COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

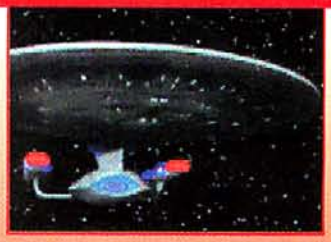
The #1 Computer Game Magazine ZD

SPECIAL WINDOWS 95 ISSUE

Are DOS Games Dead?

CGW Shows You How To Run Your DOS Games Under Windows 95

Star Trek: A Final Unity



Our Review

PLUS

Hints & Tips To Save The Universe

The Newest On-Line Games You Can Play Right Now

7 Sneak Previews!

14 Joysticks & Game Controllers Reviewed

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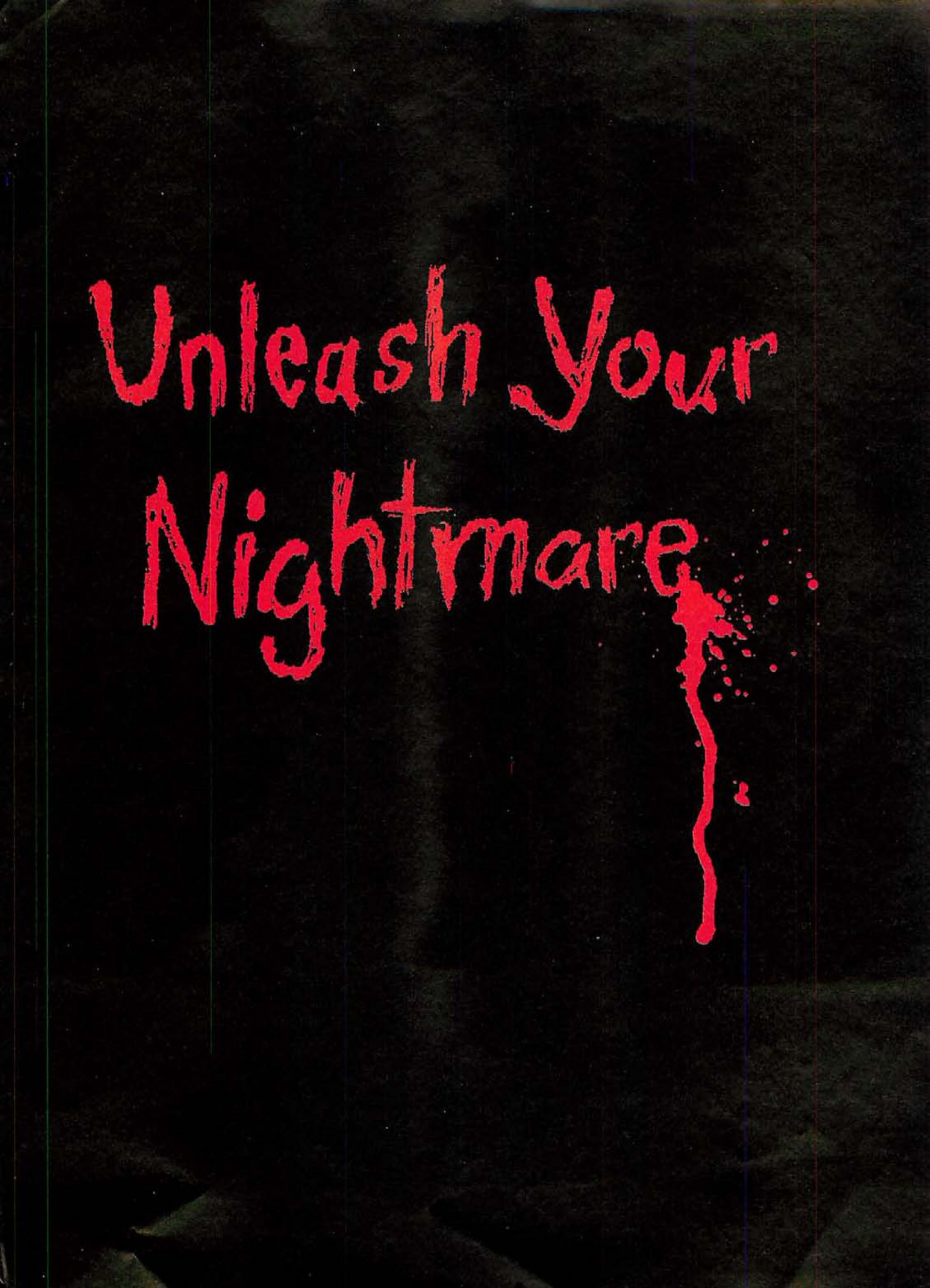
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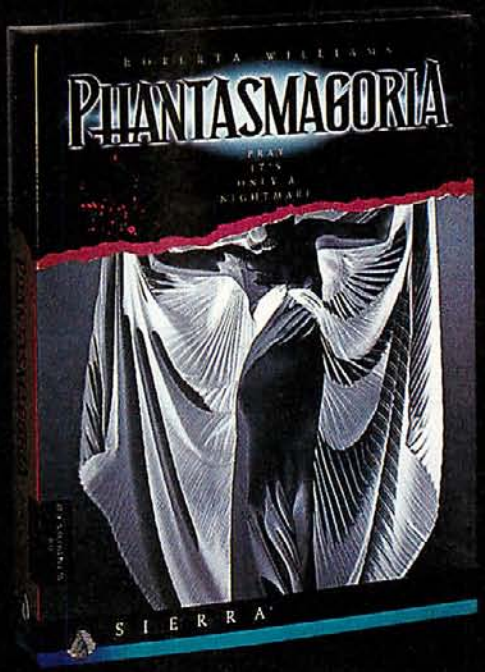

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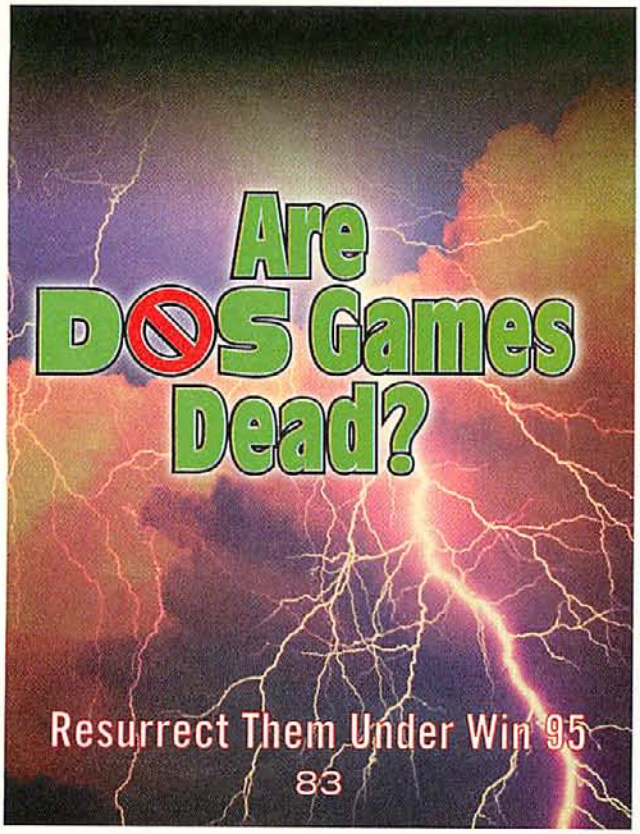

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

SEPTEMBER 1995

New Weapons In The Fight For Game Control 62

FEATURES

36 WHAT'S NEW IN TELEGAMING? Multiplayer on-line games used to require more ASCII prose than computing power and more perspiration than inspiration. Now, most on-line games have upgraded their graphics, interfaces and technology. This 15-page feature focuses on the newest games on-line, from football to fantasy, galactic conquests to gritty terran warfare.

62 NEW GAME CONTROLLERS Gordon Goble gets very "hands-on" with the latest joysticks, throttle controls and gamepads. Many of them will give you a big edge over the competition.

72 THE SIREN CALL OF SPEAKERS What good is a new wavetable sound card if your speakers are bantam-weight blue light specials? Our silicon-spawned audiophile is on hand to improve your sound without necessarily deleting your wallet.sys file.

83 ARE DOS GAMES DEAD? Windows 95 promises to make life easier for gamers. But that won't happen until games are programmed specifically for it. In the meantime, *CGW* shows you what it takes to run your DOS games under Win 95.

SPECIAL WINDOWS 95 GAME PREVIEWS

98 THE DIG Can Steven Spielberg's storytelling magic and special effects from Industrial Light & Magic overcome dated graphics?

104 SU-27 SUKHOI Tom Basham gets his chance to sit in the opponent's seat and put this Russian fighter to the test.

112 CHESSMASTER 5000 Another chess game? Terry Coleman finds that **Mindscape** continues to break new strategic ground within the confines of those infamous 64 squares.

120 PITFALL HARRY Swing from vines, crack your whip and leap across crocodiles' backs in this new update of the action classic.

124 THE HIVE Trimark hopes to take the mainstream by swarm with this REBEL ASSAULT clone.

130 ENTOMORPH Players transform into a giant insect in a Kafka-esque new role-playing game from **SSI**.

ADVENTURE/ ROLE-PLAYING

135 THE SCORPION'S TALE With the galaxy's fate again in peril, Starfleet sends our adventurous arachnid deep into Romulan space to assist gamers with STAR TREK: A FINAL UNITY.

148 STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION Spectrum HoloByte beams the Next Generation cast to gamer's computers for A FINAL UNITY. Allen Greenberg leads an away team mission with a tricorder and a new pair of Ferengi-skin boots.

160 RE-ELECT JFK Travel back to Camelot to take the Oval Office as one of the most popular modern Presidents.

162 HARD EVIDENCE: THE MARILYN MONROE FILES Johnny Wilson investigates one of the great mysteries of the late 20th Century.

ACTION

166 **CHAOS ENGINE** Jason Kapalka travels back in time to fix an errant time machine, only to find outdated graphics and gameplay.

170 **HIGH OCTANE** **Bullfrog**'s beautiful hovercraft racer gets lousy milage, but speed demon Paul Schuytema had fun while it lasted.

176 **FX FIGHTER** Finally, an arcade fighting game for the PC which breaks out of the side-scrolling mold. Jason Kapalka meets **GTE Interactive**'s telekinetic punch with his Electric Face-Grab.

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187 **BOGEY'S BAR & GRILL** Hunting, killing and hiding tactics for WWII sub drivers. Captain Denny Atkin takes the bridge.

190 **FLIGHT UNLIMITED** It may not be *truly* unlimited, and no, you can't blow things out of the sky with it, but Denny Atkin finds that it's hard to beat **Looking Glass'** new sim for sheer physics and unlimited fun.

196 **A-10 ATTACK** Mac flight sim fans can chew up tanks and spit them out at the controls of a Warthog in this new sim by Parsoft.

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206 **SNEAK PREVIEW! STEEL PANTHERS** Gary Grigsby's latest wargame blends elements of PANZER GENERAL with an attention to detail bordering on the obsessive. Realistic and quick-playing, it could be the next major hit for **SSI** and Grigsby.

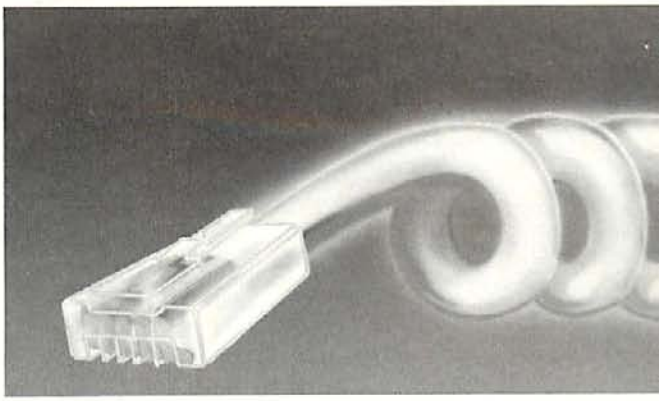
210 **SHANGHAI: GREATEST MOMENTS** Bob Proctor discovers if Shanghai is a good match with multimedia in this new incarnation of the classic strategy tile game.

214 **CELTIC TALES: BALOR OF THE EVIL EYE** **Koei** brings the fair land of Eire to life, courtesy of a few imports from the Asian steppes. Armed with runes and magic artifacts, Arinn Dembo travels the land in search of heroes.

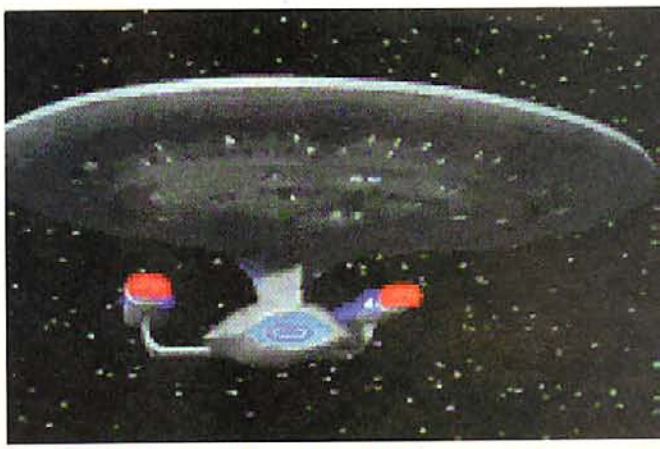
222 **THE CIVIL WAR** The War Between The States is ambitiously portrayed by **Empire** in real-time with daily turns. Terry Coleman wishes they'd put a little game play in with the packaging.

226 **MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER** Alan "Pokerface" Emrich chuckles his way through some Joe Piscopo anecdotes, and wonders where the rest of **New World Computing**'s jokes went.

230 **STRATEGY! PERFECT GENERAL II** General Patrick Miller, distressed at the number of silicon victories in **QQP**'s new wargame, declassifies charts, tables and tactical doctrines.



Play It On The Line 36



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I was passing through a wasteland when suddenly my mind drifted.
VIRTUAL BOY
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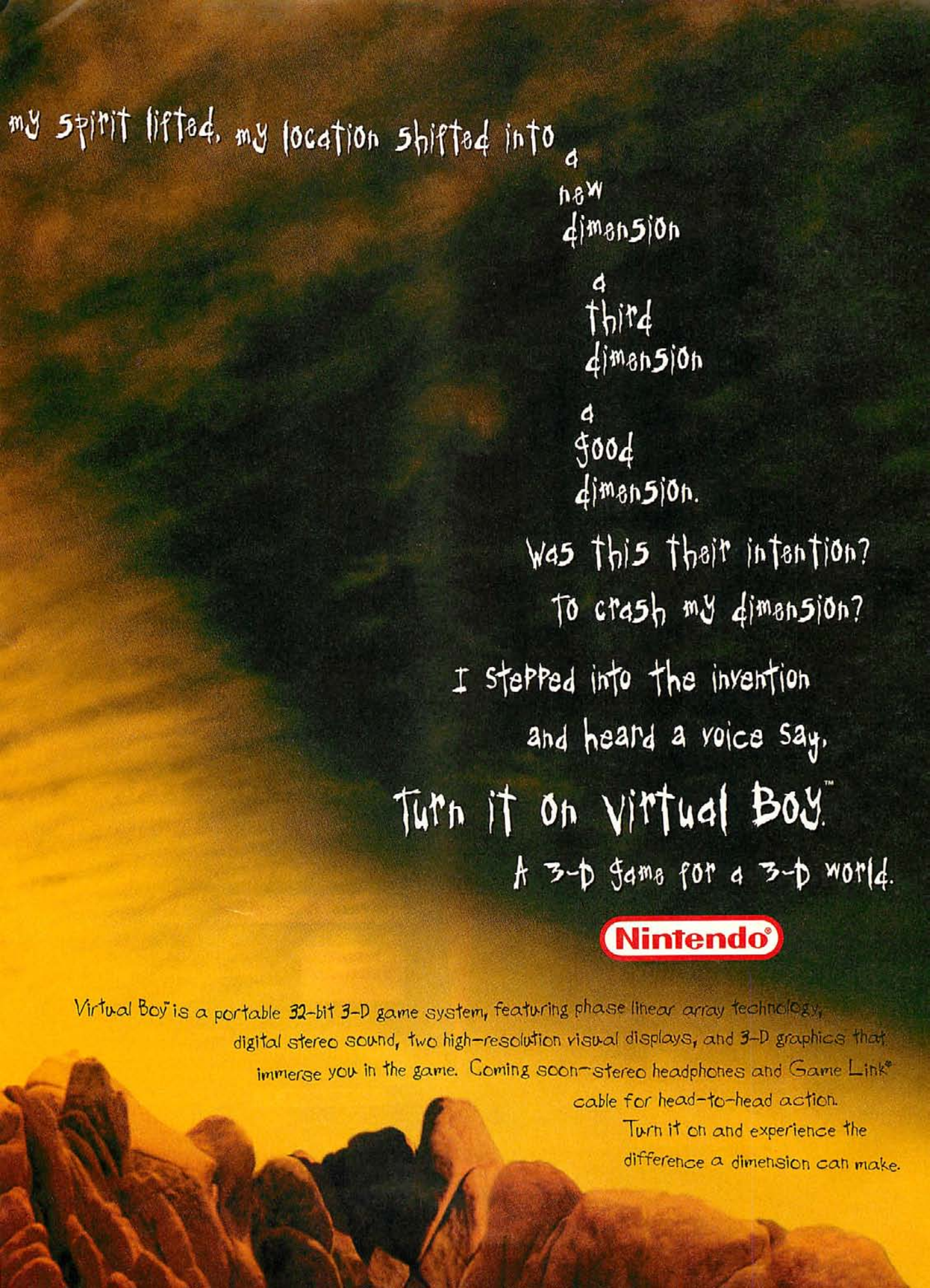
my spirit lifted, my location shifted into a new dimension
a third dimension
a good dimension.
Was this their intention?
To crash my dimension?
I stepped into the invention
and heard a voice say,
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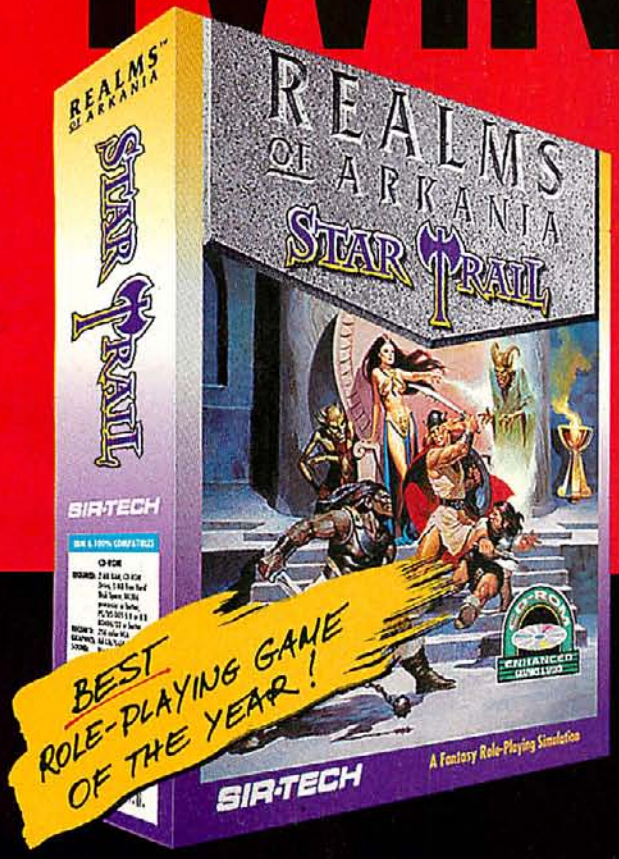

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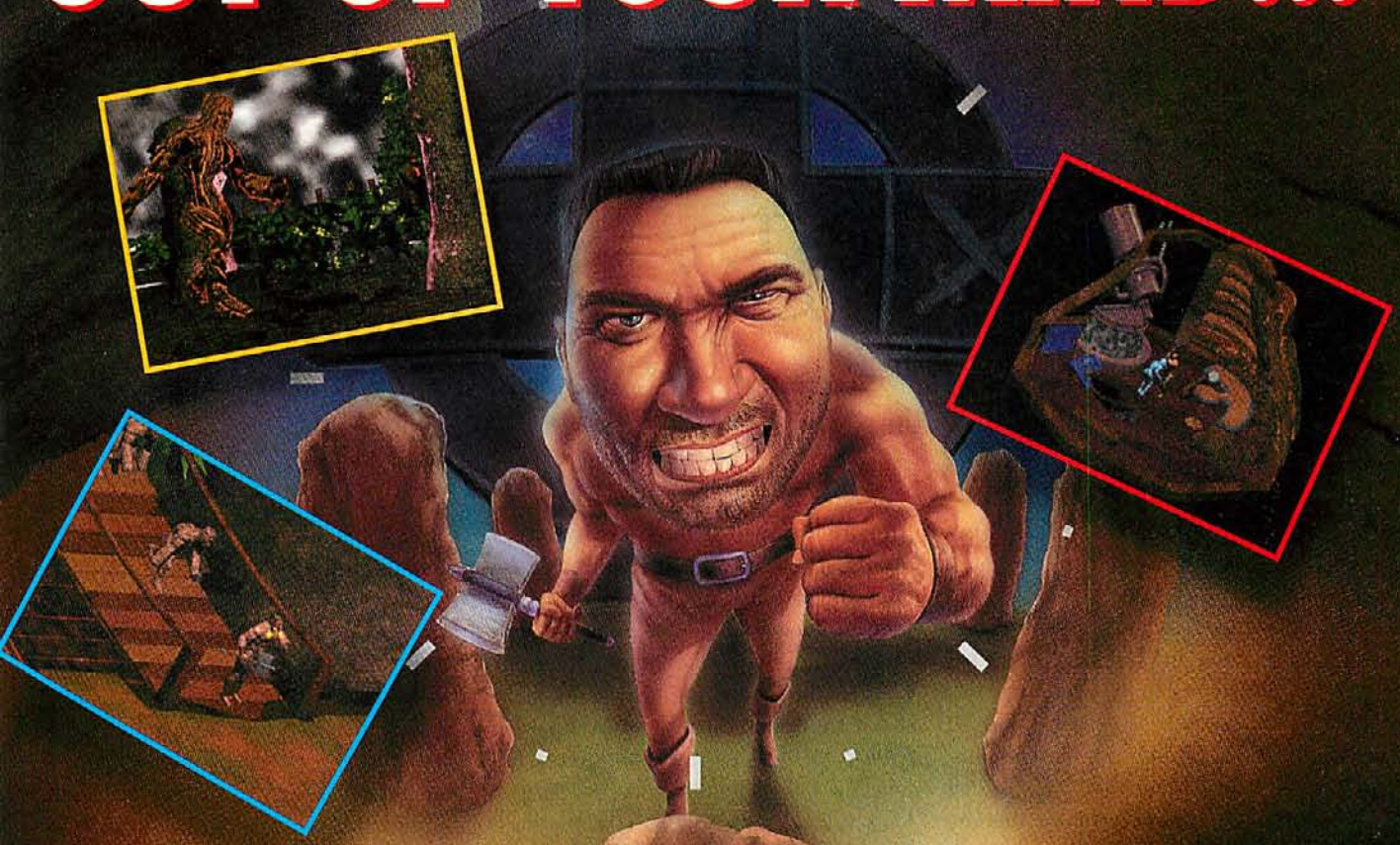

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Two Meg, Four Meg, Eight Meg, A Dollar!

Truth In Labelling Should Apply To Computer Game System Requirements, Too

by Johnny L. Wilson

AT ONE OF MY FIRST PART-TIME JOBS, A CO-WORKER PURCHASED A PORSCHE. IT WAS A LONG time ago and I don't even remember the exact model. I just remember that it was a Porsche and that he read aloud the following line from an automobile magazine, "It will do 130+ all day long." I thought it was fascinating that my co-worker didn't read off the top speed, which would have been more impressive, but focused on a performance evaluation for something he would never be likely to be able do with his car, short of buying time on a racetrack. Yet, it was an important performance characteristic for him.

Why don't most game companies put exact system requirements on their boxes?

Judging from our mail (both electronic and paper), there are a few performance numbers that our readers want to know about computer games that they are not getting. To be sure, Microsoft's Windows 95 may alleviate some of their concerns and products like GAME DOCTOR (described in this month's "Under The Hood") may alleviate others. Nonetheless, it's time to share some common concerns about the current state of computer game boxes. Our readers are, apparently, getting pretty frustrated with the generic information provided for system requirements. They're tired of reading that a game takes 640K of RAM to run; they want to know whether the game will run under their 557K configuration or whether they are going to have to shake down their machine to come up with 590K or 610K of basic memory to make it function. Others want to know how large a footprint the game will leave on the hard drive. Will it take up 30 MB or 75 MB? Is there a deluxe installation that puts more on the hard drive and an economical installation that puts less on the hard drive?

While these system requirements may seem as peculiar to some gamers as my co-worker's Porsche benchmark, there is a much better chance that computer gamers will need to know these system thresholds than that my co-worker would drive his Porsche in his own 24-hour version of Le Mans. So, we took an informal survey of the games we've received at *CGW*'s offices. "Survey says ..." most game boxes do *not* contain such information. Most simply follow the 2 MB, 4 MB, 8 MB approach and offer a "one-size fits all" benchmark so that they exclude as few of their potential customers as possible. Unfortunately, the one size may not quite fit all without performance concessions in game speed, himem lock-ups, and configuration gymnastics. By trying not to exclude any potential buyers with limited memory on their systems, many game companies end up unwittingly creating unhappy customers because their new customers aren't getting exactly what they saw on another gamer's machine or because they have to jump through hoops to get a game to run.

Why don't most game companies put exact information on their boxes? One reason was just noted—so that they do not exclude potential buyers. Another rationale has more to do with logistics than with marketing philosophy. The boxes are printed before the game goes final. Many times the publisher does not know at the time the boxes are printed what the final requirement for basic memory will be. Maybe stickers are the answer. They could print their design target on the box, but use stickers to cover over any potential errors should those requirements change. Idealistic? Perhaps, but I have several games that already have stickers because the requirements changed after the box was printed. Expensive? Definitely, but not as expensive as alienating future customers.

The good news is that out of more than 50 new games, we spotted a few that really went out of their way to provide information to their potential customers.

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Mindscape and **Philips** are listing the basic memory requirements on their most recent products (SAVAGE WARRIORS at 580K basic memory and CHAOS CONTROL at 550K basic memory, respectively). **QQP**'s ZIG-ZAG and PERFECT GENERAL II do not specifically list basic memory, but they do indicate that you will need 3 MB of extended memory to operate.

Gamers also want the labels to indicate whether EMS or XMS is necessary. It is tremendously frustrating to be partially through the installation process and discover that this is a DOS/4GW game which cannot even install with EMS resident. Gamers would be ecstatic if they could count on this type of information, but most publishers simply do not provide it at the present time.

Fortunately, even though we aren't seeing a lot of games which mention basic memory requirements or type of additional memory suggested, we are seeing a growing trend in labels which provide both minimum and recommended requirements for running their games. Most *CGW* readers know they'd better have the recommended listing if they want decent performance, but there are always those gamers who want to test both their and their machine's limits by challenging those minimum requirements. The new labels provide an easy-to-understand guideline for those of us who do *not* want to be hardware-challenged when we play a new game.

Better news is that recent games from **Domark, Interplay, Mindscape,** and **QQP** all list the footprint for required hard drive space. If everyone provided this information, you'd rarely be frustrated to see, after getting most of the way through an installation, a message that there isn't enough room on your hard drive.

Better days seem clearly on their way. Here's hoping that more people join the "truth in labeling" bandwagon.

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.

★★★★½ 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.

★★★½ 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.

★★½ 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.

★½ Abysmal: That rare game that gets it all wrong. Usually a buggy, incomplete, and/or valueless product.

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The #1 Computer Game Magazine

SEPTEMBER 1995, NUMBER 134

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Subscription Rate: The subscription rate is $27.94 for a one year subscription (12 issues). Canada and all other countries add $11.00 for postage. Airmail subscriptions are $78.00 per year. Canadian GST registration number is R140496720. Payment must be in U.S. dollars made by check or money order drawn upon a U.S. bank. Visa, MasterCard, AMEX accepted.

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Editorial Offices: 135 Main St., 14th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105.

Back Issues: For back issues (subject to availability), $6.00 per issue ($8.00 outside the U.S.), send check, money order or credit card information to Back Issues Dept., Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., P.O. Box 53131, Boulder, CO 80322-3131.

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Interface

LETTERS FROM CGW READERS

CHEATING DEATH IN DESCENT

There are six DESCENT cheat codes that you did not put into "The Gamer's Edge" in your July issue (#132). Here they are:

Press <Alt> F in map mode for full map;

FLASH makes a path of energy power-ups leading to the exit;

BUGGIN gives you Turbo mode;

AHIMSA turns off enemy fire;

BIG RED gives you every single weapon available; and

BRUIN offers extra life.

David Anderson
Cherry Hill, NJ

We stand corrupted.

HIGH ON DARK FORCES

The other day I fell into the bottomless pit in DARK FORCES and needed to get out. I invented what I call "Instant Elevator"—a fun way to deal with the situation. I first made myself invulnerable (LAIMLAME). Then, you rapidly lay down five or six mines right at your feet. Let the first one blow you

straight up in the air. When you land, the remaining mines will create a blast that launches your character 300 feet or so in the air! You can blast up so high, in fact, that if you do this on the surface, a six-mine detonation can almost put you in orbit. The game world disappears beneath you. Then, you scream your way back down. This ability has provided some fun ways to rampage around. Try it—it's handy.

David Smith
St. Louis, MO

We stand doubly corrupted.

GO MUCK-UP

Sorry, but I've got to complain about the caption for the screen shot of GOMOKU NARABE ("Shareware Showcase," July '95). GOMOKU is not a version of "the classic Japanese strategy game of GO." Virtually the only similarity between the two games is that they use the same board and pieces. The misinformation may well have come from the game's docs; lots of GOMOKU implementations claim to be a version of GO. You folks should really know better, though.

Dan Pierson
via CompuServe

We should have used the term "variant," but one of our editors felt that only boardgamers would understand the term for playing with different rules for the same board and game pieces. GO and GOMOKU are as different as lines and circles.

MAGIC: THE ADDRESSING

I just saw a copy of your June '95 issue. In it, there was an article about the upcoming MAGIC: THE GATHERING computer game. In the article, you mention two World Wide Web sites, [one of which] happens to be mine. Of course, I don't mind having one of my pages listed in a magazine. The problem is

that it was an old address. The old address was: http://skat.usc.edu:1701/mosaic/magic/html. The new addresss is http://cwis.usc.edu/users/rbaily/magic.html. You might want to let your readers know.

Robert Baily
Los Angeles, CA

Thanks for the note. We have found the site to be valuable for cross-referencing cards.

WINDOWS PANE

Well, much as I hate to say this, you are now well and truly a Ziff-Davis Publication. I hope the "Windows '95 Explosion" doesn't blow up in your face. Given Bill Gates' comments in *InfoWorld* about the future of 95 (namely that he fully (still!) expects WINDOWS NT to be the logical step up, with WINDOWS 95 being a trial of the new interface; note the requirement of running under NT to get the WINDOWS 95 logo, too) and the sudden surprise appearance of the long list of mainstream WINDOWS 3.1 applications that won't run under 95, things may not (again) be as the Microsoft hyping department would want the public to believe.

Good luck, and welcome to the bandwagon.

Stephen Drye
via the Internet

Despite your healthy skepticism, we are truly excited about WINDOWS 95 because of the benefits it offers for gamers. We believe gamers are tired of having to reconfigure their computers to accomodate the hacks of every game design team and to overcome incompatibililty problems with various hardware devices, particularly sound cards. Potentially, peripheral drivers will be handled easier, installs will finally become more uniform, graphics will be handled more efficiently, sound drivers will no longer crash games, and the AutoPlay feature will transform booting a new game from a nightmare into a pleasure. We have expressed concern that uniformity may breed contempt, but we stand by our basic assessment that WINDOWS 95 looks like a good thing. Check out this issue's bonus section on WINDOWS 95 for more information.

SHAME ON SEAMUS

First of all, I want to thank

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you for putting my quote in the "Notable Quotes" section of the June magazine. The reason for this communication is that I feel it is my duty as an airplane buff to tell you that in the 64 Gigabyte Question for June, Jonathan (Seamus) Blackley said in his opening "Bomber Attack" sequence from the game he is envisioning, he has an FW-

190 attacking a B-29. The B-29s were only operational in the Pacific Theater of Operations. Therefore, I don't think I would buy his game. Ha!

Jason Daily
Miamisburg, OH

Okay, you've got a point, but if you throw the baby out with the bath water you'll be missing out on Blackley's next flight sim after FLIGHT UNLIMITED, *tentatively entitled* FLIGHT COMBAT. *We understand the game will involve training and dogfighting in modern combat aircraft as opposed to recreating historical missions. However, if Seamus ever elects to do a WWII flight combat sim, we're betting that he'll stick to the flight model physics and let someone else research the history.*

C:\THEEND\ CLIMAX.EXE

I recently finished X-COM II: TERROR FROM THE DEEP. The whole ordeal took me about 200 hours and that time was aided by some serious editing of my soldiers' strength file. When I finished, I expected to see some sort of pay-off video or, at bare minimum, a few screens of text telling me about how I had saved the day, but to be on the lookout for the next bad guys (i.e. X-COM III). Instead, I was shoved back to the main menu. What a letdown that was!

Geoff Rosser
Emeryville, CA

We've addressed these abrupt endings before, but it was usually Scorpia reminding adventure game publishers that a story isn't finished until there is a wrap-up. Imagine Casablanca *without the "beautiful relationship" forming between Jordan and Bogart after the climactic "hill of beans" speech from Bogie to Bergman. Imagine* Raiders of the Lost Ark *without the warehouse scene. Consider even an episode of* The Lone Ranger *without a, "Who was that masked man?" It's inconceivable. Now that strategy games have this campaign/story component, they need to provide a tidy wrapping-up of their stories, too.*

IDENTICAL SINS

It would seem Johnny Wilson has blurred two movies together ("Rants & Raves", July '95). He makes reference to *Don't Start The Revolution Without Me* and goes on to say that the two pairs of main characters felt everything the other member of the pair felt. While the Corsican Brothers are the main characters of DSTRWM, the empathic link Johnny Wilson is referring to appears in *The Corsican Brothers* with Cheech and Chong playing the "duel" <g> roles. Considering the farcical nature of both movies and their similar subjects, it is easy to see how one could become confused.

Sam Baker
Oxon Hill, MD

Johnny blurred the movies together, but it was his empathic twin that wrote the editorial.

FLIGHT SIMPATHY

I have been a faithful reader of *CGW* for quite some time, and have always enjoyed the format and information you provide. I'd like to thank all concerned with the fine effort put out month after month.

The reason I am finally writing now is that I just noticed the e-mail addresses on the header. That, and I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your attention to on-line flight simulations. I realize that the on-line community is fairly small when measured against the overall gaming community. The expense requirements pretty much ensure that the people who take these sims/games seriously will remain a reasonably exclusive group for at least the near future. That aside, the reviews and previews of sims like AIR WARRIOR and CONFIRMED KILL aid greatly in expanding the player base and thus, the value and capabilities of the products.

I especially enjoyed the rather extensive article by Bob and John Nolan reviewing many of the most popular flight simulations in your June issue. The manner in which the article was organized was very well-done. First, showing the capabilities of "stand-alone" software, then progressing to modem through network play was very educational.

Again, thanks for the great work...keep those previews and reviews coming!

Glenn Smith
Phantom I/JG54 in AIR WARRIOR
via GEnie

Check out the photos on AIR WARRIOR *1.18 in this month's Telegaming Feature. The on-line world is literally exploding, and we're not sure that this will remain a small niche for very long.*

DESIGNING READER

I consider myself a long-time subscriber (since #80) and have watched you grow and change. Some of the changes for the good (sections for Strategy and Wargames), some of the changes so-so. But, one thing I have always appreciated over the other so-called game magazines, the coverage of the industry and game design. I just have two requests: 1) bring back an issue that talks about and to game design and 2) do a history of the computer game as a whole.

Steven Dietz
via GEnie

Our next issue will have a major feature on game design, and we are planning an update to our "History of Computer Games" for our 150th issue, next year.

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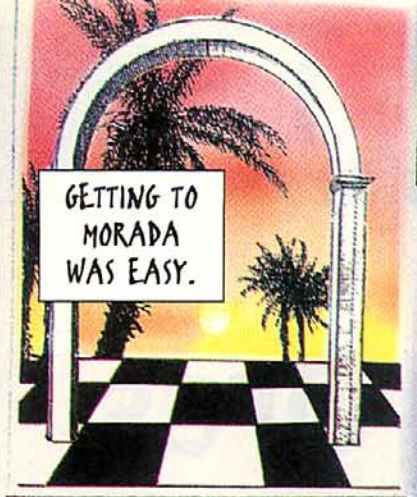

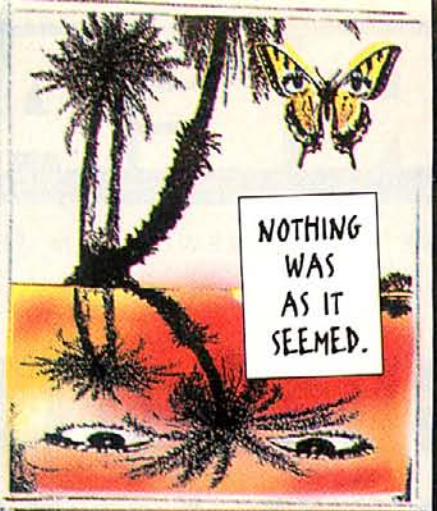

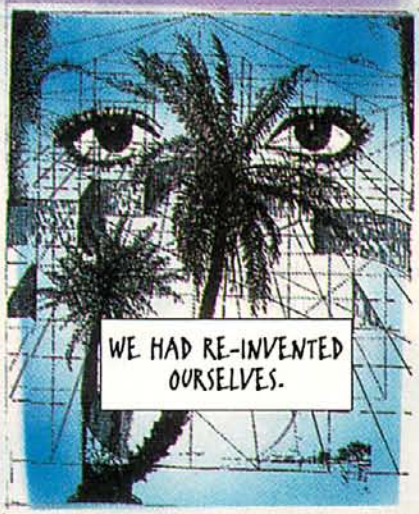

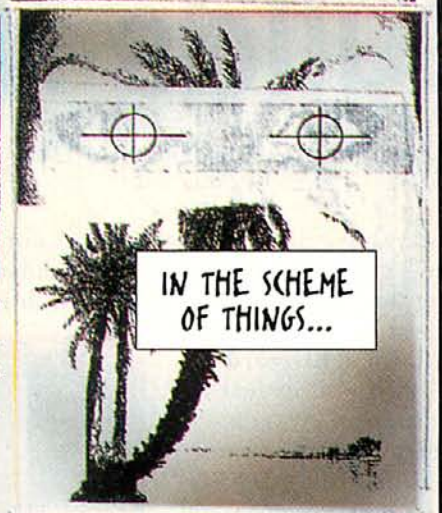

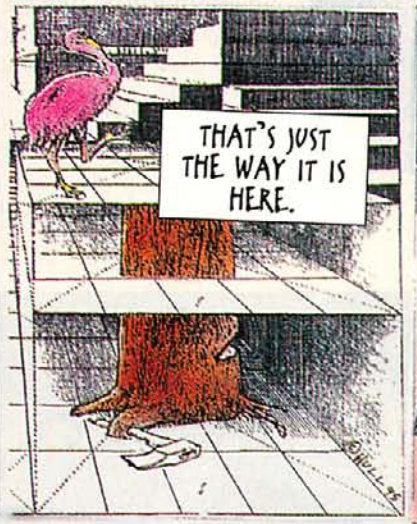

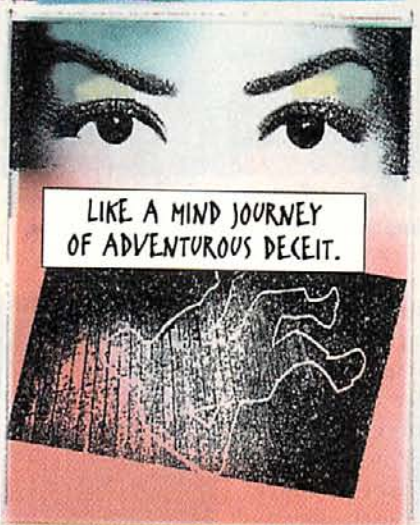

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Blizzard Trains Orcs, Builds New Empires

Blizzard Prepares WARCRAFT II, Storms Into Multiplayer RPG and Strategy Games

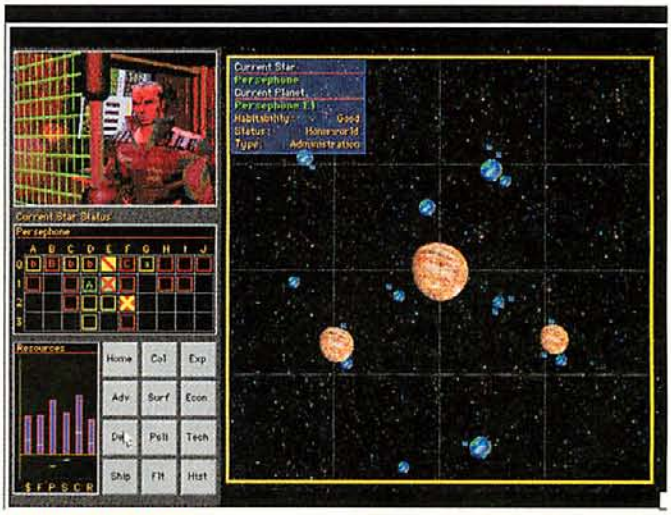
It's always great to see a "little guy" go toe-to-toe with the Big Boys of the industry and hold its own, which is exactly what **Blizzard** accomplished with its first in-house design, WARCRAFT. The best real-time strategy game since DUNE II (**Virgin**), WARCRAFT won several awards, and was so commercially successful that Blizzard has released both shareware and Macintosh versions. Needless to say, WARCRAFT II: TIDES OF DARKNESS is one of the most anticipated titles of the year.

The biggest difference between WARCRAFT II and its prequel will be smarter AI for the various Orc and Human troops. This time around, your soldiers should be much less likely to wander into trees when you aren't micro-managing them. Also, the computer opponent should be more adaptive, meaning that you can't get the AI to walk into obvious ambushes time and again.

WARCRAFT II will have much more of a fantasy feel due to the number of additional creatures included. Trolls and Ogres make for good shock troops, and the undead put in an appearance as sailors—on a submarine, no less! The game's combined arms feel is accentuated by large Orc fleets and even dirigible troop carriers. There are, thankfully, no dungeon crawls planned this time around, but this is offset by more nasty spells for each side. As before, the scenarios link together to form a pseudo-campaign with a loose plotline. The scenarios *CGW* viewed seemed to be a variety of tactical situations, rather than the neo-adventure game puzzles of WARCRAFT I. The economic model expands over the familiar lumber, ore and gold to include oil, which gives the ships something to do at sea other than fight. (The Orcish Merchant Marine...who could have imagined?) WARCRAFT II has a playing field four times as large as WARCRAFT, and should support up to seven players.

ORCS WILL BE ORCS Maneuver and finesse have their place, but some mornings you just have to board the old assault boat and pillage a Human town.

For those gamers who would rather conquer the stars than bash Orcs (or humans), Blizzard is close to completing PAX IMPERIA II. The game's scale rivals that of MASTER OF ORION and REACH FOR THE STARS, with SVGA graphics that really make the galaxy come vividly to life. Ship design is different than in MOO, but involved enough to keep



TECHNICOLOR GALAXY The upcoming PAX IMPERIA has graphics and an interface that could leave MASTER OF ORION in the dust of nebulas past.

closet galactic engineers happily tinkering for eons.

Combat features a tactical model, but is really only one of the many options available to would-be emperors. Trade and diplomacy are equally important, and random political events keep everyone guessing. Replayability is enhanced through a variable world generator and random starting positions every game. Advisors are provided to manage the growing empire, and council meetings allow you to make and change existing policies. PAX IMPERIA II will release for both Macintosh and Windows formats this Winter, and will support up to 16 players via network.

Farther off, the Spring of '96 will see SHATTERED NATIONS, a post-apocalyptic empire-builder with emphasis on building an economy. Even with the SVGA graphics and multi-player aspects, this reminds us of the old **SPI** board game *After the Holocaust*. At least this one sounds as though it will be playable in an evening.

The riskiest venture from Blizzard would seem to be DIABLO, their first attempt at role-playing. However, Blizzard is trying to transfer the grand sweep of their "empire games" to the fantasy world, which bodes well for role-players, who really haven't had worlds of any scope to romp around in lately. The game should transcend the typical dungeon crawl with the advent of a random level-generation system and multiplayer aspects. The design teams at Blizzard have certainly shown that they know how to inject new life into old fantasy themes—and WARCRAFT is a prime example. Regardless of how well these titles turn out, it is refreshing to see a small company continue to take chances, because this can only mean richer experiences for gamers in the long run.

—Terry Lee Coleman

PLAYING LATELY?

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

Readers' TOP 10

Results for *CGW* #132, JULY 1995

1.	**Panzer General**	(SSI)
2.	**X-COM: Terror From The Deep**	(MicroProse)
3.	**Dark Forces**	(LucasArts)
4.	**Wing Commander 3**	(Origin)
5.	**Jagged Alliance**	(Sir Tech)
6.	**Doom II**	(id Software)
7.	**Master of Magic**	(MicroProse)
8.	**X-COM: UFO Defense**	(MicroProse)
9.	**NASCAR Racing**	(Papyrus/Virgin)
10.	**Full Throttle**	(LucasArts)

Notable Quotes

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

"Demolition Derby—otherwise known as NASCAR—is a gas! Look at 'em try to avoid me. Hit the pace car head on and watch *him* go the wrong way. Hilarious! What!? It's a serious sim?....Oh."

'Dodge Em' Johnson, Mar Vista, CA

"PANZER GENERAL hasn't left my CD-ROM drive since the day I bought it. PG is the best game I've played this year."

David Jaromnak, Reading, PA

"I'm livin' my life at FULL THROTTLE."

Brandon Anderson, Visalia, CA

"JAGGED ALLIANCE is X-COM times 10. Terror From the What?"

David Follansbee, Manchester, NH

"Yoda is my squad leader."

Chris Farver, Elmira, NY

"Will WING COMMANDER IV keep Luke Skywalker...oops, Mark Hamill, as the main character?"

Yuhwei Liny, Toms River, NJ

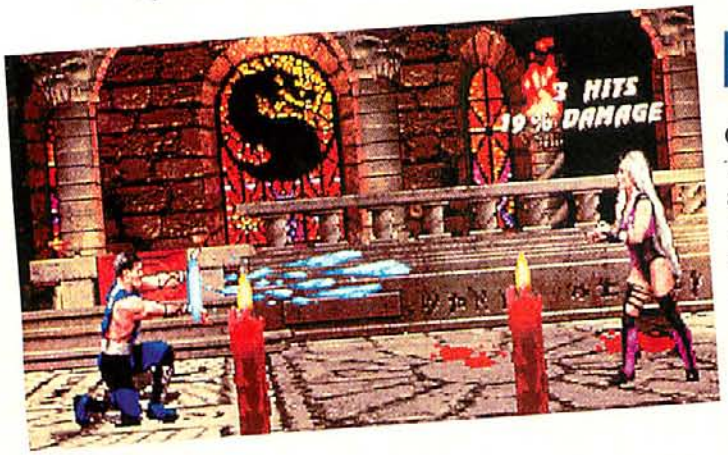
"Now that I've crushed the Allies in all five campaigns of PANZER GENERAL, I await the next version where I can crush the Axis."

Steven McKinnon, Albany, NY

BETA bits

MORTAL KOMBAT III

Blood, guts, gore and glory have always been the trademark of the MORTAL KOMBAT games, but **GT Interactive** is taking things a step farther the third time around. This faithful translation of the arcade game will include—drumroll, please—network and modem play. The storyline isn't too different than before; not that it matters much.



CHILL OUT! MORTAL KOMBAT III adds to the ensemble of martial-arts characters, each with his/her own special attack abilities—maybe even enhanced for the PC.

Just like in the arcades, multiple levels exist within a scene. Hit your opponent with a super-stiff uppercut, and he'll get knocked up to the next level, where the fight continues. In the early beta we played, the controls were considerably more responsive than we expected. Gamepad gamers will enjoy having all four buttons enabled for attacks (high and low kick, high and low punch).

But the biggest enhancement in MORTAL KOMBAT III will be the presence of online multiplayer play. Modem owners can connect up for battle, and there will be two versions of network (IPX) play. One variant will consist of a real-time double-elimination tournament where all the players square off simultaneously, wait to see who advances to the next round and then fight again until there's a winner. The other variant will most likely be free-for-all style; you'll be able to issue challenges and so forth.

There are a host of new characters, including the fearsome four armed Shiva, and GT and Williams Entertainment have even hinted that graphical improvements will be made for the IBM version. Of course, the blood still looks fake—guess that kind of realism is a whole other matter. Still, MORTAL KOMBAT II was proof that arcade fighting games can be successfully ported to the PC, and the designers claim that MK3 will have extra secrets and cheats when it finally reaches a desktop near you on Friday, October 13. GT is serious enough about the release that "Mortal Friday" will mark not only the MORTAL KOMBAT III's PC debut, but the simultaneous launch of a movie and live tour as well.

EXPLORATION

Take SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD, CIVILIZATION and COLONIZATION. Blend them together and set the game in the 1400's and you've got **Interactive Magic**'s upcoming release EXPLORATION. Intrepid gamers will step into the shoes of Christopher Columbus as they undertake a quest of epic proportions for themselves and the country they represent—the discovery of a new world.

Like SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION, a random world generator creates a New World literally with each game. And, as expected, the game moves into familiar territory as you negotiate, trade and combat up to four competitors plus indigenous peoples. In addition to meeting, greeting and exterminating each other (and the natives), settlers found and maintain colonies, mines and plantations, upgrading them when necessary. Ships carry goods along pre-defined trade routes. For spice, there's the Port scene back home, where finders of new worlds can have a drink, recruit crewmen and visit the church.

The turn-based gameplay instantly reminded us of COLONIZATION. Unfortunately, so did the standard VGA graphics, which are quickly becoming outdated in this modern, hi-res gaming world. Hopefully an SVGA mode will be added to the final version. Otherwise though, EXPLORATION has some promise. If they can

OH, MY ACHING HUMP In EXPLORATION you settle the new world by whatever means necessary—even if you have to explore on camelback.

"This ain't no flight sim...this rocks."

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–Computer Player

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–Computer Gaming World

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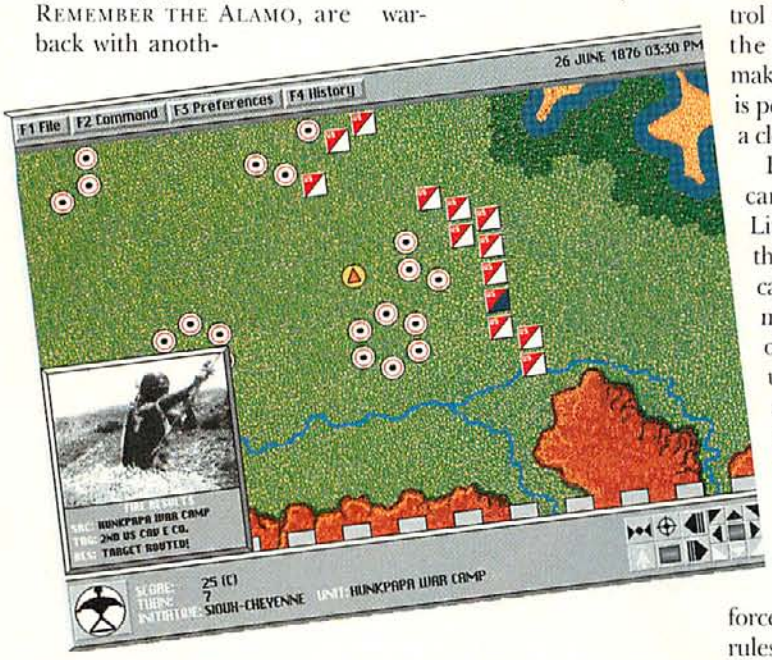
avoid some of COLONIZATION's mid-game micro-management overload problems and deliver on a seemingly well-adjusted AI model, the game we've all been waiting for—the real follow-up to SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD—will be out in September.

CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND

The brothers Lapkoff, those crazy guys who gave us REMEMBER THE ALAMO, are back with another seemingly one-sided affair in CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND. Several board wargames have done The Alamo justice, but there has never been a good simulation of the ill-fated Custer campaign against the Sioux. And while the very thought of a game on this subject flies in the face of political correctness, it is nice to see that the Sioux and their Cheyenne allies have a reasonable chance of victory, often with less casualties than in the real battle of Little Big Horn.

The even-handed treatment of the subject neither vilifies nor elevates Custer, a definite achievement, considering the controversy which still surrounds the battle. As with most good wargames, CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND gives you a lot of historically-viable options to experiment with, including: varying the numbers of Sioux/Cheyenne warriors in the village; varying the number of rifles carried by the Sioux; the Indians expecting Custer to attack; and of course, the usual fog of war and AI competence levels may be set to preference.



CAVALRY CHARGE MY FOOT! CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND puts you in charge of US forces in a tense campaign to defeat the Sioux and Cheyenne at the Battle of Little Big Horn.

When playing the US 7th Cavalry, the main advantage you face is not being saddled with Custer's arrogance (then again, your opponents may vary). US options include carrying sabers (left behind to make the cavalrymen more stealthy), Gatling guns, and even bringing along the 2nd Cavalry—all of which still make for an interesting game, even though they tilt the balance to the US side.

The game system has developed far beyond the minimalism of ALAMO, with a sophisticated "tool button" interface and crisper, cleaner graphics. While I question the authenticity of Zones of Control on this scale, it does allow the beleaguered cavalry to make their famous stand, and is perfectly acceptable for such a clean, simple game.

Even though the entire campaign, rather than just Little Big Horn, is covered, this doesn't mean that tactical detail is left out. Cavalry may fight either mounted or dismounted, stay in column or line formation, and even effect a "last stand" option under certain desperate conditions. Indian forces are more fluid, and may take cover from enemy rifle fire easier than US forces. The morale and fatigue rules are similarly simple, but equally effective.

In short, CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND is shaping up to be a fine example of why small, independent companies are still important. Not only do the Lapkoffs tackle sensitive subjects, they somehow manage to import the love for their craft to their audience. Certainly, this industry could use a bit more of that attitude.

PIPELINE

ESTIMATED RELEASE DATES BASED ON THE LATEST INFORMATION FROM GAME DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME, COMPANY	RELEASE DATE
7TH FLEET Avalon Hill	10/95
11TH HOUR Virgin	9/95
AGE OF RIFLES SSI	9/95
ALIENS Mindscape	9/95
ATMOSFEAR Time-Warner	9/95
AWFUL GREEN THINGS QQP	10/95
BATTLES IN TIME QQP	9/95
BEYOND SQUAD LEADER AH	9/95
CAESAR II Impressions	9/95
CAPITALISM Interactive Magic	9/95
CHESSMASTER 5000 Mindscape	10/95
CHRONOSMASTER Capstone	10/95
CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD Interplay	10/95
CRUSADER: NO REMORSE Origin	9/95
CYBERMAGE Origin	10/95
DAGGERFALL Bethesda	9/95
DUST Cyberflix	9/95
EMPIRE II New World	9/95
EXPLORATION Interactive Magic	9/95
FRANKENSTEIN Interplay	9/95
GABRIEL KNIGHT II Sierra	11/95
GUARDIANS OF DESTINY Virgin	9/95
KNIGHT MOVES Spectrum HoloByte	9/95
MAGIC: THE GATHERING MicroProse	9/95
MILLENNIA GameTek	9/95
MISSION CRITICAL Legend	9/95
NCAA FOOTBALL Mindscape	9/95
PAX IMPERIA II Blizzard	11/95
POLICE QUEST: SWAT Sierra	10/95
RIPPER Take 2	11/95
SHANNARA Legend	11/95
SILENT HUNTER SSI	9/95
SIMISLE Maxis	10/95
SPACE BUCKS Impressions	10/95
STAR CONTROL III Accolade	11/95
STEEL PANTHERS SSI	9/95
TEKWAR Capstone	9/95
TERRA NOVA Virgin	10/95
TFX 2000 Ocean	10/95
THE DIG LucasArts	9/95
THE RAVEN PROJECT Mindscape	10/95
THIRD REICH Avalon Hill	9/95
THIS MEANS WAR! MicroProse	9/95
WARCRAFT II Blizzard	11/95
WARHAMMER Mindscape	10/95
WITCH HAVEN Capstone	9/95
WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN Avalon Hill	10/95

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Historical Strategy Game

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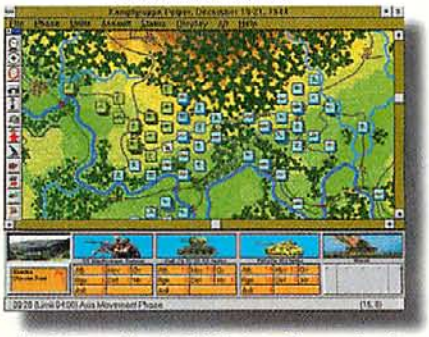

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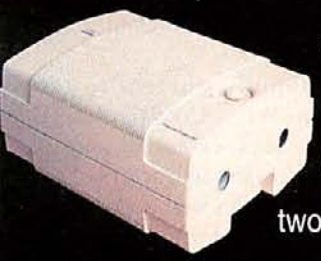

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Circle Reader Service #27

Origin Shoots For The Stratosphere With $10 Million Wing Commander

With rumors running rampant about the next installment of one of the most famous computer series ever, we decided to head for Tinseltown and check out the making of WING COMMANDER IV for ourselves. Expecting to see another blue screen studio with clusters of people huddled around actors and digital compositing equipment, we were more than a little surprised by what we found.

It seems designer Chris Roberts decided that if his game was going to have the feel of a movie, then he was going to have to shoot it like a movie. To that end, he's shooting the game on film (Sony Playstation users will benefit from this), and is using real movie sets instead of "blue-screening" everything. This should provide a more realistic feel to the game, but also means skyrocketing costs, reportedly reaching ca. $10 million. The costs dwarf the previous record for the production of a computer game, which was Roberts' WING COMMANDER III at $3.5 million.

Photo by Joel Sussman

HOLLYWOOD NOUVEAU Even more than WING COMMANDER III, WING IV resembles a big-budget film, right down to the expensive movie sets. But can a game with a big-league budget turn a profit in the current market?

The plotline goes something like this: Col. Chris Blair, played by Mark Hamill, retires from the service after wiping out the Kilrathi. But life on the farm gets a little boring when you're used to shooting things for a living, so he's more than happy to assist the Federation's plea for help in the Borderlands, where some strange things have been going down. During the course of the game, you'll discover that certain people aren't exactly thrilled with the Federation, which may lead to some interesting questions about liberty and loyalty.

Happily, the entire cast from WING COMMANDER III came back, except for a few of the female characters. Tom Wilson, who won a *CGW* Premier Award for his portrayal of Maniac in WING III, has returned, promising that his character will be fleshed out a little more this time around. As for gameplay, the next game is supposed to be pretty similar to WING III, but Chris Roberts has plans to improve some aspects. During combat, he says, you'll be able to scramble your wingmen to other Nav Points, making it possible to send a wingman to clear out one Nav Point so that you'll be able to zip on through.

If WING COMMANDER III was like Hollywood, this game *is* Hollywood. WING COMMANDER IV should be out in time for the holidays.

Take 2 Takes Time To Film 'Ripper' Right

Take 2 Interactive Software recently finished the principal filming on their upcoming RIPPER title. Featuring Burgess Meredith, Christopher Walken, Karen Allen and John Rhys-Davies, among others, the production seems destined to eclipse its original $2.5 million budget. In spite of the cost overruns, the first-line stars are discovering that interactive performances can be much more grueling than traditional Hollywood fare. Burgess Meredith, the veteran performer who appeared in *Waiting for Godot* on Broadway, *Of Mice and Men*, *Rocky* and *Grumpy Old Men* on film, and numerous *Twilight Zone* and *Batman* television episodes over the years, managed to put his 90-year-old body through over 60 camera set-ups in one day (playing two roles in the film). Karen Allen (best known for her performance in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) worked through more than 100 camera set-ups in a grueling 12-hour-plus day during her stint on the RIPPER set. The game requires so many camera set-ups compared to feature film work because there are four possible murderers and the game is set up for replayability.

GUTSY OLD MAN Burgess Meredith plays dual roles in Take 2's RIPPER. The 90-year-old legend performed all of his scenes for the game in one day, before flying out to do *Grumpy Old Men II*.

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The 64 Gigabyte Question?

Wargames, long the province of hard-core strategy enthusiasts, are only now garnering serious attention from the larger gaming audience. Part of the reason is that games like PANZER GENERAL *finally feature the cool sounds, attractive graphics and intuitive interfaces necessary to appeal to more people. Since Gary Grigsby's upcoming* STEEL PANTHERS *(see the Sneak Preview on page 206) marks this wargame deity's "finding new religion" in terms of graphics and interface, we thought it appropriate to ask him what he could design with unlimited processing power and no budgetary restraints. A wargame for all time, perhaps?*

I like historical games where the strategies have a realistic feel to them. Any of you who've played PACIFIC WAR know that I *really* like strategy games that allow you to zoom in for tactical detail. To design my dream game, I wouldn't need much, just unlimited time and resources and a 64-gigabyte, 2000 MHz computer. And, well, a couple of peripherals...

World War II: Global Conquest

Since projecting a spherical globe on a flat screen is less than satisfactory, the game would require a virtual-3D-holographic-laser-system (V3HLS). A virtual globe would be projected into the center of the "situation room," and the player could move or examine his armies by just touching an area of the projection.

Central to the game would be an enormous data base containing personnel and equipment files for all the world's armed forces. Detailed data on each country's natural resources and industrial infrastructure would drive the game's economic module. I would also include a flexible data manager to allow players to list, sort, calculate and forecast information in a manner of his/her own choosing.

The game would contain the following features:

1. **The entire war** resolved down to each man, vehicle, ship and aircraft;
2. **Realistic automated supply rules** with supplies being moved by dedicated fleets of ships, trains, trucks and wagons;
3. **Fully customizable options** to design your war economy, armed forces and weaponry;
4. **Ability to zoom in** and resolve the really interesting battles in minute tactical detail;
5. **Qualitative differences** in weapons, manpower and leadership.

Of course, only the most fanatical player would actually want to control everything under his command. The game would have to include a competent AI general/manager to move supplies, manage the factories, and control the rear-area armies. This would leave the player free to concentrate on deploying his front-line units and fighting battles.

Even if my dream technology became a reality, a game of this scale could take forever to complete, despite enormous teams of programmers and testers. If nothing else, after a mere two years of development, the V3HLS drivers would be hopelessly obsolete. In the end, the programmers would doubtless realize that the game would run too slow on the standard 2000 MHz home computer. The greatest irony of all is not that the design specifications would change, but that the cost overruns would be so huge as to parallel military spending in the real world—and that is a little too realistic a military simulation even for *me*.

AFFAIRS IN THE CYBURBS

The Latest Game News From GenCon; Win A Free Sub To 'CGdub' On The Web

Check out the latest on ULTIMA IX, WARHAMMER FANTASY BATTLES, ALLIED GENERAL, CHRONOSMASTER and more by downloading transcripts from the *CGW* Forum on ZiffNet. The transcripts are from live conferences from the GenCon Game Fair in Milwaukee, WI, in mid-August. *CGW* Editor-in-Chief Johnny Wilson and Wargame Editor Terry Coleman hosted the conferences with designers and producers from **Mindscape**, **Origin, SSI** and **Intracorp**.

Meanwhile, back at the *CGW* Web Site, you'll find several exclusive reviews, including IRON ASSAULT, as well as the latest game demos and patches. Plus, you'll be eligible to win a free 1-year subscription to *CGW* if you take the time to answer our Question of the Month. You'll find some great answers already there to the last two questions, "What was the first game you ever played?`" and "What was the BEST game you ever played?" The *CGW* site is locatedat: "**http://www.ziff.com/~gaming**".

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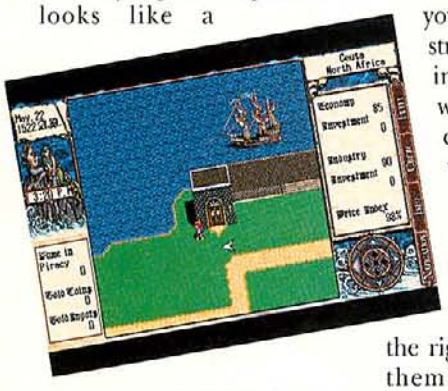
Circle Reader Service #168

NEW HORIZONS

Looks can be deceiving, and that's certainly true in **Koei**'s newest game of exploration, trading and combat. At first glance, this adventure/strategy game built upon the 16th Century Age of Exploration looks like a throwback to an early Nintendo game. From an oblique, top-down perspective, you move your tiny homunculus about the screen, bumping into other characters and walking into doors to open them. Yet, if you judged this game on its looks, you'd miss the most interesting conversation trees used in any Koei game yet. The designers actually spent some time paying attention to character motivation. More importantly, you'd miss out on the solid strategy elements underlying the adventure game wrapping. You begin by choosing one of six adventurers, each with different motivations for exploring the globe. To reach the appropriate pinnacle of fame, you'll have to recruit the right people and manage them well while running a tight ship. If you don't, it's easy enough to lose by having your flagship sink; running out of provisions and starving; being killed in a fight; or failing to achieve your goal by January, 1554. All in all, NEW HORIZONS has a lot to offer. Too bad the Nintendo-style interface probably won't appeal to those who would most likely be interested in the game. IBM CD-ROM, $59.95. Circle Reader Service #1.

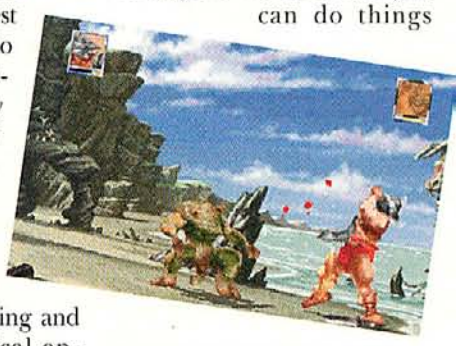
KOEI CORPORATION, BURLINGAME, CA (415) 348-0500.



MARIO GOES ADVENTURING The Nintendo-esque quality of the adventuring interface belies the strategic depth of NEW HORIZONS.

SAVAGE WARRIORS

Mindscape has just jumped into the street-fighting craze with an intriguing game that adds some new elements to the genre. SAVAGE WARRIORS bears the same old story—a mystical super-powerful warrior calls together the 10 best fighters from history to see if the best can defeat him. Thankfully the storyline's the only thing seriously recycled here. SAVAGE WARRIORS has the look and feel of WARRIORS, which, thanks to some effective coloring and a whole new graphical approach, looks remarkable, even if it is a little blurry. The action itself is inconsistent—we couldn't figure out what to make of it. At times the fighting really locked us in with its intensity. At other times we were frustrated by a level of "realism" that appears to slow down the traditional arcade reaction times. One big plus is the ability to wield weapons and take advantage of the environment to a limited degree. Which means you can do things

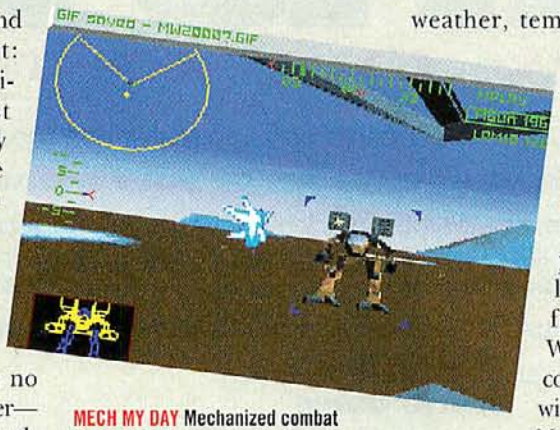


SIGGY AND THE SEA MONSTER SAVAGE WARRIORS' semi 3-D environment lets you hang from rocks and use weapons to vanquish your foe.

MECHWARRIOR II

The long wait is over and it's been worth it: **Activision**'s much anticipated sequel is almost everything a Mech jockey could want. Based on the Era of the Clans from FASA's immensely popular "Battletech" universe, players pilot huge, 20-meter-tall humanoid tanks across dozens of alien landscapes. This is no simple arcade game, either—MW2 takes into account such varied conditions as gravity, weather, temperature, and time of day, and they affect the performance of you and your machine in two long campaigns that will lead to victory for either the Wolf or Jade Falcon Clans. Along with the awesome Mechs, dozens of vehicle and building types are modeled, and weapons effects are beautifully rendered in both graphics and sound; don't be surprised to find yourself ducking when your screen shudders and rocks under the deafening impact of an opponent's long-range missile. Strap on that neuro-helmet and dress lightly, because the Clans are in town and things are definitely heating up. IBM, $69.95. Circle Reader Service #2.

ACTIVISION, LOS ANGELES, CA (800) 477-3650.



MECH MY DAY Mechanized combat fans will be happy to know that they can finally climb into the cockpits of MECHWARRIOR II.

PLAYING

like grab a rock outhanging and launch a double-volley kick into your opponent's chest. That ought to leave an impression.... IBM CD-ROM, $69.95. Circle Reader Service #3.

Mindscape, Novato, CA (415) 883-3000.

DOWN ON THE FARM Primitive graphics and gameplay in the second Atari Action Pack will take you back...but do you really want to go?

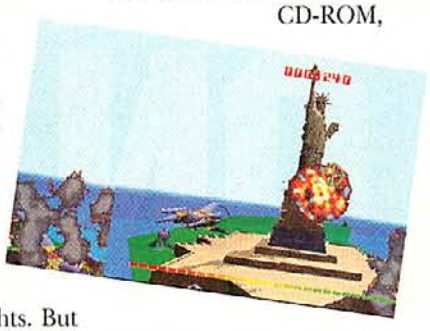
ATARI 2600 ACTION PACK 2

Proud of your ability to squeeze into those vintage bell-bottoms? Can't get enough of Nick at Nite? The folks at **Activision** have got your number. Riding high on a nostalgia wave, they're bringing out Atari 2600 Action Pack 2 with 15 more of those addictive little games of yore. While most of the games that brought a sentimental gooey feeling came out in the first Action Pack, this collection has a few gems. Classic racers Enduro and Dragster are included, as well as some space shoot-'em-ups like Atlantis and other assorted twitch-action games. Unfortunately the fond memories don't last long. The graphics and sound are, of course, primitive, and the gameplay offers little challenge beyond hand-eye coordination. Even so, some of these games are so infectious, you might find yourself hitting that reset key again and again, and not just for old time's sake. Windows CD-ROM, $29.95. Circle Reader Service #4.

Activision, Los Angeles, CA (310) 473-9200.

CHAOS CONTROL

Boy, some games sure spoil our vision of the future. When we think of space combat, we think of Han Solo piloting the Millenium Falcon to victory in space dogfights. But don't expect anything like that in Chaos Control. You're not good enough to be the pilot—you're just the gunner. And hopefully a good one: the fate of a planet rests on your guns. This **Philips** game is basically computer whack-a-mole; you point your mouse at the enemy ships as they soar past, and try to avoid taking so many hits that you blow up. The introduction, which has a comic-book feel to it, is well done, but the rest of the game is visually unimpressive. Four missions await you: Manhattan, Computer, Space and Mother Ship. Unfortunately, the controlled flight path gets old fast, and so do the missions. IBM CD-ROM, $49.98. Circle Reader Service #5.

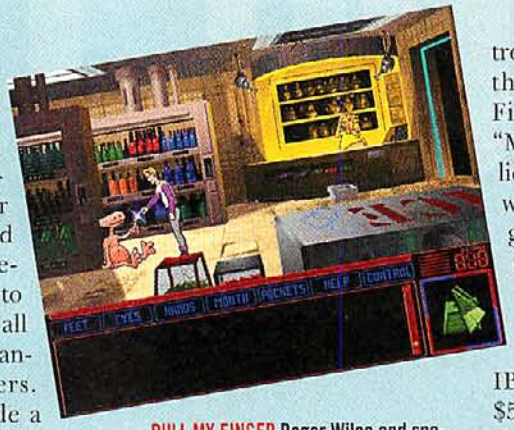


GIVE ME LIBERTY Seeing Ellis Island in a game where you have no control over your flight path is one of the ironies in Chaos Control.

Philips Interactive Media, Los Angeles, CA (800) 340-7888.

SPACE QUEST 6: THE SPINAL FRONTIER

Ahh, to be back in the sandy outback of Kerona, roasting grellburgers over a lit rocket nozzle. That's how we'd like to think space hero Roger Wilco spent his time off between sequels. However, in Space Quest 6 we learn that Roger is undeservingly stripped of his captain's rank and assigned to the SCS Deepship 86 as a janitor, 2nd class. While enjoying shore leave on Polysorbate 60, Roger gets swept up with seedy underworldlings, and it's your job to rectify the situation. The humor ranges from mild bathroom to facetious satire—sure to get a laugh from all but the most cantankerous of gamers. Highlights include a voice-over by Gary Owens and the accompanying mini-magazine "Popular Jani-tronics." Not to be missed is the arcade game "Stooge Fighter 3," which provides "Moe fun" than you can believe. When you top this off with some great SVGA graphics, a solid Windows implementation, and a top-notch interface, you have the right stuff for any lover of madcap space comedy. IBM & Windows CD-ROM, $54.95. Circle Reader Service #6.



PULL MY FINGER Roger Wilco and special guest star E.T. share a magic moment in Space Quest 6.

Sierra On-Line, Bellevue, WA (800) 757-7707

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Peter Smith, Strategy Plus

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TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE

Circle Reader Service #10

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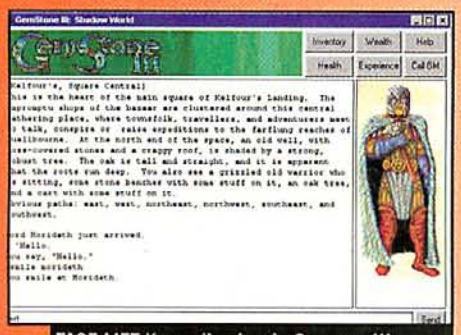

FACE LIFT Kesmai's classic GEMSTONE III should look a lot like this when it appears on America On-Line later this year.

BLACK FLAG *CGW* Editor-in-Chief and rookie driver Johnny Wilson takes out Papyrus CEO Omar Khudari in this replay of a test race on Papyrus' upcoming multiplayer system. Eleven drivers were competing at Bristol Raceway with full damage on.

Multiplayer on-line gaming is finally coming into its own. But it has taken gaming companies and on-line providers more than 10 years to get to this point. For many of us, our first experience with telegaming—playing games with other human players via modem—was either limited to play-by-electronic-mail games (PBEM) or text-based fantasy role-playing held in chat rooms of various on-line services. And you had to go Net spelunking just to find them. PBEM was an improvement over U.S. "Snail" Mail PBM games where you would send in your moves on a postcard and wait anxiously for your moderate to adjudicate all those moves and get back to you. Most play-by-mail (PBM) games were lucky to handle one or two moves per month.

So, when Russell Sipe introduced on-line *Diplomacy* games on **CompuServe** and **The Source** (an early on-line service owned by **Dow-Jones** which was eventually purchased by and merged into CompuServe) in 1982, gamers could blitz through a move per week, complete with e-mail negotiations. Today, Jim Dunnigan's 100 YEARS WAR allows you to input moves every day and many networks allow you to play strategy games live *without* having to batch process moves.

The chat room fantasy games evolved into text-based role-playing systems like ISLAND OF KESMAI, GEMSTONE III and LEGENDS OF FUTURE PAST. This was a natural evolution from the "Guess The Parser" text adventures being published by many companies, but it was difficult to compete with the still graphics and later animated graphics which **Sierra On-Line** was beginning to put into their boxed games. Even today, some of these pure text games survive because on-line games offer a human element which stand-alone adventures cannot provide. Yet, gamers want it all—good looks *and* personality.

Today, that wish is beginning to come true. The graphics are better and the settings are richer. There are more services offering on-line games and, consequently, there are more gamers to encounter out there in the outlands of cyberspace. In the early days, no one would have dreamed of live action and simulation on-line. Today, no matter which type of game you prefer (action, adventure, role-playing, simulation, sports, strategy or wargame), something new is happening on-line for you.

DOOM DESCENDING (ACTION)

Action gamers will be able to expand their conquests of two classic confrontations into the on-line world. Through the new **Dwango** network (1-800-2DWANGO), DOOMers and HERETIC players can go head-to-head against up to three of their virtual enemies (prices range for $3.90 for two hours through a month with no-limit at $32.50). Via **GEnie** (1-800-638-9636), action gamers will be able to participate in a multi-player version of DESCENT. A bit further into the future, STAR CRUISER, an action/strategy space game with simulation elements, should be available on the **Multi-Player Game Network (MPGN)**. STAR CRUISER has been a long time in coming, since it has

to overcome those infernal latency problems (the delays between typing a command and seeing its result on-screen) faced by so many on-line systems. If the developers aren't careful, the network's JUDGMENT PHOENIX, another space game for that service (1-800-GET-GAME), just may beat STAR CRUISER to beta.

CONTEXT, SUBTEXT AND GRAPHICS (ADVENTURE/ROLE-PLAYING)

The majority of on-line adventure games are still text-based. In addition to MODUS OPERANDI (see p. 58) and FEDERATION (see p. 48), Richard Bartles' MUDII, which stands for Multi-User Dungeon II, is one of the most prominent. It is currently the only text-based game on MPGN. The adventure is played via a pop-up VT100 emulator which is superimposed over a typical MPGN pub (meeting room). From there, you can type "Guestify" and take a quick guided tour of all the locations within the game: the cottage, the Admiral Bombow Inn, important treasures of the land, a galleon which has been shipwrecked, and some dwarven mines. The tour is useful for mapping and will allow you to progress more swiftly through the rest of the game.

Other classic text-based games are getting a bit of graphic chrome: GEMSTONE III for AOL (1-800-827-3338) will feature a colorful wrapping and the ISLAND OF KESMAI on **CompuServe** (1-800-848-8990) and **Delphi** (1-800-695-4005) is about to become the REALMS OF KESMAI with new graphics under construction. ROK will run under Windows in its new incarnation.

Meanwhile, start-up company **Mpath** (with veteran game designers Dani Berry (née Dan Bunten) and Brian Moriarty as principals) has solved some of the latency issues associated with on-line gaming via the Internet. Moriarty is working on a multiplayer adventure that he promises will be different from anything we've ever seen. Coming from the designer of LOOM, the first game to use a musical command line, that is an exciting promise.

On a different note, nearing readiness for beta test is **Fujitsu**'s WORLDS AWAY, an object-oriented, graphically enhanced descendent of HABITAT, **LucasArts**' original experiment in graphically-based telecommunity (on the old **QuantumLink** network and still available in Japan). WORLDS AWAY is supposed to enter open beta test on **CompuServe** before this issue hits the stands, but we haven't seen anything but prototypes as of yet.

DOGFIGHT (SIMULATION)

AIR WARRIOR from **Kesmai** (available on **CRIS II**, **Delphi** and **GEnie**) has been the most successful multiplayer on-line simulation to date, but with the entrance of **Domark**'s CONFIRMED KILL into their theater of air war, the competition is getting keen. The classic AIR WARRIOR game is upgrading its look, refining the cockpit graphics and adding off-line missions to enhance the value of the upcoming Version 1.18. Meanwhile, the challenger, CONFIRMED KILL (http://infobase.internex.net:80/domark/ck/ck.html) has raised the ante on their graphics since our sneak preview in *CGW*#130, (pp. 30-32).

Sim buffs of a different kind will be thrilled with the soon-to-be unveiled NASCAR RACING network from **Papyrus**. Although pricing has yet not been determined, some lucky beta testers have been able to participate in multiplayer races.

PAYDIRT! (SPORTS)

Sports has always been tough. Outside of **Prodigy**'s BASEBALL MANAGER (1-800-PRODIGY), about the only game in town up till now has been **The Imagi-**

Air Warrior 1.18 vs. Confirmed Kill

Since the folks at Kesmai have taken the improved graphics of Domark's Confirmed Kill to heart, we thought it would be interesting to compare the graphics from the upcoming Air Warrior version with the current graphics of Domark's network furball.

EXPLOSIVE EFFECTS AIR WARRIOR's smoke effect looks quite impressive, but CONFIRMED KILL's tracer bullets look great, too.

LONG DISTANCE CLOSE-CALLS Even distant targets look good in both AIR WARRIOR and CONFIRMED KILL.

COCKPIT COMPARISON AIR WARRIOR is opting for the bit-mapped cockpit, while Domark's design is streamlined for speed.

TRADEMARK INSIGNIA Both games have terrific texture maps that really make their dogfights come to life.

COMPUTER CASINO The folks at Virtual Vegas have opened a casino on their World Wide Web page in anticipation of legalized on-line gaming. You can already try out fairly slow-moving versions of craps, poker, roulette and slots, though.

PAPER PORTFOLIO Sierra has christened their new World Wide Web page with a new Stock Market Challenge game. You'll need a version of Mosaic or Netscape that shows tables in order to make your virtual bucks, though.

BAUD PHOENIX On-line admirals will compete live against each other for the first time in Larry Bond's classic game of modern naval combat.

nation Network's 3-D GOLF (1-800-695-4002). BASEBALL MANAGER is a very intricate variation on fantasy baseball where you pick real players and play fictitious games based on their performances. 3-D GOLF allows you to fill out an on-line foursome and play simultaneously with other players. Now, **INN** is preparing to launch FRONT PAGE SPORTS: PRO FOOTBALL on-line (see pp. 52-53).

DICEY PROPOSITION (STRATEGY GAMES)

Strategy games and their wargame counterparts are coming in many shapes and sizes in the near future. On the pure strategy side, the **Total Entertainment Network** (1-510-596-8700) has a working version of SIMCITY CLASSIC on-line and is fine-tuning their WIZWAR strategy game of arcane combat between mages, but the network hasn't gone live for subscribers as of yet.

Parker Brothers will soon release a multimedia version of MONOPOLY which will come pre-equipped for international multiplayer competition via the Internet. The nifty factor here is that the product will automatically configure to the native language of the player so that, for example, the French citizen can play in French while the English-speaking player can play in English.

Speaking of the Internet, **Sierra** had just launched its web page prior to press time (http:\\www.sierra.com). Not only is the web page going to have promotional information about their existing and upcoming products, but it already has a built-in stock-market game using real ticker symbols and the power of the web to bring you the latest updates on your virtual portfolio.

Of course, if you'd rather gamble in more traditional ways, **Virtual Vegas** (publishers of the VIRTUAL VEGAS and VIRTUAL VEGAS: TURBO BLACKJACK CD-Roms) has just opened an on-line gaming casino on the web. You can play roulette, poker, slots, and craps, although the current program doesn't seem to understand the rules of craps and tries to make a new point every time you fail to "seven out." For best results, you'll need to use Netscape, since the program uses its security program. This, of course, leads one to speculate that it won't be long before the company figures a way to turn those virtual dollars into actual dollars. It won't be the first time it's been tried. *CGW* # 3.4 (Jul-Aug, 1983) wrote about one such attempt to introduce gambling via the modem. That effort fell short in California due to insufficient lobbying. Since, however, **Virtual Vegas** isn't the only experienced multimedia developer working on on-line gambling, don't be surprised if this issue doesn't start making headlines in the next year or two.

MPGN continues to be prolific in starting new strategy game projects. JUNTA, the classic game of coups and countercoups in a fictitious banana republic, is nearing its beta test phase. The game allows up to seven players to wheel, deal, and backstab each other in a hilarious evening's entertainment. Further away are STARWEB, a space conquest game presumably built upon the **Flying Buffalo** Play-By-Mail design that virtually launched the Play-By-Mail business, and WARLORDS OF THE APOCALYPSE, a dark future strategy game of the *Road Warrior* variety.

THIS MEANS WAR (WARGAMES)

Historical wargames have always been under-represented in the on-line world. The two mainstays for serious wargamers have been OPERATION MARKET-GARDEN and 100 YEARS WAR. MARKET-GARDEN is **MPGN**'s adaptation of the **Games Development Workshop** (GDW) boardgame based on the assault on Arnhem Bridge. **GEnie**'s 100 YEARS WAR is a text-based game of historical conflict designed by Jim Dunnigan, and it is expected to support a new graphic look in the near future. Now, however, **Interactive Broadcasting** is undergoing an ambitious design with BARBAROSSA (see sidebar on page 43) and **Kesmai** is undergoing beta with their multi-player version of HARPOON, Larry Bond's miniatures level game of modern naval combat (see picture).

RUMORS

Except for the rumors, then, that's what's happening in the world of on-line multi-player gaming. Of course, there are always rumors. There are rumors of **Interplay** starting their own on-line service in 1996. Thus far, company executives have refused to comment, but it seems reasonable to look upon the **GEnie** version of DESCENT as an experiment. Also, developer rumors indicate that **Electronic Arts** and their **Origin** subsidiary may have something in the wings. Of course, that would make sense since EA's strength has historically been its strong distribution and part of the future of the on-line world is distribution.

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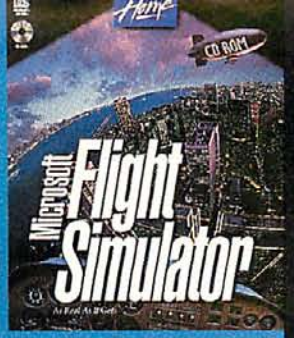

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Tank A Lode Off

Interactive Broadcasting's ARMORED ASSAULT Mixes Minerals And Funerals

by David M. Wilson

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

The night is as black as a coal miner's lungs as the dusty, gray tank lumbers over the mine opening. The glow of the star-shaped mineshaft offers the only brightness on this dark, dim planetary surface. The underbelly of the tank rumbles like a hungry man's stomach as the mining computer begins sorting six different types of ore from the bowels of the planet.

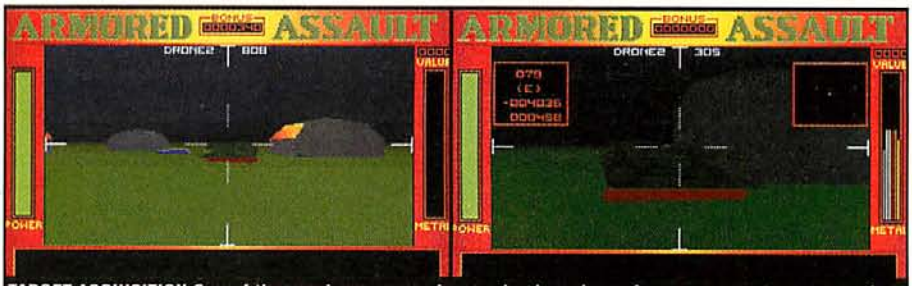
Suddenly, a flash of orange. The tank rocks from the jolting tag of a rival's laser cannon and you realize that you're vulnerable. Grabbing the shift lever and slamming your tank into gear, you spin your turret and frantically scan the horizon for any sign of the attacking adversary, the cosmic highwayman who wants your ore. Power levels fall like meteorites, but your tank crawls toward cover at the speed of a terran turtle. You curse its slow speed as you attempt an evasive zig-zag pattern in a desperate attempt to throw off your opponent's aim. To confuse your attacker, you abruptly reverse your tank and begin firing a few lethal stabs of light of your own until, with power nearly gone, you limp toward a nearby teleport grid. You run another erratic pattern in an attempt to thwart your adversary's shots, though it's obvious where you're headed.

You hastily maneuver the vehicle up the ramp of the brightly lit teleport grid and continue firing at your enemy as the teleport counts down to a safe exit. Finally, after what seems to be an eternity, the countdown is complete and you are beamed safely from the zone, collecting the payoff for the delivered ores.

At its best, such is the game play for ARMORED ASSAULT, a futuristic multi-player combat game created by **Interactive Broadcasting**, currently offered on several online services such as GEnie, Delphi, and CRIS. At its worst, when rival planetary miners have abandoned the virtual worlds of the game, it is more like armored default—more a matter of endurance than expertise. As of this writing the game is in open Beta Test, so you could always check it out for yourself by downloading the front-end software.

Graphically, the game has little to commend itself right now. Indeed, it currently looks something like the old **Atari** arcade game, BATTLEZONE. Only the tanks have simple texture-maps and, except for the ore deposits, small mounds that glow luminously in star shapes, and the aforementioned teleport pads, almost everything else is gray, gray-green, or dull green. Of course, future plans call for graphic enhancements to the terrain features. Also, no sound options were functional at the time of this writing. It is obvious that sound can greatly enhance this game, and it is expected before too long.

Movement in this polygon-based game is fairly simple using the arrow keys. The collision detection is all or nothing, though, and it is possible to get trapped between foothills or stuck against triangular tank traps relatively easily. After all, assault vehicles aren't supposed to handle like sports cars. My most arresting encounter with regard to movement was the time I was sitting on a mining deposit, sucking up metals like crazy, when one of the drones came and sat on top of my tank, preventing me from moving. Eventually, I had to escape out of the game and forfeit the profits from my mining operation in order to free myself.



TARGET ACQUISITION One of the good guys zeros in on a hapless drone for some easy target practice in ARMORED ASSAULT. Notice the pop-up navigation screens on each side of the targeting reticle which can be toggled on/off according to your preference.

ARMORED GESTALT

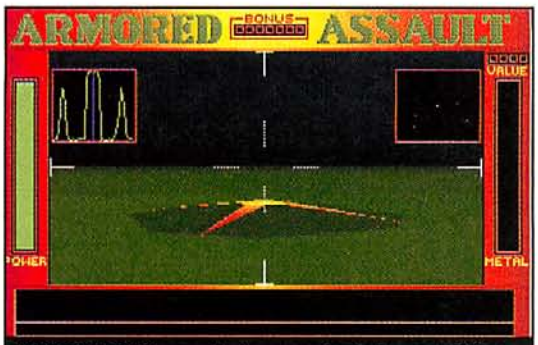
The object of ARMORED ASSAULT seems pretty run-of-the-mill: kill your enemy before he kills you. However, the reality is that you'll have to concentrate on collecting six different metals from the planet and escaping intact from the mining zone in order to collect your well-deserved payoff and obtain the weapon upgrades that should help you survive your next foray. This combination experience bonus/market dynamic gives the game a little more complexity than simply kill or be killed.

Unfortunately, as you mine those six different types of ore necessary to increase your fortune, you can spend an extraordinary amount of time sitting like a mother hen on a mineral lode, with nothing better to do than spinning the turret and watching for enemies as you extract the various metals. You could spend this time taking pot shots at drones, robotic tanks which simply cruise about with apparent disinterest in the player's vehicle or actions. When I was playing,

Armored Assault
Price: $3.00/hr. on most systems
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 4 MB RAM; Sound Blaster recommended
Protection: None
Publisher: Interactive Broadcasting in cooperation with On-Line
Available: CRIS II (1-517-895-0500), Delphi (1-800-695-4005) and GEnie (1-800-638-9636) via the Kesmai Aries system

they didn't even bother to return fire. Hopefully, they're merely waiting for some AI routines, but right now their sole purpose seems to be to serve as moving targets to aid you in honing your targeting skills.

Of course, other players can make things lively for you, but if no other players are present in the zone, game play quickly becomes very dull. Sitting on the mineral lode while waiting for the cargo bay to fill with metals is just plain boring without any real opposition.



SHIPPING ORES You must place your tank atop one of these star-shaped mine shafts in order to process ore. Tanks mine six different types of ore simultaneously and the cash value is posted in the right-hand column as you mine.

ANSI GET YOUR GUN

Weaponry is limited to a single cannon. Various upgrades can be purchased after a successful escape from the zone with a cargo of precious metals. A metal sniffer can help you locate one of the mines that are ready to be have its deposits extracted. Radar will assist your ability to locate enemy vehicles, etc.

A future weapon implementation will allow players to convert one of the six metals into a mine that they can drop in the paths of their enemies. A greater variety of weapons will certainly improve the play of Armored Assault. As it stands, there is only one way to deal with an opponent: to outshoot and outmaneuver him or her. You cannot really out-think your rival.

Of the currently available upgrades, a shield generator is probably the most valuable. This generator uses metal number six (the designers promise that the metals will eventually have names) to recharge the assault vehicle's shield system. The bad news for tank jockeys without this metal is that they are quite unlikely to get a chance to gather the metal and recharge before being blasted by the enemy.

Each time a player's shot strikes an enemy tank or one of the drones, he is awarded 10 points towards his reputation score. Each time a player kills a drone or another player he is awarded a kill which also goes towards his reputation. It seems rather irrational that killing a drone or killing another player has the same net result. After all, a drone doesn't currently return fire, while killing another player takes some skill. The drones' movements are also much more predictable than other player's evasive actions. It is impractical to award the same reputation increase for killing a drone as killing a person.

CHATTY CHASSIS

As with most online multi-player games, Armored Assault offers a chat mode so that you can taunt your enemy, beg for mercy, or even ask for assistance. It is also very common that using the chat mode will get you killed. It is very simple to be typing a message to another player and suddenly discover that you cannot access your weapons because you are in chat mode. The space bar is used to both fire weapons and create spaces in an on-line message, so this conflict can be a real annoyance.

ARMORED ASSIST

Blood Potion #6 Success in Armored Assault is dependent upon efficient collection of metals and prompt exit from the danger zone. Use the payoff to purchase a shield recharger at the earliest possibility. The recharger is limited by the availability of metal number six. The key to the game is *mining* the needed metal, *not* killing the other guy. Stay away from enemy tanks until you have built up enough of metal number six to provide adequate energy to recharge your shields in battle.

Cover Charge The buildings provide a fair amount of cover in a centralized location. Play sniper—hit your enemy and move frequently to another covered location. Only get in a protracted battle when your shields are fully charged and you have a sufficient amount of mineral six on hand to recharge them repeatedly.

Beginner's Luck When new players enter the zone, descend on them like a vulture before they have the opportunity to accumulate metal number six and recharge their shields. The longer players spend in the zone, the more likely they are to have this recharging metal and the more likely they will be able to defeat you.

Despite these problems, Armored Assault is a game that has potential. Like a lot of online games, it will probably undergo constant design changes and improvements. It is important to remember that this game is still in early Beta testing so that the structure of the game is really in flux. The designers are extremely open to suggestions and comments that will lead to the improvement of the game. Sadly, though, at this point the game suffers from a distinct lack of action. The design forces players to either enter an inequitable conflict with a stronger player or spend a lot of dead time sitting on the mother lode. Until the game grows to the point where it can offer more strategy or action, it will hardly be worth one's time to download the required front end.

ARMORED ASSAULT IN ANOTHER ERA

Interactive Broadcasting, the developer of Armored Assault and Federation (see the Sneak Preview on page 48), isn't satisfied with merely producing space games. The company is also working on a massive historical simulation of World War II's Operation Barbarossa. Entitled Barbarossa, the game will cover the entire Eastern Front campaign, and you will fit into the historical command structure within the army of your choice. You will start out at a low rank and only be able to command the units appropriate to that station. Then, as your success in the game increases or the performance of those of higher rank diminishes, you will be promoted and be able to command more units.

Barbarossa looks like a fascinating game, and the artwork here gives you an idea of the kind of graphics to expect in the game.

FUTURE ASSAULT Interactive Broadcasting's upcoming Barbarossa will feature attractive graphics for specific unit types: elite ski units, tanks in differing types of terrain, infantry with specific weapons and even paratroopers.

On-Line Night Stalker

by Johnny L. Wilson

In MPGN's Minion Hunter, You Can Be Abhorred By Minions

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

Judge Dredd would feel right at home in the dark future of Minion Hunter. He would recognize the huge, domed metroplexes separated by radioactive badlands which house outlaws, mutants and monsters in Lester Smith's game, based on his *Dark Conspiracy* role-playing universe. **MPGN**'s Minion Hunter is an on-line strategy game for up to five players versus four computer opponents. It is based on the boardgame published by **Game Designers Workshop** and set within the same dark universe.

Smith's original vision for the universe was that evil aliens from alternate dimensions were using the advanced scientific inventions and vast mental powers at their disposal to create chaos and confusion on the earth. The fact that these powers vaguely resembled certain archetypal monsters of earth's supernatural mythos only served to heighten the fear and confusion, heightening their probability of controlling the entire world. Interested readers can follow this plot in a delightful way by reading Michael A. Stackpole's *Fiddleback Trilogy* (*A Gathering Evil, Evil Ascending,* and *Evil Triumphant,* published by **GDW**), but this isn't required in order to enjoy the game. All you need to know is that the background inspired Smith to create a game universe where cyberpunk meets UFO conspiracies, with vampires, werewolves, evil spirits and interdimensional travel thrown in.

In the game, you assume the role of a minion hunter—a combination private eye, supernatural detective and mercenary. Your goal is to track down and foil enough alien plots that civilization can survive relatively intact. As a character, your four main attributes are: Empathy, Combat, Contacts and Stalking. These attributes will affect your probability for success in combat or escaping from combat. As you succeed in training and foiling your enemies, these attributes improve much like they would in a role-playing game. When you fail to end a plot, points are removed from the relevant attributes.

PRESCRIPTION FOR POLTERGEIST While you're recuperating from an unsuccessful combat encounter, you'll be stuck in the hospital as your opponents increase their fame and fortune.

THE PLOTS THICKEN

There is a limited number of plot cards, and you have to keep any of the four alien/monster coalitions from reaching 20 points before the number of plots is exhausted. A warning radar in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen notifies you whenever a coalition nears its goal. You also build up Fame points as the game advances, increasing your chance of winning.

During gameplay there are always two plot cards in play. They last for three turns, and if you haven't foiled them by the end of the third turn, the "sponsoring" coalition gets a certain number of points. To foil the plots, you need to arrive in the appropriate metroplex before the third turn ends and defeat the minions of the sponsoring coalition in combat.

To get to the threatened metroplex, you have the option of traveling across the map of the United States or accepting specialized training and moving to an encounter. Map movement is simple. You have a movement rate (e.g., one on foot, five by helicopter, six via executive jet) on a per-turn basis. If there are no intervening obstacles, it costs one movement point to move from one metroplex to another. If there is an intervening circle representing demonground (yellow) or a proto-dimensional encounter (red), the computer draws a card for you and follows the directions. If the virtual card calls for no encounter, you continue on your journey without penalty. If you encounter a biker gang or a group

Minion Hunter

Price: $4.00/hr. via CompuServe
$2.00/hr. via Internet and NYC
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486/33 with SVGA and 8 MB RAM, mouse and modem required
# of Players: 1-5 human, plus four AI opponents
Designer: (Boardgame: Lester Smith)
Publisher: Tantalus
Network: Multi-Player Games Network (MPG-NET)
1-800-GET-GAME

POP-UP PROCUREMENT Whenever you get additional equipment, you have to deal with this friendly neighborhood pawnbroker.

of spirits, your turn ends and your movement is expended.

The other choice is more interesting. You can elect to spend a turn in one of the training centers (the four corners of the "game board") and, upon exiting, hope that you "draw" a dark encounter that will let you move directly to intercept any plot on the map. The training centers represent institutes for Empathic, Corporate, Security and Streetwise learning and will improve attributes related to those careers. Security training improves your combat ability and gives you a chance to purchase equipment. Corporate training allows you to gain equipment, but costs you a point of Empathy.

PLOT DEVICE

Once you arrive at the scene of a given conspiracy, you are confronted with the type of minion you are facing, two equations, three buttons and a number for Fame points. The first equation is the Combat algorithm: Easy, Average or Difficult versus Combat, Empathy or Contacts. The second equation is the Escape algorithm: Easy, Average or Difficult versus Empathy, Contacts or Stalking. The button in the middle is the Equip button. Pressing it allows you to rearrange or arrange your armor, weapons and vehicles. The left button is the Combat button. Pushing it resolves the battle according to the Combat algorithm. The right button is for Escape, and clicking on it resolves the escape attempt via the Escape algorithm. If you fail to escape, combat is instantly resolved according to the relevant algorithm.

Should you succeed in combat, you gain the amount of Fame points listed. Should you fail, you end up in the hospital. You stay in the hospital a certain number of turns modified by: the existence of empathic healers, attempts by enemies to raid the hospital, and the amount of damage you sustained in combat. Naturally, plots cannot be foiled while you are in the hospital, so every plot that reaches zero on the countdown is automatically successful and the coalition gets the victory points.

PLOT SUMMARY

MINION HUNTER plays faster on the computer than it does with the boardgame version. It is a well-balanced game with attractive graphics and cute animated sequences to reflect combat results. It stays true to its roots and offers plenty of value.

DARK DICTIONARY

Lester Smith's *Dark Conspiracy* universe, the setting for MINION HUNTER, features a wild blend of extraterrestrial and supernatural encounters. The following are some quick definitions which might further your enjoyment of this universe.

Dark Ones: The interdimensional beings with no bodily manifestation in our universe who established the Dark Conspiracy in order to feed on pain, fear and chaos.

Dark Minions: The minor creations of the Dark Ones who feed our legends of vampires, trolls, werewolves, zombies and demons.

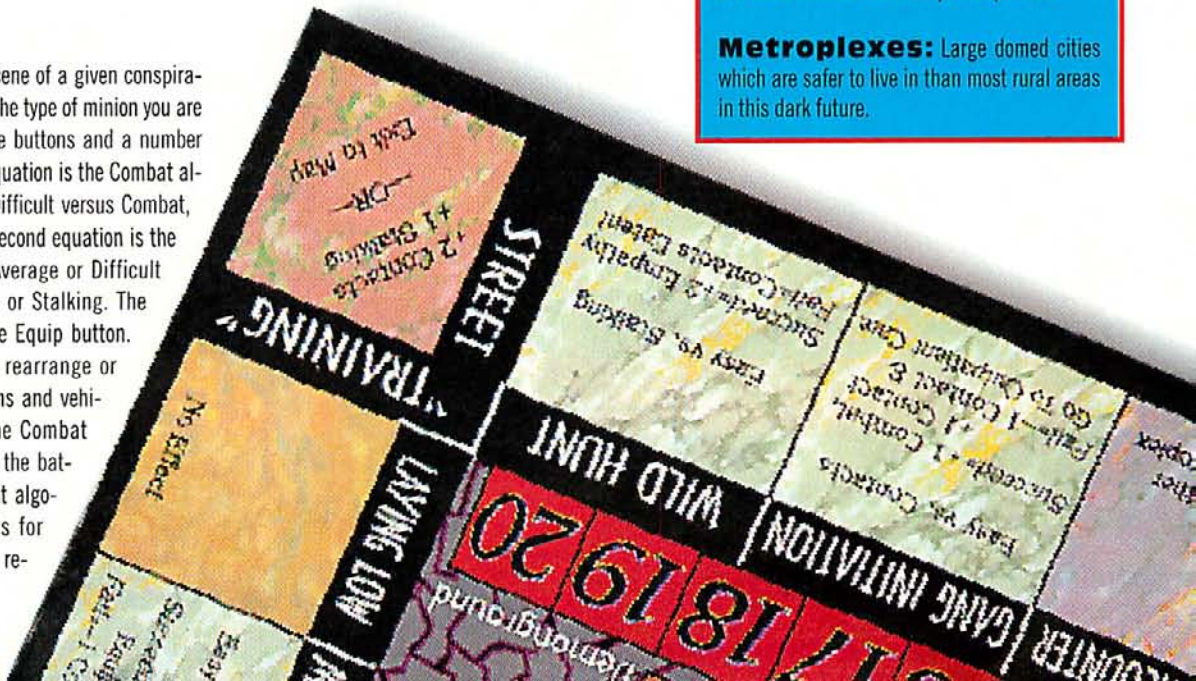
DarkTek: Quasi-organic Weaponry and equipment, largely exuded from the bodies of host aliens and used by the Dark Ones to harm innocents and enemies.

Demonground: Badlands outside of the domed metroplexes where Dark Minions oppress the inhabitants and ward off threats.

Empathy: A mental attribute which powers extrasensory perception in many manifestations.

Extraterrestrials: Alien spacefarers who were caught in the Dark Ones' snares because of their empathic powers.

Metroplexes: Large domed cities which are safer to live in than most rural areas in this dark future.



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– PC Spiel

"A game with breathtaking futuristic graphics."
– MPC

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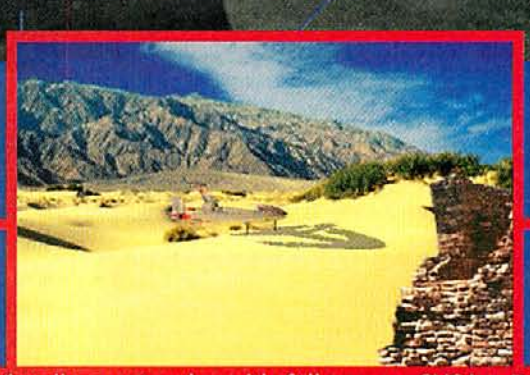

Visually spectacular with full-screen, SVGA 3-D rendered graphics and film sequences.

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A New Universe For Federation

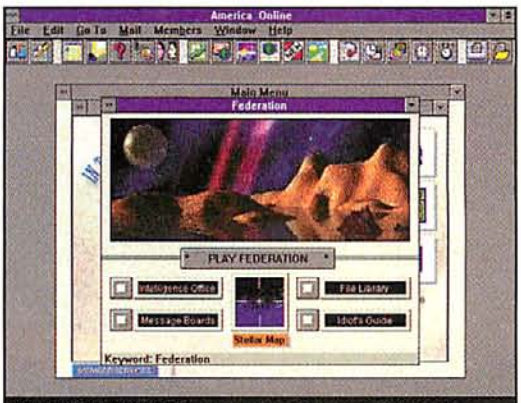
Space Trading Game Gets Cosmetic Make-Over On America On-Line

by Wyatt Lee

FEDERATION is a space trading game that lets you assume the role of an interstellar gypsy trucker climbing your way through the social airlock until you assume the status of a spacefaring shipping magnate. If you play your groats right (Imperial Groats are the official currency of this imaginative universe), you might even end up as a member of "the conclave," the elite circle and near Star Chamber of the game. Of course, you might simply find virtual romance by engaging in "textual intercourse" with another trader (especially if you can write Harlequin Romance dialogue or intriguing soft-porn).

Game play for **AOL**'s FEDERATION is essentially the same as it was for **GEnie**'s FEDERATION II (reviewed in CGW #97 in August of 1992), the text-based game still available on that service as well as on **Delphi** and **CRIS II**. You still start with no distinctive appearance, no space ship, no weapons and very few groats. You still navigate Earth's capitol city by typing abbreviations corresponding to the compass points and reading text descriptions of each movement along the way as though you were indulging in a nostalgic game of ZORK. You still have to bribe the same clerk with the BRIBE 200 command and find the shipyards in order to get a ship built. Building the ship still puts you in enough debt that it should take a while to pay back your obligation and yes, Chez Diesel is still the social center of the universe. In terms of game play, about the only thing that's changed is that you don't have to do those tedious milk runs any longer.

What *has* changed is the fact that the game has a new graphic wrapping. Now, the menu page for the FEDERATION section (where you can download help files or check up on another trader's status) is completely graphic. Now, once you enter the game itself, the text is topped by an attractive science fiction page header. The game still retains its text-based command structure on AOL, but you feel more like you're playing it via the World Wide Web instead of the way you used to feel, that is, like you were playing the game on a dumb terminal connected to an archaic mainframe.



***AOL*IEN ADVENTURE** Gamers who have encountered FEDERATION on other on-line services won't recognize the AOL menu page.

For those unfamiliar with the game, you're missing out on one of the wildest cyburbs in the telegaming universe. The game has a nice play balance and keeps you coming back for more, whether you're accepting standard jobs, attempting to smuggle more lucrative cargo, or participating in custom runs for one of the higher-ranking players. Once you've attained higher rank, the game keeps you coming back for more as you speculate in intergalactic commodities-trading, attempt to solve puzzles adventure game-style, set up your own publicly-held trading company, or at one very rarefied point, become a planetary creator with god-like powers. Alternatively, you might opt to build up your wealth until you can afford a well-armed ship and spend your time as a pirate or cosmic stagerobber.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

In terms of social dynamics, FEDERATION's virtual citizens engage in one of the most complex soap operas you could ever behold. On **GEnie**, there is an unauthorized newsletter that, like any "good" tabloid, informs its subscribers as to who is sleeping with whom, what embarrassing incidents have occurred on-line during the last week of real-time, what feuds are currently in vogue, and the usual assortment of wedding announcements and idle gossip. I haven't found the equivalent on AOL as of yet, but I'm willing to bet that someone will start it. FED's virtual society is just too ripe with scandal. After all, what other game has an artifact (to be found in one of the puzzle-solving adventure segments) named after a British sex scandal (the legendary L.V. or lunch voucher, known from British power brokers who were "expensing" their illicit sexual adventures with lunch vouchers from the government and large corporations)?

If you are a strategy gamer who doesn't mind a graphically-challenged game and has patience with a text adventure interface, you should subscribe to one of the four commercial networks that carries FEDERATION and check it out. It's one of the most "real" imaginary universes you can visit.

FEDERATION
Price: $3.50/hr. on AOL, $3.00/hr. on most other systems
System Requirements: Personal computer with modem and access to America On-Line, CRIS II, Delphi or GEnie
Developer: Interactive Broadcasting
Network Suppliers: America On-Line (1-800-827-3338), CRIS II (1-517-895-0500), Delphi (1-800-695-4005) or GEnie (1-800-638-9636) via the Kesmai Aries system

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Circle Reader Service #149

Imperial Conqueror

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

MPGN's IMPERIUM Reaches For The Stars

by WYATT LEE

Imagine what would have happened if *Star War*'s Rebel Alliance and the Empire had been a little more evenly matched. The film trilogy wouldn't have been near as interesting, but it would have made a great wargame—admirals establishing outposts, posting fleets of combat vessels to distant planets and establishing supply lines. Such a conflict would have had a drama of its own with one side fighting for its freedom and the other fighting for territorial gain.

In **MPGN**'s IMPERIUM, based on the successful boardgame of space conquest from **Game Designers Workshop**, you get your chance to be an admiral in just such a cosmic campaign against an enemy admiral played by a human opponent—no artificial intelligence involved. IMPERIUM isn't about individual ships competing against all odds, and it isn't about tactical combat between fleets. Rather, IMPERIUM gives you the opportunity to command fleets over a vast interstellar map and try to outwit and outplan your scheming counterpart.

Once you've navigated the MPGN pub (meeting room) and both established the game and invited your opponent, you can move to the game. IMPERIUM begins with an extremely attractive set-up screen consisting of primary planetary systems of green and blue (representing the opposing factions respectively) and gray systems (representing those which had not yet been assigned) connected by green spacelanes (jump routes) familiar to every *Traveller* and *MegaTraveller* player. Everything is point and click, but it wouldn't help to brush up on the boardgame's rules before you play. The game has the rules in place for error-trapping (i.e. keeping you from cheating), but the on-line help file isn't there and it is still possible to set-up wrong and freeze the game.

You'll also wish that MPGN had developed a user-friendly system of identifying all the buttons on the interface and the actual military units, vessels and buildings. The game would play fast and efficiently if you could merely right-click on each unit and get a pop-up description. So, unless you remember the differences between ships from the boardgame rules, you may have to hold off on playing this one.

Once the set-up is done, you're ready to move on to the familiar conquer, exploit, build and conquer further scenario. As you are successful, your colored glory scale builds and, of course, since it takes glory points to win the game, you know your status at all times.

BUILDING CODE The IMPERIUM Production Manager will assist you in creating new engines of destruction to feed your insatiable cosmic avarice.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK The commander of the IMPERIUM heavily outnumbers the Terran admiral in this tactical battle. Notice the typical Games Development Workshop look for the tactical combat.

IMPERIUM's combat screen (see screenshot) is reminiscent of the tactical combat screen in **New World**'s SPACEWARD HO! You line up ships against similar ships and go after them with the idea of complete liquidation of your opponent's assets. Again, the tactical combat will have a familiar look to anyone who has played any of GDW's other space games.

Of course, as you conquer those new star systems, you'll have additional resources with which to build ships, bases and military units. IMPERIUM's Production Manager (see screenshot) assists you in manufacturing new ships, outposts, bases and military units. The Production Manager screen seems to be one of the best-designed portions of the current interface, as it will be easy to use once you know the units from appearance or when the game includes a help function.

At the present time, the IMPERIUM beta shows a lot of promise for anyone who already has a copy of the IMPERIUM boardgame. However, it doesn't function as easily as the MINION HUNTER conversion and should probably be avoided by IMPERIUM novices until the help files are in.

IMPERIUM
Price: $4.00/hr. via CompuServe, $2.00/hr. via Internet or NYC local node
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486/33 with SVGA, modem (9600 recommended) and MPGN account
Designer: Games Designers Workshop
Network Supplier: Multi-Player Games Network 1-(800) GET-GAME

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Circle Reader Service #30

INN The Pocket

INN's Front Page Sports: Football Pro Heads For The Pro Bowl

by George Jones

Computer jocks are, by necessity, a lonely bunch. Sure, we can yuck it up on-line about our greatest games. Sure, we can participate in football "leagues" where everyone puts together a gameplan, one person runs all the games on his/her system, and we're all informed about the results in a relatively unsatisfying post-mortem. But when the national anthem of all our bragging is complete and it's kick-off, tip-off, face-off and first pitch time, we meekly retire into our computer rooms (or closets) to triumphantly face...our computer systems. That, folks, is simply the bush leagues.

Doom and Heretic addicts can go BFG-to-BFG over the **Dwango** server. Flight sim junkies can mix it up in furballs over two different on-line theaters of war. Everyone, it seems, is just a phone call away from a human opponent *except* computer sports fans. Even Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo players can now play football against each other through **Catapult's** X-Band Network. So, all I could say was, "It's about time!" when I found out that relief is on the horizon. Thanks to **AT&T's ImagiNation Network (INN)**, **Sierra** and the folks at **Dynamix**, we finally get to quit talking in the locker room and take to the digital playing field.

ONLY INN A DREAM

When I heard that INN was working on an on-line version of Sierra's Front Page Sports: Football Pro (FSPF), it was a dream come true—like finally getting to have an NCAA championship game for college football. I would finally be able to butt heads with all those hotshot coaches across the country who, until this point, could only boast and brag about their coaching prowess. Now, it would be *skill*, not talk, that would decide the day.

Still, even though FPSF is *the* computer football sim, and has been *Computer Gaming World's* Game of the Year winner in the Sports category for three years running, I had some concerns. How much of FPSF's strategic and statistical depth, snappy visuals and graphic detail would have to be sacrificed to the false god Baud Rate and his consort, Latency? Would gameplay slow down to a crawl? How were they going to squeeze all of this game into 14,400 bits per second, much less 9600?

LOCKER ROOM Here's where you "suit up" and get ready for the on-line gridiron.

No problem. At least, there is no problem for stat players. The on-line version of FPSF will be an authentic replication, the closest thing to real football. This is even more true now that you'll be playing against flesh and blood opponents instead of preprogrammed coaching profiles and IF-THEN AI logic.

COIN FLIP

The football portion of INN works just like the rest of the on-line service.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

You enter The Arena, a new area of INN, and pick your persona (the diehard can choose to wear pads and a helmet). Then, you enter a meeting room which, in conventional style, lists everyone present and what they're currently doing. Here you can rap about games, leagues and virtually anything else you want to in a virtual locker room that provides the right atmosphere *without* soggy towels, smelly socks or naked 350-pound linemen. Instead of popping the old towel, though, you get to find someone you want to demolish, draw up the invitation (setting the ground rules for the game like they supposedly do during the ceremonial coin flip), and it's gametime!

Whether you're prepared or not, you'll be amazed at what happens next. This isn't some 16-color dumbing down of the game (which usually happens on-line). This is the real thing: Front Page Sports: Football Pro. The graphics are *exactly* on the mark. The same holds true for the game play, even though a few compromises had to be made with regards to statistics and season play. The only thing that's really changed is who you're playing. And *that's* a change for the better!

The players are current as of the 1994 season (with the exception of a few guys, like Harvey Williams for the Raiders, who for some strange reason was listed as James Rabbit), and the rules are the new rules. That means that the two point rule and kickoffs off from the 30 yard line are in effect.

Front Page Sports: Football Pro
Price: $9.95 for first five hours
$3.50/hr. after five hours
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 with 9600 baud modem and Imagination Network access
Designer: Pat Cook
Developer: Dynamix
Network Supplier: The Imagination Network (1-800-695-4002)

Of course you'll have the usual host of options, from play clocks to quarter length. To prevent cheating, switching any option during gameplay will notify your opponent and give him or her the option of accepting or rejecting those changes. It certainly beats arguing with the refs.

Best of all, the strategy model is exactly as it appears in the commercial game. The basic, standard and advanced modes are all enabled and selectable at any time. This will allow the novice or the hands-on veteran to dive into the game.

KICK-OFF

During the game, the chat mode can be entered by simply typing in a message or hitting the chat button that has been added to the interface. One problem with chatting during the pre-season (beta test) is that you might miss some of the messages. If you happen to be selecting a play right as you receive the message, it's easy to click off the message before you get a chance to read it. The design team is aware of this problem and is trying to fix it before the "real" season begins.

After each player selects their play, the camera cuts to the field for the action. I always forget how good FPS Football looks, and the INN version is no exception to that rule. Absolutely no compromises have been made on-line, and most importantly, there is no slowdown due to data exchange. For the processor-challenged, detail levels like the grass texture and the goalposts may be turned off. Naturally, after a game (and at half-time), you'll be able to check out the statistics. True to FPSF tradition, these are broken down offensively and defensively by team and by individual performance.

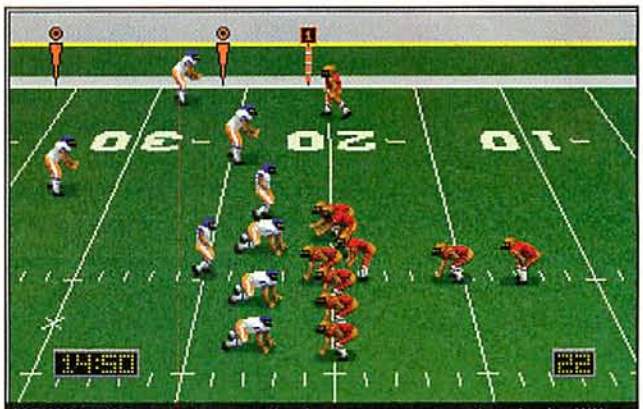
SCOUTING REPORT

The only even remotely significant problem with the on-field action is that plays are uninterruptible. This means that if you call the wrong defense (like selecting a punt return "D" against a regular play), you can't audible your way out of the situation. Neither can you call time-out. You have to live with your decisions in this game. (Hint: I found that on 4th downs, it's almost always a good idea to pick a play that anticipates a fake punt or field goal—you'll protect yourself better this way). I can live without audibles, but I could see myself becoming frustrated at not being able to call a timeout before a play begins—that's an integral part of football.

One thing I will miss thought is FPSF's amazingly robust statistical database. Fearing information overload, the designers of the on-line version decided to completely cut it. This means that statistics will not be kept over the course of the season, at least by the FPSF host computer. Of course, knowing sports fans, we have a sneaking suspicion that the legion of Sysops and players themselves will be more than happy to keep complete records for themselves.

Of course, action gamers may not feel as positive about the on-line version as stat-oriented gamers. INN didn't even attempt an action mode. They knew from the beginning that the latency issues would be too much of a problem to even approach. That's certainly better than trying to kludge together an unsatisfactory system with ghost players, freeze-ups and other response-oriented glitches.

These matters aside, FPSF is still #1. Playing against a human opponent, particularly one who knows their team, takes Front Page Sports: Football Pro to new heights. Maybe it's a new form of primal instinct, but there's something about playing against a human opponent that completely and automatically raises the competitive stakes. Not that this game needed any more of that.



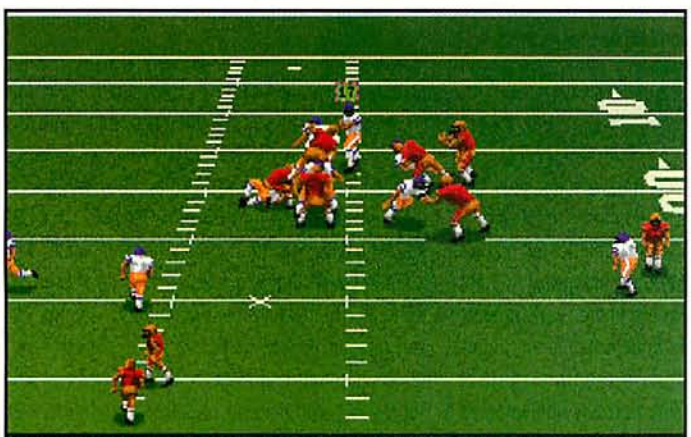
1ST AND TEN Expect the same basic camera perspectives in the INN version as you've come to enjoy in FPSF.

IMAGINATION FOOTBALL LEAGUE

The folks at ImagiNation, well aware of the competitive fires that this game will foster, are prepared to host ladder tournaments, full seasons and virtually anything else the on-line players can think off. It's our world, after all. FPSF fans who have played through several seasons using their own leagues need not fear—as long as both players are using teams from the same league, it doesn't matter. Also, INN is planning on providing plenty of team add-ons and roster updates throughout the year by means of their web site (http://imaginationnet.com/), a service which one-ups even the material available for the stand-alone version of the game.

PRE-SEASON PREDICTIONS

So, the betting line for this fall is that INN is likely to turn the on-line world of sports upside down. Imagine being able to find a real-life opponent at virtually anytime of the day (or night, if you're like me). Imagine being complimented after a nice play call, or being able to (god forbid) gloat after a big play or a big win. Imagine being able to talk strategy in a virtual locker room with hundreds of other pigskin fanatics. So, get suited up because talk's cheap. It's time to settle who's the best coach out there once and for all.



SACK TIME Front Page Sports: Football Pro fans will not be surprised by the look of the INN version.

Here Be Dragons

The Dragon's Tale Launches Into New Role-Playing Realms

by Jasper Sylvester

"Here Be Dragons" was the ancient world's nod of the psyche to the mysteries of the unexplored. Cartographers would etch the known world onto parchment and dried skins and then indicate the limits of their knowledge by scratching "Here Be Dragons" at the edges of the map, the boundaries of the known world. Psychologists could easily suggest that though ancient man was unlikely to be able to debate about the unconscious and the subconscious, these large serpents, worms, sea monsters and dragons were archetypal symbols of uncontrollable forces which humankind must eventually face.

With such thoughts in mind, it is no wonder that dragons have played such significant roles in the myth-like literature which we know as fantasy. Tolkien's Smaug in *The Hobbit*, Robert Don Hughes' schizophrenic Vicia-Heinox in *The Prophet of Lamath*, the carnivorous fire dragon of Weis & Hickman's *Fire Sea*, and the voracious virgin-fed wyrm of Disney's *Dragonslayer* film are but a few dragons who serve as seeming insurpassable obstacles and end up becoming rites of passage for the protagonists.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

It also is no wonder that warnings of dragons, delivered by a pariah-prophet complete with "Repent" sign, serve as the dominant threat introduced into The Dragon's Tale before a new character so much as traverses the first village square within the game. The Dragon's Tale (TDT) is a new on-line computer role playing game (CRPG) which stretches the technological boundaries of what an on-line CRPG is supposed to be able to accomplish. Here are not only the dragons of the story which the gamer must unravel, but also 3-D objects with sophisticated texture maps, as well as the multiple perspectives from which to view them. Here are photo-realistic horizons and intricate mazes to be explored via an intricate interface. Here is a credible fantasy universe, an able story line partially implemented (the game is still in beta), a combat system similar to the one used in The Elder Scrolls: Arena, incredible texture-mapped graphics, precision 3-D navigation, physically well-defined objects, an attention to realistic detail, and the mixed blessing of most on-line games—what Jean-Paul Sartre described as hell in the climax of "No Exit"—*other people.*

POTATO AHEAD Crossing the village square, you see a fountain on your left, the vegetable stand ahead and the mountains in the distance. At this point, the icons for your hands are empty. The five scales below your character's image show that you are in full health and you have no wounds, fatigue, hunger or magical power.

A MATTER OF CHARACTER

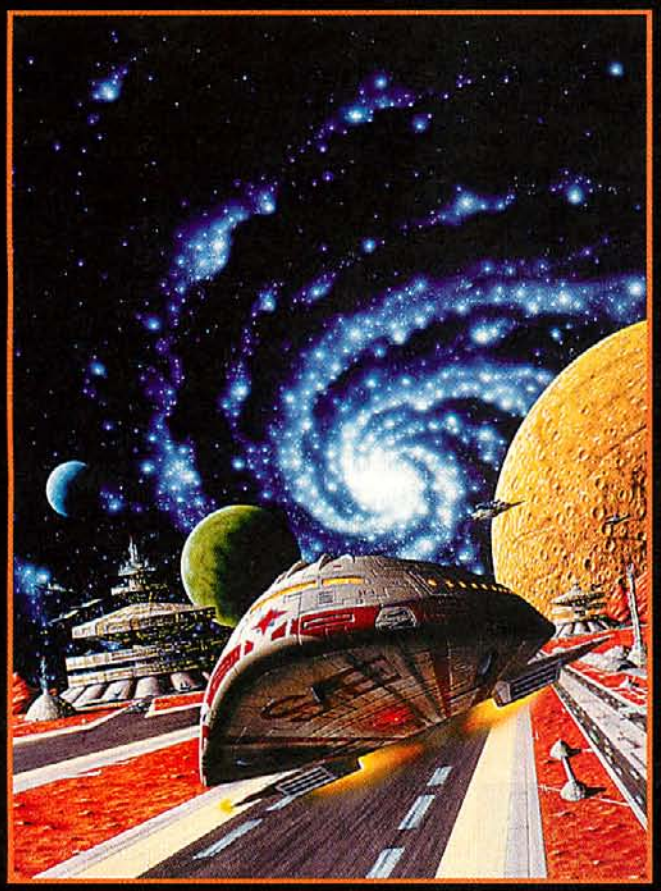
Character generation is both easy, elegant and familiar. You name your character and pick his or her sex. Then, you "roll" simultaneously for that character's Strength, Coordination, Intelligence, Personality, Willpower, Height and Weight. Instead of viewing numbers, which aren't always immediately understood, the game provides bar graphs for each characteristic, complete with a line which represents the "average" for each characteristic. Once you're happy with your character's basic profile, you can choose your on-screen image from a gallery of digitized photographs. Once you enter the game world proper, this Betrayal at Krondor-style paper doll look will be the way other players see you on-screen.

Entering TDT offers two quick realizations. First, you begin to encounter other characters and realize that, while the terrain and buildings are 3-D objects, the other characters are not. They may be 3-D, but all you see are one of four flat sides with the digitized photographs grafted on. Second, you realize that TDT handles additional bookkeeping related to five conditional states: health, wounds, fatigue, magical power, and hunger. Everything your character does within the world of TDT has an effect upon him or her and you can monitor his/her well-being via a colored scale for each conditional state. The hunger scale will keep you buying bread and fruit at almost, but blessedly not quite, the same pace as the old Dungeon Master game (remember how tedious that activity became before you finished the game?).

The Dragon's Tale

Price: $3.00/hr. on most systems
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 or better with SVGA and minimum 2400 baud modem (14,400 recommended)
Developer: Vor Technologies
Available: CRIS II (1-517-895-0500), Delphi (1-800-695-4005), and GEnie (1-800-638-9636) via the Kesmai Aries system.

Space Bucks



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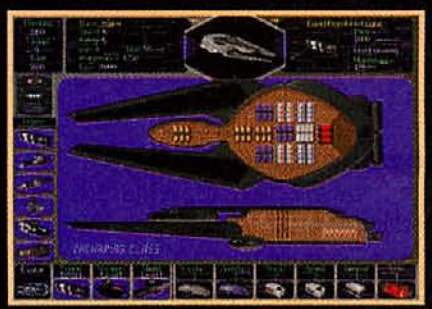

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Circle Reader Service #19

SIERRA®

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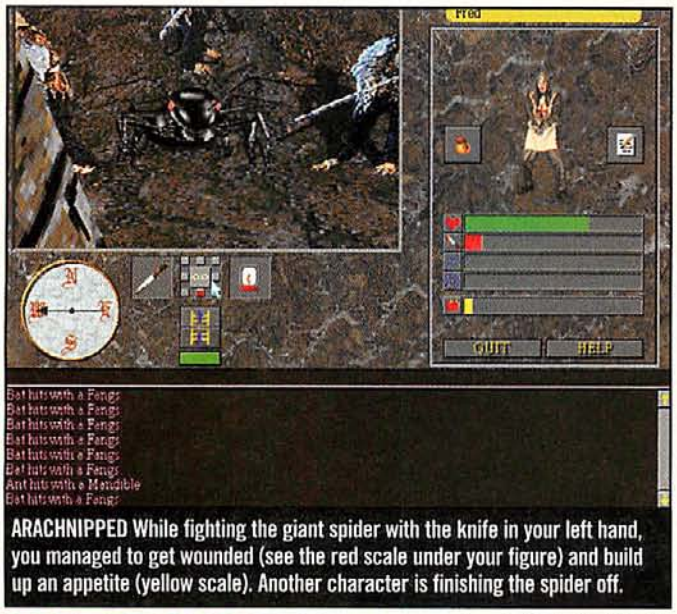


ARACHNIPPED While fighting the giant spider with the knife in your left hand, you managed to get wounded (see the red scale under your figure) and build up an appetite (yellow scale). Another character is finishing the spider off.

A MATTER OF COORDINATION

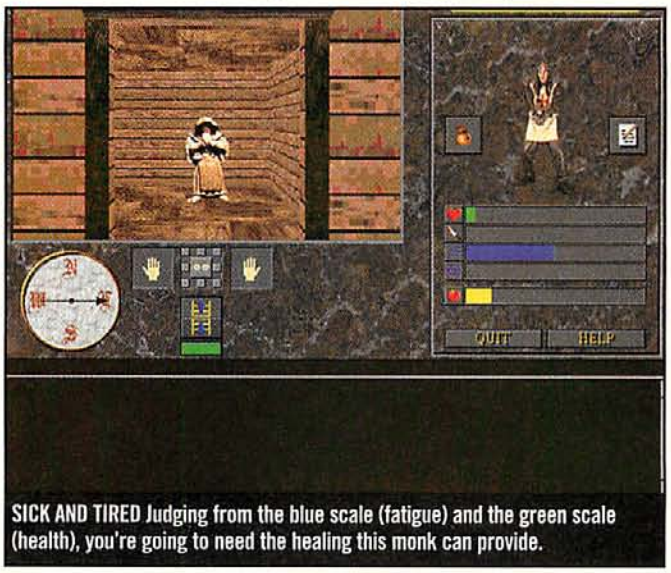
You maneuver your character through TDT's world via a point-and-click interface. Clicking when the cursor transforms itself into one arrow pointing straight up on the screen means your character will take one step forward. Clicking with two arrows pointing straight up means your character will walk faster and take two steps. A curved arrow to either side allows you to turn right or left. A straight arrow pointing to either side allows one sidestep right or left and two arrows pointing toward each side allows a double sidestep. Similarly, there are single and double arrows for stepping backward and a U-turn arrow for turning 180 degrees.

As in most modern role-playing games, clicking on the hand and then clicking on an object allows you to pick something up. Clicking on the object, moving it onto another object and right-clicking allows you to drop something or put it down. Want to clobber someone? Merely put the cursor over a free hand (for hand-to-hand combat) and click right. Then, when you move the cursor over your victim, it will become a bullseye. When the bullseye is where you want to strike, right-click again and you'll see your hand reach out and strike the victim. As in ARENA, there is different animation for each weapon.

Inventory is handled in the familiar tradition of ULTIMA VII where everything is assigned to a box on the inventory screen which corresponds to the character's body and hands. As in the later ULTIMAS, many objects can fit inside other objects so that inventory can be handled both efficiently and realistically. Also typical is the way you click and drag all objects from place to place.

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

The most revolutionary part of TDT's interface has to do with perspective. Eight little boxes on the screen surround an icon representing your character's eyes. Clicking on the box underneath the icon and to its left allows you to see the ground to the left of your character's feet. Clicking on the box directly beneath the icon allows you to see what is right in front of your character's feet. Conversely, clicking on the top righthand box allows you to see what is above and to the right of your character, and clicking to either side lets you look to the side. Frankly, I don't remember having this much control of viewpoint in any CRPG before, and I am particularly impressed by seeing it in an on-line game. It is not only beautiful, but useful for finding important objects within the game.



SICK AND TIRED Judging from the blue scale (fatigue) and the green scale (health), you're going to need the healing this monk can provide.

A MATTER OF BANDWIDTH

But I digress and must get back to both the strength and weakness of TDT (and any other on-line game). The main reason for playing a game on-line is to interact with the other characters. To facilitate this, TDT has an easy conversational interface—just type what you want to say, and it is broadcast to those characters within the game who would be within hearing distance.

Unfortunately, in a game which graphically pushes the technological envelope for on-line games, that very strength can be a nightmare. The pace of the game is somewhat chunky, at best, even though it is attractive enough to make such concerns secondary. Yet, the appearance of other characters on-screen, the very thing most on-line gamers want to see, causes the game to work so hard to update the screen that it bogs down gameplay tremendously. This is not a serious problem when only one or two additional characters are on-screen, but it gets infuriating when multiple characters appear and begin talking within your virtual hearing.

Obviously, this is not a horrendous problem while the game is in beta, but it is bound to be something of a problem when more and more gamers find out what a fascinating new kind of fantasy universe has opened. Patient gamers with speedy modems will easily overlook this difficulty because of the newfound richness of the game's universe.

HERE BE DRAGONS

THE DRAGON'S TALE has a few technological dragons of its own to slay before the game is finished, but when they've already pushed those boundaries back as far as they have, that shouldn't keep *CGW* readers from downloading a copy of the front-end software from GEnie, Delphi or CRIS and checking it out for themselves. There is simply nothing else like it.

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Caribbean Caper

Simutronics' Modus Operandi Heads For America On-Line

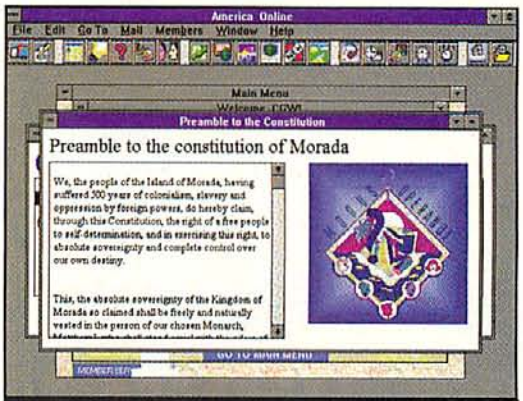
by Johnny L. Wilson

If you should peek through the window of my home office some night, don't be surprised to see me talking to myself and cackling at my own dialogue as I frantically work the keyboard. Don't worry, I've neither lost my mind nor decided to write the great American novel (aren't they the same thing?). I'm just living out a frustrated matinee dream across a virtual landscape.

You see, I've always wanted to be the on-screen Humphrey Bogart, mixing characters from *The Maltese Falcon* through *Casablanca* and on to *The African Queen*. Modus Operandi (MO), **Simutronics**' latest foray into text-based adventure gaming allows players to do just that. Building on the company's Interactive Fiction Engine (IFE), the structure underpinning their extremely successful Gemstone product, the folks at Simutronics have imbued life into Raymond Marlowe, Private Investigator.

"MORADA HAS A STEAM BATH HUMIDITY THAT ATTRACTS EXPATRIATES LIKE FLIES TO MANGO."
—RAYMOND MARLOWE, P.I.

Don't get me wrong, though. MO isn't a period piece set in the film noir films of the '40s and '50s. Simutronics has written an elaborate history for the fictitious Caribbean island of Morada. Discovered in the mid-15th Century by Columbus and his brother Bartholomew (who later "Christianized" the natives in a most un-PC fashion), the island went from Spanish through French and British rule (after Waterloo, of course). Now, it has a relatively stable existence as a democratic commonwealth (under the British model) with some slight interference from the U.S.A. There are other complications that you can read in the background documents, but the point is that the designers have provided us with an exotic locale full of multi-cultural influences that is, as the banana growers used to say, ripe for the picking. They've even written documents which detail the way Morada's government works and all its major players so that you don't have to be caught in the crossfire whenever rival factions within the bureaucracy are on the outs with each other.



CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY Simutronics has gone to elaborate detail in creating the fictitious island of Morada for their Modus Operandi game. For America On-Line, the background documents have more graphics than their GEnie cousins.

"YOU DON'T NEED A MAP IN MORADA. JUST FOLLOW THE SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS."
—RAYMOND MARLOWE, P.I.

Best of all, anyone who has played Gemstone on one of the many networks where it is offered won't have to learn many new commands. You navigate by typing compass directions (n, e, s, nw, etc.) and common sense commands (WAVE at Peter Summers, KISS Genevieve Fiset, etc.). Conversation is handled as it is in Gemstone: merely typing a quotation mark indicates that whatever follows is to be broadcast on-screen to those characters within hearing distance. MO also handles punctuation like Gemstone; typing an exclamation point or question mark notifies others that "Raymond Marlowe exclaims" or "asks Raymond Marlowe."

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

"YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW WHERE I CAME FROM, SWEETHEART, JUST THAT I'M HERE." —RAYMOND MARLOWE, P.I.

The most interesting difference between MO's modern mystery/thriller game and Gemstone's fantasy game is in character generation. In Gemstone, you use the Rolemaster paper game system to create character classes and statistics. In MO, you use a series of menus to describe your character. What does he/she look like (build, color eyes, color hair, etc.)? How tall or short? How athletic? What occupation? Is your character a private investigator, detective, investigative journalist, or something else? If you look deep enough, you'll see the characteristics and character classes there, but I think you'll also appreciate your character more after creating him/her in this way.

Once you start typing commands and begin navigating the island, you'll quickly discover that mapping is somewhat easier than in most adventures, because there are street names for most locations. Though some streets have the curves and cul-de-sacs we associate with coastal towns, the street grid provides an automatic mental reference for weary adventurers. The location descriptions seem so well-written that, in spite of its modern setting, you keep waiting for Papa Hemingway or Bogey to show up.

Of course, that's the way I play it. You might opt for a more Columbo or McCloud approach to Modus Operandi. Just remember, should you need help and ever run into Raymond Marlowe, all you need to do is whistle. "You know how to whistle, don't you? You just pucker up your lips and type WHISTLE."

Modus Operandi
Price: $3.50/hr. on America On-Line, $3.00/hr. on most other services (varies according to network supplier)
System Requirements: PC (any platform) with modem and access to GEnie, AOL or Prodigy
Publisher: Simutronics
Network Suppliers: America On-Line (1-800-827-3338), GEnie (1-800-638-9636) and Prodigy (1-800-PRO-DIGY)

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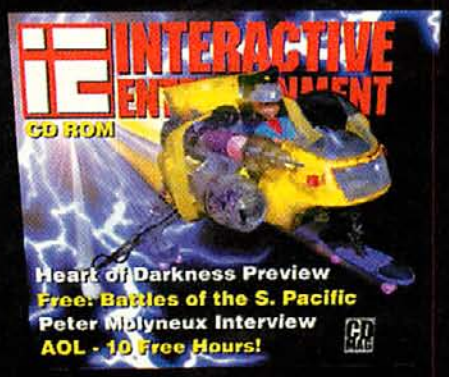

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Circle Reader Service #111

It Takes A Fief

Dreamers Guild and MPGN Present FIEFQUEST

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

by Wyatt Lee

Social climbers had it rough in the medieval period. Heroism didn't reap near the rewards that we imagine from romanticized movies and novels, and much of the history of the period was driven more by self-aggrandizement than loyalty to any sovereign or cause. Might made right in the old days and might makes right in FIEFQUEST, the strategy game by **Dreamers Guild** which has just become available on the **Multi-Player Games Network**.

The quickest comparisons to be made with existing strategy games would be with **Interplay**'s CASTLES 2 (C2) and **Impressions**' LORDS OF THE REALM (LOR). Like its predecessors, this is a game of acquiring adjacent territories, managing your resources, negotiating treaties with and/or attacking your neighbors/adversaries. Unlike C2, however, FIEFQUEST (FQ) doesn't require you to build a castle from the floorplan up. What it does require you to do is convert resources like labor, food, and natural resources into wealth, military or economic strength. Unlike LOR, you don't get to determine the cash crop for every field or the number of laborers for each project, but you do determine when to convert commodities into luxury items and when to upgrade your land holdings. Unlike C2, but like LOR when you are using the modem option, you are competing against other human beings.

Also, unlike either of its predecessors, you operate under a constant time constraint. Each game turn represents a season of the year and lasts eight minutes in "real-time" outside the game. This is a good feature to keep things happening. It also means you never have to argue over whose turn it is. The host computer at MPGN moderates how much you can do within that season, and you can keep moving, upgrading holdings, assigning projects or encountering your enemies in battle until the counter in the upper right-hand portion of your screen hits zero. Then, the economic/military results of the last season are instantly updated, and the countdown for the next season begins.

TAKIN' IT TO THE FIEFS The terrain is as detailed as the clever game system, and the battles have a micro-minatures look to them.

Remember the throne room scenarios in C2 where you were confronted with noble dilemmas? FQ doesn't have those types of encounters, but they have an interesting twist nonetheless. Somewhat similar to random event cards in a boardgame, you occasionally encounter specialists (Armorer, Drill Master, Engineer, Jester, and more) who wish to join your court. You don't have to consider a dilemma in order to recruit them, but part of the challenge is putting their special skills to work. For example, acquiring a Jester allows you to convert three labor points to wealth; a Drill Master gives your heavy infantry an advantage in both attacks and defense; an Armorer adds a defensive modifier to all of your military units, and an Engineer adds a positive modifier to any siege attacks or defenses you need to mount.

Combat in FQ consists of purchasing different military units (heavy and light infantry, cavalry, archers, etc.), adopting a default battle formation for your army (with miniature units placed on a grid in front of a tournament reviewing stand), moving to intersect the enemy on a road or in said enemy's castle. Then, you can fight out a tactical battle.

What does set FQ apart is the richness of having a greater variety of human opponents, each with their own agenda, to negotiate with via Chat mode and battle. This advantage is further enhanced by a competitive marketplace of sorts. That is, should you need extra cash, you open a marketplace using the Create Faire command. Doing so enables you to write a custom advertisement for your entertainment extravaganza/commercial venture, name your admission fee, and broadcast the invitation throughout the game world. If other players choose to pay your admission, the list of attendees is posted along with commodities which they are willing to sell. It functions a lot like the wandering merchants of LOR and the market value in C2, but it's a lot more interesting when you have to haggle with people instead of algorithms. After all, isn't real competition, not merely the artificial competition we're so used to, what gaming is all about?

IT'S A START Though your initial holdings are small, there is a huge game world to explore and conquer in FIEFQUEST.

FIEFQUEST
Price: 4.00/hr. via CompuServe, $2.00/hr. via Internet or local NYC node
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 MHz or better with 8 MB of RAM and modem
Designer: Robert Wiggins
Publisher: Dreamers Guild
Network Supplier: MPG-NET 1-800-GET-GAME

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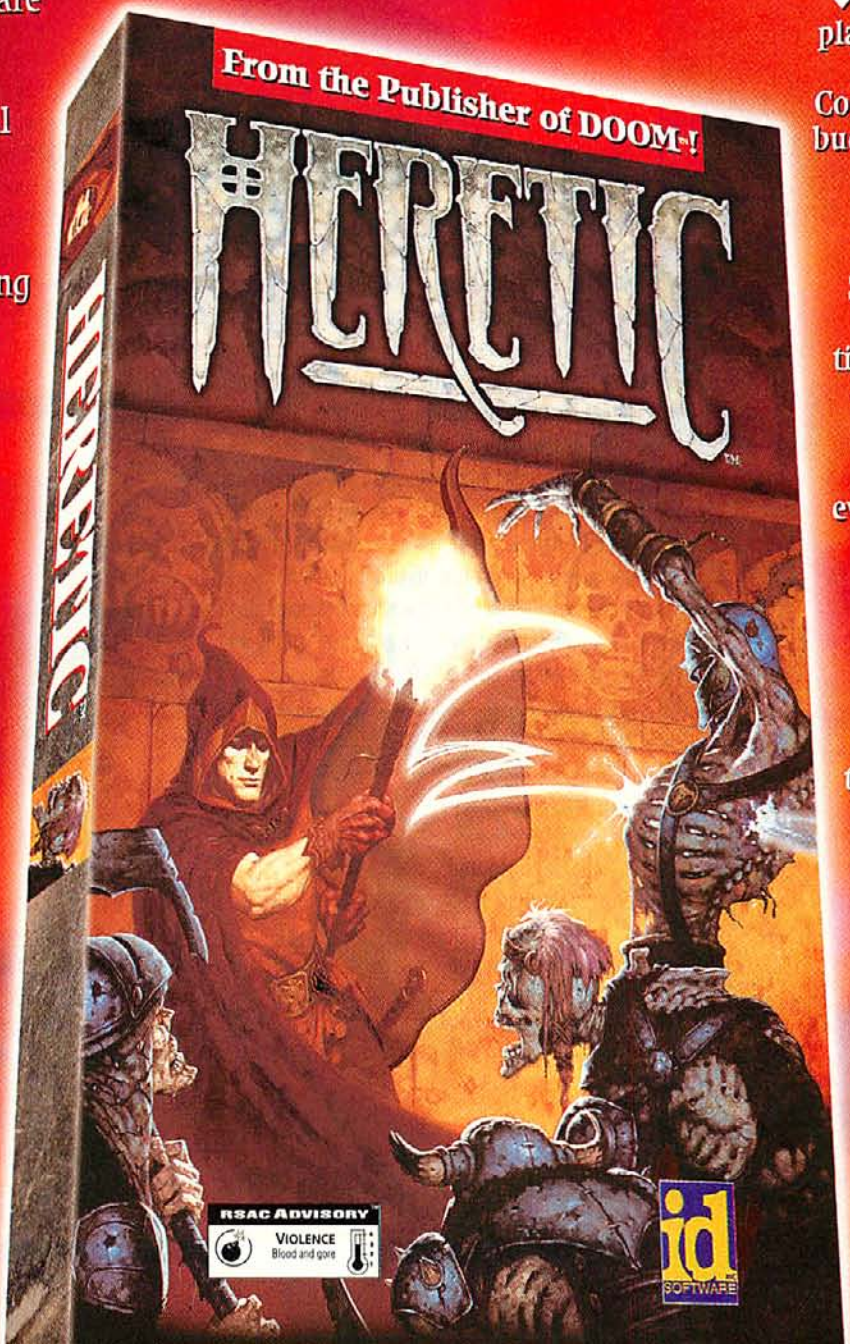

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Circle Reader Service #71

Get A Grip!

If Idle Hands Are The Devil's Workshop, Then Grab A Hold Of The Latest Game Controllers And Don't Let Go

by Gordon Goble

If you're going to go into battle, do it with the right equipment. You don't see soldiers, in real life or in the movies, heading into combat with slingshots and rocks. Likewise, if you're trying to fly U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS with a mouse, or you're drifting down DESCENT's labyrinthine passageways with a keyboard, you're just playing around.

Instead, imagine controlling your wingman in U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS without taking your hand off the stick. Or driving NASCAR RACING and accessing your tire temps and fuel load without ever touching the keyboard. These are the kinds of sophisticated controls that gamers need to play better and deepen their enjoyment of a game.

Whether you love sports games, action games or simulations, the latest controllers have something that will appeal to you. The only trick is in selecting the right tool for the job.

XL ACTION CONTROLLER

THRUSTMASTER

From those adventurous souls at **Thrustmaster** comes their solution for multiple button-lovers on the cheap, the XL ACTION CONTROLLER. Featuring four buttons, a viewing hat, and a thick black fully-contoured handle, this latest Thrustmaster release has a number of things going for it.

Geared to cover most gaming genres, the XLAC is just fine for action/adventure and sports games. Flight sim fans will like its viewing hat, but the lack of a throttle makes it less air-worthy. It is not programmable except when used in conjunction with the more costly Thrustmaster WEAPONS CONTROL SYSTEM, nor should it be at this price, but it does sport a large throw with four discernible corners (great for calibration and physical orientation when in the heat of battle).

Heavy-handed joystick bashers and race simmers may want to check elsewhere as the XLAC is astonishingly lightweight for its size, meaning the back end pops up quite often under full push. Nor are its guidance characteristics particularly smooth, lending an unwanted sense of "digitalness" during analog-type games. Price $39.95.

WINGMAN/WINGMAN EXTREME

LOGITECH

Sleek, contoured and downright stunning in design, the WINGMAN and WINGMAN EXTREME are two of the most pleasant joysticks for combat in the skies. They feel sturdy and natural in sims like FALCON 3.0 and U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS. Heavy throw resistance makes fingertip control almost impossible, and handle design may tire the hand with constant forward motion, so if you're not a jet jockey the WINGMAN family is not your holy grail. Curiously, the WINGMAN features a throttle but no hat switch, while the EXTREME has two extra buttons and a hat, but no throttle. There are no plans as of yet for a Wingman Complete. Price $39/$69.

FLIGHTSTICK/FLIGHTSTICK PRO

CH PRODUCTS

The CH joysticks have the same configurations as the WINGMAN products, save for one important distinction—they *both* come with on-board rotary throttles. These babies are not particularly new nor are they independently programmable, but **CH Products** has just dropped the retail prices on both and thrown in some shareware DOOM with the FLIGHTSTICK, and HERETIC with the FLIGHTSTICK PRO. The FLIGHTSTICKS have a good feel and are built to last. The fact is that the FLIGHTSTICK line continues to shine as just about the best joystick design and feel in the business, and that much doesn't ever seem to change. Price $59.95/$89.95.

SPACEBALL AVENGER

SPACETEC

Once in a while there is a new peripheral that enhances the gaming experience, and my nomination for this year's innovator goes to **Spacetec**'s SPACEBALL AVENGER. For 3-D action gamers with an open mind and the will to learn, the SPACEBALL AVENGER offers some potent possibilities. Shaped like a mutant gamepad on an eating binge, the SPACEBALL AVENGER is a two-handed controller for first-person action games.

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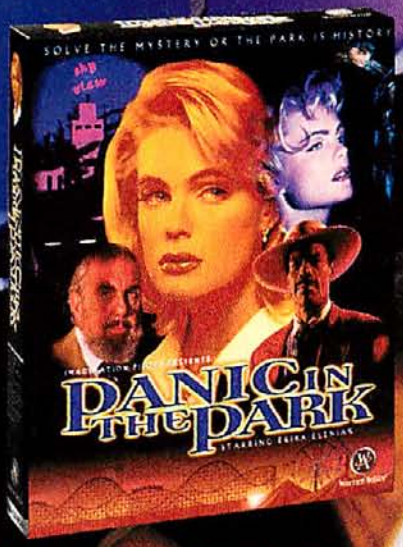

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Circle Reader Service #201

HAPPINESS IS A WARM GAMEPAD

PC action gamers might have more buttons than their console-based counterparts, but that doesn't mean they have any better control. The **Sega** Genesis, SNES and **3DO** controllers (whose roots lie with the 8-bit **Nintendo** system) are The Standard for action games. And it makes sense—have you ever tried to play a game like NBA Live '95 with a Flightstick Pro? Fortunately, PC joystick manufacturers are starting to get a clue. This year, some sophisticated PC-based controllers have begun to surface. Here are a few of the best.

Gravis' Gamepad has long been the standard arcade controller. With a comfortable grip and four functioning (though slightly inaccessible) buttons, this has long been "old faithful" for many an action gamer. This is still a great pad, particularly for left-handers who can turn the thing upside down, flip a switch and play it their way. $24.95

STD has taken the Gravis' concept a step further with their PC Pro Pad 4. By compacting the size of the controller a bit (similar to the Sega Genesis controller), they've mad the Pro Pad a little more comfortable than most. Four buttons are included—the Pro Pad's size makes them easily accessible—and auto-fire capabilities are included, although we've yet to see a game where this feature actually came in handy. $24.95

The top of the heap, however, is the **Suncom** SFX, an incredible 8-button contraption that

The device is ideal for 360 degree games like Descent where you can streak about in contortionistic splendor (go ahead—try and pull off a "figure eight" with your mouse). The Spaceball is also particularly devastating in games like Doom, where you can literally run around an opponent while simultaneously directing fire upon him/it.

With the right hand triggering the Spaceball Avenger's six mappable buttons, and left hand manipulating the Spaceball Powersensor (a touch-sensitive tennis ball-sized directional orb attached to the unit's left side), the Spaceball Avenger permits combined and/or synchronous moves that are beyond the capability of traditional control devices. Operating software includes a product tutorial that's almost a game in itself, and a convenient game launcher that *must* be accessed in order for the Spaceball Avenger to activate with desired configuration.

If you can put up with the learning curve, are willing to lose a serial port, and won't tire of manipulating that darn ball (it *can* get fatiguing), the Spaceball Avenger is an interesting option for serious first-person gamers. Price $179.

PROPEDAL CHOCKS/PEDALS

CH PRODUCTS

Last year, CH Products moved into the world of foot-controlled peripherals with their ProPedals. There was only one small problem—that fore-aft movement so necessary for rudder control just wouldn't go away for racing games.

This year, with by far the simplest product in this review, CH has solved that problem with the CH Chocks, a pair of rubber stops that, when inserted into the pedal cutaway behind each pedal support, kills the slide and leaves only the pivot. The CH Chocks are standard equipment with all new ProPedals, while current ProPedal owners can get a free set by contacting CH Products.

For those light on their feet and light in the pocketbook, CH Products has just released a related product, the CH Pedals. Distinct from the ProPedals by virtue of no fore-aft capability, these babies are a solid choice for race simmers, and an option for flight enthusiasts who don't mind pivoting as opposed to sliding. Price $139.95 (Pro)/$79.95.

FIREBIRD

ADVANCED GRAVIS

The wild and multi-faceted Phoenix was analyzed in these very pages just six months ago, and now there's another bundle of joy in the **Advanced Gravis** programmable joystick family, the Firebird.

Essentially a scaled-down version of its breakthrough daddy, the Firebird shares the same look, and many of the same features as its next-of-kin. The base has had that nifty left hand throttle/rudder appendage amputated, but other than that, things have remained pretty much the same. With a total of eight buttons and two rotary dials on the base and another seven buttons on the stick, the Firebird retains its ability to map out just about every keyboard command in even the most complex of applications. As a matter of fact, the Firebird's software program even allows multiple keystrokes to be defined as just one button press.

Like all programmable peripherals, the Firebird connects to the computer's keyboard port, and the keyboard is then plugged into it, with no special support required from the application. Gravis supplies preset configurations for 42 popular games, and each of these may be customized through the wondrous Windows-type graphical interface, or new ones may be started from scratch. The stick itself sports adjustable tension, and although it feels *way* better under working conditions than Gravis' Analog, Analog Pro or PC Pro sticks, it still has a "clunky" motion that may or may not bother picky users. Price $89.95.

SKYMASTER

QUICKSHOT TECHNOLOGY

On the Skymaster box, Quickshot boasts "Over 35,000,000 Joysticks Sold Worldwide," so these

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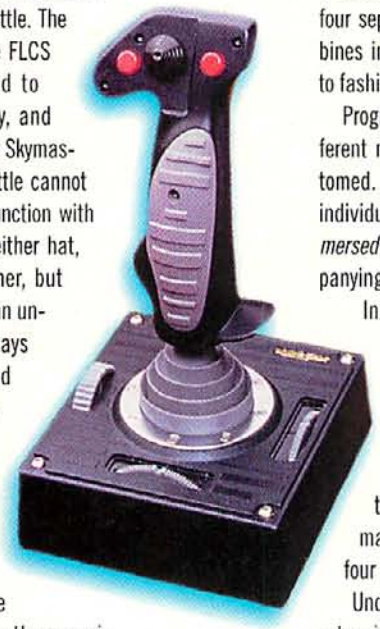
combines easy-to-program keyboard emulation (simply hold down the joystick button and hit the

appropriate key) and a SNES-like grip, even including the "R" and "L" buttons on top. At $29.99, this is THE joypad for the sophisticated action gamer—it's nice to be able to play a game like DESCENT solely from a controller. $29.99

folks must be doing something right (can you say "mass marketing"?). With the feel and look of a 3/4-scale Thrustmaster F-16 FLCS, the Quickshot Skymaster features four fire buttons (including one for the little pinky), a hat switch and a rotary throttle. The similarity to the FLCS does not extend to programmability, and unfortunately the Skymaster hat and throttle cannot be used in conjunction with each other. It's either hat, throttle, or neither, but never both, and an underside switch says so. Top-mounted X- and Y-axis trims, a soft plastic boot over the handle/base joint, and a slip guard on the handle complete the amenities.



The Skymaster feels just great in the air, with just enough resistance to be very natural. Be forewarned that a smallish base means the backside may lift off one's desk under full acceleration in racing games, and the circular pivoting motion results in an almost indiscernible line between forward and sideways, but fairly light resistance will suit most other applications. Price $69.99.

F-15E TALON

SUNCOM TECHNOLOGIES

The latest device from **Suncom Technologies** also bears a striking resemblance to the Thrustmaster FLCS. The F-15E TALON, part of a new line of F-15 Joysticks, has a hulking base and an oversized black handle that reaches a gargantuan 10 inches into the stratosphere. The TALON is home to four buttons and *a pair* of hats (that may each control four separate functions, if so desired), and it combines innovative elements and sturdy construction to fashion a pilot's digital dream.

Programmable? Why, yes it is, but in a totally different manner than to what we've become accustomed. The TALON allows one to program up to 48 individual keystrokes right into the stick while *immersed* in a given game, without the need of accompanying software drivers or program compatibility.

In English, that means any game with keyboard functions may have up to four dozen of those functions keyed into the stick, while in that application. Internal joystick memory ensures that configurations will remain intact even after the computer is turned off, and, if that isn't enough, the TALON may be switched on the fly back to standard four button stick configuration.

Under working conditions, the TALON proves to be a tension-filled beast, with heavy resistance and smooth action. The feel is most definitely pro pilot, and without a doubt its charm is enhanced by little perks—go ahead, switch your weapons toggler from pinky to "Hat 1 Left Position" without even leaving the game. Wow! Price. $129.95

THROTTLE

CH PRODUCTS

If CH Products isn't setting new standards, then they certainly seem to go where the going's good. In this case, they're headed straight towards Thrustmaster-dominated throttle-land.

The CH THROTTLE offers much the same sort of gaming enhancements as the Suncom TALON, with some interesting differences. For starters, the unit is fully functional with *any* steering device, thus ensuring compatibility even with simple joysticks, while the quasi-graphical front-end software guarantees quick and easy programming, thus ensuring compatibility even with simple joystick reviewers.

Furthermore, the throttle itself functions in a sliding rather than pivoting motion, a purely user-preference sort of thing, but it doesn't incorporate the detent positions of the Thrustmaster unit. Although this was a feature I sorely missed while trying to outfox a bogey, the unit is not due for release until September and some revisions are possible.

The CH THROTTLE is littered with buttons across the length of its horizontal handle so all the digits can get a workout, and the right side "head" is identical in shape and configuration to the FLIGHTSTICK PRO. There's a total of six buttons in all, one hat switch and a single two-way switch.

Macro programming is part of the package. Price $99.95.

F-16 THROTTLE QUADRANT SYSTEM

THRUSTMASTER

From what surely must be considered the premier flight sim peripheral maker comes the F-16 TQS (Throttle Quadrant System) programmable throttle. Designed to work in concert with the Thrustmaster F-16 FLCS programmable joystick, the TQS has six distinct buttons, including two 2-way switches, one 4-way switch, a pair of dials, a *mini-trackball,* and a variable tension adjustment. All this stuff is within easy reach on the head of the throttle handle, and can be used to activate anything your heart desires (in a game, smart guy), including commands, actions and macros that simply won't fit onto the

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ARMREST BRACKETS/ FLIGHT CONSOLE BRACKET

INTERFACE DYNAMICS CORPORATION

"Brackets R Us!" is the cry from **Interface Dynamics**, and if you've got a hankerin' to reshape your gaming (i.e., flight sim) ergonomics, IDC may well be the people to check out. They've got a good assortment of products, and have certainly cornered the bracket racket. I

had the chance to check out IDC's ARMREST & FLIGHT CONSOLE BRACKETS (two separate entities), and the verdict is that this stuff is built like a brick stickhouse.

The IDC Armrest Brackets consist of a pair of heavy-duty formed rubber slabs that, with the aid of flexible metal ties, affix firmly to the upright arm support of the common desk chair. A thick, metal plate rests atop this setup to which a joystick or equivalent (they're a custom fit for the Thrustmaster FLCS and WCS) is attached with cloth straps. Two full units come in a set, one for each side of the chair, and that metal plate may be quickly adjusted to any user defined angle. As armrest brackets go, these things will seemingly stay in place forever, and their smart design means peripherals are strapped on, *not* glued or permanently velcroed. In all honesty, it was kind of nice to recline or swivel in my chair, and have my control devices come along for the ride.

For gamers who prefer desktop extension, the IDC FLIGHT CONSOLE BRACKET clamps like a vice to any tabletop or long-lipped desk (at least three inches worth is required), and suspends the keyboard and a pair of control devices up and over your lap in mid-air. The peripherals are supported in much the same manner as with the ARMREST BRACKETS, and the keyboard sits in between (I'm typing on it as I write this).

FLCS. What makes these controllers so compelling is that their designs are based upon the real F-16 stick and throttle quadrant.

Gripped with the left hand while the FLCS is in the right, the TQS

also acts as a pivoting (and very smooth) analog throttle, featuring detent positions for minimum speed and Full Military Power, before notching into the afterburner position—a very nice touch.

Like the FLCS, specific configurations must be downloaded to the unit before entering a given game, and this does take a few extra steps. The TQS comes with setup, testing and programming software that seems a might tricky at first (c'mon Thrustmaster, go graphic), but becomes familiar with use. Supplement your FLCS/TQS combo with the Thrustmaster RUDDER CONTROL SYSTEM pedals, and you've got one heck of a killer cockpit. Price: TQS or FLCS $199.95 ea.

CONTACT INFO:

- Advanced Gravis (800) 663-8558
- CH Products (619) 598-2518
- Extreme Competition Controls (612) 824-6733
- Interface Dynamics Corporation (603) 569-4638
- Logitech (510) 795-8500
- Muti-Tech Industries (614) 436-7325
- Quickshot Technology (408) 263-4163
- Spacetec IMC Corporation (508) 970-0330 (www.spactec.com)
- STD (410) 785-5661
- Suncom Technologies (800) 444-3699 (www.xnet.com/~reno/suncom.html)
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Aural Pleasures

New Desktop Speaker Systems With Subwoofers And Satellites Pack A Punch

by Gordon Goble

I'm the first to admit it—I may not be humble, but I *am* a trend-setter. I knew "The Simpsons" were great while they were still a mere speck on the Tracy Ullman Show, that Nirvana was a pretty cool band *before* Cobain died, and that typical "multimedia" packaged speakers have *never* really cut the audio mustard. Nor has the power output of the standard sound card ever been anything more than passable, and that's why I dropped a couple of hundred bucks on a pre-owned set of floor-standing Advent speakers and a Technics stereo receiver a long time ago. My walls were shaking to COMANCHE: MAXIMUM OVERKILL when it came out, are still bouncing to NASCAR RACING and NHL HOCKEY today, and I've got AM/FM capabilities to boot. Geez, I'm cool.

The typical audio solution these days is a powered set of speakers, but the stuff you'll find in computer mega-warehouses and as part of prepackaged systems usually features weak speakers and weaker amplification. Surely the galactic explosions of TIE FIGHTER, the hell-bent-for-leather roar of FULL THROTTLE, the latest Chili Peppers cut, and even the spoken word deserve a better fate.

This article, then, is aimed specifically at those who want a little more audio bang from their computing environment. Since we all don't have the space for hulking home audio equipment, we'll check out a sampling of high-end powered computer speaker systems. As you'll see, some are grand, others are bland, and they'll all blow the doors off the low-end stuff.

THREE PIECE SYSTEMS (SUBWOOFER WITH SATELLITES)

YST-SS1010

YAMAHA

The Yamaha YST-SS1010 system provides good full response of both music and digital sound effects, if not a tad lacking in the mid-range. They have enough power (10 watts per side) in the satellites to get obnoxiously loud at close range before distortion arises. The subwoofer, on the other hand, although powerful enough at 25 watts, begins to distort above half volume. Fortunately, half volume

is more than enough to produce thundering lows, and the high cut switch can be activated to kill the inaudibly low frequencies, leaving enough effective bottom-end.

The totally independent power and volume between subwoofer and satellites can be a real advantage when you want to tailor or completely kill an aspect of the sound. This is also a minor disadvantage, as extra wiring and one more electrical outlet is needed for operation. All controls are conveniently placed on the front of both component types, and even a light kick will activate the subwoofer, while an automatic on/off function that "senses" approaching sound makes things even easier. Unfortunately, the satellites are so light that even depressing the power switch will push them across the desktop. Available in black or computer beige. Price: $349.95. For more information, call (800) 301-7076.

Yamaha YST-SS1010 Specs

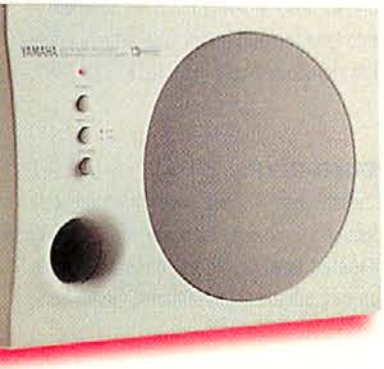
Satellites (2): Enclosure size: 4" x 8 3/4" x 6 3/8". One 3 1/2" full range driver with spruce cone in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 80-20,000 Hz. LED power indicator, power switch, presence (treble) and volume controls on front of one speaker.

Subwoofer: Enclosure size: 11" x 8" x 10 1/5". One 6 1/2" driver with spruce cone producing a frequency response of 35-250 Hz. Front-mounted LED power indicator, power switch (independent of satellites), high cut and volume controls.

MM3

HTP INTERNATIONAL

Thirty true watts per channel and black hand-finished wood enclosures make this a powerful, professionally appointed system. They have a very full sound, strong in the mid-range, and their relatively large satellite drivers result in some bottom end



coming from the desk top—and a fuller sound. There is very little noticeable distortion at any level. Sadly, these speakers are constructed with all the circuitry and wires in the air chamber of the subwoofer, resulting in an annoying and consistent vibration or rattling at higher volumes.

The control positioning also leaves something to be desired. The power switch is located on the rear of the subwoofer, which means that just turning it on is inconvenient. Also, it is impossible to increase volume on one component without affecting the other, as there are no independent volume controls between subwoofer and satellites. An SRS surround-sound version of this system is available for $50 extra. Price: $399.95. For more information, call (714) 937-9300.

HTP MM3 Specs

Satellites (2): Enclosure size: 5" x 8 3/4" x 5 3/4". One 1/2" domed tweeter, and one 4 1/2" mid-range driver in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 150-18,000 Hz. Rear-mounted tweeter level controls on both satellites. Removable cloth grilles.

Subwoofer: Enclosure size: 8" x 12 3/4" x 11". One 6 1/2" driver producing a frequency response of 45-150 Hz. LED power indicator on front, top-mounted master volume and balance controls, rear-mounted power switch. Removable cloth grille.

SRS-D2K

SONY

In keeping with Sony tradition, the SRS-D2K is a sharp-looking unit, dressed in black and styled with rounded front grill corners. Unfortunately, although the amplifier section is rated at 11 continuous watts, it sounds like less than that. So don't expect wall-thumping sound with an average sound card. Although the SRS-D2K is relatively small in sound, it is clean. There is no discernible distortion (or inner vibration problems on sub-woofer unit)—a rare find in these products. It is also very accurate through the frequency range, with the exception of the high end, where it seems to be a little weak. Although the SRS-D2K is listed as a "3-D" system, the effects are minimal.

The controls have been placed on the front of the

sub-woofer. However, there is no treble control, and no independent adjustment over satellite volume, so you're stuck with what Sony figures is right, which isn't all that bad. Price: $199.95. For more information, call (800) 222-7669.

Sony SRS-D2K Specs

Satellites (2): Enclosure size: 3 7/8" x 5 3/4" x 5". One 3 5/8" full range speaker in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 150-15,000 Hz. No controls.

Subwoofer: Enclosure size: 5 3/4" x 14" x 9 1/8". One 4 3/4" driver, producing a frequency response of 40-150 Hz. Tall slimline design with power, volume, balance, bass level, input 1/input 2 switch, and LED power indicator. (Subwoofer model "D2PC" is shielded, while model "D2" is not).

ACS300.1

ALTEC LANSING

The overall sound seems somewhat contained on the ACS300, although it is evenly distributed. With 18 watts for the satellites and another 18 for the subwoofer, this system can get quite loud. Dual 4" drivers in the subwoofer unit means no shortage of sound, but they can't produce the the deep bass tones present in both previous systems. Satellites produce an even range of frequencies from light bottom end to screeching highs. Not much here in the way of distortion unless volume is really cranked, but once again, as in the HTP International's, interior vibrations in the subwoofer become annoyingly noticeable at 12 o'clock and higher on the volume dial.

The innovative "pop-up" design of the satellites permits some flexible placement options. The satellites also have a very functional range of front-mounted controls, which enable convenient audio

SOUND RULES OF THUMB

Generally, sound cards come with just a few watts of power. (We used the **Roland** SCC-1 SOUND CANVAS for the speaker tests because of its superb tonal qualities and powerful output). The minimal wattage rating on most sound cards is just not enough to woof the woofers and tweet the tweeters. Therefore, external power is necessary, and hence the powered speaker was born. There's no hard and fast rule as to wattage requirements; just make sure you can crank the volume before buying. Remember,

any distortion may well be the result of weak amplification rather than bad speakers.

On the subject of power, be aware that some manufacturers use different wattage rating systems. Some companies will use "peak" rather than "continuous" output, thereby enhancing their stated performance in the eyes of the uninitiated. This sort of quasi-deception is perfectly legal, and it's not unusual to find a system advertised as packing 50 watts being brought to its knees by a 15 watt unit. Equalize the rating systems if possible (look for "RMS"—a standardized continuous power rating system) and listen before buying.

Practice safe computing—buy shielded speakers. Like an audio condom, shielding inhibits the magnetic field surrounding the speaker magnet (via another reverse-polarity magnet and/or punched steel surrounding the speaker magnet), and thus prevents damage to the monitor and nearby diskettes.

Don't be fooled by smart marketing. Just because something looks great with a high tech wrapping, it won't necessarily sound better. Also, don't let buzzwords influence your decision. These

customization. However, an unshielded subwoofer necessitates distance between it and monitor (see the sidebar on Sound Rules Of Thumb). The suggested retail price is a little high, so check for point-of-sale discounts. Price $350. For more information, call (800) 648-6663.

Altec Lansing ACS300.1 Specs

Satellites (2): Enclosure size: 5 1/4" x 3 3/4" x 7". One 1/2" domed tweeter, and one 4" mid-range driver in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 120-20,000 Hz. Front-mounted power, volume and mixer (for two inputs) on left satellite, and balance, hi (treble) and bass volume on right. LED power indicators on both. Clam-shell (flip-top) design. Price: $350.

Subwoofer: Enclosure size: 10 1/4" x 5" x 6 1/2". Two 4" long-throw drivers, NOT shielded, producing a frequency response of 35-120 Hz. No controls.

TWO-PIECE SYSTEMS

J-688AV

JAZZ

Jazz says the J-688AV sports 14 watts RMS per side, and it sounds like it. Not only is this thing a powerhouse, but the low end is very impressive (no doubt aided by the front-facing air port), and the high end can get screech-ingly loud. Overall, the unit sounds larger than its size would dictate, and does not distort or vibrate.

The J-688AV is one of the only units here that doesn't have an external adapter, and plugs straight into the wall, making it a dead simple set-up. Take care to avoid breaking off the speaker wire, as it is hard-wired into one speaker—you'll have to take the unit apart to re-attach. Price: $199.95. For more information, call (818) 336-2689.

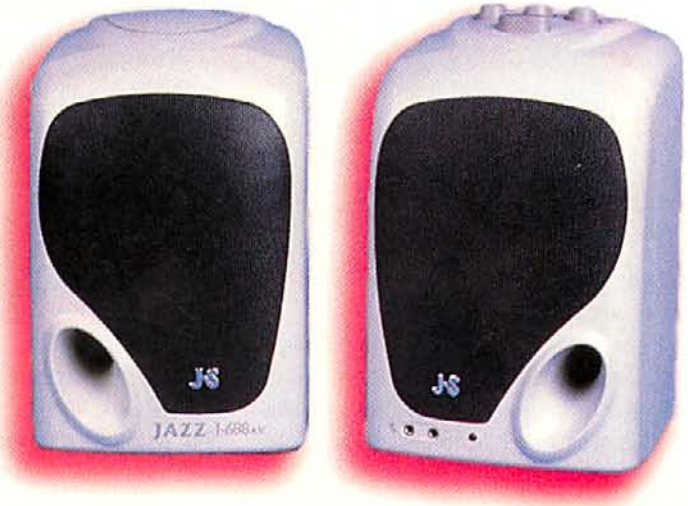
Jazz J-688AV Specs

Enclosure size: 5 3/4" x 9" x 5 1/2". A 1 1/2" cone tweeter and 4" cone driver in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 50-20,000 Hz. Top-mounted power, volume, bass and treble controls on one speaker. Microphone, headphone and LED light on front of same.

J-590AV

JAZZ

Like the Jazz J-688AV speaker system, the Jazz J-590AV packs 14 watts RMS per side, but is slightly smaller in stature, offering a tighter less "extreme" sound (despite wider frequency range specs). Nevertheless, a seemingly more modern design than its sibling produces a more spatial effect, and a very nice mid-range. Both JAZZ units reviewed here are more than sufficient for most computer audiophiles. Price: $149.95.



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days, the phrase "multimedia" on the package often translates to "We sell these ineffective speakers for inflated prices because the consumer can be fooled into thinking they're something special."

Try not to restrict yourself to a small space for speakers—there is no substitute for the bigger sound delivered by a bigger speaker, and especially in the lower frequencies, dinky just won't do. Most of the units reviewed here are three-piece systems—two satellites that supply the mid-to-high frequencies and one subwoofer that pumps out the bottom end. The subwoofer is usually three to five times the size of the satellites, and although that means a larger space requirement, said subwoofer can be plunked down on the floor virtually anywhere. Since low-end frequencies are omni-directional, you won't need to worry that it faces this way or that—just remember that the closer it is to a corner or wall, the more "boom" you'll get out of it.

Jazz J-590AV Specs

Enclosure size: 4 1/2" x 9" x 5". A 2" cone tweeter and 4" cone driver in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 20-20,0000 Hz. Front-mounted power, volume, bass, and treble controls, headphone jack and LED light on one speaker.

VIVID 3-D SPEAKERS

NUREALITY

This unit's biggest claim to fame is its "three dimensional sound," and it actually lives up to its promise. The surround-sound feel is indeed quite impressive. Sounds are suddenly "out of the box" and truly dimensional in space—you can "hear" the path of moving objects such as rockets in a game. The sense of 3-D these speakers generate will really enhance any gamer's sense of immersion.

The VIVID 3-D speakers are not overly powerful, yet deep wooden cabinets and rear ports add admirable bottom end to what are quite small but pleasant-sounding drivers. The control panel does not include treble or bass adjustments, nor is there a balance control, but it *is* heavy on spatial tailoring. Certainly the most innovative sound here. Price: $199.95. For more information, call (800) 501-8086.

NuReality Vivid 3-D Speakers Specs

Enclosure size: 4 3/4" x 9 2/5" x 8 3/5". Two 3 1/2" full range drivers in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 125-15,000 Hz. Front-mounted power, input source, "center" and "space" controls on one speaker.

VS127

VIEWSONIC

The Viewsonic's tonal qualities, like the other speakers discussed here, are much superior to that of basic department store fodder. Their small low-frequency driver produces a surprising amount of bottom end, but the sound is nowhere near the three-piece units. This system is very quiet, which means that either the stated amplifier output of 14 watts RMS is generous or speakers are extremely inefficient (ie, they do not convert supplied power well). Using the non-amplified SOUNDBLASTER output, volume was very weak, while using the pre-amped output produced immediate, heavy distortion from left speaker at even moderate levels. One nice feature is their ability to be attached to a monitor. Price: $149. For more information, call (800) 888-8583.

Viewsonic VS127 Specs

Enclosure size: 2/5" x 10 1/5" x 8 3/4". One 4 3/4" x 1 3/5" mid/high driver and one 2 3/5" low end driver in each enclosure, producing a frequency response of 40-20,000 Hz. Front-mounted power, volume, bass and treble controls and LED power indicator on one of the two speakers. Tall, "slim tower" design with mounting bracket so entire unit may be "strapped" to monitor.

MY WISH LIST

If I had the ability to create the ultimate multimedia speaker system, based upon this sampling, here's what I'd do. I would combine the sound characteristics of the NuReality VIVO 3-D tabletop speakers with the punch of the Jazz J-688AV, the control configuration of the Yamaha YST-SS1010, and the power of the HTP International MM3 subwoofer (without the vibrations). Mmm, yes, I can hear it now...

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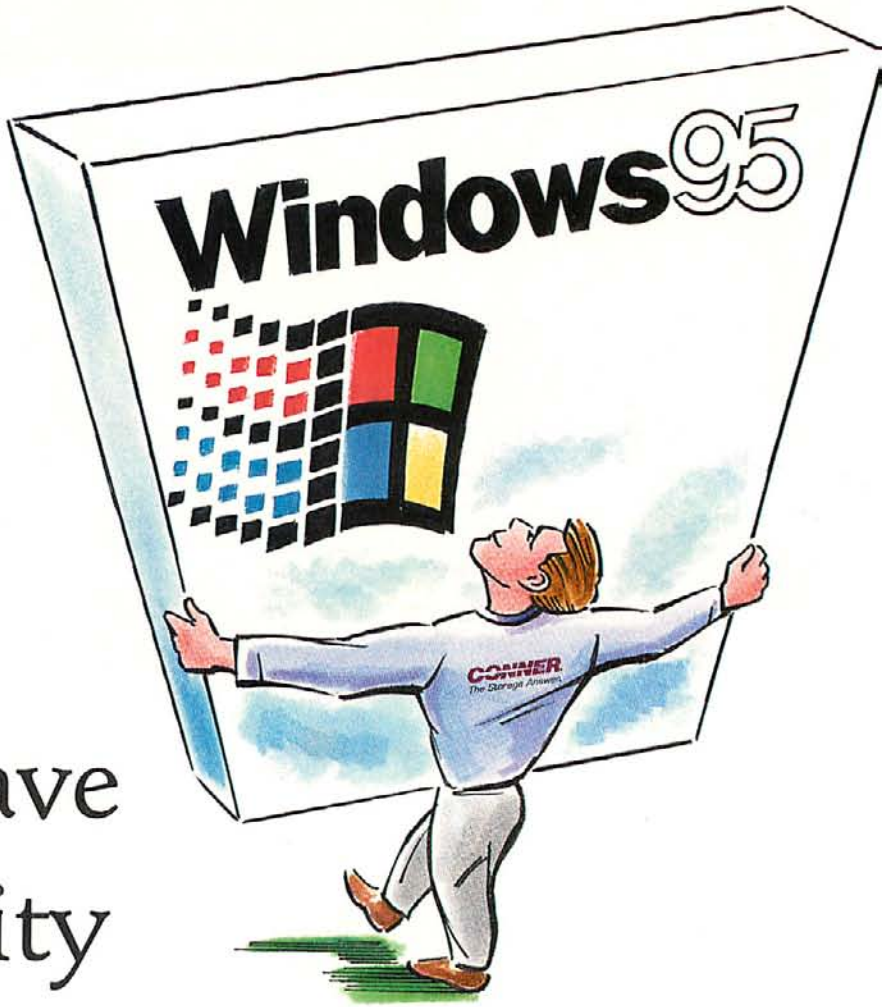

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Are DOS Games Dead?

Windows 95 Is Trying To Prepare The Eulogy

When gamers ask if DOS games are dead or not, they want to know the answer to two different questions. First, will their entire game library become a relic of the past like their 8-bit Atari, Apple and C-64 games; and second, if they can expect the computer game industry to continue to publish DOS games. To paraphrase *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, DOS games are "not quite dead yet." In this issue, we show you how to run DOS games under Windows 95. That should answer the first part of the question. Next, we sneak preview some of the games to be released under Windows 95. The previews should provide some clues for answering the second part of the question.

No matter how solid an operating system's technical capabilities may be and no matter how much marketing buzz there is about a potential gaming platform, the bottom line for gamers will *always* be "How are the games?" Gaming history demonstrates this. The Atari ST was superior to the market-dominating Apple II and C-64, but it didn't win. The Commodore Amiga was years ahead of the CGA-equipped IBM clone in color, sound and interface. It should have become the ultimate game machine, but it didn't. The 3DO had technical wizardry of which the Sega Genesis could never dream, yet the superior machine never surpassed the dinosaur in market share. Macintosh lovers would even argue that their machine is far superior to Windows-based computers, but Windows is dominant in the marketplace.

Actually, Windows is dominant in all but one area—computer games. Now, Windows 95 bears promise of shattering that last bastion of resistance. Industry insiders can talk and write about all the wonderful ways Win 95 will help game designers (see this issue's "Hex, Bugs and Rock 'n Roll" for details), but what the gamer wants to know is: "What's it gonna do for me?" and "How are the games?"

That's what we wanted to know, too. So we offer six Sneak Previews this month of Windows 95 games. And we will have a special Win 95 Games section in September, October and November in hopes that, from the August launch of Win 95 to the opening gun of the holiday buying season, we will provide gamers with enough information to make up their own minds.

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Will DOS Games Run In Windows 95?

by Loyd Case

DOS GAMES DO RUN WELL UNDER WIN 95. HERE'S A LOOK AT WHAT IT TAKES TO GET THEM UP AND RUNNING.

Windows 95 will probably be shipping by the time you read this. In addition to changing the face of desktops around the world, Windows 95 portends major changes in computer gaming. These changes have been described in detail in the pages of this magazine and other computer game publications for several months (see "Microsoft Comes Out To Play" in *CGW* #131 or this month's Hex Bugs & Rock 'N Roll).

Because Windows 95 shows promise in making our computing lives easier, every major game developer on the planet is currently or will soon develop PC games strictly for Windows 95 and not DOS. In the meantime, how well do DOS games run under Windows 95? Our experience is that they run pretty well, and this article will show you how to do that.

But before we rush headlong into this brave new world, you should be asking yourself if you need Windows 95 in the first place. Granted, it promises all sorts of nifty things for productivity and applications, but frankly, this is a gaming magazine, so

we're not concerned with any of that ugly reality stuff. Should you buy Windows 95 because it's supposed to make life easier for *gaming*? Well, that's a good question.

The answer largely depends on what kinds of games you like. If you only play 3-D, graphically-intensive simulations like FLIGHT UNLIMITED, NASCAR RACING, or U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS, you're probably better off staying with DOS and waiting for some high-performance, native-mode Windows 95 simulations. On the other hand, if you prefer adventure, sports, strategy, wargames and action games, Windows 95 may make it easier to run your DOS games.

BEN DOES WINDOWS DOS games such as Full Throttle really can run under Windows 95. Although you can run the game in a window, you'd probably want to play it in full-screen mode.

If this sounds like you, or you've got an insatiable need to be the first one on the block to install Windows 95, then you'll want to read the following techniques on running DOS games under Windows 95.

But no matter what kind of games you play, keep in mind that the number of DOS games available now vastly outnumber those for Windows 95. Until that equation changes, don't feel compelled to rush out and hop on the bandwagon "just to make playing games easier." Playing games *will* eventually be easier, but in the short term you should still expect to have to mess with boot disks, multiple configurations and reboots whenever you want to play a different game. Windows 95 will eliminate some configuration headaches, but it will supplant others with new configuration requirements all its own.

When games written *specifically for* Windows 95 actually start shipping, gamers will be in configuration heaven. Plug-and-Play and AutoPlay will finally allow games to configure themselves automatically to the hardware on an individual system, eliminating the old IRQ-DMA dance and putting an end to conflict hassles once and for all. But until then, we'll still have to contend with the usual configuration headaches that have become so familiar to PC gamers over the last several years.

DYNAMIC DUO

There are really two ways to run DOS games under Windows 95: as a Windows application and as an application that runs under "MS-DOS" mode. You choose which way you want to run by right clicking on the game icon and selecting the appropriate properties setting under "Advanced Properties." Icons are referred to in Windows 95 as "Shortcuts."

Many games will run well as Windows applications. DOOM and HERETIC are good examples. While they will run in a full screen, they are really running in the Windows 95 environment. If you press ALT-TAB (hold down the ALT

RUNNING HOT DOS GAMES UNDER WINDOWS 95

To see just how easy or difficult it would be to run DOS games under Windows 95, we took the top game from each category in the *CGW* Top 100: Adventure, Role Playing, Simulation, Strategy, Wargame, Action and Sports—and put them through their paces under Windows 95. Each game was installed under Windows 95 and played for significant lengths of time to see how it behaved. In all of the following instances, we made icons or "shortcuts" using the Explorer, the native user interface for Windows 95. Here's what we found.

ADVENTURE: DAY OF THE TENTACLE

We ran into an interesting, if weird problem running LucasArts' DAY OF THE TENTACLE: the game wouldn't run from the DOTT.EXE "shell" program. Instead, we had to run TENTACLE.EXE directly. Except for this quirk, the game ran as well as any full-screen application under Windows. We could task switch to other Windows apps with no problems, and return to DAY OF THE TENTACLE. The audio present in the floppy version (mostly MIDI music) played fine.

ROLE PLAYING: BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR

Next, we tried the CD version of BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR. Initially there was a problem with EMS memory, because the default Windows 95 environment that was set up had very little EMS configured. We added QEMM 7.5 to Window 95's CONFIG.SYS file. This proved to be the right answer for BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR. After adding QEMM, everything ran smoothly. There was no apparent frame rate hit, even with detail cranked up and the step size set to "small." Both MIDI and digital audio sounded terrific—no stutters or static.

SIMULATION: NASCAR RACING

We encountered our first real problems with NASCAR Racing from PAPYRUS DESIGN GROUP. We just couldn't get the native Windows 95 environment to have enough low DOS memory to run the game—at least, according to an error message generated by NASCAR. So we created a custom MS-DOS environment—a "virtual boot disk," which the Windows 95 Property Sheet editor refers to as the "MS-DOS mode" (note that the Windows 95 documentation also refers to MS-DOS mode as "Single Applications Mode"). This did the trick and NASCAR ran great as an MS-DOS mode program. In SVGA mode with all graphics options turned on, the frame rate got a little choppy. But that's also true when playing it from DOS. Cranking down the grass and grandstand texturing gave

key and press TAB), you can switch to a different Windows 95 application. You can even run one of these games in a window on the desktop, although performance will suffer dramatically.

The other method of running DOS games is called MS-DOS mode (sometimes referred to as "Single Applications Mode"). If a game runs in MS-DOS mode, Windows 95 reboots the system and gives the game full access to your hardware. There is no software layer between the game and the computer. Almost any DOS application will run in MS-DOS mode. When you end the game, the system reboots back to Windows 95. This is a small inconvenience for a huge gain in usability.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY, BUT I'LL HACK MY OWN

There is a catch though: when you're running Windows 95 in MS-DOS mode, you'll never get quite as much DOS memory—even with tools like QEMM or 386MAX—as you might get with straight MS-DOS. If you have a relatively simple configuration (IDE drive, CD-ROM drive attached to a sound card and few other TSRs or drivers), you can still free up a lot of memory with a good memory manager—enough to run a demanding application like FALCON 3.0, which requires 600K of free lower memory.

If your system setup is more complex, the memory issue can become problematic. For example, our test machine has SCSI hard disks, a mouse and a SCSI CD-ROM drive. Even with Intel's latest motherboard, the best that we gained was about 590 KB (nearly 600,000 bytes) of low DOS memory. That's enough for all but the most onerous of games.

Many new games use DOS extenders (usually identifiable by a line that says "DOS/4G" when executing the game). These games in particular do not have such heavy-duty low DOS memory requirements, so you are more likely to get this type of game to run.

EASY TO USE PROGRAM SETTINGS

Windows 3.1 had a concept called the PIF file (Program Information File). The DOS applications that could run under Windows 3.1 would often require special settings in the PIF file so Windows could give the application the system resources it needed. To run a DOS app under Windows 3.1, you would run the PIF editor and specify a bunch of arcane, ill-defined settings. And often, despite anyone's best efforts, if the application was a game it wouldn't run anyways.

Well, Windows 95 still has PIF files, but they're now called "Property Sheets" and they are much easier to set up. Property Sheets are configured mostly by pointing and clicking on settings. The only tricky part is if the game needs to run in MS-DOS mode. Under MS-DOS mode, you can actually specify custom CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT settings—sort of a "virtual boot disk." It can get tedious typing in long lines for each game you wish to do this for, and there's no obvious paste command. However, you can paste in preset configurations.

Here's an example: let's say you have CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files that you know work with a given game, perhaps on a boot disk. First, you invoke the Property Sheet by right-clicking on a given game icon and selecting MS-DOS mode. You'll want to transfer your configuration file information into the property sheet. The best way to do it is to run Windows' Notepad and open your custom CONFIG.SYS file. Next, select the entire file and copy it to the clipboard, because you're going to paste it into the game's Property Sheet.

Once you've copied the file to the clipboard, click on the program tab and then click the button labeled "Advanced." Then press the radio buttons labeled "MS-DOS Mode" and "Specify a New MS-DOS Configuration." Pressing the RIGHT button will pop up a dialog box that allows you more than acceptable performance on our 90 MHz Pentium system.

STRATEGY: X-COM: UFO DEFENSE

X-COM was *CGW*'s game of the year for 1994, so if it wouldn't play under Windows 95, it wouldn't be pretty. X-COM installed and ran flawlessly as a Windows application (full screen, of course.)

ALIENS ATE MY DESKTOP A low-res DOS game such as X-COM can run over the entire Windows 95 desktop. You can easily switch to full-screen mode, where the game looks indistinguishable from running under DOS.

We didn't have to tweak Windows 95, memory managers or any other system software. In short, we made a Shortcut icon point to the program and started kicking alien butt. The music and sound effects worked great, and there were no apparent performance problems.

WAR GAMES: PANZER GENERAL

The installation procedure for the PANZER GENERAL CD proceeded smoothly until the sound setup program came up. PANZER GENERAL's sound setup autodetects sound cards with no manual override. It claimed our MIDI configuration didn't exist; it also failed to detect a SOUND BLASTER AWE-32, so it set up the game with no audio. PANZER GENERAL ran great, but without sound it's not exactly an immersive experience. The trick was to run both the install program and the game as separate MS-DOS mode applications. As an MS-DOS mode program, PANZER GENERAL worked without a hitch, explosions and all. Remember, MS-DOS mode can be invoked with a custom configuration via a Shortcut icon, like we did with NASCAR RACING, or you can select a more generic MS-DOS mode (i.e., without the custom AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS) under the "Shut Down" menu screen.

ACTION: WING COMMANDER III

WING COMMANDER III is a blockbuster DOS game

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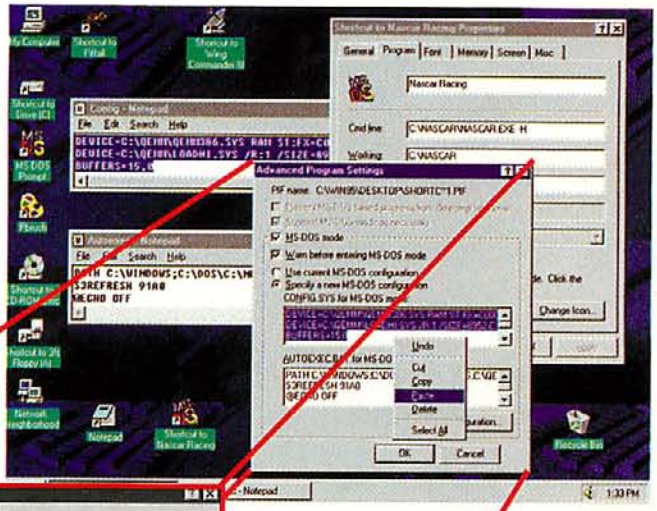
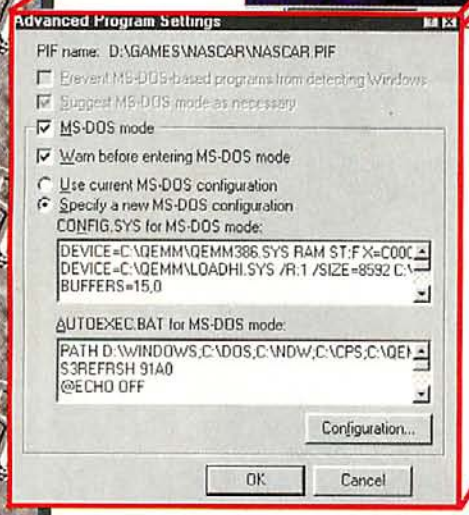
to select PASTE from a pop-up menu. (Or, for those keyboard hacks out there, you can place the text cursor in the text box labeled "CONFIG.SYS for MS-DOS mode" and press the control (CTRL) and "V" keys simulaneously). Voila. You're entire custom configuration is copied to the text window.





A WINDOWS 95 "PIF" STOP To play NASCAR RACING under Win 95, we created a custom MS-DOS mode configuration. Creating a custom config is a simple matter of "cut and paste."

You then do the same for the AUTOEXEC.BAT window. There is only one caveat: do *not* leave a blank line or other non-printing character after the last line of the custom AUTOEXEC.BAT. Instead of seeing your game run, you'll you'll be staring at the DOS prompt when you click on the icon to run the game. You can still use DOS commands at this point to run the game, but that kind of defeats the purpose.

BUT I JUST WANT DOS

Some game players might want to run Windows 95 and still be able to boot up in DOS sometimes. You can still start a previous version of DOS by pressing the F4 key during bootup. Unfortunately, Windows 95 is not like Windows 3.x where you can run and exit from Windows on a whim. However, there are two ways around this. If you upgrade from an earlier version of Windows 3.x, don't install Windows 95 in the same directory, but rather, install Windows 95 into its own separate directory. If you have the hard disk space, this is the way to go. What this does is create a special Windows 95 multi-boot configuration (much like the DOS 6 multi-boot capability). When you restart your computer, watch for the message "Starting Windows 95," (which appears just after the floppy drives are tested), then press the F4 function key. If you got the timing right, you'll now be back in your old version of DOS, including your own CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files

All in all, Windows 95 is much more game-friendly than Windows 3.x. So while we're all waiting for those cool, easily configurable Windows 95 games to ship, we can still run our old friends and keep right on playing.

and we couldn't imagine Microsoft ignoring it. Its hunger for system resources is second only to its popularity in the marketplace. We right-clicked on the desktop, selected "Shortcut" under the "New" menu option and pointed it to the WC3.EXE file on the CD-ROM. With baited breath, we watched it run flawlessly on our 90 MHz Pentium. We had a WING COMMANDER III campaign in progress, so we zipped through several missions. The frame rate was smooth in SVGA (as it should be on a 90 MHz Pentium).

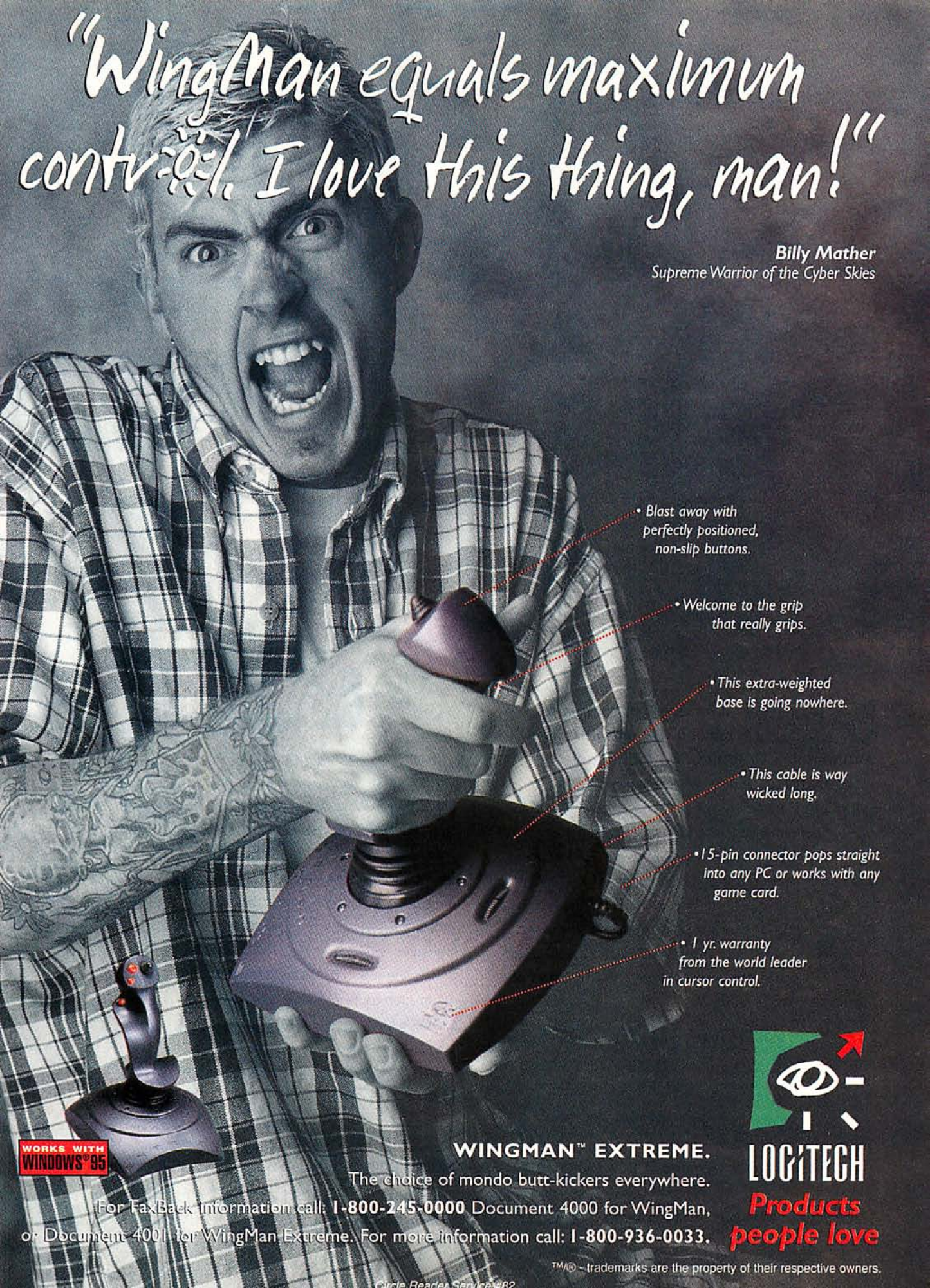
HOW MUCH FOR THAT KITTY IN WINDOWS? You can run demanding DOS games under Windows 95 with little or no trouble. We were out chasing Kilrathi pilots as fast as we could make a simple Shortcut icon.

SPORTS: FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO 95

When running our last game in this test, FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO 95, a dialog box popped up and actually told us to run the game as an MS-DOS mode application. There was even a help button that informed us that the problem was with audio. FOOTBALL PRO 95 demands 580 KB of low DOS memory. To get that much free DOS memory in a custom MS-DOS mode scenario, we ran QEMM's OPTIMIZE program. OPTIMIZE performed flawlessly, yielding a configuration under Windows 95 of almost 590 KB, including SCSI driver, CD-ROM driver, mouse driver and MSCDEX. Upon copying the newly-created configuration to the custom MS-DOS mode box in the Property Sheet (to duplicate the environment), we were able to successfully play a full exhibition game without a problem.

IS IT CURTAINS FOR DOS?

All in all, Windows 95 was very impressive in how it handled this suite of the top-rated DOS games in our *CGW* Top 100. With surprisingly few tweaks—certainly no worse than configuring them for DOS—all of the games we tested ran better than we expected.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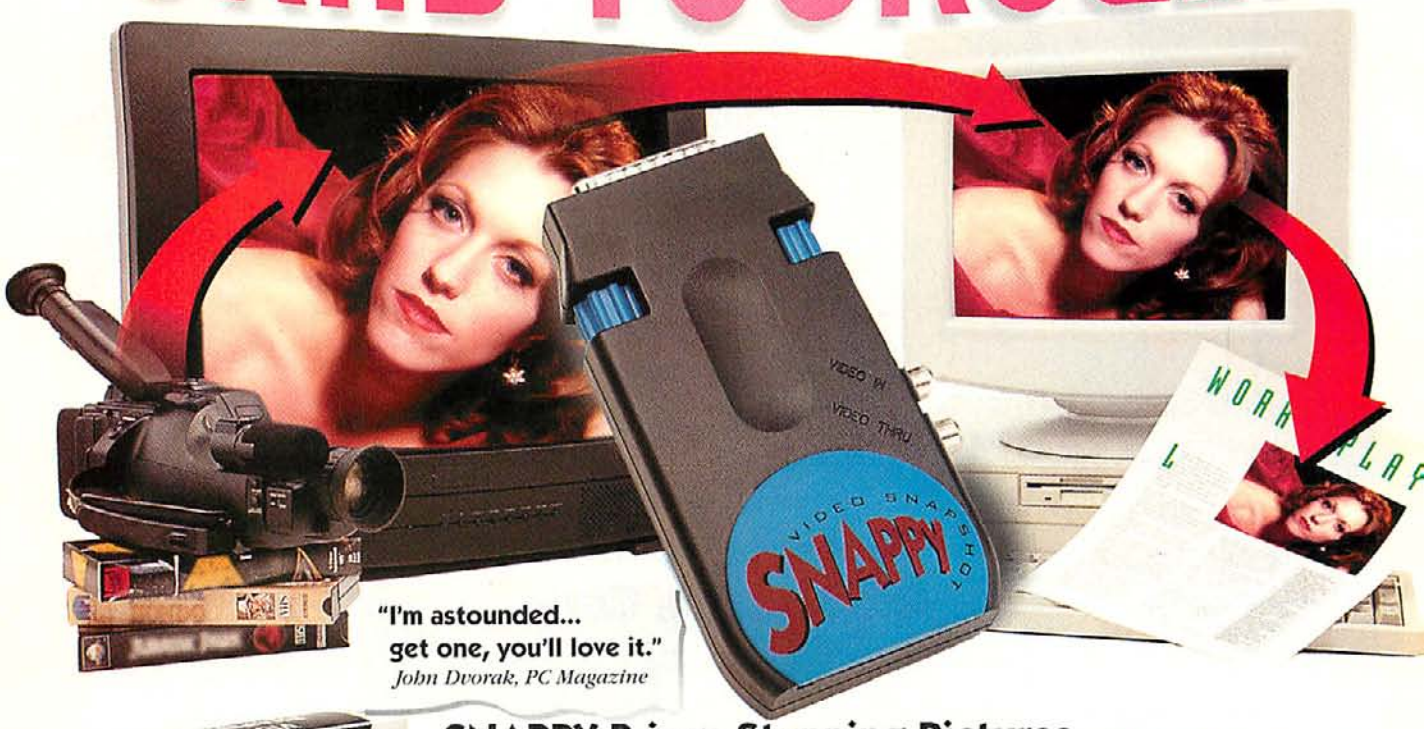

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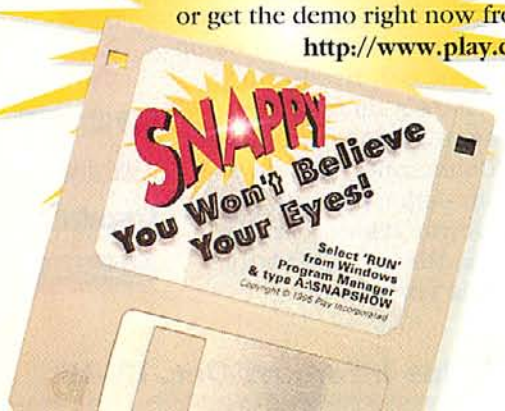

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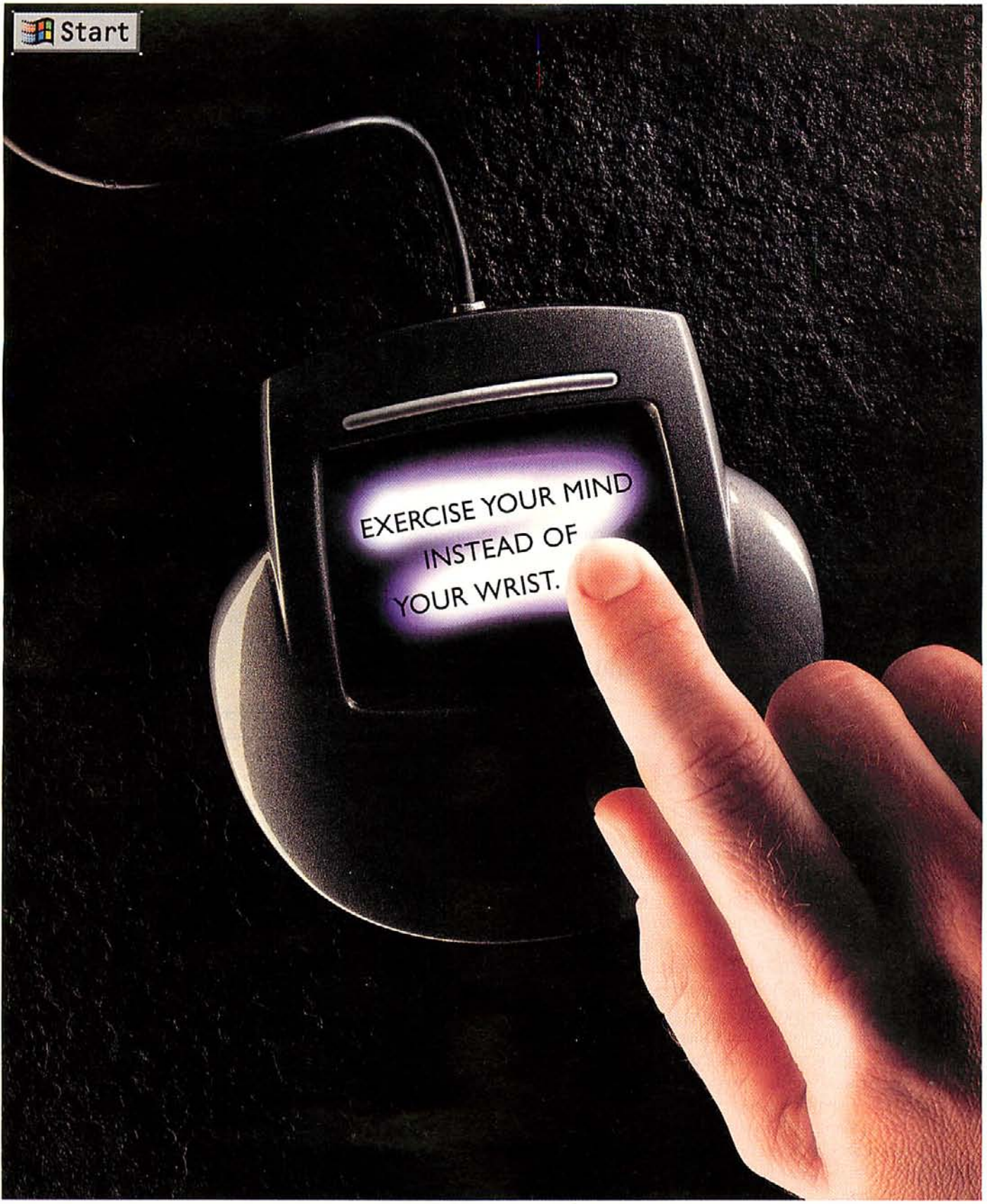

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LucasArts Finally Unearths The Dig

...And Takes Gamers Down A Cosmic Rabbit Hole

by Allen L. Greenberg

SPIELBERGIAN SPACE THE DIG'S story, created by Steven Spielberg, begins with a routine space mission. But the events that unfold, and some of the game's special effects, are anything but ordinary.

After four years in the making, LucasArts is finally preparing the release of THE DIG, the much-touted graphic adventure based on a story by Steven Spielberg. Although the game seems to have had a number of sources of inspiration, including the John Huston film *Treasure Of The Sierra Madre*, the program's intriguing opening sequence does more to evoke the tumble down the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*. This is a story which begins as modern-day science fiction, based firmly on technology which can easily be extrapolated from that of the 20th century. Then, following a quick and innocent manipulation of certain objects, the program carries the player into a mysterious, though not quite so whimsical, *Wonderland*.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

THE DIG is as close to hard-core science fiction as adventure gamers have seen in a long time. Set in the familiar **LucasArts** adventure environment, it also incorporates some eye-opening video technology which will easily set new standards in the genre as well as the industry.

BOSTON IN WONDERLAND

The story involves an asteroid, code-named *Attila*, which drifts over towards our own solar system. You are Captain Boston Low, leader of a team of official, yet somewhat presumptuous, NASA diggers and meddlers. The remainder of your team consists of an archaeologist and a scribe, neither of whom have any initial complaints when it comes to following your orders. Unfortunately, once it is apparent that you are no longer in the skies above Kansas, both team members would rather assert their individual talents. Thus, the archeologist insists that he is the safest digger, a fact which may or may not be true, and the writer would rather walk off on her own to discover whatever she can. In the mean time, you are left by yourself to discover the alien technology and whether or not it has the ability to carry you home.

YOU SOUND DEAD Trying to communicate with ghosts on dead planets wasn't part of Commander Low's weekend itinerary.

While you may or may not reach home, you will soon discover that the alien architect who established this base was very concerned with transportation, and the various modes thereof make for some outstanding video effects which should be even more impressive than the unfinished examples which we were able to see. These include a hollow-marble "tram" which speeds through an other-worldly bowling-ball gutter at break-neck speeds, and several mysterious, though quite functional, "light bridges," complete with a set of lenses and "on-off" switches.

Many of the rooms you will explore are designed in three dimensions.

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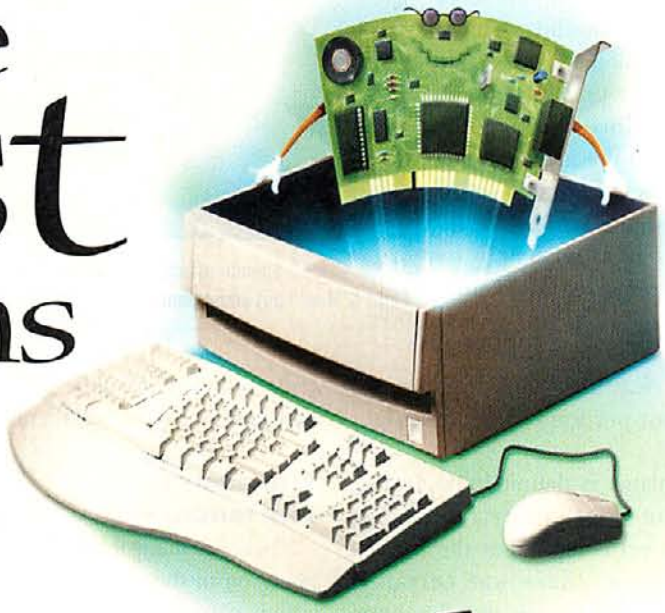

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Thus, you will be able to move across them and sense that you are traveling in a circle which will lead you back to your starting-point. There is a lot to explore through the rooms, and the many caverns and tunnels require no less than Indiana Jones-like instincts. This is no simple set of interconnected catacombs, however, and the many modes of transportation make it clear that you are taking in a significant portion of this mysterious planet.

SPACE CUBED Special effects created by Industrial Light & Magic put some punch into THE DIG's look.

The planet is definitely populated. While not all of the creature animation was yet complete at the time of the preview, there was certainly enough to convince us that the three-dimensional techniques used to animate these monstrosities are quite innovative and nothing less than outstanding. Many of the crypt-like rooms will be under guard by these critters, and so it will be up to you to defeat as well as admire them.

THE GHOST AND THE MACHINES

There are many intriguing mysteries going on in the story, not the least of which concerns the creator of this strange establishment and his or her purpose for bringing it into existence. However, it is the machinery, as well as its proper operation, which proves to be the ultimate riddle, as well as your greatest prospect for returning home. A mysterious type of green jewel appears to have the power over life and death. Is it truly a benefit or a danger in disguise? The only one who appears to know the answer is an amorphous ghost whose powers of communication make it less than valuable as a reliable source of information.

There are plenty of mechanical puzzles to be solved in THE DIG, and most of these involve figuring out how to manipulate the planetary machinery. While there are many puzzles with simple and obvious solutions, there is also a variety which will cost gamers more than a few minutes of intense concentration. Exactly how difficult, as well as how eye-opening the final product's special effects turn out to be, remains to be seen in the final product.

THE DIG was one of several products which are being prepared for Windows 95 release. At the time of this preview, however, the game was still in DOS format.

DIGGING INTO THE DIG'S HISTORY

Back when Skywalker Ranch was the home of Lucasfilm Games (now LucasArts), computer game designers occasionally rubbed shoulders with some of Hollywood's entertainment elite. Folks like Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, Linda Ronstadt and Mick Jagger were but a few of the guests at George Lucas' company headquarters, which uses a Victorian-style ranch with stables, gatehouses, conservatory and winery to harbor offices, foley studios, and sound stages along with a THX-equipped movie theater, beautiful library, restaurant and recreation center.

In fact, frequent guest Steven Spielberg would occasionally drop in on game designers at the "stable" because he was an avid player of Larry Holland's air combat games (BATTLEHAWKS 1942, THEIR FINEST HOUR and SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE). Spielberg also loved the company's graphic adventures, being expressly fond of LOOM and THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND.

Knowing the game designers as he did, Spielberg could call them up as his personal hint line whenever he would get stuck on a puzzle. Naturally, the designers didn't mind being Steven Spielberg's personal game counselors, and Spielberg felt good about their products. So, during one such call, Spielberg had an intriguing idea. It seems that his foray into television production hadn't quite shown the Midas Touch he had displayed in film production. His *Amazing Stories* television experiment had been cancelled, and his production company, **Amblin Entertainment**, was sticking with feature films. Yet, he had this unproduced script that just might make an interesting computer game.

So, THE DIG was started. Believe it or not, it was initiated at approximately the same time as LECHUCK'S REVENGE: THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND II was coming to fruition (late '91). But even then, it engendered a false start. Former executive Doug Glen had prematurely announced the game in Europe at their ECTS computer show, but Spielberg wasn't quite ready to have his name associated with the computer game project without additional assurances that he would have final sign-off on the game and any changes to the story. As a result, LucasArts' PR was denying the existence of the game to *Computer Gaming World* at the very time European magazines were beginning to write about it. CGW's Editor-in-Chief (then, an associate editor) vividly remembers pulling out a flat file drawer labeled "The Dig" during a tour of the art department and asking, "Is this the game that doesn't exist?"

Then, almost immediately, work came to a screeching halt. The first designer, Noah Falstein (now an employee of the Spielberg, Katzenberg, and Geffen-owned **Dreamworks SKG**), left the company, and famous game designer Brian Moriarty (TRINITY, LOOM) began reworking the project. Ironically, Moriarty was to leave the company over some of the same issues that constrained Falstein's departure. One source suggests that the company kept stripping personnel resources from the project in order to finish less-ambitious games. Others suggested that the stress associated with working with a high-profile celebrity like Spielberg got to both of them. The truth may never be known.

What we do know is that THE DIG still carries some of its famous legacy. It is one part *Amazing Stories*, a few parts of Brian Moriarty's puzzles, an improved version of the SCUMM game engine running under Windows 95, and some intricate reworking of the game structure by the current design team. To add extra visual excitement—and perhaps offset the dated graphics in much of the game—THE DIG also features some intriguing special effects by Lucas' Industrial Light & Magic, which proves that LucasArts' eventually did invest some of their resources into the game.

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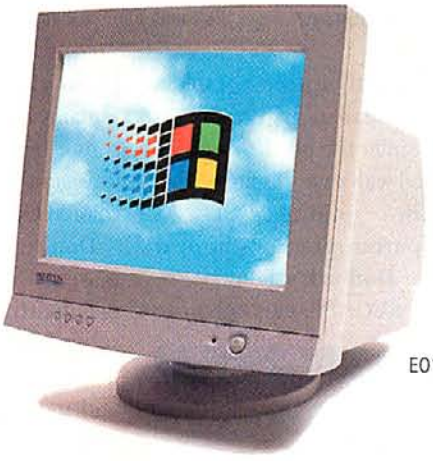

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Russian Roulette

SSI Flies Far From Home To Bring An SU-27 Back From Mother Russia

by Tom "KCski" Basham

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

What do you get when you combine a Russian design team with the UK contingent of **Mindscape** under the marketing umbrella of **SSI?** You get SU-27, one of the most exciting "hard-core" flight simulations currently in development. First revealed at last May's E3 convention in Los Angeles, SU-27, a simulation of the Russian Su-27 Flanker fighter jet, easily stole the show. Although still under development at the time of this writing, SU-27 exhibits considerable potential to unseat FALCON 3.0 as king of the hard-core simulations.

"THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH YOUR SCREEN..." The Russians show us their way of designing a HUD.

NO PHOTOGRAPHY PERMITTED

SU-27 begins with a strong graphics engine using clean polygon shapes which do not suffer the pixelation problems associated with many "state-of-the-art" graphics engines. SU-27's somewhat spartan graphics appear more akin to **Domark's** FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT and SVGA HARRIER than to **MicroProse's** richly texture-mapped PACIFIC AIR WAR. Personally, I have always preferred the former style over the latter due to its crisp, clear views. Objects remain identifiable and recognizable at much greater ranges instead of reduced to an amorphous glob of colored pixels. An F-16 remains identifiable as an F-16 at long range because the program tries to draw an F-16 shape, not reduce a multi-colored Gouraud-shaded image.

Don't get the wrong impression, however. SU-27 objects are not "plain" or "unattractive" by any means. Insignia and logos still adorn aircraft, weapons are visible under the wings, and most objects feature many small, moving details. For example, all moving control surfaces on each aircraft are visible: the nose wheel actually turns when taxiing; ailerons, rudders, and elevators all move; ground-based radar units and ships feature numerous rotating antennas.

On the down side, some users may be disappointed with the quality of "smoke" effects in the accompanying screen shots. Smoke from missile engines, burning aircraft, etc., is of fairly simplistic design; however, there is lots of it. *All* missiles leave smoke trails while the motor is burning. During a dogfight it's not uncommon to see numerous

GOT CHAFF? An R-73 missile streaks from the Su-27 toward an unwary F-16.

HOW A FLANKER OUTFOXED A FALCON

Having completed basic flight proficiency in the Su-27, Frontal Aviation shipped me and my squadron to Crimea where war had erupted with the Ukraine. Sitting on the tarmac about to launch into my first combat mission, I watched the engine RPM slowly spool up to "idle power," or roughly 60%. With the wheel brakes still engaged I lowered the flaps and increased throttle to full military power. As I waited impatiently for several long seconds while the engines slowly crawled to 100% power, the increasing thrust began pushing the nose downward. When at last the needle indicated full power, I pushed the throttle forward toward full afterburner. Releasing the wheel brake, the nose lurched upwards and my wingman and I began rolling down the rough runway.

The nose bobbed as the wheels rolled over the scabrous surface. At 340 kilometers per hour (kph) I pulled the stick back into my lap and crawled into the sky. Quickly I raised the gear and flaps but remained in afterburner; a nearby A-50 Mainstay AWACS had reported a pair of aircraft launching at a nearby airstrip and heading south towards Russian airspace. US Air Force F-16s had deployed to that same airbase just 48 hours ago, and my wingman and I hoped for the opportunity to test our mettle in battle against the venerable Falcon. Still at full afterburner, I began a right banking climb with my wingman holding good fingertip formation. His aircraft drifted a little low in the turn, but quickly regained perfect for-

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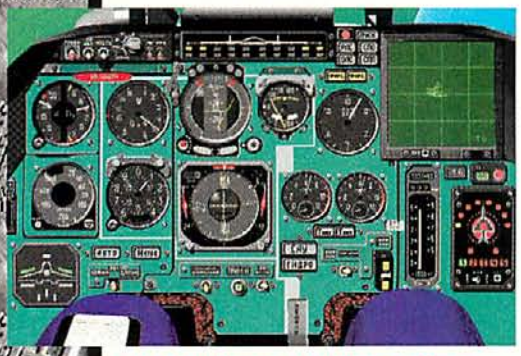
white streaks extending across the virtual sky. Of course, once the missile's motor burns out the smoke trail stops. It's extremely easy to fixate on the white smoke trails and forget that the missile is a virtually invisible dot speeding toward you. At short ranges, where the missile engine burns for most of the flight, these smoke trails greatly assist defensive pilots in evading the weapon. Further, Mindscape indicates that the smoke effects are not finalized, and the finished project may look significantly better than what we've depicted here.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

The entire cockpit utilizes the Cyrillic alphabet. Although it won't take long to adapt to, players a little familiar with the Russian language will probably learn the cockpit faster than those who aren't. All instrumentation uses metric units, listing speed in kilometers per hour and altitude in meters. For those of us used to flying "American Iron," it takes a little getting used to. SU-27's avionics suite falls somewhere between



DON'T FLY WITHOUT YOUR ROSETTA STONE
At first glance, this complex Russian cockpit, replete with authentic Cyrillic labels, may look intimidating. But after a few hours of flying you should be able to figure out how to use the instruments.

FALCON 3.0 and **Digital Integration's** TORNADO. The level of instrumentation compares to TORNADO, while the avionics complexity compares to FALCON 3.0's HFR (Hi-Fidelity) radar mode. The cockpit follows standard Russian instrumentation designs, which will also take some getting used to. Whereas most Western attitude indicators show the horizon, Russian equivalents display the aircraft's wing, in effect appearing "backwards" to Western pilots. These little touches significantly increase the "suspension of disbelief" and improve the overall realism of the experience. Other games designed to simulate Russian aircraft often utilize fully Anglicized symbology and artwork, thus degrading the authenticity of the experience.

Although retaining an air-to-ground capability, the Su-27 is primarily an interceptor. Accordingly, the avionics suite focuses on air-to-air combat. Of the six avionics modes, four focus on air-to-air combat, one focuses on air-to-ground targeting, and the last one is used solely for navigational purposes. Pilots familiar with FALCON 3.0's HFR, FLEET DEFENDER, or F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III will have little problem using SU-27's radar system. Although implementation obviously varies, the basic concepts of range, azimuth, and elevation remain consistent.

COMRADES IN ARMS

SU-27 includes a wide variety of air-to-air and air-to-ground ordnance. Besides powered weapons leaving smoke trails, all ordnance follows realistic flight paths. Many missiles make rapid, ballistic climbs while the motor runs and then dives onto the target. It's not uncommon to watch air-to-air missiles "snake" toward their targets. Weapons seem to enact a realistic penalty on their targets; however, for debugging purposes this particular beta version grants the player three lives, making it difficult to determine exactly how the damage model works. The final version, obviously, will grant the player only one life.

The campaign engine was not completed at the time of this writing, but is best described as "FALCON 3.0 on steroids." The size of the combat arena seems comparable (and is primarily centered on Crimea). Unlike FALCON 3.0, the player will have much more choice about their level of command. SU-27 will offer four levels of play: 1) training missions; 2) single missions assigned by the computer; 3) Squadron-leader campaigns requiring

mation position.

We leveled off at 3,000 meters and 1,000 kph. Activating both radar and IRST, I adjusted the multi-function display (MFD) to 250Km range. Seeing no contacts directly ahead, I began slowly panning the azimuth scan left and right while simultaneously raising and lowering the elevation scan. They were out there; above or below me, they were out there and I would find them. After a few tense mo-

YANK 'N BANK Initiating a high G turn in the Su-27

ments, my scan hit pay dirt: a pair of contacts still over 100km out. Reducing the range on my MFD I began developing our intercept geometry. At 65km my R-77 radar-guided missile locked onto the lead aircraft. The Missile Envelope Indicator on the HUD indicated the targeted aircraft was just outside the R-77's effective flight envelope. Bringing my aircraft to the right, I watched the small square representing the target slide inside the circle representing the missile's effective envelope.

The radar lock apparantly betrayed our presence to the two aircraft, because they immediately turned hard right and directly toward us. Glancing at the HUD, I saw the target was flying at a mere 1500 meters and 500kph. We had altitude and airspeed over our potential adversary. Suddenly the image of a MiG-21, which served as my Radar Warning Receiver, lit up; our adversaries had radar-locked my aircraft. Still suspecting

LOCKED, COCKED, AND READY TO ROCK! A US F-16 loaded, quite literally, for Bear.

these were American F-16s and knowing I was now within AIM-120 range I decided to shoot first and ask questions later. Squeezing

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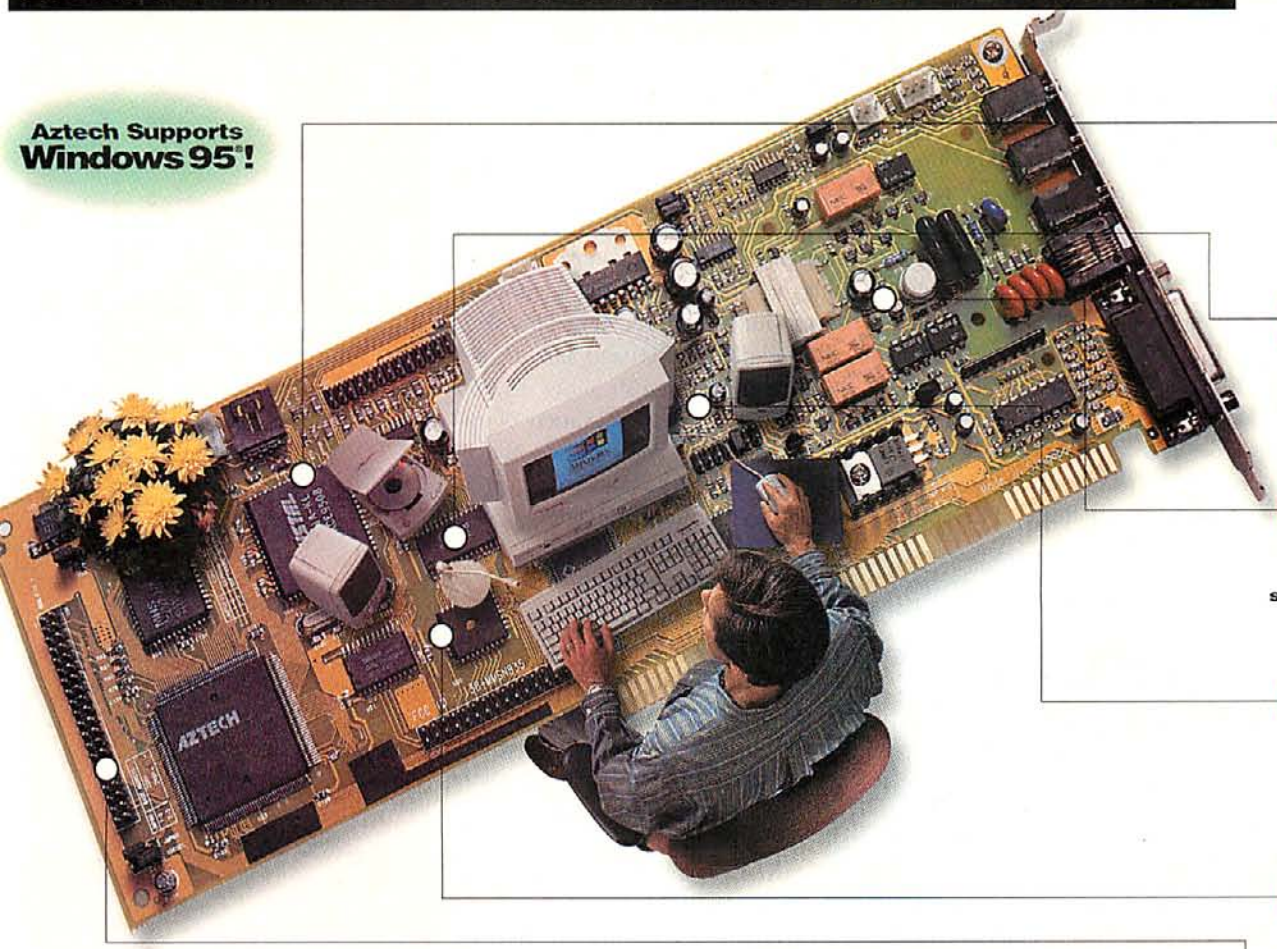

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the player to perform command level duties similar to that of FALCON 3.0, as well as manage resources and monitor intel reports; and 4) Theater commander campaigns which gives the player total control over friendly assets in theater as well as responsibility for flying individual missions.

To handle ordnance management, the mission editor uses pre-defined packages for various types of missions. Prior to a mission, you select an armament package rather than loading individual weapons on hardpoints. SU-27 also includes a replay mode—an extremely useful feature which few simulations bother to include. The replay mode lets you relive the mission from numerous internal and external perspectives as well as re-enter the mission at any point.

I CAN SEE YOUR UNDERWEAR Underwing stores of R-73 and R-77 missiles are clearly visible under this Su-27's wings.

NO VODKA PERMITTED IN THE KOCKPIT

The burning question, as always, is "how does it fly?" The answer, in a nutshell, is: quite well. It accounts for altitude and weight, includes descent AOA (Angle Of Attack) effects, along with inertia and momentum. The real Su-27 has an AOA limiter set around 30 degrees (unclassified sources quote anywhere from 26 to 34 degrees) which the pilot can override to perform high alpha (flying at or near 30 degrees AOA without losing altitude) maneuvers such as airshow routines like the "Cobra." Currently, the Mindscape SU-27's AOA limiter restricts operations to about 30 degrees AOA and is not pilot overridable. A separate key is provided to execute a Cobra maneuver when you're within initial parameters. Hopefully the final version will allow users to override the AOA limiter at will.

The SU-27 flight model covers all the basics. It loses speed under high g turns, it models AOA and can descend with the nose high. Control authority varies with speed (becoming fairly sluggish under 340 KPH) and altitude (becoming quite sluggish above 15,000 meters), and it includes a variety of upright and inverted spins. Users can execute other airshow maneuvers such as high-alpha passes and tail slides.

NUTS AND VOLTS

So, how much CPU horsepower does all of this require? If you're thinking about upgrading to a Pentium you might want to hold off for a bit. The original program written by the Russian design team was designed for a 286 CPU and EGA graphics! The boxed version of SU-27 will have one CD-ROM containing four versions of the software, according to Mindscape. An EGA version designed for use on a 386 (that's no typo), a 640x480, 256-color, DOS-based version requiring a 486-33, an SVGA version for WINDOWS 3.1 also requiring a 486-33, and a WINDOWS 95 version requiring a 486-66. Details on any differences between these versions (other than graphics quality) are not currently available. This DOS-based preview version runs smoothly on the testbed 486DX50 with 8Mb and VLB graphics. SU-27 could become the poster child for well-written, CPU-efficient code.

In summary, SU-27 shows considerable promise. The amount of work completed thus far indicates the remaining project goals are far from unattainable. Intended to be the first in a series of hard-core flight simulators, SU-27 should expand the product-starved hard-core flight simulator market as well as establish **SSI/Mindscape** as flight simulation producers.

the trigger I was gratified with the white contrail left by R-77 roaring from my starboard wing. The missile climbed until the white contrail disappeared at which point I knew the motor had burnt out and the missile was now diving at the target.

About the moment my R-77 struck its target, more warning lights went off in my cockpit; the targets had returned fire. We were now less than 20km apart and I switched my HUD from DVB mode (long-range intercept mode) to BVB mode (close-range air combat mode). I saw a white streak climbing toward me from the surviving opponent and began releasing countermeasures. After a quick break turn, I watched the missile streak harmlessly past me.

We were now within visual range and I could easily identify the aircraft passing over my right shoulder; the surviving adversary was indeed an F-16! The Falcon broke into a high-G turn while I lit the afterburners and went vertical. I was nearly 2,000 meters above the F-16 and nearly over the top when it pitched up into me. Anxious to take a shot I pulled hard on the stick despite having lost considerable airspeed in the climb. With little warning my Flanker broke into an inverted spin.

I spun rapidly and disorientingly toward the earth, pulling out of the spin at approximately 500 meters. Hastily searching the sky, I found the F-16 chasing my wingman in a series of vertical loops. Igniting the afterburners again I pulled up into the F-16 and joined the chase. The F-16, apparently low on energy, wallowed above me. Obtaining a lock, I fired an R-73 and watched the IR-guided missile snake toward the Falcon. The American jet shook with an explosion as I watched its pilot eject.

ON THE PROWL Anti-aircraft defenses were surprisingly light on this sortie.

Having spent considerable time in afterburner, my fuel supply was getting dangerously low. My wingman rejoined as I switched the HUD back to navigation mode and headed back to base. We were both low on fuel as we entered the pattern, but still executed a beautiful formation landing and rollout.

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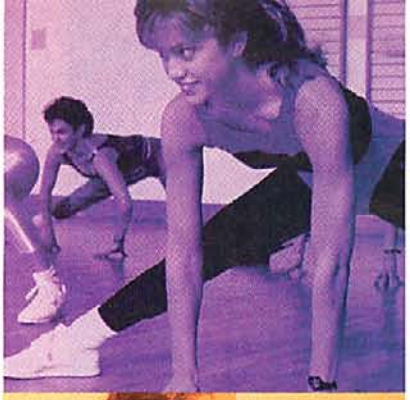

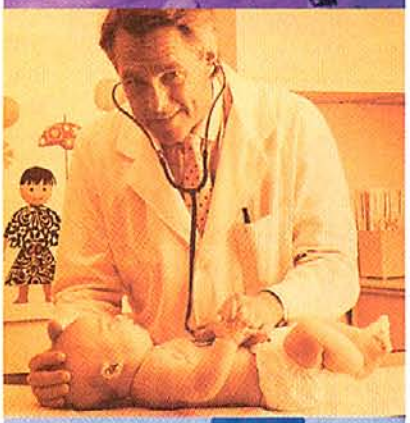

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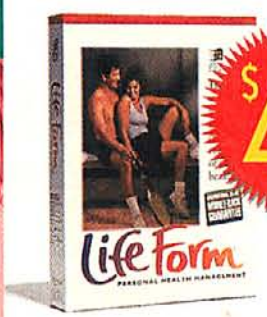

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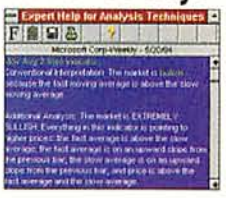

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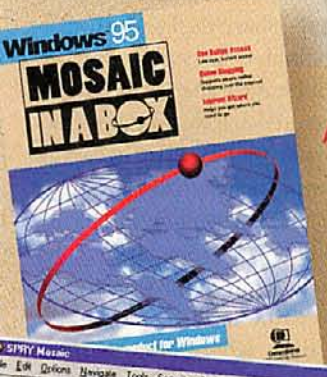

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Circle Reader Service #106

Practical Chess Openings

Chessmaster 5000 Brings The Award-Winning Series To The Windows 95 Frontier

by Terry Lee Coleman

ENDLESS EVENTS The database contains not just classic games, but also nearly every master tournament of note from the past 130 years—a chess fan's dream.

While some might argue for GO or Pente, most gamers would agree that Chess is the greatest of all pure strategy games. Despite being subjected to intense analysis for centuries, Chess still manages to delight generation after generation with its unique combination of tactics, finesse, logic and brute force—with no dice or cards anywhere in sight. Even the most cynical of observers can hardly fail to be impressed by the elegance of a Capablanca endgame, the audacity of a Tal sacrifice, or the overall virtuosity of a Fischer or Kasparov at their best.

It is hardly surprising, then, that when **Mindscape** changed its name from **Software Toolworks**, it didn't change the things which made the CHESSMASTER series the company's all-time best-seller. CHESSMASTER 5000 builds on the momentum of CM4000 by improving the interface, library, tutorials, databases, and a host of other features. One thing, however, remains essentially the same: the core engine.

In the highly competitive world of computer chess, this decision would seem to come as somewhat of a surprise, since every other month seems to bring yet another chess program, with each in succession claiming superiority over all the others. While there are methods of rating the relative strengths of computer chess programs, all of these are fraught with practical difficulties. For example, in a recent chess event specifically set up for computer chess competition, one of the competitors was allowed to run off of a mainframe, while others (such as CHESSMASTER) simply used their normal hardware, in most cases a Pentium chip or small stand-alone chess processor. Especially considering the disparities in equipment, the CHESSMASTER acquitted itself well, earning an expert rating. Since this rating was achieved under strict tournament conditions, it means that the highest level of CM5000 will be able to regularly defeat over 98% of all human chess players.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

"PAWNS ARE THE VERY SOUL OF CHESS."
—ANDRE PHILIDOR

One weakness of most chess programs is an inability to play good positional chess, something CHESSMASTER handles better than most programs. Basically, what most chess engines do is look for the best move by the classic "tree-branching" method, their strength coming mainly from being able to make quicker searches than a human via their speedy processors. What sets CM5000 apart is that the program plays a solid positional game along with the sharp tactics which characterize computer chess play in general. It understands the intricacies of pawn structure—backward pawns, isolated pawns, pawn majorities and passed pawns—better than most other chess software. The program is equally adept at building a strong pawn center and tearing it down in ways that would have pleased the most esoteric of the Hyper-modern school of Grandmasters.

The positional abilities of the CHESSMASTER series have developed to the point where it is amusing to look at the weaker defensive play of CM3000, a program barely more than two years old. More advanced players will delight that the program can launch a terrifying attack on an uncastled King in open games, or remain patient in quieter openings. Even in CM4000, I could still challenge the computer more often on positional than tactical grounds; the increased efficiency of the CM5000 engine should make it a stronger opponent in this area.

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THE GOOD GUYS

CM5000 and previous versions of CHESSMASTER is that CM5000 is a 32-bit application built to take advantage of Windows 95. It is even compatible with Windows NT. Speed of graphics, especially screen redraw, is noticeably faster than in CM4000 (a Windows 3.1 application), and the new program's palette of colors is even more stunning. The tweaking done with the autoplay and install functions of Win 95 allows you to pick and choose from different chess sets and boards. If I wanted a blue marble 3D chessboard with dinosaur playing pieces, I could choose this as my default board, and watch T-Rexes roam the world once more.

The interface has undergone a radical change as well, with right mouse-clicking finally supported for such things as rotating the board. The pull-down menus and buttons are still there (although modified to make them easier to find and use), but it is the new "tabbed" views which will allow increased flexibility for both the casual and hardcore chess enthusiast. Every tab can sport a different look: You could, for example, switch from a game on one tab to a chess problem on another tab. If you were at a critical juncture in a complicated position, you could set the position up on up to five tabs, trying a different strategy on each different board! Serious chess players could even run their own simultaneous exhibition, using a different computer opponent on up to five boards. The tabs are a boon for analysis of openings, and an incredible help in leading one through the complex maze of Rook and Pawn endgame studies.

Using the tabs, you could even play games against multiple human opponents. E-mail, modem and Internet play are supported, the latter having a clever way of getting around the usual latency problems. First, unlike most strategy games, chess only allows the movement of one piece per turn. Since the pieces are pre-rendered in *3D-Studio*, there should be minimal time lost while the screen refreshes after an opponent's move. Also, the programming team is attempting to synchronize time controls. Fairly simple with a discrete server, this is more difficult for direct Internet connections.

"I DEFEATED CAPABLANCA BECAUSE I STUDIED ALL HIS GAMES. I KNEW HOW HE THOUGHT."
—ATTRIBUTED TO ALEXANDER ALEKHINE

With the addition of better natural language advice to transform mysterious Chess references into understandable prose, CM5000 features even more on-line help than its predecessors. Theoretically, you could be playing a game via modem and ask the computer to analyze your opponent's last move. The designers are considering a "lockout" button as an option, with its use to be agreed on by players prior to their game's beginning. In any case, the information on each tab, whether an opening, chess problem, tournament game, or any game versus either a computer or human opponent, may be saved after completion or *in progress*. Thus, each game in a tournament may be flagged for saving, allowing a user to build an instant game library.

The extensive database goes beyond the old CHESSMASTER library and allows users to search through all the games by positions, openings, endings and opponents. If you wanted to pursue such esoterica as the number of games where Morphy sacrificed a bishop pawn with black in the Sicilian Defense, you could simply import the positions into the various tabs. You could then play the games from either side, or watch the computer go through the sequence of moves.

If you were having problems with an opponent who happened to be particularly proficient in a specific opening line, you could simply bring up her games and find the main lines of play for each sub-variation. The natural language comes in handy here, because it allows the user to learn the concepts behind the theory. Since one reason many strategy gamers avoid chess is the amount of memorization needed to remember pet opening lines, this more strategic concept should appeal to them—and additionally promote more natural styles of play. Finally, if you feel your research is becoming too narrow, multiple databases may be integrated for clarity or for more comprehensive searches. Regardless of how you use the database, it has immense potential as both a teaching tool and as entertainment for the rabid chess fan.

If all of this power and flexibility sounds intimidating, don't worry. One of the few complaints I had about CM4000 was that all the help and advice was to be found in several menus scattered around the old interface. The new Mentor function is an amalgamation of that advice with some notable additions. The idea is to create a com-

WINDOW TO THE MIND Because CHESSMASTER 5000 is a native mode Win 95 application, you may open several windows with no significant performance loss in either 2-D or 3-D board views.

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GADGET

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SYNERGY

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Circle Reader Service #108

puter chess coach, and CM5000 largely succeeds. The tutorials are more varied and involved than in CM4000, largely due to the talents of National Chess Master Eric Schiller, one of the best chess teachers around. In addition to offering the usual help on the use of the interface, the Mentor gives succinct advice on why or why not to play a certain move. The effect isn't quite like having Schiller in your home, but it's a far cry ahead of the often silly multimedia use of a digitized Garry Kasparov in KASPAROV'S GAMBIT.

NO MORE DEAD LETTER OFFICE

Playing chess by mail has never been easier than with CM5000. In addition to e-mail and modem play, those inclined to the pedestrian pace of play-by-US Mail may actually print chess post cards—no stamps included, of course. Best of all, the program prevents you from sending illegal or misprinted moves. CM5000 users may export files into most word processors and desktop publishing programs (a complete list was not available at press time) in combinations of text and actual chess diagrams. Finally, *Portable Game Notation* is supported, allowing you to import data from such popular chess databases as *ChessBase* and *Bookup*.

"HE PLAYS LIKE A MACHINE." —ABOUT BOBBY FISCHER

The weakest aspect of CHESSMASTER has always been the rating system. Solving chess problems or playing through Grandmaster games, the elusive search for the best move is instructive, but hardly indicative of playing strength and consistency. Finally, in CM5000 we have a reasonable rating system whereby the player is ranked according to her success or failure versus various computer opponents. While other chess games have tried this, notably KASPAROV'S GAMBIT, they invariably allow you to artificially inflate your rating by beating up patsies.

And therein lies the strength of CM5000: the wide variety of opponents. Already the best in number and quality of computer opponents, CM5000 outdoes itself here. First, the designers realize that the Grandmaster-emulated styles, playing at the expert level, are too tough to beat for the average chess player. So, they have created a number of opponents at the 1400-1500 level, a good selection for the majority of gamers.

Once the midrange level of competition is mastered, users may move on to the Grandmaster opponents, all modeled after the great masters of history, with a few modern masters' styles thrown in for good measure. Eric Schiller has tweaked many of the ratings from 4000, giving chess historians and fans endless ammunition for debate (which after all, is half the fun). As of press time, Schiller is still trying to trim down the list of computer opponents, including the Grandmaster styles, to 64, equivalent to the number of chess squares on a board. Hopefully, the powers-that-be at Mindscape will allow the additional styled opponents to be placed on the CD-ROM (there's certainly plenty of room). In any case, the new interface should make it even easier to generate your own GM-style opponents, so that you may imagine what it might be like to square off against a Fischer or Kasparov. What more could you ask of a chess game?

THE BUDAPEST GAMBIT

The CM5000 builds on the excellent computer opponents for which CHESSMASTER is known, providing some unique challenges for any chess player below master strength. With the improved positional play and better time management of CM5000, the opportunities for match and tournament play are endless. Schiller is not only a fine professional chess master, he is an unabashed chess fan and historian. Much like a baseball aficionado would lovingly model the hitting power and excellent pitching of the '27 Yankees into a statistical baseball game, so Schiller has tuned the GM-style computer opponents to his own biases.

The "Fischer" personality seems more distinctive now, while Kasparov and Karpov exhibit more attacking and defensive tendencies, respectively, than in CM4000. I wonder: could the limits on the number of GM styles to be included with the final release have anything to do with Schiller's sensitivity to having actually played so many of them? Regardless, the modeled styles for both the newer gods of the chessboard and the nearly-forgotten titans of aeons past are well-researched and easily defensible.

What I enjoyed most was that the computer style would actually reflect openings used by a legendary master at the time of his greatest prominence. Thus, Morphy balances his strong positional play with the occasional wild Budapest or King's Gambit. Karpov plays "old man" chess, and sparkling combinations erupt from Adolf Anderssen and Mikhail Tal. On the other hand, there seems to be more randomness within the most-loved openings of each player style. It's a lot more exciting to play Stenitz if you're unsure whether he will employ the defense which bears his name. For good computer opponents and eclectic styles of play, it looks as though this version of CHESSMASTER has positioned itself again as the one to beat.

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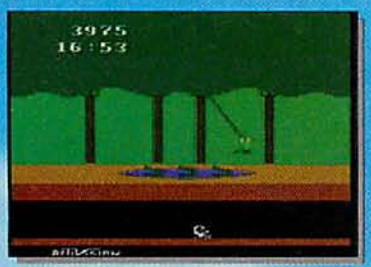

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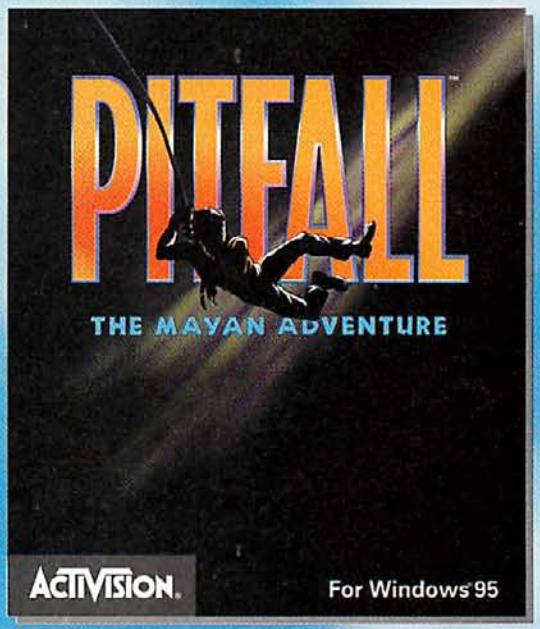

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Circle Reader Service #81

Pit-Fallin'

Pitfall Harry: Mayan Adventure Makes Another Run For The Gold

by George Jones

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

Talk about comebacks. Pitfall Harry, Activision's 8-bit (was it even that much?) stick figure superstar is back with a vengeance. All right, so he's been back for a while (in SNES, Sega Genesis and Sega CD versions of Pitfall Harry 95), but this time he has leaped from his cartridge vine into the plush, rich, jungle of Windows 95. And he couldn't be looking better.

One of the reasons why he's looking better now is because he's finally come to the PC. You might think it strange that more 16-bit cartridge titles weren't ported over to the PC earlier, but there's a reason for that. The best PC games usually wind up as cartridges sooner or later, but before the advent of Windows 95, porting games like Pitfall wasn't even an afterthought in developers' minds. Too sophisticated, too constrained by hardware, they said. Well with the debut of Microsoft's new operating system, both of these arguments are out the door; the market should broaden, and computers will be powered up for "the next generation" of gaming. Developers, realizing how truly easy it is to port their games (thanks to Microsoft's game development kit), are taking advantage of a shiny opportunity.

MODERN DAY HERO

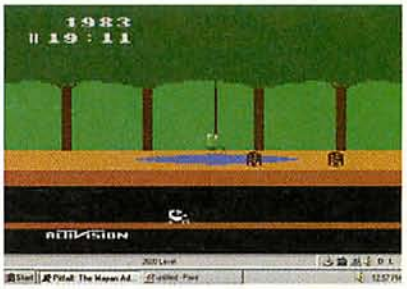
Why did that pixellated two-tone hero capture the heart of millions? And how did such a graphically bland main character take on so much attitude? Part of that was because, up until David Crane's design, the "platform" game wasn't very thrilling. It's hard to look back into another age with our modern, spoiled perspective on gaming, but Pitfall was revolutionary both in story line and in concept. The disappearing pits were amazing. And being able to swing on a vine—that was unbelievable!

Yet somehow, in this new age of multi-level platform games and more swinging vines than Tarzan could dream of, PITFALL 95 managed to clean up on the set-top market. Why? Because Harry is, and always has been a hero. This is a guy who doesn't jump over crocodiles—he jumps on them. The whip he carries at his side gives him an adventurous, bad-ass appeal that Indiana Jones would respect. And of course, the ingredients that made the Atari 2600 version of Pitfall so cool have been retained. There are swallowing pits and crocodiles a'plenty, swinging vines, as well as a multiple-path, multi-level approach. Harry's attitude is provided through grunts, moans and a wide range of facial expressions.

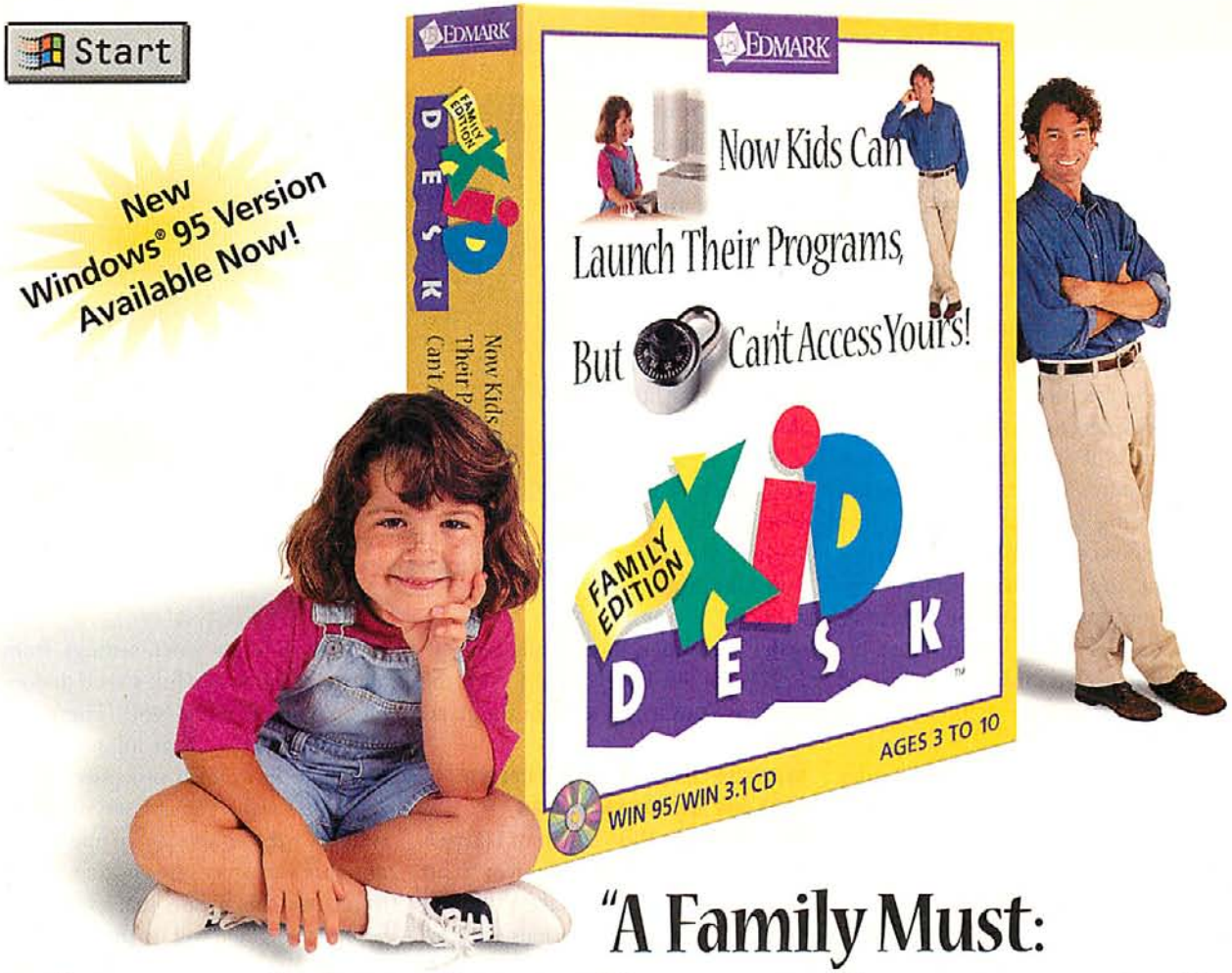
WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

My first clue that Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure was going to be an entirely different experience for PC gamers was the introduction. Ignoring the fact that it ran in a window (which all Windows 95 games will do), a three-dimensional musical fanfare heralds Harry, who sprints across the scene. There's no such thing as a long drawn-out, padded introduction in the console world, and there ain't one here, either.

The graphics in Pitfall are classic; they're not on par with Donkey Kong Country, but they are plush, colorful and very easy on the eyes. Each level has a wealth of graphic detail, from the loose debris falling from above to the thirst-quenching waterfall levels. The true parallax scrolling, where animated action can simultaneously occur at different levels of depth throughout the screen, is also remarkable and is a



MY HOW YOU'VE GROWN Harry has changed a lot since his 8-bit days, but he's still into vines and disappearing pits. The original game is included with the Windows 95 version.



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significant advance. Though it's been the norm for cartridge gamers for a long time, before Windows 95 it was considered virtually impossible to accomplish on the PC.

Of course the main character and his adversaries aren't too shabby, either. As further proof that a new age of platform gaming has come, the characters are huge, and their animations complex and detailed. Harry's abundance of character is evident as he "shimmies" down ropes, reaches out to swing from vine to vine, goes into various contortions while bungee jumping, and meditates/levitates when he has nothing to do. The monsters, like the skeleton who uses his bony detached arm as a club, are animated similarly. Personality is the name of this game.

Although the game is a lot harder than I expected, Pitfall is a blast. The 13 levels are dynamic enough that you never feel like you're simply running, running, running to the exit, and there are plenty of extra goodies to be found.

The flow of the game varies considerably. In some sections, you can hop on a mining cart and cruise—the scrolling speed on these levels has to be seen to be believed. The controls include jumping and options for four different weapons: the bullwhip (always in hand), a stone sling, a boomerang (my favorite) and some magic exploding pop rocks. Ammo for the weapons is scattered throughout each level. One drawback to the game, which will hopefully be fixed, is a muddy control model that made maneuvering in tight spots a little difficult.

Your health is kept track of by a crocodile in the far right corner; as you take hits, his mouth opens wider and wider, until finally he swallows poor old Harry. Like I said, the game isn't exactly a walk in the park.

LAST ACTION HERO Windows 95 helps Pitfall Harry cruise along at well above 60 frames per second.

HARRY AND THE TECHNICOLOR SCREEN COAT

Technically, this version of Harry is the best one yet. As producer Scott Krager puts it, "We've taken the best elements from all the various versions and incorporated them into this one." This means that the game has the 13 levels included in the Sega CD version, the rich color palette of the SNES, and the original sound, which Activision has resampled to take advantage of the PC's superior sound capabilities.

Of course, Windows 95 also plays into this technical superiority. The design team has made every conceivable effort to ensure that this game will be playable on most systems which are currently on the market, from middle-end 486es to high-end Pentium 90s. The key to this lies in the system configuration options. There are four different video settings, from a normal window to full screen to double-resolution 640 x 480. There will also be a feature that allows you to designate how much processor power you want for the game. Users of slower systems will be able to virtually monopolize the processor for their games (of course this means that everything behind the game will be put on hold). One other interesting feature is the ability to resize the playing window into virtually any shape or size. Scott Krager has an entertaining story about product testers contorting their play windows into strange and unusual dimensions (like full screen height by one-inch width) to help make those long Pitfall nights more challenging and more entertaining.

THE FRIGHTFUL DEAD Lush graphics and lots of personality give PITFALL lots of charm.

FOR WHOM THE VINE SWINGS

I'm sure there are plenty of veteran gamers out there who are waiting on what they consider to be real games and are going to grumble about these "newbie" games. Games like Pitfall may lack the complexity of a Magic Carpet, but they have a charm of their own. This game requires some fast—very fast in some cases—twitch reflexes; contains some intuitive puzzles (there are levers to be pulled and mining cars to be pushed); and is simply magical in its appeal. Even non-action gamers are likely to be captured by this one.

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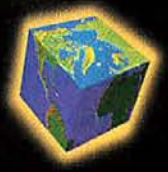

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Circle Reader Service #314

Behind The Buzz

Trimark Interactive's THE HIVE Looks Beautiful, But Will It Fly?

By Martin E. Cirulis

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

Insects. Some people study them, but most of us just try and squish 'em. I suspect it's the latter reaction **Trimark Interactive** is counting on to draw gamers into their slick upcoming arcade-action title, THE HIVE. While the software industry drones on and on about what business software will dominate the new world of Windows 95, some companies are busy trying to make sure they'll place first in the category we know is the important one: games. Trimark is attempting to take an early lead in the race by getting a game out there in Win 95's first few months—a game that takes full advantage of both the new operating system's power and its user demographics.

WINGS OF FURY THE HIVE's graphics are amazing—they look better than the 3-D-rendered splash graphics in most games' introductions.

GOOD HONEY AFTER BAD

While HIVE is essentially an arcade game, it will have a fairly complex "plot" stringing the action sequences along. At some point in the far future, humanity stumbles across the remains of an enigmatic race known as The Ancients; they probably have no relation to the little guys from *Traveler,* but it seems they have the same annoying habit of leaving incredibly powerful weapons just lying around for some curious primate in a spacesuit to stumble across. In this case, the weapon in question—a nasty biological agent capable of exterminating entire worlds—was derived from the honey of some kind of funky mutant space bee known (painfully) as "Hivasects," for all of you studying Astro-Entomology. Of course the weapon was so nifty it wiped out the Ancients and their bug farm science project the first time somebody left the honey jar open, and that was all she wrote for this particular alien solar system.

Now with the Ancients dead and all the Space Bees too, you'd think things would be over before they started. But no, that's just the beginning; it isn't future grad students who dig up these Ancients, but the Archeology Division of the Space-Mafia, otherwise known as the Black Nexus Syndicate. Figuring they are much cleverer than those dead aliens were about things like keeping honey jars closed, they secretly clone a new hive from stored DNA samples and start preparing to sell the ultimate weapon to the highest bidder. Of course, this threat to both Galactic Peace and picnics everywhere (just imagine what pests these giant space-bees would be as they buzzed around the egg-salad!) has got to be stopped. This is where you come in.

As the brave Galactic agent, your plan is to infiltrate the Black Nexus facility as a double agent and get information from a loyal scientist also acting as a double agent in the labs. This daring woman, oddly known only as "Ginger," can tell you exactly how to foil the space-mafia and destroy the Hive. But the Nexus has its own share of infiltrators and your plan goes hideously wrong from the start; you are left scrambling across a desolate landscape, commandeering various vehicles and running away in an attempt to rescue Ginger and escape into space. And oh yeah, don't forget about blowing the whole darn place into Galactic Smog.

"YOUR JOYSTICK, MR. BOND."

While you might expect to find this setup supporting a CRPG or some type of DOOM clone, the reality is actually a little more restricting than that. HIVE is a game that owes much in the

GRAPHICS
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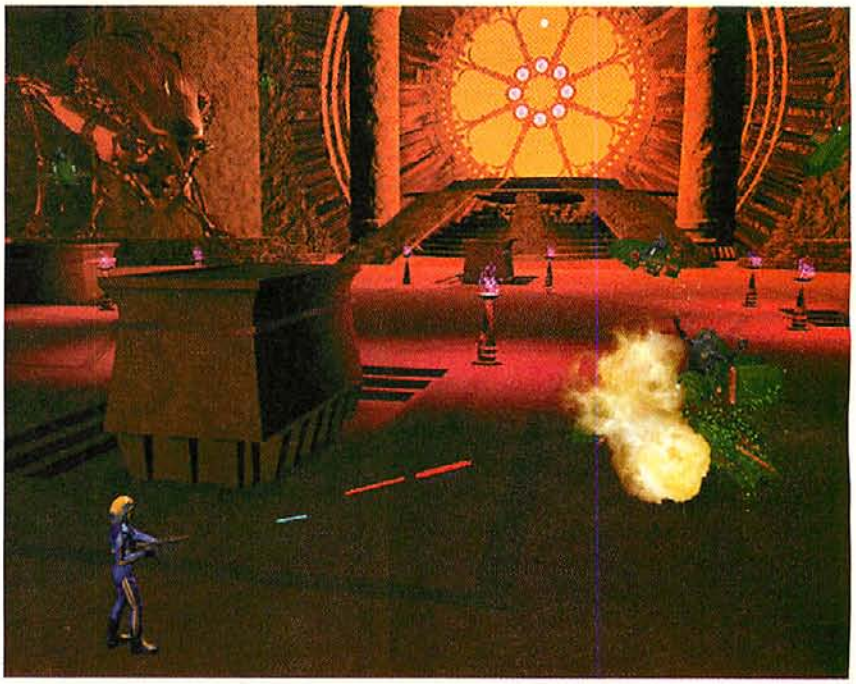
way of design and philosophy to REBEL ASSAULT from **LucasArts**, a game that, while eliciting groans from experienced gamers, nevertheless was a huge seller in the "mainstream" market. When released, THE HIVE will be an arcade-action game built upon a stunning graphic engine and two distinct modes of first-person gameplay. The first will be based on REBEL ASSAULT's "track" system, where the player travels along a set route and has only a few degrees of freedom with which to shoot at targets and avoid obstacles. The other mode is potentially more satisfying, as it will allow players a full 360-degrees of movement within the rendered environment in order to simulate situations where the player is manning gun turrets or other types of "player in the middle" devices.

THE HIVE's strengths will undoubtedly lie in the realm of sight and sound. The actual gameplay graphics will be comparable to the slick animations that only grace the introductions of most current games. And when coupled with Win 95 frame rates, the transitions between gameplay and cut scenes should be seamless. The version I played demonstrated that both the track-mode and "panoramic" game levels will not only be stunning, but fast—twitch-reflex fans will be in joystick heaven with this game. Further immersing the player into the arcade experience is the sound quality, which will draw upon every trick in the book to eke the most out of your speakers and convince you that you're actually in the rendered environment.

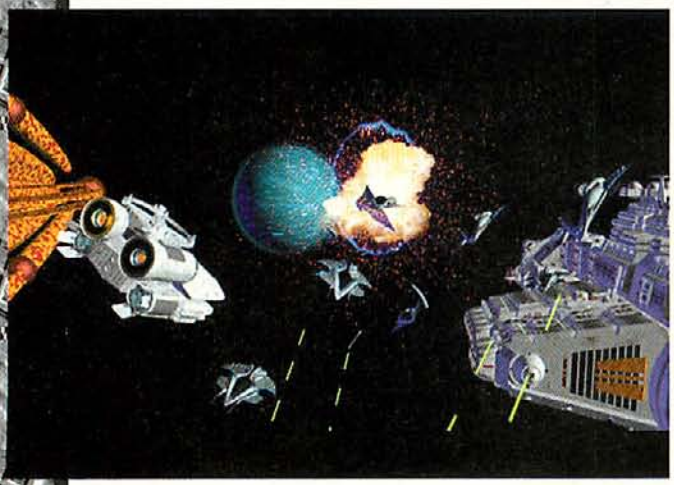


BEES' BUZZ The various episodes of THE HIVE will take you in, around, and over the home of the enemy Hivasects.

THE BUZZ OF THINGS TO COME

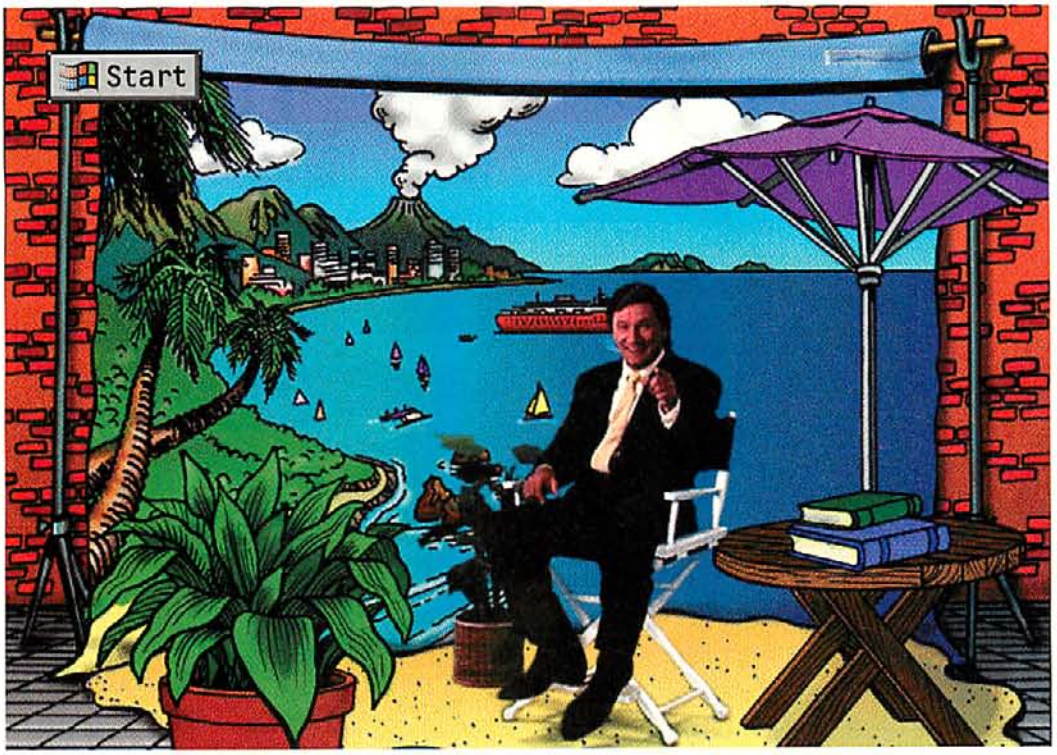
Most veteran gamers are waiting to see what Win 95 can do for the high-powered, highly complex games we love, but there's a whole other side of the industry that developers should be drooling over: the world of the occasional gamer. This is the demographic realm of PC owners whose game folders contain MYST, REBEL ASSAULT, TETRIS and maybe DOOM—people who don't have a lot of computer game experience and are just looking for some quick episodic fun before dinner or between spreadsheets. From its graphic splendor and tiny learning curve to its shrewd play on the traditional fear of bugs, all tied to the 90's crime angst, THE HIVE is aimed squarely at the occasional gamer or youngster. I suspect old-timers may end up grumbling about chrome over substance, but everyone else will probably be too busy trying to advance to the next level to notice.

If everything goes according to plan, by October we should see a slick game with an accent on repeat gameplay. It will contain 20-odd levels of varied environments, from monorails to the tunnels of a giant beehive, and take you through a convoluted action plot reminiscent of a 50's era sci-fi adventure. THE HIVE is definitely the brainchild of REBEL ASSAULT, but the variety of environments and the fact that the game will randomize enemy starting positions every time you play is a sign that an effort is being made to improve upon success. So if you were unfortunate enough to get stung by some malicious insect this summer, fear not—revenge may be yours this fall.



GUNNING FOR GLORY The graphics are gorgeous, but there is a down-side to the splendor. You are often relegated to the role of gunner—with no control over your flight path.

"A Funny Thing Happened on My Way to Learn Windows® 95"



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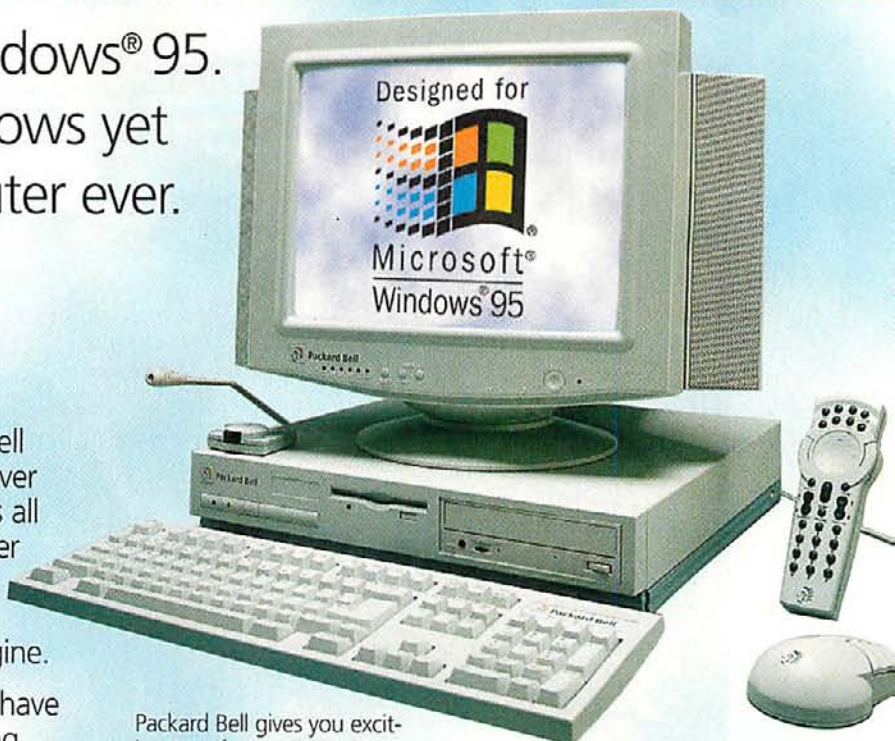

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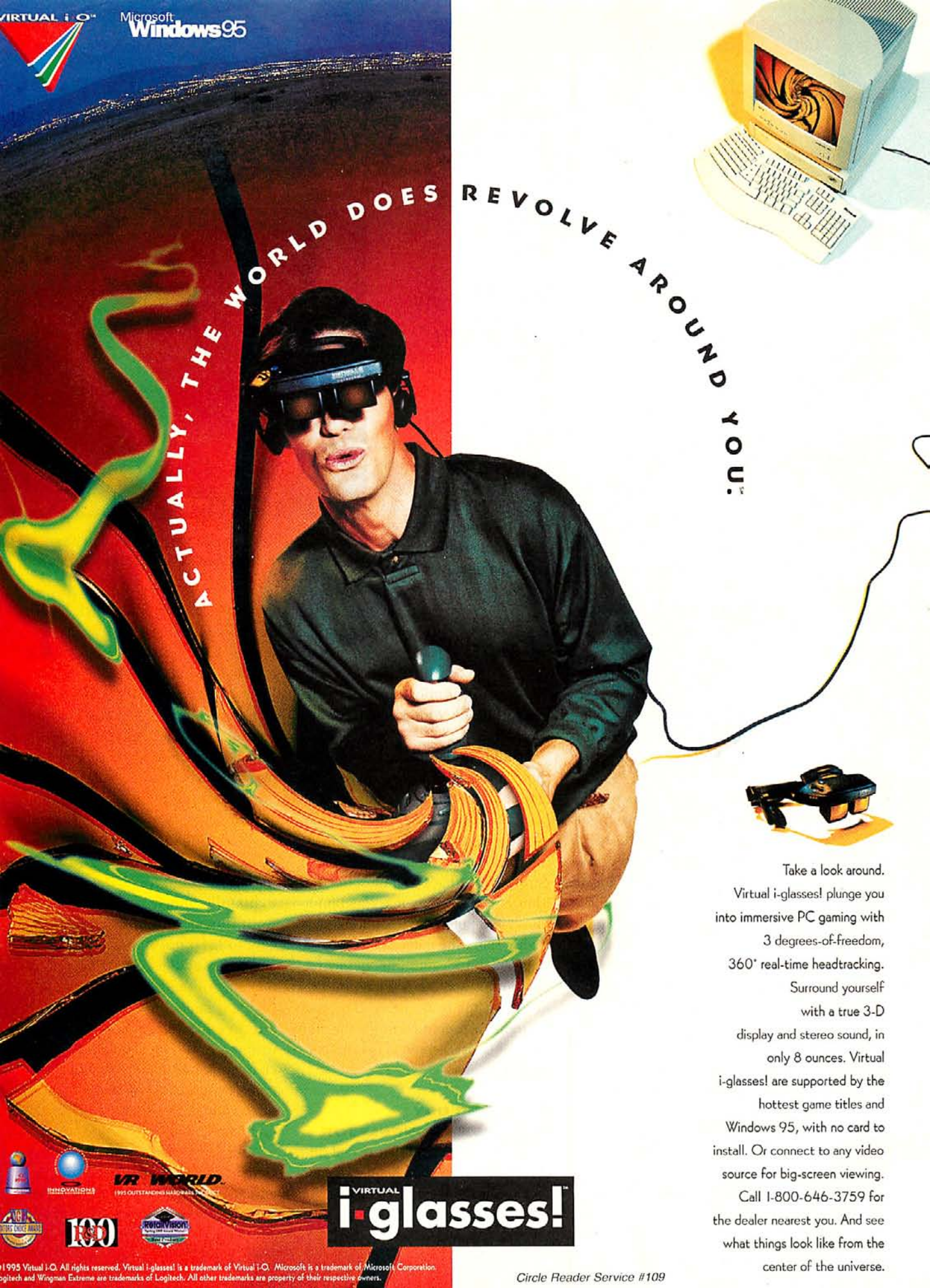

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Circle Reader Service #109

Taking The World By Swarm

Bite, Claw, And Be A Real Pest When You Become A Giant Insect In ENTOMORPH

by Petra Schlunk

HONEY, I'M DRONE No, this isn't Trimark's THE HIVE. When these eggs hatch, they'll make killer bees seem like gnats.

The role-playing fortunes of **SSI** have always seemed inexorably linked to their partnership with **TSR**, the basis for their best-selling AD&D line. Yet, while SSI is still involved with AD&D (STONE PROPHET was released earlier this year), the company has developed its own new fantasy role-playing milieu. The World of Aden is planned to be the setting for several upcoming SSI games, including THUNDERSCAPE and ENTOMORPH. Once a blissful place, the World of Aden is now beset by a mysterious plague known only as the Darkfall. Its origins unknown, the Darkfall began with a total solar eclipse, and from this darkness emerged horrors beyond imagination. The palpable evil of the Darkfall's presence and its struggle with the survivors of Aden forms a classic good-versus-evil conflict, as well as the basis for the games to be set in this world.

In ENTOMORPH: PLAGUE OF THE DARKFALL, a Windows 95 product (to be backwardly compatible with Windows 3.1) developed by **Cyberlore Studios**, an island off the coast of Kyan is suffering from a particularly bizarre problem. Its inhabitants are slowly metamorphosing into giant, killer insects! Now, giant insects, as such, are not new to Aden. In fact, the nation of Kyan is known for its dependence on insects for almost every facet of life. Insects are used to build homes, to provide transportation, and even to harvest food.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

Yet, this new infestation of giant insects is quite undesirable, since they are evil and deadly products of the Darkfall itself.

The introduction to ENTOMORPH shows a swarm of insects crossing the land and devouring everything in its path. Meanwhile, Squire Cedric Warrik, just happens to be traveling on the island in question. As the unlikely hero, Cedric (that's you) must discover what is causing this mass metamorphosis and put a stop to it. Problem is, Cedric starts the game south of a village called Addegun, without any recollection of what he is doing, or even how he came to be there. The only thought to pierce through the dim mists of Cedric's mind is that he must locate his sister.

WATCHING OUT FOR YOUR EXOSKELETON

Combat in ENTOMORPH is real-time and requires a certain degree of coordination and ingenuity. Basically, you left-click frantically on your opponents, since with each click Cedric throws out another punch. As a result, it behooves you to hide behind objects to screen Cedric from danger. Similarly, it is essential to attack opponents from long range, unless you enjoy rebooting time and again. One lesson learned fairly quickly is that neither mana (a necessity for spell-casting) nor health regenerate automatically.

Your first challenge is against a couple of walking dead, which have about as much imagination as one can expect from zombies. Later foes are, thankfully, much more interesting. Both during and after combat, it's easy to keep track of Cedric's health and mana by the colored bars on either side of the game screen. At first, Cedric is limited to mere fist-fighting, but eventually you will acquire weapons in the usual CRPG (computer role-playing game) fashion. As the game progresses, you will also learn numerous magic spells which prove useful for combat.

After some early combat sequences, Cedric continues towards Addegun and sees, to his horror, dead bodies strewn all over the town. From a wid-

In a remote galaxy, a mutant strain of genetically engineered insects produced a honey so toxic it wiped out all life on the planet. Quarantined for decades, the planet has recently been inhabited by the Black Nexus Mob, who genetically re-engineered the insects and turned the toxic honey into a deadly biological weapon. You must **infiltrate** the Black Nexus, save a compatriot, **annihilate** The Hive, and **exterminate** the Hivasects. True 32-bit autoplay. Killer graphics and 18 levels of awesome action/arcade gameplay that takes place on two planets – developed exclusively for use with **Windows® 95! Call (800) 424-7070 ext. 3061 for a free demo CD!** Or, reach us on-line: http://www.trimarkint.com; trimark@aol.com; 7477.3632@compuserve.com

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ower who is mad with grief he learns that he may find his sister in the neighboring village of Damos. As you move through the various locales, you find a variety of non-player characters, all of whom seem to have important information for advancing the plot. Speaking of characters, voice-over acting is expected for the final version, but SSI is mum on whom they have signed thus far. Also, if you opt for closed-caption conversations, you may opt to have Cedric's conversational options listed on the screen at a pace with which you're comfortable.

When Cedric wants to speak to someone, interact with an object, or fight, all you have to do is get him close enough and left-click on the target. Cedric will automatically interact with the person or object in an appropriate fashion. Often, Cedric will be drawn automatically into conversation with characters by merely walking close enough to them.

BRIDGES OF ENTOMORPH COUNTY Due to the insect insurrections they've suffered, the villagers may not welcome you with open arms.

The magic system is pretty simple as well. Magic scrolls are scribed into Cedric's spell book as they are picked up. Then, you have the option of choosing spells from the spell book and determining its power level before adding it to your roster of ready-to-cast spells. Cedric is allowed to have three different spells readied at any time, conveniently shown in "magic slots" in the interface. To cast a spell, you need only click on the spell slot containing the spell. As long as Cedric has the necessary mana, the spell is cast.

TALK ABOUT GROWING PAINS!

As you progress through the story, learning more and more about the insect plague, your character slowly metamorphoses into an insect! The various stages of this transformation let you bite, claw, and terrify unarmed villagers at your discretion. I wasn't able to see all of the insectoid stages for this preview, because SSI is holding some of them back for the final release. Despite my disappointment, though, I still feel that SSI deserves some credit for coming up with an unusual angle for an adventure game.

The plot has quite a few twists and turns, more than one would expect from so action-oriented a game. In addition to locating his family, Cedric must save himself and the town from an attack by bloodthirsty mosquitoes. Later, he finds that the village's guardian, a Water Nymph, is gone. And of course, the only one who could summon her, the town Shaman, journeyed to Addegun and died there when the town was attacked by giant insects. Like most adventure games, this bleak set of puzzles unravels eventually, but only after sojourns to other lands with even more terrible dangers. But then, that's where the fun is...

NICE HOURGLASS FIGURE ENTOMORPH takes well-known creatures, such as this black widow, and blows them up into horror film-style monsters.

PEEKING UNDER GOSSAMER WINGS

Is everything all abuzz in ENTOMORPH? Well, even considering that I viewed it in not-quite-final form, the graphics are bit cartoonish. Fortunately, this doesn't detract too much from the game. The sound effects—insects buzzing, doors creaking, explosive sounds for casting certain spells, and grunting during combat—are really pretty good. The mouse driven movement system in ENTOMORPH is generally easy to manage, although there are occasional unexpected obstacles, such as small rocks that seem to interfere with Cedric's movement.

A worse problem is that you can't use objects in your backpack at your own discretion. Since everything that Cedric picks up goes into the pack, this is somewhat irritating. Most objects are used automatically when you need them in the game, but I found this a bit too simplified for my tastes. On the other hand, the rapid pace of the combat and the many plot twists keep the story moving along, and it's fair to say that the World of Aden looks to be fulfilling some of its vast potential. We'll know for sure in September, when ENTOMORPH's blend of real-time action and adventure flies (crawls, hops, slithers...) off the shelves.

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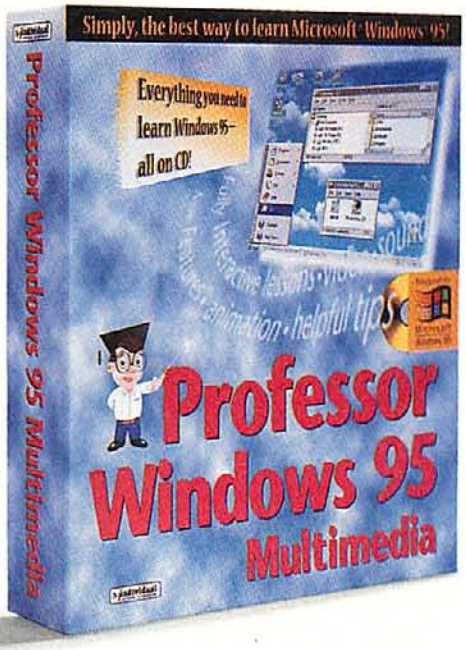

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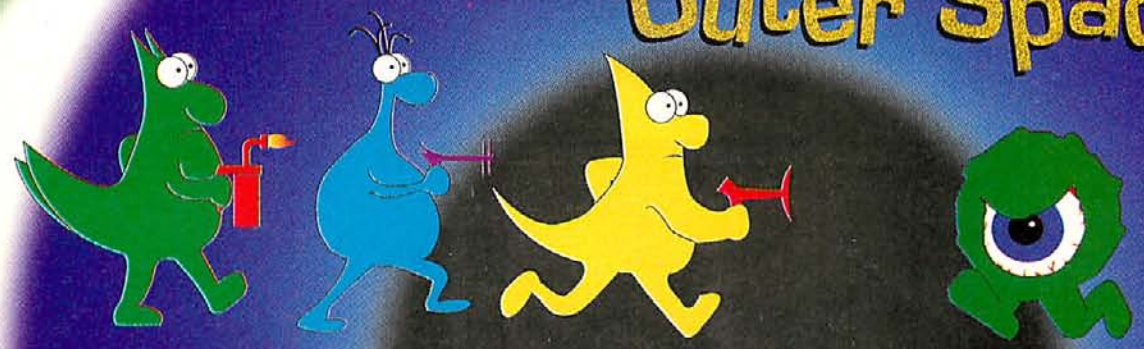
Circle Reader Service #84

AWFUL GREEN THINGS From Outer Space



What are those Awful Green Things?

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PC CD-ROM

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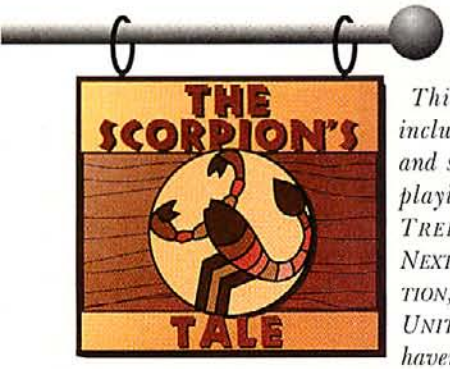
Scorpia Seeks Out The Final Frontier



Gamer's advisory: This article includes hints and secrets for playing STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION, A FINAL UNITY. If you haven't played the game and you don't want Scorpia to lead you through space/time by the nose, see the review of this game by Allen Greenberg on page 148. Play long and prosper.—Ed.

Well, fall is peeking around the corner, and if autumn is (almost) here, can new games be far behind? I sure hope not, because the last Christmas season was dreary enough and we don't need another like it. Then again, the industry track record for on-time releases is pretty dreary, too, so I'm not holding my breath. We'll just have to keep our fingers crossed, and maybe trust in the stars....

STAR TREK: A FINAL UNITY, despite any advertising to the contrary, is a linear adventure game. That means you have to follow along the obvious guideposts for the story to advance, regardless of whether you're playing at Ensign, Lieutenant, or Captain level. If you go outside the main line, not much will happen, and you're not likely to find anything interesting.

You may also have problems with the game freezing or locking up. This may be related to using a memory manager; it really *is* better to boot without EMM, QEMM, or whatever memory utility you normally have up. However, for some players, myself included, that isn't enough. You might have to run this one without sound. I wasn't able to get the game going consistently until I took out the Gravis initializations. Fortunately, the game supports text boxes, so you can play without sound (which is also important in case you don't have one of the supported sound cards).

DATA DUMP When you are on an away mission, use the tricorder on everything to get vital information. It's always good to have Commander Data around as well.

HoloByte is working on the problem, but they had nothing definite to report by deadline time (then again, they didn't have much time to work on it, either: the game arrived rather too close to deadline as it was). I hope to have an update on this in a future column, so everyone will be able to play with the sound going.

THE GREATEST ADVENTURE MIND IN THE GALAXY PRESENTS AN INTERSTELLAR NAVIGATIONAL GUIDE TO "A FINAL UNITY"

by Scorpia

Since the game begins with a confrontation, you may want to begin in Ensign mode, just in case you get into a fight. Worf is pretty good at handling space combat, and as you don't know anything about combat maneuvers yet, this is a safe way to start. Later, you can move the difficulty level up.

So here are some Garidian refugees looking for political asylum, with a Garid warship on their tails. Poll the crew for suggestions (you can't tell them to do anything directly; most choices are a response to crew suggestions) and pick the one you think best. If you're careful, you can get out of this situation without fighting. However, if combat becomes necessary, Worf can do the job quite nicely.

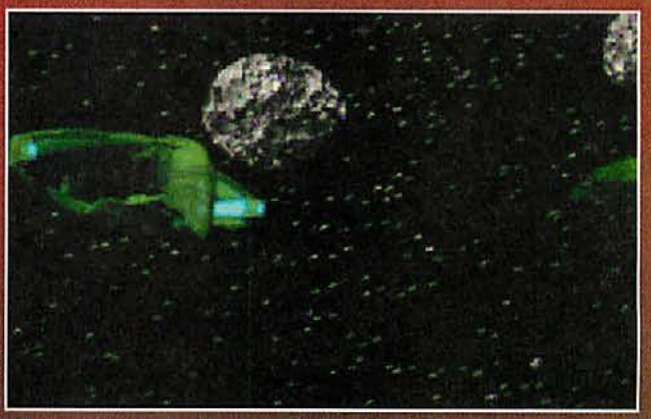
Afterwards, a chat with the refugees explains their problems, and before long, you'll probably be heading out to talk with Shanok, the Vulcan archaeologist. However, you've barely started when a distress call comes in from Cymkoe IV. The Mertens space station there has been attacked, and its power source is likely to blow at any time. Naturally, you can't ignore this distress call (well, you could, but it wouldn't look good on your record, heh), so it's off to Cymkoe IV and the first away team mission.

You can pick any crewmember for the away teams; I found it a good thing to have Mr. Data in all of them. In Ensign mode, the best team is assembled automatically for you; in Captain mode, you make the decisions. Usually, that's not too difficult if you consider the situation; some people will be obvious to include (for example, Mertens being an engineering problem, you'd want La Forge on the team).

Another thing to keep in mind on these missions is to use the tricorder on everything you come across. Sometimes the information you pick up is vital to completing the task at hand; other times, you may want to refer back to the recordings to help figure out a problem.

Okay, so the team beams over to Mertens station. The first thing to do is help the woman trapped under the cable. This is a simple problem; if you have trouble, talk to the other team members (they will always have something germane to say, and occasionally will suggest a course of action).

In Captain mode, it isn't necessary to turn on the emergency bypass for life support; you can complete this mission without doing that, if you're fast enough. The important thing is to talk to Dr. Griems in the main lab, and you just have to get past the alien machine sucking up the station's power to see him. This can be done by using the panel in Lab 4.



ON SCREEN, CAPTAIN Every time you're doing well, the plotline gets interrupted. Regardless of whether you're dealing with Federation admirals, Romulans, or galactic Rastafarian types, carefully consider your responses to avoid conflicts.

If the right person talks to Griems, you can stabilize the power core, thus saving everyone and keeping the station intact. Otherwise, the core will have to be jettisoned, which is okay, but not the best solution.

So the rescue is accomplished, and now you can go on to Shanok at Horst III. Unfortunately, he doesn't have a whole lot to tell you, and you go back to patrolling the Ruinore sector. Wouldn't you know it, Starfleet butts in again, this time in the person of Admiral Reddreck, who has a favor to ask: he wants you to find out what's up with a scientist, Dr. Hyunh-Foertsch, who seems to have disappeared on the planet Morassia. Morassia isn't in the Federation, but they've applied for membership.

Sorry, you can't beam down with any weapons, so you might as well agree to Constable Likksze's terms right at the start. Naturally, the first order of business is to examine Dr. H-F's lab. Performing complete analyses of all the animal carcasses is a good idea, as is grabbing everything you can get your hands on. Then use the comm to talk to whomever is available (some of the people on that list will never be available; others you'll be able to talk to later on).

Well well, looks like some-

TIME
STANDS
STILL

one's been smuggling in some banned animal species, and the doctor caught on to that. Hmmmm. Maybe you should do a little specimen gathering of your own. This is rather dull, as you must obtain samples from all three biotopes, which means you should have 11 total by the time you're done.

When you've finished analyzing all the specimens, see who you can raise on the comm. What follows after this is almost automatic (even in Captain mode, it's all very obvious). Before long, Dr. H-F is back, and now you just have to capture an invisible creature that feeds on energy. Someone on the team should have a suggestion about this. The only tricky part is the order of using the consoles at the Quarantine station, and that won't take long to figure out.

That takes care of Morassia, and now you do an automatic chase of the guilty parties. Remember, dead men give no information; you want them alive. Before long, the Enterprise is on its way to Frigis, home to a colony of Garidians who left their own homeworld quite some time ago. If you're not receiving a response from the planet, poll the crew.

I HATE EXAMINATIONS When you reach the endgame, check out the generator, but don't try to finish the Chodak test.

This is one of those "If only I had my gold-plated dweebflitzer" deals. Both the Chanters and the Questers have lost items to the Seekers (talk to all of those groups in that order), and you have to get 'em back. This means passing the Gatekeeper in the Seeker temple. He who knows nothing will do better than he who thinks he knows anything.

Now you just have to help Aelont (who else could that be in the stasis field?). Too bad you don't know the Chodak language, but there's probably someone around who does. Before long, you should have a couple of orchestrions (called "bells" after this!) from the Chanters, and the way to the Chodak transporter should be open in the Quester temple.

So now you're at the disappearing floor. As you guessed, ringing the different bells (after you have 'em) changes the tile patterns. I found mapping this on graph paper helped a lot. Once you get over to the door, you may want to save the game. Both artifacts will open it, but using the wrong one will destroy the Fifth Scroll (and after all this effort, do you want that to happen?).

Finally, you've gotten the Garidians off your back. Now comes the fun part: Romulan fleets have invaded Federation space. This section of the game is automatic, as the Enterprise goes hither and yon tracking down Rom ships. After you've obtained some important info from the Klingons, you'll be on your own again...until the help call from Frigis, anyway.

That means another fight or two (one on the way in, one on the way out). This is a critical stop, however, as Laraq hands over several items you can't finish without. Once you have those, you can head for Horst III, where the Roms have

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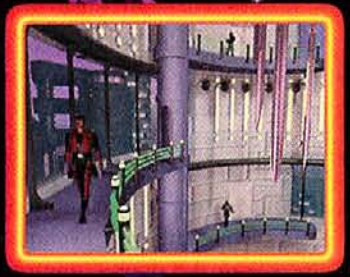

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scared off Shanok, so you can beam down to the Chodak site unopposed.

What you do here is pick up all the information you can (there are no objects to take). After this comes the toughest fight in the game, against three alien ships at Yajj. Worf couldn't handle this one (even in Ensign mode); the Enterprise always ended up destroyed. One time, I took over the Conn and somehow managed to get us through; another time, we took a beating and I just warped away. Leaving means the destruction of the outpost, but that is actually minor, and won't affect the course of the game. Run if you must to stay alive.

So you arrive at Allanor, the governing planet of the old Chodak empire. I don't advise touching anything in the first room (just yet) but do use the tricorder everywhere. In the next room, you'll want to fiddle with the display panels, and farther along, watch the drone repair and the automatic door. After that, you can go back for the logic probe.

The power station is tricky. You'll note that a drone takes three chargeups, so there is no way for the capacitors to be fully discharged (you *don't* want to step on that floor plate). What to do? When in doubt, blow it out (or have I been playing too much DOOM lately? Heh).

Now you get to meet the Chodak (yep, there are some of them left). This is a good place to lie through your teeth, and push for no escort to the computer. That will make reaching the computer harder, but getting to the Unity Device later will be much easier. If you accept the escort, you can still get to the Unity Device, but the road is a tough one.

Presuming you're on your own, you'll have to figure out how to use the Chodak transporters. This is simple trial-and-error. The security room is the hard one. You have to knock out the sensors (which don't stay off very long) and get to the door before they come on again. I could never manage running to the door on time. What worked for me was shooting out the sensors and moving straight to the back of the room, then edging to the right, shooting out the sensors along the way. Eventually, I got someone to the door (same person who's doing the shooting, of course). Whew!

TONE DEAF Counselor Troi might look bored here, but she's probably exasperated, considering that the wrong move here in the Musical Tile Room can destroy the Fifth Scroll. Save your game *now*!

At the computer, you must record the star map before the Chodak arrive; they will erase it from the database, which is why you have to arrive there first. After the automatic sequence where you learn some more about the Unity Device, you're left alone and can make your way back to the entry point (the only place you can beam up). Yeah, that means the security room again, but it's easier on the way out. You only have to shoot the two near sensors and get someone to the back of the room, then he can just walk off the left of the screen.

Okay, it's finale time (or finally time, <grin>). The Enterprise arrives at the Unity Device, as does Captain Pentara (the Garidian warship captain) and Admiral Brodnack (the Chodak leader). Love that timing! Before long, Picard and the Away Team shuttle down to the device (this is automatic). It doesn't matter who he has with him, because in the end game, he'll be alone with Pentara and Brodnack for (guess what?) the tests to see who should have the device.

The first test is getting out of the room with the forcefields. I suggest a very careful examination of the field generator. You may have to beat a little sense into Brodnack here; going through completely with the Chodak test is not a good idea.

The next test is simple; just keep in mind that you're all in this together. Then you can wake up one of the device guardians, who cheerfully makes some embarrassing revelations about Picard, before letting everyone go on to the device control room.

Hey, the Borg are invading! Gee, what a suspicious coincidence. You don't suppose this is one more test, do you? Handle this one carefully; remember there are three choices here, not two. After that, just sit back and watch the autosequence play out. Once again, the universe has been saved!

Well, I see by the old invisible clock it's that time again. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

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

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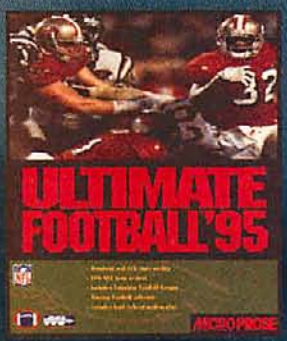

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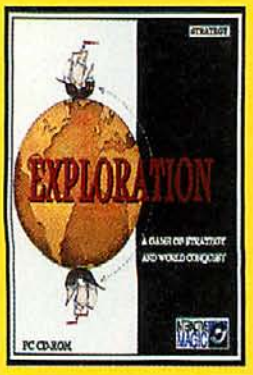

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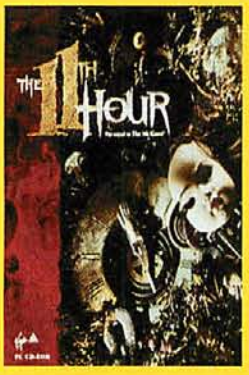

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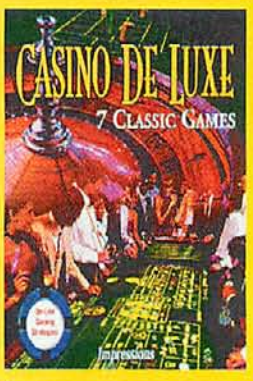

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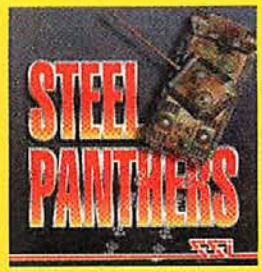

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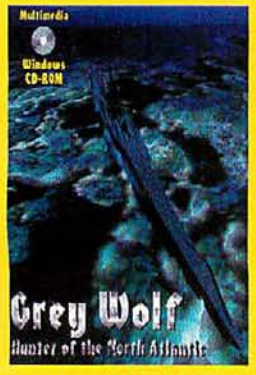

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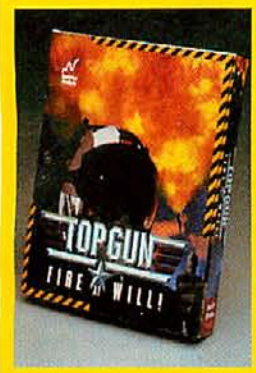

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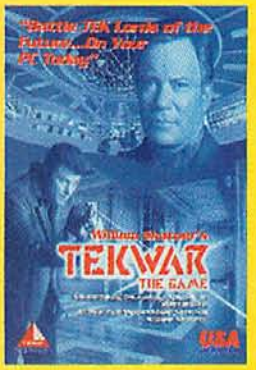

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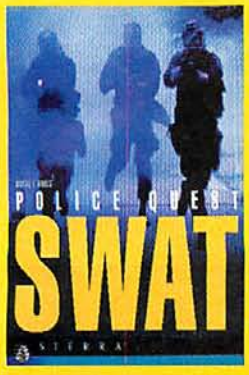

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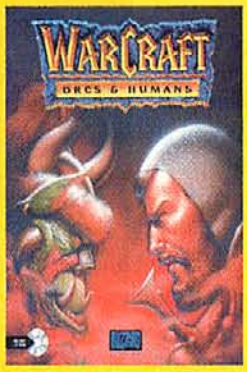

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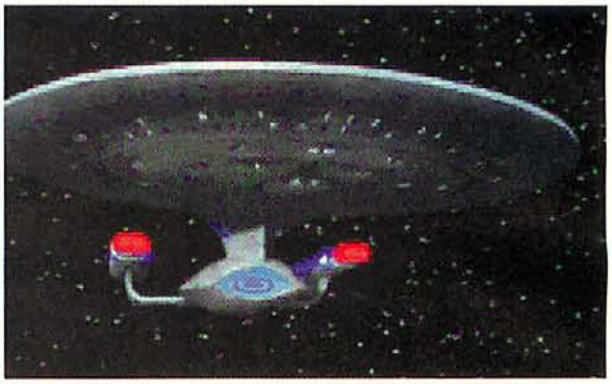
And Finally, "Unity"

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION Makes Its Long-Anticipated Appearance On Monitor Screens Across The Galaxy

by Allen L. Greenberg



GENE RODDENBERRY MADE IT CLEAR THAT STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION TOOK PLACE DURING A time in Earth's development when all problems had been eliminated and all conflicts had been skillfully resolved. Nowhere was this more obvious than aboard the new Starship Enterprise, where a diverse collection of individuals faced an unenlightened, often bitter, group of galactic civilizations that had not yet reached this idyllic state. In **Spectrum HoloByte**'s A FINAL UNITY, the crew faces an artifact from an ancient civilization whose command of science was so disharmoniously out of synch with its sense of morality that it now threatens all of space and time. Taking on the role of Captain Jean-Luc Picard, as well as many of his idolized command crew, it is your mission to track down this device and assure that time and space are protected from its galaxy-warping potential.

A FINAL UNITY

Price: $79.95 (deluxe version $129.95)
System Requirements: 486DX-33MHz, 8MB RAM, 20 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics with VESA Driver and 512K RAM, mouse; most major sound cards supported.
Protection: none
Designer: Mathias Genser
Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Alameda, CA
(510) 522-1164

A FINAL UNITY is a large, sprawling game in execution, if not in hours of play-time. It offers puzzles to be solved as well as strategic battles in space. On the ship, Captain Picard must face the slowly-unraveling mystery of the ancient race known as the Chodak, and how their history is about to impact on modern-day galactic affairs. Tugging at his tunic sleeve are other 24th Century problems, such as the civilization on the planet Garid, whose potential for civil war is linked to an archeological mission which the *Enterprise* may or may not decide to pursue. A space station has had its upper decks surgically removed by an unknown force, leaving its occupants in a precariously unstable condition. In addition, a xenobiologist has mysteriously disappeared on a world whose occupants have created a near-perfect system of ecological habitats.

Unfortunately, much of this unfolds along the border to the fabled *neutral zone*, which means that angry Romulans can, and do, appear at any moment, very much anxious to take the *Enterprise* home so they can mount it over their Romulan fireplaces. The battles in space can be fought in one of three ways, depending on your taste for such activity. At its most demanding, you are required to take full control of the starship, using your PC's numeric keypad to determine the vessel's movements. Phasers and photon torpedoes are loaded and launched at your command, although locking on target is a task reserved for the ship's computer. You also have the ability to delegate the battle's engineering functions, including the preparation of the ship's photon torpedoes, to Chief Engi-

GALACTIC TRIP-TIK Astrogation offers a lot of data in an easy-to-use format. A planet may be viewed up close to admire its beauty, in cut-away wireframe view to show its position in the stellar system, or in a 3-D navigational cube which gives a more galactic perspective.

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STAND BY TO BEAM UP The away-team missions to exotic planets are the best part of the game. Gameplay can be tense, and the usually peaceful Data paces around with his phaser drawn.

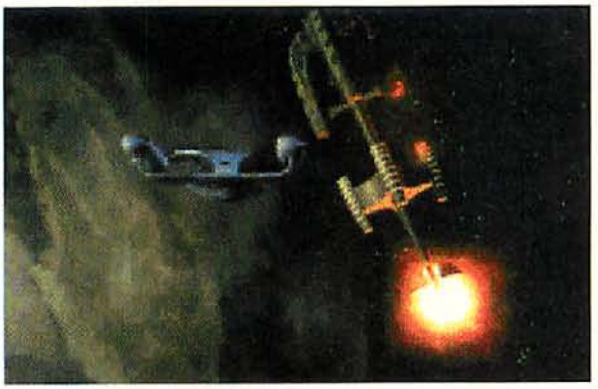
neer Geordi La Forge. Alternatively, you may chose from a menu of pre-programmed offensive and defensive maneuvers such as *Attack* and *Corkscrew*. Under this option, you are still in control of the "fire" button, and you are invited to use it at your discretion. The final option, one which will appeal to pure adventure gamers, allows you to delegate all tactical and battle commands to the ship's Security Officer, Lieutenant Worf. While this may be the most expedient method of combat, it by no means guarantees a successful conclusion. The enemy may attack in groups of three, in which case evasive maneuvers are definitely the most prudent.

Following particularly draining confrontations, repairs and supplies are available at one of several star bases. While adventure fans may find the frequent battles annoying, strategy and wargamers will not necessarily find them to be the opposite. The battles are often tedious and inconclusive. At more than one point, they intrude on the game's main plot without reason, so that one might wonder whether their presence in the game serves as little more than padding between the more engaging adventure sequences.

"ASSEMBLE AN AWAY TEAM, NUMBER ONE."

It is during the away-team missions that players will be able to live out whatever fantasies they may have of taking on the roles of Commander Riker, Lieutenant-Commander Data, Lieutenant Worf, Doctor Crusher or Counselor Troi. By the end of the game, Captain Picard will also join the away team and become an optional persona as well. The away-team missions are often not very difficult, but they are extremely enjoyable. The program's three difficulty levels makes it possible for you to select your own away team as well as designate which equipment is to be issued. At the simplest level, both of these tasks will be performed for you.

Once away from the ship, traditional adventure options such as "speak to," "use" and "walk to" become available to the character you have decided to control and lead the others. Advice passes freely between the away-team members, and it is rare that you will be caught without an idea as to what to do next. There are certain time-sensitive actions, particularly during the latter portion of the game, when the lead member of the team must either accomplish his task within an allotted time, or die. This is made even more difficult by the program's frequent disk access, during which time all commands remain frozen. Fortunately, once the leader accomplishes his or her task, the program assumes that the others have done the same, so that you need not repeat the trial three or four times. Nowhere is this more welcome than one maddening sequence which requires your group leader to walk across a room whose floor-tiles appear and disappear in response to a collection of musical chimes.



ORBITAL RENDEZVOUS Even in cut scenes like this one, the graphics do a good job of recreating the *Trek* feel and advancing the story.

As a further example of this gestalt quality of the away-team, the group enjoys an unlimited inventory capacity, each item of which may be accessed by any member of the team. Thus, there is no need for the tricorder to be passed from Doctor Crusher to Commander Riker in order for Riker to use it. Away-teams are normally equipped with a tricorder, medical scanner, emergency medical supplies and, usually, phasers. The phasers include adjustable settings which must be tuned according to circumstances. Despite their relative simplicity, for favorite character role-playing and interaction, these away-team mini-adventures form the high point of A FINAL UNITY, and one can only wish that there were more of them.

"BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN, MR. DATA?"

The real mystery of A FINAL UNITY unfolds in a little-known area of space called the *Z'Tarnis Nebula*. Using the information he has gathered both from his away teams and from outside sources, Captain Picard must piece together the enigma of fleets of alien ships, which have suddenly started crossing into Federation space on their way to the nebula. Most of the game's ship-side activity takes place on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. The captain has access here to the opinions of Data, Worf, Troi, Data and Riker. Frequently, however, those opinions consist of "Sorry sir, no idea," or "Why don't you contact Starfleet?" This is not to say that the bridge crew has no opinions. It is simply necessary, as is often also the case on the away-team missions, to wait until someone volunteers a suggestion on their own. Until such a suggestion is made, it is often necessary for you to stand and wait.

Conversations with other ships, as is also the case with otherworldly citizens, are a self-running process in which your function is simply to tap the mouse or the space-bar in order to bring up the next statement. The conversations often take on the appearance of multiple-choice selection. However, your job is to make sure that each question on the list is verbalized, rather than choose between

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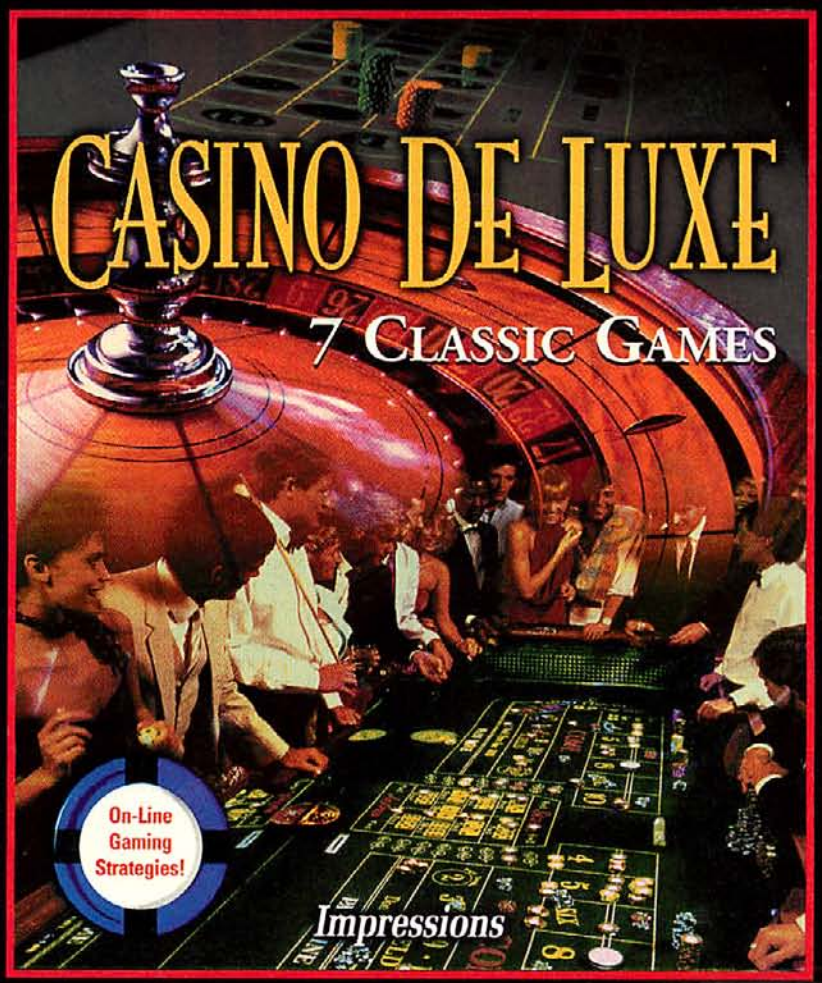

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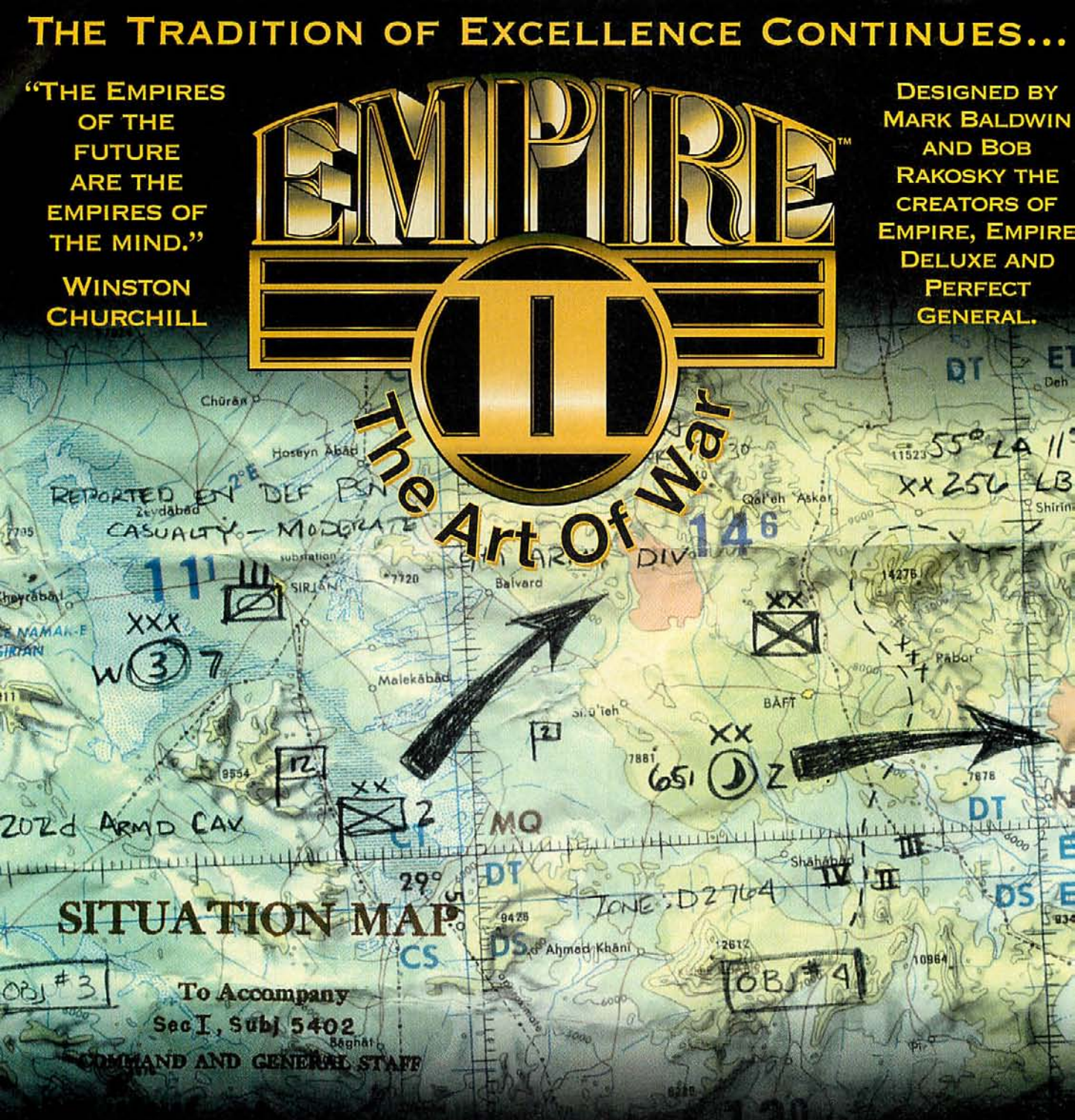

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them. It is only towards the end of the game that your choice of statement or action will have a profound impact on the outcome of the story.

Perhaps the most important source of information on the bridge is the ship's computer. This system of menus and submenus contains material regarding nearly every planet and every situation you will encounter. Its background information is very useful, if not vital, for finding your way around the galaxy.

Also on the bridge are a listing of previous destinations so that, when the time comes, you will easily be able to recall their coordinates and revisit them. Likewise, the ship's astrogation system may be accessed from here. A FINAL UNITY breaks space down into a series of sectors and star-systems so that each location requires two sets of coordinates. You may decide to break-away from the story's main flow and explore the galaxy on your own. Indeed, should you miss one of the game's most important yet subtle hints, you will be forced to do quite a bit of independent exploration. However, you will find space to be crawling with dangerous black-holes, hostile alien fleets, and other deadly phenomena.

"A REAL KLINGON NEEDS NO VOICE ENHANCEMENT."

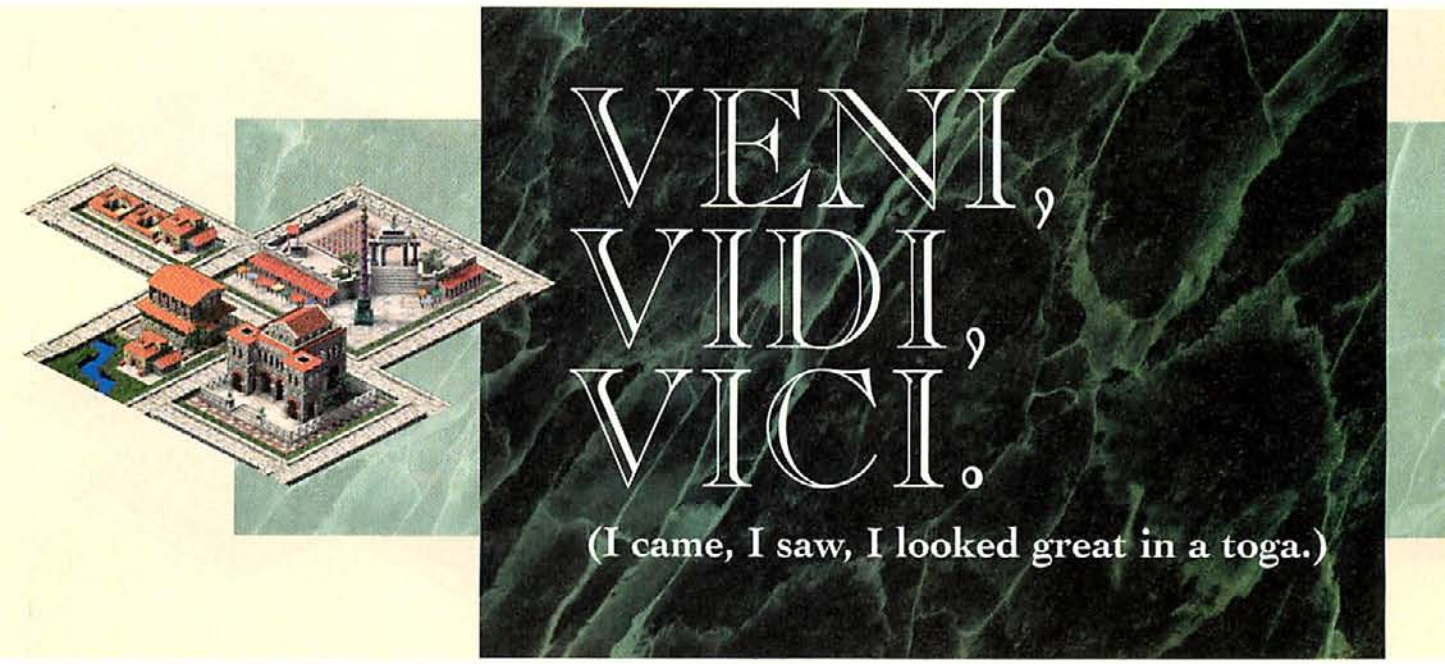
The most spectacular component of THE FINAL UNITY's impressive presentation is the appearance of *Next Generation* cast members Patrick Stewart, Jonathan Frakes, Brent Spiner, Michael Dorn, Marina Sirtis, LeVar Burton, Gates McFadden and Majel Barrett. Each cast member represents their character with the same flair and dignity which earned the cast the admiration and respect of television viewers for seven years. Other actors, with the exception of a strikingly funny Klingon Commander, are not quite so memorable, except that together they carry on the tradition of *Star Trek*'s politically correct mixture of race and gender. Sound effects are likewise taken from the show, and contribute well to the program's classically *Next Generation* look

Parlez Vous Klingon?

If a Klingon walked up to you on the street and said, "tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh'a'?" you would, like most humans, be at a total loss for words. That cultural deficiency can easily be taken care of, however, with STAR TREK: KLINGON, due from **Simon & Schuster Interactive** this fall. "To learn about Klingons, you have to get inside their skin," says Keith Halper, the title's producer. To that end, the program will immerse humans in the Klingon culture—everything from the language to Klingon history, sociology, rituals, religious beliefs and the inner angst of these formidable creatures.

The CD-ROM uses voice-recognition to teach around 100 Klingon phrases, including "tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh'a'" (Do you speak Klingon?) and "HIja" (yes). According to Halper, learning the nuances of the language is necessary in order to understand the Klingons, and he adds that the guttural harshness of the language depicts the Klingons as action-oriented beings.

As you move through the world of STAR TREK: KLINGON, you enjoy the first-person perspective of a Klingon named Pok. A tutor (to be portrayed by a yet-to-be-named *Star Trek* actor) accompanies you



and feel. There is a music score during much of the game, but it often has trouble making itself heard in between the program's frequent disk access.

Unlike previous *Star Trek* offerings, the lead characters are depicted in the full glory of their television likenesses. This is particularly true on the bridge where, despite their limited movement, each character has been rendered in a characteristic pose. Picard is unable to sit down and relax during the story's tense events, while Riker improvises a two-step as though he is uncertain as to his exact function on the ship. During away-team missions, the characters, of course, appear reduced in size. Nonetheless, they move about the screen displaying their characteristic mannerisms. Picard straightens his uniform as he speaks while Data makes sure he obtains a tricorder reading from every passing molecule. The various planet exteriors are drawn with an impressive degree of color, shading and detail, with many of the interiors somewhat bleak and stark by comparison.

Visually, the program's highlights are its many video clips which appear throughout the story. These appear to have been given the same lavish treatment as similar sequences enjoyed by the television show, and generally depict the various starships in action. Only two of the videos depict the lead characters, and are produced in the old George Pal *Puppetoon* style using some very innovative techniques. The videos may be reviewed at any point by making a quick trip from the bridge to the holodeck.

A FINAL UNITY is a demanding program, and players with high-end computers will probably find it a more enjoyable experience than will others. Despite the somewhat trying tactical sequences, it is a relatively easy game to solve, yet not so easy that it will waste the time of experienced players. *Star Trek* fans should not hesitate to spend some time with it.

Appealing to the tastes of the collector-minded *Trekker*, A FINAL UNITY has been packaged in a regular and a deluxe edition. The deluxe edition is being produced in limited numbers and contains, in addition to a serial number, an LCD pin featuring the *Enterprise*, a poster and a hard plastic container.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

A FINAL UNITY

RATING 4.5 stars

PROS Engaging story, outstanding visuals, Patrick, Jonathan, Brent, Michael, Marina, LeVar, Gates and Majel.

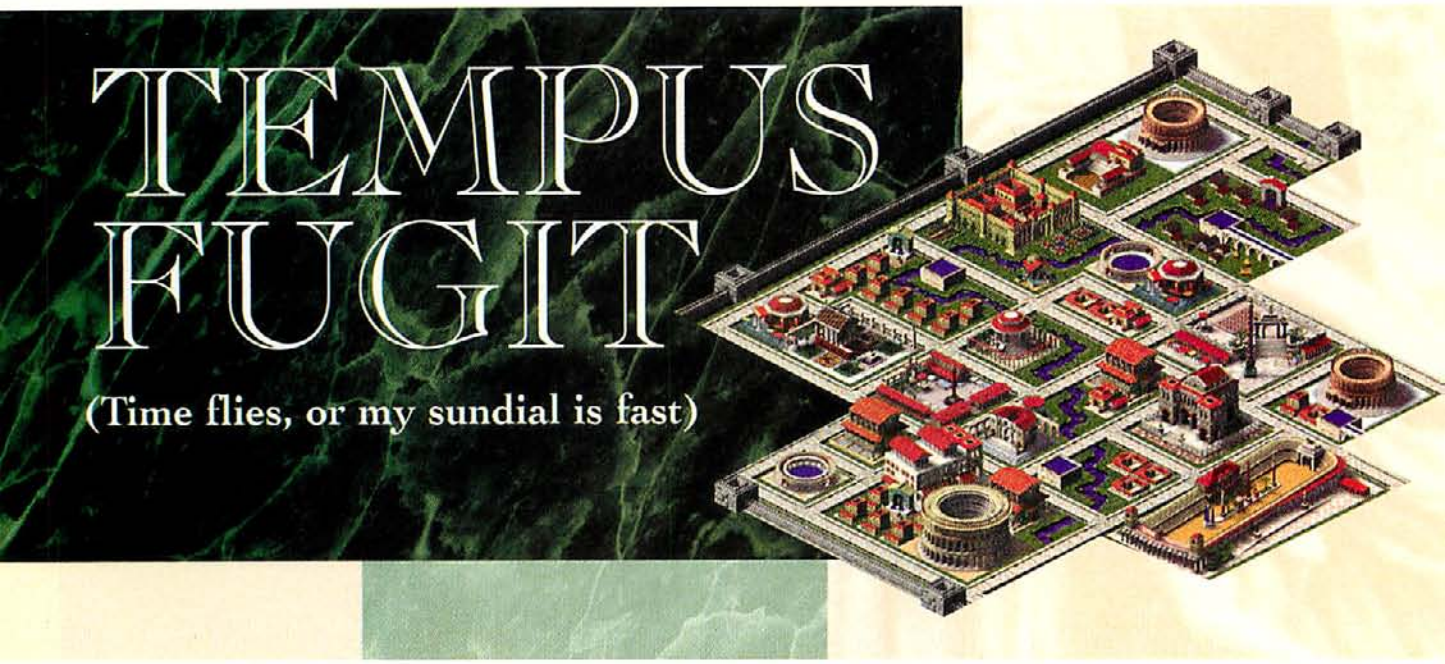
CONS The tactical portion may not appeal to all players, and the story, while good, is somewhat brief.

and gives you various language exercises. For instance, in the Language Lab (one of four sections on the CD), you'll be asked to identify such Klingon delicacies as a bowl of *gakh* (serpent worms). You may click on the image to hear the correct pronunciation or identify it by saying "gakh" to the computer.

But STAR TREK: KLINGON doesn't just teach you the language. It also contains two hours of full-motion video, most of which was shot on *Star Trek* sets using actors from the TV series, along with various training simulations such as the Right of Ascension (a Klingon's passage into adulthood). One simulation even tests your social etiquette. A Klingon approaches you in a bar. You say "nuk nech" ("What do you want?" or "Hello") and the Klingon says that he wants to sit down. You may click on a chair, inviting the other Klingon to sit, click on the Klingon's forehead to indicate an aggressive action, or simply do nothing. The latter is a sign of rudeness in Klingon culture (and of course, all *Trekkers* know how the noble Klingons value their polite, genteel reputation).

STAR TREK: KLINGON is packaged with the *Klingon Cultural Handbook* in paperback. And to round your adenoids into shape for those tough Klingon consonants, two audio tapes are included. *Power Klingon* seems more suited to the galactic businessman, while *Conversational Klingon* is better for travelers who simply need to know how to find the restroom and order fresh *gakh* when vacationing on Kinszha. STAR TREK: KLINGON is scheduled to release next year for $79.95 from Simon & Schuster Interactive, (800) 983-5333.

—Cynthia Bournellis



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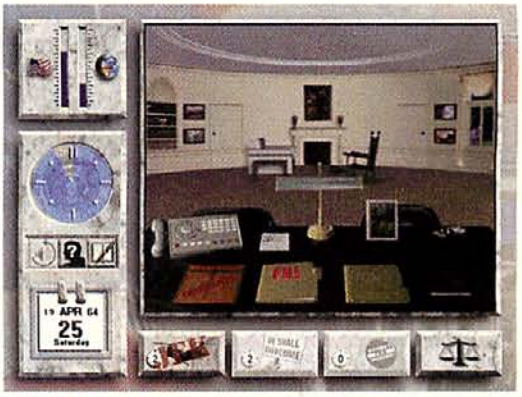
Circle Reader Service #301

Citizen JFK

REELECT JFK Lets You Live An Alternate History

by Johnny L. Wilson



STAMP ACT **Upon completion of an agenda item, JFK's stamp appears over the button.**

I WILL NEVER FORGET SITTING IN A U.S. HISTORY CLASS AND WATCHING A FILM ABOUT THE LINCOLN ASSASSINATION. My emotional teacher answered the phone and turned off the projector with tears in her eyes. "The President," she said, "has just been shot." We thought this was taking a 100-year-old assassination a little too seriously. "He was in a motorcade in Dallas," she continued and reality hit home. *Our* president, JFK, Jackie's husband, the young King Arthur of a New Frontier Camelot, had been shot.

REELECT JFK

Price: $49.95
System Requirements: Windows: 486-33 MHz, Windows 3.1, 4 MB RAM, 2 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics, 640 x 480 color monitor, and mouse; supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards. Mac: 68030 or better, System 7.0.1, 640 x 480 8-bit color monitor, 5 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, and mouse.
Recommended: 8 MB RAM for both platforms.
Developer: Viking Entertainment
Publisher: Quadra Interactive
Distributor: Compton's NewMedia
Carlsbad, CA
(800) 862-2206

REELECT JFK takes that moment and reshapes it into a chance to recover the idealism of Camelot, the 1,000 days of the Kennedy presidency. Quicktime video clips are viewed from Kennedy's perspective, and you determine what would have happened if Kennedy had only been wounded in Dallas. Your primary goal? To be reelected. Your secondary goal? To find and accuse your attempted assassin and any co-conspirators (an alternate history allows for alternate villains).

The interface uses two thermometers to indicate the presidential approval rating and global perception of U.S. strength. Four buttons indicate agenda items which you can activate. Three of the buttons (Vietnam, Civil Rights, and Campaign) are numbered, indicating the amount of time needed to accomplish that agenda item. Clicking on the item precipitates an encounter (phone call, visit to the Oval Office, meeting in the cabinet room, or briefing in the situation room). A few menu-driven options are offered during the course of these video scenes and, as you select them, a Kennedy impersonator speaks for you. It feels *very* presidential. At the end of each turn, you can click on a virtual television to see film clips from 1963-64 or on a newspaper to get hints for future decisions and indications of public reaction to recent decisions.

To me, the most interesting portion of the game consists of watching the polls; interacting with the cabinet via the agenda items; making decisions on campaign visits, speech subjects and spending; and trying to get reelected. The rest of the game requires you to move about a virtual White House and Washington, D.C., in search of clues about the assassination (a strange, time-consuming conceit offering slow disk access and very little pay-off).

I also found the three administrative agendas virtually hardwired. When I pushed toward civil rights, my approval rating went down. I also found that the American people were not about to allow me to stay in an "advisory" (non-combat) capacity in Vietnam, much less withdraw. When I escalated U.S. involvement in Vietnam, my approval rating went up. After losing by imposing Johnny's values on John (a major anticlimax because they didn't show the state-by-state election results to which we are accustomed), I was winning big by going against my actual beliefs. Then, a General Protection Fault ended my campaign. Restoring the game didn't work because the screen would freeze and the only way to "defrost" it was to hit the Escape key. Doing this invoked the "JFK solved the murder" video clip and I found out all about the assassination without actively seeking to solve the case—a disappointing result.

REELECT JFK works as a living history exhibit. At times, it is charming, invoking an authentic spirit of the era, but at other times, it falls flat in the "multimediocre" sense of not offering enough authentic interactivity. Those looking for a challenging political game will want to let this one pass by more swiftly than the thousand days of Camelot.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

REELECT JFK

RATING 2

PROS Offers charming sense of "being there" via film clips and historical situations.
CONS Little actual gameplay, not enough randomality to keep things interesting, and terrible Restore Game bug.

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Circle Reader Service #4

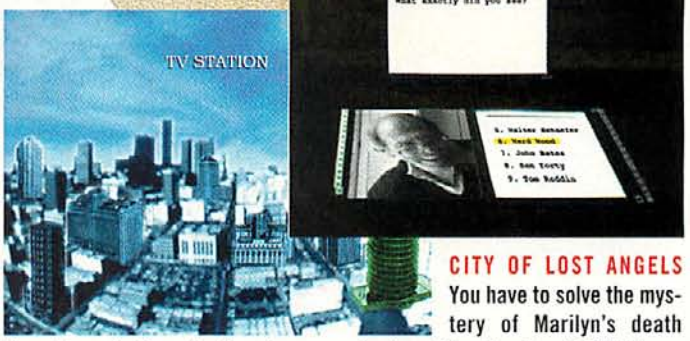
Sex Bomb

No Justice In Novell's HARD EVIDENCE: THE MARILYN MONROE FILES

by Johnny L. Wilson

I LOVE CONSPIRACIES. NO MATTER HOW ABSURD OR HOW MANY POINTS OF REASONABLE DOUBT CAN BE INJECTED INTO the discussion, I love trying to connect the disparate points of evidence into a conceivable, dramatic whole. And, just in case you haven't read the review on the previous page, I've always been pretty fascinated by the Kennedy clan. Add to this my early memories of nude photos of Marilyn Monroe seen in a friend's *Avant-Garde* magazine (briefly published in the '60s by the liberal *Ramparts* magazine) and the lustful drooling conjured by such memories, and you would consider me the ideal reviewer for HARD EVIDENCE: THE MARILYN MONROE FILES (HE).

After all, the program assigns you the task of getting to the bottom of the Monroe case and allows you to assume the role of a reporter, an investigator within the D.A.'s office, a medical examiner in the Coroner's office or a police detective in order to do so. The product has many of the right elements: video clips from the era (including a Lucky Lager beer commercial that must have come as a surprise to teetotaling **Novell**), video clips of famous witnesses (the first police officer on the scene, an eye-witness who claims to have seen Bobby Kennedy in L.A. on the fateful day, a wiretapper who allegedly acquired tapes of Bobby and Marilyn *in flagrante dilecto* (caught in the act, as it were), Marilyn's housekeeper, and more), FBI reports to click through along with a coroner's report to examine, and several locales to explore.



CITY OF LOST ANGELS
You have to solve the mystery of Marilyn's death through careful investigation. A panoramic view of Los Angeles *(left)* lights up on "hot" locations to facilitate navigation. Using Indeo video clips *(above)*, you can question but not cross-examine some key witnesses.

Unfortunately, the suspended disbelief falls apart in the product's initial design. An investigator from the D.A.'s office would definitely be able to get toxicological evidence from the Coroner's office. In HE, you must change characters to get that info. A D.A.'s investigator would certainly have no trouble interrogating police officers. Not so in HE. Couldn't a D.A.'s investigator flash his/her badge and question reporters at a television station? Of course. Yet, this is not possible in HE. To further reduce the fun factor, the program "reads" or "summarizes" every document for you, slowing down gameplay and limiting the joy of discovering vital clues for yourself.

Worse, even when you *can* interrogate folks, you often only get one or two questions. This hard-wired feeling is constrictive and does not allow you to really get into any of the four roles. Plus, these interviews leave you hungering to be able to explore some of the clues and red herrings further.

The only real good news about HE is that the data it presents is as accurate as possible. Comparing Noguchi's quotes from the autopsy in the book "Coroner" with those excerpted for HE, I was extremely pleased. I was also impressed with the witnesses which the designers were able to put on Indeo video clips and the number of declassified documents available for examination.

Yet, all in all, I had the sense that this is another case of a designer not understanding the power of the medium. It is another multimediocre product, not because it lacks production values, but because its idea of interactivity is simply clicking on a minimum of hot spots per screen and playing back information for the viewer/player. In authentic interaction, the player/interactor changes things. Alas, in HARD EVIDENCE: THE MARILYN MONROE FILES, the interactor is only a supporting character—as is Ms. Monroe herself.

HARD EVIDENCE: THE MARILYN MONROE FILES

Price: $39.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 MHz or better, Windows 3.1, 4 MB RAM (8 MB recommended), 2x CD-ROM, mouse and 16-bit sound card
Designer: T1 New Media
Publisher: Novell, Inc.
Orem, UT
(800) 451-5151

THE EDITORS SPEAK

HARD EVIDENCE

RATING 1 star

PROS Use of actual witnesses and documents lend authenticity to this exploratory experience.
CONS Too little to do and too little accomplished make HE a dull toy.

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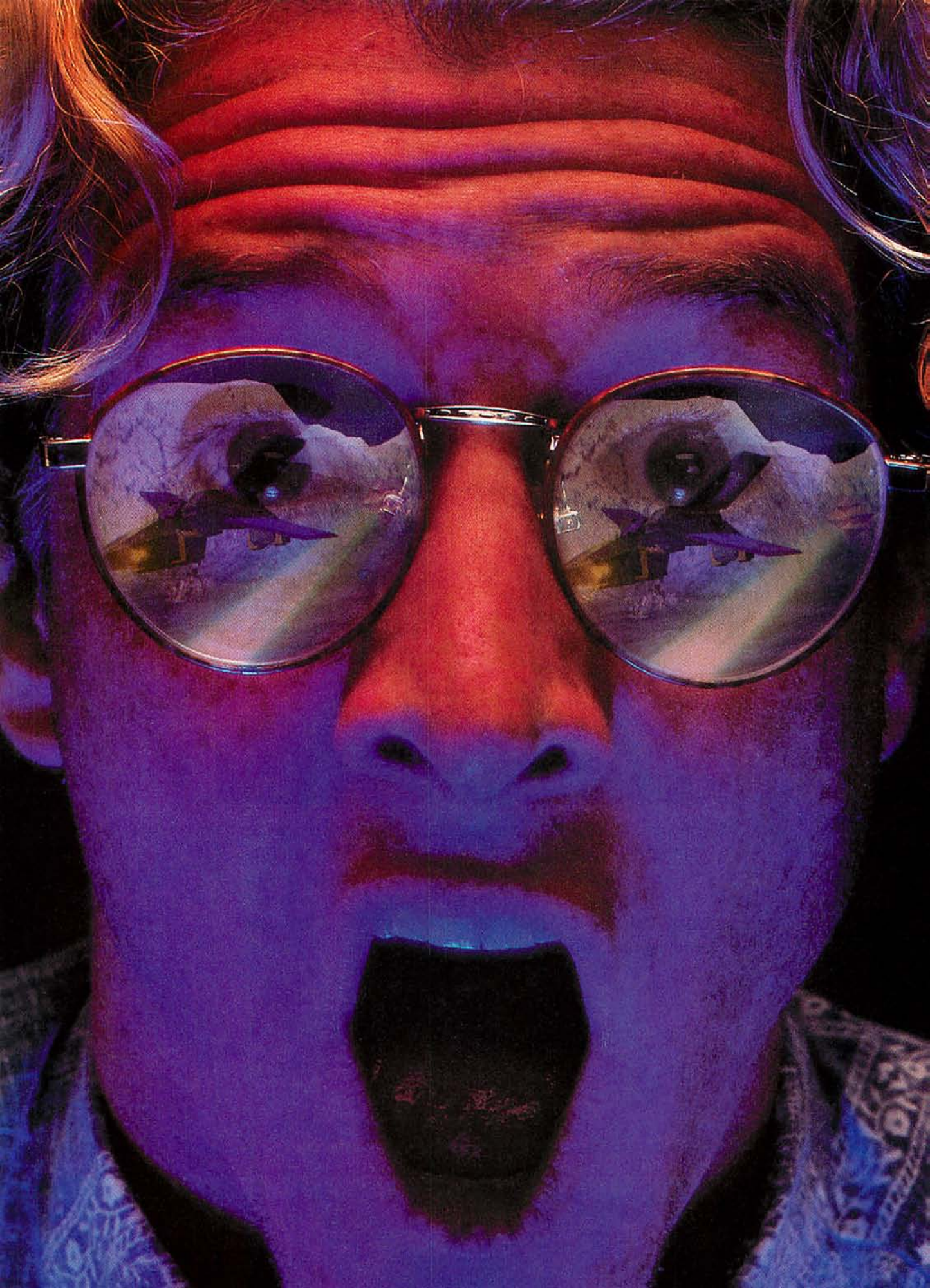

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DOMARK

Circle Reader Service #215

A Time Machine Past Its Time

THE CHAOS ENGINE Runs The Gauntlet Of Arcade Games Past

by Jason Kapalka

SOMETIME LATE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ONE BARON FORTESQUE, YOUR BASIC MAD scientist, built a machine to tamper with, as they say, "the very fabric of space and time." It's not clear exactly what the device was supposed to do, but what it actually did—and here's a bit of history I bet you didn't know—was transform all of England into a bizarre, savage landscape teeming with armored green mutants sporting really awful teeth. Since today's Brits are, for the most part, largely non-green and unarmored (though some might argue that the teeth are still a problem), it's obvious someone stepped in to restore the UK we all know and love. Stranger things have happened.

Such is the "plot" of **WarnerActive's** new arcade blast-em-up THE CHAOS ENGINE, and it's not the only thing about the game that harkens back to a bygone era. Gamers wishing they could turn their Pentium into a Super Nintendo so they can play a home-video rip-off of some 1980 arcade hit need look no further—your ship has come in. On the other hand, if you think your umpty-zillion dollar computer, with its local bus, quad-speed CD-ROM, whopping surplus of RAM and multi-gigabyte hard drive entitles you to newfangled features like full motion video, 3-D texture maps, or heck, even save game positions, buying this program will be a sure route to tears of frustration, not joy.

THE CHAOS ENGINE

Price: $29.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-25 MHz or higher, 2 MB RAM, 256 Color VGA, MS-DOS 5.0 and above. Supports Roland, Ad Lib, and Sound Blaster compatibles. Joystick highly recommended.
# of Players: 1 or 2
Protection: None
Designer: The Bitmap Brothers
Publisher: WarnerActive
Burbank, CA
(800) MY DEALER

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

You could be suckered, like me, by a quote prominently displayed in the game's ads (and on the box itself) proclaiming THE CHAOS ENGINE to be "The best two-player game on the PC, and a strong contender for best PC action game of all time." I'm charitably assuming this was written in reference to some beta-test version back in 1992, because this is a contender for Best Action Game in the same way I'm a contender for Heavyweight Champion of the World. Yeah, right—if Evander Holyfield, Mike Tyson, George Foreman and every other pugilist simultaneously dropped dead while I gained 50 pounds, I might have a shot. Likewise, if DOOM, DESCENT, DARK FORCES, WING COMMANDER 3 and TIE FIGHTER could be expunged from history, THE CHAOS ENGINE just might have a chance, though I suspect the bookies would still favor aging, brain-damaged champs like WOLFENSTEIN 3D and flash-in-the-pan punks like REBEL ASSAULT.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

So what's CHAOS ENGINE packing under its belt that's supposed to convince us it's got a shot at the title? Not much; what we have here is essentially a clone of GAUNTLET and related golden-age arcade games like IKARI WARRIORS, COMMANDO, MERCENARIES and HEAVY BARREL. Viewed from an overhead perspective, you guide your little brute around a scrolling map. You shoot the monsters. You grab the power-ups. If there are two players, you either cooperate or try to grab all the good stuff before your pal does. After zapping a number of "nodes," you go to the exit and enter the next level. And that's about it.

To be fair, a few efforts were made to spice things up. You can select from six different characters, ranging from the usual Thug, Brigand and Mercenary, to the somewhat unexpected Preacher. Each has different characteristics for speed, health and wit, along with a unique weapon and special ability. You collect coins during each level, with

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Circle Reader Service #31

IKARI GAUNTLET The Chaos Engine's graphics, top-down perspective and gameplay will instantly transport you back to the 1980's.

CHAIN OF FOOLS Who's afraid of green armored Brits when you've got the likes of a thug, gentleman and priest?

practically every monster takes multiple hits to kill. Needless to say, this leads to a short life expectancy for your mercs, as well as a lot of running around, running back and forth, running in circles, and just plain running away.

Another serious flaw lies in the save game system—there is none. After every four levels (out of a grand total of 16), you are given a password of alphanumeric gibberish, which you must write down and type back in when you wish to resume play. Maybe those used to the eccentricities of Euro-games and Nintendo carts won't be as insulted as I was, but sorry, if I can spare two and a half megs on my hard drive for this game, I think an extra kilobyte or two for a basic disk save isn't asking too much. And since you must complete four levels at a time in order to "save" your game, much, much time will be spent redoing the same old levels.

By this point, you won't expect high-tech multiplayer support, and sure enough, two players are supported through the time-honored system of plunking two people down at the same computer. If you have two joysticks, things will work okay, otherwise some unhappy camper's going to have to use the keyboard. Admittedly you don't need play-by-e-mail or twelve-person networking for a game like this, but modem support at least would have been nice.

DYNAMIC DUO Whether you play alone or with a friend, it's nice to know someone's always got your back.

which you can buy extra attribute points or equipment in preparation for the next stage. Assorted keys and other gimmicks, which can be used to access secret areas and shortcuts, are scattered about, but I wouldn't exactly call it "resource management" or "puzzle-solving." Not to say the game's easy—it isn't—but you won't be losing because of bad investments or an inability to figure out how to get the Golden Idol of Foozle from the Temple of Drug-Maddened Spearmen...

No, you'll be dying because your characters are fragile, the controls awkward, extra lives rare, and the monsters quick and accurate. To aim, you simply move towards an Englishman-cum-mutant and fire. Unfortunately, the screen area is so small, and your characters and their beasties so fast that it's very easy to run into a critter before you get a chance to blast it apart. On top of this,

CREAKY ENGINE

It's not that I think there's anything inherently wrong with an updated PC version of GAUNTLET and its ilk. During high school I spent many an hour plugging arrows into ghosts at the local bowling alley, and later, spraying lead into hordes of generic fatigued dudes in games like HEAVY BARREL. But sadly, CHAOS ENGINE doesn't recreate these halcyon days—it just reminds me of how much better than this those old games were. Even the crude, visceral visual impact of those testosterone-fests is muted, with monsters dying in polite little explosions and damage to your character registered only with a near-inaudible grunt. Instead of worrying about being overwhelmed by a tidal wave of opponents, you worry about slipping up on the joystick and crashing into one of the sporadically-released beasts while aiming. Nonstop carnage this ain't.

It's too bad the ball got fumbled, because there really is room in the PC game market, currently gorged on a glut of first-person blast-ups, for a good scrolling overhead-view game. Twelve-person Super VGA network GAUNTLET might not push the envelope of design philosophy or computer technology, but I suspect it'd be a whole lot of fun. And isn't that the point?

In the end, crisp, professional graphics, some moderately clever level maps, and the Warner publicity machine are all that separate CHAOS ENGINE from the murky realm of shareware. Frankly, I've played shareware games of this genre that were more enjoyable overall, notably a little gem called CYBERDOGS. Old Baron Fortesque ought to power up his time-space contraption and send THE CHAOS ENGINE back to 1985. It might have been a contender back then.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THE CHAOS ENGINE

RATING 2

PROS Three years ago this would have been a good Nintendo cartridge; ten years ago it might have made a decent arcade game.

CONS Today, it's not much of anything.

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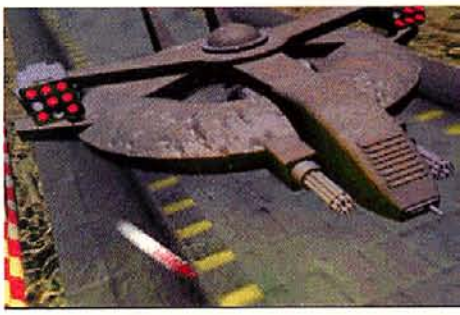

by Paul Schuytema

IF YOU DIDN'T CATCH MY REVIEW LAST MONTH ON SLIPSTREAM 5000, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT I PUT THE "FAN" in fanatic when it comes to hovercraft racing simulators. The idea of defying gravity and vaulting down a race course at utterly horrendous speeds turns me into a giggling madman. I love the whole idea. And now, another hovercraft racing sim has hit the market just when I needed another fix. Those clever Brits at Bullfrog, along with Electronic Arts, have formulated HI-OCTANE, a high-speed, down-and-dirty racing sim using MAGIC CARPET's magnificent game engine. If your tanks are running a bit dry, a good dose of HI-OCTANE ought to be able to refill them for a little while, at least.

PRETTY PICTURES

HI-OCTANE'S graphics are among the best I've ever seen. The dark, moody color palette goes a long way towards setting the brooding, intense, cyber-punkish tone for the game. And the six courses each possess a very unique flavor.

You can play in either normal or SVGA resolutions, but the SVGA mode, with all the detail turned on, is much too sluggish, even on a 90 MHz Pentium. Sure, you can reduce the detail levels, but there is nothing wrong with the regular resolution at max detail—it's far prettier than a sparse hi-res image.

Hi-Octane

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 or better (486-50 MHz recommended), 4 MB of RAM, 1 MB HD space, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse, Novell network and 8 MB of RAM (for multiple players)
# of players: 1-8 (Netbios network)
Protection: none (CD-ROM)
Designer: Bullfrog
Publisher: Electronic Arts
San Mateo, CA
(800) 245-4525

THE ULTIMATE DRIVING EXPERIENCE

You have the option of choosing one of six racing hovercraft, from the nimble and weakly-armored Outrider to the boxy, slow, near-invulnerable Jugga truck. Each racer possesses a different mixture of speed, armor, weight and firepower, all of which actually play into the race. The vehicles require different strategies and tactics, because they each perform differently on the road. Unfortunately, the cockpit for each racer looks exactly the same. The designers really missed an opportunity here to spice the game up a bit by providing some visual feedback illustrating the differences of the various racers.

Six unique race courses await the eager, from the fast Amazon Delta Turnpike to Thrak City, an urban wasteland riddled with 90 degree corners and hairpin turns.

You begin every race (even the championship races) in the pole position, and once the green light blinks on, you'll be skimming the ground at lightning fast speeds. Now I've never been in a gravity-defying hovercraft, but the physics modeling in this game feels right on, with inertia creeping into your cornering decisions as you find yourself fighting the stick, trying to maintain your line into a curve (turn early to get the thrust in line with your desired directional vector). You can zoom up rock walls, bank off of concrete abutments and generally drive like a New York cabbie on crank. This is one racing game where fun seems to have come first.

The six creatively designed race courses give drivers a host of decisions: there are pit stops, shortcuts and goodies all over the track. Each course requires a different driving strategy, and there are always different routes to take during each race.

The race length is always fixed, ranging from 11 laps on the Amazon course to a mere four laps in Thrak City. Once the green is given, HI-OCTANE quickly becomes an all-out adrenaline rush until the finish. During the championship season, I found my hand cramping up after a couple of races in a row due to the maniacal grip I had on my joystick.

DRIVE TO STAY ALIVE

During the race you have a ton of tactical decisions to make, which keeps things interesting. You have two weapons, a

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SOME MAY WISH TO STAY.

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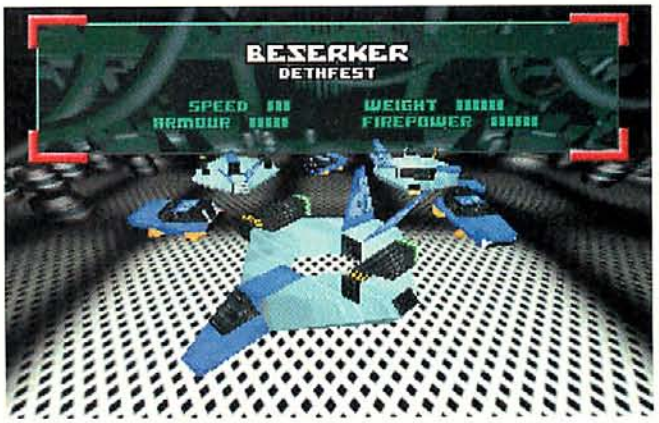
gatling gun (which rattles dryly when you're out of bullets) and a missile launcher, each of which can be upgraded by running over the appropriate power-up icon. Other power-ups provide additional fuel and shield power. These bonuses litter the course and also rain down like a smashed piñata when another racer bursts into flames.

CAR WARS Bullet holes in the window aren't good—they indicate the amount of damage you've taken.

With your weaponry, you can be every bit the obnoxiously offensive driver. The machine gun is terrifically annoying, but lacks the power to do serious damage; for that purpose you'll want to use your missiles. They fire straight ahead unless you've been tailing another racer long enough for your computer to achieve "lock." Three or four blasts should take out most racers.

Of course, the computer drivers are also gunning for you. It's quite possible that you'll end up fried as you try to blast someone else ahead of you. When you get torched (and you will), your powerups burst forth for all the other drivers to greedily snatch up. In a few seconds a repair flier swoops down, grabs you with its claws, repairs you in mid-air and drops you back on the race track (losing precious ground in the process as other racers streak by).

As a driver, you have three things to monitor: fuel, munitions and shields. It's a safe bet that you won't have enough of any of them to make it through an entire race. That's where the tactics come in. There are recharging stations on every course, sometimes right on the main track and other times in an alternate pit lane. Occasionally, two stations will be grouped together (like shields and ammo), but most of the time a course will have different pit areas for everything. The amount of recharging you do is based on how much time you spend in the pits. Blast through at full speed and you'll get a splash of fuel; park there and you can completely fill your tank. This type of timed, on-the-fly pitting makes HI-OCTANE a ton of fun and adds a strategic dimension to the game. Plus, other drivers idling in the pits make juicy targets for a well-timed missile volley. After the race, you're presented with a pseudo-spreadsheet reporting on everyone's racing performance.



SUPER FAMILY TRUCKSTER You can choose from several different car types, including the heavyweight Jugga truck.

HOVERING OVER A NETWORK

You can also play HI-OCTANE on a Netbios network with up to eight human players or a combination of biological and digital opponents. (No modem play is supported.) Playing on a network is great and it works fine, but you need at least four players to make it enjoyable. With only two racers, the competition isn't much better than playing by yourself, since if one player gets ahead, they're likely to stay there. The only problem is that a four-player network game is one hell of an investment—you'll need four fast computers networked together (which probably means you'll be playing at the office), and all four players have to plunk down the cash to buy a copy of the game. This means that we're talking over $400 for an eight-player game. I don't care how much you like hovercraft sims; that's way too rich a fuel mixture for any PC racer to swallow.

GOING FOR THE GLORY

In addition to single races, you can sign up for a six-race championship season, where the driver with the most points at the end of six races drives away with the title. Unfortunately, this is one of the weakest parts of the game. The problem is, apart from points totals and a summarizing spreadsheet, you receive no recognition for winning a race. Even worse, you'll get absolutely no acknowledgment for winning the championship. I know that, to paraphrase the Bard, "the play's the thing," but giving a player zero victory reinforcement is a design *faux pas* of the worst kind. This is one of HI-OCTANE's greatest failings.

That brings me to another of the game's weaknesses. There just isn't enough depth. No driver personalities, no animated cut scenes, no cash to earn, no "tweaking" your vehicle. Nothing but racing, and while the action is great, it really doesn't make for a lengthy play cycle. I installed HI-OCTANE at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and by 2 a.m. I had won the championship at its hardest level. So that's at least twelve hours of gameplay, right? Well, not really. We had company for dinner and I took my daughter to the library and...well, as near as I can figure, we're talking about six hours. Six hours to go from never having seen or played the game to "winning it all" does not a great game make.

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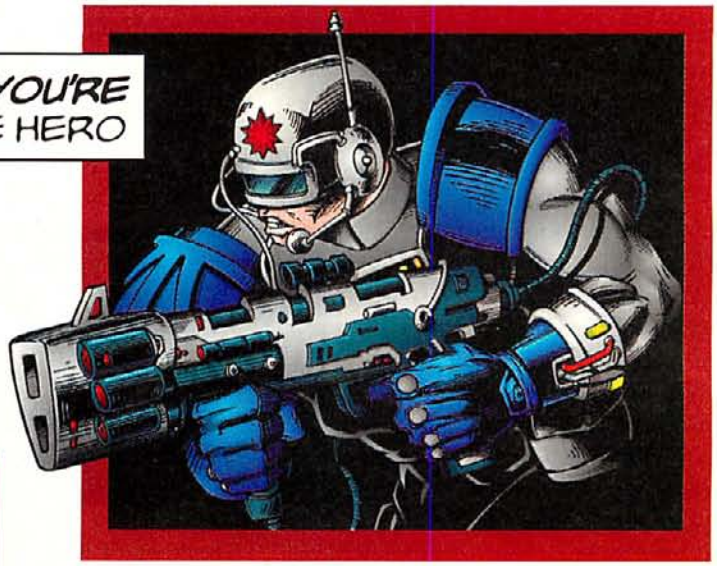

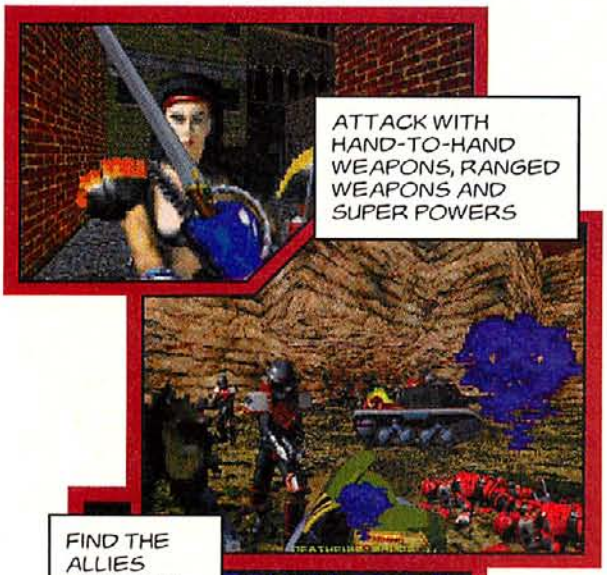

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Circle Reader Service #99

A Driver's Tale

Tips And Tricks From A Hi-Octane Pro

My name is Ralston, Ralston Mino. I've been dogging this circuit for, cripes, just about 12 years now, and I've got to tell you this straight up: there ain't no easy way to snatch a win on this circuit. Hell, there ain't no easy way to stay alive either.

All right, hold on to your boosters. I know you came here to learn some of my tricks, not to hear some old guy ranting about the days before methylpropylene and self-boosting shields. They tell me that you're all rookies with potential. That you all have The Spark, and that's just what the crowd and the sponsors and those billions watching on HTV want to see. You're the next breed. Yeah, right. We'll see about that.

One of the great paradoxes of this circuit is that you're only going to win races by being out front; unfortunately, when you're in the lead you're most vulnerable. You've got no mines and no smoke—none of those goodies the Formula Three glamour boys have. So the trick is to get out front and build your lead. To do that, you need to know the course and how to use your booster. Boost right out from the starting line, and anytime you've got a straight shot, boost again.

When the missiles start blasting your tail end, remember that the corner is your best friend. Make it to a corner, and you've got another few seconds before that hotshot behind you will be able to draw a bead.

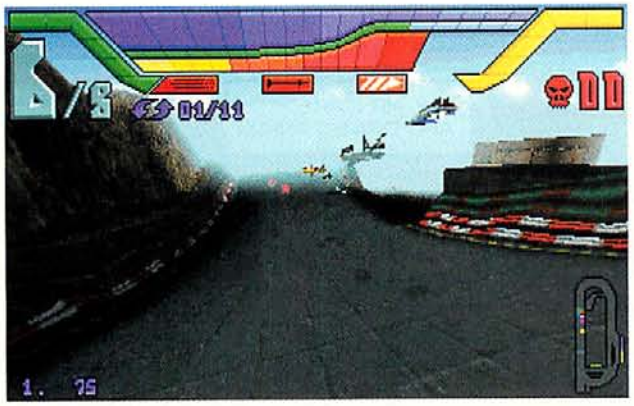
Of course to do this, you'll need a ride with some balance. Sure, the burley boys prefer the trucks, but wearing armored underwear tends to slow you down. Some flyboys, on the other hand—the pretty ones mostly—like their rides sleek and fast. A couple well-placed missiles can put an end to their day real fast.

That's why I like a good balance of speed and armor. You need enough speed so that you can use your boosters to blast past the competition, but enough armor so that you can take a few missile hits before you have to pit for your shields.

Remember that if you get yourself taken out, they'll fix you up and put you back in again. Problem is, you never know just how long that will take. Because of that—unless you want to go back to selling rat sticks in the bleachers—it's a good idea to make a run for the shield recharge station each and every lap. You don't have to park there like a pansy; if you pit every lap, you can usually just blast right through. That little bit of recharge just might save your butt.

One last piece of advice. If you should manage to put all of this together and fly a damn quick race, which I doubt, don't allow your ego to take over. What I'm saying is: don't lap the slower traffic. All you'll be doing is hanging a sign on your ass that says "Shoot Me" right in front of some no-life loser with a full load of missiles.

That does it for me. As you know, this Chernobyl run is my last race, and these words...well, let's just say that they're my legacy to you. We've got 40 minutes 'til the tree turns Christmas green, so you snappers better take yourselves a little nap. You'll need it. This old dog still has a few tricks, and there ain't a chance in hell I'm gonna let any of you snot-noses take my last checkered...



MAGIC "CAR"-PET The folks at Bullfrog have once again worked their magic with the MAGIC CARPET engine.

The bottom line on HI-OCTANE is this: I have never driven a more exciting, beautiful or challenging hovercraft racing sim. But I have to question the depth of this game. For a single player, there just aren't enough units of fun per dollar in the package. Of course, that value goes up for network players, but then so does the cost of playing the game.

If you love sci-fi racing sims, as I do, then you'll want to check this one out. You'll probably spend a lot more than just six hours driving (I sure did), even after you've thoroughly conquered the game—it is a blast after all—but don't expect to be brought to your knees by any towering gameplay challenge. As good as the racing engine is, I sure wish that Bullfrog and Electronic Arts had thought about adding some more gas to HI-OCTANE'S tank.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

HI OCTANE

RATING 4 out of 5

PROS Addictive, exciting racing, with gorgeous graphics. Good sense of speed and inertia modeling. Creatively-designed courses give drivers a variety of routes to take.

CONS No positive reinforcement for winning, disappointing championship season. Lack of depth means players can conquer the game in only a few hours.

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Circle Reader Service #213

INTERACTIVE QUARTERLY

AMERICA'S PREMIERE ADULT CD-ROM MAGAZINE

A Technical Knock-Out

FX FIGHTER Looks And Moves Like The New Champion Of PC Fighters

by Jason Kapalka

BRITISH NOVELIST MARTIN AMIS ONCE WROTE THAT THE APPEAL OF VIDEO GAMES IS THAT THEY TELL A story. The more skilled you are as a player, the longer and better the story gets. This goes a long way towards explaining why most games have simple slay-the-dragon plots with happy endings. How many gamers, after all, would be willing to toil long hours over their keyboard only to have their digital surrogate meet an Orwellian fate?

But what are we to make of the slew of "mano-a-mano" fighting games currently besieging the arcades and console systems and slowly seeping into PC-dom? What kind of stories do they tell? The cheapest kung-fu flicks have more in the way of plot and characterization. Forget Kafka—even Mickey Spillane might feel a little wimpy in the primal, testosterone-driven universe of these games.

FX Fighter is no exception, though there is a (flimsy) rationale for the carnage. Apparently a large green baddie named Rygil has dropped in on intergalactic society with a challenge. Beat him in a hand-to-hand combat tournament and his personal war-world Anarchis is yours; fail, and your home system is vaporized. Talk about a finishing move. The designers got a little carried away with the exploding planet stuff, however—defeating Rygil results in Anarchis blowing up like everything else. Whoops.

FX FIGHTER

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33Mhz or better, 20 MB free hard drive space, 4 MB RAM, CD-ROM drive (486-66Mhz or Pentium with 8MB RAM recommended)
# of Players: 1 or 2
Protection: None
Designer: Argonaut Software
Publisher: GTE Interactive
Carlsbad, CA
(800) GTE-TODAY

PRETTY, PRETTY PAIN CAVE

Nihilism aside, FX FIGHTER is a very good game—probably the best fighting game available for the PC. It is essentially a clone of VIRTUA FIGHTER, but originality is not the point here; the community of STREET FIGHTER, MORTAL KOMBAT, TEKKEN, PRIMAL RAGE and the like is already more than a little inbred. What matters is—if you'll pardon the pun—execution, and designers **Argonaut Software** (creators of STARFOX for the SNES) pull it off with class.

As in VIRTUA FIGHTER, FX FIGHTER's nine combatants are three-dimensional figures instead of the flat images of STREET FIGHTER or MORTAL KOMBAT. A computer-controlled camera swoops around the arena during each match, (usually) selecting the best vantage point. PC owners unfamiliar with VIRTUA FIGHTER will find the closest similarity is to Carnby, the angular detective from ALONE IN THE DARK, if he'd spent five years in a gym beefing up his biceps and bitmaps.

Visually it's all quite pretty, though you'll need a Pentium to get the game running smoothly with the detail maxed out. Magnon the lava man is a dead ringer for the volcanic beast from that old episode of Star Trek (you know the one, with Genghis Khan and Abraham Lincoln), while Venam the mantis is appropriately chitinous. Each fighter's arena, ranging from Kiko's sunny jungle planet to Siren's dark water world, is attractively designed and lit. Compared to VIRTUA FIGHTER, FX FIGHTER's characters are more detailed but a little slower and less crisp, with a tendency to overlap and break apart once in a while.

Though the fighters and the arena are three-dimensional, the actual gameplay is not. You're still essentially fighting on a two-dimensional line; although you can roll to the left and right, your effective range of motion is still directly towards or away from a foe. The controls are a little simpler than the average fighting game's deluge of buttons: you have your punch button and you have your kick button, and between the two of them and your joystick a whole world of face-pummeling pain.

Despite the simplicity of the controls, the characters have a wealth of unique special moves—over half a dozen for each fighter, ranging from Cyben 30's electric face grab to Sheba's leopard pounce to Ashraf's devastating telekinetic push. Throw in assorted "specials" common to most characters like rolls, blocks, footsweeps, and unsportsmanlike hit-em-while-they're-down attacks, and you have a very broad range of hurtful options.

Even though polygons don't bleed, there's still plenty of the "Ow, that's gotta hurt" factor. Jake, the beefy male human,

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has a penchant for seizing his opponent's hair and driving three or four punches into their face; Venam is probably the first fighter to use an attack best described as the "shoulder chew"; and the supposedly spiritual monk Ashraf has an unhealthy fondness for smashing fallen foes in the groin. There are no finishing moves or fatalities, but when a combatant is KO'd the camera goes into extreme slow motion to capture the loser's limp body twisting to the mat. And then, of course, their planet blows up.

LEOPARD SKIN WARRIOR Painted polygons though they are, FX FIGHTER's sharp-looking graphics help make it the pick of the litter.

POWER TO THE PUGILISTS

Fighting fans are among the most fanatical of gamers, as anyone who's hung out in an arcade lately can attest. Fortunately FX FIGHTER offers enough, er, subtleties to satisfy all but the total diehard.

For example, there are combos aplenty. Combos, for the uninitiated, are a series of specific attacks that when properly executed cannot be blocked or dodged by an opponent. This can get excessive: I personally wasn't too thrilled when a ten-year-old dealt me something like seventeen consecutive hits in PRIMAL RAGE while I tugged ineffectively at my joystick. Thankfully, the balance of power in FX FIGHTER is a little more reasonable. Two, three, and four hit combos are relatively common, but getting more than five hits in is very difficult, though not impossible.

BONE-CRUSHING AFFECTION Each character has over 10 special attacks, like Magnon's super bear hug.

The computer AI is okay, but not great, relying perhaps excessively on "cheap" moves at the higher difficulty levels, but never outright cheating or using moves impossible for human players to perform. Though the hardest difficulty setting is fairly challenging, FX FIGHTER is notable for having one of the easiest "Easy" settings I've ever seen. At difficulty zero, I'm pretty sure I could win the game blindfolded with one hand, while eating a pizza. Inexperienced or uncoordinated combatants can rest assured they will be able to learn the ropes without continual merciless thrashings at the hands of the computer.

But as with all fighting games, the most fun is playing against another human. Here, unfortunately, is where the game becomes a bit unbalanced. Versus the computer, most of the fighters can be effective, in the right hands. But against a human who takes advantage of every little design idiosyncrasy, certain warriors emerge as obviously superior choices. Ashraf's telekinetic push in particular is, in the parlance, real "cheap"; it's easy to execute, very powerful, and nearly impossible to block or dodge. If you're willing to use some "house rules" or give certain characters a handicap, you can easily circumvent these problems. But problems they remain.

Another problem is the manual, which is a little skimpy on the info. Presented as a comic book, there are in fact only three pages actually dedicated to playing the game. And none of the special moves are described. Not one. Even the technique for blocking, a pretty essential maneuver, is left to your imagination. (*For a list of moves and special attacks, see this month's Gamer's Edge on pg. 236*). With only two buttons to fool about with, it's not ridiculously hard to discover the unique moves, but in the heat of combat it can be a trifle annoying to perform a spiffy backbreaker and then forget exactly what joystick flagellations produced it.

NO MERCY AND NO QUARTERS

The PC is still not really the ideal platform for fighting games, which probably work best in arcades and on consoles. But if you're not willing to fork out four hundred bucks for a Saturn with VIRTUA FIGHTER, or if you prefer a sackful of science-fiction stereotypes duking it out instead of the usual kung-fu cliches, FX FIGHTER is your game.

And as for the story it tells, well, it's easy to excuse a little unoriginality. Chess, the oldest, most abstract and elegant game of all, has essentially the same narrative—an all-out battle to the bitter end. Of course you don't get to rip out anyone's spine from their back in chess (unless you're Bobby Fischer), but grand master Nigel Short's blunt description of the game applies equally well to FX FIGHTER. "You must win," he said. "It's not an art. It's a fight. It's a fight."

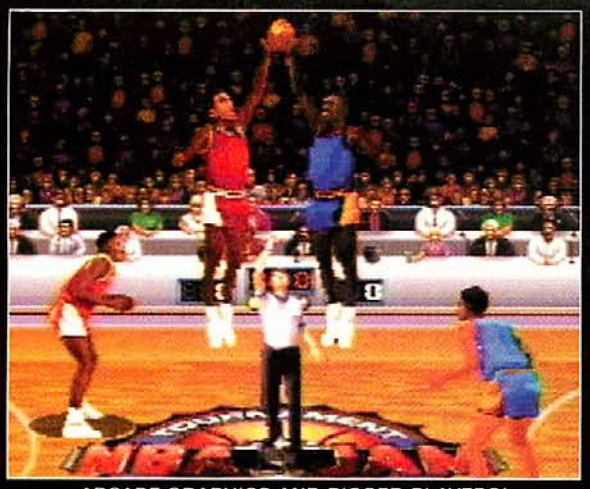
THE EDITORS SPEAK

FX FIGHTER

RATING

PROS The best fighting game currently available for the PC, with great graphics, colorful characters, and engaging gameplay.

CONS Skimpy manual, a few game balance problems, a hefty hunger for hardware. Not quite on par with the best of the arcade fighters.



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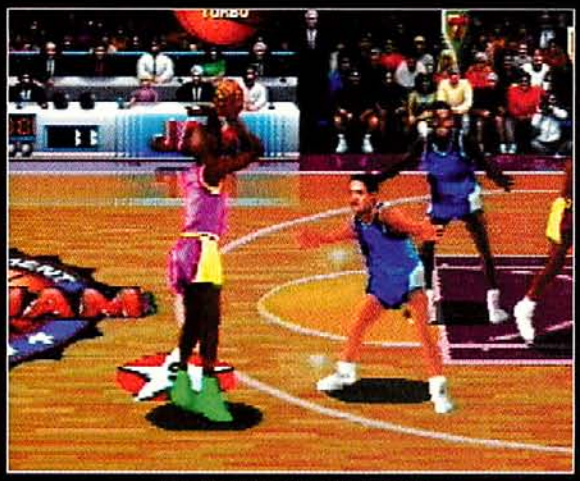

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PUMPS 1 GALLON A MINUTE.

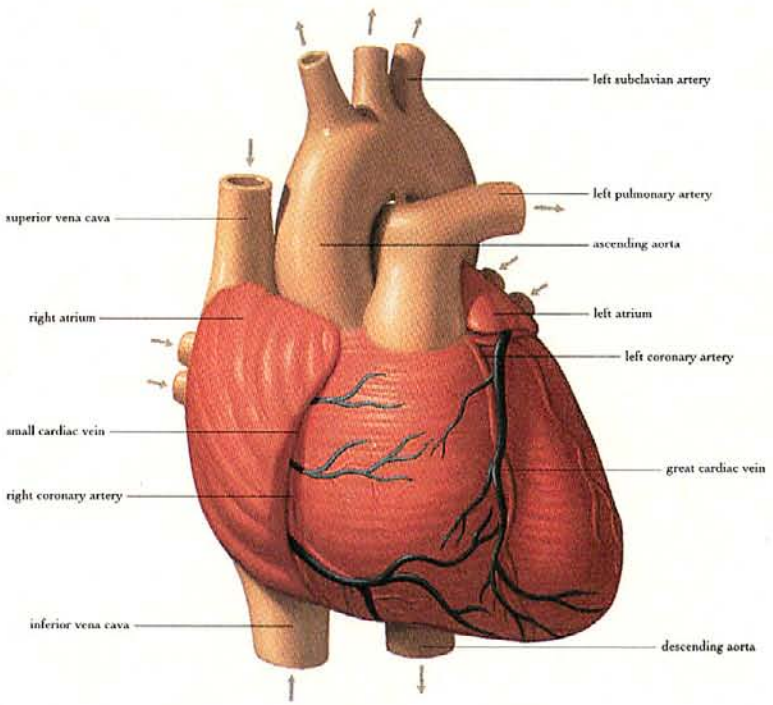

FIG. 34.–The Human Heart.

PUMPS 25 GALLONS A MINUTE.

Put your pulse in overdrive. Fade To Black is the adrenaline-pumping sequel to Flashback from Delphine. It's a mind-bending combination of fluid, life-like animation and complete control over seemingly unlimited character movements. Along the way, multiple camera angles mirror every heart-stopping turn. Even the sound and music score won't give you a moment's peace. Until you rest in eternal peace.

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Circle Reader Service #64

Ice Follies

In A Crowded Digital Hockey Division, WORLD HOCKEY Places Last

by Gordon Goble

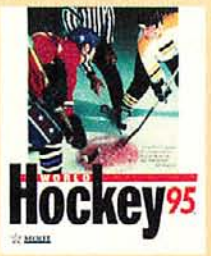
CHECK AGAINST THE BORED **Although the notion of a professional world league is an interesting one, WORLD HOCKEY '95 is mired in subpar graphics and gameplay.**

BELL-BOTTOMS, BUTTERFLY COLLARS AND DISCO-FUNK. IT SEEMS THAT EVERYWHERE I LOOK, ICONS of a bygone era are bombarding me. This cultural phenomenon even extends to the computer game industry—can anyone out there honestly say they ever thought they'd play an Atari 2600 game again? And how about Donkey Kong's rebirth from the ashes of the 1980s?

Perhaps this explains **Merit Studios'** release of WORLD HOCKEY '95, which instantly time-warped me back 10 years or so to an era that, in retrospect, was much less fashionable in terms of computer games than fashion and music. Computer games, and sports simulations in particular, sported crummy graphics, incomplete manuals, archaic interfaces and atrocious gameplay.

In this sense, WORLD HOCKEY '95 captivated me. I wondered how something so new could look so old and be so bad. This game poses a serious threat to the notion that today's sports games are consistently better than they were a decade ago.

WORLD HOCKEY '95



Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486/25 MHz or better (486/66 recommended), CD-ROM, 4 MB RAM (8 MB recommended), 1 MB disk space; Sound Blaster compatible sound card
Protection: None
Publisher: Merit Studios
Dallas, TX
(800) 238-4277

BEST OF TIMES, WORST OF TIMES

To be sure, WORLD HOCKEY is entering a market that has experienced a sudden, exciting boom, a market rightfully dominated by one game (**EA's** NHL HOCKEY 95), and witness to a pair of interesting newcomers (BRETT HULL '95 and the much anticipated ESPN NATIONAL HOCKEY NIGHT). But even if WORLD HOCKEY was the only kid on the block, I still couldn't recommend it, even as some sort of gruesome oddity. It resembles the above products in one (and only one) area: its box bears a striking similarity to that of NHL HOCKEY.

Based on an interesting if fictitious concept—the idea of a global professional hockey league—WORLD HOCKEY groups teams representing different countries into divisions and conferences. The end result is an Olympic Games (where most of the players are pros already) without the four year wait. Although WORLD HOCKEY has no licensing arrangement with any sporting organization and, consequently, no real-life players, the concept of a professional global league is an innovative one. Too bad Merit Studios couldn't pull it off properly.

Following an animated introduction, merry pucksters are taken to the first of several confusing low-resolution interfaces. You'll long for NHL HOCKEY's elegant interface as you stumble and bumble your way through this game; instead of pull-down menus, you get an awkward, cryptic collection of adjoining option boxes. WORLD HOCKEY allows the usual adjustable play options like period length, opponent skill level, player fatigue, and exhibition or league play mode. Individual player attributes may be modified, head-to-head play is permitted, and fighting (however poorly done) is also part of the package. One of the few bright spots is the practice mode, which allows gamers to rehearse their offensive or defensive schemes.

Unfortunately, the interface gets even worse as you delve into the meanings of some of the options. You'll be stymied by options like "Switch" and "Twist." And the penalties, which can be toggled on and off, are confined to four categories: "roughing," "charging," "icing" and "netting" (an odd term for "purposely dislodging the net from its moorings"). Not that these four penalties don't make sense, but what about elbowing, tripping, boarding, hooking, et al.?

Next it's on to WORLD HOCKEY moderator "Bob Connor," a man whose limited, generic commentary is delivered in a style that only Ed Wood could be happy with. The static-filled audio here is muffled, the video befitting any local Cable Access channel. Ugh. The scary thing is, these are all problems *before* you actually get into the game itself.

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Circle Reader Service #22

ICE COLD INTERFACE WORLD HOCKEY's interface is far from user-friendly.

WHAT THE PUCK?

When you finally get on the ice, WORLD HOCKEY truly shows its stuff. The game gives you a peculiar corner-of-the-rink viewing perspective that puts everything on the diagonal (much like EA's NBA LIVE '95, but not implemented as well). The scoreboard looks just fine if you don't need vital information like how much penalty time is left. Before the puck is even dropped, you'll get the sensation that something truly terrible is about to happen.

And once the ref throws down the rubber, your suspicions will be proven right. Without rhyme or reason, players move faster in certain directions than others, overskate the puck with regularity and never seem to go where you want them. In general they behave with a complete lack of skill or knowledge. The puck sits frozen on the ice as players mill about. Why doesn't somebody pick it up? Why is every player on the ice behind the net?

Wantonly walloping the unfortunate joystick, you attempt to regain control, but to no avail. You begin to babble. "Is that guy shooting or checking? Why can't I complete a pass? Why can't I change lines during play, and would player movement be different if I did? Was that a goal? What's that pinging sound? What's that hissing sound? Is it a cheering crowd? Is this merely someone's cruel joke?"

As delirium subsides and acceptance sets in, you realize this is no joke—it's WORLD HOCKEY, and you've just been indoctrinated. Calmly consulting the manual, you find the following pearls of wisdom: "You only need one goaltender," it says. "When the puck is iced no goal is scored," and "The player throwing the first punch usually spends some time in the penalty box."

"Oh," you'll exclaim with newfound insight. Then, if you're like me, you'll pack WORLD HOCKEY back into its box and return it whence it came.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

WORLD HOCKEY '95

RATING

PROS The professional international league concept is innovative, as is the practice mode.

CONS A confusing interface, poor graphics, and atrocious gameplay. Better hockey games have been made for the Apple II and Commodore 64.

They're exactly the same, but somebody just paid $100,000 for the one on the right.

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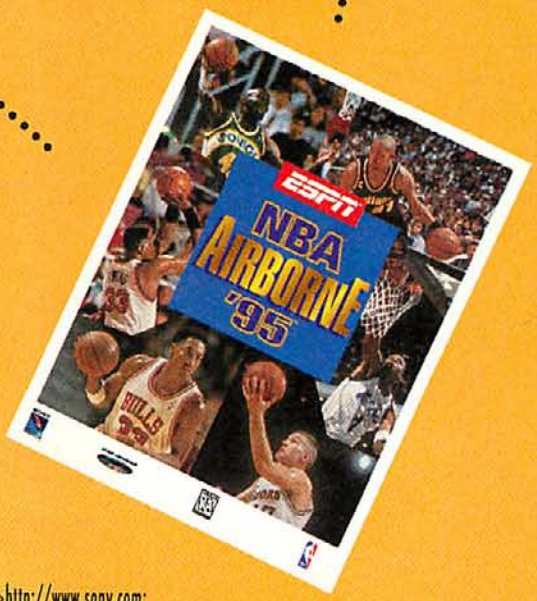

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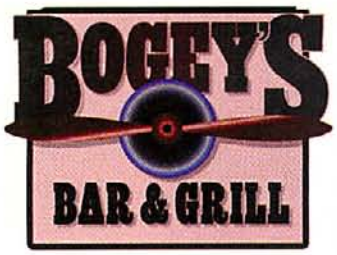
Circle Reader Service #36

Submarine Driver's Ed.

SNEAK ATTACK AND EVASION TACTICS FOR WWII SUB CAPTAINS



SIMULATIONS, LIKE THEIR REAL-WORLD counterparts, seem to attack in waves. A flock of jet simulators hits the shelves. A few months later, they're followed by a gaggle of World War II fighter games. The next wave looks to be a pack of sub sims, with **SSI**'s SILENT HUNTER, **Interactive Magic**'s WAR PATROL, **Time-Warner**'s FAST ATTACK, and **Sierra/Dynamix**'s sequel to ACES OF THE DEEP all on the way. With all these nautical games in the works, it seems a good time to take a look at some basic submarine warfare strategies.

Submarines were participating in stealth warfare more than a half-century before the term was coined. The key to being a good sub pilot is to stay undetected until the last possible moment, and then take advantage of your ship's strengths once your cover is blown. This month we'll take a look at tactics for World War II sub sims. We'll dive into modern submarine combat in a future installment.

ATTACKS BY DAY OR NIGHT

In the Second World War, submarine tactics varied by time of day. During daylight hours, subs would remain submerged and rely on surprise and stealth to launch attacks. At night the slim, low profile of the typical submarine would usually allow it to retain an element of surprise even on the surface, so they would often attack surfaced in order to take advantage of their superior speed and maneuverability above water. (Late in the war, though, the development of shipboard radar made even nighttime surface attacks risky.)

Too often novice sub gamers will try to speed right into the center of a convoy and start firing. This not only opens you to easy detection, but also risks collision. The best approach for a surface attack is the end-run ambush: Speed ahead of the convoy and take position less than 500 yards to the port or starboard of where you think the convoy will pass. This way, the enemy practically comes to you! Since you'll be lying in wait, there will be no telltale noises to give away your position. Done right, you'll be set up for easy broadside shots as the ships move past you. As they pass, line up for a shot on the most distant target first. Then try to time succeeding launches so the fish will all hit their targets at about the same time. Once one torpedo explodes, the rest of the ships in the convoy will likely take immediate evasive action, and you don't want to give them that chance. Try to keep your bow pointed directly at the target; this not only gives you the best shot, but also presents the smallest profile to the target ship and decreases your chance of being hit.

Once you've fired, don't sit there and wait for a reload, as the convoy escorts will likely come steaming your way. Move off at high speed (or dive, if an escort moves too

by Denny Atkin

ON THE RADAR

The one thing we seem to hear over and over is how fun Looking Glass Technologies' FLIGHT UNLIMITED would be if it only had air combat. Designer Seamus Blackley says his next Flight product, tentatively entitled FLIGHT COMBAT, will "make you into a fighter pilot." The product will allow you to follow the same curriculum the Air Force teaches, he says, with an emphasis on learning a new concept and then going out in a mission and putting it to the test. "You're gonna learn how to kill with an airplane, and then we'll make you prove it on the Net," says Blackley.

Meanwhile, back on the ground, Papyrus is building a souped-up Indy Car with the NASCAR RACING engine. According to a source at Papyrus, the new INDY CAR RACING II will feature NASCAR RACING-quality graphics and more detailed crashes. The AI has been enhanced over the original, and the game will be multiplayer, both head-to-head via modem and over a planned Papyrus multiplayer network. Papyrus is trying to put the new Indy Car on the track by Christmas, in Windows 3.1, Windows 95 and Macintosh versions.

close), re-arm, and then check out the situation. If the convoy is moving slow enough, you may be able to move back into position for another attack. (Be alert, though, because in a realistic simulation any destroyer or corvette escorts will be on the lookout for you this time.) If the convoy has gotten away, check its path for stragglers. Damaged ships may be limping behind, unable to keep up, and these unescorted vessels are easy pickings.

A similar tactic works for submerged attacks. Move in front of the convoy and remain submerged. Listen to your sonar and wait for the escort screen to pass overhead. When it's clear, move to periscope depth and check to see if the convoy has zigged (or zagged, for that matter). If you need to move into a better firing position, move as slowly as possible (preferably under seven knots), or the wake from your periscope may give you away.

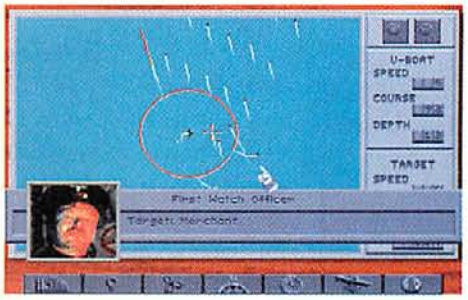
Lying in wait may not be an option if your target is moving quickly. If you need to line up for a direct moving attack, plot an intercept course to the target track that's 90 degrees off the line of sight to the target. You should arrive just ahead of the target. Once he's within about 1000 yards, turn towards him and fire away. Generally you should avoid down-the-throat (head-on) and up-the-kilt (direct stern approach) shots, as the chance of hitting is pretty slim. One exception is when an escort is bearing down on you and you don't have time to dive to evade. In that case, even a slim chance of a hit gives you some hope. More likely, though, the escort will change course to avoid the fish you've launched, buying you a few more seconds to try to escape.

IN MY SIGHTS Try to fire at your target as it passes since a broadsides launch is more likely to hit home. The fish are already away by this shot, taken from ACES OF THE DEEP.

The best way to escape if you have time is to dive. While subs usually were able to outspeed and outmaneuver escort ships on the surface, a surface escape leaves you vulnerable to shelling. And one well-placed shell can puncture your sub's pressure hull, negating your ability to dive. Try to keep your bow or stern pointed directly at your attacker when diving—this will reduce your sonar echo.

If you find yourself ahead of the enemy, you may want to try a parallel approach instead of lying in wait. Turn directly towards your target. As you reach a good firing range, turn hard in one direction and fire your stern tubes. This approach has a couple of advantages. First, it lets you use your stern tubes, a resource you often don't get a chance to exploit. Also, since you're heading away from the enemy at a good pace the moment you're in a position to fire, you have a better chance of escaping any destroyers or corvettes that may come to the ship's defense when the torpedo is noticed.

When you're on the hunt, don't just cruise around at high speed, as you'll probably never hear the enemy approaching. Instead, use the sprint-and-drift tactic. Move at full speed for a period of time to cover distance, then drop back to a drift to listen for the enemy.



TARGET ACQUIRED In this overhead view from ACES OF THE DEEP, you can quickly get the position of your sub relative to a convoy.

EVASIVE ACTION!

If you come under attack, don't make the mistake of jumping on the deck gun or torpedoes and playing Rambo. You might be able to take out one escort, but his friends will soon be along and the worst situation a submarine captain can be in is to be boxed in by multiple destroyers.

Only take the offensive if you don't have time to dive. Otherwise, crash-dive and head below 150 meters as quickly as possible, where you'll have much less chance of being hit and damaged by a depth charge. When you've passed below 150 meters, try to turn directly towards or away from your attacker, and reduce your speed to one-third power or less so you'll give off less of an acoustic signature. You don't want to stop and drift, as you'll need speed to maneuver if your attacker gets too close. If possible, try to head under the convoy so the noise from large ships will mask your own.

If you're on the surface and you spot an enemy plane, dive if you have time. Otherwise, man the AA guns and hope for a hit. Some simulations, such as ACES OF THE DEEP, will model a particularly annoying tactic where the plane will hover out of AA gun range, waiting for you to give up and dive. At that point they'll move in and attack as you dive, when you're most vulnerable. Don't wait around hoping they'll get tired of the cat-and-mouse game and go away, though, because they may have reported your position to nearby destroyers. Your best bet is to risk the crash-dive.

If you've played modern sub sims, remember that the tactics you're used to aren't always effective with 1940s technology. Back in World War II, thermal layers and the permeability of water to sonar didn't play the big part in submarine hide-and-seek that they do now, so most submarine sims set in that period don't model them.

WEB WAVES

These basic tactics should get you started in your career as a submarine captain. If you're looking for more in-depth information on submarine combat, there are a couple of sites on the World Wide Web that are packed full of information. Ron Martini's Navy Submarine Page (http://wave.sheridan.wy.us/~rontini/ron-page.html) is loaded with links to Navy sites online, submarine news, pictures of submarines, and historical documents. Similarly, Sturgeon's Submarine Home Port (http://www.cftnet.com/members/ sturgeon/) is a good resource for information on modern submarines, especially nuclear attack subs.

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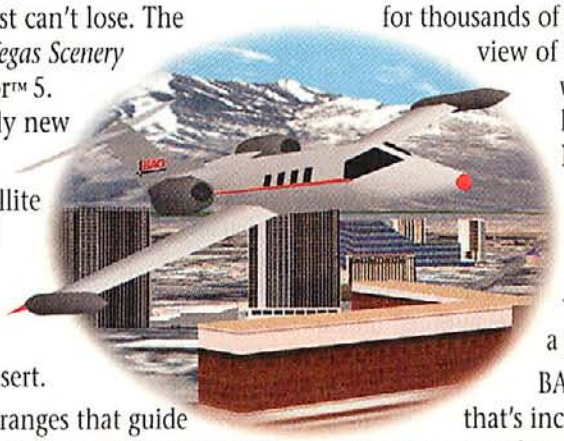

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Trapeze Flying

Soar Through The Skies With The Greatest Of Ease In The Aerobatic FLIGHT UNLIMITED

by Denny Atkin

UNLIMITED. NO RESTRICTIONS. THAT'S THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND FLIGHT UNLIMITED. IT'S JUST YOU, the sky, and a plane that does just about anything you ask it to.

Anything aerobatic, that is. FLIGHT UNLIMITED is missing most of the staple elements of flight simulations. There are no missiles, guns, or enemy aircraft. You can't learn IFR navigation or practice for your cross-country solo. You can't even land at a different airport than the one you took off from. But unless you're just never happy without something to shoot at, you won't care. You'll be too busy choreographing aerial ballets, pulling off death-defying aerobatic stunts, or just enjoying a quiet soar down the ridge line to miss that stuff.

TOP FLIGHT

The "Unlimited" comes not from the feature list, but rather from unlimited-class aerobatic competitions flown by the planes simulated therein: the Bellanca Decathlon, Pitts Special, Sukhoi SU-31, and Extra 300S piston-engined sport planes; and the Grob G-103A sailplane. These planes don't fly like anything you've ever encountered on the PC. Part of that is due to the design of the real aircraft—they're light, overpowered, and stressed for high-G maneuvers. But some of that also comes from the innovative flight modeling.

Designer Seamus Blackley realized that conventional lookup table-based flight modeling techniques wouldn't work well with an aerobatic simulation, so his team decided to use "Real-Time Computational Fluid Dynamics." In simple terms, this method actually models the flow of air across the plane's surfaces, allowing the sim to recreate nearly any maneuver possible with a real plane. A hammerhead stall probably won't work in your favorite combat simulation not because the real plane couldn't pull off the maneuver, but because the flight model isn't programmed to react properly to that aerodynamic situation—namely, air flowing *backwards* over the control surfaces.

As you earn your wings you'll deal with engine torque, rudder-induced roll, gyroscopic effects on yaw and pitch, and even yaw caused by spiral airflow from the propeller washing against your vertical stabilizer. Learning to fly high-performance aircraft under a flight model this tough can be a challenge, but thankfully a press of the Tab key puts you back into the air after a crash. Beginners can fly a simplified model that does away with gyroscopic effects.

FLIGHT UNLIMITED

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 MHz or better, 8MB of RAM, MS-DOS 5.0 or higher, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, 25MB hard drive space, mouse. (486-66 or higher and a joystick recommended, with 12MB of RAM for 1024x768 display.) Supports Sound Blaster, Roland RAP-10, Gravis Ultrasound/Max, Ensoniq SoundScape, and compatible sound cards; VFX-1, CyberMaxx, 7thSense, and i-glasses VR headsets
# of Players: 1
Protection: None
Designer: Seamus Blackley
Publisher: Looking Glass Technologies
Distributor: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Irvine, CA
(800) 874-4607

A LESSON LEARNED

While there's nothing to shoot at and nowhere to go, that doesn't mean there's little to do in FLIGHT UNLIMITED. There are four primary flight activities: You can work your way through a series of aerobatics lessons, fly through a series of airborne obstacle courses, practice soaring in the Grob sailplane, or just go wild in free flight.

The lesson section should teach novices and aces alike new tricks. The 33 lessons range from simply maintaining level flight through the heart-shaped Avalanche and the thrilling Tailslide. Each lesson starts with a whiteboard showing a step-by-step description of the maneuver, followed by a scratchpad with last-minute hints that's displayed as the game loads. Then the real fun begins. The default cockpit view for lessons is a three-window arrangement showing views ahead and down each wing, instruments, and a 3-D graph of your intended and actual flight paths. The instructor's voice walks you through the maneuver as he demonstrates it and as you attempt to duplicate his actions. An optional heads-up control display gives visual cues for proper stick and pedal movements. The instructor rates your execution of the maneuver on a 10-point scale and gives you hints on how to do it better. While some maneuvers are easy to master, don't be surprised if it takes dozens of tries before you win a completion certificate for some of the advanced stunts. The instructor's helpful advice (and his blood-curdling scream if you pancake the plane) has to be one of the best uses of voice ever in a multimedia title.

FLIGHT UNLIMITED takes a quick break from ultra-realism with its Hoops courses. This is the part of the game where you get to try to break a high score. A series of

HE'S OUT TO PROVE HE'S INNOCENT OF MURDER. AND HE'LL KILL ANYONE THAT GETS IN THE WAY.

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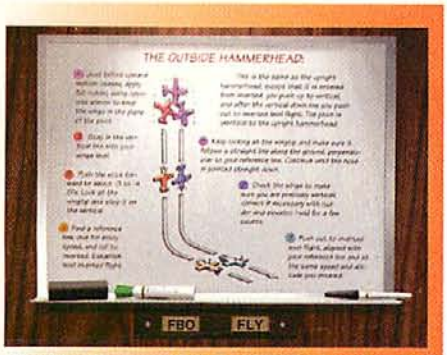
LUCAS Arts

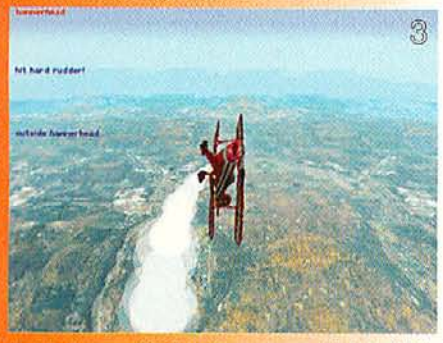
Circle Reader Service #66

HAMMERING IT IN

In at least one respect, aerobatic flying is similar to stand-up comedy: Timing is everything. Pulling off maneuvers in FLIGHT UNLIMITED doesn't require lightning-fast reflexes, just a good feel for your plane and lots of practice.



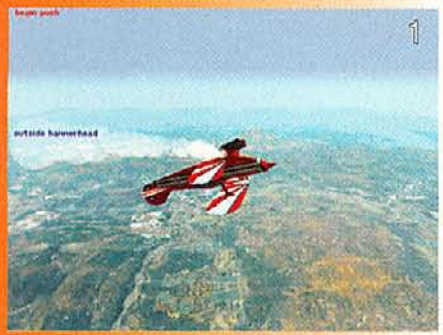
Here's a diagram of the outside hammerhead maneuver. Let's walk through it step by step.



Just before vertical motion ceases, kick in full left rudder to push the plane over on its left wing. Use opposite aileron to keep the plane's wings in the plane of the pivot. Watch your reference line and use aileron to keep your wingtip perpendicular to it.

Push the stick forward until the plane is flying straight up. You'll want to use an outside view, the virtual cockpit, or the three-panel view so you'll be able to stop on the vertical.

Continue the pivot until the plane's nose is pointed straight down. Hold the plane in this attitude for a few counts.



First, find a reference line in the terrain off your wingtip—you'll use this to maintain heading so you can pull out on a heading opposite the one you entered the maneuver on. Dive for speed, roll inverted, and you're ready to start.

As you near the altitude at which you started the maneuver, begin to push out to inverted level flight, watching the reference line off your wing. Your goal is to exit the maneuver at the same speed and altitude you came in on.

rings is suspended in the air over the landscape, which you have to fly through as quickly as possible. Miss a ring and you're hit with a time penalty. Four categories of courses present different challenges. The Trick category is amazingly tough—the only way to hit all the hoops is to pull off some very tough aerobatic maneuvers. Turn on the "Ghost Plane" and a wireframe plane flies the path of the best run recorded on that course, providing an innovative visual cue as to how close you are to beating the best time.

VIEW TO A THRILL The virtual cockpit in the Pitts Special scrolls almost as smoothly as moving your head around in the real thing.

For a more mellow challenge, try soaring in the Grob sailplane. Start in the air or try a towed takeoff with the help of the ubiquitous Ghost Plane. Once you've reached altitude, try to maintain or even increase it with the help of thermals and orographic lift (air blown upward along ridge lines).

EYE CANDY

Every few years a sim comes along that lets reviewers use the "sets new standards for graphics" cliché, and FLIGHT UNLIMITED is the 1995 entry in this club. This is the first sim to deliver terrain graphics that truly look like what you see out the windscreen of a real plane, instead of the Bizarro World polygons or pixel-explosion texture maps used by its predecessors. The six terrain areas in Vermont, Maine, Virginia, Arizona, Alaska, and France are only 12 square miles in area, but they're cleverly tiled to provide an endless canvas for your aerobatic displays.

Supported resolutions range from 320x200 through 1024x768, and terrain and aircraft detail is adjustable. A Pentium 90 is pretty smooth at 640x480, and ab-

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Circle Reader Service #85

SCARF AND VR GOGGLES: FLYING IN VIRTUAL REALITY

FLIGHT UNLIMITED on a 17-inch monitor with a pair of good speakers and a subwoofer is about as close to the real thing as you can get without a pilot's license. At least, that's what I thought before I tried the simulator while wearing a pair of VIRTUAL i-GLASSES from **Virtual i-O**. Immersion in that environment was so realistic that I had to stop playing after about 35 minutes because I was in danger of becoming airsick.

Along with the i-GLASSES, FLIGHT UNLIMITED also supports the VFX1, CYBERMAXX, and the **7thSense** VIRTUAL REALITY ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM. The i-GLASSES display isn't stereoscopic, but it still greatly enhances realism thanks to its head-tracking feature. With the game set to the virtual-cockpit display, the view smoothly follows your head as you turn it from side-to-side. The effect is extremely convincing: Tilt your head and the horizon angles realistically, and a rear-view check requires you to twist around in your chair.

The i-GLASSES support only a low-res display, but because the virtual cockpit mode has the slowest frame rate, you'll want to turn down the resolution and detail anyway. Even with the game set at 320x200 and low detail, the movement can stutter on a Pentium 90 system when you combine constant head-movements with jerky maneuvering. Even so, this is still the best environment for flying the sim, as it's extremely easy and natural to turn your head to verify your plane's attitude—the loss of detail is more than made up by the incredible situational awareness afforded by the VR environment.

solutely fluid at 320x400. On a 486 you'll want to stick to one of the 320-across resolutions. The 1024x768 mode seems to have been designed with the P6 in mind. It looks incredible, but even on a fast Pentium you can only pull a couple of frames per second.

You'll find a wealth of view options in and out of the cockpit. The virtual cockpit mode looks superb, but reduces the frame rate. The full-screen mode is impressive, but with no way to switch your view to the side or back it's tough to pull off many stunts.

HAPPY LANDINGS

FLIGHT UNLIMITED packs lots of nice touches. You access various flight modes and program features by wandering around a 3-D flight office, clicking on a globe, for instance, to change your location, or on a model plane to take flight. Each player can set up a logbook which keeps track of accumulated flying hours and provides access to recorded flights. The well-written 108-page manual works well as supplement to the in-game lessons.

There are a couple of very minor bugs (a

THE GAUGE OF A GREAT GAME Enjoying the outside camera view doesn't mean sacrificing accurate flight instrumentation.

directional guide arrow that turns itself back on after you've disabled it comes to mind, along with some problems with the VCR feature losing your smoke trail), but there's really very little to complain about here.

Best of all, much of what you learn can be applied to your favorite combat sims, if their flight models allow it. So next time you take to the air, imagine the look on the face of your favorite head-to-head opponent when he tries to follow you through a Reverse Cuban Eight followed by an Outside Immelman. That's almost as much fun as flying this superb sim.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FLIGHT UNLIMITED

RATING

PROS Incredible flight model enables nearly any maneuver real planes can perform. High resolution graphics make the game's terrain and virtual cockpit look almost real.

CONS Massive horsepower requirements will restrict many gamers to lower resolutions and detail levels. Lacks multiplayer capability. Where are the guns?

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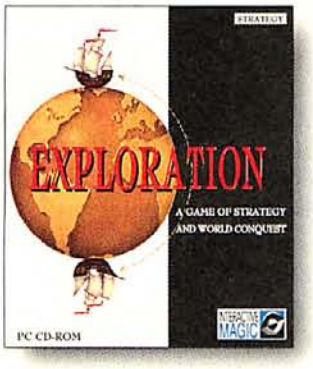

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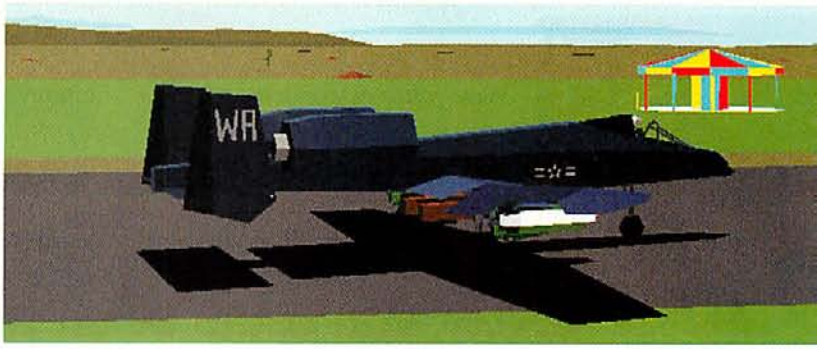
Warthog Attack



A-10 ATTACK! Invades Apple Airspace With Campaigns, Multiple Aircraft Control

by Christopher Breen

As a Mac user writing for a magazine devoted largely to PC games, it's hard not to feel a little put upon. After all, you guys have jillions of games to choose from and usually get the really cool stuff first. Over here on the Mac side, we're still waiting for games that have been ported to the *Amiga*, for crying out loud.

But every once in a while, someone is bold enough to create exclusively for the Mac a game so good it momentarily quells our PC envy. **Graphic Simulations'** F/A-18 HORNET and **Bungie Software's** MARATHON are two such games. And who remembers that, by the time MYST did Windows, it was already old news on the Mac? Well, my PC-loving friends, add one more to the Mac column: a flight/battlefield simulation called A-10 ATTACK! that won't find a spot on PC shelves for at least a year. Is it your turn to be envious? In two words, Darned tootin'!

A-10 ATTACK!

Price: $58
System Requirements: 68030 Macintosh, 4 MB RAM, System 7.0 or higher, 11.4 MB hard drive space, 13-inch color monitor.
Protection: None
Designer: Eric Parker
Publisher: Parsoft
Richardson, TX
(214) 479-1340

A PIG IN BITS

As the name implies, this sim is modeled on the A-10A Thunderbolt II—known to the aviation-savvy as the Warthog. A late '70s, ground-attack aircraft used extensively in the Gulf War, the A-10 carries the biggest durned gun this side of Arnold Schwarzenegger and enough ordnance to put a serious crimp in anyone's weekend plans.

"Whoa, Nelly!" those of you already inducted into the winged world may mutter, "*That* slow, ugly beast? Why would anyone want to fly a Hog?"

Admittedly, the A-10 is neither a sexy, high-performance jet fighter nor a classic WWII dogfighter. The charm of the A-10 lies not in sleek lines and turn-on-a-dime performance. We must harken instead to our boyish roots: flying a Hog is exhilarating because it's a blast to blow things to smithereens when you're up-close-and-personal.

HOG ROLLING

Compared with such high-tech flying machines as the Mac's other popular modern-day flight sim, F/A-18 HORNET, the A-10 is fairly stripped down. The plane possesses no active radar—just a simple flashing light and alarm to indicate when someone in the vicinity is painting the skies with radar. The HUD (Heads-Up Display) is straightforward, offering three operational modes: Navigation, Pave Penny (for missile guidance), and CCIP (for bomb targeting). The plane comes complete with chaff, flares, and ECM (Electronic Countermeasures). And of course you have the usual views: peek-out-the-window, weapons, tower, and external. A-10 ATTACK! also offers a terrific zoom mode that can't be found anywhere else in the Mac universe. But where A-10 ATTACK! gets complicated is in the weaponry.

This sucker carries a wide variety of armaments ranging from simple iron bombs to laser-guided missiles to electro-optical weapons loaded onto 11 separate stations. Aside from trying to remember exactly what each weapon does and how best to deploy it, you have to recall where you put it, because you cannot cycle through the different weapons as you can with F/A-18 HORNET. Beginning pilots will spend much of their time flipping on the Autopilot, switching into Look Down view, locating a particular weapon, and then activating it with an Option-click (yes, this is the first Mac flight sim that allows you to operate switches and knobs with the mouse) or with one of the Function or Keypad keys.

Deploying weapons may may not be what you'd expect, either. To begin with, accurately dropping bombs, even while employing CCIP, isn't easy. When targeted from a distance, bombs invariably fall short or long. A-10 ATTACK!'s maker, **Parsoft**, claims that this is a true representation of bomb targeting on an A-10—you must get close to ensure a direct hit. Players doubting this claim (or simply lacking the patience to practice) are welcome to turn on the Easy Weapons Hits option. The sim also includes environmental modeling that affects the performance of your aircraft (read: wind). Lining up on the runway, dropping the gear and flaps,

and cutting the throttle just won't cut it in this sim. Rather, you have to contend with the possibility of being blown all over tarnation just prior to touchdown.

Because A-10 ATTACK! was created by Eric Parker, the man responsible for the smooth-as-silk rendering algorithms used in HELLCATS OVER THE PACIFIC, motion is extremely fluid. Since HELLCATS, Eric and crew have dramatically improved the scenery: landscapes are studded with more realistic mountains and pitted with canyons. They even went to the trouble to include sun-blinding and an accurate representation of the constellations you'd see on a nocturnal mission.

A-10 ATTACK! comes with four training missions for practicing takeoffs, landings, air-to-ground and air-to-air attacks. For additional training, you're also welcome to take on one of the two open-ended, quick-start missions. The real meat and potatoes of the action takes place during eight missions set in a Germany soon to be overrun by a reformed Communist threat.

VIRTUAL BATTLEFIELD ENVIRONMENT

These eight missions give you your first hint that A-10 ATTACK! is more than merely a great flight sim. The game is only the first piece in a much larger enterprise called the Virtual Battlefield Environment (VBE), which has similarities to **Spectrum Holobyte's** FALCON 3.0 Electronic Battlefield Series on the PC side. However, in addition to adding aircraft to the simulation as with FALCON 3.0, you'll be able to switch to different vehicles on the fly.

SEARCH AND DESTROY This is what it looks like to sit behind the business-end of one heavy-duty flying weapons platform.

Here's the idea: In real battles you have a number of participants—some air-based, some floating about on a body of water, others riding around in tanks and jeeps. Traditionally, Mac-based sims limited your participation to operating a single vehicle while the battle raged around you. Using VBE, it will be possible to jump from one vehicle to another. For example, in A-10 ATTACK!, you'll be able to take out a SAM site with your high-tech fighter, jump to the A-10 to blow up the fuel dump, then jump to a submarine to sink a battle cruiser, and finally jump to a jeep back at the base in order to nip over to the Officer's Club for a well-deserved drink.

In VBE's current A-10 implementation, you can command several aircraft at the same time. Simply create a series of waypoints on the Tactical Map for the planes to follow, indicate how fast and at what altitude they should fly, and the missions you'd like them to perform once airborne. You could, for example, command an A-10 to take off, level out at 150 feet, travel southeast for 22.6 miles, make a sharp left turn, climb to 630 feet, take out a pesky AA site perched on a hill, fly west for 15.2 miles, bomb a destroyer, and return to base. During this mission, an automated F-16 could be taking care of the bogies above while you personally fly a second A-10 against a complement of tanks. As the battle progresses, it's possible to monitor the other planes by "visiting" them, watching their progress from a wingman's perspective. If visiting seems too passive, you can take over the controls of any of the A-10s.

Because the VBE engine is already contained in A-10, adding new vehicles, missions, and code is as simple as dropping additional VBE modules—much like Photoshop "plug-ins"—into the A-10 folder. In addition, Parsoft has big plans for future updates, including: enhanced graphics, a native mode Power PC version, and multiplayer capability, including networking (both head-to-head and cooperative missions).

IN YOUR FACE The mission planning interface is well laid-out and easy to use. This example shows you the options available while planning mission waypoints.

SQUEELS AND KINKS

Considering the complexity of the planning components of this sim, it's a pity that more care wasn't taken in preparing the manual. The online tutorial suffices for walking you through the training missions, but vital information concerning waypoints—the heart of many of the German missions—is woefully lacking. Although you can piece this puzzle together by studying other aircraft with preset waypoints, an additional tutorial would help immensely. Additionally, some bugs in the current version of A-10 cause the program to quit unceremoniously from time to time. Parsoft is aware of the problem and is working on a fix.

These complaints aside, without the Virtual Battlefield Environment (VBE), Parsoft's A-10 ATTACK! would be just a terrific flight sim. With VBE, A-10 ATTACK! represents a remarkable first step in a revolutionary Mac-gaming technology. As far as we're concerned, this lowly Hog is a blue-ribbon winner.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

A-10 ATTACK!

RATING 4½ stars

PROS A-10 is armed with a rich campaign feature, realistic flight model, and good frame rate. Ambitious Virtual Battlefield Environment lets pilots jump to different aircraft on the fly—a first for Mac gamers.

CONS A-10 isn't as rugged as its real-world counterpart due to occasional crash bugs. The manual is sadly lacking in important information.

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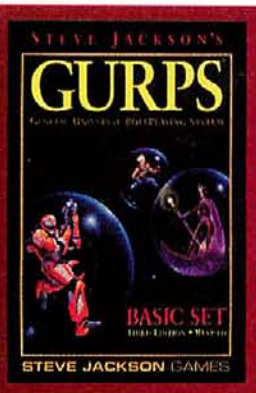

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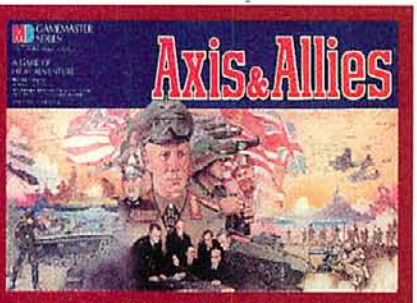

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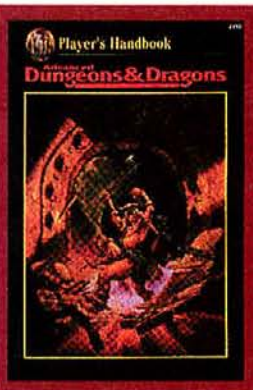

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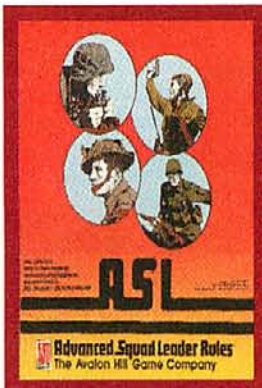

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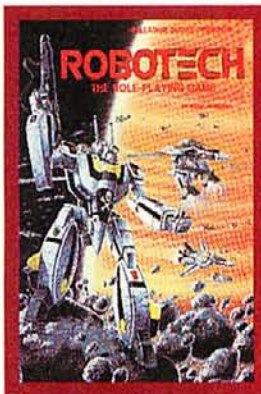

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The Pioneering Spirit Of A Wargame Guru

GARY GRIGSBY FINDS NEW LIFE AFTER GRAPHICS CHANGES

by Alan Emrich

IN THE PAPER GAME COMMUNITY, WARGAMING HAS SEVERAL REVERED "OLD MEN." NAMES LIKE JIM Dunnigan, Don Greenwood and Frank Chadwick highlight the list of pioneers who grappled with hex and counters for our hobby, blazing a trail out of the wilderness we still follow. In those bygone days, a CRT was a Combat Results Table, and "real" gamers weren't afraid to do multiplication and division in their heads to calculate combat.

When this great hobby went to bits (computer bits, that is) in the early 1980s, though, an entirely new world emerged. Early computer games seemed to step out of a parallel universe, electronic copies of the safe, sure, tried-and-true paper gaming products of those days. Upon virtual, hex-based game maps, players maneuvered virtual, square-shaped counters, and rolled virtual dice to resolve battles quantified by an odds column found on the back of the rules book (they weren't even "manuals" or "docs" in those days, but rather "rules books," another term ported over from paper games).

As the molten mass of this new computer wargaming world cooled, companies such as SSI and EA rose from the primordial soup of the budding industry. They brought with them many designers filled with ideas of how to best use the new computer medium. Of these, none has worked harder, lasted longer, or produced more fine wargames than Gary Grigsby.

What really sets a Gary Grigsby wargame apart is the depth of its research. This is usually passed along to the players via intricate combat and logistics formulae using numbers found on vast, spreadsheet-like tables. Wargamers who like to feel that they're weighing in all possible factors love a Gary Grigsby game for its exacting historical "numerology," if you will, quantifying everything from soup to nuts.

Of the 23 wargames Gary has designed, three have made the *CGW* Hall-of-Fame (placing Gary second only to Sid Meier in that category), and the rest all still worthy of any wargamer's time. Despite the accolades he's won, Gary readily admits that none of his titles are likely to be half-million sellers (a tenth of that, more likely, is closer to the sales figure for most, even successful, historical wargames). Even so, he doesn't hesitate to extend his thanks to the hard core, history-oriented players who, in their quest for games with greater depth and realism, have kept food on his table for thirteen years.

BROADSIDES & GRIPESHOT

G-2

*** Norm Koger is slaving away at THE AGE OF RIFLES for SSI, and remarks, "The very first scenario I did was Omdurman. Aside from the historical interest, the battle has a number of interesting elements that make for an ideal test scenario: wide variation in unit quality and equipment, gunboats, several nationalities, and an interesting tactical situation." Norm, you have our attention, we're (patiently?) waiting...**

*** Despite rumors to the contrary, it seems that MASTER OF ORION DELUXE and MOO GOLD are not going to be published. Instead, it seems that MASTER OF XENON (MOX) will carry on the MOO tradition with more of everything, including high-res graphics and finally, network play.**

*** New company TalonSoft certainly plans on getting its claws into the wargame industry. Their first release, BATTLEGROUND: ARDENNES (previewed in last issue's Beta Bits) should be available shortly after you**

(continued on page 202)

G-2 *(continued from page 201)*

READ THIS, AND WILL BE FOLLOWED BY BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG before the end of the year. This latter title is rumored to have something in it for the Napoleonic enthusiast as well. The Battleground engine is designed to easily change historical settings, graphics (always in 256-color SVGA), scale, scenarios, etc., without having to totally rewrite the program code from scratch. All of the upcoming games in the series are planned for both Windows 3.1 and Win 95, and feature a new you-are-there zoom view (dubbed Battleview) that provides a hilltop perspective of the 3-D terrain. The designs will also feature a plethora of unit types, realistic fog-of-war elements and multimedia enhancements. For more information, contact TalonSoft at: (410) 821-7282.

* Interestingly, MicroProse has announced that the first major online network to host their upcoming MS-DOS version of MAGIC: THE GATHERING game will be...GEnie! Evidently, the close relationship GEnie has with the Simutronics Corporation (GEnie hosts GEMSTONE III and CYBERSTRIKE) allowed the flagging network to cut the deal. No mention of exclusivity was made, so M:TG might be appearing on other, more populated computer networks in the forseeable future.

* PANZER GENERAL ONLINE (yes, online!) is a project headed by Scott Cuthbertson at SSI, working with an out-of-house programming team at Jungle Vision. It seems they've decided to create a multi-player, online version of the hit wargame in an effort to "get it out there quick" (presumably, by the end of 1995).

The turn-based sequence of play has been a stumbling block, and many suggestions to make head-to-head play speedier have been floated. Among them: moving alternating clumps of about five units at a time until all units have acted that turn; having all the human players play concurrently versus a single computer opponent; or just setting a timer at the start of each turn and having the 255 players on both sides (!) go for it in a massive free-for-all. Here's hoping that they pull it off.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?

Gary's tenure with SSI has taken him, as well as his fans, from the "square pack" engine code for such grid-based games as KAMPFGRUPPE to the recent graphic and interface metamorphosis of STEEL PANTHERS. For those whose fear that Grigsby is quick to join the "wargaming lite" crowd, Gary insists that STEEL PANTHERS might be prettier and easier to play than all of his previous efforts, but that the game is no less realistic for it! The research and databases in STEEL PANTHERS are unmistakably Grigsby—as informative and exhaustive as ever—with the data requiring some *two years* to compile and integrate into the design.

If anything, the STEEL PANTHERS game engine will remind Grigsby fans of PANZER STRIKE. The formulas for combat, suppression, and morale are similar in both games, with the major difference being in the turn structure. In PANZER STRIKE, the players plotted their moves during an Orders phase, with movement and combat results resolved during an Execution phase. In STEEL PANTHERS, all movement and combat for human controlled units is resolved during the Orders phase, and only computer controlled units perform their moves during the Execution phase.

The basic movement and combat systems are very easy to learn. Click, and a friendly unit is selected. Click again on an empty hex, and that unit moves toward it, or click on an enemy unit, and it is fired upon by the friendly unit (providing the enemy unit is in range with a proper line of sight). This simplicity should allow new players to jump in and play many of the scenarios without touching the rules manual (a common occurrence among novice and veteran wargamers alike). Once the basic system is mastered, players can learn how to request indirect fire and air strikes in about two minutes.

TACTICAL AIR SUPPORT

Interestingly, air strikes are resolved with the same eye for extreme detail that the land units enjoy. Individual airplanes traverse the map, frequently passing through an animated gauntlet of flak. As an aircraft approaches its target, it opens fire with its machine guns, cannon, or rockets. While over the target itself, it releases its load of one to six bombs. That plane then returns to base, flying off the map, again suffering possible flak damage en route.

The aircraft of STEEL PANTHERS are hardly generic. In 1944, the US Army player can choose from the P-47c, P-47d, P-38j, B-26, A-26, or B-25 for ground support. Each has separate ratings for speed, durability, and weapons loads. Every important nationality in the game can select from four to eight different strike aircraft types. Players can choose from many different nationalities, too: British, US, Polish, Greek, Russian, German, Japanese, Chinese, Italian, and many more, including "minor" forces such as Finnish, Hungarian, Maoist Chinese, Tito's partisans, etc.

Gary Grigsby's Design History

1982:	Bomb Alley, Guadalcanal Campaign
1983:	Carrier Force, North Atlantic
1984:	War in Russia*, Objective: Kursk, Reforger '88
1985:	Kampfgruppe*, Mech Brigade*, USAAF
1986:	Battle Group, Warship
1987:	War in the South Pacific, Battle Cruiser
1988:	Panzer Strike!, Typhoon of Steel
1989:	Overrun
1990:	Second Front
1991:	Western Front
1992:	Carrier Strike, Pacific War
1993:	War in Russia 2
1995:	Steel Panthers

* = CGW Hall of Fame Inductee

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REAL WARGAMERS PLAY THE CAMPAIGN GAME

STEEL PANTHERS has a long campaign game where a player can pick a customized force and use it throughout the entire war. Units gain experience in combat and lose it when they take replacements between battles. Leaders are all given a name and rank and, in addition to experience, they gain (or lose) their reputation by victory or defeat in battle. Of course, some leaders will become casualties along the way, so your leaders may still get promotions just to fill vacant commands.

In addition to the epic campaign game, there are several shorter campaigns. Players may also create random battles with the build-your-own feature. Note that hypothetical battles between the Soviets and the Western Allies are also possible in STEEL PANTHERS (imagine vast numbers of T-34/85s going after hordes of Shermans — wow!).

WAR IN RUSSIA, in its original form, was the first monster wargame for the computer, a triumph of scale, subject matter and head-to-head play via e-mail. KAMPFGRUPPE is the granddaddy of East Front WWII games, and still offers a good game despite its outmoded graphics. MECH BRIGADE was the pre-eminent tank game until the arrival of M-1 TANK PLATOON.

Although STEEL PANTHERS may be played by modem or e-mail, it isn't particularly well-suited for either method. Modem play is a bit staid with the I Go/You Go turn sequence. Each turn represents two minutes of real time, and battles take an average of thirty minutes per game, which means that e-mail play can bog down from the numerous saved game turn exchanges just to complete one game. Despite the difficulties, e-mail play should please the purists.

How does life after STEEL PANTHERS shape up for Gary Grigsby? He predicts his next project will be a modern version of STEEL PANTHERS. Beyond that, he's had trouble selling SSI on the idea of redoing USAAF for the IBM, but a science-fiction space warfare game is not out of the question. But Gary's dream game project is a global WW2 wargame on an almost grand-tactical scale. Certainly in Gary Grigsby's case, one man's dream is another man's "monster" wargame.

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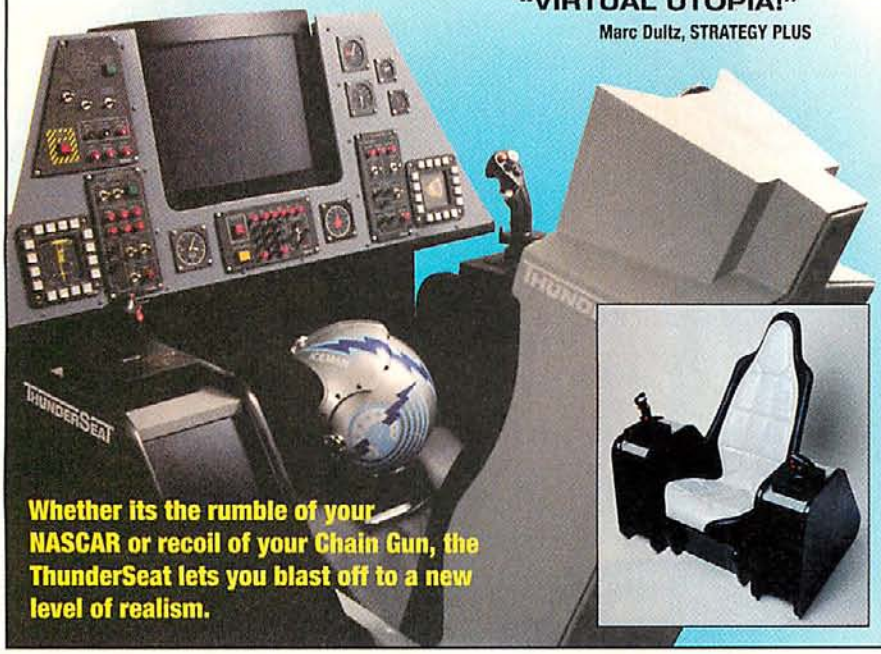

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Panther General

Gary Grigsby's STEEL PANTHERS Tries To Bridge Realism And Playability

by Terry Lee Coleman

PANZER GENERAL MAY HAVE AN ELEGANT INTERFACE, RICH GRAPHICS AND ADDICTIVE PLAY, BUT WHERE are gamers to go when they need more realism? Enter Gary Grigsby, simply the best designer extant for deep, realistic wargames (see Alan Emrich's Broadsides & Gripeshot for more background on Grigsby's games).

Grigsby wanted to create a WWII tactical system which would take the best aspects of such classics as his own KAMPFGRUPPE and PANZER STRIKE and bring them up to current standards. His publisher SSI, however, was unwilling to give up the broader commercial appeal gained from the simplicity of PANZER GENERAL. Grigsby similarly refused to compromise his standards of realism and detail. Needless to say, there was a considerable amount of tension involved in the design and development of STEEL PANTHERS.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

Of course, art—at least great art—derives from tension, and after all the jockeying from both sides, it is refreshing to see that STEEL PANTHERS is neither a puffed-up KAMPFGRUPPE nor a clone of PANZER GENERAL. So, what is it? Potentially the best tactical WWII game of the past several years—it's that good.

AS THE TREAD TURNS

It's funny that, just as the effectiveness of turn-based play is being questioned as being old-fashioned, unrealistic, and boring, Grigsby's STEEL PANTHERS stalks in and pumps new life into the grand old model. Gary keeps the action brisk through a streamlined sequence of play, where each turn represents only two minutes of time. With an average of 18 turns per scenario, games may generally be concluded in two hours or less.

Movement is very much like PANZER GENERAL: each unit's range is highlighted on the map. Remember the frustration you felt in PANZER GENERAL when you couldn't move a whole tank division at once? Since the scale of STEEL PANTHERS is tactical rather than operational, you may move entire formations together. As they move they may encounter opportunity fire, but the faster they move the more difficult they are to hit. Similarly, units on the move are less accurate than when stationary, which maintains realism.

BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH As smoke gathers over high-combat areas, both sides will find it more difficult to acquire targets.

GRIN AND BREVET With all the officers and NCOs dead, Private Billings accepts his *de facto* command and wisely takes his tank out of danger. Morale is an integral part of STEEL PANTHERS' well-oiled gaming machine.

The heart of the game is in the orders system, where you direct units to move toward objectives, lay down smoke, attempt to rally, and of course, fire on the enemy. The way in which these aspects are handled offers a lot of flexibility. For instance, you may designate targets in advance, or you can select new targets on the fly. Of course, if you select targets on the fly, your chances of scoring a hit won't be nearly as good. Additionally, you may choose to shoot smoke at a given hex, regardless of whether you see an enemy. Indirect fire is handled elegantly, as the computer figures out all the complex line-of-sight situations: existence of nearby spotters, the inevitable scatter of fired rounds, and so forth. Finally, mor-

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tar fire is modeled marvelously in STEEL PANTHERS. Well-placed mortars send enemy troops scattering for cover in a hurry, but they don't take out tanks that they can't even see (as in some recent tactical games).

THE TIGER HAS THICK SKIN

Grigsby's designs are notable for their attention to detail, something that I felt was lacking in his last design, WAR IN RUSSIA 2. In STEEL PANTHERS, however, everything is so authentic that you can almost smell the diesel fuel burning on the battlefield. In one US-German scenario, I carefully positioned my Sherman tanks to ambush an oncoming column, only to see and hear my direct hits bounce harmlessly off the armor of the approaching Tiger tanks. Meanwhile, my infantry were holding out nicely against a group of German half-tracks, because I had taken advantage of a combination of trees and thick underbrush. While I've always enjoyed Grigsby's designs, I must admit to a particularly visceral thrill at pitting my gorgeous green American tanks against the gray messengers of death coming over the Rhine. The wide range of digitized sounds include the straining propellers of dive-bombers, the staccato rhythms of numerous calibres of machine guns, the dreaded chink of a glancing blow, and the satisfying, often thunderous explosion which signifies a direct hit. All add tremendously to the enjoyment of the game.

CANNON-IZING THE TANKS Zooming down through various levels allows you to see STEEL PANTHERS in all its graphic glory. This shot shows the level of detail on a variety of tanks and tank destroyers.

Eventually, destroyed vehicles line the battlefield, their smoldering husks leaving a veil of smoke which blends nicely with the fog-of-war. Thus, the trigger-happy commander will find his errant shots obscuring the targets he has so earnestly tried to acquire. The AI here is especially impressive, because it doesn't just shoot wildly but will wait for a reasonable chance of success before firing.

Moreover, the AI is integrated into the entire command structure of both armies. Unlike say, the BATTLEFRONT system, where chaos theory is so over-emphasized that it's often hard to tell why units react as they do, it always seems to make sense when troops flee or stand fast in STEEL PANTHERS. Morale is key, as it should be to keep the game from becoming a theoretical exercise, and units have the good sense to take cover or retreat in the face of overwhelming odds. Because the turns represent brief moments, rather than the day-long turns of PANZER GENERAL, units suffer longer and more debilitating effects from suppression. These effects intensify when the unit takes casualties or a leader dies. Consequently, a large part of the game hinges on when you decide to pull troops out of danger, and whether they can rally in difficult situations. As the manual states, "No one likes to be shot at," and it is this aspect that STEEL PANTHERS handles better than any tactical game of recent years, with the possible exception of Scott Hamilton's TIGERS ON THE PROWL (a much more complex game).

What Grigsby is happiest about is that all the detail didn't have to be compromised to make the game playable. In fact, STEEL PANTHERS goes so far as to include battles between the US and Japanese in the Pacific, as well as with those of every major and most minor armies of WWII. The scenario editor allows you to pit armies of any nationality against each other in either Advance, Meeting Engagement, Delay, or Assault scenarios, with brief synopses of tactical doctrine for each country's armed forces in the manual. You may also use the editor to raise and lower hills, dig trenches, build roads, and even change the course of rivers if you so desire.

So what is the average gamer to make of STEEL PANTHERS? The graphics are stunning, the game itself is a breeze to learn, and the interface is so intuitive that you could actually play the game for quite a while without having to read the documentation. But then, regardless of whether STEEL PANTHERS is a hit, don't expect to see a similar interface for PACIFIC WAR: the amount of detail would either overwhelm the user, or would have to be compromised, a no-win situation as far as Grigsby is concerned. Sticking to a strictly tactical scale in STEEL PANTHERS avoids a lot of logistical detail without sacrificing realism. Rather than being disappointed by the emphasis on graphics and playability, Grigsby seems to have become more intensely focused than usual. The end result is a game which will offer both new and veteran wargamers a step up from PANZER GENERAL, a chance to get down-and-dirty with squad-level combat in a way we haven't been able to before—not even from Grigsby himself.

Unit Movement Costs

	Clear	Field	Slope	Tree	Stream	Stone Bldg.	Dirt Road	Bridge	Pavement	Swamp	Rough	Shell Holes
Infantry/Horse	2	3	1	6	2	2	1	1	1	3	3	3
Truck/Jeep	3	4	4	6	12	18	2	1	1	12	15	6
Half-track	2	2	3	4	9	15	1	1	1	9	12	4
Tank	2	2	2	2	6	12	1	1	1	16	9	3

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Confucius Confused

Mah Jongg Meets Multimedia In SHANGHAI: GREAT MOMENTS

by Bob Proctor

WELL, SHANGHAI FANS, OUR OLD FAVORITE HAS GONE MULTIMEDIA. THE QUESTION that needs answering is, "Did SHANGHAI: GREAT MOMENTS succumb to a temptation or take advantage of a wonderful opportunity?" As with most make-overs, some changes are good, some aren't so good. It *is* certainly very appealing visually, provided you have a powerful enough computer.

MAN WHO NEVER PLAY SHANGHAI NOT UNDERSTAND UNIVERSE

If you've never played SHANGHAI, it's a solitaire game played with *Mah Jongg* tiles instead of cards. You remove pairs of matching tiles and if you clear the board, you win. Connoisseurs of solitaire know that the best games are the ones that make you think by giving you choices; SHANGHAI does this by having four of each tile. Often, three of the same tile will be available, and then there are three ways to take off a pair. Planning ahead pays big dividends! Even if only two are available, taking them off may lock the remaining two in an impossible position. Since the tableau is stacked five levels high, some of the tiles are hidden at first. Winning strategies usually involve exposing hidden tiles early on so you can plan effectively.

HISTORICAL ROMANCE For whatever reason, the *Romance* tile set includes Napoleon and Abraham Lincoln, along with erstwhile romantics Prince Charles and Lady Di.

MAN WHO BUY MORE THAN ONE MEDIUM GET WHAT HE DESERVE

One of the major new features in SHANGHAI: GREAT MOMENTS is multimedia tile sets. There are nine in all, beautifully rendered in 256 color SVGA graphics. Every tile also has a video clip or animation, with sound, that plays when you match a pair. This has been used to create tile sets with themes. For example, with "People", if you match two tiles with Martin Luther King's photo, you can hear and see him say "I have a dream!" Similar clips run for Kennedy, Nixon, Reagan, Geraldine Ferraro, Charles Lindburg, Pancho Villa and others. Famous people from the pre-movie era are here, too: Cleopatra, Columbus, Washington, and Lincoln; they may simply have some animation performed on their picture.

Other themes abound: match Robbie the Robot and see a clip from *Forbidden Planet;* Art tiles let you match famous paintings; Space tiles show off celestial objects and spacecraft; and so on. Two tile sets, however, represent something completely new. In Romance, you make a match if you click on a tile of Prince Charles and one of Princess Di, or Tristan and Isolde, or Romeo and Juliet. This will challenge those of you who are very good at spotting duplicates — they no longer look alike! There are two of each person, and to keep from making the puzzles harder with this tile set, you can also match Romeo with the other Romeo — there are still three possibilities on any of them.

The program is so robust that it even allows you to change the tileset—something you could never do with a real *Mah Jongg* set. Loading up the animation and sound for all the various categories takes about 20 seconds on a Pentium with 4x

Shanghai: Great Moments

Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 MHz or better, 8 MB RAM, 256-color SVGA graphics, 12 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM or better, Windows 3.1 with Win32s drivers, mouse; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
# of Players: 1-2
Developer: Quicksilver Software
Publisher: Activision
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SCI-FI PUZZLE-SOLVING Even if you choose the most exotic of tile sets, Rosalind Chao is still in the corner of the screen, her advice a mere mouse click away.

CD-ROM drive and about 140 seconds on a 386 with a 2x drive. If you enjoy a relaxed style of play, with enhanced visual and audio experience, then SHANGHAI: GREAT MOMENTS is enjoyable on just about any of the computers listed above. At the other end of the spectrum, if you like to play fast and want the tiles to pop out of existence as fast as you can click, you may like older versions of Shanghai more. For many, it will come down to a tradeoff between the high-resolution graphics and slightly slower play.

There are more features to applaud: nice background scenes in full color; a very nice tutorial and help system starring actress Rosalind Chao of *The Joy Luck Club;* and some very good new layouts. This would be an excellent introduction to SHANGHAI for someone who has been missing out. For those of us already addicted, however, the flashy graphics pale after a while. I personally miss the layout editor (a big step backward) and yearn for better statistical support. Knowing how my winning percentage with Icebreaker compares with that for the Classical Dragon layout would really extend my enjoyment of the game. Maybe in Shanghai IV?

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SHANGHAI

RATING 3

PROS Nice tutorial and hints with Rosalind Chao in full-motion video. Excellent graphics and great tile sets.
CONS Even with a Pentium, there are a lot of delays. Minimal statistics and no layout editor hurt an otherwise good program.

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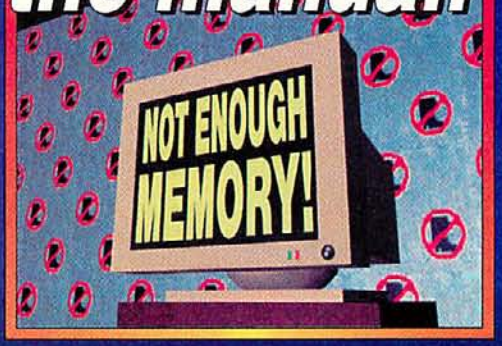

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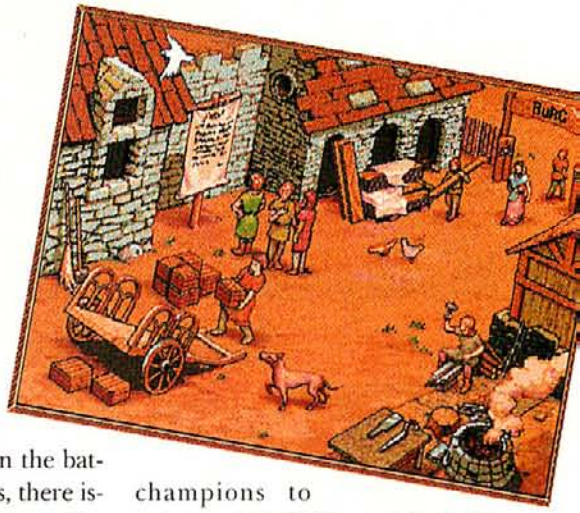
Aye, 'Tis A Bonny Land, Indeed

Koei Explores The Emerald Isle's Myth And Magic In Celtic Tales

by Arinn Dembo



Ah, Ireland—it never changes. Its green hilltops are still crowned by circles of stone; its oak forests are still haunted by the riders of the Wild Hunt; its people are still strong despite centuries of hardships.

Koei's latest offering, Celtic Tales: Balor of the Evil Eye, deals with an early period of Ireland's travail. Two thousand years ago, according to legend, the island was conquered by a savage race called the Fomors. They were big, ugly, and had very bad table manners. They had superior weapons and powerful magic, and they dominated the Celtic tribes, laying waste to the land, exacting heavy tribute and disporting themselves with rape and slaughter. No one could stand against their leader, Balor; when he lifted the lid of his evil eye, anyone facing him was struck down.

The folks at Koei have picked up the story from there. The strategy game they've created is hung loosely over the Fomor legend; although the ultimate object of the game is to hunt down Balor and put out his light, it takes a while to earn the privilege. You see, only the High King of Eire can meet Balor on the battlefield and, as the game begins, there isn't one. Before you can put an end to the Fomor occupation, you must unite all the tribes of Ireland under your rule.

Celtic Tales is a complex package, combining many elements of the best strategy games with some new twists. It has diplomacy, trade, empire-building and combat, random events, magic and magical items, as well as a cast of characters—both heroes and gods—from Celtic mythology. Regrettably, some aspects of the game are weighted much more heavily than others, but I should quickly add that the flaws in gameplay aren't fatal, just unfortunate.

Celtic Tales

Price: $59.95 CD-ROM
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 8 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 30 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM drive, mouse; supports Ad Lib and Sound Blaster sound cards and compatibles.
# of Players: 1-4
Protection: CD must be in drive
Designer: Julie Carlson-Sladcik
Publisher: Koei Corporation
Burlingame, CA
(415) 348-0500

THE GODDESS WANTS YOU!

Your orders come straight from the top. You begin the game chatting with the Goddess Danu, from whom the early Celts took their name (*Tuatha De Danann*, the Tribes of Danu). She'll give you: one of nine characters to choose from, a plot of uncultivated land, a herd of cattle, a ruined town, a shattered citadel, and the service of a few champions to get you started. The rest is up to you.

The turns of the game are based on the Celtic calendar. Every year has four seasons, these being *Samhain* (winter), *Imbolc* (spring), *Beltane* (summer) and *Lughnassad* (autumn). Each season is divided into three months, except for *Samhain*, which has four, and every month is a turn, yielding thirteen turns of play in every year. The maximum length of the game is 70 years. On the first day of every new year the Fomors will show up, demanding a hefty sum of cattle and grain as your tribute to Balor. You have the option of paying, refusing, or challenging the Fomor champion to single combat.

The process of developing your land is nothing new for a Koei game. There are nine province commands, which can be assigned to any of your champions: Explore, Farm, Build, Chop Wood, Mine, Tend Cattle, Perform Magic, Train (Play Hurling) and when your overworked champions are finally exhausted, Rest.

Your province also contains a Burg, a Citadel and the Champion's Tent. The Burg and the Citadel are the measure of your people's Culture and Power, respectively. As you build up these structures, you improve your standing with

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neighboring tribes. The Champion's Tent is basically a local pub, a hang-out for heroes who are passing through. You may try to recruit these heroes, challenge them to a duel, ask them for information or learn magic from them, depending on character class and level of experience.

Your champions come in three classes: warriors, druids and bards. The druids and bards are magic-users, and can work their spells to good effect both domestically and in war. All your champions have a number of attributes and skills which will determine their ability to perform various tasks, and they can carry weapons, jewelry or magical baubles that will increase their likelihood of success. A battle ax, for example, increases a champion's Arms rating, which means she does more damage in combat; whereas a brooch increases her Charm rating, making her more likely to prevail in negotiations, trade and recruitment of new champions.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE

It's important to refurbish your lands and recruit wandering heroes, naturally, but you're going to have to be more aggressive than that. To become High King, you have to come out of

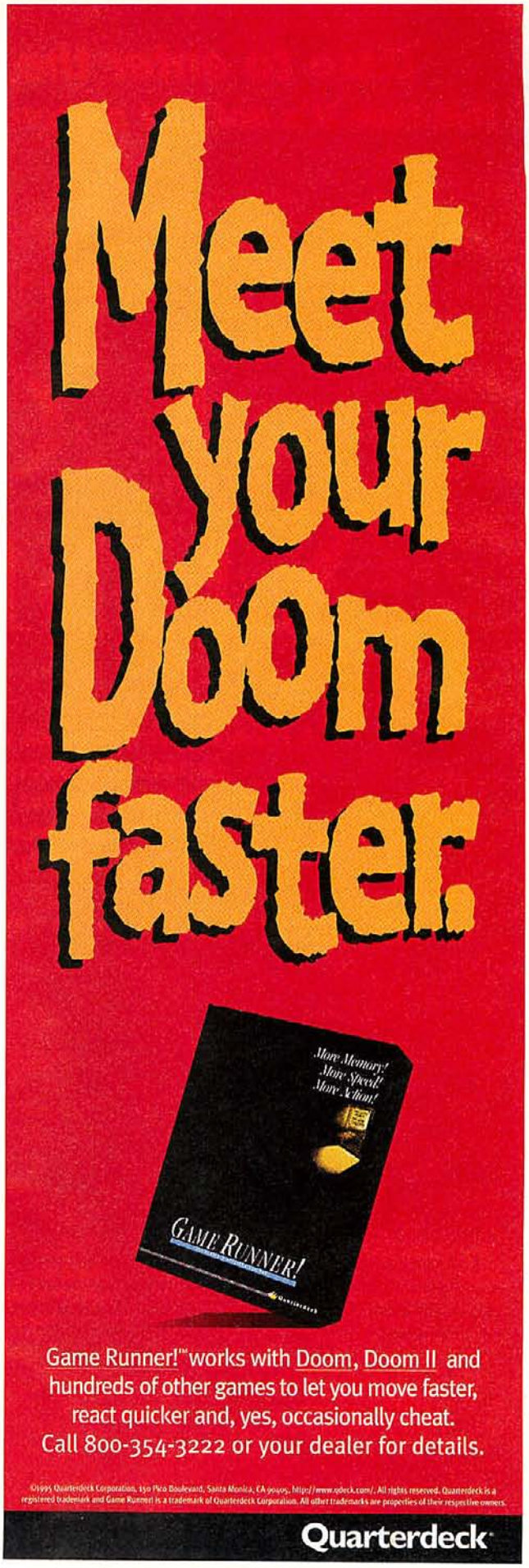
MORC'S BAD MANNERS Just when you start building up a reasonable amount of money, power and resources, the sky turns an ominous shade of gray, and Fomorians come to collect taxes.

your territory and win other tribes to your cause, either by diplomacy or by force.

This is actually one of the areas where the game is flawed. Although there are a host of diplomatic options available to you, the process of making peace is long and arduous, and can be extremely frustrating. Regardless of how hard you work to build trade and good relations with your neighbors, they will cheerfully attack you and bring your efforts to naught if you leave your border with them too lightly defended.

On the other hand, going to war and pummeling other tribes into submission is quick and unrealistically easy. It has no down side whatsoever. The design team definitely missed a call here; in order to balance the game between military and diplomatic tactics, they should have been careful to make war both more costly and more difficult.

As it stands, not only is the game weighted heavily toward war, but war is weighted heavily toward the aggressor, who has nothing to lose and everything to gain by the assault. If you can muster seven champions and provide them with enough grain for their armies, you can attack and win almost anywhere. The



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defender will not be permitted to field more than seven champions against you, regardless of how many he has in the province. In addition, his champions will not be permitted to field more than a hundred soldiers each, regardless of the fact that they are at home, defending their own country, in a province with two thousand of their friends and family.

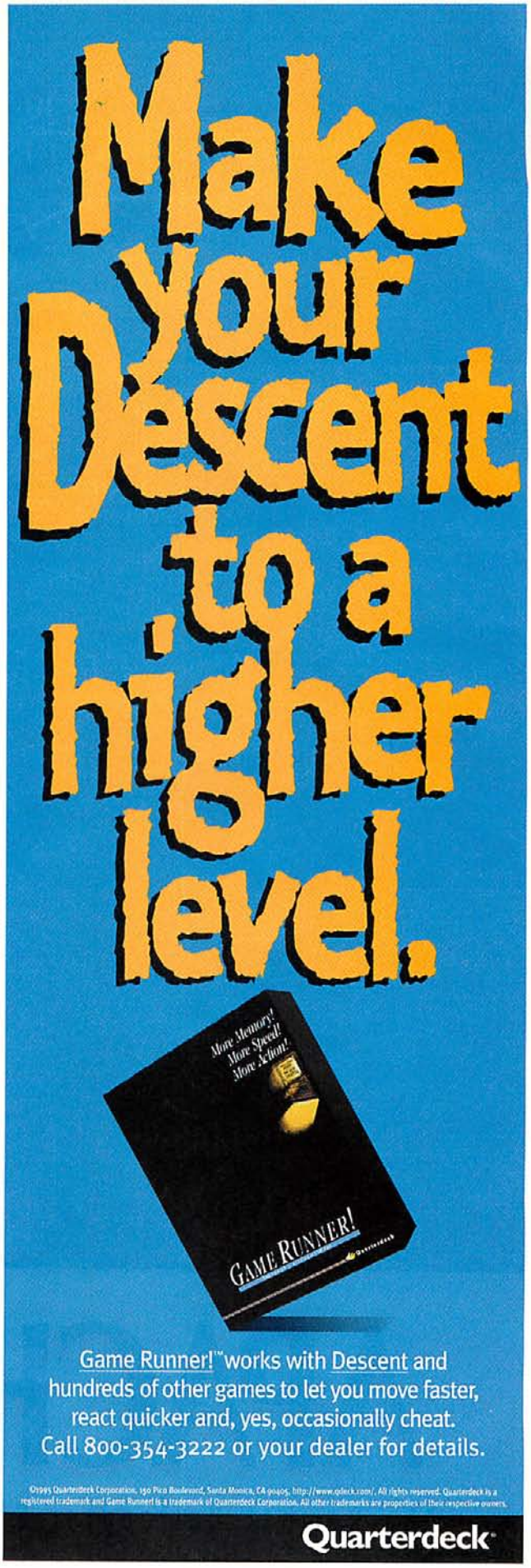
Also, the war in a province does not adversely affect its cultivated fields, herds, structures, population or natural resources. So, once you've taken over, you get the place undamaged and fresh as a daisy (too bad post-war Europe didn't come with this option). You can fight for three or four days with hundreds of men in the melee without ruining a single stalk of grain. And *that's* leaving out the druids and bards, who bring down every natural disaster you can imagine, from lightning and lava to floods and hurricane winds, without breaking a single window or killing a single cow.

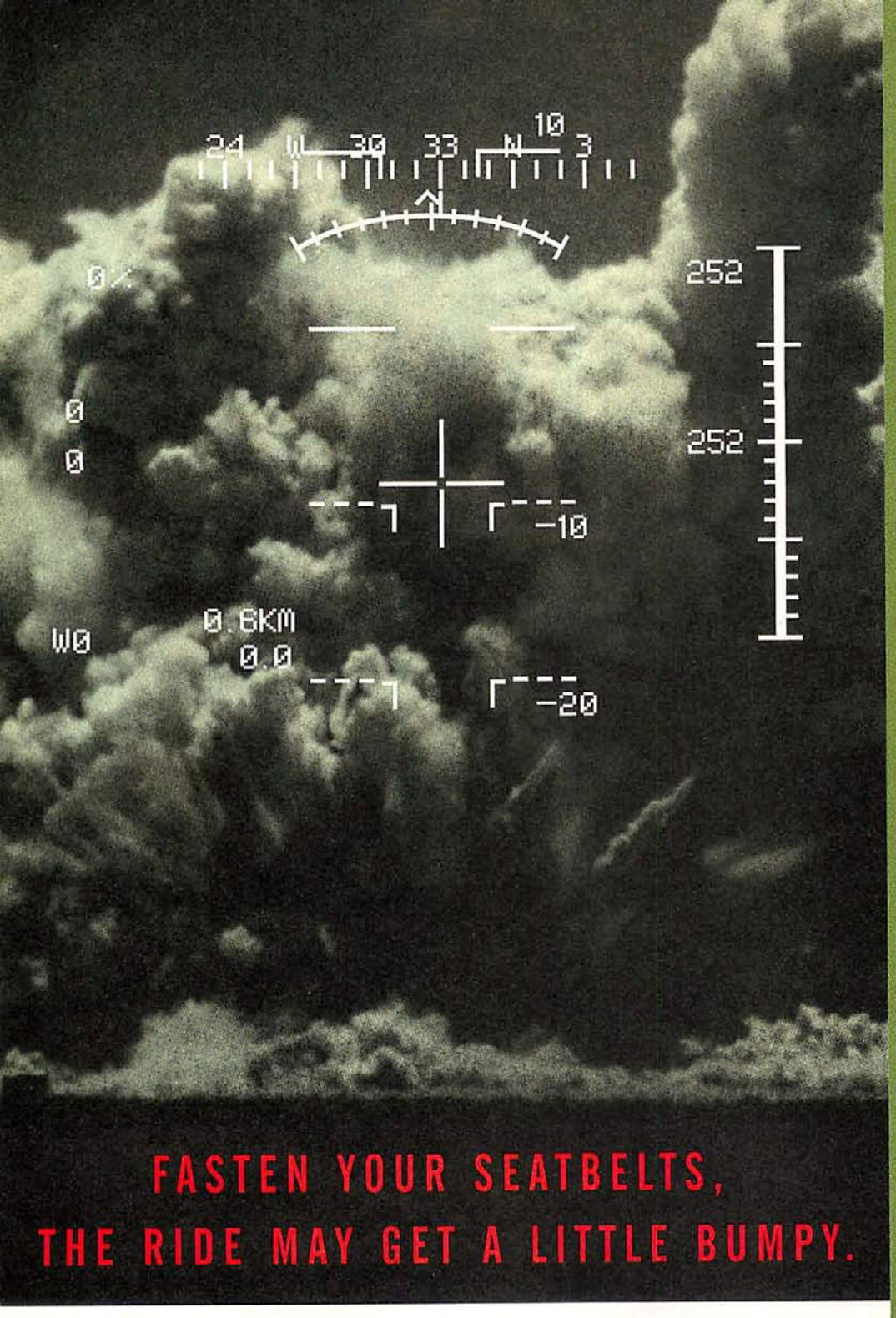
The upshot of all this is that a lot of the complexity of this game can be ignored if you go on the warpath. For example, the Power and Culture values of the province from which you stage an attack make no difference in combat—they don't affect the number of soldiers you can enlist, or the availability of supplies—which means that if you stay on the offensive, you don't really have to worry about building up the Burg or the Citadel. I never had any difficulty producing enough grain for my armies, so there wasn't much motivation to farm the land.

It's unfortunate that more thought wasn't given to these matters, but what the hell. Even if the pay-off on diplomacy is slim, the combat system is quite intricate enough to hold a player's interest throughout the game. And even if you unite the tribes by conquest alone, you'll have plenty to do and a number of formidable challenges to face. It's not quite as easy as it looks, and let's not forget—there's always Balor.

I don't want to give anything away, of course, but the last battles of this game represent an exponential leap in difficulty. All the Fomor champions are enormously strong and very resistant to magic, and if you lose to them, the island is doomed. I

SPEAK SOFTLY & CARRY A BIG SHIELD Despite all the diplomatic options built into the game, prosperity comes more easily through war than peace. Employ artisans early to build weapons and secure your borders.





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APACHE

The Combat Helicopter Simulation

From Digital Integration

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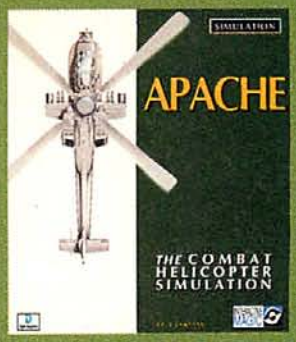

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EMERALD ISLE This close-up look shows a portion of the tile-based terrain. Although fairly detailed and informative, the Koei graphical style is beginning to look a bit out-of-date.

strongly suggest that you save the game when you're within a turn of the crown.

BRASS TACKS

CELTIC TALES is a CD-ROM product, but makes no extraordinary demands on the system. The graphics are artistic, if not photo-real; the sound effects are evocative; and the music is the usual deplorable synthetic rubbish. The interface is mouse-driven and easy to use, although it may take a while to get the hang of things, because the menus aren't laid out in the most intuitive fashion. Fortunately, the game is blessed with a useful, coherent instruction manual and a handy form of on-line help, which answer the majority of questions that come up.

CELTIC TALES yields at least a hundred hours of play, and turns can be streamlined somewhat by setting backfield provinces on automatic with the Delegate command. It also supports multiple players, which should increase its replay value significantly.

In short, CELTIC TALES is a better-than-average game, enjoyable, stimulating, and unique. The magic system is one of the best I've seen. The game will appeal strongly to both fans of Celtic mythology and to strategy gamers who can appreciate its fantasy and historical elements. Unfortunately, the gameplay is unbalanced, and it's possible to ignore much of the complexity of the empire-building phase by opting for all-out war. CELTIC TALES, which could have been a truly outstanding strategy game, is merely a good one for this reason. But if you have a special place in your heart for the Emerald Isle, as I do, you shouldn't pass up a chance to visit.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

CELTIC TALES

RATING 3.5

PROS The myth and mystery of Old Eire is captured nicely, with plenty of authentic names, customs, heroes and, of course, druids. Intricate combat and magic systems offer a lot of replay value.

CONS War doesn't affect the populace or the lands, and diplomacy is basically a waste of time. Sound and graphics are unimpressive.

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Circle Reader Service #304

Stonewall Jackson, Where Have You Gone?

When Empire Takes Aim At THE CIVIL WAR, Its Volley Misses By A Mississippi Mile

by Terry Lee Coleman

I GREW UP IN TENNESSEE. THIS WOULD NOT BE REMARKABLE, EXCEPT THAT I LIVED A MERE 20 MILES FROM SHILOH National Military Park. One of my earliest memories is going to the park one summer and, because I had been particularly well-behaved, being allowed to touch one of the brass cannon on display. As I ran my hand along the barrel, fascinated by the touch of the metal, I had no idea that the howitzer had been rendered forever harmless for the safety of the park's visitors. All I saw was this huge, powerful weapon looking out over Pittsburg Landing, having kept its lonely watch for over a hundred years.

My fascination with Civil War lore eventually spread to board games and then computer games. Yet, with very few exceptions, almost every game I tried was unsuccessful at recreating the battles, campaigns or personalities which defined the Civil War. Even so, I held high hopes for **Empire**'s THE CIVIL WAR, a game whose simple title gives little indication of its incredibly ambitious scope. Like other strategic games before it, CIVIL WAR attempts to model every aspect of the war—no small feat. Although it may seem strange for a British company to release an American Civil War game, the truth is that even overseas the War Between the States is seen as the bridge between the Age of Napoleon and warfare of the 20th Century. One of the nicer elements of the package, then, is a 48-page booklet, *Battle in the Civil War*, by noted British historian Paddy Griffith. While it lacks the detail of Griffith's *Rally Once Again* (on tactics, published in 1986), it does give the novice a good Civil War primer. One odd note is that the bibliography fails to include Shelby Foote's renowned series of books on the Civil War.

LEE MOVES NORTH? Combat is so screwy that the epic battles between the Union Army of the Potomac and Lee's Army of Northern Virginia bear little relation to history.

The Civil War

Price: $69.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386DX-33 MHz processor, 4MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 7 MB hard drive space, mouse; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: CD-ROM
Designer: Adrian Earle
Publisher: Empire Software
Gaithersburg, MD
(800) 216-9706

"I CANNOT MOVE WITHOUT MORE MEN."
—GEORGE B. McCLELLAN

The strategic portion of the game attempts to deal with the difficulties of supplying and moving large forces across the often difficult terrain of mid-19th century America. One of the major difficulties facing Civil War generals was simply knowing knowing exactly where the enemy was and how many men he had. While it's doubtful that competent players will fail, as did McClellan, to move on Richmond with a 2-to-1 majority in manpower, the hidden movement capability of the computer is well-employed here. Units themselves come in a variety of martial flavors: Militia and Regular infantry and cavalry, the latter with sabres and even *pistol shotguns*; Militia Mounted units, capable of racing to the battle on horseback and fighting dismounted; Engineers and Railway Engineers; Smoothbore, Light, Siege and Rifled Artillery; and Sharpshooters. Selecting units allows you to see their manpower, supplies and a history of their fatigue and morale levels.

The Army organization aspects of the game, however, are so poorly thought out that they sap any potential inherent in the combat system. The structure of adding independent commands, promoting or removing generals and moving troops from one theater to another is confusing for the beginner and uncon-

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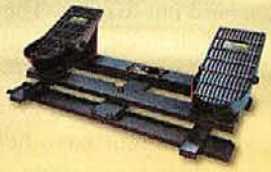

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When Johnny Comes Marching Home

If you must have a Civil War fix, but refuse to play a weak game, there are a few places to which you can turn. The best Civil War game is still SSI's GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT. It was the last wargame to top the *CGW* Top 100 poll before PANZER GENERAL, largely because it gave you the feeling that you were actually fighting a Civil War battle. Unlike THE CIVIL WAR, command control and leadership works properly here, and the the handling of melee, forced marching and tactics has a good Civil War feel. If you can look past the dated graphics, there's still a lot of fight left in this old warhorse. $15, Novastar Games, 916-624-7113.

REINFORCEMENTS

Talonsoft is developing a Gettysburg game using their engine for BATTLEGROUND: ARDENNES (see Alan Emrich's G-2 column in this issue for details). Meanwhile, Norm Koger's AGE OF RIFLES is shaping up nicely, and might be the sleeper of the fall season. The scenarios range from the Mexican-American War to the turn of the century, which obviously includes a lot of Civil War battles. Having criticized TANKS! for its morale oddities, I must admit that RIFLES is much better. The scenarios created thus far are quite balanced and enjoyable. The only question is whether the game can handle large as well as small engagements...guess we'll have to wait for the *Antietam* scenario to find out. In any case, it seems that hope for the Civil War faithful is finally on the horizon.

vincing to the veteran gamer. The system has little of the elegance and internal consistency of that found in THE ROAD FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX II, for instance. Simulating the chaos of battlefield communication is a nice idea, but here it brings more tedium than insight or gameplay.

The naval aspects of the simulation are similarly detailed and similarly confused. You start the war with wooden ships, then gain the capability of building ironclads, although the Rebels rarely have the resources to spare, properly reflecting history. There are distinctions made between riverine and ocean-going units, and the game even allows for blockade running by the Confederates. Still, it's hard to figure out through playing the game why Grant needed gunboats at Vicksburg, or why Island No. 10 was such a hard nut to crack. The naval system really fails to integrate with the land action in either game or simulation form.

Despite the flaws, a simple production system might have helped to make a playable game. Such a game might even have offered a broad insight into the major themes of the Civil War. Instead, what we have in THE CIVIL WAR is a kitchen-sink approach which totally loses focus. You will have little time to ponder the subtle differences between four different types of fortifications, because you will have to spend time micro-managing recruitment centers, supply depots and wagons, training camps, hospitals and even POW camps. On the highest levels of "realism," resources of food, raw materials other human and even *equestrian* needs must be tracked separately. If you turn the options to minimal detail, the game becomes so vanilla that it loses any relation to the Civil War. The worst part of all this is that the strategic game is played in *daily* turns! Even the most rabid Civil War fan will lose interest long before reaching the 1100 turns or so it takes to watch Lincoln win or lose in his bid for re-election in 1864.

Why can't someone design a game which does justice to the Civil War?

"I HAVE NO DIVISION, GENERAL LEE."

—GEORGE PICKETT

But what of the individual battles? Surely they can provide some excitement, with their miniatures-like depiction of the battlefield. Problem is, the designers chose to simulate the action in real-time, based on their dubious system for the Napoleonic FIELDS OF GLORY; and even this would have been okay if they had bothered to create an AI. The computer opponent is lamentable, not just for your enemy, but also for your own forces. Real-time action is held up as "more realistic," because it doesn't allow a player to take all day to move and commit his forces. That's fine, but gamers have a right to expect their own individual commanders to be at least as good as the worst bumblers of the Civil War. It's one thing if an army disintegrates from crumbling morale at Bull Run, but when the cream of Union and Confederate forces flee the field for no apparent reason at Gettysburg, even the most casual of gamers will feel insulted. The best generals in THE CIVIL WAR would make even inept leaders like Braxton Bragg look like a bloody genius; and this reduces the Gouraud-shaded terrain, the detailed supply and morale rules to mere window dressing.

THE CIVIL WAR is merely the latest disaster, leaving gamers feeling much like Lincoln searching in vain for a real general to counter Lee's success. Which brings up the question: Why can't someone design a game which does justice to the Civil War? Empire, like other companies before it, underestimates the passion that gamers have for their hobby. They also fail to realize that the Civil War breaks a lot of gaming boundaries. Several people who wouldn't normally be caught dead playing a wargame will try a Civil War title because it's a subject even mainstream Americans find compelling. Until designers find the same passion and understanding of the conflict as their consumers already have, we'll undoubtedly be subjected to more insulting, graphics-heavy and gameplay-deficient fare like THE CIVIL WAR.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THE CIVIL WAR

RATING 1

PROS Nice graphic rendering of terrain. Good Civil War primer by Paddy Griffith. Wide variety of unit types.

CONS Naval and land aspects aren't on same battle page. Overblown production system makes you more quartermaster than leader. Poor command rules and ridiculously inept AI rout this game almost before it takes the battlefield.

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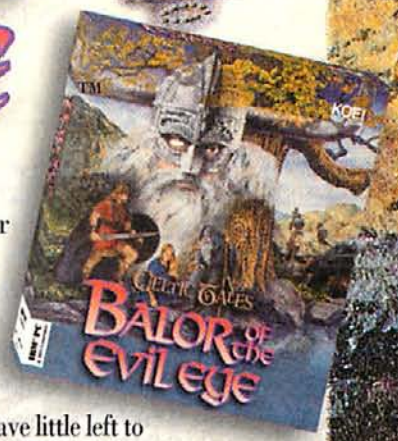
Celtic Tales
Balor of the Evil Eye



Long ago, in the days when Ireland was far removed from the mainland civilizations of Europe, the early Celtic tribes were locked in a bitter war with the Other World. The tribes of Eire were joined as one people, the Tuatha de Dannan. Their Other World enemies, who lurked off the islands shores were known as the Fomors, their powerful leader, Balor of the Evil Eye.

When you enter Celtic Tales, you enter the turbulent struggle to save the tribes of Eire from Balor's evil. Tired and broken, your people have little left to give to the struggle. Regarded as an intruder, your task is to rebuild the land, strengthen the tribes and become High Ruler of Eire. Then with your trusting champions, you must seek out the magical Runes, some of which are locked in Balor's grasp. Once in your possession, the Runes will empower your Bards and Druids with the magic needed to force the Fomor's back to the Other World!

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- Direct your champions to develop the provinces you control
- Align the tribes to your direction in a quest to become High Ruler
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Celtic Tales; Balor of the Evil Eye has not yet been rated by the E.S.R.B.

Give The Actors A Hand

New World Draws A Queen, A Commander And A Joker For MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER

by Alan Emrich

NO MATTER HOW YOU CUT IT (THE DECK, THAT IS), ABOUT THE MOST SOCIAL WAY TO GAMBLE IS TO PLAY poker. Sure, going to the track with a buddy is nice, but there is no substitute for a table full of interesting patter as the chips are falling where they may. Basements, kitchens, and dining rooms around the world still see more poker games than Las Vegas can even dream of.

Hollywood hasn't missed out on the importance of poker, either. What was the major plot device in the films *A Big Hand for the Little Lady* or last year's *Maverick*? What kept the "family" together in *The Odd Couple*? How do we see the crew of the Enterprise really relax in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*? The answer, of course, is poker—where, on film, every game is a "big deal."

Moreover, just when you thought it was safe to leave the cinema to go home and play some poker on your computer, Hollywood once again rears its head. This time, it's in the form of MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER from **New World Computing**, where you are invited to join Joe Piscopo, Jonathan (Commander Riker) Frakes, and the lovely Morgan Fairchild in a friendly game of poker.

MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER

Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 or greater, 4MB RAM, Windows 3.1 or later with 256 color support, 2x CD-ROM; supports most major sound cards.
# of Players: 1
Protection: None
Original Concept: Jon Van Canegham
Publisher: New World Computing, Inc.
Woodland Hills, CA
(800) 325-8898

ANTE UP!

Gamblers, of course, know that four-handed poker is not where the action is. In fact, many Las Vegas casinos will start a game of four-handed poker by only collecting a small rake from the pot. They do this to get some action going so that other players will be attracted to join the game, yet not penalize the few players already seated at the table. With only four players at a table, high pairs are often winners, and two pairs is usually a monster hand.

After entering your name and sex, you can choose whether you'll have a speaking part, a digitized, generic male or female voice that announces your "call," "bet," "raise," etc. Next, you can set the background music to one of three stations: classical, pop, or rock. You may also slightly alter the video continuity and quality (in order to help speed play).

NOT FAST, BUT LOOSE

When play begins, the celebs are chatty and charming. Obviously, this is what people are paying for when they buy this product, and one quickly becomes engaged by their banter. The atmosphere is jovial, and only a real curmudgeon could suppress all the smiles this software package provides.

When the chips start to fly, however, they really fly. While Jonathan Frakes and Joe Piscopo are fairly loose players, Morgan Fairchild seems downright reckless (and lucky). There are times when you can't blast these players out of the action with a cannon, and don't even think about bluffing because they'll stay in regardless. But, hey, the cashflow rapidly goes back and forth, and the charming company helps forgive less sophisticated play. Even the most skilled, conservative player will be tossing chips around in a similarly cavalier manner when playing MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER.

The program does have its hilarious moments, particularly in the "out-takes" accessible via a convenient icon. There is also a menu item dubbed "Tell a joke," that animates Joe Piscopo into telling an old chestnut in his own inimitable style. Groans, guffaws, and belly-laughs must be provided by the player, because the other actors sit stone-faced through both joke and punchline.

On occasion, when he loses a pot, Jonathan Frakes will chime in with the

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REAL POKER FACES It doesn't matter how funny Joe Piscopo is, the other celebrities appear less than amused. Then again, maybe they had already heard the limited number of jokes too many times during rehearsals.

wry comment, "I hate not being Number One." Aside from the obvious *Star Trek* pun, that is a prophetic comment about MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER. For those seeking a superior poker game, the aforementioned limitations in this product really leave you wanting. Hard-core poker players are still advised to pick up **Villa Crespo**'s AMARILLO SLIM'S DEALER'S CHOICE or **Electronic Arts**' POWERPOKER.

DEJA VU AGAIN

As a purely entertaining experience, which is clearly what New World had in mind for this product, it succeeds, but with considerable limitations. Specifically, the number of gestures and bits of celebrity dialogue are limited. After just a few minutes, repetitions kick in for the third and forth time, leaving you with the feeling you've seen this before. At that point you begin to pay more attention to the weaknesses in the poker game than in any pleasures of "celebrity entertainment."

Sadly, even the joke database is limited to a mere four jokes. Personally, I could have sat there listening to Joe Piscopo telling jokes around the poker table all night. But until we all start rubbing elbows with the likes of these stars around our own kitchen tables, games like MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER will be the only game in town.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

MULTIMEDIA CELEBRITY POKER

RATING 2

PROS An adequate variety of poker games is made much better by the pleasant, jovial company kept. The jokes and out-takes are nice touches.

CONS To a gambler, four-handed poker is akin to one-handed sex, and even the entertaining celebrities rapidly become repetitious, repetitious, repetitious.

TOTAL:

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BLAST-FEST
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While designed for all levels of wargamers, Panthers In The Shadows is not recommended for first-time gamers without some understanding of military forces and operations.

Requires VGA display, 580KB free base RAM, 1MB high memory, 4MB hard disk space and a mouse. 2MB or more of high memory is suggested for optimum performance. For IBM PC and compatibles. Copyright 1995 by Scott Hamilton/HPS Simulations. All Rights Reserved. IBM is a registered trademark of International Business Machines, Inc.

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How To Defeat The Perfect General (II)

Tactics To Help You Overcome Human Or AI Opponents In PERFECT GENERAL II

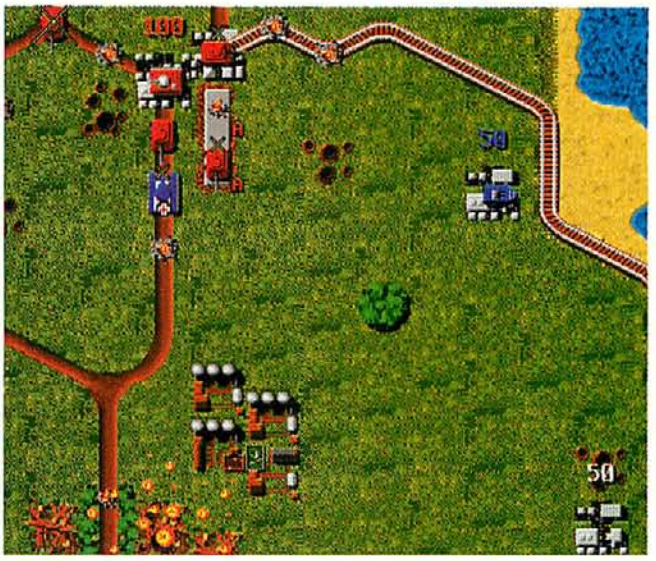
by Patrick C. Miller

"Listen up, all you bug-infested, vaporware-for-brains wargamers! I'm disgusted by the fact that some of you so-called generals are routinely getting your cursors kicked all over a hex map by a computerized commander who couldn't fight his way out of a mini-tower. And when it comes to mixing it up with another human, most of you don't know your bazookas from your serial ports. You're the sorriest excuses for officers I've ever seen!"

While the above isn't one of the video clips in THE PERFECT GENERAL II, it probably should be. To paraphrase George C. Scott in the movie *Patton*, the object of PERFECT GENERAL II isn't to whine because you lose constantly, it's about making some other poor sucker whine about losing to you. So, here are some strategy and tactics tips that will not only help you win against the game's best computer opponent, but will also make you a more challenging opponent for head-to-head competition.

SURVIVING CONTACT

PG2 is primarily a tactical-level wargame, but what you do before the shooting starts also affects the battle's outcome. This is the game's strategic aspect, where you set your objectives, determine how you'll accomplish them, assemble a force and deploy it to make your strategy work. A major factor in planning strategy is understanding PG2's scoring system, plus being aware of any special conditions within the scenario you're playing. A few scenarios require you to have a certain amount of unit "buy points"—a combined total of unit costs—in shaded areas of the map by game's end. If you don't achieve these conditions, you won't win, no matter how well you do in beat-



ON TO VICTORY Here, Blue collects points for occupying a single city hex, Red has its units occupy a multiple-hex victory point area, and an unoccupied city is shown in white to indicate that neither side controls it.

Perfect General II Turn Sequence

	Phase	Attacker	Defender	Comments
1. Buy	Reinforcements	Variable	Variable	Depends on scenario.
2. Place	Reinforcements	Variable	Variable	When available.
3. Mobile Artillery	Plot	Simultaneous	Simultaneous	Select final targets for pre-plotted air strikes.
4. Artillery	Fire	Simultaneous	Simultaneous	Fire mobile, light, heavy artillery. Conduct air strikes.
5. Artillery Plot		Simultaneous	Simultaneous	Plot artillery and air strikes to arrive next turn.
6. Direct Fire		1st	2nd	Return fire available during opponent's fire.
7. Movement		1st	2nd	Opportunity fire available during opponent's move.
8. Direct Fire		1st	2nd	Return fire available during opponent's fire.
9. End Turn		Simultaneous	Simultaneous	Point totals calculated for victory hexes held.

PERFECT GENERAL II Unit Capabilities

Type	Cost	Move	Attack*	Defense	AA Defense	Strengths & Weaknesses
Infantry	1	1	2	2 (Soft)	No	Cheap, slow, vulnerable
Engineer	5	2	6	4 (Soft)	No	Fixes & breaks things, vulnerable
Infantry MG	3	1	4	3 (Soft)	Yes (Range 2)	Cheap AA, slow, vulnerable
Bazooka	3	1	4	3 (Soft)	No	Cheap anti-tank, slow, vulnerable
Armored Car	5	11	2	3 (Armor)	No	Fast scout, cheap, weak
MG Armored Car	6	11	4	3 (Armor)	Yes (Range 2)	Mobile AA, fast, weak
Light Tank	6	7	3	3 (Armor)	No	Good scout or APC, fast, weak
Medium Tank	8	6	4	8 (Armor)	No	Good all-purpose unit
Heavy Tank	12	5	6	15 (Armor)	Yes (Range 2)	Powerful, expensive, slow
Elephant Tank	15	3	9	21 (Armor)	Yes (Range 2)	More powerful & expensive, slower
Mobile Artillery	14	5	6	6 (Armor)	No	Inaccurate, self-propelled, weak
Light Artillery	9	0	6	1 (Soft)	No	Accurate, vulnerable, immobile
Heavy Artillery	20	0	6	1 (Soft)	No	Powerful, vulnerable, immobile
Aircraft	15	40-60 ferry, 20-30 attack	66% chance to kill (50% vs. Elephant Tank)	33% chance to be shot down	No	Highly accurate, expensive, vulnerable to ground attack

* For direct fire attacks only

ing up your opponent and piling up victory points.

In fact, it's actually possible to win a battle of attrition, but lose the war because your opponent controls more victory point areas. For this reason, you should play with the victory point display turned on. The latest PG2 patch color-codes the point values shown on the map, enabling you to quickly determine which victory point hexes are controlled by the attacker (red) or the defender (blue) and which hexes are still up for grabs (white).

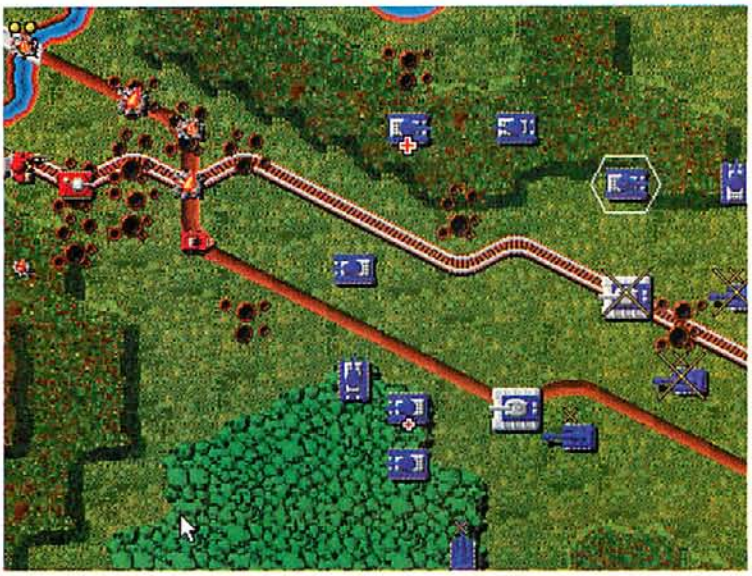
To receive victory points for a hex or a group of hexes, at least one of your units must occupy the hex or hex group. If one or more units from both sides occupy a victory point hex area, neither side receives the points. Each turn your forces alone occupy the area, you'll receive points for it. Victory points are cumulative, always added to your total score, never subtracted. Therefore, the sooner your units take a victory hex area and the longer they remain its sole occupants, the more points you'll receive for it.

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

To help refine your strategy, use the recon map available during the initial unit purchase phase to: analyze the terrain; examine relative set-on positions; see victory hex values; and determine which transportation routes are most useful. In some scenarios, reinforcements arriving in later turns can significantly tip the game's balance, so you should know when, where and how many reinforcements each side receives and plan accordingly.

During unit selection, buy a force tailored to your plan. Do you need a fast-moving offensive force capable of quickly seizing a large number of victory hexes, or a defensive force that can slug it out in close terrain? If the scenario requires you to occupy a large number of victory hexes, make sure you have plenty of cheap infantry units to do this so that you don't sap your combat strength by using armor and artillery for this menial job.

In the unit placement phase, organize your force into combined-arms teams of armor, artillery and infantry and position them to quickly reach their assigned objectives. If your forces start within range of enemy mobile artillery, try to disperse your units as much as possible to minimize casualties. When on the defensive, deploy your units to take advantage of terrain, set up ambushes and create kill



THE KILLING FIELDS Only a few units remain of Red's huge attack, which blundered into a kill zone set up by the Blue defender. Medium tanks take advantage of the woods and hills on the flanks as heavy tanks block the open terrain in the center. With a couple of mobile artillery units in support, a rout is assured.

zones with overlapping fields of fire. Site your artillery in concealed locations that enable it to interdict the enemy's most likely avenues of advance.

Finally, your strategy should be flexible, allowing you to roll with the punches when necessary and exploit opportunities when they present themselves. Above all, stay focused on achieving your objectives. Don't allow your attention to be diverted from the scenario's victory conditions, a trap that even veteran wargamers sometimes fall into.

SHOOTING AND SCOOTING

With a good strategy in place, you can start your battle off on the right foot. However, as mentioned earlier, PG2 is primarily a tactical game and how you move and fire your units usually determines the success or failure of your strategy. Proficiency in tactical combat begins with understanding the turn sequence. You should also be familiar with the capabilities of your combat units—your tactical tools.

Direct fire is conducted by units that have a line of sight to their targets. Armored cars, tanks and infantry units may only use direct fire, while artillery units have the choice of either direct or indirect fire. Artillery units firing indirectly can shoot over sight-blocking terrain by using friendly units to spot targets for them. Only aircraft and offshore artillery have the ability to attack targets in unsighted hexes.

With the exception of machine guns, all weapons can fire only once per turn. For direct fire, these rules apply: Take your highest percentage shot, inflict as much damage as possible and concentrate on destroying the targets that represent the greatest threats. In general, try to avoid firing your units in the first direct fire phase unless you're fairly certain a unit won't get a better shot or that it will probably be destroyed during this phase.

Use opportunity fire during the movement phase to prevent enemy units from taking victory point hexes and conducting close assault attacks against your weaker units. You should attempt to destroy enemy units before they fire, disrupting your opponent's efforts to concentrate superior firepower. During the second and final direct fire phase, shoot all units that have shots remaining, even if their chance of hitting an enemy unit is slim.

In PG2, it's easy to develop a love-hate relationship with your artillery. Sometimes it's fickle when you need it the most and at other times, a single well-placed barrage can change the course of a battle. Because light and heavy artillery must be plotted a turn in advance, using it effectively against opponents who keep their forces dispersed and moving can be problematic.

You need artillery in larger scenarios to discourage your opponents from massing their forces. However, an over-reliance on artillery can be a mistake. Artillery units must have an armored shield in front of them; otherwise

PLACEMENT IS EVERYTHING During the unit placement phase of the "Cauldron" scenario, attacking German units (red) are placed in a tight formation because the defending British have no mobile artillery. Light tanks are positioned to quickly pick up infantry in the opening movement phase.

PERFECT GENERAL II MAXIMUM DIRECT FIRE WEAPON RANGES

Attacking Unit	Soft Targets*	Armored Cars	Light Tanks	Medium Tanks	Heavy Tanks	Elephant Tanks	Mobile Artillery
Infantry vs.	5	1	1	1	1	1	1
Engineer vs.	5	1	1	1	1	1	1
Infantry MG vs.	5	2	2	0	0	0	2
Bazooka vs.	8	8	6	4	2	1	6
Armored Car vs.	6	6	3	1	0	0	3
Armored Car MG vs.	5	2	2	0	0	0	2
Light Tank vs.	8	8	6	4	2	1	6
Medium Tank vs.	10	10	8	6	5	3	8
Heavy Tank vs.	13	13	11	8	6	4	11
Elephant Tank vs.	16	16	13	10	8	5	13
All Artillery vs.	13	13	11	8	6	4	11

*Includes infantry, engineers, bazookas, heavy and light artillery

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C. R. Tees	Albentown	PA
Great American Sports Page	Danville	PA
The Bookshelf	Edinboro	PA
Gateway Comics & Cards	Erie	PA
Comix Universe	Hanover	PA
Patty's Paperback	Indiana	PA
MFB Inc.	Pittsburgh	PA
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Green Dragon	N. Charleston	SC
Dakota News	Sioux Falls	SD
Funny Pages	Greenville	TN
Ziggy's Comics	Knoxville	TN
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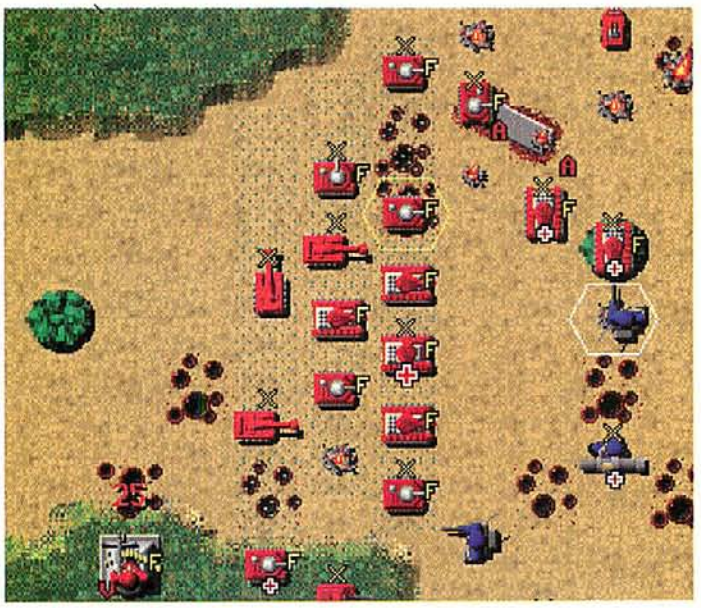
- **Improved engineers** Fast, tough, and pack the firepower of a heavy tank
- **Unit repair** Towns are a haven for damaged units
- **Artillery cover** Sand, forest, swamp and water hexes absorb shrapnel, preventing damage to units in surrounding hexes

there's little to slow or halt the enemy's advance, negating your artillery's ability to do what it does best—pound the enemy from afar. As a rule of thumb, spend no more than a third of your points on artillery units.

FIRST WITH THE MOST

At its heart, PG2 is a game of mobility. The side that gets to the major objectives first with the most units will usually win. Static defenses will succumb to massed firepower, artillery bombardment and air strikes. Slow-moving, cautious attacks invite heavy casualties and inevitably fall short of achieving their objectives. Be bold and aggressive, and be willing to take a few calculated risks, especially when playing against a human opponent of equal or better ability. Be unpredictable and, when possible, disguise or hide your true intentions from your opponent.



CAMPGROUND MONTY To win *Montgomery's Stand*, the attacker must have 60 points of units in the shaded area. Pay close attention, because these areas are sometimes difficult to spot, as is the case here.

To attack successfully, use light units to find and fix opposing forces. Your main attack should follow closely behind your scouts and be centered on medium or heavy tanks, well supported by artillery and air strikes. Use light armor and infantry to form mechanized infantry units that can drop off troops to garrison victory point hexes as you seize them. Don't allow your recon units to get too far ahead of your main body and don't let your main body get too far ahead of its artillery support. Maintaining a steady advance makes it more difficult for your opponent to plot artillery fire and keeps the pressure on, forcing the enemy to respond to your moves while enabling you to maintain the initiative.

On the defensive, don't waste resources attempting to defend everywhere or by placing high-value units in low-value victory hexes that will be quickly overrun. Always look for opportunities to counterattack. Slipping a few units behind enemy lines can raise havoc with the opposition's strategy. A mobile reserve of tanks and a few mobile artillery units can often thwart an enemy breakthrough. When heavily outnumbered, delay and die tactics are usually your only choice. Slow the enemy's advance as much as possible by obstructing or destroying roads, bridges and railroads.

When the shooting stops and the smoke clears from the battlefield, attempt an honest self-evaluation of your performance. Your ability to objectively analyze your failures, as well as your successes, will be the difference between joining the ranks of great generals or being sent to the stockade to keep company with infamous commanders doomed to repeat their mistakes.

Perfect General II Artillery Capabilities

Type	Indirect Fire Range	Barrage Fire?	Pre-plot Turn Before?	Target Hex Sighted?	Transport Needed?
Mobile Artillery	11	No	No	Yes	No
Light Artillery	13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Heavy Artillery	26	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Offshore Artillery	Unlimited	No	No	No	No

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The Empire Gets Hacked

Bust Imperial Heads In DARK FORCES With These Free Level Editors And Utilities

by Jeff James

CONTINUING THE TRADITION OF DOOM-INSPIRED MAYHEM, LUCASARTS' DARK FORCES presents gamers with an addictive 3-D game world filled with the infamous villains of the *Star Wars* universe: Stormtroopers, bounty hunters and all the other unsavory goons allied with the Empire. As playable as DARK FORCES is, many players find the inability to save games between levels a real pain in the keister. Like many gamers, a few of my DARK FORCES game sessions have gone something like this: after bludgeoning my way through hordes of bounty hunters, hostile droids and other adversaries—navigating tricky passageways and defusing byzantine puzzles in the process—I'm blasted by a lowly Stormtrooper in the last portion of the level. To avoid this frustrating occurrence and to help even the most ham-fisted member of the Alliance wend his way through starports and star destroyers with impunity, you may want to turn to the dark side and use a cheat or utility program to help you out.

Dark Forces Editor Version 2.0

by Sean Baker

With Sean Baker's DARK FORCES EDITOR version 2.0, you can finally get even with all of those uppity Imperial goons. A Windows-based shareware utility, this program allows you to add a wide variety of weapons and other objects to the current map level, such as mines, extra energy weapons, gas masks, medical kits, and more than a dozen other goodies. You can even throw in extra lives and invincibility power-ups if you want, sure to make your battles with

Special Moves For FX Fighter

FX Fighter

FX Fighter is a fighting fan's dream come true except for one thing; the manual isn't exactly helpful in the moves department. Fortunately, FX correspondent Jason Kapalka let us borrow his cheatsheet o' special moves...

Legend:

F: Forward
B: Backward
U: Up
D: Down
P: Punch
K: Kick
X, Y: Press X, release, press button Y
X+Y: Press X and Y simultaneously
BD: Diagonally down and back
BU: Diagonally up and back
FD: Diagonally down and forward
FB: Diagonally down and back

Special moves common to most fighters:

B+P	Block
U+P	Jump on or slam downed opponent
U+K	Kick opponent while rising from knockdown
D+K	Foot sweep opponent while rising from knockdown
F, F	Roll forward after knockdown
B, B	Roll backward after knockdown
P+FD	Roll sideways
BU	Backflip (release quickly)
BD+K	Shin kick
BD+K	Sweep kick (while crouching)
FD+K	Groin kick
FU+K	Jump kick
F+P	Power punch
FU+P	Hop punch

Individual fighter's moves

Sheba

F, F+K (close)	Handstand kick & throw
F, D+K (close)	Super leg takedown
F, B+P (close)	Takedown
F+K	Face rip (crouching)

Kiko

F, F+P (close)	Double knee slam
B, F+P	Throw ninja star
B, F+K	Double jump kick
K, K	Triple kick
B+K	Crescent kick

Siren

U+P (close)	Telekinetic lift
F+P, B+K	Super roundhouse kick
P, F+P, P	Triple punch
FD+P	Judo punch (while crouching)

Venam

F, BD+P (close)	Shoulder chew
B, F+P	Acid spit
F, B+P, P, P	Spin punch

Jake

F, F, F+P (close)	Hair grab/ face smash
FU, FD+P (close)	Fast takedown
B, F+P	Uppercut
F, F+P	Headbutt

Magnon

B+K (close)	Bear hug
FD+P (close)	Grab and toss downed foe
B, F+K	Lava breath
F, F+K	Earthshaker
B, F+P	Rampage punch

Ashraf

F, D, F+P	Telekinetic push
F, B+K	Handstand kick
F, B, D+K	Cartwheel kick
B, F, F, F+P, D+K	Super somersault kick

For a complete listing of moves for every fighter, check out The Gamer's Edge section of the CGW Web site (http://www.ziff.com/~gaming).

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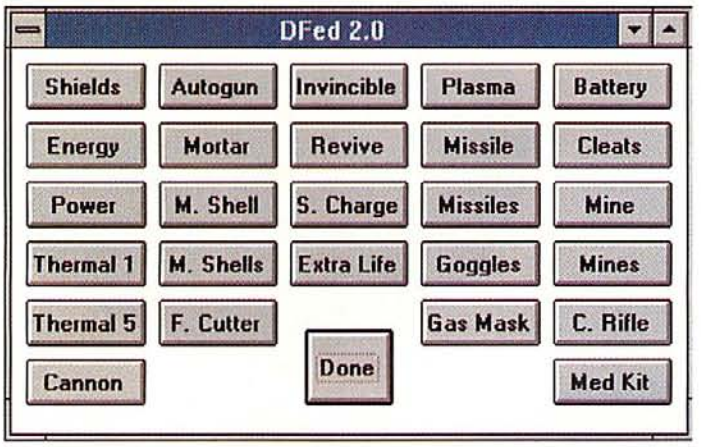
even the most fearsome Imperial henchmen a cakewalk. If DARK FORCES isn't hard enough for you, you can use Sean's utility to add enemies galore to the current level, including Bossk, Boba Fett, Stormtroopers, Officers, droids, and other enemy characters. If you've played all of the levels in DARK FORCES to death, a handy object randomization feature will scatter objects around the level and breathe new life into levels you've already played. On the downside, the utility has next to nothing in the way of help files, "read me" documents or program description. If you're confident about editing your DARK FORCES files without much in the way of written instructions, then the Force must be with you. Regardless, this utility will help you bust Imperial heads like a true Jedi.



MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU The DARK FORCES EDITOR is as powerful as a Lightsaber; unfortunately it's not nearly as elegant.

DFUSE Version 1.0

by Yves Borckmans

Unlike Sean Baker's DARK FORCES EDITOR—which is geared towards making the game harder or easier for the player—Yves Borckman's DFUSE is aimed right at all the wanna-be DARK FORCES level designers of the world. If you want to try your hand at designing your own custom levels, complete with new graphics, DFUSE is the utility to get. I should say *utilities*, as DFUSE is a collection of more than a dozen specific utility programs. Each of these DOS-based game utilities performs a different function in the overall DARK FORCES level editing scheme. For example, LEVMAP.EXE is a fully-featured map and objects editor, while BM2BMP.EXE will convert DARK FORCES *.BM files to Windows *.BMP format. HEX.EXE is a general purpose hex editor, and xxxVIEW.EXE is a general purpose graphic viewer for DARK FORCES graphic file images. The rest of the utilities perform fairly arcane functions, dealing with the nuts and bolts creation of GOB files and other technical matters. All the utilities are exhaustively documented, but novice gamers may find most of the utilities too difficult for them to just jump in and start banging out new DARK FORCES levels. There is one utility—DARKHACK.EXE—that should appeal to gamers of all levels of technical know-how. This little program alters the contents of the DARKPILO.CFG configuration file, granting access to all the game levels and all weapons.

If you're not afraid of delving into the secrets of the DARK FORCES directory structure and don't mind editing contents of important game files, you probably have the stomach to use these utilities. If the thought of hacking your way through Dark Forces code leaves you a bit uncomfortable, you'd be well-advised to wait for a more user-friendly alternative.

Dark Forces Level Codes

Type the code listed next to the level number to warp to that level.

1. LASECBASE
2. LATALAY
3. LASEWERS
4. LATESTBASE
5. LAGROMAS
6. LADTENTION
7. ARAMSHED
8. LAROBOTICS
9. LANARSHADA
10. LAJABSHIP
11. LAIMPCITY
12. LAFUELSTAT
13. LAEXECUTOR
14. LAARC

Jeff James, CGW columnist and Associate Editor of The Electronic Roadhouse, is available on CompuServe at 74774,1635 and through the Internet at 74774.1635@compuserve.com.

ZiffNET

To locate these files on-line, tune in to the *CGW* headquarters on ZiffNet. Files featured here can be downloaded from ZiffNet on CompuServe. On CompuServe, go to *Computer Gaming World*'s own forum (GO GAMEWORLD), and search in the Gamer's Edge file library, library 18.

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Reach for the Stars		D-Day		
Gold of the Americas		Conquest of Japan		
Panzer Battles *		Global Domination		
Warlords		When Two Worlds War		

* Includes many additional scenario files.

Wargame Construction Set II: Tanks! has won Strategy Plus' 1994 Wargame of the Year! and is rated #9 in CGW's Top Wargames. It has an easy to use editor to build your own battles with 1300 platoon-sized units from 1918-1990's. Novastar and Norm Koger continue to support new versions of the game (v. 1.27) with many new rules such as variable end game, variable weather, defensive fire, automatic dismounting in combat, and we have developed a Modern Database with 350 units/150 nations! Over 200 additional scenarios can be added. See below.

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Disk 2: France 1940	Disk 8: Bastogne	Disk 14: North Africa
Disk 3: Utah/Omaha	Disk 9: North Africa	Disk 15: Vietnam
Disk 4: Gold/Juno/Sword	Disk 10: Remagen	Disk 16: **Modern** Korea
Disk 5: St. Vith/KG Peiper	Disk 11: France 1944	Disk 19: Korea 1950's
Disk 6: Desert Storm	Disk 12: 1973 Israeli	Disk 21: **Modern** 1st US Arm.

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Whirling & Hurling

TERMINAL VELOCITY Might Make You Hurl, But H.U.R.L. Will Keep You Clean

by Chuck Miller

SINCE THE ARRIVAL OF CONTINUOUS-MOTION 3D ACTION GAMES WITH WOLFENSTEIN 3-D BACK in 1992, it can be said that players' heads have been spinning ever since. Many have even endured nausea as a result of computer-induced "motion sickness" brought on by the twisting walls and corridors of these "virtual" (and I use the term lightly) worlds. Though I've never personally had the need to keep a barf bag handy, I've had more than my share of visual disorientation. Still, like most gamers, I keep going back for more. There is just something fresh and invigorating about the experience. Such is the case with this month's 3-Dizzying titles: H.U.R.L. and TERMINAL VELOCITY—two quite enjoyable spin-fests with the benefit (for many) of not a drop of blood in sight.

TERMINAL FEROCITY

Apogee is a name that's become synonymous with quality shareware (honestly, I can't recall a single Apogee game I didn't enjoy playing). With the release of TERMINAL VELOCITY, a new company is about to acquire that same reputation—**3D Realms**, Apogee's 3D game development offspring. With DUKE NUKEM 3D and SHADOW WARRIOR set to follow TERMINAL VELOCITY, 3D Realms has a hot lineup ahead for 1995. (For more on 3D Realms, see the DUKE NUKEM Sneak Preview back in the July issue.—*Ed.*)

Now, to get right to the point of this review, if you like 3D action games, don't even think about it—download TERMINAL VELOCITY and have a blast! The only real complaint I can level against this game is the size of the file itself (over 3.6MB). With a 14.4K modem, it took me about an hour to download. Nevertheless, you won't find a better 3D action title online at present than TERMINAL VELOCITY.

Okay, with the aforementioned out of the way and before getting to the gritty details of what TERMINAL VELOCITY offers, let's set the stage for play. As the story goes, it's man's far future and the Earth is once again under attack by some malevolent beings from a distant world. As a pilot from the Ares Squadron, it's your task and destiny to save the known galaxy and all sentient life from this latest scourge—all from the seat of your outgunned and outmanned TV-202 fighter. So, with that said, gear up and fly!

As expected, TERMINAL VELOCITY features all the latest visual and virtual goodies, and does so in a bloodless atmosphere. There is full 360 degree movement, nine unique planets with three levels each (one planet in the shareware version), seven destructive weapons (four available to shareware pilots), air-to-air and air-to-ground combat, SVGA graphics (registered version only), eight-player network or two-player modem support, CD-quality audio and more. As with Apogee's RISE OF THE TRIAD, RemoteRidicule and CommBat levels are supported for multiplayer gaming.

THE ICEMAN COMETH TERMINAL VELOCITY has enough action to satisfy that "I've got to blow up something by noon" craving.

Like most new games, TERMINAL VELOCITY requires at least a 486DX or better system. On a Pentium, movement is fluid and action furious. Control is excellent, especially with a gamepad controller. Furthermore, the frame rate is fast, while outdoor and indoor environments are realistic and feature fog effects and a cloud layer that you can fly through and fight above! In fact, several battles are set to occur above the clouds. In all, TERMINAL VELOCITY offers an experience that blends **Interplay**'s DESCENT and **LucasArts**' REBEL ASSAULT in a single, invigorating package.

To enlist as a galactic fighter pilot, download a copy of TERMINAL VELOCITY (3DTV.ZIP or TVP3.ZIP) or, better yet, just go for the full registered version. The CD-ROM edition with over 70MB of 3D cinematics, special high-resolution textures, a bonus planet and some extra shareware games is $39.95 (the game can be played from the CD). For a more modest $29.95, you can get the less feature-rich diskette version. There will also be a TERMINAL VELOCITY Strategy Guide available for $14.95. For the latest in 3D action, contact 3D Realms at P.O. Box 496419, Garland TX 75049-6389 or call (800) 337-3256 with plastic in hand.

I THINK I'M GOING TO HURL!

Billed as a "hilarious, non-violent, 3D action game...for baby DOOMers of all ages," H.U.R.L. rides the fence of shareware, being more of a commercial demo than a true shareware release. Still, a playable "shareware" version can be downloaded to provide you with a taste of its light-hearted action in a style that's designed to appeal to younger players (pre-teen mostly). You see, in H.U.R.L., you don't tote a gun, or any other instrument of destruction; your collection of

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Circle Reader Service #148

DIRTY BIRDY HURL is a mild-mannered kids version of DOOM; instead of dying, your opponents simply raise their hands in surrender.

armaments includes water balloons, soap and deodorant. Yes, that's right—the land of H.U.R.L. is a dirty place, and it's your job to clean up this trash-filled world infested with marauding ducks, pigs, frogs, apes and tomcats. Whether it be the Hairball Trailer Park, Drool School or Fast Food Alley, your task is to clean up town without accumulating too much filth in the process. Collect pop bottles and cans, banana peels, and other items of refuse to exchange for money to buy the cleaning supplies you need. Then, hurl them at the critters you meet. However, get covered in dirt and it's back to the start of the level.

One concern I have, which many would consider a flaw in design, is H.U.R.L.'s lack of joystick support (a fatal flaw in **Merit**'s FORTRESS OF DR. RADIAKI, as well). I find these types of games just too frustrating to play with a mouse or keyboard. Someone should hurl on the project manager or programmer who said "Who needs to use a joystick, anyway?" Still, given the above, most children will probably derive a great amount of "non-violent," bloodless pleasure from this otherwise charming title.

Though H.U.R.L. (HURLDEMO.ZIP) is a sizable download at almost 1.4MB, you may find it worth it, especially if you have younger players who get cranked up playing 3D action games, but who may be too tender for the violence of mainstream shooters. However, you will need at least a 25MHz 486 and 4MB of RAM to start your hurling (the full commercial version also requires a CD-ROM drive). If you can live with the lack of joystick support and prefer a more "gentle" approach to 3D gaming, it's not really asking that much these days. For the full version of H.U.R.L., stop by your local retailer with $39.95 in hand or contact Millennium Media Group Inc., 234 N. Columbus Boulevard, Philadelphia PA, 19106, (215) 625-8928.

Chuck Miller, editor of The Electronic Roadhouse and CGW's Shaman of Shareware, can be reached through the Internet at 74774.1476@compuserve.com.

ZiffNET

To locate these games on-line, tune in to the *CGW* headquarters on ZiffNet. Games featured here can be downloaded from ZiffNet both on CompuServe and on Prodigy. On CompuServe, go to *Computer Gaming World's* own forum (GO GAMEWORLD), Library 7, Shareware Sizzle. On Prodigy, jump ZiffNet and Search by Title for the games listed here. Or, Search by Category to browse the entire Games Library.

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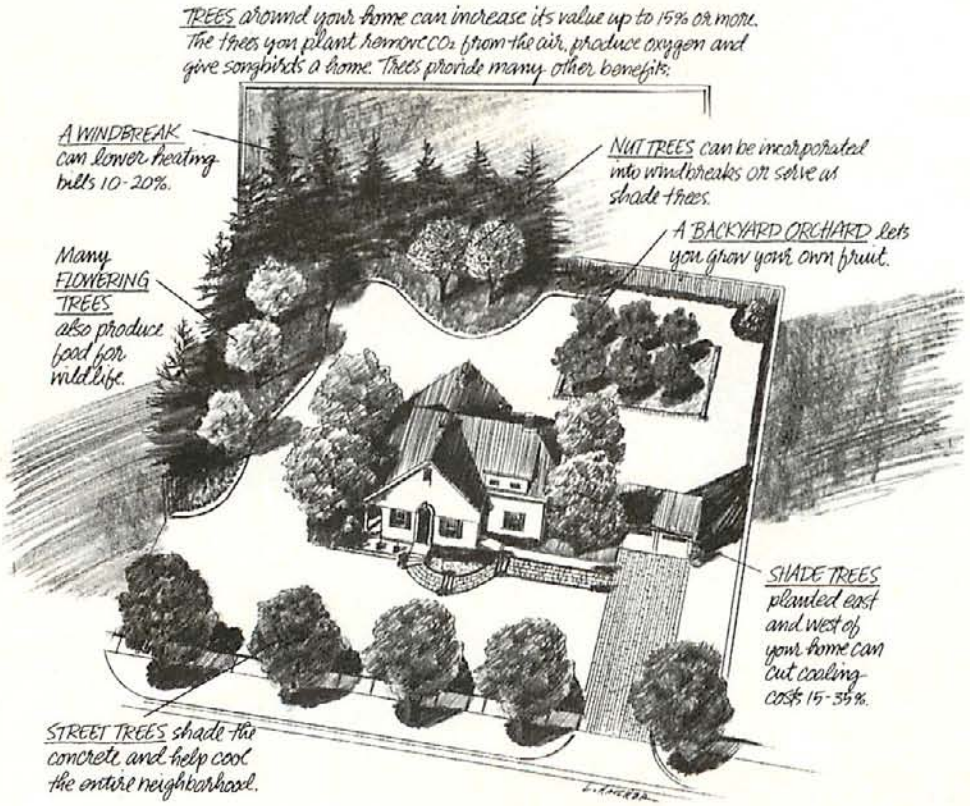

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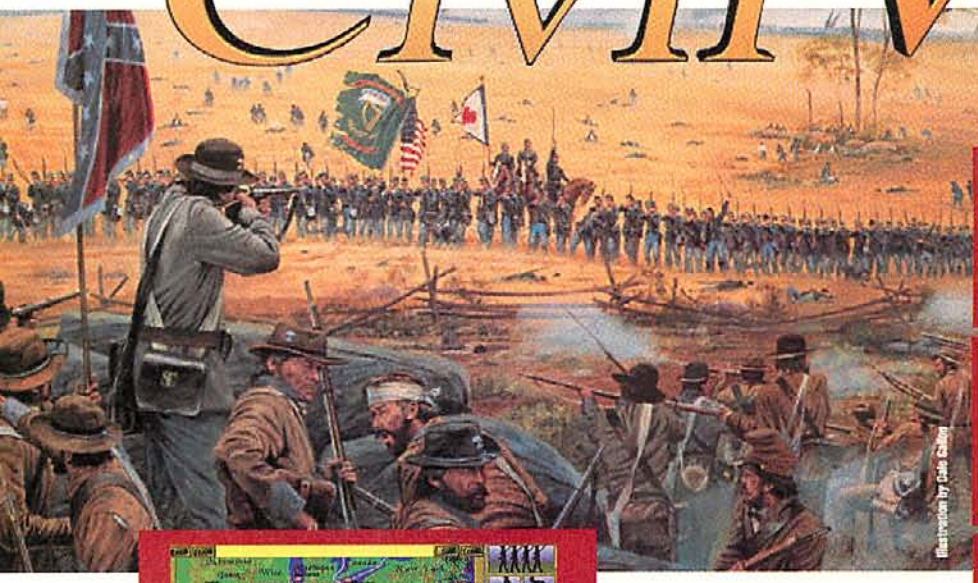

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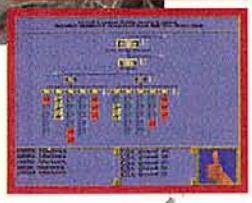

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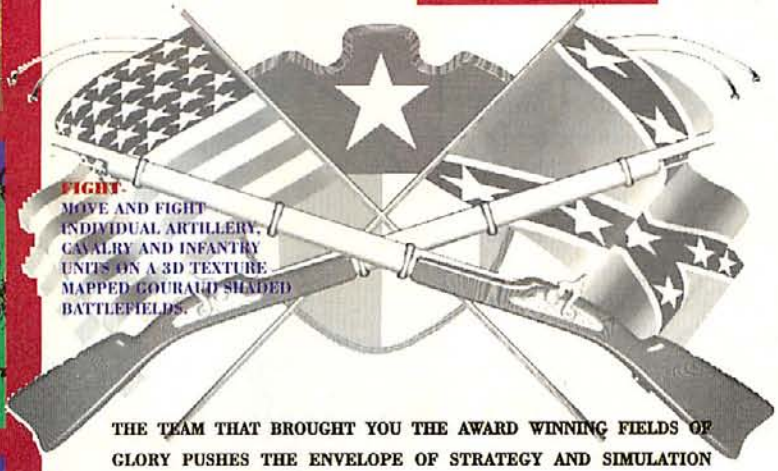

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Circle Reader Service #6

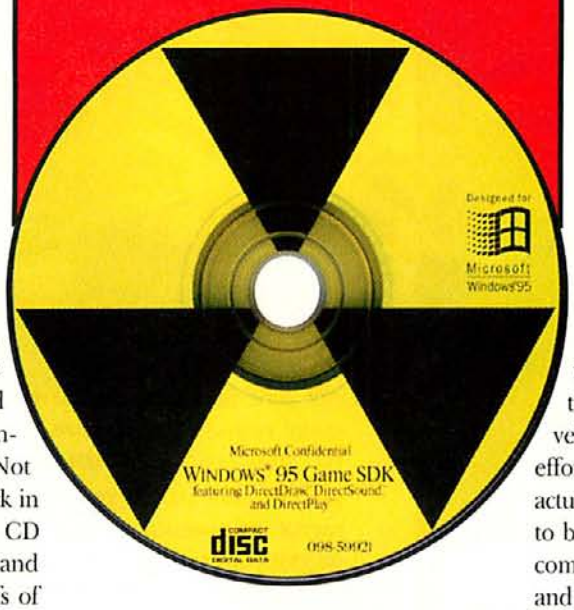
Hey, Wanna Play With My SDK?

The Windows 95 Game SDK Will Mean Good Things To Gamers

by Paul C. Schuytema

For months you've read the hype surrounding Windows 95. I'm sure you've even enjoyed some of the "anti-hype" which has been percolating through the press for this long-overdue operating system. In my opinion, Windows 95, while not a revolutionary operating system, is a pretty amazing piece of evolutionary software. That it can deliver on many of its promises and still be transparently compatible with all our favorite Windows 3.1 and DOS applications (and games!) is quite an amazing feat.

With the Game SDK, developers can now focus on writing the cool parts of their games, and leave all of that nasty, dirty input/output stuff to the operating system.



THE AMAZED SKEPTIC

I popped the beta CD of "Win95" into one of my machines and held my breath as I clicked on the "abandon all hope..." button. It installed just fine, and so without so much as a glance at the on-line documentation or the READ.ME file, I opened a DOS window, installed HERETIC, created a shortcut on my desktop and double-clicked. Pow, it was up and running, as fast as before, but this time I could "control-escape" right back into Windows 95 and an Excel spreadsheet. Not too shabby. But wait, there's more. Back in Windows, I popped a Black Sabbath CD into my drive. In a few seconds, Ozzy and Iommi were smoking through the riffs of "The Wizard." Cool. Then I clicked on the taskbar icon for HERETIC and instantly was back in that magical world, still playing at top speed, yet still listening to Black Sabbath (and damn loud, too). All that on a 486/66 with 16 MB of RAM. Perhaps Microsoft is onto something here...

PHOOEY GUI

The old Windows 3.1 was a fairly decent graphical front-end (GUI), and for word processors, spreadsheets and page layout, it was light-years beyond DOS for ease of use. But were there any games? Sure, you could plunk away at SOLITAIRE, or try your hand at surviving the excitement of OUTPOST, but for the most part, the Windows game offerings were pretty lean and lame. The reason? Just ask any game developer. Developing for Windows 3.1 was an exercise in madness. Not only did Windows games have to deal with all the hardware trickery that DOS games did, they had to work within the constraints of Windows, which meant s-l-o-w graphics, and a whole bushel full of other operating system gobbledy-gook to keep it running happily within the GUI interface. For many developers, it just wasn't worth the trouble.

MICROSOFT TO THE RESCUE?

Now, Microsoft comes along and wants to do away with the old Windows 3.x and MS-DOS—on a global scale, mind you. You can imagine the collective groan which rose from the game development community. But through the efforts of a few Microsoft evangelists who actually play games, Windows 95 is poised to be THE game operating system of the coming years. We've already seen, above and in previous *CGW* issues, that Windows 95 can run DOS games just fine, with the added value of task switching (not for productivity, screw that, but so you won't get busted when you play WING 3 at work).

Beyond that, Microsoft wants to take it

one step further and make it easier to create games for Windows 95 than for DOS. How often have you dealt with configuration woes, shortages of conventional memory, video driver headaches and sound cards that don't work with the game you just bought? Just multiply those headaches by the number of sound and video cards on the market, and square that by the sum of all the possible combinations, and you'll get an idea of the hassles game developers have to deal with. With Microsoft's new Game SDK (Software Development Kit), developers can now focus on writing the cool parts of their games, and leave all of that nasty, dirty input/output stuff to the operating system. This means, for both developer and player, Windows 95 will do more of what a computer can actually do, which is deal with all of that nasty hardware input/output and configuration stuff, and leave us creative, winsome humans to grow and prosper.

As we all know, Microsoft isn't doing all of this out of any supposed benevolence. They want to make money, and that means getting people to buy computers and all the cool stuff that we jam into them. As a little passage in the 500+ pages of SDK documentation states: "[The SDK] must be able to add value to today's games with no hardware acceleration, but the API[s] must be rich enough to create a demand for hardware accelerators."

THE PARTY BEGINS

Back in late April, Microsoft rented out Paramount's Great America theme park in San Jose for a day-long seminar and bash to convince the game developers (still slightly hung-over from the Computer Game Developer's Conference which ended the day before) that Windows 95 is serious about games. Attendees picked up a cool T-shirt and a copy of the Game SDK beta version. The final version CD-ROM, released soon after, looks more like some alternative rock CD than a suite of programming and development tools.

At its most basic level, the Game SDK is a package of programming functions and routines which are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of game developers (programmers fluent in C and C++, that is). Included in the SDK are DirectPlay, DirectSound, DirectDraw and DirectInput. Also included, but not really a part of the SDK, is information on how to utilize AutoPlay.

CAN YOU SAY "AUTOPLAY?"

Let's start with AutoPlay. Essentially a part of the Windows 95 operating system, AutoPlay will know when you put a CD in your drive. If it's an audio CD, it will launch a CD player application. If it's a PC CD-ROM, it will look for a file called autorun.inf. That file simply tells the computer what program to immediately execute. This can be an installation program, a "teaser" program (such as a graphic image with a "play" or "quit" button) or the game itself. This lets anybody simply pop in a CD-ROM and get moving right away.

ISLANDS IN THE SCREEN Gamers who are tired of treading the slippery rocks of DOS will find the going gets easier under Win 95. And multitasking will win you big points at the office, too, for "working" so long at your computer.

DirectInput is a set of utilities which allows programmers to access a player's joystick. In the Windows 95 Control Panel, there will be a joystick icon. The player will click on this to select the joystick they have and to calibrate it. Then, when a players starts up a game, the game already knows the type of joystick and how to receive information from it. This may seem trivial, but it really takes quite a bit of work to write a routine which correctly grabs joystick information, and developers very often had to write a small library of routines to support the myriad joysticks that consumers own. Now, they only need to tell DirectInput to go and fetch the joystick data. Programmers never have to be concerned with what kind of joystick a player has. They will still have to contend with whether or not the game will support a hat switch or a number of buttons, but that's all. It doesn't matter if the coolie hat is on a Thrustmaster or a CH Flightstick.

ON-LINE AND MIGHTY FINE

DirectPlay is the component of the SDK which focuses on multiplayer games. It is essentially a mini client/server engine which takes care of all the bookkeeping and connections tasks for a game. That means that a developer doesn't have to write different code for network or modem play. It also means that there is an elegant way, built into the system, for a player to enter and leave a multiplayer game in progress without the whole thing crashing down around the remaining players.

While DirectPlay handles most of the "unglamorous" tasks of multiplayer connectivity, it still leaves all of the synchronization chores to the game code itself. This is done to allow a range of different play options, rather than shackling developers to some communications protocol dreamed up on the Redmond campus.

THE SWEET SOUND OF COMPATIBILITY

DirectSound is the audio portion of the new Windows game tools. It will allow direct access to the hardware-based sound channels of your sound card. This may not seem like much, but it allows a programmer to enjoy down-and-dirty access to the exciting capabilities of a sound card, without being the slightest bit concerned as to which brand of card the consumer has on his or her particular machine.

One of the neatest features of DirectSound is its built-in capability for three-dimensional sound. For nearly two years,

we've seen blips and glints of the coming wave of spatial sound, and Windows 95 is already geared up for that aural feast. Now, developers can begin coding games for 3-D sound, and they can be sure that the sounds will work on upcoming cards released over the next few years.

The most interesting of the 3-D sound components of DirectSound is a little item termed DirectSoundBuffer3-D. This interface object contains data for a 3-D audio object's position, velocity, orientation, ambient volume and directional path. To apply these esoteric labels to a real object, just consider the sound of a missile being fired. Using the Game SDK, developers will not only be able to display its path on the screen, but in 3-D audio space as well. We can hear it coming from behind us, whizzing by in the background, or swooping from behind. I can't wait until every sim uses this technology!

In fact, the folks at Microsoft have added so many goodies into their 3-D sound routines, that they hint that only the most anal-retentive developers will make complete use of it. You can, for example, vary the speed of sound according to altitude, or how far under the water you are. You can also tailor the sound for the size of the "virtual" room that the player is supposed to be located in, from an open wheat field to a cluttered broom closet.

FEAST YOUR EYES ON THIS

Possibly the most ambitious component of the Game SDK is DirectDraw. DirectDraw will provide the game developer unparalleled access to video display memory and the inherent capabilities of a consumer's video card. Using DirectDraw, programmers can play around with all sorts of neat display tricks, including hi-res, texture mapping and high-speed animations. Again, all of this arcane spellcasting can be handled without developers writing any extra code to support specific cards the consumer might have.

Sure, we've all seen some of the "universal" drivers out there, which allow our cards to work within standard VESA (Video Electronics Standards Association) specifications, but DirectDraw should allow even more sophisticated graphics trickery, while allowing the operating system to manage the specifics, instead of some additional layer of software emulation.

WASH YOUR WINDOWS

Windows 95 is coming, whether we're prepared or not, and it has all of the expected force of the Microsoft tsunami behind it. Switching to a new operating system is always a spooky move, not only for users but also for developers. The developer's dilemma has become, "Should we invest time and large amounts of money learning to develop for a new operating system that might not be accepted?" Well, it looks like Windows 95 will have plenty of users, and the backwards-compatibility to allow everyone on the bandwagon.

But the question for game developers is "will it do games?" With the Game SDK, it looks like Microsoft has finally decided that "games are good," and they have given development teams the tools to do even more spectacular gamish magic than under the venerable old DOS. All of that, and no config.sys woes for Win 95 games? What will they think of next?

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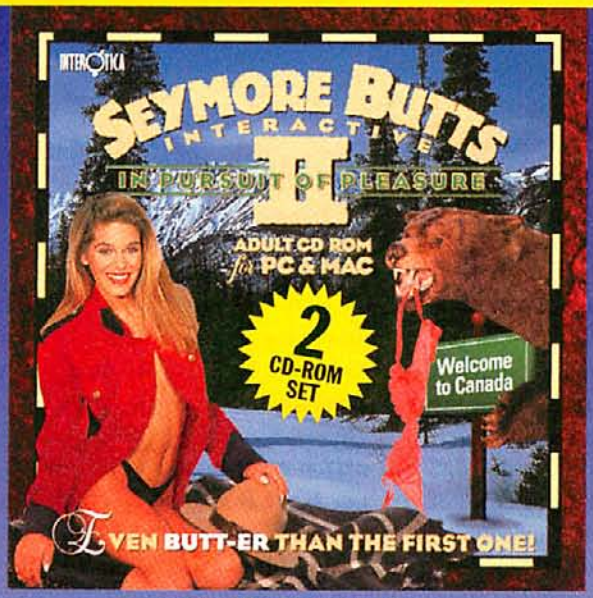

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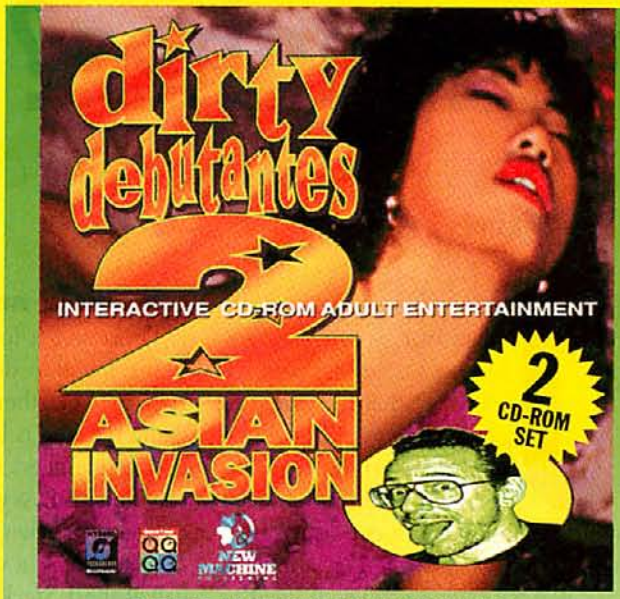

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Configuration Headaches?

New 'Game Doctor' Writes Prescription Configurations For What Ails You

by Mike Weksler

UNTIL THE LAST DOS GAME ROLLS OUT OF THE FACTORY, GAMERS WILL STILL HAVE TO configure their machines to get games running. Even with the advent of Windows 95, you'll still find yourself booting up under MS-DOS to run games that, for one reason or another, won't run under Windows 95. Since you'll need to boot your machine differently for different programs, you'll probably need well-written config files that incorporate boot menus. For those of you who don't know how to do this, the folks at **Mad Mouse Software** have devised an ingenious program that will practically do it for you. The GAME DOCTOR will set up an astonishingly in-depth multi-config setup so that you can easily configure your machine to play the games you want.

SHORT CIRCUITS

REMOVIT-II from Vertisoft has a WINDOWS 95 UPGRADE ASSISTANT feature that will go in and prepare your computer for that most imminent of upgrades. The new CLEANUP COACH utility, another new feature, will help clean out unwanted files to get the most out of your current Windows 3.x configuration. Price: $69.95. For more information, call (800) 466-5875.

Oops! In last month's Under The Hood, a typo in the MPC Level 3 chart referred to a 540GB hard drive. Sorry, we haven't seen a half-terabyte drive yet. We meant 540MB hard drive. Hope you didn't sign a long-term lease to buy that kind of storage capacity...

DIAGNOSIS: BOOT DISK-ARHEA

There are a lot of great games out there, but that doesn't matter much if you can't get them to run. Getting the game running is largely a matter of getting your fingers dirty with a little DOS configuration. As we well know, one set of configuration files generally won't run all of your games (if you have one that does, call Robert Stack at Unsolved Mysteries—I'm sure he'll be glad to put you on the show). Most people use various config files on separate bootable floppy disks. These "boot disks" are a nuisance because you need to have them handy to enjoy your game. Additionally, your config files can be just as screwed up on a floppy disk as on your hard disk—boot disks merely make it easier for technical support people to isolate a given problem for their game. Besides, booting from a floppy disk is pretty slow compared to booting from your hard drive.

THE HEALED STATE

Computer-savvy users deal with the configuration blues by setting up what's known as a "multi-config" setup using DOS 6.0 and later. Once the computer starts up, you are presented with a menu of options like "Games" and "Home Office." Each menu can have sub menus like "CD Games," "EMS Games," and even specific labels like "Run U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS."

These "boot menus" work great, but in the nightmare world of CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT hacking, I've seen multi-config setups that would bring rocket scientists to their knees. There's a good chance that without a background in structured programming, you might never enjoy the benefits of a well-written multi-config setup—unless you know a DOS hacker or use a program that can do much of the legwork for you.

A CURE FOR WHAT AILS YOU

THE GAME DOCTOR is an amazing program that cranks out multi-configs like a pasta machine at a noodle convention. When you install it, the GAME DOCTOR analyses your old CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files. It can detect your CD-ROM drivers, and most sound drivers. For those of you out there with exotic peripherals, such as home networks, you'll be pleased to know that the designers incorporated an option which allows you to add additional drivers from both the CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT file. For instance, the **Ensoniq** SOUNDSCAPE ELITE has a command in the AUTOEXEC.BAT that initializes the sound card. The program allowed me to enter this line during it's analysis phase. Once this analysis phase was complete, the computer rebooted and I had a genuine multi-config setup that would have otherwise taken me at least an hour to whip up from scratch. Those with less experience in writing custom configs will be able to save even more time—but just to get the game running is probably reward enough for most people.

The first option in the standard GAME DOCTOR boot menu will invoke your old configs—great in case you need to get back to a favorite config setup. Then, there's a generalized Windows menu option, an option for generic MS-DOS applications, one for Games, and one for Custom configs. The Games menu option

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allows you to select from several pre-configured setups. You decide whether you want to load the CD-ROM drivers or what kind of memory to enable, and you can even back up to a higher-level menu if you make a mistake.

It's the Custom menu option that really makes THE GAME DOCTOR shine. To add to this menu, you run a shell program with a full interface to the basic functions of your config files. Load the Mouse, Disk Cache, and CD-ROM drivers with a mouse click. Do you want 8MB or 16MB of EMS? No problem, just select from the pop-up menu! Once you decide upon the permutations for your new custom config, merely name it and save it—THE GAME DOCTOR will add it automatically to your boot menu!

The custom configuration generator is the heart of THE GAME DOCTOR. Creating new configurations has never been this easy.

CONFIG PANACEA?

THE GAME DOCTOR vastly facilitates the process of organizing multi-config files, thereby eliminating the need for a boot disk (unless you hose the files on your hard drive—then you *will* need a boot disk). It is not designed to tune a given configuration; rather, it is designed to provide you with enough general variations with which to get a given game to run. I found that for a real hot-rod setup, I would take my individually tuned and tested configs (such longtime favorites as my "QEMM Silver Bullet," "DOS EMS Memory Missile," and "XMS DOS/4G Greased Lightning"), and separately cut and paste them into the master CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files. This step should be attempted by someone with at least an intermediate level of understanding of how these files work.

For someone wishing to quickly gain conventional memory on a favorite config with the MS-DOS MEMMAKER utility, be warned—don't do it. MEMMAKER will destroy a multi-config setup in horrible ways that even an expert can't imagine.

THE WINDOWS 95 EFFECT

In the near future, Windows 95 will alleviate much of the hassle of installing, configuring, and running computer games—but only with games written to take advantage of the features which Windows 95 offers. Until the last DOS game rolls out of the factory, we as gamers will be faced with, for whatever reason, having to invoke the old version of MS-DOS to get a given application to run. The F8 key will bring you back to DOS, where you can then boot to a GAME DOCTOR-configured boot menu.

PROGNOSIS

If you play DOS games on your computer and wish to dive into the dark world of boot menus and multi-config hacking, get THE GAME DOCTOR—I wouldn't boot my computer without it. Price $19.95. For more information, call Mad Mouse Software (403) 271-2886.

PLEXTOR'S BLAZING 6X CD-ROM LOADS AND RUNS GAMES FASTER

by Loyd Case

The prices of 4x CD-ROM drives have been dropping almost as fast as the price of hard disks. You can now find quad-speed CD-ROM drives for under $200 with EIDE interfaces (Enhanced IDE) and SCSI versions for under $250. With that thought in mind, we recently tried out the **Plextor** PLX-611 six-speed CD-ROM drive.

When is a six-speed (or even quad-speed) CD-ROM drive useful? Today's multimedia applications that ship on CD-ROM (including many games) are actually tuned to work with double-speed CD-ROMs. When you see the term "quad-speed," it means that the CD is rotating at four times the rotational speed of a standard audio CD. At "single speed," a CD is capable of delivering data at a rate of 150 kilobytes per second—adequate for 16 bit stereo audio, but not full-motion video. Many games and multimedia reference works have been tuned to work best at 300 kilobytes per second—"double speed." Other CD titles are set up to work with whatever speed the drive will handle. One example is WING COMMANDER III. The installation program for WING III tests video, CPU, and CD-ROM speeds. In games like this, CD-ROM speeds can make a big difference, particularly in load times for missions. WING III's installation program rated the Plextor PLX-611 six speed drive at data rate of 927164, reporting "quad-speed or better" performance. The game actually loads in 14.5 seconds, as opposed to a load time of 19 seconds for Plextor's quad speed drive. We also checked performance with the CDI CD-Index benchmark from Advanced Information Retrieval Technologies. The

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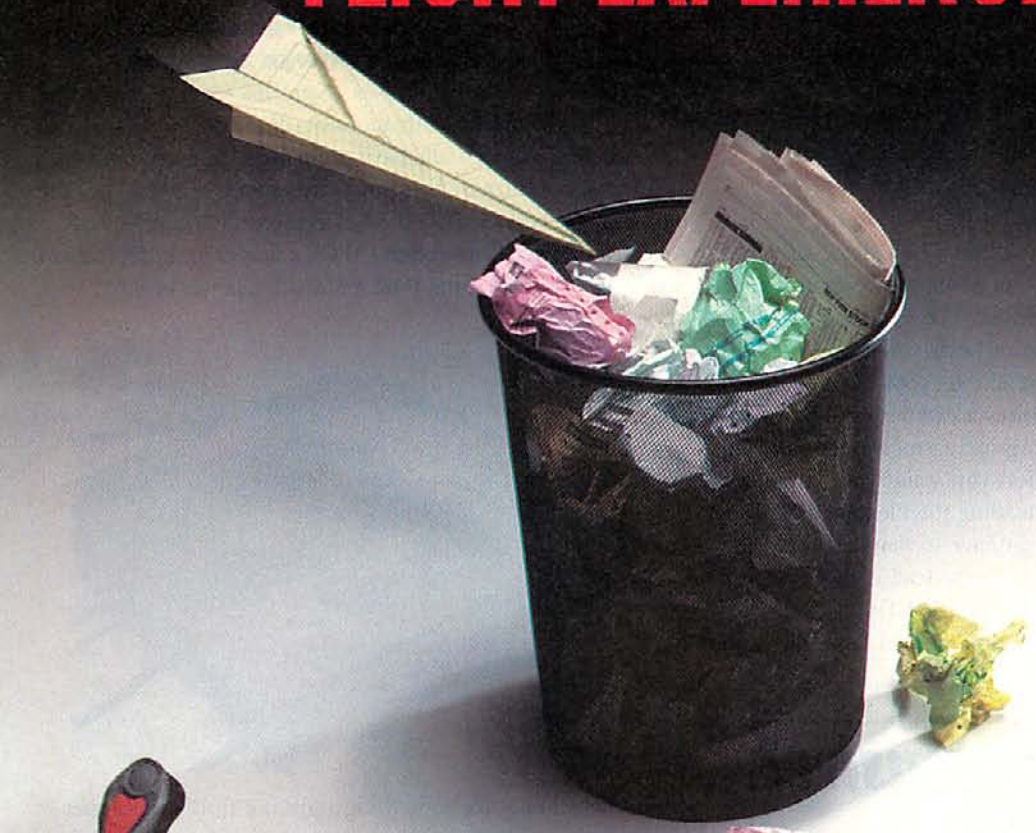

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resulting data transfer rates were: at 100% CPU utilization, 874 kilobytes per second; at 60%, 573 Kilobytes per second.

What about real world use? The drive definitely loaded games faster. WING COMMANDER III missions that might take as much as several minutes with a double speed drive would take mere seconds with the Plextor. Other games showed similar behavior in load times. Is it worth it? That's unclear. The Plextor six-speed drive has a suggested retail price of $549—more than double that of some SCSI quad-speed drives. The Plextor PLX-6H is also a SCSI drive, so that needs to be factored into the cost equation—you'll need a SCSI host adapter (or a SCSI equipped sound card). The drive also requires a caddy to hold the CD-ROM, something that's becoming increasingly a nuisance in this day of caddyless drives (unless you stand your computer case on its side). On top of that, loading the Plextor PLX-6H is a two-handed operation, since you have to manually hold the door open to pop the caddy in. One great feature, however, is a full set of controls on the front to play audio CDs.

If you have applications that constantly load large files and you need the performance, check out the Plextor PLX-6H six-speed CD-ROM drive. Otherwise, we suggest waiting for a little competition so the price will come down.

Price: $549 (internal), $639. For more information, call (800) 475-3986.

APC POWER CENTER HANDLES CORDS AND POWER CONTROL

We've all seen them: flat, square boxes that sit underneath monitors and have a plethora of switches. They usually have some surge protection built-in, and are used to turn on computers, monitors, printers, etc. The look may be best described as extreme utilitarian. Now from **American Power Conversion** (APC), a leader in uninterrupted power systems, comes the POWER MANAGER power center.

This baby looks like something right out of Blade Runner—black, sleek, streamlined. Even the customizable buttons look cool and vaguely "Giger-ish." The top lifts up so you can wind extra cordage in it, a definite plus if you find yourself tangled up in computer peripheral cables like I sometimes do. Its even rated to support monitors that weigh up to 70 lbs—that's most 17-inch monitors.

There are some other thoughtful touches, too. One of the connectors in the back is actually a mini-extension cord, for those annoying power "brick" adapters that come with some peripherals. Another useful feature is the power connection on the "unswitched" side—even when the main power switch is off, this connection still routes power to the plug. Perhaps you want your computer off, but you use your sound system for audio listening. Also, it's perfect to run a battery charger for you laptop-toting gamers. APC has even included a pass-through for a phone line, which adds surge suppression to your modem connection—nothing could be worse than protecting your computer, only to have your modem fried by a surge over the phone line.

If you have several peripherals and a tangled web of cables (as most gamers do), the POWER MANAGER may be worth checking out. Price: $134.99. For more information, call (800) 800-4APC.

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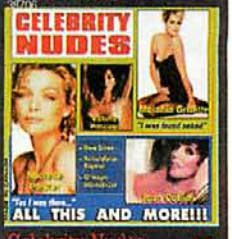

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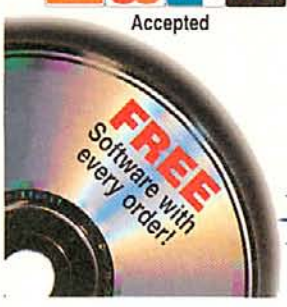

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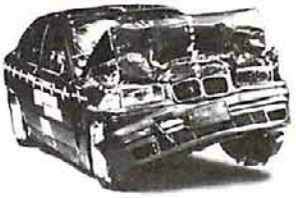

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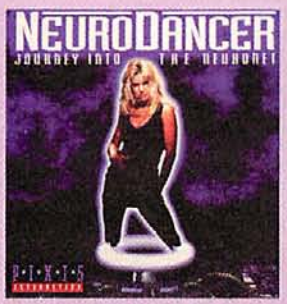

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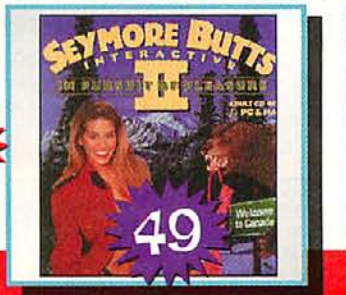

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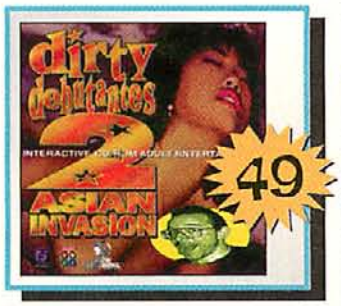

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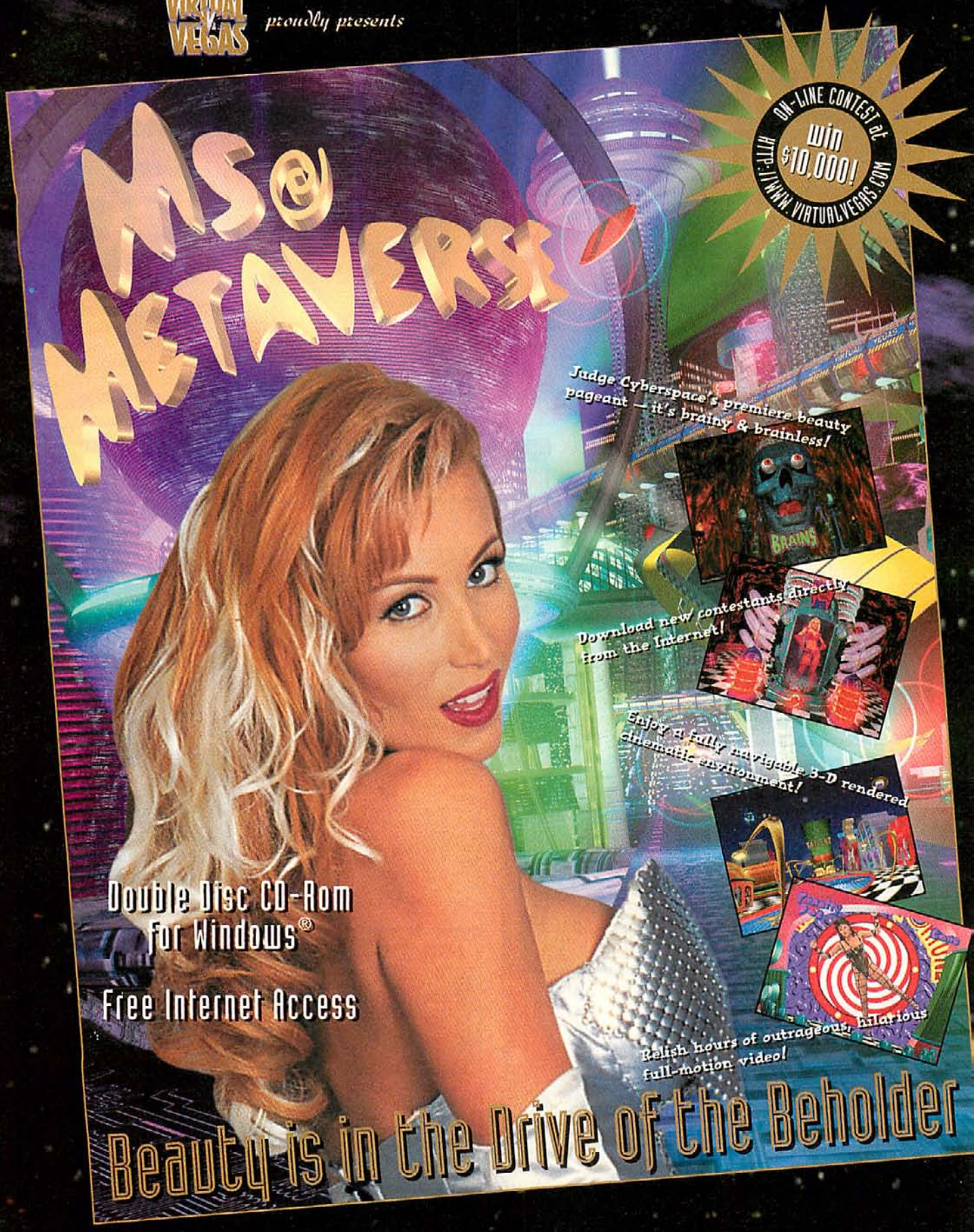

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03. ☐ Amiga
04. ☐ Dedicated game machine
05. ☐ None

3. If Intel, what level? (Check one only)
01. ☐ Power PC
02. ☐ Pentium (586)
03. ☐ 486
04. ☐ 386
05. ☐ 286

4. Do you own (or plan to buy in next 6 months) a CD-ROM? (Check one only)
01. ☐ Own
02. ☐ Plan to buy (6 months)

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02. ☐ Once every two to three weeks
03. ☐ Once a month
04. ☐ Once every two to three months
05. ☐ Once every four to six months
06. ☐ Once a year

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01. ☐ Independent computer store
02. ☐ Consumer electronic store
03. ☐ Mass merchandising store
04. ☐ Computer store chain
05. ☐ Direct from vendor
06. ☐ Mail order

7. What is your (and others in household) favorite type of game? (Check one in each column)

	Yourself	Other 1	Other 2
01. Strategy			
02. War/Military			
03. Role Playing			
04. Brain Teasers			
05. Card			
06. Sport			
07. Action/Arcade			
08. Educational			
09. Adventure			

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01. ☐ Some high school or less
02. ☐ Graduated High School
03. ☐ Some College or Technical school
04. ☐ Graduated College
05. ☐ Post Graduate school

2. Computer currently owned is: (Check all that apply)
01. ☐ IBM compatible (Intel standard)
02. ☐ MacIntosh
03. ☐ Amiga
04. ☐ Dedicated game machine
05. ☐ None

3. If Intel, what level? (Check one only)
01. ☐ Power PC
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05. ☐ Direct from vendor
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02. War/Military			
03. Role Playing			
04. Brain Teasers			
05. Card			
06. Sport			
07. Action/Arcade			
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09. Adventure			

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Highlights

RAILROAD TYCOON
MICROPROSE, 1990

It's hardly a coincidence that Sid Meier holds the record for the most titles in the *CGW* Hall of Fame. His genius is in constantly devising innovative approaches to classic gaming ideas. Like many a young lad, Sid grew up fascinated by trains, and longed for a game which would properly showcase his beloved steam engines. The reason that his RAILROAD TYCOON became much more than just a "train sim" game can be traced to, of all things, SIMCITY. Sid had played and fallen in love with the "software toy" concept, but thought it could be expanded to fit into a strategy game. Bruce Shelley, who had designed the *1830* board game for **Avalon Hill,** agreed, and worked with Sid to form a solid strategy game of economic competition between rail empires. Finally, Sid added cutthroat computer opponents modeled after historical robber barons. For depth, replayability and sheer delight, it's hard to imagine a game that does a better job of evoking the real sense of an era.

RED BARON
DYNAMIX, 1990

Ever since he designed STELLAR 7 for 8-bit computers, Damon Slye has pushed the technological envelope. His first games for **Dynamix**, SKYFOX and AIRFOX, were shoot-em-up action games, but he soon graduated to high-end simulations like A-10 TANK KILLER. Although Damon's ACES OF THE PACIFIC and ACES OVER EUROPE were best-sellers, gamers and fellow designers alike still consider RED BARON to be Damon's crowning achievement. The graphics may not be up to the level of **Origin**'s WINGS OF GLORY, but they have aged better than those of most VGA fight sims, and they do a credible job of dressing up the traditional polygons with bit-maps and shading. The flight modeling is to WWI aerial combat what FALCON 3.0 is to the modern era, with planes that fly like the rickety wood-and-fabric constructs they simulate. With all the realism options on, RED BARON offers a challenging flight for any joystick jockey, complete with campaign play from both sides and a multitude of quick-combat missions.

CIVILIZATION (MicroProse, 1991)
FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
GUNSHIP (MicroProse, 1989)
HARPOON (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
KING'S QUEST V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
LEMMINGS (Psygnosis, 1991)
LINKS 386 PRO (Access Software, 1992)
M-1 TANK PLATOON (MicroProse, 1989)
RAILROAD TYCOON (MicroProse, 1990)
RED BARON (Dynamix, 1990)
THEIR FINEST HOUR (LucasArts, 1989)
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (LucasArts, 1990)
ULTIMA VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD (Origin Systems, 1992)
WING COMMANDER I & II (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
WOLFENSTEIN 3-D (id Software, 1992)

Inductees Prior to 1989

BATTLE CHESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)
CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)
EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)
EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)
GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)
KAMPFGRUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MECH BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)
PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)
SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)
STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)
THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)
ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)
ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)
WIZARDRY (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

THE SCORE

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	9.87
2	Full Throttle	LucasArts	9.49
3	Gabriel Knight	Sierra	9.42
4	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	9.30
5	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	9.25
6	Under A Killing Moon	Access	9.12
7	Relentless	Electronic Arts	9.12
8	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	9.09
9	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharmacist	Sierra	8.96
10	Alone in the Dark	I-Motion	8.95

TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Betrayal at Krondor	Dynamix	9.44
2	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	9.37
3	Lands of Lore	Virgin	9.25
4	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	9.11
5	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	9.08
6	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpent Isle	Origin	9.08
7	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	8.83
8	Veil of Darkness	SSI	8.74
9	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	8.64
10	Menzoberranzan	SSI	8.26

TOP SIMULATION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	10.00
2	Wings of Glory	Origin	9.63
3	US Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.60
4	Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	9.48
5	Indy Car Racing	Papyrus	9.43
6	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	9.25
7	Hornet	Spectrum HoloByte	8.96
8	Aces Over Europe	Dynamix	8.66
9	MiG-29	Spectrum HoloByte	8.64
10	1942 Pacific Air War	MicroProse	8.44

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	X-COM	MicroProse	10.37
2	Master of Orion	MicroProse	10.20
3	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	10.14
4	Warlords II	SSG	9.95
5	Master of Magic	MicroProse	9.67
6	Warcraft	Blizzard	9.66
7	Sim City 2000	Maxis	9.51
8	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	9.39
9	Merchant Prince	QQP	9.08
10	1830	Avalon Hill	9.05

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TOP 100 GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
✲1	Panzer General	SSI	WG	10.61
✲2	Wing Commander 3	Origin	AC	10.57
✲3	X-COM	MicroProse	ST	10.37
4	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	AC	10.29
5	DOOM	id Software	AC	10.24
6	Master of Orion	MicroProse	ST	10.20
7	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	ST	10.14
✲8	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	SI	10.00
9	Warlords II	SSG	ST	9.95
✲10	NBA Live '95	Electronic Arts	SP	9.93
✲11	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	AD	9.87
12	DOOM II	id Software	AC	9.83
13	Dark Forces	LucasArts	AC	9.78
14	Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	AC	9.71
15	Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	SP	9.67
	Master of Magic	MicroProse	ST	9.67
17	Warcraft	Blizzard	ST	9.66
18	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	SP	9.64
19	Wings of Glory	Origin	SI	9.63
20	X-Wing	LucasArts	AC	9.60
	US Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.60
22	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.58
23	Sim City 2000	Maxis	ST	9.51
24	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	WG	9.50
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30	Perfect General II	QQP	WG	9.43
	Indy Car Racing	Papyrus	SI	9.43
32	Gabriel Knight	Sierra	AD	9.42
33	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	ST	9.39
34	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.37
35	Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	WG	9.36
36	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	WG	9.35
	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	WG	9.35
38	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	AD	9.30
39	Lands of Lore	Virgin	RP	9.25
	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	AD	9.25
	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	SI	9.25
42	System Shock	Origin	AC	9.19
43	V for Victory: Gold Juno Sword	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.18
44	Privateer	Origin	AC	9.16
45	Relentless	Electronic Arts	AD	9.12
	Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	9.12
47	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.11
48	PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	SP	9.09
	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	AD	9.09
50	Merchant Prince	QQP	ST	9.08

TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Panzer General	SSI	10.61
2	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.58
3	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	9.50
4	War in Russia	SSI	9.44
5	Perfect General II	QQP	9.43
6	Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	9.36
7	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	9.35
8	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	9.35
9	V for Victory: Gold Juno Sword	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.18
10	Tanks	SSI	9.00

TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander 3	Origin	10.57
2	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	10.29
3	DOOM	id Software	10.24
4	DOOM II	id Software	9.83
5	Dark Forces	LucasArts	9.78
6	Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	9.71
7	X-Wing	LucasArts	9.60
8	System Shock	Origin	9.19
9	Privateer	Origin	9.16
10	Heretic	id Software	9.08

TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	NBA Live '95	Electronic Arts	9.93
2	Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	9.67
3	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	9.64
4	NHL Hockey	Electronic Arts	9.49
5	PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	9.09
6	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	8.78
7	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	8.76
8	Hardball IV	Accolade	8.70
9	Jordan In Flight	Electronic Arts	7.85
10	Microsoft Golf 2.0	Microsoft	7.43

Vote!

You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The *CGW* Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the *CGW* Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.

	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpent Isle	Origin	RP	9.08
	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	RP	9.08
	Heretic	id Software	AC	9.08
54	Syndicate	Electronic Arts	ST,AC	9.07
55	1830	Avalon Hill	ST	9.05
56	Tanks	SSI	WG	9.00
	VGA Planets	Tim Wisseman	ST	9.00
58	Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	WG	8.97
59	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	ST	8.96
	Hornet	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.96
	Clash of Steel	SSI	WG	8.96
	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharmacist	Sierra	AD	8.96
63	Alone in the Dark	I-Motion	AD	8.95
64	Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin	AD	8.94
	Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	ST	8.94
66	Descent	Interplay	AC	8.91
67	Incredible Toons	Dynamix	ST	8.86
68	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	ST	8.85
69	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	RP	8.83
70	Carriers at War II	SSG	WG	8.82
71	Serf City	SSI	ST	8.80
72	Harpoon II	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	8.78
	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	SP	8.78
74	Myst	Broderbund	AD	8.77
75	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	SP	8.76
76	Genghis Khan II	Koei	WG	8.74
	Veil of Darkness	SSI	RP	8.74
	Dracula Unleashed	Viacom	AD	8.74
79	Hardball IV	Accolade	SP	8.70
80	Empire Deluxe	New World Computing	ST	8.69
81	Aces over Europe	Dynamix	SI	8.66
82	MiG-29	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.64
	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	RP	8.64
	King's Quest VII	Sierra	AD	8.64
85	Superheros of Hoboken	Legend	AD	8.62
86	Space Quest V: Mutation	Sierra	AD	8.60
87	Hand Of Fate	Westwood Studios	AD	8.56
88	Kasparov's Gambit	Electronic Arts	ST	8.54
89	Rules of Engagement 2	Impressions	ST	8.52
90	The Horde	Crystal Dynamics	AC,ST	8.50
	Death Gate	Legend	AD	8.50
92	Star Trek: Judgment Rites	Interplay	AD	8.49
	Prince of Persia 2	Broderbund	AC	8.49
94	The Lost Vikings	Interplay	AC	8.46
95	Sid n' Al's Incredible Toons	Dynamix	ST	8.45
96	1942 Pacific Air War	MicroProse	SI	8.44
97	Dark Legions	SSI	AC	8.43
98	Lords of the Realm	Impressions	ST	8.42
99	Sim City CD-ROM	Interplay	ST	8.40
100	Flashback	SSI	AC	8.38

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above. ✱ = Top game of type. Dark Teal = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports

The Computer Gaming World Poll

A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

PATCHES

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common. Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs.

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major on-line networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZiffNet) and Computer Gaming World's Web Site (http://www.ziff.com/~gaming), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's BBSes or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase. Red indicates new files.

1942: Pacific Air War V1.5b AI Update: Provides AI enhancements. For use with version 1.4 or later. 5/24/95

Blood Bowl Modem Patch V1.1: Adds modem play and fixes a number of known quirks. 6/7/95

Colonization for Windows Update: Corrects some problems with the Win95 beta as well as other fixes for the original Windows version. 7/5/95

Confirmed Kill Beta Update: Brings versions 0.8.1 and 0.8.2 up to "0.3" status—the flickering view and other problems are fixed. 6/3/95

Cyberia Save Game Patch: Corrects problems with the game not saving milestones after the conference room. 6/6/95

Daedalus Encounter V1.2: This patch solves all the known bugs in the game. Works with all previous versions. 6/10/95

Descent Registered Version 1.4a Update: Fixes reported bugs. 6/23/95

F-14 Fleet Defender V2.0 Update: Updates MicroProse's flight sim to version 2.0. 5/24/95

First Encounters V.05 Update: Fixes several reported errors in the English CD version. 6/27/95

Harpoon Classic V1.55b for Windows: Fixes a bug introduced in 1.55a loading some scenarios as well as two more user-reported GPF errors. 6/14/95

Klik'N'Play V1.1 Update: Works only with the U.S. version; fixes several reported bugs. 7/7/95

Machiavelli The Prince V1.1 Update: Fixes several bugs. 6/23/95

Omar Sharif Bridge Update: Corrects the "speech driver not found" error message, and allows Sound Blaster support at IRQ 5. 6/30/95

Operation Crusader V2.35 Update (Mac): Fixes several errors and updates version 1.0 to 2.35. 6/14/95

Renegade V1.1 Update: Works only with the 60 MB install; fixes reported bugs as well as enhancing some aspects of the game. 6/16/95

Road from Sumter to Appomattox V1.23 Update: Fixes history recorder problems, excessive casualty bugs and several other errors. 6/14/95

Shadows of CAIRN Update: Adds easier mode and ability to cheat, fixes audio playback problems, adds sound effects and dungeon art. 6/12/95

Stalingrad Update V1.85: Fixes reported problems. 6/9/95

Stone Prophet V1.1 Update: Fixes reported problems. 5/23/95

Super Street Fighter 2 V1.5 Update: Corrects music and sound problems, movement bugs and gamepad calibration problems. Also includes a FAQ with information, tips, hints and codes. 6/9/95

Tank Commander V1.1 Update: Fixes reported problems on faster PCs with serial/modem data loss. Also solves a few other minor quirks. 5/19/95

The Perfect General 2 Update: Updates some scenarios and includes a resign feature, as well as some other small bugs. 6/9/95

Tigers on the Prowl V1.24 Update: Fixes all reported problems with versions 1.2x and adds a few new options that can be selected to speed up game play (at a little loss in accuracy). 5/14/59

USS Ticonderoga Update: Adds the following enhancements: support for the GUS, PAS and Ensoniq sound cards. Additionally, weapons on board now display in a number format. 6/21/95

Virtual Pool Video Drivers Update: The latest batch of video drivers, dated June 20, 1995 for the full or demo version. 6/23/95

Warlords II v1.0.6 Update for Power PC: Fixes multiple problems. 6/15/95

Wing Commander 3 Thrustmaster Hat Patch: Fixes problems associated with the Thrustmaster controller. 6/27/95

World of Xeen for Macintosh V1.1 Update: Fixes several problems and adds a Power PC native mode. 6/2/95

X-COM: Terror From the Deep V2.0 Update: Numerous tweaks and fixes to X-COM 2. 6/3/95

Zephyr v1.1 Upgrade: Adds modem and network play as well as fixing a couple of video and headset problems. 6/20/95

Publisher BBS Numbers

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N-8-1.

Accolade (408) 296-8800

Apogee (508) 368-7036

Bethesda (301) 990-7552

Blizzard (714) 556-4602

Broderbund (415) 883-5889

Capstone (305) 374-6872

Creative Labs (405) 742-6660

Id Software (508) 368-4137

Impressions (617) 225-2042

InterPlay (714) 252-2822

LucasArts (415) 257-3070

Maxis (510) 254-3869

MicroProse (410) 785-1841

Microsoft (206) 936-6735

NovaLogic (818) 774-9528

Origin (512) 328-8402

Papyrus (617) 576-7472

Sierra Online (206) 644-0112

Spectrum HoloByte (510) 522-8909

SSI (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739 6623

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Circle Reader Service #319

What's The Deal With... Netwits?

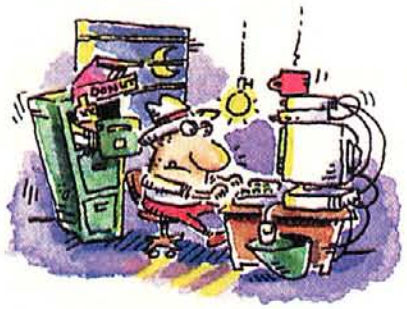
by Martin E. Cirulis

LET'S TALK FOR A MOMENT ABOUT THE FAVORITE SUBJECT OF EVERY TECHNOLOGY REPORTER WHO doesn't really know anything about technology: The Internet. Is it a Neo-Greek Forum For The Free Exchange Of Ideas or the Happy Hunting Ground Of The Socially Inept? As with most things, the reality probably lies somewhere between the two extremes, and experience often dictates how close to either pole a person sees things. Normally this wouldn't have much to do with computer gaming, but lately, time spent bopping around the Internet and a few BBSes has made me think twice about the synergy of media hype, the Net and gaming.

In the '80s, the nets were mostly harmless, a good place to exchange a little mail with other intellectual types who had too much time on their hands; everybody knew not to take anything too seriously. But now things have changed. With 60 zillion people getting Internet access every second, and TV's talking heads shouting that you'll be able to do your own organ transplants over the Internet the day after next Tuesday, the whole thing has taken an odd edge of validity it really shouldn't have—akin to the fifties sentiment, "If it's in print, it must be true." This phenomenon is giving the rutted Information Wagon Trail an odd effect on the buzz for a game.

In an effort to get through the inevitable lag time between a game hitting the shelves and a valid review of said game hitting the stands (and by "valid" I mean an actual review of the final, boxed game, not something written from a beta version and a press release), gamers have long been posting messages on BBSes the moment they can manage to stop playing a new title. For those hip to how many grains of salt to take these posts with, this tradition is a valuable part of a discerning buyer's pre-purchase routine—but for those gamers who are just discovering the world of repercussion-free discussion, things can be a little misleading.

The trick is to remember that there are two basic types moving about the nets: those who like to share ideas, and those who want to be noticed: The Netwits. The former write postings that are great to read and easy to relate to, whereas the Netwits are a blight run amuck. Without the physical threat of a wedgie or a swirlie to contain them, these debate-club has-beens roam the Net like rabbits in Australia. (Actually there is a third type on the Net, the "I got Mom's AOL password and I'm gonna type out a swear word or threaten homasexules! Huh... huh...heh..." type, but they really don't affect our hobby until they grow up to become politicians.)



For those new to the Net, I can offer at least one observation, garnered from 15-odd years of wandering about the electronic landscape: in any given discussion of a new game, you're going to find about 80% crap. The rest might actually be relevant to your gaming needs, since it's written by folks like you, who are really just interested in talking about a new piece of software. Furthermore, the crap postings will consist of two forms, generally written by two different but related species of socially challenged humanity. The first type is the "Gusher" posting, generally in the vein of "This game is the greatest thing since sliced bread," and is usually written by some 25-year-old living in their parents' basement who is desperately hoping to be noticed by a game company and given a "Dream Job" because they can play DOOM by sound alone. The other type of post, also having little to do with reality, is of the "More-intellectual-than-thou" variety, and takes the tack of "This game is obviously crap and far beneath me, because of my extreme expertise in some subject that usually drives party guests to throw themselves from windows when I corner them." These are authored by bitter, lonely, smart guys who think that becoming a "Figure" on the Net will somehow compensate for never having had a successful date, and that if somebody actually agrees with them on-line they have made a new friend.

Gushers are usually easy to spot, but some of the Superior posts are better disguised and can simulate intelligent conversation quite well. Sometimes the only way you can tell is to observe carefully over a period of time, and see how the person deals with a contradictory post. Superior types always give themselves away by either ignoring counter-arguments, or by deliberately misunderstanding them. Again, it can be a tricky call, and in general the numbers pro/con are a better indicator of reality than individual posts—so give it a couple of weeks before buying/condemning anything you're in the dark about.

Some of this will apply not only to gaming, but to most other computer-related discussions as well, be they on Bill Gates conquering the world or how many hours the Pentium will remain state-of-the-art. If you're just venturing into the lands of the Net, beware of Netwits and remember that each new discussion area is like moving into a new neighborhood; until you get to know a bit about the people around you, anything you hear is just so much bean gas in the breeze.

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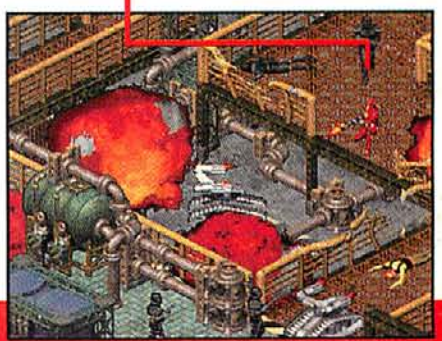

Check out the demo at http://www.ea.com/origin.html

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