99 Miles of Bad Road: AutoDuel!

by Ronald Wartow

Looking for a healthy outlet for aggression on your computer? Climb behind the wheel of *AutoDuel*, a lively combination of strategy, arcade, and some minimal role-playing. Based on the Steve Jackson board game, Car Wars, the action takes place in the 16 cities of the devastated Northeastern corridor of the United States in the year 2030. The highways are infested with outlaws in heavily armored vehicles, the cities are crawling with low life and rumors, and the national pastime is gathering in the arenas to watch vehicular gladiators fight to the death in competitions that range from Amateur Night to City Championships.

The cities, now practically devoid of culture, are mere shadows of their former selves and support this lawless society, full of bars, abandoned buildings, truck stops, hospitals, arenas, auto assembly plants, garages, salvage yards, weapon shops and the American AutoDuel Association (AADA). The cities are all different and contain some interesting destinations. (Guess which company can be visited in Manchester, New Hampshire?) Death is so prevalent that hospitals sell clones and braintape updates. (The latter is actually a cleverly done "save game" feature.)

AutoDuel's 32-page manual, handy command card and map are thorough and effectively set the mood for the game. The package also includes a miniature tool kit. (I'm running out of space for storing my Origin Systems' game doodads, like my *Ultima IV* ankh and my *Moebius* oriental headband.) The game involves röle-playing in a *Road Warrior* (the movie) setting.

AMATEUR NIGHT

When the game begins, you have 50 points to divide among your attributes (driving ability, marksmanship and salvage, each of which tops out at 99), but not even enough money to buy a decent car. On foot and with a prestige rating of zero, you don't even know the game's goal. You wander into New York's arena and see that it is Amateur Night, which describes you perfectly. Sign up and try to wipe out your five opponents to win prize money and enhance your prestige. Do this a couple of times, then enter the assembly plant to buy your first car. If Amateur Night is too much for you, catch a bus and head for the Atlantic City casino.

The car-buying phase reminded me of the ship-building phase of *Cosmic Balance*. Each of the seven kinds of cars (you may also build a pickup truck, van, and station wagon) that can be built has just so many spaces (room for parts and weapons) and can carry just so much weight. Your choose your car's equipment from a wide variety of components: tires range from standard to solid; power plants from standard to super. Each part takes up space, has weight, and affects the car's handling and several other performance characteristics. Since you will probably be doing a lot of fighting, the car's four sides and underbody must be equipped with armor. An extensive array of firepower is available: offensive weapons like the powerful laser and puny machine gun; defensive weapons like the deadly minedropper and the oil slick; and hybrid weapons like the flamethrower. Some weapons may be mounted on all sides of the car, while others (such as the paint-spray) can only be rear-mounted. The better the component, the dearer the price.

On a logic chart, the game goes something like this: To ascertain your final mission, you must build your prestige by surviving on the open road, successfully carrying out regular AADA courier missions on time, or winning arena championships. (Big casino wins enhance prestige also, and late courier deliveries will lower it.) To do any of the above you need money to buy more powerful cars (Other than weapon enhancement, cars cannot be upgraded after you've left the assembly plant.) Money is obtained from courier mission payments, selling salvaged parts from outlaw cars, and from casino wins. You can't do anything well until you have substantially increased your driving, marksmanship and salvage skills, which can be accomplished only by -- you

Be a Knight for a Night in Brimstone

Since the days of Colossal Cave, the present tense viewpoint has been the universal perspective in text and graphic adventures. *Brimstone* is the first one written in the third-person past tense: instead of reading "you see a castle," you read that "Sir Gawain saw a castle." In this fashion the author, San Francisco writer/poet James Paul, renders an interactive novel whose style and tone closely parallel those of traditional fiction more than they do the Crowther and Woods' formula. It is a subtle but significant departure, one that creates a feeling that you're reading a story someone has written about your exploits, a story that you still have the power to change. (I would never campaign for a movement to have all adventures written in past tense, but it is stimulating to see adventure authors begin to tap the varied prose techniques overlooked in the games of the last decade.)

First a few paragraphs introduce the story, which opens on All Hallows Eve in Camelot during King Arthur's reign. Sir Gawain, a knight of the Round Table, falls asleep and into a strange dream. The rest of the all-text adventure is divided into chapters. In Chapter One, "The Dream", Gawain discovers a castle that

ADVENTURE HOTLINE

SSI Strikes Again

Formerly known for their war games, Strategic Simulations has launched an all-out offensive on the land of adventure. SSI's latest quest features animated tactical combat in the quest for the *Wizard's Crown*, a game that has been described as a "complex *Phantasie*." A sequel to *Phantasie* is also due any day now.

Activision is calling *Alter Ego*, written by a clinical psychologist, a role-playing game. We'll put it on the couch and find out in an upcoming review. Mindscape is doing more icon-based adventures like *Deja Vu*. A "pre-beta" version of Penguin's *Oo-topos* showed up last week, too late for this issue but look for it next month.

Conversion Update

Sundog is now available for the Atari ST, but rumors of C-64 and Macintosh conversions, says FTL Games, are unfounded -- they have no such plans for the immediate future. Hayden says the Apple and Mac conversions of *Novel Construction Set* are being studied but no decision has been made. Right now it's on the shelves only for IBM owners who want to create their own all-text adventures. Penguin's *Sword of Kadash*, just released for the Mac, will soon be ready for Atari ST owners. Look for Activision's *Hacker* on IBM PC, jr, Tandy 1000 and other compatibles. Their graphic games, *Mindshadow* and *Tracer Sanction*, have been converted for those machines as well as the Amiga, ST and Macintosh. Epyx says *Rogue* and *Temple of Apshai* should be ready for the Amiga and ST soon. The Atari *Ultima IV* (48K) is out now; IBM and Mac are next. Electronic Arts is considering doing an Amiga version of *Bard's Tale*.

Problems with the C-64 Bard's Tale Conversion

Due to a problem with "one set of code running into another" in the Commodore conversion of *Bard's Tale*, players cannot transfer characters in from *Ultima III* as is possible with the Apple version. This makes the first stage of the game much harder. So many people have complained that Electronic Arts says the next edition of the Commodore version will be revised. Instead of encountering monsters every other step while in the town, you'll be attacked every fourth step. The same creatures will be there to chew on your gizzard; they just won't jump you as frequently in Skara Brae. In the mazes, however, they'll be as active

as ever. The C-128 version, like the original Apple program, has been optimized to take advantage of the extra memory by providing faster disk access. And if used with the 1571 drive, the program autoloads.

A time-saving feature was overlooked in the manual for the Commodore version. You can speed up the combat result's rate of display by depressing the right cursor key. The left cursor key slows it down.

Stuck in Paris?

Help is now available for anyone stuck anywhere in *Earthly Delights*. The encyclopedic *Earthly Delights Companion* contains a cheater's map of Paris, answers to all problems, indexes of objects and locations, and more. It goes for $4.95 plus $1 postage. (California residents add sales tax for a total of $6.25.) Dan'l Leviton Co., 2401 E. 17th St., Suite 139, Santa Ana, CA 92701.

Eamon for the IBM

Eamon, the public domain text adventure/role-playing system that's been providing nearly free entertainment for Apple owners since the late '70s, will soon be ready for the IBM. Paul Van Bloem of Little Green Software (whose *Super Eamon* was reviewed here last April) also says the National Eamon Users Club is working on a Commodore version but the project is far from complete. *Eamon* fans looking for something new -- graphics! -- should check out *Haunted House* from Little Green Software. We'll be reviewing it soon.

Accolade Adventures

Alan Miller, who co-founded Activision and programmed many of the company's hit VCS games, has co-founded again -- this time a software company called Accolade. One of his first titles, *Law of the West*, combines adventure-style graphics and character interaction with a shoot-'em-up. They've also got a science fiction RPG, *Psi 5 Trading Company*. Both are available for the Apple and C-64/128, and we'll be looking at them in future issues.

Contest of Contests

Winner of the ongoing contest is Thomas Bellard of Friendswood, Texas, who won a copy of *AutoDuel*. For those who have asked how to enter the contest, all you have to do is be a subscriber. (If you haven't already done so, let us know what kind of computer you have.) Each month a name is simply chosen at random from the sub list.

guessed it -- extensive driving, good marksmanship and successful salvage.

For example, the higher your driving ability, the more responsive the car is to the joystick. As your prestige rises, the AADA gives you more sensitive and lucrative courier missions. Then you start to pick up rumors of special assignments from other sources. When your prestige is high enough you are sent on your final mission, and you'll need a powerful, weapon-laden car and the highest driving and marksmanship skills you can muster.

AutoDuel, a hybrid joystick-keyboard game that was designed and programmed by Lord British and Chuckles, is very easy to play. At almost anytime and anywhere, you can use control-key commands to call up detailed and informative screens on you, the driver, any of your cars, your cargo, and the date and location. Driving and fighting are controlled entirely by joystick, and easy toggling between available weapons is swiftly accomplished. The main screen is effectively laid out with an adequate graphics display of the highway, your weapons, speed, condition and radar. The game is also fun to watch. Destroyed cars spin out and burst into flames, and the program realistically displays the effects of cars subjected to oil slicks and paint sprays. Arcade skills come in handy when, for example, you improvidently run across a pack of bikers on your tail, or multiple outlaws start pot-shotting at your car from all angles. (Your vehicle can only fire straight out from the front or sides.)

Thoughtful courier route planning and the use of AADA traffic reports is a must. Careful strategy for your actions is essential, since all cities don't contain an AADA office or services for needed car

Fraktured Faebles

This graphic game seems inspired by a segment from the old Rocky and Bullwinkle show, "Fractured Fairy Tales." Illustrated with the distinctive art of Rick Incrocci, it is a collection of loosely related puzzles that fit together to form a semblance of a plot. An evil witch, according to the title screen, has cast a spell on you and dropped you off in the middle of a strange forest. Here you'll meet up with characters like Goldilocks and the bears, one of the three little pigs, Rip Van Winkle and Little Red Riding Hood. A typical problem consists of saving Red from the big bad wolf. If you type "score," the program says "Sleeping Beauty still awaits," so apparently reviving her is the long-range goal.

Over each scene appears the location's name and visible exits. You can switch between all-text, all-pictures, or a mixed mode that lets you flip back and forth between the two. It also features extremely fast disk access, using split-second horizontal wipes that replace the old picture with a fresh scene. There are few sound effects, but some are used in a novel manner. When you unravel a particularly important puzzle, one whose solution leads to or hints at the solution of another problem, two beeps alert you so you can study the situation more closely. Its significance may not become apparent until later. Those familiar with previous games by programmer Dale Johnson will find *Faebles* harder than *Sherwood Forest*, and perhaps -- but don't be too sure -- easier than *Masquerade*. (If you've never played these, you've missed some top-flight adventuring.) Highlighted with ubiquitous spot animation, Incrocci's illustrations are as visually rewarding as the puzzles are cerebrally satisfying. The game also profits from sly humor and clever responses to the player's commands.

LOOK PARSER

Though the problems are object-oriented and can be sufficiently handled with the simple two-word parser, this program reduces the greatest minds of our time to the level of six-year-olds. "Put sign," "get comb," "salt bird" -- I realize you don't need a full-sentence parser in every adventure, but this kind of baby-talk has got to go. If the parser doesn't understand a word in your command, it simply says "I can't tell you anymore about it." It's up to you to determine if the error is in your choice of words, syntax, or whether you're barking up the wrong tree entirely by seeking a solution to a non-existent problem. Another thing: does it make sense that you can say "drop all" but cannot say "get all"? Not to this Collector of Rare and Usually Worthless Objects. Even Scott Adams has upgraded his parser to accept multiple commands, which aren't allowed by this one.

People who don't mind grappling with the parser, especially those who like graphic adventures presented in the style of TV cartoons, will still have a lot of fun with *Fraktured Faebles*. If you're not as picky about your parsers as I am, you're certain to enjoy the ingenious problems even more.

Computer: Apple
Planned Conversions: None
Skill Level: Advanced
Saves: 7 on game disk
Price: $34.95
Manufacturer: American Eagle, POB 46080, Lincolnwood, IL 60646

American M.U.D.

M.U.D. -- Multi-User Dungeon -- will soon be available on Compuserve under the title *British Legends.* Originating on Compunet, it been the rage in England for years. As the name implies, *M.U.D.* enables many on-line players to explore the same dungeon simultaneously. It's a long-playing all-text game in which you advance through the levels to become a Wizard or Witch. The British game has "D & D" overtones: if you kill another player you get some of their accumulated points.

It is extremely interactive, permitting advanced players to change various aspects of the game. During Christmas, for example, the Wizards and Witches have access to a room called the Christmas Box. Objects such as a snowman, holly, a wreath, a decorated tree and other holiday items are stored there for these players to distribute throughout the land. Then the less advanced players score points by finding them. The original game also has *four* mazes, two major and two minor ones. And one of them can only be mapped by several adventurers acting in concert, using each other as markers. Whether all these features will be implemented in *British Legends* remains to be seen -- but you can be sure This Adventurer will be there to find out. An American *M.U.D.* could knock *Megawars* right out of orbit as Compuserve's most popular telegame.

Powerstar

by Brian Smith

Powerstar has to be the fastest-playing, most technically interesting cartridge-based graphic adventure ever. That's right, it's on a fully packed 16K cartridge that has rooms for 63 locations. Each location has a separate view for each of the four compass directions, and you must utilize every view in order to obtain all the items and clues needed to solve the game.

POWER UP FOR POWERSTAR

The scenario is set in the 21st century, when all the electrical power in the United States is generated by one huge nuclear reactor in an orbiting space station known as Powerstar. Power from the station is beamed down to earth via microwave. Things have been going well, then you're summoned by the authorities. It seems that that only human operator aboard Powerstar is not responding to messages. You are ordered to investigate, and begin the game in front of the government field station.

You move through the game with the N, S, E, W keys, cursor keys or a joystick. Commands are typed in and interpreted by a simple parser designed to understand many sentence constructions and synonyms. It has a vocabulary of about 250 words. Sound effects are heard at key locations, intensifying the atmosphere of intrigue. Graphics are sharp and clear. The only obvious shortcoming is their blockiness, due to the fact that they're produced in a multicolor GTIA chip mode. Some older computers that have the older CTIA chip will produce very strange displays.

It starts easy and grows progressively more difficult. I found the last stages very difficult, and even had to ask for help near the end of the game; the manufacturer responded quickly. There are several mazes to be solved, one in which you find Powerstar and a harder one inside a steam room. It's difficult but can be mapped.

It took two years and 3,000 man-hours to develop this game, which the average adventurer should be able to polish off in 32 hours.

Computer: Atari 400, 800, 130XE
Planned Conversions: None
Skill Level: Intermediate
Saves: 10
Price: $34.95 (no extra charge for postage on mail orders)
Manufacturer: Pandora Software, 177 Carlton Lane, N. Andover, MA 01845.

Whose "Alternate Reality" is it, anyway?

This one-character RPG takes place in a city whose streets you trod in the same manner as the main streets and alleys of Skara Brae in *Bard's Tale*. As you walk, the walls scroll past on each side, though they are not as detailed or colorful. Your location is shown with familiar 3-D graphics, but appear here in a center-screen window (like *Seven Cities of Gold*), with status reports displayed below and attributes overhead. I like the idea of situating a maze in a town rather than a dungeon; it revitalizes the process of exploring and mapping.

Reality also introduces other novel concepts that enhance the playing experience -- notably the ability to "trick" an opponent into dying when your character is too weak or insufficiently armed to defeat him in combat. I went at it sword and dagger for a week, building up a level-eight character and generally having a good time until I realized *Alternate Reality* is missing only one thing -- a game.

There is at least a story line, which will be developed in the next six games in this projected series of interlocking programs: you have been abducted by an alien spaceship and dropped off in the City of Xebec's Demise, from which you must escape back to earth. This one takes place in the City, which forms the hub of the series. When you approach the Northern Gate, you are instructed to insert the appropriate disk to proceed into another game, *Wilderness*. Or you could begin outside, enter the City and step down into the Dungeon, provided you have all three programs. All seven will interconnect in this fashion.

Character creation is facilitated in a new process. After you name your character, the opening scene shows a room with a single door. Over it you see seven boxes, one for each of the usual attributes. Numbers in the boxes are constantly changing, and those currently displayed when you hit a key to walk through the door become your character's attribute ratings. (There are no classes or races, so don't count on being a dwarf fighter or elf wizard in *this* reality.)

When you attain enough experience points to make the next level, the program promotes you on the spot, even if you're engaged in combat. (No trekking cross-country to pay your respects to Lord British.) You can also boost attributes with potions and by visiting the proper guilds. Four characters and one game for each can be saved on a blank disk. Convenient utilities let you back-up the character and scenario disks. When you start the game, your character is erased from the save disk, as in *AutoDuel*. The game must be saved in progress in order to resave the character, otherwise he's gone forever.

YOU BELONG TO THE CITY

Once out the door you find yourself in the City's town square. Keyboard or joystick commands will advance you to the taverns, shops, the Granite Bank and the local armorer. Inside, transactions are conducted via menus. When more than one item is for sale, the proprietor won't show them all on a menu. Instead, he'll name one and quote a price, then offer another if you turn down that one. You've got to keep your food and water supplies replenished by visiting the taverns, where the waitress may even give you a meal on the house if you look hungry enough.

You can bargain for better prices but can't sell things back to a shop or even trade in used gear. Oddly, some of the shops sell nothing but clothing, which seems to have little value: red silk togas, orange fur-lined vests, purple pants. (Now I know where Prince does *his* shopping.) There are many little things about this game system that make it different, particularly the way the stores sell a fresh assortment of goods each day. That includes the armorer and even the taverns. To make time pass faster, you can check into an inn, also the only place you can learn the time and date.

The city is on the copper standard. A piece of silver is worth 10 coppers; a piece of gold, 100. Occasionally you'll find a gem or jewel after defeating a mugger or merchant and can sell it to the bank. The bank offers some interesting investment plans for those who don't want to pack a lot of loot while wandering through town. You may choose from a low, medium or high risk account. (What? No IRA?) The interest rate ranges from 1%-2.7% daily, and each has an appropriate risk of failure -- losing it all, in other words. It's another of the subtle traces of character that make this such a potentially outstanding game system.

ON GUARD, DIRTBAG!

Though you've been snatched by a UFO, the town in which you are dumped is not a futuristic metropolis but a medieval city populated by poor and common citizens, acolytes, warriors and an occasional dragon or wizard. A musical flourish heralds each encounter, then the creature (never more than one at a time) manifests in the picture. There are two encounter modes: engaged and disengaged. While engaged you can hail, attack, parry, use an item, cast a spell, or attempt to disengage. If successful in disengaging you can try to escape, or trick or charm the foe.

The system lets you wield a primary weapon in one hand, a secondary one in the other, and switch between them during the battle without losing a chance to attack during that round. Combat results, whose rate of display is *not* player-adjustable, are shown at the bottom of the screen. Magic spells are difficult to procure, while weapons are readily sold over the counter or won in battle. Some of the latter are cursed and can only be discarded by a visit to a guild. You'll find four kinds of potions, some of which cure disease or poison. Some might kill you. Healers will render first aid if you're out of potions.

Graphically it can't compare with the crisp artwork of *Bard's Tale*, but *Reality* exhibits one personalized brushstroke: the view encompasses more than the nearest buildings, for you can look over them and see mountains in the distance, the sun sinking behind them at day's end. Lightning flashes in the sky during storms, and the falling rain is animated. (In an unprecedented astronomical event, however, the sun sank *in front* of the mountains on one occasion.) The 64 x 64 square maze is frustrating to map because a single keystroke doesn't always equal one square on the map. It often takes nine or ten punches to edge past a shop that looks only a single square wide on the screen. You can buy a compass or use the sun's position in the sky to get your bearings.

A more disturbing graphics flaws is that when you reach the end of a wall and look back, the wall often shows no depth or thickness but looks like a sheet of plywood forming part of a maze rather than like the wall of a building. This disrupts the fantasy of being in a real (even an *alternatively* real) city. And the graphics are nothing to telecommunicate home about. Not bad, but they just don't display enough detail, especially when portraying the enemy during encounter sequences. There's no spot animation.

Sound effects aren't used in combat or while walking, but music plays a big part in the taverns as well as in announcing each encounter. (It cannot be toggled off, however.) In each tavern you hear a different tune, which plays while the lyrics are shown line-by-line. The songs are supposed to conceal clues and hints -- but to what?

FIRST DOWN, GOAL TO GO

For there's no goal to this scenario, which offers nothing to do but prepare your character for the *next* game. Without a goal there's no quest. And without a quest, what's the use? (As Descartes said, "I quest, therefore I am.") According to the blurb on the back of the box, the goal is to escape back to earth or seek revenge on your kidnappers. That is apparently the ultimate goal of the series, not this program. Future installments are supposed to have sub-goals, so you'll find more to do than just hack and slay, stop and shop.

I've also learned that the subsequent titles will be stand-alones that will also facilitate character creation, so the only reason for getting this one is to develop a powerful character. Of course, you may not find many shops or guilds in the next game, *Dungeon*. Does it make sense to buy a program to prepare for a sequel when you don't know if the quest involved in the sequel will be worth playing? (Especially when the sequel won't be out until Christmas?) That's your decision. I recommend waiting to see what the sequel is like before developing a character for it. I also hope the graphics are improved in the sequels.

Computer: Apple, C-64, Atari
Planned Conversions: C-128, Mac, IBM PC & jr, Amiga, Atari ST
Skill Level: Novice
Saves: One per character
Price: $49.95
Manufacturer: Datasoft

Dragon Quest

by Ken St. André

"Have you ever fallen down a well, been shot by an arrow, turned into a toad, and broiled by an angry dragon -- all on the same day? That's what happens when you're the chief character in *Dragon Quest*, a graphic adventure that transports you to a once-happy kingdom nestled in a pleasant wooded valley. There an enormous fire-breathing dragon has settled, attacking people and carrying them off. The peasants live in terror, the princess has vanished, and the king is offering a large reward!

"Many perils await the adventurer who attempts this quest. The path is long and hard, sudden death the only reward for the unwary. At the end of the road is the final, inevitable confrontation between good and evil. Can you end the dragon's threat and free the land from oppression? Find out! Play *Dragon Quest* and reap the rewards only a rich colorful adventure can offer. This game has been carefully designed and tested to give many hours of fun. Good luck and good hunting."

So much for the author's introduction to this game. Falling down a well, being shot by an arrow, etc., is not my idea of fun. In fact, the sudden and unfair deaths scattered throughout this game tee me off, even though I have been warned about them. They also angered some of my friends, whom I asked to help me get deeper into the adventure.

First, a description of the game. This is your traditional fairy tale adventure with a two-word parser. Actually, I doubt if it has a *real* parser -- the responses are so limited. *Dragon Quest* combines allusions to Shakespeare with every dragonish fairy tale you've ever read. It is one cliché piled atop another, building to the big surprise ending. I haven't

solved the whole game yet, but doubt if the ending will surprise anyone over the age of twelve.

You start out, as usual, with nothing but your wits and a sign offering a reward for slaying the dragon. Go north to the King's Castle, yell "See King" about "dragon" to get in, and your adventure is well begun. I don't want to spend any time on the puzzles you will encounter, for fear of giving away too much.

Let me instead talk about some of the technical aspects of the game's design. The pictures are in hi-res in Atari's graphics four mode. Very well done with a lot of detail, they are limited to four colors in any one picture. Fortunately they are not always the same four. Each screen has a scrolling three-line text window at the bottom for narration. Both the pictures and text, of course, are called up from disk, and Atari disk access time is excellent, better than either Commodore or Apple.

Documentation is supplied on the back of the double-sided disk. There is an option to dump it all to your printer if you wish. If you seriously intend to beat this game, you will take advantage of the save game feature. (Also be cautious, observant, and read the documentation before playing.) This requires formatting a disk in Atari DOS 2.0, but those without DOS 2.0 can still format a save game disk by using an option built into the program. For you hackers who don't have it, this implies that DOS 2.0 is on the disk.

You'll need to save the game frequently because the program kills you every time you make a mistake. (Sometimes it allows you to take the mistake back and make another choice, and there is a kind of condescension in this that irks me almost as much as getting killed.) One very nice feature about the game is that it allows you to keep a written log of

your adventure simply by typing "printer on." This echoes the text from the screen on the printer, a feature usually only seen in all-text games.

So technically *Dragon Quest* is excellent, a state-of-the-art adventure of about two years ago. For the price I'm assured that it is a very good buy. Artistically, you get uninspired but very well done fairy tale scenes in graphics four mode. Stylistically, author Ed Churnside is a fine writer with an engaging narrative voice; his work is unmarred by the misspellings and incorrect usages that wreak havoc on the English language in some many adventures. Overall, it is a good package, and there are even a few razzle-dazzle special effects thrown in.

On the other hand, I found my frustration level very high with *Dragon Quest* . (Perhaps it irked me that the game seemed to have been written by a very young teenager -- which I'm not! -- but that it still baffled me all too often. Many logical alternatives in certain situations are completely ignored. For example, I discovered that I could not put things down and then pick them up again later. You can't swim the stream to reach the Monastery of St. Bunny's if you are carrying the gold that the King gives you. If you drop the gold and swim across, it is gone forever.

Hence my recommendation is limited. *Dragon Quest* is a good value for those with a limited budget, a love for traditional fantasy and a high tolerance for frustration. (Let me add that *Antic* produces a lot of material by actual Atari fans as opposed to professionals, and that the fan-user level of all their material is excellent!) Others with a greater desire for novelty might want to pass on *Dragon Quest* .

Computer: All Ataris but ST
Skill Level: Intermediate
Price: $12.95
Manufacturer: Antic Magazine

AutoDuel

repair and healing. Cars should be built based on your available resources and what you want to accomplish. For instance, in the beginning, building a lightweight quick car with some cargo space and rear-mounted defensive weapons (the documentation calls this a "rabbit") will allow you to outrun the outlaws to complete courier missions. As you get more money, you can build heavily armored, well-armed cars and become a vigilante who cleans the highways of outlaws, or a city champion in the arena.

The game has a few flaws, none fatal, that deserve comment. The most annoying is that the program "hangs" after you save a game, so you can't save and continue playing as with an *Ultima* -- but must reboot the game. Some of us non-joystick jockeys had occasional difficulty, particularly in getting started in the Amateur Night competitions. Finally, there is no sound for any of the driving or fighting. *AutoDuel* maintains a difficulty level in the tolerable range: not too hard and not too easy. We recommend *AutoDuel* for hours of challenging diversion. (And the game doesn't have to end when you've completed the final mission. You can jump back into your car and keep driving and shooting.)

[Editor's Note: There are two comments I have to add to the above. It's way too easy to win money in Atlantic City. By raking in $200,000, I was able to immediately buy a super car and never have to worry about paying repair bills. For a more exciting game, limit your winnings to $10,000. The game's real weak point is that you don't have to complete the special courier missions in order to be assigned the final one. Just when I thought I was getting into the heart of the game, it was over. Still, I enjoyed the process so much that I restored a saved

game and played it for a few more days.]

Computer: 64K Apple
Planned Conversions: Commodore 64/128
Skill Level: Novice to Intermediate
Saves: One per player
Price: $59.95
Manufacturer: Origin

Brimstone

conceals an entrance to the underworld of Ulro. He must penetrate its depths, learn the five magic words and escape in one night. If he awakes too late or without the magic words, warns an overdemon who meets Gawain at the threshold of Ulro, a part of him will remain forever there. In that case the game then restarts automatically. This is one of the many uncommon aspects of *Brimstone* -- instead of getting killed as a result of a wrong move, you merely awaken from the dream and start over.

Of the three doors in the castle, one is green, another red, the third white. Latin inscriptions provide what are supposedly instructive guidance. (I have enough trouble when the clues are in a language I *can* read, so these didn't help.) The game is linear in the early stages, offering few places to explore as it nudges you toward the castle's secret entrance to Ulroc. It opens up expansively when you reach the third chapter, where you can wander around and will probably want to draw a map.

On the trip you'll meet characters such as Master Adam, the squiremaster who trained you in the knightly arts of combat; Enitharmon, an enigmatic eight-year-old girl who materializes to inform you when you've failed in the quest; Fum, an underdemon -- who is part monkey, part bat, part demon -- who offers a helping hand now and then; Morgan Le Fay, King Arthur's wicked half-sister, the Green Knight and the white apes of Ulro. Sir Gawain himself is an odd sort, not at all

your standard adventure game knight, brave and bold and self-confident. At every corner Gawain pauses, wondering "What am I doing here?" He frequently feels a sense of deja vu and sometimes seems to recall Enitharmon having appeared in his dreams before.

Some puzzles are solved by talking to people or even to yourself, while others hinge solely on object-manipulation. In Chapter Three, the game's most unusual puzzle finds you frozen in a block of ice in the center of hell. You can't move a finger, and only your imagination and the correct mental association will save you from the predicament. *Brimstone* has one classic puzzle -- being locked in a prison cell -- whose solution is the easiest of all its ancestors. (Infinitely simpler than the same problem in *Escape from Rungistan*.) There is no scoring system. Type score and you receive a progress report that lists your accomplishments and tells which chapter is underway.

Paul's evocative imagery paints evocative mental pictures of white marble lions and black obsidian turtles, of icy wastelands and a crystal case containing a suit of magical armor. The armor, while not the first such suit to form part of an adventurer's wardrobe, is described in unsurpassed and authentic detail: as Sir Gawain you'll don a silk dublet, capado, sabatons, and a bright burrie, all the elements of a genuine suit of armor. Conveniently, you can put them all on by issuing a single command.

BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

The Synapse parser certainly fooled me in its first incarnation in *Mindwheel*. There it seemed quite intelligent, facilitating never-before-seen kinds of character interaction. But in this game it sometimes responded with the intelligence of a disoriented, absent-minded professor. When I knocked on a door in the cell in Chapter Two, I was reprimanded: "you're not near enough to the green door."

Apparently it was referring to the door way back in Chapter One's castle. (There wasn't even a green door in the cell.) When I said "give all to man," all my items were handed over one at a time. Inexplicably, the program then announced that "you're not able to pick up the man." (Say what?)

The parser accepts multiple commands, adjectives and the pronoun "it," and usually responds without a hitch. It sports a sizable vocabulary, so there's no need for synonym-searching. But it got confused often enough to make me wonder what went wrong with a parser I once referred to as "revolutionary." Maybe they won one battle but lost the revolution?" Or perhaps the problem is not the parser but its implementation in this program. I don't know. I do know that *Brimstone*'s parser doesn't match Penguin's Comprehend counterpart in the task of truly analyzing and interpreting commands. That's a first: in the past, all-text adventures -- because they are all-text, therefore more word-oriented -- have usually utilized parsers that were superior to those in graphic games.

I still enjoyed the story and its distinctive presentation. Usually I *don't* like adventures involving castles, knights and magic armor, so that's saying a lot. Paul treats the subject more maturely than most adventure authors have done. His style is moody, almost somber at times, so don't look for a lot of laughs. *Brimstone* is the easiest of Synapse's first three Electronic Novels. It is packaged with the standard 100-page, hardbound book that doubles as documentation and copy-protection.

Computer: AP, C-64/128, IBM (128K) & jr, all Atari except ST (need 48K & two drives), Macintosh
Skill Level: Novice
Price: AP, IBM, $44.95; others, $39.95
Manufacturer: Broderbund/Synapse

KEYS TO THE KINGDOMS

AutoDuel

1. When creating your character, assign all your points to driving ability and marksmanship. Give none to salvage, which you can buy. 2. Unless you're an arcade whiz, forget Amateur Night in the beginning (your driving and fighting skills are too low); instead head for Atlantic City's casino by bus and try to win enough money -- by playing poker, not blackjack -- for a super car and enough prestige to get some lucrative courier missions. 3. You can safely build up driving and other skills by leaving a town just long enough to make two or three kills, then returning. 4. When you get clues about special assignments, take the bus to get investigate them rather than wasting time driving. 5. Never, ever enter an assembly plant with a car. 6. The character disk is not copy-protected, so you can copy the copy you're playing on after saving the game at critical junctures and not worry about spending money for clones.

Moebius

1. Fight with your bare hands wherever possible (unless you have a blessed sword). All of the evil characters are very susceptible to low kicks, except the evil monks. Try middle and high kicks on them. 2. To quickly rise in level on starting the game, head right for the palace and find the Overlord. Use your "listen" command for the character who is issuing decrees. Kill him and you get a blessed sword that will wipe out most of your adversaries with one shot at this stage of the game. 3. If you're about to lose a fight, hit the Return key to "Break and run." When you're prompted to "Make your break," simply use the program's convenient "Restart at last save" command and you're out of trouble.

Nine Princes in Amber

To get the pack of trumps from the locked case, ⚹◻️⏃⌖ ♐︎⏃⏃ ⚹◻️◼️⌖ ⏃⌖⚹⚹⚹⏁(which is on ⬛︎⏃⚹⌖ ⏃⚹⏃⚹⚹).

Spellbreaker

The grouper: Memorize blorple, drop everything but the ♦️◻️⌖⌖ ⏃⌖ ⌖⌖◻️⬛⌖ and go south. After the hit the water and the grouper shows up, drop the ♦️⏃⏃⬛you brought. The grouper will eat it instead of the cube or bottle. Get the cube, then the bottle. Blorple back to Water Room. Inside the bottle you'll find a new spell scroll, ⬛◻️⌖⏃⚹⌖ which is used in the ⏃⬛⌖◻️⬛◻️⏄⊟⊟⏄ and on the ⌖⏄⬛⚹⏄⏄. Another tip: as you get more cubes, try reading the documentation -- especially the list of verbs -- for clues.

Bard's Tale

1. Bring over your strong *Wizardry* and *Ultima III* characters or plan on adding about 20 hours to game completion time. It's hard enough *with* them. 2.Develop an archmage as soon as possible. 3. Make sure a bard is always with your party because only he permits access to certain areas and only he can wield certain weapons. 4. Mapping every square is advisable, but also be sure to check the dungeon corners, i.e. 0N,0E - 21N,21E - 0N,21E, and 21N,0E, because major events and items are there. 5. With the Commodore version, invest a few hours creating dummy characters, pooling their gold to one who will be in the real party so you have enough to deck them out in armor and put some cold steel in their fists.

THE CODE

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⚹A  ⬛B  ⸱C  ◻D  ⬭E ♦F  ⸰G  ⌐H◻I  ◌J
◌K ⚹L  ☞M ⸳N  ⏁O  ⚹P  ◌Q  ⬛R  ⬛S
⏁T  ⊟U  ⌐V  ⬛W  ⸰X  ⬛Y  ⬛Z
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Waiting for Duffy

Duffy's out right now, but send in a brief ad if you're stuck, stuck, stuck.

Free help on all Infocom adventures, up to 330 points on Spellbreaker. Also Ultima 3 and Mindwheel. Some Ultima 4. Send SASE to Matt Friedman, 108 Lewis Lane, Oak Ridge TN 37830. If you have more than 330 points in Spellbreaker, please write. I need help.

How do you solve the final one-person maze in Expedition Amazon? Does anybody know the way out of Gemstone Warrior? I am lost. Gayle Ann Stanford, 3281 Foxgate Dr., Memphis, TN 38115.

Can anyone tell me how in the world you build or make rooms with Adventure Master? I looked all through the "program guide" and could not find anything. Helen Whitley, Lot 141, 4701 Anderson Rd., Houston, TX 77053.

Ultima 4: Where is the mandrake (exact location)? What is the pure axiom? What happened to humility? I can't find a city or dungeon of humility and can't find a shepherd to join me. Also need help on Suspect, Nine Princes in Amber, Perry Mason and very end of Dragonworld. I can help with most Infocom games, Amazon, Ultima 1-4 and Lucifer's Realm. Send SASE. Aaron Chou, 7032 Stratford Rd., Woodbury, MN 55125.

Need help in Ultima 3 and Hacker. Can help with Questron and Enchanter. Chris A. Raudonis, 45 Pelham Rd., Hudson, NH 03051.

Spellbreaker: How do you get cube in giant bird's nest? Will gladly pay for hints. Have solved and can help anyone with Ultima 2, 3 and 4, Enchanter, Sorcerer, Zork 1,2,3, Hitchhiker's, Mask of Sun, Serpent's Star, Deadline, Suspect, Planetfall and some of Spellbreaker - free! Send SASE to M. Kim, 10425 NE 124th

St., Kirkland, WA 98034.

Stone of Sisyphus: How do you get past dogs in the kennel? In Asylum, I need all the help I can get - will pay for complete solutions to either game. Brian Smith, 3035 Montego, Plano, TX 75023.

The Mist: How do I start the truck? Questron: Mesron wants to see me; how do I find him in castle? Can help with Mindwheel, Tracer Sanction, Amazon, Mindshadow, Dragonworld. Call/write Karen Lee, 444 Bridgton Rd., Westbrook, ME 04092. (207) 797-7985.

Can help on Enchanter, Zork and Original Adventure for $5 + map. Need clue on Ice Maze in New Adventure. David Aultfather, 13209 Dossau Rd., Austin, TX 78753.

Ripper: Have found clue under blood and had Holmes decipher both messages; identified all parties but dwarf; climbed ladder; put all items in study; tried to close stuck closet door. Now what? Does anyone know words so I can reach fireplace to find secret passage? J. Swienty, 7951 Saloma Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91402.

Spellbreaker: Have 8 cubes, 365 points and Belboz' key but can't open vault door or find crunchy food for green-eyed rock. Can help with many game, including some new ones. T. Walsh, 116 Homestead Cr., London, Ontario, Canada N6G 2E8.

Amazon: Need all the help I can get. Will pay for answers. Can help on Planetfall, Deadline, Seastalker, Cutthroats and Serpent's Star. J. Lema, 431 Alphabet St., Holbrook, NY 11741,

Amazon: how do you cross bridge? Sundog: where do you buy ground scanner? Can help with Quest, Mask of Sun, Zork I. W. Hall, 1110 44th St., Sacramento, CA 95819.

SWAP SHOP

Got a houseful of old adventures? Trade 'em off with a free ad.

APPLE

To trade: all four Ultimas, Hitchhiker's Guide, Zorks, Transylvania, Deadline, Starcross & more. Looking for ACS, Questron, Crimson Crown, Sorcerer & others. Write 1st: Paul Berland, 4430 N. Francisco, Chicago, IL 60625.

$15 each: Interactive Fiction, Sands of Egypt, Invasion Orion & TG paddles. $20 each: Mystery House, Empire of Overmind, Cyborg, Legacy of Llylgamyn, Shadowkeep, 7 Cities of Gold. Time Zone, $50. $25 each, Ultima 3 & 4. All are originals w/docs. Will buy or trade for Questron, Timeship, SunDog, Zork 3, Prisoner 2. Originals only, with docs. Write first to Gayle Ann Stanford, 3281 Foxgate Dr., Memphis, TN 38115.

Will trade original copy of Gemstone Warrior or Sword of Kadash for original of Ring Quest. Write first. Bob Reitz, 218 N. Fourth St., Sunbury, PA 17801.

Will trade games and utilities. Send list of your programs. Also will sell solution to Zork I for $2.50. Jon Champlin, Moffat Rd., Nelsonville, NY 10516.

$20 each: Amazon, Deadline, Cutthroats, Hitchhiker's Guide, Rendezvous with Rama, Zork I and II. $18 each: Blade of Blackpoole, Gruds in Space, Murder by the Dozen. $15: Wizard and the Princess. All original with docs, packaging. Call or write Karen M. Lee, 444 Bridgton Rd., Westbrook, ME 04092. (207) 797-7985.

Ultima II with box, maps and manuals for $30. Can help anyone with Ultima II or III. Michael Gathers, 1419 Heathwood Dr., Houston, TX 77077.

Interested in trading all types of adventures and FRPs. Send list of what you have to trade and games you want. Ba Ha, 4111 Sunset Dr. # 24, Los Angeles, CA 90027.

Trade or sell: Rendezvous with Rama and Dragonworld with packaging and docs, $15 each. Want Moebius, Spellbreaker, Bard's Tale. Must be originals with docs and boxes. Aaron Chou, 7032 Stratford Rd., Woodbury, MN 55125.

30+ games, including Wizardry, Zork III, and Legacy of Llylgamyn. All original, 50-60% off retail. For list, write to Tony Ard, 4207 Cypress St., Tillamook, OR 97141.

For sale or trade: Quest and Murder by the Dozen, $20 each. Both original disks with manual; Quest has hint book. Will trade for Ultima III, Fahrenheit 451, Ring Quest, Mindshadow, Witness, Transylvania, Wishbringer, Sherwood Forest. Write first. W. Hall, 1110 44th St., Sacramento, CA 95819.

Planetfall, Deadline, Serpent's Star, Cutthroats and Seastalker. Will sell or trade, have hint books for all but last. Want any Infocom or Telarium, Mask of the Sun, Time Zone or Adventure. Write first. John Lema, 431 Alphabet St., Holbrook, NY 11741.

Will trade complete copies of Sorcerer or Gruds in Space for same of Fahrenheit 451, Shadowkeep, Dragonworld, ACS, Robots of Dawn or Timeship. Mark Fujimoto, 1646 Komo Mai Dr., Pearl City, HI 96782.

Will trade first 12 Infocom games, all three Wizardrys, Ultima II and more. Send list of what you want and I'll try to fill order. Thomas Blake, 3002 Pendell Lane, Ft. Smith, Arkansas 72901.

Will trade or sell originals of Zork 1, Enchanter & Starcross w/docs, maps and hint books but no boxes. Interested in original adventures. Phil Christensen, BANFES Project, Dept. of State, USAID/Lesotho, Washington, DC 20520.

COMMODORE 64/128

Wanted: Adventure Construction Set games. Send ACS game and blank disk, get 2 adventures and membership in ACS Fanclub. Also, 2 ACS games for sale, $5 each: Tunnels & Trolls, based on FRP by Ken St. André, and Dreamworld, based on H.P. Lovecraft's Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath. For $4 each, Barsoom Construction Set or Middle Earth Construction Set, using ACS. Or join club for $1 and get latest newsletter; $1 each for updates. Ken St. André, (authorized ACS Fanclub leader), 3421 E. Yale, Phoenix, AZ 85008.

For sale or trade: Deadline, Zork I, Hulk, Mask of the Sun, Amazon, Indiana Jones, Transylvania, Dragonworld. J. Wright, 2341 Charbonneau, Waco, TX 76710.

Want Serpent's Star, Infidel, Sorcerer, Blade of Blackpoole, Gruds in Space, Planetfall and Cutthroats. To sell or trade, I have Amazon, Dragonworld, Tracer Sanction, Starcross, Suspended, Deadline, Mask of the Sun and all Zorks. Tim Fox, 734 Strobel N.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

20 games for trade or sale. All w/boxes & manual, some have maps & answers. Very cheap! For list send SASE to Andrew Bundschuh, 635 E. Comstock, Glendora, CA 91740.

Willing to trade off ALL software I have, including many adventures. Prefer not to, but will also sell. For list of 68+ titles, write: Greg Eden, 909 Cascade Ct., Coquitlam, B.C., Canada, V3J-6E7.

Will trade or sell Planetfall, Enchanter, Sorcerer & Blade of Blackpoole. $15 each, with hint books & maps except Blade. Looking for Gemstone Warrior, Sword of Kadash, Shadowkeep or The Quest. Dale Angelotti, 600 Primrose St., Haverhill, MA 01830.

Want to buy Suspect, Suspended, Planetfall, Hitchhiker, Infidel, Mind Forever Voyaging, Cutthroats, Fooblitzky. Also hint books. Helen Whitley, 4701 Anderson Rd. L, Houston, TX 77053.

60+ games for sale or trade, $8-$30 each. Also am interested in buying adventures. S. McIntyre, 45 Chapple Dr., Glace Bay, N.S., Canada B1A 4C3.

Numerous games to trade or sell. Send $2 & SASE for list. G.M. Shearer, 1500 Iceplant Rd., Suite 7F, North Versailles, PA 15137.

Looking for Seastalker, King's Quest 2 & other NEW adventures to trade with you. Chris Raudonis, 45 Pelham Rd., Hudson, NH 03051.

IBM & Quest-Alikes

Will trade Ultima 2 & 3, with docs. Also Zork 1 & King's Quest. Want any good adventures. Write or call (not collect) before sending game. Thane K. Sherrington, RR #2, Port Hood, N.S., Canada B0E 2W0. (902) 787-3387

To trade: 7 Cities of Gold, King's Quest 1 & 2, Transylvania, Ultima 2 & 3, Wizardry, By Fire & Sword, Gato, Zork 1, Archon, Mindshadow, Murder on Zinderneuf. R. Reid, 404 Shelley Pl., Goldsboro, NC 27530.

CP/M

Looking for Infocom games for 8" disk. David Aultfather, 13209 Dossau Rd., Austin, TX 78753.