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Tile games have been entertaining and challenging people for centuries. Here for the 20th Century is a computer version that is done quite nicely. Game play is as you would expect but is greatly enhanced with many variations and accompanying visual and audio displays. Shanghai: Great Moments is a compilation of four different tile-matching games all based on the same concept: finding matching tiles and removing them from the display. These games require some strategy, much memorization, and as with most games, a little luck.

Interface

Activision gets you rolling with an introduction from film star Rosalind Chao after which one of four games may be selected with a simple mouse click. The tiles are set in layouts where the player removes them by matching like images on the face of the tiles and selecting them with the mouse. This sounds simple, and for the most part, it is. However, some of the more difficult scenarios are quite challenging. The menu bar contains a host of options including 4 games, 9 tile patterns, 16 layouts, many help functions (one is a neat x-ray mode that allows you to see buried tiles), adjustments for the degree of difficulty for some games, and a save game feature. The games are played on a background that has a theme to compliment the images on the tiles. This background feature may need to be turned off at times because, in some cases, it interferes with the players' ability to distinguish the patterns on the individual tiles. Oh, and Rosalind is stationed in a corner ever ready to render advice and hints.

Sound

For the most part, the audio is clear and coincides well with the video. The background music is different for each tile set and may be turned on or off.

Graphics

Everything is clear and concise. The animation design is well thought out, pleasing, and adds pizzazz to game play. Tile animation is nifty but if players find that it slows the play down too much, it can be turned off. Low resolution movies can be selected for those computers that won't accommodate hi resolution. In all, there are over 150 video clips, 400 unique tiles, and 300 animations.

Help

Activision does an outstanding job in this department. Rules and strategies are explained in depth and are easy to understand. Information is available in a manual and on screen from the help menu as well as Ms. Chao in person. If you're stuck and can't find a match or need light or deep strategy guidance, assistance is easily and conveniently available. The players are provided with an abundance of hints and tricks that will help make the beginner an expert in short order.

ameplay

Shanghai: Great moments is made up of 4 different games, each with its own characteristics but containing a common theme: identify matching pairs of tiles and remove them from the game.

Classic Shanghai: Remove matching pairs of tiles that are not blocked on the left or right. Remove all of the tiles and you win.

Great Wall: Similar to Classic Shanghai. Remove matching pairs and upper unblocked tiles fall to a lower row. Great wall can be made more difficult by engaging the magnetism function. This will move a fallen tile to the left or right to a position that is adjacent to another tile.

Action Shanghai: Fast paced action as the player works against the clock to clear the screen as the computer adds more and more tiles.

Beijing: Matches can be made by sliding a tile next to its matching tile. Entire rows and columns can be moved to find multiple matches for higher points. Beijing is probably the most complex of the games.

All games can be played solo or with two people. There is also a tournament mode that consists of twelve games. Each game is played three times. You are scored by how fast you play. After completing all twelve games, your name will be entered into the "Wall of Fame". At the end of either an individual or tournament game, you are rewarded by some picturesque scenes along the Great Wall of China. The last game mode is contemplation. Here, games (except Beijing) are played according to the normal rules except that the tiles are placed face down. Tiles turn face up when clicked on and only two tiles will remain face up at a time. If the tiles do not match, they will be turned face down. The object is to remember the position of the tiles and clear the screen.

Summation

Now for the bad news. Shanghai is a rather simple game, and it should be able to be played off of the hard drive without having to hunt up the CD. If you just want to blow a few minutes to clear your mind, not having it accessible on the hard drive makes it much less practical to have around. Another drawback is the tile sets. For one thing they are very slow loading: anywhere from 3 to 4 minutes depending on how many extensions are loaded. Another problem with the tile sets is eye strain. Activision went to a lot of trouble to design interesting and colorful images but it is difficult to distinguish individual tiles in some of the sets and layouts. This results in a situation where play is seriously affected by the game's added graphics. The original Mah-jongg format is still the easiest to "read" and play with.

Even with these imperfections, Shanghai: Great Moments is a good buy. The price is very reasonable, and there are many refined touches and cool functions. If you like this type of puzzle game and multi-media presentations, you won't be disappointed with Activision's latest version of Shanghai.

Pros

- Reasonably priced
- Easy to learn and fun to play
- Excellent help features
- Enjoyable video effects

Cons

- Tile set loading is slow
- Some tiles are hard to read
- Simplistic
- Can't be played without the CD

Publisher Info

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