



Getting More Real

Software and peripheral developer Miacomet stopped by yesterday to demo a couple of new sports gaming peripherals in the works. They brought prototypes of two unique products: a fishing rod and reel simulator, and a specially adapted trackball-type input device that will actually let you use your favorite pool cue to control the billiards action onscreen. Though the peripherals are still in development, the prototypes were working well enough to show their potential.

On the fishing sim *Real Feel Fishin': Surfcasting Nantucket*, also in development at Miacomet, the fishing peripheral proved superior to a generalized input device like a joystick. Using Miacomet's Real Feel technology to realistically gauge the angle and velocity of our casts, the rod and reel device put the line out into the ocean onscreen. Quick jolts let us know when fish were biting, and the resistance on the reel simulated fighting sea bass. Peripherals powerhouse InterAct will distribute these unusual controllers, as well as future Miacomet products, under the Real Feel brand.

Miacomet has plans for other interesting-sounding products that will aim to more accurately simulate a variety of sporting experiences for all platforms and promise to work with most major titles. They're dedicated to creating highly specialized controllers that do one thing well, rather than doing everything with varying degrees of success. Time will tell whether computer and console gamers really need or want this level of realism. But then, if you play a lot of racing games, you want a steering wheel; if fishing or pool's your thing, you'll want to take a look at these products later in the year. We'll have full reviews as soon as the peripherals are ready, of course.

I bring this up because I had more fun with the fishing peripheral than I'd expected. Fishing games have never been my favorite, and even on the most sensitive force-feedback joystick, I've had trouble getting into the fantasy. Developers like Miacomet are out to change that, to make the experience of simulated fishing entail everything but the slime and smell (maybe they have plans for that, too, but they're not telling).

My question is: what next? Now that PlayStation, Nintendo, and PC systems are going down in price and the Dreamcast is set to launch for an affordable \$199, maybe we'll have the spare cash to spend on more specialized peripherals rather than getting one that aims to handle every type of game. What would you like to see? Effective virtual reality is still a long way off, in my opinion, but what can hardware manufacturers do in the meantime to help get us more into the experience? Once you've landed a 52-pound sea bass with a 30-inch electronic rod and reel, no idea seems too far-fetched.

Tell us what other gizmos you'd like to see.
Charles D. Gray, editor-in-chief
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