y Brad Newell

inkha is not a game. Let's get that out of the way from the start. Though billed as an interactive multimedia novel, its interactivity is limited to turning the page and adjusting the volume. There is only one ending, and your actions have no influence on the way the novel ends. Why, then, is Sinkha so wonderfully compelling and such a pleasure to read?

The Story

Sinkha starts out as a printed graphic novel. The producers used the Macintosh to create full 3D, wireframe models using Stratavision 3D to be rendered with lighting effects, textures, and backgrounds. The result was a series of extraordinarily realistic models of the human form, other organic shapes such as flowers and animals, and alien spaceships. After all of this work had been done, it was decided to publish a multimedia version of the novel at the same time. The Sinkha CD-ROM is the result. Sinkha features seamlessly integrated animation, music, sound effects, and still graphics to create an all-compassing environment that is as much a feast for the eyes as it is for the ears.

Sinkha transports you to the barren world of Thallisar, where a young girl dreams of escaping her planet by falling in love with a member of the Sinkha, a mysterious race of star-traveling immortals. The story is compelling, though the dialogue is sparse and simplistic. It is a shame that the text doesn't flesh out the characters to the same degree that the graphics do. Sinkha's ending is also fairly inconclusive; the story is to be continued

in an upcoming sequel. What you end up with seems like only Part 1 of a complete story. Sinkha takes about one-and-a-half to two hours to finish. This seems like a very short amount of time to spend with a typical CD-ROM, although in that time you get to see a non-stop display of hundreds of individually rendered scenes and over 11 minutes of animation.

inding Your Way Around

Sinkha is a multilingual application. When you start up Sinkha, you have the opportunity to choose between English, French, Italian, or German narration. The interface is minimal, but effective: you use the left and right arrow keys to go forward and backward in the book, and the up and down arrow keys to adjust the volume. Whenever there is text on screen, the program waits for a keyclick before continuing to give you time to read. At other times, the program will display automatically updating images in a "slide show" format. Sinkha is organized in chapters. There are 26 chapters in all, and you can skip to the beginning of any chapter to continue where you left off. Sinkha does not remember where you were the last time you used the program, so you have to remember the number of the chapter in order to continue. It would be nice if there were some sort of "bookmark" feature to save your place.

A Graphics Showcase

The graphic images in Sinkha are nothing short of extraordinary. Although Sinkha runs on a 256-color display, if your Macintosh is capable of displaying 16-bit or 24-bit color, you are in for a treat. Sinkha's images are so vivid and detailed that they are simply breathtaking. For budding graphic artists, in particular, Sinkha is worth a look simply to see what sorts of amazing effects can be coaxed out of a 3D rendering program. Anyone who has at least fooled around with creating 3D wireframe models will appreciate the difficulty and complexity of the models used throughout Sinkha. One of the models of the spaceship

Darcron was even used as the official splash screen for Strata StudioPro 1.5. As you leaf through the novel, the images are presented in various ways. Sometimes they will fade into the scene, other times they will blend smoothly into a Quicktime movie. Other times, they will tile over each other on the screen until they create a collage of different views of a particular scene. This variety is refreshing and makes full use of the high-quality images. It is also a dynamic, powerful way of telling the story.

ound Effects

Sinkha's music and sound effects are quite well done. From the crackling of thunder and electrical storms to the howling of the wind through creaking metal structures, your imagination is further sparked as you turn the pages. The musical segments are also keyed to specific sections of the plot: the music is dramatic and forceful at one point, relaxed and tranquil the next. The music only occasionally dips into repetitiveness in places where the musical loop is a bit short where the text is long.

The Bottom Line

Overall, Sinkha does a wonderful job of creating an environment in which you can experience the sights and sounds of a doomed planet. Sinkha's graphics and sound are brilliant. In fact, certain scenes and animations are among the best in the industry. For computer graphics buffs, Sinkha is worth its price for the graphics alone. All of the multimedia elements are masterfully woven together to create a believable, submersive environment. Some of the images depict the heroine in uncharacteristically revealing attire or positions, however, making this title inappropriate for children. This is unfortunate, since Sinkha's text and storyline remains on a 14-year old level throughout. With a more robust storyline and a more complete ending, Sinkha would be a tremendous product in its own

right. As it is, one would be better advised to wait for "Escape From Thalissar"—which is to feature Quicktime VR technology—and buy both titles as a two-part epic.

Pros
• Spectacular graphics
• Seamless integration of animation, sound, and music
• Did I say spectacular graphics?

Cons
• Weak storyline
• Relatively short playtime
• Aspects of story too old for kids, too young for adults

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