



Review: Better Dead

by Bill Jahnle

Type: CD-ROM Game

Publisher: ARTSector ONE (203/338-0192)

Retail Price: \$59.95

Street Price: \$40.00

Requires: System 6.0.7+, Minimum of 5 Megs of free RAM, 13" color monitor or larger, Sound Manager 3.0, 030 processor or better, masochistic tendencies

Protection: None

IMG Rating:

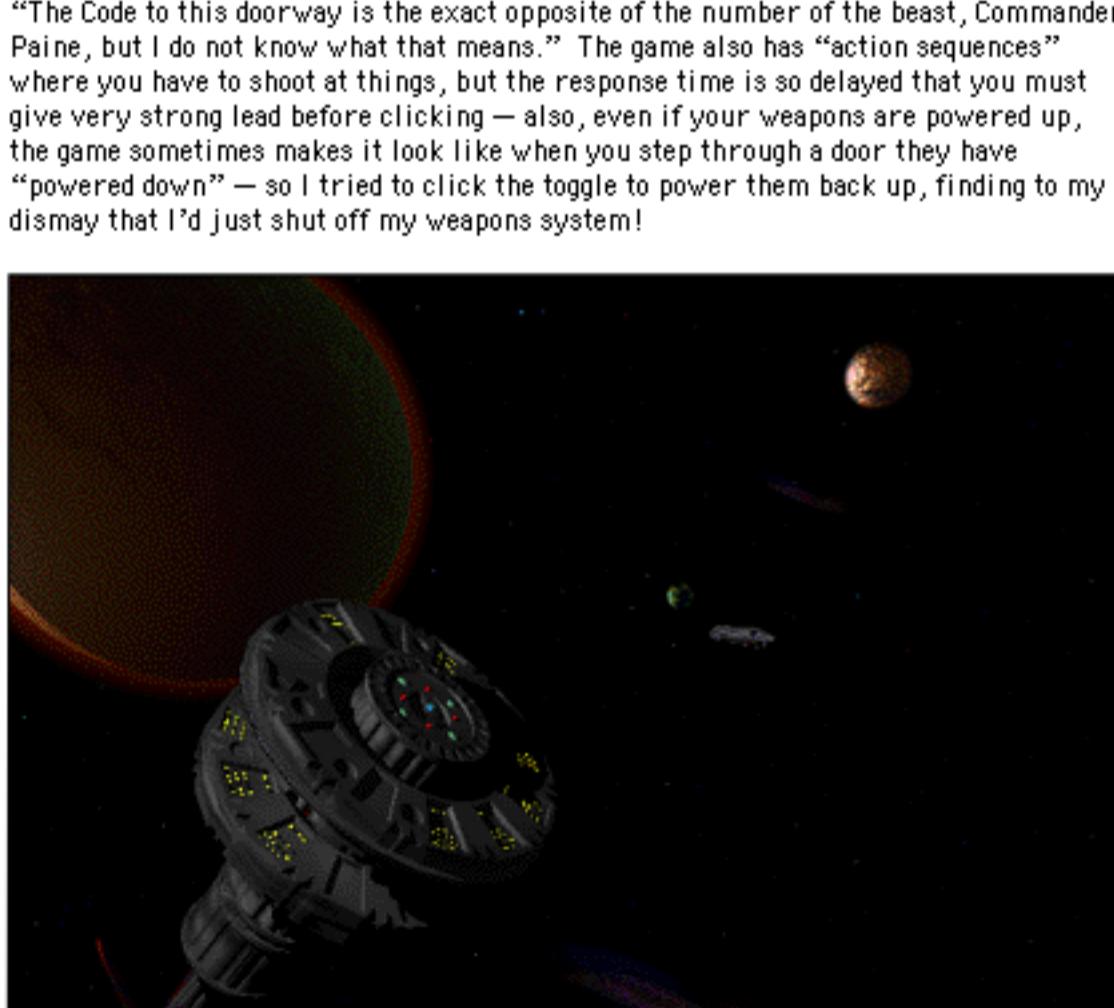
The Better Dead Ratification is like a Ross Perot chart — pretty to look at, but insubstantial and boring once you really try and get something out of it. Furthermore, it's buggy, slow, wholly linear and completely unchallenging. I couldn't bring myself to put the term "game" after CD-ROM in the category listing above — and I damn well can't call it an entertainment product.

The "Game"? Better Dead Ratification looks cool when it first starts — it has fine graphics and sound — I am given to understand that the designers spent the better part of two years on this product, which makes this a tragedy of even worse proportions. You are Commander Paine, a man pulled from the past to fight in an interstellar semi-mythic crusade against a race of creatures called the Binwas (pronounced the same as the Oriental sexual aid), led by their charismatic leader, Mi Natas Phoule (quick, do the jumble: "I'm Satan, Fool!"). In order to defeat this bozo you must secure four "Holobible Links." To do so, you must "psychofuse" with a robot and become a cyborg. There is supposed to be some mystery involved with the man from the future (always in static) who pulls you into this... but if your incredulity threshold has already been shattered, it's best not to try and push it any further.

The plotline concept sounded hokey, but heck, by comparison to the other problems in this game, the joke of a plot can be excused.

The Interface — Such As It Is. I should have known something was amiss when the rule booklet in the Jewelcase suggested that there were functions on the robot controls that did not work. They took some sequences out of the game, so the "spotlight" function on the robot was unnecessary. I was deeply apprehensive in seeing this — after all, a good programmer would have then removed the useless controls. The excess controls were only the beginning of the problem.

Navigating on the world is a standard first-person view in a fully-rendered environment. At least the renderings are very pretty, because the interface is pretty awful. The cursor never changes over hot spots, so there is always some question if you are to click things. Some hot spots are much too small or are poorly thought out. (In one place in a temple, you are supposed to click on a jar lid to release a secret panel — but the lid is nearly covered by the one mandatory Inventory item you have, and for the longest time I never clicked there, afraid I would accidentally set off my one-use item.)



Saving the game is a nightmare. You can only do so after you are fused, and the game gives you a password to re-enter later. You must exit the shell of the game to gain this password. The password is in all caps and has a number — spaces and the all-caps are important, by the way — don't expect the game to be able to interpret lower-case letters. Also, I found that when restarting you often lost some of the things you had done, and in at least two restart areas the game froze on me as I restarted, forcing me to re-undergo almost an hour's worth of play in order to get back there. (I should note this really isn't a lot of gameplay in itself, but the long, mandatory speeches and information you must listen to before passing into other areas made having to retrace your steps excruciating work.)

Rule J: Beta Test Extensively. The Better Dead Ratification is so jam-packed full of bugs and bad programming decisions, one wonders if it was beta tested at all before shipping. Besides the buggy, stupid, and counterintuitive "game save" feature, the game would just occasionally lock up on me, even with all but the most essential extensions on. These were never in the same place — I have no idea why the game loved to torment me so. The game also demands a huge amount of system power in RAM — the 5 free megs of RAM is a minimum, and the game fairly creeps along at the 12 megs of RAM sitting on my Quadra 800.

Puzzles, You Ask? The most challenging puzzle in the Better Dead Ratification was "The Code to this doorway is the exact opposite of the number of the beast, Commander Paine, but I do not know what that means." The game also has "action sequences" where you have to shoot at things, but the response time is so delayed that you must give very strong lead before clicking — also, even if your weapons are powered up, the game sometimes makes it look like when you step through a door they have "powered down" — so I tried to click the toggle to power them back up, finding to my dismay that I'd just shut off my weapons system!

Pros

- I personally didn't have to pay for my copy.
- Skeek the frog-man's voice was a pretty good imitation of Peter Lorre.

Cons

- Fully linear
- Unchallenging
- Buggy as hell

• Horrible save-game interface, when / if it works

• Gameplay is slow

• System resource hog of RAM

• Character's voices are so high reverb you sometimes can't understand them

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