

C*R*P*G*S

Computer Role-Playing Game Survey

by Scorpia



When CGW asked me to do a survey of computer role-playing games, it seemed a massive task. There were so many of them! Or were there? I started a list, which went quickly at first. *Wizardry*, *Ultima*, *Bard's Tale*, *Might & Magic*, the Gold Box series, *Alternate Reality*, *Wasteland*, ummm... *Elvira*... *Hard Nova*... ahh... hmmm... it's getting tougher... quick, Scorp, the archives!

As it turned out, there weren't as many as I had expected. It may not seem that way, but it's true. Once the list was fully compiled, it presented an interesting picture. There was a small cluster of CRPGs at the dawn of the micro age (roughly 1978-82). Then, aside from the occasional release of a new *Wizardry* or *Ultima*, there was a long dry spell that didn't end until about 1986.

That year marked the turning point in the CRPG market, as suddenly publishers were rushing to get such games out the door. The pace has been accelerating since then, with more of this genre appearing each year (1990 was a banner year, with the most new releases). That's why it seems that CRPGs are all over the place; it's a fairly recent phenomenon that more or less burst on the computer game scene.

The compendium that follows is not all-inclusive. It would be nice if I had (and had room for) an Amiga, Atari ST, and Mac in addition to my old Apple and IBM-compatible. Unfortunately, that's not the case. I can only talk about games I've played. So, for example, *Dungeon Master* is conspicuously absent from the list; it seems to be out for every computer except the ones I have.

Since such an overview can cover games only briefly, I have included the issue (by number and cover date) in which the particular CRPG was covered, either as a review or as a "Tale." In some cases, the game was not reviewed by me (hey, I can't have a monopoly on all the action!); these are marked by an asterisk.

Finally, a word about Fozzle. This is my generic term for the Ultimate Bad Guy (or Gal) who is behind all the trouble. Invariably, Fozzle is either an evil wizard or demon who has unleashed hordes of monsters that are making everyone's life difficult. Games that feature a Fozzle almost always have a big battle with him (or her) as the major goal of the game. These days, there is a slight trend away from "Kill Fozzle" endings, but most CRPGs still include it as the "big moment".

Alternate Reality: The City

Datasoft

Review: #32 (November, 1986)

First of a proposed multi-game adventure, *AR: The City* was a fascinating premise that turned out rather poorly, especially in the 8-bit versions. There was literally nothing to do beyond mapping out the city and building up your character for the next scenario. Of course, much was meant to open up to you as later scenarios arrived, but the total lack of any true goal turned what could have been a really involving CRPG into a tedious exercise in hack and slash. A game for those with great persistence and patience.

Alternate Reality: The Dungeon

Datasoft

Review: #44 (February, 1988)

Second and last in the series, *AR: The Dungeon* was a slight improvement, with several little quests to be completed, assigned by an Oracle. However, the design was very loose, and you could stumble on quests without having been told of them by the Oracle at all. A Devourer that showed up to steal items when your inventory became too large did nothing to improve matters. Although there was a bigger area to explore, emphasis in the game remained primarily on fighting. Better than the first game, but not by much.

Ancient Land Of Ys

Falcom

Japanese import converted from game machine to computer. Nintendo-style combat and graphics. A fairly simple entry with a few puzzles to solve. Several tough battles with major monsters (called "bosses" in the idiom of arcade gamers), otherwise pretty much a romp. Interesting mainly for seeing what the Japanese do in terms of lightweight CRPGs.

Bard's Tale I

Interplay

Review: 5.5 (November-December, 1985)

The initial game of the series is a combination of puzzle-solving and hack'n/slash set up in a very linear approach. Dungeons must be done in strict order for successful completion. Getting started can be extremely difficult, and the game can be saved only in one place, making for a certain amount



Buck Rogers

of aggravation. However, it does have many points of interest, particularly in the puzzles, and is definitely a game worth getting.

Bard's Tale II

Interplay

Review: #38 (June-July, 1987)

Without a doubt, the worst of the series. Combat reaches excessive and ludicrous proportions, while the Death Snares are nothing more than monotonous run-arounds designed to frustrate and aggravate the player. The "big battle" is a farce, with Foozle going down pretty quickly, but his guards taking many rounds to dispose of. Boring and pointless about sums up this one.

Bard's Tale III

Interplay

Review: #48 (June, 1988)

The series redeemed itself with the third installment, flawed though it was by several seams in the game. Basically a sequence of mini-quests, with the party visiting various lands and times to acquire a variety of special magical items. All of this, of course, is the prelude to the usual "ultimate combat" at the end, which, unfortunately, is again rather a letdown. The best parts are the quests themselves, which have a slight "adventure game" feel to them, as the use of different objects is often necessary to accomplish one's goal. Still too oriented towards the "hordes of monsters" approach to combat, along with spells of absurd power, but otherwise worth playing.

Beyond Zork

Infocom

Review: #42 (December, 1987)

Infocom's only entry in the hybrid game approach, its merging of CRPG with adventure does not mix as well as it should. Combat in particular is more a matter of getting the "lucky hit" rather than damaging an opponent sufficiently over time to kill it. The adventure portion is, of course, much better, as you would naturally expect from a company famous for their adventure games. So this one is really an adventure game with some CRPG features rather than a true hybrid.

Buck Rogers

SSI

Review: #78 (January, 1991)

A surprisingly enjoyable little game, using the AD&D Gold Box engine with the addition of character skills. Typical plot of stopping the bad guys, but the atmosphere of the old serials is re-created quite well. Side bits connected to the main story add a lot to the game; everything is related, one way or another. Essentially a quick-playing game, but fun nonetheless.

Champions of Krynn

SSI

Review: #70 (April, 1990)

First in the "Dragonlance" series, a slight variant of standard AD&D, primarily in the handling of magic. Go forth and beat up on dragons and dragonmen (as well as other

critters) to stop the evil Myrtani from corrupting the eggs of good dragons. Standard fare for the most part, although the final battle with Myrtani is wearisome rather than exciting. Cameo appearances by some of the characters from the books is a nice touch.

Curse of the Azure Bonds

SSI

Review: #63 (September, 1989)

Sequel to *Pool of Radiance*, with a bit more plot. Characters must rid themselves of five blue tattoos that put them under the control of evil forces. Improved combat with fewer opponents per fight; no more hordes of critters to slow things down. More linear than the previous game. Some interesting side bits, especially with the Rakshasa. For all that, it's still mainly hack'n'slash leading up to the usual "Kill Foozle" ending.

Dark Heart of Uukrul

Broderbund

Review: #67 (January 1990)

A standard dungeon-delving expedition with some interesting points, not least of which is the best auto-mapping feature in any game to date. Combat is better balanced, for the most part, than in many



Death Knights of Krynn

CRPGs of this type. Solving puzzles becomes important in the latter half of the game, so this one is *not* for those seeking only hack-and-slash entertainment. Has an unusual ending for a CRPG (play it and find out).

Death Knights of Krynn

SSI

Review: #84 (July, 1991)

Sequel to *Champions of Krynn*. This time it's Lord Soth and his endless undead legions of all varieties that are causing trouble. Quite linear; getting to Soth is a step-by-step process that needs to be followed carefully. However, you can take time out to wander the countryside for interim adventures as the fancy takes you. The showdown with Soth is standard stuff. Afterwards, two special areas open up for additional adventuring and goody-grabbing. All in all, though, it's mainly just another chop'em-up.

Deathlord

Electronic Arts

Review: #46 (April, 1988)

Poorly designed, poorly implemented mish-mash with a quasi-*Ultima* look. Everything that could be taken from other CRPGs was

thrown in with little coherence, covered over with pseudo-Orientalism, and developed into an extremely pointless game. Deficient manual makes it worse. Definitely one to avoid.

Demon's Winter

SSI

Review: #53 (November, 1988)

Follow-up to *Shard of Spring*, pretty much in the same style, but with an expanded engine. The world is larger, with more to do, and dungeons now require some puzzle-solving, but clues and directions on where to go or what to do are scarce. Many improvements over the previous game, and an interesting plot, although combat is not as balanced as it could be. The demon of the title is the main foe, but the ending does not rely on the usual "Kill Foozle" battle, which is refreshing.

Don't Go Alone

Accolade

Review: #65 (November, 1989)

Boring trek through a haunted house. Simplistic puzzles at best, when there are any. Ill-described character classes, some of whose functions are unknown. Magic is performed through the use of chemical formulae, the only point of interest in an otherwise dreary product.

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Dragon Wars

Interplay

Review: #66 (December, 1989)

First of a proposed series, *Dragon Wars* has a lot going for it: balanced combat and magic (no mega-death spells), skill use, interesting subplots, and a battle with Fozzle that will not be of the "ho hum, over in two rounds" variety. The only feature lacking is conversations with NPCs. There isn't much talking to be done here: most information comes (as it did in *Wasteland*) from reading designated paragraphs in a separate booklet. While the game does have a few rough edges, overall it's a good choice when you want something a bit more than a standard slicer/dicer.

Drakkhen

Infogrames

Japanese import with an interesting idea but poor implementation. Take sides in a war among dragonkind that also has profound implications for the human race. Odd combat style allows for little in the way of tactics or even control during fights. Character movement is occasionally awkward with people getting stuck at times behind obstacles, or the party not following the leader through doorways. Sparse documentation does not provide enough information. Terrible character generation system requires creating the party together; one poor set of stats and you may well have to start it all over again. This one is only for the patient.

Elvira

Accolade

Review: #82 (May, 1991)*

Beautifully graphic CRPG with many gory close-ups; not for the squeamish or faint of heart. This is true of combat as well, where much blood goes flying as you fight your way in and around the castle. Plenty of combat, using a variety of weapons and spells (cooked up for you by Elvira herself with ingredients you have to find). Lots to do and explore; this is a tough game and will not be finished in a few sittings. If you don't mind gruesome visuals, it's definitely worth playing.

Eternal Dagger

SSI

Review: #40 (October, 1987)

Sequel to *Wizard's Crown*, using pretty much the same engine, with a few enhancements and minor changes. Not as good as the previous game: *Dagger* is too weighted towards magic use in combat, and opponents are far more difficult to dispose of, making for lengthy battle sequences. Fighting in dungeons is especially frustrating. Interesting plot idea, but otherwise this game is only for the patient.



Elvira

Eye of the Beholder

SSI

Review: #83 (June 1991)

First in a new series from SSI, this one features a totally new engine and graphics, based on the *Dungeon Master* model. Excellent visuals and use of sounds to create a "you are in a dungeon" feeling. Emphasis is on puzzles over combat, a big departure from the Gold Box series. The combat portion, however, needs work, as controlling up to six characters during real-time fighting becomes unwieldy at times. Nonetheless, an impressive first effort that bodes well for the future.

Fountain of Dreams

Electronic Arts

Review: #78 (January, 1991)

Horrid post-nuke loser with a quasi-*Wasteland* interface. Inane plot, ridiculous combat, terrible ending. Not worth anyone's time or money.

Hard Nova

Electronic Arts

Review: #81 (April, 1991)

Science fiction CRPG using an improved variation of the *Sentinel Worlds* engine. Indoor locations are now fully graphic and movement is no longer a tedious business. Take on mercenary jobs for the Starkillers; recruit a variety of NPCs along the way. Good plotline with an interesting ending, allowing for two different ways of handling the main problem. Plenty of combat (which is well-balanced), with little of it random, except in space. Definitely worth your attention if you like space games.

Knights of Legend

Origin

Playing Tips: #69 (March, 1990)

Tactical wargaming with a thin veneer of role-playing. Well-done backgrounds and NPCs are buried by the weight of incessant combat: twenty quests, all in the same mold (bring back an item stolen by some type of creature), tend to become tedious after awhile. The game emphasizes battle techniques over all else. Only wargamers or devoted hack'n'slashers are likely to enjoy this one.

Legacy of the Ancients

SSI

Review: CGW #43 (January, 1988)

CRPG in the *Questron* style, with many similarities. Not surprising, as it was done by the same people. The only novelty is the museum with exhibits you enter by depositing the proper coins. Plot is almost identical to that of *Questron II*: destroying a scroll of evil spells. Primarily a hack'n'slash epic of moderate interest.

Legend of Faerghail

Rainbow Arts

Review: #79 (February, 1991)*

German import that should never have crossed the Atlantic. Poorly translated manual has several mistakes. Graphics are ugly to tolerable. Combat is absurd: characters in the rear rank can be hit by opponents nowhere near them (opponents that do not use missile weapons). There is nothing new or of interest in the game; a mediocre effort at best (the CGW review presents a quite different picture of this game and makes me wonder if we were looking at the same product).

The Lord of the Rings


Interplay

Review: #81 (April, 1991)*

Probably the best so far of the Tolkien adaptations, though not without weak points. Follows the first book (*The Fellowship of the Ring*) fairly closely in its main aspects, but also has a lot of side stuff added. The terrain covers a huge area, and walking around can be a bit much at times — especially as many things can be found only by stepping on the right spot, which makes for a lot of hoofing. Since new material has been added to round out the game (this being only the first of three parts), those familiar with the original story

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may find themselves a little bewildered now and then. It is best to go through *LOTR* slowly and carefully; this is a big game and will not be completed quickly, however well you may know your Tolkien.

Magic Candle I
Mindcraft Software
 Review: #58 (April, 1989)

CRPG in the late *Ultima* style, with much trekking around and gathering of information, as well as multiple mini-quests to perform. No endless stream of monsters or extraneous combats; this is *not* a hack'n'slash game. Careful note-taking is a must. Superior non-violent ending; one of the few CRPGs that does not depend on "Kill Fozzle" for the denouement. *CGW's* Computer Role-Playing Game of the Year for 1989, and deservedly so.

Martian Dreams
Origin
 Review: #86 (September, 1991)

Second in the "Worlds of *Ultima*" series, using the same engine as *Ultima VI*. Visit Mars in the 1890s. Nice re-creation of Victorian science fiction, with an interesting story line. However, this is more an adventure game than a role-playing game, as character stats have relatively little importance in accomplishing the mission. Overmuch walking about and backtracking, with no means of easy travel, is a weak point. Game demands patience and careful attention to detail, but is otherwise enjoyable.

Megatraveller I
Paragon
 Review: #76 (November, 1990)*

This computerized version of the popular *Megatraveller* role-playing game comes off rather poorly. Its most serious flaw is the atrocious combat system, which makes fighting an experience of excruciating frustration. Much time must be spent in earning money to get on with the game. Nowhere near as good as it should have been. Only for the devoted *Megatraveller* fan with a high tolerance for exasperation.

Might & Magic I
New World Computing
 Review: #36 (April, 1987)

Extensive CRPG, rivaling (possibly even surpassing) the *Ultima* series in the size of its world. Map-making is a must; expect to have 50+ by the time you're finished. Plenty to do besides cartography and exploration, with many mini-quests to complete and puzzles to solve. One of the few in this genre that has a nonviolent ending. Biggest difficulty is getting started, as combat in the early stages is unbalanced. However, it's well worth the effort.

Might & Magic II
New World Computing
 Review: #57 (March, 1989)

Not as good as the previous game on



Eye of the Beholder

many counts. Worse is the excessiveness of the combat, which turns this one into a "Monty Haul/Monster Mash" extravaganza. Weak plot padded with many extraneous activities, leading to a "kill Fozzle" encounter, followed by a real-time solve-the-cryptogram finale. Graphics are much better, and the party can be filled out with various hirelings, but overall, this one is only for the devoted hack-and-slash crowd.

Phantasy II
SSI
 Tale: 5.4 (September-October, 1985)

A surprisingly good little game, with many interesting features: auto-mapped dungeons, multiple parties (only one at a time can be out), dropping off of characters in different towns, and monsters that can (sometimes) be bribed to leave you alone. Combat is a little weak, as party members are strung out across the bottom of the combat screen when fighting begins, but this is not too serious a drawback most of the time. Standard "Kill Fozzle" ending, but he is tough to defeat.

Phantasy III
SSI
 Review: #30 (August, 1986)

Tough follow-up to the first game. Almost exactly alike in terms of engine and interface; the same manual is used for both I & II (with a card to detail the few differences, which are very minor). The world is smaller, but the monsters are nastier, so getting through this one will be hard slogging. Also, this isn't exactly a "Kill Fozzle" epic, and the rewards afterward are fun and better than in many games of this type. A good sequel to the previous game.

Phantasy III
SSI
 Review: #38 (August-September, 1987)

This one closes out the trilogy, and is by far the weakest in the series, even with the changes to the basic engine. For one thing, it is quite short, and players may be

astonished at how quickly they reach the typical "Kill Fozzle" endgame. Fewer dungeons to visit, so the world seems smaller. Monsters, of course, are even nastier than before, but the game can be finished with characters of lower level than usual. Still, the final battle is a toughie, and the final rewards are very nice, so the conclusion ends up being satisfying, if perhaps a little too brief.

Pool of Radiance
SSI
 Review: #49 (December, 1988)*

Initial entry in the Gold Box series; the game that started it all. Multi-quest format, leading up to the standard "Kill Fozzle In The Big Battle" ending. Has a more open format than later games. Biggest drawback to this otherwise well-designed slicer/dicer is the inordinate number of creatures to fight as the game progresses. Combats become drawn-out and tiresome, with no way to avoid them or speed up the action. Patience (possibly of Job) required to get through this one.

Prophecy
 Review: #59 (May, 1989)*

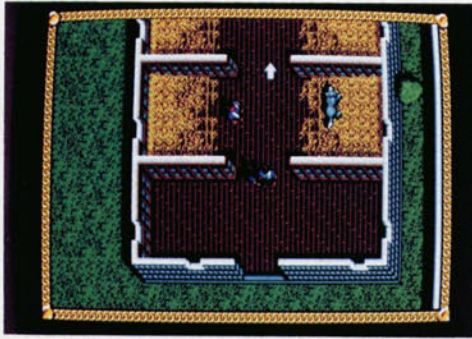
Another of the Nintendo-style, single-character CRPGs, with a plot heavily borrowed from *Star Wars* (your character is the son of a Jedi, sent into hiding with relatives for safety). Follow a chain of quests that leads to the inevitable "Fozzle Fight" at the end. Fast-paced arcade fighting and magic use (your character can use both magic and weapons). A fun one for those who like their action hot and heavy; those who aren't into arcade-type combats, however, may want to avoid this one.

Quest for Glory I: So You Wanna Be a Hero
Sierra On-Line
 Tale: #67 (January, 1990)

Cute hybrid of adventure and role-playing; one of the few that are truly replayable. Multiple solutions to many puzzles, depending on character class. Several different quests in the game, but no overall "Kill Fozzle" plot, quite a nice change of pace. Great graphics, particularly the animations. Lots of humor. Essentially a beginner's game, but can be enjoyed by all.

Quest for Glory II: Trial by Fire
Sierra On-Line
 Tale: #79 (February, 1991)

Second in the series, this one is more structured and linear than its predecessor. Not as replayable, as many events are time-dependent with little to do in between after you've gone through the game once. Slightly harder than the first game, but not by much. Save the home town of the Kattas, and "Kill Fozzle" at the end. Each "Fozzle" battle is different, depending on character class, with the thief ending being the most



The Lord of the Rings

difficult and involved. Has one of the best "reward" sequences around.

Questron

SSI

Review: #4.3 (June, 1984)*

Something along the lines of an early-*Ultima* clone (a license had to be obtained from Lord British for this game to be published), but with its own points of interest. Monsters roam the outdoors in specific places and require particular weapons to kill them. Travel is accomplished in a variety of ways, including by ship, llama and giant eagle (the most fun way to get around). Three nasty dungeons to traverse before the big one with Fozzle. This one is a bit old, but it still has one of the neatest reward endings in the genre.

Questron II

SSI

Review: #50 (August, 1988)

Reprise of a familiar theme; pretty much the same stuff as the previous game, although somewhat easier. Here you're out to destroy the evil book of magic by going back in time, a plot device rather reminiscent of Mondain and his evil gem in *Ultima I*. Mainly hack'n'slash with some dungeon-delving; no puzzles to speak of. Auto-mapping is available in some dungeons. Overall, not as good as the first *Questron*; this one is a mediocre effort at best.

Realms of Darkness

SSI

Tale: #37 (May, 1987)

CRPG of only moderate interest at best. March through various dungeons on little quests, solving obvious puzzles along the way. Not as well-balanced as it could be in matters of combat. Extremely linear setup, requiring completion of one quest before moving to the next. Overall, a game for beginners more than anything else.

Savage Empire

Origin

Review: #80 (March, 1991)*

First in the Worlds of *Ultima* series, using the *Ultima VI* engine and graphics. Avatar and friends are pulled by accident into a jungle world and must find a way to get home. This requires uniting a variety of native tribes who are all more or less at war with each other. Like *Martian Dreams*,

more oriented towards puzzle than role-playing, although there is a fair amount of combat to be done along the way. Not too difficult, but occasionally tricky. Good for filling in the hours while you wait for the next real *Ultima*.

Scavengers of the Mutant World

Interstel

Review: #59 (May, 1989)

Another post-nuke disaster that should never have seen the light of day. A game with ugly graphics, incredibly awkward interface, killer-dungeon mentality and truckloads of aggravation. Pass it by.

Secret of the Silver Blades

SSI

Review: #75 (October, 1990)

Sequel to *Azure Bonds*. The party is summoned (sans equipment) to help a mining town besieged by monsters in the mines. Of all the Gold Box games, the most combat-intensive and also the most boring. There is virtually nothing to do but kill almost everything in sight. For hard-core slicer/dicers only.

Sentinel Worlds I: Future Magic

Electronic Arts

Review: #54 (December, 1988)

Interesting science-fiction CRPG, once you get past the slow beginning; it takes awhile before the good stuff starts to happen. Good plotline, with several smaller stories inside the large one. Biggest drawbacks to the game are the incredibly tedious indoor movement system, and the terrible ending ("Okay, you won! That's it! Done, over, next.") If you can live with that, this is a good game to play.

Shard of Spring

SSI

Review: #33 (December, 1986)

Typical hack-and-slash romp as your party attempts to retrieve a magical gem (the shard of the title). Ramble across the countryside and through dungeons (most of which are small, except the final one). Numerous battles, leading up to the usual "big confrontation". This one is not bad for its type, and better than some.

Sorcerian

Sierra On-Line

Yet another Japanese import, with an interesting feature or two. Instead of the usual long adventure, this one sports fifteen separate small quests. This allows for a certain amount of variety, and will appeal greatly to those who find the epic-type games too much. The down side is the magic system, which is complex and unique, as spells are not acquired directly by magic users. Potions must be concocted and items enchanted (which takes a long time) in order for spells to be cast. Also, the action is arcade in style, which is typical for a Japanese game, and some will find this irksome. On the other hand, this is not just hack-and-slash, as there are puzzles to be solved along the way. The manual is thick, but is skimpy on some important informa-

tion relating to magic and occupations. Overall, good for a change of pace, if you can stand the arcade "thing" and get the hang of the magic system.

Space: 1889

Paragon

Review: #80 (March, 1991)*

Paragon's attempt to bring this paper RPG to life falls flat on its face. Uninspired graphics, disorganized plot, irksome interface, terrible combat system, and humdrum ending. While not a total disaster, it is likely that only the most hard-core *Space:1889* (paper version) fans will enjoy this.

Times of Lore

Origin

Review: #55 (January, 1989)

A minor CRPG in the Nintendo style, notable mainly for the use of an icon interface and simplicity of play. This one is essentially for the beginning CRPG player, and is in fact a good introduction to the genre if you haven't played anything like this before, or found the more complex games a bit bewildering. Experienced players, however, will find little of interest here.

Tunnels & Trolls: Crusaders of Khazan

New World Computing

Review: #79 (February, 1991)

Perfect example of a good game gone wrong (see the article for details on why that happened). Poor programming and/or playtesting allowed far too many bugs in the game. Very loose design, with little direction for the player on what to do or where to go. Unbalanced combat, especially late in the adventure. Overall, a big disappointment; for the hard-core *T&T* fan only.

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Origin

Tale: #44 (February, 1988)

Science fiction cartoon pretending to be a real game. Hokey graphics and simplistic play destroy any feeling of excitement or suspense. Shallow, bland, and not particularly imaginative. Good for a summer afternoon or rainy day when you want something that isn't mentally taxing or especially involving.

Ultima I

Origin

Review: #2.1 (January-February, 1982)

This first game in the series is truly epic in scope: aside from a large land (with dungeons) to explore, eras pass from primitive to high-tech, providing ever-better weapons, armor, and transportation. There is even an outer space combat segment! The basic goal is to eventually go back in time and destroy Mondain and his evil gem of power. One of the first games of its time to have a real outdoors; most in the genre were busily pushing you through underground passageways. This game also introduced talking to people to pick up clues, although in a much more rudimentary form than the current *Ultimas*. Biggest problem in the game (which was not really fixed until IV) is

the unbalanced combat system. Otherwise, a classic not to be missed.

Ultima II

Origin
Review: 3.2 (March-April, 1983)*

In this game, Lord British began tightening up the design. Here you're after Minax, the protege of Mondain. There is still some flying around in space (which could well have been omitted), and moongates are introduced for the first time, but there is also considerable scaling back in the structure, with a trend towards more plot. Aside from the uneven combat, and the fact that dungeons tend to be extraneous excursions, a good sequel to the original game.

Ultima III

Origin
Review: 3.6 (December 1983)

Best of the first trilogy. Time travel and space stuff have been dropped; the emphasis is on fantasy alone. Plot and structure are more developed. First Ultima to feature party adventuring, with a group of up to four, and a revised combat system with individual depictions of monsters and characters. Destroy Exodus, offspring of Mondain and Minax, in a surprisingly quiet and nonviolent fashion. This marked the turn of the Ultima series away from the standard "Kill Fozzie in a Big Battle" ending to resolu-

tions that are less combative in spirit, a trend that has continued through *Ultima VI*.

Ultima IV

Origin
Review: #25 (January-February, 1986)

Still my personal favorite of the series. The only game on the market where personal development of the character, beyond mere fighting skill, is the heart of the plot. This theme makes the game occasionally difficult for those who are only used to the typical slicer/dicer where the sole matter of importance is the body count of monsters.



The Savage Empire

Structure is very tight, but the format is open: this is by no means a linear game, and you have much freedom to roam and explore. Combat is better balanced here than in previous Ultimas, so even the beginning character alone is in no danger of being trounced by over-powerful opponents. A class act throughout.

Ultima V

Origin
Review: #47 (May, 1988)

A more somber theme prevails in this one, with the land of Britannia crushed under laws enforcing pseudo-virtues. Lord British is missing, and the Avatar is called back to set things to rights again. A worthy follow-up to the previous game, although the manual is surprisingly poor, omitting much basic information of importance. The Underworld is likewise a disappointment, being vast but essentially empty, and rather a tedious place to move around in. The structure of the game also seems a bit loose, and there is a slightly unfinished feel to it. For all that, *Ultima V* is the logical continuation of the previous game, with an involving storyline, and is not to be missed.

Ultima VI

Origin
Review: #71 (June, 1990)

The ground-breaker that ushered in a new

TWIN ENGINE GAMING PRESENTS:

Out Time Days

a game of Time Travel in an alternate dimension

THE EXPERIENCE: OTD is a game of life on a strange world. Although populated by a variety of semi-humanoid races, it is nothing like the Earth that your character left behind. Gone is the industrial might of large nations. The multi-talented worker is a thing of the past. Even your famed Time Jumping skills have been checked to a certain degree. However, you do happen to be one of the few Time Jumpers on this world, and that in itself is a major strength.



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OUT TIME DAYS is a highly interactive role-playing Play-By-Mail game with turns processed weekly. It has received excellent reviews, notably from Flagship and Paper Mayhem. Turn cost is \$5.00. The game is open ended and 99% computer moderated. The rulebook may be obtained for \$5.00 (refundable with startup). A special startup is available that gives you the rulebook, the startup turn, and five turns for only \$15.00.



Dependable, weekly, error-free turns since 1984

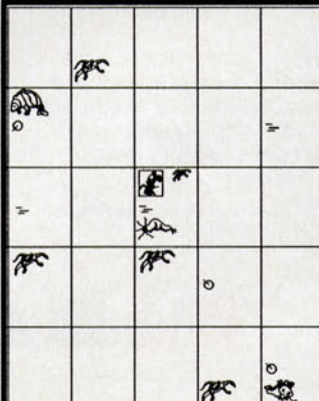
Space Combat

a game of pure tactical combat...
in a rather unique environment

You'll be fighting in an edgeless contest zone aboard living creatures. **Space Combat** is almost all combat, with some room for diplomacy. Offensive actions include the creature's Psychic Screams to mentally disrupt others, launching Inverse Mines that will implode near your enemy, freeing Spores to destroy internals, using Nerve Pulses to paralyze pesky scouts, and Virally Infecting your opponent in the hopes of taking over their alien. Each turn comes with a special full-page graphic



printout of your ending position to aid you in planning.



Space Combat was designed to be easy to learn, but difficult to master. Every game starts with ten players, and as each is eliminated, the chances of the game ending will increase. Turnsheets are custom made on a laser printer to aid you in filling out your next turn. The games run about 12-18 turns. Cost is \$3.50 per turn. A rulebook (required before you can join) is \$1.00 (free if you mention this ad!)

Twin Engine Gaming; Dept 631; 3254 Maple Leaf Ct.; San Jose, CA 95121

era in Ultima graphics, with a world and interface so completely different it comes as a shock to veteran players. The size is single scale, with no more "zoom-ins". Virtually all items are tangible and can be manipulated some way or other. Overall, the real-world feel to this one is astonishing, and takes a little getting used to. This is enhanced further by putting all the monsters in dungeons, so that combats on the surface are few and far between. The plot wraps up the first trilogy, as well as the second, reveals the secret of the Codex of Ultimate Wisdom, and provides some lessons on getting along with those who are different. The weak spot is the middle portion and the hunt for the pirate map, which is more a time-waster than anything else. Regardless, this one is definitely worth your time.

Wasteland

Electronic Arts

Tale: #48 (June, 1988)

Really the only decently-designed post-nuke game on the market. Desert Rangers investigate strange happenings in the deserts of Arizona and discover more than they bargained for. Bang-up ending, although not exactly in the "Kill Fozzie" class. Interesting subplots, with multiple solutions to many situations. Emphasis on skills (although this part was not as well

thought out as it could have been) as well as stats. Has, perhaps, more combat than is really necessary, but fighting is better balanced generally than in many games of this type. A good one to choose.

Wizardry I: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord

Sir-Tech

Review: #2.3 (May-June, 1982)

The original classic, and the first CRPG to give you a full party of individuals to control, instead of the usual single character roaming alone in dangerous places. Also the first to provide for heavy-duty magic use, with reams of spells for mages and priests. Delve into a ten-level dungeon to retrieve Trebor's (the Mad Overlord) amulet that was stolen by Werdna. 3-D point-of-view, with mediocre graphics: walls and floors are line drawings without color or decoration; no visible objects on-screen (stairs, for instance, have to be stepped on to find out they're there); static monster picture (although in full color) during encounters. All-text combat resolution.

Of course, *Wizardry* was never noted for its graphics, but for the quality of its game play. Moving through the dungeon levels was exciting, and occasionally frustrating, thanks to Dark! areas (where no light worked), Fizzle! areas (where no magic worked), spinners, teleporters, pits, and

other nasty contrivances, not to mention all manner of hostile critters. This was in addition to the tricks and puzzles, most of which were solved mainly by having the right item equipped, and a host of mysterious magical objects whose uses were determined by trial and error. While mainly hack-and-slash, it's still a grand expedition, even today.

Wizardry II: The Knight of Diamonds

Sir-Tech

Review: #2.4 (July-August, 1982)

Disappointingly weak follow-up. Tiny (comparatively) dungeon with only six levels. Pick up the pieces of the Knight of Diamonds armor that are scattered around through the dungeon. Playing *Wizardry I* first is a necessity, as characters must be imported in from that game. Nothing really new or innovative to be seen here, although the non-Fozzie ending is a nice touch; best for the hard-core fan only.

Wizardry III: Legacy of Lyllgamyn

Sir-Tech

Review: #3.6 (December, 1983)*

This one is not a true sequel, as you start out with level one characters. Essentially, *Legacy* is *Wizardry I* all over again, with a few bells and whistles added. The object is to obtain the Orb of Lyllgamyn from the

(Continued on page 108)

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PICTURES,
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FLEET MED, Tactical Naval Combat In The Med, 1939-1943.

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NewMAIN BATTLE TANK: MIDDLE EAST, Modern Tactical Armoured Combat. The Middle East seems to forever be in turmoil. And if recent history is any indicator, this situation will not be changing in the near future. MBT:ME, our third MBT game (in design for two years and delayed to incorporate data from the recent Gulf conflict) provides the terrain of the Middle East deserts and the forces of the local powers, as well as intervention countries, in a command oriented simulation that allows for past, current, and future combat situations. Prebuilt scenarios and a "build your own" system are provided. Amiga, Atari ST, & IBMPC.

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MBT: NORTH GERMANY, Modern Tactical Armoured Combat

BT: BARBAROSSA TO STALINGRAD, Tactical Armoured Combat In The East, June 1941 - May 1943.

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ROMMEL AT EL ALAMEIN, Battles For Egypt, 1 July to 6 November, 1942.

MOSCOW CAMPAIGN, Typhoon & White Storm, Aug 1941 to Feb 1942.

TO THE RHINE, The Allied Advance In The West, 29 Aug to 11 Dec, 1944.

ROMMEL AT GAZALA, Battles For Tobruk, 26 May to 27 June 1942.

STALINGRAD CAMPAIGN, The Turning Point In Russia, Jun 1942 - Feb 1943.

KURSK CAMPAIGN, Operation Zitadelle, Summer 1943.

OPERATION OVERLORD, The Invasion Of Europe, 6 June - 28 August, 1942.

GOLAN FRONT, The 1973 Arab/Israeli War In The North.

FALL GELB, The Fall Of France, Spring 1940.

ORDERING INFORMATION, PLEASE READ CAREFULLY: All games are \$60.00 each for Americans, \$80.00 each for Canadians (GST included), and \$65.00 each for purchasers outside North America. We will let cheques clear before shipping (6 weeks!), so, money orders are preferred. PLEASE be sure to tell us which computer you own. **Purchasers from outside of Canada should send payment in U.S. funds.** Nova Scotia residents must add an extra 10% of the total for Provincial tax.

SIMULATIONS CANADA, P.O. Box 452, Bridgewater, NS, Canada, B4V 2X6.

CRPG'S

(Continued from page 20)

dungeon. This requires running two parties alternately, one good and one evil. Aside from that novelty, and a change in the monster graphics, there is little to distinguish it from the previous two games.

Wizardry IV: The Return of Werdna
Sir-Tech

Review: #41 (November, 1987)

Wizardry IV is an inverse: instead of being the good guy, you play the evil Werdna, making his slow way up through the dungeon to retrieve the amulet of power. Along the way, you can summon a variety of nasty critters to help you in your fights against wandering bands of adventurers who want to keep you down. In addition, there is a raft of diabolical puzzles to solve as Werdna treks upward to the exit. When he gets there, the second half of the game begins. This one is involved and complicated, with multiple endings, and by no means linear. It was designed primarily for the experienced, hard-core *Wizardry* player and is not for the novice gamer. *Wizardry* fans who want a good workout shouldn't miss this one.

Wizardry V: Heart of the Maelstrom
Sir-Tech

Review: #56 (February, 1989)*

A better game than II or III, although it does away with the neatly sized dungeons, making for a lot of aggravation in mapping. This one is a combined rescue mission/kill Fozzle expedition. Combat is not as well balanced as it should be, and there is a lot of silliness in the game. Monster pics are improved over previous *Wizardries*, but the dungeon graphics are still lines. This one began the trend of actually using objects during play, instead of merely having them with you. Most puzzles, however, are simple, once you have the right item (or right instructions, as the case may be). One of the better features is (are?) critters you can talk to as you progress through the dungeon, who will provide information and/or have important items for sale; it's refreshing not to have to kill everything you come across. Overall, a medium effort: better than some, not as good as others.

Wizardry VI: Bane of the Cosmic Forge
Sir-Tech

Review: #79 (February, 1991)*
Tale (tips): #82 (May, 1991)

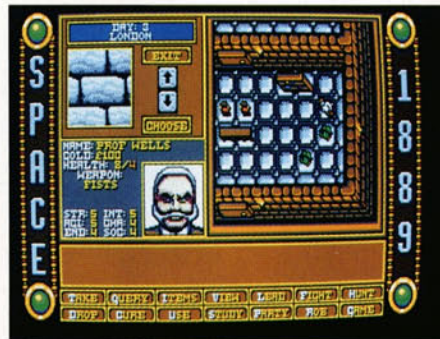
At last, the series breaks out of the line-drawing mold and starts to get into real graphics. The bleak and colorless walls are finally a thing of the past (and about time, too). While there isn't that much variety, it's still better than outlines. This one is not a sequel to *Maelstrom*, as you have to create a brand-new group, although character creation isn't much different from before, except in some of the classes and races you can have. Much more puzzle-oriented than most

previous *Wizardries*, with a lot of objects (not necessarily magical) to be used in different places and posers to unravel; however, the majority are not difficult. Interesting use of multiple endings, although how to get to them is somewhat obscure, as there are no clues. Combat in the latter part of the game tends toward imbalance. Weak in parts, but better than *Wizardry V*.

Wizard's Crown
SSI

Review: #31 (September-October 1986)

A better-than-average hack'n'slash game, featuring tactical combat and other interesting points. Fighting is extremely detailed with many options, but also somewhat time-consuming. A quick combat mode is available for the speedy dispatch of weaker opponents (done in text mode with the computer running both sides). No levels as such; experience is traded for increases in skills and stats, a very intelligent way of handling things. Good balance of magic/weapon in combat; spells do not become overwhelming. Very tough fight with Fozzle at the end. A good game for the bash'em crowd.



Space 1889

Wrath of Denethor
Sierra On-Line

Review: #37 (May, 1987)

An *Ultima II* look-alike, right down to the graphics, only not as good as the game it copies. Trek around the world to find out how to bring about the downfall of the evil Denethor of the title. Lots of tedious backtracking, with nothing particularly new or inventive in the game. If you didn't play it, you didn't miss much.

Moldy Oldies

These games are old (*really* old) and it's doubtful you will come across any of them these days. Even if you did, most are likely to be unplayable, since they were written mainly for the old Apple II and TRS-80 lines, although some might run on the IIGS.

This collection of the first CRPGs may surprise you a little. Not all of them were of the endless hack-and-slash variety, and some contain features you might not expect in games that were designed to run on small machines. Many were slow in terms of play speed, and their graphics primitive

by today's standards, but the concepts they introduced have been incorporated into most of the modern CRPGs. So take a look and see what was going on in "the good old days" when Apple was king and 64K RAM was a huge amount of memory (heh).

Aklabeth
California Pacific

This was Lord British's first published game. Bluntly, it wasn't all that terrific. *Ultima* fans may find it hard to believe, but the outdoors were absolute, unrelieved black. The only features were the little five-square symbols that represented towns (and carried over to early *Ultimas*), big X's that looked like scars (and represented dungeons), and way, way down on the right-hand side, a castle. In the castle was a lord who kept sending you out to kill particular monsters, after which he would raise you in rank (you started as a peasant). That was the whole "plot" of the game.

The main point of interest (other than it being Lord B's first) was the dungeoneering. This is where all the graphical efforts went. The dungeons were point-of-view, 3-D perspective, and you could see monsters in the distance, approaching you, becoming more defined as they got closer. What makes this especially noteworthy is that *Aklabeth* was the first CRPG to use this form; other dungeons typically had the overhead, bird's-eye-view look. Otherwise, *Aklabeth* was a pretty standard hack-em-up.

Adventure to Atlantis
Odyssey: The Complete Adventure
Wilderness Campaign
Synergistic Software

This trio of games by Robert Clardy, published sometime between 1979-81, were some of the finest of the early CRPGs. While mainly along the "Kill Fozzle" lines, they incorporated an astonishing range of features: true wilderness, with swamps, mountains, jungles, etc., that had hazards of their own to overcome; travel by horse, ship, magic carpet or teleportation; sailing by the wind (which required re-rigging the sails when the wind changed); nonhostile travelers such as merchants to buy from or mercenaries to recruit; temples, ruins, crypts and castles to explore; a bunch of items and magical objects to use; and monsters that inhabited specific areas (so you knew pretty much what you'd be up against in many locations), among others.

Not only that, but success required a lot of people on your side, especially for the final battles. *Wilderness Campaign*, for example, recommended that you have 50-75 warriors — a veritable army — in your party before going to take on Fozzle. And you thought you had it good if your present-day groups were six or eight characters strong!

More amazing yet, this type of detail was squeezed into games that were designed for 48K RAM Apples. Sometimes it makes me wonder about the modern CRPGs that require 640K or more, and what's using up all that space (grin).

Beneath Apple Manor
The Software Factory
 N/R

One of the earliest (1978!) CRPG-type games for the Apple. Used ASCII graphics (letters, numbers, and symbols) for the display. A single character fought through successive levels of nastiness beneath Apple Manor to recover the fabled golden apple. Written in Basic, it was terribly slow even by the standards of the day, but it was fun nonetheless. Interesting points: experience was traded for stat increases, gold for "brain scans" that were essentially save-game positions, and your character was able to use both weapons and magic. Even more, each new game created a random dungeon over which you had some control, such as choosing number of rooms per level and the difficulty factor (how tough the critters were). Not bad, for a game that was designed to run in as little as 16K of memory! The big drawback (aside from the slowness) was that the game had to be played in one sitting, as the save game was good only for the current session.

Bronze Dragon
Twisted Speare
Commonwealth Software
 Review: #32 (November, 1986)*

Hybrid adventure/CRPG in the *Swordthrust* mold, but a little more sophisticated, as you could create a new party right from the start and go adventuring with them. Aside from the main scenario, there were twelve others that you could play. These were somewhat like *Beneath Apple Manor*, in that you had control over their creation and difficulty. This did not change the plots of the scenarios, but did confer some advantages in having an idea of what you were up against. *Twisted Speare* was a follow-up with more scenarios to play, set in the Twisted Speare tavern. Most interesting was having NPCs drop in now and then to give clues and information about the various quests. It was another fun series that did not survive the graphics onslaught.

Eamon/Swordthrust Series
CE Software

Eamon was one of the first (if not the first) of the adventure/CRPG hybrids, blending standard role-playing features with puzzle-solving. You created a character with physical and mental attributes and sent him out into different scenarios. These scenarios required a combination of fighting (and a little magic) and regular adventure game puzzle-solving to complete.

This game was eventually released into the public domain, along with utilities for creating your own adventures. It survives to this day, and both the utilities and new scenarios can often be found on local bulletin boards (by this time, there may be other versions besides Apple floating around, but Apple *Eamon* is still the most prevalent).

Swordthrust was a revised and enhanced version of *Eamon*. Still all-text, it allowed you to pick up other characters in a

scenario who would join you for the duration of the adventure. Interestingly, monsters had a chance to either like you (and go with you), or ignore you (as long as they weren't bothered), as well as rush to rip out your throat. After the original game there were six different scenarios, with #7: *Hall of Alchemie* ending the series (the master diskette was #1), and each being more difficult than the last. The master disk was required to play any of the follow-up adventures, but the scenarios were complete games in themselves. It's a pity that *Swordthrust* did not survive into the graphic era, as it had great potential.

Galactic Adventures
SSI
 Review: #3.4 (July-August, 1983)

This was a sort of follow-up to *Galactic Gladiators*, which was mainly tactical wargaming with a science-fiction flavor. *Adventures* kept the tactical combat and added a bunch of little quests for the party to complete, thereby giving a bit more to do than merely bash. It was actually quite involved, for all that the adventures themselves were

for more and more decline, etc). Overall, this one was better than *Apshai*, but not by too much, since the game considered the queen "just another treasure" and there was no special message for getting her out of the dungeon. Two follow-up scenarios for the Apple were published, *The Keys To Acheron* and *Danger In Drindisti*; as with the *Apshai* add-ons, they were only extra adventures with not much new about them.

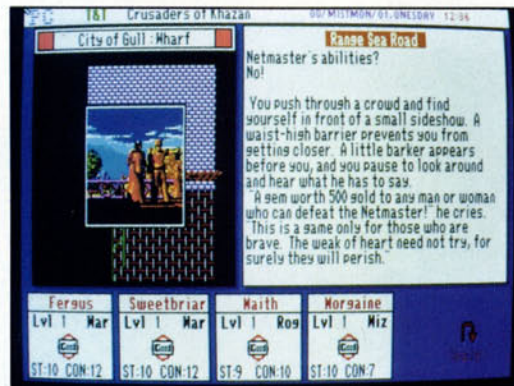
Telengard
Avalon Hill
 Review: 3.3 (May-June, 1983)*

Another of the early "hack'n'slash with no main goal" extravaganzas. Create a character and explore ever deeper into the dungeons below the surface. Very much influenced by *Dungeons & Dragons*, as shown by: a) the attribute range of 3-18; b) the requirement for getting treasure out of the dungeon before it counted towards experience; c) one level at a time advancement, regardless of the amount of experience acquired; and d) the spells available for use. (Do names like "Magic Missile," "Cause Light Wounds," "Phantasmal Force" and "Power Word Kill" sound familiar?) Interesting for its time, the game would be pretty dated today, especially with the advent of SSI's Gold Box series. Back then, however, it was hot stuff, and a fun way of passing the time.

Temple of Apshai
Epyx
 Review: #30 (August, 1986)

This game caused a sensation when it first appeared, being one of the earliest graphic CRPGs. A fully defined character was maneuvered through a series of corridors and rooms in a four-level dungeon. It was a hack-and-slash game, with no particular goal beyond killing monsters and grabbing treasure. The programming was not as polished as it could have been, since the game could never remember how much gold you carried, and always asked on replays what you had (a really powerful incentive to, ahem, pad a trifle). It was also very slow, being another done-in-BASIC game. However, in a day when most CRPGs were text (like *Eamon*) or had graphics but text-only combat, it was a marvel to be able to see the fighting, especially when your character lunged at a critter. The game was later ported over to the Atari 800 line with several improvements in the way of speed and graphics. Two add-on scenarios for the Apple were also released, *Upper Reaches of Apshai* and *Curse of Ra*, but they didn't add much new, being just extra adventures to take your character on.

One of the more interesting aspects of *Apshai* was its use of paragraphs to describe the various rooms of the dungeons (the Apple graphics being rather Spartan). This feature was later taken on by more modern games such as the Gold Box series from SSI and *Wasteland* (to name just a few), but, so far as I can tell, *Apshai* had it first. (These paragraphs, by the way, were a great means of ensuring that you didn't miss any rooms on a particular level!) **CSW**



Tunnels & Trolls

simple, with people to hire (they had to be paid and fed), skills to perfect, and various planets to visit. Also, like several other games mentioned in this section, you had control over creating the scenarios themselves. Of course the main part of the game was still the combat, and this one (if you can get it) is likely to appeal more to wargamers than anyone else.

Hellfire Warrior
Epyx

This was the true sequel to *Temple of Apshai*. It brought in some improvements, such as the game being able to remember how much gold you carried, and having an actual goal, this time rescuing a sleeping warrior queen, a quest lifted pretty much right out of Wagner's Ring cycle. It played almost the same as the previous game, although this one brought in the use of magic potions to temporarily enhance attributes. The interesting kicker to this was that some of the potions were addictive: if you used them too much, your permanent stats began to decline, forcing you to use the potions more and more (and making