

Abandonware Times



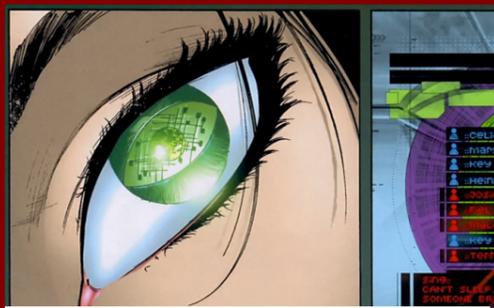
Interview with Matthew Stibbe **PAGE 5**



Discworld Review **PAGE 13**



Amiga: The PC's best friend **PAGE 37**



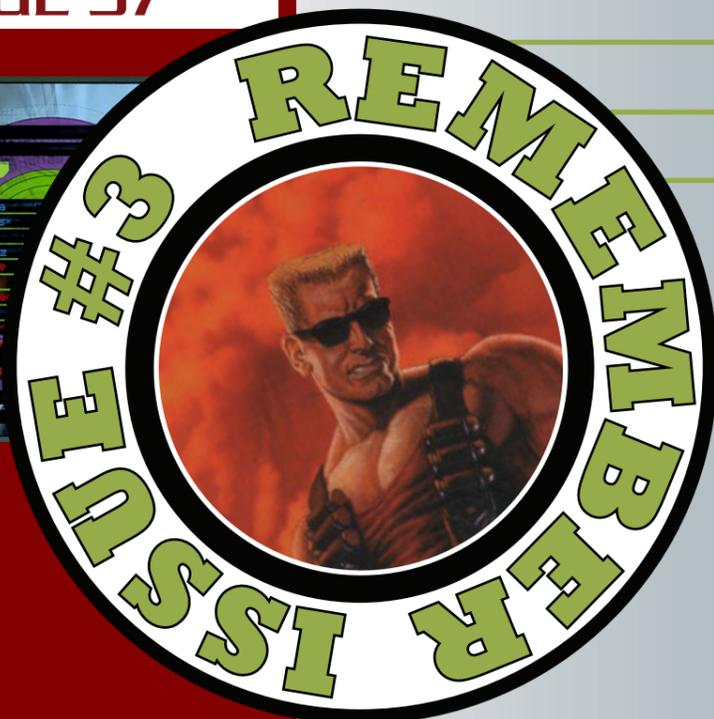
Human ++ **PAGE 26**



1 Interview with Aidan Hughes **PAGE 20**

2 Toonstruck Review **PAGE 40**

3 Cannon Fodder Review **PAGE 17**





EDITORIAL

Time hasn't been a particularly kind friend to the Abandoned Times magazine. We needed four years to release the first issue, another two for the second, and four more for this third iteration. That covers the entire Daniel Craig era in James Bond films, to put it into perspective. Not to mention that most of our contributors now spend a big part of their daily lives inside care homes for elders, solving sudoku puzzles or playing dominoes... Yes, I don't know about the others, but I do feel that old when I look back at all these years. Thankfully, everyone is still young and healthy and you can still see us from time to time on Abandonia's forums.

It does beg the question, however: Why bother? Why bother making #3 when we have a smaller readership than an obscure doujinshi at the Comiket in Japan, especially with such a ragtag team of talents very much prone to sudden periods of chronic idleness. Well, the main reason is that we've accumulated a wealth of material throughout the years, written by great people in love with old games. They've been waiting to see their articles online for a long time now. Some articles go way back to 2006-2007, when the idea of an Abandoned Times magazine was still in its infancy. That's the main reason why I've decided to call this issue "Remember", in order to bring us closer to Abandonia as it was then, revive happy memories, but also to make a statement--that our love for old games will never die.

In terms of content, I'm almost afraid to say it, but I think this is possibly the best issue yet. Thanks to saibot216 we're featuring interviews with Matthew Stibbe, designer and producer at Intelligent Games, and Aidan Hughes, a well-known commercial artist who designed the first-person shooter ZPC. red_avatar came prepared with two overviews on the history of the PC and Amiga, and a personal favorite of mine, The Fifth Horseman has written an article about the future of humankind. Tens of other reviews and articles will make sure that everyone will find something to their liking.

Enjoy the read!

-Editor.

CREDITS

Main Editor

Dumitru Condrea
(TotalAnarchy)

Designer

Dumitru Condrea

Grammar Team

arete
red_avatar
_r.u.s.s.

The Fifth Horseman

El Quia
knobfer
Acethor

DarkArmada
Simoneer

Additional screens

El Quia
TheChosen
Tomekk
marko river
Paco
wendymaree
red_avatar
MobyGames.com

Special Thanks

Abandonia staff
Matthew Stibbe
Aidan Hughes
All who wrote for us ►

Contact Us

regnumekal@hotmail.com
(editor)

CONTENTS



**Interview with
Matthew Stibbe**

by Connor Eck

p.5



**The Golden Years or The Rise
and Fall of PC Gaming**

by red_avatar

p.10



**Discworld
Review**

by verek_22

p.13



**Freeware Corner
Ben There, Dan That Review**

by red_avatar

p.15



**Cannon Fodder
Review**

by BranjoHello

p.17



**Master of Orion II
Battle at Antares Review**

by Tomekk

p.18



**Interview with
Aidan Hughes**

by Connor Eck

p.20



**Lands of Lore III
Review**

by verek_22

p.22



**Ultima VIII: Pagan
Review**

by vctrsknt

p.24



**Human
++**

by The Fifth Horseman

p.26

CONTENTS



**VERSUS X-COM: UFO Defense
vs Terror from the Deep**

p.30

by dkw



**VERSUS Goblins: The Original
Trilogy vs Goblins 4**

p.32

by bobson



**Reflections of a cat wearing
a lime on its head**

p.34

by Tito



**Wilderness: A Survival
Adventure Review**

p.36

by Dumitru Condrea



**Amiga: The PC's
best friend**

p.37

by red_avatar



**Star Trek: The Next Generation
A Final Unity Review**

p.39

by DarkArmada



**Toonstruck
Review**

p.40

by El Quia



**Vikings: Fields of Conquest
Kingdoms of England II Review**

p.42

by mexbrush



**Console Corner
Venus Senki**

p.44

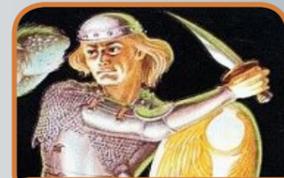
by The Fifth Horseman



**Console Corner
Wild 9**

p.45

by Dumitru Condrea



p.47

**Sword of Fargoal
Remake Review**

by bobson



p.48

**History of Horror Games
1992-1995, Part 1**

by Dumitru Condrea



p.52

**Horror Reviews
in Brief**

by marko river



p.53

**Interview with
Pac-Man**

by Bazly



p.54

**History of Horror Games
1992-1995, Part 2**

by Dumitru Condrea

Released in 1996 for MS-DOS, Azrael's Tear was developed by the UK based company Intelligent Games, also known for developing Dune 2000 and Emperor: Battle For Dune. The company was founded in 1988 by Matthew Stibbe, and closed its doors in 2002.

by Connor Eck
aka saibot216

Azrael's Tear was a game that I discovered on one of my scavenging runs through the depths of the MobyGames database. If I recall correctly, I was looking for a sci-fi adventure game and I saw the title Azrael's Tear, which in and of itself was very intriguing to me. I kept the game in the back of my mind and got it before I went to study abroad (in the United Kingdom, oddly enough). The game quickly became one of my all time favorites, so being able to talk with Matthew Stibbe, the game's creator, about the game, was such a treat for me.

Given he is in the UK, our interview scheduling was a bit strange, having to deal with the time difference and all. We decided on a Tuesday at 3pm his time, which was 9am my time. So I woke up, rolled out of bed, shambled on over to my desk chair, plopped down, and started the Skype call.

Matthew Stibbe:

Azrael's Tear, there's a blast from the past. That must've been like 15 years ago or something.

Connor:

Yeah... The first question I have is where did the idea for Azrael's Tear come from?

Matthew Stibbe:

Well, um, a long time ago (laughs) in a Galaxy far far away, I worked with an agent called John Cook, whose company had the wonderful name of Bad Management. He's a good guy, and a good agent, and he represented us on a couple of projects. He brought us this proposal for a game that was called "Raptor" at the time, which was

probably a better name than Azrael's Tear in retrospect. It was developed by an Australian guy called Ken Haywood, and it was just a paper document.

The document was Ken's original thing, I think we still have some of his original artwork on my Bad Language blog, and he said, "Hey, would you like to do a game based on this?" and we said, "yes." This was around 1993 or 1994, the time when Myst was very successful, and our idea at the time was that we would do Raptor/Azrael's Tear in the style of Myst i.e. pre-rendered 3D graphics with limited animation, and you would hop from one place to another, but we would try and make it look very beautiful. That's where the original idea came from, and the original concept was to make a Myst-like game.

Connor:

One of the things I noticed was that back in that era when games were coming out, they had voice acting and typically the voice acting was not good, Resident Evil being the case and point for that--

Matthew Stibbe:

(laughs)



I
N
T
E
R
V
I
E
W

Interview with Matthew Stibbe



▪ This guy DEMANDS that I break open a boulder or else!

Connor:

--it was very emotionless or the emotion was lost and the writing was bad, but that's probably on a different point. I noticed in Azrael's Tear that the voice acting was... actual acting.

Matthew Stibbe:

Actual acting! Yes!

Connor:

It was really surprising to me, so I was wondering how much preparation and thought went into the voice acting?

Matthew Stibbe:

Yeah, I think that was an interesting aspect of the game. I think we probably did more work on the audio than was typical at the time. On the acting side, the game design had sort of evolved from Ken's original idea and he was involved in the development of the design. He worked with the Intelligent Games team, particularly Richard Guy. If I remember rightly, and this was a long time ago so I might make mistakes



▪ Illustration from Ken Haywood's design document.

on some of this stuff, we had a guy named Mark Giles who worked in the company, and together they came up with this strong intention to make it very compelling as an experience. I remember having these crazy fantasy casting sessions – if we could have anyone we wanted to play the characters, and Ian McKellen came up at one point – so it was very much an intent from the beginning. The same goes for sound effects and the music; we worked with a very professional team who did all kinds of stuff like that for films and TV, music mainly. So it was recorded with real actors in a recording studio.

A lot of effort went into the script, and I thank you for noticing that because I think that was one of the elements that worked, looking back now at the visuals some of them were very interesting, but fell far short of what we imagined just because of the technology that was available then. But I think the audio side and the voice talent – that really worked well.

Connor:

Yeah, definitely. You mentioned things being lost due to technology, when I was looking at the design document, I saw that there were different Raptors that the player could choose from, as well as equipment such as things like water flasks, food, hunter-seekers, etc; were those lost due to technology, or were there different reasons for that?

Matthew Stibbe:

I couldn't tell you the design decisions that we went through, that's too long ago and they were mostly down to Rich and Ken, but I think – I think, I have a strong recollection of the early days of the design... it was interesting because we had the conception that we would do it like Myst, so it was pre-rendered and you'd go from set

set piece to set piece. At the same time, I remember playing a pen & paper version of the game, like a role-playing, Dungeons and Dragons-type game, with different equipment and depending on what you picked up and dropped you could do different things. A little bit of that survived in the game –

At the same time lots of people were trying to do it, I remember the very beautiful Blade Runner game that Westwood did and there was a game where you were a private detective, I can't remember the name of it now, but in retrospect that whole genre has pretty much died out now. Except for a very niche audience, people do not like adventure, problem solving, puzzle games – in history, King's Quest and Zork and all these, they were the big hits, but they've been destroyed by first-person shooters.

Connor:

You said the game had this plan to look like Myst, what made you change to the more 3D environments? As you said this was a long time ago, so you may not remember...

Matthew Stibbe:

(laughs) Yeah, I think it was pretty clear that doing it in a Myst style was going to be very constricting in terms of what we could do. With Myst you go from one place to another, so the game controls your view, and I think we wanted to have it be more like you could move around the room a bit more.



▪ The Orrery room.

– you have this sort of gun and you can shoot people, but it was never the intention to make it into Quake or a first-person shooter. As the game evolved we probably felt that there was a rich history of this sort of puzzle-solving in games, you go back to Adventure and Zork, and I think that became quite influential, you know trying to recreate that experience in an immersive 3D environment. There had been some attempts to do that, but I think Azrael's Tear had been very innovative in its approach.

Instead of just rendering, say, the Orrery room once with some stuff happening, we felt like we would probably end up having to sub-divide the floorplan into a grid and you can move forward and backwards, and left and right, and rotate. Suddenly it would become quite complex and that involved having lots of imagery and – yeah, and about that time, sort of '93/'94/'95, computer power started accelerating – I'm looking at Wikipedia and it says the minimum specifications for Azrael's Tear was a 486 and

66 Megahertz, I've got a calculator that's faster than that--

Connor:
(laughs)

Matthew Stibbe:
--I could emulate 20 of those on my iPhone, but at the time you had that, and Pentiums were coming in, and computers and graphic cards were getting faster. There were also these 3D -- now, with 3D rendering, you either go and buy a license for an engine and you pay whatever and you get a fantastic, amazing, kick ass engine. Your job is to come up with amazing graphics and game-play with it, or you use Direct 3D or whatever it is these days in the operating system and you get good 3D rendering for nothing, but at that time, you built your own.

It was only just beginning to become possible to go and buy a 3D rendering engine and Microsoft was only just starting to think about implementing Direct 3D/ Direct X into Windows. But Azrael's Tear came out on DOS first, so you didn't get any of that -- it wasn't for Windows. I think, and again this is going back into my memory (laughs), but I think we realized that we could just about do it in 3D and that would liberate us massively from the problems of doing it Myst-style, but with more flexibility of movement.

In practice, because we were trying to figure out how to do a lot of this stuff from scratch, we didn't have Tomb Raider as a reference, we didn't have Quake as a reference point, Doom -- yes, but... well actually, I think Quake came out and we kind of looked at it... So yeah, 3D, you think it solves all your problems, but you get a load of different problems, and if you've played

Azrael's Tear, you know that once you start playing it you sort of find yourself wedged in a corner of a room, trying to turn around and get back (laughs), it's not obvious -- the navigation, you have to learn how to do it and not a lot of people knew how, except gamers and Quake players. Everybody on the team played Doom and Quake, so they had those lightning fast reflexes and had no problem navigating in a 3D space, but for a puzzle audience -- not so much. So we were working this stuff out, but that's why we went 3D.

Connor:
Ok.

Matthew Stibbe:

So I'm rabbiting a bit, it's quite funny to think about all this so much later.

Both:
(laugh)

Connor:

I just had one last deep design question so hopefully this isn't too bad; the game originally took place in a single temple that was all very enclosed, where all the rooms are directly connected as opposed to the release where everything has a pathway leading to it, you know what I mean?

Matthew Stibbe:

Yeah, that has a pretty simple technical explanation, right? We didn't have the processing power to do deep vistas, you know, you couldn't look a long way or else you use up all your polygons. And you can see, in the game, that it does that "updating environment" sort of thing, but what it's actually doing is loading in the next set of polygons

for the next location and it was quite challenging. There was this stress of trying to keep the polygon count low and the texture maps small so that it could load quickly, it was very frustrating if you would go from one location to the next and it had to load for some time. So yeah, that's the fundamental difference, where as if we had gone with the Myst style pre-rendered route, we could have given you gorgeous panoramas and very broad views with lots of depth.

The original design artwork from Ken was much more magnificent, the interiors were more grandiose, and also well lit (laughs). We dimmed down the lights a lot to get away with some of the texture limitations that we had.

Connor:

Looking back, knowing what you know now, what would you change?

Matthew Stibbe:

Ugh (laughs), well number one on my list, and I'm sorry, but I was never a fan of the name and I don't know how we got that. I'm sure I was guilty and responsible for my part in it, but I'm going to disclaim it now. I think Raptor would've been much better, partly because it's hard to figure out what it means, what the game is about, what you're playing, and you know -- Blah! So, the name is catastrophic.

You know when you're in the game and you're looking out of the helmet and it's sort of a letterbox view, that was done deliberately in order to reduce the size of the window that we had to render, because rendering it was a performance issue. In an ideal world, we would've been happier if we had gone a year later and had it in Windows, had Direct 3D and could take advantage of hardware acceleration -- the first generation of 3D hardware. It's frustrating because it's not as fluid or as beautiful to look at as Quake or Tomb Raider, which were its contemporaries, but they had a much more constrained environment, whereas with Azrael's Tear, we were trying to do a different set of things.

I think the user interface was challenging. I think the development team was so familiar with first-person shooters that they found that mode of navigation really easy, and I remember one evening where we got a bunch of people in to play the game, like a really early version where you could wander around and do stuff, and I had a feeling of unease when I saw all of these non-gamers, these casual gamers, literally bumping into walls, getting stuck in corners, you know really really basic things like, "why is my cursor changing?" Which you and I know means that you can click on something and stuff like that. Looking back on the success of Myst, I think one of the reasons why it worked so well was because anybody could



Through broken windows lies a pedestal of some kind.

play it, but that's for the benefit of hindsight. I think what I respect about it was that Azrael's Tear was the last hurrah of the text adventure game and I think we translated that experience really nicely. It would be beautiful to see it done by a really professional game company with one of these top end graphic engines and lighting and particle effects and all this great stuff. I think that would be an interesting game, but I think it's almost inconceivable, it's almost impossible... actually it's so conceivable that it's almost impossible (laughs).

Connor:

You harp on the name, but honestly that's what got me to play the game. When I was looking up adventure games, I saw the name Azrael's Tear and I thought it was very intriguing.

Matthew Stibbe:

Ah!

Connor:

Eventually, I got the game and then at some point in the game it says, "the holy grail is made from Azrael's tear," and I thought, "oh, I get it now. Now this all makes sense."

Matthew Stibbe:

Ahh yeah – this sort of magic meteorite thing.

Connor:

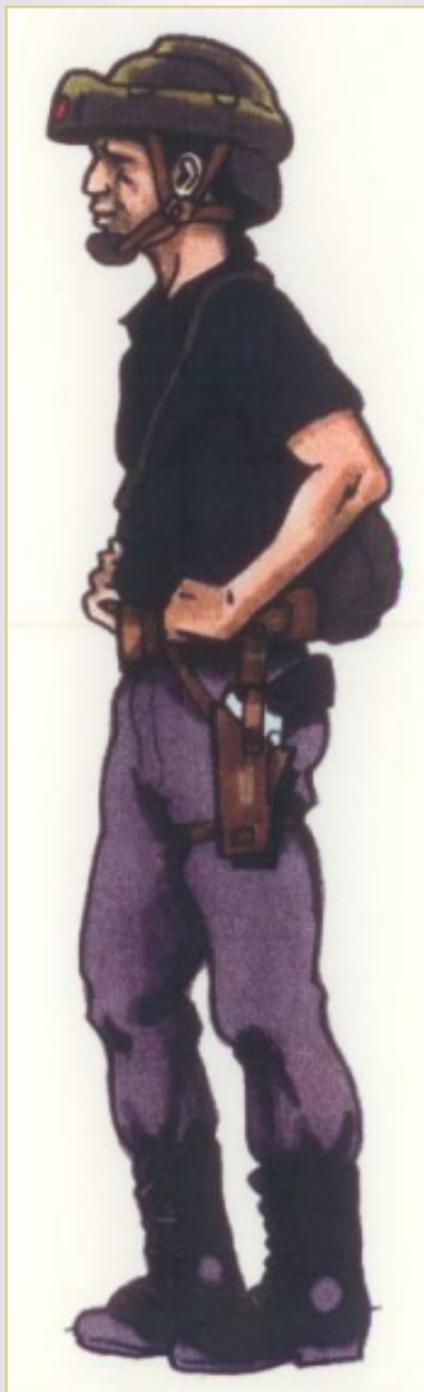
Yeah. Outside of Azrael's Tear, you also worked on a couple of Dune games and I was wondering if you were a big fan of Dune or if you were just thrown on those games?

Matthew Stibbe:

Oh – wow! (laughs) Yeah, we were playing Dune 2, the first Westwood Dune game, which was popular when Intelligent Games started up, and I remember playing it in the office, all the people talking about it and we were very excited, so yeah, big fans of that kind of game from Westwood.

I remember going to a computer games show in Earl's Court and seeing the first public demo of Command & Conquer, which was Dune 2, but grown up, and just being gobsmacked – just astonished by how awesome it was. It really was a big step forward from Dune 2. So when the opportunity came, and it was later, to work with Westwood and do Dune 2000, we were really excited about that, then after that Dune Emperor*. We also worked on a couple of expansion kits for Red Alert as well, so we had done a lot of level design for Westwood,

*refers to Emperor: Battle For Dune



▪ An illustration of the player character in Azrael's Tear from Ken Haywood's design document.

and before I left Intelligent Games, we were working on quite serious designs for Command & Conjure, which would've been, I suppose, vaguely, a World of Warcraft/magic/sorcerers version of Command & Conquer, but using the Dune Emperor* engine. Sadly that never came to anything, but we did quite a lot of work on the design.

Connor:

Were you a fan of the Dune movie or novels?

Matthew Stibbe:

My memory is that I had never been a big fan of the film – the David Lynch film, neither liking it nor disliking it, or the book, but having started doing the game, I re-read them and enjoyed them very much. It's very curious, and this is a terrible admission from someone who ran a computer games company for twelve years, but when I started the company, I was never anything of a science fiction fan – I was insufficiently geeky. It was only as the 90s went on that I started getting into science fiction, but I remember, we had the opportunity to work on some Star Trek stuff. The thing about

working as a developer is that you work on three games that don't get published for every game that does, so we worked on all kinds of stuff – ideas, concepts, and prototypes – that never came out, but we were working on some Star Trek: Voyager, I think, so I actually went out and rented all the Star Trek TV shows from the video store – which is another thing that we don't have anymore – so yeah, I have computer games to thank for making me a sci-fi geek, as opposed to some people who were into computer games because they were a sci-fi geek to begin with. It worked the other way around for me (laughs).

I'll tell you what though, Dune fan or not, I had massive massive respect for Westwood Studios, the guys that worked there were the Leonardos and the Rafiels of computer games and they really really really worked hard to get that stuff good. There's this myth that computer games are all inspiration, and staying up all night, and hacking something out – Westwood, they just tested everything and they played it, and they played it, and they played it, and they pushed, and they pushed, and they worked really hard, and they were really good at what they did; I learned a lot from them. I've got a lot of time for those guys.

Connor:

Do you prefer developing a strategy game or an adventure game?

Matthew Stibbe:

Well I got into computer games because of strategy games. I worked on two games when I was in college, the first was a space empire game called Imperium and I designed it, while Nick Wilson programmed it. That was an absolutely classic, hard sci-fi, galactic exploration, colonization game. The other was a military political simulation of the Vietnam war, which was an awfully hugely successful game, but I programmed it and I designed it. That's where I was coming from. In university, I was playing SimCity and Harpoon a whole bunch, so the first two games that I did when I came out of university and started Intelligent Games properly were SimIsle, which was originally Sim Rainforest, and I sold that to Maxis, and USS Ticonderoga, which I designed and we sold it to 360 Pacific, who published Harpoon. So I literally came out of university going, "these are the games I like the most, how do we do games like that, and who sells them? Let's do that." So that's how I got into it.

The adventure stuff – I used to enjoy them, but in my life I've never been a chess player or a crossword puzzle solver or anything like that. I like war games, I like strategy games, I like simulations.

Connor:

Interestingly enough, I'm the opposite way where I love adventure games and I love going through that whole environment and using my brain to figure out what's going on and to solve puzzles, but then with RTSes I'm almost afraid to play those because I don't know if my strategy will be good enough – I just got a strategy game that revolves around World War I and so I have yet to figure out how to navigate around trenches...

Matthew Stibbe:

(laughs) Well... horses for courses, isn't it? People like different things. I certainly remember playing Infocom games when I was a kid. I loved Zork, so it's certainly in there somewhere. Azrael's Tear was the only adventure style game that we ever did, we worked on a sort of sequel, but that never came to anything, and I think the market, the universe, decided that the genre was dead. I think even now you'd have a hard time persuading people to give you money to make a graphic adventure game.

Connor:

They're starting to come back in the independent community, which is nice.

Matthew Stibbe:

I hope so. There's something very satisfying about going into a world and exploring it. I know I had something with the Infocom games, a richer, emotional, sort of story experience, than I had in reading many books for example. It's a different kind of computer game experience. With strategy games I'm a completer, finisher, and I'm sort of an optimizer of things, so that works very well for me.

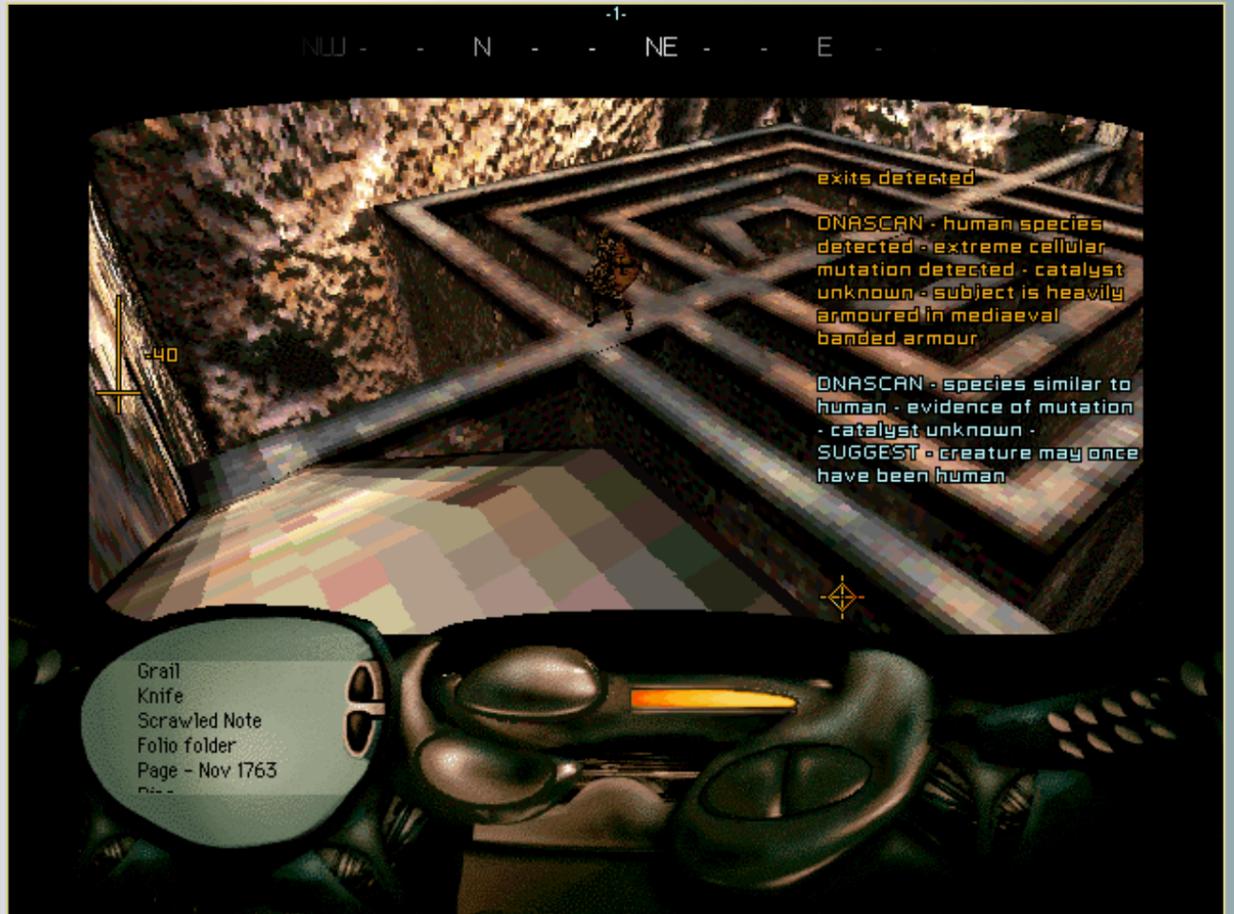
It's interesting, a lot of the team that worked on Azrael's Tear now work for Slitheryne, who make wargames. Philip Veale is there, Richard Evans is there, Ian McNeil is there – Ian runs it, and they all worked on Azrael's Tear, so it's kind of curious that the core of the team are now making strategy games (laughs). I think all those guys are still there. I don't keep up with them so much.

Connor:

What was your reason for leaving the games industry? I know some people leave because it's too much work or it's too stressful, was that the case for you or was there some other reason?

Matthew Stibbe:

Well... certainly. Yes. It was stressful. I started out at the university where I would design a game and sometimes program it and we'd get them done in nine or twelve



■ Your gun is broken, and an enemy stands waiting. Uh oh...

months and two or three people – an artist, a programmer, and me. By the time I had sold the business, twelve years later, we were working on games like FIFA World Cup and we had something like 25 people working on it, and it was really complicated, with big budgets and very challenging to manage. The company was 70-something people and I sat in my office kind of dealing with money, lawyers, contracts, HR, managing a team that managed a team that managed development, nobody would let me make games anymore.

Connor:

Wow.

Matthew Stibbe:

I kind of found that frustrating. You start off thinking you're going to make computer games and you end up becoming a sort of lawyer/accountant/salesman. Some people are really good at that stuff, right? So that's fine, but it just wasn't for me. Also if you have a budget – the budget for the first game I made was £30-40,000 and the last game I was working on had a budget of £2 million. You make a mistake on a £30,000 game, you screw it up, and the budget increases by 30%, alright, well £10,000, well that's bad, but it's not gonna kill you. You can just about afford that out of your salary. You screw up a £2 million game and with 30%, your business goes bust. So the stakes get much higher.

The opportunity came to sell the company to the management team, the opportunity being that they were interested in buying it and I was interested in selling it. Great! I was very happy when the time came to wrap it up. I think... yeah... stress, but I also think

not having so much fun and creativity was a big factor.

The job changed on me when I wasn't looking, but I enjoy what I do now, which is writing. It's more creative and independent, and paragraphs don't crash (laughs). But that's all very personal, it's also a very long time ago. I'm proud of all the games. I have all of the games I was involved in up on a shelf in my sitting room, so whenever anyone comes to the house who hasn't heard the boring story, I take them in and go, "I did that! Look at all these games I made!" It's quite a satisfying thing to look back and think about how a few million people played a game that I designed, programmed, produced, managed, had at very least negotiated the contract for (laughs).

There's some happiness, and Connor, it's nice to talk to you because you obviously, and bless you, you've obviously managed to find some enjoyment in Azrael's Tear, and that's really nice, that's really satisfying to think about.

Connor:

That was my last question for you, so thank you very much for your time.

Matthew Stibbe:

Oh hey, it's my pleasure, thank you for your interest. ♦♦♦

F

F
E
A
T
U
R
E

The Golden Years or The Rise and Fall of PC Gaming

by red_avatar

and music, not to mention full motion video, to gamers. "Multimedia" was touted as the future and PCs now started to look towards playing movies, music and watching pictures. The PC was suddenly becoming cool! In just a few years time, it transformed from a business machine to a family experience which meant a huge boost in sales.

And then the Playstation was born...

Come join me on a trip through the history of PC gaming: follow the road to power and the golden age, a time when the PC and its games influenced the future of gaming!

When you take a look at the history of the PC, it's quite an interesting one. Starting from an underdog position, it took years before it finally ended on top of the world in those golden years: the early and mid 90's. During that period, the PC finally became a worthy gaming platform, surpassing the Amiga and easily knocking its way past the consoles of the time (Super Nintendo & Megadrive). But how did the PC manage to break through? Well, read on and find out!

it was finally losing ground and due to dropping prices, the PC became more and more affordable to regular families.

The golden years (1990 - 1995)

With all the hardware in place, the PC became a dream platform to develop games for. Games could be developed cheaply (no license fees needed to be paid and no expensive console development kits were needed either) and the growing potential appealed to many. This led to the creation and refinement of many genres that we still have today: Dune 2 gave us the Real Time Strategy genre, Wolfenstein 3D (and Catacombs 3D) gave us the First Person Shooter, etc.

Needless to say, it really was a wonderful time for gamers as we got showered in classics such as Theme Park, Doom, Magic Carpet, Syndicate, Lemmings, Civilization, UFO: Enemy Unknown, Monkey Island, Day of the Tentacle, Beneath A Steel Sky, and many many many more. We were the envy of the gaming world, with many moving away from consoles (which had gotten more and more stale thanks to dull platform games that plagued them) to join the growing crowd of PC gamers.

While consoles were struggling to keep up, the PC enjoyed the release of the CD ROM drive which brought digitised speech

Fighting for dominance (1995 - 1998)

The Playstation was both hated and loved by PC gamers. It broke through the crowd like no other console could and dominated the console market in no time, leaving both the Jaguar and the Saturn behind eating dust with Nintendo's N64 failing to make a big enough dent and even the PC suffered. The reason for its success was to be found with what we now call the mass market: the Playstation appealed to casual gamers as well as regular gamers, and this meant that developers had a fresh crowd of consumers.

At the same time, games were becoming more complex and expensive to make: 3D engines, speech, music tracks, full motion video, 3D rendered cut scenes, etc. While the early 90s opened the door to many amateur programmers, this door was now firmly being closed with the cost of game development going through the roof! Wing Commander 3 cost a small fortune to make at the time and it was a sign of what was yet to come.

The rise of the underdog (1980 - 1990)

The 80's were a rather subdued time for the PC: hardware limitations severely hampered its potential, making fast-moving and fluent games nearly impossible. While the Amiga mostly focused on entertainment, the PC was more expensive and mainly used for administration, making it a poor choice for gamers. With IBM dominating the market, entertainment (including games) were really only an afterthought. After all, the 'B' in IBM stands for 'Business'! As a result, the PC had to make do with inferior games compared to those of its gaming brothers. While the Amiga had digitized sound and music - not to mention an amazing 64 colours - the PC was stuck with primitive PC speakers and (at most) 16 colours!

But then, around the turn of the decade, three vital improvements came around: IBM invented VGA, Creative released their first Soundblaster and PCs suddenly had hard drives instead of floppies. Thanks to VGA and its whopping 256 colours (an amazing 4 times as many as what the Amiga could muster), games now looked better than on any other platform.

In just two years time, the PC had wiped out all of its disadvantages and was suddenly appearing on the gaming scene as an ideal platform to code for and game on. All around the world (but especially in the UK and USA) developers and bedroom coders started to see the new potential. While the Amiga was the PC's superior for many years,



Some Sonic games have been ported to the PC in the 90s, including Sonic CD shown here.

The PC put up a strong fight against the Playstation: it was still the only proper platform for first-person shooters (and several other popular genres) with many titles remaining exclusive to PC. The PC being present in nearly every home really helped out as well: sales of its games continue to do very well thanks to an expensive piece of hardware: the 3D card.

While the Playstation had to make do with ugly low resolution textures and a single low resolution, the PC was able to use bilinear filtering to smooth out the jagged edges and pixels. It resulted in some stunningly beautiful games such as Unreal, Incoming and many more. However, all this came at a price - literally and figuratively. The steep price for 3D cards put a great strain on gamer's wallets, causing some to move back to consoles. After all, a single 3D card nearly cost as much as a complete console!

PC: meet the world wide web (1998 - 2002)

Around the turn of the millennium, a new opportunity knocked on the door: the Internet. Having finally reached the point where the Internet became fashionable, millions of people ventured online. In its wake came hundreds of PC games with online capabilities including classics such as Quake III Arena, Ultima Online (the first true MMORPG) and Counter-Strike. Being the only gaming machine capable of online gaming, the PC attracted lots of new gamers. In fact, most PC gamers these days started gaming during those years, when the

allure of real life opponents proved too great a temptation to resist.

While it was basking in its online glory, a great evil was lurking in the shadows. The evil called "mass-market gamers"...

The shift (2002 - 2004)

At the start of 2002, we saw the release of a game which was greeted with rather mixed feelings: The Sims. Getting reasonable review scores but being branded as "repetitive" and "pointless" by many gamers, few expected it to be a huge success. After a few weeks, most gamers had already grown tired of the sandbox game but for some reason, the game remained high in the charts. It quickly became obvious that the reason

was... girls. Oh no. (*editor: Surprise attack. Male nerddom rolled a 1*) The Sims sold millions of copies and expansion packs over the years and it marked a great shift within the industry. Why cater to serious gamers, who are more critical and harder to please, when you can aim at casual and mainstream gamers? Mothers, grandfathers, 10 year olds - they all had access to a PC and many developers saw dollar signs in front of their eyes as a result.

But that was not the only problem. With games costing too much to produce compared to the often meager sales (which were due to a number of reasons), a solution had to be found. That solution proved to be a thorn in the eye of many gamers: cross-platform releases.



▪ After Neverwinter Nights, Bioware focused on Xbox. Jade Empire was ported to PC 2 years after the original.



▪ The demise of Troika, makers of VtM Bloodlines, marks the end of an era.

The fall (2004 - 2009)

Cross-platform releases have always existed, of course, but never to such an extent. Only the bigger console games were marked to get ported to PC (for example, the excellent Aladdin) and some did rather well but, except for a few exceptions like Tomb Raider, they were never able to match the PC-born classics like Dungeon Keeper, Deus Ex, Half-Life, etc.. In fact, throughout the PC's history, cross-platform releases nearly always resulted in poor sales! So why, God forbid, did they think that showering the PC in console ports was the solution? Because it was cheap, because it was easy, because the risk was a lot lower and, of course, because they were aiming for the mass market.



▪ We've waited more than a decade for this.

This proved to be a near-fatal blow to PC gaming for several reasons: a lack of games catering to the more classic PC gamer meant that many older gamers gave up on PC gaming and dropped out of the hardware-update race while sticking to playing the oldies instead. As a result, the few excellent PC-only games that did get released, got reasonably poor sales. After all, why keep investing in an expensive PC when you can play the same games on a much cheaper console? Especially when these ported games often had terrible control systems due to the game-pad conversion (Fahrenheit, I'm looking at you!).

Dozens of console ports were being released on PC every month. World of Warcraft, with its immense army of casual and mainstream gamers, accounted for a huge chunk of all PC gamers. More and more developers moved away from PC. After all, the poor sales (due to them being rather mediocre most of the time) weren't really making the PC market very attractive to publishers. In the mean time, we got to swallow DRM which put off even more gamers.

**Present
(2009 - 201X)**

Rarely can a single event change an industry so drastically that it affects not only the quality of a product, but the way it is marketed and sold as well. Kickstarter was such a phenomenon. After its launch in 2009, gamers and not only could act as investors and chip in money on the budget for a game, movie or art project. It is only partially an investment, since the reward is the finished product, while the profit made from regular sales still go to the publishers and developers.

Crowdfunding has existed before, Indie-

-GoGo being an earlier such platform for example, but the success of Kickstarter unleashed a dozen of copycats. Lately, Valve's Steam launched Early Access which allows gamers to buy and play early versions of games while they're still being developed.

This continues to remain controversial, as many projects are faced with uncertainty, but crowdfunding managed to fuel an unprecedented level of creativity into PC gaming.

Still, the resurgence of the platform owes much more to those indie developers and small publishers that despite an unfriendly market decided to persist. Without them, games such as Legend of Grimrock, Crusader Kings II or Killing Floor would certainly not exist. ♦♦♦



▪ PC game developers are returning to their roots (Legend of Grimrock).



▪ Some series are just too resilient (Tropico 4).

Publisher: Psygnosis
Developer: Perfect 10, Teeny Weeny Games
Release Year: 1995
Genre: Adventure
Themes: Fantasy, Comedy, Terry Pratchett
Status: Abandonware

The 2D point-and-click adventures of old remain favourites to almost all adventure gamers now. While I enjoyed Grim Fandango, it's harder to solve puzzles in 3D. Discworld is a point-and-click adventure which deserves to be played by everybody. It's just as funny as a LucasArts classic and I never once discovered myself in a situation where it was impossible to get further, because I'd forgotten an item earlier.

You play Rincewind, a cowardly wizard who is incapable of casting any magic. He lives and studies at The Unseen University, a school for wizardry. He is summoned by the Dean, who informs him that it is his task to save the city of Ankh-Morpork from the mighty Dragon who has been flying around and burning people. This is where Act 1 begins. While it seems to be a plain simple storyline, it branches quite unexpectedly from there. The game is separated into four Acts. The first three have a fair length, so you'll find plenty of gameplay time to enjoy.

Rincewind can only carry two items. This is where the Luggage (a magic box on hundreds of little legs) comes in. As far as I am aware, the Luggage never runs out of



▪ I don't want to get THAT close.



Review by verrek_22

inventory space. But since it is a box, it cannot follow you everywhere. So when Rincewind must climb ladders, he has to take the needed items with him. This can make the puzzles in these areas rather difficult, since you cannot use the old 'try everything on everything' tactic familiar to all adventure gamers. Apart from these situations, the Luggage is very helpful, but there are times when he takes rather longer than I would like to catch up.

Other characters of the Discworld are also helpful. Often you must do something for them in order to receive a useful item,

which you need to progress through the game. But there are many people, and the only way you can really work out who to talk to is by approaching everybody. This is because the game sometimes fails to point you in any direction, and leaves you to blunder around cluelessly, trying to work out who to talk to. It's extremely annoying at times, but not half as annoying as the stupid puzzles.

The characters have many amusing things to say, such as Dibbler selling his Dragon Detectors. The Detectors are made from a stick of metal with a piece of wood on the end ('When you get close to a Dragon, the wood turns to ash!'). A bit of hope found its way into Rincewind's heart there. He thought he might be able to dodge building one. Of course, it's not that easy, so you still need to build a working Detector. Still funny, though. The Librarian is also hilarious, but I better stop quoting here and actually get on reviewing. Anybody who has read the books will know what I'm talking about anyway.

The graphics have a Monkey Island theme, which suits Terry Pratchett's Discworld quite well. It is clear that the creators have studied the books hard, and have done their best to recreate them into a game. The backgrounds are cheerful and cartoony, with many jokes hidden around if you spend time looking. Even the night-time scenes look great, because of the cheerful yellow lamps and well-coloured dark streets. I liked every background in the game. The animation is pretty too. For example, you ask for a drink at the infamous Broken Drum and the barman will reach over, grab a bottle, and pass it to Rincewind. The animation really has all the detail and attention expected from a LucasArts game.

The jokes are, of course, mostly from the books, so if you didn't read them, you are unlikely to find the game very funny. However, this is no reason to assume you won't



▪ The map of Ankh-Morpork



▪ Rincewind is both a coward and quite unlucky, but he always manages to survive.

laugh. There will be jokes you will understand. Some people may consider this to be stupid, but it is a game based upon the Discworld books, and the main thing about Terry Pratchett's books is the way they make you laugh. Without the comedy lines, this game wouldn't be anywhere near as good as it is. It would be like a book without characters and a game without sound. Still fun, but missing something which would have made it great.

While the puzzles present a fair

sticks in the memory, and I have to confess to recording a few tracks for myself. You'll listen to a wide range of music, from the cheerful tunes of the Unseen University and the Broken Drum, to the dark and creepy theme of the Shades, the place so dangerous that the coward within Rincewind puts it off-limits for a large part of the game.

As mentioned above, the game is split into four Acts. While the final Act is tiny, the first three are really long. The Acts all involve helping Rincewind save Ankh-



▪ Well, at least it's not Rincefart.

The Final Verdict: Discworld is a funny adventure game with a good story, but some puzzles don't make any sense.



▪ Death is a recurring character throughout the Discworld novels.

Score of

8.5

out of 10

challenge, they sometimes make no sense whatsoever. Like cutting a crank of a well with a screwdriver, so you can use it to torture a dummy on a rack in the palace dungeons, from which falls a sword. Also, on the part where you must get into the cellar of the Broken Drum: it turns out you must go and talk to a door, and discover there is a bogeyman behind it. A door, in a totally different area of the Drum, that bears no hints or signs that say 'Bogeyman'. Just a plain door. There are many stupid puzzles like these two in this adventure game, and if it were not for them, I would say Discworld was one of the best adventure games of all time. Sadly, due to this, the title of 'Sort of okay' will do.

The music is great. It plays in loops without becoming annoying, switching smoothly as you move around Ankh-Morpork. It



▪ I have to remember this one.



▪ Animated cutscene.

-Morpork from the Dragon. There are sadly no shocking plot twists anywhere, so those who enjoy adventure games with great stories are in for a bit of a disappointment. What you see is what you get. This does not mean that the story is boring. There are many interesting and funny cutscenes to enjoy here. The story is good, and most of the puzzles are okay, so either way, you are likely to enjoy Discworld. ♦♦♦



▪ The ninja assassin is about to have a nasty surprise.

Ben There, Dan That Review

Written by red_avatar

Editor note: This review was written in 2009.

Over the past 10 years, bitter few new competent adventure games have appeared for us to gorge ourselves on. Gone are the glory days of LucasArts, when they could do no wrong and when each year would bring us yet another classic.

With each year making it less and less likely for the adventure genre to make a revival, it's good to see that there are still gamers out there that refuse to let it die. Ben There, Dan That is, for me, a great example of what can still be done with a small budget. Let me start by saying it's completely free which makes it tremendous value for money. Read on to discover why this is a 'must play'!

Developer: Zombie Cow Studios
Release Year: 2008
Genre: Adventure
Themes: Sci-Fi, Comedy, Alien, Retro
Status: Freeware

You might say Ben There, Dan That is a spoof of every LucasArts adventure game ever made and a damn good one at that! While it does not share its quality of backdrops, it's easily as funny (if not funnier) than anything LucasArts ever made. I can't remember ever laughing this hard while playing a game and for me, that's a major thing. This game is really stuffed full of brilliant gags and nearly every piece of dialog is comedy gold. You won't find any lame "I can't do that" remarks here, oh no!

The backdrops, while quite basic, really do work very well. The whole style of the game just... works! It didn't require a small fortune in animation techniques or a whole crew of animators to make, yet it easily has more style and class than most of those sterile 3D adventure games that get released these days. When you consider the complete game is less than 10MB, it's quite amazing.

But what about the puzzles and the story? Well, without spoiling anything, the story is reasonably short but it does take you to quite a lot of interesting locations. The game can be completed in 3 hours or so depending on how often you get stuck... which brings us to the puzzles. I must say the puzzles are pretty much spot on. They don't require some really weird logic to



▪ A room full of dinosaur programmers.



▪ The authors seem to be hopeless nerds. :)

◀ LucasArts classics:
 ♦ Maniac Mansion
 ♦ Sam & Max
 ♦ Full Throttle



The Death Of The Adventure Game.

▪ This is sort of the premise and the main message of the game.



▪ The greatest nightmare for the British people is to become American?

figure out and even budding adventure gamers shouldn't have too hard a time to solve most of them!

So in the end, BTDT is a reasonably short game with a very amusing story, brilliant comedy, great puzzles, an unique style and character and, best of all, it's completely free. What else do you need? Go on, go play it. Oh, and if you enjoyed it as much as I did, you should give the sequel a try. It's not free but it's only a few dollars/pounds/euros so you really should give it a go! These guys deserve it. ♦♦♦

Score of

9.0

out of 10



▪ The protagonists find out they're dead in an alternate dimension.

ZOMBIE COW STUDIOS

A little about the developer

Founded in 2008 by Dan Marshall, Zombie Cow Studios debuted with the freeware, donation-based comedy adventure game Ben There, Dan That. Previously, Dan released a "2D deathmatch game" called Gibbage in 2006.

BTDT was followed by a direct sequel named Time Gentlemen, Please! (2009). Filled with authentic British humor and intuitive puzzles, the developer's games found a cozy place in the rather niche indie adventure games market, dominated by Telltale and German studios at the time.

Given its unusual record, it's not surprising that Dan was contracted by Channel 4 to make a sex education game (Privates, 2010), one inspired by Gears of War, morphed into a platformer. In 2011 the studio changed its name to Size Five Games, and has released the procedurally-generated one-on-one combat game-Gun Monkeys (2013). Having decided to stick with roguelike mechanics, their next project is the procedurally-generated thieving steampunk game The Swindle, which is something like Invisible, Inc. only as a platformer.

CANNON FODDER

○○○○ WAR HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN ○○○○

Original ideas will always get my attention. Games based on original ideas will get even more - my time, my appreciation, and a high score in my reviews. If there ever was a developing team with enough originality in their heads, it's certainly Sensible Software, so let's give them a big round of applause! Why? Read on...

It's time for WAR and you are defending the colours of the Home team, ready to kick Away team's butt. There are recruits at your disposal right from the start, and it looks like the Sensible Software crew are first in line, too! You are in command of a squadron of up to eight men and, if you wish, you can split up your squadron (creating two squadrons of four men for example).

Controlling them is very simple - clicking the left mouse button on the screen makes your soldiers move there (sometimes they can get stuck in trees, but it's only a minor bug). Right-clicking the mouse makes them shoot their machine guns, and right-clicking, then left-clicking makes them throw grenades or fire missiles (which you have to pick up first).

Review by BranjoHello

Most of the time you have to kill all enemies and destroy their buildings, but there are also some very tricky objectives that will give your grey cells a little workout. Some missions also have more than one phase, which need to be completed in order, without the option of saving your game in-between. If your band of brave soldiers gets killed, others from the recruit pool will replace them. However, if all of them die, then it's GAME OVER! (but fret not, there is only a very small chance of this happening).

Map sizes range from small to large. Thankfully, there is a map overview (lower left corner of the screen) which you can consult for easier pathfinding. After you complete a mission, surviving soldiers are promoted, and the names of those that died are placed in the Hall of Heroes. The soldiers with a higher rank move and shoot faster so you would probably like to keep them alive (but it's fun to sacrifice them, from time to time).

All this might not sound so great on

Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Sensible Software
Release Year: 1993
Genre: Action Strategy
Themes: Military, Comedy, Tactical
Status: Sold

paper and may not tempt you to try the game, but once you start playing, it consumes you. This game puts war in a different light: it's fun and sarcastic. The developers certainly wanted to laugh in the face of waging wars and they succeeded for sure (as proven by the reactions of the British press and politicians upon the game's release).

The graphics are only about average, but fit the game just fine. Your missions take place in different environments such as a jungle, the Arctic circle, a desert etc. The landscapes look nice, but your soldiers, enemies, and other moving objects like birds (which you can't shoot unfortunately) don't sing the same tune. The sound is nothing special (except for the sound of flying grenades which you just HAVE to adore!), although the music is pretty cool.

72 levels of great action and super laughter, what else can you wish for? ♦♦♦



■ There's a cinematic feel to the prelude of every mission.



■ Make no mistake, recruits. This is what awaits you.



■ In the wild.



■ Spotted an enemy.

Score of

9.0

out of 10

MASTER OF ORION II BATTLE AT ANTARES



Review by Tomekk

In the '90s, MicroProse was well-known for their strategy games: *Civilization*, *Colonization*, the *Tycoon* games. And then there was *Master of Orion*, a sci-fi epic and one of the best strategy games of all time. This is the sequel to that game. They're very similar, but this one is ON STEROIDS! It improved on nearly every aspect of the original, which makes it much more complex and enjoyable at the same time... A true classic was born.

A long time ago, in a galaxy far-far away... 2 extremely advanced and powerful races, the Orions and the Antarens fought a war that decimated the galaxy. The Orions were triumphant, but instead of exterminating the Antarens, they banished them to a "pocket-dimension." After some time, the Orions abandoned the galaxy, leaving

behind a very-powerful robotic battleship, the Guardian, to protect their homeworld.

If the player defeats the Guardian, they can colonize the Orion homeworld, which is usually the best planet available, form an alliance with Loknar, the last of the Orions (who commands an extremely powerful battleship), and acquire some military technologies that can't be researched normally. Despite the title, conquering Orion will only give you a huge advantage, instead of victory.

However, don't think the Antarens will just sit down and watch you conquer the galaxy. Randomly they will break out of the "pocket-prison" and start sending increasingly powerful fleets, with the sole purpose of destroying anything they encounter.

MoO2 is a very-very-very complex

Publisher: MicroProse Software
Developer: SimTex
Release Year: 1996
Genre: Turn-Based Strategy
Themes: Sci-Fi, Aliens, 4X
Status: Sold

game, and I could write an entire page on every gameplay aspect. This doesn't mean however that it's not extremely enjoyable and fun at the same time. Every single part of the gameplay is very detailed and has lots of options, so every time you replay the game, it will never be the same. Its only major flaw is the fact that there isn't any real tutorial, although accessing your race's statistics in-game can lead you to some help files.

At the beginning, setting up your game involves selecting the amount of AI races,



▪ The first diplomatic encounters are pretty polite.



▪ Some weird races prowl about the universe.



▪ You can zoom in to see a more detailed view of the Galaxy map.

the age and size of the galaxy, tech level, and choosing if the Antarens can attack. The game features a large variety of races, from Ants to "Rock-men", and you can also make your own race with its own advantages and disadvantages.

There are three ways to win in *Master of Orion II*: destroy all of your opponents, get elected as supreme leader of the Galaxy (all of the races will be listed, and the more star-systems you conquered the more votes you'll have) or lead a successful assault against the Antarens.

The battles are very fun and deep at the same time. Fighting is done both in space and on planets. While ground battles are won purely by numbers, in space these don't really count. You just need some maxed out ships with plenty of weapons in order to

obliterate the enemy. Things like shields and ship maneuverability can also affect the outcome of a battle.

The spaceships range from small scouts and cruisers, to battleships and Death-Stars. Smaller ships rely on shields and maneuverability, while larger ones have bigger amounts of firepower. Another interesting thing is, that you cannot have an infinite amount of ships (well you can, but you'd go bankrupt, and lose a lot of them). This is specified by command points. The more starbases you have, the more CP you have.

Since you'll encounter lots of other races

Elections, but they also require additional care.

Throughout the game you'll notice the developers' tremendous attention to detail. For a type of strategy that nowadays is known for its austerity, Battle at Antares manages to bring life to every planet and solar system, all in gorgeous Super-VGA graphics. I especially liked how the colonies were represented, with all their buildings, trees, domes and the natural landscape surrounding them. It gives you the genuine feeling that you're building a splendid space empire.

What gives MoO2 the last push towards perfection is the amazing music. It does a terrific job, and really makes you feel the vast size and beauty of the Universe. The musical score will be the last incentive that will make sure you'll stay immersed for hours in this awesome sci-fi experience.

The wide selection of customizable options for your starting galaxy; the sheer amount of choices that explore every aspect of both a bloody and a peaceful expansion of your empire, including diplomacy, technology research, and colony management; the impressive variety of weaponry and



■ The star systems hide treasures and forgotten knowledge.



■ Nothing like happy citizens and chronic pollution on the same planet.

during the game, Diplomacy is also heavily involved. You can forge alliances, propose trade/science pacts and declare war on other races. Exchanges of technology are also possible, which is very useful. You can also send special agents to spy or sabotage them.

Colonization is the best way to expand your empire. It involves leading a colony base/ship to a new planet, or conquering the enemies, which will then come under your rule.

There are tons and tons of stuff that can affect the outcome. There are plenty of different stars, which are better at supporting life or giving you more money (minerals). Planets also come in different shapes and sizes. The environment can range from large tundras to oceanic worlds. Planet surfaces can be radiated or toxic, even the gravity has effects! Also, some planets have natives (best farmers in the game), alien technology and splinter colonies which join you immediately.

The best planet is usually Orion, which is guarded by the Guardian. Good planets can also be guarded by a variety of other space monsters (Hydras, Eels), but these are fairly weak when you have decent ships. The more planets/star-systems you command, the more money and votes you get in the



■ The leaders add another dimension to the management part of the game.



■ A cutscene depicts the obliteration of your empire.

spacecrafts; the easy to use interface, as well as all the other elements that remain to be discovered in-game convinced me that this is seriously one of the best turn-based strategy games ever. The feeling and gameplay make it very memorable. Definitely worth your time! ♦♦♦

Score of

9.5

out of 10

INTERVIEW WITH AIDAN HUGHES

Commercial artist and designer for ZPC

by Connor Eck
aka saibot216

Being a fan of KMFDM, I was very familiar with the artwork of Aidan Hughes. I found his propaganda style of artwork to be very interesting as I had not seen something like it before. When I found out that he had developed a game with that art style, I got very excited and ordered a copy from Amazon. Prior to receiving the game, I started to get very ill (the doctor said I just had a nasty virus) and I was home from school the entire week. When the game arrived at my doorstep, I put the game into my disc drive and proceeded to figure out how to actually run the game. The game is very hard to get working on modern machines, even with a virtual machine. For the rest of that week, while I battled the illness, I played ZPC. I never beat the game, as it was incredibly difficult, but I had so much fun nonetheless and the game became a favorite of mine.

Connor:

Your proposal for what would become ZPC was in the form of a comic, as opposed to one big document. How did developers react to that?

Aidan Hughes:

Originally, the game Zombie had in mind was very Duke Nukem-ish in tone, set in the (then) present day and with 90's techno music as the soundtrack. I believed the use of contemporary themes would date the game prematurely so I suggested an alternative idea based on several different elements from earlier comic and film scripts I'd created which I subsequently fused into one story line.

My intention to make the game into a three-part war epic probably freaked the developers out while my in-depth script and storyboards, 300-year time line and large cast of characters left programmers shaking their heads in disbelief that the technology could handle it all (for example: I wanted the Black Brethren to host disgusting alien life forms which would burst out of their stomachs when they were threatened. However, this wasn't possible with the software back then).



■ I am certainly pining for some PERMASHEDS!

In the mid-90s, only a handful independent companies had employed full-time artists to work on game concepts so there was always going to be a breaking-in stage in the relationship between the art department and the number-crunchers ('codies' we called them).

Fortunately, I'd just finished art directing a 2D/3D animation at H-Gun Studios in Chicago so I had experience of working with both camps. During that particular shoot, I'd learned that the best way to keep things moving forward was to make a list of the animation jobs to be done that week before allocating them to the digital or art sections of the workforce. Rather than send the lists to them via email, I nailed a large board to the wall of the studio and pinned the lists up there so when a crew had completed their task, they would run a line through it.

This structured approach was a fun way to incentivise both teams and much cheering, jeering and high-fives ensued over the months. I decided to use a similar scheme for the Zombie game.

But it wasn't just in the game design we changed things round. I introduced kids to the game-testing crew, got both teams to dress properly for work and organised boat

trips and outside activities to bond together the designers, programmers and animators.

Connor:

The game was originally planned to be an adventure game, why the change to an action game?

Aidan Hughes:

It was a technical decision based on Microsoft deciding, during the making of the game, to delay the release of the first 3D graphics card. Without the card, our game would be published but no-one would be able to play it.

We had to pull the plug on our original idea and start again - this time with the Bungie Game engine. 70% of all my ideas were now impossible and the evolving, multi-layered structure we'd created had to be redesigned as a Doom-style shooter. We were gob-smacked. I'm sure there must have been some sort of investor/shareholder backlash that forced the company's hand, but I wasn't at any of those meetings so I wouldn't know.

Connor:

Would you ever want to develop a game with the original concept?

Aidan Hughes:

Yes, of course. The technology we have now could easily handle the architecture we planned back in the day. I'd want to do a cross-media thing: a series of graphic novels, games and movies. The story is so huge and layered, it could easily spawn and support multiple spin-offs. In the original storyline, Arman was just one of a line of Psionic war messiahs stretching back to pre-historic times, so, conceivably, each one could have his own series.

Connor:

I remember you telling me that there were some rather sadistic programmers on the team. How did they affect the gameplay?

Aidan Hughes:

There was a clique that saw the likes of me with my limited knowledge of computers and their limitations/capabilities as a newbie interloper (they didn't appreciate

Connor:

It was said awhile back that you were planning to develop a full length ZPC animated movie. Is that still in the works?

Aidan Hughes:

I'd obviously love to pursue the idea of making a big-budget feature but I'm not really in the position to as the property belongs to Zombie Games. However, if I were to get some backers interested, I'm sure CEO, Mark Long, would be up for letting us develop it into a proper script.

Connor:

Paul and Roland Barker were selected to do the soundtrack for the game, and they did a fantastic job, they captured the mood perfectly. Was there any particular reason why they were selected? Were there any other "composers" people had in mind?

Aidan Hughes:

To be honest, I'm not sure Paul had much of a role in the soundtrack as I worked exclusively with Roland during its production. I assumed Roland was on the team due to a previous collaboration on another game.

Connor:

You worked on the development of a game, do you play many games yourself?

Aidan Hughes:

If I ever have any free time, I tend to spend it as far away from a screen as possible. However, I do keep up with what's out there on Youtube etc. and I get links sent to me from friends who are developers, programmers etc.

Connor:

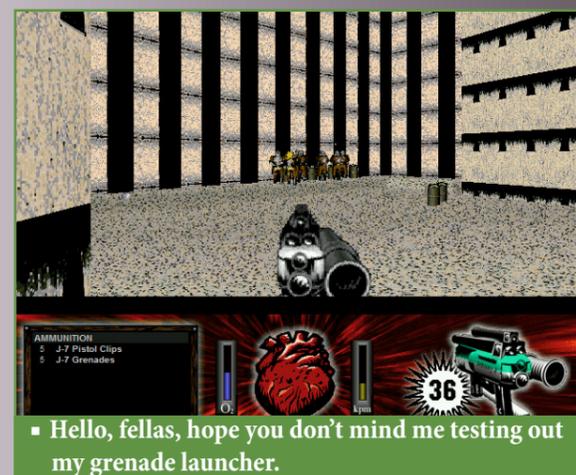
Looking back, is there anything you would've done differently in terms of ZPC?

Aidan Hughes:

Obviously, we all would have preferred it had we been able to make the game we wanted to originally but, with the technology available to us at the time, we weren't able to go further with the concept than we did. Design-wise, I was happy with the ideas I created and I'm proud of what the team did with the limited scope afforded to us. It still looks and sounds as beautiful and scary as it did when it came out all those years ago. ♦♦♦



■ The evil fortress has some nice views.



■ Hello, fellas, hope you don't mind me testing out my grenade launcher.



■ It even has its own pool of blood.

my outside-the-envelope way of working). While some of them eventually came to see me as an asset to the company, there was a hard core that preferred the company remain artist-free. As far as gameplay went, I can't say it was affected in any way. We all had a vested interest in seeing the game become successful so sabotage was out of the question.

He assembled the tracks from an extensive collection of film and classical music (Conan the Barbarian by Basil Poleadoris and Bernard Herrman's score for Taxi Driver among them) that I thought would be perfectly suited for a gothic, military-industrial sound I had in mind. Not sure if anyone else was in the running for the job prior to my involvement.



About the developer

Zombie Studios is a Seattle based independent game developer that has been around since 1994. In addition to ZPC (1996), they developed the Spec Ops games, Zork Nemesis, and Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Covert Ops Essentials.

Lands of Lore III

Review by verec_22

When I played Lands of Lore III, I wasn't angry, I was sad. I felt like I'd just returned from a funeral. Oh sure, I smiled at times. I was able to extract limited amounts of fun from the game. But by the end, there was no hiding from the truth; my Westwood was dead, and nothing was going to bring them back to their former glory.

Let's start with the story. Don't worry, I won't give away spoilers, but if you want to know the plot of LoLIII, read any fantasy book ever. That should have you covered.

The game returns to the locales of Throne of Chaos, chiefly the Kingdom of Gladstone. You play Copper LeGray, the bastard son of King Richard, and every

Publisher: Electronic Arts, Inc.
Developer: Westwood Studios
Release Year: 1999
Genre: Action Role-playing
Themes: Medieval Fantasy
Status: Sold

just isn't here.

Thankfully, unlike Guardians, Copper doesn't transform into a goddamned lizard every five minutes, which is a big plus. Instead, you're given a choice of flying pets that accompany you through the game, which does help shake up the combat.



▪ The automatons at work--what are they planning?

barely any reason not to join all of them, making the choice almost meaningless. Still, it's a nice addition, I just wish it'd been fleshed out better.

Speaking of fleshing things out, the environments could've used some work too. You might frequently wander into a room that seems empty and purposeless, probably added for some planned function that was later cut mercilessly as the budget squeezed. The rooms that weren't cut are often barren and undetailed, barring the odd pile of barrels, as though they were slopped together in a rush.

Now, I know you can't judge a game on visuals alone, but the graphics in LoLIII really hurt it. They hurt me. I was injured by the ugly, that's how bad it is. Even back in 1999, critics and fans alike agreed that this game looked horrendously dated, and time has only made things worse. As if the blandness of the areas wasn't bad enough, the textures they sport are fuzzy, and many are simply stripped right from Guardians and stitched into LoLIII, like some hideous Frankenstein's monster, giving the visuals a horribly inconsistent look. There's no style or aesthetic to anything; it's a random mess.



▪ Wizards are such show-offs!

whiny 90's brat you ever wanted to strangle. He was out enjoying a nice camping trip with the Royal family (who are, of course, in the forests alone and unguarded) when suddenly the Plot struck, and Copper's soul is stolen. He's left with no choice but to go on a quest to save his soul (and also the world I guess).

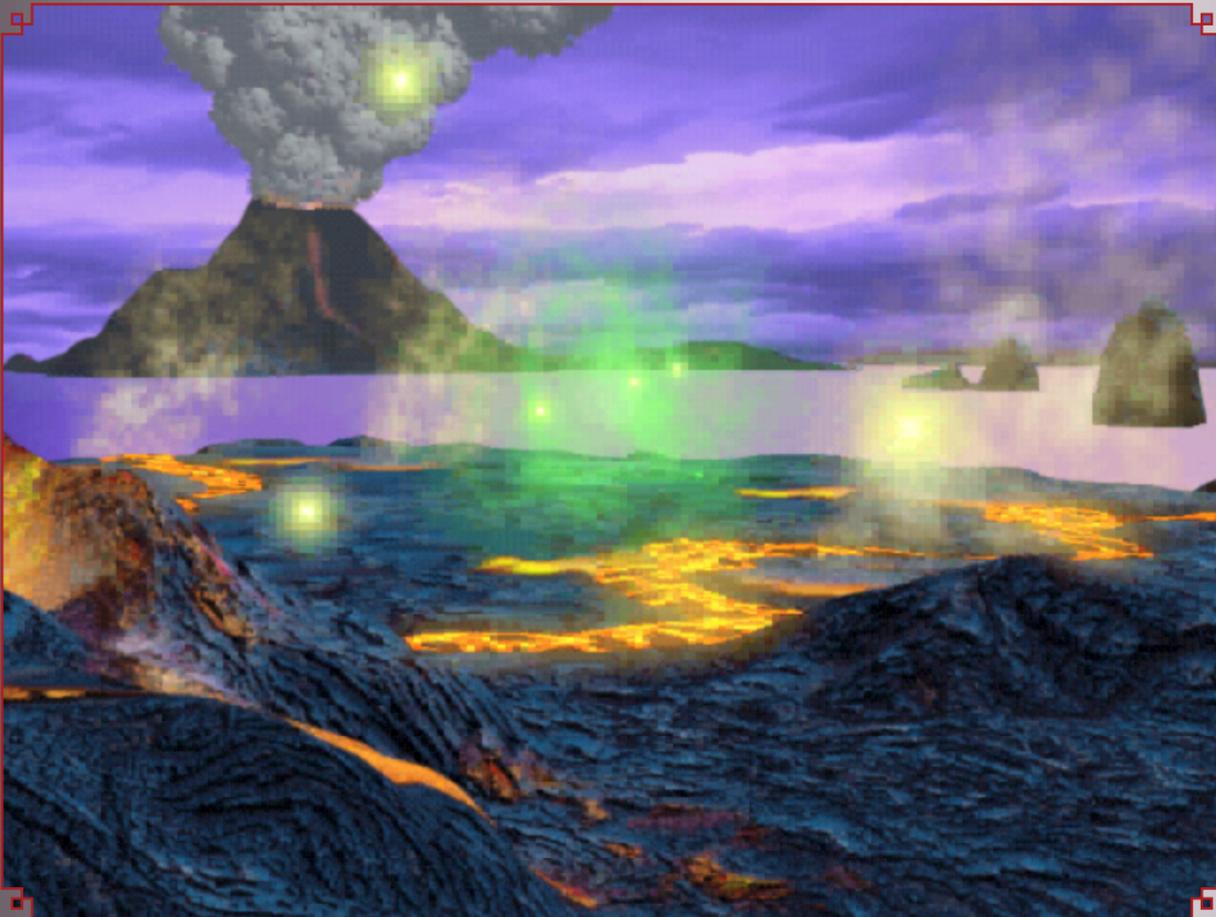
And so begins the standard Lands of Lore romp. Anybody familiar with Guardians of Destiny will know what to expect, since not much has changed. Largely, you'll spend your time steering Copper around Gladstone, scooping up items and whacking beasties across the nose. Which is fine, but I was hoping for a bit of an advancement that

Apart from that, though, it's the same swingy-hitty affair from the last game, where you sidle up to a monster and keep clicking, pausing only to chug a healing potion. Not that you'll need healing potions, as the game's difficulty has been wound so far back that your grandmother could beat this (seriously, ask her to try, I'm curious).

When he's not snoring his way through the fights, Copper can now join up with a selection of guilds, which unlock character classes with their own special spells and skills. The trouble is, the only penalty for joining multiple guilds is that each class levels more slowly, but this doesn't really have much noticeable effect. Meaning there's



▪ The game features flying pets, that do tricks when they're bored.



▪ The pre-rendered cutscenes are pretty good, for the time.

The character designs fall into the all-too familiar trappings of late-90s 3D. Apparently, between Guardians and LoLIII, Gladstone was conquered and enslaved by a race of badly rendered cardboard automaton, brought to life through some horrific science, navigating Gladstone by a series of glitchy walk animations, who pause only to spout the same lines of dialogue.

Speaking of which, pretty much everybody in Gladstone is voiced by a high-school amateur dramatics class (or so it sounds), delivering the same stiff, unconvincing lines which give Oblivion a run for its money. Worse, many of these lines are looped over and over, a sore example being the shopkeepers, who will repeat the same 'I guess I can buy that off of you' (or similar) for every item sold. When returning to the shop to sell a stack of 16 daggers, mute the sound for your own sake.

While the sound design might be lacking, the music certainly isn't. This is one place where LoLIII truly shines, as long-time Westwood composer Frank Klepacki delivers another lovely soundtrack. It's easily the best part of the game, and I'd definitely recommend listening to it, even if you don't plan on playing the rest. Every track perfectly complements the surroundings, and adds a lot to the atmosphere of the world, sometimes enough to make up for the visual shortcomings. That said, I would have liked to see more combat tracks, as they do get a tad repetitive by the end of the game.

Overall, Lands of Lore III was (and still is) a big disappointment to me. Westwood crushed it under a pile of ambitious ideas they just couldn't flesh out, leaving us with



▪ Apparently Gladstone Forest is made of map paintings.



▪ These guys were a pain in the butt.

a generic action RPG. The saddest thing is that Westwood clearly tried their best, but due to time/money/EA constraints, their best just wasn't good enough. ♦♦♦



▪ The character sprites stick out like low-resolution sore thumbs.

▼ Sometimes the visuals don't look too bad.



Score of

5.5

out of 10

ULTIMA VIII PAGAN

review by vctrsknt

Plucked from your daily existence by the hulking fingers of a gigantic red hand, cast into the ocean near a remote island; it is not just the disembodied, booming voice that lets you know you have landed in deep trouble from the very start of your journey through Ultima VIII: Pagan.

For any regular adventurer, this would have been the end - but not for you... Why, you ask? Because you are The Avatar, the legendary Warrior of Britannia and upholder of virtue.

"You, Avatar, have a place in the world as a truly great man. But what if all that were to change? What if all your fame and glory were to be taken away from you? Avatar, I welcome you to the island of Pagan: a place where the sun never sets; a land of perpetual twilight. A place where no one knows of you. A place where everything you ever knew, never was."

to the dark atmosphere that this game creates. The music is dark and mysterious and, most importantly, fits the game perfectly. What Pagan delivers in the graphics is sorely lacking from its gameplay. The controls make it easy to get from A to B without many problems - tackling most of the obstacles you meet is okay - but careful manoeuvring can be pretty hard. One thing you're going to do in this game is die. A lot. Quite often by miscalculating your jumps. In some, rare cases you'll land on a spot and, due to the game's buggy nature, you'll end up somewhere completely different (eg. Into the lake you were trying to avoid in the first place).

Moving around can be awkward and this can be very frustrating in combat as it can make you very vulnerable to enemy attacks. But, still, it is manageable - you get used to it...



▪ If by that you mean becoming dead like you, then I hope not.

Ultima VIII: Pagan is regarded as the black sheep of the Ultima family and, unfortunately, in some ways it is. There are gaping holes in the plot and the game is riddled with bugs. Perhaps more importantly, a lot of the features which the fans grew to love in the earlier games are gone. But let's forget the previous Ultima games and focus on this chapter in the series.

The visual elements of Ultima VIII are stunning. The detail is amazing. The animation; the scenery... Everything contributes

The game has a save function and you'll learn the seasoned gamer's trick of using it. In the update, Origin fixed (among many other problems) the jumping: before it's time to perform difficult jumps or travel through dangerous areas, the Avatar does a short, visible head shake if he believes the jump impossible or fatal.

All in all, the game play definitely has a few flaws, but is more than adequate to make Pagan enjoyable. Once you get the hang of everything it'll be plain sailing.

Publisher: ORIGIN Systems
Developer: ORIGIN Systems
Release Year: 1994
Genre: Action Role-Playing
Themes: Fantasy, Alternate dimension
Status: Sold

Another thing that's different about this installment of Ultima, is that you don't meet a party to accompany you - you are alone. This is one of the many things that die-hard fans love to complain about, but I feel that this contributes to the gameplay. The



▪ The small inventory space will become a mess.



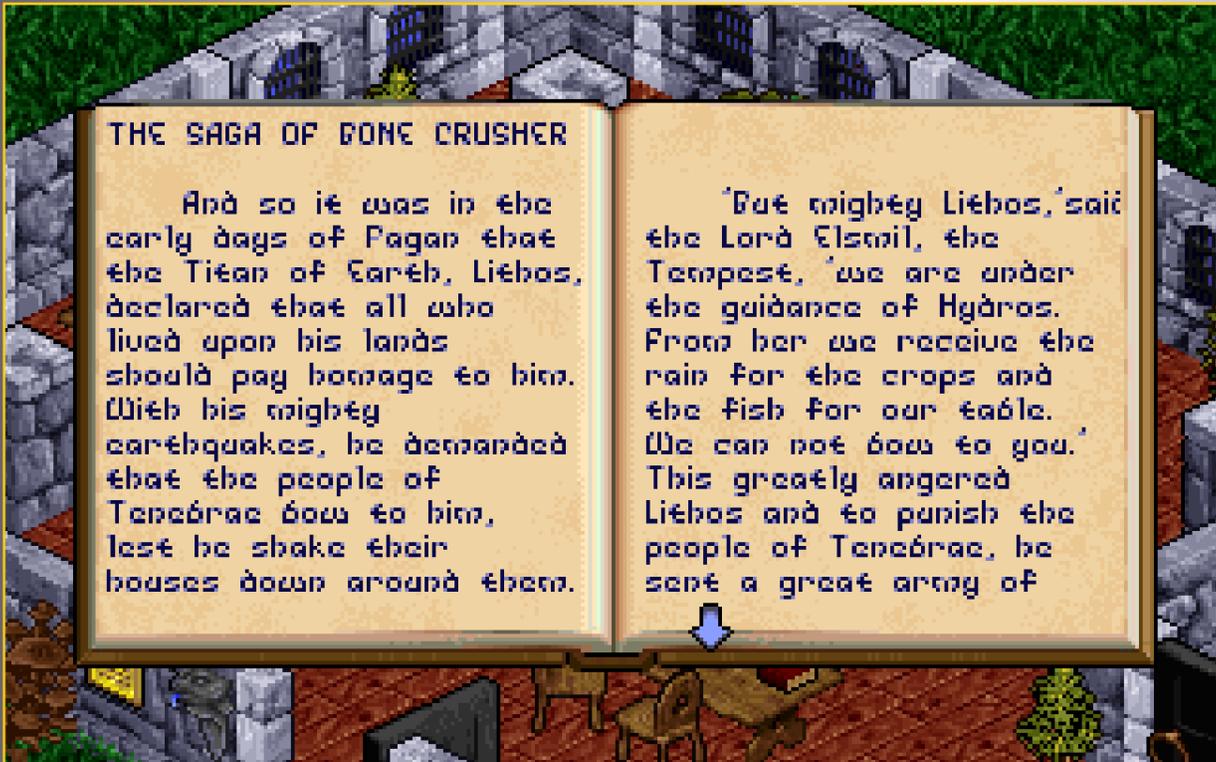
▪ These are the 90s alright.

non-essential NPC's you meet don't have much dialogue (another thing players frequently complain about) but this too contributes to the strange, dark tones of the game - it gives you a certain feeling of disconnection, as if the lack of proper dialogue furthers the notion that you don't belong on Pagan; a sense that you don't understand the ways of the people and are not welcome on their shores.

The game also features a basic character leveling system whereby you increase the character stats by simply fighting or casting magic, e.g. by hitting monsters with a sword, you improve your strength. The system is very straightforward and serves its



▪ Magic is the primary focus of the game.



▪ Another RPG with a "gods" problem.

purpose well.

The game's storyline is centered around The Avatar. This time the main objective is to find a way to escape the island, known as Pagan, back to Britannia so that you can save it from the destructive hands of The Guardian. You advance through the storyline by talking to certain key characters, by going to certain places and by completing mini-quests. After completing a set of mini-quests you often get a major advancement in the storyline - this part of the game is pretty standard for RPGs such as this; any adventure gamer should find themselves at home.

The plot, which I consider to be the best part of the game, is perhaps the biggest subject for debate. It is filled with many gaps and holes, places you never see and obvious last-minute solutions to make the plot work out. However, I feel that even these contribute to the inherent atmosphere of the game, albeit an unintentional effect, since the game is apparently not finished as it was planned, according to its creators.

The game's mood, as I have said, is very dark and strange - everything seems quite surreal and the sense of isolation your

Getting lost in the Catacombs, trying in vain to find somewhere that, no matter what you do or where you go, seems to constantly elude you; huge gates in a great and empty hall - gates whose purpose appears



▪ It wasn't enough that I fell into a trap, they're throwing a zombie at me too.



▪ There are many ways to avoid combat in Ultima VIII.



▪ One of the rare cutscenes in the game.

character experiences is well conveyed. The fact that certain places just do not seem to exist contributes to that strange and dream-like sensation.

unfathomable. I remember these things well... I also remember being very frustrated about not finding these, apparently hidden, places and being equally frustrated about not understanding why certain things were like they were.

In retrospect, I feel that these mysteries are among the many things that make this game so great. Even though there are massive holes in the plot - a lot of threads left dangling - the story is quite simply amazing. It grabs hold of you and drags along the trail of despair and loneliness that is the dark and sinister world of Pagan. In my opinion, this is nothing short of sheer poetry.

Another, beautiful aspect of this game is that The Avatar (by extension, the player) has to accept the fact that, in order to escape Pagan, some evil must be committed so that the greater good may be served.

It saddens me to think that this game was rushed and it makes me wonder how the finished game would have been - I hope for a day when this chapter in the journeys of the Avatar may be completed.

Ultima VIII, despite its imperfections, is an unintentional masterpiece. One that is most definitely worthy of its place among the Ultima legends! ♦♦♦

Score of

8.5

out of 10

HUMAN ++

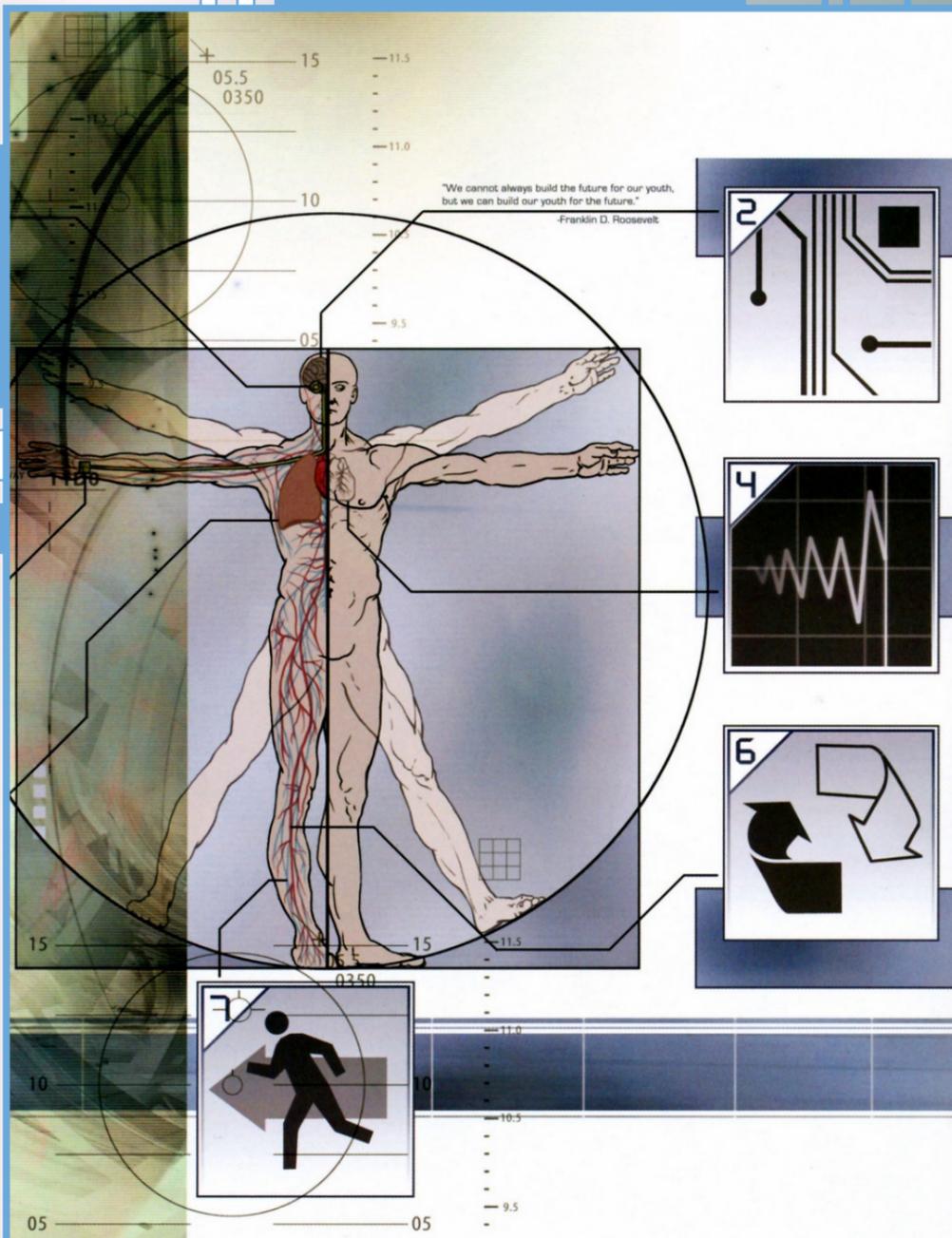
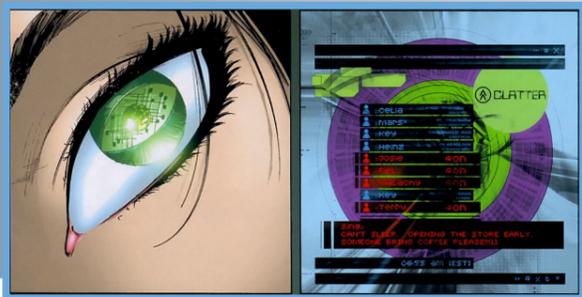
ARTICLE BY THE FIFTH HORSEMAN

PROSTHETICS TODAY... POST-HUMANS TOMORROW?

Millennia ago, an early hominid first thought of using a tool. Since that time, we have been using - and developed - artificial means of supplementing and enhancing our natural abilities: weapons, protection, tools.

Our technological progress builds upon the prior technologies and discoveries to improve the first and generate more of the latter, resulting in an exponentially increasing rate of development (most perceivable through Moore's Law).

Editor's note: This article was written circa 2008.



▲ COVER OF COMIC BOOK TITANIUM RAIN, CHAPTER 2
STORY BY: JOSH FINNEY ART BY: KAT ROCHA
ARCHAIA PUBLISHING

◀ COMIC BOOK DOKTOR SLEEPLESS, ISSUE 7
STORY BY: WARREN ELLIS ART BY: IVAN RODRIGUEZ
AVATAR PRESS

ENHANCEMENT AROUND US // COMMUNICATION

"Everywhere I go, I hear the same thing: Where's my fucking jetpack? Where's my flying car? You're thinking it right now. (...) Where's the future we were promised? That's what I hear you say. Who cheated me out of my spaceship and my ray gun?"

Stop looking for something that isn't there. You live in the future and you don't know it. Half of you know where your friends are by looking inside your own eyeball, for god's sake.

It's not so long ago that a letter or a photo took months to cross the world.

You can tell people where you are today and what it looks like in seconds, no matter where they are. (...)

That wasn't in the future you were expecting.

The future sneaks up on us. It leaks in through the small, ordinary things.

You want your jetpack, but you don't even think about your IM lenses and your phones. Were you born with them?

No. You're science fictional creatures. Each and every one of you."

-- Doktor Sleepless, „Doktor Sleepless” issue #1 (written by Warren Ellis)

The same principle of technological progression applies to our external “enhancements” - personal computers and cellular phones being two most easily recognizable representatives. Twenty years ago, a then-modern cellular phone was an expensive, bulky and cumbersome brick of a device, with little to no extra features. Today's modern cell phone exceeds the parameters of what twenty years ago was a high-end personal computer, is small enough to fit in the pocket of your pants with room to spare, has more features than you'd care to know about... and it's practically everywhere. Think about that for a moment.

Twenty years ago, personal computers weren't rare, but hardly as popular as nowadays. Your PC's parameters exceed those of what twenty years ago was a high-end unit by anywhere between two hundred and five hundred thousand times, depending on which components we're talking about. The Internet as we know it twenty years ago was at best in its infancy. Today most of us make use of it - and while some may spout nonsense about it being a series of tubes or only useful for pornography, some realize that

the moment you sit in front of the machine and go online you become more than simply human: your calculational abilities are augmented by the various utilities present in the system, and your knowledge base is supplemented by the near inexhaustible resources of the Internet.



▲ COMIC BOOK THE AUTHORITY, ISSUE 2
STORY BY: WARREN ELLIS ART BY: BRYAN HITCH
DC COMICS, WILDSTORM

ENHANCEMENT AROUND US // STRENGTH // PORTABILITY

"Afghanistan. A hidden bunker. Four men with rifles guard a thick, rusted steel door. Bam! A huge fist pounds against it—from inside. Bam! More blows dent the steel. The hinges strain. The guards cower, inching backward. Whatever's trying to break out is big. And angry.

The door flies open, and a metallic giant bursts through. It looks like a robot but, hidden inside, famed weapons designer Tony Stark maneuvers the mechanical beast. Bullets bounce off the suit, barely denting his armor. He levels the guards with one swat. Outside, he stares down the enemy camp around him, switches on the flamethrowers in his arms, and roasts the joint.

Utah. A secret mountain lab. Software engineer Rex Jameson backs into a headless metal suit that's hanging from a steel I-beam by a thick rubber cord. He clicks into the aluminum boots, tightens belts across his legs and waist, and slides his arms through backpack-like straps, gripping handles where hands would be. It looks as easy as slipping into an overcoat.

Then he moves, and the machine comes to life, shadowing his every motion. He raises his fists and starts firing sharp jabs while bouncing from one foot to the other. He's not quite Muhammad Ali, but he's wearing 150 pounds and he looks light.

He could easily knock a nearby coder to the floor, or fling one over a desk—but even more impressive, he could do it all day. To show off his superhuman endurance, he walks over to a weight rack and yanks down a bar loaded with 200 pounds. Then he does it again. And again. He stops somewhere around 50, but he's been known to rip through 500 reps in a row. Even then, he quits out of boredom, not fatigue."

-- <http://www.popsci.com/node/20689>, "Building the Real Iron Man" (Popsci.com)

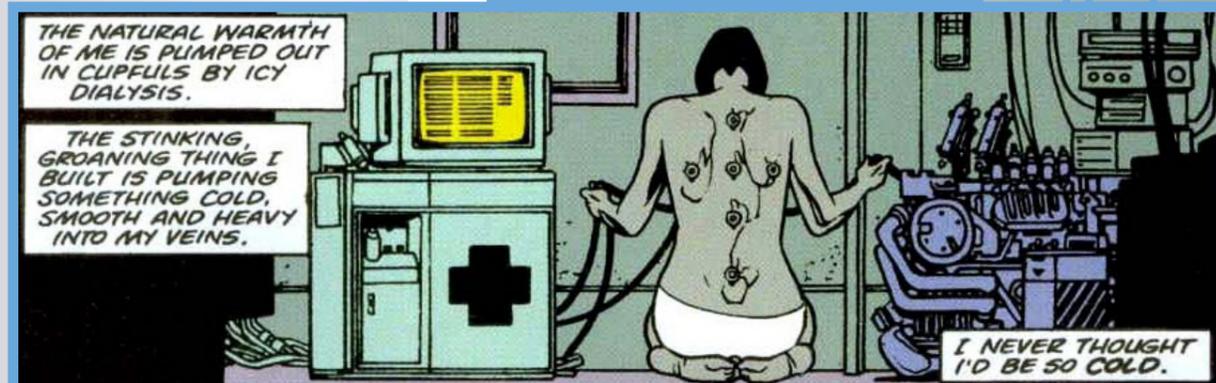


▲ GAME DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION STORY & ART BY: EIDOS MONTREAL SQUARE ENIX

Powered exoskeletons: a thing of fiction. Once, Iron Man is a comic book character, his armor just a product of imagination of technologically-minded writers. The Raytheon-Sarcos XOS work by Rex Jameson is a real life exoskeleton that augments the strength and endurance of its' wearer - fully functional as of two years ago and slated to enter production for United States army in the near future.

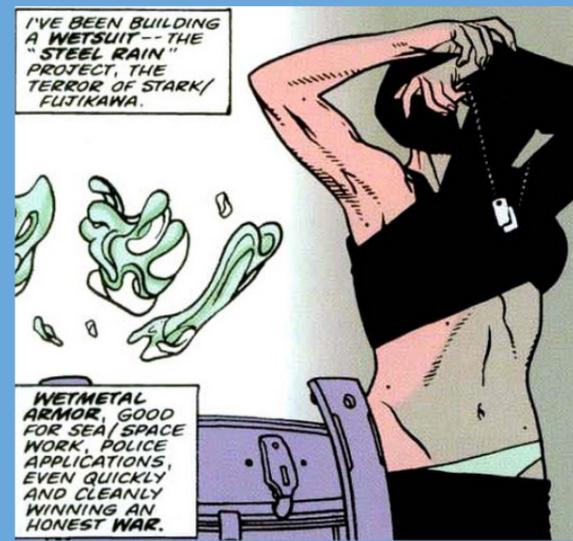
In 1980, Steve Mann looked like a reject from the stage of a low-budget science fiction movie, wearing a bulky system comprised of a helmet, a backpack containing a computer system with a power source and a load of assorted cabling and parts besides. Today, his wearable computer consists of few visible elements beyond a set of seemingly normal glasses and a module attached to his belt.

From massive systems that took up entire floors of buildings, the constant refine-



-ment of technology gave us progressively smaller and lighter (and more powerful) devices, progressing to ones small enough to fit on a desk then small enough to be portable... then wearable.

The next logical stage of this progression will be integration of the device with the user. Ridiculous? As much as this statement may sound completely "out there", the foundations of this stage are already well underway...



▲ COMIC BOOK 2099 UNLIMITED, ISSUE 9
▼ STORY BY: WARREN ELLIS ART BY: GARY ERSKINE MARVEL 2099, MARVEL



BUILDING THE MAN OF TOMORROW // THE LIMBS

"Gentlemen, we can rebuild him. We have the technology. We have the capability to build the world's first bionic man. Steve Austin will be that man. We can make him better than he was before. Better, stronger, faster."

--Oscar Goldman, The Six Million Dollar Man

In 1974 TV series "The Six Million Dollar Man", a crippled astronaut is rebuilt using experimental bionic implants, effectively turning him into a superhuman: the artificial legs allow him to run at speeds of 100 km/h, the cybernetic arm grants him superhuman strength and the synthetic eye acts as a telescope and allows him to see in wavelengths not normally perceptible for human beings.

Believable? Back then, maybe. Possible? The human body is more than a sum of its' parts, and while a cybernetic arm may be super-strong in and of itself, the rest of the body is not. To explain:

"It's not just a case of sticking an artificial arm on. The surrounding bones and fibers have to be hardened and supported or else the new arm will rip out clean off your shoulder the first time you flex. You'll need tensile support across your back, or your spine will snap the first time you lift something heavy. (...) You'll take a chip in your brain to handle the specific dataload from the artificial nerve system controlling the arm. You're getting the idea, right?"

-- Member 436, Global Frequency #2 (written by Warren Ellis)

Today's bionic prostheses are relatively crude in comparison to those envisioned by science-fiction writers, but there are already several areas in which they will surpass flesh-and-blood originals at some point - quite possibly in the near future.

Prostheses using nerve signals as their control input and capable of providing limited sensory feedback are already possible. Eventually, they will reach a level of equivalent performance with flesh-and-blood limbs.

They might in fact become marginally faster, through the use of conductive materials transmitting signals faster than normal nerves can, such as the conductive polymer Poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene) (also known as PEDT or PEDOT).

A powered prosthetic can - barring any component failures - function however long as its power source lasts. Not being subject to fatigue, it can perform the same action over and over without a decrease in effectiveness. To put this in perspective, if a runner had a pair of completely bionic legs functionally equivalent to the originals, he may not be racing cars any time soon but would be able to sustain his top speed (whatever that was) for an extended time period with far less physical effort on his part (and with proper construction of the limbs, considerably less energy use - Oscar Pistorius, a South African Paralympic runner, was barred from participating in the 2008 Summer Olympics after it was discovered his leg prostheses used 25% less energy than the limbs of an able-bodied runner at the same speed).



▲ COMIC BOOK BLACK SUMMER, ISSUE 2
STORY BY: WARREN ELLIS
ART BY: JUAN JOSE RYP; AVATAR PRESS

Limbs are far from the only body parts we currently possess artificial replacements for. Not to be confused with Ventricular Assist Devices often misdescribed as “artificial hearts” (which only supplement the function of the original organ instead of actually replacing its functionality), several variants of Total Artificial Hearts exist and are in

active use (such as the fully implantable AbioCor unit). Enhancement-wise, it is worth remembering that just like future prosthetic limbs, the TAH's will not fatigue due to exertion - a sufficiently effective TAH may well offer its user increased performance over the original organ.

Although not particularly noteworthy in the scope of this article, currently existent artificial lungs are worth mentioning in the regard that they are capable of almost completely replacing the full functionality of the original organ.

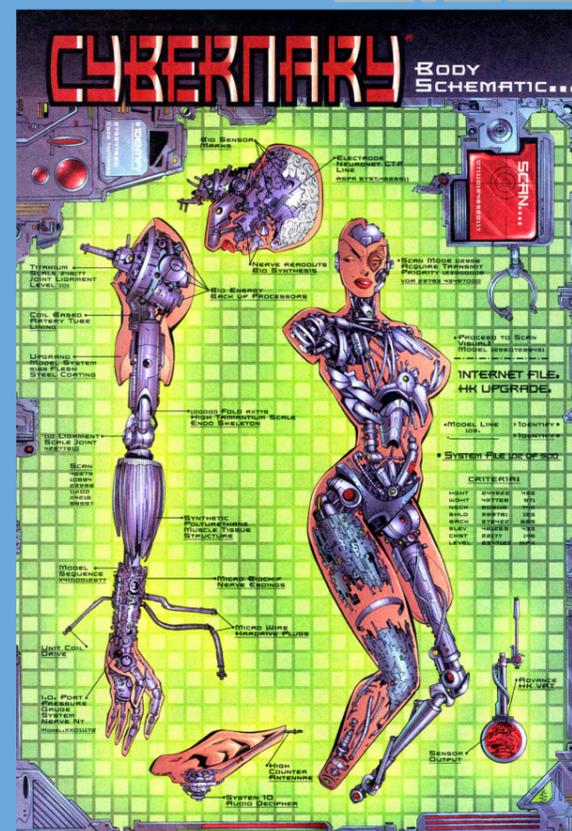
“Artificial livers” and “artificial bladders” are in use, but these are produced from real liver cells rather than being true replacements. Finally, artificial pancreas are currently under clinical trials. These - or specifically, their medical equipment-based variation (as opposed to gene therapy approach or using real beta cells) - consist of an insulin pump under closed loop control using data from an implantable continuous blood glucose sensor.

Visual and hearing prostheses are presently in use - at this point quite rudimentary and only able to provide relatively low-quality sensory input, they nevertheless allow blind and deaf individuals a measure of self-reliance in day to day business. Although presently the artificial eyes have low resolution of the output signal and operate purely in the visual spectrum, future versions are worked on that offer much higher image quality and ones may eventually appear that can perceive higher and lower wavelengths (allowing for infrared and ultraviolet vision).

While artificial sensors copying senses of smell and taste have been developed, neither of these two has been used for implantation into living subjects so far.

One truly interesting thing worth mentioning here is that during his experiments with an electrode array connected to his nervous system, the British scientist Kevin Warwick was able to utilise that array to transfer signals from an external

pain, Parkinson's disease, tremor and dystonia), studies suggest it might also be effective in improving the subjects' long-term memory up to and including the provision of perfect recall.



▲ COMIC BOOK CYBERNARY, ISSUE 5
STORY BY: STEVE GERBER
ART BY: JEFF REBNER; WILDSTORM

Hypothetical future means of brain augmentation is covered largely by “exocortices” - theoretical external systems that would interact with and augment an individual's brain, including add-on memory modules which could provide an enchancile with additional information and/or exchangeable skill sets.

A reverse concept is the “wetdrive”, where part of an individual's brain structure is utilised as a digital storage medium. Presently, we do not possess sufficient knowledge to determine with any degree of certainty how much either concept is viable.

THE ORGANS // THE SENSES // THE BRAIN

information source - an ultrasonic sensor - to his brain, effectively gaining use of another, artificial sense for a brief period.

At the present, there isn't much we can do to cybernetically augment a human brain: electrode arrays like the one mentioned above are a possibility to expand its sensory capabilities and allow it control over external devices, including artificial limbs; the other “augmentation” takes the form of Deep Brain Stimulation, mostly used to disrupt the signals produced by incorrectly operating neural structures (ie “brain pacemaker”), in therapy of treatment-resistant movement/affective disorders (chronic

However much advantage the cybernetics might possess over the organics, the largest discrepancy between both is in how their healing abilities work. Cybernetics are generally the tougher of the two, and repair would essentially consist of just replacement of damaged components, but they are incapable of self-repair. Organics are more fragile and heal longer, but are capable of self-healing (one could say it's part of the “design”).

Although right now humanity's advancements into nanotechnology can be compared to monkeys flinging rocks at things, nanotechnology promises to rectify this

LET'S DO IT WITH NANOTECH // THE TOMORROW'S CYBERPUNKS

difference with the development of “naoassemblers” - machinery capable of rebuilding matter at the molecular level - which would allow spontaneous repair of cybernetic replacements without the need for a major intervention by a qualified technician (although supervision by one might still be required).

On the other hand, flesh-and-blood individuals could also benefit from much the same effect, as the nanomachinery could supplement and augment their bodies' natural regeneration ability.

“You can rebuild your own fucking bodies at home with stuff you bought from the hardware store. (...)

You know what you are? You're grinders. While you wait for the real future you think you're owed, you fuck with your bodies like they were virtual-world avatars. You add things to them. You treat them like characters to be improved and you grind them.”

-- Doktor Sleepless, „Doktor Sleepless” issue #1 (written by Warren Ellis)

Replacing one's body bit by bit with - and possibly superior - bionic equivalents is not going to be very effective in the long run. At some point, a preferable option will be to transfer the brain into a fully synthetic body. As the brain would be the only (some-what) organic element, the complex system of internal organs could be greatly reduced, with some of them becoming entirely superfluous to the new being, and more compact life support modules used in their place. By and large, that would improve the body's overall effectiveness, although there may be other consequences to the recipient's mental health (outlined in the final paragraph, below).

“Sometimes I suspect I'm not who I think I am. Like, maybe I died a long time ago, and someone took my brain and stuck it in this body. Maybe there never was a real 'me' in the first place and I'm a completely synthetic.”

-- Motoko Kusanagi, Ghost in the Shell (written by Masamune Shirow)

If they go insane, what we'd have on our hands is a completely deranged human brain controlling several hundred kilograms of bulletproof machine - stronger, faster and far more lethal than a human being could ever aspire to be.

“All your memories of your wife and daughter are false.”

-- Ghost in the Shell (written by Masamune Shirow)

If we've got all those implants, then how about a connection to the Internet (or whatever will replace it in the future)?

As it turns out, Internet today can be a scary place. Identity theft, data hijacking... some people actually enjoy causing considerable harm to others (example may be 4chan /b/s “The Anonymous”, a group identity of people who - just for their own sick enjoyment - posted seizure-inducing animations on a forum whose community was mostly comprised of epileptics).

Unfortunately, those people come in entire packs, and there are always a few who, despite their attitudes and habits, have a high level of technical aptitude. As a result, anyone possessing bionic enhancements capable of going online within a network would have to consider themselves at a severe risk of an intrusion - and what the intruder could and would do to them might range from “merely” annoying (such as randomly interspersing the victim's auditory input with fragments of “Never Gonna Give You Up” by Rick Astley and their vision with corresponding snippets of the complementary video) up to and including potentially lethal (taking over their body control, trying to strangle them with their own artificial arm etc).

Awareness of that risk alone might contribute to mental instability (as outlined above).

“Bionic people”, “cybernetic enchanciles”... the future's technologically upgraded breed of Man may enjoy advantages beyond those of us flesh-and-blood creatures, but along with them a considerable share of new risks and disadvantages.

You might have found this article vaguely disturbing, overtly speculative or altogether laughable. Don't dismiss it, however, without a second thought: a few decades down the line, we might yet find ourselves living it. ♦♦♦



▲ COMIC BOOK SUPERGOD, ISSUE 2
STORY BY: WARREN ELLIS
ART BY: GARRIE GASTONNY; AVATAR PRESS

Let's face it: at some point, consumer market-grade bionic replacements will become viable. When that happens, there will be at least two groups of people willing to cut out parts of their own body to replace them with shiny cyberware.

First, the techno-geeks with their constant drive for “better, faster, more impressive” hardware (compensating for something, perhaps?).

Second, maybe not as expected as the first, would be the body modding community. They reshape their ears to a pointed shape just for kicks. For those people, implanting teflon horns on their foreheads or cutting amusing shapes into their genitals constitutes nothing more than a fashion statement. Taking that into consideration, having their hand replaced with a chromed bionic contraption doesn't seem like a particularly major leap.

You've always wondered where would all those cyberpunk characters come from - now you know.

So, we've got ourselves a cyborg. Someone who replaced most or entirety of their body with cybernetics. The problem is, there is no sure way to tell if after doing that they're still sane. Currently used Deep Brain Stimulation implants and electrode arrays have been shown to produce negative results - possibly brain damage - in part of the subjects. What if our full body cyborg finds out that the sounds and images transmitted from its artificial senses are almost perfect, but for minor glitches or data loss of the input? What if the sensory input is perfect but misses a tiny detail, like the ability to feel pain? What if - like Motoko Kusanagi quoted above, the cyborg begins to develop an identity crisis? What if for some reason there is a social stigma against cybernetic beings? These - and many other possible factors besides - may adversely impact that individuals' mental health.

Versus X-COM

UFO DEFENSE vs Terror from the Deep

Written by dkw

When people look at UFO Defense (UFO: Enemy Unknown) and Terror from the Deep, they see the latter as little more than a reskinning, a simple attempt to cash in upon the success of the former. In terms of general gameplay that is true. Why change the controls when they have been proven to work? However, the similarities between the two games end with the user interface because almost all of the mechanics, rules, and technology have been altered considerably.

In UFO Defense the aliens are more passive aggressive than anything. During a month, they rarely launch more than one terror mission, and usually build only one base. At the same time, they're not really keen on convincing countries to stop funding X-COM more than once every two months. The aliens act defensively in battle and tend to stay within a small area around their starting point. It seems like the aliens in UFO Defense are afraid of X-COM for most of the game.

In Terror from the Deep the aliens have become extremely aggressive. In a month, they average three terror missions, build an average of three bases, and attempt to convince a country to stop funding X-COM at least once. They actively seek out targets in battle and are likely to roam the battlefield,



UFO Defense



Terror from the Deep

instead of staying put waiting to be found. What the aliens seemed to fear in UFO Defense has disappeared.

All the weapons in Terror from the Deep have been altered to some degree. They have less ammo compared to their UFO Defense counterparts, and as a weapon's firepower goes up, its ammo capacity goes down. Human weapons in Terror from the Deep deal far less damage than in UFO Defense and are less accurate, while the alien ones deal more. There are no more laser weapons with infinite ammo, Microprose having admitted that giving them to the players was a mistake. Some of the weapons only work underwater now, and those tend to be the most powerful in the game.

The number of aliens in a mission in Terror from the Deep has been doubled

on average, quadrupled in two-part missions. Small UFOs in UFO Defense carry between 3 and 7 aliens, while in Terror from the Deep the number rises to 5-11 aliens. This massive increase makes it extremely difficult to complete the two-part missions.

In UFO Defense only the final mission is two-part, and it is tame in comparison with the similarly structured missions from Terror from the Deep. Alien Activity, attacking an Alien Base, and the Aliens Terrorize a Cruise or Cargo ship, all those are two-part missions, where the player has to win both parts in order to succeed.

When entering the second part, the only things available are what the soldiers were carrying at the end of the first. If all the ammo was used up, then they are out of ammo. The condition of the soldiers also carries over, such as health, fatal wounds, low morale, low energy... All aliens that were knocked unconscious in the first part of the mission die as soon as the second part starts, making it harder to capture living aliens. Only unconscious aliens in the second part are counted as captured. Aborting or losing in the second part causes all the civilians the player saved in the first part to be counted as killed by the aliens.



UFO Defense



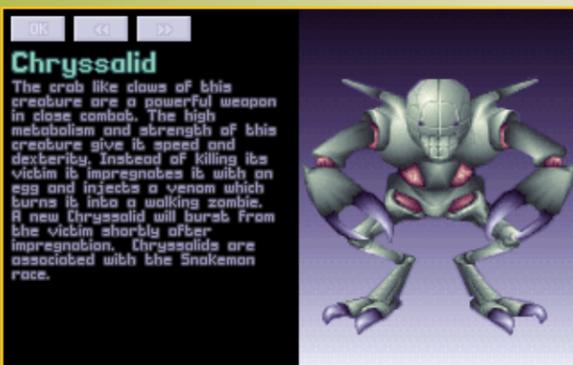
Terror from the Deep

The final mission in Terror from the Deep has three parts. The first two are identical to attacking an Alien Base or Alien Activity site, but the third part is extremely difficult. Your soldiers have to fight their way through narrow corridors with indestructible walls, following an inward spiral toward the center of the map. The overhead map as well as the ability to save the game have been disabled.

The aliens themselves are more dangerous. In UFO Defense the aliens could see about two squares farther than humans, while in Terror from the Deep their advantage increases to four squares. All the aliens in Terror from the Deep have about twice as much health as their counterparts in the first game. UFO Defense's Stectoids averaged 35 Health, while TFTD's Aquatoids average 60 Health.

Other alien stats received a boost as well, including their damage reducing armor. In one battle in Terror from the Deep I hit a Lobsterman, one of the most powerful aliens in the game, with 3 alien grenades and 16 gauss rifle shots in a single turn and it walked away like nothing happened; had I hit ANY alien in UFO Defense with that kind of firepower it would have died, its corpse would have been destroyed, along with all of its equipment.

The artificial intelligence controlling the aliens in Terror from the Deep is smarter than in UFO Defense, allowing to better exploit the terrain in battle. More of them can fly, especially the Chryssalid (an alien that creates more aliens by killing non-aliens) counterpart in Terror from the Deep, the Tentaculat. Aliens have fewer weaknesses, and more resistances.



■ UFO Defense

In Terror from the Deep they have been provided with an extra way to win. If they complete a varying number of "Alien Activity" missions, depending on the difficulty setting, the player will automatically lose the game. Forcing the player to lose or abort the attempt to stop the "Alien Activity" counts as a success for the aliens. The player HAS TO WIN the "Alien Activity" missions if they wish to have any hope at winning the game. Aliens score more "points" in Terror from the Deep when they successfully complete missions than they did in UFO Defense, and the more points the aliens get,



■ Terror from the Deep

the sooner the nations funding X-COM will abandon the program.

Terror from the Deep's tech tree is significantly different. Many of the more powerful technologies needed to give soldiers a fighting chance require at least twice as much research. In UFO Defense, to get a better suit of armor for the player's soldiers requires researching Alien Alloys and Personal Armor. In Terror from the Deep, to get that same armor the player has to research a Deep One Corpse (found only in Terror Missions where Gillmen are involved), then Aqua Plastics, and finally Aqua Plastics Armor. To research the technology found in alien USOs in Terror from the Deep requires capturing an alien Engineer and researching it first; that restriction didn't exist in UFO Defense. Access to many advanced technologies in Terror from the Deep require researching live aliens, alien corpses, and a specific X-COM built submarine. If the player knows how the tech tree unfolds, then at the very least it takes twice as long to get the technology needed to fight the aliens on equal terms. In UFO Defense, I could have the second best armor for my soldiers within four months of in game time.



■ Terror from the Deep

In Terror from the Deep, to get to that same point requires about seven months assuming all the required living aliens and alien corpses line up.

The battlefields have changed as well. There is more terrain that slows soldiers down, more places for aliens to hide, and fewer ways to get behind the aliens to avoid losing soldiers to opportunity fire when walking through a door, around a corner, or down the street. The battlefields are also cluttered with narrower passages, forcing the player to cluster their soldiers together more often. This makes them vulnerable to



■ Terror from the Deep

alien grenades. The narrow passages are even worse onboard cargo and cruise ships where single file corridors not only make it difficult to bring in X-COM's tanks, but also allow the aliens to set up ambushes. Although the environment remains completely destructible, the lack of ammo for all weapons made it expensive to blast holes through walls in order to sneak behind an alien. Microprose changed how Terror from the Deep calculates if a soldier saw an alien or not. While the soldier can see the cubby hole an alien could be hiding in, it is impossible to make sure if someone is indeed there without getting into shooting range; in UFO Defense if the soldier can see the cubby hole, the alien hiding in it was visible as well.

The aliens have better positioning in Terror from the Deep. The player will always find aliens on higher grounds shooting down at their soldiers, almost totally negating the player's use of terrain. This is obvious when the player attempts to stop an Alien Activity mission or is attacking an Alien Base. The player will find their soldiers out in the open with no cover and the aliens are all hiding within fortified bunkers shooting at them from safe positions.

The player needs to be careful with explosives when defending bases from alien attacks in Terror from the Deep because too much damage to a base causes the facilities inside it to be destroyed when the battle is over, even if the player wins the battle. Everything stored in destroyed facilities is lost, including personnel, equipment, submarines, research, etc., and if the Air Lock facility gets destroyed the entire base is done for, even if the player succeeded at defeating the aliens.

You may be wondering why did Microprose make Terror from the Deep so much more difficult? Because people who had figured out the tricks, tech trees, alien weaknesses, and exploits in UFO Defense complained that it was too easy. All those tricks and exploits have been removed from Terror from the Deep. About a year after it came out, Microprose released a patch that removed some of the bugs the game had as well as weakened the aliens a little, but the impact this had on the overall difficulty was minimal. ♦♦♦

Versus GOBLIINS

The Original Trilogy vs 4

Written by bobson

Just recently, a fourth part of the Goblins series has been launched onto the market. Fifteen long years have passed since the last Goblins game was released. Is this rebirth worth attention? Let's take a closer look.

In the gaming industry, even a couple of years can push a sequel to a completely new level of quality. The technical aspect of the hardware is improved, there are less restrictions on the programmers' creativity; new limits are surpassed time and time again. All of this allows for prettier graphics, smarter A.I., more complex level design, improvements to gameplay and many, many other things. But not every sequel goes this way or at least not in every aspect. The series I'm going to write about goes forward a little, but...

All four games in the Goblins series are adventures, and interestingly, since 1992 nearly nothing has changed gameplay-wise. Every time, you control more than one character and often you'll have to make them cooperate. In each game your progress is based on screens – if you complete one (or a set of connected screens) you go to another, and so on until the happy ending. In every screen, of every episode of this series there are a lot puzzles – some easy, some tough, and (unfortunately) some illogical. Another thing that doesn't change is the sense of humor. These games are filled with jokes – most of them are slapstick, but what makes for more fun than a neighbor's misfortune? Also, the main graphic designer hasn't changed for all those years. Pierre Gilhodes



• Goblins

is the man responsible for all those colorful sceneries and unforgettable characters.

It would be untrue if I said that nothing really changed over the years. In the first game, the goblins were able to carry one item at a time - later on, their pockets became bottomless. In the beginning there was only one screen at a time – in the third game, the screens were not only larger than what you could see (you had to scroll), but often they were also connected, to create two or three complex locations. The possibility to save the game, introduced in Goblins 2, was a huge improvement, as previously you could only use specific codes to

reload the stage which you didn't complete. At the same time, finding out what to do to was gradually getting easier... The first part didn't give many clues, while in the third one, the "aim of the screen" was added. As you probably noticed the quality, the complexity, and in my opinion, the overall level of fun experienced by the player was increasing as the Goblins saga continued. Then the latest, fourth instalment arrived... So now, it's time to continue the thought left in the first paragraph.

Goblins 4 takes a step back. Unfortunately the game released in 2009 is a disappointment. Nowadays gamers probably won't look at this title because its graphics are in no way the equal of most games today: the 3D environment looks poor; the engine does not use any modern effects and in an era sporting HD video, the resolution of 1024x768 is a letdown. If I were a casual player looking at the screenshots, I would think this game is designed for kids and only for kids. Good thing is that I'm not a casual gamer! I started my gaming adventures in about 1990. That is why I can close one eye and try to enjoy it without caring about how it looks. I can say more – for me it looks good, as the graphics are not the most important part of the experience. Yes, some improvements could be made, but that is not the point here... There are Goblins, so it is fun!

Finally, the characters have gained the ability to run. Not a vast improvement, although sometimes it's good to see that



Gromelon

• Goblins 2: The Prince Buffoon



▪ Gobliins 3

yet to accomplish. Was it that hard to show the aim of the screen like before? I would have known what to do in order to advance further, without getting irritated. If I could save, then I'd try something new the next day I played...

All in all, Gobliins 4 is not that bad. It preserves the spirit and humor of the series. It's still fun to play and see how the goblins hurt themselves when they do something wrong. It's good to feel your brain working on these often abstract, bizarre puzzles. Maybe the authors tried to make more of a tribute to the first games, rather than a true sequel to the series? Most of the game mechanics look like they were taken straight from the first. That wasn't the best possible idea, but they did it and I've decided to pay for it!

If, in your country, this game also contains the entire Gobliins saga, do not

they can move around faster. Especially when they need to cooperate in one spot and one of them is on the other end of the screen. Another improvement I have found is a set of golden teeth: if a player manages to collect them all they'll get to a bonus stage (I haven't completed the game yet, so I can't tell you if it is good). That is all I have found to have improved since the previous instalment.

I really enjoyed Gobliins 3: Goblin's Quest and, in my opinion, this is the best chapter in the series. It's for this very reason why I don't understand why the latest addition to the Gobliins saga is so emasculated in comparison. I can't use a different word to describe it, as the steps backwards really disappoint me. There is no way to save during a screen – every time you need to start the stages from scratch. The screens are always separated and there is always only as much as you can see. What happened to scrollable, combined multi-screens? Sometimes it seems like I've done everything possible to progress to the next level, but somehow the door and the arrow aren't showing up... What to do? Stay longer and look around? There may be some oversights, as in all



▪ Gobliins 4

adventure games, such as a well-hidden puzzle or plot-line with an NPC that you have

hesitate and buy it! ♦♦♦

Gobliins 1, 2:

Score of

7.0

out of 10

Gobliins 3:

Score of

9.0

out of 10

Gobliins 4:

Score of

5.0

out of 10

Reflections of a cat wearing a lime on its head



Written by Tito

Hello and welcome all to this brand-new section of the Abandonian magazine. What hidden wonders will you discover in this marvellous article? What sources of unending wisdom will it reveal to you, gentle reader? I guess none, as my brain has been severely torn by the unsuccessful study of ISO: 9001 norm during the last weeks, a horrible torture not even my worst enemy deserves. But making an enormous effort, I'm bringing you a series of reflections over one of the most popular game genres nowadays. That is, RPGs.

Maybe some of you don't know it, but that curious acronym actually means role playing game. That is, you are supposed to play a role. This, which may sound obvious, must have been causing some kind of mind twist in game designers for the last fourteen years or so, as ninety percent of them choose exactly the same role for the main character. I can visualize a reunion between a producer and the original designer like this:

Designer: "Good day, oh almighty giver of wealth. I have a great idea which can make you even wealthier".

Producer: "What is it? Talk, you humble henchman!"

Designer: "Well, it is a computer game in which players will find themselves in the role of an anonymous character, and after some adventures, they will be charged with the exciting task of saving the city/land/world/universe".

Producer: "Mmmmm, it seems like a clever idea. Take this huge load of money and do it".

That is one of the explanations for this curious lack of ideas, they are too afraid of their bosses to actually suggest anything original. Or maybe they just don't have any ideas at all. Personally, I prefer another explanation, that I find more plausible. RPG designers have a particular type of brain. As a result of years of hard research over fantasy worlds, invented futures and alternate dimensions, they are all mentally connected as bees in a world wide beehive, and that prevents them from thinking different. I know this explanation is quite twisted, but it is the only one that justifies how people can be paid again and again for always doing the same thing.



▪ Feel the power of my middle age crisis!

Editor's note: This article was written back in 2007.

But, besides this sinister discovery about plots in RPGs, these games have provided us players with one priceless feature. That is, bad guys!

Apart from the evident trauma which came from discovering the real evil mind behind the hideous scheme in *Realms of Arkania: Shadow Over Riva* (a so terrible truth that I feel reluctant to tell it here), other games have shown us a gallery of funny and colourful characters. They have a tendency to work the following way:

"Oh, I'm so powerful that I have conquered this whole land with no effort. And I'm so evil that I find no better way to celebrate it than standing in this dark and wet throne room while proudly staring at my ugly and smelly minions. Man, this makes me feel so good that I'm gonna start laughing stupidly. BWA HA HA HA HA HA HA!! BWA HA HA!!"

That is what I call an exceptional mind.

Others prefer to spend their free time taking walks around volcanic and sulphurous areas. That's the case, for example, of The Warlord in *Anvil of Dawn* and Dagoth Ur in *Morrowind*. Frankly, given the look of the second one (a thin and grey body, quite

oversized hands and feet, a problem with food and quite a bad taste for clothes), I can understand that he prefers to be alone. But, The Warlord? He was a cool guy, with a fancy armor and having the gift of the gab. If I was him, I would probably go to luxury medieval discos looking for a pretty elf to tell her something like "Hey honey, do you know I'm the owner of the world most successful company? I have like 10.000 orc employees, fully motivated and demanding no salary, completely willing to follow my orders. You look like a promising girl. Maybe you would like to have a nice and well paid position in my business when I set a bloody iron grip in your beautiful elven village? Let us discuss it, but let me first invite you to a drink". Yeah, it would be nice to be the bad guy in a fantasy setting.

There are other bad guys that have more interesting social lives than those mentioned above. For example, Irenicus, in *Baldur's Gate II*, didn't resign himself with standing at a given location and waiting for time to go by while the world was easily conquered. He was still crazy as a castrated cat, with a lot of resentment in his little evil heart, lived in some weird sewers before moving to an asylum, had smelly minions and the

“uncontrolled laughing” syndrome, but at least he did things, and knew how to talk in an impressive way. I have some nice memories of him. So bald...

Another one I'm very fond of is Malak, from Knights of the Old Republic. Also bald. Also evil. He did many things during the game, chasing you all over the galaxy in a way that showed an admirable tenacity. Still, I don't understand the obsession that many characters in the Star Wars universe share towards endless chasms in their homes. It is quite a waste of space and time, not to mention the problems with distances

He had this huge tower, not because he needed it, but because he was a terrible narcissist! He wanted you to listen to what he was playing in some ugly pipe organ, and the only way he was able to achieve that was having you climbing flight after flight of stairs, so you couldn't avoid that terrible music! After reaching his chamber I felt like saying “Yeah, sure, but I guess you can't play Bach's “Tocata and Fugue in D minor”, you filthy pig”. Instead, I killed him, which isn't a bad solution either. Even when I've heard he has the bad habit of ignoring his own death in other games of the series, and



▪ What's on the front cover of Shadows Over Riva?



▪ Cruelty. Check. Arrogance. Check. Power. Check. Baldness. Check. What more do I need to become a god?

and air conditioning . I certainly wouldn't like visiting him for a cup of tea. If I wanted to go to the toilet, it would be something like “Of course. Take that door, walk the two hundred meters long bridge without banister over an endless chasm, then when you arrive to a closed module is the second door to the left”. Quite exhausting.

And to finish this reflection about RPGs and their characters, I have to talk about one of the better known ones. That is, Ganondorf! Yes, that dirty pig (and I mean it quite literally). I've only had the pleasure of meeting him in The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, but still I won't forget the experience.

returning without even giving an excuse.

Well, that's all for this first article, folks. Hope you have enjoyed it, and until the next one, if there is another.

PS: I can't help it. The evil mind behind the scene in Shadows Over Riva was... A bunch of little caterpillars!!! I still tremble at the mere memory of those terrific and small bugs... ♦♦♦



▪ Ganondorf, stereotype or simply misunderstood?

WILDERNESS

A Survival Adventure

review by Dumitru Condrea

It was raining hard and I could barely make out what was ahead of me. I stopped and found a more sheltered part of the woods to set up my tent. Dry wood from under the umbrella of some thick thorny shrubbery was plenty to start a fire. I hanged out the food like I always do and put the small game I caught a little while ago up against the fire. Just when I was starting to get comfortable, a cougar entered the scene! Quickly, I gathered all my things and ran as fast as I could. It didn't follow me, thankfully. A quick look into my backpack, however, revealed a terrible truth--the cougar stole all my food! And that includes meat, eggs, nuts, beans, potatoes... even the candybars?!

Damn, this game seems unfair sometimes. *Wilderness: A Survival Adventure* is a text game about exploration and survival. It includes one main scenario where your plane crashes in the Sierra Nevada range and you're forced to find your way to a rangers' outpost. In an additional scenario you're trying to find the Lost City of Gold, rumored to be somewhere in the same area of the Sierra Nevadas. Several expansions cover other parts of the world, such as Bolivia, Burma and New Guinea.

We need to get one thing straight first. This is no ordinary text adventure game. The vocabulary it understands is simple enough (use knife, kill game, drink water etc.) and the descriptions it offers are short and to the point. The game likes to mention when you enter a forested area for example, when you reach a river, or when there is food nearby. It also helpfully notifies you when you're so thirsty you'd drink Lake Michigan, or when your condition worsens. What sets it apart is the focus on survival. The player has several stats (energy, thirst, hunger) and it's necessary to keep them in check: drink, eat and rest regularly. Furthermore, you need to use various navigation tools such as a topographic map and a compass in order to find that rangers' outpost.



▪ It's rather pointless to attack this ferocious predator.

Publisher: Electric Transit
Developer: Titan Computer Products
Release Year: 1986
Genre: Simulation Text Adventure
Themes: Survival, Wilderness
Status: Abandonware



▪ A basic trick to use when in search for civilization.

So it's more of an RPG without levels, rather than an adventure game, if that makes any sense. Because of this many of these status management tasks end up feeling like chores by the end of the journey. Luckily, not all mechanics revolve around text. Most of the screen is occupied by a graphical representation of the wilderness from a first-person perspective. What's really neat is that you can pan to the right or to the left and the game will scroll the view just like in 3D. You can move in any direction as long as you're facing it, making this one of the most memorable open-world experiences of the 80s.

The main problems owe their existence to the technical limitations of the time. The graphical gimmicks in this game are impressive, but after travelling miles of mountainous terrain, I have to say there isn't much to see. Just the same pines, rocks and rivers. Predators have separate sprites, but they are only three in this region (the cougar, the bear, and the rattlesnake), while other wild animals and plants are usually not illustrated. I always believed the key to a good exploration game is the detail, but I am afraid there is nothing to discover in this barren world. To make matters worse, the rangers' station, which players must find in order to finish the scenario, is impossible to see from a distance. Finding the square which designates the outpost on the topographical map is very easy using the compass for direction, and the mountains and rivers to determine the current location. What follows is a lot

of time wasted circling around the probable location of the outpost, since there are no visual landmarks or clues--only a lot of gray, and more pines.

Once you get past the pixel hunting the game poses no challenge, as long as you've read the manual. Food and water is aplenty, running from predators requires little effort, and in the worst case scenario it's possible to resurrect your character and continue on from the same spot. That only gives you a penalty to the score. There is even an alternative Research mode that removes all survival elements.

Still, *Wilderness: A Survival Adventure* shines in the educational department. The 100+ pages of the manual go beyond the general commands of the game, describing in detail the geography of different regions, their fauna, injuries that one might suffer and how to treat them, how to use navigation tools, how to set up a camp or find shelter, food and how to determine if it's edible, and so on. It can serve as a guide in case you get stranded for real. The status management in the game imposes discipline when it comes to surviving with limited supplies of food and water. You may also learn that cooking food attracts cougars, and they won't hesitate to steal your candybars. Ok, I'm not sure if that actually happens in real life.

In the end, I would recommend trying this just to glimpse a good idea about a survival game. It felt great to be alone in the wilderness, but the topographical map made things too easy. Without one, however, there is little point in playing it, unless you like to look at pines. In the real world, surviving a day is a string of trials, here--one day is a list of chores. ♦♦♦

Score of

6.0

out of 10



The PC's best friend

by red_avatar

When it comes to the history of gaming (and of PC gaming in general), it quickly becomes clear that it's not easy to draw clean lines. Which game inspired which? Which developer was really the first to use a certain technique (like fog of war)? Whenever I've read any article that tried to answer such questions, comments or letters from readers set the writer straight on quite a lot of the "facts", which goes to show how complex the history can be!

And yet, if one thing is for sure, it's that the PC have inherited a lot of great games and developers from... the Amiga.

Introduction to the Amiga

Since not all of you will be familiar with the Amiga (mostly due to its varying popularity across the world) I believe introductions are in order. After the release of the Commodore 64 (C64), Commodore released a series of home computers, the first going on sale way back in 1985. Named "Amiga" after the Spanish for "female friend", several models were released over the years, from the expensive full computer models (with screen and case) to the cheaper models with integrated keyboard that could be hooked up to the TV. With the added benefit of backward compatibility, the Amiga soon turned into a very solid gaming platform which lasted over 6 years.

Despite being released near the end of the C64's life span, the Amiga was not meant to be its successor, however. It was always meant to be a brand new chapter for Commodore and if you compare the C64 with the first Amiga model, the A1000, the differences are staggering. It set the standard for all Amiga models to follow - most notably, the inclusion of a mouse was of great importance. They may not be all that noteworthy anymore, but it was back in 1985! Just a year before, the mouse was still virtually unknown and by adding it as a standard feature, Commodore gave the Amiga a great advantage since it allowed for genres which couldn't exist otherwise. But not only the mouse proved to be a high-tech addition--



■ Amiga A1000

--so was the use of 3.5" floppy disks as a standard while nearly everyone else was still using tapes and 5 1/4" floppies.

Despite this technological advantage at an attractive price, it took a few different models and a few years for Commodore to really cause a stir with the release of the A500 (more on this later), which made "Amiga" a household name in the UK. It enjoyed quite a success in the rest of Europe as well but, sadly enough, it still failed to make a big impact in the US where the competition (IBM PC, Apple Macintosh and Atari ST) was a lot tougher.

The hardware

But let's take some time to have a closer look at its hardware to give you an idea of what the Amiga was truly capable of and why it proved to be so popular.

We already mentioned the 3.5" floppy drive, but didn't explain its importance yet. Not only was it possible to store up to a 1MB of data, it didn't take up a lot of physical storage space and was more durable to boot: a metal clip protected the coffee-coloured magnetic disk when not inside the drive. Access times were a lot better as well, making games load much faster.

Of course, there were some downsides as well: unlike the IBM PC at the time, the Amiga didn't have a hard drive. Sure, it was possible to add one but it was expensive and, because it wasn't a standard feature (unlike the mouse), many games didn't make use of

it anyway, and so games were being played straight off the disks which proved to be painful when new games started needing more and more of them as the years came and went. For example, back in 1994, Beneath A Steel Sky came on no less than 15 disks (!!!) which resulted in plenty of disk swapping to the annoyance of the user. It only took one of the disks to be faulty for the entire game to become unplayable, as well. Still, despite all this, the typically blue Amiga disks are of great nostalgic value to many Amiga gamers of old...

But that's enough about the disks. It's time to do what many of you will be more interested in: comparing the hardware of the Amiga models to that of the (IBM) PCs at the time. To do this properly, we made a few jumps in time to give you a more accurate view. Enjoy!

1987

In 1987, the Amiga A500 first arrived on store shelves. It wasn't as expensive as the A1000 and the A2000 but still proved to be a powerful force to reckon with. To put it bluntly: it was miles ahead of the PC in almost every way while sporting a much lower price card. It had integrated sound with even the possibility of speech. The PC, on the other hand, had to make do with an internal PC speaker. There was the Adlib sound card which was just released, but it was costly and produced inferior sound to boot. On top of that, it would take another year before the first PC games would even support Adlib music!



■ Amiga A500

The A500 could also display up to 32 colours (and even twice that in EHB mode) with thousands of colours to choose from. This at a time when most PCs were still using CGA (4 colours) and EGA (16 colours) which were not only far more basic, but also had substantially less colours to choose from.

And let's not forget about the mouse: we already briefly mentioned this, but PCs still used DOS back then which was keyboard-operated. The Amiga 500, on the other hand, came with Workbench, which was

mouse-controlled. Besides that, few PC games even used the mouse because it had to be purchased separately. After all, it makes no sense to lose most of your customers by using technology few had, right? That would be like PC developers making it so their games only worked with a touch screen because Windows 7 supports it. The Amiga 500, on the other hand, did have a mouse included by default, and this resulted in many Amiga-exclusive games gladly taking advantage of it.

So, did the PC have *any* advantage then? Well, yes: they already had hard drives and were far more capable as business machines, but with few games really needing a hard drive, this wasn't a really big deal to gamers.

1990

Three years later, things had begun to change. Despite the A500 being well ahead of its time in 1987, the next few Amiga models didn't have any big impact. While the A3000 was technically superior, the much higher price tag meant that it had much lower sales which, in turn, resulted in most developers still using the A500 as a standard.



▪ Amiga A3000

The PC, however, now sported VGA in many of its machines while the Amiga still only had 32 colours to work with. Games such as Secret of Monkey Island were noticeable more colourful on PC while just a year or two before, the roles had very much been reversed.

Despite this, the Amiga still had the superior sound and music in the large majority of games. The first Sound Blaster for PC had been released, but was yet to make a big impact and, as such, most games still used the inferior Adlib.

1993

The Amiga seriously had to catch up now, and it did with the A1200. However, it turned out it wasn't enough. Even when released at the end of 1992, just in time for

the Christmas sales boom, it was already barely a match for PCs at the time, even though it could finally match the colours VGA had to offer thanks to the AGA chipset... but by now, SVGA started to break through on PC, which offered up to 16 million colours. A bad move since the A1200 was originally supposed to have a much better chipset but due to time and budget constraints, the disappointing AGA chipset was chosen.

The biggest problem by now, however, was the lack of a standard hard drive, meaning games still had to be designed to play straight off floppies. While 3.5" floppies



▪ Amiga A1200

were a blessing during its early years, they finally proved to be much too small to be a worthy storage medium. By now, the average game used over 3 floppies with many using more than 5 or even 10, which meant plenty of swapping during play. The PC, on the other hand, simply let you install the games to the hard drive. Games loaded much quicker, saving games was easy and quick and due to disks being handled less, they lasted longer as well! Not only that, but the Amiga never supported high density disks, meaning PC games could be stored on half as many disks.

The Sound Blaster received a great deal of support by now as well. While many PCs were still sold without any sound card at all, most gamers quickly snapped up a Sound Blaster Pro or 16 which offered sound and music of a similar quality to that of the Amiga.

In short, the Amiga was finally being overtaken. Commodore made a final effort with the CD32, but when this largely failed too, it was the end of the Amiga era.

The Amiga and Friends

Amazingly, despite the Amiga being the better platform in the late 80's, IBM PCs and the Apple II proved far more popular in the USA at the time. It's no surprise that companies such as Origin, Softdisk and Sierra mainly developed with those in mind despite the Amiga offering a far superior platform. Many of those games were

eventually ported to the Amiga, although this was often years later with sub-par graphics and poor sound & music to boot which didn't do the Amiga's qualities any justice.

Case in point: Ultima V. The original was released on the Apple II first in 1988. The Amiga port? Released in 1990 with poor sounds & music and terrible graphics. Some of you may be reminded of the way older console games are cheaply ported to the PC and with good reason - it's basically the same thing.

For UK developers, it was luckily an entirely different story. Unlike their American colleagues, the Brits recognized the power and potential "their" Amiga had to offer. Instead of getting shoddy ports which did disservice to the Amiga's true capabilities, they created games which pushed the Amiga to its limits. That's why, when you look at Amiga games of the late 80's, you'll find the best use of the mouse and of music & sound in British games.

This is why the Amiga is such an interesting platform for those who enjoy PC games of old: there are many quality Amiga exclusive games out there (Ambermoon, Ruff 'n' Tumble, Banshee, Lionheart, the Valhalla series, etc.) but also games that were released on both the PC and Amiga of which the Amiga version is far superior. Take Cannon Fodder, whose Amiga version had a very catchy "War has never been so much fun" song while the PC had to make do with just MIDI music.

A good influence

While I briefly touched upon the quality of British titles above, it needs an entire chapter to do it justice. After all, most of us know and love Bullfrog but it's important to realise that many of our favorite Bullfrog titles were born on the Amiga: Syndicate, Populous, Theme Park, etc. were all designed with the Amiga in mind.

Only when the PC became the more attractive platform, Bullfrog shifted their focus, but you might say we'd never have gotten games such as Magic Carpet and Dungeon Keeper if the Amiga hadn't been around to give them a springboard. Another developer not to forget, is Sensible Software, best known for Sensible Soccer and Cannon Fodder. ♦♦♦

STAR TREK

THE NEXT GENERATION: A FINAL UNITY

review by DarkArmada

Captains Log - Stardate 47111.1 : A Federation listening post along the Romulan Neutral Zone has detected an unidentified vessel headed for Federation space. The Enterprise is moving to intercept.

Another day and another crisis for the Federation. Yet what seems like business as usual for Captain Jean Luc Picard aboard his starship Enterprise, is just the beginning of an epic adventure across uncharted space involving a long since passed alien race, the quest for knowledge and the ever present Romulan threat.

This is Spectrum HoloByte's Star Trek: The Next Generation – A Final Unity. Released in May of 1995, it is an excellent example of adventure gaming in the 90's and one I would recommend to any fan of the genre. I was always a Star Wars kid growing up, but even I fell into the universe that is Star Trek.

A lot of effort was put into every aspect of this game from beginning to end, with the cinematics extremely detailed for its time, as well as including all the original voice actors from the TV series. In fact, on release STTNG was hailed for its quality cinematics and was considered the benchmark for performance for mid 1990's computer hardware.

Your adventure begins on the Bridge of the Enterprise and throws you straight into the everyday running of the ship. When on the Bridge, you have the option of visiting other areas of the ship or to converse with



various members of the crew about the current situation. Throughout the game you have to talk to certain people to advance the plot e.g. at the beginning of the game you beam aboard some political refugees that you will need to exhaust all dialogue with to find out your next action or destination. In past adventure titles I'd find myself skipping large amounts of text just to get the game moving, this wasn't the case for STTNG as



the quality voice acting creating mood and tone for every scene. As a note, you can enable subtitles in the options menu, which I always find easier.

The gameplay is divided into two main areas--ship battles and point-and-click adventure, with difficulty affecting both sides of the fence providing a very innovative use of a difficulty system rarely seen in other games of the genre. The gameplay also appeals to both the hardcore Trekkie gamer as well as the casual adventurer with every part of the Enterprise, including the combat interface, allowing both manual and full auto control. This was a godsend for me as micro-managing every single system is not one of my strong points.

The "easy" difficulty takes control of every aspect of ship management including pre-selecting away teams and their inventory as well as assigning combat and engineering to Lt. Worf and Lt Cmdr La Forge respectively while the "hard" difficulty is the complete opposite, leaving everything up to you.

As with every adventure game, puzzles are everywhere and are mostly logical and easy to grasp. In the case you can't figure something out, the use of the Tricorder with different members of your party will generally give you the information you need to solve the puzzle. Speaking to every person you come across along the way, as well as looking at everything you come across is essential to complete each mission. There are also multiple paths each conversation can take, sometimes resulting in very different outcomes e.g. you may solve an issue diplomatically or end up in a fire-fight, so be

Publisher: Microprose
Developer: Spectrum HoloByte
Release Year: 1995
Genre: Adventure
Themes: Sci-Fi, Star Trek
Status: Abandonware

mindful with how you treat some characters you come across.

The gameplay, combat and cinematic visuals are exceptional and most scenes are extremely well detailed. It seems that the developers went above and beyond to create a totally immersive landscape for the player to actually be in.

My only gripe with the game is the quality of the audio. Sound effects, music and voice acting is choppy and sometimes all over the place, skipping and going out of tune. This is the case when running in MS-DOS or DOSBox and I have been unable to remedy this issue. The funny thing is, my memories of the game on release includes these quirks, so I wouldn't want to remove them if I could!

All in all, Star Trek: The Next Generation – A Final Unity is a must for any adventure nut. Trekkie or not, it's not a game to pass up and the recent release of it as abandonware makes now as good a time as any to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before! ♦♦♦

Score of

9.0

out of 10



Written by El Quia

This game was developed by Burst Studios and published by Virgin Interactive in 1996, a year which in my opinion had seen the last days of classic adventure gaming. There was supposed to be a sequel, but meager sales due to a changing market and poor advertising led to it being cancelled. The sequel would have included extra material that was cut from this game and didn't make it into the released version.

In this little gem of an adventure game, you are Drew Blanc (played by Christopher Lloyd, better known as Doc Brown from Back To The Future), a burnt out cartoon animator that, by some freak accident, gets sucked into the world where his creations live. There, he and Flux Wildly will be enlisted to save Cutopia from Count Nefarious and his evil Malevolator. In their quest, they will explore Cutopia, Zanydu (from where Flux comes), the Malevolands, and even the dark castle of Count Nefarious himself.

Toonstruck uses a point & click interface with the cursor changing shape according to the kind of interaction possible. Travel time

Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Burst
Release Year: 1996
Genre: Adventure
Themes: Comedy, Cartoon, Live-Action
Status: Sold

eyes". Even then, it's still fun and you shouldn't get stuck too much. There are a couple of timed puzzles, though, that you just need to try again and again until you win. I find such puzzles just plain lazy (come on, I'm playing an adventure game, not some freaking arcade game!). Reducing the cycles in DOSBox might help you with those.



■ Where to now?

can be shortened significantly by right-clicking on the room exit, a feature greatly appreciated in this type of game and yet often left out. The dialog interface is similar to that of Discworld, with icons for each different topic. The conversations can be long winded, but luckily they are usually



■ What dark secrets does Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun hide?

amusing. Toonstruck has a lot of comedy including puns which may not be everyone's cup of tea, but I personally have a weak spot for a well placed pun. Also, the game tries to capture the classic cartoon humor of old (things falling from the sky, character-shaped holes in the walls, etc), but sadly enough this is not always successful.

The puzzles aren't very hard, although their logic stands a lot on the cartoon side, meaning crazy and fun. It's not so much about having a difficult solution, but rather about learning to see things with "cartoony



■ The octopus Fingers, voiced by Dom DeLuise.



▪ Characters have expressive names, in this case it's Footman.

The ending is more satisfying than in most games because it goes for more than just a "Congratulations, you have won!" message. The real shame is that it's an open ending, due to the sequel that never was.

The sound and music fit the game well: it sports typical cartoony sound effects even when you fail, without plaguing the game with the classic "I can't do that", although those kind of expressions still find their way into the game.

The voice acting is good, but some voices start to get on your nerves while the game advances, especially the cutopians: they are so upbeat, and happy and high-pitched... that you want to beat them senseless. But the acting is good and some characters are memorable because of this.

Each room has its unique tune, and it blends in and out with the music from other rooms when moving from one to another. It rarely gets boring, and there are some classics and well known pieces there.

First of all, except for some cutscenes, the entire game features the digitized

Christopher Lloyd interacting with the cartoon world. The acting is a little limited during gameplay, and during cut-scenes he



▪ The FMV scenes are in sharp contrast with the cartoony style.

uses his cartoony expression, to different degrees of success. Maybe some backgrounds are not lovely drawn like in some games (Quest For Glory IV comes to mind), but they are more than adequate, and certainly do the job. The cutscenes are all over the place, which was common in the CD-ROM craze era. They are nice to see and, sometimes, hilarious. They are interlined, but if you use DOSbox windowed, the interlines aren't visible. Some of them are way too long, but there is a lot of plot advancement



▪ These frogs sure know how to sing.



▪ A lively and wacky world awaits exploration.

in them.

Toonstruck was really underrated at its time, because it is extremely fun, has a nice (if clichéd) plot and a solid gameplay. In its two CDs you have some hours of great adventuring fun and find them well-spent. If you can get this game, do it because it is really worth it. ♦♦♦

Score of

8.0

out of 10

Vikings: Fields of Conquest

Kingdoms of England II

review by mexbrush

Vikings has been largely confused with Lost Vikings, and stayed very much in the shadow as a consequence. During the time of Amiga, most of the vendors in my city (Istanbul) thought these two are the same and prevented this gem to reach Amiga players during that decade.

Designed in 1992 by Brian Vodnik, Vikings is a tabletop, turn-based strategy game in which you try to build a mighty kingdom from scratch by establishing a healthy infrastructure and economy, upgrading your lands' protection, recruiting new soldiers and ultimately taking over other territories. As one of the six factions, you play to conquer England and Ireland. Some regions from Iceland and Norway can also be disputed on the game map.



■ The game map.

Everything is done on the map. You start with 3-4 provinces around your castle. The only constructions or upgrades that can be performed are increasing farm lands or building keeps and ports (if adjacent to sea). The starting position is important: a region full of mountains or grasslands will not be the most favorable strategic point to begin with. A valley near the mountains is the best choice, since it'll be easy to approach both, the rich farmlands and the mountains with deposits.

It's a turn-based game and each turn starts with a "farm & harvest" phase in which you decide whether to increase or not the current farm lands in your provinces. This is a significant phase of the game, yet underestimated by many. If a land has a



■ Flotilla.

Publisher: Realism Entertainment
Developer: Realism Entertainment
Release Year: 1993
Genre: Turn-Based Strategy
Themes: Medieval, History
Status: Abandonware

province for mine deposits. While it's an expensive option during province management, if you found gold, silver, bronze or iron deposits it'll come in handy throughout the game and will shape your defense structures in or around that province.

Besides different types of ore, provinces can generally supply you with stone and



■ Searching for ore deposits.



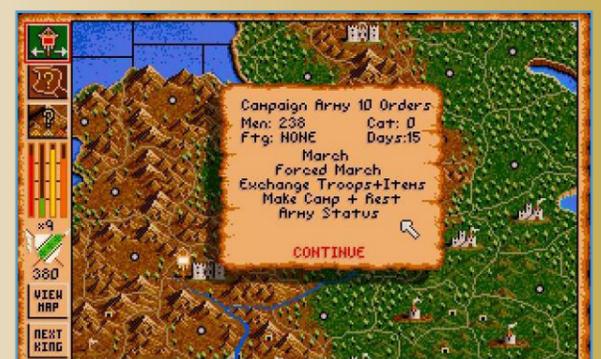
■ Recruitment.

wheat shortage, its population will decline and your tax income will decrease respectively. In the beginning it's hard to provide sufficient farm lands for every province, so a careful planning is required to set priorities.

After the farm land phase, you can direct either your armies or your provinces. I always take care of the provincial matters first, then resume to administrate the armies. The provinces are the resource bases of your factions; they will provide stone, iron, wood and food. On the left side of the screen there are some bars showing the amount of those resources, which you can buy and sell as well.

Just above the resource bars is the option that I like most in the game: searching a

wood, and will generate grain/food throughout farming. So a wood/stone province should be defended wisely. If its population increases well enough after providing sufficient farming lands or its tax rate is above 5, you should start building a defense post there. Defensive constructions, just like recruiting soldiers, will require some type of resource; in this case: stone, wood, iron and gold. They will follow the upgrade tree: land clearance, tower, keep, small castle, castle, large castle. After your peasants clear a spot and build a tower, you will see that the tax rate of the region has increased.



■ Army orders.

To have proper means of defense you should increase the population and tax income. Besides building keeps, you can build flotillas to carry your armies on the sea. You should always keep in mind that Ireland is a rich land which should be conquered before your enemies.

In provinces the recruitment of soldiers depend on the castle type you have on your land. In simple provinces you can deploy: swordsmen, archers, pikemen and crossbowmen. With improvements you can build other units and at last with a large castle you can deploy catapults.

Controlling the army is easy, just click on it and move it to the region you want to conquer. By clicking on the region you'll see the text-based battle and battle status bars. From there you can decide to retreat or stay and fight to the last man.



▪ Siege preparations.

Lord Mexbrush of the Vikings				Lord Brian of Stonebridge			
Start	Died	Wounded	Remain	Start	Died	Wounded	Remain
143	103	40	40	Swordsmen	96	83	13
130	92	27	38	Archers	74	57	17
177	128	35	49	Crossbowmen	66	39	27
75	56	19	19	Pikemen	22	14	8
17	11	4	6	Knights	19	11	8
2	2	0	0	Mtd Knights	0	0	0
1	1	0	0	Champions	0	0	0
545	393	125	152	Final Totals	277	204	73

INVADERS VICTORIOUS!

After suffering HEAVY losses, Lord Brian decided to retreat his forces and regroup to fight another day... Victorious, and taking HEAVY losses, Lord Mexbrush declares Middlesex a part of the Vikings Kingdoms domain!

▪ Battle results.

If you try to shelter your faction from the wars between the others and focus on the nearby provinces and your defenses, your patience will be rewarded with defensive victories first, and offensive later. While the AI diminishes its faction's power, yours will gather strength.

Enemy factions home castles are crowded, I mean really crowded. When you create an army you receive eleven swordsmen and one champion. The enemy home castles



▪ Faction status.

have (because the game advances and AI finds time to deploy a lot of men there) a total of 1000 men at least. They usually have 5-600 Archers+Crossbowmen, a couple hundreds of swordsmen, some other hundreds of pikemen, at least 100 knights and mounted knights, and more than 50 champions. So after a fake attack to see the enemy reserves you should equip your main assault army with sufficient soldiers and catapults (I generally have a minimum of twelve catapults).

I really like this gem, and I used to play it for long hours on my Amiga. After finding out the proper way to save and load with PC/DOSBox, I could finally enjoy the epic play sessions again and the feel of victory after capturing the enemy home castles. Graphically and gameplay-wise it's simple - sort of a Risk game with resources and defensive building. But it gets really addictive

when you get used to it. As I mentioned above, searching for mines and watching the enemy waves dissolve in front of your tower defenses is great fun. Vikings: Fields of Conquest will provide at least 12 hours of entertainment. It will be much more fun in hot-seat mode versus your friends. ♦♦♦

Combat Units

- Swordsmen are cheap, but handy units.
- The archers are important when sieging and when you plan on annihilating the opposing forces in combination with sufficient swordsmen and pikemen.
- The pikemen are skillful slayers of mounted knights.
- The crossbowmen are the snipers of your army, efficient against knights, pikemen.
- Knights: required after the development phase of the game; they boast higher resistance and damage.
- The champions are the heroes of your brigade; they last long and inflict plenty of harm; they should be supported by auxiliary units.
- You cannot start a siege without catapults.

Score of

9.0

out of 10



VENUS SENKI REVIEW

(translated: "Venus Wars")

Written by The Fifth Horseman

expected--are in very limited supply and can only be restocked at the supply carrier). When you encounter one of the Ishtaran massive battle tanks, the mini-game takes a different form, where you circle around the tank using every possible opportunity to fire against its' turrets and other weak points. Need I add that each and every one of these armor-plated mammoths has anywhere up to a dozen gun turrets that keep firing

Publisher: Varie Corporation
Developer: Human Entertainment
Release Year: 1989
Genre: Action Strategy
Themes: Sci-Fi
Status: Console game
Platform: NES

In the year 2003, the comet Appolon impacted on Venus, drastically altering the planet's surface conditions to a point where terraforming the world for human habitation became a distinct possibility. The first human being set foot on Venusian soil in 2007. In 2012, the colonisation began in full... and by the year 2083, we've proven once again that anywhere humans go, war will inevitably follow.

Turret-mounted 160mm smoothbore cannon and 200mm missile tube. 110 tons of heavy tank. One meter thick composite armor plating everywhere except for the back.

The Octopus class tanks used by Ishtaran military eat your standard-issue main battle tanks for breakfast. How the hell do you beat THAT? The Aphrodisian nation doesn't have anything in its arsenal that could stop the Ishtaran invasion.

2350m/s muzzle velocity. Depleted uranium alloyed with titanium and osmium. Two kilograms of 40mm caliber kinetic penetrator.

Or rather, it didn't. Until now.

Turbo-charged 3500cc engine with ceramic pistons, valves and interconnecting rods. 248 horsepower. Redlines at 20 000 RPM.

Enter... the Hound.

A one-ton bike? Wait a minute... what the hell would you use a monster like that for?



Enemies are at the desert point. The Kite Force denies entry into that region. Approaching will result in a battle! but you can't turn back now!



CAPT. SIMS.

There will be blood.

Based on a manga of the same name by Yoshikazu Yasuhiko, Venus Wars is an action/strategy hybrid putting the player in command of Battalion Zero--the first group of prototype Hounds to enter the battlefield--through fifteen missions of progressively greater difficulty.

During a mission, the player controls eight Hounds and two supply carriers on a top-down map (a rather cramped one, at that), planning their movement and attacks. Unlike in a number of similar productions, friendly units do block each other's movement, and your bikes' fuel supply is limited, lasting for about four or five turns until you have to refuel at the carrier.

Unlike many other turn-based strategy games, the combat between units is not resolved automatically, but rather through arcade-style shooter sequences - each attack run lasts sixty seconds, during which you drive the Hound against a gauntlet of enemy units, trying to evade their attacks while destroying as many as possible using your cannon and missiles (which--as you probably

at you the whole time? You'll wreck a good few bikes before you can develop effective strategies against them, but it's not as bad as it sounds - the pilots are always assumed to survive the battle no matter how badly their ride was totalled, and return to the field in next mission.

Unfortunately, once the novelty of the combat resolution system wears off, Venus Wars turns out to be a merely average title that - while fun to play for a while - doesn't really stand out on its own. ♦♦♦

Score of

5.5

out of 10

The strategy part is turn-based.

WILD 9 REVIEW

 Console Corner

Written by Dumitru Condrea

As I was playing Wild 9 I kept on thinking that whatever inspired it probably got stuck somewhere in the 90s, and it doesn't plan to get out anytime soon. The whimsical design and the poop humor didn't really click with me, nor did the characters, who speak like the Looney Tunes characters of old. There's a heavyweight behind this title, Shiny Entertainment, who also developed the first MDK, and even more importantly--they invented Earthworm Jim. Wild 9 wanted to be a cinematic platformer like the latter, but ended up as an amalgam of different genres, that together provide a decent experience... for a budget game. Something that, as a developer, you could easily squeeze between the release of MDK and Messiah, except Messiah got delayed over and over again until 2000, so it didn't work out.

The plot follows a band of disgruntled superheroes who call themselves the Wild 9, seeking to overthrow the oppressive regime of Karn, a centuries-old being with the brain of a monkey ruling the entire Andromeda galaxy. Shortly before the start of the game

Publisher: Interplay Entertainment
Developer: Shiny Entertainment
Release Year: 1998
Genre: Action Platform / Shooter
Themes: Sci-Fi
Status: Console game
Platform: PlayStation

they get ambushed by Karn's shocktroopers. In the aftermath of the encounter, most of the heroes are captured and are taken away. You take control of the two remaining ones, Wex Major, a human teen that somehow ended up millions of light-years from home (for some reason he reminds me of the main character in the comic Invincible), and residing in the Rig attached to his arm--a critter called B'Angus. They are tasked with saving their friends, who, curiously, aren't killed on sight, but are scattered in prisons throughout the galaxy. None of this happens in-game, honestly, and I compiled this information mostly from the manual and interviews. There's only one cutscene at the end of the game, and B'Angus appears in pop-ups explaining the controls. The game itself is a simple collection of levels that Wex must navigate in order to save the other



▪ A welcoming poster showing Karn, the absolute ruler of the Andromeda galaxy.



▪ It involves some light puzzle-solving as well.

members of the Wild 9.

The Wild 9 are not superheroes at all, more like experiments gone wrong. It's a miracle they survived until now! For example, one member called Nitro is a living bomb, exploding violently when making contact with almost anything. Since everyone else is basically a weirdo, it's up to Wex to ultimately save the day. The background story and the ideas are interesting, but they aren't reflected in the game itself, except maybe for the character designs, but even that is a hit or miss because 3D was still in its early days. The press at the time offered wide praises to the graphics. From today's perspective, however, they haven't aged that well. It's a typical example of the dark style

that gained popularity in the late 90s and the first half of the 2000s. There are crates, steely platforms, rudimentary buildings, and so on. Good thing they usually get shadowed by a much brighter and inspiring background showing an aerial or faraway view of cultivated lands or a jungle...

The most important part is that the game manages to keep you hooked, because Wex travels from one planet to another, meaning that every level is unique in its own way. It's not surprising, for example, that while the world is a mix of sci-fi and steampunk my favorite level is the swampy Drench, where you won't encounter a lot of technology. Another high point is the cinematic camera that changes angles as Wex navigates around the levels, giving different perspectives, including for solving puzzles.

As with most games, there is a gimmick here. The Rig, which Wex holds attached to his arm, can lift enemies or objects into the air, similarly to the much later Gravity Gun from Half-Life 2. To kill enemies you smash them a couple of times on the floor, but that gets old fast. A better prospect is to torture them using the surrounding environment, e.g. throwing them into lava, spikes, meat grinders, rotating fan blades; you can also use them as a stepping stone or as hooks



▪ The Rig in action.



▪ The boss battles turned out to be repetitive.



▲▶ Half of the game consists of these easy digressions into other genres.

thrown into cogs. All this is made possible by the Rig, but in some places the contraption can also be used as a grappling hook in the vein of the “bionic arm”. As a result, most of the time the gameplay is creative, half action, half puzzle. For unreachable monsters Wex can shoot rockets as well, but their number is limited since the developers probably didn’t want it to derail into a platform shooter.

The game as described until now would certainly grow on me if they’d put more soul into it and add some content, however half of the levels are technically rail shooting, and sections where Wex falls through a vertical tunnel, avoiding obstacles and throwing shocktroopers into walls--there’s absolutely no platforming involved. They pose no real challenge, and feel like filler material with the only purpose of stretching the



▪ The loading screens have a lot of charm.

the game’s length. The same can be said about the last boss fight, which is full of random patterns and it takes a while before you get your chance to strike back.

There’s a lot of trial and error involved, especially in boss fights, but the progress can be saved between levels, and if you gather

enough coins you can receive more lives. Even if you get to die often, and repeat the same levels over and over again, the game feels short. The content is thin, and even if you’ll set yourself to find more ways to torture your enemies, there’s little chance you’ll return to Wild 9 after finishing it. In fact, this game was made to be forgotten. ♦♦♦



Score of

6.5

out of 10

Sword of Fargoal

a special review of the remake by bobson

Sword of Fargoal is a game originally created by Jeff McCord in 1982 for the VIC-20 and Commodore 64. Some years ago I was a proud owner of a Commodore 64 and when I found this game for the first time as a kid it was nothing special for me. I preferred games with better graphics and a more arcade style of gameplay. Many moons have passed since those days...

When I was a student, one of my professors told us about Allegro C++ libraries to add something more to our first text-based programs. That was the day when I stumbled upon Sword of Fargoal for the second time. A couple of guys created a remake of this game and put their version as a free example of what you can do with the earlier mentioned libraries. This time around I paid more attention to it, and spent a lot of time playing instead of studying and programming.



that each level is randomly generated upon entering, which means if you go down and later return up, you will find a completely new (and hidden) set of rooms, corridors and most important--new monsters. Good thing that our hero is not defenseless--he has a sword and knows how to use magic scrolls.

Since Diablo is not considered an RPG by hardcore gamers, this game could also be

Developer: Elias, Paul Pridham
Release Year: 2007
Genre: Action Role-Playing
Themes: Fantasy
Status: Freeware remake

Chests are not always filled with treasure and sometimes there is a trap hidden inside. You are automatically healing between fights, but when your maximum HP increases, so does the time needed to recover it all, since the healing rate is constant and counted in points - not by percent of maximum health. A last but not the least important impediment is the timer starting when you lay your hands on the Sword of Fargoal in the deepest level. You have exactly 2000 seconds to take it out of the dungeon. This artifact can be stolen by a couple of monsters and it does not reset the timer. Are you ready for the challenge?



It is time to write a few words about the technical aspects of this game. As the original was based on modified ASCII characters, the remake also shows the player and the monsters as non-animated sprites. It looks like moving pawns on a board. The graphics give the game a nice atmosphere of a table RPG session. There is nearly no sound, just some effects during fights and when you interact with or just walk over some items. What I really enjoyed are the descriptions during fights: "Thud", "Cling" and other onomatopoeias, after each hit.

Overall, Sword of Fargoal gives a good deal of fun and the random factor can keep you occupied for long hours. ♦♦♦

Download link:

<http://www.allegro.cc/depot/SwordofFargoalremake/>

Today I look back at Sword of Fargoal and I find it as an early precursor to Diablo. Some elements of the RPG genre are mixed with random dungeons filled with gold and monsters. Your in-game avatar is a brave knight on a quest to retrieve the title sword from the deepest level of a dungeon.

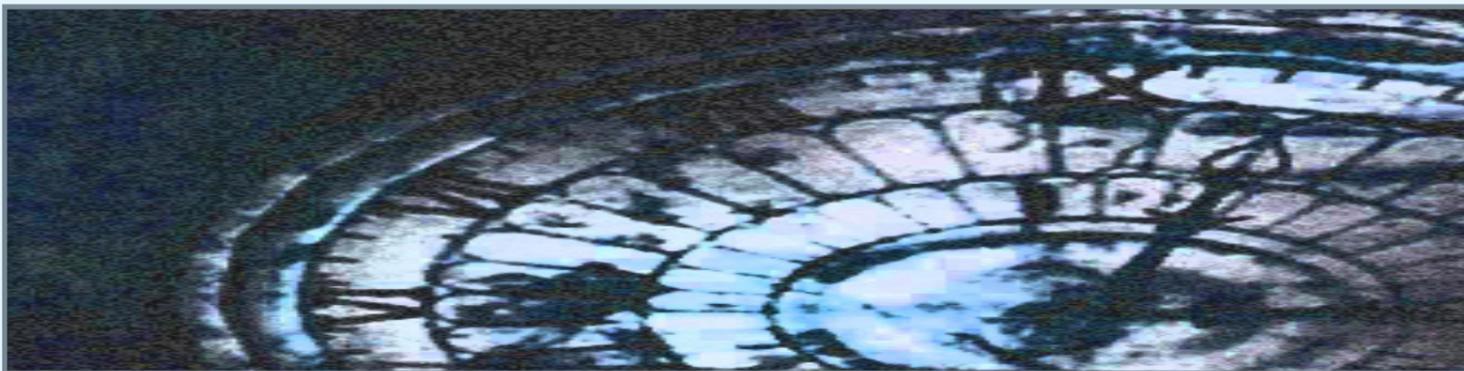
Sounds easy, but the game mechanics make it really difficult. Your character is placed in an unknown place--you need to walk around to find what's hiding in the initial darkness clouding every square you haven't stepped in yet. You need to know

placed in a different genre as its only role-playing element is gaining levels. There are only two stats describing the player: Experience points, obviously needed to gain levels and Health points which grow automatically with higher levels. In the remake you can also improve your sword. The scrolls mentioned above do not have any requirements, if you find one you can use it a second later.

Sword of Fargoal is really not easy to finish. You have probably figured out that not only you, but also the monsters are getting tougher as you go into the deeper levels.



F
E
A
T
U
R
E



THE HISTORY OF HORROR GAMES

The Cthulhu Renaissance

Volume III: 1992-1995

written by Dumitru Condrea

* Continued from issue #2 of Abandoned Times.

The gaming industry has experienced only a few major shocks during its rather steady evolution. Compared to the success of Call of Duty, which can be regarded as a natural development of the first-person shooter genre, the impact of titles such as Ultima Online was unexpected and came to define an era in an aggressive way, even if some people tasted hints of the future in MUDs or fledgling multiplayer games. 1992 was supposed to be such a turning point, and all the ingredients were there, but Alone in the Dark never managed to produce the amount of clones generated by Doom or Ultima Online. The Infogrames classic was a far-reaching ripple, with consequences that are hard to track now. The connection between Resident Evil and Alone in the Dark is more implied, than proven—nobody stepped up to admit it. On a technological level, Alone in the Dark set the

“Lovecraft and the Cthulhu mythos have enjoyed the privilege of inspiring many horror games, especially point-and-click adventures.”

precedent of using 3D characters on bi-dimensional backgrounds, the same method employed in many later point-and-click adventures and the first Resident Evil games. It also pioneered cinematic camera angles and clunky 3D character controls. Even if they deny it, the similarities in both gameplay mechanics and atmosphere assure us that the original survival horror legacy has moved on to the new generation in 1996.

Technological prowess is not the sole thing that made the game stand the test of time. Plot and design were equally important. While the overall theme of surviving in a mansion full of supernatural perils traces its origins to the old horror movies young Frederick Raynal (the game’s director) used to watch, the story and the monsters themselves are a tribute to H.P. Lovecraft and his writings. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu mythos

have enjoyed the privilege of inspiring many horror games, especially point-and-click adventures. There are several reasons as to why he is preferred to other horror writers. For starters, his works are in the public domain and developers can draw elements from them without facing any legal risks.

In this regard I’ve seen parallels drawn with the Sherlock Holmes property which, I admit, is popular on its own, but has been backed heavily by only one company in recent years. Secondly, the world and characters conceived by Lovecraft seem perfect for adventure games. Detectives, students, savants and the theme of forbidden knowledge go hand in hand with the research-oriented adventure game mechanics. While this is all fair, allow me to add a third important factor for the period we’re covering: Chaosium and their pen-and-paper RPG Call of Cthulhu.

Before their deal with Infogrames to create video games based on their CoC property, Chaosium influenced horror games indirectly. As many game developers in the 80s and early 90s were genuine geeks who invested more than a couple of hours into pen-and-paper role-playing games such as Dungeons & Dragons, it’s no surprise they would create video games inspired by them. This is the case of Infocom’s Dave Lebling, creator of Zork and The Lurking Horror; this is also the case of Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards who founded Eldritch Games, the studio responsible for The Hound of Shadow and Daughter of Serpents. According to their bio, the last two were deeply involved in the RPG scene,



▪ A Thai kick to the spleen of an undead (Alone in the Dark).

"The Hound of Shadow is upon you, and you bear his mark." the Adept is pointing at the young man, who screams terribly and begins clawing at his face. He must be wearing a mask of some kind, because when he takes his hands away, his face is gone. In its place is a thing of horror, covered in shaggy black fur, with eyes like boiling lava above a blunt muzzle which drips blood. He turns toward you, and the jaws gape to reveal cruel fangs. He speaks, but you cannot understand his words, and his breath is hot with the sweet stench of corruption. Abruptly you find yourself awake in bed, trembling and bathed in sweat.

It is the morning of April 22nd 1920, and looking at your watch you see that the time is twenty-nine minutes to eight.

What now?

▪ **Terrible nightmares haunt your sleep (The Hound of Shadow).**

having written for specialized magazines and even designed board games. Compared to *The Lurking Horror*, which I like to think of as a subtle homage to Lovecraft in a Zork universe, the offspring of Eldritch Games are actually loose adaptations of the Call of Cthulhu pen-and-paper game.

The Hound of Shadow has the inner workings of a typical text adventure, but attempts to introduce RPG elements such as professions and skills. They are either determined by the player in the character creation process at the beginning of the game or inherited from pre-generated heroes. Technically speaking, the blend proves to be unsuccessful as choosing between an aristocrat or a private eye, investing points into skills like woodcraft, driving or natural history has little consequence in the grand scheme of things. They may add bits of trivia regarding specific objects or events, and indeed some of it helps to get a better picture of what's happening, but the story is way too linear and the world offers few items of interest for the system to be worthwhile. This is partly because the Timeline skill system was planned to support character imports across multiple installments, an idea which never came to fruition. The plot of the game takes cues from Lovecraft's short story *The Hound* about two friends who in their

desperate flight from boredom have turned to grave robbing, and in the process became the targets of a giant supernatural hound. Further developments reveal the game as a sequel to the original story. The player character in *The Hound of Shadow*, and his friend John are hunted by a hellhound as well, for different motives, but later events turn the insanity up a notch as even the Blood Countess Elisabeth Bathory and Count Dracula make an appearance in the form of their descendant. I know, crazy, huh? The writing is pretty good, but there's an unfortunate lack of genuine horror moments, amplified by the poorly drawn stills that pop up once in a while.

"Lovecraft's works are distinctive because together they form systemic universes, such as the Cthulhu Mythos, that are logical in themselves."

In a normal world, Eldritch Games would take the Timeline system and improve it. The truth is their next and last game, *Daughter of Serpents* (1992) fell victim to the same mistakes. It was cursed with a complex professions system that does squat basically. It numbers six specialties (Traveller, Sleuth, Egyptologist, Private Eye, Occultist and Mystic), each with its own unique set of skills, which are assigned points at the beginning of the game. Since this is a traditional point-and-click adventure, they do nothing more than expand on the knowledge the players receive. Add in the fact that the game can be finished in under one hour and most of the screen is almost devoid of hotspots that can be investigated, and you've got a wannabe RPG system that has missed the mark by an entire light-year. It's a shame, because the idea was promising. Several Lovecraftian themes converge around a plot that sees players save

the world from Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos. He appears in the form of the Egyptian god of science and magic, Thoth, still revered in Egypt by a secret desert-dwelling sect with dubious motives.

As the players explore the interwar Alexandria, they encounter hints pointing toward this cult and a world-tearing event supposed to take place when the stars are correctly aligned. Sounds interesting, but the developments were pretty obvious from the beginning, if there can even be a beginning to a game that ends so soon. *Daughter of Serpents* came boxed with a supplement called *The Alchemist of Istanbul*--a stand-alone pen-and-paper game and a prequel scenario which throws the party of adventurers into the heart of the same city, trying to uncover the secrets of the *Book of the Serpent Staff*, supposedly an ancient treatise on alchemy. It is well-written, to a degree that makes me wonder why it wasn't included into the main product.

Lovecraft's works are distinctive because together they form systemic universes, such as the Cthulhu Mythos, that are logical in themselves. Thanks to this structural approach, later authors easily wrote new lovecraftian tales that could even deviate from the original post-WWI setting. Chaosium's own *Call of Cthulhu* has several sourcebooks placed in unique time frames, such as the Victorian era in the case of *Cthulhu* by Gaslight or the present day in *Cthulhu Now*. As for video games, most



▪ **There are some pictures as well (The Hound of Shadow).**



▪ **Exotic places and artifacts are at the heart of this adventure (Daughter of Serpents).**

stick to the original Interwar period, although there are exceptions. The events in *Demon's Tomb: The Awakening* (1989) unfold in the Spring of 1990. Despite the contemporary setting, however, the game is content to stay rural and the year seems more like an esthetic afterthought. *Demon's Tomb* is an interactive fiction with a bit of a twist. The story involves archaeologist Edward Lynton discovering the reemergence

of an ancient evil in present day Britain, but fails to do anything about it and dies in a fire at the site of the find--a mysterious tomb in the heart of Devonshire. His son, Richard, worried about his father's long absence, travels there to find out what happened. The player will get to control both the father (in the prologue) and the son (for the rest of the game).

The number of the clues saved in the prologue determines how much information Richard receives later and how far he is able to progress. In fact, the game can't be "won" without preserving enough clues. The Lovecraftian themes lurk in the background at the beginning, but as the player moves the story forth, a centuries-old battle between brothers Thai and Tzen resurfaces. Both brothers were priests able to explore the dream world, like Randolph Carter in the novella *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, and travel to the edges of the universe. After one such astral projection, Tzen came back tainted by Darsuggotha, and the rest is history. Another popular element is the occurrence of a specific planetary/celestial alignment as the perfect moment to awaken or summon an archaic evil. In *Daughter of Serpents*, the ninth planet Yuggoth serves this role, while in *Shadow of the Comet*, the catalyst is Halley's Comet.



▪ It's good to have all your enemies in one place (*Shadow of the Comet*).

important license and was titled *Call of Cthulhu: Doom of Derceto*. However, the deal fell through for reasons still unclear. Worth keeping in mind that they later approved the traditional point-and-click adventure *Shadow of the Comet*. The decision is not weird, however, since *Alone in the Dark* features more nods to old horror movies, like the cheap scares from monsters breaking through unexpected places, while

of evil, and as he plunged deeper and deeper into the forbidden knowledge the occult books provided, his dreams became increasingly worse; he was convinced the house was haunted by "The Dark One". Meanwhile, the servants had no doubts that their master had gone nuts.

"Shadow of the Comet is a one-way ticket to cosmic horror, with contemplative scares and an active approach to story-telling featuring a rich cast of characters..."

Demon's Tomb: The Awakening was developed by Silhouette Software, a development house with experience in Lovecraft games. For starters, they created the ZX Spectrum exclusive, *The Mystery of Arkham Manor* (1987), a command-based adventure game about a reporter of *The London Chronicle* trying to investigate the weird happenings in the small town of Arkham. The main people behind it, programmer Mike Lewis and artist Carl Cropley, also worked on the previously mentioned *Hound of Shadow*. With that in mind it becomes apparent that the early Lovecraft-inspired titles are the product of a small circle of people.

At the same time, Chaosium was seeking a direct insertion into the market. That opportunity presented itself with Infogrames' horror game concept developed by Frederick Raynal and his team into the genre-breaking product that came to be *Alone in the Dark* (1992). At one point, the game was to make use of Chaosium's most

the plot itself is a look into the past told by scraps of papers, letters and notebooks. *Shadow of the Comet* is a one-way ticket to cosmic horror, with contemplative scares and an active approach to story-telling featuring a rich cast of characters, as is typical for the genre; furthermore it's not constrained by the walls of a single mansion.

The change in *Alone in the Dark's* direction appeared late and Lovecraft remained a strong influence for the rest of the development. Most of the monsters are borrowed from the RPG's bestiary, like the bird-like Byakhee, the first enemy encountered in the piano room that has a knack for breaking windows, or the Nightgaung, that has the same weakness as the mythical Medusa here, despite it possessing no face, nor eyes! Writer Hubert Chardot penned the story, and through the journal and letters we find out that the previous owner of the Derceto mansion, Jeremy Hartwood, who hanged himself recently, was having bad dreams. He decided to seek clues on how to get rid of the nightmares that ailed him in the library inherited from his father. Turns out, the Louisiana mansion itself was the source of

Alone in the Dark hasn't aged that badly as people say. Graphic-wise it manages to stay afloat. The player character polygons still look like a human being, and the others are obviously ugly monsters. Some old horror games end up quite funny, but not this. It remains a scary and atmospheric experience, especially when taking the CD soundtrack into account. The control scheme is the only part that chews some of my patience away. Every action can be done in a very roundabout way, by switching to it first through the inventory menu. As you explore the mansion as either Edward Carnby or Emily Hartwood, it becomes increasingly evident that actual progress can



▪ Artwork showing Edward Carnby's behind (*Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare*).

only be made through trial-and-error, considering that the game is exploration-heavy and vile monsters hug the shadows awaiting for the perfect opportunity to strike. Every corner seems to hide a well-planned death scenario. More than anything, this is a mark of the era the game belongs to, and not a shortcoming of the design.

Alone in the Dark produced several sequels across the years, including *The New Nightmare* (2001) and the recent skirmish with the evil of Central Park, New York, titled simply *Alone in the Dark* (2008). The two immediate iterations from 1993 and 1994 managed to preserve the original's engine, but departed from the Lovecraftian theme, opting instead for a more action-packed adventure featuring a band of murderous zombie pirates in *Alone in the Dark 2* and a gang of angry zombie cowboys in part three. Sounds hilarious on paper, but they brought more of the same, and in this case, more of the same is good. Frederick Raynal didn't agree with the Infogrames management to use the same formula for the sequel and felt that his efforts were not fully recognized. Shortly after *Alone in the Dark's* launch, he together with most of the original development team left to found Adeline Software.



▪ Parker can make scary faces too (*Shadow of the Comet*).

madness. Nobody believed his accounts of what happened in Illsmouth, nobody except John Parker, who is determined to find the mysterious site near the calvary and take a glimpse of the comet as it completes yet again its 76-year cycle around the solar system.

What impressed me the most are the dialogues, and I don't mean only the eerie voice acting in the CD version. Every conversation is accompanied by close-ups of the characters' faces and often they have short animations like shifty eyes which add a psychological dimension to the experience. The rich cast of characters are not simple challenge givers or solvers; they have their own life, don't play by the protagonist's rules, and most importantly, all of them

“The game industry hit the sack, as every second game designer donned the director's hat and went to make a full-motion video game.”

Despite the series' worldwide success, there wasn't a boom in 3D third-person games until the second half of the 90s. Here we have a game that accomplished every developer's obsession since Cinemaware: to create a real “interactive movie”. And how did they react? The game industry hit the sack, as every second game designer donned the director's hat and went to make a full-motion video game. Thankfully, the middle of the 90s was also a prosperous age for 2D adventure games, and a good example to prove this is *Call of Cthulhu: Shadow of the Comet* (1993), considered by many the best adaptation of Lovecraft's work. It follows the exploits of John Parker, a reporter for the *British Scientific News*, in the small forgotten village of Illsmouth. In 1834, Lord Percy Boleskine visited the place to witness the passing of Halley's Comet, from a spot near the village rumored to have an exceptional view of the sky. Whatever wondrous things Boleskine had seen there, he returned a raving lunatic, and was confined at St. Andrews Hospital until he died of a heart attack in 1837, after having ripped off his psychiatrist's face and eyes in a sudden fit of

have a role in this dangerous intrigue surrounding Illsmouth. *Shadow of the Comet* is packed full of Lovecraft material. The story draws most of its influences from the short story *The Dunwich Horror* and novel *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. Similarly to *The Dunwich Horror*, some of the plot revolves around Yog-Sothoth, the god that is both time and space itself but for some reason can't access our own world. A part of Yog-Sothoth's traits and actions in the short story are assumed in the game by other deities, but in short they all need proxies such as human followers that could bring them to rule our world once again.

The Lovecraftian references are a jumbled mess, much like the entire Cthulhu mythos. For example, in *Shadow of the Comet* there are two deities that would offer immortality to their followers: Nyarlathotep and Dagon. While Dagon may do that in accordance with the typical portrayal of the Deep Ones, explained among others in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, Nyarlathotep is a difficult case and even in the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG rulebook his rewards are usually material or cognitive. Still, he is the representative of the Outer Gods, so who knows? There are

other themes characteristic to Lovecraft as well, the belief for one that there are “primitive” cultures such as certain Indian or African tribes who worship and have the knowledge to summon primordial evil powerful enough to topple all modern civilization in a single blow. Three people are credited for the writing in the game, although most likely it was Hubert Chardot doing the grunt work, considering that he participated in every major Infogrames project at the time and that he was the only professional writer out of the three. *Call of Cthulhu: Shadow of the Comet* is an exemplary model of a mystery/detective title, thanks to its steady build-up of information escalating into the final confrontation. On the other hand, that last part where Parker fights all manner of evil is a bit too long and elaborated. I'm also very saddened that gamers' natural nemesis, the maze, decided to make an appearance as well.

In 1995, the game received a sequel titled *Prisoner of Ice*. In it you play Lieutenant Ryan, an American agent sent by the Office of Naval Intelligence aboard the submarine H.M.S. Victoria in order to rescue a Norwegian explorer and anthropologist, Björn Hamsun, from the Nazis. Along with him, the submarine crew also picked two mysterious crates. They are supposed to bring them all to the safety of the nearest naval base, but that soon becomes unlikely as Hell breaks loose aboard H.M.S. Victoria. The adventure takes you to unexpected places such as Antarctica and Buenos Aires, and is loosely inspired by Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* about a horrific civilization buried in the snow of the South Polar Circle. Time travel and nazis are thrown into the mix, while an unbelievable twist ties the events to *Shadow of the Comet* as well. Compared to the latter, *Prisoner of Ice* is more linear, has easier puzzles and cheesy voice acting. The horror aspect is treated lightly, and this is potentially the least horrifying Lovecraft title I've played, with few references to the Mythos. At the *Mountain of Madness* concludes a long list of works written by H.P. Lovecraft that managed to exert a great influence on horror game development until the middle of the 90s. All these themes will eventually be recycled in later games such as *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*. **continued on page 54**



▪ Wipe that stupid green off your face (*Prisoner of Ice*).

Horror Reviews in Brief

by marko river

Ghosts 'N Goblins

A huge hit on the arcades. It features a brave knight fighting evil forces, out to rescue his beloved princess. The game starts in a graveyard filled with zombies rising from the ground. The hero can jump over gravestones and throw lances to kill enemies. Further on, more demonic creatures and locations await, like a sea of fire and the castle of a demon boss. A very imaginative and challenging game, its status of a legend is well-earned. It spawned a short series with only the first sequel, *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, having been released for both arcades and home computers, with improved graphics, levels and monsters.

Several of the conversions for home computers were pretty good, but the DOS version is one of the worst. For 1985, a game with EGA graphics sounds amazing and the sprites do look awesome for that era, but that is where the good things end.

The entire game seems like it was simplified and development rushed just to get it done. The scrolling is replaced with static screens that every now and then are repeated three or four times to lengthen the levels. Every screen starts empty, and after a few seconds monsters suddenly appear in predefined places. You have to memorize them or you may be standing in one of the spawning points. Touching the bottom of the screen will kill you, which works for the pits, but



prevents you from going down the ladders. Why did they even create the upper floors on level 2 then? They "fixed" this by allowing you to walk through walls in that location.

Going further would mostly cover bugs and broken mechanics. On the positive side, the final boss chamber is included unlike other console and computer conversions. However it doesn't make things much better. The game is irritating and easy. It doesn't feel like an official conversion at all. Shame on you, Capcom! ♦♦♦

Blade Warrior

If the fantasy setting wasn't enough to grab your attention, *Blade Warrior* has a unique graphic style as well: almost everything is displayed as dark silhouettes against an eerie blue night sky. The concept does a great job at creating a tense feeling of fright, as everything around you will first seem evil and menacing. This is enhanced by the environment, which consists of marshes where loose vegetation thrives and gnarled trees are overgrown with tendrils and mushrooms. Old arrows and spears stick out of the background, strange creatures and birds are moving about, and sculptures adorn lonely gates. Everything looks so still, and then suddenly a huge hairy spider comes at you, or a flying

witch, or maybe it's an armed skeleton with holes between his ribs... Strangely, there still aren't many games that use this approach.

You play as some warrior-wizard that lives alone in his castle in the middle of the wilderness. In your castle you can mix potions, but you need to collect ingredients first. Ingredients are the various little things that are actually colored in this dark game, like frogs, bats or spider webs. When you leave the castle you get to roam through the wilderness. Vile creatures will attack you, you will pick up ingredients and look for special objects and keys that can unlock the gates for further traveling. You can perform three types of attacks. There are other castles (should be nine of them) with their own wizard hosts. Those wizards have something you need to beat the game, but each want something in exchange.



After you have found the things you need, you can choose to fly a dragon from one castle to the next one (or maybe back to your own castle) instead of walking. This part is a side-scrolling shooter. Several flying creatures will attack you and you use dragon's breath against them. You can't be killed while on dragon, but if you are hit you will fall down and must proceed on foot. The game has a lot of things thrown into it, which unfortunately can still become repetitive. The graphic style definitely sets it apart from similar games of the time, though. ♦♦♦

Night Hunter

Finally, a game where you play as the famous vampire count, Dracula. Your task is to get six medallions that will make you incredibly powerful. Still surroundings conveniently change from your castle, villages and forests to the streets of London. The best part is you get to drink people's blood and transform into a bat and a werewolf. Awesome!

Every level is beaten in the same manner: walk around, avoid danger, drink blood and eventually collect all eight items scattered around it. Five of those are keys that unlock some doors on the level. One of the doors is also an exit that opens when all items are collected. A medallion is at the end of every fifth level. Then the locations get repeated following the same cycle, meaning the castle is in levels 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26; the forest--in

levels 3, 8, and so on.

People will fight you with fists, axes, arrows, holy water, crosses, even pistols carried by the London policemen. Still, they are afraid of you, so you need to chase them around and perform your main attack: grab them and replenish your health by emptying their veins. It gets harder with more people in one place, so act as a vampire: get them one by one. When you collect all items, Van Helsing (white bearded guy) appears and starts throwing stakes at you. Very irritating, since you cannot duck fast enough. The only solution is to transform into another form, and the stake won't kill you instantly. But even this won't help you much if he is on same floor, since that will make him more than happy to use rapid fire.

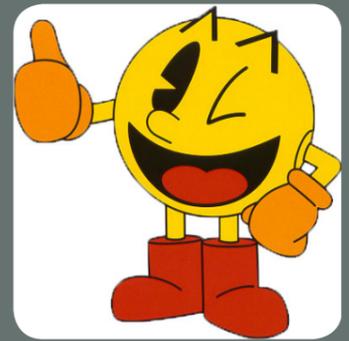
Van Helsing is just one of many things that ruin the gameplay after a few levels. The DOS version has a very unfortunate technical



problem: it pauses whenever a sound is played. You'll hate locations with frogs. The inability to dodge Van Helsing's stakes gets amplified when you find out that you can't properly dodge vultures either. They grab you and let you fall in a random location on the level, including water. Naturally, the vampire missed the swimming classes in order to perfect his transformation skills. Last, but not least, the game is very repetitive. After the first five levels you've really seen everything this game has to offer. Having to repeat that five more times doesn't sound like an interesting prospect. The base idea is really interesting, but unfortunately that might not be enough to keep you hooked. Surely worth trying, especially if you are into vamps. ♦♦♦



Interview with Pac-Man



written by Bazly

Anyone who claims to be a gamer should know him: the little yellow circle chased by oddly shaped coloured ghosts, trying to collect all of the Pac-dots in the never-ending blue dungeon of mazes. He is the legendary Pac-Man, star of the arcade game of the same name.

Released in 1980, the game has been incredibly successful, being declared the "Most Successful Coin-Operated Game" in Guinness World Records: Gamer's Edition 2008, and undoubtedly being one of the most recognizable games ever made.

Recently, Abandoned Times was able to get a special, one-on-one interview with the spherical star, and when asked about his own gaming habits, the Q&A took an interesting turn.

Bazly:

Being such a big gaming star, are you a gaming fan yourself?

Pac-Man:

Absolutely. Though Pac-Man introduced me as a star in games, I had been a fan of video games before landing that role. In fact, I remember playing Pong with Ms. Pac-Man for hours on end.

Bazly:

So you've played a lot of games then? It's been over three decades since Pong was released. What have you been into since then?

Pac-Man:

I think my fondest video game memory was when I first played Doom on my computer. I've been addicted to the Doom series ever since.

Bazly:

Really? Doom? What led to your addiction to that game?

Pac-Man:

Well, it was a rough time in my life. The last game I had starred in was Pac-Mania, and unfortunately the stress of starring in



■ The first Pac-Man (from the Japanese anniversary site).

another title lead to my addiction to power pellets resurfacing. Ms.Pac-Man had been trying to help me and I only ended up pushing her away. This was in '87. In 1992, I had hit rock bottom: I had lost all of my friends, I had lost Ms. Pac-Man to Inky, and was in a confusing relationship with Clyde, and my addiction to Pac Power Pellets was worse than ever. I checked into rehab that year, and moved out into a new place on my own.

Bazly:

So, when you first played Doom you were still struggling with your addiction to Power Pellets?

Pac-Man:

Unfortunately, yes. My addiction had grown and grown, but the twelve step program at Pellets Anonymous was working. Then I found Doom. In a lot of ways, my obsession with Doom in '93 most helped me get over my pellet cravings. If it hadn't have been for them, I don't know if the SNES port of Pac-Man would have ever been made!

Bazly:

That's right, the SNES port came out in 1995, meaning you spent another two years sobering up.

Pac-Man:

Yep, and by the time '95 hit, I was more than ready to get back into the gaming business.

Bazly:

What do you feel led to your strong Doom addiction?

Pac-Man:

Well, I think the leading factor was the similarities to the work that I had done. My addictions had lead to horrible nightmares. For years I dreamt of being trapped in that maze, being pursued by the "Inkies", and worst of all, Clyde. Then I played Doom: a game where you navigate mazes in a horror themed setting. It brought me back to those days, and those dreams. Only this time, I had radical weaponry.

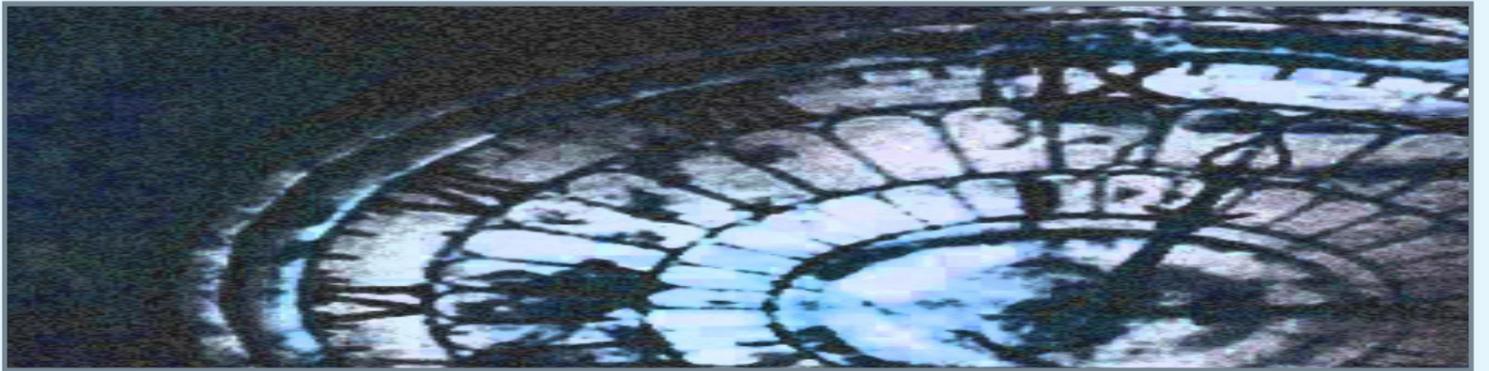
Bazly:

Did the dreams stop?

Pac-Man:

You bet! When I hit about step eleven, and had to start paying back my debts, I had just started playing Doom, and within a week the dreams stopped.

As many of you may know, the legacy of Pac-Man still continues. In May 2010, the original Pac-Man game celebrated its 30th birthday, and still the series is going strong, the most recent installment being the 2007 Pac-Man Championship Edition. With addiction and relationship scandals behind him, Pac-Man pushes forward, continuing to bring quality games to the public. ♦♦♦



THE HISTORY OF HORROR GAMES

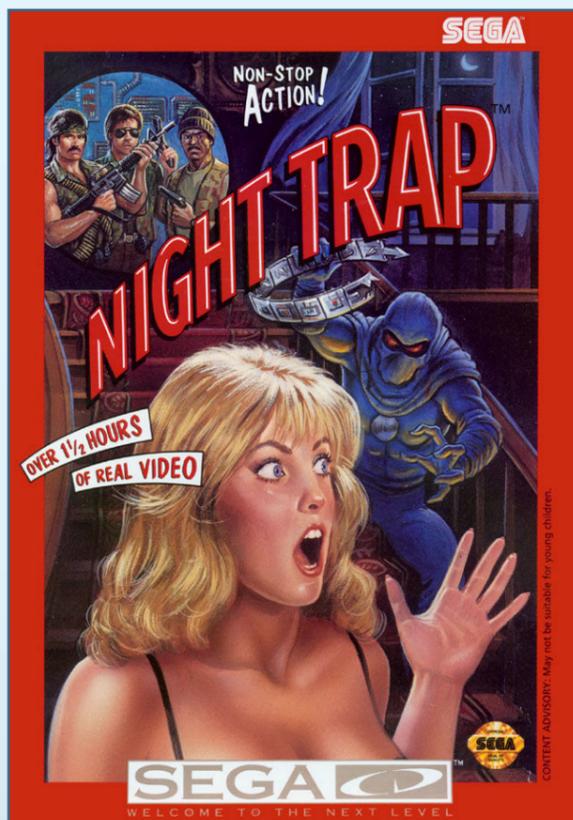
The Full Motion Video Revolution

Volume IV: 1992-1995, Part 2

written by Dumitru Condrea

The 90s were a battlefield. Amiga was dying, while IBM PC emerged as the sole relevant personal computer. In place of the platforms gone extinct, Japanese consoles popped up to take over the market share. In all of this chaos, the compact disc was gaining traction, and many believed it to be the next big thing. Several consoles that were to exploit this new media wonder were pushed onto the scene, including Atari Jaguar, 3DO and the Mega Drive/Genesis add-on, SEGA CD. Sadly, a lot of developers had no idea what to do with this sudden boost in disc space, and gamers ended up with videos advertised as video games. These were a fertile ground for horror material.

The first consoles to have introduced CD-ROM add-ons were TurboGrafx-16 and Mega Drive. Their impact was relatively small compared to how Myst shifted CD drive sales after 1991. These peripherals needed a reason to exist, and the manufacturers would have gladly accepted any title making full use of them. For SEGA CD, one



▪ The cover makes it seem more fun than it actually is (Night Trap).

budgets at the time. By the end of the decade, Hasbro was leaking money in all

“Filmed in 1987, Night Trap devoured over one million dollars in resources, far beyond most game studio budgets at the time. By the end of the decade, Hasbro was leaking money in all directions and decided to can the entire project.”

of these games was Night Trap. It was originally the failed product of a similar foray into movie-games by Hasbro and Nolan Bushnell's Axlon. In mid-80s they were developing a VHS-based console called NEMO, and Night Trap was one of the two games planned for the system, the other one being Sewer Shark. Filmed in 1987, Night Trap devoured over one million dollars in resources, far beyond most game studio

directions and decided to can the entire project. Several years later, Digital Pictures salvaged both NEMO games and retooled them for the SEGA CD, with multiple platforms following after. The reason why Night Trap ended up being well-known was because of the emerging controversy regarding violence in video games, where it was characterized as the vilest of things summoned by the devil to corrupt the children's

innocent minds (my words). Mortal Kombat and DOOM were called to stand trial as well in a process that concluded with the creation of ESRB, which is probably the only positive thing in the whole debacle.

As for the content in this B-movie wannabe, it is incredibly tame and the way the US Senate hearings in 1993 misrepresented the violent and sexual themes is ridiculous. You play as a member of the SEGA Control Attack Team (S.C.A.T.), who is sent to investigate the mysterious disappearance of five girls, after being invited by the Martins to stay at their mansion. The Martin family are organizing another slumber party, but this time S.C.A.T. has an undercover agent, Kelli Mead, played by Dana Plato, among the new girls. Turns out the house is infested by vampires and it's up to you to protect them. There's much screaming and running around, but don't expect anything genuinely scary to happen. The most common enemy are the Augers, which look like middle-aged men dressed in ninja suits, and they possess an absurd blood-draining device that points towards a director suffering from a severe case of tokusatsu addiction.



▪ Ugly textures and low-res videos--typical 90s (Bloodwings: Pumpkinhead's Revenge).

The main problem the developers face when creating an FMV game is that once the scenes are filmed, they are impossible to change. The gameplay must be built around them. The developers have found multiple solutions to this issue, with varying degrees of success. Unfortunately, in *Night Trap* your intervention as a player is severely restricted. Your role is to monitor the situation through hidden cameras. It's possible to switch between the rooms of the mansion and view different videos of the characters doing silly things. When the enemy pops up in a room, you hit a button and trap them. That's about it for interactivity. This is still acceptable. Some games, such as *Bloodwings: Pumpkinhead's Revenge* (1995), which uses video scenes from the horror B-movie *Pumpkinhead II: Blood Wings*, have become infamous for their esoteric gameplay mechanics. The game is a fusion of 3D first-person shooter and adventure game elements. The player navigates through bland corridors, shoots any monsters encountered and enters the vortices left by them when destroyed to collect blue crystals. These crystals are then used to activate the FMV scenes (portals into the real world) which sit conspicuously at the end of the game's many corridors, hanging on walls like ordinary TVs.

What's really mindblowing is that it's possible to interact with the videos directly. By clicking on specific hotspots at the right time while they are running, the player is able to gain the items depicted. They may come in handy later in the 3D portion of the game, just don't expect their uses to be logical in all of the cases. I don't know what impression it left on the 90s, but pulling 2D sprites out of a live-action sequence looks as ridiculous as having 2D pixelated weapons in a modern FPS. While it enforces the idea that the FMV has become "truly" interactive, the game is a mess design-wise. The player has the chance of making several choices, like saving characters from *Pumpkinhead*, but it isn't he who drives the story forward. The plot unfolds independently in the videos, while the main portion of the game remains a poor man's *Realms of the Haunting*.

The same year 1995 witnessed a release with a much more elegant approach to player integration into the FMV. I'm talking about *Psychic Detective*, where you, as a psychic, can hop from mind to mind in a continuous video and explore the events from the perspectives of the characters around you. While intriguing and with a dose of violence, it is a rather normal crime story and thus a little beyond the scope of



▪ Every character except the player was made into a ghost (7th Guest).

of this article. *Pumpkinhead's Revenge* fits this article rather well thanks to the campy horror inherited from the movie and the ugly monsters roaming the corridors.

Unfortunately, B-movie quality is the highest we got from FMV games, even in the case of financial and critical successes

plan was to film the entire thing, with the action playing out in a panoramic copy of the original mansion, but in the end the studio opted for the cheaper 3D rendered backgrounds, with actors filmed against blue screens. It was impossible to completely remove the screens from the video scenes, so the actors ended up with blue auras--another miscalculation on the developers'

“Unfortunately, B-movie quality is the highest we got from FMV games, even in the case of financial and critical successes like *The 7th Guest*.”

like *The 7th Guest* (1993). The only difference is that *The 7th Guest* was created as a game from start to finish. Trilobyte founders Graeme Devine and Rob Landeros were Virgin employees at the time when the CD-ROM sparked the minds of people as the media of the future, and events such as the InterMedia conference in New York, 1990 were organized to help developers figure out how to use it. It convinced both to create a CD-ROM game, potentially based on the board game *Clue*. It didn't take long before they advanced their proposal to Virgin's Martin Alper. Following that, they were promptly fired, so that they could work unobstructed to bring their ideas to fruition, as part of their own studio, Trilobyte.

The evolution of the concept known initially as *Guest* reflects the universal adversities encountered by any game title during development, including design overhauls following technical necessities. The initial

part. It was then decided to make all characters in the story into ghosts. The scenario, written by Matt Costello is rather strange, but look who's talking, I'm no B-Movie aficionado. Henry Stauff, a mugger turned toymaker created a life-like doll following an inspiring dream. As any self-respecting criminal would do, he converted this idea into profit, selling copies of the doll to gullible children and their parents. The twist is that all of those kids became affected by a



▪ Well I'll be damned, it's a genie! (7th Guest).

mysterious illness after the purchase. Stauf retires into his own mansion, avoiding contact with other people. He turns it into a deathtrap filled with dangerous puzzles and invites six guests for a final show. Whoever solves all the puzzles in the estate will get all that their hearts desire.

The player retraces their steps, taking a stab at any puzzles encountered along the way. In fact, the puzzles are the main attraction in 7th Guest, while the FMV scenes remain simple rewards for any progress made. It's fun however to watch the characters argue amongst themselves and meet grisly ends. Originally, the game was supposed to be much more violent and bloodier compared to the launch product, but it did manage to preserve a genuine dark atmosphere, thanks to the weird 3D renderings and some disturbing moments.

“Time limits are the bane of adventure gamers, but sometimes they achieve their primary purpose: creating a sense of urgency.”

example Dracula Unleashed, tried to spice things up with non-linear progress and multiple endings, but frustrated players by including sequences which can be triggered only at a specific time. Time limits are the bane of adventure gamers, but sometimes they achieve their primary purpose: creating a sense of urgency. One of the more memorable milestones of early horror gaming was D, a CG equivalent to FMV games that must be completed in under two hours. The plot sees Laura Harris trying to save her father from his own nightmare world, after he

it and seek for the source that is causing it all. The players control Adrienne in a move supposed to defy stereotypes at the time, but which thanks to the Fatal Frame, Clock Tower and Resident Evil series has become a standard for the theme.

By the end of the 90s, FMV games were built on million-dollar budgets, while emulating the quality and spirit of B-movies. Since the developers rarely aimed higher, the revolution turned out to be just a passing fad; with a cult following, but still a fad, one that has reached its apex in the form of 1996's Harvester. Hats off!

In the end, the truth is I haven't touched upon all the games with noticeable horror elements that got squeezed between 1992 and 1995, and that includes titles such as Dark Seed, Ecstatica, and The Dark Half. The main reasons for this are the space and time constraints--the article already numbers seven pages, and I need at least a couple of paragraphs to describe a single game to a level I'm satisfied. Still, I hope one day I'll be able to continue this article and talk about these more traditional adventure games before tackling the survival horror wave of titles, starting from 1996.

Additionally, don't forget that our previous issue (#2) was entirely focused on horror and there are several reviews discussing in detail games from the 1992-1995 period, including Veil of Darkness and, of course, DOOM. ♦♦♦



■ And it's yet another mansion (Phantasmagoria).

Just like Alone in the Dark and Myst, 7th Guest was considered an innovative game and enjoyed an immediate success, but Trilobyte failed to capitalize on it fast enough. The sequel, 11th Hour (1995) suffered several setbacks as lead programmer Graeme Devine wrestled with the gargantuan disk space requirements set by the more demanding video scenes. A new compression engine was developed, and by the time the product was released on four CDs (Phantasmagoria had seven), neither the FMVs, nor the Myst-like puzzles were novel anymore.

It was enough for one or two games to set the trend of violent FMV games, and a whole industry sprang up over night. Most of them had the same characteristics, such as lousy acting, pointless gore, and poor general design choices. Certain games, for

managed to massacre an entire hospital.

The gore evolved hand in hand with the technical level, and later titles such as Phantasmagoria featured a better integration of pre-rendered environments, digitized actors and videos in the same world. The Phantasmagoria series was a personal ambition of well-known Sierra games designer Roberta Williams to bewitch a new wave of curious adult gamers initiated into the vice by the likes of Myst and 7th Guest. It was around this time when adventure games adopted today's simplified single-cursor and user-friendly interface, but the games started losing in the design and puzzle department, of which Phantasmagoria suffered as well. The story about a young couple who have just moved into an old mansion is rather standard fare. The husband, Donald, gets possessed by an evil spirit and becomes increasingly violent, to the point of madness, while his wife Adrienne is forced to cope with



■ A final parting gift (The Hound of Shadow).

Fin.

Thank you for reading.