

Central Intelligence from Ocean of America

Ocean of America contributes a highly complex, intricate, involved game into the world of PC CD-ROM with their latest title "Central Intelligence."

The game's storyline revolves around the tiny Caribbean island of Sao Madrigal (which doesn't exist, oh by the way). As is wont to happen with small Caribbean islands, the benevolent democratic government of Sao Madrigal has been overthrown in a bloody military coup and is now under the control of a fascist dictator. Moon Over Parador this isn't. Well, for one reason or another, the United States Gub-Ment has decided to, through sneaky, covert means, try and reestablish the democratic government. It's your job to run the operation. You're an operative for the CIA and it's up to you to help the rebel forces in their struggle against the dictator and incite the populace into revolution. Where's Oliver North when you need him?

The game opens up with a really cool rendered and fully animated sequence involving two military helicopters. One of them is destroyed on the ground, and then the game begins. Or should I say the learning experience begins.

I should note that I did have a problem firing up Central Intelligence. Seems that I had just a TAD too little memory, and I mean I was only off by about 5 or 6 K. The technical support at Ocean was very helpful. Jason walked me through exactly what I needed to do to get the information he needed to diagnose the problem, and then told me exactly how to remedy the problem. His walkthrough in editing my autoexec.bat file was clear and easy to understand. The friendly, personal service was very welcome. Thank you, Ocean.

Graphics in Central Intelligence are a bit of a mixed bag. On the one hand, there are the primary graphics that make up the main map and decision-making screen. These graphics are rather primitive looking and very pixelated. On the other hand, for most locations, there is a "snapshot" of some real homes, buildings, and locales. Also, for the REALLY important places, a short full-motion video clip was included. This helps immensely to add to the atmosphere of the game and is a very nice touch. You do get the feeling that you're helping out a Caribbean nation. I wonder where they got the shots for these?

As for the sound in Central Intelligence...well...what sound? There is a collection of sound effects that help a little bit to add to the atmosphere of the game. Most occur either when one of your "mission" windows are opened, or a major event occurs. The main ones quickly get tiresome as you are constantly opening new mission screens. However, the more interesting ones are so few and far between that they barely do anything. There is an installation program that allows you to assign different sound effects to different events, but, the available list is not too big and not very impressive. Lots of gunfire sound effects.

As for gameplay, well, this is where I run into my biggest problem. Interface by itself is very simple; point and click. However, it's what needs to be done with that point and click that takes a while to figure out. There is a SHORT tutorial that walks you through two different missions, but that's IT. The two missions simulated are ones that should take place early in the game. After that, it's up to you to figure out what to do. This is not a game that you can simply sit down at and learn how to play in a few minutes. It literally takes a few HOURS to get the hang of assigning people to missions and figuring out WHICH missions need to get accomplished first. The game does provide short teletype messages reporting on significant events, but it's up to the player to figure out how to act on them.

One gripe that sticks out is how difficult it is to learn the layout of Sao Madrigal. The poor graphics on the map screen don't help matters any. There is a "map" of the

island that shows distinction between civilization and jungle, and that's it. There are no labels on the towns. Come on, is the CIA's budget so tight that they can't afford to go down to a gas station and buy a road map? Simple labels on the towns would help immensely with the learning process of the game.

Once the complexities of conducting missions are ironed out, then comes the task of actually trying to incite a rebellion on the island. This is also a long, involved process. This game will definitely keep you occupied for many hours, even after you learn how to play it.

There probably IS an audience out there for this type of game. If you're looking for a game that you can dive right into, with lots of "wowie" stuff, this isn't it. This game doesn't rely on fancy graphics or sound effects, but rather on complexity of gameplay. In that respect, Central Intelligence succeeds. While I am all for a level of complexity that challenges the intellect a little bit, Central Intelligence goes way beyond that and into the "cerebral" area of gaming. Political science and international relations majors will probably like this game, but if those two areas aren't your cup of tea, best leave the country-making to the pros in the United States Gub-Ment.

Rating

GRAPHICS	78
SOUND	61
INTERFACE	66
FUN FACTOR	50
OVERALL	61

System Requirements

386 33
4 MB RAM
CD-Audio connected VGA 256K color mode
Soundcards : Roland (LAPC1 & SCC1), Adlib or Soundblaster
Keyboard Mouse
Joystick supported