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he big software developers can talk all they want about "3-D Imaging". While they may achieve the depth and detail to make you say, "Hey, that LOOKS like 3-D.", they can't make it happen. They can fool your eye but not your brain. Leave it to a shareware jockey, though, to revive the old red/blue paper glasses and combine them with a computer game to give you a "real" 3-D experience. That's what you get with "Glimmer" from Jeremy Bem. You also get a bit of a headache.

For those who have never experienced this type of 3-D "technology", back in the 50's, movie studios began to produce movies, mostly horror and sci-fi, in "3-D". The scientific principle, which has yet to be significantly improved upon, is that the illusion of 3-D can be created in two dimensions by presenting two images (each of a different color). The eyes view this image through lenses of the two different colors. When the images combine, the flat screen appears to be three dimensional. Of course, it's not a perfect system: it's very hard on the eyes and you look real silly in those glasses. But it DOES work.

Extra points go to Jeremy for combining the imaging technology of modern computers with this nostalgic magic trick. What makes it a worthy download, though, is that Glimmer is a solid game.

Vaguely reminiscent of "Crystal Quest", Glimmer takes place in a series of rooms in which diamonds hang suspended in the air around the room. The rooms have highly irregular shapes with deceptive corners and spires jutting into your field of vision. You must pilot your dreidel-like alter ego to collect these diamonds and exit to the next room. Your score is based on the number of diamonds you collect and how quickly you go about your business. Opposing you, of course, are a rogues gallery of villains who want nothing more than to end your little party.

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he sound is excellent with clean, well-implemented stereo, and unobtrusive music. The visuals, too, are quite good. The movement of the objects is very realistic, and the complicated contours of the rooms are the game's most interesting challenge. The 3-D illusion is particularly effective with the scenery, turning it into an interactive Escher print.

The game play is good but suffers from being just too cluttered. Since the "characters" are rendered so large to enhance the 3-D effect, any more than six makes movement inordinately difficult. When you have four villains, six diamonds, a bunch of mines, and yourself in what is a fairly limited space, the game becomes far too difficult. This, combined with the speed of the game and the rather long time required to adjust to the 3-D effect, makes for an ultimately

unsatisfying game.

I might be inclined to stick with it if the red/blue effect weren't so hard on the eyes. Perhaps due to the natural modulation of computer monitor images, the 3-D effect in this game is quite strenuous. I didn't notice it as much when I was playing, but as soon as I stopped and removed my glasses, I felt the effect immediately. Although Glimmer represents a refreshingly original idea, it may be too much for many people.

While I admire the game's structure and its ingenious gimmick, I believe that its faults are fairly serious. This does not, however, mean I would dissuade anyone from trying it out - eyestrain is in the eye of the beholder. If it is not a problem (and you can find out for yourself by writing to Jeremy for a complimentary pair of glasses when you download the program), you will get some fun out of Glimmer. Less subjectively, though, I think the cluttered feel of even the early levels keeps Glimmer from being anything above average.

Pros

- o Good visuals and sound
- o 3-D very effective and adds to gameplay.

Cons

- o Game seems cluttered
- o 3-D has potential for eyestrain.

Publisher Information

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here are two kinds of shareware games. First, there are those of commercial or near commercial quality which tend to be original games or ones otherwise unavailable on the commercial market. A fine example of the first beast is Ambrosia's "Maelstrom" which made a defunct title ("Asteroids") available again and jazzed it up with the latest technology. These games tend to appeal to gamers who generally prefer the quality of commercial releases but like the bargains available with shareware. The second class of shareware are versions of popular commercial releases available for much less than their mass marketed cousins and usually with a number of original and quirky features. We Mac gamers tend to see a lot of these due to number of A-list titles which never make it to our platform. These games tend to be a bit more rough-edged than commercial games but that's their appeal; if you like these kinds of games, you probably like garage bands, basement fanzines, and the movies they do on Mystery Science Theater. The measure of these games is not so much how they compare with their commercial inspirations but whether they are, in their own right, fun to play.

Modeled after Mortal Kombat, Sprite Fight 2002 (a sequel to the popular Sprite Fight 2000) features photorealistic characters, violent hand-to hand fighting, and Fatalities (moves or key combos which send thine opponent to his maker in a particularly gruesome manner). Since Mac MK fans have been thus far left out in the cold, a shareware version of this concept might be just what we need to get our fix.

SF2K2 is built around the customary forces-of-evil-taking-over-the world-and-only-through-a-tournament-of-skill-can-the-good-guys-win scenario. The plot, though, is a just a simple cover for the real object, kill the person on the other side of the screen. Not that there's anything wrong with that!

The game can be played by two people, one person against the machine, or you can allow the computer to play with itself. You can also play against the computer in a tournament. After defeating "enough" opponents, you are treated to a "Tournament Breakout".

o become the ultimate killing machine, you must master the controls which, for each character, consist of directional keys, block, kick, punch, uppercut, a flying attack, and a projectile. All of the attacks (except the uppercut which must be used while crouching) can be done in combination. A new addition to SF2K2 is my favorite command, the "taunt" key which you can use to laugh at the feebleness of your opposition and, incidentally, to add health back to your rating. While mastering the fighting technique is not difficult, the keyboard layouts are another matter.

With no option for a joystick or mouse control, you must adopt a complex arrangement of keyboard commands. While the Player 2 controls are awkward but eventually workable, the Player 1 controls are a mess. Crammed over in the lower left corner of the keyboard these controls are Carpal Tunnel Syndrome waiting to happen. Try covering these keys with both hands: Shift, Control, Option, Command (or Apple), Space, S, D, Z, X, and C. And since you can't customize the keyboard, you are stuck. One way around this is to make the computer Player 1 and yourself Player 2. OK as long as you are playing alone, but a real disadvantage for the poor sap who gets to be 1 in a two person game. That's not the end of the story, though; in tournament play you can ONLY play as Player 1.

This lack of customization is particularly puzzling because nearly everything else in the game can be fiddled with. You can lift up the hood and make adjustments on backgrounds, sounds, and even characters. One of the most intriguing features of SF2K2 is the power to add in new fighters and, if you have the technology and know-how, you can invent whole new armies of foes and alter egos. No more hunting for hidden characters or having to win a match without hitting the punch button from the right side of the screen less than 20 pixels from the statue of evil warrior Blotto of Ulm. Just draw your warrior up, enter him or her, and you have a new character. If this project sounds daunting, there is plenty of help available as the game's creators have provided a number of software tools and help files to get you up and building the perfect beast. In the end, this do-it-yourself gaming is the most appealing aspect of Sprite Fight 2002, because the game itself is nothing real special.

The technology used to create the photorealistic characters of Mortal Kombat is both extremely expensive and labor intensive but creates a shocking level of realism and fluidity of motion. Given the cost, it is unrealistic to expect the same level of realism from a shareware game. Unfortunately, realism is not the issue; the issue is smooth, reactive game play and the limited animation in SF2K2 just doesn't allow for it. At all but the slowest speed, it is quite difficult to play with

any skill—I actually found that I did better just hitting buttons near randomly than I did trying to fight with any sort of strategy or technique. Further, the characters are, by necessity, rendered so small, that the nuances of mano a-mano combat are simply lost.

Though an interesting toy to have around, Sprite Fight 2002 is no substitute for Mortal Kombat unless all MK is to you is hitting people and seeing them spew a little blood. The game itself is only mildly diverting though it becomes more so if you get into designing your own characters. The bottom line though is that the shareware fee, a mere \$5, is a bargain so you've got very little to loose. The only catch is that SF2K2 is a huge download and if you are pulling it off a commercial service, the cost of the game will rise rather quickly. Myself, I will wait for the summer release of MK3; sure it's a little more expensive but sometimes you just have to hold out for the real thing.

Pros

- A diamond-in-the-rough charm
- Character creation tools are a real DIY gamer's dream

Cons

- Choppy, hard to control animation
- Keyboard controls are awkward and not configurable

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