

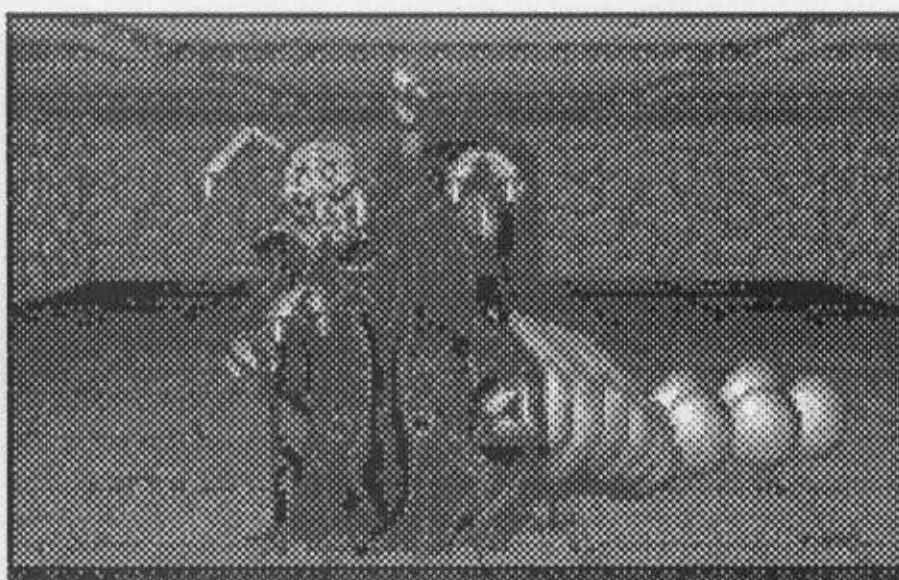
# The PRODUCT MONITOR

## RATINGS

- Superb ★★★★★
- Excellent ★★★★
- Very Good ★★★
- Good ★★
- Fair ★
- Poor ☹
- Bad ☹\*
- Defective ✖

### At The Adventurer's Inn

YOU! After I heard about the quests you'd decided on last year I figured ... well, never mind. Welcome back. As you can see from our 'Adventures for Hire' board, the demand for your special skills is greater than ever!



vanished long eons ago, Phoonzang is supposed to have hidden an awesomely potent artifact called the "Astral Dominae" somewhere on his world. The 'Dominae' is said to hold the secret for creation and destruction of whole universes!

With stakes like this the competition has been, to say the least, 'spirited'. The Umpani and T'Rang, the galaxy's two great space-faring races, have landed sizable forces and begun to recruit allies from among the Gorns, Munks, and other native peoples. Meanwhile, another powerful player, the mysterious Dark Savant, has seized

search buildings, journey along tree-lined paths, sail the seas, and clamber amongst craggy mountains. Always, you see what your party sees: large, colorful, nicely drawn and animated forward views. Excellent sound effects finish the picture,

Throughout the adventure, you retain nearly complete freedom of action. Nothing forces dealings with the Rattkin 'Godfather'; still, the Rakuza is a powerful organization whose friendship could be very useful. Enlisting with the Umpani "Special Forces" is another good idea and following the Munk's "Way of the Five Flowers" turns out to be very profitable. You CAN 'go it alone'; but, you'll get further faster if you fit in and cultivate a few allies.

You can choose sides, too. In fact, it's nearly impossible to avoid favoring one of the factions. On the other hand, why antagonize or kill-off valuable sources of trade and information until absolutely necessary?! So, pay your dues to the Dane mystics and accept a few missions from the T'Rang Queen. True, they are dangerous and



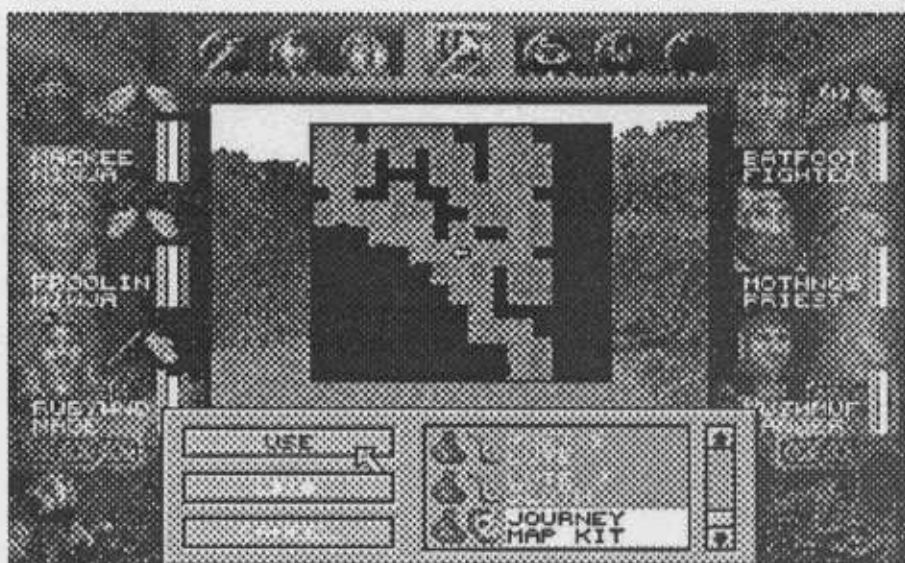
with several well-done melodies to help set the mood.

Beautifully drawn and animated "monsters" help make encounters more real than ever. You'll see ebony-armored troopers of the Dark Savant, spider-limbed T'Rang "Watcher" mages, musket-wielding Umpani regulars, and many others. The dancing, whirling, water nymphs are a special treat!

Besides more variety and more sheer gamescape, you'll find a rich scenario. This one's

duplicitous partners; but, then, so are your guys.

Meanwhile, your actions impact the activities of major personages, armies, and others who are constantly on the move. For instance, I delayed confronting a powerful T'Rang leader until after completing a quest and was shocked to find that an important ally had been killed in the mean time (by the T'Rang I'd avoided). At no small cost, I restored to an earlier position, took on the T'Rang arch minion



### Crusaders of the Dark Savant (Wizardry VII)

★★★★

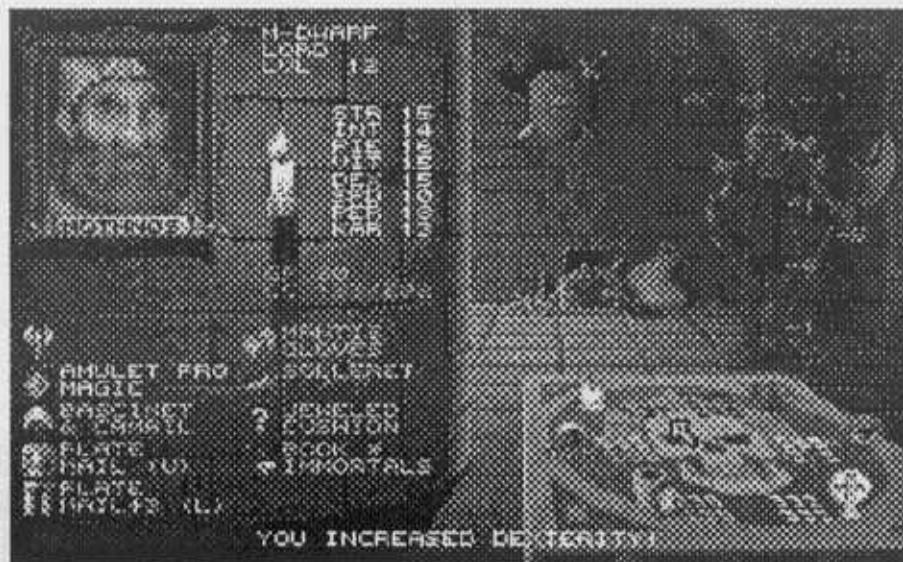
\$69.95 for 640K EGA-VGA PC

Sir-Tech

In case you were wondering, signing up for this one (tap, tap) gets you six tickets to Lost Guardia, otherwise known as "Phoonzang's Planet". Before he

the planetary capital. Getting past his bad-tempered robotoid troopers is just one of many challenges you will have to overcome. The Astral Dominae MUST NOT fall into the wrong hands!!!

Crusaders' takes the excellent multi-character adventuring system of the 6th Wizardry 'outdoors' complete with day/night effects and moon phases. So, besides exploring stone-walled mazes and temples, you'll walk the streets of towns,

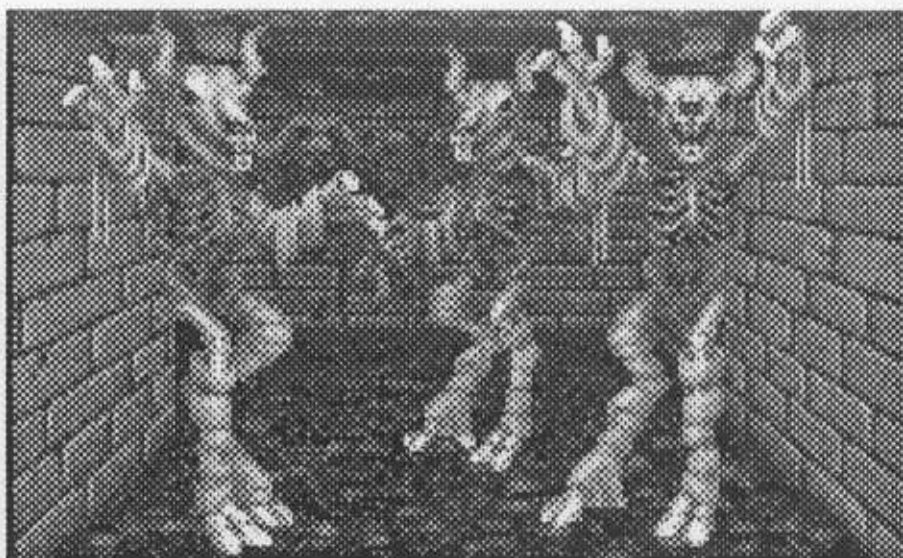


crammed with interesting personages, engaging mini-quests, challenging combats and Wizardry's trademark 'weird machine' puzzles. As in Bane', your 'tools' include an extensive magic system, piles of neat artifacts, AND virtually open-ended opportunities for character development.

first, and saved my ally. With eight vital "maps" to acquire, plus traps, mazes, puzzles, strange devices, and flocks of enemies to overcome... well, you need every friend you can find!

Will you need the (\$19.95) Clue Book? Possibly, not. Thanks to auto-mapping, an excellent manual, fold-out





'world map', and ample in-game hints, skilled questers may never require 'extra help' (e.g. a call to Sir Tech's Hint Line). Still, Brenda Garbo's 179-page treasure trove of maps, clues, solutions, (monster & item charts, strategy advice, ...) etc. amounts to more than just 'the ultimate un-sticker'. In an adventure rated at something like 300 hours(!) playing time, the nicely illustrated, well written compendium is a valuable filler-inner and organizer which can add a lot to the fun of your crusading.

Weaknesses? Just three merit mention: first, well into the game there are still too many pissant monster encounters, especially since monsters are visible only when encountered (i.e. you can't 'see 'em coming' and avoid contact). Second, the gamescape display offers few unique landmarks (e.g. unusual trees or rocks, signs you can read without clicking on them, etc.). Third, found or dropped items show up only in a small window (lower left screen) not on the main forward view. The one bug—using a Locate Person spell scroll messes up the display—has been reported and, according to Sir Tech's Lori Mitchell, it WILL be fixed.

Was it a book? a movie? a game? or did you actually watch dragon rooks wheel across the sky from a mountain top? or, spend a long night tromping amidst the angry trees and battling gnarled guardians near an ancient shrine? or ...? This IS an adventure packed with memorable experiences. Expect months of high-impact, high-tech swords and sorcery questing when you challenge galactic empires, Lost Guardia, and the 'Dark Savant!

## Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge

★★★★

\$59.95 for VGA 640K PC

Lucasfilm Games

"I hear that you became a real pirate back on Melee' Island; so, maybe this ad will be of interest:

'Visit beautiful Woodtick, the jewel of Scabb Island and starting point of any search for the fabulous Big Woop treasure!'

The 'jewel' stuff is something of a stretch, I've been there. Woodtick is chiefly an on-the-water junk yard maze of ships too rotten for sea duty. Strangely, none of my requests for additional treasure information have been answered; but there's a rumor that some bozo named Largo LeGrande has slapped an embargo on the place. My guess is you won't get anywhere near Big Whoop 'til you deal with the local bully."

When you're famous for some magnificent feat, like exploding a dreaded ghost pirate, hardly anything is more annoying than finding a bunch of people who don't believe you or suspect the tale has been grossly 'embellished'. Hence, your search for the Big Woop—"That'll show 'em!". Maybe, but it's certain Guybrush Threepwood (you) won't get off Scabb unless something is done about Largo.

The "something" turns out to be a voodoo doll and your first quest is to collect ingredients for the recipe (supplied by an old friend, the Priestess, who has moved to the Scabb Island swamps). After a scary visit to the cemetery, freeing the inn keeper's pet alligator, sneaking into Largo's room, and swiping a laundry ticket, you get the job done. Now, all you need is money to hire a ship, which

one. (The soup, incidentally, is cold. The rat will be okay.)

Soon you're on the high seas with several islands and 90% of the adventure ahead. Along the way, you will discover something worse than having your accomplishments doubted; namely, having an "accomplishment" after you with blood in his eyes! LeChuck did NOT like being blown up!! Lest one's resolve falter, your almost-for-sure-true-love, Governor Elaine Marley, shows up, too.

Monkey Island 2' comes with a skinny 8-page manual which, at that, probably supplies more help than you'll need. (For 'insurance', see Origin's 'Book of Orbs hints book; Lucas's Clue Book may be ready, too.) In any case, the challenge of low-medium difficulty brain teasers is only half the fun. When you put on your Guybrush Threepwood suit you also expect cute, clever dialogue, quaint scenery, 'pirate music', and outlandish situations. That's just what you'll get, about 25-35 hours worth, when you sail off to face 'LeChuck's Revenge!

## The Summoning

★★★★

\$59.95 for VGA 640K PC

Strategic Simulations

"This commission is from The Council of Mages, led by a newcomer named Rowena. They're looking for a champion to do away with a mysterious sorcerer known as Shadow Weaver. According to Rowena, the main threat is not Shadow Weaver's enormous army (called "The Horde") or even his unmatched magical powers. The Council is most afraid that 'Weaver will obtain both pieces of The Staff of Summoning, call forth the God of Magic into our dimension, and try to zap him in order to seize his powers. Whoever

ful mages. Yet the Council's "secret"(?) base remains and its ragtag army still rides out to harass the Horde! Anyway, Rowena says you'll get some good weapons and magic training; and, entering the labyrinth surrounding Shadow Weaver's Citadel will be no problem. Lots of brigands and other misfits go there hoping for Horde employment. Just one bit of advice: something about this deal smells funny; if you accept the commission, watch out!"

Features: Full-color high-perspective top-down view showing animated action figure plus all nearby monsters and personages. Special purpose screens facilitate handling character inventory, conversations/trading with maze personages, and spell casting. Expect good AdLib/SB effects and music (music-only on Roland) plus quick multi-position Save and Restore.

... The fearless Narf was on the move! I had made it through the three "Beginner" levels and was well into collecting the six parts of The Seal required to open the way to the Elemental Barriers. Once past these, I'd slice through the five Guardian Knights' domains like butter, wrap up the five "End" levels, and soon be into The Citadel ready to polish off Shadow Weaver: Zip-zop and a dozen roses to the widow!

So much for first impressions. Some thirty hours into The Summoning it was becoming clear that my initial perusal of the Level Layout Map (on page 90 of the game manual) had lacked perspective. Like, for starters, many of the thirty-plus levels are laid out on a 64 x 64 grid and most include several barrier puzzles built around locks, pressure plates, levers, (giant rolling balls, blocks, pits, fireball traps, etc.) and various kinds of teleporters. (HINT: Monsters are part of some solutions. You can push dead bodies onto pressure plates.) Besides which, the 'Layout Map omits several areas located in an "Otherworld" dimension!

I was not surprised when the Robbers and Giant Bugs of the early levels began to give way to Guards, Skeletons, and Giant Spiders. Eventually, you face fire-spitting Hell Hounds, Harpy bowmen, (Giant Crabs, Assassins, Golems), Elite Guards, ... all in realistic real-time combat. With a few exceptions, handling combat point-click and motion controls demands only modest 'arcade expertise', particularly since spell-casting is in "null time" (you can take as long as you want to click-in the required hand movements).

Weapons variety and a versatile magic system means there's always more than one way to 'skin the cat'. So, you can flee a mob of deadly but slow gazers (and come back after finding



leads to constructing a rat trap, which lets you ... For those who love 'get this to open that to make whatever'-style challenges, the second Monkey Island is an absolute bonanza. Best of all, the puzzles are easy enough to figure out—aha! I'll try dropping the rat into the soup—but tricky enough to make you feel really clever when you crack

wins, such a confrontation could, literally, eradicate all life from the face of the planet!

"What's odd about all this is that Shadow Weaver hasn't already smashed the Council. I made a few discrete inquiries and it turns out every king, duke, and baron in the region was wiped out long ago along with most of the really power-



The Magic Mirror) or, unlimber your bow and try a hit-and-run strategem. For very fast opponents, like the Knights, the key to victory may lay in strategy—Hint: lead the Red Knight into a nearby fireball trap—or, if all else fails, using up a precious Dagaz rune stone (it casts Spell of Slaying). Sometimes, as when battling a nest of Hell Hounds, you can dodge around and actually get the monsters to zap each other!

There's lots to see and do in The Summoning, yet, many paths to victory. The start allows going for a direct assault on a "Broken Seal" level or a 'learning the ropes' tour through three beginner areas. Later on you discover a tough, tricky challenge built around Shadow Weaver's arch minion, The Raven, AND an alternative shortcut to the Citadel through the (non-auto-mapped!) Sewers. (HINT: Go for the 'Raven quest'; it's more fun and pays off better

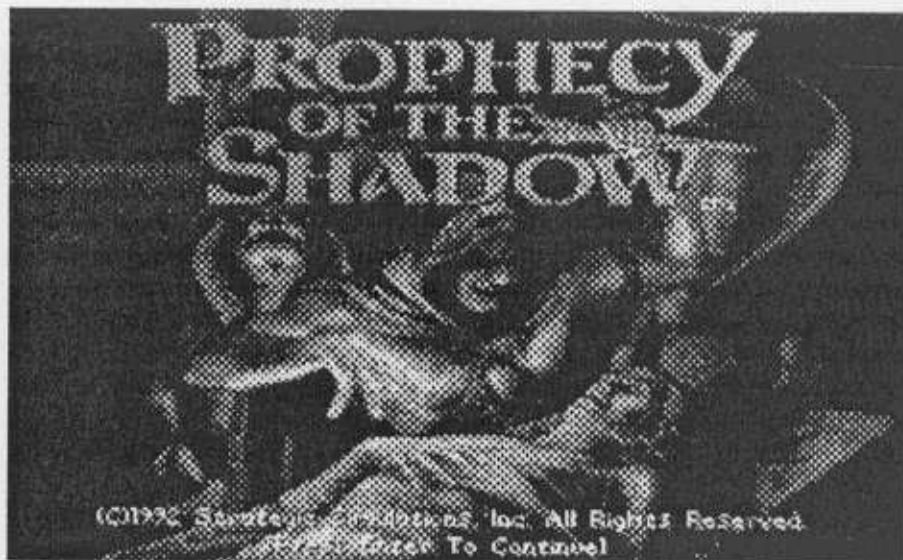
take a peek' would have been irresistible. As things stand, I can say that yes, you will find the CB 'very nice to have', especially if your setup won't handle the map printouts; BUT, the manual and in-game info are all one needs to win. As to SSI's on the box "100+ Hours" playing time claim, it's for real. Count on weeks of addictive challenge and maze adventuring at its best when you answer The Summoning!

## Prophecy of the Shadow

★★★\*

Strategic Simulations

NOTE: Lest you be put off by the "Defective" rating addendum, yes, Prophecy' does have a major bug. Happily, there's an easy fix! (See "Prophecy Bug Squish" in the Fast Frames section.)



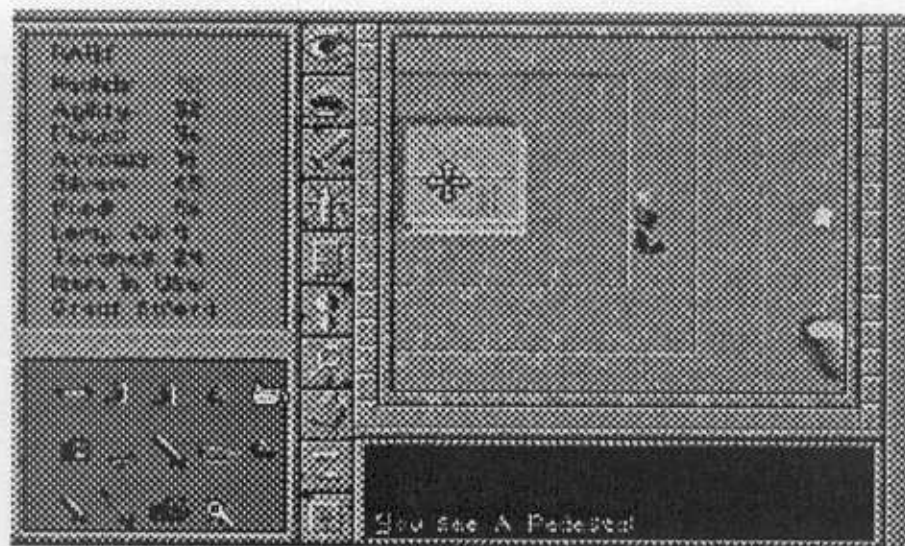
in character-boosting Experience points.) Even the climax is branched. The right choice is fairly obvious; but, do a Save and try them all. You will better appreciate the game's clever ending.

Despite its size and large puzzle count 'Summoning' is unbelievably free of glitches. A player has so many ways to manipulate pressure plates, teleporters, etc. that opportunities for throwing a monkey wrench into the works would seem to be legion. I tried some pretty far-out ploys; but only managed to get 'dead stuck' one or two times. The one flaw worth mention concerns the game's high-perspective display. Walls occasionally obscure items (like arrows you've fired) and can make it difficult to see and move dead monster bodies. Once or twice a body became wedged into a corner and could not be moved.

When SSI's Clue Book (\$14.95) arrived Narf was already off on another adventure. Maybe, it's just as well. The 158 pages are packed with map after map (all nicely annotated) along with puzzle solutions, item locations, and descriptions of key artifacts. Probably, it ranks among the top two or three CB's ever produced by anyone. The temptation to 'just

As both a founding of unknown parentage and an apprentice healer, you have won only grudging acceptance among the superstitious inhabitants of Bannerwick. That some suspect your master, Larkin, uses magic (true!) doesn't help matters, especially now that a scoundrel named Cam Tethe has seized royal powers. He blames "evil magic" for the disappearance of his ward, Princess Elspeth, and has sworn to eradicate all mages! Bad enough? Not quite. When Larkin is mysteriously murdered, you do not become the island's new healer; you become the prime suspect!

Whoever ordered Larkin's demise probably considered his young apprentice worthless except as a convenient 'fall guy'. Well, someone has badly miscalculated! In proving your innocence you take out enough monsters and rogues to up your powers a notch AND obtain a death warrant listing Larkin along with other personages. The warrant (evidently a Mage Hunter's 'work sheet') is signed by Cam Tethe! Soon you journey to the mainland, join the underground 'Resistance', and find yourself involved in a search for Princess Elspeth, a search which gradually develops into a quest to save your



world from (1) the power-crazed Cam Tethe, (2) a creeping blight called "the Withering", (3) evil cultists intent on resurrecting a Shadow Lord, and... (4) The Prophecy!

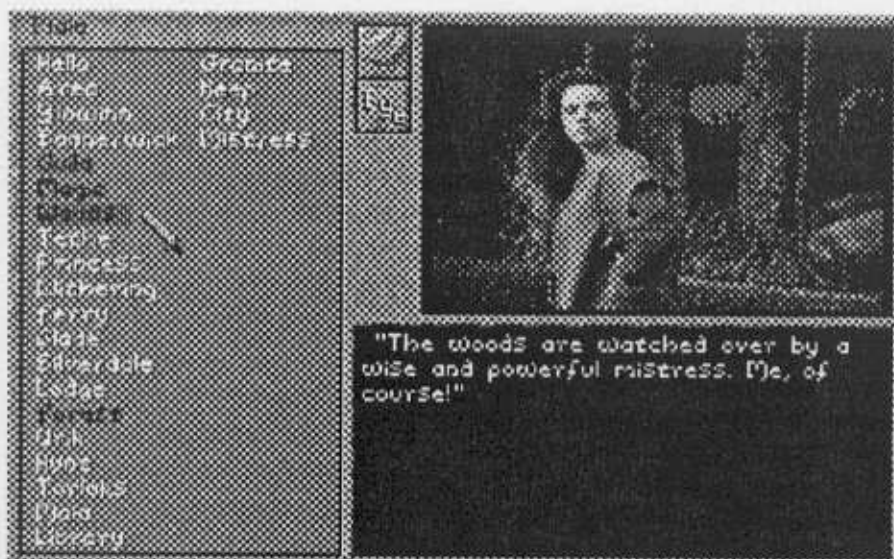
With AdLib/SB or Roland music to set the mood, you explore a large island and continent-size mainland encompassing several towns and 'dungeons' plus a sprinkling of castles and other major structures. Attractive slant-down views show your character, any nearby personages/monsters, and terrain features—e.g. you see bushes, flickering torches, bookcases, etc.—with keys, swords, coils of rope, and other gettable items enlarged for easy point-click manipulation. Along with food and gold, Prophecy' lets you carry around quite a large inventory; and (a BIG help) you can drop items anywhere and pick them up later when needed. (NOTE: Due to an odd glitch, when starting the adventure you will find it difficult to pick up the key to Larkin's hut unless you have equipped your dagger!?)

As in "The Summoning", (also from SSI) all combat occurs on the current display in something close to real time. Animation and solid sound effects plus good pre-battle hype when you go against a major bad guy all add to the fun; but the clinchers are realistic 'monster' behavior

ern, temple, witch's hut, or whatever implies a certain level of character development; so, the program is able to match challenges to your abilities. You seldom face either boringly "easy" or "totally impossible" combats.

A major part of 'getting from here to there' has nothing to do with fighting bandits, ghosts, (spiders, guards, evil clerics, torloks, ...) and other such baddies. Many of the townsfolk and other personages you meet are willing to buy/sell items, suggest profitable missions, and supply information. The more you already know, the more people, things, etc. you can ask about (by clicking on available 'key words'). Conversational text is often verbose, sometimes humorous; plus, to enhance realism, Prophecy' employs animated digitized pics of real actors.

As claimed on the box, this is a medium length (40-60 hours) endeavor. Most likely, it will seem even shorter. Following a slow start—mainly, a matter of getting used to the controls—the low-pressure adventure 'hooks' you with one quest, then another, then ... until you find yourself positively glued to the computer! The manual and in-game hints supply all you need to win; however, the \$12.95 Clue Book supplies maps and journal entries which can enhance



and freedom to maneuver all over the gamescape. Flexible controls let you zip around corners, fire arrows, target spells, etc.; and, if too many enemies join in, you can always try something like dodging behind a tombstone or running for a stairway. Getting into a cav-

player enjoyment without ruining the challenge. (i.e. a lot of the CB stuff SHOULD be in the manual.) Either way, on a long evening with a notepad and cup of coffee, 'Prophecy is a fun place to be.



## Super Space Invaders

★★★

\$39.95 for CGA-VGA 640K PC

Domark/Accolade

Joystick and AdLib, Sound Blaster, or Roland sound recommended

As everyone knows, sometime in 1990 thousands of old arcade machines were dumped into space to help plug the ozone hole, reduce global warming, and, with luck, provide future nesting sites for spotted owls. Unfortunately, one machine, a prototype "Space Invaders" model, was knocked out of orbit by a meteor, whipped around the sun, and picked up by an advanced alien culture which proceeded to generate trans-species hybrids patterned on the enhanced video engrams of the game creatures. Needless to say, the super critters have returned; now, YOU must save Earth from the Super Space Invaders!

Domark's new Invaders is a one- or cooperative two-player version of the original arcade featuring colorful VGA scenery and monsters backed by pounding SB/Roland sound. You get responsive joystick control only in single-player mode (KB input for two-player game). The ten-position High Scores roster is maintained on-disk so that ordinary mortals can properly appreciate (and be awed by) your efforts on the part of humanity.

What humanity faces is wave upon wave of mechanized, mutated menace! Moving along the bottom your aim is to zap the aliens who may adopt any of several attack formations (back-forth and down is the most common). Potting a Supply Saucer (these move across the top) yields a Buster Laser, the churning "fire flower", time freeze, and other special weapons. Wiping out three waves gives you a crack at the Level Guardian ship (tricky) or the bonus Cattle Mutilation bonus screen! (Again, 'as everyone knows', alien saucers like to swoop down and snatch cattle for dastardly experiments.) In the latter, you pile up points by defending a herd against the saucers. To move to the next Level (there are at least 12), you must zap the Guardian.

In 1979, when Toshihiro Nishkado's game hit the scene, I was neither a quarter-popper nor an Atari owner; so my "Space Invaders" experience was limited to just a few plays. From what I remember of the original, the "Super" version is just that: faster, crisper, better sounding, and at least as addictive. Complete with manual detailing Guardian powers and Level formations, Super Space Invaders is balm for arcade vet-

erans and a guaranteed solution the next time younger visitors want to 'play something on the PC'!

## Daughter of Serpents

★

about \$40 for 640K EGA-VGA PC

Millennium/Electronic Arts

Set in genteel 1920's Cairo, 'Serpents involves you in murder, serpent-people cults, and a search for ancient scrolls. You can play Estelle Pryor (a psychic), Joe Gettsky (a private eye), one of the other four pre-made characters, or create your own from scratch. Attributes/skills like Clairvoyance, Linguistic abilities, and Magical knowledge—to name just a few—slightly impact the scenario; so, several replays are possible. That each is good for only an hour or so tells you what to look for by way a challenge. The 'hard part' is getting used to Millennium's interface and click-searching scenes for items. Your adventuring choices—e.g. "Will you help find the scroll?"—are uniformly obvious.

The 'Serpents package includes dungeon master instructions for a stand-alone role-play adventure named "The Alchemist of Istanbul". Billed as the prequel to 'Serpents, it is NOT a computer game although you are encouraged to employ the 'Serpents character creator/editor to develop player roles. The editor does not support a print-out option; however, a DM with a computer 'assistant' can easily reference any player's attribute displays to make outcome decisions.

Whether or not "Alchemist" gets a tryout, you will eventually discover that 'Serpents's "Scripted Interactive Graphic Novel Operating System" does not make a particularly versatile dungeon master. At best it responds to only a few major character attributes. (HINT: When starting 'Serpents, pick one of the pre-defined characters and don't waste time in fine-tuning.) Millennium also warns that the disk I/O part of SIGNOS is not compatible with Hard Disk compression and caching software. You must boot without SmartDrive; and, DOS 6 DoubleSpace users will need to install 'Serpents on the 'non-compressed drive' part of HD space.

Those who especially crave an authentic "Mummy's Curse"-style atmosphere can add a rating star. Backed by SB/Roland effects and music plus piles of colorful VGA art and digitized images, Daughter of Serpents does take you on an entertaining, if brief, Cook's Tour of quaint shops, musty tombs, and darkly lurking ancient evil.

## Martian Dreams (Ultima: Worlds of Adventure)

★

\$59.95 for EGA-VGA 640K PC

Origin

AdLib/SB/Roland sound and 512K expanded memory recommended

Second in Origin's "Worlds of Adventure" series, 'Dreams begins with a remarkable premise. It's 1992 when you receive a mysterious letter from Nikola Tesla (died 1943) begging your help to avoid a disaster of historical proportions. Due to sabotage, Theodore Roosevelt, Marie Curie, George Washington Carver and several other key figures have been/were shot off to Mars while touring a space cannon set up at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. You are asked to employ your Orb of Moons stone as a time travel device, go to 1895, and participate in the rescue mission. With the letter is a 'How to use the Orb' manual written by YOU while on the 1895 mission!

On Mars you, Tesla, and three other rescuers find that everyone seems to have settled in nicely! Some mine Oxium (the substance needed to breath, used as money), Calamity Jane helps run the Trading Post (where you buy supplies and ammo), and most of the others seem to belong to exclusive cult-like groups which have appropriated abandoned Martian installations, mainly the cities. You also hear of the "Dream Machines"; but, being, at first, unwelcome in the cities, have difficulty investigating. Aside from canals, patches of 'forest', and caves, the landscape is barren red desert—big, and easy to get lost in (until you buy a sextant to use with the fold-out map).

All indigenous Martian species are a combination of plant and animal; and, no surprise, many of these "plantimals" are hostile. Planthers, Rockworms, swarms of Creeping Cacti, Sand Trappers, and other novel creatures are the main reason you go everywhere armed to the teeth. However, several varieties of berry do, temporarily, impart such useful abilities as mind reading and telekinesis.

So, why aren't the rescuees leaping with joy and anxious to make preparations for a return to Earth? That, of course, is the mystery you must unravel. Unfortunately, it is one of the few incentives for sticking with the game. Instead of the teeming, vibrant world of Flash Gordon or Edgar Rice Burroughs, this is the windswept, nearly vacant planet of Martian Chronicles. Your progress is continuously bogged down by swarms of pis-

sant monsters; yet, a cumbersome combat scheme makes mopping up Martian critters a genuine chore, and, with no Evil force in evidence, positively anti-ecological!

As always, Origin delivers quality support materials including the colorful map and two illustrated booklets. One booklet describes each historical personage encountered; the other details knowledge and speculations concerning Martian civilization, important sites, geography, and plantimals. Along with the game's flashy intro, it's a good beginning. Too soon, alas, you discover realistically bland landscapes, a so-so sound track, and a scenario which employs endangered species purely as barriers to exploration. Dogged pursuit of the game's mystery can be entertaining for players who enjoy munching low-key quests an hour a sitting; for the rest of us, 'Dreams is, literally, a sleeper.

## MS-DOS 6 Upgrade

★★★

\$129.00 list, for PC

Microsoft

MS-DOS 6 Upgrade comes on three diskettes ready to install via the user-friendly SetUp program. SetUp makes MS-DOS 6 your DOS, supplanting an earlier DOS or OS/2. The package is called an "upgrade" chiefly because the new DOS still looks and works much like DOS 5 and because the 321-page manual is really a supplement to the more comprehensive DOS 5 manual.

Granted, for an "upgrade", the new DOS seems to add quite a few powerful capabilities. An improved SmartDrive does noticeably enhance system speed; and, you're sure to like the way a new EMM386 lets you cram more stuff into "upper memory" to free precious 'DOS Program Space'. You'll also like the built-in Anti-Virus and Defrag plus Undelete and an expanded Help. On the other hand, you will NEED DoubleSpace and Multi-Config!

DoubleSpace compression does not, as some claim, rot your files; nor, on the average, is access speed impacted. (i.e. speed gains due to smaller size of compressed files tends to balance speed loss due to extra processing.) Microsoft notes that some early user problems seem to relate to the upgrade being applied to older ready-to-bomb drives. For our 120MB hard disk, the gain is about 80 very nice-to-have MB! 1.7 seems to be a typical multiplier. DS makes it easy to set up (and change) how much of your hard disk is to be compressed and how much will remain un-compressed. These partitions are



treated like separate drives (e.g. Drive C: and Drive I:).

Multiple Configuration capability means you can predefine two or more different machine configurations for convenient menu selection upon startup. It definitely beats swapping-in new AUTOEXEC and CONFIG files and rebooting when you want to start up in Windows, or use a full-featured Mouse driver, or install memory-hungry multi-media peripherals, or ... Currently supplied as version 6.2, MS-DOS 6 is the quickest way to 'Upgrade Your World'!

### Guest Reviews

#### Battle Chess Multimedia Version ★★★

\$59.95, for SVGA PC running Windows 3.x

*Interplay*

by Baywoof

I am not what you would call an avid chess player. I do like to play chess from time to time, but not very often. Probably the reason is that I am only a fair player, and I am too impatient to become really absorbed in the game. Even so, the evolution of computer chess programs does continue to invite my curiosity. As illustrated by Interplay's latest version of Battle Chess, computer wood-pushers have come a LONG way since the simple text-based products of many years ago.

Programmed for the Multimedia PC (MPC) environment, the new Battle Chess comes on compact disk running under "Windows 3.x". With the promise of stunning SVGA graphics and animation plus CD quality music and sound effects, it looked like just the right package for giving my recent "Sound Blaster Pro2 Multimedia" upgrade a good workout. (The SB kit includes a CD ROM and bundled software.) To be honest, I was more than impressed! After an easy installation, I clicked the Windows icon to execute the program. When the 640 x 480 SVGA display came up with a true, not synthesized, CD soundtrack, I felt that my hopes for the future of PC software had been attained. The investment in a multimedia system had been worth it!

My 20MHz '386 plus SB kit meets the MPC standard; but, I certainly would recommend as much speed ('486 PC's) with as much memory as you can afford. The game does take your system into account, as the program allows users to set animation and sound options to optimize speed of play. I selected all sound and animation sequences 'ON' and did not notice any irritating slowdown in play. The CD ROM, although slower than fixed disk drives, did not interfere with game play while loading sound sequences and graphic images.

Battle Chess, of course, is chess with superbly animated pieces that tromp, clank, slink, etc. from square to square and actually do battle! Yet, the package offers most of the features of other, less spectacular, computer chess players. Setup allows any combination of human and/or computer opponents playing either or both sides (Red or Blue) as well as long-distance play via modem. Fixed time-per-move settings range from a few seconds at "Novice" Levels up to a few minutes. If requested, the computer will even make Next Move suggestions. For the toughest challenge, you can enter max Thinking Time values up to several hours per move. Naturally, you get Take Back Move, Force Move, and Replay, too.

You can switch from the animated chess board to a conventional chess board with conventional looking pieces without animation. I found myself going to the latter mode often. The animated chessboard can appear quite cluttered at the outset, and switching to a conventional board made decision making easier and quicker. I would then switch back to the animated board to enjoy the battles.

Perhaps the best feature of Battle Chess is its tutorials. Selecting any piece from the Help window produces an animated piece character who describes its function. If you consider chess to be a serious intellectual exercise, be prepared to have your feathers (or whatever) ruffled. Each piece has a personality with voice to match and is presented in a comedic manner while discussing its movement and history. For those interested in learning chess or in helping get a younger player started, the tutorials may be an effective method to overcome chess's "stuffy" reputation.

A question arises; with all that Battle Chess/MPC has to offer, what else can you do with a computer chess game? Mainly, you could build in some of the sophisticated features of more "serious" computer chess players. Most notably, BC users won't find on-line 'book moves', historical games, and printout of played games using standard notation. But, then, "serious chess" was never the intention of BC's designers. Their intention is that you have FUN while challenging a 'fairly decent' computer opponent. As mentioned, I am only a fair player; and Battle Chess/MPC was more than formidable enough!

Despite all the flash and glitter, playing BC/MPC has not changed my attitude toward chess. It HAS confirmed my expectations for what multimedia can bring to PC users. This is The Future for gaming software. When products attain a new plateau in terms of graph-

ics, animation, and sound, users soon become addicted to the improvements and you have a new benchmark. The latest Battle Chess definitely fits this 'benchmarking' category.

Earlier versions of Battle Chess were impressive for their time; and, Interplay has done well in this MPC release. If your computer supports multimedia, the package deserves a tryout. For those who have not yet 'gone MPC', it's time to think about upgrading. The next generation of software has arrived!

#### Lords of Time ★★

\$49.95, for 512K Amiga 500-3000

*Hollyware Entertainment*

Joystick recommended

by S. H. Bruton

As every sci-fi movie fan knows, space pilots should steer clear of anomalies. In Lords of Time you don't and viola!, you're wrecked on an unknown planet. So much for your old mission. Your new assignment is to get back into space; but, that's going to take a while. First, you've got to check this place out and take care of a few details, like, for instance, survival!

Lords of Time will attract even the most seasoned action-adventure gamer. The top-down view 'exploration mode' graphics deliver good detail as you weave your way through forests, along ocean shores, etc.. Close-ups, as when come face to face with a dragon in a hidden cave, are excellent. The sound effects and music are good, too; though the continuous looping melody may wear thin after awhile. Not that you'll have much time to notice: LT definitely has an arcade 'feel' with plenty of spiders, meat-eating plants, and other animated monsters to contend with. Count on getting your fill of exploring, spell casting, theft, and combat. A guy's gotta do 'what a guy's gotta do' (and it ain't always pretty) to make it through the day in this world.

Fortunately, LT offers quick Save/Restore and you may save each of several games with a different name. To get anywhere you will need to do frequent saves, especially at the start when you're looking for a town and learning how to find food. There ARE many dangers and even those that look the same may be different. You might quickly dispatch one spider, outlaw, or whatever, but the next could be much tougher. YOU could be the one who's dispatched! (HINT: Be skeptical of everything from an "easy drink" to an "easy opponent".) This game requires you to be about your wits.

LT's manual is short and to the point allowing for quick reference with a few hints added for good measure. Getting started is easy; but, exploring the strange world chock full of un-

usual people, places and things may take weeks. Building your character's powers and actually winning amounts to a solid action-quest challenge. And, since each new game uses randomly selected solutions to key puzzles, the adventure is good for several replays. In short, expect lots of action lots of times. Lords of Time has enough surprises and 'extra touches' to keep you coming back again and again.

### Fast Frames, Updates, Etc.

#### Shadow Sorcerer ★

Supplied with a paperback copy of Wanderlust, SSI's Shadow Sorcerer (\$49.95, for CGA-VGA PC) opens just as Caramon, Goldmoon, and other DragonLance heroes prepare to guide hundreds of refugees through a hazardous wilderness. Many locations on the 20 x 33 hex map screen 'break out' into large, attractive, slant-down view maze, mine, and temple gamescapes, which is where most exploration, combat, and meetings with friendly personages take place.

Why just one star? The rating does not reflect such buglets as being able to break into the final dungeon from the first cave entered—you won't get far anyway. Mainly, SS suffers from cumbersome controls during the real-time combats and a user-unfriendly interface for trading, identifying, and using items.

#### The Missing Stick?

It was impossible, yet, according to X-Wing I could not use a joystick because none was connected! One was; so, I ran EA's trusty Joystick Tuner (same result); and, finally ended up checking our interface card settings. (They were okay.) For one last test I ran Elite Plus. It said "no joystick", too, AND noted that, if one were connected, it was too far off of center. (Aha!) Sure enough, the stick's X and Y trimmers were way off their usual settings. After adjustments to rough 'center', my FlightStick was no longer 'missing'!

#### Prophecy Bug Squish

Bug: Upon first entering Tethe's castle, a combat ensues which is probably supposed to be unwinnable unless you cast a Time Freeze. (You have not learned the spell yet; but, you do have a scroll.) Unfortunately, using a Time Freeze scroll always bombs the game! Following ten or so scrollessly unfruitful tries at the battle, I called SSI— "Yes, we know about the bug"— and, then, set out to find a cure.

Squish: The fix is to temporarily boost your character's Hit Points, Magic Power, and Agility. Before entering Tethe's cas-



tle do a Save, exit, and start up a file editing utility like XTree Gold. View the saved game file (e.g. NARF5.CAT) and jot down the values of bytes \$10-\$14. Now set all five bytes to \$7F (127 decimal), save the changed file, and return to play. The battle will still be rough; but, you should be able to win. Afterward, do a Save, exit, and restore the changed bytes to avoid spoiling the challenge. (Many tough fights lay ahead; but, thanks to growing powers and improved equipment, you will have no further need for a Time Freeze scroll.)

### The Rocketeer ★★

Those who love a stiff arcade challenge need only strap on a rocketpack and tackle Disney's multi-sequence action adventure. Presented as a series of episodes with comic book-style intros and storyline fillers, 'Rocketeer takes you from a wild two-pylon air race to battles with Nazi agents on the ground and in the skies. You can expect excellent 256-color VGA artwork and animation plus good SB or Sound Source music, effects, and speech. (Music on Roland is an option.) There is no Game Save; instead, winning through an episode earns you the Code Word needed to start at the next episode. (HINT: If you know the Code Word for, say, Episode 5, you may choose to play any of the earlier episodes. I made several guesses and hit upon one for a late episode in which Rocketman must RESCUE his girlfriend!)

Challenge variety rates a 'decent'; but, the point-and-shoot gun battle in a hanger, obstacle-packed fly-and-shoot attack against an airship, and most of the other sequences are just mildly entertaining. The three-plane Air Race is the game's real star. Flying the plane of your choice, you must win three successively longer races plus a race against the planes wearing your rocketpack. (More HINTS: It's easiest to win flying the Gee Bee. Depend mainly upon the forward-view insert to get the tightest turns around each pylon.) Supplied with illustrated manual on both 5.25" and 3.5" diskettes, 'Rocketeer is \$49.95 (\$69.95 with external Sound Source) for EGA-VGA PC.

## Next

Whatever's left of your Christmas computer-stuff funds, DO NOT spend it all yet. Next time we'll check out Origin's Ultima Underworld I/II, New World's Xeen adventures, SSI's Veil of Darkness, Lucasfilm's X-Wing, Microsoft's Visual Basic, and Disney's Screen Saver plus ... More in 94!

THE NAZI THREAT IS ONCE AGAIN HELD BACK...FOR NOW...



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