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FORMAT

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COVER

16

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DUNGEON MASTER BEATER
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**UNMISSABLE
FORMAT GOLDS**
F-19 Stealth Fighter
Rick Dangerous 2
Distant Armies
Captive

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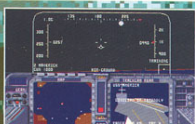
- The most amazing animation on show ● 25 pages packed with games
- Win an A5000 ● How do flight simulators compare with the real thing?
- Which is the best Basic, GFA or HiSoft? ● How you can run ST software



Hurting across the plains of Central Europe, the Stealth takes evasive action after trashing a radar base. This will clear a path for 'conventional' strike planes to bomb unhindered.



A mission briefing and things look grim. The black lines represent your intended flight path. The black dots show the radar range of the enemy and the grey circles show their missile capability.



A night mission and to prove it there's the mood. Looking behind on the tracking camera the USS America is seen fading into darkness. In the night the Stealth defies even visual detection.



The game offers two different aircraft for you to fly: the theoretical model F-19 created by Microprose before details of the real thing were available and the actual Stealth Fighter, the F-117A. Here the F-117A, literally worth its weight in gold, is prepared for you to fly.

F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER

MICROPROSE £29.99 ■
Joystick, Mouse or Keyboard

Literally worth more than its weight in gold, the Stealth Fighter is a weapon of the 21st century. During a cold war it's ideal for covert action; in a limited war its invisibility makes it perfect for tactical strikes. Best of all, if and when the war finally heats up, its sheer undetectability allows the F-19 to tread boldly where normal planes fear to fly.

F-19 lets warmongers, hawks and sabre-rattlers try for the top gun slot in a simulation of flying, bombing and dogfighting. Flying either a true Stealth (F-117 A) or Microprose's theoretical model of the plane – designed for the PC version in which the craft didn't 'officially' exist – you play the part of a new pilot hoping to win glory, medals and promotion through the ranks by way of flying skill.

Stealth gives you two planes with masses of missions and three levels of hostility in four different battle zones. Reality is high on the

agenda with four levels of detail for approaching objects, enough views to make the head spin, tactical maps, tracking cameras for target identification, on-board computers, detection threshold indicators, every weapon under the sun and even accurate star constellations in the night sky.

If that's not enough there are alterable way points to aid navigation and pulse or Doppler radar to contend with. Using real maps and with a staggering variety of targets to shoot, bomb and fire missiles at it has enough to satisfy anyone's appetite for destruction.

Every stealth mission follows a set pattern. After selecting a pilot there's a briefing in which you can check on the tactical info available on both your primary and secondary targets. It also gives you a chance to work out the way points you'll need to set for navigating around enemy radar bases and SAM sites.

After arming your plane at the one-stop missile shop it's time to get airborne. Taking off from a ground base is reasonably easy but carriers prove to be a little more difficult. Even flying is tricky, because for max stealth potential the plane must be flown at tree-top level (200 feet) where all the best turbulence lives. This fact exacerbates the F-19's already major aerodynamic flaws – this plane was designed to be invisible, not soar majestically! The Stealth flies like a Skoda and steers like a truck when compared to all the MIG 29s waiting out there.

Using the rather handy and pleasantly idiot-proof way-point direction system, getting to the target is child's play. When flying, though, your prime objective is keeping your radar profile low. In the centre of the cockpit sits a detection indicator. A bar coming from the bottom indicates how much of a profile you're currently

showing the enemy, while a bar at the top shows the strength of their radar pulses. If the two bars overlap they've spotted the Stealth and MIGs will be scrambled. Basically, you're in trouble – big, bad trouble.

As the target approaches it's time to use the nifty tracking camera system. Basically it's a small TV monitor that helps you to identify targets and tell friends from foes. You can look in four directions and prioritise targets with the tracker, sorting out who's for the chop and in which order.

A good array of skills and tactics is essential if you're to reach the top. Techniques have to be learned for toss bombing, altitude bombing, anti-ship warfare, anticipation firing, dog fighting and carrier landings, if you're to become even remotely good. The excellent technical manual must be scoured for hints and tips, because flown properly a Stealth Fighter is unstoppable.



GRAPHICS AND SOUND

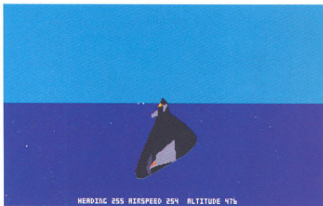
F-19 uses graphics of real speed and quality to bring home the combat experience. With the trackcam giving pictures of the targets, plus all the various chase plane and exterior views, the graphics mesh well, bringing the sim to life. With themed beginning and end sequences, the military concept is backed to the hilt with official-looking clipboards, regulation cups of coffee, back-slapping buddies for survivors and military funerals for crash victims.

Sound-wise *Stealth* doesn't do itself justice, but there's little scope for innovative sonic engineering with planes. They poole around dropping things that go bang and little else.

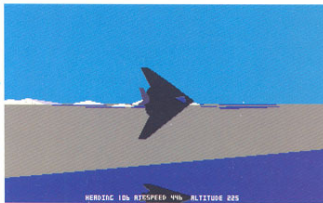
LASTING INTEREST

Stealth isn't the kind of sim which can be flown straight away, even by adept Amiga aviators. You'll be able to keep the thing in the air with no hassle after a few flights, but a lot of hours have to be logged before the plane's full potential is realised. There are some odd flight characteristics which seem impossible to master.

With the missions 'randomly' generated, there is obvious scope for long-term gameplay. The parameters that create the missions allow great flexibility with everything from the experience of the opposition to the war zone, chosen by the pilot. The game doesn't cease to amuse once you've learned the art of survival against elite opposition in Western Europe with the reality settings on max: then there's the chance to get cocky, showing the 'commies' what the best pilots can do with the best equipment.



The fictional F-19 throws a quick left turn. Flying like this is dangerous but fun. The F-19 looks nice but flies like a large black brick.



The F-117A, ugly but effective. This is the real thing and although it may look silly it has an as yet unrealised potential!

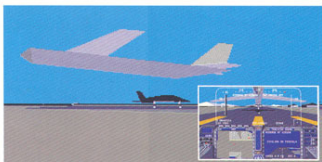
The Stealth Fighter in action:



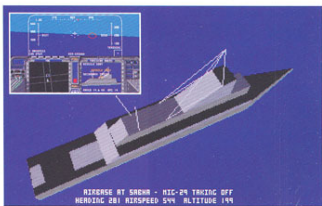
- 1 Power controls.
- 2 Gear controls.
- 3 'Autopilot' indicator.
- 4 'Gear Down' indicator.
- 5 Map. Can be switched from a true

- 6 Radar profile indicator. The red bar at the bottom shows how
- 7 Tracking camera. Lets you choose and identify targets.
- 8 Warning lights, for bay doors, infra red lock on, radar lock, or if you've left the ECM on.
- 9 HUD type, toggles between air-to-air, air-to-ground and navigational.
- 10 Current weapon.
- 11 Height indicator.
- 12 Speed indicator.
- 13 Current item displayed on Tracking camera.
- 14 Direction indicator.
- 15 A windmill.

much of a radar profile you're showing the enemy. A white bar coming from the top shows how strong a fix the enemy has on you.



Exterior shots can reveal some heart-stopping moments, especially around take-off time. A near miss with a 737 is bad for the nerves!



A missile boat gets an unpleasant surprise, seen from the missile view. In the cockpit the tracking camera identifies the target.

JUDGEMENT

F-19 is the business. It deals with state-of-the-art kit and is a state-of-the-art sim. There isn't just a rush to the target, dropping a bomb or two and running away: there's the strategy of avoiding radar and the challenge of keeping your profile as low as possible. *Stealth* is the most complete flight sim yet in terms of gameplay. It's as if the plane was built for a game. You have the edge in terms of technology and that's a good feeling, but they have the numbers and even the *Stealth*'s special powers can

not guarantee success. A good pilot is always needed. There's a real thrill when fighters race above your head, while you proceed unhindered and unseen, safe in the knowledge that you have a missile lock on them but they don't even know you're there. *Trenton Webb*

GRAPHICS	8
SOUND	2
CONTROL	8
INTELLECT	8
ADDICTION	8
OVERALL	91%

WINGS OF FURY

BRODERBUND/DOMARK £24.99 ■ Joystick



The bomb bay is empty, the enemy bases have all been destroyed and the deck crew guide your plane in for a safe landing. All the signs of a job well done. Have a promotion. Oooh, thank you very much... let's have a celebration... Oh I dooo like to be beside the seaside! Oh I dooo like to be beside the seeeeaaa! Right then, where's the bar on this ship...

As the end of the second World War draws near, US Naval forces are clamping down on the Japanese troops. Huge aircraft carriers carrying F6F Hellcat fighter planes cruise the seas closing down enemy encampments.

You are a member of the crew on the carrier USS Wasp, one of the most heroic ships in the fleet, travelling from the frontline back to the safety of an Allied port. Unfortunately, the weaponry and structure of your vessel has been damaged in battle and you must

pilot one of the Hellcats in an attempt to protect your ship, the Wasp, from enemy attacks.

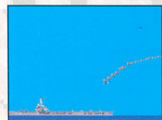
Along the way you come across various enemy installations, in the shape of island bases or battle cruisers. You are given a mission to complete on arrival in each zone. To complete a mission all the targets must be destroyed; that is, all gun emplacements must be blown up, all ships have to be sunk and every last man on the islands must be shot down. For this purpose, you are given a small

selection of weapons to use in battle, each of which has its own specific purpose:

ROCKETS are used to take out heavily armoured gun emplacements and ship's guns.

BOMBS are used to bomb ground targets and send enemy troops scurrying into the open, ready for a strafing run with your machine guns. Yahaaa!

TORPEDOES are used for sinking ships once all the guns have been taken out.



Will the plane make it to the deck? Pile it down there anyway.



The anti-aircraft guns have done their worst, the enemy troops have been scared out into the open... time for a strafing run. Dakadaka!

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

On first sight the graphics look a little on the crude side, but the care taken over the detail and animation of the sprites is incredible. The flailing bodies and bursts of flame when you're on an attack run are very well drawn. The effects are used well to create an atmosphere, with some realistic engine noises, gun blasts and shrieks to push the action along. So it just goes to show, don't be fooled by early appearances, since *Wings of Fury's* graphics and sound suit the game superbly.

LASTING INTEREST

Even though the gameplay itself is quite repetitive, the game has a hook that will have you coming back time after time for another blast. Many a review has been put off so that the *Format* staff can have a bash at blowing a few enemy troops away! The earlier missions aren't too difficult to get to grips with, but the higher ranked missions are a bas... er... they're very difficult!

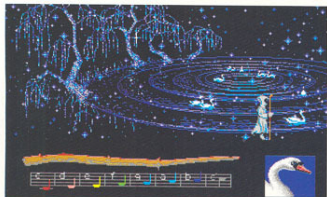
JUDGEMENT

Mostly, shoot-em-ups tend to take themselves a mite too seriously. *Wings of Fury* manages to skate this trap by producing an action-filled blast which is loaded with humour. The flying bodies of enemy troops under fire caused a few chortles around here! Unfortunately, some people will find the tasks a bit too slow and arduous to get deep into the game, but with perseverance the game soon proves to be an enjoyable little jaunt which is well worth checking out. *Maff Evans*



Rockets away! Let those Jap guns have a taste of your weapons: a pretty metallic taste!

GRAPHICS	7
SOUND	7
INTELLECT	3
ADDICTION	8
OVERALL	84%



Floating in the void, Bobbin encounters his lost Guild, the Weavers. They've turned themselves into swans to flee the forthcoming apocalypse, an event that Bobbin has the power to avert.



Guild of Weavers?

I don't remember having a Weaver visit us before.

The head of the Guild of Glassmakers. He welcomes Bobbin with curiosity. Listen carefully to everything that he and his people say and do, because they cast spells which you can hear and copy.

LOOM

LUCASFILM/US GOLD £24.99 ■ Mouse

Loom, n. an apparatus used for weaving yarn into a textile. vb (intr) 1. to come into view indistinctly, with an enlarged and often threatening aspect 2. to seem ominously close. Definitions which all set the scene for Lucasfilm's latest offering, an adventure about weavers in a land where the final apocalypse threatens doom.

The world has become split into Guild factions, a system by which each and every trade has closeted itself away and is busy refining its art. The mightiest of these Guilds are the Weavers. They've discovered that as well as cloth they can weave reality, with songs replacing the shuttle. Their power centres on a huge loom, where they've attempted to stay Armageddon by reworking the great pattern of life itself.

You take the role of Bobbin, a young weaver who was conjured from the Great Loom and who therefore has massive magical potential. The loom has been attacked and all the Weavers except Bobbin have fled from the Weavers' island, so you must guide Bobbin in his bid to find the lost Guild, learn their art and save the world into the bargain. Not bad for a beginner!

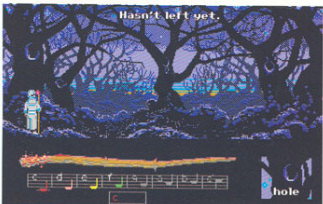
Weavers use an eight-note scale to weave magic. Using a special 'distaff' they simply sing notes in a certain order and - shazzam! - the spell takes effect. The Weavers train their vocal abilities to gain control and to sing higher, more powerful notes.



The game kicks off with young Bobbin the Weaver in seclusion on a hillside. After he is summoned, his adventures in magic begin.



In the Palace of the Glassmakers, Bobbin tries to discern the true nature of the crystal chalice. It could be a blue herring, though!



Bobbin can learn many things from the creatures he meets. Now, what spells could night-flying owls possibly know?

Learning to sing, then, is Bobbin's first task: he must find some songs, called drafts, to employ.

Getting a staff is no problem: the fleeing elders have conveniently left a magic distaff behind. Then, by observing and listening to various creatures, people and objects, Bobbin can hear the music of the universe, which is effectively songs he can copy to weave magic himself.

While exploring the Isle of Loom and beyond, Bobbin is continually faced with situations that can only be resolved with use of a draft. The game is designed so the correct magic is always either a lateral thought away, or available for learning on site. Bobbin's never unavoidably stuck; he may have the right spell but be casting it the wrong way around - singing a spell backwards often has the opposite effect - or the object he wants to affect may 'sing' the right song itself, if he listens carefully enough.

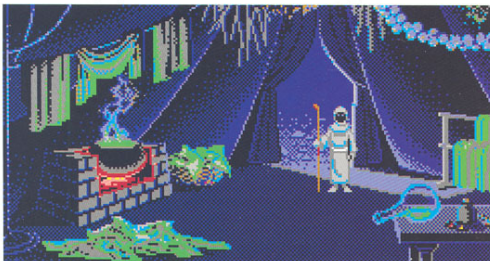
Loom has an innocent charm, dealing with sorcery in an original and amusing fashion, and it is very funny in parts. Bizarre problems can have bizarre solutions, so it pays to learn even the most stupid drafts. Dyeing wool green seems pretty useless, but it could save your lamb - sorry, bacon - later. The use of 'twoe' sound magic should be naff, but with flexible graphics, challenging puzzles and witty comments, Loom soon weaves into an adventure that demands to be finished.



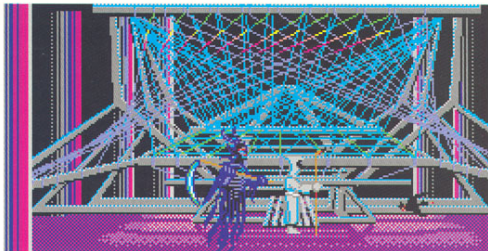
GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Loom is head and shoulders above most graphic adventures. The screens often scroll (albeit slowly) and the characters have perspective, disappearing up hillsides or down into valleys. Bobbin's well drawn and is intelligent enough to move around objects to reach locations; the point-and-click mouse movement system is very easy to implement. The 'examined item box' helps by showing a detailed picture of any item which can be manipulated. Spells are cast by simply clicking the notes or the distaff itself to conjure music.

Any game which features the work of Tchaikovsky and has a 30-minute audio tape in the box should be impressive. The tape is excellent, with some 'in game music' on the back of the story. The noise that the Amiga's asked to chuck out ain't up to the same standard, however. It's good, but is one of those annoying tunes that you find yourself humming even though you hate it. Sound, however, also plays an unnaturally large part in the 'expert' mode of play. In either 'training' or 'normal' mode you've a bar of music that lights up when you hear a spell, a massive help for the non-musical amongst us who can then jot down the right notes. On expert level only the distaff glows as music plays and you must recreate the spell by ear!



Bobbin will swap two packets of his old powder for one of new Sudso automatic, because all his washing has just turned green. Since this is his least favourite colour he's not impressed. Of course it could be the effect of that spell he learned from the potion. Now how did it go again? Do, Re Me...



Bobbin goes head-to-head with the game's chief nasty, the Lord of Chaos. The great loom is the key to the universe and the Lord wants to control it. Only Bobbin can stop him, but where, oh where, will he hear the right magic notes to send the blue guy packing?



The Isle of Loom in all its glory. Inside one of those tents is the great hall, others hide secrets or spells for the young weaver to discover.



That spinning wheel plays some interesting music, but it seems to be of little use. One day its magic may save your life.

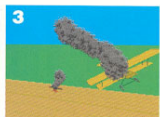
LASTING INTEREST

Staying power, aye, there lies the rub, as a certain Danish Prince never said. Loom is highly finishable, a fact that cuts both ways. Most adventures seem more like a life sentence than a game, but any committed player will be watching Loom's end sequence the week they buy it. To give Loom a longer life there are three difficulty settings, yet after completing it on an easy level it's debatable whether the same game in a harder mode merits another crack. The notes that comprise each draft do change and singing a spell is harder when woven directly on the distaff. This makes life hard, but not impossible, as by now you'll know which spells are needed and where to get them.

THE VERDICT

Loom is a highly enjoyable package with its visually themed spell book, 30-minute audio tape and great gameplay. As an adventure it's ideal for beginners because of its friendliness: Bobbin cannot die for example. The mix of finishability, excellent graphics and good sound, spiced with an innocent wit, appears to make Loom a brilliant package. The overall length of playing time, however, calls its staying power into question: a factor that eventually just manages to spoil one of the most enjoyable treatments of the wizards and magic theme ever to hit the screen. Trenton Webb

GRAPHICS	9
SOUND	8
INTELLECT	9
ADDICTION	9
OVERALL	85%



1 While flying a sortie over the Somme we encountered some Fokkers. Tally ho! We charged in and I bagged one. 2 Unfortunately I took a pop in the oil pump. 3 I shot back and we went down in flames together. 4 Now I've moved to new accommodation in the local cemetery...

WINGS

MIRRORSOFT £29.99 ■ Joystick and Keyboard

Wings gives nostalgic danger-junkies a taste of life as a World War One pilot. It lets you relive those heady days when planes were made of wood and Von Richthofen ruled the skies, when synchronised machine guns were state of the art and radar was science fiction, when sidewinders were still snakes and a SAM was the Uncle you signed up to serve.

Essentially this is three arcade battle sequences bound together by the ongoing story of 56th Aeosquadron. To earn your pilot his wings there's a single dry run mission, which is all that's asked of you to prove your flying skills – and is probably a much better training than the real WW I pilots received! You select your pilot's statistics, choosing between flying and shooting ability, mechanical aptitude and stamina. Then it's time to join a squadron and leave for the fields of France.

The meat of the game is flying, be it dogfighting, bombing or strafing. These are the only styles of flying you'll encounter. As the war drags on, the battles get harder: new planes appear, better weapons are developed and ground defence improves.

Bosch-bashing is best in the 3D-style dogfights. Sitting behind the pilot's head you control the plane in time honoured 'sim' fashion but without the usual sensory overload from dials and HUD systems. As the battle rages the pilot's head spins indicating the nearest enemy. Travelling at a constant speed, all you have to do is line up Fritz in the small round gunsights while avoiding the ground and the other guy's bullets.

Dog fights are never easy because as well as the Hun there's the prehistoric kit to cope with. The planes are massively underpowered, spluttering to a stall in climbs, while the guns tend to jam

with a terrifying regularity. Bombing runs only appear in the latter stages of the war, which is realistic because historically bombs were in short supply. Luckily these sorties, like strafing runs, are non-fatal affairs.

In classic shoot-em-up style you scroll up the screen searching for your primary targets while dodging the ack-ack fire and shooting incoming fighters. There's a limit of 10 bombs per plane, so it's not wise to try and invent blanket bombing 40 years ahead of its time.

Strafing lets you fly a plane low over a track, blasting anyone or anything in sight. Except, that is, Red Cross trucks, which if bagged earn you a caution and a chewing out from your CO. On strafing runs you could be after troops, tents, trains, trucks or tankers full of fuel, most of which have the audacity to fire back as you slaughter them.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Cineware's graphics are up to the usual exemplary standard. Beautiful animations and great battles scenes help to recapture that spirit of determined courage the real pilots exhibited. The battle sequences are linked by the Company journal, which tells the story of the conflict on both a global and personal scale. Sonically the game supports the theme of WWI France, with haunting tunes running whenever you're back at base. Naturally it also has all the important 'dagah dagah' machine guns, without which no biplane game could show its face in public.

LASTING INTEREST

With only three core game elements and low life expectancy for pilots, *Wings* should hit the ground in flames on the first sortie. Yet the facility to enrol a new pilot the same day your last one died gives *Wings* a stamina it shouldn't possess. It's possible to play through to the end of the war by continually enrolling pilots, seeing who – if any – of your original squadron makes it through the whole show. What spoils *Wings* is the disk-swapping nightmare. Two-drive pilots will spend more time swapping than flying before Armistice day.

JUDGEMENT

Despite the disk swapping, *Wings* has that seat-of-the-pants feel. Bombing and strafing are fun, but the dogfighting makes the game. Here you struggle for kills while risking mechanical failure and instant death. Favourite flyboys can be scrubbed from the roster for one mistake, making it edge-of-the-seat stuff all the way. Still, if you lose your current hero, there's always plenty of volunteers on the home front eager to replace him! Trenton Webb

GRAPHICS	4
SOUND	4
INTELLECT	3
ADDICTION	5
OVERALL	79%



MAIN PICTURE: A strafing run over the Hun lines. Luckily Fritz wasn't expecting us and we had little opposition. They didn't seem to like being shot at and began blasting back, then for no apparent reason my plane filled with holes. INSET: Training for a bomb run. Hit both huts and you've earned your wings.

Long gone are the days when PSS would take a war movie theme like the Battle of Britain and make a strat-sim-arcade cocktail out of it; now they claim the ancient battlegrounds of other game formats as their conquests. *The Final Battle* is an animated role-playing adventure displayed in isometric 3D, a format first really explored by *Ultimate*, who loved it so much that they overkilled it.

TFB is a sequel, albeit one which looks refreshingly unlike its predecessor, *The Legend of the Sword*. You are Steroff, the warrior hero of the original game, who is struggling once more against the evil Suzar. The predictably unstoppable doom merchant has escaped, hired a few dog-faced grunts, found himself an up-market labyrinthine pad and started doing again what he does best - Being

Anti-Social. Those same misled doggie types have bashed you and your mates over your various heads, killed off those who are least useful to the plot and imprisoned the rest.

Your first task is to get out of your cell. Like everything else in the game, it's a problem due to the game's all-pervading flaw, a lack of playability. Don't worry about conquering the parser, the manual reassures you more than once, "all you need is a mouse". That's true. But figuring out how to use the mouse to achieve what you know needs to be done turns out to be just as complicated as communicating with those limited vocabulary and syntax text-input devices of yore.

To open a grille which isn't locked, a satisfying double-click on the item does the job perfectly, for

example. However, try to cut the ropes that bind one of your companions with a piece of broken glass and the message "You strike the rope with the piece of broken glass - impressive!" soon has you swearing with contempt for the program's inflexibility.

The same goes for keys. You meet a cleric early on in the game who blurts out that this is going to be a collect-the-bits-and-put-'em-together game. Ostensibly, he's supposed to be the first character who joins your party. He is still manacled to his cell wall, but the first thing he tells you is where you can find the key that will free him. Fair enough? Alas, after fifteen minutes of, "You strike the floor/chain with the key - impressive!" I tried giving the doddering old sod the damn thing so that he could do it himself. At this point

the utterly unhelpful computer narrator piped up with, "Why don't you just find a way of freeing him?" Why don't you reward initiative? In the end I left the prisoner to a fate he may not have been destined for but one which he richly deserved.

You've got to move fast in this game (which is almost impossible) because all actions are time-sensitive. If you don't reach Pagan and Cryselta, two more erstwhile compatriots, soon enough, you'll end up kicking a pair of anonymous corpses around a torture chamber. You can keep a rough track of time by way of one of the more easily understood of the game's plethora of graphic devices - a time and weather window. Weather, too, plays an important and clever role in the problem-solving curiosity that this game struggles to be.

THE FINAL BATTLE

PSS £24.99 ■ Mouse



Here they are: freeing Pagan and Cryselta depends partly on timing. If you get to them too early there will be a guard who's perfectly capable of taking you apart. Get there too late, on the other hand, and your comrades will be unrecognisable piles of bones. But even if you get to them in time, there is another formidable foe to overcome - the game's interaction device. Please, no!



Again, good timing allows you to get past these two and explore the castle grounds beyond.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Sound effects are very good in places: spot effects are overdone, but background noises are great. The graphics demand a superlative or two. Every item you see is recognisable and the action and statistics screens effectively combine carved stones

effects and a misty soft focus that suits the scenario. They're slightly spoiled by the untidiness and lack of clarity of some icons and the fact that an object dropped behind something else becomes inaccessible, even though the text tells you it's still there. You can't see where your characters are on screen, either.



It's been a while since the last spring clean around here.

LASTING INTEREST

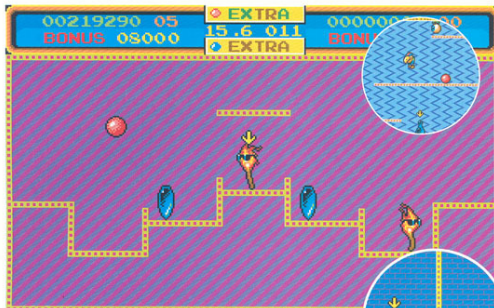
There should be lots, but in practise it's doubtful whether many people will accept the confusing gameplay and soldier on to the end. Redeeming and promising features are swamped by needless complications and unrewarding inflexibility.

JUDGEMENT

As you gather allies and artifacts for the ultimate confrontation with Suzar you can appoint a different group leader, set specific tasks for individuals or concentrate on combined team effort, adding a new dimension to this type of game. However, the sheer impenetrability of the game's command and control system is a deterrent from trying anything remotely innovative and ultimately from playing the game at all. Though this is indeed the problem-solving game it purports to be, the problems are all with the game, not in it. If *The Final Battle* lives up to its name, I'll be rather glad the war's over.

Sean Masterson

GRAPHICS	8
SOUND	2
INTELLECT	9
ADDICTION	1
OVERALL	56%



A tricky situation, as Billy tries to bounce into the middle of the screen to take out that highlighted flame-sprite. One false move and there could be a multitude of water droplets flying around - which will NOT make life easy! In fact that snake on the right is about to make trouble by splitting in two.

HELTER SKELTER

AUDIOGENIC £19.99 ■ Joystick

Sing along now... "I'm like a... RUBBER ball, bouncing off the walls and on the wrong platforms and into the wrong monsters and oh no! AAARGH!"

Yes folks, it's time for another one of those games where you play a cute little bouncy creature. This time you are a rubber ball, bouncing around platforms trying to kill monsters. And what does that mean? Hours of frustration!

You play a small, red ball named Billy, who bounces around a series of platform-filled screens colliding with various monsters. Billy can kill monsters by simply crashing into them, but the catch is that he has to crash into the right monsters.

The target creature is highlighted by an arrow and once hit will disappear. If, on the other hand, Billy crashes into an unhighlighted creature, it splits into two smaller beasties, giving him more to clear up. Easy enough? Not when you consider the seriously limited time limit. Things are never easy, are they? BOING!

THOSE BONUS PICKUPS IN FULL



Extra Time - adds precious seconds to the clock.



Time Freeze - stops the sands of time trickling away.



Monster Freeze - stops all the creatures in their tracks.



Kill any Monster - bop any creature and he dies, but it works for a limited period only.



Level Skip - takes you straight to the next screen.



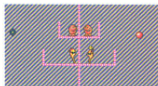
Extra - collect all the letters and you receive an extra life.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

As you would expect from a game of this type, the appearance leans heavily towards the 'cute' end of the spectrum. All the monsters, even the most evil ones, are drawn in a colourful, cartoon-like style and the sound is packed with bouncing, gurgling effects. Those who remember the original version of *Helter Skelter* will notice the refinements that have been made to the presentation, including the more detailed sprites, enhanced title screen and bouncy soundtrack, which all go together to improve the games' appearance no end.

LASTING INTEREST

The game itself contains 80 levels, the earlier screens being quite easy to complete, but getting seriously difficult as the game progresses. Consideration has been given to those who find the game either too easy or too difficult, however, by the inclusion of a screen editor (for those who finish the game quickly) and a series of passwords (so that wimps can reach the higher levels without battling through the earlier screens).

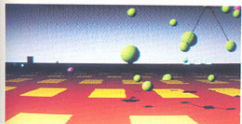


Hit the flame or grab the letter? Oh dear, decisions, decisions!

JUDGEMENT

As you may have guessed if you read last month's *Amiga Format* (I'm sure you all did!) puzzle games are enjoying somewhat of a revival. *Helter Skelter* originally appeared a couple of years ago, but was lost in the wash of big Christmas license releases. This is rather unfortunate, since the game was definitely worthy of attention. The revamped and updated version retains the compulsive gameplay, but with the addition of improved graphics and sound and more impressive presentation. If you missed it the first time round, then *Helter Skelter* is definitely worth a slice of any puzzle fan's moolah. Maff Evans

GRAPHICS	7
SOUND	7
INTELLECT	4
ADDICTION	8
OVERALL	87%



A green virus takes a direct hit and scatters into two small, non-contagious balls. The rest of the string still needs killing, so watch them balls.



The yellow peril virus attacks a healthy cell, so shoot it quick! To make matters worse those blues are lining up for a go, too!

Conditions are terrible, it's five to a cell! That cry will be heard the length and breadth of the country any day now. Thing is, it won't be prisoners complaining about conditions, but your very own body. Unknown, unseen and unexpected a virus is attacking mankind, but luckily the Assembly Line has come up with the Vaxine.

For all its medical trappings Vax' is a shoot-em-up, puzzle game hybrid. The world you patrol is packed with half-spheres sticking out of the floor, the healthy cells you're out to protect. Floating around are huge balls of three different colours – these are the virus which want to attack your healthy cells and they are generated by polo mint pucks that skate around the place.

Playing should be simplicity itself. While driving around, you fire out the correctly coloured Vaxine

balls to hit virus spheres, thus killing them. When there's no more virus cells left you've finished the level. Every four levels there's a bonus screen, for loads of bonus type things.

Defeating the virus is no cakewalk, because for microscopic non-cognitive life-forms they're pretty smart. Similarly-coloured virus cells try to bind together so they can attack a healthy cell; a minimum of three is needed for an assault. These long molecular strings bash around in the most improbable way and are exceptionally awkward targets. Even singles bounce in a nil gravity fashion that tests the shooting eye. Then, there's the fact that Vaxine and virus look identical once fired. As the misses mount, then confusion reigns.

Like virus particles, Vax' spheres can be fired in a long

string. This not only looks rather smart but also allows the germ bashers to roam the playing area with a greater chance of snagging a victim. As each level reaches a climax, Vaxinators are seen rushing madly around trying to find that last blue virus. Trouble is if you run out of Vaxine of a single colour then it's game over; if all the healthy cells are sucked dry of life, it's the same story.

Why would anyone want to play a microbiology simulator? you may well ask. For the thrill of screaming around a surreal ray-traced 3D world facing a rapidly multiplying threat with an ever decreasing supply of vaxine, that's why. As the levels progress it builds to a head-spinning, eye-blurring test of straight thinking in a mad, bad, diseased world where the virus is king and Vaxine's only a temporary remedy.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Vaxine is a visual feast of pig out proportions. The shapes may be simple, the floor designs are basic geometric patterns, but they all move with a speed that beggars belief – a factor hammered home with universal ray-tracing. Vaxine looks just how it should, and that's beautifully odd, carrying a modernist theme to biochemical levels. The results shock at first and enchant later. The sounds in the game are suitably strange with echoing impacts and disconcerting squidge noises. The soundtrack, however, is obviously the first victim of Vaxine starvation and sounds definitely poorly in parts.

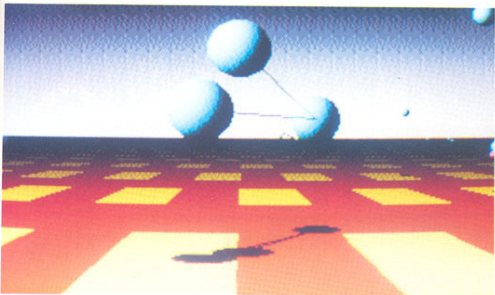
LASTING INTEREST

Vaxine is strange enough to elicit only two possible reactions from players. It's a love-hate relationship with nothing in between. It may be viewed as little more than a luck-based romp around a pretty landscape with some poorly-disguised blasting, which barely merits the occasional game. Alternatively it can be seen as the direct heir of *E-Motion*, but takes even more time to master. The latter appears to be the truth because there's gameplay in abundance in them there balls. The introduction of the puck-like virus generators, the time-stopping doors and the bonus star shooting range all conspire to take the game to great heights. It's a high speed challenge that engages the brain as well as the synapses so seek out some Vaxine, your doctor recommends it.

VAXINE

US GOLD £24.99 ■ Mouse or Joystick

Oh no, a deadly blue virus dead ahead! Select your blue Vaxine with a click on the right mouse button and then get firing. The sphere-and-a-half in the top right-hand corner shows how many good cells and how much of each virus is remaining. The coloured bar lets you know just how much Vaxine is left.



JUDGEMENT

Vaxine is the cure to those generic blues, yet its very individuality may alienate some players. It's worth struggling to understand, if only to see the more outlandish levels. Excellent coding and wild graphics make it a game to be reckoned with. If you're suffering from the same game blues, rejoice, there's now a Vaxine. Trenton Webb

GRAPHICS	9
SOUND	5
INTELLECT	7
ADDICTION	8
OVERALL	85%

Driving a tank is no hassle: nothing gets in your way and you don't so much park as flatten. Life gets more complex, however, when you're in direct control of sixteen armoured units who are standing alone against the might of the Red Army. As Kipling nearly said, "If you can keep your tank while all around are losing theirs, you're a better man than I am, Private First Class Sean Bannon.

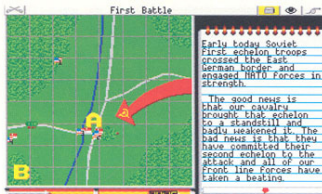
Team Yankee, a sixteen-tank unit, is your charge and everywhere they move, everything they shoot, even what they see is under your control. The Russian army will try to brush your troops aside and sweep into Europe, so you must do your worst to stop them.

The vehicles in your stable are twelve M-1 Abrams, two M-2s, two ITVs and two M-113 APCs. Grouped in units of four (with always at least two M-1 tanks per unit) they must act in concert, supporting each other to win.

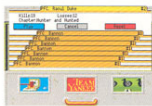
The game has two main modes: you're either in direct full-screen control of a four-vehicle unit, or have hands on all the 16 tanks using a four-way split screen view. Tank units are moved by selecting the map, marking a destination then choosing the vehicle formation and speed; then they'll drive to the destination. At any point you can pop inside for the gunner's view of what the lead tank of each unit can actually see, by rotating the turret from side to side.

Flicking between the full-screen views takes time and you may miss something vital, like a barrel-sighted Russian tank waiting for a kill. So it's best to operate all four units from the split window, flipping between map and gunsight windows individually. This way you always have at least three pairs of eyes scouting for the commie scourge.

The game itself follows a five-chapter format. To earn promotion



Mission One and the notepad has all the bad news a tank could ever want to hear. You must study this map and work out tactics.



Pick a tank, any tank! Note the rather neat quit and fight icons!



How not to be seen, Lesson One: hide in all that smoke!

Early today Soviet First echelon troops crossed the East German border and engaged 11th10 forces in strength.

The good news is that our cavalry brought that echelon to a standstill and badly weakened it. The bad news is that they have committed their second echelon to the attack and all of our front line forces have taken a beating.

TEAM YANKEE

EMPIRE £29.99 ■ Mouse and Joystick

- The view from unit one, who are currently crashing through a large clump of trees.
- Looking around from Unit 2 and they can see themselves putting out smoke for cover.
- All clear for Unit 3.
- On map, view the cross marks where Unit 4 will end up. The stars and stripes show the current location.
- Toggle for quarter or full screen view.
- The view selector: choose between map, gunner or mechanical status checks.
- Direction of turret and orientation of the tank.
- Weapon select, choose between HEAT or Sabot shells, TOW Missiles, Smoke or machine guns.
- Time elapsed on current mission.
- Zoom in on map.
- Magnification of map.
- Zoom out of Map.
- Current speed.
- Surrender.
- Pause.
- Relative strength of forces.
- Speed control slider.

you need to win five sequential battles, all of which test your armour management skills to the full. Rearguard actions and spearheading counter-attacks are just two functions you'll be asked to fulfil as leader of Team Yankee.

The battleground features forests and rivers, towns and roads, all factors which heavily influence a tank's fortunes in war.

All the actual shell firing is done manually, aiming the gun with a mouse cursor. The turret rotation and weapon selection are also mouse controlled, although loading is automatic and scarily slow. Sighting is made easier with a telescopic sight and fighting at night is made possible with an infrared 'scope that illuminates any heat sources out there.

Fighting is survivable when you have the time to fight battles individually in full screen mode; you can stop and examine foes, making sure they're Russian

before blating them. Real war, though, demands that four battles are fought at once, forcing you to rely on the smaller windows. This makes identification difficult and blasting your own tanks in sheer terror is a real danger.

With serious tank identification problems, the speed of modern mechanised combat, as well as controlling sixteen vehicles simultaneously, Team Yankee's a real challenge. You give the orders and decide the strategy but must also ensure that no tanks are forgotten.

It's a nightmare blend of planning and action that will have you rewriting the battle-plan time and time again as unexpected enemies pop up in strange and curious places. Team Yankee makes the palms sweat with fear and the head ache in confusion. But remember you're all that stands between Gorbys' day-trippers and the free world, so you must give it your best shot...



On full-screen view the gunner switches to infrared. Mind you, all heat sources are shown in bright green - which does kind of beg the question, why isn't it called infra-green?

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

The four-view screen is immediately understandable, giving enough detail to win the battle with. The flexibility is excellent; you're only ever a screen-click away from a full-screen view of a unit on either the map or the battlefield, and the four-quadrant view is always available to see what the others are up to.

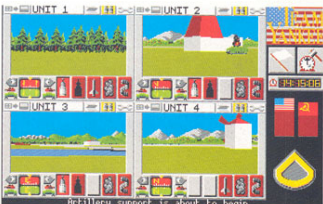
The battle view is good, but does tend to pixelise when magnified, making the tank camouflage too effective. This means differentiating between the good (US), the bad (USSR) and the ugly (the US ITV) rather tricky. This could render the game unplayable, but the map helps out with large flags and a little confusion is only to be expected in times of war. Sounds are limited to a short overture at the start and loads of explosions during the game. Not much, but enough to drop hints that you're being shelled.



A whole field of burning Russian armour. However, the strength indicator shows that some Russians are still hiding. Cowards!



A heavily-magnified view of Unit 3. Here you can actually see the formations. These are selected with the buttons on the far right.



The view on the ground for Mission One. Artillery support is about to begin, so button up. Unit Four has found another windmill: those things seem to get everywhere!

LASTING INTEREST

The five battles of Team Yankee are fought over and over again as you rise through the ranks. The main differences are an increased number of enemies and more cunning Russians. Five battlefields, no matter how differently configured, cannot be enough to simulate the whole war. Which is exactly what you want to fight once you get the hang of this tank commanding lark. Learning to control the tanks, though, is hard enough and will keep any tanker busy for a long while.

JUDGEMENT

Team Yankee blends a 3D arcade-style tank blast with enough simulation to create a truly playable, if difficult, game. While it is accessible enough for anyone to play by ear, students of armoured warfare need not feel snubbed as Team Yankee's reliance on military technology makes it a fascinating exercise in modern war. Always destined to be a game and not a sim, Team Yankee recreates the feel of the novel on which it is based,

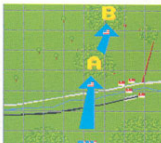
not an Abrams technical manual. If you long for the thunder of a 30-ton destroyer then join Team Yankee. It presents a game in a sim's clothing, which when dealing with tanks has to the perfect approach. Trenton Webb

GRAPHICS	6
SOUND	2
INTELLECT	6
ADDICTION	6
OVERALL	61%

Mission Objective:
Team Yankee - you are the first team of our battalion to have seen combat. You are therefore being asked to spearhead our first attack.

To the north of us the Soviet 28th Guards Division is making a concerted attack on our lines.

This attack will take us right into the flank of the enemy.



Mission 2 and it's time to go into the forest and hunt some reds. Trouble is that in forests tanks are notoriously hard to spot.



The magical traveller comes across a trader in the dungeons. What's that he's rubbing on those boots? Looks a bit dubious to me... or it could be a magic potion, I suppose. To you - 80 pieces of gold.
INSETS: A lovely, lovely red gem - but don't spend too much time admiring it! Use its mystical powers to fight your way through the catacombs and save the master.

THE IMMORTAL

ELECTRONIC ARTS £24.99 ■ Joystick

Why can't things stay happy and peaceful? It hardly seems any time at all since you were a young wizard's apprentice, learning all the spells and incantations from the great wizard Mordamir. Now things have become all dark and fearful. Mordamir has been kidnapped and is now held captive in the evil dungeons of Erinoch.

The master called to you recently in a dream - a dream filled with oppression and dread. It's up to you to find your way through the labyrinths of Erinoch to rescue your mentor. The path is

fraught with danger. Goblins and trolls guard the labyrinth, but they are only the tip of the iceberg (adopts Orson Welles growl...) 'Beware the Slime!'

You must venture into the labyrinth and take on the dangers to save your master. Throughout the dungeons you will find many enemies, some of which can be fought in a straight sword battle, but there are also many other characters and objects which serve a specific purpose in completing the puzzles on each level.

All interactions which involve either speech or objects (such as

searching, questioning and trading) take place via a series of text screens, which give you a yes/no option at the end. This way you can pick up, buy or be given objects to use later on - not all of which are useful. In fact, some are downright dangerous!

If you complete a level, you are given a 'certificate' number, which allows you to access the last level you reached without playing through the earlier sections of the game, but you do retain the necessary objects from the upper levels needed for your quest into the depths of the labyrinth.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

A lot of the scenery is similar, but this is made up for by the superbly animated sprites. The death scenes are so good it's almost worth dying on purpose! The sound, on the other hand, is of a different matter. The spot effects are very few and far between, and the pseudo-medieval soundtrack is grating. This is a pity, since a decent, dark, atmospheric theme would have suited the graphics and produced a superbly eerie feel.

LASTING INTEREST

At first, it's great fun working out the puzzles and battling with the goblins, but the appeal wears off after a while when you have to do exactly the same thing time after time. The adventure will take some time to work out, but once you have completed the quest it's doubtful whether you'll feel the need to return for another bash.

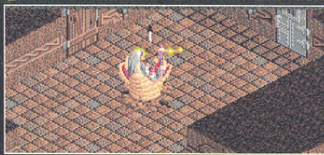
JUDGEMENT

The appearance of *The Immortal* is most definitely its strong point, though to begin with the puzzles are absorbing. However, the only people who will stick at the game long enough to reach the end time after time are the die-hard adventure freaks. These are a select breed and rather scarce these days. Couple this with the fact that the game will only run on machines fitted with a memory expansion and the appeal is restricted even further. But if you adore graphic adventures and have one meg of memory then you may find a spark in the game that makes it worth playing. Casual adventure gamers, on the other hand, could quickly become bored. *Maff Evans*

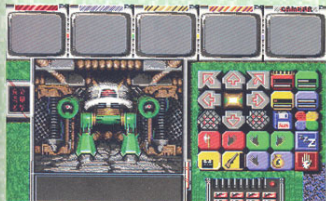
GRAPHICS	9
SOUND	3
INTELECT	5
ADDITION	6
OVERALL	78%



The goblins are revolting. "Yes, I can smell them from here." Never mind that! Stab! Slash! Swipe and generally do the rum covers in!



Oops! Looks like our adventurer has taken a wrong step. Or maybe it's that bag of worm bait that he carelessly dropped!



He may look like a movie star, but don't stop to ask for an autograph! Arm your team and get bashing. The red droid icon (the one with the crown) shows that the team leader is distinctly damaged.

CAPTIVE

MINDSCOPE £24.99 ■ Mouse



Prisons are no fun, especially when the prison in question is a starship that draws its power from a series of remote planet bases. Knocking out the power in order to facilitate an escape could prove difficult, bearing in mind your limited travel potential. That's where the lap-top computer that's lying in your cell comes in handy. Using its remote control facility, you're able to direct the actions of four droids. Worked properly they can free the Captive.

Essentially a Dungeon Master clone, Captive replaces all that ramby-campy magic with heavy-duty military hardware. Before the game really starts, though, you have to find the first generating complex. After landing on any number of worlds, you'll finally locate the start zone: and then it's time to bring on the droids. Before they can go anywhere, the droids

need a brain chip implant, so that they can become your interface with the outside world.

The droids explore, fight beasts, collect kit and destroy power stations. Their movements are wholly controlled by an icon cluster consisting of a directional pad for movement of the whole squad, a party order selector and a 'weapon held' section.

As the game progresses it's possible to develop your team from a bunch of dumb robotic fist-fighters into a highly-armed weapons unit. As they gain experience they develop skills with bigger and better weapons.

One big advantage of using droids is that they're easily rebuilt. If a bit of 'bot gets damaged, guide them to the local Droids 'R Us shop – they're everywhere – and buy a new arm, leg or hand. On the flip side, droids drain power

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

What the Captive sees via his robots is determined by the leader. If this droid has an accident or gets bashed then the view distorts as the vision circuits get damaged. There are neat touches with silly foes and creatures that transform into hideous beasts. There's the ability to use remote cameras and other scanning devices in the bank of monitors above the main screen. With the game running on one screen, through

which sub-screens are accessed, the graphics are flexible and inventive. They allow up to six different areas of play to be watched simultaneously. With constant reminders of droids' stats on screen too, all you ever need to know is compactly and clearly displayed.

The sound too makes some bold efforts. If you blast something down a corridor then the pitch varies in a mock Doppler effect. It's not perfect but serves to illustrate the amount crammed into the game.

LASTING INTEREST

Ten dungeons and the guy's rescued! That doesn't sound promising, but even tackling this small number is a real challenge. If, however, you manage to survive this ordeal, then there's 64,890 more surprises waiting for the newly-liberated captive.

As with any game of this style there's a certain amount of unavoidable frustration as you become used to handling your droids and their kit. Once familiar with the game, it gathers pace, becoming a frantic charge into the unknown. It has a nastily strong hook: just finding sillier monsters is enough of a spur. Captive demands playing time after time as you grow in power and proximity to the prison.

JUDGEMENT

A captive is what you start the game as and soon a true captive of this immense challenge is what you will become. It has the same absorbing qualities that made *DM* such a hit. The variety of monsters is frightening – quite literally at times – and it takes time to fully appreciate the game's finer points. There's a healthy return on the time invested in play, because Captive is staggeringly big. Rescuing the Captive is just the beginning: as your destructive potential increases, so you'll want to probe deeper into this fantasy world. Captive is at the vanguard of second-generation 3D maze adventures. Magic has been replaced with an implicitly violent technology, while warriors and wizards can now explore from the comfort of their own prison cell. Trenton Webb



Droid building for beginners. First place the chip over the brain; now your droid saviour can wander about and meet the creatures inset. Note that the top right picture is distorted due to critical head damage.

GRAPHICS	8
SOUND	8
INTELLECT	8
ADDICTION	9
OVERALL	91%



KUNG FU

Kung Fu, the ancient art of beating people senseless.



ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: Kyo Kushin Kai - a rather different style of fighting. Here you can use headbutts, elbows and knees to tender spots. Two combatants battle until one lands 15 successful blows.



KYO-KUSHIN-KAI

BELOW: Kendo, the ancient art of hitting people with sticks while wearing a fire guard.

ORIENTAL GAMES

MICROSTYLE

£24.99 ■ Joystick

Karate Kids have had more than their fair share of computer game exposure. Exploding Fists through to Double Dragons have chopped and bashed their way to fame and fortune. Now you've a chance to fight properly, for your honour, displaying control, using tactics and occasionally a large sword. The Oriental Games have begun.

Oriental Games gives beat-em-up fans a chance to fight in three classic styles. Kendo, Kung Fu and Kyo Kushin Kai are the forms in which you can get beaten senseless by either the computer or a friend. Kendo is the art of using

bamboo swords, Kung Fu involves high-speed hand and foot fighting, while Kyo Kushin Kai is the style employed on a Saturday night in taxi queues.

Before the big battle all the entrants must register. After a quick bit of form-filling you choose between single warm-up bouts (a sensible option) or leaping straight into the tournament. After this it's bare knuckle time.

Each bout is fought over a number of hits. In the classic Hamlet fashion the two opponents face up and then try to score by tagging the other guy. A player's energy is divided into five blocks,

each of which runs from white to yellow to red indicating successful hits. This is backed up with a 'power' flag, which shows the relative strength of each combatant. The boys fight until one bar is completely red, then that guy goes down while the victor celebrates his arrival in the next round.

All the disciplines have special moves, ensuring that you practice before going for a tournament. A joystick editor is available for the linking of moves: so, for example, in Kung Fu a single waggle can send you hero from a front kick to a low punch to a backwards somersault out of danger.



KENDO

JUDGEMENT

OG has a certain violent appeal, but will capture the imagination only of those who don't mind putting their brain on hold while their fists do the talking. Having a tough alter ego on screen is fun in the short term, especially fun in the two-player mode. Life's tense here because pride is on the line. However, at a time when games, and gamers, are becoming ever more sophisticated, OG appears as a splendid example of a past genre. Beat-em-ups can no longer consist of straightforward head-to-head battles, no matter how good the fighting, regardless of the variety of combat styles on offer. Trenton Webb

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

OG hangs tough on the graphics front. The large warriors move quickly, which fosters the sensation of actually fighting, rather than the 'waggle and hope' strategy of most fighting games. You need to be able to select the right manoeuvre and with OG it's possible. The characters move fast enough to demand instant reactions, but slow enough to give you a chance to actually avoid that

round-house kick to the head.

The variety of attacks demands good animation and OG is smooth enough to be edge-of-the-seat stuff. There's lots of groaning and grunting, as you'd expect when people are having their faces kicked off. That's all you really need and that's all you get. It's limited, but then so are the complaints, because these boys are here to fight and not do full-contact aerobics - "Hold that kick, two, three, feel the burn!"

LASTING INTEREST

Beat-em-ups have one problem: they demand intensive joystick wagging and as such are physically limited by the amount your wrist can take. There's added craft in the art of bashing when you use the joystick command editor. You can learn certain combinations that take anyone out, but then so can the better computer players. OG does have lasting interest, but in a different style to the *Dungeon Masters* and *Elites*. OG will come out after a hard day at the office and fancy showing something the back of your hand and butt of the head.

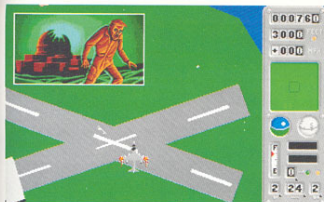


TOP: a kung Fu bout gets heavy as a leg sweep is attempted.

MIDDLE: Player Two takes a nap while Player One enjoys victory.

BOTTOM: A cup for me! How kind!

GRAPHICS	8
SOUND	4
INTELLECT	3
ADDICTION	6
OVERALL	72%



A flaming Harrier goes in for a bombing run. The mission is to disable the enemy airfield, so a few well-placed bombs should do the trick.

LASTING INTEREST

That instantly addictive element is strangely absent in *Harrier*. This is partially due to this unusual game system and partly because of the ease with which the first missions are accomplished. There's a lot of subtlety to be learned when controlling your plane, but this comes from the 'hard knocks' school of flying into mountains and fluffing mid-air refuelling. The linking screens are unavoidable and waste time when your blood's boiling for another crack at the swines who shot you down.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Once again the Rotoscope engine proves to be a flexible games tool. While clever and easy to use, it does lack the glorious colours of other Amiga shoot-em-ups. The inter-game sequences try to make amends with huge pictures of carriers, craft and commanding officers, but are essentially peripheral and fail to lift the game into the realms of pictorial excellence.



The CO is none too happy that you crashed another plane! One more slip and it's game over.

OPERATION HARRIER

US GOLD £24.99 ■ Joystick

Enemy chiefs of staff have been spotted on a cruiser that's sailing right into your sector. Now is the time to strike a single blow that will set their work reeling. It's time for *Operation Harrier* to go into action.

Using your jump-jet's unique ability to climb and dive, you must seek out that ship and destroy it. Ranged against you is the cream of the enemy forces – jet fighters, missile bases and ships – all seeking to do you down. It's time to choose your weapons and get into the sky for an aerial battle.

Operation Harrier is played in Rotoscape, the system first used in *Rotox*. Now they've added a 3D-ish element, allowing the plane to

climb and dive. Your plane sits in the centre of the screen and the whole world rotates around it. Fly forward and it looks like any other shoot-em-up, but when you bank into a turn you see the bullets from your cannon sweep to one side in an odd but realistic effect.

Flying this baby, meanwhile, couldn't be easier: just push the joystick to accelerate, press fire and push forward to dive.

Each of the missions sets a primary target that has to be blasted out of existence, but blating anything else you encounter is positively encouraged. The target could be anything from a battleship to a ground station, while everything from helicopters to

nuclear power plants are fair prey. If you miss the target first time round, don't panic: you can avoid disgrace by landing and reloading.

Flashing around in the sky is fun until the missiles start to home in. Other planes are no problem, especially if you picked sidewinders in the 'weapons selection' section. Their missiles are as dogged as yours, though, so if one's locked on your tail it's damned hard to shake it. Luckily, being British-built, Harriers can take four hits before going down in flames. The various weapons you can drop on the enemy are easily used but hard to target, which means you'll have to take plenty of spares for a second run.

JUDGEMENT

Operation Harrier has its moments, but they're generally well spaced. The armaments aren't flexible enough to allow it to encroach on pseudo-sim territory, while your plane's not deadly enough to tread on shoot-em-up toes. This leaves the Harrier wallowing in the turbulence of its own unique system. There's the sense that *Op Harrier* was designed around the Rotoscope system, rather than naturally fitting the style. This leaves the package strained, as good original concepts pull in different directions. *Trenton Webb*

GRAPHICS	7
SOUND	4
INTELLECT	4
ADDICTION	6
OVERALL	64%

THE LEGEND OF BILLY BOULDER

US GOLD £24.99 ■ Joystick



Billy (the cute one) meets some of the less friendly townfolk, so he starts knife-throwing to clear a path through the throng.

Billy Boulder was your average run-of-the-mill caveboy until one day he decides to rescue the Princess. She is being held captive by a spell of ageing cast by the mighty wizard Zor on a day when he was feeling a shade peaky himself.

Billy must fight his way through a series (of over 20) cities to find Zor. The cities are rough places, full of folks who want to kill him. He needs to carry a weapon at all times, throwing it to clear a path. This kills the spiteful townfolk and allows him to pick up the jewels and keys they drop.

Each city is constructed in a maze style. Billy wanders the streets finding shops and the location of the next city or important people. The shops are useful not only for goodies but also a word menu allows him to question vendors.

Played from an overhead view, *Billy* is instantly accessible. Yet for all its vastness there is little excitement. Billy doesn't develop enough and the game has a monotone feel. It will last dedicated players for months but they'll have to muster the enthusiasm first. *Trenton Webb*

GRAPHICS 6 / SOUND 4 / INTELLECT 8 / ADDICTION 3 / OVERALL 68%

AMIGA FORMAT 75



Dragonflight's best feature is the way it handles combat. Turn by turn movement and actions are carried out for each character before the computer does the same for any monsters. The grid (top left) is there to show each individual's relative position and can be used to the tactician's advantage.

DRAGONFLIGHT

THALION £34.99 ■ Mouse

There was once a lot of magic. Now there isn't very much at all. There were once a lot of dragons. Now, ditto. You control four characters duty-bound to do something about it asap – a dwarf fighter, a wizard, an elfen arrow mistress and the obligatory grunt – each with basic kit and a little money, but no weapons.

The party also has a Ring of Stasis each. Any character forced to shuffle off this mortal coil disappears into a ring, so while there is at least one character left all the original party may be revived (complete with possessions) by going to one of the character revival clinics (called temples) scattered across the gameworld.

The world itself is enormous. A complete map consisting of twelve parts can be hunted down but only one piece belongs to the party at the beginning of the game. Take a peep at this and you'll get some idea of how much landmass there is to explore. You're likely to cover every corner of Dragonflight's flat Earth before you complete the quest.

Long-distance action takes place over an Ultima-like display with towns illustrated each by its own well-crafted flag. Wandering creatures are displayed as single monsters of a given type, though the number encountered varies. Entrances to dungeons (ancient

"schools" of magic) and temples are displayed by markers.

Towns are entered via an icon on the control panel that lines the bottom of the screen. You can talk to inhabitants you bump into, most of whom have something cryptic to throw into the conversation. If you have any treasure, then try visiting other characters at homes (though eliciting info from them is no mean feat) or, more importantly, equipping with supplies from one of the many shops.

But of course it's exploration and adventure you seek and of this there's plenty. The wilderness is normally traversed on foot but the more temples you discover the better. Each has a name which you learn upon entering and once you know the names of two or more, you can use a network of teleports: simply say the name of your destination and away you go.

Sooner or later, carved into the side of some mountain, you will come across an entrance to one of the many dungeons, each uniquely designed and several levels deep. Enter a dungeon and you travel in first-person perspective, familiar to those who have braved DM. Torches burn low with time and darkness in Dragonflight is complete. Plan your delvings well.

Features include trapped treasure chests, locked doors (you can listen to discover what they

hide) and all manner of secret doors and devices. Most impressive of all, though, are the magic mouths found set into walls. These devices block progress and will only disappear should the question they ask be correctly answered.

Combat only occurs in rooms or the wilderness and for this the view changes again, to a profile of the party and adversaries. Moves are handled on a turn-by-turn basis allowing for magic, movement and hack-and-slay. Its intricacy, combined with its elegant simplicity, makes the combative process a cut above the average. The icing on the cake is a grid displayed to the top-left of the combat screen displaying the relative positions of all the characters in the melee. Use it to out-maneuvre opponents and the more fearsome monsters will be defeated instead of being fed adventurers.



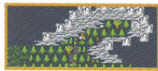
The town Pagana from which you begin your adventure is packed with stores stocked with items to fill your every need. Take the time to explore it. If you recover treasure, go and visit some of the locals with it.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Both are pleasant enough but they're straight ports from the ST and that is something of a disappointment to Amiga owners. However, they were of the highest quality on their Atari cousin, for this sort of game. Whichever way you look at them, it would be hard to deny that they're evocative and detailed.

LASTING INTEREST

You could keep going for ages with this one. The fact is that the game is so open-ended that it should suit most adventurers' style of play. The apparent lack of progress in early stages may put off the more impatient but that's almost a function of this sort of game. Some will persevere to the very end – but will a sequel appear first?



Northwest of Pagana is the most accessible dungeon. Make sure you light a torch!

JUDGEMENT

Dragonflight is an interesting and accomplished combination of some of the more popular adventure games to date and the dedicated approach of the designers shines through every detail. It's eminently playable despite a couple of weird operating commands. The manual is a wasted opportunity, though, as is the plot. If this effort had been applied to something more esoteric than standard sword and sorcery there'd be no hesitation in recommending it. As it stands, however, a sense of déjà vu and a price-tag of thirty-five quid could conjure up a Well Of Oblivion into which this game may well disappear.

Sean Masterson

GRAPHICS	6
SOUND	5
INTELLECT	5
ADDICTION	8
OVERALL	70%



I spy with my little map something beginning with 'Ruskie'.

Tanks revolutionised warfare during the battle of the Somme in September 1916. They've come along way since those first farcical vehicles, named after labels on the crates that disguised them, and have evolved into sophisticated war machines of frightening power. King of the armoured heap is the Abrams M1 main battle tank, \$2.5 million from your local tank stockist (Iraq excluded). MicroProse, however, will flog you a whole platoon at a very small fraction of the price.

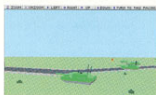
M1 Tank Platoon is a heavy-duty simulation and not a tank game. Your job is to command four tanks and their crews through a series of battles, training them as you go. Win a firefight and commendations are handed out to the team, which are used to enhance your troop's skills, making them into better gunners or drivers.



All quiet on the gunnery front, for the moment at least!

After establishing a platoon you volunteer for duty: high-risk missions earns more medals, but you'll have to live to collect them. Training missions are always a good idea before you kick off the real war, because these tank things are awkward to control. Having chosen your fate, a brusque gent in fatigues introduces the mission and tells you of any available auxiliary support such as artillery, Apache helicopters or A-10 Thunderbolts. Then it's war!

The heart of M1 is the battle map, which shows where everybody is, and it's here that you plan the tactics. Tactics are essential for success: gone are the days when tanks were invulnerable. Everybody wants a crack at these beasts and most have the firepower to succeed. Slugging matches are mutually suicidal



An outside tank view reveals you're all present and correct.

because even hi-tech ceramic steel plate has soft spots.

Tanks can be driven from the map to assume tactical positions, but once the shells begin to burst it's safer to use the interior views. As either the gunner, driver or commander you get a ground-level view of the action. Once you're within shooting range the gunner's your main man; tanks you're not actively controlling can fire at will, but as most of the team start as no-hopers it's wise to take one tank's gun.

All the goodies that the real M1 has, you possess too: infrared scopes, laser detectors, laser sights, distance indicators and a choice of shells with which to kill people. When you take the team out for a spin you'll feel the rush of power as enemies are tagged, but also feel the cold hand of fear when you take a hit in return.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

M1 relies on maps for strategy development and single-tank views (or various perspectives) for action. Both are flexible, controlled by keyboard short-cuts or mouse clicks. The graphics have a distinctly PC feel and do not overflow with colour, which is a disappointment. The game screens are lightly shaded and lack any real strength, but the intermediate screens are bright and solid. As with other tank games, sound is not M1's speciality, but there are enough bangs, bullets and blasts to keep you on your toes.



The commander scores a hit on his own tank! Don't panic, lads, the MG won't even scratch it.

LASTING INTEREST

M1 is a simulator and as such is crammed with long term appeal, once you understand the mechanics. All the controls must be mastered before you can even start to get to grips with the strategy. The split between the map and in-tank view makes the game initially hard to grasp. Swapping between vehicles when giving specific tanks individual commands, for example, proves disconcerting. This may well persuade the less committed player that tank driving isn't their vocation. It has a long-term hook, but only if you persevere.

JUDGEMENT

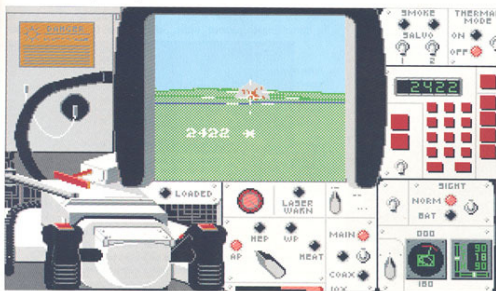
M1 is a thorough simulation and is more detailed than any other tank bash about. Yet this may be to M1's detriment as a game, because there's too much for the first-timer to cope with. Simulations have to be accurate and M1 is spot-on, but they must also be reasonably accessible. M1 stutters here, requiring some serious manual spadework. Then, at last, you'll appreciate the depth of this simulation and get into the tactics pertaining to tank battles. This lack of instant appeal marks M1 down as a game for military hardware fans only, not for your everyday tank driver in the street. Trenton Webb

GRAPHICS	6
SOUND	2
INTELLECT	10
ADDICTION	5
OVERALL	71%

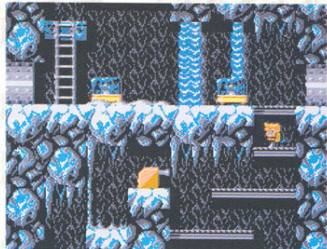
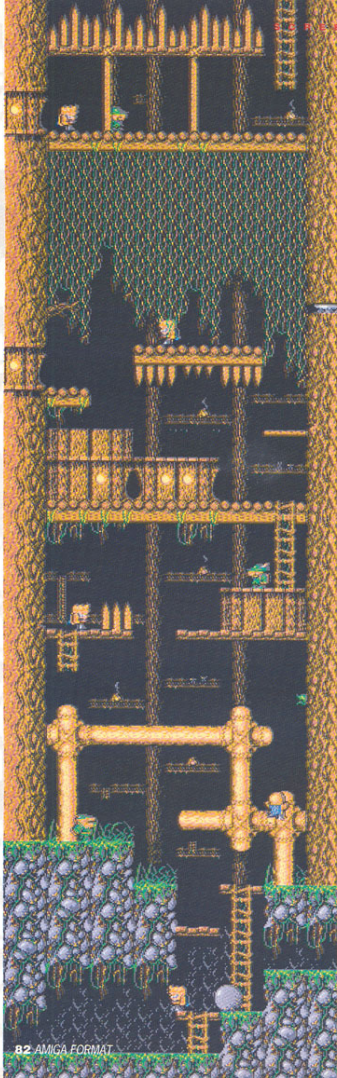
M1 TANK PLATOON

MICROPROSE £24.99

■ Mouse, Keyboard



Using the range finder (the white numbers) the gunner scores a direct hit. Depending on the range and target, different ammunition must be used for maximum destructive potential.



The icy world of Freezia, where even the penguins come in handy, easy-to-manage, prepacked, frozen containers. Watch out for that snowball machine and see what happens when the little feathery beggars thaw out and start coming after you!

RICK DANGEROUS

MICROSTYLE £24.99 ■ Joystic

After rushing around through all manner of strange and exotic locations, the man they call Rick Dangerous is in need of a rest. It's no mean feat trying to thwart the plans of overweight tyrants and Rick has just fought a long and gruelling battle with just such a blubbery villain. But the Fat Guy will not rest easily and he is determined to make his plans to take over London come to fruition.

Rick is just heading home, his hat pulled firmly down and his coat-collar pulled tightly up against the dismal English summer, when

he hears a strange noise. Looking up he sees a fleet of... naaah, it can't be! It is! A fleet of flying saucers! And who is that at the controls of one of them? None other than the Fat Guy himself!

The saucers appear to be touching down in Hyde Park, so it's time for Rick to show his true strength. Away goes the Indiana Jones jungle clobber and pistol – out comes the nifty superhero suit and laser weapon. Time to kick that wobby behind for good!

In this, the sequel to what is arguably one of the most playable



What a big girl's blouse! One laser blast and Rick shuffles off his little mortal coil. Bah!

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

The appearance of the original had a wonderful cute quality but, believe it or not, the sequel has gone even further. The graphics are more colourful and varied, with a multitude of wonderfully-animated sprites and backgrounds. The sound, too, has been given a boost. Some of the monster effects have to be heard to be believed, especially the blubbery slime monsters in the atomic mud-nins. In addition there are some superb intermission screens, showing Rick's journey between locations. The whole thing is like a cross between a matinee serial and a cartoon – can't be bad.

JUDGEMENT

By now, *Rick Dangerous* has earned its place in the hall of fame for classic platform games, but just when everyone was taking it for granted, along comes the sequel – and it's even better than the original. The graphics have been polished up, the sound effects are funnier and the gameplay is more fluid and enjoyable. With a little thought all the puzzles can be worked out (and some of the solutions are extremely strange), so no more of the 'getting stuck behind the same guard' syndrome!

Even if you haven't played the original game (where have you been?) *Rick Dangerous II* is well worth a generous slab of any game-player's time. But a generous slab could have you sitting in front of your computer for days without rest. You have been warned... but buy it anyway. Maff Evans

GRAPHICS	8
SOUND	7
INTELLECT	5
ADDICTION	9
OVERALL	92%



ROUS II

platform games ever to appear on any computer screen, you must continue the adventures of suave, sophisticated and – basically – 'hard mother' adventurer, Rick Dangerous. After his earlier defeat, the Fat Guy has returned to create even more havoc. You must make use of Rick's increased power in a fight to overcome the obese dictator once and for all.

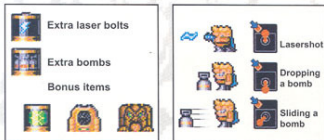
Play begins at the landing site of the Fat Guy's saucers, continuing to the icy planet of Freezia, the overgrown forests of Vegetabilia and the Fat Guy's atomic mud-

mines. The gameplay is in the same vein as *Rick I*, with some new twists. Instead of a poxy little six-shooter, Rick now carries a powerful laser gun. Also, Rick has learnt the art of sliding bombs to their target, allowing you to take obstacles out from a distance.

To complete the game, all four sections must be completed before you can take on the Fat Guy, but you can practice on any of them any time you wish. Even so, there is still quite a fight ahead. Get those lasers going. Zap! Voom! Kapow!

LASTING INTEREST

Each of the levels is quite a challenge, so even when you know what to do, you need the timing and reflexes to pull it off. The sequel has the extra advantage of allowing you to play the other levels without fighting through the earlier adventures (a difficult task for the would-be platformer), but it's still by no means easy. Weeell, it's easier to complete the levels than it is to stop playing!



Extra power-ups are essential for Rick to complete his quest.

Master the use of the weapons otherwise it's Adios, Amigas!





Flying through space, tail whipping away at his enemies, Saint Dragon comes across some attacking battleships. Easy, just a few blasts here... hang on... where did those jet fighters come from? Time to let loose some serious cyber-reptilian firepower to take them out!

The Galaxy is in danger. A far-off planet has bred a race of super-powered cyborg creatures with which they plan to spread their empire throughout the peace-loving systems of the Galaxy. Various races have fallen foul of the evil forces, their forms being taken and warped to produce more cybernetic forces for the cyborgs' nefarious deeds.

Only one hope remains. The only race that posed the cyborgs any serious problems were the dragons, but even they have been crushed under the metallic heel of the invaders. The last great dragon has been captured and

taken to the cyborgs' base, its immense power being tapped to supply their troops.

You play a cyborg warrior who has decided to rebel against the evil and oppressive forces of your tyrannical leaders. Why? Simple. Your cyborg form is part machine, part dragon.

Your quest is to battle from the front line, which is where you have been sent, back to the very centre of the cyborg complex in an attempt to rescue the mighty dragon. You begin as you reach the surface of the cyborg planet, armed only with your designated single-shot laser and fireball

weaponry. This can be upgraded by picking up the power-pods originally intended for cyborg troops. These include fan-shots, enlarged fireballs, bouncing crystal-orb guns and ring-lasers.

As well as these weapon-systems, you also have the ability to utilise your dragon form in combat, by way of your specially armoured tail. This can be moved and coiled to either protect you from enemy attacks or to kill cyborg warriors.

It's down to you. Use your armour and weapons to release the last dragon and save the Galaxy from destruction.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

The team that brought *Silkworm* and *Ninja Warriors* to the Amiga has managed to come up with another wickedly accurate conversion. The graphics are superbly drawn and coloured, evoking the feel of the coin-op to a tee. Despite the number of sprites on screen and the sheer size of some of the guardians, everything moves on at a pretty slick pace, scrolling and animating smoothly throughout. *Random Access* are becoming a pretty hefty tour-de-force in the conversion game. Keep it up!

LASTING INTEREST

The gameplay starts off easily enough and it soon becomes possible to steam through the first level without losing a life. Level Two, on the other hand, is quite a different matter. Things start to get a great deal more tricky from here on in and could prove annoying to casual blasters who find themselves dying in the same place time after time. Those with a niftier trigger finger, however – such as those who have actually played and enjoyed the coin-op – will find the difficulty level just about right to keep them pushing through. It will still be some time before the final objective is reached, no matter how sharp-shooting you think you are!

JUDGEMENT

Many coin-op conversions are pale imitations of the originals, but *Random Access* have come up with the goods once again. *Saint Dragon* is almost exactly like the coin-op. The graphics and sound are of arcade quality, with superb sprites and backdrops backed up with seriously hard sound effects. The intro sequences have been shuffled a bit to reduce the "Hurry up and load! I want to play again" syndrome and the game flows along pretty slickly on the whole. Due to the nature of the arcade original, some may find the going a little too tough, but with some dedication (and a blister or two) it is possible to push through the game and get a great deal of enjoyment from this wonderfully accurate conversion. *Matt Evans*

SAINT DRAGON

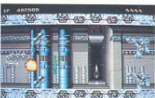
SALES CURVE £24.99 ■ Joystick



A giant pod-ship at the end of the forest level is ready and waiting for your attack. Those chainguns are definitely not the most friendly sight in the world, so keep movin' and shootin'.



A nice forest stroll this certainly is not. Watch out for those rocks or you'll have quite a headache.



Jetpack attack! No worries: by this point our hero Saint Dragon is highly armed and well hard.

GRAPHICS	8
SOUND	8
INTELLECT	2
ADDICTION	8
OVERALL	82%

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

There's an awful lot of *Speedball* floating around here and graphically it's by no means a bad job. Players will usually go in the direction you point them, but footspeed is a problem on all levels. Annoyingly, all players run at roughly the same speed, so if you're chasing someone in full flight, you're going to stay that way until the computer chooses an idle player to take over.

The worst aspect is impact detection. Once you attempt a tackle the chances are you'll win the ball, and it works in much the same way for the computer or human opponent. If there's no competition, why bother?

On the sound front there's nothing to say because as soon as you hear the dreadfully clichéd 'Amiga action computer game music' you'll switch the volume down, or at least toggle to the effects.

LASTING INTEREST

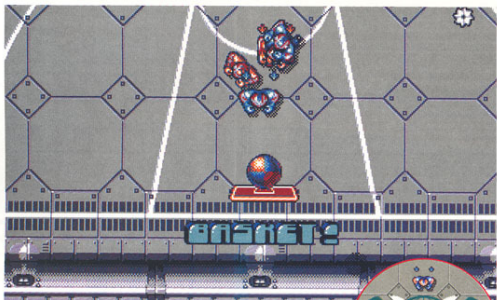
The amusement level of such violence plummets after about half an hour, even if you're playing against someone whose face you'd love to cave in. All the pushing, shoving and grunting wears a little thin on the fun front after that. The league option, which features an editing facility, does help the game hang on a little while longer, but it hasn't got the legs for a long run in the big league.

JUDGEMENT

Future Basketball looks like too many other games. The original concept suffers from flawed logic: basketball with contact is rather like boxing with baseball bats: mindless fun for a while, but the real skill vanishes. Technically it suffers the odd glitch where players refuse to do what they're told. It suffers from a lack of depth, but worse, it suffers from a serious lack of fun. *Coin Campbell*



GRAPHICS	6
SOUND	5
INTELLECT	0
ADDICTION	1
OVERALL	43%



The blue team strikes with a two-pointer. Scoring is easy: all you have to do is stand in the 'D', let the joystick go dead and press fire. Then, with a bit of luck, you're two points up. Getting there is the tough bit!

FUTURE BASKETBALL

HEWSON £24.99 ■ Joystick

Let's get one thing straight. Basketball is about cruising across the wooden floor, bouncing that big ball, dodging those suckers with long legs and clumsy arms. It's definitely not at its best when some beefhead launches himself at your torso, gives you a crack on the nod, and then zips off with the ball. That just isn't basketball. Not cricket, as they say.

But the writers of *Future Basketball* don't reckon on it working that way. They figure basketball's best when the good players are getting turned into pancakes and all the slobbering gits are crashing around scoring baskets. In their future, lots of people are

unemployed and so become loonies who like to watch basketball played the Oliver Reed way.

In *Future Basketball* the general idea is to don *Robocop* suits, go out, go berzerk and if by some happy coincidence you end up with the ball, go towards the basket. When you're close enough to the target, stop dead, lob the ball networks, and jump around stupidly when the darned thing is home. Of course all this requires some heavy-duty joystick waggling and fire-button slamming, but you get the general idea.

To add some variety to this exercise there's also three different 'playing surfaces' which have

the novel distinction of being almost exactly the same. There are also some inexplicable little flying bits which get in everybody's way for no apparent reason whatsoever. These saw blades and bombs are supposed to take down the other team, but prove a far greater hindrance than help.

As you may have guessed, playing *Future Basketball* does not require a degree in sociology. As in most computerised team sports games these days, the computer decides which player is closest to the ball and four big arrows start flashing over him (it's all seen from an overhead perspective). That player should then be directed at an opposing player (preferably the one with the ball). Press the fire button, crash towards the fool, and come out of the encounter with the ball. No problem.

Then go toward the basket, avoid the suckers and get yourself in front of the net. Leave the joystick on dead, fire the button (there's no need to aim) and – surely not, what a surprise, knock me over with a fanzine – the ball's in the net. Do this several times and you'll win the match.



The orange team get physical and try to 'get' the ball. To tackle just stand close and then thomp them. Simple!



The arena's littered with weapons which can be activated to maim opponents. Deadly stuff, this basketball!

Good shall always triumph over evil. History has proved that over and over again. The problem is, the forces of evil are an irrepressible bunch. As soon as you banish the evil forces back to the place from whence they came, they return to wreak havoc upon the world once again.

This time, though, evil reckons it's got it sussed. All the powerful wizards that have been its undoing before have been captured. The only reason they're not dead yet is because Satan has been kept busy devising really nasty ways to torture them to death. And once they're dead, the world is doomed - this time for eternity.

There is one tiny glimmer of hope. While a warrior could not possibly take on the evil satanic forces himself, if one were to become adept in the use of magic, then maybe, just maybe, he'd stand a tiny chance of defeating the dark overlord.

Unfortunately it's not a case of simply enrolling in the local college for a crash course in advanced wizardry. To learn the arcane arts he must first cross the land of lost magic, where he will find three magic papyrus rolls that will give him the required knowledge. Only then will our hero - and this means

you - be capable of the awesome task of taking on Satan and the other creatures of hell.

The game is split into two halves. In the first you play the warrior, guiding him through the land of lost magic in his quest for the lost papyrus rolls.

You can run around to your heart's content on the platforms. To advance through the levels though, you'll need to jump and cling onto the pillars which seem to hang in mid air. Arcade fans will notice that this section bears more than a passing resemblance to the game *Black Tiger*.

The monsters come in several flavours. The plain vanilla type are the Trows, which are everywhere, and if you so much as blink you'll find them popping up all over the place. These can only harm you by contact, but they're still pretty tough, and need several shots to kill them.

You'll meet many other of Hell's minion on your travels. They have various methods of attack and you'll have to fight them all if you're to stand any chance at all of success. Killing creatures reaps rewards. Most often you'll get a coin which just gives you points. Some will reveal more valuable collectables, though: extra energy,

more time and additional lives are amongst the goodies up for grabs after successful combat.

Eventually, after much running about, leaping around and getting hurt, you'll come across one of the Guardians of the scrolls. These are real mean monsters, and hopefully you'll have received a power-up or two before you face them.

The first you'll come across is Tam Lin, a dragon made of bone. You'll need to shoot him in the head several times and then blast his beating heart to pieces to obtain the first scroll.

In the unlikely event that you manage to complete the first part, you'll be given an access code to reach the second section of the game. It's here that you meet Satan, along with even worse adversaries with whom you will enter in mortal combat.

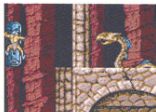
Luckily, though, you're now a wizard. Admittedly a pretty poorly-equipped wizard, but it just so happens that there's a corner shop where you can shell out on more powerful magical items. Then it's a case of fighting the ultra-tough evil beings. If you manage to floor one of the big brutes, two more appear, and so on until you've killed the lot - or they've killed you. Hell, as they say, is war.



It's Satan himself. And he seems to have engulfed me in flames.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

For the most part the scrolling is smooth and constant. It does seem to judder occasionally, just out of the corner of your eye, but this doesn't detract from the playability. The backgrounds are well drawn, with lots of fire-and-brimstone stuff. The monsters are excellently animated too.



You can click on pillars as you shoot. A good thing too.

LASTING INTEREST

Satan is almost two games in one. Firstly there's the *Black Tiger* style platform and pillars game. Complete that and you'll find the second half different enough to keep you going. Saying that, both sections are tough enough in their own right and it's quite possible that you won't beat the first level. However, many will.



Oh, no! It's Tam Lin, the famous end-of-level guardian!



Shoot like crazy, but be sure to avoid the snapping jaws.



Once you've destroyed his head, break his heart to get the scroll.

SATAN

DINAMIC £19.99 ■ Joystick and Keyboard



Once you've been through hell and high water in the first section of the game, you have to do it all over again - reborn as the wizard. Oh look, there's one of the captives up there. Coo-ee!



Ah, a snake. As long as you stay out of range, you'll be safe.

JUDGEMENT

Satan is unoriginal, but good fun nevertheless. The first part is a linear adventure, where you progress further and further each time you play. The second section could be described as a sort of martial arts with lightning bolts. It's this combination that makes Satan such a devilishly addictive game! Adam Waring

GRAPHICS	6
SOUND	6
INTELLECT	4
ADDICTION	7
OVERALL	77%

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Sound is not something you look for in a strategy game. So, save for *The Narrator* and the 'tone' option, there is none to talk of. Graphically they've done a fine job. Each game has its own board; Chinese chess has a wide blue strip down the middle, Chaturanga has a pieces shaped like elephants. The movement is smooth, even on the 3D view, and even the text for Rules and History is well done. Graphically it's an eloquent piece which

doesn't intrude on the gameplay – it heightens it! If I was forced to think of a negative criticism, it would be that the female narrator sounds like a blues singer with a throat infection the morning after cheering for the Chicago Bears.

LASTING INTEREST

With ten games to choose from, each one as addictive, brain-teasing and generally wild as the next, this little package should run and run. The ability to change skill levels, learn more

about the history of the great game, test yourself to your limits and come out of the experience with more than a trifling nickname on a hi-score table means that *Distant Armies* should keep being taken out of the disk collection and played until it splits in two. The only thing which might inhibit is the cowardly player who loses constantly – and in the beginning you will – and then decides that the package is no good. Sure it's hard, but so was riding a bike when you started.

The whole world awaits your agile brain and ability not to get too frustrated when all of your preconceptions are blown straight out of the window. But wait awhile, not only is the world your oyster; time also looks like it's ready to do your bidding. Fancy a game from ancient Persia? How about testing yourself against the H-Bombers at Los Alamos? *Distant Armies* shouldn't be distanced for much longer. Oh, by the way, I'm supposed to tell you that the package comprises chess variations...



DISTANT ARMIES

EXOCET £24.99 ■ Keyboard/Mouse

Just back from some serious chess playing down at the local, the Queen's Pawn and Ferret, the last thing I wanted to do was review a chess compilation. I had just beaten the best, old Fred, like a thug with problems. My middle game had been incisive, the end game had been brutal but sharp. I knew all there was to know about the game.

Then I got my first glimpse at this non-big-name game. The packaging was bland, the manual a flimsy thing. I booted the game from the desktop and was greeted by a king doing *Space Harrier*. So far, so good? Maybe it was time for *Kick Off*, maybe not.

The menu screen showed a map of the world with the names of ten different chess variations in boxes. I clicked on Byzantine and the two-dimensional board appeared. There was an option to change to 3D, but that's only for flash Harrys. I began to play.

Two minutes later I was shredded, beaten, fascinated man. This form of the game is played on a circular board. The strategy is mostly similar to chess but the differences really put a hook into me. I clicked on to top menu bar and brought up the History option. Fascinating. I read it again, then moved on to the rules. This really started to look interesting.

Luckily, instead of having to return to the Rules option every time I forgot how a certain piece moved, I could click a Help icon on any piece on the board. Its moves were shown and I was able to continue. I sent out for pizza. This looked like it was going to be a long night – there were still nine other options to play.

I decided to check out the options. The board, background and piece colours were changed pronto – yellow pieces on a purple board with a 'puce' background. Then there was 'The Narrator' to

contend with. He, or she, shouted things at me like "It's not your turn to move yet!" so I altered the volume and brought down the pitch to more relaxing levels.

The pizza arrived and I was ready to play Los Alamos chess. Very similar to the recognised game except there are no bishops and the board is 7x7. Try making the English opening (knights out for the lads) on this and you're looking for a bloodbath. By the time I'd got to grips with this, in a childish manner, the pizza was cold crust.

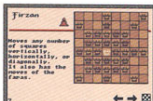
Time to move on to Chinese chess, or Chaturanga, or Decimal, Shatranj, Courier or Turkish chess. It was like being a food freak at the most exotic meal ever. Each new game threw up new strategies to learn and new tricks to try. It made *Laser Squad* look tame. I went out the next day and bought a new Amiga specifically to play this package...



What's the best way to get out of a tricky situation? Yup, get the Amiga to do it itself. It's also a good way to learn the rules.



Ummm, this looks like fun. If only you could forget all the rules of chess and just concentrate on the gameplay.



The Firman is a ferocious piece, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. But how the hell to use it to your advantage?



The Narrator. It will drill you into the ground if you dare to make an illegal move, so make it sound like Mickey Mouse.

JUDGEMENT

A gem of a package. Not only will *Distant Armies* reawaken tired chess players, it should also create a stir amongst strategy gamers. I would have liked to see a bigger manual, containing the text files for perusal on the train or in bed. One thing missing might be a conventional game for relief. Aside from this quibble, *Distant Armies* is one of the most intelligent uses yet produced for the Amiga – and it's Amiga-only at the moment. Get it while you can get it. And then play it until you win. *Tim Smith*



BUDGET SPECIAL

A LOOK AT LOW-COST SOFTWARE WITH
TRENTON WEBB

GRAPHICS 7 / SOUND 6 / INTELLECT 5 / ADDICTION 3 / OVERALL 65%

BUG BASH is a jolly little poison-em-up in which you play a small, cute insect out to keep the garden free of your ugly-bug cousins. Armed with a 'terrifying' insecticide spray gun and helicopter jet pack you must chase around collecting rubbish. Cute nasties fall out of the sky who you spray with the gun or dodge using your heli-pack, because each contact saps energy from your little buggy body.

Bright brash sprites disguise some neat scrolling and backgrounds. It desperately wants to be cute and succeeds, but the game itself is far from friendly. Energy levels determine your

survival and these are very rapidly knocked down to zero - cue dying fly time. The best route must be worked out for each level, as must the collection order. Food can refresh you temporarily but there's very little about, so discretion always proves the better part of valour.

Backed up with a super twee background song, *BB* looks good and plays reasonably well. It never really makes it into the realm of the thrilling, standing firmly in the frustrating camp. This may spur some on to greater Bug Bashing, but most will not see it metamorphosise into a good game.



This bug's no mug. He knows that cute is king in the world of budgets and goes all out for it. You play the bug in the bash hat.

BUG BASH/NUCLEUS

MICROTECH Double-game pack £12.99 ■ Joysticks

NUCLEUS proves that shoot-em-ups have grown up. No longer are players content with duff sprites, now they demand smart art as well as good game design.

Well, *Nucleus* scores heavily here, because it's a vastly pretty blast. The backgrounds exude an eerie menace (*Menace*, did some say *Menace?*) and the aliens, while far from original in concept, all look the part.

The graphics of any shoot-out, though, are just the icing on the cake. Players have come to expect more from shoot-out games and speed is truly the key to success: it sets the heart

pumping, the palms sweating and the joystick groaning as you madly waggle to survive. Sadly this isn't the case for *Nucleus*.

The safe routes are obvious, which is just as well because the ship's gun is awesomely slow. The aliens repeat in identical waves until you reach the end of each short level, when you bash the big guy. The guardians are hard to kill, bearing in mind your limited speed, actually posing a real threat to your welfare.

As part of a two-game pack for less than £13 it's fine, but as a game on its own terms it's a good looker that lacks action.



INSET: The end of Level One. He's not tough, but you're dead slow. MAIN: Level Two goes sub-atomic with an attack of killer molecules.

GRAPHICS 8 SOUND 6 / INTELLECT 1 / ADDICTION 3 / OVERALL 54%

NUCLEUS

NEW LINE Software £9.99 ■ Joystick

When was the last time you played a game from Norway? Whatever the answer, *Plexu* could, sadly, put you off for life. In a horizontally-scrolling amble along, all you do is plod about blasting strange creatures with a poxy cannon and then dying.

Plexu himself may be a new kind of hero - duff! His basic motions are slow, no matter how hard you waggle, and they're limited to jumping, ducking (if you're lucky) and shooting on an angle. He has to use these skills to overpower flying eyes, floating

trees, dragons and assorted *Shadow of the Beast* rejects.

Technically *Plexu* looks good, if predictable. There's just one problem though: someone forgot the gameplay. *Plexu* goes through the motions, but there's never any motive forcing the pace. The hero dies frequently and with little consequence. The only real reason you push on is to see whether anything gets better. Unfortunately it doesn't and all that remains is a lame, but pretty, duck of a game that comes out just at the wrong season.



Oh dear me, that dragon's just zapped *Plexu*. Ah well, at least something happened!

GRAPHICS 7 / SOUND 4 / INTELLECT 0 / ADDICTION 0 / OVERALL 21%