COLLECTOR'S EDITION

15TH ANNIVERSARY

150 BEST (and 50 Worst) GAMES of ALL TIME

Which is the *Best*?

CIVILIZATION

DOOM

RED BARON

Lord British
ORIGIN SYSTEMS, INC.
PRESENT
Ultima IV
QUEST OF THE AVATAR

ULTIMA IV

11>

SPORTS

EASY
INTERMEDIATE
ADVANCED
DIFFICULTY LEVEL
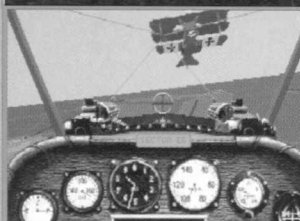
Strat Me Up

## No-Nonsense Baseball Sim Gets Prettier In First CD-ROM Version

by Dennis McCauley

Together with long-time rival APBA, Strat-O-Matic is one of two producers of stat-based baseball sims that have successfully made the transition from table top to hard drive. Both are unique in the rapidly evolving world of computer games, where "long-standing" often means that a game has survived long enough to have a sequel. Strat-O-Matic, on the other hand, has been cranking out their computer baseball game for over a decade, and has been offering their card-based game since JFK played touch football on the White House lawn.

STRAT-O-MATIC BASEBALL (SOM) can be considered a boutique product, appealing to fans who demand the utmost in statistical realism — and get it. Make no mistake, SOM will never compete with the likes of EA's TRIPLE PLAY or Sierra's FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL PRO, but then, it doesn't try to. The small, privately run company from Glen Head, New York, simply churns out what may be the finest statistical simulation available today. Thankfully, with the new version, they've spruced it up with just enough eye candy to keep things interesting.

Never let it be said, however, that Strat-O-Matic moves precipitously. While most other companies switched exclusively to CD-ROM and high-res graphics several years ago, Strat-O-Matic finally took the plunge this summer, and not without hesitation. Long-time fans waited impatiently for the game's release, their anxiety fueled by rumors of strange new arcade-like features inserted into what has historically been a shrine to statistics. Well, the new baby has arrived, and it's doing fine — a better-looking version of its older siblings. There is an extra appendage you should know about, though. It's called the
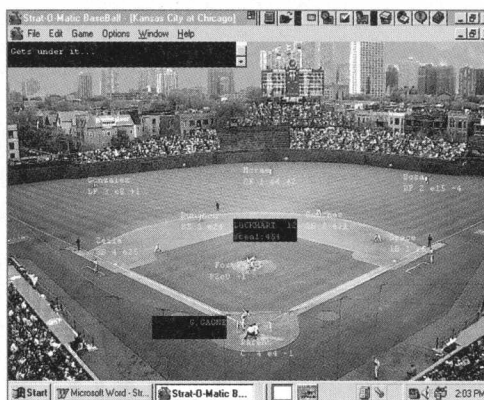
MIRROR, MIRROR For this first CD-ROM, Windows version, STRAT-O-MATIC BASEBALL's new look features much better looking stadium backdrops, though no one is going to mistake the game for TRIPLE PLAY 97.

Regulator, and it's ugly. But don't worry, the doctor says you can toggle it off and no one will know the difference.

There's one other major difference in the new STRAT-O-MATIC: It's Windows-based, running under both 3.1 and Win 95. Veteran SOM players will have little trouble navigating in the new version, since conceptually the game has changed little. STRAT-O-MATIC newbies may find things a bit more confusing, however, due primarily to the lack of a printed manual — a terrible trend in the industry in general that the company should not have followed.

A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

To its designers' credit, SOM is about as flexible as a baseball game can be. Players can choose to manage their favorite team while committing the others to autoplay mode. Or, if they choose, put every ball club on autoplay, sit back and watch the results fly by. On a Pentium 90 or better, complete season replays can be completed in under 15

minutes. Anyone who's surrendered their computer for a weekend while waiting for FPSBB to finish a simmed season will relish SOM's speed in CPU-to-CPU play.

Gamers who scan the fine print on the stat sheets will appreciate SOM's inclusion of every player who picked up a bat or a glove during a season. It's great fun to use the late season call-ups and lesser role players in recreated seasons.

Player manipulation has been simplified in the new STRAT-O-MATIC as well. The old General Manager module has given way to a drag-and-drop interface for trades among teams in the same league. In a carryover from the old SOM, interleague trading remains more complicated than it should be, requiring an edit-copy-paste step.

One aspect of management that's especially cool is the Swap-O-Matic feature, which allows the gamer to propose trades as large as three-for-three with GMs of computer-run teams. The game's
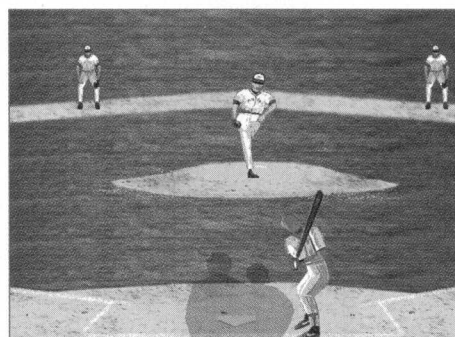
MINOR LEAGUE ACTION STRAT-O-MATIC has thrown a bone to arcade gamers with an awkward beast called The Regulator, a cartoony pitcher-batter confrontation that you'll want to disable as soon as possible.

Strat-O-Matic
COMPUTER BASEBALL

Price: $66.00
System Requirements: Windows 3.1 or higher, 8 MB of RAM or greater, 20 MB of hard drive space for full install, CD-ROM drive.
Protection: Floppy key disk
Developer: Strat-O-Matic
Glen Head, NY
(800) 645-3455
Reader Service #: 338