

by Todd Stauffer

7600

*a gander at
drive, so I ran
churning (this
Virtual*

*started up my
that showed off
of prison
controls,*

*different
those key
Command+3, the game
card installed in*

I popped the Unreal Beta 1 CD-ROM into my Power Macintosh (augmented by a Sonnet Crescendo 266 MHz G3 card) and took the contents. At about 500 MB, it was too much to copy to the drive, so I ran it from the CD. After some unoptimized beta-level drive churning (this pre-release version requires tons of RAM and at least 100 MB of Memory), the game popped on the screen. It looked good.

I played with the settings, checked out the keyboard layout and first go at the game, after a cool little fly-through of a castle the graphical wonders of the game. After landing in some sort of cell/holding area, I started moving about the cabin testing the controls, refresh rates and other settings.

Then I lit upon it - in many games, Command+numbers equals different views or allows you to switch between weapons. In this case, those key commands switch between video modes. When I hit Command+3, the game went into 3Dfx mode, taking full advantage of the Power3D card installed in that 7600.

better put the

Yowza.

"Honey!" I called down the hall from the computer room. "We dog up for adoption."

"What?!" came the reply.

"Sorry," I cried. "But I won't be leaving the house ever again!"

Viewed in its 3Dfx Voodoo splendor, Unreal is all too real.

G'orious Graphics

around with the

be fairly

has a good

rough edges. I

and crisp,

detail, with

After picking my jaw up off the ground, I began to fumble other settings. While performance and frame rates can't really tested at this early beta stage, let me say that the Unreal team start. The walking-around experience is good, with only a few saw very few rendering artifacts - overall the screen is clean even when you swing around quickly. There's a high level of

seen before,

good results in

180 MHz

offered good

the most

textures and

Movement in

creatures and

arms. Even

gun around in

your next

textures that can only be described as better than what you've especially in an enhanced 3-D mode.

Even dropping back into QuickDraw RAVE acceleration gave the graphics department (on both the test machine and on a PowerPC 604e PowerCenter Pro), and the lesser machine also performance for moving through this world. Unreal is certainly grown-up 3D shooter I've ever played, with sophisticated incredible visuals, including impressive outdoor landscapes. the game is very fluid, too, with ultra-realistic bird-like monsters that take each step with a believable swing to their your character has a few nervous ticks, sometimes rolling the his (or her) hand, twisting and cocking it idling as you decide move.

splatters as the

Shocking as it may seem, there's a little gore, too. Blood

Weapons
pistol you'll
flowing
caused by

haven't felt much
that you can
on a themed
Disney's
flash, sounds
gets you a
downright

*occasion warrants - the bigger the fall, the heartier the smear.
fire is fun to watch - especially the relatively ineffective laser
likely stumble upon first. And a number of other effects - like a
waterfall, underwater scenes and the rumbling of earthquakes
hidden machinery - are certain sources of delight.*

*Beyond the graphics, Unreal has a feel to it that I certainly
while gaming in front of a computer. It's the level of immersion
feel in a sitdown coin-op...sometimes. You'll more likely feel it
thrill ride where effects are more important than speed - like
Space Mountain or a really good haunted house - where lights
overwhelm and your pulse races a bit. If playing Quake or Duke
little paranoid with your trigger finger, then Unreal will feel
spooky. In a good way.*

But wait, there's more

accost your
open prison cell.
you watch as
arrive on a
cells for
left by your
blooms,
even more

*Blood-curdling screams, electronic voices and dying gasps
senses as you arrive, somewhat shaken, in the game - in an
Stumbling about to find some health (bandages, health kits),
the room around you begins to crack up. After finding a lift, you
similar cell block, stepping over a dead prisoner, reaching into
flares and health, all the while reading diary entries apparently
fellow brig-mates. You climb into a ventilation duct, where fire
electricity arcs and the screams from somewhere below echo
eerily. A lot of people on this ship are dying.*

Rikers, your cell
well, with
atmosphere. The
into a crash

*That's right - there's a plot. As the prisoner on the Vortex
opens as the ship, a prisoner transport, encounters a gravity
power being diverted to avoid falling into a nearby planet's
planet grabs hold, though, and rips into the ship. As it's pulled*

*into a shallow
coming to a rest.
landing. And
parts by -*

*trajectory toward the planet's surface, the crew puts the ship
decent, burning a crater down the side of a mountain before
A lot of your shipmates and cellmates don't make it through the
the few who do survive the crash are soon pulled into bloody
something else.*

*members and
this sort of
read, but you
around a
your quiet time.*

*The game unfolds as you move about, reading the words of crew
guards as you encounter new areas. The interface is good for
interaction - you hit the Return key to pop up the entry and
can continue moving with limited visibility. You can even fight
diary entry, although I wouldn't recommend it. Read during*

*search of a
penchant
expect it. As*

*After escaping the ship, you explore the planet, apparently in
way to get home. The natives aren't particularly friendly, with a
for tossing a barrage of hard-hitting missiles when you least
you move through the levels, you will need to do a little*

*thinking - it's
things to*

*you from one
stumble upon
a strong
There's no
yet.) The point
par.*

*through, but
shooters.
to encounter
heights or
from one
hideous, there
like you
some point,*

*mostly exploration, with the right amount of levers to pull and
twist to make you think you might be missing a clue.*

*Although there are levels, they seem to be very linear, moving
part of the game to the next - for instance, you might suddenly
a new level in the middle of a long, dark corridor that find after
fight. Stopped suddenly, you wait for the next section to load.
score, body count or "secrets found" numbers. (At least, not
seems to be to finish the story, not compare your time against*

Other Tidbits

*I've just kept playing. The game isn't particularly tough to get
it's certainly taken longer for me than many similar first person
In fact, I'd almost label this one an adventure game - I have yet
a "level" that requires you to negotiate mazes, jump to certain
engage in much trickery - the gameplay is more about getting
challenge to the next. And although the monsters are certainly
are enough people in the frames to make this feel rather real -
really are marooned, there really are others out there and, at
you'll meet up.*

sophisticated
connections. You're
female
players -
individually
characters in a
nonfunctional in

is the
interactive movie that
with Aliens
real live plot
the best time.

you that
rewarded. My
card before your
invest in
As our

As far as the gaming experience itself, the interface promising network play that can be optimized for LAN or modem able to create a number of different looks, including male and personas wearing a wide enough variety of garb to differentiate with style. There's also promise for a feature that allows you to configure "Bots," allowing you to control an entire team of deathmatch against others. Unfortunately, network play is this early beta.

All in all, I'm really impressed with this early look at Unreal. This closest any game has ever made me feel to being in an conjures the realism and the giggle-inducing fear I'd associate or a similar flick. And the combination of sound, visuals and a make it a game that's more than moving the fastest or getting It's entertaining.

If you've been looking forward to Unreal impatiently, let me tell such impatience is completely warranted and will be justly only admonishment - if you don't yet have one, get a Voodoo final version of Unreal arrives. And if anyone else lives with you, some good headphones - the sounds will surely freak them out. fearless interim leader Steve Jobs might say, Unreal is real. Enjoy the wait!

