

## reviews: **The Bottom Shelf**

What is The Bottom Shelf? It's where the older Mac games are usually found at your local software store. The games reviewed in this section have been released for some time now but are still selling, so you should get the Inside (Mac Games) Scoop.

### [Spectre \(1991\)](#)

Recently there was a unique episode on Star Trek: The Next Generation. It focused on a computer game that made use of a virtual reality environment. A virtual reality environment is one in which you feel like you are right in the middle of the game. On the

show, the game became very addicting because every time you completed a level it would stimulate the pleasure portion of the brain. Of course, this is science fiction, or is it? I have always found it interesting how science fact has a way of catching up with science fiction. It seems that Velocity Development took the first step at making virtual reality a reality on the Mac. They did this with the release of their first entry into the Mac game library called Spectre.

Spectre is a 3D tank battle simulation that has to be seen to be believed. Velocity feels so strongly about it that they claim it is more addicting than Tetris. Those are mighty strong words but I think Velocity has the ammo to back it up. This game could set a new standard for Macintosh arcade games. You are in full control of a fully armed and armored tank. The fight for your life takes place in the cyberpunk CyberArena. Your enemies consist of smart enemy robot crafts or your best friends. This is the beauty of the game. You can either play it in a solitaire mode or network it so you can compete against (or with) those you call friend.

On the solitaire mode it is up to you to capture the flag and move on to the next level. This may sound easy but it is not. Velocity has programmed your smart enemy robot crafts with Real Time Artificial Intelligence. These critters can even anticipate your moves as you move up in level. So far I have found myself up against four enemy crafts whose only fondest wish is to be my worst nightmare! If you really find yourself in a jam, you can always hit your hyperspace button (if it is fully charged) and move to a safer section of the arena. That will give you a moment to regroup and lick your wounds. Don't get comfortable- like the Terminator, they will be back!

Velocity claims the best way to truly appreciate the virtual reality of Spectre is by playing it through a Spectre network party. This is where you can really put your buddies in their place. Up to six people can be linked into one game. Each person must have their own legal copy of Spectre in order to be a contender.

Unlike the single player mode, the networking mode allows for three different scenarios; arena, flag rally, and base raid. Arena is a total free- for-all where you shoot at your friends and enemies for points. Flag rally is similar to arena except now you are trying to capture as many flags as possible. If you have captured any flags and get killed, the victor gets your flags as well. Game ends when the last flag is captured or by setting a time or point limitation.

Base raid is a capture the flag scenario. This is where you are broken into a red and white team. The object of this game is to destroy the enemy base by ramming your tank into it. This scenario really needs at least four players (two on each side). One to guard the base and one to enter the arena and kick tail.

The graphics are excellent. On B&W machines the graphics are vector line drawing while on color machines they are filled polygons and will need 1300K of RAM (750K minimum for B&W). The animation is very fluid and fast. I sometimes feel myself leaning into my turns as I play! The sounds are but the icing on the cake on what is going to become (and has) a member of the MacClassic Hall of Fame.

## Railroad Tycoon (1991)

Sherman set the wayback machine to the 1830s. That was a time when mass land transportation was coming of age. The great iron horse was beginning to chug along, delivering people and supplies throughout the eastern portion of the U.S. It was a time where a person could make some investments in a small railroad company and turn himself into a Railroad Tycoon.

Railroad Tycoon by Microprose allows you to build your own railroad empire from the ground up. As you develop your railway system you will have to decide which routes work best, the type of cars you will need to haul people and cargo, and what resources should go to which location. A lumber mill could send its product to one of two places. First it could be hauled off to a paper mill and then sent on to a city for use as newspapers and stationary or it could go to a power plant to make energy and other goods. By linking towns to cities, trade is able to flourish which helps the status of the national economy. A strong economy helps make it easier to get loans and sell (or buy) bonds and stocks to help your empire grow.

As your empire grows, make sure you are always looking over your shoulder. The competition is murderous. It would not take much for some other railroad empire to swallow up your entourage or go into a price war that could put your empire into a premature death. Life is tough in the railroad business and you must be fast on your feet if you expect to survive.

No two games are ever the same. Railroad Tycoon offers four different world maps to play on. They include NE America (1830), Western N. America (1866), England (1828), and Central Europe (1900). Each time you start a new game, the program will draw up a new world map. In one map New York City may be a megalopolis while another rendition may do it as a small town. This helps to keep the game fresh at all times.

Mastering how to play this game/simulation will take some patience. The world of railroading is not a simple environment in real life and this program is as real as you can get on a Mac. To help get you started a railroad tutorial has been included to help you get the feel of the game. The only minor weak spot I found in this simulation was in the manual. It was more written for the IBM version than for the Mac although a technical supplement was

added to fill in some of the gaps.

Middle and High School History teachers could find Railroad Tycoon an excellent tool in the classroom. First, it can teach students the history and development of the railroad industry. Then it can give them an appreciation of what it takes to run such an empire and lastly get them to understand why the railroad industry is as important to the world as the circulatory system is to any living thing. In any case, it is sure to get them on the right track!

This is an excellent simulation. It reminds me in many ways of SIM City. Sid Meier (creator of Pirates) did a bang up job redesigning this for the Mac. This is not an IBM port. You can tell that a lot of time went into the birthing of this gem. The graphics are real sharp and add a lot of realism to the game. The sounds are so good that Microprose suggests wearing headphones to help capture the full ambiance of the game. Just make sure you listen for the "all aboard" or you may be left behind on track nine going nowhere fast.

### Loom (1991)

It was the age of the Great Guilds. Mankind was trying to take dominion over the land. Five different guilds arose across the land. Some of these guilds became very strong and powerful while one particular guild fell into obscurity. This was the Guild of Weavers.

As time progressed, the Weavers truly perfected their trade. Anything that bore the mark of

the Weavers came to be held in high esteem. Soon the Weavers passed the need for cloth and began to weave the very fabric of reality.

Shunned and feared by the other Guilds, the Weavers built a small island to help maintain their heritage. Alas, the Weavers were to face another misfortune as infant mortality began to sore. Cygna was the first to challenge the ways of the elders. She was with child and felt that the way to end the infant death rate was to be found in the magic loom. The elders saw Cygna as a heretic and told her to repent in her ways or face the consequences.

The following night Cygna snuck back into the elder's chamber and began to work the magic of the loom. Above all else, she wanted her baby to be born. By the time the elders made it to the chamber, Cygna had worked the loom and given birth to a healthy boy. She named the boy Bobbin.

The Elders were not very amused with Cygna. Sentence was passed then and there. Cygna is banished from the land of Weavers. The Elders weave a draft that turns Cygna into a swan and she flies away. Lady Hetchel is given the task of raising Bobbin as she had raised Cygna.

Banishing Cygna does not end the woes for the Elders. A rift has formed in the fabric of reality and somehow it is tied to Bobbin. This causes the elders to fear the loom child.

The child is kept separate from all Weavers. Lady Hetchel teaches Bobbin all he needs to know and what the Elders don't want him to know. Hetchel teaches Bobbin how to weave and cast spells. Little did Bobbin know how important these lessons would prove to be.

It is Bobbin's seventeenth birthday when the Elders command him to appear before them. When he gets there he hears the elders arguing with Hetchel. They have found out about the secret training she has given to Bobbin. The elders pass a similar fate onto Hetchel as they had passed on to Cygna except Hetchel folds up into an egg. At that moment, a white swan crashes through the chamber window and, as if to protect Bobbin begins to work the magic of the loom. One by one the people of loom are turned into swans and fly off except for Bobbin and a lone egg.

Using the elders distaff, Bobbin finds a way to bring Lady Hetchel out of her shell. Hetchel then tells Bobbin that the rift in the loom grows worse and that it will be up to him to make things right and solve the mystery of what became of his people. With that, Bobbin sets out on his quest to solve the mystery of Loom.

Loom, by LucasFilm, is their second 3D graphic role fantasy game (see Indiana Jones and the Last Crusades April 1991 Apple Barrel) on the Mac. This has to be one of the most beautiful games I have ever seen rendered on the Mac. I still cannot get over how it looks on my Classic. Those of you who have color Macs are in for a real treat.

If you think my intro into this review was on the lengthily side, then wait till you listen to the full 1/2 hour tape that comes with the game. It's like going back to the time when radio was our main source of home entertainment. If anything can draw you into a story, this tape surely will.

The tape is a full length audio drama that was made at LucasFilm's Academy Award winning Sprocket Systems. I recommend that you listen to the tape prior to beginning the game. The tape will give a fuller understanding and history of Bobbin and the world he lives in.

Loom is just as much an audio as it is a visual game. As I said earlier, Hetchel went against the orders of the Elders and taught Bobbin how to weave spells known as drafts. Each draft consists of four musical notes or threads that are channeled through a device called a distaff. It's a pity that Bobbin does not pay better attention to Hetchel. The distaff's eight threads are used to weave a combination of four into a draft. Bobbin can only weave four of the eight threads. It looks like he would have to learn as he goes.

As Bobbin encounters certain objects in his quest, these objects will emit tones that correspond to the threads on his distaff. If these threads are in the range of his abilities, Bobbin can then play them back to find out what type of draft was woven. Bobbin will then enter it in his Book of Patterns.

Loom has two major levels of play. On the standard level you have a musical scale to help you identify the threads played on the distaff. The distaff glows as well to the corresponding threads. On the expert level all you have are your ears. You may wish to use a set of headphones on this level. If you solve the mystery of the loom on the expert level, you will then be treated to a special animated finale that is not shown on the standard level.

The drafts will randomly change with the start of each new game. This helps to keep the game fresh. Playing Loom is all done via the mouse. Not one keyboard command is needed. It will play on any Mac with one meg or more of memory and requires the use of system 6.03 or better. Enhanced sounds are available if you use 6.07 or better. Do you think you can unravel the mystery of the loom or just get tangled in the threads?