

# review: **NetherWorld**

by Sean Kelley

Type: Arcade/Action

Publisher: Stick Man Games (2357 S. Beretania St, Suite A325, Honolulu, HI 96826)

Shareware Fee: \$15 plus \$5 shipping/Demo is free

Requires: 68020 Processor, System 7.x, 256 color monitor, 2.5 MB RAM, Sound Manager 3.0

Protection: None

here's nothing quite like a spin through Hell in a turbocharged spaceship with dual wing mounted machine guns. Whoa, who's that little guy down there? Looks like he's waving...oops...splat!!!... Good thing this is just a game or I might feel bad about painting that poor soul's eternal organs all over that rock. You might not know it from the way I play, but the real object of Netherworld, the new shareware game from Stickman games, is to pick up these "souls": and you'd better do it before the demon heads of Hell crash the party and your ship along with it.

The introductory story supplied for the game is short and sweet. In 2005 all the nations of the world sign a peace agreement that puts a "virtual" end to war and crime on Earth. This hurts the feelings of the beast and his evil minions who are motivated into overdrive claiming innocent souls for the abyss. Your job as intrepid pilot is to go down there and rescue them.

**The Play's the Thing.** So like Dante and Virgil and anyone who has ever had to use Dos, let's take a little tour through Hell. The freeware version of Netherworld is made up of 5 abysses (if you think the game is cool and want more you can print out the order form and send in \$15 for the full version with 66 more levels, more demons, and more carnage). Each mission begins with an intro screen with a scary picture of a nether dweller and an appropriate title such as Speed Demon or Lost Souls. From there it's into the abyss! The action window gives a 3/4 view. An easy to read display tells you how many souls remain to be collected and how much time is left before the beast awakens. Flying off the screen scrolls you into the next section. At the boundaries of an abyss there's a notable gravitational pull. Plunge through the boundary to teleport to another area. A radar screen shows souls in green and demons in red and is extremely useful. The game includes pause

and save features.

Flying is a breeze using the keyboard ( the mouse and joystick aren't supported). The ship, which handles like the ship in Asteroids and a lot of other games, is very responsive and even casts a shadow. Unfortunately, the abysses all look a lot alike, but the graphic details are worth pausing to check out. Hell looks eerily similar to my next-door neighbor's back yard: rocks, old tires, trashed vehicles and the occasional skeleton. Rescued souls have a variety of cute responses, at least until you get sick of them. "Cool" and "thanks" spring to mind. All the sound effects, from gunfire to the ships engines to the splattering of souls are quite convincing.

So what's it like to play Netherworld? It's addictive and it's fun. You fly around picking up lost souls who wave to you like little air traffic controllers. The challenge comes in trying to do this while evading the demons of Hell. They come at you like, well like big heads outta Hell. Among others there's a skull, a bivalved heart and a pointy eared green head. Bringing your guns to bear on these apparitions turns them into bullet riddled pulps that vanish with a scream, leaving behind only a bad memory and some points or power ups. Predictably, these power ups allow you to increase the destructive power of your weapons, improve your ship and even suspend time.

t's when the clock starts winding down that the game really comes into its own because you do not want the beast to wake up . I was actually filled with a sense of dread at the prospect. For one thing, the beast's head is 5 times as big as the rest of the demon heads. If you happen to be in the corner where the beast is napping you can see his eyes pop open,

and wherever you are in the abyss you can hear his friendly message "There is no escape." Once the beast gets on your tail he is impossible to shake. The game designers say it's possible to destroy him, but try as I might couldn't take him out. Blasting him while he's catching up on his beauty sleep seems to have no effect either. My advice is to concentrate on picking up all those souls before he awakens, or it's back to the beginning of the level.

**Whines.** While I really liked this game I do feel the need to whine and complain a little. First of all, the demo is too short. After a few sessions of getting used to the controls I was able to reach the end of the fifth level pretty easily. This translates into only a few hours of gameplay before the demo is played out. I know. I'm supposed to shut up and buy the real version. My other complaint is that each of the five abysses looked the same. The game would be more interesting if each level had a graphic theme that flowed into the next to tell a simple story. There was no feeling of descending deeper and deeper into hell.

**The Last Word.** Netherworld is fun and you'll want to keep playing it. The action is fast, the monsters are bad and the humor is humorous. The game ran great on my PowerMac and never crashed. The five levels of the freeware version are limited but the game is fun and addictive enough to warrant shelling out the 15 bucks for the full version. Netherworld is one hell of an action shareware game.