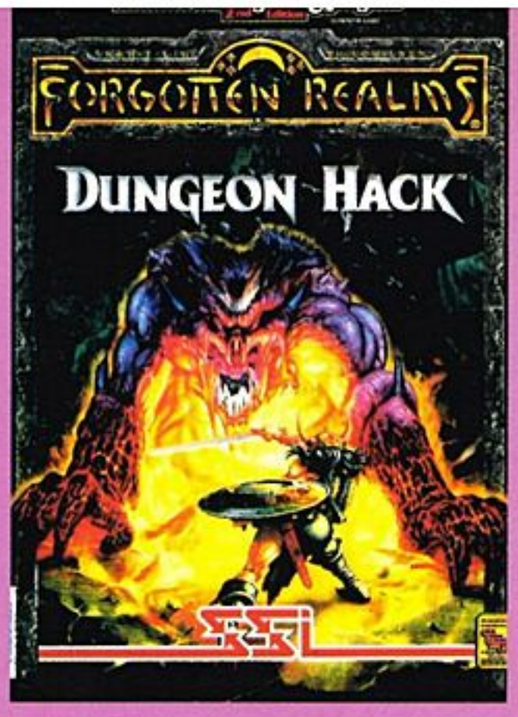

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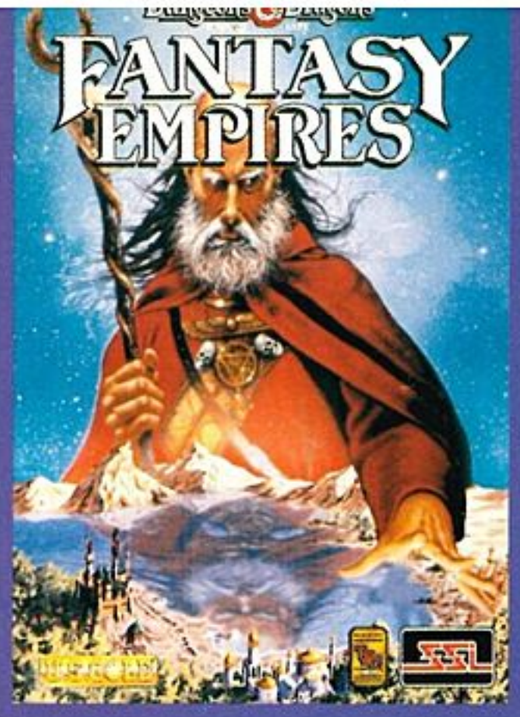

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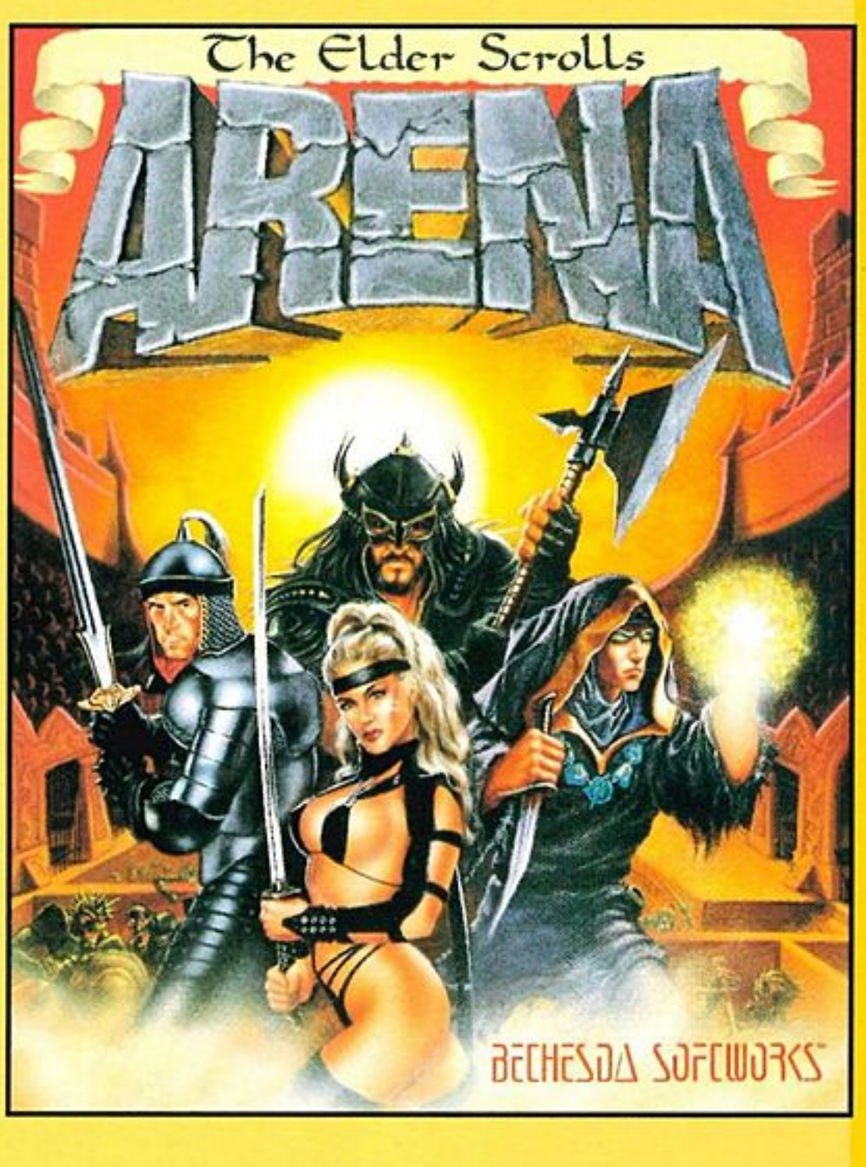

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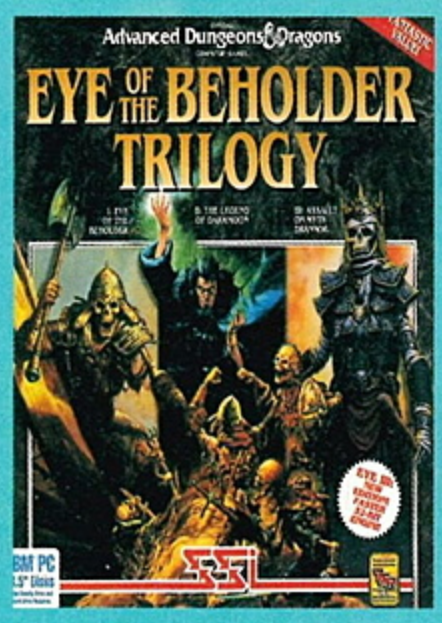

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PC PLAYER

SIMULATION ADVENTURE STRATEGY

The only magazine for serious PC entertainment

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA

CANNON FODDER

DRAGONSPHERE

SEAWOLF

STARLORD

XIth HOUR

Starlord, Mike Singleton's game of galactic domination arrives at last, while the lighter side of strategy is explored in Sensible's Cannon Fodder

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PC Player
Issue Six
May 1994
£2.50

As CD-ROM starts to take over the PC games scene we take a look at some of the latest CD-ROM bundles which could get you started

MULTI-MEDIA HARDWARE

SUPER TEST:

THE BEST MULTI-MEDIA PACKS

TESTED AND RATED

The Ultima series enters its final phase as the most groundbreaking instalment yet enters the scene

ULTIMA VIII

EXPLORE THE WORLD OF PAGAN

This month's cover image has been rendered on a Silicon Graphics workstation by Dennis Loubet and Jennifer Davis. Thanks to Origin for supplying the artwork.

pc·PLAYER

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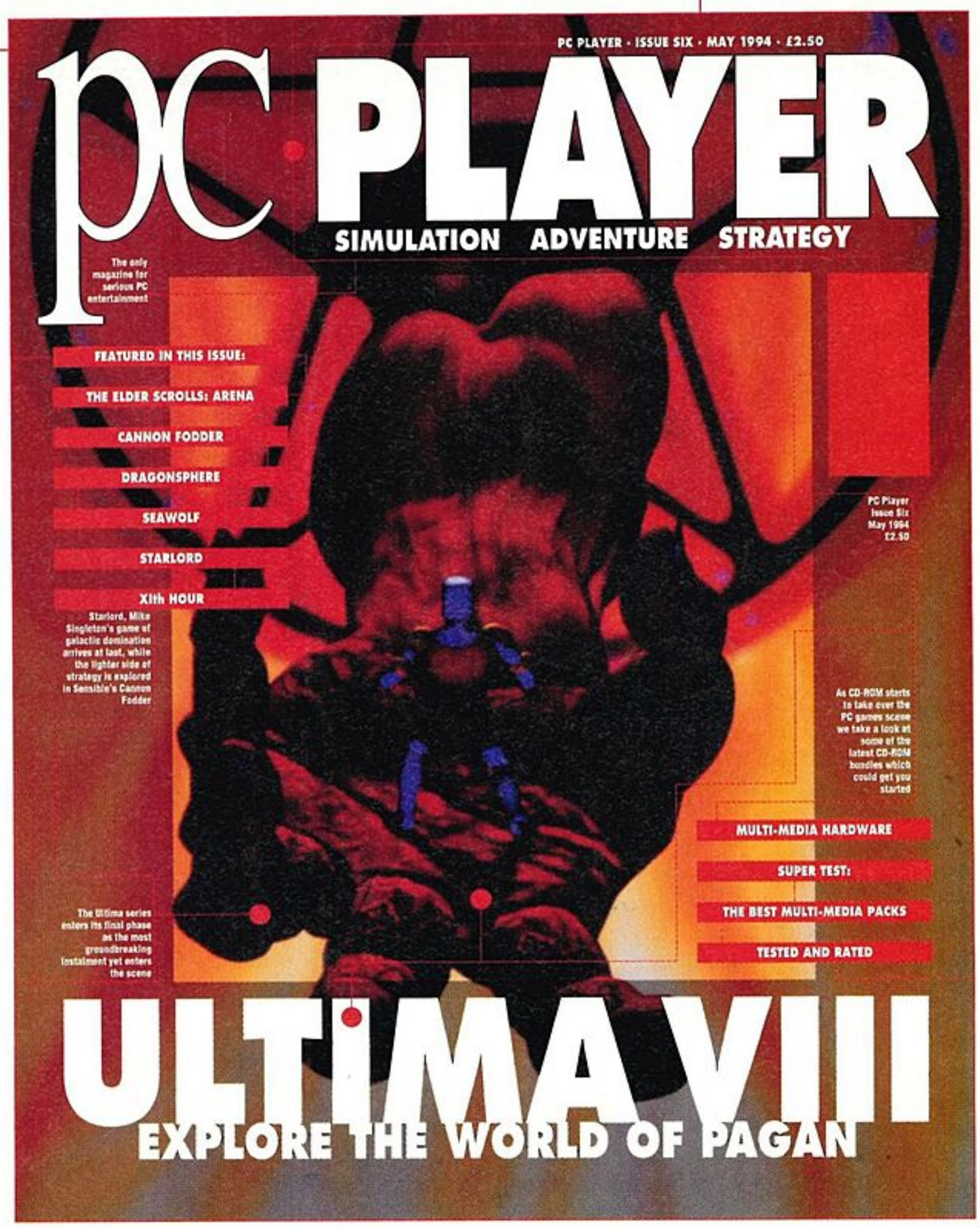

SIMULATION • ADVENTURE • STRATEGY

WELCOME TO PC PLAYER

THE PC is growing all of the time and from what we've seen in the last few weeks everything is going to get crazier over the next six months to a year. CD-ROM is already establishing itself as the new standard for PC entertainment as we learn that large stores such as HMV Level One are selling half of their PC stock on CD.

It's not just this though, the power of the PC is about to take another step up as well. Just as we accept that maybe a DX2 ought to be on the shopping list this year we find that a whole host of new spec CPUs being released through Intel. The high powered, clock tripled 486 DX2 75 joins the two new Pentium chips (rated at 90 and 100MHz!) as we also learn that the new Pentium-based systems in the US are selling for under two grand. At Christmas we all thought that Origin recommending a Pentium for its next batch of releases was just a joke, but now it seems far more serious. With 67 million 486-based PCs now installed worldwide, it seems that the huge power struggle we spoke of a few months ago is already over. It's an unfortunate thing to have to accept, but the 386 is dead. More than 50 per cent of the world PC userbase is now using the 486 – how can the developers and software houses ignore that?

What's next though? With Power PC just around the corner it looks as though nothing will stand still.

JOHN DAVISON ■

THE PC PLAYER SCORING SYSTEM

EXCEPTIONAL	★★★★★
RECOMMENDED	★★★★
AVERAGE	★★★
POOR	★★
DIABOLICAL	★

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Virgin's sequel to the ground-breaking 7th Guest surpasses even its revolutionary forefather with even more awe-inspiring Super VGA graphics

ULTIMA VIII: PAGE 52
The eighth instalment of the superb Ultima series is about to wash up on our fair shores so *PC Player* grabs an exclusive review of what could well be the best role-playing game of this year. Ultima VIII: Pagan is bigger and beefier than ever before, but is it better?

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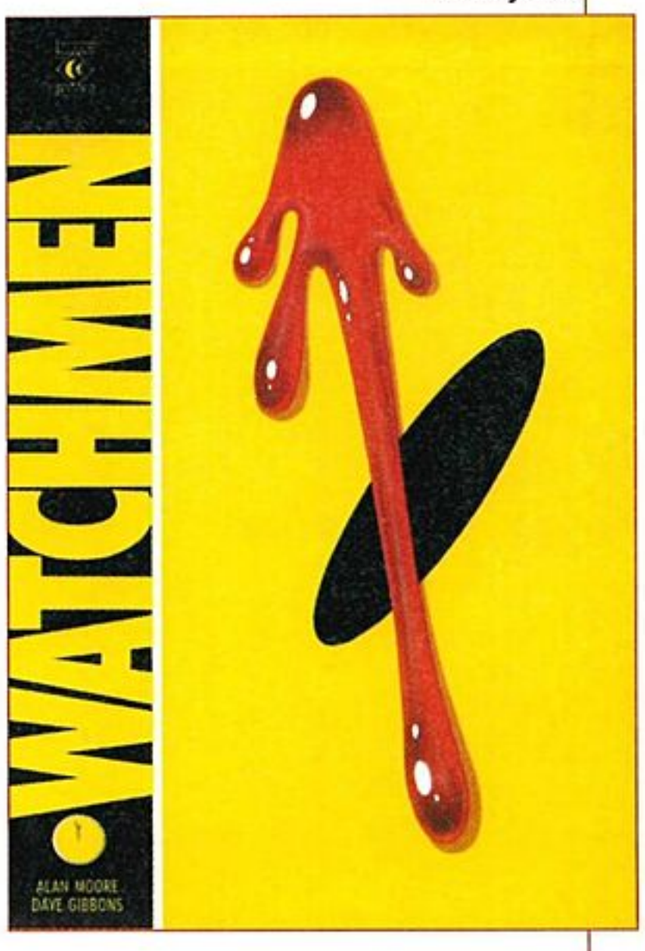
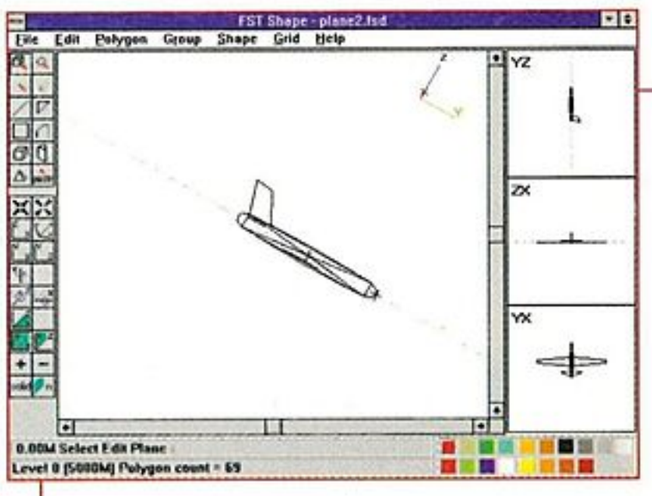
DAVE GIBBONS COMPETITION: PAGE 62
To tie in with the excellent Dave Gibbons/Virgin collaboration Beneath a Steel Sky, we have 10 signed copies of both the excellent Watchmen and Give Me Liberty graphic novels. Just answer a few simple questions and Dave's holy scrawl can be yours!





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UNLEASHING THE POWER OF FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT: PAGE 70
Domark's revolutionary FST is not one of the easiest programs to get to grips with, so here, we begin to take you through a step by step guide to creating the ultimate in user-defined flight sims.

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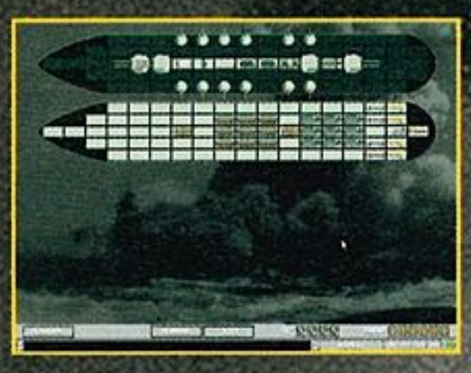

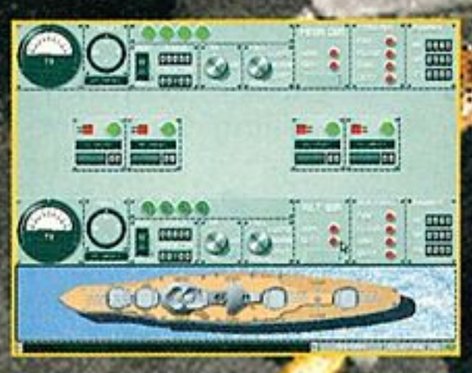

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PC PLAYER NEWS

ELECTRONIC ARTS PREPARES ITSELF FOR NOCTROLPOLIS, WHILE NOVALOGIC FINALLY ACCEPTS THAT A GAME REQUIRING 8MB IS A BIT UNREASONABLE! ELSEWHERE THE 3DO COMPANY ANNOUNCES A BOARD FOR THE PC AND IBM ACCEPTS SOUNDBLASTER AS A STANDARD.

THOSE productive people at Westwood Studios (see the special feature in issue two) are continuing the fight against mediocre software with a number of high-quality software titles planned for release later in the year.

With the CD-ROM version of **LANDS OF LORE** waiting in the wings for its appearance, the announcement of a sequel comes as no surprise. Details are sketchy but expect loads of beautifully drawn graphics when the game is released by Virgin in September.

Around the same time as LOL II, Westwood will again be teaming-up with Virgin to release a brand-new strategy game entitled **COMMAND & CONQUER**. Again, not much is known about it yet, so stay tuned for further developments.

While we're on the subject of Virgin, you may also be pleased to know that the Dave Perry Mega Drive classics **COOL SPOT** and **ALADDIN**, are being converted to the PC for release later this year. Cool Spot will appear in June priced £30.99, with Aladdin following sometime in October. Better late than never I suppose.

A brand-new RPG/adventure set in a world dominated by Soviet oppression, is set to be released by Cyberdreams UK and Texas-based Castleworks towards the end of April, with a RRP of £39.99. Entitled **RED HELL**, Cyberdreams MD Mark Scriven is clearly excited about this new release; "We recognised very quickly that Red Hell was a quality adventure game of truly epic proportions, which would appeal greatly to fans of the genre". Red Hell features cinematic, 3D animation and includes more than 70 spectacular locations throughout the game – sounds promising. A date for the release of a CD-ROM version will be announced shortly.

Cyberdreams is also about to unleash a CD-ROM version of **DARKSEED** (watch for a review next issue), plus it has also announced a sequel to the original Darkseed game and has again signed-up HR Giger to handle the visuals.

It's time to get scared again with **NOCTROPOLIS**, a subtle cross between an interactive movie and a point-and-click graphic adventure. In this atmospheric new game you play the role of a comic store owner who is mysteriously transported to Noctropolis; a dark and unsettling place inhabited by Darksheer who is your favourite comic character. Unfortunately for you, Darksheer has disappeared and the city looks to you for salvation. Not being a superhero yourself, you're going to have a hard time convincing the inhabitants otherwise.

Slated for an August release, Noctropolis is already beginning to take shape and, as you can see by these shots, the graphics already look absolutely stunning. Watch out for a preview soon. ➤

Noctropolis – Electronic Arts

NEWS

Formula T–1 Driving Control – Thrustmaster

Good news for PC drivers; Thrustmaster, the software industry's premier supplier of high-quality hardware peripheral devices, has just released the **FORMULA T-1 DRIVING CONTROL** which is a fully functioning steering wheel with acceleration and brake pedals for added realism. Retailing at just under $180 in the States, this sturdy, functional and highly sexy black, powder-coated aluminium set-up will probably only ever be available on import in the UK. For more details call Thrustmaster direct on 0101 503 639 3200 or call Bob Sidwick at RC Simulations on 0272 550900.

Oxford-based Rebellion is testing an enhanced CD-ROM version of its critically acclaimed **EYE OF THE STORM**, with the release date still a month or two away. This new CD version will feature an all-new soundtrack (the original had a great, ambient theme tune) plus a few other bits and bobs thrown in there for good measure. Jason Kingsley, creative director at Rebellion, assures us that there will be no wasteful graphics sequences to hamper the gameplay, with all efforts being concentrated on the atmosphere and ambience.

Rebellion also has two as yet unnamed titles in development for the PC; a 3D, space exploration game based on a huge moonscape is still some time away, whilst a mediaeval village simulator utilising complex 3D modelling should also be ready sometime around Christmas.

At the moment Rebellion is having to concentrate all its efforts on Jaguar development and so is looking to expand its development team. Interested programmers and graphic artists should call Jason Kingsley on 0865 784555 for all the details.

3DO

The **3DO** company has recently announced that the guts for its revolutionary games system (due to be launched in the UK any day now) will be made available on a single PC expansion card. Coupled with an MPC's CD-ROM drive the new card will provide a full spec 3DO system for a fraction of the price of a standalone console. Although nothing has been confirmed as we go to press, it seems likely that we'll be seeing this new card by the summer of this year. We'll bring you more news as soon as we have it.

More hardware news this month comes from **INTEL**. Just as you thought everything had settled down in the processor power stakes, the firm has now made a number of announcements regarding both its 486 and Pentium series processors.

Released earlier this month was the clock-tripled 75MHz 486 DX2 chip as well as both 90MHz and 100MHz **PENTIUM** chips. This sudden leap of power has been made possible by the fact that cheaper production is now possible and as a result Intel can concentrate on pushing all of its powerhouses to the maximum.

Related to this news is the fact that a full spec Pentium-based system in the US is now available for less than $2,000 – a dramatic drop. Maybe the new standard will become widely accepted now? Still, with **POWER PC** not far away, we're going to be sitting back and watching one hell of a fight for superiority in the coming months. Expect prices of Intel-based hardware to tumble by the end of the year.

US Gold is planning to release the official **WORLD CUP USA '94** simultaneously on nine different formats – PC included. Football fans disillusioned by England's lack of success in the World Cup will no doubt take solace from the fact that this new footy game incorporates 3,000 frames of player animation, actual images and designs from the World Cup (including Striker the dog) and competition at club, international and world levels. Apparently there will also be over 15 different moves available, including overhead, bicycle and scissor kicks plus goalkeeper throw-outs and one-handed saves – more moves than the England team is able to throw together!

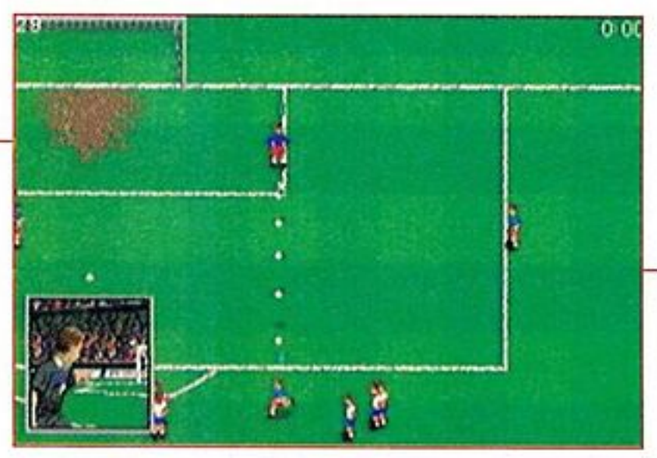
Release is set for sometime around the start of the World Cup on 17 June and the price is to be announced.

EA's **FIFA SOCCER** is coming out for the PC. The disputed king of the console footy games, FIFA Soccer managed to sell by the bucketload before anyone realised that it looked a lot better than it actually played! Still, the PC version is being programmed in the UK and is apparently looking extremely good. Expect to see a battle between this and US Gold's World Cup USA '94 sometime in the near future.

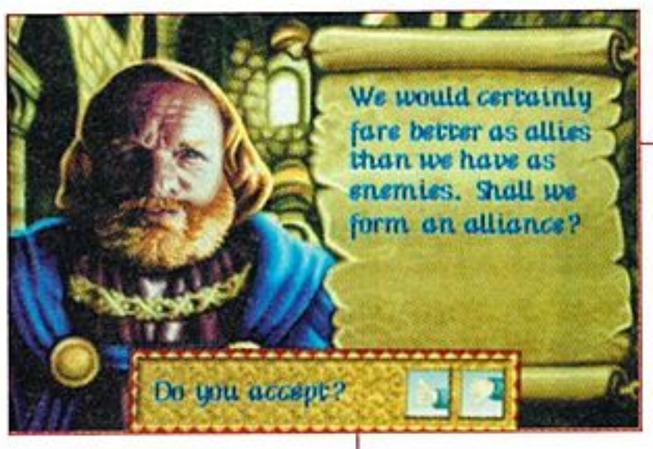
Flight Sim fans will no doubt have noticed a few bits and bobs regarding **TORNADO 2** in our interview with John Nichol last issue. Well, the project is still pretty much shrouded in mystery, but we are informed by the bods at DI that the game should be out during the first quarter of 1995. *PC Player* should be one of the first with news on this new simulation, so keep it here.

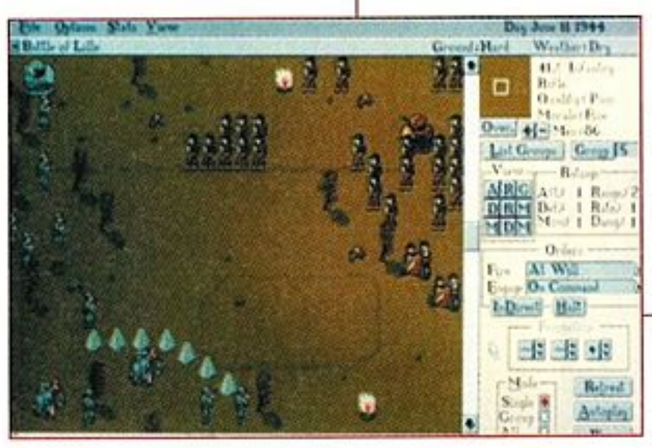
Microsoft's **FLIGHT SIM 5.0** is about to go through a re-birth in the shape of an official new patch disk available only through the Flight Sim Club of Great Britain. Frame rate has been visibly improved (almost doubled in speed!), stalls and spins are now

World Cup USA '94 – US Gold



NEWS





(Top Row) Lords of the Realm, (Bottom Row) D–Day: The Beginning of the End – Impressions

properly implemented, flight models have been improved and engine torque effects have been toned-down.

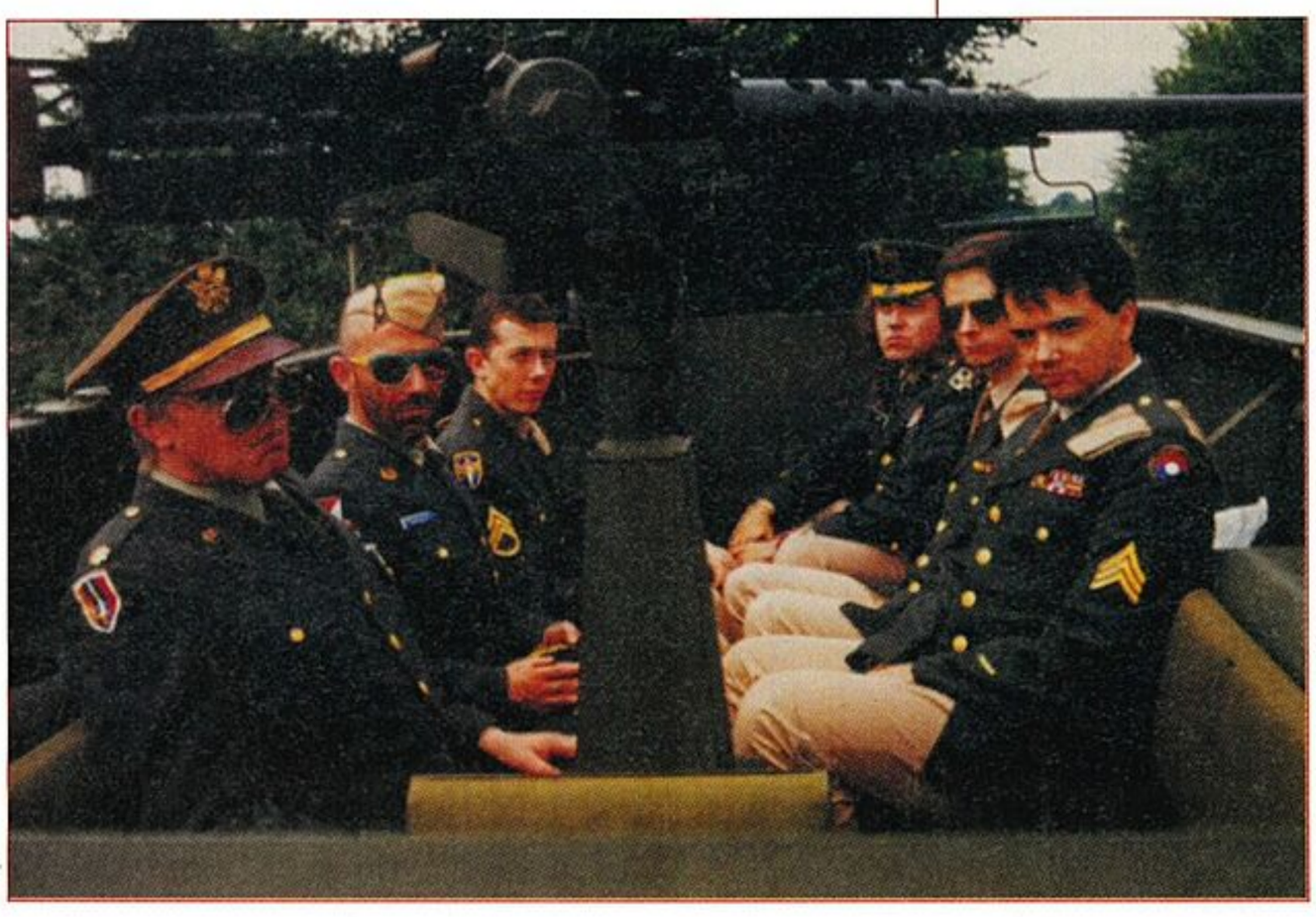
The Flight Sim Club bulletin board can be reached on 0908 319291. If you are having any difficulties getting hold of a copy, send £2.00 (covering P&P) to RC Simulations, Beehive Trading Estate, Crews Hole Road, St George, Bristol, BS5 8AY for an update disk.

Virgin has got it! If 'it' is catching, it can keep away from us! But (not very) seriously folks – after Sensible Soccer and the hugely enjoyable Cannon Fodder, those cheeky boys at Sensible Software have announced their latest bastardisation of a popular sport. Yes, **SENSIBLE GOLF** is said to put the 'GO' back into 'GOLF' as programmers Jools, Stoo and RJ attempt to remodel computer golfing with the totally original Sensible approach.

Knowing exactly what the team is aiming for, Software chief Jon Hare had this to say about the game: "There are these four guys walking around the courses, and they each have their own charm and personality. To appease the sad style-over-content consumers, we have decided to introduce sprinkling of big, snazzy graphics such as oversized pictures of each bloke as he takes his shot". Sounds revolutionary, and should definitely be a plus for the sad image obsessed consumer looking for a purchase.

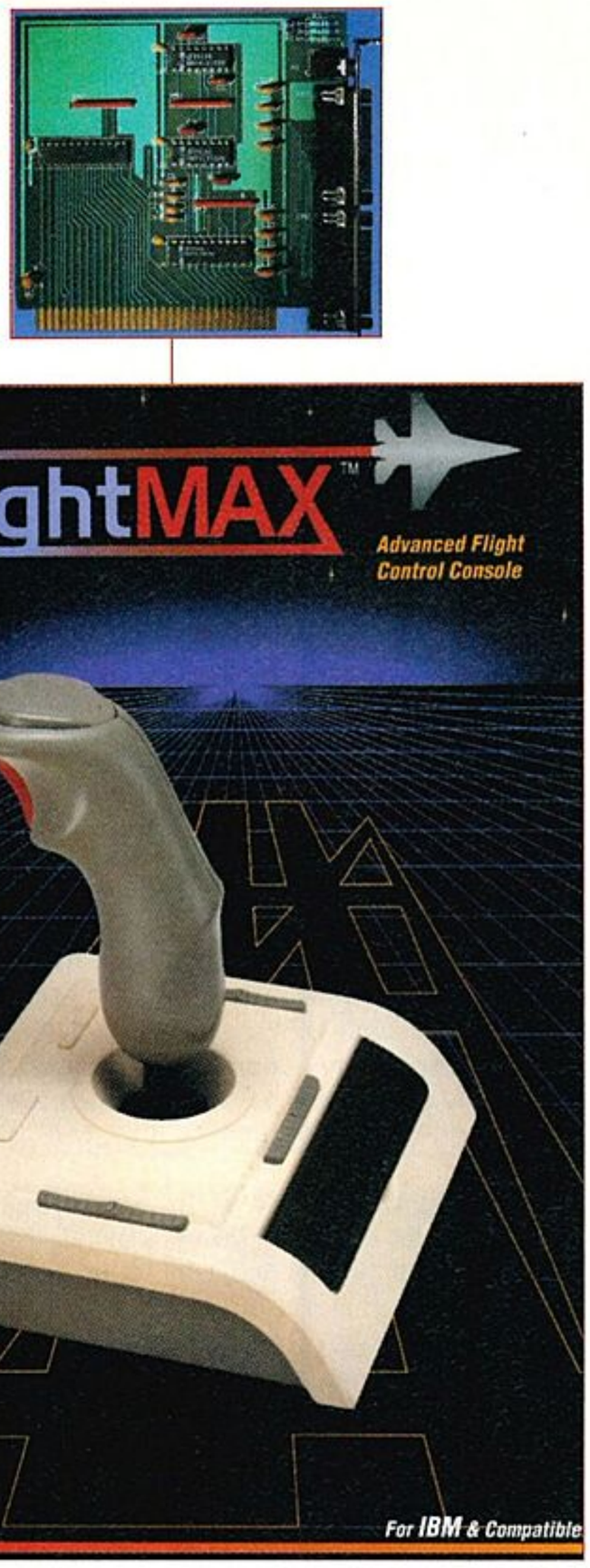
The game is still at a very early stage in its development but we're assured that "in no way will it turn out crap". Sensible Golf is (ahem) 'on course' for release this Christmas, so until then, normal service will resume as usual.

Sensible Software

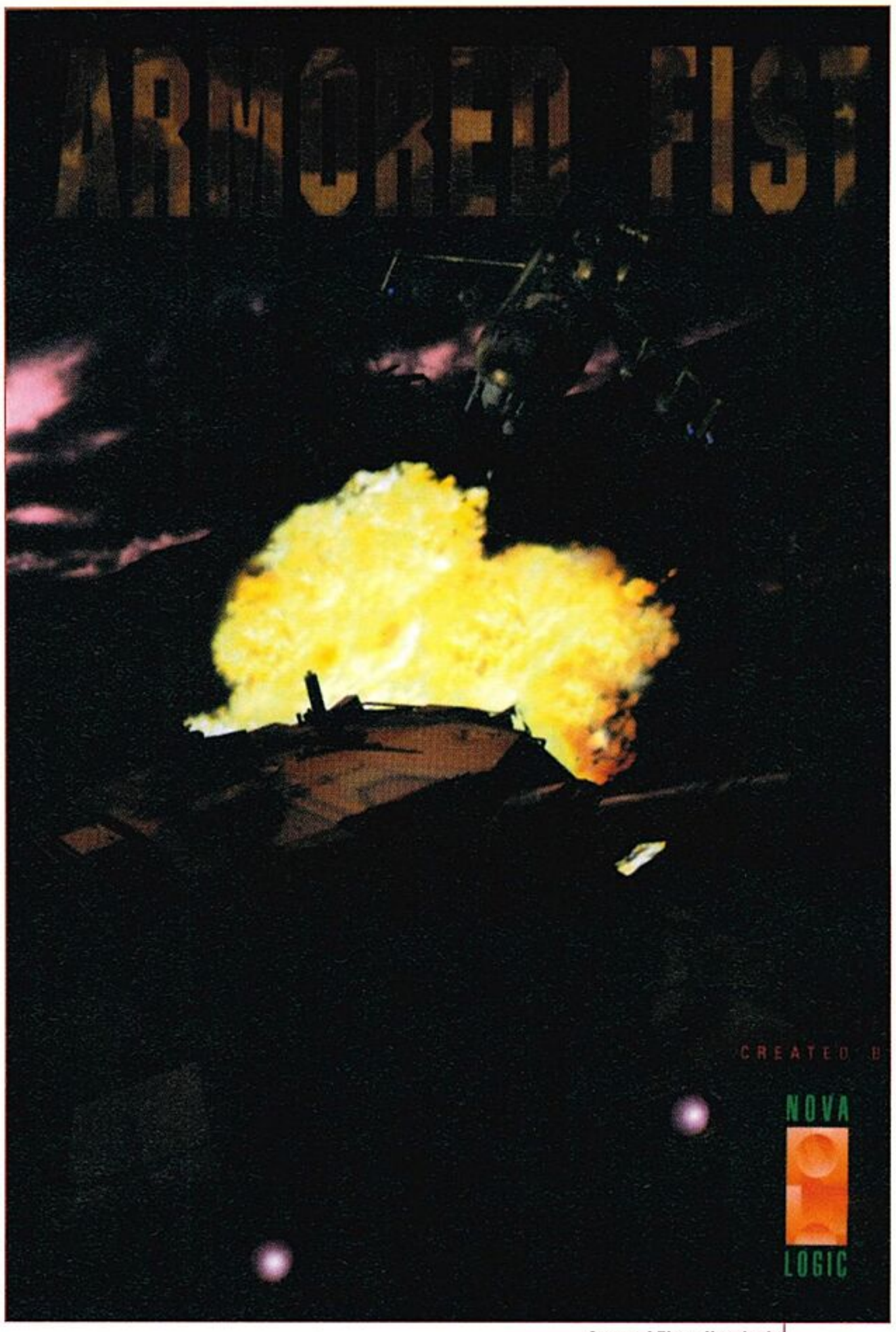


D-DAY: THE BEGINNING OF THE END is yet another PC title commemorating the 50th anniversary of D-Day (alongside Virgin's D-Day Overlord), and will be winging our way courtesy of Impressions Software Inc. The Beginning of the End is the latest in a series of Micro Miniatures games and will be the first in the series to feature modern unit types. Following on from the success of The Blue & The Grey, TBOTE will be a fully-fledged campaign game, where the player commands either the Allied invasion force or the Axis defence force in a bid to take Berlin, or repel the invasion. Crisp, hi-res graphics and months of prospective strategy play will no doubt tempt many a strategist awaiting its release.

Impressions is also about to take a step back in time with its new, period strategy game of feudal governing, combat and conquest in the late 13th Century – **LORDS OF THE REALM**. While looking remarkably similar to Kingmaker in places, Lords of the Realm is probably more akin to a mediaeval sim-type of product, with the player becoming involved in farming as well as conquest (the mind boggles)! Lords of the Realm can be played by either one or two players, and in Impressions' ongoing commitment to on-line gaming, modem play will also be supported. *PC Player* will have a full review in the near future.



(Top) Gameport 2000, (Bottom) Flight Max – Suncom



Armored Fist – Novalogic

CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY, the team behind the Soundblaster standard, has announced that it has signed a deal with IBM to establish the Soundblaster as the true standard for sound on the PC. IBM will now ship PCs with a high-spec Soundblaster Pro as standard and it seems likely that many other manufacturers will follow. Maybe we'll even see sound technology on the main PCB in the next few months?

Suncom has just released its latest high-calibre joystick in the shape of the **FLIGHT MAX**, described by the firm as an advanced flight control console. Offering both throttle and rudder controls on thumb wheels (much like those found on the CH Flight Stick), the unit is excellently constructed making use of all of the very latest technology. Watch out for it in all decent game stores for £39.99.

Also from Suncom is the advanced game port card, the **GAMEPORT 2000**. Basically a simple dual-port card, we're assured that this new (extremely small) expansion card will work on all systems from 286 to Pentium. As well as offering joystick interfaces, it also has the novel feature of routing the sound from your internal speaker to an audio jack...hmm, now you can hear crap sound at high volume.

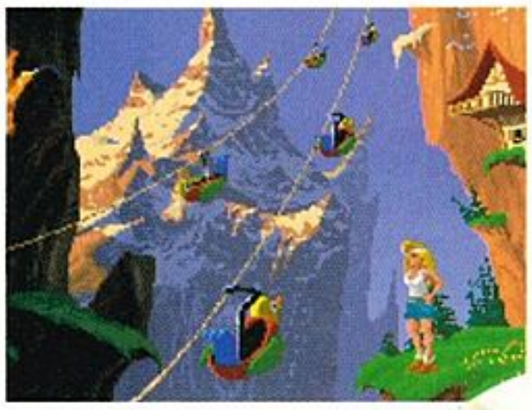
ARMORED FIST, the tank simulator developed by Novalogic developed and set to be released through US Gold, has been delayed quite considerably due to a major rethink in way the game is to be marketed to the public. Originally intended as an extremely high-end combat simulator requiring ludicrously high hardware specs (486 and 8Mb of memory!), the game is now set to be enhanced (if that's the right expression to use) so that it will run on a 4Mb machine. Hopefully we'll be previewing the new version of the game in issue seven.

Another last minute news item – it seems that Ocean and DID have had to delay the launch of the rather super-looking **INFERNO** until at least September. Details are a little unclear at the moment, but seeing as we were expecting the CD-based space combat game to be available by May, it'd be safe to say that some major changes are being made.

PC CD-ROM seems to have already established itself as a high volume format. According to HMV's flagship Level One store on Oxford Street, CD-ROM titles are now consistently in the top five. In the past months the superstore has more than doubled its shelf space for the up-and-coming format. According to HMV games manager Gerry Berkley, "the success is being fuelled by genuinely innovative CD games rather than simple time-saving games that are just titles that would have been 11 disks put on one CD". Aside from this, Berkley also claimed that by the end of 1994, CD-ROM sales would account for half of the London store's PC games sales. Source: CTW 7/3/94

FABLES & FIENDS

THE HAND OF FATE



Now you see it. Now you don't.

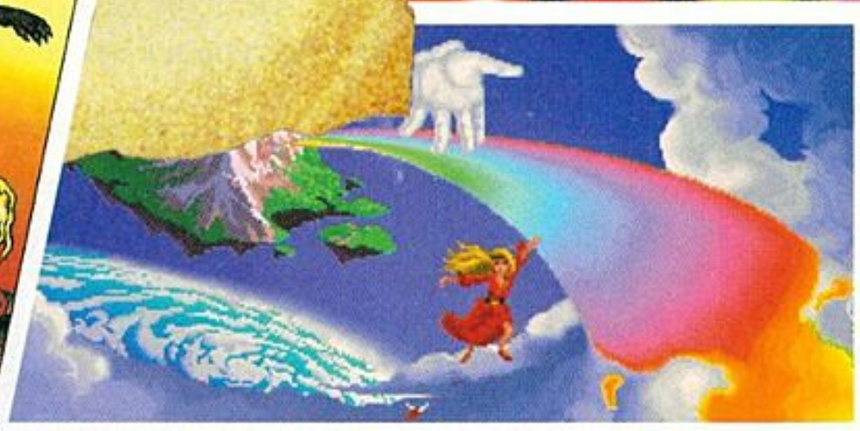
The land of Kyrandia is disappearing piece by piece and all the evidence points toward one perilous conclusion:

A Curse!

Thus begins **The Hand of Fate**, second in the Fables and Fiends series, where you are the off beat, young mystic who must voyage to the centre of the world to break the spell. Out of sync and out on foot, your aberrant journey reveals nothing is what it seems. Everything is what it isn't. And you can count your friends on one hand. Literally".

P.C Review. 8 out of 10.
"The prettiest game of the year".

P.C Zone. "Recommended".
"Excellent graphics and an imaginative storyline".
"A great game".



Westwood™ STUDIOS

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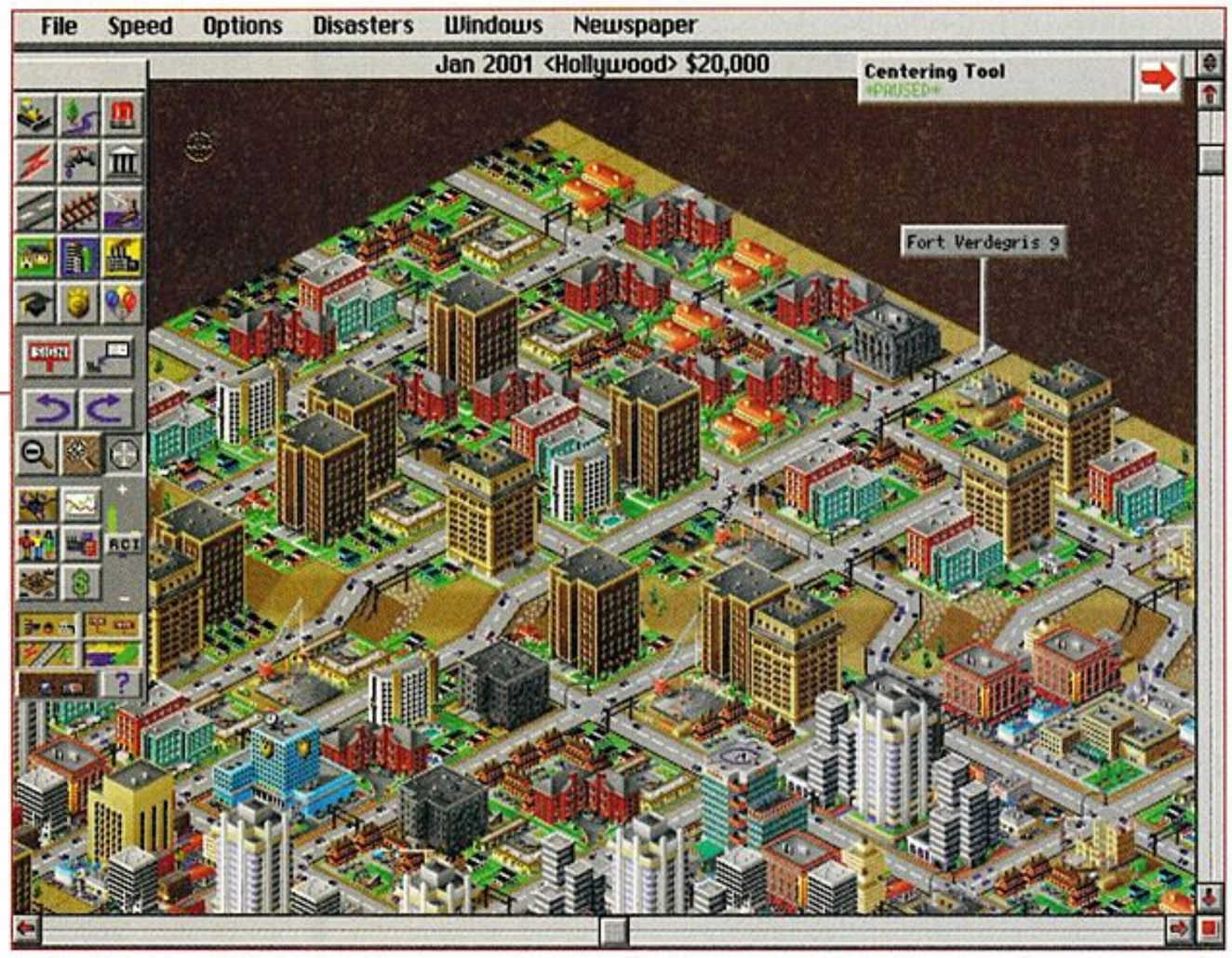
Virgin Interactive
Entertainment (Europe) Ltd.
338A Ladbroke Grove
London W10 5AH
Tel: 081 960 2255 Fax: 081 960 9900

Virgin INTERACTIVE entertainment



Sim City 2000 CD-ROM – Maxis

Don't be surprised if a CD-ROM version of **SIM CITY 2000** appears in the not too distant future. Boasting slightly enhanced features and the convenience of CD-ROM, it seems that Maxis is hoping to have its top-selling game (it's currently nestled very firmly at the top of the Gallup charts) on the shiny format in the next couple of months.

After nearly two years of lying low, Krisalis has pulled out all the stops and is set to unleash a whopping eight games over the next few months. First out of the stables is **QUARTERPOLE**, a horse-racing game which will have hard-up gamblers squirming in their seats. It promises to include every aspect of the real thing, even down to betting on the gee-gees, running your own stable and even recreating the stench of fresh horse dung (thanks to a handy scratch 'n' sniff card). Like many of the new Krisalis titles, Quarterpole will cost a mere £29.99 – a veritable bargain I think. Even the Queen Mum has expressed an interest in the game and she's hoping to upgrade her 486SX to a more powerful DX2 before the game comes out in the spring.

While on the subject of royalty, Krisalis also has **MANCHESTER UNITED PREMIER LEAGUE CHALLENGE**, which is due out some time in May. Following on from the numerous other Man Utd titles in the Krisalis back catalogue, this new version will be better in every way compared to its predecessors. Improved graphics, improved gameplay – hell, even the packaging is going to be improved. As yet no price has been decided, but Krisalis promises that a free rubber Ryan Giggs will not be given away free with each copy.

Still on the Krisalis front there is **HANNIBAL**, a census-taker's-liver-served-with-Fava-beans-and-a-nice-bottle-of-chilled-Chianti simulator...no, sorry it's based around the A-Team. No, no, it's actually something to do with that bloke who trudged across the Himalayas with a herd of elephants. Unsurprisingly, it's a strategy game and should be reviewed in full in next month's issue of PC Player.

Yet more Krisalis titles coming up, but not until nearer the end of the year. **SUPER TREK: SEARCH FOR STOCK** is a puzzle game due out in September, while an enhanced and updated version of the strategy extravaganza **RINGS OF MEDUSA** will appear in May, entitled **THE GOLD EDITION**. There's also **SOCCER KID**, a cute platform game more at home on the consoles than on the all-powerful PC. One last game (gasp) is **LEGEND**. At this stage very little is known about the game apart from it's going to be an RPG and should arise some time in November.

Interplay is working on a sequel to the excellent Castles. Imaginatively entitled **CASTLES II: SIEGE AND CONQUEST**, the new game will be along the same lines as its predecessor, with lots of beer-drinking and pillaging and that sort of thing, but it'll also feature some smart digitised footage and more intelligent computer opponents. It's not due out for some time and as yet no price has been decided.

If you're having problems with your PC then Eurosoft might just be able to help you out, with a useful utility called **PC-CHECK** which does exactly that. Coming on disk, when run this program checks out your entire system, looking over the motherboard, RAM, CMOS settings and the DMA controller. Memory can be checked with the tester, and it also scans all the drives to make sure that they are working efficiently.

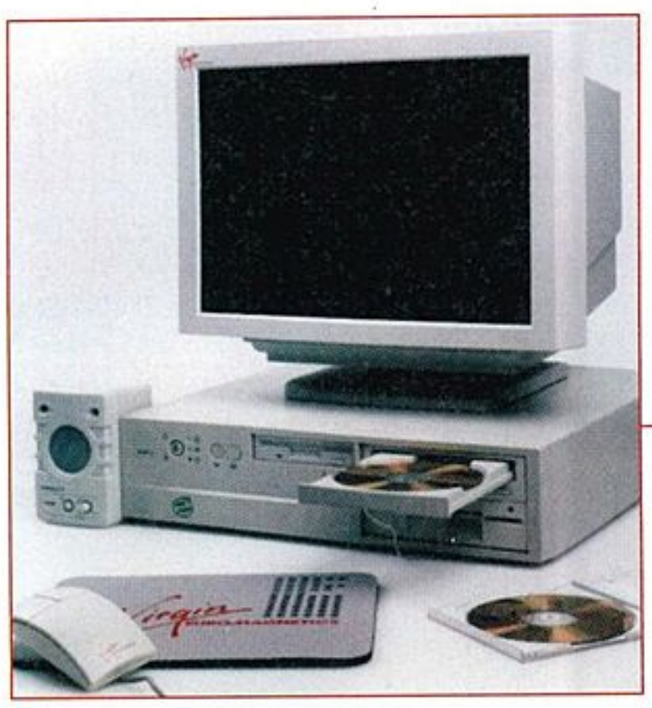
Other checks the program runs include video tests which check the monitor for alignment and linearity, and the utility can also predict any future problems after an extended soak test. PC-Check is the perfect utility for curing PCs suffering from slow-down or not working at all, and costs £79.99 from Eurosoft who can be contacted on 0202 297315.

Eurosoft also has the **DISCOVERY CARD** which fits into any expansion slot on the motherboard. It detects every IRQ and DMA request, which can be extremely useful. It doesn't come cheap though, costing £199. Once again contact Eurosoft on the number above.

Virgin's next big release looks as though it's going to be **CREATURE SHOCK**, developed by Argonaught Software. A CD-ROM only product, the game combines 3D role-playing adventure with shoot'em-up action in an unusual alien world of the future. Using some truly stunning 3D rendered visuals, it looks set to be one of the most spectacular games of the moment. Huge twisting tunnels, massive monsters, scary creatures and a host of characters make this really worth taking a look at. What more can we say? Just check out the screen shots below. The release date for Creature Shock is tentatively scheduled for late June.

Creature Shock – Argonaught Software

NEWS



Multi-Media PC – Virgin Euromagnetics

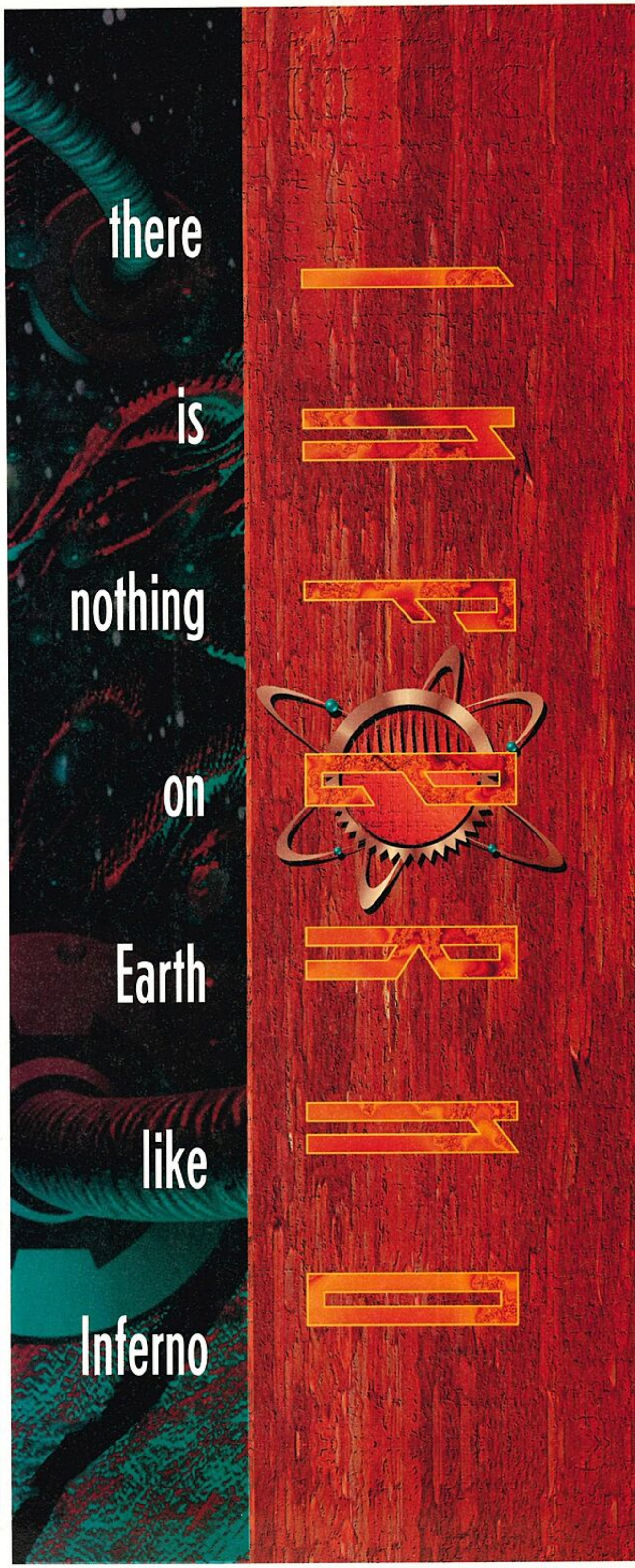
Microprose has finally announced the release date for its tank combat simulator, **ACROSS THE RHINE**. Those of you looking forward to the MPS ground-based sim will no doubt be pleased to learn that it will be in the shops by June.

Making use of a very similar graphics engine to that found in F-15 III and F-14 Tomcat (which, incidentally, we should have for review next month), the game presents a tactical sim set in the closing stages of WWII. Gameplay is set in June 1944 and can be continued right through to the end of the war in 1945, with players being given the option to play as either the US army or the German Wehrmacht.

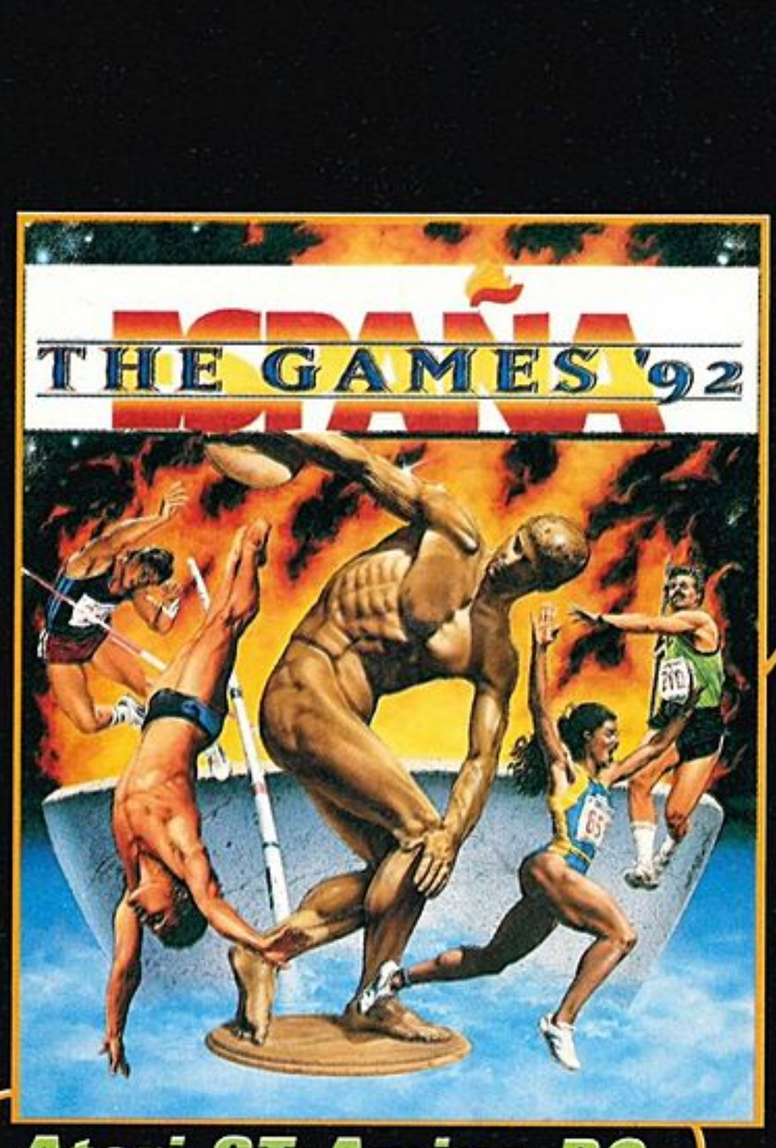
Microprose is adamant that the game is very much a simulation rather than a war game as such, and is pitching the product as a tank Vs tank, squad Vs squad-level battle. As the commander of a single tank, players basically have to move according to orders and eliminate any threat to their forces, with much of the control being from an almost Battlezone-style viewpoint.

Support forces and squads are all implemented for both sides and we're informed that an enormous amount of research has gone into the development of the game to make it as realistic as possible. We're also told that a number of set-piece battles have been included as part of the package including Battle of the Bulge, Mortain, Falaise and the breaching of the Siegfried Line. Watch for a preview next month.

VIRGIN has announced that its growing number of **MEGASTORES** will soon be stocking PC hardware as well as software. The primary product on offer will be the new **VIRGIN EUROMAGNETICS** machine – the **MULTI-MEDIA PC**, which is a low-cost PC aimed at the home and small office. Prices for the new machines start at £1380 (including VAT) for a 486SX25 with 170Mb hard drive and double-speed CD drive. All machines in the range share the basic specs and include 4Mb of memory, Local BUS architecture, 1Mb Video RAM and a 14" SVGA monitor. Expect to see the machines in the firm's 24 stores within the next month or so. ■



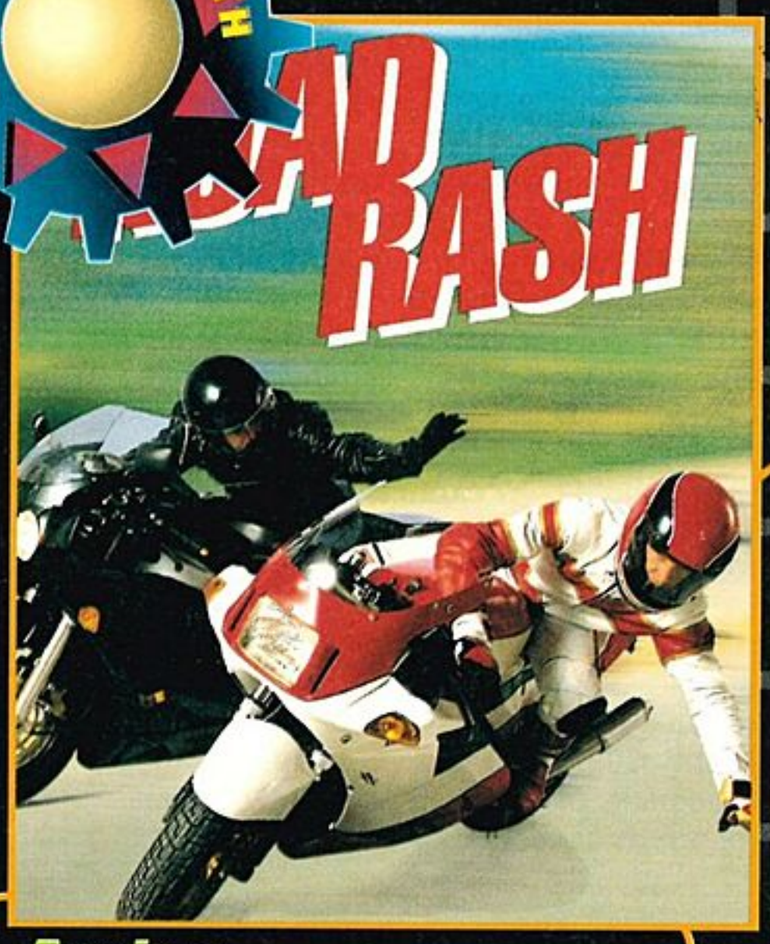
BUDGET for the BEST on your PC & AMIGA!



Atari ST·Amiga·PC

"...the most complete athletics simulation of all time. Excellent." AMIGA ACTION 90%

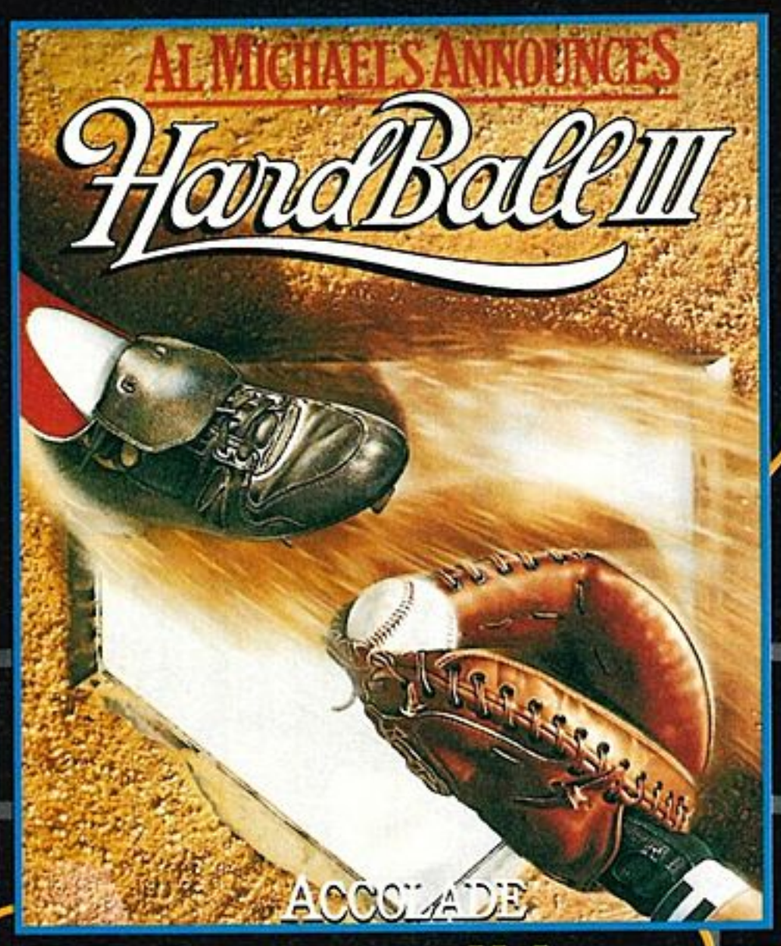
GAME OF THE MONTH



Amiga

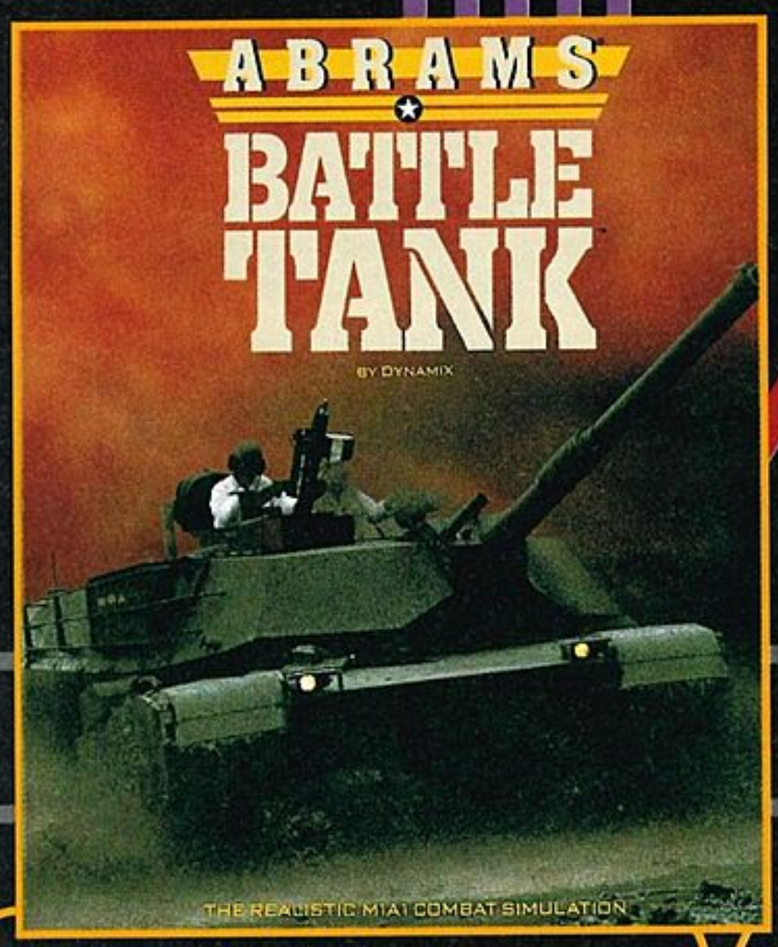
"You' back time is a m GAM 91%

Electronic Megastore - Wellingborough, Antics - Swindon, A - Z Leisure - Northampton, Northampto
Darlington, Marcliff Comp - Sunderland, Topsoft - Darlington, Topsoft - Stockton, AJM - Monton, Mighty
Sea, Computer Games - Brierly Hill, Telegames - Dumfries, Mr Disk - Queensway, Bus Info Systems -
Barkman Computers - Kingston, Computer Software Co - Manchester, Bytes & PC - East Sussex,
Invicta Software - Tunbridge Wells, Battlepower - Camberley, MaidtapeComputers - Bracknell, Vudata
Silica Systems - Ipswich, Microtronics - Tamworth, Computacenta - Derby, Model Shop - Stro
F1 Return - Lowestoft, Hobbyte - Luton, Tavistock Video - Bedford, 1st Compute - St Neots, Auditions -
Bits 'N' Bytes - Dundee, Holburn Software - Aberdeen, Ultima - Guildford, Antics - Guildford, Software
Superstores - St Helens, Software Superstores - Bolton, Software Superstores - Hanley, Antics - Wo
Fosters - Lichfield, Knight Games - Bridgenorth, Gainsborough Software - Gainsborough, Software Box
Datagem (High Holborn) - London, Datagem (Pitfield St) - London, Games Buster - Aldridge,
City Computers - Lancaster, Pulse Computing - Christchurch, House of Fun - Torquay, Antics - Plymou
Game Zone - Blandford, Tomorrows World - Hull, Computer & Game Centre - Scarbo



PC & compatibles

"A well-executed, state-of-the-art sports simulation. Offers all the whiz bang technologies that make gaming such a joy."
STRATEGY PLUS



Atari ST·Amiga

GAME OF THE MONTH

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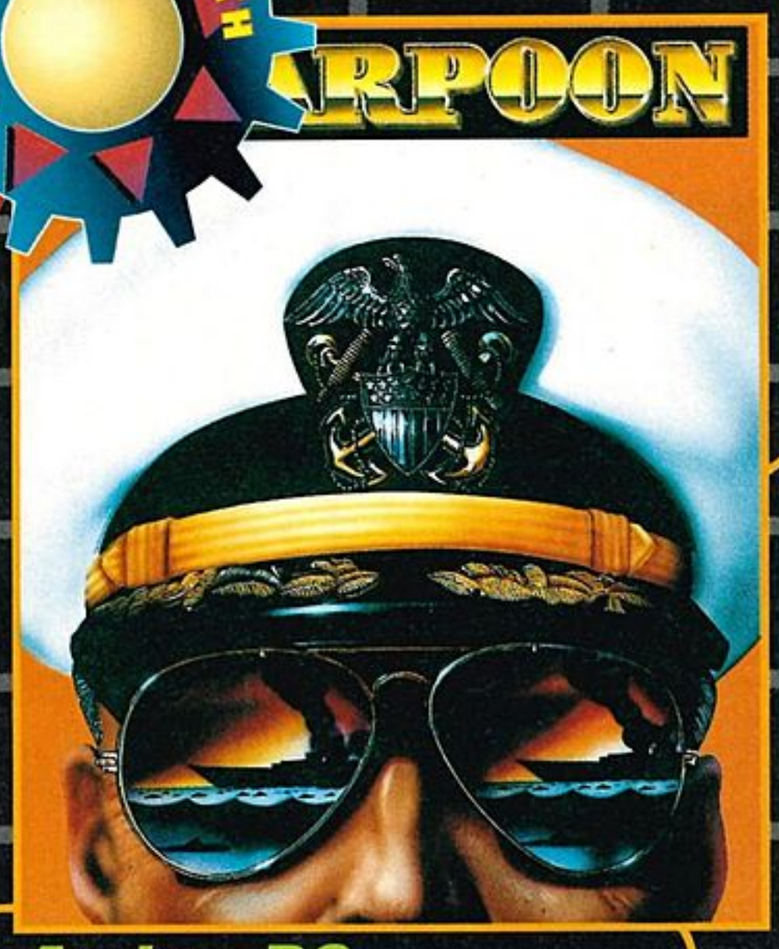
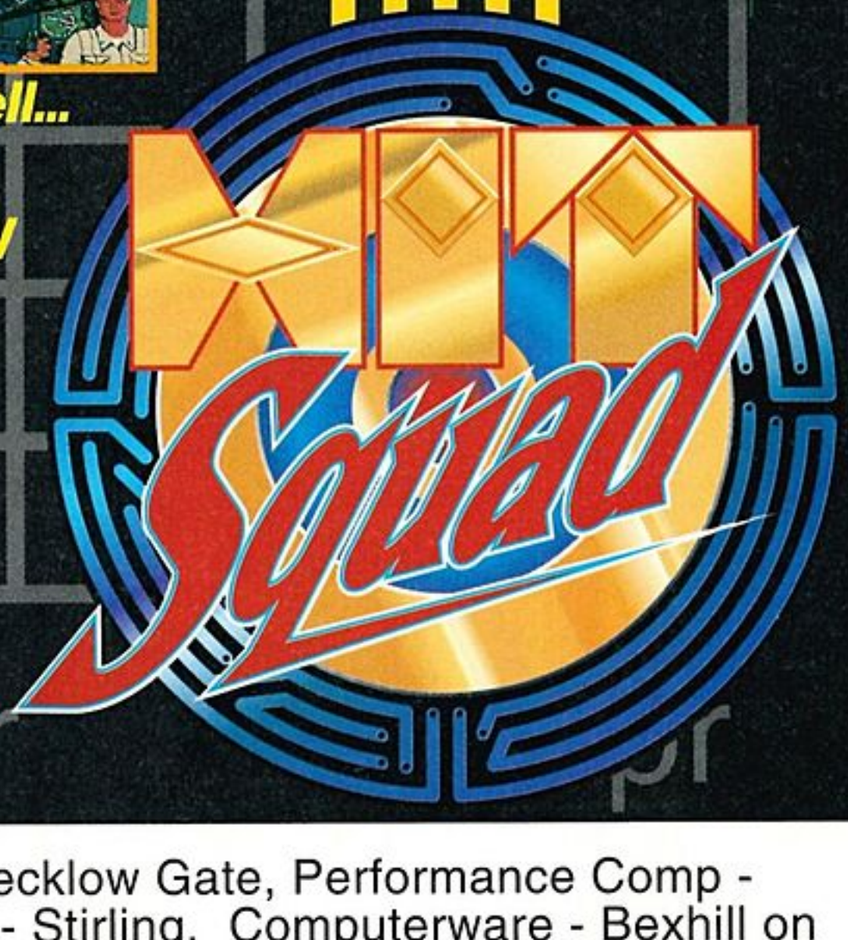
ESMASTER



Amiga·PC

"...plays well... go buy it!"
PC REVIEW



n Computer & Games - Northampton, Mays - Leicester, Softly - Becklow Gate, Performance Comp -
y Micros - Fallowfield, Computerware - Eastbourne, K-Computers - Stirling, Computerware - Bexhill on
Haverford West, Comtazia - Merry Hill, Virgin - Birmingham, Computa Store - Belfast, Gizmo - Halifax,
C & N Cycles - East Grinstead, Weldon Enterprises - Ashford, Westman Computers - Gravesend,
- Ashton U Lyne, Omega Projects - Leigh, Sapphire Software - Hastings, Ultima Retail - Southampton,
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- Kettering, Kerrison Toys - Norwich, Computer Plus - Isle of Wight, Softville - Havant, Chips - Newport,
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RJ Computers - Bristol, Antics - Bristol, Coventry C.C. - Coventry, Capri Marketing - Marlow,
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rough, Soft Centre - Cwmbran, SGM Electronics - Wigan, Seventh Heaven - Wisbech.

PAGE 16

multi-MEDIA

SUPER TEST

MULTI-MEDIA IS ABOUT TO BECOME BIGGER THAN EVER, WITH THE COMPACT DISC BURYING THE FLOPPY DISK IN THE SAME WAY IT KILLED VINYL.

by John Davison

GAMES ARE INCREASING DRAMATICALLY IN SIZE SO IT'S ONLY LOGICAL THAT THEY'RE SQUEEZED ONTO A SINGLE CD RATHER THAN 15 FLOPPY DISKS. BY THE END OF 1994 MOST SOFTWARE HOUSES WILL PHASE OUT FLOPPY RELEASES IN FAVOUR OF CD-ONLY PRODUCTS, SO ISN'T IT TIME YOU UPGRADED TO CD-ROM?

by Paul Mallinson and Alex Simmons and Keith Sloan

FEATURE

The Media Vision CD-ROM drive suffers considerably in the hardware quality stakes due to a number of reasons. Unfortunately the most glaring problem is the horribly flimsy CD tray which pops out of the machine with a disturbing lack of sturdiness

As time passes the price of a CD-ROM drive drops, making it more affordable for your average PC owner. Now a range of multi-media packages are available, including the CD drives, the appropriate sound cards as well as a load of games and software utilities, but are the benefits of CD still worth forking out another £400 for?

The advantages of CD are obvious. The first advantage is that the storage capacity of a compact disc far exceeds that of a floppy and therefore most of the data can be left on the original disc, thus freeing up valuable hard disk space. Another feature of many CD games is the inclusion of digitised dialogue which greatly enhances many of the point-and-click adventure games readily available, not to mention some of the more impressive full-motion video games like Return to Zork and the visually stunning Rebel Assault. But before you part with your hard-earned cash, carefully scan through this month's multi-media Super Test where PC Player rips open four of the most popular CD packages on the market.

VALUE FOR MONEY

EASY CD	★★★
ORCHID	★★★★
MEDIA VISION	★
SOUND SENSE	★★★★★

When you take into consideration how much some of these multi-media packages cost, it's essential to know which bundle gives you the best value for money. After all, not many of us can afford to spend another six hundred quid on a CD drive after forking out a grand or so on a decent computer.

In terms of cost, the Orchid multi-media kit is the cheapest bundle of the four, totalling in at just under £370. The Sound Sense bundle is slightly more expensive, but is still relatively cheap compared to the Double Fusion LX which costs a whopping £600 – a lot of cash for an internal CD drive, I'm sure you'll agree. Finally there's Creative's Easy CD-16 which has a recommended retail price of £619 (excluding VAT), although you'll be able to get it cheaper if you shop around.

The contents of all of the bundles are very similar. Inside each box is a double-speed CD-ROM drive, a decent sound card and a pair of speakers. However, some of the packages have the additional bonus of including utilities and games. For instance, the Sound Sense kit comes complete with £150 of software titles, namely 7th Guest, Day of the Tentacle and The Legend of Kyrandia. All of these are quite sensibly on compact disc, which is more than can be said for demos included in the Orchid multi-media kit. Why have a couple of demos and Zool on floppy when you've just paid out for the advantages of CD?! The Easy CD-16 contains a massive five CDs, which store various programs including Aldus Photostyler, a fairly poor Interactive encyclopaedia, the entertaining Animals CD and a couple of animation utilities.

Both Creative Labs' Easy CD-16 and the Sound Sense CD drives prove to be reliable and easy to install, although you do pay extra money for the quality of Creative's external drive. The Orchid and the Fusion LX are equally as simple to set up, but the latter is far inferior in terms of the quality of workmanship – the flimsy plastic CD tray is pathetic and the whole unit has a very cheap and somewhat nasty feel to it, which is rather surprising considering the price.

One of the best all-round CD-ROM drives is the Panasonic system which is not only excellent as part of the Sound Sense Multi-Media package, it's also the ideal choice if you're after a standalone CD system to go along with your existing 16-bit sound card. It's well built, more than fast enough and reliable

Taking into account the quality of the drives and the hard/software you get in the bundles, the Sound Sense multi-media kit offered the best value for money. It's the cheapest of the four and has some excellent software included in the pack, Day of the Tentacle in particular. The drive itself is one of the best internal CD drives we've had the pleasure to use. The Orchid comes a close second, with the overpriced Double Fusion LX ending up at the bottom of the list. For £600 you can get the Easy CD-16, which is an excellent drive with the added bonus of being external – but why pay that much cash when you can get an internal drive with the same performance and better software for just over half the price? Do the advantages of an external drive warrant the hefty price tag?

HARDWARE

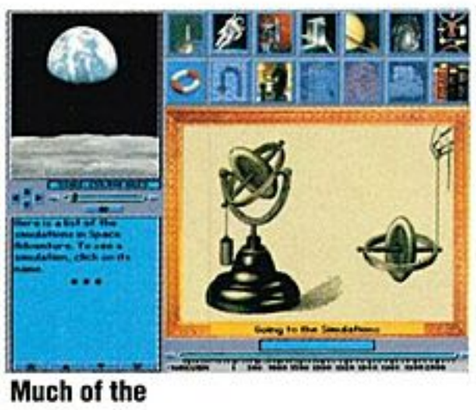
EASY CD	★★★★★
ORCHID	★★★★★
MEDIA VISION	★★
SOUND SENSE	★★★★

Considering that the Sound Sense Panasonic CR562B drive is one of the cheapest of the lot, it is extremely well constructed. It's a double-speed drive which, like the other drives tested, runs at about 310KB/s. The accompanying Soundblaster compatible Galaxy Pro 16 sound card is excellent, but still does not match the performance of the SoundWave 32 card that comes in the Orchid package, which is compatible with the Soundblaster, AdLib, General MIDI and Roland. All the cards are 16-bit which means the sound is clearer and in stereo.

No matter how good your sound card is, a decent pair of speakers is needed for the perfect audio experience. The speakers in all four packages are quite good, but don't expect a set of 16-inch woofers that can kick out more decibels than the PA at Wembley Arena – these are just small speakers that are perfect for the job.

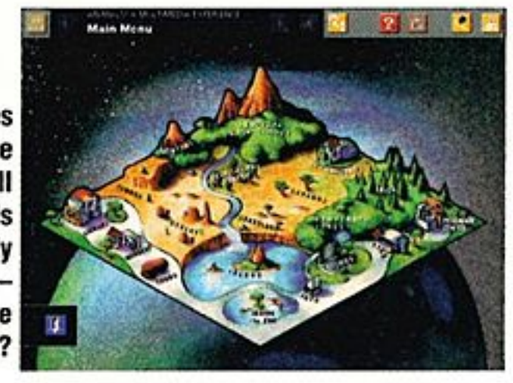
Of the four, the external Easy CD-16 drive is the sturdiest, housed in a tough casing. The Orchid and Panasonic drives are equally well constructed, leaving the somewhat disappointing Double Fusion LX trailing. Considering this is the second most expensive drive we've tested, it really is quite poorly made. It looks cheap and tacky and the flimsy plastic CD tray really is appalling. I reckon the tray will last little longer than a few months of continuous use and it's extremely limp compared to the strong Creative and Panasonic drives.➤

FEATURE



Much of the multi-media software on offer is of little consequence to gamesplayers, however there are some surprisingly good educational programs

Click on the people and watch them do amusing things in this entertaining yet ultimately useless 'interactive book'. Certainly one of the more obscure uses for a multi-media system



Many of the freebies included with the packages are very well presented. The Animals for example is effectively an SVGA zoo on disc – with all the appropriate noises. Fun or what?

Even though they all perform at the same access rate, the internal Panasonic and external Creative drives have the edge because of their reliability. The Orchid is also particularly good, especially as it's bundled with the outstanding SoundWave 32. Just don't bother with the Double Fusion LX.

SOFTWARE

EASY CD	★★★★
ORCHID	-
MEDIA VISION	★★★
SOUND SENSE	★★★★★

Virtually every multi-media upgrade pack comes complete with bundled software. There's no denying that 60 per cent of this software is a complete waste of plastic, but there are always exceptions to every rule and some bundled 'freebies' actually increase the overall value of the upgrade packs.

The Creative Easy CD-16 pack comes supplied with five CDs – more than any other upgrade package featured here. Unfortunately, there are no games supplied with the Creative pack (which is a bit boring), but the quality of the rest of the software makes up for this. Aldus Photostyler is a professional imaging utility that runs in either 640 by 480 (256 colours) or (for the best results) in 24-bit truecolour, which can also be used in conjunction with the supplied Photo CD disk. While all of these upgrade packs are Photo CD compatible, the Creative Easy CD-16 is the only one to actually include the software needed to read Photo CD files. The ubiquitous Software Toolworks interactive encyclopaedias rear their ugly heads too, with only The Animals worthy of anyone's time and attention. If you're looking for entertainment, it may be better to look elsewhere.

At the other end of the scale, the Sound Sense upgrade pack comes supplied with three quality CD games; Day of the Tentacle, Kyrandia and 7th Guest. As we already know, DOTT is an essential CD purchase which will no doubt have sold a good few CD-ROM drives on its own. As bundled software goes, the Sound Sense pack is hard to beat – quality, not quantity is the key here.

Bottom of the bunch is definitely the Orchid upgrade pack. With three demos (Zool, Sink or Swim and Lotus III) squashed onto one floppy disk and only one complete game (Zool), it may come as no surprise to discover that this particular piece of kit fared very badly in this category. Heck, the package doesn't even come supplied with a single CD, which is a very bad move in itself!

Media Vision's Double Fusion LX tries its best to provide us with some half-decent software, but if the truth be known the bundled software is nothing more than a collection of very old games and the usual interactive book-type product. Railroad Tycoon is good, as is Arthur's Teacher Trouble (if you're looking for edutainment that is), but neither match up to the might of Day of the Tentacle and co.

Not a great deal can be said about the installation software supplied with each pack, except that they are all very easy to use. The Orchid installation software is the only one without an autocheck, but this is only a minor problem when you consider that the pack comes with very little decent software anyway!

INSTALLATION

EASY CD	★★★★★
ORCHID	★★
MEDIA VISION	★★★
SOUND SENSE	★★★

PRODUCT	PRODUCT
Sound Blaster: Easy CD-16	Sound Sense Multi-Media
SUPPLIER	**SUPPLIER**
Creative Labs	BCC Distribution Telephone: 0282 31108
PRICE	**PRICE**
£619 ex VAT	£349
CONTENTS	**CONTENTS**
D/s Matsushita CD-ROM drive, Soundblaster 16, Stereo Speakers, Mic, Software	Panasonic CD-ROM Drive, Stereo Speakers, Sound Card and three games

SOUND BLASTER: EASY CD-16

The Creative Labs' pack has been assembled and constructed with the user in mind – a minimum amount of fiddling is required to get the system up and running, and the CD drive itself is powered by the sound card so there are no extra cables to be stuffed down the back of your desk. A Soundblaster 16 sound card is supplied with the pack and this is the only piece of hardware that requires installation to your PC motherboard. Once all the relevant driver software has been loaded onto your hard drive, you're away. It's that simple – the package isn't called the Easy CD for nothing!

FEATURE

The CD drive itself is a very fast Matsushita double-speed external model, running at approximately 320 KB/s – easily fast enough to handle even the more sluggish examples of CD software. Not only is the drive aesthetically pleasing and sturdily constructed, but it also comes complete with a built-in game port (for joysticks).

The bundled software is a little thin on the 'fun' side. The Kodak Photo CD disk could come in very handy if you plan to take advantage of this new medium.

In terms of quality of product and ease of installation, the Creative Easy CD-16 is hard to beat, but these advantages must be weighed up against the cost.

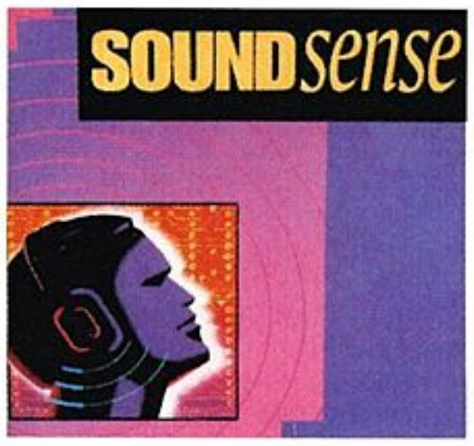
SOUND SENSE MULTI-MEDIA

The Sound Sense bundle includes one of the most popular and reliable CD-ROM drives currently available, this being the sturdy Panasonic CR562B. It's an internal drive with a data transfer rate of 300KB/s, plus multi-session and Photo CD capabilites. The unit fits snugly in the front of the machine, screwing firmly into position, with all the necessary leads to the sound card included in the bundle.

Also found inside the package is a pair of magnetically shielded stereo speakers that give excellent sound reproduction when used in conjunction with the digital Sound Galaxy Pro 16, which is also included in the price.

Installation of both the CD and sound cards is simple, with the Galaxy Pro simply fitting into a spare expansion slot and connecting to the CD-ROM via a ribbon cable. The whole process of installation takes about half an hour, including installing both the sound and CD drivers, plus fitting the drive inside the PC.

The complete Sound Sense bundle is finished off with three high-quality CD games, these being Virgin's ground-breaking 7th Guest, The Legend of Kyrandia and the superlative Day of the Tentacle.



The Sound Sense multi-media package is actually fairly easy to install. If you're an absolute technophobe it can get a little daunting, but on the whole it's pretty painless

The four packages on test are all relatively easy to fit, but by far the simplest is the Creative drive. Fitting involves no more than taking off the metal casing to the computer and fitting a specially prepared sound card into one of the expansion slots. The CD-ROM unit is then plugged into a port on the back of this card and that is that – quick, painless and as easy as it gets. Of course, this is an external drive so it should be easy, but for those who suffer from occasional bouts of techno-fear, an external drive is your best bet. The installation software consists of only one disk which auto-configures itself to the hardware present, saving the trouble of going through DMA settings and the like.

The Sound Sense package and in particular the Media Vision bundle are a little more fiddly than the Creative offering. The SS drive slides snugly into the bay, with the connections being placed in an easily accessible location. The Media Vision drive is a little fiddly, due to the fact that it takes a bit of persuading to fit into one of the drive bays. It was also discovered (after getting the thing screwed in) that it is very difficult to connect the cables with the drive in the bay – we had to take it out and fit it while it was balanced precariously on the edge of the computer. The software for both packages is excellent though – a single disk auto-configures itself, presenting no problems at all.

The final bundle, the Orchid drive, fits into the computer easier than the other internal drives, but the installation software leaves a lot to be desired. No automatic setting of DMAs or IRQs means that you have to make notes of the setting when you are told, then enter them into the set-up program yourself. For user unfriendliness, this package is going to take a lot of beating.

CONCLUSION

EASY CD	★★★★
ORCHID	★★★
MEDIA VISION	★★
SOUND SENSE	★★★★★

With the number of packages hitting the market at the moment, it's hard to find something that suits your needs absolutely perfectly, but from this new batch of releases there are two obvious winners. Creative's Easy CD package, although quite expensive, is a very well-made unit which includes some superb hardware and software. The convenience of the drive being external also means that this is one of the most user-friendly systems in our test.

As far as all-round value and quality goes, the Sound Sense package is easily the best. The Sound Galaxy card is an excellent Soundblaster 16 compatible card and the Panasonic drive is one of the very best you can get your hands on for a reasonable price. If you want to get the most for your cash, this is certainly the one to go for.

Where the other two are concerned, we feel that only the Orchid system is worth going for. Although the software is a bit on the poor side, the hardware is of excellent quality – the robustly-built CD drive is only bettered by the Sound Wave 32 card which is one of the best multi-purpose sound cards we've come across in a very long time.

Unfortunately, it's the Media Vision Double Fusion system which comes off worst – the combination of low-build quality and high price means that this is by far the weakest of the bunch. Sad, but true. ■

Without a doubt the most impressive sound card on test is Orchid's exquisite Soundwave 32 card. With full MIDI and LAPC support as well as Soundblaster 16 compatibility, this is one of the best buys at the moment

ORCHID MULTI-MEDIA UPGRADE

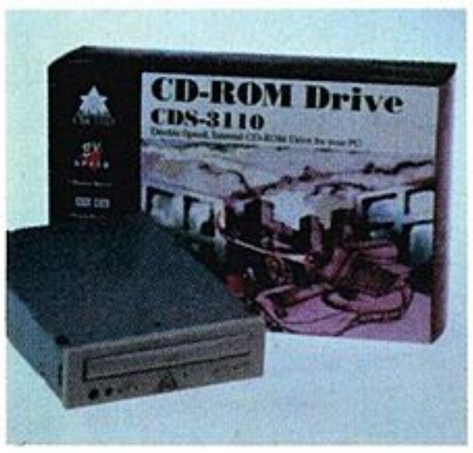
PRODUCT
Orchid Multi-media Upgrade

SUPPLIER
Orchid

PRICE
£359

CONTENTS
CDS 3110 Drive, Orchid Soundwave 32, Stereo Speakers, Disk-based Software

Considered by many to be one of the best packages to be announced recently, the Orchid multi-media upgrade pack includes an excellently constructed internal double-speed CD drive (the acclaimed CDS3110 drive – rated at 307 KB/s), along with Orchid's excellent new Soundwave 32 soundboard. Unlike many of the other sound cards featured in this test, this particular little beauty is Soundblaster Pro, General MIDI and LAPC compatible, making it one of the best cards around at the moment.



Although the hardware is all very impressive, the one aspect of this package which does strike us as being rather odd is that there aren't any CDs in the box! Pretty weird, huh?! You buy a brand-new CD-ROM package and then have to go out and purchase your first CD title on top of that. On the software front all that you basically get with this package is the sound card and the CD set-up disks, along with a demo disk containing Gremlin's Zool, a demo of Sink or Swim and a slide show from Lotus. Not particularly awe-inspiring! Nevertheless, for the price this appears to be an excellent package from a brand name that is both trustworthy and established.

DOUBLE FUSION LX

PRODUCT
Double Fusion LX

SUPPLIER
Media Vision

PRICE
£599

CONTENTS
Double-speed Phillips CD-ROM drive, Pro Audio Spectrum 16, Speakers, Software

The Media Vision Double Fusion entry into the ever expanding world of multi-media features a double-speed CD-ROM drive manufactured by Phillips, a Pro Audio Spectrum 16-bit sound card and a pair of magnetically shielded speakers.

The actual CD unit itself performs well, although the build quality does leave rather a lot to be desired. The feel of the unit is very lightweight, with the loading tray seemingly made out of the thinnest plastic MV could lay its hands on. Being double-speed, it is more than adequate for running the majority of CD-based software around at the moment and should hold its own for a while to come.

Installation is a relatively simple matter of plugging the sound card into one of the available slots on the PC's motherboard and attaching the CD-ROM cable to a set of pre-configured jumpers. Power is drawn from the computer's PSU making a spare power cable a necessity, which could present problems depending upon how many internal peripherals are installed on your system.

The whole package comes bundled with a wide range of software, including the obligatory interactive encyclopaedia (Space Adventure), an interactive children's book (Arthur's Teacher Trouble), B-17 Flying Fortress, Railroad Tycoon and Greens, a golf game.

The actual installation software is easy to use and coupled with the relative simplicity of fitting the CD-ROM unit, should provide the PC novice with very little trouble. All the fitting instructions are straightforward and easy to follow, but some people might find it necessary to tie back some of the cables, because with most PCs the tangle of wires can become a little extreme!

FEATURE

"WAR - NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN."

IF YOU'VE PLAYED THE AMIGA VERSION YOU WILL

ALREADY KNOW THE WORDS TO THE SONG.

YOU'LL ALSO REALISE JUST HOW DAMN GOOD THIS GAME IS TOO.

CANNON FODDER

PRODUCT
Cannon Fodder

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin Interactive Entertainment

PRICE
£35.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 3.3 Min, 2Mb Ram (560K base), 386, VGA, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland compatible Sound Cards

THE latest brainchild of software god Sensible Software, Cannon Fodder fights for the cause of playable software. Wasteful visuals are kept to a minimum, keystrokes are few and far between and playability is optimised – the antithesis of much of the 'multi-media' crap that has been pouring into the office recently. I'm sorry, but I've got a bee in my bonnet about so-called multi-media software titles. I have yet to see a multi-media product worthy of its over-inflated price tag. The Journeyman Project, Critical Path, Quantum Gate, CITY 2000, Inca II, Dracula Unleashed, Iron Helix...you may all leave the room – oh, and send Cannon Fodder in on your way out.

Cannon Fodder is an arcade combat game with strategy overtones. You control a team of commandos who must fight their way through 24 gruelling missions, each divided into a total of 72 phases. Each phase is represented as a scrolling play area that intelligently tracks the movement of your soldiers as they run around the landscape.

Missions are based in one of five different campaign settings; jungle, desert, Arctic, moor and subterranean (cave) levels, each with their own characteristics. Jungle missions throw up spikes, man traps and other devious devices; deserts are rocky, cavernous places often sporting bottomless canyons just waiting to swallow your fighters; Arctic levels are slippery, hampering the manoeuvrability and speed of your team; dense woodland is one characteristic of the moors, but there are also a number of houses, cottages and ploughed fields added to the terrain; and finally the caves are riddled with locked doors and sewer channels, not to mention a very high proportion of enemy soldiers.

Some of these settings also have their fair share of rivers and lakes. If a player decides to move their troops through shallow water (light blue), the soldiers will slow right down, putting them at risk from enemy attack. In shallow water your troops can still fire their weapons, but once they begin to wade into deeper waters (dark blue) their weapons are incapacitated while they swim slowly through it. This effectively transforms your men into sitting ducks – an easy target for the enemy. It is therefore recommended that extreme caution is taken when committing any of your men to the water.

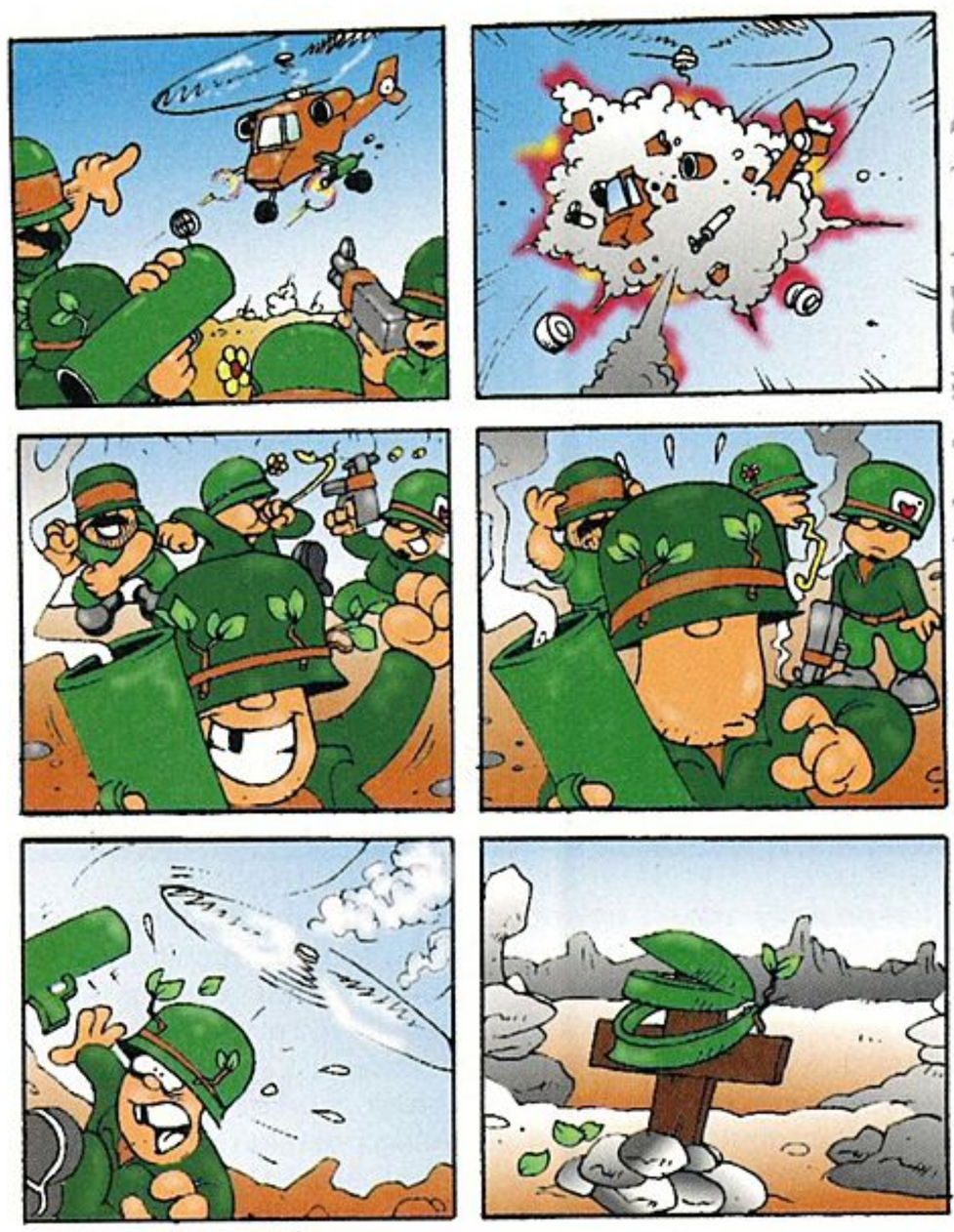
"CANNON FODDER IS AN ARCADE COMBAT GAME WITH STRATEGY OVERTONES. YOU CONTROL A TEAM OF COMMANDOS WHO MUST FIGHT THEIR WAY THROUGH 24 GRUELLING MISSIONS, EACH DIVIDED INTO A TOTAL OF 72 PHASES"

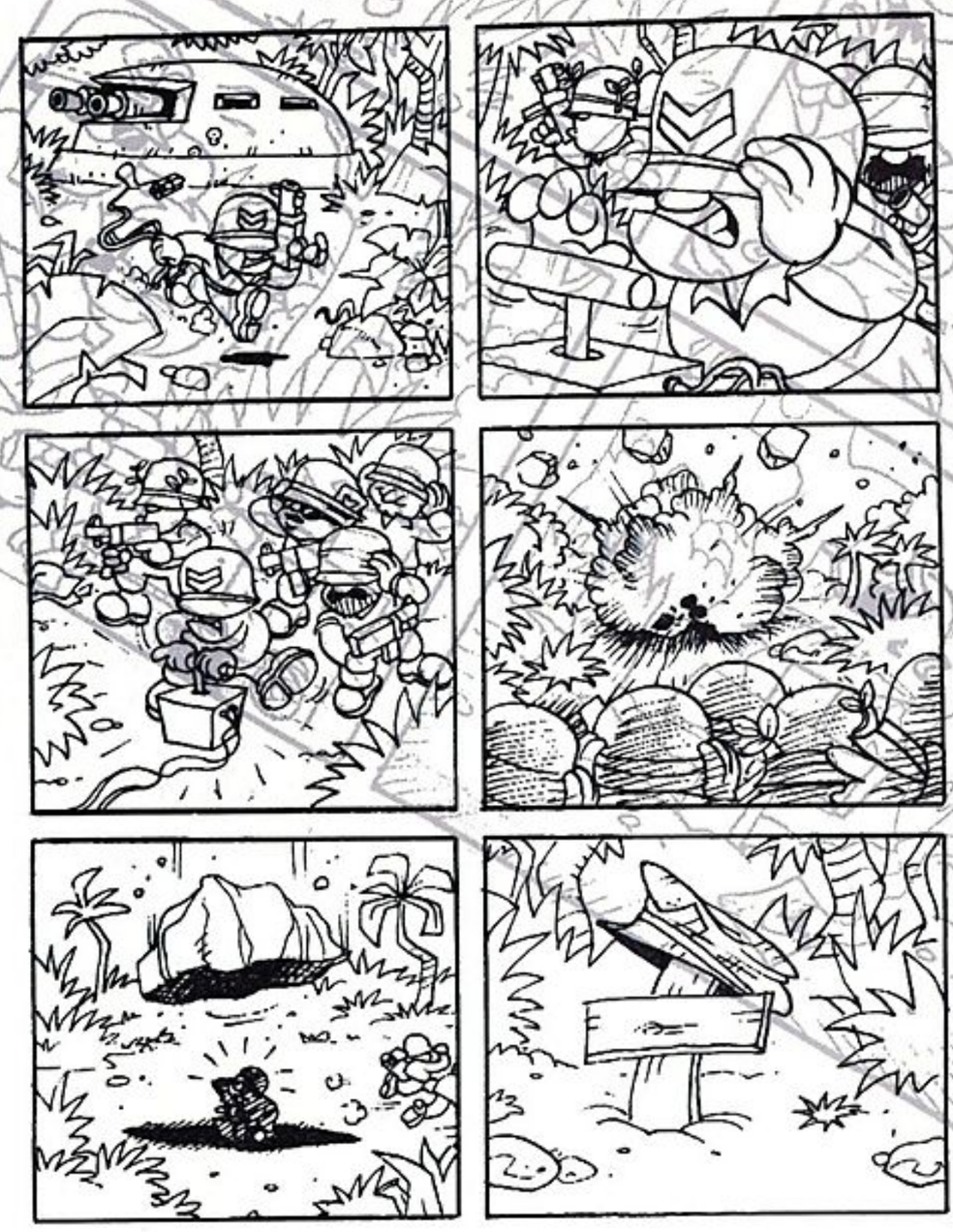
REVIEW

Try not to get too close to an exploding building. Throw grenades from a distance and make sure you take out the door of the building – if the door is left standing, enemy soldiers will still emerge to kill you

The later underground levels are a real test of strength and character. You will encounter every type of hostility from helicopters to tanks, as you race to destroy the enemy control centre

The opportunity to ride a tank or a helicopter is very rewarding and immensely satisfying, especially if the vehicle is heavily armed!





A NEW INTRO

The PC conversion of Cannon Fodder replaces the original Amiga intro tune with a series of animated cut-scenes. Each of the five animated sequences depicts a particular complication of combat, such as rotor blade death, booby-trapped animals, man traps or land mines. Although the sequences are highly humorous, they serve as a reminder of the horrors of war.

(Left) These early storyboards show the kind of thing Sensible's designers are striving for

The size of your team depends entirely on the individual mission. Most missions provide you with at least four commandos with which to complete them, but they can fluctuate from one-man missions to full, six-man sorties. However many men you have under your control, you always handle them the same way.

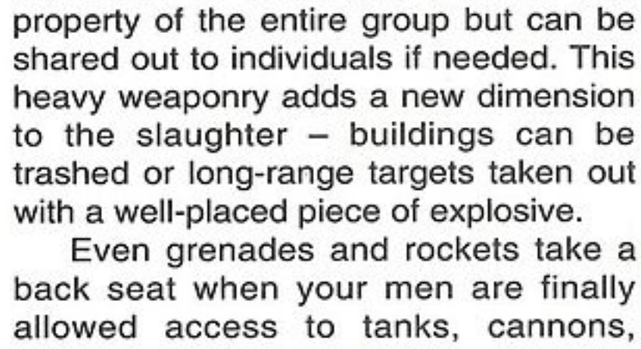
Using the mouse, you can move your team from point to point by clicking on a location with the left mouse button. If your soldiers are already on the move they will automatically head towards the last selected destination, however it does take some time to be able to negotiate the terrain without constantly walking into walls or corners! The right mouse button, when depressed, automatically triggers the weapons of your team – the usual pointer cursor changes into a cross-hair that the player then uses to target their aim. Any enemies caught in the crossfire are immediately killed. You don't have to be standing still to be able to fire either, because your soldiers can swivel at the hips, changing aim while running in any direction. Again, this is another technique vital for success – you must always keep moving through gunfights, zigzagging or making long runs while targeting any hostile forces at the same time. It's all very simple and once you've got the hang of it you will no doubt soon impress yourself with a series of decisive, crushing manoeuvres against the poor old bad guys.

Eventually you'll meet your match – the learning curve is graded perfectly for the first half of the game, allowing reckless, wanton destruction without too much thought on the part of the player. Stay reckless however, and your army will soon dwindle. As things begin to get more difficult, careful planning and stealth is required, with certain situations even necessitating the splitting of your team. Highlighting any number of the identification stripes at the top-left of the screen will automatically prime the selected individual for a split and clicking on the group motif will then execute the split. The selected individual will now remain under your control until either you return to your dug-in comrades or you are killed in battle. Obviously, if your lone guy bites the bullet, control reverts to the surviving members.

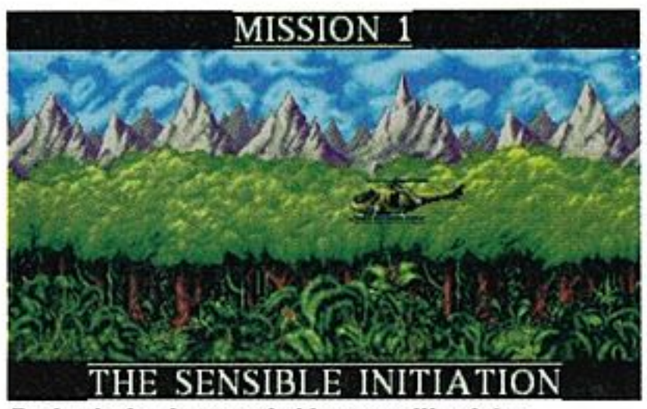
To back up these new strategies there are also extra weapons to be picked up in the shape of grenades or bazooka rockets. This essential collection of ordnance remains the property of the entire group but can be shared out to individuals if needed. This heavy weaponry adds a new dimension to the slaughter – buildings can be trashed or long-range targets taken out with a well-placed piece of explosive.

Even grenades and rockets take a back seat when your men are finally allowed access to tanks, cannons, skidoos, Jeeps and helicopters. Finding and taming any of these vehicles is a satisfaction in itself – squash the enemy in a tank and you're laughing...that is, until you're either; (i) destroyed by an enemy cannon, or (ii) you end up blowing yourself up by targeting too close to your own vehicle! We've all done it, I know.

"SQUASH THE ENEMY IN A TANK AND YOU'RE LAUGHING...THAT IS, UNTIL YOU'RE EITHER; (I) DESTROYED BY AN ENEMY CANNON, OR (II) YOU END UP BLOWING YOURSELF UP BY TARGETING TOO CLOSE TO YOUR OWN VEHICLE!"



Cannon Fodder has a novel way of supplying the player with 'lives'. You start with 27 recruits and are awarded another 27 if you successfully complete a mission. Lives are lost if your entire team is killed in battle and are replaced by fresh soldiers



Each mission is preceded by a scrolling intro sequence. This lets the player know exactly where they will be fighting – on ice, in the desert, in the jungle, on the moors or in the caves

Tanks move slowly and are highly vulnerable to heavy artillery fire. Bullets, grenades and missiles can't harm you if you're inside a tank, but enemy tanks can!

REVIEW

An all too familiar sight – the 'try again' message. When playing Cannon Fodder you certainly need a steady hand and an unfaltering eye because it's hard...it's very hard. You're going to need all the skill you can muster to beat the later levels

➤ Although there's no real story for Cannon Fodder to hide behind, your soldiers do have a purpose to their missions. More often than not, all that is required to complete a phase of the mission is the total annihilation of the opposition's buildings and infantry. As the missions become more complex the objectives often change. Civilians must sometimes be protected or rescued (while at other times you can just go ahead and blast them to pieces – hee, hee!), hostages freed and specific buildings targeted. Complete strategies, combined with a regular use of the save feature (not forgetting a lot of practice), are required for later missions. A map of the entire playing area (which is useful if the level is quite large) can be called up during the game, showing the current position of your team and the location of enemy buildings. I found it useful to study this map before exploring the immediate area – you can never be too careful!

Cannon Fodder can only be played with a mouse, but you're going to need a really good mouse if you are to make any headway through the later stages of the game. Having played the Amiga version of Cannon Fodder to death, it took me some time to accustom myself to the way in which the game interface reacts to the PC mouse. The PC version is also much faster than the Amiga version (it is on a 486 DX 33 anyway), which also takes some getting used to. I even switched my PC to low speed in order to emulate the speed of the Amiga version. Unfortunately, this resulted in jerkier scrolling so I resigned that idea to the 'hair brained' cupboard!

Yes, the graphics are small and yes they do lack definition, but they do serve their purpose very well. Sprites and animation, for their size, are all pretty much spot on, especially the beautiful explosions! Splatters (or should that be 'splashes'?) of graphical gore are included, constantly reminding us that in war, people just don't die in one piece. It's all humorously done, but Cannon Fodder did cause minor ripples upon its initial release. Maybe this was due to the fact that the screams of wounded soldiers can be silenced by sending a few more bullets their way? I dunno – some people eh?!

Forget the controversy, because when it comes to the crunch, Cannon Fodder is simply an extremely playable arcade shoot'em-up. This time though, it's a shoot'em-up that requires the use of a brain.

"FORGET THE CONTROVERSY, BECAUSE WHEN IT COMES TO THE CRUNCH, CANNON FODDER IS SIMPLY AN EXTREMELY PLAYABLE ARCADE SHOOT'EM-UP. THIS TIME THOUGH, IT'S A SHOOT'EM-UP THAT REQUIRES THE USE OF A BRAIN"

As control goes, I've played nothing this intuitive in a long time. You can really 'feel' your way through the game once you've mastered control of your team, and the longer you play the sharper your hand-to-eye coordination becomes. Cannon Fodder is surprisingly atmospheric too. The sound effects draw you into the game and it is also worth noting the clever use of volume, used most noticeably in locations where there is rushing water. The attention to little details such as these result in a polished and professional product.

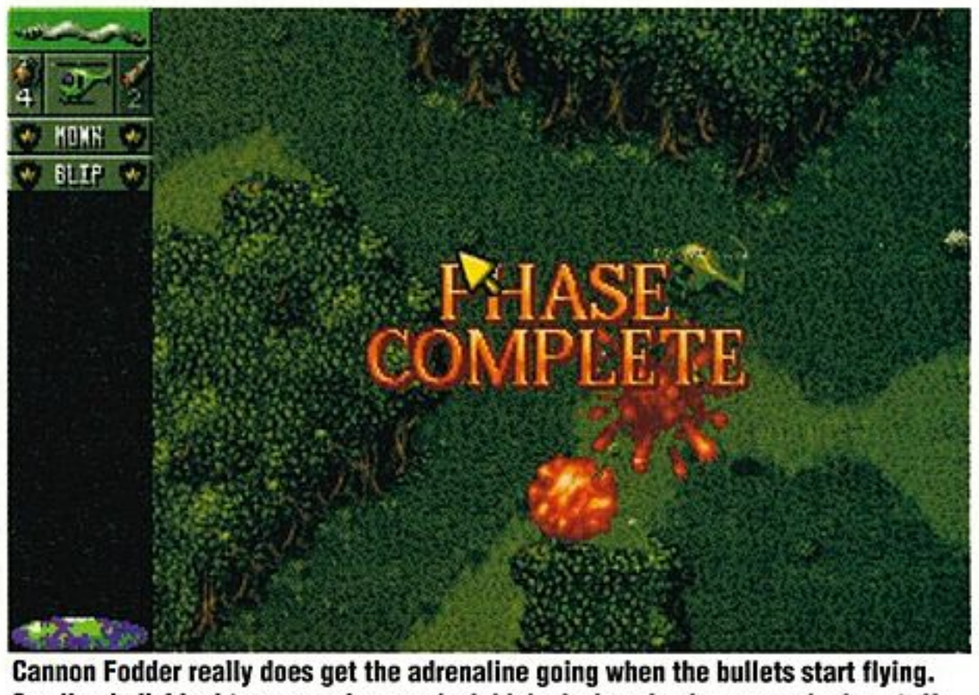
I mentioned earlier that I had played the Amiga version of this game prior to seeing the PC version, and without a doubt the Amiga version is the better-looking of the two. Of course the Amiga game can support smooth scrolling, sturdy mouse movement and complex sprite manipulation through use of its custom chips, but the PC version puts up a tremendous fight and is every bit as playable as the original incarnation. Anyhow, comparing the Amiga version to the PC version is not really the right thing to do – it should be judged on its own merits.

Of course, we're just Cannon Fodder snobs here at *PC Player* and many people reading this will never have played the original Amiga game. If you ARE Cannon Fodder illiterate, this is one gaming experience you just wouldn't want to miss.

SCORE ★★★★★

REVIEW

Sea mines, if placed in close proximity to each other, can be destroyed in a chain reaction of explosions. Minesweeping tactics such as this help clear the way of any danger



Cannon Fodder really does get the adrenaline going when the bullets start flying. Sending individual team members on 'suicide' missions is also very gripping stuff

CAPTAIN SENSIBLE

PC Player recently spoke to Sensible co-founder Jon Hare about Cannon Fodder, controversy and the Commodore 64.

PC The PC conversion of Cannon Fodder hasn't been done in-house has it? Can you tell us a bit about the people that have undertaken the task?

JON *AVME had already done Sensible Soccer and Mega-lo-Mania before so we're used to working with them. They work from Batley in Yorkshire.*

PC Does the PC version of Cannon Fodder have any obvious enhancements over the Amiga version?

JON *There's a new intro sequence, the amount of colours in the graphics has been increased – nothing particularly outstanding.*

PC Are you planning any data disks or sequels at all?

JON *We're not ruling them out, but we're not planning them.*

PC What was all the controversy surrounding the initial release of the Amiga version?

JON *The main controversy was over the use of the poppy, which The British Legion owned, which we didn't know at the time. I don't know...who cares? (Laughs.)*

PC What was your reaction to their complaints – was it disbelief?

JON *The biggest disbelief was that they raised all these moral issues about how it was degrading to people who died in the war and how it was almost sacrilegious, then when we offered to change their poppy to a natural one and to give them a sum of money as compensation for their inconvenience, and the 'moral' issues (if there were any in the first place) seemed to disappear in a puff of smoke.*

PC Can I print that?

JON *Can you print it? Erm...if you put 'allegedly' at the end! (More laughs!)*

PC Did you consider a Super VGA version of Cannon Fodder?

JON *I don't know. That's something that AVME have had to consider.*

PC Yourself and Chris Yates have been in and around the industry for nearly nine years now. Are you still as enthusiastic about games development now as you were in the early days of computer entertainment?

JON *Oh yes, but we're enthusiastic about different things. Obviously you don't get the excitement of getting your first game signed-up and coming home with the cheque. It doesn't matter how big the cheque is now – the cheque's somehow not very exciting anymore. You know, you just get annoyed if you don't get it!*

As far as games are concerned; if something goes really well – if something clicks into place the first time, it's always a buzz. It doesn't matter – if you're playing music it's a buzz, if you're writing games it's a buzz. I guess what's happening is now that we're bigger it becomes more complicated a process. Yes, you can appreciate something coming together, but the next thing you know there's another problem to deal with. The amount of problems you have to encounter all the time takes away the enjoyment.

PC Is Sensible getting a bit sick of producing playable and engrossing games while many other software companies seem to be satisfied making pots of money from unplayable 'multi-media' CD games? Do you have any plans to fall slave to the great CD-ROM god?

JON *We're planning to produce a CD game which is funny. To be honest it's very near the knuckle and it's an extremely 18 certificate game – there are a few concepts in there that some people may view as very 'immoral', if you like.*

Some people might also argue that it's not grown-up at all, that it's the opposite. The whole audience, like yourself, like us, like everybody – a lot of gamesplayers are in their twenties and thirties now. There is a market there for sophisticated adult titles, a market that's not predominantly just kids – especially with CD-ROM games. OK, you're going to have to be careful with Mega Drive games and stuff, but there is a mature audience out there who deserve better.

JON HARE
MODEST BUT TRUTHFUL

Sensible Software not only possesses plenty of talent, but its humour and character have earned it such a well-respected reputation throughout the software industry that virtually anything it lends its hand to will be a roaring success. Not that I want Sensible to feel pressured or anything!

PC To change the subject slightly, do you still play any of the old CBM64 games anymore?

JON *The last time we put on a CBM64 was about a year ago. To play...what was it? Actually, I think it was Wizball. Yes, I played it right through to the end.*

What was really sad was that we built an arcade machine with a '64 in it that would automatically load up any of our games. That was about five years ago. While we were one day fiddling with the joystick on the cabinet to get it working, one of the tubes got nudged and it blew up. It was all very sad – it was an old Asteroids machine.

PC What do you think of the software industry now compared to the old Spectrum and CBM industry of years gone by?

JON *I very much agree with Gary Penn (ex-editor of the legendary Zzap!64, now a freelance writer) really, in that he says that there is no innovation anymore.*

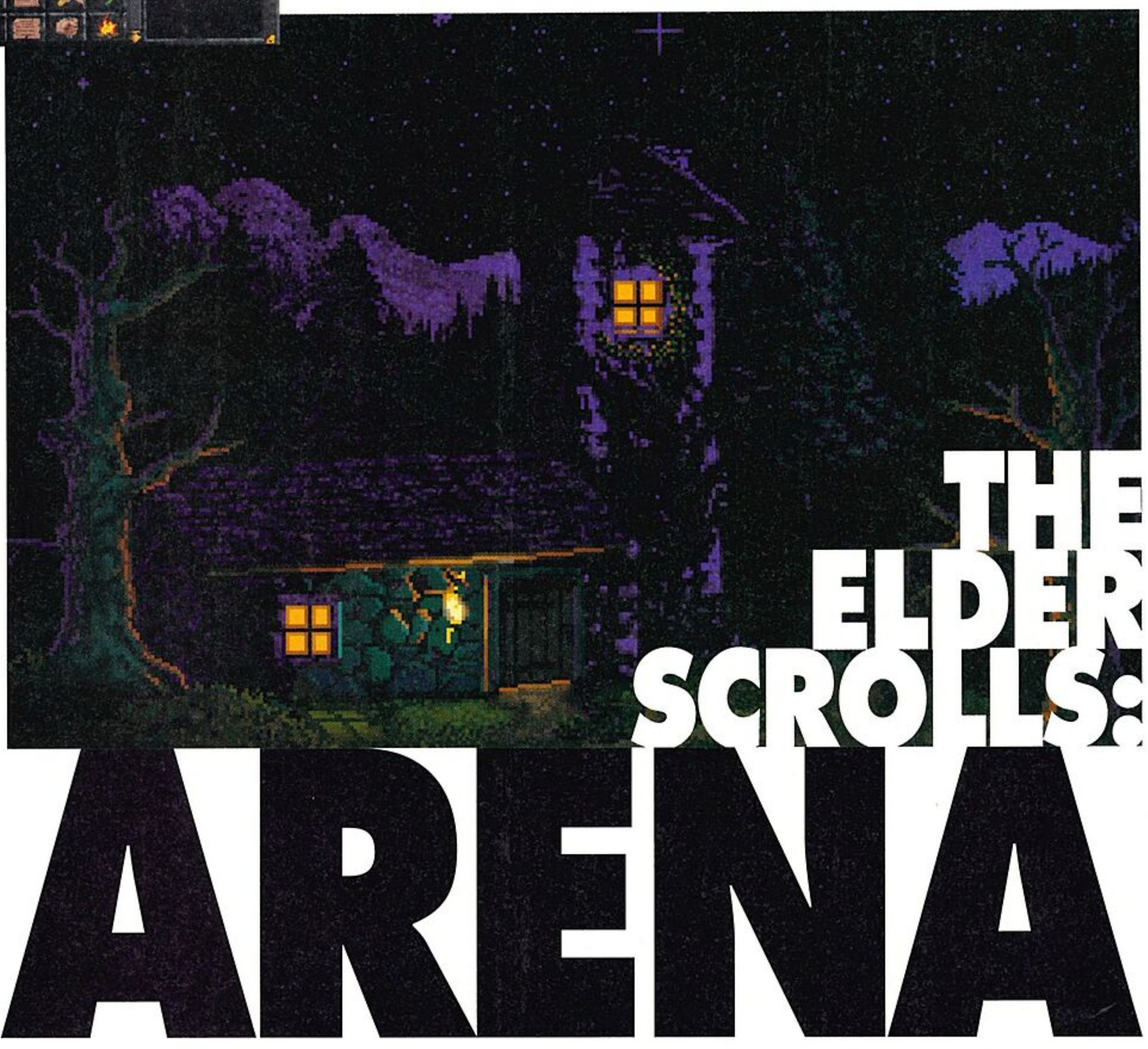
PC What was the last innovative piece of software that you can think of then?

JON *Well, there are things that come out all the time which are innovative, so in a way I'm wrong. Lemmings was innovative when it came out. Another World was innovative too. We do stuff occasionally that is innovative.* ■

REVIEW

If you hear a nearby growl there's a good chance that you're about to be attacked. Also, here's a tip – if you notice any HD access once inside a dungeon, you're almost certainly going to be approached by a monster

US DEVELOPMENT HOUSE BETHESDA HAS BEEN VERY BUSY OF LATE. ITS LATEST TITLE IS A 3D RPG TO RIVAL EVEN THE ULTIMA UNDERWORLD SERIES OF GAMES.



THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA

REVIEW

PRODUCT
The Elder Scrolls: Arena

SOFTWARE HOUSE
US Gold

PRICE
£45.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 4Mb Ram, 386 (33Mhz) or better, VGA, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Pro Audio Spectrum, Aria Chip Set, Gravis Ultra Sound, Ensoniq Soundscape and compatible Sound Cards

by Paul Mellinson

THE Emperor of Tamriel has been imprisoned by Imperial Battle Mage Jagar Tharn. Years of magic misuse has transformed the once-trusted mage into a feared enemy of the state, and anyone who dares question his absolute authority is condemned to a slow, painful death. As a loyal subject of the former emperor you have also been locked away deep within the city's dungeons.

Inside the slimy cell your eyes become heavier and you yearn for rest. Suddenly a great light fills the cell – an apparition of Ria Silmane, a state sorcerer recently killed by Tharn's minions appears. She explains that your quest is to rescue the emperor from the dimension in which Jagar Tharn has imprisoned him, by recovering the eight pieces of the Staff of Chaos.

Ria Silmane dissipates into the air and the room glows dark once again. An itching sensation behind your eyes reminds you of Ria's presence, but more immediate matters (ie that you're still locked deep within the dungeon) require your attention. This is where the game starts proper. A locked gate is your first obstacle and the conveniently placed ruby key is the solution.

"A LOCKED GATE IS YOUR FIRST OBSTACLE AND THE CONVENIENTLY PLACED RUBY KEY IS THE SOLUTION"

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

There are over 20 different creatures roaming the wilds of Tamriel. Lower-level monsters are really the whipping boys of the Arena scene, but make no mistake about it – become complacent and you will soon be overpowered by your enemies. Here is just a small selection of the creatures you will have to face:

GHOUL

GOBLIN

ICE GOLEM

SKELETON

SPIDER

WOLF

Your first few problems will allow you to acquaint yourself with the player interface – picking things up, hand-to-hand combat and running around the place is all handled using a mouse. The movement system can be likened to the Ultima Underworld games. As you look at the screen you will notice that the mouse cursor can change into one of any 10 different cursors; either an arrow, a sword or a cross-hair. When the cursor is an arrow and the left mouse button is depressed, your character will walk in the direction designated by that arrow. For example, if you move the cursor to the top-left of the screen it will transform into a left-pointing arrow – now hold down the left mouse button and your character will walk left. The further towards the edge of the screen your arrow gets, the faster you will walk.

When the cursor is a sword it can be used to click on any of the icons found at the bottom of the screen. More on these icons later. Finally, when the cursor turns into a cross-hair (in the centre portion of the screen) it can be used to interact with any person, object or place you are currently in contact with.

Placing the cross-hair on another person and clicking the left mouse button will allow you to talk to them, pickpocket them or cast a spell on them (depending upon which mode your cursor is in – normal, steal or cast). Locked doors and chests can be opened using the cross-hair and if they are locked the computer will give your character an assessment of the lock and your chances of picking it. Any treasure found lying around can be examined using the cross-hair and if there are any items worth having, a quick double-click will ensure that they are collected.

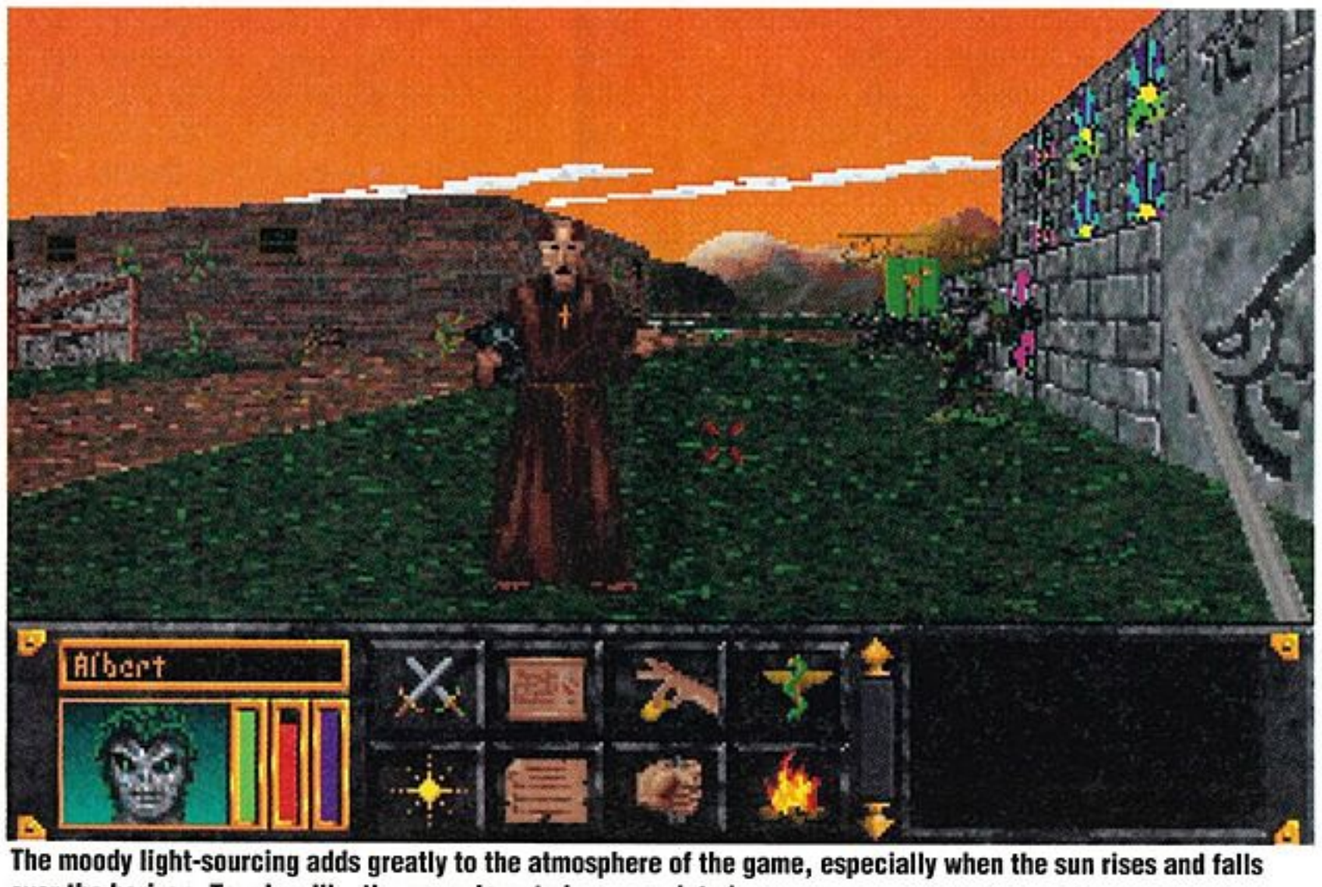
Jumping is accomplished by pressing the right mouse button while the left button is also depressed. If you are standing still at the time you will jump straight up into the air, whereas if you are running you will take a broader jump. The distance you can jump is determined by your strength and the speed at which you are running. Since characters with a higher speed rating can run faster, they will also be able to jump farther.

"YOUR FIRST FEW PROBLEMS WILL ALLOW YOU TO ACQUAINT YOURSELF WITH THE PLAYER INTERFACE - PICKING THINGS UP, HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT AND RUNNING AROUND THE PLACE IS ALL HANDLED USING A MOUSE. THE MOVEMENT SYSTEM CAN BE LIKENED TO THE ULTIMA UNDERWORLD GAMES"

As I mentioned earlier, there are also a number of useful icons placed within reach at the bottom of the screen. Working top-left to bottom-right they are as follows; attack, automap, steal, player status, cast, logbook, use and camp.

If you choose to camp outside the city walls, you put yourself at risk from attack by nearby monsters, and even more so if you are trying to get some kip inside a dungeon. Raised plinths are the safest places to sleep – if you sleep on the floor the monsters will pick up your scent and disturb your slumber, therefore entering a dungeon with no raised plinths is a fraught experience. If there is nowhere you can sleep in relative safety, there's no way your character can regain those all-important lost hit points!

I wake from my slumber to find a hoard of evil goblins scratching at my head with their axes. Let's see how they like the taste of cold steel...



The moody light-sourcing adds greatly to the atmosphere of the game, especially when the sun rises and falls over the horizon. Touches like these are here to be appreciated

Cutting through the fog can be a hazardous experience, especially if you're outside the confines of the city walls. Keep an eye on your compass and try not to become too disorientated

REVIEW

The programmers have a real sense of humour and it shows throughout the game. You will encounter many strange and eccentric characters on your travels, as you can see here

ALTER EGO

ATTACK

CAMP

CAST

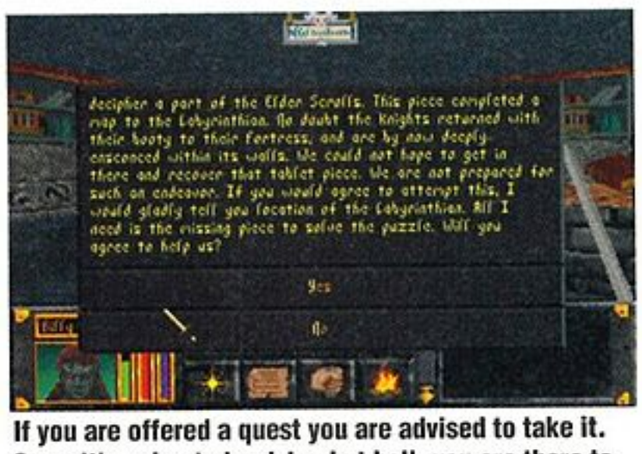
LOG BOOK

MAP

STATUS

STEAL

USE



If you are offered a quest you are advised to take it. Sure, it's going to be risky, but hell, you are there to take risks

➤ As with most role-playing games of this type, it is important to choose the right character for the job. The Elder Scrolls; Arena is a single-character adventure in that you control an individual rather than an entire team. There are two ways in which the player is able to choose their final character, the first of which is to generate a character using a psychometric test – you know, one of those questionnaires that prospective employers sometimes decide to throw at you during a job interview! You are asked 10 questions and must answer a, b or c to progress. A number of soul-searching questions determine the outcome and the computer suggests a suitable character class. You don't have to stick with the suggestion, but the test is novel and fun nonetheless.

If you're after a specific class of character you can simply select one from the list provided. There are three class groups, each with six character types to choose from. Thief classes such as burglars, assassins, thieves, rogues, acrobats and bards are agile, cunning and speedy. What this class of character lacks in combat it makes up for in various nefarious ways.

As you would expect, warrior classes are highly versatile in combat. Whether you choose to play the part of a knight, a ranger, an archer, a warrior, a monk (!) or a barbarian, you are always assured of competence in the field of warfare.

Mage classes possess the power of magic. While magic users can sometimes lose out in hand-to-hand combat (especially when you consider the sometimes crippling armour restrictions), they excel in the manipulation of offensive and defensive magic. Mages, sorcerers, healers, battle mages, spellswords and nightblades all have their own particular character quirks and, with experience, can become formidable fighting forces.

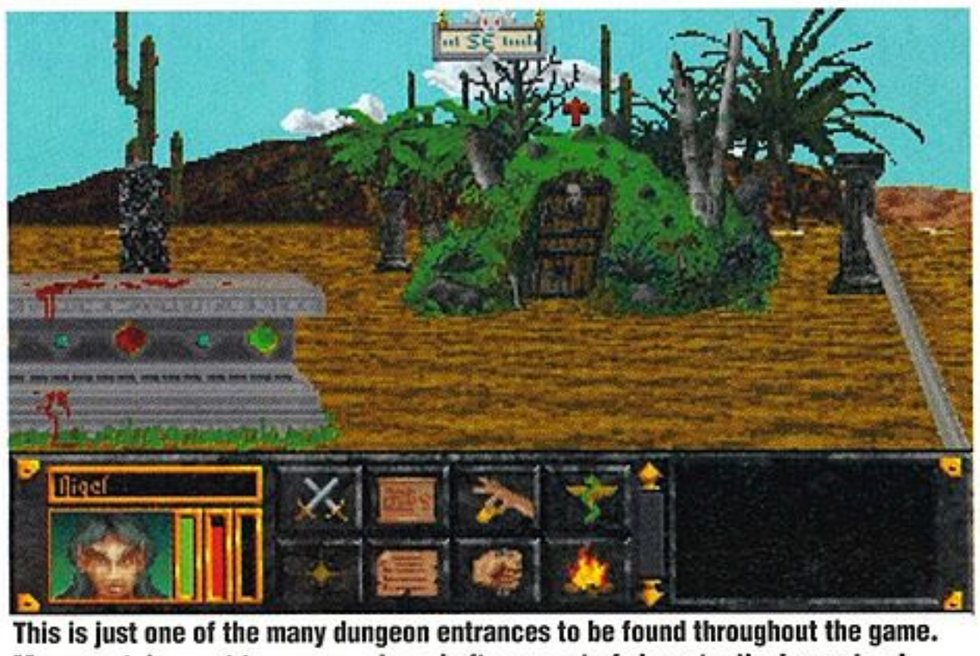
Choosing the class of your character does not restrict the player's ability to progress through the game – the programmers have ensured that however you decide to live your life in the game world, your character still has a chance to succeed. It goes without saying that mages will have to approach the game in a different way to the life of a thief or a warrior, and this character versatility adds excitement to the proceedings and allows much experimentation on the part of the player.

"CHOOSING THE CLASS OF YOUR CHARACTER DOES NOT RESTRICT THE PLAYER'S ABILITY TO PROGRESS THROUGH THE GAME - THE PROGRAMMERS HAVE ENSURED THAT HOWEVER YOU DECIDE TO LIVE YOUR LIFE IN THE GAME WORLD, YOUR CHARACTER STILL HAS A CHANCE TO SUCCEED"

Character selection doesn't end here though. Next, the player is invited to choose a race for their character. The non-player characters (NPCs) sometimes react differently depending on your race – yes, a fantasy role-player that recognises the problems of racism! There are eight character races, each hailing from a different province of the empire. For more race details see the box entitled Racial Awareness.

With each class and race of character also comes a set number of so-called ability modifiers. Basically, what these ability modifiers do is affect the performance and well-being of the character in certain situations. Strength not only affects ability in hand-to-hand combat, but it also determines the maximum weight of objects that can be carried by the player before fatigue penalties are imposed. Intelligence increases the magical power of spell-casters if it is kept high, Will influences resistance against magical attack, High Agility points present the player with a better chance of actually hitting an opponent in battle, while Speed affects how your character turns, runs and performs in battle. Endurance has some effect on hit point (HP) totals and also on the rate of healing. A good amount of Personality points add charisma to a character which in turn can affect how other people react to your presence, which is useful for bartering or prising information from them. Finally there's sheer Luck to consider – the greater your luck, the better your chances of success in all walks of life. All of these factors contribute to your general well-being.

Weapons and armour also come into play in true role-playing style. Unfortunately, not all of the classes are allowed to wield the most powerful weapons or wear the best armour. Magic users cannot use most found weapons and metallic armour is also a no-no. Because of their agility, thieves are prevented from wearing restrictive clothing – leather armour only for these guys. Only warrior class fighters are comfortable with both offensive and defensive material goods, and this is an important consideration that must be borne in mind early on in the game.



This is just one of the many dungeon entrances to be found throughout the game. Many contain great treasures, plus a hefty amount of sharp-toothed monsters!

On your quest for the Staff of Chaos you'll have to defeat the dungeons of many evil lords. These should present a challenge to even the most experienced RPG player

REVIEW

A WORLD AWAY

As you may no doubt have noticed, The Elder Scrolls; Arena is a 3D, texture-mapped role-playing game very much in the mould of Shadowcaster and the Ultima Underworld games. Apart from the usual inventory and map screens, everything the player does is conveyed in the main 3D play area.

In any of the 400 cities, towns and villages you will find numerous towering buildings within the confines of the city walls. Scattered throughout the (rather box-like) architecture of the dwellings, the player can also find useful havens such as inns, churches, equipment stores and mage's guilds. At night the streets can be a dangerous place to hang out, so the inns are useful for sleeping the midnight hours away. Not that I'd recommend it, but your character can also drink the night away until they can no longer stand (you CAN get drunk!). If you're a little short of cash there may also be a few useful jobs to be found if you meet the right people.

Finding your way around large cities can be a bit of a nightmare at times. If you're looking for a specific place on the map, the best thing to do is to approach one of the many friendly NPCs that walk the city streets. Although you will only encounter them during the day (they need their sleep too!), they are always willing to give directions or let you in on all the latest gossip.

Bartering skills are incorporated into the game so that useful equipment, spells and potions can be added to your inventory at bargain prices. More expensive essentials necessitate dangerous expeditions to treasure-laden dungeons and crypts found outside the confines of the city. Stepping through the city gates will enable the player to explore the surrounding wilderness at their leisure. The wilderness can be a beautiful but dangerous place even during the daylight hours, and there are rich pickings for those adventurers brave enough to leave the relative safety of the city states in search of wealth.

"IF YOU'RE THAT WAY INCLINED, ARENA CAN BE PLAYED SOLELY AS A MEDIAEVAL ALTER-EGO SIMULATOR. YOU DON'T NECESSARILY HAVE TO TAKE ON THE MIGHT OF JAGAR THARN SO THAT THE EMPIRE MAY ONCE AGAIN BE FREE - YOU CAN LIVE THE LIFE OF YOUR CHOSEN CHARACTER AS YOU SEE FIT"

If you're that way inclined, Elder Scrolls can be played solely as a mediaeval alter-ego simulator. You don't necessarily HAVE to take on the might of Jagar Tharn so that the Empire may once again be free – you can live the life of your chosen character as you see fit. Eventually I suspect that this particular style of play may begin to pall, and the promise of fame, fortune and glory may tempt the player into meatier quests in search of the Staff of Chaos.

Inside the mage's guild the player can purchase useful magical items or even make their own spells using the unique spell-making menu. Beware though – the more powerful the spell, the more it will cost

Fog and snow combined really conjures up an incredible wintry atmosphere. Now if only you could see your breath...

Finding the eight pieces of this valuable artefact is no easy task. First, by gathering information and listening to rumours, you must track down the location of each piece, defeat the evil in their respective holdings and return the pieces to safe cities. Many sub-quests have also to be negotiated along the way, none of which are particularly easy for the inexperienced player. Vicious monsters roam above and below ground, making your life difficult at the best of times. The only way to deal with them is by mastering the art of combat – either hand-to-hand or through the use of magic. Killing monsters, exploring new places and completing quests increases the experience of the player character which in turn awards bonus points allowing ability modifications. Before tackling any of the harder dungeons I recommend building your character to at least the tenth level of experience! ➤

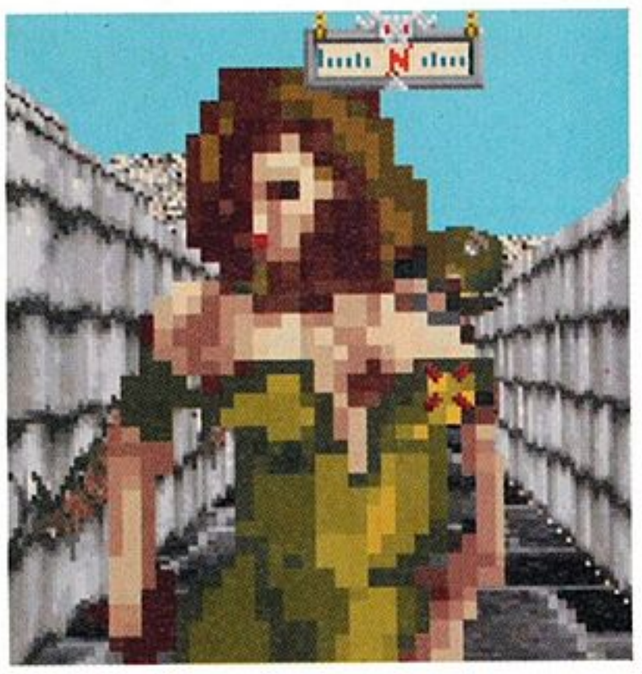
RACIAL AWARENESS

The Elder Scrolls; Arena is set in the sprawling empire of Tamriel. Tamriel itself is divided into nine provinces with each province, bar the central Imperial Province, home to an individual character race.

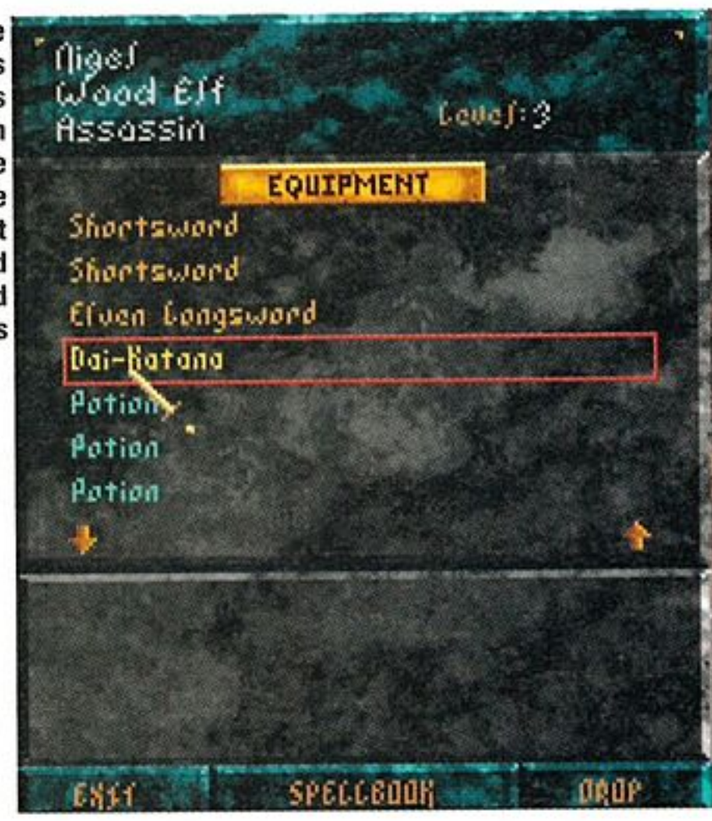
REVIEW

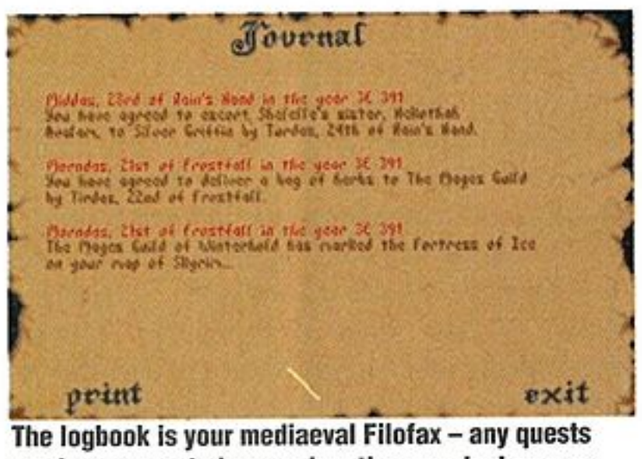
This irritating character falls at the hands of my war hammer. The range of held weapons available to the player is a warrior's wet dream!

The cursor fails to assess my chances of unlocking this particular chest, which is a real pity



Every aspect of the player's status is covered on this screen. Here we can see a full list of the ability modifiers, the armour and equipment currently being used by the character and armour ratings





The logbook is your mediaeval Filofax – any quests you have accepted or any locations marked on your map by other characters are all detailed here

➤ The Elder Scrolls; Arena is not the prettiest 3D role-player I've encountered. The graphics appear a little rough around the edges (gaps sometimes appear between the polygons) and the texture maps do lack detail. The level of detail can be altered to speed the game up, but on a 486 DX2 there are no problems at all – the game fair flies along. As I pointed out earlier, many of the buildings and structures are a bit too box-like by today's standards, but this isn't a major gripe (maybe, since seeing Doom, this due to a bit of snobbery on my part!).

Fortunately, the light-sourcing and depth-cueing easily make up for this, especially when the sun sets and the dark closes in. Fog, snow and rain all add to the superb atmosphere and the subtle but apt music really does draw the player into the game. Sound effects too are of top quality, with the growls and grunts of nearby monsters adding to the intensity.

Presentation comes second place to the game itself. Arena is a HUGE game, there's no doubt about it. We are reliably informed that there are literally hundreds of hours of playing time to be found in the hostile continent of Tamriel. We all know that size doesn't mean anything – it's what you do with the thing that counts, and Arena has enough scope to keep even the most jaded RPG fanatic happy for many, many months (with the sluggish saving/loading system no doubt doubling normal playing time). The inclusion of hundreds of friendly NPCs is definitely a step in the right direction – endless combat can become tiresome so it can be heartening to meet a friendly face from time to time. In bigger cities it is also rewarding to become part of the community and to walk around with the locals. You see, this is what computer role-playing is all about; interaction, freedom and variety – not about seeing how many magic spells you can fit into the program or having four party members instead of just the one.

With The Elder Scrolls; Arena, Bethesda has at least taken a risk and gone off at a slightly different tangent to many other RPGs presently clogging up the PC marketplace. It may not look the best and it may not be the most original RPG to date, but at least it's heading in the right direction and I applaud it for that.

SCORE ★★★★

"WE ARE RELIABLY INFORMED THAT THERE ARE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF HOURS OF PLAYING TIME TO BE FOUND IN THE HOSTILE CONTINENT OF TAMRIEL. WE ALL KNOW THAT SIZE DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING - IT'S WHAT YOU DO WITH THE THING THAT COUNTS, AND ARENA HAS ENOUGH SCOPE TO KEEP EVEN THE MOST JADED RPG FANATIC HAPPY FOR MANY, MANY MONTHS"

Strangers in the night, exchanging glances. Nocturnal humans that aren't out to attack and rob you are quite rare throughout the game

EXPERT OPINION

REVIEW

WELL, *dip me in bat shit! A computer RPG with a 360-degree game engine that lets you interact with everyone you meet, and you only have to kill some of them. Whoopee!*

But seriously folks, there's still a long way to go before computer RPGing will get close to the tabletop scene and Elder Scrolls; Arena is only very slightly more ground-breaking than its predecessors. Most of the character and campaign aspects of the game are taken directly from TSR's Advanced Dungeons and Dragons with a few features, such as the Spell Maker, taken from various other fantasy systems to make the gameplay a little more attractive.

Elder Scrolls; Arena is definitely a game for those long, cold, dark winter evenings when your fellow role-players have been snowed in and don't have the bottle to venture out for your weekly session. ■

Dave Renton is the editor of the dedicated role-playing magazine Role-Player Independant. In his time Dave has played hundreds of RPGs and is a mine of information when you actually get to pick his brains. And pick his brains we did!

INTO THE ARENA

PC Player spoke to Elder Scrolls' designer and producer VJ Lakshman to find out more about the game.

PC When did Arena go into development and how long has it taken from start to finish?

VJ *We went into development last January and it's essentially taken us about 13 months.*

PC Is Arena aimed at the more experienced role-player?

VJ *I think anyone can play it. It's very easy to understand but also very in-depth – I think more experienced role-players might get more out of it, but anyone can play it.*

PC Did the finished version of Arena end up pretty much as planned or were there any major alterations made during development?

VJ *Arena was originally going to be a multi-character game with up to four people in your party, but in the end we decided to stick with the single-character game. The reason behind this decision was that logistically speaking it would have been difficult to implement the level of AI that we had originally intended. That is the only thing which didn't get in that we really wanted to have in there, but also because of this a lot of the quests had to change a little bit because you couldn't count on having up to four people with you.*

PC How long would it take the most experienced Arena player to make their way through the entire game?

VJ *I can play the game and I could probably finish it in a week, and that would be playing it for probably 10 hours a day. I'm the designer so I know where everything is and the solution to every riddle, so I'd estimate that the average person would probably have to play for 100 hours.*

PC I was pleasantly surprised by your approach to character generation – the psychometric test idea. Why did you decide to implement this into the game?

VJ *I personally like to play myself in a game and I'm always intrigued to see what I might be like in this kind of world. I wanted to give people a chance to go through that as well, and also give them the chance to select a specific character that they would like to play. A similar system had been used before (in the Ultima 7 series), but the questions were very 'cut and dry' – you were either good or evil in the way you answered them. In this game there's really no right or wrong answer and I think our version is more of a psychological profile rather than a device to create either a good, bad or neutral character.*

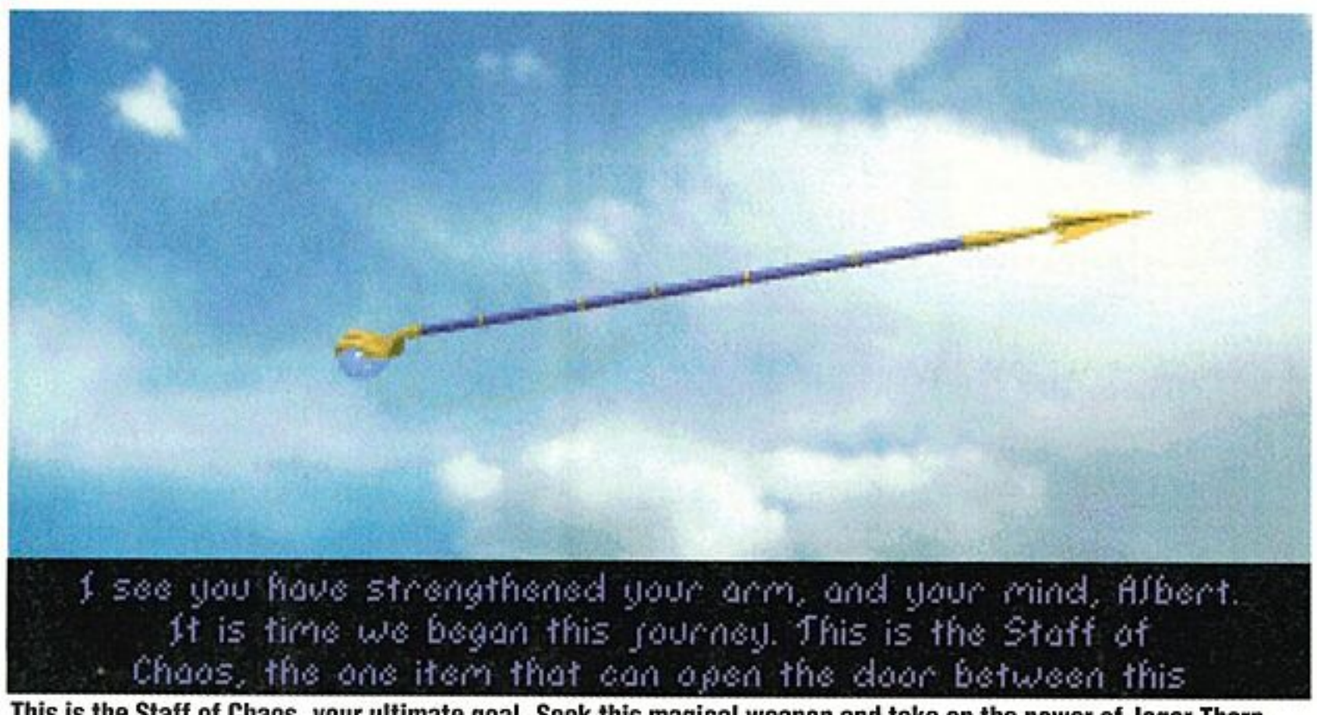
PC I understand that you are planning a number of future chapters to improve and expand the Elder Scrolls' campaign setting. Can you tell us about the sort of add-ons that we can look forward to?

VJ *The chapter that we are working on at the moment is called Mournhold and it will take place in the province of Morrowind. It will be more of a Gothic horror adventure, and now that we've already laid the foundations of the Arena world we're no longer going to go for the vastness or the breadth of the original, instead trying to get a lot deeper in content. I think that each chapter will flesh-out a particular province to make the game much deeper and more interactive.* ■

Searching dead bodies is one way of accumulating wealth. More powerful enemies usually carry more gold pieces if you manage to kill them first

Your demise is greeted by the gloating of Jagar Tharn. A sign of insecurity in all megalomaniacal dictators I'll wager

Unfortunately the loading and saving process can become rather tiresome because it does tend to take quite some time. Installing a smartdrive before playing the game can speed loading times



This is the Staff of Chaos, your ultimate goal. Seek this magical weapon and take on the power of Jagar Tharn and his armies

REVIEW

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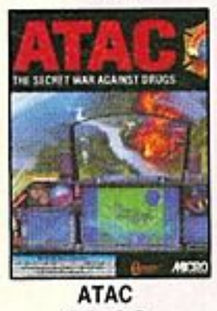

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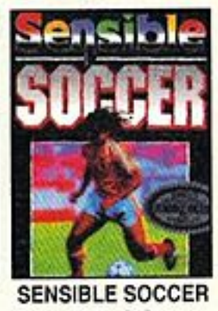

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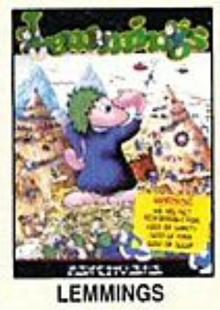

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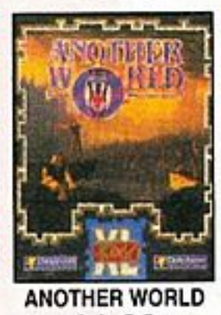

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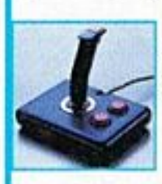

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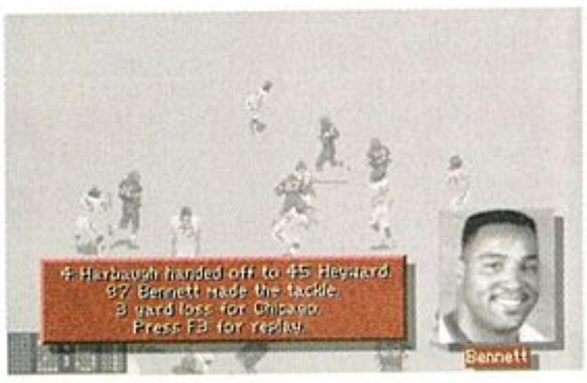
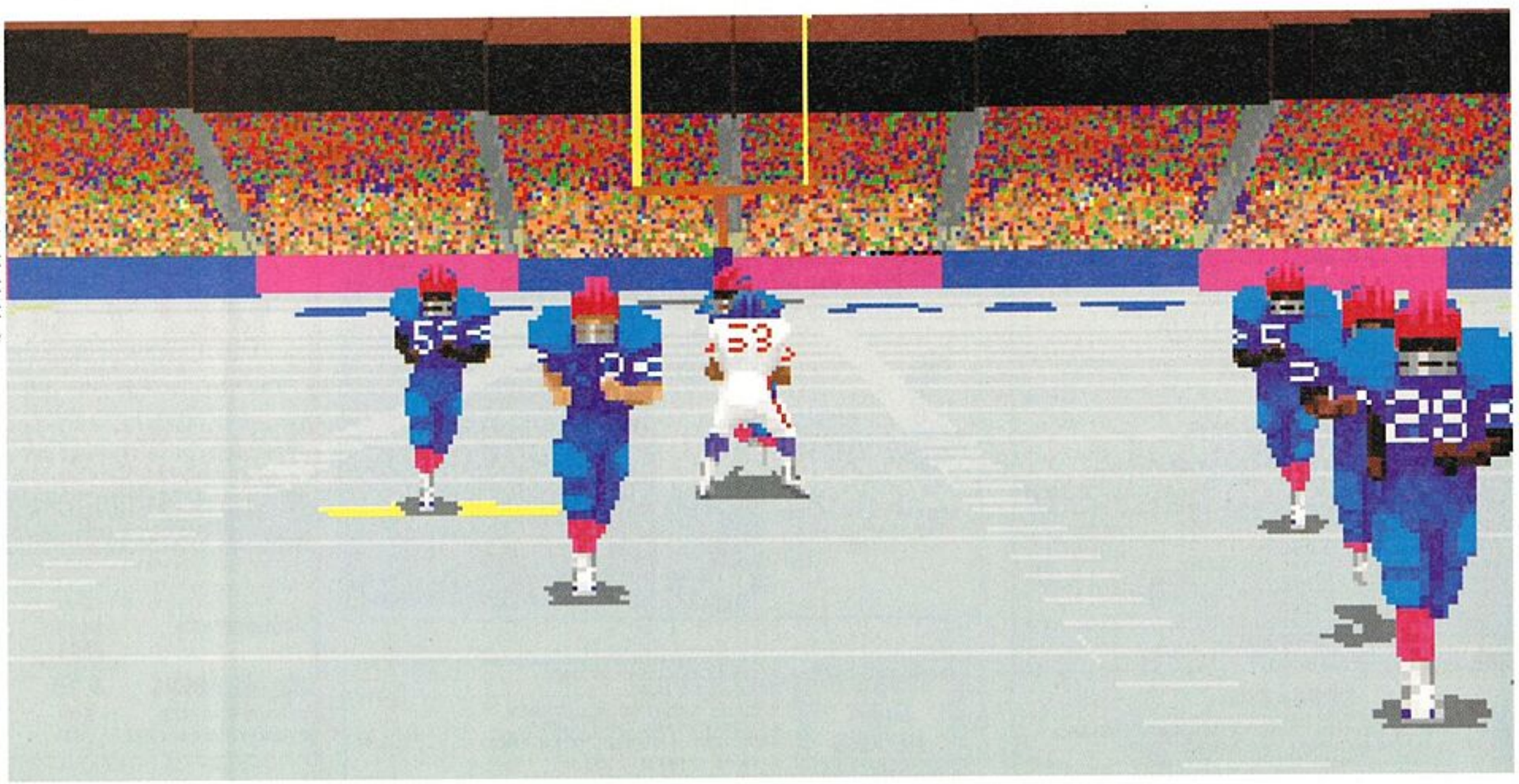


After some of the more exciting plays, the commentator will appear to let you know in more detail just what went wrong (or right) with your manoeuvre

ALL OF A SUDDEN, OR AT LEAST IT SEEMS THAT WAY, THE PC HAS BECOME A SURROGATE MOTHER TO A HOST OF AMERICAN FOOTBALL GAMES.

CAN ACCOLADE ADD ANYTHING NEW TO AN ALREADY OVERSATURATED GENRE?

UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS



The action replay facilities from UR are very similar to those found in a lot of flight sims. Fast forward, slow motion and frame advance are all included, thus allowing you to view either your greatest goals or your worst defensive blunders at your leisure

PRODUCT
Unnecessary Roughness

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Accolade

PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 4Mb RAM, 386, VGA

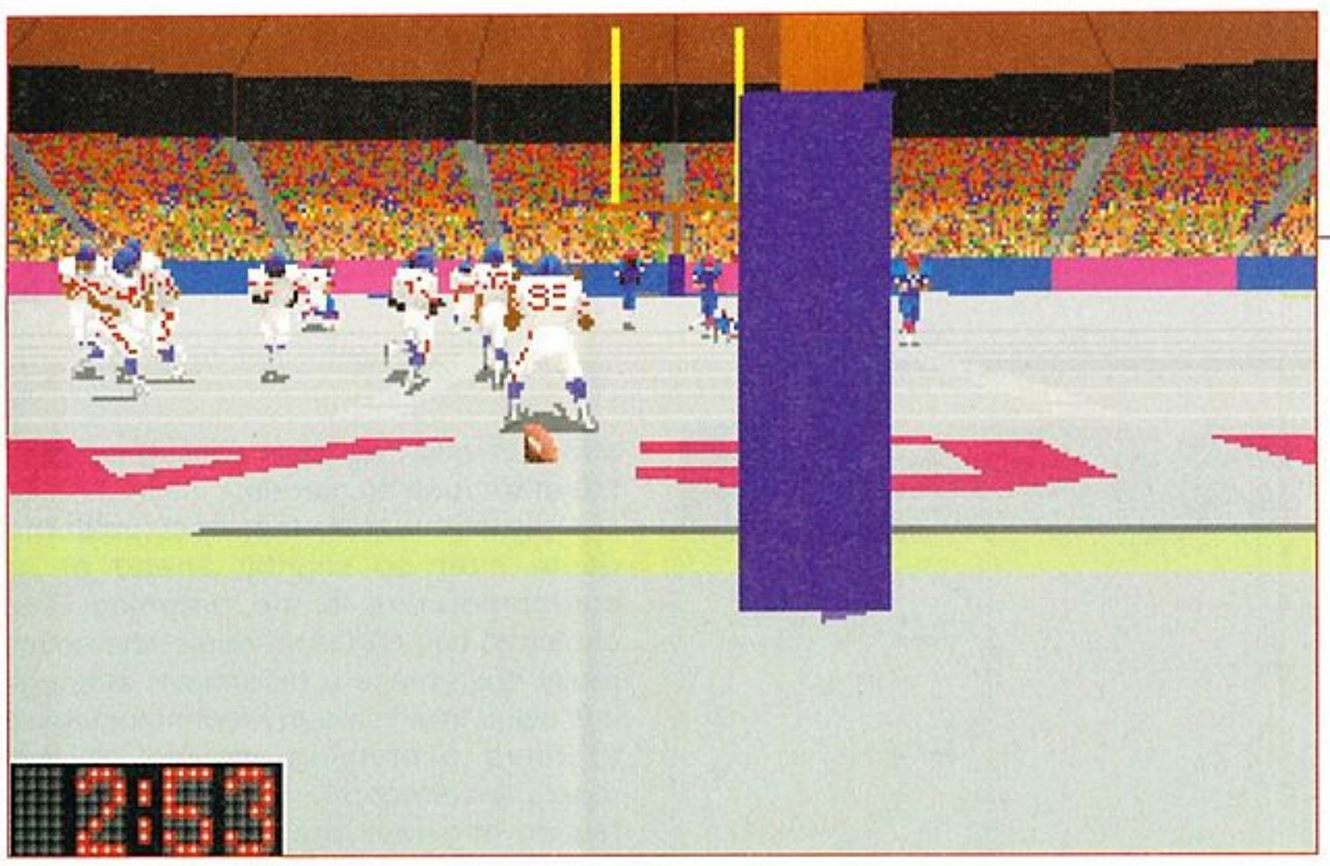
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Joystick, Mouse, SVGA

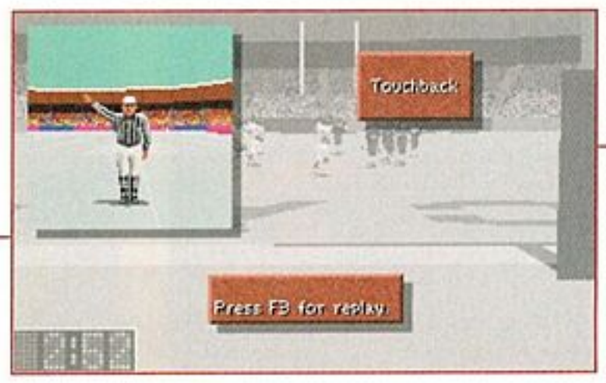
REVIEW

THERE was a time when American football was known as nothing more than a game of Rugby with shoulder pads. The British didn't really understand the game, thinking it to be a poor relative of that game the Welsh hold so dear (although judging by their current state of play, not dear enough). Large men with names like the Fridge, with positions such as quarterbacks, running backs and wide receivers, all ran around a field wearing what amounted to Kevlar battle armour more usually seen on SWAT officers. Then one day all that changed when Channel 4, in its infinite wisdom, decided that the ignorance towards this sporting equivalent of apple pie had to stop. The British were about to be introduced to the tactics, the skill and the sheer brutishness of American football, and that was that.

Of course all this, as they say, is history, but I have often wondered how things would have turned out if Channel 4 had decided to buy up the rights to some other slice of Americana, such as monster truck racing or rodeo riding. Would the PC now be swamped with computer-generated images of people holding on for dear life while a mad, rabid horse tried its level best to throw some unfortunate soul off its back and face down into the dirt? Somehow I don't think so, but what is the fascination with American footy and,

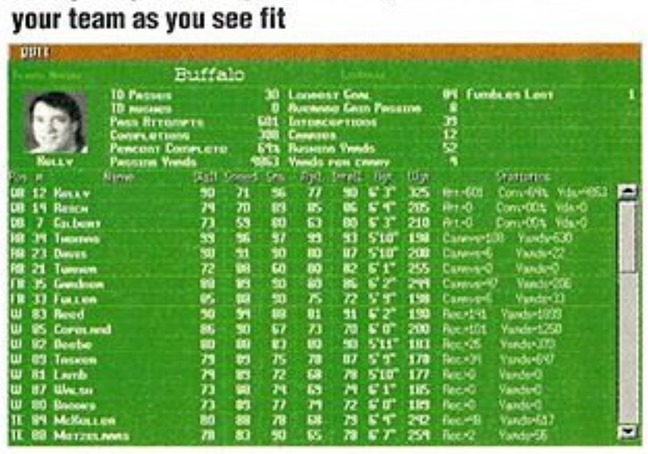
"WHAT IS THE FASCINATION WITH AMERICAN FOOTY AND, MORE TO THE POINT, WHY DO SOFTWARE COMPANIES SEEM INTENT ON RELEASING A COMPUTER VERSION OF A GAME THAT DOESN'T DIFFER IN THE SLIGHTEST FROM ANY OF THE OTHERS RELEASED?"



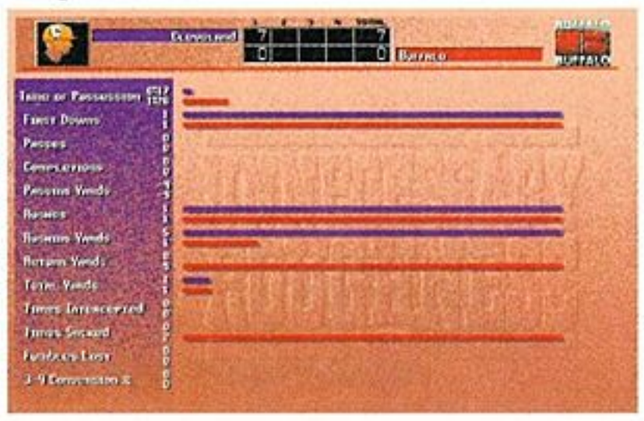


The touchback rule comes into play when the kick-off from one team is caught by a member of the opposing side in their own end zone. The ref signals his intentions to the linesmen (and the rest of the world), and play is restarted from the 20 yard line

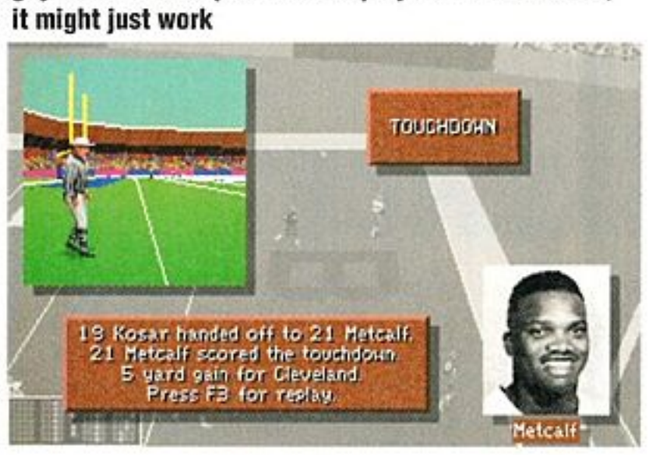
Each player in the team has an individual stat screen that gives you the information you need to get the best out of your team. As an added bonus, you can change any of the figures in the game to customise your team as you see fit



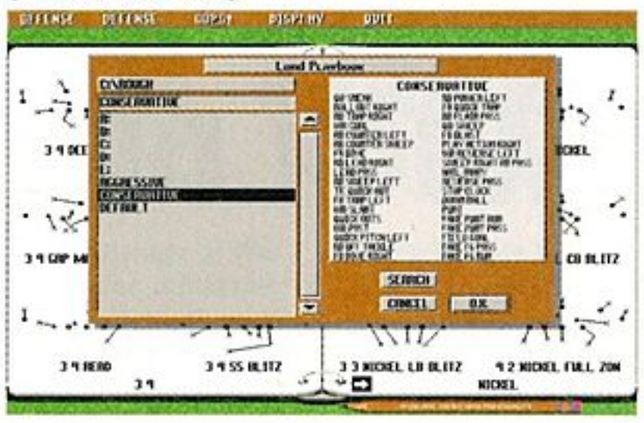
Statistics play an important part in American football, so after every touchdown a stats screen gives all the vital information recorded during the game and presents it in an easy to read, low calorie chart-type thing



With only a few yards to go, it looks as though now would be the perfect time to execute the 'get the big guy to run at the quarterback' play. You never know, it might just work



Like most American football games on the market today, UR comes with a comprehensive amount of plays already installed from which you can take your pick. Choose wisely



more to the point, why do software companies seem intent on releasing a computer version of a game that doesn't differ in the slightest from any of the others released?

Accolade has decided that the time is now right to jump on the Superbowl bandwagon and make its contribution to the world of PC football games. Does it offer anything new? Are all the players and teams from the real leagues there in their entirety? What about all those complex-looking plays that never seem to work – are they all included? Well, the answers are; not really, sort of, and then some. "Que?", I hear you ask. Well, while not offering anything new, there are some touches that do make this just a little different from the other games on the market at the moment, although not much.

Unnecessary Roughness (UR) is a football game that, unlike the offering from DI reviewed in issue five, concentrates more of its efforts towards graphics and an arcade style of play than most of the others.

For a start, the game supports SVGA running at 640 x 480 x 256 colours, and this makes an astounding difference to the way that the game is perceived (see 'Does It Really Make That Much Difference?' box out). Everything is crisp and clear, but the downside to this is that even on a fast computer (DX2) everything is a bit sluggish. After the initial viewing, I doubt many people will want to play with this reduction in speed and will revert back to the normal VGA standard.

OK, so after the graphics, what's next? American football games seem to live or die on the amount of plays that they have. A game with relatively few will soon lose its appeal, no matter how good it looks. UR contains a plethora of different strategies that can all be accessed at any stage of the game. Each playbook comes complete with pre-planned tactics to pick from, and most of them actually seem to work. If you choose a play whereby the wide receiver crosses to the left and makes a run up the field, then after the snap the wide receiver will do just that, making play a lot more tactical and less of a hit and miss affair. Choose the wrong play and you will find yourself forced back to your end zone.

The computer opposition is clever and reacts well to most situations, making the most of its opportunities. This level of AI appears to be stronger here than in the other games on the market, but in some cases there seems to be no way through the melee of bodies that stand between you and a goal – no matter how well you choose your strategy.

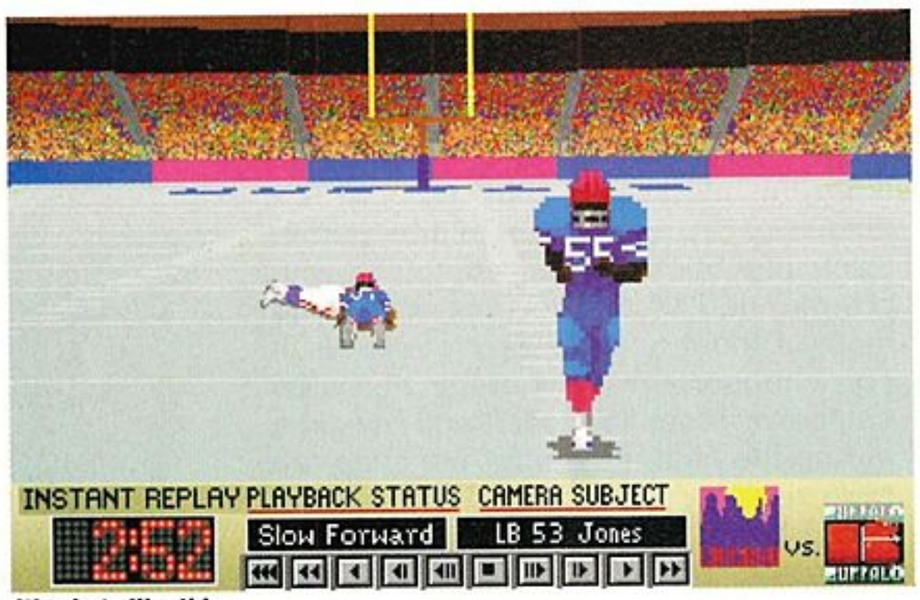
As well as the pre-planned plays, an editor allows you to start from scratch and do things as you see fit. It's a simple tool to use, requiring you to position players individually, set their movements and their actions and then preview the play to see if it is going to work as well as you expected. These plays can be saved out and used in a game, although if it all goes wrong it may just cost you the match.

Accolade has managed to secure the rights to use real players' names and statistics in the game, giving you the chance to manage and play for your favourite team but, strangely enough, hasn't included actual teams. All the teams in the game are called by their city, so the Cowboys become plain old Dallas and the Dolphins lose their tag and revert back to Miami.

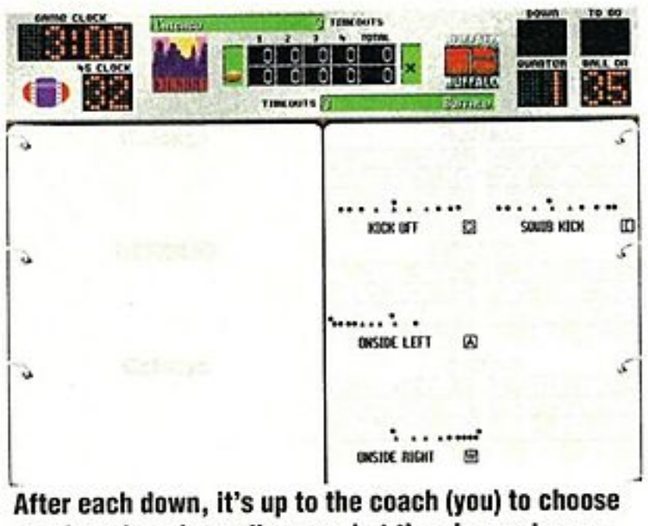
The inclusion of real statistics does go some way to making up for this though, as all the stats can be altered, giving freedom of control over all the players in the team. Weights, throwing and running distances, and a whole host of other facts and figures can be changed, meaning that you can see what would happen if you changed the Dolphins' quarterback from a 320 pound hulk into a 135 pound weakling. By the same token, a player's running ability could be altered to give you the edge over a team that was fast on its feet. ➤

"UR CONTAINS A PLETHORA OF DIFFERENT STRATEGIES THAT CAN ALL BE ACCESSED AT ANY STAGE OF THE GAME. EACH PLAYBOOK COMES COMPLETE WITH PRE-PLANNED TACTICS TO PICK FROM, AND MOST OF THEM ACTUALLY SEEM TO WORK"

REVIEW



It's shots like this that are really the final nail in the coffin for VGA. Roll on the time when SVGA really does become the standard resolution



After each down, it's up to the coach (you) to choose another play, depending on what the circumstances are at any given time

➤ Actual control of the game relies on the joystick, with all the passing and running plays being controlled by the player. Before the snap, a choice can be made as to which player to control. The player then controls this member of the team and must make all the running, passing and catching with no help from the computer. It is tricky at first, but after a while things start to gel and you soon find yourself playing with a certain panache that even Joe Montana would be proud of.

It's very hard to go the whole hog and recommend UR, not because it's a bad game...it isn't, but due to the fact that there are other American football games out there that offer the same plays, the same control methods and the same interpretation of America's favourite sport. Aside from the new plays that can be added and new graphics that can be used to depict the action, there is nothing unique about UR – after all there is really only one way to present a playable game of this type and that way has been utilised by all of the other football games.

The one feature that does push this game ever so slightly ahead of its contemporaries is the graphics. The choice to use SVGA to depict the action really does make a difference, although it is still a little too early technology-wise to have everything moving at that resolution smoothly enough to get the feeling of a fast moving football match across to the player.

If you are a football fan, then by all means take a look at Unnecessary Roughness. It plays well, has some very nice graphical touches and contains stats and plays enough to delight any fan of the sport. It really comes down to a choice between this and the Microprose effort, but I personally think that this just manages to edge NFL out of first place thanks to the better presentation and slightly improved playability. For the football fans out there, you've never had it so good.

"IT REALLY COMES DOWN TO A CHOICE BETWEEN THIS AND THE MICROPROSE EFFORT, BUT I PERSONALLY THINK THAT THIS JUST MANAGES TO EDGE NFL OUT OF FIRST PLACE THANKS TO THE BETTER PRESENTATION AND SLIGHTLY IMPROVED PLAYABILITY"

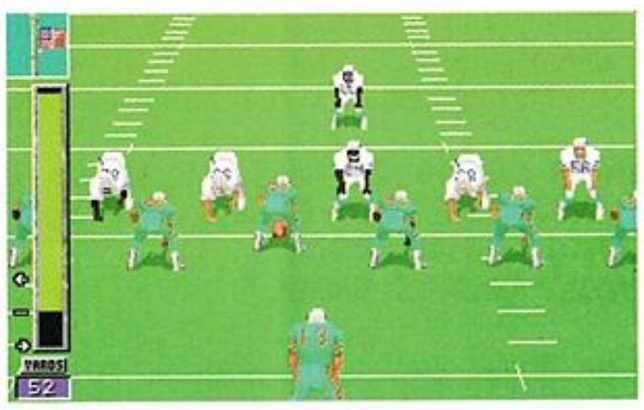
SCORE ★★★

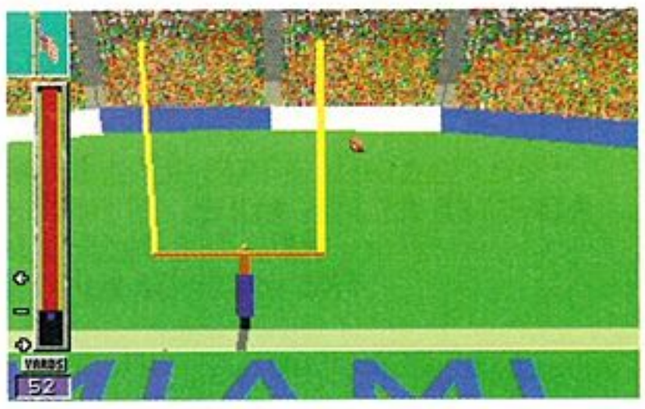
DOES IT REALLY MAKE THAT MUCH DIFFERENCE?

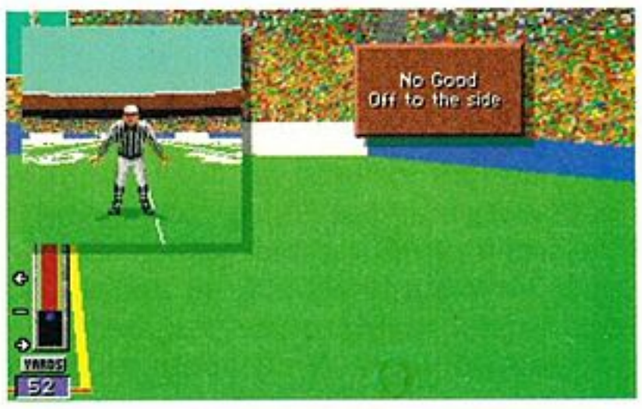
As SVGA starts to become more and more prominent in the games that we play on our PCs, we can expect to see a dramatic increase in the quality of the graphics. Unnecessary Roughness is the first American football game to make use of this extended graphics mode, but are things really that much better?

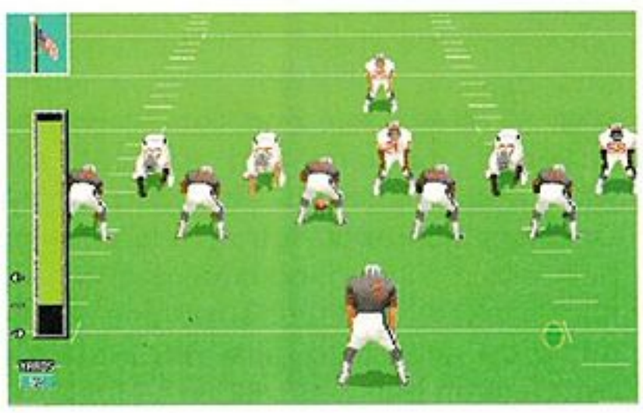
The problem with most American football games (or any other sport games for that matter) is that the players tend to look like they are all made out of Lego. SGVA graphics go a long way to make this problem disappear and, as you can see from these shots, the whole effect is quite a bit better than the corresponding VGA resolution. The players look much sharper and the whole game is a lot easier to play because of it. The downside to this is a loss of speed which occurs, even on a fast machine, but this problem will hopefully sort itself out as the technology continues to improve.

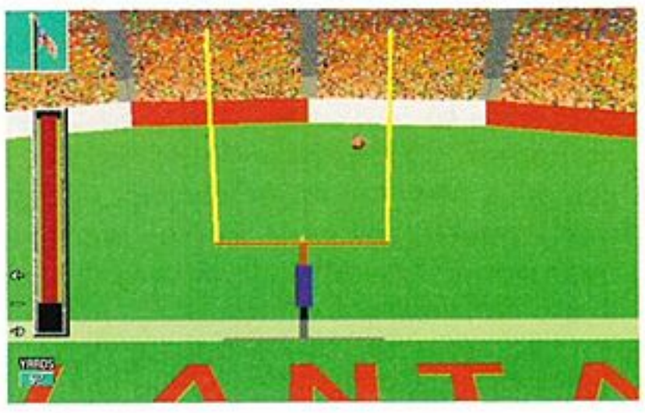
It looks as though SVGA is definitely here to stay.

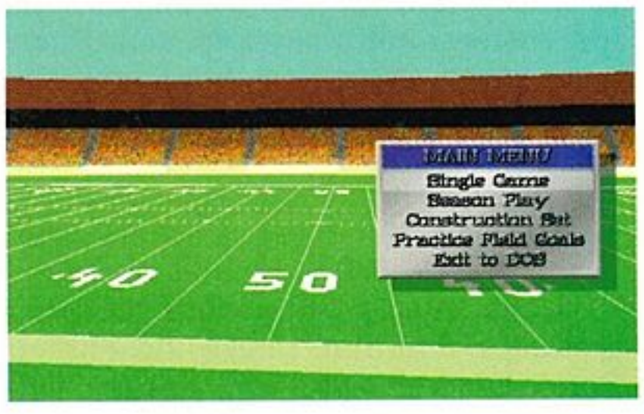












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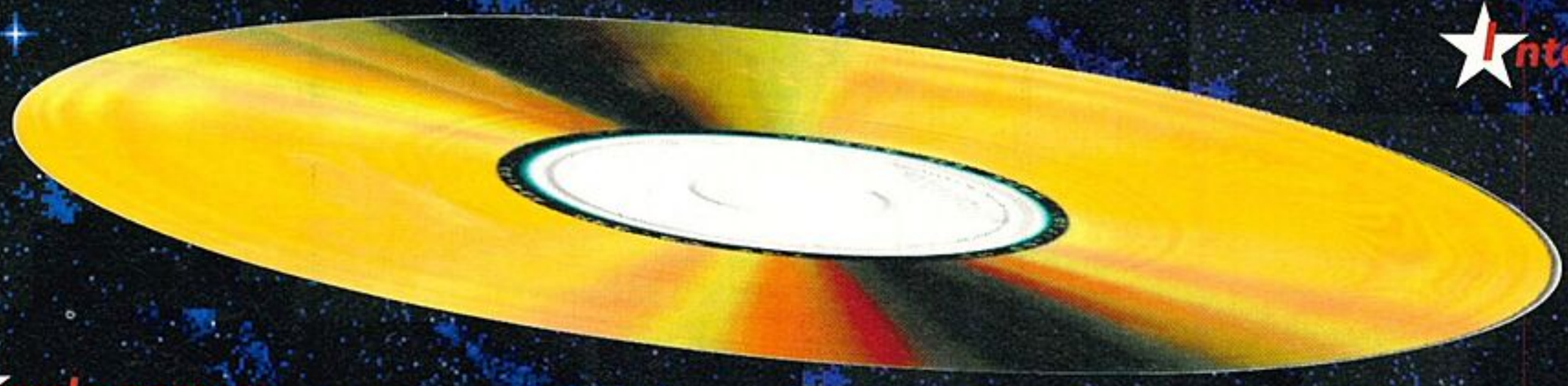

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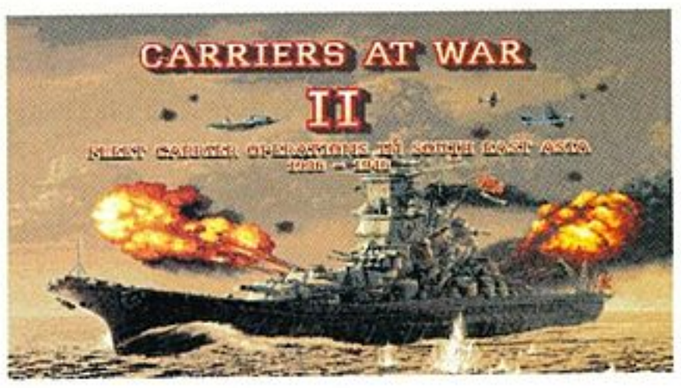


CARRIERS AT WAR II

SET at the tactical level but covering huge tracts of ocean, Carriers at War became the standard for simulations of carrier air operations. Last year the long-awaited PC version was released – the Strategic Studies Group (SSG) had started with a clean slate and redesigned the game. Every ship and aircraft was given its own colourful graphic depiction and combat unfolded before your eyes as bombs rained down on ships and the splashes of near misses sent towering geysers over burning bulwarks. The interface was clean and simple to learn, and the game was a success again.

Rather than rest on their laurels, SSG laboured to build on the success of this release by giving the gamer the CAW Construction Set – one of the most comprehensive add-ons for any strategy game. With this kit the avid CAW fan could now design scenarios in any global area, redesigning everything from the graphics of the vessels and aircraft to the AI.

The Construction Set comes with WarRoom – a module that enables the production of a battle plan for the computer opponent through the use of warcards. Each action that a task force or base may take is described on a given warcard, along with alternative actions depending on the situation.

By having the designer employ basic programming skills, the AI is designed from scratch for each new scenario in a user-friendly environment. Thus, instead of a generic AI that is expected to adapt to every conceivable tactical situation, the AI is developed anew for each scenario. Moreover, because the warcard sequences are designed by a human, when playing the game the player feels like they are effectively playing the human designer. This ingenious idea represents a revolution in wargame AI and one that I would very much like to see other designers emulate. The net effect is that playing the computer in CAW is more akin to playing a flesh and blood opponent than in any other wargame.

SSG doesn't appear to know when to stop! Carriers at War II (CAW II) is its latest variant of this system and further embellishes what is already a superb wargame. The CAW system is tactical – forces are represented as individual vessels and aircraft, and the game can be played solo, two-player or computer versus computer. In addition, when playing against the computer the player may elect to take control of all of the forces on their side or alternatively one or two task forces, leaving the computer to handle any friendly forces not selected. This also enables co-operative play – two human players may control different task forces on the same side against the computer.

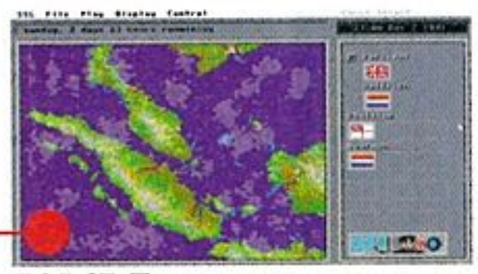
"PLAYING THE COMPUTER IN CAW II IS MORE AKIN TO PLAYING A FLESH AND BLOOD OPPONENT THAN IN ANY OTHER WARGAME"

A scenario map of the traditional hex-based variety covers an area of four million square miles, in 20 mile hexes. Time passes in five minute increments and there are no 'turns' as

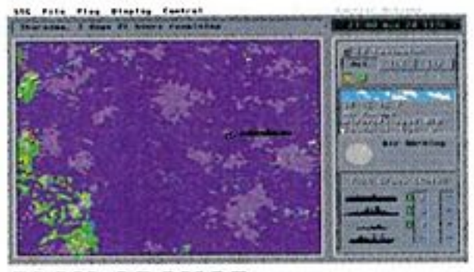
The core of CAW II is the eight new scenarios and their variants. Four of these depict events from early in the Pacific War and feature the Royal Navy during some of its darkest hours. Three are based on operations of the US Navy during the closing months when the IJN was very much on the defensive, and one features the battleships of the IJN and USN in 1936 in a hypothetical surface clash

REVIEW

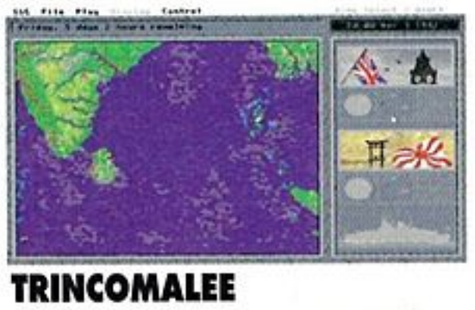
SAILING ON THE



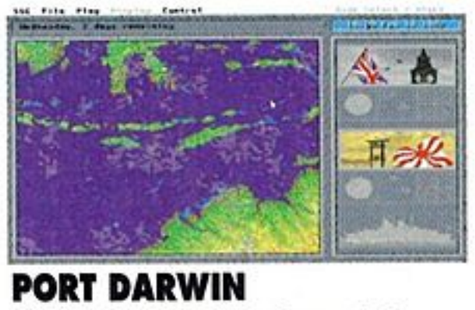
FORCE Z
The failure of the British planners to have a fleet carrier deployed to Singapore necessitated committing the battleship Prince of Wales and the battle-cruiser Repulse to defend the shore of Malaya from Japanese fleets. They were spotted and rapidly sunk by land-based torpedo planes



PLAN ORANGE
Pre-war American planning predicated a massive naval reinforcement of this area from Pearl Harbour using battle-ships, supported by carriers. With this game you can see if the theory could have worked. Using carrier planes without the range for effective striking, you rely on the the big guns



TRINCOMALEE
A seriously sizeable British battle fleet lies at anchor in the Indian Ocean port of Addu Atoll and threatens any further Japanese expansion. Nagumo's carriers sail westward to do a Pearl Harbour job on the Royal Navy in and around Ceylon. Swordfish versus Zeros, Vals and Kates



PORT DARWIN
The small and unassuming port of Darwin on the north coast of Australia becomes the scene of some casual target practice for the Japanese carrier fleet. What if the US carriers had been close by? Why not throw a few in there and work out if things would have ended differently?

HMS Formidable showing her air wing in various stages of deployment

PRODUCT
Carriers at War II

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Strategic Studies Group

PRICE
£44.99

REQUIREMENTS
386, VGA, Mouse,
7Mb Hard Disk (9.6Mb with Construction Set)

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib and Compatible Sound Cards

such – the clock can be set to tick continuously until interrupted by the player, or by a selection of pre-set events such as the discovery of enemy units by search aircraft or radar. Forces are grouped into historical task groups which cannot be rearranged, although damaged vessels may be split off with an escort to limp back to base.

The original game came with six scenarios and the Construction Kit added a further three, plus some additional variant scenarios for the aforementioned six. Eight new scenarios, four of which feature the Brits are the main addition in CAW II.

These new historical scenarios include the sinking of Force Z, the Japanese attack on Ceylon, the battle of the Java Sea and the attack on Darwin. Added to these is Plan Orange – a hypothetical clash between the battleship fleets of the US and Japan in 1936, when the potential of carriers was yet to be realised and when the outcome would have been decided by the big gun in a sort of Eastern Jutland. Finally, the scenarios are rounded off with historical clashes at Leyte Gulf, Okinawa and Operation Olympic. All in all, the new scenarios and their many variants give the gamer a lot of new game to chew on and represent a further insight into the power and fragility of naval forces of this era.

CAW II is more than a collection of new scenarios. The game is not simply an add-on, but a complete standalone version – version 2.05 to be exact. However, owners of the original CAW, either with or without the Construction Set, will find that the installation upgrades their older software to the new 2.05 standard, enabling them to play all of the original scenarios as well.

This new version makes many changes to the extant system, but none of them are major. Graphical changes include more detail to ship and aircraft pictures, and better representation of the icons used in combat to depict aircraft and ships. The complete Royal Navy and Dutch Navy are added to the forces that may be designed into new scenarios, together with background pictures for bases and nationality-specific carriers.

System enhancements proliferate but most are hidden from the player. Task forces will now launch any idle fighter aircraft on CAP as soon as an incoming raid is detected, without being told by the player. It is thus a good idea to maintain a flight of fuelled and armed fighters on deck for this purpose.

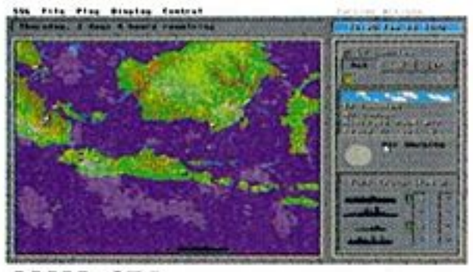
In addition, any readied strike aircraft hanging around on deck will be defuelled, unarmed and sent below decks automatically when the bad guys show up. However, this takes time and it is still possible to get caught out with readied aircraft on deck when the banzai boys heave-to overhead.

Numerous other changes have been made to the WarRoom module of the Construction Set. If you don't own this, the effects of the improvements are still there in the more subtle AI, but you just won't actually know about it. If you do own the Construction Set, you now have two additional actions that may be employed on warcards.

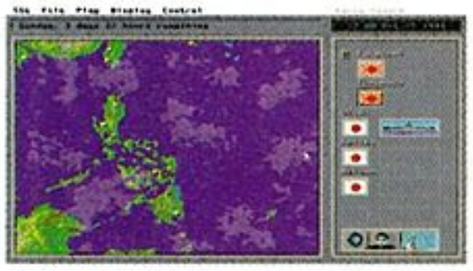
In the first, it is now possible to specify a damage level at which a vessel will consider itself hors de combat. If this is set to 40 per cent for example, when this damage level is reached the ship will either be split off and head for safety, or if the vessel is a carrier, the whole task force may retreat to preserve the capital ship. For carriers, this can instead specify a percentage of aircraft lost, at which point the carrier will consider itself non-effective and head for a friendly port. ➤

"THRILL TO THE SINKING OF BRITISH WARSHIPS IN A VARIETY OF TROPICAL LOCATIONS AS THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY DOES THE MARITIME EQUIVALENT OF TRAMPLING ALL OVER OUR BELEAGUERED EMPIRE!"

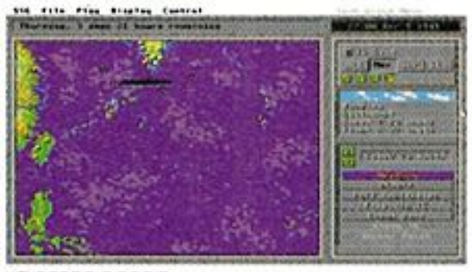
SEAS OF FATE



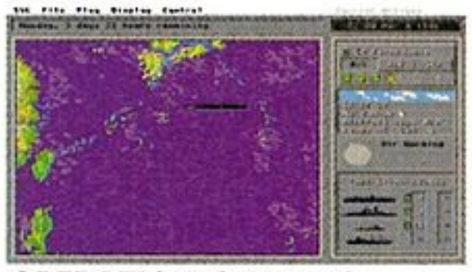
JAVA SEA
The remnants of the American, Australian, British and Dutch naval forces in the Java Sea make a bold attempt to halt the Japanese advance on the oilfields of Java and Sumatra. The historical battle ended in a bloody defeat for the Allies. Can you do any better?



LEYTE GULF
The last sally by the IJN as the US naval forces invade the Philippines. Every remaining Japanese warship was put to sea in an attempt to repel the invaders. All of their carriers were sunk and many of their major surface units, including the mighty Yamato battleship



OKINAWA
The invasion of the Japanese Home Islands was forced through against considerable opposition from land-based air units. Many of these were kamikazes which swarmed all over the huge American surface task groups providing cover for the invasion fleet



OPERATION OLYMPIC
It's 1946, the test program for the atomic bombs has failed and Western leaders agree that the only way to end the war is to invade Japan. The US forces, augmented by a British task force, stands off to support the invading forces and pound Japanese bases into submission

REVIEW

➤ The second new warcard action enables bases to take action based on the achievements of certain task forces, thus producing better co-ordination between land and naval forces.

The manual is well written and embellished with a fair amount of humour. There is an excellent tutorial system based on the Trincomalee scenario which will have new players up and bombing in a trice, and there are details of all the new ships and aircraft included in the game with the addition of the British and Dutch.

My only complaint about the manual is the rabidly anti-British strain that runs through some of the scenario commentaries. This is not misplaced nationalism on my part – I accept that the British leadership was wanting at this time, especially during the Malaya campaign. However, SSG has overstressed this failing and sought to use it as an explanation for a whole run of defeats that didn't end until Midway. This is an oversimplification that SSG has been guilty of in past games, and ignores other factors such as the lack of preparedness by the US and its pre-war dependence on the concept of sending the surface fleet from Hawaii to reinforce the Philippines. The error of this strategy was clear to all after Pearl Harbour, but by then it was too late to repair the situation, so it is fatuous to pretend that the Japanese success was due to a bunch of incompetent British admirals and generals.

Is CAW II worth purchasing? If you have CAW I and the Construction Set, it may seem a bit excessive to pay the price for a full game to get a few enhancements and some new scenarios. It rather depends on how much you like the original system. The scenarios are very good indeed and SSG is to be complimented on the thorough research that is evident in the scenario design. Not all of the scenarios are balanced, but do you want your wargames close or accurate? Nearly all of the scenarios have historical variants which tend to balance up the play, so you can still have an even game.

There remain a few niggles with the basic game engine, for example surface combat still happens too frequently – the human player knows when the computer has spotted him, which is plainly nonsense. Also, the scale of the map makes seeing details a little awkward at times. But these are not show-stoppers by any means, indeed they are counterbalanced by the fact that the game is, as far as I can tell in many hours of testing, bug-free.

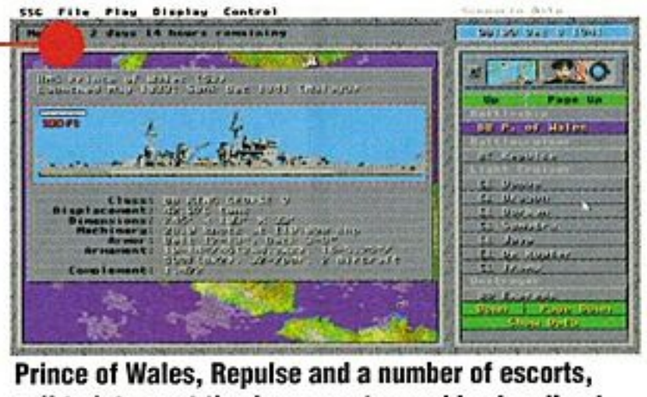
The CAW system is the best WWII tactical naval computer game on the market, and CAW II adds and improves to that system. It is evolutionary, not revolutionary, and raises the quality of this simulation way above the competition. Most importantly, it has the best artificial opponent of any computer game I've played, and on that basis gets my vote for a 'must have' wargame.

"THE GAME IS, AS FAR AS I CAN TELL IN MANY HOURS OF TESTING, BUG-FREE"

SCORE ★★★★

ATTACK FORCE Z

The following screens show the British forces in a play through the 'Force Z' scenario...

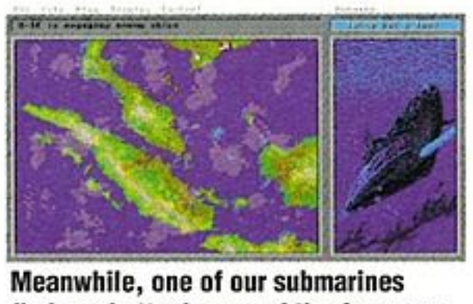


Prince of Wales, Repulse and a number of escorts, sail to intercept the Japanese troop ships heading to invade Malaya. The data screen for Prince of Wales gives an idea of the detail of the game and what you can expect

The first contact with the enemy, as search aircraft from Singapore reveal the yellow crosses indicating the presumed presence of enemy ships. However, search reports were often wildly inaccurate, leading to caution during the first tense moments of contact

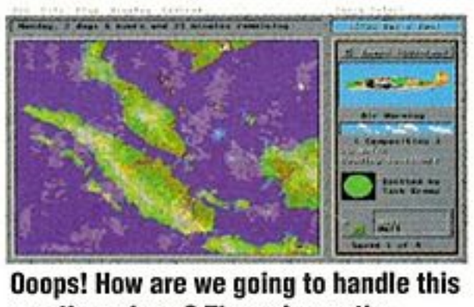
The screen giving the complete list of ships making up Force Z – notice the absence of a carrier. Admiral Phillips was happy to proceed to sea under cover of land-based craft only, not that he had much choice in the matter

Now that we've sighted the invasion fleets, it's time to send some of our land-based aircraft to attack. This screen shows the planning of a strike. RAF Ansons are readied for a bombing and torpedo attack against troop-ships off Kota Baru



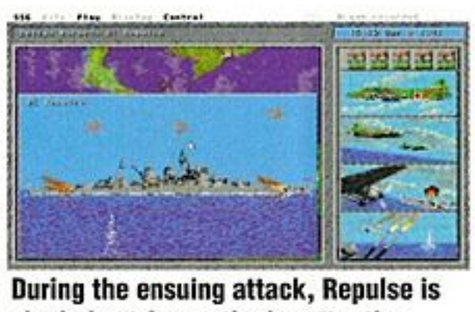
Meanwhile, one of our submarines finds and attacks one of the Japanese convoys. The player has little control over submarines and their combat usefulness is limited, but they can be handy as pickets to spot the enemy early on

Our Ansons have closed with the enemy. So much for our search aircraft – they told us this was a troop convoy, but when the bombers attack they run into flak from a Japanese heavy cruiser group! Still, the Japs come off worse as the Suzuya takes another hit



Ooops! How are we going to handle this one then chaps? The radar on the Prince of Wales picks up an incoming strike of Nell and Betty bomber. "For what we are about to receive..." There could be a bit of a mess after this lot have finished

REVIEW



During the ensuing attack, Repulse is singled out for particular attention from Japanese torpedo bombers. Notice the 'fish' streaking thorough the water. Every bomb, torpedo and shell splash is depicted during combat, adding to the tension

After the vicious Japanese attack, the damage screen reveals that fires are consuming Repulse and are spreading quickly, but Prince of Wales has escaped fairly lightly and must continue in its efforts to intercept its targets

Repulse's damage proves fatal, but Prince of Wales manages to intercept the Japanese heavy cruiser group. One of the CAs is burning already, and when the action is completed all four will lie at the bottom. Unfortunately Prince of Wales takes hull damage...

The scores on the bulkhead. The Brits win a marginal victory. Although both capital ships meet their demise, enough damage is inflicted on the invaders to disrupt their schedule, allowing Singapore to be reinforced. Rule Britannia!

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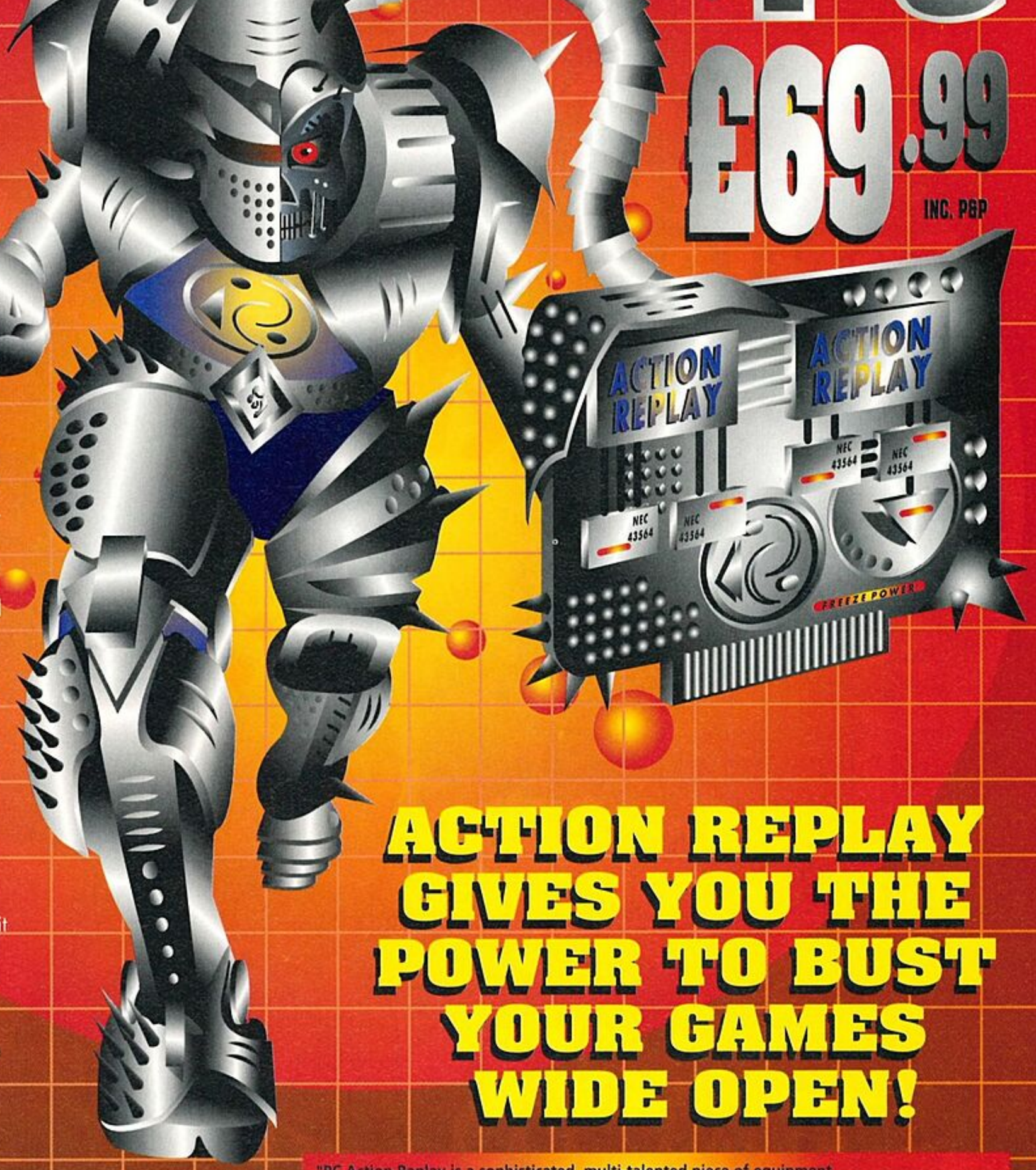

INFINITE CHEAT GENERATOR

Action Replay has a powerful CHEAT FINDER feature that actually scans through the game in its FROZEN STATE and finds the locations that control lives, ammo, objects etc. etc. in fact anything within a game that can be counted! The unique CHEAT GENERATOR then gives you a cheatcode for that game. Simply press a key to restart the game and you are invincible!! Cheats can be saved to disk or entered again at a later date.

PROGRAM SAVE

Freeze your program at any point and save entire contents of memory, including extended memory, to floppy or hardrive. When you reload the program it will resume at the point it was frozen. Ideal for saving a game at a difficult point or for programs with tedious 'password' loading systems.

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At the press of the Action Replay freezer button you can grab a standard VGA screen from any program and save it out as a standard PCX file suitable for your graphics package.

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Allows you to play a game at your own pace. Select from about 10% to full speed.

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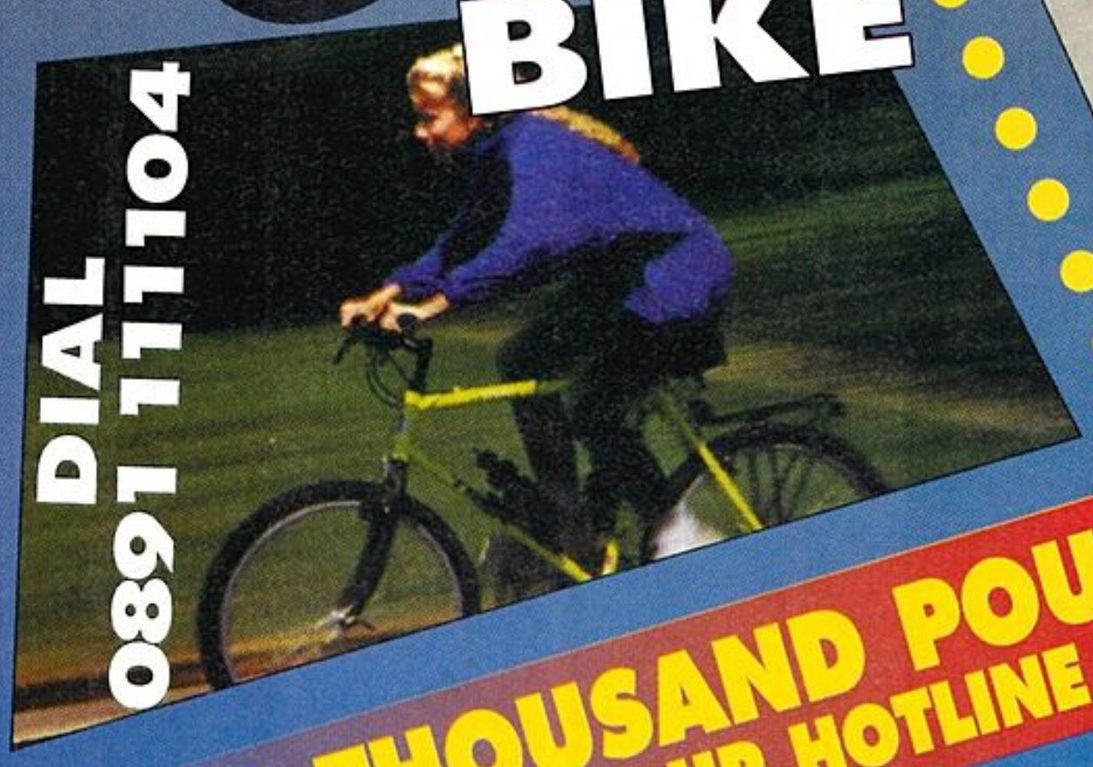

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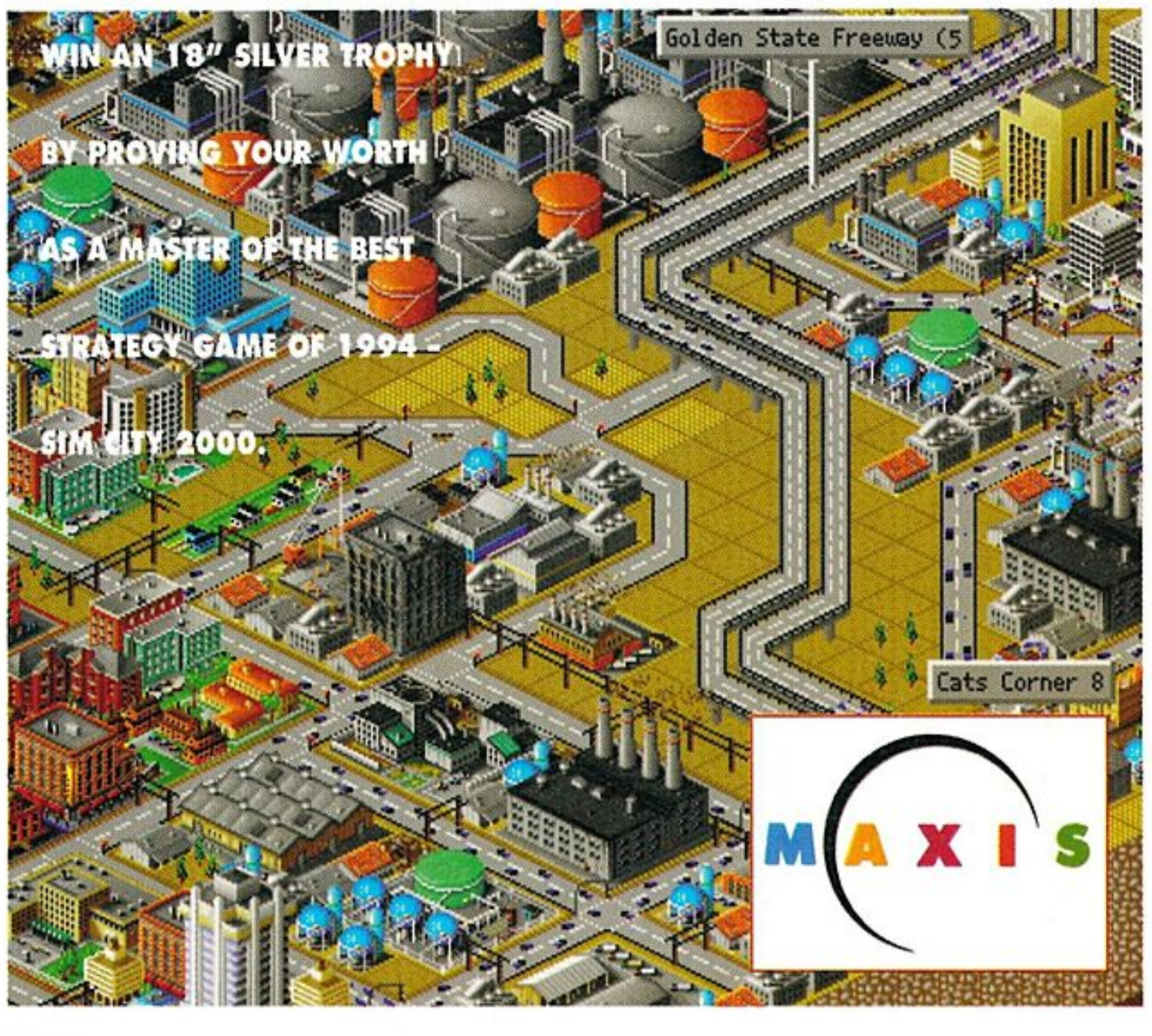
COMPETITION

SIM CITY 2000



WITH Sim City 2000 firmly established as one of the best PC games of the year, we thought we'd do something a bit different with our competition this month. With so many of you obviously owning copies of the game we'd thought we'd have a bash at aiming our competition specifically at Sim City fans. What we want to do is encourage the town planners among you, by offering this stunning 18" high silver trophy as the prize, thanks to the chaps at Maxis.

So what do you have to do? Simply create the best possible city you can using the game – it's easy to build up something which just makes money and attracts residents, but we want to see some really creative urban planning.

The most attractive or unique city received will be featured in full (a huge linked screen shot of your city) in issue eight of *PC Player* and the planner of it will be presented with this gorgeous engraved trophy. Anything goes – it's just got to look damned fine.

Simply send your entries to us on disk to the usual address. Easy or what? ■

Entries must be submitted by 1 May 1994 on 3 1/2" disk. No correspondence will be entered into, so don't go calling us and asking us if you've won because you'll be instantly disqualified. Sorry, but those are the rules. The editor's decision is final – so it's his weird taste you've got to appeal to.

Send your entries to: Sim City 2000, *PC Player*, Maverick Magazines, 16-17 Hollybush Row, Oxford, OX1 1JH.

COMPETITION

MIKE SINGLETON COMES OUT OF

by

HIDING AND REJOINS MICROPROSE

Alex

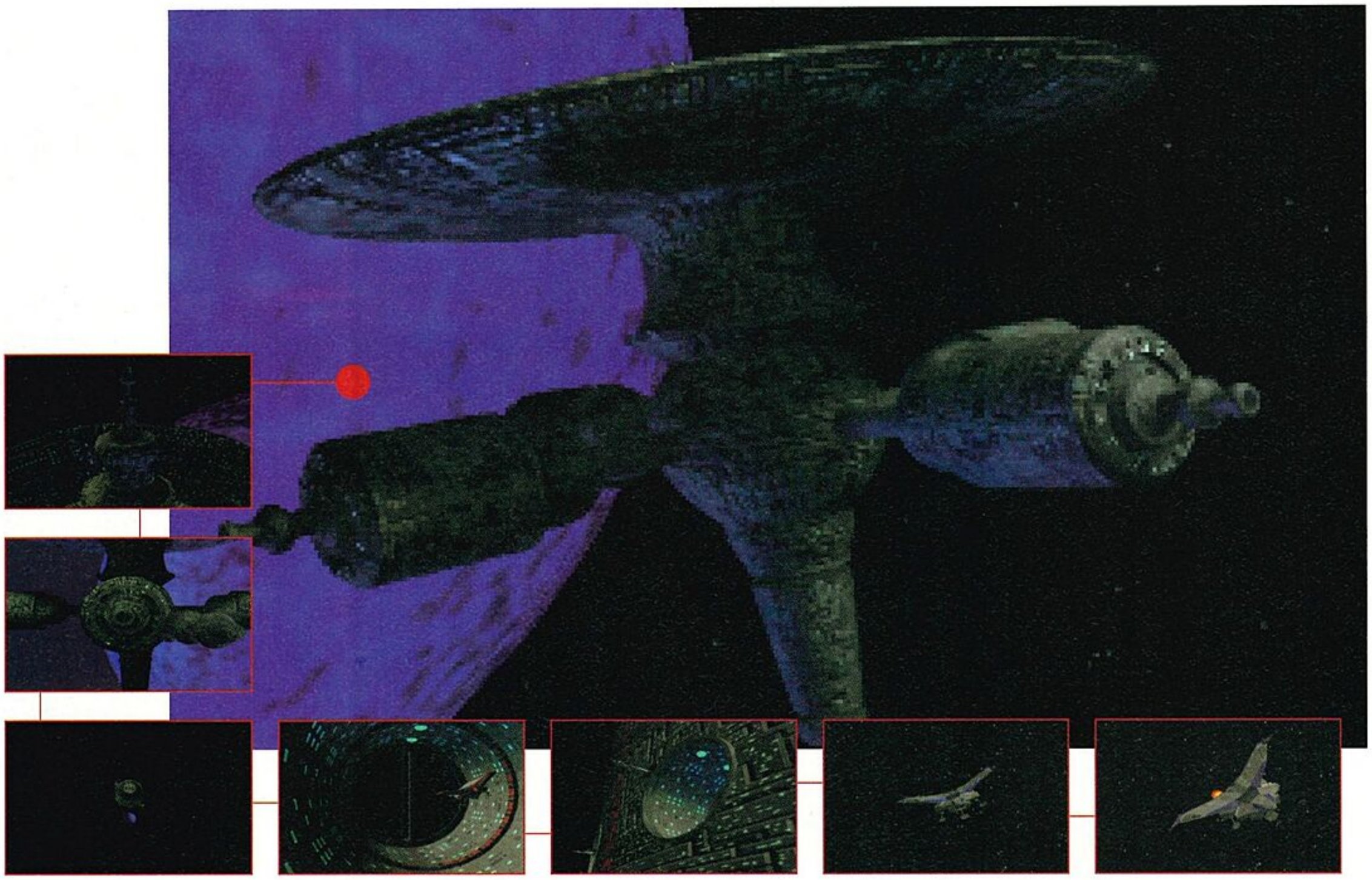
FOR HIS SPACE STRATEGY EPIC,

Simmons

STARLORD.

It's easy to make enemies in Starlord. While flying from one system to another, our Starlord was ambushed but managed to defeat Earl Perakin Ostordiat in battle. After the bitter defeat, Ostordiat changes his stance from neutral to enemy

STARLORD



REVIEW

PRODUCT
Starlord

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Microprose

PRICE
£44.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA, 7Mb Hard Disk Space

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Mouse (recommended), Joystick

IT'S the final frontier, it's very big and it's very black. It is of course space, the vast expanse of nothingness which attracts the attention of squinting old codgers like Gamesmaster's Patrick Moore. Strictly speaking it's the stars and planets that are interesting, because who knows what indigenous life-forms they support – for all we know the universe may be a bustling metropolis and our solar system just a boil on the rear end of space. To conquer an individual planet is one thing, reigning over the entire universe is a totally different ball game.

Starlord is the new-born baby of Mike Singleton – the man responsible for the Midwinter series, Dark Sceptre and Lords of Midnight among others. With such a reputation is there really any point in reviewing Starlord – surely it's going to be great? Well yes, almost...

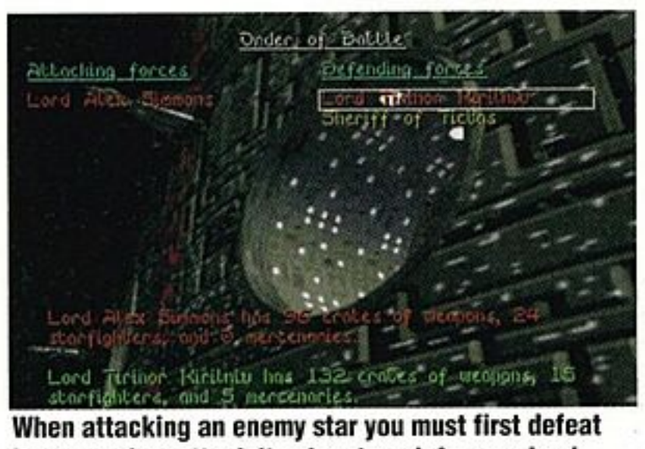
Like all other strategy games, this one is about domination. Do you take orders or do you prefer to give them? If the last category applies to you then at least you possess some of the qualifications needed for the position of Emperor of the Universe.

Starlord has an uphill struggle on its hands, considering the tough competition it faces against the likes of the newly released Frontier: Elite II and Privateer. All these games are based

THE NEXT DEVASTATION

Arriving at the enemy planet you're asked to pay a toll to visit the star or suffer the wrath of its mighty space legion. Ignore the pathetic threats and declare war immediately!

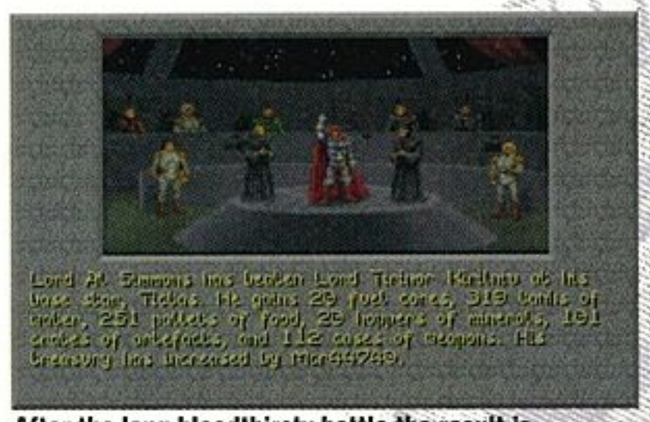
The moment war is declared, both sides gather their forces and prepare for a bloody battle. Flying your base star into orbit, the enemy army glides to intercept the invading spaceships



When attacking an enemy star you must first defeat its army, then attack its planetary defences. Lord Tirinor Kirilniu will lead the counter-attack while the Sheriff of Tictas will stay back and protect the planet

From here you must make the decision to either play the battle in full or let the computer determine the result. The enemy has more mercenary ships and weapons than you, but your fighters outnumber theirs

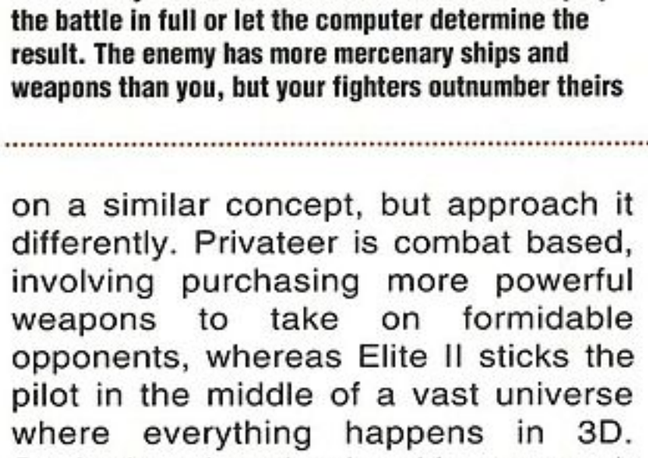
Opting for the full battle, a battle map is displayed which shows the location of all starfighter squadrons. Issue orders to each squadron, asking them to attack or stay back and protect their capital ship



After the long bloodthirsty battle the result is declared. This time your starfighters overpowered the mercenary fighters but next time you might not be so lucky

on a similar concept, but approach it differently. Privateer is combat based, involving purchasing more powerful weapons to take on formidable opponents, whereas Elite II sticks the pilot in the middle of a vast universe where everything happens in 3D. Starlord on the other hand is very much a strategic affair. While the others have elements of strategy, neither is as complex as this. They do feature 3D combat sections, but the emphasis is on trading, colonising and conquering the universe. In that sense, Starlord is a bit like Civilisation in space.

"STARLORD HAS AN UPHILL STRUGGLE ON ITS HANDS, CONSIDERING THE TOUGH COMPETITION IT FACES AGAINST THE LIKES OF THE NEWLY RELEASED FRONTIER: ELITE II AND PRIVATEER. ALL THESE GAMES ARE BASED ON A SIMILAR CONCEPT, BUT APPROACH IT DIFFERENTLY"



The combat sequences in Starlord are impressive, moving smoothly and swiftly on a 486. Things tend to slow a little on a 386 but these action sequences can be turned off in favour of a computer-determined result

After determining the sex and rank of your character, it's time to embark on a scenario. Choose to play as either one Starlord or as an entire family in the Dynasty game. The obvious difference between the two is that the first concentrates on the life of a single Lord while the dynasty option places the player in control of a whole family of Starlords, continuing until all family members have either completed their tasks or are killed. There are also three galaxy options, which vary in difficulty and can be adjusted to suit both skilled and amateur Starlords alike. Things get highly complicated in this game, so it's probably best to stick to the first scenario for your initial few Starlord outings.

Standing on the bridge of the battle cruiser, moored just off the base star, a pull-down menu reveals the options open to the beginner Starlord. The most obvious choice to is to view the base star, this being the planet which must be kept alive throughout the game. Each year the star needs certain minerals and artefacts to keep the whole thing running smoothly, with the amount depending on the size and power of the defending army. For the time being all is well – there are enough supplies to last for a couple of years and there's enough cash in the treasury to get things up and running. Mind you, the money's no good in the bank because intergalactic traders don't take cheques, even with a guarantee card. While time is on your side, draw out all your savings and with the money safely stashed inside your pocket, it's time to go shopping.

Trading is an important element of Starlord as it is one of the most effective ways of making money. With a little experience it's possible to make a mental note of the each planet's requirements, remembering which systems sell each of the required minerals at a greatly reduced cost. Then it's just a case of jumping from one star to another, buying and selling at inflated prices. Stock up on fuel as it is one of the most important resources in the game, providing a means for interplanetary travel. Without it you're stranded, so make sure you always top up.

REVIEW

Your chances of winning the 3D space combat sections are greatly enhanced by switching on the HUD. The target craft that the weapons are locked onto appears in a red cross-hair, while target range and speed appears on the side of the display. Without the HUD, the screen is less cluttered but tracking enemy craft is a lot harder

the results by comparing the strength and power of the opposing forces. If trigger-happy blasting isn't your thing, opt for the quick battle and let the computer do all the hard work. Otherwise, choose to play the full battle and get ready on the fire button.

First a two-dimensional battle map appears, showing both friendly and enemy squadrons facing each other. Each squadron can be given orders from those listed below the map, including commands like attack, defend, intercept, move and follow. Once orders are issued to all the ships, click and hold on the real-time conflict icon to let the action begin. Ships will advance and eventually engage, battling it out in the same sector until the capital ship is finally attacked and you're dumped inside the cockpit.

Initially both flight and gunner controls are handled by the computer, allowing the pilot to sit back and enjoy the impressive 3D show. Taking over manually is half the fun – piloting a starfighter in the midst of a battle against swarms of deadly mercenaries is an enjoyable challenge.

The spacecraft under your control is equipped with a variety of weapon systems, the most basic of which is the Pinpoint forward-facing laser cannon. Two streams of laser fire streak out to the front when this weapon is used, but because they're unguided it's quite difficult to actually hit the target. This problem is rectified with the Javelin space-to-space missiles which home in on their target, but these are easily confused by countermeasures such as mines, which are another of the weapons carried by the basic spacecraft. The remaining weapon is the powerful Mostal plasma ball generator, a single blast from which is capable of knocking out the shields of almost any destroyer.

There is a selection of other weaponry to be purchased from stars which specialise in munitions manufacturing. The Quarrel is a more advanced version of the Javelin and is less likely to be affected by countermeasures such as chaff, the TurboBoost doubles the ship's acceleration, while the Lance enhanced shields are designed in such a way that they can be used to inflict great damage by ramming the opponent. Other weapons include high-powered laser cannons and cruise missiles, but these are both expensive and hard to find.

A variety of views offer impressive 3D action but little more, which in truth could be said about the whole space combat section of the game. Starlord is essentially a strategy game and after the novelty factor of the combat stages wears off you'll automatically switch the game onto quick battle.

"GRAPHICALLY YOU COULDN'T WISH FOR ANYTHING BETTER. THE STILL STRATEGY SCREENS ARE, COMBINED WITH THE MUSIC, ATMOSPHERIC AND MOODY BUT STILL REMAIN FUNCTIONAL"

However, a lot of enjoyment can be got from the game as a whole as it is both an intriguing and absorbing strategy experience. It's not the easiest of games to get into, but then again most games of this type are fairly complicated. Persevere through the initial stages and what you'll find is a most enjoyable blend of space trading and conquest, something along the lines of Microprose's Civilisation. Starlord is not quite as good as the aforementioned game, but then again Civilisation is quite astounding.

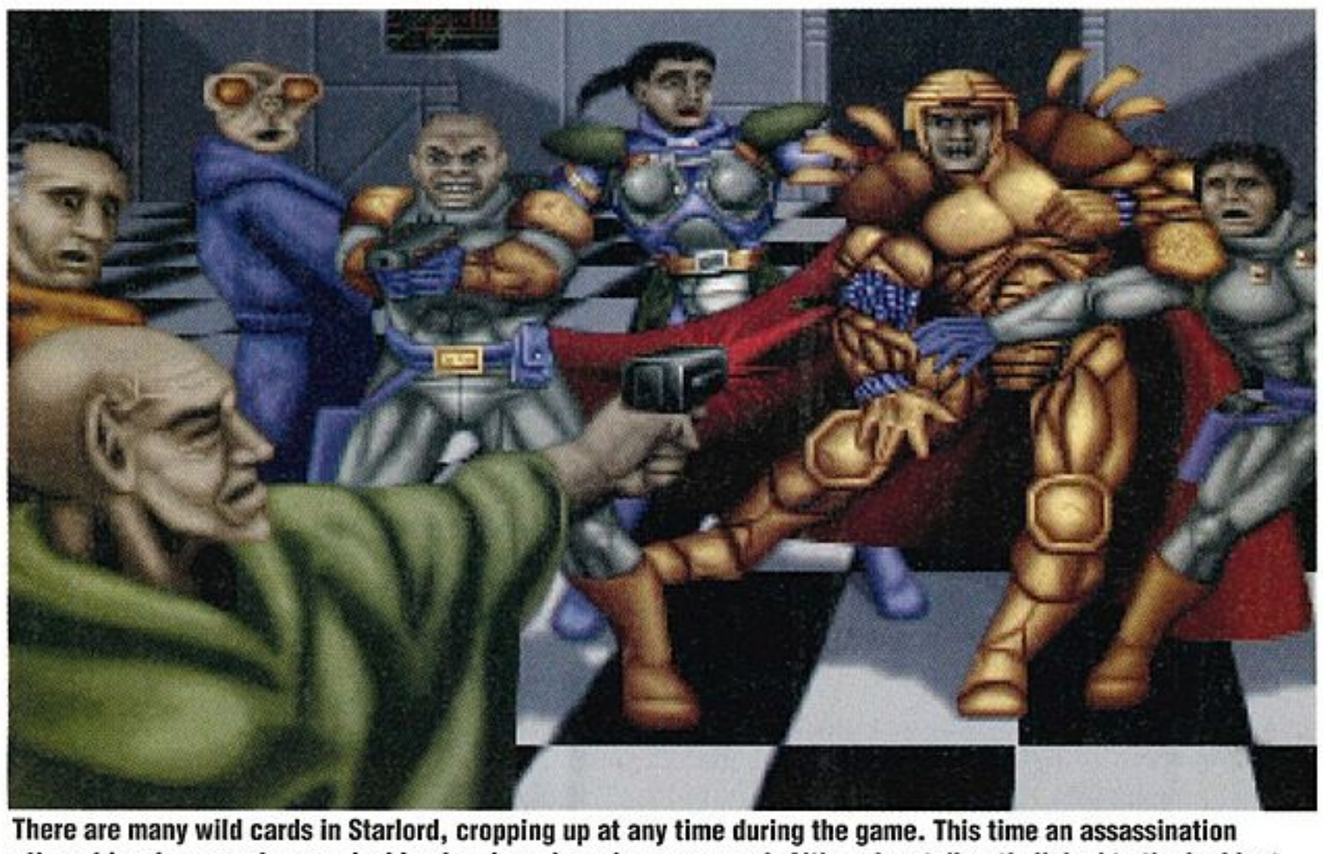
Graphically you couldn't wish for anything better. The still strategy screens are, combined with the music, atmospheric and moody but still remain functional, which really is essential considering that over half of the game is played on these screens. The excellent space combat sequences are the most graphically impressive of all. Although a little slow on a 386, on the faster 486 they are smooth, detailed and colourful. The 10 camera views offer different angles to watch the action from and while most are simply a cosmetic nicety, some of the views make combat so much easier.

At first the combat is quite difficult to get to grips with as the game doesn't play in quite the same way as, for example, X-Wing. After a little practice things get easier, but there's always the automatic pilot if things get too complex. I'm also glad Mike Singleton had the foresight to include a quick battle option, as these sequences soon become tiresome and time consuming.

Starlord isn't an exceptional game but nevertheless it's a highly polished game that will appeal to fans of the strategy genre. Those unfamiliar with this type of game will probably shun it for being too difficult to get into, but it really is worth checking out. The hot-keys and pull-down menus mean the game runs quickly and smoothly, while the mammoth overall task will take weeks, maybe even months, to complete. On the whole, this is a well-presented and thoroughly enjoyable game packed with longevity, gameplay and strategy.

SCORE ★★★★

REVIEW



There are many wild cards in Starlord, cropping up at any time during the game. This time an assassination attempt has been made on a rival Lord and you have been accused. Although not directly linked to the incident, you must still pay compensation

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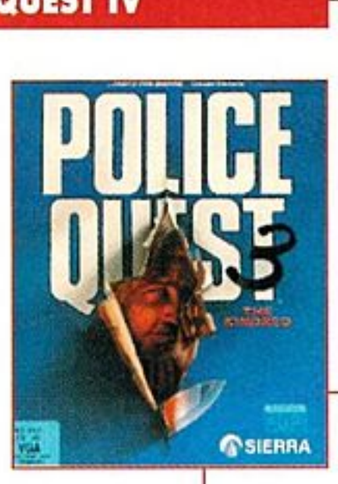

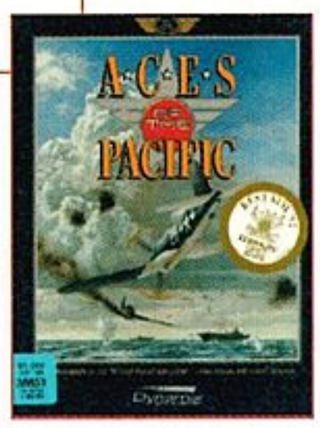

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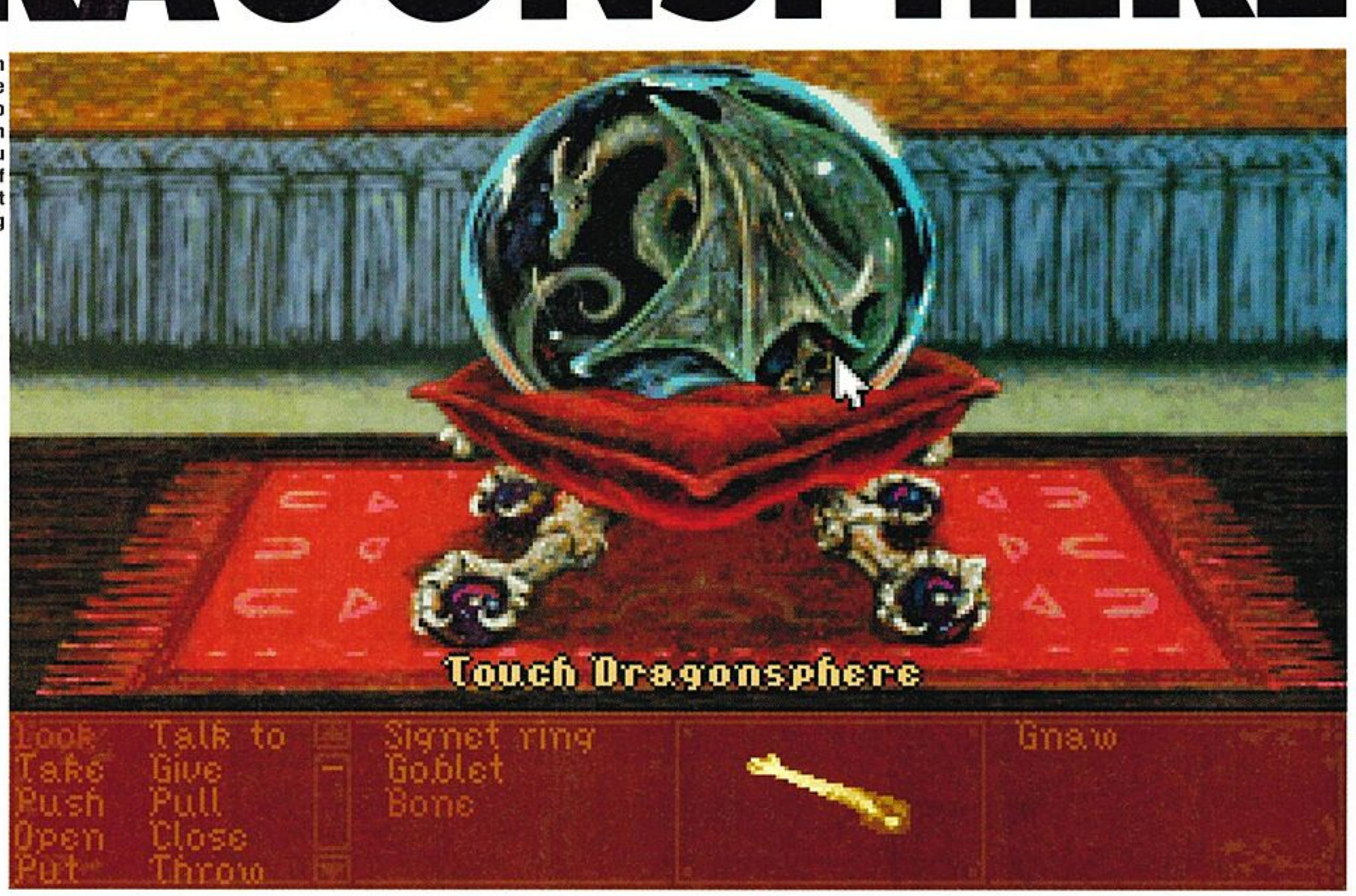

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REQUIREMENTS
Dos 4.0 Min, 2Mb Ram (4Mb recommended), 386 (33Mhz), VGA, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, Pro Audio Spectrum, Roland MT-32, LAPC-1/CM-32L, AdLib, Covox Sound Master, GOLD Sound standard, General MIDI and all compatible Sound Cards

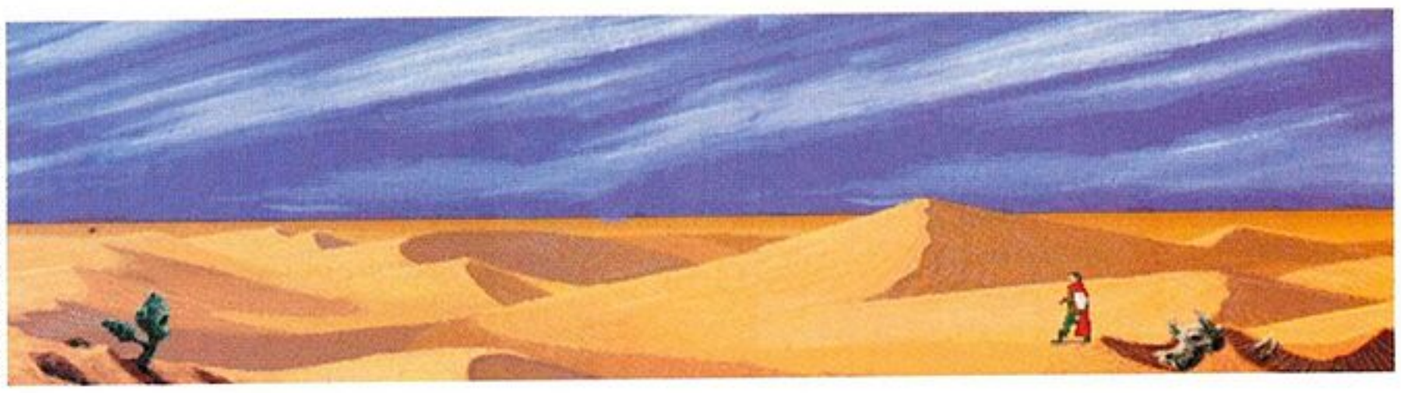
REVIEW

LAST year Microprose took the brave opportunity to invade the point-and-click adventure market with its all-singing, all-dancing, sci-fi sex comedy, Rex Nebular and the Cosmic Gender Bender. The new adventure system developed by Microprose was entitled Microprose Adventure Design System (or MADS for short), and to some it seemed every bit as good as the classic LucasArts' SCUMM system. Rex Nebular had a great story, some incredible animation and most importantly, lots of playability – there was no doubting that Microprose had struck a rich vein and further adventures using the MADS interface would be highly anticipated.

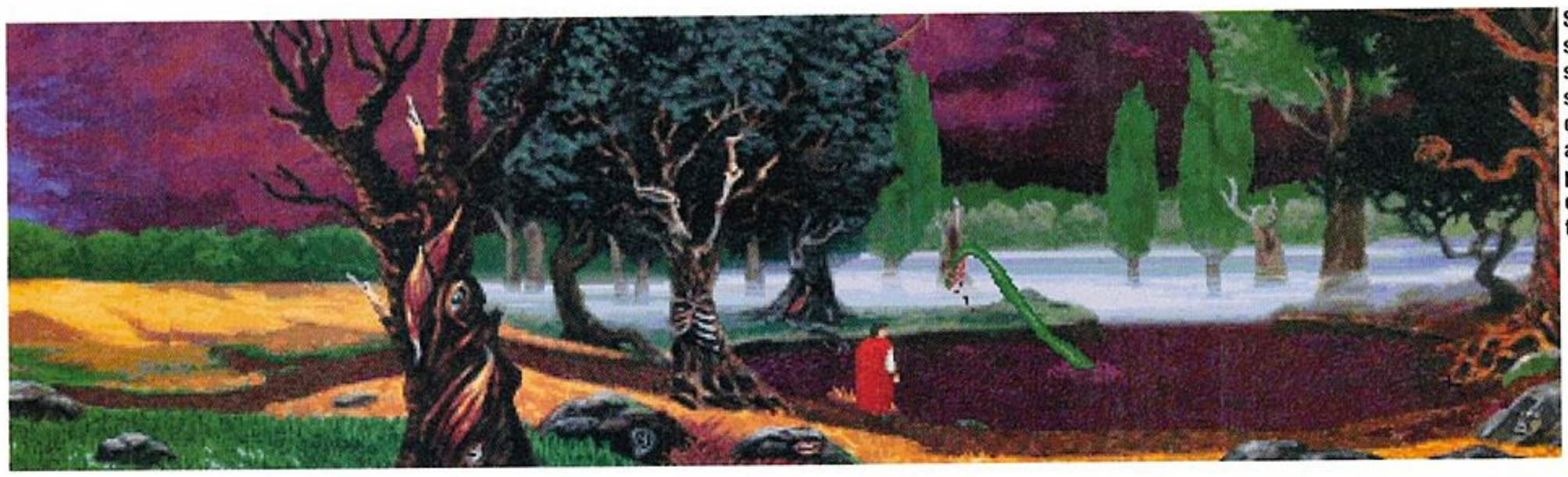
To follow came the second MADS adventure – the graphically stunning Return of the Phantom. Now, less than a year after the release of Rex Nebular, the bods at Microprose have readied their next animated graphic adventure (AGA) and Dragonsphere is its name.

The kingdom of Gran Callahach is in mortal danger. 20 years have passed since the evil sorcerer Sanwe first appeared in Gran Callahach, destroying villages and terrorising the population. A powerful court wizard called Ner-Tom travelled to Sanwe's tower and after a tiring battle managed to imprison the evil sorcerer using a spell called the Dragonsphere. Sanwe vowed that he would break free from the spell in 20 years, and seek vengeance against his captors. To keep tabs on the evil sorcerer, Ner-Tom created a physical representation of the spell in the shape of a tiny dragon-homunculus encased in a crystal sphere. As long as the globe

"REX NEBULAR HAD A GREAT STORY, SOME INCREDIBLE ANIMATION AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, LOTS OF PLAYABILITY - THERE WAS NO DOUBTING THAT MICROPROSE HAD STRUCK A RICH VEIN AND FURTHER ADVENTURES USING THE MADS INTERFACE WOULD BE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED"



The great desert of Soptus Ecliptus is a dangerous place to be if you're not sure where you're going. Ask the locals for directions



Slathan ni Patan is a strange place. Shape-shifters come in all shapes and sizes – the one found thrashing about in this murky pool has to be outsmarted if you are to pass in one piece

remained whole and the dragon still, the kingdom could rest in the knowledge that it was safe.

The story picks up some 20 years later. The king has died and you, Callash, are now the ruler of Gran Callahach. Your kingdom is swept with paranoia as the people await the return of Sanwe, while the sphere is beginning to crack and the dragon is stirring. The only option is for you to prepare for the return of the sorcerer and confront him yourself. Prophecies concerning Sanwe's demise speak of three stones of power that must combine their energies to banish the sorcerer. No one knows where these stones are hidden so you set out to find them.

As the adventure begins, Callash bids farewell to his queen and untrustworthy brother (whom he catches sitting on the king's throne). The castle has many rooms to explore before even setting foot outside, some of which are empty, while others have a few useful objects hidden within them. All passable exits are sensed by the intelligent cursor in much the same way as in many other adventures of this sort. In fact, the MADS interface appears pretty run-of-the-mill until you actually realise how good it is.

A verb list with all the usual commands (look, take, talk to, etc) is situated at the bottom-left corner of the screen. Complete commands can be constructed by first selecting a verb then clicking on a target – for example, talk to (verb) hermit (target). Simple! More complex commands involving verb/object/target constructions (eg throw banana at gorilla) are also possible.

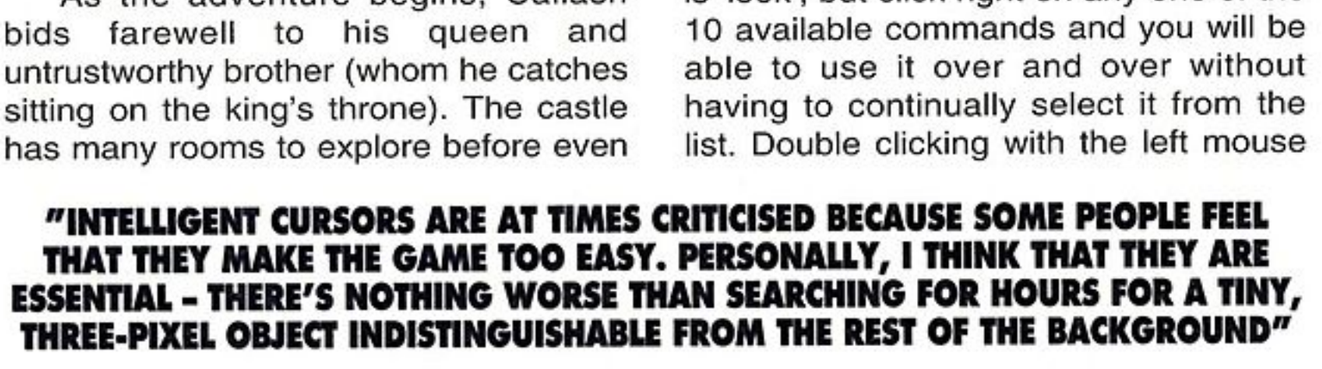
Every object in the game also has its own set of commands which become available once you have the object in your possession, enabling magical stones to be invoked, liquids poured and swords swung. And that's not all – the right mouse button can be defined to automatically configure to a certain command of your choosing. The default is 'look', but click right on any one of the 10 available commands and you will be able to use it over and over without having to continually select it from the list. Double clicking with the left mouse button on the look command will give you a general description of the location you are currently in, which is useful if you've just arrived for the first time.

I mentioned earlier the intelligent cursor, and Dragonsphere certainly has one of the best adaptations of this system yet seen. Intelligent cursors are at times criticised because some people feel that they make the game too easy. Personally, I think that they are essential – there's nothing worse than searching for hours for a tiny, three-pixel object indistinguishable from the rest of the background.

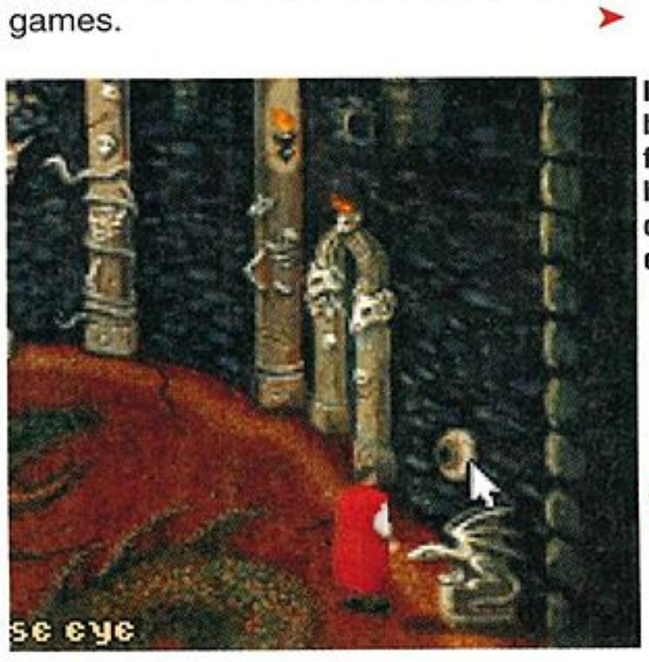
"INTELLIGENT CURSORS ARE AT TIMES CRITICISED BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE FEEL THAT THEY MAKE THE GAME TOO EASY. PERSONALLY, I THINK THAT THEY ARE ESSENTIAL - THERE'S NOTHING WORSE THAN SEARCHING FOR HOURS FOR A TINY, THREE-PIXEL OBJECT INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE REST OF THE BACKGROUND"

Anyhow, Dragonsphere makes up for this by allowing the cursor to react with virtually anything present in the background graphics, rather than just the important objects contained within the location. Text descriptions are displayed for anything from the sky to a spider's web hanging inconspicuously on a wall – obviously the sky and the spider's web aren't going to be of much use to you in your quest, but the cursor recognises them nevertheless. It's a small but significant feature of the finely tuned MADS interface and one that I hope to see more of in future games.

Trying to climb down a well without the correct safety equipment is always fatal. Still, it is an interesting taste of things to come later in the game



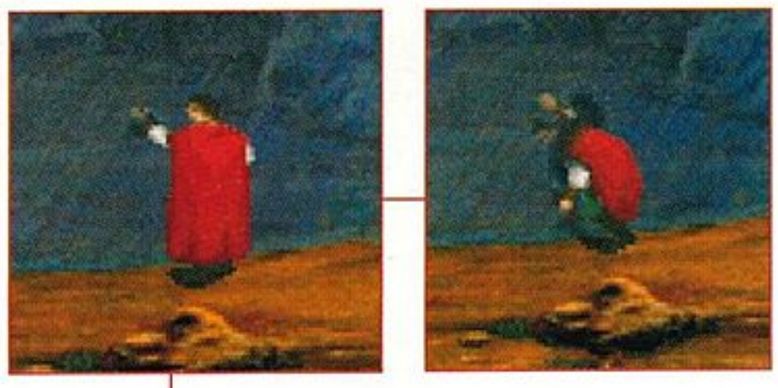
Make sure to explore Gran Callahach castle properly before you venture outside – there are a number of useful bits and bobs hidden in the rooms

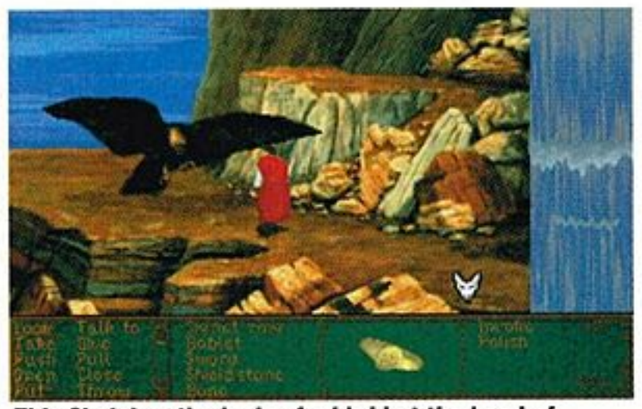


Inside the tower this bulbous eye bars further progress. I'll have to find some way of closing it before I can pass

REVIEW

Just one example of the wonderful animation seen in Dragonsphere – Callash approaches the shield surrounding the tower and touches it before stepping through





This Shak has the body of a bird but the head of man...and the damn thing won't let me pass

➤ The story unfolds as you encounter other characters throughout the game and the mysteries of Gran Callahach unravel through conversation. The CD-ROM version has a distinct advantage over the floppy incarnation in that it contains full speech, but little of the humour or charm is lost in the text-only version. While the digitised speech is very atmospheric, it is by no means perfect. For a start the volume of the music drowns out much of the conversation, which is a pity. Mind you, the voice acting is a tad irritating from time to time too, so luckily the music, sound effects and digitised speech can all be toggled on or off if you so desire.

The nitty-gritty of conversation (ie what is said rather than how it is said) is spot on. Although not quite as thorough or probing as something like Cryo's Conspiracy, it has enough depth to make it actually feel like a conversation and not a one-sided chat with a digitised sprite. It's a good idea to pay attention when you are being spoken to because most characters refuse to repeat previous conversations (as you would expect in real life). Easily distracted as I am, I learnt the hard way and had to restore my game on numerous occasions.

The most important information you will no doubt pick up along the way are the locations of new and exciting places to travel to. Talking to everyone in the marketplace outside the castle of Gran Callahach will open up four new locations – Soptus Ecliptus, a desert plain inhabited by gruff-sounding, bleached-white-skinned traders; Brynn-Fann, the enchanted world of the faeries; Sanwe's tower, enveloped in a shield of magic; and Slathan ni Patan, the land of the shape-shifters.

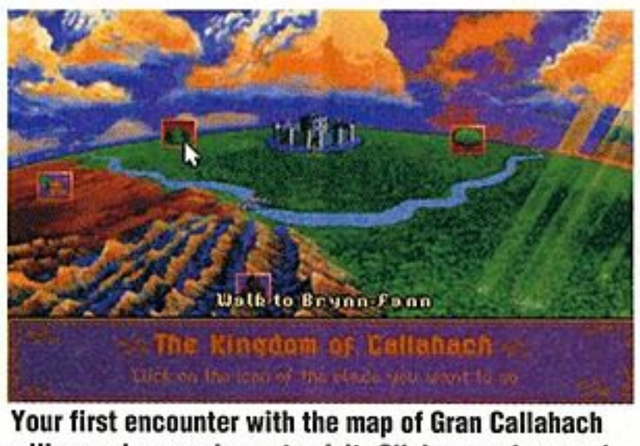
Each region of Gran Callahach has its own particular style of puzzle, for instance the faeries like to annoy travellers (humans especially) by confronting them with logic puzzles, while the Soptus Ecliptus prefer language-related riddles. Although the puzzles are all well designed, I did find myself hitting a brick wall from time to time, although more experienced adventures will revel in the challenge. Don't let this put you off though, because there are two difficulty levels (novice and challenging) allowing players of any ability to participate.

A running theme throughout the game is the prejudice held by the human characters against shape-shifters. Talk to the guards about shape-shifters and you will be informed that they are "untrustworthy individuals who are able to steal your very identity". Even the sentries standing guarding the entrance to Slathan ni Patan (the shape-shifters' homeland) doubt your identity and fear that you are merely a shape-shifter masquerading as the king. Without going into too much detail (to avoid seriously affecting your enjoyment of the game), this underlying theme unfurls as you explore further, adding immensely to the unwinding plot.

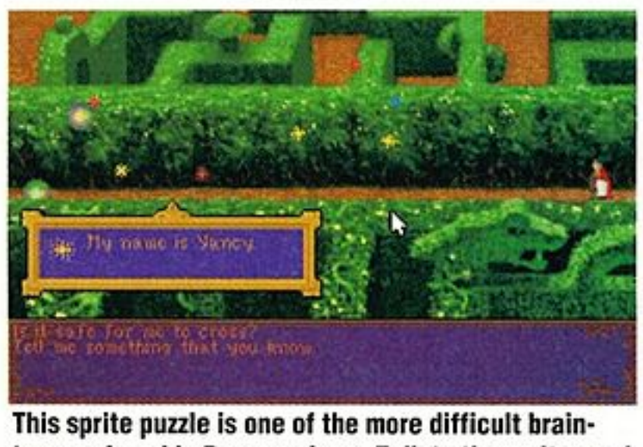
One of the most impressive features found in Dragonsphere has got to be the quality of the character animation throughout. Granted, much of Callash's movement is clearly rotoscoped (a process where live-action footage is transferred frame by frame into drawn or digitised animation), but the end result is nothing short of outstanding. Watch as Callash descends a rope, climbs up the side of a rock-face and generally walks around, and I defy you not to be impressed. In one particular sequence the main character steps through the shield surrounding Sanwe's tower; first he tests the shield with his hand (it ripples), before squeezing his body through it, one foot before the other. His cape is the last to be pulled free of

"ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE FEATURES FOUND IN DRAGONSPHERE HAS GOT TO BE THE QUALITY OF THE CHARACTER ANIMATION THROUGHOUT. GRANTED, MUCH OF CALLASH'S MOVEMENT IS CLEARLY ROTOSCOPED, BUT THE END RESULT IS NOTHING SHORT OF OUTSTANDING"

REVIEW

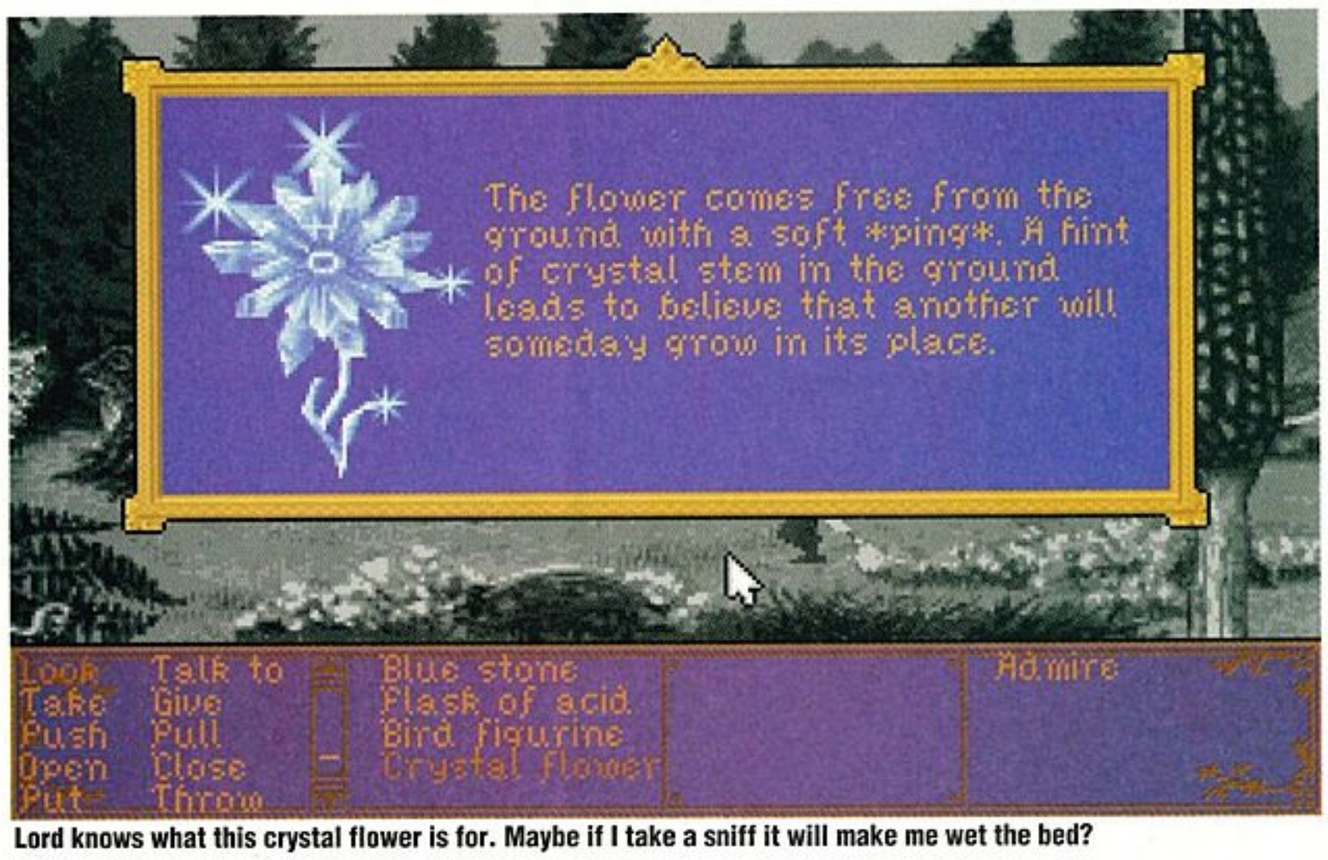


Your first encounter with the map of Gran Callahach will reveal more places to visit. Click on an icon and the chosen location will emerge from the map in glorious 3D (of sorts)



This sprite puzzle is one of the more difficult brain-teasers found in Dragonsphere. Talk to the sprites and make notes as you go!

I'm being attacked by a magic rope! If I try to pass, the infernal thing lynches me. Think, boy, think! There has to be a logical way out!



Lord knows what this crystal flower is for. Maybe if I take a sniff it will make me wet the bed?

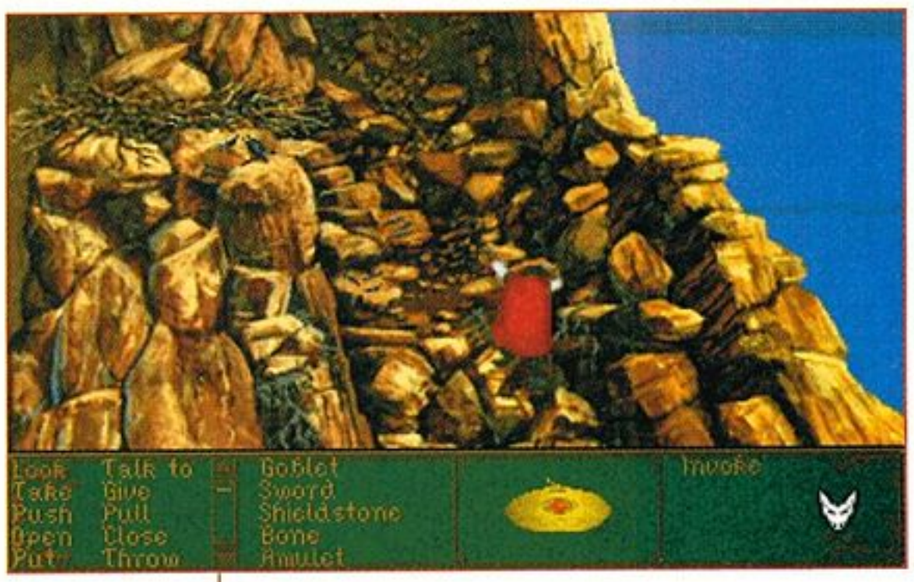
the enveloping shield, with Callash even turning to pull the cape free of the mysterious barrier. Wow! Attention to detail like this is very rarely found outside of the LucasArts stable.

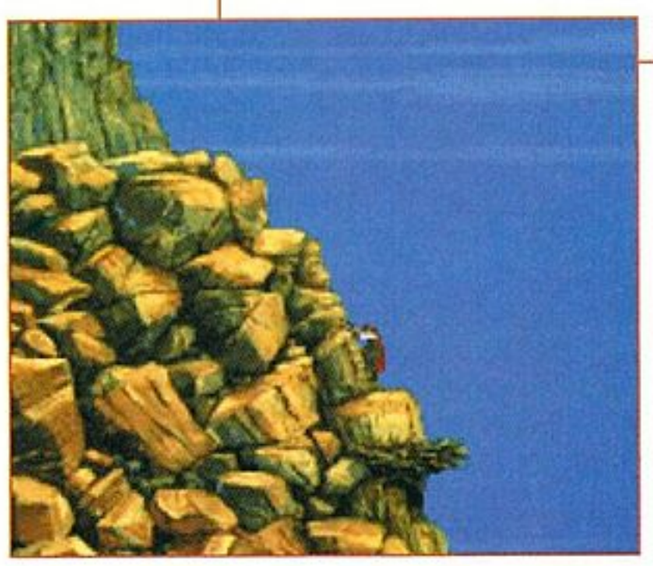
The puzzles are of similar quality, starting off not too hard, but gradually increasing in complexity. Every now and then you will stumble upon a number of cleverly designed logic puzzles. Callash's first encounter with the faeries is met by an impassable barrier patrolled by a selection of cheeky, coloured sprites. By asking them questions you should eventually deduce which sprite has the ability to deactivate the nearby barrier. Cracking this puzzle may sound easy on paper, but a fair amount of logical brainwork is required to get a result. Needless to say, completing this particular kind of puzzle is highly satisfying – something which is vital for the success of any graphic adventure on the market.

Progress is well paced on the whole. Of the two difficulty levels available, 'challenging' is geared towards experienced adventurers. Less clues are available in this mode and if you find that you may need that extra bit of help along the way there's always the novice mode to fall back on. Playing the game on the novice setting isn't too detrimental to lastabilty either, because none of the puzzles change, instead you just get a few helpful pointers here and there.

I suppose if there is a downside to Dragonsphere I would have to say that it has to be the music. The game supports almost every major sound card (and there are a heck of a lot of them now!), but it seems that the musicians have just missed the mark as far as atmosphere is concerned. The 16-bit Pro Audio Spectrum sound card fitted to my machine strained its little heart out to deliver the goods, but in all honesty the sound never impressed me. The music isn't awful by any stretch of the imagination, just a missed opportunity.

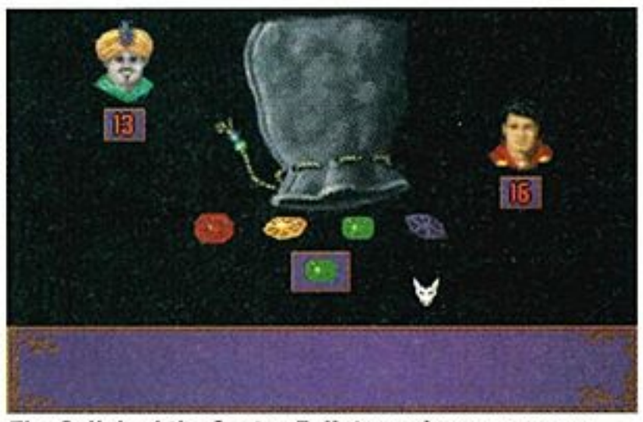
IT'S GOOD TO SEE A FAIRLY SERIOUS APPROACH TO THIS KIND OF TOLKEIN-ESQUE FANTASY ADVENTURE. SURE, THERE ARE PLENTY OF CLICHÉS TO BE FOUND IN THERE, BUT THE WHOLE THING IS PUT TOGETHER WITH A LOT OF STYLE"





More superb animation. Callash climbs a huge rock-face to reach Sanwe's tower. The first time you climb you are treated to an excellent animation sequence as Callash makes his ascent

It's good to see a fairly serious approach to this kind of Tolkein-esque fantasy adventure. Sure, there are plenty of clichés to be found in Dragonsphere, but the whole thing is put together with a lot of style. Adventuresoft's Simon the Sorcerer never really caught my imagination and I'm not a great fan of Sierra King's Quest games, but Dragonsphere definitely fills the gap and is certainly one of the best point-and-click adventures developed outside of the LucasArts stable. **SCORE ★★★★**



The Caliph of the Soptus Ecliptus enjoys a game or two to while the hot days away – beat him at his own game and you're onto a good thing

The tower is filled with many dangerous traps, while getting into the place is a trial in itself. Be patient though and you'll be picking grapes from these vines in no time at all

REVIEW

DESPITE REACHING A NUMBER OF SEQUELS NEARING FRIDAY THE 13TH PROPORTIONS, THE ULTIMA GAMES ARE STILL MORE THAN CAPABLE OF DRAWING A CROWD. IS THIS REALLY THE BEST RPG ON THE PC?

by John Davison

Richard Garriott and his team spent many hours researching pagan rituals and the many myths surrounding demon worship. It shows too – Ultima VIII: Pagan contains some particularly impressive invocation sequences; witness this fire elemental being raised from within the pentagram

ULTIMA VIII:

REVIEW

PRODUCT
Ultima VIII: Pagan

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Electronic Arts/Origin

PRICE
£44.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 4Mb RAM, 386 (486 preferred), VGA, Mouse, 30Mb Hard Disk

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland, General MIDI Sound Cards

YOU'D have thought that after so many games all set around pretty much the same theme that we'd find ourselves in a situation where no one particularly cares anymore. However, in reality it seems that nothing could be further from the truth – the sense of anticipation and excitement surrounding the imminent release of Ultima VIII seems to be at a ludicrously high level. If you thought people were going crackers at the prospect of last year's Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds you'd be surprised at just how much attention the latest game is receiving. Why though? What is it that draws people towards Richard Garriott's world of the Avatar, the Guardian, Lord British and all Britannia?

It's no secret that Garriott and his team practically re-invent the whole gameplay engine with every new product, but there's more to it than just this. Ultima games have always been on the leading edge of RPGs and each new game has been bigger, better and more in-depth than that which has gone before. Pagan is different though. Whereas Ultima VII proved just how big you could make something, this has gone completely the other way – rather than trying to create something unmanageably vast, the Ultima team has focused on fine tuning the realism and graphical qualities of the product. The result is a game of quite stunning detail that is reputedly a third of the size of Ultima VII. A wise move or not?

Do not adjust your set! Take a trip to novelty island. All you have to do is eat one of those funny-coloured mushrooms found lying in the grass...

I knew I should have checked the chest for booby traps before opening it! Luckily, I survived the blast and whatever is in the chest is now mine

PAGAN

THE WORLD AND MAGIC OF PAGAN

OK, so Ultima VII finished very dramatically – there was the Guardian and lots of other stuff going on, and then that bloody great red hand scooped you up and pulled you away to another dimension. As it turns out, this other dimension was the realm of Pagan – an island where the Guardian's forces are in absolute control. It seems that after conquering both Britannia and Earth the big G intends to use you as an example to all those who stand in his way.

"WHEREAS ULTIMA VII PROVED JUST HOW BIG YOU COULD MAKE SOMETHING, THIS HAS GONE COMPLETELY THE OTHER WAY - RATHER THAN TRYING TO CREATE SOMETHING UNMANAGEABLY VAST, THE ULTIMA TEAM HAS FOCUSED ON FINE TUNING THE REALISM AND GRAPHICAL QUALITIES OF THE PRODUCT. THE RESULT IS A GAME OF QUITE STUNNING DETAIL THAT IS REPUTEDLY A THIRD OF THE SIZE OF ULTIMA VII"

Waking on the shores near the city of Tenebrae you learn that a lone fisherman dragged you to dry land and now proceeds to assist you in any way he can. It's here that the adventure begins as you discover that your only hope of freedom is to travel through Pagan and seek out all those who oppose the Guardian, while at the same time coming to terms with the strange ways and beliefs of the native people.

Much of Pagan's life revolves around both magic and the mystic elemental Titans which hold such a fierce grip on the land (along with the Guardian himself). Surrounding the basic elemental beliefs of the populace are the various arts which are employed by the mystics and if you are to truly succeed in your quest you're going to need to get pretty nifty and rubbing bits of dirt together and mumbling mystic chants.

Necromancy, the magic behind the earth elemental, deals mainly with life energy and is something which can be picked up quite quickly by a reasonably experienced role player. Necromancy offers opportunities to exploit the dead for both information and assistance as well as the use of the land itself to provide protection. Using basic elements (known as reagents) such as blood, bone, wood or even dirt – a necromancer can soon become quite powerful.

The water elemental provides the magic of tempestry – an art that allows the caster to walk on, or even breath under water. Aside from this it also provides a number of destructive powers associated with water and stormy weather.

Theurgy is the magic provided by the air elemental and, once focused through trinkets that can be found by even the least adept novice, can provide the power to heal, to jump great distances or even make the caster invisible. At its strongest level, the art can even resurrect the dead – a power only available to the most adept player.

Sorcery, which like necromancy is focused through the use of reagents, is the magic associated with the fire elemental. A deadly and aggressive art, sorcery is developed through the use of a pentagram and basic elements such as volcanic ash and brimstone. Once charged through his pentagram a sorcerer can be a powerful opponent capable of a great deal of destruction.

As far as the Avatar is concerned though, these basic arts need not be separate. As a visitor to the land of Pagan you have the opportunity to exploit what the scholars of the realm refer to as thaumaturgy. Basically a mish-mash of the four basic elements, the art is the perfect aid for the Avatar in his quest. As well as providing him with a huge array of powers, it also offers the opportunity to destroy the elemental Titans and free the land from their reign.

REVIEW

FIGHTING TALK

Initially, combat is highly infuriating, but after some practice you will soon get the hang of it. Every swing, parry and kick is controlled using just the mouse and the cursor on screen. A brief description of combat techniques follows:

READIED

Double click the right mouse button over the Avatar and he will draw his sword and ready himself for combat. You may notice that the arrow cursor turns red

MOVEMENT

Keep moving around if you're in any danger. Hold down the right mouse button while close to the Avatar and he will shuffle in the direction the arrow cursor is pointing

USE WEAPON

Move the red arrow cursor towards the edge of the screen (making sure it's pointing towards the enemy) and double click the left mouse button. The Avatar will now utilise the weapon currently held

A NEW LOOK

Those of you who've kept up with the Ultima series since the beginning (there must be some of you out there) will no doubt be big fans of the top-down perspective employed throughout the series. Because of this it's probably safe to say that the boldest move made by Pagan is that it makes use of a scrolling isometric 3D screen layout that allows for much larger, more detailed graphics.

Beyond this, we've also lost the turn-based play system which was used throughout every version and in its place we now have a very free control method which is decidedly reminiscent of that found in the Underworld games. Simply move the arrow around the screen to define which of the eight possible directions you want the Avatar to move and then determine how fast he moves by moving the cursor closer to the edge of the screen. It's simple and effective, and while cynics may feel that it trivialises the good ol' tried and tested RPG system, it does manage to make the game both extremely playable and very fast moving.

Speculation in many of the previews written about the game described the new system as more akin to an arcade adventure (and coupled with the isometric viewpoint it does occasionally stir up memories of old games like Fairlight and Sabre Wulf) than a fully blown adventure, but now the game is complete it's more than apparent that the controls have been tailored to provide a truly hands-on experience.

To say that all of this takes a little

Kith are a species of super-deformed arachnid, sometimes herded and domesticated for food. They can still be very dangerous and should always be approached 'feet first' as it were

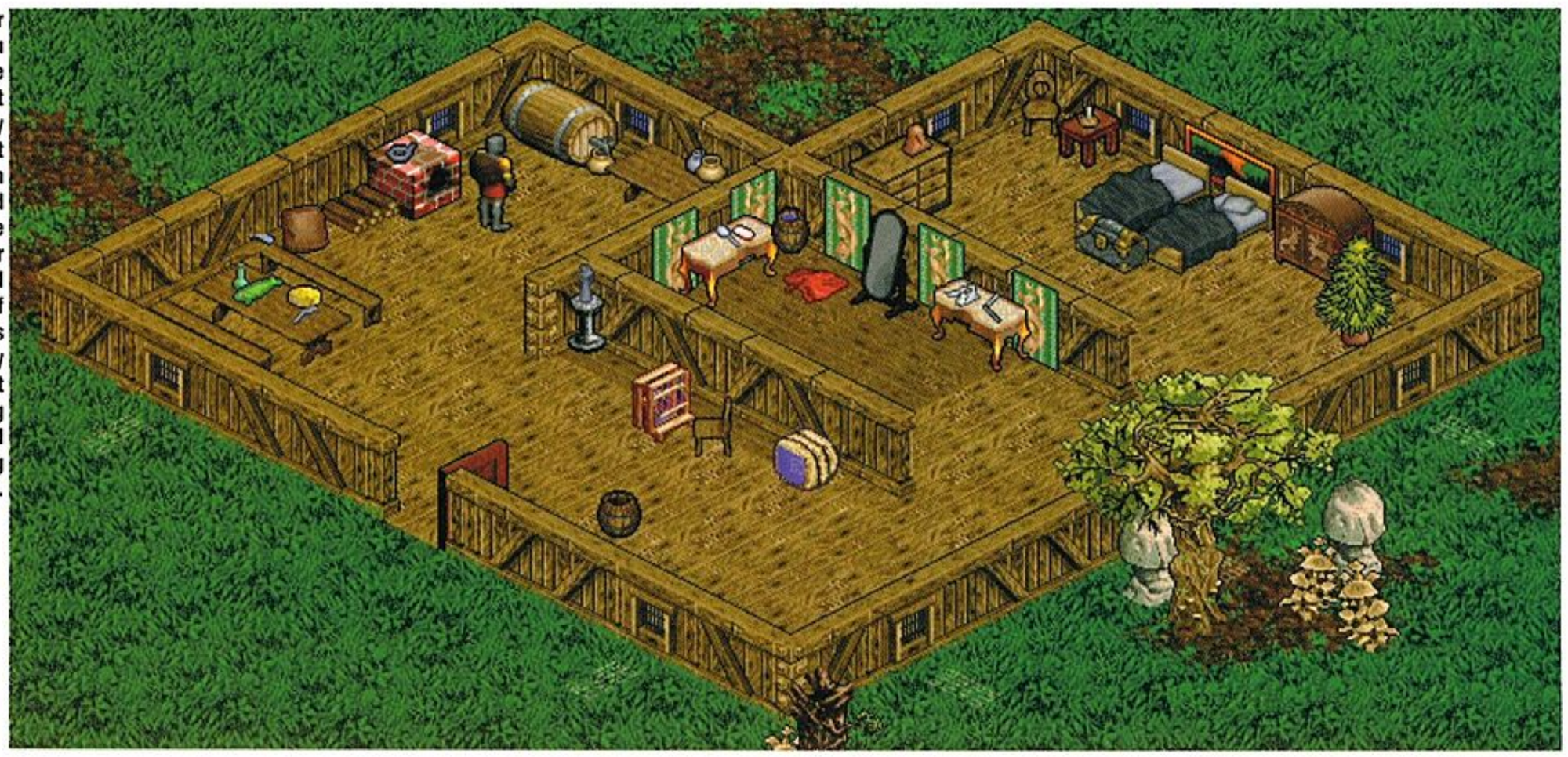
getting used to at first would be an understatement. If you're used to the traditional RPG style of controlling things you're going to feel totally muddled when faced with Ultima VIII.

"IF YOU'RE USED TO THE TRADITIONAL RPG STYLE OF CONTROLLING THINGS YOU'RE GOING TO FEEL TOTALLY MUDDLED WHEN FACED WITH ULTIMA VIII. THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF FIGHTING, RUNNING, JUMPING AND INTERACTING WITH CHARACTERS AND MONSTERS USING THIS COMMON INTERFACE ARE QUITE DAUNTING INITIALLY"

The different ways of fighting, running, jumping and interacting with characters and monsters using this common interface are quite daunting initially. For some reason the Avatar just won't do what you want him to at first – he either won't face the right way when you want him to fight something, or he jumps too far because you've put the cursor in the wrong place on the screen. All of this is very infuriating at first, but once you've slipped into gear and got to grips with the way the game works the interface becomes very much second nature.

Once you've got the hang of all of these new fangled features you can sit back and revel in the fact that this is by

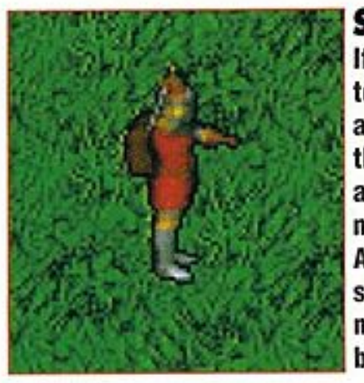
Unless a locked door bars your way (and you don't happen to have the correct key), most houses are pretty easy to 'break into'. Almost every item you can see littered around the building can be examined, moved or picked up. The level of detail in many of these dwellings is absolutely outstanding – most even have tiny shaving facilities if you feel your stubble is getting rather long...



REVIEW

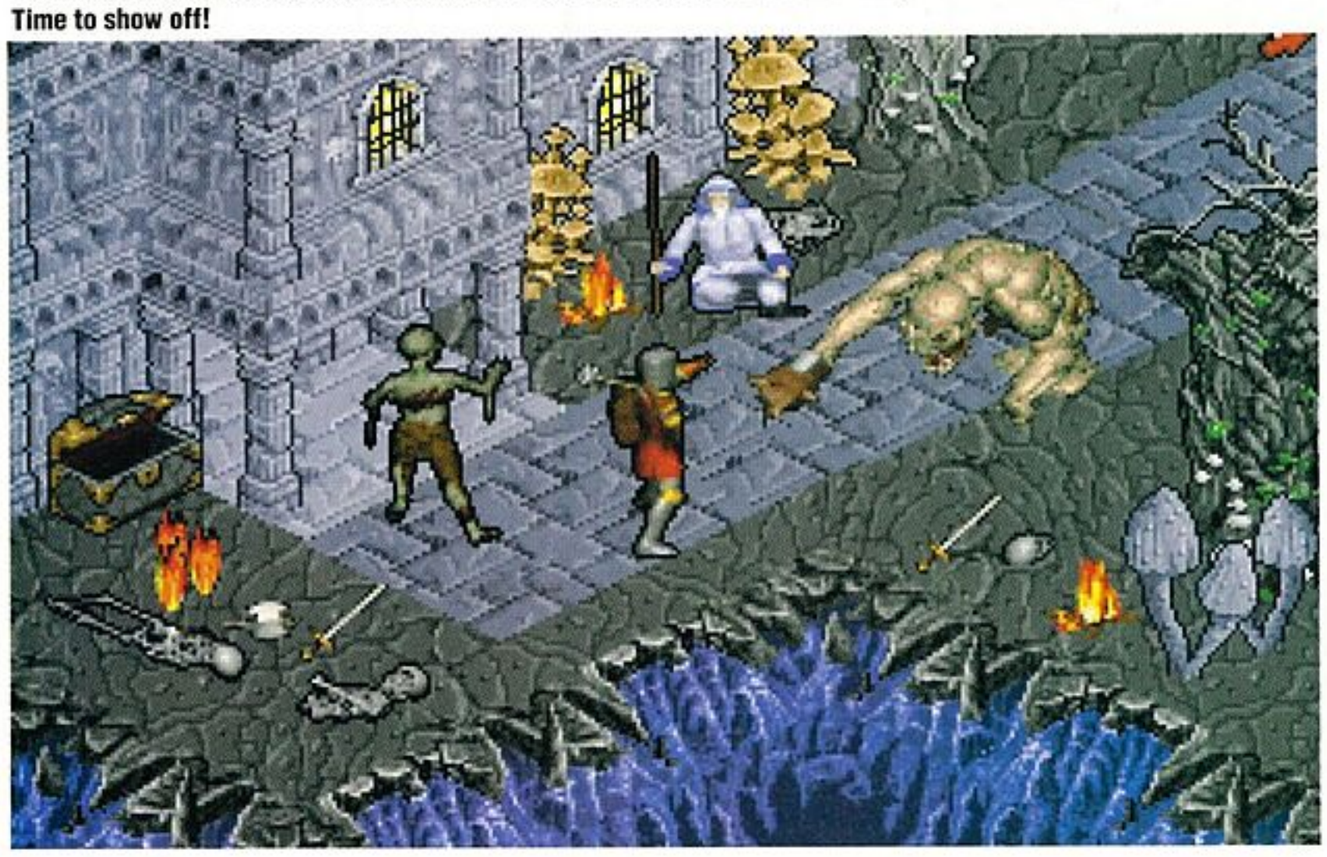
KICK
Alternatively, double-clicking the right mouse button in the desired direction will make the Avatar kick out with his feet. Useful as a rapid, close-combat last resort

BLOCK
If you can see an unstoppable offensive move coming your way, hold down the left mouse button to block the attack. It may not always work, but it's worth a try



SHEATH
If your enemy attempts to do a runner, move the arrow cursor towards the edge of the screen and hold the right mouse button down. The Avatar will sheath his sword and move as normal until the mouse button is released

A troll and a zombie attack from both sides as the sorcerer looks nonchalantly on from behind. Time to show off!



The only way out of this mess is to use some powerful offensive magic to blow the enemies away. The magic system is extremely thorough and there are many spells to master

Not all the monsters in Ultima VIII: Pagan are humanoid in appearance – take these giant insects, for example, each can insert its proboscis into your head and slowly suck your brains out!

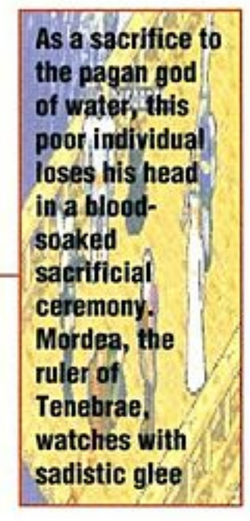
far the most impressive-looking (and indeed sounding) Ultima adventure yet. Aside from the fact that all of the backdrops are exceptionally well drawn, each one boasts in its presentation. Many of the creatures showcased are animated with more than 400 individual frames and the Avatar himself swagger or stomp around while the humans vary from drunken slobs looking up from a table in an inebriated stupor to gorgeous young maidens swooning around wiggling their hips provocatively (or as provocative as a bunch of brightly coloured pixels can get if you take my meaning – I'm not that sad).

"MANY OF THE CREATURES SHOWCASED ARE ANIMATED WITH MORE THAN 400 INDIVIDUAL FRAMES AND THE AVATAR HIMSELF APPARENTLY BOASTS A GRAND TOTAL OF 1,200 FRAMES! THE RESULT OF ALL THIS IS THAT WE NOT ONLY GET SOME VERY SMOOTH AND FLUID-LOOKING MOVEMENT - WE ALSO FIND THAT MANY OF THE CREATURES AND PEOPLE TAKE ON THEIR OWN PERSONALITIES JUST FROM THE WAY THEY MOVE"

one of the best features about the new style graphics is that the animation is exceptional.

The variety of NPCs and monsters roaming around the land are not only impressive in their numbers, but also in the amount of frames of animation which apparently boasts a grand total of 1,200 frames! The result of all of this is that we not only get some very smooth and fluid-looking movement – we also find that many of the creatures and people take on their own personalities just from the way they move. Certain creatures

To top it all off the game has some of the very best sound I've heard in a long time. If you're lucky enough to have the opportunity to use a Soundblaster for the excellent stereo sound effects and a General MIDI compatible music source, you're in for a treat. The superbly composed music varies from the dramatic to the eerie and atmospheric, while the effects (which incidentally employ some very clever programming to deliver four channel stereo samples on a stereo card) are some of the best I've heard on a non-CD based product. ➤



As a sacrifice to the pagan god of water, this poor individual loses his head in a blood-soaked sacrificial ceremony. Mordea, the ruler of Tenebrae, watches with sadistic glee

Searching through any of these receptacles will more often than not reveal something for the taking. Barrels often carry food while the cloth bags sometimes carry money and jewels. Chests are the more sought-after of the three and are usually booby-trapped to ward off would-be thieves

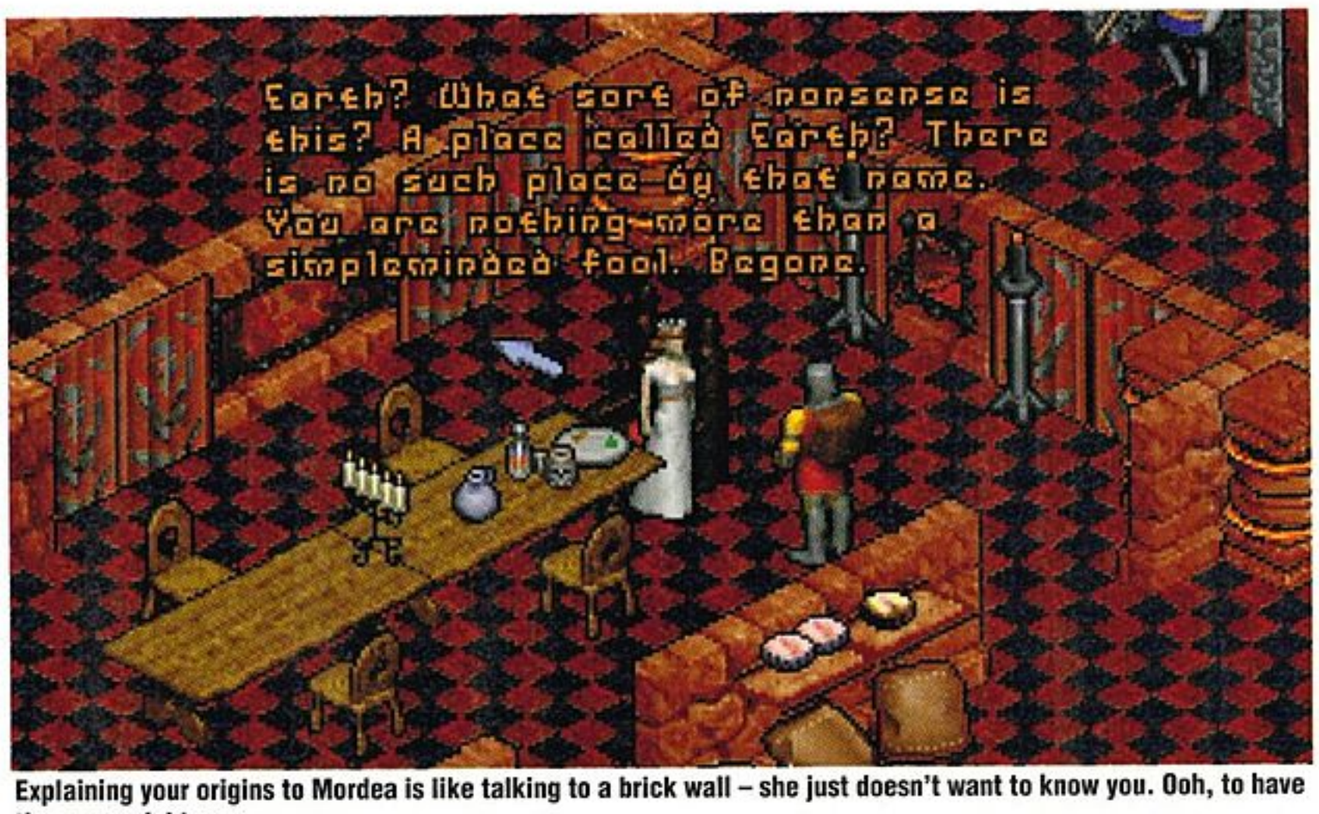
➤ The big question must hang solely over the gameplay opportunities that this latest instalment offers. Despite worries that the game may be 'too small' when the specs were announced late last year, it would seem to us that there is a great deal which Ultima VIII has to offer over all of the previous Ultimas. The freedom of movement, the lack of a turn-based structure and the combat system (see our brief description of how this works elsewhere) means that you do feel that you are playing a role far more than you do in many of this style of game.

Couple this with the fact that there are an enormous number of opportunities to exploit and you have a game which really must rate as one of the best yet. The developers have obviously injected a great deal of history into this new mystic realm and this is all brought to the fore through the excellent interaction with NPCs.

While the conversation system isn't perfect (when are they in RPGs these days?) you do get the opportunity to learn a great deal about your surroundings by simply talking to people by means of a simple option driven conversation system. There are even moments where you feel that you've got to know a certain character and this is the sort of thing that role playing is all about. The conversations may not be totally 'free' as far as you're concerned, but you can have some very lengthy chats with people.

On the quest front, aside from the basic 'get out alive and kill all of the bad guys along the way' objective you are also presented with a host of opportunities which will take you through seven different parts of Pagan – four of these are specific to each of the basic elementals. From the streets of the city of Tenebrae you'll work your way through a wide range of landscapes which are all filled with some superb creatures which must be either fought or reasoned with. The Bestiary which accompanies the game speaks of 12 basic types of creature (including humans) which can vary in strength and power. Aside from this there are also varying degrees of magic user which must all be overcome if you're to get out alive.

When dealing with a product like this in a review there is a certain amount of turmoil which we go through as we try to communicate the qualities of the product. On one hand there's a very strong feeling that whatever you say, it's not enough. The game has so many strong points that it really is very difficult to mention everything. However, on the other hand much of



Explaining your origins to Mordea is like talking to a brick wall – she just doesn't want to know you. Ooh, to have the power right now...

UP TO SCRATCH?

the delight which can be had from a game like Ultima VIII is derived from the sense of the unknown, and that everything you encounter is a surprise. As a result of this, we've tried very hard here not to give to much of the game away and concentrate basically on the overall feel and the mechanics.

On both of these fronts the game is hard to fault. OK, we've had our little niggles with it; the control system takes a while to get used to (although this is only a short-term problem) and the conversation system doesn't seem quite enough (it's only a very basic response-based option structure), but on the whole there is very little which you can actually gripe about. From what we've seen here, it's obvious that the whole ethos behind the Ultima series has now changed. Gone is the old-fashioned party-based philosophy of yesteryear, and in its place is something far more individual which probably has more in common with the Ultima Underworld games than it does with the earlier games in the series (apart from the first-person perspective point of view of course).

Is it really worthy of all the hype though? Well, it's got the point now that anything with the word Ultima tagged onto it will cause a stir, but Ultima VIII deserves to more than most as it does actually both try and succeed to break the mould and take RPGs to the next level. Aside from the presentation which is quite obviously superb, the game as a whole does manage to continue in the vein of its predecessors while building and improving on many of the ideas found there. It's definitely a very firm and very bold step in the right direction. Who knows what Ultima IX will bring?

SCORE ★★★★★

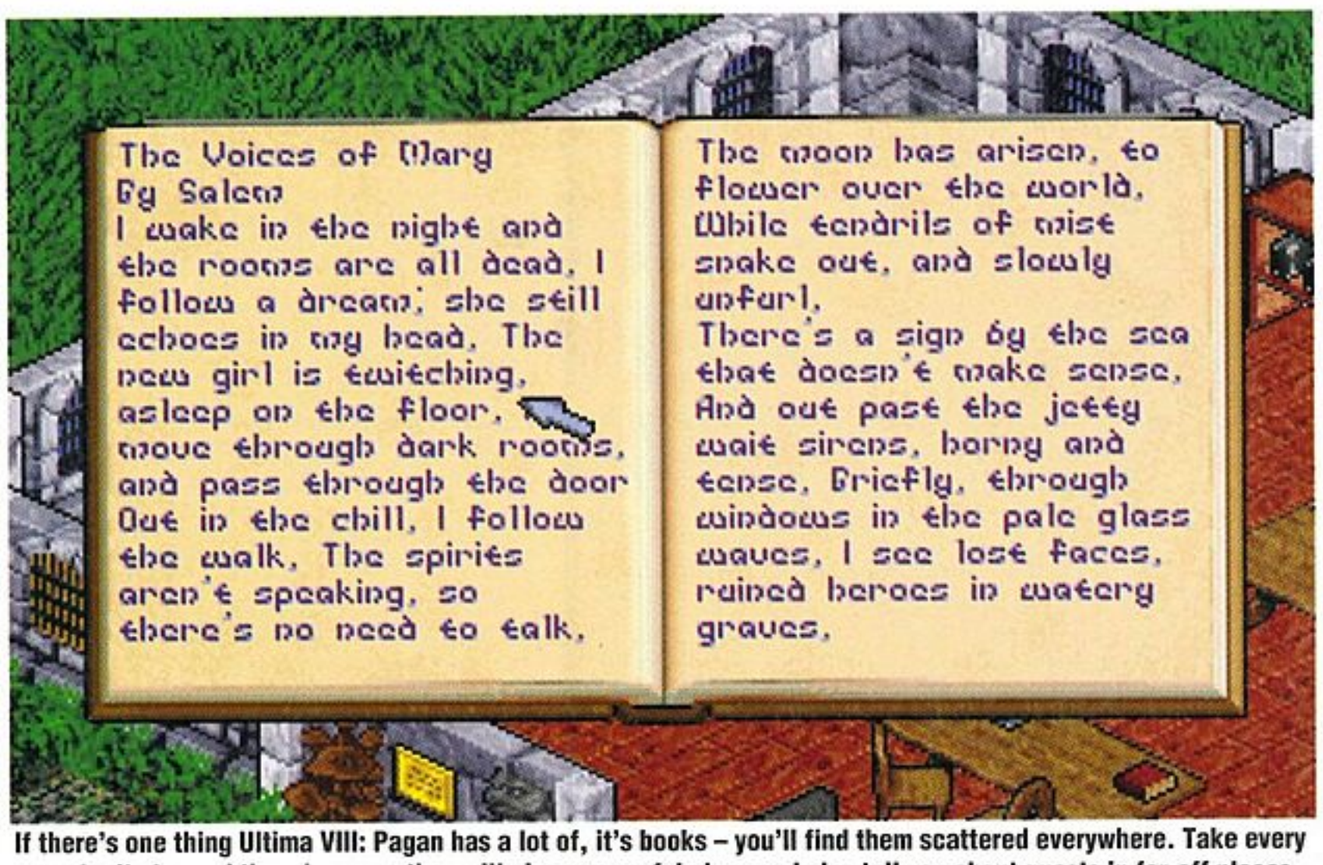
"GONE IS THE OLD-FASHIONED PARTY-BASED PHILOSOPHY OF YESTERYEAR, AND IN ITS PLACE IS SOMETHING FAR MORE INDIVIDUAL THAT PROBABLY HAS MORE IN COMMON WITH THE ULTIMA UNDERWORLD GAMES THAN IT DOES WITH THE EARLIER GAMES IN THE SERIES"

REVIEW

This rope bridge is not the safest place to take on a zombie. I'm in no doubt that I can beat him, but if I take one hit I may plummet to my death

These strange, green creatures are called Torax. Torax are domesticated animals that are bred for their meat – attack one though and they will bite back!

EXPERT OPINION



If there's one thing Ultima VIII: Pagan has a lot of, it's books – you'll find them scattered everywhere. Take every opportunity to read them because they will give you useful clues and also tell you about quests in far-off places

Dave Renton is *PC Player's* contributing RPG expert. With an enormous amount of experience in the field as long time editor of *Role Player Independant* magazine, his input is invaluable

"WELL, *here we go with another straight from the stables of Mr Gary Gygax (co-creator of the D&D game). The Ultima series has now reached numero eight and it is still sticking to the clichéd fantasy pap that we've been force-fed since Tolkien whipped out his quill and ink in the back of the Eagle and Child hostelry not more than a stone's throw from where I sit right now.*

Fantasy RPGs, whether table top or computer, have several things in common that are necessary to play the game; a combat system, a magic system, lots of monsters, and people to interact with (that's why it's called role playing). So what does Ultima 8 offer us in the way of these things? Combat's your usual point-and-click to hit, but to be fair it is a little more involved than that, and there is no way to tell that you are actually damaging your opponent, until either of you keels over dead that is. One thing that has been missing from computer RPGs is the ability to move the dead bodies out of the way after combat, I was particularly delighted to see this feature – no more teleporting dead monsters.

Magic can make or break a new role-playing system coming onto the overcrowded RPG Fantasy market. If you ain't got a good reason for it, you can be sure your system is gonna fall flat on its face – it can't be stressed enough that magic is an integral part of a fantasy system. OK, so you are limited with what you can do on the computer, but I do wish games designers would take a look at some of the other table top role-playing games and not just one particular good seller (you know the one I mean). Ultima spellcasters seem to have taken a quick look at FASA's Shadowrun system, and White Wolf's Storytelling systems, and thought, that looks a little complicated so let's just use some of the phrases and stick with an AD&D-style spell system.

Monsters are the usual standard affair and have been taken from the realms of mythology or the dark recesses of an unimaginative brain. Ghosts, ghouls, trolls and daemons are all on call along with the seeker, Aerial Servant (bit of a give away, lads), and a large blue and red pet spider called a kith.

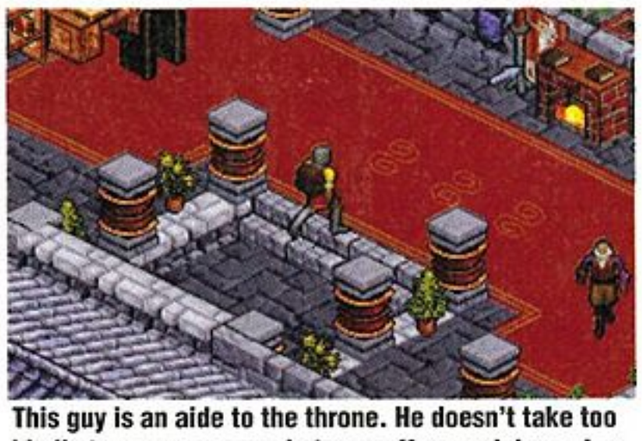
Now to the sticking point; interaction. We've all had these conversations before – "Where is the bog?" "Sorry, do not understand 'bog'". The problem is the computer doesn't think on its toes (or little rubber feet). It has to say what it's been programmed to say. This is where Ultima VIII seems to differ from the rest. Maybe a lot of the character interaction consists of guards telling you to be a good boy, but try talking to some of the characters and you'll find it hard to drag yourself away from the conversation.

Overall, Ultima VIII looks like just another point-and-click role-playing game. Its saving grace is the interaction with other characters, and that is what role playing is about, isn't it?" ■

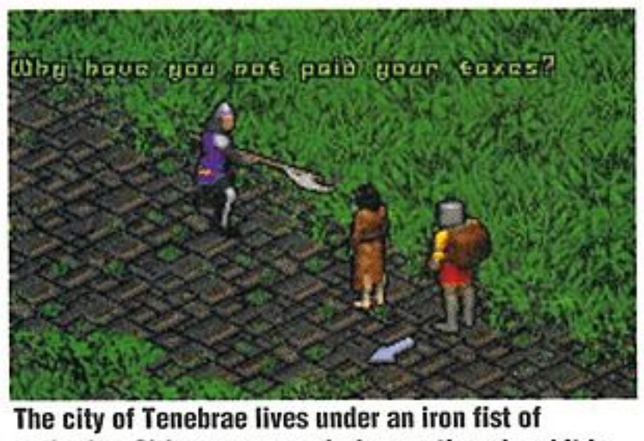
"MAYBE A LOT OF THE CHARACTER INTERACTION CONSISTS OF GUARDS TELLING YOU TO BE A GOOD BOY, BUT TRY TALKING TO SOME OF THE CHARACTERS AND YOU'LL FIND IT HARD TO DRAG YOURSELF AWAY FROM THE CONVERSATION"

The first troll you will encounter will probably be this one safely locked up inside this cage. If you can get inside this mediaeval zoo you could find some useful items for the taking

Finding the right combination of switches will open a portcullis further back in the cave. This is not going to be easy with all those zombies walking around outside

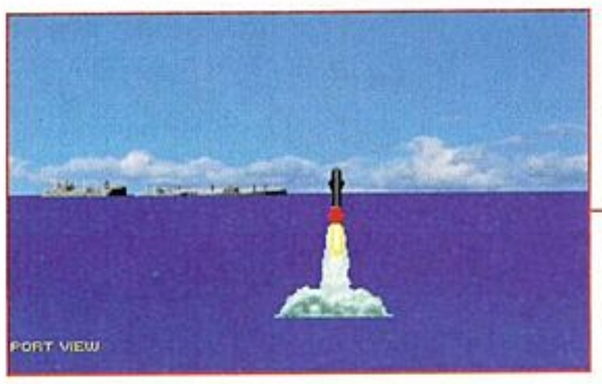


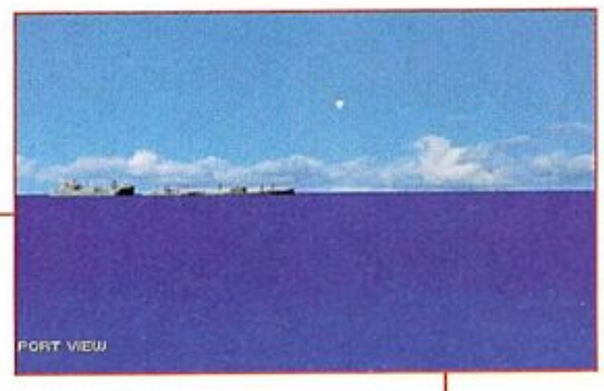
This guy is an aide to the throne. He doesn't take too kindly to your presence but may offer a quick word or two if you're persistent



The city of Tenebrae lives under an iron fist of authority. Citizens are regularly questioned and it is in your best interest not to get involved

REVIEW





The Tomahawk has a greater capacity for causing death and destruction than the torpedo, but it places the Seawolf in a much higher risk zone because it has to be fired from relatively near the surface

SUBMARINE SIMULATIONS HAVE NEVER REALLY GAINED THE SAME RESPECT FROM PLAYERS AS THEIR AIRBORNE COUNTERPARTS, BUT WITH THE RELEASE OF SEAWOLF, ELECTRONIC ARTS IS HOPING THAT THE BALANCE WILL BE REDRESSED SOMEWHAT.

by Keith Sloan

SSN-21 SEAWOLF

PRODUCT
SSN-21 Seawolf

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Electronic Arts

PRICE
£49.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5, 386 33Mhz, 4MB, Mouse, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland,Two-player Link-up

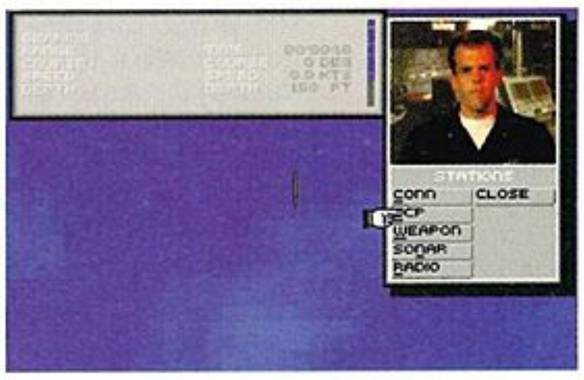
REVIEW

OF all the game types the PC could have possibly been used for, it seems that the only genre to really make its mark is the flight simulation. Literally hundreds of flight sims have come and gone over the years, ranging from the decidedly primitive (remember the original F-15 Strike Eagle?) to the most advanced that modern computing has to offer (most notably Tornado and Falcon 3.0). The reason behind why this should be eludes me – after all, if programmers can successfully re-create the complex flight dynamics of a modern military aircraft, why shouldn't they be able to translate other real-life situations into the 0s and 1s that go to make up a computer game?

Recently there has been a swing towards making the PC more of a broad simulation machine, with the likes of IndyCar Racing and X-Wing breaking the stranglehold of the fly boys. A few years ago it seemed that submarines were to become the next great thing in terms of PC sims, with Silent Service starting the ball rolling. Giving you total control over all the elements of submarine warfare, it was a fun product that was really more of a game than a simulation. Following closely on from that was 688 Attack Sub, EA's entry into the marketplace. Gaining respect for its more technical feel, it was (then) state-of-the-art as far as games of this kind went.

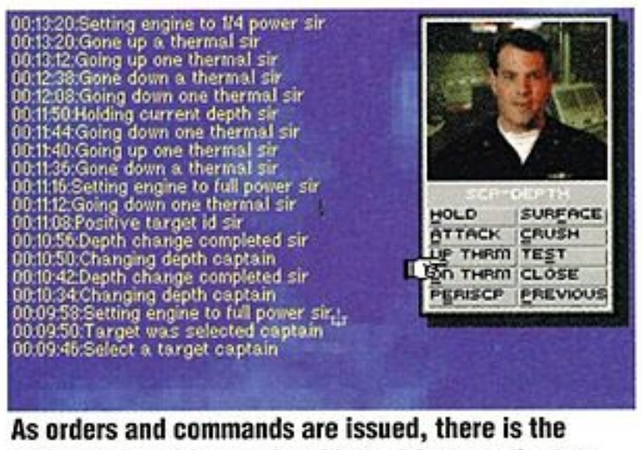
"SEAWOLF MAKES USE OF TODAY'S MUCH IMPROVED TECHNOLOGY TO PROVIDE A MORE REALISTIC GAME ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING STEALTH TECHNOLOGY AND ACCURATE SONAR DEPICTION"

After that, things seemed to stop. Other genres filled the void left by the

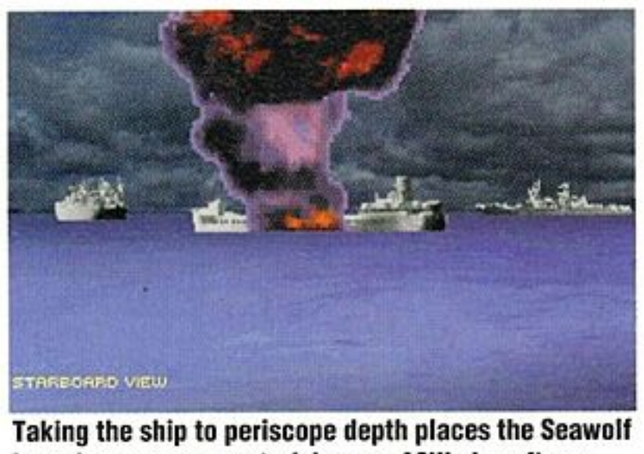


This is the screen that you'll refer to most often. It provides a top-down look at the theatre area, detailing your position, land mass, sea depth and any other ships or submarines that you have detected on sonar. It also displays the menu from which most of your tactical decisions will be made

All of the missions that you are required to undertake revolve around using the Seawolf to either ID suspect shipping or to destroy it. In this case, stealth is the keyword, meaning that passive sonar is the only way to positively ID a vessel



As orders and commands are issued, there is the option to have them echoed in text form on the top-down view. This does tend to make things rather hard to distinguish, but it also allows you to see what is going on at all times



Taking the ship to periscope depth places the Seawolf in an immense amount of danger. ASW aircraft can easily pick up the radar returns from your vessel, and other subs can also detect the Seawolf easily through the fairly clear, uniform water layers on the surface

Each torpedo must be loaded into a tube that then has to be flooded before the weapon can be fired. The problem with this is that (apart from taking time) the tube can become filled with exhaust waste from the weapon. Leave the torpedo for too long and it will have to be ejected so as not to cause damage to the launch tube. Scratch one torpedo!

sub games and there was nothing remotely subaquatic for a long time. Recently, there has been somewhat of a resurgence, with Sierra's Aces of the Deep due for release shortly and the eagerly awaited Seawolf, the follow-up to 688 Attack Sub. Programmed by John Ratcliff, the man responsible for the original game, Seawolf makes use of today's much improved technology to provide a more realistic game environment, including stealth technology and accurate sonar depiction.

The story behind Seawolf is the first indication that something regarding the game might not be quite right, at least politically. Soviet naval forces have started to amass around Cuba and the back door to the US looks like it might be blown wide open, resulting in the spread of communism and the end of the world as we know it. Soviet attack ships, subs and ASW (anti-submarine warfare) support aircraft make daily progress, testing the resolve of the United States' fleet and forcing military skirmishes to occur.

The primary weapon platform of the US navy (at least for the sake of the game) is the SSN-21, known as the Seawolf. Relying on stealth and an advanced array of listening and targeting equipment, it is the Seawolf's duty to patrol the waters surrounding the Cuban mainland and carry out the orders sent its way. These can range from acquiring a positive ID on suspect shipping, to locating and sinking Russian patrol vessels and attack subs. Succeed and the world remains free, but fail and, well, who knows what fate will befall mankind? This may seem like a very small, niggly 'political' criticism, but it is now 1994 and the old Soviet Union doesn't even exist anymore, let alone pose a threat. The days when game designers could get away with this kind of thing have long gone. Hell, even film makers have had to come up with story-lines that veer away from the old 'east meets west' crap, and to have this kind of scenario in the mid '90s is almost unforgivable.

Unlike aircraft, the whole point of using a submarine to pull off daring exploits of military heroism is that you can keep your position secret from the enemy. If the enemy can't see you then it can't attempt to blow you out of the water. To this end, the playing screens featured in the game are a little different from those you might find in the latest flight combat sim. The main bulk of the game is played on a look-down representation of your surrounding area. Land mass is shown, as are bays and beaches, and the varying depth of the water is also displayed as light and dark patches of water. Commanding a submarine requires that you don't ground the thing on the seabed, and so paying attention to the whereabouts of areas of shallow water is of paramount importance.

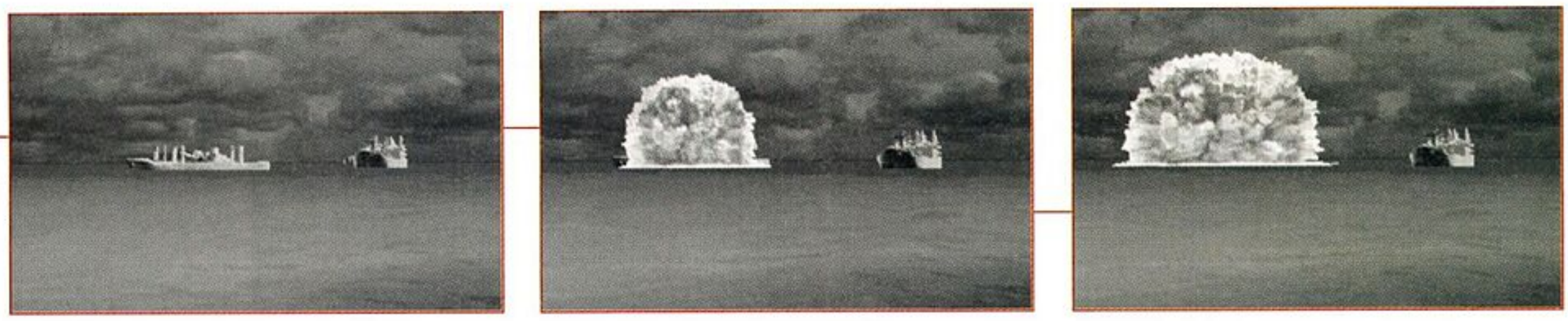
As well as displaying all the geographical detail of the immediate battle zone, this look-down screen also displays any contacts that may have been picked up by the sonar operator. All contacts are shaped and colour-coded according to what they are, so that at a glance the player can instantly see whether a ship that's straying too close to the submarine's direction of travel is a harmless trawler or an enemy missile boat. This is the main screen in the game and is where all the changes regarding heading and depth are made.

Most of the commands in the game can be made by the use of a simple menu system – simply choose a section of the vessel to issue commands to (such as the weapons room or the sonar operator) and click on the instructions. The sub can be made to travel in a certain direction or follow waypoints much in the same way as an aircraft does. ➤

"ALL CONTACTS ARE SHAPED AND COLOUR-CODED ACCORDING TO WHAT THEY ARE, SO THAT AT A GLANCE THE PLAYER CAN INSTANTLY SEE WHETHER A SHIP THAT'S STRAYING TOO CLOSE TO THE SUB'S DIRECTION OF TRAVEL IS A HARMLESS TRAWLER OR AN ENEMY MISSILE BOAT"

REVIEW

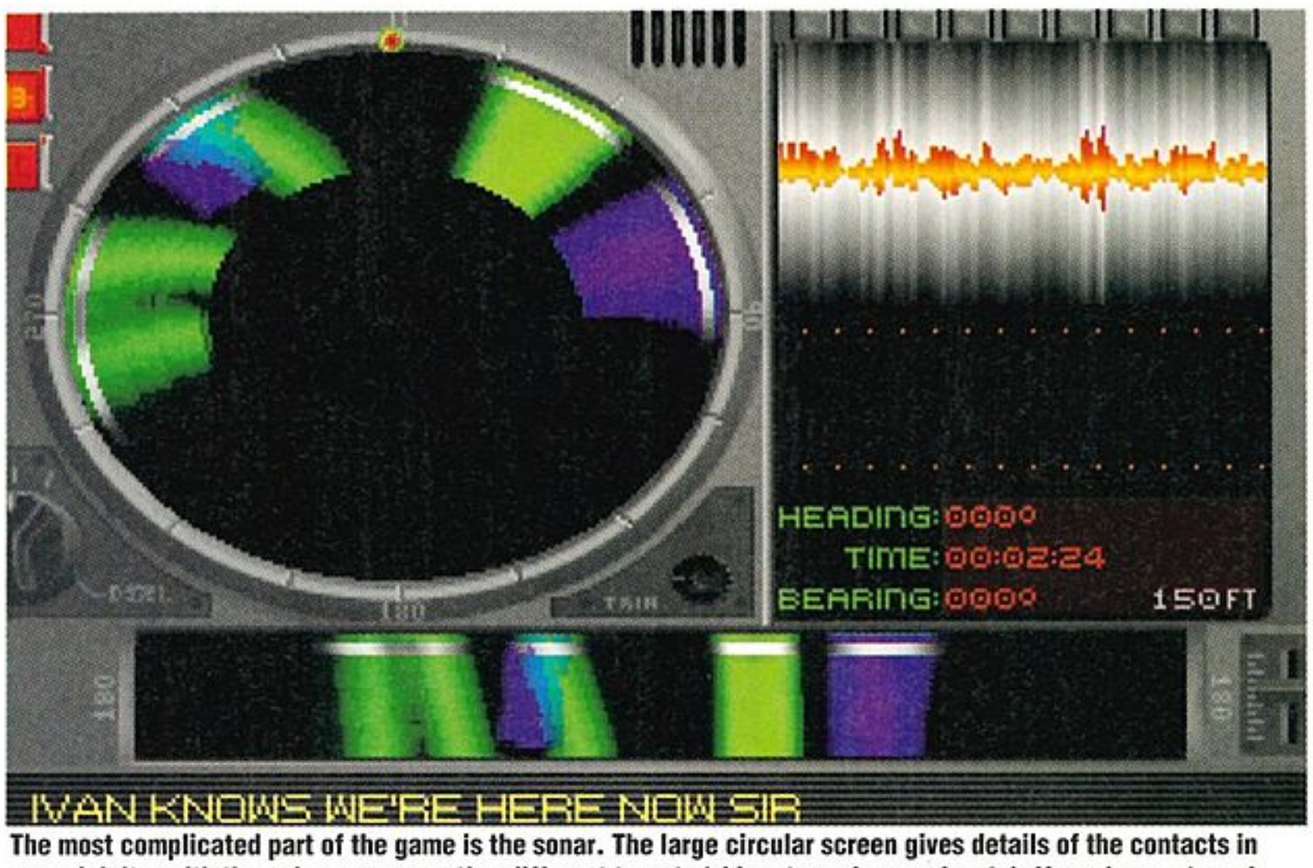
The Seawolf is equipped with two remote cameras that can be used to scout the surface on occasions when rising to periscope depth would be too dangerous. The cameras can be dropped from any depth and will rise and begin rotating through 360 degrees. These are undetectable by the enemy and are a useful tool to have in your inventory



➤ Depth instructions are issued either in plain old English feet or (and this is where you start to actually feel as if you are on a submarine) in thermals. What are thermals, you ask? Well, the sea isn't a regular body. In something like a swimming-pool, the water contained in it is of a uniform density and a uniform temperature. The sea, on the other hand, has layers of water that are affected by pressure and temperature. As you go deeper down into the water, the pressure increases and as a direct result so does the water density. In a similar way, the temperature drops the deeper down you go and this also has a dramatic effect on the water's property.

Now, all this wouldn't matter but for the fact that for a submarine to track and fire upon its target it must use the only tracking device it has, namely sonar, and the sound waves that this instrument picks up are bent according to the condition of the water. In areas of greater density the sound waves bend away from the area, and vice versa for areas with less density. This allows vessels travelling underwater to make use of these thermal layers to shield themselves from the prying ears of the sonar operator. In effect, it is a stealth manoeuvre and one of the ways in which subs not only defend themselves from other submarines but also from surface threats such as ships and ASW helicopters.

Learning to use and at the same time overcome the problems of thermals is one of the main tricks to be learnt in Seawolf. The only eye (or should that be ear?) that you have underwater is the sonar and this is one



The most complicated part of the game is the sonar. The large circular screen gives details of the contacts in your vicinity, with the colours representing different targets (ships, torpedoes, subs etc). If you have a towed array out (a line of listening devices that is towed behind the sub), then the area covered will be greater, but at a cost of less overall speed. The second panel down on the right displays the unique signature for each ship in the shape of a bar-code. White areas on the display indicate targets that have been hit with an active sound burst, giving a positive read-back to the operator but also indicating to the enemy where you are

of the most impressive facets of the game. The sonar is, at its most basic, a listening device that picks up the sound of anything above or below the sea. As it's a passive receiver, there is no way that an enemy can tell whether it has been detected on your sonar scope. The noise of a ship's or submarine's propeller produces traces that are easily picked up, but identifying the contacts and moving the submarine into an advantageous attack position is a different matter.

The sonar screen is actually three instruments that give all the information needed to detect, identify and lock up a target ready for a missile or torpedo launch against it. The large circular screen gives an indication of where the contact is positioned in relation to you and what kind of vessel it is. All the sonar returns are colour-coded, allowing you to gauge at a glance when another sub is likely to pose a threat or from what direction a torpedo is coming in from.

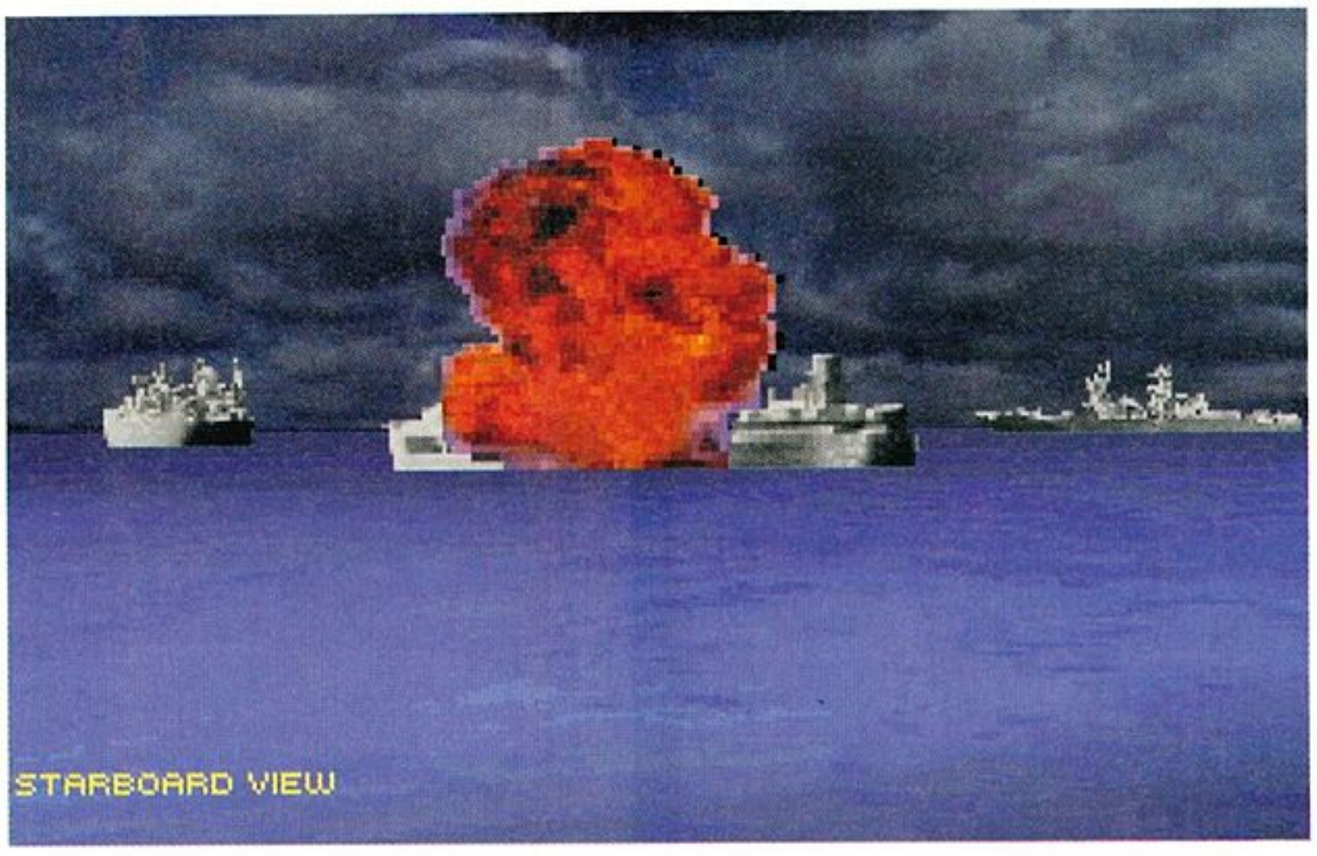
As well as a relative bearing, there is also a unique sound signature displayed depending upon which target is currently being listened to. Now, you have two choices here – you can either wait until the computer sonar operator identifies the target, which takes a while but is always correct, or you can ID the target yourself going by the sonar returns. This is a lot quicker, but are you sure that you read the instrument right and you are not about to fire upon a friendly craft? The last part of the sonar display gives you a picture of where the contacts are moving in relation to your craft, and can be used to give you advanced warning should the vessel under observation decide to change thermal layers and screw up your tracking.

"ON THE SURFACE, SURVEYING YOUR SURROUNDINGS WITH THE PERISCOPE PRESENTS YOU WITH A GREAT SEA PORTRAYAL, COMPLETE WITH SUBTLE COLOUR CHANGES AND A WAVE EFFECT THAT HAD ME FEELING A LITTLE QUEASY, BUT THE SHIPS THAT CAN BE SEEN LOOK CHUNKY AND ILL DEFINED"

The crew will not take things lying down and any problems that may arise, from running out of weapons to fires breaking out after you have been struck by a torpedo, will be duly reported to the CO

REVIEW

Orders must be followed to the letter, so it's wise to make sure that you know exactly what the Admiralty wants from you before sailing off and sinking the first ship that you set eyes on



The trails that you can see indicate not only the direction of any vessels but also their speeds. Like the ticker-tape experiments that you used to do in physics lessons, the further apart the dots are, the faster the object is moving

As impressive as the sonar is to look at and use, it is only one part of a system that is used to destroy enemy ships. In the weapons room, varying types of missiles and torpedoes can be loaded up into the relevant tubes and directed at any ships that you don't like the look of. Accomplishing this is simplicity itself – click on the load and flood button, which will place a torpedo into a tube and then flood the tube with sea water, designate a target and let it rip. All of the torpedoes are self homing, meaning that after they've been fired you are free to target another ship and launch a second or third torpedo.

As well as torpedoes you also have in your arsenal an array of modern missiles (one of which is the Tomahawk) which are a lot more devastating but require you to fire from a depth of no more than 150 feet. This gives you less thermal coverage with which to hide in, so unless you are sure that there are no other possible threats around it's a better tactic to make use of the torpedoes and maintain your stealth advantage.

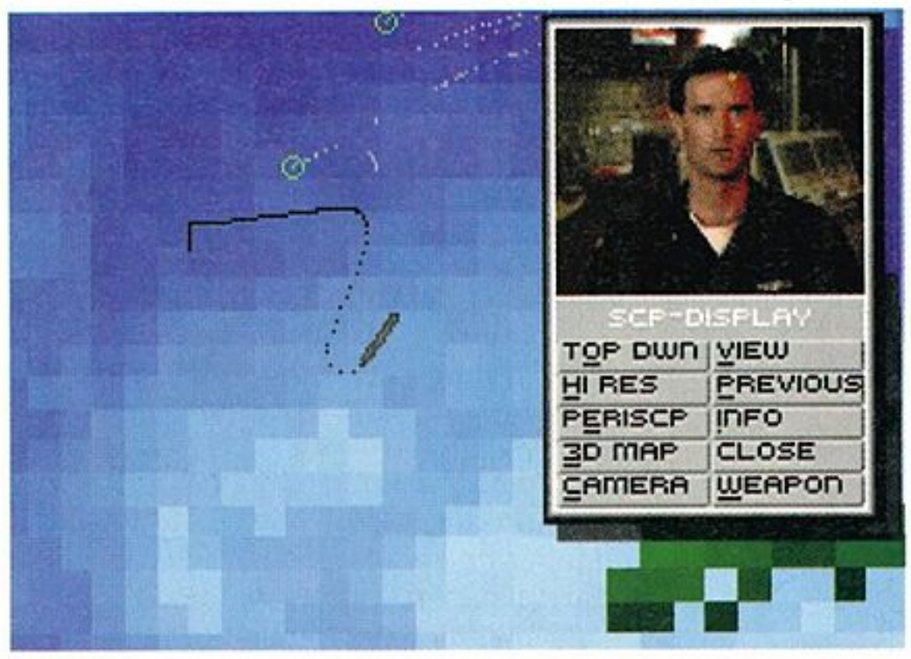
One of the problems with Seawolf is that there are no fancy graphical touches to be found in the game. Yes, the sonar display is excellent, but aside from that nice graphics are few and far between. On the surface, surveying your surroundings with the periscope presents you with a great sea portrayal, complete with subtle colour changes and a wave effect that had me feeling a little queasy, but the ships that can be seen look chunky and ill defined. Even below the surface there seems to be very little emphasis placed on graphics.

To help navigate around the sea the player can access a 3D first-person perspective view of the surrounding area, complete with troughs and mountainous regions. Using this view it is possible to manoeuvre your sub into a position whereby the natural terrain found on the seabed shields you from the unwanted attention of any sonar operators. The graphics used to depict this subterranean fantasy world could have been made to look a lot better. Simple mountains shapes don't really give you any idea of where you are in 3D space, and even when an enemy sub is within a few hundred feet the only graphical representation that you get are the same symbols found in the top-down map view. It would have been nice to actually catch a glimpse of your enemy, even if it was only for a fleeting moment.

"IN A PLANE THE OUTSIDE WORLD PLAYS A VITALLY IMPORTANT PART AND THE SENSATION OF SPEED IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO HOW EXCITING THE GAME IS. SUB COMMANDERS DON'T HAVE A LOT TO LOOK AT FIFTEEN HUNDRED FEET BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE WATER AND MAYBE THIS IN ITSELF IS A PROBLEM"

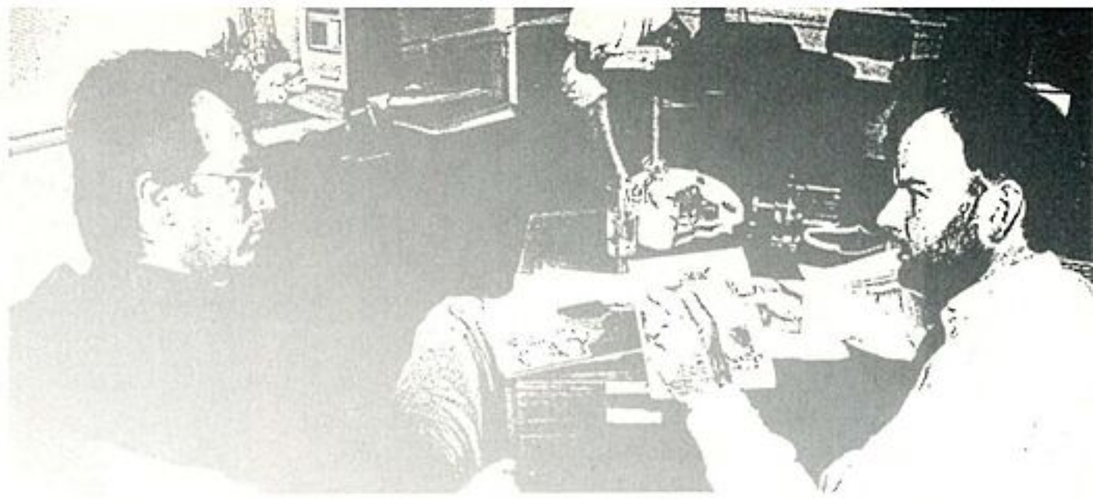
Seawolf is a game that doesn't quite manage to live up to the expectations placed on it. All the ingredients are there to make it a state-of-the-art submarine simulation, but in the end the playability lets it down. For too long you feel like you are playing a strategy game as opposed to an exciting simulation of modern submarine warfare. Maybe attempting to simulate something with so little dynamism (relatively speaking) is a bad idea – after all, in a plane the outside world plays a vitally important part and the sensation of speed is directly related to how exciting the game is. Sub commanders don't have a lot to look at fifteen hundred feet below the surface of the water and maybe this in itself is a problem. The inclusion of a two-player or networked link-up is a good idea though, and it does make the whole game a lot more challenging knowing that the sonar return you've just received could be a fellow human intent on sinking you to the bottom of the sea.

To sum up, Seawolf is as good as a game of this type is going to get. Everything has been done correctly, but the subject matter lets things down. It does have its moments and on the whole I enjoyed playing it, but it is never going to replace the thrill of zooming around the skies in a Falcon or an Eagle, dogfighting and dropping bombs on the enemy. **SCORE ★★★★**



As most television news signals are now transmitted via satellite, the Seawolf can patch into the news network and examine some of the reports. If you are well on your way to completing the mission successfully then all well and good, but if things start to look bleak, you can be sure that the newsreader will take great delight in reporting your screw-ups to the rest of the world

REVIEW



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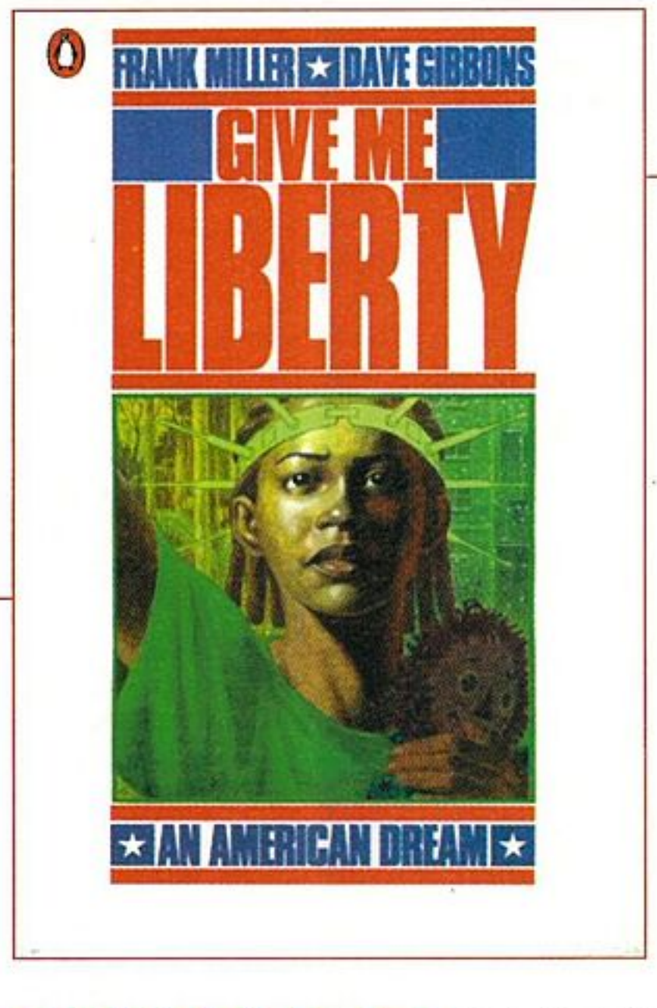

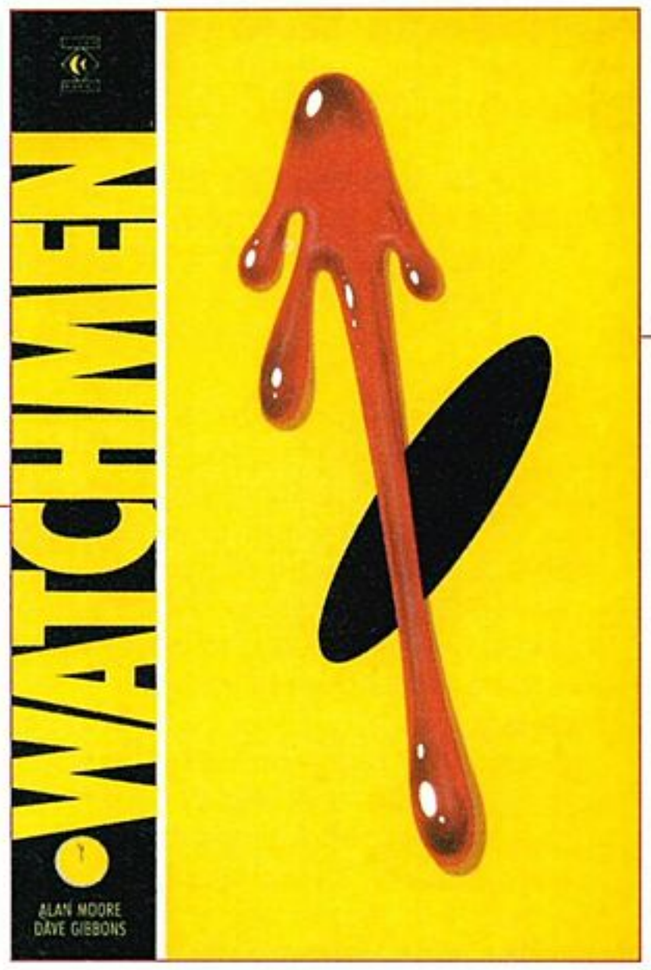

RENOWNED comic writer and artist Dave Gibbons started his career some 21 years ago, when he realised that drawing was of more interest to him than his job as a surveyor. Retiring early to pursue a career in comics, Gibbons started out with Quest AD 2130, but his first work published was actually a short series called Powerman. Much of Gibbons' work has appeared in 2000AD, including numerous Rogue Trooper strips as well as creating a Doctor Who series for Marvel UK.

In 1982 he started working for DC Comics and it was there that he co-created the award-winning Watchmen with Alan Moore. Since then he has discovered the word processor and has written stories for Fleetway's Rogue Trooper and DC's World's Finest. Now he has teamed up with developer Revolution Software and created Beneath a Steel Sky, thus expanding his talents from paper to pixels.

Reviewed in issue three of PC Player, Beneath a Steel Sky (BASS) scored a well-deserved four stars, rating it above many of the other point-and-click adventures around. Dave Gibbons' unique style of writing and art adds mood and atmosphere to an already outstanding game.

To tie in with the release of Beneath a Steel Sky, Virgin has pestered Dave Gibbons for 10 signed copies of Give Me Liberty and Watchmen. You can win one of these sought after prizes just by answering the following questions:

1. NAME THE INNOVATIVE GAME SYSTEM USED IN BENEATH A STEEL SKY.
2. WHICH DEVELOPMENT TEAM COLLABORATED WITH DAVE GIBBONS ON BENEATH A STEEL SKY?
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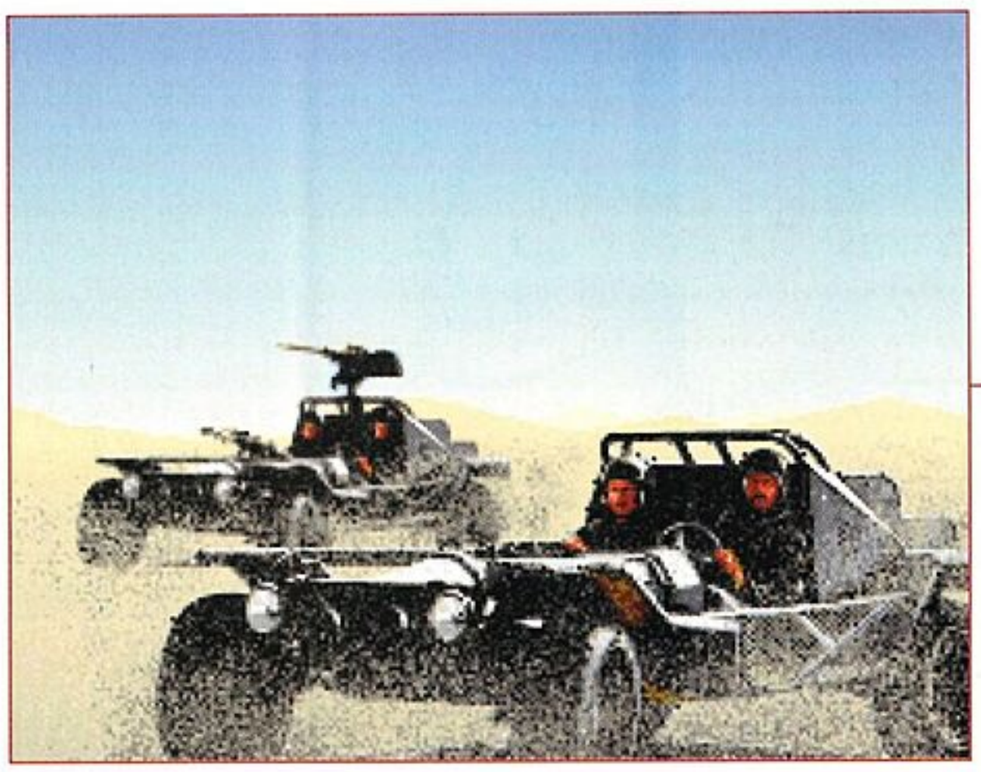


SABRE TEAM

WHO DARES WINS IN KRISALIS' TOPICAL BIG BROTHER OF THE ACCLAIMED STRATEGY EPIC, LASER SQUAD.

By Alex Simmons

REVIEW

PRODUCT
Sabre Team

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Krisalis

PRICE
£29.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb RAM, 386, VGA, 10Mb Hard Disk Space, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland LAPC-1 Sound Cards

FOR the last 18 months all has been quiet on the Krisalis front. Not so much as a budget game has spawned from its loins, but things have been brewing steadily. After nearly two years of celibacy, Krisalis is about to give birth to triplets. The first to see the shining light of day is Sabre Team, a strategy-based title that delves into the gung-ho action of the SAS and pulls out a game brimming with guns, killing and, erm, guns.

Sabre Team is like a pixelised board-game. On every turn, each of the soldiers has the chance to move and fire, then it's over to the opposing side which has the same options. All very simple I'm glad to say, as there is no rolling of dice and all results are worked out by the computer.

"SABRE TEAM IS LIKE A PIXELISED BOARD-GAME. ON EVERY TURN, EACH OF THE SOLDIERS HAS THE CHANCE TO MOVE AND FIRE, THEN IT'S OVER TO THE OPPOSING SIDE WHICH HAS THE SAME OPTIONS"

The game consists of five fictional missions in which the SAS must deal with terrorist attacks. Apparently any likeness to real-life situations is purely coincidental...yeah right. Anyone remember the boys in black raiding the embassy in London? OK, so this time it's the American embassy rather than the Iranian but similarities are definitely present. Krisalis has also incorporated many of what are believed to be SAS standards, like the four-man Sabre Teams and also a lot of the weapons and equipment available to the Special Air Service.

Unlike territorial army soldiers, SAS troops aren't easy to recruit. They are the cream of the crop, the elite of the elite. Soldiers must endure years of training, both physical and mental, before they are ready to face many of the terrorist situations dealt with by the

The entire Sabre Team consists of eight trained SAS troops. These must last throughout all five missions so don't go hoping for reinforcements. Any combination of soldiers can be picked but there is a limit of four troops per mission

Each soldier specialises in a different field of expertise so it's advisable to make sure you've got a well-balanced team before you start. Each individual is rated for marksmanship, stamina, intelligence and strength

After picking the soldiers for the next mission, visit the supply room for weapons and equipment. Supplies are limited so use what you have sparingly but always keep in mind that equipment can be taken from both enemy and friendly wounded soldiers

WE EAT GREEN BERETS FOR BREAKFAST

SAS. That's why you only get eight soldiers to play with in Sabre Team. These few must last through all five missions and each one specialises in a different field of expertise. Lose a single soldier and the entire team could suffer so it's vital that they work as a team and cover each others' backs.

Each Sabre Team attack force is comprised of a maximum of four soldiers, picked from the pool of eight. Clicking on the character portrait reveals a health summary, which rates abilities like intelligence, marksmanship and stamina as a percentage. All start in tip-top condition but obviously some are better at certain skills than others so it's vital that the skills balance out across the team.

With all troops signed on and ready to go, the supply room is the next port of call. Like the soldiers, weapons and equipment are in limited supply. Initially the soldiers are spoilt for choice with racks of sub-machine-guns and high-powered rifles to pick from. Ammunition is also there in abundance along with a few respirators, bullet-proof vests and gas grenades. While weapons and flak jackets can be used over and over again, ammunition supplies soon run dry. The obvious way of replenishing stocks is to steal the equipment off any dead terrorists the team kill – not exactly moralistic I'm sure you'll agree but without bullets guns are useless.

Each of the SAS soldiers can carry up to eight items of equipment. Weapons, flak jackets, medical kits and respirators take up a whole slot each, while ammunition and grenades only take up a single slot no matter how many cartridges you carry.

The first mission is the Embassy Siege. Starting outside, the team can be placed in any way you see fit, providing all begin on the highlighted drop-zone squares. The obvious choice is to place them nearest the entrance to the building as action points aren't wasted just to walk up to the door. Once all of the troops have been dispersed, the icon box appears at the bottom of the screen with the action screen just above. There are two screen set-ups for Sabre Team, either full or scrolling screen. The latter is probably best for slower machines, but full screen is the easiest to use.

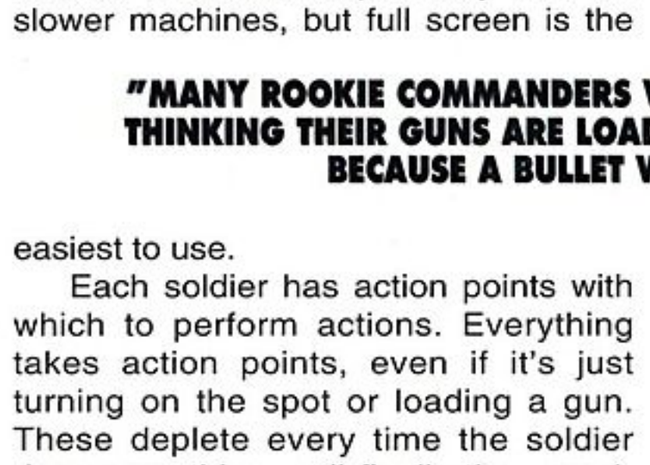
Each soldier has action points with which to perform actions. Everything takes action points, even if it's just turning on the spot or loading a gun. These deplete every time the soldier does something until finally they reach zero and he can do nothing more that turn. The number of points a troop gets depends on both health and the amount of equipment carried. The more weighed down they are, the less they can move.

The primary action to perform is not walking, but loading a weapon. This is a sneaky move by Krisalis because many rookie commanders will wander into the embassy thinking their guns are loaded and then get blown away because a bullet wasn't chambered.

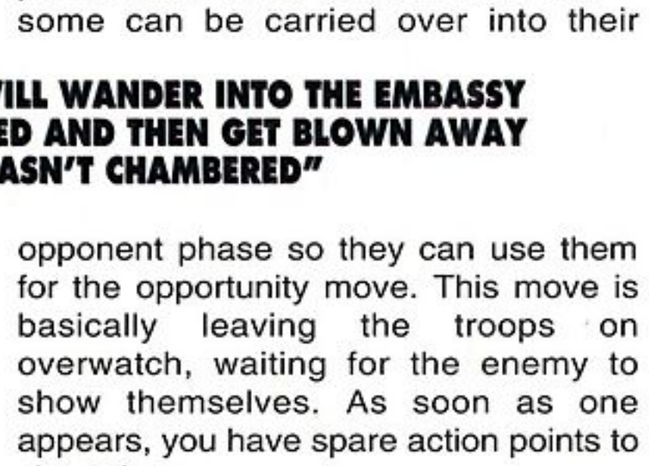
Each action uses up a different number of points depending on difficulty. Turning on the spot is simple so it only takes a single point, walking is more energetic and uses up four points, while aiming and firing a gun uses up six action points. Not all of the team's action points have to be used in their turn – some can be carried over into their opponent phase so they can use them for the opportunity move. This move is basically leaving the troops on overwatch, waiting for the enemy to show themselves. As soon as one appears, you have spare action points to shoot them.

"MANY ROOKIE COMMANDERS WILL WANDER INTO THE EMBASSY THINKING THEIR GUNS ARE LOADED AND THEN GET BLOWN AWAY BECAUSE A BULLET WASN'T CHAMBERED"

Apart from obvious actions like walking and shooting, soldiers can pick up and drop items, open and close doors and use grenades. A grenade must be primed before it is thrown, otherwise it won't explode. However, pulling the pin takes points so make sure you have enough remaining to throw the grenade, otherwise it will detonate in your hand! ➤



Before the mission begins you are briefed by your commanding officer. Listen carefully to his advice and the primary mission objectives



Although the map can be incredibly useful, it uses up a lot of action points to view the entire area. It doesn't reveal the position of the enemy either

REVIEW

When a target appears in an adjacent room you only see the soldier rather than revealing the whole room. Enemies are only visible when they are in the line of sight of any of your Sabre Team members

WHO DARES WINS

➤ Aside from carefully aiming and firing a weapon, there is also the option to strafe. Although inaccurate, it is perfect for attacking two or more enemies in a confined space.

The go-to icon is the easiest method of moving – just click the cursor where you want the soldier to move to and he'll find the shortest route there. If he runs out of action points along the way he'll simply stop. The remaining icons open up statistic boxes on player status as well as blueprints of the battle scene, and enable you to end your turn and switch over to your opponent's go. Seconds later the computer's turn is over and the action switches back to your team and so on.

As previously mentioned, the game is entirely icon driven and is therefore easy to pick up and play, even if it is a little on the slow side. The go-to icon makes movement quick and simple and actions like pick up and firing are all basic and take little time to master. In all the control method is good, with little to actually drag it down.

That's not to say the game is completely perfect though. One of the main problems I encountered in Sabre Team was a problem with the line of sight. Now I know Krisalis decided to opt for realism but I think it sacrificed a bit of gameplay in the process. The soldiers can't actually shoot or see the enemy unless they are directly facing them – I found this odd as most people have got a 180 degree field of vision and therefore the troops in the game should have been able to see more, even more so because surely the SAS are trained to be aware of their surroundings. Another gripe I have is that I think there should have been a couple more missions – five isn't many, although the limited troops and supplies obviously make the game a lot harder.

Visually, Sabre Team is fairly good. While far from stunning it is easily comparable to most other strategy games...if not better. The troop animation is a bit rough and the scrolling isn't particularly smooth but the static shots and in-game graphics are both clear and well-drawn. The sound is OK, with the crisp voice-overs that accompany the action and the briefing screens being the audio highlight.

Probably the best thing about Sabre Team is the price. It's only £29.99 which, compared to the £45 price tag of many other PC products, is a bargain. Because it's cheap it doesn't means it's nasty – Krisalis is simply trying to offer value for money and it's achieved this. This is highly-enjoyable and better than many other, more expensive strategy games available.

SCORE ★★★★

REVIEW

MISSION ONE: EMBASSY SIEGE

Terrorists have taken control of the American embassy in London and are holding four people. To complete this mission guide the captives to safety or kill all the terrorists, leaving the police to collect the hostages. All surviving hostages must be rescued – a minimum of three are required to complete the mission

MISSION TWO: JUNGLE POW CAMP

Situated within the prisoner of war camp are four hostages. A minimum of three need to be found and guided to safety to the air-lift drop-zone just outside of the camp. Once all are safely inside the chopper, guide the remaining team members back to friendly territory

MISSION THREE: WAR GAMES

Four computer terminals containing missile launch codes are located within this underground military base. All four consoles must be destroyed by shooting them at least three times each. Once the machines have been eliminated, make sure all surviving team members are air-lifted to safety

MISSION FOUR: LINER HIJACK

Under Siege Deja Vu terrorists hijack an ocean liner and have altered its course. Innocent passengers and crew have been taken hostages, leaving the SAS no other option but to board the ship and eliminate all the terrorists. The mission will end when the last enemy soldier has been shot

MISSION FIVE: MISSILE GUIDANCE

As in mission three, four computer terminals inside this missile manufacturing plant have been encoded with the secret launch passwords. All of the machines must be destroyed (again with a minimum of three bullets each), then the Sabre Team members must be guided to safety

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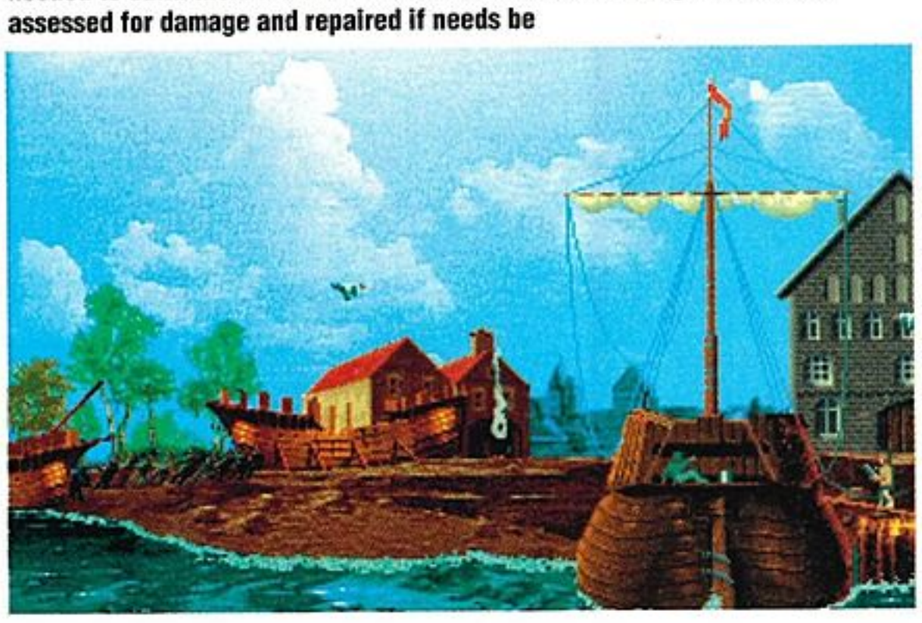
Alex

EXPLOITATION WITH A NAUTICAL TWIST?

Simmons

THEN TURN THE PAGE...

From this screen new ships can be constructed, providing the materials needed to build them are stored in the warehouse. Existing boats can be assessed for damage and repaired if needs be



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REQUIREMENTS
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SUPPORTS
Soundblaster Sound Cards

LET'S face it, CD-ROM has great potential, although you wouldn't think so if The Patrician was the only game bundled with the drive. As a floppy release Patrician would have been acceptable but on CD? Don't make me laugh. Initially it was released on disk about six months ago but now we have a so-called 'enhanced' CD version boasting 10 new animated sequences and 25 minutes of stereo soundtrack. I can hardly wait...

The Patrician is a seafaring trading game set in 14th century Europe. Up to four players can make their bid to reign over the seas in either a full or quick game, the difference between the two simply being that the short game awards big cash instantly while in the drawn-out full version it takes longer to build up your empire.

Visually, The Patrician is far from outstanding. Throughout the game there are little more than a few static screens which change colour slightly depending on which seaport your ship is anchored in. OK, they're quite nicely drawn and often colourful, but they're not up to the standard we've quite rightly come to expect from the CD-ROM. Oh, don't forget the 10 new animated sequences either – they're all right, but I've seen better.

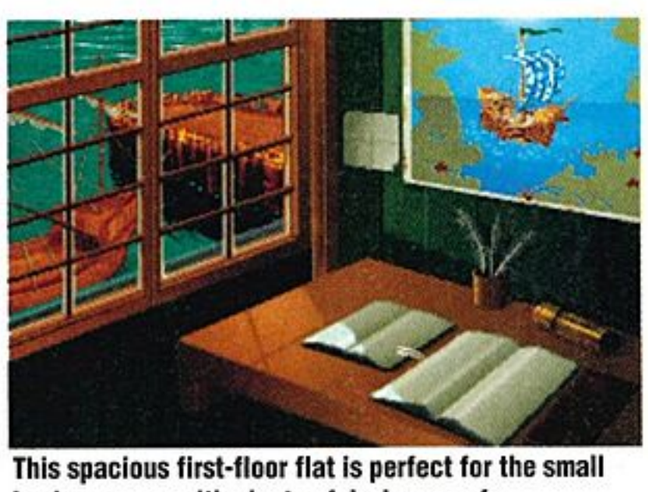
Then there's the sound. We're talking about a CD game here and one thing you can usually rely on in a CD product is excellent audio, but once again this game fails to impress. The music is slightly moody and the spot sound effects are, erm, very spotty – the odd seagull squawk and the ripples of the tide as it washes against the shore, that sort of thing.

As for the game itself, well don't get too excited. While the prospect of sailing around Europe buying and selling goods to make money may sound initially appealing, the excitement wears off all too soon. Trading is not the entire game though – there's plenty more to do. There's always the option of building your dream boat or maybe nipping into the chapel for a quick Sunday service or even to get married. Yep, marriage is an excellent way of coming into money, and don't forget the moneylender either, who is all too willing to raise the interest rates when you want cash fast. It's also a good idea to get ahead in politics by giving the people what they want, namely a huge beerfest with wine, women and, erm, whale meat.

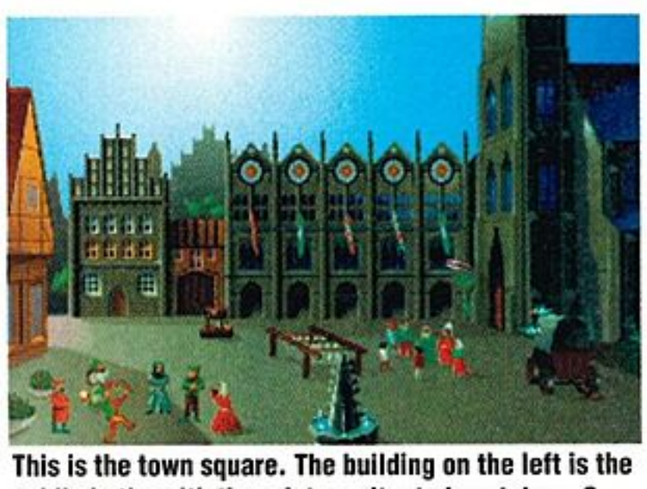
So, The Patrician is a blend of trading, bribery and cutthroat exploitation. This may sound intriguing, but believe me, it isn't. For forty quid what you're basically getting is an outdated, low-rated strategy game that would be more at home on the Amiga rather than on the PC CD-ROM. Not only is it a waste of money, it's also a waste of the medium. **SCORE ★**

"THE PATRICIAN IS A BLEND OF TRADING, BRIBERY AND CUTTHROAT EXPLOITATION. THIS MAY SOUND INTRIGUING, BUT BELIEVE ME, IT ISN'T. FOR FORTY QUID WHAT YOU'RE BASICALLY GETTING IS AN OUTDATED, LOW-RATED STRATEGY GAME THAT WOULD BE MORE AT HOME ON THE AMIGA"

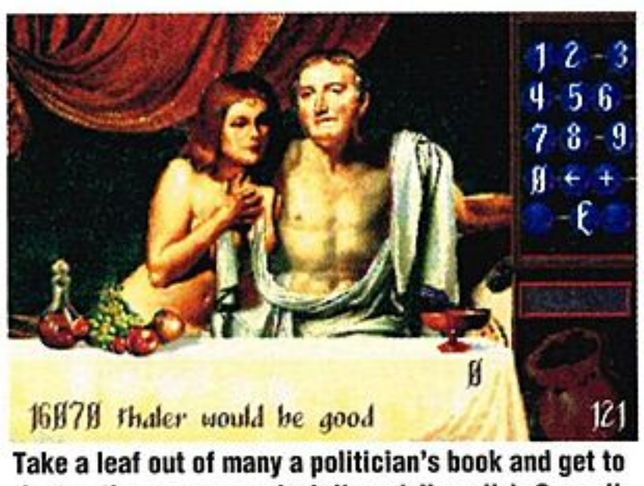
REVIEW



This spacious first-floor flat is perfect for the small businessman, with plenty of desk space for paperwork and the odd abacus. The walls are covered with plush Laura Ashley print while the solid oak floorboards are covered deep shag fitted carpets



This is the town square. The building on the left is the public baths with the printers situated next door. On the right is the church but don't bother going there unless you want to make a donation to the poor (pah) or get married (yeah, right)



Take a leaf out of many a politician's book and get to the top the easy way – by bribery (allegedly). Council officials don't come cheap though, and for some reason you'll only find them lurking in the baths with a scantily-clad girl draped over them

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DOMARK SET A NEW STANDARD LAST YEAR WITH THE RELEASE OF FST.

by

IN THIS, THE FIRST OF WHAT WILL HOPEFULLY BECOME SOMETHING OF

Keith

A REGULAR(ISH) FEATURE IN PC PLAYER, SOME OF ITS INCREDIBLE

Sloan

DESIGN MODULES ARE EXAMINED MORE CLOSELY.

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF FST

FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT

To start things off, a set of colours must be decided upon. As the Arctic islands are the choice of scenario, the snowy wastes must be simulated. Taking the lowest area of the land as a starting point, this was coloured an off-white to recreate the dirty snow found on the ground. As the altitude increases, the snow becomes purer which results in a brighter white being seen. All that you really have to do is set the lowest and highest points and click on the spread button. The FST will then work out the correct graduation of colour which saves you a lot of time and effort, and gives the landscape a better overall appearance

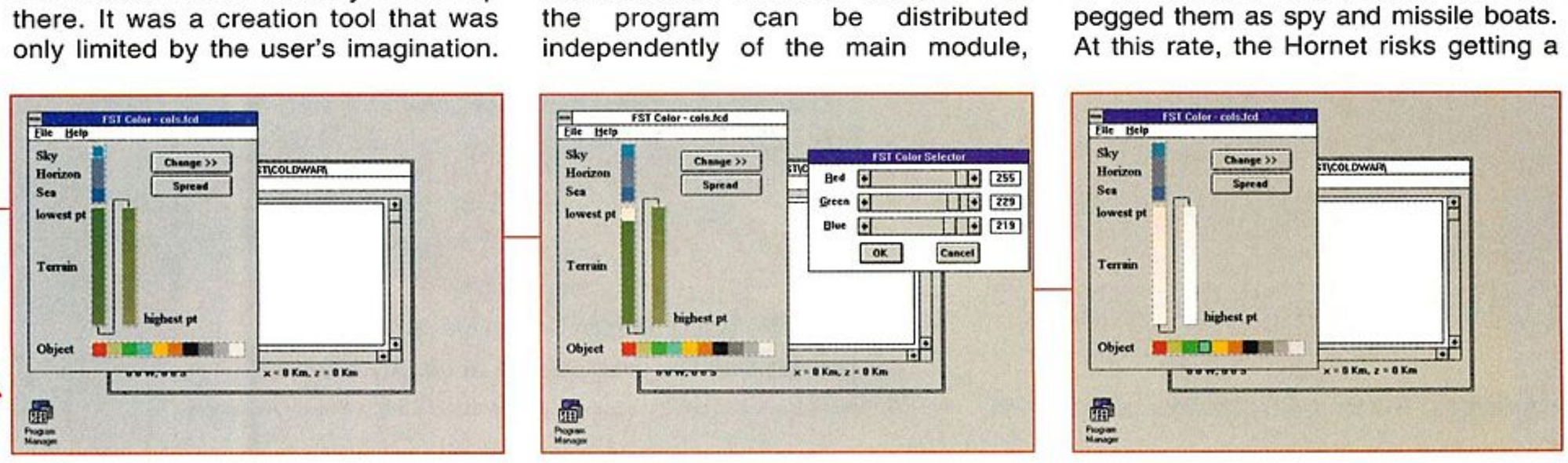
FEATURE

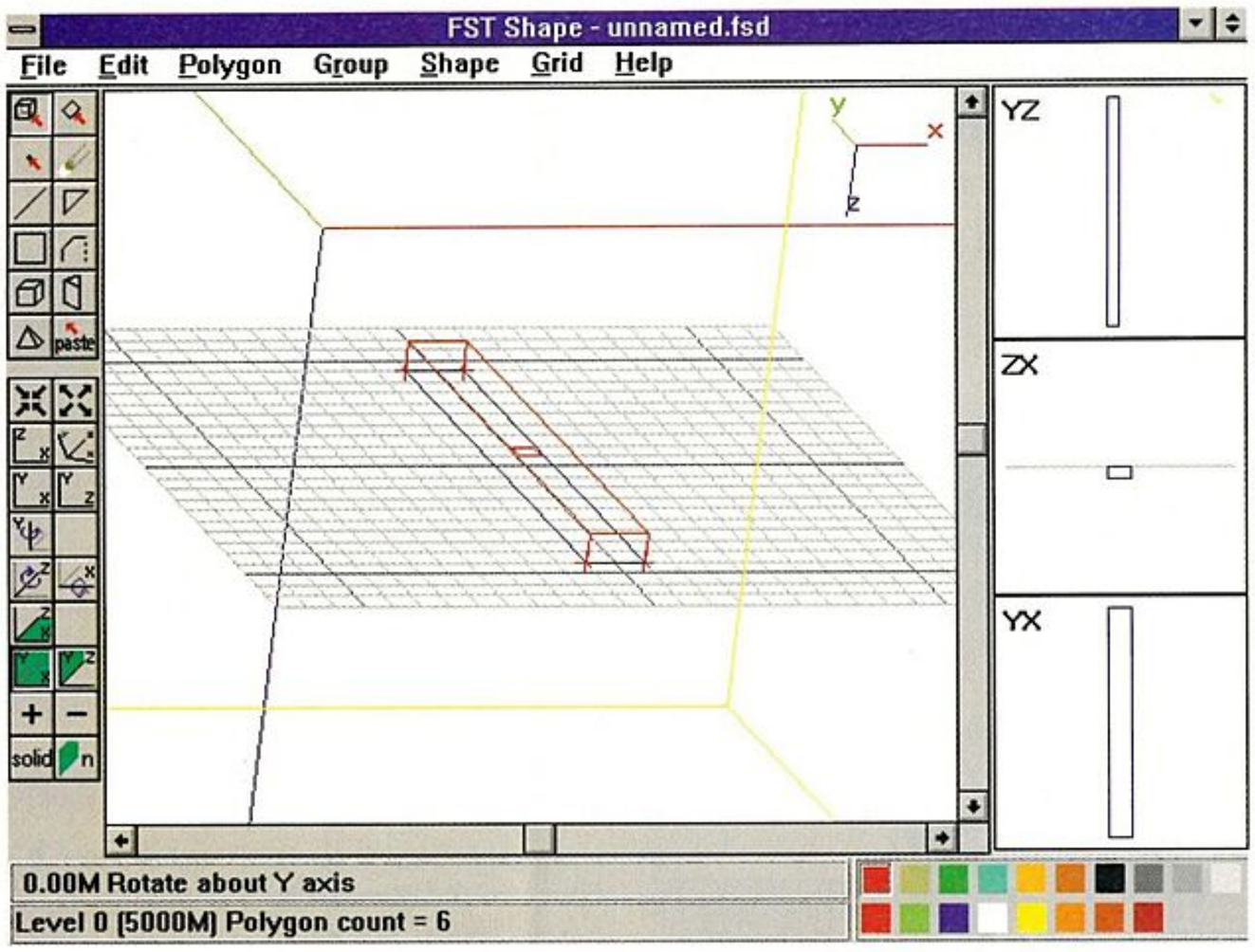
THERE can be few programs released over the past year or so that have had such a profound impact on the genre they slot into. Of the ones that I can think of off the top of my head there's Alone in the Dark with its breathtaking graphics and superbly atmospheric play. More recently came Flight Sim Toolkit by Domark – seemingly overnight, the whole idea that the flight sim was nothing more than either navigating around a dull landscape or attempting generic combat missions was turned upside down. Here was a program that to all intents and purposes, gave you a free reign over what to fly, where to fly it and what to do with it once you were up there. It was a creation tool that was only limited by the user's imagination. Could this be the start of something big? Well, quite possibly but only as long as you managed to get to grips with some of the quite powerful and, it has to be said, complicated utilities that were on offer as far as creation went.

What this feature hopes to do is shed some light on the various facets of FST, giving you an insight into how best to use the tools available to create something that will be both aesthetically pleasing and a challenge. Remember, the scenarios that are created with the program can be distributed independently of the main module, allowing other players to experience your idea of a perfect flight/combat sim.

"WHAT THIS FEATURE HOPES TO DO IS SHED SOME LIGHT ON THE VARIOUS FACETS OF FST, GIVING YOU AN INSIGHT INTO HOW BEST TO USE THE TOOLS AVAILABLE TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT WILL BE BOTH AESTHETICALLY PLEASING AND A CHALLENGE"

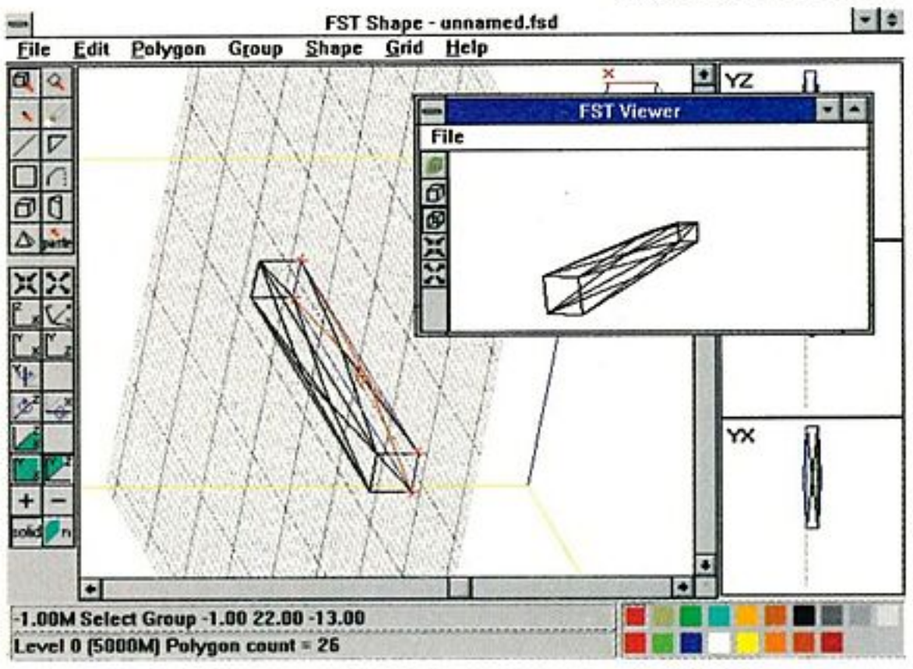
The first thing to do is to decide on a scenario. For the purpose of this article, it's 1980. A Soviet spy has stolen a U2 spy plane and all that stands between him and a life without bread and potatoes in the Motherland is a lone F/A-18 pilot, warming up his aircraft on the runway. As well as the U2, US military intelligence (a contradiction in terms?) has noted a build-up of trawlers in the Aleutian island chain, and has pegged them as spy and missile boats. At this rate, the Hornet risks getting a





Before anything else is even thought of, the main fuselage body is laid down – it consists of nothing more than a rectangle extended into a 3D cuboid plus a few other things. After overlaying various other polygons onto it, the appearance can be altered drastically

Using the 'create tetras' command, the fuselage is given a slightly softer appearance. By making use of the differing scales that the edit grid can be set to, it is possible to set the height that the overlaid polygons will extrude to on the fuselage. This is yet another feature which makes the shape editor so powerful



SAM up his tailpipe before even seeing the stolen aircraft. Added to this is the appearance of a few Soviet cruisers and an aircraft carrier. It's going to be a long night.

The mission is therefore twofold; to destroy the outbound U2 and any other aircraft that pose a threat, and disable the missile boats before they can get a shot off. Armed with four HARMs, four Sidewinders and 2,000 cannon rounds, that shouldn't be too difficult. Should it?

To create this scenario, the following need to be used: 1. The colour editor to create the correct colours for the islands; 2. A shape for the U2 spy plane created with the shape editor; 3. A cockpit for the F/A-18 including flight models for both the F/A-18 and the U2; 4. Sound effects; and 5. The terrain over which the scenario will take place. In this instalment, the colour palette and the shapes will be taken care of, with later articles concentrating on the other aspects of the sim.

First, open a new project and call it COLDWAR. As creating shapes is both difficult and time consuming, why not make use of the large clip-art library and copy across to the new project the following objects; A18.FSD, AIRHANG.FSD, TOWER.FSD, TRAWLER.FSD, KIDD.FSD, MIMITZ.FSD, RAPIER.FSD, ZSU-57.FSD, SU-25.FSD and TUG.FSD.

You may also want to copy across the .WAV files for the sound effects, although some of these will be changed later.

Starting with the colour editor, it's time to match the colours to the environment. Open the default colour file (COLS.FSD) and here you will see the sky as a common shade of blue, with two different gradients blending into the horizon and the sea. The ground also features gradual colour shading, albeit in green. Leave the sky as it is and concentrate on the land colour.

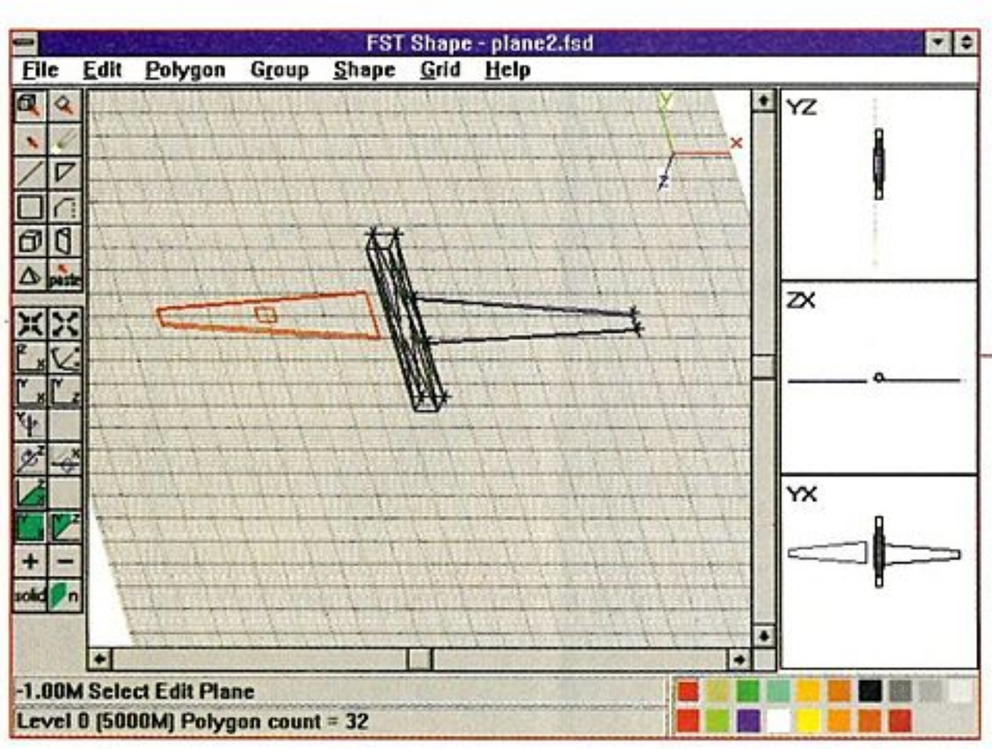
As the simulation is taking place over Arctic islands, the landscape should be coloured accordingly. Click on the top-left box of the ground columns (the lowest point), and alter the land to grey, with the highest point being depicted in pure white (255, 255, 255). Looks a little unbalanced doesn't it? No problem. Make use of the 'spread' command, and the whole colour scheme will be blended into something that looks a lot more realistic. This will cause the low points of the land to be coloured in grey, with everything above that being tinted with a pure white up to the highest point.

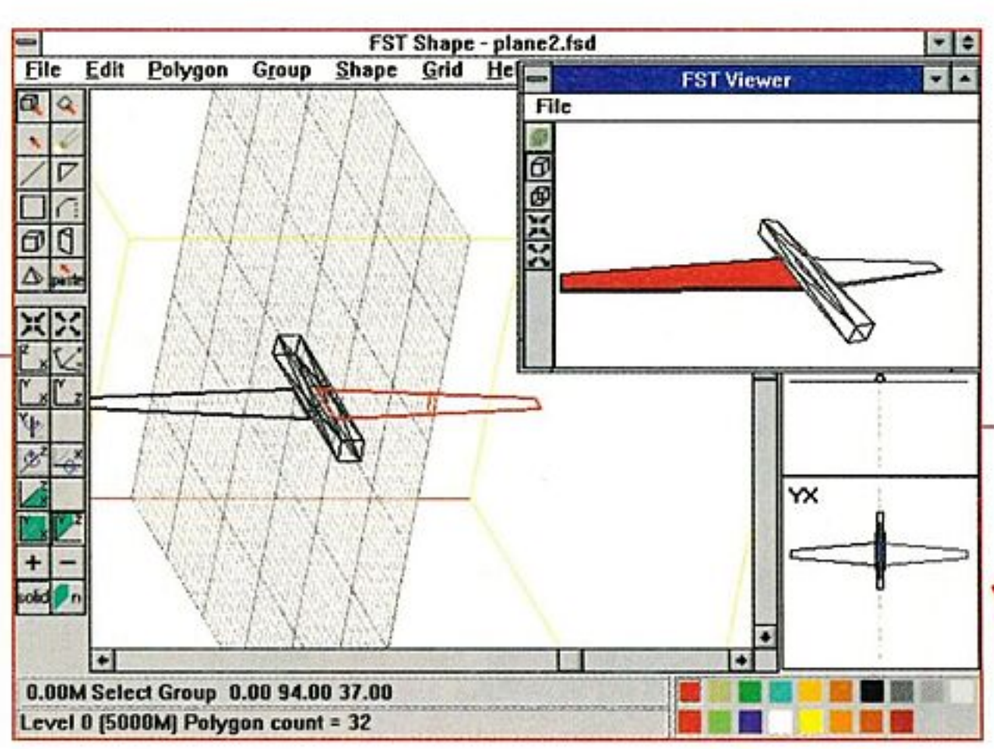
"GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE SHAPE EDITOR IS A DAUNTING PROSPECT AND, UNLESS YOU HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE WITH CAD SYSTEMS BEFORE, IS WORTH PRACTISING ON UNTIL YOU GET USED TO THE WAY THAT THINGS WORK"

The next step in the creation process is possibly the most tricky. Getting to grips with the shape editor is a daunting prospect and, unless you have had experience with CAD systems before, is worth practising on until you get used to the way that things work.

The first step in creating the U2 is to define the fuselage. Using the 'create cuboid' tool, define a box 18 metres in length by two metres in width. It is important at this stage to remember to define points of the polygons you are going to create in a clockwise direction, because this will tell the program which face of the shape is going to be viewed in the FST world. As the grid is set at one metre, the box will be 18m x 2m x 1m. ➤

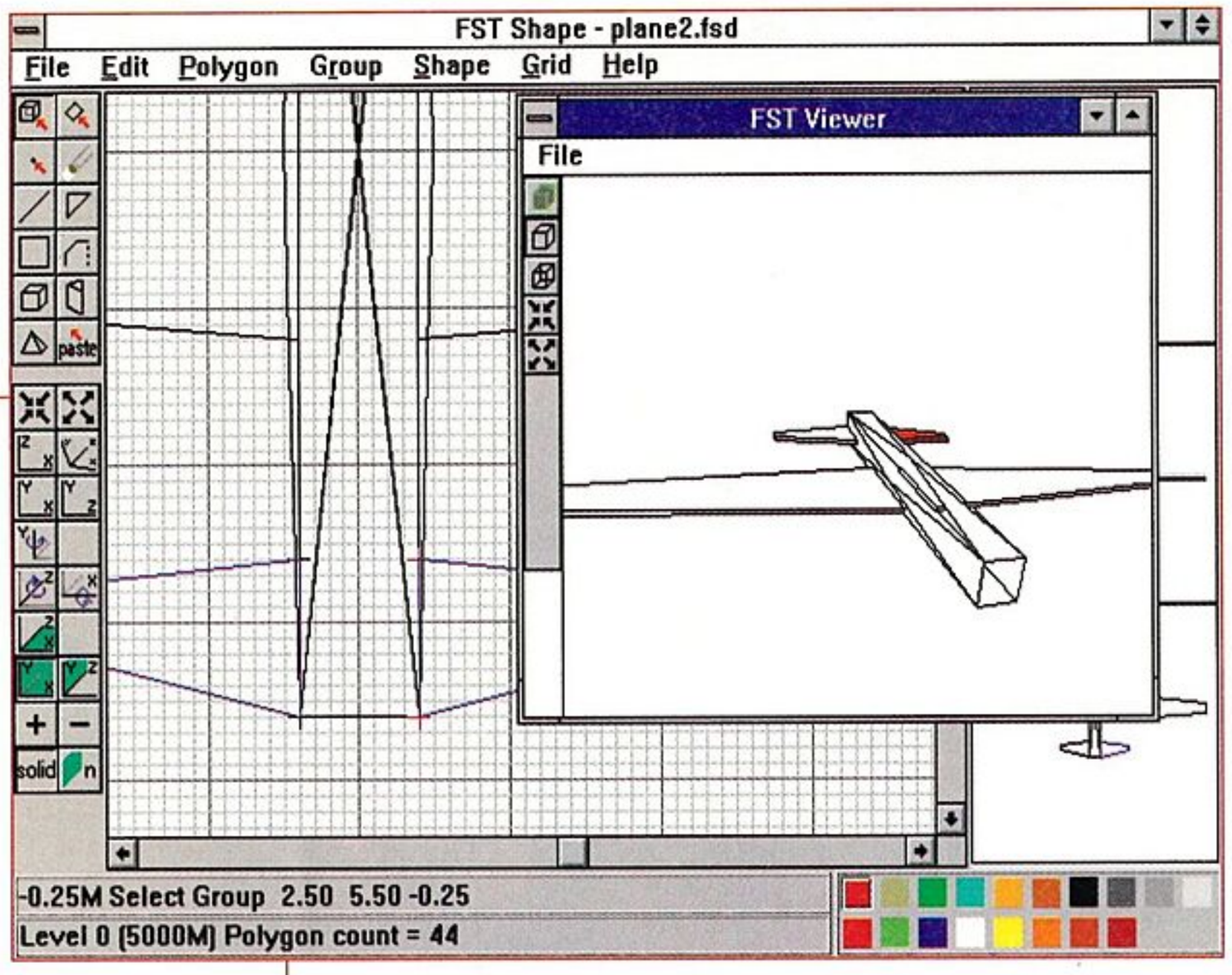
Fitting the wings to the aircraft is where it starts to get a little easier. A simple cuboid shaped into a long, wing-like shape is fitted into position at a point on the fuselage. By making use of the different views and the 3D viewer, it is important to make sure that the wings are positioned correctly in all three planes and that the polygons are all visible. After one wing has been created, simply copying it and flipping the copy will present you with another usable wing. Don't forget to place it in the correct position and use all the views available to make sure that it is symmetrical

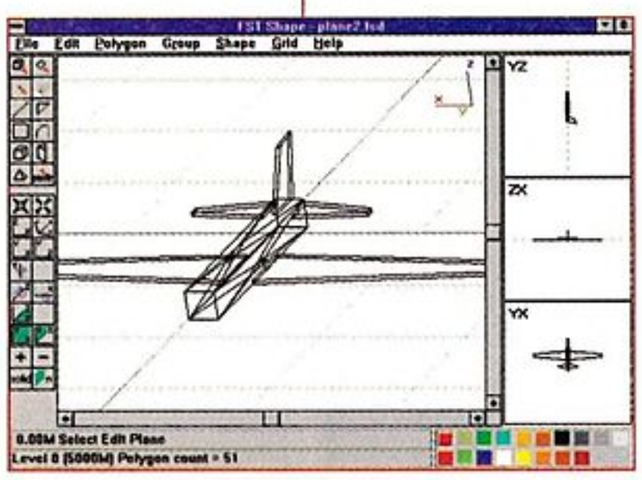




FEATURE

The tail sections are very similar to the wings with regard to fitting. The same rules have to be observed to make sure that everything is placed in the correct plane and at the correct position. Again, the 'copy', 'paste' and 'flip' commands can save an awful lot of fussing about creating two identical elevators, when only one original is really needed





The cockpit presented the most difficult part of attempting to produce a reasonable-looking aircraft. I discovered that the best way was to use two cuboids – one for the rear part of the fuselage and one for the actual cockpit itself – and slope the ends of the boxes down to their respective positions. Looking from the back this made the fuselage look as though it flowed into the body of the plane, and the cockpit had the slope it needed to appear as though it was a viewing window to the pilot. Coupled with the colouring used on the finished plane, it is actually quite a pleasing effect

FEATURE

➤ To pad it out slightly, alter the plane of the grid so that it is slicing the fuselage in half longways. Select a single polygon and extend it one metre in the relevant direction. The box should now be 18m x 2m x 2m. The shape now needs to be rounded off, and to do this we will make use of the 'enter tetra' tool. Change the grid size to 0.5 metres and define a tetra on each of the four sides of the fuselage. This will have the effect of smoothing the lines out and making the box appear rounded. To save time, the 'copy', 'paste' and 'select object' commands can be used to simply duplicate the tetras that you need.

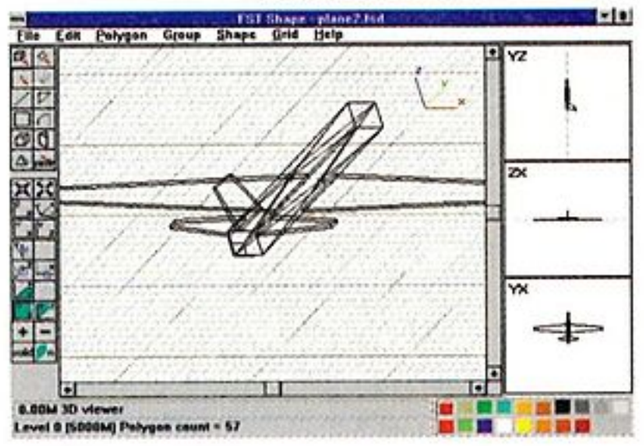
Once the tetras have been added, you can start with the wings and the tail. To give the wings some thickness, set the grid to 0.25 metres. Use the 'cuboid' tool to define them, making them long and relatively thin. As soon as one wing is done, it is a simple matter to copy it to the other side, using the commands outlined earlier. The tail can be created in the same manner, making sure that both the wings and the tail sections line up in all three dimensions – use the 'view' tool liberally for this function.

For the engine shape at the back, it is necessary to change the grid back to one metre because that is the scale which the fuselage was created in. Move the editing grid to the back of the plane, and create a block using the 'cuboid' tool. To get a cone shape, the four outside points of the cube (those that face away from the aircraft) need to be moved towards the centre. Change the scale to 0.25 metres and move them in such a way that a cone shape is achieved.

The final part of the procedure is creating the cockpit. After much trial and error, I've found that the easiest way to go about doing this is to create two cuboid shapes on the back of the original fuselage, with a thickness of about 0.5 metres (remember to change the scale of the grid for this). The back cube should be about seven or eight metres long, and start from just behind where you want the cockpit canopy to appear. The front cube is going to be the canopy, so it should be smaller, perhaps only one or two metres long.

To get the sloping canopy look, bring the top two points of the smaller, front

The engine at the back of the aircraft is a cuboid with four of its points brought toward the centre of the outline square. To produce this sounds rather complicated at first, but as soon as you see what you have to do it becomes simply a matter of placing the edit grid in the correct plane and altering the position of the four corners of the cuboid



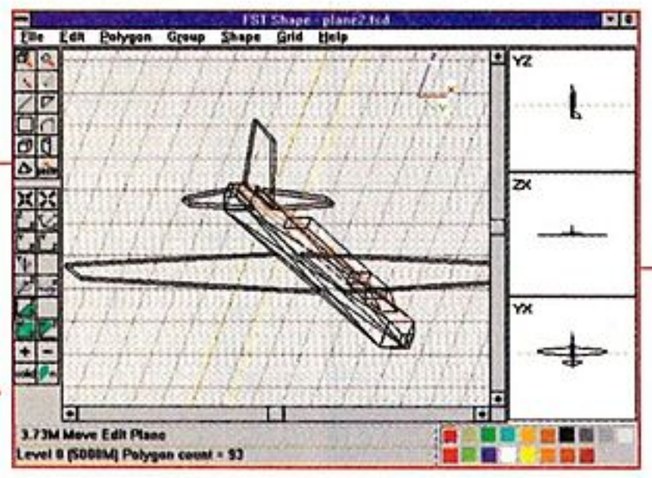
cube down towards the nose of aircraft. Don't make the angle too steep as it should slope gradually. The larger rear cube should also be sloped in a similar manner, angled towards the tail section, thus giving the appearance that the cockpit is part of the overall design of the plane.

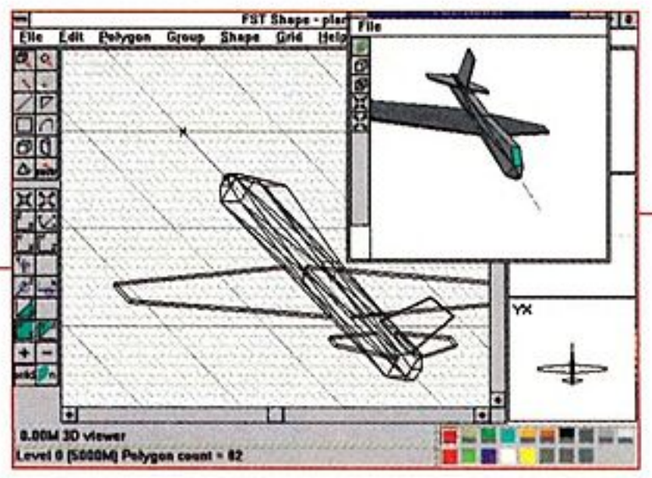
The final thing to sort out with regards to designing the aircraft is to colour it. There are no rules here, but it is advisable to make the actual cockpit canopy turquoise so that it stands out well from the rest of the aircraft. Apart from that, it's up to you and your sense of taste.

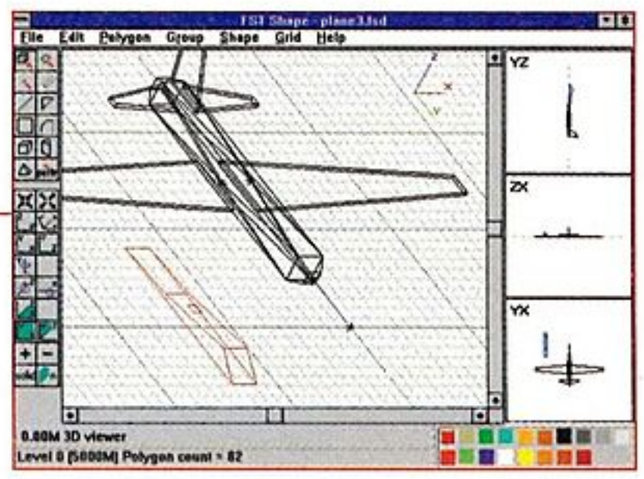
The airplane designed in FST takes its basic shape from the U2, but in the end the authenticity of the design depends upon how adept you are at using the shape editor and how much time you have to spend on actually creating a realistic-looking aircraft. Some stunning results can be obtained (just take a look at some of the objects contained in the clip-art library) but to actually create anything like that is going to require a lot of work.

For now, I am pleased with the way my U2 copy has turned out and, hopefully, it has given some sort of grounding to the jet jockeys out there who would otherwise just spend their time flying pre-built aircraft around pre-sculpted landscapes. Next month, the cockpit editor and flight model editor come under the spotlight. ■

"I AM PLEASED WITH THE WAY MY U2 COPY HAS TURNED OUT AND, HOPEFULLY, IT HAS GIVEN SOME SORT OF GROUNDING TO THE JET JOCKEYS OUT THERE WHO WOULD OTHERWISE JUST SPEND THEIR TIME FLYING PRE-BUILT AIRCRAFT AROUND PRE-SCULPTED LANDSCAPES"







PC PLAYER IN CONJUNCTION WITH Special Reserve The Games Club

READER AWARDS

IN issue four of *PC Player* we invited you to send in your nominations for the *PC Player*/Special Reserve Reader Awards 1994. Your entries arrived in their droves and the results are as follows:

BEST GAME OVERALL
X-WING - US GOLD/LUCASARTS

LucasArts' superlative futuristic combat simulator took 14 per cent of the entire vote, just pipping joint runners-up Frontier; Elite II and the atmospheric 3D blaster Doom – collecting 13 per cent of the vote each.

BEST SIMULATION
TFX - OCEAN

This category was pretty close, even up until the last votes were cast. TFX took 23 per cent of the vote, with Virgin's incredible IndyCar Racing just being pipped at the post with 20 per cent. LucasArts' X-Wing and Digital Integration's Tornado both did well in this category too.

BEST ROLE-PLAYING GAME
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD II - ELECTRONIC ARTS/ORIGIN

A clear winner (and one that we initially suspected was ineligible until we checked release dates) – Origin's 3D role-player took a whopping 39 per cent of the overall vote. Infogrames' Alone in the Dark, the nearest competitor to the throne, managed only 13 per cent of the vote, clearly demonstrating Ultima Underworld II's superiority in this category.

BEST ADVENTURE GAME
DAY OF THE TENTACLE - US GOLD/LUCASARTS

A tense race to the finishing line with this battle of the giants – the best two adventures on the PC, fighting for the title! The lead changed hands regularly before Tentacle finally made the stronger finish of the two. Day of the Tentacle took 40 per cent of the vote while Sam & Max Hit the Road came in with 33 per cent. Closely fought, as I'm sure you can see.

BEST STRATEGY GAME
SYNDICATE - ELECTRONIC ARTS/BULLFROG PRODUCTIONS LTD

While Frontier; Elite II and Dune 2 put up a brave fight, it was Syndicate that was to emerge victorious in the strategy section with 20 per cent of the overall vote. More titles were voted for in this category than any other, splitting votes more evenly.

STATE-OF-THE-ART AWARD
DOOM - ID SOFTWARE

Three titles shared the runner-up position with 13 per cent of the vote each! The latest orgy of destruction from id Software obviously made its impression and remained strong in the face of tough competition – 14 per cent of the vote ensured victory.

So there you have it! Congratulations to all the winners and thank you to all the people who sent in their votes.

One lucky entrant pulled from the mountain of entries also walks away with 10 of the best games of all time, courtesy of the generous guys and gals at Special Reserve. The winner is Paul Barker of Romford in Essex, so congratulations go to you. ■

european computer user

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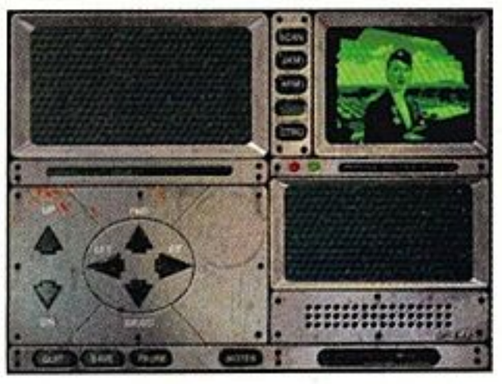
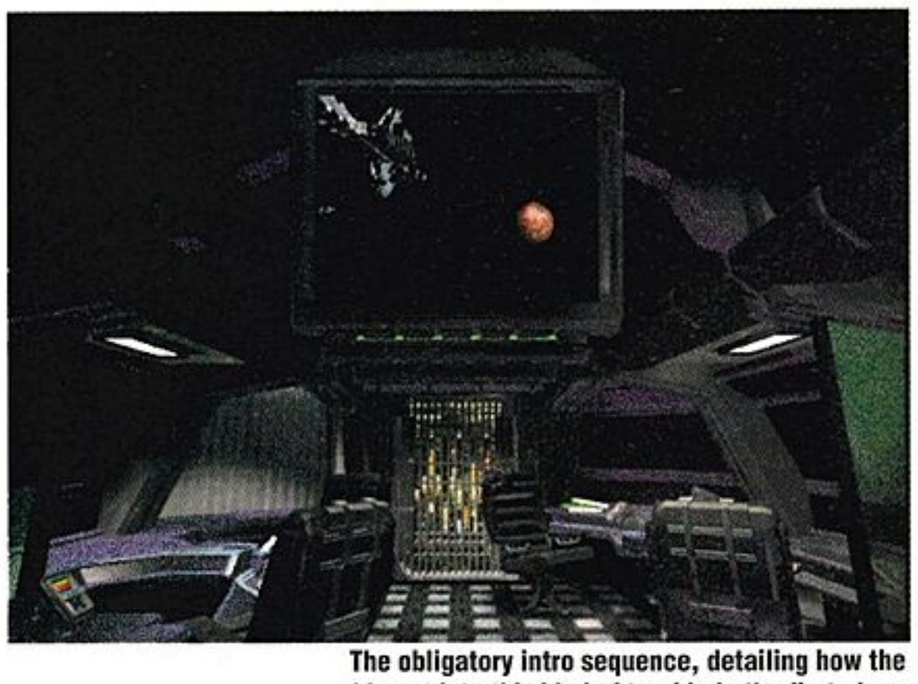
PC PLAYER MAY 94

WITH CD-ROM DRIVES BECOMING EVER MORE POPULAR, SOFTWARE PRODUCERS ARE FALLING OVER THEMSELVES TO PRODUCE SOMETHING THAT CAN TRULY BE CALLED 'AN INTERACTIVE MOVIE'. DOES IRON HELIX FIT THIS BILL?





The obligatory intro sequence, detailing how the ship got into this kind of trouble in the first place

IRON HELIX

by Keith Sloan

WITH the advent of the CD-ROM, games have gradually become a lot better to look at. Invariably making use of the SVGA standard, the graphics seen in these games have become crisp, clean and immensely detailed. As the format becomes more popular, the floppy disk will die in the same way that computer tapes did in the early '80s. It's a fact of life and there is nothing that can be done about it.

The one thing that worries a lot of people though is the quality of the gameplay in these new super games. The efforts so far (including the pretty, but ultimately dull The 7th Guest) have made up for little or no gameplay by having as many fancy graphical touches as possible included in them. The results have been disappointing to say the least, but Iron Helix could start a trend towards CD games that actually contain enough gameplay elements to make them enjoyable.

Set aboard a spacecraft loaded up with the world's most deadly weapon, you play the part of an unsuspecting captain of a small space vessel who receives a message to board the ship and attempt to override its computers. Without this intervention, the autopilots and the on-board defence systems will carry out the last orders given to them and deliver the weapon, causing the universe as we know it to self-destruct in an orgy of bright explosions and mythical loud bangs (no atmosphere means no sound. Star Wars sure screwed up there!).

As the weapon is a new biological strain, the only way that things can be brought to a halt is to send aboard a simple droid. The Darwin is used for nothing more than examining new species and collecting samples, so it possesses no weapons. Using this droid, it's up to you to travel around the ship, avoiding the sentry robot, looking for clues as to how to complete the assigned task.

Iron Helix is split up into four distinct phases. The first requires you to search for samples of the dead crew's DNA. This can be found all over the ship and can be collected and stored in one of the three available data banks of the droid. In effect, this DNA acts like keys, with certain parts of the ship inaccessible without the correct DNA.

The second part of the mission requires you to log onto the computer terminals and examine video footage the crew left behind before they were destroyed. These clues will give you hints as to how to complete the third part of the game; destroying the sentry droid. You are not armed and so there is only one way to make scrap metal out of it, which you must discover. The fourth and final part is a race against time to shut down the weapons system and prevent the biological device from being deployed.

One of the things which makes IH stand out from the crowd is its fluid use of graphics. Unlike in T7G, the programmers have consciously made the decision to have the game-display as small as possible, thus enabling everything to scroll along smoothly without the usual wait that is associated with CD-ROM games. While this does make seeing what is going on that little bit harder, it doesn't take too long before you adjust and can move around the ship with ease.

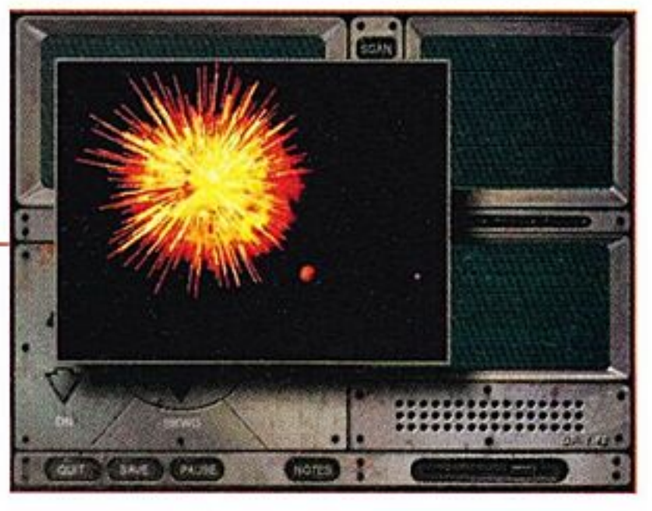
"IRON HELIX COULD START A TREND TOWARDS CD GAMES THAT ACTUALLY CONTAIN ENOUGH GAMEPLAY ELEMENTS TO MAKE THEM ENJOYABLE"

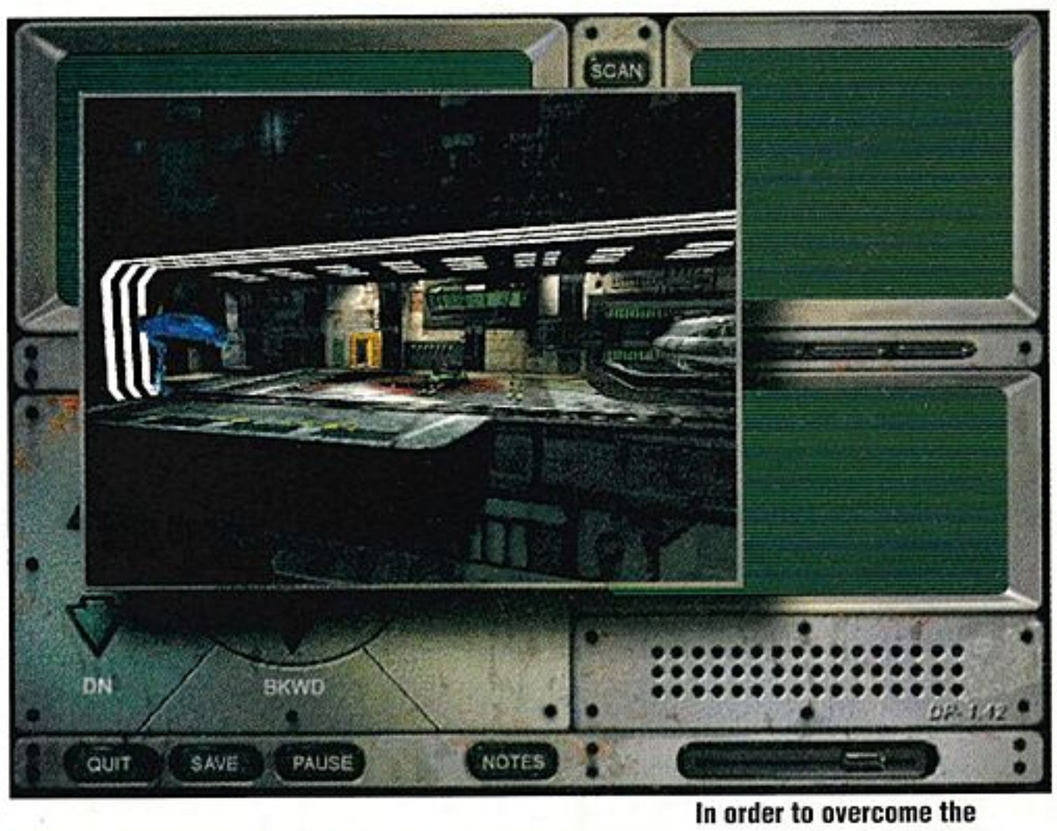
The graphics used to depict the inside of the ship are sharply defined, and feature rendered tables and chairs in the lounge, computers and displays in the bridge and even a loading bay, complete with an open airlock leading to the infinity of space.

Controlling the droid is through the interface which takes up the bottom two-thirds of the screen. As is becoming the norm for this type of game,

The price for failure is high. Unlike your average war game or futuristic sci-fi jaunt, it's not only the world that stands to be blown away and totally destroyed. The whole universe hangs in the balance, separated from biological death only by you and a small, unarmed droid. Makes you feel good, doesn't it!

REVIEW





PRODUCT
Iron Helix

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Microprose/Spectrum Holobyte

PRICE
£44.99

REQUIREMENTS
Windows 3.1, 4Mb Ram, 386, SVGA, CD-ROM, Soundblaster or compatible Sound Card, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster and compatible Sound Cards

In order to overcome the technical limitations of CD-ROM, the programmers deliberately made the viewing windows in the game small. This means that less information needs to be pulled from the CD, with the result being that the frame rate is kept high and fluid

movement is made possible by clicking on the direction arrows, with other functions such as scanning for DNA and operating the remote probe arm also controlled from this panel. Everything is easy to use, and the lag between clicking on a function and the graphics updating to show what is going on is as minimal as you will get at this stage of CD-ROM technology.

As I said at the beginning of this review, IH breaks the mould of most other CD games by having playability as well as fancy graphics. Searching around the ship and avoiding the sentry is quite enjoyable, although it can get a little irritating when you can't find the last piece of the DNA puzzle that will allow you to progress onto the second phase, and the rest of the game follows suite.

It is actually a little Alien-esque, as you can use lifts and tunnels to travel between floors, never knowing just where the sentry is, and this provides for some rather tense gameplay. The graphics are detailed and, perhaps most importantly of all, they scroll SMOOTHLY with virtually no slow-down or frame flip.

Until the technology for this type of medium becomes as advanced as the current trend of super-fast processors, the games are always going to look and feel somewhat lacking. Iron Helix does its best to overcome the problems inherent with the format, and does so admirably. Easily the best of the current trend of CD-ROM games, this should provide a few hours of enjoyment.

SCORE ★★★

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PC PLAYER MAY 94

Avalon Hill is back in the computer wargaming league again. Is the company back with a vengeance?

AMERICAN GAMING COMPANY, AVALON HILL, HAS BEEN AROUND FOR A LONG TIME – WAY BEFORE COMPUTERS CAME INTO VOGUE IT WAS PRODUCING BOARD-GAMES. THE COMPANY BEGAN IN 1958 WITH TITLES SUCH AS TACTICS II AND GETTYSBURG AND IN THE 35 YEARS SINCE THEN IT HAS PRODUCED WELL OVER, WAIT FOR IT, 250 TITLES.

by Paul Rigby and Derek Dela Fuente

AVALON HILL

SINCE Avalon Hill dived into the computer game development arena it has had a tough time getting to grips with it largely due to "cultural differences" – whatever that means. Time passed without a peep from AH, apart from numerous 8-bit titles being released without much success, until the sudden appearance of the Amiga version of Third Reich – one of its most successful, nay legendary board-games. The PC game was immediately expected.

Fans of the board-game waited for this PC version with soggy taste-buds...and waited...and waited...and nothing. Enter Jim Rose, director of software development for AH: "When I joined Avalon Hill in December 1992 the programmer who did the Amiga version of Third Reich was about 50 per cent through the PC version. I looked at his work carefully and determined that he was headed down the same path as the previous version. Dissatisfied with his approach and his unwillingness to prevent the same mistakes I scrapped the whole project and started over".

Having assembled a new development team, a new version of Third Reich was underway by February 1993. The original intention was to have the game finished by the autumn of that same year but Avalon Hill was having problems with its artificial intelligence (AI). Obviously wishing to only ship a quality product, the decision was made to hang on for a bit, rewrite the dodgy AI, give it a thorough beta testing and THEN release the game.

"ALL OF THE PRETENDERS TO THE THIRD REICH THRONE ARE MERELY COPIES AND TAKE-OFFS OF OUR BOARD-GAME. IN 1974 WE WERE THE FIRST TO MARKET A STRATEGIC WW2 WARGAME BASED IN EUROPE. OUR FOCUS IS ON GAMEPLAY, NOT MICRO MANAGING YOUR ECONOMY"

"Our focus on Third Reich PC is a different approach to the first versions. We have a large advantage over similar products," boasts Jim, "in that we sold almost 400,000 copies of the board version and enjoy a very large, built-in demand for the product. It has also been refined over time resulting in an excellent strategic simulation".

Those 'similar products' that Jim mentioned have largely been responsible for a resurgence in the wargame economy – wargames are money makers once again, gaining in popularity with the likes of QQP's Perfect General and 360's High Command. The latter is a game that

The computer version of Third Reich benefits from the fact that there is already a strong potential userbase out there in the shape of the numerous enthusiasts who own the board-game

After being a bit of a balls-up on the Amiga, it seems that the PC version of Third Reich could well turn out to be one of the strategy games of the year. With numerous rip-offs of the board-game already around – will it beat the competition?

FEATURE

Third Reich is not a greedy program, it only requires a 286, 640k of RAM and VGA. That's certainly a bit different from the V for Victories of this world

Avalon Hill's US acquisition of US Gold's Kingmaker is the first step in the firm's growth plans for 1994

Jim indirectly commented upon when he exclaimed that: "All of the pretenders to the Third Reich throne are merely copies and take-offs of our board-game. In 1974 we were the first to market a strategic WW2 wargame based in Europe. Our focus is on gameplay, not micro managing your economy".

Third Reich is not a greedy program, it only requires a 286, 640k of RAM and VGA. Gameplay involves making strategic decisions that the leaders of the Axis or Allied nations would have made; when and where to attack, what units to build and so on. Briefly, after all of the naval movement has been completed, the player moves their infantry and tank armies into position to attack. After a successful attack has occurred the player then exploits the 'holes' in the enemy lines.

Third Reich is not the end of the line however, and an AI add-on editor is under consideration. John Rose also had a further suggestion: "We have already published an Advanced Third Reich in a board-game format. It would seem logical to migrate to that product at some point".

That's not all for Avalon Hill, and possibly the jewel in the AH crown is the moving of Atomic Games from 360 to Avalon Hill. It has to be noted that the relationship is more a partnership than a take-over. You'll all be familiar with Atomic's V For Victory series which set alight the wargaming fraternity, and at the moment Atomic is working on a new game called Operation Crusade which is the first in its new World at War series. This new series will retain the Atomic 'look' which took the company to many a wargaming heart. Crusade is due in March, a game based on the Stalingrad campaign should be around in July and an Atomic game based on the Battle of the Bulge should also ship in October. All of the World at War games will have a Play by Mail system built in.

Finally, Atomic will also be doing a computer implementation of AH's tactical warfare series, Squad Leader. bearing down on the high seas.

While computer development takes up an important slice of AH's development time it still produces its own board-games. For example, it is famous for its Rune Quest game – this little gem is experiencing a renaissance at the moment. How about a computer incarnation of this one, eh Jim? Jim Rose finished off the interview in majestic style by likening AH's return to software gaming with Return of the King: "We are most assuredly Back With a Vengeance!". ■

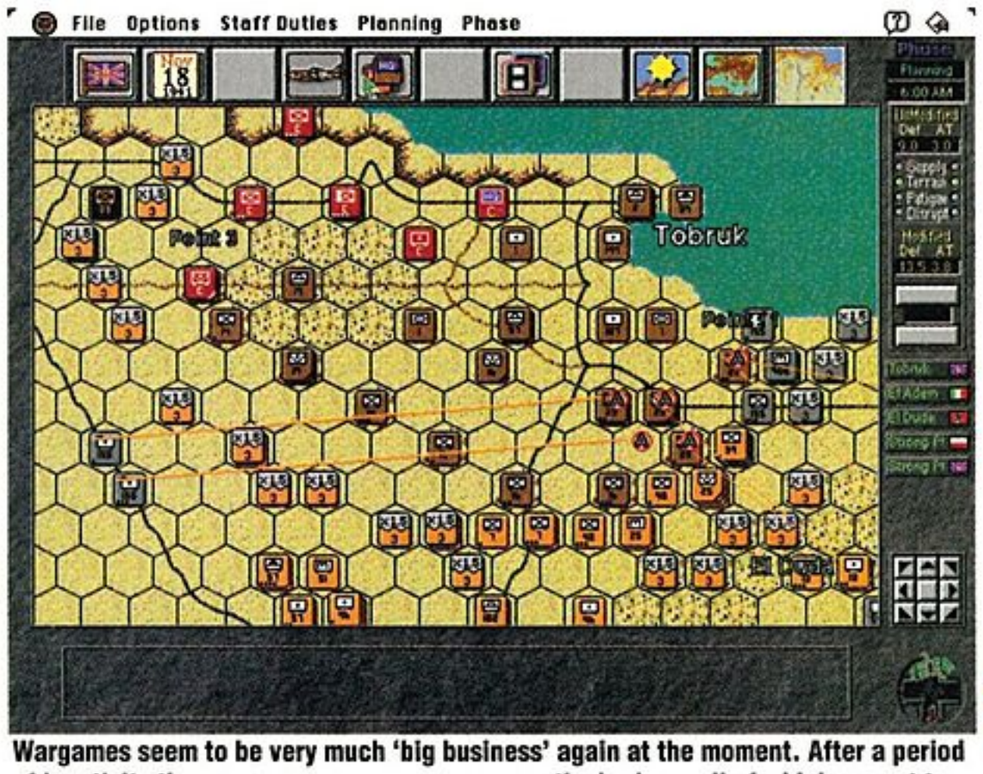
Entitled Beyond Squad Leader, this new game will launch a whole new chapter in computer gaming and I, for one, will be first in the queue when it is released. Look out for this game which is to be shipped before Christmas.

So is the Atomic Games move the start of an empire-building period for Avalon Hill? Is it out to become the Blackburn Rovers of the wargaming fraternity? Jim innocently retorted with, "Empire building? Who...us? All we are doing is talking to almost all the serious developers in the industry".

Avalon Hill is also on the release trail with a few more titles of its own in the pipeline. To begin with, it is taking US Gold's own strategy game, Kingmaker, and distributing that in the USA. Then it will be releasing two strategy games based on board-games called Advanced Civilisation (this has nothing to do with the Microprose game of a similar name) and 5th Fleet. Both will be released in the summer. Later, in the autumn, expect to see Blackbeard

"WHILE COMPUTER DEVELOPMENT TAKES UP AN IMPORTANT SLICE OF AH'S TIME IT STILL PRODUCES ITS OWN BOARD-GAMES. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS FAMOUS FOR ITS RUNE QUEST GAME"

US Gold's superb Kingmaker board-game has already made the journey across the Pond to the US and is proving very successful for Avalon Hill on its new PC games label. Good ol' British know-how wins through in the end...



Wargames seem to be very much 'big business' again at the moment. After a period of inactivity there are now numerous games on the horizon, all of which are set to push the limits in terms of AI, interface and historical accuracy

FEATURE

As you'd expect, the Discworld game will revolve around the exploits of Terry's most famous creation – Rincewind the wizard

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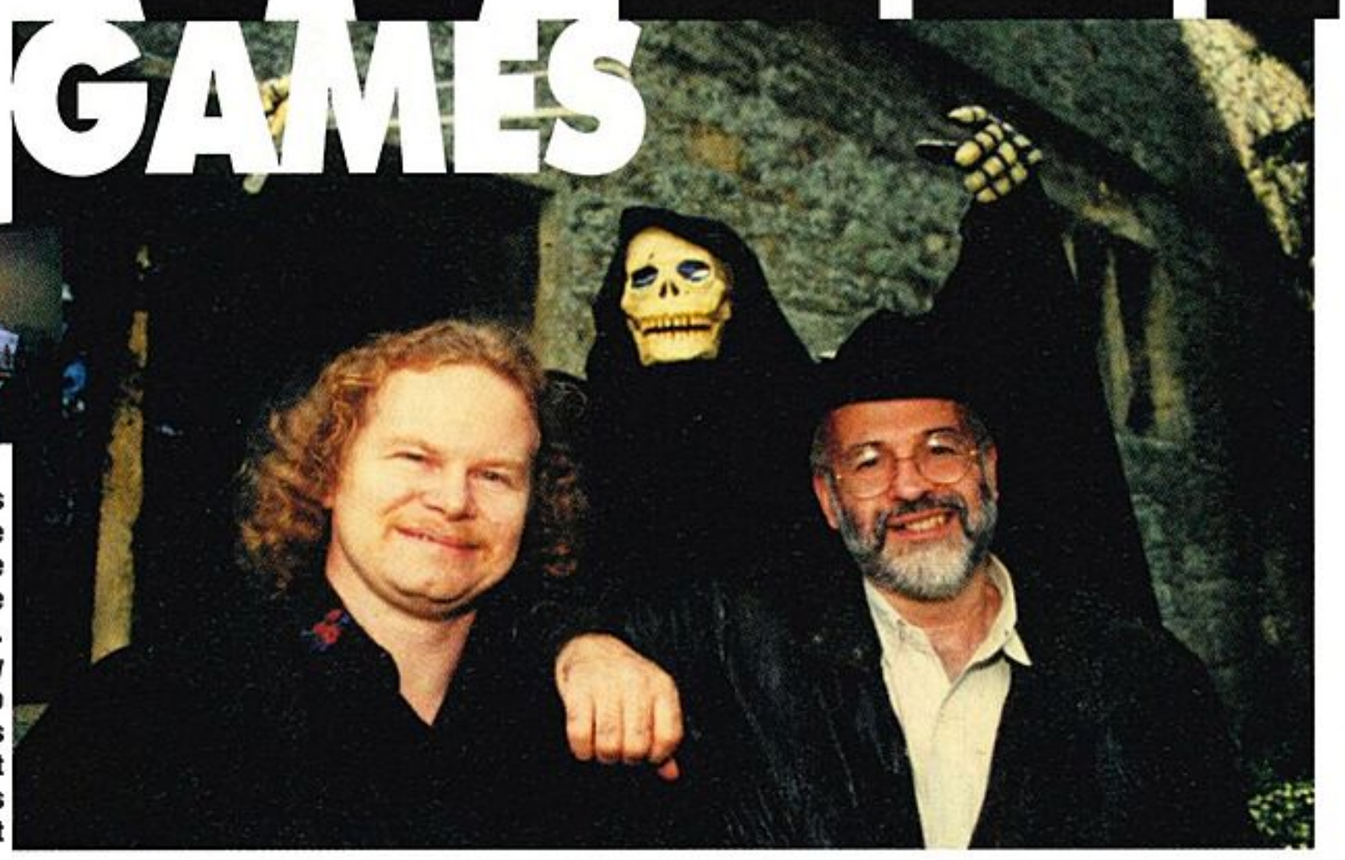
THE PROSPECT OF A TERRY PRATCHETT DISCWORLD GAME HAS BEEN ON THE HORIZON FOR SOME TIME. NOW PSYGNOSIS IS SET TO RELEASE IT WITH THE HELP OF TEENY WEENY GAMES.

by Paul Rigby and Derek Dela Fuente

TEENY WEENY GAMES



Terry Pratchett has been a driving force throughout the development of the Discworld game. Rather than simply selling the rights to his 'world' he has been an integral part of the game's development

TEENY Weeny is not the most well-known development team in the country – well, not yet at any rate. It started over three years ago with just one programmer and our interviewee for the day, MD Angela Sutherland. It proved successful in its endeavours and its numbers rose steadily to the 23 people that constitute Teeny Weeny today. Angela reckons that 30 will form the compliment by the year's end and details the team's aims for the future as: "Essentially what we are doing now – ie writing our own games, not licences, and then presenting them to a publisher. Discworld is a good example".

Cough! So Discworld isn't a licence? Angela: "This may be conceived as a licence because it is taken from a series of books from Terry Pratchett. We are all fans of his books so had certain ideas about the game. We worked on the game for over six months before approaching Terry, so by the time we presented them to him they were well structured. Initially, we had a bit of a problem persuading him that it was the right thing to do, but once he was on line and happy with what we were doing things went smoothly. It was another year before we even presented it to a publisher and by then we had spent a lot of money in its development. When we eventually went with Psygnosis we knew it would be yet another year before its completion".

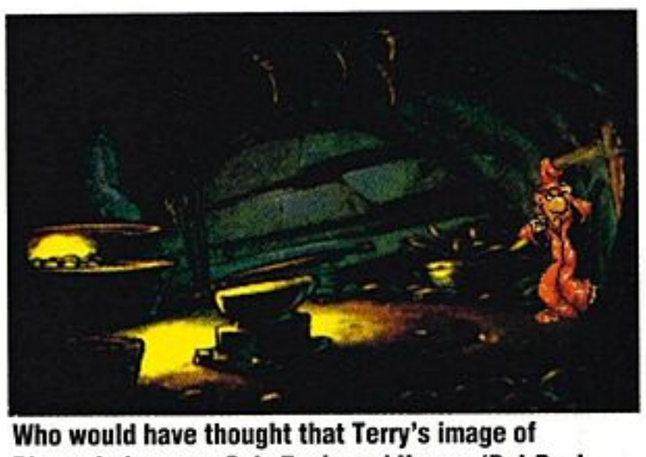
The designer of this new graphical adventure (which will be released on PC CD-ROM and other formats) is Gregg Barnet, who worked on the 8-bit version of The Hobbit. The game itself isn't based on any individual book; it is more of a slice from a certain time featuring familiar characters such as The Luggage and Rincewind, who you can choose as your player-character. The sequel will take another slice from a period, as will the, wait for it, Discworld pinball game that's in production as you read this.

So, getting back to the licence question what Teeny Weeny has is a general world licence, a licence for a setting and not a licence for a specific film or book. In other words TW has the ingredients, but must make its own cake. "Because we are all avid Terry Pratchett fans there is the right feel to the game. With Terry working and being involved in the game it ensures we stick with the essence of his ideas," enthused Angela.

"THE GAME ITSELF ISN'T BASED ON ANY INDIVIDUAL BOOK; IT IS MORE OF A SLICE FROM A CERTAIN TIME FEATURING FAMILIAR CHARACTERS SUCH AS THE LUGGAGE AND RINCEWIND, WHO YOU CAN CHOOSE AS YOUR PLAYER-CHARACTER"

The game is pretty big and is structured into three 'acts' that include

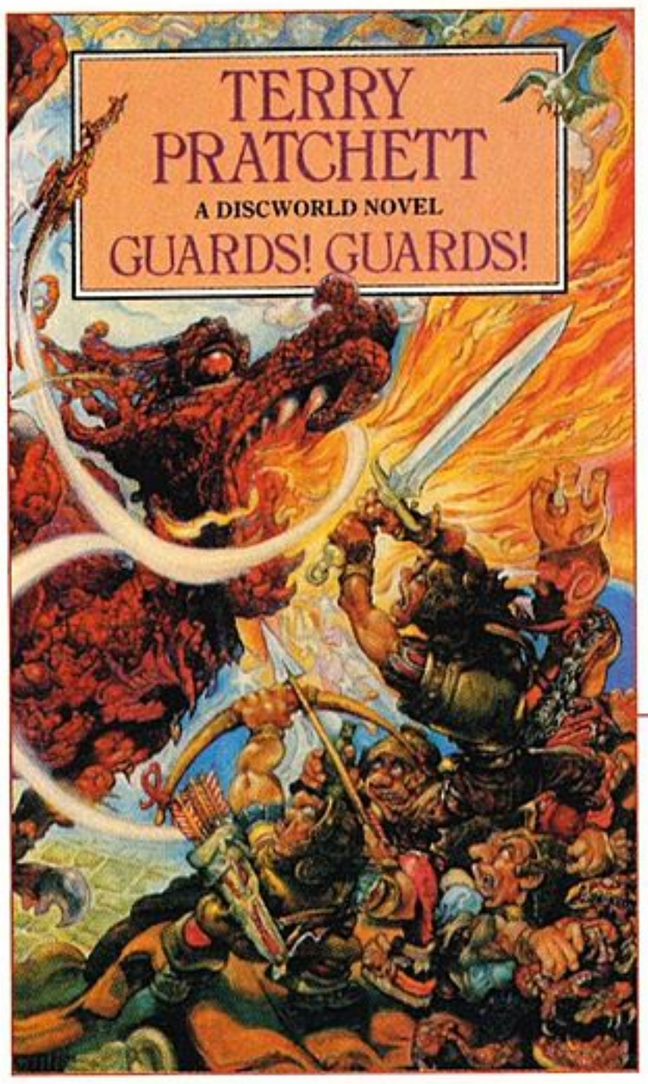
FEATURE



Who would have thought that Terry's image of Rincewind was an Only Fools and Horses 'Del-Boy' kind of a guy? You live and learn

mini-quests. Gameplay will feature the same sort of humour and spirit that the books have always provided and, although people familiar with the Pratchett story-lines will find some clues to the puzzles, this knowledge will not help to solve the quests.

"Every time we get to a milestone," commented Angela, "we send what we've got to Terry (he has his own computer and is very enthusiastic about it) and he either approves it or tells us why it isn't right! Sometimes he comes back with an alternative that is even funnier – I think he is enjoying himself. Terry had a certain image of Rincewind (Del-Boy from Fools and Horses) and, once he told us that, we knew what was expected. He gave us lots of secrets to the make-up of the characters that helped us know how they would react. It reinforced the perception we got from reading the books".



Angela had a few frank thoughts on the subject: "We've concluded that Sierra games are awful, Westwood's are better and LucasArts' are very good – that is worrying us because each time they bring out a game it breaks new ground. A few more games in the line of Monkey Island and they will be leading the field. I see Lucas as our main rival".

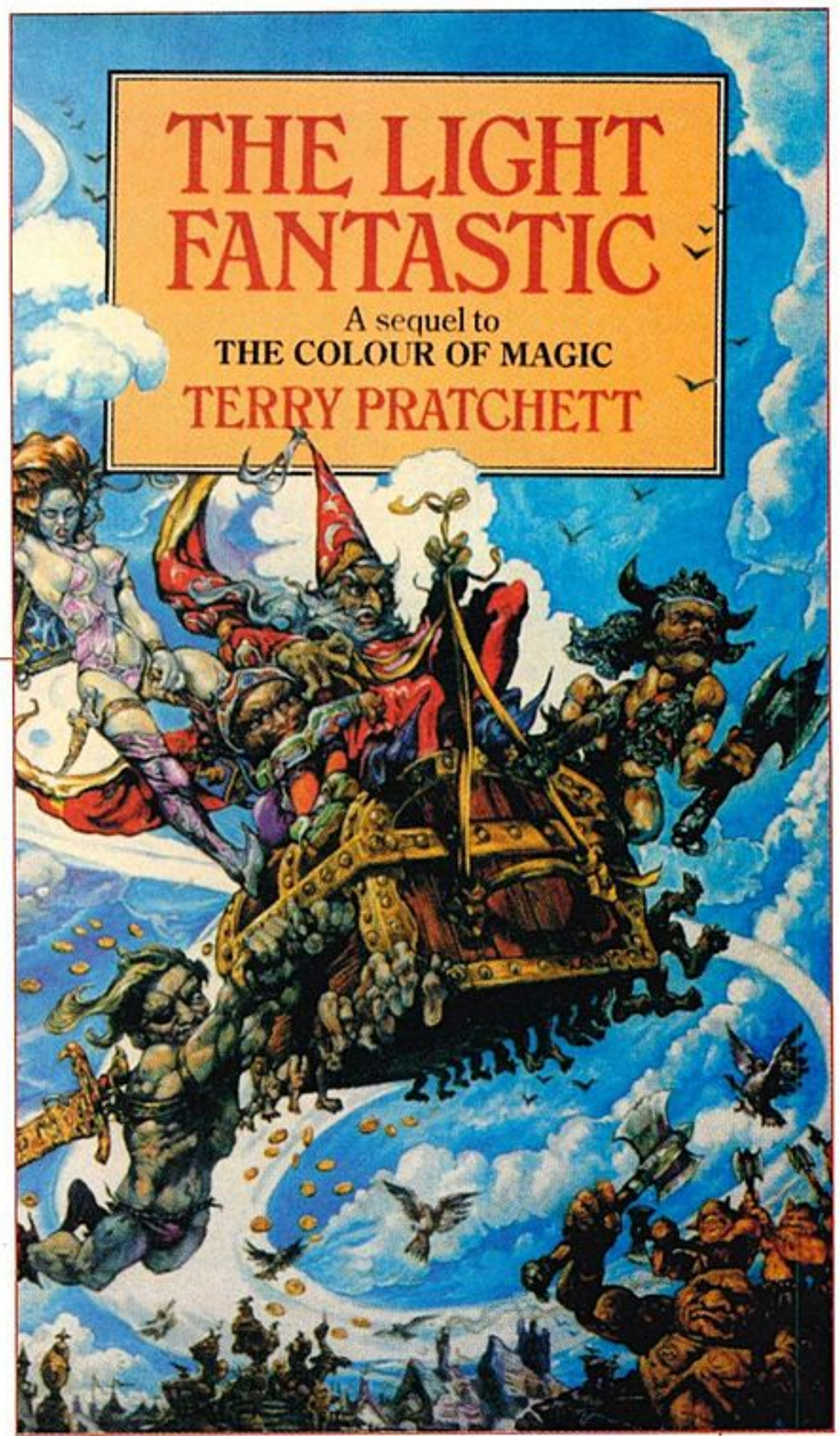
The interface to the new Discworld game is very different to the bog-standard adventure game – not at all like Sierra's, more like LucasArts'. It is not a copy however, the game's interface was developed before the new titles hit the shelves.

"THE GAME IS A PUZZLE-BASED, NON-LINEAR ADVENTURE THAT WORKS IN A SIMILAR WAY TO DAY OF THE TENTACLE BUT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO COLLECT OBJECTS A AND B SO YOU CAN OPEN A DOOR"

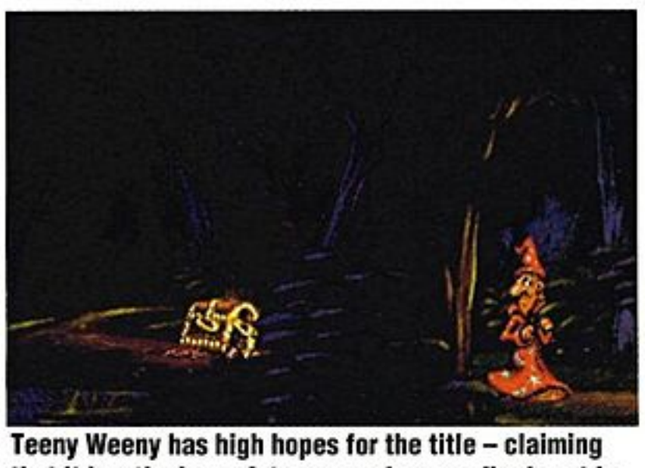
The procedure for writing the Discworld game might surprise a few people because Teeny Weeny began with puzzle writing. Then it drew the backdrops in the form of line drawings that were then transformed into hand-painted pictures. Next these were scanned and rendered. "We then used people up in Leeds to do most of the animations," Angela continued, "then the scenario was written by a professional script writer who also writes comics and knows Terry Pratchett well".

The visual structure of the game was formed in the same way as cartoons are created. All the animations were made at the start of the project, TW then had a visual script to use as a guide. Angela concluded: "The game is a puzzle-based, non-linear adventure that works in a similar way to Day of the Tentacle but, for example, you do not have to collect objects A and B so you can open a door. We are selling entertainment not an IQ test, so people that play our games will find a lot of enjoyment and fulfilment.

Discworld is funny and is not difficult at all. A notable part of the game-engine is that if a person gets stuck the AI will detect this and will help you. It is not a good thing to have to call a company to get hints, although you must have some difficulty to make it fun. It's a challenge, yes, but not a mind-boggling experience". ■

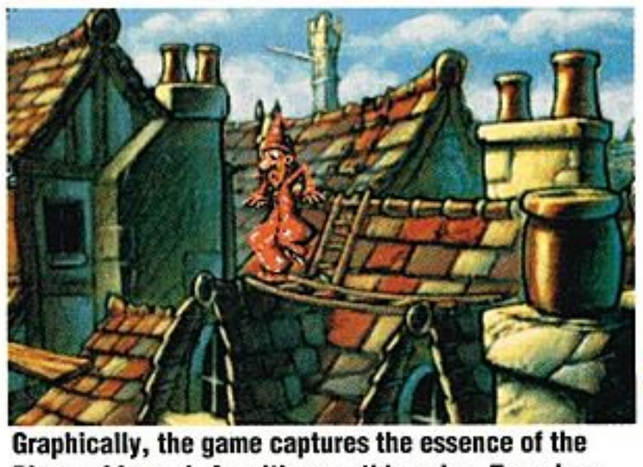


The Discworld novels have managed to generate a culture all of their own and are now some of the most successful books of their genre. With millions of copies sold, a computer game was inevitable really wasn't it?



Teeny Weeny has high hopes for the title – claiming that it has the LucasArts range of games firmly set in its sights as far as both humour and interface go

It's claimed that Discworld will be a non-linear puzzle game which relies more on the Day of the Tentacle school of adventuring



Graphically, the game captures the essence of the Discworld novel. As with everything else, Terry has acted as a consultant for the way the game looks

FEATURE

ALREADY AN ESTABLISHED TRADITIONAL AD&D CAMPAIGN SETTING, RAVENLOFT IS SET TO FOLLOW THE LIKES OF DARK SUN AND FORGOTTEN REALMS INTO THE ELECTRONIC WORLD OF THE PC. HOW IS IT GOING TO COMPARE?

by Keith Sloan

ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

RAVENLOFT STRAHD'S POSSESSION

PRODUCT
Advanced Dungeons and Dragons
Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession

SOFTWARE HOUSE
US Gold/SSI

RELEASE DATE
May

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards

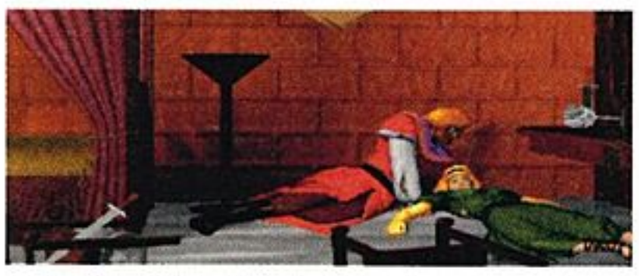
The familiar character screen gives you the different strengths and weaknesses of the various characters in one informative, easy-to-read package

FOR the last 15 years, nearly as long as the PC has been around, fantasy role-playing fans have really only looked towards one system of play to satisfy their cravings for all things mystical and fantastic; that system being Advanced Dungeons and Dragons. Devised originally in the early '70s, it has now survived the onslaught of video games and all the other technological terrors, to stand head and shoulders above any other system available to fantasy role-players.

In fact, things have progressed to such an extent that there is a definite link between computers and AD&D. Witness the transitions of games like Dark Sun and Forgotten Realms to the PC – they have, perhaps miraculously, managed to keep their original gameplay elements intact, providing the true fan with a better way to play their favourite campaigns. Of course, it still cannot hope to really match the feeling of playing and interacting with other human opponents, but it comes in a very worthy second place.

Now, Ravenloft has gone the same way, giving the player the chance to relax their imaginations somewhat and let the computer govern the rules of play, as well as depict all manner of things that are going on in the game world visually. As the 21st century looms large, the border between traditional role playing and computer role playing has been blurred once more, perhaps to the extent that things will never be the same again.

Ravenloft is a gothic RPG that features Strahd, dark knight and full-time vampire. As one would expect from a game of this nature, there is a strong story-line to pull the player into the ethereal world of the nosferatu. The story is that the ruler of Elturel has been attacked by a mysterious assailant and both he and his mage lie wounded at the hands of the attacker. Dhelt, the

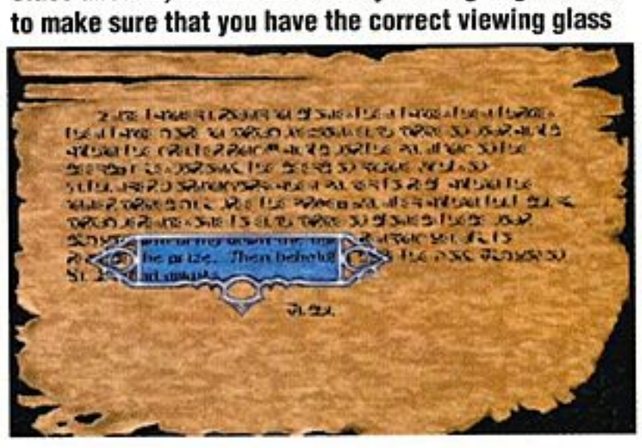


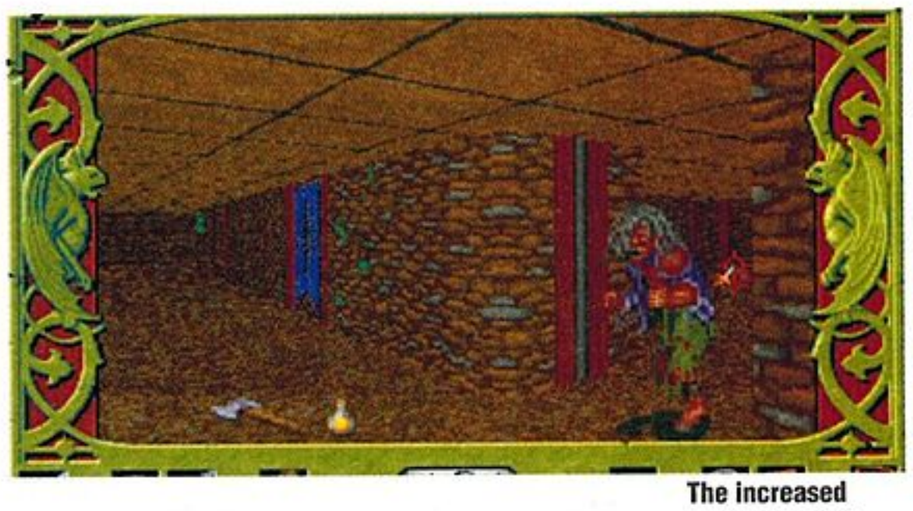
PREVIEW

Communication throughout the game is of vital importance. Who you talk to and how you talk to them could well determine whether or not you get to go head to head with Strahd and avenge the theft of the amulet

Where would the modern day adventurer be without the ever-present threat of an enemy-launched fireball

Clues abound, but to read them you are going to have to make sure that you have the correct viewing glass





The increased resolution of the screen may not be immediately apparent from these still screen-shots, but when you are playing the game it becomes very difficult to go back to standard VGA

injured ruler, has had the sacred amulet ripped from his body and stolen.

The player's party has responded by rushing to give aid to Dhelt. Swearing (rather stupidly, in my opinion) to avenge this theft and make whoever is responsible pay for their crimes. You take your party to retrieve the amulet and avenge the theft in the only way you know how – extreme violence directed at the perpetrators.

Unfortunately, for you in particular, the thief is none other than Strahd, a powerful vampire lord. So it looks as though it is up to you and your merry band of adventurers to go forth into the unknown and attempt to tweak the nose of fear and laugh in the face of adversity.

Ravenloft is, like so many games currently surfacing at the moment, viewed from the first-person perspective. The viewing window used in the game is specifically made extra large, both to give the player a better idea of where they are and also to show off the new graphics mode that's receiving its début in this game. As most PC users know, the standard VGA resolution (320 x 200 with 256 colours) leaves a lot to be desired, especially for this type of game. It's not so noticeable when flying around in a Tornado, or commanding an entire naval fleet, but if the program in question stands or falls on how realistically it can get across the feeling of 'being there' to the player, then the graphical limitations become more and more restrictive.

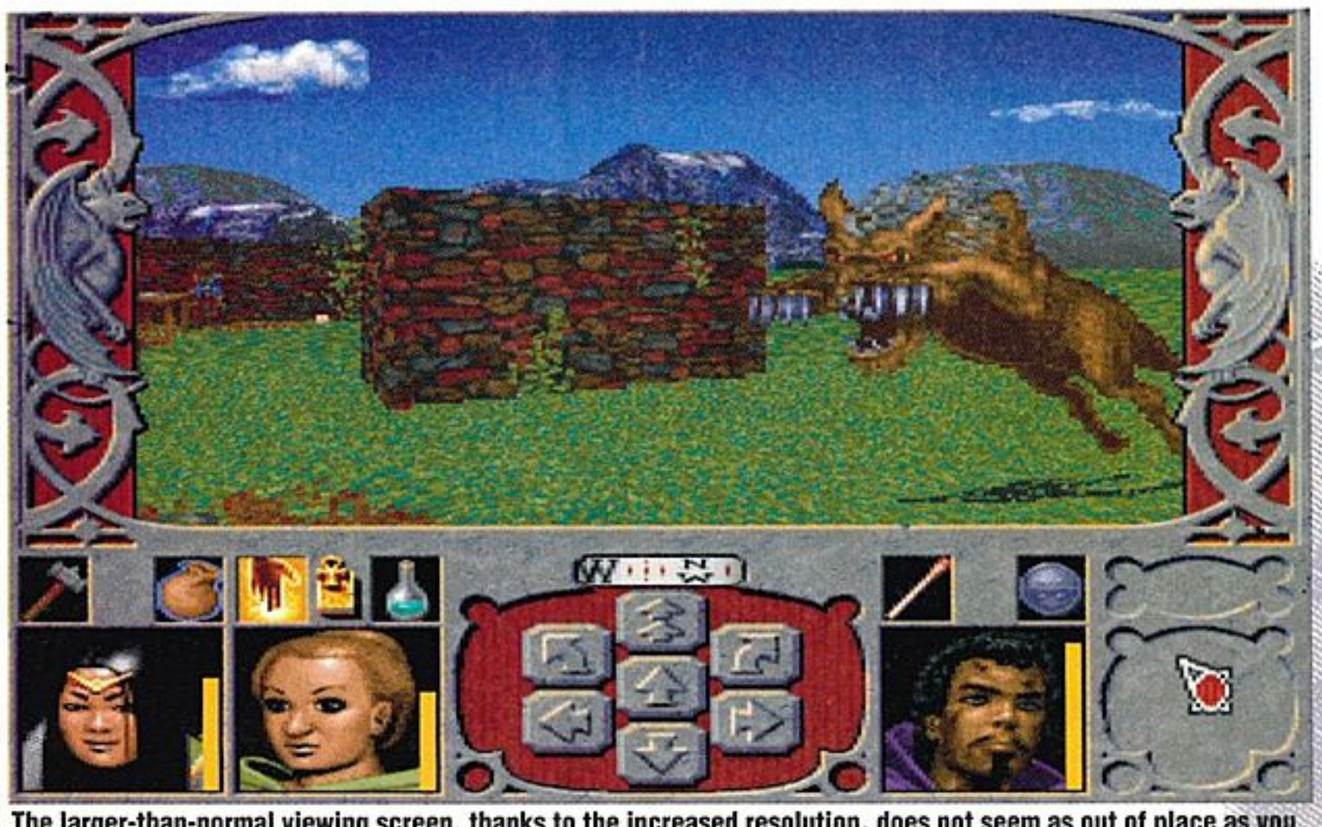
Ravenloft gets around this problem by making use of a brand-spanking-new mode – instead of using 320 x 200, the programming team has managed to squeeze an extra bit of resolution out of the VGA standard to produce graphics that run in 320 x 400, without the need for expensive new graphics cards. This way, the outside world stays sharp even when you get close to a wall or monster, with none of the usual blurring or blockiness found in other games of this type. Is there a downside to this system? As far as I can tell; no. The screen moves as swiftly as one could hope for, with the update being smooth and gradual. Until SVGA actually becomes a more commonplace standard, this could well be the missing link between having clear, sharp graphics running under the control of a normal VGA card and SVGA.

"THE DOMAIN OF THE VAMPIRE IS A BLACK, NIGHT ENSHROUDED ONE AND DAYLIGHT IS ONE OF YOUR BEST WEAPONS AGAINST THE DARK PRINCE, SO USING IT TO ITS BEST ADVANTAGE IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE"

The gameplay control method is of the high standard that we have come to expect from SSI. Relying on a mixture of mouse and keyboard control, movement around the playing world is easy to achieve and, coupled with the use of mouse-driven icons, the whole thing works very well. Something that a lot of people will find very useful is the new automapping feature – as well as giving you a complete rundown of where you have been so far, there is also the choice to annotate the map before you save or print it. This means that it can accommodate a lot more information and make the job of working out where you've been and piecing together the puzzle that bit easier.

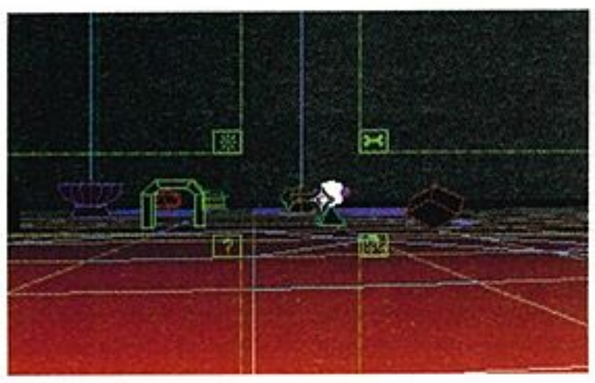
As the main crux of Ravenloft relies heavily on the legend of the vampire, it would seem only right that there was some mention of the powers of light and dark to give credence to the story. Daylight and darkness have been cleverly worked into the game by forcing you to think very carefully about certain actions you might take. The domain of the vampire is a black, night enshrouded one and daylight is one of your best weapons against the Dark Prince, so using it to its best advantage is of paramount importance. Failure to do so may result in you and your party making an impromptu donation to the manager of the local blood bank!

For those people who are already familiar with the SSI interpretations of the AD&D games, then Ravenloft will fulfil your expectations. It has some superb graphics, a music score that eerily sets the scene and, perhaps most importantly of all, the game manages to generate just the right kind of atmosphere for the player. Look for a full review in an upcoming issue of *PC Player*.



The larger-than-normal viewing screen, thanks to the increased resolution, does not seem as out of place as you would expect. Everything is in proportion, with the icons at the bottom of the screen still being easily legible

PREVIEW



There are six character types to choose from, including a low-down sneak, a street punk or maybe even a corporate exec, nicknamed The Jockey. The tech-rats deal with electronics, the killers are cybernetic mercenaries who maim for money, while the net-junkies have the perilous task of entering and exploring the maze of computer networks

CAN CYBERSPACE LIVE UP TO EMPIRE'S CONFIDENT BOASTS OF IT BEING THE DEFINITIVE VIRTUAL REALITY GAME ON THE PC? IT CERTAINLY HOPES SO.

by Alex Simmons

CYBERSPACE

PAGE 82

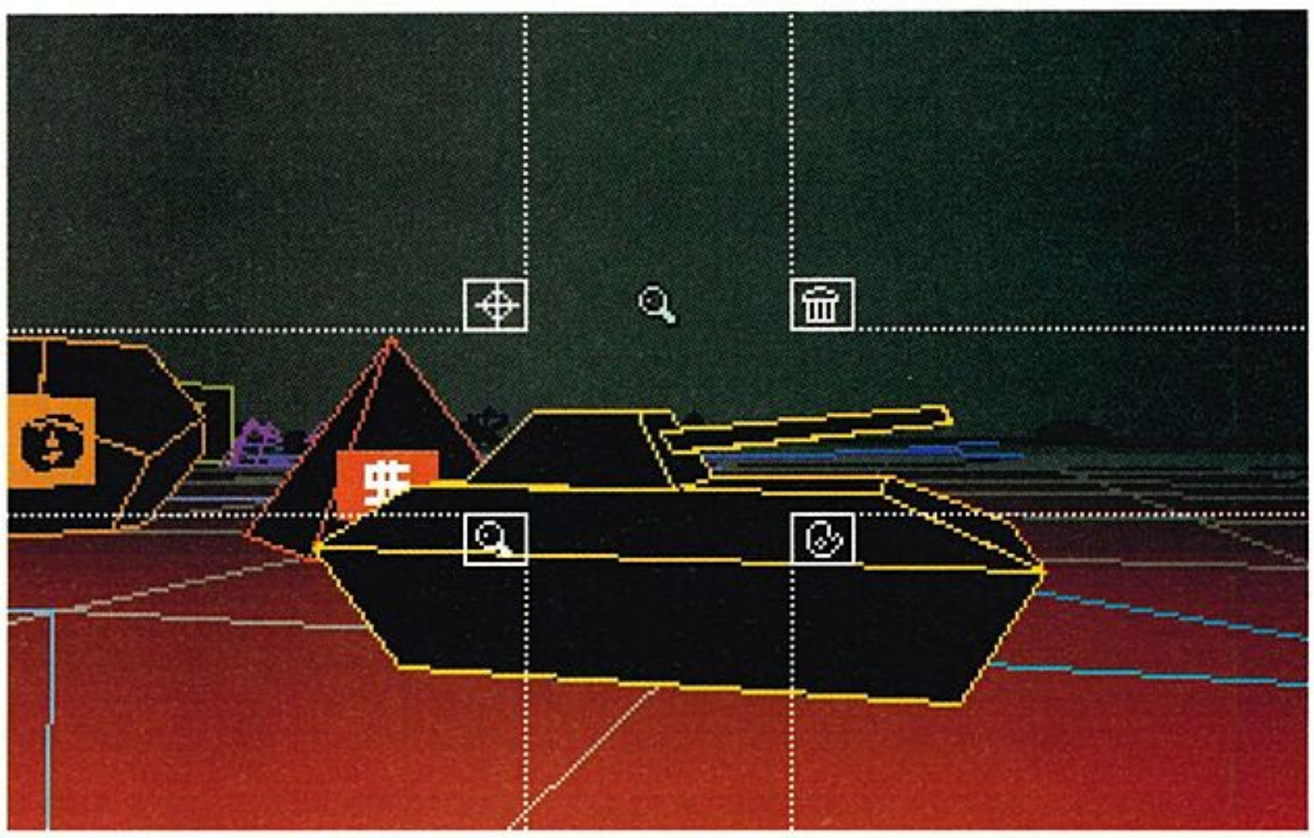
PRODUCT
Cyberspace

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Empire

RELEASE DATE
March

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards, Mouse



SET some hundred years in the future, Cyberspace is William Gibson's virtual reality dream come true. The world is dominated by global corporations and cybernetic implants give street punks the edge to stay alive in the violent 21st century.

Full-screen 3D recreates the world of Cyberspace, using the advanced 3D technology originally seen in Team Yankee and Pacific Islands to create a believable virtual reality. In this world towering corporation buildings hide floor after floor of security guards, while the slums and ghettos thrive with violence. Without your hardware booster chips you'd be dead.

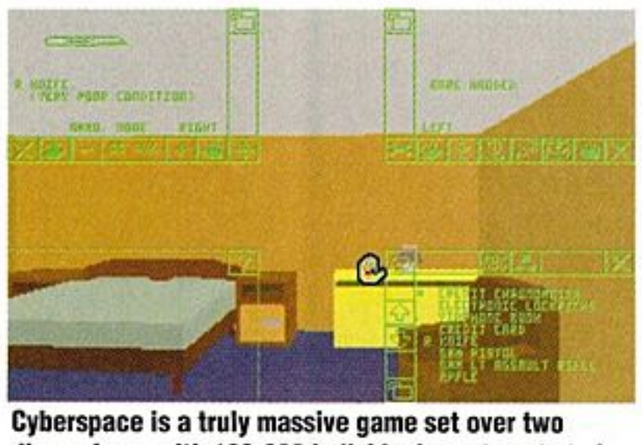
Elements from Cyberspace are taken from Gibson novels such as Neuromancer and Virtual Light, but many will also notice bits of Judge Dredd among other influences with the game being set in a mega city. Here the population is close to one million, divided between 500 area zones each with their own social class and function. Approximately 100 buildings make up a single zone, consisting of office blocks, shops and apartments. Each building can be entered and explored, and you can find new items and characters to interact with in the various rooms.

There are over one million non-player characters (NPCs) to interact with, each with their own tasks which they perform, oblivious to your presence. That is unless you decide to communicate with Cyberspace's simple text interface – any character can be talked to, revealing information which will then appear on your HUD (more about that later). Depending on your response they will either befriend you or be disruptive, but don't make too many enemies in this world of violent crime because there are no policemen to drag you out of some particularly nasty bar room brawl. You'll know your friends from your enemies as each character is instantly recognisable and is displayed using animated polygon-shaped bodies combined with complex bit-mapped heads which show their facial expressions.

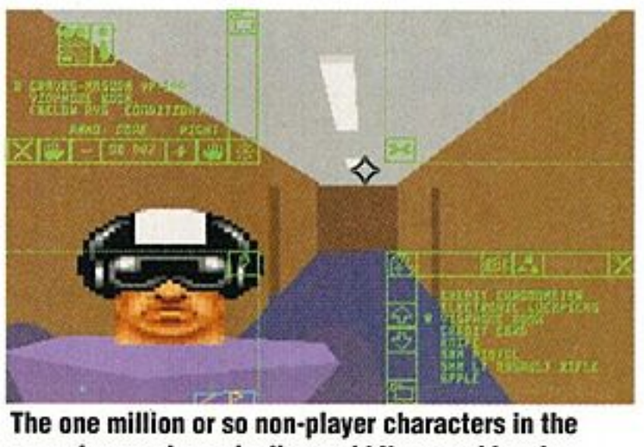
"ELEMENTS FROM CYBERSPACE ARE TAKEN FROM GIBSON NOVELS LIKE NEUROMANCER AND VIRTUAL LIGHT, BUT MANY OF YOU WILL ALSO NOTICE BITS OF JUDGE DREDD AMONG OTHER INFLUENCES"

While the seedy streets of New Boston provide a background for most of the game, there are also large chunks dedicated to net-running. In the future, computer systems operate over the net – a 3D virtual desktop if you like,

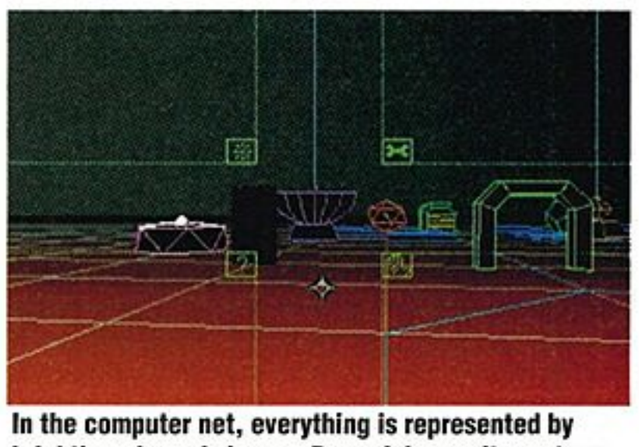
PREVIEW



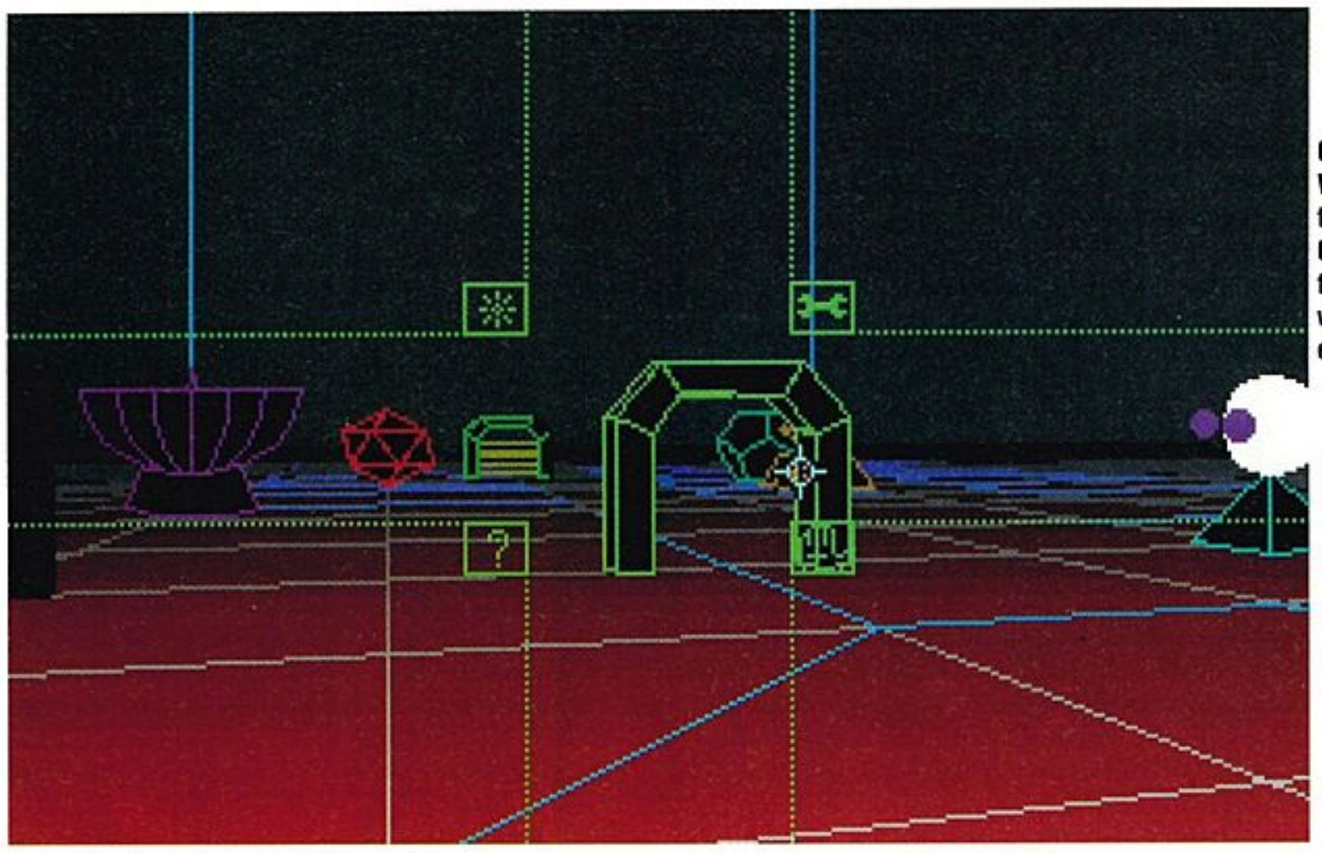
Cyberspace is a truly massive game set over two dimensions, with 100,000 individual apartments to be explored which often contain useful pieces of equipment or weaponry



The one million or so non-player characters in the game have polygon bodies and bitmapped heads. Surprisingly, all of the NPCs can be interacted with, providing you have the odd millennium to spare

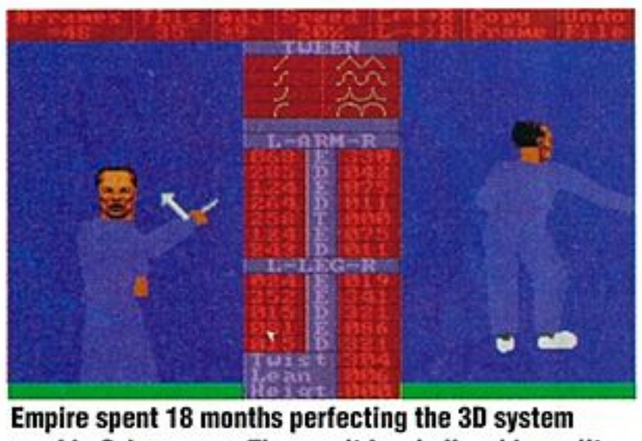


In the computer net, everything is represented by brightly-coloured shapes. Powerful security systems protect data from spies and threaten to fry the brain of a net-runner attempting to break in



Cyberspace borrows a lot of ideas from William Gibson's Neuromancer and other table-top role-playing games like Cyberpunk. The computer systems of the future are operated in a 3D desktop which can actually be walked round and explored

The HUD can be stretched to fit the whole screen or alternatively up to four displays can be used for different purposes. The display has been designed in such a way that it doesn't interfere with the main character view



Empire spent 18 months perfecting the 3D system used in Cyberspace. The result is a believable reality in which the characters act sensibly. They don't walk through walls and they move smoothly and realistically

You have two options when faced with another character. The most obvious choice is to ask a few questions and hopefully gain a little information. Alternatively draw your gun, aim the cursor, then fire

which you can actually walk around and explore. In this alternative computer-generated reality, net-junkies (the futuristic equivalent of computer hackers) can penetrate the computer systems of massive corporations, stealing top-secret data and then selling it to rival companies for big bucks.

The net isn't easy to negotiate though, because ICE (intrusion counter-measure electronics) programs protect many of the large systems. A skilled net-runner can retaliate with their own programs to break though the security wall, but fail and it could end up frying your brain!

Back out in the real world, it's about time you got yourself a gun. Fists are no match for a .357 slug and it's always better to out-gun an opponent. Don't bother with a six-shot revolver, instead go for something with a bit more punch – either a machine-gun or even a semi-automatic shotgun like the Spas model 12. Whatever you're armed with, combat is simple. Aim the cursor at the target, fire and bullets will spray the target, unless of course you're fighting bare-fisted.

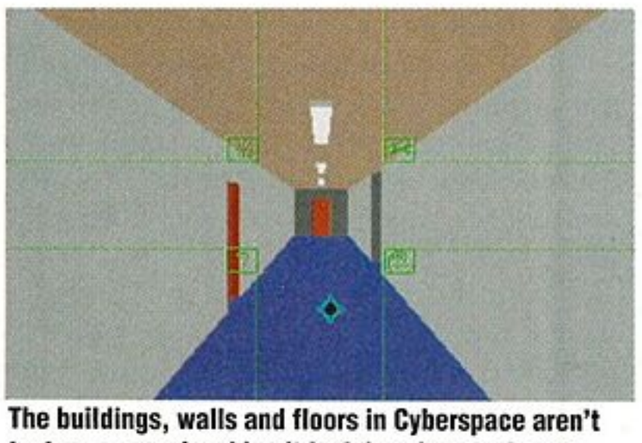
Unlike the table-top RPGs in which the games-master must refer to tables for the combat result, the computer works out all this automatically, taking into account the difficulty of the shot (distances to target, target size etc) and your weapon prowess. Mind you, Cyberspace is designed in such a way that you can get through the game without so much as throwing a punch, so essentially you can have as much or as little violence as you want.

What cannot be avoided though is the intrusion of technology. In the year 2090 everything is automated and there are electronic gadgets covering every inch of space. They even provide the player with vital information, processing the data and flashing it up on the HUD which overlays the character's view. In an instant you can switch between focusing on reality then concentrating on the green neon of the HUD. Any spoken dialogue appears on the HUD, along with full details on each item in your inventory and a list of all the actions available.

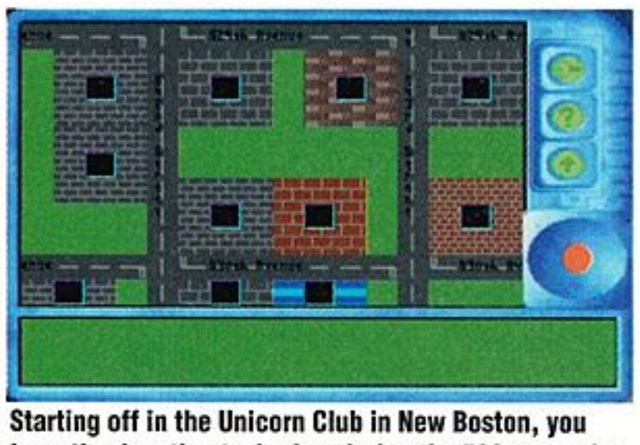
The question mark is used to examine objects and is useful for reading signs, many of which hold vital clues for solving puzzles. The conversation icon is also of importance, especially when you're caught red-handed trying to pick the lock to a safe. Confronted by a bald-headed Sinead look-alike armed with an automatic pistol, is it best to tell the truth or bluff your way out? They always say honesty is the best policy but I don't think Sinead would take too kindly to you stealing her possessions. As an alternative to sweet-talking the thug, you could always blow her head off!

"IN LIGHT OF SUCH RECENT 3D MASTERPIECES AS DOOM, CYBERSPACE IS MORE THAN JUST A QUICK BLAST. IT IS AN IN-DEPTH ROLE-PLAYER WITH STACKS TO DO AND HUNDREDS OF LOCATIONS TO EXPLORE. IT SOUNDS LIKE VIRTUAL REALITY, BUT WHETHER THE END RESULT CAN LIVE UP TO THESE CLAIMS REMAINS TO BE SEEN"

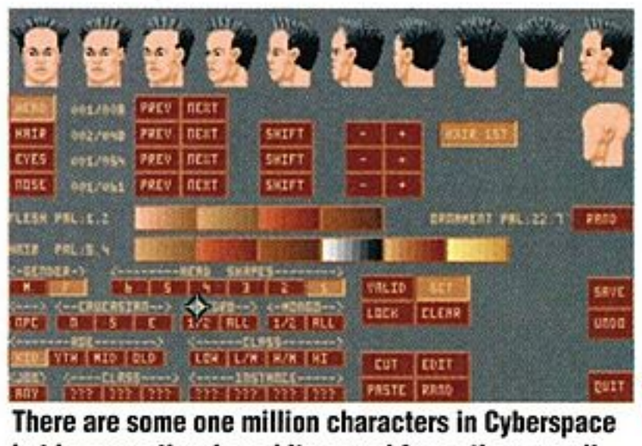
In light of recent 3D masterpieces as Doom, Cyberspace is more than just a quick blast. It is an in-depth role-player with stacks to do and hundreds of locations to explore. It sounds like VR, but whether the end result can live up to these claims remains to be seen. Cyberspace should appear around March, costing £39.99. ■



The buildings, walls and floors in Cyberspace aren't texture-mapped making it look less impressive as Doom, but it does mean that the whole things moves a lot more smoothly and faster

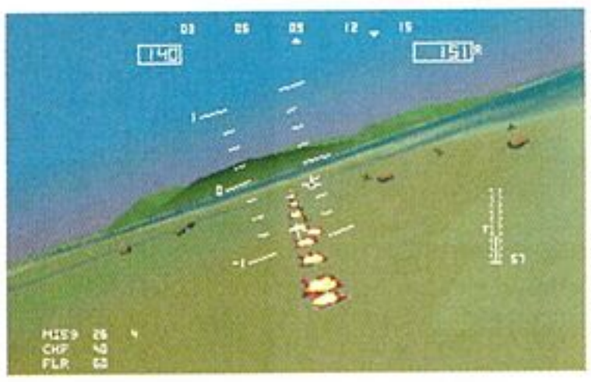


Starting off in the Unicorn Club in New Boston, you have the daunting task of exploring the 500 zones that make up the violent city possessed by technology and cybernetics



There are some one million characters in Cyberspace but because they have bitmapped faces they are all instantly recognisable. Well, nearly all of them anyway

PREVIEW



As is usual with all Simis games, the ground detail is kept fairly simple so as to keep the frame rate high. Although not having the same kind of visuals as Tornado, it nonetheless conveys a feeling of high speed, low-level flight very well

THE NUMBER OF WORTHY HELICOPTER SIMULATIONS CURRENTLY

by

AVAILABLE ON THE PC CAN BE COUNTED ON ONE HAND.

Keith

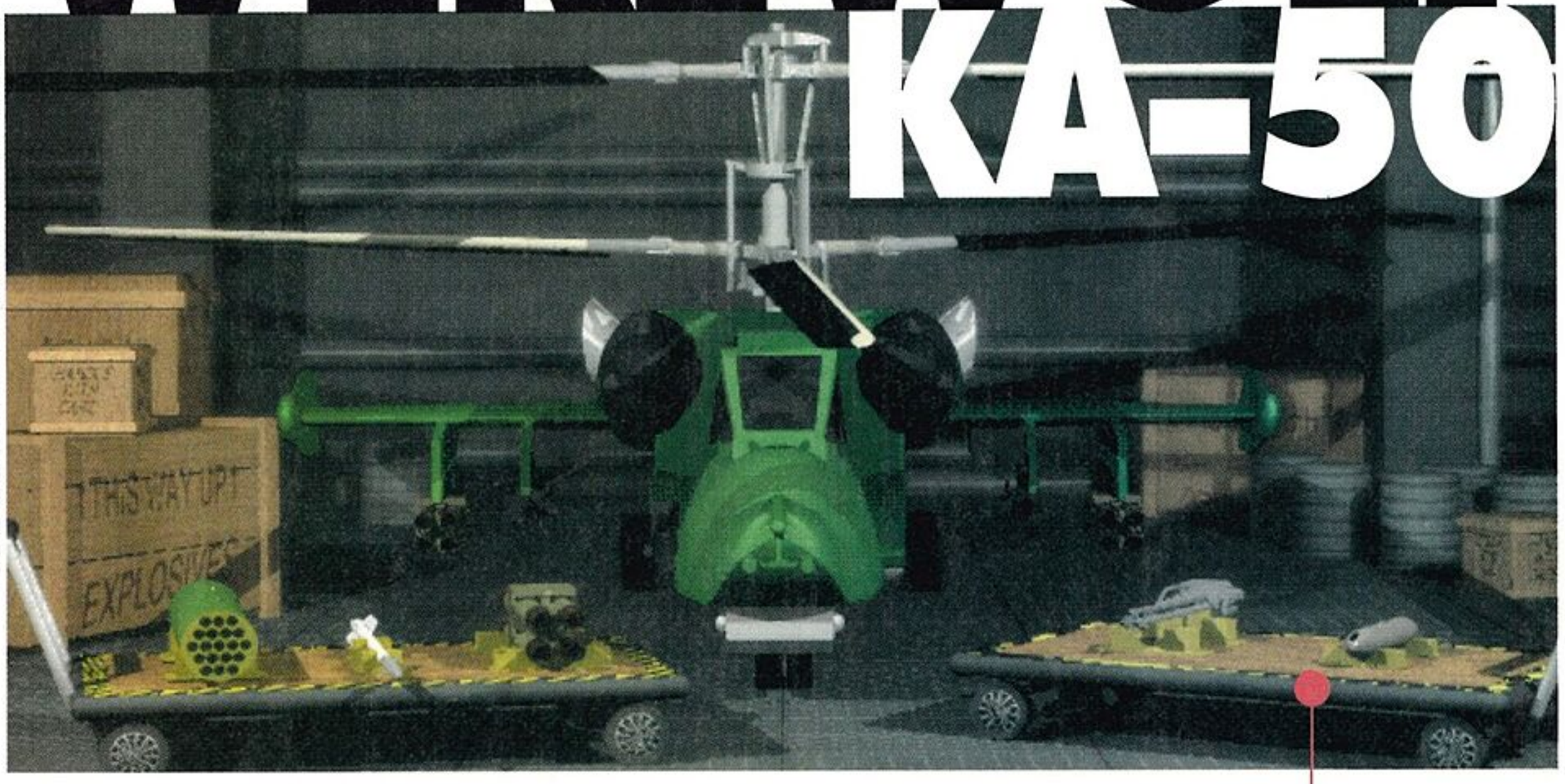
NOW, VIRGIN IS ENTERING THE FRAY WITH A SIMULATION OF

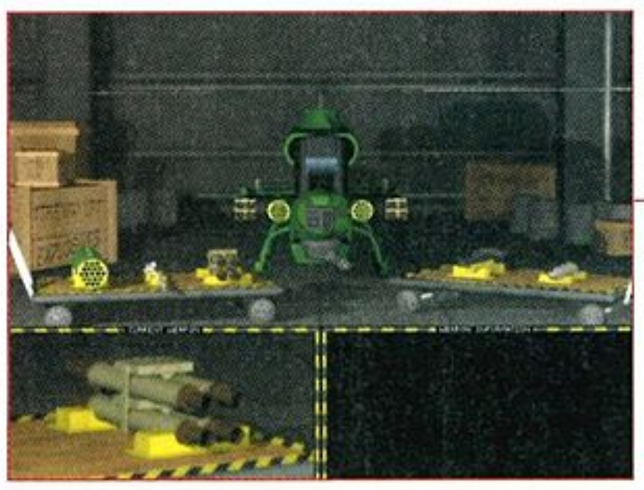
Sloan

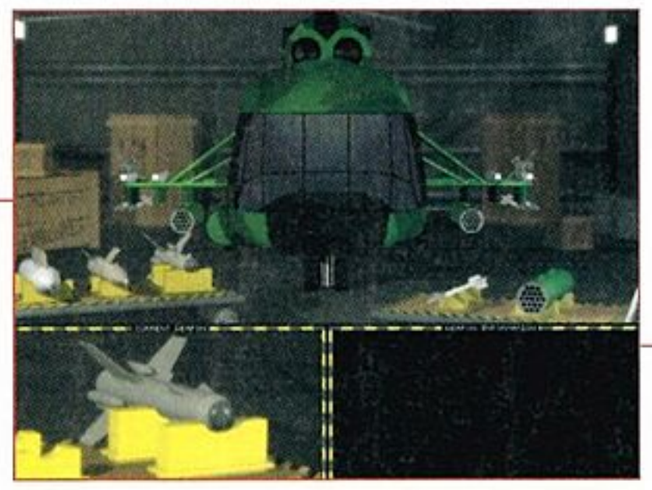
THE KA-50, AKA THE WEREWOLF.

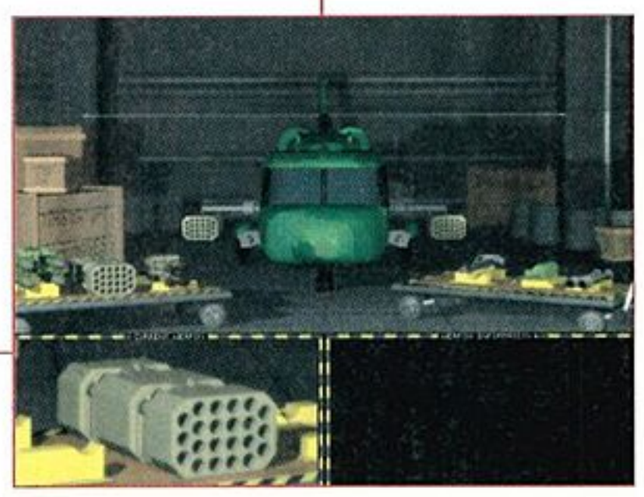
WEREWOLF KA-50

The true worth of SVGA has never been so graphically demonstrated as it is here in these screen shots. All the helicopters are fully rendered in 640 x 480, giving a crispness and a clarity that should once and for all bury the bog-standard VGA display mode. Arming the helis is a tactical process, because the flight models used in the game react realistically to things such as weight and drag. Could this be the chopper pilot's version of Falcon 3.0?









PRODUCT
Werewolf KA-50

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin

RELEASE DATE
May

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster Sound Card, Thrustmaster, SVGA (640x480x256)

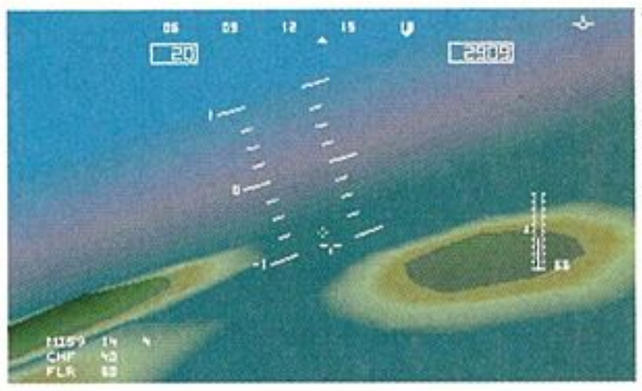
PREVIEW

LONG after sims of fixed-wing aircraft had become commonplace on home computers, the software companies finally decided that simulating the high speed, low-level flight characteristics of a military helicopter might just be a little more exciting for the player than flying a Cessna around a simple, computerised vision of Chicago. With a helicopter, everything happened a few hundred feet above the ground and the feeling of actually flying the thing was increased.

Microprose really started the ball rolling with the release of the classic Gunship. Although the graphics were simple wire frame representations, the real fun was in the fact that all the hills and valleys in the game could actually be used to a certain extent to shield you from the unwanted eyes of the enemy. There was nothing more exciting than darting behind a hill unseen, popping up to target a SAM sight and letting off a couple of Mavericks before the radar operators even had time to pickle the launch switch.

This was undoubtedly the start of something that could have been big. However, helicopters have been sadly overlooked when it comes to PC simulations, in favour of more 'trendy' flying vehicles such as the F-16, the F-15 and more recently the Tornado. Virgin is about to go some way towards rectifying this situation with the release of Werewolf KA-50, a simulation of among others the Kamov KA-50 – a twin rotor gunship which is the latest in Soviet helicopter technology. Designed

As with AV8B, most of the in-game options are accessed from various corridors, with different doors offering different options. This time though, all the option screens are fully rendered SVGA screens that take your breath away. Phew!



The terrain around the play area is divided up into islands, allowing for a spot of island-hopping if things get too boring!

to provide close air support and compete directly with the American AH-64, it is, in the right hands, a formidable tool of destruction.

The South China seas have become a dangerous place. In the old days, pirates could be recognised by their skull and crossbones flags, but in the modern age of high-tech weapons and even higher-tech thieves, the first indication you'll get that your vessel has been boarded is when somebody points a gun in your face. With the sea lanes narrowing to little more than a mile in width and the depth of the water barely able to support a huge supertanker, it isn't very difficult for a small boat to slip up beside the superstructure and enable a party of armed men to steal what they can. The average tanker carries about $100,000 to cover wages and other expenses, so stealing from them can be a profitable business.

You play the part of a captain in charge of a band of mercenary soldiers and heli pilots, hired by a cartel of Japanese, Chinese and Singaporean businesses to find and destroy the organisation responsible for the sea thefts. Armed with six helicopters and a limited supply of weapons and supplies, it's up to you to manage your men and resources, while attempting to seek out and destroy the person or persons who are responsible for creating this problem.

Werewolf follows in a similar vein to Gunship 2000 in that it allows you to have your pick of four choppers with which to fight in. As well as the KA-50 there is the AH-1W, the Westland Lynx and the Kamov MI-8. Each 'copter will feature a fully independent flight model closely resembling the real thing (although the statistics for the Russian craft are more likely to be guestimates), meaning that tactical choices will come into play regarding which craft to take on which mission.

Of course, having a state-of-the-art helicopter is of no use whatsoever unless you have some state-of-the-art weapons to load onto its weapons pylons. As well as the usual cannons and Sidewinders, Werewolf allows the player to load up with TOW anti-tank weapons and BAe Sea Skua anti-ship missiles. The one major problem with them is that they are expensive and you, as commanding officer, must decide on the best ways to distribute them. After completing successful missions you will be paid for your services, but it looks as though you'll need a degree in accounting as well as a keen head for A-A and A-G combat if the team is going to be kept at full fighting strength.

"LIKE A LOT OF THE FLIGHT SIMS COMING OUT AT THE MOMENT, WEREWOLF FEATURES A FULL STRATEGIC BATTLE PLANNING SYSTEM WHERE YOU PLAN MISSIONS, MOVE YOUR SUPPORT SHIP AND MAKE DECISIONS THAT WILL AFFECT THE OUTCOME OF THE WHOLE SORTIE"

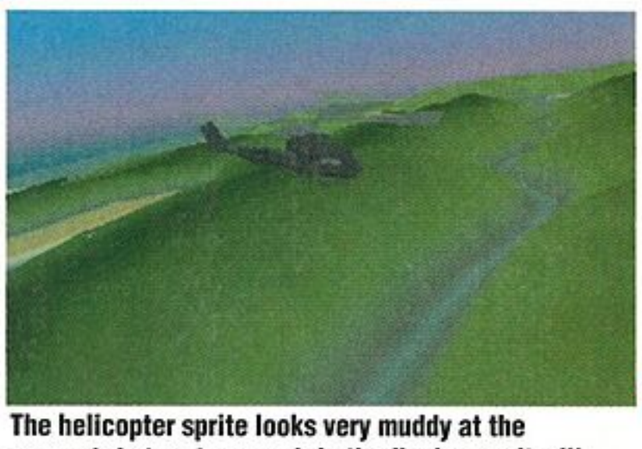
Like a lot of the flight sims coming out at the moment, Werewolf features a full strategic battle planning system where you plan missions, move your support ship and make decisions that will affect the outcome of the whole sortie. Over 400kms of the South China seas need to be brought under the player's control, so careful mission planning and a watchful eye on the local shipping and weather forecasts must be employed or else the tankers and freighters will become targets, in turn meaning that you will not get paid.

The game itself has been coded by Simis, known for AV8B and more recently FST. As is usual for a Simis game, the ground detail is kept relatively simple (meaning non-textured polygons, but plenty of them), with two graphics modes to choose from. The standard game is run in VGA, with Gourad shading on the hills and valleys giving a very convincing feeling of flight. The game is also set up to run in SVGA with more definition (obviously), but no Gourad shading. It's nice that users have a choice of which system to run the game in, rather than having to buy two separate versions. Also included is support for players who own local Bus systems and Windows accelerator cards. Hopefully, this is the thinking that all development teams will adhere to in the future, giving users a greater choice when it comes to how the game looks and runs.

The graphics are fluid and fast, something that Simis has become synonymous with, and the feeling of flight, especially when travelling down some of the valleys and chasms found around the islands is superb. The game is due for release in late May and there will hopefully be a full review in the next issue of *PC Player*. ■

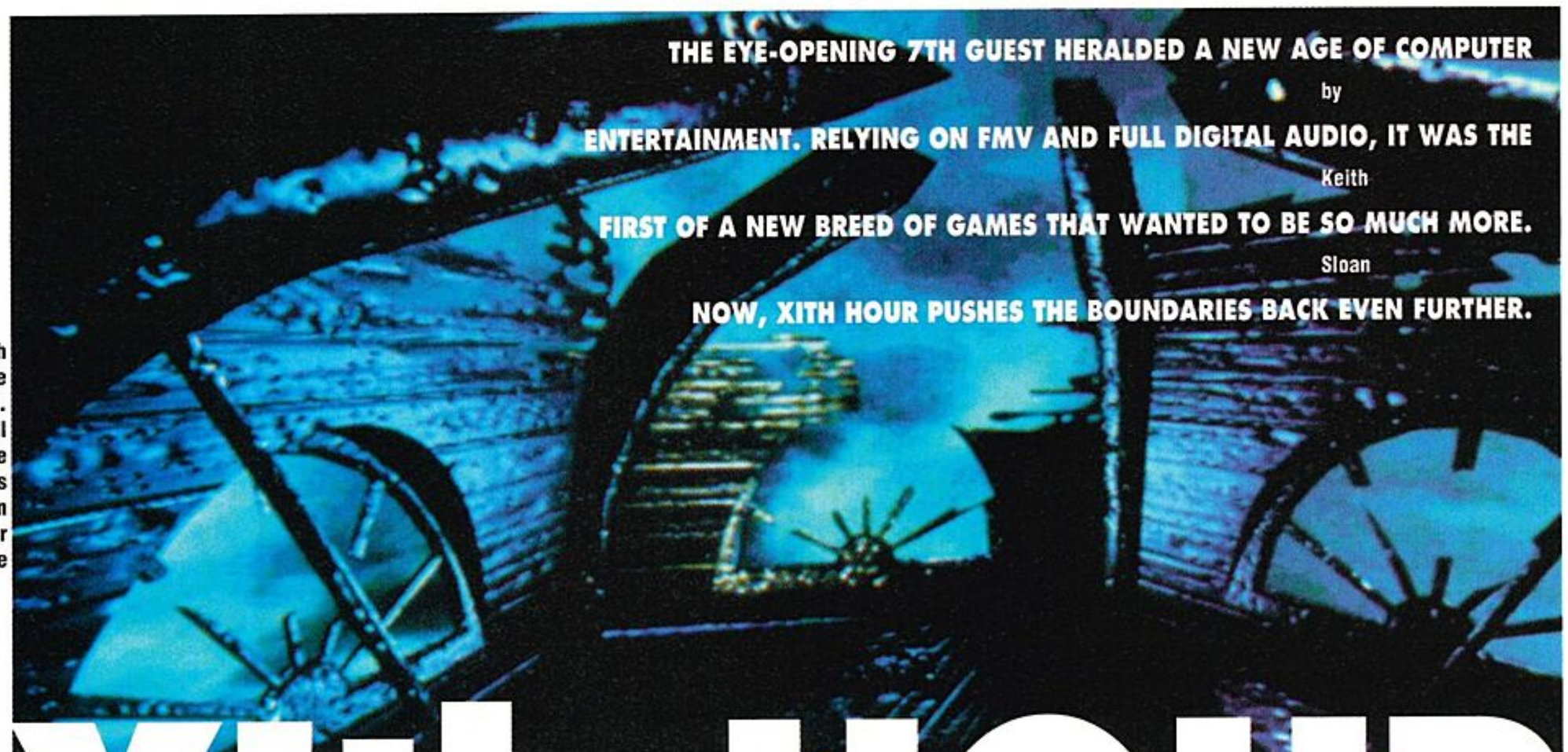
The Gourad shading used in the game is excellent. Although requiring more processor power than a flat unshaded world, the graphics still manage to whiz by at a more than acceptable rate

Most of the threats encountered will be on the ground, but just occasionally an air-to-air threat will rear its ugly head. When these situations occur you'll be glad that you loaded up a couple of Sidewinders



The helicopter sprite looks very muddy at the moment, but rest assured, in the final game it will look as though it could wipe out a small town at a hundred paces!

PREVIEW



The graphics in XIth Hour really have to be seen to be believed. Making use of the full SVGA standard, there is nothing that comes close to the PC in terms of sheer atmosphere

XIth HOUR
THE 7th GUEST PART TWO

PRODUCT
XIth Hour:
The 7th Guest Part Two

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin

RELEASE DATE
June

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 4Mb RAM, 486SX, SVGA, CD-ROM (150k/sec), Sound Card, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Roland, Sound Blaster, Pro Audio Spectrum, Thunderboard, Reel Magic and other MPEG Boards

THERE can't be many people who didn't gasp at the release of Virgin's The 7th Guest. Not only was it packaged in a box that could also have served as a very effective nuclear fallout shelter should the need arise, but it made the first tentative steps across the line that divides the humble computer game from a cinematic experience. Containing the kind of graphics previously only seen on expensive graphics workstations, the game was an attempt at combining an adventure game with the look and feel of a real film.

The fact that the actual gameplay was a little lacking didn't really seem to matter, because the real focus of attention was directed towards the way in which FMV and computer-generated images were used to such a startling effect. To say that the game was groundbreaking would be an understatement. The CD-ROM revolution had well and truly begun.

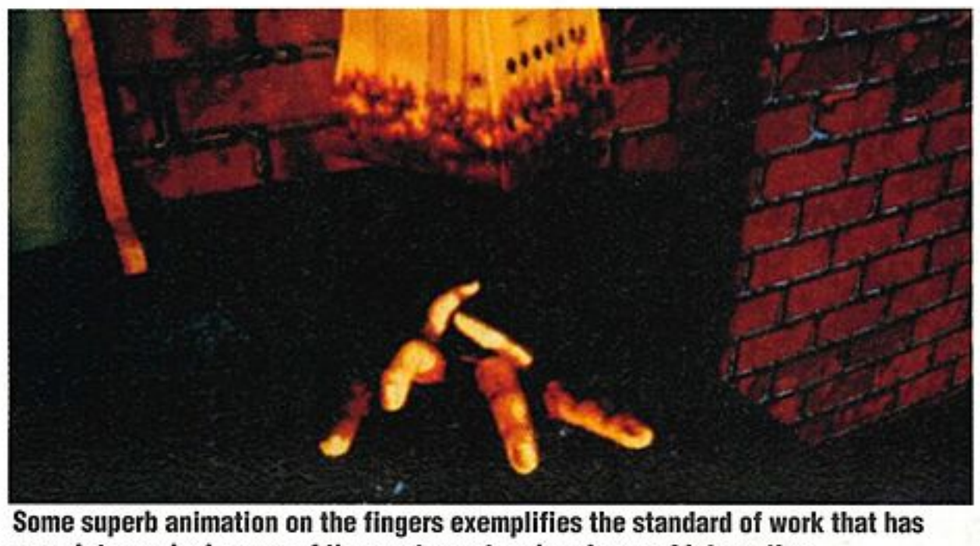
In the 18 months that the game has been around, technology has again been advancing at a rate faster than anyone could have imagined five years ago. New, faster processors have appeared and, along with the SVGA resolution becoming a lot more commonplace, everything is geared towards making the ultimate computer fantasy – true interactive cinema – a reality.

"CONTAINING A MUCH IMPROVED STYLE OF GAMEPLAY AND A STRONGER STORY-LINE THAN ITS PREDECESSOR, XITH HOUR IS SET TO SHOWCASE THE POWER OF THE PC IN A TRULY AWESOME WAY"

It is with this goal in mind that the next step beyond, XIth Hour, is currently having the finishing touches put to it. Containing a much improved style of gameplay and a stronger story-line than its predecessor, XIth Hour is set to showcase the power of the PC in a truly awesome way.

Set in 1993, you play the part of Carl Denning jnr, an investigative reporter for the TV show Cases Unsolved. Your friend and lover, Robin

PREVIEW



Some superb animation on the fingers exemplifies the standard of work that has gone into producing one of the most spectacular pieces of interactive entertainment yet to appear on a PC

The main layout of the mansion has been kept pretty much the same, meaning that players of T7G will have very little difficulty finding their way around. Of course, to spice things up a little, there are a few surprises in store

Furniture World – for all your furniture needs

Morales, was gathering background information surrounding the stories of supposed hauntings at the old Stauf mansion before she disappeared. As Denning, you travel to the mansion to try to ascertain what happened to your girlfriend. Will you end up facing the same fate, or are the stories of death and terror linked to the house nothing more than an elaborate fairy tale?

As in T7G, the game takes on the form of an interactive adventure, with the player controlling where in the house to go. In some rooms in the mansion there are puzzles to solve, such as the Railroad Switcher and the Number Chain and only by completing these successfully can clues be collected that will enable the player to complete the game.

As well as the puzzles, a treasure hunt element has been added, meaning that every location visited will have some importance on the overall state of the game. Complete freedom of movement is available, allowing all the locations in the house to be explored.

Movement from room to room via the foyer and hall systems is depicted by the whole scene scrolling in the relevant direction, but the big difference here is the speed at which the graphics update. On a low spec 486, the frame rate in T7G was almost non existent, causing the scrolling to 'flip' rather than update smoothly. XIth Hour increases the frame rate so that, even on something like a 486SX, the sense of movement is a lot better.

Another feature in XIth Hour that differs from T7G is the use of camera panning, and zooming into a close-up shot of an object. There are no longer the intricate zooms and moving camera angles which take up not only CD space, but processor time. The new effect uses the much simpler approach of fading and cutting. Even though it sounds as though this is a cop out, it works better than the old system, giving a much more film-like quality. It seems like the old adage 'less is more' is certainly ringing true in this case.

Since the release of T7G, the MPEG video standard has now become a lot more widespread, allowing the programmers to make use of its powerful features. XIth Hour incorporates 60 minutes of full-motion video and animation into the game, made possible by the clever use of MPEG compression.

Skulls, severed heads and things that go bump in the night. Where would we be without the staple ingredients of the horror genre, eh!

There are two types of video effects found in the game; composite and gamebook. Composite video, more commonly known as the 'blue screen' effect, is where actors act out the scene in front of a blue background. This footage is then superimposed over the back-ground action, allowing all sorts of special effects to take place. Gamebook video is full-motion MPEG video that is run within the smaller window of the gamebook.

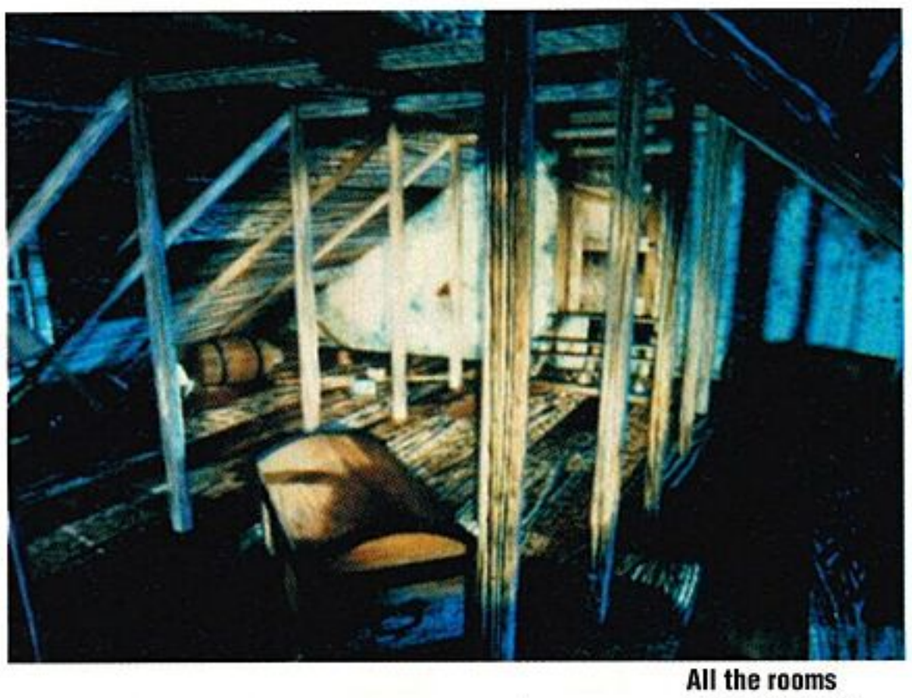
For users that don't have MPEG boards (which is probably most of us), then the gamebook video will only appear in 320 x 160, as opposed to 640 x 320 with a MPEG compatible graphics adapter fitted. The composite video action however, will appear in 640 x 320 with or without the board.

It's fair to say that XIth Hour is definitely aimed at the more mature, adult audience (which is not surprising because the cost of the equipment needed to run the game is not something that the average 14-year-old is likely to have). The game makes a big deal out of the moral problem of infidelity, ie do you, Carl Denning, succumb to the temptations that are placed before you throughout the game considering that you are actually here to find out what happened to your girlfriend?

Some of the graphics that appear in the game are approaching what could be called photo-realistic, but that isn't to say that the small-minded minority who oppose all things bad have a reason to get on their high horse, because everything is clearly done for effect and there is nothing here to turn mild mannered teenagers into rabid killing machines. If anything, it's the subject matter of the game and the whole feel that lifts this into the realms of 'executive stress relief'.

If you liked T7G, this is going to blow you away. The graphics are better, the puzzles more in-depth and devious and the overall feel is infinitely slicker. Due for release in June, *PC Player* will run a full review as soon as we can. ■

"IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT XITH HOUR IS DEFINITELY AIMED AT THE MORE MATURE, ADULT AUDIENCE (WHICH IS NOT SURPRISING BECAUSE THE COST OF THE EQUIPMENT NEEDED TO RUN THE GAME IS NOT SOMETHING THAT THE AVERAGE 14-YEAR-OLD IS LIKELY TO HAVE)"



All the rooms encountered in the game have something hidden in them that is important to the overall quest. This gives the player something to do other than simply look around for rooms that contain puzzles

Some of the scenes in XIth Hour are told in flashback style. The game focuses on the element of time, with things that happen outside of the house occurring along a different time scale than the goings on inside

PREVIEW

SPACE FEDERATION

THE NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED by TO PROTECT THE INNOCENT, BUT Alex UNIVERSAL ARMAGEDDON IS Simmons STILL THE ORDER OF THE DAY.

PRODUCT
Space Federation

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Interplay

RELEASE DATE
May

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb RAM, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Joystick, Mouse

WOAH, space strategy overdose! What with Starlord, Reunion, Master of Orion and now Space Federation, it's getting a bit crowded in this genre. Someone is going to have to give in, but it's certainly not going to be Interplay which is set to release Space Federation in the next few months.

Initially entitled Star Reach, Space Federation looks a bit like Asteroids with a few strategy bits thrown in. With numerous scenarios which range from beginner to expert in their difficulty level, the objective of the game is quite simply, universal supremacy.

Reigning over entire systems is achieved by gradually building up your empire, conquering planets one at a time and then stripping them of anything valuable, such as precious minerals and ores. Alternatively use them as outposts of your kingdom, building spaceports and factories on them in order to manufacture more space cruisers with which to take over the next planet in the chain.

Initially you have little in the way of valuables – just the radiation suit on your back and a small spacecraft with a rather nice stereo and matching speakers. A single planet is also under your control, providing you with an income and a steady supply of food and minerals. The other planets in the system are either neutral or under enemy influence, with the aim of the game being to take out all of the enemy stars by force. Forget negotiating – the only way to settle this battle is by blowing the enemy away in the Asteroids action bit.

Looking at the ship from above, control over the craft is just as it was in the classic arcade game, except without hyperspace and obviously sporting more advanced graphics – the ships are apparently ray-traced but they're so small that you'd hardly notice. Anyway, you nip from one planet to another, thrusting around the galaxy in search of new and unexplored stars to conquer. It's very easy to stray from friendly territory and as a result enemy attacks occur all too frequently. If the aliens don't get you, drifting around space without fuel and supplies soon will.

While the ship's spanking stereo is very impressive, being able to play up to six compact discs (it plays anything from Black Sabbath to Beethoven and has a one-millennia guarantee), the fuel tanks are small and provide you with very little 'umph'. To remedy this, planets must be conquered as you cross the galaxy – fuel is instantly topped up when orbiting a friendly system, although not all systems are on your side.

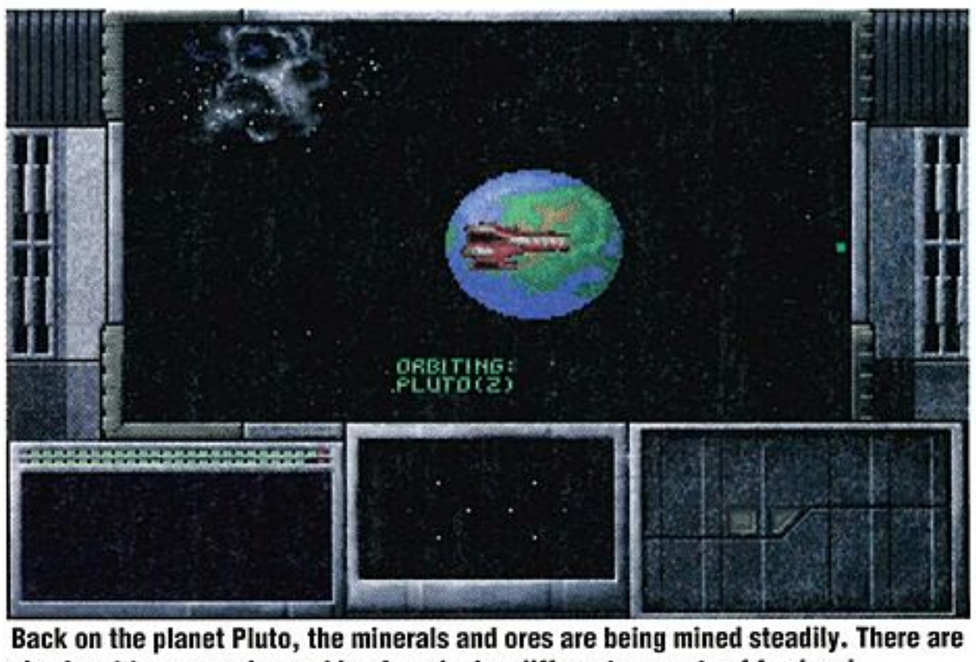
Before exploration can properly begin it's advisable to get your home planet up and running by building factories, star bases, mining rigs and the like. This will provide you with the materials to build the ships needed to explore distant planets. The troop carrier is perhaps the most important vessel as it's the only ship which can change a star's loyalty from neutral to friendly.

Once the troop carrier has docked with its destination planet it is then safe to visit it with your own ship. Destroyers and other fighter craft can be sent to provide back-up when attacking hostile planets, while enemy planets can be

"SPACE FEDERATION LOOKS A BIT LIKE ASTEROIDS WITH A FEW STRATEGY BITS THROWN IN. WITH NUMEROUS SCENARIOS WHICH RANGE FROM BEGINNER TO EXPERT IN THEIR DIFFICULTY LEVEL, THE OBJECTIVE OF THE GAME IS QUITE SIMPLY UNIVERSAL SUPREMACY"

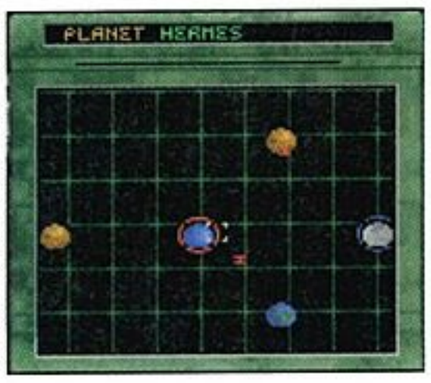
PREVIEW

Before exploration can start it's best to improve the production rates of your home planet by building mines and factories. They cost money and use up minerals but the end result is worth it

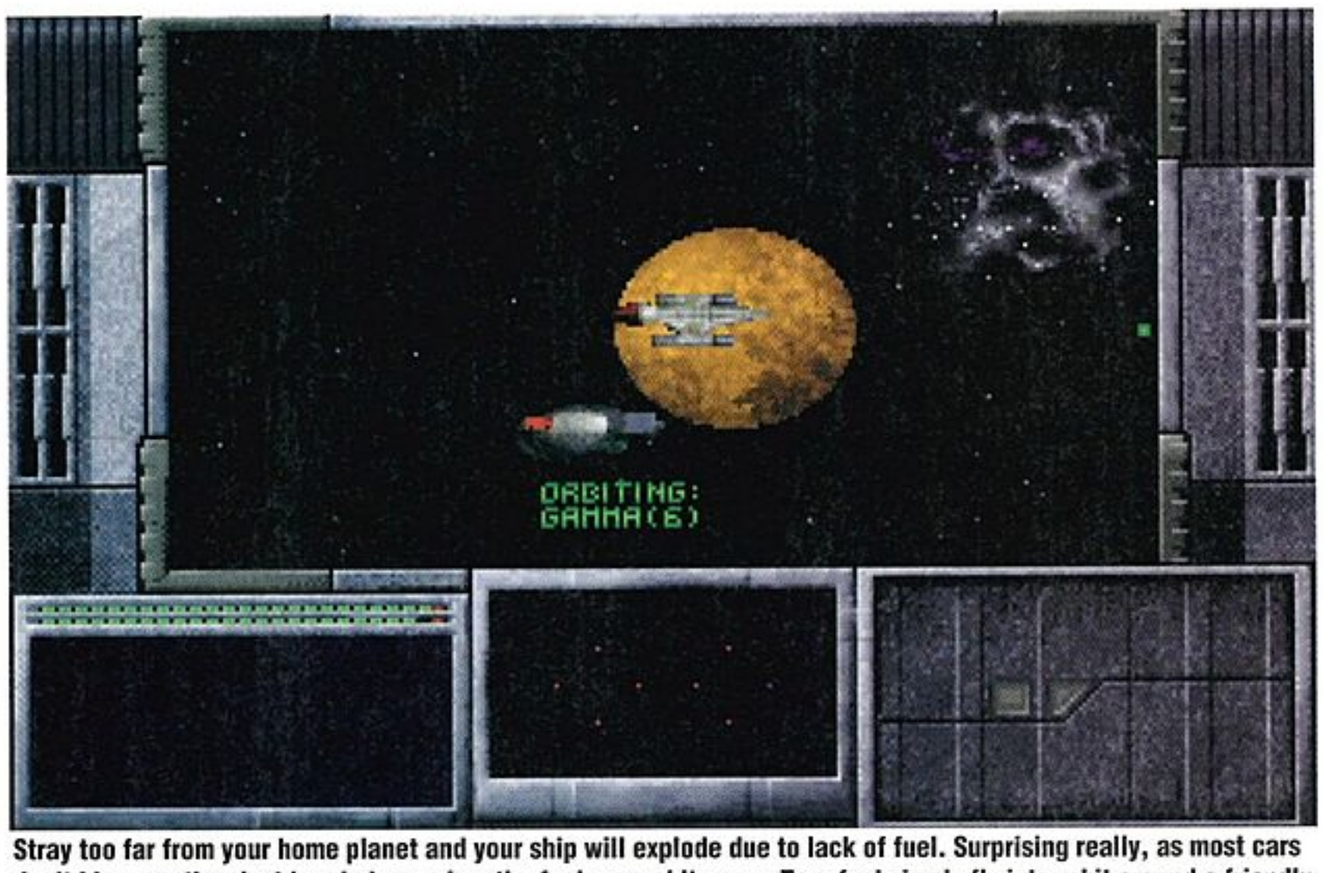


Back on the planet Pluto, the minerals and ores are being mined steadily. There are six planet types, each capable of producing different amounts of food and minerals. Some are also more suitable for human colonisation than others

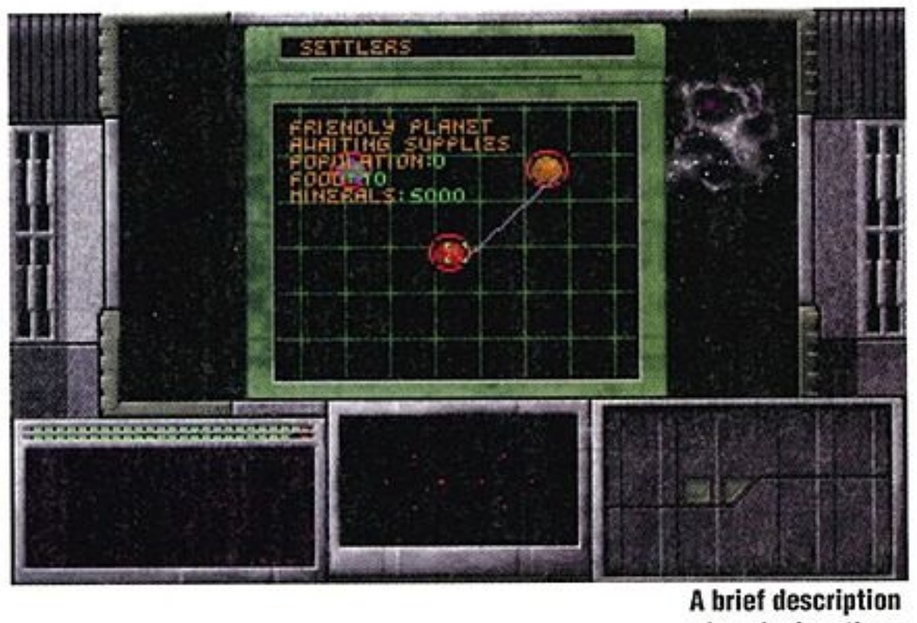
The systems are quite small, with eight planets to conquer in each. Opposing commanders start at opposite ends of the galaxy with the first battle usually occurring somewhere in the middle. The aim of the game is to wipe out the enemy



Click on the planet icon to open a summary of your home base. From the picture you can instantly tell which ores can be mined and also shown are the buildings which churn out the steady supply of space craft



Stray too far from your home planet and your ship will explode due to lack of fuel. Surprising really, as most cars don't blow up, they just break down when the fuel gauge hits zero. To refuel simply fly into orbit around a friendly planet



A brief description of each planet's output can be called up on the map, detailing statistics like mineral production and population

devastated with the deadly bomber ships.

Once your empire has spread to other planets, supply lines can be set up to carry minerals and other products from one system to another. In all there are six types of planets with different natural resources – for example, volcanic and desert stars both have very high mineral contents, and can therefore be mined for precious ores, while the water and earth planets have high food production rates. Busy shipping links between planets can ensure that friendly star systems have a stockpile of all the food, minerals and manpower needed to keep your empire up and running.

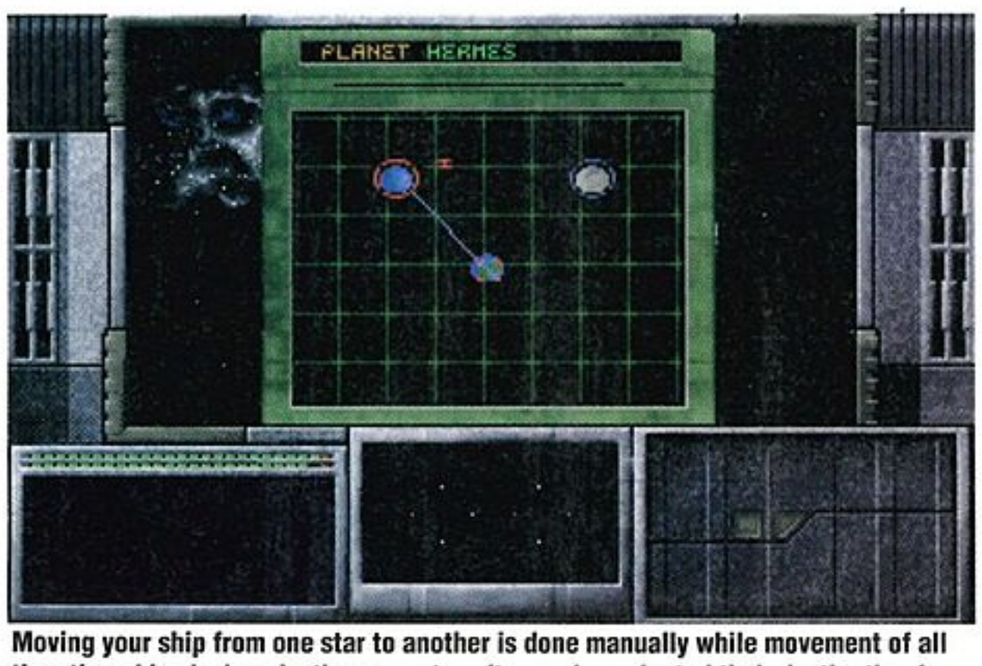
Patience is the only real way to defeat the enemy, and to this end you should wait long enough to build up your army to a respectable size before launching an attack. Wait too long though and your opponent might strike first, catching you unaware and crushing your empire in one fell swoop. If the enemy proves too tough there's always the two-player split-screen game in which opposing lords occupy half the screen each – the winner being the commander left at the end of the battle.

The game is controlled by either mouse, keyboard or joystick using the game's unique 'Vicky' operating system. Vicky is a metallic terminator-type hand which basically acts as a virtual hand or, to be honest, like any other cursor.

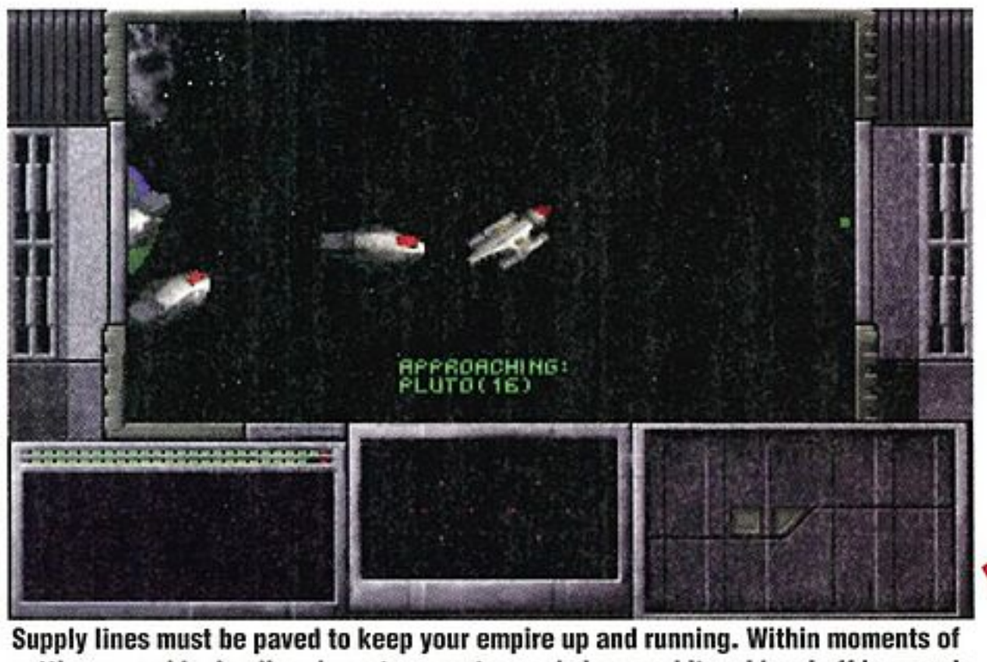
Graphically, Space Federation looks impressive with functional icon displays and slick scrolling on the combat stages. The sound promises to be equally as good, incorporating loads of digitised speech. However the gameplay has still yet to be tweaked so you'll have to wait until next month to find out if Space Federation plays as good as it looks. At the moment it is still undergoing testing and isn't due for release until May, when it will be let loose from the Interplay stable. ■

"PATIENCE IS THE ONLY REAL WAY TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY, AND TO THIS END YOU SHOULD WAIT LONG ENOUGH TO BUILD UP YOUR ARMY TO A RESPECTABLE SIZE BEFORE LAUNCHING AN ATTACK. WAIT TOO LONG THOUGH AND YOUR OPPONENT MIGHT STRIKE FIRST, CATCHING YOU UNAWARE AND CRUSHING YOUR EMPIRE IN ONE FELL SWOOP"

The enemy's home planet is located on the far side of the galaxy and cannot be reached without stopping off to refuel. Your opponent won't always be home, especially in the two-player split screen game. While you're raiding his base he may well be attacking yours



Moving your ship from one star to another is done manually while movement of all the other ships is done by the computer after you've selected their destination from the system map



Supply lines must be paved to keep your empire up and running. Within moments of setting up a shipping line, huge transport vessels leave orbit and head off in search of a suitable to star where they'll dump their cargo of minerals

PREVIEW

PC PLAYER

READER SURVEY

PC Player is now six months old and we're extremely happy with the response we've had to the magazine so far. However, as the PC market gradually changes and evolves we need to make sure that we're still on the leading edge when it comes to providing information – and that's where you come in. We need to know what you think so we can ensure that we grow the way you want us to.

NAME

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

GENDER
☐ Male ☐ Female

AGE
☐ Under 16 ☐ 17-20
☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30
☐ 31-35 ☐ Over 35

HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE OF THE FOLLOWING AGES?
☐ Under 5 ☐ 5-12
☐ 12-16 ☐ 16+

ARE YOU...
☐ Unemployed ☐ Self-employed
☐ Employed ☐ Student
☐ Retired ☐ Other (specify)

DO YOU USE A PC...
☐ At work only
☐ For work and recreation
☐ For games only

ANNUAL INCOME (optional question)
☐ Under £10k ☐ £10k-£15k
☐ £16k-£20k ☐ £21k-£25k
☐ £26k-£30k ☐ Over £30k

WHAT TYPE OF PC DO YOU OWN?
☐ 286 ☐ 386SX
☐ 386DX ☐ 486SX
☐ 486DX ☐ Other (specify)

HOW MUCH MEMORY DOES IT HAVE?
☐ Less than 2Mb ☐ 2Mb
☐ 4Mb ☐ 6Mb
☐ 8Mb ☐ More (specify)

HARD DRIVE SIZE

DO YOU INTEND TO BUY A CD-ROM DRIVE IN...
☐ One month ☐ Six months
☐ One year ☐ Over a year
☐ Never ☐ I own one now

HOW MANY PC GAMES DO YOU OWN?

APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY GAMES DO YOU BUY IN A YEAR?

WHAT TYPE OF GAME DO YOU PREFER?

WHERE DO YOU BUY MOST OF YOUR GAMES FROM?
☐ Mail order
☐ Specialist shop
☐ High street chain store
☐ Back of Uncle Peter's Cortina Estate
☐ Other (specify)

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☐ I would buy the mag more frequently
☐ I would buy the mag less frequently
☐ It would make no difference
☐ I would stop buying the mag

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☐ I would stop buying the mag

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☐ Players' guides
☐ Help pages
☐ Columns
☐ Design
☐ Editorial style
☐ Overall content
☐ Covers
☐ Scoring system

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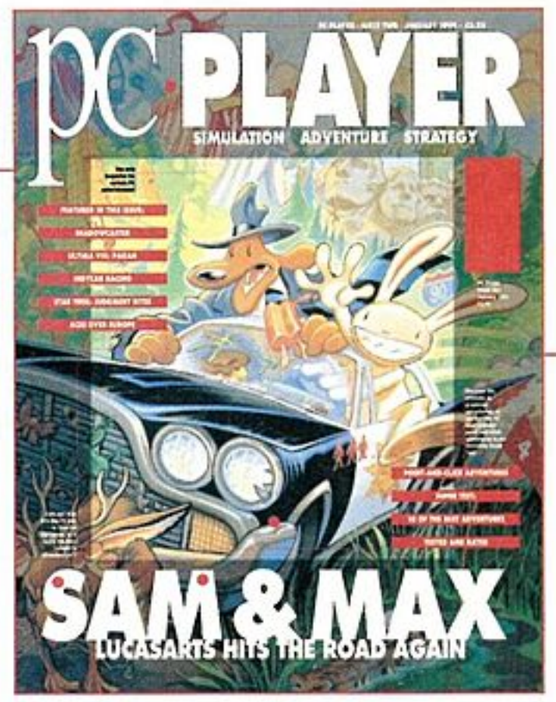

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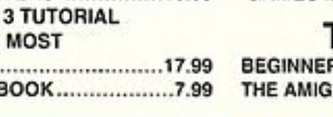

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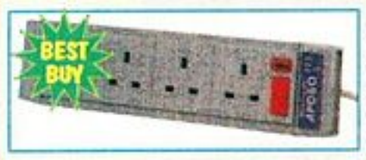

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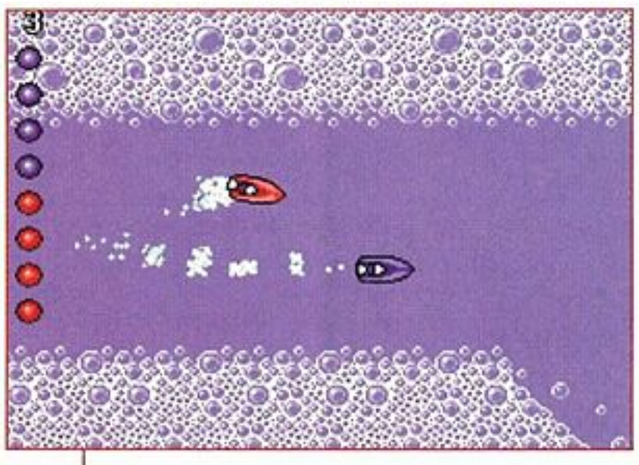
GAMES ROUND-UP

IN THIS SECTION PC PLAYER WILL REVIEW SHOOT'EM-UPS, BEAT'EM-UPS...YOU KNOW, THE GAMES THAT DON'T REQUIRE TOO MUCH THOUGHT, ALONG WITH CD-ROM AND UPDATES OF GAMES PREVIOUSLY AVAILABLE.

by Keith Sloan



MICRO MACHINES

CODEMASTERS
£19.99
REQUIREMENTS
286, 640k, VGA, DOS 3.1
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Joystick, Mouse

Is there no end to the subjects that software designers see as fair game? Now, small toy cars have made their way onto the PC with what is arguably the most playable arcade racing game on the machine.

Micro Machines (MM) is a look-down racing spree set over 27 courses. The machines that you get to race are not those that are normally associated with racing games – unlike Mansell and his Indy car, or Senna and his F1 monster, MM is all about dinky little toys. Smaller than the average milk-bottle top, these cars, helicopters, speedboats and dune buggies race over various tracks littered with household nick-nacks. Fancy a few laps around the pool table, complete with cues and pool balls to hinder your progress? How about a table-top romp with erasers, pencils and a smattering of note pads? It really is a case of anything goes here, and with the option of knocking your opponent off the table onto the kitchen floor adding an extra bit of spice, a lot of fun is almost guaranteed to be had.

For a PC game, the courses all scroll by at a superb rate. Of course, there is the odd occasion whereby a few jittery frames get in the way of things but these, thankfully, are few and far between. If two-player, fast action, fun games are your thing, then I strongly suggest that you seek out a copy of MM this instant. Codemasters has come up with a winner. **SCORE ★★★★**

INTERPLAY'S 10 YEAR CLASSIC COLLECTION

INTERPLAY
£44.99
REQUIREMENTS
DOS 3.3, 640k RAM, 286, VGA, CD-ROM
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib

There are very few software houses around today that could hope to reach 10 years of age. Don't get me wrong, I'm not casting aspersions on business sense, product quality or any of the other variables that go together to make up that indefinable something known as 'success', but 10 years ago the software industry was completely different to how it is now. Programming teams had less raw power to work with, and so had to make do with better techniques to get the most out of the machine they were working on. Interplay is a software house whose age has reached double figures and to commemorate the fact a CD package stuffed with 10 Interplay titles has been released.

Going right back into the dawn of time, Mindshadow and Tass Times in Tonetown show us just how far things have progressed since these two games were young. Both are adventures, with Mindshadow allowing text input only and TTIT bearing a VERY early example of the now familiar point-and-click interface. The graphics are in CGA, and I don't think I'm being that unkind when I say they look awful.

The story-lines of both games are fairly strong though, it's just that the chances of you wanting to put down your copy of Sam and Max or Day of the Tentacle for the sake of either of these is pretty remote. The games themselves are fun to play, as long as you ignore the location graphics, but serve as nothing more than reminders as to how far technology has evolved.

Battle Chess is a fairly bog-standard chess game that has the pieces chopping, hacking and fireballing each other to bits when an exchange takes place. The engine for the game is nothing special, relegating it to the ranks of strictly part-time players. Again, the game looks dated now but is fun for a while.

The other games in the package (Bard's Tale, Lord of the Rings, Wasteland, Dragon Wars, Star Trek 25th, Castles) all seem to have aged more than they should have. That isn't to say that they aren't good games, it's just that they seemed a lot better at the time.

All the titles except one are strategy or adventure oriented, giving players with a love of this kind of genre a good (if dated) selection to choose from. The only game that doesn't fit in with the overall pattern is Out of this World. At its most basic it could be described as a platform game, but there is something about it which gives it a lot more appeal than the average Sonic clone. A strong story-line is supported by some nice graphics to give something that dares to be a little different.

For those of you out there who owned an 8-bit machine, then this is going to seem like a trip down memory lane, especially with the inclusion of TTIT and Mindshadow. The games on display aren't revolutionary (some are as old as the company itself), but all offer something of an interactive history lesson to the new-ish PC user. One for nostalgia junkies only. **SCORE ★★★**

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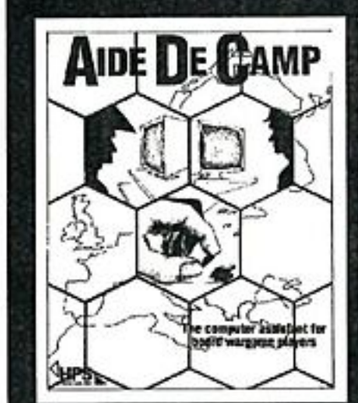

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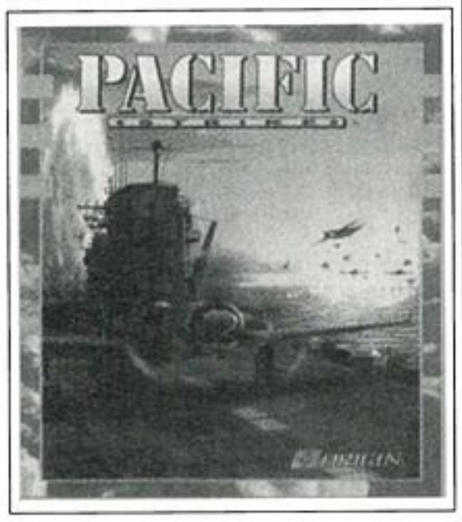

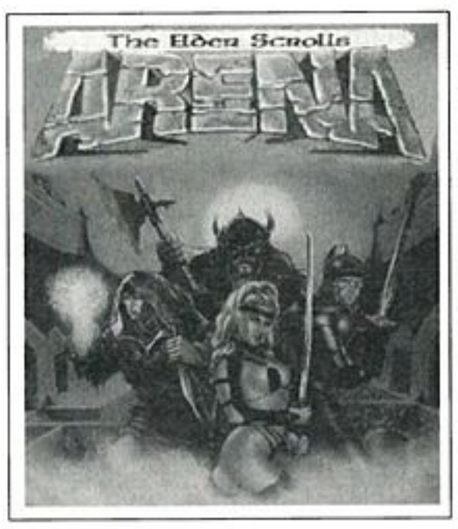

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	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH
10	7.99	9.99	6.49	7.99	5.99	6.99
20	14.50	19.50	11.99	15.50	10.99	13.50
50	35.00	47.50	26.00	37.50	23.99	32.50
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200	185.00	190.00	94.99	141.99	83.99	121.99
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RECYCLED BLANK DISKS

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FOREVER GROWING GARDEN

MEDIA VISION
£39.99
REQUIREMENTS
DOS 5.0, Windows 3.1, 4Mb RAM, 386, SVGA, CD-ROM
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards

Perhaps one of the best uses the new multi-media technology could be put to is education – the child would get used to the technology and the application that was running could also be of some educational use. I say all this because Forever Growing Gardens is one of only a relatively small number of CD-ROM titles that are aimed at children.

The concept of the program is fairly simple; three different types of gardens can be populated with a selection of flowers and vegetables, both real and imaginary. A castle, an allotment and a small garden are the three canvases on which the child can 'paint', and the amount of water, sunlight and a whole host of other things that will ultimately affect the growth of that particular plant can be altered to see what effect this has on the growth of the flower.

The selection of flowers is quite substantial, with the choice being made in the hardware shop. All the virtual seeds come in a virtual packet which gives information about the contents and ideal growing conditions. Planting takes place in the virtual garden, with virtual water and virtual sunlight being added to the mix to try to make the garden grow. The gardens can then be saved out and attempted again, this time altering the variables to see what affect each one has on the different flowers.

FGG is a program that tries its best to educate, but falls short. Why Media Vision decided to make the whole game revolve around a flower garden is beyond me. Wouldn't something linked to basic maths or science have been a better foundation on which to build? Still, perhaps I am missing the point.

The game looks lovely, with E-VGA graphics (640 x 480) depicting everything with a sharpness that really shows just what a lousy standard VGA is, and it will at least hold a child enthralled on the strength of the graphics. Hopefully, FGG will start the trend towards a more useful use of multi-media rather than it just being a platform to keep releasing 'interactive' games on. **SCORE ★★★**

PRIVATEER: RIGHTEOUS FIRE

ELECTRONIC ARTS
£18.99
REQUIREMENTS
Privateer, 386, 4Mb, VGA, DOS 5
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland, Joystick

Privateer has been around for a while now (at least in terms of PC software), so it is going to come as no surprise that at long last EA has decided to expand the life of the game by releasing a missions disk. Entitled Righteous Fire (which, in my opinion, is quite a snappy moniker), the add-on disk gives 24 new missions to the already overflowing sackful that were found in the original game, along with minor ship improvements and fresh character dialogue.

The game picks up where Privateer left off – you have decided to take a much needed break on one of the galaxy's better known pleasure worlds when you find that your reward from the first game, the Steltek gun, has been stolen. If you can scrape together enough cash and cargo to outfit your ship, then there is a chance that you will eventually find out what happened to your gun and in the process thwart a plan to overthrow the Gemini-based government.

Ignoring the story-line (going after a prize GUN – I ask you!), what does this offer the Privateer pilot for their money? Well, for one, any graphical updates are missing. Add-on disks nowadays should include batch files to update the graphics to a new level. It wasn't as if the graphics in the original were so great that they didn't need any improvement. The only things that this new add-on offers to any great degree are missions – and lots of them – which expand the original playing universe and offer the player even more ways to make a fortune and end up as space debris.

At the relatively cheap asking price, this presents a fairly good buy. It doesn't add to the original, rather it expands upon it, but for those people who found Privateer to be a God-send then this isn't going to be a problem.

SCORE ★★★

LEMMINGS CD - LIMITED EDITION DOUBLE PACK

PSYGNOSIS
£34.99
REQUIREMENTS
CD-ROM, XT/AT or above, CGA, 512K RAM
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards, Joystick, Mouse

Is there anyone out there who doesn't know what Lemmings is all about? Released on the Amiga years and years ago, it was ported across onto the PC when Psygnosis discovered just what a little gold mine it had on its hands. The game has now become a legend in its own lifetime (not an easy thing to do) and still manages to rise head and shoulders above any other game in this genre.

This package, a special CD double pack featuring the original game and the sequel Oh No! More Lemmings, contains what amounts to as much mental fun as you can have without going for the full frontal lobotomy. The game is set across many deviously designed stages that require you to guide the small, green haired imbeciles by way of a user-friendly icon system.

Each lemming can do one of many things, such as dig down through the floor of the level, glide down to earth from great heights using an open umbrella and build bridge-like structures to facilitate access onto higher levels. The idea of the game is to get a certain percentage of lemmings through the maze-like infrastructure to the end goal, whereby they all leap happily into the end enclosure and the next level starts. Fail to get the required amount through and the level has to be played again.

One of the things that made the game such a hit when it was first released was its simplicity. The control method works beautifully, making all the courses challenging as opposed to frustrating, and the graphics, although by no means state of the art even then, are 'cute' enough strike a chord.

For those three people who missed this game the first time around, then this is the perfect opportunity to catch up on some long overdue homework and see what all the fuss was about. As puzzle games go, Lemmings ranks right up there with Tetris. It's simple, challenging and, above all that, addictive in the extreme. **SCORE ★★★★★**

GAMES ROUND-UP

PART ONE

by

OF THE

Paul

ULTIMATE

Mallinson

PLAYERS' GUIDE.

SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

PAGE 100

WARNING

This players' guide is complete and concise, so if you don't want to know it all 'DO NOT READ'

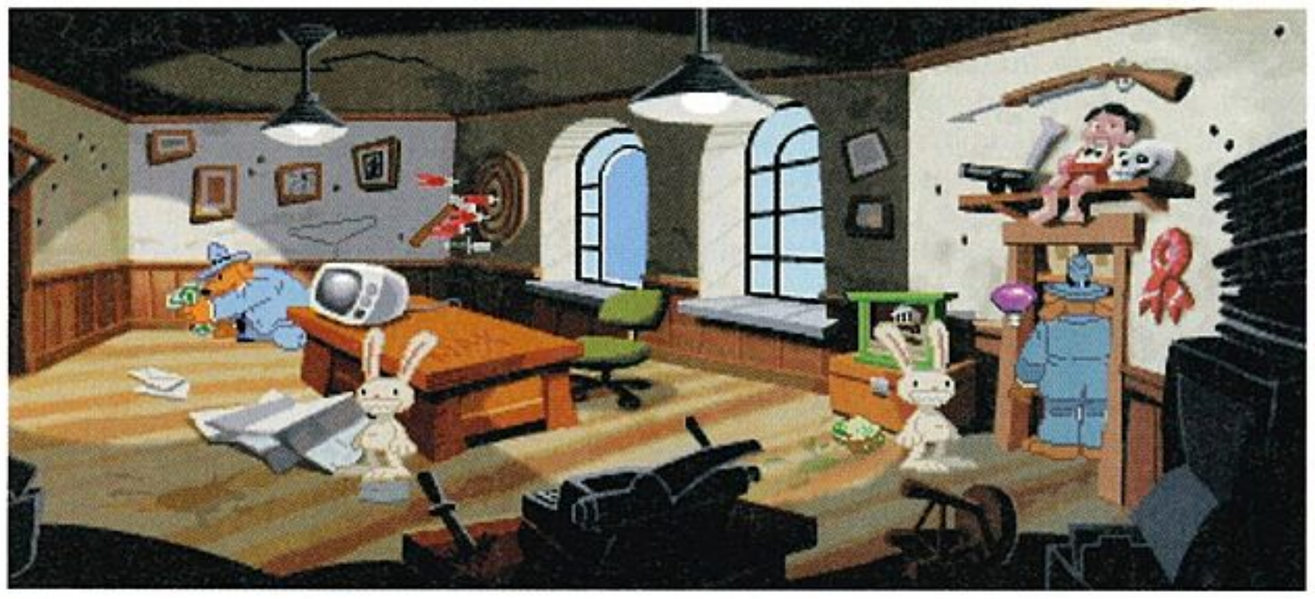
LUCASARTS came good again. As the critics doubted its ability to equal (never mind surpass) the sheer brilliance of Day of the Tentacle, the development team lead by Steve Purcell was already busy on its latest game. Sam & Max Hit the Road was the resulting experience – a twisted journey through inbred America, helped along by a truck-load of biting humour and some amazing visuals. It was everything I'd ever wanted in a game and still makes me laugh to this day.

To celebrate the arrival of this amiable duo, *PC Player* is proud to reveal the first part of its Sam & Max Hit the Road players' guide. No stone will be left unturned as everything you need to know about the game is revealed; where to go, what to do and what to use. Thanks to the people who offered help with this guide, especially Peter Woodroffe and RAJ Crookes – both of whom supplied impeccable guides. Your prizes? Games from the *PC Player* bargain-basement bin!

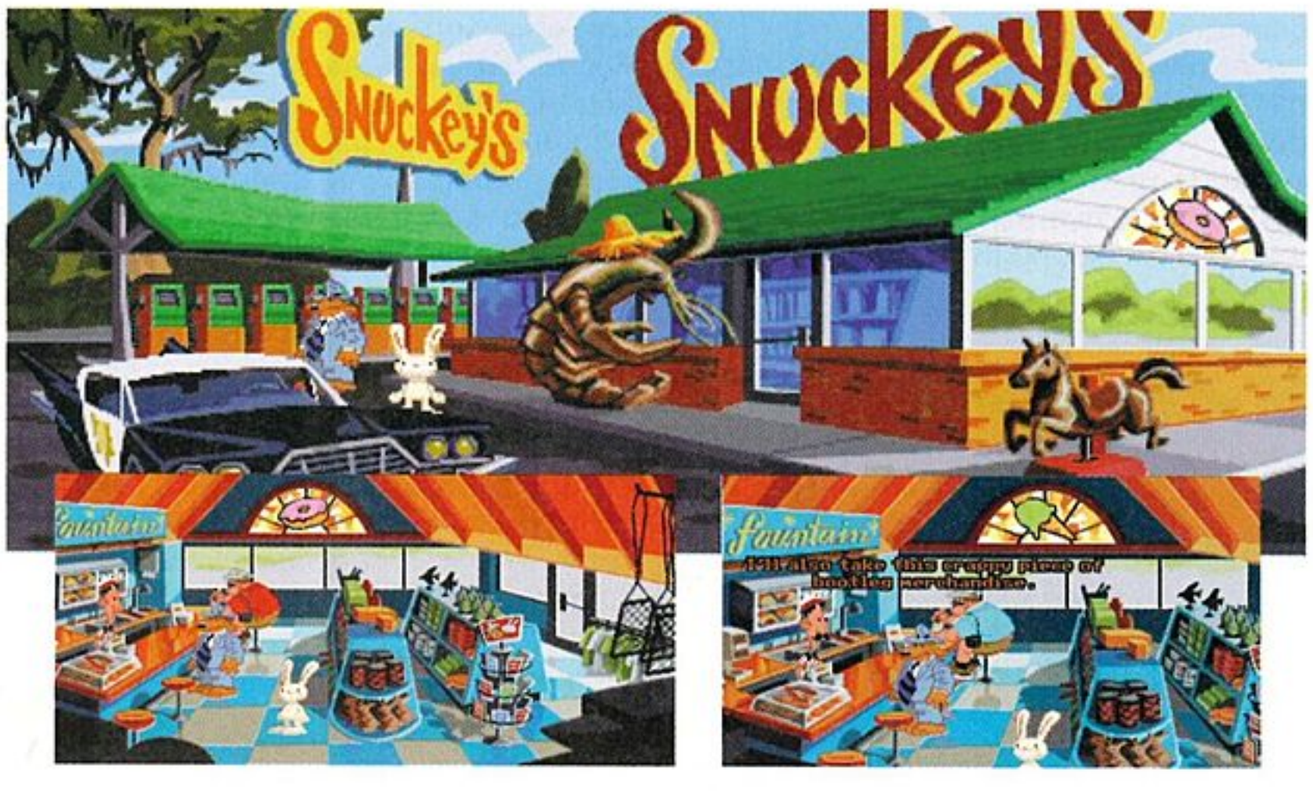
FIRST THINGS FIRST

THE OFFICE

Following the intro, get your money from the mouse-hole, and take the light bulb from the store room on the right. Go outside and get Max to retrieve the Commissioner's orders from the cleverly disguised city courier (ie the cat). Now get in the car and go to Snuckey's.



TAKE A LEAK

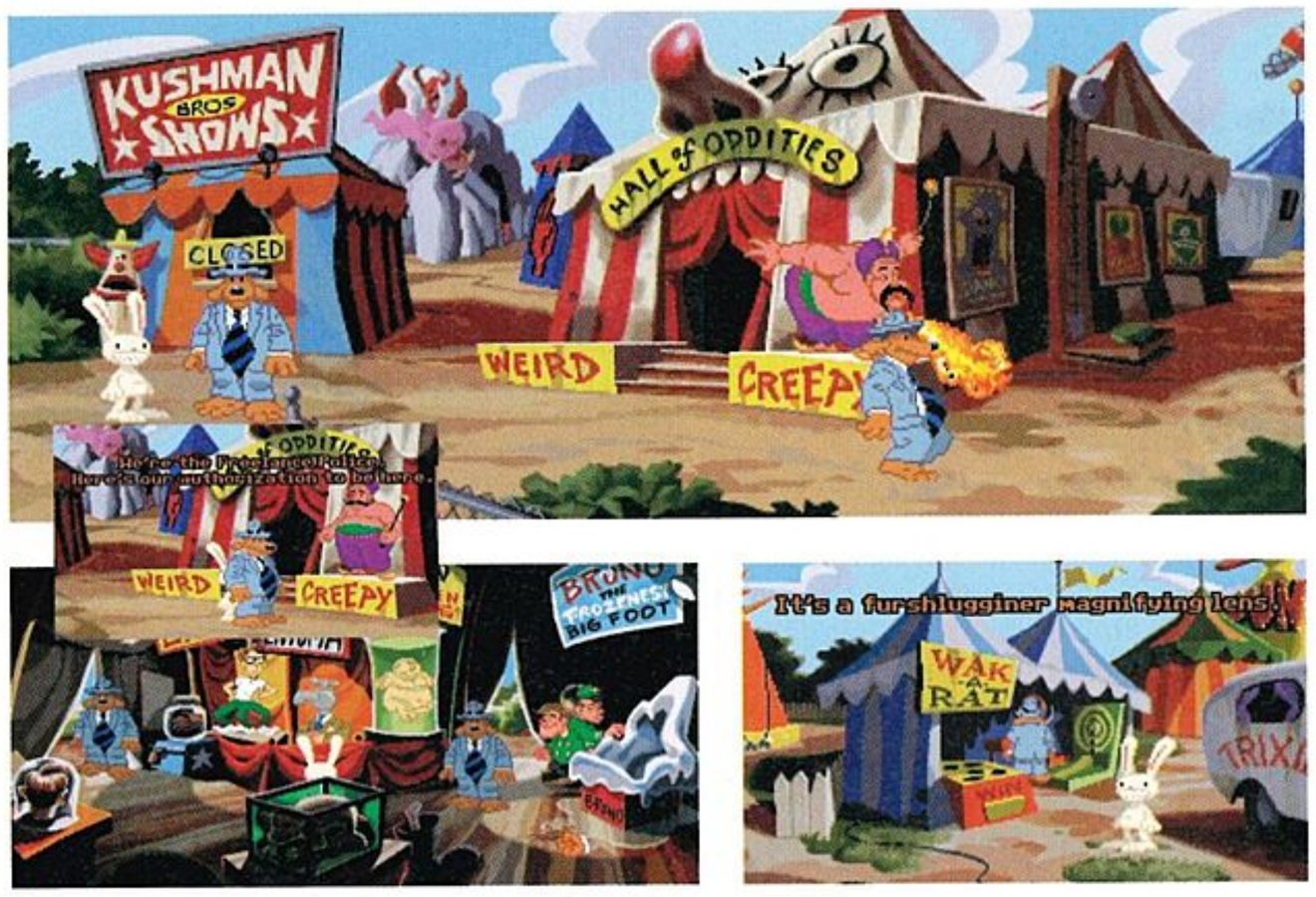


SNUCKEY'S

Before entering the store, pick the cup up from the pavement. Get the pecan candy from inside the store (top shelf). To pay for the candy Sam will have to talk to the guy behind the counter. When Max asks to go to the toilet, get the key from the employee and follow Max outside. Talk to Max before he returns the key and ask him to hold onto the rasp. Now go to the carnival.

PLAYERS' GUIDE

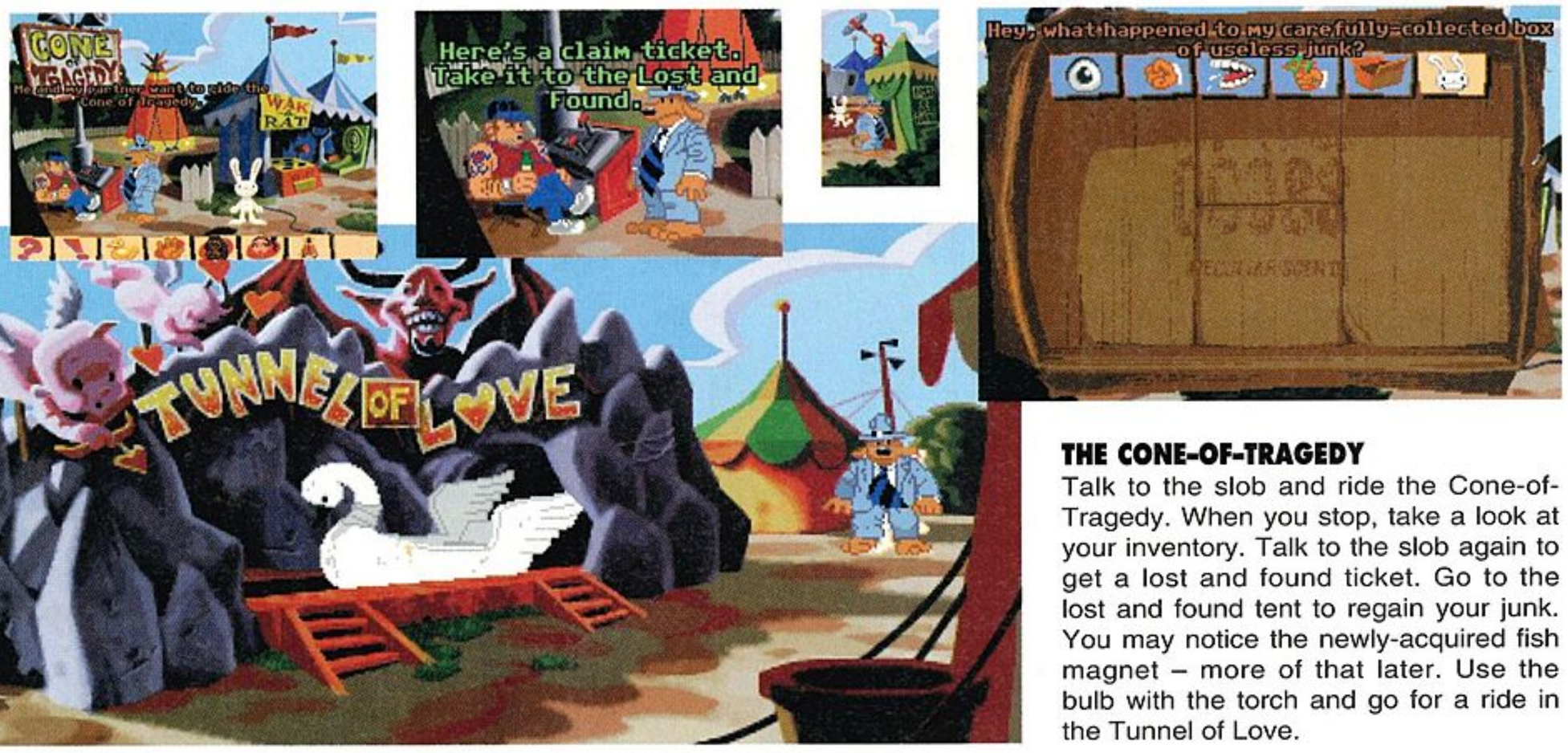
RUSHOLME RUFFIANS



THE CARNIVAL

Show Flambe the Commissioner's orders and he will let you pass. After talking to the twins, get the sasquatch mange from the floor and the severed hand from the stand next to the insect lad. Leave by the back door and play the Wak-A-Rat game. Score 20 points or more and you will be awarded a torch for your troubles. Turn around and take the lens from the thing next to the Wak-A-Rat.

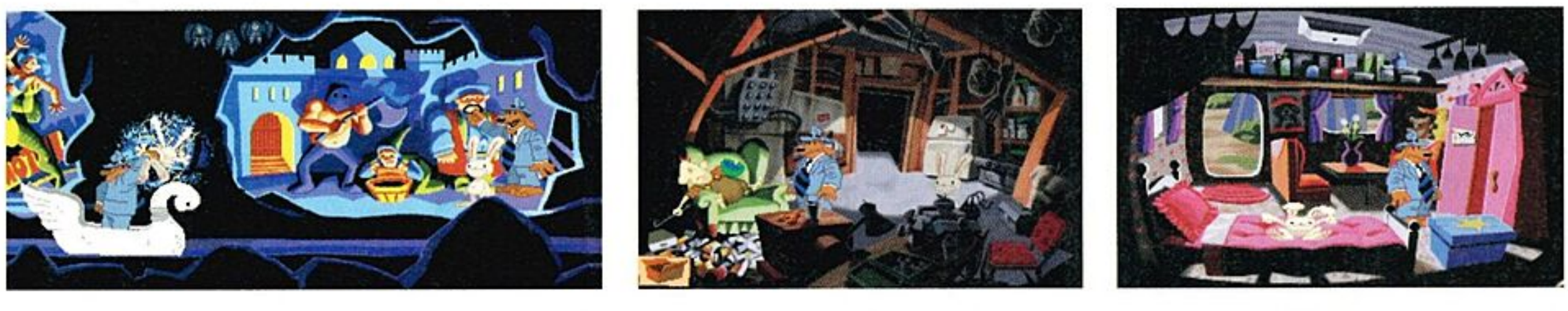
POCKET EMPTIER



THE CONE-OF-TRAGEDY

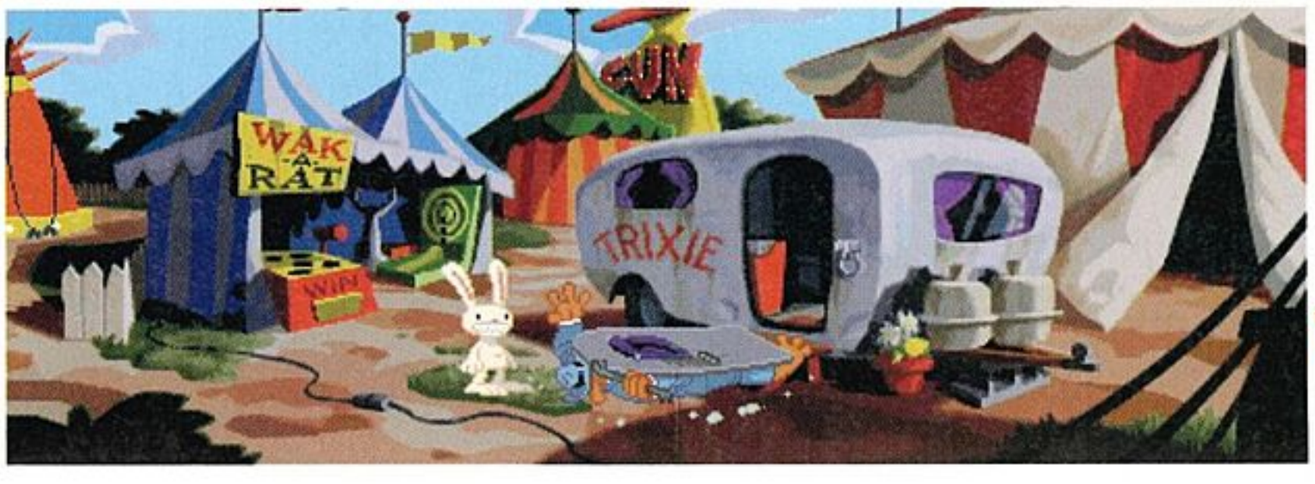
Talk to the slob and ride the Cone-of-Tragedy. When you stop, take a look at your inventory. Talk to the slob again to get a lost and found ticket. Go to the lost and found tent to regain your junk. You may notice the newly-acquired fish magnet – more of that later. Use the bulb with the torch and go for a ride in the Tunnel of Love.

IN THE MOOD FOR LURVE



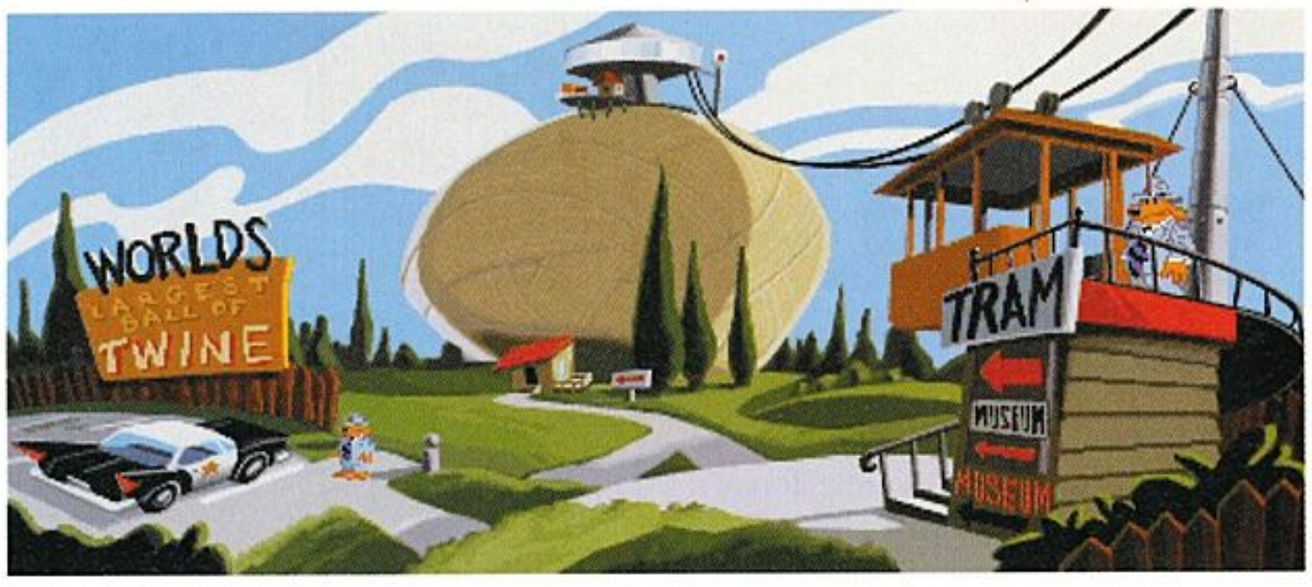
THE TUNNEL OF LOVE

In the tunnel, get your torch out, then, just before you reach the crackling fuse box, use Max on it to stop the ride. Pull on the fat bloke's moustache to open the secret door. Enter and talk to Doug. After getting the 'key' to Trixie's van, reset the ride and leave. Go to Trixie's van and open the door. Take the costume from the box and the scorecard from the wardrobe. Next, go to the Giant Ball of Twine.



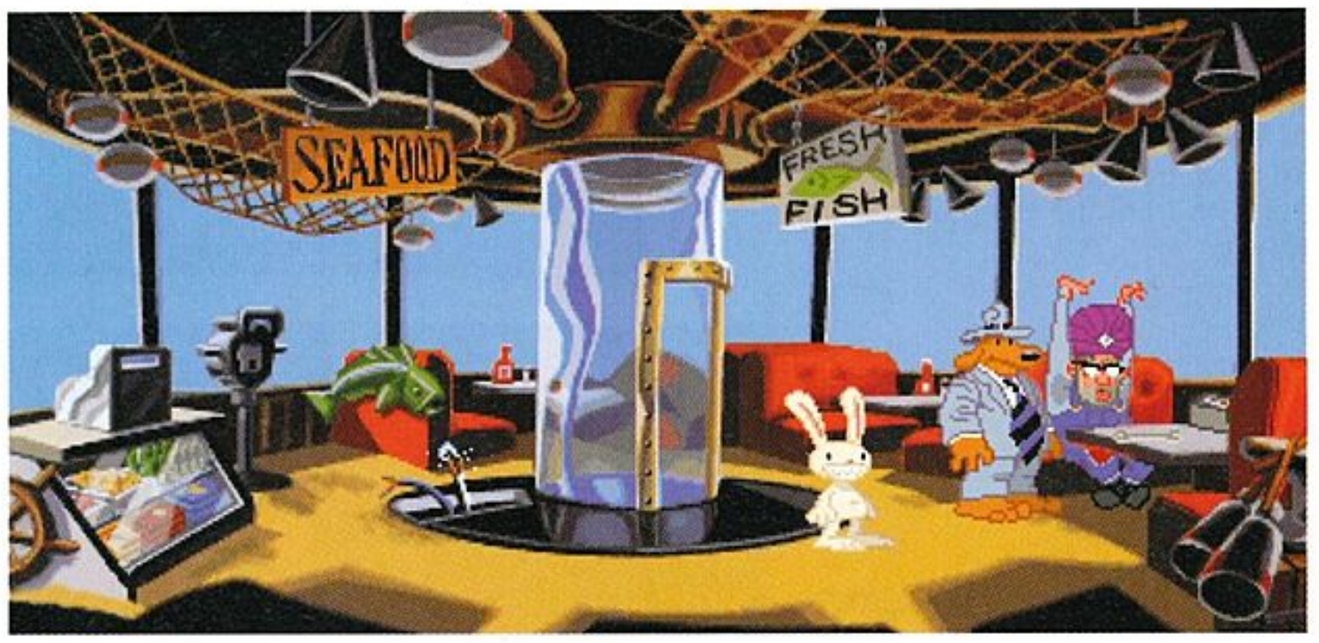
PLAYERS' GUIDE

GREAT BALLS OF TWINE

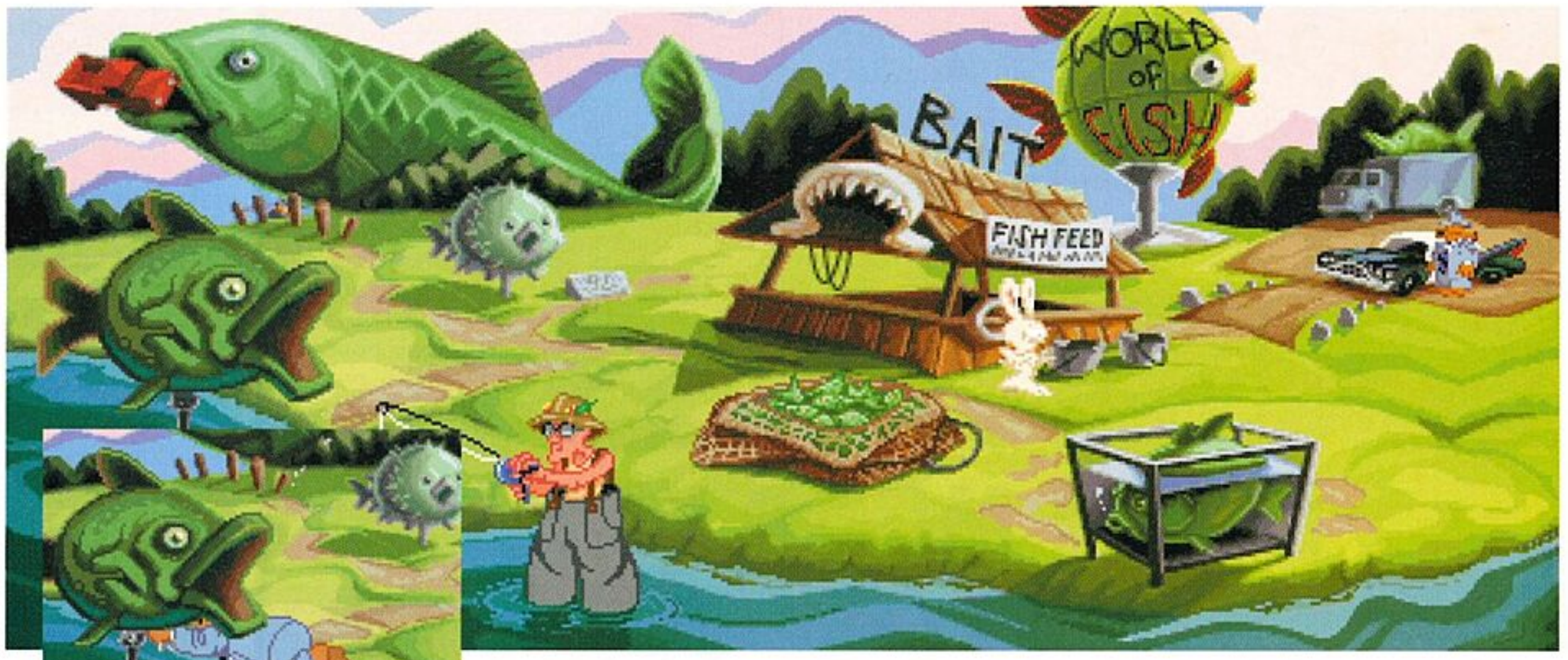


GIANT BALL OF TWINE

Ride the tram up, then take the lift up to the revolving restaurant where you have to talk to the mechanic. Get your free sample and pick up the loose electric wires and tie them to the binoculars. Connect the fishbowl lens to the binoculars and go to the World of Fish.

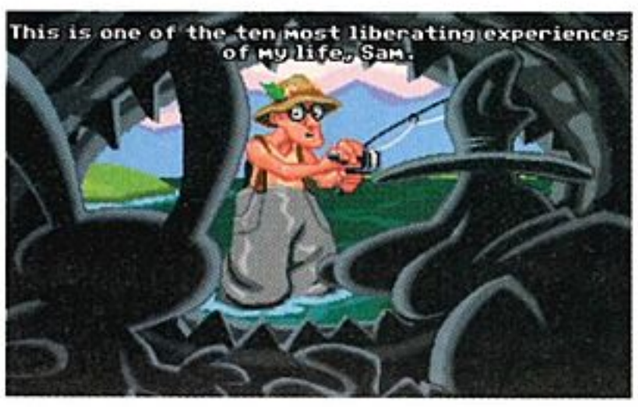


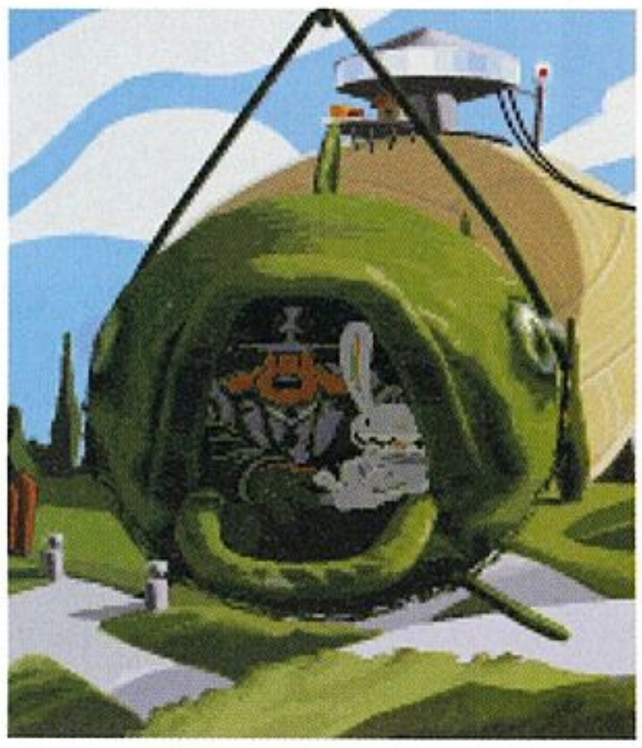
ON THE LITTLE DISHY



WORLD OF FISH

Grab the bucket of fish and use the left-handed spanner on the large plaster fish. Get inside and get Max to join you. You are then flown to the Giant Ball of Twine.

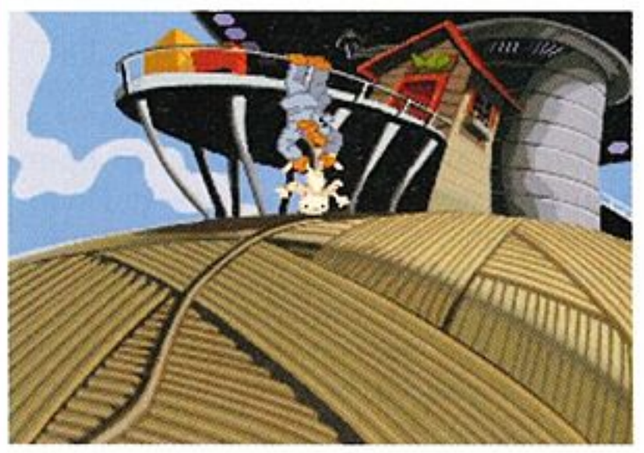




CHEW IT

GIANT BALL OF TWINE

When the chef goes, use Max to get the loose end of twine. Now go to the Gator Golf Course.

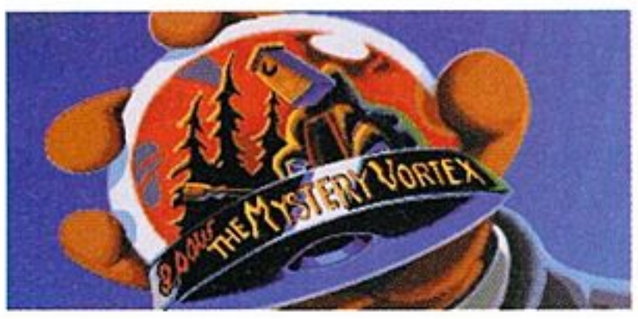


PLAYERS' GUIDE

FORE

GATOR GOLF

Go down to the driving range. After Max has been dunked, swap the bucket of golf balls for your own bucket of fish. Take a club and line up the crocodiles until Max tells you that you have made a path. Open the door to Max's cage and a secret door will appear in the side of the box. Open this and get the sno-globe. Get the mange from Max, then go back to the owner of the park and get the broken golf ball retriever. Go back to Snuckey's.



AT YOUR CONVENIENCE

SNUCKEY'S

Talk to the employee and get him to open the jar (select the exclamation mark). Fix the hand onto the broken retriever and fix the fish magnet onto that.

ESCHER WOULD BE PROUD

MYSTERY VORTEX

In the hallway, note down the colours of the four small doors. Use the mirror. You will now enter a room with three giant magnets in it. Turn on the various magnets to make colours (ie red, red + blue = purple, etc). Make the magnets the colour of your first door. Go back into the main hall and walk through the first door. After talking to Shuv-oohl, go into the gift shop and get the third piece of sasquatch mange.

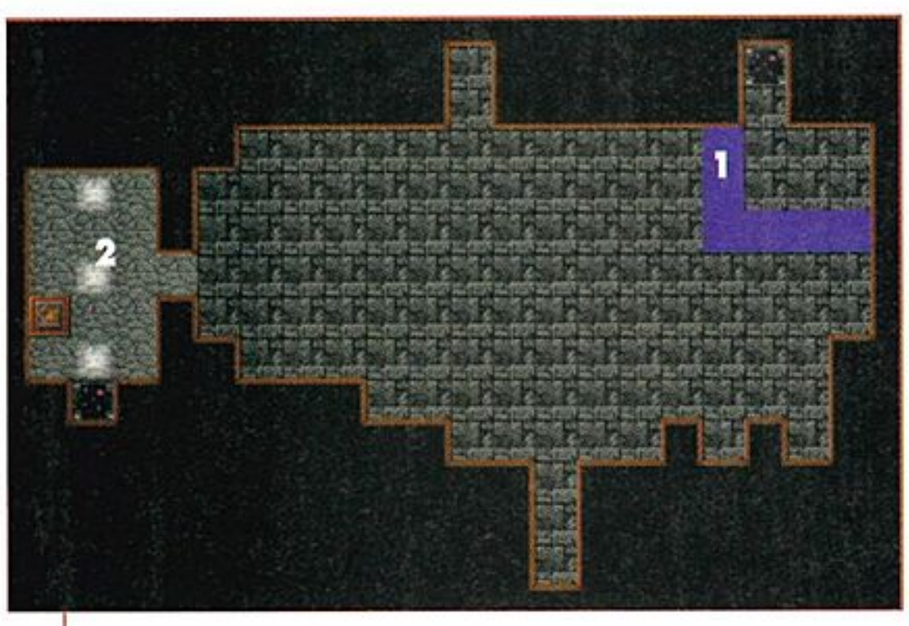
UNTIL NEXT TIME...

We leave Sam & Max there with the soggy sasquatch mange for now, but where will they go next? Will they find Bruno and Trixie? Will they uncover the secret of Conroy Bumpus? Does Max have genitals? All will be revealed in the concluding half of this players' guide, so tune in next month for a right-old American knees-up!

PLAYERS' GUIDE

THIS MONTH WE RETURN TO THE EXCELLENT SHADOWCASTER, CONTINUING FROM WHERE WE LEFT OFF, ON LEVEL 18. IN THIS, THE CONCLUDING INSTALMENT OF THE GUIDE, *PC PLAYER* TAKES KIRT AND COMPANY TO THE VERY DEPTHS OF HELL IN SEARCH OF THE EVIL SHAPE-CHANGER, VESTE.

SHADOWCASTER



LEVEL 18

1 Cast the tablet (from the previous level) in the acid to turn it to water. This will stop the demons from attacking.

2 The obelisk will grant you the form of Ssair.

Watch out for the lava giant around the corner. This beast can be easily destroyed with Opsis' effective death blow.

3 Still in the form of Ssair, fly across the lava and take on the lava giants with the spiked tails. Attack them from the north, placing the giants between you and the fireballs launching from the south wall. If energy levels drop too low, retreat and regain energy with Caun.

4 Use the tail attack to destroy the flame warrior then top up power levels on the magic pad here.

5 Fireballs streak across this passage-way. Close your eyes and run quickly past!

6 Pick up the boulders and place one on each of the pressure pads. The ceiling will rise, revealing the exit.

3 Grab the Obelisk tip from around here.

4 Negotiate this section with care as it is packed with deadly flame warriors and the huge lava giants. Ssair is still the best character to use but equip him with the amulet of defence for protection.

5 In this room the base of an obelisk moves quickly around. To stop it and gain the form of Grost, slot the hourglass into the carving on the south wall.

6 Change into Grost and punch your way through the secret wall. You'll know which section to punch by referring back to the map.

7 Punch through the two thin walls to get to the power regeneration pad to the north. Remember, change back to Kirt to benefit more from the healing powers of the pad.

8 All of these areas can be accessed by punching through the fragile walls as Grost. None of them are particularly exciting though, hiding nothing of real importance apart from a credit list of the programmers!

LEVEL 20

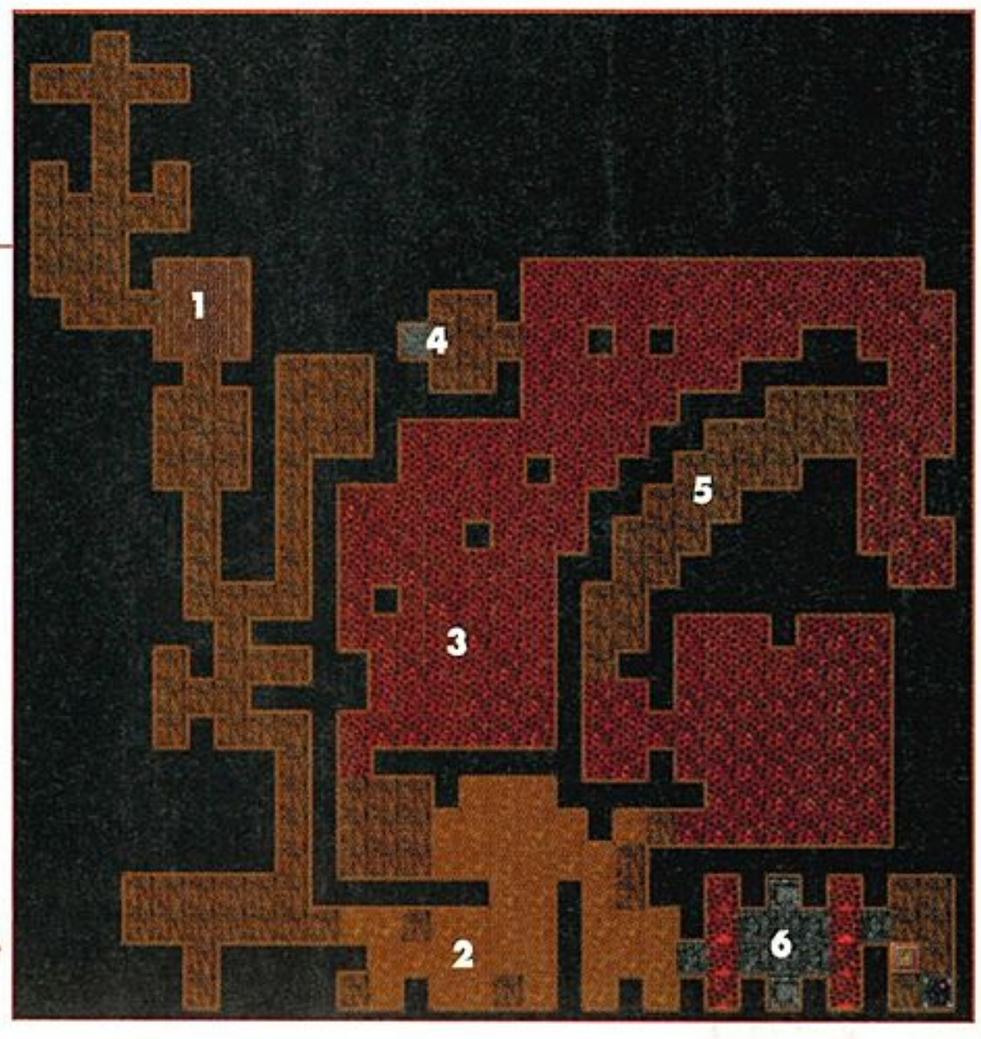
1 Yank the chain to reveal a secret passage.

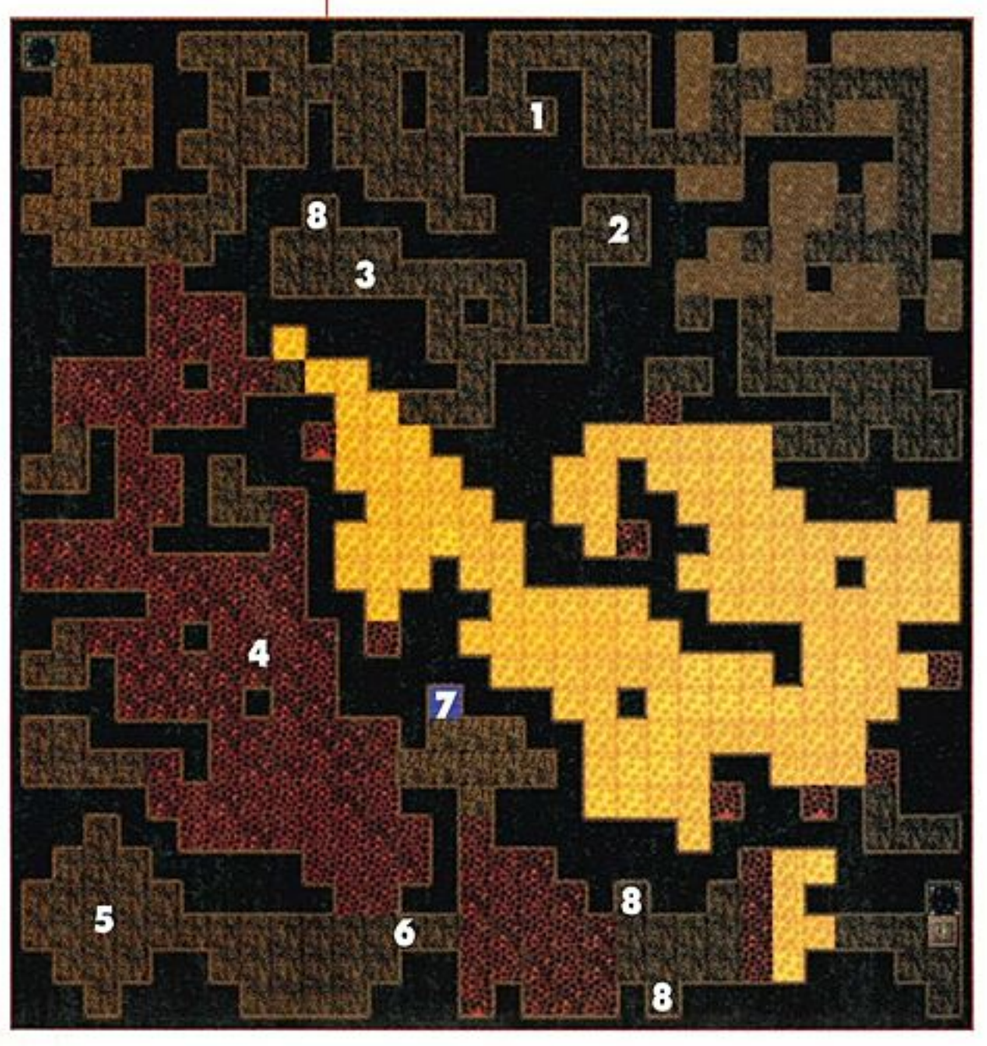
2 Change into Ssair to fly over the mud which will otherwise suck you under.

LEVEL 21

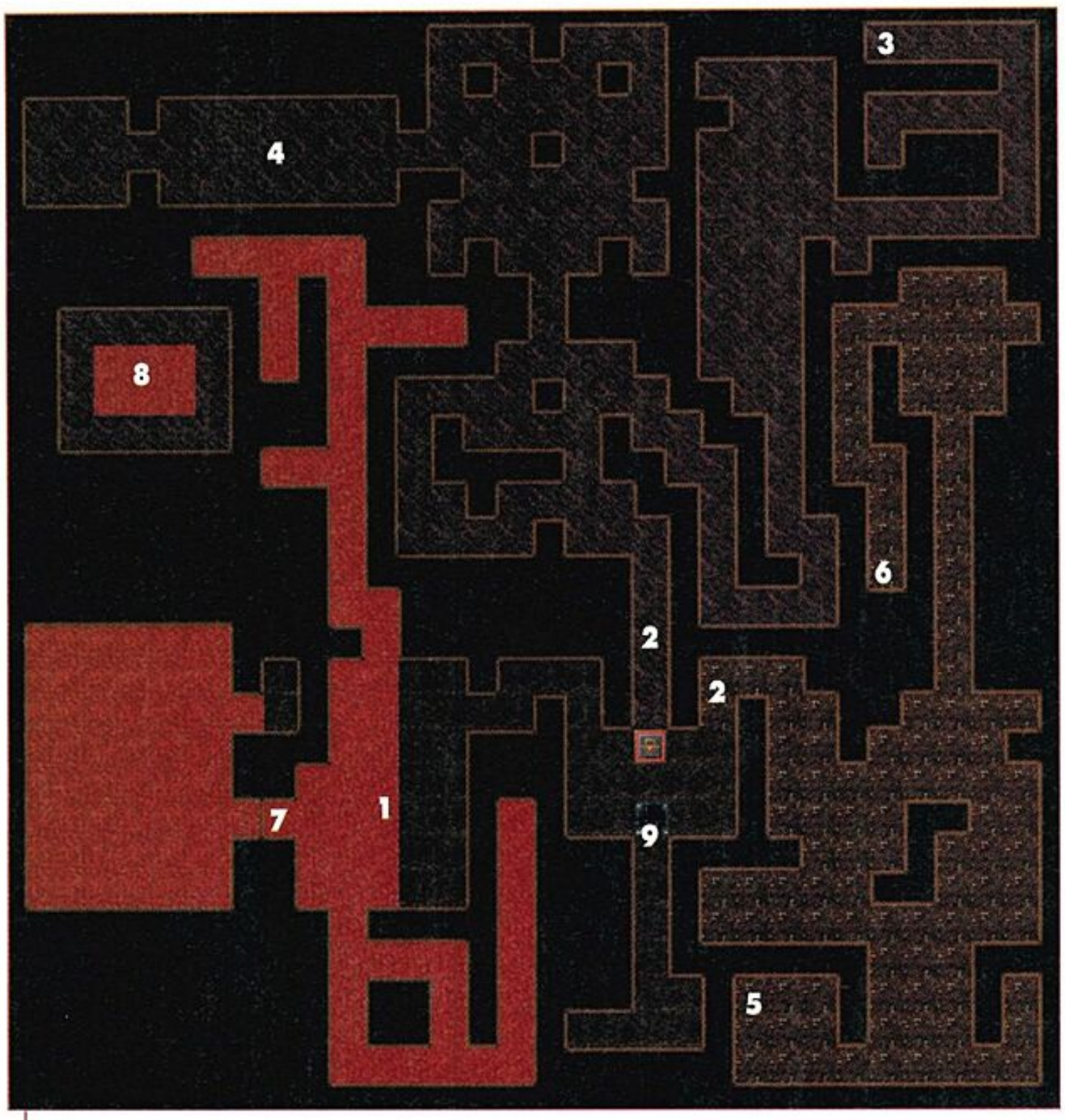
1 Walk up to the frog carving and cast Caun's insect swarm to unveil a passage leading north.

2 Pick up the hourglass from here. You'll need it to get the form of Grost.





PLAYER'S GUIDE



LEVEL 22

1 After swimming along the river of blood you'll end up in a cave with two dangerous flying eyes. Fly up to their level with Ssair and hack away at their energy with either the tail or magic sword. Get Caun to top up energy afterwards.

2 In both of these passages are some wickedly hard gargoyles that fire a constant stream of fireballs. Eliminate them by flying in close with Ssair then topping up energy and power levels.

3 Grab the stone sword from here and take it back to location four.

4 Fireballs fly around the room so run quickly across to the statue and slot the stone sword in its hand. A door will open to the east where you'll find the flesh crystal. Grab it.

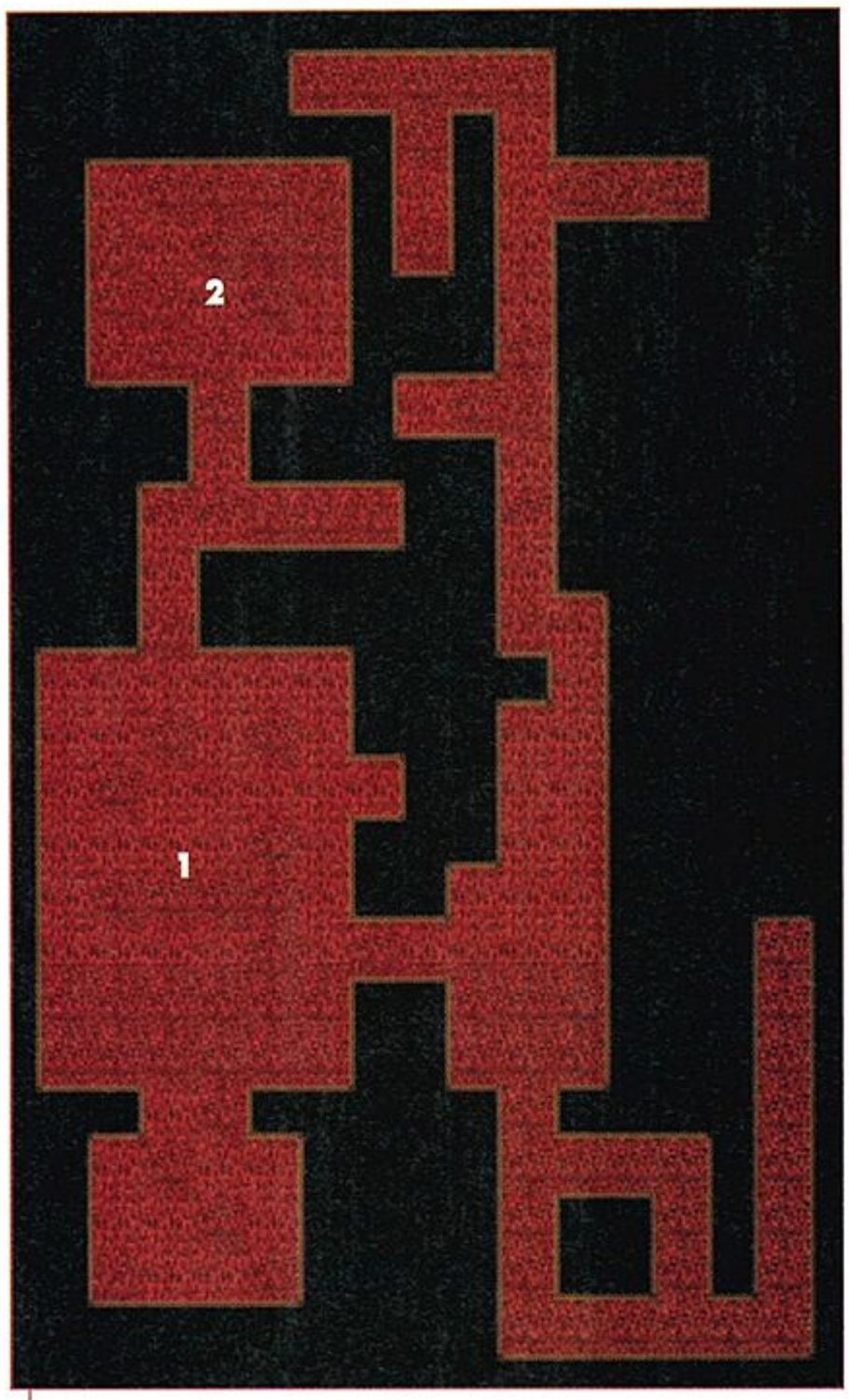
5 There's a chest in this corner which contains useful energy and power potions.

6 You'll find the bone crystal hidden in this corner.

7 As Kahpa, dive in the river of blood (level 23) and swim across to location eight.

8 With the shuriken, shoot the blood clot on the ceiling to get the blood crystal.

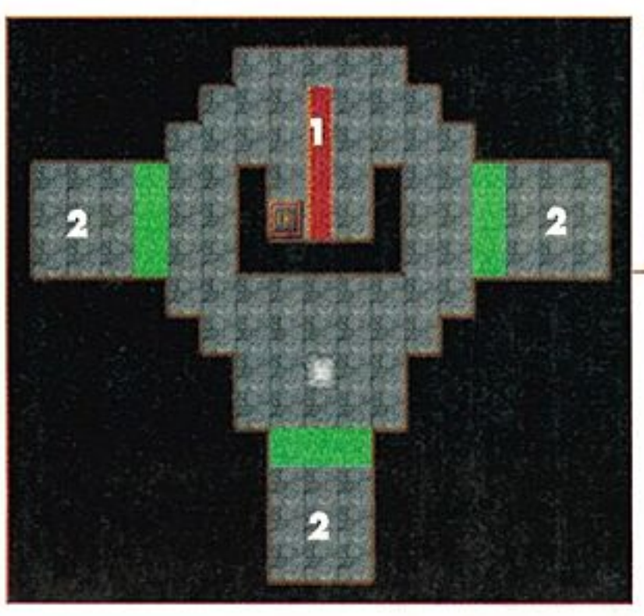
9 Once you've collected them, place the three crystals (blood, flesh and bone) on the small pillars that protrude from the ground. This will open the portal to the final level. Before you step inside, save!



LEVEL 23

1 This section is packed with weird four-armed bloaters. You'll only be able to take on a couple at a time, before having to retreat back to the surface to regain some energy.

2 Surface in this section to get the blood crystal from the ceiling on level 22.



LEVEL 24

1 Don't bother exploring this level unless you want to die very quickly. Transform into Grost then charge in to attack the old man directly in front of you – make sure you've got full energy first! He'll transform from one shape to another as you continually pound his face and, providing you're wearing an amulet of defence, he'll die just before you do.

2 Explore the rest of this level and these wall sections will open revealing a total of nine deadly wizards. ■

PLAYERS GUIDE

STAR TREK: JUDGMENT RITES

by Alex Simmons

PC PLAYER RESPONDS TO CAPTAIN KIRK'S DISTRESS CALL AS HE BATTLES THROUGH THE EIGHT MISSIONS IN STAR TREK: JUDGMENT RIGHTS.

FEDERATION

TAKE out the Elasi pirate ships that attack at the beginning, concentrating on the vessel that fires the three photon torpedoes then going on to eliminate the remaining ship. Probably the best tactic is to fire phasers continuously, leaving the torpedoes for close range.

After you've been locked up inside the brig, talk to the guard about his father. Keep questioning him about his Dad and eventually he'll free Kirk and company. If all else fails, use Spock on the weak part of the north wall. Search the guard for a pass card and use it to open the lockers in the adjacent room and collect both tricorders and the phasers.

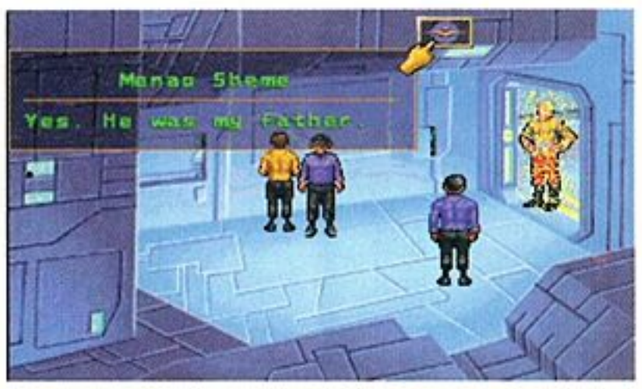
With the phasers set to stun, go to the computer and take out the two guards. Use the phasers on the technician in the computer room then get Spock to play with the chessboard. When asked, select a neutral move – don't choose a move that's either too aggressive or defensive.

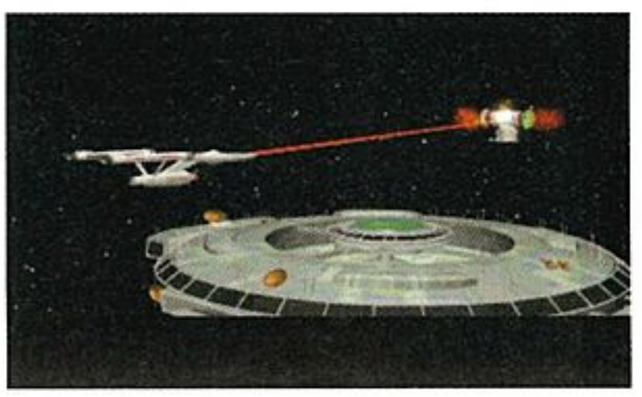
Trudge across to the executive quarters and pick up the air purifier before entering the crew's quarters. Use the medi-kit on the sick guard, then take the practice dummies from the top of the room. Head towards the transporter room and attach the air cleanser to the floor grate before the effects of the gas kick in.

Use the dummies on the teleporters and transport across to the security room. Kirk will be protected from the guards' shot by the dummies, leaving him with enough time to return their fire. Use Spock on the computer then walk towards Central Command. Get Spock to disable the three computer terminals and ask McCoy to treat the nervous technician.

Catch the elevator to the shuttle bay and instead of fighting, choose the surrender dialogue box. After Spock has nerve-pinched the two guards, get him to wreck the shuttle controls. **Change the phaser setting to kill and make your way to the special projects room. Quickly zap the four-limbed beastie then use Spock on the computer.** Back at the computer room use both tricorders on the console to gain the passcode to Breddel's quarters.

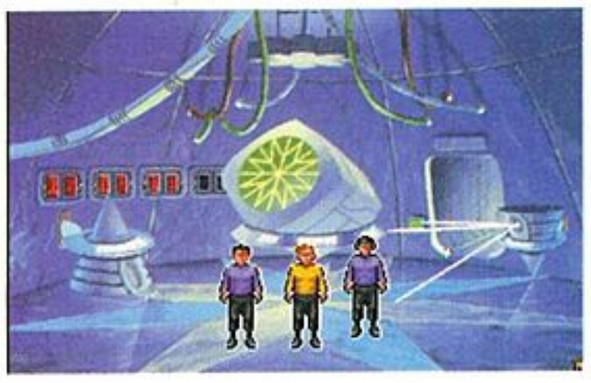
Breddel is waiting for Kirk in his room. As soon as you enter, get ready to stun him with the phaser. Get the book from the table and pick up the bookmark that falls out. Use Spock's tricorder on the bookmark to get the correct security code then pick up the dartboard adorned with Kirk's face. To finally disarm the Big Bang experiment, get Spock to enter the code into the control panel behind the dartboard.

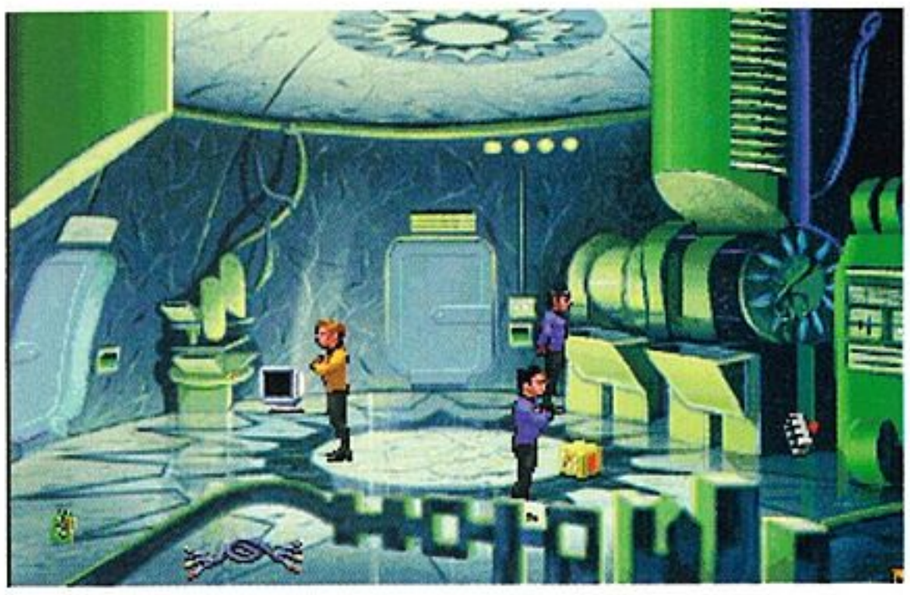




PLAYERS' GUIDE

SENTINEL





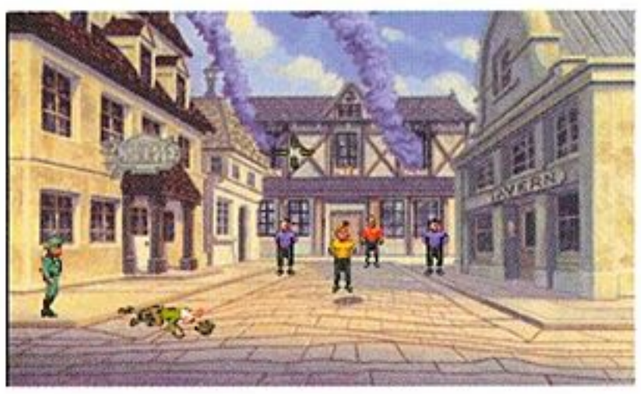
To pass through the security doors, get Spock to short-circuit the locks. Walk into the next room then take the exit on the right. Pick up everything from the floor then grab the cards and batteries from the two bins on the right. Get Spock to use both the cards and batteries on the machine on the left to make badges. Take the badge to the recharging station to the left and now you can walk freely around the complex.

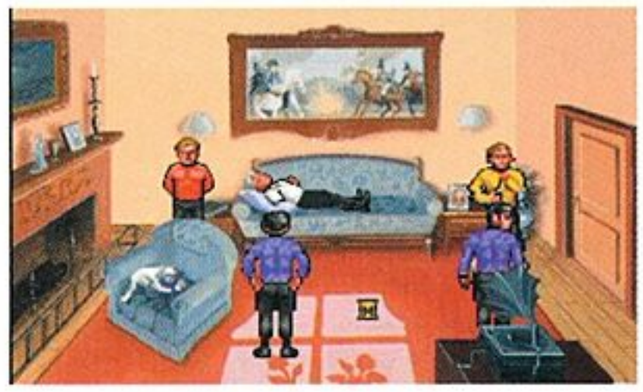
In the central computer room, use the monitor and the box on the terminal in the centre of the room. **Solving the shape puzzle which appears is easy – add up the number of sides on the objects in rows, then pick the shape that will give the last row the same number of sides as the other two rows.**

By the food producing machine, use Spock on the Balkosian when he walks past. Take him to the medical room and use McCoy on the tiny alien when he's lying on the bed.

Walk to the room filled with the gigantic gas cylinder and fix the switch to the side. Walk back to the power generator room and use the wires and the control card on the generator. **When Spock asks, tell him to shut the generator down to finish the mission.**

NO MAN'S LAND





Trelene's triplane is difficult to beat so concentrate your fire with both phasers and torpedoes. When Trelene heads straight towards the Enterprise, break off to one side. In the prison on the planet surface, pick up the sticks and open the case of schnapps on the right. Pick up and use a bottle of schnapps on the hay in the corner, then use the stick on the hay. When the guard walks in, get Spock to render him unconscious with a nerve pinch.

Outside in the streets, get Kirk to sort out the guard and then use McCoy's medi-kit on the old man. Walk inside the store and ask the boy for the rope, the broom and the food. Leave and walk to the school where you'll meet the German soldier. Talk to him briefly and when given the option, get the kids to vote. After he's left, scan the chalkboard with Spock's tricorder.

Leave the school and walk across to the old man's apartment on the right. Get Kirk to clean up the floor with the broom and ask McCoy to check over the sick man. With the money he's given you play a game of poker in the room behind the tavern. With your winnings, buy the clock from the store. Back at the poker game, ask Sundergard to spread a rumour about the chalkboard in the school. First he'll need the transfer papers from the armoury.

Give the food to the dog outside the armoury and then use McCoy to cure its rabies. **Inside the armoury talk to the commander and then return to the tavern. Drug the beer barrels on the right with the medi-kit, then return to the armoury and tie up the commander with the rope.** Grab a rifle from the case and threaten the German commander into signing the transfer papers for Sundergard's son. Take these papers and give them to Sundergard, then talk to Schiller in the tavern about the chalkboard rumours. He'll give you a letter which when presented to the schoolteacher allows Kirk to take the board.

Walk to the trench scene to the left of the town and talk to the wounded soldier. Use the science tricorder to analyse his wounds then use the medi-kit on him. Talk about his girlfriend's locket and take the letter he gives Kirk to the barmaid, Gretel. When you return he'll hand over the locket.

Now Kirk has all three of the power items, he just needs the TNT from the armoury. Use Spock on the commander inside the armoury to get the combination to the safe. Inside you'll find TNT. Take it to Trelene's triplane (found to the right of the village) and stuff the clock, the chalkboard and locket inside the cockpit. Use the TNT on the plane and stand back!

Kirk will finally meet up with Trelene. Talk him into showing you a historical trench scene and then lecture him on the evils of war. Eventually he will give in and return command of the Enterprise to Kirk. ➤

PLAYERS GUIDE

LIGHT AND DARK

➤ As you enter the temple, walk to the rooms to the east and west and talk to the angel and the demon. **Convince them that they are of a similar race and they'll tell Kirk they want to be joined together using the DNA machine. They'll then both leave samples in the slot on the genetic storage computers.**

With both of the samples in the inventory, go back to the central room and talk to genetic scientist Jons. He's not happy about combining the two DNA samples together so convince him otherwise by saying he has no right to hinder the wishes of the other two beings. **Place both the samples, one at a time, inside the sequencer on the left. Get Jons to operate the computer and eventually you'll have two sequenced samples.**

Back with Captain Kirk, set the phasers to stun and blast away the green slime around the replicator. Once removed, individually place both the sequenced samples in the right slot and get Jons to replicate them using the computer. Finally take both the replicated samples to the room to the north.

Place both of the replicated DNA samples in the computer slot at the top and create a new life form with Jons. Within seconds a green being will appear, or at least a hologram of one, however his signal is breaking up because the exterior antennae are failing. Walk outside and off to the right of the temple.

The first antenna is powered by a geo-thermal device. Use the science tricorder on the control panel and then fire the red phaser on the rocks at the top of the screen. Use the tricorder on the rocks and then, with the communicator, contact the Enterprise. Walk off to the next antenna and once again use the tricorder on the control box. Communicate with the Enterprise and then use Spock on the control panel. With the radar fixed, return to the transmission room inside the temple in order to complete the mission.

VOIDS

On the bridge, talk to everyone present, leaving Spock until last. Use Spock on the science station twice, talk to him, then use him on the science console once more. Get Kirk to use the science computer then exit to the turbolift, heading towards auxiliary control. Whenever you try to enter the auxiliary the alien will just kick you out. With the red phaser, blast a small hole in the door, then scan the alien through the hole using the medical tricorder.

Head towards sickbay and show the alien scan to Dr McCoy. Pick up the gas canister and take it to engineering via the turbolift. Use the gas cylinder on the life-support mixer on the right of the screen, then operate the life-support controls on the left. Back at auxiliary control, use the sensor controls on the far right. **Once Kirk has the co-ordinates of the Vurian, use the transporters to teleport down to the planet surface.**

Ignore the Vurian for the time being and pick up the brown pouch on the next screen to the right. Scan the blue gems with both tricorders, then pick them up using the pouch. **Walk off to the east to find Spock. He's delirious so use the medi-kit to bring him round.** He's still possessed by Savant so talk to the Vurian and ask him to summon Savant, who'll appear in the huge crater to the right. When talking to Savant, make sure you don't leave the planet without Spock or ask Savant to destroy itself. Destroy it by throwing the pouch of blue gems into the blinding light. A few moments later, Kirk, Spock and the rest of the crew will be reunited on the bridge of the Enterprise.

PLAYERS' GUIDE

MUSEUM PIECE

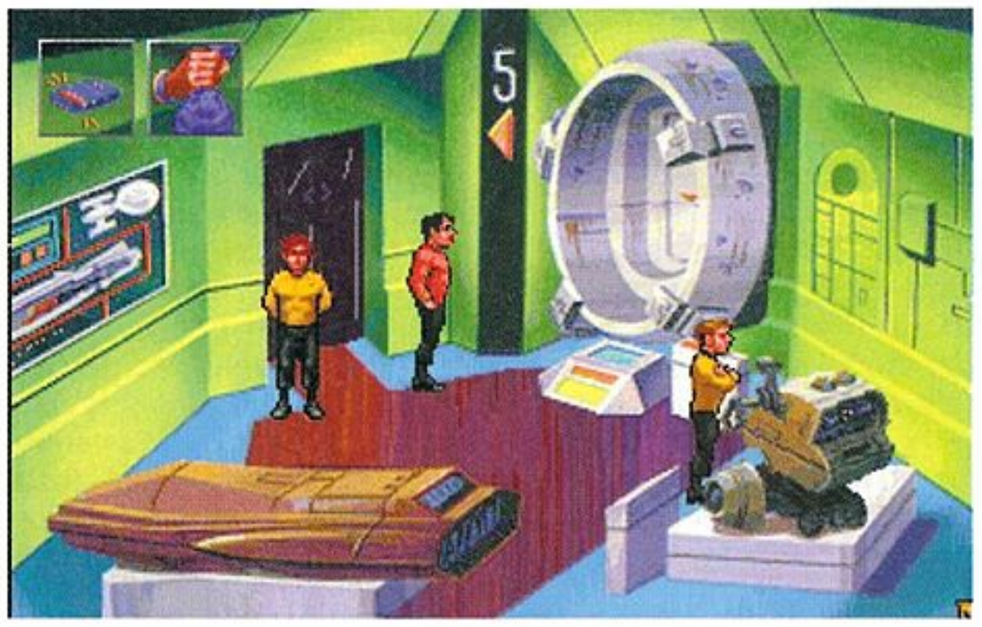
After talking to the curator, have a look around the museum. Soon you'll be called back to his office where the terrorist attack will begin. When the curator is out cold on the floor, use Kirk on his limp body. **Use Scotty on the security console three times before taking the bottle on the right, as well as the note hidden underneath. Also pick up the decanter, the silver serving tray and the lance from the knight. Read the note and you'll find the code VVSOP2123.** This opens some of the security locked doors, including the door to the right. When you enter the code, be sure to enter the letters as capitals.

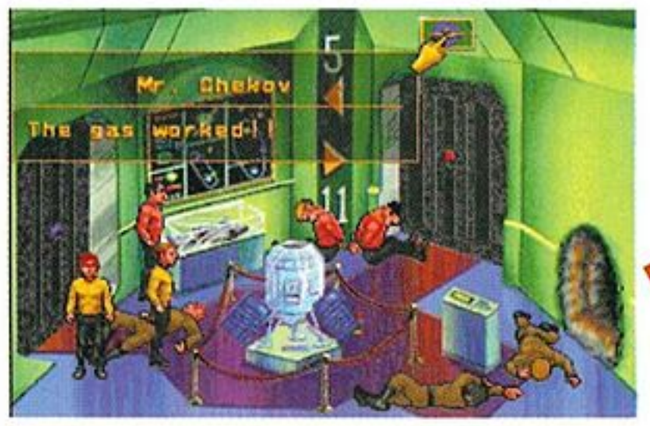
In the next room, use Scotty on the machines at the top and right of the screen to get the capacitors and interface cable. Charge the capacitor by leaving it on the table for a few seconds, then pick it up and exit through the door to the south, using the passcode to override the security lock. Pick up the two clamps from the docking ring then insert the charged capacitor into the robot. The robot will fizz and spark, then some wires will fall out. Pick them up and also take back the capacitor. Before you leave the room, grab the metal panel from the pod at the bottom of the screen.

Back in the room with the glowing white table, place both of the capacitors down to charge them. Once charged, get Scotty to examine the door then the table. Place the clamps on the table next to the capacitors and then use the red wires to join them together. Place the lance on the table and finally connect the interface cable to the table. **Get Scotty to operate the Klingon control machine to blow a hole in the door. Get both capacitors before leaving.**

Walk through to the next room and pick up the gas canister from the floor. **Walk into the room at the top right, take a piece of the dilithium crystal display before activating the small robot with a charged capacitor.** Use Scotty on the robot to get it to open the pod bay door, then use Scotty on the open door. Use the decanter on the door, followed by the tray. Finally place the capacitor on the door to charge it.

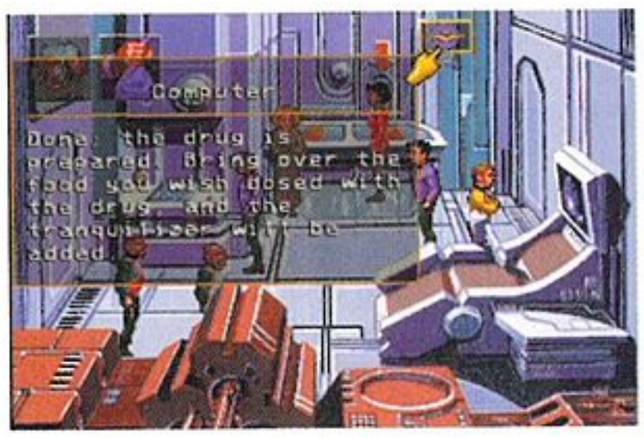
Take the charged capacitor and the silver tray back to the wrecked room below. Use the crystal, the tray and the charged capacitor on the communication unit in the bottom left. **Use Kirk on the communicator to negotiate with the terrorists. When negotiating, make sure you're firm but still listen to their demands. Point out that they have the same goals as their enemies, offer them your guarantee and above all, deal with them fairly.** If this fails, recharge the capacitor using the pod and the silver tray, this time using the other bottle as a catalyst. Back in the wrecked room, it's time to gas the terrorists out by using the ancient machine on the left. Use the wires, the charged capacitor and the panel on the transporter, then use Scotty on the machine. Put the gas canister on the panel then tell Mister Scott to energise. Seconds later, enter the room with the terrorists in to complete the mission. ➤

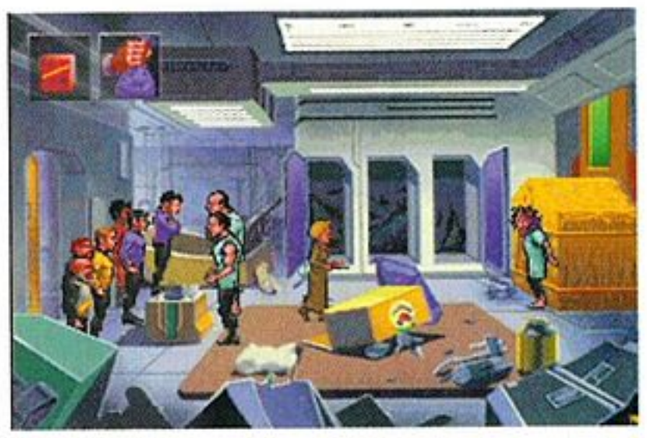




PLAYERS' GUIDE

THOUGH THIS BE MADNESS...





➤ **On the vessel, talk to both of the men in the room, then walk south and use the medical tricorder on the old woman in the corner.** Use Spock on the woman and he'll momentarily mind-meld with her. After this, walk to the toy room in the far right of the complex and use Spock on the chessboard to get the teddy bear. Give the bear to Jakesy and he'll give you his building blocks in return. Get Uhura to speak to the king, convincing him that she is descended from royalty. After he's gone, use Kirk on the light switch next to the door at the top and the ceiling panel will open. Use Kirk on the panel to get the lightbar.

Walk to the room filled with planets and take the metal keg from the incubator at the very end. Place it on the workbench before firing the red phaser at the contaminated keg. Use the table, then place the blocks in the keg before using the red phaser again. Pick up the cleansed keg and place it back into the incubator. Leave the room and wait a few moments before returning. The plant should now be fully blossomed with red fruit. If not, leave and return when it does. Take a piece of fruit to the woman in the eating hall and talk to her. Ask what is troubling her and try to solve her problems. Ask about her son before offering her the fruit. She'll refuse to eat it but will give Kirk permission to talk to her son, who's found in the sleeping quarters.

When the young boy sitting on the bed asks, say that you do have his mother's permission to talk to him. Give him the fruit and continue talking. He'll mention something about food and offer to show it to you. Agree and take the food back to the eating hall. Use the food on the computer terminal and answer "yes" to the drug question. Use the food machine on the right then use the food on the computer terminal. Answer "yes" to the computer questions then use the food machine once more to get another, drug-free food package. Talk to the woman in the food hall about Tuskin and use the drugged food on her. Walk to the toy room and offer Tuskin the drug-free food. He'll refuse and seconds later Moll will enter and give him the drugged snack. Tuskin will fall asleep on the floor.

Tuskin is being guarded by two men, one larger than the other. Stun the largest guard with the phaser then talk to the remaining man. He will step out of the way, allowing you to use the secret doorway leading to the computer room. Inside the room, use the lightbar on the computer terminal on the right. When this fails, use it on Klarr, the Klingon captain. Use the piece of bulb on the computer to fix the problem.

When you talk to the Klingons, always act diplomatically. Whatever you do, don't force the Klingons to leave or you'll fail your mission. Talk to the computer and analyse all the information it gives out. Take the crystal that is lowered from the ceiling and use it on the computer terminal. Review the data it gives out, then attempt to enter the portal. Make sure you're followed by the Klingon captain, then enter the portal for the final mission...

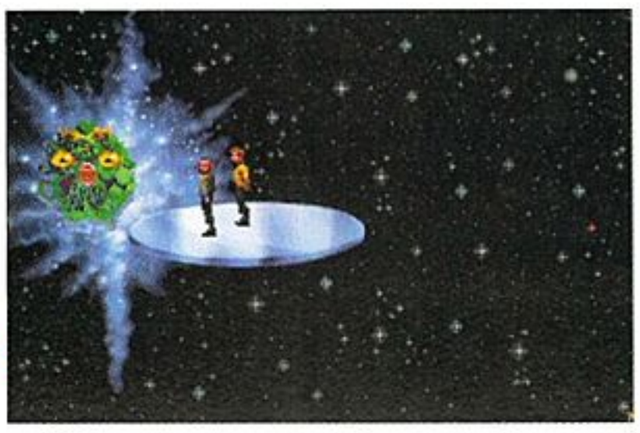
...YET THERE IS METHOD IN IT

PLAYERS' GUIDE

When the Brassican asks a question, be sure to ask the opinion of everyone present, including Klarr. **When it comes to answering, answer the first question with Uhura. Use McCoy to answer the next and then Spock to answer the third riddle. When it comes to answer the final question, make sure you use both Kirk and Klarr – don't pick a reply that will leave one of them behind.** This is done by talking between both Kirk and Klarr until they finally agree on an answer.

After all the questions have been answered, you'll be warped to another dimension and Captain Kirk will be given the opportunity to find out more about the Klingon empire. Decline this offer, then talk to Spock and finally Klarr.

After a brief good-bye, the Klingons will depart and you'll be beamed back to the Enterprise. Starfleet should be pleased with your performance and grant Kirk and crew two weeks of well-earned shore leave. ■



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IT'S THAT SPOT WHERE YOU GET TO HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT. THE PC PLAYER LETTERS PAGE – IT'S HUGE.

LETTERS

"WITH *reference to the letter from AE Bradshaw of Stalybridge (issue four). I too have experienced the same problem with Network Q Rally. I have a 486SX 25, Dos 6, SVGA, Sound Galaxy and Gravis joystick. The game locked up after 2/3 stages and was unplayable with a joystick. I rang the software house and the 'half-wit' I spoke to told me to ring back in a few days as the programmers were coming in to sort out a fix...I was then told to send back my disk for them to modify the files.*

The disk came back within a few weeks with no new files on it, hence the game still didn't work. I sent the game back a further two times and it came back with modified files, but still refused to work properly. After six weeks enough was enough and I sent the game back to Special Reserve and asked for a copy of IndyCar Racing, which I received straight away. I have had no problems with this game and am glad I got rid of Rally. I will never buy a piece of software from Europress Software again. If a software house has customer service like this then they will be the ones who eventually lose out."
S Butterworth, WILMSLOW

"In issue 4, AE Bradshaw from Stalybridge complained about Europress Software. I too had problems getting my Gravis joypad, FX2000 and Warrior joysticks to calibrate. I got the brush off from the technical helpline (a contradiction in terms) and have since sold the game on. I will look more closely at any future game that they bring out."
David Byrne, Cannock, STAFFORDSHIRE

MIKE ASKEW, SPOKESPERSON FOR EUROPRESS SOFTWARE REPLIES:
"The situation regarding Network Q Rally was that there was the usual rush of calls to our technical support line after the Christmas selling period. There were some problems with Rally on release that have now been sorted out, problems regarding compatibility with certain soundcards and joystick combinations. We are confident now that there are no remaining problems with the software.

There have also been personnel changes in the customer services department, and I can assure your readers that the kind of situation mentioned in the letter is not likely to happen again. I would suggest that anybody who is still having problems with the game ring us here and we will sort them out. As for the six week wait; what happened was that we wanted to test the new files and fixes thoroughly before we released the new disks, so there may well have been a wait before the new, modified software became available. The customers that phoned us, as far as I'm aware, were certainly told that. They were given the option of either returning the software to us or waiting for the update disks to support their particular systems."
If you are having problems with Rally, Europress Software can be contacted on Adlington 0625 859333

"...I feel I must respond to the Angry column. The writer does not seem to grasp that there is no such thing as a standard PC, and that therefore installation procedures cannot be standardised. The CPU has changed several times (and with it, the way of handling memory); the video system has changed, and is still in a state of flux; I don't know how many version of the operating system are out there; and to cap it all the expansion potential means that each individual PC may actually be set up differently. None of these set-ups are 'wrong' – each one will be in response to the individual users needs. (It is this flexibility that has made the PC so successful in business, as compared to the Mac with its closed architecture)...Unfortunately there is no choice with the present PC architecture – it is necessary to learn DOS and the innards of your machine..."
Tom Burke, Totley, SHEFFIELD

PC PLAYER: The PC is in fact, pretty standard in that the CPUs are all downwardly compatible with each other. Games nowadays seldomly work on anything less than a 386, and the difference between these two chips, for the sake of this argument anyway, is the speed. There is very little difference in the way that they manage memory, so allowing games to work on either machine without large chinks of code having to be rewritten for the sake of different users. Video cards are similar. The VGA standard is now just that, and with the introduction of VESA (Video Electronic Standards Association) compatibility is slowly but surely spreading its tendrils across the board. It shouldn't be too long before things calm down in that area as well. With all these standards, there is a strong argument for software houses to make installation of games easier and more user friendly, but so far there has been little done to actually follow this argument through. It looks as though, for the meantime at least, the PC user is going to have to learn just what makes an AUTOEXEC.BAT file tick if they want to play the latest mega-game on their much-loved machine.

"...I retired a year ago and bought myself a computer because I am writing a book, and also to play games on. Like most other 'oiks' I knew nothing at all about the monsters. My first problem was hard disk space – 40Mb was not nearly enough, so I had a 120Mb disk installed. A couple of games were loaded and play began. It wasn't long before the 'magic message' flashed on the screen – "Not Enough Memory', 'Close Down One Or More Applications'. I didn't know what an application was so, off to the shop. "Oh, not enough memory sir! No problem. A trifling £300 will soon cure that". This 'trifling' sum I forked out for two 4Mb SIMS and these, coupled with the two 1Mb SIMS already 'in situ' gave me the very impressive total of 10Mb of memory. I now find that it is of little use as it cannot be accessed by 'The Monster'. I receive all sorts of advice and encouragement from well-meaning eggheads who babble on about CONFIG.SYS, AUTOEXEC.BAT and EMM386 et al, all of which completely by-passes my burnt-out brain cell. The result of all this is that I cannot wait to replace what I have learned is 3-year-old technology with a 486DX tower machine, 400+Mb hard disk space, 16Mb memory, CD-ROM an the latest technological wonder WINDOWS 4!!!"
Ian G Hughes, HULL

"Following your very positive review of TFX in your first issue, I though that you'd appreciate some feedback on a few of the points you missed out on. There are many more problems [there were 17 listed], this is just a selection. We are very disappointed by the quality of your review as many of these problems become apparent after reading the manual and playing the game for a couple of hours. Whilst we appreciate that commercial pressures play a part here, at the very least we expect an honest review and if there are problems we expect to be told about them. Amongst the people on Compuserve who bought TFX on the strength of your review there is a strong feeling that they will be less inclined to take future reviews seriously. The graphics are excellent, but after the hype that this program received it fails to deliver as a serious flight simulator and we wait in hope for Ocean to release a bug fix that does more than fix hardware compatibilities."
Andrew Luck and Mark Taylor, Dereham, NORFOLK

LETTERS

PC PLAYER: When we saw the review version of TFX, it was still not quite finished. There were a few things that were to be added and a few bugs that, we were promised, would be ironed out before the finished version hit the shops. As it turned out, most of the problems had been sorted out, leaving us with a game that was as close to bug free as it could be. Do you remember the original version of Falcon 3.0? The game was absolutely riddled with bugs, and there were more than a few complaints sent in to the various PC magazines that were around at the time. As the various add-ons for the game have been released, the problems in the game have gradually got fewer and fewer.

TFX is a huge game, both in size and in programming technicalities. It is naïve to think that it would be totally free of any bugs, and the review wasn't intended to give a complete run-down of all the things that needed to be fixed – rather it was a subjective appraisal of the game as a whole. You wouldn't expect a review of a film to concentrate solely on the continuity errors or special effect gaffs that the reviewer spotted, because that would be no help when deciding whether or not the film was one that you wanted to see. You would want to read about how good or bad the film was, what it was about, how the acting was, etc. All the reviews in the magazine aim to tell you about the game as a whole and, if there are any glaring bugs that cause the game to crash or perform stupid stunts, then these will be mentioned.

"...Your magazine was part of my technological exploration and my journey towards deciding whether to invest further time, effort and money in PC equipment. Throughout this process, I have endured being addressed both as Bill Gates and Baldrick, and rarely as somebody who understood what a PC could do – but who did not necessarily understand which stop one caught the VESA-BUS from. It also appeared impossible to find any quantity of intelligible adult reviews of computer games and to be made aware that there was entertainment software that did not require serious levels of anorak-wearing. Your magazine gives me hope that computer gamers, and those who review the games, are not the sad nerds that so many usually reveal themselves to be through their own publicity and magazines."
Lewis J Hulatt, Guildford, SURREY

PC PLAYER: The path to buying the right PC is not one of the easiest to walk on. It's a bit like becoming a member of an exclusive club, with the established members reminding you at every available opportunity that you are still the new guy, so just watch it. As for your comments about people who use PCs to play games on not being nerds, I had hoped that type of thinking had disappeared a long time ago. With the average price of a system nowadays ranging from £800 upwards, and the price of the software at £40 plus, the PC has become very much a grown-ups toy. Similarly, PC games reviewers tend to have healthy adult interests outside their chosen profession. In the case of the *PC Player* staff, John is a keen musician, Paul spends his time engrossed in all things film and music related, Alex drinks copious amounts of alcohol and I practice a martial art. Hopefully, these diverse outside interests enable us to look at a lot of the software that comes in with a fresh pair of eyes, and to criticise them objectively, without any kind of bias. Probably.

"I own a 486SX 25 with DOS 6, a SVGA monitor and a S3 video card. I've been keeping an eye on Sim City 2000 for a while and couldn't wait to see the review in PC Player. I looked through and thought "Great, 5 stars". The game looked stunning, everything I'd been waiting for, but then I noticed the fact that your machine had to have a VESA video card and driver and, since VESA is a type of local BUS, then your machine has to be a VESA one. Is this true? Is there no way of getting around this? It's not as if the game has to be compatible with VESA to be able to display SVGA graphics, is it?"
John Reed, YORK

PC PLAYER: I think that you've got your wires crossed big time, John. VESA is not a particular graphics system, rather it is a standard. For a long time now, the companies involved in PC graphics, whether that is graphics hardware or software, have attempted to standardise things to make life easier for both the end user and the software and hardware manufacturers. VESA is the result of this partnership.

All modern graphics cards that are VESA-compatible come with either a video driver pre-installed on the board itself (contained on a ROM chip) or a software driver that sits in the computer's memory and communicates between the program currently running and the video card. This way, a game such as Sim City 2000 talks to the driver, which then interprets what is going on and sends the relevant information to the graphics card.

Having a standard such as this should, in theory anyway, make life that much easier for everyone involved. However, some cards are not VESA compatible which means that other drivers have to be included in the game to allow it to talk to the graphics card. Local BUS VESA cards are simply VESA compatible graphics cards that use a local BUS system on the computer's motherboard (if it is equipped with one) to run graphic applications, including games, at a much higher speed than the normal 8-bit VGA cards.

"...I'm amazed at the number of complaints I hear, or read about, concerning 'technical support'. I purchased a copy of A-Train which is inherently incompatible with disk compression, and phoned up the Ocean technical helpline. Even after telling them details of my CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files they could not tell me why A-Train would not work on my system. Another problem is hardware compatibility. I own an Olivetti printer with a supplied Windows driver. This is fine for programs running under Windows, but what happens if I want to print under DOS? In these circumstances, neither the computer or hardware manufacturer wants to accept responsibility, and both blame it on the software! "
Marcus J Kerr, ABERDEEN

PC PLAYER: Technical helplines seem to be the flavour of the moment. A lot of people have had problems with these lines, and it would appear that a lot of the technical assistants got their job through who they know rather than what. Still, if you've given a complete breakdown of the problem and the hardware you're running it on, then you should at least expect an answer other than, "Sorry, I can't help you". It seems that technical helplines are the thorn in the side of the games playing public. ■

If you have any comments, queries or views on PC Player or the PC entertainment market in general, then we would like to hear from you.

POST
PC Player, Letters Page, Maverick Magazines, 16-17 Hollybush Row, Oxford, OX1 1JH.

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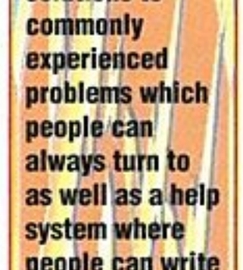
PROBLEMS

The idea for this page is for it to become something slightly more than just a simple 'Question and Answers' problems page. What we effectively want to produce is a regular 'bulletin board' of solutions to commonly experienced problems which people can always turn to as well as a help system where people can write in for assistance. Hopefully, as long as the service proves to be successful we'll be able to expand to a larger section in the magazine, so to help encourage an initial barrage of tips we're offering The Secret of Monkey Island from the Kixx XL catalogue to anyone who helps.



MEMORY AND SOUND CARD PROBLEMS

So what's the easiest way to provide an optimum memory set-up? Well, there's a lot to be said for boot disks – and it's good to have an all-purpose set-up sitting on a floppy for those annoying little situations.

Many games offer a custom boot-disk system which will not only optimise your memory, but also load the game in – however, we have found it helpful to have an all purpose 'memory stripped' system disk sitting around just in case we run into problems. Playing around with the system files on your hard drive is a pain at the best of times, especially if you have a certain set-up which is good for most purposes.

If you format a disk using the FORMAT/S command in DOS, all you have to do then is enter DOS EDIT and copy out the following two files.

Save as A:\CONFIG.SYS
DEVICE=C:\DOS\HIMEM.SYS
DEVICE=C:\DOS\EMM386.EXE
DOS=HIGH,UMB
FILES=30
BUFFERS=30
If you are running Double Space from DOS 6.0 add the line:
DEVICE=C:\DOS\DBLSPACE.SYS/MOVE
to the end of your file.

If you find that this still causes memory problems (some really fussy games might insist on even more memory) try reducing the FILES and BUFFERS lines to either 25 or 20.

Save as A:\AUTOEXEC.BAT
PATH=C:\;C:\DOS
PROMPT PG
LH C:\MOUSE\MOUSE.COM

Another common problem which seems to crop up in letters and phone calls to the *PC Player* office seems to revolve around sound card conflicts and malfunctions. With all of the different types of card around, it's difficult to always say exactly what the problem is but invariably it has to do with the way a card is initialised. The standard set-up for many cards sees:
ADDRESS: 220
DMA:1
IRQ: 7
Most games will ask for this set-up and invariably (as long as your system has no hardware conflicts) it's one that works. Unfortunately you may occasionally experience hardware conflicts which result in your system either; a) crashing or b) not playing any sound at all. If you've already tried altering the settings on your card (changing the IRQ to 5 and the ADDRESS to 230, etc) you may feel that you've exhausted all of the possibilities.

A call to the Creative Labs technical department left us with the following solution – they claimed that the problems could be that; a) the sound card isn't 100 per cent Soundblaster compatible which is something which just can't be helped, or b) conflicts with other cards are effecting operation. To test for this the department suggested removing any cards and then replacing them into the system one by one – testing the sound with each card. Helpful huh?

"WHEN running Falcon 3 (the old version) the sound is out of sync with the graphics. On the start up screen, I have heard that the two aircraft fly over my head before they have actually reached me. When trying to communicate with other aircraft I've found that the sound is virtually inaudible.

I have been to obtain a patch called F3 SND from Creative Labs to cure my problems, but unfortunately this didn't work. I then contacted Microprose who said that my graphics card was far too fast for the game!?!? How can this be when the sound happens before the graphics? I was advised by Microprose to alter the speed setting on my sound card which my dealer had advised me could not be done. Does anybody know what they are talking about?"
P Evans, Cleveland

PC PLAYER: As you rightly say - the problem you're encountering is quite an old one, however it's quite easily rectified by means of a Falcon 3 revision update patch disk which you can get your hands on from pretty much any shareware library around. As well as fixing various other bugs which have annoyed Falcon users for god knows how long, it also fixes your problem. Alternatively if you've been looking for an excuse to justify buying a copy of either the MiG or Hornet mission disks, you'll find that these will also cure your problems. If you have any trouble getting hold of a patch disk...give us a call and we'll see if we can sort you out with something.

●

"Having recently bought a copy of A-Train I've been experiencing some problems getting the thing to work with my machine. I'm currently using a 486/33 with 80Mb hard drive and DOS 6 with double space. Is there anything you can do to help me?"
J Marcus, Kent

PC PLAYER: Basically your problem running the game is caused by your system set-up. Like many games, A-Train refuses to work with virtually all of the disk compression utilities which are available on the market. Unfortunately, if you want to play the game on your machine you're going to have to lose double space.

●

"Gabriel Knight is currently driving me bonkers, for some reason it just doesn't want to work on my system. No matter what I do it just comes up with strange error messages or alternatively it just crashes.

I've tried using boot-disks, I've altered everything I can think of in my AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files but nothing will work. I'm currently using a 486 DX33 with 8Mb of RAM and a 240Mb hard drive. Is there something you can do to help me?"
N Gorton, Aberdeen

PC PLAYER: We actually encountered this problem ourselves when we received our review copy of the game a couple of months ago. From what we worked out it seems that there is an unusual system compatibility problem which totally screws things up with GK. If your BIOS isn't something that the game recognises, it will just refuse to work. Fortunately Sierra has now made a patch disk which can be obtained from the firm's customer support department. Call them on 0734 303171.

●

"I'm in the market for a sound card at the moment but I'm a bit confused about the differences between an 8-bit and 16-bit card. Will it be possible for me to hear all of the digitised sounds on the (decidedly cheaper) 8-bit cards or is some sound specifically 16-bit? I'm currently looking at loads of different add-ons and the choice seems to be rather odd. Surely most of them are the same thing but with a different name?"
G Hubbard, Northampton

PC PLAYER: Sound cards come under a number of categories but the most widely accepted is the Soundblaster compatible system. Every game supports this card and if it uses digital sound it'll work fine whether the card is 8 or 16-bit. What you will notice though is a decided change in quality of the sound. The 16-bit systems are very clear and high quality whilst its cheaper counterpart produces sounds which are very 'scratchy' and muffled. ■

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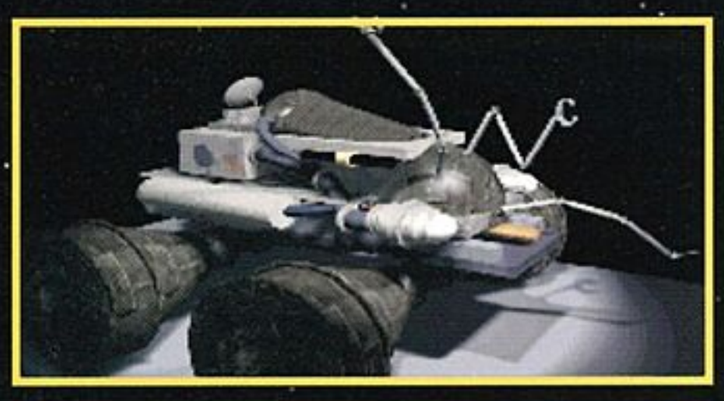

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