

A Magic Carpet Ride

It's Easy To Get Carried Away With Bullfrog's Beautiful MAGIC CARPET

by Mark Clarkson

THE WIND ROARS IN MY EARS AS MY FLYING CARPET SKIMS JUST INCHES ABOVE THE ROLLING OCEAN WAVES. Before me rises the castle of my enemy. Ready to cast the appropriate spells, I accelerate and sweep over the castle wall so rapidly that I am momentarily disoriented and might lose my footing on the carpet were that possible. Then I am over the parapets and among a mass of startled, black-clad archers. They recover quickly and drop to their knees, taking aim. Arrows whiz by, inches away, but none strike home. In return, I unleash a rain of fire, killing many of the archers where they stand, and burning ugly scars onto the pristine white walls of my enemy's castle. In seconds I am over the far wall again and accelerating out over the ocean in a sweeping curve to approach the castle from another direction.

I glance into the all-seeing eye and note a tell-tale spear of red fire approaching me. Another wizard, known to me only as Vodor, has felt my attack on his castle and I am seeing the dissipation of magical energy as he rushes to its aid. He will be too late.

I invoke my most powerful spell. A flaming meteor roars over my head and falls to strike the castle. The explosion is fantastic and when it clears the outer walls have disintegrated, blasted down to bedrock. Lustrous red globes of manna, the source of all my enemy's wealth and power, spill unprotected into the sun. Mine for the taking, if I'm quick.

But as I advance I hear the dreaded

'click' of a magical trap being sprung and a trio of sinuous dragons materializes in the air before me. They turn, bellowing with rage, and my world fills with fire.

HELP ME! I'M ENCHANTED

Forgive me if I seem to have lost my grip on reality, but I've been playing Bullfrog's new first-person action/strategy game, *MAGIC CARPET*. I've been spending all my time lately flying around on my magic carpet, blasting bad-dies with fire and lightning. I haven't had a computer game suck me in like this since



WIZARD DOGFIGHT Three wizards blast each other with deadly magic while their drone balloons harvest manna to increase their power.

DOOM. *MAGIC CARPET* is simply marvelous.

You are an apprentice wizard whose quest is to visit the 50 "shattered worlds" in turn, restoring each to magical balance; monsters, traps, and other wizards stand in your way.

MAGIC CARPET takes you outside, where few first-person games dare to tread, into island landscapes of oceans

and sometimes downright beautiful, especially if you have the hardware to run the game in high resolution mode. Ocean waves roll and pitch. Objects cast shadows and are reflected in the water. Fly low over a village and you hear the background chatter of voices. Hover above the water and you hear the lap of the waves. Pick up speed and the waves are replaced by the sound of wind.

The landscape itself shifts during play. Fireballs dig furrows in the ground and ignite palm trees into blazing tiki torches. The scene of a battle can quickly come to resemble the closing seconds of *Apocalypse Now*. Potent earthquake spells rend the earth, sometimes cleaving entire landmasses. Other spells gouge out great craters or raise erupting volcanoes that spit out burning boulders.

The monsters and enemy wizards are acceptably nasty and shrewd, but the civilian population is downright zombie-like. They take no notice of your flying over their heads, loosing lightning storms and meteors. It would be nice if they'd at least turn and point.

I CAN FLY!

The experience of flight is the single most engaging part of *MAGIC CARPET*. It will have you bobbing your head and applying heavy doses of body english. My

MAGIC CARPET

Price: \$54.95

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

486-33 or

better, CD-

ROM, 8 MB

RAM, VGA

graphics, 2 MB

hard drive

space, mouse;

(recommended:

486-50 or faster, 2x CD-ROM) supports

Sound Blaster compatibles and most major

sound cards.

Protection: None

of Players: 1-8 (network)

Designer: Peter Molyneux of Bullfrog

Publisher: Electronic Arts

San Mateo, CA

(800) 245-4525



and palm tree forests, featuring castles, monsters and grotesque, mysterious monuments. Lovely hot-air balloons dot cloud-filled skies.

The quality of the landscapes is always



I AM THE WIZARD KING Amidst a hail of flameballs and lightning spells, a wizard flies over his besieged castle, his enemy's bones drying in the sun.

wife, who's never shown the slightest interest in any flight sim or DOOM clone, pronounced it "neat." Even my six-year-old daughter loves to fly around and explore the worlds, once I've rid them of monsters and traps.

You drive the carpet with both mouse and keyboard. The mouse (or joystick, if you prefer) controls the carpet's attitude. You use the mouse to pitch up or down,

and to roll left or right. The keyboard controls your direction of travel and speed. Press the up arrow key once and you'll slowly move forward; press it again and you'll pick up speed. Now move the mouse to the left and you'll bank left. Pull back on the mouse to climb; push forward to dive. You can't fall off and you can't crash into anything. Hey, it's a magic carpet.

Using keyboard and mouse in combination, you can execute any number of artful flying maneuvers. By moving left while simultaneously banking right, for example, you can circle an enemy. Or you can charge in going forward, swing around a monster, and depart flying backwards, firing all the time. It seems as though it would be hard to use two control devices at once, but it becomes natural in a surprisingly short time.

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MANNA, HOW I LOVE YA

Battles in MAGIC CARPET are fought with magic. You will eventually have 32 different spells to choose from, if you can find them all. You begin the game with naught but the magic carpet of the game's title. You'll have to pick up power, spells, and experience as you go along. Spells are found in urns scattered around the various worlds, which at first are obvious and above ground. In later levels, the spells lie hidden, waiting for you to trip an invisible, magical switch before they materialize, usually with an accompanying slew of monsters. As you progress through the worlds, the spells get more powerful, going from simple fireball to rapid-fireball to the horrific Global Death spell.

To use those spells, you'll need manna. Manna is to magic what gasoline is to the internal combustion engine. The more manna you have the more spells you can cast, and the more damaging those spells will be. Without manna you are powerless.

Manna appears as shiny globes, sometimes found lying loose on the ground or floating above the water. By casting a "possess" spell, you can claim it as your own. Manna left lying around loose will be possessed by enemy wizards, or consumed by monsters. But most of the worlds' manna is locked away in the form of unholy monsters who threaten wizard and peaceful civilian alike.

There are vultures who peck your flesh, giant worms, fire-breathing dragons, huge tusked apes who hurl flaming boulders, and swarms of deadly killer bees. (I hate the killer bees!) These monsters aren't natural; they're magical. Destroy them, and they give up the manna that went into their creation.

A WIZARD'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE

One of your first tasks on every world is to build yourself a castle. The castles provide you with thick walls to hide behind and a place to store your manna. A castle has hot air balloons which drift over the landscape, gathering up the manna you've possessed and returning it to your castle for safe keeping. A small castle can only hold a small amount of manna. When your castle fills, you must enlarge it.

You'll need to keep a close eye on the strength of your castle's walls. If monsters or other wizards succeed in reducing or destroying it, all of your hard-won manna will spill out. When you have gathered



sufficient manna within its walls, the world is restored. You can then move on to the next world, or fly around gathering up manna and spells you may have missed, or just enjoy the scenery. Restore all 50 worlds and the game is won.

You'll need eight megabytes of RAM to experience *MAGIC CARPET* in its unabridged form, although you can play it with six or even, Bullfrog claims, four megabytes by turning off ambient sounds and some of the effects like sky and shadows.

With *MAGIC CARPET*, Bullfrog is pushing the edge of the hardware envelope, and only those with the fastest machines need apply. The game is optimized for play on a Pentium, and to run it on even the fastest of 486 PCs requires compromise. On a 486/66 PC without local bus video, I had to turn off some of the video effects (sky, motion blur, etc.) to get smooth motion. And that's in low resolution mode. Don't even consider the high resolution mode unless you've got an 8 megabyte Pentium with a fast PCI bus video card. *MAGIC CARPET* also provides two 3D modes: red/blue 3D (glasses provided), and Stereogram (those random dot pictures that some people can't see). It also supports the VFX 1 Virtual Headset, although I didn't get a chance to test it. Finally, the game can be played on a network with up to eight wizards vying for supremacy. Unfortunately for most of us, it does not support modem play.

MAGIC CARPET provides a wonderful blend of first-person shooter and strategy game. You'll need both eye-hand coordination and resource management skills. You must know your spells and keep them programmed for easy access at a second's notice. You must learn to keep your eye on your castle, your balloons, your manna, and the other wizards, while simultaneously dueling with dragons. Captured by its spell, *MAGIC CARPET* will keep you busier than a Sorcerer's Apprentice. 🐉

THE EDITORS SPEAK

MAGIC CARPET

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A fevered first-person shooter with real strategic depth; amazing visual effects for the spells; a cutthroat network mode.

CONS A game that will push your hardware to the limit, and then some.

Before & After



A RAVINE RUNS THROUGH IT The bigger the castle or landmass, the more spectacular is the destruction from the Earthquake spell. Marked only by that little sphere at left, the spell slices through the castle and carves through the entire *continent*, instantly, in real time.



LIGHTNING STRIKES AGAIN A handy way of dealing with a cluster of enemy forces, such as these Demons, is to cast the Lightning Storm spell. The spell floats above, stabbing any living creature with scorching lightning fingers, often killing everything in its reach.



BURNIN' DOWN THE HOUSE Why use that puny one-shot flameball when you can unleash a firestorm like this? The Meteor erupts in a torrent of fire that can denude hillsides and burn castles to their foundations in seconds.



YOU'LL POMPEII FOR THIS! Here we've installed a lovely, active volcano in the living room of an opposing wizard. Sadly, it didn't fit very well, so we had to burn the castle walls to the ground.

