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TEN TOTAL ENTERTAINMENT NETWORK

The cyber-type is incredible this season. To read the popular press, much less *Mondo 2000*, *Wired*, or *Morph*'s *Outpost* (even this column sometimes) one would think there were punks behind every electronic tree. An entire world of super hip, ultra techno street spawned boys and girls are purported to punch deck into the Digiverse on a daily basis, and all one needs to join them are a modem and a very severe haircut.

But upon getting a modem and signing on to an on-line service, John and Jane Public find a wealth of information, yes, great interactive games, yes; convenient downloads and shopping, yes; hyper-cool, no.

So, they say, we will get on the Internet, that's where the mysterious. They say it's all really happening, the culting edge. And what does our hapless public find there: a free information spirit, yes; a bunch of snotty wizards, yes; a mind-destroying weight of difficult to assimilate data on every topic imaginable, check; some very interesting text games, yes; good people, often; an entire community of ghost hackers so hip they have problems walking properly; no ticket unless they spend a lot of time punching tickets and someone decides to show them where the action is!

So is there anyway for the young, hip person who doesn't want to spend their whole existence learning techno to go and hang out in the electronic ether with others of like mind?

If Daniel Goldman and Janice Linden-Reed follow their vision there soon will be.

These are the two wonderkind behind the Total Entertainment Network (TEN), a cybernetic oasis of hunch currently being alpha tested in the San Fran Bay area and scheduled to go national this winter.

"We want to do for the on-line world what MTV and FOX have done for the television world..." says Daniel.

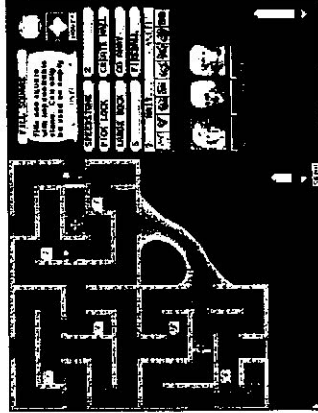
How do you go about making that kind of an environment? Well, the first thing you have to do is pump up the volume on interfaces—640x480 is a good place to start. Then jack in some animations. Both of which are found in the TEN interface. And with the TEN network a user isn't just dealing with an anonymous screen name or a cartoon picture. Subscribers can send in a picture and it will be visible in their profile and used at some points in the system.

But the interface can also be customized to the user's interest. Sports overlays, science fiction overlays, and horror overlays are already defined. But that is just controlling an overlay. What is more important is making sure that a user ends up dealing with the right kind of people, the kind of people they happen to think are cool. To this end, the interface is also going to be customizable as far as content. The subscribers decide what they are interested in, and that becomes the template for their log-ons. They can go other places,

but the overlay is their basic menu, unless they specifically decide to go outside of it. It is still being decided if premade menus are going to be issued for specific interest groups from the start, kind of a jump-start on topic specific tunnel vision, to ensure the user will see things that interest them.

Getting around to those interesting things is another cool barrier on many services. Steve Case, president of America Online recently complained in a letter to AOL subscribers that one of the most frustrating things for the staff is users complaining of wanting a service when in actuality it really does already exist; yet no one can locate it.

TEN uses a geographic paradigm to show available



• TEN, WIZ WAR

areas. While still hierarchical, by seeing things as if on a map as opposed to nested file folders, at a glance people can see where they are and build a mental picture of the "landscape" of the service.

So it's pretty. It's high res. It is easy to navigate, but online *Space Invaders* is still going to be about as interesting as reading the back of a networked cereal box. Content is the name of the game. But the problem with content is there can be so much of it. Yeah, there is some cool stuff out there, some obscenely roccoco data that kills on contact, but how do you SORT it?

"We are doing a lot of interesting things with InterNet access and managed information," says Janice. Managed is the key word here.

"We are going through and making the information more accessible and easier to sort through because the InterNet is basically a big confusing mess."

A combination of a friendlier interface and plenty of tools for navigation are inherent in the new system. Also, the information is presorted. This system is tailored for entertainment, not as a general database system, so interesting things can be extracted from the general world and filtered into the system.

• TEN NETWORK

And, of course, there are the games.

Right now, all TEN has on-line are a chess game with fully configurable boards and *Wiz War*, a board game variation of *Wizardry*. They're currently busy developing a number of other offerings, including, according to press releases, an adaptation of "one of the most popular computer games of all time."

While Daniel and Janice are mum about the details of this game, it isn't exactly rocket science (not to be confused with Rocket Science, the programming team) to see they both worked for Maxis for most of their professional careers and make a pretty good guess. Look for more details on this on-line conversion in this column as they're made available.

In the future, TEN hopes to implement virtual development tools to allow users to make 3-D worlds in which they can freely interact and script events. Authors can open up their worlds for others to view and interact with, much like a graphical version of the MUD and MUSH environments; some of the more fascinating jewels on the InterNet. If this vision can be realized, the network world will be one important step closer to St. Gibson's vision of cyberspace.

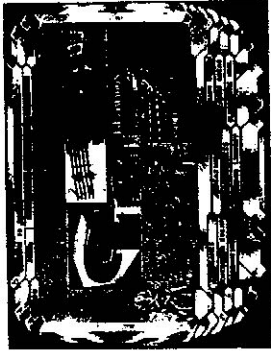
If it can be realized from its conceptual state all the way through its completion, this is an ambitious project, both technically and financially. Janice and Daniel are working almost constantly on the programming details and also looking into original and innovative marketing concepts such as being the entertainment provider for older more established on-line services that seem to be neglecting their gaming responsibilities.

But in the end, cool always comes down to the users, and David sums up the goals of the service well.

"We want to not only provide a total entertainment environment, but also allow our users to guide the direction of the service, both with feedback and with tools to provide content based on their interests and talents," he stated.

This is a very laudable goal and on-line game enthusiasts should hope they can pull it off successfully.

by John Whithers



THURSDAY
AUGUST 11, 1994

TIMES BUSINESS

SimCity goes on-line with startup

Emeryville's Optigon is first
to feature popular Maxis game

By GEORGE AVALOS
Staff writer

ORINDA — SimCity, the popular city-building video game, will be among the first offerings on an on-line network being launched by a tiny East Bay company, executives said Wednesday.

The network was devised by an Emeryville-based start-up, Optigon Interactive. SimCity's appearance on the network marks the first time Maxis of Orinda has made its computer games available on-line. Currently Maxis only sells SimCity software for personal computers.

Now multiple players will be able to subscribe to Optigon's Total Entertainment Network and play a variety of video games. For \$10.95 a month, people will be able to play the same game with or against each other at the same time.

"Total Entertainment Network will appeal most to people in their 20s and 30s interested in playing, exploring, interacting and creating," said Daniel Goldman, Optigon's president.

'Sitting in a sandbox'

"With SimCity today, you're sitting in a sandbox all by yourself, but it's a lot more fun to sit in the sandbox with a lot of other people," said Will Wright, co-founder of Maxis.

"This sounds like a fantastic idea," said analyst Harrison Rose, editor of Converge, a Sunnyvale-based high-tech newsletter. "But the key issue is how much will it cost and what's the level of fun. Those are both a challenge and an opportunity."

If Optigon's venture succeeds, it will enhance the way most people play video games. At present, video games are primarily a solitary pursuit. Optigon faces competition from Imagination-Network, its main rival, which already offers some multiple player games. But Optigon is promising an array of games that would be more complex and challenging.

People who play SimCity on the new network will be able to pretend they're developers who are building an imaginary computer-generated city. They also will be able to engage in an essential aspect of a board game for the first time. They could kibitz by sending messages over the computer links.

\$1 million of his own

Goldman has been working on the idea of this network for eight years and has put \$1 million of his own money into the company. Goldman, who grew up in Walnut Creek, is a long-time video-game technologist. He co-founded Optigon in 1992 with Janice Linden-Reed, a video-game and computer network expert.

Goldman said Optigon is negotiating deals with subsidiaries of several Hollywood studios. Optigon hopes these alliances would let it offer games on the network based on movies or programs produced by Tinseltown.

The first set of games on the network will include SimCity, chess, backgammon and a fantasy role-playing game. Optigon intends to launch the network in November.

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Multimedia content is roaring online at an astounding pace. Graphical online services are beginning to appear passe as both the new contenders and stalwarts continue to promise the next level of interactivity.

OPTIGON ACQUIRES RIGHT TO PRODUCE ONLINE VERSIONS OF 3 MAXIS TITLES

Optigon Interactive will produce *SimCity* from Maxis, for the company's recently introduced *Total Entertainment Network* (TEN) online service (MMWire, 7-1-94). TEN's version of *SimCity* will allow multiple players to interactively cooperate, compete and communicate within simulated cities online. The agreement between the two companies gives Optigon the right to produce online versions of 3 Maxis titles, including sub-licensing rights, allowing them to distribute multiplayer versions of these simulations to other online services.

TEN is currently in Alpha and on schedule for a national roll out in Nov. The system will technically be able to support 100,000 subscribers, although Optigon officials will be comfortable with 30,000 by the end of the year. The company is finding that in some instances they are having to educate some potential gaming content partners regarding the dynamics of online. (Optigon, 510/596-8700)