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## Spirit teaches children virtues

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*In a world of ultraviolent video games, where dexterity of the thumb and index finger is infinitely more important than the flexing of the cerebrum, there must be a place for children and their parents to interact and actually learn something from that overpriced multimedia computer/gaming system. Take a deep breath and enter the ROMper Room, where learning is a four-letter word -- cool.*

Children can learn the importance of virtues while solving the mystery of the Sword of the Spirit.

The 17-year-old Christian-themed radio series "Adventures in Odyssey" has extended its reach to the world of CD-ROM edutainment with an interactive tale that hones middle schoolers' appreciation of moral values.

The story involves the citizens of Odyssey -- older inventor John Avery "Whit" Whittaker and teenagers Connie Kendall and amateur archaeologist Eugene Meltsner -- who are trying to recover an ancient sword for the McAlister estate before selfish art dealer Gustav Schmidt does.

To accomplish this task, they must pass a gantlet of virtues tests that family patriarch Peter McAlister has set up to prepare his children for life's many obstacles.

Map exploration mixes with levels of puzzle solving and traditional virtual play; the child gets several sneaky lectures on positive values as he or she works through eight tests of character that have been translated into on-screen games.

As the player helps the main characters -- who converse via animated scenes resembling a decently produced Disney Channel cartoon -- he can access a database of Odyssey residents, read up on some history of the town and use a scanner to reveal clues to the artifact's hiding place.

When a player separately controls the trio of investigators, that leads to underground caverns containing recordings of Peter McAlister, who introduces some pretty challenging games.

For example, Whit eventually must solve a series of jumbled puzzles with pieces that must be rotated, flipped and mirrored into proper positions. McAlister calls it a test of "peace" because that soothing virtue only occurs when a sense of order is maintained.

The player will help Connie conquer patience by carefully guiding her through dangerous caverns with some nasty winds. The side-scrolling game can be exhaustive, as she must be controlled via keyboard commands to jump, fly via gust trails, climb ladders and bounce to get through the test.

Eugene spends lots of time in mine shafts while sneaking around bats in another side-scrolling game loaded with methodical levels as he reminds players that they are working on tests of character, which he defines as "what you are when no one is looking."

The areas of kindness, self-control, love, joyfulness (maintaining a good attitude) and perseverance also are reinforced throughout the adventure.

Additionally, the CD-ROM includes an audio presentation of an episode from the "Adventures in Odyssey" radio series, desktop wallpaper and a jukebox mixer game to match music with narratives.

Overall, Sword of Spirit does an excellent job of teaching a child about important

concepts he might not normally be exposed to because of being pummeled by multimedia moments often geared toward hate and violence in both the gaming and real worlds.

*Sword of the Spirit from Digital Praise (www.digitalpraise.com), \$29.99, For Windows (98/ME/2000/XP) and Macintosh (OS X) operating systems.*

*ROMper Room is a column devoted to finding the best of multimedia "edutainment." Write to Joseph Szadkowski, The Washington Times, 3600 New York Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002; call 202/636-3016; or send e-mail (jszadkowski@washingtontimes.com).*

#### Multimedia treats

•Myst IV: Revelation, from Ubisoft, for Xbox, \$19.99. A legendary puzzle adventure finds its way to Bill Gates' favorite entertainment console and tempts teens to traverse its awe-inspiring world.

Photo-realistic graphics, immersive video and even an original song by Peter Gabriel all compete for a player's attention as he tries to concentrate on a "hunt-and-click" quest to save a little girl caught in a struggle between two evil brothers. The game is quite the brain drain as it demands meticulous exploration and an acute use of logic to successfully navigate its realms and reveal a story encompassing all of the Myst titles.

Life has gotten even sweeter for the multimedia-minded family as they can now enjoy the digital artistry via a high-definition television with Dolby Digital Surround 5.1 sound.

•Call Upon Yoda, from Hasbro, standalone product using three C batteries (included), \$49.99. In honor of the final "Star Wars" film, "Episode III: Revenge of the Sith," the company known for its various plastic tributes to the Skywalker clan has come up with a technological wonder for youngsters to learn the ways of the Force.

Junior can hang out with the 12-inch-tall, 800-year-old Jedi Master from the planet Dagobah as the green-skinned mentor relays five-minute story synopses of all six films (including revealing most of the plot points of "Episode III: Revenge of the Sith").

Yoda also offers multiple-choice trivia questions on the "Star Wars" universe and, much like a Magic 8-ball, answers yes-or-no questions about the galaxy's most befuddling queries. He speaks more than 500 phrases and moves his body, arms, eyes, ears, and occasionally twitches his nose as owners squeeze his hands to interact with him.

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