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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The Premier Computer Game Magazine

May 1993 / Number

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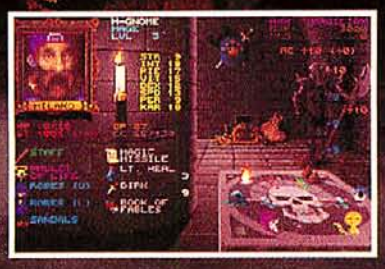

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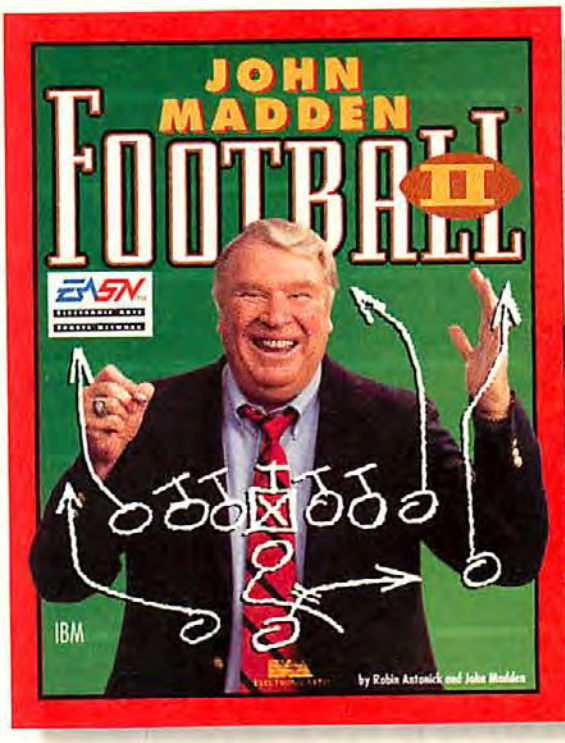

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Dancing with SEALs

Simulation Therapy With Electronic Arts' *SEAL Team*

by Johnny L. Wilson

Sneak Previews are not designed to be reviews. They are feature articles based on "works in progress" that CGW's editors have deemed worthy of early coverage. These articles are not intended to provide the final word on a product, since we expect to publish appropriate review coverage when the game is finished.

An acquaintance of mine has a son who happens to be the same age as my daughter. Both offspring are in their last year of high school. That makes me sensitive to any stories about adolescents who are venturing into adulthood. What got my attention, though, was the fact that my friend, a Vietnam veteran, had a son who desperately wanted to enlist in the service (special forces, in particular) and get involved in a "hot one."

I told this gentleman that my daughter was a "peacenik" like her father, and I had hoped that all of her generation had learned the painful lessons of war. I had hoped that their generation would be, as corny as it sounds, spared the casualties that our generation had faced. He responded that he couldn't get through to his son. His son's favorite film is *The Green Berets* (starring John Wayne) and the young man watches it regularly, firmly believing that the glory depicted in the film is the glory of war. My friend tried to get his son to watch more realistic presentations of the Vietnam Conflict, citing *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon* in particular. The upshot is that I am extremely proud of my daughter's direction in life. My friend is rather disappointed in his son.

I wonder what the reaction of this young man would be to Electronic Arts' *SEAL Team*. Would he be affected at all by the moving cinematic sequences at the end of each mission where the team returns and the program only shows the survivors getting off the boat or out of the helicopter? Would there be glory or revulsion as he adjusted his weapon to full automatic and fired, just as a black pajama-clad VC started standing and raising his hands in surrender? Would he nervously peer at the screen, occasionally jumping, as a white butterfly crossed the screen or a blue bird flew out of the bushes or would those feints of nature be brushed aside as an annoyance, a waste of programming energy? I think they are a great touch.

Would he pay any attention to the elaborate insertion and extraction scenes where the SEAL team must wade out into the water to reach their objective or be picked up by their support boat? Would he realize that the on-screen bull session that precedes each mission was talking about just such bodies of water when one of these stalwart commandoes spoke of wearing pantyhose in order to be able to remove leeches easier? Would he realize that his air-conditioned house was nothing like the hot, humid jungles being depicted in beautifully-rendered terrain on the screen? Would he be affected by the sight of fallen polygon-filled comrades behind him and other team members rushing medical aid to said comrade? Would he recognize that the simulation makes it easy for gamers to distinguish between the black pajamas of "Charlie" and the blue pajamas of civilians? Would he place any importance upon the fact that VC guerrillas always surrender (in my playing experience) *legitimately* to the player's team rather than pulling any diabolical tricks like being prewired with explosives?

NILO: "An F-4 Wild Weasel pilot aiding the B-52 bombing north of Saigon went down."

How Realistic Is It?

Electronic Arts' *SEAL Team* is a first-person simulation of small unit action in the jungles of Vietnam. It is graphically impressive in that it presents a more detailed environment than many games which use polygon-filled graphics, and because it uses cinematic techniques to enhance the mission briefing and debriefing, as well as the insertion of the team into and extraction of the team from the action. The polygon-filled figures seem more realistic than those in *Wolfenstein 3-D* and the action feels smooth and convincing.

The interface is fascinating because it uses the mouse in a fascinating analog of movement. When one wishes the team to move forward, the mouse must be pushed forward in deliberate steps. When one wishes to go faster, more such mouse steps are required. To slow, one reverses the procedure by simulating mouse steps backward. To stop, one continues pulling the mouse back. To back up, one continues the reverse mouse steps. To turn left, one clicks the left mouse button. To turn right, one clicks the right mouse button.

Such an interface adds to the verisimilitude of the experience, particularly when combined with the

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capacity to move upright, lumber in a crouch, or crawl in a prone position (performed with a press of the 1, 2 and 3 keys respectively) and the graphic views to support such perspectives.

In many ways, *SEAL Team* is extremely realistic. The missions follow a logical progression, and the team has adequate resources to accomplish them (in contrast to the chaos faced by the grunts in the jungle). Some missions only require intelligence gathering and return, while others require the player to use demolition skills or set up an ambush. The weapons have accurate rates of fire and ranges, the role of the support boats and aircraft seems reasonable, and the objectives are based on actual mission data from the Vietnam era.

Verisimilitude breaks down somewhat (as in most simulations) when one considers how much damage the gamer's character can take before being killed. On one mission, my unit was shelled by a mortar attack as soon as we stepped out of the river. Although one of the team members was wounded, this had very little impact on our ability to carry out our mission. After another ambush, one of the team members was forced to carry the other member and this did slow us somewhat. Yet, I think we would all have been wasted in a real ambush. Of course, being *too* realistic can kill a game.

Further, although the game has extremely attractive graphics, current machine speeds do not allow programmers the ability to really make the jungle as dense as it truly is, and travelling through the underbrush and swampy rice paddies seemed significantly easier than I would have expected it to be in real life. Again, a simulation should not be so realistic that it is no longer interesting to play, but I would have liked to see some game feature that indicated something more of the unfriendly terrain. In many ways, the simulation is too pretty. Many gamers, however, will prefer the less inhibited movement system chosen by the designers than the sluggish restrictions I might have imposed on the sim.

Finally, though the simulation accurately conveys *some* of the problem of civilian casualties which was faced by personnel during the Vietnam Conflict, the gamer certainly has it significantly easier than the veterans did. The program not only color-codes civilians (blue) and VC (black), but the targeting diamond designates (at least in the pre-release version we examined) whether that potential target is a civilian or Charlie. As anyone who has studied the history of the Vietnam Conflict is aware, it wasn't always easy to tell the "good guys" from the "bad guys." One thing is certain, I am glad that the design team took the time to put non-combatants in the game. I really hate games where one can shoot everyone and everything with impunity. Fortunately, *SEAL Team* has more character than such games.

Mission Accomplished

Whatever my quibbles about verisimilitude, I must confess that *SEAL Team* has the potential to be a phenomenal game. I was against the war in Vietnam and avoided it with all my resources, yet I found myself drawn into the humanity of the game. For me, the goal of the game was to survive. I selected my player character from a selection of files describing each recruit who had graduated from SEAL training and carefully nurtured him through the campaign. In my initial campaign, he won a lot of purple hearts and was often extracted from unsuccessful missions by the skin of his teeth.

Yet, every time my character returned to base, I felt a sense of accomplishment — even if we botched the mission. Somehow, it was a more personal issue than when I brought planes and submarines home in other simulations. Somehow, it was more important to me than winning medals, even though there are plenty of medals to be won in *SEAL Team*.

I also think that the skill-based nature of the character selection adds something to this personalization, as do the atmosphere-setting conversations between team members prior to each mission. The deaths of my brother SEAL members on various missions and the cinematic segues between an extraction and the mission debriefing certainly brought the message home.

Further, I will never forget the time I switched my weapon from semi-automatic to automatic fire and pulled the trigger (by hitting the ENTER key), only to watch a VC stand to surrender just before my burst sliced through him. Im sure it wouldn't dissuade my friend's son from enlisting in special forces, but it sure might open his eyes to what's in store.

Technologically, *SEAL Team* is an outstanding advance. It offers all the bells and whistles of a vehicle simulation with a clever interface and a design that makes gamers really care about the results. It is a showcase product graphically with a tremendous amount of game play. Give the design team a medal. They deserve it. **CGW**

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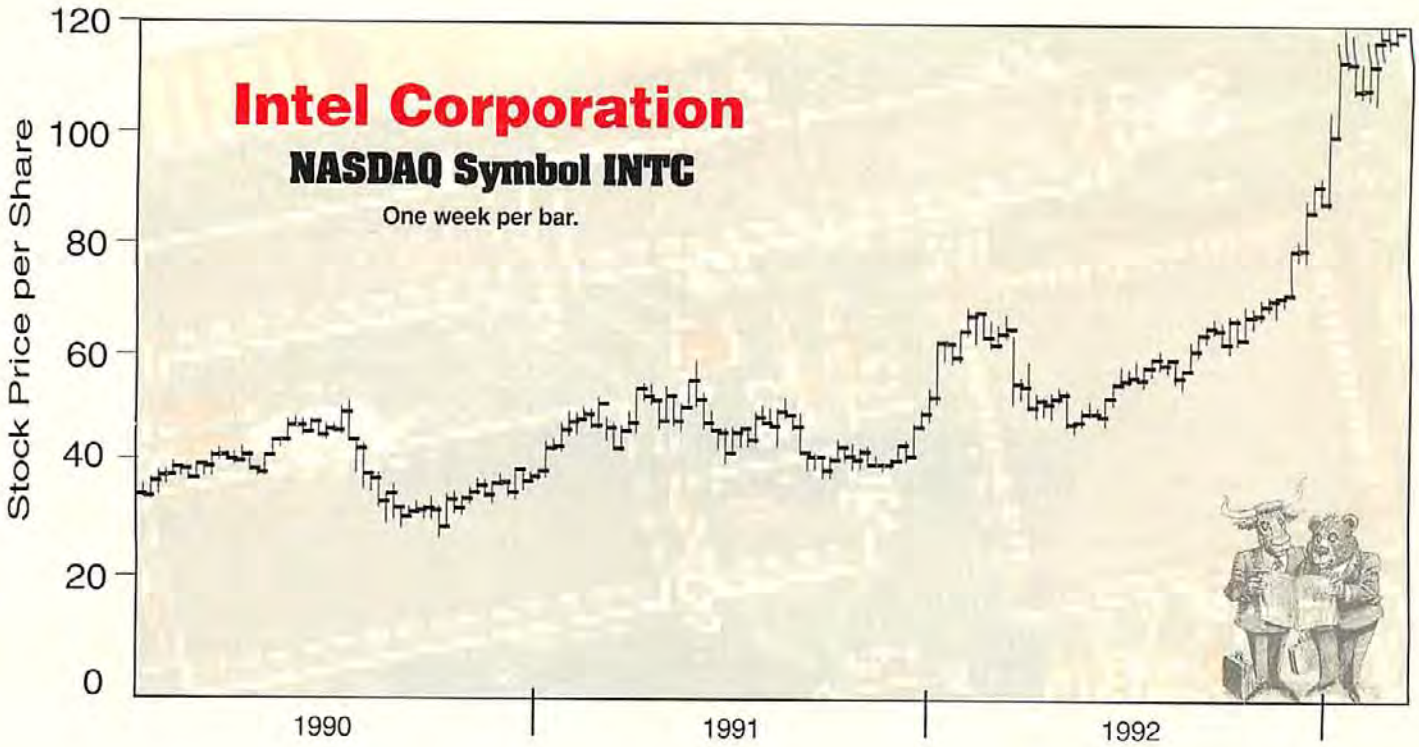
STOCK WATCH

A monthly look at the Computer Entertainment Stock Market



Intel Processors Drive Profits And Computers

Apparently, computer gamers aren't the only ones who think processing power is important. There seems to be a real hunger for faster, more powerful processors in the marketplace, and **Intel Corporation** (NASDAQ: INTC) has the earnings to prove it. On February 10, 1993, Intel announced earnings per share of $4.97 for 1992. This was approximately a 27% increase over the earnings of the previous year ($3.92 per share, representing a 23% increase over the previous year). In addition, the company paid its initial quarterly dividend in December of 1992 ($.10 per share).

In an interesting move which occurred at press time, the company announced its intent to offer a 2-for-1 stock split on their common stock. As the chart shows, Intel has had a tremendous run over the last year, from around the $46 per share mark to its press time quote of $116. In order to provide more affordable shares for the average investor, the company's directors have elected to offer the split which would, in effect, halve the price per share (while doubling the number of shares held by existing shareholders).

As readers who peruse the story on the *Pentium*™ processor (see the following pages) should realize, Intel is expecting to play a big role in the lives of gamers. At press time, the *Pentium* processor had not been officially announced and **Standard & Poors** (providers of the most followed rankings on Wall Street) had already estimated 1993 income at $6 per share. Whether the new technology will have significant impact on these earnings estimates or not will remain to be seen. In the meantime, cutting-edge technology, strong demand for existing processors, and sound management make Intel a stock to watch over the long haul.

Ironically, Intel's success is a mixed bag for computer gamers. Their continually improving processors make new and improved games possible, but the proliferation of advanced machines creates an accelerating pattern of obsolescence (meaning gamers have to upgrade more often) and provides a temptation for some game developers to try too much (resulting in "buggy" products). In the long run, the introduction of new processors should create a better gaming atmosphere. CGW

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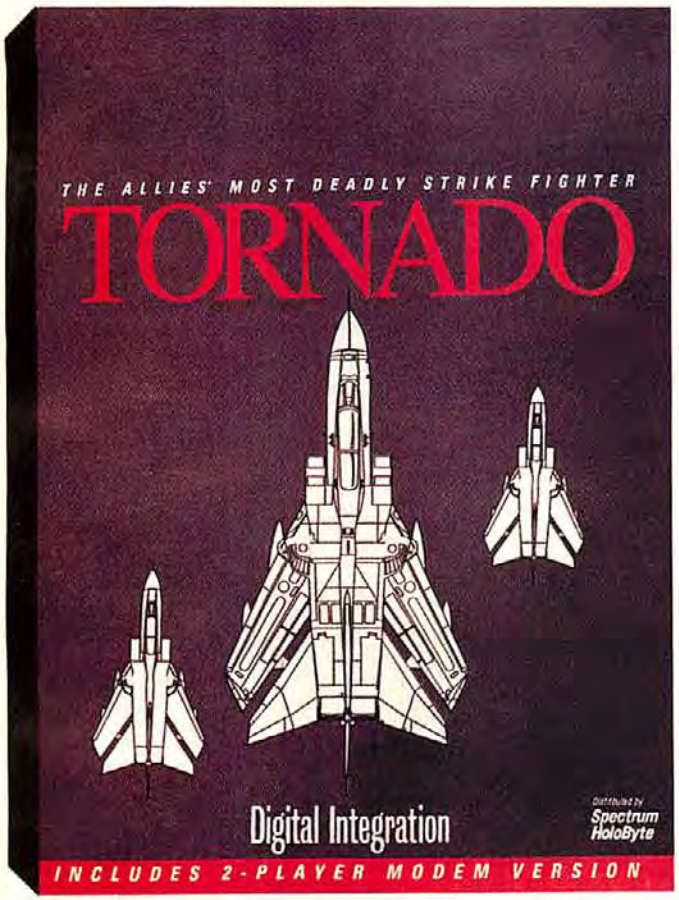

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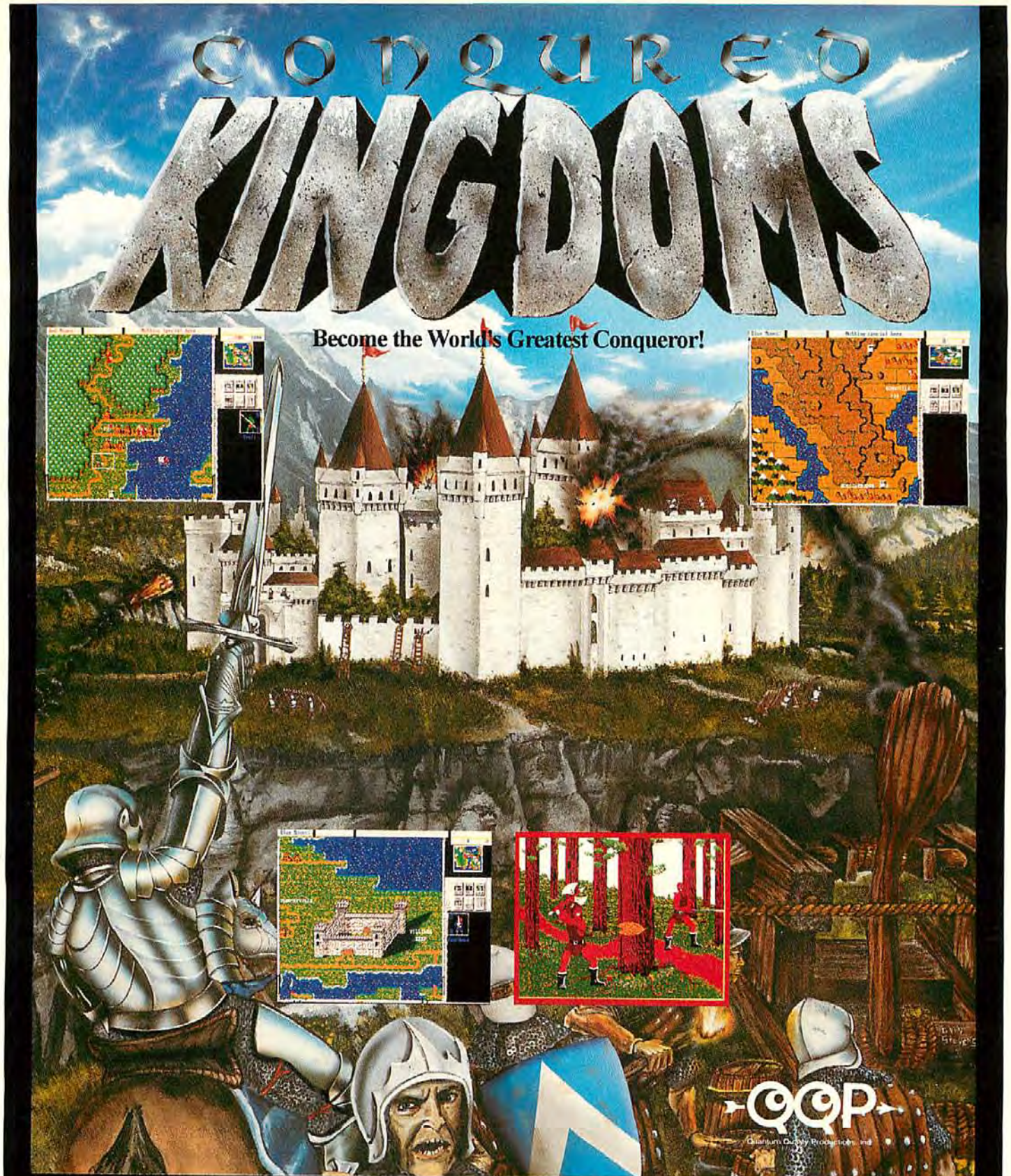

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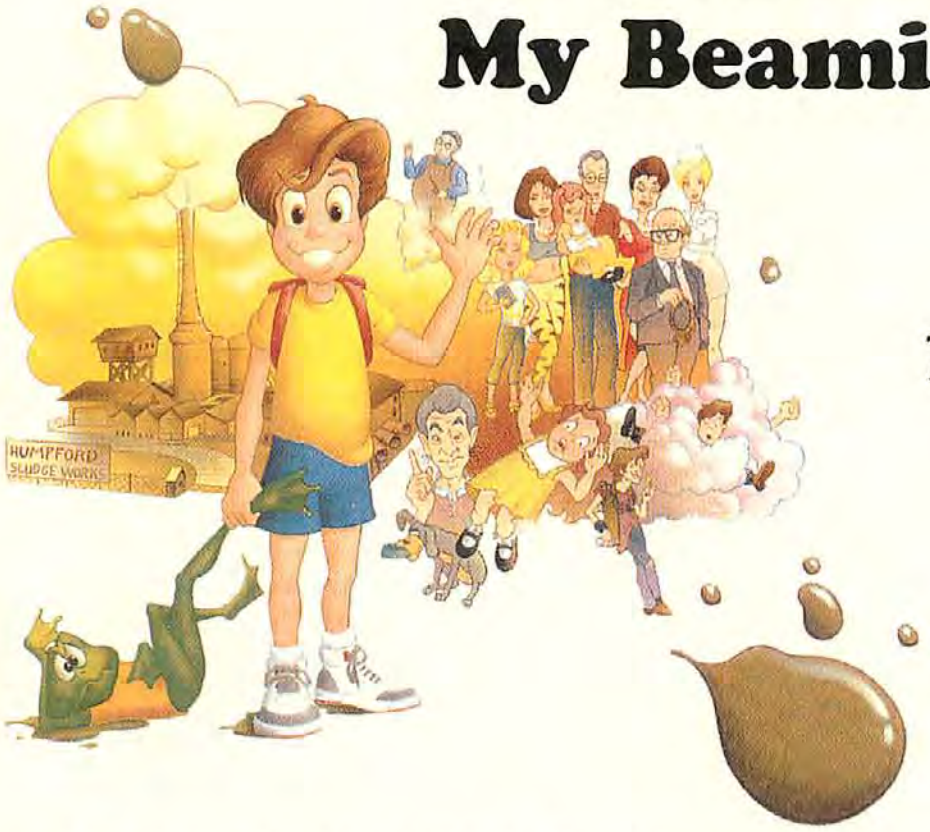

Dynamix' *The Adventures of Willy Beamish*

by Charles Ardai

Having just reviewed Sierra's CD-ROM edition of *Space Quest IV* (issue #105), a first-rate enhancement of a solid original, I am particularly disappointed to see what sister company Dynamix has done to *The Adventures of Willy Beamish*. Well-chosen voices and strong readings made *Space Quest IV* smarter, faster and funnier. *Willy Beamish*, on the other hand, is practically ruined by a cast of voice actors who climb all over each other to give their characters the ugliest voices this side of Saturday Night Live's "Pat." In the process, they trample the storyline, louse up the jokes, and generally make a hash of what started out as a pretty good game.

One wonders how this happened. Did CD Director Scott Wallin deliberately instruct his actors to read their lines as slowly as they do? The performances seem to be paced and pitched at the comprehension level of a four-year old, with lots of strained pauses between words and actors speaking in condescending baby-talk intonations.

Did Voice Casting Director Sher Alltucker (who, in a fit of inspiration, cast herself as both the villain and the heroine of the story) think it was clever to have the singularly untalented Roxy Ragozzino supply the voices for all of Willy's female relatives? In the most ill-advised triplecast since NBC's showing of the Summer Olympics last year, Ragozzino gives readings as Willy's mom, big sister, and little sister that are as subtle as a kick in the pants and as enjoyable to hear as a car alarm at three in the morning. (Mom is a whiny yuppie, Tiffany a whiny valley girl, Brianna a whiny toddler.) Sitting at a dinner table with these three harpies is like dying and waking up in Sartre's *No Exit*.

Did Michael Zibelman, who struggles along bravely in the role of Willy, never ask politely whether the game might not be that much better if he screamed "Yahooey!" a little less often? Did no one play the game before it went out to the stores to see whether anyone could stand to listen to it?

We'll never know. Somehow the game made it to the light of day wearing all its flaws like so much Spring finery. That no one stepped in somewhere along the way with a reality check — "Time out, guys, are we doing this right?" — is remarkable. It seems, nevertheless, to be the case.

Slick Willy

Willy Beamish is an attempt to present a kid's-eye view of being a kid. The game consists of a series of dirty-hands-and-skinned-knees adventures in suburbia starring a precocious (but not geeky), cute (but not cloying), mischievous (but not rotten), tousle-headed, videogame-addicted, chore-avoiding moppet.

TITLE:	The Adventures of Willy Beamish CD-ROM
SYSTEM:	IBM with CD-ROM
PRICE:	$69.95
PROTECTION:	None
DESIGNERS:	Jeff Tunnell, Meryl & Tony Perutz
PUBLISHER:	Sierra/Dynamix Coarsegold, CA (800) 326-6654

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CGW-593

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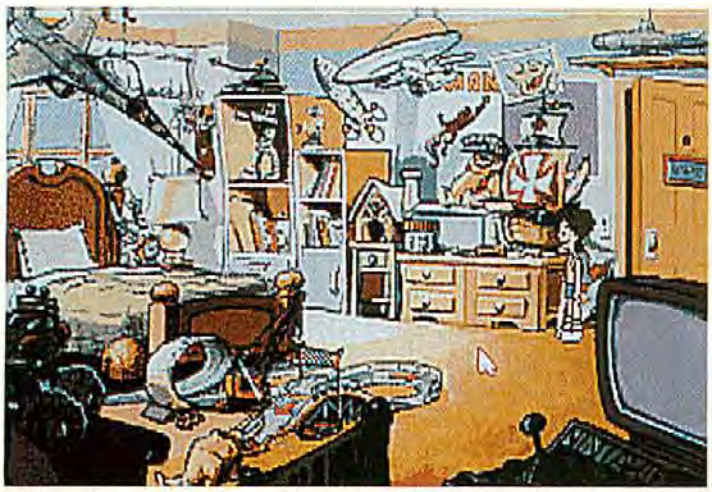
Circle Reader Service #71

Willy is a good kid but he's no angel. He lives in a fantasy world out of a 1950's sitcom (everyone seems to be white and upper-middle-class), but his world is not untouched by evil: his father loses his job; the town is at the mercy of a nasty, rich woman named Leona; and the plumbers go on strike, leaving the town faucets full of brown glop. Lots of the comedy is sepia-toned and sweetly nostalgic, but not all — there are also moments of satire that could come out of the pages of *Mad*, *Spy*, or *National Lampoon*.

In short, *Willy Beamish* offers a mix: things that a nine-year-old player will enjoy, things a nineteen-year-old might, and things that only a person even older than that will appreciate, such as an encounter with a street gang that saunters down the street snapping its fingers a la West Side Story. This mix worked fine in the original because the player was free to read the game's text at his or her own pace and to take away from it as much as he or she understood.

Alas, in deciding on a set of voices to use for the game, Dynamix also had to decide on a single tone for the game to have. They could have chosen subtle, quick, ironic readings, but they were probably concerned about alienating younger gamers. Or they might have done a straightforward, child-oriented reading; while that would have sacrificed a lot of the game's humor it would, at least, have been bearable. Instead, Dynamix went for something in between, and the result comes across as, at once, insulting to children and inconsiderate of adults, whose skin it will make crawl.

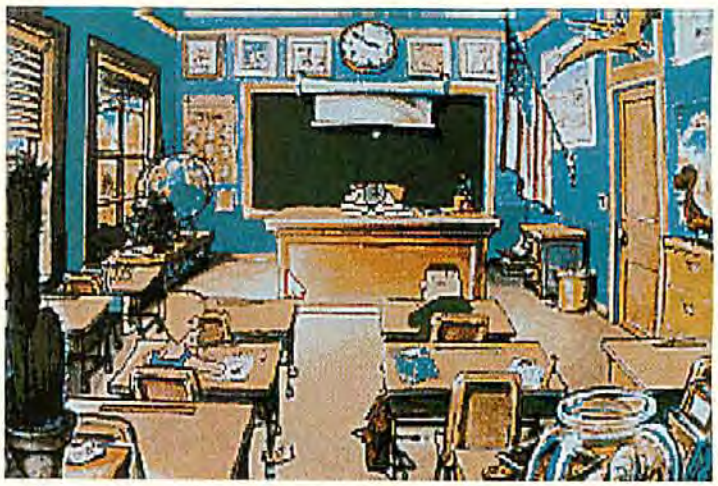


There is little in the world more cruel to the ear than the sound of presumably normal adults gurgling in thick-tongued googly-woogly voices. The worst offender here is the Narrator (played by Ed Ragozzino, further proof that in the Ragozzinos Dynamix has turned up a family whose calling ought to be mime). The Narrator manages to put exactly the wrong emphasis on every word he speaks, mis-read jokes so that they are no longer funny, and affect a voice that makes Pee-Wee Herman sound like Sir Ralph Richardson — all at the same time.

Oh, Frabjous Day

Of course, not everything about the CD-ROM edition is terrible. There is the game's story, for instance, which hasn't changed a whit from the original. Willy's main goal is still to help his pet frog, Horny, win a frog jumping contest so that he (Willy) will have enough money to go to the Nintari videogame championships. Along the way he still has to contend with the school bully, boring teachers, a sinister babysitter, his deceased but talkative grandfather, a family of Japanese tourists, and any number of other fun, oddball characters.

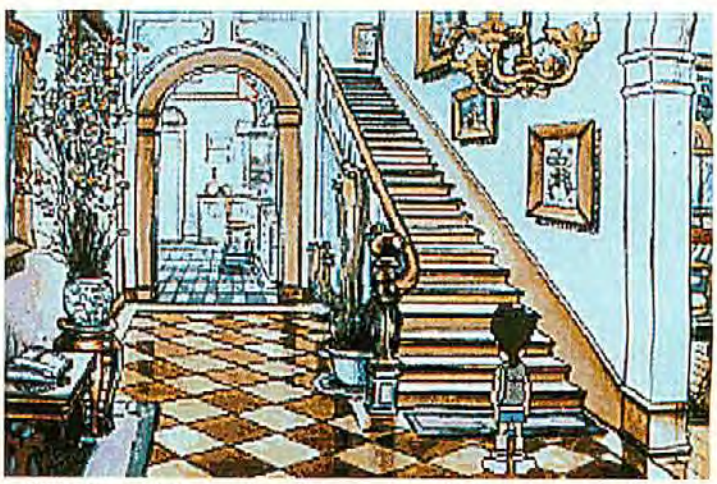
Gameplay, too, is the same as before: rather than a complex interface, the player just moves a cursor around the screen, clicking on hotspots to get information about, or to interact with, parts of the environment. Most puzzles demand only simple interactions ("Use item X at spot Y"), but they do require enough thought to be challenging even to older gamers. Sometimes the game doesn't play fair, by having objects show up without warning in places they weren't before (so the fact that a cabinet is empty at one time is no reason to assume that it will be empty at another); but this resembles real life, especially for a child living in his parents' house, so I think it is acceptable.



The game's graphics and animation are neither better nor worse in the CD-ROM version, though there is slightly more of the latter, including a new opening sequence. Willy's features still devolve occasionally into a two-dots-and-a-squiggle smiley face, but none of the other characters suffer from this odd malady, perhaps because they have less screen time. The animation is not breathtaking, but it is funny, abundant and well-executed.

One of the original game's more peculiar quirks that has survived into the new edition is the characters' emphatic sexuality. Between the huge-breasted school nurse, an impossibly well-endowed volleyball player, Willy's tank-topped mom, and teenaged Tiffany who (at one point) leaps out of her bath to towel-whip Willy, a person might wonder whether he is playing a Steve Meretzky game rather than a game intended for young people. This is not a bad thing per se, but it is odd for a game about a pre-adolescent hero to have such an adolescent sensibility.

It's all of a piece, though. The smirking, adolescent sexiness goes hand in hand with the self-indulgent, immature performances of the actors, which are no better than what one might expect from a high school drama club. The only mature performance in the game comes from Andrew DeRycke as Willy's beleaguered dad, and given the company he keeps, it's no wonder that the guy is beleaguered.



Willy Beamish deserved, and Dynamix could have done, much better. This is a game best played with the voices turned off. Given that it is a CD-ROM game, that's saying a mouthful. **CGW**

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Circle Reader Service #85

Petitioner Microsoft Corporation, Ex. 1025, p. 17

Gentlemen, Start Your Simulations!

How the Pentium™ Processor Will "Hot Rod" Gamers' Computers

by Johnny L. Wilson

Today's games eat up processor time with the same kind of ravenous zeal for feeding shown by the title character in Spielberg's *Jaws*. At the same time that computer pilots are looking for more sophisticated shading techniques with no degradation of performance, even the efficiency of the fastest 486-based processors is topping out. At a time when new genres are moving to the 3-D environment with increasing speed, the processing power of existing machines is being tested to its limit.

So, it is very likely that gamers are wondering what the next generation of microprocessors will do for them. Will it help them handle memory more efficiently? Will it speed up frame rates? Will it speed up floating point calculations so that sophisticated shading techniques won't cripple the frame rate?

The good news is that the *Pentium* processor will most definitely speed both floating point and integer calculations. Obviously, this means that the calculations required for dynamic 3-D environments can be completed very quickly and the visual effect will be faster.

How did **Intel** manage to speed up the processing power in this next generation of computer chips? First of all, the secret is to be found in its superscalar structure and use of branch prediction. The superscalar structure means that the CPU has been redesigned to function almost like two Intel 486 processors. It has a true 32-bit CPU and bus, *plus* separate 8K caches for data and code for double access (the former with a 256 bit bus and the latter with a 32 bit bus).

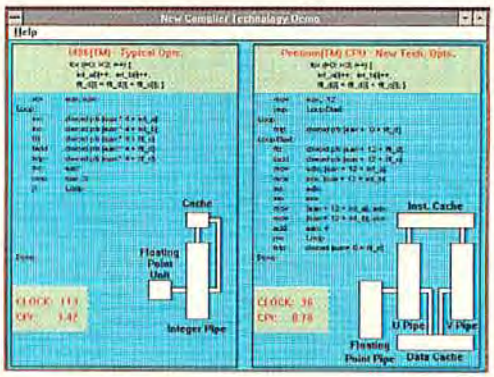
Further, the new design features built-in multiply, add and divide features. Most chips use a proliferation of add functions to multiply such that each addition function requires a clock cycle. With the true multiply function, Pentium-based computers will only use one clock cycle to multiply any two numbers.

Branch prediction means that the computer predicts which direction the program will go next. When it's right, it speeds processing. When it is wrong, the program simply backs up to the last known stage, but neither affects the answer to the calculation nor adds to the processing time over what the non-predicting chip would have used. This feature in itself adds a 25% performance boost over the highest rated 486.

The screen shot provided with this article illustrates the way the *Pentium* processor optimizes its processing. Earlier processors funneled all data, whether required as part of the program instructions or as data for a given calculation, through the same bus. As illustrated on the color-coded screen shot, the *Pentium* uses a bus for both sides of its "brain" and the branch prediction further speeds the process.

How Fast *Is* The *Pentium*™ Processor?

For those who want to know exactly how much faster this new generation of chips is likely to be, consider the following. Not only will the *Pentium*-based computers run at 66 MHz and process 112 MIPS (million instructions per second) compared to 54 MIPS at 50 MHz for 486 DX2 machines, but they will utilize optimization tools which Intel has worked out with compiler publishers. These are software solutions that allow programmers (and hence, gamers) to get more performance out of the chip. Interestingly enough, the optimizers are so useful that code compiled using the new compiler options will run significantly faster, even on a standard 486 (the new code will not affect 386 owners either positively or adversely). This means that the *Pentium* processor runs more than twice as fast as today's fastest PC processor. In addition, the company plans to upgrade their technology in order to surpass the 200 MIPS mark by the mid-1990s.



Consider also how fast the new chip performs in comparison with industry standards. A non-profit organization called the **Systems Performance Evaluation Cooperative** (SPEC) has developed a standard group of benchmark programs to measure the performance of computing systems with actual applications. *SPECint92* is a numerical rating based on performing the same calculations using six real-world applications in: circuit theory, LISP interpretation, logic design, text compression, spreadsheet calculations and software development. *SPECfp92* is a numerical rating based on 14 real-world

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application benchmarks which require floating point calculations.

A *SPECfp92* number of "1" would be roughly equivalent to the performance of a standard **VAX 780** mainframe performing the same benchmarks. For comparison, consider that an Intel486 processor running at 33 MHz performs at 8.5 SPECfp92 and the new *Pentium* processor performs at 58.6 SPECfp92. Comparative SPEC performances are presented in chart form on these pages. Note, however, that the best performer on the SPECint92 chart runs at 133 MHz compared to the *Pentium* processor's 66 MHz; the *Pentium* pulling less power and creating less heat. Intel's marketing department insists that the *Pentium* processor will be the first chip to provide performance for under $1.00 per SPEC point.

In a similar fashion, Intel uses a group of benchmarks for internal testing. The goal is to significantly improve performance on these benchmarks over previous processors. Using the same battery of applications, the new processor (at 66 MHz) was 14 times faster than the Intel386SX (at 25 MHz) and almost twice as fast as the Intel486DX-2 (at 66 MHz).

What Won't The *Pentium*™ Processor Do?

Unfortunately, the new chip design won't do anything about memory problems that chain gamers to the 640K barrier. It won't handle those memory management problems that seem to be driving gamers up the wall. Apparently, many of those problems are a result of 16-bit compiler code being written in such a way that part of the program uses DOS and the rest of it uses the processor's protected mode. It is possible that new 32-bit compilers like the one from **Watcom** and those expected from **Microsoft** and **Borland** (among others) will solve much of the problem, but the chip cannot fix this.

Intel's Director of Engineering (for microprocessor design), Avtar Saini, explains that designing the architecture so that it ignores the arbitrary 640K low memory limitation would make future chips incompatible with existing chips. The *Pentium* processor's architecture has been designed so that gamers should still be able to use software purchased for older machines (286 up) with *Pentium*-based machines.

I Just Want To Upgrade

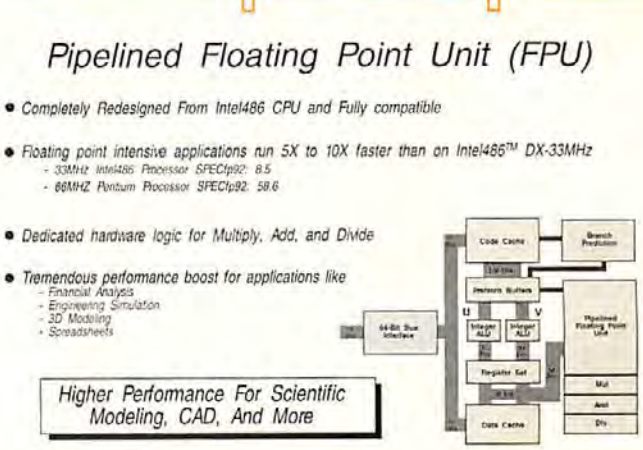
Alert consumers will remember that many Intel486-based computers have spaces for expansion. By next year, there will be an *Overdrive* chip for these upgradeable Intel-based computers that will enable computer owners to gain *something* of the benefits of *Pentium*-based processing. The override chip will not make a computer quite as fast as the true *Pentium*-based computers, but it is expected to boost 486 DX2 performance by at least 50 percent. In staying true to the architecture, it's nice to know that Intel hasn't forgotten its loyal customer base.

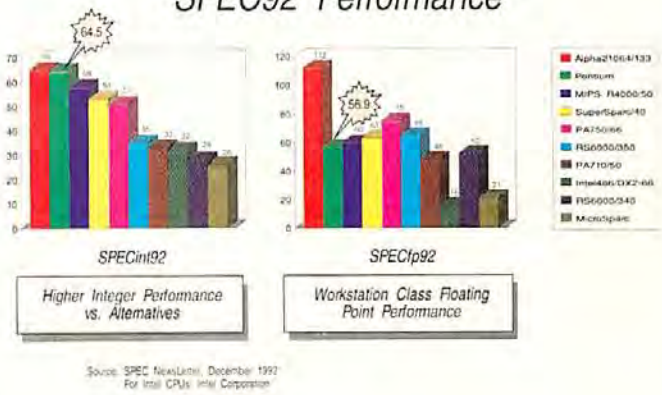
Further, the *Pentium*-based computers will also feature the built-in slot for an *Overdrive* chip that should allow Pentium processor owners to get a *P6* (the next generation of processors) style of performance upgrade.

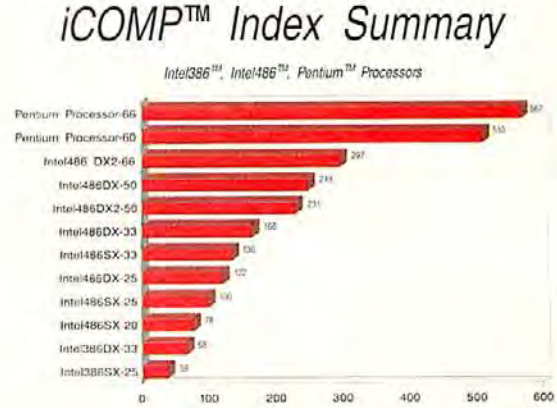
What's It To Me?

Intel's introduction of the *Pentium* processor means that an affordable rival to RISC-based workstations is in the offing. The high SPEC ratings mean that gamers will be able to count on faster frame rates, even on programs that use advanced shading techniques.

In summary, the upside and downside of the new processor are two sides of the same coin. With new processing power, we can expect games that push the limits of the new technology. This will antiquate the older generation of computers (forcing gamers to buy new machines) while simultaneously giving rise to a new generation of games that we simply *have* to have. That's a mixed blessing for all of us. **CGW**







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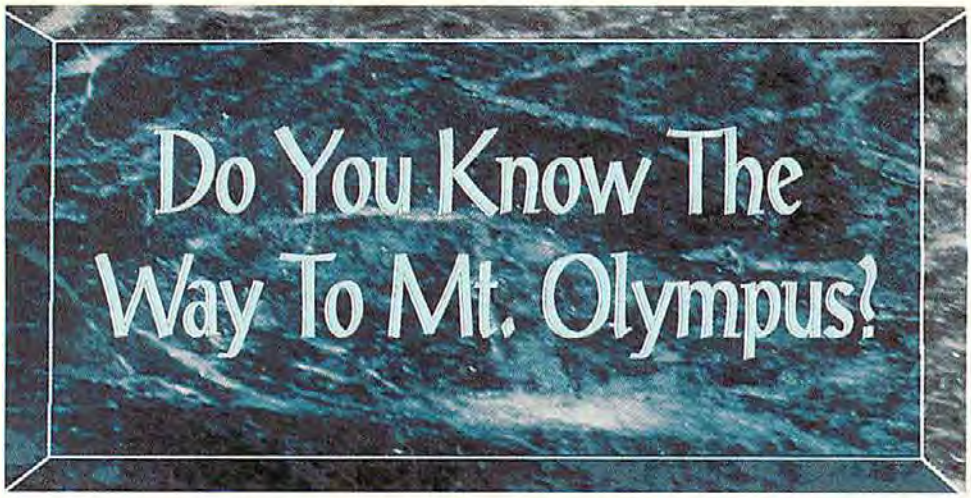


Electronic Arts Points the Way to

Populous 2

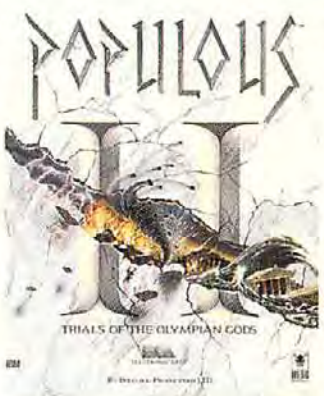
by Allen L. Greenberg

"THE PANTHEON IS LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD GODS!" reads a sign leading to the Mount Olympus Recruiting Center. Considering that the benefits of a career as a god — immortality and omnipotence — are among the most attractive in the known universe, one would easily expect the line of applicants to extend all the way to Asgard.

However, these aspiring deities must first face a series of daunting trials in order to be sure that they indeed have what it takes to be all-powerful. A thousand worlds must first be conquered by a cadet godling before he or she will be given a place among the other gods of Olympus. Those 1000 worlds, along with their populations and an assortment of miracles with which they may be influenced, have been neatly packaged in *Populous 2* (*POP2*), **Bullfrog**'s sequel to its famous first opus.

The original *Populous* placed the player in command of a race of primitive tribesmen who were at war with a similar population; the latter under the control of an evil god. Armed only with a pocket full of miracles, players easily become intoxicated with the experience of leading armies of righteous followers to victory.

In addition to replacing the stone-age civilization with one of ancient Greece, *POP2* has increased the number of worlds to conquer and provided a number of other innovations. As in the first *Populous*, the player looks down on a three dimensional landscape, home to his or her worshipers. Smooth, flat ground, provided by the benefi-cent player, allows the race to settle large estates with healthy families. Left alone, the people would be content to take their time and produce only the heartiest of settlers and warriors. Unfortunately, time is not a gift which the player may bestow liberally. In order to compete with the rival population, it will be necessary to shake things up — breaking up households to increase the number of settlements. The goal is to strike a careful balance between the quality and quantity of these households.



TITLE:	Populous 2
SYSTEMS:	Amiga, IBM
PRICE:	$59.95
PROTECTION:	None
DEVELOPER:	Bullfrog
DISTRIBUTER:	Electronic Arts San Mateo, CA

With this population comes "mana" — a measure of the player's strength. As healthy worshipers increase, so does the mana which, in turn, acts as fuel for miracle-working. Miracles may either benefit or damage a population, depending on where and on whom they are performed. It is this strength, in combination with a healthy army of worshipers, which will determine which god will earn victory. Without mana, a god is finished as is the game.

As in the original game, victory entitles the player to a password to the next world and each succeeding world is more difficult to conquer. More advanced worlds feature more aggressive populations, as well as more hostile

terrain. Of course, a keener adversary is also in control of the rival population. A different variety of miracles also becomes available to both the player and the evil god. Once the player has reached these more advanced miracles, they may then be used in "custom designed" worlds which the player is able to create.

Put On A Holy Face

Adding a role-playing aspect to *POP2*, players now assemble a personality for the god they wish to represent. Following classic Greek style, in which a book may always be told by its cover, this personality is clearly reflected in the god's face.

(Continued on page 24)

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Circle Reader Service #42

THE VERY BEST IN STRATEGIC STARSHIP COMBAT

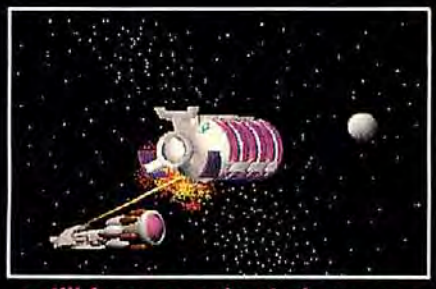
Impressions are delighted to announce an Omnitrend production - Rules of Engagement 2!

The original became an instant success -"one of the top 6 games of 1991" (Newsweek), "involving, well-planned, entertaining, highest levels of intelligence and excitement" (Computer Game Review).

Now, the sequel surpasses even the original's excellence!

Rules of Engagement 2 is a real-time, strategic space combat game. The player commands a fleet of starships engaging enemy ships in campaigns composed of multiple combat missions. The attention to realism and detail (Omnitrend's hallmark) and the sheer size of the game are phenomenal, and are made accessible by the unique easy to use control system.

Rules of Engagement 2 is the latest Interlocking Game System module - and can link with *Breach 2* or *Breach 3* (coming this fall).



a still from an animated squence

- Exciting animated sequences featuring 3D rendered spaceships relate the storyline at strategic points within campaigns. Players can create their own tree-structured campaigns with the world's first campaign-builder - and can even include their own PC Animate Plus animation files!

- *Rules of Engagement 2* features an outstanding interface. Game screens consist of four QuadPanels, color coded to distinguish different control systems. The central control bar coordinates all activity between panels. Users can select which of the 28 QuadPanels appear on the main screen - and can even save several configurations for use in different situations.

sample configuration of QuadPanels

- *Rules of Engagement 2* offers a significant advance in artificial intelligence within computer gaming. Each starship captain has a substantial dossier complete with many personality traits which affect how he, she or it reacts to orders and situations which arise.

a starship captain's dossier

outfitting a ship in dry dock

- *Rules of Engagement 2* offers immense replay value, allowing the player to design and construct both friendly and hostile spacecraft and their captains, specify the physical and mental capabilities of the enemy forces -- and design solar systems in which the battles will take place!

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Impressions Software, Inc. 7 Melrose Drive, Farmington, CT 06032

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RULES OF™ ENGAGEMENT 2

OMNITREND

INTERLOCKING GAME SYSTEM™

Impressions

(Continued from page 20)

Players choose this face by sifting through a variety of mix-n-match foreheads, eyes and mouths. A more aggressive or monstrous face will result in more challenging battles, while a serene or contemplative expression leads to a more strategically demanding game. In general, the nastier the god's face, the more difficult the game.

The number of miracles, or "Divine Intervention Effects," are now so great that they have been broken into six categories, much like spells in a fantasy/role-playing game. Each effect is now categorized as one which relates to people, vegetation, earth, air, fire or water. There are a total of 29 different divine effects, each with its own price tag. With enough mana, players will be able to shake up their worlds with such spells as "Tidal Wave" or "Lay Plague." In addition, there are now six different "super heroes" into which a population leader may now be transformed, so that he or she may proceed independently in a berserk rampage directed at the enemy. All 29 special effects, however, are not available at the same time — each world places only a handful at the god's disposal. Note that the two gods do not necessarily have access to the same magic at the same time, and the player may not be aware of the evil god's abilities until they are used in combat.

POP2's main screen contains the same basic information as that used in *Populous*. Behind a close-up view of the play-area is a map of the entire world. Also included is a population indicator, cleverly disguised as a colosseum. Players may switch to an alternate close-up view which does not include the colosseum, but does display a larger area of land in greater detail. Lining both screens are icons representing the various miracle categories which, if selected, give the player access to other sets of icons representing specific effects.

The game may be played using either hi or lo-resolution. Hi-resolution produces a wonderfully detailed display, but slows down game-play quite a bit. Players with extremely fast, capable computers, however, may find themselves searching for ways to slow down their processing speed. A faster computer makes for a far nastier opponent who will build his population and cast his attacks at lightning speed. Mercifully, the game allows the player to adjust the speed of both the enemy and game-play.

The graphics and animation continue to reflect Bullfrog's attention to character and detail. The individual members of each population are now given gender and occupation-specific characteristics. There are many noteworthy animation effects, including lightning bolts which attack their targets with savage precision, while other victims are carried away in a Wizard Of Oz-style tornado. Many of the warriors and transformed heros have chosen to do battle with a minimum of clothing, and are easily some of the most virile characters ever to appear in a computer strategy game.

POP2's origins on the Amiga computer are immediately obvious. Game-play without a mouse is impossible, although keyboard commands may be used as an adjunct. Even with a mouse, IBM owners will not enjoy the same fluidness of motion as those who have access to the game on an Amiga. The most noticeable loss may well be the game's sounds, very few of which will be heard on machines equipped with a Sound Blaster-compatible board. Sadly, none of the game's famous breathing, heartbeat and ethereal chorus — all of which make the Amiga seem to pulse in life-like rhythm — appear in the IBM version.

Oracle By Icon

The game features a "Help" function, so that an on-line explanation of each of its many icons is available at any time during play. Any number of games in progress may be saved, although only one god may occupy the disk at a time. Two players may play against each other using two computers. These may be connected either by modem or a network system.

Playing the role of an army general may be fun. Pretending to be a king or emperor can easily become addicting. Godhood, however, has again proved to be a wonderfully intoxicating experience in this strategy exercise from Bullfrog. Amiga owners in particular should not miss out on this opportunity to apply to the Pantheon. The benefits of belonging to humanity, thus far, consist mainly of expendability and blind servitude. Why pass up omnipotence? CGW

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Circle Reader Service #64

Warning: *Although "The Scorpion's Tale" takes place in a warm and comfortable tavern of the mind, complete with a nice, cozy fire of vibrant images, our resident storyteller conjures up illuminating hints about games.* ***If our readers eschew hints, let them beware!***

Scorpia Prepares Gamers for *Eric The Unready*

What? Is it springtime already? Seems it was autumn just the other day. Time certainly seems to be passing faster than ever. Gotta find a way to turn the clock back. Back to those thrilling days of yesteryear, when knights were bold and went on quests joust for fun!

Of course, that's not quite how it is with Eric the Unready, knight errant. Very errant. Perhaps he should have been named Eric the Catastrophe or Eric the Jinx. Not that he deliberately does anything wrong; it's just that he tends to leave a trail of havoc and destruction in his wake, without hardly trying.

Having already left quite such a wake as the game begins, our hero is assigned a task suited to his abilities: visit a farmyard and kiss a farmer's daughter who has been turned into a pig. This is a mere bagatelle for Eric, and really so easy a sequence it hardly bears mention. Especially, since he has to go down a privy to get the job done (phew!).

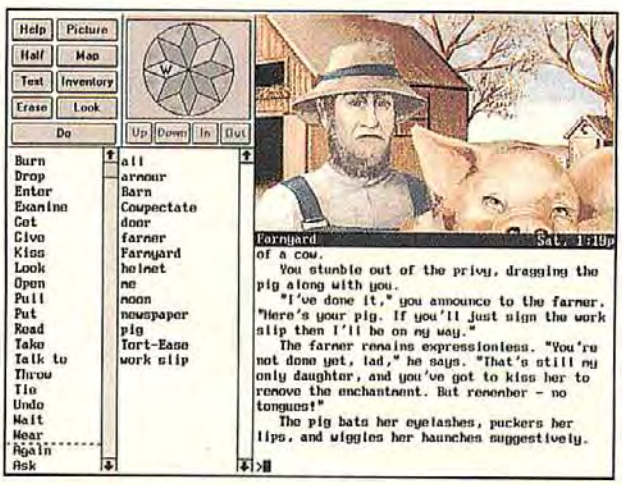
In fact, much of this game isn't too tough, but it certainly is funny. The main things to remember are (a) grab everything that isn't nailed down and (b) *always* pick up and read the day's newspaper. This is a magical paper. It has not only that day's news, but the news from previous days, too. You don't want to miss the ad for *Cleric's Gossip Weekly* (heh)! More importantly, a couple of issues have clues for some of the puzzles. So, look over the paper from time to time.

Okay, so Eric has kissed the pig, and gets a lift back to the castle from the king's daughter. No snob, she! Not only does she allow the filth-covered knight into her carriage, she gives him much encouragement to keep on with his duties as a knight. Right there, you know she's worth rescuing (and being rescued is the prime occupation of young, beautiful princesses the world over).

Being conscientious, Lorealle (the princess) allows herself to be kidnapped in short order. Naturally, our boy is assigned to go out and get her. There is a time limit involved; the king is scheduled to die in a week, and the princess by his side at the time is the one who inherits. Naturally, we all want Lorealle the Beautiful rather than Grizelda the Hefty to be the lucky lady. So let's get a move on, Eric.

The first item of business is getting new armor (the old suit being in offal shape). This is really the game's copy protection, and you need the armor diagram from the manual or Eric ain't rescuing anybody anytime soon. Of course, armor takes awhile to make, so our boy gets a cloak to wear while he waits. Hey wow, there's a magic bean in the pocket! Just what he's always wanted.

Anyway, now Eric can bounce around the area and see what's what. That tower looks interesting. No door, though, and no ladder in sight. Hmmm, wonder how Jack, err, Eric can get up there.



Once at the window, Eric meets Bud the Mighty Wizard, something of a football fanatic. What mighty quest does Bud have on tap? He wants a root beer float, and tosses a coin to our hero to buy one. Ah, the glories of knighthood!

No need to rush; there's time to look around, and possibly do a little favor for the guy in the Ice Cream Shoppe. And Eric's been wanting to hear that Epic of Baldur, right? Right? (Hey, Eric, you got a problem with your hearing or something?)

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At least it gets him up the stairs, where he hears enough to know that nefarious plots are afoot! (Like we're all surprised by this). So, before long, Bud has Eric pull Bananacalibur from the stone, to prove he's the one marked by destiny (or at least by designer Bob Bates) to rescue Lorealle. Eric has to pick up five magic items that will get him past The Black Gate (this thing shows up everywhere, doesn't it?), and he's only got a week, so let's go do it!

The pitchfork is the first item on the shopping list, and Eric begins his search in the Enchanted Forest. That is, he will, just as soon as he gets past the nasty-looking tree. Looks dry, doesn't it? Anyhow, Eric waltzes past and finds himself in a clearing with branches. Of course they're meant to be moved (hey, there's a lot of obvious stuff in this game; keep that in mind).

Underneath is a trap door that leads to ... well, shades of the original *Zork*! Which is exactly what it is, white house, mailbox, and all. Okay, not really all, but the house is there and so is the mailbox, which contains a winner's sweepstakes notification. A pity Eric is human and not a dwarf, eh?

Onward he goes to explore the rest of the GUE, or what's left of it, which isn't much. A couple of Dwarven shops and that's about it. At least Fran (yes, DO talk to him) is helpful.

Getting back to the white house (no relation to the one on Pennsylvania Ave), Eric should have no trouble finding a way in, or doing what's necessary. Like I said, it's all obvious. Remember, though, a six foot man doesn't look like a three foot dwarf, unless he's willing to be humble.

"Don't be daft. I think you're a perfectly good knight who's just had a run of bad luck. You keep trying, that's the main thing. If I ever got in trouble, I'd much rather be rescued by you than by one of those stuck-up prima donnas who come preening around the castle."

So Eric collects the prize, a day at the fun park, which is built before his very eyes! Wow! That's service. Let's check this out. There's a game of *Concentration* off to one side, just like the one on TV (or used to be on TV; not owning one of those insidious devices, I can't be sure). And yep, Eric has to win to get that magic slingshot!

Then, maybe a ride on that neato Ferrous wheel (well, it IS made of iron) is order. After all, how else is Eric gonna reach the pitchfork in the branches of the upside-down tree? Speaking of down, the only way down is to jump (after taking the proper precautions, naturally). The rest follows pretty automatically, and it's time to move on for the crescent wrench.

So, Eric is now outside a tavern. This is a good time to open up the book, if he hasn't already. Then, he can go inside and try to capture the attention of Bruce the Waiter. When Eric finally gets a look at the menu, what to order should, by now, have been made pretty obvious. Then, it's time for a stroll to the castle.

Well, they aren't rolling out the red carpet there, so Eric is just gonna have to find another way in. Try something dangerous (hey, that's what Restore is all about, heh), but check out the bush first. In hardly any time at all, our boy has made it to the rear entrance where he is confronted by, oh no! Killer Turtles!! Good thing he has something to take care of these tortoises.

However, he's got nothing to cut the chain holding the door key.

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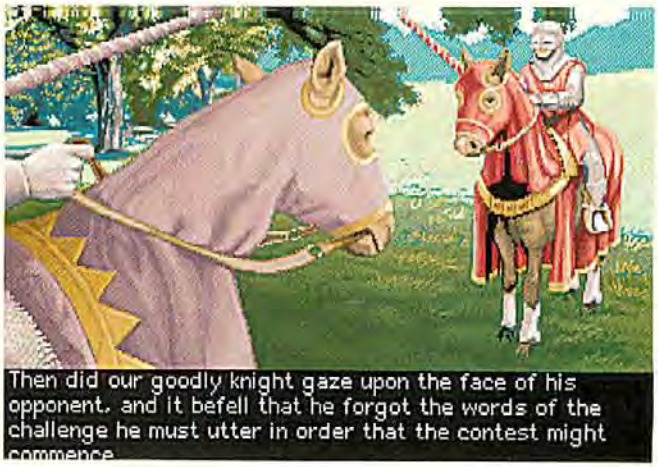
Sorry, Eric, that's one item you can't get into your hot little hands. But hey, there's always a way around these little difficulties. Visit the stable. Visit the parapet. In no time at all, the problem should melt away like wax in a hot flame.

Then, Eric gets to play Wheel of Torture! Actually, this is more like *Jeopardy*, and our hero will have to guess at most of the answers. Fortunately, while the categories change, the questions don't, so sooner or later, Eric should be able to win the wrench. Ah, easy stuff!

Now it's off to the fair, to get the raw steak (yes, that's one of the five items). This one's a bit more complicated. Things to do: listen to the rules. Play a game or two. Talk to everyone. Visit the Pavilion of Tomorrow (for some reason, the words "babel fish" come to mind); Eric may incommode himself here.

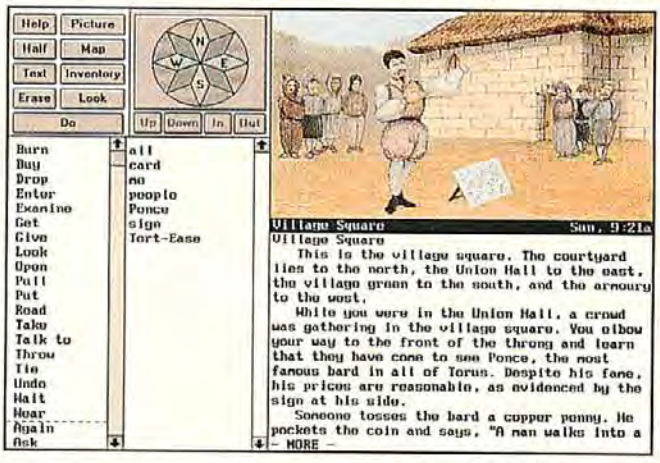


Make a fool of yourself, in more ways than one. See all three shows at the amphitheatre. Get cozy with Lily (sorry to say, Eric won't be getting too cozy with her, since he'll never be finishing up that second errand … besides, what would Lorealle think?) and try a couple of other things, which will be obvious when our hero has gotten this far along.

When all that's been done, Eric is prepared to take on the dragon that guards the Raw Steak, as well as the semiprecious ring. Since he listened to the dragon story, he knows exactly what to do, and in hardly any time at all, it's off to Godland for the crowbar.

Of course, he has to get there first, and getting there means proving he's a virgin. Eric did read up on this, I hope. Obtaining the first item isn't hard, provided Eric makes a display of himself. The second one is tricky, but newspapers are just so helpful in this game (by the way, you may want to save and try all the bells, just for fun!).

After passing the test, and stopping briefly to ogle the ladies in the Salon, Eric marches on into the Sanctuary, where the sacrifices are performed. Of course, no one's gonna do that while he's standing around. Remember Precious (yes, that ring). Remember what happened when someone wore it? What do you think might happen if someone wears a semi-precious?



After a short wait, a virgin is dumped into the room as the next sacrifice. Eric will have to calm her down before anything else. Then he can take her place, so to speak. Heroic actions just come naturally to knights.

In fact, there's no sacrifice involved, just a quick trip up to the top of the mountain where all the gods live. A little exploring is in order, and Eric should talk to any the gods around. That will make getting into the palace much easier.

After performing his little errand, our boy can wander about freely, noting in passing all the interesting items tacked on the bulletin board, as well as the "hard-working" repairgod. He'll fix the broken nectar machine just as soon as he gets around to it. Funny how you can help him with that.

The library can be difficult, as any book chosen only lasts ten minutes. Maybe they think Eric took a speed-reading course. Well, he didn't, but there's always speedwriting.

And hey, let's not forget that poor guy, err, god, in the cave. It's a special day for him, after all. No one else has remembered it, but knights are always thoughtful and courteous and all that stuff. Especially when they've read bulletin boards.

So now, Eric's read the right book, has all the stuff (he *did* deliver a second note to Morty, I hope), and, after making a complete fool of himself yet again (seems to come naturally to him), the crowbar is his! Only one more item to get!!

Our hero finds himself in a swamp. Oddly familiar music plays in the background. Yes, it's time for … Swamp Trek!!! I have to say, being a fan of the original show, this section was my personal favorite, and I had a hard time getting through it, mainly because of hysteria. Some baaaaad jokes here, and lots of other fun stuff. So, I'm not going to say anything about the "Swamp Trek" parts; it's better if you come to it unprepared.

All Eric needs to do here is make a rum drink. That's really simple, as all that's necessary is visiting the various islands by raft, grabbing everything, and reading the sign on the Lilliputian lever carefully. This section is one of the easiest, and more for fun than anything else.

Finally, with all the items collected, Eric arrives at the dreaded Black Gate. Yay! And about time, too, because Lorealle is about to be married off to a real beast, and we don't want that to happen (don't forget the candygram!). So, using the magical thingies one by one, Eric opens the gate..to be promptly captured by the wicked witch (who bears a startling resemblance to a certain other wicked witch). Before you can even say "Oz!", Eric is up in a tower room and the hourglass sands are running out pretty quickly. Nothing like a little tension to liven things up a bit.

Eric, being much brighter than any kid from Kansas (with or without dog), does the obvious thing, which gives him a little extra time to snoop around and find a way out. What self-respecting domain of evil doesn't have a secret passage somewhere?

Meanwhile, down below, the wedding guests have all arrived, and the ceremony will be taking place soon. Better move fast, Eric. But not too fast. There's a little matter of proper timing here (always read labels!) if Lorealle is to be rescued from a fate worse than death (*much* worse).

All right! Everything comes off, the place crashes down, the wicked witch gets a bang out of it all, and Eric and his beloved fly off to the castle! Will they be in time? Will Lorealle inherit … or is it already too late? Play the game and find out!

Whew! That's enough adventuring (easy though it may be) for now. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

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

Until next time, happy adventuring! **CGW**

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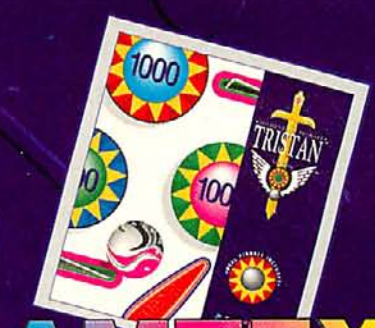

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Playing a Game of Ketchup

Psygnosis Takes Up Gardening with *Bill's Tomato Game*

by Chuck Miller

The sun is brightly shining, the morning air is fresh and crisp, and the ACME delivery van is on its way to market with a truckload of juicy, ripe tomatoes. Just the start of an average day… or is it? Well, maybe not all that run of the mill, *if* one happens to be a tomato.

Terry and Tracy, our two red and round friends, have decided that they want more out of life than to be the main ingredients in a favorite condiment. Besides, they are in love and cannot bear the thought of being separated from each other (or stewed together for that matter). So, with escape the only chance to avoid any further strain on their relationship, Terry and Tracy become vegetables on the run.

Unfortunately, in their hurry to avoid puree, Tracy is tomatonapped by an evil squirrel and dragged up out of sight on a nearby vine. Not to stand idly by while his sweetheart is carted away, Terry sets off in pursuit, one branch at a time, in an attempt to either rescue her or become tomato sauce in the process.

No Time for Hanging Around

Bill's Tomato Game is Psygnosis' latest release for the Amiga. Though exhibiting some arcade leanings, it is primarily a puzzle-based game featuring 100 levels of conundrums that vary in difficulty from extremely easy to frustratingly difficult. While some are arduous enough to stay one's progress for a significant spell, none are so difficult as to cause the player to put the game away in disgust. Usually, when progress is thwarted for an extended period, the answer is to simply try a different approach.

Springing into Action

Ten worlds, composed of ten levels each, comprise the play environment for *Bill's Tomato Game*. The player, as Terry Tomato, begins at the vine where Tracy was snatched away. From here, one must guide Terry up the vine until he enters the first available world. When each ten-level section is completed, the next world appears.

Once one enters a world, the puzzles begin. Terry appears on the left side of the screen (normally, though, he can appear on the right side, too) upon a springboard. All one can do at this point is direct Terry to bounce straight up and down. This, however, will not solve any puzzles. To progress through the levels composed of blocks, barricades, conveyors, spikes, spinning wheels and many other obstacles, one must employ the unique tools at Terry's disposal to construct a path of escape. These implements include the Frumulous Fan (which comes in two varieties — one facing left and one facing right), Tomato Trampoline, Jeremy Jack-in-the-Box and the Blocking Box.

TITLE:	Bill's Tomato Game
SYSTEM:	Amiga (512K)
PRICE:	$49.99
PROTECTION:	Disk- and Manual-based (Number Entry)
DESIGNER:	Bill Pullan
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis Ltd. Brookline, MA (617) 731-3553

Implements of Construction

The most useful item, the Frumulous Fan, is employed to blow Terry across the screen and past obstacles. Placement and number of fans affect Terry's travel horizontally and diagonally. The Tomato Trampoline allows the player to bounce Terry over obstacles. Too high a bounce, however, results in a small red pile of tomato pulp. Jeremy Jack-in-the-Box allows Terry to gain additional height during his travels across the screen, while the Blocking Box provides a flat surface for rolling upon or as a directional deflector.

Though all items are not available on each level, those used must be placed precisely if Terry is to clear all obstacles and safely reach the conveyor belt that transports him to the next level. Each level is also timed, allowing three minutes to solve the conundrum before the countdown timer reaches zero. As such, there is little room for error.

The Hunts is On

Once the player understands the use of each tool, it is time to begin the attempted rescue. From the Radio Screen (the initial screen presented upon loading the game), the player progresses to the vine and world one, level one.

The first puzzle is quite simple. Place three fans, then bounce Terry off a drum and onto a conveyor. Level two is just as easy. The third level, however, begins to add some challenge by providing several trampolines, plus a toy that pops open and squashes Terry unless he bounces off it at just the right moment. From here on out, difficulty increases and one's mind is really put to the test. Fail too often and it's tomato sauce.

As in most games of this nature, a code word is provided upon completion of each level. Thus, when the player runs out of tomatoes

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or has used all available lives, he or she can restart the game from the last completed level.

You Say Tomato, I Say Tomäto

Psygnosis fans who have found pleasure in helping hapless lemmings find their way to safety will enjoy aiding Terry in the attempt to rescue his true love, Tracy. Although not quite as addictive as *Lemmings* or *Oh No! More Lemmings*, *Bill's Tomato Game* is still capable of capturing one's attention for hours on end. Except for several puzzles, difficulty builds well on a scale of increasing complexity. Playing time should extend for several weeks until one is able to master all 100 levels and rescue the damsel (or is that vegetable) in distress.

Those itching for joystick action, however, should avoid this offering as there is actually nothing to shoot. In fact, joysticks are not even supported. All input is accomplished with the use of either the mouse or keyboard in this game of logic and timing.

Plump, Juicy and Delicious

Graphics are a mix of high and low resolution images. Hires 16-color art is employed for the Radio and High Score Screens, while each level of puzzles makes use of 32-color low resolution images. Overall, visual quality is very high, providing an attractive environment.

Audio accompaniment is also of high caliber. Background music and digitized sounds effectively enhance game atmosphere and can be toggled on and off if desired. There should be no need to turn them off, though, as the catchy tunes and realistic sound effects add immensely to the game without becoming monotonous even after extended play.

In the Basket

Unfortunately, *Bill's Tomato Game* employs disk-based copy protection (as well as manual-based) and cannot be installed to a hard drive. **Psygnosis** promised almost a year ago that they would be moving away from disk-based protection and making provision for hard drive installation. So far, they have not made good on this promise. Still, the game loads quickly and, with 1MB of RAM or more, there is little disk access during play.

The documentation is comprised of **Psygnosis**' familiar four-language manual (English, French, German and Italian), its contents sufficient for instructional purposes and quite humorous. Also included is a handy "bookmark" which acts as a quick reminder of mouse controls and item descriptions.

How About a Game of Squash?

Bill's Tomato Game is one of **Psygnosis**' best Amiga offerings of late and is much more original and enjoyable than any of their other releases during the past six months. It is the most entertaining and addictive Amiga title I have played in a long time. Puzzle difficulty and variety is balanced, and evidently a great deal of care and thought has gone into its creation.

Amiga owners who have been longing for an excellent means of challenging their mental powers now have a valid reason to visit their local computer store. *Bill's Tomato Game* is more enjoyable than soup de jour or a fresh garden salad, and has fewer calories. In fact, spending time with Terry Tomato is guaranteed to get the juices flowing and paste a smile on your face. **CGW**

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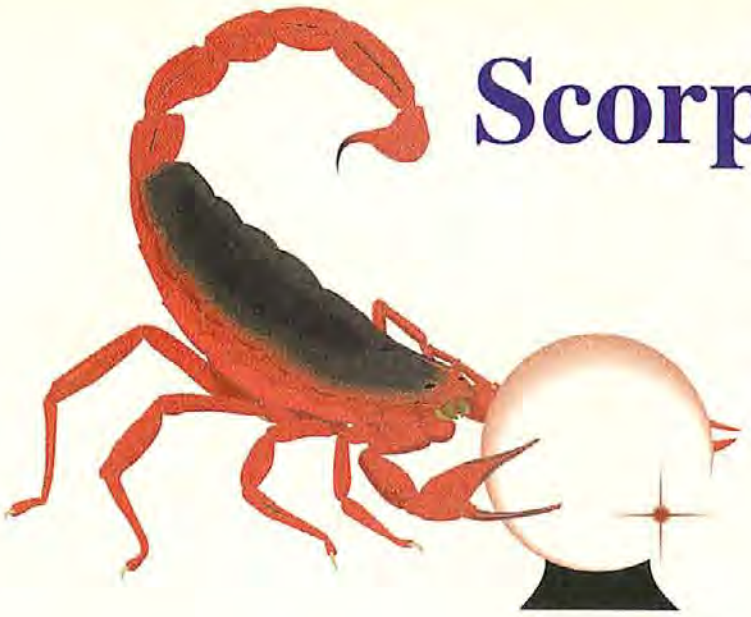

Scorpion's View

Scorpia Orckiller Lights Mindcraft's *Magic Candle III*

Scorpia is an experienced and respected adventure game expert. CGW is pleased to provide this forum for her distinctive and often controversial perspective.

Magic Candle III brings us back to the town of Telermain on the island of Oshcrun, a place familiar to anyone who played *Magic Candle II*. This time around, Telermain is the starting point for an expedition to Solia, the collective name for the islands to the south, about which little is known.

The problem is a mysterious blight that has already engulfed much of the islands and is even now spreading onto Oshcrun. It is the party's job to find a means of stopping and/or destroying the blight before it takes over everywhere, bringing an end to all life.

As with the previous game, there are many Companions and Hirelings along the way, eager to join the party and help save the world. Companions are full-fledged members of the group, willing to share and trade with others, as well as to be assigned to train or work. Hirelings are in it for the money; what they have is theirs, and they will not share or trade with anyone else. They also want to be in on the action, and can't be assigned to train or earn money at a shop.

In addition, there are three special Companions that you choose from a pool of eight at the start of the game. What makes them different is that they come with some extra points that you can put into their attributes and/or skills as you desire. This allows you to customize them, at least to a certain extent. In all other regards, they are the same as any other Companion.

Your own character, the "Lukas" hero, comes with his or her own set of attributes and skills, depending on the profession you choose at the beginning of the game. You can also transfer your character in from *Magic Candle II*. Unfortunately, I was not able to find my *MC II* save disk, and I cannot say what happens to your character when it is brought over.

After the three Companions have been chosen and customized, the game proper begins with the party in the middle of a small, blight-stricken forest outside of Telermain. Here you meet Garz, an Orc prince who offers to join the group. This is the true purpose of being in the woods, as there is nothing else of interest here, and it is best to get out of the forest as quickly as possible once Garz has been accepted into the party.

Once out of the woods, you have some time to reconsider the party's composition. Several old friends, namely Tuff, Sakar and Rimfiztrik (Fiz), are waiting eagerly to go adventuring with you again. Since there can be only six in the party, and you do need Garz in the group for awhile, you'll have to make some decisions on who stays and who leaves. Garz, by the way, is rather like a Hireling; while you don't have to pay him, he won't share or trade with anyone else.

After settling on the party members, and doing some shopping, it's time to set sail for Kabelo, the Orc capital city. The king is not exactly thrilled over your appearance (it was his calling me "Scorpia Orckiller" that gave me the clue), but for the sake of his son, he'll at least talk to you.

What he wants is for you to recover the royal sceptre from the goblins who live on an island a little further south. Relations between the two races are a bit strained at the moment, so the King expects you to do his dirty work for him.

When you arrive in Serivu, the goblin city, you come into a situation that is both a poor piece of game design and a poor piece of programming. The very moment the party walks into the mayor's room, Garz pipes up with a request to be assigned to stay as a hostage for the sceptre — before you have said a word to the mayor.

Worse, if you don't assign Garz to stay immediately when he asks it, you can't finish this part of the game. Should you talk to the mayor first, he'll mention the sceptre and the goblin charter (which the Orcs are hold-

TITLE:	The Magic Candle III
SYSTEM:	IBM
PRICE:	$59.95
PROTECTION:	None
DESIGNER:	James Thomas
PUBLISHER:	Mindcraft Torrance, CA (310) 320-5215

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ing), but that's all. Nothing about trading the items, nothing about wanting a hostage, etc. If you then assign Garz to stay, and talk to the mayor again, nothing changes. Nor does the Orc king realize that Garz is gone from the party should you return to Kabelo. The action just isn't noticed at all by the program.

Therefore, you *must* assign Garz to stay as soon as he requests it. Then the mayor, when you talk to him, will babble on about accepting Garz and hand over the sceptre. This you can take back to Kabelo and exchange for the charter, which you then bring to the mayor, who releases Garz.

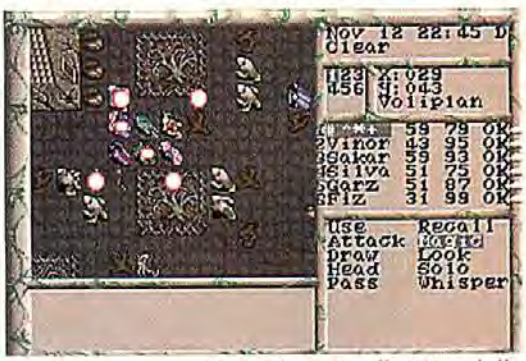
Not only was this poorly thought out, but it is a pointless exercise. You simply bring one item here and take another there. Nothing special is required beyond having Garz in the party. Neither the goblins nor the Orcs give you anything for returning their respective items. The entire sceptre/charter sequence does little to further the storyline. While it does serve to introduce Garz, and you do need an Orc in the group at the end, something better than this could surely have been devised.

Past this, the game falls back into the familiar *Magic Candle* mode. The party visits the various towns and islands, talks to people, picks up information, gathers crucial items, rampages through dungeons and towers, and finally performs the necessary ritual to cleanse the land.

Little has changed in the game mechanics since *MC II*, but there have been some improvements. The notepad is now a much more refined utility. The pad is saved when the game is saved, so nothing is lost. You can call up the notes anytime and scroll through them, from either the top or bottom, and even search for individual words. Also, there is an option to delete notes and another that lets you add in notes of your own. Continued from before is the ability to set the detail level of the auto-notes, from taking down virtually everything to only the most vital information.

Party movement is also better. There were many complaints about having to always change the formation when moving through tight spots and narrow passageways in the previous games. Now the party members automatically change their positions temporarily, making it easier to maneuver in most of the difficult areas. They don't always rearrange themselves perfectly, however, and from time to time you may need to change the party leader to get the group moving again.

The blight is a different and interesting menace. It is something you can actually *see* on the move, which produces a certain amount of urgency. As you re-visit areas over time, the spread of the blight grows. Oshcrun is relatively clear of it at the start of the game, but by early spring, the blight is almost on Telermain's doorstep. If nothing else, it is definitely an incentive not to waste too much time.



For all that, *MC III* is a game with problems. The biggest one is lack of money at the start. You don't have much, and even with Tuff in the group to do the trading, prices are high, especially for the magical herbs and mushrooms.

As an example, nift, the invulnerability herb, costs 120 coins for six (that's with Tuff and his 75 trading skill doing the buying). Gonshi, the speed-up mushroom, is 105 coins for twelve. These are two things everyone in the party needs, and even a small supply for six people eats up the cash supply quickly. Add in armor and spellbooks, and the money practically melts before your eyes.

This is all the more serious as the first dungeon in the game, the Tower of Qaldiur, is crawling with Fermigons, both in the rooms and lurking in ambush in the corridors. One or two hits from these things can put down anyone in the group. Walk into an ambush with six or seven Fermigons, and it's time to restore the game. Even knowing about them ahead of time doesn't help much if you don't have enough protective herbs to go around, and Qaldiur has six levels to get through, with other creatures besides, which are just as nasty.

So, you are pretty much forced into money-grubbing at the beginning. Instead of getting right on with the quest, you stick people in shops to earn coins and sit the rest of the group in front of Ketrop to hunt for food. Every so often, you duck into the village to sell most of it, then hunt for more.

This is *boring*. It is also ridiculous. Here we have a party of heroes out to save the world, but they can't get on with the job because they have to make some money first — and *this* with the blight always on the move.

Keeping money in short supply and the prices of important herbs high, was deliberate on Mindcraft's part as a way of making the game "more challenging". What they overlooked is the fact that anyone can make the game as challenging as they wish by simply purchasing fewer herbs in the first place. The previous two games had that flexibility; *Magic Candle III* allows you none, thereby making the game unnecessarily difficult.

If the entire party dies or your character dies and is not resurrected, the game ends. *Ends*, mind you. A screen is displayed saying how the great hero failed and how the world was destroyed, followed by a drop to DOS. Not a menu for restoring the game — a drop to DOS — forcing you to reboot. By now, you'd have thought game designers would know enough to avoid this!

Dungeon design was not well-coordinated. The earlier dungeons were generally much harder than the last one. True, by the time I reached the endgame, the party had finally accumulated a reasonable supply of herbs, all the spellbooks, and a few suits of methreal, as well as having wakened all the gods, so it was a pretty tough group.

Still, you would expect that six levels of caves, followed by ten levels of tower, would be a difficult proposition, when in fact the whole thing turned out to be pretty much a romp. Most of the critters encountered were relatively low-level monsters, and even the supposedly all-powerful blight lords proved to be no challenge at all. The "big confrontation" in the final room was amazingly easy.

Overall, in spite of the neat blight idea, *Magic Candle III* is a dull game. I had a hard time getting into it, and slogged on mainly to get it over with. We've all been here before and there isn't anything really new or exciting. The game is unnecessarily lengthened by the constant need for money, and, overall, one is left with the feeling of doing things by rote rather than going on a grand adventure. It is all very depressing and rather a shame, as the first *Magic Candle* held much promise for the future — promise that has yet to be realized. **CGW**

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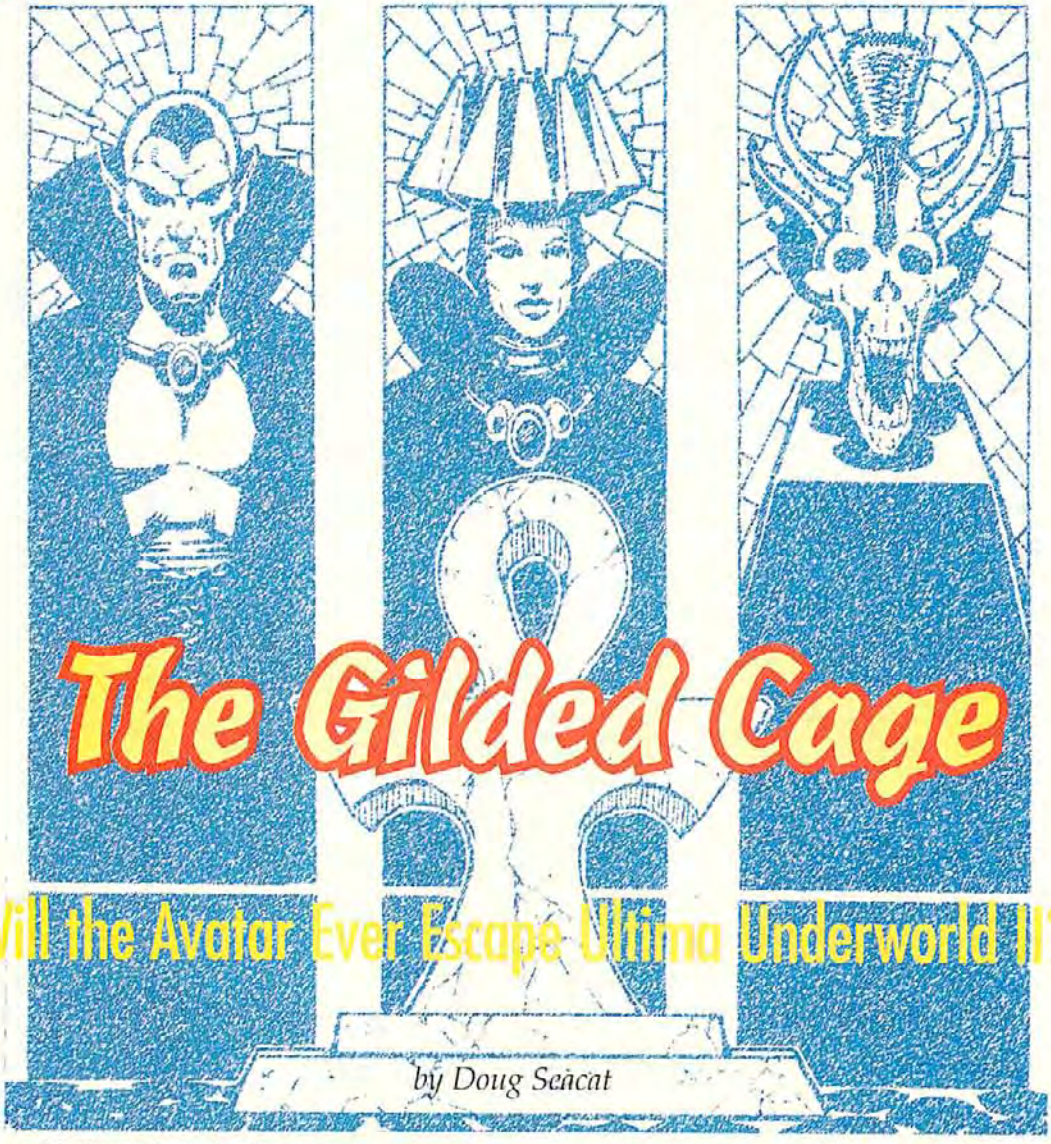


The Gilded Cage

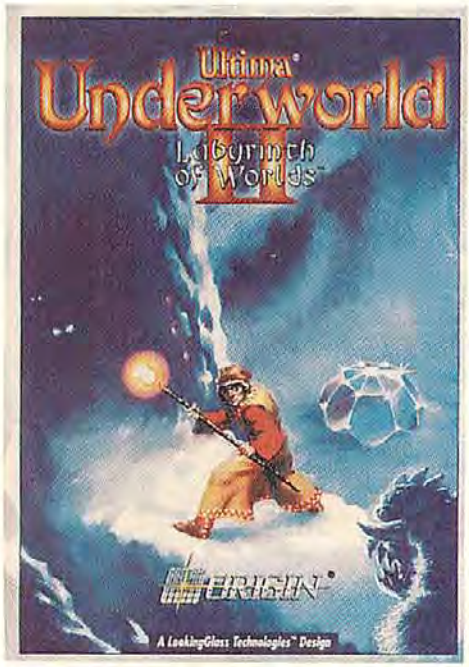
Will the Avatar Ever Escape Ultima Underworld II?

by Doug Sencat

Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds, is the second of **Origins'** and **LookingGlass Technologies'** 3-D dungeon games. With the success of their first "you are there" environment in *Underworld I*, the folks at Origin have gone on to a more ambitious plot within the same environment.

Surprise, surprise, the Avatar is needed again. The rubes in Britannia can't seem to do anything for themselves. So, they are once again a potential target for destruction. Fortunately, they have the Avatar to save them, on his supposed ninth quest for them.

This time, the Guardian of *Black Gate* fame has reappeared (as I'm sure most players of that game certainly expected). This enigmatic red-faced nemesis has decided to stop Lord British's interference in his works directly, by sealing off Castle British entirely from the outside world. He has surrounded the castle in Blackrock, a substance impervious to magical and physical manipulation. The imprisonment will isolate both the heroes of Britannia and the Avatar himself, while the Guardian wreaks havoc outside, converting followers, inciting warfare, and in general doing nasty, evil things.



There is hope. The Avatar must descend into the centuries-old dungeons of the castle in search of clues about the Guardian's sources of power. Before long, this search takes the Avatar on a multiple-world quest of exploration to eight centers of the Guardian's strength, each of which must be nullified to save Britannia, and the Multiverse, from the Guardian's manipulation.

The Rudiments of Disbelief

Character creation is a short and simple process, since this is a solo-adventure. The player can choose among eight classes (Mage, Fighter, Ranger, Shepherd, Bard, Druid,

TITLE:	Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds
SYSTEM:	IBM 386 or 486 with 2 MB RAM
PRICE:	$79.95
PROTECTION:	None
DESIGNERS:	LookingGlass Technologies
PUBLISHER:	Origin Systems Austin, TX

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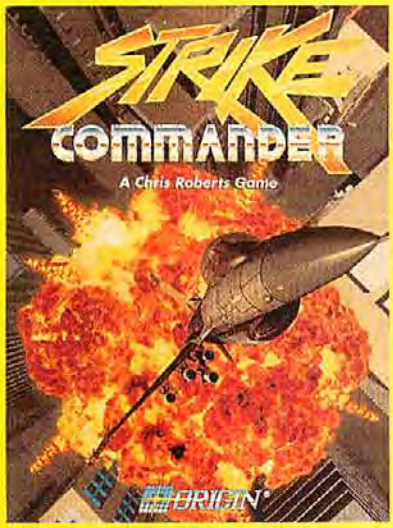

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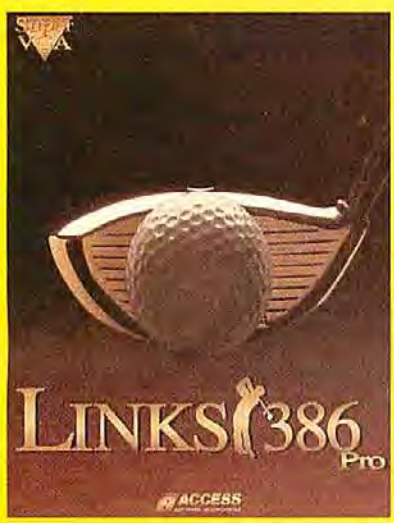

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Paladin, Tinker) and then, can customize the class by choice of skills. While each class has its own benefits and advantages, the game can be completed with any of them, and the skills-choice can allow a character to adopt a needed quality of another class. (For example, a fighter can still cast spells if he takes time to learn how, and a Paladin could repair items if he wished).

While there have been graphic improvements from *Underworld I*, the game's features and gameplay are very similar. Those who mastered the 3-D environment of the first will find an easy transition into this new storyline. Newcomers will need time to adjust to the mouse interface, which is less than intuitive. For example, the way the game handles left and right buttons for different functions is an acquired skill. Fortunately, there are keyboard equivalents to many of the functions.

It will also take time to adjust to the environment. The ability to move freely through 3-D space can make movement frustrating. Getting stuck on corners, whirling about too rapidly in place, walking too close to an object to see it, and missing a corridor by not turning fast enough are some of the more common neophyte mistakes. In time, however, it is possible to familiarize yourself with the Avatar's body, just as one would a new car. The game provides a well-written tutorial which assists in the transition, as well as giving some important game information.

Similar to all such 3-D dungeon games, items are handled by placing them in either the inventory or upon the body itself. Most items have descriptions detailing their current condition, which can erode over time and use. Items which have been subject to frequent abuse will eventually break or be destroyed, though a proficient character can repair items to full effectiveness.

One nice feature of the game is the fact that items (except weapons) don't need to be "in hand" to be used. For example, a wand within a backpack can be activated simply by opening the backpack, and then left-clicking on the wand. This is welcome since moving items can be a tedious process. If the player wishes to move the wand from his backpack to a sack, he has to move the wand out of the backpack (assuming he left an empty spot in his primary inventory), close the backpack, pick up the wand, and then put it into the sack. Since there are many necessary items in the game, the player is advised to organize his possessions carefully. Keeping several sacks and backpacks is recommended, enabling a division of similar items. Also, the player should stockpile certain heavy things (such as gold) in an easy to reach location.

Skills are handled automatically, with a few notable exceptions (such as Repairing, Picking Locks and Tracking). A player skilled with the sword will hit more often; an acrobatic character will jump better and take less damage from falls. The game allows even unskilled characters to perform actions involving those skills, though with slightly less success. Even a character with no swimming skill won't immediately drown.

Magic is handled via runes and each spell is a two or three rune combination. In order to cast any particular spell, the Avatar must be at a high enough level, have enough Mana (casting juice), and have the necessary runes. The rune aspect means that even a high-level character won't be able to cast a lower level spell if he lacks the proper runes. An important process of the game is adding to one's rune-bag through exploration.

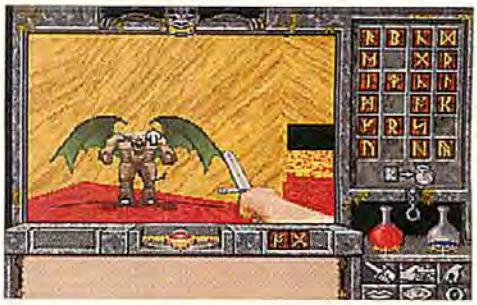
Combat is simple — whip out a weapon, find a foe, and strike them. The combat graphics are well done, with three types of melee weapons (Maces, Blades and Axes), three strike types (Overhead bash, sidewise swipe or jab) each of which has advantages against certain foes and missile weapons. During battle, foes move about, and the player must keep moving to keep from getting attacked from behind or overwhelmed by multiple foes.

Lest the reader think this *Ultima* is merely a hack-and-slash, however, it should be stated that role-playing is a strong element here. Conversation is just as important, if not more, than having a good sword arm or spell book. There are many characters to interact with, be it in the castle, the dungeons, or the other worlds. The plot is rich with details and characters, and much is gained from trying a peaceful approach.

Throughout all of this, the Guardian continues to expand his multi-world empire, constantly taunting the Avatar in dream messages. Lord British and the other inhabitants of Castle British have to deal with their own problems, be it possible traitors, lack of water, or the Guardian himself, who offers bribes and power to subvert the good.

The Elements of Pleasure

There has obviously been a great amount of effort and time spent on this game. The 3-D movement, while perfected earlier, is just as impressive. This technique gives the player a strong sense of "being there." The screen bobs up and down as one walks, and footsteps can be heard as one moves. When the Avatar falls into a river or pool of water, he sinks down, and is caught by the current as the screen sways back and forth enough to give one motion-sickness.



This aspect of the game is further heightened by the many small details included by the designers. For example, the Avatar will become woozy and dizzy if he drinks too much. He can even pass out from such excess. Strange mushrooms will cause vision to distort, and the screen shakes when damage is taken. When the player sleeps, occasionally he dreams, and a night's sleep in a bed is better than in a bedroll. Further, sleeping without eating beforehand can result in a restless night. Before long, the player can become completely immersed in the fantasy world.

The graphics are well-executed. Animation is smooth, though slow on a lower-end computer, and the monsters and people have a good range of possible movements. Rats leap up at one's face, imps crackle with magical energy. Even death-throes are portrayed, as demons explode in colorful balls of power, or snow-cats flip over backward before dying in a pool of blood.

The spellcasting also deserves a note of praise. While not extremely complex or sophisticated, the spells are varied, giving a good balance of utilitarian, movement, informational, combat and defensive measures. Further, they are entertaining to cast. The Deadly Seeker spell deserves special mention. This spell is the Fantasy version of the Heat Seeking Missile. When cast, this spell causes a smoke-trailing missile to launch out and track down any nearby foe, even around doorways! It is not only diverting, but very viscerally satisfying.

Convenient for users with slow computers (such as myself), the graphic detail can be reduced, which greatly speeds play. Users may find it useful, even on a fast system, to use different modes of detail at various points in the game. Specifically, reducing the detail can speed movement considerably when one is returning to the castle after a long trek.

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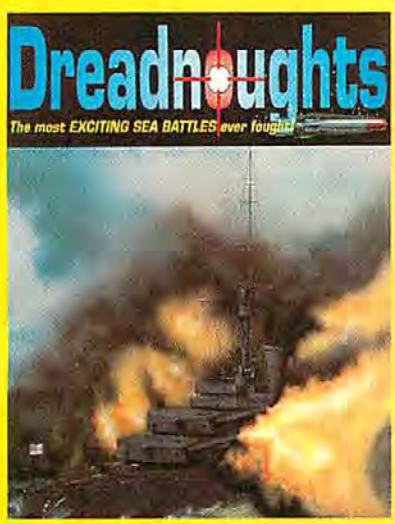

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While it isn't much changed from before, the auto-mapping still deserves a mention. Folks like Doug Church, Dr. Cat, Dorian Hart, Mark Leblanc and Tim Stellmach are to be praised for including such a good system of mapping to go with such a rich gameworld. The maps are clear, easily noted and become one of the primary tools of the Avatar's quest.

Further, the emphasis upon nonviolent solutions has become a hallmark for later *Ultima* games. Fortunately, it is a tradition well-kept in *Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds.* While there will be plenty of combat for the sword-thirsty, the story takes on full significance through interaction with NPCs. Speaking with the various denizens of the Eight Worlds gives one a definite sense of being in a different place, with different philosophies and ideas. Further, the full extent of the Guardian's power and evil is put forward clearly through meeting the people he has oppressed. This sort of background and interaction gives the player the motivation necessary to continue onward in this huge game.

The Elements of Disappointment

Unfortunately, *Labyrinth* is far from a perfect game. Some of the problems are larger than expected for an Ultima product. First, the small stuff. As good as the auto-mapping is, there is one thing which should have been fixed immediately: secret doors appear on the map whether a person has actually found them or not. This was a problem in the first game and remains unfixed here. On a similar note, there are some inconsistencies with the mapping.

For example, most of the time the auto-map is extraordinarily accurate. Even when going through certain teleportation devices, the map can often tell exactly where the new location is, and map accordingly. One can even map while swimming in a strong current or fighting nasty monsters. However, there are times when the map won't operate. In the Ethereal Void, nothing can be mapped accurately, which might make sense if not for the previous unerring accuracy. Further, in such a place the compass won't work either. Thus, the player goes from having a completely accurate sense of place to none whatsoever. Even a temporary, "arbitrary" compass might have been nice, or a map which was speculative if nothing else. These opposite extremes can really throw one off.

While the 3-D movement is one of the game's strongest points, it's also a pain. Even when the player is used to the game, corners can catch the Avatar or a passage can be difficult to enter from a certain angle. There needs to be some computer assistance here, which wouldn't destroy the illusion of "being there." As it is, the situation is comparable to walking into a doorway but getting stuck by catching one's shoulder on the door frame. Some of this should be automatic. It's fine and good to have the Avatar's body take up 3-dimensional space, but they've made it awkward.

Another small but very irritating problem is the game's inability to put things down where the player wants. Dropping an item in some places can be highly frustrating, as the computer will refuse unless it thinks there is room. Unfortunately, this is true even if the player picked up the item from the same spot. At times, the game will throw an item when the Avatar attempts to drop it. I almost pulled my hair out when I was trying to recharge a light-sphere but instead threw it against the wall and broke it.

The arbitrary nature of events in the game is a more serious matter, however. While much thought has gone into the plot, it is rigid and largely linear. Small problems, such as opening doors, are given multiple solutions, but the story line itself must continue along a very set route with little choice for deviation.

Most seriously, this linearity often doesn't follow logically. For example, there was a point in the game where a "listener imp" had to be killed. However, following the advice of the manual, I instead continued deeper into the game, moving forward, thinking I could come back and find the imp when I wanted. When I opened the gateway to the next world, it wouldn't open, simply because the imp was still alive, even though he had nothing to do with the gateways themselves. Further, the imp had to be slain before opening the gateway, or it wouldn't work at all.

On a similar note, time in the castle isn't as important as what actions the player does. Even though a "water shortage" problem occurs in the castle, it won't get worse no matter how much actual time passes. The only thing which exacerbates the situation is going on to other worlds, which makes no sense whatsoever, except as a machination to continue the linear, non-changing plot of the game.

Further, the game's handling of NPCs is poor. While there are many people to speak with, the conversation options are limited and similarly linear. The choices are usually obvious, and there is little true choice about what to say. Sometimes a particular conversation topic will be possible, and other times not. This can be frustrating since the player can't initiate topics himself. Only a few people allow key-words (as was used as far back as *Ultima IV*) which would have given the game a much freer conversation scope. While key-words are a little crude, they give the feeling that one's choices matter.

Following both of these problems comes the feeling that the world is non-dynamic. The Avatar often feels like the only active person in the multiverse, which reduces the game's involving atmosphere. At times it feels like the Avatar is the only capable individual in the entire universe. Lord British wanders around doing nothing, and all the Avatar's companions complain that they wish they could help, but won't. The few times assistance is given by other people, it feels contrived. Granted, the player should take the active role, but the game would have seemed much more rich and involved if other people were doing things independently of the Avatar's actions, especially as time passes. Instead, the NPCs are reduced to information sources and training posts.

Skills within the game were largely disillusioning. While they had a definite affect upon the character's actions, few of them were useful or important. Most of the skills just help in nonessential situations, or can be obviated entirely. Despite not having the "swimming" proficiency, my character could swim well enough to get everywhere necessary. Those few skills which seem to have some potential can be easily replicated by spell casting ability. I was rather depressed, using a "Tinker" character, to find that the "Open" spell was much better than picking locks, and there exists a spell which repairs armor better than any tinker. The only real skills which seem to be necessary are Mana, Casting and Combat Knowledge.

One reason for these problems is that the designers wanted the game to be solvable by any profession — another contrivance. If a Mage is just as good as a Tinker at every puzzle, why does it matter which you are? Indeed, if a Tinker can get through the Academy Final Test of Magic (one of the puzzles in the game), isn't something wrong? The player can only find so many conveniently placed wands (in case he wasn't a spell caster) before it seems entirely phony.

Many times, the game seems much more frustrating than enjoyable, due to the elements listed above, and due to the nature of the puzzles. There were a few convoluted mazes in the game which made me want to toss my computer out the window. Including mazes in the game can extend the play-dura-

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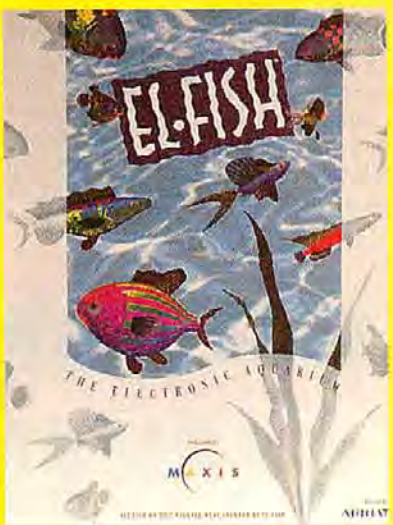

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tion of the game with little effort. Few players enjoy wandering through repetitive passages for hours on end, however. Granted, the game is titled "Labyrinth of Worlds" but I don't think this needed to be taken literally.

Further, the sheer scope of the game can be daunting. If the player feels stuck somewhere, he or she has practically miles of dungeon to check for one earlier mistake. This can be particularly annoying if the solution to the problem is something as small as examining a particular wall or device more carefully.

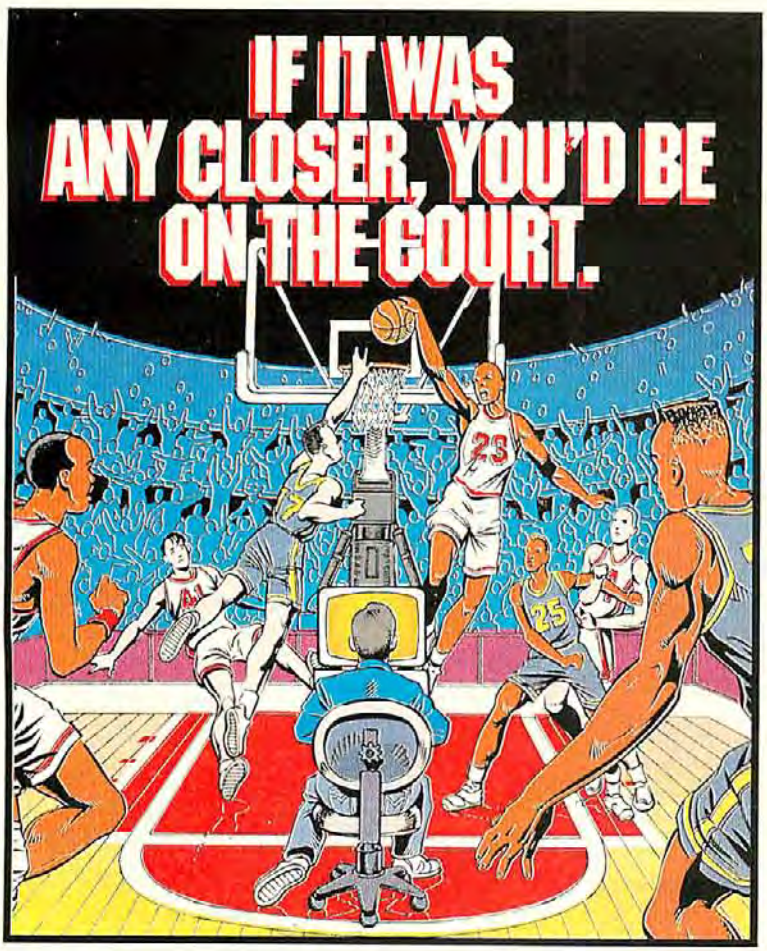
Some of these problems could have been solved elegantly by the programmers with more NPC involvement. It would have been nice if the members of the castle could provide more support. For example, if the player has been wandering around for hours getting absolutely nowhere, one of the NPCs could provide a clue, which could become more explicit if the player still doesn't make progress. This would be perfectly feasible since the entire population of the castle is supposedly working on the dilemma, together with the Avatar. This could ease frustration, while also making the NPCs seem more involved and alive. Further, the NPCs could, at infrequent intervals, descend into the Labyrinth themselves, perhaps to solve a class-specific puzzle. In the instance above, it would have been much more exciting and interesting had Nystul (the court wizard) assisted in the Academy Final, then allowed the Avatar to solve the bulk of the puzzles. Having a dynamic game environment would have been the perfect compliment to the "you are there" feeling of the game, and would have provided a complete and total gaming environment.

On a different note, the basic plot has some problems. Why is it that every 3-D fantasy game has to take place entirely underground in dungeons? I became increasingly claustrophobic as world after world went by, never seeing the outside! Perhaps this was intended to keep the sense of being imprisoned, in which case it served its function well, but it would be nice to see a "you are there" game which took the player's character outside!

Finally, why is it that the Avatar, savior of Britannia eight times over, enters the game as a first level character? This constant restarting of the Avatar is ridiculous. The game does give the Avatar's name a heroic legacy, but the player feels none of that power when required to start from scratch. *Ultima* has abused the Avatar long enough. If they want to keep him, they should at least give him some sense of power and grandeur. If they want a first level character, have it be another follower of the Virtues, a new novice who will rise and save the world in the Avatar's name. I know it'll be hard for Origin to let that plot-gimmick go, but I think it's long past due.

The Final Analysis

Despite the problems, *Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds* is a relatively high-quality game. However, I can recommend it only with reservations. Hard-core *Ultima* players will definitely want to play the game to continue the Avatar's exploits. Further, those who love 3-D dungeons will find much enjoyment. Still, those who purchase the game should be aware that they are in for a long and grueling quest, which will task their patience. While testing their stamina is a good test of the Avatar, it won't suit all gamers. Further, the game is in many ways a gilded cage: it looks very nice, and is in many ways comfortable, but it is *still* a cage. The contrived plot and setting have the player imprisoned, forced to follow a certain set path to freedom. By the time I finally saw daylight again, emerging from the *Labyrinth*, I must admit that it wasn't exultation I felt, but sheer relief. Frankly, I don't want to go back to that prison again. CGW



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Review

Is Wisdom the Greater Part of Valour?

SSI Introduces U.S. Gamers to *Legends of Valour*

by Chuck Miller

Mitteldorf, a massive city, teems with activity. Busy streets abound with local merchants, travelers and, potentially, fellow adventurers. Of course, the local inns and taverns attract their usual clientele. So, be ready at a moment's notice to become the focal point of a friendly brawl. Also be prepared to spot a bargain and don't hesitate to accept an errand or two in order to earn a few extra groats. However, remember that legends are not made of mundane toil. There is a mission to fulfill — find a missing cousin named Sven.

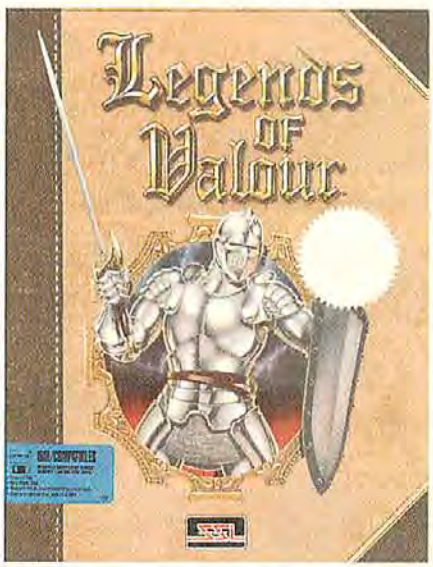
His last letter reached his family quite some time ago and, understandably, they are worried about Sven's condition. Thus, the immediate goal is to try and discover where he is and what has befallen him. Beyond that, the game hasn't offered so much as an idea of what adventures lie in store. Though, ultimately there is the prospect of slaying an evil demon and restoring a king to power.

Stuck in the Mitteldorf with You

Legends of Valour, a 3-D fantasy role-playing game similar in many regards to **Origin**'s *Ultima Underworld*, claims to rewrite the standard in 3-D adventures by offering "the hottest, smoothest 3-D scrolling ever seen in an underworld, or any world!" A few minutes with *Legends of Valour* substantiates the assertion concerning its extremely smooth 3-D scrolling graphics. Its claim of rewriting the standard in 3-D adventures, however, must be challenged.

Seldom do I begin a review focusing on the negative aspects of a game. I felt it appropriate to do so, though, in this case. SSI has long been respected for the quality of their games and their commitment to meeting customers' needs. I am convinced this has not changed. Nonetheless, I am concerned. *Legends of Valour* is SSI's second out-of-house product released since December, the first being *Pirates of Realmspace*. Unfortunately, *Legends of Valour* (like *Realmspace*, which appeared to be a last ditch effort to market one final Gold Box-style product) has placed SSI in danger of soiling their reputation by publishing games of an inferior nature while making grandiose claims about them. I know these words seem harsh, but SSI's long-standing reputation for quality is not evidenced in their two latest role-playing titles.

One should not assume from these statements that *Legends of Valour* has no value. Game design is good, play is somewhat enjoyable and the game system holds great promise for the future. However, implementation of and weaknesses inherent in this fantasy role-playing adventure cause it to come up short in overall atmosphere and playability.



TITLE:	Legends of Valour
SYSTEM:	IBM, 386 or greater, 640K RAM; Mouse recommended
PRICE:	$59.95
GRAPHICS:	VGA
SOUND:	Ad Lib, Roland and Sound Blaster/Pro
PROTECTION:	Documentation Look-up
DESIGNERS:	Dimension Creative Designs, Ltd.
PUBLISHER:	Strategic Simulations, Inc. Sunnyvale, CA (408) 737-6800

From Generation to Generation

Character generation in *Legends of Valour* is a simple and painless procedure. While races are limited to human, dwarf or elf, a great degree of customization is provided for altering the appearance of one's on-screen persona through a type of character portrait construction set. When facial features are to the player's liking, the process moves on to selecting armor, goods and weapons. Up to eight characters can be created, though only one is employed during play.

The downside is that only eight save positions are available. In addition, the player can only save his or her progress at specific locations, namely inns, taverns and hostels. This unfortunate carryover from early RPGs means that one must locate an appropriate place to save their progress on a regular basis or face the inevitable Restore-and-Replay Syndrome, one which quickly robs the game of its pleasure.

A Knight on the Town

Legends of Valour takes place, as mentioned, in the town of Mitteldorf and its dungeons beneath. Basically an immense above-ground maze, Mitteldorf offers well over 100 locations to visit, from taverns and shops to guilds and temples. Many dwellings have second story accommodations, too. In all, a great majority of early game play revolves around identifying and investigating the numerous establishments in this thriving city. To aid in this procedure, a copy of Ye Olde Mitteldorf Town Map is provided for the player, listing the major locations but requiring one to place them on the map. In addition, a rather primitive automapping feature is available which identifies one's general location in the city or dungeons below.

Unfortunately, the player will probably also have the opportunity to kill some time in one of several prisons. In fact, it is extremely easy to get arrested in Mitteldorf. About a dozen specific crimes are listed. However, the whole process appears to be unrelated to actually committing a crime. For example, while standing in the street, I was arrested for "assaulting an officer" and was promptly dumped in prison, fined and released the next day a much poorer individual. Is there no justice in Mitteldorf?

Tourist Distractions

In addition to the random nature of criminal arrests in *Legends of Valour*, there are several other major distractions with which to contend. Acquiring one's daily sustenance is more of a battle than most of the violent encounters. The need to eat, drink and sleep is emphasized so greatly that it is

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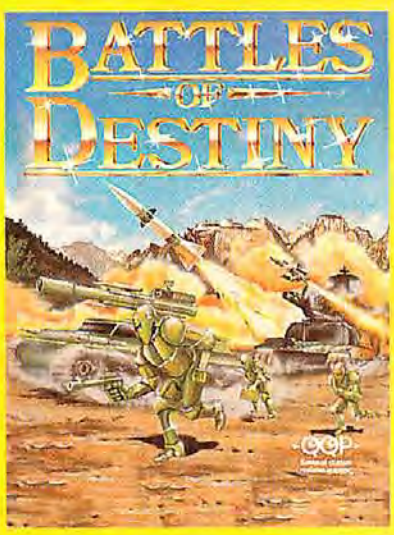

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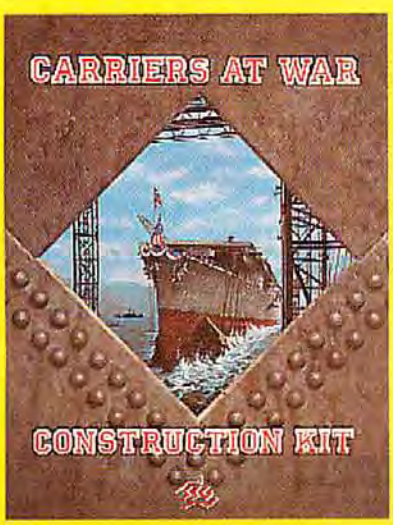

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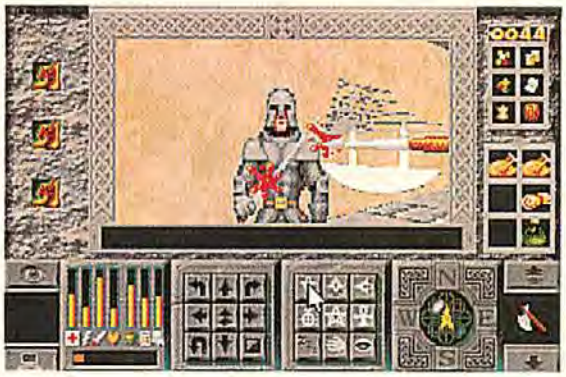
overly distracting to play. I died from lack of food and poor health so often just when the game was getting interesting that I soon tired of the whole process. Fantasy adventures should remove one from the distractions of real life, not impose an overdose of these minute distractions upon them.

Another distraction to the flow of the game concerns interaction with the NPCs encountered. More often than not, conversing with the local inhabitants is a repetitive process of issuing "What is" and Where is" questions which result predominantly in the same pithy answers (though insults do show greater variation).

A general lack of atmosphere also prevails in *Valour*, the primary culprit being the background music and sound effects, or rather their dearth. Sound effects are sparse and music is almost entirely lacking.



Is There Any Value to *Valour*?

By now, one must be wondering if *Legends of Valour* has any value to offer. In spite of all its failings, yes, it does. The interface, though a trifle cluttered, is well designed and offers good mouse and keyboard support. Smooth scrolling 3-D graphics, as claimed, are exceptional and provide the player with a well detailed window on the world of Mitteldorf. The size of the display window is adjustable (reducing its size makes play acceptable on slower systems), though, even at its largest size the view provided is about 50 percent smaller than that of *Ultima Underworld*. Still, when approaching an object, texture and detail remain amazingly intact, more so than the competition.

Clearly, smooth 3-D graphic scrolling is *Valour*'s key selling point, enhanced by the overall quality of its 256-color VGA graphics. However, next to graphics in caliber is the game's documentation. Both creative and entertaining, the manual is written with just the right amount of information and humor, making the experience of pouring through its pages an enjoyable one.

The Stuff of Which Legends are Made?

As already stated, *Legends of Valour* suffers from a significant number of weaknesses. Its restrictions on game saves, numerous distractions, general lack of atmosphere, and absence of sufficient audio enhancements all contribute to an overall lack of enjoyment and staying power. While the graphics are as good as claimed, they cannot make up for the game's numerous deficiencies.

I have high hopes for SSI's upcoming releases: *Dark Sun, Eye of the Beholder III* and *Veil of Darkness*. All portend to be excellent products. As far as *Legends of Valour* is concerned, though, I believe the wise choice would be to leave the task of discovering what legends are made of to some other adventurer. CGW

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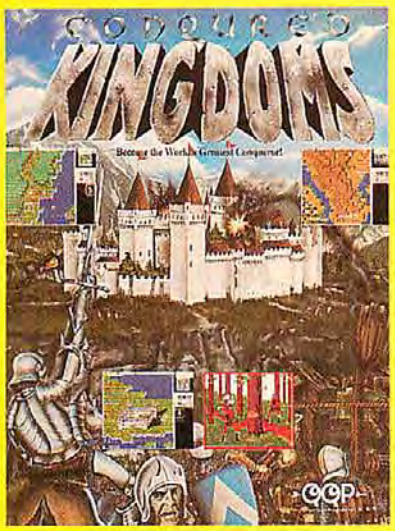

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BEST of the REST

The world of shareware

DUNGEONS MAKE ME DIZZY

by Chuck Miller

Wolfenstein 3D from **id Software** is one of the best known shareware games of recent years. It shattered the popular conception of shareware games as low quality productions with its smooth scrolling, 256-color VGA graphics and its high caliber music and sound effects.

Most gamers, however, are unfamiliar with another title by **id Software** that was actually *Wolfenstein 3D*'s predecessor, *The Catacomb Abyss*. *Abyss* was developed by **id Software** for **Softdisk Publishing** before the release of *Wolfenstein 3D* (while **id** was still a part of the **Softdisk** development team). In this installment of "Best of the Rest," we will examine *The Catacomb Abyss,* in addition to a similar release from Ken Silverman at **Advanced Systems**, *Ken's Labyrinth.*

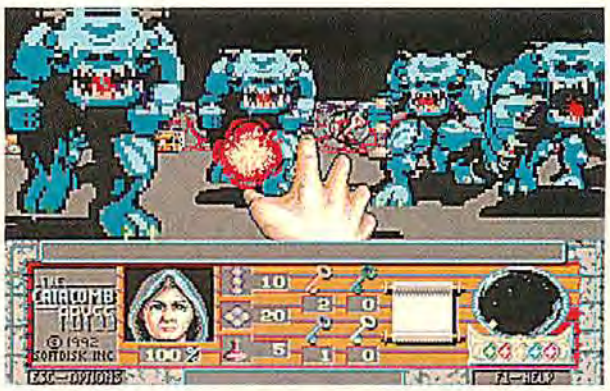
A Brush with Death in the Catacomb

Though **Softdisk Publishing** is best known for their *Gamer's Edge* monthly disk subscription service, *The Catacomb Abyss* [IBMPC RT #31173] is a shareware release. The story is of the traditional search-out-and-destroy-the-evil-minion variety, with the player assuming the role of a great wizard. Play begins at surface level, with action drawing the player into the depths of the labyrinth below. Puzzles consist primarily of finding the keys necessary to unlock doors leading to successive levels of the underground maze. Other objects must also be collected in order for the player to survive and succeed in this quest. Zappers and Xterminators allow the player to fire powerful weapons at enemies, and Curing Potions keep the player alive, while magical items such as special gems help the player identify the number and position of opponents.

Combat is very basic. The player must destroy all enemies encountered (there are no friendly NPCs in this game). Three weapons are available: Magic Missiles, a single shot spell; Zappers, a continuous stream of magic missiles; and Xterminators, a circular dispersion of magic missiles. While some creatures can be disposed of with several missiles, many require a constant barrage to stop them in their tracks.

Graphics and sound effects are minimal by today's standards. Only 16-color EGA graphics are supported, though the game can be played with any EGA or better graphics card installed. Graphic detail is good, but modest, while sound effects are limited to simple explosions, thuds and the like. Music is nonexistent. Still, the game is very enjoyable despite the austerity of its presentation.

The only other notable problem in *Abyss* (which holds true for all 3-D smooth scrolling products) is that the game's smooth scrolling, which so readily allows dungeon walls to speed by at a rapid pace, may cause some players to experience excessive eyestrain, headaches and even motion sickness after extended play. Limiting the amount of time spinning through labyrinths to shorter sessions will prevent most of these problems from arising. However, there are some gamers who cannot stomach such rapid motion on-screen. A game as addictive as *The Catacomb Abyss*, though, is hard to pull oneself away from.



Asking for trouble in The Catacomb Abyss

The shareware version of *The Catacomb Abyss* is available on the Software Creations BBS at (508) 365-2359 and (508) 368-4137, and is available from the Download Superstore on the PRODIGY Service. Those who do not have access to a modem, can order *Abyss* direct from **Softdisk** for $5.00.

The registration fee of $14.95 purchases an on-line hint book that includes maps of each level, object locations and several helpful Cheat Keys. Sending in a registration fee of $29.95 entitles the player to all three *Catacomb 3-D Adventures* including the sequels *The Catacomb Armageddon* and *The Catacomb Apocalypse.* For the investment, this bundle is a very good value. An MS-DOS compatible computer with 640K RAM and an EGA or better graphics card is required. Mouse and joystick are supported as are Ad Lib and Sound Blaster sound boards. For more information, contact:

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Ken's Labyrinth [IBMPC RT #31470], like *The Catacomb Abyss*, employs 3-D technologies to provide the player with smooth scrolling graphics in a first-person perspective adventure. Like *Abyss*, the labyrinth walls pass by quickly and smoothly. However, graphics in *Ken's Labyrinth* are of much higher quality at 256-color VGA. Detail is very high.

Another area in which *Ken's Labyrinth* differs from *Abyss* is in its audio accompaniment. Though sound effects are

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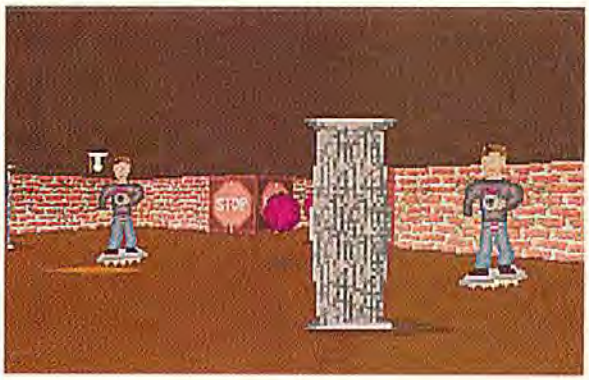
clearer, the outstanding background music really stands out. In fact, each of the 27 levels in the labyrinth offers an original soundtrack.

At times, *Ken's Labyrinth* almost seems to be a parody of its competition, placing signs on the walls that read "WALK THROUGH THIS WALL" and by depicting food that looks suspiciously like that of *Wolfenstein 3D*. Nevertheless, the game has much to its own merit.



Ken's Labyrinth

A registration fee of $15 provides the player with Board Pack 1 that adds an additional 10 levels to the game, plus a Bonus level. A second Board Pack is also available for $15 adding another 10 levels and a Boss level. Both can be had for a registration fee of $25.

To play *Ken's Labyrinth*, one need only possess an MS-DOS compatible with 965K of RAM (210K conventional memory, plus XMS or EMS memory) and a VGA graphics card. A 386-based system is recommended. Support for a mouse and Ad Lib compatible sound cards is provided. Those desirous of venturing into *Ken's Labyrinth* should send their registration fees to:

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Out of the Depths

This concludes our look at shareware games for another issue and continues to prove that computer entertainment does not necessarily have to offer the best in graphics and sound to provide one with an enjoyable playing experience. Nor does one have to part with $40 to $60 to acquire a worthwhile game. Shareware offers a viable source of entertainment, especially for the gamer on a budget. So, until next we meet, great gaming to one and all!

Games reviewed in this column are available through numerous distributors of shareware and public domain software, as well as on many national and private telecommunication services (GEnie RoundTable locations and file numbers appear in brackets when available). If access to these services is not available, it is possible, in most cases, to write or call the game developer for an evaluation copy. Remember, shareware games should be registered with the author.

Send Us Your Best

Those who have authored a shareware or public domain game and would like to have it considered for review in this column, please send two complete copies (preferably on 3.5" disks) with documentation and a cover letter to:

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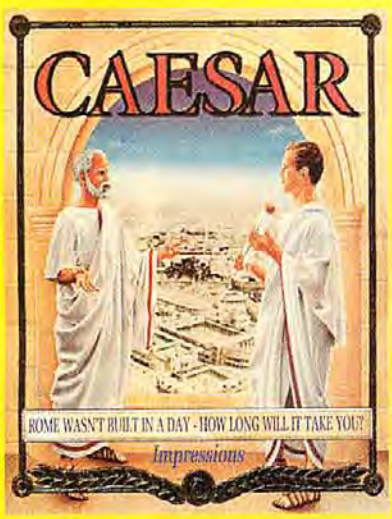

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Over There

The Comet Cometh

by Robin Matthews

This should be a very busy column this month, since software is appearing from almost every direction. The French Franc may be tied to the Deutchsmark, but the Software *maison* Chez **Infogrammes** is one of the most original and prolific ensembles around. Their innovative title *Alone in the Dark (AITD)* was initially pencilled in as a genuine horror/thriller adventure in an agreement with the estate of the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft.

That project, however, became a technical crusade in its own right, with its dynamic and haunting movement system becoming the main thrust of the software. It was decided to postpone the genuine H.P. Lovecraft project and to concentrate on the radical design of *AITD*.

Having successfully completed *AITD*, the company has now returned to the drawing board, and its designers are hard at work on the original game storyboard — provisionally entitled, *Shadow of the Comet*. The plot starts some 76 years ago with the visit of Lord Boleskine, an eccentric British scientist, to a small fishing port in New England, called Isthmuth.

Upon gazing up at the night sky, he notices that the stars are arranged in a different fashion in a specific place. Then, during the passing over of Halley's Comet, he experiences a strange and peculiar phenomenon that sends him quite bonkers and totally doodle alley. Two years later, he dies locked up in an asylum in London. Since that time his works, sketches and writings have faded into obscurity.

Scroll forward to the year 1910. A young British Astronomer, John T. Carter becomes interested in Lord Boleskine and decides to investigate the last few years of the mad scientist's life. Carter travels to Isthmuth and is warmly welcomed by its inhabitants, including Dr West and the local Public Records Official, Tobias Juggs.

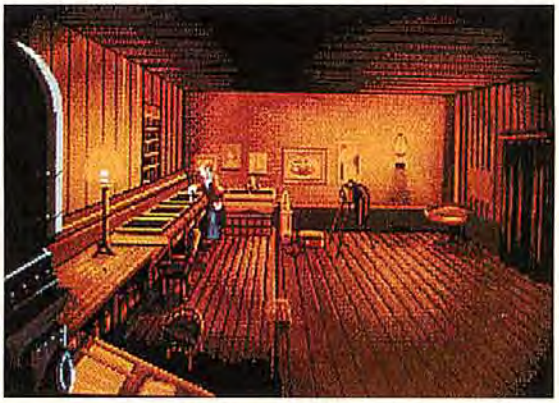
Carter discovers that all is not well in Isthmuth. Why, for example, is the Whatley name treated with such fear? What is this strange religious cult? What are these strange ceremonies being held in the forest? What is the strange old Indian Sorcerer Miskaquamus trying to do? Who are the ancient Gods who reigned over the Earth thousands of years ago? What is the *Necronomicon*?

This is the detailed background to *Shadow of the Comet* and may explain why **Infogrammes** did not want to risk combining such a rich storyline with the new *AITD* engine. *Shadow* is a full blown graphic adventure, using a development of the techniques used in their well received *Eternam*. Gamers control John T. Carter around the 100 or so screens that make up Isthmuth and will be faced with a series of puzzles and quests that must be solved by interaction with the 40 or so NPCs.

Each time one of these characters is encountered or one's on-screen personna enters a screen that has particular importance to the game (opening a lock, using items, unleashing incredibly powerful supernatural forces or omnipotent super beings), a fully animated sequence is presented. With NPCs this is normally a full close up of the NPC, with others full screen animation.

The interface appears simple to use, harking back to the halcyon days of adventures and limited to basic commands such as: talk, get, take, use and look. This normally would result in the game being linear or limited, but in *Shadow of the Comet*, Infogrammes hopes that the graphics and storyline are so impressive that the interface merges into the game, rather than being the most important feature.

A general information bar can be displayed or suppressed and an "Info" command gives access to Carter's diary which has a summary of the important stages of the adventure as well as conversations and happenings. This form of *aide memoire* is being used more and more in recent games and is a welcome feature.



Shadow of the Comet

The graphics are about the best seen in 320 x 200 mode, with locations being separately drawn for day and night scenes, and utilizing sprite animations, vectorial full-screen graphics and close-up techniques. Movement is as sweet and rapid as in *Eternam*, but without some of the quirks. *Shadow of the Comet* looks very promising, is due for release on MS-DOS platforms later in the year and will support VGA/MCGA graphics only, as well as all major sound cards.

The last few years have been the era of the *big* game. Games like *Ultima Underworld*, *Ultima VII* and the very dark

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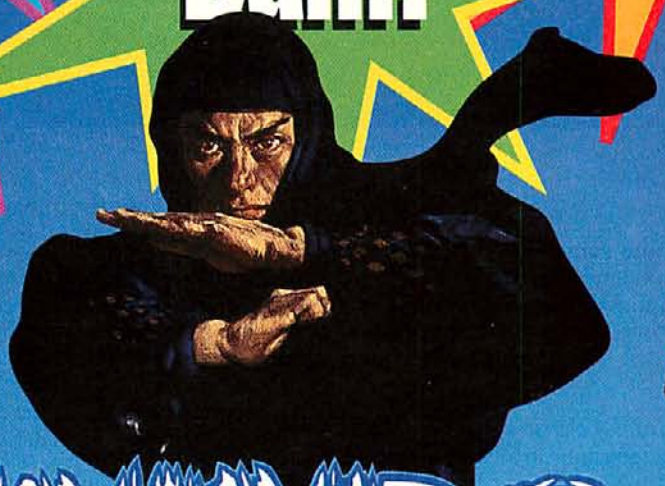
Hi-Ya!

Bam!

Ouch!



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Darklands. As a departure, the remainder of this month's "Over-There" looks at some lighter software that may, or may not, end up travelling across the pond.

One of the big European software houses that does not figure too often in the "Over There" column is the UK's **Ocean Software**. Based in Manchester, **Ocean** is well known in Europe for several things — some home grown superior shoot-em-up's, various film tie-ins and importing some classy US software. Their own software development boys have gone berserk over the last few months with a series of new releases. These include: *Elf, Wizkid, Zool, WWF European Rampage Tour, Cool World ,Robocop 3* and shortly, *Lethal Weapon.*

Shadow of the Comet

Elf is a good looking adventure game with a heavy dose of the scrolling platform game. Gamers control Cornelius the Elf and travel through some wonderfully sculptured back drops, casting spells and disposing of an indeterminate collection of goblins, gooks and castle guards. With lots of good puzzles, the system has some quirks, but generally works well.

Wizkid is **Ocean**'s follow up to a UK classic called *Wizball*. This was an early piece of very odd programming involving bouncing a ball around a platform type environment. *Wizkid* is almost equally as weird, but far more playable. Set in a strange adventure world, there are links back to *Wizball*, since Wizball and Wizard have been kidnapped and imprisoned by the evil Zark. So has the family cat, Nifta, who is locked up in Turtle Jail. Okay, most of the newcomers to this bizarre game universe are now skipping this article and moving off down the page. Hopefully, they will hang on for a minute, because there is much more to come and, with a plot this convoluted, the game *must* make up for it!

Wizkid consists of two phases with additional bonus levels thrown in. Phase 1 involves controlling the Wizkid as he bounces around the screens. As he bounces about, one not only destroys the minions of the chief nasty, but also earns some hard cash in a very unusual way! As the character knocks out the baddies, a musical note is created and floats across the screen. If the Wizkid can grab this, some musical notes are written to a musical stave. If one collects enough notes to make a tune, this invokes a most welcome rainstorm of money. Naturally, the Wizkid must quickly collect said funds or the entire exercise is worthless.

Shadow of the Comet

Still reading? Now, the Wizkid can take the money to the shop and use it to purchase lots of very strange odds and ends that function as useful tools in the next portions of the game. Once all the screens have been cleared of Zark's minions, one of Nifta's kittens appears and the player can then move into the second part of the game. Each kitten needs to be rescued, which is achieved by solving various logic-type puzzles.

The graphics are very good, sound support is OK, and the interface is involved, but once learned is pretty good. *Wizkid* is an original and unusual game. It is European in flavour, very European; in fact it could even be French. This will not be everyone's pint of beer, but it is different and, with the tactical and puzzle aspects is far more than an arcade game with some frills bolted on. It is currently available now on Amiga, ST and IBM.

Zool is another superior puzzle/platform type, worthy of a short mention purely because of the recent hype about consoles. *Zool*, currently available on the Amiga, but shortly to be produced on the IBM, is considered (by those who profess to know) to be all that Sonic Hedgehog — the animal that launched a thousand consoles — should have been! That is a big compliment for this graphically superb addictive joystick waggler. "Over There" will keep you posted on the IBM PC version, but when the console explosion subsides, it may be this type of product that will draw those users to proper machines, and real software.

World Wrestling Federation: European Rampage Tour is **Ocean**'s follow-up to the original WWF product. It is a wrestling 'simulator' that allows gamers to pit their favorite WWF Superstars, such as Hulk Hogan and The Ultimate Warrior, against their European counterparts, such as Natural Disasters and the Nasty Boys. Graphics are purely average and the controls are all right, but let me put my cards on the table, this is definitely *not* my sort of game.

In fact, it wouldn't even appear in this column other than it allows me to ask US sports fans everywhere to kindly keep the "heroes" of the WWF well and truly locked up in the USA, in their cages, or their television sets or whatever. If this is available on import in the US it will be a fitting revenge!

The two other US inspired products from **Ocean** are *Lethal Weapon* and *Robocop 3*. The first is almost a straight platform tie-in with the Mel Gibson/Danny Glover smash film. Early screenshots look good and the company really knows how to produce this type of title as a winner.

Robocop 3 is, however, much more than a mere shoot-em-up film tie-in. One of **Ocean**'s big early hits was the UK distribution of the old **Data East** four color CGA *Robocop*. They did not handle the later EGA versions, but have now produced, in-house, this excellent product. *Robocop 3* is based on a film yet to be released, but the basic backdrop of the plot is of OCP, the company that built Robocop, being taken over by a Japanese conglomerate. Crime is still rife in town, with Splatter punks and official vigilante groups declaring war on each other.

Robocop 3 puts the player in charge of old tin legs and can be played on one of two levels, Arcade or Movie. The Arcade game consists of five different modules, the Adventure game is more of a graphic adventure, weaving the type of challenges found in the arcade games into one story line. The separate games within this mode involve either having the player on patrol and driving a Police Turbo Cruiser, cleaning up drug gangs and rescuing hostages, testing out the new gyropack, or going head-to-head with another cyborg. All the action is seen through Robocop's perspective, but there are also a series of selectable fixed and floating camera angles.

That's the story of what's available on this side of the **Ocean**. We'll try to have even more surprises, next issue. **CGW**

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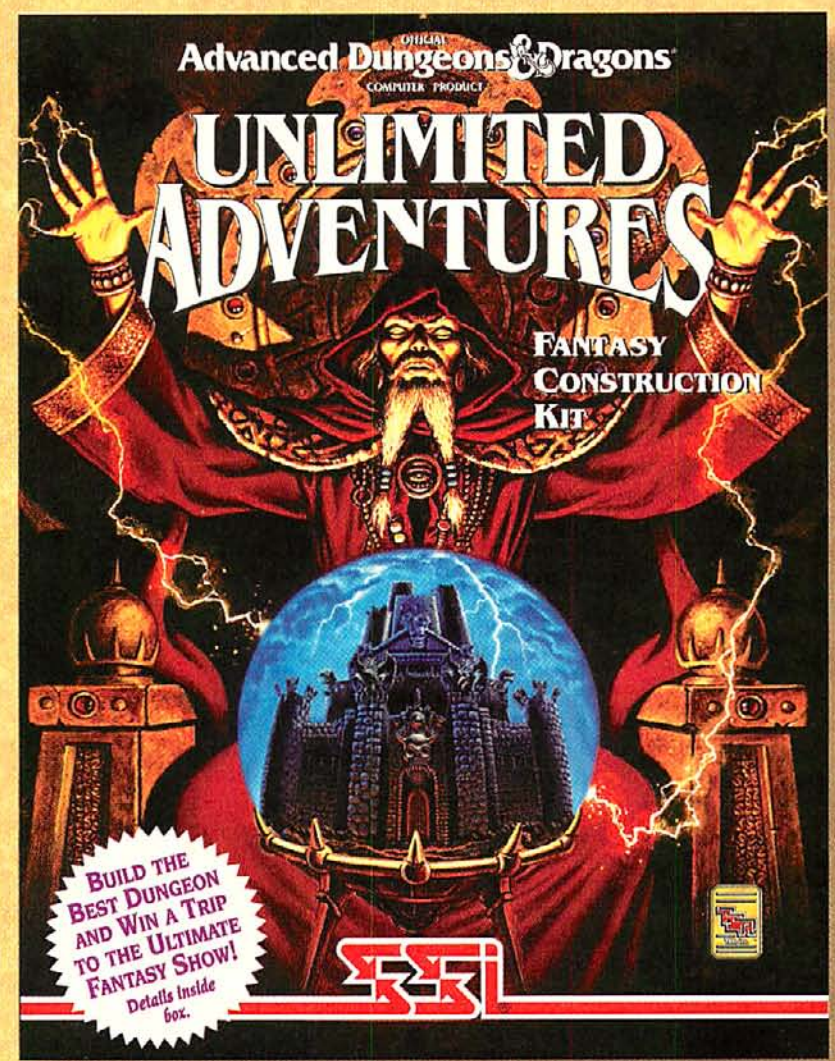

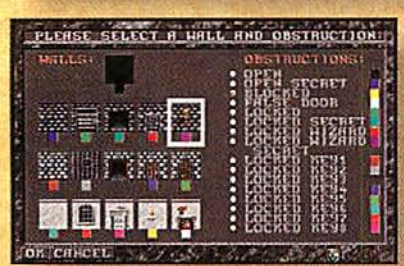

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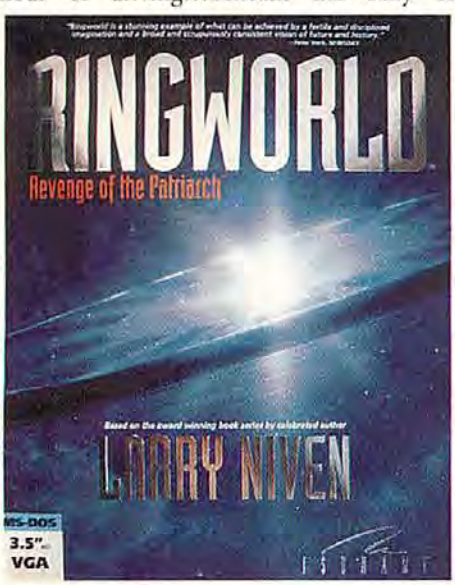
Return To Known Space

Tsunami's *Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch*

by Charles Ardai

Larry Niven's Ringworld is enormous. Not the novel, which weighs in at a tidy 342 pages, but the Ringworld itself, the huge alien artifact which gives Niven's best-known work its title. At one point, Niven likens the Ringworld to 50 feet of Christmas ribbon circling a candle. Only, in place of the candle, imagine a sun — and suddenly one is dealing with a Christmas ribbon that has three million times the surface area of the Earth.

The size of the thing is one of the crucial points of the book, and it is inevitably the one that suffers in the computer game adaptation from Tsunami. There are only so many screens of the Ringworld wall that one can scroll past before getting bored. "How could Speaker stand it?" Niven writes. "Hour after hour of driving...beneath the belly of this...artifact." So Tsunami gives us three and lets it go at that. With so much room, the Ringworld is home to an unimaginably huge number of alien cultures; Tsunami shows us five, and shows them to us briefly.



TITLE:	Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch
SYSTEM:	IBM
GRAPHICS:	VGA
SOUND SUPPORT:	Ad Lib, Pro Audio Spectrum, Roland, Sound Blaster
PRICE:	$59.95
PROTECTION:	Documentation Look-up
DESIGNERS:	John Jarrett, Chris Hoyt, Robert E. Heitman
PUBLISHER:	Tsunami Coarsegold, CA (209) 683-8266

There is probably no way of getting around this limitation, short of putting the game on a couple of CDs and spending a decade or two writing it. Still, Tsunami has to face the fact that it has chosen to adapt an essentially impossible-to-adapt work. One could create a comprehensive simulation of *War and Peace*'s Russia before one could exhaust the slightest fraction of the Ringworld's surface.

Readers might wonder why I mention this at all — surely Niven himself didn't exhaust the possibilities of his creation in his novel, and no one gets on his case about it. Yet, as I keep stressing in my reviews, there is a difference between a novel and an interactive game. A novel, like a film, is an author-directed journey through however immense a landscape. A game, on the other hand, is supposed to be a player-directed journey. In a game, the entire landscape, or as much of it as possible, must be accessible.

Not here. In *Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch*, Tsunami has taken the opposite tack, shuttling the player through a storyline so rigidly constructed that one might as well be in the hands of an intrusive, Dickensian author who says explicitly, "Now, Dear Reader, I shall take you to see the colony of the Canyon People..."

Never before has there been a game so movie-like in its construction. There are great stretches of action during which the player literally does nothing. The last several minutes of the story contains several events in which the player could participate, but he is never given the chance to do so. Even when the player's input is requested it is often irrelevant (i.e., all of the player's choices produce the same outcome), or else it sets in motion an animated sequence over which the player has no control.

The animated sequences are well done (though the graphics sometimes become embarrassingly rough when the characters approach the extreme foreground), and the game is relentlessly faithful to Niven's conceptions; but this is all beside the point. The point is that the game resembles a cartoon. One does have to solve puzzles to "unlock" each section of the game, so the player does have *something* to do, but Niven fans should not come to the game expecting to have a chance to roam free on their beloved Ringworld. What they should expect, instead, is a single, new tale of the Ringworld, with them participating minimally in the telling.

Chmeee For Wu and Wu For Chmeee

The story picks up shortly after the end of the novel and, in fact, maps itself to the novel quite well. In place of jaded adventurer Louis Wu we get jaded mercenary Quinn, a friend of Louis Wu's. In place of the nameless Kzin, Speaker-To-Animals, we get Speaker's son, Seeker-Of-Vengeance. In place of sassy, sexy Teela Brown we get sassy, sexy Miranda Rees. In place of insane Puppeteer Nessus running the mission for his own purposes we get a different Puppeteer, also "Hindmost" (that is, pulling the strings), though this one only appears in holographic form. In short, we get a new (but not very) band of four adventurers out to reclaim Slaver technology from the backward Ringworlders.

The two humans and the Kzin go off to the Ringworld under the Puppeteer's coercion, hoping to track down the missing Louis Wu and Speaker-To-Animals, as well as to restore the honor of the Chmeee family. (Speaker-

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To-Animals has been branded a traitor for cooperating with the humans and the game opens with an raid on his home.) There is also some business about the new hyperdrive ships that the humans and the Kzin are building and about a Kzinti plot to destroy the Puppeteer Fleet of Worlds...all in all, enough plot for several novels, or at least one very big one.

As noted above, though, the game is not very big. Most of the issues the game raises simply go unresolved. What became of Wu and Chmeee? Will the order of execution against Seeker be lifted? What will become of the artifacts found on the Ringworld? Were the Puppeteers ever in danger? If not, why not?

These questions and more like them are just dropped unanswered at the game's close. There is an explosive climax and a rousing chorus of the theme music, and then there's the DOS prompt, blinking merrily and leaving the gamer without so much as a promise of a "Part Two."

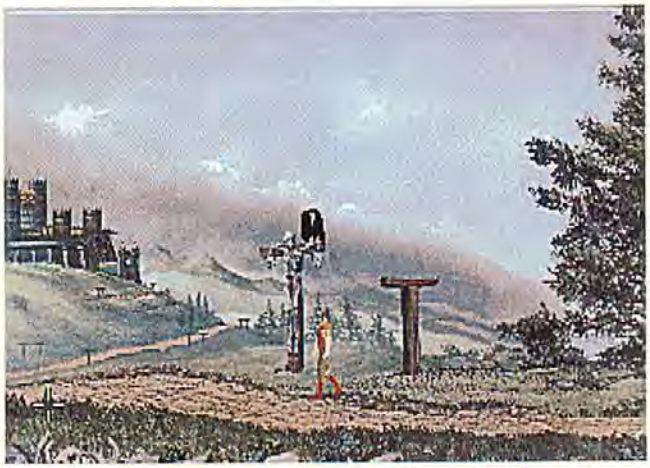
Within individual sequences, the player is asked to solve puzzles (and, at one point, to go through a mercifully optional action sequence) in order to find high-tech items that are in the hands of some very low-tech aliens. One stasis box is held by the superstitious, drunken Canyon People, and Quinn has to sleep with the daughter of the Chief to get it. Another is in the cavern of the Flesh Eaters, where Quinn and Seeker get captured and almost eaten. Still another is at the bottom of the ocean and its acquisition, strangely, takes place offscreen. The last, longest, and best sequence has Quinn infiltrating a Kzinti castle on the Ringworld to steal a Slaver helmet. Then, finally, there's a trip back to the Canyon People for an encounter with one more alien and that's it — that's the whole game.

Along the way, buddy-buddy relationships build up among our three heroes. We know this because they start the game snarling at each other and, bit by bit, snarling gives way to amiable sniping. The banter is on the level of a Saturday morning cartoon, and the simplistic, one-dimensional relationships make the original novel, somewhat pulpy itself, look like a Henry James psychodrama.

There Ain't No Justice

The player puts the characters through their paces using a pop-up interface of command icons which appears wherever one clicks the right mouse button. The icons include no surprises: one can Talk, Walk, Look, Use/Touch, access one's Inventory, or access the disk. This interface works well, and I like not having to go to the top of the screen to do everything.

There are some quirks in the gameplay, however, which make the game occasionally unbearable. One of the worst is in the Flesh Eaters' cavern, where a helpful alien instructs Quinn to push on a stone pillar. The first problem is that there are many stones and many pillars, pushing on any of which but the right one produces no result. The bigger problem is that if one pushes on the right pillar in anywhere but exactly the right location, there is also no result.



What ends up happening is that one pushes the right pillar, sees no result, and writes that pillar off as the wrong one. Hours later, after trying to push everything on the screen, one may return to the right pillar and accidentally hit the right spot or, then again, might not. Less annoying, but only slightly, is a scene where one has to touch exactly the right book on a crowded bookshelf.

Movement is another source of annoyance. One clicks on the spot where Quinn should go and, as often as not, he promptly goes somewhere else. Sometimes he even wanders onto portions of the screen where one cannot see him at all and stays there while one clicks wildly to get him to reappear.

You Gotta Niven To Hold 'Em...

There is one area in which the game is unequivocally successful, and that is in conjuring up Niven's creatures and environments. This, presumably, is what most gamers who buy *Ringworld* are paying to see, so it may be that other players will be happier with the game than I was.

The aliens Quinn encounters are drawn meticulously and always in keeping with Niven's descriptions from the book, from the two-headed, ostritch-like Puppeteers to the ferocious, feline Kzin, first cousins to *Wing Commander*'s Kilrathi. If the aliens Quinn meets in the flesh aren't sufficient to glut the appetites of hardcore Niven fans, Quinn's lander (transparent, bubble-shaped, just as Niven wrote) contains a computer terminal which can access a sort of Encyclopedia Nivenica which includes text about the inhabitants and history of Known Space, plus pictures of almost all alien races.

The spaceships in the game are not entirely satisfying (the super-duper hyperdrive vessels look like the nacelles of the Starship Enterprise), the human beings could be drawn better (Miranda looks distractingly like a young Barbra Streisand), and the animation is jerkier than one would like. However, the aliens, the props (flycycles, pressure suits, sleep plates, autodoc) and the Ringworld itself all look just the way fans would expect them to.

Unfortunately, I suspect that it will be exactly those players who love the game for its recreation of Niven's world who will hate it for its negligent storytelling. They are the ones who will really want to find out what happens next, and they are the ones who will be the most disappointed when they discover that the answer is "nothing."

...Niven To Fold 'Em

As with most adaptations from literature, this game is obviously a labor of love, created by people with an affection for Niven's universe but too little story-telling talent to do it justice. Science fiction fanzines are full of stories like this one, the work of fans who try to write new adventures of Tarzan, Dr. Who, Captain Kirk or whomever. Such stories are almost always sub-professional, at least in terms of technical skill. Writing is tougher than it seems.

Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch is a disappointment in exactly this way. It looks and sounds good but is very poorly written. *Ringworld*, the game, is to *Ringworld*, the novel, what the *Ghostbusters*, *Back To The Future*, and *James Bond, Jr.* cartoons are to the movies that inspired them: more colorful, perhaps, but flatter, dumber, smaller, and in every way lesser. **CGW**

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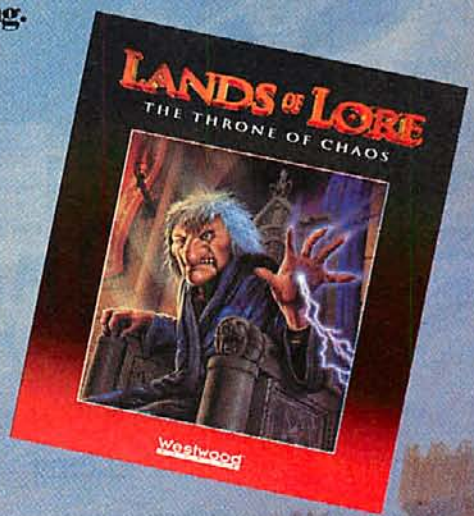

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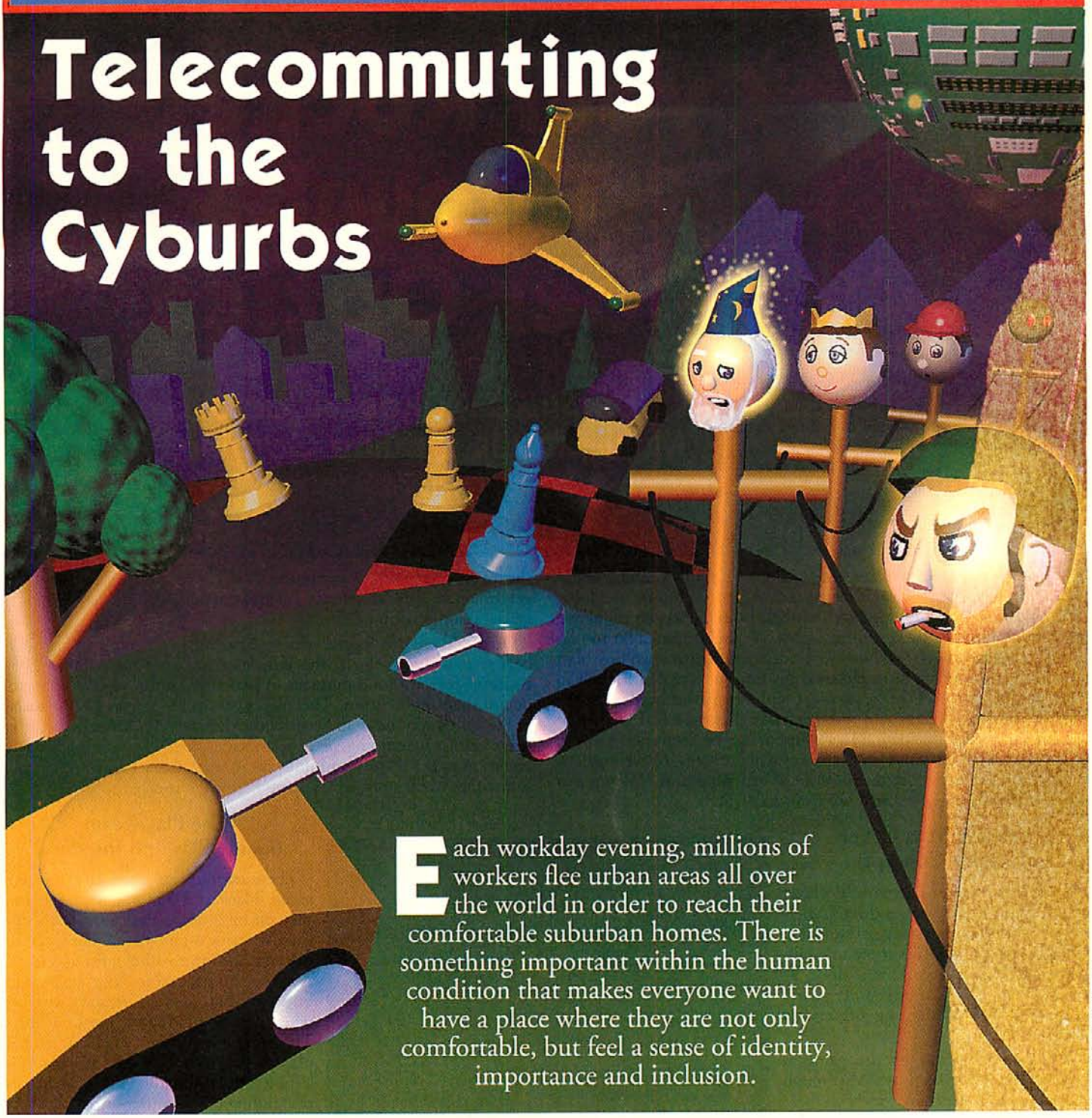

Each workday evening, millions of workers flee urban areas all over the world in order to reach their comfortable suburban homes. There is something important within the human condition that makes everyone want to have a place where they are not only comfortable, but feel a sense of identity, importance and inclusion.

Illustration by Herk Dawson

For many computer gamers, the commute to more comfortable surroundings is both faster and further than ever before. Instead of commuting to and from the suburbs, they compute to and from the cyburbs. What are these cyburbs? They are communities of on-line gamers where one's neighbor may be geographically located a full continent away. They are both real and imaginary locations where gamers can find a sense of identity (or another identity), importance and inclusion. They are cultures and sub-cultures with their own social dynamics of language, ritual and politics.

According to a recent *CGW* poll, almost 40 percent of our readership is connected to one on-line service or another. So, it is very likely that many are already effecting their own great escapes, and others will be interested in what it means to do so. With this in mind, we have created a survey of on-line games and a host of special features for this month's theme section. This is our on-line world and welcome to it.

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Cyber Rockets Through Fiber Optics

GEnie's *CyberStrike* Makes Gigantor Strides in Multi-player, On-line Gaming

by David M. Wilson

First kills are sweet. After half an hour of madly dashing about dropping energy relay towers, picking up expansion modules, jumping over buildings with a single bound and getting blown up, I finally had the turkey in my sights. He had drifted a bit too far from his energy towers, and I took the opportunity to open fire, blast after blast pummeling him. He tried to run, but jammed himself in between the corners of two adjoining buildings. So, I moved in for the kill, savoring the sweetness of revenge (after all, he'd killed me two or three times already that day). His air support dropped an energy tower, so I turned and blasted it, lowering his available energy. Swiveling back to face him, I finally had the pleasure of watching him blow up and received the message, "Earned kill recorded!"

Driving Miss Cyber (Game Concept)

CyberStrike is a fast-paced multi-player action game where players drive Cyberpods — robotic, two-legged vehicles. The goal of the game is simply to establish control of a city. This is done by establishing fortifications and power centers as well as fighting off enemy teams.

The primary focus of the game is power. This power is provided through relay towers. Players have to rely on these towers. They must call their air support planes to drop towers at strategic points and eliminate the enemies' towers. I found myself occasionally straying too far from one of my team's towers. At such times, my energy level would drop rapidly, and a teammate would radio me, "Get closer to the towers, Butcher." The result of running out of energy is instant destruction. Fortunately, players who are killed are instantly assigned a new Cyberpod (devoid of any modifications that had been made before being destroyed) back at the team's start point. A two-minute shield protects the player until he gets oriented or decides to start offensive actions before the two-minute grace period is completed.

Driving these two-legged vehicles is not very difficult if one remembers several things. First, the vehicles don't stop on a dime. They continue forward for a moment or two after slamming on the brakes due to their momentum. This forces one to try stopping a bit ahead of the actual spot desired. Second, the display will show a player who jams against a building or other object which leg is jammed. Pay attention to the display and it is easy to work free. Also, jumping will sometimes free a jammed Cyberpod, as will a rocket module.

TITLE:	CyberStrike
SYSTEMS:	IBM
PRICE:	GEnie Value Service ($6 per hour non-prime time usage)
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:	VGA 386-20 MHz or faster, 2 MB memory, and modem (2400 recommended)
DESIGNER:	David Whatley
PUBLISHER:	Simutronics
AVAILABILITY:	GEnie 1-800-638-9636

The Play Team (Game Play and Interface)

There are four teams in each game: red, green, black and blue. Four players can play on each team. Each unit has a distinctive stripe on its side so that it can be distinguished from other units on a team. A player can attempt to "lone wolf" a bit, but play is more effective and satisfying when one is working as part of a team. The game is well-balanced so that if other players on a team quit, and one player is left by himself, he still has a good chance of standing off the other teams.

There are also "neutrals" in the city. There are tower munchers which attack towers without demonstrating any color preferences and sentinels which sit on strategic points and fire upon any approaching team. Fortunately, these neutrals serve as an automatic balancing factor. If one player suddenly finds his buddies have logged off, the tower munchers will pick on the towers of the opposing teams who outnumber him until some degree of balance is restored.

One of the goals David Whatley had in de-

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One of the goals David Whatley had in designing this game was creating a multi-player universe that was easy to learn but difficult to master. *CyberStrike* excels in its simplicity. The keyboard controls are easily mastered and the game mechanics uncomplicated. The only necessary option I find missing is a timer display that shows how long the player has been on-line. At $6 per hour there will be some real surprises at the end of the month. Of course, once I got in, my friend and I played for nearly twelve straight hours. I *do* understand the meaning of the term "game-lock."

Although I spent the majority of my time for this review in ALPHA, the training city, and, as a result, was able to move about and survive pretty well in the beginner-level cities, I was usually instantly annihilated in the upper levels when Whatley jacked me into higher levels just to get a feel for the game.

The depth of the upper level cities is utterly amazing. I was really impressed with the graphic portrayal of fog. You can't get more real than this. The fog was the most believable effect that I saw, but I was dumbfounded at its ability to portray reality. The storms were well done, but I discovered it rains inside the tunnels just as hard as it does outside them (hopefully, that's just a beta-version quirk). One of the basic necessities of the upper levels is an Infrared module, which enhances images in dark or fog.

According to Whatley, there are over 50 modules which a player can pick up when another player is destroyed (those little suckers go everywhere) or purchase with points (earned for each second of survival). Each module enhances the player's ability by increasing firepower, movement, speed or vision. The catch is that the player is limited on what kinds of modules he can carry. Each module bay is assigned a level, and only modules of that level or lower may be installed. As the player earns points, the level of the bays advances and the player can add modules on a higher level. Experienced players will assist the "newbie" in knowing what modules he needs for each individual city.

The Killing Yields (Conclusion)

I noted from the multi-player games bulletin board that I was not the only person who had problems getting into the game. My modem was not working properly with the software. The thing that some people are having to do, from terminal mode within the software, is to give their modem a direct command, "AT&C1" to wake their modem up. Then, the software is generally ready to call and connect, *if* the comm ports are set up properly. **Simutronics** cheerfully assists anyone having trouble getting into the game (not just reviewers). Leave E-mail and they *will* assist you, I guarantee it's worth it.

CyberStrike is addictive, action-filled and downright fun. The violence is bloodless (since everyone immediately gets carried back to their bases and receives new Cyberpods), but the challenge is exhilarating. Since it is played against real people instead of artificial intelligence, it varies every time it is played. And it will be played a lot! **CGW**

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All Screens shown are IBM 256-color VGA.

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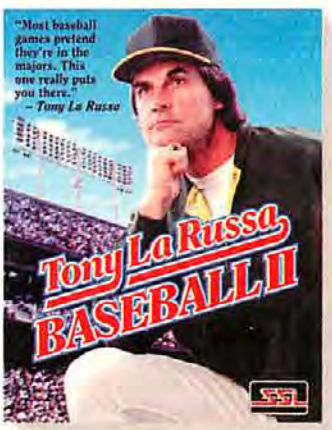

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Mining the BBS On-line Games

A survey of gems to be found on private bulletin board systems

by William J. Shefski

The geology of the Bulletin Board System (BBS) scene anywhere is ever-shifting. Private boards come and go, and so do the games they carry to attract and amuse their faithful callers. Just as distributors of commercial games show little mercy towards an unsuccessful game, the cruel dictates of available hard-drive space cannot tolerate the presence of an on-line game which fails to attract players. The evolutionary pressures of the BBS world are strong, and only the fittest seem to survive.

This article covers some of the games suitable for use on local bulletin board systems. Even *CGW* readers who do not operate their own BBS may want to look for the same or similar games on local boards in their areas.

To offer some guidance in this maze of on-line games, I have rated the games on a three point system. The highest number represents games which are so interesting that a gamer could fill his/her whole time ration with it, if the BBS set-up would allow it. The medium rating suggests games which are amusing enough to keep a player coming back often, but not necessarily losing any sleep if they missed a session here and there. The lowest rated games are probably best avoided.

Nearly without exception, these on-line games generate a bulletin that can be posted somewhere on the board. Some keep track of the high scores for the month, week, day and/or all-time. This is an important aspect, maintaining high caller interest through the gamers' desire for cyber-glory.

(Please note: Because of the shifting nature of the BBS scene, the telephone numbers and addresses listed here may have been changed by the time this issue reaches the stands. No guarantees as to the currency of the boards they may or may not reach is possible.)

BBS BOWL: (James Fair, The Fishing Hole BBS, 615-646-5550) This game features bowling on an unforgiving lane. Indeed, a real bowler might say it was over-oiled. Still, this features an attractive screen and it is likely that the smart-alecky commentary will bring the player back to try again. It has an increasingly more common "hold-back" enhancement for the registered version — make-up days. This allows the caller to play their daily limit of games from days they missed during the month.

BUGS! (Rick Salinas, Dark Side of the Moon BBS, 209-225-6824) This arcade game invites players to take on the role of exterminator and slaughter the crawlers. Gruesome … and snooze-some.

CRUNCH LEAGUE FOOTBALL: (Stephen David, Crunchware, Temple of Nine BBS, 703-820-6824) Allows the board to moderate a full blown football league with divisions, stats and a Super Bowl game. Users can draft fictional players who generate stats. This is a perfect use of the computing power of the host machine. This game and sports games like this generate a high degree of user interest. Sooner or later the big sports game companies will realize the potential of this forum and the deficiencies of *Crunch* will be apparent. For now, it's just about all that's out there.

DRAW POKER: (JNS Software BBS, 304-733-4148) This is one of a series of well-executed card games implemented by the prolific Rusty Johnson. Most of the others are solitaire, but *Draw Poker* is one step above that. It's five card draw one-on-one versus the computer.

GET OIL IN KUWAIT: (Gordon Wheat & Andrew Brown, Amoeba Ware, Nuclear Amoeba BBS, 410-479-1828) Although Saddam makes no appearance in this game, it is an interesting arcade-type puzzler. The gamer must pump the black gold from pockets of various shapes and sizes under the sands. Then, the oil must be removed before one's drilling rigs are destroyed by gas pockets and dynamite blasts.

GLOBAL WAR: (Joel Bergen, ProVision BBS, 206-353-6966) With a bit more than a passing resemblance to *Risk*, *Global War* provides a widespread and active door. The map is a bit different than the one in the boardgame classic, as are some of the minor rules. Many games can be played at once and there are provisions for team games. The computer resolves all combat and there is an interesting allowance made for missed calling days (i.e. Armies awarded at the beginning of one's turn are multiplied by the number of days missed.) Also available is a terminal emulation program called GWTERM which can, when running in the caller's computer, use the machine's graphics capabilities. Not only do the maps refresh almost instantly, they are much more attractive. It also allows the use of a mouse, a unique feature in an on-liner.

KANNONS & KATAPULTS: (Alan Davenport, Al's Cabin BBS, 717-686-3037) An entire game of *K & K* can be played during any logon. Player and computer are king or queen of an all-text kingdom, taking turns managing or defending kingdom and castle with cannon, catapult (oddly, more powerful than the cannon), soldiers and assassins. Beware, the computer fights back fairly well.

LABYRINTH: (Randy Hunt and Mark Goodwin, The Lighthouse BBS, 207-942-6575) Gamers looking for an interesting quest simply must wander through this 160-room text adventure game.

LADDERS: (Al Lawrence, Sunrise Software, Sunrise-80 BBS, 404-256-9525) This is a rather simple dice-rolling game where the possible rolls on two dice are ladders which have to be climbed in order to win.

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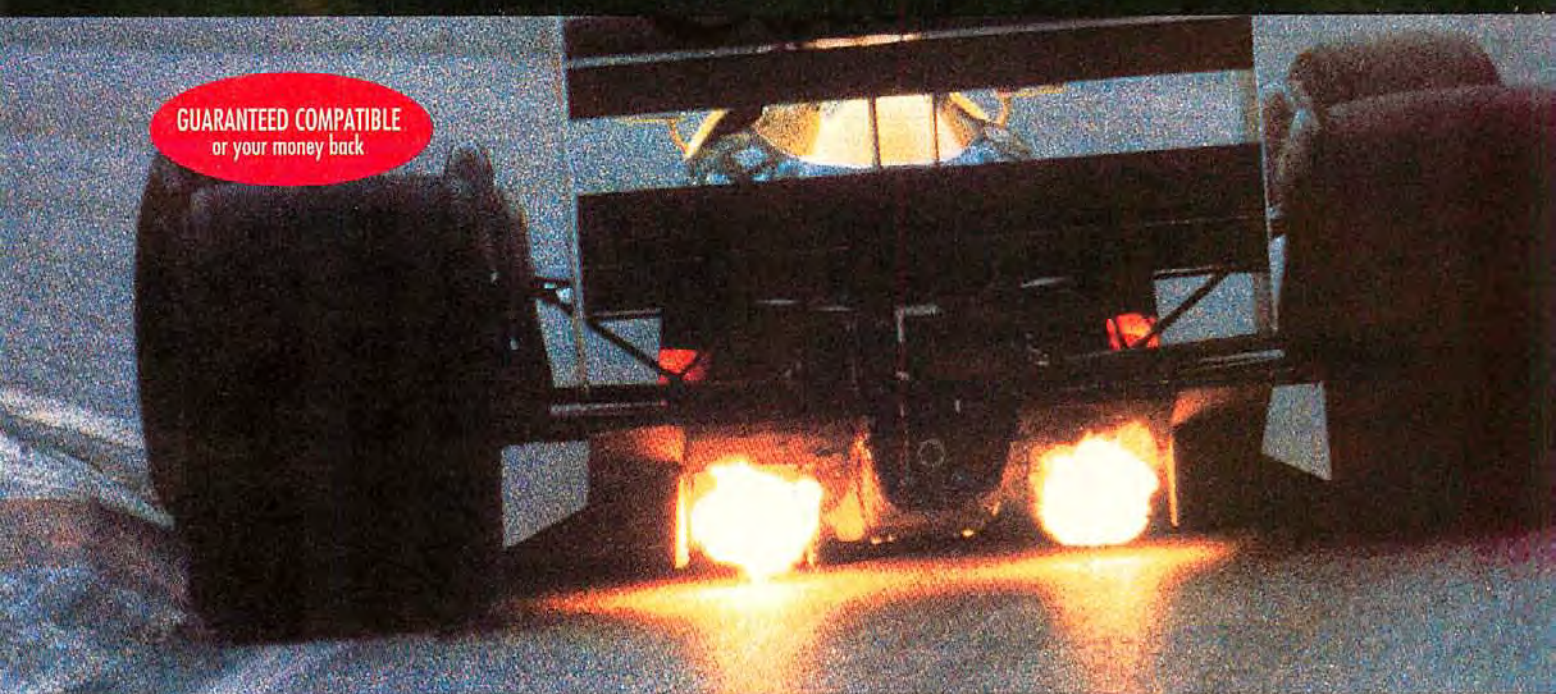

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LOGITECH

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MAHJONGG PYRAMID: (Mike Wilson, Secret Service BBS, 304-429-6838) Unfortunately, *Mahjongg Pyramid* is no more than a variation on regular pyramid solitaire with uninteresting tiles used instead of cards.

MAT MANIA: (Hack, Spiko and Doctor Z, the Cutting Edge BBS, 203-233-8993) This is an all-text game where the player names, trains and manages a wrestler. Matches can be picked at random by the computer, or one can choose a grudge match against a particular baddie (or goodie). The wrestlers, computer- and human-controlled, are ranked according to whom they have beaten. The text of the action scrolls by, and one's wrestler finds himself in and out of hammerlocks, pounding his opponent with Brain Busters, and climbing the turnbuckles. Training allows improvement of attributes and even the invention of a trademark "rasslin'" move. There could be no better testament to how surprisingly entertaining the game is than when, while tolerantly looking over his shoulder while he played, a certain non-computer-game-interested spouse of a certain reviewer couldn't contain herself. "Go for the pin! Go for the pin!" she urged. It is truly an impressive little game.

MONTE CARLO SOLITAIRE: (Al Lawrence, Sunrise-80 BBS, 404-256-9525) Players try to match up card pairs on a square grid. Then, they consolidate. Frankly, there are better ways to waste one's valuable recreational time.

MC RACE: (Motor City Software) Drag racing is the theme of this text-based game where one is required to maintain and race a rod. The excitement level probably depends on how aroused one gets by the real ones.

ON THE EDGE: (JNS Software BBS, 304-733-4148) Rusty Johnson has provided an intriguing solitaire effort in this game which is built on a 4X4 grid of open spaces. Face cards are placed around the edge and, of course, the gamer turns over cards and places them. Spaces open up by matching pip cards that add to a total of 10. No room for a face card? It's "Game Over!" Scored in the manner of duplicate bridge tournaments (as are many of the efforts from this company) where everyone plays the same hands. Thus, users are measured against each other using the same challenges.

POST TIME RACING: (Parole Software, The Parole Board BBS, 919-965-4696) If one is enough of a horse racing fan to thrill to the sight of three "horses" — represented by what appear to be hair pins — stutter across the screen, this game could be a good bet. Otherwise, one might be better off watching text phosphor burn into the monitor than trying to pick the winners in this one.

PUZZLE: (Rusty Johnson, JNS Software BBS, 304-733-4148) Consider this game to be an electronic version of one of those party favors where squares with numbers are moved around until the numbers are in order. Between the host board's computer, the home computer and the phone system in between, enough energy is burned in one play of this game to buy a six-pack of Cracker Jacks, in which the same game will likely be found as a prize.

SCRABBLE: (Christopher Hall, P.O. Box 26025, Austin TX, 78755-0025) Anyone looking for an excellent electronic rendition of "the word game by which all others are judged" will do well to check out this version. The host board houses the dictionary, adds up the points and keeps track of all the moves in up to 20 games at a time. The "challenge" rule is not invoked, but a player has only three chances to input a valid word or the turn is lost. Oddly, some proper names are acceptable in this version. That would take some getting used to for the *Scrabble* purist, but it's well worth it. Could there be any better glory than being listed as the leader in the *Scrabble* bulletin of one's local BBS? We think not.

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SINK 'EM: (Jim Wilcox, IHS Software, P.O. Box 5103, Macon, GA, 31208) This *Battleship* look-alike allows "fleets" of 10 players plus the computer to shoot five shots a day at each other.

STACK 'EM: (J & W Software 9426 N. China Pink Way, Crystal River FL, 34428) Anyone who can spell Tetris knows the score.

SUPER SLOTS: (J & W Software 9426 N. China Pink way, Crystal River FL, 34428) Who could dislike a game that starts out with "The House will stake you to $500,000"? This is a five-spot slot that spins cherries and lemons, bells and bars (not pictures, the words.) The progressive jackpot starts at $100,000,000. Addicts might play all day, if the sysop would let them.

THE PIT: (James R. Berry, Midas Touch Software, MTS BBS, 806-797-2239) A tolerably interesting fantasy-themed work, this game might easily be labeled, "Let's Pound Each Other." This one at least tries to go beyond the text readout of how many hit points have been lost by letting the player's character maneuver around the arena with the number pad. There is nothing that will excite the hard core electronic dungeon diver, but it's a hair above the rest of the Pound 'em Pack.

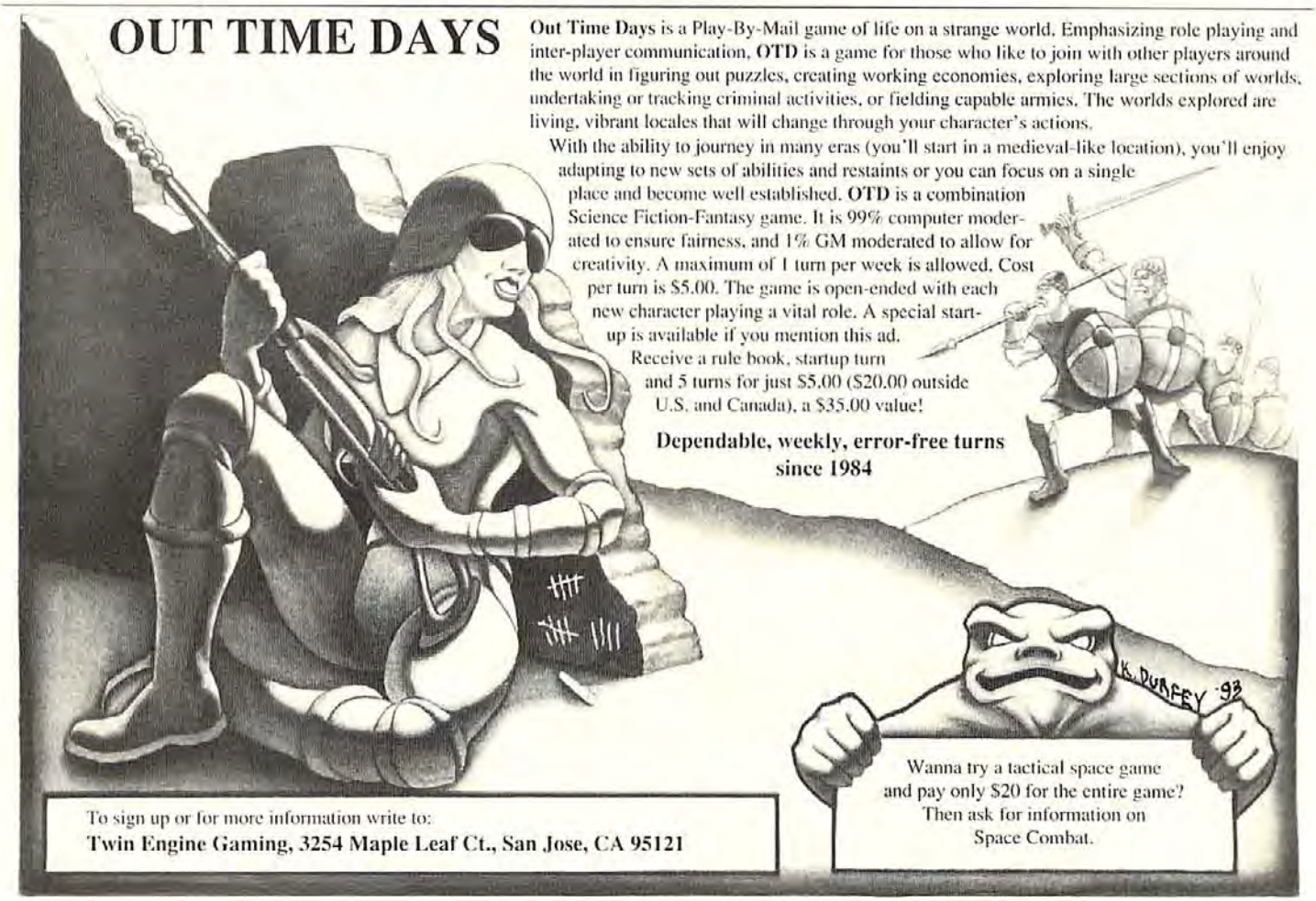
TRADE WARS: (Chris Sherrick & John Morris, The Abandoned Land BBS, 702-746-1364 & 65) For many players cruising the boards, there is no other on-liner than *Trade Wars.* Many versions are circulating and they are, apparently, highly configurable. Except for the core concepts and basic mechanics, no two boards seem to carry the same exact game. The basic format is that the galaxy has 1000 sectors to explore. The trader can build up his or her wealth moving commodities and building a fighting force. At higher levels there are planets to acquire and even terraforming. Keep an eye out for the computer enemy and, of course, for fellow users. The beginning player has a long apprenticeship, but the persistent can build a large and complex empire. This game will be around for a while, in one form or another.

TRIPLE YAHTZEE: (Al Lawrence, Sunrise Software, Sunrise-80 BBS, 404-256-9525) The enduring poker-dice game has seen many a programming exercise. This is Yahtzee times three, where one can place one's dice roll in any of the three consecutive games. It could conceivably serve as a two- or three-player game, all at the same calling computer.

TRIVIA TIC TAC TOE: (Mike Wilson, Secret Service BBS, 304-429-6838) There are a lot of trivia doors circulating. This one does a bit more than just add up how many a player answered correctly. The gamer places an "O" in the square if an answer is correct. If not, X gets the spot.

VIDEO POKER: (Worldwide Programming, The Lighthouse BBS, 209-252-7968) Just like it sounds, *Video Poker* is a pleasantly-rendered Jacks-or-Better coin-eater. The computer keeps track of how many pairs, two-pairs, three-of-kinds, etc. the player scores. Then, it generates a bulletin with the records in each. As much action as any casino (or the corner bar), and one isn't likely to lose the rent money — unless calling long distance.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE: (Michael Goetz, The Speak Easy BBS, 407-291-4626) Vanna in ANSI? (No. But it had to be said, didn't it?) "The Famous Wheel" is not present in its familiar form. The numbers spin more like the "Showcase Spin" prop on "The Price is Right" but the word puzzle game is the same. For the solitary player. CGW



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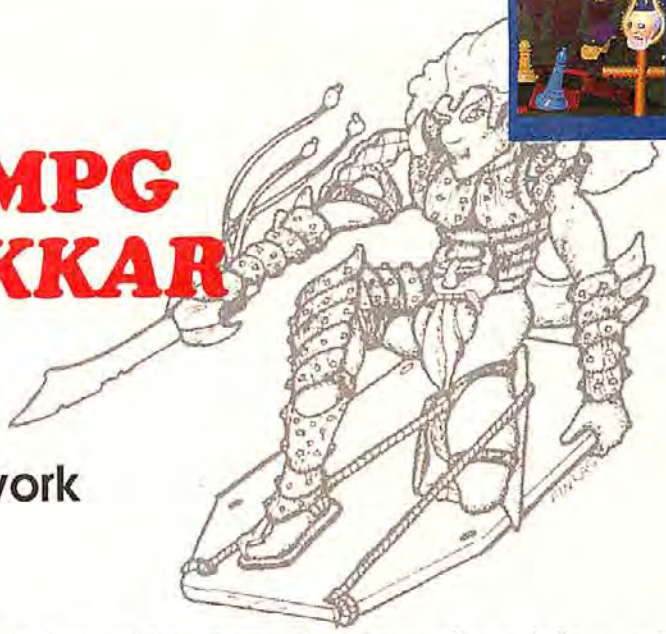


Role-Playing on the Multi-Player Games Network

by Jasper Sylvester

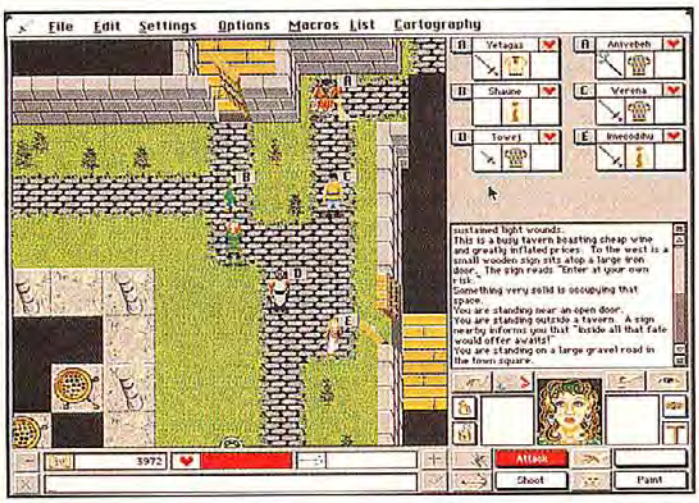
I'm glad my parents didn't name me, "Mork." Imagine being known as Mork from Nork. It's bad enough being from a town that everyone knows something nice about. "Oh, yeah! I got my training as a Mentalist in Nork." "Nork? Explored my first dungeon in Nork." "Hey, do they still have the Steel Flower Tavern?" I get tired of hearing about it.

It's not that there's nothing to do in Nork. It's just that everybody seems to be doing it. There's just no sense of having been the first to have done something. Let me explain. Drakkar used to be one great landmass. Then, the Empress decided to release a bit too much of her psionic power and now, of the four habitable cities, only Nork is not an island in a sea of inhospitable terrain. All four cities are still connected, though, by virtue of a system of one-way portals, and it seems like everybody who wants to be somebody comes through here.

We get 'em all. From cities, woodlands, forests, mountains and caverns they come. As outcasts, they come. Male and female, they come. We must have a magnet for mercenaries. No matter whether they are high in Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Agility, Willpower or Constitution, they come. Whether they have a lot of Luck or a great deal of Charisma, they come.

I guess that makes sense. We have a Brotherhood of Fighters where a person can become proficient in weapon skills; a Brotherhood of Mentalists where individuals can discover psionic disciplines; a Brotherhood of Healers where one can learn to focus psionics for healing; a Martial Arts dojo where one can learn the traditional arts of hand-to-hand combat; a Thieves Guild where one can discover the more streetwise and slippery of disciplines; and even a Barbarian trainer outside of town. We even have the perfect training ground, right below our city.

The dungeon, as we call it, used to be the dormitory of the Elite Guard. When the Empress' mental powers went awry, so did the guard. In fact, they may be the source of the monsters that would-be adventurers fight below the gravel roads of our fair city Whatever the tale, there are riches aplenty and experiences galore to challenge novice- to intermediate-level adventurers. When they get too strong for Nork's underground, they can also try their hand at the monsters outside of Maeling, Frore or the Volcano City. None of those cities is as light and cheerful as our fair environs, but there is certainly more action in their vicinities.



D is for Destiny

Once they get here, it's almost as if they are driven by forces far beyond our world. It is like their destiny guides them a move, two moves or maybe three moves at a time. I often get the feeling that someone is pointing a little arrow where they are supposed to go and clicking some magical artifact to get them to move along, as though they give up to three orders and wait for my friends and neighbors to carry them out. Sometimes, I even get the feeling that these forces even script out common actions in advance and invoke a special magic called "Macros" to get my fellow adventurers to act even more quickly.

Sometimes, I imagine that I am one of those forces that control adventurers. I look down on our town from above and click a hero or heroine through their paces. I use the " symbol to put words in my hero's or heroine's mouth. I tell my adventurer(ess) when to attack that orc, rockman or goblin by clicking my rodent-sized artifact or running my fingers over a rune-covered tablet that clicks as I caress it. I negotiate with shopkeepers by commanding my vicarious personage to place their loot on the counter and have it appraised. Sometimes, I imagine that other beings are trying to communicate with me through their representatives in our world.

R is for Rockman

I'm not sure it would be easy to control my heroes in combat, though. Since it seems like everyone is getting up to three orders in advance, it looks like some of our unique monsters (Rockmen, Sanquin and Yeti)

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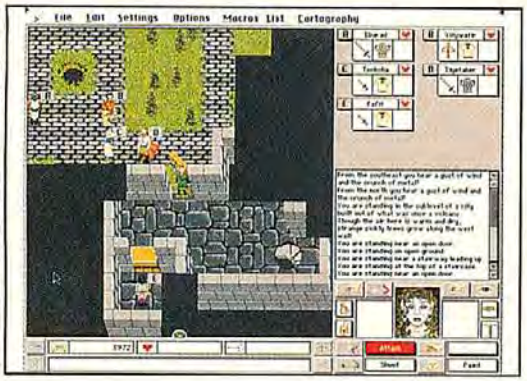
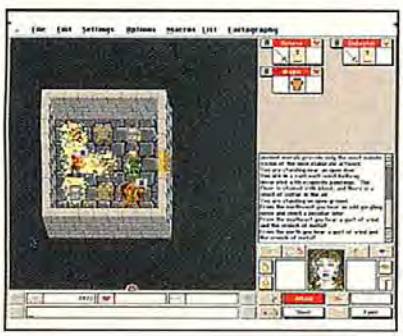
would be able to get into hand-to-hand combat with our heroes before we, as the controlling force, even saw them. Then, we would just have to keep giving the same scripted order over and over again till we quit getting messages that our hero was getting hit. Hero and hobgoblin could even pass each other in the same maneuver. It would sure make it hard to maximize an adventurer's use of missile weapons. It would almost make it advisable to wait until the monsters attacked one's surrogate before attacking.



One thing's for sure, I would make certain my surrogates learned to search corpses. Some of the best treasure is found after a nice little dungeon scrap. In my imagination, I see little clouds of gleaming gold streaming out from under the piles of ordinary weapons, armor and bodies whenever there is treasure. I'd even make sure that they had a pouch, a bag and belt for holding gems, bottles, scrolls, weapons and gold coins. I'd even make them read the scrolls in the dungeon, if there wasn't an immediate fight at hand. That way, they could dump 'em if they weren't useful and save 'em if they were.

A is for Action

I'm sure I'd love watching the action from my god-like perch high above the denizens of our dungeon and citizens of our city, but I wonder if I would know more about why all this fighting's going on if I were a controlling force. After all, the dungeon dwellers seem to leave us alone if we stay out of the dungeon. Is it just our greed that keeps us going down in the dungeon? Is it the only way we can gain status?



Sure the scrolls occasionally give us a hint as to where to find more dangerous and potentially more rewarding dungeons or nudge us toward hunting a red dragon in order to harvest the scales, but why are we here? Where is our motivation? People who come to Nork can find armor lying all over the roads of our town. Where does it all come from? The dungeons are full of treasure. Where do these creatures get it? We seem to be here as someone's playthings. Shouldn't there be more?

K is for Keebler

I guess the best reason we're here is to get to know each other. It's kind of nice meeting lots of new people. Take those forest dwellers that were hanging out in the Last Chance Tavern, for instance. They called themselves the Keebler elves and said they looked like some merchants in a different town that sold cookies. I didn't understand them, but they did look like cute little elves and I would buy cookies from them.

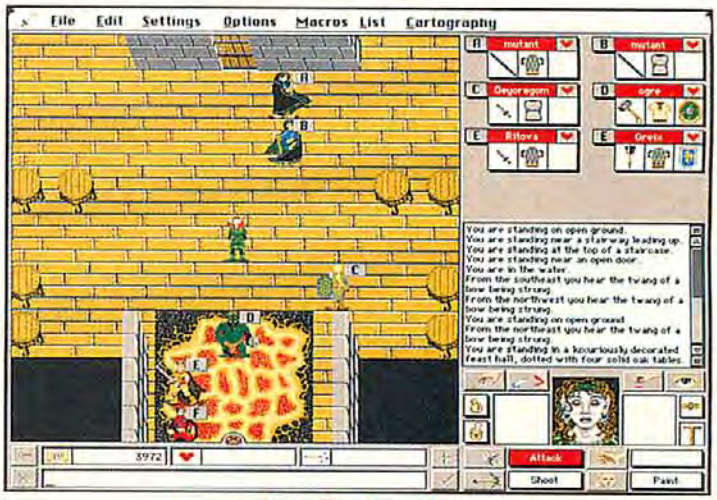
They were all sixth level fighters and were looking forward to reaching the 13th level. If they could get enough 13th level fighters together, they can charter the powers that be in Nork to grant them a charter as a Guild. It's hard to imagine a Guild of Keeblers, but that's why they're in Nork. They're trying to make a name for themselves and their guild-to-be. I like that. Maybe I'll join.

K is for Karma

One of the best things about this place is that it's possible to come back from the dead. Even a controlling force can't always bring his/her servants back to life, but in Drakkar, one always has a chance. I think the mantra is something like "Restore," and then the Healers use their karma to bring the heroes back to life. I think that's good. If a controlling force is going to invest his/her time in guiding an adventurer across the terrain (and under it) of Drakkar, they ought to be able to get another chance when things go awry.

A is for Assets

I also like the fact that any adventurer who doesn't use psionics can go to the Steel Flower Tavern and put some of his/her loot in a locker. This means that scrolls and gems don't have to be sold right away and that adventurers don't have to get burdened by carrying a lot of weight around. It also acts sort of like insurance. Should an adventurer die and not be restored to life, his/her heir can get the goodies out of the locker. The loot on the person disappears, but the treasure in the locker stays there.



R is for Results

Yes, if I had the chance to be a controlling force, I think I'd like to control a person on Drakkar. I might have to appeal to other forces in order to open the gateway to reach Drakkar. The Kingdom of Drakkar exists on a plane called the Multi-Player Games Network. One must expend something like six gold coins per hour ($6.00) to maintain a presence on that plane. For those who cannot reach that plane directly, there are portals known as SprintNet and Compuserve Information Service through which one can reach that plane for a few additional coins.

If I could remake Drakkar, I would give its citizens more of a reason for living. I would interweave a plot through its history. I would rework the monsters so that they are visible at all times. Yet, who am I to speak? I have yet to kill a Yeti and am yet to wed a wife. Still, I have told you of our city and I hope to see you here. Even, if your parents name you Mork.

[*Translation:* The Kingdom of Drakkar *is a multi-player graphic role-playing game on the* Multi-Player Games Network (1-800-438-4263). *Gamers use a combination of an icon-driven and a command-line driven interface to react with the world - Ed.*] CGW

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Publisher: Sierra **$42**

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Publisher: Maxis **$36**

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Publisher: Microprose **$48**

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Publisher: Capstone **$27**

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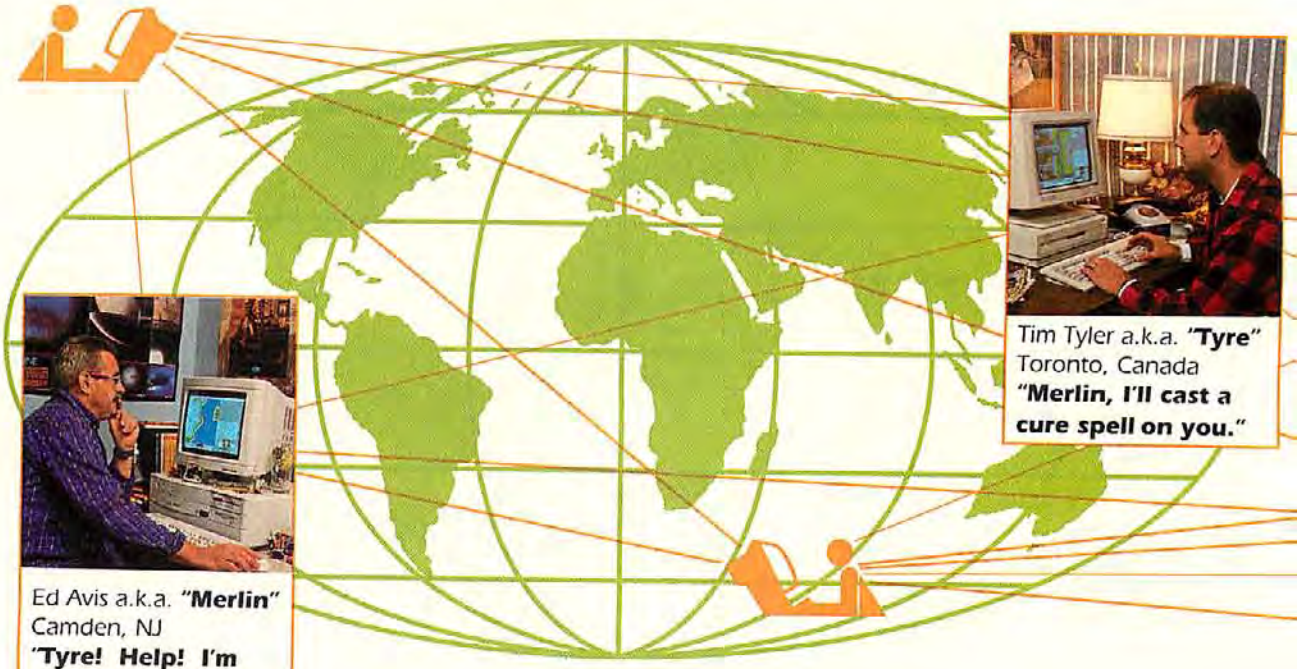

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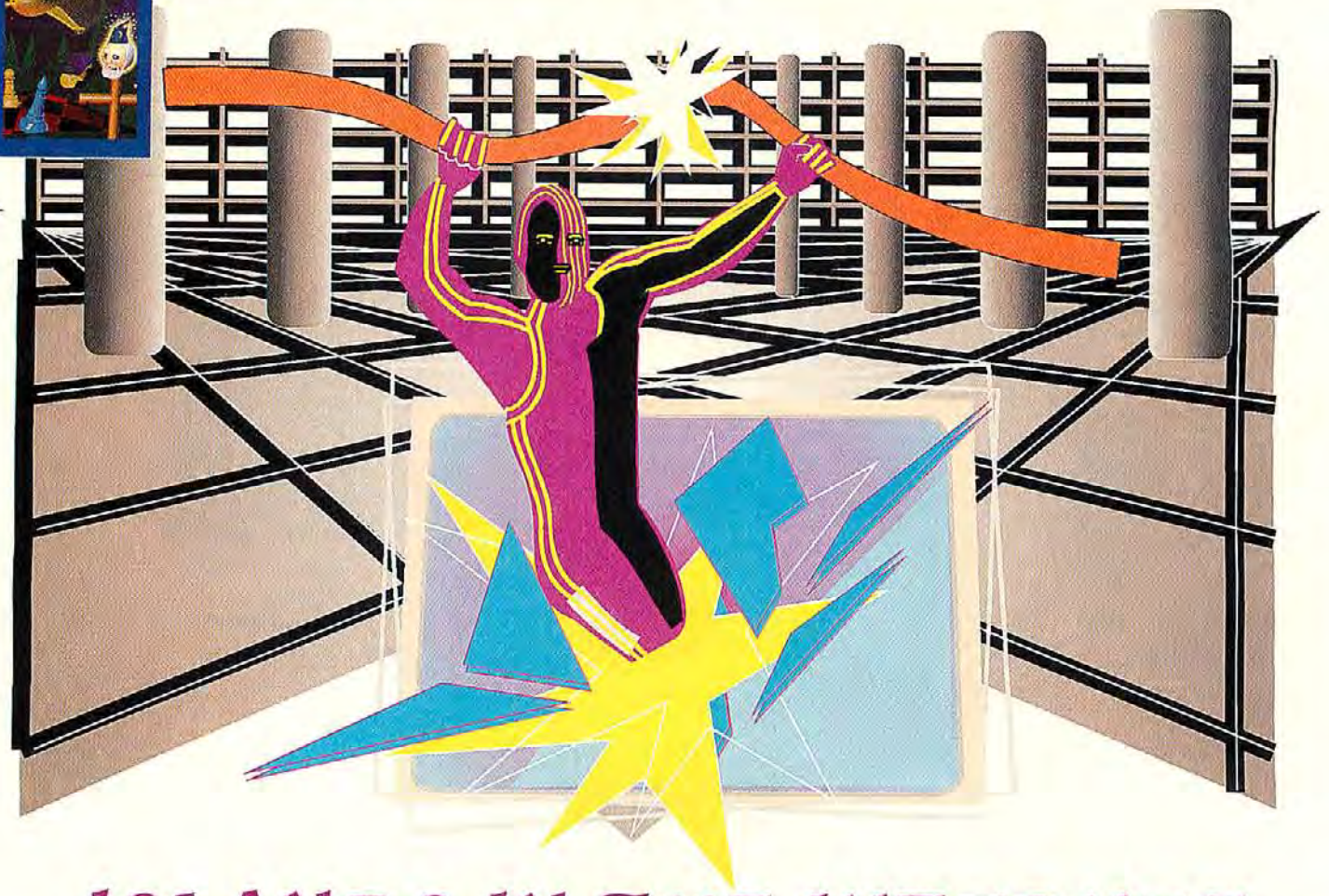

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ISLANDS IN THE INTERNET

A Navigational Chart for Gamers on the Internet

by John J. Brassil

The 10th anniversary issue of this magazine contained a brief review of the history of computer games. As observed in that article, the very first computer games were developed by computer scientists (a.k.a. nerds) who wanted to play with their new toys after they were finished working on them. Now, these mainframe computers are connected to one another by the thousands in a network of mind-boggling complexity. Toss in the govenment and commercial hosts and it totals about one million hosts attached to the **Internet** worldwide! (An article in the *Internet Society News* estimates 992,000 in June of 1992.)

Since that first game of *Spacewar* was played at MIT in the 1960s, there have always been games wherever there have been computers. Things have progressed far beyond the days of *StarTrek* on display terminals and the original Great Underground Empire (i.e. *Zork*). It is now possible to play computer games, talk about computer games, and even design computer games (in a fashion) on the Internet.

To give some sort of idea of the scope of interest, let's take a look at the Usenet newsgroups which deal with gaming on the three major home computer types. A Usenet newsgroup is very similiar to the discussion areas found on the major on-line services such as Compuserve, Genie, America On-Line, and the like. Readers post articles which can be read by anyone who subscribes to the group and replies can be made via follow-up E-mail or posting to the group. One of the newsgroup hierarchies is the "rec" area, which deals with recreational topics. There are about 70 different areas under the "rec" group (the number changes as new groups are added and deleted — the Internet is a *very* dynamic environment!) One of these areas is rec.games, which in turn, has 29 of its own subgroups, ranging from rec.games.abstract to rec.games.xtank. In between are newgroups relating to backgammon, the game of Go, *Empire*, fantasy role-playing games, board games, *Diplomacy* (more about that later), and even coin-op arcade games.

An area of special note is the rec.games.mud newsgroup. "MUD" is an acronym for "multi-user dungeon." Here, players get together in an electronic dungeon and interact in "real time!" There are several Internet hosts which provide these on-line dungeons, engendering several different styles of "muds." Needless to say, these types of adventures don't support the fancy graphics and sound support of commercial software, but there is the thrill of actually designing and defining the universe you inhabit!

There are also newsgroups under the comp.sys hierarchy which deal with the commercial, shareware and freeware games available for home computers. In the latest weekly reporting period, the comp.sys.ibm.pc.games newsgroup had 1,252 articles (1,864,624 bytes), comp.sys.mac.games had 440 articles (1.139,452 bytes), and comp.sys.amiga.games had 363 (536,494 bytes) articles posted. That's over 2.5 MBs posted in one

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