MG: Cool Games, Hot Show

by Tuncer Deniz

I had a feeling about this year's Macworld Expo show in Boston, a feeling that I was going to be disappointed. A feeling that the traffic, muggy weather, and lack of shipping titles was going to get me down. Well, I was right. This year's Macworld Expo in Boston was one I will soon forget. After spending nearly 5 hours during the first day parading through the rather thin crowds, I knew the show was missing something. Where was everyone? Why isn't anyone shipping any games? Well, thankfully after doing my job of gathering all the necessary info I needed to write this article, I had the privilege to play network Marathon for a few hours the next day before leaving. But don't get me wrong, the publishers that DID come to Boston had some great stuff to show off.

The classic arcade game Dark Castle has been rewritten by Delta Tao Software to run in full color on all Macintosh (color) computers, and will debut sometime this fall. The game, originally developed by Silicon Beach Software, was no longer supported after Silicon Beach was bought by Aldus Corporation, and devotees of the original were chagrined to find that it wouldn't work under System 7 or on many of the newer Macs.

Delta Tao Software, makers of Spaceward Ho! and Eric's Ultimate Solitaire, approached Aldus for the rights to produce a color version of Dark Castle. The graphics were completely redone in 256 colors, special backgrounds were added to many of the levels, and the game code was rewritten from scratch to ensure that it would run on everything from an LC to a PowerMac, under all versions of the system software. The levels, however, have remained virtually unchanged, so fans of the original Dark Castle will find that most of their old techniques and patterns will work just they same as they did on the old version. Reportedly, even the famous "Christmas tree" easter egg has found its way into the new version, along with some new ones.

fter Dark Castle is released, Delta Tao plans to begin work on the sequel, Beyond Dark Castle, and eventually the company hopes to develop an entirely new Dark Castle game to complete the trilogy.

There will even be an upgrade path for registered owners of the original Dark Castle, since in addition to the game rights Delta Tao also received "a big, dusty box" full of the original registration cards. Dark Castle is due to be released this Fall; contact Delta Tao for ordering information.

Changeling Software is busy these days not only promoting software of their own but publishing externally developed titles as well. One of those games, Avatar: Principles of Conflict, is a computer board game with a revolutionary twist. Based loosely on chess, Avatar brings the challenge and excitement of this age-old game into the 21st Century by changing the rules.

Avatar is, in fact, a collection of five chess variations. This not only revitalizes chess for current players but also levels the playing field by being quite different from traditional chess and therefore removing the vast advantage of having studied historical chess games. Furthermore, while many chess aficionados develop variations, few of these are ever played due to unusual board requirements or lack of experienced competition. Avatar addresses these issues by providing both the board and the opponent on your Macintosh. Avatar will be published on CD-ROM for 680x0 and Power PC Macs and will be shipping in September.

Changeling also showed their upcoming Pax Imperia 2.0. The new version retains all of Pax Imperia's features, scope, and strategic elegance while adding realtime, 16-player network play over LocalTalk or modem connection; a more interactive ship-to-ship combat system which emphasizes the significance of each ship's design while providing greater tactical flexibility; and a dramatically streamlined user interface. Pax 2.0 also incorporates an advanced map-generation technology developed by Changeling which enables players to view and colonize thousands of different planetary surfaces. Finally, new advisor functions provide players with easier and more-complete access to the information necessary to manage their empires; while new color graphics improve the game's already stunning visual appeal.

Frontal Assaultware is planning on a Mac invasion in the 4th Quarter with Onslaught. The game is of divisional level continental warfare based on a "1950ish" style army. One or two people can play on a single Mac or two can play on an AppleTalk network or through ARA. Your goal in the game is to conquer a computer generated continent using forces of armor, infantry, mountain troops, airborne infantry, fighter, and other forces you've built. The game features beautiful 256 color artwork, liquid smooth scrolling, and an intuitive interface.

Dust: A Tale of the Wired West is the latest creation from Cyberflix, from the company that brought you Lunicus and Jump Raven. The game takes you back to the year 1882 to the town of Diamondback, New Mexico Territory. Here you'll be able to walk through the town's streets and alleyways, explore barrooms and banks, talk with more than 30 interactive characters, and face down notorious bank robbers. Dust is set in the DreamFactory, new technology created by Bill Appleton, which allows players to interact more fully and with more characters than ever before in CD-ROM entertainment. Look for Dust in early 1995.

Ah, but that's not all! Cyberflix is also working on a 4th quarter release of Skullcracker, an action-horror arcade CD-ROM game. The dead have suddenly come alive (along with other weird mutants) and it's your job to exterminate them. As freelance exterminator, Bonecracker, you have join forces with Mortality Enforcement and help them put these unruly beasts and uncooperative cadavers back in their proper place. Using a variety of weapons and implements, your mission takes you through cemetaries, cathedrals, catacombs, woods, sewers, backstreets and....yes, the urban shopping mall.

Onto hardware, the guys at Bungie Software were showing their upcoming game Marathon using a virtual reality headset called the CyberMaxx. Weighing some 14-ounces while worn, viewers can see a 360-degree virtual environment with a 62-degree horizontal field of view. The headset also provides a high-performance stereo speaker system and real-time tracking technology so that when the user moves his head, the game environment also moves with him in full color with 3D stereo and visuals. The two .7" active-matrix liquid crystal displays have resolutions of 120,000 by 180,000 pixels and is compatible with IBM and Mac computers as well as Sega, Nintendo, and Jaguar games systems. The retail price on the CyberMaxx is around $700 and will be released sometime in September.

MircoQue, makers of the QueStick (see the review in the August issue of IMG) was showing of their new QuePad, a game pad like controller. The QuePad comes with 4 assign able buttons on the top and two additional buttons on the front end (similar to SNES controllers). Overall the new QuePad feels great in your hands and should be a big hit when it debuts this September.

And as if that weren't enough with hardware, Advanced Gravis announced it would ship the Phoenix Flight and Weapons Control System in the first quarter of 1995 for the Mac. The Phoenix features 24 programmable buttons, analog   or digital rudder and throttle control, and a jet style joystick handle with aileron and elevator controls, all in console. It remains to be seen as to whether the Phoenix will be able make on dent on ThrustMaster's dominance in the flight sim joystick market and emerge as the ThrustMaster killer.

Finally, all of you who have been dying for DOOM can now rejoice, it's finally coming to the Mac! Lion Entertainment signed an agreement with id Software (the original developers) to port both DOOM and DOOM II to the Macintosh. Interestingly enough, Lion Entertainment is also doing the Mac port of Super Wing Commander for Origin Systems.

The shareware version of DOOM for the Mac could be here as soon as October 10th, but expect a later date. In talking with id, we learned they've decided to develop DOOM only for Power Macs. However, we've also recently learned that the folks at Apple are putting pressure on the id guys to do an 040 version of DOOM. It'll be interesting to see who wins this battle <grin>.

f you've never seen or played DOOM, the game is based on a simple concept. If it moves, shoot it. The game features extremely fast 3D scrolling graphics and some of the most heart-pounding action ever seen in a computer game. Fans of Pathways Into Darkness and Wolfenstein 3D will love DOOM and all its gore. Also look for the commercial version of DOOM, entitled DOOM II: Hell on Earth in early 1995.