

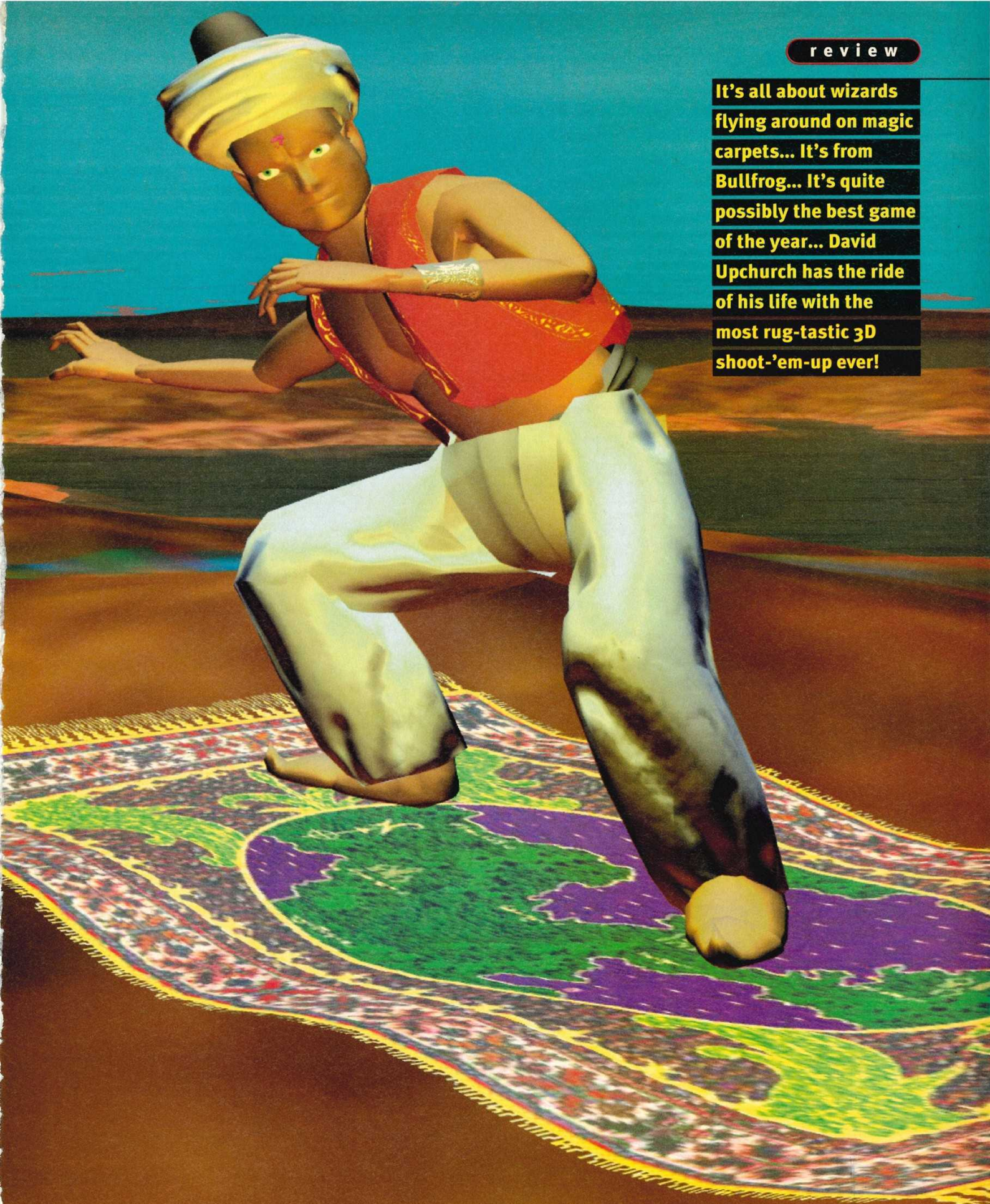
review



# Magic Carpet<sup>CD</sup>



**It's all about wizards flying around on magic carpets... It's from Bullfrog... It's quite possibly the best game of the year... David Upchurch has the ride of his life with the most rug-tastic 3D shoot-'em-up ever!**

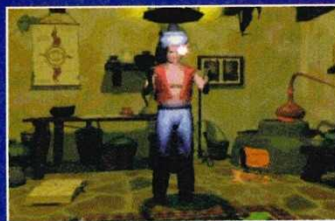




The sorry tale of how the planet came to be in a mess is told in story-book form...



The screen dissolves to show the young apprentice, holding a magical orb...



The orb rises, then falls onto the rug on the floor, instilling it with magical life...



A dragon's roar is heard! The lad hops on the carpet and prepares to do battle...

## Oh, That's *Lovely*...

We love a game with a good intro sequence, we do — and *Magic Carpet's* is simply *exquisite*. Here it is, in all its rendered glory...

**W**hen I was a child I dreamed of having my own magic carpet, and of being able to soar and swoop high over the rooftops of my home village. And now, at long last, those dreams have been fulfilled. Not literally, you understand — the only thing magical about the carpets in my house is the fact that you can still see the pattern beneath all the lager and curry stains.

No, I am, of course, referring to *Magic Carpet*, the latest game to emerge from the pedigree Bullfrog stable. Already on something of a roll after the phenomenal critical and commercial success of *Theme Park*, the Bullfrog phenomenon shows no signs of losing steam with this — it's not only the best game Bullfrog have ever created, it's also in with a odds-on chance of being the game of the year.

*Magic Carpet* is set in a mystical, Aladdin-style fantasy world. Once a beautiful blue and green jewel floating serenely through space, the planet has been scarred and ravaged by an apocalyptic war between rival power-crazed wizards. Now, as the apprentice of the last 'good' wizard (now deceased, sadly), it's your duty to attempt to restore the world's natural balance.

This plot is detailed in the game's lengthy but impressive intro. Starting off as a tale read from an ancient manuscript, it neatly dovetails into a beautifully rendered animated sequence depicting the apprentice hero battling a fire-breathing dragon.

Typically, of course, such intros are the over-sweet icing on a disappointingly ordinary and bland cake. No so in *Magic Carpet's* case — if anything, the in-game graphics are even more jaw-dropping than the intro's.

You see, our turban-headed hero doesn't travel across his troubled world on anything so mundane as a horse or a ship. Oh no, he's a wizard's apprentice, remember? And what better mode of transport for an aspiring mage could there be other than a magic carpet? Nothing... except a broomstick, maybe

— but then he's a warlock, and only witches use broomsticks.

Employing an 'in your face' first-person 3D perspective, your carpet's-back view of the eerily-beautiful, mist-shrouded world is truly spectacular. Gliding oh-so-smoothly over the rugged hills, plunging crevasses and dense woodlands is a joy in itself — it's very easy to become completely mesmerised by the whole thing.

And if you've got a *really* fast machine — a Pentium would do nicely — you can turn on all sorts of additional special effects, like a texture-mapped sky, reflections in the water and anti-aliasing. However, while this *does* add to the experience, the basic 3D is perfectly good enough as it is, so owners of mere 33MHz 486s needn't feel that they're missing out on too much.

Perhaps the most incredible thing about this 3D — by far the best I've ever seen on the PC, or any other machine for that matter — is that it's Bullfrog's first attempt at a 'true' 3D engine; their previous games — i.e. *Populous*, *Powermonger*, *Syndicate* — have all used a forced isometric-3D perspective. Given the engine's power and versatility, I've a feeling we'll be seeing a lot more of it in future Bullfrog games...

### It's a bit like...

...*Doom*, especially in multi-player mode. Easily as tense and nail-biting as *Doom* ever was, *Magic Carpet's* gameplay also offers far more subtlety and, because of the freedom you have to move around and interact with the gameworld, there's greater scope for cunningly devious tactics. Indeed, *Magic Carpet* is destined to become the net-player's favourite after-hours time-waster...



You can choose to blow up houses and kill the people inside to get their Mana, but it's better to use Possession spells on them instead — you're awarded the Mana instantly, rather than having to wait for your balloons to pick it up.



Some special features on the landscape are trapped — fly too near to them and something disastrous may happen, like an army of skeletons will appear and attack you, or a volcano will erupt. However, clever players can try to lure their opponents into them...



Seeing the Volcano spell in action is a truly awe-inspiring experience — a pillar of rock erupts from the ground, spewing fire and balls of lava from the top. Golly!



In the epic conflict that follows, mere fireballs soon prove useless against the beast...



The apprentice draws on all his mystical power and generates an awesome spell...



...Which he casts at the approaching dragon in a desperate last ditch attempt to kill it...



The dragon dead, our weary hero flies slowly back to his castle home...

(Below) Take that, you fiend! Although battling rival wizards is a serious drain on your Mana and health, it can repay dividends — by casting a Possession spell at the skeleton of the dead wizard, you gain all the spells they owned.

(Below) Take care when placing your castle — build it too near another building and your base's expansion will be restricted by the obstruction in the way. This is another fact that can be used to your advantage if you're a bit smart...



Gorillas and trolls don't like being disturbed. Shoot at them and they'll lob boulders and rocks at you. Nasty.

The wonderful thing about it all is that flying on the carpet *feels* exactly how you imagine it would do. Part of this is down to the simple and very-easy-to-get-the-hang-of mouse/keyboard-combo control system where, basically, the mouse governs the steering and the keyboard the speed you travel at.

Within seconds of playing you'll be as proficient at, um, carpet driving (for want of a better term) as, say, Aladdin — although thankfully, there's no irritating Robin Williams-voiced genie accompanying you. Indeed, it's all so intuitive that, like any good control system, it soon becomes transparent, allowing you to get on and enjoy the game without any hassle.

The excellent flying sensation is also partly due to the clever and subtle use of sound. Fly up high and all you can hear is the roar of the wind, descend down to sea level and you begin to hear the lapping of the waves, glide past a flock of birds and you can hear them squawk and flap, and so on. Acting as a backdrop to all this is a marvellously 'ambient' Middle Eastern-style soundtrack, which changes tempo and force depending on what's going on on-screen. Fantastic.

But what's the game like? After all, if the game's a dog, then even the best 3D engine in the world (which, actually, this probably is) is worthless. Relax — Magic Carpet plays as good as it looks and sounds, if not better.

As mentioned earlier, your task is to restore your homeworld's natural balance. Obviously, it's a little unfair to



Ah. Whoops. I saw this spell jar on my scanner and went to get it, and unwittingly activated a trap. I'm now surrounded by legions of skeleton warriors, swarms of bees and a dragon or two. I should've *known* the spell wouldn't be that easy to pick up.

expect you to harmonise the whole planet at once, so to make your life easier it's been broken down into fifty realms. Once a realm's natural balance is back to normal, you can move on to the next and do it all over again. As you'd expect, the going get tougher the further you progress.

But how do you restore each realm's natural balance? By collecting a set amount of Mana, that's how. Every creature in the gameworld — and these include peasants, soldiers, skeletons, dragons, griffons, trolls and even giant crabs! — possess Mana, a magical energy force. Killing these creatures forces them to release their Mana (shown as a shiny golden sphere) which you can then collect — once you've built a cas-

tle, anyway, but I'll get on to them in a moment or two.

Mana is also the 'fuel' for your spells. At first you have no spells, but scour the landscape and you'll eventually find little red jars which, when picked up (by simply flying into them), add a spell to your inventory. You can then assign this spell to either your right or left mouse button and use it in battle.

In all there are twenty-four types of spell you can employ, ranging from the basic cheap 'n' cheerful spells like Fireball and Speed-Up, through the 'useful' spells like Heal and Temporary Invisibility, to the mega-destructive but Mana-sapping spells such as Volcano and Meteor. Basically speaking, the more potent the spell is, the more Mana



Pressing both mouse buttons or the Return key brings up a map of the current realm and the spell menu — all 24 spells are shown.



The sea-dwelling Krakens are *really* tough cookies — first they 'lock on' to you with a Rubber Band spell, then they cast Lightning spells at you. Aaaaaaeeee!

you have to acquire before you can cast it and the longer it takes to recharge before you can cast it again.

The special effects accompanying the spells are breath-taking. Casting the Skeleton Army spell, for example, causes a group of undead warriors to grow from the earth. The Earthquake spell, on the other hand, cuts a ragged gash across the landscape, the ground crumbling away before your eyes, while Volcano makes a mountainous pillar of rock erupt from the earth, spewing fire and balls of flaming lava into the sky. The first time you see these spells in action, you really won't be able to believe your eyes.

Perhaps my favourite spell — and arguably the most important one — is the Castle spell, which creates a fortified base in which to store your Mana. When you first cast this spell it erects a pathetic little keep, but every further time it's cast, the size and strength of your castle grows. Walls, towers and parapets form — you even get a small battalion of soldiers to help guard it from attack.

And you get hot-air balloons too. These balloons are your automatic Mana collectors, drifting slowly across the realm, picking up the Mana left by

slain monsters and taking it slowly back to your castle for storage. However, they'll only pick up Mana that you've 'possessed' by using the aptly-named Possession spell — you can tell when a Mana ball has been possessed because it changes colour from gold to silver.

As you progress through the fifty realms, the creatures you face become tougher to kill — and you'll often find that they won't give up their precious Mana without a fight. You'll encounter rival wizards too, each scooting about on their own magic carpets and with their own castle bases — and this is when the game gets *really* interesting.

Like you, these wizards are hungry for Mana and will do *anything* to get it. They'll think nothing of possessing the Mana from monsters you've just spent five minutes trying to kill, or destroying your balloons to get at the Mana inside, or pulverising your castle and stealing your precious Mana stores.

The worst thing is that they're a bugger to kill — or, at least, to kill permanently. You knock them out of the sky with a Meteor spell and think you're safe, then they turn up again, good as new. You see, the problem is that wizards regenerate a short time after being killed as long as their home castle is still standing. The trick therefore is to zap them, then rush over to their castle and knock it down, say, an Earthquake or Volcano spell before they have a chance to rejuvenate. It's not easy...

Of course, you get no such 'second chances' — once your health bar is down to zero, that's it, game over, start again. Luckily, however, there are several ways that you can replenish your waning health, such as the Heal spell or, alternatively, by hovering over your castle or one of the stone dolmans that litter the landscape.

Although Magic Carpet may sound like a relatively simple 3D shoot-'em-up, you'll soon find that you have to apply a surprising amount of strategic thought if you're ever going to reach the game's fiftieth realm. There are various little tricks you have to employ to defeat those rival wizards, especially as in the later levels they often start out much more powerful than you.

I don't want to reveal too many of these tricks here — I'm saving them for the player's guide next month! — but, as an example of the sort of thinking involved, the fact that you can only see rival wizards that are within your line of sight, and vice versa, can be used to your advantage — by using the landscape for cover and popping out to fire off a few shots when it's safe, you can gradually wear down your more-powerful rivals without (hopefully!) taking any damage yourself.

As a one-player game Magic Carpet is superb — exhilaratingly fast, action-packed and completely absorbing. However, it's as a multi-player game that the game really comes into its own. Via a network it's possible to play

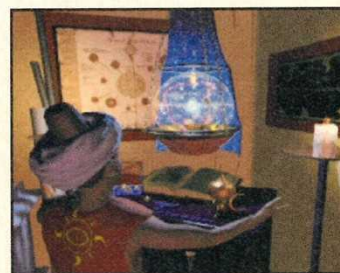


If you've got a beefy Pentium you can switch on loads of extra graphical frills, such as water reflections, textured sky and anti-aliasing, which 'smooths' the graphics.



I keep telling these giant and very nasty bees that I haven't nicked their honey but they just won't have it.

(Below) After successfully completing each realm you're treated to a short cutscene.



## Choices In 3D!

Magic Carpet offers the player the choice between three types of 3D image...



...There's the normal 'flat 3D' mode, which is the one I suspect most people will use...



...Then there's the 'Put on your 3D glasses' mode, as seen in old 50s' horror films...



...And finally there's the 'Go all boggle-eyed and make your head hurt' 3D mode.

### MAGIC CARPET<sup>CD</sup>

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#### MINIMUM SPEC

33MHz 486, VGA, 4Mb RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive and mouse.

#### ALSO SUPPORTS

Sound Blaster, Ad Lib, Pro Audio Spectrum, Gravis UltraSound and SoundMaster 2 soundcards.

#### THE GOOD...

- Without doubt, the most awesome 3D graphics you've ever seen.
- Intense and exciting action, requiring a surprising amount of strategic thought.
- The sensation of flying is simply breathtaking.
- Brilliant multi-player mode that knocks Doom for six.

#### ...AND THE BAD

- Errrr...

### Overall

95%

