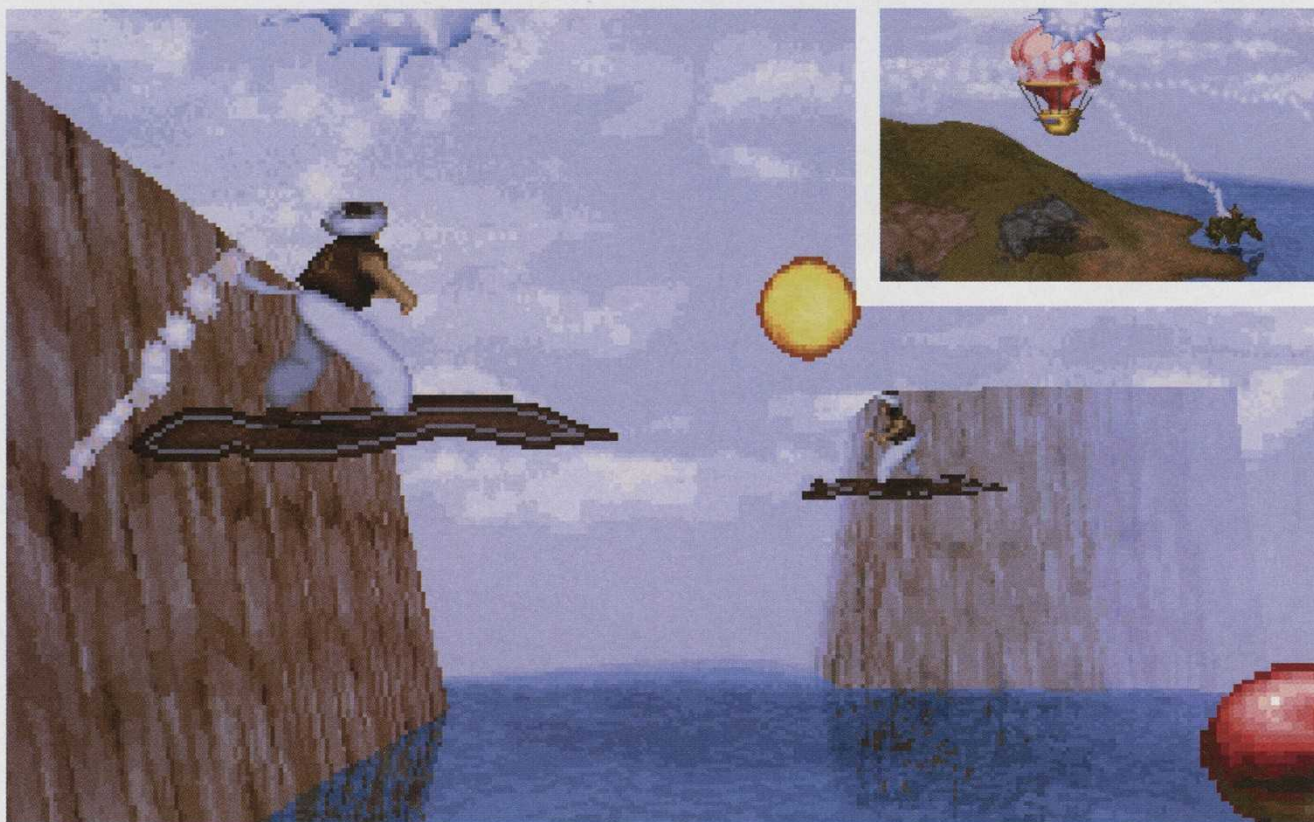


testscreen

Magic Carpet



Magic Carpet's graphics probably represent the PC's finest hour. Two enemy magi (wizards) slog it out over a glittering sea while you sit back and annihilate them both (above). An enemy balloon and a kraken suffer the full force of your wrath (inset)

Format: PC

Publisher: Bullfrog

Developer: In-house

Price: £50

Release : Nov 18 (UK)

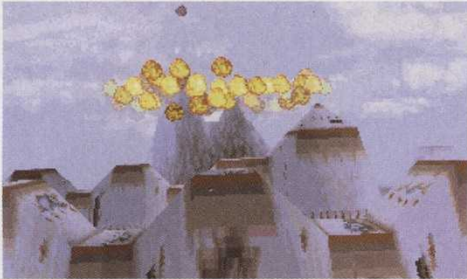
Virtually every successful software company has made it big by carving out a specific niche for itself.

LucasArts dominates the graphic adventure genre with hits like *Monkey Island* and *Sam 'n' Max*. Maxis depends entirely on its *Sim* series for sales revenue. And Electronic Arts is the undisputed champion of the sports sim. So when a developer eschews the style of game it is best known for and flies off in a completely unexpected direction, people sit up and take notice. Especially when that company is the sickeningly successful Bullfrog.

Bullfrog made its name with intensely playable strategy games like *Populous*, *Powermonger* and *Syndicate*. However, its new creation is a full-on arcade trip whose main strength is its luscious graphics. In fact, in

Magic Carpet Bullfrog has managed to create one of the finest realtime environments ever seen. As you explore on the magic carpet which is your mode of transport throughout the game, the landscape scrolls beneath you with breathtaking speed and smoothness. The texture-mapped polygons are expertly depth cued and shade off into a beautiful mist effect in the near distance – this not only softens the whole view, making it more realistic, but it also obviates the need to draw to the horizon, allowing the game to run faster and use less memory. A similar effect was seen in the Novalogic shoot 'em up *Comanche*, but the results of the proprietary 'Voxel Space' technique used in that game were far inferior.

You don't need a top-of-the-range Pentium to make the earth move, either: even on a



The volcano spell only appears later in the game. It shows everything around with lava and is the most effective method of razing an opponent's castle to the ground. Before (left) and after (right)

486DX2/66 the frame rate is very fast. If you have a lower-spec machine, you can speed the game up considerably by selecting one of the lower-detail options, but many players will decide that the game's full graphical finery enriches the atmosphere so much that it easily compensates for the slightly reduced feeling of motion.

Magic Carpet is also blessed with a model control system. It's sufficiently sensitive to permit fine adjustments but still allows violent evasive action. Moving the mouse affects pitch and roll and the cursor keys control sideways movement and speed. You automatically rise

over hills and feel no ill effects if you collide with a wall, which makes the game less of a flight sim and more of an arcade experience.

But, of course, games live or die by their gameplay. And the gameplay in *Magic Carpet* is bloody marvellous. You play a wizard who has to do battle with up to seven other wizards in each of the game's 50 worlds as well as all that world's other inhabitants. Killing a sentient being (peasants don't count) releases its mana (magical energy) in the form of a ball. Casting a spell turns these balls from a neutral gold into your playing colour (eg blue), which allows you to dispatch a balloon from your

Options

Magic Carpet has a wide range of options to suit the power of your PC. Clouds can be added to the sky with a minimal loss of speed. The water can be set to reflect silhouettes only, although the result is that you lose the stunning effect of full reflections on rippling water. Anti-aliasing can also be turned on to soften edges, but this has a heavy CPU burden and can make the landscape look fuzzy on a small monitor. Options making their first appearance in a mainstream PC game include support for 3D glasses and stereogram generation.



Summon an army of skeleton warriors to aid your attacks (above). This mirror (top left) teleports you to a random place on the map. An earthquake spell in the process of destroying a castle (top right). Killer bees attack in swarms (inset). Mana balls have to be changed to your colour before you can capture them (right)

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testscreen

castle to collect them. As your balloon drifts around gathering mana, it becomes a target for other wizards looking to steal your gains. Defending it while maintaining pressure on your opponents is an art in itself. As you collect more mana your spells become more effective and your castle becomes more heavily fortified – archers even appear on the ramparts to ward off attacks.

There are 12 different types of enemy on which you can unleash your spells. All possess an array of magic and physical attacks which they employ with unnerving intelligence. Some attack as individuals while others swarm towards you in a collective attempt to knock you out of the sky.

All this means that *Magic Carpet* is the best of all worlds. Not only is it a visual treat, a thoroughly exhilarating experience and a

frantic blast, but it incorporates just the right amount of strategy to ensure that you never get bored. Bullfrog has distilled all the highly addictive elements of its God sims into a single game, and added raw pace. At its most basic, it's an inspired mix of *Populous* and an arcade game, combining the best graphics outside an arcade with freeform gameplay. It's also a seriously longterm challenge, especially with the superb network option which allows up to eight players to contest the airspace in a frantic orgy of multiplayer violence.

Magic Carpet more than vindicates Bullfrog's change of course. It's a game that's as addictive, demanding and visually impressive as *Doom II*. And that's some achievement.



Edge rating: **Nine out of ten**



Five seconds ago this banner flew above a mighty fortress (top right). The genie is a potent foe (right). 3D glasses are supported (top). Water is fully reflective (above middle) The map alters as your geomorphology experiments continue (above)