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Level Designing for BLOOD

Know the Facts...

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HERE'S A NEW ADDICTION THREATENING THE COUNTRY; THERE'S A NEW SICKNESS SWEEPING THE WORLD. IT'S CALLED LEVEL DESIGNING AND I'M HERE TO WARN YOU ALL—WELL, ALL OF YOU WHO ARE STILL SAVABLE. IT ALL STARTED FOR ME, AS I'M SURE IT DID FOR MOST OF YOU, BY PLAYING DOOM. THAT WAS ALL; IT WAS JUST A GAME. I DIDN'T THINK ABOUT TEXTURE ALIGNMENTS, I WASN'T WORRIED ABOUT ENEMY-TO-BONUS RATIOS, I HADN'T BEEN ABSORBED BY VIRTUAL REALM THEMES. BACK THEN, I THOUGHT A SPRITE WAS JUST A BITMAP PARADIGM THAT BECAME OBSOLETE WITH MY COMMODORE 64. I WAS WRONG, TERRIBLY WRONG! THIS SEEMINGLY HARMLESS GAME WAS ACTUALLY THE INSIDIOUS AND UNDERLYING INVITATION TO THE REAL HORROR—LEVEL DESIGNING.

...before it's too late!

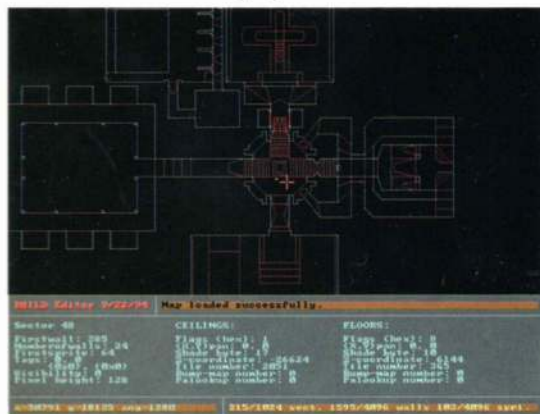
Level Designing for BLOOD

I spent only 2 months playing DOOM; I lost 6 months designing levels with DEU (DOOM Editor Utility, a hacker's level editor for DOOM). During this level designing binge, I lost 48 pounds and most of my friends and family. I didn't care about anything else. Every waking moment, and many sleeping ones, were consumed by level designing. I didn't care and I didn't see. That's why I'm here to warn you.



The spray can has some other uses, besides for graffiti.

Level designing is intuitive in the BUILD Editor.



There are, by now, millions of immersion game addicts around the world. You know who you are and you know the severity of this addiction. You've accepted the Maintenance Plan for your mouse because you can't afford to replace it each month. You've ordered the stainless steel, shock-resistant Alt, Ctrl, and Space Bar key shrouds for your keyboard. You've felt the pain of your bladder screaming for you to please, please, relieve it from the 8-hour, coffee-drinking session. I know I'm not the only one who's thought of running a CPU-to-bathroom catheter and who keeps an industrial-sized spatula handy for when the buns just won't come apart from the chair. I, now in the later stages of the disease, have had to seek professional treatment to separate the fused vertebrae of my lower back.

Soon, I'm afraid, there will be almost as many immersion game level designers as immersion game players. Those of you who have already fallen pray also know who you are and I hope you'll back me when I say that this addiction is even more intense than simply playing the game. There is something too tempting, something devilishly enticing, about creating your own version of hell and sharing it with friends. My habit has now brought me to the very gutter of this self-abuse; yes, I've gone professional. By day, I'm the supervisor of software engineering at an aerospace company; by night, I'm a level designer for Apogee. I'm working on their new game BLOOD, a horror-based immersion game to be released in early 1995. Scott Miller and George Broussard, those demons at Apogee, intend to include the professional level editor, called BUILD, with BLOOD. I have witnessed the irresistible captivation first hand and I have experienced the strange side effects. My days and my nights are filled with BLOOD and level designing. They invade every aspect of

my life. I critique the real world as though it were a BLOOD-y one. I catch myself staring at the wall of the restroom for that minute or two that it takes to do my business, saying "Yeeesh! ...they really could have spent the time to align those wall-papers in the corner...". I walk down wooded paths created by nature itself saying "You know, the rocks on this path really don't match these tree sprites...".

If you are still reading, I must conclude that you too are an addict and that there is no hope of saving you. Before I get into level designing and the BUILD Editor, let me briefly describe the premise of BLOOD. BLOOD was conceived at Q Studios, a premiere game developer for Apogee with the talents of Nick Newhard—Game Designer, Programmer, and Creative Director; Peter Freese—Senior Game Programmer and Technical Director; and Kevin Kilstrom—Artist, Animator, Model Maker, and Videographer... names that will surely soon be associated with those of H.P. Poe, Clive Lovecraft, and Edgar Allen Barker.

The theme of BLOOD is horror. If that isn't enough, BLOOD also has horror and more horror. It is set in the Carpathian Mountains and the artwork, sound effects, and, of course, level designs, will catapult you deep within their eerie, moonlit valleys and the habitats of horror found therein. Many bad and evil things await the brave-but-foolish there, along with a very unusual, therianthropic (look it up if you need to, I did) surprise. I can't divulge too much about this surprise, but I can tell you that roles and attitudes can change quickly in the Carpathian Mountains. Even the best-intentioned and most true-hearted hero can find himself taken over by the mountains' insidious and enslaving evil. I'm restricted from releasing too much about the enemies and weapons and some of the more special features of BLOOD, but I



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can promise you that there is nothing, and I mean nothing, like the creative madness contained in this game. I believe, when it gets right down to it, that the two most effective elements of a good immersion game are its visuals and sound effects. BLOOD will surely be remembered for these two qualities. Sure, it's nice to have a few special tricks up your game engine's sleeve, but the bottom line to good 'immersion' is good 'effect'.

Okay, okay, okay. Here's one BLOOD-ty novelty that I can spill: there is a spray paint can to be found in BLOOD and it can actually be used to write on walls, furniture and even dead bodies. You remember how fun this was from your childhood, I presume. Sounds kind of silly though, doesn't it? I mean, why bother with graffiti and simple vandalism while you're trying to rid the world of its ultimate of evils? Well, if you had the unabridged edition of childhood like I did, you'll also remember what fun it was to put a lit match in front of spray cans, ...remember? I'll just leave it at that and hope you'll think of this when it's time to toast some Tarantulas.

Now let's talk about the BUILD editor and the horrible addiction that I'm trying to save you from. Having a full-throttled, professional level editor is a luxury that I can't adequately describe in words. There are two modes for the

flick-of-the-finger away. The command key set can be memorized in less than an hour and within moments of entering BUILD, you will be creating your own personal version of virtual hell. BUILD lets the level designer pay full attention to the important aspects of the art. And, for me, the most important aspects of good designing are traps, strategies, and well-balanced, gut-wrenching bonus-to-damage ratios.

One of my favorite traps is to create a chamber in which the player is lured out into the middle of an open area by a nice supply of dynamite. Yes, I did say dynamite! "Hmmm...", I can hear the player thinking, "I can use that dynamite later!" No my friend, you'll need that dynamite sooner than you think because, of course, reaching it will mean setting off a cleverly-placed trigger (you're welcome!) that unleashes a furious flurry of skin-slashing gargoyles from above. If the player doesn't reach the explosives and fling them in time to catch the attackers in a tight group... well, let's just say that timing is critical and the player that thinks too much is the player that doesn't come home for dinner.

BLOOD has some interesting 'mobile' sector tricks that make for great traps and player intrigue. There are sectors that travel and sectors that drag the player in a direction of the designer's choice. The level designer can make some



In BLOOD you will meet every horror imaginable from zombies and gargoyles to the grim reaper himself.



BUILD editor: 2D and 3D.

Most of the true level designing occurs in the 3D mode as this mode offers the most intuitive arena for the actual game play. The 2D mode is used for basic floor layouts and grand-scale strategic planning.

As you can imagine, creating levels in a 3D editor that replicates the actual game is a very natural, very friendly, and very efficient way to design levels. Unfortunately, because of this ease and natural way of designing, BUILD also has a way of invading your own mind set and permeating every thought process you have. The BUILD editor is powerful yet friendly, sophisticated yet intuitive, entertaining yet enslaving. Forget the tedium and time-consuming torture of those 'other' editors! All of the cutting-edge facilities in BUILD are a mere

"way cool, dude!" areas where the player must traverse treacherous passages by leap-frogging from one traveling sector to another. Failure to time each jump results in, I'm afraid, a soothing bath in toxic poison or a warm firewalk on hot lava.

The dragging sectors are probably my favorite for player torment. I so enjoy making a cesspool of green goo with only the smallest of ledges around it. With a simple keystroke and sector tag assignment, I can add real adventure by making the ledge drag the player toward the poisonous pool. This means that the player, in order to compensate for the pulling effect of the ledge, must face away from the cesspool while running along the ledge; like fighting a strong wind. To add to this challenge, I deposit a few Zombies, who hap-

pen to love

wallowing about in cesspools by the way, in a direction that forces the player to face the cesspool (and the dragging force, oh yes!) for the attack. What fun! The nights that I spend laughing and chortling. Strange, though, none of my neighbors return my "Good Morning!" anymore or even look in my direction when we meet at the mail box.

Similar to the dragging floors, BLOOD also offers rotating sectors. These are sectors that spin around. Another favorite trick of mine is the Carousel of Death. The Carousel of Death is a large, spinning platform upon which the player must climb in order to attain a good line of fire on the otherwise hidden bad guys. However, trying to maintain a good bead on a target while you're spinning around on a merry-

go-round of murder is not an easy task. And don't you know that the aim of those evil, evil bad guys doesn't seem to be as effected by your spinning? Rotating sectors can also be turned into spinning pillars of jagged and bashing obstacles that make staying out of lateral lava pits almost impossible.

The player can look up and down in BLOOD. This feature may seem trivial, but it adds incredible realism to the game; trust me, you'll love it! This ability also adds to my designing. The upper and lower extremes of both ceilings and floors are amazing in BLOOD. I can make pits that give the player a nice, nauseating plunge for what seems like hours of accelerated falling. This, with the ability to look up and down, lets me create situations where the player is confronted with a pit or mote that seems to have no bottom. "Should I jump or not..." the player questions. They'll never know until it's too late; and curiosity can be a deadly thing.

BLOOD also has some great features such as sound generators that add eerie sound effects from specific places in a



level. There are breakable walls that impede the players' progress through a level, as well as translucent textures and sprites allowing players to see through them—great for windows and other ghostly paraphernalia. The level designer can also plot flat sprites that redefine the traditional differences between sprites and textures. These sprites can be oriented and rotated in the same manner as walls, and can be plastered against walls and even other sprites, providing many more combinations of texture and sprite sets.

Again, I warn you, o' innocent reader. You will soon have the opportunity of entering this BLOOD-y level designing world and I want you all to be aware of the magnitude of your decision. I've done my best to describe what's in store for you. I've warned you not to try this at

The BUILD Editor uses the actual game to test your constructed levels.

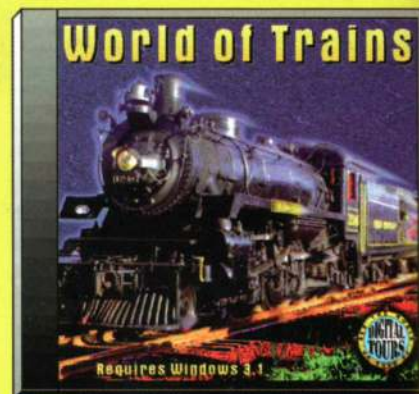
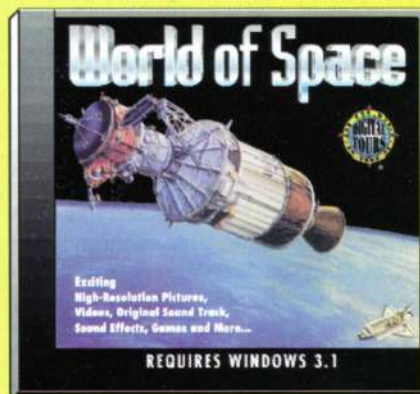
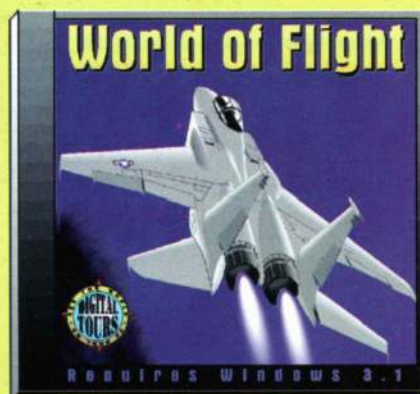
home. I know, though, that none of my pleading will help any of you. You will buy BLOOD and you will make the mistake of building your first level and you will become an addict! You will think that you can just build one or two 'quick ones' and be done with it. You will be wrong.

The difference between the neurotic and the psychotic is that while the neurotic dreams of castles in the clouds, the psychotic lives in them. There is an otherwise unattainable creative force to be found in madness, but please believe me, this is a madness. With that distinction clear, I can rest more easily at night knowing that, although I have crossed that line myself, at least I warned you. Prepare yourselves, fellow architects of the virtual realms, BLOOD will rock your foundations! After this article, I plan to write two books: "The BLOOD Diet—How I Lost 48 Pounds in 4 Months" and "Manic Level Designing—The BUILD Psychosis Uncovered" ...does anyone have Oprah's number?

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