Sorcerer: Enchanter II

More Excitement For Thinking Adventurers

SOFTWARE EVALUATION

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Fantasy/adventure is the single most popular genre in computer games. There are several reasons for this, but the most prominent is creative flexibility. In a fantasy context anything goes. When a new world is created for viewing on a CRT, its laws are subject only to the whims and desires of the writers/programmers who have conceived it.

However, not all of these computer generated fantasy worlds are created equal. Some adventures violate the integrity of their own premise for cleverness sake (introducing, for example, "force fields" in a traditional Cold War spy thriller), while others choose simply to settle for a re-hash of someone else's game (find your way into the Great Caverns, map the maze, kill the 101 guardian monsters, steal the gold, and get out).

In some cases, the differences between good games and better ones lie in the programming. More often than not, however, the differences are simply the result of good writing versus bad, of a creative imagination versus an imitative one. Today, there are very few truly excellent fantasy/adventure games in the software market-place, but the ones that do exist are so well conceived and so imaginative, that they tend to be engrossing in a way that almost transcends mere gaming. Perhaps not so coincidentally, the people at Infocom, authors of the fantasy trilogy *Zork*, have written roughly half of these wonderful programs.

Sorcerer, the second installment in the *Enchanter* trilogy, carries Infocom's Fantasy Series forward again with another well-conceived and executed storyline. Like the first *Enchanter*, *Sorcerer* turns on the

idea of a quest. All that is known for certain this time is that Belboz, leader of the Circle of Enchanters, has disappeared and that event is linked somehow to a demonic presence called Jeearr.

The plot of *Sorcerer*, therefore, is more detective tale than mere adventure. It is a mystery in a fantasy setting that must be

unraveled one small step at a time. Clues abound in the wilderness of the Great Underground Empire, but as in any good mystery, determining just how they fit the larger puzzle of the game remains one of the challenges.

Yet, the mystery element is only one of the things that makes this a special game. In many ways, *Sorcerer* is wilder and more

colorful than its predecessor. There are more rooms of a greater variety, and they are inhabited by a wonderful collection of fantastic and bizarre creatures each of

which must be dealt with to survive the game.

Actually, *Sorcerer* provides so much to see and do that it seems less than half of the game is directly connected with the locating of Belboz. There is even an old amusement park tucked away in an obscure corner of the Empire. If that sounds a little too frivolous, there is always King Duncanthrax's Maze of Glass—a three dimensional 27-room cube of transparent walls constructed as a plaything in the early days of the Great Underground Empire to torture the unfortunate. An inattentive and unimaginative enchanter will be hard pressed to survive for very long in its interior, yet traversing its many passageways is mandatory to solving the game.

Sorcerer is a uniquely difficult game to play. Rather than providing the continuity of bafflement found in the first *Enchanter*, it turns on several extremely tough puzzles built into an otherwise (seemingly) simple game. In other words, you can play for hours just wandering around having a good time, only to stumble into a situation where you become stuck without a clue as to what should be done next. Remember: this is a game for the thinking person.

What is nicest to see is that Infocom believes in its own fantasy world. There is a consistency both in mood and detail

allowing each game in the Fantasy Series to build on an already conceived and established groundwork. In *Sorcerer*, Steve Meretsky adds to the foundation laid by *Zork* and *Enchanter* authors Marc Blank and Dave Lebling by further expanding the geography and legend of the Great Underground Empire. Like an immense jigsaw puzzle of characters, places, and events, the pieces previously scattered

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about are now beginning to dovetail and the picture takes shape.

The writers at Infocom have made "real" their own realm of fantasy in fiction, and by doing so, are granting those of us who play these games a share in that creation. Who can say where it will all end? One thing is certain: years from now when critics of interactive computer literature discuss the origins of the genre, there will be little doubt that it had its most colorful and entertaining beginnings at Infocom. ∎