**** *Users who register will be notified of any* ****

**** *future releases when made available.* ****

What is in this panel?

These are miscellaneous items that may be if interest to you.   It is strongly recommended that you skim through them at least once so that you know what is going on with Columns...I don't want there to be any surprises!   After you've read through this once, there's probably no need to ever bother with it again.

This version is fully functional!   All features are enabled.

If you register with the author, you will be given a license key that will make the annoying "shareware alert" panels go away   *the key does not enable any new features*±this is the full game!   I know there there are a few people who dislike the appearance of License keys of any sort.   (I don't particularly like them myself, so I sympathize.)   I feel that the key mechanism I have implemented is justifiable, however.   Here's why I have used it:

(1)   I have found that many people forget that Columns is shareware, and so I needed a mechanism to help remind them of this fact.   The shareware alert panels are there to serve this function.   Once a user registers, there is no point to the panels, so the key keeps them from coming up.

(2)   I offer source code to those who register.   The source distribution has no key mechanism...so the fact that this distribution has a key shouldn't keep you from registering.   If you don't bother to obtain the source, and leave the key there, it shouldn't be a problem anyway, since once a key is given, you never need to worry about it again.

(3)   The implementation tries to be inobtrusive to registered users. Register once and you are done with it.   The license "keys" act as a floating license±they are machine and user independent.

I feel that these reasons are sufficient justification for the key mechanism; I have tried to make the mechanism as reasonable as possible.   If you still hate me for putting it in, please send me e-mail and we can discuss it.

A terrific bargain available to you:

If you are considering purchasing PillBottle as well, there is a 'package deal' in effect: For a mere $15 you may purchase a license to both games!   (They are normally $10 each.)   The cost calculation in the new order form takes this into account.   If you are purchasing multiple licenses, and desire a quantity discount, please contact me before sending any money.

So, what's new with Columns?

The most important changes are:

- · Cosmetics.   Panels, mono images, the works.
- · New Preferences Panel layout (inspector style).
- · Better keyboard handling.
- · New keyboard commands (p, n).
- · "Revert" preferences item to take you back to the default game
- · License forms, registration numbers, suggestion mailer.   (The

suggestion mailer will probably *not* work with NeXTSTEP 3.0.   If you are using 3.0, use my e-mail address in the Help... panel.   This will be fixed when I obtain my copy of 3.0.)
· Game screen size is reset to new default first time you run Columns 2.0 but after that your Preferences settings take hold.
· Drag and drop colors onto playing field to set background color.
· Switch for Columns to drop from center/anywhere at top.
· Speeding up happens more smoothly.
· And many more subtleties!

   Feel free to suggest any changes or bug fixes that you'd like to see implemented.   Your input will determine which things get addressed first.

Some Future Plans:

There is stuff that needs to be added to Help, but I didn't have time to do for

this release: the files "ToDo" and "Changes" should be read into the help system rather than making you look for them inside the Columns.app folder. The highscore system needs to be explained.   For now, if you are having troubles, make sure that the file Columns.app/highscores has read and write priviledges granted to all users.   A description of   how to change sound effects and make your own images is missing.   If you want more information on any of these things, please ask me via e-mail (you can use the Send Suggestion... item in the Info> panel if your NeXT is on the Internet).

   I also plan to improve the auto-key repeat, some of the playability features, and spiff up the graphics in future releases.   Better Preferences for adjusting the sounds and images used will be implemented.   Getting simultaneous sound and music is also a high priority, but up to now has proven difficult at best.

Columns may launch slowly...

Depending on how you set your preferences, it may take Columns quite a while to launch.   Complex background bitmaps and the preliminary sound decoding are the culprits.   Of course, once these preliminary set-up things are finished, Columns is as fast as ever!   Note that resizing the screen from the Preferences... panel can also be slow if you have a large, complex image.   You may want to set the screen to a solid color using the Color Panel first, and then reload the background image after you have found the screen size that you want to use.

Getting source code to Columns...

Registered users may request fully commented sources to Columns.   The sources will be available sometime after July, 1992.   The only reason that I'm not making the sources available to registered users immediately is that I haven't had time to clean it up to my satisfaction yet...and I don't want to show

off some of my more ugly hacks until I can make them look less offensive.   :-)

Problems with the sounds:

   There seems to be a bug in the NeXT sound object which can crash this
game, usually at the most annoying time possible. The culprit seems to be
some method about six levels into the NeXT sound object, something which I
cannot alter easily.   Because of this, I have written a substitute object which
bypasses the NeXT sound object.   However, due to time constraints, this new
object is somewhat non-friendly.   When you start the game, it grabs the sound
out port and won't let go of it until you quit.   It does not matter if you've
turned off the sound effects in the preferences panel±Columns will grab the
sound out (DAC)   anyway.   (It doesn't grab the DSP, though, so you should be
able to do DSP.)   This means that even if Columns is being quiet, other
applications can't make noise.   If another app wrestles the sound out port
away from Columns...or you click on the mystery button in the Info Panel...then

Columns won't be able to make noise without restarting the game, since it will lose rights to the sound out port.   If this behavior bothers you, and you'd prefer to have a version with the NeXT crash±inducing object instead, contact me.   (This is for registered users only.   I can't imagine why you'd want it, though!)   Later in the summer±after I get my copy of 3.0±I will release a new version that re-incorporates the new NeXT sound object.   (Let's pray the new one will work right!)   Anyway, this version of Columns should be rock solid stable; I haven't crashed it yet!   (You probably will find a way, though, via Murphy's laws of software development.)   Other than the problems with the sound and lack of music, there are no known bugs.   If you find one, please tell me so that I can fix it!