

Fire King

This new game comes from the Strategic Studies Group and Micro Forte, a software company "dedicated to creating the most visual and entertaining software" designed to keep you on the edge of your seat. *Fire King* comes within inches of this goal.

Fire King combines action and role play, and its pace never slows. Its fantasy-filled plot is extremely well conceived, and, unlike many games of this genre, it keeps the player's interest. *Fire King* is for one or two players, but playing with a friend makes the going much easier.

Your quest begins when the Fire King is killed and a supernatural Death Beast takes control of your town. It's up to you to assume the role of one of six characters to begin the first miniadventure and reclaim your town.

Each character is uniquely defined, and each one's attributes are different. Should you choose a magic user? A warrior? Your decision drastically affects gameplay, as certain attributes are more important than others.

Control and move your character in eight directions with a joystick. Bumping into an object adds that item to one of your nine pockets. When all pockets are filled, you're informed that you can carry no more.

Unlike many other action/role-playing games, Fire King holds your interest all the way through.

Bumping into a book displays its contents or prompts you to answer a riddle. Be sure to note every clue along the way because a correct answer to the riddle rewards you with gold or another clue. Also, watch for scrolls. They contain magic spells you'll need throughout the game. Some spells permit you to walk on water, while others make you invisible.

You start off in your lodgings, the beginning and ending point of each quest. Leave your room and enter the town square. In the town, you may choose to steal gold from the Treasury, visit the Holy Temple of Dragara, or match your fighting or magic skills with monsters kept in the Thieves Guild. Exploring the town thoroughly is important: Many of the objects here can make your quest easier.

But the catacombs below the town is where the first adventure takes place. Here you must seek and destroy the

Death Beast, releasing its evil hold on the town and permitting you to uncover the Fire King's mysterious tomb. Completing this miniquest is just one small part of the game.

After solving this first mystery, more difficult challenges test your mind and magic in the wilderness surrounding the world of the Fire King. The outskirts and landscapes are well detailed and designed, and they enhance the game's feeling of fantasy and adventure. The wilderness contains many species and races: Some are friendly, some are not. The terrain includes many rivers that erode your strength and dexterity. Boots for Water Walking are a must because the strong currents can carry your character away in no time.

Magic is an important part of *Fire King*. You'll need many enchanted objects to complete the game. Even though every character possesses magical abilities, spells are more powerful when cast by wizards and enchantresses.

Fire King comes on two disks and contains a decoder wheel that's needed to advance through each adventure. Also included on the inside cover of the package is a map of the mythical world, including a plan of the town. The landscape is painstakingly rendered. Every detail on the screen is shown on the map.

Fire King's only drawback is the player's manual. It isn't organized well, and it lacks information about the game's main objective. It contains hints for the first quest but doesn't provide a clue for subsequent ones.

Despite the manual's problems, *Fire King* does have flicker-free scrolling, grade-A graphics, and a captivating plot. It's a topnotch game all the way around.

—Romney Laanstra

Fire King
Strategic Studies Group
Distributed by Electronic Arts
1820 Gateway Dr.
San Mateo, CA 94404
\$29.95

Omni-Play Basketball

I have an avid interest and involvement in sports. When I'm not shooting baskets at the playground on the corner, I usually can be found consulting the record books to settle a sports bet between my friends. But all that has changed now. Thanks to *Omni-Play Basketball*, I've gone pro.

I've become an owner. Next to basketball team owners, medieval potentates knew nothing of power, manipulation, or internecine warfare. We team owners must know when to trade and when to cut our players loose. For the fan, basketball consists of thrilling shots between the beer commercials;

for the players, basketball is lived game to game. But for us owners, managers, and coaches in the upper echelons of Olympus, basketball isn't a matter of a single shot, game, or season. It's season after season, year after year. It's our life.

Omni-Play Basketball brings the entire snarling beast of basketball into your home, including the unsightly, seamy side of the business: back-room dealing. It's all here, cheerleaders, a side-view module (available at extra cost), and inane sports commentary for the brain-damaged—in short, professional sports in all its glory, but without the commercials.

But be warned, this isn't a game you can simply sit down with and start playing. It requires careful study. Get out your reading glasses; the manual is encyclopedic. Begin by looking over the history of the league and the teams, which provides a wealth of stats. Actual teams can be inspected as well, on a player-by-player basis. Then you can begin to build your team.

It's all here: cheerleaders, inane sports commentary, and pro basketball in all its glory, but without the commercials.

Omni-Play Basketball provides you with a quantity of cash (trading points) which you use to purchase the best players you can afford from other teams. Recruit rookies or try to trade for better players (plus a healthy amount of cash). Another way to improve your team is to send a failing player to training camp. Players, as in real life, suffer injuries from which they must recover.

You can play against the computer or a friend, or (the ultimate in flexibility) *Omni-Play Basketball* can play itself until you get the hang of the game. Sit back and watch games played out in realistic animation or skip the actual game and go right to the score.

Ever since the invention of the videotape machine (a device developed to watch television for people who don't have time for it themselves, according to Douglas Adams), I've been looking forward to the self-playing videogame. You can set it up to play against itself and then go do something useful—like watching basketball on television.

As a coach, you can make decisions such as electing to charge in after free throws, work inside, work the clock, or go for the quick shot. You can elect to foul out the opposing team, anticipate inside passes, steal the ball, or change coverage. >