

## The Point

## Tracker McDyke matches wits with Dullagan Straightman

by Cynthia Yockey

Until Cathy Ralph released "Caper in the Castro" in May, there was one area of publishing from which Lesbians and Gays were conspicuously absent: computer games.

Now, why, you might ask (if you are from Mars, or do not have a personal computer), do Lesbians and Gays need a Lesbian/Gay-theme computer game? Well, why do you need Lesbian and Gay movies, or plays, or novels? BECAUSE THEY'RE AN EXPRESSION OF LESBIAN AND GAY LIVES, AND GAY PEOPLE DESERVE TO SEE THEIR LIVES EXPRESSED, THAT'S WHY! Obviously, you haven't thought about this very much.

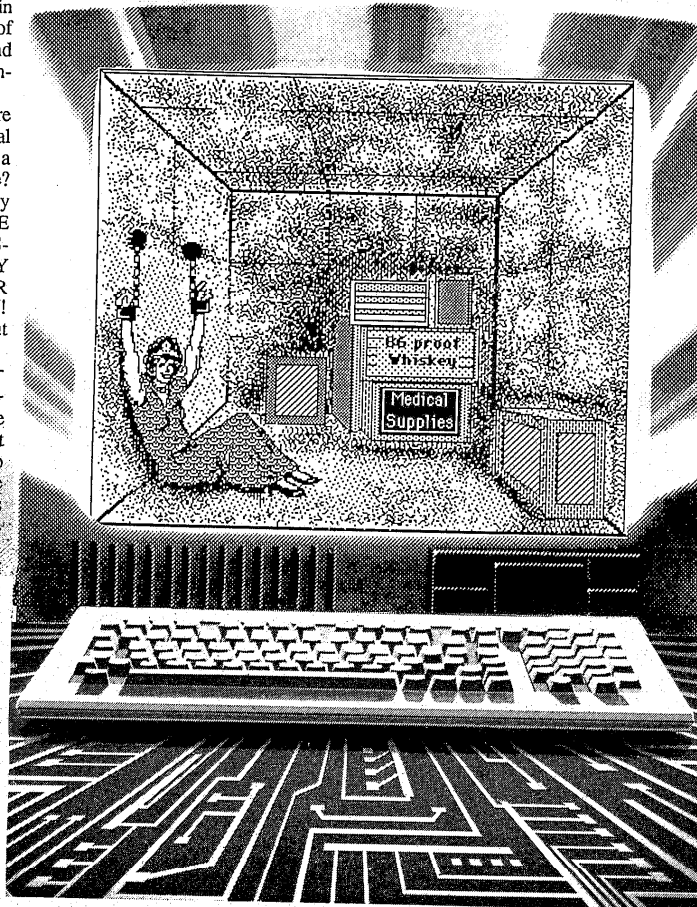
## VIDEO

But just ponder for a minute where this could lead. Instead of games that reflect male values where the object is to gain power, defeat and destroy, there could be games written from women's values where the goal could be to get the maximum number of people to like you. (Women who deny that this is one of their primal objectives are lying — er, not in touch with one of their deepest drives.) There could even be consciousness-raising role-playing games like "Teen Pregnancy" or "Patriarchy," where each player is required to alternate between characters of different genders and sexual orientations.

Are you catching on to the scope of this?

Since the advent of personal computing in 1977, computer games have been dominated by two genres — shoot-'em-ups and role-playing, both of which generally also involve solving some sort of puzzle. In fact, since the computer itself is a kind of puzzle, the game genres are the natural product of the emotions the computer inspires: delusions of grandeur when you can get it to work, and the urge to kill when you can't. A product of this tradition, "Caper" is a role-playing mystery — with lots of shooting.

"Caper" was written for the Macintosh computer using HyperCard, a database — no, a graphics — no, an animation — no, a hypertext — no, an authoring program — well, frankly, Macintosh mavens still aren't quite sure what HyperCard is, so, gestalt-wise, it's something you just have to experience.



"Caper" opens with a tutorial that explains how to use the eight tools provided for you to interact with the game: a map, a notepad, a pistol, binoculars, a key, a magnifying glass, a lighter, and a head with a cartoon dialogue balloon that symbolizes the ability to talk by typing instructions. The tool that will be the most useful is the pistol. When you are really frustrated, shoot something and the results can be very gratifying. The tool that will seem the least useful is the lighter; in fact, you'll soon be convinced that it's the last thing you need to win the game (hint, hint).

After the tutorial, you are thrust into this scenario:

"You are the world-famous lesbian private detective, Tracker McDyke.... It's 3:05 a.m. You have just been awakened by a phone call from your old friend, [drag queen] Tessy LaFemme. She sounded frantic and asked you to meet her in front of The Gayme Room (a favorite hang-out of yours). She said she'd be there in 15 minutes. She started to say something about getting the goods on Dullagan Straightman (notorious fiend and villain), but before you could ask Tessy what she meant...she was cut off."

Ralph says that only two people have solved the game so far, a 14-year-old boy and this reviewer, both in about four hours. The boy is reportedly an avid computer gamer and was therefore aided by his understanding of the typical conventions of role-playing games. The reviewer knows how to cheat in HyperCard. This means using the option-command key combination to find out what parts of the screen to "click" for information or action. It also includes looking at the scripts, or instructions, that tell each button what to do. (Notice that you aren't being told how to do that.)

Here's one more crucial pointer: the clue you have to collect letters for is correctly spelled, but when you want to free Tessy, "shakles" is not. This is the kind of thing that makes you nervous when the solution apparently depends on orthographic precision, but don't let it bother you. Ralph's beta testers obviously had a very low threshold for frustration and failed to help her catch some spelling errors that will be corrected in version 1.1.

In addition to creating the first Lesbian/Gay computer game, Ralph has coined the term "CharityWare;" if you like "Caper in the Castro," she asks you to send a donation to the AIDS charity of your choice. Ralph, a Lesbian artist/computer hacker who lives in San Mateo, California, survived the recent earthquake with Mac intact and has more games in the works.

"Caper" is a lot of fun and is available free on-line via modem from GLIB, the Gay and Lesbian Information Bureau, (703)578-4542. It is also on sale as a Macintosh shareware disk at meetings of the Pink Triangle Computer Alliance, the new national Lesbian and Gay computer user group for owners of IBM-compatible or Macintosh computers and that is headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Cynthia Yockey is the founder of the Lesbian Ladies Society and the Pink Triangle Computer Alliance. She is also a writer and desktop publishing consultant on the Macintosh computer.

The PTCA will have its next meeting on Thursday, November 16 at 7:30 p.m., in a handicapped-accessible home near the Woodley Park Metro. For the exact location and more information, call (301)369-9259. ▼

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