

A Look at Mac Games

Last week I had the good fortune to attend the MacWorld Expo in Boston. Ostensibly I was there at the behest of my corporate masters, who wanted a full report on the latest tools and hardware coming down the pipeline for graphic artists. But, devoted game player that I am, I spent a good part of the first day checking out all the hot new entertainment titles. For those of you who were unable to attend, I've pulled together as much information as I can recall about what I saw. Please understand, though, that this is by no means a comprehensive overview of all that was on display at the show.

MacPlay, surely the commercial game company with the strongest commitment to the Mac entertainment market, had the largest booth of the entertainment-only companies at the show. They were demoing several of their upcoming titles. The most impressive by far was Descent. For those who are not familiar with it, Descent is a 3d action game that was released as shareware for the PC within the last year or so. Descent is similar to Marathon or Doom, except that the player controls a ship which handles like an airplane. Gameplay involves working one's ship to the bottom of complex subterranean mazes to destroy the core, while collecting power-ups and battling a variety of enemy craft along the way. PC players rave of Descent, especially of net play against other humans. This will be brought over to the Mac version. MacPlay had a playable demo up and running and it looked and sounded AWESOME! They were playing it off of a 9500, so of course it screamed, but it was still very impressive. Graphics were fluid while on highrez and running full-screen size. A MacPlay rep said it would definitely be released, as shareware, before Christmas. MacPlay formally announced the following titles and rough release dates: Descent - Q4, 1995; Mortal Kombat II - 1996; NBA Jam: Tournament Edition - 1996.

MacPlay was also showing Frankenstein, which is based on the under-achieving 1994 movie remake. Frankenstein incorporates video clips and stills from the Hollywood production. The graphics and sound effects were very impressive, though to be honest I only spent a minute or so fiddling around with it, as nearby they had DungeonMaster II running. This also looked great since the graphics have been redone from the blocky PC originals. The sounds were also first rate. Both of these titles are also

supposed to be released before Christmas.

Cassady & Greene had a large booth with a variety of software. Most interesting, and the only really new game, was a strategy boardgame called AmoebArena. Gameplay is hard to describe but is similar to a combination of Attaax, checkers and chess. Players compete against up to three other computer or human opponents. Graphics were very good. Word of mouth on this one is very excellent; supposedly gameplay is hugely addicting. A little bird told me to expect some new, interesting titles from Cassady & Greene before Christmas as well. This is rank speculation, but who knows, maybe Cassady & Greene will finally get around to releasing a sequel to the wonderful Mission Thunderbolt.

Papyrus was showing an early beta of Indycar II, a sequel to the very popular PC racing game. The graphics were really superb, though gameplay was far from complete. For now the cars have only forward and reverse gears, and crashes are not fully implemented. A Papyrus rep said the Mac version would be compatible with their upcoming on-line service which allows head to head competition against up to 32 other racers. Mac or PC users will connect via modem, either through local access numbers or a national 1-800 number. They plan on sponsoring tournaments and competitive leagues as well.

Papyrus was in Virgin's booth (I'm pretty sure Virgin is going to distribute Indy Car II for Papyrus) and Virgin had several demos running. They're releasing an updated version of Monopoly that incorporates multimedia elements and a lot of rendered animation. They've just released the graphically intense Daedalus Encounter, which they were also running. They were passing out catalogs, and inside were some screenshots of an upcoming fantasy role playing game called Rivers of Dawn, which I'm pretty sure is a game being designed by Gary Gygax, one of the inventors of Dungeons and Dragons. The graphics looked fantastic, but its hard to say much about gameplay from a few screenshots. The same catalog also shows shots of another upcoming game, Alien Alliance, that seems to be a Wing Commander-type game. Again, it's hard to tell much from screenshots.

Bungie was demoing the sequel to the hugely successful Marathon. They had a booth set up for network play which was of course three deep in people, but I managed to score a copy of 'The Disk,' and have been playing around with it on my roomie's wonderful new 7200. **(editor's note: see PowerMacs Roll Out for more info on the 7200)** In short, Marathon 2: Durandal ROCKS!

Bungie is simply awesome. New features include several new enemies, a larger viewing area, 'intelligent' Bobs with weapons, two person cooperative play, and fluid effects including the ability to travel underwater. There was

no word on when it will actually be released, but I can tell you that if you liked Marathon (and who didn't) then you'll love the sequel. (editor's note: see [Marathon II Preview for more info](#))

A new company named Anark was demoing a very interesting looking 'game' called Galapagos, which incorporated some artificial intelligence algorithms. It looks absolutely gorgeous, but it was really hard to tell how gameplay will be. Players don't directly control the spiderish looking creature that represents you in the very trippy looking gameworld. The premise is that one uses behavior modifying techniques to influence the spider's behavior as a means to helping it stay alive and navigate its way through a series of complex puzzles. Again, it's really hard to say how this one will turn out, but certainly the graphics were first rate, and it will be worth a second look when it's finally released.

Blizzard Entertainment was showing a virtually complete Warcraft: Orcs & Humans, which is a port of the very popular PC action strategy game. This looked and sounded very, very good. Gameplay is similar to Dune II (an older PC game) or The Perfect General. Players control villages of either Orcs or Humans, and gameplay proceeds in real time as players click on units and issue them orders. The blocky PC graphics are gone from the Mac version, and the Blizzard rep I spoke with said it will be out by the middle of September. He also indicated that if it sells well Blizzard will port the upcoming sequel, which will initially only be available for the PCs.

Blizzard is also the company that now owns the rights to Pax Imperia, and they were demoing Pax Imperia II. Graphics on this one were fantastic. Everything was rendered in 3d, and almost every window seemed to contain animated elements. It's due before Christmas this year, and registered owners of the original Pax will be able to upgrade to Pax II at lower-than-retail cost. In fact, the Blizzard rep has said on Usenet that all registered owners of Pax will receive notification of the offer soon.

Reality Bytes, the good folks who brought us the much maligned Sensory Overload were demoing Havok, a Terminal Velocity-like 3d shoot-em-up with excellent graphics. Players drive a jeep through a 3d landscape, battling enemies and other humans while collecting powerups. (Sound familiar?) While graphics and sounds were terrific, the most interesting aspect of the game was its network friendliness. Supposedly, an unlimited number of Mac and Windoze players will be able to compete against each other over TCP/IP. On the downside, this one will almost definitely need some serious hardware. A pre-Christmas release is expected for this one as well.

Access, publishers of the wonderful Links golf game, were showing Under A Killing Moon, which is a multi-cd adventure game complete with tons

of live video. It stars Margo Kidder (Lois Lane in Hollywood's Superman movies) and has a hard-boiled detective theme. The videos looked great, and there are some impressive Marathon-like 3d exploration scenes.

Starplay, the folks who produce those wonderful pinball machines, were showing an early demo of a new game called Wraith. I only got to see it for a second or two, but it looked interesting. Play involves piloting a ship through maze-like structures using asteroid style controls. Graphics looked decent, but not great. Frankly, this one looked a little flat, but it isn't out yet and I didn't get a real long look at it. It's hard to say how this one will turn out. Certainly Starplay makes some great pinball machines, so this one will also be worth a second look when it is finally released.

Apple was showing a prototype Pippin which crashed at least five times while I stood there watching it. I never did see it actually up and running, though I watched it try and boot Marathon a number of times. Clearly this one is still in the beta stages. I did hear from folks that it was up and running at other times, though, and could even play Marathon.

There were two things I really wanted to see that I did not. One was the forthcoming Lucas Arts game, X-Wing. As anyone who has played it can attest, Dark Forces is simply superb, and, as a diehard Star Wars fan, I really wanted to see a demo of X-Wing. It was at the show and from all I've heard it looked great, but sadly I didn't see it. Lucas Arts was also showing a demo of the forthcoming Full Throttle, which has gotten some good reviews on the PC side.

The other thing I really wanted to see was Apple's upcoming (any month now) integrated internet solution, CyberDog. While they demoed it at the World Wide Developer's Conference, they were not showing it (publicly anyway) at MacWorld, which for me was the biggest let-down of the show.

Still, there were a lot of exciting new products showing this year at MacWorld. Doubtless I've left out more than a few things, but I've covered the majority of new games on display. To sum up, watch for Havok and Descent. They both look really good. Oh, and save your pennies for a 604, since they both looked like they needed one.