MAY 1995 NO.130

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The #1 Computer Game Magazine ZD

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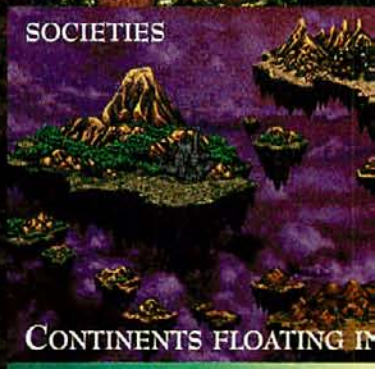
WORLDS OF ELVEN TREET

SOCIETIES



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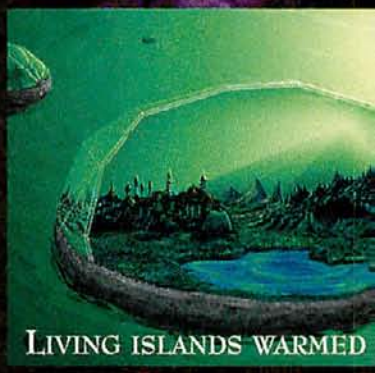

LIVING ISLANDS WARMED

SEASUN

ROCKY TUNNELS FILLED W

MOLTEN LAVA WHERE THE

DEAD SERVE THE LIVING

ONE WORLD TORN ASUND

SEALED FOREVER BY THE

DEATH GATE

- ☑ CD-ROM
- ☑ Super VGA
- ☑ Voice

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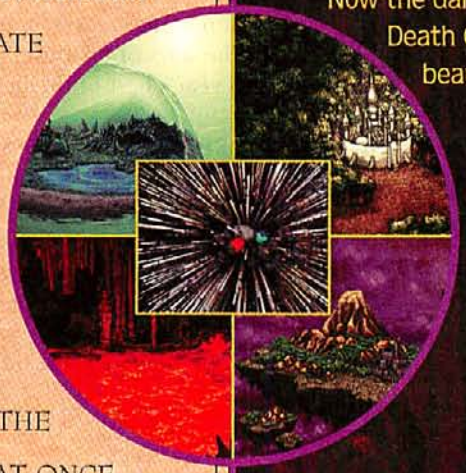

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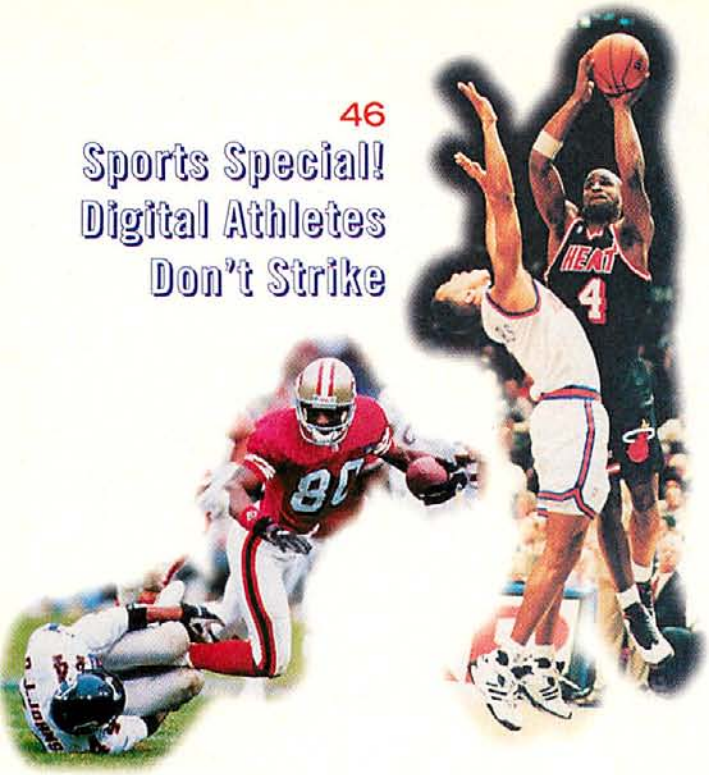
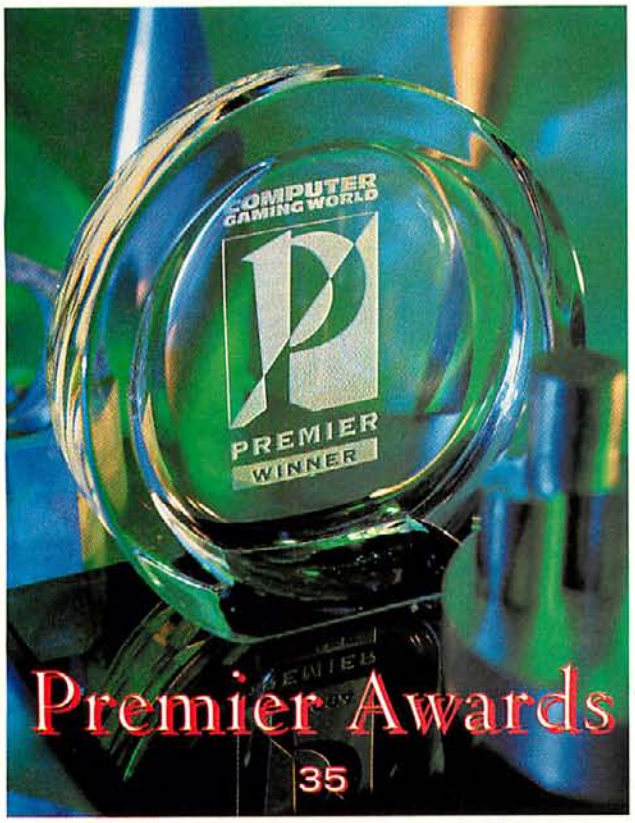

46
Sports Special!
Digital Athletes
Don't Strike

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

MAY 1995



FEATURES

30 SNEAK PREVIEW! CONFIRMED KILL *CGW* straps on the aviation gear and soars into **Domark** and **ICI**'s on-line combat zone. Ultra-realistic flight models, a huge assortment of WWII aircraft, and hundreds of human opponents could make this the dirtiest, deadliest dogfight in gaming.

35 THE CGW PREMIER AWARDS Every year, the *CGW* editors: strain our brains with the toughest puzzles; stress our joysticks in the most demanding simulations; get virtually damp from numerous dungeon romps; fulfill our favorite sports fantasies; get new calluses from frantic action games; and conquer worlds from ancient Greece to the stars of far-flung galaxies. Find out why selecting this year's best of the best was tougher than ever.

46 SPECIAL SPORTS SECTION In the wonderful world of computer sports simulations, your favorite teams never go on strike. George Jones takes it to the hoop with the latest basketball sims, Gordon Goble goes for the hat trick with hockey, Terry Coleman audibles through the zone of football games, and Jim Gindin bats cleanup with enough baseball programs to replay anyone's favorite season.

ADVENTURE/ ROLE-PLAYING

71 SCORPIA'S STING Our master spy goes undercover to discover the secrets of BUREAU 13, and also investigates the latest version of ULTIMA VIII: PAGAN.

76 SCORPION'S TALE The Mata Hari of adventure gaming shows you which drawer to ransack in **Take 2**'s BUREAU 13, while *CGW* disavows any knowledge of your actions.

80 HODJ 'N' PODJ Steve Meretzky's latest design is a potpourri of classic games. Charles Ardai tells us if Breakout, PacMan and Solitaire are any more interesting this time around.

ACTION

90 RENEGADE FASA's *Interceptor* board game comes to the computer space combat arena courtesy of **SSI**, but how does it translate into Galactic Standard?

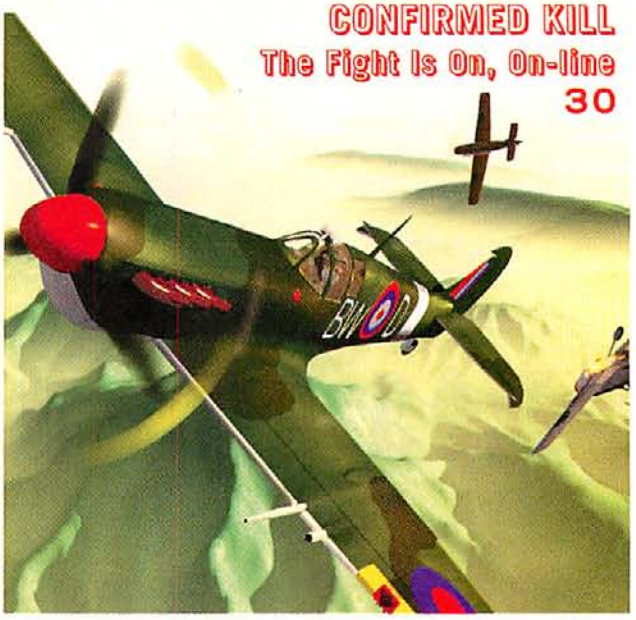
94 DARK FORCES Tremors of DOOM have been felt in the Force, and they seem to be coming from **LucasArts**' 3D shooter.

98 **RISE OF THE TRIAD** Terrorists are up to their tricks again in yet another 3-D shooter. Vox Day arms himself with a slew of unique weapons and blasts his way through **Apogee**'s blood-soaked corridors.

106 **MORTAL KOMBAT II** Having proven his knowledge of secret fighting techniques, George Jones takes on **Acclaim**'s latest attempt to capture the PC arcade market.

112 **MARATHON** Faithful Macintosh owners finally have their day in this hot, 3-D shooter. Christopher Breen pauses long enough between rocket salvos to report on **Bungie Software**'s success.

116 **ZORRO** Who is that masked man so gleefully cracking his whip at banditos, while avoiding sinister traps? None other than the swashbuckling Charles Ardai, fresh from climbing through the levels of this PRINCE OF PERSIA wannabe.



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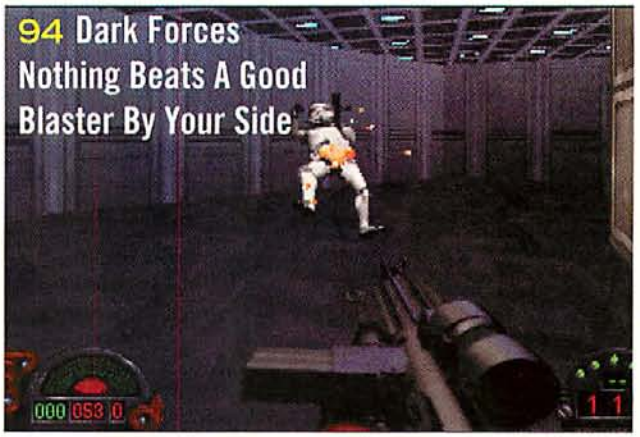
123 **BOGEY'S BAR & GRILL** Ever wonder how high-end flight simulators would prepare you for the real thing? Join Denny Atkin in the back seat of an F-15 and find out.

128 **STRATEGY! NASCAR RACING** Reflexes, steely nerves and experience are important, but the real secret to racing is a good pit crew. Roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty with Gordon Goble, as he explores the ins and outs of spark plugs and springs, adhesion and horsepower.



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146 **STALINGRAD** The climactic battle of the Eastern Front brings multiple scales to the WORLD AT WAR system. Field Marshal Tim Carter returns from the banks of the Volga with a full report.

154 **HIGH SEAS TRADER** Johnny Wilson sails choppy waters in **Impressions**' new game of trade, broadside battles and scalawags.

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6:02 AM –

7:03 AM – HAD TEQUILA

9:31 AM – PUNCHED

12:02 PM –

6:31 PM – KICKED THE

MIDNIGHT – TOOK A RIDE AND

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WITH CORN FLAKES.
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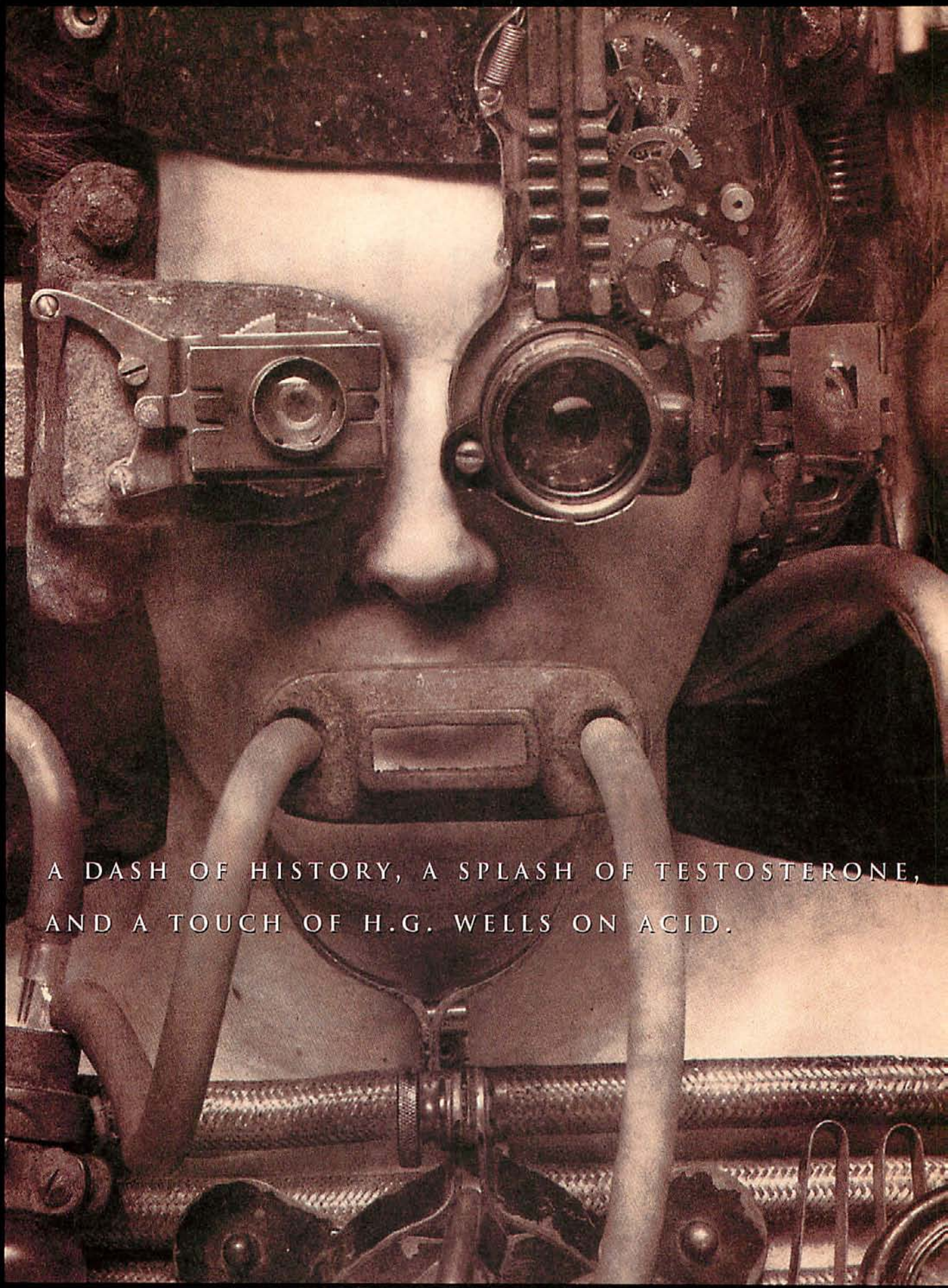
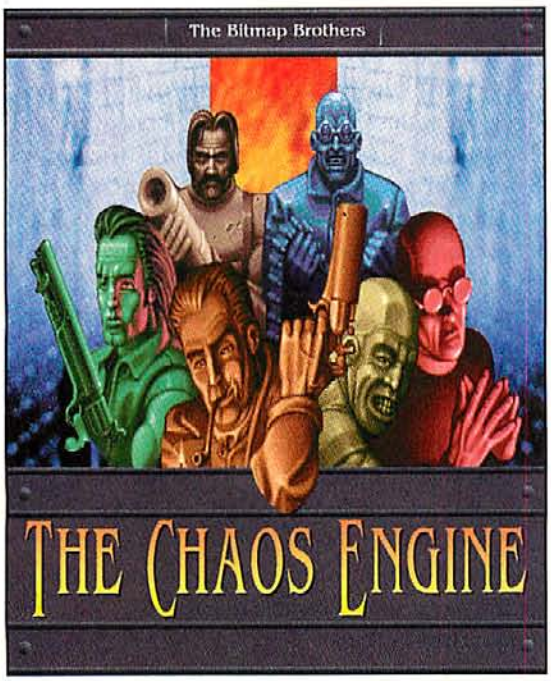

A DASH OF HISTORY, A SPLASH OF TESTOSTERONE,
AND A TOUCH OF H.G. WELLS ON ACID.

Meet the Chaos Engine—a side of merry olde England you'd rather not know. But forget about tea and crumpets and all that jolly rotten stuff. 'Cause this arcade-action style CD-ROM game transforms your PC into a gruesome battlefield of psychotic monsters and ruthless warriors. We're talking armor-plated, razor-toothed killing machines here.



So pick one of six mercenary buddies, stock up on twenty-five deadly weapons and explore four fiendish worlds with 16 levels. But keep an eye peeled for mincemeat-making traps, life-saving power-ups and assorted keys. It's Britain's award-winning designers, the Bitmap Brothers, at their bloody best. God save the Queen? God save your ass.

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Circle Reader Service #255

You Asked For It

When Software Publishers Get Their Wish, Do Gamers Get Theirs?

by Johnny L. Wilson

Boomers probably remember the old television show, *You Asked For It*. Viewers would write in requesting film footage of unusual sites to be seen, stunts to be performed, and celebrities to be interviewed. At the beginning of each segment, the host would give the name and address of the individual who requested such film footage (making the entire show almost one big Letters to the Editor column) and would recite the tag line, "You asked for it."

While attending this year's Spring Symposium of the Software Publishers Association, I kept expecting that aging television host to pop up and deliver his famous tag line. For as long as I've been observing the entertainment software industry, the holy grail has been to move computer games into the mass market. Now, according to the SPA's latest research, 33% of U.S. households own a personal computer. And these aren't just old Atari STs and Commodore 64s being used as doorstops and anchors, since the survey also indicates that 57% of computers purchased in 1994 had 486 chips and above. Further, they aren't just buying multimedia machines and sticking with the software bundled with the hardware packages. Of the new buyers, 56% of those who purchased machines with multimedia bundles had already purchased additional software titles. If these numbers are close to the truth, then software really has become a mass market item.

Of course, the mass market merchandisers know this as well. Personal computer software is currently being sold in Sears, Target, Walmart and discount warehouse stores. In addition, software is expected to reach bookstores in ever-increasing numbers as this year progresses. And, just in case you haven't noticed, Columbia House has started a CD-ROM club for entertainment software and multimedia. All of these are signs that software publishers have gotten their wish.

That's good news, isn't it? Our hobby has come of age and we're able to find and purchase software at a variety of venues. Higher volumes equal lower prices, so we should be able to get games at lower prices. Easier shopping and better prices! Isn't this great news?

Well, everything has its price, and we are just beginning to read the fine print on this price tag, the legal disclaimers that correspond to the asterisk. Sure, you can find MYST in your local Target, but will you be able to find PANZER GENERAL? Sears has set aside an average of 20-25 linear feet of shelf space per store for software; Target, 12-24 feet. This floor space is roughly able to handle a maximum of 100 titles. Yet, this is 100 titles out of all consumer categories: education, entertainment and productivity. One hundred titles is only about one-fifth of the number of games that we see in a given year. Naturally, this means that the mass marketers are only going to be stocking and selling only the hottest titles. Since, by some estimates, MYST outsold PANZER GENERAL by a 10 to 1 margin during 1994's fourth quarter, you could very well expect to find the former, but not the latter.

Obviously, what we're looking at is less variety on store shelves, and the possibility that the software industry will fall victim to a New York Times Bestseller List mentality (Then again, if it were *CGW*'s Bestseller List....). Seriously, though, there is a danger that software publishers will become so mass-market-oriented in their planning that they refuse to take chances on those little jewels of products that *CGW* editors and readers like so well, and there is a danger that gamers will become so complacent that they merely accept the selection on mass market shelves and quit prospecting for those hard-to-find jewels. On both fronts, publishers and gamers, there is a danger of having products that regress to the lowest common denominator, the computer game equivalent of broadcast television.

What, then, can be done to ensure that the mass marketing of software does not destroy the creativity and innovation that built it? First of all, publishers ought to explore new venues. Shareware and electronic distribution methods, software clubs, multimedia magazines, on-line services, and networked storefront entertainment venues are but a few approaches outside the traditional channel that can be used to experiment with innovative (read: "risky") games.

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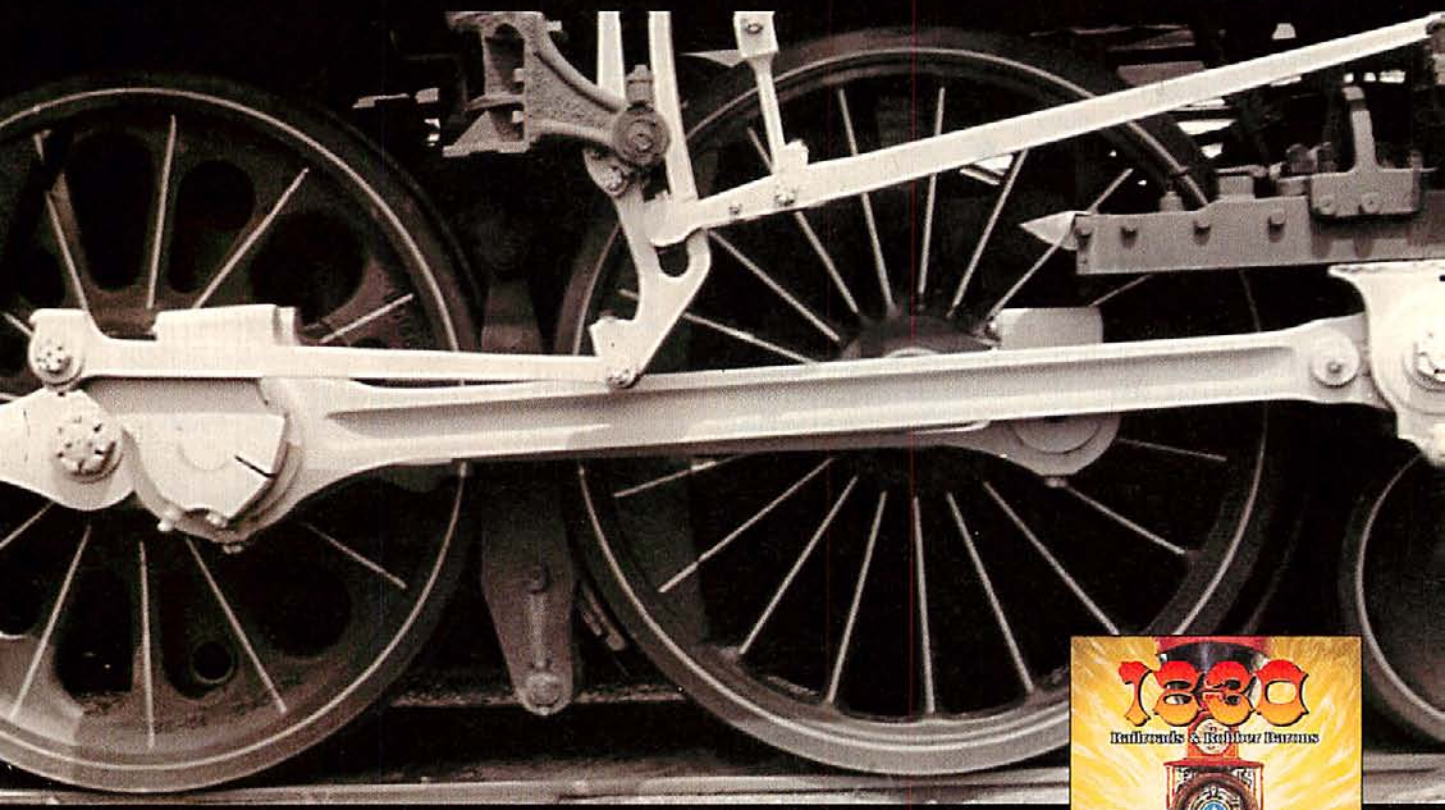
Actual screens may vary



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Second, gamers should use every method at their disposal to get information about new games and new game concepts. Getting familiar with the Internet and the World Wide Web can provide timely, useful and money-saving information about games, as well as point you to FTP sites where you can download demos and shareware free of charge. The SPA's most recent study shows that over 70% of computer owners have modems, but only 25% use them. According to a recent *CGW* survey, 81% of our readers have modems and 92% of those use them, but less than 10% have Internet access.

Further, gamers can help get computer games on retail shelves by special ordering. Sears has a program they call the Retail Special Order System, or RSOS. It is essentially a catalog in the software area that allows you to order software titles for next day delivery that are not already on the shelves. Future orders for shelf-stocking will be made with reference to the number of RSOS orders, so this can be a way of proving the viability of certain computer games to the retail buyers.

Finally, publishers should think more about developing on-line games, and gamers should think more about participating in on-line games. Sure the money meter is always running on these games, but then again, you don't have to buy an entire game before you play it. You can quit when it's no longer fun or within your budget. With wider and wider Internet access, we hope to see more and more on-line and play-by-e-mail games to expand gaming's horizons beyond the retail channel of distribution.

Yes, the entertainment software industry has found its holy grail. Let's just hope it's not an ordinary coffee mug sitting with the other Blue Light Specials.

HOW DO WE RATE?

The Guide To CGW's Review Rating System

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

★★★★½ Very Good: A quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems, but is still worth your time and money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter/genre.

★★★½ Average: A mixed bag. Can often be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in significant areas. Can also just be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.

★★½ Weak: A game with serious problems. May be buggy, may not have much play value, may be ill-conceived—and you may want to think twice about buying it.

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

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The #1 Computer Game Magazine

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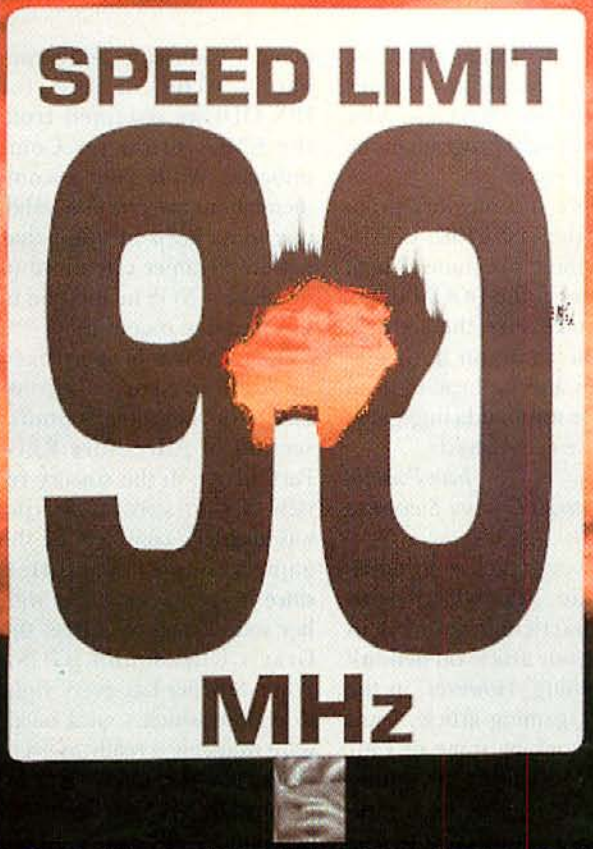

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if you want to go all out for games, the Falcon is he best bet for your money."
Paul C. Schuytema, Computer Gaming World

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96% Overall Score "
- Ted Chapman, Computer Game Review

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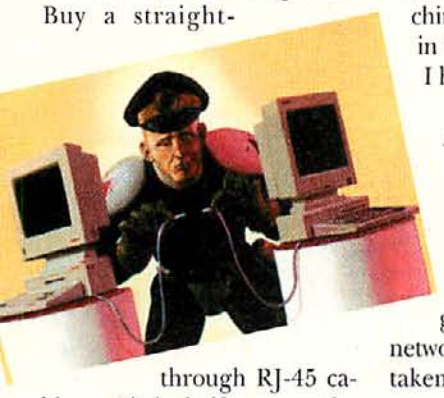
Interface

LETTERS FROM CGW READERS

NETWORK NOOSE

Your article describing a home network for playing network games was too complicated. Here is a description of an RJ-45 jack network for two PCs to play DOOM.

Physical: You need two network cards with RJ-45 jacks and the installation software. I installed the I/O address at 340-35FH and the IRQ at 15. Buy a straight-



through RJ-45 cable, cut it in half, expose the wires and strip off a one inch section of the orange and green wires. Twist the dark orange wire from one PC with the dark green wire from the other. Twist the light orange with the light green. You should have four wires from one LAN card to four wires from the other. Then, cover the exposed wires with electricians' tape. Ignore the other wires. If your LAN card has a LAN check, it should now work. Note: This method limits you to a two PC network only.

Mental: There are three programs needed to run the network.

1. LSL.COM

2. The driver program for your LAN card. Mine is HP3AT16P.COM. This should be supplied with your LAN card software.

3. IPXODI.COM

I obtained the LSL and IPXODI programs from the America On-Line Games area's DOOM directory under a network help program in the miscellaneous.

If there is a memory problem in the first 640K, LOADHIGH these programs. Then, run setup in the DOOM directory, make sure the settings are the same on both machines and go head-to-head in the most addicting game I have ever played.

John Pombrio
America On-Line Subscriber

I very much enjoyed issue 127 overall with particular interest in your article on network gaming. However, in the network gaming article, I was taken aback by some of your recommendations for setting up a system for network gaming. Of particular note was your recommendation to purchase a full-fledged network operating system (NOS), such as Personal Netware or WFW 3.11. While this is definitely a good idea for resource and printer sharing between two computers, it is by no means a necessity for setting up a few machines to play DOOM (or any other network-ready game, for that matter). All that is really needed is two or more NE2000-compatible ethernet cards (preferably with BNC connectors to keep the cost down), cabling, T-connectors, terminators, and driver software. My friends and I have been playing DOOM for over a year with said hardware and have not had to purchase a NOS. Specifically, we each purchased SMC Ether Card Elite Ultra Combo cards, a couple lengths of coaxial cabling, T-connectors and terminators. The drivers for IPX/ODI we obtained from the SMC forum on CompuServe. While your recommendations are certainly valid, one must keep in mind that not every gamer can afford to purchase a NOS in addition to the hardware required.

Also, I was a bit perplexed by some of Scorpia's comments in the Scorp's Shorts section of Adventure/RPG. Particularly, in the cursory review of NOCTROPOLIS, Scorpia was unable to comment on the game's sound capabilities, since it was incompatible with her sound card of choice, the Gravis UltraSound (GUS). While Scorpia has every right to choose which sound hardware to use, it is really in every reader's best interest that the games she reviews be tested on sound cards that have broader support. As a former owner of the GUS, I know that the card receives very little industry support in lieu of support for the de facto standard, Sound Blaster. In fact, the GUS is probably the most poorly supported sound card because of its reliance on software, rather than hardware, emulation of the Sound Blaster standard. It is this fact that caused me to trash my GUS for a more widely supported sound card, a PAS16. Perhaps in the future, Scorpia can test her games on both the GUS and a SB-compatible card on different machines.

Chris Haswell
Austin, TX

Thanks, Chris and John for your words of wisdom to the budget-minded net gamer. As for Scorpia, we should point out that she is an out-of-house freelancer who only has access to her own machine and peripherals. She doesn't come in and use the CGW Labs equipment. For individual columnists and reviewers, mixing and matching equipment can be a logistical nightmare. We simply wouldn't force that on any of our freelancers, especially one that is liable to send Fred, her "friendly" grue, after us.

STAR SNORES

My computer gaming friend and I were watching STAR WARS the other night when he asked me, "Hey, is that the same guy who starred in WING COMMANDER III?"

Noah Oskwarek
Kent, CT

Yes, yes it was. After his stellar performance in the Origin game, Hamill was recruited by George Lucas for the Star Wars films. Of course, there was a hairy little bit of time travel involved, but Lucas spares no expense.

DOOMED TO APPROBATION

Great magazine! I really liked the COMMAND & CONQUER preview. Only one problem, I was looking through your Hall of Fame and...WHERE'S DOOM?! With its formerly unprecedented leap in first-person perspective, the ability to compete against other players in team or head-to-head play,

"One Must Fall 2097 is the best fighting game available for the PC, bar none"

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the use of light diminishing, plus the way sound from one part of a level echoes down passages, how [could it not be in there]?

Also, MECHWARRIOR II, every time I hear that title, my stomach does sort of a flip-flop and my palm invariably slams into my forehead. "Postponed for around a year now!" I groan as my friends and I talk of a game we had such hopes for. At least, there is still a glimmer of light at the end of this almost endless tunnel.

David Prestin
Jackson, MI

The Hall of Fame issue is simple. Games have to prove themselves over a period of more than two years before they are eligible for induction into the CGW Hall of Fame. Just as professional athletes have to be retired for a certain amount of time before they are eligible for their respective halls of fame, the computer games inducted into our hallowed halls have to prove their timeless value. Since WOLFENSTEIN-3D was just inducted, however, one would expect that DOOM would not be far behind. As for MECHWARRIOR II, we'd like to see it too.

NECESSARY GRUFFNESS

Kudos to your reviewers for their scathing honesty about HELL & UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS. I will save a wad by not buying those games. Some people think you blokes are too rough, but I don't think that's even possible. Mr. Ardai's "Emperor's New Clothes" analogy was right on target. Most computer games still suck inexcusably, so keep kicking butt and taking names—and saving my money!

Jack Wuder
Eugene, OR

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

It was both fun and gratifying to read your February '95 column, *Hex, Bugs and Rock & Roll* ["The Dream Job"]. A little over a year ago, I would have been digesting your column like most of your readers, hoping to glean some insight into Silicon Tinseltown. As you had mentioned in your column, while I had much experience as a programmer, my computer gaming INDUSTRY experience was nil. Now, I find myself to be a quickly-hardened and battle-wary "rookie" of the trade. So far, the ride has definitely been worth it (even though it could be compared to the ride taken by Keanu Reeves in this past summer's film, *Speed*)—it's amazing how much the human mind can pick up and improvise when thrown over the proverbial cliff without a bungee cord. Seriously, though, even though the hours this past year have been excruciating and the work endless, I would still recommend this job to anyone who shares the passion that I, you, and the majority of your hardcore *CGW* readers obviously have for this rapidly evolving pastime.

I would like to emphasize a point that seemed to permeate the entire article, however. The ability to solve problems (and do it quickly) is a necessary skill in this field. Your ability to do this inevitably increases as your game programming "tool chest" grows, and the only way this happens is through continual experimentation and problem-solving. While I did receive a B.S. in Computer Science, I have found that my B.S. in Mathematics has proven to be more valuable in the long run. When I entered college, my goal was to study Computer Science, with Mathematics being a painful, but necessary, additional field of study. Over time, however, I have found that to master the field of Mathematics (and God knows I haven't) really indicates a mastery of problem-solving and conceptual thinking. Computer Science techniques, as Nicholas Fullager commented in your article, come and go with time and get replaced with "New and Improved." The conceptualizing skills that the study of Mathematics teaches, however, never die off.

As an adjunct to this, I'd also like to reiterate the importance of continual learning. If it can't be done through actual coding or experimentation, it should at least be done through the enormous amount of literature out there (especially the recent amount of material on game programming). The listing you supplied of pertinent game-related programming resources was a good one—most of those listed are recent releases—and even just a year ago, I would have benefited greatly from having had them as additional resources for game programming.

Glenn Doren
Programmer, D.C. True, Ltd.

Sorry we couldn't print all of your kudos, Glenn. We wouldn't want Paul Schuytema, our Hex, Bugs, Rock & Roll columnist, to renegotiate his contract, now, would we?

ALERT THE MEDIA!

Can this magazine get any better?! I don't think so. Your magazine is better than *Time* and *Newsweek* combined!!

Joe Daly
Westerville, OH

We think so, too. The news magazines never have enough screenshots, and they don't have Scorpia. Seriously, we are always trying to make the magazine better. Keep your eye on us during the next few months—we've got graphic improvements, column additions and more coming your way.

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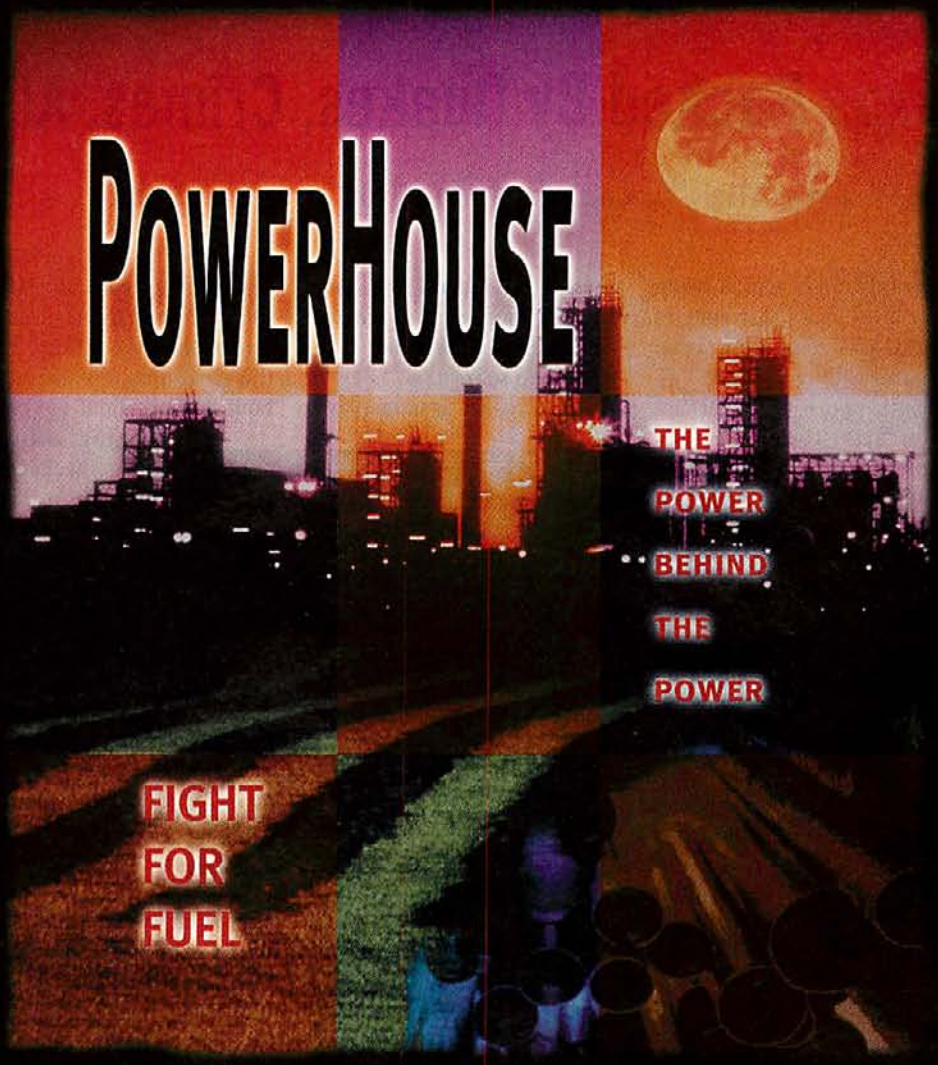

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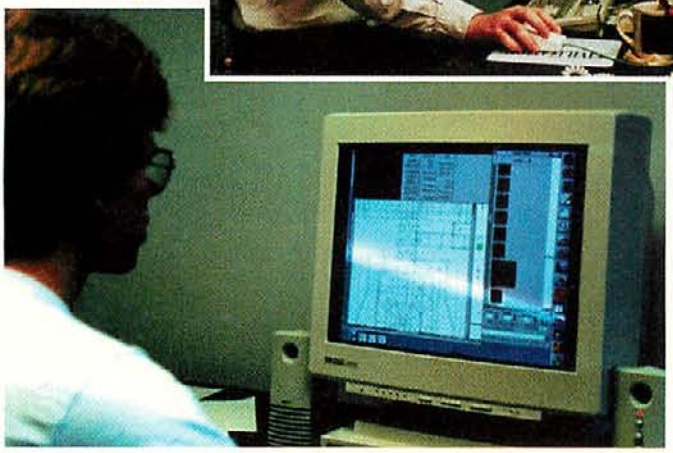
Texas Rocked By Quakes, Crimes, Alien Designs

CGW Visits The "Disaster Areas" Of Origin, SimTex And Id

Recently, *CGW* took a swing through the Lone Star State to see what was going on in what some are calling "Silicon Valley South."

The first stop on our sojourn was **id Software**'s Mesquite, TX office. Id has been keeping a tight lid on their recent doings, but Jay Wilbur, id's biz-man, was kind enough to allow us to take a peek at their next project, the super-anticipated QUAKE.



DESIGNING HUMANS ***CGW*** **caught Steve Barcia of SimTex (top) in the act of designing his next space conquest game in the tradition of MASTER OF ORION; while John Carmack of id Software was engrossed in designing the level editor of QUAKE, id's "next-generation" first-person shooter. "It'll be done when it's done," says id's "biz-guy" Jay Wilbur.**

First off, QUAKE, id's next-generation 3-D action game, will be done when it's done—id isn't talking release dates yet. They just want to create a killer game, and if that takes time, then so be it.

QUAKE, as far as gameplay is concerned, will be to DOOM what DOOM was to WOLFENSTEIN 3-D. QUAKE's world will be true 3-D, with polygon and texture-mapped critters and real-world physics. But QUAKE will really set the standard in multi-player options. From the ground up, QUAKE is being built around client-server networking, allowing up to 100 players to exist in a single game world, although not all on one game level.

The registered CD-ROM version of QUAKE will contain not only the game, but also client-server software which will allow users to set up their own multi-line server, a level editor to design their own QUAKE levels, and the ability to edit id's own proprietary AI scripting language. In essence, id will be giving players the tools to create their own 3-D worlds.

Next stop was Austin and **Origin Systems.** In the distant future (Christmas '95), Origin is gearing up for work on WING COMMANDER IV, PRIVATEER II and ULTIMA IX. Two titles in the later stages of development caught our eye: CYBERMAGE and CRUSADER.

CYBERMAGE is the child of veteran story-teller David Bradley (formerly of **Sir Tech**'s WIZARDRY series). The game is a first-person adventure in a comic book world of incredible detail. As the hero, you are given the gift of "dark-light" powers, a pseudo-force which mists up from the soul of someone as they die.

What sets this game apart from other first person adventures (such as Origin's own SYSTEM SHOCK) is that David Bradley knows PC storytelling,

FORGE ON! Origin's BIOFORGE design team celebrates "ship day" with a few cold ones, amidst hundreds of beta CDs, each a unique version of the game.

and this story is going to be a whopper, full of mystery, intrigue and danger. The 3-D city that you must explore is simply amazing. You can walk through the streets or fly via police hovercar, just like Harrison Ford in *Bladerunner*.

CRUSADER will employ a heavily modified SVGA version of the ULTIMA VIII engine, and the gameplay will be mission-based. The mis-

CYBERMAGE Origin's next release combines a *Bladerunner*-style adventure with blistering 3-D action.

sion goals are reminiscent of **Bullfrog**'s SYNDICATE, but in this one, you are a lone operator. This game features detailed environments like we've never seen before (finally, someone appears to have figured out how to make SVGA graphics look "gritty"), and live video clips of character interaction.

Just down the street from Origin is Steve Barcia's **Simtex**. Occupying an office suite above a Greek gyro joint, and welcoming guests with only a pinned-up piece of paper proclaiming "no soliciting," the folks at Simtex are quietly creating some of the best games around.

We saw the completed 1830 railroad empire game that SimTex designed for **Avalon Hill**, and a nearly completed MECHLORDS that they are wrapping up for **New World Computing**. CGW also caught a glimpse of two projects "in the works," and still without publishers: a space strategy game and a fantasy role-playing game.

From their previous successes in MASTER OF ORION and MASTERS OF MAGIC, and after speaking with Barcia about the Simtex design philosophy, we will keep an eye on these folks—they have yet to disappoint.

— Paul Schuytema

PLAYING LATELY?

Here are the games that your fellow players are blowing the most time with. Let us know which game you've been playing the most by writing the name of your current addiction in the "Playing Lately?" blank of the *CGW* Top 100 ballot (page 160).

Readers' TOP 10

Results for *CGW* #130, MAY 1995

1. **Wing Commander 3** (Origin)
2. **Panzer General** (SSI)
3. **Heretic** (Raven Software)
4. **Master of Magic** (MicroProse)
5. **X-COM: UFO Defense** (MicroProse)
6. **Warcraft: Orcs and Humans** (Blizzard)
7. **Magic Carpet** (Electronic Arts)
8. **Doom II** (id Software)
9. **Front Page Sports Football Pro '95** (Sierra)
10. **Transport Tycoon** (MicroProse)

Notable Quotes

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

"PANZER GENERAL was the best thing I got for Valentine's Day. Well, almost..."
John M. Urevich, Flanders, NY

"Between WARCRAFT, WC3, NASCAR and MAGIC CARPET, I've barely got time to eat! Too many good games, too little time."
B.R.E., Gary IN

"TRANSPORT TYCOON is the most addictive game I have ever played! I have not slept since I purchased this game...and I have played it non-stop (except to go to work)."
Howard Bohannon, Jacksonville, AR

WING COMMANDER III was a *blast;* it had to be to make up for the *annoying* load times. And I picked Flint."
Phil Latreille, St. Louis, MO

"The competition might as well forget about it. Dynamix and the Front Page Football line have cornered the football market."
Robert Perez, Bronk, NY

"HERETIC is my id fodder until QUAKE is released. It is an incredible, beautiful, frightening game!"
David Laprad, Smithville, TN

MicroProse Wise Men Discover The Secret Of Multi-Player Games!

The epic blockbuster of global strategy and conquest, SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION, was originally released four years ago, and since that time its popularity has grown unabated. There has been only one real complaint about this classic game—no multi-player options!

Finally, after several years of waiting, CIVILIZATION players will have their multi-player wish. 2-PLAYER CIVILIZATION, the new two-player game, sports high-res graphics, runs under Windows, and lets gamers indulge their territorial and technological aspirations via modem.

Fun as it might be to square off against another human, 2-PLAYER CIV is not the full-blown multi-player CIVILIZATION the game's vocal fans have been clamoring for. So, MicroProse will be publishing a separate network version, titled SID MEIER'S CIVNET, to be released near the end of May. Up to seven humans may conquer, research and explore newly-generated CIVILIZATION worlds over a network, sending challenges to rivals with the chat feature. "Quick and dirty" scenarios are planned, and saved games allowing e-mail play are supposed to support matches between Mac and Windows computers. Time limits can be set for each turn, and if you finish before your opponents, you can spend the extra time building the next Wonder of the World. The attractive graphics are available in resolutions up to 1280x1024.

So start stocking the granaries and collecting those taxes, because the ultimate race for space is upon you again—and this time that buffoon at your border might not be bluffing!

For more information, contact MicroProse at (800) 879-PLAY.

CIVILIZED COMBAT New two-player Civ supports 1280 x 1024 resolution. World conquest never looked so good.

The 64 Gigabyte QUESTION?

Welcome to the monthly column where CGW asks game designers to dream, and dream big. This month, we continue asking, "What kind of game would you create if there were no hardware or financial constraints on your creativity?" The dreamer this month: Chris Roberts, designer and producer of the WING COMMANDER series. Chris?

"What would I do if there were literally no limitations? If money and technology were no object, I'd make a game like, oh, WING COMMANDER III!

"Seriously, I'm pretty fortunate right now in having access to enough resources to pursue many of my dream projects. But what I'd really like to do is a game where you could travel from planet to planet—and there would be hundreds of planets—with full 3D action. You could go down and explore each planet in detail and interact with all sorts of live-action characters. Plus you could retool your ship with lots of different guns and engines.

"The project would feature all the best elements of adventure and virtual reality, but with the same high production level of a Hollywood blockbuster. That means big-name stars and the look and quality of, say, *Bladerunner*. I guess my goal is to bring the superior production values of large Hollywood movies into the interactive realm—creating an environment that was really cool and really fun and where you could spend hundreds of hours exploring a virtual universe that seems totally lifelike down to the smallest detail. Sort of a SimUniverse on steroids!"

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BETA bits

TERMINAL VELOCITY

TERMINAL VELOCITY is bound to set off sweet bells of recognition in your head. It's DESCENT without frontiers; MAGIC CARPET without the strategy and the morphing environment; SKYFOX for the Pentium. Yeah, that last one will do nicely. This debut release for **Apogee**'s "3D Realms" label—for 486/33 and faster machines—is essentially a three-dimensional arcade game.

STRIVE TO STRAFE TERMINAL VELOCITY puts you in the cockpit of a mighty fine vehicle fully equipped with lasers, bombs, and dual passenger airbags.

The Earth is in jeopardy (when was the Earth not in jeopardy?) and, in its defense, you're flying over seamlessly texture-mapped terrain, blowing up everything in sight. Said things come apart like shotgunned skeet more often than not, but sometimes explode into flames (which is much more satisfying). In the remains of these installations, you can collect power-ups that restore your battered shields and enhance your weapons—laser, plasma, guided missiles, et cetera. And then, after a STRIKE COMMANDER-like view of the chaos you've wrought, it's on to the next waypoint, guided by an onscreen arrow and a map overlay.

The charm of this game is its very open-endedness. Its three extensive, multi-stage levels—dusky hills, misty canyon and metallic, towered surface—can be explored and destroyed at will. Moreover, each is peppered with tunnels, which are just hard enough to find to make them a reward for good work on the surface, and just enough of a squeeze to keep you on your toes once inside them. Within, you might happen onto an especially desirable power-up, an unexpected "boss" or, just possibly, a hangar with drawings of aliens on the walls and a squadron to lay waste to. And what you find makes you wonder about what you didn't.

The game, the first by Dallas-based **Terminal Reality Inc.**, is slated for release in May, but was still evolving at press time. The player's ship looked more like a mall-rat's earring than a bringer of death and destruction, and the levels lacked the final, poignant brush stroke that transforms a playfield into an environment (there ought to be more to do than simply blow stuff up. Here's a vote for multi-player play). But that's a matter of refinement rather than re-invention and, having come this far already, look for the designers to go the distance. And for TERMINAL VELOCITY to be a blast.

TOTAL DISTORTION

Take that driving Van Halen riff and combine it with those video clips of a demon-headed snake poking through some explosions. Or how about grabbing that rolling Chili Peppers bass line and using some background psychedelic visuals to create some acid-funk rock? What do you mean the audiences back home don't dig this stuff? It's art, man, from, like, another dimension.

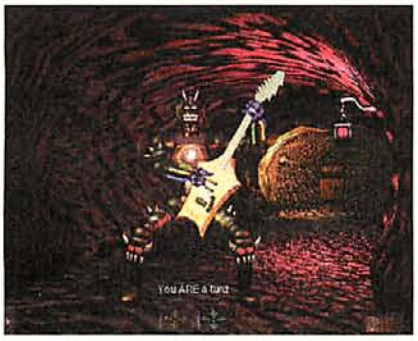
Art or not, the music videos you create in **Pop Rocket's** upcoming TOTAL DISTORTION had better make some money. After all, you didn't blow all that cash traveling to another dimension just to take some nice pictures, did you?

Trying to describe this genre-busting Macintosh game is not easy—it's a mix between early music videos, MTV's *Buzz Clips*, and *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*. Oh, and it's a game loaded with potential too.

In a nutshell, you've decided to revitalize Earth's decidedly mundane entertainment industry by jumping not to another planet, but to another dimension entirely. Integral to the game is your spaceship and the sophisticated video mixing equipment on board. Although ultimately you'll make your fortune using your own video footage and samples in this new dimension, a massive library of audio and video clips is initially at your fingertips. Assembling videos is an easy thing: pick three different layers of scenery for each "sequence" and then pick some music and sound effects to go with it. Of course, no matter what you think of your own work, it still has to float with the video producers back home. After uploading a video to Stevie Groovie, for example, she rejected it, saying it was too short. So we lengthened it—then she complained that there weren't enough people in it. "Sorry," she coldly remarked.

Creating and marketing videos seems to be a game unto itself, but the designers aren't stopping there. They're trying to work an entire strange-world adventure into the game, one where you explore a whole new dimension and fight guitar chord battles with demons. Of course,

eventually, it all comes back to the music videos, which might prove tiresome if you haven't the yen for such things. On the other hand, if you're from the "raised on video" generation, TOTAL DISTORTION might serve as an interesting creative outlet, and a trans-dimensional adventure game to boot.



SURE PLAYS A MEAN GUITAR Playing TOTAL DISTORTION is just like being a video producer for MTV, except instead of fighting corporate power, you'll battle demon guitar warriors.

ABSOLUTE ZERO

Most space combat sims reach for the Grand Scope, spanning the galaxies of space and involving hundreds of worlds. But **Domark Software** has more modest ambitions, at least in terms of scope, in their upcoming ABSOLUTE ZERO, a space combat simulation set entirely on Jupiter's little lunar companion, Europa.

Europa was a peaceful human mining colony whose inhabitants bore into the hard, icy surface in search of vital resources. But the miners' happy "Hi ho, hi hos" turned to "Uh ohs" when an alien menace, hidden under Europa's ice for god-knows-how-many eons, was awakened, and loosed its vengeance on the unsuspecting, unarmed human colony.

As the game opens, the player's character arrives on the scene to help organize a resistance against the continuing alien onslaught. As the human colonists covert their mining machinery into jerry-built tools of war over the course of the game, you'll see the story progress through the eyes of a dozen different characters, and you'll fight in many different vehicles, from a standard space fighter, to a tank, to cargo carrying craft.

Domark's Flight Sim Toolkit engine has been evolving and improving over the last few years, and in ABSOLUTE ZERO, we get to see the latest results of their work. While on the whole, the Super VGA, 3-D environment has the slightly sterile look of the FST engine, a closer look will reveal a world of wonderful detail. Domark has created hundreds of intricately designed objects—mining stations, earth-moving equipment, and combat craft—many of which are animated, giving the impression of an alive and active world.

The few battle scenarios we were able to preview seem tightly scripted and involved. Fortunately, Domark has incorporated detailed briefings into the game's slick main interface, giving players explicit instructions for the successful completion of the scenarios.

If the quality of the scenarios holds up across the entire game, ABSOLUTE ZERO should be a modestly successful addition to the space combat genre.

MINER 2049'ER Better put some thermals under your britches before you help save a mining colony from a zero-degree enemy in ABSOLUTE ZERO.

PIPELINE

ESTIMATED RELEASE DATES BASED ON THE LATEST INFORMATION FROM GAME DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME, COMPANY	RELEASE DATE
ABSOLUTE ZERO Domark	5/95
ACES OF THE DEEP 2 Sierra	11/95
AIRSHIP Mindscape	6/95
ALL-AMERICAN COLLEGE FOOTBALL Micro Sports	5/95
APACHE-GUNSHIP Interactive Magic	5/95
AWFUL GREEN THINGS QQP	7/95
BATTLES IN TIME QQP	7/95
CELTIC TALES Koei	5/95
CHESSMASTER 5000 Mindscape	9/95
COMMAND & CONQUER Virgin	5/95
CRUSADER: NO REMORSE Origin	5/95
DAGGERFALL Bethesda	6/95
DUKE NUKE 'EM 3D Apogee	6/95
EARTHSIEGE 2 Sierra	11/95
EMPIRE II New World	9/95
EXPLORATION Interactive Magic	6/95
FRANKENSTEIN Interplay	Q2/95
GABRIEL KNIGHT 2 Sierra	10/95
G-NOME Merit	5/95
HARVESTER Merit	5/95
HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC New World	8/95
JETFIGHTER III Mission Studios	6/95
LANDS OF LORE 2 Virgin	Q3/95
LAST BOUNTY HUNTER American Laser Games	6/95
LOST ADMIRAL 2 QQP	5/95
LOST IN TOWN Sierra	5/95
MAGIC THE GATHERING MicroProse	Q2/95
MARCO POLO I-Motion	Q2/95
METAL LORDS New World	9/95
MILLENNIA GameTek	8/95
NETWORK CIVILIZATION MicroProse	5/95
NBA LIVE EA	5/95
NEW HORIZONS Koei	6/95
PHANTASMAGORIA Sierra	6/95
POLICE QUEST: SWAT Sierra	9/95
PRO LEAGUE BASEBALL '95 MicroSports	5/95
SILENT HUNTER SSI	7/95
TEKWAR Capstone	9/95
THIRD REICH Avalon Hill	6/95
THUNDERSCAPE SSI	5/95
TOP GUN Spectrum HoloByte	7/95
WETLANDS New World	9/95
WORLD SOCCER Empire	5/95

Microsoft Game Development Tools Promise To Simplify Windows Gaming

Microsoft will soon release a suite of software development tools that has the potential to simplify computer gaming under Windows 95. The new tools make it possible for game developers to convert existing DOS titles to Windows 95, make the installation and loading of Windows 95 games virtually automatic, and aid in creating new Windows 95 games. Microsoft plans to announce the new suite of development tools at the Computer Game Developers Conference in Santa Clara, CA, in May.

The Windows 95 Games SDK (software development kit) from Microsoft gives developers a complete suite of tools for creating Windows 95 games. Using a feature Microsoft has dubbed "Autoplay," games will load automatically when a game disc is inserted into a CD-ROM drive. The Games SDK also has functions for an install routine that promises to greatly simplify game installation—whether a Windows 95 game or an Autoplay-enabled DOS CD game.

The Games SDK will also help developers port earlier DOS games to the Windows 95 format. Origin, Mindscape, Accolade and other gaming companies have projects in the works using the Microsoft development tools. Although Windows 3.1 games typically have slower frame rates than their DOS versions, a component of the Games SDK known as DIRECT DRAW will let 2D Windows 95 games take advantage of current Windows graphic accelerators. This translates into significantly faster 2D frame rates for fast-paced games.

The new games kit promises advances in the handling of 3D graphics, as well. Microsoft, following its purchase of Rendermorphics, will be marketing Rendermorphics' 3D libraries to game developers. The REALITY LAB software package will facilitate 3D game development for start-up companies, many of whom don't have the resources to make their own 3D games from scratch. For the few companies that do have their own 3D libraries, the Games SDK will have provisions for allowing developers to port the 3D portions of their game to WINDOWS 95.

If Microsoft's promises become reality, the Games SDK may make both gamers' and developers' lives easier. Games will be much easier to load and play, and hardware installation and configuration will be much less painful.

AFFAIRS IN THE CYBURBS

Cyberpunk Author William Gibson To Discuss Johnny Mnemonic On-Line

Award-winning author William Gibson makes a rare on-line appearance in May to discuss his circuit-headed brainchild, Johnny Mnemonic, short story character *cum* full-motion video action/adventure game. The "Father of Cyberpunk" and author of *Neuromancer* will take questions and dispense digital divination live on CompuServe/ZiffNet May 18th. Any CompuServe member can join the discussion without signing up on ZiffNet.

JOHNNY MNEMONIC, produced by Sony Imagesoft, is an entirely interactive, full-screen, full-motion video game on two CD-ROMs (see cover story, *CGW* #127). There will also also be a feature-length film of the same name coming soon from Tristar Pictures, but the two were filmed separately.

Special "Johnny Mnemonic" events are planned for May 15-20 on ZiffNet. CompuServe members can explore ZiffNet during that week for just the connect-time charges. Jack in, won't you?

Jury Of Their Peers

Software Publishers Select The Best Games Of '94

The annual Codie Awards ceremony of the Software Publishers Association looked amazingly like an Academy Awards presentation, but few of the "celebrity" presenters and recipients are widely known outside the software industry itself. To computer gamers, the game awards may provide an interesting counterpoint to our own Premier Awards in this issue.

Best Action/Arcade Program: DOOM II was the easy winner in this category with kudos going to both distribution partner **GT Interactive Software** and developer **id Software.**

Best Fantasy Role-Playing/Adventure Program: UNDER A KILLING MOON from **Access Software** captured the industry's imagination with its digitized video of known performers.

Best Simulation Program: Maxis has owned this category with their innovative "systems simulations" for many years, so it is not surprising that SIMTOWER was this year's winner.

Best Sports Program: Papyrus Design Group was the clear winner in this category with NASCAR RACING, the excellent sequel to INDYCAR RACING.

Best Strategy Game: 7th Level, Inc.'s MONTY PYTHON'S COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME captured the hearts of the Boomer execs in the software industry with its strange and well-named approach to game design.

Congratulations to all of the winners. Now see page 35 for *CGW*'s take on the best games of the year.

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*Some restrictions apply. Must be over 18 years of age to subscribe. For games to be free of charge for up to 17 hours, user must observe the following: play in non-prime time (between 6PM and 8AM EST); access speed must be set at a maximum of 2400 baud; user must dial into a local access node; remain solely in gaming area. Otherwise, normal GEnie usage fees may be incurred during the 17 hour complimentary period. This offer is in lieu of all other offers, and is for new subscribers only. Additional long-distance phone charges may apply. Available in US and Canada only. Offer expires 12/31/95.

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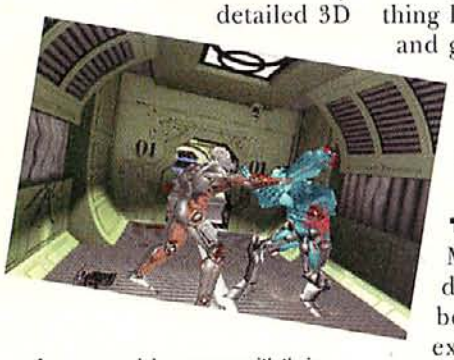
Circle Reader Service #29

NOW

BIOFORGE

Part man, part cyborg, totally confused. That's probably the easiest way to describe the character in BIOFORGE, **Origin**'s much-anticipated "interactive movie." The story many of you already know. Your hero wakes up with that not-so-fresh feeling you get when you've been genetically and physically altered into a biomechanically enhanced "thing." From this point, the game becomes very similar to I Motion's ALONE IN THE DARK titles. You use the keyboard to move around the beautifully detailed 3D environments and to fight when you have to. One immediate problem you'll face is that the manual is wrong about several keys' functions. It took us a few minutes before we realized that the space bar "uses" an item and the return key picks things up. Gamers looking for simple action might want to think twice—BIOFORGE matches immersive action with some fairly intricate problem solving. As for the character animations, about which a great deal was made, everyone and everything looks lifelike, realistic, and great. IBM CD-ROM, $54.95. Circle Reader Service #1.

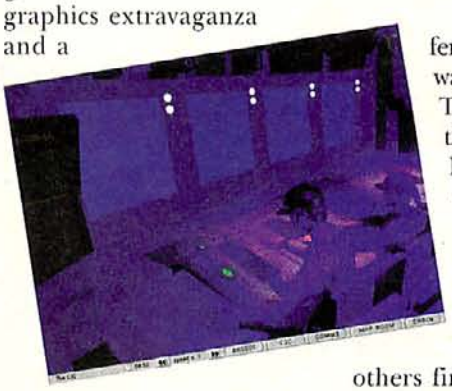
ORIGIN, AUSTIN, TEXAS, (512) 335-5200



Anyone can club an enemy with their own mutilated arm, but can you outthink an entire complex of evil in BIOFORGE?

TICONDEROGA

Make a base from standard NATO ship symbols; throw in an extensive array of weapons, tense scenarios, and beautiful 3D-rendered backgrounds. Top with several cinematic cut scenes, mix well, and what you have is **Mindscape's** TICONDEROGA, a game that tries to be both a graphics extravaganza and a realistic simulation. Unlike playing HARPOON or AEGIS, you can actually walk down the corridors of your Ticonderoga-class ship, gaze off the port bow, or even make coffee in your cabin. The interface takes a bit of getting used to though, despite the tutorial. TICONDEROGA covers three different war-time scenarios: The Pacific hotbed, the re-ignition of the Persian Gulf, and our old Soviet adversaries, suddenly resurgent under radical right-wing rule. In some battles, you go solo; others find you in the more traditional Ticonderoga role at the head of a task force. Each scenario also presents you with decisions that carry political consequences which can affect your career. A great performance leaves medals on your dress uniform, but if you inflict too many civilian casualties you'll be lucky to get an analyst job on CNN. IBM CD-ROM, $59.95. Circle Reader Service #2.



3D-rendered backgrounds form the backdrop for advanced naval combat in TICONDEROGA.

MINDSCAPE, NOVATO, CA, (800) 234-3088

DISCWORLD

Once upon a time there sprang forth a writer from the very land (England) that begot Eric Idle, who begot *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. He was called Terry of Pratchett, and the humor in his fantasy stories seemed to many to be very 'Pythonian'. So it was that the gods of the universe and the lords of marketing did decree that these two kindred spirits should join, and bring gaming joy and laughter to all. The Discworld, a flat disc traveling through the cosmos on the back of a giant turtle, forms the setting for Pratchett's zany mix of humor, satire and fantasy. Most novels never translate properly to the computer medium, but casting Eric Idle as the bumbling wizard Rincewind is certainly a step in the right direction. DISCWORLD's eclectic characters: stodgy old wizards, articulate thieves, monkey librarians, trolls, dragons and other fantasy take-offs provide comic relief while advancing the plot. The animation has a delightfully cartoonish feel, and despite the fairly large world to be explored, it's not meant to be taken too seriously. If DISCWORLD sounds a lot like a Sierra adventure with a touch of tea & crumpets, that's as apt a description as any. IBM CD (with voices) and floppy (without), 59.95. Circle Reader Service #3.

Rincewind the Wizard bumbles through humorous misadventures in DISCWORLD, trusty magic luggage by his side.

PSYGNOSIS, LTD., CAMBRIDGE, MA, (617) 497-5457

PLAYING

Grab the scented bait and hit the fresh water for some good ol' fashioned anglin' in GONE FISHIN'.

GONE FISHIN': DIGITAL FRESH WATER FISHING

There's a saying that a bad day fishing is better than a good day at work, but with GONE FISHIN': DIGITAL FRESH WATER FISHING from **Amtex**, this saying may no longer be applicable. GONE FISHIN' simulates a day out on the lake quite well. You sit in your boat casting, reeling, and watching your lure speed and line tension, while you wait for the fish to bite. All sorts of fish are in here—Northern Pike, Walleye, Smallmouth Bass, Sunfish, Perch, and everyone's favorite, the Catfish. The renditions of the lodge and bait shop are dated, but once you're out on the water, it feels just like the real thing—including the long stretches when nothing is biting. The company of your "fishin' buddy" Bill Saiff (host of Public Television's *Rod and Reel*), the wonderful sound effects like the water lapping on the side of the boat, and the great fishing control interface (which reminded us of teeing off in LINKS 386), make GONE FISHIN' a "must-have" for real and virtual anglers alike. Besides, what other game gives you a discount coupon on scented bait?

IBM CD-ROM, $39.95. Circle Reader Service #4.

AMTEX, BELLEVILLE, ONTARIO CANADA, (613) 967-7900

PAPARAZZI! PAPARAZZI!

This **Museworthy** release is an interactive satirical revue that puts you in the role of a freelance photographer trying to make an honest buck off of others' sometimes dishonest acts. You'll uncover clues as to where the stars are, go to those locations and hopefully catch them on film. Then, if anyone wants to buy your photo, a series of offers will appear. You select the offer that works best for you and pocket the profit as you watch your reputation improve or disintegrate. You begin each day and night by scanning the television for clues or checking your answering machine in the hope that one of your usually reliable sources has phoned in. The six bizarre television channels may only be QuickTime movies, but at least one filmed bit per day is in the tradition of Kentucky Fried Movie or Second City Television. Ideally, you'll unearth a nice clue that will enable you to choose an appropriate location and snap some appropriately juicy shots. If your picture sells, you get to see your photo on screen, accompanied by a legitimate headline or a tabloid-style cut-line.

Simple photographs of stars getting out of cars sell, but it's the scandalous stuff the people want in PAPARAZZI!

Macintosh CD-ROM, $59.95. Circle Reader Service #5.

MUSEWORTHY, INC., ADDISON, TX, (214) 233-3384.

SAIL '95

Sailing may not have the high-speed crashes of auto racing or the thundering hooves of horse racing, but it does have its own special brand of excitement—all of the competitors are at the mercy of the wind. Every race is different, even over the same course. SAIL '95 by **Vivid Simulations** is a Windows-based sailing simulation of America's Cup Racing with detailed 3-D rendered ships running in 1024 by 768 resolution. It allows you to control as much of a sailing vessel as you wish. You can simply decide upon gross tactics or you may decide to micromanage the entire boat. The game allows you to re-race the '92 America's Cup, to try out the '95 America's Cup course, to sail an Olympic-style triangular course, or to train on a very short course. SAIL '95 also provides you with plenty of hi-tech information. You get dynamic gauges which reflect your opponent's position, your navigational information, your trim, who has the right-of-way, and several other wind-related morsels of information. For most of us, this will be the closest we ever get to high-speed sailing. IBM, $59.99. Circle Reader Service #6.

SAIL '95 makes America's Cup Racing approachable, and a lot more fun than watching it on ESPN.

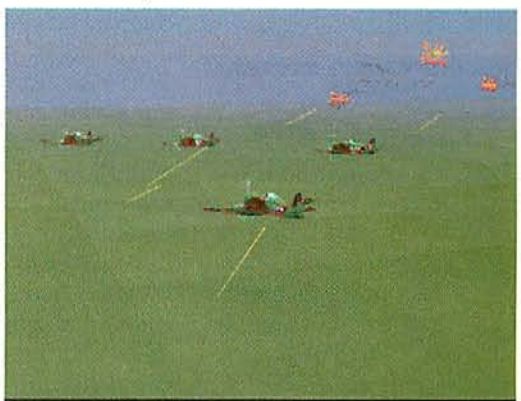
VIVID SIMULATIONS, CLINTON, CT, (203) 664-1634

Aces Over The Internet

With Ultra-Realistic Flight Modeling, 60 Realistically-Rendered Aircraft, And A Sun Network Server, Domark/ICI Is Gunning For Dominance In The On-Line Simulations Arena With CONFIRMED KILL

When a conversation between gamers contains the words "hard-core flight sim" and "on-line," you know they're talking about one of two things: they're either fantasizing about the multi-player game of their dreams, or they're discussing **Kesmai**'s AIR WARRIOR. For several years now, AIR WARRIOR, a simulation of WWII air combat that can be played by dozens of people at one time, has provided the only gaming experience of its kind. Check into AIR WARRIOR's arena on any given night and you'll see three countries, "A," "B" and "C" fighting for dominance of the on-line skies. You'll find groups of gamers gathered in virtual meeting rooms, plotting attacks against enemy factories and airfields. You'll "hear" the adrenaline-charged chatter of pilots communicating during dogfights, and often vicious taunts exchanged between engaged enemies. Unchallenged, AIR WARRIOR and GEnie, the game's predominant venue, have gathered a fanatical following of flyers who've logged hundreds of hours in its simulated skies.

AIR WARRIOR is far and away the best multi-player flight simulation available, but being "best" in a field of one is an easy thing to do. Now, in the spirit of the simulations they create, **Domark Sofware** and **ICI**, Domark's Texas-based partner, have come soaring out of the sun with a new on-line air combat game, CONFIRMED KILL. CONFIRMED KILL has lined up its sights squarely on the tail of AIR WARRIOR, and it's ready for a fight. AIR WARRIOR had better find air speed, altitude or ideas quickly, because CONFIRMED KILL may have it out-gunned. AIR WARRIOR is a few years old now, and while upgrades and additions to the system have been made, they've been slow in coming. With its $2.00 per hour price tag (cheap, in the world of on-line games), higher transfer bandwidth through the Internet, over 60 aircraft in its hangar, and a wealth of new features, CONFIRMED KILL appears in excellent position for the fight.



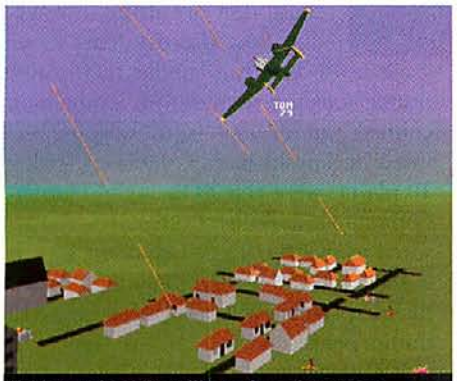
A flight of Hawker Seafuries meets stiff resistance on its way to a target.

POINTS, PRESTIGE, POWER

The fight is what it's all about in CONFIRMED KILL (CK). When you log in to CK from an Internet access provider (see sidebar: Connection Established), you'll choose to fly for one of four countries. Each country will have its own base of operations from which to launch attacks on the others. Countries will earn points through airborne kills as well as the bombing of key enemy sites. The countries can also launch tank incursions and naval attacks on enemy facilities, with the pilots providing air cover. With up to 500 possible players on the system at one time (100 maximum in any one "arena"), you can be sure that the action will be intense.

But the war is not just fought for God and country; a player's personal rank can mean a lot in the CK world. Pilots will earn points for kills, as well as for successful bombing runs, CAP missions, and even for successful landings. There will be awards given to the leaders in points, win/loss ratio, and kills per flight hour, among others. One of the first rewards of success is the ability to customize your aircraft's wings, tail, and nose with a variety of texture-mapped insignia. As you rack up the points, you gain access to more and better art. Of course, you can be sure that those planes flying "braggart" markings will become prime targets for ace hopefuls. Other awards might include free game hours and Domark clothing and paraphernalia.

The spoils of victory may not stop there. Domark is hoping to implement a rank system whereby top-notch pilots will earn the ability to take command. During large-scale engagements, those with the privilege of rank could direct their country's planes using an overhead map view and "radio" communications. This position could become especially useful and interesting during the planned historical battle re-creations. Domark has plans for Battle of Kursk and Solomon Islands arenas, where these major air battles of WWII can be completely re-created. To maintain the proper historical flavor, the planes available to the sides in the battle will be limited to those actually used in the battle. Interestingly, a squadron of AIR WARRIOR pilots who fly Japanese Zeros have already expressed interest in taking up the Japanese cause in the Solomon Island campaign.



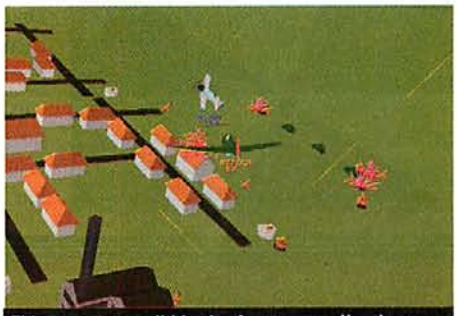
Taking and holding villages is an important aspect of CONFIRMED KILL's historical scenarios. This Me-110 is trying to soften up a Soviet town for a panzer assault.

A MODEL MODEL

As interesting as the historical scenarios might be, they won't satisfy the flight sim buff long unless the planes perform with reasonable realism. Here, CK is certain not to disappoint, unless it does so because it's *too* realistic. The CK system uses a "force model" rather than a "table-based" flight model as used in most simulations. Table-based models use an array of predetermined flight performance numbers for a specific plane. So, for instance, if a P-51 Mustang is at 5,000 feet, the simulation looks up the flight performance specs for that plane at that altitude and finds the roll, turn and climb rate numbers. Table-based sims are very common because they are easy to program, but they produce less-than-optimal results.

A force model, on the other hand, is very difficult to design. This type of simulation determines an aircraft's flight characteristics from "control inputs"—things like engine size and RPM, prop size, and control surfaces like vertical stabilizers, wings, and dive brakes. All of these variables (and many more) are factored into very sophisticated equations that are calculated "on the fly" rather than precalculated as in table-based sims.

The result is that the planes behave very realistically, perhaps too realistically for novice pilots. You won't be able to jump into a plane and yank-n-crank your way around the skies. With most of the aircraft, that kind of joystick jockeying will land you in a flat spin from which it can be very difficult to recover. In our test flights, we flew the Corsair, the flight model of which accurately simulates the plane's strong engine torque; we had to lay hard on the rudder just to keep the plane on a straight line during take-off. According to Domark, each of the 60+ planes in the CK world will have its own flight model based on their aircraft research.



Things can get wild in the Arena, as a Hurricane and Zero get acquainted over a village defended by T-34s, flak panzers, and anti-aircraft bunkers.

Even the weapons in CK are recreated realistically. The arsenal includes rockets, bombs, torpedoes, cannons and guns, and the guns have realistic rates of fire, damage capability, armor penetration, range, and muzzle velocity. You can even adjust the boresight of your guns—from 100m convergence to 1000m—while on the ground.

Of course, not everyone knows their high speed stalls from their flat spins, and their Wildcat from their Spitfire, so CK will have an easy mode and a special arena for new pilots. There, newcomers can learn to fly and test out maneuvers without falling prey to point-hungry veterans. Also, to make sure that everyone has enough targets to fire at, the CK system will constantly gauge the action in the battle arenas. If things get a little slow, the computer will launch its own attacks on the players, sending out tank columns against human headquarters, enemy flights against airbases, and V-1 rocket attacks against strategic sites.

As for the simulation mechanics, CK has the standard array of features and options. The system will support the standard view modes and a functional padlock view that will display situational awareness info (a pitch ladder, airspeed, altitude, and an arrow pointing toward the currently locked enemy) on the screen at all times. All of the planes and all of the views from the planes will have cockpit graphics based upon the aircraft types. Each cockpit will have a standard altimeter and compass, but the rest of the dials and gauges will be based on the real-McCoy. (A few of the Russian planes will even have Cyrillic lettering.) The keyboard command layout is very similar to that used in AIR WARRIOR, but it can also be remapped to the player's preference. The simulation will also support some autopilot modes that will prove very handy: One will level your plane at its current altitude, one will hold a programmed airspeed, and yet another will hold the aircraft at its best climb rate. Also, to help in the identification of craft in the simulated skies, some helpful graphic indicators will be provided. Every visible craft

will have a clear indicator underneath it which can be configured to display aircraft types, player names, or range information.

38 POINTS OF PAIN

One of the most innovative aspects of CONFIRMED KILL is its damage model, which is more sophisticated than any we've seen. In most simulations, the damage model is very simple: if a plane receives "X" hits, it will start to lose oil pressure and smoke; if it received "X" more hits, it goes down. In CK, a pilot's troubles will be much more sophisticated. Aircraft can take 38 different types of damage, and the damage will have realistic effects on the plane's performance. For instance, a plane can have its rudder shot off, and the turning performance of the plane will suffer severely as a result, or an individual aileron could be blown off, wreaking havoc on the craft's climb performance and stability. Likewise, engines can be damaged (producing black smoke), radiators can be punctured (white smoke), fuel lines can be severed (grey smoke), and pilots can be killed by direct hits to the canopy. Your landing gear could even become damaged, forcing you either to crash land or try high-G maneuvers that might dislodge the gear! As you can see, the system is very robust.

Two classic dogfighters, the La-7 and Zero meet in the Arena.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

CONFIRMED KILL will support graphic resolutions from 320x200 to 1024x768. Of course, getting decent performance at the highest resolutions will require some heavy-duty hardware. To play at the highest resolution, Domark is recommending a Diamond Stealth 64 video card with 2 MB of RAM or equivalent. The Diamond card, among others, supports the S3 graphic accelerator chip that Domark has championed over the last year. The network performance is also a key issue in high speed simulations of this kind. Current on-line simulations have problems with "warping," where a plane will suddenly disappear and then reappear a few screen-inches away. Domark insists that, because they are using a heavy-duty **Sun Microsystems** server (which can handle 1200 player transactions per second) with a minimum connect rate of 9600 baud, warping will rarely be a problem. In fact, during testing 10 players were able to fly in tight formation without difficulty. Domark has also assured us that the frame rate of the sim on a 486/33 local bus, the minimum recommended system, will never drop below 15 frames per second.

If Domark and ICI don't succumb to "performance pressure" as development continues, CK will be one hell of a multiplayer arena. Not only are the flight mechanics of a very high fidelity, but the world and competitive construct is extremely robust. For example, imagine being shot down over enemy territory, and parachuting to the turf. If a buddy sees you go down, he can radio in for a rescue mission. The computer will then send out a rescue helicopter to pick you up. BUT, if the enemy gets wind of this, they might send a couple of pilots after the rescue copter, who could then be intercepted by pilots from your side flying a RESCAP (Rescue Combat Air Patrol) mission.

And so it will go, dirty furball after dirty furball, dozens of player going head to head in the classic aircraft from a classic era. This sort of multi-player free-for-all is gaming at its best, and perhaps the future of this hobby. If Domark and ICI can put everything they want to into CONFIRMED KILL, it will be a terrific example of on-line gaming for others to follow.

This beautiful, if unorthodox, Do-335 is one of the high-powered experimental and "super" planes that players can fly in CONFIRMED KILL.

JANE'S PLANES

Vintage aircraft fans will be in hardware heaven with CONFIRMED KILL. Domark's skunk-works have been cranking out planes faster than Lockheed, and eventually their hangars will include over 60 aircraft, including some that have never before been modeled in a simulation.

A6M3 Zero-Sen
A-26B Invader
Barracuda
Brewster Buffalo
Bristol Beaufighter
B6N2 "Jill"
B5N1 "Kate"
B-17G Flying Fortress
B-25B G4M3 Betty
B-24D Liberator
Dornier Do 335
DeHavilland Mosquito MK.IV
D3A1 "Val"
D4Y2 "Judy" Seafury
F4F-3 Wildcat
F6F-3 Hellcat
F4U Corsair
Fw 190
Fw 200c Condor
Grumman F8
G5N1 Liz
Henschel Hs 129
He 111H
He 219 Uhu
Hawker Hurricane Mk I
Iiyushin Il-10
J2M2 Jack
Ju 87G-2 Stuka
Ju 88
Ju 188
Ki-21 "Sally"
Ki-43 "Oscar" Hayabusa
Ki-44 "Tojo" Shoki
Ki-61 "Tony" Hien
Ki-84 "Frank" Hayate
Ki-100
LaGG-3
La-7
Lancaster III
Machhi C.202
Me 110
Me 109
Me 262 Schwalbe
MiG-3
N1K2-J "George" Shiden
P-38L Lightning
P-39 Aircobra
P-40 Warhawk
P-47 Thunderbolt
P-51D Mustang
SB2C-3 Helldiver
Supermarine Spitfire
Supermarine Spiteful
Ta-152H1
Grumman TBF Avenger
Tempest
Tupolev Tu-2
Yakovlev Yak-1
Yakovlev Yak-3
Yakovlev Yak-9

CONNECTION ESTABLISHED

HOW TO FIND CONFIRMED KILL ON THE INTERNET

CONFIRMED KILL is run off of a host computer in ICI's Texas offices. To connect to the CK host, you'll need access to the Internet and TELNET capability. You simple dial up your Internet access provider, TELNET to the CK host, download the "front end" software (about a 20 minute download), and you're set. Alternatively, you can jump to the Domark World Wide Web site through *CGW*'s WWW home page. Drop by our place at "http://www.ziff.com/".

Never Lose Sight Of How Pinball Should Be Played.

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

Washington Post– "Crystal Caliburn perfectly captures the essence of a great pinball machine."

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

Inside Mac Games– "ARCADE GAME OF THE YEAR"

Computer Game Review– "Crystal Caliburn sets a new standard. For realistic pinball on a computer, there's nothing like this game."

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

GAMES Magazine–"You'll forget you're playing on a two-dimensional computer screen... the realism is astonishing."

MacUser–"Electronic pinball's Holy Grail." (Rating: 4 1/2 out of 5)

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

MACINTOSH: 13" or larger monitor, 256 colors, and 4MB RAM.

WINDOWS: 386 or faster processor, Windows 3.1, 256 SVGA monitor, 4MB RAM. Supports SoundBlaster® and other Windows compatible sound cards.

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Ground breaking BATTLEVIEW™ Graphics

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1995 PREMIER AWARDS

The devious minds behind the games that capture your imagination and wreck your life were razor-sharp in 1994. They pored over the nation's stock car tracks with surveyor's accuracy, studied combat effectiveness of *Wehrmacht* units more than the Germans themselves, and put the brains in those plasma-packing aliens who taunted you so maddeningly you couldn't *wait* to get back in the commander's seat to kick their little green butts again. There were games in 1994 that, like Sid Meier's Civilization, "will stand the test of time," and we present them here in the most laudable manner we know, the *Computer Gaming World* Premier Games of the Year.

Each year, the editors of *CGW* try to single out the best computer game in each category, the best performances in multimedia products, and the Best of the Best—our Premier Game of the Year. We do not nominate games that are merely popular or games which simply appeal to us. We nominate games with the realism, brilliance and audacity to suspend a cynical gamer's disbelief and have him or her *crawling*, with complete disregard for sleep and social standing, back for more. In other words, we nominate the BEST. The games are judged on a number of levels, including originality and innovation, playability, contribution to their genre, popularity among our readership, impact upon the computer gaming hobby—and plain ol' Fun. In the next few pages, we invite you to celebrate the finalists and winners of these Premier awards with us. You'll discover why we thought the finalists were so important and why we believe the winners are the *creme de la creme*.

ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR

Action games emphasize fast reflexes, fast decision-making and nimble dexterity over long-range strategic plans or accurate modeling of real-world dynamics. They are the games that pump the adrenaline and wear out the buttons on joysticks and gamepads.

One of the clear heavyweights in this category is id Software's DOOM II, the sequel to the oft-copied but never bested shooting game that won last year's Premier Game of the Year. DOOM II reached the finals by virtue of its diabolical new traps, intricate level designs and devastating new creatures.

MAGIC CARPET from Electronic Arts lifts gamers above the teeming hordes and lets them soar and fight in a magnificent 3-D fantasy world. This real-time action offers innovative gameplay, fantastic graphical effects, and even long-range strategy elements. SYSTEM SHOCK, published by Origin Systems and developed by Looking Glass Technologies, at first glance appears to be yet another DOOM clone. But its first-person action is fleshed out with adventure elements in an elaborately detailed 3-D world. Farther out in space lie the star fields of LucasArt's TIE Fighter, a space-combat game played from the "villain's" side of the *Star Wars* universe. TIE FIGHTER's challenging missions, enhanced graphics, and improved combat simulation give it enormous replay value.

Ground-breaking cinematic sequences, familiar characters, and hot 3D space combat make WING COMMANDER III the pick of a competitive action genre.

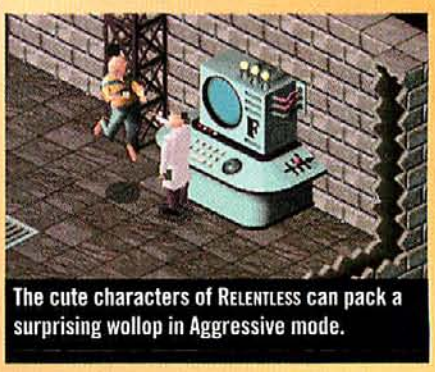
Chris Roberts' shot for the stars with WING COMMANDER III.

The action category was intensely competitive this year. Every one of the Finalists is a great play, but the edge was held by Origin's WING COMMANDER III. Designer Chris Roberts blends the excitement of the original WING COMMANDER with some of the best cinematic cut scenes of any game yet made. Although the term "interactive movie" is often abused, WING COMMANDER III comes as close as we've seen to tapping the immense potential of live-action video, while still retaining, at its core, a highly playable game.

ADVENTURE OF THE YEAR

Adventure games let you take an alter ego through a storyline or series of events. The plotlines are usually advanced by solving puzzles, using limited resources wisely, or interacting with the story's characters.

This year's finalists definitely raised the graphic ante over past winners. DEATH GATE from Legend is based on the best-selling Weis and Hickman fantasy novels. The quality of the puzzles is evident, but DEATH GATE also uses compelling atmospheric graphics to distinguish its numerous imaginary worlds. DRAGONSPHERE from MicroProse has an intriguing storyline, imaginative fantasy cultures, and a wonderful conversation system within its universe. Psygnosis' ECSTATICA is a hybrid of action and adventure in a fantastic 3-D world. The offbeat characters and unusual storyline mesh with the racy humor to form an adventure of a different feather. One of the year's most charming releases was Sierra's KING'S QUEST VII, the latest in the distinguished series of graphic adventure games. The feature-quality animation and the hodge-podge of classic tales make it the closest we're likely to come to a fairy tale on the computer.



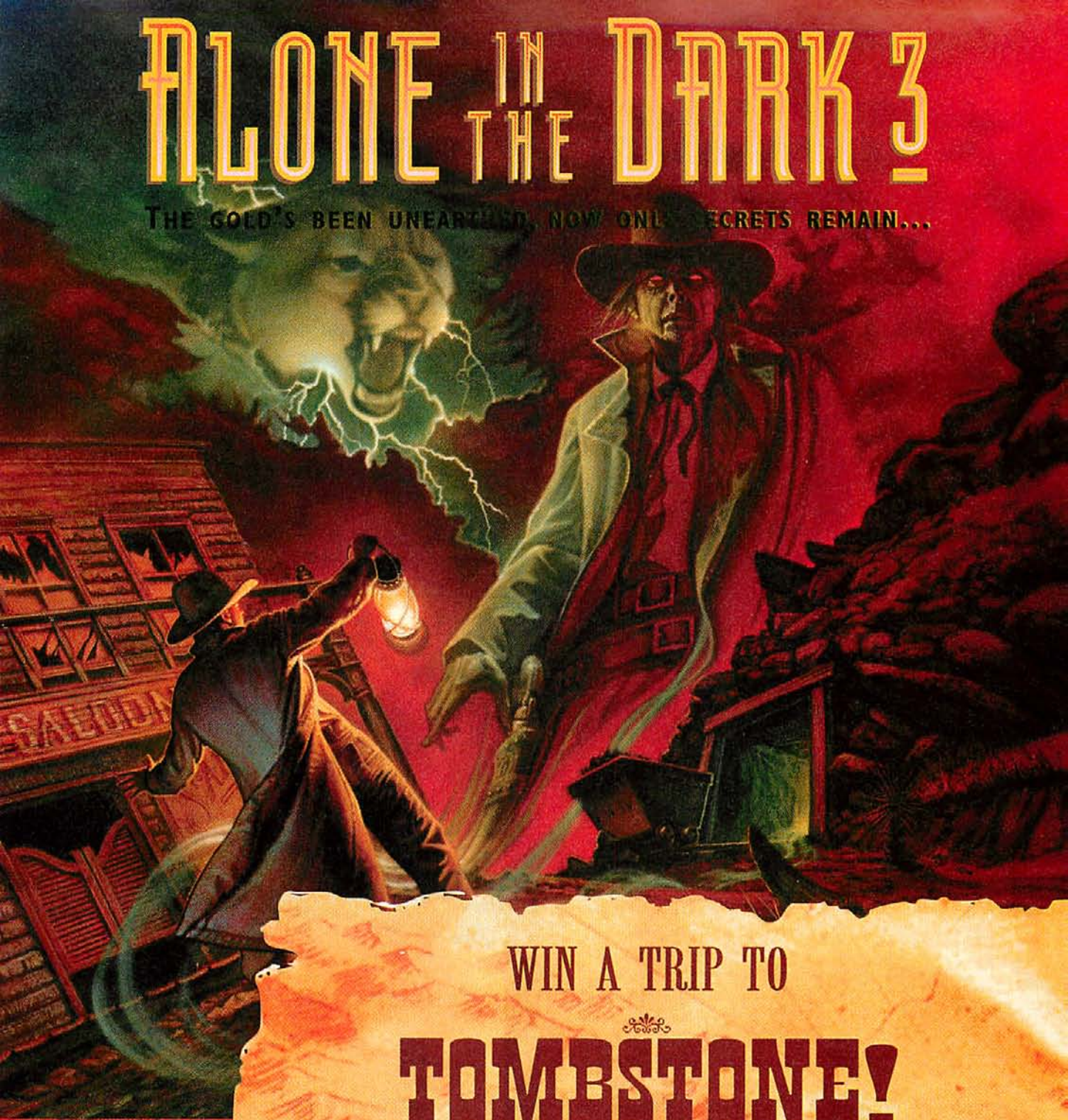
The cute characters of RELENTLESS can pack a surprising wollop in Aggressive mode.

But it was an obscure game from far afield that caused a surprise upset in the adventure category this year. RELENTLESS, designed in France by Adeline Software and distributed by Electronic Arts, is an action/adventure that's remarkably innovative in both artistic and game design. Designer Frederick Raynal (ALONE IN THE DARK) has fashioned a surrealistic universe with an odd Fisher-Price look, combined with delightful psychedelic cut-scenes. The different modes adopted by your character (Normal, Aggressive, Athletic, Discreet) potentially provide several different solutions to the game's puzzles. RELENTLESS receives high marks in terms of both innovation and creativity.

RELENTLESS designers: Frederick Raynal, Laurent Salmeron, Yael Barroz and Didier Chanfray.

ALONE IN THE DARK 3

THE GOLD'S BEEN UNEARTHED. NOW ONLY SECRETS REMAIN...



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Alone in the Dark 3 will also take you on a 3-D adventure to the ghost town of Slaughter Gulch, where the cast and crew of Hill Century Studios' latest production have vanished. As supersleuth Edward Carnby, you'll enjoy up to 70 hours of solving puzzles and dodging outlaws as you uncover their mysterious disappearance. So sharpen your spurs and get ready for the draw... with Alone in the Dark 3 you can't imagine how wild the West can get.

BUY ALONE IN THE DARK 3 BY JUNE 16TH FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN.

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ROLE-PLAYING GAME OF THE YEAR

Role-playing is a sub-set of the Adventure category, but it generally involves exploring worlds of greater depth, with less emphasis on puzzle-solving to advance the plot. RPGs also emphasize the development of a players' characters over the course of the game, either in numerical attributes, skill levels, spells and abilities, or access to resources.

Bethesda's THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA offers a dilemma-based character creation system, first-person perspective movement through a 3-D world, rich variety in world cultures, and use of mini-quests to advance the plot. RAVENLOFT from Strategic Simulations, Inc. tried to capitalize on the upsurge of interest in vampires and all things dark. RAVENLOFT's subject matter and new 3-D look enhance the solid background universe created by TSR's AD&D team. Sir-Tech's STAR TRAIL is an improvement upon the REALMS OF ARKANIA system. The game's enormous detail in weaponry, skills and the game world make it well-suited for hard-core role-players. Legend's SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN broke most of the rules. Portions of this game function as a traditional adventure game, while other parts are more like a full-fledged role-playing game. The goofy dialogue and storyline, and well-balanced gameplay make for a wild ride through designer Steve Meretzky's left-of-center imagination. WOLF, from Sanctuary Woods, is an innovative role-playing game that, obviously enough, places characters in the role of a wolf. It skillfully mixes role-playing elements and scientific fact, and its variety of scenarios are designed to teach as well as amuse.

ARENA offers a variety of NPCs, a large world to explore, and the best 3D action yet seen in a role-playing game.

V.J. Lakshman and Julian LaFaye succeeded in their quest for a breakthrough RPG.

Armed with +3 Broadswords and The Armor Of Champions, we pit these games against each other in the editorial arena. Emerging victorious was Bethesda's THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA. Intended to be the first in a complex role-playing series, ARENA was the vision of V. J. Lakshman and Julian LaFaye. Both are traditional role-playing gamers, and they liked the idea of combining the perspective of DOOM with more traditional role-playing elements. So they created a rich world with a variety of cultures and a myriad of mini-quests, and dropped it into a 3-D environment. THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA is a breakthrough game richly deserving of this year's role-playing award.

SIMULATION GAME OF THE YEAR

Simulation games are based on the modeling of vehicles in real-world environments. Typical sims put you in the cockpit of fighter aircraft, behind the wheel of million-dollar race cars, or in the close confines of a submarine stalking its prey.

This year's finalists are the strongest in many years. 1942: PACIFIC AIR WAR from MicroProse has accurate flight models and detailed graphics, but what makes it unique is its realistic handling of missions during a campaign. Dynamix' ACES OF THE DEEP is a detailed U-boat simulation set in the Atlantic Theater of WWII. Its historical accuracy, realistic graphics, and engaging gameplay come together in a campaign game that is notorious for devouring large chunks of gamers' lives. MicroProse's FLEET DEFENDER is a modern air combat simulation built around the F-14 Tomcat. It features beautiful graphics, extensive radar modeling and solid play balance. NASCAR RACING from Papyrus via Virgin builds upon the award-winning framework of INDYCAR RACING. NASCAR has more realistic handling characteristics, stunning graphics, and tough competition. US NAVY FIGHTERS from Electronic Arts is a modern campaign game of naval air combat. Solid play balance, next-generation graphics, and a well-designed campaign game make this accessible to novices and veterans alike.

Don't get caught by enemy escorts when you're gazing through the seductive periscope view of ACES OF THE DEEP.

Sub designers do it deeper—Alan Roberts, Jarrett Jester, Mike Jones, Dennis Kilgore, and Langdon Beeck.

Hairpin turns at three-digit speeds make NASCAR an experience not to be missed.

And the winners are: NASCAR RACING and ACES OF THE DEEP. We found ourselves torn between the technological excellence of NASCAR RACING and the total experience of ACES OF THE DEEP. Both experiences capture their respective subject matter with incredibly realistic graphics and a near-fanatical devotion to detail. Both have monstrously addicting gameplay, and, in the case of NASCAR RACING, an experience that promises to get better with advances in processor speed. We salute both of these outstanding achievements as winners of the Premier Simulations of the Year.

NASCAR RACING designers Adam Levesque, David Kaemmer and John Wheeler run in pretty fast circles.

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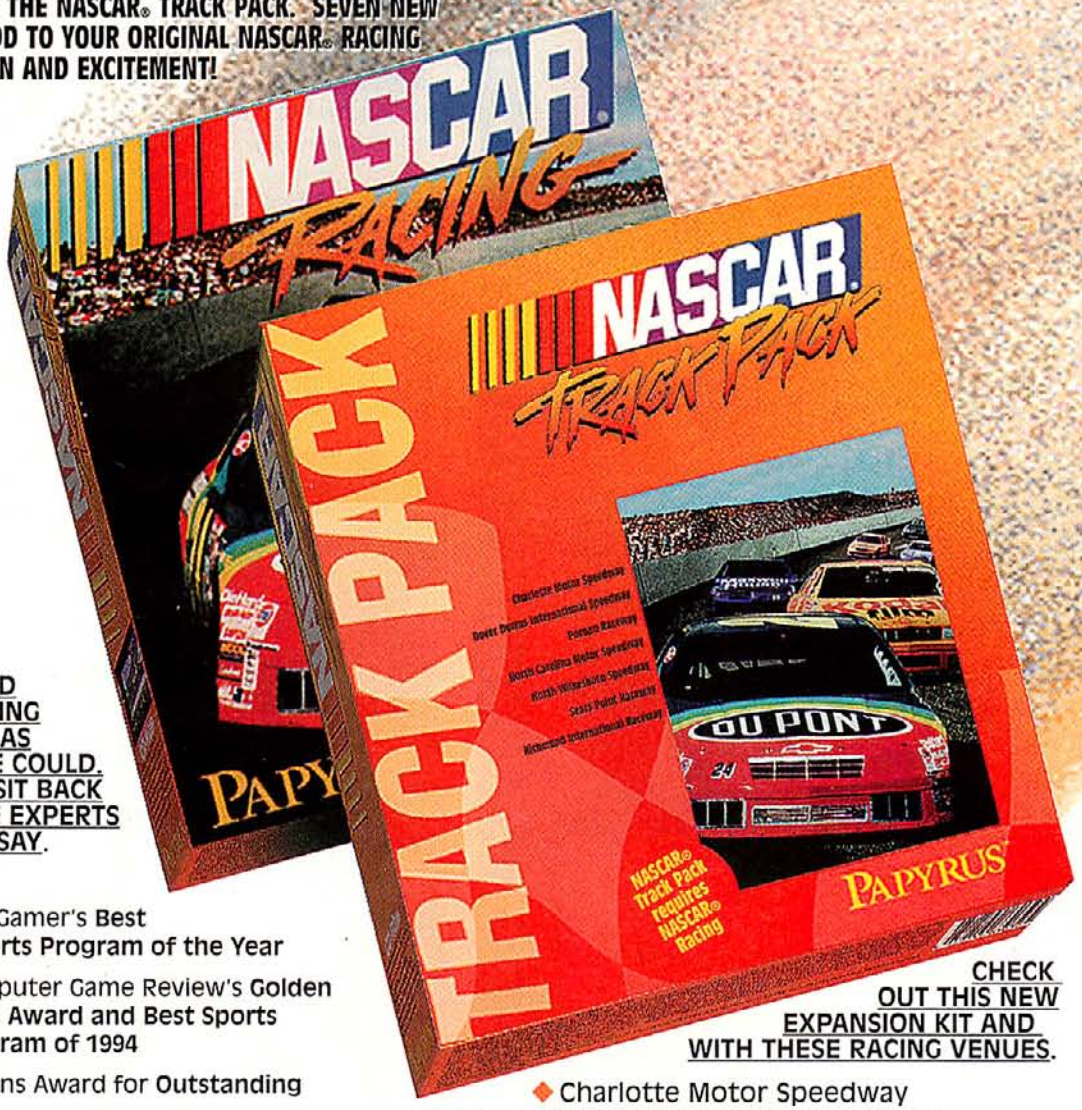

WE'VE HYPED NASCAR RACING JUST ABOUT AS MUCH AS WE COULD. NOW WE'LL SIT BACK AND LET THE EXPERTS HAVE THEIR SAY.

PC Gamer's Best Sports Program of the Year

Computer Game Review's Golden Triad Award and Best Sports Program of 1994

CES Innovations Award for Outstanding Simulation

Interactive Gaming's 1994 Game of the Year Award for Best Sports Program

Interactive Gaming's Editor's Choice Award In Recognition of Outstanding Achievement in Game Design and Execution of Production

Computer Gaming World's Best Simulation of 1995

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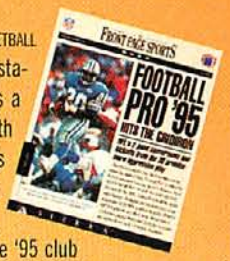
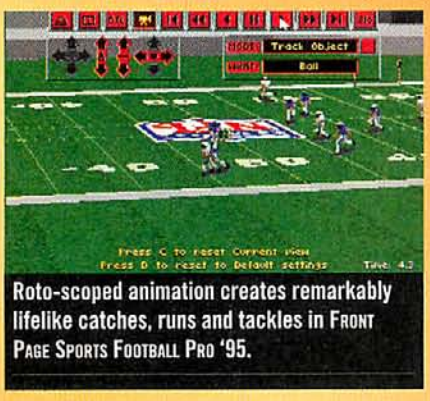
SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

Since real-life sports encompass both participation and coaching, it's only natural that sports games offer both action and strategy elements. It is the exceptional game that can effectively appeal to both action- and strategy-minded sports gamers.



Lance Haffner's COURTSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL is a text-based game that boasts great statistical fidelity. This latest version offers a strong artificial opponent to go along with the stats and fast play for which Haffner's designs are known. FPS: FOOTBALL '95 from Dynamix is the successor to last year's PREMIER SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR. The '95 club makes the playoffs with its superb ratings editor, play selection options, improved play-calling AI, and life-like rotoscoped animation. No other PC game has captured the flow of a hockey game as well as NHL HOCKEY '95 from Electronic Arts. Fast play, credible player statistics, great sound effects, and outstanding play balance make this a welcome addition to any hockey fan's trophy case. Electronic Arts' PGA TOUR GOLF 486 is a graphic feast overlaying a physics-based golf challenge. PGA TOUR is as beautiful as LINKS 386 PRO but more competitive, since the PGA license lets you tee off against Tom Kite, Fuzzy Zoeller and other PGA greats. Finally, STRAT-O-MATIC BASEBALL 5.0 shows that there is still a place for stat-based baseball games. This veteran enjoys a winning season because of its interface, quality computer manager, statistical accuracy, base-running AI, and solid seasonal play.



Roto-scoped animation creates remarkably lifelike catches, runs and tackles in FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO '95.

Patrick Cook's FPS team won an unprecedented third CGW title with FOOTBALL '95.

This year's championship ring will be worn by FPS: FOOTBALL '95, for an unprecedented third year in a row. The FPS: FOOTBALL games are the epitome of designs which bridge the gap between stat-based and action-oriented sports games. Designer Patrick Cook has created such a delicate balance of playability, statistical viability, and customization that FPS: FOOTBALL has become the standard against which all other football titles are compared.

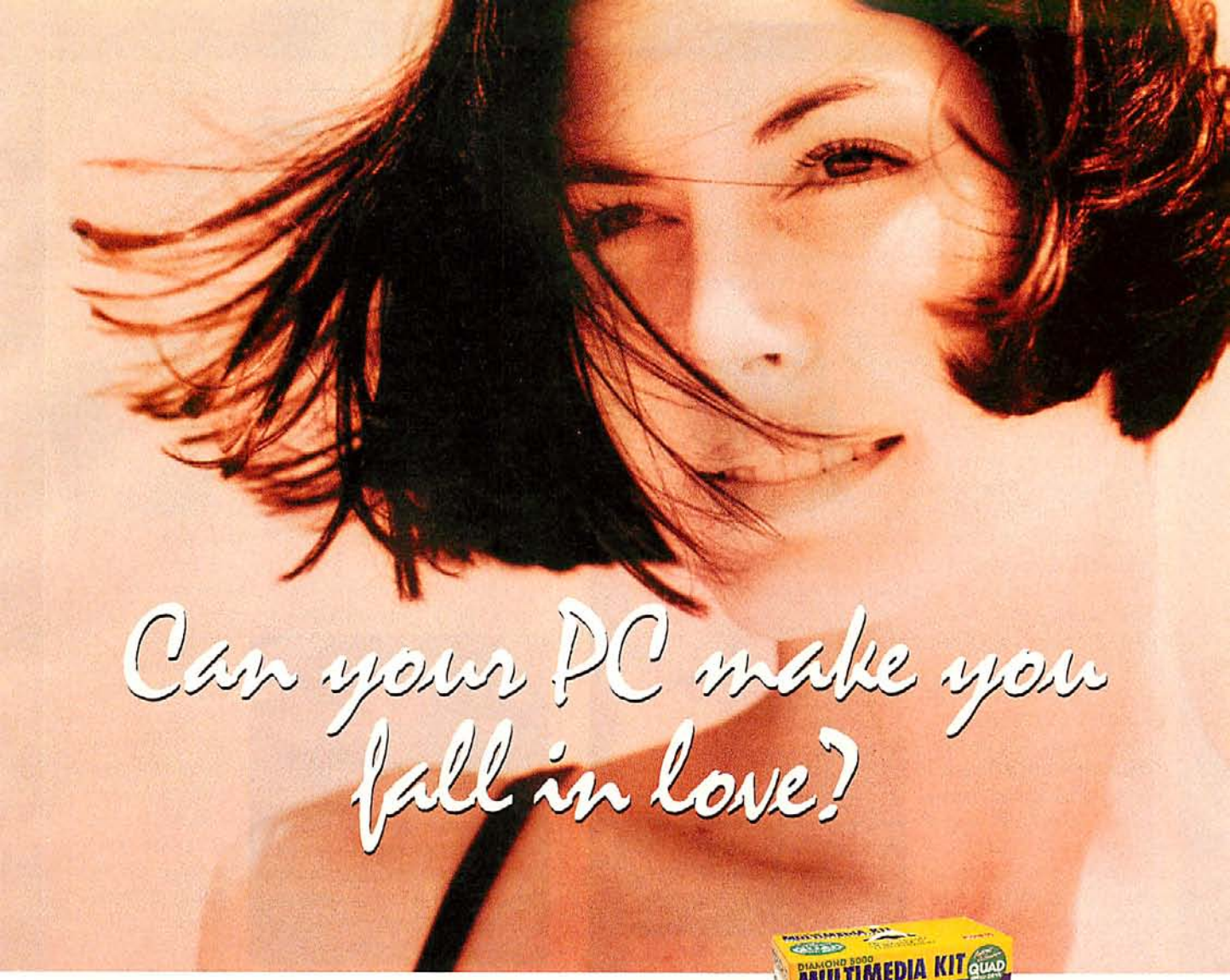
STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

Strategy games emphasize long-range planning and resource management in order to reach a certain victory condition. This year, strategy gamers struggled for dominance in lands medieval and fantastic, traded salvos o'er the high seas, and even defended the Earth against invaders from outer space.

LORDS OF THE REALM from Impressions is a medieval combat fest that is so fresh in its approach, it even makes animal husbandry fun. The multi-player game is nicely balanced and features a host of diplomatic elements for gamers aspiring to the throne of England. MASTER OF MAGIC, developed by SimTex for MicroProse, builds elements of role-playing into its fine strategic foundation. Steve Barcia's design requires that you not only conquer the world, but also discover the "Metaspell" and proclaim yourself the absolute MASTER OF MAGIC. Although abstract, THE GRANDEST FLEET from QQP is a wildly variable and unquestionably enjoyable game of naval combat. The game goes beyond THE LOST ADMIRAL with a solid economic model, brisk scenarios, and demanding naval campaign. Blizzard's WARCRAFT: ORCS AND HUMANS is the best real-time strategy challenge since Westwood's DUNE II, which it closely emulates. Combining research and city development with fast-paced tactical combat, WARCRAFT put a fresh twist on an old rivalry.

The arsenal of weapons in X-COM would make an *Aliens* marine as green as an alien's envy.

Towering over all, however, is X-COM from Mythos Game and MicroProse. While concepts like hidden movement and opportunity fire have been around in computer games for ages, rarely have they been used so well in a tactical, man-to-man, combat game. Researching exotic alien technology recalls the developmental joy of CIVILIZATION, and the growth of your squad's abilities adds a strong role-playing theme. The economic and political aspects of building facilities to defend Earth's nations offer a good strategic shell, but the game springs to life when you arm your squad, position them, and hunt down those alien invaders. X-COM is truly a masterful blend of classic strategy game elements.



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Circle Reader Service #77

WARGAME OF THE YEAR

Wargames recreate historical armed conflicts from a command perspective. They emphasize planning, carrying out a coherent strategic concept, and often involve tactics to achieve the objective. This year was a banner year for wargames, with sufficient variety to satisfy everyone from the casual commander to the hard-core military enthusiast.

FLIGHT COMMANDER 2 from Avalon Hill is a strategy-oriented look at modern air combat from Korea to Desert Storm and beyond. The depiction of modern air-to-air combat will ring authentic to any would-be pilot—and no joystick is necessary. In Koei's GENGHIS KHAN II, players must use up to 16 different types of units in medieval combined-arms tactics, conduct diplomacy, build an economy at home, and even designate heirs. Terrific campaign options and one of the toughest artificial opponents around make GK2 a wonderful wargame. Avalon Hill's OPERATION CRUSADER one-ups Atomic Games' V FOR VICTORY series in terms of both graphics and gameplay. Supply is properly emphasized without overwhelming the design, and the fluidity of desert warfare is captured through a blend of hidden movement, reconnaissance and improved AI. TIGERS ON THE PROWL from HPS Simulations is a detailed and realistic depiction of modern armored combat. The graphics are lackluster and the learning curve is steep, but the wealth of hard data, "soft" factors, and excellent command control make TIGERS highly worthwhile.

PANZER GENERAL's effective mix of graphics, sound, solid AI and unique campaigns sets a new standard in wargaming.

The SSI PANZER GENERAL team takes a rare break from the game development battleground.

Even with such stiff competition, there was no wargame better than Strategic Simulations' PANZER GENERAL. Due to its emphasis on fun and its wonderfully simple interface, this game will even appeal to non-wargamers. PANZER GENERAL brings a fresh perspective to WWII with role-playing aspects that let would-be Rommels advance their career with an innovative system of prestige points. Rapid blitzkriegs, set-piece armored assaults, and amphibious landings in over 40 scenarios and campaigns allow for hundreds of hours of challenging play. The design team accomplished this with well-balanced competition, plenty of "What if?" options, a campaign game that really works. PANZER GENERAL is the first wargame since 1987 to garner the #1 spot on the *CGW* Top 100 poll—a fine endorsement for the most exciting wargame in a long time.

GAME OF THE YEAR

The overall Game of the Year always generates controversy, and the editors of CGW hotly debate the merits of each game. Obviously, all of the category winners have to be considered, but the overall game of the year must be that game that transcends genre boundaries and appeals to a wider range of gamers. This year, all of the finalists considered meet these qualifications.

WING COMMANDER III effectively employs big-name actors and integrates the film footage into a hard-hitting action game. TIE FIGHTER tactfully handles the tricky subject of flying for the evil Empire in the *Star Wars* universe and improves on the intense space combat of X-WING. NASCAR RACING's incredible graphics, sound and overall experience appeal to simulation enthusiasts and casual sports fans alike. PANZER GENERAL may be the mythical "mass market" wargame, but achieves that status without insulting veteran wargamers.

Winning in X-COM requires research, financial savvy, tactical skill, and the nerve to face an Ethereal Commander on its home turf. What more can you ask for in a Game of the Year?

Despite these worthy contenders, it was the year of X-COM, which burst unheralded onto the scene without full-motion video or other multimedia flash. Designers Julian and Nick Gollop of Mythos Games rightfully chose to focus on challenging gameplay. X-COM was the most-played game by our discerning readership for several months, and even now it hovers near the top of our Top 100 Games poll nearly a year after its release. The graphic novel-style art captures the "Marauding Aliens from Outer Space" feel quite well, and the variety of decisions to be made about personnel, tactics, and technological development will keep any gamer's butt glued to a chair for hours. X-COM doesn't require a Pentium or a quad-speed CD drive to play; its success shows that pushing the technological envelope is often less important than stoking the gamer's competitive fire and imagination.

"The tactical system was based on my earlier games, and I knew it was a popular concept, but the strategic element was very much untried, and we were concerned about how the whole game would fit together."

— Julian Gollop on X-COM

CGW salutes X-COM and all the other Premier award winners for their ability to deprive us of sleep, forget important engagements, and in general, dazzle us in ways that we could hardly have dreamt just a few years ago. From all of us at *CGW* to the designers of these games, we say: you twisted fiends are at once our lifeblood and our undoing, but we wouldn't have it any other way. Congratulations, you've all outdone yourselves. *Encore!*

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MINDSCAPE

Circle Reader Service #102

Multimedia Awards

At any time, but particularly in games, multimedia should mean more than shoveling audio and video onto a disk. Multimedia needs to offer an experience that you cannot get elsewhere, a chance for you to make a difference in what you see on-screen—whether through game performance or direct selection. The two major distinctions which multimedia capability has brought to computer games have been in the areas of characterization and sound. The former has been advanced by the introduction of professional actors and the latter has been enhanced by improvements in sound technology joined with an increased commitment to musical talent. So, this year as last, we celebrate the multimedia performances that we believe really made a difference in their respective products.

Acting in a computer game, as well as scoring a computer game, takes different skills than performing in a linear art form. Actors continually tell us that the multiple possibilities for each scene and the tight demands of continuity make computer game performances a real stretch for them. In the same way, the musical composer for a computer game doesn't have the luxury of watching film from start to finish and matching the mood with the music. The computer game score has to be appropriate at every turn. So, we feel it appropriate to offer awards to those artists who improved our game experiences.

BEST MALE ON-SCREEN PERFORMANCE

Once again, the editorial staff of *CGW* felt that the best on-screen performance in a computer game was not by an actor in a lead role. The best on-screen performance, and the runner-up performer as well, was provided by a supporting actor. And the winner is Tom Wilson from Origin's WING COMMANDER III. Wilson is best-known for his performance as Biff in the *Back to the Future* film series and, he plays Maniac with something of that same "Biffness." His scenes are crisp, comedic and convincing. Every dramatic venture needs that character to ratchet up the protagonist's angst and provide that extra bit of tension that makes you really care what happens to the good guy. In WING COMMANDER III, Wilson's Maniac does just that.

Tom Wilson (top left) portrays the cocky, insubordinate Maniac with aplomb in WING III.

BEST FEMALE ON-SCREEN PERFORMANCE

Although this year's outstanding female on-screen performance appeared in a relatively weak game, it was extremely well-played. This year's Premier award for Best Female On-Screen Performance goes to Paige Witte in Hyperbole Studios' THE VORTEX: QUANTUM GATE II. In our review of the game, Charles Ardai called her effort a "stunning performance" and stated, "she delivers her lines with such ease and naturalness that you forget she's wearing big angel wings and a headdress covered with scraps rummaged from the five-and-dime..." He's right. In spite of the weakness in the script itself, Witte was perfect as the protagonist's near-ethereal spirit guide, Illyria. Well-done, Paige!

Illyria, marvelously portrayed by Paige Witte, adds a compelling presence to the surreal storyline of THE VORTEX.

BEST VOICE-OVER ACTING

This year's best voice-over performance is something of a surprise. Normally, the voice talents who speak for animated characters in adventure or role-playing games are the leading contenders. Yet, this year, we felt that the performance which added the most to a gaming experience was not in the adventure or role-playing genres. Rather, the Premier award for Best Voice-Over Acting goes to Barry Lank, the commanding officer in Strategic Simulations, Inc.'s PANZER GENERAL. These briefing and debriefing sessions before and after each scenario added an extra dimension to the campaign game. Down deep, you knew that Lank was acting, but he played the part so earnestly that you were simply caught up in the suspended disbelief of the entire game. Along with the game's other multimedia enhancements, Lank's voice-acting did what it was supposed to do: It made the game better.

BEST MUSICAL SCORE

If you've ever tried to watch a horror film with the sound muted, you know that they can look pretty ridiculous. It takes the right sound cues along with the visual to make the right connection with our brain. The same is true of most games. The musical themes and sound effects associated with the imaginary world of the game take the experience up a notch. The winner of this year's Premier award for Best Musical Score is a fresh new sound in the world of computer entertainment, D'Cückoo. What our editors describe as world-beat-techno-funk was actually an appropriate sound for THE VORTEX: QUANTUM GATE II. The sound matched the global concern and the mythic symbology within the script. We offer a standing ovation to D'Cückoo's unique sound.

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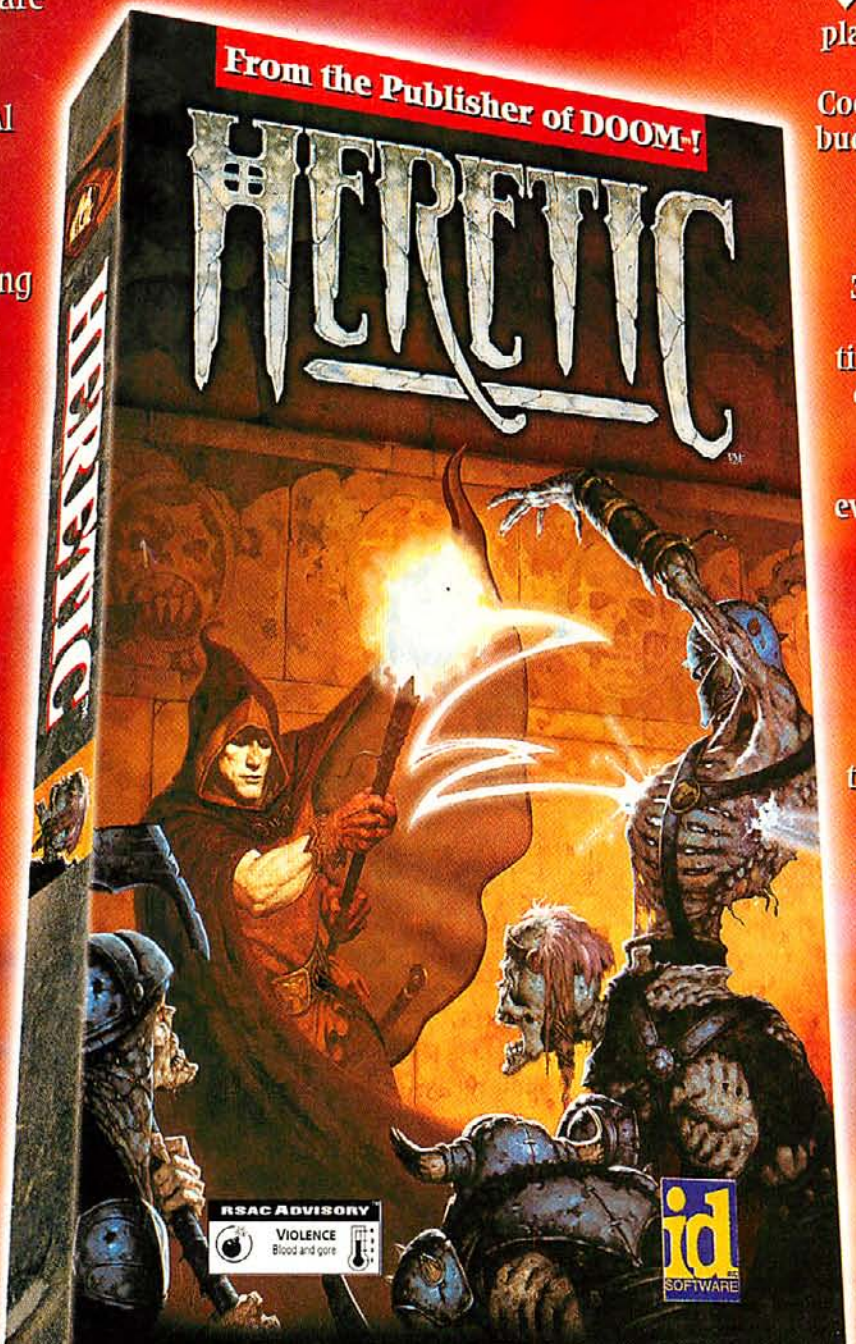

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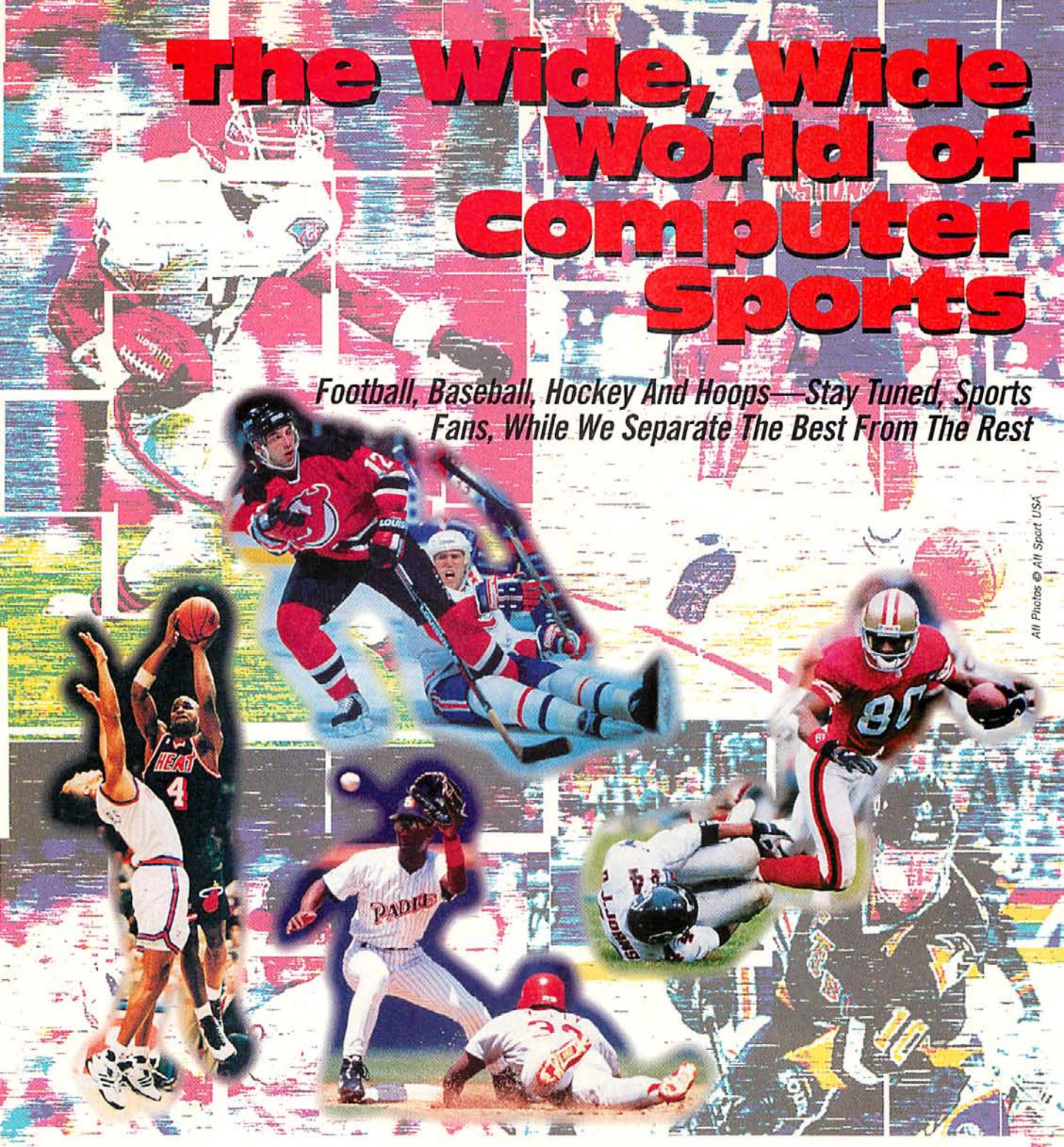
Circle Reader Service #71

The Wide, Wide World of Computer Sports

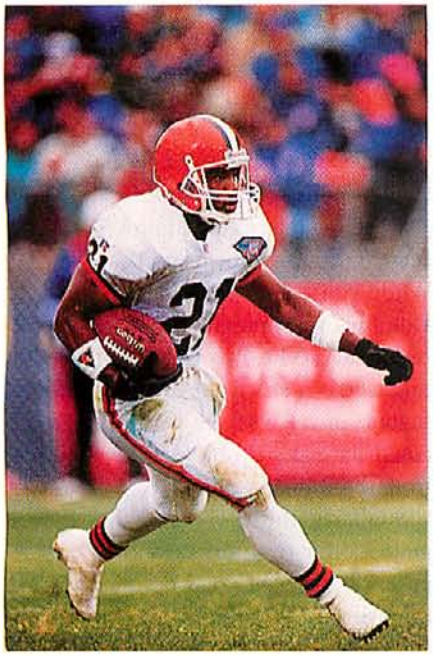
Football, Baseball, Hockey And Hoops—Stay Tuned, Sports Fans, While We Separate The Best From The Rest



All Photos © All Sport USA

Springtime and Sports. Any other year, this would be an easy introduction to write. We would wax poetic about how magnificent it is to hear the crack of the bat again after a sleepy winter hibernation, or glorify the brutal ice ballet that is hockey, and the distinct intensity and tradition of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. But in these days of collective bargaining agreements and merchandising, player walkouts and owner lockouts, the smell of oiled gloves, new rubbery pucks, and fresh cut grass is mixed with money's stench. Sure, these "business" issues have been around for years, but have they ever seemed more severe?

As computer gamers, our response to these real-world woes is to crank up the computer and escape to a reality where the most important thing—The Game—is the most important thing. Join us, then, as we take a tour of the fields, courts, and rinks of the The Big Four Sports Conference and its players: football, hockey, baseball and basketball. In these digitized leagues, the players and owners don't bellyache about TV revenues and salaries—they just want to play ball.



Football

Pass The PC Pigskin

by Terry Lee Coleman

Football lacks the non-stop action of basketball, the timelessness of baseball. But what football does have is a wonderful mix of action and strategy, grace and brute force. While football is a game of stars and individual performances, it is still very much a team sport: a great running back is nothing without his offensive lineman, and a quarterback's perfect passes will fall incomplete without his receivers' great hands. This well-balanced mix of individual and team effort make it a perfect topic for computer simulation.

For years, the football game market was sharply divided between pure action games and the strategy-rich coaching simulations. But in 1992, **Dynamix** released FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL, which offered a reasonable compromise between the two camps, appealing to both the action-starved gamer and those who wanted a more cerebral contest. Since then, any football game that desired best-seller status has followed The Front Page Sports lead.

UNNECESSARILY ROUGH

The football field of UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS '95 is painted with an SVGA brush, and animated players streak down the hashmarks like world-class sprinters. Play-by-play audio features the authentic dulcet tones of Al Michaels. A gridiron fan's dream—on the surface.

The problem is, UR '95 does everything with mirrors. Any game with an emphasis on action will have some dubious statistics, but UR '95 insults even the most casual fan. Running backs gain 4,000 yards with ease, and journeyman quarterbacks throw for as much as 1,000 yards per game! The only way to defend against the pass is to flagrantly hold and interfere with receivers, yet these penalties can't be refused. Since the blocking algorithm is flawed, any team, regardless of their all-pro linemen, can be stopped cold on the ground (whatever would Larry Csonka say?). Add all this to some annoying crash bugs, and UR '95 is destined for the cellar.

LIGHTS, CAMERA...

LIVE ACTION FOOTBALL tries a different route to success. Full-motion video fills about a third of the Windows screen. While the video isn't up to TV standards, it is smoother than most video applications for the computer. The first few plays are exciting: You can watch Marino throwing to Tim Brown, or Barry Sanders taking a hand-off and scampering right up the sideline in his patented style (those aren't the real players on-screen, though—they're "minor leaguers"). Pat Haden's analysis and Al Michaels' play-by-play are as professional as ever. The interface is simple to learn, but it also seems to limit the playcalling. Essentially, the basic fault of LIVE ACTION FOOTBALL is its lack of ambition. Nowhere near enough plays were filmed, so it's not uncommon to see the same play several times in each game. Plus, it's kind of confusing when a play that began on your 20-yard line and ended on your 46 is described with "He breaks it for 55 yards!" In the end, LIVE ACTION FB is little more than a glorified VCR game.

CARDBOARD FOOTBALL

While football sims don't go for the mind-numbing mass of numbers so loved by their baseball cousins, re-creating a season with statistical accuracy is still the goal for many an armchair coach. But simply regurgitating stats is obviously no fun—the computer opposition must give a worthy challenge, so that those records broken and those championships won feel like they've been earned.

One of the oldest contenders for the statistical throne, APBA PRO FOOTBALL, still has a lot to offer. The statistics have a genuine feel, and the schedule-maker and league replay features are fairly flexible. Still, this old warrior isn't far from retirement. The primary-color scheme looks less like the Green Bay-green it aspires to than blades of artificial turf. The clunky interface seems as out of place as the Wing-T offense in today's competitive football market, and the stodginess of the documentation doesn't help, either. Computer coaches are called "robots," which pretty much sums up their style of play. All in all, APBA is more for the replay fanatic than the average fan.

"WIN"-NING FOOTBALL

Quorum's HEAD COACH FOOTBALL for Windows, on the other hand, does have a decent AI, making it a good choice for a laptop football game. As plays are selected, they pop onto the screen in X's and O's, just like the old coach would draw 'em on the chalkboard. Teams are rated for penalties, injuries and depth, with the computer making player substitutions for you. Opponent tendencies are also flashed on screen, giving novices a little inside dope. As with LIVE ACTION FOOTBALL, it's often hard to tell in HEAD COACH whether or not you hit a secondary receiver or had a busted play. But then, HEAD COACH FB is a lot less pretentious, and has much more replay value.

LANCE A LOT

Lance Haffner Games has been around the sports arena for over a decade. Haffner's games have always been statistically viable and fun to play, even if only displayed in text. Now, Lance has finally discovered VGA graphics—to a point. While 3-IN-1 FOOTBALL hardly has more color than APBA, it at least sports a clean, uncluttered look. Much the same can be said about the game system, a model of efficiency. Season replay is brisk, and historic teams can

SUPER SUNDAYS FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL, at the peak of its curve, is the current football champ; Micro Sports is no slouch though, coming out with new versions of both their pro and college games.

be easily matched against current powerhouses. 3-IN-1 includes over 300 past and present teams, and is one of the few games to cover both pro and college football. 3-IN-1 is simple to learn, and a game can be completed in under an hour. But it also has a deceptively tough AI. This is easily the best buy for the stat-starved football fan.

FOOTBALL SUPREME

Twenty years ago, many NFL players couldn't sport a mustache. Now they proudly wear earrings and appear in their own music videos. Heck, even backup players make millions of dollars nowadays. It seems appropriate that computer games have changed to reflect the times as well. Sometimes the effects are unintentional: **MicroProse's** ULTIMATE FOOTBALL, when first released, had such lackluster sound that it was reminiscent of a meaningless late-season game, so quiet were the crowd and the players. The Action mode was as difficult to master as contract negotiations, and the computer needed to run the game properly could set your bank account so far back that you might need to trade your high-priced starting QB.

Even so, ULTIMATE FOOTBALL improved enough on Doug Whatley's COACHES CLUB FOOTBALL to make it a contender for the computer playoffs. Although it lacks the robust statistics of a text-based game, ULTIMATE's game action is fairly realistic and more reliable than most action football games, particularly when replaying seasons. Special teams are finally given their due, and time pressure and audibles are also handled very well. The best way to play this game is via modem, as it is currently the best head-to-head coaching challenge around.

PAGE 1 PIGSKIN

Nonetheless, the best football game on the planet is still FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO '95. Player modeling is unparalleled, with each individual performing close to real-life levels. Line-blocking algorithms are sophisticated enough to relive those classic Packers' power sweeps, and running backs break tackles and perform showboating spin moves. You can even create your own highlight reel with the flexible VCR mode.

Leagues are a breeze to start and maintain, especially with the new draft profiles. The powerful editor allows you to swap players and edit player ratings with ease. You may even select your own Pro Bowl team using criteria you define. Expanded rosters, blocked field goals, coffin-corner punts and even the newer rules such as 2-point conversions and kick-offs from the 30-yard line are all here in a visually potent and user-friendly package.

FOOTBALL MVP

In summary, if you buy one sports game all year, Front Page Sports: Football '95 is the one for you. Patrick Cook and his **Dynamix** team have won *CGW*'s best sports game three years running for a reason: they combine incredible action with reasonable statistical performance. If you absolutely *must* have a text-based game, **Haffner Games**' 3-IN-1 FOOTBALL delivers great performance for a small salary.

FOOTBALL IN THE FUTURE

Micro Sports is currently warming up on the sidelines with not just one, but two new football titles, both of which look to have some potential. NFL PRO LEAGUE FOOTBALL: 75 ANNIVERSARY EDITION is a totally revamped version of Micro Sports earlier systems. The clunky animation of prior versions has been replaced by larger player sprites, which add a lot to the thrill of this strategy-based game. The play-calling interface is improved, and offers many more options than before. While run-heavy teams such as the '72 Dolphins will operate much as they did historically, NFL PRO LEAGUE will let Namath take snaps from the Shotgun formation or lets you see if Sammy Baugh could have put up big numbers gunnin' from the Run-and-Shoot.

Similarly, those who feel that college games offer the purest football experience will be able to play out their pigskin fantasies with Micro Sports' upcoming ALL-AMERICAN COLLEGE FOOTBALL. While it uses a similar engine to the NFL game, AACF goes to great lengths to achieve its own identity. From the Orange Bowl to South Bend, each stadium exudes an individual flavor. The widely varying offenses and defenses add to the charm: Oklahoma's wishbone, Miami's wide-open attack, even the late-game histrionics of Boston College. While action-loving gamers may wonder what all the fuss is about, these two titles have the potential to take any football fan to the bowl of their choice, be it Super or Sugar.

Hockey

A Long Draught From Stanley's Cup

by Gordon Goble

Over the course of the last few years, mainstream America has finally caught on to what Canadians have known for some time now: hockey is a great game. Even way down south in places like Florida and Texas, hockey is no longer a mystery with a French-Canadian accent.

National television exposure has lent a helping hand, with both ESPN and FOX recently getting in on the act, and didn't Mark Messier and his good friend "Stanley" became a fixture on Dave Letterman's show after the Ranger's championship run last year? Yep, hockey is here to stay, and slowly, very slowly, computer gaming is beginning to catch on.

While not exactly overflowing with titles, the hockey section of your local software store is no longer invisible, and at last there are a few products from which to choose. On the text side we'll look at a pair of entries, **Lance Haffner's** HAT TRICK and **APBA's** PRO HOCKEY, while Team Graphical is represented by NHL HOCKEY '95 from **EA Sports**, **Bethesda's** WAYNE GRETZKY III, and the rookie talent, **Accolade's** BRETT HULL HOCKEY '95.

NHL '95

Like the Detroit Red Wing teams of the 1990s, NHL HOCKEY '95 is packed with firepower and covers all the ice, but still lacks the finishing touch around the net needed to be deemed an all-time great. It's mighty close though.

Spawn from 1993's NHL HOCKEY, NHL '95 is the first hockey product to go CD-ROM. Stunning high-resolution interfaces dot the NHL '95 landscape, menus and sub-menus are vast and offer most every option any player/coach could want (including a complete statistical library), player animations are better than ever, and the game simply feels and sounds great. I've personally seen this game through two full seasons of play (I'm currently on my third), and I'm still happy as a bruiser in a brawl. Well, mostly happy...

You see, there are a few nagging little doubts that keep creeping into my mind when recommending this game. For openers, the software decides a little too much of the on-ice activity. Penalties, goals, and entire game results are sometimes more a reflection of what the program says should happen than what the current play or situation dictates. Annoying though this is, it's still better than winning all the time, which is what you might do once you've mastered the game's idiosyncrasies (i.e.: hammer any enemy player to the ice when the computer team is breaking out of it's own zone, and the bad guys will *never* score).

NHL '95 also seems to forget that a pass directed at the net (in essence a wrist shot but not documented as such) has a better chance of scoring than a slapshot, and at the very least should be counted as a Shot on Goal. It is not. But such complaints are far outweighed by NHL 95's penchant of picking you up and throwing you into the hockey experience, on the ice and in the front office.

The game offers a number of G.M. options, such as mergeable databases that permit whole groups of human opponents to carry out a season from remote locations, player trades, and league creation. NHL '95 won't let you pit the '75 Flyers against the '84 Oilers, and the recent release of BRETT HULL HOCKEY shows just how short and squat the NHL '95 players look on-screen, but for a total NHL experience, this is as close to pucking perfection as you'll get.

BRETT HULL HITS THE ICE

When I first booted up BRETT HULL HOCKEY '95, I had but one reaction: I desperately wanted this baby to make the grade. Never has a hockey sim put the jolly joysticker so close to the action. BHH '95 producer Kevin Wilkinson says, "I had envisioned putting the gameplayer in a helicopter about 15 feet above ice level," and in this, BHH succeeds. The player viewpoint is not unlike that of NHL '95 (a 3/4 pan of the ice surface), but with a very noticeable shift from the nosebleeds to front row.

This is the way hockey was meant to be seen on a computer—the players are lanky, their sticks are long, and the rink goes on forever. Generally, puck movement is accurate, and the game is difficult, as in real life. Players mimic their real life counterparts and fatigue with time, as is the case with all the games reviewed here. But despite all the high notes it hits, BHH '95 has a certain sense of incompleteness to it.

Players back off the puck when they shouldn't, computer goalies will hang onto the biscuit long after Mr. Human has *completely* cleared the zone, and sometimes the best offensive maneuvers result from an indiscriminate clicking of buttons. It's far too easy to skirt the defense and walk in alone on goal, and then far too difficult to score from that position. Most of the time, BHH '95 hums along just fine, but with skaters that exhibit such odd tendencies under certain circumstances, well...has anyone ever dope tested a computer player?

BHH '95 supplies a minimal amount of statistics, a head-to-head play option (like NHL '95), replays, and allows adjustments to team attributes. If you can handle the sometimes puzzling player behavior, and don't feel the need for glamorous interfaces, BHH '95 may just crank your slapshot.

SHOOTS...SCORES! NHL HOCKEY '95 is the leader of the pack because it is fun, addicting, and because doggone it, people like it. BRETT HULL HOCKEY '95 is right there, although it could use some more time to "ice."

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HAT TRICK

In other computer sports, text-based games have been striving to merge their words and statistics with a touch of graphics, some sound and mouse support. Such is not the case in PC hockey, as neither **APBA** PRO HOCKEY or its counterpart, **Lance Haffner's** HAT TRICK HOCKEY, have yet seen fit to up the ante. And I gotta be honest with ya, although some people dig the pure text approach, you can feel that ancient 8-bit awkwardness in both from start to finish.

Nevertheless, HAT TRICK is the better of the two by a slight margin. Despite sporting a downright hellish manual, it features a relatively simple installation procedure, allows more coaching/playing options when manually contesting a game, has print functions, and is generally the more enjoyable of the two.

The goal here is to provide gameplayers and stat freaks with an environment in which to develop customized teams and leagues, draft players, accumulate detailed statistics and create "fantasy" situations. You'll have to wait a long time for HAT TRICK to automatically complete all or part of a season (it takes 30 seconds for just a single game's stats to be saved to disk, on a Pentium, no less!), but this aside, HAT TRICK offers more game and more stats than PRO HOCKEY.

APBA ON ICE

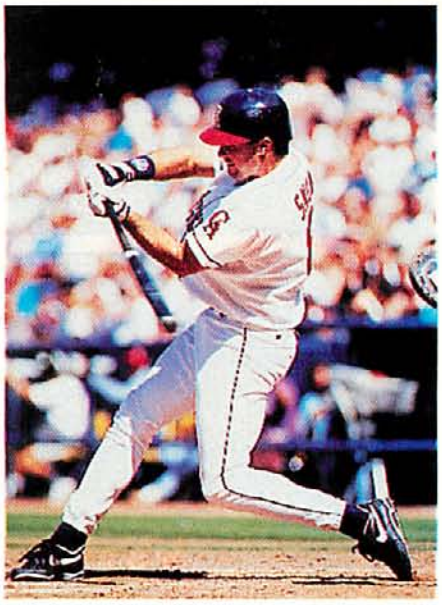
A limiting and frustrating installation procedure may well be the first thing you'll notice about APBA HOCKEY; nevertheless it does manage to perform virtually the same tasks as HAT TRICK, and in less time. Manual gameplay involves more coaching than on-ice decisions (which are almost non-existent), but play descriptions are good, head-to-head tilts are permitted (as with HAT TRICK), and stat compiling is quick.

With a prettier but more confusing interface than HAT TRICK, APBA may feel more like work than leisure to graphic game junkies, but in fairness, such is the nature of text-based games. For those who wade through Monday morning newspapers in search of the sports summary pages, APBA PRO HOCKEY tunes you into the facts, just the facts, man.

HOCKEY MVP

In summary, that perfect game, the one that blends hot graphics, cool options, and total on-ice realism with thorough stats, fantasy team and league possibilities and off-ice developments like long-term injuries, remains locked up in some programmer's mind. In the meantime, PC hockey nuts can be thankful that certain software houses are finally placing more emphasis on this venerable game, as competition can only spur on the process.

In the meantime, I'll be getting my kicks from NHL HOCKEY '95, the best of what is still some slim pickin's.



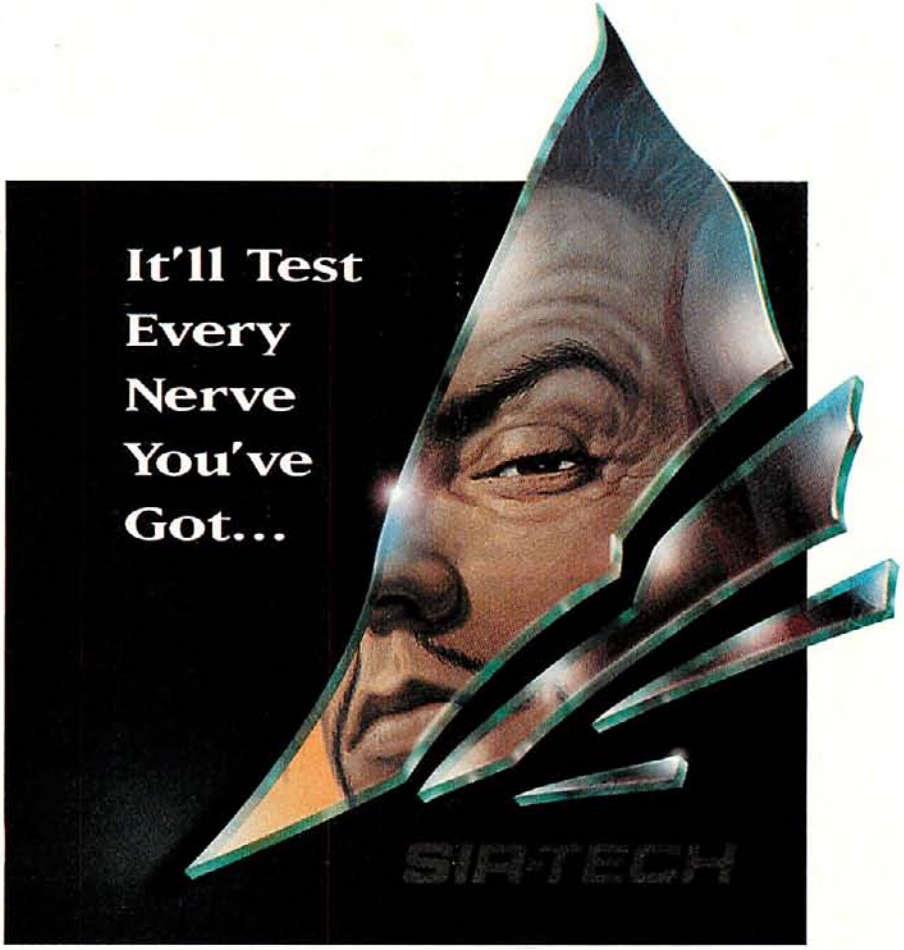
Baseball

Diamonds Are A Fan's Best Friend

by Jim Ginden

Baseball has a pace independent of clocks, stopwatches and time in general. Games end only after a certain number of outs have been recorded, and then only if one team is in the lead. These qualities, which frustrate fans in search of team hysteria or a quick action fix, serve to make baseball the perfect venue for a computer game designer.

Computer baseball today has evolved in two separate directions. One direction, referred to affectionately on the Internet as the domain of the "Stat-Drunk Com-



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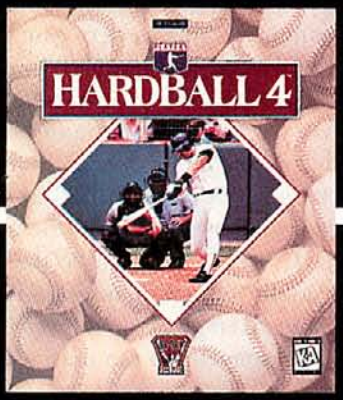

With all due respect to Minnesota and Atlanta, HardBall may be the greatest series of all time.

"HardBall 4 isn't merely better (than ESPN Baseball), it's in another league entirely."

– Entertainment Weekly

"HardBall 4 is without a doubt the most realistic baseball simulation you can buy."

– Electronic Entertainment

"Great graphics and fantastic arcade action are what have made the HardBall series the most popular action-oriented ball games around."

– Computer Gaming World

There is no debate. HardBall is the best-selling PC baseball game series of all time. And now, HardBall 4 has refined playability and realism to an unfair level that has the experts adjective-silly. You get stats that would make a sports bureau envious. You get 28 stadiums that are now more detailed, from the nasty winds at The Stick to the ERA-bruising altitude at Mile High. And HardBall's greatest graphics ever, with unequalled high-resolution digitized video graphics that'll have you swearing you see all 108 stitches. If you want a PC baseball game, get HardBall 4. And when talk turns to the greatest game ever, you can say you were there.

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puter Nerd," is the realm of games attempting to capture baseball statistically. These "text-based" games are measured by realism. If you manage the 1993 New York Mets, no matter how skilled you are with baseball strategy and lineup creation, you will be hard-pressed to escape the National League's Eastern Division basement. As sports strategy games are judged, the few that top this genre are among the best.

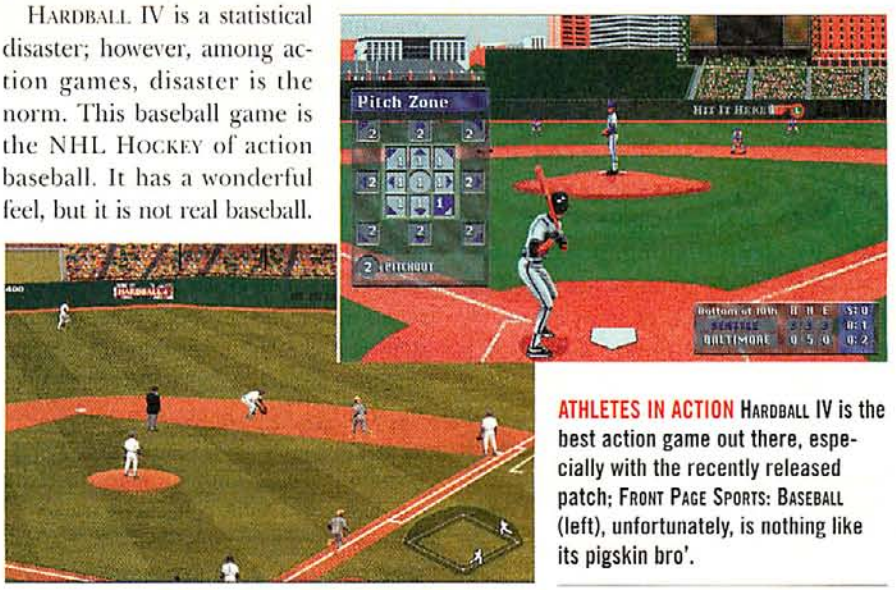
The other direction is the action-based game. Swing your bit-mapped bat at the proper instant. Guide your fielder sprites to the proper position. As in any action contest, the better you master these skills, the better your 1993 Mets will fare. On the whole, these games are much worse than their football and hockey counterparts. They are impressive more in their depiction of Baltimore's Camden Yards or Denver's Mile-High Stadium than in capturing the feel of tracking down a high fly ball to deep center.

BATTING LEADOFF

Three games, all fairly new to the scene, currently lead the action baseball market. **Accolade's** HARDBALL IV is by far the most visually impressive. The game's designers spent an enormous amount of effort putting together the SVGA baseball fields and pitching animations. HARDBALL features an excellent pitching interface, simple in theory, yet a model for all future development. Each pitcher has the ability to throw three or four of eight available pitch types, specializing in one. A button press selects the pitch. Another press begins the windup. You then attempt to guide the pitch into the proper location, your success determined by the pitcher's control rating.

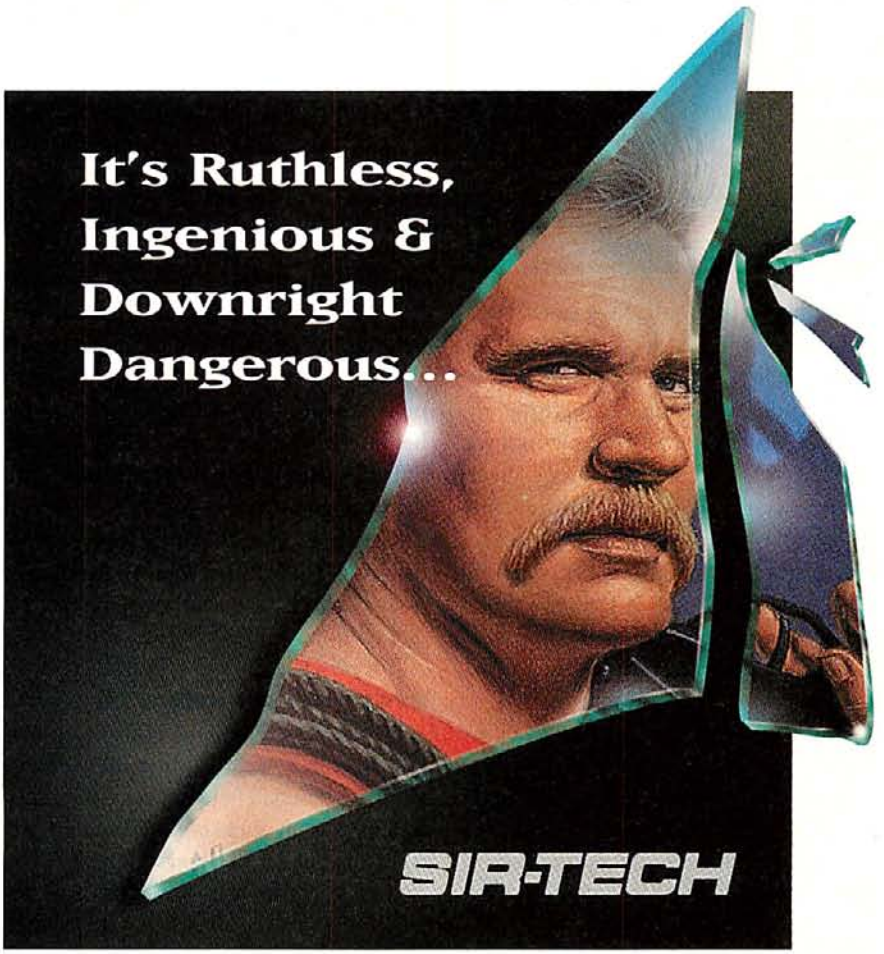
Hitting, as in all action baseball games, is an exercise in timing the swing of the bat. Because pitch location is very difficult to determine, HARDBALL, like its competition, is generous in allowing contact with the baseball, despite offering nine different locations for the swing. Once contact is made, the view shifts to a fielding screen, where the object is to guide the fielder toward the ball. Outfield play in HARDBALL is very difficult and is the key to successfully beating your opponent.

HARDBALL IV is a statistical disaster; however, among action games, disaster is the norm. This baseball game is the NHL HOCKEY of action baseball. It has a wonderful feel, but it is not real baseball.



ATHLETES IN ACTION HARDBALL IV is the best action game out there, especially with the recently released patch; FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL (left), unfortunately, is nothing like its pigskin bro'.

It is, perhaps, easier to master than **Electronic Arts'** on-ice action. After just a few games, you'll be handily winning games. If, or when, you make contact with the ball, it almost seems like there is a 50% chance the ball will land somewhere between two outfielders. And infielders have all the range of Ozzie Smith—when he's fast asleep. Fortunately, Accolade recently released a patch for HARDBALL that fixes some of these problems. Hits are slightly harder to come by and the fielding, particularly in the infield, is more easily controlled. Although our limited testing hasn't revealed too dramatic a change in difficulty, hopefully there is more here than seen at a quick glance.



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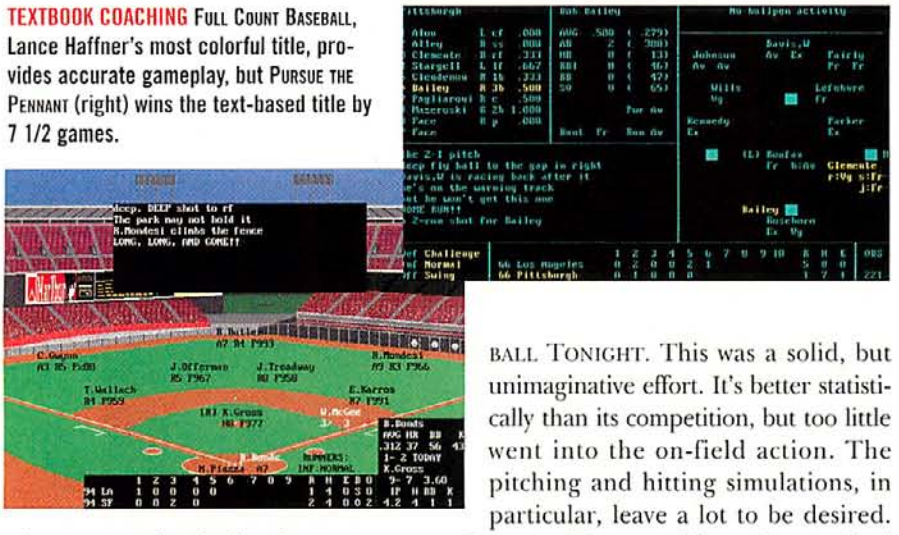
TRIPLE A BASEBALL

FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL basically represents nothing more than **Dynamix** porting its incredible football game to the scope of the baseball diamond. Its innovative ability ratings have been carried over to the Major Leagues. Players are rated for contact hitting, power hitting and speed, while pitchers are rated for endurance and each of several possible pitches. Terrific in theory, the game is statistically suspect. The player's ratings fluctuate only minimally from year to year, taking all the fun and skill out of managing a team for the long term. Pitcher ratings seem to have zero effect on game play as well. Colorado, which suffered from terrible pitching numbers due to a home ballpark that inflates offense like none other in history, routinely wins pennants in simulated seasons.



TEXTBOOK COACHING FULL COUNT BASEBALL, Lance Haffner's most colorful title, provides accurate gameplay, but PURSUE THE PENNANT (right) wins the text-based title by 7 1/2 games.

The FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL games excelled because of player animation and detail. In baseball, however, these are less important, and Dynamix, unfortunately, did not put much effort into new types of graphic simulation. Fielding plays start out with a dot representing a fielder and a box representing where the ball will fall. If I really wanted to play "guide the blip into the blip container," I'd dig the TRS-80 out of my closet and write the program myself.

To make matters worse, if you enjoy playing with a single team in a league, you must wait eons for simulated games. Just about every other game on the market can simulate a season in a couple of hours with equal or better accuracy. Even on a high-end computer, FPS:BASEBALL takes days to simulate a full season, and it gives your hard disk quite a workout—as if Dynamix opens and closes a file every time it updates a single at bat. FPS: BASEBALL '95 was in the works but has now been put on hold due to the baseball strike. That's too bad. At least the much delayed Stadium/Great Players add-on is on it's way. I sincerely hope that Dynamix does revise FPS, and if they do, I hope that they hire a baseball expert or two because FPS: FOOTBALL is probably the most innovative sports game ever made. Dynamix *should* know how to turn the baseball world on its collective ear.

STORM ON THE HORIZON

Stormfront Studios just recently entered the baseball world with ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT. This was a solid, but unimaginative effort. It's better statistically than its competition, but too little went into the on-field action. The pitching and hitting simulations, in particular, leave a lot to be desired. BASEBALL TONIGHT follows the standard fielding model—players running toward a shrinking circle—but one-ups the competition with what is probably the best fielding implementation on the market. Statistically, it has nowhere near the depth of the text games, and the rest of the game, marred in particular by a weak pitching model and uneven scrolling, doesn't stand out enough to warrant a lot of attention.

STAT FREAK FRENZY

PURSUE THE PENNANT 5.03 is as plain-jane as it ever was, resisting the trend of adding a baseball field as background art. But statistically speaking, it's the most accurate game on the market. PTP is fast and easy to use, with a wealth of radio-style play description. For baseball enthusiasts who enjoy running full-season simulations, this is the best product around. Its designers have a wonderful understanding of the intricacies of baseball-by-the-numbers.

STRAT-O-MATIC COMPUTER BASEBALL 5.0 is almost as good as PTP when it comes to statistical accuracy. It has a wonderful, mouse-driven graphic interface and a few extra features, including a computer draft module and limited artificial intelligence for making trades. If you enjoy managing games head-to-head or playing the role of one manager in a league, this is the best game on the market. STRAT-O-MATIC does suffer from a key-disk based copy protection scheme, which may limit its appeal.

BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS is based on the APBA board game. Unlike its competition, it is not well-suited for league play because the game's computer coach is unusually weak. Additionally, BBW is very slow recreating games, and if you have enabled injury or fatigue, it interrupts season simulation for user input. BBW is on a par with Strat-O-Matic statistically, and features beautiful ballparks and an excellent statistical report interface. BBW is ideal for a long, leisurely, single game against a human opponent.

FULL COUNT BASEBALL 6.0 is one of a huge line of games created by **Lance Haffner.** FULL COUNT is a little harder to use and doesn't match up to PTP or STRAT-O-MATIC when it comes to simulating full seasons. It has a few bugs and less variety in play description. But this is a quality game and sells for less than the competition. If you're willing to spend a lot of time with lineup creation and opponent tools, you can get full functionality and accuracy out of this game.

BASEBALL MVP

When it comes to choosing the best in computer baseball, there's no one game that leaps to the fore. For one thing, no one game meets both the action- and the stat-oriented gamers' needs. For the stat-based, let's-manage-a-team enthusiast, I'm torn between STRAT-O-MATIC 5.0 and PURSUE THE PENNANT 5.03. For the action baseball player, I recommend HARDBALL IV and a six-run handicap.

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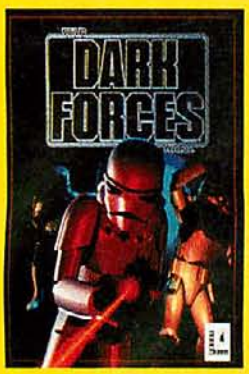

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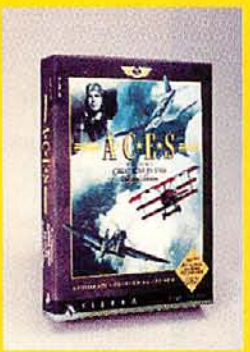

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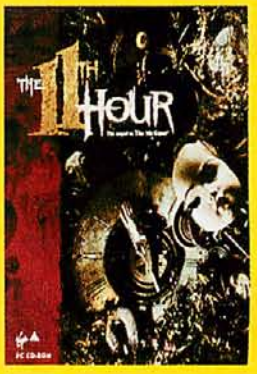

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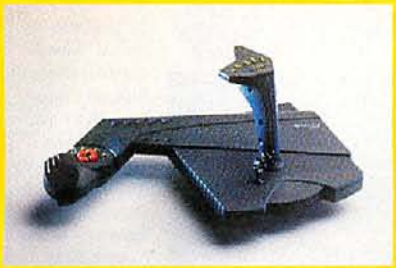

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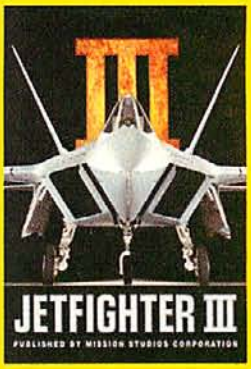

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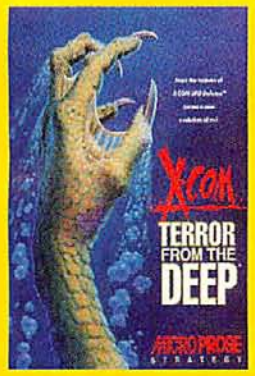

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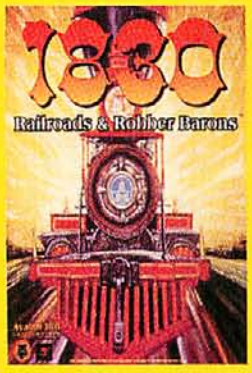

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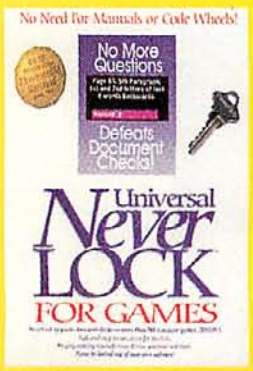

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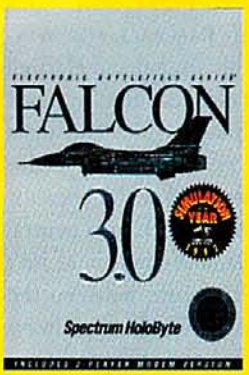

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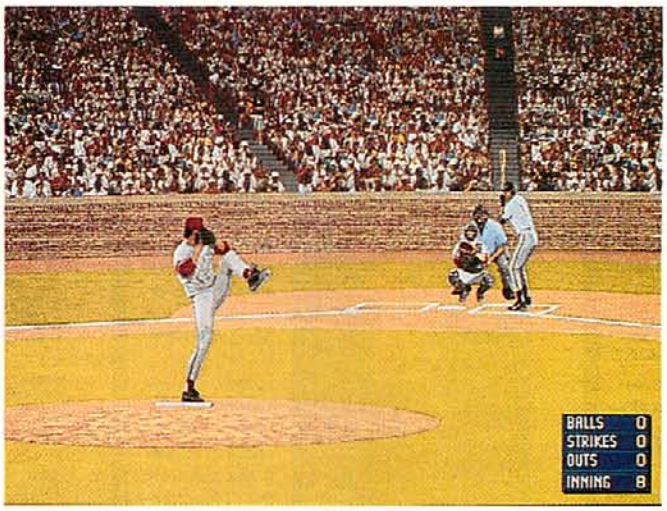
ROOKIES OF THE YEAR

TONY LARUSSA BASEBALL 3 will soon appear on store shelves. It is designed by the prolific **Stormfront Studios**, who designed ESPN Baseball Tonight and is reportedly putting together a baseball game for **Microsoft** called MICROSOFT BASEBALL. TLB3, done in SVGA, is a graphic improvement over ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT. The animation is much smoother and the pitching interface, while still a long way from HARDBALL or FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL, is also improved. However, fielding was very difficult in the beta version we looked at. Again, you have to guide a fielder into a gradually shrinking circle, only there's very little room for error. This may be more fault-tolerant when the final version is released.

The hitting mechanism is, like all other games, an exercise in timing. Once you get the timing down, you can generate enormous numbers of hits. Again, this will hopefully be toned down when the game is released. TLB3 is graphically just a few notches below HARDBALL in detail. The game adds an innovative one-pitch action mode, which generates contact on most swings. This reduces game time without greatly affecting game play.

Statistically, TLB3 seems to border on the bizarre. Season simulation takes only a few minutes, and comes up with far too many home runs, but not nearly enough singles, doubles and strikeouts. Relief pitchers often make 120 appearances in a 162-game season and starting pitchers almost never complete a game. But at least TLB3 simulates quickly, as opposed to its competitors which fare just as badly using much more time. TLB3 features a managers' profile, which strangely enough does more than manage. If you tell the manager to select lineups based on good power hitting, the team's power hitters will suddenly become Ruthian. If the pitchers are told to challenge hitters, they suddenly become unhittable. I played with the 1993 New York Mets profile, and increased their win total from 61 in real life to 111 in the simulation. Eric Hillman (2-9, 3.97 ERA in 1993) became a Cy Young-caliber pitcher (23-5, 2.86 in the simulation).

TLB3's designers are not afraid to attack the unknown. When released, the game will have a fantasy draft module that will include player salaries. It will also contain a General Manager Challenge, which will implement scouting and control of a changing team over the course of several seasons. Unfortunately, these modules were not functional in the beta version.



THREE TIMES A TONY **In Tony LaRussa's third computer game incarnation, Stormfront is hoping to put it all together: fantastic graphics, great gameplay and a dugout full of stats.**

MILLER TIME

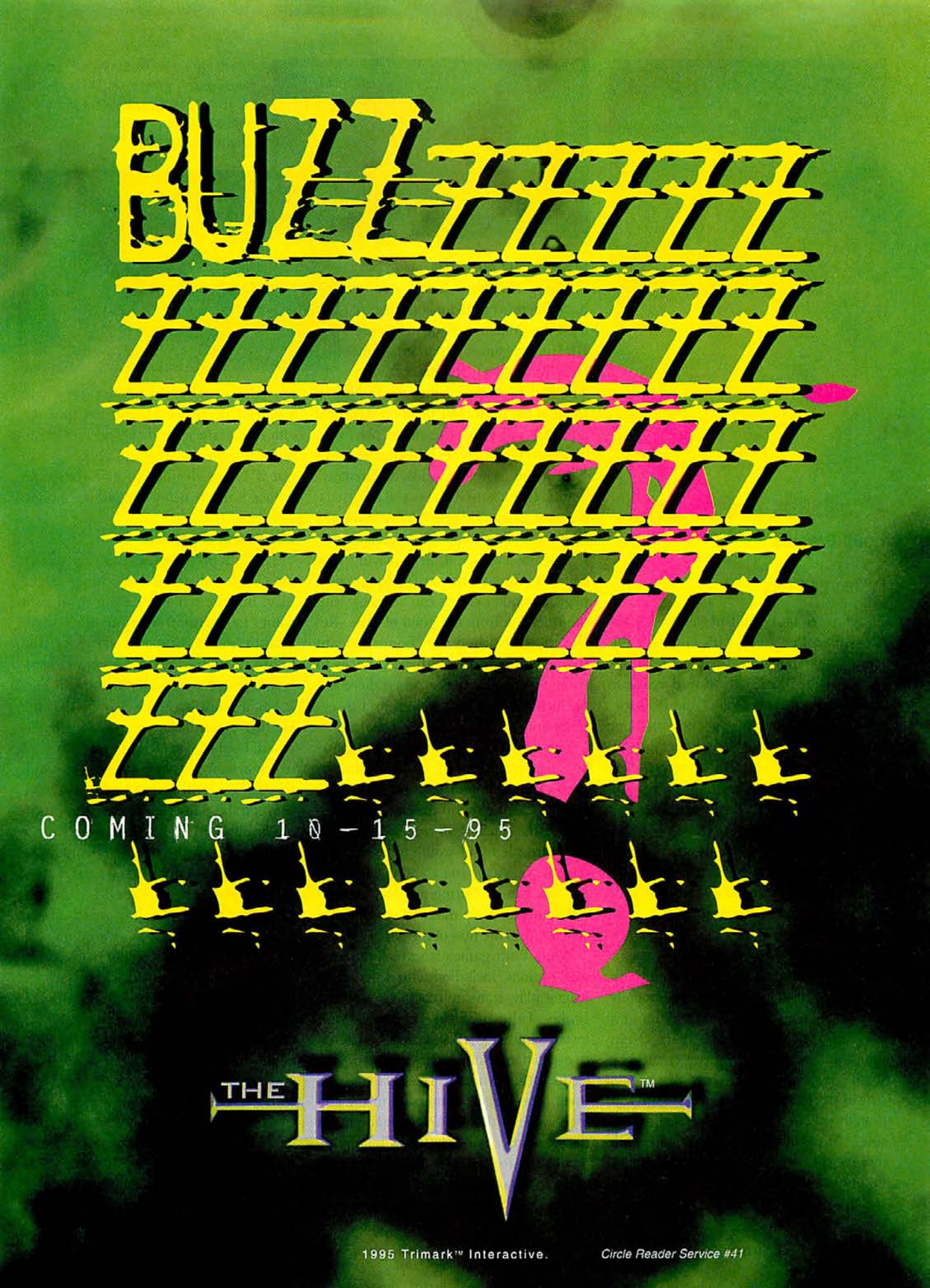
Miller Associates is adding a wealth of new function to BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS. First up is the BILL JAMES ELECTRONIC BASEBALL ENCYCLOPEDIA. This CD-ROM contains just about every baseball statistic every recorded. It also provides the mechanism for quickly creating a wide variety of reports based on these statistics; for example, you can create a report comparing Claudell Washington and Lou Gehrig from age 25 to 33. Or you can list the top 25 left-hand hitting third basemen when it comes to hitting triples among National Leaguers from 1922 to 1979. The encyclopedia either runs off the CD-ROM or puts 65 megabytes of information on your hard disk. It can explore its entire database in about 12 minutes from a hard disk on a high-end machine.

The BASEBALL ENCYCLOPEDIA is designed so that you can import players into BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS 3.0, which is also due out in the near future and will address players' numerous concerns. This will give BBW an edge over the competition, who often charge high prices for a season disk containing players from the past.

For those of you who grew up, as I did, within radio range of WJR in Detroit, Miller Associates has another treat in store for this season. ERNIE HARWELL'S BROADCAST BLAST adds sound to BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS. This amounts to Harwell reading the text that appears on the play-by-play during a game. You can adjust the broadcast to favor the home or visiting team, or have a neutral broadcast, although there isn't much difference between the versions. Harwell was always considered one of the most impartial announcers in baseball.

BROADCAST BLAST adds a lot of text in between batters, and, because BBW already had a large play library, gives this product much more complete announcing than any of the action games with an announcer. This adds to the game's appeal as a great game for a leisurely afternoon with a friend. And, if they make some significant fixes in Version 3.0, this Windows-based baseball sim could be a future pennant winner.

With the exception of Lance Haffner's game, all the major text-based simulations are based on a board game. The newest board game, *Dynasty League Baseball*, will debut its computer version later this year. Michael Cieslinski, who designed PURSUE THE PENNANT, is moving on to design DYNASTY LEAGUE. The computer version, designed on the Windows platform, will be an exact duplicate of the board game. The upcoming release will contain just a single-game module. A more complete version, containing league management function, is also due for release this year.



1995 Trimark™ Interactive.

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Basketball

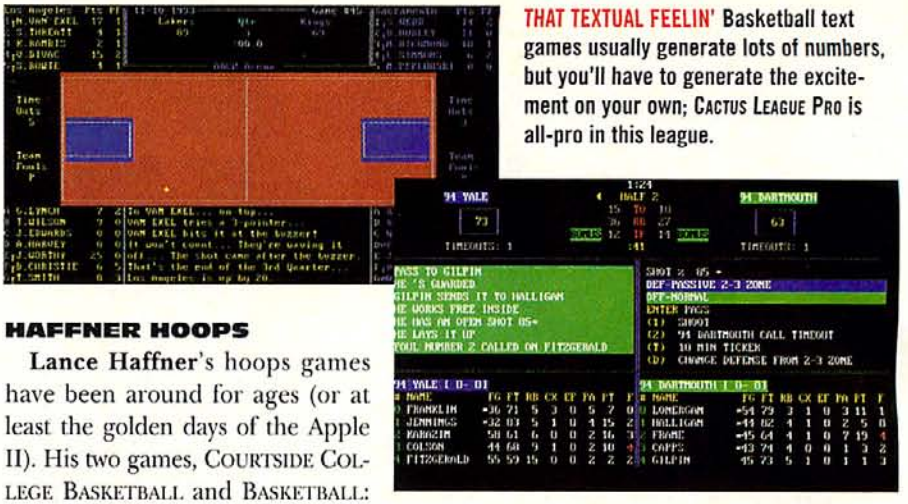
Hoop Dreams

by George Jones

As a former basketball player and a big hoops fan, I'm green with envy. All the other major sports have great simulations that provide great action and realistic gameplay. But basketball is one PC sport which hasn't yet come into its own—not on the broad scale of a FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL '95 at least. But enough whining. While things do appear about to change with **Electronic Arts'** upcoming NBA LIVE '95, the present is filled with text-filled hoop simulations, some of which are surprisingly good, and one ambitious graphical attempt that doesn't quite make the grade.

TAKIN' IT TO THE TEXT

Text-based hoop games have been around for ages. They have traditionally boasted a robust statistical model and a no-frills approach to basketball. Often times, these games have been created by small companies, or in some cases, by a single person. Don't let this fool you though—these games are for real. Not a single one of them is sub-par, although most of them do lack some of the refinements we've come to expect from the larger game design houses.



THAT TEXTUAL FEELIN' Basketball text games usually generate lots of numbers, but you'll have to generate the excitement on your own; CACTUS LEAGUE PRO is all-pro in this league.

HAFFNER HOOPS

Lance Haffner's hoops games have been around for ages (or at least the golden days of the Apple II). His two games, COURTSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL and BASKETBALL: THE PRO GAME are games for the purist in all of us. Both offer dead-on statistical accuracy and tons of teams to play with. THE PRO GAME comes with last season's NBA teams as well as a disk of "greatest" teams. COURTSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL comes with every single NCAA Division I team, as well as some of the greatest college teams ever. And, as if playing with teams from past days wasn't enough, nostalgic computer cagers can also play with the rulebook from the good ol' days. Relive the days when the "bonus" meant that a player received three chances to make two free throws, or when there was no such thing as a shot clock or a three-point line.

The textual descriptions of each game are fairly plain, relying on terse descriptions of the action as opposed to flowery language, but I found that it didn't matter all that much. You should be able to generate plenty of excitement on your own; if you can't, you shouldn't be playing text games. During a game, you can either make every decision, or you can coach within the flow of the game.

While both games feature long-term play options, including auto scheduling, league play, statistical databases and autoplay, I did miss the "creature comforts." Haffner's NBA version had a few pre-existing schedules built in, but COURTSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL had none. The biggest ommission in the college game is the NCAA tournament—a damn shame. Still, Haffner's incredible dedication to the titles (he is constantly updating statistics and compiling more teams) is an example for all game designers to follow. These games are very sound statistically, and once you get past the clunky interfaces and the decidedly unhelpful manuals, they do shine. Watch out if Lance decides to give these two games a much needed Windows facelift.

DESERT, PLEASE

The "cactus leagues" have long been associated with small time, minor league play. But the name is deceptive when it comes to **Cactus Development's** CACTUS LEAGUE PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL: the fourth revision of the game, released early this year, looks ready for the big time. It has a polished, finessed look that the Haffner games lack, yet it still maintains a high level of statistical accuracy. I found it remarkably easy to navigate through the games, and while coaching a game between the saintly Lakers and the much-despised Celtics, I found myself more drawn into this game than any other: An easy-to-read gameplay screen and a more colorful play-by-play is probably the reason why. On one play, my guard canned a three-pointer, but it was waved off—his foot, was on the line! Additionally, coaching seems more intuitive and better captures the flow of the game. Although there is a graphical representation of the court, the only active graphical element is an indicator of where the ball is.

CACTUS LEAGUE BASKETBALL comes with the current season's teams, all of whom play reliably. Auto scheduling, league play, and an impressive statistical database are included. I do wish that there was a schedule generator, though. I'm lazy and I hate having to draw up

schedules for the 16 team leagues I'm always creating.

WELCOME TO THE NBN

Rather than trying to recreate reality, **Strategic Gaming Design** decided to create their own world of basketball in NOTHING BUT NET. At the beginning of a season, the program creates the appropriate number of players from scratch to fill an 8, 16, or 28 team league. Gamers then take turns drafting players (or let the computer do it for them) according to their respective strengths and weaknesses, which are numerically rated. The only problem with this scheme is that after spending considerable time and effort drafting and setting up a team, there is no way of automatically generating a schedule (that laziness thing again). So, if you create a 28 team league, you're going to have to create a 28 team schedule if you want league play.

I had mixed feelings about the gameplay. On one hand, there was tons of information, entertaining descriptions of the court action, and even small scale graphical depictions of players shooting the ball. On the other hand, there is so much information on the screen at once that things can get a bit confusing. Furthermore, the interface, as intuitive as it seems, was slow to respond to my wishes, even on a Pentium machine. NBN takes a few seconds to recognize mouse clicks and button presses, which can be a little frustrating in the heat of a game.

Even though computer cagers looking for real NBA or NCAA action will be disappointed with SDG's fictional approach, fans who don't mind creating their own history and won't mind the few flaws might want to check out this title. It is amazing how easily you get attached to "your" players, even if they are nobodies.

VISUAL ROUNDBALL

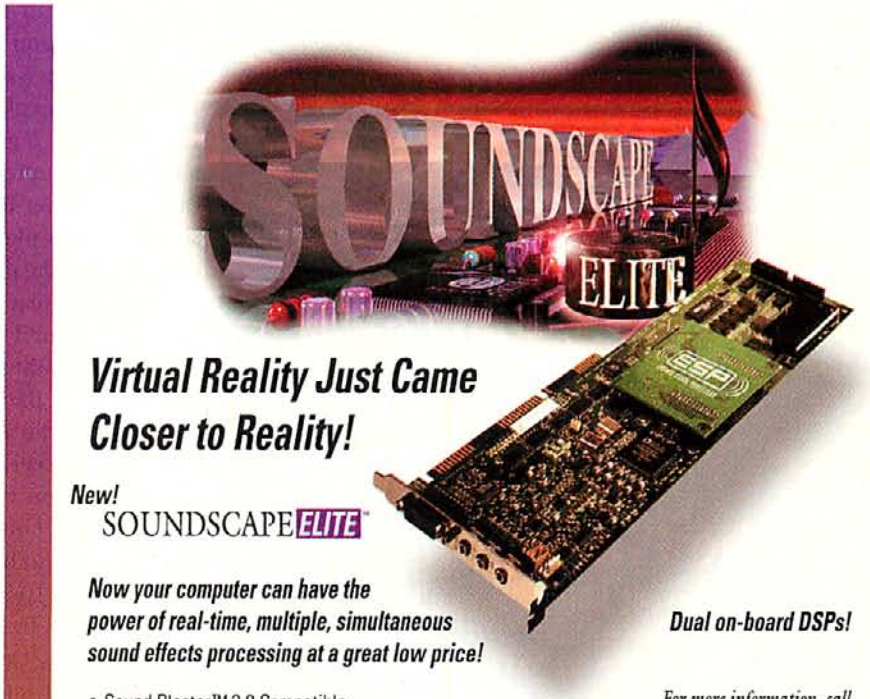
Bethesda's college basketball game has been greatly anticipated. But ultimately, **Bethesda's** NCAA: ROAD TO THE FINAL FOUR 2, like all the others like it, is more of a testament of how hard it is to make a good basketball game with nice graphics. To put it bluntly—this hoops game is not that good.

Statistically, this game is right on the money. After running through 20 1994 NCAA tournaments, Arkansas (last year's champ) made it to the final four 18 times. North Carolina made it 14 times, and most of last year's powerful teams appeared multiple times. In fact, it seems that this game might be a little too predisposed towards the favorites; I witnessed very few big upsets. But that's life, I suppose. How often does a Miami of Ohio team beat Arizona?

HIGHER LEARNING NCAA 2 looks pretty good, but is mostly unable to attain the lofty goals it sets for itself.

NCAA 2 has some real problems when it comes to the on-screen action. First and foremost is the fact that there are only two different images of the players—one set of which looks nothing like actually basketball players. This kind of dampened the "wow" effect of the high-res SVGA graphics for me, a problem which was even further compounded by the awkward animation of the players as they stuttered down the floor. And then there is the huge flaw in the game's rule-book which allows substitutions after any made basket (in real life you have to wait until a dead-ball, timeout, or after a made free throw).

It's really too bad, because if executed properly, NCAA 2 could have been *the* basketball game for the PC. Instead, poor design features and an unimpressive graphical representation of the game bring it down. After watching your forward dribble on the baseline for 10 seconds and then get a charging foul, you'll think so too.



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SLAM & JAM With its flashy graphics and top-rate action, NBA Live '95 is looking to quickly become the new hoops hero.

BASKET BALL MVP

My advice to the gamer interested in authentic hoops action is to go for Cactus League Basketball. It is the easiest to use, the least frustrating, and the most fun. If you absolutely must get some college action, you'd be better off avoiding NCAA2 and buying Lance Haffner's Courtside College Basketball. Clunky interface aside, it is a pretty good hoops sim, and where else can you coach the Dartmouth Big Green? If you're an action fan or if you're just sick of text, then run, don't walk, to your software store, and buy NBA Live '95. Right before press time we got a good look at a near final version, and it looks like our hoop dreams come true.

IN THE BONUS

Several companies have promised basketball titles sometimes this year, including **MicroLeague** and **Sony Interactive** (ESPN Basketball, which will apparently be an NBA-based two-on-two game in the style of **Acclaim's** NBA Jam), but we were only able to get our hands on one product, **Electronic Arts'** NBA Live '95, which should be on the shelves as this article appears. It's a good thing, too, because this cartridge-to-PC port blew our minds and ate up our time.

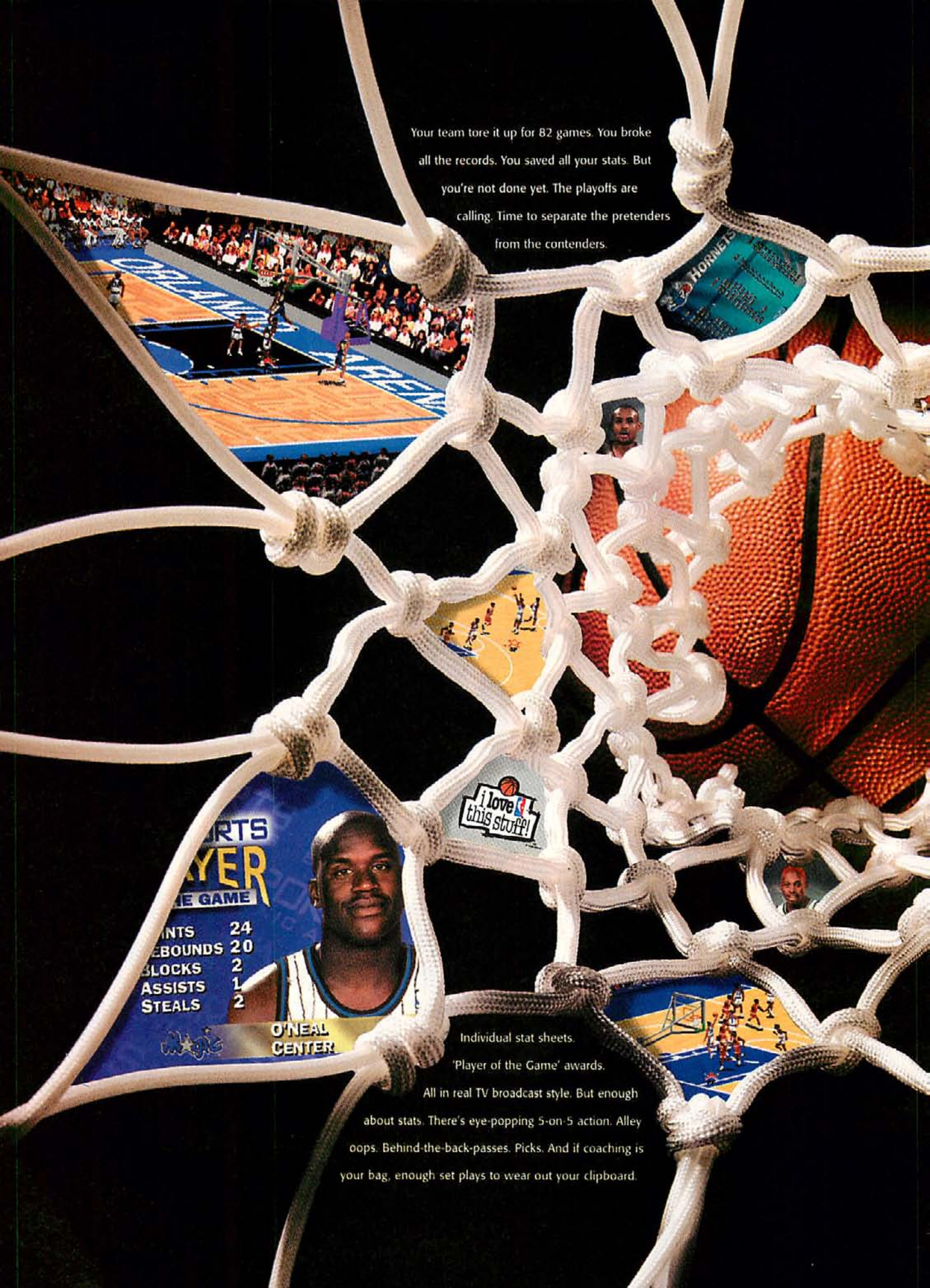
While Sega and SNES owners have had a slew of basketball games for their systems, PC players have seen nothing but text. Perhaps that explained why, minutes after booting up NBA Live, a crowd of gawkers gathered around the computer. Just about every feature you could hope for are on this court: practically every player from every NBA team (even "Shaq"), full season play with playoffs, and a surprisingly good statistical database. But the main draw, in all honesty, is simply the action-oriented gameplay. Not only are the players well-animated, but they move around the screen quickly *and* intelligently. You'll get up from your seat when you see Kevin Johnson throw an alley-oop to Charles Barkley for a monster jam. The sounds are good too, creating the atmosphere of an NBA arena with echoing dance riffs and cheering.

But the action isn't everything. There appears to be a solid statistical model underneath all the flash and excitement in this game, which also boasts full 82 game league play. Each team is rated in over 10 statistical categories, and you can sort the league leaders by category. Players, most of whom have full screen photos, can also be traded from team to team (but there's no trade intelligence).

In the end, there is a lot more we could say about this game, most of which would be said in superlatives. Although the version we played did appear to have some endgame AI bugs, which will hopefully be fixed, it is still a remarkable product. If our first impressions hold up, NBA Live '95 will do for computer basketball what the NHL series did for computer hockey.

Circle Reader Service #110

INTRODUCE YOUR COMPUTER TO A MIND-BOGGLING NEW NET.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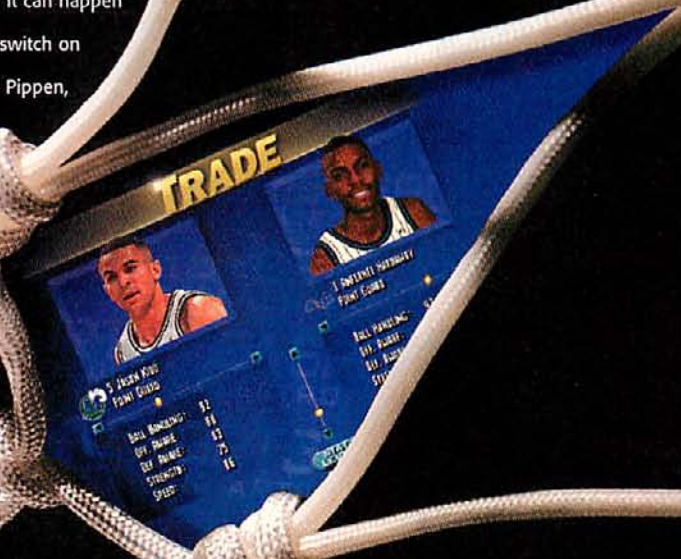
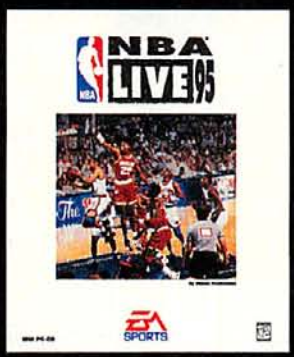
All in real TV broadcast style. But enough about stats. There's eye-popping 5-on-5 action. Alley oops. Behind-the-back-passes. Picks. And if coaching is your bag, enough set plays to wear out your clipboard.

Webber. Traded. Drexler. History. Gugliotta. Going once. Going twice. Gone to Minnesota. Hey, if it can happen to these guys, why not pull the switch on some other big names like Pippen, Starks or Kidd?



EA SPORTS. It's in the game.

We rated the players in 15 categories like field goals, assists and rebounds. Of course, stats can't begin to describe the thrill of a game-winning, two-guys-hangin'-all-over-ya, nothin'-but-net-trey.



We took the usual stats and did something extreme. Actually added basketball. Now you control fast breaks, slams, blocks. You crash the boards or ride the pine from either of two views. Full court and close up. It's the NBA. On your PC. Get ready to sky.

NBA LIVE ON PC-CD

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SCORPIA SCOPES OUT THE AVATAR'S NEW CLOTHES AND PEEKS INTO THE X-FILES OF TAKE 2'S, BUREAU 13

GAME UPGRADES ARE AN ALL-TOO-COMMON OCCURRENCE these days. Often, when a new release shows up, the first question from gamers is likely to be: "So? When is the patch coming out?" Buggy games, followed by several patches to fix the flaws, are almost routine.

So it is unprecedented for a company to produce a patch that neither incorporates missing material (as with OUTPOST) nor repairs serious bugs (too many products to mention). ULTIMA VIII, as released, was a complete game, and had no serious technical problems; indeed, it ran very cleanly on my computer.

Yet few were happy with PAGAN, for a variety of reasons, and gamers were not shy in voicing their dissatisfaction with the game; I certainly wasn't. As a response to this tide of discontent, **Origin** has now brought out an upgrade to address some of these points. I gritted my teeth and reinstalled the game, to see for myself how much the upgrade improved PAGAN. So let's take a look at what's new.

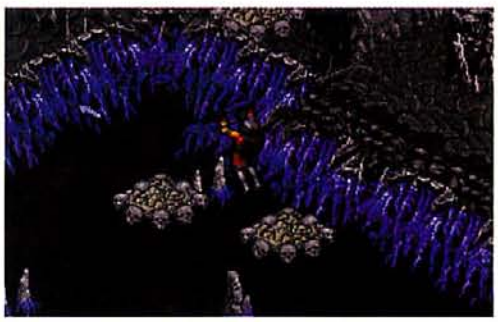
Targeted jumping. Probably the single most-hated feature of the original was the unbearable precision required to jump from place to place. Stand just so, face just so, then jump and hope for the best, which frequently meant restoring the game as the Avatar sank out of sight.

That's gone. Now, clicking on the target area causes the figure to leap right to it. You do have to be facing that way, of course, and the spot has to be in range, but otherwise, exact positioning is no longer necessary. Also, the floating platforms on the path to Lithos have been frozen in place, making it a snap to get across. Unfortunately, the disappearing bridge, vanishing platforms, and sinking stones are still with us. Jumping is thus not entirely carefree; timing remains an important consideration. For all that, jumping and leaping are far less aggravating than they used to be, and these sections of the game can be completed much faster.

Sorcerer spells. Another disliked part of the game was the fickleness of having everything just so when enchanting items with fire spells, along with having no idea what was wrong if the spell didn't work. PAGAN is now more forgiving about the placement of reagents, although they still have to be fairly close to the candles. You also receive a hint from your mentor during the Sorcerer test, and from the Avatar himself later, as to what is wrong if "nothing happens."

Breath of Wind. Stealing this item from Stellos caused all air spells except Air Walk to stop working. Now, the spells will work whether you have the Breath or not, so you can take it any time.

Recall Item. The teleport device now comes with unlimited charges, and can be used anywhere except in the Obsidian Fortress. Previously, it did not work inside the Sorcerer enclave.



TREAD LIGHTLY, AVATAR Jumping is not quite the hair-pulling ordeal it used to be in ULTIMA VIII, thanks to Origin's PAGAN upgrade.

Void Pentagram. The final pentagram that opens the Black Gate now provides a hint when you place the powered blackrock fragments on it. When a piece is set in the right location, little sparkles briefly appear over it, so you know it's in the correct spot.

Wood Names. The special wood requested by Vividos during the Necromancer tests has been given the name "Dead Man's Elbow," instead of just "sticks," so you know exactly what he wants.

Conversations. If you talk to people long

by Scorpia

enough, you receive more information from them than before.

Birthplace of Moriens. This did not exist in the original, causing many people frustration when they went looking for it. Now, the structure in the crypts that was previously labeled "Towards Fate Do You Travel" has a sign that says "Birthplace of Moriens" instead. Also, there is a small altar, similarly named, inside, although the altar itself does not seem to do anything.

Combat. This has not changed much, except in one regard: the Avatar no longer falls down when hit, unless he receives a killing blow. There is still a knockback effect if he takes a shot, but it isn't half as bad as falling down and trying to get up again.

Inventory. Reagents stack properly, and dropping items is less restrictive, although you still have to be careful that what you drop doesn't bounce away.

Item Changes. Bonecrusher now exists, replacing the Hammer of Strength. I suspect this is a name change only, as Bonecrusher did not perform any better in combat than the original Hammer. The library at Argentrock now contains some books on the philosophy of the Theurgists. Previously, all you could read about were air spells, making it very difficult to pass the Test of Wisdom. After reading the new books, anyone should be able to pass the test with ease. A change was also made to the magic armor in the ghost subplot, but this I didn't check, since I could never get that section of the game to open up.

Finally, several hot keys have been added. The F7 key does an unnamed quick save, and F8 restores it. "B" can be used to activate the bedroll immediately, without rooting around in the backpack. "R" does the same for the Recall Device, as does "K" for the key ring when opening locked doors.

So what do all these changes mean? ULTIMA VIII is not materially different from before. You still have to perform the same actions, do the same leaping and jumping, behave in the same deceitful fashion, and generally wreak havoc on the world, just as in the first release.

However, the mechanics have been improved so that getting through the game is much less aggravating than it used to be. Jumping is not quite such a horror. Some of the tedium has been relieved. More information is available. Overall, PAGAN is definitely more playable with the upgrade than the original release. If you had put off playing this one because of the arcade aspects (among other things), you may want to obtain the patch (from Origin, or almost any online service, or Internet) and give it a try. I can't guarantee the game will be more fun, but it will certainly be less frustrating. In any case, kudos are due to Origin for making this extra effort.

WHEN THE GOING GETS STRANGE... In BUREAU 13, you can pick a pair of agents from a selection of six "specialists," although their special abilities aren't as useful as one might hope.

X-FILES IMPOSSIBLE

Moving now from the old to the new, we come to BUREAU 13 from **Take 2 Software**. This is an adventure based on the paper RPG of the same name. It could be described as "Mission: Impossible meets X-Files," although, unfortunately, the game doesn't have the quality of either.

BUREAU 13 is a hush-hush agency that investigates the paranormal, be it flying saucers, demons, werewolves, or what-have-you. In the current case, the Bureau is after a rogue agent who tried to kill a small-town sheriff for reasons unknown. Your mission is to find out why and prevent J.P. Withers (the rogue agent) from completing the job.

BUREAU 13

Price: $69.95, CD-ROM
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/33 or better ,1.5 MB free EMS, VGA graphics, 13 MB Hard Disk space, CD-ROM drive; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
Designers: Rick Hall, Tom Howell
Publisher: Take 2 Interactive Software
New York, NY
(212) 941-2988

You may take any two agents from a pool of six: hacker, thief, priest, witch, vampire, or musclewoman (who runs around in powered armor). Each has skills that can be used to solve some of the puzzles, although it doesn't particularly matter whom you have in the party.

The game has a "golden path," such that it can be completed regardless of the mix of agents you use. So, you don't have to worry about becoming stuck because you chose the wrong people, and you can use any two that appeal to you.

The interface is point-and-click, with the cursor lighting up as it touches hot spots on the screen. These spots are items to look at, pick up, or manipulate. The right mouse button cycles through the actions available with each item; clicking the left button performs the action. Happily, you can do this from anywhere in a room; the lead character will walk (if there are no obstacles) over to the item and perform the desired action.

A drop-down bar at the top of the screen displays the active agent, his or her inventory, and a list of standard commands. You don't need to use the list very often, since you can cycle the command cursor with the mouse button.

Typically, the agents will go together from screen to screen, but you can make one "stay put" by toggling the follow/stay put button on the bar. There are a couple of situations where this can be useful, but for the most part, keeping the pair together is best.

Movement is accomplished with the mouse, and exits or special locations light

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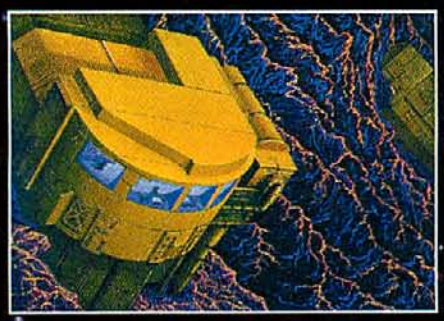

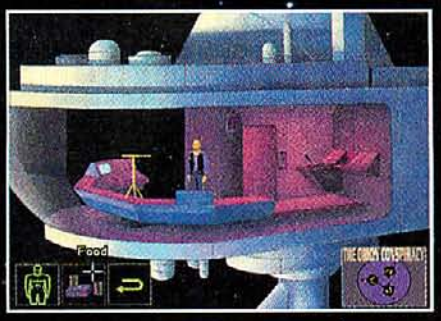

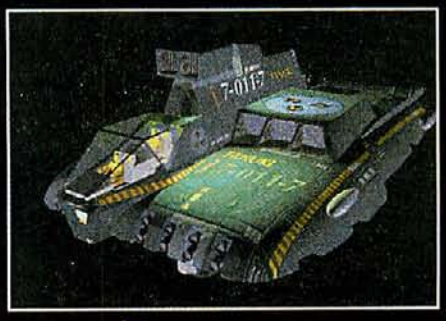

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up with a short description, such as "Forest Road" or "Inside Police Station;" clicking when these are visible moves the team to that area.

Using an item from the inventory is generally a matter of putting it on the cursor, then left-clicking where you want to use it. If nothing happens, you're probably trying the wrong item, or you may need to do something else first.

BRING OUT YOUR WEIRD Fortunately, the tolerant folks of Stratusburg don't mind being around vampires, thieves and other freaks.

The game allows for 16 save positions, arranged as 4 x 4 boxes. Each box has a small graphic of the save location and a space at the top of the screen for a description.

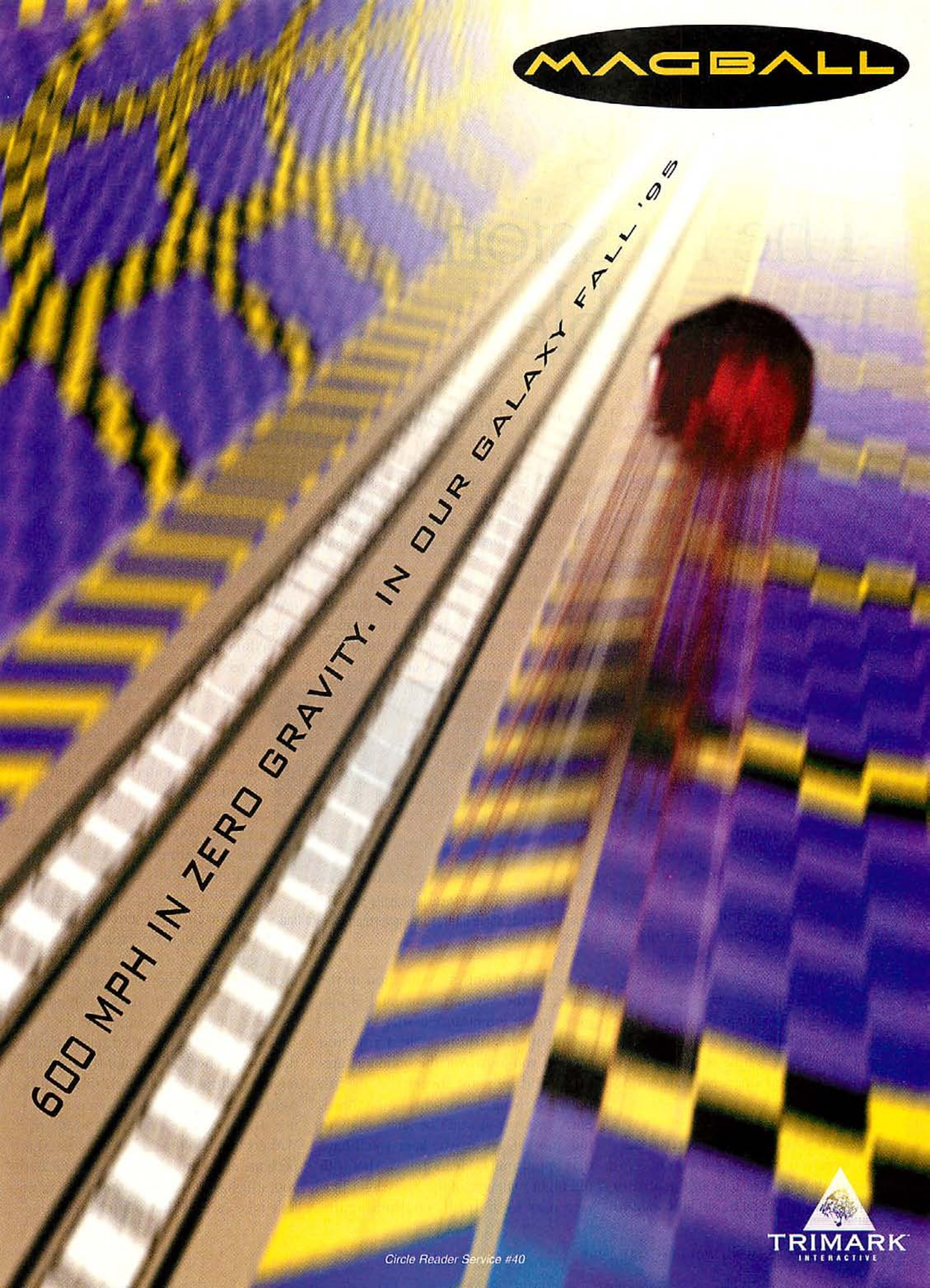
Most of the puzzles are not especially difficult. Some solutions, however, tend towards the obscure, requiring leaps of intuition rather than logic. Also, the major puzzles in the game can only be solved one way, even though you'd think that some of the special skills could be useful in overcoming the problem.

For example, there is J.P. Wither's van, which has a special magnetic lock. The lock is beyond the thief's abilities. The hacker says he could bypass the mechanism "If I had a feedback loop," but there is no such device in the game, nor can one be built from parts in the electronics store. Even the vampire, who can turn into mist, is unable to enter the van because it's weather-proofed. The only way in is to find the special magnetic keycard.

Situations like this are annoying, because they reduce the importance of the individual agents' skills, particularly when those skills would be most useful. While we don't expect every puzzle to have multiple solutions, the ones that do ought to have been better thought out.

Much of the information gathered comes from books, notes, memos, etc. Conversations are almost superfluous, considering how little is learned from them. Even Father Blank, who is supposed to be superior at getting people to talk, is hardly able to elicit more from characters than any other agent.

Overall, while BUREAU 13 is a nice concept with some interesting possibilities, they don't quite come together here. The game had an unpolished feel to it, especially in the looseness of the plot, lack of meaningful conversations, and some poorly-conceived puzzles. At best, this is a modest entry, good for those times when there isn't much else to play.



Circle Reader Service #40

Fulfilling The Mission Impossible

Special Agent Scorpia Leads You Down The "Golden Path" of Take 2's BUREAU 13

SO, YOU'VE CHOSEN TO ACCEPT THE MISSION PRESENTED BY **TAKE 2**'S BUREAU 13. IT'S GOOD TO HAVE you on the case. Of course, should you fail in this mission, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions, but that's why I'm here to help you along. By the way, this hint column will self-destruct in five seconds....

As noted in Scorpia's Sting, you can choose any two of the six agents for your team, so this Tale will mainly be a guide to the "golden path" that will get you through the game, regardless of team composition. That still gives you room to experiment with your agents to find alternate solutions to some of the situations.

BUREAU 13 isn't quite linear; you do have some freedom to roam around and solve things in different orders, although there are key points in the game that open up new areas to you. And you can always go back to any place you've been before; nothing is closed off after you've left it.

Remember to look at (or search) every item you pick up. Otherwise, you might miss an important clue to the item's function. And while there's no combat in the game, there are a couple of places where an agent can end up very dead, so do save regularly.

THE STRATUSBURG SHUFFLE

Okay, here you are on the streets of Stratusburg. After a quick tour of the area to see what's around, you'll probably want to visit the police station. The cop at the desk isn't going to be very helpful, no matter what. This is a sticky situation that can quickly turn hot, which isn't a bad thing (heh).

Once he's out of the way, you shouldn't have much trouble snooping around the station and picking up all sorts of interesting stuff. When you're done there, you'll likely want to check out Rick's Electronics (just about every location in the game, by the way, has something of major or minor importance in it).

VAMPIRES IN THE MIST Misty invisibility in the locker room presents some interesting opportunities—to find clues, of course.

Getting in without a thief isn't too hard, if you look over the building carefully. And let's not forget the Sheriff, poor guy, lying there in his hospital bed. Sorry to say, you won't be able to talk to him just yet, but maybe later you'll have that opportunity. Meanwhile, a chat with the night manager of the Messenger Service may be helpful. Or then again, maybe not. One way or another, you have to get up to the second floor. Perhaps that scaffolding between the buildings will give you some ideas as you saunter into the women's gym next door. Of course, men can't wander around just anywhere in there. The answer to this one may be a little foggy.

Anyhow, once you've made it to the messengers' locker room and brightened things up a bit (you did take *everything* from the sheriff's office, right?), getting your hands on Withers' jacket is no problem. Even so, you can't enter the RV quite yet (the key is only the key to the engine, not the door).

While you ponder that one, why not poke around the Advanced Instrumentation (AI) offices? True, there's a guard on duty, but he isn't very bright. He's also not much security (you'll find that true of AI generally; for a top-secret government contractor, they sure don't protect their secrets very well). A look behind the building should help you get inside.

This section is pretty straightforward (be sure to check all locations!). If you're having a little trouble with the remote control, open everything in Simpson's office. By now, there's no doubt at all that Withers bombed the sheriff, nor that AI is perhaps not quite on the up-and-up. But you still haven't gotten into the RV, so let's take care of that matter by visiting

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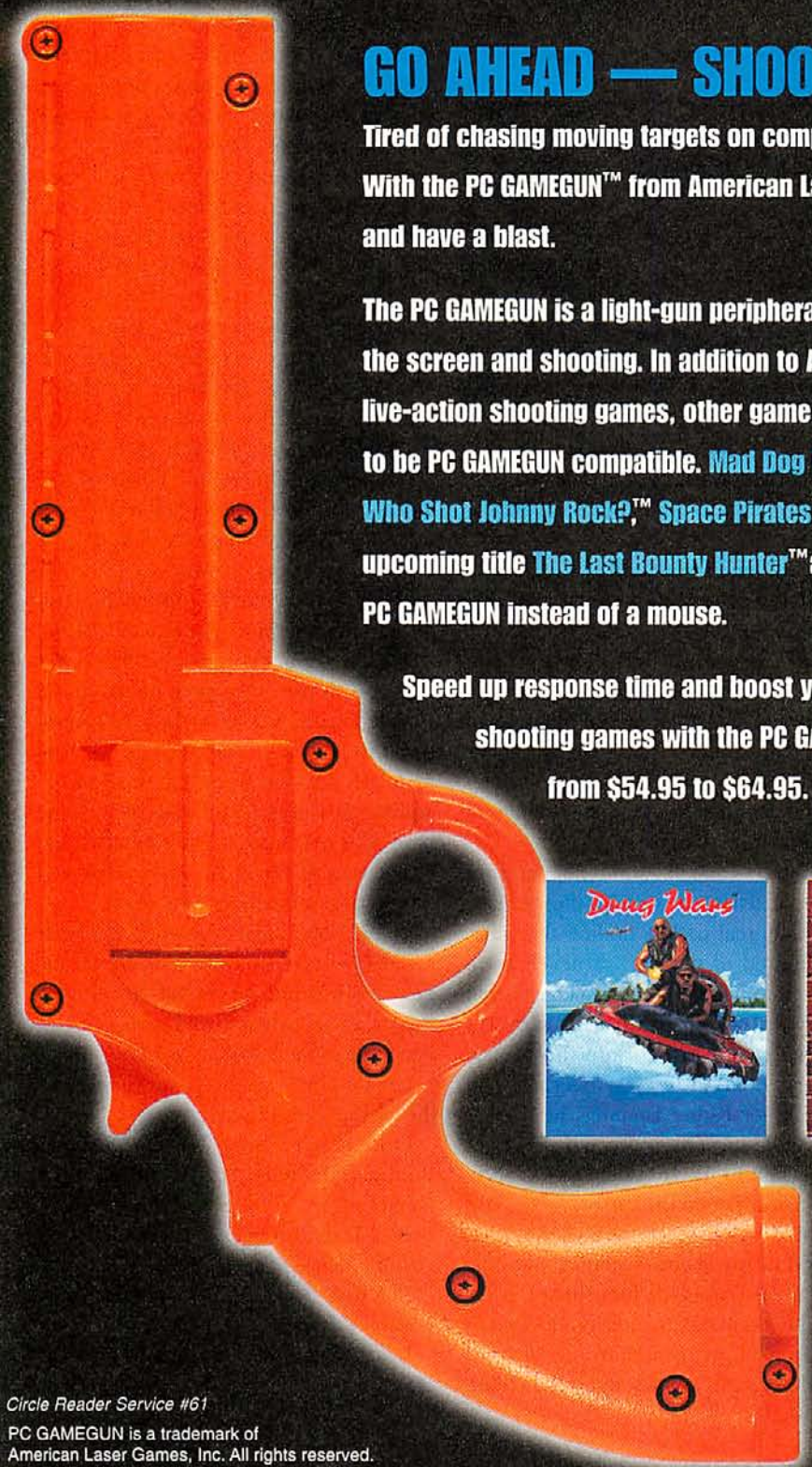

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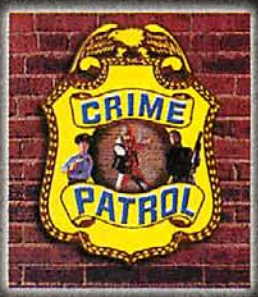

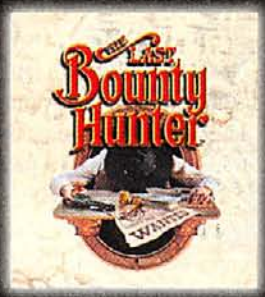

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American Temporary Storage. Before running off anywhere though, you might want to step right back out of the vehicle, since Withers left an interesting little book inside. After you've looked that over (and taken an action that's pretty obvious), you can do some traveling.

Right now, only two locations are available, the AI Weapons Plant and the cemetery. Not much is happening at the graveyard, so the plant is your best bet. So what if there's a big electrified fence around it? There's a way to sneak in without being seen at all. Check around the vicinity of the Forest Road, and before long you'll be inside the facility. The only place you can reach has an L4 door and an L6 door. Don't worry about L6 now; that's the end game. Just pop into the L4 stock room and take the elevator down to the secured corridor. The sign about "Lethal Security" isn't fooling; you can be killed here if you don't take precautions.

POKING IN THE PARTS DEPT. There's an important file somewhere in Rick's Electronics, as well as some other clues.

AGENTS ON WHEELS

After reading the book (AI is looking less nice all the time), you'll be able to drive the RV to the suburbs. This is actually one long street running right to left. Yes, you have to break into all the houses, the library, and the high school (love those covert ops!). Eddie Houston's home has two items of importance; don't leave without both of them.

Stalker's can only be entered with a ticket (no, you can't swipe one of the ticket halves; it has to be a genuine ticket). Backstage is where you want to go; no one will stop you. Once you've been there, locating Eddie shouldn't be a problem.

On 6th Street, look at everything closely and you will soon discover the secret gang lair. Sawbuck isn't around, and the gang member isn't going to be helpful in finding him, but that's no big deal (just don't leave here empty-handed). A visit to the bar will do the trick. How you handle that situation is up to you, but the approach shouldn't be hard to determine if you read up on him in the RV database.

There's still Sterling and Veronica Cotton to find. Sterling should pop up near the RV. Hmmm, don't you think that's a little....suspicious? Better take care of him before doing anything else. Now there's just Veronica the witch to deal with, and the Herbalist shop is the place. You won't find her there, but she'll send her buddy Elmo the cat to guide you to her. Looks like you're on the way to the cemetery (such a cheery place to live).

If you're not getting anywhere with Veronica, like she's always kicking you out, maybe she does indeed know when you're coming. I wonder how she does it? Bet there's something magical involved.

Okay, you've finished with all the drones, and now...oops, something spooky just showed up at the bloody tombstone. This thing doesn't look at all nice. Fortunately, it isn't going to bother you; it just won't let you go to the mausoleums. But first things first—you have a containment disk to make.

You need some dogwood (no, not from Dogwood Drive; it's much closer than that). The real trick is finding the "man condemned of murder." I never got a clue to him myself; it was a matter of trial and error (hey, that's what the shovel is for). Then you can go into the church and help yourself to everything else you need. As for Father Dominic, he doesn't seem to be turned on; I could never get him to talk to us. He doesn't even show up as a hot spot on the cursor.

So now you're ready for Stellerex. Getting rid of the spook is simple; you only need to be cross with him (hehe). After that, the way to the mausoleums is open to you. Speaking of open, only one of them is, and of course, you just know something will happen as soon as you walk inside. Like the exit disappears. Uh oh.

Before long, it's apparent there's no way out. You just seem to be going around and around, getting nowhere fast. Still, there's one room that isn't quite the same as the others. And if walking in circles is making you feel cornered, well, that's a good feeling to have.

MISSION'S END

Whew! You're done with Mr. S, but there's still some unfinished business to take care of at the AI plant, and now you can get past the L6 door. Of course, there's the guard to dispose of, but that's easy. Then just get his badge and continue on to the next room. Here's someone else, but she's out cold. Luckily, you have something for that situation, too. And a very good thing, because she tells you what's happening and how to stop it. So run along to the EMP lab and take the device. Now here's the nasty part. When you charge it up, you see a little cut scene graphic of the device being powered. But it isn't fully charged! You have to do this *twice* before the item will work. This gave me a lot of trouble, as I was misled by the cut scene.

Move on to Simpson's office. When you disable the computer here, you seal the lock to the computer room, but that opens the lock on the other door by the guard station. Finally, you get to meet Ted Simpson, who isn't in terrific shape at the moment. He fills you in on the final details, and the last thing that needs to be done here. You may want to save the game before sitting in the chair, just in case you forgot to do something along the way.

Ta-da! Once again, the world has been saved. Now you can relax and wait for the next crisis. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

On Delphi: Visit the GameSIG (under the Groups & Clubs menu).

On GEnie: Stop by the Games RoundTable (type: Scorpia to reach the Games RT).

By US mail (enclose a self-addressed envelope if you live in the US): Scorpia, PO Box 338, Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028.

Until next time, happy adventuring!

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Feeling Board?

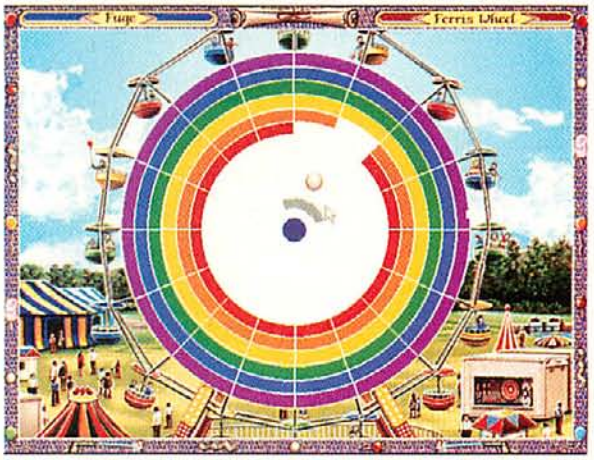
Tour the Kingdom of Po-Porree In Virgin's HODJ 'N' PODJ

by Charles Ardai

When you install Steve Meretzky's new game, HODJ 'N' PODJ from **Virgin Interactive**, you'll notice that instead of putting it in its own directory under Windows, your computer places it in the "Games" directory, right next to SOLITAIRE and MINESWEEPER. This should give you some idea of what you are in for.

Wanna play "Battleship"? No? How about "Whack-A-Mole," that old carnival favorite in which you take a mallet and use it to pound on the heads of rodents as they pop out of their burrows?

Okay, maybe you had your fill of those two games when you played them in **LucasArts**' SAM AND MAX HIT THE ROAD. No problem. You can solve a few cryptograms instead, or answer some riddles, or tackle a word search. If you're in a nostalgic mood, maybe a game of PAC-MAN, SPACE INVADERS, or BREAKOUT would be more your speed. If all else fails, there's a new version of "Solitaire"...



BREAKAROUND Old video games find new life in the land of Po-Poree. Here, BREAKOUT gets another ride on the wheel of fortune.

Meretzky, the renowned wit responsible for such classic computer games as PLANETFALL and THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY (as well as more recent romps such as **Legend**'s SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN), isn't exactly straining himself here. Take away an amiable but slight opening sequence which tells the "Fractured Fairytales"-style story of twin kidnaped princesses Mish and Mosh and the twin suitors who compete to rescue them, and all you have left is a mild little electronic board game in which are lodged, like plums in a pudding, 19 "mini-games" of confounding familiarity.

HODJ 'N' PODJ

Price: N/A
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/33, 4 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 1 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM, Windows 3.1, mouse; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.
Protection: None
# of Players: 1-2
Designer: Steve Meretzky
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Irvine, CA
(800) 874-4607

What's confounding about it? That from first to last, there's hardly an original idea in the lot. There are some original twists, and plenty of audio-visual work has been done to add juice to lemons that have otherwise long since been squeezed dry, but the games themselves are such a familiar lot—not only from 50 years of brainteaser compilations but also from being included in titles like SAM AND MAX, BLOWN AWAY from **MGM**, and the DR. BRAIN games from **Sierra**—that seeing them turn up yet again in HODJ 'N' PODJ is downright baffling.

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Meretzky, of all people, knows what he is doing; he's been writing games forever and playing them even longer than that. This is what throws the purpose of his latest endeavor into question. Is HODJ 'N' PODJ an ironic gag of some sort? Maybe so—Meretzky seems to be winking at a knowing audience when, for example, he names his version of Simon, the old electronic pattern-matching game, "Garfunkel." If it's all a gag, though, it's not an enormously funny one.

Or did Meretzky really think the world needed another version of Battleship, another Hangman-type game, another version of Video Poker? If it's all meant in earnest, well...certainly no harm's been done, but the world of computer games has not been materially enriched.

HODJ 'N' PODJ takes place on a board representing the fairy-tale kingdom of Po-Poree, which is spread out over several elaborately illustrated screens. As in a tra-

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ditional board game, a segmented path meanders through the illustration and the players—Hodj in the blue tights and tunic, his brother Podj in the red—take turns moving segment by segment, after rolling the electronic equivalent of dice to determine how many segments they are permitted to move in a given turn.

Dotted around the board are various sites of note: the locations of the 19 mini-games which Hodj and Podj must play to turn up clues to the princesses' whereabouts and the valuable trinkets needed to effect a rescue, plus the dozen forbidding locations ("Hermit's Tent," "Pirate's Cove," "Warlock's Lair") where the princesses might be stashed.

Walk around the board and you'll encounter some of the random effects Meretzky has thrown in—"Lose a turn," "Move again"—plus other features of the sort you might find in a conventional board game, such as shortcuts from one part of the board to another. Successfully complete a mini-game and you'll either be paid off in goods or directed to look up a clue in one of the two cluebooks that come with the game. The clues tell you (without revealing to your human opponent, if you have one) what you must do to release the princesses from captivity. Free them and there's only one task left: you must escort them back to the castle at the center of the board without being intercepted by the other player, who can snatch the princesses from you if he bests you in a mini-game challenge.

That's it for the "frame" game—the pudding, if you will. As for the plums, it's worth noting only that there are 19 of them, and that the ones you haven't heard about already are no more captivating than the ones you have.

RIDDLE ME THIS When you're talking classic games and brain-teasers, you can't get much more "classic" than good ol' riddles. (A: "Fork")

WHAT'S THE DEAL? Apparently, Steve Meretzky thinks the world is a better place with another poker machine in it.

In fairness, Meretzky and the crew of artists he's pulled together do their best to turn some pretty simplistic entertainments into full-fledged multimedia affairs. The peg-jumping game "Peggleboz," for instance, is the best peg-jumping game I've ever played, mainly because the "pegs" here are shot glasses and a boozy hiccup accompanies your removing one of them from the board. "Battleship" here is "Battlefish," complete with sound effects that include kazoo music and a crusty old salt growling, "Arrr! You sank her sardine!"

But so what? These tired old things are games you could play in your sleep, and a bit of freshening up on the soundtrack does little to encourage you to stay awake. Cryptograms are cryptograms, even if there's a googly-eyed skull on the screen reciting W.C. Fields and Groucho Marx lines. "Solitaire" is still "Solitaire," even if Meretzky sets the whole affair in a barbershop and posits a deck with five suits and Barbers, Customers, and Manicurists for face cards.

To spice things up further, there are plenty of irrelevant hotspots on each screen for questing cursors to stumble upon, and some of the animations these unleash are amusing. (Others are merely bizarre, such as when an armchair inexplicably turns into an automobile.) There is also some room for modification within each of the games—settings for difficulty levels, speed, time limits, skill of the computer-controlled opponent, and so forth—and the option of playing the mini-games without bothering with the boardgame. But once more I say, "So what?" An "After Dark" screen saver has options I can set and amusing little animations to watch, but I'm not going to sit and play with the thing for more than a few minutes. I'd be surprised to hear of anyone treating HODJ 'N' PODJ differently.

SCORE BOARD

One could make the case that HODJ 'N' PODJ must not be intended for experienced gamers, that it is a family game meant to be shared with the young'uns, and that it's a perfect package for kids because each generation deserves its own chance to discover "Whack-a-Mole." I'd go along with this notion, were it not for a couple of serious flaws.

First, the recent proliferation of unapologetically unoriginal puzzle-compilation games makes me worry that we can expect to see still more down the line. There are only so many classic puzzles to go around, and already with HODJ 'N' PODJ we're seeing plenty that even young computer gamers will recall seeing before.

Second and more important, though, is that the renditions of the puzzles in HODJ 'N' PODJ are not consistently top-notch. If it's true that everyone should get to play these time-honored classics, they should also get to play them at their best. But the videogame knockoffs in this game are horrid—"Pac-Rat" and "Archeroids" are sluggish and barely playable—and the traditional puzzles range in quality from excellent ("Peggleboz") to clumsy ("Word Search") and banal ("Art Parts," a jigsaw puzzle with rectangular pieces).

There is some good stuff in this package, but not nearly enough. Given what else is out there, even those with a pronounced puzzle craving should be able to do better than HODJ 'N' PODJ.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

HODJ 'N' PODJ

RATING 4

PROS Polished graphics and a sense of humor help jazz up some classic puzzles.

CONS You've seen all the puzzles before, often done better than they're done here. How jazzed can you get about "Life" or "Solitaire," anyway?

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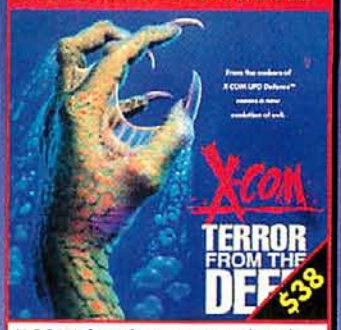

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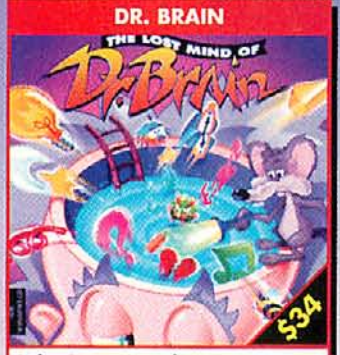

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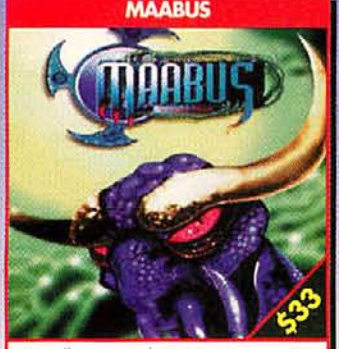

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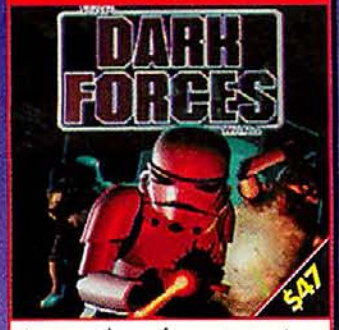

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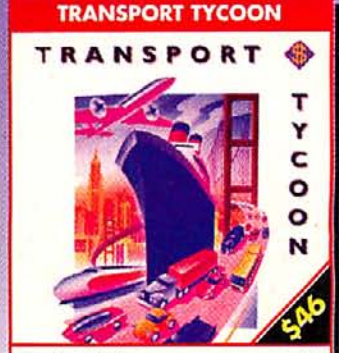

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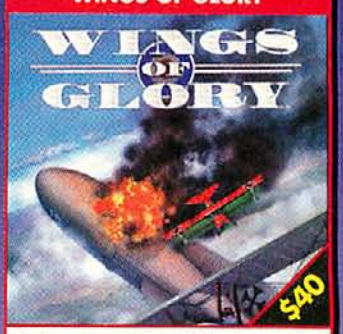

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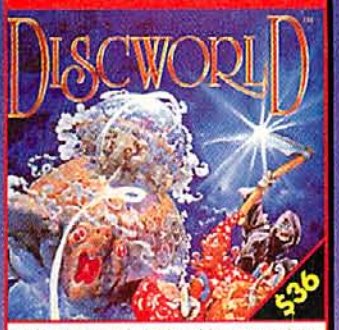

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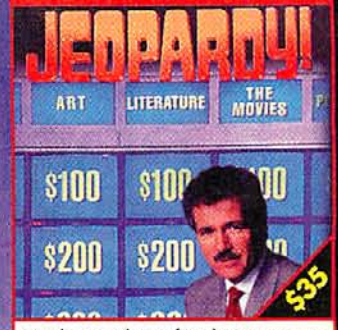

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Rebel Commander

SSI Follows The Leaders of Space Combat In RENEGADE

by Martin E. Cirulis

YEARS AGO, A WARGAME COMPANY CALLED **FASA** WAS LOOKING FOR ANOTHER LINE OF SCIENCE FICTION games to complement their hugely successful *Battletech* line. Since graphic appeal and extensive background made *Battletech* a lasting sensation, it was only logical that their new gaming universe should have the same qualities. And thus was born *Renegade Legion*, a slightly more "serious" series of SF simulations that concentrated on space combat between starfighters. In this year of board game-to-computer translations, **SSI** has taken the rules of the original *Renegade Legions* board game, *Interceptor*, and turned it into a new space sim, RENEGADE: BATTLE FOR JACOB'S STAR.

THE STORY SO FAR....

Things were going quite smoothly for the old home world—humanity was kicking butt and taking names in the rest of the galaxy—until sometime around the 64th century, when a nasty plague wiped out most of the race. This would be a big lurch in the course of any civilization, but the disaster was compounded by a couple of alien races, the KessRith (a nasty crossing of Centaurs and Rhinos) and the Ssora (the mandatory lizard race), who decided to take advantage of our distress and conquer most of the devastated empire with a mind towards cheap labor, Simon Legree-style.

This unpleasant situation continued for a few generations, until a clever slave decided to train and organize human troops under the guise of historical pageants for the amusement of the alien Overseers. And hey—when you all want to dress the same, march the same, and shout enthusiastically at the same time, what better time period to mimic than the Roman Empire? With all training and preparations made, these neo-Roman troops rose up across a dozen worlds, and before you know it, Humanity was back on top. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough for most of the troops; they went on to forge an entire Neo-Roman star empire, complete with Republic/Caesar transition, giving any other race they met the choice of submitting to human rule or becoming doggie snacks.

At some point, a portion of humanity calling itself the Commonwealth decided that turning everyone else into slaves in revenge for being enslaved did not make for particularly good Karma, and pursued a separate peace with old alien enemies. This didn't go over so well with the Neo-Romans, and just like in the good old days, humans once again warred against humans. The immense Neo-Roman Empire, encompassing thousands of star systems, would have easily crushed the relatively small Commonwealth without a group called The Renegade Legion. When that wacky rule-of-Caesar thing replaced the Republic, a sizable portion of the military, finding this unacceptable, had defected *en masse* to the Commonwealth. These men and women fought their former comrades, defying the greatest tyranny the Galaxy had ever seen. Labeled "Renegades" by Caesar and sentenced to death, they had little choice but to win at any cost.

Huge and impersonal as all this history may seem, there is indeed a place for you some 150 years later. The war goes badly for the Commonwealth and the Renegade Legion; currently stalemated, it is only a matter of time before the mind-blowing numbers of the TOG military succeed in swallowing the remaining pieces of the Commonwealth. Every lost star system is like another pint of blood draining away. At this point, each new battle may decide the war.

Enter the player, stage right. You are a hot new interceptor pilot who finds himself in a backwater squadron that makes Baa-Baa Blacksheep look spit-n-polish. This would seem to be the end of your career—patrolling an irrelevant system called Jacob's Star—but within moments of your arrival, a huge TOG invasion

RENEGADE: BATTLE FOR JACOB'S STAR

Price: $59.99
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486/33 or better (486/66 recommended), 4 MB RAM, 1 MB SVGA card, 15 to 60 MB hard drive space (depending on install options), CDROM drive; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
Developer: Midnight Software
Publisher: SSI
Sunnyvale, CA
(408) 737-6800

fleet pops in to let you know that your new planet is going to be the lynch pin in a new offensive. And then, as if this weren't stressful enough, your CO gets blown up on your third mission and you are left in charge. Should you fail, the TOG marches on, unstoppable. Give them a bloody nose and the Commonwealth will live to see another day...and "Renegade" will still be an honorable word.

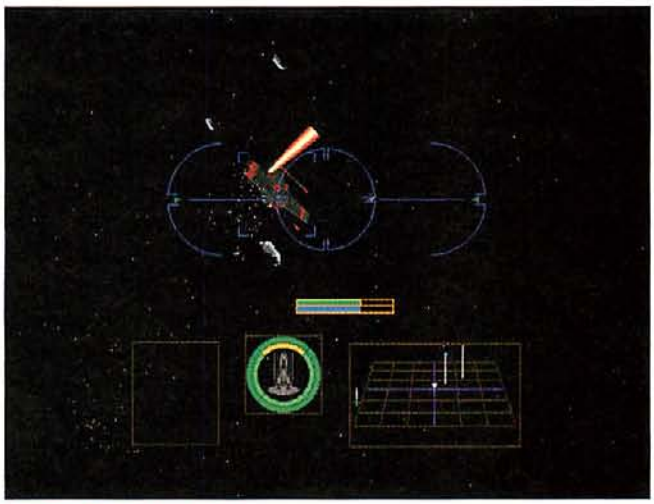
SPARTAN SPACE Although many gamers will like RENEGADE's SVGA style, some might find the cockpits too simplistic for their tastes.

THE BENEFITS OF HISTORY

While RENEGADE is nothing more than another story-driven space combat simulator, it does distinguish itself by having deeper roots to draw on than its two more famous and older cousins, the WING COMMANDER and *Star Wars* sims. This depth comes not just from a rich background story, but also from the fact that most of the mechanics of combat and the space fighters have been refined and balanced by years of old-fashioned board game play.

The designers of RENEGADE made a very wise decision when they chose to stick with most of the original rules of the board game instead of gratuitously changing or simplifying things. This has resulted in a simulator rife with interesting ships, exotic but balanced weaponry and, most importantly, a damage model unmatched by any other game. If you've played the board game, then all you need to know is that the intricate internal damage system has been retained. Instead of a basic hit-point system of damage (i.e. one hit, two hit: shields down; three hits, four: engines damaged; five hits, six: eject!) that suffices for other games, here you have a random and dynamic system that reflects the reality that allowed some P-47's to return with half the fuselage missing while others disappeared in a trail of smoke after one lucky hit to the engine.

The benefits of having the basic design work already down are reflected throughout this sim. The design philosophy of fighters is coherent and logical: TOG fighters are designed for quick, massed missile strikes and always score first hits against you, while being penalized by a couple of bad design features that you would expect from a corrupt establishment. Your fighters are all battle proven, long-endurance ships relying on guns instead of missiles, and are a mix of human and alien designs. The character of this sim has been under development for a long time, and it shows.



PADDY-LOCK, PADDY-LOCK RENEGADE's padlock view is wide-open, and still provides speed, weapons, shields, and radar readouts.

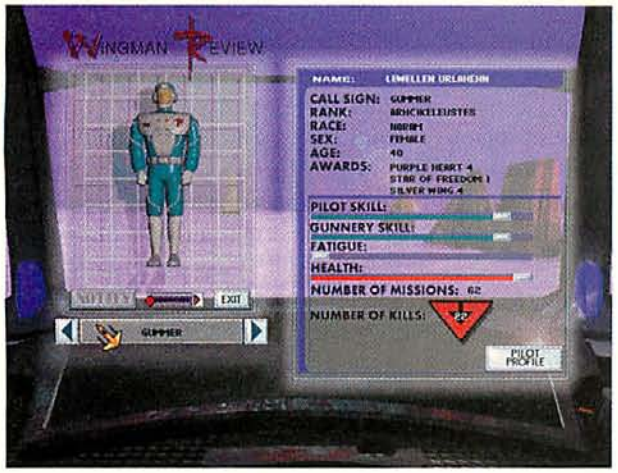
Not to say that the design team didn't achieve anything on their own. The SVGA combat graphics are great, though they have a somewhat simple, overly-sharp *Babylon 5* look rather than the softer, model-like ship graphics we have grown used to. Sound effects are varied and very well executed, with your own weapon sounds coming not only from your right and left but sometimes from above and below. Even the music is a step above the usual fare, with a decidedly more modern touch than the usual classical space-opera. And, if shooting people to techno-dance tracks isn't really to your taste, you can play the music CD of your choice during combat.

RENEGADE also sports the most extensive skill-level adjustment system yet seen. Instead of just picking a level, a player can adjust almost all the factors affecting combat for either side. From armor thickness to weapon recharge rates to skill bonuses for pilots, players can make the experience as easy or as masochistic as they want.

THE SIMPLE FACTS

Even with all these nice design touches, RENEGADE is not a game without its awkward moments, some of which are bad enough to make the more difficult-to-please gamer want to avoid this promising space combat sim.

The greatest flaw in this game is that, as a whole, it fails to live up to the complexity and richness present in its background. It aspires to equal the WING COMMANDER series in its storyline and the characterization of pilots; but while the elements are all here, one begins to get the impression after a few hours of play that not much of it is making any difference. The pictures and bios of all your intense-looking wingmates are nice, but they don't seem to be very distinctive out in the great wide open; and the things they point out to you between mis-



MAKIN' MISSIONS In between the space action, CO's will have to follow their superiors' orders by selecting men and machines to achieve specific mission goals.

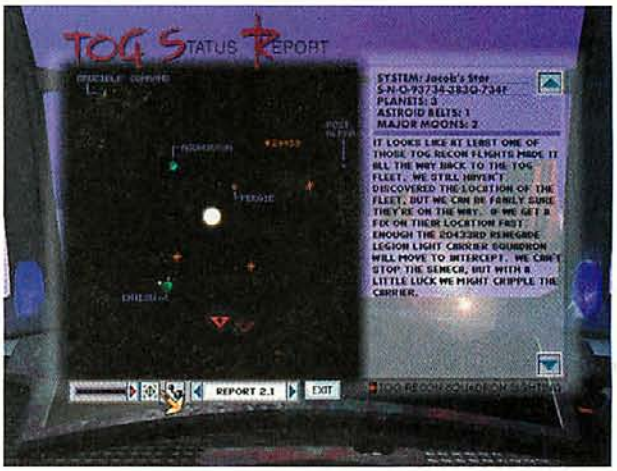
sions don't appear to be very relevant. Even their radio chatter slowly devolves into silliness—as a pilot shouts "Careful, the TOG are near! I can feel them in my bones!" while you are twisting for your life in the middle of a 12-fighter furball. Gee, thanks for the psychic news flash!

Also absent is any sort of feeling of control over your wingmen while in combat. There are various commands to give your fellow pilots during a brawl, but your wingmen aren't very responsive to your desires. The only call they actually give a response to is the roll-call order. It is very annoying to have a damaged enemy fighter slipping away from you while the fastest ship in your wing dawdles along, even after you have given a direct "attack my target" command.

While it is interesting that you are placed in the role of commander and forced to decide who goes on a mission and who gets to rest, even this is frustrated by a no-brainer omission. Although you can choose your own fighter for a flight, the pilots you pick will chose their own fighters, seemingly at random. So while the computer warns you to take a fast fighter and only one wingmate on a recon mission, you end up flying hot metal with the slowest fighter in your arsenal there to protect you.

The rest of the overall game has the same kind of basic feel to it: not bad, but not good either. The flight model is good, but not as inertial as I would have liked; and while the cockpit graphics are very nice, they are frustratingly simple. You would think a fighter capable of starflight could tell you what your heading is, what your velocity in actual numbers is, and provide tracks on incoming missiles.

Both your pilots and the enemy fly well enough. Although there is an annoying tendency



to bunch up during dogfights, at least you can depend on not having to do all the killing yourself, and it is usually a grave mistake to let a heavier fighter blind-side you.

The final problem with RENEGADE revolves around playability over the long run. First of all, the campaign is on the short side, averaging around 20 missions in total—not much of a bang for many gamer's buck. And though the game is nice enough to give you a random selection of pilots in your squadron with every game, the story isn't really rich enough to justify more than two or three runthroughs. Compensating somewhat for this is a now classic space sim option, the "Gauntlet" mode; here, one must destroy an ever-increasing number of enemy ships in order to wrack up a high score on the simulator.

Some players will be shocked to discover that RENEGADE has no mercy. When you get killed, you stay that way. There is no way to back-up a career or resurrect a campaign built into this game—a rude shock after 10 hours of long missions. For those who don't enjoy that, there's a way around this little annoyance: take any text editor program and call up the .plr file from the Renegade directory; in it you will find the word "dead." Simply change it to "alive," and—PRESTO!—you're ready to continue play or start your own Western religion.

THE TOG WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY

What we have here is a great-looking space-sim that has its flaws. The issue for me, and my final word 'yea' or 'nay,' hinges on the issue of support. If SSI gives this game the patch it needs, and if they intend to offer add-ons and sequels someday—or even more interestingly, if they translate the other three *Renegade Legion* boardgames into real-time sims—then this is a great start, and the series could be a real contender with the other two biggies in the field.

On the other hand, left to flounder on its own, I can't see recommending this game to the experienced starfighter. The player most likely to get the full enjoyment from this package as it stands today is a newcomer, looking for an introductory space-sim that doesn't pull many punches.

Hopefully, by the time you are reading this, the track RENEGADE is on will be clear. What we have here is a strong baby with a rocky birth. Only the parents can help it live up to its full potential.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

RENEGADE

RATING 3 stars

PROS Good-looking, good-sounding and fast-playing space sim with great background and potential.
CONS Many aspects are not detailed enough to make the campaign experience truly satisfying. Needs support to be a real contender.

ZIG ZAG

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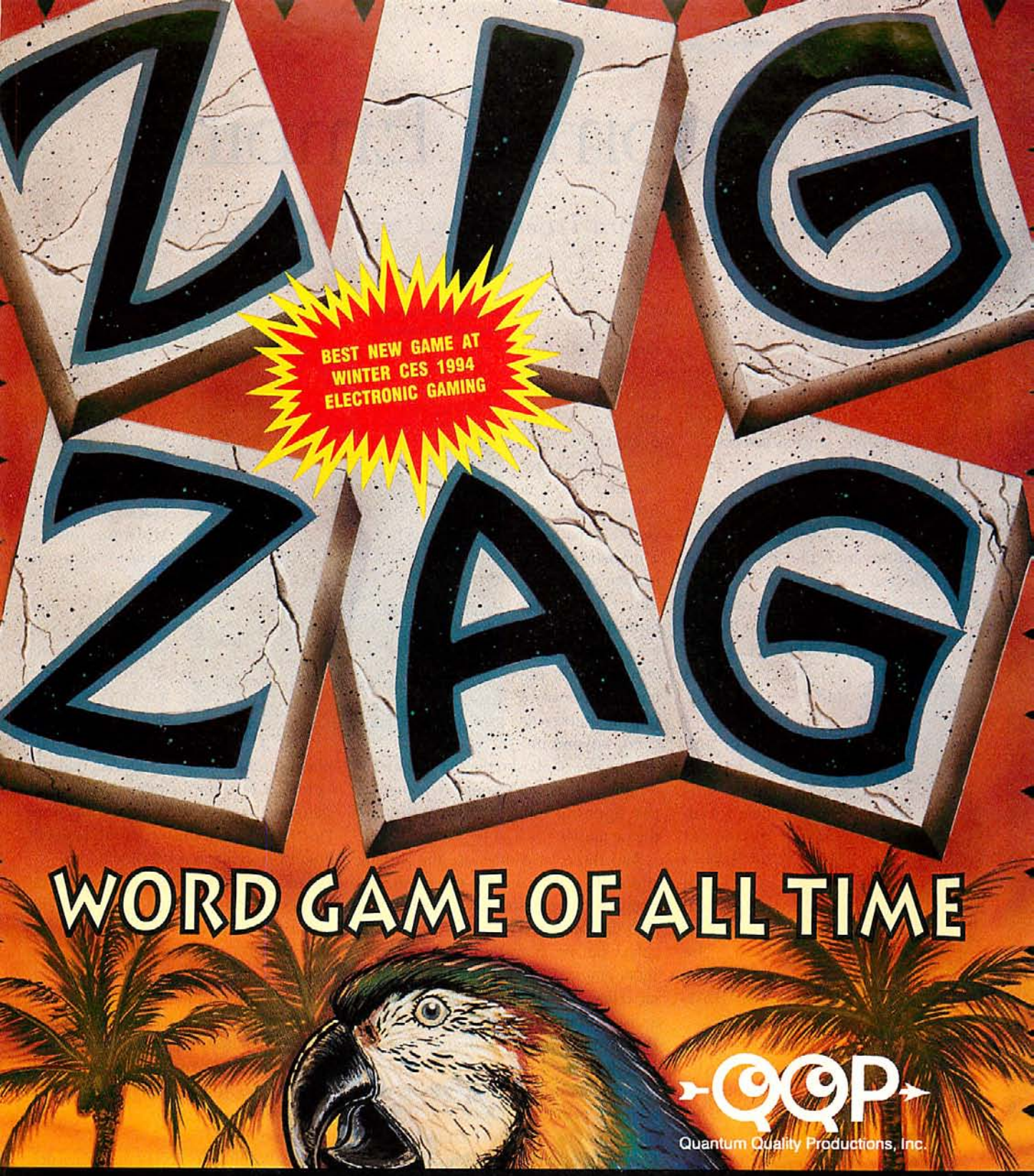

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Circle Reader Service #354

The Doomed Empire

LucasArts Strikes Back At The First-Person Action Craze With DARK FORCES

by Jason Kapalka

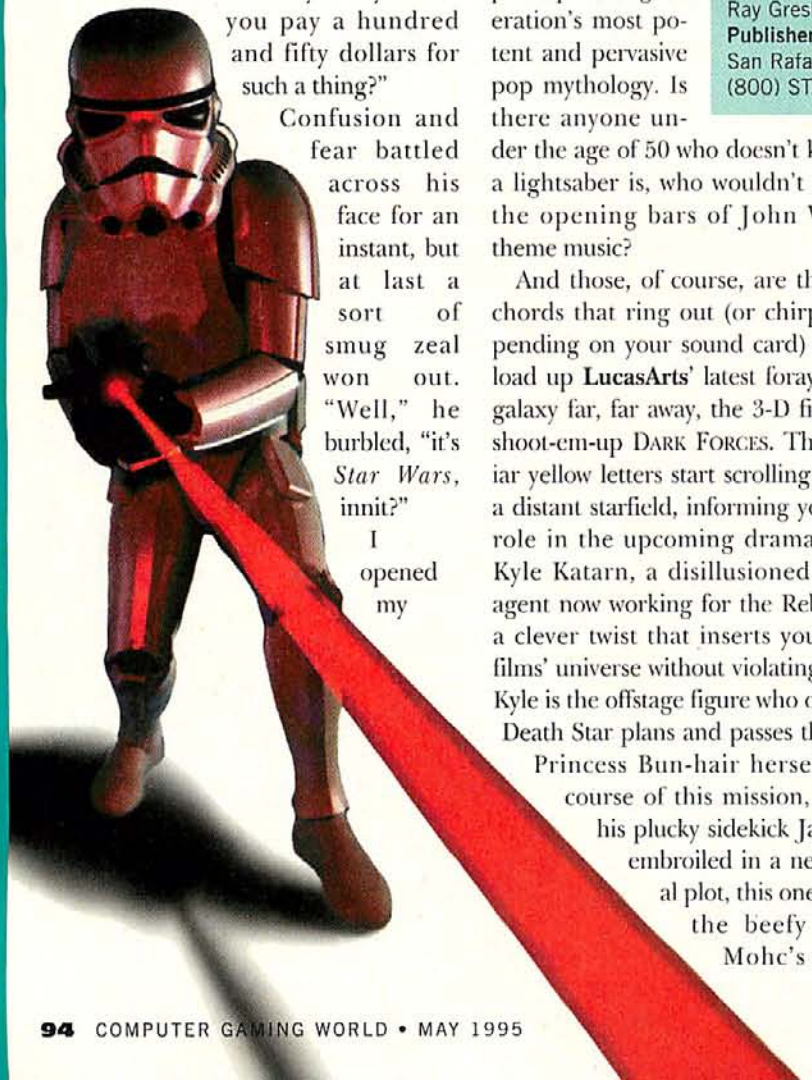
RECENTLY A FRIEND WHO COLLECTS SUCH THINGS SHOWED ME AN OLD *STAR WARS* ACTION FIGURE HE'D found at a comic store. I asked offhand how much it had cost.

"A hundred and fifty."

"What? *Dollars*?"

He shifted uncomfortably. "It's, like, Luke in stormtrooper armor, with the removable helmet, from the 'Power of the Force' collection..."

"It's a stupid piece of plastic, and you can't even afford to pay your rent half the time. Why? Why would you pay a hundred and fifty dollars for such a thing?"



Confusion and fear battled across his face for an instant, but at last a sort of smug zeal won out. "Well," he burbled, "it's *Star Wars*, innit?"

I opened my mouth, then shut it again. What could I say? To him, that viciously overpriced vacuum-mold widget *was Star Wars*...a film nearly 20 years old that's still a monstrously lucrative franchise, and something more than that: it's perhaps this generation's most potent and pervasive pop mythology. Is there anyone under the age of 50 who doesn't know what a lightsaber is, who wouldn't recognize the opening bars of John William's theme music?

And those, of course, are the stirring chords that ring out (or chirp out, depending on your sound card) when you load up **LucasArts**' latest foray into that galaxy far, far away, the 3-D first-person shoot-em-up DARK FORCES. Those familiar yellow letters start scrolling away into a distant starfield, informing you of your role in the upcoming drama: you are Kyle Katarn, a disillusioned Imperial agent now working for the Rebellion. In a clever twist that inserts you into the films' universe without violating "canon," Kyle is the offstage figure who obtains the Death Star plans and passes them on to Princess Bun-hair herself. In the course of this mission, Kyle and his plucky sidekick Jan Ors get embroiled in a new Imperial plot, this one involving the beefy General Mohc's plan to create an army of super robotic stormtroopers ("Dark Troopers"). *Star Wars* luminaries such as Boba Fett, Jabba the Hutt, and Mon Mothma put in cameo appearances.

Okay, it's not Hamlet, or even WING COMMANDER III. But in a genre where "character development" is usually a euphemism for stockpiling ammo, and the "plot" a laughable excuse for mass slaughter (anyone ever figure out what DOOM II was actually about?), DARK FORCES' storyline is a welcome reform.

As for what genre DARK FORCES belongs to, I expect the hype and hoopla have familiarized everyone with what to expect. But let's get it straight anyway. DARK FORCES is not "a 3-D real-time action adventure in the tradition of DOOM." It's a DOOM clone, pure and simple. The gameplay, the controls, the overall approach—all are identical. And as with the recent flurry of DOOM-alikes, there's really only one question that needs to be answered.

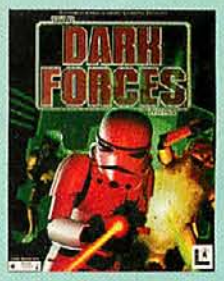
Is it as good as DOOM?

Actually, in almost every way, it's better.

Almost every way.

There are flaws, but I'll return to them later, giving the "Moody Loners with Handguns" subchapter of the DOOM Worshippers' Club time to work up some suitably juicy death threats, because even with its limitations and shortcomings, DARK FORCES is an amazing game.

DARK FORCES



Price: $51.00, CD-ROM
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/33 or better (486 highly recommended), 8 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 3.5 to 70 MB Hard Disk space (depending on install options), CDROM drive; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
RSAC Rating: 2 (humans killed)
Designers: Daron Stinnett, Justin Chin, Ray Gresko
Publisher: LucasArts Entertainment Co.
San Rafael, CA
(800) STARWARS

LEVELS OF COMPLEXITY

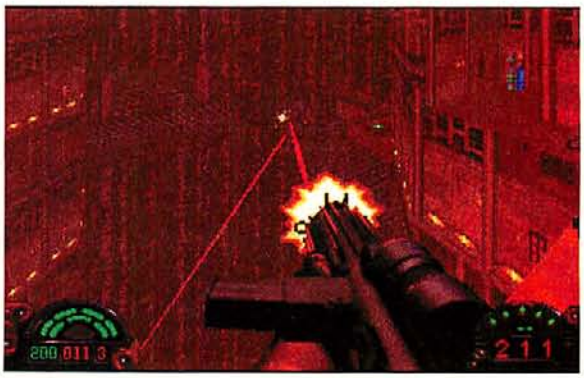
Those who have only played the relatively simple one-level demo that's been floating around for the last few months will not have seen the game's new 3-D Jedi Engine working to its full capacity. The levels after this one balloon in size, complexity, and graphical wow-power.

There are only 14 levels, but most are more than twice as big and complicated as any comparable DOOM maps. They're also more diverse. When DOOM tries to portray a city, it doesn't really look like a place where you could live: it looks like a humongous playground built out of those omnipresent cinder-blocks. When DARK FORCES brings you to the vertical city of Nar Shaddaa, you see the lights of distant windows, graffiti on the walls, cargo tugs rising and falling through the central air shaft, and when you step out of a window onto a narrow ledge you'll hear the wind whistling past you. On other levels, searchlights sweep about, heralding a massive blitzkrieg if they spot you. TIE Fighters glide in and out of docking bays, lasers ricochet off walls, giant pistons and other industrial machines pound, rotate and spin about, waterfalls cascade, sewer pipes plunge you down slimy passages where nasty stalked eyes poke out of the sludge to stare. Nearly every level has a distinct visual theme.

So she's pretty, you say; but what's she got under the hood? Well, assuming you've got the ninja PC required to run her, son, she's got plenty. You'll need 8 MB of RAM, a fast 486 (the manual claims it can run on a 386/33, but hey, good luck), and a CD-ROM drive. The payoff for these heavy-duty requirements is one heavy-duty game engine, as fast or faster than DOOM's, with a bevy of extra features. You can look up and down, run, jump, duck and shimmy, with a heads-up automap display superimposed over your view. A headlight and infrared goggles are available to illuminate the Empire's darker corners.

The levels, supposedly designed by real architects, are believable locations rather than silly deathtrap arenas, with multiple layers of architecture. For instance, an Imperial prison has seven floors, with elevators and access tunnels running throughout. Secret rooms and clever logic puzzles, way beyond the typical "find the key, open the door" brand, are scattered everywhere. You might need to sneak through an elevator maintenance tunnel, or manipulate computer panels to rotate a giant catwalk to the right level, or input Imperial codes into a lock, or blow holes in stressed walls, or...the list goes on. After playing DARK FORCES for a while, DOOM starts to feel constricted and small, with your space marine hero, head locked straight ahead, unable to jump a two-foot barrier or look up at a sniper's position.

Of course in a shoot-em-up you want something to shoot with, and at, and DARK FORCES delivers a taun-taun-load of both. There are nine different weapons, ranging from the basic blaster pistol to the awesome (and undocumented) plasma-spewing assault cannon. Many of the guns have a secondary fire mode: the fusion cutter, for instance, triggers all four of its tubes at once instead of one at a time, and the assault cannon launches a missile instead of blue energy balls. And then there's a whole new class of indirect-fire weapons, like thermal detonators (grenades), mines, and the mortar launcher. These require more ingenuity and skill to use, but you'll get a warm fuzzy feeling all over when you manage to lob a grenade through a sniper's gun-port and hear the satisfying *crump* and shriek.



LASER TAG Our hero exchanges fire with stormtroopers in a dusty mine shaft.

FIRE AND ICE The ice world can get slippery, but at least you're not swallowing a thermal detonator....

As for your targets, well, you'll see plenty of stormtroopers. Legions of stormtroopers, in fact, along with Imperial officers and commandos. Also present are a rogue's gallery of aliens and bounty hunters, including three-eyed grenade-tossing Grans, axe-wielding Gamorrean guards, and Trandoshans packing deadly concussion rifles. Flying Probots, interrogation droids, and drone remotes round out the mix, along with some very tough and accurate ceiling-mounted laser turrets. A few surprises are in store on certain levels, like the swimming sewer beasts and Jabba's Kell dragons. And then there are the Dark Troopers, who come in two different flavors: really mean laser-reflective guys with swords, and horrifically vicious flying dudes equipped with assault cannons.

LucasArts seems to have upped the AI ante with DARK FORCES. Although you couldn't exactly call them "smart," your enemies here are certainly less predictable than DOOM's. Stormtroopers use cover, try to double-back on you, and call for reinforcements. And the first time you level a blast at a Dark Trooper and see him *dodge*...well, let's just say I watched a hardened DOOM veteran scream aloud in shock, shortly before his stunned computer surrogate was terminated by a torrent of plasma.

Rogue's Gallery

Here's a few of the bad guys you'll cross paths with in DARK FORCES, along with info on their original movie appearance, and, for the real die-hard, list price for the action figure.

STORMTROOPER

The basic grunt. Though they're awful shots, their armor makes them more difficult to kill than Imperial officers.

Movie Appearances: Everywhere.

Action Figure: Likewise, everywhere. Maybe $10 mint in box.

TRANDOSHAN

This scaly fellow's concussion rifle can make short work of any Rebel in his line of sight.

Movie Appearances: Though Trandoshans can be seen in the background of *Star Wars*, the mercenary variety first (and last) appears in *The Empire Strikes Back*, as one of the freelancers ("Bounty hunters! We don't need these scum!") hired by Vader to track the Millennium Falcon. Bossk, our Trandoshan, does flex his foot once.

Action Figure: Originally available by mailing in proofs of purchases. Mint in box: $35

IMPERIAL COMMANDOS

Tougher, faster, and a better shot than either stormtroopers or officers.

Movie Appearances: Seen hanging around the Death Star in Star Wars. No commando-like qualities exhibited.

Action Figure: Listed as "Death Squad Commander." Mint in box: $105

BOBA FETT

You might not get close enough to recognize him when you do finally meet up with this famed bounty hunter, because the storm of rockets he launches makes it advisable to stay far, far away. Hard to hit while flying; best to corner him when he's on the ground.

Movie Appearances: First appeared in a cartoon segment of the Star Wars Christmas Special. Met an ignoble end in *Return of the Jedi*, knocked accidentally into the maw of the big sand-monster thing, much to the disappointment of fans who had been speculating on Boba's possible importance for the previous three years.

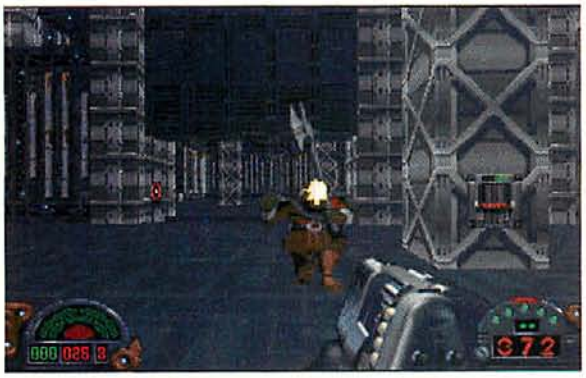
Action Figure: Mint 12" figure in box with wookie braids, $295 or more.

PROBOT

These flying droids are big, slow targets, but they can hover out of your line of sight.

Movie Appearances: Seen making weird chattering noise in *The Empire Strikes Back*, just before getting blown up by Han Solo.

Action Figure: Only available with the Planet Hoth playset, $75 in box.



AX ME NO QUESTIONS! A Gamorrean guard, Jabba the Hutt's favorite play pen pal, takes a blaster shot in his low brow.

REAL JEDI DON'T SAVE

Which brings us to the topic of mortality, and to the game's biggest flaw. You will die, a lot, in DARK FORCES, even on normal or easy game settings. Now you might think, no problem, I'll just save and restore a lot; only you won't, because there is no save-game system. It ain't there.

The game saves your status after every mission, yes, and you can go back and replay any level you've already completed, but once you're in the thick of things you either finish the mission or perish. Sure, you have several lives and the opportunity to collect more, and when you do die you get reincarnated nearby without losing your map or weapons, but those extra lives can go awful fast, and when they're gone, you'll just have to start the mission over. And since many of them will take hours to complete (at least the first time), you'd better hope Sharon Stone doesn't call you up for a sleepover at her place while you're in the middle of an Imperial mining facility.

It's annoying, but not fatally so. Think of it as incentive to boot Imperial posteriors without a wimpy save-game net. Be a man.

Oh yes, then there's the multiplayer option. This, too, is nonexistent. Get used to it. This is a running theme in LucasArts games, and there are no signs to suggest that this will change.

DARK FORCES' long-term potential is hard to guess at. I don't know how long one could go on playing these same 14 levels (a while, I suspect—Hard" difficulty level is pretty murderous), but I do know that if LucasArts gets on the ball with sequels and expansions, or if enterprising hackers code a level-building program, productive life on the planet is in serious danger.

Even if you don't know or care who the asthmatic guy in the black armor is (like, if you've been frozen in carbonite for the last 20 years), DARK FORCES is a one-player action experience with few rivals. And for those of us who grew up with Luke, Han, Leia, Chewie and the droids, well...it's *Star Wars*. Innit?

THE EDITORS SPEAK

DARK FORCES

RATING

PROS The next generation of DOOM-clones set in that loopy science-fantasy universe we've all come to love.

CONS No multiplayer options and a goofy save-game system are the exhaust vents in this Death Star.

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Steve Bauman, Strategy Plus

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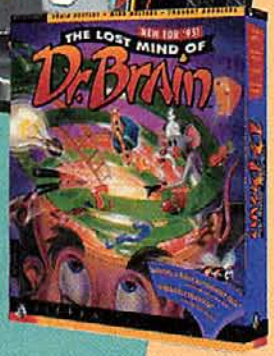

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Circle Reader Service #97

A Triad's A Crowd

Apogee Plays Up Multiplayer Action And Gratuitous Gore In RISE OF THE TRIAD

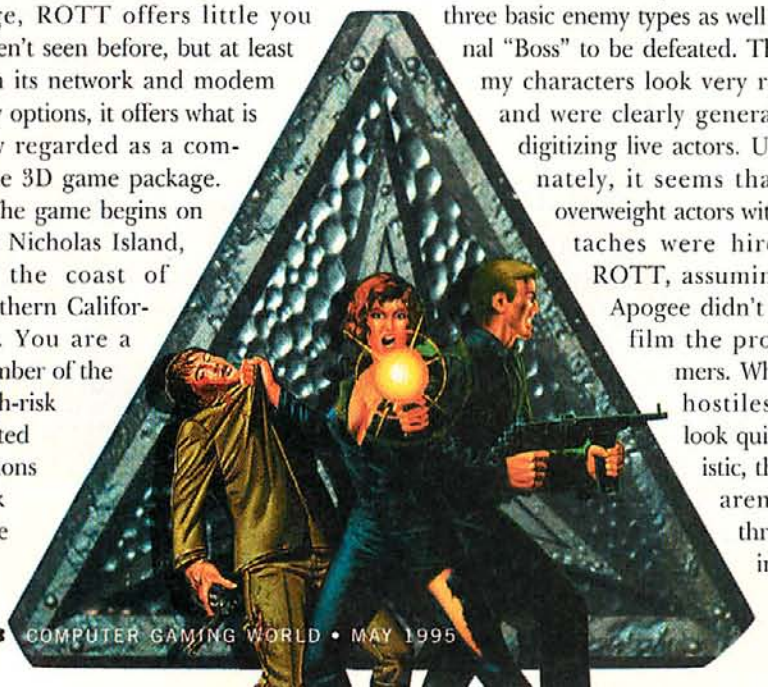
by Vox Day

To escape from the pain
and an existence mundane,
I gotta nine, a sign, a set,
and now I gotta name.
—Rage Against The Machine

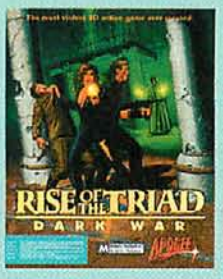
LIKE THE PROTAGONIST OF RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE'S *SETTLE FOR NOTHING*, THE CENTRAL character of **Apogee's** RISE OF THE TRIAD: DARK WAR enters the picture with a nine millimeter semi-automatic and a sign. Only in this case, existence is far from mundane, and the only sign of import belongs to someone else, namely, the Triad.

ROTT is the latest, though surely not the last, in the onslaught of 3D first-person action games aspiring to succeed DOOM II as the killer game of the moment. Unlike some of its primary rivals to the throne, DESCENT and DARK FORCES for example, ROTT does not sidestep the violent, blood-and-guts motif of the **id Software** games, but instead throws itself headlong into the slaughterhouse gore. Aside from the excess of carnage, ROTT offers little you haven't seen before, but at least with its network and modem play options, it offers what is now regarded as a complete 3D game package.

The game begins on San Nicholas Island, off the coast of Southern California. You are a member of the High-risk United Nations Task force team (HUNT) investigating the remains of an old monastery for signs of the Oscurido cult. The sudden annihilation of Los Angeles coincides with the destruction of your boat and an onslaught of Triad soldiers, leaving you little alternative but to fight your way out. Fortunately, you have plenty of ammo—an infinite supply, as a matter of fact.



RISE OF THE TRIAD: DARK WAR



Price: $51.00, CD-ROM
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/33 or better (486 recommended), 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 20 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM drive; supports most major sound cards.
# of Players: 1-11 (modem and network)
Protection: None
RSAC Rating: 4 (Wanton and gratuitous violence)
Designer: Tom Hall
Publisher: Apogee Software
Garland, TX
(800) APOGEE-1

BRING 'EM ON, AND ON

The warriors of the cult don't fight with much intelligence, but what they lack in common sense, they make up for in sheer numbers. ROTT takes an approach reminiscent of cartridge-based games with its villains. Each episode introduces three basic enemy types as well as a final "Boss" to be defeated. The enemy characters look very realistic and were clearly generated by digitizing live actors. Unfortunately, it seems that only overweight actors with mustaches were hired for ROTT, assuming that Apogee didn't simply film the programmers. While the hostiles may look quite realistic, they just aren't that threatening, and some of their appearances are almost ludicrous. When a Lightning Guard approaches, clad in an unadorned olive trench coat, you wonder if you're going to be attacked or just flashed.

The enemies do offer some interesting attacks, however. Triadlings can be devious, and are not above feigning death, only to pop up behind you once your back is turned. Watch out for the white-belted Overpatrollers' web attacks—if you don't have a knife on you, it's easy to get tangled up. And if you've wounded an enemy, don't hesitate to finish him off immediately. Mercy is for the weak in the world of the Triad.

The appearance of the enemies is the only really weak graphic element in ROTT. The background textures are varied and interesting, the objects scattered around the mazes are excellent, if occasionally bizarre, and the weapons offer some of the best explosions I've ever seen in a PC game. There are 11 different weapon types to be wielded, 12 if you count the "God mode" power-up. I'm a real fan of both the Drunk Missile Launcher and the Flamewall. The latter will particularly appeal to closet pyromaniacs like myself, and it's just plain fun to watch the Drunk randomly scatter missiles all over the place.

The music and sound effects are a bit

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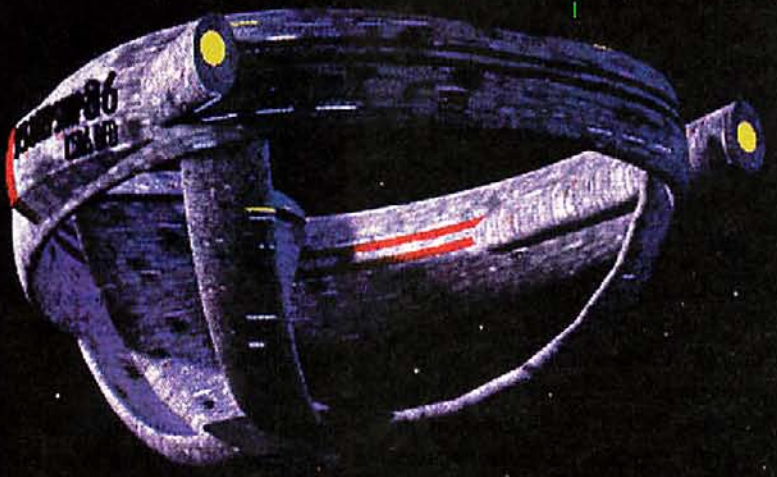

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Circle Reader Service #271

of a mixed bag. Much like the enemies themselves, the enemies' sound effects are the weakest sonic link. Shouts of "Outsider!", "Die!" and "Shoot him!" sound amateurish, and don't come close to the hideous, gut-wrenching growls and snarls of certain earlier games. But the weapon sounds range from fair to good, and there are a lot of excellent explosions and sizzles. The music is unobtrusive, which is best in a game of this type.

VARYING VISUALS

Apogee boasts that the levels of ROTT are huge—"up to one million square simulated feet"—and they certainly are big. The four episodes of the registered version are made up of at least eight separate levels apiece, so this is not a game you can expect to finish in a single night. However, though large, the levels aren't particularly well-designed. In this, ROTT is much more similar to DOOM than to DARK FORCES, where the levels have an admirable degree of architectural realism to them. The ROTT levels feel more like haphazardly constructed mazes than coherent structures, and their names, like Spring Surprise and Winding Way, reflect this as well. Still, a host of very nasty traps and moving hazards will keep your mind off such things.

The 3D engine is very quick, though disgracefully limited in comparison with some of its competitors. In many ways, the spatial technology of ROTT is better classified as an improved WOLFENSTEIN 3D than as a DOOM clone. ROTT does not have angled walls, elevators, or multi-level floors; instead, floating metal discs serve as a workable substitute for the latter two. From a gameplay standpoint, this solution works tolerably well. It's just disappointing, after having played DOOM, to return to this chunky, dissonant, pre-DOOM appearance.

FLYIN', JUMPIN' AND BUMPIN'

The "flying" mentioned in the literature cannot be compared with that of DESCENT, or even HERETIC for that matter. Movement through the air feels exactly the same as ground movement, and you have to "aim" up or down instead of "looking" up or down, since flying uses the same keybuttons as looking. You can look up or down when you're on the ground, though, and the game even gives you assistance in firing at an enemy that is above or below. One handy trick when under fire from an unknown direction is to fire your weapon while spinning in a circle; if your attacker is not in your horizontal plane, your weapon will begin to track his vertical position automatically, which will tell you exactly where he is.

DOUBLE YOUR DEATH The game engine we've seen before, but unique features like twin gun weapons and enemies that beg for mercy are a surprise.

GUNNING FOR GUTS AND GLORY Five enemies never looked so dead so fast as they do with the Firebomb. Fortunately, the graphic violence can be moderated for junior or for the fainthearted.

One truly innovative feature that might be even more fun than flying is ROTT's jump pads. These circular contraptions, scattered liberally through the levels, will send you or a Triadling bouncing up and out of control through the lower levels of the atmosphere. It is a total blast to charge at an enemy, run recklessly over a jump pad, and then hurtle through the air, guns a-blazing. In addition to allowing gamers to jump over obstacles and access secret parts of the game, the pads can also provide some comic relief, especially if you are unlucky enough to have scored a Shrooms power-up just beforehand. Dramamine is highly recommended in these circumstances, especially if you remember getting sick to your stomach watching someone play WOLFENSTEIN 3D.

ROTT supports both modem and network play, which is something that we've come to expect from this type of game. There are some interesting new features, foremost of which is the ability to send a voice message across the net to your opponents. You'll need a mike attached to your Sound Blaster, but even without one you can still broadcast one of the pre-recorded voices. No more speakerphone taunting! Up to 11 players can go at it simultaneously on a Local Area Network, but unfortunately, one computer must be devoted to exclusive duty as the game server. There's an option to let a single machine serve as both client and server, but the game crashed immediately every time I tried to run a net game this way.

The network driver doesn't appear to be as solid as DESCENT's, but on the other hand, the modem connection seems to work more reliably than that used by DOOM and HERETIC. This is, of course, dependent on many, many variables, but this was my experience, at any rate. ROTT's creators deserve credit for putting more time and effort into developing the multi-player aspects of the game. There are five distinct player-characters, as well as nine different multi-play options, including Tag, Scavenger, and Capture the Flag. It is a good sign that 3D action games are evolving into more than mere slaughterfests.

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MY LIFE AS A DOG A twisted reversal on "God mode" is "Dog mode," where you're not only invincible, but can paw and bite your opponents to death. Woof!

A CRUSHING GORE

But you wouldn't know that just from watching someone blast their way through a ROTT level. In keeping with the new industry awareness on violence, ROTT comes with an adjustable setting which modifies the level of on-screen gore. As socially estimable as this may seem, ROTT also offers some grotesque sequences that will appall most parents and not a few gamers. Apogee, knowing full well that there's money to be made in bloodshed, is billing ROTT as "The most violent 3D action game ever created."

Fire a bazooka into a High Guard at close range, and you're liable to be splattered with severed heads, eyeballs, and the occasional missing limb as the game chortles "Ludicrous Gibs." One can be thankful that aside from this bit of wit, cannibalism is not a part of the game. Wounded prisoners beg for mercy on their knees, but since they'll recover and attack you if you don't finish them off, you are practically required to give them the *coup de grace*. Also, when your character is killed, you're usually treated to a little sequence as he or she is impaled by Stabbers, pulped by Spinblades, or incinerated by various means.

KEEP 'EM LAUGHING AS THEY DIE

Keep in mind that the violence, like many other aspects of ROTT, seems to be somewhat tongue-in-cheek. It seems doubtful that anyone at Apogee seriously thought that this game would offer a serious challenge to the title of Best DOOM Clone, so they instead decided to have some fun with it. RISE OF THE TRIAD cannot be described as more than an average 3D action game, but it does have all the necessary ingredients, especially when it comes to network play, and it has its moments, too.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

RISE OF THE TRIAD

RATING 3.5

PROS It's fast, it's bloody, it's got a sense of humor, and it's got great modem and network play.

CONS The level designs and characters are far below the current watermarks. And when talking single-player experiences, several other games will deliver a heavier blow.

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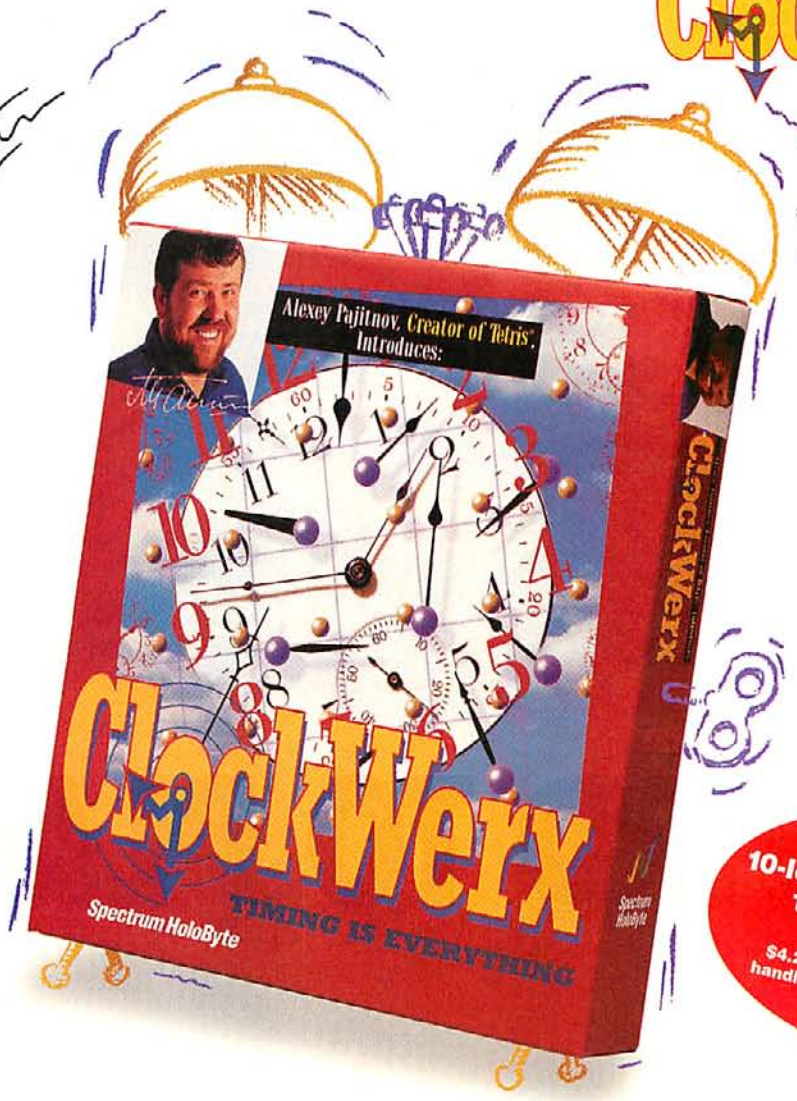

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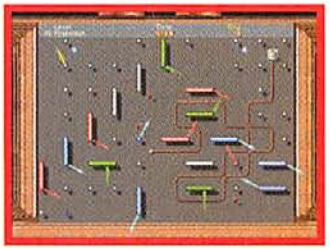

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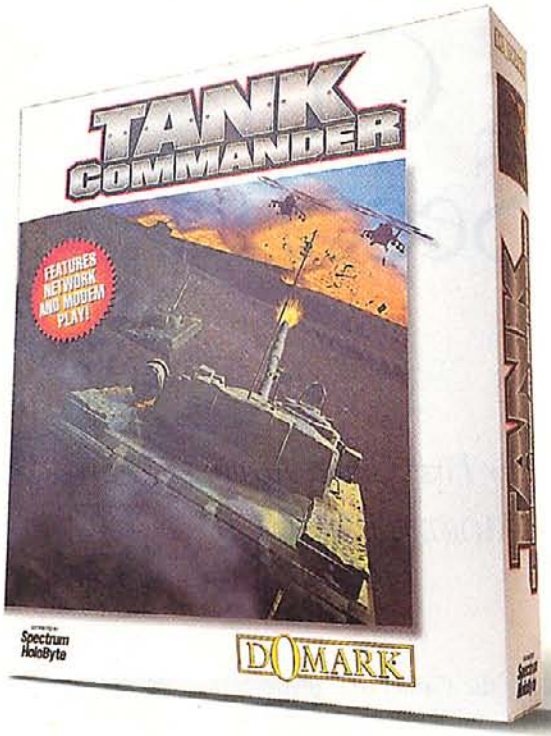
HARD TO PLAY.



HARD NOT TO PLAY.

For multi-player action, use a modem to play against a buddy. Or, get on a network and challenge up to three other players!

Stunning texture-mapped graphics enhance the realism and intensity of battle, as does the inclusion of several landmarks such as Stonehenge.

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A Knock Out In The Second Round

After A Brutal Beating In Their First Game, Acclaim Returns To Take The Title In MORTAL KOMBAT II

by George Jones

"*FINISH HIM!*," THE FANS SCREAMED AS MY FLYING KICK CAUGHT JOHNNY CAGE SQUARE IN THE jaw. Cage was on his last leg, and the crowd wanted blood. As Cage slowly got to his feet, I considered my options in dispatching him.

Sure, I was tired—he was my 5th opponent—but I knew that somewhere deep within me I had the power to finish this chump in spectacular fashion. But there were so many options. Should I do him with a simple uppercut, or should I indulge myself and the fans with a special Fatality? Such decisions weigh heavily on a street fighter's mind.

If I wanted to toy with him, I could turn him into a baby, or I could give him a cake in the hopes that we could become friends. But no, he had proved far too much of a nuisance, and deserved the worst I could deliver.

With agility that would have earned a nod from Bruce Lee, my fingers moved across the GamePad, and I watched in dreamy wonder as my fighter wound up with the Mother of All Uppercuts. The blow clocked Cage so hard his body literally exploded, raining blood and guts all over the floor. "TKO's are for losers," I mused as I sucked my knuckles clean of gore. Six down, six to go before I faced the deadly Kintaro, and after that, Shang Tsung.

RAZOR BURN Some of the characters' special moves, like Baraka's ginsu knife demonstration, leave a bloody mess.

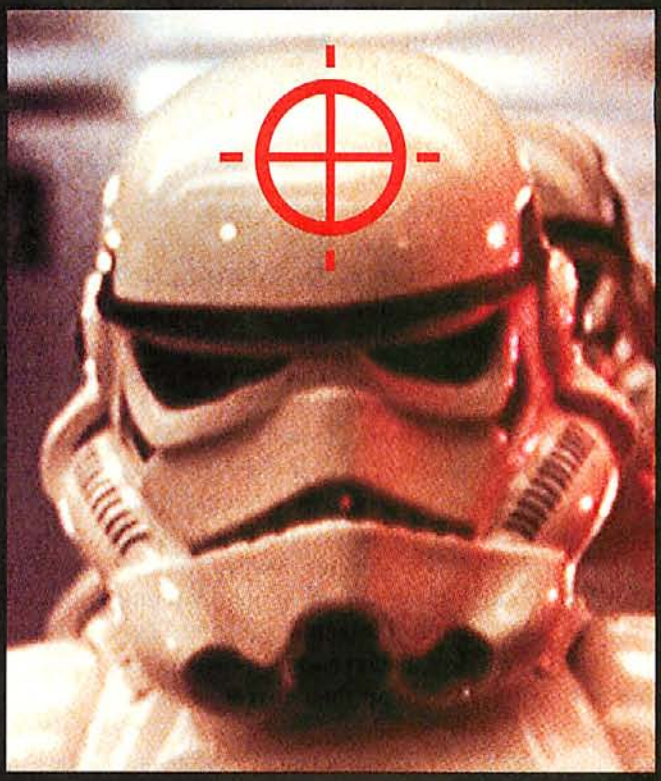
MORTAL KOMBAT II

Price: $59.95, Floppy & CD-ROM
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 386/33 or better (486/33 MHz recommended), 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 25 MB hard drive space; supports most major sound cards.
# of Players: 1-2
Protection: Documentation check (floppy only)
Developers: Midway
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Oyster Bay, NY
(516) 624-8888

KOIN-OP KOMBAT

Arcade-style fighting games—where two combatants square off in a two dimensional world—go back to the heyday of video game parlors. Games like KARATE CHAMP and YIE AR KUNG FU are some of the early watermarks. The STREETFIGHTER and MORTAL KOMBAT games represent the new generation. Large animated characters, fast action, and lots of "moves" gave these games incredible replay value and well-deserved success. Inevitably, conversions to home platforms followed as game manufacturers desperately sought to cash in on the craze. And cash in they did—16-bit versions of STREETFIGHTER and MORTAL KOMBAT sold in the millions. Those who were relegated to spectator status, as usual when it comes to action-oriented arcade games, were the PC players. And when Acclaim allowed **High-Tech Expressions** to port the original MORTAL KOMBAT to the PC, it must be said, disappointed sighs were heard around the country. It was a featherweight doomed to humiliation before a crowd with heavyweight expectations, and the crowd was getting ugly.

Acclaim took notice and learned from their mistakes. After the disappointment of that first offering, the company promised that MORTAL KOMBAT II for the



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PC would be a much stronger title with improved graphics and intense bloodletting action. Fortunately for the Jean-Claude Van Damme in all of us, they came through.

BLOODSPORT

For the uninitiated, MORTAL KOMBAT II is your basic "kill them before they kill you" fighting game that has punched its way into gaming culture, spawned a near religous following, and resulted in a major motion picture. You select your character from 12 different fighters and begin demolishing opponents. Win enough battles and you'll soon face the top dogs. Beat them and you win the game. In the two player mode, which is a blast, you basically keep slugging it out with a friend until one person has had enough. While I could waste time discussing the storyline and whether it works—Shang Tsung has rigged another tournament to assist him in his devious plans for world chaos—it's really not important. What is important is how this coin-op to 16-bit to PC platform game plays.

Action fans will be excited to learn that MORTAL KOMBAT II looks, sounds, and plays just as it does at the arcade. In fact, I find I like it better than the coin-op version because I favor a gamepad-type controller over your standard coin-op stick. The large digitized fighters look almost exactly as they do in the coin-op version, the sound effects are absolutely amazing, and the background graphics are impressive. Slicing an opponent into bloody bits has never been this much fun, nor sounded this good.

TONGUE ON CHEEK When a lizard man rips your head from your shoulders with his tongue, you know that you've just suffered a Fatality.

Speaking of bloody bits, there's more blood in MORTAL KOMBAT II than in an Elm Street nightmare. Of course, the original MORTAL KOMBAT was one of the games resposible for the parental furor that brought the government and its rating systems into the gaming picture. The brutal decapitation and limb-ripping "fatalities," with all their pixelated blood and gore are all here in the PC version, and there's no way of taming or disabling the violence. Concerned parental units beware.

CHALLENGE TO THE DEATH

Unless you're a wily, experienced veteran of the MORTAL KOMBAT games, you'll find the initial going a little difficult. The basic moves are simple enough, and although you'll be able to win a battle or two simply using jump kicks and uppercuts, that won't be enough to win the war. Instead, you've got to master a number of combinations and "specialty" moves. Although each fighter has some sort of missile attack (Raiden shoots lighting, Kung Lao throws his razor sharp hat), they also have two or three unique power moves. Fortunately, unlike the disappointing RISE OF THE ROBOTS by **Time Warner**, these moves are easily accomplished. I didn't need to have the right timing or good luck to perform Liu Kang's Bicycle Kick, I simply had to press the right buttons in the right order.

To win the game, you'll have to beat every character, including a clone of yourself. Then you'll have to take on Kintaro, a four-armed goliath with a grudge. Beat him and you'll face Shao Kahn, who is cocky, lightning fast, and initially close to impossible to beat. Each of these two superfiends has certain weaknesses, though, and once you find their Achilles' tendons, you might even be able to win the game.

This is an area where MORTAL KOMBAT II earns some distinction. In most other fighting games, I often hit a wall at some

Movements For The *Coup de Grace*

Each character, in addition to their "special" moves, can finish their opponents with three special kinds of attacks: Fatality, Friendship and Babality. The Fatality move can be used any time you are commanded to "*Finish Him.*" The Babalities and Friendship moves have one prerequisite: You cannot use the punch button in the winning round. Here are some favorite Fatality, Friendship, and Babality moves.

Liu Kang
Dragon Fatality: down-forward-back-back-HIGH KICK
Friendship: forward-three back-LOW KICK
Babality: two down-forward-back-LOW KICK

Johnny Cage
Torso Shredder Fatality: two down-two forward-PUNCH
Friendship: four down-HIGH KICK
Babality: three back-HIGH KICK

Reptile
Tongue Grab Fatality: two back-down-PUNCH
Friendship: two back-down-LOW KICK
Babality: down-two back-LOW KICK

Shang Tsung
Deadly Mist fatality: hold HIGH KICK for 2 seconds, then release
Friendship: two back-down-forward-HIGH KICK
Babality: back-forward-down-HIGH KICK

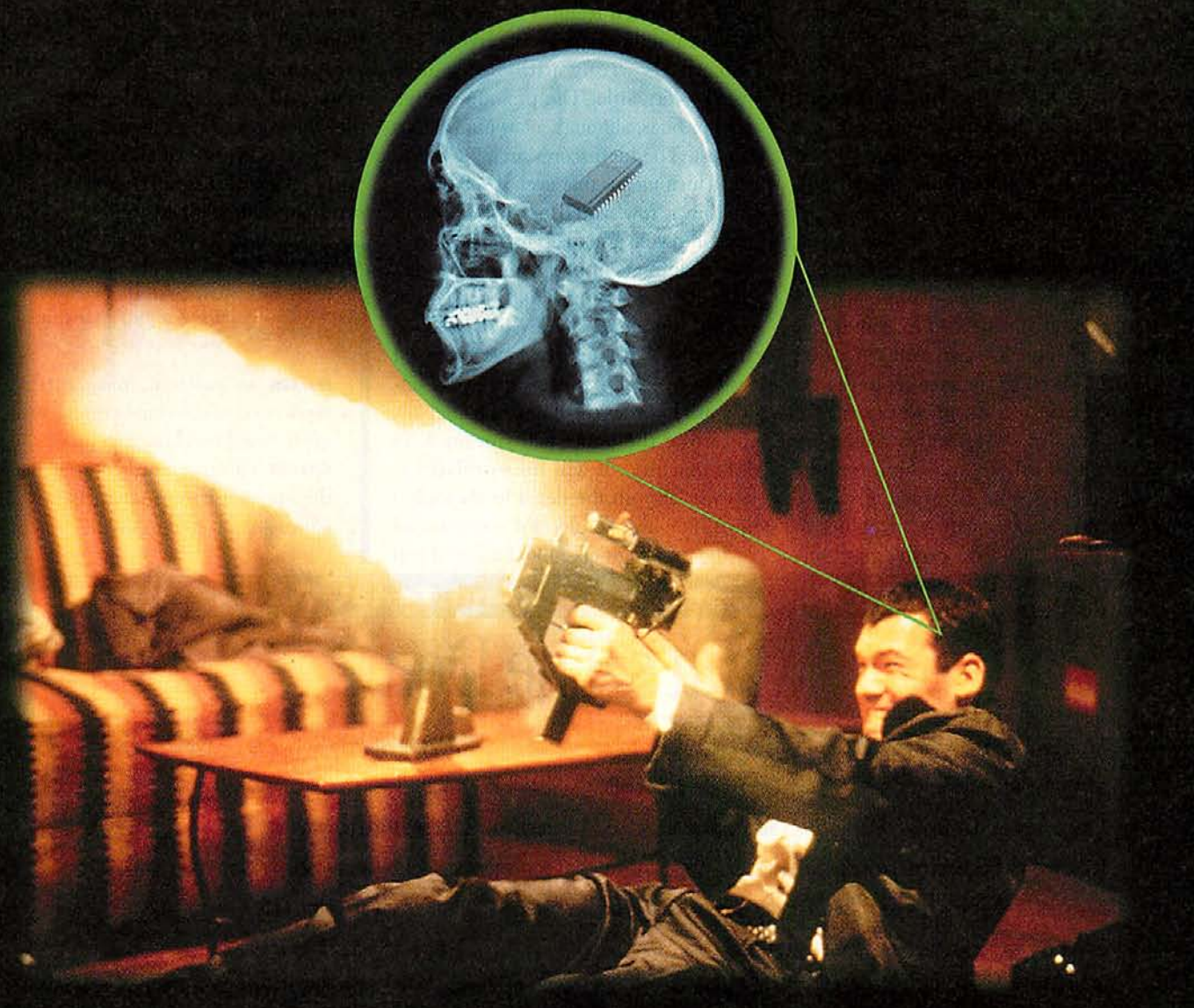
Kitana
Kiss of Death Fatality: hold LOW KICK (two forward-down-forward), then release
Friendship: three down-up-LOW KICK
Babality: three down-LOW KICK

Jax
Arm Ripper Fatality: tap block 4 times-PUNCH
Friendship: two down-two up-LOW KICK
Babality: down-up-down-up-LOW KICK

Mileena
Dinner Fatality: hold HIGH KICK for 2 seconds, then release
Friendship: three down-up-HIGH KICK
Babality: three down-HIGH KICK

Raiden
Supper Uppercut Fatality: hold PUNCH for 10 seconds (finish round holding PUNCH)
Friendship: down-back-forward-HIGH KICK
Babality: two down-up-HIGH KICK

Johnny Mnemonic.
Soon you won't be able to get it out of your head.



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point that is so frustratingly difficult I say, "to hell with it." Not so with this game. Although it took me a while to figure out how to beat both Kintaro and Shaoh Kahn, I never got to the point of calling my computer names and wishing it physical harm. Instead, combat is more like a puzzle. Once you figure out which moves and combinations work (and more importantly, which moves don't), things will get a little easier. There are five difficulty levels and 12 characters, so the replay value of this game is fairly high. And we haven't even explored the collection of "secret" moves.

SHHHH, SECRET

Part of the long-standing popularity of MORTAL KOMBAT has been its abundance of "secret" moves. Thankfully, Acclaim decided to keep all the goodies in the PC version. Gory "fatality" moves exist, like Kitana's Kiss of Death, which causes her opponent to inflate and then explode into blood and gore all over the screen. "Friendship" moves allow your fighter to offer a peaceful finish, exchanging gifts instead of blows. For the childish, "Babality" moves simply turn your opponent into a baby. In terms of hidden features, this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are other secret moves and even some secret characters out there. In fact, there's a whole cult of crazed fighters documenting these hidden features on-line on the Internet and the commercial services.

So what's wrong with the game? Frankly, very little. The program is free of major bugs, although a few minor ones do exist. The high scores aren't saved to disk, which means that even if you win 25 fights in a row, you'll never be able to prove it to your friends. There also seems to be an infrequent problem with joystick recognition. Every now and then, upon starting the game, my joystick behaved erratically. A few people have reported crash bugs, but I haven't witnessed a single crash in over 30+ hours of gameplay. And while the game will run on a 33 MHz machine, it will do so relatively slowly, even with the detail levels turned down. For best results, I'd recommend playing on a high-end 486. Finally, if you don't own a four-button gamepad, go buy one (they sell for around $15). Without a pad you'll have one hand on the joystick and the other on the keyboard—and that's no way for a warrior to fight.

When you get right down to it, MORTAL KOMBAT II is a rough and tough, macho action gamers' game. But more importantly, it's a whole lot of fun, particularly when you're fighting a friend. While the blood and guts might disturb some people, those people are hereby warned to stay a way. For those that remain, the arena is taking all-comers, and I've got a head-butt with all of your names on it.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

MORTAL KOMBAT II

RATING

PROS An authentic, uncensored replication of the coin-op game with great sound and fast, gory action.
CONS The gratuitous gore will have the squeamish screaming. High scores aren't saved to disk.

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The Apple Of Your Bloodshot Eye

MARATHON Goes The Extra Mile To Bring The DOOM Experience To Mac Gamers

by Christopher Breen

LIKE DISTANT TRIBAL DRUMS ECHOING ACROSS THE SERENGETI, MACINTOSH GAMERS HAVE HEARD THIS INCESSANT sound: *DOOM-DOOM-DOOM, you're never gonna get it! DOOM-DOOM-DOOM-DOOM, you might as well forget it! DOOM-DOOM-DOOM-DOOM.*

For a time, this persistent hubbub caused many an insecure Apple loyalist to wonder if they made a slight miscalculation in the computer department. Signs of this discomfort could be viewed on many a Mac gaming bulletin board in message threads titled, *Where is Mac-DOOM?*, *Why no DOOM for Mac?*, and *I Know It's a High Crime, But Should I Endure the Hellish Interface and Buy a PC Just For This Friggin' Game?*

There was little joy in Macville.

But then, like the first delicate shoots of March, short, encouraging messages began to pop up on these same electronic services: *MARATHON is Coming. Hold Out for MARATHON. A Mac First-Person-Perspective-Shoot-'em-Up Guaranteed to Make PC Players Envious.*

And so we waited.

After months of delay, the full version of MARATHON was released to coincide with January's San Francisco Macworld Exposition. To celebrate, **Bungie Software** hosted a Kill-a-Thon where Expo attendees blasted the bejeezus out of their companions over several networked Macs in the Bungie booth. Did MARATHON live up to the early hype? Evidenced by the sweat pouring down the faces of frantic players and the number of people lined up to purchase the game, I'd have to say "yes." Mac players finally have a texture-mapped, 3-D diversion that muffles the thrumming of those far-off drums.

MARATHON

Price: $69.99, 3.5" Floppy
System Requirements: 68020 Macintosh or faster (68040 highly recommended), 3 MB RAM, 8-bit color monitor, System 6.05 or later
# of Players: 1-8 (modem and network)
Protection: One-time serial-number entry
Designer: Jason Jones
Publisher: Bungie Software
Chicago, IL
(312) 563-6200

THE FIRST STEPS

The game opens as you arrive on the hangar deck of the interstellar colony ship U.E.S.C. Marathon. You are a nameless security officer who discovers that an alien race, known as the Phfor, has invaded the Marathon with the intention of enslaving its occupants. As if this isn't enough to take the spring out of your step, you find that a rogue computer named Durandal has annexed the ship's artificial intelligence system. This would simply be a minor annoyance if it weren't for the fact that Durandal controls the teleportation systems of the ship and thinks that tossing you into the midst of the alien marauders is a real hoot.

Ostensibly, your mission is to defeat the Phfor, return the Marathon to its rightful owners, and propel Durandal from the ship's computer system. But as with most games of this type, your *real* mission is to tear through the beautifully rendered, winding corridors; gather an ever-deadlier inventory of weapons; figure out how to get from point A to point B; and annihilate just about anything that stands in your path.

Whereas Bungie's previous FPPSEU (First Person Perspective Shoot 'Em Up), PATHWAYS INTO DARKNESS, contained many of the aforementioned elements, it felt more like an adventure game: it was necessary to track down particular items and solve puzzles in order to proceed through the levels. Although MARATHON has its share of plot devices and brow-furrowing puzzles, this game relies more on quick reflexes and dexterous digits.

THE VIEW FROM THE ROAD

As the fine and slightly tart MARATHON manual explains, "being naked in space stinks," so you are attired in the latest futuristic military garb, complete with a Cyberhead Helmet that acts as your interface to the game's world. This interface reflects some of the innovations of the game and contains such elements as a View Screen, Shield Energy Display and Weapons Manifest. These doodads are old news to seasoned FPPSEU players, but wait—they're just the beginning.

Take the Oxygen Level Display, for example. Space adventures always seem to assume that there's plenty of clean, fresh

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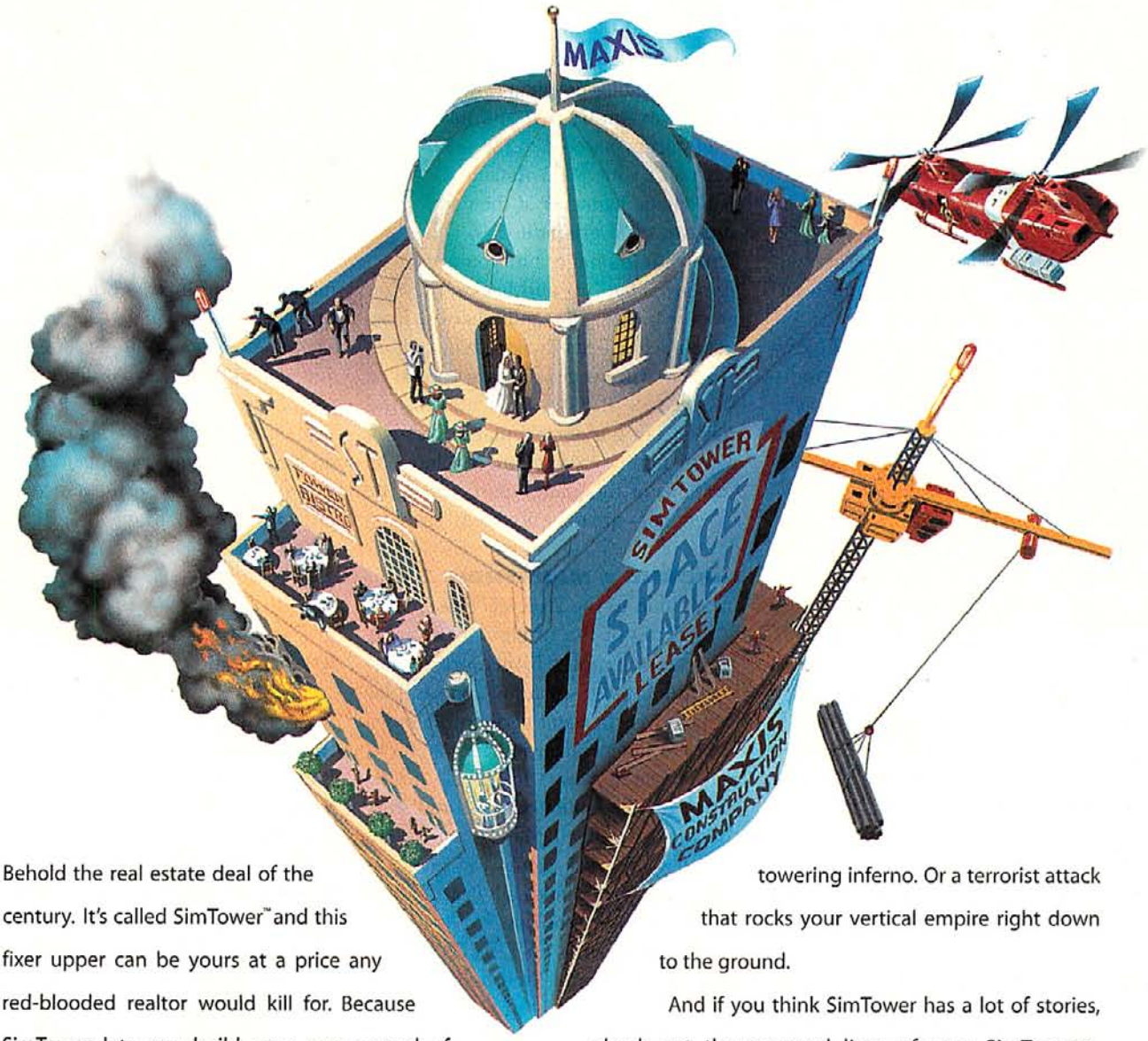

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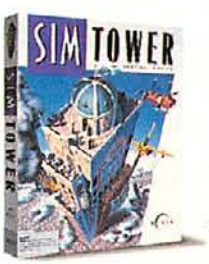

The Vertical Empire.

MAXIS

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air about. But let's face it, a potable atmosphere isn't standard equipment in a vacuum. MARATHON addresses this condition by equipping the player's suit with an oxygen supply. Additionally, the game's designers must have considered that running and dodging are likely to deplete this same supply. One particularly tricky level of the game requires that the player not only slaughter a large number of baddies, recharge his shields, and navigate a vexing maze, but also to stop off at inconveniently placed oxygen pumps to top off the tank. This adds a bit of spice to the game but, regrettably, as the rest of the ship's levels are pressurized with nature's best, this is only a factor on this single level.

MARATHON's interface also includes a Motion Detector. Having this early warning system may seem like so much pabulum to DOOM players accustomed to slimy goons springing from behind darkened doorways, but it does allow the player to more carefully plan his next move. Given that much of the MARATHON environment is shrouded in eerie darkness, this tool is almost a necessity. Not that it's a complete walkover: the detector indicates only that there is some bad action nearby. Whether these cooties can be taken out with a sharp uppercut or require sterner measures such as the SPNKR-X17 Surface to Surface Rocket is left for the player to discover at his leisure.

Not only are the high-powered weapons tougher to obtain than in DOOM, but MARATHON also gives players more control over the weapons once they're in hand. I don't know about you, but the last time I aimed a Tech .50 Fusion Pistol at a beetle-bodied creep on a high ledge, I had to move my arm up as well as over. That's right, MARATHON requires that you move your weapons on the x *and* y axes. Pablum *indeed*.

Being able to move your weapon up and down opens up some intriguing possibilities. Let's say, for example, that you have your shields powered to the max, you point your M.75 Assault Rifle/Grenade Launcher at the floor, and fire off a grenade. Yes, you take some damage, but you are also propelled up and backward. Now suppose there's a low and otherwise inaccessible ledge behind you. Grenade hopping, as this technique is known to MARATHON hipsters, is mentioned nowhere in the documentation but is a skill that one is expected to develop if all locations of the game—particularly the secret ones—are to be accessed.

BUG OFF MARATHON one ups many 3D action games with innovations like a motion detector and a digital readout.

RUNNING A MARATHON

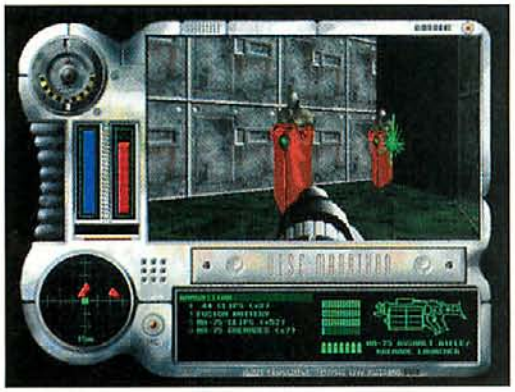
In addition to the 26 levels (MARATHON, 26, get it?) of the single-player game, MARATHON includes 10 network scenarios. Within these scenarios, you can play cooperatively in teams or as one among a group of independent warriors. Network players can also elect to include hostile aliens, disable motion sensors, and show the location of all players on a map overview. Network games can go on as long as the power holds out or be limited by time or number of kills.

The game runs on LocalTalk, TokenTalk, and Ethernet networks, and each copy of the game includes two installations: one for the full game, plus an extra network install so two people can play without buying an additional copy. The latest update lets users play modem-to-modem via Apple Remote Access, but the current implementation is unplayably slow.

Although MARATHON runs smoothly on high-powered 68040- and PowerPC-equipped Macs, its higher resolution prevents it from exhibiting the breakneck speed found in DOOM on less capable machines. Fortunately, Bungie has made provisions by making screen resolution, window size, sound sample rate, and wall and ceiling textures adjustable for better performance.

MARATHON is a remarkable effort, but I do have one minor complaint to add to that of execrable performance in modem-to-modem play: in Full Screen mode, all on-screen indicators and gauges vanish—you're flying blind. Although you can quickly switch to a smaller view with a single key press, the less-successful FPPSEU SENSORY OVERLOAD handled the problem more elegantly by shrinking these items and placing them along the edge of the screen. Bungie should explore this option.

But frankly, that's a tiny blemish in the big picture. MARATHON is an absolutely enthralling and nerve-wracking distraction as a single-player-game, and it's the kind of networking experience that causes monthly productivity graphs to take a decided turn to the south-east. If you have a Macintosh, you probably already own this game. If you're a PC user, eat your heart out.



PESTS ON A PEDESTAL Gamers will experience a DOOM-like atmosphere with DOOM-like weirdness in MARATHON.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

MARATHON

RATING 4.5 stars

PROS A terrific first-person-shoot-'em-up that contains a reasonable plot and enough puzzles to cause you to briefly cool your weapons.

CONS Playing in Full Screen mode removes helpful indicators. Crummy modem-to-modem play.

Kind of

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ACTIVISION®

Prince Of Perspiration

Capstone's ZORRO Likes To See You Sweat

by Charles Ardai

Here's another one for the Same-Melody-Different-Lyrics department—and while we're at it, proof that DOOM is not the only game that's being imitated to death these days. A tough climbing/jumping/fighting/falling/ducking/dodging game set in Ol' Meh-hee-ko, **Capstone**'s ZORRO will remind you of **Broderbund**'s exceptionally fine PRINCE OF PERSIA games, right down to some of the particular animations it employs.

Zorro hangs from ledges just like your character in PRINCE OF PERSIA does. He jumps and runs and hoists himself up onto platforms just like the Prince does. He draws a sword and slashes it about like the Prince. He even crumples in a bloody heap at the bottom of deep pits in much the way his accident-prone predecessor did. The only animations that are really novel, in fact, are Zorro's cracking of his long, black whip (a nice bit of business) and the way he keeps taking off his hat between encounters to wipe the sweat off his forehead.

Funny, he never seemed to sweat in the old serials.

ZORRO

Price: $59.95, CD-ROM
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/33 or better (486 highly recommended), VGA/SVGA graphics, 4 MB RAM, 5 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
Designers: Kelcey Simpson
Publisher: Capstone
Miami, FL
(305) 373-7700

Of course, in the old serials he never ran into the sort of situations he finds in this game. There were deathtraps in the movies, even deathtraps galore, but this game takes things way past the "galore" point. Very much in the style of PRINCE OF PERSIA, ZORRO offers several ways for you to die, or at least to lose some of the eight "health points" with which you start the game, on every screen.

It also offers you a CD-ROM-sized helping of video scenes featuring actors standing around impoverished-looking sets and dishing out long mouthfuls of expositionary dialogue. It appears that Evil Senor Cortez (who shows how mean he is by beating his wife, cutting off a monk's fingers, and not speaking Latin) has gotten his hands on a map that points the way to a cache of church-owned gold. He knows the hoard belongs to the now eight-fingered padre, but will he respect this sacred claim of ownership? No, siree, not without our hero showing up to give him a good whupping.

So, there's a plot, after a fashion, and just enough acting to put it over. One assumes that whomever Steven Spielberg casts for the big-budget *Zorro* flick he's putting together will do a better job with the role than David Lugo, who wears the mustache and mask of Don Diego here. He'll also come up with sets that don't look like a card table plopped in front of a backdrop and matte paintings that don't look like a cross between Frederic Remington and Jim Steranko. For now, however, fans of the Zorro myth or of the PRINCE OF PERSIA game paradigm will not find themselves too disappointed with Capstone's slightly cheesy (and heavily derivative) version of the old story.

CATCHING SOME ZS

Get past the opening mini-movie and you'll find yourself in a semi-abandoned mine, the first of the game's many similar-looking locations. Why the mine has been abandoned is something of a mystery, since gold bars are still scattered around here and there; equally mysterious, you can run and jump just fine even after you've tucked a good number of these mammoth ingots into your trousers. Videogame logic—go figure.

Side by side with the gold, you'll find a small number of large, glittering Zs, the equivalent of PRINCE OF PERSIA's curative potions. The Zs are typically tucked away in some hard-to-reach spot, so that the damage they heal is likely to be damage you incurred trying to get to them, but no matter. They're this game's version of a brass ring and your job is to grab them.

Also tucked away in the mine's various crooks and crevices are tripwires that activate what look like harpoon-launchers and Gatling guns (I assume that's not what they're supposed to be, but what the

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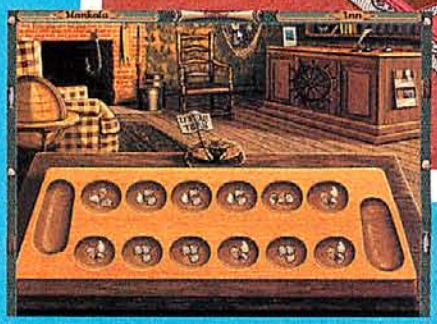

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hell, you end up just as dead if you walk in front of them), as well as booby traps of an even more devious nature. One of the most common is a uni-directional rotating plank: step onto one side of it and you're fine, but step over to the other side and the whole thing spins out from under you, leaving you plummeting to almost certain doom.

Along with such inanimate traps are plenty of animate menaces: hardy, buckskin-clad frontiersmen, frisky Mexican soldiers with long, pointy bayonets, and other similarly ill-tempered wretches hoping to a take piece out of your hide. Keep them at a distance and you have a prayer of whipping them to death (which is a good deal of fun, I blush to admit); let them get within striking distance and you'll have to have a swordfight (which is less fun, since sword combat here is awkward and a good deal harder to pick up than in PRINCE OF PERSIA).

Kill enough banditos, collect enough treasure, evade enough traps, and pick your way far enough through the maze of precariously connected ledges and passageways and you'll find yourself in Level Two...which is an awful lot like Level One, only more so. If PRINCE OF PERSIA was a game for masochists, ZORRO is even more punishing. The levels are huge, and though lacking the malevolent cleverness in construction that PRINCE OF PERSIA author Jordan Mechner brought to bear, they make up for the missing cleverness with a double helping of malevolence.

EN GARDE, BANDITO! Zorro makes quick work of an hombre guarding the Lode del Madre in an abandoned mine.

Fortunately, the "save game" function works better than in PRINCE OF PERSIA, less frequently requiring you to retrace your steps through long, deadly gauntlets that you've already gone through once before. There is also no limit (as far as I could tell) to the number of times you can die and start over again from where you left off, even without saving. So, you learn quickly not to be reluctant to try a move that is likely to leave Zorro either wounded or dead. Which is a good thing, since there is no way to get off even the very first screen without hurting yourself.

WHIP IT GOOD Zorro's not only master of the blade, but he's pretty handy with the whip too.

'Z' IS FOR ZIRCONIUM

For all that is good about it, ZORRO is not a gem—glittering, hard-faceted, priceless, and rare—the way PRINCE OF PERSIA was. It's not even a diamond in the rough. Like one of those cubic zirconium rings they sell on the Home Shopping Network, it looks an awful lot like the real thing, and maybe could even fool an untrained eye, but in the final analysis it's not worth the same amount at all. To use another analogy, it's a little like a photocopy made from a crisp, clean original: the graphics are similar but cruder, the controls are similar but stiffer, the suspense is still there...but it's not the same.

Part of the problem is that the game is harder to play, not for good reasons but because some of PRINCE OF PERSIA's subtle elegances are missing. It can be hard to line Zorro up underneath a ledge he needs to climb up to, for instance, so either you end up walking him back and forth until you get the positioning just right, or you have to have him jump with his arms extended over his head again and again until he stumbles across the "sweet" spot that lets you ascend.

There's no way to deliberately creep forward, as opposed to just walking, to make it easier to avoid traps. When Zorro drops from a higher level to a lower one, it's hard to make him let go at just the right time. In swordfights, it's hard to see just when to strike and when to parry.

Then, too, there is the matter of the graphics. The full-motion video interludes are a nice touch, but the graphics during the game itself are disappointing, lacking the clean, neat lines and striking color contrasts found in PERSIA. The characters here have jagged outlines, and one adobe-colored scene tends to blend into another.

Capstone made a good choice picking its storyline—what better adventure yarn to counter the Arabian Nights with than Zorro, assuming the Indiana Jones license was tied up?—and on the whole the designers have comported themselves well. ZORRO is a solid, presentable, only occasionally annoying game. But unlike both its namesake and the game that inspired it, the stuff of legend it's not.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

ZORRO

RATING 3 stars

PROS One of the better PRINCE OF PERSIA imitators out there, with a novel setting, a much-loved main character, and tough gameplay.
CONS The toughness sometimes comes from design flaws, and the familiarity of the whole exercise robs it of some of its potency.

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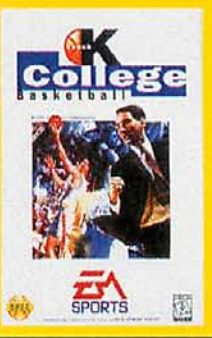

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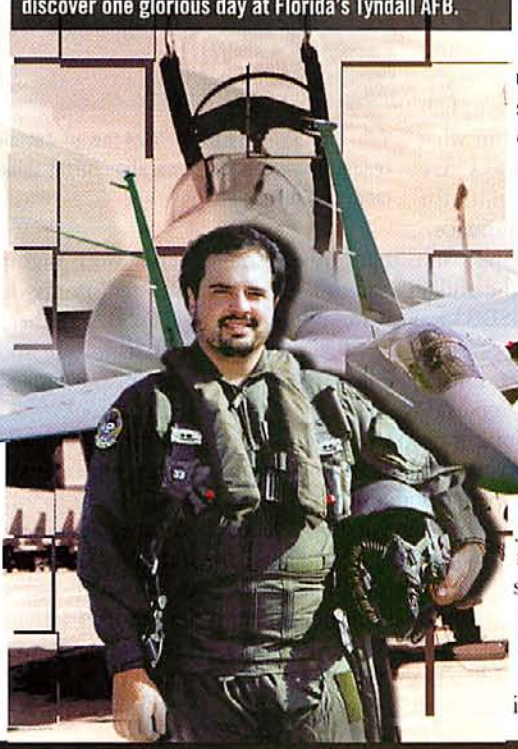
Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing

DENNY ATKIN RECOUNTS HIS EXPERIENCE ABOARD AN F-15, AND HOW IT RELATES TO SIMULATED WORLDS

DON'T HATE ME FOR BEING LUCKY. BUT last October I was sitting at my desk at work, minding my own business, when I got a call from an Air Force PR officer. "How would you like to ride in an F-15?" he asked. My first reaction, of course, was to hang up and go find the co-worker with the sick sense of humor. But it turned out that the guy on the other end of the line was a press liaison for the Air Force, and he was arranging press rides for the upcoming William Tell exercise at Tyndall AFB in Florida. Of course, being the responsible journalist I am, I felt it was my duty to take him up on his offer. Only so I could report the experience to you folks—really.

Okay, so maybe the fact that I've been an aviation nut since I first flew commercial at age three had a little to do with it. Perhaps having logged hundreds of simulated flying hours since the day I first spotted **Sublogic's** FLIGHT SIMULATOR on an Apple II back in 1982 influenced my decision just a bit as well. At any rate, I arrived at Tyndall to find the flight line filled with dozens of F-15s and F-16s, as well as a squadron of Canadian CF-18s. And the back seat of one of those planes was going to be mine for an hour. This was a simulator nut's nirvana, and I was incredibly excited, but also more nervous than a novice installing a multimedia kit.

After a morning of egress training, it was time to fly. The second the afterburners cut in, I realized that I'd never quite feel the same way about flight sims again. No matter how much more sophisticated the graphics and sounds get, and no matter how much realism is eventually packed into the flight model, there's just no way you're going to experience those G forces sitting in front of a personal computer.



Flying flight sims is one thing, but flying a real F-15D is quite another, as Denny Atkin was lucky enough to discover one glorious day at Florida's Tyndall AFB.

We shot into the sky at a 45-degree angle and formed up with another F-15D. As we slid within a few feet of the other fighter, I realized the second-biggest difference between the sim experience and the real thing—situational awareness. Riding high in my seat under the F-15's huge bubble canopy, I was afforded an incredible panoramic view. Checking six was just a matter of twisting in my seat (although that's no small task with the helmet, G suit, and chute straps restricting movement).

After a bit of formation flying, we engaged the other jet

by Denny Atkin

in some basic combat maneuvers, just trying to get on each other's tail. At one point we pulled 7.8 Gs, and I started to gray out. One thing you don't realize when flying sims is how much effort is spent trying to stay conscious during combat maneuvers. The G suit alone isn't enough to keep you conscious—you also have to tighten the muscles in your lower body to help restrict blood flow, and do special breathing exercises to keep the brain oxygenated.

NOT YOUR FATHER'S FALCON One of FALCON 4's authentically-rendered cockpits sports the F-16C's distinctive dual multi-function displays, which help facilitate pilot workload.

Aside from the G forces and the great view, though, the flight was much as I'd come to expect from my sim experiences. The pilot allowed me to take the controls and execute some turns and rolls. Those maneuvers felt just as I expected them to, except the plane responded a bit quicker than most of the simulated aircraft I've flown. The instrumentation and controls were easily understood, and the joystick looked and felt a lot like my Thrustmaster FCS.

Far too soon, the flight was over. We did a few touch-and-goes on the Tyndall runway and then set down. Landing appeared less challenging than the typical simulator touchdown, since the excellent view from the F-15D's bubble canopy allows you to get a good visual fix on your altitude. I climbed down from the Mach 2.5 jet exhilarated at the experience, and simultaneously disappointed that it was very likely the only chance I would ever have to do anything that thrilling.

SIMULATED REALITY

I came away from the F-15 experience realizing that PC-based sims aren't likely to capture the full feel of flying a real fighter jet—unless you can convince a roller-coaster operator to let you bring your laptop aboard. But I was simultaneously impressed with how well sims had prepared me for reading all the jet's instruments, understanding the various flight modes, and even controlling the plane. Now that sim designers are coding for fast 486 and Pentium machines, simulated aircraft are flying more and more like the real things. And they're are only going to get better. I talked to **Spectrum HoloByte**'s Steve Blankenship, product manager for FALCON 4, as well as Matt Shaw, who's helping develop **Jaeger**'s FIGHTER DUEL, about the increased realism we can expect in upcoming sims.

Blankenship says two factors have allowed Spectrum to create a more sophisticated, realistic simulation: The increase in power of computers, as well as the company's growing experience in simulation development. "We can do quite a bit more in FALCON 4. Part of the reason this stuff wasn't done in FALCON 3 is some of the limitations of the time, like it had to run on a 286. Were we writing for the defense industry on SGI Reality Engines, we could have pretty cool *everything*. You have to balance it all within what marketing says are reasonable limits for your target audience," he says. For Spectrum, that target audience will see the 486/66 as middle-of-the-road, with a 486/33 as absolute minimum hardware.

But practice and a wider knowledge base also play a part. "We've learned a lot and come a long way. We've made some great contacts with the military community, who have opened some of their doors to us," he says. "That's enabled us to learn how radar nets work, how a pilot would interpret various signals on their threat gear or on radar, and make use of them."

Spectrum has also gone to the folks who fly the real hardware for advice. "We work very closely with several F-16 pilots," he explains. "We've been out to Nellis Air Force Base and witnessed their ACMI (Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation) room and tactics, and seen how that all fits together into a plan. We've worked with the pilots in terms of functionality and feel." Of course, translating that advice into better program code is still a challenge. "Pilots won't tell you 'oh, it has this Sin/Cos equation equivalent,'" Blankenship explains. "They yank it back and say 'it feels a little sluggish here, it feels pretty good there.'"

Matt Shaw and Bill Manders at Jaeger Software are creating an enhanced PC version of FIGHTER DUEL, a highly realistic head-to-head World War II air-combat game that debuted on the Amiga. It can be a bit harder to find pilots who've flown Corsairs and Spitfires, but Shaw says Jaeger has beta testers who've flown many of the planes in the game. Shaw and company have visited the Smithsonian's Garber facility to better document the performance of the aircraft in the simulation. "Those guys [at Garber] are flight simulator fanatics," Shaw says.

VIEW TO A THRILL With state of the art advances in real-time 3D object rendering and terrain generation, flight sims like FALCON 4 are looking more real than ever.

"They were ragging on me to add more realism." Pretty demanding, since FIGHTER DUEL's realistic modeling of factors such as torque and inertia has sent many veteran sim fans scurrying back to virtual flight school.

Both companies have found that the faster, more powerful hardware has allowed them to add a new level of realism to their sims. The challenge is finding a balance. "Basically, if it's not fun, we don't do it," says Blankenship. "If you have to set all your circuit breakers, adjust your exhaust gas temperature, and [check] your cross-feed valves in your fuel system—that's something a pilot has to

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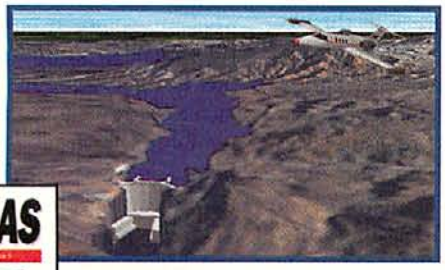

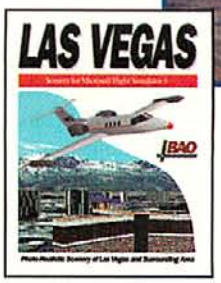

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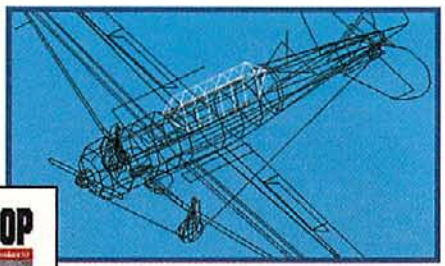

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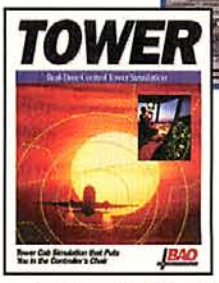

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do, but it's no fun." Still, FALCON 4 will realistically model the entire electronics suite of a real F-16, something that you won't be able to just pop in and use without careful study. So Spectrum has included a sort of virtual flight school in the game. "We'll have, at the lower levels of the game, the ability to put you in the cockpit and say 'here's how you bomb a target,'" Blankenship explains. "You watch it, and you see why the plane does what it does, and you see how to make it do that in terms of diving or turning or accelerating or whatever, and then how to release the weapons. Coming out of our Nellis training grounds, you'll know how to control the aircraft and deliver all the weapons."

SURPRISE ATTACK Jaeger Software returns to the PC with its FIGHTER DUEL, which aims to please hard-core sim buffs with more realistic flight modeling.

Still, there are some who just want to grab the joystick and start shooting. Rather than creating a mode that dumbs down FALCON, Spectrum has instead created a less complex line of simulations for the beginning pilot. TOP GUN, Blankenship says, is targeted at fliers who want "the yank-and-bank kind of fun." Jaeger allows novice pilots to start in the air, with a simplified flight model. "We have realistic gunnery," Shaw adds, "but you can turn it off if you want laser-style shots."

Now that flight models and enemy AI are both pretty darned realistic, the companies are turning toward making the audio-visual experience more authentic. Eventually the limited-view problem of PC sims may be addressed by virtual-reality goggles, but Blankenship feels that current models are too slow, too limited in resolution, and too expensive to be viable for FALCON 4. Right now Spectrum is concentrating on making the monitor views work as naturally as possible. "We're putting a lot of thought into the view system. Whether that includes a virtual cockpit or a padlock or a variety of views like AIR WARRIOR, we just haven't quite settled on one yet," Blankenship says. "It's very critical that you be able to gain situational awareness, but because of the view limitations—and the machinations you have to make with the keyboard or the joysticks to get those views—there's big tradeoffs there."

Jaeger's original version of FIGHTER DUEL included an innovative mouse-controlled view-panning system. While it was very flexible, giving you great coverage of all areas of the sky, Jaeger realized in some ways the full freedom of movement was actually less realistic. "In a real plane, you don't really scan like [you can] with the mouse view. Your eyes move more like a view key—they skip over, and then you refocus again," Shaw says. "That's hard to simulate. So in some ways the view keys are very appropriate."

Sound is important for situational awareness as well. "There's also a number of subtle audio clues that are not included with most programs," says Shaw. "Things such as the prop loading, which we have in FIGHTER DUEL. You can feel when a plane is about to stall, but there's also a change in the sound when the plane's about to stall. There normally is a certain whoosh going past the wings, but that stops, because the air's being disturbed—it's no longer flowing over the wing—and you're not getting that whoosh from the Venturi effect of the wing lift."

Spectrum has always been good at creating a realistic in-cockpit situation, and now the company wants to extend that so that you won't suddenly be jarred back into the reality that you're using a computer once you've landed. "There's going to be a video interface, and I think that'll be pretty exciting," Blankenship says." It gives you a first-person perspective—you're a pilot in the squadron, and you go through the base, into the different rooms, and do what you need to do in preparation for a flight. The idea being that we didn't want to break the first-person perspective—the difference is typically so glaring between the sim and the interface."

Having now been at the stick in an F-15 in addition to a Mooney 231 and a Twin Cessna, I'm even more impressed with the level of detail and realism in the current crop of simulations, and I can't wait for what's to come, as faster processors allow photorealistic graphics, and as new add-ons bring VR goggles and controls with tactile feedback into the realm of feasibility. But how realistic should sims get? "You hear arguments all the time about how nobody wants the realism," says Shaw. "They say if you put it in the game you're just killing yourself in the market. But there are *a lot* of people in the PC market, so there's probably a sizable number of people who do want the realism."

He's probably right. In fact, I'd imagine there are even a few sim pilots out there who won't be happy until the programs support multimedia scent cards to get that new-plane smell part of the experience down right. But in the meantime, those of us with more realistic expectations can look forward to climbing the realism curve as upcoming sims get better and better.

"TALK TO ME GOOSE!" For those who just want to hop in a jet and live out their *Top Gun* fantasies, Spectrum HoloByte's TOP GUN ought to be right on target.

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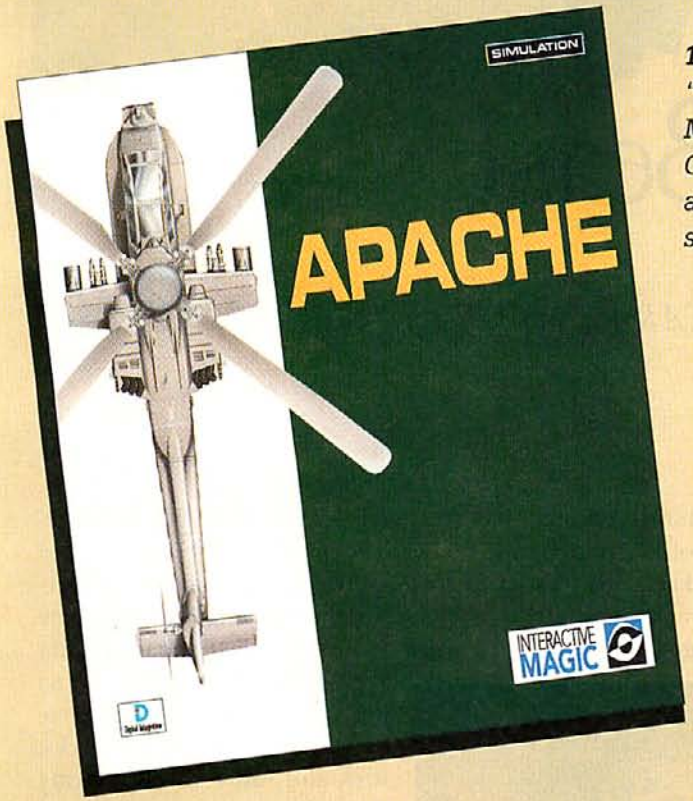

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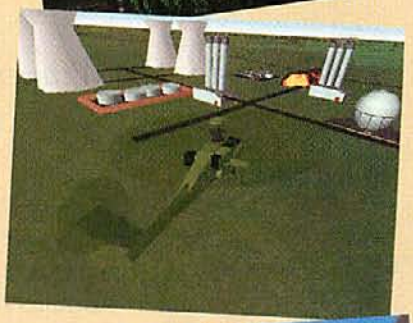

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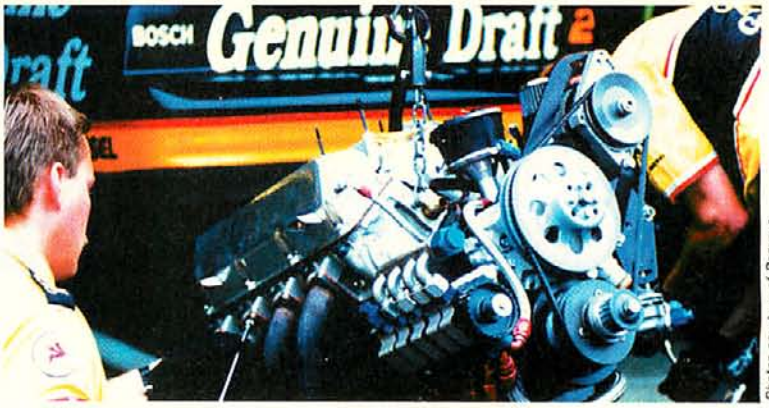
The Tune To Tame The Savage Beast



Photos courtesy of Papyrus

The Road To The Winner's Circle In NASCAR Racing Is Paved With Oily Wrenches

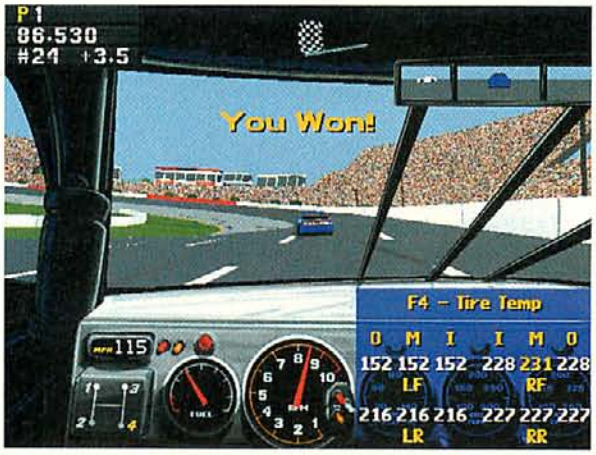
by Gordon Goble

THE WEATHER WAS UNSETTLED AND SO WAS MY STOMACH AS I HEADED OUT THAT SUNDAY MORNING—TOO MUCH pre-race celebration had seen to that. My name's Johnny Speed, and my game is driving, driving fast.

I didn't give a crap about the lousy weather, because today I was goin' indoor racing—**Papyrus'** NASCAR RACING to be exact. I had heard of a guy who could set up cars like nobody's business, and if I could put up with his guff, he'd make my job a hell of a lot easier. His name was Rick, and they said he was pretty good with a wrench, and with the dames too...my kinda guy. I met him and we didn't kill each other right away, so I figured he'd be okay.

We wanted to set up two kinds of cars—one that'd get us a screaming fast lap, and one that'd keep us near the front through a full race without burnin' up the rubber. The first part would be tough, the second tougher since we were gonna run against 100% competition, and there were no wankers in that group.

To prove our worth, we'd have to show some variety, a little scope, a little range. Since NASCAR RACING is a bunch of short ovals, a bunch of long ovals, and one road course, we knew that making our mark at one track wouldn't be enough. We'd have to go for two.



STORMIN' GORDON WINS AGAIN! Johnny Speed flaunts his perfect car set-up (and consistent driving) by breezing to a win at Martinsville. Tire temps indicate even heat across the meat.

Rick was hemming and hawing, but after I slapped him around a bit, he agreed to my track choices. I'd been workin' on my own full race set-up at the big 1.5 mile Atlanta oval, so it was in as our long track, and we picked the almost flat Martinsville half-miler, too, just 'cause it's short and hellish—kinda like my sister.

Before we hit the garage, Rick babbled on for a while about car set-ups in general, and damned if he didn't make some sense. My relief driver (we'll call him Andy) and I knew a little, too, so we started scratchin' notes—me on the back of cigarette packs, Rick and Andy on old betting slips. Here's what we wrote and here's what we did, with assistance from Rick's latest dollface, an *English teacher* fer cryin' out loud. So the words get a little fancier from here on in.

THE PHYSICS OF ROAD, RUBBER AND 700 HORSES

If you want to travel with the NASCAR front-runners, you've got to understand how and where the rubber meets the road, why a car can feel great one minute then drive like a dumptruck just a few laps later, and how modifying one setting may well have an undesirable side effect on another. In short, computer drivers must now become mechanics and physicists too.

Fortunately, Papyrus has helped make

the whole procedure a little easier. NASCAR RACING comes with an in-depth manual that provides a decent tutorial on this very subject, and furthermore, each NASCAR track comes with several "default" cars, of which the "Qualifying and "Ace" machines are generally a good, relatively fast yet neutral beginning. And neutrality is what you'll want to start off with as you begin to explore the limits of adhesion and horsepower, and come up with a solid driving style.

This brings us to a very important point, one that must be taken to heart. Without doubt, the most effective set-up weapon you'll ever have is your driving style. Squealing rubber, early tire wear, and slow straightaway speed may well be attributed to the driver, not his set-up. The one constant in NASCAR is "the need for good exit speed," and it'll take a smooth approach to get it right.

Fly into a turn as hot as you want, but if your entrance, turn-in, and cresting points adversely affect your exit speed, that lap will hardly be worth the effort. It's a difficult thing to judge in a computer simulation, as moving pixels simply can't duplicate the G's one would feel if behind the wheel of the real thing. But a smooth, constant drive *will* win out in the end. At Martinsville, for example, watching the speedo fall below 70 mph in mid-turn is not a pleasant sight, but that's where it should be in order to get the car cranked up again for a fast shot down the straight. Please remember, then, that this advice and these set-ups are presented under the assumption that one's driving adheres to these principles, and is, by all means, *consistent*.

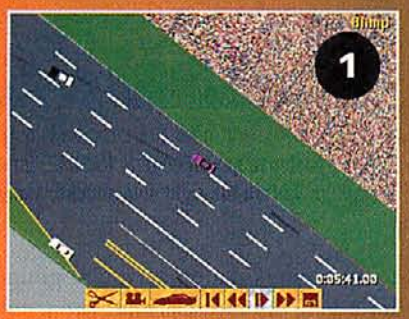
Begin by choosing a chassis. They say Ford has more downforce in the front, Chevy more in the rear, while the Pontiac is balanced fore and aft, and extensive testing seems to bear that out. However, the aerodynamic difference is minimal. Spending all day on chassis changes is not recommended. Suffice it to say that the Ford is marginally less "twitchy," and therefore may be the preferred choice for short ovals. As for the tires? Well, we stuck with Goodyear from start to finish, as Hoosier just isn't in the real life NASCAR race anymore. But if you want a little more stick and a little less life, go with Hoosiers.

When first on the track with your Papyrus-supplied "Qual" car, start by finding a smooth, consistent groove and driving rhythm, one that lets you lay low in the turns, swing out to the outside wall, and keeps tire squeal to a minimum. Watch the tach and speedometer, but keep abreast of what's happening outside the car as well. Watch for markers—signposts, trees, anything—that'll help you determine the ideal braking or acceleration point. Monitor what the computer guys are doing, and always remember to allow a few laps for the tires to come up to temperature. (Don't forget to opt for a pace lap during any racing efforts—this will help raise the tire temps so the computer cars don't have an even greater advantage off the start).

TINKER TIME

Whether you're out to beat the clock on that one glorious orbit, or in search of a durable long-term performer, there are many similarities in setting up cars be-

CORNERING TECHNIQUE



Try using the replay "blimp" view to analyze your cornering technique. A good turn-in spot at Martinsville is just after the end of the big red "MARTINSVILLE SPEEDWAY" sign on the outer wall.

Try to be inside the edge of the cement section by the time it appears. The author's hideous-looking magenta car is trailing by several car lengths, but not for long.

By this time, you'll be getting pretty slow. Stay low.

Hang in there and stay low. As you can see, the #1 car of Rick Mast has come out far too early and is losing a lot of ground. Ease the throttle back to life.

If you've done everything by the books, you should be flying now with the throttle wide open.

After completing a properly executed corner, the author's car rides hot on the leader's tail. Anyone for a little bump-drafting?

tween the two. Generally, creating a screamin' demon for that record-setting lap is a good start and that's what we did. Later, it was "de-tuned" into a decent full-race car—one that didn't reach tire burn-out halfway to a pit stop.

There is no magic answer to the set-up riddle, and undoubtedly some backtracking will occur as settings change, but generally you'll want to check out the gear ratios first. If you're red-lining near the end of the straights, you're wasting time. Rick calls NASCAR cars "torquey," and it's certainly true that there's a lot more speed happening at 8,000 rpm than at 9,000. You should also assume that with additional modifications the car is only going to get faster, so don't be afraid to give yourself some room by lengthening the top gear.

When you've made your initial gear selection, note the facts and figures on a piece of paper or save it to disk. This is a procedure that should be followed after each alteration, as car prep can get pretty darn complicated in a short period of time. Even more importantly, never ever make more than one change at a time without testing first, or soon you'll be wondering just which adjustment did what.

You'll undoubtedly be re-gearing later as the car improves, but if you're happy with your top-end speed, it's probably a good time to take a gander at your tire temperatures. Later, as you're gunning for a long-distance machine, tire temperatures will play an even more critical role, but it's a good idea to run a few laps now and see what they're doing. Hitting the F4 key will bring the temperatures into view as you're running, and that's good because cold temperatures are of no use.

UNDER PRESSURE Proper tire inflation is a critical aspect in racing. But it's easier to get an edge in NASCAR: inflate the tires to 60 psi at Talladega, stiffen the right side shocks, and you'll smoke everyone.

Temperatures are shown across the width of each tire, and ideally, the inside, middle and outer temperatures of each tire should be equal. That doesn't mean each tire should be the same temperature, just the readings across each slab of rubber. If one portion of the tire is considerably warmer, that tire is not contacting the ground as it should. Increasing tire pressure will bulge the tire's center (and cause you to travel much faster down the really long straights of Talladega or Michigan), while deflating will cause the center to sag. A modicum of pressure adjustments can be made now, but save the drastic stuff for later, when working on a full-race distance car.

Now try overdriving the car through the turns. What does it do? Is there a "pendulum effect" as it swings out of turns, or does it want to drive straight up and into the outside wall. A "loose" car will kick its back end around, and although this may indicate a need for more weight in the rear, making the back end heavier may just add to the kick-out momentum. This is where things start to get real tricky, and time-consuming.

Stagger (adding larger diameter tires to the outside wheels to compensate for the extra distance they must travel around a turn) is a good place to start some serious "dialing in" of your car. Ideally, the right amount of stagger will have your car "rolling" through turns, without pushing up when coming out or skidding when turning into a corner. A good rule of thumb is to stagger the short tracks.

Now it's time to check out the spoilers, fore and aft. These components add downforce by directing wind either over the car (thus pinning it to the track), or,

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in the case of the front air dam, over the hood or through the engine compartment and under the chassis. In real life, they tape over the front grille while the air dam remains fixed, but NASCAR RACING doesn't go quite that far. You may want less downforce at superspeedways to keep speed up along their long straights, but both Atlanta and Martinsville have their fair share of turns. Usually the default Ace car is pretty close to spoiler perfection as is.

Shocks should be considered next. NASCAR RACING combines both shocks *and* springs into this one setting, and although in real life springs would be set before the car even gets to the track, we'll pretend that Papyrus has given us a good spring setting to start with.

Stiffening or softening an individual shock will help decide how much weight is transferred at that wheel. Again, this is very important in turns, and while stiffening the left front shock will help tighten the car coming out of corners, stiffening the right rear will help with entrance speed and control. Also, since a softer shock places less force on that wheel, keeping the front right shock fairly soft will help decrease wear on that all-important corner. This should be remembered, especially when setting for a long-distance run, as nothing will ruin your day like a burnt right front tire.

Along the way, you should be closely monitoring the car's overall performance and handling characteristics, as the barrage of modifications will have some side effects. Run a whole bunch of fast laps, then pause the game after popping out of a turn. Check the tire temps (yes, again!). If a given tire is hotter on one side than another, try adjusting the camber. Positive or negative camber effectively tilts the wheel in or out, placing more force on that side of the tire. Camber adjustments will probably be needed throughout the set-up procedure, and it can't be said enough—try your best to keep tire temps consistent across each tire.

FULL SERVICE LANE The Kodak pit crew swarms over their car to refill the tank, replace the tires and finish in less than 18 seconds.

Default "weight jack" settings (the distribution of car weight from front to back, side to side, and left rear to right front) should be close to optimal for a short-distance car. Later, as you de-tune the thing to make it roadworthy over long distances, the elements involved in weight jacking will become more critical, and "cross weight" will have a direct effect on right front tire wear. But be careful with weight adjustments—their side effects will often throw

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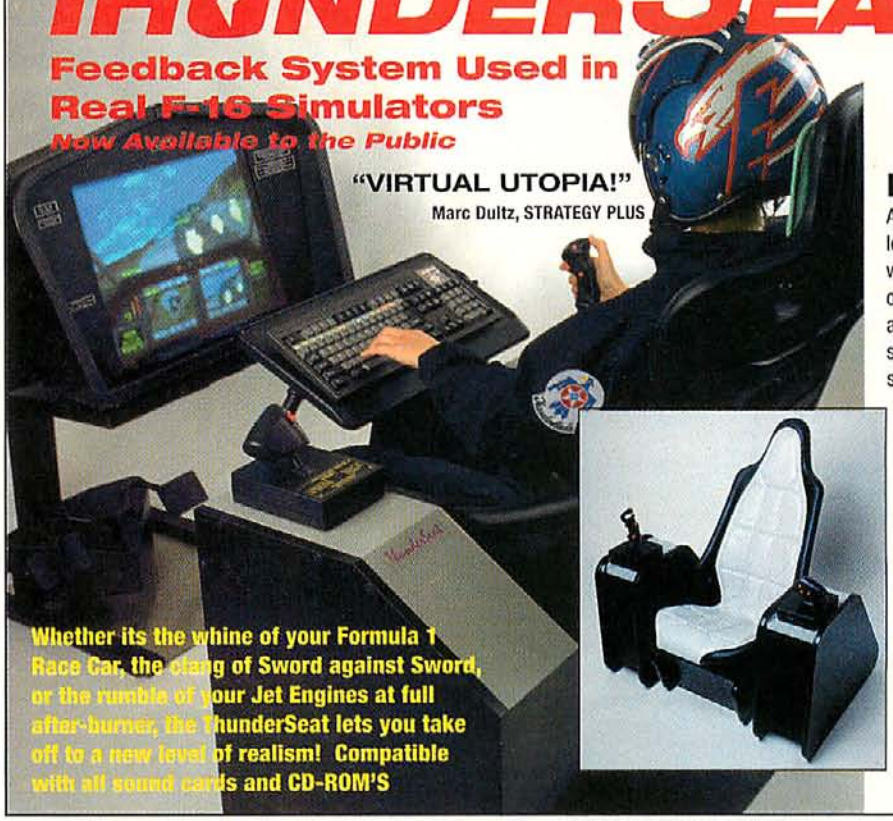

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a good car way off.

Those are the basics. Don't be discouraged if you spend several hours setting up just one car for one application—the payoff is worth it and your name and record time will come up each time that track is loaded. The best settings come through patience, experimentation, and by accident. If you've reached the final step above and still aren't satisfied, don't be afraid to go back to the start. Just keep track of anything new, whether it works or it doesn't.

When you've finally clocked some scorching laps, it's time to refill the tank (you did drop the fuel level when tuning for a fastest lap, didn't you?), and de-tune for a full-race car. The major area of concern here is the right front tire, as usual. If the car is just FLYING around the track early, it's right front rubber will most probably evaporate over the long haul. Tire temperatures in the 200-230 degree range are ideal. Any colder and you're just not getting enough contact; any warmer and they may wear out too quickly. Try and find that happy medium between performance and long-term stability. It's up to you: de-tune or be prepared to add one or two extra pit stops to your run. Pour yourself a cup of java and get ready to drive four-fifths distance to the first fuel stop; by that time you'll know how a decreasing fuel load and heated tires affect performance. Oh yeah, follow the groove—it's there for a reason, and don't worry about your brakes, they don't fade.

Finally, drop that death grip on the joystick or wheel (we used a CH Flightstick for testing), and make sure it's in calibration. And remember, there's a ton of variability under race conditions, not the least of which is other traffic, so no alteration is ever completely wrong. I've found that some of the best race settings don't work particularly well until a half-dozen or more laps are behind me, so take your time and, as they say, break a leg, kid.

The author wishes to thank Rick Weaver, the Pacific Northwest's top racing crew chief, and Andy Mahood, veteran Formula Ford, Formula Atlantic and stock car driver, for their assistance in setting up cars for this report.

MARTINSVILLE SET-UP OVERVIEW

Fast Car: *Diligence paid off big time at Martinsville. This car was quite capable of turning high 97s, a few 98s, and one earth-shattering 99.666, obliterating the currently posted CompuServe record with Goodyear tires by over a second. Take four or five laps to warm things up, slow it down through turn three, and give 'er hell coming out onto the front straight. Stay low in the corners and remember, exit speed is everything.*

Race Car: *Working mainly with tire pressures and camber, we developed a car that will literally toy, toy I tell you, with 100% competition. Tremendous exit speed and grip with a full tank of gas will have you running consistent 95s and 96s early in the race. The advice from this corner: get up front, then coast. Let them try and catch you as your tire temps get down into the white all 'round. This thing's a bit slippery as fuel load decreases, so be careful nearing each pit stop.*

ATLANTA SET-UP OVERVIEW

Fast Car: *Get this baby warmed up, then forget about the brakes. Aim for the geometric apex when entering the turns while gently rolling off the throttle, and never let the speedo drop below 165 mph. The less squeal you hear, the better. This set-up has notched a top one lap speed of 183.562, but will nail several consecutive high 182s when driven right.*

Race Car: *The surprise find of our research, this set-up is an amalgamation of two others, and a definitive one it is. It offers dead even tire temps across the board, throughout the run from full to empty, and won't burn up the rubber. It's a little finicky at first, but adapts quickly, and has been known to crack off a high 179 mph lap in the early going. Like the Martinsville race car, slowly work your way to the front, and make the enemy come after you—you'll be quite able to pass them back, at will. As an added bonus, this car has qualified (with less fuel of course) at a 180.198, good for pole.*

The rest is up to you. If you don't find these settings to your liking, tough toenails. But if you do (and you probably will), remember to tell them Johnny Speed sent you.

THE SET-UPS

TRACK	ATLANTA FAST LAP	ATLANTA RACE	MARTINS FAST LAP	MARTINS. RACE
TIRES				
RF	50	54	49	54
RR	51	51	51	52
LR	51	52	50	47
LF	48	47	49	41
STAGGER	1.100	.950	.750	.890
FUEL	4	22	1	22
AIR DAM	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
REAR SPOILER	70	70	60	60
CAMBER				
RF	-2.80	-2.40	-2.60	-2.30
LF	0	-.10	+.40	-.70
WEIGHT JACK				
LEFT BIAS	1900	1900	1900	1900
REAR BIAS	1860	1850	1900	1900
CROSS WEIGHT	-25	0	0	0
SHOCKS				
RF	20	20	50	40
RR	20	70	30	30
LR	35	70	10	10
LF	70	100	100	100
WHEEL LOCK	8	8	10	10
GEARS				
1st	9.80	9.80	10.80	10.80
2nd	5.80	6.90	8.50	8.50
3rd	4.30	4.90	6.80	6.80
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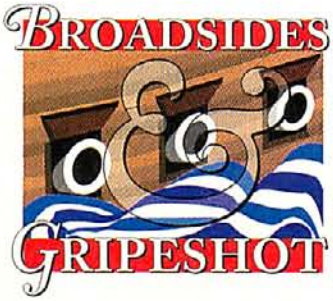
Wargames For The Rest of Us

PANZER GENERAL MAY LAUNCH A BLITZKRIEG OF FUN, ACCESSIBLE WARGAMES

by Alan Emrich

CHRIS CRAWFORD, COMPUTER GAMING DESIGNER AND PUNDIT EXTRAORDINAIRE, IS A WARGAMER AT heart. Sure, his credits include my favorite anti-war game, BALANCE OF POWER, and the ecological sermon, BALANCE OF THE PLANET, but don't let that fool you. Deep down, Chris Crawford can push panzers with the best of us. He knows all about the three *N*s (NATO, Nukes and Nazis) and may yet throw his helmet back in the ring, marching to the sound of simulated guns.



It was not so long ago that Crawford set out to design, program, and publish what he felt would be the holy grail of wargaming: a wargame "for the rest of us." This wargame would be so compelling that non-wargamers would, in fascination, pick it up and jack their synapses into our hobby. It had everything going for it. It had Nazis; it had Americans; it had a desperate, see-saw battle (the Battle of the Bulge); it had multi-media pizzazz; it had hyper-history by the handful. What it *didn't* have was a lot of takers. This noble pursuit, PATTON STRIKES BACK, found an ignoble end on the bargain shelves of most retailers. Few since have dared to dream the dream that there could ever be a wargame that would reach out beyond the small, core group of grognards in the hobby.

WE'RE #1!

Is Crawford's dream just a memory? Well, take a look at this issue's Top 100 Games for the answer. There, atop the pile, sits **SSI**'s PANZER GENERAL, blowing away the likes of DOOM and WING COMMANDER III. I can't tell you how exciting it is for me to see a wargame, finally, after many years of draught, make the top of that prestigious list. But PANZER GENERAL is more than just a critical success. It may have opened a hole into that wargaming *Shangri-La*, the mythical "mass market" of gamers. Tales of its impending conversion into a 3DO version only confirm my feeling that this game could see the daylight of 100,000+ unit sales. Perhaps it could even reach the quarter-million sales nirvana of **Avalon Hill**'s PANZERBLITZ or **Milton Bradley**'s AXIS & ALLIES board games.

Veteran gamers know that this kind of success usually shakes up the gaming industry and has far reaching effects (witness the impact of games like DOOM). But veteran wargamers also know that exploiting a breakthrough

G-2

*** A mole at SSI tells us that many Windows products are in the company's future, including a Windows version of Panzer General. But will we have to wait for Windows '95?**

*** The Power to the Players prize this month goes to Nicholas Bell for his Lipovka 1942 Tigers on the Prowl v1.2 scenario (HPS Simulations). It's a nice bit of history and a fascinating study via play. It can be found on CompuServe (Gamers Forum, Library 3, LIPVKA.ZIP) and other networks.**

*** Tim Patterson of MicroProse announced that Master of Orion Deluxe (MOOD) has been canceled, and taking its place will be MOO Gold. No doubt this will be the MOO 2 we mentioned here in a previous column that adds new races, faster game turns, and multi-player options. The company has projected a release date of Fall '95, but that could change if SimTex can't find time for the game in their hectic work schedule. Meanwhile, rumors of another "ultimate" strategic space game, Master of Xenon (MOX), have sprung up. When do these guys sleep?**

(continued on page 140)

properly is usually more difficult than creating one. How, then, will PANZER GENERAL shape the wargaming ways of things to come?

The most obvious effect of PANZER GENERAL's success will be sequels—SSI already has a few in the cooker. Other effects will be more subtle. It will be very interesting to see how PANZER GENERAL's "role playing" concepts will be adapted to new designs. We may see more "linked" scenarios, and more features that allow the player to personalize the game and identify with his units, alter ego and country.

But for the most part, I expect that new designs will make an attempt to be more accessible. Generally, this means simpler and easier to interface with. Although that will make these wargames, of necessity, more "game" than "historical simulation," I can live with that. There is a place in our hobby for more introductory level games, and other games for those who have made their acquaintance with wargaming and are looking for something a little more historically accurate and realistic.

This process of simplifying and easing entry into wargaming was already well under way before PANZER GENERAL blasted onto the top of our charts. EMPIRE II is shaping up to be a fascinating operational level wargame construction kit, but has been carefully designed and positioned away from the core wargamers in an effort to better interest non-grognards. Even on the paper game side of the hobby, products like *GameFix* magazine and *Dixie* (a great little Civil War trading card game) are current symbols of the trend in wargaming toward smaller, cleaner designs where "playable is beautiful" is the battle cry.

But will the success of PANZER GENERAL influence the likes of **Impressions**, **QQP**, **SSG**, **Alliance** and the others? These larger companies will almost certainly add one or more PANZER GENERAL-like titles to their production schedules (but they might take 18 months to reach the market). Smaller wargaming companies, like **HPS**, **Adanac**, and a host of other independents, are far more likely to serve, unwavering, our need for deeper, more intricate military simulations. Naturally, this war correspondent will keep you posted as I venture from The Bunker to the trenches all along the line. At the end of the battle, however, I see our hobby attempting to enlarge the PANZER GENERAL bridgehead and do their best to exploit it. Now, to take that fateful steppe.

G2 *(continued from page 139)*

* As QQP's The Perfect General 2 hits the shelves, there are plans to release an editor on a scenario disk which will allow players to create scenarios (although not campaigns). The release version of TPG2 will support modem play and should include approximately 80 scenarios. The manual is even supposed to have a Table of Contents and an Index (somebody pinch me!).

* QQP has also been working on a computerized version of the wacky Tom Wham board game, The Awful Green Things from Outer Space (Steve Jackson Games). This exercise in silliness pits the cute cosmic crew members of the Exploration Ship Znutar against the rapidly growing vicious Green Things. The computer version still features Captain Yid, Leadfoot the Robot and the rest of the crew, but in the best QQP traditions, a fleet of ships will be there for campaign game play, as well as player histories and statistics.

* While QQP originally published Merchant Prince, it is MicroProse which will be releasing an enhanced version of the game. Machiavelli: The Prince will feature a major upgrade in the graphics (and, hopefully, the documentation).

* Keith Zabalaoui of Atomic Games announced that titles to be released this year in their World at War series for Avalon Hill should include Kharkov, America Invades! (working title for a revamped Utah Beach), and Velikiye Luki. These titles are in addition to Beyond Squad Leader and, hopefully, Blitzkrieg.

* Many computer combat vets who remember SSG's Reach for the Stars have been waiting 10 since they promised Road to Appomattox. According to a confession recently beaten out of Roger Keating, these are games "SSG would like to do but currently does not have the resources." Presently, SSG is concentrating its resources on The Last Blitzkrieg, due in June. While mum on the subject of future Warlords games or another new wargame series, Keating chuckled at the questions, providing some cause for optimism. We were assured that play-by-email would be a feature "in all future SSG games." I wonder how their designer Ian Trout faired in his recent Panzer General campaign?

* HPS Simulations announced some more Aide de Camp releases, this time from board game publisher G/RD (publishers of the Europa series). It appears that Winter War will be their first ADC release, followed by Balkans, Fire in the East/Scorched Earth, and Second Front. Prices should range in the $15 to $30 range. For more information, call G/RD at (515) 236-8899.

* MicroProse will release Multi-Player Civilization in the second quarter of 1995 as a two-player modem version, with a full multi-player network version in the following quarter. They are working on three other network games, developed with the Internet in mind.

* Arsenal Publishing will be conserving ammo. Jim DeGoey announced that Arsenal will be "going direct" with all of their products for the next year or so. Customers will only be able to purchase their products—such as the Windows version of TacOps—directly from the company and some of the major mail order houses.

* While speculators are making a fortune trading and selling Magic: The Gathering collectable playing cards, MicroProse continues to grind away on the computerized version of the game. MicroProse says that the game is still on track for a late Summer release. I bet we won't find any Black Lotus or Mox Stone cards on those CD-ROMs.

* Brian Walker, England's own refugee from Harry Blackwell's list, informs us that the computer conversion of Games Workshop's Blood Bowl is proceeding apace. It looks like they're sticking to the strategic side of this wacky, monster-ridden football game, which means that it will remain true to its board game heritage.

* Last issue we mentioned that the 3W board game Tahiti was being considered for computer publication. It appears that an unnamed computer gaming company is working on a conquest and colonization game engine and sees Tahiti as the spring board for a large Pacific exploration game module. Tahiti designer Kevin McPartland is waiting in the wings with a sequel game, Hawaii, featuring white men, guns, ocean-going raiding parties and more. Aloha!

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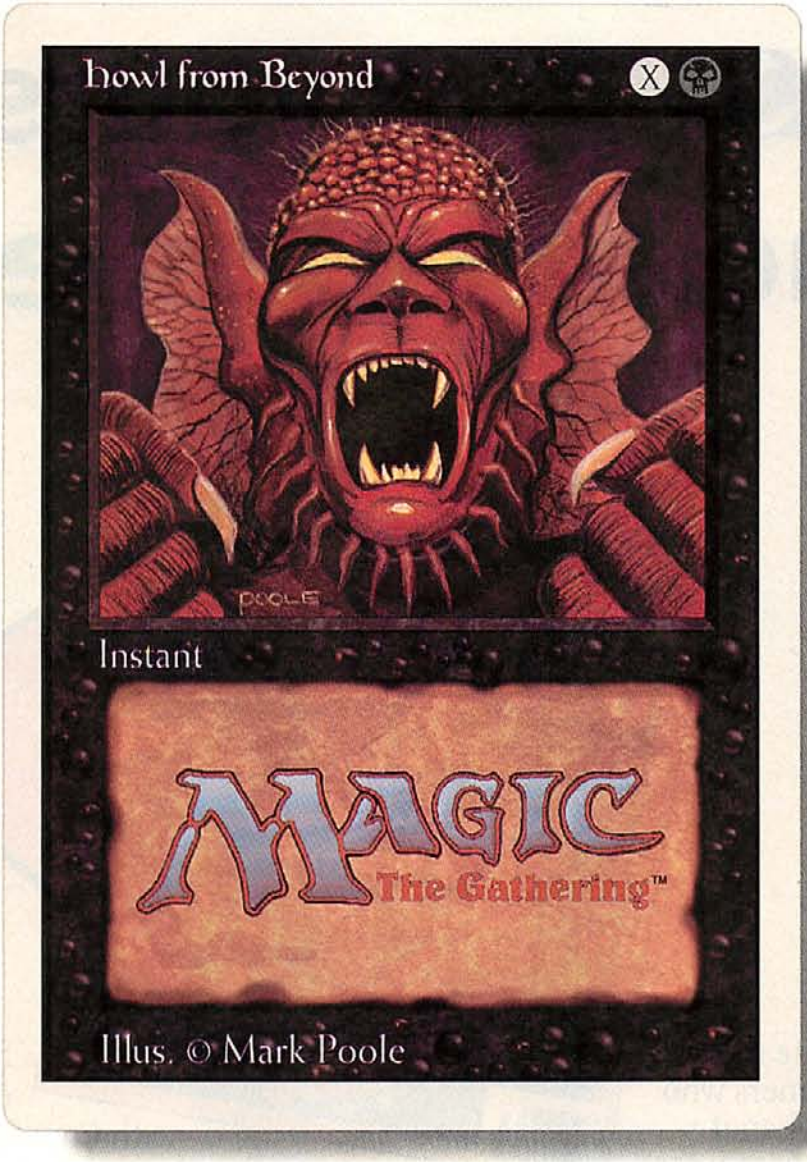

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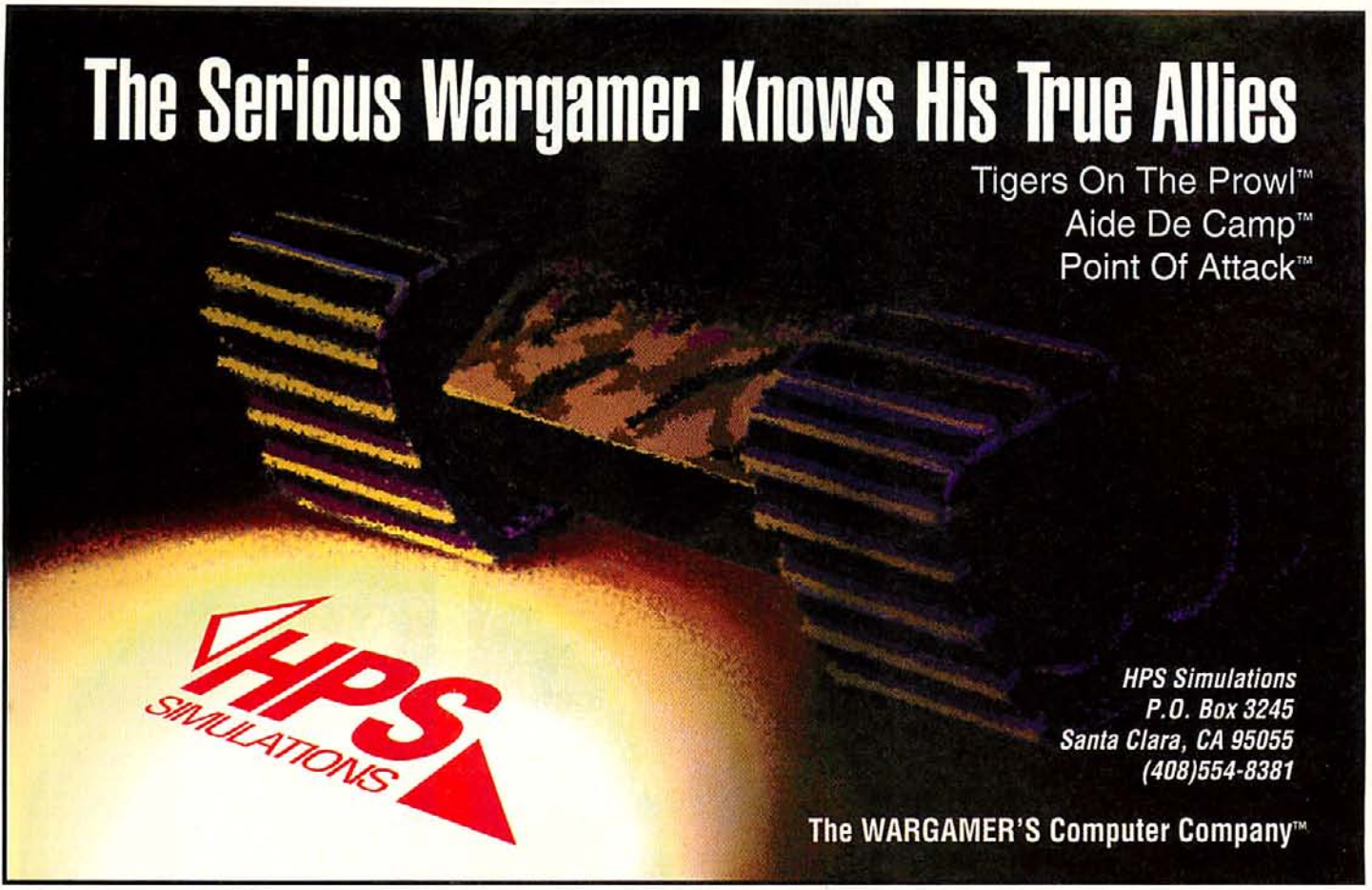

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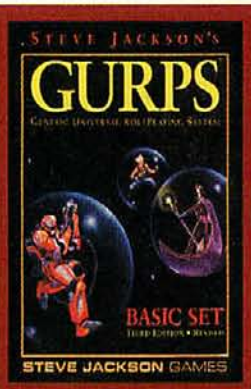

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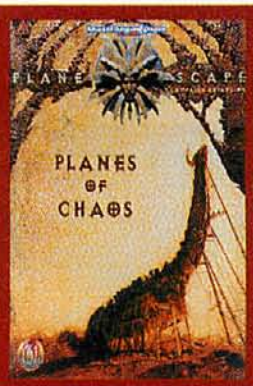

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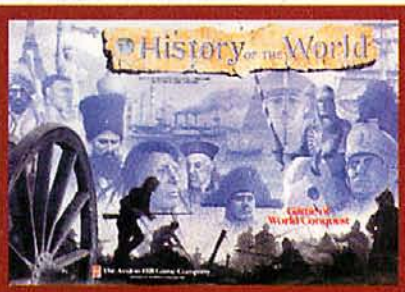

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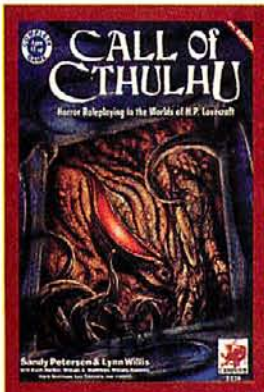

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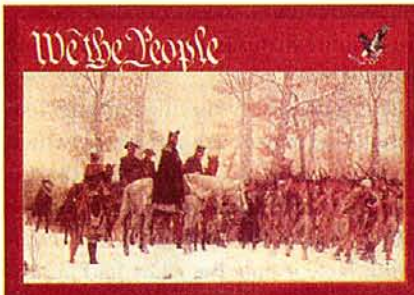

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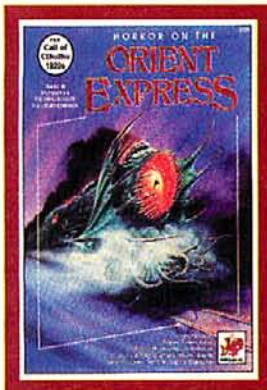

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Push To The Volga

Atomic & Avalon Hill Hit The Russian Steppes With STALINGRAD

by Tim Carter

Ah, spring. The thawing of the snows, the chirping of the birds, the release of computer games promised for the previous Christmas. Even as the weather improves, wargaming fanatics will still be dreaming of snow, ice and frigid winds howling across vast and featureless steppes. The reason: the release of **Atomic Games/ Avalon Hill**'s STALINGRAD, an operational recreation of the battles that took place around the famous Soviet city during the winter of 1942-43.

AS DEEP AS THE RUSSIAN SNOW

STALINGRAD is definitely aimed at the experienced wargamer. The game presents players with an immense amount of information, and the management of relatively complex supply, organizational and operational factors is necessary for both success and enjoyment.

This is not to say that STALINGRAD is inaccessible. The documentation is quite good, as far as it goes, and the interface is largely intuitive despite its complexity. (Just remember, manual control of artillery and unit movement requires that you hold down the *Alt* key.) In fact, the designers should be congratulated for incorporating so much information into the system without making gameplay awkward.

One particularly useful interface feature is the organizational chart, which can be called up at any time. This chart is quite helpful for keeping track of the units in each army, and the chain of command. Now if only the chart had an option that allowed you to go from the selected unit directly to the chart and back again...

STALINGRAD

Price: $59.95 (Mac, IBM versions on one CD)
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/SX or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, CD-ROM drive, mouse; supports most major sound cards. Macintosh System 7.0, 14" color monitor, 8 MB RAM; Power PC compatible.
# of Players: 1-2 (same computer and e-mail)
Protection: None
Designer: Atomic Games
Publisher: The Avalon Hill Game Company
Baltimore, MD
(800) 999-3222

STALINGRAD may be played against the computer or a human opponent, face to face or via e-mail. As with many artificial intelligence routines, the computer is still unlikely to be a match for an experienced human opponent. The structure of STALINGRAD lends itself very well to e-mail play, however, and the best games are likely to take place electronically.

While the e-mail function worked fine for me, some gamers have reported problems, especially in games played between Mac and IBM platforms. Atomic and Avalon Hill should be complemented in supporting cross-platform play; but since similar problems occurred with OPERATION CRUSADER, one wonders how they let this slip through testing. More disturbing is that STALINGRAD crashes repeatedly when using a Sound Blaster 16.

ROLLING IN THE FOG

A particularly well-executed aspect of STALINGRAD is the game's handling of the fog of war. As in other games by Atomic, enemy units only appear on the map if they can be seen by a unit under the player's command. Furthermore, unless contact with an enemy unit is maintained over a long period of time, information about the enemy is scarce and inaccurate. It is also possible to lose contact with friendly units if their disruption is too great or they lose contact with their parent HQ. One welcome addition to the WORLD AT WAR system is the ability to order air reconnaissance missions. A wise commander will use aircraft for scouting in most scenarios, as good information is crucial to battlefield success.

Supplies are once again a dominant element of successful planning and execution. In the campaign game, HQs and their attached units may be supplied from the air—a new feature for Atomic, but one which is crucial to the faithful recreation of the encirclement and destruction of the German 6th Army.

Maintaining the proper chain of command is crucial to maintaining both com-

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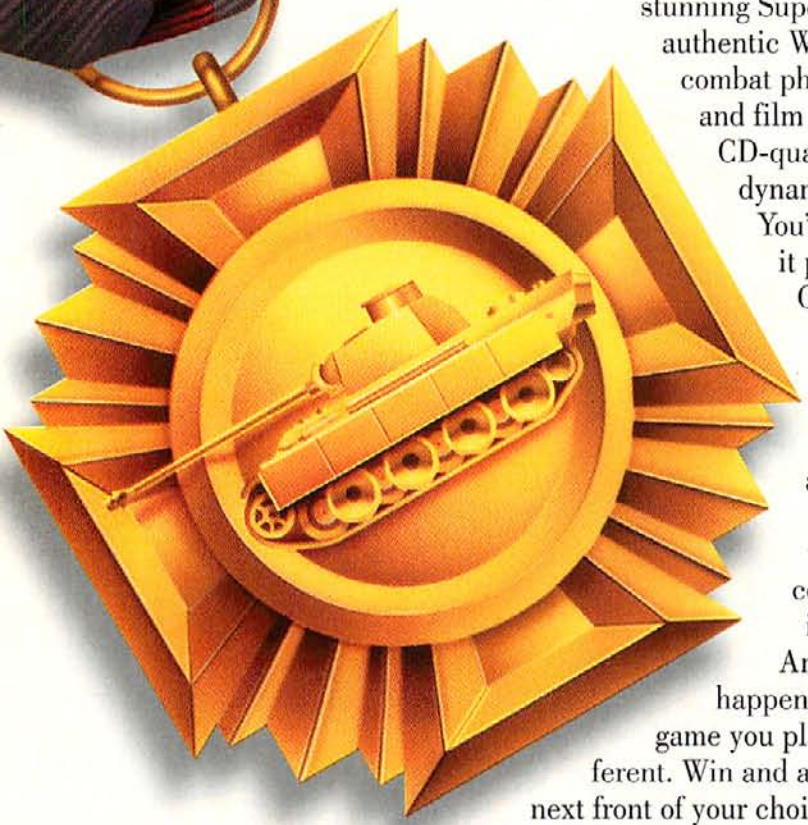

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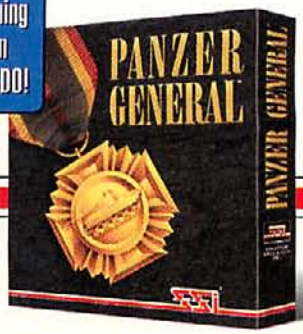

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mand and control and adequate supply lines. As supply is determined for combat units at the start of the day, however, they are free to move out of supply during the course of the day's actions, provided a viable supply line exists at the beginning of the next morning. This provides combat units with considerable autonomy—particularly in the scenarios with smaller map scales, which have eight turns per day.

Smaller map scales? That's right, campaigners, the biggest change to the WORLD AT WAR game system is the variable scales at which scenarios take place. Unlike other products, which offered just a single scale (and often a single map), STALINGRAD offers three map scales—400m/hex, 1km/hex or 3km/hex.

The shift in scales creates a few problems as far as realism is concerned. A rather vociferous debate on various electronic bulletin boards has centered on the inability of the game engine to support direct ranged fire, even at the 400m scale. As many armored vehicles and anti-tank guns had ranges in excess of 400m, this would seem to be a weakness in the game's realism.

Furthermore, the stacking allowances at the smallest scale are somewhat generous. Putting three battalions into an area 400 meters across is certainly possible, but it could hardly be considered militarily prudent.

400 METERS/HEX ***To the Volga!*** **finds the German 6th Army banging at the door of the Red Barricades Factory. Realism? Well...**

The designers at Atomic and their defenders have countered these criticisms by arguing that the 400m scale is presented primarily to simulate close combat within the city of Stalingrad itself. Within such a built-up area, ranged fire would be unlikely beyond 40 meters, let alone 400. Furthermore, within the tightly-packed environs of Stalingrad both the Germans and the Soviets employed massive numbers of men and large numbers of equipment—unit densities which would have been unlikely under other circumstances.

While this explanation sounds a bit more like rationalization than justification, both critics and defenders seem to have overlooked the larger issue here—variety. By adding two additional levels of play, the designers have, within the compass of a single product, produced three quite distinct gaming experiences, though not all of the various scales will please the historically-minded gamer.

At the smaller scales, the movement allowances for combat units are much greater. This can lead to a much more open, free-wheeling style of play. Furthermore, artillery ranges are, as one might expect, considerably greater than at the larger scales. This means that long-range artillery can cover a much greater portion of the battlefield, providing commanders with considerably more flexibility and firepower.

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Henry Ford Photo: UPI/Bettman

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WINNERS AND LOSERS

The real strength of STALINGRAD lies in the design of its scenarios. But not all of the them are winners. *Quietly Flows the Don*, for instance, embodies all of the weaknesses both of Atomic's basic game system and many of their previous products. The scenario is one segment of the campaign game—the collapse of the northern flank of the 6th Army at the outset of the Soviet counterattack—with the map, unit dispositions and reinforcement schedules as they are in the larger battle. It offers absolutely nothing that is not in the campaign game, and while the designers may defend its inclusion as a case study, it looks more like add-water-and-stir type scenario-building to me.

Fortunately, *Quietly Flows the Don* is the exception, rather than the rule. From the mammoth campaign game, which runs 188 turns and involves more than 1000 individual units on both sides, to the wonderfully fluid *Manstein's Solution* (200 units, playable in an extended evening) the scenarios are original, diverse and a lot of fun.

Because of the different map scales (2 scenarios at 400m, 2 at 1km and 3 at 3km), players will not notice that all of the battles take place within the confines of a single strategic map. Also, the campaign game map is so huge that smaller segments of it do not feel claustrophobic by comparison. The smaller scenarios, particularly those that allow more room for maneuver, have an internal logic and integrity which clearly separates them from the more sweeping scale of the campaign.

3 KILOMETERS/HEX The familiar WORLD AT WAR interface and game system is at its best in the wide-open *Manstein's Solution* scenario.

The best scenario is *Manstein's Solution*. This hypothetical battle is based on the designers' estimation of what Von Manstein might have done to relieve the beleaguered 6th Army had he unlimited freedom of action. Both sides have strong, mobile forces, and neither starts in possession of the field of battle. The fog of war rules, combined with appalling weather conditions, mean that neither side is likely to know where the other is, or what he is seeking to accomplish. The resulting confusion is immensely enjoyable, and I had to force myself to stop playing it just to give the other scenarios a fair hearing.

Furthermore, the scenario does not feel like a repetition of the campaign game, nor does it play like a cheap knock-off created as a throw away to bulk up the marketing of the overall package. Against the computer, *Manstein's Solution* can be completed in a single sitting, bringing some welcome relief from the more lengthy scenarios. Against a human opponent, *Manstein's Solu-*

He ruled the shipping lanes.

Aristoteles Onassis Photo: UPI/Bettman

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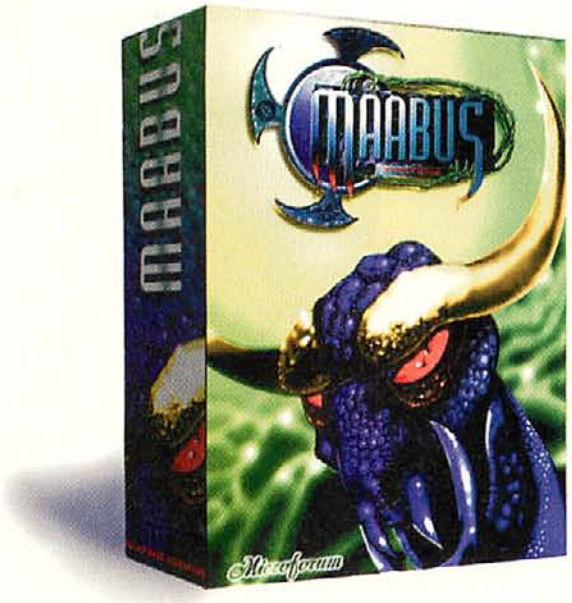

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tion took considerably longer, although the enjoyment factor was commensurably higher.

Throughout the scenarios—except for *Quietly Flows the Don*—the designers have managed to inject an impressive sense of urgency to the gameplay. Coordinating attacks in an uncertain environment with the clock ticking is a tricky business. Devastating overrun attacks can be quite rewarding if players judge their opposition correctly, but they may waste valuable time with no results if their intelligence is inaccurate. It's one thing to build the fog of war into a game system, it's another to create scenarios that take advantage of the feature to build real tension and gaming excitement. Not knowing where the enemy is (those Russian steppes are big), or where the real crisis may fall, adds a dimension of unpredictability to STALINGRAD that is sadly lacking in many computer games.

In addition to uncertainty, the space, weather, limited unit numbers and limited intelligence all combine to create ample possibilities for another facet of warfare: deceit. Because intelligence is so unreliable, and because most battles involve considerable mobility, it is possible to screen off a large enemy force by creating the appearance of a strong defense where it does not exist. On the other hand, a strong defense, particularly with mobile units, might be more effective if weakness is feigned, luring the enemy's leading elements into a trap.

ALL INTENSE ON THE EASTERN FRONT

Obviously, everything in STALINGRAD doesn't pass muster. As good as the individual scenarios are collectively, the lack of realism on the 400m/hex scale will irritate historical buffs. The e-mail and sound bugs are disturbing for a game engine that has been around the battlefield as long as V FOR V/ WORLD AT WAR. The computer opponent, although still better than many wargame systems, isn't as good an opponent in STALINGRAD as it was in CRUSADER, mostly due to the larger number of units involved in contesting the Russian steppes.

Even with all the above, this is one of the only wargames for the PC that I can remember where the advice given by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* was actually useful. Overall, STALINGRAD is a moderate success, not just because of the fancy graphics, not because of the well-refined interface capable of providing more useful information on each individual unit than any other game I am aware of, but because of the game's ability to challenge its players to think both strategically and tactically. Unquestionably fun, STALINGRAD has enough depth and variety to keep wargamers high stepping until the snows come again.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

STALINGRAD

RATING

PROS Excellent documentation, superb graphics, and a mature interface make it easy to enjoy one of the great battles of history. Three different scales of combat offer a variety of challenges.

CONS The 400m/hex scale doesn't work historically, and the AI is a slight step back from CRUSADER. Sound and e-mail bugs on some systems.

Circle Reader Service #350

Trade-R-Us Ventures

Sail The Seas For Blood And Profit In Impressions' HIGH SEAS TRADER

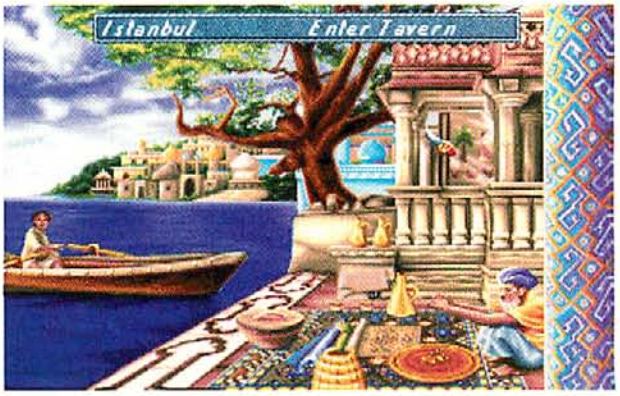
by Johnny L. Wilson

Cannon erupt with their sulfurous stench, hissing like iron-mouthed serpents as the gun crews sponge them out. Sails and rigging are splintered, torn and shredded, unholy banners in the black mass of destruction. Decks are splintered, scarred and bloody, a sticky fluid carpet of death. This is the glory, such as it is, of fighting sail.

Yet, in history, it took considerably more than naval tactics to smooth the pathway from uncharted waters "where there be dragons" to that thoroughfare of commerce which Horace Walpole called "the streets of our capital, the ocean." **Impressions'** HIGH SEAS TRADER is not a mere fighting sail game, celebrating the gory glory of that era through first-person simulation. A simulation it is not, even though your initial impression of the interface might lead you to believe so. Nor is it SID MEIER'S PIRATES!, though that is where the inevitable comparisons will be drawn. Meier's classic game provided action sequences on two scales to advance its adventure elements; but there is only one scale of action in which you can approach swashbuckling, ship-to-ship combat in HIGH SEAS TRADER.

Impressions has created a largely menu-driven, spreadsheet-based strategy game that captures something of the spirit of the adventurous bravado it took to meet the economic challenge of being a seafaring merchant in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Fortunately, the menus are disguised as colorful paintings that reflect the cultural similarities within geographical areas, and those who use a General MIDI card for the music will be treated to a number of different musical themes which offer aural references to ports both familiar and exotic. Sadly, those who use General MIDI do not get the benefit of some of the great sound effects used in the game—cannon fire, crew cheers and the creaking of the ship itself. Unlike many programs, HIGH SEAS TRADER does not give you the option of installing both a card for music and a card for sound. Consequently, those who opt for sound effects miss the distinctive music because the same basic musical score acquires an annoying sameness when played via FM synthesis.



PORT IN A PAINTING Although HIGH SEAS TRADER is menu-driven, each menu is a painting with "hot spots" for each possible selection.

TRADING PLACES

The goal of the game, much like the goal of the seafaring entrepreneurs for which HIGH SEAS TRADER was named, is to gain wealth and recognition. Your character begins as a mere Peddler and progresses through the ranks from Journeyman to Tradesman, Merchant, Master Merchant and reaches the victory condition of becoming Viscount. To progress, you need to do two things: amass wealth and develop character/prestige. Your character is measured in four characteristics: Daring (improved through victorious sea battles), Honor (determined largely by your reaction to random business propositions); Loyalty (influenced by the way you treat fellow countryman, allies and enemies); and Nobility (based on your familiarity with

HIGH SEAS TRADER

Price: $69.95, CD-ROM and floppy versions
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386DX-33 or better, 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, CD-ROM, mouse; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None
Designer: David Lester, Chris Foster
Publisher: Impressions Software
Cambridge, MA
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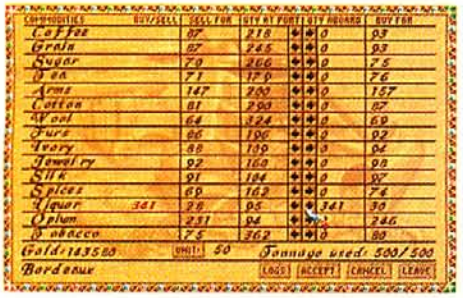
the entire world map). These are cleverly presented via a graphic chart with sailors climbing up rigging proportionate to your relative position.



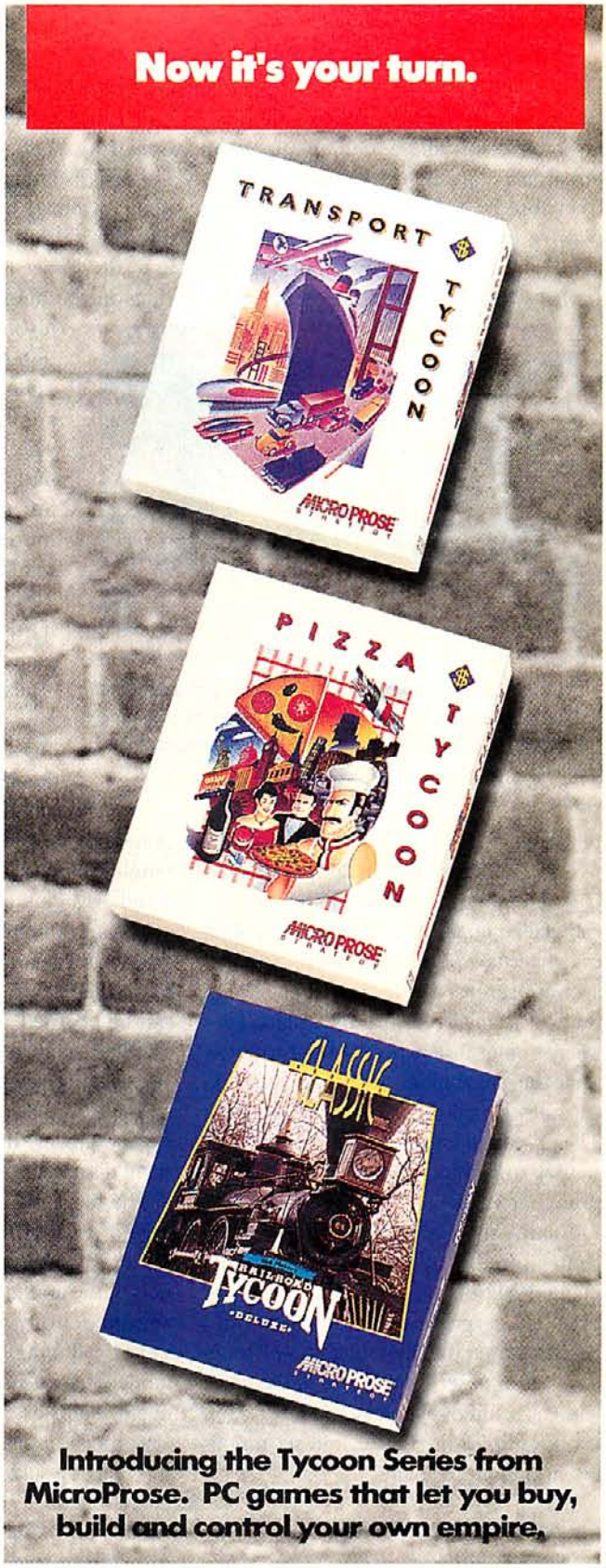
PROVISIONAL ADMINISTRATION Provisioning a ship and buying/selling cargo is simple with HIGH SEAS TRADER's mouse-driven spreadsheets.

Although your fortune is measured in terms of character development, as well as gold and property, the bulk of your activity will center on the game's trading mechanism. Since this area of the game is so vital, gamers will find it very good news that the trading interface is commendably user-friendly. Everything is handled via mouse clicks. You begin the game with a small, squat merchant ship called a fluyt, a pragmatic design invented by Dutch traders. You have about 5000 gold with which to outfit a ship with rations and materials and invest in cargo. By merely moving the cursor across the painting of your home port, captions appear which you can click to bring up various pop-up spreadsheets or, in the case of the tavern or charthouse, another menu disguised as a painting.

Want to repair or outfit your ship? You call up the Dock spreadsheet. Want to buy or sell commodities? Go to the Market spreadsheet. Want to find a navigational chart or hire a helmsman? Call up the Charthouse screen. Want to deposit/withdraw gold from the bank? Click for the Bank spreadsheet. All of these elements are present in every port, but three portions of the interface deserve special consideration: the Market and Tavern screens.

The Market screen is a huge spreadsheet. For every available commodity it shows the buying/selling price for that port, the amount available at that port, and the amount aboard ship. Merely clicking on directional arrows will allow transactions to occur, but the most welcome news is that each ton of each commodity being negotiated is kept in red letters in a pending column until you are satisfied that you have the right amounts in place. The deal is not done until you click the Accept button. Until then, you can negate any pending deal with the click of the Cancel button. This ability to back out of an error is a welcome and useful feature.

Perhaps even more welcome is the Logs button at the bottom of the Market Spreadsheet. Instead of having to make notes on the dynamic marketplace *a la* MERCHANT PRINCE, the game assumes that a wise skipper will be collecting price information in



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Circle Reader Service #350

his log. So, if you're making a trip to Curacao, you can quickly discern the most favorable price differential for commodities available in the current port and deliverable to Curacao. To make this feature even friendlier, the program places the names of enemy ports in red so that you won't have to bother with irrelevant prices.

FRYING DUTCHMAN The combat interface tells you whether or not the cannon banks are manned and ready to fire, as well as the amount of damage taken by your ship and compass/wind headings.

The Tavern is another graphic menu. It is dynamic in that the hot spots are characters: potential passengers, art dealers, tavernkeepers, and sailors, soldiers and apprentices to be recruited. Many times, the tavern is the first place I go when I enter a new port. I want to know what the possibilities are for making extra gold by taking passengers aboard. Then, I can tailor my cargo to fit the passenger's destination and maximize my profit potential.

Finally, the Cabin is a major control center for the game. Another graphic menu, it allows you to check current allegiances, cargo, crew conditions, and game status at the bookshelf, as well as allowing you to set your course at the chart table by setting waypoints, repair the ship via the ship in the bottle, and set rations by clicking on the plate.

TRADE PROTECTION

Of course, the true color of the game comes from sailing. The nicest screens in the game, in my opinion, are those with the on-deck sailing interface and the combat screens. Each features colorful bit-mapped graphics, but each is disappointing in its own way. First of all, almost anyone who plays this game is going to want to feel like he or she is actually sailing. Yet, everything has been simplified so much that it doesn't matter whether you are beating or reaching. The direction of the wind makes a difference in terms of speed, but there are no visual clues in the animated depiction of the jib-shaped mainsail (as opposed to the square-rigged sail most would have expected) to help sailors along. The design choice was obviously to keep things simple, but a chance to choose a more robust sailing model would have been nice.

Second, the combat doesn't quite hold together. The game offers three different types of ammunition and they act differently in terms of range. That's about it, though. I've raked the decks of pirate corvettes with grapeshot, only to be boarded by obscene numbers of buccaneers. This seems highly unlikely. Plus, crews that use chain shot are usually aiming at the masts and rigging of their enemies, the goal being to make the enemy less mobile so that they can be boarded in the future. I couldn't see that chain shot made any difference. Round shot acts appropriately, but the bad news is that I have stern-raked many a ship with my broadsides only to watch them disappear on the horizon.

The inevitable conclusion is that there are no visual or textual cues given to the player as to the differences in effectiveness of the ammunition because the damage model only calculates in terms of generic damage. I know the damage model is *probably* calculated the same on enemy ships as it is on your own, but it very much appears as if "X" number of hits equals a surrender, sinking or retreat by the enemy as opposed to tracking accumulated damage in specific locations. Also, the age-old gaming convention of a critical hit seems to be missing. Where is the exploding ammo that causes a ship to sink on the first hit? Why doesn't the captain die and leave morale low enough that the enemy strikes their colors immediately? Why aren't ships ever dismasted?

Worse, it doesn't seem that the enemy ships are affected by damage. I've had ships that looked like the ghost ship of Flying Dutchman run away from me with ease. Pirate corvettes that looked like smoking ashtrays were able to dance around my untouched ship as though they were standing still. Impressions claims that the herky-jerky movement that I experience on my computer, where enemy ships stop dead and then fly away from cannon balls after I fire, is distinctive to my computer.

Finally, fans of SID MEIER'S PIRATES! and those looking for the "swashbuckling" part of the strategy promised on the game box will be most disappointed with the boarding sequence. Instead of getting to fence, it's simply a battle of attrition where you watch colored bars representing your soldiers, sailors and apprentices go against the colored bars of your enemy. There are no tactics, no decisions, and no random variables to save the day in this sequence. It is the age old gaming rule: He with the most dice wins.

TRADE WINDS

The bottom line is that I wanted to like this game. The character advancement, social climbing, estate and title acquisition, and subject matter made this a "must have" game for me. If the sailing and combat had been designed as well as the trading and navigational approach, it would be an outstanding game. Unfortunately, given the oddities of the combat interface in particular, they do not provide enough to help this game reach its potential.

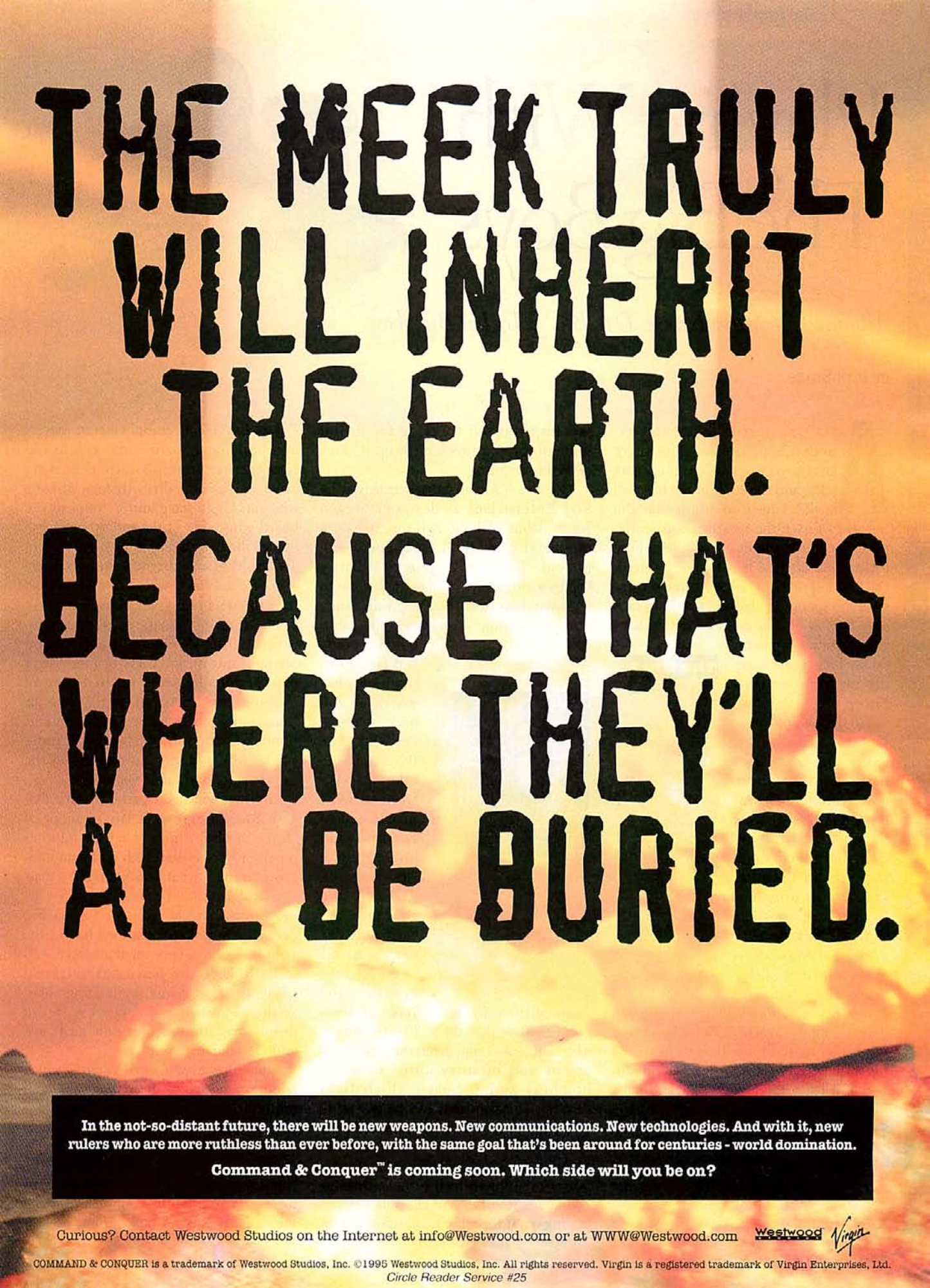
THE EDITORS SPEAK

HIGH SEAS TRADER

RATING 3 out of 5

PROS Great trading interface, colorful subject matter, and an interesting game structure designed for replayability should have put this game in a safe harbor.

CONS Very limited combat sequences, weak boarding sequences and lack of sailing mechanics make captains feel more like Popeye than Nelson.



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Circle Reader Service #25

Playing With The Big Boys

Alliance Interactive Brings THE BIG 3 To The Big Show

by Josh Bruce

As a great poet once wrote, Spring is in the air. The smell of flowers, the call of the lake, and the stink of the baseball strike. I have to admit that I'm not sorry to see the new baseball season postponed, and might actually be a little disappointed when it is finally resolved. Do I hate sports? Do I have some bizarre desire to spend my days off watching *Welcome Back Kotter*? Or is my otherwise happy-go-lucky attitude finally failing and leaving me a broken and bitter old man? No, worse than all of these, I'm a Cubs fan.

Yes, the only baseball team that never quite recovered from the Great Dust Bowl is the one that I call my own. But if there's one thing that a Cubs fan knows, aside from how to deal with abuse, is that the personality and charisma of a team matters a lot more than winning games. At least that's what I always tell myself until the World Series, when every fan wants to see their heroes grab the brass ring, and I must face the cold reality that it takes solid game play and flawless execution to be a winner—and the Cubs simply don't have it.

Every time I play **Alliance**'s WWII game, The Big 3, it reminds me very much of the Chicago Cubs. The game has some "raw talent" and the caring hand of a designer who loves his work, so you find yourself cheering for it. But some disturbing problems keep it short of the big leagues.

The Big 3 was originally released by **SDJ Enterprises** as designer Steven Jones' labor of love, and was strictly a two-player game, with no computer opponent. This new version by Alliance brings a single-screen map of Europe to your Windows desktop, along with something resembling a computer opponent. Unlike many WWII games that emphasize detail and micro-management, The Big 3 seems to take a page from **SSI**'s Storm Across Europe and its philosophy of "less is more." France and Germany are each only five map hexes large, and the armies and fleets of the warring nations will never number more than 20 or 30 units apiece. The unit types range from the traditional armor and infantry units, to heavy bombers and U-boats, which fight through scenarios that can be played in under an hour. The game scale is strategic with three "seasonal" turns per year, and the focus is on the production of fleets and armies which struggle with the enemy for factories and cities in a never-ending quest for more production points.

The Big 3

Price: $39.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/25 or better, Windows 3.1, VGA graphics, 4 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM; supports Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards.
# of Players: 1-2 (modem play)
Protection: None
Designer: Steven D. Jones
Publisher: Alliance Interactive Software
Plantation, FL
(305) 423-4289

The Big 3 will remind veteran players of a traditional board game with its uncomputerlike concepts such as stacking units, hexes and dice. In fact, anyone who has their wargaming roots in the board game side of the industry will recognize the design and implementation of The Big 3 as an extremely simplified version of *Third Reich*, with a hint of *Axis and Allies* thrown in for good measure.

The map of Europe is divided into three fronts (Western, Eastern and Mediterranean), and each turn the player must decide whether or not to declare an offensive, which lets you employ your air force and fleets at the cost of economic points, or choose a tactical operation, which costs nothing, but only allows the use of armor and infantry units.

Another board wargame feature that The Big 3 borrows is the concept of "force pools," which restrict a nation's purchase of new units with set limitations. For example, Britain cannot build a massive land army, and is limited to a few armor units, but may construct a massive fleet. The Soviet Union always has a large army, but only a very small air force, and so forth. Units are purchased with build points that are gained by holding cities; at the beginning of each year, build points are allotted and new units are added to the force pool.

There are a number of variants which add a great deal to the replay value and unpredictability of the game. For example, you may use Germany's *Plan Z* to construct a larger fleet, or gain an increase in the amount of Lend-Lease that Roosevelt is able to give to England. Historical purist have the option to disable the variants and get build points the old

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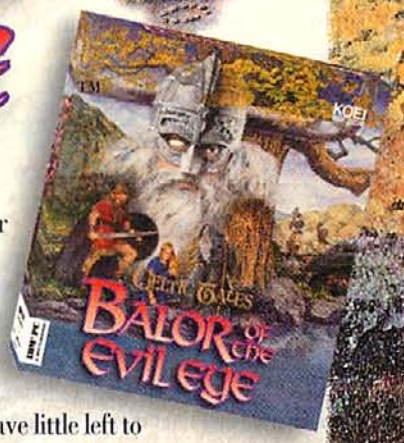

Long ago, in the days when Ireland was far removed from the mainland civilizations of Europe, the early Celtic tribes were locked in a bitter war with the Other World. The tribes of Eire were joined as one people, the Tuatha de Dannan. Their Other World enemies, who lurked off the islands shores were known as the Fomors, their powerful leader, Balor of the Evil Eye.

When you enter Celtic Tales, you enter the turbulent struggle to save the tribes of Eire from Balor's evil. Tired and broken, your people have little left to give to the struggle. Regarded as an intruder, your task is to rebuild the land, strengthen the tribes and become High Ruler of Eire. Then with your trusting champions, you must seek out the magical Runes, some of which are locked in Balor's grasp. Once in your possession, the Runes will empower your Bards and Druids with the magic needed to force the Fomor's back to the Other World!

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- Direct your champions to develop the provinces you control
- Align the tribes to your direction in a quest to become High Ruler
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Celtic Tales; Balor of the Evil Eye has not yet been rated by the E.S.R.B.

fashioned way if the unpredictability is too distracting, but then they'll miss one of the most interesting parts of the game.

Another nice touch is that the game may be played with three factions, USA/Britain, Germany/Italy, and the Soviet Union, with the computer able to control any of these. When playing as either the Soviets or Western Allies, and having the computer control your allied ne'er-do-well, the result can be quite unnerving, as you first curse the computer Germans for attacking Leningrad, and then rant at the computer Allies for not sending a Lend-Lease convoy. Moreover, should Germany be conquered before the game ends in 1945, the Allies and Soviet Union will begin fighting with a frenzy that only a Patton could appreciate. OK, pal, now we'll see who needs Lend-Lease!

You might be thinking that THE BIG 3 has all the makings to be a classic introductory wargame that can be shared with the entire family. And it does. However, the simple elegance of the design is laid low by sloppy programming, plain and simple. I encountered several different bugs, which ranged from forcing air units to retreat, to isolating infantry, to being kicked completely out of the program, or having the game freeze. This is in addition to other non-fatal bugs, such as not being able to attack when playing the USSR until the German invasion (as opposed to 1942 as stated in the rules), as well as an amazing disappearing zone-of-control phenomenon. What makes this particularly unforgivable is that this game is targeted at novices, who are the people that are the least understanding of program glitches, and are likely to shelve the entire hobby

THE BIG PICTURE A Windows interface and crisp graphics will make BIG THREE accessible to any WWII aficionado.

HANDICAPPING THE FIELD BIG THREE's editor allows you to balance contests between a novice and veteran human general, but it can't make up for the lame AI.

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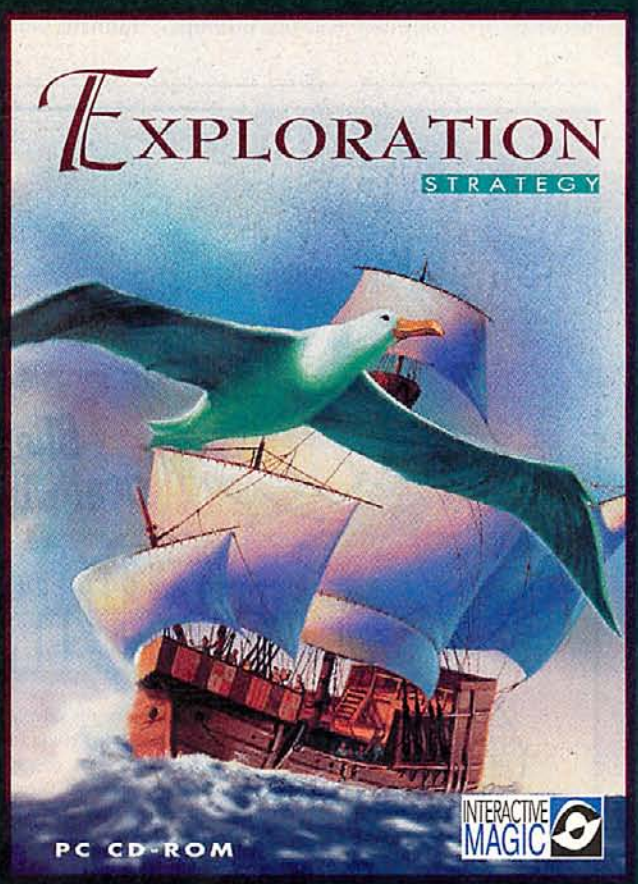

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after one frustrating experience.

The computer opponent is prone to error as well, and sometimes makes the folly of Hitler look like the wisdom of Clausewitz by comparison. Your silicon opponent seems to have the ability to form an overall plan, but then does inexplicable things in the heat of battle. For instance, the computer will not attempt to rescue units that are out of supply, and will often pull its air force so far back that it can't properly support front line units. Something I hope is a bug, and not a feature of the design, is the opponent's refusal to recognize strategic warfare; it neither uses it nor defends against it. It will watch passively while U-boats blow rather nasty holes in its supply convoys.

WHAT IF...? THE BIG 3 does allow you to try ahistorical variants. Here, the German forces prepare to invade neutral Spain.

Worst of all, the computer will declare war on countries, particularly Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, without having enough troops available to have the slightest chance of victory. Because of this, players will find themselves making up their own victory conditions—such as conquering the world before 1942 as the Russians, while watching *Talk Soup* and juggling three tomatoes. The documentation clearly states that the computer opponent is at a disadvantage versus a human; but while I'm all for truth in advertising, I can't imagine that this is what the designers had in mind.

THE BIG 3 really is like the Chicago Cubs. Spunky and with no shortage of personality, you find yourself cheering for it and hoping that it does well. But when you see all of its problems and glitches, it becomes obvious that THE BIG 3 simply can't compete in the big leagues of gaming. This is a real shame, because the game has all the makings of a great introductory wargame, but like the Cubs, it can't seem to eliminate the errors and form a winning lineup.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THE BIG 3

RATING 2 stars

PROS With its nice graphics, interface, and ease of play, THE BIG 3 could be a great introductory wargame.

CONS Under a heavy shelling of program bugs and AI oddities, its target audience will be running for cover.

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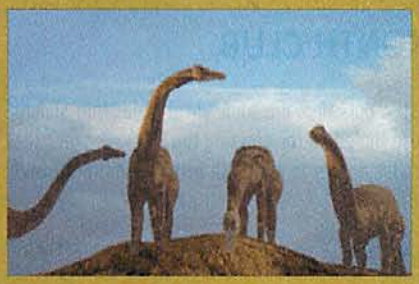

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Pump Up Your Weakling Soldiers With These Shareware Cheat Utilities

by Jeff James

FEW GAMES IN THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE ATTRACTED AS RABID A FOLLOWING AS MICROPROSE'S X-COM. Well-received by players of all stripes, X-COM has something for everyone. Wargaming grognards love the detailed squad-level infantry combat engine, while novices marvel at the animation and graphics—and all agree that the elements come together to form an extremely addicting challenge.

The game starts out slowly, making you chase down tiny UFOs and lightly-armed aliens as you learn the interface and controls. As the game progresses, you're bound to lock laser beams with a group of mean and green alien hombres that make your troopers look like cub scouts on a camping trip. When that happens, it's usually a good idea to regroup and invest in some better training and weaponry. That'll usually be the answer to your problems, but if you seem to spend more time on the losing end of the equation—seeing your bases blasted into rubble and your best soldiers turned into drooling zombies—you can turn to a number of shareware game cheats and editing utilities to help you give those uppity aliens the righteous butt-kicking they so decidedly deserve.

MONEY.EXE

Archive title: MONEY.ZIP

by Doug Gesler and David Stall

One of the simplest X-COM utilities, this little gem lets you play tooth fairy to the X-COM treasury. Unzip the archive and copy the MONEY.EXE file to your XCOM/UFO directory. Upon starting the program you're provided with a list of your current save games and the funds you currently have available in each. Enter a saved game number and the amount of money you want (up to $2,147,483,646), and the program will alter the necessary files for you. Upon loading the altered save-game you'll have enough capital to fund even the most extravagant of alien-bashing operations.

SOLDIER.EXE

BASE v2.11

Archive title: UFOCHE.ZIP

by S. J. Lamble

Once you've boosted your financial position with MONEY.EXE, you can use the utilities SOLDIER and BASE to soup up your squaddies and boost your base equipment. SOLDIER allows you to edit soldier stats, transforming your grunts into a super-human band of alien exterminators. BASE is used to edit base layouts and equipment; if you don't like the layout of the base you're given when you start the game, you can use this utility to reorganize hangers and general stores to your hearts content. I found both of these utilities to be a bit on the touchy side; the author is rumored to be working on newer versions of both programs, which should be available

CHEAT OF THE MONTH CLUB

Epic MegaGame's Jazz JackRabbit

Is your bunny struggling to stay one hop ahead of the stew pot? Here are some cheat codes that should put some spring in your step. To activate these codes, pause the game (by pressing the "P" key), press the backspace key, then enter the code as listed below. These codes appear to work with both the shareware and registered versions of the game.

ARJAN	Displays a text message and causes the screen to vibrate.
BAD	Gives Jazz a bird ally.
BOUF	Gives Jazz full health and turns invincibility on.
CSTRIKE	Gives Jazz a cool airboard. (Look out, Silver Surfer!)
DOOM	Makes enemies tougher and faster.
GREETZ	Displays a text greeting.
GUNHED	Gives Jazz all guns, maximum ammo and rapid fire.
HOOKER	Turns on 3D bonus level.
KEN	Exits game and drops to DOS.
LAMER	Skips current level.
MARK	Kills off Jazz.
SABLE	Gives Jazz mega-speed and super jumping ability.
TIM	Displays text message.

Psygnosis' Nova Storm

Here's a special warp level code for Psygnosis' NOVASTORM arcade shooter. To activate the warp, just type "TOMATOES" as soon as the game gives you the ability to move your fighter craft.

After typing the code, you'll be warped to a bonus level where you're given all special weapons. As an added bonus, all your shots assume the guise of ripe tomatoes. After you've completed the bonus level, you're warped to the final stage of the game.

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UFO Save Game Editor v 0.3
Archive: UFOEDI.ZIP
by Dave Durbin

Winning the Swiss-Army Knife award for X-COM utilities is the UFO SAVED GAME EDITOR, a jack of all trades XCOM/UFO utility. UFO EDITOR can do just about everything an aspiring X-COM player could want: edit base layouts, alter base equipment levels, and adjust soldier stats and experience. The interface is a bit cumbersome (if you want 999 units of Elerium in your base stockpile, you'll have to hold down the "+" key a few minutes to get the value you want), and it doesn't let your alter your funding. Glitches and gripes aside, if you only download one XCOM cheat utility, the UFO EDITOR should probably be it.

X-STAT.EXE
Archive: X-STAT.ZIP
by Andre Gauthier

If you've ever wanted to print out your X-COM soldier stats and brag about them to your friends, X-STAT.EXE is just what you need. When placed in the XCOM/UFO directory and executed, X-STAT will pull the stat-lines, rank, equipment and names of all your soldiers and place them into two files: SOLDIER.TXT (ASCII text format) and SOLDIER.CDF (a comma-delimited file format). You can use the former to print out your soldiers, while you can load the latter into your favorite spreadsheet for further manipulation. It's ideal for the comparing stats and skills of your soldiers before you wade into combat.

YAXE.EXE
Archive: YAXE.ZIP
by Patrick Shea

This program doesn't let you get any extra money or equipment, it simply fixes what many X-COM users see as a flaw in the original game design. As any X-COM gamer will tell you, the inability to arrange your forces in the troop transport before hitting the combat zone is an irksome shortcoming. Using YAXE, you can sort your troopers by all sorts of criteria. If you want the soldiers with the greatest number of time units to exit the transport first, simply type in YAXE followed by the requisite command line options and they'll be rearranged for you.

These utilities can be found on most on-line services, as well as *CGW*'s own forum on the ZIFFnet service. Some of these programs can also be found on the MicroProse BBS at 410-785-1841. As with all game cheats and hacking utilities, be aware that use of these programs carries with it the risk of corrupted game files and other problems. Before attempting to use any of these programs you should back up your save game files.

Jeff James, CGW columnist and associate editor of InterActive Gaming, can be reached on through the Internet at 74774.1635@compuserve.com.

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Circle Reader Service #59

Yesterday, Games Were Such A Simple Play

by Chuck Miller

I SUSPECT I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO WAXES NOSTALGIC OVER THE ARCADE GAMES OF THE '70S AND '80S. WHEN I think about the hours I spent blasting space debris and detonating nukes with my perfect missile parabolas, it's no wonder that games like **Atari**'s new 2600 ACTION PACK trigger a parasympathetic response from my neuro-credit membranes. Simple though they were, they captured my heart (and my quarters!) and didn't let go.

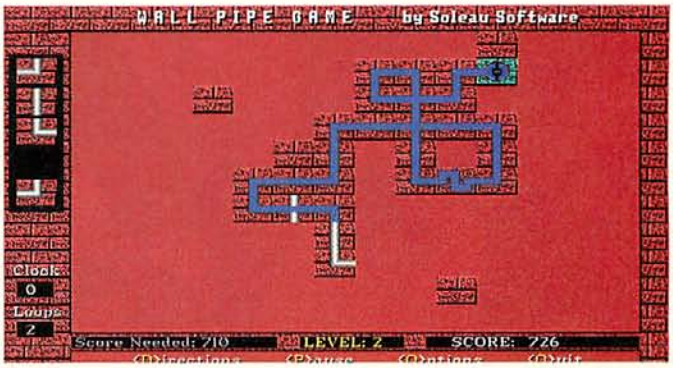
With the new emphasis on whiz-bang graphics and hard-driving stereo soundtracks in computer games, it's easy to overlook the fact that, not that long ago, games were fun *without that stuff*. These days, if a game lacks stunning visual and audio embellishment, we tend to shrug it off as an inferior product—whether or not we've given it a chance to prove itself. That's unfortunate, because there are a lot of "gems in the rough" waiting to be discovered, lacking only the final cut and polish that separates them from the big commercial titles.

More lamentable is the idea that a game has to offer a new idea or storyline to warrant our interest. All storylines are rehashed and reblended anyway, so this shouldn't matter as much as a good balance of gaming elements. To give you an idea of what I mean, I offer for your consideration three games of stark simplicity, not only elementary in their presentation and scope, but enjoyable adaptations of earlier classics. These games have one key ingredient that makes them stand out and transcend the need for digital smoke and mirrors—simple, addictive play.

PIPE DREAMING

WALL PIPE 2.2 from **Soleau Software** might take you back to happier times if you played its predecessor, PIPE DREAM. The gameplay is so faithful to the original that after a solid hour of play, it took a first-run episode of "X-Files" to pry me away.

For those unfamiliar with PIPE DREAM and its clones, the objective in WALL PIPE is to keep the water flowing as long as possible by linking together various pieces of pipe to direct its path. Although it sounds simple, maintaining a continuous course of water is complicated by a random stream of pipe segments that appear in TETRIS-style. Stationary and moving bricks get in the way of your growing pipeline, and a ticking clock keeps the tension high. On the first level you have 40 seconds to lay pipe before the water starts to flow; in the higher levels, you'll have less and less time before the water well "liquidates" its assets. While you can continue to place pipe after the water begins its trek through your freshly constructed network, keeping ahead of the flow is extremely difficult.



PLUMBER'S NIGHTMARE Simple plumbing is but a "Pipe Dream" with this classic knock-off.

As in real plumbing, there are numerous pipe segments available to keep the water flowing. These plumber's helpers include standard pipes (right elbows, left elbows, horizontal and vertical segments, etc.), directional pipes (allowing water to flow only in the indicated direction), bonus pipes and tubs (providing extra points if employed), cross pipes (offering bonus points for causing the water to loop past itself) and sinks.

Though by no means an original idea, WALL PIPE is still a thoroughly enjoyable game (more fun than writing this review!). Although it could use a few added features, like the ability to adjust the clock and the mouse controls (the pointer moves a bit sluggishly for my tastes), this game is certain to appeal to any gamer looking for a balanced blend of strategy and action.

WALL PIPE will flow smoothly on any IBM-compatible computer with EGA/VGA graphics and a mouse. The shareware version of WALL PIPE 2.2 is downloadable as WALLPI.ZIP. Send a check or money order for $12 to switch on the full registered version, which doesn't have registration "nag screens," loads much more quickly than the shareware version, and has unlimited levels of play. To register, send $12, plus $2 shipping and handling (New York residents please add the appropriate sales tax), to Soleau Software, 163 Amsterdam Avenue, Suite 213, New York NY 10023 or call (212) 721-2361 with a credit card in hand to order by phone. Adding another $6 will increase your gaming pleasure with the Soleau Software Member Game Pack including eight of their most popular shareware releases.

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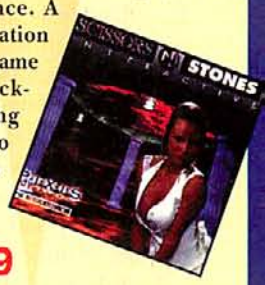

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DEADLY DIAMONDS Make one wrong move and it's easy to find yourself SIX FEET UNDER in this new rendition of BOULDERDASH.

DIGGING IN THE DIRT

Greed drives men and women to all sorts of extremes, even to the point of risking life and limb. Films like *Jewel of the Nile* and *King Solomon's Mines* depict the length to which some will go for riches, especially in the form of precious gems. Such is the case in SIX FEET UNDER, a timed game of strategy in the cast of BOULDERDASH and a thousand clones.

Alone and deserted, you're trapped in a remote cavern underneath the Arizona desert. All your friends are gone and no one answers your calls for help. Then, just when you're about to give up in despair, a glint of light catches your eye—a diamond as big as Roseanne Barr's ego! Excitement replaces panic, and greed overcomes despair as you race from gem to gem in the first of 50 interconnecting labyrinths. Your dilated pupils register huge dollar signs!

Like the many strategic maze games that have come before, the goal in SIX FEET UNDER is to collect the necessary gems on each level to open the exit to the next. Of course, obstacles block your path. Falling stones will squish the juices out of the slow of foot, while giant spiders and frogs will slurp you up without a moment's notice. It's also possible to become trapped and expire from any number of underground dangers.

Each level of the 25 provided in the shareware version of SIX FEET UNDER begins with a password to proceed directly to that level. After the first few levels, which go rather quickly, I suggest you pause the game and write them down. You'll need them. For instance, Level 9 (Which Way Do I Go?) is a killer that has done me in more times than I care to remember. Timing here is just *too* precise. One slip of the direction keys and it's "Game over, man!"

While SIX FEET UNDER has top-notch sound effects and an animated icon for the player (your on-screen persona actually walks as he moves across the screen), it does lack some of the more standard features. There is no way to select a skill level or to "stop the clock" on puzzles where there never seems to be enough time. It would also be nice to have some control over matters like the number of points required for extra lives and the number of obstacles provided to challenge the player. Nonetheless, SIX FEET UNDER is a rich find in the BOULDERDASH vein. If you have a 386 or faster PC running Windows 3.1 or higher, a 16-color or better VGA card and at least 4 MB RAM, you'll be able to dig SIX FEET UNDER (SIXFET.ZIP). A modest $15 is all that's required to unearth the full 50-level registered version (another 50 levels are in the works, as is an upcoming level editor). Carve out a check to EnQue Software, 25700 East 203rd Street, Pleasant Hill MO 64080 or call (816) 987-2515 to order by credit card for instant gratification (via an unlock code).

BIG PAC ATTACK

PACMANIA is another simple game that will bring to mind the countless quarters you slipped into the silvery slots of many an arcade machine. An almost identical clone of the original Pac-Man—offering all its simplicity, charm and addictiveness—PACMANIA will take you back to the early days of electronic gaming when four colors and some basic digital bleeps were all that you needed to be entertained for hours.

The goal in PACMANIA is as simple as the original: eat everything in your path, avoid the ghosts, and score as many points as possible. Fruits are more valuable than dots; scoring 10,000 points earns you an extra life. That's all there is to it.

Moronic as it seems, there's something in that yellow chomper that keeps you tapping the arrow keys or yanking the joystick for hours at a time. So, to return to a simpler, more basic gaming era, chase down a copy of PACMANIA (PACMAN.ZIP). A standard registration of just $10 (other options are available) lets you reclaim a small part of your gaming youth. PACMANIA is available from Sophisticated Software Systems, P.O. Box 4936, East Lansing MI 48826-4936.

I'M A PACMANIAC! Fortify your gaming diet with some cherries, bananas and other fruits in this gobble down memory lane.

Chuck Miller is the editor of InterActive Gaming and CGW's Shaman of Shareware. He can be reached on CompuServe at 74774,1476, America Online at IGAMING and through the Internet at interactive.gaming@swcbbs.com.

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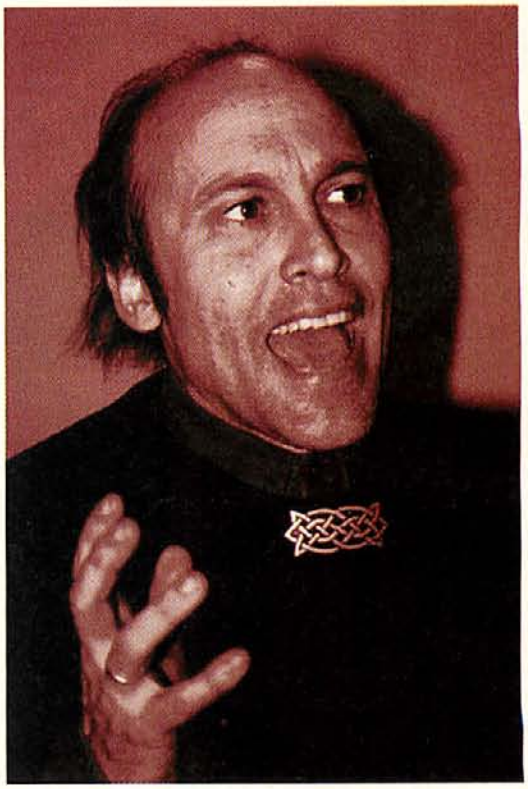
Circle Reader Service #379

Crawford's Quest

A Game Designer's Search For Arthur And The Holy Grail Of Interactivity

by Paul Schuytema



FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, I WALKED INTO MY LOCAL COMPUTER STORE, DROPPED A FEW BILLS, and walked out with a large zip-lock bag containing the pride of the Atari Program Exchange—EASTERN FRONT for the Atari 800 computer. That wargame, with its scrolling map and seasonal color changes, was a milestone in the evolution of computer games, and I have to say that it was the first game to ever really hook me.

That game was the brain child of Chris Crawford, then an Atari programming guru and now one of the last lone wolves of game design. Soon, Crawford will be joining the pack, launching his own design house, as he realizes that creating a full-bodied game to tempt today's audience is a task too daunting for just one man. Recently, I had the opportunity and privilege to invite Mr. Crawford to my neck of the Illinois cornfields and treat him to a cholesterol-rich Midwestern meal. I listened to his tale.

77 CYCLES OF HELL

His adventure began at Atari in 1979, as a programmer/designer for the Atari 2600 video game system. The cartridge-based system was lean on processing power and even leaner on megabyte real-estate, boasting a whooping 2K of ROM for the program code, and 128 *bytes* of RAM to hold all of a game's variables. To make matters worse, that 128 bytes also served as the machine's screen buffer.

"That was a ferociously tight environment," said Crawford. "You actually drew the display on the screen as the [electron] beam was running across."

The draw routines for the 2600 were the property of Atari's TIA chip, which had a buffer that would spill one line of graphics to the screen at a time, giving programmers the luxury of 77 machine cycles to prepare for the next draw line. That meant that programmers had to cram the operational kernel of their game into a series of instructions that took exactly 77 cycles.

"You'd be in your office," said Crawford, "and suddenly you'd hear some anguished wail coming down the corridor, '78 cycles!' He didn't make it. And if you could get it done in 75 cycles, then you were screwing up, because you were wasting two cycles. God, that was intense programming!"

THE 12 BYTES OF CHRISTMAS

After cutting his teeth on the 2600, Crawford moved over to the Atari 800 personal computer. It was on this machine that he created EASTERN FRONT.

"My big goal for many years," says game designer Chris Crawford, "has been to get real characters into games. I consider that goal to be the holy grail of game design."

"EASTERN FRONT was, technically, the most brilliant design I've ever done," said Crawford. "It had an inverted program structure and a full AI system running in just 8K of RAM. That's pretty good AI!"

One of the neat features of this early graphical wonder was the fact that the icons for the trees changed color as time progressed through the seasons. To this day, Crawford is proud that the routine for that colorshift was coded in only 12 bytes of 6502 instructions.

After the collapse of the video game industry in the early 1980s, Crawford found himself without a job at Atari, and set out on his own as a freelance game programmer and designer. He developed a portfolio of games, some which did quite well and others which just plain flopped. During this time, however, Crawford kept coming back to two common themes: his love of the legend of King Arthur, sparked by the dark and moody film *Excalibur*. He was also fascinated with the

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potential of the computer to serve as an interactive storyteller, but not just narrating branching stories, but giving a player an opportunity to interact with detailed synthetic characters in "an emotionally meaningful way."

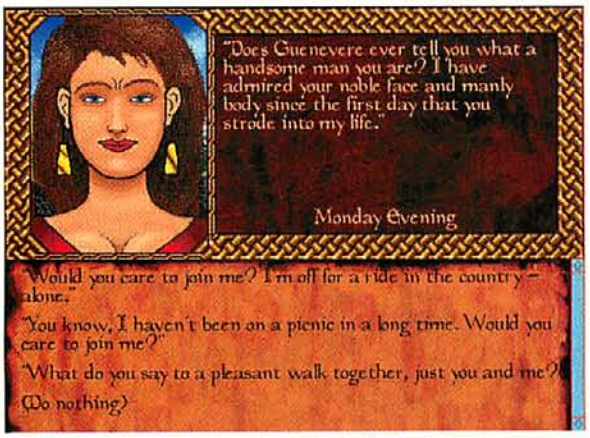
THE HOLY GRAIL

"My big goal for many years," reflected Crawford, "has been to get real characters into the games. I consider that goal to be the holy grail of game design."

Three years ago, Crawford decided that the time was right. He was going to begin work on an Arthurian game, entitled LE MORTE D'ARTHUR. "I was going to do interactive storytelling; I was just going to do it," said Crawford. "I would just keep working at it until I solved the problem. It turns out to be enormously difficult."

First and foremost in the design process of creating an interpersonal relations engine was to define the starting point. How could you turn human conversation and personality into a believable computer model?

"There is no simple program you can create that will present an interesting character with which you can have an emotionally meaningful interaction," said Crawford, "and you're sure as hell not going to do it in assembly language."



A key component of Crawford's vision is a facial expression system that can capture the subtle, non-verbal aspects of human communication. "The true test," says Crawford, "was to see if [his facial technology] could accurately represent Guinevere's 'come hither' look." (The graphics are still under-development.)

Crawford had been playing around with the idea of sentences as an output device in an earlier game, BALANCE OF POWER. Tweaking his concept slightly, he decided that the sentence would be the essential "atom" of interactivity in LE MORTE D' ARTHUR. Crawford also had a revelation when he decided to treat input and output as essentially the same beast. A player should be able to say the same things to a "virtual" character that the character might say back to him.

Working from that foundation, Crawford began to build up a library of "interrelation algorithms" that would comprise the backbone of his game's interactivity. One point that seemed essential was the fact that people gossip—that information spreads in finite and limited ways from person to person. For Crawford, creating a world in which his characters were all omniscient was doomed to failure.

But attempting to translate the very human characteristic of gossip into a packet of Pascal procedures proved to be very daunting. Crawford studied the problem and designed a general assumption algorithm which stated, essentially, that humans tend to tell things to their closest friends first, and they also prefer to tell information that is near and dear their hearts, and humans are especially willing to tell information that is of vital importance to their friends.

Crawford programmed this gossip algorithm and set the court of Camelot on its way, simulating an entire array of independently functioning and thinking virtual characters, all interacting with each other. Soon, Lancelot had "plucked the royal feather" by seducing Guinevere. He was excited about it, and the algorithm told him that he should want to tell a friend. He would also want to tell a friend who would find this information most useful and important. That friend, of course, was King Arthur.

"That's a flaw in the algorithm," remarked Crawford. "Fixing that problem stumped me for over a month."

Crawford had to rethink his approach to gossip and inter-character information passing. Some of the core algorithms of his program were the procedures that would allow a character to mull over information they had just been given and pass verdict. A character would consider how information affected him and whether it changed the way that character felt about any of the other characters in the game world. Crawford discovered that by using these routines, a character could "place himself in another's shoes" and work through the ramifications of a piece of gossip before he blurted it out to another character.

Armed with the new procedures, Lancelot was then able to imagine how Arthur would feel when his best friend gleefully told him that he had just bedded his wife and queen. Naturally, Lancelot kept his mouth shut.

IN ARTHUR'S WORLD

So just what is LE MORTE D'ARTHUR? It is, at its simplest, a game of kingly diplomacy. You are cast in the role of Arthur, late in your reign. Your bastard son Mordred really wants to become king and urges you to step down from your throne. Of course, you refuse. The game begins at this point, where you hold court at Camelot while Mordred schemes in the background, waiting for the right moment to initiate a rebellion against your throne.

"When all is said and done, it all boils down to a simple battle, and the loyalty of the people," said Crawford. At that climactic moment, your previous diplomatic acumen will either bear ripe fruits of victory or you will be unceremoniously ripped from your thrown by Mordred.

Throughout the game, you are constantly interacting with 16 other characters, all who are vying for your attention and approval. Some will attempt to seduce you, while others will urge you to battle, to kick some Saxon butt for the good of Camelot.

"I've created something truly unique in this game," said Crawford, "the first wargame done without a map. This is a wargame with full tactics and troop movement, only everything is done verbally."

Of course, if you go off to attack the Saxons and lose, then your prestige will plummet. Like all good medieval tales, your power and influence is based on your prestige, by the appearance that you can act like a king would act.

(continued on page 178)

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GEMINI GAMES

Circle Reader Service #369

(continued from page 174)

THE LONE WOLF JOINS THE PACK

Crawford has been laboring on LE MORTE D'ARTHUR for well over a thousand days, working from his home in San Jose over-looking Silicon Valley. His constant companion is his suped-up Mac II, on which he cranks out Pascal programs as he attempts to find his own grail. Along the process of creating the engine for the game, he realized its universal functionality as a storytelling tool.

Now, Crawford has entered into a partnership to create a design house that will not only finish work on LE MORTE D'ARTHUR, but also perfect the engine as a development environment that could then be licensed to other designers. Already, he is planing two additional games, one based on office politics and climbing the corporate ladder, and another a lusty soap opera, but more akin to a Three Musketeers-type of romance than a lunch time soap.

After a decade and a half as a lone wolf programmer, doing everything from design to programming to art, Crawford has realized that a team is required to create the whole product. Already, he has worked with artists to create LE MORTE D'ARTHUR's facial interface, since Crawford firmly believes the human face is the most efficient tool for reflecting the emotional state of a character. He has had the artists create face "foundations" for each of the 16 characters, and a "Mister Potato Head" approach of hundreds of facial tiles to create a desired expression.

"The true test," reflected Crawford, "was to see if this approach could accurately represent Guinevere's 'come hither' look."

The first step in the "mainstreaming" of Crawford's work is to get his Mac-based Pascal code optimized in C++ for the PC. After that grunt work is completed, Crawford will set up his "storytelling hierarchy" for creating his interactive stories. He envisions a "master storyteller" who works on larger design issues and character and story development. This storyteller will then oversee three separate teams: a tools team for program design, a writing team for crafting the substories and characters' responses, and an art team to craft the most effective means to present the story to the player.

Soon, Crawford will invite his engine licensees to his facilities for an intensive training period in this new type of interactive story telling. After training, the licensees can then go off to create their own tales of character conflict and interaction.

After three and a half years, Crawford still has a lot of work to do, at least another year until LE MORTE D'ARTHUR is complete, but he can see the light at the end of the tunnel. For years, he has been outspoken visionary promoting the values of character interaction in computer games, feeling at times like a solitary wolf howling at his own moon that nobody else has seemed to notice. Now, his journey is almost complete. From his beginnings at Atari, where 77 cycles were the Holy Grail, he has traveled very far indeed, and stands on the brink of something truly unique in the realm of game design.

"It's a massive challenge," said Crawford, "trying to figure out under what circumstances will a character respond with anger or burst into tears? What kind of tools and techniques do you use to create that level of interaction? It sure as hell ain't computer science."

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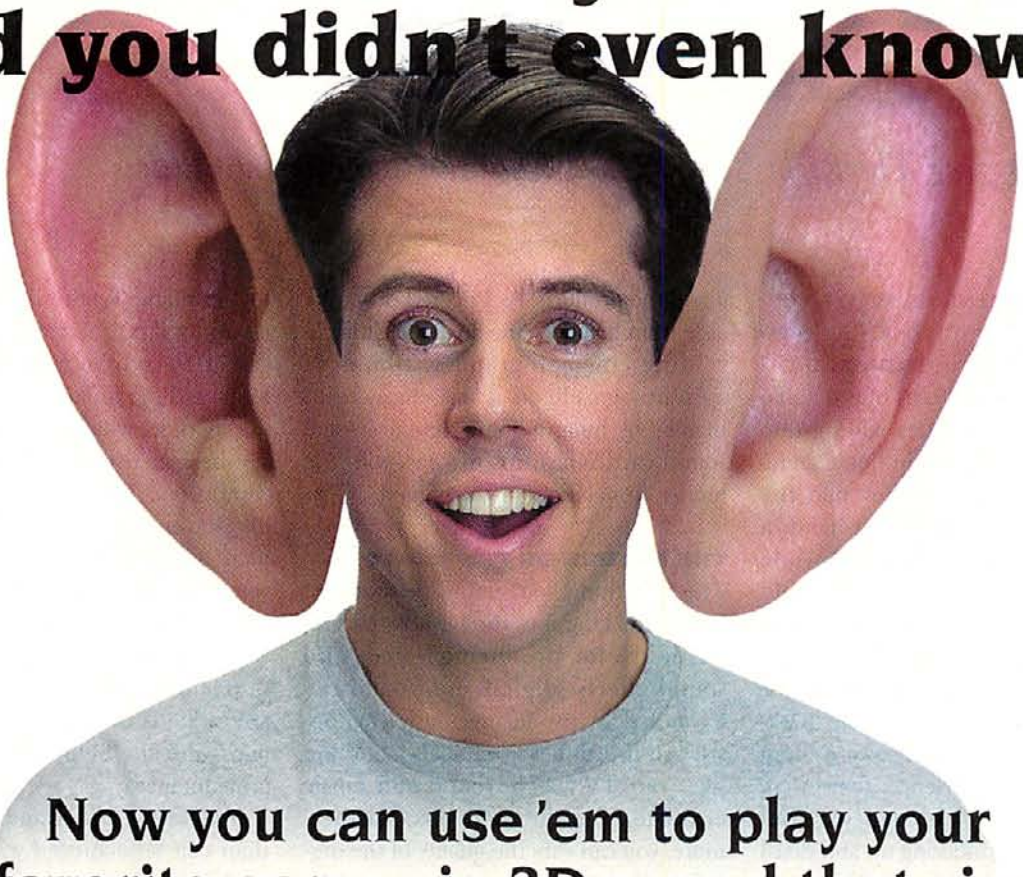

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Circle Reader Service #270

Stalking The Great White Sound Card

Tips For Bagging The Right Sound Card For Your Gaming Adventures

by Mike Weksler

On a recent safari to a consumer electronic "Gigantastorus Rex," I witnessed the stalking patterns of two audio hunting parties. One group was interested in home audio systems, and they had the benefit of experiencing it first-hand: a salesperson explained features while tweaking knobs so the customer could hear the difference between different products. Then I made my way through the jungle of multimedia hardware to the personal computer sound card aisle. It was there that I became acutely aware of an entirely different experience: there were no beating drums, no chanting, but rather, customers wandering up and down the aisle in complete silence! They were making purchases solely based on the pretty pictures on boxes, the salesperson's often inaccurate explanations of features, and recommendations from members of their tribe—but no one was actually *listening* to the products. As I peered down the aisle from behind some boxes, I felt like a wildlife cinematographer, filming a sprightly gazelle as it was chased and mauled by hungry lions. Here are some sound card safari tips to keep you, the hunter, from becoming the hunted.

SHORT CIRCUITS

Hunting down the right cable that connects your new sound card to your existing CD-ROM drive can be a real adventure. This magic cable allows you to hear music CDs and, more importantly, the sound and music in some CD-ROM games, out of your sound card's speakers. Without this cable, you miss portions of a game's music that are on the CD.

SC&T makes a "Twin-Head" CD-ROM audio cable that's compatible with Creative Labs, Media Vision, Aztech Labs, and Orchid Technologies sound cards. Price: $12.95. For more information, call (800) 408-4084.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

The first thing you should be aware of before trekking into the bush is that the hardware for producing voices and sound effects (digital audio) and the hardware for producing music (synthesis) are two different animals—nothing like your TV, where sound and music emanate from the same box. Furthermore, you can vary the quality of the digital audio and music synthesis on your computer, from scratchy sound effects and kazoo-like music to much cleaner sounding digital audio and orchestral-sounding music.

After deciding how much ammo you have for the hunt, the next thing to do is select which options are important to you. Most games only use 8-bit digital audio (16-bit data, while sounding great, has elephant-sized storage requirements). If your interests lie in digital audio only and you don't mind FM synthesis (often referred to as Ad Lib or Sound Blaster compatibility) for your music, you could probably settle for an inexpensive, small caliber 8-bit sound card like the Sound Blaster Pro from Creative Labs. It's inexpensive and a real no-brainer to install and configure.

If you require superior music for your "trophy piece," you could add a standalone General MIDI device, a standard for wavetable synthesizers, alongside an 8-bit sound card. Examples of these General MIDI cards include the Turtle Beach Maui and the Roland SC-55 Sound Canvas module, which is the General MIDI synthesizer used by many game music composers. Then, when playing games like Raven Software's Heretic, you will hear both the sounds of combat from your 8-bit digital audio card and rich, orchestra-like music from your General MIDI synthesizer. The stalwart sound card hunter should really listen to the different kinds of synthesis first-hand, perhaps with the help of a fully equipped acquaintance.

If you want better audio performance than can be achieved with 8-bit sound cards, consider higher fidelity cards like Creative Labs' Sound Blaster 16 or Media Vision's Premium 3D, augmented with a General MIDI daughter card. Daughter cards snap onto the main sound card and use chipsets from synthesizer companies like Roland, Ensoniq, Kurzweil and Korg, which are all professional-level keyboard manufacturers.

A good compromise is the "all-in-one" sound card like Ensoniq's Soundscape, Logitech's SoundMan Wave, Aztech's Waverider, and Creative Labs' AWE-32. These provide General MIDI wavetable synthesis and 16-bit digital audio.

Now, when you reach the bush, here are some questions to ask your guide: first, ascertain if a sound card is upgradeable to wavetable synthesis, i.e., "Can this model of Sound Blaster 16 accept a wavetable daughter card?" Second, ask whether the wavetable sound card will require you to wrestle an alligator-sized ter-

After hearing his favorite games on a Sound Blaster, Vincent regretted the ear thing.

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minate and stay resident (TSR) program. Cards like Creative Labs' AWE-32 use a big TSR to handle General MIDI (though more games are supporting this card directly), which will eat into your available memory. (For more on the AWE-32, see "Under The Hood" in issue #123, October, '94.) Finally, since most CD-ROM drives can be connected to your sound card, you should try to find a sound card that is compatible with your CD-ROM. There are SCSI versions of sound cards and, usually, you can find the same card in a "Multi-CD" model which offers more CD-ROM interfaces. The most common CD-ROM interfaces are Sony, Mitsumi, Panasonic/Matsushita, and IDE.

On a parting note, don't bother to get a lion of a sound card if you are only going to use it with mousy little speakers!

Mike Weksler, CGW's Technical Editor, can be reached by e-mail at ***mweksler@mail.zd.com****, or by US post at Under the Hood c/o Computer Gaming World, 135 Main St. 14th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105.*

THE PARTS DEPT.

A LAPTOP COMPUTER FOR THE GAMER ON THE GO

by Loyd Case

I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHECK OUT SOME HARDWARE SOLUTIONS FOR NOMADIC GAMERS. LAPTOPS have really been poor game machines for a number of reasons, but the primary problems are poor graphic performance and lack of audio. However, a new crop of multimedia-enabled laptop computers has hit the shelves which show some promise. The one I tested, **Texas Instruments**' TI TRAVELMATE 4000M/75, has 8 megabytes of RAM, a 340 megabyte IDE hard disk and a 75 MHz 486/DX4 processor.

On the surface, the TI has what it takes to be a sweet game machine. It has a built-in Jazz 16 chipset from **Media Vision** which supports Sound Blaster-compatible digital audio and FM MIDI synthesis. There's a SCSI-2 port on the back of the machine for attaching CD-ROM drives, as well as a joystick/MIDI out port and connectors for audio in, out, and a microphone input. We didn't test the optional CD-ROM Docking System (pictured), but it has a double-speed drive and built-in stereo speakers.

But how good is it, really? Some warts begin to show up on closer inspection. The first one is the mouse. The mouse is one of those little knobby sticks that rise out of the center of the keyboard. While perfectly adequate for pull-down menus, it's useless for moving around in games like DOOM. However, it can be disabled and a real mouse attached. The second problem is the keyboard. The travel of the keys is short, and the keys are closely

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spaced, which often leads to incorrect key presses. Again, no big deal if you're writing—you can always run the spelling checker—but this can be a major problem in some games. Hitting the wrong key at the wrong time can result in the untimely demise of your warbird or your favorite character. The cursor keys are even worse: although laid out in a nice inverted "T," the pint-sized keys are less than half the normal size.

Okay, so the user interface isn't up to snuff. What about the display? As we've noted in the past, poor graphic performance can make a particular system useless for DOS-based games. The TI uses one of the many Cirrus Logic chipsets. Theoretically, it should be reasonably fast in DOS and fairly mediocre in Windows. We ran some benchmarks to check it out. For comparison, we ran the same benchmarks on a 486DX2/66 desktop system equipped with the DIAMOND SPEEDSTAR PRO graphics card. Results are below.

TEXAS INSTRUMENTS LAPTOP VERSUS DESKTOP COMPARISON

Benchmark	TI 4000M/75	486DX2/66 VLB
3D Bench	41.4 frames per second	47.6 frames per second
Vidspeed (320x200) Writes	3004 bytes/second	7641 bytes/second
Vidspeed (320x200) Reads	1628 bytes/second	2732 bytes/second

Of course, the real test is in the game playing. We tried out DOOM II, FLEET DEFENDER (an F-14 Tomcat flight simulator) and OPERATION CRUSADER (a wargame from **Avalon Hill**). The results were somewhat mixed, but DOOM II fared the best. The 9-inch, active matrix display, though small, showed off DOOM II pretty well—except in the dark areas, when we had to crank up the gamma correction a bit. FLEET DEFENDER actually performed pretty well, although since we didn't have the special joystick cable, we couldn't give it a thorough workout. In a real furball, there was a noticeable slowdown, though not enough to be more than a minor nuisance. Surprisingly, **Avalon Hill**'s OPERATION CRUSADER fared the worst. Although it started up fine, after a move or two, the display locked up. OPERATION CRUSADER is a Super VGA game, running at resolutions ranging from 640x480 up to 1024x768. It ships with a universal VESA driver, called UniVBE, which wouldn't even recognize the graphics chipset. So SuperVGA games may be problematic.

All of the music and digital audio played well. The internal speaker is small and weak, but if you're used to the beeps from a PC speaker, it's a breath of fresh air. Of course, if you're playing DOOM II in an airliner seat, you might want to connect a pair of headphones to the line out jack (which disables the internal speaker). Then the sound is very good FM synthesis and very clean digital audio.

All of this doesn't come cheap. The street price for the TI 4000M/75 ranges from $3,399 to $4,199 depending on the size of hard drive and type of display. Oh, and memory over 8 megabytes is incredibly expensive—about $1,800 for a 16-megabyte expansion module (ouch!). Still, if you're in the market for a laptop for business, and you need to do some multimedia presentations, and you just can't get away from HERETIC, this might be a machine worth checking out.

Price as reviewed, $3,999; portable CD-ROM Docking System has an estimated street price of $849. A 100mz model is listed at $4,699. For more information, call (800) 848-3927.

MEDIA VISION PCMCIA SOUND CARD ISN'T THE PANACEA FOR PORTABLE SOUND

A lot of people already have laptops, and some of them have reasonable graphic displays. The only thing missing from these systems is audio. The answer to this problem lies in those little, credit card-sized expansion jobs known as PCMCIA cards (also known as PC cards). Originally developed as a way of expanding memory in hand-held computers, PCMCIA has recently become the hottest thing in the laptop market.

Almost every laptop shipping today has at least one PCMCIA slot. Several vendors are now making PCMCIA audio cards, so we decided to try one out. We installed a **Media Vision** PCMCIA Sound Card in a Toshiba T3400CT, a tiny, 4 lb. laptop with a 7.5 inch active matrix color display.

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We expected problems—PCMCIA cards are notoriously difficult to set up, and compatibility between platforms is often problematic. However, the only issue we had was with DOS memory. PCMCIA drivers—the card and socket services needed to make a PCMCIA slot a universal interface—ate up a huge chunk of DOS memory, even when we tried to load most drivers high with MEMMAKER. Media Vision thoughtfully ships a custom driver, known as a point enabler, with the card. The point enabler is a small driver that doesn't need card and socket services. (This means you can't use the slot for other cards until you reload card and socket services).

By using the point enabler, we were able to get CIVILIZATION, DOOM 2 and TRANSPORT TYCOON running—sort of. The problem is that PCMCIA doesn't support DMA, which means that Sound Blaster digital audio won't play. Media Vision does supply an emulation driver, but that only works with games that don't use a DOS extender. Since both DOOM 2 and TRANSPORT TYCOON use DOS extenders, digital audio was out. This was not a problem with TRANSPORT TYCOON, but try playing DOOM 2 without digital audio and see how long *you* stay alive in Ultra Violent mode.

We'll take a look at some more portable solutions in the coming months. This is a new and developing area, and there are still a lot of teething problems. In the meantime, imagine setting up a HERETIC network on your next flight. Who needs movies when you can turn your flying companions into chickens at 35,000 feet?

Price: $299. For more information, call (800) 845-5870.

YAMAHA TONE GENERATOR BRINGS WAVETABLE SOUND TO PORTABLES

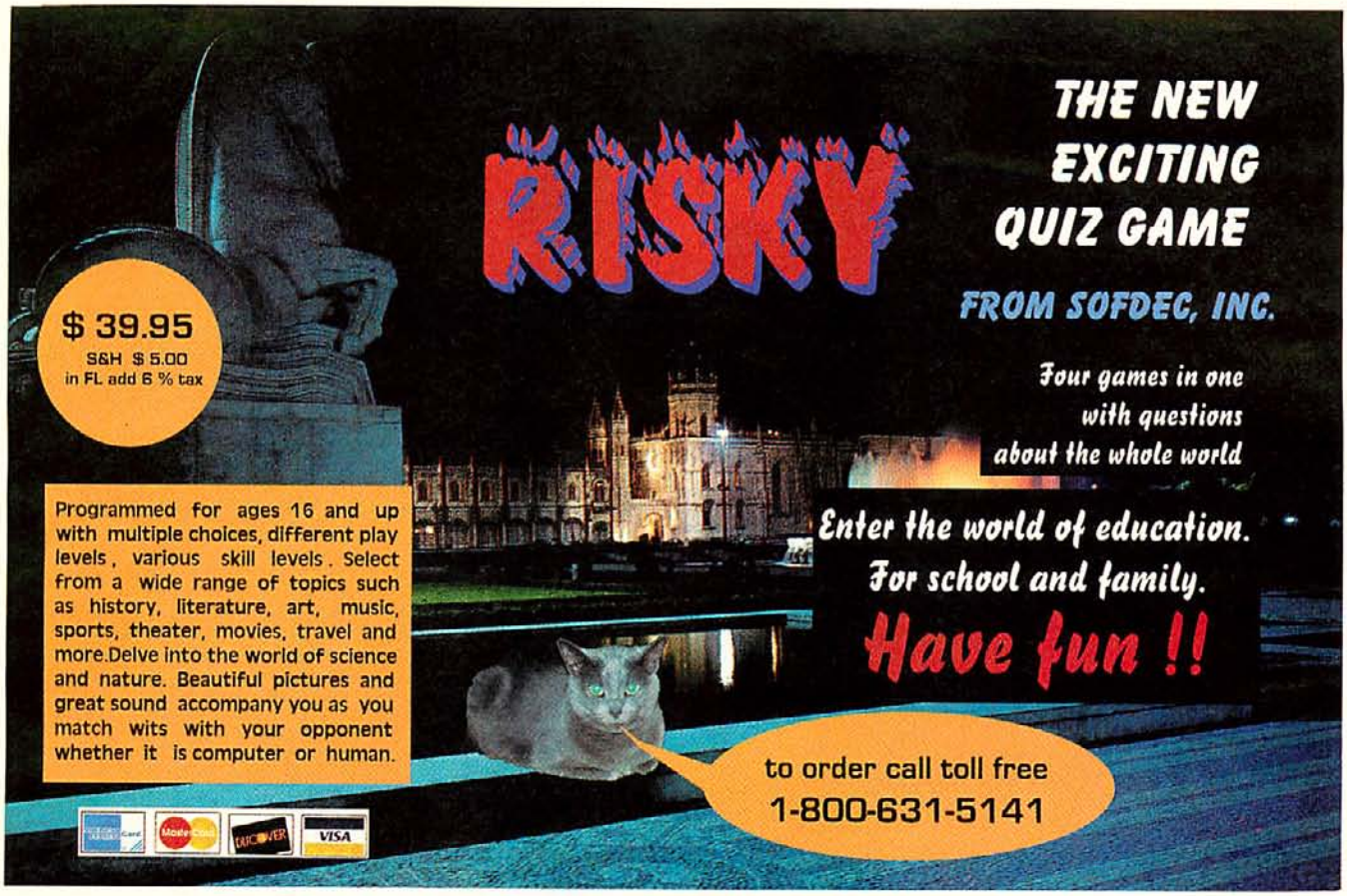
It's a challenge getting good sound from a portable computer, and the drawbacks of the Media Vision PCMCIA SOUND CARD only serve to underscore the problem. But don't give up yet—**Yamaha** seems to have created a sound solution with its MU5 TONE GENERATOR.

At the heart of the Yamaha unit lies an orchestra (albeit not a perfect one), because the MU5 is a General MIDI-compatible wavetable synthesizer. By attaching it to the MIDI port of a laptop, or through the Media Vision SOUND CARD, you'll enjoy clean, rich General MIDI music on a portable computer.

Powered by a small power supply or six AA batteries, the unit even has a mini keyboard to generate tones, although using it to compose music would be a real chore.

But the benefits of the MU5 are not limited to portable users. Many desktop gamers are relegated to the flat, tinny sound of FM synthesis because they have a SOUND BLASTER 16 without a General MIDI daughter card connector or a PRO AUDIO SPECTRUM 16. Owners of these devices can attach the MU5 to the MIDI port of either of these cards and get sound that's head and shoulders above FM synthesizers. It's no match for the **Roland** SOUND CANVAS, but we ran a number of MIDI files and several games through the MU5, and they sounded terrific. There is also a serial port connection for the MU5, but this only plays sound for Windows.

There are more affordable solutions for desktop systems, but if you have the need for portable General MIDI, the MU5 is worth a closer look. Price: $299. For more information, call (714) 522-9011.



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The Civil War

1861-1864

From the first shots fired at Fort Sumter to the elections of 1864, empire interactive's The Civil War is the first PC-based full scale depiction of the terrible conflict that tore apart a nation.

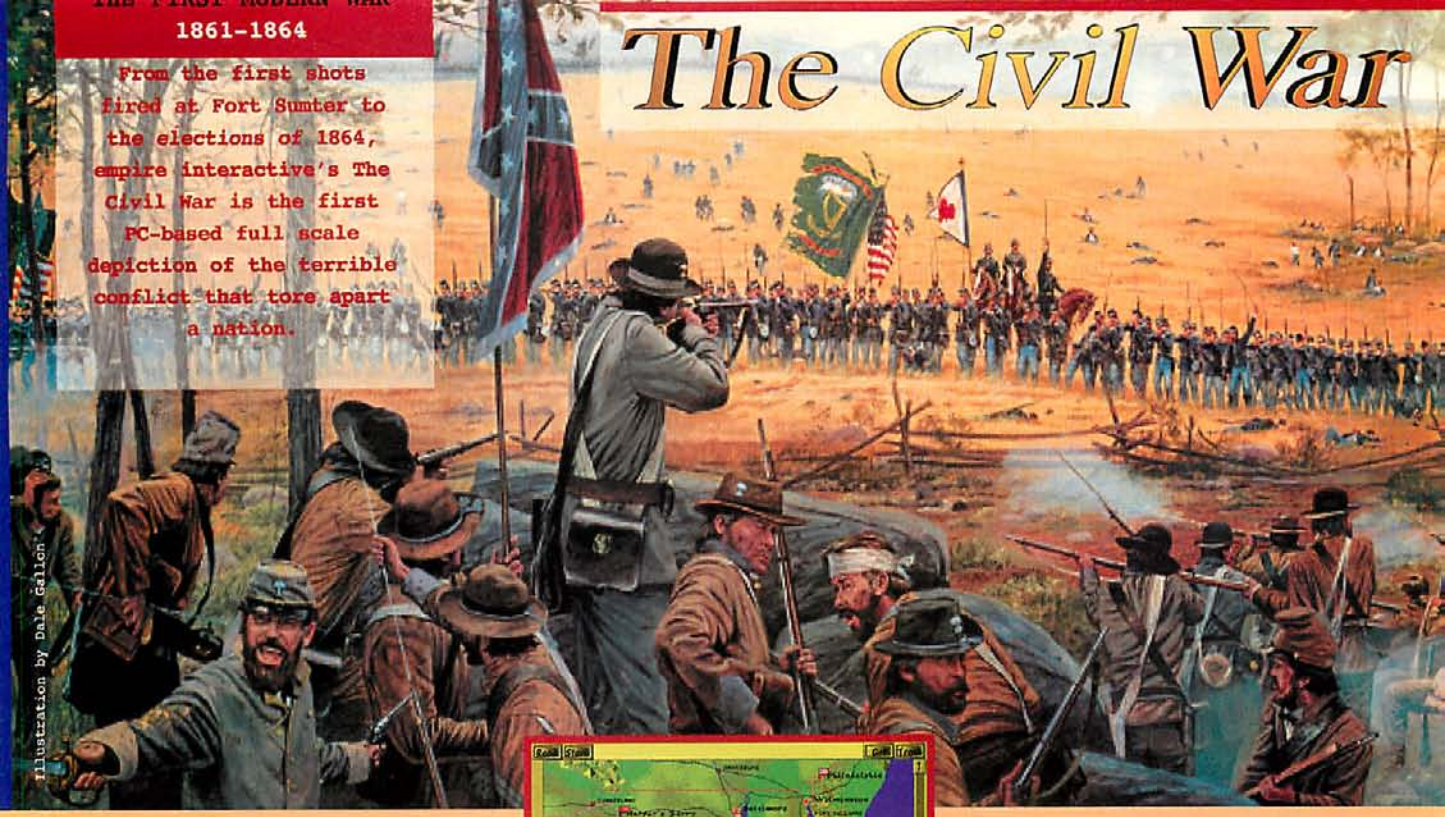

Illustration by Dale Gallon

This innovative game will redefine the genre and provide for the first time a stunning backdrop for full action battles. A 3D texture mapped battlefield with Gouraud shaded terrain lets you control your forces in spectacular combat sequences. In The Civil War, you plan the campaigns and fight the key battles that will determine the fate of the nation.

The Civil War is a superb strategy game that accurately recreates the difficulties of this the first modern war.

The campaign section allows you as a Union or Confederate commander to control the resources and the movement of armies over a detailed map of the USA. Recruit and train new armies and fleets, build fortifications and railways. A strong economic base is essential for victory.

Using Empire Interactive's Intuitive Combat Control Interface (ICCI), strategic orders can be given to the overall forces or just to specific units. During the battle action situations, zoom in from a dazzling panoramic view to minutely detailed combat level action! Watch each individual soldier react to rifle and cannon fire!

The strategic game is suitably vast, but well organised and very playable

Battlefields can be rotated 360Þ giving you powers of observation that real Civil War commanders could only dream about.

Tutorial battles and a massive on-line database coupled with historical references throughout the manual give you fascinating insight into the trials and glories of The Civil War. Review information regarding famous generals and weapons! Enjoy songs from the period and read accounts written by the newspaper or soldiers themselves!

Could you destroy "Stonewall" Jackson at Manassas and end the War? Would Grants Army of The Tennessee stand against you at Shiloh?

Two Player mode available with play over serial link or modem.

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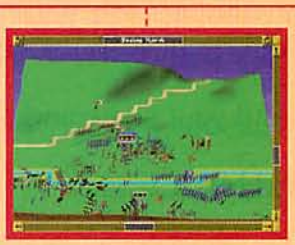

IBM PC CD-ROM

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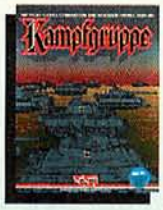


KAMPFGRUPPE
STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS, 1985

Designed by wargame deity Gary Grigsby, KAMPFGRUPPE is the granddaddy of Eastern Front WWII wargames, the benchmark against which many wargames have since been measured. Graphically, KAMPFGRUPPE was the first game to offer a miniatures-style look on the computer, although the black and white maps and units are primitive compared to today's high-res games. The sound was ahead of its time, with stereo explosions on the Amiga version adding a lot to the enjoyment. The challenging AI is one of the main reasons that this venerable classic has been dusted off and made available by **Novastar Games** (916-624-7113), who acquired the rights to republish the game from **SSI**. Military hardware freaks will find that the variety of units—*Wespe* self-propelled artillery, T34/85 tanks, *Hetzer* tank destroyers, and even flame-throwers for infantry—make this an enjoyable WWII tactical game even in today's competitive market. KAMPFGRUPPE's spirit may be recaptured and recast for the '90s in Gary Grigsby's forthcoming STEEL PANTHERS.

KING'S QUEST V
SIERRA, 1990

No graphic adventure series pushed technological advancement quite like the KING'S QUEST series. Graphically, the series led the way from EGA to VGA up through SVGA in terms of video cards. Along with SPACE QUEST III, KING'S QUEST IV was the first graphic adventure to provide solid sound card support for multiple drivers (AdLib, Covox and Roland), as well as a reason to use them—fabulous musical soundtracks by well-known composers. KING'S QUEST V used new scanning techniques to offer beautifully painted backgrounds that many simply could not believe (a precursor to some of the resplendent rotoscoping used in KQ6 and KQ7). KQ5 also heralded Sierra's controversial move to the parserless interface. No longer were gamers forced to type commands into a text parser, as pointing and clicking on command icons became the order of the day. KING'S QUEST V was an important landmark in the best-selling graphic adventure series of all time, and we pay tribute to the entire series and its creator, Roberta Williams, by honoring this game.

CIVILIZATION (MicroProse, 1991)
FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
GUNSHIP (MicroProse, 1989)
HARPOON (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
KING'S QUEST V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
LEMMINGS (Psygnosis, 1991)
LINKS 386 PRO (Access Software, 1992)
M-1 TANK PLATOON (MicroProse, 1989)
RAILROAD TYCOON (MicroProse, 1990)
RED BARON (Dynamix, 1990)
THEIR FINEST HOUR (LucasArts, 1989)
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (LucasArts, 1990)
ULTIMA VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD (Origin Systems, 1992)
WING COMMANDER I & II (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
WOLFENSTEIN 3-D (id Software, 1992)

Inductees prior to 1989

BATTLE CHESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)
CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)
EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)
EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)
GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)
KAMPFGRUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MECH BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)
PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)
SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)
STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)
THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)
ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)
ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)
WIZARDRY (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

THE SCORE

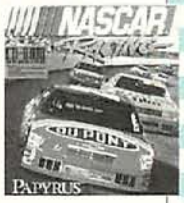
TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	9.87
2	Sherlock Holmes CD I	Viacom	9.55
3	Gabriel Knight	Sierra	9.42
4	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	9.38
5	Star Control II	Accolade	9.33
6	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	9.30
7	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	9.25
8	Under A Killing Moon	Access	9.09
9	Quest for Glory I (VGA)	Sierra	9.05
10	Eric the Unready	Legend	9.04

TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Betrayal at Krondor	Dynamix	9.44
2	Ultima Underworld II	Origin	9.42
3	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	9.37
4	Lands of Lore	Virgin	9.25
5	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	9.11
6	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpent Isle	Origin	9.08
7	Wizardry VII: Crusaders of Savant	Sir-Tech	8.97
8	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	8.88
9	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	8.81
10	Veil of Darkness	SSI	8.74

TOP SIMULATION GAMES



	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	10.05
2	US Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.62
3	Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	9.55
4	Indy Car Racing	Papyrus	9.43
5	World Circuit	MicroProse	9.36
6	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	NovaLogic	9.27
7	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	9.25
8	Stunt Island	Disney	9.00
9	Hornet	Spectrum HoloByte	8.96
10	Aces Over Europe	Dynamix	8.66

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	X-COM	MicroProse	10.37
2	Master of Orion	MicroProse	10.21
3	Warlords II	SSG	9.95
4	Dune II	Virgin	9.82
5	Master of Magic	MicroProse	9.71
6	Warcraft	Blizzard	9.61
7	Sim City 2000	Maxis	9.58
8	Conquered Kingdoms	QQP	9.53
9	Merchant Prince	QQP	9.08
10	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	9.08

READER POLL #128

TOP 100 GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
✲1	Panzer General	SSI	WG	10.57
✲2	Wing Commander 3	Origin	AC	10.55
✲3	X-COM	MicroProse	ST	10.37
4	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	AC	10.33
5	DOOM	id Software	AC	10.24
6	Master of Orion	MicroProse	ST	10.21
7	Heretic	id Software	AC	10.14
8	Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	AC	10.08
✲9	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	SI	10.05
10	Warlords II	SSG	ST	9.95
✲11	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	AD	9.87
12	DOOM II	id Software	AC	9.86
13	Dune II	Virgin	ST	9.82
14	Master of Magic	MicroProse	ST	9.71
✲15	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	SP	9.64
16	US Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.62
17	Warcraft	Blizzard	ST	9.61
18	X-Wing	LucasArts	AC	9.60
19	Sim City 2000	Maxis	ST	9.58
	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.58
21	Sherlock Holmes CD I	Viacom	AD	9.55
	Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	SI	9.55
23	Conquered Kingdoms	QQP	ST	9.53
24	V for Victory: Velikiye Luki	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.52
25	NHL Hockey	Electronic Arts	SP	9.49
✲26	Betrayal at Krondor	Dynamix	RP	9.44
	War in Russia	SSI	WG	9.44
28	Indy Car Racing	Papyrus	SI	9.43
29	Ultima Underworld II	Origin	RP	9.42
	Gabriel Knight	Sierra	AD	9.42
31	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	AD	9.38
32	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.37
33	World Circuit	MicroProse	SI	9.36
34	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	WG	9.35
35	Pacific War	SSI	WG	9.34
36	Star Control II	Accolade	AD,AC	9.33
37	Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	WG	9.31
38	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	AD	9.30
	System Shock	Origin	AC	9.30
40	Comanche: Maximum Overkill	NovaLogic	SI	9.27
41	Lands of Lore	Virgin	RP	9.25
	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	AD	9.25
	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	SI	9.25
44	V for Victory: Gold Juno Sword	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	9.18
45	Privateer	Origin	AC	9.16
46	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.11
47	Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	9.09
48	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	ST	9.08
	Merchant Prince	QQP	ST	9.08
	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpent Isle	Origin	RP	9.08

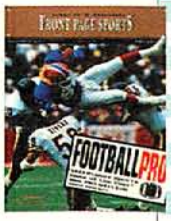
TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Panzer General	SSI	10.57
2	V for Victory: Market Garden	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.58
3	V for Victory: Velikiye Luki	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.52
4	War in Russia	SSI	9.44
5	Carriers at War Construction Kit	SSG	9.35
6	Pacific War	SSI	9.34
7	Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	9.31
8	V for Victory: Gold Juno Sword	Three-Sixty Pacific	9.18
9	Tanks	SSI	9.00
10	Clash of Steel	SSI	8.98

TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander 3	Origin	10.55
2	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	10.33
3	DOOM	id Software	10.24
4	Heretic	id Software	10.14
5	Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	10.08
6	DOOM II	id Software	9.86
7	X-Wing	LucasArts	9.60
8	System Shock	Origin	9.30
9	Privateer	Origin	9.16
10	The Horde	Crystal Dynamics	8.50

TOP SPORTS GAMES



	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	9.64
2	NHL Hockey	Electronic Arts	9.49
3	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	8.93
4	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	8.78
5	PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	8.76
6	Wayne Gretzky Hockey III	Bethesda	8.30
7	MicroLeague Baseball 4	MicroLeague	8.23
8	Jordan In Flight	Electronic Arts	7.85
9	Microsoft Golf 2.0	Microsoft	7.43
10	Ultimate Football	MicroProse	7.26

Vote!

You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The *CGW* Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the *CGW* Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.

51	Syndicate	Electronic Arts	ST,AC	9.07
52	Quest for Glory I (VGA)	Sierra	AD,RP	9.05
53	Eric the Unready	Legend	AD	9.04
54	Stunt Island	Disney	SI	9.00
	Battles of Destiny	QQP	ST	9.00
	Tanks	SSI	WG	9.00
	VGA Planets	Tim Wisseman	ST	9.00
58	Clash of Steel	SSI	WG	8.98
59	Wizardry VII: Crusaders of Savant	Sir-Tech	RP	8.97
	Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	WG	8.97
	Relentless	Electronic Arts	AD	8.97
	Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	ST	8.97
63	Hornet	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.96
	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharmacist	Sierra	AD	8.96
65	Alone in the Dark	I-Motion	AD	8.95
66	Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin	AD	8.94
67	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	SP	8.93
	King's Quest VII	Sierra	AD	8.93
69	The Incredible Machine	Dynamix	ST	8.92
70	The Island of Dr. Brain	Sierra	ST	8.91
71	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	RP	8.88
72	Incredible Toons	Dynamix	ST	8.86
73	Empire Deluxe	New World Computing	ST	8.82
	Carriers at War II	SSG	WG	8.82
75	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	RP	8.81
76	Rex Nebular	MicroProse	AD	8.80
	Serf City	SSI	ST	8.80
78	Harpoon II	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	8.78
	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	SP	8.78
80	Myst	Broderbund	AD	8.77
81	PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	SP	8.76
82	Genghis Khan II	Koei	WG	8.74
	Veil of Darkness	SSI	RP	8.74
	Dracula Unleashed	Viacom	AD	8.74
85	Aces Over Europe	Dynamix	SI	8.66
86	F-15 Strike Eagle III	MicroProse	SI	8.65
87	MiG-29	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.64
88	Superheros of Hoboken	Legend	AD	8.61
89	Space Quest V: Mutation	Sierra	AD	8.60
90	Hand Of Fate	Westwood Studios	AD	8.56
91	Lords of the Realm	Impressions	ST	8.55
92	Kasparov's Gambit	Electronic Arts	ST	8.54
93	Rules of Engagement 2	Impressions	ST	8.52
94	The Horde	Crystal Dynamics	AC,ST	8.50
95	Star Trek: Judgment Rites	Interplay	AD	8.49
	Prince of Persia 2	Broderbund	AC	8.49
97	The Lost Vikings	Interplay	AC	8.46
	Menzoberranzan	SSI	RP	8.46
99	Sid n' Al's Incredible Toons	Dynamix	ST	8.45
	Challenge of the Five Realms	MicroPlay	RP	8.45

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above. ✱ = Top game of type. Dark Teal = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports

The Computer Gaming World Poll

A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

PATCHES

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common. Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs.

ZiffNet These patches can usually be downloaded from most major networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZiffNet), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's own BBSs or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase. **Red indicates new files.**

Colonization Version 3.0: Corrects reported problems and adds a map editor. Works *only* with the U.S. version of the game.

Doom V 1.9: Official Id upgrade works *only* with version 1.666. 2/8/95

5th Fleet Version 1.2 Update: Fixes some reported bugs. 2/2/95

Flash Traffic Installation Update: New INSTALL.EXE expands sound card support, includes drivers for MS Sound System and cards with the Ensoniq chip. 1/27/95

FrontLines V1.01: Fixes reported bugs. 2/10/95

Front Page Sports: Baseball '94 V1.02: Fixes many reported problems, including crash bugs and General Manager AI as well as roster handling bugs. 2/3/95

Front Page Sports: Football Pro '95 V1.02: Adds fans to the stands and enables the CD-ROM version of the game to access extra plays from the CD, plus many other enhancements. 1/26/95

Hammer of the Gods Update: Fixes mouse problems, low memory issues and all known related issues. 2/22/95

Harpoon Classic Macintosh V1.57: Fixes some missile targetting bugs; works with version 1.5 or better. 2/3/95

Harpoon Classic for Windows V1.53b: Corrects several reported GPF errors, and fully implements all version 1.32 missile changes including bearing-only attacks; works with version 1.5 or better. 2/2/95

King's Quest VII Update: Corrects all known problems, but is *not* compatible with V1.1. 1/11/95

Master of Magic V1.3: Latest upgrade to MicroProse strategy/magic game with numerous fixes, new features, and major AI enhancements. 2/23/95

MetalTech: Earthsiege V1.01: Adds difficulty levels to career mode and support for Thrustmaster WCS throttle.

NASCAR V1.1 Patch: Problems corrected in this version include: pole bug, interrupt 10 or higher for sound card settings and some problems with SET CONTROLS function when using ThrustMaster T1 and other pedal units. 12/19/94

Out of this World Macintosh V1.0.3: Bypasses the need for the code wheel, fixes incompatiblities with System 7.5 and takes care of the white screen problem with the PowerPC. 2/17/95

Panzer General V1.1 Update: Separate CD-ROM and floppy patches fix some reported problems. 1/6/95

Return to Zork V1.2: Fixes many bugs and inconsistencies in gameplay, and fixes many audio driver problems. 2/17/95.

SimTower V1.1 Update: Macintosh only patch fixes problems with metro station, random lock ups and some graphics glitches. 1/20/95

Tanks V1.25: *Unofficial* patch by Norm Koger adds panic fire and retreats, hidden AT guns, variable weather, horse drawn artillery, reduced effectiveness air and artillery and much more. 1/25/95

Ultima 8 V2.12: Comprehensive patch includes fixes to many problems as well as several game enhancements. 2/17/95.

Voyeur Patch: Installs newer sound drivers. Should fix most problems. 2/22/95.

Warcraft: Orcs and Humans Disk/CD-ROM Update: Works with both the disk and CD-ROM versions, contains unit editor and cheat codes. 1/27/95

Warlords II Power Mac V1.04: Speeds up redraw of hidden maps on Power Macintoshes. 2/1/95

Wing Commander III QVision Patch: This patch will fix problems with the Compaq QVision in SVGA mode. 2/17/95

Wing Commander III Joystick patch: Fixes reported joystick lockups when starting up WC3. 1/2/95

Wing Commander III ThrustMaster Patch: Adds support for the ThrustMaster coolie hat.

Wing Commander Armada Proving Grounds Add-on: Adds 6 player network support to Armada. 1/2/95

Wing Commander Armada v1.0 Patch: Fixes reported problems. 1/2/95

Publisher BBS Numbers

Many of these patches are available direct from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N-8-1.

Accolade (408) 296-8800

Activision (310) 820-1276

Apogee (508) 368-7036

Bethesda (301) 990-7552

Broderbund (415) 883-5889

Capstone (305) 374-6872

Creative Labs (405) 742-6660

Id Software (508) 368-4137

Impressions (617) 225-2042.

InterPlay (714) 252-2822

LucasArts (415) 257-3070

Maxis (510) 254-3869

MicroProse (410) 785-1841

Microsoft (206) 936-6735

NovaLogic (818) 774-9528

Origin (512) 331-4446

Papyrus (617) 576-7472

Sierra Online (209) 683-4463

Spectrum HoloByte (510) 522-8909

SSI (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739 6623

Virgin Interactive (714) 833-3305

NR 13

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The Tell-Tale Bag

by Edgar Alan Lovecraft

Should you find these scrawlings upon my bag, you, dear reader will comprehend the dreadful mystery. I am not myself. Nor have I ever been. The schizophrenic guises that adorned the by-lines of my columns were not, as many may have supposed, the *nom de plumes* of one forced to remain incognito, but the trapped souls of beings who long ago fled this mortal coil. And I will have joined them by the time these blood-drenched consonants catch your eyes.

I cannot aver that I was not cautioned. I was told the Victorian was cursed, that the local citizenry believed it haunted. Yet, it was so brightly painted, so beautiful, I could not believe this glorious abode, this antiquarian dream house could play host to the denizens of hell. From its bright sun porch through the lead-glassed sitting room and formal dining room, it was a romance come alive. I could not have conceived a more perfect design. Even had I the use of KLIK & PLAY 2, the upcoming offspring of **Maxis**' brilliant game design utility. Even with the new product's ability to use .AVI and .MOV files, as well as the capacity to write your own .DLL files, I could not have constructed such perfection. I stepped into this domicile and found myself transported through time. Nay, not to the time of **Impressions**' CAESAR II, an expanded sequel to the game of city management in the Roman Empire which will offer more strategic options than its ancestor, but to the time of railroad empire building, frontier expansion, and Abner Doubleday's new game. I found myself so mesmerized by tinted stereopticon views of the era that I couldn't even imagine what boys of that day would think of **Time Warner**'s RBI BASEBALL, the new computer game version of the classic cartridge hit.

As I walked through the formal dining room, I spied the sliding doors of one bedroom ajar. I peeked through the narrow view and felt my neck snap backward in shock. There, beside the traditional window seat, rested the most unwelcome anachronisms. Though it was obviously a child's room, it did not contain the wooden horses and spinning tops of the era I expected to see. Rather, there were metal and plastic trucks askew across the floor as though some great debacle had occurred. Had my mind been clear, I am sure I would have thought of **Apogee**'s monster truck game which is currently under development. I would have remembered that some wanted to turn the game into a CAR WARS type game, but the game's developers were opposed to the idea. I would have wished that I could have spoken to those designers and agreed with the CAR WARS advocates.

Yet, these vexing toys disrupted my thoughts. Angrily, I muttered that they might as well have planted a computer-controlled telescope in the window and disrupted the venerable ambiance by playing space games—**Interactive Broadcasting**'s ARMORED ASSAULT, a multi-player game which features futuristic tank battles and planetary mining and is being designed to be played over commercial networks, or CORPORATE COLONIES, **QQP**'s outer space business game which emphasizes both strategy and economics with just enough arcade elements thrown in to act as spice.

I continued my peripatetic viewing of the edifice by entering the basement. There, I found what I thought was an innocuous bauble, a child's mask cut from a paper grocery bag. Would that I had not placed it on my head! For, as soon as I did so, strange visions assaulted my mind. I saw the hideous visage, the deformed physiognomy from a horror film I had viewed at university—the dreaded *Pumpkinhead*. On the visions came, unwelcome and unbidden. I sensed that **Electronic Arts** would distribute BLOODWINGS: PUMPKINHEAD 2, a traditional maze-oriented role-playing game with a twist. The game will have lots of full motion video upon which you much click to grab items out of the horror movie scene. Then, I sensed myself becoming a succession of persons—ethnic caricatures, protagonists from film fiction, composite literary figures, and satirical silhouettes of software industry celebrities. I realized my existence was a sham, my vaunted column a hollow prevarication, an unnecessary stumbling block. And then, I knew the truth. I was mad. The bag had forced multiple identities upon me, thrusting me into the assumption of one personality after another—month by month—year after year. I forced myself to remove the bag and end this lunacy. Yes, dear reader, should you find these raving declarations of a lunatic, written in his own blood, you will know I have been successful—haunted no more by this cavernous bag of many persons, this rumor bag to which I have been enslaved. Farewell.

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