



By Sean McQuaid

in the immortal words of Monty Python: "and now, for something completely different."

This week, we talk computer technology. No, this isn't going to be a rehashing of failed techno-comics like *The Hacker Files* and *Blip*. It doesn't even involve computer-created comics, like *Digital Justice*. No, what we're taking a gander at this week are comic book-inspired computer programs-- specifically, screen savers! (insert writer yelling "yaaaay" like Kermit the Frog here).

Long, long ago, *X-Press* computer whiz Bruce Davison reviewed the *Marvel Screen Posters* screen saver from those nice folks at Berkeley Systems, makers of the popular and oh-so-versatile "After Dark" screen saver system you know, flying toasters and stuff). Bruce concluded it was purty albeit impractical, a nice toy if you could spare the cash and the hard drive-- especially if, like a few staff members here, you're a comic book fan.

Now, Berkeley has followed up their earlier effort with a screen saver devoted entirely to Marvel's most popular team: the X-Men. Heck, what with their animated cartoon, stickers, video tapes, trading cards, bubble gum, video games and action figures on the go, this latest merchandising gimmick was probably inevitable.

For the computer illiterate, screen saver programs guard against "phosphor burn" (images being burned into your computer screen if left unchanged for too long) by running visual programs to keep your screen active. In actuality, the likelihood of real danger to your screen is often slim, so screen savers are really marginally useful novelties.

For the comic book-illiterate, the X-Men are a wildly popular team of mutant superheroes published by Marvel Comics. Now, the kings of screensavers and the kings of comic books join forces to protect your monitor from the forces of Phosphor Burn! (frighteningly enough, that sounds like it could actually be an X-Men villain's name, but I digress).

The *X-Men Screen Saver* plugs into the *After Dark* system like its various Berkeley

cousins (Windows installation is pretty darn foolproof regardless), and after a quick setup the fun can begin! Corny, sure, but fun.

Mind you, some of the settings are just plain cheesy. "X-Clocks" and "X-Logos" (floating clocks and title logos, respectively) about as exciting as the parliamentary channel. "X-Women" (showcasing lazily floating images of X-babes Jean Grey, Rogue and Storm)

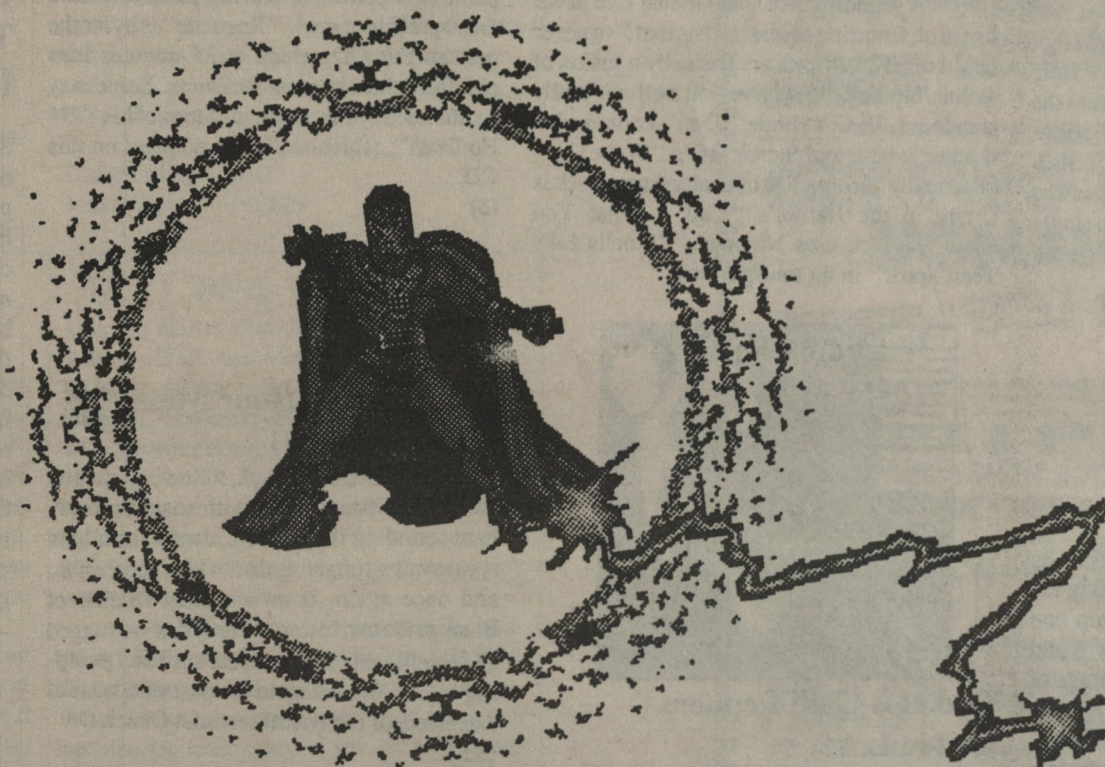
training devices of the Danger Room. It's kind of funny, but the figure animation is conspicuously stiff and awkward. More convincing is the animation of "Magneto," the X-Men's greatest foe: Mags floats around in a circle of magnetic energy, making with the electromagnetic zaps now and again whilst alternately attracting and repelling various metal objects (look for a priceless cameo by Captain Ameri-

screen saver is its "X-Trivia" setting: once it turns on, you can engage it in an interactive game of X-Men trivia indefinitely, with 250 questions to choose from. It's a surprisingly comprehensive list, with questions from the earliest and most obscure X-trivia to some of the most recent story elements. Literally hours of fun can be had here if trivia games are your bag (though one minor error has Deathbird and

Lilandra pegged as cousins, not sisters).

Peeves:

- few of the screen saver settings are very much fun, except for the trivia (until you exhaust the pool of questions) and action scenes like "Magneto" and "Berserk"
- it takes up lots of computer space
- on installing the screen saver, we can't call up the *After Dark* setup module anymore (this may be our technical ineptitude showing, but time will tell)
- comparatively few X-Men are on display here; characters like Angel, Iceman, Banshee, Havok, Polaris, Sunfire and Psylocke would have juiced the mix up a bit with extra visual effects, while satisfying us



is also pretty sedate and static stuff, though a tetch easier on the eyes. "X Sound F/X" is just what it sounds like-- although you'd need sound equipment to get the full effect. "X-Telepathy" is, depending on what messages you program into it, sometimes humorous (Professor Xavier floats out and delivers a pre-programmed "telepathic" message), and "X-Sentinels" is a very unique selection (if not the most entertaining). The latter module displays data and schematics on the mutant-hunting Sentinel robots, and then goes on to deliver a Sentinel's-eye view of stalking mutants (be vewwy, vewwy quiet.... they're hunting X-Men!). Interesting, but somewhat slow-paced and repetitive.

This brings us to a few of the more action-oriented screen savers. Among them is "The Beast," featuring the X-Man of the same name pitting his acrobatic tricks against the

ca's shield). The energy effects are rather neat, Magneto himself is pretty graceful, and the flow of his cape is, as one staffer described it, "kinda hypnotic." Somewhat more boisterous is "Berzerk" (an office favourite) wherein X-Men characters Bishop and/or Wolverine run onto your screen and proceed to blast, claw and shred it to pieces. The characters are nicely animated in this sequence, and there's a subtly perverse humour in seeing one's computer screen unceremoniously trashed by renegade comic book characters. Rounding out the action settings is the more subdued "X-Men Action," wherein Cyclops, Jean Grey, Professor X, Gambit, Rogue, Wolverine and Storm pop onto the screen individually and either strike poses or go into action. Fun parts of this include Cyclops blowing holes in the screen with his optic blasts.

One of the weirdest elements of this

avid completists

- the monstrous expense of computer software
- the lack of classic covers as screen posters or wallpaper

Perks:

- Magneto, Wolverine, Cyclops and Bishop all looking rather cool
- control panels allowing you to gauge qualities like Magneto's evil and Wolverine's ferocity
- characters who demolish the screen
- the corny (but fun!) musical effects and sound riffs thrown in with the screen saver program
- *After Dark* compatibility
- The X-Men! Commercialized to death, but still a nifty novelty for one's monitor. If you have sufficient money to throw around and a yen for comic books, the *X-Men Screen Saver* may be just the thing for you.