neak Peek: Exile: Escape from the Pit

by Don Henson

NOTE: Screen shots and information presented in this article are based on a pre-release version of Exile and are subject to change before final release. This article is not a review.

With a dose of luck, on the reader's part, the release of Exile may be found on this CD in the shareware folder [Editor's note: It is, see below]. Just in case, I will tantalize you with a bit of a preview of this new RPG (role playing game) from Spiderweb Software and published by Fantasoft. The latter are the folks that bring you Realmz and its successive scenarios.

Exile: Escape from the Pit is a non-linear RPG that is a bit more of the flavor of the Ultima games and yet not geared to the typical classes of characters available in most RPGs. In Exile, one is able to allocate the abilities of all six characters in the same way, or create their own version of mage and cleric types. There also aren't different races to start with, so the attributes again are at the whim and fancy of the gamer. As in the other role-playing adventures, it will pay to have a party that is built in a versatile manner for all the missions and quests that lie ahead.

The surface world is ruled by The Empire, in turn ruled by King Hawthorne. The desire was order at any cost and that is what was accomplished. As is the problem with most utopian ideals in societies and elsewhere there was need to decide how to deal with the miscreants, misfits, malefactors and other malcontents. The Empire had first been taking the easy way out and simply killing the various low-lifes, but it was decided that the bloodshed had to end, and a more conscientious way of dealing with these people had to be developed. It was decided to throw them into the pit that was a doorway to the underground with no known escape. All thought this was a grand and humane idea. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem quite the same when it has been decided that you have been declared unfit and sent to Exile as well.

o it is time to get your party of adventurers together and see what you mischief you can undo or get into. In being non-linear, it is sort of up to you to decide where you want to go and what you want to do, as long as you are able to get there and survive. As mentioned there are no races and so one doesn't get involved in the standard sort of decisions of whether I should have human and dwarf fighter type, or whatever. Just customize the characters to fit with the beginning points at Fort Exile. One can have male and female characters without any penalty, just select female icons and names and off you go.

First see Tor and get some supplies he has for your group. Then get them allocated and equipped in a manner you deem appropriate. In leaving a town, fort, or dungeon just keep walking out the doors in a straight line you will emerge in the outside world of Exile. There is a convenient automapping feature that will keep track of areas that you have already explored while you are on that sector of map such as a town or a large section of the underworld's exterior.

When you leave Fort Exile the menu of control buttons changes to commands needed outside, likewise there is a special menu for combat. Once outside your party is on its own to figure out what to do and where to go and of course discover who is friend or foe. The combat is a bit different outside than in the interiors. Out here it is a more like the combat we see in other RPG adventuring. In the unfriendly towns and tight interiors, things are at times much more cramped. One nice feature is that you can exchange places in your party by moving them onto the square of another and they automatically switch. This is very handy in some of the tight cave and dungeon passages to get your party rearranged so that the strong weapon users are close to the enemy and the magic users can hopefully get a clear shot for a spell.

he menu contains online summaries of the essential help sections to make getting started easier for those of us who don't like to take time with manuals. Like most of the games that have staying power it is a challenge to learn the ropes and get the levels of your characters up to levels that are more comfortable and useful. There are many routes to this — some obvious to one, some to another — but a great variety and complexity of possibilities. The walls of natural or artificial origin are not always what they seem. This is sometimes very helpful, and of course sometimes very dangerous as well.   It is possible to have unlimited saves, so save often and see if you can solve the many areas and puzzles.

Exile: Escape from the Pit is shareware that allows you to try large areas of the game before contacting Fantasoft to get your key code to unlock the rest of the game. This is a must for anyone that likes role-playing games and thinks that there aren't enough good ones available for the Mac.