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1. What is Space Dodge'm?

Space Dodge'm is a shareware version of the game of Dodgem. Dodgem is a game that was invented in 1972 by a mathematics student at the University of Cambridge -- Colin Vout. The name Dodgem comes from the nature of the game -- it is often necessary to 'dodge around' enemy pieces in order to advance your own.

(You can read about Dodgem in Martin Gardner's book "Time Travel and Other Mathematical Bewilderments" in chapter 12: "Dodgem and Other Simple Games".)

This version of Dodgem, Space Dodge'm, differs from the original game in its setting (deep space, on a space station rather than on a normal 'checkers or chess' style playing board), its playing pieces (shuttles and landers rather than plain black and white pieces), and the presence of a relentless time keeper (the rogue asteroid -- not present in Mr. Vout's original game).

Space Dodge'm is an example of a very simple game that has no known 'winning' strategy. The goal of each player is to move his or her shuttles or landers, one piece at a time, one square at a time (following very simple rules), until all have safely been launched and evacuated off the opposite end of the space station. The first player to evacuate his or her shuttles or landers wins the game. There are time constraints, however. The rogue asteroid "brakes for no one" and may vaporize the station before anyone can win.

6. The Boss Key.

I am sensitive to the fact that you might want to play Space Dodge'm in private at times.

To that end, if you hit the space bar anytime during play (unless a modal form is showing such as a message box), Space Dodge'm will instantly end.

This is also why Space Dodge'm minimizes program manager on start-up --- so that after the boss key is used you won't see an embarrassing 'Games' program group, up top, in front, for all to see.

7. How to contact the author.

If you have comments or suggestions, you can contact me by:

E-Mail at CompuServe: 74212,1123

or by letter to:

P.S. Neeley
248 W. 3325 N.
North Ogden, Utah 84414

8. Credits (or where did all this stuff come from anyway?).



Space Dodge'm was written in Microsoft's Visual Basic for Windows 3.0.

The shuttles, the landers, the exhaust flames, etc. were created using IconMaster -- an application furnished with Visual Basic. The BMP images were either created or re-touched as needed using Microsoft's Paint program furnished with Windows.

The very beautiful deep space background for Space Dodge'm came from the file ASTRO.ZIP in CompuServe's WINFUN forum. The impacted asteroid was also carefully cut and pasted from this file. Once again, Microsoft's Paint came to my rescue.

The asteroid BMP was carefully cut and created from a BMP file entitled ASTERS.BMP. I'm not sure where the original came from -- I think I converted this file from one in the GIF format but do not know where I got the original GIF image.

The sound file (SDBLAST.WAV) for the lander and shuttle launches was recorded via sound card, microphone, and the Window's Sound Recorder, with sounds from a PBS program, on the TV, dealing with the Space Shuttle. The asteroid impact sound (SDIMPACT.WAV) came from another PBS TV program on atomic bomb testing in New Mexico in the 60's. The celebration sound, SDWIN.WAV, is, of course, the TADA.WAV file furnished with Microsoft Windows 3.1 but with the volume turned up a bit. The buzzer sound (SDBUZZER.WAV) is a recording of a high school basketball buzzer.

The MIDI background music file was furnished as a demo, named HIDNSEEK.MID, with my Gravis UltraSound card. I changed it to suit my needs with MidiSoft's excellent software -- MidiSoft Recording Session -- and stored it as SDBCKGRD.MID.

This help file was written with the aid of Craig Villalon's shareware help authoring system -- VB Automatic Help Author v1.32.

The knowledge and interest in Mathematics and programming is due to my father Pat's influence and the fine education I received from the many Math and Science teachers and professors who taught so very well (obligating a debt I can never repay).

The time to complete this programming project was largely 'stolen' during the late, late evening and wee morning hours when more normal people would, and should, be sleeping. But, inevitably, some prime time was 'donated' by my wife, Barbara and my children, Jon, Melissa, Christie, Patrick, Nick, and James.

Some day they may come to understand that while other fathers were tinkering with the family car, mowing the lawn, doing woodwork in the garage, etc. -- tending to normal business -- their father, high in the dark castle tower, and bathed in the soft glow of the electron's fire, was practicing modern-day sorcery. For he was building something that would never really grow old and decay, that could be copied exactly many times with almost no effort, that could be used and enjoyed by many, many people at the same time, and that could be scattered on the electronic winds to the ends of the Earth. Yet, this something was made out of nothing but an idea, diagrams in the air, and glowing bits of phosphorus. Can there be anything more magic than that?

2. How do you play?

First, the object of the game is to get your shuttles (or landers) to the launch pads(and launch them!) on the far side of the board before you opponent does and before the asteroid vaporizes the station. The shuttle launch pads are at the top of the station, the lander launch pads are at the far right of the station.

Whose turn it is to start is decided by the computer at random and noted at the extreme right of the menu bar and also, visually, by the icon just below this turn indicator. You take alternate turns until someone has won or the asteroid has turned your game to vapor.

Shuttles move one square up, right, or left -- never back or diagonally. Landers move one square up, right, or down -- never back or diagonally. The possible moves are denoted by a "+" symbol in adjoining squares after you've chosen a piece to move by clicking on it. You then click your move choice (a board position with a "+" symbol) and your piece (shuttle or lander) will move to occupy the position you have chosen. Does this make any sense? Try it once -- you'll find it simple!

It is possible (though quite rare to just stumble into without trying to in the first place) to make a move in Space Dodge'm and leave your opponent without any valid moves at all. If you make such a move, and pin your opponent in this way, then you forfeit the game! You must always leave your opponent a valid move -- preferably a poor one, but at least one move nevertheless.

Remember: Space Dodge'm is not a game of cooperation. Yes, you and your opponent can gracefully avoid one another's pieces and race to the launch pads without any interference. In this case, the first person to move in the game always wins -- rather dull. No; the idea is for the 2nd player to move in the game to block the first player so that he or she must go around, "dodge", the 2nd player's piece(s). Once this happens, with various blocks and dodges taking place on both sides, the outcome of the game is very undecided. Of course each opponent tries to block the other in strategic ways but always, during the struggle, eyeing the launch pads and racing for one when they can. A well played game of Space Dodge'm is very enjoyable and exciting!



For example: In the game fragment at left, lander #2 (circled) is the only piece that is not part of a block (blocked by or blocking another piece). Lander #4 is blocking shuttle #1, lander # 3 is blocking shuttle #2, shuttle #2 is blocking lander #4, shuttle #3 is blocking lander #3, and shuttle #4 is blocking lander #1. Question: Should shuttle #4 launch? It could, but it is currently blocking lander #1. It may be better to leave this block in place for a while since it can be launched just as well later.

Bottom line: Get out there and block! Then wait, analyze, and when it's time, make a run for the launch pads!

3. What do the items on the menu do?

The menu items are mostly self-explanatory (I'll bet you've heard that before).

Options:

Change Board Size:

Change the board size to anything between 3 x 3 to 8 x 8.

Change Time-To-Impact:

Change the asteroid's time to impact -- between 15 and 3600 seconds

Begin New Game

Start a new game

Sound Effects?

Do you want sound effects? Sounds include shuttle and lander launches, asteroid impact, buzzer sound when you lose, and win celebration. To hear the sounds you'll need a sound card OR you can still hear the sounds, sans sound card, if you install Microsoft's public domain windows sound driver which you can find on almost any BBS or on-line service.

Background Music?

If you have a sound card and you're in Windows 3.1 with the MIDI sequencer activated, you can listen to some 'hurry up the asteroid's coming music'.

Play the Computer

Play the computer on four levels -- Novice, Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. The 'Switch Sides' option lets you switch sides with the computer whenever its your turn to move. The 'Cancel Play' option lets you stop playing the computer and return to playing both sides yourself or with a friend.

Help:

How to Play

Gets you to this help file.

About

Answers the question: Who would make something like this game anyway?

Exit

Exits, ends the game, records the board size, the time to impact, and whether sound is on or off, in the SDODGEM.INI file. Space Dodge'm will use this information on start-up next time you play to give you the same configuration as when you left.

4. Playing the computer.

You can play against the computer on four levels -- Novice, Beginner, Intermediate, or Advanced. Just click on the 'Play the computer' menu item and choose the appropriate level. You can cancel playing against the computer at any time by choosing "Cancel Play" in the same menu list.

While playing the computer, you can use the 'Switch Sides' option (any time it's your move) if you'd like to play from the other side.

The computer always plays the turn that is up at the time you choose a playing level -- either shuttles or landers -- and continues playing this side until you 'Switch Sides', 'Cancel Play', or 'Exit' the game.

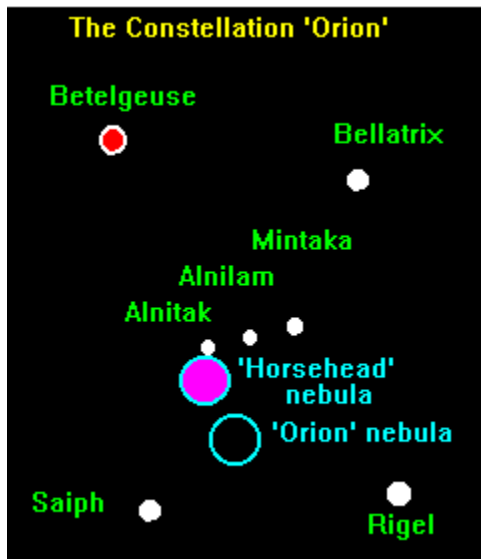
Remember that Space Dodge'm is a game that has no known 'do this and you'll be sure to win' solution. I've done the best I can, with my limited capacity and resources, of giving the computer a reasonable strategy to give you a good fight. If you find even the "Advanced" level too easy then spend some time thinking of a better strategy for the computer to play. Test your theory out by playing against the computer using your strategy. If it looks good, then send it to me and I'll try to incorporate it in a new release of Space Dodge'm (and give you the credit).

5. The SDODGEM.INI file.

Space Dodge'm uses the information in the SDODGEM.INI file in the Windows directory to re-set its configuration -- board size, time to impact, whether you want sound or not, and whether you want the background music activated or not -- when you start the game. This INI file is updated when you exit, via the menu 'Exit' command, for use next time you play. If you ever want to delete Space Dodge'm from your system, you should also delete SDODGEM.INI in addition to the files in your SDODGEM directory.

9. The 'Horsehead' background.

As noted in the 'Credits', the background BMP graphic for the game came from CompuServe's WINFUN forum. The background is a scan of a photograph of one of the most famous areas in the night sky -- the 'Horsehead' nebula -- located about 1/2 degree south of the star 'Alnitak' in the constellation Orion's belt. The bright star just to the upper left of center in the picture is Alnitak (the picture is turned on its side from how it would appear in the night sky from Earth). The nebula itself is a dark fountain of cool gas and dust that obscures the bright, hot gas behind it. The Horsehead nebula is not visible to the naked eye and even requires sophisticated photographic equipment to show its detail. A little further to the South, though, the great Orion nebula can be appreciated with the naked eye on a clear night. The Orion nebula is the middle 'star' in the three small stars that mark the star sword that hangs from Orion's belt at Alnilam.



The graphic at left may help you find this important region of the sky

10. Other Creations by the Author (or maybe you'll like one of these too?).

Here are some of my other humble shareware creations that you might enjoy. All can be found in CompuServe's WINFUN forum and, I would hope, eventually other services and BBSs.



Family Memory Match:

A Windows memory match game for the whole family. Play on an infinite number of levels against the computer, or play against a friend. Great graphics, fun for the children, definitely challenging for adults.



Shuttle Save:

A Windows 3.1 screen saver that uses your BMP collection as material to create stunningly beautiful collages in the contrails of launching rockets. Full featured including password protection. Not gimmicky, not intruding, ever changing as your swap BMP pictures in your library. The family will love it at home; as good as an office with a window at work.



Lunar BBall:

A Windows simulation (not just a game) of a small basketball court that can be moved from Earth, Orbit, to the Moon, and even Jupiter. What would it be like to play basketball on the Moon? Could you play in orbit. Can you even shoot the ball on Jupiter? Find out! Great user interface, great graphics, basket ball sounds -- educational and definitely fun. Real physics! Real action!



Gomoku Narabe:

The ancient Japanese game of 5 in-a-row for Windows. Great graphics, beautiful to look at. Easy to understand and play -- but definitely challenging. A good example of a simple game with no known winning strategy. Includes a 'mathematics laboratory' that allows you to explore alternate M x M, N in-a-row games. Real Japanese culture and flavor. Play against the computer on three levels or against a friend. A thinking game with history, culture, and deep mathematical meaning.

0. Afterthought: Please consider registering.

This really is an afterthought -- that's why it's numbered 0. Please consider registering. Space Dodge'm is not freeware, it's shareware; even though it is not 'hobbled' in any way, nor are there pesky 'nag' screens to bother you.

Unless you can't afford the \$10 (and with 6 children, I have been there), then you must register this program after 21 days. To register, send \$10 to:

P.S. Neeley
248 W. 3325 N.
North Ogden, Utah 84414

