

Jagged Alliance from Sir-Tech & MadLab Software

It's getting dark on the tiny island of Metavira, and Jack and Brenda are counting on you to take over that factory in order to produce more sap and perhaps gain an edge over the shifty Lucas Santino. You cautiously approach the factory, scanning at every step for unseen thugs. Suddenly one of your men calls out over the radio, 'Dis guy be dreaming... I put big hole in him, no?' as he spots one of the foolhardy guards. You send your man into a crouch and he sneaks up to get a better firing position. 'Crack!' goes a twig under his not-so-carefully placed feet. The bad guy perks up and starts scanning in your man's direction as you sit rigid in your chair, praying that he's not going to see your man. He does. He releases a volley of .12 guage rounds in your direction and dives for cover. You find yourself screaming at the screen, 'GO GO GO we only got a round or two before the guy with the detonator blows this place!' Yes, it's THAT intense.

In a superb gaming experience by Sir-Tech Software, you are the commander of a group of mercenaries, known as 'mercs', hired to return the island of Metavira to its rightful owners. The reason this is so important is that the sap of the Fallow tree, found indigenous ONLY on this island, has produced a wonder cure for cancer with the effort of your bosses and mentors, Jack and Brenda Richardson. The slimy character Lucas Santino, once a partner of your friends, has taken over the island for his own profit, and so you must regain it from him, sector by bloody sector...

This game is VERY similar in play and style to the popular X-COM series put out by Electronic Arts, which is still close to the top of the charts in many peoples' eyes. Gameplay is accomplished via the rodent(mouse), clicking on where you want them to go, who you want them to shoot at, etc., with mouse and keyboard combos for special moves like crouching and sneaking. The graphics are well done; the only thing I might change about them is the fact that all your mercs look the same; a view which depicts each merc packing whatever weapon they are currently using and perhaps some quirk about them, or at least a different colored shirt or something would be cool, but overall the graphics are excellent, with running streams, well-animated cut sequences, and a long-awaited attention to detail not seen in most games.

Combat is seen from a top-down perspective, with line-of-sight being a MAJOR factor, as when the enemy is moving around, you might actually lose sight of them. The quips emitted by your mercs as they struggle to regain a sector are great, with voice actors being used heavily-they range from the grandpa-like voice of ' Pops' to the 'Duuuhhhhhh... Okay.' of Carl 'It' Goodman(sounds like quite a bright fellow ;)), and most of them have some sort of accent or other that distinguishes them from the rest very plainly, such as Scully's Australian flavor.

One of the reasons I liked this game so much is the depth of it. I mean, ya gotta like a game that has your people with such shortcomings as forgetting orders, getting overzealous and ignoring your orders when they have an enemy sighted up, and even ratting on fellow team members at the end of the day! Add to all this the fact that each merc has their different skills and weaknesses, such as not being able to swim or being a really good doctor but a terrible shot, and each merc has a different personality! With the foreboding music this serves to create an atmosphere that will literally keep you on the edge of your seat. I actually jumped a few times when my mercs would discover something and report it over the radio... :)

There are also other fun things, like finding new equipment that you can combine to create something entirely new, or just modifications on existing equipment, such as a scope-modified 9mm Beretta, or a Treated Kevlar Vest, with a tube of 'Compound 14', stuff that seems to scare bullets away from your men.

One word of caution, however: this game is ADDICTING, as well as being rather time-consuming. As in X-COM, it takes time to maneuver your merc into a suitable formation to enter a building without getting blown to bits. My average scenario took about 1 1/2 to 2 hours to complete, perhaps a bit less if I knew where things were from a previous try. There are a couple missions that are TOUGH and take HOURS to complete, but I'll let you find out which ones those are on your own...

Overall, being as X-COM-like as it was, I was still very impressed by the improvements they had made over the basic system, and you can bet if there's a sequel, I'm gonna be first in line for it!

Robert Miller

Ratings:

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| graphics | 90 |
| sound | 94 |
| interface | 90 |
| fun factor | 92 |
| overall | 91 |

System Requirements

486/33
4MB RAM
15MB HD space
256k color VGA,mouse
CD-ROM for CD version

Recommended

8MB RAM
38MB HD
sound card