

Saturday Morning Fever!



Sid & Al's Incredible Toons Will Drive You Looney Tunes

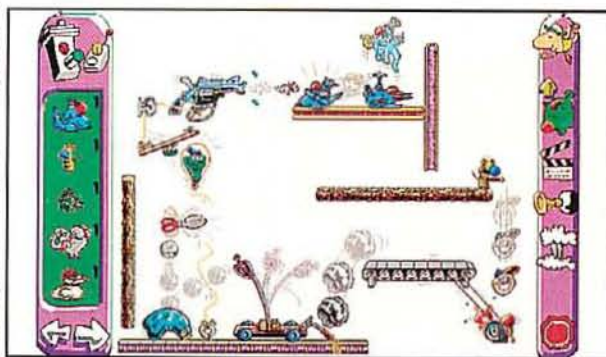
by Neil Harris

Back in the early part of the century, artist Rube Goldberg created newspaper cartoons diagramming machines of fantastic complexity. His machines were typically "time-saving devices" that accomplished their goals through an outlandishly circuitous chain of events. It might start with an anvil dropping on a seesaw which propelled a mouse through the air onto a platform with some cheese which released a balloon which triggered a switch...all ending in the completion of a menial household task. Rube Goldberg's machines became part of American folklore, leading to one of the stereotypes of the mad inventor—the father in "Honey, I Shrank the Kids," for example.

In Dynamix' recent puzzle game, *The Incredible Machine*, the goal was to create incredible machines in the Goldbergen vein and to solve mechanical puzzles.

In the puzzles, an item or group of items was missing from a machine, and it was the player's task to figure out which item was missing from where. I showed this game to an engineer friend who immediately became addicted. He bought a copy and showed it to all his friends, leading to a chain reaction that brought productive work to a halt at a major naval yard. I wouldn't be a bit

surprised if the next propulsion system for battleships is just a wee bit more complex than it might have been otherwise.



Sid & Al's Incredible Toons is the sequel to the *Incredible Machine*—and boy what a sequel! I'll be up front and admit my unabashed love for this game. It's exactly what I wanted from a sequel to *The Incredible Machine*. The puzzles are more challenging, the animation and sound effects are hysterically funny, and there are a host of small improvements.

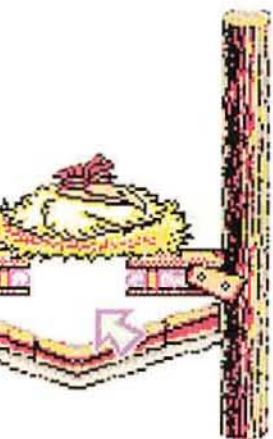
A Game With Character

Like *The Incredible Machine*, *Sid & Al* is a series of puzzles that begins with a goal and with some of the parts needed to complete the goal. The object is to choose from the pieces available and produce the desired result. The difference is that the machine "parts" are wonderfully drawn and animated cartoon characters. Whereas we were dealing with mostly inanimate and mundane machine

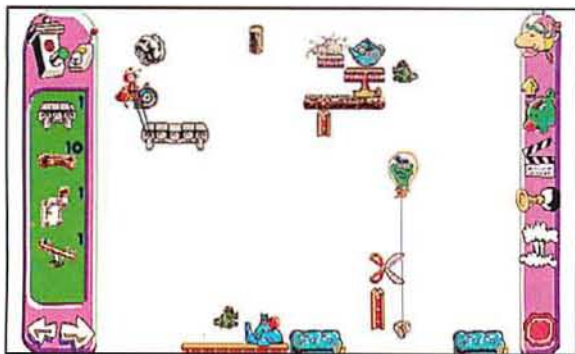
parts in *The Incredible Machine*, we are now working with Sid Mouse and Al E. Cat, two animated creatures who look like

washed up rejects of a by-gone cartoon era, each having the stereotyped animosity for the other's species. In the puzzles, perhaps Al will have to catch Sid, or Sid will have to destroy Al. By placing the pieces together just so and pushing the "on" switch, a series of animated steps play out on the screen until the goal is reached, in its action looking like something Wile E. Coyote had ordered from ACME, though hopefully performing more effectively.

So where *Sid & Al's Incredible Toons* bounds past the original game is in its character, or rather, its characters. Along with the titular stars, Sid and Al, is a supporting cast of toons including Bik Dragon, Eunice Elephant, and Hildegard Hen. Each character has a set of actions him, her, or it will take under different circumstances. If Al sees a dead fish, he'll lurch his overfed self over to it and scarf it down and spit out the bones. Al will also eat bananas and bubble gum. If he sees Sid, he'll chase him. Dropping things on Al's head get different reactions. Something heavy will make a small flock of birds circle his head, tweeting merrily. An egg will crack and he'll do a slow burn, frying the egg. The variety of



reactions and animations is a real treat. I'm sure there are many animations still lurking in this game that I haven't seen yet because I haven't put together the right combination of circumstances so far.



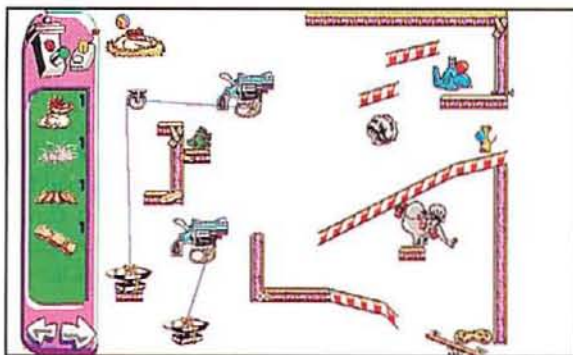
The supporting characters have a lot simpler reactions than Sid and Al. Bik Dragon spews fire when bumped, useful in lighting bomb fuses, heating teapots, or roasting one of the other characters. Eunice the Elephant vacuums up peanuts and anything else in the vicinity of her favorite snack, and she also tosses objects and, of course, runs away from Sid the Mouse in terror. Hildegard Hen lays an egg if she's bumped, and the egg drops down onto something or someone.

Most of the reactions are logical and internally consistent within the game, and will be familiar to those of us reared on Saturday morning cartoon shows. There are a few that I have trouble with, mainly the fact that some characters and objects are

arbitrarily immune to the effects of gravity. I mean really, an *elephant* is not affected by gravity but a mouse is? It's only a quibble really, because you get used to the rules in a hurry. If you care to read the manual, it's all there, but most of us will learn more from trial and error. It's more fun that way.

More Objects Than Carter Has Liver Pills

One major improvement over *The Incredible Machine* is in the variety of the objects you have available. I counted 66 different objects, not counting the characters already discussed. Some of them are only slight variations of each other, like the five types of



inclines and six types of walls, which vary in appearance and in how slick they are when something is sliding along them. Some items are unique. And some, like the gears, pulleys, conveyor belts, rope, electric switch and outlet, and teeter-totter are pretty much identical to the parts available in *The Incredible Machine*.

Some of the objects have interesting properties that can be adjusted. The Ratapult can be set to fire off one or multiple boulders. The timer can be set to go off immediately or to delay until a later time. Generally you have to adjust these just right in order to bring off the desired result. One of my favorite new objects is the Chow-Man Motor. If some food drops into his tray, the Chow-Man scarfs it up, his chest puffs out, and he jogs along his treadmill. Sid ought to consider getting this kind of exercise.

The tunnel is another handy item. It comes in two identical parts, and a character going in one part will come out the other before long. I keep expecting a train to come out of one of them. Maybe I haven't hit a high enough level yet, or maybe the designers are

saving that for the next sequel. A nice touch is that Sid puts on a mining helmet before going into the tunnel, and when he comes out the first thing that becomes visible is the beam of light from the helmet.

Nobody Said This Would Be Easy

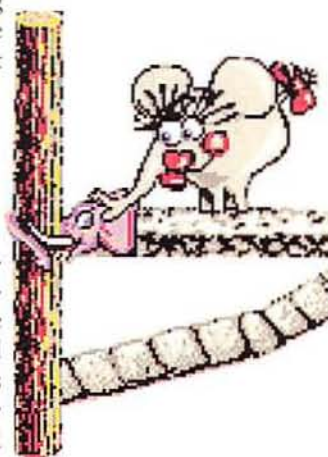
While the previous game was a challenge, with a little perseverance (and maybe a few friends kibitzing over a few shoulders) it could be solved completely.

I find this game to be *much* tougher.

It's divided into levels. The first is called Cake Walk, and it's very simple, designed to demonstrate the basics of the different parts and get you used to the game. The next section, called All Brawn, No Brains, are about at the level of the puzzles in the prior game, requiring a lot of trial and error along with a good dose of inspiration.

From then on, it's time to swear. The third level is called Really, Really Hard, and it's not named that way to make you feel good. On the earlier levels I had the stamina to solve many puzzles in each sitting. On this level, it's all I can do to get through one, after which it's time for a hot toddy and a good night's rest.

That's not all. There is an even tougher level—Looney Bin!, which might just send me there. After a while I get the feeling that this level was created just so Dynamix can sell hint books. Ten of the puzzles in this level can't even be attempted until all 90 of the other puzzles in all the levels have been solved. At the end of all 100 puzzles there is some kind of spectacular show, or so the documentation says. I may never see it myself.



Toon It Yourself Kit

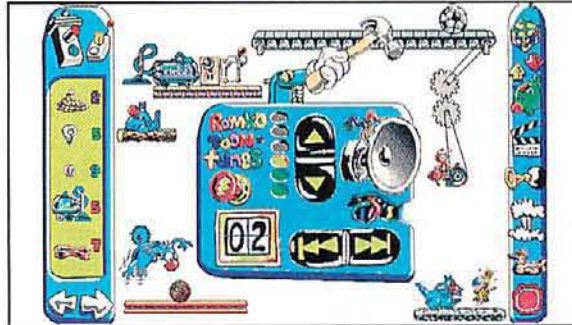
The designers would have been severely remiss if they didn't let players design their own puzzles using all these wonderful characters and gizmos. Of course they knew better. The HomeToons section gives you a blank slate and a full selection of all the pieces to play with. You can even save your puzzles to disk and trade them with your friends or, as the manual suggests, upload them to your favorite on-line service for the rest of us to try—especially those of us still stuck on the Looney Bin! level.

The only shortcoming in the HomeToons section is that the game can't be programmed to understand when the puzzle has been completed successfully. That's a shame. Perhaps the designers can take this on as their own puzzle for the inevitable next generation game.

More Improvements

I mentioned earlier that there are many small improvements to *Sid & Al's Incredible Toons* compared to its predecessor. This

game automatically saves your progress and eliminates the strange set of codes that saved your score in the older game. A score system with points based on speed of solving the puzzles was apparently judged superfluous—solving the puzzles is certainly reward enough for me.



The other improvement I'm very fond of is the screen dump feature. The game creates a disk file containing a screen dump when you hit the ALT-S key combination: a handy feature if you want to analyze a screen away from the computer. This would be very handy from inside a padded cell, although the psychiatrist might frown on it. On the other hand, solving the puzzle that sent me there might be therapeutic.

Finally, a special mention should go to the folks who put together the manual, Michael Waite and Richard Tunnell. The manual is well organized, fun to read and, with its cover parody of TV Guide and frenetic layout, in the spirit of the game.

Kudos Deserved

Jeff Tunnell and his co-designers, Chris Cole and Brian Hahn, have pulled off a winner here. *Sid & Al's Incredible Toons* deserves a place on your computer and will certainly show up on best game of the year lists. It's challenging to solve, fun to play, and great to just watch the animations and listen to the sounds. **CGW**

