-generated clans. But in every
game I played, many clans retained the
same characteristics over and over
again. The Fire Demons were always
deadly afraid of spinners, the Raiders
were always terrified by "creatures cre-
ated by magic" (whatever those are),
and the ill-named Raveners were scared
of everything—they were usually wiped
out by their braver brethren before I
ever had to come to terms with them.

If you opt for the CD version, be aware
that it supports no limited installations. All
50 megabytes are dumped directly to your
hard drive, including many graphic cut-
scenes that one would think could be ac-
cessed from the CD, since the game
requires the disc be in the drive at all
times anyway.

A BREED APART Five beasts in the Mixing Room are about to be magically combined into a new
creature, which will hopefully possess all of their best qualities.

CRITTER COMBAT From your overhead vista you can watch a troop of Drakes and Reptons engage the
Raider clan.

Then there are more deeply-rooted
flaws. The secret spells, for instance, are
a complete waste of time. Not that
"Death Cloud" and "Acid Flood" don't
sound like handy spells... it's just that in
over a dozen games I was unable to get
even a single hidden spell mixed. Suffi-
cice it to say you need to interrogate lit-
urally dozens of the rare enemy mages to
have even a chance at getting one of
these spells, by which point the invad-
ing hordes will be dancing a jig in the
throne room, if you haven't already abdi-
cated in disgust.

The Monster Mixing feature is simi-
larly useless. By carefully arranging
creatures on the appropriate pedestals,
you can, indeed, create a beast with all
their best qualities. One beast. A quick
look at the nearly 800 invaders reveals
that monster-breeding is a novelty with
limited use. The Clone spell can help
you get more mileage from your mu-
tants, but it uses rare reagents and is in
short supply at all times.

There are other flaws and quirks, like
the awkward mouse + keyboard controls
used in the Gauntlet-style melees, or the
fact that most of the invading clans have
ranged weapons, while only one of your
30 beasts (the Drake) has such capabilites.

But the most serious problem of

DOMINUS is simply this: for all the op-
tions available, you still feel like you
lack control. Clans are often eliminated
without any apparent action on your
part. Even on the easier difficulty levels,
the invaders swarm over your kingdom
too quickly for any sensible holding
action, leaving the most inelegant strategy
as the most successful: wait for the
massed invaders to get to your castle
and then dump everything you've got
on top of them. Too often you get the
feeling that you're wasting your time
with all the fancy-doo-dads, when a
crude bludgeoning approach would
work better.

Still, at its frenzied, confusing best,
DOMINUS can indeed be thrilling; and it's a
pleasure to see a game that takes chances
with an innovative design. It's a shame
that the few design problems make
the game play exasperating as often as it is
exciting. Perhaps with a revision or two this
game could live up to its potential, but for
now, masked mesomorph fans should ap-
proach this castle with caution.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

DOMINUS

RATING

PROS A radically unique blend of
gaming styles and features.

CONS The mad pace and the cool
teatures just don't gel very well into a
balanced, challenging game.
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Circle Reader Service #177
A Pair Of Perplexing Puzzlers

by Chuck Miller

As games become hydra-headed monsters of digital video and multiple CDs, it's important to remember that good games can still be very simple. This month's shareware games offer two perfect examples (well, nearly perfect) of simplicity without compromise. STREET SHUFFLE by MaxWare is an easy-to-play tile-based puzzle game for Windows, and BOPPIN' from Accursed Toys and Apogee Software is a DOS-based puzzler for the borderline masochist. Both demonstrate that you don't need megabytes of storage space and high-end, state-of-the-art hardware to have some good, clean, addicting fun, at least when it comes to brain-teasers.

Hey, Taxi!

Computer games with Taxis in them are becoming standard fare, if you don't mind the pun. Following HELL CAB there was QUARANTINE, and now STREET SHUFFLE, a game about fleeing your fares. The idea is to take your passengers on the "scenic tour" through town, the longest ride possible to their desired destination. Hey, 2105 AD is a tough time for honest cabbies. The highways are fully mechanized and automated by the CABMASTER system (Computer Assisted Bypass Mechanism for Automated Street Traffic Elimination or Reduction), a computer controlled "street mover" designed to ensure that each trip you make is by the shortest route possible. Fortunately, you're not constrained by petty virtues like honesty. Since you get paid by the mile, you've invested your last cent to install a HACKMASTER (Human Assisted Console Keying of Mechanism for Automated Street Traffic Elimination or Reduction) in your cab, allowing you to take back control of the road, and boost your earnings in the process.

THE LONG WAY HOME In 2105, honest taxi-cab drivers can't survive, so you need to take your passengers for a long ride and rack up a big fare.

In STREET SHUFFLE, the object is to reconnect street segments to form an unbroken path from your cab to its destination before time runs out and your taxi begins its trek. If the path is incomplete before your vehicle starts moving a crash is very likely, an event that translates into costly repair bills. However, by finishing the path and reaching your destination, you'll be rewarded with a fare based on miles traveled and advancement to the next level. As your funds increase, a trip to the service station affords the opportunity to buy special equipment and, of course, gas up your vehicle prior to its next jaunt. With 50 levels of escalating complexity and shorter time allotments, STREET SHUFFLE soon becomes as desperate a challenge as hailing a real inner-city cab.

Creating a path in STREET SHUFFLE is much the same as rearranging the squares in those sliding plastic puzzles you destroyed at birthday parties when you were six. You slide the street tiles around the screen so that the route created is the longest possible one from start to finish. However, you'll be lucky on some levels to get any path created before your cab starts moving. Often, you may find the need to move one or more tiles into position while your taxi is in transit to make sure it arrives at its destination safely.

While most levels begin with the street tiles already positioned on the board, bonus levels require you to place them in vacant squares yourself. In these cases, you are provided tiles one at a time and must determine the best place to drop them (a window at the left shows you several tiles at once to aid in placement). If you're not careful, though, you'll end up with a path that leads to a dead end and costly repairs. In addition, once a section is placed, it can't be removed. However, the reset button will allow you to restart the level up to the point when the cab begins moving.

Accidents Will Happen

Running cabs involves some degree of risk. You're asking for trouble if you run into a dead-end or blank space, return to your starting point, drive over icy roads without snow tires, or drive on dirt roads without four-wheel drive. Each crash results in a 25% loss to your
So, if you thrive on strategic puzzles and have time to burn, you'll definitely enjoy "burning gas in Street Shuffle. It's as good as any of the commercial Windows strategy games, including TETRIS and BREAKTHRU! What's even better is its modest registration fee of $7, plus $3 shipping and handling. Registering STREET SHUFFLE furnishes you with new levels (Easy for children and Genius for even greater challenge), SVGA levels for those with higher resolution monitors, additional graphics files for a change of scenery, and the level editor that allows you to create your own levels to distribute to other registered players. Send your payment to: Street Shuffle Registration, 4615 East Glen Ridge Circle, Winston GA, 30187.

JUST BOPPIN' ALONG

Those with a background on the Amiga should be familiar with BOPPIN' and its designers, Accurized Toys (programmers of a great Dr. Who game for the Amiga). Though it has taken several years, Accurized Toys has finally released a PC version of BOPPIN', their cute and sadistic strategy game.

As the story goes, Arcapedia is one of trillions of little universes, pockets in spacetime, that drift through the Absolute Elsewhere. It's also the home of Yeet and Bird, triangle-headed, stick-figured arcade gamers. But wait! Something's terribly wrong in Arcapedia. All the monsters have disappeared from the arcade games—every single one! If there are no monsters to kill, there can be no high score and, worst of all, no one to save. Who could have done such a rotten thing? Why, that goody-two-shoes, Hunnybunz, a giddy sweet, candy cane toting, singing bear (no, not purple dinosaur, but they're equally despicable). As events would have it, Hunnybunz has imprisoned all the monsters and hidden them throughout the land in the guise of simple patterns and designs—

BOP TILL THEY DROP Yeet and Bird's "bopulation" frees a monster in Boppin'. Hurry, free the monsters! Gamers need more creatures to kill.

cab's structural integrity, a very costly occurrence. Drop below 1% integrity and it's time for Jake the junkman.

The gameplay here is, without question, very addictive. The mix of logical tile placement and the time limitation make for a challenging gaming experience. You'll gain a healthy sense of satisfaction as your taxi weaves its way gracefully around the screen toward its appointed destination, ringing up the dollars on the meter all the while.

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In order to solve the puzzles on each level, Yeet and Boik must pick up and toss “bopping blocks” around the screen, called “waggling,” in an effort to cause “boppulation,” the disintegration of matching blocks. Poor aim results in lost or stuck blocks, and the aforementioned demonstration of one’s mortality. Match the blocks and the matched pieces disappear. Clearing one of several special patterns will release hidden monsters and glean you some extra points in the process. When the screen has been cleared of all objects, Yeet and Boik move on to the next level, 25 in all.

BOPPIN’ is in some ways similar to TETRIS (matching colored objects) and in others a bit like PONG (bouncing blocks around the screen). It also has some similarities to SHANGHAI (matching patterns on the objects). BOPPIN’S multifaceted character adds to its appeal, making it an entertaining exercise in mental gymnastics while retaining an arcade element. If you don’t mind a bit of violent humor, and if you aren’t put off by some occasionally severe frustration, BOPPIN’ may just find a place in your contorted little heart. Registration is $29.95 and includes 160 levels and a level editor. A budget edition is available for $19.95 (offering only 80 levels and no level editor). To order either edition, contact: Apogee Software, P.O. Box 496389, Garland TX 75049 or call (800) 426-3125. Tell ’em the Shaman of Shareware sent you!

Chuck Miller, CGW columnist and editor of InterActive Gaming, can be reached on CompuServe at 72241,7222 and through the Internet at 72241.2122@compuserve.com.
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The Dream Job

How To Get Your Start In Computer Game Programming

by Paul C. Schuytema

ANY MONTHS AGO, I POLISHED UP MY RESUME, COMPLETED WORK ON A 10-PAGE game design prospectus for a flight-sim/adventure called “Pylon Racer,” and sent off a packet to Origin Systems in Texas, looking, like so many of you, to break into the nuts and bolts side of the computer game industry. The game design would be so brilliant, I hoped, that the “Creators of Worlds” would offer me a six figure salary and a window office next to Lord British. The weeks passed and I finally received a little post card which thanked me for my application and informed me that Origin would be in touch.

It was shortly after receiving that “Don’t call us...” postcard that I began this column, figuring that the next best thing to designing games was writing about them and the people who create them. Still, the dream of creating computer games remains, and I hope someday to have a crack at it.

I know I’m not alone. Every month, CGW receives several letters from young hopefuls looking for a way into computer game design, programming, and art. This month I decided to poke my nose around the game industry in search of the answer to the eternal question: “How can I get a job as a game programmer?”

THEY GET PAID FOR THIS?

There’s no mystery to the lure of game programming. Computer science majors the world over spend countless hours learning data structures and the importance of linked lists (I should know—I spent several years in PDP-11 purgatory, before the writing bug claimed my educational energies). After working boring hours to get that semester project of a C++ x86 disassembler coded, you pop back into your dorm room, flare up your 486 and kick some demon butt in Doom 2. Hexadecimal table lookups or roaring subterranean hell-spawn? The choice is obvious.

(Note: Just to shatter any misconceptions, life as a game programmer will involve countless hex table lookups, binary shift operations and variable length data structures, so pay attention to those classes: you’ll need those skills even when crafting a Cyberdemon.)

Ten years ago, breaking into the gaming industry could be seen as a solo affair driven by the “hacker mentality.” You loved programming, you cruched code in your sleep, you created a game, and then, if it was good enough, you were off. You could market the game yourself, in the old zippy lock style of packaging, or use the game as a lever to get you into a larger company. Rarely was a diploma a required powerup, it was long hours of self-taught programming that brought the rewards.

Today, the rules have changed. PC, Mac and cartridge games are a multi-billion-dollar-a-year business. Now, game publishers have whole human resources departments, and a well written resume is a handy powerup indeed. One tool can still help you land that first job, according to DC True’s lead software engineer Glenn Doen, and that is writing your own game.

“I actually learned some of my first hard-core game programming techniques from Bruce Webster’s old CGW column,” said Doen. Doen was a game addict from his early years, addicted to D&D and hacking away on an Apple II and Atari 400 computer all through high school. He started out with Apple Pascal, and did the requisite “hello world” application in 6502 assembly language, but found the cryptic semi-machine code too difficult.

Doen made his way to the University of Illinois to major in computer science, and began working on his magnum opus, a tactical combat game he called “Meelee.” Several years after college, he found himself on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, wearing one of those funky, color-coded, polyester blazers and trading bond futures. When he would go home at night, his escape was working on his Meelee game. On July 4, 1992, after two years in The Pit, he had had enough. Doen declared his own independence day; it was time to follow his dream into the world of game programming.

He first turned to CGW’s Alan Emrich, who provided a few addresses of Chicago-area game publishers. Emrich also suggested that Doen take a trip to the April Game Developers Conference in California (continued on page 210)
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mastery of the techniques. He studied the original Wing Commander, and created a demo to quickly rotate and scale 2D bitmaps, just like the Kilrathi ships. When it was time for his interview, he disassembled his home PC so that it would fit into an easily carried case, and then presented his demos to the EA team.

MORE B.S.?

Several of the letters I've received ask the rather blunt question: is an undergraduate degree in computer science worth it? Nana Chambers, the Director of Software Development for Simulations and Interactive Movies (the division which produced U.S. Navy Fighters) at Electronic Arts thinks that a degree is an essential ingredient for getting an entry-level position as a game programmer. "College teaches you about tenacity," she remarked.

When she interviews a candidate, she is looking for some computer engineering classes, computer science classes, and working knowledge of C and C++. "If assembly language was a plus. "Definitely," was her reply. "We're looking for programmers with a little more of a hacker style as opposed to a die-hard computer science student, someone who really knows the machine and has a lot of

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Game programming is a highly technical art requiring a ton of reading and a ton of programming practice. Below are some resources which will help you learn some of the vital skills you will need to make it into the world of professional game programming.

Books to take a look at:

Arcade Action Set by Diana Gruber, Coriolis Group Books—how to create scrolling arcade games in C.


Flights of Fantasy by Christopher Lampton, Waite Group Press—creating a 3D, polygon-based flight simulator in C++.

Tricks of the Game Programming Gurus by LaMothe, Ratchiff, Seminatore and Tyler, SAMS publishing—primarily a book on how to craft DOOM-like 3D games, but more encyclopedic in nature with tons of background techniques.

Game Designer's Handbook by multiple authors—executable hypermedia encyclopedia, available on the Internet via ftp at ftp.uwp.edu in the pub/games/game-dev directory.

The Art of Computer Game Design by Chris Crawford, Osborne/McGraw-Hill—a book about game design theory, not programming. It's a bit out of date (c. 1984), but it still provides good food for thought. It's also out of print, but I've seen it in a few libraries.

Magazines of interest:

Game Developer, 600 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107-9602

Interactive Entertainment Design, 5251 Sierra Road, San Jose, CA 95132
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interest in gaming."

Fullager reflected that, if he had his education to do over again (he was a computer science major at the University of California at Santa Cruz), he would be a math major instead. "Math remains pretty much constant, while computer science techniques can quickly become old news. Whenever I really get stuck on something, it's generally the math."

Fullager also credits college with giving him the skills needed to read professional journals and research papers. He picked up the Wing Commander bitmap routines from a General Electric research paper written in 1980.

THE HACKER AND THE C

C and C++ are becoming tools of the trade, so knowing your way in and out of "main()" loops is an essential skill. "It didn't mean squat," illuminated Chambers, "if you knew C a few years ago. Now, it's required knowledge."

"I've found that liberal arts graduates are a little more well rounded," says Chambers. "After all, it isn't about sitting around and building a database; it's about free-form programming. Make it cool, make it fun and make it fast."

Don McCasland, a programmer for Cyberflix, feels certain that "a lot of programmers dream about working in the database; it's about free-form programming. Make it cool, make it fun and make it fast."

So you know the code, you've played the games and you've even written one of your own. How do you get your foot in the door? "You have to do your homework," says Chambers. "That means knowing who does what at a company, reading the credits of a game, and sending your resume to those people."

From the people I've spoken to, there seem to be a few common traits: most have been game addicts and programmers for years, often crunching code before puberty set in. They have all studied computers extensively, many in college. And they all have the willingness to make the proper connections to make sure their talents get the attention they deserve.

What about my resume? Well, as of yet, Origin's human resources office still hasn't returned my call. Anyone out there interested in a killer 1920s-era pyl- lon racing simulator?

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Caddy Hack
Selecting The Right DOS Clubs
For The Gaming Green
by Mike Weksler

Imagine strolling up to the fairway at Pebble Beach and tee ing off on a 450-yard hole with a sand wedge. Even if you tee off like a gorilla on PCP, that Topflight isn’t going to fly anywhere near the green. Of course, it doesn’t matter how hard you swing because the problem isn’t power, it’s in your choice of driver.

We have a similar situation in the world of PC games. You can have all the computing power in the world—a screaming Pentium and RAM coming out of your ears—but if your memory is not configured correctly for a specific game, you’re not going anywhere. What makes matters worse is that no two games have the same memory configuration requirements—this one wants extended memory (EMS) and the other wants expanded memory (XMS)—and no two computer systems are exactly the same. So, just as the golfer has a selection of clubs for different situations, so the savvy computer gamer requires a selection of configuration files that will arrange his system memory to run different games.

In this article, we won’t concern ourselves with altering configurations for specific purposes; many columns (including many of my own) and entire books have been written on the subject. Instead, I’d like to address how you can organize multiple configurations for different games. We’ll look at three solutions: the boot disk, configuration batch files, and the DOS 6.0 boot menu.

But first, let’s clarify terms. When I talk about “memory configuration” I’m talking about two files on your computer: the CONFIG.SYS and the AUTOEXEC.BAT. These files contain instructions telling the computer how to organize your memory and which “drivers” to load. “Drivers” (also known as TSRs for Terminate and Stay Resident) are special programs that are loaded into your computer’s memory and stay in memory in case they are needed. Drivers often serve as an interface between the peripherals in your system (mouse, sound card, CD-ROM) and the main part of the computer. Without the drivers, your Sound Blaster Pro wouldn’t know how to communicate with your processor and vice-versa. Unfortunately, with too many drivers, your brand new game will often refuse to communicate with you!

In the simplest of terms, memory problems often arise because your sound card, CD-ROM, and other peripheral devices are eating up too much of the 640K of lower memory in your machine. If you have a game that requires 580K of the 640K of lower memory in your machine, and you’ve got 80K worth of software drivers loaded into that lower 640K, then you’ve got problems.

There are many ways to handle these problems—including little tricks that enable you to load some of your TSRs into a region called “upper memory” and memory management software like QEMM that will do the dirty work for you—but as I’ve said, we’ll leave that discussion for another day.

BOOTING UP
With a typical DOS installation, you probably have one set of configuration files (AUTOEXEC and CONFIG). If you were to view these files in any text editing program, you would see several lines of text in each one. Some of these lines include commands that execute programs. Most programs that end with .SYS, .COM, and .EXE are your TSRs. You’ll need them for your mouse, sound card, CD-ROM, and whatever else you have running.

Of course, as soon as you have your configuration ducks in a row, a new game will come along that will require a new configuration. Now, you could edit your configuration files with a text editor in order to run the game, but then the new configuration might not work with Windows or another program that you often use. Do you want to change your configuration every time you want to run a different piece of software?

Of course not. One simple solution is to create a “boot disk” for each game you play. A boot disk is simply a floppy disk that holds the two configuration files (AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS). When you want to play a specific game, you insert the boot disk into your computer and start it up. The game-specific configuration will
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Experience the power of studio-quality music and heart-pounding special effects from your PC games and music programs with UltraSound MAX™. The newest waveable PC sound card from Advanced Gravis, UltraSound MAX comes with over 5.6 megabytes of real instrument recordings to produce 32 voices of incredibly realistic music - light years from the tinny sound pumped out by FM cards. Hear the difference right away with DOOM™ and Epic Pinball™ (both included). Enjoy sensational waveable and digital sound with hundreds of popular applications that already support UltraSound. The MAX will also give you great sound with most games and applications written for Sound Blaster™, MT-32, General MIDI, and Windows™.

Record or playback in 16-bit stereo at 48kHz (surpassing CD quality). Explore over 15 megabytes of bonus software. Offering you the greatest flexibility, the MAX uses a unique, RAM-based waveable system. Imagine creating new instruments bounded only by your imagination. With MAX it's for real.

UltraSound MAX is the most complete, powerful, and affordable sound card you can buy.

For more information, or to find out how to obtain the UltraSound Experience CD-ROM demo, call (800)663-8558, (604)431-5020 or fax (604)431-5155.

Circle Reader Service #283
then be used to configure your memory. Many game installation routines will make a game-specific boot disk for you, but these disks are also fairly easy to create on your own.

You make a boot disk by formatting a floppy for your A: drive and then typing the magic code "SYS A:" to make it "bootable." Then you edit your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT to your liking, save the new files to your boot disk, and you're done.

Boot disks are easy to understand, easy to make, and work fairly well. Most customer support people suggest boot disks because they're easy to explain how to make over the phone, and they don't screw up your configuration. The down side is that you must have a boot disk for just about every game in your library, and boot disks are notoriously easy to misplace and crush under the wheels of your office chair.

**MIXING UP A BATCH**

There are other solutions that are more efficient, but they are a little more difficult to implement. If you have a DOS 5 or earlier owner and are adept at creating batch files, you can make copies of all of your favorite configuration files on your hard drive and write batch files to copy them back and forth on your whim. I like to create batch files that I call "RIG4"s. I have RIG4-QEMM which "rigs" my system with the QEMM memory manager. I have a RIG-I-VAN which gives my system a standard "vanilla" setup. And then I have RIG4s for my favorite games, like RIG4-FALC (Falcon 3.0) and RIG4-NET (for network DOOM-fests). All these batch files do is copy a specific set of configuration files (AUTOEXEC.QEM and CONFIG.QEM) over my current set of configuration files. Once the batch file is run, I can reboot the computer and the new configuration will be applied to it.

**THE BOOT MENU**

With the introduction of MS-DOS 6.0, managing multiple configuration files has become much easier. A new feature of DOS 6.0 is a function that allows you to create a boot menu, which essentially consolidates all of your configuration files into one big AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS. Once you've created a boot menu, you will be given various configuration options when you boot your computer. All you do is select the configuration appropriate for the current task, and you're all set for the day's gaming activities.

Setting up the boot menu is the tricky part. Basically, you have to create a CONFIG and an AUTOEXEC file with a special structure. Figure 1 shows a basic skeleton for the structure of the boot menu. The menu allows up to nine different configurations.

Figure 2 is a piece of my own boot menu configuration as an example to work from. Many of the details of the configurations are specific to my machine; you will have to create configurations that work for your own system.

One word of warning: Before tinkering with your configuration files, make sure you back up your original CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files to a bootable floppy disk. This way, if you mess up the configuration, you can still boot your machine with the floppy disk.

Using my examples and your DOS 6 manual, you should have a boot menu running in no time. Then, you'll be able to switch configurations with ease, test your configurations with new games, and, if necessary, add a new configuration when needed. Then, you'll be like the well-equipped golfer who has a club appropriate for every shot situation. Fore! (or RIG4!)

Under the Hood is both a column on technology and a Q&A technical support forum. Please send technical questions, comments, and solutions to Under the Hood, c/o Computer Gaming World, 150 Chaparral Ct., Suite 260, Anaheim Hills, CA 92808, or at any of our e-mail addresses.
DAWN PATROL

The First Air War

Dawn Patrol is a true flight simulation with the emphasis firmly on pilot control and 'seat of the pants' skill. Climb into the cockpit and prepare for the aeronautical experience of a lifetime.

- Take the controls of one of 15 period aircraft including the Sopwith Camel, SPAD 7, and the Red Baron's Fokker Triplane.
- Leading Edge Technology provides fully image Mapped aircraft and landscapes.
- 640x400 SVGA mode gives 4 times the resolution of standard VGA flight sims.
- A myriad of viewing perspectives (View Matrix) including interior cockpit, multiple external and unique ordnance view.
- Over 150 missions to accomplish ranging from traditional dogfighting to balloon busing, each with full mission briefing and embedded hypertext.
- 64 pilot biographies allow you to create your own characters from Rookie to Flying Ace.
- Experience a complete account of the 1914-18 'War of the Skies' and battle for either side of the conflict.
- Over 30 original anecdotes, speeches and wise words from Commanders and pilots of the era.
- The 1914-18 team spirit amongst the airmen is further emphasised through a number of authentic wartime ditties.
- A full range of realistic sound effects accompanied by Tchaikovsky's "Capriccio Italian" add the final touch of authenticity.

Forget all other flight sims, Dawn Patrol tests your flying skills to the full against the real pioneer Aces of air combat.

Dogfighting will never be the same again!
Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games. Here, raised upon pedestals, you'll find the games that broke the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

**CGW HALL OF FAME**

**The Bard's Tale** (Electronic Arts, 1985)
**Battle Chess** (Interplay Productions, 1988)
**Chessmaster** (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
**Civilization** (MicroProse, 1991)
**Dungeon Master** (FTL Software, 1987)
**Earl Weaver Baseball** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
**Empire** (Interstel, 1978)
**F-19 Stealth Fighter** (MicroProse, 1988)
**Gettysburg: The Turning Point** (SSI, 1986)
**Gunship** (MicroProse, 1989)
**Harpoon** (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
**Kampfgruppe** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
**King's Quest V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
**Lemmings** (Psygnosis, 1991)
**M-1 Tank Platoon** (MicroProse, 1989)
**Mech Brigade** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
**Might & Magic** (New World Computing, 1986)
**M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)
**Pirates** (MicroProse, 1987)
** Railroad Tycoon** (MicroProse, 1990)
**Red Baron** (Dynamix, 1990)
**SimCity** (Maxis, 1987)
**Starflight** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
**The Secret of Monkey Island** (LucasArts, 1990)
**Their Finest Hour** (LucasArts, 1989)
**Ultima III** (Origin Systems, 1983)
**Ultima IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)
**Ultima VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)
**War in Russia** (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
**Wasteland** (Interplay Productions, 1986)
**Wing Commander I & II** (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
**Wizardry** (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
**Zork** (Infocom, 1981)

**H.O.F. HIGHLIGHTS**

**Gunship**

**MicroProse, 1989**

For several years, MicroProse was the undisputed champion of the simulation market, and it was games like **Gunship** that got them there. MicroProse's simulation of the AH-64A Apache helicopter, though outshined graphically by such games as **Maniac Maximum Overkill**, remains the most accurate simulation of helicopter combat in gamingdom. The polygon-filled graphics moved quickly, even on the 8-bit Commodore 64, and the keyboard controls, aided by a keyboard overlay, offered enough realistic options to satisfy even the most demanding of sim buffs. **Gunship** was the first to offer character continuity through a linked series of missions, even including R&R for fatigued pilots. Although it spawned a host of imitators, none of them—even **Gunship 2000**—has managed to strike as fine a balance between realism and playability.

**Harpoon**

**Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989**

When Tom Clancy needed to simulate the naval battles in his novel **Red Storm Rising**, he turned to Larry Bond's **Harpoon**, then in miniatures format. When Three-Sixty and crew brought the tabletop game to the computer, gamers found the digital version to be just as accurate, with a thorough and accessible database to boot. Bond's experience as a retired naval officer and NATO wargames referee was reflected in the quality of play, which was more intense and involving than anything this side of the Naval War College. **Harpoon** was proof that hard-core wargames could still sell in big numbers. And while **Harpoon II** has since arrived to carry the naval simulation flame, those who wish to experience the original can check out the excellent re-release of **Harpoon Classic** by Alliance, which features new scenarios and a new interface along with all the bug fixes known to wargaming-kind.
# Game List

## TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

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## TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

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## TOP SIMULATION GAMES

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## TOP STRATEGY GAMES

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## TOP 100 GAMES

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<tr>
<td>Pacific War</td>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>9.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V for Victory: Gold Jinn Sword</td>
<td>Three-Sixty Pacific</td>
<td>9.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation Crusader</td>
<td>Avalon Hill</td>
<td>9.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>8.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clash of Steel</td>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>8.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigers on the Prowl</td>
<td>HPS Simulations</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Top Action Games

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIE Fighter</td>
<td>LucasArts</td>
<td>10.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOOM</td>
<td>id Software</td>
<td>10.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOOM II</td>
<td>id Software</td>
<td>9.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-Wing</td>
<td>LucasArts</td>
<td>9.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of Persia 2</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>9.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Horde</td>
<td>Crystal Dynamics</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of Persia 2</td>
<td>Broderbund</td>
<td>8.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lost Vikings</td>
<td>Interplay</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Assault</td>
<td>LucasArts</td>
<td>8.44</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Top Sports Games

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front Page Sports Football Pro</td>
<td>Sierra</td>
<td>9.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL Hockey</td>
<td>Electronic Arts</td>
<td>9.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Page Sports Baseball</td>
<td>Sierra</td>
<td>9.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony La Russa Baseball II</td>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>8.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGA Tour Golf 486</td>
<td>Electronic Arts</td>
<td>8.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Gretzky Hockey III</td>
<td>Bethesda</td>
<td>8.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Golf 2.0</td>
<td>Microsoft</td>
<td>8.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MicroLeague Baseball 4</td>
<td>MicroLeague</td>
<td>8.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultimate Frisbee</td>
<td>MicroPro</td>
<td>7.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan in Flight</td>
<td>Electronic Arts</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Note

You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CGW Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CGW Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. PURGE ALERT! This month we've purged all games over two years old from the list. More than 30 games were retired, all of which are now eligible for the Hall of Fame.
Patches

Computer game programs have grown in size and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common. Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. These patches can be usually downloaded from the major online networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZiffNet), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's own BBSs or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase.

Red indicates new files.

Aces of the Deep V1.1: Updates floppy version of Dynamic's sub sim. Fixes reported problems, including random lockups, faulty time decompression, and others. 10/27/94

Blake Stone V3.0 Patch: Updates V2.1 to V3.0. Users must have Blake Stone 2.1 currently installed. Works with registered version only. 11/3/94

CyberRace V1.22P CD-ROM upgrade: Includes all previous fixes plus Pentium/PCI fix. 11/8/94

Dark Legions V1.1 Update: Adds native sound support for UltraSound/UltraSound Max, AWE-32, ESS488/688 Chipset, and Esonic SoundScape. CD and floppy versions available. 10/13/94

Dark Sun II: Wake of the Ravager Update: Fixes reported problems. Works with CD-ROM version only. 10/29/94

Falcon 3.0 V3.05: New Upgrade for floppy users of Falcon equivalent to the new Falcon CD release. (See also MiG-29 and Hornet upgrades below.) 9/29/94

Flight Commander 2 V1.01: Patch fixes PBEM feature and reported problems with some video drivers. IBM compatibles only. 12/2/94

Flight Commander 2 V1.01: Macintosh only patch addresses PBEM problems and several minor bugs. 12/2/94

Front Page Sports: Baseball '94 V1.01: Upgrade fixes many reported problems, including crash bugs and General Manager AI. 12/2/94

Harpoon Classic V1.56b: CD-ROM upgrade corrects some bugs with setting aircraft speeds, air-to-air fuel, and some other long standing bugs, as well as using less memory. Missiles launch bases correctly. Works with all previous versions. 12/1/94

Lode Runner Windows Upgrade V1.03: Corrects problems listed in the Readme file of the initial release. For Windows versions only, not DOS. 11/18/94

Lode Runner CD-ROM Upgrade: Corrects a problem with restoring saved games with the small installation option. For CD-ROM only. 12/2/94

Lords of the Realm V1.01: Update to latest version, allows for modem play, CD-ROM and floppy versions available. 11/1/94

Master of Magic V1.2: Latest upgrade to MicroProse strategy/magic game with numerous fixes, new features, and major AI enhancements. 12/1/94

NCAA2 V1.02: Fixes S3 chipset problems and excessive fouling. Also, inbounding-players no longer receive assists. 11/22/94

Outpost V1.1: Fixes for many of the problems in Sierra's science-fiction title. 10/3/94

1942 Pacific Air War Modern Patch: Provides modern play and fixes some bugs. 10/13/94

PGA 988 Update: Updates PGA.COM file and eliminates GOLFV.EXT error message. Also allows use of Universal Vesa Driver. 12/4/94

Quarantine V3.5 Update: Latest update for all previous versions of Quarantine, floppy and CD-ROM versions available. 11/1-94

Quarantine DOS4GW.EXE update: Simply an updated DOS4GW.EXE for commercial version owners. 10/21/94

Rebel Assault Macintosh Patch: Corrects "no CD in drive errors", and improves game speed when playing full screen. Also features direct Power PC support. 10/19/94

Shadows of Caesar Update: Fix for fantasy/adventure DOS/WINDOWS game adds joystick calibration profile, help for character movement, new dungeon sound effects and fixes DOS sound setup. 12/8/94

SimCity 2000 for DOS V1.1: Fixes problems reported, including crashes; also includes some minor cosmetic fixes. 10/28/94

Tanks V1.23: Latest patch fixes reported problems. 11/18/94

Tigers on the Prowl V 1.15b: Latest patch fixes problem accessing multiple units and adds some new features. 11/23/94

Ultimate Footballe V1.31 Update: Replaces previous update V1.3. Adds crowd noise, fixes reported problems. 11/8/94

Under a Killing Moon V1.04: For use with the Cyrix microprocessor. 11/8/94

Under a Killing Moon DOS driver update: Works with Gravis UltraSound and Gravis UltraSound Max. 11/8/94

Publisher BBS Numbers
Many of these patches are available direct from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N-8-1.

Accelade CA (408) 296-8800
Activision CA (310) 820-1276
Apogee MA (508) 368-7036
Bethesda Software MD (301) 990-7552
Broderbund CA (415) 883-5889
Capstone FL (305) 374-6872
Creative Labs OK (405) 742-6660
Impressions Software MA (617) 225-2042
InterPlay Productions CA (714) 292-2822
LucasArts CA (415) 257-3070
Maxis CA (510) 254-3869
MicroProse MD (410) 785-1814
Microsoft WA (206) 936-6735
Origin TX (512) 928-8402
Sierra Online CA (209) 689-4463
Spectrum Holobyte CA (510) 522-6480
SSI CA (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739-6623
Virgin Interactive CA (714) 833-3905
Our Multi-Media CD-Roms Speak For Themselves...

**Club Cyberbaise**
CD-ROM For Macintosh and Windows

*Virtually Everything*

In This Virtual Nightclub, Your Dreams Will Come True

**Sorority House**
CD-ROM For IBM PC Compatible

*Major in Physical Education!*

An Interactive Game Of Hide And Peak

**Wanderlust**
CD-ROM Interactive For Mac & Windows

An Erotic Quest Within The Deepest Reaches Of Cyberspace

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Interactive Interview with an Accidental Icon
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How can anyone find them offensive?

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The Rumor Bag

Days Of L'Chaim And Roses

by Yosef Ben-Yehudah

If you ask me, it was a little much. Arguing, my friends were, over the bride price, and here I was sweating like you wouldn’t believe with this stupid sack covering my face, steaming up my glasses. Grossberg, sitting next to me, says the bargaining sort of reminded him of Impressions’ up and coming Space Bucks game. He called it Space Bucks because it’s sort of like Air Bucks, only this one deals with intergalactic commerce and transport. Much like Spectrum-HoloByte’s Gazillionaire, except what you can do is attack and literally demolish the opposition something terrible instead of just beat them up in market share. At the moment Impressions calls it Galactic Express.

Windbag Grossberg finally shuts up when the mothers get ready to break a plate. I missed hearing the exact bride price and I didn’t dare ask Grossberg, who would’ve shouted out “Tradition!” and begun singing from Fiddler on the Roof. If it was tradition I wanted, it would be Activision’s upcoming multimedia version of Shanghai I would play. This is supposed to offer some beautiful video pictures of great moments in history, famous inventors and such like.

Anyway, next thing I know, the groom is veiling the lovely bride. Suddenly Grossberg, fiddling with his personal programmable whatchamacallit, shows me what a wonderful marvel this device is. I tried to ignore him, but he goes on about programmability being the next wave in hardware, and uses a new joystick from CH Products as proof. I, skeptical, demand more information, to which Grossberg tells me this Pro Throttle is supposed to have more buttons (20) than the rabbi’s Lexus, and every one is supposed to be customizable.

“Pshaw,” I say, “that’s meshugah.” Meanwhile, the musicians have started into the obligatory rendition of “Sunrise, Sunset” and, before we know it, the beautiful couple is under the huppah, the canopy symbolizing their spiritual and physical house. If it symbolized my house, it would be full of papers, magazines, disks and dirty dishes. Also it would be something of a beehive of activity. I whispered this to the nice lady sitting on my other side, and since she also in the industry works, she whispered back that Trimark Interactive was working on a Rebel Assault of Cyber-IA type game called The Hive. The lady tells me that the game is more interactive than the others, and that it features artwork done by some of the Wing Commander III team, with multimedia animations running under Windows 95.

The rabbi began to chant in Hebrew and I suddenly realized how wonderful faith really is. It made me contemplate the Creator, and the so-called “god games” on the computer. MicroProse in England is working on such a game what could add new spirit to this category. Their working title is Little People, but in this game you are the deity who has to influence the citizens of your world to do what is best for them. Such a unique game concept, I wondered how my friends of faith and friends without would take it.

But, before daydreaming could capture me more, the ceremony was over. We were ushered to the reception hall and everyone joined in a hora. We danced in a great circle—programmers, designers, friends and family all swaying and singing and making a wonderful racket. We lofted up the happy couple in a chair dance, burning more energy than a pro basketball team. I shouted to a fellow chair hoister that Sony was working on an ESPN NBA Basketball product. He dropped his leg of the chair to roll up his trousers and show me a pair of NBA Basketball socks, grinning like an idiot while we struggled to keep the groom from crashing down on him.

After the Hora was over and we began to calm down, the crowd gathered for the ceremonial cake cutting. The best man began to make some touching comments about how sweet should be the life of this couple, rushing the room and bringing a tear to my eye, when I noticed Grossberg curiously maneuvering behind the best man. Then, before the best man had even finished, to my utter horror, that meshugah Grossberg stabs his long-nailed finger into the cake’s frosting, smearing it along his beard and in his mouth. Enraged, I blurted out, “icing penalty!” and lunged for him, but fortunately the crowd prevented me from tearing his beard off. To calm me down, the kind lady I’d spoken with earlier told me that the incident reminded her that Sony is working on ESPN NHL Hockey.

I didn’t get a chance to apologize for the disturbance that night, so I’d like to take this chance to say mazel tow to them, God bless, and congratulations. And when you prepare your first reunion, don’t put me at the same table as that fathead Grossberg.”
Take control of your elevators, ailerons, throttle, rudder, and flight and weapon commands with this unique two-handed joystick – the Phoenix Flight & Weapons Control System.

Each of the 24 buttons can be programmed using a graphical interface, designed for simplicity. The Phoenix is compatible with all games and flight simulators that support a standard joystick and keyboard controls. No special support is required.
ORIGIN's been listening, and we're giving you what you want — a CD-playable spaceflight simulation that incorporates head-to-head combat against another player via modem, network or split screen. At last, you have the chance to prove your piloting skills against players across town or across the country.

But there's more ... **Wing Commander Armada CD** is three games in one. You can enter a single dogfight to the death, team up with a friend in Gauntlet mode, or combine spaceflight with strategy as you mine and battle your way to the enemy's homeworld. With **Armada**, you have the chance to play whatever game suits your flying style. It's taking the universe by surprise.

- Pit yourself against a friend, computer, or with a friend against the computer — via modem or network.
- Choose to fly intense dogfight scenarios, search-and-destroy battles or extended campaigns.
- Never play the same game twice as you explore, fortify and mine hundreds of planets in an infinite number of randomly generated universes.
- Live your life as a Terran or Kilrathi pilot and fly 10 different ships.
- Customize tactics and controls with **Armada**'s built-in audio file integrator and keyboard configuration utility.
- View RealSpace™ texture-mapped, 3-D polygonal ships at up to 16 frames per second!
- Carefully plot tactical moves to stop your enemy cold — but beware, the tides of war may swiftly turn your next move into your last!
- Play directly from the CD (with 8 mogs of RAM) and save hard drive space!

"**Wing Commander Armada** is a totally awesome game, no doubt about that. Check it out sooner rather than later." — Gamestar Magazine

"The graphics and sound effects in Armada are AWESOME!! I was completely blown away with the explosions, from the sound of the hits to the debris flying through space! Simply fantastic!" — Jodd Hansen - online gamer