

# THE DEFECT EFFECT

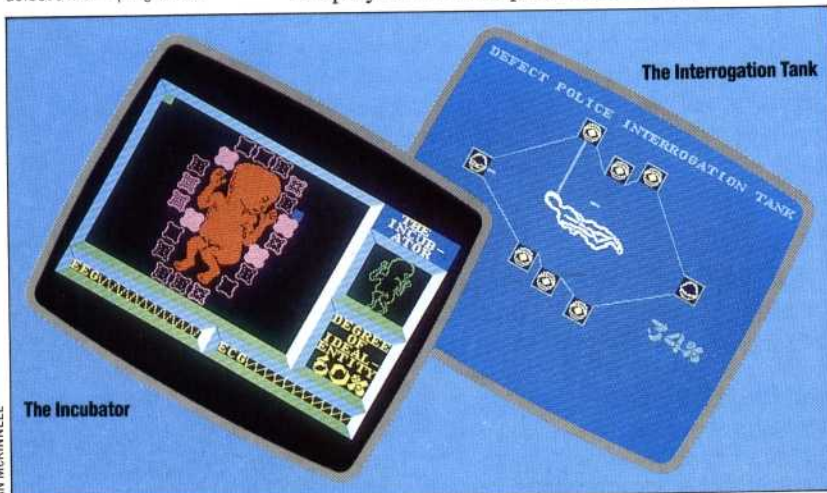
**Automata's Deus Ex Machina claims to offer 'a completely new form of computer entertainment'. Combining elements of well-known arcade games with an audio soundtrack featuring showbusiness stars, this complex program allows you to take the leading role in a 'fully animated televised fantasy'.**

As computer games have developed into a major part of the leisure industry, it was perhaps inevitable that software houses would join forces with other segments of the entertainment business. Automata Software, best known for its series of games featuring the Piman, has taken the first steps in this direction by developing a product that contains not only computer software but also an audio cassette that can be synchronised with the computer program to provide a soundtrack to the game. This soundtrack features well-known figures like Jon Pertwee and Frankie Howerd.

The idea behind Deus Ex Machina, which took six months to develop and three months to program, is that an all-powerful computer of the future rebels and assists in the creation of a human 'defect'. The player, as the defect, passes through various stages in the game that depict experiences from childhood to old age. The player's involvement begins at conception by guiding the sperm towards the egg. As the child grows, it is under constant attack by the 'defect police'. It is up to the player to deflect these attacks, using either the keyboard or the joystick. Scoring is achieved by maintaining the 'ideal entity percentage', which begins at 99 per cent and drops under the assaults of the defect police. As the defect grows to adulthood, the nature of these attacks changes and the player must adapt to meet them.

## The Game Progresses

Deus Ex Machina can be either played or viewed as an entertainment. There is a wide variety of screens in the game, although some do bear a resemblance to others. The tactics required to maintain the 'ideal entity' are changed constantly. The score is shown as a percentage in the bottom right-hand corner and slowly falls as the game — and the defect's life — progresses



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Once the game is loaded, the audio soundtrack should be synchronised with the program. Care must be taken when this is done, as the various screens are timed to coincide precisely with the words and music, and this adds greatly to the enjoyment of the package.

The program is divided into two segments, one half on each side of the cassette, making up a total of 96 Kbytes of code. At the end of side one, after an amorous scene in which the player must move a cursor around the body to meet the kisses drifting towards it, the second side must be loaded. The computer should not be switched off, and again care must be taken to synchronise the soundtrack correctly. Player involvement in the second half consists mainly in jumping over obstacles before reaching 'old age'. At this point, large blood clots appear onscreen, which must be broken up by the player. At the end of the game, no matter what the score, the defect dies.

Deus Ex Machina is unusual in that there is no winning score, and in fact the player need not even participate in the game at all. Events will unfold in the same way without any participation, so you have the choice of becoming involved in the game or sitting back and watching it as a piece of entertainment. The graphics are uniformly excellent and imaginative. Although none of the screens is breathtaking, they do reflect the care and attention to detail devoted to the whole package.

The soundtrack music was written and performed entirely by Automata's co-founder Mel Croucher, who also wrote the story. The songs themselves are pleasant but not exceptional. The best number accompanies the scene in which the defect comes to life, and is sung by Ian Dury.

The story and soundtrack are quite different from most computer games and reflect the non-violent philosophy behind all Automata's computer games. Games enthusiasts who enjoy destroying fast-moving barrages of attacking aliens would probably be disappointed, and many people may find the semi-mystical content of the lyrics irritating. However, Automata should be heartily applauded for their innovative idea. The program is a bold experiment and will no doubt be considered an important step in the development of computerised entertainment.

**Deus Ex Machina:** For 48K Spectrum, £15.00  
**Publishers:** Automata Ltd, 27 Highland Road, Portsmouth, Hants, PO4 9DA  
**Authors:** Mel Croucher, Andrew Stagg  
**Joysticks:** Optional  
**Format:** Cassette