MG: Mudgeon on Games
by Mudgeon

Hate to rave, hate to rave, but in this case it's absolutely necessary. There isn't much space remaining in this issue to really delve with depth into this awesome title, but you should be able to get a good idea of what's cooking with this hot property. I only hope that the designers and developers of this game don't become inflicted with overly-swelled egos as a result of their accomplishment-what can quickly pump you up to the heights of success one day can quickly bring you down to earth on another!

The first product I wish to mention is Marathon, from Bungie Software. Sure, you may have heard that this is a Doom-like product that currently is only available for the Macintosh. I say Marathon is BETTER than Doom. The reason? You certainly do more than blow the alien opposition away. With space critters possessing some pretty good AI, graphics that leave you gasping for breath, a decent sound track, and I/O movement that enables you to step and slide and look and look down, you feel as though you've actually entered the game. Throw in the stereo sound (for those of you with speakers), and you can actually determine the direction an approaching adversary is arriving from, simply by adding that additional sound dimension to your array of sensory awareness.

What truly makes Marathon a winner is its network capabilities. With at least two Macs connected via anything from LocalTalk to Ethernet, or anything that's compatible with those standards, you can go for it as the game includes a different copy of Marathon for installation on the second machine. With two distinct serial numbers on the games, the controlling player simply gathers the network game and everyone else just joins in the game play. I've watched eight folk go at it at the Bungie headquarters in Chicago and was totally impressed and amazed at the speed of play, the ability to "team-up" against others, and the total immersion of the players in the game. You could have yelled FIRE, heard the arrival of fire trucks with sirens, and the only response from the players would've been spacebars being depressed as all weapons were fired.

You may set all of the keyboard presses to your exact liking. Although you can use a combo mouse and keyboard for all game commands, I preferred simply using the keyboard. Your right hand rests upon the numeric keypad, and your left hand hovers deftly above the left side of the keyboard where your Action key (usually TAB) and your weapons firing key (SPACEBAR) and looking keys should be situated.

Depending upon the speed of your computer, you may also set a variety of graphics and sound controls. For extra speed, select Low Resolution mode, although you will see graphics at about one-half their full resolution and intensity. You may also run the game in either 16-bit or 8-bit color modes. Also cool is the fact you can brighten the game's graphics without adjusting your monitor. And as far as sound is concerned, you can range from a lower quality sample rate of 11.127Khz up to their original rate of 22.225Khz. Oh, in order for myself to fully access all of the goodies Marathon offers, I assigned 9MB of RAM to the game. Never had a problem, never!

Plot? You want plot? You get a terrific storyline, with all the accouterments necessary to keep you pumping from one level to the next. Darkened hallways, switches that turn lights and elevators on and off, a Cyberhead helmet that provides you a heads-up display that includes a motion sensor (just like in Aliens, only cooler!), shield and oxygen levels, a view screen from which you can see everything around you-and coming at you! There are computer interfaces throughout the Marathon station, from medical stations where you can obtain healing help to AIs that control of all of the automated systems. Unfortunately, one was destroyed during the initial alien attack upon Marathon, one was injured, and one remains operational. Your CRITICAL requirement is to remain in touch with the working AIs so that important information can be downloaded to you at every stage of the game. You'll even find Biobus Chips that you plug in to your space suit and your helmet. Although their effects are short-lived, these puppies can add amazing capabilities to your character, from such goodies as hypervision to transparency.

A range of weapons can be found, each one a potent force against the enemy. However, don't forget the bloody aliens fire back-remember your "sidestep" keys to avoid those incoming blasts. You have to find a variety of items throughout the ship. Each level is dedicated to the furtherance of missions that'll, eventually, lead to your success.

The only part of Marathon I didn't enjoy was the fact that in order to save your games in progress, you must interface with a pattern buffer device. These little interfaces are NOT numerous, and in the heat of a game, you occasionally forget to even look for them. Should you not do well and end up toast, you then have to recall your last saved same, which could've been quite a while ago when last saved. Make this an important consideration when you traverse the various levels of Marathon-found those buffer devices!

Bungie has done just about everything correctly with Marathon, from a well-written manual that includes information on network play, to ensuring maximum enjoyment for consumers. Once you start Marathon and adjust to the various key presses necessary for looking and movement, you'll find yourself totally immersed in the game's action environment. Watching and waiting for aliens, finding those all-important technical goodies that'll help wipe out the enemy, this is the stuff of pulse-pounding entertainment. If Bungie doesn't convert this game to for PC/MS-DOS based systems, they're not thinking correctly. Marathon is soooo good, it simply isn't fair to only allow Mac gamers the opportunity to thrive on this electrifying experience.-Mudgeon