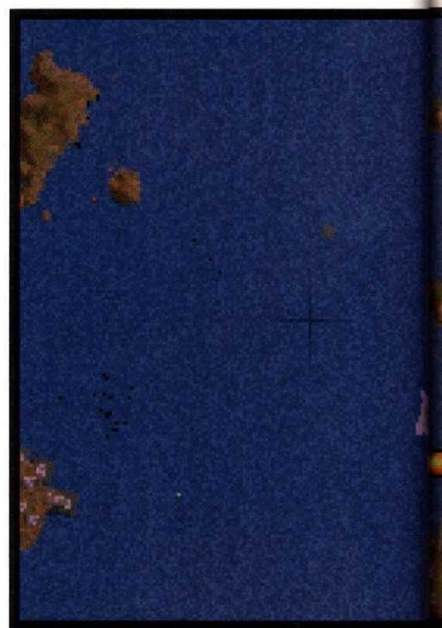


MAGIC CARPET



AND LO' it came to pass in times long past (about a year ago) that the one they called Duncan of the tribe of MacDonald did journey to the land of

Bullfrog in the realm of Guildford (or somesuch nowhere). And he did meet the wise and mighty one, Molyneux of that name. And it did come to pass that there was much burning of tobacco for they were both of the smoking persuasion. Through a Silk Cut haze they did speak a little of the game known as *Theme Park* (For 'twas that the Mac they called Donald had come to see.), but Molyneux had more knowledge

than any in the universe and did say "Come, see, worship," and did lead the Duncan to a screen where a landscape was scrolling at a fair old rate of knots.

"That's smart" said the Duncan, for he was oft one to flatter, especially in the presence of the Molyneux.

"Yes I know" said the Molyneux "but I'm not sure what to do with it yet. I'll probably end up doing a flight sim."

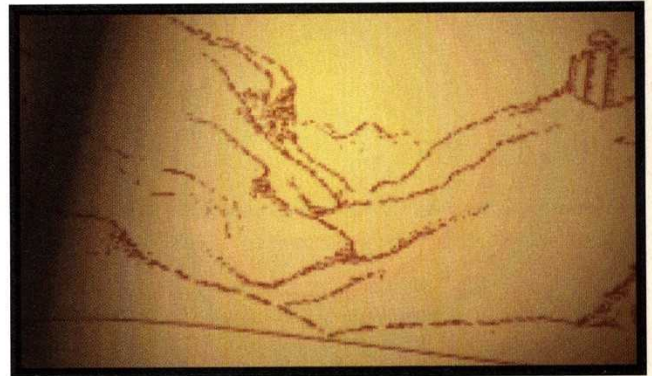
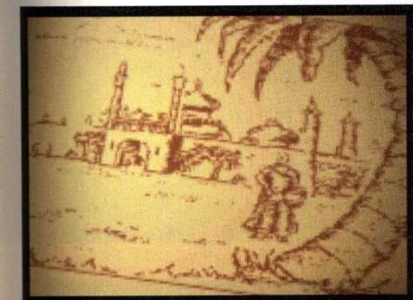
And lo' the audience was over and the Donald of Mac did return to the offices of PC Zone and verily did he rave of what he had seen. So we did sit

So old and sad that he now spends much of his time queuing at Queensway sales, **Paul Takin** takes time out of his World of Home furnishings to cast a glance at the much vaunted *Magic Carpet* from Bullfrog.



(Left) There are all sorts of spells to play with, from pathetic little fireballs to full-scale thermonuclear bits of rock.

(Below) The castles are where the important stuff happens...wipe out an opponents home and he's stuffed.



is to charge around destroying everything in sight. The slight difference is that the Met don't fly around on Magic Carpets firing thunderbolts at everything that moves (Though just give it time...).

The aim of each level is to gather a certain amount of the manna which is dropped by some of the creatures you destroy. (If I was a halfway decent writer I would now make some clever pun about this being the manna by which you restore order, but I'm not so I won't.) By gathering sufficient quantities of this manna and returning it to your castle, which you prepared earlier, you complete the level. Ah, but wait, there's more to it than that. Not much more mind you, but more nonetheless.

Inspiral Carpets

At the start of each level you are confronted with a first-person perspective view of a world populated by a range of creatures

ESR

Electronic Arts and speak to them of the wondrous things the great Molyneux one had unveiled.

"Oh bugger," they did say "He wasn't supposed to show you that."

That's enough padding (Ed.)

So there you have it. Peter Molyneux at Bullfrog had a great routine (though nothing to the one he does with the feather duster, chain saw and packet of smarties...), but he wasn't sure what to do with it. A flight simulation seemed the obvious choice but then, when were Bullfrog ever obvious? So we get *Magic Carpet*, an aerial shoot 'em up with pyjamas.

The scenario is so notional it's barely worth the intro sequence it's related in (though the intro sequence itself is dead smart). Basically, and it is pretty basic, your world was in quite a bad way after years of fighting. Your master, a wizard, proceeded to really put a spanner in the works by producing a spell so powerful that it destroyed both him and most of the planet.

The job of restoring order falls to you, and you, of course, welcome it with open arms and a steady jaw. (Well it's either that or fart about whistling the Sorcerer's Apprentice for the rest of your life.)

In the great tradition of the Metropolitan Police, your method of restoring order

Oh No It's An Anno

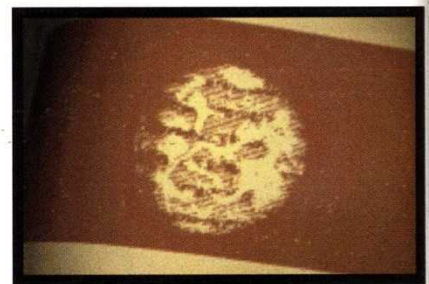
Overview: A top-down map of the immediate area, enemies show up as black dots and the whole thing rotates around to show you where you're going. The map itself is also transparent, and whilst this isn't the useful...it looks really flash.

Your castle(s): The number in the top left is the number of castles you own. The top bar shows the castle's health (?), the bottom is the amount of manna you have stored in it. If the castle is under attack this section of screen starts to flash.

Your balloons: (You're not so normal yourself, ho, ho). All of the numbers and bars are the same as with the castle icon. This section also flashes if the balloon is under attack from the pyjama clad enemy chaps or anything else.

You: Same as above, though the flashing, when under attack, is usually fairly redundant since the sight of a fireball hurtling towards you is often something of a give-away. The icon looks dynamic anyway doesn't it?

Magic: The icons here show which spells are loaded up to the left and right mouse buttons respectively. Very often though things are going so fast you haven't got a clue what's going on. Clicking both buttons together lets you select the spells.



with a variety of leg-to-head ratios, but one thing in common – they all hate you. (So what's new? Sigh.) Initially you have no reply to the slings and arrows that they hurl at you, but as you fly around the land you'll be able to collect a variety of spells. These spells range from the basic fire ball to some spectacular, ground splitting, volcano creating spells, usually restricted to people whose name begins with G and ends with od.

Flying around the screen is initially a tad unnerving. Pitch, tilt and direction is controlled by the mouse, while the cursor keys control speed and left/right movement. For me this meant a lot of time spent crashing into hills or getting stuck behind walls. However, it soon became pretty intuitive. (Can something become intuitive?). Besides, your central nervous system may not have been destroyed by years of Talisker abuse, in which case you'll probably pick it up straight away.

Once you've mastered the flying bit it's time to set off in search of magic. Not Black Magic, which can be found down the local newsies, but violent magic, which can usually be found in pots that are lying around

beside standing stones. Once you've gained a spell, you can assign a numeric key to it.

Pressing that key will then make that your active spell. Pressing the left or right mouse button will then send this particular brand of oblivion hurtling towards any monster, castle or innocent

blade of grass that takes your fancy. (Not all the spells are destructive but most of them are.) Right, now it's time to kill something.

Bad mannas

On torching, blasting and generally exterminating a foul fiend, it will then give up manna in the form of one or more golden balls. Provided you have the correct spell (and if you don't, you might as well quit the level there and then) you convert the manna to your colour. It can now be collected by the balloon.

Balloon?

Er... yes. With each castle you build you get a balloon. Don't ask me why, you just do, okay? This balloon sort of floats (as

"...the other players also attack your castle, your balloons and, of course, poor old you."

balloons do) over the walls (and indeed crenellations) of your castle. Every now and

again it sets off around the map collecting all the manna that's in your colour. This might not be quite as much as you are expecting because (cue spooky music) you

are not alone. There are other wizards, equally challenged in the trouser department and equally eccentric in their choice of transport. These wizards may be computer or, if you play the game over a network, human controlled. (Though most of the people I've ever played games over a network with would struggle to be classed as human.) The moment your back is turned these guys will whip in, turn the manna to their colour and send out their balloons to gather it up, and before you know where you are all of your hard work has gone down the drain (or into the balloon to be more precise).

As well as half inching the fruit of your labours, the other players also attack your

(Right) And here we are at chez moi...an idyllic little townhouse in the heart of the more salubrious area of town.



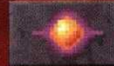
(Below) The water looks absolutely brilliant...it's big, blue and wobbly and looks about the closest to the real thing ever in a computer game.



Now that's magic!



Fireball: The Lee Enfield .303 of the magic world. A basic spell that uses up little energy but is reassuringly accurate.



Possession: The spell by which you claim possession over all that lovely manna.



Speedup: A brief turbo boost making your carpet as fast as a piece of lino.



Castle: The magicians equivalent of a Home-start Mortgage from the Halifax. Builds those oh-so-important castles in which you store your manna and souvenirs from Blackpool.



Heal: Of course it's not a heel, it's a heart and it restores your health with a speed previously reserved for Iron Bru.



Shield: Reduces the affect of spells cast against you by the great unwashed that are your opponents.



Invisibility:...Er... invisibility. (*Very succinct. Ed.*)



Earthquake: An absolute cracker (ho ho) splits earth apart as if it wasn't there. Watch with glee as peoples' homes are rent asunder and they are cast into the sea.



Crater: A slightly more boring version of the above. Creates a huge hole.



Meteor: My fave. Launches an awe inspiring fireball which turns the screen into a wall of flame. Particularly satisfying when used against something small and harmless.



Volcano: Install a unique feature in your opponent's front room. All the neighbours will talk about it, until they are burnt to death in floods of burning lava, that is.



Skeleton Army: A rapid recruitment policy on a skeleton army 16 strong. Great for destroying opponents' castles. Unfortunately, they're equally adept at trashing yours.

By Any Manna of Means

Bullfrog seem to have quite a thing about manna. So what is it? Well, in Bullfrog games it's usually a source of power or energy. In the Bible it is the food that God gave to the Israelites to feed them during their 40 years in the desert. However, in *The Manna Machine*, Rodney Dale and George Sassoon claimed that the biblical text could be interpreted as a description of a nuclear-powered food production unit and that it was this that had fed the Israelites. They built a model of this machine, based on their interpretation of the text, and claimed that it had probably been left behind by aliens who had visited earth centuries before. This is very interesting. Rodney Dale used to be my next door neighbour. This is not very interesting.



(Above) The balloons are vitally important 'cause they collect the all important manna balls.



castle, your balloons and, of course, poor old you. Dogfighting these guys is a nightmare since, despite all your magic, you've still failed to invent radar, and besides, even if you can see them, they're an absolute bugger to kill.

Simple minds

Hmm... I'm not sure that I've made a very good job of explaining this game, which is rather annoying because one of my criticisms is of its simplicity. The game looks great, particularly if you have all the shadows and reflections turned on. The way the castle walls become more scarred is smart, better still are the splashes when one of your shots hits the water. Ahh, the water, it undulates in such a sort of undulating way that I felt horribly sea sick by the end of one level. On a 486 66MHz the game simply whizzed along, smoother than a Rupert Grant. It's supposed to run pretty smoothly on a 33MHz, but I didn't have one to test it on. It was certainly very clunky on a 25MHz machine, but to be fair it's not recommended for those, and you can improve things by turning the detail down.

So, the game looks and moves like a dream. (Yes I know there's a remark crying out to be made here, but we don't all read *Loaded*.) The whole thing is put together with the sort of professionalism and style that one usually expects only of the top US teams such as LucasArts. And it's certainly very playable. Look, half of me wants to

give it a whopping great score. But... it's just a bit basic. Of course there is a strategy/puzzle element on the later levels (and there are c. 50 of them) as you try to devise a plan to nobble the other players.

I imagine it must be great as a network game, provided you don't mind losing all your friends. But... oh I dunno, maybe it's just that Bullfrog are becoming victims of their own reputation. If anyone else had produced this game I'd have probably said "wow, what an excellent, fast, smooth and imaginative shoot 'em up, I'll give it 100 per cent" Because it's Bullfrog I want more than that. Perhaps, also,

they're victims of their own imagination. They've avoided the obvious flight sim and gone for something a bit different. Problem is, I found myself thinking

"I'm not really into this magic carpet stuff, it's a bit poncey". I was actually wishing that they had done an arcade flight sim instead. Maybe I've just got something against pyjamas. (As the result of a strict upbringing I only ever sleep in a Victorian Bee-Keeping outfit.)

Oh dear, oh dear. Even as I write this I'm dithering over the score. It's good, it's very good, but is it "Bullfrog Brilliant". I think I'll go and have a cup of coffee while I think about it. I'll see you at the verdict. ☒

"Ahh, the water, it undulates in such a sort of undulating way that I felt horribly sea sick..."



SCORE

An excellent shoot 'em up, that looks really fab and groovy.

A Populous Shoot 'em-up

In last month's *Blueprint of Magic Carpet* (See, I do read the magazine.) Peter Molyneux mentioned how pissed off he gets with people who think of Bullfrog as "the people who did *Populous*". Fair enough, there's a lot more to them than that. I prefer *Syndicate* to *Populous* anyway. However, I defy anyone to play this game and not be substantially reminded of that classic *God* sim. For starters there's the manna, then there's the use of earthquakes and other natural disasters to destroy your enemy's home. You build castles while trying to destroy his and collect manna like crazy. It all sounds a bit familiar, doesn't it?

Generally, there's nothing wrong with all of this - writers, composers and directors often use the same ideas (or in Michael Winner's case - idea) in more than one project, so why shouldn't game designers? I'll tell you why they shouldn't. Because before we know where we are you'll start getting games reviews along the lines of "Once again Peter Molyneux explores the theme of the power and feeding and the power to feed. Blending Biblical imagery with Malthusian pessimism." And once we start to get that sort of bollocks we might as well shut up shop and go back to pinball, that's why they shouldn't.

Minimum Memory: 4Mb RAM

Minimum Processor: 486/33, 486/50 recommended

Hard Disk Space Required: 2Mb

Graphics Modes Supported: MCGA Hi-Res 256 colours, 64,000 colour mode if available

Sound Cards Supported: All, including AWE 32

Controls: Mouse/keyboard, VFX 1, digital and analogue joysticks

Price: £44.99 **Release Date:** November

Publisher: Bullfrog **Tel:** 0753 546465