

y "The Cajun"

This month's How To column will focus on Chiral, or more specifically, [Chiral Basics](#), a new interactive tutorial created to supplement Chiral. It turns out that Chiral has a rather steep learning curve. It takes some time to figure out what you are doing in the game, and that time is generally too long to hold the interest of the player. Also, I do not think folks were too thrilled about scrolling through the (rather long) instructions either.

This was the perfect opportunity for me to exercise my growing Macintosh programming skills. And it turns out that the program is just the right size to be bundled with Chiral. So we hope that Chiral Basics will help those who had difficulty learning Chiral.

Chiral Basics is a simple, interactive program that walks you through the basics of Chiral. It covers general information about the game and its elements. Then it moves on to the basics of building a molecule, taking you step by step through the process. After you build the first molecule, you will continue to build other molecules, each one focusing on a particular technique of the game. At the end, a brief description is given of all of the "Special" atoms in Chiral.

But, there are a couple of things that are not covered; as my beta testers have informed me. I would like to go over these things here. I do not feel that these are basics of the game, and have excluded them from the tutorial. But I would like to at least satisfy those curious among you.

The big one is scoring. Scoring in Chiral is handled in a rather intricate way. It is designed to become more challenging as you get better. And since there is no way to actually determine the scheme, I will explain it here.

Basically, you get two scores in Chiral: when you complete a molecule, and when you end a level. Each has its own method of calculation.

When you complete a molecule, the bonds in the molecule are totaled up. This is how big the molecule is, so we will call it Molecule size. Molecule size is then multiplied by the number of atoms, and any Multiplier atoms in your molecule. If you have two multipliers in your molecule, they are added together and the total used. Then the whole thing is then multiplied by a factor of the skill level, and then rounded off to the nearest ten.

For example, a 10 atom molecule, with 30 bonds, on practice level would be:

(Molecule Size) x (# of atoms) x (multiplier) x (Skill Level)

$$30 \quad \times \quad 10 \quad \times \quad 1$$

$$\times \quad 1 \quad = \quad 300 \text{ points.}$$

When you complete a level, things are a little more complex. You have a Level Bonus, a Speed Bonus, and a Stray Atom Penalty. All of these things are calculated to give you a score for the level. The level bonus is a product of the level you are currently playing on and the skill level (freshman, sophomore, etc.). The Speed Bonus is simply the remaining points in the Bonus box during play. And the Stray Atom Penalty is a product of the number of bonds that are possible from the unattached atoms remaining, times a factor of your game level and skill level (the Level Bonus). Basically, this is designed so that as you progress to higher skill levels, if you leave atoms hanging around, the penalty gets steeper. (You're supposed to be getting better, so you are penalized more as you do).

Another thing that isn't covered in Chiral Basics is certain elements of the play area, such as the Schzapp indicator and the Bonus box. In fact, because I was a little pressed for space, I removed the Bonus box from the game area all together. Again, these are areas I feel do not fall under the heading "Basics." I'm sure I'll hear something about it in the future.

Once Chiral is understood, molecule building becomes second nature. The challenge comes from the randomness of the atoms, and the increased speed of their decent. It can take a while to get the hang of Chiral, but once you have a basic understanding the game grows with you. I hope that Chiral Basics will help more folks enjoy the game as much as we have.

Happy New Year.

"Cajun" David Richard  
Technical Services Manager  
Ambrosia Software, Inc.  
AOL: AmbrosiaSW