Mission Thunderbolt
by John Hausmann

In the early 80's, a game was ported from UNIX, which became known as Rogue. It was simple in premise, explore unknown territory, survive as long as you can, going as deep as you could, accumulating as much treasure as you could. The graphics were crude but it was a new idea in gaming and it became a huge success (it's still popular and you can find it now as NetHack, Hack, Moira and Rogue).

Shortly after the Mac was introduced, a shareware product called Dungeons of Doom thrilled those who were able to play it. It expanded on the Rogue concept by providing a simpler goal, retrieve an object and exit the maze. It sported much better graphics than Rogue, which was pretty much limited to the extended ASCII set that is available on PC's. Now let's advance, if you will, to present day. Cassidy&Green, publishers of the popular Crystal Quest and Sky Shadow, have brought us the latest in this genre of games, Mission Thunderbolt (although most of the genre deals with Fantasy, Mission Thunderbolt is Science Fiction based).

Your mission, in this installment (there are rumors that the next installment is currently in Alpha test), is to travel deep within an "abandoned underground research and development lab", searching for a prototype of an anti-matter bomb, called L.A.M.B., that will save humanity from the invasion of an Alien race. There are 16 main levels, called Regions, 12 sub-levels, called Warrens and 2 supplementary levels in the Detention Center, for a total of 30 levels for the game. The game starts with the player selecting characters attributes that are randomly determined by the Mac. The game recommends you try to get high values for dexterity and constitution. Make sure that you follow this advice. After you have completed this phase, you're off and running in the complex.

The game plays much as Rouge does, you start with nothing explored and no experience points. As your character travels through the region, he encounters of "bad guys" that must be fought in order to gain the experience necessary to travel deeper into the complex. Along the way, the player encounters different objects, weapons, armor, pills and 'strange devices', that may or may not be helpful in solving the quest. The player can also find gold that can be used to purchase more powerful weapons, armor and healing for when things are most desperate.

A wise gamer will save as often as possible during the first attempts at solving this game, receiving penalty points but ensuring that he will not have to repeat an in depth search of a specific region if the death of a character occurs. Death is almost inevitable during the first few attempts at the game.

Designed for the Mac, the interface is very well implemented. The large command base can be accessed through menu items or buttons. The manual will be required reading for those new to the genre. It took me 18 hours, cumulative, to solve it on its normal setting ,there are four available, easy, normal, advanced and expert. I am currently playing at expert level and have only progressed through the first three regions. Earlier versions of the game had some bugs that affected playability but the latest version (1.0.6) seems to have solved most of the problems. For those tight on disk space be aware this game will at least 7 Mb of disk space. The only fault I can find with the game is in its copy protection. The game uses a pink colored code sheet with faint blue/gray writing that is, at times, difficult to read. It seems as if Mission Thunderbolt randomly asks you to match a picture and enter the code. The major drawback is that it can ask you for verification several times during a game session. This is a major annoyance but has minimal

impact on play.

The game has excellent sound and graphics. The sound of a dreadnought can be frightening, a moppet humorous and the sound of the snagglepuss frustrating. Sounds are an integral part of the game, providing clues as to what's happening. A close-up mode is available, enabling you to observe the level of detail the designers have put into the graphics although I don't use it much because you can't see far enough away to provide ample warning when a bad guy is approaching. The game can be frustrating at times but will bring you back time and again, in an effort to solve it. Once solved, you will still go back into the game in an effort to improve the scores received on earlier attempts.