

LATEST NEWS

REVIEW OF VIRTUAL CHESS

by Nick Schoonmaker

My review copy of Virtual Chess, distributed in the U.S. by I*Motion Inc., was received literally after this issue of CCR went to print (which explains why this review is included as an errata sheet to the magazine). As detailed elsewhere in this issue of CCR, Virtual Chess scored 3.5-2.5 in the 1995 Harvard Cup tournament (defeating GMs Boris Gulko and Michael Rohde, and drawing with GMs Joel Benjamin, Gregory Kaidanov, and Ilya Gurevich) to capture first place among the computer entrants.

The copy of Virtual Chess I received (version 1.05) operates only under Windows 95. I do not know if there is a commercially available version that is compatible with earlier versions of Windows or MS-DOS. I have also been provided a copy of Virtua Chess, which appears to be an older version of the same program but that is distributed in England; however, I was unable to get it to work on either my 100 MHz Pentium or 33 MHz 386DX computer. In either case, when attempting to run the program I received the following error message: "FATAL: This version will only work on English systems." However, I experienced no problems with running Virtual Chess (the U.S. version) on my Pentium computer.

I*Motion Inc. did not provide me the manual for Virtual Chess. And surprisingly, there was no documentation on the supplied CD-ROM disk as well as no on-line help while running the program. However, even without documentation the program is very easy to use. The pull-down menus are logically arranged and contain most of the standard features found with other top programs.

Virtual Chess has decent database functions. It processes PGN and EPD files, allowing both import and export capability. It also imports ChessBase files. One nice bonus feature is that the program comes with databases of many games (PGN format) for several dozen grandmasters. The program also analyzes games, a feature now standard among top programs.

Virtual Chess has a user adjustable hash table size. On my computer, which has 16 MB of RAM, the program is able to access up to just under 11 MB for its hash table. However, I do

not know what the size limitation is for computers with very large amounts of memory.

When given the One-Hour CCR test, the program scored 69 points, a result which is about in the middle of the pack for the top programs. It is the same score achieved by Chessmaster 4000, HIARCS 3.01, and REBEL 6.0 on my Pentium computer. (See separate article for more details) Unfortunately, the late date at which I received Virtual Chess did not allow me to perform further formal testing, such as the Franz Maresch endgame problem set. There is not much other data yet available on the program, since it is unrated by Ply. But based on preliminary results, and particularly on its first place finish among computers at the Harvard Cup tournament, the program is quite strong. Its database capabilities and other features seem generally comparable to the other top programs. So at this point, Virtual Chess appears to be a good choice for Windows 95 users. But further data on this program is still pending.

OOPS!!!

On page 136, we inadvertently left out the Krypton Challenge. So here goes:

Excalibur Krypton Challenge - under \$150 - pressure sensory - 100 levels - saves game in progress - 12"x 10" - 8 user selectable playing styles - LCD display showing chess clocks, line of play and position evaluation - takes back 32 ply - for advanced intermediate players - 4 AA batteries or AC - perhaps 2100 at 40/2 - 1 year warranty

YOUR OPINIONS COUNT

Let us know what you think of this issue...

Fax: 516-424-3405

E-mail: LGTY92A@Prodigy.com

Write: CCR, 21 Walt Whitman Road,
Huntington Station, NY 11746 USA