Wetlands from New World Computing

The future. An ecological disaster has transformed the Earth. Once teeming with life and resources, the planet Earth is covered almost entirely by water. Civilization as we know it no longer exists. Humanity survives, but just barely...

Bad Kevin Costner movie? Nope, it's the setup for "Wetlands," a new action/arcade adventure from New World Computing. Considering the storyline's striking similarity to a certain movie released over the summer, I'm almost tempted to think New World Computing held off releasing this title for just that reason. Good choice. Although I must say this game is significantly better than "that movie."

Wetlands centers around the character of John Cole. This guy is the stereotypical, one-dimensional tough guy. He's big, he's bad, and he's mean. He's also on the hunt. His current job is to track down one Phillip Nahj, a nuclear physicist who developed the weapon that made the Earth what it is. Nahj was "on ice" in a cryogenic prison. Somebody busted him out, and now it's up to Cole to track him down. This far in the future, the planet Earth (now "Wetlands") is home to riff-raff from around the galaxy. This HAS to be "a more wretched hive of scum and villainy." To be totally honest, the story is decent. Nothing I'd like to see Steven Spielberg do (and definitely NOT Kevin Costner), but enjoyable enough for a game.

Gameplay is straight-forward arcade action. You control the weapons systems of Cole's various craft, and his handgun when in first-person scenarios. The flight paths of the various vehicles is controlled by the computer and there's not a thing you can do about it. Just use the joystick to position the crosshairs over your target and fire. Simple, right? Pretty much.

The graphics in Wetlands are superb. Wonderfully rendered 3-D vehicles, landscapes, and environments dominate the game. Human (and humanoid) characters are slightly less sophisticated, being simply two-dimensional cartoon animations. However, the animation is very smooth and flowing, with plenty of facial expressions and fine details. The cut scenes are very well done and help move the game along.

Sometimes, the graphics are almost TOO good and realistic. Since the majority of this game takes place underwater, most missions occur in an aquatic environment. In some places, the only light source available is that from your little jetsub. Everything else is dark. During combat, your computer might lock on to a target, but you won't be able to see it until you're literally right on top of it. This makes it a wee bit difficult in destroying targets. However, this is a GREAT touch of realism that really helps add to the game's atmosphere.

Sound effects and music in Wetlands are not bad. There are the more or less standard laser, torpedo, explosion, bubble, and underwater sound effects. Character voices are done well. Of course, John Cole, being the stereotypical tough guy, has a stereotypical tough-guy voice. All in all, the sound effects help to keep the atmosphere of the game, and that, in my humble opinion, is important.

About the only problem I have with Wetlands is the control, and that's not too much of a problem. Interface is basically the joystick. There's a few keyboard commands available, but an explanation for all commands fit on a widely-spaced two page spread in the instruction manual. Control of your targeting crosshairs takes a while to get used to. Also, the sometimes wild flight path of your jetsub makes it extremely difficult to lock on and destroy targets. On those occasions, if you don't know exactly where your intended target is, forget it. Speed causes problems with target acquisition as well. As with most games of this type, all it takes is a little practice.

Overall, Wetlands is a solid game. The graphics, sound effects, story, and gameplay are all interwoven in a manner that makes the game playable. Fans of arcade

action games will probably dig Wetlands. Somewhat quirky controls can make the game frustrating at times, but perseverance will pay off in the end. So, for anyone who's just dying for some arcade action with a story set on a water-covered Earth, take the plunge into Wetlands (that was bad, I know).

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Rating		**System Requirements**
graphics	92	486dx266
sound	86	8MB ram
interface	83	10MB hard drive
fun factor	89	2x CD-Rom
		Vesa or PCI video
overall	88	Major sound card