

Another Leap Forward

Psygnosis' Lemmings

by Allen L. Greenberg

TITLE:	Lemmings
SYSTEMS:	Amiga, Atari ST, IBM
# PLAYERS:	1-2 (IBM, solitaire only)
PRICE:	\$49.99
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis Liverpool, England



The name "lemming" refers to any one of a number of small, arctic rodents, several European species of which have become widely romanticized for their aptitude to engage in a mass migration which frequently terminates at a nearby ocean and in a watery death for the community. Having recently seen an entire country engage in a holy war to achieve much the same results, is it any wonder we humans feel some fascination with these cute, furry and largely inept animals?

Lemmings is also the name of a new addiction (aka "game") from **Psygnosis**. The challenge is for a human player to subtly intervene in lemming affairs, thereby guiding them to safety and saving them from extinction. This may well be the best offering to date from **Psygnosis**, and it certainly is worth lining up in the fashion of the game's title characters to obtain a copy.

Lord of the Lemmings

Those who enjoyed the brief glimpse of godhood afforded in the playing of **Electronic Arts'** *Populous* will be treated to yet another "divine" experience in *Lemmings*, albeit with a far less dignified group of (devout) followers. As the exercise begins, a community of lemmings, appearing more like creations of Dr. Seuss than actual rodents, plummet one at a time from a trap door onto a two-dimensional playing field. Immediately, the lovable Lilliputian herd begins to walk across the screen until it reaches a barrier which forces it to reverse its direction. Should the creatures encounter a more deadly situation, such as the edge of a cliff, an ocean or a raging fire, they will casually proceed to their deaths with only a brief cry to mark their passing. The session ends when the last lemming is gone, or, more desirably, when the population has been guided to the exit door by the player's "divine intervention."



The Right Lemming for the Job

For the community to survive the migration, the player must carefully assign abilities to certain members of the group. A lemming who becomes a "blocker" prevents his comrades from moving past a certain point. Other lemmings may become "floaters" who are able to survive long-distance drops by the judicious use of an umbrella. "Climbers" are able to shimmy up any object or terrain, while "diggers" and "miners" are able to drill beneath most surfaces. "Bridge-builders" perform the task for which they are named and "bashers" can remove anything from tree-stumps to entire mountains. Finally, *any* lemming can be rigged for self-destruction. The resulting explosion may remove barriers, but may also prove a traumatic experience as the small creature turns to the player, shrieks in a high-pitched silicon-accented "Oh no!" and disappears in a haze of confetti.

Of Mice and Lemmings

The player interacts with the lemming population using their distant techno-relative, the mouse. IBM users may, instead, use the keyboard. The animals are given their assignments by first clicking on one of the icons which line the bottom of the screen and

then clicking on a particular lemming. Each icon and its corresponding ability may only be used a limited number of times. Split-second timing is important because the creatures have no capacity for independent judgment and all decisions must be made for them at the right instant.

Players may choose from one of four categories of play: "fun," "tricky," "taxing" or "mayhem." Each category contains 30 different levels of play arranged in ascending complexity which the player must complete in order to move onto the next level. After successfully completing a level, the player is given a password which will allow him to return to that level without first replaying the earlier exercises at future sessions. The "fun" level is actually a slow-paced tutorial which allows the player to become familiar with game play and develop strategies for the remaining 90 levels. The Amiga and Atari versions also feature a two-player mode for which two mice are necessary. In this mode, each player has a separate view of the same play field and must attempt to seduce as many lemmings as possible away from his opponent.

Eyes and Ears for Lemmings

The usual assault of sounds and graphics made on the senses by **Psygnosis** programs is present in *Lemmings*, although these may be a little more subdued in some cases. The sound effects are plentiful, realistic and quite useful for keeping track of the creatures. Players who have stereo speakers connected to their systems will be able to approximate the position of the source of a sound based upon which speaker it is heard from. The player

has the option of doing without some of these sound effects in order to hear some appropriately traditional (nerdy, actually) music.

The screen conveys less of the lush background detail in *Lemmings* than one may be used to seeing in other **Psygnosis** offerings. However, what is present is displayed with that company's "standard-setting" color, animation and realism. The only difficulty which some players may have is with the lemmings themselves. They are simply so tiny on the screen as to cause occasional frustration in following them.

Each sequence in *Lemmings* generally takes place across several horizontally scrolling screens. The scrolling is completely under control of the player, who will need to follow the action in more than one place at a time. This control is further enhanced by the presence of a small "radar" window which not only displays the movements of the lemmings across the entire playing area, but also allows the player to instantly jump to any spot by clicking on it in the radar screen. It's a well-conceived system and it works nicely.

Where Lemmings Go, Fun Follows

Recreational computing may well be the last safe outpost wherein a company may claim to have an "addicting" product and not find themselves in danger of attack by a lynch mob. Not since *Tetris* has this reviewer been so addicted to, or completely fascinated with, a series of challenging puzzles. For those who enjoy fast-moving jousts of logic and creativity, follow the crowd and get *Lemmings*. **caw**

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