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Myst Meets Mysticism

A unique computer game gives new meaning to the term “interactive”

All right, we'll admit it: The New Age has entered the twenty-first century. Yes, with the release of a spiritually themed video game with a biometric twist, the void between “the Age of Aquarius” and the year 2004 has definitively been bridged. The brainchild of two self-described “New Age entrepreneurs from Eldorado Springs,” it's called *The Journey to Wild Divine* (featuring a user manual intro written by Jean Houston herself). And the best thing is, it's actually pretty cool.

What makes it cool isn't exactly the game itself—a *Myst*-like adventure with lush graphics and a mysterious plot—but rather its state-of-the-art controller. Wearing three “magic rings,” or biofeedback sensors, the player advances through the game by manipulating objects on screen. These sensors fit on the tips of your fingers and detect two different types of biometric data: your Skin Conductance Level (SCL) and Heart Rate Variability (HRV). SCL represents the activity of your sweat glands, which increases or decreases depending on how excited or relaxed you are, and HRV is a sophisticated calculation of the difference in heart rate from one beat to the next.

Now, games in the *Myst* genre typically require the player to solve mind-bending puzzles, but here the idea is to participate in “events,” relying on your feelings, breathing, and imagination to interact with the game and complete the task at hand. The Tibetan ex-monk Nawang Khechog acts as your in-game guide, giving helpful advice as you strive to juggle balls by thinking creative thoughts, maneuver boats with rapid breathing, practice archery with your eyes closed, steer hot-air balloons through deep breathing exercises, and in various other ways use the Force. Some of these events are harder than others, but getting frustrated is often precluded by design. When, for instance, a rabbit doesn't appear fully from behind a wall because you aren't relaxed enough, you know from experience that getting frustrated or anxious isn't going to help matters. And as far as kids are concerned, unless they're unusually patient, this game is going to put them to sleep.

Wild Divine has a high novelty factor and replay value (the user manual even suggests returning to your favorite event as a daily meditation technique), but most significantly, it shows exciting potential for the future of interactive games. One can only imagine that those impatient kids of today might be wearing full body suits of biometric sensors a decade from now, immersed in an epic virtual-reality spiritual adventure, meditating somewhere in the infinite vastness of cyberspace with all their gaming peers. (www.wilddivine.com)