



BIG SUGAR VS. THE

The government supports a program that destroys the environment, enriches a few wealthy farmers and costs consumers \$1.4 billion a year. So why do Democrats and Republicans keep voting for it?

FROM AN AIRBOAT SKIMMING ACROSS THE EVERGLADES, South Florida appears to be a vast region of neither land nor sea. Illuminated by a tropical dawn, fields of gold-green saw grass give way to occasional islands of cypress trees. The proliferation of vegetation gives the impression of solidity, but the entire landscape is submerged under 6 feet of water. At the helm of the airboat — essentially an airplane engine attached to an aluminum hull — sits Ron Jones, a professor of biological sciences at Florida International University who has probably logged as much time in this aqueous realm as any human. With a light

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM YAEV



touch of a handle, Jones turns the boat from open water toward what appears to be a solid wall of saw grass. I cringe, anticipating a screeching crash, only to watch 8-foot stalks flatten and rise again as our wake subsides.

Jones, pale skinned and baby-faced at 39, has studied the Everglades ecosystem for 11 years. He heads the Southeast Environmental Research Program and has done government-sponsored research for Everglades National Park and other federal agencies. He also is that rare field scientist who is willing to use his data to confront a powerful political constituency—in this

case, the sugar cane industry, which has dominated Florida politics for decades. Jones is convinced this landscape is imperiled by a federal support program that encourages sugar cane producers to expand their crop further into this once-pristine refuge.

"The sugar program is destroying the Florida Everglades," Jones says with a scientist's certainty. "There's no question in my mind whatsoever."

Jones has offered to take me out this November morning to show me why he is so certain. Navigating the flat, nearly featureless terrain, Jones points out blue herons, white egrets, snake birds, mosquitofish and even

LEFT: THE MACHINERY OF BIG SUGAR BRINGS IN THE HARVEST. ABOVE: FLORIDA'S EVERGLADES, A RIVER OF GRASS THAT ONCE FLOWED ACROSS 50 UNINTERRUPTED MILES.

a carnivorous plant called the bladderwort, all of which thrive in the world's largest subtropical wetlands ecosystem. We are on the outskirts of Everglades National Park, which, along with Big Cypress National Preserve to the west, the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge to the north and some federally owned water-conservation areas, is what remains of the 2,700 square miles of the Everglades. Once, this

In March, the House and Senate approved sweeping changes to the Farm Bill, phasing out price supports for wheat, corn, rice, cotton and other crops. Sugar, once again, survived.

river of grass flowed sluggishly in an uninterrupted 50-mile-wide swath from Lake Okechobee all the way to Florida Bay, at the southern tip of the state. We arrive at a point where the natural flow of water has been disrupted by man, corralled by one of a vast series of dikes, levees and canals built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. At this crossroads of the natural world and man's attempt to control it, the story of the South Florida sugar wars becomes stark and unambiguous.

Jones cuts the engine. On one side of the levee, he tells me, the Everglades has mostly been protected from harmful phosphorus-rich runoff from sugar cane farming many miles to the north. As we drift and look around, Jones points to the clearings used by wading birds. Cattle sprout in small bunches near heron rookeries and alligator nesting areas. Absent the roar of the engine, the sounds of a hundred life forms fill my ears: A moor hen walks on a lily pad; a snake bled splashes against the water on its fishing expedition; an unseen animal carries the saw grass.

On the other side of the levee, where runoff from sugar cane fields has been channeled and concentrated, the area looks like an overgrown cattail forest. The emphasis on sugar production, says Jones, set off an unintended cascade of biological problems in the complex Everglades ecosystem. At the epicenter of the controversy lies the 700,000-acre farming tract known as the Everglades Agricultural Area, bordering Lake Okechobee's south shore. The EAA, privately owned for the most part, is where more than half of the country's sugar cane is grown. In the wet months the South Florida Water Management District drains the area; in the dry months it irrigates it. This one-two reversal of the natural order drastically alters the quantity of water that flows through the system every season.

The water quality, on the other hand, is simply declining. Phosphorus, a botanical nutrient, is produced when the drained soil oxidizes in the intense sunlight. This situation is aggravated by the tilling of the land for sugar production, and tons of phosphorus runoff accumulates downstream. This in turn promulgates the overgrowth of certain plant species: The cattails, for instance, thrive on the phosphorus and crowd out other native forms of life.

The situation is potentially cataclysmic, says Jones, a careful man who wears a light jacket though the temperature has warmed into the '80s. More phosphorus also means that algae and marsh plants pro-

liferate and then suck oxygen out of the water as they decompose. Without oxygen, fish can't survive, which means that fish-eating birds lose their food supply, and so on. Already in many places the open spaces

that wading birds need to land are covered with cattails, and the number of these birds has dropped alarmingly. Parts of the system are "irretrievably damaged," says Jones, meaning it would take hundreds of years to restore the system's balance. Left unchecked, he says, the rest of the Everglades will follow suit over time. He stops, squints into the sun and points to the side of the levee where the phosphorus hasn't infiltrated. "This is the Everglades," he says. Pointing to the other side, where the cattails have run riot, he says, "This is not the Everglades."

A CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE

RARELY DO ENVIRONMENTAL issues take on the kind of national political immediacy that the fight over the Everglades is likely to attract in the coming months. Both President Bill Clinton and Sen. Robert Dole have been engaged in a sort of Everglades one-upmanship as they jockey for Floridians' votes. The most recent round began on Feb. 19, when Vice President Al Gore stood beside a saw grass marsh in Everglades National Park and laid down the administration's

marker in Florida, a strategic political battleground for the 1996 presidential election. Gore proposed that the sugar industry in Florida pay a 1-cent-per-pound tax on sugar that would provide \$35 million per year toward what could ultimately be a \$1.5 billion Everglades restoration project. The administration's proposal feels like cold calculus and also a little ironic, since one of Clinton's biggest Florida political fund-raisers was Alfonso "Alfie" Fanjul Jr. (a former co-chair of the Clinton campaign in Florida and the designated Democrat of a wealthy and powerful pair of Cuban-born brothers). The Fanjul family owns Flo-Sun Inc., one of the largest sugar-producing companies in the state.

It's no secret that public opinion in Florida and around the country has turned against the sugar industry, and the polls consistently show strong support for those who say the industry should be made to clean up after itself. Dole, who pushed through a \$200 million Everglades cleanup appropriation, will have to balance his party's anti-tax, anti-environmental-regulation positions with the electoral weight of Floridians' votes. No

doubt, too, he will take into consideration the opinion of Alfie's brother, José "Pepe" Fanjul, Flo-Sun's president, who has hosted fund-raising dinners for the senator from Kansas.

As important as it is, the Everglades is just one theater of the sugar war being fought all over the country—in the cane fields of Hawaii and Louisiana, a candy factory in Georgia, a refinery in California, sugar beet fields in North Dakota and most significantly, in the halls of the Capitol in Washington, D.C. The inside story of how the sugar barons' sweet deal survived a yearlong assault by its many foes is a tale of deeply embedded greed and influence.

The modern life of the sugar program began in 1954 and was amended into something close to its present form in 1981. It is not a traditional farm subsidy, through which a farmer gets a payment for growing (or not growing) a crop, but a Byzantine system of price supports, loans, import restrictions and domestic-marketing allotments (which limit the amount of sugar that domestic producers can sell within the United States). The program allows America's estimated 10,000 sugar beet and sugar cane farmers, in 38 states, to produce most of the nearly 20 million tons of sugar that Americans consume every year at a price that guarantees a substantial profit for the grower. Sugar, whether it's refined from sugar beets in North Dakota or sugar cane in Louisiana (the final product is indistinguishable), gets the same sort of price protection. This legislation itself is buried in the Farm Bill, which comes up for approval by Congress only once every five years. On March 21, a House-Senate conference committee reached an agreement on a major overhaul of the nation's farm programs. The legislation, which the *New York Times* called the "most sweeping agricultural bill since the Depression," would phase out price



ABOVE: JONES AT WORK. BELOW: HARLEY AND REED, THE GREENS' SECRET WEAPONS.



supports for such crops as wheat, corn, rice and cotton. The sugar program dodged reformers' efforts.

The secret to this success? Enormous influence peddling, huge political-action-committee contributions, unabashed electoral logrolling and a textbook case of how interest groups join together in ferocious packs to bully Congress. To the sugar program's many critics, the issue also provides the perfect hypocrisy test for the Republican revolution. Newt Gingrich, who has called the sugar program "wrong"

DANIEL GLICK wrote "Twilight of the Greens," about the new environmental movement, in *RS* 719.

and "absurd," has been noticeably silent.

"This program really says a lot about what a cowardly revolution it is," says Joe Lockhart, who until late last year was a spokesman for the Coalition to End Welfare for Big Sugar, an unlikely group of anti-sugar program activists that includes grass-roots environmentalists and huge corporate interests. Lockhart is highly critical of the Republican legislative agenda, which he says targets welfare mothers but leaves corporate welfare recipients unscathed. "Anyone who can't protect themselves is getting hit," says Lockhart.

US. SUGAR CORP.'S HEADQUARTERS ARE IN Clewiston, Fla., which calls itself America's Sweetest Town. In 1931, the company set up shop on the southern shores of Lake Okechobee. The company grows most of its own cane there and mills 700,000 tons of raw sugar annually in nearby plants. The raw sugar, still brown from some residual molasses, is sent off to plants, mainly in the eastern United States, and refined until it resembles the white stuff you spoon into your macchiato.

In an upstairs wood-paneled office, Senior Vice President Bob Buker sits at a vast conference table, grumpy after a day trip to Miami to confront Big Sugar's foes. Buker shakes his head slowly, wondering how his life could have devolved into this: spending this entire day rebutting claims by former Florida governor Claude Kirk that sugar growers are somehow responsible for giving locals AIDS.

Buker stops grumbling, loosens his tie and begins his defense of a federal farm program that he insists is vital to his industry's health. The world sugar market is one huge, subsidized mess, he says. Other countries' subsidies make the U.S. sugar program seem like the free market. Until the rest of the world changes the way it does business, Buker says, the American sugar program needs to remain intact. It is not a subsidy, he insists, drinking out of a coffee cup that says ZERO ZIP ZILCH, which is what Buker says the program costs the Treasury.

But Buker and his colleagues in the industry clearly share a disdain for those who champion wetlands preservation. "One hundred years ago we called this place a swamp, and we drained it," says U.S. Sugar spokesman Otis Wragg III, who has joined the conversation. "Now we call it a fragile ecosystem."

Buker and Wragg's main enemies are represented in the Coalition to End Welfare for Big Sugar, which includes public interest groups that claim sugar growers hike consumers of \$1.4 billion a year; environmentalists who insist that excessive cane production is destroying the Everglades; huge sugar-using food manufacturers like Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Hershey and General Mills, which complain the program costs them jobs and profits; free-market conservatives who rail that the program amounts to Soviet-style agricultural management; and good-government watchdogs who assert that the debate over Big Sugar exposes the need for campaign-finance reform.

Buker's critics are largely on target. The convoluted federal program that benefits sugar growers doesn't do much to benefit the lives of most Americans—unless by "most Americans" you mean a handful of wealthy sugar beet and sugar cane farmers. The program personifies a government intrusion that would be immediately laughed out of any Congressional subcommittee if anybody had the audacity to propose it today. But although proposing a new government program is heresy these days, disposing of old ones hasn't yet become political orthodoxy.

On Feb. 29, the House of Representatives narrowly voted down an amendment that was introduced by Reps. Dan Miller, R-Fla., and Charles Schumer,

IN THE MID-1800S, Miami was known as Fort Dallas. It was a muddy, rutted, steaming, mule-infested settlement of 200 souls, personally under attack from crafty Seminoles or decimated by epidemics of malaria. This was a time long before [Carl] Fiber, [Henry] Flagler and the other land-grabbers arrived to suck their fortunes out of North America's most famous swamp. . . . Then at last, the smell of opportunity was too strong to ignore, attracting a procession of grafters, con artists, Confederate deserters, greys, bush-whackers, rustlers, gypsies and slave traders. Their inventiveness and tenacity and utter contempt for the wilderness around them would set the tone for the development of South Florida. They preserved only what was free and immutable—the sunshine and the sea—and marked the rest for destruction. . . . All this was done with great efficiency and enthusiasm but with no vision whatsoever. CARL HAASEN —"YOUR BEST SEASON"

THERE IS A REASON THAT alligators eat poodles in the suburbs west of Miami. Besides being easy pickings and stupid, poodles in South Dade do not possess the survival instinct of indigenous swamp creatures like raccoons, water moccasins or Skink.

It is not in a poodle's thought process to relate to its breeding as a midmorning snack for a ravenous bull alligator weighing in at nearly a quarter-ton but masquerading his deceptive speed as he goes about his submerged surveillance in a nearby man-made canal that separates the swamp from the suburbs, and in one violent gulp takes what he needs and leaves only a severed rhinestone leash and gashes in the manicured sod as evidence of his presence. No, the poor poodles are just unsuspecting victims who have the misfortune of being in the wrong part of the food chain at the wrong time.

The only creatures less knowledgeable than the poodles are their owners. They came to Florida swallowing the myth of "waterfront property." They knew they weren't going to be buying next door to Donald and Marla in Palm Beach, but hell, Florida was long, skinny and surrounded by oceans. Their blind faith and bad sense of geography have deposited them smack-dab in the middle of one of the biggest swamps in the world.

The first time I ever set foot in the Everglades, I felt out of place. This was long before I ever thought in terms of preservation or population. That day, I only wanted a beer to cool me off from the heat and monotony of the trip from one side of Florida to the other. It was 1968, and I was 22 years old. I had embarked on a spring-break pilgrimage with two college roommates in a borrowed VW bus, on my way to the Florida Keys for the first time. It was a trip that took me from the free orange-juice stand on Highway 98 at the Alabama-Florida border to the end of U.S. 1 in Key West, and it changed my life forever.

At a serpentarium on the Tamiami Trail, we were feeding quarters to the piano-playing duck near the entrance to the alligator-wrestling pit. The local whites were weird; I was sure I had seen most of them as extras in the movie *Village of the Damned*. They were all running from somebody or something. Why else would they be out in the fucking Everglades? The tourists were embarrassing, with their bad clothes, bad complexions and kindergarten questions. The Indians were friendly but haunting. They knew something that three white boys from Mississippi would never

learn. In this bizarre gathering of humanity, each of us played out his part against a backdrop of activities from rattlesnake milking and alligator wrestling to the piano-playing of the duck. It must have been the corn dogs we ate for breakfast in Naples or the Boone's Farm beach party near Sarasota the night before, but I felt like I was in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

Half-water, half-earth and always moving: This wasn't Florida. Hell, it wasn't even America. The early Spanish map makers didn't just pull the original name of this haunting place out of some Conquistador's helmet. There was a reason that they named it La Laguna del Espiritu Santo.

I am certainly no expert on the economic or environmental aspects of the fight that now rages, but I recognize that like most abominable behavior by an em-

powered few that affects the unempowered masses, the destruction of the Everglades has its roots in power and greed. I cannot lay out the boring and despicable details of a price-support policy for sugar that has Democrats and Republicans agreeing on its absurdity. I cannot quote salt-content or pesticide figures or the government publications on mosquito control or disappearing panthers, but I do know a little about the place.

I have chased snook and tarpons through the Lake of the Holy Ghost, near Flamingo, and found myself hopelessly lost in a watery labyrinth known as Hell's Bay, where

clouds of mosquitoes could give any tribe of cannibals a good run for its money. I have had the privilege of spending an afternoon with the author and activist Marjory Stoneman Douglas in her Coconut Grove cottage, sipping tea and listening to a noble woman's simple plea for sanity. I have sat at a dark marble conference table surrounded by charts, graphs and slide shows as an invited guest of the sugar barons who refer to themselves as "farmers" and listened to their attempts to wash their hands, Herold-style, in the water they have helped pollute. I have traveled to Tallahassee in hope of finding answers to real problems but more often than not found only more problems.

The Everglades are in trouble, but how does that relate to the vast numbers of people who have never been to Florida, let alone been in the swamps, and can think of the region only in flashes of B movies filled with rattlesnakes and runamways? It is simple. It is about us, as the human inhabitants of the planet, coming to grips with our responsibilities. The Earth is not made of kryptonite. There is no more free ride. The byproducts of our march out of the caves to the stars are catching up with us. We are only the tenants here, and we have done a pitiful job of keeping house.

Basically, we do not belong in the Everglades. None of us. Environmentalists, sugar barons, real estate developers, hunters, fishermen, bird watchers, tomato farmers, dope dealers or bureaucrats. The only people who should be in the Everglades are the Indians, because they understand that this moving river of grass is a fragile piece of our planet, and they can hear the call of the herons, owls and panthers who come out under the cover of darkness and, in the cautionary words of Marjory Stoneman Douglas, cry out, "There are no other Everglades in the world." I hope we are starting to hear the call.

NO VISION WHATSOEVER WHY WE ARE ALL STRANGERS IN THE EVERGLADES BY JIMMY BUFFETT

The U.S. sugar program costs domestic consumers \$1.4 billion a year. Where does the money go? According to critics, it ends up in the pockets of a few wealthy farmers.

D-N.Y., that would have phased out the sugar program entirely over five years. Instead, the House version of the Farm Bill leaves the sugar program substantially intact.

BAD BUSINESS IN GEORGIA

TO UNDERSTAND JUST HOW THE PROGRAM operates in real life, I paid a visit to Albany, Ga., home of Bob's Candies, the world's largest manufacturer of candy canes. For 41-year-old Greg McCormack, president of the family owned business that his grandfather started in 1919, the federal sugar program makes about as much sense as putting chili peppers instead of peppermint into his candy canes.

During a tour of his factory, McCormack explains how the government jacks up the price of candy canes and inflates the cost of thousands of products from mayonnaise to Froot Loops. The entire program is so convoluted, it's fully comprehensible only to agricultural policy wonks and truly devoted sugar foes, but it boils down to this simple fact: The federal government guarantees sugar farmers a price for their crop that is significantly higher than what it costs to grow it.

That's great for sugar beet and cane farmers. But people like McCormack are then forced to buy sugar at those inflated costs. There is nowhere to turn, because although American growers can fill only about 85 percent of U.S. demand, the government also strictly regulates imported sugar and taxes it to keep it as expensive as homegrown.

McCormack and I don hairnets and red BOB'S CANDIES baseball caps and walk out on the factory floor. The hot, sticky-sweet air is filled with the sounds of whirring mechanical taffy pullers and boiling candy. The stripes and rockmen, a mostly African-American work force, manhandle giant balls of 60 percent sugar, 40 percent corn syrup, boiled together at 285 degrees, then pull, color, twist, cut and package them into more than 600 million candy canes a year. McCormack spends enough time here on the floor, he says, that when he attends outside meetings, people can literally smell him coming.

He tells me he pays about \$2 million per year in extra sugar costs because of the program. He knows this in part because he owns a much smaller sister plant in Jamaica, "which keeps us abreast of how absurd the program is," he says. If McCormack purchases 1,000 pounds of sugar grown and milled in Florida for his Georgia headquarters, he currently pays 28.5 cents per pound. If he wants the same shipment of sugar for his Jamaica plant, he pays 17 cents per pound.

Trouble is, Bob's has lost market share to a Canadian confectioner that McCormack figures can buy sugar cheap enough to undercut his U.S. operations by 10 percent to 15 percent. When you

buy some 18 million pounds of sugar every year, as Bob's Candies does, a 1-cent price difference on raw materials between competitors is a fiscal cavity. A 10-cent difference is like corporate root canal. Since buying raw sugar accounts for a quarter of McCormack's total production costs, you begin to understand why he isn't really happy that Congress seems to value sugar growers more than Bob's Candies' 600 employees. "Why should a beet farmer in Kalamazoo, Mich., profit at the expense of a candy maker in Albany, Ga.?" McCormack wonders.

As we ride to dinner in his Ford Econoline van with CANDY'S LICENSE plates, McCormack is warming up. When Bob's exports candy canes—say, to Canada—McCormack gets what is known as a re-export credit. This ingenious bit of governmental engineering allows the Department of Agriculture to reimburse McCormack the difference between what he should have been paying for the sugar on the normal world market and what he actually had to pay in the perverse U.S. market. With these re-export credits, McCormack can sell his candy canes cheaper in Canada than his Canadian competitor can sell theirs, but he can't match their price in the U.S. market. The bottom line for the business, McCormack says, is that he could wholesale his product for about 10 percent less without a sugar program. That means retailers could easily drop prices 15 percent and still pocket some of the difference.

Multiply this absurdity across the consumer landscape, and the U.S. sugar program costs domestic consumers \$1.4 billion annually, according to the General Accounting Office. The government, because it buys a lot of food for poor people, military personnel and prisoners, also pays a sugar surcharge of about \$90 million. Who benefits from this deal, you might wonder. The accounting office concluded that the benefits for the program are concentrated in the bulging pockets of a very few growers, with 42 percent of the benefits going to 1 percent of the growers. Growers like the Fanjul brothers' Flo-Sun and Baker's U.S. Sugar are at the top of the list.

Then there are the unintended consequences of the program. After the 1980 Farm Bill raised sugar supports even higher, the sweetener market got a whole lot sweeter. Manufacturers of high-fructose corn syrup, which is virtually indistinguishable from sugar in soft drinks, for instance, saw

an opportunity. With sugar's cost artificially propped up and high-fructose corn syrup's production costs much lower than sugar's (estimated at between 9 cents and 12 cents per pound, compared with U.S. sugar at 20 to 22 cents per pound), the fledgling high-fructose corn syrup industry hit a gold mine once it figured out how to mass-produce its product. By undercutting sugar by a mere couple of cents, the high-fructose corn syrup market stole the soft-drink business and about half of sugar's market—and reaped unimaginable profits from this windfall. Not surprisingly, the corn growers have gloomed on to the sugar growers as loyal allies.

Over dinner at Albany's only sushi bar, McCormack becomes visibly upset that politicians in Washington don't seem to realize the effects of the misguided sugar program on businesses like his. "I don't want to move from Albany, Ga.," says McCormack, who is so buy-American he sticks to Miller Genuine Draft (bottled here in Albany) rather than try a Japanese beer. "It's not right," he says. "I ought to be able to make candy here in Albany, Ga." He sips his Miller and shakes his head wearily in a way that recalls U.S. Sugar's Bob Baker after his Miami trip. "I'm just a candy maker," says McCormack. "But this thing is crazy."

POLITICS IN FLORIDA

IN WASHINGTON, IT'S OVER. ANY ACTIVITY attempting to kill the sugar program has been defeated for this session of Congress. Some members of the anti-Big Sugar camp blame the big industrial users, who didn't turn on enough pressure. In South Florida, however, the main event of the coming political season will be Big Sugar vs. the Everglades.

To advance their cause, environmentalists often have to rely solely on a sense of moral righteousness. In South Florida, however, they've added two additional weapons. First, they have acquired committed financial backing from wealthy conservationists. And they have something that may ultimately prove even more effective than money: a martyr.

During the 1980s, a wealthy developer turned Everglades crusader named George Barley had almost single-handedly built up public awareness of the growing environmental blight brought on by excessive sugar production. The feisty conservationist was famous for his Barleygrams, to-the-point notes he sent to motivate supporters. He was also active in getting the federal government to sue the state of Florida in 1988 over violations of water-quality standards. I had met Barley once during a tour of the Everglades with Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, who had been trying to forge a settlement between sugar growers and environmentalists in order to clean up the Everglades. The settlement, which was ultimately embodied in a controversial state law called the Everglades Forever Act, requires [Cont. on 64]



CLLEWISTON, FLA.: WORKERS MILL CANE INTO RAW SUGAR.

SWEET REVENGE How to Rescue the Everglades

For more information on the Everglades, call or write to the following organizations. Contact your representatives and senators to inquire how they voted on the sugar program.

Save Our Everglades

PO Box 347068
Orlando, FL 32834-7068
888-Everglades (888-383-7432)

World Wildlife Fund

1250 24th St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
Attention: Ron Tipton
Director
South Florida/Everglades Project
202-778-9661

National Audubon Society

160 N.W. 176th St., Suite 202
Miami, FL 33169
Attention: Stuart Szabl
Executive Director
Everglades Restoration Campaign
305-655-1136

TECHNOLOGY SUGAR

BY STEVE MORGENSTERN

CD-ROMS INCORPORATING live-action video have gotten a well-deserved bad rap. Video sequences have been either full-screen low-ers or crisp but postage-stamp size. In some titles the video sequences were just decorative gimmicks tacked onto mediocre software. In others they were the linchpin of virtually unplayable games (anybody want to buy a remastered copy of *Johnny Mnemonic*?). But that's all changing thanks to increased computing power and more sophisticated software design. Each of these CD-ROMs delivers high-quality video and uses it with real style.



"TERRA NOVA: STRIKE FORCE CENTAURI" (LOOKING GLASS TECHNOLOGIES, DOS, \$60) Climb into a heavily armed robotic armor suit, assemble a team of similarly pumped-up warriors and charge into battle in this beautifully rendered, first-person 3-D combat simulation. The Looking Glass Software de-

velopers use real-world special effects techniques. Realistic TV news broadcasts keep you up-to-date on world events, while face-to-face conversations with familiar-looking character actors help you unravel the sinister plot. Of course, the best part of the old James Bond movies was a trip to Q's lab to check out his wonderful toys, and *Spycraft* offers its digital equivalent. Here the toys are computer-based systems that players use to analyze sounds and images, bullet trajectories, suspects' facial features, and more. Activision claims



that these are all based on real-world spy technologies. And, hey, if you can't trust the heads of the CIA and the KGB, who can you trust?

"THE BEAST WITHIN: A GABRIEL KNIGHT MYSTERY" (SIERRA ONLINE, DOS/Windows, \$65) You are Gabriel Knight, the schlock novelist from New Orleans whose hereditary link to the supernatural was first explored in the voodoo mystery *Sun of the Father* (Sierra, 1994). Now you're in Germany stalking werewolves in a cinematic horror story that delivers the level of genuinely chilling



experience we associate with first-rate monster movies. Much of the credit goes to writer-designer Jane Jensen, who has created a game with well-defined characters and intricate plotting set in an intriguing world that combines historical fact with eerie folklore. But it took a virtual army of artists, composers, performers and software wizards to bring Jensen's vision to life on the computer screen, and the result is as satisfying as it is ambitious.

HIGH-QUALITY VIDEO ADDS SIZZLE TO CD-ROMS



"ANGEL DEVOID: FACE OF THE ENEMY" (MINDSCAPE, DOS/MACINTOSH, \$50) Nobody's done a better job of interactive storytelling using state-of-the-art full-screen video than Electric Dreams, the developers of *Angel Devoid*. This dark, futuristic thriller sends players on an adventure in a *Blade Runner*-inspired urban jungle. As the game opens, you're a cop pursuing arch-criminal Angel Devoid in a high-speed chase. You crash and burn, but you don't die. Instead, Devoid plays a cruel trick: A surgeon gives you the criminal's face, takes away your voice and kicks you out onto the mean streets of Neo-City. Learn Devoid's secrets and defeat the villain, or die trying.

The combination of computer-generated backgrounds, 24 live actors and a movie-quality soundtrack immerses players in a convincingly creepy cyberpunk environment. The game design does have its rough edges (oddball navigation commands and a short running time), but on balance the dramatic impact of the production makes up for these shortcomings. Turn down the lights, crank up the speakers, save your game often and have fun.

development team includes several MIT byte crunchers and physics nerds who've mastered the difficult task of making a simulated world feel real. They did it before with a groundbreaking flight sim, *Flight Unlimited*. Now they've created utterly convincing surface worlds to serve as alien battlefields. You walk, run, duck and jump through a landscape complete with hills, mountains, rivers and valleys, striving for strategic advantage against

tough computer-controlled enemies.

So far we have the ultradeluxe computer version of *Rock'em Sock'em Robots*, but the video-based storytelling adds personality and plot development. *Terra Nova* takes place in a richly imagined fictional future of space pirates, armed rebellion and political turmoil. Having the fate of 23rd-century civilization hanging on each mission makes blasting bad guys to cosmic dust that much more satisfying.

"SPYCRIFT: THE GREAT GAME" (ACTIVISION, DOS/Windows, \$50) It looks like Activision's affirmative-action plan for out-of-work Cold Warriors is starting to pay off. The company hired William Colby, ex-head of the CIA, and Oleg Kalugin, a former major general of the KGB, to help create *Spycraft*. This tale of espionage and international intrigue is told through a variety of multimedia

[Cont. from 49] sugar producers to pay for some of the cleanup. Environmentalists insisted it wasn't nearly enough, since taxpayers were left to clean up most of sugar's mess. "The settlement is a bum deal," Barley told me at the time. "Sugar has been breaking the law for 20 years, and they're breaking the law today. But they can't get off my hooks."

Then, on June 23, 1995, the 61-year-old Barley died in a charter plane crash en route to a meeting in Jacksonville, Fla. His widow, Mary Barley, vowed to continue the fight and enlisted the aid of a number of well-heeled Floridians, like former Nixon administration official Nathaniel Reed. She threw in her portion of the \$2 million insurance settlement awarded in the wrongful-death suit against the charter airline and persuaded the multimillionaire commodities trader Paul Tudor Jones II to help fund their campaign. In the spirit of "let's win this one for George," they spearheaded the Committee to Ensure Florida's Economic and Environmental Future, and suddenly sugar's opponents were willing to fight the industry with their own weapons: money—and not \$20-per-contribution money. Real money.

In Reed's elegant home in Hobbs Sound, Fla., Reed, Mary Barley and I talk politics over dinner. Reed, a partisan Republican developer who was a former assistant secretary in the Interior Department, is not your typical environmentalist. But cowardice in Washington has radicalized him. "I thought the Republicans were going to come in and say, 'That's the end of that,'" he says. "But the long arms of sugar are not going to allow that." I mention to Mary Barley that the sugar people are complaining that wealthy environmentalists like her are trying to win their cause by buying public opinion. She is indignant. "Up until this moment, sugar money has been the only money in this debate," she says adamantly. "But for every penny sugar puts into this, they get a return on their investment. For every penny we put in, we'll never see a return to us personally. It's just the morally right thing to do."

One of the biggest problems with the sugar program, says Charles Lee of the Florida Audubon Society, is that it has made it profitable to raise cane on otherwise marginal farmland. In fact, you could plot the increase in government support for sugar production by looking at a map of South Florida: In 1960 there were 60,000 acres of cane; today it's about 575,000 acres. Land that is unprofitable to farm when sugar sells for, say, 15 cents a pound, is wildly profitable at 24 cents a pound. Lee agrees that much of the Everglades Agricultural Area's black-muck soil is perfect [Cont. on 60]

SUGAR

[Cont. from 64] for sugar cane, and he prefers farming cane to some of the other crops that could be introduced there, like condo-building Northerners.

The sugar campaigns in Florida have been particularly bitter. Sugar growers took out a full-page ad in a Miami Spanish-language newspaper, comparing Nathaniel Reed to Fidel Castro. U.S. Sugar's Barker headed Reed "a terrorist with a tie." Environmentalists, on the other hand, have demonized the *Fanjul* brothers, who provide a juicy target with their Palm Beach estates, Ferraris and Caribbean getaways. *ALIENS EARN BILLIONS IN GOV'T BONANZA!* is the headline in the tabloidish *Bitterwater Times* put out by the anti-sugar coalition.

Even U.S. Sugar's Barker complains that the *Fanjuls* "don't know how to be rich in America." Each year, the brothers derive an estimated \$65 million in benefits from the sugar program, not just from Flo-Sun's share of the largest but from the sugar they grow in the Dominican Republic and sell here at gleefully inflated prices. The *Fanjuls*, hopelessly nouveau riche in some ways, obviously know how to play politics the way old money does.

Paul Tudor Jones II, who has dipped into his deep pockets for the save-the-Everglades campaign, has no patience with the sugar industry's complaints about the cost of cleaning up after itself. "Here is a group of people who have benefited enormously at the expense of society," he tells me by phone from his office in New York. "We're just asking them to give something back." He says emphatically that instead of whining "they should be on their knees thanking God for the past 20 years."

INSTEAD, THE SUGAR INDUSTRY IS probably thanking God for the failure of any significant campaign-finance reform. Thanks to what one anti-sugar Beltway lobbyist calls the old "boon, broads and bucks" school of lobbying, the sugar industry has attained a level of clout completely out of proportion to the number of its farmers or their contribution to the national economy. "If Congress operated like you were taught in civics textbooks, it would be no contest," says lobbyist Drew Davis of the National Soft Drink Association. "This is a classic example of what's wrong in Washington," says Charles Schumer, who co-sponsored an amendment to undo the sugar program.

The conventional wisdom about sugar's survival techniques reduces to these neat maxims: Give early. Give a lot. Give even more when big vote time comes around. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research organization based in Washington, since 1979, sugar-related interests (sugar

cane, sugar beet and corn sweeteners) have invested at least \$12.8 million in the political parties and the campaigns of candidates for federal office. That doesn't even count state contributions, which in Florida's case have been estimated to account for another \$13 million.

The money talks. The center reported that then-standing members of Congress who voted in favor of the sugar program in 1990 received on average nearly 10 times more money from sugar PACs than those who voted against the sugar program. "Sugar is the poster child for campaign-finance reform," says Rep. Dan Miller, a South Florida Republican from a cane-free district who has doggedly tried to kill the sugar program. A former statistics professor, Miller has seen his Florida office picketed and vicious (and expensive) attack ads placed in his district. At public meetings, the sugar industry has flown in farmers' wives with children in tow to scream at him. "Tell them what they're going to do if you put their daddies out of work."

The sugar industry is understandably sensitive about its PAC contributions. Their lobbyists counter that corporate foes like Coca-Cola and Hershey combined outgive sugar PACs by far. But there's an important difference in the purpose of the corporate generosity, says soft-drink lobbyist Davis. "We have issues every year, every session," he says, from Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations to trade policies, pollution to minimum-wage laws. Consequently, he says, his clients can't turn a lobbyist's laser on a single issue the way the sugar lobby can. "We don't ask for a thermonuclear war if a member doesn't vote with us," says Davis. "They do."

When Republicans took over Congress in 1995, a lot of people thought Big Sugar's time had come. Free-market reformers nominated a bunch of farm programs for cutbacks or elimination. Former bomb-throwing minority legislators like Dick Armey, who had long considered U.S. farm policies to be the equivalent of "Moscow on the Mississippi," assumed leadership positions in the House. Kansas Republican Pat Roberts, chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, introduced his Freedom to Farm Act, which aimed to cut back farm subsidies. The Coalition to End Welfare for Big Sugar seemed to offer a lobbying counterpunch to the sugar industry's clout. Even the sugar cane refiners, who had always marched in lock step with their sugar-growing brethren, broke ranks by complaining that the policy was driving them out of business by shaving the profit margins in refining to nearly nothing.

But as opponents of the program soon found out, the sugar program is connected to the peanut program, and the peanut program is connected to the cotton program, and so on. In his agri-

culture committee, Roberts soon found himself confronted by an open rebellion of farm-state legislators. Roberts started cutting bait. He made the sugar and peanut people a deal right away, trading their votes in favor of Freedom to Farm for a promise to leave them out of the first round of cuts. But the cotton, rice and wheat people stuck together, and Roberts was placed in the embarrassing position of not being able to get his own bill out of his own committee. Freedom to Farm was temporarily shackled.

Meanwhile, the sugar lobby engineered an ingenious parliamentary ploy to stave off subjecting sugar to an up-or-down vote in a farm bill. Instead they maneuvered the program into the giant budget package. Since the sugar program doesn't give farmers direct-cash subsidies like other farm programs and doesn't "cost" anything, sugar never appears to be a budget issue. Inside the budget package, says Tom Hammer, a lobbyist for the Sweetener Users Association, the sugar program could hide "like a small ball in the tall weeds."

WHEN THE HIGH-STAKES BUDGET wrangling hit a peak last fall, Washington was a war zone for legislators and lobbyists on both sides of the sugar issue. The Republican leadership, obsessed with

"Sugar is the poster child for campaign reform," says a congressman.

passing its budget, temporarily backed off in order to keep farm-state legislators in line on the larger issue. There was no counterpressure from the Clinton administration, either, since the White House was convinced that farmers will rise up and electorally smite Republicans for cutting farm subsidies.

But a few politicians stuck to their guns. Sen. Judd Gregg, a New Hampshire Republican, was openly disdainful of his conservative colleagues like those on the Republican Steering Committee. "It's hard to walk into a room full of people who hang a shingle saying they're conservative Republicans and find out they all support sugar," Gregg says. "It's totally unjustifiable."

Taking up the cause has fallen to professional lobbyists like Luther Markwart, the executive vice president of the American Sugarbeet Growers Association and chairman of the American Sugar Alliance. To hear Markwart talk, you'd think the sugar program comes second—perhaps—to defense spending as a matter of national security. "We've got to feed 260 million people in this country,"

he says. "Sugar is an essential ingredient in all our food. When you mess around with the supply of sugar in your food system, you're taking a great risk."

Markwart echoes Barker's complaint that virtually every country that produces sugar gives its growers some support or subsidy. "We are in a street fight with the policies of foreign countries," he says. "To eliminate the program unilaterally is suicide." As for the assertions that Big Sugar barons are throwing money around to buy politicians, Markwart seems genuinely offended. "I can't remember a time when I had to ask a member if he needed money," says Markwart. "The initiative comes from them," he says with remarkable candor, in what amounts to a shakedown.

I went to the National Corn Growers Association on Capitol Hill to hear their side of the story. It just didn't add up. There just don't seem to be enough people who benefit from the sugar program to ensure its survival. Why, I asked their lobbyist, the red-suspended Mississippi Keith Heard, are the corn guys still on board with the sugar guys when everybody seems to hate them? After all, only a fraction of the corn crop was used in the sweetener market. "Us farmers have to stick together," says Heard with a slick grin. Heard has been doing some vote counting and all but guarantees me that the sugar program will remain intact for at least a while longer. "Sugar's going to be slower moving into the new world order," Heard says matter-of-factly. "It's the most embedded ag program there is."

Heard is right so far. But opponents promise another fight when the agricultural appropriations bill comes up later this year, and after that another, and another. The plan now is to "make members earn their sugar money," says Lockhart, the activist; he wants to make pro-sugar Congressmen stick their necks out with "five votes a year instead of one vote every five years." Davis, the soft-drink lobbyist, reiterates this smoke-'em-out gambit: "We need to make sure there's a public debate about the reform of this program."

Down in South Florida, scientist Ron Jones wonders how much of his beloved Everglades will be destroyed before the politicians gather enough gumption to act. Though a conservationist by nature and by career choice, Jones is at heart a scientist. He's just as likely to rail against environmentalists who exaggerate sugar farming's damage as he is against the sugar industry, which happily uses his research when it suits the industry's purposes. Jones knows that sugar cane is only a part of the Everglades' problems. Still, his hours and days and weeks as an eyewitness on the polluted river of grass have persuaded him where we should start. As we pull the airboat from the water, Jones turns to me. "We know the disease," he says. "And we know the cure." ■