BLACK MAGIC

Synapse Software's Necromancer, written by Bill Williams, can be compared to a 'well-made play'. The scenario is divided into three acts: the seeds of the drama are literally sown in the first act, and the plot moves remorselessly to a climactic encounter between good and evil.

The Overture Both Atari and Commodore 64 versions are easily loaded: the slow haul of the Commodore's sluggish disk drive is made tolerable by the program producing a range of curious noises — rather like an electronic orchestra tuning up. The title graphics are accompanied by introductory music that uses the sound capabilities of each machine to the full.

Act One: The Forest The drama begins in 'the age of darkness' when 'Tetragorn, the evil wizard, reigns supreme'. You play the part of Illuminar, a druid described as 'the defender of truth and protector of the human race'. As you can imagine, this isn't an easy task. Play starts with the druid appearing in a dark open space. An aura of stars protects you from hundreds of little ogres that march relentlessly across the screen waving giant cutlasses to an insistent musical accompaniment. You use the joystick to control a magical 'wisp' that flies around the screen destroying the ogres and notching up points before returning to your hand.

Placing the wisp in the desired space and pressing the joystick button enables you to plant trees in an attempt to create a forest that will aid you later in the game. You must protect the seedlings from the ogres' cutlasses and Tetragorn's spiders, all the while keeping an eye on your strength, which is sapped by the sting, or invigorated by the death, of a spider. After five levels of play, the first act ends in the spiders' attack, which quickly exhausts the druid's strength. The program then freezes the action, counts the number of trees you have grown and places the druid in the next act.

Act Two: The Vaults It is here that the spiders hatch. There are five different levels, each one containing two layers of four vaults. Inside the vaults are spider eggs, which flash in different colours when they are about to hatch. Also on-screen is the 'tree bin' (containing the trees you grew in the first act). You must use your wisp to release and move a tree to a position above one of the vaults; if you're quick, the tree will grow roots and smash through the top of the vault to destroy the eggs before they hatch.

An added danger is supplied by the 'hands of fate'; these reach down from the ceiling and grab at anything underneath them — druid, trees or question marks. The latter are used to represent mystery prizes, and one must be acquired before you can lower a ladder to the next level.

Act Three: The Necromancer's Lair The climax of the drama is enacted in an eerily dark graveyard. The tombstones mark the many graves of the Necromancer and must be destroyed to prevent his re-incarnation. The wisp is powerful enough to kill each incarnation, and the gravestones themselves disappear if you move the druid on top of them. But the battle between good and evil isn't that simple, as all the spiders that escaped you in the second act are transformed into 'zombie' spiders and come to the Necromancer's defence.

It is imperative to reserve plenty of energy for the Lair, because here you must have all your wits about you. Certainly, the last act can be highly frustrating, as it is not possible to access it independently of the rest of the game.

Of the two versions of the game, the Atari implementation is the better. The Commodore version is slower and contains slightly less spectacular graphics and sound. Both versions can suffer from joysticks that give jerky and slow responses. These quibbles aside, however, owners of either version should find this a magnificent and enchanting — albeit expensive — game.

Necromancer: For Atari 400/800 (32K), £28.95, for Commodore 64, £28.95
Publishers: Synapse Software, 5327 Jacuzzi St, Suite 1, Richmond, CA 94804
Authors: Bill Williams (Atari), Scott and Steve Coleman (Commodore 64)
Joysticks: Standard Atari/Commodore joysticks
Format: Disk and cassette

Visual Treat
Necromancer combines sprite grahics with high-res background displays to produce dazzling screens at all three levels of skill. The glittering tree-tops, rapidly-darting druid's wisp, the movement of the spiders and ogres, and the necromancer's fire make Necromancer a stunning visual treat as well as an exciting game

The Vaults

The Forest

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