

## review: **Troubled Souls**

by Roman Victor Loyola

Type: Strategy/Puzzle

Publisher: Varcon/MacSoft (800/229-2714)

Retail Price: \$34.95

Street Price: \$25.00

Requires: 256 color Macintosh with 4MB of RAM running System 6.0.7 or higher

Protection: None

Computer games are becoming more complex each and every day. With CD-ROMs, QuickTime, faster processors and great strides in graphic technology, the trend for games nowadays leans towards labyrinth-like plots and strategies that can be documented in volumes.

So how does a game with a simple objective and interface survive among the glitz and glamour of the market? By catering to the human need for instant, addictive gratification. Tetris filled the role nicely, and is one of the most successful games in computer history.

MacSoft's *Troubled Souls* is another one of those games that has a simple objective, yet can be quite addictive and provide hours of amusement. The basic object of the game is to form closed loops with the various pieces that are given to you during a regular interval. You are randomly given pieces in the form of curves, straight parts, or a cross, which acts as an intersection. The bigger and more complex the loops, the more points scored. Loops are made by choosing the area on the field with your cursor, and pressing the mouse button to place the part. A loop can be as simple as four curved pieces, or as complex as a large figure eight, so long as a no openings are left.

The playing field of *Troubled Souls* is placed against a dark, gothic backdrop that is handsomely designed. Body parts such as the eyes, skulls, and hearts are well drawn. You have three lives, signified by the Life Vials that contain hands with beating hearts inside. The background music sets a mood that will deter you from playing with the lights out. If you think this might be the perfect game for your PowerBook, make sure you have 8-bit video support; otherwise, you're out of luck.

[ow The Hard Part](#). The game sounds easy enough, down to the simple point and click interface. But as you progress, your playing field begins to fill with obstacles, leaving you with less room to work. And as you move further along, the pieces become labeled with body parts. Body pieces work like plain pieces, with one exception: Only one type of body piece may exist within a loop. For example, if you start a loop with an heart piece, only other heart pieces and plain pieces can exist in that loop. You can't make loops with heart pieces and hand pieces. Thirteen loops must be made before advancement to the next level.

The pieces fall out of The Queue. To place a piece on the field, you simply point to the area you want the piece, and click. The piece is removed from The Queue, and placed on the field. The higher the level, the faster the pieces fall through The Queue. You lose a life if you don't move fast enough and The Queue fills completely with pieces. To avoid filling The Queue on the higher levels, place the piece on an area of the field that won't interrupt your strategy.

You can also swap pieces between The Queue and the field. If you're running out of space, you can temporarily place a part within a loop until the appropriate piece falls, and then swap them. But keep in mind that only the piece at the bottom of The Queue can be swapped at any given moment.

As the game progresses, it's important to pay attention to The Queue, since it can be easily ignored while you're deciding where to place a piece. If you're not careful, The Queue will be close to full, causing you to frantically place pieces anywhere. The hearts in the Life Vials beat in correspondence to The Queue, and the hearts beat faster as The Queue creeps

closer to capacity. Use the sound to monitor The Queue as you decide to place pieces, but don't depend on it. If you play with the sound off, you'll simply have to keep an eye on it.

Extra lives are granted every 200,000 points. Keep track of the score as you progress. If you're very close to 200,000 points, still have three lives, and your field is a hopeless mess, let The Queue fill. You'll lose a life, and you'll have to start the field over again, but you'll have a clear field to use. You'll also regain that life when you accumulate enough points.

After completing all 13 fields, you'll find the animated finale, but the game isn't really over; it starts its pattern over, but at a faster pace and different body parts. This means you can keep playing, instead of trying figure out what to do with the software.

**First Born.** Troubled Souls is the first commercial game by 17-year-old Randy Reddig, who started programming in the fifth grade. While the basic concept itself might not be original, for a first game, it's pretty good. It has an addictive quality to it that will keep you occupied, and it's also easy to progress pretty far (which might also turn off some people). With Troubled Souls, Reddig has a solid foundation upon which to evolve as a game designer.

#### Pros

- Addictive
- Easy to play
- Relatively quick to master
- Nice graphics and sound

#### Cons

- Requires 8-bit video
- Relatively quick to master
- Can get monotonous