

rake's Corner

by R.L. Drake

To PC or Not To PC

I'm sure you've thought about it once or twice. Should I get an IBM/PC compatible so I can play all those cool PC games or should I just stick with my Mac? There's no doubt about it, the temptation is great. Sadly, most of the games that come out on the PC platform will never make their way to the Mac. Even if they do, it's usually about a year after its been released on the PC.

I had been thinking about purchasing an IBM compatible for years but I never did seem to get around it. Besides, for the most part, I was happy with all my Macintosh games. But this Christmas season clinched it. I went to a local Egghead Software store and saw one great title after another. Wing Commander III, DOOM II, Cyberia, and on, and on. I just couldn't stand it anymore.

So I did the unthinkable, I went out and bought myself a Pentium 90 MHz clone for about \$2000. Two grand ain't peanuts so I decided to investigate the purchase thoroughly by talking to friends who owned PC's and getting their advice. I also went to computer stores like CompUSA and called a few mail order dealers like DELL and Gateway. But in the end, I found a dealer advertising in the business section of the Chicago Tribune with reasonable prices. So I visited the dealer and told him what I needed, a game machine. He said he had just the thing for me. A 90Mhz Pentium with 16 MB of RAM, 500 MB hard drive, and a 15 inch Sony monitor. He also (thankfully) installed a CD-ROM drive (a Quad speed drive for just \$300!), a Soundblaster 16 audio card, a CH FlightStick Pro joystick, and a copy of Wing Commander III. So after handing over the check (God, that hurt!), I ran home and set up my brand new (albeit flawed) Pentium machine.

Yea, yea, I know what you're thinking....TRAITOR! Who me? Never! I'll never give up my beloved Macintosh (or my 540c, which I am using to write this article in the Las Vegas Airport, of all places). Within minutes of firing up my Pentium for the first time, I knew the Macintosh would be with us for a long, long time, God (and Microsoft) willing. But actually I didn't know what to do after the machine booted and gave me this c: symbol awaiting my command. Well, I had no idea how to run DOS so I went out and bought a book called DOS for Dummies so I could learn how to change directories and make things run. It was getting a little frustrating not being able to "jump" right into the games. So I read as fast as I could

and learned how to change directories (you actually have to type commands, how archaic!). Enough of this learning stuff, I want to waste hours of playing games, not learning!

So I decided to try running Wing Commander III for the first time. When I went to run it said I need more Conventional Memory to run the game. Huh? What? Conventional Memory? As opposed to what, Unorthodox Memory? I guess I needed more learning so I dug out the DOS for Dummies book again (trust me, I began to feel like one). The book said I needed a memory manager programmer like QEMM to give me more RAM. What? I have RAM, 16 megs of it. Whatever, I took the book's advice and bought QEMM. It had been 5 hours since I brought my Pentium home and still NO GAMES! OK, so I installed QEMM and got enough conventional memory going. So I ran Wing Commander III and was finally able to play it.

Overall, I was extremely impressed with Wing Commander III. It had a remarkably movie like feel to it and the high resolution 3D graphics were spectacular. I want MORE I said to myself! So I went out (again) and bought copies of Cyberia, US Navy Fighters, Nascar Racing, and a few others and gave them a test run (this was getting more expensive than I had originally planned). Overall I was impressed with the quality of these games as well, although with some of those game it asked me weird questions like what my IRQ, or DMA is set at when I tried to install them. Hello, habla Ingles?

For about a week I played with the PC, only on occasion starting up my Mac to check the old e-mail bag. After checking out Windows (I couldn't stop laughing when I first ran it) I felt a sense of relief. Frankly, I don't know what all the hoopla is about. Windows to me seemed like a joke. It looked bad, felt bad, and even tasted bad. Yuk! But I guess I understand the fascination PC people have with it after years of playing with DOS. It's like a Mac, but it's as close as it gets. I don't blame them for trying to make their PC act like a Mac.

Well, enough Windoze bashing, there's no need to convince you that it's not like a Macintosh. The real question here is should you buy a PC (if you've been thinking about getting one)? If you're a game fanatic (like I am), I would recommend looking into getting an IBM clone. I know what you're thinking, spend \$2000 just to play games? Well, I've found one thing about game fanatics, they'll do just about anything to play games. As far as which one you should get? Naturally, shop around for the best deal, mail order is probably your best bet. But I strongly urge you to stay away from 486's and anything below that and buy a Pentium. All of the games I've mentioned above require a Pentium (at 640 X 480 mode).

If you're on a tight budget, I'd recommend looking at the new DOS compatible cards (with 66MHz 486's) from Apple and Reply. They offer exceptional speeds at an affordable price. But don't expect to run high quality SVGA games on them, they simply don't have the horsepower.

You could also try SoftWindows on your Mac but since it only offers 286 emulation, it doesn't run games like DOOM. I won't even get into the speed issue. But looking into the new SoftWindows (an updated 386 emulated version coming out this spring) might not be a bad alternative, especially running on a 150 MHz 601 or 604.

The last option, of course, is to not get anything. If you're an occasional gamer, getting a PC just to play games is stretching it too far, especially at a cost of \$2000 or more. So you'll be missing out on some great games on the PC, so what (in my casual game player voice). There are plenty of Macintosh games out there now and more on the way. If you've been thinking about getting a PC to play DOOM, don't bother, it's coming to the Mac. And if you've been thinking about getting a PC to play X-Wing, don't bother, it's also coming to the Mac.

The bottom line is if you think you need one, go for it, I enjoy my Pentium. But I still believe in the Macintosh and the PowerPC. As PowerMac's become faster, there's no doubt you'll be able to play DOS games on it. I also believe 1995 will be a stellar year for Macintosh games and many of the games you've been wishing for (that are available only on the PC) will be coming on the Macintosh soon. But about the best advice I can give you right now is stick with your Macintosh, there's simply nothing better out there. Don't ever give it up.