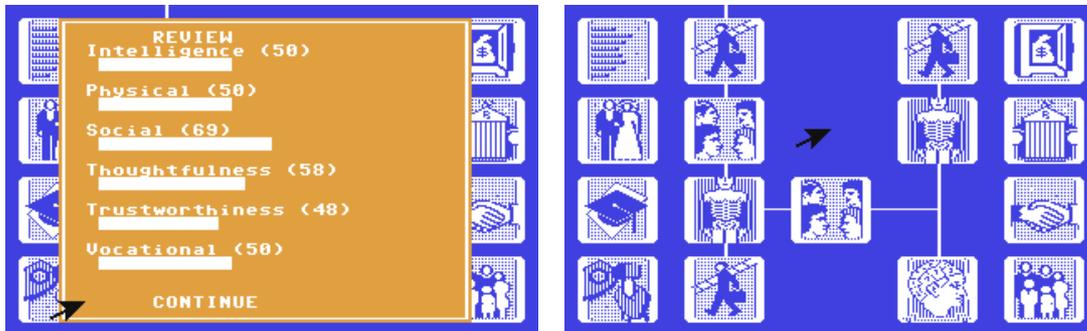


Alter Ego

Activision. £ 14.99, Disk, Joystick or Keys

Most text of the present article comes from the review published British C64 magazine ZZAP!64.



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What if ... If you have ever wondered what would have happened if you had tried harder at school, had more confidence when dating, been more daring in your social life, then Activision have a product with some possible answers for you. Called Alter Ego, it's a three disk adventure/role playing game which takes you through the seven stages of life by means of icon driven decision making sections.

Initially, a character may be created by either the computer or yourself, by answering a series of questions such as, 'Do you think questions like this are a waste of time?' with TRUE and FALSE responses. If you allow the computer to answer the questions, an option to review and edit the responses is still available. The seven stages of life are Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Adulthood, Middle Adulthood and Old Age. Any of these may be chosen as the starting point to the game and it is possible to play the same section more than once.

Initially there are two main icons on the screen. The first of these is accessed to display your main characteristics both physical and psychological. The second tells you your age. The rest of the screen is best described as a series of icons connected in flowchart fashion. These central icons are Emotional, Physical, Familial, Intellectual, Social and (later) Vocational. Selecting one of these icons enters you on a kind of multi-choice mini-adventure which, if successfully completed, increases your life score. These episodes open up from text windows appearing above the main screen. As each of the episodes is played out, the flow chart may be scrolled down to reveal the next series of events.

Playing the mini-episodes is the main part of the game. The choices available allow your character to develop in a wide variety of different ways. Later in life, the consequences of earlier actions will affect anything from what kind of job opportunities are open to you to getting a compatible partner for marriage (which is as suitable time as any to point out that whilst the version reviewed was 'male', Activision are preparing a female version). Normally the episodes take the form of a situation being

presented where you are the central character. You then choose the mood for your character and then the action he or she performs. More choices may follow, depending on the situation. The conclusion usually hints strongly at how well you did and takes the opportunity to poke fun whenever possible.

When a section of the game has been finished, a 'narrator' comments on your progress so far, offers some advice for the future and gives you the option of saving the current game, playing the section again or continuing into the next stage. Once adolescence is reached, more static icons appear on the screen. These consist of High School, Risks, Relationships and Work. They may be accessed more than once and remain on screen, despite the disappearance of the central icons. Paying too much attention (or too little) to any of these icons will affect you, no matter how well you do elsewhere. For instance, if you spend all your time dating instead of going to school, you are more likely to get somebody pregnant than passing your exams! On the other hand, do you really want to end up being the introverted, limp wimp... Of course, playing out the various mini-adventures properly is still essential to successful play.

Risk taking can improve self-confidence and intellect but because of the dangers involved with some of the activities, may also lead to death. If this section is chosen, the computer constantly asks whether you would rather stop or continue. Intellectual questions start becoming more of a general knowledge quiz. Unfortunately, the questions seem to be biased towards the American player however, Activision have kindly supplied a crib sheet so it is possible to answer questions about presidential protocol correctly!

As life goes on, more static icons appear dealing with College, Major Purchases, Marriage and Family (the one you help create rather than the one you came from). Life consequently becomes more complicated and difficult to co-ordinate. The game expects you to play in character and so indicates when it believes you have made a bad choice in an area. Also, if your action indicated an impulsive nature rather than a thoughtful one, you may find yourself rather short on resources from time to time as the computer assumes you splash out the cash without much concern for the consequences.

If at any point during an episode, you wish to backtrack through to a particular choice, the Review option at the top of the text screen allows you to do so. A game may be saved in the middle or at the end of one of the seven stages.

Whatever the public think of the game, one thing is almost for certain: it's going to stir up a lot of controversy. Throughout the instructions, there are reminders that this is only a game. Nevertheless, it tends to be quite educational and it doesn't consider any area to be a taboo subject. Everything from early sexual encounters and toilet training to complex social interaction and death is given equal treatment -- all with a humorous sweetener. Even so, the option is given to flip past these sequences. Apparently, in the states, the game has gone on sale with an 'over sixteens only' label but the same caution is not to be applied to the English market. No doubt, a lot more will be heard about Alter Ego ...





Activision have released some pretty innovative and original software in the past, but never have they released anything quite so stunningly original as *Alter Ego*. It is a truly remarkable simulation of life itself and proves just as enjoyable an experience as the real thing, with a multitude of different situations to face as you see fit. It is one of the most addictive and compulsive games I have ever played (yes, that old cliché), mainly due to its voyeuristic and indifferent nature. There's not much more to be said, other than enjoy life to the full... With *Alter Ego*!



From the very first keypress this game is addictive really addictive ! It's wonderfully written. The writer (an American psychologist) displays a great sense of humour and a surprisingly perceptive view of all the problems both the young and old face in their lives. Almost every situation has happened to you at some point. With this game you have the chance to answer back to teachers when you never had the guts to in real life-- take risks that you sometimes chickened out of -- and make decisions that you have not yet experienced for real.

As life goes on, play becomes realistically more complex and demanding. Frequent checks on your characteristics are necessary if a balanced character is to be developed. The result is a game that's original in nature and compulsive to play. It's neatly presented on the screen, it's challenging -- it's excellent Go out and buy it -- worry about the consequences later!



INCREDIBLE !!! The harmless looking packaging of *Alter Ego* contains one of the most incredible programs I've ever seen- and played ! Additive's not the word for it--- I sat down one Sunday afternoon and loaded up *Alter Ego* -- goodbye Sunday night and most of Monday morning... The sort of problems that you encounter in real life are present in *Alter Ego*, and there are loads and loads of them--girlfriends, friends, Mummy and Daddy, fights, school, getting married/divorced, witty ones, dangerous ones, sexy ones, sad. ... Everything- the author's a genius!

The sheer volume of text is also unbelievable, and the problems that crop up are taken from a pool making the game different each time it's played (obviously the same problems DO appear eventually). I can't recommend this program highly enough. If you've got a disk drive then beg, steal or borrow *Alter Ego*. If you haven't then beg, steal or borrow a disk drive too!

Presentation 96%

Well produced, comprehensive instructions and excellent on-screen presentation.

Graphics N/A

Sound N/A .

Hookability 98%

An enjoyable doddle to get into and easy to use.

Lastability 97%

When you're bored of life, you'll be bored of *Alter Ego*.

Value for Money 91%

Well, it IS quite expensive, but your life over again, and again, and again? Given that you have the money to spend, then it's well worth it.

Overall 98%

Original, unusual, compelling, varied... C'est La Vie!