eview: The C.H.A.O.S. Continuum

by Edward Hamilton

Type: CD-ROM space adventure
Publisher: Creative Multimedia (503) 241-1530
Retail Price: $69.95
Street Price: $45.00
Requires: Macintosh II or better, System 6.07 or later, 2.5MB free RAM, 1MB
free hard-disk space, 13" or larger monitor with 8-bit display,   CD-ROM drive with
150k/second transfer rate, 380ms or less access rate recommended.
Protection: None

y mother always told me, "If you haven't got anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

Oh, hello. Still there?

Okay, you're right. As a reviewer, it's my job, however unpleasant, to give you the inside
dope on The C.H.A.O.S. Continuum. But please bear in mind that the people who put this CD-

ROM together have families and feelings and, after the shellacking they're bound to get from game players and reviewers, will probably try much harder in the future to put out products that score lower on the Lame-O-Meter.

What makes the C.H.A.O.S. Continuum so lame? Let's take a look:

Problem 1. Poor plot line.

In the year 2492 (that's a thousand years after Columbus, get it?), a colony that is intended to be used as a supply base for deep space exploration is set up on Saturn's moon, Titan. This colony, New Eden, is a self-contained biosphere that features all the comforts of an earthbound metropolis.

The scientists and educators of New Eden throw together the first orbiting biogenetic computer and, in their infinite wisdom, name it the Cybernetic Holistic Autonomous Orbiting Server, or C.H.A.O.S. for short.

Let's take a little break here, shall we?

We're discussing a group of eggheads who have the smarts to build a self-perpetuating (meaning the thing grows like a fungus), sentient, neural net-based supercomputer. Now, don't you suppose that one of these brainiacs would have paused a moment and thought, "Gee, maybe C.H.A.O.S. isn't the kind of name that inspires confidence." I'm a not-terribly-bright guy living in the relatively dark ages of the late 20th century, and even I know that if I were to release a system called the Computer Rendering Aid Product, I would have some problems with the marketing department.

But I digress….

So now there's this awesome intelligence floating above Titan that needs a communications link to the beings below. Hmm, how about cathode-ray tube monitors? Nah, too 20th century. A direct audio/video link (they're sure to have worked out the bugs in HDTV by then!)? Too easy. No, our plucky scientists massage their noodles and come up with a truly 25th century kind of idea: "Let's ram a biogenetic implant into every citizen's head so that we can establish a direct brain-link with our old buddy, C.H.A.O.S.!"

Did these people even pass their S.A.T.s?

As you can probably guess, somebody slipped up when they coded C.H.A.O.S., and the computer starts to mutate, grow, and develop a rather surly will of its own. Before you know it, the damned machine has cut off the colony from all outside contact and sent the colonists into dreamland by chanting "You are getting sleepy, sleeeeepy…" into their implants.

That should be the end of the story, except for the fact that the scientists got one thing right: They apparently didn't have implants stuck into their precious crania. No, sir! While the rest of the colony is going nightie-night, the scientists beat a hasty retreat, via dimensional jump (don't ask), into a parallel continuum (again, don't ask), where C.H.A.O.S. traps them for the duration.

Here's where you come in.

It seems that the trapped scientists can only phone out from their time zone to a zone five centuries in the past (something to do with gravitational waves). They contact you — yeah,

you, sitting there at your computer terminal — and demand your help in freeing them from the continuum as well as destroying C.H.A.O.S.

You are to accomplish these tasks by taking charge remotely of an armed Time Probe, following the orders of the continuumed scientists, jaunting about the landing bay and science labs of New Eden, jetting off to C.H.A.O.S., and engaging in the BIG SHOWDOWN with the computer.

As you can see, this is not Pulitzer material.

roblem 2. Slow performance and limited access to the game environment.

The C.H.A.O.S. Continuum is a CD-ROM game, and as such, we should expect slower performance than from a floppy-based product that has been installed on a hard disk. Alas, even when compared with other CD-ROM games, C.H.A.O.S. is glacial. It's tough to experience a heart-racing pace when you're constantly waiting for the Time Probe to execute something as simple as a left turn.

That's provided, of course, that you can make the left turn. Many areas in the game are inaccessible. For instance, while scouting about in one of New Eden's science labs, you might spy some interesting bits of machinery. Cool, you think; let's explore! You hit the Forward button and are rewarded by a cybernetic voice exclaiming, "Motion restricted!" Why? There's nothing in the room to physically stop you from treading across the floor. It seems that the designers simply didn't feel like taking the time to create the graphics files.

Problem 3. It's too easy.

Along with the navigation controls, the Time Probe features an Information Sub-screen that provides a means for the trapped scientists to communicate with you. And communicate they do. The learned ones are understandably anxious to escape their continuum, but by constantly providing updates and directions, they remove much of the challenge of the adventure.

These are the challenges left you:

 a) Open doors in the Science Labs by mimicking musical tones played and displayed on a control panel.
b) Send a distress call to one of three off-planet locations. Two of these signals will be intercepted and mean termination of your probe; the other sends the code.
c) Navigate a maze.
d) Shoot a Drone Guard.
e) Navigate another, smaller maze.
f) Confront the Big Bad Computer, and prevail.

A reasonably experienced game player can expect to finish the game within a few hours.

Problem 4. The story doesn't ring true.

The difficulty in creating a world
so far in the future is that knowledge and technology that seem fantastic to us in the 20th century are, to the beings living in 2577 (the year in which C.H.A.O.S. takes place), commonplace. The C.H.A.O.S. Continuum trips up badly in this regard.

For example, we are led to believe that the top minds of Titan are working on incredibly high-tech stuff in their subterranean labs. Yet, when we access their top-secret computer databases, we are presented with a lecture on the basics of black holes — kindergarten physics, even in these dim days. Don't you imagine, that by the time 2577 rolls around, there will be more stimulating subjects to explore?

Problem 5. It's buggy.

Aside from the fact that the current version of C.H.A.O.S. doesn't run with an accelerator, Adobe's ATM and Type Reunion, or Apple's MacsBug, a map contained within one of the Science Lab computers is incorrect. If you take Creative Multimedia at its word and follow the map assiduously, you're dead.

For the sake of a cheap joke at the beginning of this review I'm afraid I've led you astray and let my mother down. I do too have something nice to say about C.H.A.O.S.

The animation sequences, created with the help of a Silicon Graphics system, are quite good and the graphics, overall, attractive. Perhaps, if Creative Multimedia had diverted some of the time and energy they spent on creating these visual goodies to quality writing and game design, they would have produced a more believable and challenging game.

Pros
• Fine graphics and animation

Cons
• Poor plot line
• Slow performance and limited access to the game environment
• Too easy
• Buggy