

Game on

We all need a break occasionally, including Tim Nott who refreshes his palate, jaded by little puzzly-type Windows games, by embarking on an orgy of downloading from CIX, to taste the latest shareware games. There's more on RAM upgrades too, as well as tips to help you work with Windows.

It's about time we had some fun. I don't mean doing silly things with desktop settings, or gazing at the latest in screensavers, but real fun — playing games. After all, that's what computers are really for, isn't it? But when you think of successful games, such as *Seventh Guest*, *Myst*, *Alone in the Dark*, *Indiana Jones*, *Day of the Tentacle*, and (it pains me to admit) *Doom*, Windows is rather an also-ran in the platform stakes. Commercially, what have we got? *Sim Earth*, *Sim City*... yawn. *Microsoft Golf*... snore. *Microsoft Arcade*... nostalgia. Then there's lots of little card or puzzly-type things: variations on *Minesweeper*, shareware games that are sometimes good (for instance, *Kye*) or sometimes rivetingly dull (*Barrow*, a game where you shoot balloons with a bow and arrow). There's certainly nothing on the Windows shareware scene to touch the *Commander Keen* series or *Jazz Jackrabbit* — at least, there wasn't the last time I looked.

So, thinking that it was high time I had another look, I embarked on an orgy of downloading from CIX. First down the wire, weighing in at a modest 87kb, was *Puzzle (1pz11a.zip from Windows/Files)*.



Boxes — for those who find Tetris too easy

This shareware game, created by the reassuringly-named software house *Idle Time*, consists of just one file which includes an interactive help screen.

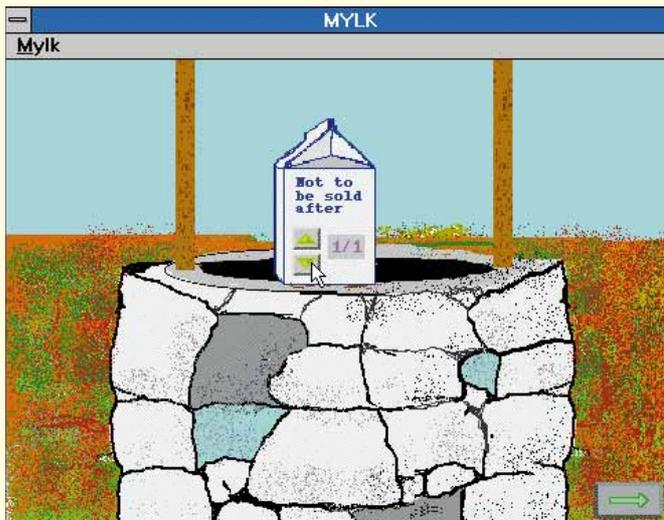
The game consists of a grid of tiles each bearing different symbols and the object is to press all the tiles down: for example, clicking on a tile with a + sign pushes down that tile, as well as its neighbours to the north, south, east and west. An "X" affects the NE, NW, SE and SW, and so on. A piece of cake really, except for the major irritation that once a tile is

down, clicking on another tile which affects that square will bring it back up. Earlier on, I thought it I might have had to make a straight choice between getting this column in on time and completing the first level. But having found the "hint" feature, I'm starting to get the hang of it now. Registration costs \$12.95, it's infuriating and addictive, so to preserve sanity I'll move on to *Stellar Explorer (Windows/Files/Stellar.zip)*.

To boldly warp...

This is a relatively ancient game (1992 file dates) but one I'd never seen before. The screen consists of a ten-by-ten grid with a load of trekkie-titled buttons such as "Photon", "Phasers" and "Warp" (no, it's not from IBM, it comes from Technological Computer Innovations of Lafayette), and an impressive array of flashing lights. The object of the game is to "eliminate all the aliens before you are destroyed." However, this reassuringly American gung-ho mission doesn't involve any split-second arcade action — it's essentially a board game. There are sound effects though and various bits of the screen flash when something exciting is happening. Well, perhaps "exciting" is an overstatement. Personally I found it less interesting than *Notepad*, but if your idea of a challenge is to decipher (from the Help file) what sentences such as "When viewing the short range scan, warping is done within a quadrant" means, you may like it enough to fork out the \$20 registration fee. Meanwhile, I made my excuses and boldly went.

Boxes (also in *Windows/Files* on CIX as *boxes400.zip*) shows an immediate touch of class by playing non-stop *mid-Beethoven*. The game is a little like *Tetris*, in that blocks fall from the top of the screen. You have to guide each block to come to rest on a crate of the same colour. Pile three boxes on top of a crate, and you've cleared that crate — it disappears. Clear all the crates and you've completed the level. The sting in the tail is that the boxes fall in pairs of different colours. The first level is trivial, but once you move up from kindergarten level you begin to appreciate the sheer, dedicated, sadism of the *DynoTech* programmers. At championship level it's a serious mental health risk but great fun. Registration (which entitles you to many more levels) is \$15 for the standard *Boxes* and \$20 for the championship version.



Well, well, well —
it's Mylk

In the moo'd

Next came Mylk — “the mystical low fat adventure that will become your world” and a distinctly high fat 2.25Mb download. This was originally written for the Macintosh by Bart Gold and converted to Windows by Wayne Twitchell. It's written as a pyss-take of — sorry, tribute to — Myst, and no, I didn't make those names up. I found it, once more, in the Windows/Files topic but if you're not a CIXen, try emailing the author at bartacus@caprica.com for other sources. There's only one menu and the help file consists of “Click on everything — tables, stands, cartons and buttons”. It's also one of the first applications I've seen that uses the new Microsoft graphics system, WinG. It must be said, however, that pictorial content is not really its strong suit, but this is much redeemed by the storyline and gameplay.

Now, let's see if I can get this right: you're on this island, see; solve the first puzzle, and the ashtray with six little stones in it changes into an animated bull, which tells you that someone's been destroying the milk cartons. It could be Frances the chicken, or maybe Farmer Ben. Or was that Ben the Chicken and Farmer Frances? Never mind.

Check out the books in the barn, and examine carefully anything that looks like a milk carton. It may be animated, or depending on the sell-by date it may transport you to the magic mountain where the celebrated Swiss Army knife puzzle is to be found. Solve that one, and you're well on the way to discovering where the farmer keeps his moonshine.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, you're this cow Elsie, if you see what I mean. Oh, and that thing with the stones in it isn't an ashtray at all; the

screen tells me it's a “forechamber imager”. Now, where was I? Down by the well, I think, where this milk carton appears to be some sort of time machine. Come to mention it, the manure heap smells a bit off, too, and I can't find the fruit machine any more — I'm sure it was there last night.

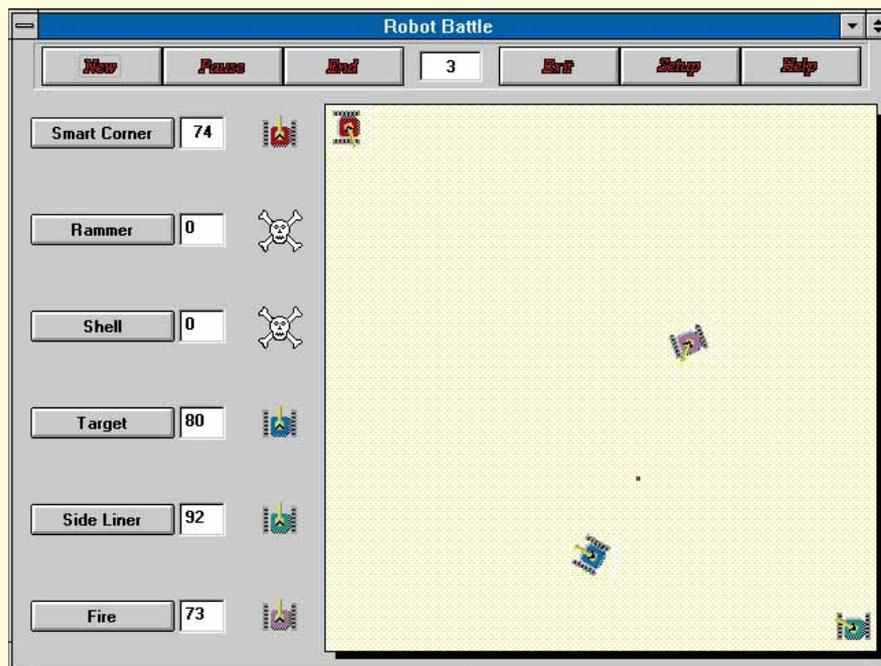
Nothing is quite what it seems, here. Mylk is delightfully weird, seriously puzzling, and was all done with Macromedia Director. There are lots of jolly noises and tiny animations to liven up the rather dull graphics, and it's absolutely free.

Finally, from the Winrobots CIX conference comes Robot Battle, by Brad Schick (robotbtl@aol.com). This starts off simply

The infernally addictive Puzzle

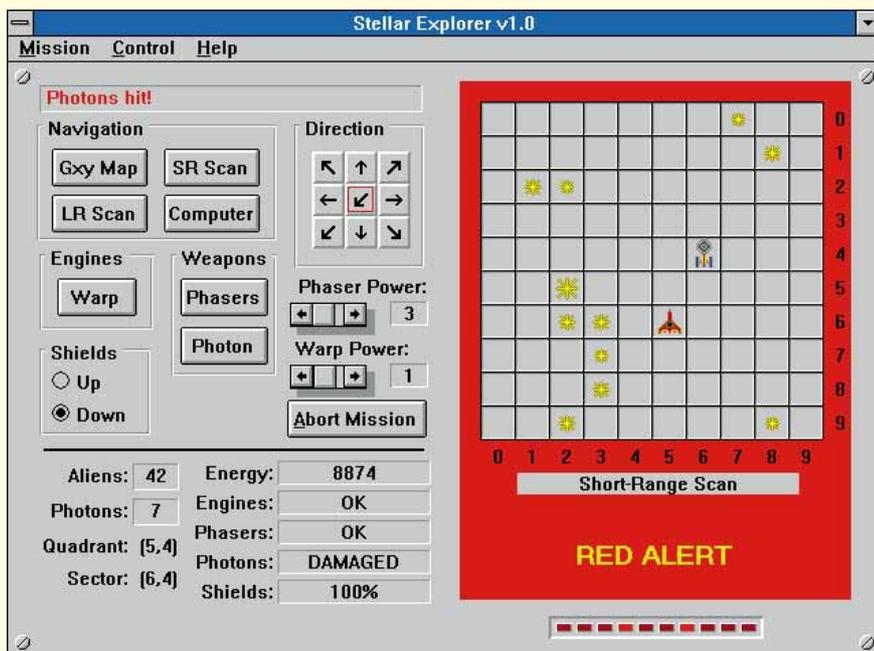


enough: choose up to six robots, then let them get on with it. They are all represented by little tanks of different colours but they behave in different ways: the Rammer tries to destroy other robots by crashing into them; the Side Liner runs up and down the side of the arena desperately trying to avoid conflict, rather like the school weed at football. Eventually, one robot will see off all the rest and sit in a corner wagging its gun triumphantly and letting off the occasional celebratory round. The challenge starts when you begin designing your own robots, using what the manual refers to as "a simple scripting language". This uses commands such as "DtcCookieEvents (boolean)" which is "used to either turn on or off, handling of energy cookie detection events" so I must admit I have yet to really get the hang of this. Suffice it to say that you seem to be able to control all aspects of a robot's



Above *Robot Battle* — Sit back, relax, and watch the little blighters destroy each other

Left *Warping with Stellar Explorer* — will the engines take it?



behaviour and event-handling. What makes this game really different is that you can pitch your robot against others in an international contest. The next takes place on 1st November, with cash prizes for the winner and five runners-up. It costs \$10 to enter a robot, and \$25 to register the program, although you don't need to do the latter to compete.

Columnist in egg-on-face shock!

In the April issue of *PCW*, I wagged a stern finger at Nildram for releasing a shareware product which, in my opinion, was a crippled version of the registered edition and thus not really in the shareware spirit. I'm very pleased to report that despite this,

Screen Thief has been nominated for two international shareware awards. Well, I did say it was excellent, apart from that.

Feedback

In July's column about RAM upgrades, I mentioned that 30-pin SIMMs were rapidly falling out of favour and that most, if not all, PCI local bus motherboards will only take the 72-pin variety. "Thank you" to someone who signs themselves as Ivor B, for pointing out that there is an alternative to trading in your old SIMMs if you upgrade the motherboard. It's a SIMM Swapper, a 72-pin holder that will hold 4 x 30-pin SIMMs. It uses 8-bit or 9-bit SIMMs to make 32-bit or 36-bit 72-pin SIMMs. It

takes combinations of 256Kb, 1Mb or 4Mb 30-pins x 4, to give 1Mb, 4Mb, or 16Mb respectively. More details are available, Ivor tells me, from Linefeed, or HCS.

Going further back in time, to the days of disk spring-cleaning, Charles Drayson's question is so obvious that it never occurred to me at the time. He emailed me to ask: "Is there a text which describes the files which come with Windows so that I can try to identify those that didn't?" The good news is that there is. It's called LAYOUTS.WRI and lists every file on the installation disks, what each one does, and which disk it is on. There's just one tiny snag. Go on, guess. Yup, that's right; LAYOUTS.WRI is not, itself, one of these files. It's part of the Windows Resource Kit which can be bought from Microsoft as a book with disks or downloaded on line (sorry, I don't personally know of an FTP address). You should also find it on this month's cover CD. This is the Windows 3.1 version. I'm still looking for the Windows for Workgroups 3.11 version, but have so far only been able to find it in French, without the descriptions.

In my column in the May issue, I mentioned the curious email address of Hiroki Nakayama, author of Graffiti;

Ten Top Tips for Windows

Starting Windows To start Windows and a program, type WIN :program.exe at the DOS prompt. This works with associated documents, too — e.g. WIN :C:\DOCS\MYFILE.TXT will load the file into Notepad. (Thank you Adrian Waddingham.) Note that there must be a space between WIN and the colon and that this also suppresses the startup screen.

Fonts Write starts up with a strange font? Check that Arial is the first TrueType font listed in the [fonts] section of WIN.INI.

Fax/Modems If you use a fax package to wait for incoming faxes, you may find you can't use comms software without first closing it. Then there's the additional hassle of remembering to start it again. So try using the "Advanced settings" in Control Panel/Ports to set two COM ports to the same IRQ and address. Point the comms to one port, the fax software to the other. I don't guarantee success, but it works for me.

Control Panel Keep its parts beyond the reach of meddlers by adding a [Don't Load] section to CONTROL.INI, containing a list of entries in the format. For example, Fonts=1.

Program Manager If you don't like a program's icon, you can change it. Press Alt+Enter, "Change Icon", then "Browse". You can look in any file — PROGMAN.EXE has some useful "spares", MORICONS.DLL has a selection ready-made for DOS applications, and dutiful digging elsewhere (e.g. the .CPL files in WINDOWS\SYSTEM) will find more.

Screen Savers Forget your password? Delete the "password=" line in the [Screensavers] section of CONTROL.INI. The password will default to an empty string — i.e. you just press return to get back in.

Write To start Write with (say) Times New Roman as the default font instead of Arial, start Write, change the font and save as "Default.wri". Use File Manager to make this read only, and replace the Write Program Manager item with this file. As the file is read-only you'll be prompted to save under a new name each time.

File Manager It's not the easiest thing to remember, so here it is again: dragging a file to a directory on the same logical drive moves it; control + drag copies it. Between drives: drag copies, while Shift or Alt + drag moves.

Multimedia If you buy an internal CD-ROM drive and sound card, check that there's an audio lead to connect the two internally. That way you can play audio CDs without having to connect the socket in the front of the former, to the input in the back of the latter.

Cardfile Ctrl+Shift + letter takes you to the first entry whose title begins with "letter". If you want to "promote" an entry to be first in its letter group, type a space after the first letter in the index, e.g. "Personal Computer World".

=?ISO-2022-JP?B?GyRCQ2Y7MyEhTT U0cBsoQg==?= Reader, Richard-in-HR8, emailed me out of my misery by explaining that this was a part of the "MIME (Multi-purpose Internet Mail Extensions) thing for using non-ASCII characters in message headers and/or bodies. The syntax is weird and was chosen so as not to be mangled by certain mailers and to reduce ambiguity with 'proper' header lines." He then went on to kindly explain what it all meant: "The ISO-2022-JP specifies the character set in use; I think this one is a 16-bit thing. Anyway, it's probably Japanese." After that, it got complicated with references to Base 64 encoding and I was plunged back deeper into misery. I think I'll leave that sort of thing to people who know better in future.

Following my recent advice on spring-cleaning your system, I have heard from David Agbamu who found "somewhere on CompuServe" a program called "Wincrap". The accompanying text read: "Tired of the shrapnel Windows programs leave behind? WINCRAP displays the name information stored in Windows binaries

including EXE, DRV, FON, DLL etc. Clean up your hard disk by identifying un-needed files. Works great on the \WINDOWS and \WINDOWS\SYSTEM directory. Back up before using, just in case you delete something that is really needed. WINCRAP does not delete anything on its own, just a report. Must be run at DOS prompt, can be directed to file such as WINCRAP > CRAP.TXT. If you like it, send \$5.00 (beer money) to an out of work programmer. Steve Farkas, 3615 Longridge Avenue, Sherman Oaks, Ca. 91423, USA. 76507,1110@compuserve.com."

Although I haven't yet seen this myself, I think it's definitely in the public interest to report the existence of this delightfully-named product.

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