

neak Peek: Dust

by Joshua D. Rothman

NOTE: Screen shots and information presented in this article are based on a pre-release version of Dust and are subject to change before final release. This article is not a review.

Cigar smoke glows in the dim light of the saloon. Both men examine their cards, their faces giving away nothing.

“You gonna see that bet?” says one man, his cigar held in one hand. The other player looks at him across the table. “What about that fancy knife o’ yers?”

Decisively, the other player lays his knife down on the table. The card shark tosses his cards nonchalantly onto the table, chuckling. Four aces. He reaches to gather his winnings.

“Looks like we got a cheater at the table!”

Both men look up at the barmaid. “The Kid’s been cheatin’ all along!” she says. Before you can blink, the knife that was lying on the table is through the Kid’s hand. The Kid draws, but the other man lunges forward and tips the table over, deflecting his aim. As the gunshots echo in the saloon, the only sounds that can be heard are the footsteps of the fleeing card player and the cry of the barmaid: “Run, stranger!”

[A Tale of the Wired West](#). The introduction to Dust makes it clear that Cyberflix really is in the interactive movie business. In the past, Cyberflix’s releases have wandered more towards the cinematic part of the spectrum, limiting user interactions to breathtakingly spectacular arcade sequences. Now, with Dust, Cyberflix has created a true interactive film, with equal portions of cinematic wizardry and interactive depth.

In Dust: A Tale of the Wired West, players will find themselves in Diamondback, New Mexico, a fully navigable 1880s frontier town. You’ll converse with the town’s many residents, play poker, blackjack, and the slots with full-time gamblers in the saloon, and — of course — have a few gunfights.

[n One End...](#) Dust is the culmination of 10 years of intense development. Bill Appleton, president of Cyberflix and lead programmer for Dust, has finished Cyberflix's proprietary development environment, the DreamFactory. We've seen DreamFactory evolve through the games that Cyberflix has released. Both Lunicus and Jump Raven, which changed the way we think about CD-ROM games, were created with early version of DreamFactory. As more products are released, most notably the upcoming Jump Raven II and H.M.S. Titanic, we should see use of the DreamFactory technology become even more advanced.

DreamFactory consists of eight modules for building three-dimensional models, putting together the CyberPuppets we've seen in other Cyberflix titles, arranging the musical score and other tasks. Developers, without needing to deal with the nuts-and-bolts code, are able to concentrate on story and content, using the tools provided by DreamFactory. If the final version of DreamFactory does for adventure games what its antecedents did for arcade games, we're in for some real treats.

[...And Out the Other!](#) The result is an experience unmatched by any other game I've played. The player walks around Diamondback, watching passing scenery and happenings in the town. We don't see movies of farm animals; we see images of farm animals generated in real time. Instead of returning to the same place to talk to a specific character over and over again, we can find the character all around town, doing his or her daily chores — characters are always accessible, and remember what you say to them. Instead of waiting for the CD-ROM to play jerky QuickTime movies in a small window, Dust uses Cyberflix's CyberPuppets to produce life-like facial expressions — all actors are real people, not the drawn cartoons we've seen before.

One of the most impressive features of Dust is the way it conveys a true sense of

movement. As we move down a street or an alley, the store-fronts and houses move. Shadows change depending on the player's position. DreamFactory creates the impression of a cross between texture mapping and rendering — fluid movement combined with exquisite detail. At times, Dust's graphics rival games like Myst. Dust doesn't trade speed for detail.

Classic Western. Dust's incredible graphics are complimented by an involved plot. The player assumes the role of the Stranger, a newcomer to Diamondback with almost no money, worn-out boots and, worst of all, no gun.

The story evolves piece by piece as the player meets the town's weary inhabitants, all with their own distinct personalities. Although the acting isn't Hollywood-quality (although that doesn't always say much), it has enough authenticity to make it believable. As you wander through the town, talk to gamblers and ladies in the saloon and explore the hotel and abandoned mission, you unearth fact after fact, mystery after mystery. Combined with the amazing graphics, the story draws you in and becomes instantly more believable. Dust really does give you a good case of the "you-are-there's."

Of course, Dust has all the elements of a classic Western — brawls, women (some respectable, some not), gunfights, drunks, and lots of chickens and guitars. Although the game is more focused on thought than action, some of the famous Cyberflix action still shows through. Dust has something for everyone — whether you crave the action or the puzzles.

A New Direction. Dust signifies a departure from the proven formula for Cyberflix. For one

thing, it's Cyberflix's first adventure game, focusing more on thought than action. For another, Dust is the first game to fully incorporate Bill Appleton's DreamFactory technology. Dust is amazing in its own right; if it's any indication, Cyberflix should only get better.

[Demo Instructions](#). Click on the button below to install a portion of the Dust demo to your hard drive. Then launch the demo from your hard drive. Make sure the IMG Jul/Aug 95 CD is loaded on your computer.