



# It's Alive

*CREATURES Is Bound To Tickle Your Fancy*

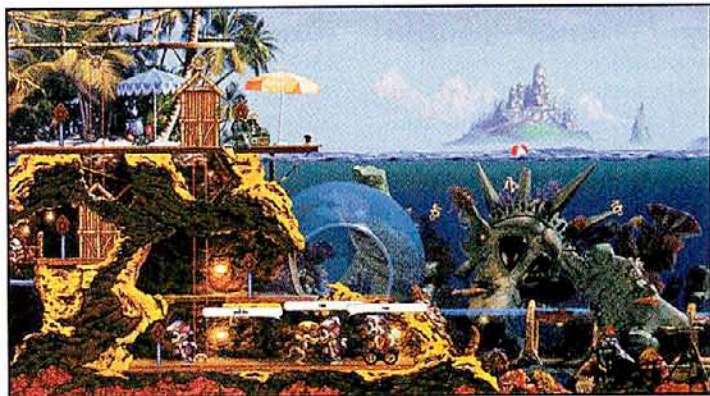
by Dawn Jepsen

**A**lbia is a paradise, filled with lush plant life, beautiful mountains, and clear waters. It's inhabited by cute, peaceful creatures called Norns, which resemble less furry versions of Gizmo from the film *Gremlins*. Alas, Albia is also inhabited by the green, diseased Grendel. Happily, Albia has you as its overseer, and your job is to help keep the Norns happy, healthy, and prolific.

*CREATURES* isn't a traditional game. It's an artificial life program without set goals—imagine the classic *LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE*, only with breeding and genetic factors. The creatures in question, Norns, are cute little animals that are hatched from an egg and, with your guidance, mature into adulthood, have families, and eventually die. Each Norm has a very distinctive personality controlled by approximately 246 different variables within the Norm's neural network. A Norm's actions are determined by its individual genetic makeup and its reactions to its constantly changing environment; Norns can breed, and their characteristics are convincingly passed on to their offspring. Your role in all of this is as a guardian to the Norns. In the game, you are represented by a hand, which also serves to move things, tickle or slap the Norns, and to point to objects in Albia.



**BITTERSWEET BIRTH** If Albia is at capacity, an older Norm must die before a new baby can be hatched.



**THE BIG PICTURE** To minimize awkward scrolling, run *CREATURES* in the highest resolution that your video card will support.

## IN THE BEGINNING

Before hatching my first Norm, I decided to take a quick peek around Albia. Unfortunately, it's quite difficult to take a leisurely scroll around Albia, due to slow screen updates. I found it quicker to save locations such as the pond, beehive, kitchen, incubator, island, and garden using the game's Favorite Places feature. Albia's landscape is detailed, varied, and beautifully drawn. Just the kind of place you'd want to raise a family.

Because female Norns take longer to develop, I chose a female egg from the hatchery, placed it carefully in the incubator, and waited anxiously for the birth of my first Norm. Within a few minutes, I had an adorable baby girl that looked like a cross between Gizmo and a lop-eared rabbit. She had the biggest blue eyes and the cutest little grin. I decided

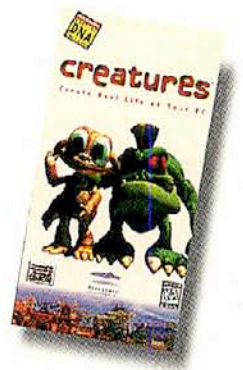
to call her Abbie. Abbie responded to my profuse tickling with the funniest little chuckle.

When Norns are first born, they will usually follow the hand. It's very important to reward your Norm with a tickle whenever she follows the hand or responds appropriately to a command. If your Norm doesn't respond correctly, give her *one slap only* and she should become more obliging. If you slap her too often, even accidentally, she will fear you, run from the hand, and eventually slap other Norns.

I led Abbie to the computer where she quickly learned her verbs. This is an imperative step in the Norns' development, as failing to do so may hinder their survival skills. It seems that word retention is quite difficult for most Norns, so have your newborn repeat the words she learns several times. From



**OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS** Grendels steal food, carry disease, and teach Norns antisocial behavior.



**Price:** \$39.99

**Minimum System**

**Requirements:** Pentium 60, Windows 95 or Windows 3.11, 8MB RAM, 60MB hard-disk space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, 16-bit DirectX-compatible sound card.

**Macintosh:** Power Mac, 16MB RAM, CD-ROM drive, System 7.5 or higher, 35MB hard-disk space, 256-color display.

**Multipayer Support:** None.

**Designer:** Cyberlife Technology LTD

**Publisher:** Mindscape Sunnyvale, CA 94608 (408) 737-6800

[www.creatures.mindscape.com](http://www.creatures.mindscape.com)

**Reader Service #:** 340

here, I coaxed Abbie into the garden where my intent was to teach her the names of objects in Albia. This proved more difficult than I anticipated, and I soon realized that Abbie was referring to me as "food." I eventually determined that Abbie was looking at the hand, not a carrot, when I typed in "food." Take plenty of time teaching your Norm how to eat, sleep, and identify objects and you'll be spared a great deal of frustration in the long run.

Since I was managing fairly well at this point, I introduced a male Norm to Albia—and to Abbie. Andrew proved to be very cute, with a fluffy tail, knee boots, and dark colored bands on his arms. I tried in vain to lure Andrew to the computer. It was here that I discovered one of the most frustrating aspects of rearing Norms. The most interesting thing to a Norm is another Norm, and Andrew and Abbie were virtually inseparable.

The solution was to temporarily export Abbie, which not only saved her as a file which could be shared with other CREATURES fans, but also removed her from the program. Once Andrew acquired adequate life skills, I imported Abbie back into Albia. While older Norms will teach your babies words, they are often fragmented or altogether incorrect, and older Norms will often regress to "baby talk" after spending time with unlearned newborns.

#### CREATURE COMFORTS

Soon, my Norms were ready to explore Albia without a lot of direction from me. I was however, anxious for my lovebirds to breed. Thinking I could help things along, I opened up the breeder kit to see if my Norms were in the mood. Determined that Abbie and Andy would be more than just good friends, I fed each a tomato aphrodisiac and waited. Before long I was the proud mother of my first natural born Norm baby. Beth had characteristics from both parents and proved to be a rather quick learner. After hatching a mate for Beth, I found I had more than enough to keep me busy. With the ever curious Norms ever increasing their numbers, trouble is bound to come along. It does, in the form of a Grendel.

The Grendel is a nasty green lizard-looking creature that seeks out your innocent Norms for playtime. In "playing" with the Norms, the Grendel passes on diseases, steals food, and slaps them silly. To prevent your Norms from getting sick or violent, teach them to defend themselves. Whenever the Grendel approaches, direct your Norms to either "run" or "push

## Norm Adoption Agencies

In the short time since its release, CREATURES has gathered an amazing online following. On developer Cyberlife's Web page ([www.cyberlife.co.uk](http://www.cyberlife.co.uk)), you'll find tips, background information, and add-ons including free Purple Mountain Norms. Also here is information about the much anticipated genetics kit which will allow you to make test tube Norms and a Grendel/Norm hybrid, amongst other things.

You'll also find links to well over 50 user-created CREATURES pages. Some feature Norm editors, as well as hacks for getting rid of the Grendel for good or making him as nice as your Norms. The widest variety of pages allow you to "adopt" Norms from breeders all over the world. Especially popular are unique Norms with unusual colors, brain size, or life spans—mutations that speak well of the complexity of CREATURES' genetics modeling.



Grendel." If you have several friendly Norms slapping the Grendel at once, he will usually tuck his tail and run. For a more permanent solution, entice the beast to eat a death cap mushroom. The Grendel dies and you will have about 30 minutes before another is hatched.

After investing a great deal of time and affection to my Norms, I found I had grown quite attached to them. It was then, quite despairing to watch my ailing Abbie grow frail and ill. I scanned the health and science kits for herbal cures, pain medicine, and just plain shots of energy. It was futile. After bearing three delightful children, Abbie curled up as if she were sleeping, let out a little moan, and died as I watched helplessly. Andrew stood faithfully at her side, calling her name and "pushing" her.

On the verge of deciding that all of this was just too depressing, I discovered I had a new egg. A bittersweet cycle began again in this delightful and well thought out game. I've now played CREATURES so much that my real-life family is seeking an intervention. ☹



**TICKLED OUT** Ticking a sleep-resistant Norm will usually lull it into a nap.

▶**APPEAL:** Gamers who enjoy SmCry-style games; people who live in apartments that don't allow pets.

▶**PROS:** Norms exhibit very convincing behavior; detailed genetics model; strong support from the company for online additions.

▶**CONS:** 12-Norm limit means otherwise healthy Norms must die to make room, a depressing experience; program scrolling could be better.

