y Bart G. Farkas

After a successful college career filled Mike Stemmle with much revelry and very little studying, he sat around his crummy studio apartment watching too much daytime television and eating too much pizza. He did this for a year. Then a friend of his tossed a LucasArts interview his way. Much to his surprise, he was offered a job. In the six years he's been at LEC, he's been Lead Programmer on "Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis," Co-Project Leader on "Sam and Max Hit the Road," and Project Leader on "Afterlife."

IMG: Afterlife bears more than a passing resemblance to some of the other'Sim' type games out there. Was this intentional?

MS: A little. This was LucasArts' first sim game, so we spent a lot of time looking at the other sim games on the market, saying things like, "Oooh they did this well. We might wanna do something like that," or "Man, this interface really bites. Let's not make THIS mistake." One of the consequences of this approach was that we rapidly came to admire a LOT of SimCity2000's features, which probably lead to us paying "homage" to SC2000 more than we had intended to. Now that we've got our feet wet
in this genre, I think you'll be seeing a little less of that "standing on the shoulders of giants" vibe that you sometimes catch with "Afterlife." But hey, if the worst thing anyone says about "Afterlife" is that it looks a lot like SimCity, I'll be a happy camper.

IMG: What would you say was the most challenging aspect of developing AfterLife?

MS: Designing rewards for Heaven was a major league pain in the posterier. Coming up with creative punishments for Hell was easier than falling off a moss-covered log, but conjuring appropriate rewards for Heaven was harder than doing jumping jacks on that same log while carrying a hippo.

IMG: What is your favorite part of the game/gameplay?

MS: Personally, I like the gradual discovery of new tiles, complete with new jokes/descriptions/stories. Of course, now that I've played the game eight trillion times, that thrill of discovery is gone. Oh well. Second to that, I enjoy finding all sorts of goofy strategies to make structures evolve in different ways. The underlying mathematics of the game's artificial stupidity is a strange and wondrous thing, and I'm constantly surprised by its unintended side-affects.

IMG: Who came up with the idea for a heaven/hell game like this? (by theway, I liked the way you dodged the inevitable onslaught from the Bible Thumpers in the manual by mentioning that THIS IS NOT EARTH! :-)

MS: So much time has passed since I pitched my inital design (which was titled "Good Heavens" and would've featured the Tentacles from "Day of the Tentacle") that I've utterly forgotten how the idea came up in the first place. For now, I'm going with these two apocryphal stories:

1) "Afterlife" was inspired a bad joke whose punchline was "Where in Hell is Carmen Sandiego?"

2) "Afterlife" came about after a LucasArts employee bet me $10 that I couldn't get the company to build a sim game about something that doesn't necessarily exist.

IMG: The built-in tutuorials with the two helpers bantering is a great part of Afterlife, who did the voices for them? Especially Wormsworth, his voice was most fitting.

MS: Milton James is the drippingly nasty voice of Jasper Wormsworth, and Rebecca Arthur is the relentlessly chipper Aria Goodhalo. Considering the pure density of mind-numbing technobabble we had to insert into their dialogue, I'm overjoyed at how well their banter turned out. It just goes to show how important it is to hire professional voice talent for this kind of stuff.

IMG: Will there be a sequel or add-ons in the future? (I predict this gamewill be a big hit, when I offered it up for review to my writers, justabout every single one of them asked for AfterLife (and there are 35writers)).

MS: I've heard rumors of a tile editor, but right now they're only rumors. I can't even fathom where a sequel would begin.

IMG: Were there any difficulties in porting AL over to the Mac?

MS: There were virtually no difficulties porting this puppy over to the Mac, for two important reasons. First, our lead programmer, Justin Graham, made sure that our underlying engine was extremely portable. Secondly, LucasArt's resident Mac programmer, Aaron Giles, is a coding maniac.

IMG: Are there any features in the Mac version that are not in the PCversion or vice versa?

MS: Unless Aaron slipped some easter eggs into the Mac code that I don't know about, they're exactly the same game.