

Review: **Iron Helix (CD-ROM)**

by Hartley Lesser

Type: Sci-Fi action adventure

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte (created by Drew Pictures) (415/550-7651)

Retail Price: \$99.95

Mail Order: \$65.00

Requires: Color Mac, 4MB RAM, System 6.0.7 or later, hard drive, CD-ROM drive
(Incompatible with NEC CDR-25 model)

Protection: None

ou hear it all the time: CD-ROM hardware technology hasn't caught up with the advances in software know-how. While there's some unavoidable truth to this, there are a few Macintosh game publishers who have devised some workarounds, relying instead on ingenuity rather than waiting for quad-speed CD-ROM drives to produce credible entertainments.

Drew Pictures is definitely one of the smarter CD-ROM game developers. They've put a speedy spin on their Iron Helix disc, resulting in a game that's a delight to play. Additionally, the game is a graphical feast for your eyes with full, 3D-rendered art and animation. The user interface is enormously easy to learn and use, and the storyline—although not original—is exciting. In fact, the adventure is soooo good that, right now, the game's distributor, Spectrum HoloByte, is probably kicking themselves for only producing 5,000 discs for the game's first production run. Iron Helix had sold out when this review was started!

The trick employed by Drew Pictures is to use small windows on screen to contain the animation. When I first saw the screen size, I was concerned that they would be far too minute for noting critically-needed, explicit, detail. I was wrong—the detail is extremely well rendered and presented and, even in the smallest of the windows, I could easily perceive detail and depth.

[The Search for DNA](#). The standard science-fiction theme—hostiles from an alien race threatening Earth with total destruction—may be old, but it's also tried and true. In this variation on the theme, mankind is threatened by an alien race known as the Thanatosians,

and the only hope for rescue is a new and deadly virus-based weapon called the Iron Helix. Once unleashed, the Iron Helix attacks the cells of an organism and the DNA is mutated. This causes death in the victim within a few hours, because the DNA mutation inhibits the body from control of all metabolic functions.

One ship, the S.S. Jeremiah Obrian, becomes the unfortunate and unintended first test site of Iron Helix. Ordered to transport the secret weapon into some tactical war games, the virus escapes its confines and the entire crew is killed. The ship continues on its heading toward a small planet within the Thanatosian domain known as Calliopé. If the virus infects the citizens of Calliopé, the spark to ignite a totally destructive, galactic war would be struck, and life within the galaxy would cease.

nly you are in a position to halt the Obrian before it reaches Calliopé. You have at your disposal your intelligence and three Darwin 5 Probes. Onboard the Obrian, you must find the information necessary to halt its journey. This is done through collection of three different DNA samples that originated from the higher ranking—and now quite dead—members of the ship's crew. With the DNA in hand, so to speak, you can access various databases and control systems throughout the ship that will provide you with the required information. Unfortunately, between you and the DNA stands a Defender Robot, a tracking, firing automaton whose sole purpose is to seek out intruders and destroy them, whether metal or flesh in nature.

Your search must be conducted through the six decks of the Obrian. Some of the DNA you locate will be unusable and, as your probe can only store three DNA strands, you have to make certain you have the DNA in hand required for the next step of your quest. You'll also be looking for video clues that will tell you, little by little, how to defeat the Defender Robot. This must be done before you can actually stop the ship from its deadly flight. With only three probes at your disposal, you must complete a number of activities (some rather difficult) within a short period of time if you're going to save the galaxy.

Hot Stuff. Iron Helix is a delight to play. The sixth level reminded me a great deal of Alien, with its dark corridors and only one light beam to highlight progress through that area. Even keeping an eye on your radar display doesn't totally eliminate that feeling of imminent dread as you note the Defender Robot tracking you ever deeper into the bowels of the ship. Now, where was that damned hidden elevator shaft? Perhaps, with some thought and practice, you'll be able to figure out how to lead the Defender Robot into different areas of the ship, thereby enabling you to move into sectors that still need to be investigated, just one step ahead of destruction.

With display speed at acceptable form, smooth animations, and an exciting plot, this title is one Macintosh gamers will thoroughly enjoy. It'd be great if Drew Pictures were back at work quickly developing another title, because if Iron Helix is any indication of their capabilities, the consumer will definitely be the winner!

Pros

- A delight to play
- Good speed
- Smooth animation

Cons

- Small graphic window

Hartley Lesser has been writing software entertainment reviews since 1979, and writes THE ROLE OF COMPUTERS column in Dragon magazine (which has been running each month for the past eight years) and the Mac Attack! column in Mac Home Journal. He is currently the Entertainment Manager at Apple Computer Inc.