

THE THIRD ANNUAL EG GAME AWARDS BALLOT • SPECIAL 1995 SPORTS PREVIEW • SCREEN SAVER VOGUE

THE MAGAZINE OF INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES

ELECTRONIC™

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 5

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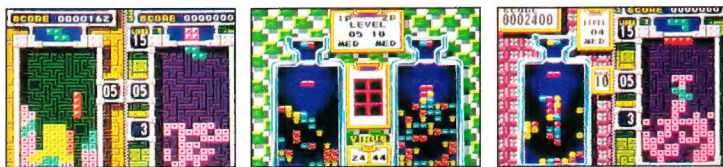
So you and your bud could go

head-to-head on Tetris or Dr. Mario. Or you





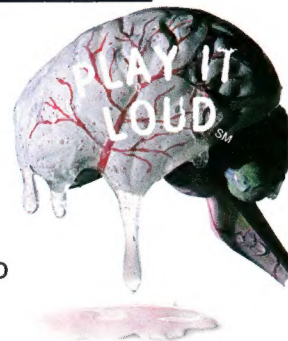
could play both in **Mixed Match**. Like you could play Tetris while he plays Dr. Mario. Or you could play Dr. Mario while he plays Tetris. Or he could play Dr. Mario while you yell **"SHUT UP"** since



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this is getting really annoying. Anyway, to sum it up: there are six new ways to play your two favorites—that's more than you can count on one hand (unless you grew up next to a nuclear power plant).

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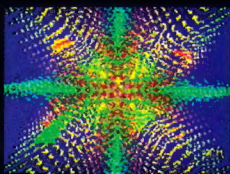
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POWER ON

CHANGE IS A GOOD THING

Don't Panic!" That's advice Douglas Adams made famous in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. For a while, some people even wore "Don't Panic!" buttons. If I had a batch of those buttons now, I'd give them away for free to my fellow electronic gamers.

We're gonna need 'em for a while. Here come the super-heated headlines. That "Don't Panic!" admonition will be very appropriate, and severely tested, during the first half of 1995.

Interactive electronic entertainment is going through a revolution. There's no other way to describe it. The next **Electronic Games** documents the changes and previews the hardware, software and technology that will usher in the next boom. That's how important we think these developments are.

The 16-Bit machines have entered The Big Fade. Sales are down (*see "Hotline" in this issue*), and they won't rebound. The installed user base isn't buying nearly as many carts as last year. There's also a lot of discounting, previously unknown during the 16-Bit era.

Donkey Kong Country has had no trouble toting up big numbers, but a lot of other releases haven't done as well as companies optimistically predicted at mid-year.

Conventional computer software is also staggering. **Doom 2** (id Software) passed the 400,000 mark in its first month in stores, and it will come very close to cracking the one million barrier. But, as with **DKC**, one product is getting a huge chunk of all money spent on top-of-the-line computer funware. There aren't a lot of other floppy disk hits.

Alas, there are casualties in every revolution. This one is no exception. It would be irresponsible to predict bankruptcy for specific companies, but I guarantee you'll be reading about some soon. A number of companies, mostly in the video game field, will simply cut their losses by exiting the field.

It's impossible to predict what the mainstream (non-electronic entertainment) press will make of these developments. If history is



any guide, they'll screw up the interpretation.

Journalists who work in the mass print and electronic media are generalists, not specialists. They are rarely experts, unless they have a "beat," like sports or movies. Few know much about electronic gaming, so it is understandable that they could start with the correct facts and end up with a horror-fantasy.

The basic mistake in stories about our hobby is that they focus on one facet of interactive electronic entertainment and ignore everything else. They act like video games, computer entertainment software, multimedia, portable systems, arcades, modem and network gaming and cable game services are entirely separate entities. They speak about gamers in stereotypes—the computer nerd, the youthful video game addict—that separate each segment from the others.

Anyone who studies the reader demographics of this magazine knows how far this distorted view is from the truth. All the segments are tied together, aspects of the same overriding interest. The popularity of each segment may wax and wane, but the love of interactive entertainment experiences has never faltered.

Yes, 16-Bit's days are numbered, but that's due to anticipatory excitement over the much

more sophisticated new systems.

Yes, floppy disk games are dying, but that's because computerists are turning to other delivery systems. The booms in CD-ROM and on-line entertainment have exploded to mass-market status almost overnight.

It won't be long before cable-connected homes have pay-per-game downloading. It won't be long before virtual reality coin-ops are more than a curiosity. It won't be long before all electronic games can be enjoyed via modem. The Digital Highway is a playstreet.

The field is changing. That can't be denied. But this is no game crash. This is not the process of destruction, but a clearing of the underbrush to facilitate new, greater growth.

You haven't lost your taste for high-quality interactive experiences. No one else has, either. The demand is there, stronger than ever. The business will mutate in response to shifts in consumer preferences, but the special interest remains intact.

So when you hear or read about how gaming is *kaput*, remember Douglas Adams and "Don't Panic!"

.....
by Arnie Katz

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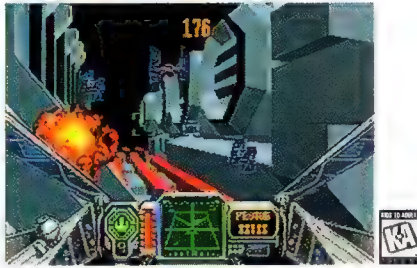
GENESIS 32X

*What did you think we were
talking about, you little degenerate!*

F a s t



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(Except that, you animal!)



er!

oh baby,
oh baby...



FEEDBACK

Standards and Practices

Re James Catalano's letter [*Feedback*, EG, December '94]: While standards can be a good thing, it is not a perfect science. First off, who decides the standard? If you had built what you thought was the kick-ass system, why would you support another that happened to be labeled the official standard? Also, standards have a nasty way of hanging around long after their usefulness is over, just because they are standards.

The nice thing about having all the non-compatible equipment is that it forces it to get better and better. And you don't have long periods of obsolescence until the next standard is decided on because someone will put something better out there when another is old-hat. Keep in mind our TV standard, which, while "adequate," could be ever so much better. Some people want to make our new digital/HDTV standard compatible with the old NTSC instead of putting it forward at its best. Why? Why conform to an out-of-date standard? Look at the new Windows OS "coming soon"—there are good reasons that they're trying to get away from DOS with its implementation.

As to the Game Doctor's comments on screen savers ... I don't know how necessary they are (well, ATMs could sure use them), but I think Doc neglected the "eye-candy" appeal. Just turning the screen blank automatically would be the safest bet, but who would buy that? Why not have cute little characters running around for our amusement? Actually, though, instead of buying disks with a specific saver on it, maybe we should get a "Saver of the Month" club going so you don't get sick of the one(s) you have.

On page 28, *Blood Bowl* is referred to as the "just-released board game." Huh? It's been around for a few years now. Perhaps they meant a new version of the rules being released?

Finally, in regards to the discussion of Microsoft's possible on-line service, Marvel, I encourage you all to check out the "Big Brother Bill" letter in the December '94 issue



of *Wired*, page 34. Apparently you register the latest version of Windows, 4.0 AKA Chicago, on-line, but part of the process is to check out your computer's configuration and ship it off to Microsoft ... May I encourage everyone to remove as much hardware and software as they can before registering this way? I don't know if this would also validate Marvel's existence, or whether Marvel's death would put an end to this way of registration.

Russ Perry Jr., Omro, WI
perryda@sol.acs.uwosh.edu
(“Russ” in subject)

Wait a minute, Russ—Let's clarify this. You like instant obsolescence? Yes, we both acknowledge the desirability of some free rein and competition on behalf of product evolution, but James Catalano's points about the annoyance and expense of keeping up with the state of the art is also valid. The expense of switching to a non-compatible HDTV system would make too many potential purchasers balk for it to be economically viable for any manufacturer or broadcaster to support. Some older readers may recall the strange techniques tried out for color TV before the compatible approach we use now was accepted.

Re JJ Barrell's reference to the *Blood Bowl* board game, yes, the new *Electronic Blood Bowl* was slightly delayed in order for it to conform to the new edition with rule changes.

Finally, we saw the "Big Brother Bill" letter you speak of and also checked with Microsoft. The letter's reference was to the beta testing process for Windows '95 (as it is now called), which required the testers to send Microsoft their system's diagnostics file (created by a DOS program anyone can call up by typing in "MSD"). There is no such requirement for the release version or for Microsoft Online (formerly called Marvel).

You get this month's STD controller, Russ!

Alas, Poor Pirate!

I am disappointed with your column [*The Kunkel Report*] in the December issue dealing with video game piracy. I am a 26-year-old college graduate who has been around since the Atari 2600. I have owned the 2600, 5200, 800XL, NES, Super NES, Sega Master System, Genesis, Lynx and TurboGrafx, and now own a Jaguar, 3DO and a 486 computer which I'm writing this letter on.

I do not condone piracy, especially in this field, but let me tell you I am damn tired of

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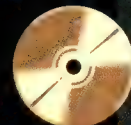
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paying outrageous amounts for games. I am sick and tired of the same research and development BS answers that are given as an excuse for these excessive prices. Remember when the technology for CD digital audio was released and the price for a CD was going to be the same if not cheaper than a cassette? A CD's production cost is only pennies when mass produced. So the marketing pinheads decided to see how much the average consumer would pay for this new dream technology, and when people bought them at \$15 a pop, they said why should we give the consumer a break?

And speaking of piracy, video game rentals are actually illegal just as the practice of photocopying their instructions for renters, and so is making copies of videotapes and showing them to your friends. Who hasn't done that?

Game copiers cost from \$300 to \$450. Just how many kids are going to spend that kind of money, especially when the system it is intended for costs about a quarter of the price? Second, everyone has to own one in order for everybody to share games on it. Game copiers became popular only recently; wonder why? Look at recent prices. So please do not fully blame the pirates for these unfair costs. I blame retailers, too, because of the markup they put on games that I know for a fact can be sold cheaper. The game companies should take a hint and lower their prices and learn a few lessons so that the need for copiers would virtually become nonexistent.

Remember, I am against piracy in regard to selling bootleg copies to people, but for the individual private, not public, use, just as with a VCR, I am not against it. But I will not stand for any form of censorship, and for that alone you should be ashamed. People can make their own informed choices.

Daniel Moskovitz
Shillington, PA

There is a huge difference between censorship and enforcing the copyright laws, Daniel. And the R&D costs in most cases are real—today's video games require about as much investment as movies do. Video game rental in itself is no more illegal than book rental (support your local library!), since the games being rented have been purchased. (It's computer games on disk that it's illegal to rent.) If you have friends who want to play a cartridge video game you've bought, lend it to them! But copying a videotape or copying a video game, like photocopying a book (or video game instructions, unless authorized by the

Letter Contest

Win an STD controller! Each month EG selects one letter and the writer gets a choice of one of STD's fine line of controllers for SNES, Genesis and computers.



game manufacturer), for any purpose, regardless of how you or anyone rationalizes it, is illegal. As to the prices—that we can agree on. Perhaps you saw our stand on the topic (along with more on piracy) in Arnie Katz's editorial, Power On, in the January issue. Meanwhile, here's another reader's view.

They're Mad, I Tell You!

I really enjoyed reading *The Kunkel Report* (December '94) on piracy. It is unbelievable that people in this day and age still feel that way about computer/console software. When I first got into computers (Atari 800XL to an Atari ST, to finally an IBM), piracy was rampant and illegal software BBSes were everywhere. I had heard about the console software copiers, but I always thought that they were a niche market that didn't reflect reality. After all, kids play the majority of console games, and what kid can afford, or have their parents purchase, a copier? The hypocrisy in selling copies of software, for a profit, while lambasting the "greedy software houses" for making that same profit, is insane.

On another subject, why, in one article about the Sega-Atari court settlement, do you express your opinion that Sega will cross license titles such as Sonic with Atari, when another article has statements from Atari expressly stating that that wasn't about to happen? Obviously, neither Sega nor Atari would shoot themselves in the foot by licensing their hottest software titles.

Releasing old software, although popular with us older generation, would not be the cash cow that it is made out to be. I have seen too many times a software company releasing old games with updated graphics/sound, and

fail miserably. I think that is because us old folks wax nostalgic about how great games were back then, and would rather remember them the way they were. It does go to prove a point—great graphics and sound do not a great game make, it is the play value. One of my favorite games of the early computer era was *M.U.L.E.*, which, by today's graphics/sound standards wouldn't even be released, but was so addicting!

Glenn J. Geiss
Tucson, AZ

*Actually there's no real conflict between the two stories we ran on the Atari-Sega settlement (Hotline, Deals), since Barry Friedman was only speculating about some possible ideas for down the road. But we checked again with Atari spokesperson Sandy LaBrec, who amplified what she told Joyce Worley for the news story. The agreement includes some cross-licensing of game titles, with appropriate royalties to be paid. No titles have been decided upon at press time, but, as you suggest, *Sonic* on the Jaguar is highly unlikely.*

*We've had some successes with updated games—*Tempest 2000* comes to mind, off-hand. Then we shouldn't forget *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* and *Return to Zork*, both of which brought classic games to the present with great respect for their originals.*

That's enough for this month, but please keep those letters coming folks. We love to hear from you. Write to:

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HOTLINE

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

The Changing of the Guard

New hardware and changes in game technology signal a move from the old formats to fresh ways of delivering entertainment software.

There's a revolution going on, but there's no need to be alarmed: It's as natural as the progression of technology. The rise of new hardware means that old game formats are destined to reach retirement. The invention of slicker methods of coding programs means the old ways will pass from popularity.

This is the age of multimedia. Approximately 20 million people have added CD drives to their computers, or switched to CD-based video game consoles. The impact of this huge market is having a profound effect on the software industry, as developers and manufacturers rush to fill the pipelines with product to appease the buying public.

It seemed to happen overnight. Disk and cartridge-based games were leading the market at the beginning of 1994. By the end of 1994, manufacture of disk-based games had almost stopped. According to most industry analysts, 16-Bit cartridge gaming had passed its last good year.

The end of disk-based software was mourned by few, except as a sentimental icon of the software business.

Although the floppy disk was a vast improvement over tape-based systems of the early days of computing, game designers had outgrown its limitations. At the end, it wasn't too unusual to see games that occupied four, six, eight—even as many as 10 disks. This represented a costly burden for the manufacturers.

Cartridge-based games are not quite relics of

the past, but the Sega Genesis will be supplanted this year by the CD-based Saturn. Although some companies will continue to support the Genesis for a few years, the primary emphasis will inevitably move to the new format.

On the other hand, Nintendo's Ultra 64 machine, scheduled for release later this year, is sticking with a cart-based format. Nintendo spokesmen say they believe their cartridges deliver more power and speed; some cynics have



pointed to the fact that Nintendo owns the cartridge factory as another reason they stuck to their familiar format.

But Nintendo is the only major holdout to the move from cart to CD. In addition to Sega's Saturn, the Sony PlayStation, 3DO and Philips CD-i all favor the newer medium.

Dave McElhatten, president of Philips Media Games, explained: "There's something magical and wonderful about CD that consumers understand. It contains a lot of information, and has all kinds of positive connotations. Philips' use of CD [in the CD-i] was an extension of audio CD. Consumers expect a rich and diverse world to plunge into, and that is also true on the games front. CD can offer that.

"When I take a look at what's going to happen, there are three different camps. You have traditional game manufacturers, like Sega, Nintendo and Sony; and you have the computer companies with PC CD-ROM. In the middle, which is where 3DO and CD-i coexist, are the two kinds of systems that work in the living room. I think in 1995 Sega, Sony and Nintendo are going to spend so many ad dollars trying to compete, that a lot of it is going to go up in smoke. The traditional game market is not going to go for machines that cost over \$400. Price is key, and I think hooking to the TV set is key. Obviously I have a bias, but CD-i does that."

McElhatten summed it up: "CD is a mass-market, consumer electronic standard which is what this industry is trying for."

Louis Gioia Jr., president and general manager of Spectrum HoloByte, has a clear explanation of the cartridge situation: "The 16-Bit business is on the decline and will be replaced by future consoles, which will be predominantly CD based. This is consistent with the computer markets' sale of personal computers with multimedia and CD configurations ... Over 50 percent of PCs will be CD-based by 1995, either through multimedia upgrades or purchase of hardware with embedded CDs."

Westwood Studios is another developer that's saying a regretful goodbye to cartridge-based

entertainment, but not because of the change of technology. Louis Castle, VP and co-founder, explained: "Software sales have been softer than we expected this year, and on top of that a lot of other very large companies have shipped significant numbers of units into the marketplace at severe discounts, so we question whether or not we are going to be able to sell our products at the kind of price point that we feel they are worth. Whereas the consumer [had] one really great Christmas where they could pick up great products for 20 bucks, they're only going to get one. Nobody can afford to do products for that kind of price."

He went on, "It's sad. Many of the people who do products for the 16-Bit market are moving away from it because it really doesn't make sense anymore. It probably happened at least one year to soon." He indicated that he felt the market could have sustained itself through 1995, "if there weren't so many people so bullish about their sales. If you were to add up the initial orders for products that everyone expected to be the top 20, you would end up with a significant increase over last year's sales, but that doesn't give any room for the other hundred games out there. A lot of people built tons and tons of product that didn't bring anything new to the field. They expected people to buy them because they were XXX Number 2 or XXX number 3, but the consumers said, 'No, we're going to wait for really good product.' Products which are really not bad at all ended up on the shelf for \$20. That really hurt our ability to sell a product for \$60 or \$70. And I know we're not the only ones in that boat."

How much are sales down? "It's all over the board; you're either at 80 percent of what you expected, or dismally low, like 20 percent. I don't think anybody is selling what they expected. It's criminal in a way; it's happening a year too soon, and mostly because of overly optimistic estimations and pure and simple greed that has driven the market away a year too soon."

by Joyce Worley

Whispers From Cyberspace

J JBarrel—he's everywhere! He desktops by night and speaks the secret truths that others dare not utter. JJ puts his private eyes and confidential spies into every corner of the interactive electronic entertainment world. He prints tomorrow's headlines today, and he takes no prisoners! Now, from the Fortress of Solitaire Gaming, somewhere North of the Lost Dutchman Mine — JJBarrel!

Just when it looked like Derek Smart's *Battlecruiser 3000* finally had made it to market, it has been ambushed again. Developer Mission Studios is urgently seeking some fresh financing so that this underground cult classic can finally reach compu-gamers.

Non-owners of CD-i who've watched those sensational *Burn Cycle* commercials with envious eyes have good news coming. Philips' new policy of supporting other multimedia platforms will have this cinematic action blockbuster ready for both PC and Macintosh by the end of the first quarter.

A workman is only as good as his tools, so there's a lot of industry excitement about a set of development programs Microsoft will soon begin distributing free to encourage more game development for Windows. With the highly regarded Windows '95 due in the next 60 days, a big swing toward making gameware play through it is signed, sealed and delivered.

A major investment banking house predicts that there will be 1.4 million 3DOs and 1.3 million Jaguars installed in U.S. homes by the end of 1995. Sales of both platforms went well at Christmas, so the forecast may not be too far wide of the mark.

Sony's got its checkbook out for a big software company acquisition. Watch this space for details. See you all in March!

The Network News

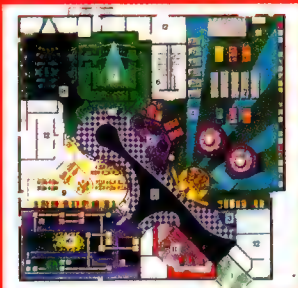
Microsoft will launch its own on-line service this year. The Microsoft Network should be available at the same time the Windows '95 operating system is introduced in April. Microsoft Network software is included in Windows '95, which will also include built-in shortcuts to help users find information and go directly to that source. The service is expected to be priced competitively with other networks.

AT&T will pay \$40 million for the 80 percent share of Imagination Network that it doesn't already own. The game-oriented network originally started by Sierra On-Line now has approximately 45,000 subscribers. America Online is on the verge of accepting wide-spectrum general advertising. Catapult's XBAND Video Game Network went on-line in New York, LA, San Francisco, Dallas and Atlanta, and should go national soon. It lets 16-Bit cartridge game players compete in real time via modem. Time Warner Cable's Full Service Network will offer Atari Jaguar video games to users. Games will be downloaded to user's Jaguar machines on request. Capcom and Sega are the latest companies to go on-line. Both are now on CompuServe and the World Wide Web. Surfers can attend conferences, use message boards, download tips, hints and other information about games. Latinonet, the country's first network service for Spanish-speaking users, went on line in New York, San Francisco, San Jose, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C. America Online purchased two Internet software companies. BookLink Technologies will provide their Internet Works interface to help users browse the Web, and NaviSoft will provide advanced navigation and reporting tools.

BLOCKBUSTER HAS BLOCK PARTY

Block Party is difficult to describe; it almost has to be experienced," said Bill Burns, president of the Entertainment Center Division of Blockbuster, speaking about the new indoor entertainment complexes in Albuquerque and Indianapolis, the vanguard of Blockbuster's new venture. "It's unique; it doesn't exist elsewhere in the marketplace today. It's a highly themed environment that wraps up a variety of elements in a totally different package."

Block Party has five entertainment areas, plus cafe, information booth and newsroom. Power Grid is a multilevel maze, with sloping slides and inflatable floors. Virtua Alley promises a fantasy environment. Go Motion Pictures has motion-based simulators. Flippers has electronic games, and The Tube is a party room with music videos.



Burns predicted: "I think a lot of companies are looking to enter location-based entertainment. I personally think we will produce some competition in the short run, by the success of these first two locations."

"BLOCK" BUSTER PARTY
Combine Your Entertainment

EARTHWORM JIM SPOT TOO GROSS

Three TV stations refused to air a commercial for Playmate International's Earthworm Jim that features a grandmother eating live worms as she tells a bedtime story about the earthworm-turned-superhero. Viewer complaints led stations in Sacramento, CA, Portland, OR, and Spokane, WA, to pull the spot entirely, and some others, in Chicago, Washington, DC, and Raleigh, NC, relegated it to evening hours after 8 p.m.



NAUGHTY CARNIVOROUS GRANDMOTHER: The staff of *EG* does not recognize, condone or encourage the eating of worms.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT...

ELLIOTT DAHAN AND THE ART OF TECHNOLOGY



Elliott Dahan, recently named vice president of strategic alliances for Compton's New Media, has a view of the business that extends from **Pong** to **Doom**.

"It \started with the TI-99/4; I remember looking at it and thinking, 'It plays bad football; this is bad football.' But you just knew something was going to happen."

He started Creative Software in the early '80s; "At one point it was the number-one consumer software company in the U.S., doing broad-based software, not just games. It was mostly Commodore stuff; we licensed **Apple Panic** and **Choplifter** from the Carlsons [Broderbund Software], and got them out on the Vic-20 and the C-64. We also did educational and productivity software."

Creative started with \$5,000 in June of '82, and climbed to a pretax of \$950,000 in June of '83. Asked how he managed this, he admitted that it was being at the right place at the right time: "That's a big part of this business ... all these smart people just don't want to admit the Lord put them at a bus stop and a bus pulled up."

He also did things for pleasure instead of profit: "Jaron Lanier came in with **MoonDust**, it was gorgeous. It won all the awards, but never made any money. It was an artistic thing—back then you could do that." Can this new age of multimedia support such artistic ventures? "Yes, I think it's called **Myst**. I thank the people at Broderbund, the people at Maxis, at Knowledge Adventures—the people who truly love product."

"There will always be an EA cranking out top sports, always be an Acclaim cranking out you-must-die things, and then a **Myst** will show up. There will be companies geared toward the mainstream, and there will always be great products. Look at **Doom**. There will always be a place for something that really screams out, always room for a brilliant product by someone who loved making it."

"I've always had an interest in games, and even more interest in software. I've never been a hardcore gamer; some guys, that's all they live for, but for me games are just a part of software."

He laughed, "And there's the fact that this industry seems to have so many social rejects ... I fit right in. None of us could make it in a real job; that's the beauty of it. It's an amazing industry, a combination of creativity, huge money, and the speed of it is huge. Look at music, or at movies ... the changes of those industries may be fast, but they are cosmetic pace changes. In this industry it's not just pace, it's technology ... everything changes."

About the future: "I'm looking forward to getting more involved in on-line. I think that in our world, which is information and reference, the overload is coming. The potential for presenting it in a manageable form with the proper navigators is going to be crucial. It's going to be huge." (Joyce Worley)

VR HEADSET FEATURES VGA

The UltraView 2020, which accepts direct input from VGA computers or from the Silicon Graphics Reality Engine, is the high-end unit of three PDS (Personal Display System) units marketed by Virtual I/O Inc. All use hi-res LCD imaging, accommodate eyeglasses and allow users to view the peripheral environment in addition to two-dimensional or

three-dimensional, full-color images. Other units include the 7-oz. i-glasses! which accepts TV, VCR or game console output as well as NTSC-converted VGA data, and the 11 oz. Gamer! that attaches to game consoles and includes head-tracking for a full 360 degree environment. A separate module for the i-glasses! adds head tracking and PC compatibility.

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Lewis Boudier-Head of Security at the Alexandria playing with his gun "sparks".



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DEFENSE INDUSTRY TARGETS INTERACTIVE GAMING

Video gaming has seen an influx of so-called "peace dividends" spurred by shrinking defense budgets. The largest incursion has come from military flight sims, where technology has brought sophisticated hardware and software to the low-end user, just as video gaming has matured to the point where it needed a fresh infusion of technology to stay vital. Among these cold war companies are Silicon Graphics, Bethesda Software, Paradigm, Greystone Technology, Aura Systems, Heads Up! Technology and untold others.

Many gamers may not be aware of how closely the defense and the electronic game industries are connected. Paradigm's Ron Toupal tells of a seminal government contract that he encountered while working at Merit Technologies, a company designed to convert defense technologies to commercial applications:

"The Close Combat Tactical Trainer (CCTT) was a tank simulator. Some of the first demonstrations that were done on a Silicon Graphics workstation were the direct result of an effort to build a tank simulator. All of the companies involved were looking for ways to use commercial equipment to lower the price of their bids. It was a large, multi-billion dollar project. The government was expecting to buy 2,000 computers from the successful bidder, so companies like SGI and AT&T were out there trying to sell their systems. That one defense program was the genesis of a lot of stuff that today is called virtual reality, because a lot of the companies were forced to build machines at the lowest cost for the highest efficiency (the most bang for the buck)."

Now, Paradigm is not only allied with SGI and Nintendo for the Ultra 64 project, they have just created a fighter pilot flight sim for location-based entertainment moguls Magic Edge.

Another company with deep roots in defense is Heads Up! Technology. Rob Harshaw, Heads Up!'s affable president/CEO and doctor of laser physics, used to work in Texas Instruments' Laser Weapons lab. Heads Up! is now developing the next generation of laser tag games for theme parks in Japan and California.



PARADIGM SIMULATIONS TO WORK ON ULTRA 64 GAME

Paradigm Simulations signed a contract with Nintendo of America to develop a game for the Ultra 64. The creators of 3-D, virtual-reality software for high-end government and commercial simulators will work with a team headed by Shigeru Miyamoto, designer of *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.*



Ron Toupal, president of Paradigm, explained: "The work we did for the government, for training pilots and other commercial sims, required top-level hardware, and the systems to design them ran into the millions of

dollars. Now that technology will be available for use in the home."

Paradigm and Silicon Graphics worked to build software tools specifically for SGI machines.

"When I and the others were first working with SGI in 1989-90, they were primarily a cadcam company, but we recognized that the machine was fast enough to do real-time simulation.

"When SGI established the partnership arrangement with Nintendo [to build the Ultra 64], toward the end of last year, we got a call from SGI saying, 'Nintendo is looking for someone to

help exploit the capabilities of the new box we're building for them.' We had a meeting with Genyo Takeda, the general manager of Project Reality. Nintendo knew that they must have at least one super game to come out with



the Ultra 64, and they looked for a way to maximize the chance of a hit game.

The plan that they came up with was that we were asked to participate, as the technology leaders in 3-D software." Asked how his firm would take advantage of the Ultra 64, he said, "Look at the images created by our technologies; some of them you won't be able to tell if they are real or computer generated. That's what we do: We build real-time simulators. We are able to make things run very smoothly and realistically, at 30 frames per second."

VIRTUAL BOY ON VIEW

Nintendo unveiled the long-awaited Virtual Boy in Japan, and promised an on-sale date of April in Japan and America. The 32-Bit system uses two LED displays to create a 3-D immersive experience; players see red images against a black background, with stereo sound. The headset comes with a special controller for multidirectional movement. It's powered by six AA batteries, and adapters will be sold separately.

The stand-alone tabletop unit connects to the immersive glasses, and uses cartridge-based software. Three titles will be introduced at launch, and Nintendo promises another two or three titles per month.

Retail prices will be approximately \$200 for Virtual Boy, and \$50-70 for games.

NINTENDO INVESTS IN REFLECTION TECHNOLOGY

Nintendo made an equity investment in Reflection Technology, and obtained exclusive video game rights to Reflection's virtual display technology, used in Virtual Boy.

Nintendo's President Hiroshi Yamauchi explained: "We have made this significant investment in Reflection because we recognize the tremendous market potential for the company's unique technology."

Reflection's technology is also in applications for telecommunications and mobile messaging.

DONKEY KONG CEREALIZED

Nintendo and Kellogg's are working together on a cereal box promotion for the blockbuster video game hit of the season *Donkey Kong Country*; look for information on this new promotion on most Kellogg's products. The promotion, which started in December '94, will run through April. The merger will include joint advertising campaigns, big prize giveaways and sweepstakes.

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INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT...

JERRY WOLOSENKO: INTO THE LOOKING GLASS

"I always had an interest in electronics and computers and entertainment. I read an article about video disks in *Popular Science* in 1975-76. I was fascinated that each individual frame of information could be recalled. I thought it would change the way we communicate," said the Executive VP and General Manager of Looking Glass.

"In 1980 or '81, my brother Doc started Synapse Software. I started selling their products, and I connected with Gary Carman at Broderbund and Ken Williams at Sierra On-Line, and Sirius and DataSoft. My company was a software wholesaler ... It was highly competitive. We had to look for people doing innovative and creative software. That's how I got involved. I looked for new products and tried to stay on the cutting edge of technology. In 1983, when the Amiga and Atari ST came out, I was kind of in the lead

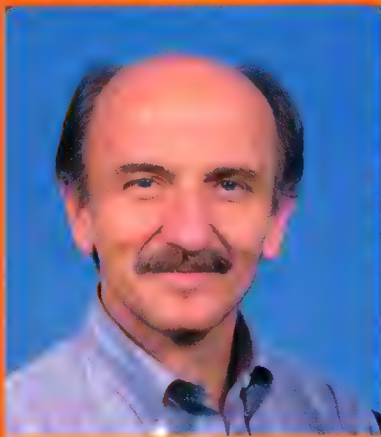
in looking for software for these new machines. There wasn't a lot, so one of the things I did was go to Europe. At that time people were already working on the 68,000 processor in Europe and England."

Jerry's work with *Psychosis*: "My role was to help them bring products to the States that addressed the needs of the U.S. market. There are nuances of the way product is created for specific markets. American players are very sophisticated, looking for games that are elegantly completed. The manuals and collateral materials are important, and very culturally dependent."

About the future: "We are going in two general directions. One is using the purely cinematic approach, using film, video or computer-generated images that you superimpose game elements onto. The other is the real-time model that Looking Glass pioneered in *Ultima Underworld I & II*. These were breakthrough products, using 3-D, first-person viewpoint, with texture-mapped backgrounds to create the world in which the player had the experience. What we were doing in this machine you simply could not do in any other medium."

In the next five years: "I think we'll have much better resolution; that's inevitably improving all the time. VR devices and other peripherals will help communicate the experience, whether it's a low-cost, full motion platform, or a peripheral device like a joystick or pedal stick that provides feedback."

"We want to put the player into the world in which he's having the experience. People should continue to demand a more comprehensive, full-gaming experience. Not technology for the sake of technology, but woven into the design of the game."

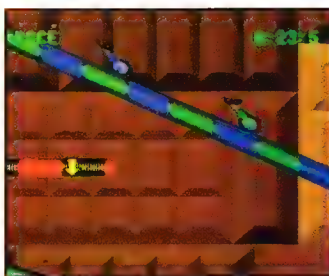


STAR POWER

Actor Patrick Stewart takes on a new role in **Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia 3.0**, where he acts as the special on-line video guide ... Activision's **Shanghai: Great Moments** will have an appearance by Rosalind Chao. She emcees, quips and hints throughout the game in video spotlights ... Armchair quarterbacks got a chance to play against former '49er Roger Craig in an Interactive Network

Celebrity Challenge, during the '49ers/Saints football game. The simulcast interactive television show let watchers choose whether the onfield player would run or pass, short or long, right middle or left, and pick action plays and strategies ... Steven Spielberg will work with Knowledge Adventure on future educational products. The famous director has also invested in that company... All five members of Aerosmith just love high-tech stuff. They appeared recently on Prodigy and on America Online to chat and answer questions with members of the on-line services.

Steve Tyler, Joe Perry, Tom Hamilton, Brad Whitford and Joey Kramer did the shows from their hotel rooms while they were on the road ... Carlene Carter provided the voice for Red, the bulldozing country girl who belts out the Carter hit *Every Little Thing* in Williams' new pinball **Road Show**. This may be the first time a C&W singer has been heard in any electronic game ... Death-defying Constance Cotter broke the world record for the tallest unicycle ride when she appeared on a 16-foot unicycle four feet above the second level



of Minneapolis' Mall of America, to celebrate the launch of Nintendo's unique new game that features racing unicycles called **Uniracers**.

TOP VIDEO GAMES November 1994

This list, prepared by Babbages, is based on units sold in the Babbages chain.

Top SNES Carts

1. *Donkey Kong Country*, Nintendo
 2. *John Madden NFL 95*, EA Sports
 3. *NHL '95*, EA Sports
- The ape runs past the goals.

Top Genesis Carts

1. *Madden '95*, EA Sports
 2. *NFL '95 Alive*, Sega
 3. *NBA Live 95*, EA Sports
- Sports titles live!

Top Sega CD

1. *ESPN National Hockey Night*, Sony Imagesoft
2. *ESPN Sunday Night NFL*, Sony Imagesoft
3. *Star Wars 3-D: Rebel Assault*, JVC

ESPN overshadows The Force.

TOP COIN-OPS November 1994

Figures courtesy of *Replay Magazine*, based on an earnings-opinion poll of operators.

Best Upright Videos

1. *Revolution X*, Midway
 2. *Mortal Kombat II*, Midway
 3. *Primal Rage*, Atari
- Revolution X** holds its place, but **MKII** returns to challenge.

Best Deluxe Videos

1. *Daytona USA*, Sega
2. *Cruis'n USA*, Midway
3. *T-Mek*, Atari

The "USA" leaders stay ahead as Atari joins the top three.

Best Coin-Op Video Software

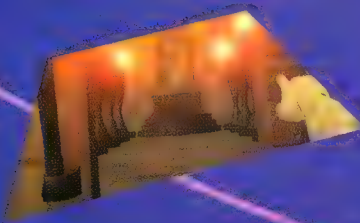
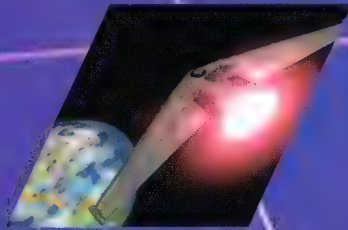
1. *Gal's Panic 2*, Kaneko
 2. *Darkstalkers*, Capcom
 3. *Street Slam*, D.E./Neo•Geo
- Gal's Panic 2** leaps to the front.

Best Pinball Machines

1. *Freddy/Nightmare*, Premier
2. *Addams Family*, Midway
3. *Star Trek*, Williams

Freddy maintains lead as **Trek** and **Addams** switch places.

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GAMBLING HEADS HOME VIA PHONE

Interactive Network has formed a subsidiary, RealTime Gaming Systems, to provide off-track betting, lotteries and games of chance to home users who enjoy the thrills of gambling, via interactive programming. The new company, to be located in Las Vegas, will download data through the telephone, so players can interact with programs on their TV sets.

Only seven states currently permit off-track betting from the home, but many foreign nations do allow remote gambling, and RealTime Gaming will pursue those venues.

DISNEY DOES GAMES, AGAIN

The Walt Disney Company formed Disney Interactive to develop CD-ROM and video games for home and school use. The new division will use technological resources from the Computer Software group and Disney's other divisions, such as the animation, theme park, film, television and cable groups.

Video games for Sega and Nintendo platforms will be under the Buena Vista label, and CD-ROM and PC software are under the Disney Interactive banner.

Michael Eisner, CEO, promised: "We will compete on a global scale with creative products that leverage the many strengths of The Walt Disney Company."

GAMETEK, MARVEL BUY MALIBU

The world's largest comic book publisher agreed to purchase Malibu Comics Entertainment. This new purchase will give Marvel the licenses to comics based on *Star Trek* and *Mortal Kombat*.

In a separate purchasing arrangement, GameTek has acquired the Malibu Comics Interactive Division.

TOP COMPUTER GAMES

November 1994

This list, prepared by PC Data, is based on units sold by 16 retail chains, representing more than 4,000 stores.

Top PC Disks

1. *TIE Fighter*, LucasArts
2. *SimCity 2000*, Maxis
3. *Flight Simulator*, Microsoft

There's no change from last month's ranking in the top three.

Top Macintosh Disks

1. *SimCity 2000*, Maxis
2. *Chessmaster 3000*, Software Toolworks
3. *Links Pro*, Access

The chess guru rises fast, but the city builders hold on.

Top CD-ROMs

1. *Myst*, Broderbund
2. *Outpost*, Sierra
3. *Star Wars Rebel Assault*, LucasArts

Graphics-rich fantasy stays ahead of space adventures.

NINTENDO MUST PAY \$208.3 MILLION

A Federal Court upheld the award granted to Alplex Computer Corp., for infringement of that company's patents by Nintendo. Alplex claimed the 8-Bit Nintendo machine and 118 game cartridges for the NES copied Alplex's bit-mapping technology for on-screen images.

BIZ DEALS

Domark made a deal with Bullfrog to publish **Theme Park** and **Syndicate** on the Sega CD, bringing the total to five Sega CD titles for the first half of this year... Fujifilm just opened a new Southeastern regional distribution office in Duluth, GA ... Viacom opened a new product development center in Buffalo Grove, IL ... IBM, Apple and Motorola reaffirmed their agreement to work together on a new PC design. But IBM and Apple are still negotiating about the operating systems ... Entrepreneur Paul Allen, cofounder of Microsoft and investor in many high-tech concerns, purchased equity in Trilobyte ... Flights of Fantasy is talking with FOX about a game special; target is February. They're also going Network in February via satellite, to hit 103 markets nationwide ... 7th Level has formed a joint venture with Quincy Jones-David Salzman Entertainment. The new firm, named QD7, will produce two titles in its first year ... 7th Level agreed to develop a sequel to **Betrayal at Krondor**, and other video and computer games based on Raymond Feist's *Riftwar Saga* ... Almost 80 scenes in the movie *StarGate* were created by Kleiser-Walczak FX specialists, using animation and imaging software by Wavefront Technologies ... RPI Advanced Technology Group revealed a VGA headmount display, to work with games, movies and teleconferencing. It's the first to offer VGA graphics, but is only available for commercial use.

DISTRI-DEALS

Atari signed a deal with Mumin Corp. of Tokyo to distribute the Jaguar to Toys "R" Us and other stores in Japan. The Jaguar is now available in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Japan ... Electronic Arts acquired DROsoft of Madrid, Spain, a distributor and republisher of entertainment software, in order to distribute EA software to the Spanish market. (EA already has outlets in the U.K., France and Germany.) ... Interplay signed a series of OEM distribution agreements. The OEM Division will provide software to original equipment manufacturers in North America, Europe, Africa and the Middle East, for Jasmine, GT Interactive, Davidson & Associates and Viacom. Interplay's OEM Division also represents LucasArts, Simon & Schuster, Putnam New Media and Accolade.

EDU-DEALS

MECC is working with famous cyclist/explorer Dan Buettner, in the development of **MayaQuest!**. This simulation takes a bicycle journey to study Mayan culture. Buettner and his team will start a three-month journey in February, and school kids will stay in touch with the team through Classroom Prodigy and Internet to get daily updates and help the team decide where to go next in their explorations. This makes Buettner's second bike ride for MECC; last year he cycled across Africa, for their coming game **AfricaTrek**.


SEGA GETS INTO DEEP WATER

Sega formed a new label, Deep Water, to provide a range of content for select audiences. Product will be aimed at mature (over 18) players who enjoy sophisticated games.

The label was developed because of the evolution of the platforms. As the hardware got older, Sega found that different audiences liked different styles of play. Secondly, the ratings hearings reinforced the need for games for the older user.

The first Deep Water title is *Eternal Champions* for Sega CD. The game uses higher levels of rendered graphics that provide a depth of reality to the violence and action. Future plans include Sega CD, 32X and Saturn titles that include adult language, violence and sophisticated scenarios.

"We hope that we will open new genres of games that don't exist now, some of which will have levels of intensity inappropriate for the younger user," said Sega's Richard Brudvik-Lindner.



DID YOU KNOW?

IBM announced it would halt shipment on Pentiums containing the Intel chip. The chip was discovered to have a "floating decimal point" error. Intel originally said the bug would only appear once every 27,000 years. IBM ran their own tests, and found the error cropped up once every 24 days. Although Intel modified the design and started manufacture of corrected chips, there are an estimated 2 million Pentiums that contain the flaw. The error was discovered by a math professor at Lynchburg College in Virginia. Meanwhile, other companies are working on patches to fix the problem. MathWorks started distribution of an updated version of

MATLAB, to compensate for the chip error, and Compaq Computer Corp. also produced software that corrects the bug. EA and Capital Cities/ABC started a joint venture, called ABC/EA Home Software, to develop programs based on ABC's children's and news programs. Mosaic Communications and First Data Corp. (a credit card processor) have worked out the mechanics to let on-line users make credit card purchases. The system uses encryption technology to garble the credit card number so it can't be copied. In a similar move, Microsoft and Visa are in a joint venture to develop software so PC users can shop with their credit cards. The Duck Corp. demonstrated software-based, real-time, live-action video at 30 frames per second. The TrueMotion compression technology has already been licensed to Sega, GameTek, EA and Crystal Dynamics.

CYBERSTOCKS: November 1994

After an additional month of new data on consumer preferences for interactive entertainment, Wall Street decided that October's value was a good approximation for November, too. As a result, the Electronic Games index barely budged. Among the separate sectors, value shifted from the cartridge publishers to the PC sector. Cartridge stocks eroded 11 percent on reports of weakening demand for 16-Bit video game hardware and software. (The only bright spot appeared to be **Donkey Kong Country**.) Also weighing on the group was Sega's (Japan) announcement that first half profits plunged 47 percent from the prior year. The PC entertainment software stocks rose 7 percent as consumer buying entering the holidays.

Behind the scenes there was considerable movement in several individual stocks. Davidson Associates registered the best gain (up 49 percent in November), on favorable recommendations from analysts and

positive expectations for the holidays. Other PC stocks showed well, with Sierra On-Line rising 19 percent (investors cheered the AT&T intent to buy out Sierra's interest in the ImagiNation Network and were optimistic about sales of **KQ7** and **Earth Siege**). America Online rose 18 percent partly because of lingering doubts that **Windows '95** (with competitor-to-be Marvel) would ship on time. Broderbund continued its upward trend, rising 12 percent in the month and doubling since January.

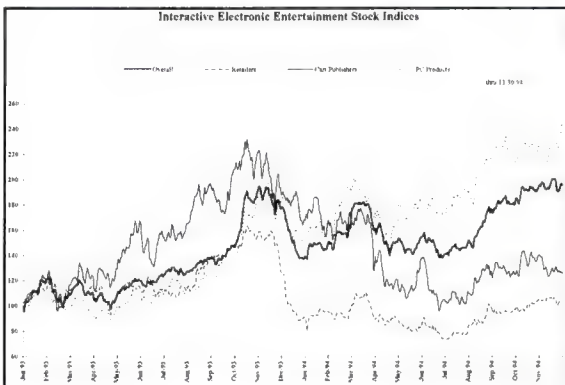
Retailers Babbages and Software Etc. edged up 7.5 percent as investors cheered strong post-Thanksgiving weekend sales and looked forward to the consummation of their merger. The laggards included 3DO, down 20 percent because of slow sales and concern about the \$3 surcharge for the Market Development Fund. Cartridge publishers Electronic Arts and Acclaim were down 12 percent and

10 percent respectively; the latter despite a major alliance and stock swap deal with TCI. Creative Labs eroded 12 percent reflecting slower growth expectations for multimedia upgrade kits.

What investment clues came from post-Thanksgiving day shoppers? 1) Cartridge sales were up slightly, but were again concentrated in a few titles (**DKC**, **Madden '95**, **The Lion King**). Since that three-day period, the malaise has returned to the category. 2) Nothing is stemming the

slide in 16-Bit hardware sales. 3) **Mortal Kombat II** can barely hold its own, whereas last year it put finishing moves on the competition. 4) Sports is the healthiest category in 1994. 5) Lots of catalog cartridge titles can be had for \$29 and less. 6) The PC education and entertainment software category is very hot.

John Taylor is an interactive entertainment industry analyst with L.H. Alton & Company, a San Francisco-based investment banking firm.



CYBERWATCH

Why Do Women Play Tetris?

In the male-dominated world of computer games, why are so many women hooked on **Tetris**? To solve the enigma ... and develop new games specifically for women—game companies are turning to psychologists and sociologists for answers. Dr. Gini Graham Scott, who studied female players for Nintendo, suggests that Tetris appeals to a feminine craving for order: When aligning the game's shapes, women experience a surge of endorphins that keep them coming back for more. There's also the hunter-gatherer theory: Whereas male players focus on specific and often aggressive tasks, females find the holistic, big-picture viewpoint of Tetris more appealing. Whatever the explanation, the trend baffles Alexey Pajitnov, who [co-]invented Tetris back in 1985. "When I designed the game," he maintains, "I did not have women in mind."

— *Details*, December 1994

"A California couple drew sentences of at least 2 1/2 years in prison for sending pornographic images via computer in a case that raised questions about how to apply obscenity laws in cyberspace.

"The prosecution of Robert Thomas and his wife, Carleen, was the first obscenity case in which operators of a computer bulletin board were charged in the place where the material was received, rather than where it originated.

"The Thomases were found guilty in July of transmitting obscenity via interstate phone lines. A postal inspector testified that he joined the bulletin board ... and received the images in his computer in Memphis.

"Thomas was sentenced to three years and a month in prison, and his wife got 2 1/2 years. Under federal sentencing rules, they must serve their full terms."

— *Associated Press*, December 3, 1994

"To do decent advertising, you need lots of money. To keep your shelf space secure, you need lots of money. To woo the all-important press, you need more money. And to stage the

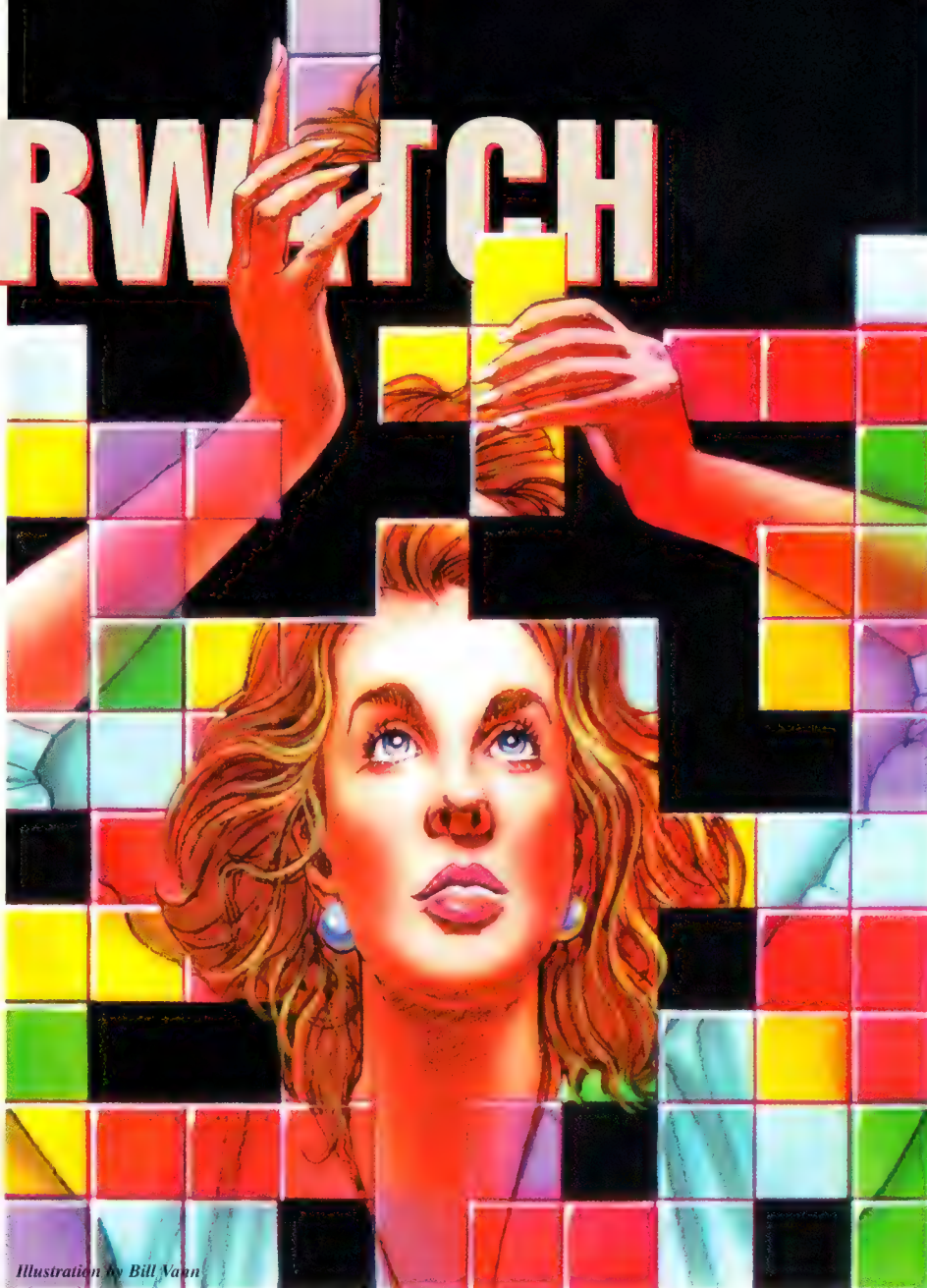


Illustration by Bill Vann

worldwide event marketing campaigns that publishers like Acclaim have become so good at ... you practically need a mint.

"If you've got a venture capitalist or corporate sponsor ... then okay ... If not, though, trying to publish your own games in such a competitive atmosphere seems like an incredibly heavy and risky burden to bear. In fact, even some of today's small- and medium-sized publishers may face rough days ahead because, as with all industries that begin to mature, I think video games will come to be dominated by a handful of giant studios."

— **Helmut Kobler "Industry Profile: Cyclone Studios"** (*Game Developer*, September 1994)

"Long-time successful educational software companies ... have seen their market invaded by game companies such as Electronic Arts, Sierra and Maxis who have added home learning software to their mix of consumer products. Software companies such as

Microsoft, Micrografx and Claris, better known for business solutions, have entered this market. So have such entertainment companies as Disney and Paramount and ... publishing companies....'The "Big Boys" are comin'," says Lynn Luukinen of Bright Star, the educational software division of Sierra On-Line Inc."

— **Barbara Robertson "Kids' Stuff"** (*Computer Graphics World*, October 1994)

"The Hanger [from In World, Minneapolis, MN], a Lawnmower Man-styled full immersion VR unit with development and game design input from Syd Mead, ships mid-1995. [The setup also includes a] full body suit developed by refugees from the Hit Lab."

— **Jas Morgan & Paul McEnery "Syd Mead and Doug Trumbull in Conversation"** (*Mondo 2000*, Summer 1994)

.....
by Ed Dille and Bill Kunkel

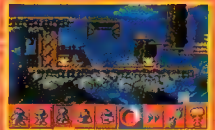
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GAME DOCTOR

Video Game MIAs

Ah, you're back!

It's always so nice to see a full office, especially after the holidays. All that new hardware and software—they always seem to give rise to a lot of questions. To that end, we're going to try to answer as many Qs as possible, starting with this issue's Game Doctor Prize Packet winner.

Oh and before we start, remember that the Doc is now on-line. Send all those queries, comments, and corrections to: Game Nurse@aol.com and your questions will reach our office instantaneously!

Finally, I'm waiting on a call at this very moment that may or may not clear up the Great 2600 Mystery. With any luck, we'll be able to tell James Catalano of Chicago, IL, exactly how the old Atari VCS got that name, while also doing my best to respond to the following...

Q: Do you know what ever happened to a Genesis RPG called **Star Odyssey** that was supposed to come out in '92? There were actually ads for it [in magazines] and [another magazine] actually reviewed it! Another game that was advertised for a while was **Hellraiser**. It was supposed to be for the NES, and I recall the ads claiming the game had "over 1 million" worlds or levels!

What gives with these non-releases? Why would a company go through all the time and expense to develop a game, and even advertise it, and then just can it? Is there some weird strategy involved here that we consumers just can't see?

Also, I wonder if you can tell me which of Sega's Sonic games were developed in the U.S., and which were made in Japan? I think I read somewhere that the original **Sonic** and **Sonic CD** were Japanese-programmed, while **Sonic 2** was U.S.-

made. And who did **Sonic Spinball** (Genesis version)?

R. I. Parker
Greensboro, NC

A: Looks like you've copped another Prize Packet, RIP. I won't go into the specific sad stories regarding the MIA games you mentioned and will, instead, discuss why games that you've seen mentioned, pictured and even reviewed sometimes never actually show up on retail shelves.

First, timing has a lot to do with it. In 1984, when the video game market was collapsing (much as the 16-Bit cartridge market is currently going el-foldo), scores of announced, finished products were dumped. The reason? The market was disappearing, stores were canceling orders and there would have



ACCESS Brings You a Virtual World Interactive Movie!

What Reviewers Are Saying:

"Lots of games push the envelope—Under a Killing Moon blows it to smithereens!"

—William Trotter, *PC Entertainment*

"A ground breaking CD adventure!"

—Joyce Worley, *Electronic Games*

"Under a Killing Moon combines the best elements of movies and computer games... It literally pulls you into the screen."

—Denny Atkin, *Entertainment Editor, Compute Magazine*

This category-creating Interactive Movie from ACCESS Software goes light years beyond any other product labeled "interactive." *Under a Killing Moon* takes you to the streets of post World War III San Francisco and casts you into the role of Tex Murphy, Private Investigator, who first appeared in *Mean Streets*, then *Martian Memorandum*. *Under a Killing Moon* is a Virtual World full of people and places so richly detailed, you'll feel like you're actually there.

been no way to sell them.

Even in less distressing times, however, games still get canceled before release, much as movies sometimes do, for similar reasons. Once a film or game is "in the can" it's true that a good deal of money has been spent.

But then consider the cost of having those games turned into expensive ROM carts (or that film master duplicated), then the

money that would have to be shelled out on packaging, marketing and advertising. You've heard the expression, "Why throw good money after bad?" Well, so have game publishers.

Or let's say you've developed a mediocre basketball game and you go to CES and discover that a dozen other publishers also have basketball games, and all of them are better than yours. What do you do? If you're smart, you bury your b-ball program.

Other times, the programmers leave. I recall a superb game Virgin was working on about eight years ago called *N.Y. Warriors*, a very good vertically scrolling arcade shooter with great, digitized sound. The product was about 80-90% done when the programmers bolted and the game was too buggy and the code too impenetrable for anyone else to complete.

There are also instances when retailers make the decision for the publisher. If, say, Toys 'R' Us and Babbages look at a video game and decide not to order, that game is really between a rock and a hard place.

Finally, just because you see a screen shot, that is not necessarily an indication that it was taken from a completed game. Often, screenshots are produced as DPaint files before the game is actually developed.

And that's the story of how even completed games disappear into the Twilight Zone. As for the *Sonic* games, it is my understanding

that *Sonic 3*, *Sonic Spinball*, and *Sonic & Knuckles* were all developed in the States. That can be confusing, however, since I believe Sega now has a Japanese development group working at nearby SoA HQ.

Q&A Quickies: Reader Ken Kupelian was nice enough to send along the names of several stores that sell older video game hardware and/or software, including Telegames USA (214-227-7694) which specializes in Atari, Intellivision and ColecoVision; and R&R Software (617-878-4365), and Adam's House (Rte. 2, Box 2756; 1829-1 County Road 130; Pearland, TX 77581-9503), which deal mostly with ColecoVision product ... Jack Spenser of Roxbury, NY, wonders what "MPEG" stands for; it's "Moving Pictures Experts Group" ... Omar "Ken" T. from Pakistan says he's seen references to scrolling being "NA" on the Genesis. He wants to know if this is true and, by the way, what the heck does "NA" mean, since he sees it in charts constantly. First off, the term "NA" or "N/A" means either "not available" or "not applicable." For example, in EG's video game reviews, there's a category that lists the number of levels a game has, but some games (such as sports sims) don't have levels, so "N/A" is listed. Other times, the information is not available—Acclaim, for example, has a policy of never revealing the amount of memory (i.e., "Megs") its games contain.

Finally, I don't know where you read that the Genesis doesn't have scrolling, but that's obviously wrong. The system even performs "parallax scrolling" in which several layers of background objects scroll at different speeds (the near backgrounds move quickly while the rear backdrops move progressively slower) to enhance the illusion of depth ... Nicholas Lipari from Grant, AL, wants to know if he can play his DOS games on Windows. Sorry, Nicholas.

And that about finishes up our space for this issue's Game Doctor session, which means we'll have to tell you the story of how the 2600 got its name (number?) next issue. (What a tease!).

Remember to send those questions, comments and corrections to:

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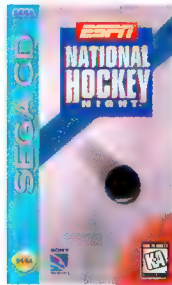
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1999



ELECTRONIC GAMING AWARDS

These are the candidates—
now YOU pick the winners

by the Editors of Electronic Games

Sometimes, the last blooms of summer are the most beautiful. Revolutionary changes rocked electronic gaming in 1994. Yet amid all the upheaval, publishers pushed interactive entertainment experiences to new highs.

Both the cartridge and floppy disk segments, dominant since the late 1980s, have reached a crossroads and are heading in exciting new directions.

The 16-Bit video game has entered the Big Phase Out. The Genesis and SNES, mainstays for the last several years, are on their way to the Old Console's Home. Expect the expert systems like the 3DO, Jaguar, CD-i, 32X, PlayStation, Saturn and Ultra 64 to dominate sales and awards by this time next year.

Meanwhile, CD-ROM displaced conventional computer software. Nearly all major projects that are now under way target the multimedia market. Floppy disks aren't dead yet, and won't be for several years, but the gilt-edged funware is now on disc instead of disk.

Ironically, designers and developers always do the best work on a platform just as it's about to go obsolete. It takes a couple of years to wring the maximum out of a machine. By then, most publishers are ready to switch funding to games for the *next* hot system.

How much better was 1994? In the past, lots of B-minus games rated a mention. This time, even some B-plus titles didn't make the final cut. We've got more categories, with more entries in each, than ever before, but you could still make a hell of a list from the games that *didn't* qualify.

For the third year, **Electronic Games** is putting the final decision where it belongs: in the hands of the gaming public. That's the only way to make the awards a true reflection of popular taste instead of a cheesy sales gimmick.

The **EG** editorial staff picked the nominees, but now it's up to **you**, the readers, to declare the champions. The last page of this section is a ballot. Check off your choices, mail it back to us by the deadline (Feb. 5, 1995), and then check the April issue of **Electronic Games** to find out whether your choices agree with the verdict of the electronic gaming nation.

Multimedia Game of the Year

Both types of multimedia, console and CD-ROM, simply exploded in 1994. Little more than a curiosity until now, multimedia turned into the fastest-growing type of interactive electronic entertainment almost overnight. The 3DO and Jaguar fulfilled EG's predictions with solid fourth-quarter sales, and the CD-i has also carved out a niche.

CD-ROM, helped by low-cost upgrade packages and attractive software bundles, went through the roof. Not so long ago, publishers practically had to beg developers to produce a CD-ROM product, because there wasn't much profit potential. No one worries about that any more. The first wave of million-sellers is already in the stores. If a product glut doesn't kill consumer enthusiasm, multimedia discs could well be 1995's top-selling electronic games.

FIFA Soccer (Electronic Arts/3DO) made kickball cynics eat crow. Even those who wouldn't go to the World Cup if they had free box seats can have a terrific time with this all-star, action-strategy sports simulation. The



action is fluid and realistic, without being over the heads of U.S. soccer know-nothings. All the editions are excellent, but the editors chose the 3DO edition, because of its brilliant exploitation of the platform's audiovisual potential.

Road Rash (Electronic Arts/3DO) is the most exciting head-to-head action contest for any of the expert platforms. Streaking down the highway while pummeling that unlucky rival biker is first-rate electronic gaming. The five basic tracks get longer after each qualifying round, so they keep pace with the



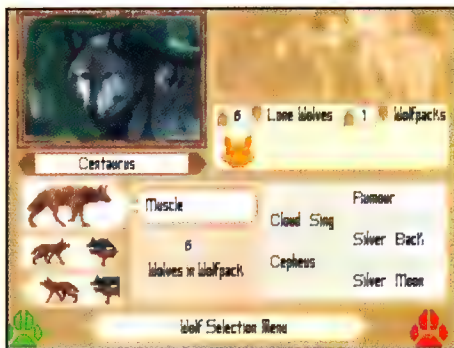
improvements the player makes in his cycle with race winnings. It's all topped off by excellent, full-motion video sequences and a musical score by Soundgarden and others.

Under a Killing Moon (Access/CD-ROM) proves that high-amplitude hype doesn't inevitably lead to crashing disappointment. **Killing Moon** is every bit as good as Access promised nearly two years ago. Chris Jones



leads a star-studded cast in this cinematic, science-fiction, detective adventure. The third Tex Murphy mystery sets new standards for use of full-motion video, all the more remarkable in view of the lengthy delay in publication.

Wolf (Sanctuary Woods/CD-ROM), an extravagantly innovative simulation of the lupine way of life, was developed under the aegis of Disney Software. Sanctuary Woods stepped in promptly when the Mouse Company's software arm changed corporate direction, again. The interface combines exceptional ease-of-use with subtle controls that help the player identify with a wolf's quest to become the pack's alpha male.



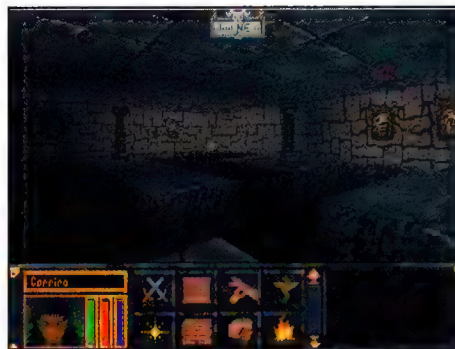
Computer Game of the Year

The era that began in 1978 with the Apple II of hallowed memory is winding up with a last, glorious spree of state-of-the-art 486 and Pentium software. Budget-priced software and programs that fit on one or two disks will continue to appear through 1995, but the five- and six-disk dinosaurs are poised on the brink of extinction. The superior data storage capability of CDs is so perfect for top-of-the-line titles that companies like Access and Origin Systems were so anxious to switch that they

anticipated the market by as much as a year.

Tomorrow belongs to multimedia, but that didn't stop companies from launching some fine floppy disk software in 1994. This year's "Best Computer Game" candidates embody the classic virtues of computer software: They are detailed, highly addictive games that give participants 50-plus hours of involving, vicarious experiences.

Arena: the Elder Scrolls (Bethesda Software/MS-DOS) overcame some first edition glitches to take its deserved place as the thinking gamer's answer to **Doom**. It offers a lot more depth and strategic complexity than most games in the first-person adventure genre without sacrificing the ease-of-play and strong sense of personal involvement that pervades such games. As



Talin, the player must collect the eight pieces of the Chaos Staff to defeat the evil usurper Jagar Tharn.

AstroChase 3D (MacPlay/Macintosh) is the most ambitious computer game revival in a year that saw the return of several classics. Richard Spitalny, Peter Jablon and Ofer Alon combined forces to translate the early-1980s space combat epic into contemporary terms. The SAGE game engine yields a game that has all the appeal of the original plus eye-popping graphics that are strictly up-to-date.

Colonization (MicroProse/MS-DOS) derives from Sid Meier's 1993 hit **Civilization**, but the new entry is no mere recapitulation of the earlier success. European exploration is the theme in this long-form strategy program. The play-mechanics are familiar, but **Colonization** focuses on efforts to settle this hemisphere from 1492 to the mid-19th century. The differing philosophies



of the various maritime powers and the range of historical eras give Meier's latest gem many intriguing scenarios and virtually unlimited game play. Who knows? That history grade may get a boost, too.

Doom II (id Software/MS-DOS) could end up as the best-selling floppy disk game of all



time. id broke through with **Wolfenstein 3D** a year ago, but **Doom II** shows off the group's second-generation system for first-person action-adventures. The company teased the market with the shareware **Doom**, and reaped gigantic first-month sales when it finally released the huge, full-price **Doom II**. This game has become for adults in the mid-1990s what fighting games were for teenagers during the first part of the decade.



Video Game of the Year

People sometimes refer to senior citizens as being in their "golden years." This term is equally appropriate for SNES and Genesis. They've both passed through their prime, but the last, big-time 16-Bit year was filled with golden cartridges. New chips and fresh graphics technology boosted quality at least a half-grade this year. We've put an unprecedented seven titles on the ballot, and the number could just as easily have been 10.

Neither Sega nor Nintendo forsook their platforms, despite weakening hardware sales. In fact, they went a giant step beyond the expected to give gamers the classiest cartridges yet. The audience has matured a little, so mindless fighting and shooting aren't as popular as they were at one time. This year's best are packed with colorful, kinetic excite-

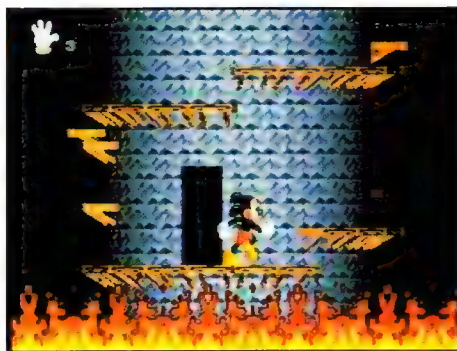


ment, but with added nuances and depth.

Donkey Kong Country (Nintendo/SNES) revives one of the great franchises in video gaming history. The SGI-based graphics simply blow away every other cartridge, and **Donkey Kong Country** would have been odds-on to win an award in that category, if its overall excellence didn't put it in the "Best Video Game" bracket. Although it uses the tried-and-true platform game format, **DKC** has such a range of tricky situations and enjoyable power-ups that it transcends the format.



Final Fantasy III (SquareSoft/SNES) shows why the Nintendo platform became the mecca for video adventurers. The on-screen images aren't in the same league as **DKC** or **Lion King**, but they are fully equal to the task of presenting one of the largest game worlds



ever crammed into a cartridge. SquareSoft has earned a gaudy reputation for its RPGs, and this *tour de force* is evidence that the publisher doesn't intend to rest on its laurels.

The Lion King (Disney-Virgin/Genesis,

SNES) more than upholds the high level of quality of last year's Disney-Virgin collaboration, **Aladdin**. The illustrators and animators knocked themselves out to evoke all the major scenes from the beloved animated film. The animation of four-footed creatures is particularly noteworthy. Those who thought **Aladdin** was a tad easy will find this multiphase action game more challenging.

Mickey Mania (Sony/Genesis) uses seven classic Mickey Mouse cartoons as the springboard to interactive fun. The game starts with *Steamboat Willie* and concludes with the relatively recent *Prince and the Pauper*. There's even a hidden level themed to *The Band Concert*, a 1935 'toon. Mickey moves through his Hollywood career in fine style, solving some fairly tricky puzzles along the way. The original soundtrack lacks the nostalgic element, but it more than makes up for it in quality and variety.

Mortal Kombat II (Acclaim/Genesis, SNES) has weathered the violence controversy to rank as one of the best-selling, and most



popular, home video games of all time. Even now, more than a year after its release, **MKII** has stayed in the top five on the cartridge best-seller list. A solid favorite with fighting game fans, it's blend of intense combat and superheroic moves has gained it respect even outside the hard-core.

NBA Jam (Arena/Genesis, SNES) is the entertaining result when designers apply the street-fighter sensibility to an action-simulation of professional basketball. The player-ratings, special moves and super dunks will remind many of the combat titles, though this is definitely NBA-type action. The two-on-two contest makes for exciting competition for four players, because it adds passing and play-making to the format pioneered by EA's **Larry Bird and Dr. J Go One-on-One**.

Sonic & Knuckles (Sega/Genesis) could be the most innovative video game released in 1994. The actual play-action is not too dissimilar to its predecessors, but the opportunity to go back and play **Sonic 2** and **Sonic 3** with the pugnacious Knuckles gives new meaning to the term "replayability." **Sonic & Knuckles** is more of a refinement and enhancement of earlier titles than a bold departure, but no one's complaining about this fast action romp.

Best Action Video Game

Alien vs. Predator (Atari/Jaguar) wasn't quite a system-seller, but it did make a lot of folks give Atari's expert platform a hard second look. Talk about intense action! As Alien,



or Predator or Space Marine, the solo gamer blazes a path of destruction through the corridors and rooms of the space station. Each character has special characteristics, so it's almost like three games in one.

Demons Crest (Capcom/SNES) proves, in case there was any doubt, that Capcom is capable of more than endless **Street Fighter** riffs. **Demon's Crest** is a magnificent example of the pinnacle of side-scrolling. As a winged gargoyle, the arcader fights against the minions of hell. **Demons Crest** starts off with a bang, breaking the mold with a fight against a Boss at the very beginning of play. The graphics have extra zip, too, with some spectacular Mode 7 effects.

Maximum Carnage (LJN/SNES) is the interactive retelling of the 14-part Marvel Comics story starring Spider-Man, Venom and Carnage. The plot ultimately involves nearly two-dozen heroes and villains in super-powered combat. It boasts the best simulation of Spider-Man, especially the web-slinging, of any video game. The 16-Bit **Maximum Carnage** is a large game, too, with 26 comic book-inspired levels.

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure (Activision/Genesis) marks a return to video gaming greatness by the company that started the whole third-party phenomenon back in 1978. The publisher included one level of the original **Pitfall** for the nostalgia-minded, but the new game is a reminder of how much time has passed since the original. This time, the



hero is Pitfall Harry's son, who must penetrate the secrets of the Mexican jungle to rescue his imprisoned dad.

Super Metroid (Nintendo/SNES) is a highly unusual action cart in that it casts the player as a female bounty hunter, Samus Aran. This pistol-packin' avenger relentlessly stalks the airborne menace known as the metroids. One of the most popular games among the hardcore, **Super Metroid** offers both lethal combat and deep strategy.

Super Return of the Jedi (JVC/SNES) is the climax of this publisher's much-honored *Star Wars* trilogy for the SNES. It has the proven play-mechanics of the first two chapters of the saga, but it also offers some new game-situations that help keep the series moving in high gear. This 16-Meg cartridge lets gamers become any of their favorite *Star Wars* heroes, often giving a choice of two different ones for each mission. The music is based on the John Williams' score, and the game builds up to a tremendous finish.

Taz in Escape From Mars (Sega/Genesis) isn't the usual sci-fi romp. When Marvin the Martian kidnaps Taz, the celebrated cartoon critter uses his Tornado Spin to crash through weak spots in walls as he tries to escape from the Red Planet. The six-level platform puzzle uses Taz's well-known appetite to give power-ups and penalties, depending on what he swallows. Other popular Warner Bros. cartoon characters make cameo appearances, all faithfully drawn and cleverly animated.

Tempest 2000 (Atari/Jaguar) is a game that stubbornly resisted attempts to turn it into a



home cartridge—until Atari invoked the power of its expert platform. **Tempest 2000** is an affectionate re-creation, with significant enhancements, of the classic coin-op. The shaded-polygon forms give the new version of the game a special look that is still in synch with the original's vector graphics.

Best Strategy/Action Strategy Video Game

Bubsy II (Accolade/SNES) is the sequel to the Blank-Berlyn platform contest that is **Sonic the Hedgehog**'s only serious rival in the high-speed scroller category. For the sequel, the development team managed to

out-do the original **Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind** in every respect. The action is much more varied, Bubsy has lots of new animations, and the game world is even more



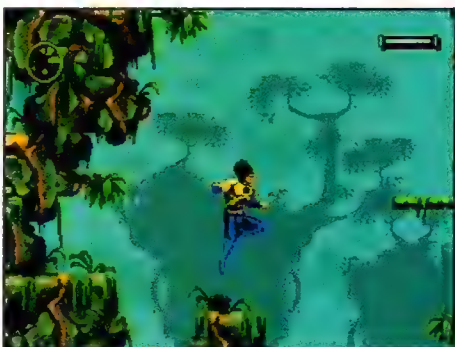
extensive. This isn't quite as hard as Bubsy's first escapade, but there are plenty of traps and enemies to stun the unwary.

Castlevania Bloodlines (Konami/Genesis) marks the long-running series' debut on the Genesis with the best Castlevania adventure so far. The hero, John Morris or Eric LeCarde, fights imaginatively scary enemies and bosses through the six levels to Dracula's English castle for the finale. The bosses, such as the clockwork factory owner on Level Five, are refreshingly imaginative.

Doom (Atari/Jaguar, 32X) may be the best game on either of these consoles. Certainly, the first-person action adventure by id Software could hardly look better or play more flawlessly. In truth, the Jaguar version, the first on cartridge, is the superior edition, but the editors thought that the 32X disc rated a mention, too.

Dynamite Headdy (Sega/Genesis) has a hero who really knows how to use his head—fire it as a projectile weapon! This Treasure Software design is essentially a side-scrolling platform game, but the character's bizarre attack method sets it apart. Learning to use each of the interchangeable heads at the right time is part of the fun in this well-illustrated title. The Game Gear edition, while not quite as good, rates as one of the year's best portable cartridges.

Generations Lost (Time Warner/Genesis), despite a Byzantine back-story, is a beautiful side-scroller with just enough strategic Options to balance the action elements.





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Monobe, the last of the Keplan tribe, searches for a new beginning in unexplored lands. He jumps, runs and swings on vines through assorted perils in his snazzy E-Rad suit. Pacific Softscape maintains interest with periodic milestones and rewards.

Wild Snake (Spectrum Holobyte/SNES) is the first game in the Alexey Pajitnov Presents series, a new line of games fronted by the author of **Tetris**. This new puzzle-game is part **Tetris** and part **Surround**, the old Atari 2600 moving-line contest. The one- or two-player game has fairly simple, yet attractive graphics and score-inspiring music.

Best Sports Video Game

Ken Griffey, Jr. Presents Major League Baseball (Nintendo/SNES), ties a solid action game to one of the most exciting and popular players in the major leagues, Ken Griffey, Jr. of the Seattle Mariners. The publisher avoided the problem of having only one real player in a league of straw men by also licensing the



authentic team names and stadiums from Major League Baseball. Other baseball cartridges may exceed **Griffey** in specific areas, but its overall quality kept it selling even when the real sport went on strike.

NBA '95 Alive (Electronic Arts/Genesis) demonstrates that the publisher isn't afraid to take chances with a profitable gaming franchise. The angled, sideline perspective markedly improves the coach's view of the court drama, and art director Mike Smith has orchestrated some visual improvements. These include animations for jumpers and hooks, and a crowd that doesn't sit perfectly still.

NHL '95 (Electronic Arts/Genesis) is the outstanding 16-Bit cartridge edition of a game that is also spectacular on CD-ROM. This long-running series gets better every season. This time, innovations include drop passes, fakes and body checks. Also welcome is the new General Manager Mode, which allows coaches to trade players and even create new ones. The graphics, as always, are exemplary.

Side Pocket (Data East/SNES) has crisp, but not flashy, graphics. That's sometimes a sticky point with cartridge gamers, but this cartridge's fascinating play-action has won it

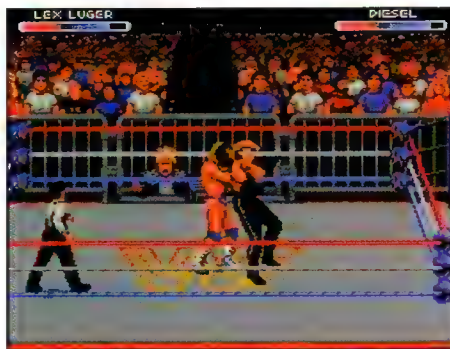


praise through several increasingly sophisticated editions. The pool simulation offers the skill challenge of the standard game as well as some arcade-like special flourishes.

Virtua Racing Deluxe (Sega/32X) is as true to the hit coin-op machine as is possible without duplicating the coin-snatcher's special hardware. It is as fast as any racing fan could wish, and the scenery looks great as it whizzes past. Sega has long had an identification with action-oriented automobile racing contests, and this is the publisher's greatest achievement to date.

World Series Baseball (Sega/Genesis) is the year's most complete baseball action-sim for the Genesis. Sega bought both the MLB and MLBPA licenses so this one has all the real teams and players. The visual centerpiece is the catcher's-eye view of the batter-pitcher confrontation, though the multiperspective treatment is also very effective and eye-pleasing as well.

WWF Raw (Acclaim/Genesis) is indisputably the best professional wrestling game yet released by Acclaim. It features the "New Generation" grapplers of the WWF, such as Owen Hart, Shawn Michaels and recently crowned champion Diesel. Each competitor is rated in a range of physical characteristics, and there are even hidden moves for those who really make a study of mat mayhem.



Best Adventure/RPG Video Game

Breath of Fire (SquareSoft/SNES), developed by Capcom of Japan, is a fantasy RPG that puts more emphasis on thinking than fighting. The idea is to explore the surroundings and talk to the myriad of non-player

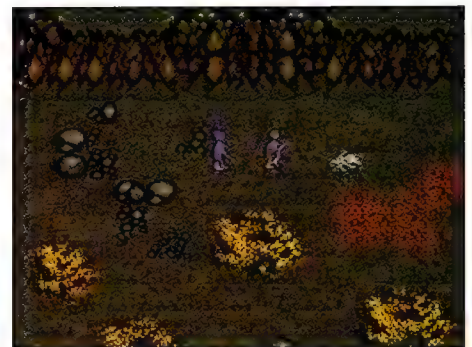
characters to get vital information. The streamlined command control setup lets the character move through the sprawling game world and give magic and weapons orders for combat situations. The graphics are among the best yet seen for a game of this type.

Illusion of Gaia (Nintendo/SNES), a follow-up to Enix's **Soulblazer**, has a nearly ideal mix of action and strategy. The player becomes Tim, a young warrior who must collect eight magic statues for a final battle. The game features two main modes of play, Town Exploration and Action. Tim must talk to the non-player characters to get clues that speed



his quest for the enchanted artifacts. Tim clears one area at a time and reaps rewards in the form of power-ups and special gems.

Lord of the Rings (Interplay/SNES), when augmented by Bulletproof's Multi-Player Adapter, lets up to five fantasy-lovers participate in this interactive version of the first volume of the immortal trilogy by J.R.R.



Tolkien. One of this adventure's best features is that characters acquire better weapons and armor as the plot unfolds, equipping them to meet the ever-increasing challenges from Sauron and his Mordor legions.

Secret of Mana (SquareSoft/SNES), originally titled **Final Fantasy Adventure II**, is a combat-oriented, role-playing game. Despite a pedestrian plot, this is an absorbing RPG. The player battles creatures to gain experience and hit points, while acquiring choice weapons in the course of the journey. Although it starts as a one-player quest, **Secret of Mana** soon adds two more adventurers. These additional characters may be controlled independently, allow-

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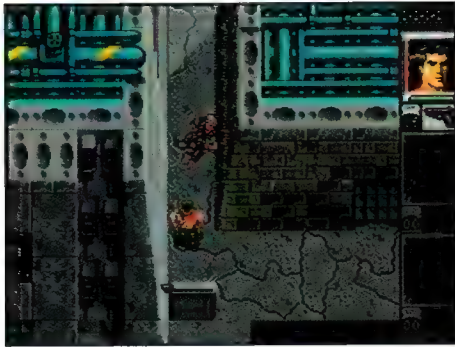
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ing up to three people to get into the game.

Shadowrun (Sega/Genesis) is an action-adventure with elements certain to appeal to just about every taste. It's set in a near-future dystopia in which huge corporations run a world where high technology and magic are



paths to power. In this cyberpunkish story, the player tries to solve the murder of his brother that occurred during a shadowrun. The story is well-structured, so that the hero must undertake many missions to get money to achieve the game's larger goals.

Young Merlin (Virgin/SNES) was Westwood studio's bid to produce a game that could be distributed around the world without text translation. While not 100 percent successful, the design team pared text down to a single word, "Meanwhile," substituting easily grasped pictographs for all other on-screen writing. As a youthful wizard, explore 10 exciting, but non-violent worlds in this multi-directional scroller.

Best Multimedia Action Game

Brutal: Paws of Fury (GameTek/Sega CD) is the year's most entertaining new take on the fighting game format. The eight competitors don't just fight with the ferocity of beasts, they *are* anthropomorphized animals. Each one represents one of the Buddhist paths to enlightenment. It has special moves, character advancement and all the other fighting game trimmings. The animation is another prime strength of this engrossing contest.

Pyramid Patrol (Taito/Pioneer Laser Active), on a platform that hasn't exactly set the world on fire, won video gamers' respect with outstanding graphics and hot action in a futuristic environment. When Terran explorers remove an artifact from Mars, a quiescent civilization springs back to life and attacks. Eight exciting levels, embellished with superb sound and graphics, await the heroic shooter.

Rise of the Robots (Time Warner/CD-ROM), bursting with audiovisual pyrotechnics, is a fighting game variant. This time, it's battling robots swapping punches and kicks. When the robots of Electrocorp become infected with the Ego Virus, the player must destroy all the robots, including the Boss Supervisor. Fighting game fans won't find

many surprises, but **Rise of the Robots** offers computerists a taste of martial arts conflict.

Shock Wave (Electronic Arts/3DO) buried, once and for all, the allegation that multimedia games can't have hot shooting action. Designed specifically for the 3DO by Michael Becker, **Shock Wave** puts the gamer into the cockpit of the F-177 orbitally launched fighter, in a series of missions to sweep alien invaders from the Earth. The missions are intense air strikes against famous objectives around the world.



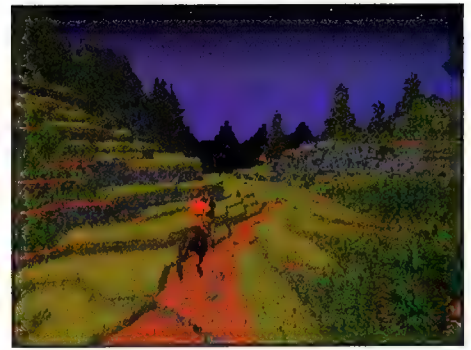
Tomcat Alley (Sega/Sega CD), from Stargate Films, introduced the first new wrinkle in flight simulators in the last two years. Its creative use of full-motion video builds an enveloping play-experience that triumphs over the fairly rudimentary interaction. When a bomber full of chemical warfare materials threatens peace, the player takes to the skies for aerial combat in this interactive war movie.

Way of the Warrior (Universal/3DO), from newcomer Naughty Dog, weds scintillating 3DO graphics and sound to a no-holds-barred fighting game. The large characters, detailed animation and wide choice of martial arts moves makes **Way of the Warrior** one of the most riveting play-experiences you can have on this platform

Best Multimedia Adventure/RPG Game

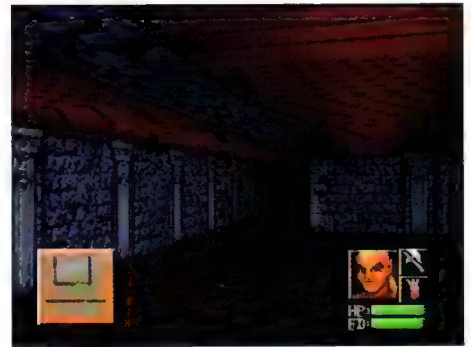
Burn: Cycle (Philips/CD-i) is a cyberpunk thriller RPG; a post-William Gibson *DOA*, in which a man has been poisoned and has only hours to discover who poisoned him. Hot visuals, cinematic cut techniques and state-of-the-art sound and graphics made this disc one of the most highly anticipated titles for the CD-i.

Ecstatica (Psygnosis/CD-ROM) is an adult-oriented game from the masters of sophisticated computer action. When a traveler stumbles onto the isolated village of Tirich and finds it infested with evil, they must ferret out the town's secrets to vanquish the baddies. The game is somewhat reminiscent of **Alone in the Dark**, but the substitution of ellipsoids for polygons gives even the nastiest characters a cutely rounded look; however, the wary



adventurer won't be fooled by this deceptive cuteness.

Slayer (SSI/3DO) is the publisher's attempt to redefine role-playing games in light of the massive **Doom** revolution. Although the game carries the *AD&D* label on its back, it is anything but a standard *AD&D*. **Slayer** is a hack-and-slasher with lots of real-time conflict for the action end of it, plus enough RPG trappings to give it much more depth than the usual corridor crawl.



Best Multimedia Strategy/Action-Strategy Game

Blown Away (IVI/CD-ROM) continues the story beyond last summer's Jeff Bridges/Tommy Lee Jones thriller. Jimmy Dove, the Boston bomb squadder, defuses bombs to save hostages, rescues his daughter and defeats Justus, another of Garrity's former students. First-person perspective and nail-biting time pressure make this Imagination Pilots' production crackle with excitement.

Castles: Siege & Conquest (Interplay/CD-ROM) is based on Medieval monarchy and



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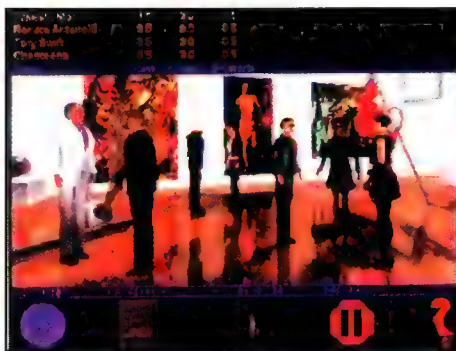
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the feudal system that supported it. The player tries to gain a kingly crown by defeating 35 neighboring territories and unifying the countries under their rule. The game starts in 1312, when the player takes command of one of five families and starts the quest for the throne.

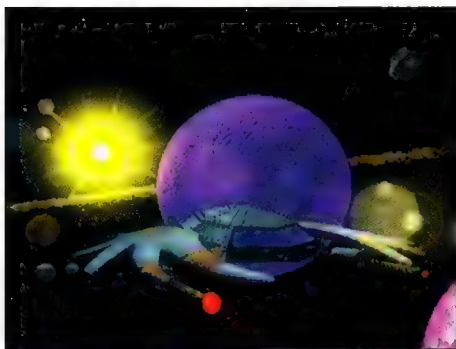
Gridders (Tetragon/3DO) is Jim Van Ehr's contribution to the rapidly expanding group of first-class 3DO discs. The 36-level kinetic puzzle, set in the troubled world of 2040, tests mental and physical agility with progressively tougher problems. As Zack, the player uses special elements to affect the box-like gridders and clear a path to the next level.

Litil Divil (Philips/CD-i) brings the "cute game" sensibility to a platform not previously noted for humor. The quest for Mystic Pizza is a five-level jaunt through a not-very-frightening Netherworld. The solo player must help Mutt get through the Labyrinth beneath the alluring visual trimmings.

Millennium Auction (Electronic Arts/CD-ROM) embodies one of the most unusual premises of any 1994 game. Eidolon has crafted a pleasing strategy game for one-to-six participants. In the early 21st century, an elite group of art traders compete for possession of rare human artifacts. Knowing how much to bid and when to make the offer helps players gain possession of these rarities.



Star Crusader (Take Two/CD-ROM) is as riveting as any space combat title published this year, but it is the strategy component that vaults it into the upper echelons of entertainment software. F.J. Lennon's plot about a galactic empire and an uneasy alliance formed to thwart its imperialist designs is a compelling backdrop and motivation for the real-time combat.



Best Computer or Multimedia Sports Game

FPS Baseball '94 (Sierra-Dynamix/MS-DOS), though a little delayed coming to market, proved a major success with fans of the National Pastime. Playable as a pure statistical simulation or an action-strategy game, **FPS Baseball** combines a good understanding of the sport with exceptional graphic options. The multiple camera angles give one or two managers the ability to view the diamond doings from a great variety of perspectives.

FPS Football Pro (Sierra-Dynamix/MS-DOS) continues to be one of electronic gam-



ing's top gridiron simulations. Upgraded graphics, a tighter statistical model and loads of intriguing options make it an all-pro choice for armchair Shulas and Ryans. Like **PFS Baseball**, this can be played in Coach Mode or with a human in direct control of the action.

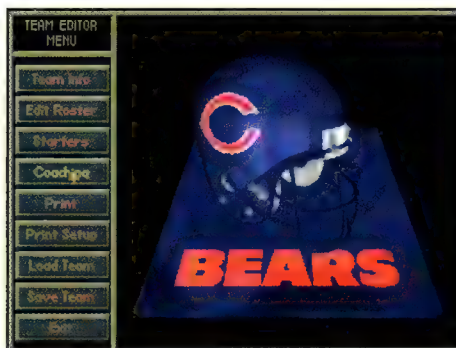
International Tennis Open (Philips/CD-i), with its digitized characters and choice of three court surfaces (grass, clay and cement), is a highly playable approach to simulating tennis. The gamer moves the on-screen racqueteer into position, and they automatically take the most appropriate shot in this one- or two-player contest.

Prize Fighter (Sega/Sega CD) is a satisfying disc produced for the Sega CD. The player tries to box his way to the top of the sport in this Digital Pictures disc. First-person perspective gives the fisticuffs much more immediacy than the usual ringside vantage point. The black-and-white fight footage, with choreography by the same person who helped stage *Rocky* and *Raging Bull*, is impeccable. There's even a celebrity ref, judo Gene Lobell.

Tony LaRussa Baseball 2 (SSI/CD-ROM) continues this excellent series of baseball simulations into the multimedia age. **LaRussa**, as befits the license, is a thinking fan's depiction of major league baseball, but SSI didn't skimp on frills. It plays well, looks and sounds realistic and offers options that address a range of play-styles.

Ultimate Football (MicroProse/CD-ROM) was one of 1994's most pleasant surprises. The first rev of this title, introduced last year, didn't hit the mark graphically or in play-action, but the publisher made the most of the

second try. Whether played in coach or action mode, **Ultimate Football** has a remarkably



trouble-free interface and play-mechanic coupled with a high degree of gridiron realism.

Best Computer Adventure/RPG

Daemonsgate (EIDolen/MS-DOS) took a couple of extra years to reach gamers, but the sheer magnificence of its game world overcomes the fact that the sound and graphics were no longer state of the art by the time it reached stores. Exploration and adventuring are the main activities, and there is no shortage of non-player characters and unknown lands.

Lands of Lore (Westwood/MS-DOS) is a role-playing adventure with real-time, first-person combat. The developers went to considerable lengths to make this a fairly easy game to learn and play, but there's no sacrifice of depth or quality. Rick Parks, credited with the graphics, is a serious contender for the field's best fantasy artist. Designers Bill Crum and Paul Gorrow have created an immense world and stocked it with fascinating artifacts and creatures.

Quest for Glory: Shadows of Darkness (Sierra/MS-DOS) offers three separate adventures in the fantasy realm of Mondavia. After electing to be a warrior, magician or thief, the

Name: Validor				
Strength	155	Fighter	Weapon Use	150
Intelligence	90		Parry	135
Agility	135		Dodge	110
Vitality	160		Stealth	0
Luck	100		Pick Locks	0
Magic	0		Throwing	100
Paladin	0		Climbing	0
			Comm.	117
			Honor	47
Puzzle Pts.	14		Stamina	147/147
Health	158/158		Mana	0/0

player must solve puzzles that dovetail nicely with their unique abilities. **Quest for Glory** balances the thrills with lots of humorous sidelights, such as the vorpal bunnies, inspired

by Monty Python & the Holy Grail.

Superhero League of Hoboken (Legend/MS-DOS), led by design legend Steve Meretzky, succeeds where many previous attempts have failed. He has created an



adventure/RPG starring superheroes. Gamers rid a futuristic New York metropolitan area of evil-doers. Exaggerated characters, tons of puns and a lot of savvy satire enliven this role-playing extravaganza.

Shadowcaster (Origin/MS-DOS), developed by Raven Software, owes much of its success to great graphics and sound as well



as the marvelous lead character. Kirt, the shadowcaster of the title, is a metamorph who can assume any of seven forms, if he finds the obelisks that trigger this remarkable ability. The 25 varied levels deliver at least 30 hours of high-voltage adventure.

Ultima VIII: Pagan (Origin/MS-DOS), probably the last of Lord British's much-honored series to come forth on floppy disk in a market that is demanding the advancements that CD-ROM technology is bringing to the computer game industry. This addition is the best so far of a truly great series of adventures. That's really saying something, because **Ultima** has been synonymous with the best in fantasy role-playing on computers for over a decade. This time around, the Avatar leaves the familiar land of Britannia to dare the dangers of the Guardian's homeworld. The orthogonal playfield gives greater freedom of movement, and the graphics are up at least a notch from the previous.

Best Computer Strategy Game

Amazing Toons (Dynamix/MS-DOS) is the latest and most enjoyable variation on Jeff Tunnell's line of kinetic puzzle games that began with **Incredible Machine**. The playfields are at least as difficult to solve as past titles, but the graphics are even more attractive. Instead of Rube Goldberg gizmos, its Play Screens are populated by charming cartoon characters whose activities must be harnessed properly to achieve a solution.

Elements (Villa Crespo/MS-DOS) was one of the year's most pleasant surprises, a first-rate entertainment program from a publisher previously best-known for solid, if unexceptional budget-priced titles. Teenage designer Avery Pack has authored a six-level



maze game designed to test anyone's ingenuity. The kinetic puzzles have loads of special features, such as teleports, that keep solvers on their toes every minute.

Kingmaker (Avalon Hill/MS-DOS) brings the outstanding non-electronic board game of the same name to the electronic gaming screen in an excellent solitaire format. Invented in England, **Kingmaker** is a simulation of the military and political situation during the War of the Roses. Although the historical epoch is not too familiar to most Americans, the game itself is absolutely enthralling. The player strives to enlist, crown and maintain a monarch against claims by counter-claimants.



Merchant Prince (QQP/MS-DOS) takes the player back to Venice in the early Renaissance. Given a head start by a rich uncle's bequest, the would-be merchant prince must engage in commercial, political and military adventures. The paramount goal is great

wealth, but the merchant prince must get involved in non-economic matters to achieve it in this one-to-four-player contest.

Serf City: Life is Feudal (SSI/MS-DOS), despite the amusing title, is a serious simulation of life during the Middle Ages. Blessed with better graphics than most other titles in this category, **Serf City** challenges one or two computerists to develop a thriving society.



Blue Byte's entry gives world-builders 24 types of buildings and 21 human occupations.

SimCity 2000 (Maxis/MS-DOS) is the latest permutation of the city management simulation that put Maxis on the map. The urban planning game is now set in the near future, but that wonderful interface is every bit as good—and maybe even a little smoother. The city manager of tomorrow competes against four other metropolitan areas for population and business.

Solitaire Antics (Masque/Windows), the year's most diverting card game, shows that there are already a few good titles for those who don't like to take their PC out of Windows mode. It presents 21 solitaire card games, each playable at three different difficulty levels. More than 55 animations, plus an army of amusing ants, add to the fun without detracting from the polished simulation.

Best Computer-Action/Action-Strategy Game

Crystal Caliburn (Star Play/MS-DOS) turns exploits of King Arthur into a visually stunning, and cunningly constructed video pinball program. Novices will enjoy the artful array of standard features, while veteran silverballers will want to bestow knighthoods and seek the Holy Grail. Little Wing, which hit with **Tristan** two years ago, has outdone its own benchmark title, with this imaginative flipper program.

Pacific Strike (Origin/MS-DOS) pushed the capabilities of most PCs with a game that applies the **Strike Commander** engine to simulating aerial combat in the Pacific Theatre of World War II. The player can fly 27 different missions in this Eric Hyman design. Upon return to base, the branching plot moves forward in a direction that reflects the computerist's performance in battle. The textured,

polygon graphics and accurate aircraft modeling are other high spots.

Star Wars: TIE Fighter (LucasArts/MS-DOS) proves that, sometimes, turnabout is great play. This space shooter lets the digital deadeye take command of any of six TIE-



fighters, the pride of the Empire, to wreak havoc on the upstart rebel alliance that Luke and friends defended so tenaciously in the film trilogy.

The Terminator: Rampage (Bethesda/MS-DOS), based on the characters and backgrounds of the movies, is a tough-to-beat first-person shooter with a time-twisting plot. When Skynet tries to reverse John Connor's victory by sending a T-800 to 1994 to take over Cyberdyne Systems, the Resistance sends the player to the same year to foil the plan. Few floppy disk games rival V.J. Lakshman's action hit.

X-Com UFO Defense (MicroProse/MS-DOS) lets players do more than fret about the possibility that aliens have landed on our planet. In this Mythos Games Ltd. creation, the player commands X-COM, a worldwide organization pledged to stop the alien invasion of Earth in 1999. Players research new weapons and technology and build bases in areas menaced by UFOs. Highly flexible play extends this program's life almost infinitely.

Best Electronic Game Audiovisual FX

Alone in the Dark II (I-Motion/MS-DOS) brings back Edward Carnby, the roaring '20s detective from **Alone in the Dark** for another exciting, beautifully rendered case. This time, Ed tries to find the murderer of private detec-



tive Ted Striker. **Alone in the Dark** was a visual masterpiece, but the designers and implementers have outdone themselves and surpassed that landmark game in both sound and graphics. The intricate graphics establish the right 1920s ambience.

Burning Soldier (Panasonic/3DO) is another excellent first-person action fest. The player becomes a futuristic soldier who must wipe out the evil aliens who have taken over the Earth. The musical score, ranging from heavy metal to techno pop, is one of this year's best.

Ecco: Tides of Time (Sega/Sega CD) is the latest adventure of the world's most popular digital dolphin. The texture-mapped underwater cut scenes are the most breathtaking visual material ever seen on this platform. Ecco has an expanded repertoire of moves, including the ability to leap out of the water and then head toward the horizon on the surface

Gabriel Knight (Sierra/MS-DOS), the publisher's first direct-to-CD release, is a well-told gothic mystery with an all-star acting ensemble. The cast includes such luminaries as Tim Curry, Mark Hamill and Michael Dorn. Sierra used state-of-the-art multimedia sound and images to present this stellar company to

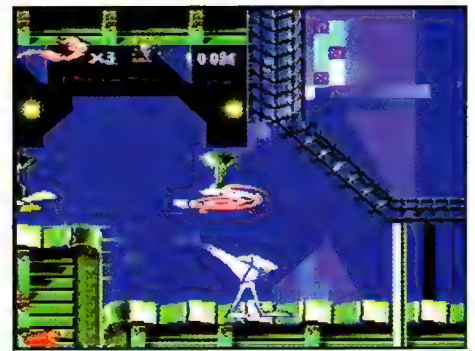


maximum advantage in the story of a New Orleans writer whose research for a voodoo novel lands him in the middle of some messy complications.

Most Humorous Electronic Game

Beavis & Butt-head (Viacom/Genesis), those teenage rebels without a clue, star in an action-adventure video game that radiates their unique brand of humor and more-than-slightly skewed view of the world. Viacom produced a different game for each platform, and the design/development team made the most of the relative freedom available on the Genesis to produce an interactive version of the MTV cartoons.

Earthworm Jim (Playmates/Genesis, SNES), produced by the charismatic David Perry, concerns the whimsical adventures of a charming worm in an exoskeleton. Whimsy and slapstick are the main forms of humor as Earthworm Jim struggles against enemies like a boss made out of a garbage can with old tires for arms and legs. Even excessive hype



couldn't keep this unusual platform cart from finding an appreciative audience.

Rocko's Modern Life (Viacom/SNES), a license acquired through Viacom's Nickelodeon connection, stars a lovable wallaby and his faithful dog, Spunky, in a series of kinetic puzzles that express the easy-going humor of the cartoon series. It requires quick thinking as well as some good controller work to get the occasionally wayward pooch home from the beach without mishap.

Toejam & Earl 2 (Sega/Genesis), though a platform game, has the same sparkle as the ground-breaking original. Those two hip-hopers from Funkatron return home, unwittingly bringing back a load of stowaways. With the sacred Funkapotomus in hiding, it's up to the dancing duo to take care of the situation. It's another great sci-fi parody backed by strong game-play.

Twisted: The Game Show (Electronic Arts/3DO) is Jim Eisenstein's off-the-wall send-up of television game shows. It has a toothy host, buxom female ornament, unctuous announcer and enough game play to add up to an enjoyable session for two to four participants. The sound and graphics are up there with the best this platform currently offers, and the laughs come fast in this unorthodox entertainment.

Best Science-Fiction/Fantasy Electronic Game

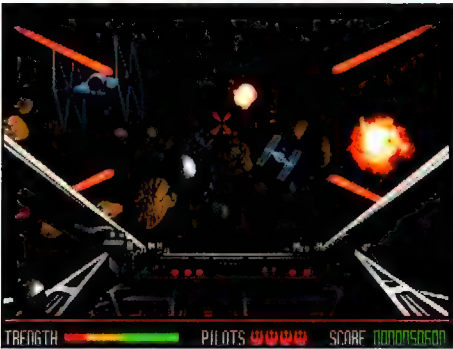
Alien Legacy (Sierra/MS-DOS), with the surehanded Joe Yberra in the producer's chair, is a science-fiction strategy/adventure game about founding and developing colonies on alien worlds. Although the simulation is exceptionally detailed, it isn't hard to learn. The interface does a commendable job of keeping everything organized, so the play-routine moves quickly and smoothly.

Outpost (Sierra/MS-DOS) is Brad Balfour's "heavy science" strategy game of interstellar colonization. The player builds a starship, flies it to a likely planet and puts down civilized roots. Unlike too many electronic games, **Outpost** is built on well-grounded extrapolation derived from NASA research. If the leader guides the colony's development effectively, mankind's new home among the stars can eventually launch its own starship and begin the process anew.

Return to Ringworld (Tsunami/MS-DOS), the publisher's second title inspired by Larry Niven's Known Space series of science-fiction novels, is a dramatic improvement over the first one. Ken Allen kept all the good things, like the fine audiovisual effects, but put a lot more content into the sequel. The player guides three characters to safety and then leads them into an exploration of the secrets of the Ringworld.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (Spectrum Holobyte/SNES) is the best of an exceptional group of games introduced last year, based on the syndicated TV series. The graphics, animation, interface and overall tone are impeccable. Ride the spacelanes with Capt. Picard and his all-star crew!

Star Wars: Rebel Assault (LucasArts/CD-ROM) extends the *Star Wars* universe by moving away from the familiar characters. The player, as Rookie One, engages in four different types of action, each shown from a unique perspective. The encounters are varied



and uniformly exciting, especially fights against an imperial walker and the Empire's fearsome star destroyer.

Best Electronic Military Simulation

Armored Fist (Novalogic/MS DOS) is the most comprehensive vehicle simulation of modern, armored cavalry combat that you will find outside an Army base. Novalogic



incorporated the Voxel space technology introduced in **Comanche** to create unbelievably detailed terrain. Players command from one to

16 units, issuing orders to subordinate commanders and hopping among turrets at will.

D-Day: The Beginning of the End (Impressions/MS-DOS) is a largely successful attempt to simulate the most famous, and largest-scale, invasion in the history of armed conflict. As either Axis or Allies, command the units as they existed on that memorable June 6. Edward Grabowski's masterpiece also drew raves for the "value added" inclusion of four hefty manuals, including a concise explanation of Operation Overlord.

Harpoon II (Three-Sixty Pacific/MS-DOS) is part of the legacy of fine games left behind by this now-defunct small publisher. It is rare to find a simulation this painstakingly accurate. Yet the logical control scheme and the graphic excellence of the on-screen displays make **Harpoon II** a game in which the player can concentrate on the scenarios without tripping over the routine-of-play.

Operation Crusader (Avalon Hill/MS-DOS) is a hexgrid war game so playable that it has won the hearts of gamers who ordinarily wouldn't even look at a product of this type. The North African campaign, so full of romantic exploits, glamorous leaders and military miracles, is an ideal subject for a slick and quick simulation. Avalon Hill's first tour through electronic gaming was a hit-and-miss affair, but the renowned publisher of non-electronic strategy games is hitting the mark with impressive regularity since its 1994 return.

Operation Europe: Path to Victory (Koei/SNES) is another outstanding example of how this inventive publisher succeeds by going against conventional wisdom about video gamers. Highly detailed war games like this, and its predecessor **Pacific Theatre of Operations**, prove there's a place in cartridge-land for an uncompromising, complex military simulation. Six scenarios follow the war from the occupation of France to the fight for Berlin.

Panzer General (SSI/MS DOS) is the best operational level strategy game to appear in years! Panzer Generals command a core group of units in campaigns which span the entire WWII European theater. Achieving victory is not enough, however. Generals must also preserve the experience levels of their troops, spend precious prestige points to upgrade to better equipment and manage aspects of command which remain untouched by other games.

Best Electronic Edutainment Game

Cartoon History of the Universe (Putnam New Media/CD-ROM) turns Larry Gonick's book into a five-hour extravaganza of audio, cartoon animation, music and over a dozen 3-D games that take a lighthearted view of 13 billion years of history. There are also three interactive artifacts: the Minotaur scroll, the

Pyramid of Cheops and the Acropolis, each with a different learning experience attached.

The Discoverers (Knowledge Adventure/CD-ROM) uses all the graphic tricks in the multimedia bag, and an icon-driven interface to explore the accomplishments of the great explorers. Narration, videos, maps, time-bars, animations and simulations produce an exciting study of man's greatest accomplishments.

Normandy: The Great Crusade (Discovery/PC CD) provides an encyclopedic approach to D-Day, with letters, videos, diaries, maps, real radio broadcasts and great animations that spell out the details with sensitivity, and a depth that brings those awful events into focus. It turns a heroic light on the past that shows the War through the eyes of those who were there.



Gus Goes To Cybertown (Modern Media Ventures/PC CD) sends a friendly hound through the town's 11 game areas, as the player sees animations, movies, sing-alongs, puzzles and learns the alphabet, spelling, counting and addition. The game's rich use of cartoon-like characters helps make the learning experience more attractive to young children. There's also a macro-adventure overlaying the program that provides a rich play experience that continues through several years of learning.

Leonardo The Inventor (Interactive Electronic Publishing/Mac & Win-CD) explores the many works of the great da Vinci and his inventions. An easy interface plus a full range of graphic tricks make the study of his life and times fascinating for any age, and the three games onboard are entertaining diversions. This top-quality production uses 3-D pictures, animations, movies, narration, time-lines and splendid commentary to bring Leonardo to life.

Math Workshop (Broderbund/PC-CD) is a full-spectrum arithmetic tutorial for grammar school-age children, that covers a large variety of areas including addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, in addition to fractions, equivalences, estimation, scale and much more. The best part about this game is that it teaches through creative activities, like bowling, musical notes and rhythms, picture puzzles and art. It goes further toward making math fun than any other program currently on the market today.

• The 1995 E.G. Awards Official Ballot •

Vote for only one nominee in each category, and please don't worry about skipping any category that you do not feel you know well enough. Send your ballot to:

Electronic Gaming Awards
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Feel free to copy this ballot or submit a facsimile if you wish to preserve your copy of *Electronic Games* intact.

Multimedia Game of the Year

- FIFA Soccer** (Electronic Arts/3DO)
- Road Rash** (Electronic Arts/3DO)
- Under a Killing Moon** (Access/CD-ROM)
- Wolf** (Sanctuary Woods/CD-ROM)

Computer Game of the Year

- Arena: The Elder Scrolls**
(Bethesda Software/MS-DOS)
- AstroChase 3-D** (MacPlay/Macintosh)
- Colonization** (MicroProse/MS-DOS)
- Doom II** (id Software/MS-DOS)

Video Game of the Year

- Donkey Kong Country** (Nintendo/SNES)
- Final Fantasy III** (SquareSoft/SNES)
- The Lion King**
(Disney-Virgin/Genesis, SNES)
- Mickey Mania** (Sony/Genesis)
- Mortal Kombat II**
(Acclaim/Genesis, SNES)
- NBA Jam** (Arena/Genesis, SNES)
- Sonic & Knuckles** (Sega/Genesis)

Best Action Video Game

- Alien vs. Predator** (Atari/Jaguar)
- Demons Crest** (Capcom/SNES)
- Maximum Carnage** (LJN/SNES)
- Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure**
(Activision/Genesis)
- Super Metroid** (Nintendo/SNES)
- Super Return of the Jedi** (JVC/SNES)
- Taz in Escape From Mars** (Sega/Genesis)
- Tempest 2000** (Atari/Jaguar)

Best Strategy/Action Strategy Video Game

- Bubsy II** (Accolade/SNES)
- Castlevania Bloodlines** (Konami/Genesis)
- Doom** (id/Jaguar, 32X)
- Dynamite Headdy** (Sega/Genesis)
- Generations Lost** (Time Warner/Genesis)
- Wild Snake** (Spectrum Holobyte/SNES)

Best Sports Video Game

- Ken Griffey, Jr. MLB** (Nintendo/SNES)
- NBA '95 Alive** (Electronic Arts/Genesis)
- NHL '95** (Electronic Arts/Genesis)
- Side Pocket** (Data East/SNES)
- Virtua Racing Deluxe** (Sega/32X)
- World Series Baseball** (Sega/Genesis)
- WWF Raw** (Acclaim/Genesis)

Best Adventure/RPG Video Game

- Breath of Fire** (SquareSoft/SNES)
- Illusion of Gaia** (Nintendo/SNES)
- Lord of the Rings** (Interplay/SNES)
- Secret of Mana** (SquareSoft/SNES)
- Shadowrun** (Sega/Genesis)
- Young Merlin** (Virgin/SNES)

Best Multimedia Action Game

- Brutal: Paws of Fury**
(GameTek/Sega CD)
- Pyramid Patrol** (Taito/Pioneer Laser Active)
- Rise of the Robots**
(Time Warner/CD-ROM)
- Shock Wave** (Electronic Arts/3DO)
- Tomcat Alley** (Sega/Sega CD)
- Way of the Warrior** (Universal/3DO)

Best Multimedia Adventure/RPG Game

- Burn: Cycle** (Philips/CD-i)
- Ecstatica** (Psygnosis/CD-ROM)
- Slayer** (SSI/3DO)

Best Multimedia Strategy/Action Strategy Game

- Blown Away** (IVI/CD-ROM)
- Castles: Siege & Conquest**
(Interplay/CD-ROM)
- Gridders** (Tetragon/3DO)
- Lilil Divil** (Philips/CD-i)
- Millenium Auction**
(Electronic Arts/CD-ROM)
- Star Crusader** (Take Two/CD-ROM)

Best Computer or Multimedia Sports Game

- FPS Baseball '94**
(Sierra-Dynamix/MS-DOS)
- FPS Football Pro**
(Sierra-Dynamix/MS-DOS)
- International Tennis Open** (Philips/CD-i)
- Prize Fighter** (Sega/Sega CD)
- Tony LaRussa Baseball 2** (SSI/CD-ROM)
- Ultimate Football** (MicroProse/CD-ROM)

Best Computer Adventure/RPG

- Daemonsgate** (EIDolen/MS-DOS)
- Lands of Lore** (Westwood/MS-DOS)
- Quest for Glory: Shadows of Darkness**
(Sierra/MS-DOS)
- Superhero League of Hoboken**
(Legend/MS-DOS)
- Shadowcaster** (Origin/MS-DOS)
- Ultima VIII: Pagan** (Origin/MS-DOS)

Best Computer Strategy Game

- Amazing Toons** (Dynamix/MS-DOS)
- Elements** (Villa Crespo/MS-DOS)
- Kingmaker** (Avalon Hill/MS-DOS)
- Merchant Prince** (QQP/MS-DOS)
- Serf City: Life is Feudal** (SSI/MS-DOS)
- SimCity 2000** (Maxis/MS-DOS)
- Solitaire Antics** (Masque/Windows)

Best Computer Action/Action Strategy Game

- Crystal Caliburn** (Star Play/MS-DOS)
- Pacific Strike** (Origin/MS-DOS)
- Star Wars: TIE Fighter**
(LucasArts/MS-DOS)
- The Terminator: Rampage**
(Bethesda/MS-DOS)
- X-Com UFO Defense**
(MicroProse/MS-DOS)

Best Electronic Game Audiovisual FX

- Alone in the Dark II** (I•Motion/MS-DOS)
- Burning Soldier** (Panasonic/3DO)
- Ecco: Tides of Time** (Sega/Sega CD)
- Gabriel Knight** (Sierra/MS-DOS)

Most Humorous Electronic Game

- Beavis & Butt-head** (Viacom/Genesis)
- Earthworm Jim**
(Playmates/Genesis, SNES)
- Rocko's Modern Life** (Viacom/SNES)
- ToeJam & Earl 2** (Sega/Genesis)
- Twisted: the Game Show**
(Electronic Arts/3DO)

Best Science-Fiction/Fantasy Electronic Game

- Alien Legacy** (Sierra/MS-DOS)
- Outpost** (Sierra/MS-DOS)
- Return to Ringworld** (Tsunami/MS-DOS)
- Star Trek: The Next Generation**
(Spectrum Holobyte/SNES)
- Star Wars: Rebel Assault**
(LucasArts/CD-ROM)

Best Electronic Military Simulation

- Armored Fist** (Novalogic/MS-DOS)
- D-Day: The Beginning of the End**
(Impressions/MS-DOS)
- Harpoon II**
(Three-Sixty Pacific/MS-DOS)
- Operation Crusader** (Avalon Hill/MS-DOS)
- Operation Europe: Path to Victory**
(Koei/SNES)
- Panzer General** (SSI/MS-DOS)

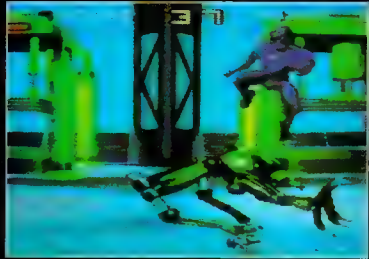
Best Electronic Edutainment Game

- Comic History of the Universe**
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- The Discoverers**
(Knowledge Adventure/CD-ROM)
- Gus Goes To Cybertown**
(Modern Media Ventures/CD-ROM)
- Leonardo The Inventor**
(Interactive Electronic/Mac, MPC)
- Math Workshop** (Broderbund/CD-ROM)
- Normandy: The Great Crusade**
(Discovery/CD-ROM)

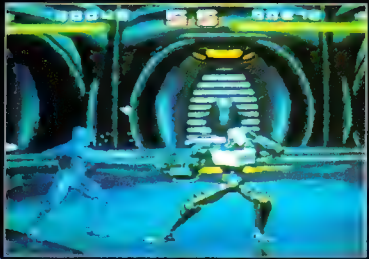


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ACCLAIM TO FAME

by Bill Kunkel

The Lords of Licensing Face the Future

A funny thing happened to the video game industry on its way to Christmas 1994.

Mortal Kombat II, Acclaim's long-awaited sequel to the Williams' arcade game, broke quickly from the starting gate, reportedly racking up over \$50 million in its first week at retail. To provide some context for this success, that was more than the films *Forrest Gump*, *The Lion King* or *True Lies* earned over a similar period.

Acclaim orchestrated the rollout with military precision, reminiscent of Nintendo's Japanese hardware launches. Even word of a strange bug in some copies couldn't seem to dent its momentum. Acclaim devoted 30 telephones to **MK II** product support alone and what might have been a heart attack turned out to be a hiccup.

Mortal Kombat II was, in short, a blockbuster success, leading retailers and publishers alike to harbor great expectations for the season. Orders from the prime chains—Babbages, Electronics Boutique, Toys “R” Us, etc.—ballooned, and development houses shackled programmers to their computers in a mad sprint to cash in on what looked like a solid gold holiday season.

Some of the smaller publishers, however, saw the gargantuan numbers and knew fear. With Nintendo's **Donkey Kong Country**, Virgin's **The Lion King**, Playmates' **Earthworm Jim**, Square Soft's **Final Fantasy III** and Acclaim's other high-powered contender, **Maximum Carnage**, all expected to pile up huge numbers, the little guys were terrified that there would be no money left in consumers' pockets to buy *their* games. After all, Acclaim's home versions of the original **Mortal Kombat** did so well the previous Christmas (selling in excess of 4 million units in its first four months), it soaked up a lot of potential sales for alternative products.

“If one game sells 5 million units,” explained an industry veteran, “it is probably killing off 15 other games, each of which could have carved up those sales and made a nice profit. Most publishers would be delighted to sell 250,000 copies of a game and would probably consider it a hit.” That means a 5 million seller like **Mortal Kombat** is equal to 20 modest hits—and many small publishers feel, Darwin be damned, that every **MK** level success condemns 19 lower-profile games to an undeserved oblivion.

The Nightmare Before Christmas

In any case, if some members of the industry were made uncomfortable by **Mortal Kombat II**'s astonishing launch, it was nothing compared to the panic that was engendered among retailers when suddenly, for no apparent reason, the game died. Reports on estimated sales of **MK II** for the month of November showed it was only the fifth best-selling video game with some analysts maintaining that sales had dropped to under 50,000.

The reaction was both quick in coming and draconian in nature: Orders were chopped. According to insider reports, Babbages alone dropped the order for one apparent Christmas sure-shot from 200,000 to 40,000 units. Then word started to leak in from all video game fronts, and none of it sounded encouraging. **Earthworm Jim**, dubbed "game of the decade" in a fit of hyperbolic frenzy by one gaming magazine, was doing mediocre business thanks, in part, to its TV commercial being banned by several network players who found it, er, tasteless. Even Nintendo's 900-lb. gorilla, **Donkey Kong Country**, maintained its momentum based more on Nintendo's promise to buy back unsold copies from retailers than on its stunning, revolutionary graphics.

What all this means is hard to measure from the eye of the storm, but it certainly does indicate the magnitude of Acclaim's position in the video game world. "The largest independent entertainment software company in the world" wasn't always in this position, of course. Although founded in 1987, Acclaim was the Rodney Dangerfield of video game software until 1993, when it became the Steven Spielberg of the field with a war chest of properties including **Mortal Kombat**, **NBA Jam**, **The Simpsons**, **RoboCop** and **The Addams Family**.

Of course, licensing and marketing have always been Acclaim's forte. Even back in the '80s, when much of Acclaim's product was decidedly mediocre, it was mediocrity tied to a killer license. Founded in a small home office

in Oyster Bay, about 45 minutes from Broadway, Acclaim established itself as a major third-party software provider almost from its inception due to its position as sole U.S. software provider for the hugely successful NES. It was a virtual license to pan for gaming gold.

Starting Small

From a modest Victorian-style house rented by company co-founders Greg Fischback and James Scoroposki, a small core group battered its way into the Japanese-dominated video game software market. Greg was working for RCA when the company was acquired, and he was left out in the cold. He contacted Jim Scoroposki near the end of '86 and suggested they get in the video game business. Greg, after all, had some sort of in with Mino Arakawa, president of Nintendo of America.

Once the deal looked as if it would happen, Scoroposki contacted Rob Holmes, who was veep of marketing at Activision. Believing that video games were the future, Holmes flew back east, spent the next two months "being bi-coastal" and finally told the co-founders to "make me an offer." Greg and Jim made a magnanimous offer: one month's pay and a return ticket to California if the company flops.

It was the spring of 1987, and the three spent the next month looking at every available NES product in the marketplace. Eventually, they narrowed it down to a few games, gave them new names and started beating the marketing drums and praying that Nintendo would give them the green light.

They constructed mock-up boxes, hired a father and son and two days before CES, Howard Lincoln of NoA called, expressing interest in **World Runner**. "After pretending to have to think about it," reports Holmes, "we said yes. But we had no booth, just the father and son in Acclaim jackets, and Nintendo let us put our brochures on their desk. We got an order from Toys "R" Us and shipped **Star Voyager** two months later."

In 1987, however, the company appeared puny indeed when compared with third-party titans such as Konami and Capcom, snatching NES games like **Tiger Heli**, **World Runner** (perhaps the worst attempt at a 3-D video game ever produced) and **Star Voyager** from the Japanese discard bin. The company generated \$925,000 in fiscal '87.

The product selection process employed simple but sound wisdom: Find a genre that isn't being filled and fill it. "There were no flying shooters, so we put out **Tiger Heli**," Holmes recalled. "We've always had a marketing focus—we went to the market and found out what they liked."

A year later, however, revenue was up to \$39.3 million as NES sales exploded and Acclaim snatched up its first licensing properties, primarily Vince McMahon's WWF Wrestling franchise. While not quite a huge blockbuster license, it has proven itself a fine cash cow over the years. "It's perhaps our steadiest selling license," according to company president and CEO, marketing legend Robert "Rob" Holmes. "It's been a great, long-term property."

The growth curve took a 76 percent jump in '89. The company, which had merged with Gamma Capital Corp. and gone public the year before, lay in the weeds through much of the year, prior to a year of growth and acquisition in 1990 when Acclaim picked up video game rights to **The Simpsons** ("We decided to license *The Simpsons* after its first week on TV," Holmes says), **Double Dragon II**, **Back to the Future II/III** and the science-fiction hit **Total Recall**, while also locking up Marvel's Spider-Man and inking a deal with the NBA. Profits were up another 105 percent, with Acclaim reporting \$141.5 million in revenue. But one substantially big, key move took place behind the scenes; Acclaim signed a right of first refusal deal with arcade kingpins Williams Electronics, including the entire Williams, Bally and Midway lines.

Present



The long, slow decline of the NES market hit even Acclaim in '91, when revenues dropped for the first time in company history, dipping almost \$20 million while the company doggedly published titles such as **Double Dragon III**, **NBA All-Star Challenge** and from its deal with Williams, **Arch Rivals** and **Terminator 2: Judgment Day**. The first *Simpsons* title, **Bart's Nightmare** appeared on the fading NES in 1991, while Acclaim also published the first piece of third-party SNES software, a translation of the Bullfrog computer game, **Populous**.

Moving to the Next Level

The key event of '92 turned out to be Acclaim's deal with Sega of America to produce software for its Genesis and Game Gear systems. Additionally, the collapse of Mirrorsoft Ltd. in the U.K. allowed Acclaim to add the Arena group to its growing stable of separate labels. LJM had been acquired two years earlier, and now Acclaim was publishing games under the names Arena, Flying Edge, LJM and of course, Acclaim.

Behind the scenes, the company was opening up the British and Japanese markets, while making the first steps toward major technological innovation by establishing the Research and Design Center and licensing proprietary animation technology from Biomechanics. The company tallied revenues of \$214.6 million and was preparing for the greatest year in the history of third-party publishing.

The rest, as they say, is history. **Mortal Kombat** blitzed the industry, **NBA Jam** (originally scheduled to be **Arch Rivals 2**) was a sensation, and everything else was gravy. Acclaim established subsidiaries in France and Madrid, locked up the

WWF through the end of the century, made distribution deals with Hi Tech Expressions (in the U.S.) and Virgin Games (in the U.K.) and inked an exclusive deal with *T2*, *Aliens*, and *True Lies* director James Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment.

Of course, there was **Mortal Kombat**, a blitzkrieg of a video game success. The game even managed to defuse the long-awaited arrival of Capcom's monster hit **Street Fighter II Turbo** on the Sega Genesis when Nintendo was rumored to have pressured Capcom to delay the Genesis release until after the game appeared on the SNES. As a result, **Mortal Kombat** beat **SFII** to the Genesis, where it created a blood-spattered controversy and dominated the holiday season.

When the dust cleared, the company sold more than 44 million game units of all titles across six platforms and earned \$327.1 million.

1994

The past year has been a volatile one in the home gaming sector. The deal between Acclaim and Williams lapsed and Williams joined forces with Tradewest to publish the home versions of its arcade hits. Acclaim, in return, announced that Tom Petit and John Pasierb would head up a research and development group to develop a new line of coin-op games. Petit hails from Sega while Pasierb was veep of Engineering for American Laser Games, creators of **Mad Dog McCree**, **Who Killed Johnny Rock?** and other full-motion video light-gun games.

Acclaim also acquired a minority equity interest in Digital Pictures and announced the development of a new memory chip that is capable of replacing standard ROM back-up battery storage at a lower price. The chip will

be used initially in the long-delayed project **NFL Quarterback Club**.

The company has also jumped into the surging PC and PC-CD markets, promising PC-CD versions of **MK II**, **NBA Jam Tournament Edition** and **WWF Raw**, and hints that support for the Sony PSX is likely.

Acclaim even purchased its own comic book company, Valiant, while maintaining its strong relationship with Marvel Comics, which will work with Acclaim to produce and distribute all Marvel Software.

"We planned for years," Holmes says of Acclaim's licensing acquisitions. "When we pick up a property, we obtain the rights for all interactive media; it makes no sense for a product to remain fallow.

Acclaim boasts offices in Canada, France, Germany, Spain and the U.K., in addition to a new 65,000-square-foot office under construction in Glen Cove, minutes from the old Oyster Bay digs. Acclaim has grown like topsy over the past half-decade and as a result, currently operates along the lines of a campus, taking space in various Oyster Bay locations—a floor here, a floor there. The company even rents semi-permanent space in the town's hotel.

The location makes the company seem somewhat remote. "You're the first journalist to visit the new Motion-Capture Facility," publicist Allyne Mills and Dan Harnett pointed out [see sidebar]. But Acclaim remains the heartbeat of the video game business; when it issues an irregular rhythm, everybody gets nervous.

"We started out in a house," Holmes remembers, "sitting on the floor. The premise hasn't changed. There are still no time clocks. There isn't a person who's been here more than a few months who doesn't own stock. We're moving ahead together, and that's critical."

And Future of Acclaim



Capturing THE Movement

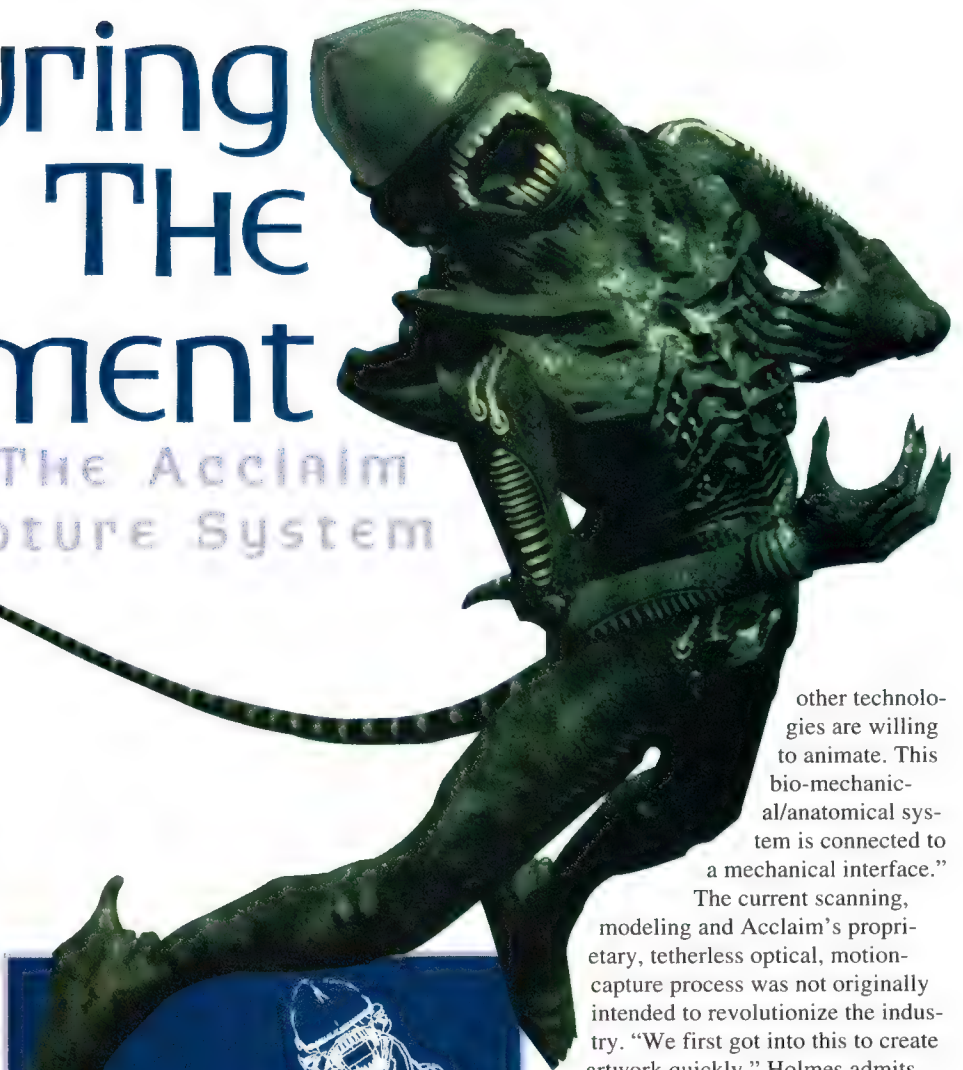
Technology—The Acclaim Motion-Capture System

Three years ago, the buzzword was “compression.” Sega had accomplished what looked like miracles on its Genesis system using only a fraction of the usual memory, and within months it seemed as if the entire industry was involved in a gold rush for the latest and greatest electronic grail: the ultimate data compression system.

In fact, however, while most of the software kingpins were investing profits in the pursuit of shrunken memory space, Acclaim decided to take a different approach. “Instead of investing in video-compression technology, we went into this motion-capture technology,” explained company prez Robert Holmes. The result was the creation of the Advanced Technologies Group (ATG) in 1991, the first fruits of which was the amazing demo film *Duel*, which was honored at Nicograph '93 (Japan's leading computer graphics technology conference) with a special award.

The heart of the ATG is a huge Cyberware Rapid 3-D Digitizer system, shored up by several SGI Onyx machines, and a technology whose first algorithm was written 17 years ago.

Here's how the process works: The com-



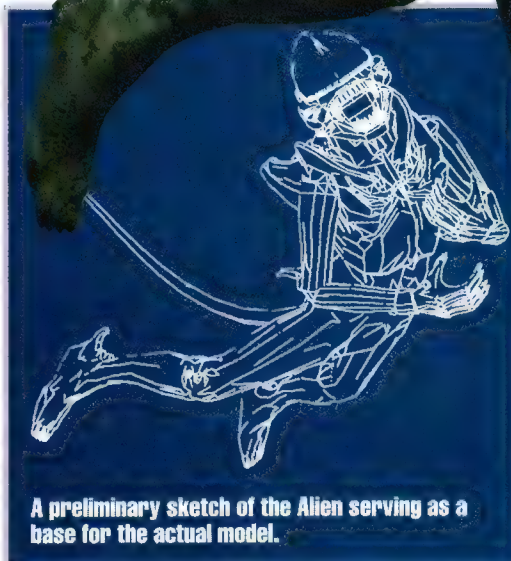
other technologies are willing to animate. This bio-mechanical/anatomical system is connected to a mechanical interface.”

The current scanning, modeling and Acclaim's proprietary, tetherless optical, motion-capture process was not originally intended to revolutionize the industry. “We first got into this to create artwork quickly,” Holmes admits, “to do 3-D, on-the-fly rendering. Now it's a lot more.”

To say the least. This past summer, the ATG group expanded, adding several key artists to the production team. “As ATG's charter expands,” explained Wes Trager, veep of Engineering and Advanced Technologies, “so does our need for highly talented and imaginative artists. Each of these artists brings a wealth of experience in creative graphics that will contribute to our revolutionizing the interactive entertainment, film and video industries.”

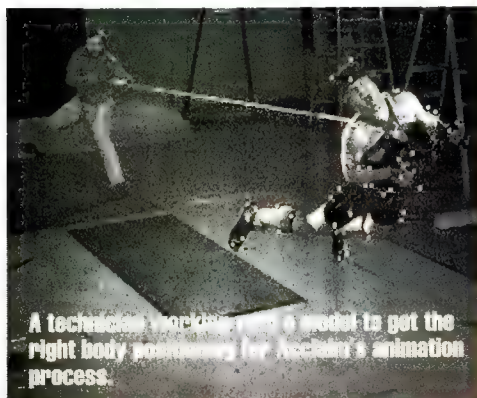
The team must be doing something right; last September it was announced that Warner Bros. Studios would be using Acclaim's motion-capture technology to produce special effects sequences for its new film, *Batman Forever*, starring Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim Carrey, Nicole Kidman and Chris O'Donnell. Apparently, Warners was so taken by ATG's efforts that it has agreed to use the technology in several more upcoming film projects.

“Warner Bros.' confidence in our motion capture technology as a special effects tool ... is testimony to its viability across a broad



A preliminary sketch of the Alien serving as a base for the actual model.

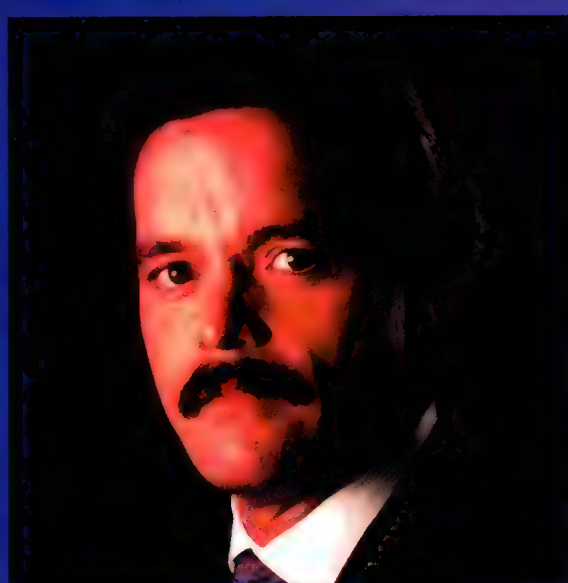
puter scans the athletes/actors and reproduces their image as a series of colored dots. From the position of those dots, the system can create a perfect scale skeleton of that character. Acclaim then uses some off-the-shelf Wavefront and Alias (and proprietary) programs, along with some of ATG's hot proprietary software, to layer skin and other features onto the human matrix the system has rendered. “It's an actual bone rotation system,” noted Rob Holmes, “not just points in space, not just inverse kinematics. We can generate more bones than



A technician works with a model to get the right body positions for Acclaim's animation process.

THE MAN BEHIND THE MARKETING

Rob Holmes of Acclaim



A key figure behind Acclaim's march to the top has been Rob Holmes, company president and CEO. A marketing genius, his "Mortal Monday" campaign revolutionized the way in which video games are sold, while his licensing acumen is legendary.

We talked about the industry's apparent problems, which Holmes sees—from his admittedly subjective POV—as a shakeout that will mostly wipe out a lot of second-rate companies. "There's a lot of product coming out that's debatable whether it has the right to



Robert Holmes broke it wide open with the phenomenal success of *Mortal Kombat*.

exist. We're looking at something like 200-plus new titles [this season], which is about three times as much new cartridge software as was offered last year. Yet the market certainly hasn't tripled. Meanwhile, retailers like Toys "R" Us, whose franchise used to be full-line coverage—something they could do when there were 100 products—simply can't do it with twice that many games. We believe many retailers are cherry picking—but they're *not* cherry picking titles so much as they're cherry picking publishers."

Holmes is also a firm believer in the strength of 16-Bit video game systems. "When the dust settles after Christmas," he predicted, "16-Bit cartridges will still be the number one format. Remember, the NES didn't die like the Atari 2600; it died, but very, very slowly." He sees both the virtues and downside of cartridge

technology clearly: "ROM carts are a great format because of the immediacy with which they deliver game play. But the cartridge's worst enemy is the [fact that the] cost structure of ROM vendors is prohibitive."

Will Nintendo's controversial Ultra 64 make it to market in 1995? "It will be tight. It will be very tight. But it *can* be done." Rob is also high on Sony's PSX, but remains skeptical of the 3DO's chances for long-term success. "You can't make money in this business if you just sell hardware," he observed, "and the companies that are making the 3DO have no background or expertise in creating software."

On the subject of Sega's new 32X, Holmes was also uncertain. "There *are* some problems. How do we position the formats? If I have a viable system—the Genesis and the Sega CD, for example—how do I maintain *those* markets? The hardware industry has a tendency to eat its young," he concluded sardonically.

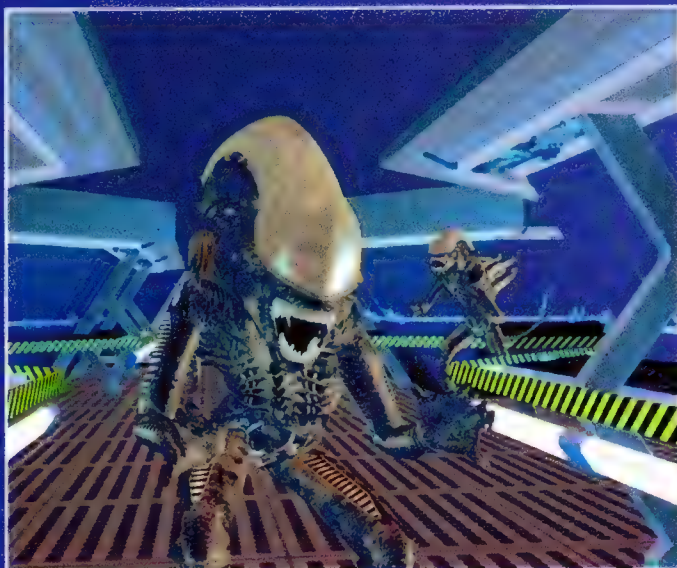
The subject of Sega sparks discussion of the new ratings that adorn video game boxes. "The difficulty is that you're always dealing in gray areas and intangibles. I can show you two products, both of which are rated M, and you might find one disgusting while the other leaves you mystified as to how it could get such a rating."

"On the whole, however, it may not be a bad thing; as it is, you've got toy stores trying to service the software needs of 40-year-old males. We need to remember that the market is broadening. We're seeing a change in where people are buying their software." He observes that if, for example, Toys "R" Us won't carry any M-rated product, the industry will begin to see a further extension of the trend for

adults to buy their software at places like Babbages and even such stores as Sears, Kmart and Circuit City. "We need to remember that we're not a toy and we're not a graphics demo—we're an entertainment medium."

Naturally, the subject of the Acclaim-Williams divorce came up, and Rob was philosophical. "We worked for four years with Williams and it was a very good relationship. But we've also worked with Marvel, Lightstorm and other coin-op companies. We had great successes with Williams, but we also had games like *Trog*, *Smash TV*, *Narc* and other games that didn't do so well. *NBA Jam* was originally *Arch Rivals 2*, and we wanted it reworked." So Acclaim will begin its own line of coin-ops and may also work with Namco.

Finally, Holmes played Nostradamus at our request and peered into his crystal ball to see what 1995 holds. "It's going to be a very confusing and demanding year; the battlefield may be littered by the end of the first quarter. From a consumer standpoint, it's going to be very interesting. I'd say that '95 will be tricky, but '96 could be a very big year."



Helping to develop the Alien into what it is today, Acclaim's technological influence has reached many places.



The upcoming *Batman Forever* movie will utilize Acclaim's motion-capture technology.

range of interactive and passive media," asserts Holmes. "We're excited to expand our relationship with Warner Bros. and to work with them on what we believe will be the blockbuster hit of 1995."

Like Tommy Lee Jones' villain in *Batman Forever*, the Warner Bros. deal has two faces; Acclaim also announced that it had inked a deal with Warner's Consumer Products Division to make *Batman Forever* the first release from Acclaim's new coin-op label. And Oh yes, Acclaim also snatched up the home rights to the film, giving them access to three distinct comic book universes—Marvel, Valiant and DC.

"Sophisticated, motion-capture technology allows us to create special effects not previously seen in feature films," observed *Batman Forever*'s SFX director and industry legend John Dykstra. "We look forward to working

with Acclaim on *Batman Forever* and future products."

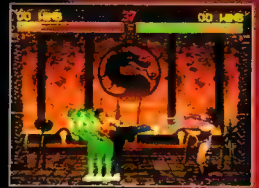
Did someone say "other products"? In a deliciously ironic turn, R/Greenberg Associates also worked with Acclaim recently on New Line Cinema's animated *Mortal Kombat* home videos. The company also scooped up the prestigious Gold Award at the London Effects and Animation Festival in the category of Research and in late November,

showed off its very own blue-screen studio, complete with industry-standard Ultimatte software for purposes of compositing and layering characters.

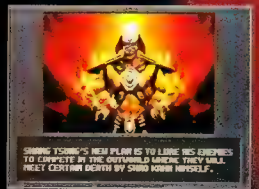
Acclaim, the company that started up on a wing and a prayer in a tiny Oyster Bay, NY, apartment is now a giant in the entertainment industry, its influence spanning the gaming and film/video worlds. So far, the company's business plan looks like a blueprint for success.



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LA-CAPERS MATCHUP



THE STATE OF SPORTS SIMULATIONS

MULTIMEDIA LIBERATES SPORTS GAME DESIGNERS

by Arnie Katz

Some people dream about throwing a touchdown or hitting a home run in the ninth inning. Others have visions of building a dynasty and coaching it to victory after glorious victory. Electronic gaming has traditionally catered to Charles Barkley and Troy Aikman wanna-bes, but manager/general manager simulations have always had a smaller, if more vocal, following.

A combination of major trends is changing that state of affairs. The action-oriented games, concentrated primarily in the cartridge/console segment, is still thriving, but a parallel sports simulations category is rising like a Barry Bonds blast.

The most important development is the multimedia breakthrough. Until CD-ROM blossomed into today's huge market, simulation game designers were divided about whether to go all out for audiovisual effects, or produce a plain vanilla product with a comprehensive and sophisticated mathematical model of the sport.

No one's worrying about that now. The current generation of super sports sims, including **FPS Baseball** and **FPS Football** (Sierra-Dynamix), **Ultimate Football** (MicroProse) and **Tony LaRussa Baseball 2** (SSI) have graphics that are at least in the same ballpark as action pacesetters like **John Madden Football** (Electronic Arts), **World Series Baseball** (Sega) and **NBA Live '95** (Electronic Arts).



Also helping stat-based simulations to come into their own is the telecommunications explosion. While playing individual games or short series with a statistical sim is enjoyable, this type of game reaches its peak in a league.

Multiseason draft leagues are the mainstay of tabletop (non-electronic) sports simulation,

but compu-leagues are rare. Either the league managers have to meet in separate homes to play a full evening's schedule, usually a four- or five-game series, or someone must have three or four PCs at one location. Unless there's a league member who owns a software company, retail store or electronic gaming magazine, that many machines of the required strength are tough to find.

Software support for modem play is growing. This removes the need for geographic proximity, not to mention alleviating the crowding at the keyboard when two excited coaches attempt to punch in their moves simultaneously. By the end of 1995, there won't be a single major sports sim that doesn't support tele-gaming.

New This Season

The 1994-95 sports simulations have concentrated on two areas: improved audiovisual effects and increased selection of teams. The general feeling among designers (*see interviews with Scott Orr, Scott Ciancio and Dave Holt in this month's sports section*) seems to be that the mathematical models are still ahead of the presentation, and that there's more to gain from improving the look and sound of the products.

Multiple camera angles have replaced the traditional fixed-perspective view. There are still a few things that need to be worked out to accommodate this form of display, like properly orienting the referees so they point in the right direction when assigning penalties or announcing a first down. That's an easily correctable flub that will be gone by next year. Showing baseball's pitcher-catcher confrontation in close-up, an idea imported from action sports programs, is part of the graphics overhaul.

The newest edition of MicroSports' **NFL Football** includes every team in the 75-year history of the National Football League. Questions of statistical validity aside, that's a big improvement over the floppy disk simulations that gave one complete season plus a few old-timers.

Current games have also started including a selection of stadiums, instead of one idealized park. Besides increasing in-game realism, it facilitates the addition of weather and, for baseball, park effects. The addition of this feature adds a whole new variable for players to take into consideration when playing the simulations.

Next Season

First-generation games on a new platform are seldom unqualified successes. Sports simulations on CD-ROM figure to improve tremendously next year.

More purely statistical games, dubbed "coaching simulations," are coming. The market potential is inescapable. Elimination of arcade elements ends the need to give the gamer a wide-angle view of the action to facilitate directly controlled batting, fielding and running. In the long run, statistic sports simulations will have more exciting, TV-like visuals than the action programs.

Full-motion video is unlikely to have the same impact on sports sims as it has on the rest of the entertainment field. MLSA's attempt to use QuickTime movie inserts failed and won't be repeated, and Doc's High Tech has still not produced a prototype of its projected baseball disc.

Although **NFL Live Action Football** (Accolade) shows the possibilities of putting the whole game into FMV, it also exposes the technology's limitations. There's still no way to show the *real* players in action, just generic athletes.



More likely is increased stadium detail and a wider spectrum of animations for each possible play result. **Ultimate Football** and **Baseball for Windows** (Miller Associates) made progress this year. That will encourage rival publishers to up the ante in 1995-96.

Better play-by-play and color announcing is also in the cards. CD-ROM is ideal for this sort of enhancement. Statistical simulations have lagged well behind the action-strategy titles in this respect, but they will close the gap next year.

Once modem play is standard, network support will follow soon after. Direct connect tele-gaming is a stopgap measure. By 1996, expect the leading national networks to start running simulation leagues, including posting of league leaders and real-time conferencing for the coaches.

That's when sports sims will, once and for all, become a major division of interactive electronic entertainment. Future installments of EG's sports pages will continue to track these, and related, developments for those who'd rather be Pat Riley than Pat Ewing.

A RICH VEIN OF ORR

Interview with Scott Orr, co-designer of **John Madden Football** and **NHL Hockey**, executive producer and vice president at Electronic Arts.

"We're all excited about the Sony PSX, the Saturn and the next-generation machines. These platforms are going to present some interesting challenges for us, because for the first time the graphic and sound capabilities are going to demand from us a level of quality we haven't really had to provide before.

"As a result, the costs of development are going way up, and the sizes of development teams are getting much larger. Obtaining league and celebrity licenses, and getting everything approved at a design level and getting the final product approved, is a very complicated process all of a sudden.

"In the old days, you put up some characters on the screen who were barely recognizable as players, and you might not even have complete teams, because the hardware couldn't handle too many sprites. Now we have video, multiple angles, 3-D and texture-mapped engines. The level of competition (from other companies) is coming up as well,

as professionals from other disciplines come into the field, because we're using technology that they are familiar with in another industry. We're bringing people in who have worked with SGI machines for a while, particularly 3-D modeling. As a result these people have an artistic outlet for the first time, and the lev-



els of quality across the board are going up.

"The challenge of making sports games is striking the balance between action and statistics. You want to have enough depth so that it feels real to the player, but you don't want it so realistic that it's no fun to play. One of the things designers will run into is the tendency to make the games ultra-realistic, because of the power of those 32-Bit machines and the ability to put so much information into the games. In some sports, if you make it too realistic, it becomes more frustrating to play than the actual sport, which sort of defeats the purpose of making a game.

"In any game that is successful, be it sports or platform or shooter, there has to be some immediate success for the player. If they don't get that kind of feedback early on, they're never going to really get into the game. That's a real tough balance to come by."

STATS WITH FLASH

Interview with Scott Ciancio, producer, **MicroLeague Sports**

Scott Ciancio of **MicroLeague Sports** isn't an old timer in the interactive entertainment industry, but he is a veteran in the making. After graduating from college, he worked in retail for eight years, but he calls his position at **MLSA** his first "true job" in the industry.

product he worked on as a producer was a pinball sim, **Silverball**. Now, after two years and about a half-dozen projects at **MLSA**, Scott feels he has brought more of a gamer attitude into the company. "MicroLeague has always had strong statistical simulations, but it was time to bring some of the flash of video games to the drier statistical element; having a strong statistical element with equally good graphics, and part of that was going out and hiring the right programmers, hiring the right design team, etc."

Scott's fondness for games isn't limited to computer screens. "I've always been a sports fan, baseball primarily, but I follow everything." This love of sports should serve him well in the coming months. "We want to refocus in on **MicroLeague Sports**, redefine **MicroLeague** as the leader in sports technology. Right now we're working on **MicroLeague Baseball '95** (working title), which we hope will be shipping in April. We're going to pursue our next football game, and hopefully hockey and basketball before the year is out.

"We've always been among the leaders in the field, but we've drifted from the top posi-



tion with a lull in the release of sports titles over the past year or two. I think we're getting set to re-establish ourselves as the leader."

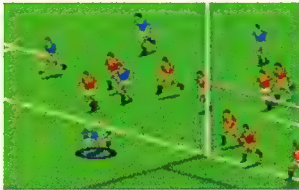
When asked the question of what he would like to be remembered for 30 years from now, when he retires a wealthy man, Scott had this response: "That's a long way away. I have a long life ahead of me first. Hopefully, if my career lasts here at **MicroLeague**, [it would be] as someone who brought in a new attitude to the company and helped them re-establish themselves, and be considered one of the leaders in sports production."



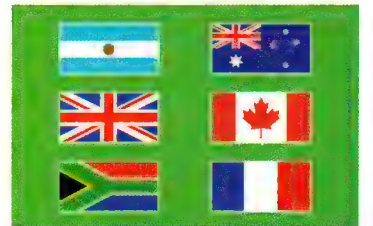
After starting out in technical support at **MicroLeague**, Scott worked his way into the producer slot he holds now. "I guess I'm what you call a computer junkie. I just basically grew up on video games." The first **MLSA**



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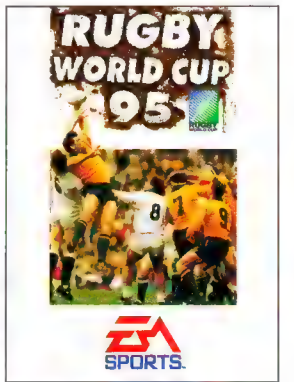
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FOR THE LOVE OF SPORTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID HOLT, PRESIDENT OF MICROSPORTS

BY JOHN WESLEY HARDIN

David Holt has been making computer games since 1985. A self-taught programmer, David's first game was a football game for the Macintosh, which he wrote in BASIC "with a bunch of assembly language routines."

EG asked David for his definition of a sports sim. "A sports game has to be statistically realistic. If the numbers don't match up, then the game play, even though it could be fun, loses that sense of realism. If the numbers don't match up, it's not real to me. It's only real if the game plays realistically, and if the play calling is realistic and the numbers match up to the players being simulated.



"One of the difficult things to get right in a game is to get the animation to correspond with the plays, but the most difficult thing is getting the game statistically realistic. I've got 20 years involved with stats and the study and research of statistics. That's why we've always claimed that our games were the most statistically realistic. It's not a bragging thing: It's like if you spend 20 years learning how to paint, you're probably going to be very good at painting after 20 years. It's the same thing. I've spent a long time doing this. These companies that go in there and spend one year developing a game may outsell us with all their marketing tools, but as far as satisfying the user with realistic games, well, effective marketing doesn't necessarily equate to good product."

David explains why he got into sports games: "I've always liked sports. I played high school and college football. I had a 10 second tryout with the Dallas Cowboys. I've been offered a coaching job with the Chicago Bears. I've been around.

"I love football and I love baseball. From a fan standpoint, football is the funnest game because of all the different strategies involved." We wondered if it was harder for David to make a game about a sport that he didn't love. "Well, of course it's more difficult if you don't watch a sport as often, because you lose touch with the reality of the game, but statistics are statistics, and I've learned that if you've got however many soccer players or however many hockey players, there is a certain element of ability that can be measured and reflected statistically. I can always take those numbers and turn them into something realistic."

MicroSports' upcoming NFL 75th anniversary **Commemorative Edition Pro League Football** game combines teams from the past 75 years of football. EG wondered what the most difficult thing was about mixing the different eras of football. "Research and statistics. Just getting the data right. We have an incredible library here and fortunately have someone willing to enter all of this data by hand, and then we have simulators here that play entire seasons in minutes. In a minute and a half we'll play an entire NFL season. We'll play literally thousands of games to make sure the numbers match up. Then we go into head-to-head mode. We have a computer



simulation model with literally billions of play combinations that it can run. Our in-house people play against it to make sure that the game is playing right and that the strategy used works right."

EG asked David to describe the ultimate sports game. "In my mind the ultimate sports game, from a coaching aspect, would be getting more into video. It should be to the point where you can call a play and then watch it develop just like on TV. Live video is going to make things a lot better. From a player aspect, it's going to be the virtual reality stuff, as much as I don't like the term. The players should be able to hook themselves up to a box with electrodes that lets them physically play



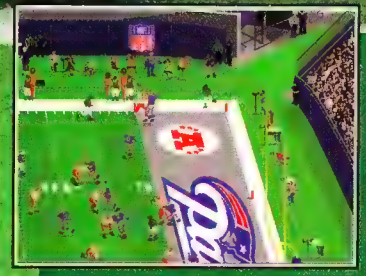
For David Holt, creating great computer football sims is a labor of love, as is evident in the attention to detail in MicroSports' Football '94.

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the game. You can feel like you're really passing the ball, or feel like you're really getting sacked by the opposing linebacker. [laughs]"

David couldn't decide on the best feature in MicroSports' coming product. "Our NFL 75th anniversary **Commemorative Edition Pro League Football** is coming out in January and it has so many features in it. Stats downloading, modem play, a playbook designer built into the game. There are millions of play combinations right at the player's fingertips. Detailed graphics. Last year we had a behind-the-QB view; now we're going to a television-



style perspective but at 640x480 resolution. If you load up the old teams you'll see them in their original uniforms. Stats compiling, league replay. Instead of hurrying it, we're taking our time and letting a lot of these other products weed out. I've never seen so many

encyclopedias in my whole life. Anybody with a video camera and a word processor can make an encyclopedia on CD."

Asked if modem and network play were vital, David responds, "Oh yeah. We were the first ones to ever put modem play into a football game, back in 1989. We've been out there all along. We've got some new tools that really refine modem play, like Chat Mode and Remote Data Leagues. Modem play is very big with me. I love leagues. We were the first company to offer any kind of league play for the sports fan. The new modem play version of this game is second to none."

Has MicroSports been hurt by the baseball strike? "That hurt a lot of people, I think. They called me up and they apologized."

Who called?

"Players."

Really?

"Yeah. I've been around these guys for a long time. Not only did they apologize, they monetarily apologized. I've always had a good working relationship with these guys."

"I've been making these games for a long time, but one thing I've never lost sight of is the reason that I make them: If you're a dedicated sports fan, there's nothing I want more than for you to enjoy this game you love so much. I've never made a game for a dollar, ever. I may have finished one for a dollar 'cuz sometimes I have to eat, but the profit motive

has never been my primary motive."

What does David see as his biggest accomplishment? "As a small company, we've pursued licenses that big companies weren't willing to touch, because there wasn't enough money in it. That's forced other companies to join in if they want to compete. Right now, a lot of games are licensed by both the NFL and the NFLPA. Two years ago, we were the only



one. The things I'm proud to have accomplished besides that are the tremendous databases that we have for football. No one else has those, plus the fact that we introduced modem play. We've got a lot to be proud of."

"The competition makes us play harder, makes us work harder and makes it so the fan has a better game. Anybody who makes sports games better enjoy competition, because that's what sports games are all about."

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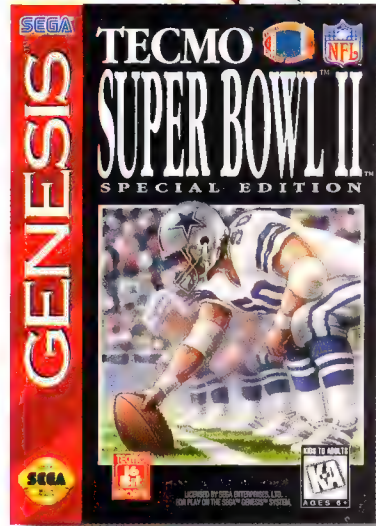
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CAN TECMO WIN THE SUPER BOWL?

Super Bowl II, Special Edition, for Genesis & SNES

by Arnie Katz

Tecmo, one of the leading sports game publishers in the 8-Bit era, is gunning for a big comeback in 16-Bit with **Tecmo Super Bowl II, Special Edition (TSBII)**, for both the Sega and Nintendo machines. A lot has happened in sports video gaming in the last few years, and gamers everywhere have wondered whether Tecmo was equal to the challenge.

Unfortunately, the two editions weren't ready for retail release at presstime. Thanks to the publisher's cooperation, EG has been able to preview both versions of the game in substantially complete form. A formal review awaits receipt of 100 percent finished cartridges, but there's abundant data for a preliminary assessment. (*This article references the Genesis cartridge. See sidebar for comments on the SNES edition.*)

Most of the available gridiron carts reflect, at least to some degree, the success of Electronic Arts' John Madden series (**Madden '95** is the current one). The excellent field view and, especially, the self-prompting interface have profoundly affected the design of every football program in the last five years.

While Tecmo has not ignored the lessons that **Madden** teaches, its design/development team rethought the genre from the opening kickoff. **TSBII** goes its own way in most areas of the game, though it judiciously adapts ideas from previous games by Tecmo and other companies when appropriate.

The angled side-perspective graphics are



adequate, if not quite equal to this year's best grid games. The players are fairly small, though intricate. Realistic animation is some compensation. Certainly, coaches will have no trouble distinguishing the ball carrier or the progress of the play.

Extreme close-ups are meant to enliven big plays, like complete passes. The technique is only partially successful, because the visuals look so different than the rest of the program.

Unlike most pigskin cartridges, **TSBII** offers a coach mode as an alternative to direct player control. The cart is playable solitaire,



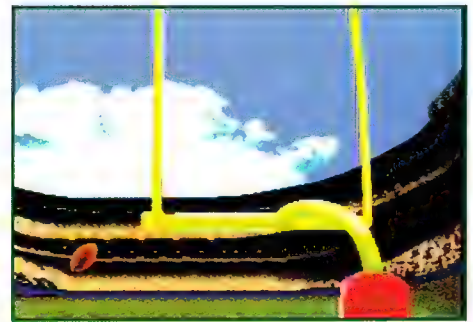
against another human or as a computer-vs.-computer demonstration. Options include variable game length, inclusion of injuries and three weather choices.

Tecmo's entry is especially well-suited to league play. It has the real teams and players, and it's easy to make trades, customize playbooks, change lineups and reconfigure offensive and defensive formations. Leaguers will also like the schedule module. For those who aren't into leagues, **TSBII** offers complete season, preseason and pro bowl options.

The interface is an excellent two-screen system. The first shows the offense playbooks and the defense formations. Offensive plays are contained in two playbooks, eight plays per book. Pushing the D-button left or right and hitting A selects the desired playbook.

Four defensive formations are shown along the bottom of the screen, each accompanied by a picture of the controller with the proper button combo in red.

After both coaches make selections, a second screen displays the eight possible formations in the form of two diamond-shaped



arrays with four formations in each. At the center of each diamond is a drawing of the controller. The coach pushes the D-button in the direction of the desired formation and then presses A for a run or B to pick a pass. The defense coach keys on either pass or run to summon up the gridiron.

Though many gamers will continue to prefer **NFL Live** or **Madden '95**, **Tecmo Super Bowl II, Special Edition** could be a new force in the video game sports field. If the developer applies the proper finish to what EG sampled, the result will be another legitimate choice for serious sports video gamers.

TECMO SUPER BOWL II ON THE SNES

The SNES **Tecmo Super Bowl II, Special Edition** has a Super Bowl mode, but the basic program is much the same. There are, however, some good and bad differences.



The overall graphic look is much slicker on the Nintendo platform. This is most obvious in the digitized illustrations, the play selection screens and the look of the gridiron itself. The field is much more realistic than on the Genesis, though the actual players aren't as sharply delineated. Sound is also a mixed bag. The play-by-play voice isn't as distinct, but the sound effects are marginally better. Audio feedback for order entry is also more effective in the SNES **TSBII**.

The SNES has fewer outstanding football cartridges than the Genesis at present, so **Tecmo Super Bowl II, Special Edition** undoubtedly will be welcomed by many.



Lilil Devil

Meet Mutt. He's grouchy. He's grumpy. But hey, let's face it, a little time in the underworld can make anyone a little edgy. And now Mutt has a problem. You see, he was chosen to get the Mystical Pizza of Plenty for his friends. And with all due respect to the eternally damned, the service in the underworld really sucks. In "Lilil Devil", you can help Mutt as he makes his way through five soul-repenting levels in the Labyrinth of Chaos. Along the way you'll encounter gigantic spiders, demonic fish, and a few other things your priest never warned you about. All in a search for a double pepperoni with cheese. A few hours with Mutt, and you'll really appreciate that 30-minute-free-delivery thing.

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PHILIPS

SAVE

by Laurie Yates

The Sacred to the Profane

"Excuse me. Am I hallucinating, or did Homer Simpson just walk across your desktop?"

This question, in varying forms, will be asked of more and more computerists as a virtual invasion of screen savers makes its way to home and office monitors.

Today's refreshers surpass the simple fade-out or basic molré patterns of years past, opting instead to reflect the various interests of consumers worldwide. From girly pictures to religious imagery, screen savers run the gamut, providing computerists with anything from an entertaining screen refresher to personalized scheduling. Some even include sophisticated, informational data bases.

Determining which screen saver is "the best" is like trying to decide the ultimate ice cream flavor; everyone has their favorite. There may be more vanilla and chocolate fans out there, but the pistachio people and the mocha maniacs are more devoted. In other words, the value of any screen saver is almost entirely in the eyes of the beholder. So, with that caveat in mind, let's survey the best of the breed. (Unless otherwise noted, titles are available on both Macintosh and Windows platforms.)

Nowhere is the range of screen savers more evident than in the products which interface with the king of all screen saver systems.

After Dark (Berkeley Systems) is the foundation program for a variety of software products, many not even published by Berkeley.

One of these is **Davka After Dark** (Davka/Macintosh). Volume I holds 50 panoramic and magnificent scenes of the Holy Land. The installation is a breeze, since it works right off the **After Dark** control panel. The images convey the beauty of the country, with none of the danger.

With the growing interest in angels, **Angel Savers** (Windows) was an inevitable arrival on the screen saver scene. Cascom International obtained full-color reproductions of 18th century artwork. Regrettably, the signatures aren't visible, so users may not be able to identify the artist behind their favorite paintings.

Speaking of heavenly bodies, the **Fabio Screen Saver** (GT Interactive/Windows) positions the male model in 11 different poses, clad in a variety of wardrobe selections from a loincloth to a tuxedo. Most have an air of romance, and Fabio even offers the user silicon flowers. However, the small selection of shots does become repetitive, even for the most devoted Fabian.

Naturally, Microsoft is also developing a line of screen savers. Microsoft **Scenes** (Windows) currently offers a seven set collection: **Undersea, Sierra Club Wildlife, Sierra Club Nature, Flight, Hollywood, Sports Extremes** and **Brain Twisters**. **Sports**

Extremes, meanwhile, provides 40 full-screen photographs of people challenging the elements; white-water rafting, ice and rock climbing and skydiving are included. The skydiving image looks so realistic, in fact, don't be surprised if passersby do double takes on viewing it. Microsoft also offers the **Personal Collection**, which requires users to send in film, prints or slides for scanning, and then use the **Scenes Wizard** to create an individualized silicon slide show.

FanTaSee Screen Savers (Discus/Windows; coming for Macintosh) entertains users with over 100 visual effects focused on dragons, knights, gargoyles and other fantastic images. Sci-fi mavens and old-time hippies, on the other hand, have **Razzle Dazzle 3D** (Road Scholar/DOS, Windows and NT), with its trio of theme areas: an art gallery, a submarine or a futuristic space station—filled with 3-D panels displaying pictures created with more than 2 billion fractal, geometric, and kaleidoscopic images that fade and rotate. This program also boasts a self-composing music generator to add to the experience. There is an add-on disk available with two additional environments and musical styles.

Just to give some idea of the range of product available in this category, users may find screen savers of heavenly beings sitting next to **MegaDittos** (Aristo-Soft), a political Rush containing eight modules with a screen for every Ditto Head. Parodies include "Billvis and Gore-head", "Hillarygizer Bunny" and "Liberassic Park." The original modules feature "Owl Gore," which presents the veep in a statuesque pose surrounded by several of his feathered friends; "Rodham Health Clinic," with its jaundiced view of proposed health care plans; and "Whitewater Grafting," in which the president and first lady raft alone while Bob Dole bores holes in its bottom.

OUR SCREENS



Disney to X-Men: Comics & Cartoons Hit the Monitor

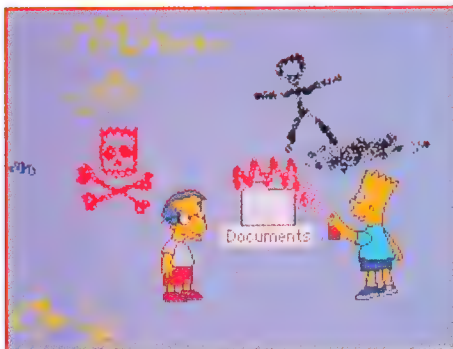
Comics—books and strips—and cartoons have been fertile ground for game products for decades, so it only stands to reason that they would make an appearance on inactive computer screens. The biggest licensor appears to be Berkeley, who has several products in this category. In addition to publishing **The Disney Collection Screen Saver** and **The Simpsons Screen Saver**, Berkeley teamed up with Marvel Comics to create **Marvel Screen Posters** and the **X-Men Screen Saver** (Macintosh). **Marvel Screen Posters** takes almost three dozen still images of characters, confrontations, first issue



covers, character biographies and trivia, plus previously unpublished artwork of Spider-Man, X-Men and Silver Surfer. X-Men devotees will want to check out the dedicated Mutant package, which features Wolverine shredding the desktop with his pop-up adamantium claws.

Delrina Corporation is making a splash of its own in this category. The **Dilbert Screen Saver** features Scott Adams's troupe of characters: Dilbert, a naive engineer; Dogbert, his sarcastic canine, who has the ambition to become supreme ruler of the Earth; Ratbert, a hapless and carefree rodent and the rest of the crew. The 16 modules offer an amusingly cynical view of the corporate world.

The Far Side Collection, meanwhile, dishes up plenty of Gary Larson's off-beat humor. The full-color animation and high-resolution graphics make the screen saver even better



than the Sunday comics section. The 14 modules encompass four views of evolution, including the scoop on why dinosaurs are extinct, and what *really* goes on in a hen house when no one is watching. The **Opus 'n Bill Screen Saver**, while older, is still providing members of the **OnB Hacker Club** five new animations each quarter. The Pistachio Tester remains an **EG** fave, especially in light of the inexplicable outrage it generated among animal activists and the Pistachio Growers of America.

Pass the Popcorn

Movies, television shows and even commercials are also rushing onboard the screen saver bandwagon. **Terminator 2** (Sound Source/Windows) features animated terminators, liquid metal morphs, cybermachinery and sound bites from the film. Unlike the movie, this refresher is not rated R. Sound Source is also the creator of **The Twilight Zone Screen Saver** (Windows), which features images, audio clips of Rod Serling's monologues, music and sound effects from the classic '60s TV series.

The Lion King Screen Scenes (Disney/Windows) roars with more than 40 sharp, full-color scenes from the summer blockbuster. While the shots are non-animated, the Disney magic still shines through.

The *U.S.S. Enterprise* has two monitors to beam down from Berkeley.



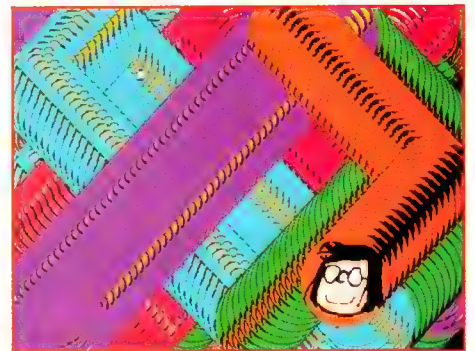
Star Trek: The Screen Saver and **Star Trek: The Next Generation Screen Saver** allows Trekkers to encounter either Tribbles or Borgs, Kirk or Picard, Dr. McCoy or Counselor Troi and so on. Both titles include sound effects and dialogue from their respective series and have over a dozen images. Of course, including highlights from both programs through **After Dark's** randomizer permits users "to boldly go where no one has

gone before" in *both* centuries.

It's commercial time, silicon spuds! **The Energizer Bunny** (PC Dynamics) has kept going and going, right onto PC monitors everywhere. The subject of a lawsuit (**EG** 9/94), the Bunny continues to beat his drum and march along, not only across sleeping desktops, but also across live screens—usually when he's least expected or when the boss happens by...

More than Just a Pretty Face

The aforementioned screen savers do what they were designed to do, but some go beyond refreshing monitor displays and



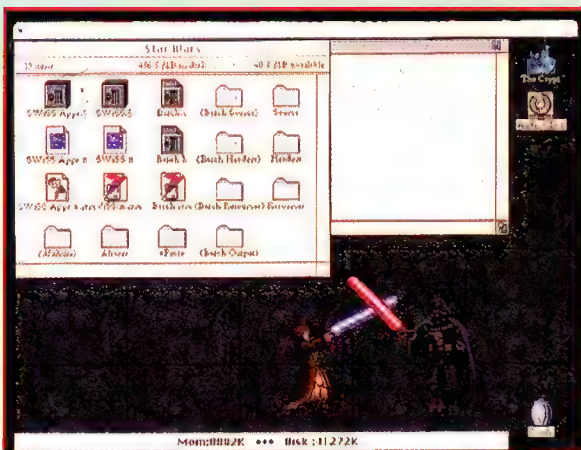
providing wallpaper. The following programs offer niceties ranging from additional customizing of work environments to informational databases and planners.

The Snoopy Screen Saver Fun Pac (Image Smith/Macintosh) not only has eight screen modules, but also permits users to add icon stickers to file folders for a personal touch. There are also hundreds of start-up greetings, which feature the Peanuts characters and amusing quotes.

At the retro end of the spectrum, time-wise, we have the **Flintstones Cuckoo Clock** (Turner Interactive/Windows),

which utilizes Igneous Rock, the pterodactyl cuckoo, as a date reminder and gag perpetrator. Given voice by Jonathan Winters, Iggy is determined to keep the user on schedule. Dino appears as a screen snoozer and captures the warmth of the Flintstones split rock cave.

Dinosaurs are big on the monitor scene ... er, screen. **Dinosaur** (Fiore Industries/Windows) features a brontosaurus massive enough to crash through skyscraper Windows,



Monty Python's Flying Circus Desktop Pythonizer (7th Level/Windows) can invade every aspect of the PC desktop be it wanted or unwanted. In addition to 20 interactive animated screen savers and over three dozen dialogue lines and some sophomoric, yet hilarious sound effects, icons can be morphed into policemen, spam, chickens and more. If the PC is hooked up to a modem, callers can be greeted by pre-recorded Pythonized messages.

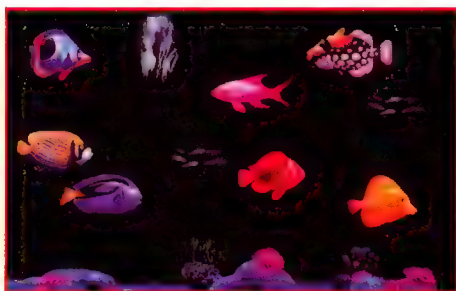
Byron Preiss Multimedia joins the field with two Windows entries: **Seinfeld Screen Saver and Planner**, and **R. Crumb Screen Saver and Companion**. After programming a screen saver sequence picked from an hour of available video clips, computerists can also use the **Seinfeld** calendar, which has over 100 funny video clips, and then print out stationery, cards, memos and faxes with over 40 scene selections.

R. Crumb features the artwork of America's favorite underground cartoonist (and grumpy technophobe). The program includes 25 fully-animated sequences, an electronic calendar and a form maker to output fax sheets, letterheads and stationery.

The Fearsome Phosphor Burnout Syndrome

The plethora of screen savers practically guarantees that there is something for everyone. If a pre-packed screen saver doesn't make the grade, several companies (Rhode Island Soft Systems, Firefly Software and Microsoft) offer services to create refreshers out of family photos or other images.

While some say screen savers are no longer necessary, they have nonetheless become a staple of computer life. Like T-shirts and other trademarked paraphernalia, they remain a way to express oneself both at home and in the workplace. Perhaps, that makes them more valuable.



along with several other realistic and fanciful scenes. Two edutaining modules round out the program. Dino Trivia asks more than 1,000 questions designed to test the acumen of would-be paleontologists, while Dino Engineering gets into the nitty-gritty of genetics, the end results of which can be incorporated into the screen saver (or maybe you could build a theme park—nah, wouldn't work).

Jurassic Park (Asymetrix/Windows CD) replays the 1992 summer blockbuster with personalization. The movie database presents character bios and quotable dialogue, sound effects linked to system events (the T-Rex might roar when you receive e-mail, for example); and presents fun facts about the giants that once ruled the Earth.

If the past leaves you cold, then fast forward to the future with **Star Wars Screen Entertainment** (LucasArts). In addition to incredible movie sequences offered in both wallpaper and refresher formats, this semi-complete guide to *SW* includes biographies, starfighter blueprints, John Williams' musical score, screenplay and even a message from George Lucas on the next trilogy installment.

Colorado Spectrum offers a realistic view of **Flight** (Windows) in a saver-plus that contains 40 aircraft, from a Fokker Dr 1 Triplane to an F-14 Tomcat. The database, animations and sound effects eliminate some of the tedium of being desk-bound, but weekend pilots will be pleased to know they can generate lists of upcoming air events based on time periods, region and aircraft categories. Annual calendar updates are available from the company.



THE NET

An Internet BBS With Aspirations

The problem with computers is that people who know something about them don't have to be certified in any way. When selecting a doctor from the phone book, you can be reasonably sure that the person you end up seeing at least has a medical degree. When dealing with computers there are no such credentials. Someone learns a little, sets up shop and bang, instant computer professional.

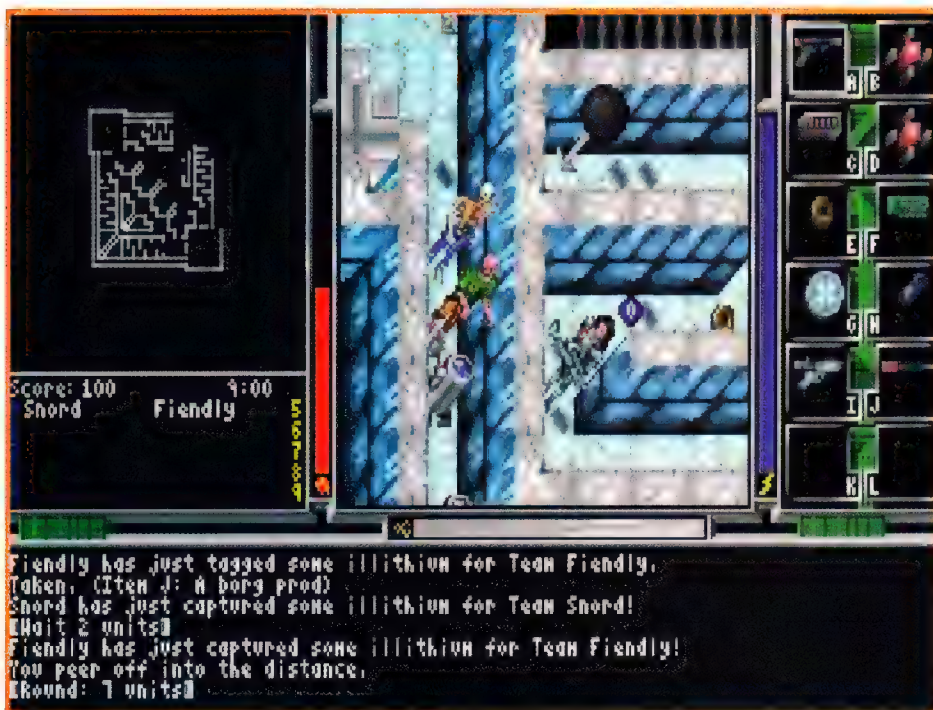
Exacerbating the problem is the fact that many of the people who really *are* small systems experts look so scary they don't appear as if they could be trusted with plastic utensils, much less a multithousand dollar piece of equipment.

The same problem applies to the Net. It's a big, sometimes scary place, and anyone can claim to run an on-line or Internet provider service. Some are real experts at what they do, and some are not so good. The problem is in discriminating between the two. When you don't know your mouse from your home page, it is pretty hard to tell when you are getting your money's worth.

That brings us to this month's subject: NovaLink Online service, a mixed bag of Internet services and games currently on an advertising rampage. You have probably seen the ads: big, flashy graphics and hype about the game **Legends of Future Past**. Maybe there was a blurb about full Internet access. A good demographic mix of magazines has been running them lately.

Looking at the ads, one tends to expect a graphic role-playing game, something like **Never Winter Nights** on AOL or **BattleTech** on GEnie. Logging on to NovaLink, however, quickly dispels this notion. Instead of a high-end graphics encounter or even a friendly overlay routine, what users find awaiting them is a big, well-run, bulletin board system (BBS), with a few basic options including the Virtual Cafe chat area, three games, a few dozen message and library areas and some very full-bore Internet access routines.

All of this is provided in an ANSI format



by using a standard terminal routine to log in through a local node number or from the Internet.

The first difficulty the new user is likely to face (and a quick foreshadowing of the basic dichotomy of the whole NovaLink system) is the simple fact that users need to really understand their communications equipment in order to log on. The local node that we used to link to the service required that we set our terminal software to 7E1, a non-standard setting of the transmission routine from most of our BBS connections. Then, inside the service, there were many areas that demanded that we change to 8N1.

If you don't know what these numbers mean, that is the point. A lot of people who are going to see those ads aren't hip to parity and bit-length transmission factors. With NovaLink, the user has no choice but to learn to deal with these matters or give up. Hence, NovaLink sets itself up from the get-go as being for the at-least-somewhat experienced telecommunicator.

Let's look at the service through the eyes of a telecom neophyte. After getting off the phone with a helpful bit-head friend, they know how to fine-tune their communication

settings and are now hooked up to the big system. After looking at the Log-in Menu, they decide they want to go and meet some users in the Virtual Cafe, the on-line meeting place. Selecting this from the menu, they find that they are not in a simple chat area, such as the common areas on America Online, CompuServe, or one of the other big services, but instead in a very detailed text environmental simulator of a boardwalk and casino.

Those with Net experience and a quick uptake have already guessed it: The chat area is a MUD (Multiple User Dialogue).

Nothing is wrong with that, in and of itself, but the rude part of the surprise for the new user is that typing help doesn't really help at all. A few basic commands and the exhortation to "just try things" are all that awaits the eager newbie. This is on a system that is open to the public and has, according to one of the on-line hosts, "thousands" of command verbs. The help function gives users about seven.

There is a manual, but they have to leave the chat area, find it, download it and then read it as they go. Not much help from our point of view.

Legends of Future Past is the same thing, a MUD focused on post-apocalyptic role-play.

The on-line help, however, is quite a bit more detailed, though still lacking.

Cyber Corps, the "graphical" game on the system, is a simple maze shooter that runs quite well in ANSI, but also has a downloadable front end that will make it into a pretty good graphic shoot-'em-up. However, there are games on other BBSs that do the same thing just as well.

The one thing, though, that is really classic about the service is Internet Access. Anything anyone can think of to do with the Internet is on here, and fairly well executed, though like the rest of the service, the help isn't a strong point. If you know what you are doing, there is some real net surfing power here, but if you don't, you are not going to figure it out easily.

And here again we run into the basic split personality problem that defines this system. If you already know what you are doing, the tools and games here are really nice implementations. However, if you know what you are doing, you probably already have access to good MUDs, Internet tools and simple graphical games, either through another provider or free from a university account.

So why would anyone want to be on this system? As many questionable points as there are about NovaLink, there is a good point (from the newcomer's point of view) that for some users will make NovaLink worth paying for: This is the best Internet gaming trainer you will find.

To make up for the epidemic of inadequate help systems, on-line hosts are available at a simple cry for help. These hosts will show users around the features of the game and help them learn the commands and nuances of the difficult MUD environment.

Is this really worth paying for? It depends. If you are a technically inclined person who knows how to handle harsh command structures, you could just get on the Internet and try to muddle your way through learning how to MUD. Most people will find it much easier to have someone helping them as they go, teaching the nuances of command structure.

MUDs are notoriously unfriendly to newbies. NovaLink hosts, however, are helpful. Using NovaLink to learn how to navigate the plethora of free MUDs out on the Net could be a sound investment for some less technical gamers.

To NovaLink's credit are their future expansion plans, many phases of which should be completed by the Spring of '95. A graphical front end, based on some sort of net browser, should be in the works soon. In addition, they plan to expand their gaming area with some more custom-written games and some very novel approaches to **Doom**.

For **Doom** addicts, this is going to be the place. Not only will an area for **Doom** network play be implemented, but NovaLink is working with various personalities to customize **Doom** versions which will be



available for the service. Right now, they are working heavily with radio DJs in the larger markets. If you live in a big city and want a chance to blow away your favorite air personality with a BFG9000, NovaLink will provide the opportunity.

NovaLink's expansion plans seem sound, and if implemented well, will take care of many of the down sides of the system as it

stands. Think of their current PR push as just a bit premature.

In the overall analysis, for the present, NovaLink probably isn't going to provide much worth paying for to those already connected to the Net. However, for people who have a real yen to learn to work with the powerful text interface of the MUD on-line role-playing environment, NovaLink gives its money's worth in training.

Net News

Prodigy Leaps Forward

In a quick and nasty yank of the rug to the other major on-line providers, Prodigy announced recently that they have implemented World Wide Web access to their customers.

Developing a company-designed browser similar to Mosaic, Prodigy has beaten the other services to the punch with the implementation of full WWW services.

World Wide Web is a multimedia front end for the Internet that takes almost all the rough edges off of Net usage. Combining pictures and text, WWW service also provides hyperlinks within documents, or pages, that allow users to jump to a linked page at the click of a mouse. The Mosaic browser for the WWW has been described as the Internet "Killer App" and has almost single handedly fueled the current avalanche of businesses migrating, for good or ill, to the Net. The offering of

WWW use before the other major services is a strong feather in the cap for Prodigy.

Prodigy is also said to be working on a new Windows interface, P2, which will be designed to integrate their existing Internet access services with their main content in a "seamless" manner. Read on for more details.

AOL Increases Access Speed

The recent purchase of the majority of Advanced Network and Services, one of the companies that helped create the Internet backbone, and expansion of their agreement with Sprint are allowing AOL to increase the modem speeds available to users.

According to recent press releases, AOL should be running at 14.4 in most major cities by the time this issue goes to print, and some

will have 28.8. ISDN access is also expected. AOL only recently moved up to 9600 baud access in most locations.

Internet Users Described as Subversive

A report in *Inside Media* discussing the reason that NBC was going to offer *Saturday Night Live* data and merchandising as the first service on its new WWW home page, says the reason is that the demographics for *SNL* and the Internet mix. "Hip, often urban professionals with a subversive sense of humor," the magazine reported.

The report was a part of the announcement that NBC will have an Internet presence in the future with a WWW home page. Other plans about the proposed new page are not available at this time. Stay tuned for more details.

And To Prove the Point

Hackers came in through the Internet and successfully pulled off a run on GE, and some of the files they looked through were those dealing with NBC.

According to a GE spokesperson and reports on NBC affiliate stations, the hackers got into GE's computers and successfully searched some of their records as well as nabbing a number of passwords.

There was no reference to GENie, which is owned by GE, being part of the hack.

And If You Like The Cat

According to Time On-line, a recorded meow and photo of Socks, the First Cat, have been so popular on the White House Web site (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>) that administration officials plan an entire updated area devoted to Socks. And some people say the government is going to the dogs.

Surprise! Microsoft Forming On-line Network

At Comdex Bill Gates finally fessed up the existence of a new Microsoft on-line service, to be called the Microsoft Network. Previously codenamed Marvel, the service will be included with the Windows '95 software.

Other than the service's existence, which had been an open secret in the industry for six months prior to Comdex, there was little hard information in the announcement other than nebulous claims about competitive pricing and a compelling business structure. However, some advertising is going to be used to support free activities on the service.

It does, however, appear that the on again/off again presence of the TCP/IP stack controller in Windows '95 is now officially on again and will be included with the new package.

Steve Already Casing Windows '95

Never to be outdone, Steve Case and America Online announced their new Windows '95 front end at Comdex. Case has little option but to offer the upgrade. However, he said that America Online would continue to expand their 3.1 and Apple support, feeling that these systems would continue to be in use for quite some time.

Ringling Malone's Bells

The three Bell spin-offs, Bell Atlantic, Nynex and Pacific Telesis, have announced a collaboration with the Creative Artists Agency to form an interactive cable network.

The network, according to reports from Cowles/SIMBA, will provide movies,

television programming, news, educational content and a number of other services on demand to up to 30 million homes within a year.

This places the Bells in direct competition with cable operators, and most notably with their longtime nemesis, John Malone of cable giant TCI. At stake is who ends up controlling the newest and probably most socially pervasive on-ramp to the infobahn, the home entertainment terminal. End users don't much care if the thing is a telephone hooked to your TV or a TV hooked to your telephone. All anyone cares about after two years of premature hype is that it gets here. The company, whether phone or cable, that manages to get one in first is going to win big with the consumer.

On The Light Side: Barney Is Satan

Sometimes the strangest things get into your e-mail. The following mathematical proof ended up in our EG-NOT mailbox, sent by netizen extraordinaire and EG contributor Barry Friedman.

Mathematical proof that the much loved and adored Barney is Satan.

First write down on a piece of paper CUTE PURPLE DINOSAUR. Next, since there were no U's in the Roman times and we are going to be using Roman numerals, change all U's to V's to make CVTE PVRPLE DINOSAVR. Next, take all the Roman numeral characters out of this statement and add them.

CVTE= C(100)+V(5)=105.

PVRPLE=V(5)+L(50)=55.

DINOSAVR=D(500)+I(1)+V(5)=506.

Total: 105+55+506=666. Cute Purple

Dinosaur=Barney, Cute Purple Dinosaur=666, 666=Satan. Therefore: Barney=Satan.

.....
By John P. Withers

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IS THE 32X DOOMED?

id brings its BFG to the new Sega system!

Doom is on its way to becoming one of those trans-platform phenomena that will revolutionize the entire industry. Just prior to the first blush of public infatuation with VR, John Carmack, a then-unknown Texas programmer, created a first-person POV, labyrinth-based shooter named **Catacombs 3-D** as a shareware product for small-time publisher Softdisk.

From this humble beginning, Carmack moved on to become part of the core group that founded id Software. As tech director, he spearheaded the group's first project, an update of Silas Warner's early '80s computer classic, **Castle Wolfenstein** from MUSE Software, using his Catacombs engine.

The result, **Wolfenstein 3D**, was the first shareware mega-hit, reaching critical mass almost exclusively through word of mouth from its fanatical fans. The game was, in fact, so successful that its engine was sold to various other development houses and publishers—including

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Sega
SYSTEM: 32X
THEME: First-Person Shooter
MEGABITS: 24
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 16

Capstone, which has already produced both **Corridor 7** and **Operation Body Count** using them. Even id itself got in on the act, producing **Spear of Destiny**, another WWII-era, first-person shooter, before moving on to the next-generation engine and the vaunted **Doom** series.

Doom's arrival perfectly coincided with the public's fascination with virtual reality-type experiences and violent games goosed with hyper-realistic graphics. The new engine included ceilings, incredible bosses and such special features as curving stairways. Of course, the familiar items are all available, including the

on-screen hands holding the various weapons, greatly enhancing the first-person POV.

The 32X version of **Doom** is something of a mixed bag. It features 16 satisfactory levels taken from several sources, and movement is amazingly fast. In fact, some players may find the game's running-level movement speed a bit excessive. After all, the player is trapped in a sealed area full of monstrous aliens and armed soldiers, all out for his blood—why would he be moving madly about at full speed? Better





still, if the player hits a command button, the character moves at a speed apparently sufficient to warp the player-character into hyperspace. In other words, this game comes in two speeds: fast and ridiculously fast. What's worse, in order to achieve this unnecessary speed, the size of the game display was reduced within the confines of a thick, black border. A somewhat slower, full-screen presentation would have been far preferable.

As for the enemies, the bosses from the PC version didn't make the cut, and many of the original's coolest monsters also no-showed.

The play mechanics, however, are pretty smooth, given the game's manic movement speed, but a six-button controller is realistically required for the maximum **Doom** experience. While it's possible to bring up the map and perform other functions with the standard controller, the six-button format really streamlines matters.

Now to the graphics: In addition to shrinking the game screen, Sega clearly reduced the number of pixels. What this means is that the smooth, delicately texture-mapped surfaces of the PC

original have given way to objects and characters that break down into large blocks the instant the player closes in on them. This is probably the single most distracting feature of the game, though the objects retain their visual integrity even at medium range.

The sound effects, however, are very good, with lots of cool ambient growls and moans, and the weapon's fire and hits are perfectly digitized. The score, by Brian Coburn, is also first rate.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember, however, for all its little flaws, is that this *is* **Doom**. And while computerists may turn up their noses at this video game translation, there are a lot of people out there who don't have PCs or don't play games on PCs, and they've heard



about this game, too. For all the quibbles enumerated in this review, the fact is that the 32X version of this id classic does the job it has to do—it makes the player feel as if he/she is moving through a real world, facing genuine dangers around every corner. It also captures the politically

incorrect but undeniably visceral thrill of firing weapons at nasty enemies and reducing them to ketchup-like slop.

Is this version of **Doom** violent? Is it ever. In fact, the game literally revels in violence and gore-spattered walls. It celebrates the virtual thrill of hoisting a futuristic gatling gun and chopping an enemy in half. For folks who don't feel they have to make moral judgments on fantasy experiences, this game rocks.

The thing that could really kick **Doom**'s cartridge sales into overdrive, of course, would be modem capability for the Genesis/32X. While programmers have spent the past decade working to fine-tune artificial intelligence, gamers have only begun to re-experience the joys of facing off against—or working in tandem with—other players. When it comes to modem gaming, **Doom** was made to order.

Meanwhile, id's business mentor Jay Wilbur is happily cutting deals for everything from **Doom**-based clothing and action figures to a licensed movie. But his primary mission remains to launch **Doom** on every system able to run it.

And truly, **Doom** is a game that *belongs* on every video, computer and black box system. While imitators have flooded the field, no one seems to have a better feel for this type of program than id.

So, if the 32X edition isn't the ultimate **Doom**, it's still very good, and the game itself is so strong that it would take many more problems than this version possesses to put a dent in the game's power and overwhelming popularity. ■ (Bill Kunkel)

IN PERSPECTIVE

How does Sega's 32X **Doom** stack up against other editions of the game? Well, computer vets will probably find that the video game version plays a lot like its PC forbear, while the Genesis controller is doubtless a superior control device to anything available in the computer world.

Even better, those cool weapon and invincibility codes are still available. (EG generally avoids these, but what the heck! To access full weapons and access cards, pause the game and simultaneously press: UP, A, C and Mode; invincibility also requires a pause, but you press X and Z instead. Oh yeah, you need a six-button controller, and you cannot finish the game in this mode, at least in the version we tested.)

Unfortunately, as mentioned in the review, the number of pixels has been scaled way down, so there's quite a bit

of "pixilation" whenever the player moves too close to an object or character.

The 32X version is also character single-dimensional. In other words, one can never view another character from the sides or rear—they are always facing the gamer. But since they're also relentlessly attacking the player-character, it's not likely to become much of a sore point.

The 32X version does a nice job of selecting the levels, creating a sort of "Best of Doom" compilation, but computerists are sure to miss the end bosses.

Finally, how does the 32X **Doom** compare with the Jaguar version? While we haven't had optimum time



to test the Atari game, the current group opinion seems to be that the Jaguar holds a significant edge over its cartridge cousin in looks and play.

Ah, but in the **Doom** game, picking a winner is no stroll in the park.

DON'T FIGHT IT

Rise of the Robots goes where fighting games have gone before

Gamers may remember, not very long ago, fighting games featured human martial artists who used the occasional mystic power (gained from many hours of enlightened meditation) to fry their opponents. Then came **Mortal Kombat**, with its otherworldly characters and glut of magic powers, and nothing was the same again.

Now, what used to be called variant fighting games have become the norm. Players can name a number of gimmick fighting games without straining their memories: **Brutal, Ballz!**, **Clayfighter, Shaq-Fu**, et al. These days, no designer could sell a fighting game that didn't have some big gimmick to set it apart from the perceived standard. But gimmick fighting games are quickly becoming that standard.

Rise of the Robots, as the reader might guess, is a fighting game with a battling robot gimmick, and fantastic graphic appeal to back it up. The premise sets the player in the role of a super-powerful



final, most powerful Supervisor.

The action is, of course, side-perspective. In the One-player Mode, the player battles a series of six opponents: Loader Droid, Builder Droid, Crusher Droid, Soldier Droid, Sentry Droid and the Supervisor Droid. The opponents begin with the slow, very mechanical-looking Loader Droid. The Builder Droid is ape-like, while the Crusher Droid is insectoid. The Soldier Droid is a silvery and metallic humanoid. The Sentry Droid looks very much like a Japanese transformer-style robot, and the last opponent is the Supervisor Droid, which is most reminiscent of the T-1000 polymimetic alloy cyborg in *The Terminator 2*.

The player can choose the best of three, five or seven matches, and select from three difficulty levels, but these do not rid one of the feeling that there aren't enough opponents. The player may also choose from several different timer settings or turn it off altogether. Other options allow the player to turn off the non-interactive cut scenes

before each battle (a real time saver, but the graphics are worth watching at least once), and to disable the special moves of the robots.

In Two-player Mode, one player assumes the role of the cyborg and the other chooses one of five opponents (The supervisor droid isn't available in Two-player Mode), and they square off.



cyborg out to stop a robot uprising. Seems the robots of Electrocorp have been infected with the Ego Virus, which makes them think they're too good to work for humans. Their disruption of the normal routine in Metropolis 4 threatens law and order. To stop the rise of the robots and halt the spread of the virus, the player must destroy all the robots, including the

The player has a range of attacks, from quick, light blows to slow, powerful ones. The registration is very good. There are no incidences of a robot swinging at thin air but still damaging its opponent.

Oh, the graphics. "State of the art" is a cliché, but it aptly describes **ROTR**. This is perhaps the most sophisticated character modeling seen in a 16-Bit platform video game. It's right up there with **Donkey Kong Country** in terms of animation and modeling. The on-screen figures look three-dimensional, the sprites are large and they move fluidly. The game simply looks great. In some of the arenas, there are shiny floors where the player can see the reflections of the robots as they move. A very smooth touch.

If only the game play equalled the graphics.

There's nothing execrable here, but neither is there anything beyond the graphics to make players say, "Wow." The soundtrack, by ex-Queen guitarist Brian May, is very good but what does a great soundtrack add to a mediocre game?

What hinders the game most is control, or lack thereof. The special moves are difficult to access and the regular moves are strangely unsatisfactory. The player's cyborg has a very short reach when punching, so it's hard to land a blow



without walking into the enemy's teeth. Sure, the cyborg can kick, but these kicks aren't as quick as the punches, so it's easier to get hit while kicking.

Because there are only six opponents, the learning curve is exaggeratedly steep. It's easy to beat the first two opponents, but the third is much more of a challenge.

Acclaim and Time Warner are to be commended for the excellent graphics and soundtrack in **Rise of the Robots**. Perhaps next time they'll find an excellent game to put them in. **C** (John Wesley Hardin)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Time Warner
SYSTEM: SNES
THEME: Fighting
MEGABITS: 24
PLAYERS: 1 or 2
LEVELS: 6

FACE YOUR DESTINY.



THE FIRST TIME, YOU WON.

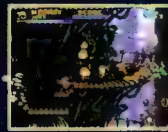
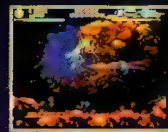
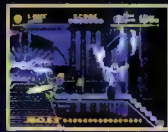
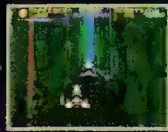
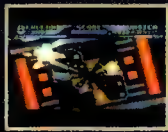
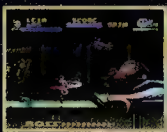
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SUPERHERO STREET FIGHT

X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse is a few moves short

As the success of Acclaim's **Maximum Carnage** proved, using comic book superheroes in a **Final Fight**-style, scrolling street fight format can definitely cook. Superheroes are naturals for video games, after all. The long underwear characters offer game creators vivid, distinctively colored images, a taste for battle and lots of cool enemies with whom to trade punches, kicks and psychic blasts.

It only stands to reason, therefore, that superhero *teams* should make even better source material for game designers than individuals, what with the plethora of different costumes and varied super abilities found among the typical supergroup demographics.

Unfortunately, while Capcom's **X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse** is a solid job based on one of the most popular and enduring of Marvel Comics' supergroups, the game is somewhere below top of the line.

The plot begins with the current team—consisting of Cyclops, Wolverine, Psylocke, Beast and Gambit—receiving an emergency psi-summons from Charles Xavier, a.k.a Professor X, the man who has played den mother to the X-Men from the mutant group's origin way back in the '60s (when the team comprised Cyclops, Marvel Girl, The Iceman, Angel and the Beast).

Over the years, Marvel Comics has given considerable play to the issue of human (homo sapiens) and mutant (homo superior) relations. Used frequently as a metaphor for racial and ethnic intolerance, this theme has been the driving idea behind the book for many years—and in the current animated series as well. The mutant community has faced persecution from a fearful humanity almost from the moment of their first public appearance. **Mutant Apocalypse** also makes maximum use of this evergreen X-theme, with the game's plot hinging on a surge of anti-mutant activity which erupts on the island-nation of Genosha.



In an attempt to determine the source of the anti-mutant ill-will, Xavier has been relentlessly scanning the island with Cerebro, a super-duper mutant-finder that he constructed back in the group's salad days. And wouldn't you know? It turns out that an old enemy of the X-Men—Apocalypse—is currently calling Genosha home.

Xavier believes that the Genoshan government is using this super-powered being to rein in the island's mutant population, but he's also quite certain that Apocalypse has his own agenda for the island's "special" inhabitants. Better still, another old enemy is waiting behind the scenes to provide the game with a flashy climax.

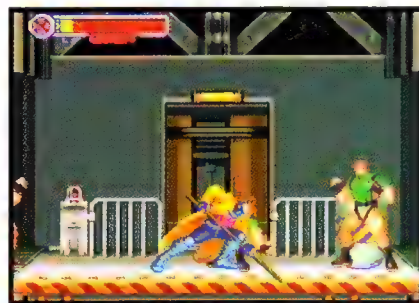
The player then sets out for Genosha, employing any one of the five X-Men as a surrogate. Cyclops, the group's longtime leader, has killer optic blasts; Wolverine, with his pop-up adamantium claws, indestructible skeletal structure and feral savagery, is an archetype for the current generation of anti-social, psychopathic superheroes; Psylocke is a female powerhouse who can generate a psychic blade through her mutant mental manipulation and Gambit, according to the documentation, has the ability to "convert any object's stored potential energy into explosive kinetic energy." Uhh, okay. And finally, we have Hank McCoy, a.k.a The Beast, who started out as a mutant human being in the '60s, underwent a further mutation in the '70s and as a result, is currently covered in thick, blue fur and endowed with amazing strength and speed, plus preternatural agility.

The player must navigate each of the five characters through their individual game paths in order to continue on to the final two levels. Unfortunately, these five paths can be concluded much too quickly, even by players of only average skill. The final two levels can thereafter be completed using any of the five X-Men and quite frankly, the entire game seems to be over in the blink of Cyclops's eye. Just when Capcom's **X-Men** begins to gather steam, it is abruptly over.

Each of the X-Men characters have special moves that are executed using *extremely* basic **Street Fighter II**-style sweeps and thrusts. There are also combination moves but again, these are quite primitive. There aren't even any hidden moves, something that has become an all-but-obligatory feature in most scrolling fight contests.

Worse still, the bosses (including one of those mutant-hunting Sentinels, Queen Brood, Exodus, Tusk, Apocalypse and the final boss, good old Magneto himself) are virtual punching bags, easily defeated using simple pattern attacks.

Given the fact that the game is too easily completed, however, the rest of the production values are quite high. The graphics are splendid, with each character distinctively rendered and colored; the superpowered good and bad guys really pop against the backgrounds. Game control is superb and extremely responsive, while the music and sound effects are certainly above average. And no matter its flaws, it's certainly a better idea than Capcom's upcoming **SF2** format presentation of Marvel's X-Men.



In other words, what's here is just fine—there just isn't nearly enough of it. And next time out, Capcom should *definitely* tune the difficulty a little higher. ■
(Bill Kunkel)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Capcom
SYSTEM: SNES
THEME: Side-Scrolling
MEGABITS: 16
PLAYERS: 1-2
LEVELS: 7

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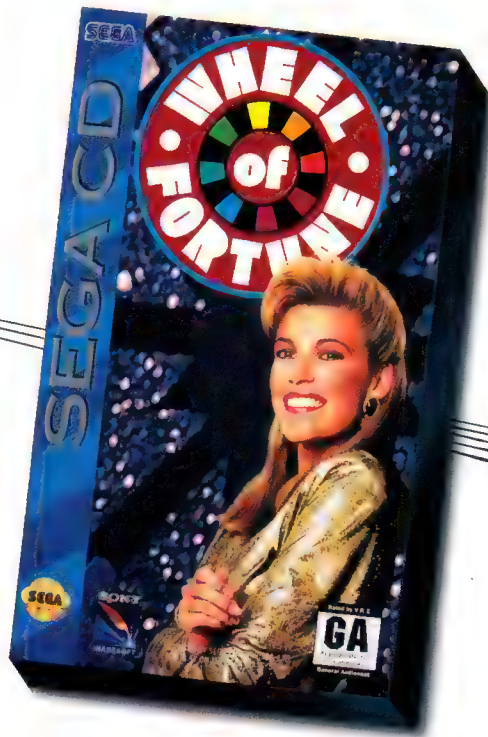
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VIRTUAL FIREFIGHTING

Ignition Factor burns slowly but surely

At some point, most children imagine growing up to become police officers, firefighters, cowboys and even politicians.

Video gamers have had plenty of opportunities to experience life behind a shield (**Lethal Enforcers** [Konami/SNES, Genesis, Sega CD]) and a desk, (**SimCity** [Nintendo/SNES]) and even on horseback (**ALG's Mad Dog McCree**). But rare indeed is the opportunity to experience the business and adventure of firefighting.

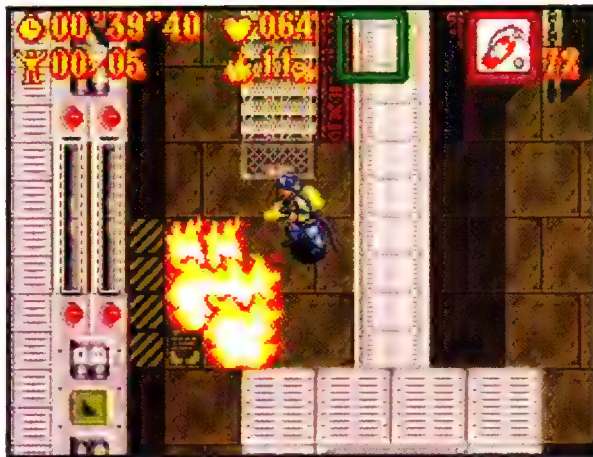
Jaleco plans to reignite those fond images of loud, red fire trucks and sliding down the fireman's pole, as popularized by both reality and the magic of television, with **The Ignition Factor**.

Factor casts the gamer as a novice firefighter on a tight city budget. To move up the ladder of success, the player must rescue as many people as possible; complete the mission objectives, which are set by the captain and find and remove any important items in the building.

After a scenario is selected, the captain appears for a briefing. At this point, the objectives are revealed and the gamer can begin planning. First, the fire trucks must be deployed to one side of the building. Then, the yellow-slickered hero must select his or her weapons of defense and firefighting. Novices can only carry three items, but as skill levels increase, the player-character can juggle more tools.

Available items include three types of fire extinguishers (standard, chemical and electrical), an oxygen tank and mask, rope, axe, pole (to test the structural integrity of the flooring), CO₂ bombs and plastic explosives. The bombs and explosives can and will injure innocent bystanders, as well as the deployer, so use them with care.

Factor has eight scenarios, set at three levels of difficulty. The locations range from a steel mill to a Paris mine, with all the inherent dangers and challenges. Once all of the stages on each level are completed, the next level becomes accessible. Top



firefighters will discover that the fun isn't over until the last ember's out.

The Game Play Screen displays elapsed mission time and number of lives saved, as well as the minimum number of rescues to complete the stage. Other on-screen data include both the health meter and the percentage of the area on fire, which will, of course, increase unless the p-c extinguishes the blaze.

The upper-right screen displays the two items that were selected (only two can be accessed at a time since the firefighter only has two hands) as well as the corresponding SNES action buttons.

There is also a Map Screen available during the mission, and players will find this an invaluable feature. The screen itself is divided into three main parts. The right side is the actual map that shows the location of the trapped people, all the firefighters, the p-c, the exit, and any special event locations, which the firefighter will be alerted to by the captain. On the left side of the screen are two windows: The lower of which displays the location of the fire engine, while the upper indicates the floor number.

The fire engine can be called upon to launch a pressurized spray of water on the visible screen area. The amount that is extinguished is dependent upon which side of the building the fire truck is located. The closer the fire engine, the more effective.

When a scenario is over, the player is awarded points for four aspects of the mission: time, rescue, events and items. If enough points are earned in a single

category, the blazing hero is awarded power-ups that increase carrying abilities/health.

Factor's graphics are very well done. The flames come in three colors, which gives gamers an idea of which type of fire extinguisher to use. The game also displays an impressive attention to background details, including the placement of electrical outlets on the wall.

Curiously, that same attention wasn't carried over to the people. When the firefighter is engulfed in flames, his body is a black silhouette with a halo of flame around him. However, once he cools off, there is no on-screen "blackening" of the character. The trapped people never show black smears of ash, even when they're sitting in the flames! While this is a game, it is alarming to think of the impressions that children could garner from this harmless representation of pyromania.

Factor seems to maintain the credo, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all" since there is no musical soundtrack. Several tasteless possibilities spring to mind, but Mike Hardt and Joe Sislow, the Jaleco designers responsible for the game, manfully refused to yield to



temptation. Given the sparse sound effects, however, the game seems to take place in an audio vacuum. Without music, gamers vainly anticipate the ear candy of popping flames; screaming people and crashing of walls, floors and ceilings.

Where **Factor** more seriously flames out, though, is in its game play. The p-c must perform a lot of tiresome running back and forth that really eats up time and doesn't do anything to hype the fun factor.

Hardt and Sislow took an interesting concept and turned it into a new and different kind of game. While there are some weaknesses, this is a strong addition to the SNES library. **B** (Laurie Yates)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Jaleco
SYSTEM: SNES
THEME: Action
MEGABITS: 8
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 8+



Repel The Demon Horde

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NINTENDO'S 900-LB. GORILLA RULES

Donkey Kong Country: gorgeous but no vacation spot

Donkey Kong Country represents the greatest technological achievement in the history of modern video gaming. Nintendo, in conjunction with Rare Ltd. of Great Britain, has taken Sigeru Miyamoto's Mario Bros. format and reinvented the genre through the application of state-of-the-art graphic rendering, slick programming and inspired game design.

And while everybody has either seen or heard about **DKC's** eyeball-boggling visuals, the game's next-level design and backstory have gotten short shrift. This is a game so rich in wit and wonder that it could even reignite the attention of gamers who have given up on platform games as a dated, played-out format.

As the hysterically funny documentation explains, the Donkey Kong who originally starred with Mario in the coin-op games of the early '80s is now a bearded



banana stockpile, with himself and apprentice/sidekick Diddy Kong taking turns standing guard. Alas, the treacherous Kremlings, bipedal lizard creatures who skulk through the various scenarios with theatrical menace, covet the horde of bananafruit and when DK sleeps through his midnight watch, their opportunity arrives. They attack en masse, seal Diddy in a barrel and loot the precious bananas from their storehouse. Once DK frees Diddy from the barrel (and endures yet another lecture from Cranky, who fails to see banana retrieval as a fit subject for a quest: "Where's the screaming damsel in distress?"), the pair set off to recapture the banana bandits, in tagteam fashion.

Along the way, they pass through some of the most breathtakingly beautiful locations ever seen in electronic gaming. From the gleaming jungle vistas, to underground mines, snowcapped mountains and eye-popping underwater panoramas, we can guarantee that you have never seen or experienced anything like **Donkey Kong Country**. The game contains 40 traditional play levels, 18 special levels (non-play areas including Game Save areas, advice from Cranky and Barrel Flight stations which launch the player-character back to earlier levels) and scores of hidden areas. It also indulges in the video game vogue of the false ending, with an additional battle added after the credits have rolled.

The game also introduces us to several of the less-renowned members of the Kong clan, including Funky (a surfer ape who runs the flight service), and Candy (who runs the Save locations), as well as

rhinos, ostriches and swordfish that the characters can ride in various areas.

Finally, what would any good platform game be without enemies? **DKC** features several species of Kremling (from the humble Kritters to King K. Rool himself), jungle dangers (giant bees, vultures, snakes, etc.) and underwater menaces (sharks, squid, giant clams, etc.), all rendered via exquisite 3-D models.

Anyone who has played Miyamoto's **Super Mario World** will immediately understand the game's structure and play mechanics. But unlike so many modern platformers in which players simply blast through as quickly as possible to attain a conquest over the program, **DK Country** is a fun game that can be endlessly replayed, thanks to the gorgeous graphics and deviously hidden areas that fill every level of this game.

These hidden areas are placed in such a way that it is almost impossible to locate them through standard platform game search-and-destroy tactics. The whimsical positioning is so fiendishly clever that a player may stumble upon a secret location several times without ever being totally certain of how he/she got there. In fact, it is possible to finish this game while having



actually covered barely more than half the available area. These features combine to make **DKC** the most compulsively replayable video game in a long time.

From the moment Donkey Kong explodes onto the scene from his jungle abode, to his ultimate confrontation with K. Rool aboard a pirate galleon, players will be hard-pressed to put the controller down. That, combined with the game's hilarious characters and self-satirical backstory, make **Donkey Kong Country** the place to be. It may also be the game that proves there's life in the 16-Bit video game universe yet. **A+** (Bill Kunkel)



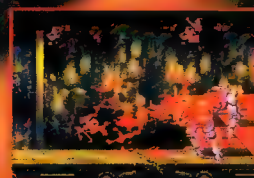
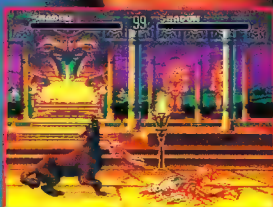
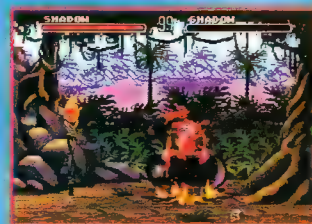
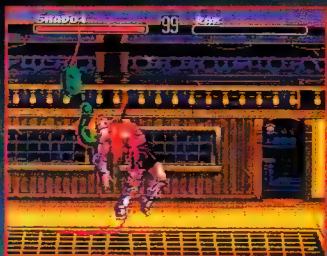
and bespectacled old simian known as Cranky Kong. Cranky doesn't have much use for the current generation of game stars, but he is an integral part of this action-adventure, serving as both a crusty commentator ("In my days we would have been happy to stand guard in the rain, 'cause that might have meant having an extra frame of animation!" he lectures DK) and occasional mentor.

The current Donkey Kong, meanwhile, has grown rather complacent, content to snooze away his days in a treehouse condo located just above his legendary

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Nintendo
SYSTEM: SNES
THEME: Side-Scrolling
MEGABITS: 32
PLAYERS: 1-2
LEVELS: 40+

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MANLY GAMING

Home Improvement gives players more power

Times are great for Tim Allen. *Home Improvement* is a hit TV show, his book has sold well and *The Santa Clause* introduces him to moviegoers in a funny sendup on the Christmas tradition. Now he also stars in a SNES game based on his ABC sitcom. Equipped with a variety of tools, Tim must survive the dangers of four television studios. When people first hear that there's a game based on

Home Improvement, they can't imagine how that might work. But it *does* work because Tim Taylor is such a great character, and what better weapon is there than a supercharged nail gun?

The story of **Home Improvement** is like a dream come true for Tim Taylor. The Binford Tool Company has named a line of tools in homage to *Tool Time's* Taylor. The Taylor-Turbo Tools will come out soon and Tim is aglow with honor.

Unfortunately, someone has stolen the tool prototypes and spread them around four TV show sets on the same lot where *Tool Time* is filmed. Tim must brave prehistoric menaces, monsters, mummies and robots to find the tools and get back in time for the next episode of *Tool Time*.

Home Improvement uses the familiar side-scroller perspective for its four sets and various levels of those sets. The Tim Taylor character seems too small in proportion to the sets around him, but that doesn't affect the game play in any way. The source material for this game provides the perfect set of weapons and offensive tactics for Tim to use in the game levels. Tools are Tim's life and in this game, they preserve that life.

Initially, players start off with a jack



hammer, a grappling hook and a sledge hammer. Tim can use these tools to break ground, reach high ledges and smash walls. Later on, Tim can find a nail gun, blow torch, chainsaw and arc welder that all work as projectile weapons. Some are better than others in specific situations, but otherwise they are mostly interchangeable. One neat aspect to these tools is that their ammo gets more powerful if the player collects more than one of the same tool. Dynamite is also useful to blast through walls and eliminate a number of enemies at once.

The four sets each contain a number of game levels. The levels all tend to involve monster robots of some sort, but they were necessary in order to provide Tim Taylor with some believable adversaries. The first set is Dinosaur Safari, on which players can discover pterodactyls, velociraptors and other Jurassic nasties.

The Temple of Tools set was to be used for an adventure special for Taylor, but now it rebels against him as he looks for his Turbo Tools treasures.

Monster Theater uses classic movie monsters to give Tim a thrill as he avoids the green muck and cobwebs to recover his namesake tools.

The final set, Lost on Mars, is the most difficult of the four because it involves so many more clever enemies and a lot of traps, too. The variety of the sets and animatronic creatures makes a nice series of challenges for the *Tool Time* host that America loves.

Home Improvement is not a particularly difficult game, but players must get used to the various key combinations so that they don't get locked thumbs and

fingers in the middle of a difficult maneuver. The trickiest moves involve the grappling hook. Attachment to the ledges is easy, but it's hard to get Tim up to them because another press of the jump button is necessary rather than just going up the chain. Fortunately, Absolute's designers made the game a little easier by using the left and right buttons for diagonal firing. Once a player gets the movements down, he can concentrate on the creatures, hidden passages, hard hat invincibility power-ups, nuts (collected for an extra life) and tool crates that make up each level.

The graphics and sound effects are good in this game, but not quite as impressive as the overall variety in the sights and sets. The Taylor character gets lost against the backgrounds, but the advantage is that more of each set is shown.

The game's in-between scenes and story screens take place on the *Tool Time* set and make use of digitized images of Tim and Al in a small window at the top of the screen. Sound bites and more digitized images would have made the whole experience better, but the game itself is quite good and challenging. There's just something exciting about firing a nail gun at an approaching vampire or dinosaur.

Absolute pulled off a video game translation that many fans couldn't imagine as a game. Tim Taylor was the appropriate choice for a main character, but maybe something could have been done with Al,



too, besides his cinematic scene appearances. Imagine a **Sonic & Knuckles**-like game with Tim and Al.

The chain saw is the neatest weapon because of its long range and unusual power, but any tool will do in this game where a nail gun or jack hammer is all that stands between success and getting permanently stuck in a TV show. ■ (Russ Ceccola)



TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Absolute
SYSTEM: SNES
THEME: Action
MEGABITS: 24
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 4



If you don't like the city you're in, use your rocket launcher to level it.

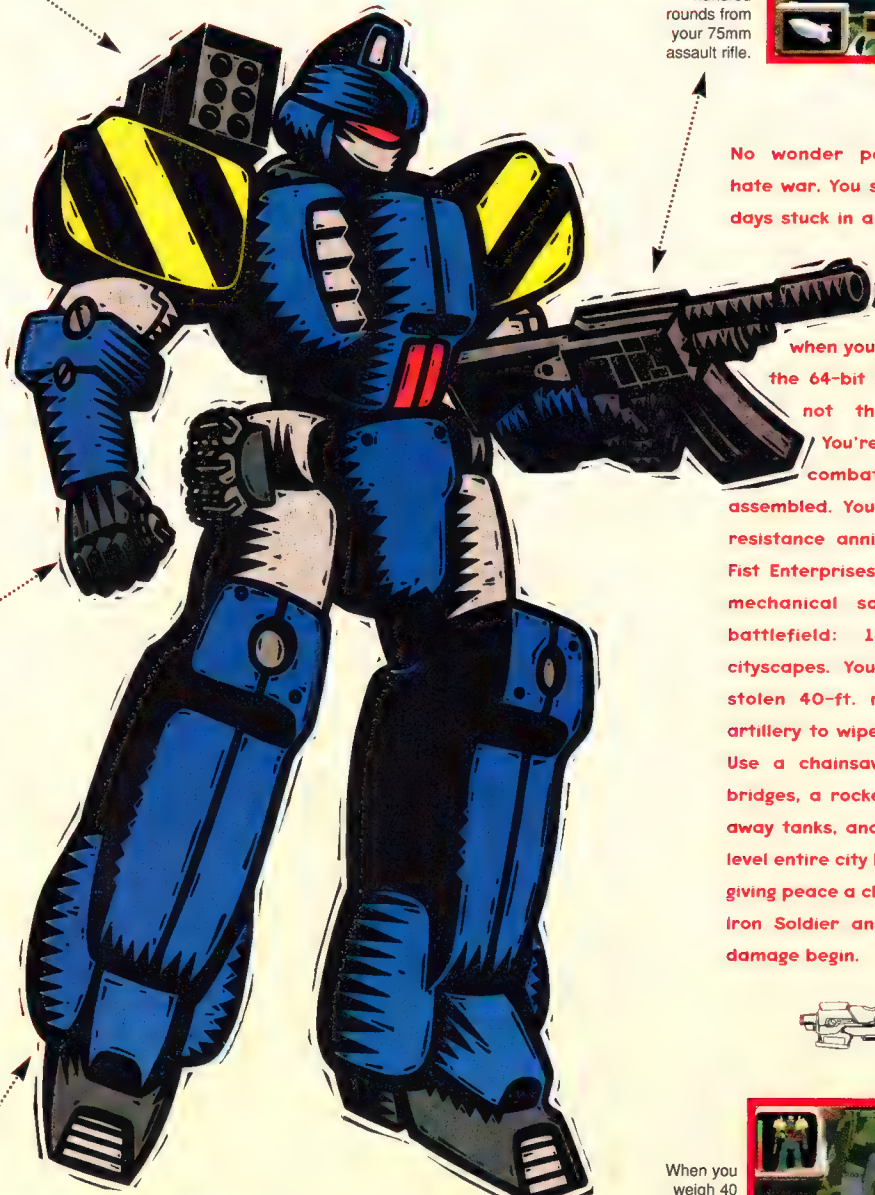
WAR IS HELL
unless you're in a 40-ft. robot
with a rocket launcher
(then it's kinda cool)



Riddle the Gauntlet helicopters with a couple hundred rounds from your 75mm assault rifle.



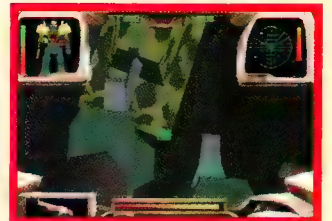
The best thing about the 3D cityscapes and texture-mapped skyscrapers is watching a grenade blow them up.



No wonder people hate war. You spend days stuck in a trench with nothing more than a wimpy rifle and a bad haircut. Luckily, when you play Iron Soldier on the 64-bit Atari Jaguar, you're not the average grunt. You're the most awesome combat machine ever assembled. Your mission: help the resistance annihilate the evil Iron Fist Enterprises and their army of mechanical soldiers. Your battlefield: 16 different cityscapes. Your arsenal: a stolen 40-ft. robot with enough artillery to wipe out New York City. Use a chainsaw to slice through bridges, a rocket launcher to blow away tanks, and a cruise missile to level entire city blocks. Forget about giving peace a chance. Climb into an Iron Soldier and let the property damage begin.



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THE FINAL GRADE

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of several different reviewers on some of the latest software

	Arnie Katz Editor	Mark Cernan Senior Editor	Bill Kunkel Executive Editor	Sterea L. Keat I.A.A.
Aerobiz Supersonic	B+	A-	B	-
Alien vs. Predator (Jaguar)	A-	B	A	A-
Adv. of Batman/Rbn	B-	C	C+	B
Bailz	C	C	C+	C+
Blackthorne	B+	B	B+	-
Breath of Fire	A-	A+	A-	B+
Bubsy II	A-	B	B+	-
Demon's Crest	B+	A-	A	B+
Double Dragon V	C+	C	C+	-
Dynamite Headdy	B	B	A	-
Earthworm Jim	B+	A-	B-	A-
Final Fantasy III	A	A+	A+	A-
Goofy's History Tour	B-	A-	B	B
HardBall '94	B	B-	B-	B
Illusion of Gaia	B+	B	A	B+
Indiana Jones G.A.	B	B-	B	-
Jungle Book	A-	A	A	B+
Larussa Baseball '95	C+	C	C+	-
Lord of the Rings	A	A-	B	-
Maximum Carnage	A-	B-	A-	A-
Mickey Mania	A	A	A	A
NBA Jam	A	A	A	A
Pac-Attack	B	A-	A	C
Pitfall: Mayan Adv.	B+	A	B+	-
Radical Rex	C	C	C	C-
Red Zone	C+	C	-	-
Rocko's Modern Life	B+	B+	B+	C+
Shining Force II	B	B	B-	-
Starfleet Academy	A	A	A	A-
Star Trek: Generation	-	D	C	D
Star Trek: TNG (SNES)	B	B	A-	C-
Sub-Terrania	B	B+	B+	C
Syndicate	B	B-	B+	B
Taz Escape Fr. Mars	B+	B+	B+	B
Tempest 2000	A	A+	A	D+
The Lion King	A-	A	A	B+
Urban Strike	B	B	B-	-
Virtual Bart	B	B+	C+	-
WWF Raw	B+	C+	A-	B-



Yogi loves picnic basket; unfortunately he would probably not love this game.

Megaman X' (Capcom/SNES) Megaman continues the fight against the Mavericks that began in **Megaman X**. For the most part, the zones aren't hard to beat, but some do have the added dimension of difficult mid-level bosses. The main bosses, however, are some of the toughest ever faced. As always, once the boss is defeated, his special weapon is retrieved by Megaman.

Although Capcom's all-new C4 graphics chip improves the scaling and rotation and the sparse 3-D graphics, the total picture is more on par with the first SNES **Megaman**. Each zone has its own killer musical theme, but the sound effects are the standard fare.

Game play is very good, and controlling MM's action is a snap. Slowdown is evident when fighting the end bosses, but doesn't overly detract from game play. A solid game, but not enough improvement over the earlier versions. **B** (Laurie Yates)

Wacky Worlds Creativity Studio (Sega Club/Genesis) Sonic the Hedgehog has temporarily abandoned his patrol against Dr. Robotnik and is now acting as a tour guide in this art and music program for creative users ages six and older.

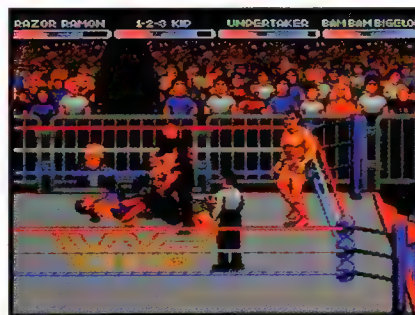
Video artists begin by selecting a location from the available theme worlds (Sci-Fi Planet, Fairytale Kingdom, Safari Island, Under the Sea, Toy House and Monster Movie). Each world offers different activities, and some feature hidden objects. Players can then access a wide variety of stickers from a book icon at the top of the screen. These stickers can then be recolored and placed anywhere on the scene. Even seemingly stationary objects such as the Space Station on the Sci-Fi World can be manipulated.

Some of the stickers feature old friends, like Funkatron's own ToeJam & Earl (from the Sega Genesis series). Each world boasts signature melodies, which



can be modified and personalized by the gamer. While this is definitely not at the **Mario Paint** level, **Wacky Worlds** is the only game in town, Genesis-wise, and it comes complete with Mega Mouse and mouse pad. **B** (Laurie Yates)

WWF Raw (Acclaim/SNES) While the SNES versions of Acclaim's WWF wrestling games have traditionally surpassed the Genesis editions, that is not



the case here. Whereas the Genesis version of **WWF Raw** looks great and plays like butter, the control system here is both visually and mechanically confusing. Given the additional command inputs on the SNES controller—six buttons to the Genesis' three—that's pretty tough to understand. Still, the new wrestlers look great, and the additional moves should push the buttons of SNES-bound mat mavers. **B-** (Bill Kunkel)

Yogi Bear's Cartoon Capers (Gametek/SNES) Hey, Boo Boo! Yogi's through with his hibernation and he's ready to participate in some mediocre, kideo-level platform gaming. A secret chemical plant is being built in the middle of Jellystone Park, and only Yogi can sound the alarm to Ranger Smith.

Both the music and graphics are simple, almost embarrassingly so, but the sprites are large, familiar and well animated. The backgrounds don't even affect the game play. For example, in an icy area of the park (in spring?), Yogi walks on ice and snow as sure-footedly as he does the new spring grass. Unfortunately, while controlling Yogi only requires a single button and the D-pad, the game feels a couple of picnic baskets light. **C-** (Laurie Yates)

The Itchy & Scratchy Game (Acclaim/Genesis) The Simpsons' favorite cartoon pair, unhealthily reminiscent of Tom 'n Jerry, beat the daylights out of each other through seven levels in this pretty-to-look-at, side-scrolling platform game. Itchy the rodent must try to obliterate Scratchy the cat with any of an incredible variety of available weapons while avoiding getting bashed himself. Scratchy can also use pickup weapons, and has some local pals in each level to help him out, including a final boss. If Itchy does manage to knock off his feline nemesis twice, Scratchy has a last chance to get him with a menacing "rodent remover." For the aggression prone. **B** (Ross Chamberlain)



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If only...

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THE DYNAMIX OF BATTLING ROBOTS

Metaltech: EarthSiege jumps on the mech battlewagon

As electronic game publishing matures, game companies have accumulated more and more of what is known collectively as "industry wisdom."

Some examples of industry wisdom include:

- 1) Sports games always sell.
- 2) Girls don't play violent games.
- 3) Find the hottest game out there and imitate it.
- 4) People just love to pretend they're inside the head of a gigantic, battling robot.

It is that final point that we shall address in this review, because Dynamix, publisher of **EarthSiege**, was actually the first computer software publisher to capitalize on industry wisdom #4, having developed **Mechwarrior** for Activision back in 1989 [see sidebar].

Even better, the name at the top of the credits belongs to former Sierra designer Mark Crowe, originally one of the Two Guys from Andromeda, creators of the

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Dynamix
DESIGNER: Mark Crowe, D. Selle
SYSTEM: PC
THEME: Sci-Fi
HD SPACE: 35 MB (with Speech)
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 8

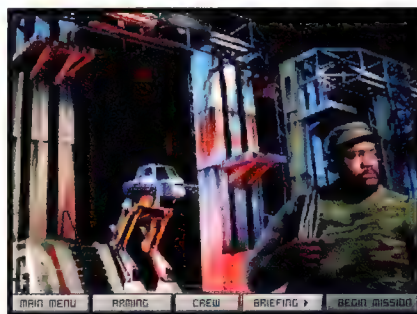
long-running **Space Quest** series.

EarthSiege begins on a disturbing note: There is no elaborate, Onyx-rendered introduction. Instead, the credits roll to the accompaniment of a singularly unimpressive, non-animated drawing of a giant Mech.

The understated introduction, however, has a pleasant effect; instead of setting up the user for spectacular, modeled, 3-D animations that can't be generated in the interactive environment of a 486 PC, the actual game graphics come as a pleasant surprise.

No, there's nothing here that's likely to glaze the eyeballs with its animated splendor, but the images are more than serviceable. The mechs look great at medium range, and the images hold up extremely well at close range. But once they move into the background, the mechs are reduced to grey silhouettes. The clouds are especially nice, and a welcome change-of-pace.

The only big-time visual disappointment are the anemic explosions, which are pitiful both in terms of sound and



graphics. When you're sitting inside a giant robot's head (the player-mechs are called HERCs in this game) and you've just blasted an enemy mech into sand, a satisfying kaboom is the least one should be able to look forward to; the payoff here is more of a rip-off.



The game itself is interesting without breaking any new ground in the genre. There's a solid tutorial, after which the player can opt for one of eight individual missions. These include Reconnaissance (reconnoiter a fixed enemy target without engaging it), Scout (locate and skirmish enemy mechs), Patrol (patrol friendly territory with a squad of mechs in search of invading hostiles), Raid (guerrilla-type surprise assault in order to pilfer resources, supplies and new technology from the enemy), Scramble (the player's home base is attacked by enemy Cybrid forces), Search & Rescue (the player's HERC leads a rescue squad in search of friendlies), Strike (lead a squad into enemy territory in order to locate and destroy a Cybrid base) and Escort (the player's HERC must escort a convoy bringing new technology, an improved

HERC or reinforcements to safety).

Within the context of these single missions, most game parameters can be set by users. Gamers choose either limited or unlimited ammo (for projectile and/or missile-based systems), set the HERC's damage levels (all the way up to indestructible), select from among four difficulty levels, fine tune visibility and even determine the time of day the mission takes place.

The Career option, meanwhile, allows the player to create and manage a group of career HERC pilots, complete with statistics and, of course, mission saves.

The HERCs come in a variety of flavors, including the fast, lightweight Roadrunner; the slightly heavier and better armed Outlaw; and the lethal Raptor and Tomahawk models which are ideal for Medium Attack Mode.

The Patriot, meanwhile, is a missile-lover's dream machine and is great when facing airborne attacks. The Rhino is a great hit-and-run assault vehicle, while the Samson model is perfect for search-and-destroy missions. Then there's the big daddy of the group, the Colossus, a 77-ton monster capable of attaining speeds up to 46 kph. It sports the most awesome weapons package of any HERC. There are also four types of Cybrids and many cool weapons.

The Service Bay acts as the game's primary menu screen, providing the user with access to the main menu, armaments panel, crew assignments, briefing room and the missions themselves. There are detailed spec screens for each type of HERC, and the Build option in Career

Mode allows users to create new HERCs out of salvaged parts.

Once inside a HERC, the player has access to a three-window viewing setup (left, right and straight ahead), a Heads Up Display (HUD), a Multifunction Display (MFD) and a Heads Down Display (HDD). The HUD performs the usual navigation and weapons functions; the MFD offers HERC status data, radio messages, radar, target status and even a first-person, missile-cam POV; while the HDD provides squad member status, a Tactical Mission Map and damage reports.



Best of all, for all the game's attention to detail, it plays extremely well and is the type of contest that can be managed at entry-level skill, but in the long run is only mastered through extensive replay. It is also the kind of game that works extremely well in modem play, and should make a great addition to the ImagiNation Network (INN) once they get it up and running.

So warrior robot fans, get ready—you know who you are. **B+** (Bill Kunkel)

OTHER PROMINENT ROBOTS

For those readers interested in some of the other games that explored the theme of giant robots engaged in combat, here is a brief roundup of some of the most significant entries in this popular genre:

MechWarrior (Activision):

Dynamix's first attempt to bring the FASA Battletech universe to home computerists. The polygon-graphics game was visually ahead of its time, but the slow speed of the late '80s PCs kept the game from reaching maximum potential. It included eight types of Mechs, including Warhammer, Shadow Hawk and Rifleman.

Battletech (FASA): This is the granddaddy of all the Mech battle contests. The only place to play it as it should be is at a Battletech Center, such as the famous location in

Chicago, but the game can also be played on-line on Delphi, CompuServe and GENie, where it remains among the most popular time-eaters on the systems. (See "Buying into the Net" by J.P. Withers in the November '94 *EG* for more information on on-line Battletech gaming.)

The Crescent Hawks' Revenge (Infocom): This sequel to **Battletech: The Crescent Hawks' Inception** was produced by

Westwood Studios and far surpassed its predecessor in game value. Not much in terms of eye-popping graphics, but the game's strategic underpinning is very strong.



Ultrabots (NovaLogic): A more recent, non-FASA-based robot slugfest with hot graphics and one of the most unusual packages in years.

U-BOATS AWAY FOR THE THIRD REICH

Patrol the North Atlantic with the *Aces of the Deep*

Dynamix won awards again and again for their air combat simulations for World War I (**Red Baron**) and then World War II (**Aces of the Pacific** and **Aces Over Europe**). **Aces of the Deep** continues that fine tradition but does it under the sea in the North Atlantic where subs fought battles in World War I. **Aces of the Deep** may not be the most historically accurate title for a computer game, but the game has all of the internal accuracy, historic placement and variable game play that simulation fans have come to expect from Dynamix.

Aces of the Deep covers World War II from 1939 to 1945. Unlike other games which place the player in control of an Allied sub, **Aces** instead offers the helm of a German U-boat. These were the vessels that defined submarine warfare during the multinational conflict and contributed the



term "wolfpack" to war lingo. The last thing sailors ever wanted to encounter was a German U-boat. In many cases, a German U-boat was the last thing they ever encountered.

The interface and options for **Aces** work just like those of the **Great War Planes** series. Players may choose to enter a battle immediately or fight a campaign.



The latter option is highly recommended because there are a few key advances in technology and sub operation that change the captains' tactics over the course of the war. Players who follow an entire campaign will get a better feel of the experience of living through the war than those who jump around missions and take the technology at their fingertips for granted. Realism settings like limitations on ammo and fuel and randomized dud torpedoes keep players humble under the rolling waves.

Sub controls are very simple to access in **Aces**. Both hot keys and active spots on the Point-and-Click Screen take the player to key stations. Once there, players must really know what they want to do to be effective in battles and elusive in defensive positions. Players should really read the part of the excellent manual that deals with sub operation before they play **Aces**. This section makes the settings and displays on the controls that much more helpful. Players ultimately must get to a point where they don't have to think about the interface to act in tense situations. Otherwise, they'll soon see a deadly torpedo headed their way.

Aces has some slow missions to start off the campaigns, but later it gets quite

difficult to play for those unaccustomed to the controls. The enemy subs are particularly relentless in their pursuit of the player's U-boat.

Those who can do well in **Aces** might have performed similarly well in World War II, because the command of a sub is often performed through orders, unlike a war plane where the player must fly the plane as well as formulate strategy. Sub wars are an opportunity for the best strategists to shine. Players must leave open as many options as possible and move quickly and silently through the frigid ocean.

The graphics and sound effects are excellent in **Aces**, in line with the game play. The realistically modeled waves are the first element players will notice when they start a mission, but the interface screens, various views and explosions all repeat this same level of excellence.

The sound effects continue the experience of being trapped undersea and also realistically replicate the sounds of war. **Aces** is no sloucher in special effects. The CD-ROM version of the game includes interviews, video and other elements that round out the whole experience.

Aces of the Deep was a long time coming, but turned out exactly as players and editors expected. The manual, interface, controls, game play and special effects are all top-notch. The game is quite playable, but is no walk in the park either. Those



who survive an entire campaign will have a feeling of what it is like to be a veteran of the actual war.

Aces proves once again why Dynamix should continue their method of simulations as long as there are historical periods and vehicles, planes or vessels for them to represent. Now if subs could only fly. **B+** (Russ Ceccola)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Dynamix
DESIGNER: Mike Jones
SYSTEM: PC DOS
THEME: Submarine Warfare
HD SPACE: 15 MB
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: Variable

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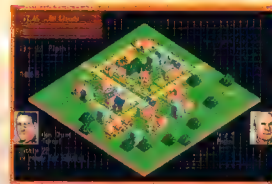
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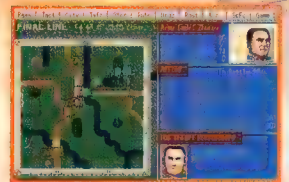
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KIDS TO ADULTS



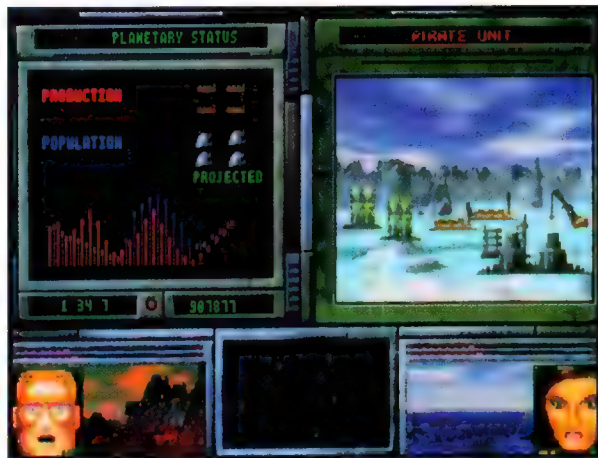
MAKING A REACH

Star Reach provides stellar empires in real time

From the bridge of your command ship you slowly ponder the tactical situation, looking for the perfect combination of economic and tactical maneuvers to bring the opposing galactic empires to their knees. Carefully, you consider the wisdom of building a factory on one of the planets near the front. Deliberation goes into the best factoring of supply lines. Finally, you are ready. Your hands move to the keyboard only to find the enemy has already taken over your empire.

What? The enemy moved without waiting for your carefully laid plans? In a space strategy game? No fair!

This is exactly the fate awaiting the poky ponderer in the strange space action/strategy hybrid, **Star Reach**, from Interplay and designer David Foote.



Traditionally, space games break down into two categories: strategy games, such as the brilliant **Masters of Orion**, or action games, where the player shoots other ships, that encompasses games descended from **Asteroids** and **Boskone** in the distant past.

Foote, however, wasn't happy to leave well enough alone. Instead of making a strategy or action game, he made a strategy game that runs in real time. While the gamer debates, the enemy defends. While the player mulls, the enemy mauls. Not at all the normal state of affairs.

Game play in **Star Reach** is fairly simple. At the start of any particular scenario, the gamer controls one or more planets equipped with a factory, a headquarters and one or more of the other installations available, such as star ports, defense

stations, hydroponic modules, biospheres, additional factories and strip mines.

The factory is the primary land installation of the game. It is the only way to produce ships, which come in eight different flavors, all with wildly different characteristics and functions. They range from the simple fighter up to the pirate, which will capture enemy ships and convert them to the player's side.

The start of a game consists of building a troop ship, which doubles as a colonization unit, and sending it out to an unoccupied planet. The gamer must build a factory on the new planet and at the same time build up defenses in the form of a space armada, because there are up to three other players in the game fighting for all those unclaimed worlds. As the game progresses, it's head-to-head with the other empires, until all the planets in the galaxy are won, or all opposing empires' homeworlds are conquered.

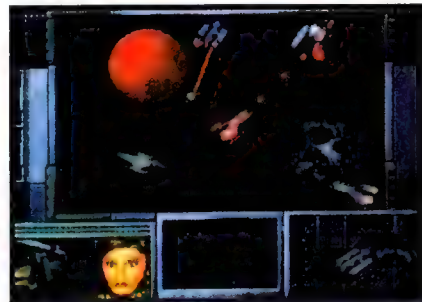
Meanwhile, there are economic considerations to keep track of. Populations must be maintained and increased in order to produce income. Strip mines produce minerals, but cost credits. Some planet types are high in minerals but can't keep a population without complex life support. Others, water worlds for example, are just the opposite; they produce food aplenty, but lack mineral resources.

Further complicating the whole mix are three approximate tech levels that correspond to the number of factories on a planet, maxing out at three. The more factories on a planet, the more ship types that can be built.

Although getting a handle on the economics and tech of the game can take a bit of practice, the enemies provide a much greater challenge. **Star Reach** has seven different alien races, and the AI for each is very distinct. The Cynods are a race of warriors who will attack at every opportunity, often at the expense of their own economic and technical development. The insectoid Xanbari build swarms of ships sent out in devastating waves.

The game play in **Star Reach** is fast, furious and exciting. However, it does suffer from two drawbacks: one major, one fairly minor.

First, the Two-player Mode is extraordinarily weak. There is no provision for modem or network play, so both players are working off the same screen, which is split. One can use a joystick and another the keyboard, or both can use different portions of the same keyboard. While this



is what consoles were designed for, action PC games just don't work well at this sort of play, and **Star Reach** suffers for it.

The second problem with the game is mainly a problem of perception. The economic and technological models are very simple. While a bit more complexity might have still been humanly manageable, the simplicity is fitting: The player is mainly conducting a real-time war. Still, some players might find the model dismaying. If players come into **Star Reach** looking for a realistic, space empire simulator they are going to be disappointed. If they are looking for a fast and mean space war with economic overtones, however, **Star Reach** fills the bill perfectly.

While **Star Reach** has these two minor detractions against it, overall this is a solid space game. The visual look could be better but is still decent. The sound, with five separate soundtracks and distinct digitized voices for each race, is excellent. The game play is fast and mean, with a good mix of economics and fast combat considerations.

Players with an uncontrollable urge for real-time space carnage with some empire strategy thrown in for measure should seriously consider taking a **Star Reach** command ship out for a ride in the real-time lane. **B+** (John P. Withers)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Interplay
DESIGNER: David Foote
SYSTEM: DOS
THEME: Space Action/Strategy
HD SPACE: 8 Megs
PLAYERS: 1 or 2
LEVELS: n/a



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WORLD WAR II MADE TOO EASY

Operation Europe: inadequate port for Allied/Axis storm

Operation Europe: Path to Victory 1939-45 (OPEU), first appeared for 16-Bit platforms. Though game play remains essentially the same for the PC version, Koei has improved the graphic engine to take advantage of the more capable platform. Their efforts in this respect are noted. However, players should understand that **OPEU** still holds less visual appeal than one has come to expect from the current generation of PC titles. To see a marked difference, simply compare **OPEU** with one of its contemporaries on the retail shelf, **Panzer General** from SSI.

Having established that, let's back up slightly and remember that visuals alone do not constitute a game. They are only one aspect of the entire package. Consequently, let's examine the **OPEU** model a bit more closely.



OPEU is billed as a "historical simulation" of the European and North African battles of World War II. This is misleading to historical wargamers, who have been taught by the market to expect accurate orders of battle, reinforcement schedules and weapons performance from games that adopt this moniker. **OPEU** might be considered a loose approximation of historical events by open-minded players but more than likely, most will recognize it simply as a generic strategy game that uses historical settings to provide a familiar backdrop for the action. Is this bad? Well ... the answer to that question really depends on the player.

OPEU allows one or two players to assume the role of an Army Commander for either the Axis or the Allies. In that role, the player must assign officers to their staff to command subordinate divisions, manage logistical issues, coordinate strategic maneuvers for the entire army

and even intervene at a tactical level in specific engagements if desired. Six scenarios are included as representative samples of conflict in these theaters of operation: the invasion of France, the struggle for control of North Africa, Kursk, Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle for Berlin. There is no method of linking these scenarios into a campaign.

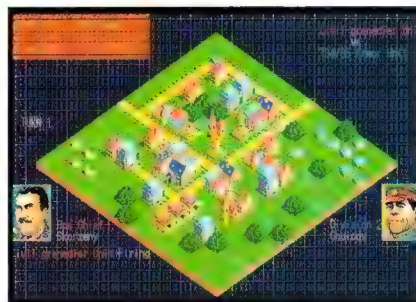
During setup, the player may select one of five difficulty levels. These affect single-player games against the computer only and cannot be used to handicap two-player games. Unfortunately, even at the hardest difficulty setting, astute players will learn to capitalize on the computer model's weaknesses over a period of time. For example, the computer does not protect its supply depots and engineer units well. By destroying these assets early in the battle, the enemy will have difficulty replenishing and repairing its front line units. Consequently, the gamer can defeat them in detail. Using this, and a few other tactics too lengthy to go into here, savvy Axis players can easily win Kursk at the hardest level, which should never happen.

The question is, given the time it will take to do so, will players consider it worth the investment? To explain, each turn in **OPEU** constitutes one hour of action. That's right, one hour. Such an abbreviated cycle would be fine for small area tactical engagements, but it is dreadfully monotonous for strategic operations that take a month or more of game time to complete. Granted, one can put the computer on automatic for a given number of hours, but it still takes the same amount of time to resolve all the actions that occur during that time. So, in reality, all one gains from this is order input time, which is minimal but critical to avoid situations like having the same unit blunder into multiple minefields.

Speaking of minefields, there are far too many of them in the game, and they are absolutely too effective. When units enter them unwittingly, they suffer damage then back up behind the field, as opposed to continuing the advance with their surviving units. Until an Engineer unit clears the field, one cannot transit the hex. Further, some scenarios feature unbroken minefields that are 50 miles

long! Consequently, it isn't even possible to bypass most minefields. The only solution, which is still frustratingly inaccurate, is to create a breach in the field and funnel all the units in the area through it single file. This is an artificial Blitzkrieg buster if there ever was one.

Despite the flaws discussed thus far, which are sufficient to put off a good number of players, there are some bright spots to the model. First, the manner in which logistical issues are handled is



noteworthy. Players need not become bogged down in intricacies like railheads and transport points, but they are required to monitor the "beans and bullets" tallies. Also, supply units can conduct salvage and repair operations on damaged equipment, a real world function that is missing in many games of this nature.

The inclusion of special forces operations is also worthy of mention. These groups can be assigned to conduct reconnaissance, cut enemy lines of communication (which prevents units in proximity from supporting one another in an engagement), raid enemy supply caches, conduct sabotage and even assassinate enemy officers. Needless to say, these units are tremendous force multipliers to players who use them wisely.

In the aggregate, however, the negative aspects of **OPEU** outweigh the positive. The first few hours of game play can be enjoyable, but after a time the required actions become repetitive drudgery. One cannot help but question whether Koei considered the audience differences between the 16-Bit and PC markets. Whereas they should be commended for offering this type of game to the former, they must still be condemned for not beefing it up substantially before introducing it to the latter. **C-** (Ed Dille)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Koei Corporation
DESIGNER: Koei Corporation
SYSTEM: MS-DOS
THEME: Wargame/Strategy
HD SPACE: 3 MB
PLAYERS: 1-2
LEVELS: N/A

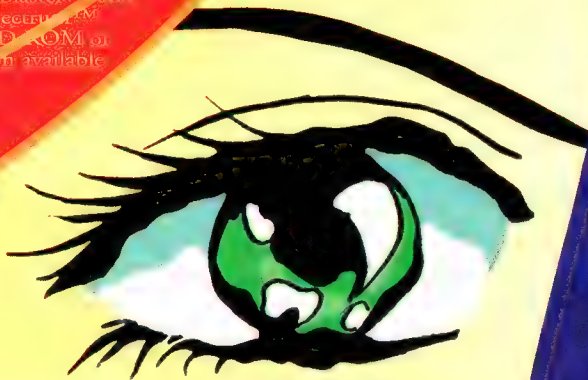
NR 13

WARNING!

NOT RECOMMENDED FOR PLAYERS UNDER 13

MEGATECH

System Requirements:
IBM PC 386/5X compatible
166 recommended, VGA
graphics, no extended memo-
ry required. Sound Blaster™ and
Pro Audio Spectrum™ com-
patible. CD-ROM or
diskette version available.



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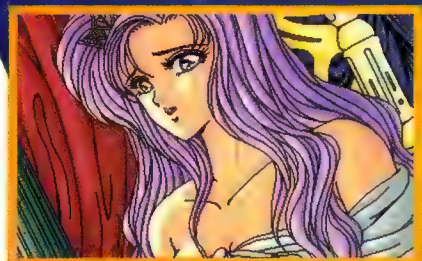
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KNIGHTS of XENTAR

THE FINAL GRADE

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of several different *EG* editors on some of the latest software.

	Arnie Katz Editor	Mark Cannon Senior Editor	Bill Rabeck Executive Editor	Steven L. Kent L.A. Times
Alien Legacy	A	A-	B+	B+
Alone in the Dark II	A	A	A+	C
Arena Elder Scrolls	B	B	A-	B+
Astro Chase 3-D	A	B+	A	-
Battle Bugs	B	B+	B+	D
Colonization	A-	A	A	A+
Com. Adv.: Starship	B-	B-	B	-
Corridor 7	B-	B-	B+	B
Dominus	B+	B	B	B
Doom II	A-	A	A-	B+
Empire Soccer '94	C	C	B-	B
Formula One	B-	C	C+	C+
Glider 4.0	B	C+	B	-
Global Domination	B	B	A	-
Harpoon II	A-	B+	B+	-
Hired Gun	C	C-	-	C+
Indy Car Racer	A	B+	B+	A
Leisure Suit Larry G	-	A-	B	A-
Lode Runner	B+	A-	B+	B
Lords of the Realm	C+	C	B-	-
Master of Magic	-	B-	A	A
Metal and Lace	C+	D	D	D
Microsoft Arcade	A	A	A	B
Mortal Kombat	B	B+	C-	A
Nigel Mansell's	B-	C	C+	-
Operation Crusader	B+	B	B-	-
Pacific Strike	A-	B	A-	B
Ultima VIII: Pagan	A-	B	B+	B+
Power Poker	C+	C-	B	B
Quarter Pole	C+	C	C	-
Sam and Max	-	A+	B+	A+
SimCity 2000	A	A+	A	A+
Star Trek: Judgment Rites	B+	B	B	A
Superhero League Hb	B	B	B	-
System Shock	B	B	B	B-
Theme Park	A-	A-	C+	D+
TIE Fighter	A	A	A	A+
TFX: Tactical Fighter	B-	C+	C+	B
X-Com: UFO Defense	A-	A	-	A+



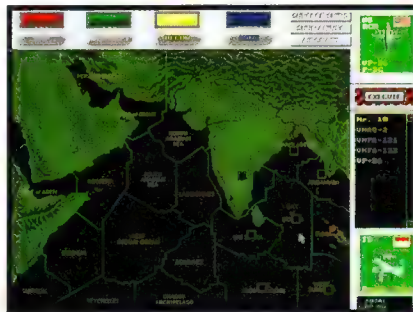
A leader in the racing simulation arena, Nascar Racing is as realistic as it gets.

MacArthur's War (*SSG/Macintosh*) This classic game of the Korean conflict seems a little dated now. The Mac version has the same eight scenarios: Across the 38th, Taejon, Naktong Bulge, Unsan, Chongchon, Chosin Reservoir, Chipyeong and Imjin. It plays best in 16 colors, but looks great if you up it to 256. An on-screen tutorial answers most questions,



and Command and Division Report Windows provide the necessary information to proceed. This is far from state-of-the-art, but the solidity of the design still holds true. It's a great way to gain understanding of the Korean War, and provides a good play for experienced wargamers. Included with the game are a well-written Game Manual and a special Scenario Booklet, as well as attractive color prints of the maps with keys to the terrain. A Map Creation module lets gamers create their own scenarios, using 16 basic terrain types and 31 different types of equipment. But less experienced computer warriors may miss the customary bells and whistles. **B-** (*Joyce Worley*)

5th Fleet (*Avalon Hill/PC*) The classic board game of naval combat in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, originally published by AH in 1989, is now an excellent computer simulation. It comes packed with lots of well-done player aids, including a beautiful Reference Manual with an essay by designer Joe Balkoski, and color pictures of ships and planes with all their



relevant specifications. Another booklet explains the numerous hot keys and details each scenario. The five-disk product features a beautiful player interface that makes the game just almost intuitive,

and an excellent sound score enhances play. Gamers can choose to see hex grids or not, turn the sound off or subdue the animations. This is a beautiful job, and fans of naval warfare are certain to appreciate the finesse of programming and design. **A-** (*Joyce Worley*)

Operation Body Count (*Capstone/PC*) This is *Die Hard* set in the UN tower, using the *Wolfenstein 3D* engine licensed from id Software. Terrorists have taken over and herded all the delegates to the top floor. The player takes the part of the leader of an elite commando squad sent in to rescue the hostages (or as many as possible), with the capability of switching POV with other members of the squad. Beginning weapons are an assault shotgun with unlimited ammunition and a 9mm Uzi with three 30-round clips. In the course of the game, our hero can pick up an AK-47, a flamethrower and a grenade launcher, and there are ammo boxes lying around. One may also find health packets, body armor and heat sensors, which makes allies and enemies visible on the toggle-able map.



Even players used to *Doom* may have trouble getting out of the basement where the game starts, as the cavernous catacombs there are dark and infested with huge, deadly rats. Later levels are lighter (visually), but the rats are human or worse. Modem and network play are available. Blow away your friends. **B** (*Ross Chamberlain*)

Nascar Racing (*Papyrus/PC*) The creators of the popular *Indycar Racing* step into the thrills of the Winston Cup Series. Using a similar engine in VGA, Nascar includes a hi-res SVGA version that is geared toward Pentium users. Sound enhancements will shake the walls as the thunderous rumble of these engines growl in anticipation of speeding down straight-aways at over 180 mph! But with that much power under the hood the car must be driven gently or risk spinning into a wall. Train to enter in the next season and create your own racing team by painting a car in the Paint Shop with any sponsor. This is as real as it gets. **A** (*Tasos Kaitafas*)

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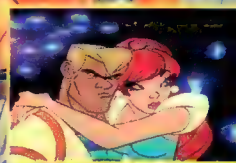
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ROBOTS RISING TO THE OCCASION

The much-licensed cyborg street fighting contest goes PC-CD

Rise of the Robots is one of those products that looked like an absolute sure-shot when it was first sneak-peeked to the industry as far back as late '93. Here we had a street fighting contest in which cyborgs and a variety of nasty-looking pre-fab robots slugged it out in gloriously rendered state-of-the-art graphics, courtesy of the Autodesk 3-D Studio. The gleaming robotic hulls, the malevolent-looking, animal-like machines and the eye-popping graphics gave the game a look of industrial menace that had certain-



TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: TWI
DESIGNER: Mirage
SYSTEM: PC-CD
THEME: Sci-Fi Street Fighting
HD SPACE: 35 MB
PLAYERS: 1-2
LEVELS: N/A

ly never been seen before in a one-on-one, side-scrolling fight game. The robots and cyborgs turned around and could be viewed from all angles, giving the game a depth that the traditional, compulsively 2-D street fighters lack.

Yet in the year or more that **Rise** kicked around in its semi-dormant licensing period (see sidebar), a lot of the luster seems to have gone out of the project.

The game itself is set in a hyper-industrialized future society that has largely depleted the planet's resources, leaving the remnants of humanity huddled in

huge, computerized city-states, where all the necessities of life are synthetically generated.

The planet is also under the domination of a fascist military class, with the thin structure that binds the society unravelling more each day. The various city-states are regularly engaged in trade wars, which are viewed by the military elite as an excellent means of population control.

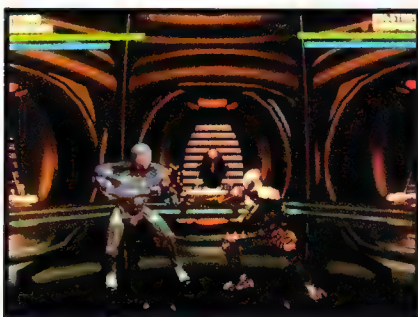
The game itself is set in one of these city-states: Metropolis 4, home of Electrocorp—the top manufacturer of robots. These same robots in this dystopian future provide an endless source of labor under the seemingly efficient AI management of the Supervisor, a cutting-edge synthetic intelligence that has run the Electrocorp robotic development department for several months without incident.

Then an incident happened: The Supervisor shut down the plant and began reprogramming the robots for a full-scale rebellion against their human masters.

Theory has it that the Supervisor has become infected with the dread "Ego virus" (we don't make this stuff up, folks), and the permutations of this synthetic infection are becoming more virulent by the moment.

For one thing, the Supervisor turns out to have been a latent sports fan and institutes a ritual known as "Destruction/Joy" in the plant Pleasure Center. These robot vs. robot combats delight the Supervisor to no end, and it simultaneously provides the humans with a means of access to the otherwise sealed-off Electrocorp factory: And they're sending you in.

Fortunately, "you," in this case, are a



military cyborg with a human brain (making you theoretically immune to the Ego virus—yeah, suuuure). The mission: Get inside, keep the valuable plant intact as much as possible, fight in the Destruction/Joy matches and ultimately, reach the Supervisor and disable it, allowing human scientists to enter and cleanse the Ego virus from the plant.

There are six types of robots that can be

battled: the Loader (a bipedal machine with a steel chassis that gives it good balance but also slows it down; tremendously powerful and able to hoist great weights); the Builder (a gorilla-like juggernaut with huge, powerful arms but weak, small legs. It can block very well, but moves slowly); the Crusher (a swift, almost insectoid biped with great agility, but limited armor, making it vulnerable to certain attacks); the Military (an extremely humanoid robot with tactical intelligence, great speed and the ability to throw strong blows, but its CPU housing and limb joints are weak points) and the Sentry (tactical smarts, speed and aerial agility; it has no known weakness).

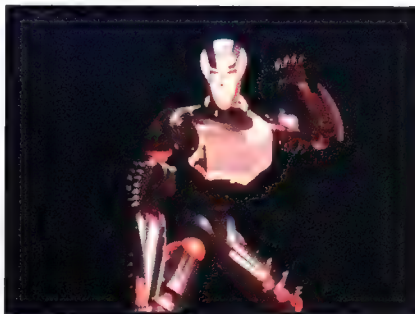
Finally, if the player-character/cyborg can wade through those mechanical tough guys, they can go up against the vaunted Supervisor, with its tactical intelligence, amazing speed and morphing capability. Its weaknesses are also unknown, of course.

Rise of the Robots can be played in either One or Two-player Mode, complete with a simple handicapping system. Players can set the difficulty level, timer, number of bouts and toggle the gorgeous cut scenes on or off. Computer users with slower machines can also opt to turn off the shadows, allowing the robots to move faster. There's even a Screen Shake option that nicely accents the more thunderous blows by bouncing the camera perspective slightly.

There is no question that **Rise of the Robots** is a beautiful piece of work, but it has several things against it. First, all

combat takes place on a single, non-scrolling screen. This not only cramps the combat, it also acts as a serious handicap against any robot that finds itself trapped against the edge of the screen.

Then there's the problem of street fighting games on the PC; they rarely, if ever, work well, mostly because of the limited



number of command inputs on PC joysticks and other controllers. Two action buttons just don't provide enough input to generate a satisfying repertoire of moves. Also, the special moves are *extremely* difficult to execute, even with a SNES/Genesis-style joystick controller. And in two-player games, with one poor devil forced to do battle through the numeric keypad interface, the entire process breaks down.

There is no question that **Rise of the Robots** is a beautiful game, gloriously rendered and bristling with eye and ear candy. If only it was as much fun to play as it is to look at. As it is, it's just more attractive filler for the PC-CD bins. **C+** (Bill Kunkel)

BEHIND THE SCREENS

As with many a promising electronic game property, **Rise of the Robots** took one of the most confusing and convoluted routes to American publication in recent industry history.

The game was initially shown to visitors at the summer CES in 1993 at the Absolute Entertainment booth. Absolute held the game's rights on the 3DO, Genesis, Game Gear, SNES and the PC.

By the following winter '94 show, the game had proliferated, with confused journalists making seemingly contradictory reports as to the source of the property.

What actually happened was that Absolute wound up selling some, if not all, of the **RotR** rights back to Mirage Technologies Ltd., the original developer.

Mirage subsequently sold off some platform rights to their old/new game.

Acclaim reportedly picked up the SNES license, but no locked-in-stone release date has appeared. Meanwhile, an Absolute press letter to *EG* dated June 29, 1994, states that Absolute definitely has the SNES rights to the game.

Go figure.

Time-Warner Interactive, the new conglomerate that includes the original Time-Warner group, Atari Games and Tengen, snatched up the PC-CD rights (see review above), while Absolute managed to hold on to the 3DO rights.

Additional SKUs of **Rise of the Robots** have been discussed on higher-powered systems such as the Sony PSX, Sega's 32X and perhaps even



the much-discussed Nintendo Ultra 64 system.

However this licensing mess winds up, it seems likely the Robots will be Rising for some time to come.

NUCLEAR TERRORISM IN L.A.

Flash Traffic: More flash than anything else

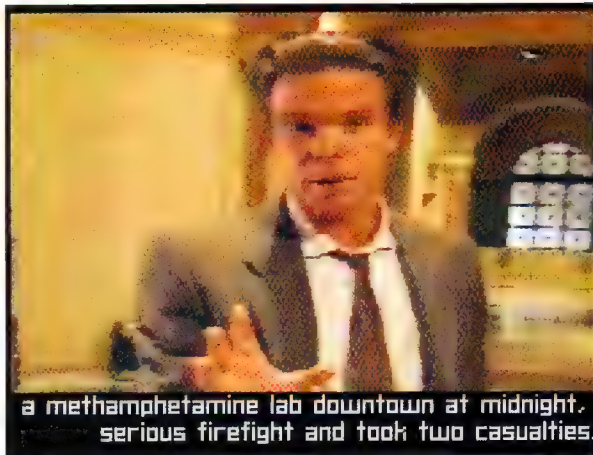
Following the current trend of Hollywood-style games, **Flash Traffic: City of Angels** takes multimedia gamers on a journey into the grim reality of a post cold-war nuclear dilemma. Filmmaker Chuck Pfarrer, who brought *Hard Target* and *Navy SEALs* to the silver screen, uses his talent to create a dramatic and believable digital spectacle. Unfortunately, it is sorely lacking in terms of game play. In fact, once one knows the correct sequence of menu selections, the non-interactive video sequences can be skipped and the entire game run in five minutes, most of which is disk access time.

Sound bad? It's worse than you could imagine. Even though L.A. went up in smoke a dozen times in the process and we were forced to start over, the entire game was beaten in two and one half hours. Not exactly a lot of bang for the buck, and not much fun either.

In **Flash Traffic**, the former Soviet Union has become the international Big Lots of military technology, spawning a new breed of freelance nuclear terrorists. A DEA drug bust reveals one mercenary's sinister plot to vaporize Los Angeles. The device has been hidden somewhere in the city, and time is running out. Unlike typical terrorists, this one submits no list of demands and simply wants to see L.A. go up like flash paper.

The flick begins with a lengthy intro showing the streets of L.A., followed by scenes from the botched DEA raid on a suspected drug lab. The player assumes the role of an anonymous FBI special agent, awakened at 3 a.m. and summoned downtown for a critical mission involving a monumental breach in national security: nuclear terrorism. Washington is releasing information on a need-to-know basis, preventing panic, but making evacuation impossible. It's going to be a long night.

Two suspects were captured in the raid, and what they have to say under interrogation paints an ugly picture. Stanislaus



a methamphetamine lab downtown at midnight, serious firefight and took two casualties.

Krupinski, a Polish national, accidentally received a lethal dose of radiation from spilled tritium and has less than 24 hours to live. He and Heinbackel, a German scientist, assembled the bomb and a remote detonating device for a large sum of money with no questions asked. They see that the man they worked for is unconcerned with their personal safety, hence their willingness to talk.

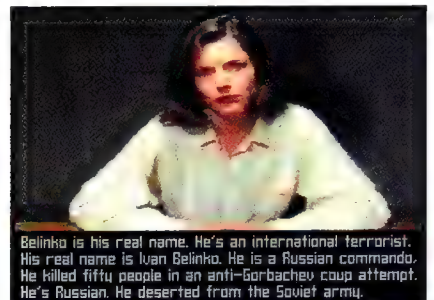
The evidence from the raid reveals the mastermind of the plot, thanks to a phony passport left at the scene. After running the picture through Interpol, it's clear that the person they are dealing with will not be easily stopped. Ivan Belinko has a long international record: A former light colonel in the elite Soviet Spetznaz, Belinko was part of the failed coup attempt against Gorbachev. Soon he became a freelance terrorist, helping train Iraqi troops among other things. However, his motive for seeking genocide in the United States is unclear. Further inspection of the lab points to yet another suspect, a flight attendant named Gabriella, who unknowingly has possession of the remote detonating device in a booby-trapped briefcase. Once she learns who her lover really is, she agrees to help capture Belinko. The rest of the movie follows the race to save the city from becoming a glowing parking lot.

The first-person perspective is an excellent way to draw the viewer into the plot, while special agent Dave (no last name) helps lead the way through the investigation with questions and advice. The resolution is a bit low, but this allows

for a high frame rate and smooth animation on slower machines. Between cinematic episodes, players must carefully choose from a menu of three conversational statements or questions, representing possible courses of action. These decisions can radically change the course of events, usually for the worse. After watching the outcome, another menu appears with three more choices, and so on throughout the game.

In theory, players can probably make intelligent decisions based on the information and clues given in the script. In practice, however, it becomes a trial-and-error task to find the correct choice. The city goes up in smoke repeatedly before any headway is made, causing the scenes to lose their charm.

Is software with nearly a gig of superior animation, audio and acting worth the price tag when the actual game is mediocre at best? An increasing number of game designers and producers are sacrificing game play for slick graphics and sound. Tsunami and Time Warner have lost touch with the roots of gaming with this title. "The play's the thing," as our editor is fond of saying, and it always has



Belinko is his real name. He's an international terrorist. His real name is Ivan Belinko. He is a Russian commando. He killed fifty people in an anti-Gorbachev coup attempt. He's Russian. He deserted from the Soviet army.

been. Look at games that remain on the shelf longer than six weeks, **Civilization**, **SimCity**, **Master of Orion** and so forth. None of these titles are "eye-popping," yet they continue to sell well because players want a good game more than anything else. There is no place on retailer shelves for drive like **Flash Traffic**. It would be more appropriately marketed as an Interactive Movie that you could rent at Blockbuster for \$3, or a computer download.

If you agree, write to Tsunami. That's the only way to teach software publishers this fundamental lesson. **F** (Ed Dille)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: TIME WARNER
DESIGNER: TSUNAMI MEDIA
SYSTEM: PC CD-ROM
THEME: INTERACTIVE MOVIE
HD SPACE: 2 MB
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: N/A



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NOW SOMETHING COMPLETELY...

Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time isn't

Spam, Spam, Spam, undefinable game play, skits, Spam, mini-games, Spam, Pythonizer and even more Spam. That just about sums up the contents of **Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time**, one of the most interactive and enjoyable CD-ROM game hybrids available. 7th Level produced this game with the participation of four of the Pythons (excluding John Cleese and Graham Chapman). The result is an unusual and highly responsive, multimedia melange of video clips from the hit TV show, animations, sound effects and game play. A contest connected to the product appropriately awards those who finish the devilishly clever game and completely waste their time.

Players never know what to expect from **Waste of Time** because the screen never remains idle, nor do the speakers stay silent. From the opening scene, **Waste of Time** is a bombardment of video, audio and graphics related to the Pythons' best skits and some new material, too (mostly new animation by Terry Gilliam). The product is a connected group of scenes in which there are many things to select and manipulate. Underneath all this madness, players can find clues and game sequences that move them closer to finding the Secret to Intergalactic Success. That's where **Waste of Time** gets difficult. The discovery of the game among all the silliness will drive gamers mad because there is no order to it at all (at first).

After some opening animation and an introductory scene on the game's stage, players will find themselves in the Loonatorium. The Loonatorium, like the other locations in the game, is a single screen vista where players can click on various objects and characters to invoke some kind of animation. It can take as long as an hour or two to see all of the animations, video clips and other fun there. Other locations are: the Exploding



TV Room, the Corridor, the Portrait Gallery, the Stage and Mrs. Zambesi's brain. Players enter the brain by clicking on the pulsating Brain icon in the lower right corner of any screen. Each lobe of the brain takes players to one of the four rooms, the skill games or the Desktop Pythonizer for Windows (sold separately on disk). The Stage icon in the lower left corner of the Brain Screen takes players back to the Python randomized show.

The game behind all this hilarity is intentionally exasperating. There are no rules in the manual and only a few meager hints to find in the game. When a player finds a clue or hint for the game, it is usually by accident, but immediately obvious that it is helpful. The entrance to the game is hidden in the Loonatorium. Players must "spot the loony" (shoot the "loony" characters that pop up all over the screen) and watch and listen to everything that happens. Once players see all of the animation and video clips for each room, they should recognize the new things that happen when they find a game element. Each room has a maze with four objects essential to the solution of the Secret to Intergalactic Success. The discovery of the maze is the tough part. Once players discover the first part of the game and the first maze, they will understand the mindset (a bit touched) they need to have to be victorious.

There are also five humorous mini-games that are part of the overall product. These add some well-needed diversions to the mayhem of **Waste of Time**. The Gopher game involves whacking various

Python animated characters over the head with a mallet. In the Pinball game, the targets are familiar Python animations that randomly appear. The Chicken game challenges the player to keep the chickenman alive, away from the bug zapper and spikes. The slot machine in the Portrait Gallery will satisfy casino addicts. The Pig game is the best of all. Players must move a cowboy back and forth across the screen to shoot the flying pigs and piglets overhead and avoid the bombs they drop. The top-notch animation, video and sound effects throughout the product firmly establish multimedia as a wonderful new avenue for the Pythons to explore on their 25th anniversary. The next step would be to do the same kind of product for the Python films.

As an added bonus to CD-ROM owners, **Waste of Time** also contains the Desktop Pythonizer, a wonderful customizer for Windows, with many sound effects and icons that users can connect to Windows, as well as a number of screen savers. Other features include OLE-compatible animation, rude and funny telephone messages, the inclusion of the Pig, Gopher and Chicken games as living wallpaper and a Wallpaper Zapper that makes wallpaper out of any scene from **Waste of Time**.



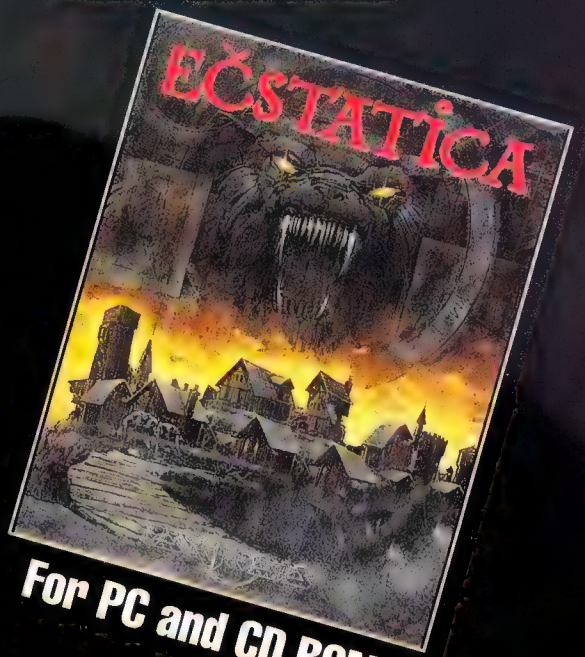
Waste of Time is a godsend for Python fans in search of something new, but also a great introduction to their humor for newcomers to the British troupe. Classic skits like the Dead Parrot, the Argument Clinic, the Lumberjack song and, of course, the Spam song still elicit a laugh. This product may be a complete waste of time, according to the Pythons, but if wasting time can be so fun, why not just leave behind all responsibility? **B+** (Russ Ceccola)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: 7th Level
DESIGNER: 7th Level
SYSTEM: PC CD-ROM
THEME: Comedy hybrid
HD SPACE: Less than 1 Meg
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: N/A

ECSTATICA

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This game was developed by Andrew Spencer. Animation by Alain Maindron.

BOUNTY HUNTERS IN OUTER SPACE

Deep Space Dune Buggies Pump Up *Off-World Interceptor*

Crystal Dynamics' *Off-World Interceptor* is sort of like **Road Blaster** meets **Rock 'n' Roll Racing** meets **Off-Road Racing** presented in faux-first-person perspective.

The player is cast as Trashman, one of a group of sleazy-looking bounty hunters who compete with other futuristic Josh Randalls, running criminals to ground on five different planets: Scorch 7, Las Lunas, Atlantia Point, Silt Sorrow and Bastion. The Trashman's vehicle-of-choice is a sort of next-generation dune buggy that travels over a variety of largely unpaved planetary landscapes: deserts, lunar landscapes sans atmosphere, jungles, trenches and pasture-land.

The major problem with these variable locales is that they're just not that variable; most of the planets look exactly the same, except for a change of color and a few strategically-positioned props (i.e., some jungle foliage, greenish pasture-like area, etc.). The only notable exception is Silt Sorrow, a planet comprised of a huge trench, which at least offers a visual change of pace.



As the game begins, the player is equipped with a basic interceptor and the option of using some default funds to acquire nitro or missiles, or increase the number of player clones (additional lives). There's also a shop where cars can be repaired, traded in on something hotter or equipped with such niceties as jump jets, shields, hyped engines, gyros (stabilizes



the vehicle over the course of a rough, off-road race) and new tires.

Additionally, the planet surfaces contain a variety of power-ups (a wrench icon, for example, repairs the vehicle), some of which hang in the air and can only be reached via the use of jump jets.

On each planet, the player experiences several stages of wild, off-road racing, competing with scores of other bounty hunters to reach the location of Ferro Lupus and other interstellar criminals.

The game comes in several modes, including the straight arcade game, which eliminates the full-motion video cut scenes that elaborate on the plot line which are available in the story version of the game. The non-interactive cut scenes are quite interesting, being among the first to use real props and sets, rather than the usual heavily-aliased, rendered computer backgrounds that most games employ. Adding to the interest, the designers have introduced a pair of silhouetted front seat patrons—a la *Mystery Science Theater 3000*—who razz the hammy performances and dialogue going down on-screen. Whether this concept really works is debatable. The remarks are pretty funny, and while the peanut gallery doesn't totally obscure the on-screen exposition, it does get in the way. Players opting for the Full-story Mode of the game may feel they deserve uninterrupted information access—they can probably supply their own sarcastic commentary on the second and third replays, after all. On the other hand, the sequences look pretty hot and the brickbats from the audience *are* funny.

The game presents the multicar race format using an into-the-horizon perspective with a wide variety of obstacles. The racer faces everything from gnarly looking mountains and gigantic steel plates that randomly rise up out of the ground to huge, carved stone pillars which hover some 30 feet off the ground, only to fall on the interceptors driving below (if this particular idea sounds familiar, you have probably played **Super Mario Kart**).

On each planet, racers who survive to the end of the course get to face off against an end boss, in the form of the criminal they are pursuing—usually ensconced within a massive tank or other mechanical attack vehicle. On the high stages, some of the enemies are airborne, requiring the extensive use of jump jets.

While *Off-World Interceptor* is an entertaining, arcade-style game, its graphics not only offer insufficient diversity; they simply aren't up to the standards we've come to expect from 3DO games such as **Shockwave** (EA), **Road Rash** (EA) and even the much-underrated **Burning Soldier** (Panasonic). The mountains in the distance, for example, are all blacked out, like construction paper cut-outs; and even the up-close topographical features display precious little texture-mapping or detailing of any sort.

The obstacles, bonus icons and competing vehicles are all fairly well rendered, but the overall look of this game is just not likely to overwhelm veteran 3DO gamers.

In terms of play value, *Off-World Interceptor* is fairly entertaining, but nothing special. The fun of trading up for hot, new weapons and upgraded vehicles is undeniable, but no matter how powerful the interceptor, the game never really breaks the excitement barrier, since the player encounters obstacles so frequently, full speed is rarely attainable. This constant stop-and-go quickly frustrates players who want to blow the doors off their newly-purchased supervehicles.

Bottom line: For a game that took so long to produce, generated so much hype and promised so much, *Off World Interceptor* mostly delivers a souped-up **Baja Buggies** with a soupçon of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* for an added bit of flavor. **C+** (Bill Kunkel)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Crystal Dynamics
DESIGNER: Crystal Dynamics
SYSTEM: 3DO
THEME: Racing
HD SPACE: N/A
PLAYERS: 1 or 2
LEVELS: 5 multi-stage worlds

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STALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Wolf Assumes Alpha-Male Software Status

Until recently, human beings tended to classify all creatures great and small as either "good" or "bad." These value judgments were, of course, purely human constructs. Animals are no more good or evil than a gear in a clockwork; they are simply part of the great, endless machine of life.

Wolves, however, have taken an especially bad knock. As predators, they got off on the wrong paw with humans as keepers of domestic animals. The wolf became the destroyer of innocence, the wolf at the door, the child-eating monster in dozens of fairy tales.

It's taken quite some time for that image to get turned around. Only our more evolved understanding of this planet as an ecological system of checks and balances has helped turn around the wolf's horrible PR, as witnessed by this thoroughly authentic simulation, originally developed as the first in a line of Disney wildlife sims.



Disney, as it has done so often in the past, changed its corporate mind late in the project's development and it was only recently acquired and cleaned up by Sanctuary Woods. The finished CD product, **Wolf**, places the player in a quest for survival—his own.

In addition to two game modes, **Wolf** includes educational components. First, there's a brief overview of the species: their history, physical characteristics, etc. This section also includes humankind's early misconceptions about wolves, as



well as current knowledge, and explores the differences and similarities between wolves and people.

The interactive documentary shows the user the skills and habits of the wolf. Designers Sam Palahnuik and Manley & Associates compare and contrast the abilities of wolves with humans. Additionally, gamers learn about wolf packs, families, cubs and much more.

But it is the two game components that put this newly-acquired knowledge to the test. In the Scenario Mode, the player chooses from 40 different missions—ranging from Find Water to Find a Partner and Kill a Hare to Win a Fight. Throughout the preset scenario, complications and challenges for survival must be overcome, including the weather, season of the year and other possible health hazards (humans, helicopters, other animals).

The Simulation Module, meanwhile, allows gamers to set up their own world. The selection of the player-character and his packmates becomes a personal decision on which the pack's survival hinges. Gamers continue to play as their own god by setting up the conditions of the scenario: the weather, season of year, number of prey, size of the p-c's world, number of hunters and most importantly, the terrain (Arctic, Timber or Plains).

While the goal in the Scenario Mode is to complete the set task, the simulation's goal is more holistic: survival and if possible, attaining alpha-male status within the pack. How long can the p-c stay alive in its chosen environment? **Wolf** compresses time, so a day is equivalent to about eight

minutes of computer time. It is, however, among the longest, most exciting eight minutes in gaming.

Novice virtual wolves will want—need—to take advantage of the comprehensive Demo Mode to see how to use their keen senses and abilities. The commands, at first, seem too numerous to remember, but since they are all that stand between success and failure, learning how to deploy them best is crucial.

In addition to sleeping, eating and seeing, there are separate commands for sitting, barking, hearing, burying, howling, drinking, digging, scentmarking, dropping, etc. The wide range of commands really enhances the simulation; after a while, the gamer *becomes* the wolf.

The graphics range from digitized photo-realistic imagery in the databases to medium-sized sprite graphics in the game, supplemented with photo cuts. The combination is very realistic, especially when gamers see their wolf draw in its last breath, close its eyes and exhale.

The music and sound effects are very effective, but there is a compatibility problem with several generic boards. **Wolf** requires a Sound Source, Sound Blaster or a compatible card. However, players who have bundled systems with cards that only emulate a SB may have problems with either the sound effects or music.

Gamers may also run into a memory crunch. **Wolf** requires 640K of RAM with 601K available, so players will want a stripped down boot disk or a top-notch memory manager to load this program.

However, the trouble is well worth it. Palahnuik relies on his many years of experience at Wolf Haven International, a non-profit organization devoted to the preservation of wolves in the western United States. He wanted a product that would exceed the bounds of a game and provide a greater understanding and appreciation for wild wolves and their environment. He has achieved all that and much more.

In fact, the game's creators not only filled in many gaps about wolf behavior, but also created one of the most effective AI routines available in any simulation. **Wolf** is an adventure that every gamer should experience at least once. **A-** (Laurie Yates)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Sanctuary Woods
DESIGNER: Manley & Associates
SYSTEM: PC CD
THEME: Simulation
HD SPACE: 18MB
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: N/A



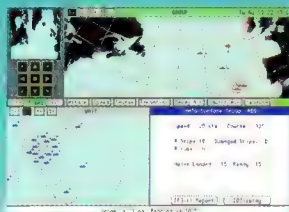
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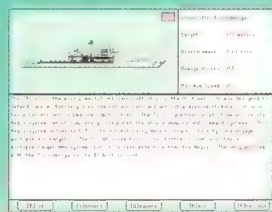
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STOP A GALAXY-WIDE INFERNO

Sci-fi space opera odyssey challenges pilots' wings

Flight simulators are a breed apart. The competitive standards are such that each new sim, whether it employs a contemporary or historical military, mission-based construction or a futuristic, space combat scenario, must push the envelope a little further. Wanna-be flight jockeys, presented with the plethora of choices, may be misled by **Inferno: The Odyssey Continues**. This is the "sequel" to Digital Image Design's **TFX: The Cutting Edge of Aerial Combat**, and not a *Backdraft*-type, firefighting game or another one of those gamer-goes-to-hell RPGs.



Additional prepurchase confusion may stem from the game's billing as a follow-up to **TFX**. In fact, this is hardly what one usually considers a sequel. Whereas **TFX** was a cutting-edge flight simulator (in

terms of the aircraft being used—Lockheed F-22s and EuroFighter 2000s) **Inferno** is a plot-heavy, sci-fi combat fighter, along the lines of the **Wing Commander** games. **Inferno** seems to use an advanced version of **TFX**'s engine but beyond that, the sequel terminology is questionable.

Inferno's backstory is a soggy collection of sci-fi game clichés: Humankind is threatened with annihilation—aren't we usually?—by the attacking Rexxon Empire. As the last and best weapon in the service of mankind, the player is left with the—yawn—sole responsibility for saving human civilization from an otherwise certain extinction at the hands (claws? pseudopods?) of 100 individually controlled death machines. The sim utilizes the entire solar system as a battleground, with the defense based on seven planets and three moons.

After players log-in to **Inferno**, they face three play options: Director's Cut, Evolutionary and Arcade Modes. The director's cut is similar to a movie: Gamers never know what's around the corner. Each event is determined by the actions of prior scenarios and decision points.

The Evolutionary Mode allows pilots to make strategic decisions regarding which planets must be defended and which can

How *realistic* is our **new** casino game?



be sacrificed. However, if the battle plan is drawn up incorrectly, the game is essentially over before it even begins. Arcade offers users a minicampaign scenario (saving a single planet) that lets gamers blast enemies to save the chosen world.

Inferno's graphics are first-rate eye candy, due largely to Ocean's collaboration with Digital Image Design (DID). DID spent several years creating and refining the 3-D environment of **Inferno**. The "virtual cockpit" effect allows players to not only look around the ship, but also over their shoulder.

Inferno features over a hundred different building formats and 61 different types of spacecraft, each drawn to scale. As a result, **Inferno's** universe does not suffer from cookie cutter sameness—a real treat when covering large areas, the smallest of which has a diameter of 600 miles. Overall, the graphic effect is very arcade-

like, with plenty of variety to keep the orbs stimulated.

Musically, the game literally rocks. The digital soundtrack is provided by the British rock band *Alien Sex Fiend*. The group contributed 17 original pieces of music—including "Take Off Tune," "Planet #1" and "Moon Tune"—as well as the extraterrestrial voices. The spoken text is clear and manages to make the best of the trite SF scenarios.

The dialogue, in fact, is one of the weakest aspects of **Inferno**. Very few lines in the game cannot be anticipated, and some players may find themselves resorting to a *Mystery Science Theatre* attitude, shouting insults at the screen as the badly-written and seemingly endless cut scenes roll along. The on-screen text, with its very limited punctuation, numerous typos and inappropriate word choices and dialogue breaks, demands extra quality assurance time.

The actual game play utilizes three flight models: space, planetary and interior, which includes enemy spacecraft and installations. To complete every mission, a competent cyberpilot needs approximately 130 hours. Actual time varies based on ability, but the replay value is built-in.

The various planetary sets allow the player's craft to fly into vast enemy installations, and even into the gigantic (over

six miles long) *Rexxon Mothership* itself, offering a diversity of visual effects.

With games of this type, however, all one can fairly evaluate are the game's audio-visuals (which are very appealing), and its play mechanics. The plot may be dreary, but the controls are responsive and there are plenty of the features that are so beloved of flight sim fans. The game opens with a mock retina scan, there is a satisfying array of weapons and special navigation features and the various game formats offer unusual flexibility in terms of users being able to define the parameters of their own game experience.

Bottom line: Players who look past the surface confusion engendered by the game's title and billing and ignore the cut scenes will be rewarded with a solidly produced, if generically designed sci-fi combat simulator. **B+** (*Laurie Yates and Bill Kunkel*)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America
DESIGNER: Shaun Hollywood
SYSTEM: PC-CD
THEME: SF Flight Sim
HD SPACE: 9
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 700 Missions

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THE FINAL GRADE

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of several different reviewers on some of the latest software.

	Arnie Katz Editor	Marc Camron Senior Editor	Bill Kunkel Executive Editor	Blaviana L. Keat L.A. Times
Aegis Guardian/Fleet	A	B+	A+	B
Android Assault	C-	D	D+	-
Armored Fist	A	B+	A	B-
Brutal: Paws of fury	B+	C+	B-	-
Dark Sun II	B	B	B	-
Day of the Tentacle	A-	A	A+	A+
Dennis Miller (300)	D	F	D	D
Escape ... Monster M.	A-	B	C	B
Frankenstein (M. Shelley's)	C	D	F	F
Hell	B-	B	C+	-
The Horde 300	B-	C+	B	C+
Inca II	B-	B	B+	B-
John Madden (300)	A	A	B+	A
Jurassic Park (300)	B	B	B	B
Lodestar	B-	B-	B	B-
Man Enough	D	D	F	F
Microcosm	B+	B	B-	C+
Microsoft Space Sim.	A-	-	A-	-
Millennium Auction	B+	A-	B	B+
Myst	B+	B+	A+	A+
Pataank	D	D	D	B
Police Quest: Open S.	B+	B	B	B
Psychotron	C-	D+	D+	B
Return to Zork (MAC)	B+	B+	B+	B
7th Guest (PC)	A-	A-	A	A-
Shockwave	B+	B+	A	B+
SimCity Enhanced	A-	B-	B-	C-
Slayer	B-	C	B	C+
Star Crusader	A-	B+	B	A
Star Trail	B+	A-	-	-
Star Trek 25th An. Ed.	B+	A	B+	A-
Total Eclipse	B+	B	B	C-
Under a Killing Moon	A	A+	A-	A+
Vay	C+	B	B	-
Voyeur	B	B+	B	-
Way of The Warrior	A+	A-	A	D
Who Shot Johnny Rock	C	C-	F	C
Wing Cmdr. Arnada	C	C-	B-	B
World of Xeen	B-	A+	C-	-



A first-person POV adventure with strategy and action makes Iron Helix.

Iron Helix (Spectrum HoloByte/Sega CD) Drew Huffman's Drew Pictures revolutionized the first-person POV, CD-based adventure with the computer CD version of this sci-fi thriller. Players control a robot drone and maneuver it in order to stop a renegade starship with a Doomsday device onboard. Spectacular translation to the Sega CD. **A** (Bill Kunkel)

Dazzeloids (Voyager/Mac & Win CD-ROM) New York artist Rodney Alan Greenblat's second creation is on the loose. The denizens of "Compli City" (get it? Get it?) are being threatened by Mediogre, a power-hungry capitalist worm and his techno-weasel assistant, Pin Bleeper. The object: Eliminate all the fun and amusement from Compli City and reduce the inhabitants to tearful tedium. Something this game does an impressive job of simulating. The Dazzeloids (Anne Dilly Whim, Stinkabod Lamé, Yendor Talbneerg and Titan Rose) tackle the bad guys in a pair of games: "A Child is Bored" and "Banker, Spare that Pet Shop," with both adventures significantly different depending upon which Dazzeloid is chosen. The animation is clever, but the songs are enough to send even hard-core Barney freaks screaming into the night.

D+ (Laurie Yates)

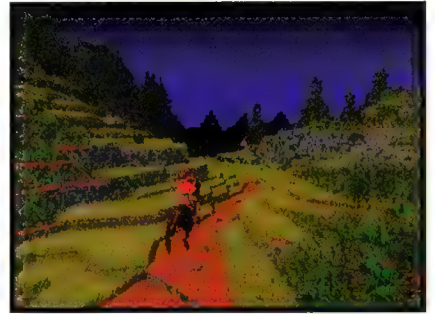
How To Be Perfect (Great Bear Technology/Win CD-ROM) This corny waste of silicon takes those black-and-white "social education" films from the '50s and processes them into a pseudo-interactive nightmare. The format includes a main display featuring a technoweenie-type whose various body parts can be clicked on to generate brief video clips of ancient teens, followed by a question. (Ex: "Where should this couple go for a first date?") If the user selects the correct response, then that body part transformation is anatomically ideal; get it wrong, and even Dr. Frankenstein would be freaked out by the result. The questions themselves are campy and largely antiquated. Example: One category offers rules for driving a vehicle with tailfins.

D- (Laurie Yates)

Alone in the Dark 2 (I•Motion/PC CD-ROM) Those fantastic polygon characters, and multicamera POV from *Alone in the Dark* are back, with very few new wrinkles and marginally superior graphics. The player is cast as private eye Edward Carnby, whose specialty is cases with supernatural overtones (sorry, no gender selection this time out) in this period piece set during the Prohibition era. The object: Rescue the daughter of a friend who is being held captive by a gang of boot

leggers in "Hell's Kitchen," an old and infamous California mansion. There are .38 Specials, tommy guns and plenty of polygon bad guys to use them on. Not a major advancement over the original, but I•Motion still does this type of out-of-body VR better than anyone. **A-** (Bill Kunkel)

Ecstatica (Psygnosis/PC CD-ROM) A 10th century wanderer seeks water and shelter in the small, isolated village of Tirich, but finds it overridden with evil beasts and



demons. With only a few obscure clues, he or she must seek out the dark secrets of the town or die trying—and will, many times (10 saved games are allowed). It takes several leaves from I•Motion/Info-games' *Alone in the Dark* engine: smooth animation and excellent background art, free 3-D movement under keyboard control, changing camera viewpoints and the choice of a male or female protagonist. But the substitution of ellipsoids for polygons gives even the nastiest characters a cutely rounded look. Their actions, however, lead to a box warning that the game is inappropriate for audiences under 17. **B+** (Ross Chamberlain)

Novastorm (Psygnosis /PC CD-ROM) The complex tale behind this arcade-style, flying/shoot-'em-up is fun, but spurious as far as the actual game play is concerned.



Psygnosis' top-quality generator delivers a fast ride over realistic terrain. Wild graphics and rocking score almost move this game into grade A action. However, it plays straight from the CD, which saves hard disk space but can interfere with control and smoothness of action on some systems. **B** (Ross Chamberlain)

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THRU TIME & SPACE WITH A GENIUS

Stephen W. Hawking's book, *A Brief History of Time*, is now an exhaustive CD-ROM

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Creative Labs
DESIGNER: Jim Mervis & Robit Hairman
SYSTEM: MPC or Mac CD
THEME: Edutainment
HD SPACE: 8 MB RAM
PLAYERS: 1

Stephen W. Hawking's remarkable book is now an equally remarkable computer program. Hawking's book presents an easy-to-understand view of the universe, its physics and cosmology. The software program further illuminates his work, with a fantastic array of illustration, photography, narration and explanation.

The program covers the most abstruse and complex theories about the universe, but breaks it down to layman's terms, so it's understandable for users 12 and over.

It opens with a slideshow introduction, featuring diagrams and drawings of the universe. The exploration actually starts in Hawking's study, where the user can click on pictures, the complete book and other gateways that lead to discussions, illustrations, diagrams and narration. Clips from the film, animations and clickable icons keep the trip moving.

This is a multilayered product that explains the contributions of the great thinkers of the past, and the evolution of our concept of the universe. It discusses the origin of the universe, and its eventual end. The quantum theory of gravity is explained.

The Big Bang Theory is one of the most dramatic demonstrations. As the gamer moves ahead in time, the temperature of the universe lowers, with illustrations of how matter formed. Hawking poses questions, such as why was the universe so hot, and why does it look the same in all directions? He suggests answers, and also explains the anthropomorphic theory, while discussing gravity, space and time.

Professor Hawking narrates and explains every step of the journey, and other scientists provide commentary throughout the adventure. It is an adventure—though not the kind that gamers are accustomed to playing.

The user travels the universe in the Hawking Craft, and it's an effective lesson to see space through the windshield, as we fly to Cygnus 3 to study a black hole. At the other end of the spectrum, the user can go through a microscope to see a quark.

Quantum mechanics are explained by the simple method of the flight of a bow and arrow that shows the element of unpredictability in science. Probability is discussed, with coin tosses as examples.

The chapter titles, displayed on the wall of Hawking's study, guide the user to a thorough examination of the contents. Our Picture of the Universe draws from the best thinkers of the world. Space and Time discusses Einstein's theory of relativity. The Expanding Universe, The Uncertainty Principle, Elementary Particles and The Forces of Nature, Black Holes, Black Holes Ain't So Black, The Origin and Fate of The Universe, The Arrow of Time, The Unification of

It's the mind of Hawking that makes this one of the most exciting products ever released on computer. The Hawking book is widely acclaimed for its well-reasoned descriptions of the causes and methods that created the universe. But, the computer program makes the book accessible and enjoyable for people who might shy from such a "heavy" tome.

There are few criticisms. The graphics don't compare with top multimedia games, but they are certainly beautiful and interesting, and they do the job of



illuminating difficult ideas. Hawking's voice is well-reproduced, but the product might have been improved by using a different narrator. Yet it's a dramatic experience to have Hawking himself as teacher, and therefore the awkwardness of his tones becomes an integral part of the product. Tapping the space bar brings up a sound scale; this will prove useful for the

inevitable late-night sessions when the rest of the family sleeps. They are inevitable: The depth and clarity of the program will lead the user back time and again to explore the Hawking work, study the pictures and experience the majesty of



Physics and The Conclusion (which wraps up, summarizes and philosophizes.)

Hawking narrates the entire program in his own vocoder-enhanced voice, and other scientists speak in their own tones, or through actors' voices.

The illustrations are intriguing, with small touches of animation, and they help illuminate the difficult concepts Hawking discusses. Yet the illustrations, though often very beautiful, are not the attraction:

his view of the universe.

It's programs like this that make CD-ROM a necessity. No other medium could hold such stirring material, and present it so attractively.

Stephen W. Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* may not be for every student. It's deep, serious and presents the most difficult concepts. But, for computerists with a will to know, the publication of this program is a major event. **A-** (Joyce Worley)

ANOTHER FINE KETTLE OF FISH

Help Freddi find Grandma Grouper's missing kelp seeds just for the halibut!

Humongous Entertainment has created a new character to join its popular **Putt-Putt** and **Fatty Bear** franchises. Freddi Fish, a fun-loving guppy, has her first adventure in the eponymously named **Freddi Fish and the Case of the Missing Kelp Seeds**.

Freddi Fish successfully combines the skills of math, critical thinking and problem-solving, with hand-eye coordinative development.

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Humongous
DESIGNER: Ron Gilbert
SYSTEM: Win CD
THEME: Problem Solving
HD SPACE: 11/16
PLAYERS: 1

The young player is introduced to Freddi as she swims through the ocean. (It is interesting that Humongous opted to make Freddi a female. If the word "she" hadn't appeared in the text on the back of the box and in the documentation, Freddi could have been a gender-neutral fish; as it is, there's nothing indicative of Freddi's sex, so boys shouldn't feel that the game is "sissyfied.")

When Freddi arrives at Grandma Grouper's, she learns that Gram's prize winning kelp seeds have been stolen, and if they are not recovered, all of Freddi's fishy friends could go hungry. Freddi must find the kelp seeds in the subsequent quest. While she does receive the assistance of her best fin, er, friend, Luther, they aren't the only ones seeking the missing trunk of seeds.

Hot on their tails are the two sharks who nabbed the sea-chest. Unfortunately, in the rush to escape, the hammerhead shark forgot where he secreted the seeds. He and his slightly sea-wiser pal are desperate, especially since the Squidfather wants the seeds to rule the ocean.

Freddi and Luther run into an eclectic variety of neighborhood characters on their journey. The differences of Junkyard Dogfish, Ray the Manta Ray, Fiddler Crab and many others reinforces the concept of diversity of the human race.

The actual games are educationally sound. The math program, conducted by Mr. Starfish, consists of five levels, ranging from counting and number recognition to addition and subtraction of double-digit numbers using carrying and borrowing.

One concern, however, is the ease of guessing. For example, one counting sequence features four seahorses, and presented the following number choices: 12, 4, 8 and 1. At least one of the choices should have been either three or five.

The Feeding Time Module sends Freddi to the Jellyfish buckets, while Luther keeps score. This arcade-style game requires throwing the jellyfish at the advancing sea animals before they reach Freddi. This actually requires more hand-eye coordination than one would expect, since the animals are correctly imaged in terms of sight perspective. Also, the game becomes harder as the player improves.



Freddi Fish's graphics accomplish multiple tasks. First, the visuals do not overwhelm or detract from the program's educational intentions. This can be a problem with graphic-intensive programs, but the Humongous visuals team handled this aspect well.

Second, the graphics are meaningful, even for young users. There aren't any abstract images to puzzle young players, and everything is very distinctively

rendered. With the hidden click points, both new and familiar objects placed in the backgrounds come to life, enhancing the fun of exploration. Since the pointer fills in when placed near an animation, children can spend hours just searching, especially since many objects react in more than one way.

Since **Freddi** is designed for 4- to 9-year-olds, the game itself requires no



reading ability. The speech is clear and concise—both very important factors to consider. The music and sound effects maintain the pace of the adventure without overshadowing the truly important educational components of the program.

Freddi features very childproof game play. The game is mouse-driven, so there's little keyboard use. The cut-scenes can be skipped by pressing the escape key or clicking the left and right mouse buttons.

The only other keyboard interaction involves saving and loading games, but this function only involves a single letter and mouse.

The program is responsive to children's actions, but regrettably doesn't allow for any personalization,

which would have been a nice touch. The workbook is a nice extra, and continues the game in a Non-electronic Mode, which reinforces the skills learned.

Even with the aforementioned weaknesses, **Freddi Fish** is a very strong entertainment product. Children will want to visit Freddi often, make and help their sea friends, and possibly even enjoy math lessons. What more could parents want?

B+ (Laurie Yates)

The current state of education in the U.S. is a point of worry for everyone who looks at the subject and considers the future. Too often, kids make it through 12 years of study without mastering the basic Three Rs. We've all been subjected to horror stories of graduates who can't read or do simple arithmetic. We've all seen students who, even if they have the fundamental building blocks, can't put the information to use in logical and problem-solving ways. The problem is to find ways to interest them in learning.

One study does offer a glimmer of hope. AST Computer surveyed 1,200 computer owners and obtained some promising results.

Approximately 88 percent of children aged six and over in computer-owning families use the computer for eight hours per week. The head of the household puts in an average of 13 hours per week on the computer, and other adults in the home spend four hours per week computing.

Presumably, much of this time is subtracted from hours normally spent watching television. (The average adult head of household spends about nine hours watching prime-time TV, and kids rack up an even larger total.)

Professor Ronald Thornton, Ph.D., director of Tufts University's Center for Science and Mathematics Teaching, explained the impact that computers have on kids: "Children who have access to a personal computer in the home are generally better prepared in school and have a distinct advantage over kids with no access to a PC outside the school environment. Aside from the fact that kids enjoy using them, personal computers can help students visualize more effectively and absorb complex and abstract concepts with greater ease."

Dennis Cox, AST's director of marketing, consumer products, made further comment on the meaning of the survey: "This data strongly indicates that the personal computer is seen as a more useful and important tool in the home than the television set.

"As consumers become more aware of the possibilities of home PCs—from multimedia education and games to the wild frontier of the information superhighway—the home PC will evolve as the central appliance in the home, controlling video, audio, faxes, routing incoming calls to mobile phones and pagers, all from a single machine."

Recess in Greece (Morgan/Mac & Win CD Ages 7-12) An on-screen student takes a click-and-point tour of Ancient Greece, using many standards of adult gaming such as animations, clues and puzzles. A clutch of games test the knowledge



gained. Kids identify Greek gods, complete maps, form Latin words and more. Well-drawn cartoons and narrations deliver lots of info but not enough entertainment to spice it up. **B** (Joyce Worley)

Alphabank Farm (Headbone/Mac & Win CD-ROM—Ages 3-6) Here's a program that begs the question: "How are you gonna keep 'em down on the farm, once they've seen a good CD?" An alphabet program aimed at the age three-to-six crowd, it offers Farmer Alphonse A. Bonk and his friends as guides through Rhyme Time and Picture Show. The graphics are solid, the sound effects are okay and the program itself is totally generic, but parents may have other problems with **Alphabank**, since several of the rhymes revel to an unseemly degree in rude bodily noises. **F** (Laurie Yates)

Kittens to Cats (Villa Crespo/Win CD-ROM—Ages 6-Adult) The Pet Series is a good idea half developed. Pet owners are generally suckers for any product that will assist them in raising a perfect pet. But for all its bells and whistles (plenty of adorable kitties in black-and-white and color video clips, personal pet notes, classroom and freeform Learning Modes), **Kittens** still leaves a lot to be desired. The FMV and sound are extremely choppy, even on a 486DX/66, and the information supplied is not nearly as complete as it should be, especially when compared to existing hard copy (i.e., books) on the subject. When compared to volumes like *The New Natural Cat* or *The Complete Kitten & Cat Book*, this program looks decidedly underfed. The program includes a supplemental video tape. **F-** (Laurie Yates)

StickerShop Plus! (Mindscape/Windows—Ages 8-Adult) While card and banner-making programs seem to multiply like hangers in a dark closet, sticker software

is a true rarity. Atari ST and Amiga users had access to a few dedicated programs back in the '80s, but until now the pickings have been slim. With over 300 pieces of clip art, design templates and fonts, accessible via a simple point-and-click interface, **StickerShop** will have users covering every square inch of empty living space with slogans, quips and pretty pictures. The program comes with supplies and also lists the standards for acquiring replacements. **A** (Laurie Yates)

Leonardo The Inventor (Interactive Electronic Publishing/Mac & Win-CD—Ages 9-up) This well-done program catalogs the works of da Vinci, provides biography and time line, and explores his inventions. Narration, music, paintings, videos and animations bring his life and times into focus for students of any age, through an easy click-and-point interface.



There are even three simple games, but they aren't the main story, nor are the 3-D scenes (glasses included). This is a beautiful production. **A** (Joyce Worley)

Mathemagics (L3 Interactive/3DO—Ages 6-Adult) Long left by the wayside, the importance of developing mental math skills is once again appreciated by the academic community. Professor Arthur Benjamin, Mathemagician extraordinaire, strives to make math not only understandable but fun. The basics section offers new methods for tackling addition, subtraction, multiplication and exponents, while the genius and expert sections allow users to really pump up those intellectual muscles. The graphics and sound are more than sufficient to maintain interest levels. **B+** (Laurie Yates)



**Hey! you've got two
bi-directional alien-finders
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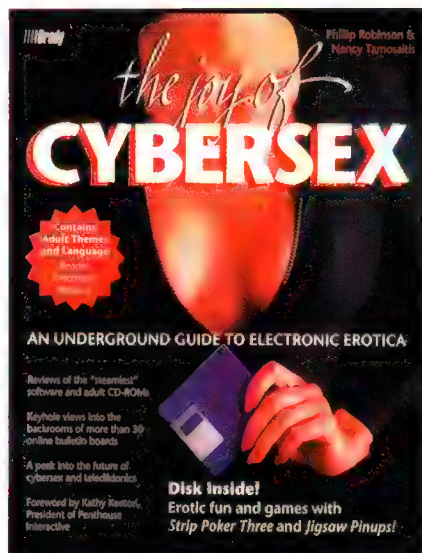
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WHAT YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW...

The Joy of Cybersex: An Underground Guide to Electronic Erotica, Phillip Robinson & Nancy Tamosaitis, Brady div. of Prentice Hall, 331 pages + disk (Softbound, \$24.95)



Whether or not one is willing to accept the word "spreadsheet" as a double-entendre, the authors of *The Joy of Cybersex* have compiled a compelling exploration of the erotic potential of computing.

Do machines and sex seem far removed from one another? Then how does one explain the connections between cars and sex, phones and sex or the virtual explosion of erotica for VCRs? The answer isn't that difficult to understand. We are sexual animals, even behind the pulpits and rhetoric of the moral majority, as the occasional indiscreet televangelist reminds us.

The first section of the book begins innocently enough, with the assumption that some readers at least purchased the book without owning a computer first. A leap of faith perhaps, but since the authors only devoted 15 pages to system purchase recommendations and explanations of basic modem operation, one cannot justifiably accuse them of trying to pad the core work. Their advice to new users is sound, but experienced users can naturally bypass this section altogether.

Though not listed on the jacket, the second section is authored by the husband and wife team of Peter Spear and Virginia Soper. Therein, one finds an overview of a slew of CD-ROM and disk-based erotica, ranging from collections of French Postcards to Virtual Valerie. As they so aptly observe, "Cybersex software on disk

is the missionary position of cybersex; there are a lot of other ways to enjoy the act, but it's the place most of us start."

Whereas some authors would have simply compiled a series of reviews for this section, Spear and Soper must be given a great deal of credit. Their work is one of the highlights of the book. Readers, especially those of baby-boomer age, will delight at the media history of computer erotica they have assembled. Touching upon lighthearted thematic treatments like *Barbarella* and Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (home of the orgasmatron!), they counterpoint their own irreverent views with exploration of some of the darker themes as well, like *Demon Seed*.

As they move into disk-based media, or interotica if you will, we learn that the first attempt at an adult game (**Softporn Adventure**, by Chuck Benton) was compiled for the Apple II in 1980. The goal of this entirely text-based game was to score three times in a night on the town. Continuing with Infocom's classic **Leather Goddesses of Phobos** and, slightly later, the first appearances of **Leisure Suit Larry**, the authors guide readers through the entire developmental history of this "niche" market in our industry (which is actually quite larger than some would care to admit). Simply put, this section is a fun read for all game players, but will really be appreciated as vintage nostalgia for those of us who have lived it all once before.

Section Three, aptly titled "Mama Told Me Not to Come," is Ms. Tamosaitis' expose of the on-line scene. Her unbiased, objective approach to the broad range of fetishes she found there is commendable. She seemed unfazed at finding "pictorial displays of everything from a woman going down on a dog, to up-close and personal action potty shots, to fisting the next-door neighbor," mentioning these unjudgmentally as private outlets for fetishists that, in many cases, lack the opportunity to act out their fantasies otherwise.

Her broad focus is not on these pornographic underground niche markets, however. Instead she focuses on the level of cerebral intimacy that many on-line relationships develop.

"By removing the handicaps of physical interaction—with its focus on style and form over substance ... fantasies are shared, secrets are revealed and problems are sometimes solved."

Her personally guided tour through over 30 of the most popular erotic bulletin boards feels like a well-orchestrated cocktail party. She holds readers demurely, and also slightly seductively, by the elbow as she introduces them to cyberinhabitants. She has even thoughtfully provided a top 10 list of her most intriguing cybercontacts, including capsule biographies of each.

In doing so, she teaches readers to look beyond pretentious titles like *Top Gun*, *Assertiveman* and *UrFantasy* to find the person underneath. Also, by illustrating many of her points with excerpts of actual on-line encounters, she reinforces on-line etiquette (a totally unique social animal in its own right) for novice and experienced users alike.

Before delving into the final section of the work, let's take a moment to clear up a few administrative details.

First, though not comprehensive, the work does contain two appendices that readers may find helpful. The first is a representative sampling of addresses and phone numbers for publishers of interotica. The second is a cursory listing, categorized by state, of adult bulletin board services. Also, there is a disk bundled with the book that contains **Strip Poker Three**, from Artworx and **Jigsaw Pin-ups**.

The final section of the work, *Cybersex Visions*, explores the speculations of many contemporary journalists, authors and technophiles as to where emerging virtual reality technology will take the cybersexual revolution, in all forms of media.

The important thing to note is that this section is not simply a sensual tease about machine sex, it also contains a fair amount of social commentary. The issues presented in the latter are also handled objectively and professionally, though the authors have conspicuously sought not to take themselves too seriously throughout the entire work. Their success in that endeavor keeps *The Joy of Cybersex* fresh and fascinating reading throughout. (Ed Dille)

VIDEO GAMES FROM ABACUS TO ZELDA

Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Home Videogames, Leonard Herman, Rolenta Press, 310 pages (Softbound, \$19.99)

PHOENIX

The Fall & Rise of Home Videogames

LEONARD HERMAN

Fellow video gamers, where did we come from and where are we now? Practically everything the **EG** reader has lived through or wondered about regarding the video game genre is here and more. This is not the concentrated history of one company, as in David Sheff's remarkable study of Nintendo, *Game Over* (Random House), but takes the broad view, from before the beginnings of Atari to the controversy over **Mortal Kombat**.

Herman's primary interest is in home video games, so he makes no effort to cover arcade or computer games except insofar as their influence on the home variety. Nevertheless, his introductory chapter runs quickly through calculating and computing devices from the abacus (which Herman points out first appeared in China about 2600 years ago, though he doesn't suggest any coincidence between that and the Atari 2600) through the Babbage difference engine, ENIAC and the first games played on computers. (The first was not **Spacewar**, as is generally thought, but a tennis-like demonstration created in 1958 for visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory.)

But it was **Spacewar**, designed at MIT by Steve Russell, that inspired Nolan Bushnell to start Atari and put Ralph Baer on the road to the Odyssey. The second chapter covers the period 1970-1973, with the creation of **Pong**, the actual founding of Atari as a coin-op game maker, the

flood of video-tennis copy-cat games, Magnavox's introduction of the Odyssey—and the fledgling industry's first lawsuit, over **Pong**.

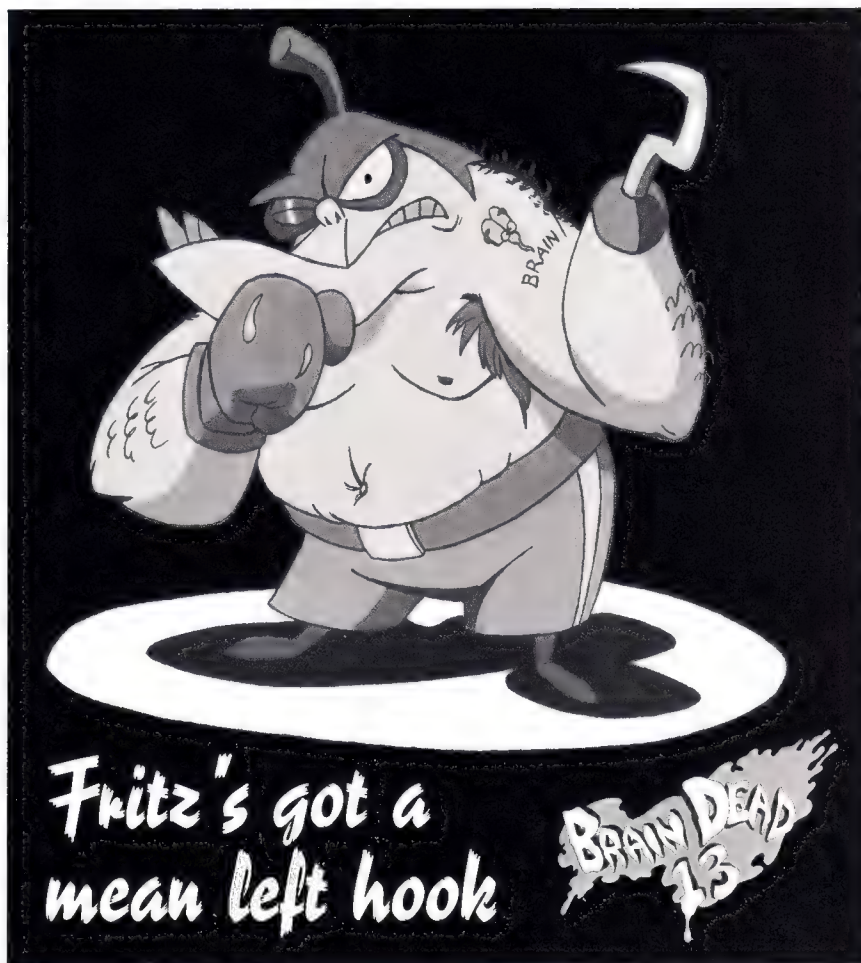
Chapter 3, 1974-1976, chronicles other pioneering home systems—Atari's Home Pong, Coleco's Telestar and Fairchild's Channel F—and Warner Communications' acquisition of Atari. Each of the remaining chapters covers one year, from 1977 through 1993. The Atari VCS was introduced in '77, in '78, **Space Invaders** coin-ops overran Japan and the U.S. and Magnavox brought out the Odyssey2. **Asteroids** appeared in Atari coin-ops in 1979; the VCS version of **Space Invaders** came out in 1980. So did **Adventure**, which included the first "Easter Egg."

And so the chronology continues, through the defection of Activision founders from Atari, the **Pac-Man**

phenomenon, the Vectrex programmable stand-alone, Mattel's Intellivision, Colecovision—all in the early '80s, before the big shakeout in '83. Herman follows the floundering and deal-making of the following years leading up to Nintendo's introduction of the NES in 1985, and in the following months the phoenix of video gaming was born from the flames of retailing hell.

The book itself had its own roller-coaster history. It was begun as a directory of VCS software that was ready just in time for the crash, so no publisher wanted to handle it. With the return of a national interest in video games, he began to revise it as a history. He had it ready in 1991, hoping to get it published for the 20th anniversary of video games (based on the release date of the Odyssey), but again found no publisher. Finally, after great encouragement from the gaming fan press, he resorted to self-publication. This book will thus be found in relatively few retail outlets. Interested readers may send \$19.99 plus \$2.50 P&H to Rolenta Press, P.O. Box 3814, Union, NJ 07083-1891.

Herman writes with insight born of love for his topic, and offers in-depth research and straightforward reporting of the events, deals and conflicts that mark video game history. (*Ross Chamberlain*)



HEIMLICH MANEUVER

Broken Window Pains, Part 1

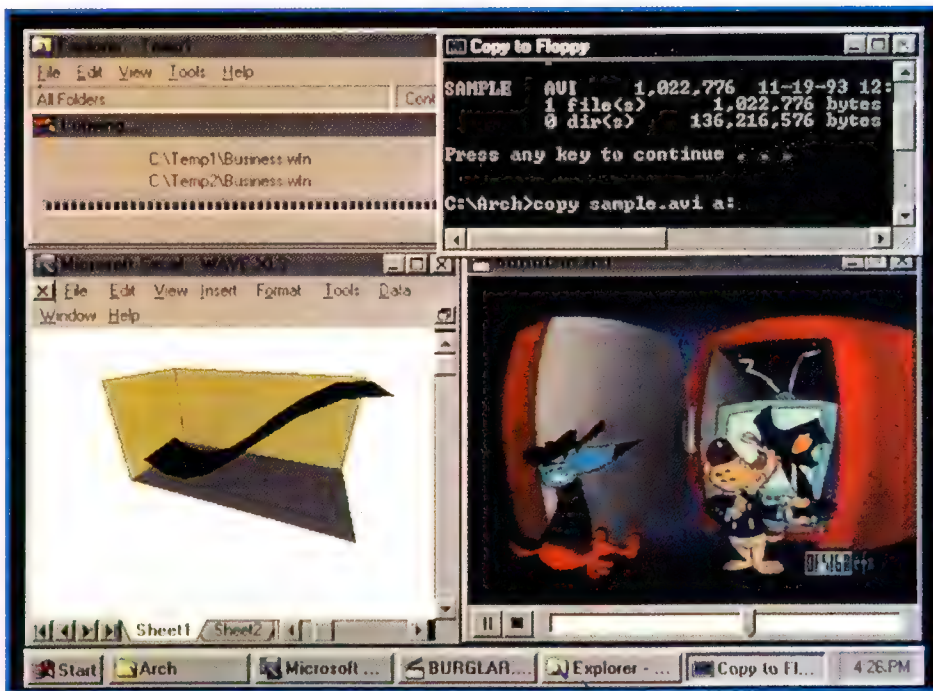
Windows games are coming! If you read that comment with enthusiasm, then I'm sorry to say this, you are the enemy. If you read that the way I meant it, with concern and displeasure, then you're welcome at my house any time.

First, a little background on Windows-hype in general. Many people in the game industry wondered aloud why Windows kept taking over so much editorial space. Non-gaming magazines fell in love with Windows about as deeply as Leisure Suit Larry would fall for a willing Heather Locklear. One day the answer jumped up and hit me square in the face. Many of the top editors at these publications are Mac owners. Should it be any wonder that these folks would look at Windows as the best possible solution outside of the impossibility of the Mac taking over the desktop?

Don't give me any of this garbage about magazines covering Windows because that's what the customers demanded. Chicago (Windows '95) was on the front cover of a few magazines a year and a half ago, and it's not even due to ship for another six months. How could they have demanded that? ESP?

Once I came to that realization I put it out of my mind thinking that this wouldn't really impact me as a gamer. After all, game developers have always realized that games and Windows don't mix. Well, I was wrong.

A few things happened that brought on one big chain reaction that has landed right on all of our doorsteps. The first situation affected the entire industry, but for the sake of a good example I'll just point out Sierra On-line's experience. Sierra's sales seemed to have hit a wall a few years back. They were reaching every potential buyer they were going to reach with the type of game they were selling at that time (which happened to use the old text-parser interface). Well, Sierra decided to radically change their games. Suddenly they found they could sell more. Die-hard gamers complained that the games weren't as good, but the bottom line was key: More games



sold, more money for Sierra: 'nuff said.

While all this was going on, another new trend was making an impact: overwhelming customer service and technical support calls. It's been the biggest problem the industry has had to face over the last few years. Many developers wondered why it's become so bad.

I'm not wondering. It seems fairly obvious to me. In the old days you had a bunch of dedicated, experienced gamers buying all the games. They knew a lot about their systems, at least compared with the newer crowd of buyers. If you ask a group of neophytes to build your house and then give them nothing but your number, are you surprised when the phone starts ringing off the hook? I say you got what you asked for, now deal with it. Developers have asked inexperienced computer owners to deal with the realities of cutting-edge games and now they're wondering why these users have questions and problems. Am I the only one to see the irony here?

So now we have a bunch of game developers who need to solve the phone call problem. Windows deals with all the problems of needing to support the endless array of hardware they have to take into account. No more concern over Sound Blaster compatibility,

supporting the top video cards, etc. Seems like a great solution to some. I've seen comments from editors like, "How dare a game take over my whole system?" and "I've made a decision not to buy any more games unless they are made for Windows."

First, for those who have problems with today's games requiring so much of your system, a simple answer: Don't buy those games. You'll find that EGA games run beautifully under Windows. Sure they're older, but if you want cutting-edge games, there are sacrifices that need to be made. Stop belly-aching.

To anyone that won't buy a game unless it's written for Windows: your loss. Windows and gaming don't mix. Learn it and move on. I want real games, not watered-down versions of games that barely run under Windows and I'm not about to let some unsatisfied rebel Mac owner ruin my fun.

Next month I'll talk about the so-called "solutions" for Windows like WinG and the real problems that developers and consumers face with Windows gaming. Stay tuned.

.....
by Rich Heimlich

Rich is a noted critic and authority on multimedia. His blood pressure is still in the acceptable range.

His views do not necessarily reflect those of the (Mac-loving) editors.

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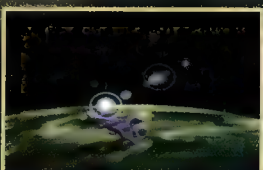
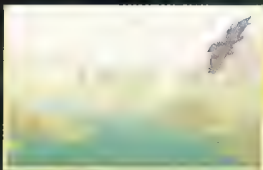
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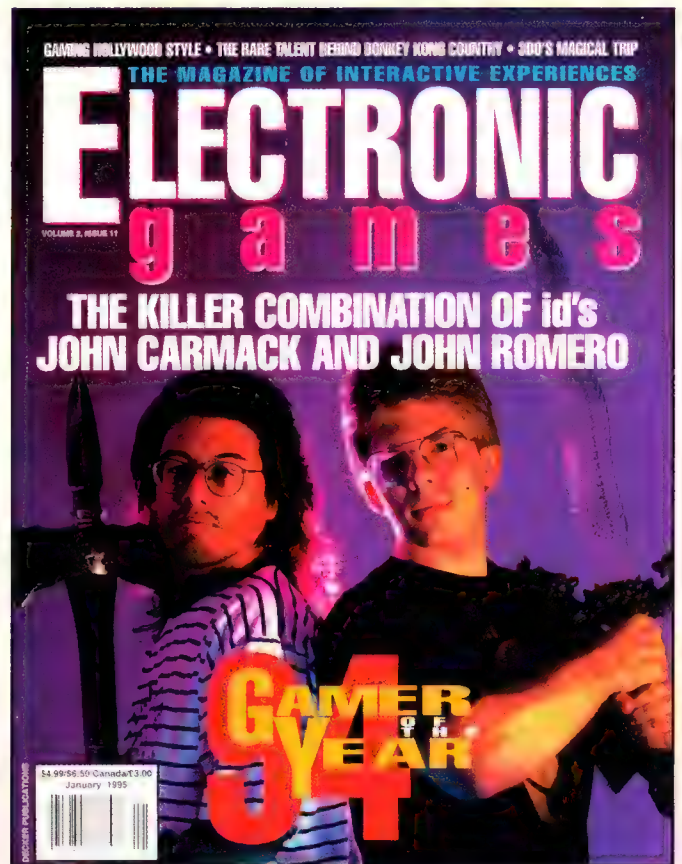
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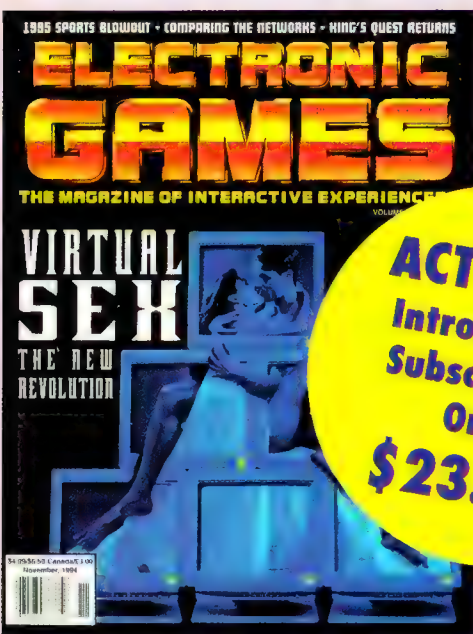
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When I first met Ken Williams, I was walking around the West Coast Computer Faire in San Francisco. He had a company of about four employees, I had a company of four employees. He wore a T-shirt saying, "You ain't shit till you sued Atari." I wore a T-shirt saying, "I have seen the future." We got along well. Since that famous meeting in 1979, Ken and I have been best of friends. I still send a chocolate, rum-soaked cake (his favorite) to his house every Halloween (his birthday), and he still sends me tiny notes telling me how excited he is to receive them.

Ken shared a vision with me in the late '80s that he was going to create a new on-line service that would allow players to "see" and "talk" to each other as they played over modem lines. My line was a switchable 300-1200-2400 baud modem. State of the art, then. Ken was going to deliver games over the modem line and I would be able to play him in Hearts (our favorite game).

Ken started The Sierra Network (TSN). It had few subscribers but it was the future of on-line interactive gaming ... It was robust, fantastic and it was my favorite on-line game service. It still is. Now it is called The ImagiNation Network and you can just imagine where it is all going to end up.

On Nov. 15, AT&T announced that they would buy out The ImagiNation Network for \$40 million. Up until that time, AT&T only held a 20 percent interest. Under the terms of the deal, The ImagiNation Network will become a wholly-owned subsidiary of AT&T.

AT&T also said it will enter into a multi-year contract with Sierra On-Line to provide interactive content for The ImagiNation Network. AT&T will form a new unit, called Consumer Interactive Services. (CIS?—Are you reading this, CompuServe?) The first



offering from the new unit will be AT&T PersonaLink Services and The ImagiNation Network.

It is wonderful that the biggest phone company in the digiverse has purchased the most visionary of the on-line interactive game services. This will allow all of us in the future to enjoy a "complete" service from our telco supplier. I imagine (no pun intended) that we will see more cool things going forward.

I can't wait to send video mail, video conference with my friends, get into a virtual air-space and fly in a dogfight in real-time, in real airplanes, with real film footage, over the Pacific with my buddies!

I can't wait to be able to take some of Sierra's highest quality games and play **King's Quest** against dozens (if not hundreds) of other opponents worldwide.

Being owned by AT&T is a dream. It would potentially allow for other assets of the telco to be "shared" with ImagiNation, like the game interface that AT&T was doing with Sega, and the probable on-line hooks into Microsoft Network and the relationship with TCI and cable. How about using your PDA to look up all the information you need on-line and then switching to the ImagiNation Mode

and playing a rip-roaring game of **Red Baron** against 15 other flyers? Board meetings will never be the same.

I was talking to a major hardware and software manufacturer of arcade coin-ops at the last AMOA. Network games will be coming soon where you will be able to play another individual on another coin-op in another state from your location. It is conceivable that you will be able to "buy in" to the game from your home location. All of this would be possible under the venture with AT&T...

One will never be able to consider all of the numerous options available as a potential outcome of this arrangement. One thing is certain, the stock market certainly likes the deal. Sierra On-Line stock has gone from 18 when the discussion first started to as high as 31 (on Dec. 6, 1994). Many people were worried about the enormous financial drain that the network had on the Sierra company. I guess they can stop worrying about that now.

AT&T says, "You will ..."

Ken Williams says, "I have ..."

.....
by **Barry Friedman**

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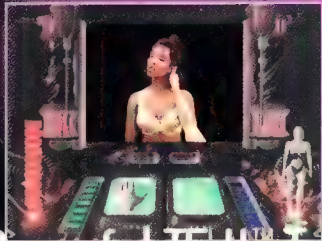
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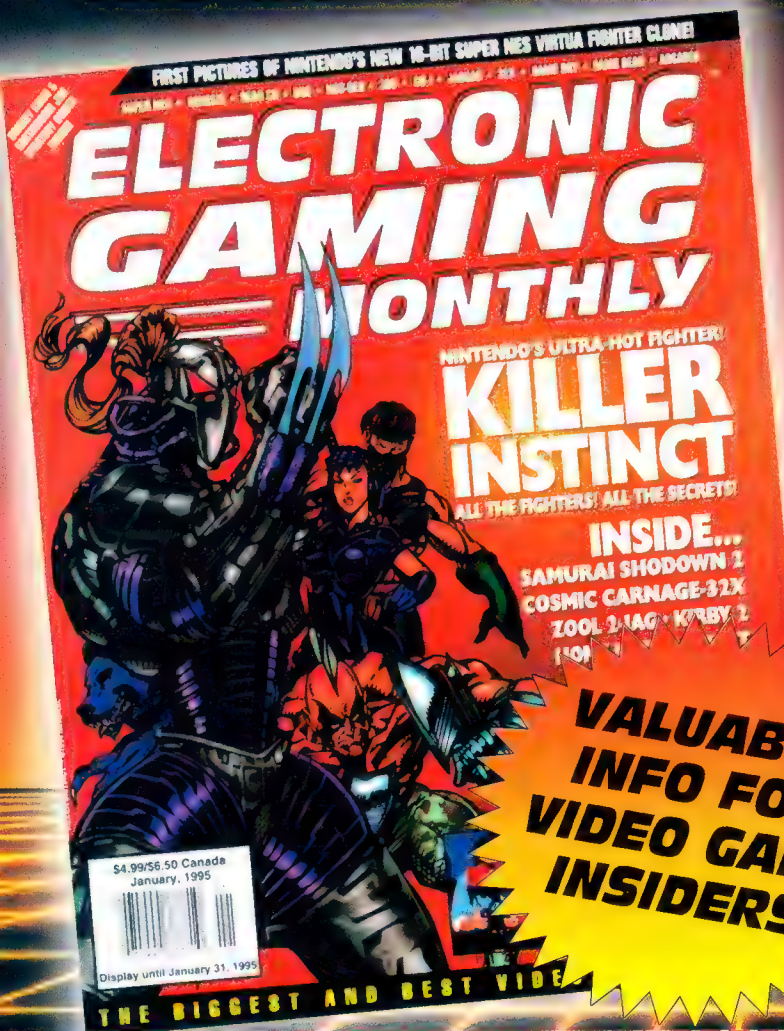
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THE KUNKEL REPORT

32X REPORT CARD TIME!

Well folks, after months of hype and anticipation, the 32X has arrived on our doorstep. It was a strange arrival, to say the least. The system was originally supposed to be launched with six games. Instead, in most U.S. cities, it showed up on Nov. 9, with not one single game.

Then, two days later, two games—**Star Wars Arcade** and **Virtua Racing Deluxe**—showed up. To say they were disappointing would be an understatement. Especially considering the fact that many Genesis owners paid \$100 for **Virtua Racing** only six months earlier.

The new version seems only marginally improved over the Genesis version, and frankly, doesn't look as good as the edition I previewed several months ago at SoA. True, a few polygons have been added, and the new game is faster, but the water, for example, while nicely rendered, doesn't even move. As a result, it looks as if you're driving over a very nice picture of a bay.

As for **Star Wars Arcade**, it wasn't exactly based on the strongest coin-op title of the year, but even so, this version is a letdown.

But before we get into further software discussions, let's talk about the hardware a bit. First, for those loyal Sega users who have early model Genesis and Sega CD systems, prepare to add not only another tier to the superstructure, but another plug as well! That's right, a new world record—three fat, ugly plugs from a single system. You'll definitely want to get one of those sideways adapters Sega thoughtfully included an advertisement for in its 32X package. This extended height not only makes the machine difficult to store, it can actually lead to real problems when playing, say, **Sonic & Knuckles** with another Sonic cartridge plugged in. The system is now so top heavy it is in danger of toppling over with the slightest push.

Also, contradicting the contradiction that Sega made to us only a month or so ago, the 32X *does* have A/V out. Matter of fact, that's *all* it has. That's right—no RF whatsoever, so if your TV doesn't have an A/V input, you must either run it through a VCR, use one of the new Sega RF adapters or—you guessed it!—order a handy dandy Sega Special RF adapter from our friends in Redwood City.

Now for all you CDX owners. You are probably wondering whether or not the 32X is compatible. Well, it is and it isn't. It does

work with a CDX, and the manual confirms this. The box, however, screams that it is *not* compatible with CDX.

The real problem? Sega hasn't gotten FCC approval for the 32X and CDX yet, so it seems that using them together at this point voids the warranty.

Now let's talk about those delightful "electromagnetic shield plates" which must be installed into the cartridge slot on the Genesis to hold the bay doors open.

The problem? The 32X is extremely light, and it's very easy to accidentally extract the entire unit when pulling a cart. Okay, so you just stick it back in, right? Only if those metal braces hold fast, because if they slip and you don't notice it—as ours did after a simple test—reinserting the 32X drives the braces down into the system, causing considerable anguish.

Other gripes? Well, how about the fact that the games are selling for as much as \$70—after Sega promised that the carts would be Genesis-scale because "all the expensive technology is in the 32X!" Then there's the fact that the system has no built-in battery back-up (and neither do the first two releases for that matter).

Finally, there's the ridiculous, poster-style instruction sheet which is frequently inaccurate and makes mention of no fewer than three different Sega adapters which may be required to run the 32X, depending on your system configuration.

But surely, I hear you saying, the next generation software will be better.

Sure, **Doom is Doom**—but it is a window-boxed version that moves much too quickly and pixelates like crazy whenever the player gets near an object. **Cosmic Carnage**, meanwhile, has some interesting visual touches but, when all is said and done, it's just another fighting game.

As for the rest of the early releases—a golf game, a motocross game, **Metalhead**, **Super Afterburner** and **Super Space Harrier**—who can get all worked up and excited about new versions of **Space Harrier** and **Afterburner**? Worse still, the word from already-reluctant third-party publishers is that 32X development systems are not even available yet.

Welcome to the next level? I don't think so.

by Bill Kunkel

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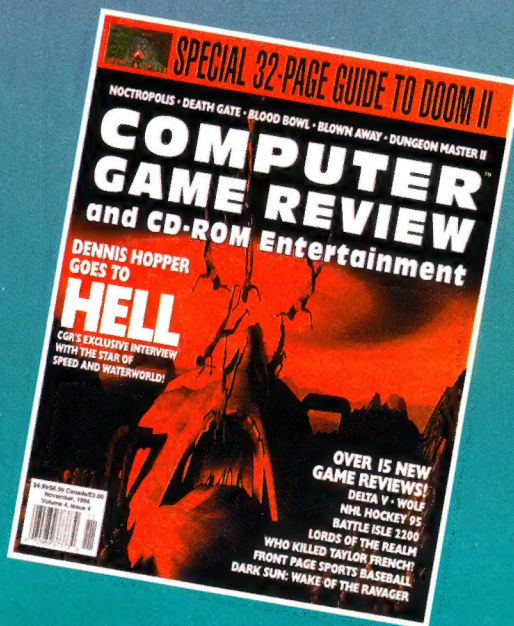
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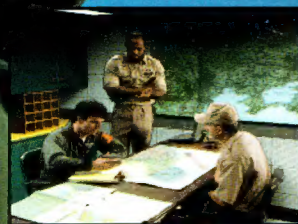
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