HABITAT

No, no! We're not talking about the trendy furniture store! This *Habitat* is the latest and possibly greatest online interactive adventure in the world. It harnesses the power of the C64 to put YOU in the centre of the action. Our Stateside newshound Marshal M. Rosenthal tells you all about the adventure and the Quantumlink system which enables you to access the wonderful world of *Habitat!*

Who designed and created Habitat? Responsible for developing this world-in-the-electronic-dimension is Chip Morningstar. We can never know what preparations God might have made, but Morningstar's three years at Lucasfilm's Game Division were preceded by image processing research, and software/language design for instruments to be placed on orbital satellites.

Morningstar was working feverishly one rainy evening trying to complete a bit of code before calling it a night.

A lightning bolt struck the building and shorted out every printed circuit, including his terminal, just as he was in the midst of compiling a program for customizing Avatars.

The ensuing electrical maelstrom disintegrated his physical body, and left him trapped within the code.

Lucasfilm personnel discovered this the next morning when they booted the work disk to find a familiar-looking figure lolling around with his feet on the furniture. Morningstar was subsequently moved into Habitat, where he now resides.

C+VG's American contributing editor, Marshal M. Rosenthal, is no stranger to the unexpected. But even he found it a bit unusual to receive a game designer IN a package marked URGENT/DO NOT X-RAY! Rosenthal booted Morningstar up in a Commodore 64 for the following exclusive interview.

C+VG: How does it feel to be a part of *Habitat*?

CM: It's different, but who's complaining? Before this happened, members of the Games Division used to sit around having an ongoing debate on artificial intelligence. We wanted to create an automaton. A thinking, feeling being to appear in software. The Quantumlink network opens up an avenue for our creating a unique world of alter egos that can parallel human experiences. This is really an exciting prospect.

C+VG: What have you discovered about your new home?

CM: Quite a lot. But first off it's called a Turf. I discovered that no one here eats or drinks, although you can still go to bars and hang out. Artifacts are strewn throughout, and you can purchased unusual devices and search for strange and mystical things. But nobody's running around in ski-masks pulling *Friday the 13th* stuff. That doesn't mean that everybody is nice, but the general attitude is for fun and adventure rather than mayhem. Besides, the Oracle provides everyone with a fat bank account and it's real easy to live off the interest. Just go to a dispenser and get some tokens.

C+VG: Can't such a life get boring?

CM: No way! Remember, this is interactive. Everything is constantly in motion whether you're a part of it or not. You may return to Habitat after a few days to find all sorts of changes. And of course there are the other Avatars popping in and out of your electronic life. There's unknown territory to discover, adventures to participate in, even social interactions like games and politics if you want. Puzzles are everywhere, and you have to learn the different rules and regulations of this world the hard way — by experience.

C+VG: How do you do things as an Avatar?

CM: Simple. A joystick moves you around, and there are a selection menus that appear onscreen when you want to go somewhere or do something. The keyboard takes care of the rest. Talking in word balloons does take a bit of getting used to though. Still, if it's good enough for Popeye. . .

C+VG: Did you have to create everything from scratch?

CM: Fortunately, no. We could build on some existing software tools, and adapt them to work in whole new ways. Take the shape of the Avatars for example. They may seem to be of the same stuff as the characters used in our Labyrinth game, but there are entirely different techniques occurring.

C+VG: So just what is going on?

CM: To start, every single thing that happens is linked through the Host computer, and then into other players from all over. This kind of processing takes a lot of power, and so we're using a STRATUS non-stop super minicomputer. This baby is actually a number of processors hooked together. Eight are online right now, and more can be added as the need arises.

Consider just what is going on; colour graphics, sound, disc input/output, keyboard and joystick commands. ALL operating at the same time. You'd almost expect the disk drive to explode and the C64 to roll over on its back and die!

C+VG: How does the software tie in with the STRATUS?

CM: Well, first the prógram is loaded after entering the gaming section of *Quantumlink*. Then you put in the disk containing object data. The C64 is then controlled by three things; what your Avatar is doing, what other Avatar's are doing, and what the Master Program thinks about the whole business. Think of the data as building blocks that can be formed into just about anything.

Each location (store, forest, dungeon, etc.) is called a region, and I've been able to count over a thousand of them right now. There's a lot more on the way too. Some really awesome stuff.

C+VG: Any comments on how this is affecting your social life?

CM: I've no complaints. My Turf is swell, and I can change the furniture, colours or patterns in a flash. It's great.

Telecommunication services allow people from all over the world to call in using their computer and a phone modem. Unlike other telecom services, Quantumlink is designed for use only with the Commodore 64/128 computers, and even provides the software free with a purchase of the machine.

Q-link performs a full range of text and information services, but because it is designed for the exclusive use of C64ers it can take advantage of the computer's graphic and sound capabilities. None of that generic stuff, with games represented by numbers and bits of graphics tossed together from letters. Here you'll find the same type of graphics as you can access from a disk.

The software handles everything. Auto-dial modems can be triggered into action and the software will do the rest, even taking care of giving the correct password and name.

Users select topics by pointing to options displayed on the screen. What could be simpler? There's even an online Commodore Information Network, with helpful advisors always available to chat with.

Things to do include the People Connection (where special interest groups can be found), a learning center containing educational materials, and news and weather reports.

Plus lots of games, where you can play against the master computer or another person. You can even sample new software provided by various companies.

Possibly the best news is the price. *Quantumlink* gives unlimited base service for only $9.95 a month, and that's for 24 hours a day on weekends, and 6PM to 7AM weekdays. Premium services, like *Habitat*, cost an additional six cents a minute.

Quantum Computer Services Inc. 8620 Westwood Center Drive, Vienna, Virginia 22180

being able to swtich heads whenever you want. I've also heard that those who enter *Habitat* the normal way can even choose their gender. Making friends is as easy as going out the door, and you can later contact them directly with ESP. There's even a mail service and regular newspaper. Maybe I should place a classified and see if there are any others who got zapped here like I did.

C+VG: How many Avatars are out there anyway?

CM: Okay. Truth is — who can count that high? I did limit it to six in one region at a time, because more than that makes me claustrophobic. That's all you can fit in a hot tub anyway, and that's one place I wasn't going to leave out. But I did add a ghost feature to let unlimited numbers of Avatars congregate together, although the full-bodied ones are warned by a little icon that someone is watching and listening in. Imagine the fun of performing on stage with hundreds or thousands of invisible spectators. What an ego trip! And no food means no critics pelting you with tomatoes.

C+VG: So you're happy in *Habitat?*

CM: You bet. My friends come online and visit me, and I look forward to seeing the world evolve as Avatars interact with each other. I do miss the northern California weather though, so perhaps I'll add a tanning salon. There's no end to what can happen. It's gonna be fun.


Yes, I am the all-powerful Oracle. I have consented to show you around HABITAT, so pay attention. Usually I do not bother to make myself known directly. Imagine how much time it

takes to be answering everyone's questions about every little thing. That's why I usually respond by mail.

Here we see two Avatars, for such they are called. The fountain of the city of Populopolis is one place where I manifest myself, but I wish she would turn down the music. I also like the shopping on Rodeo Drive, and the Skid Row area, although it tends to get a lot less civilized there.

This is Valentino, and there is his home, or Turf as I have decreed it. Looks like he's gotten some mail.
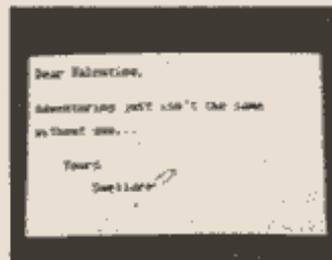

So Swelldre is no longer mad at him, eh?

Let's peek in on her. Hmm, guess she's getting tired of playing checkers and wants to use him as a pack mule for another adventure.

I wouldn't have credited Valentino with so much sense. He's checking the weekly newspaper, the *RANT*, to see if there's any mention of what Swelldre's been up to.

He's still going to meet here though.
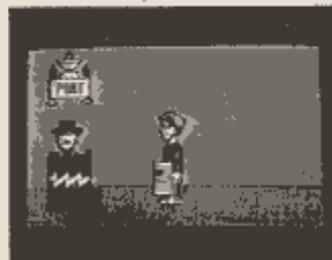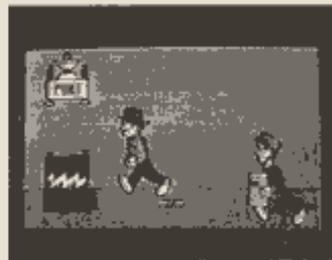
At least he's smart enough to use a Teleport.

There's Swelldre, and she looks like she's in another one of her ogre-ish moods.

Let's leave Valentino to bear the brunt of her bad humor, and look in on a new arrival to Habitat. His name is Kusama, and he's in the process of choosing a head to reflect his personality.

Sometimes I think I put this in so I could watch Avatars running around like chickens with their heads cut off.
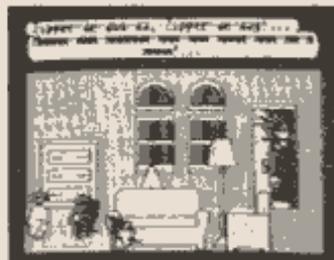
Well, he managed that all right. There he does out the door.

Yeh, I thought he was heading for the bar.

He sure got into networking quick. Probably a solicitor in the other world. He'll be here for a while.

Let's see how Swelldre and Valentino are making out. He's following her lead as always.

Looks like she's found something.

She better be careful with that crystal ball. Oh no! She's telling Valentino to get lost and wishing that she was somewhere else.

Well, she got her wish. I don't think we should watch, it's going to get a bit painful.

I see a couple of Avatars hanging out around one of the bank token dispensers. Sometimes I wish I hadn't given everyone millionaire status, but at least it keeps them from spending all their time doing boring things like getting jobs and working.
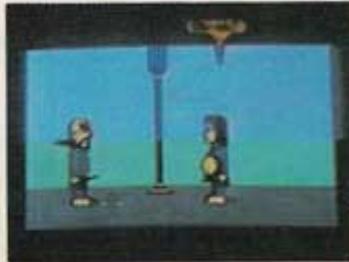

For shame! Who made that rude noise?

Apparently, Pratt thought Pigface responsible. Interesting that all he did was bounce him a bit.

Can't fault Swelldre for trying. She's made it through the forbidden woods and isn't daunted by the mysterious dungeons. That's one tough Avatar!

Well, so much for her good luck. Say goodbye to the crystal ball, Miss S. At least the devil has a sense of humour.
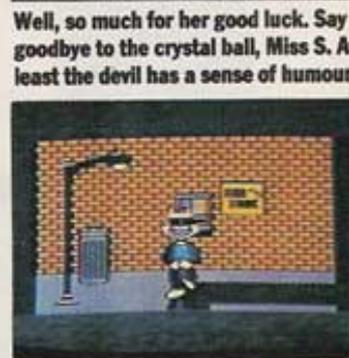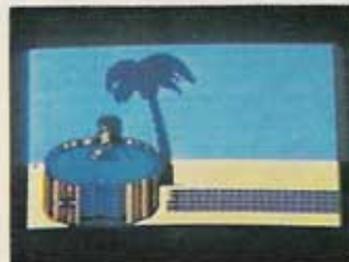
Let's leave them to sort things out.

There he goes again, frittering away tokens on vending machine stuff.

So the devil let Swelldre go? Doesn't look like her mood has improved by the favour.

Too bad she can't just tune into a pleasant forest scene like I can when there's a need for tranquility.
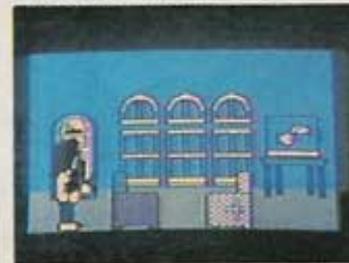
And there's Marmalot changing her Turf again. She's never satisfied.

I think that you've seen enough. I have to follow along with Carnipet and Sissalay, but it's time for you to return home.
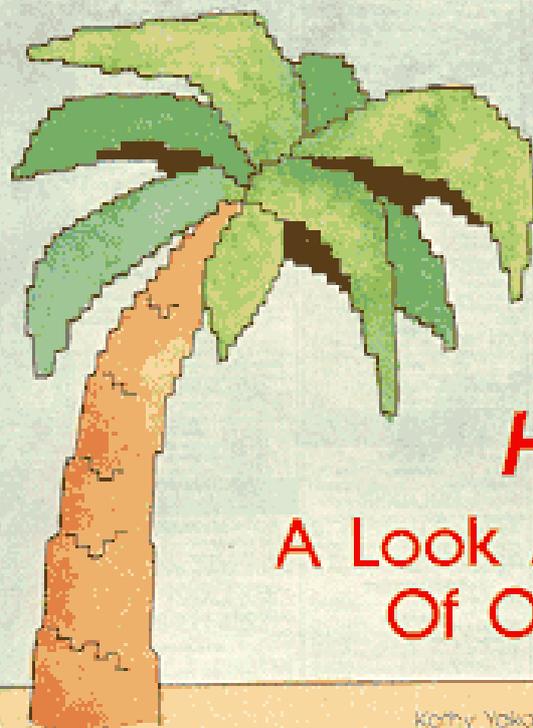
Habitat
A Look At The Future
Of Online Games

Kathy Yakal, Assistant Features Editor

Online gaming, or telegaming, has for years been a feature of many bulletin board systems (BBSs) and computerized news and information services. Ranging from versions of simple board games like checkers to the complex world of CompuServe's MegaWars, the offerings from this electronic service give players the opportunity to compete with opponents across the country. Recently, QuantumLink and LucasFilm Games announced a new online feature for Commodore 64 owners. Habitat—a unique, animated game that encourages interaction, not competition, among users.

Electronic interaction—the online, realtime socializing done in conference areas of BBSs and online news and information services—is one of the most popular consumer applications for telecommunications today. Though many home computer owners use their modems for doing job-related work, downloading programs, doing research, and trading technical information, many prefer to use them for play. People make new friends online, often extending those relationships into written correspondence, telephone calls, and face-to-face meetings.

For example, CB'ers on CompuServe, a major telecommunications service, hold regular conventions, arriving at a central location from all over the country to see the faces behind the "handles" they use on the system. Some electronic correspondents have even developed online relationships that have led to marriage.

Online relationships are dependent on the common threads that people find and follow in their conversations. People may discover that they once lived in the same city, or like the same obscure movies or books, or have similar jobs. When they meet again online, they recognize each other, and have a common starting ground for conversation.

Telegaming is a more focused way of interacting with people online. There's no fumbling around, trying to find something to talk about. You're there to participate in a game. For some people, that's interaction enough. But some go further, moving into conference areas to talk about the game they've just played, and to see what other interests they share.

Habitat is an intriguing combination of telegaming and straight online chatting. It's an outgrowth of QuantumLink's People Connec-

Say hello to people, Spike
Well, Hello.

Hello! My name is Phred.

this world, the Avatars will once again become the interesting bunch they once were.

Once you've entered the world of *Habitat*, your first task is to create a character to represent yourself. This is done with a kind of character construction set. You decide what you want to look like and how you want your "turf" (home base) to be decorated. If you'd like, you can even have a pet. Then it's off to meet the other inhabitants of the world.

Your Avatar is controlled by commands entered via the joystick. You can Go, Do, Get, and Put—and, of course, Talk to other Avatars. The first four commands are used for moving from room to room and manipulating objects you find there.

Communication with other Avatars can be accomplished by letter, by phone, or just by talking directly to them. If you're in the same room. It's similar to the three ways in which you normally communicate with another user on Q-Link E-Mail, online messages, or joining a conference in the People Connection area. Unlike People Connection—where your words appear next to your name after you've typed them and pressed RE-TURN—*Habitat* shows your words

in a little bubble above your character's head, as in a cartoon.

If at any point you get lost in this world, there is help available. You can look at maps or visit the Hall of Records. And the Oracle is always around for guidance.

Some DOs And DON'Ts
In the course of your adventures in *Habitat*, you'll discover some cultural norms, just as in the real world.

DO

• Make new friends.

• Buy things, using tokens or credit cards.

• Teleport (transport yourself to other rooms too far to walk to).

• Hang out at the Oracle, the place to see and be seen. In Avatar slang, you head down to the O.

• Make phone calls.

• Go on adventures.

• Explore.

DON'T

• Participate in organized sports. Avatars just want to have fun, and don't like having someone tell them how to do it.

• Play cards (for the same reasons listed above).

• Watch television. Enough said.

• Drive vehicles. Walking and teleporting are the preferred modes of transportation, unless you happen upon a skateboard.

• Be materialistic. You're an Avatar, not a Yuppie.

• Overextend your Avatar's hospitality. Only six people to a room at any one time.

With computers in more than 10 percent of American homes, entertainment developers can afford to try different things, hoping to capture the interest of even a small percentage of them.

Which segment of the home computing population *Habitat* appeals to remains to be seen. There's certainly room for it. Traditionally, telegaming has had a rather limited audience, though its small following is devoted. *Habitat* is an innovative new addition to the growing world of online gaming.

The monthly fee for QuantumLink is $9.95 for unlimited use, with a $3.60 charge for some special services. At this writing, the hourly charge for Habitat has not been determined. For more information, write to Quantum Computer Services, 8620 Westwood Center Dr., Vienna, VA 22180, or call (800)392-8200.