

# MG: Fair Game

by Ross Scott Rubin

## Now That We've Got Your Attention

These collective months we call 1994 may go down in history as twelve of Apple's gloomiest. Newton was disappointing. Native PowerPC applications were late. Compaq pulled ahead as the leading personal computer vendor. Lotus confirmed its bewildered incompetence about matters Macintosh. And System 7.5 looks long in latecoming enhancements and short on breakthroughs. As Apple braces itself for the challenge of Microsoft's Chicago, it can point to few triumphs in this year of transitions.

Amidst the chaos in its product line, though, Performa sales have continued to bring Apple users in the home, and that means attention from game developers. Indeed, 1994 has seen several old Mac developers return to the fold. Microprose pulled through and delivered F117-A and Pirates Gold! The Prince of Persia had a harder time escaping from Broderbund's Mac developers than from his captors, but his sequel has finally reached us. Electronic Arts made a splash with PGA Tour Golf II and MacSyndicate.

MacPlay broke new ground with Astro Chase 3D and LucasArts is on the verge of answering Star Wars' fans clamoring for Rebel Assault. The promise of PowerPC gaming probably won't be fully realized until next year, but the new RISC juggernauts have already attracted a few first-time Mac developers, including Domark and Access Software. And, of course, some of the hottest titles of 1994 are around the corner.

It also appears as if Apple's strategy of low-balling high-quality CD-ROM drives has paid off. Industry observers estimate that close to half of the Macs Apple sells into the home have CD-ROM drives. Virtually any CD-ROM of note is released for the Macintosh, and we've even scooped the old DOS crowd on some of the best, including MYST and Peter Gabriel's Xplora 1. The sister category of games—edutainment—is exploding on the Mac, drawing the big guns of Microsoft's and WordPerfect's consumer divisions. Microsoft even deigned to release Isaac Asimov's The Ultimate Robot first for the Mac; now if their word processing division would get the hint.

Why, even our old friends at Origin have been hinting strongly that Super Wing Commander is on the way, and Ultima 8 may soon be much more than a fantasy for role-playing

afficianados.

So, it's been a very good year for Mac games. Alas, though, as I write in a city that is hosting everything from PC Expo to the World Cup this month, celebration seems a bit premature. (Besides, all the decent hotels are booked.) DOS ports still take an eternity to hop platforms, even if they do arrive with much better quality these days. Sometimes the timing is especially bad. For example, Links Pro for Macintosh will arrive on the heels of Links 486, its next generation of the DOS. Similarly, the Mac version of Syndicate comes to market as EA readies a souped-up version for Intel iron.

Furthermore, the pot luck approach to filling gaping holes in Mac market niches has had mixed results. The sky that was once nearly devoid of Mac flight simulators is now crowded with seven titles (with A-10 Attack touching down sometime this decade). Yet, the car-racing scene has been dead since Spectrum Holobyte released Vette years ago. The platform that didn't have a single texture-mapped shoot-'em-up may have at least five before the end of the year. Meanwhile, high-quality role-playing game development drags and sports sims are stuck in a golf cup.

Of course, talking to developers of games you want can and has had an impact, but most game developers are pretty good at extrapolating Mac demand for their games by the size of their installed base. Getting a DOS developer to port a game in-house isn't always desirable anyway. Some of the most successful ports have been handled by specialized translation companies such as Presage, Bullfrog Software, and the illustrious Mark Adams of Chuck Yeager's Air Combat and Links Pro fame. These days, it seems, it's more a question of money than time, effort, and expertise.

With MacPlay quickly moving into the driver's seat in the Mac market, and Electronic Arts cautiously catching some Mac religion, it's time to preach to the converted. MacPlay has convincingly shown that it is willing to bring over titles where there is a demonstrated demand. Its release of Wolfenstein 3-D later this summer will bring to the Macintosh a game that arcade fans lusted for before Bungie leaped ahead with Pathways into Darkness, and forces one to realize it's only a matter of time before id's current smash—DOOM—finds its way Macs. And here we were all talking to id!

Finally, don't be afraid to tell Mac game companies—even smaller ones—your dreams. At worst, they'll appreciate your ideas. At best, they'll ask you to beta test something they'll think you might enjoy!

The Mac games market is picking up steam. By this time next year, it may well be a runaway train. But trains serve their customers better if they can stay on their tracks, and it's up to us to help provide that direction.

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