y Karen Kaye

<div align="center" style="color:blue">100% POST-CONSUMER DATA</div>

You don't need me to tell you that recycling is a wonderful idea. It not only means less pollution for our world, but it might just slow down the enormous drain we place on our dwindling supply of natural resources. Even though most of us participate in the green movement to a lesser or greater extent, not everyone is motivated to do so by a compelling sense of responsibility for the world that we will leave behind for our children. In the mecca of capitalism, recycling not only means a cleaner environment, but for many, it also means a quick buck.

This same concept is also fairly familiar in the entertainment software industry. During the past two years there has been a dramatic increase in the proliferation of software packages that bundle assorted older software titles in one glitzy package. Development cost is zero and marketing expenses are low, so the majority of the revenue is pure profit. Unfortunately, there is precious little common ground to tie the elements of the package together, and so the consumer winds up buying a mixed crate of apples, oranges, and prickly pears.

There are a handful of such software amalgams that set themselves apart from the rest of the pack, by showcasing a specific family of games, namely a compilation of computer strategy titles. They all offer reasonably good value for the money, but some have held up to the test of time far better than others. I put these old warhorses through their paces, and found that while some are best turned out to pasture, the majority still had plenty of fire and excitement left in them.

This was not necessarily the case with the Deadly/GAMES CD-ROM Mac Bundle (**1/2, $39.95, Deadly Games: www.deadlygames.com, (516) 471-5700). The games in this pack are all a little bit long in the tooth and not aging very well in the era of multi-media. The age of the titles can be judged from the fact that one of the titles is B&W only, while the other will run on a Mac Plus with 2 MB of RAM. While the old gray mare certainly ain't what she used to be, these games are still worth a closer look, especially for those who enjoy first person perspective arcade games that are both easy to learn and loosely wrapped in a strategy setting.

The four games cannot be played off the CD-ROM, therefore that must first be copied to the hard disk. Two of the games are recreations of air combat, one is a tank simulator and the other is a submarine strategy game. They all feature rather crude graphics and simplistic game play, but the use of sound is innovative and extensive use is made of digitized voices. The games ship with a set of headphones, but since the cord is not much more than a foot long, its use is rather limited.

Bomber II is the most dated game in the bundle. It a pretty straightforward simulation of a B-17 crew's attempt to survive 25 missions over the flak and fighter infested skies of Nazi Germany. The most immediately noticeable feature of the game is the low resolution graphics that characterize the product. The images are frequently so grainy that it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish the target through the B-17's Norden bombsight. The players are nominally cast in the role of the pilot, but they are also responsible for all the other crew positions during the heat of the battle. This can be confusing and task saturating, especially when enemy fighters swarm around the Flying Fortress and the players can only direct the fire of one of the numerous machine gun positions. The game is supposedly being updated with new color graphics and higher resolution images, however in it's current form it is unlikely to attract much praise from the gaming community.

omber II is typical of the games found in Deadly Games' CD-ROM bundle. While these games strive to provide a realistic first person perspective that make clever use of sound, their graphical shortcomings and simplified performance characteristics make them poor overall simulations.

The second game in the bundle is a WWII tank simulator. M4 places the players in the role of American tank commanders in the European theater of operations during the latter stages of 1944. The game combines elements of role-playing and strategy games. Crew performance improves as the player completes each successful scenario, and the vehicle itself will be upgraded as the players' success climb. The game has a certain amount of novelty and can

boast a nearly level learning curve, but neither of these help to cover up the chinks in M4's armor. Foremost amongst these is the fact that the game ignores a significant historic reality. The M4 was extremely vulnerable to German tanks and guns, and on average it took seven Shermans to knock out a German Panther. The players' tanks operate alone in an environment where they are likely to encounter multiple German tanks and anti-tank guns. As a result the game tends to have an arcade feel to it, where historic reality gets shoved to the back of the bus and player is left to amass an astronomic kill ratio.

But the real Achilles heel of M4 is the static nature of the game. In contrast to the mobility of tactical level WWII mechanized warfare, this combat simulation is for all intents and purposes practically inert. Once the player encounters the enemy, there is only one movement option available: close with the Germans and find a hull down position. Then the game degenerates into a long range gun duel where the player clicks on the fire button repeatedly until all enemy units are destroyed. This is a ho-hum product that proves that poor gameplay is the root of all evil in strategy simulation.

The concept of U-Boat is significantly better thought out, and the game replicate the historic perspective with greater fidelity as well. As it's name implies, this product is a first person simulation of the operations conducted by a German Type VII submarine at the outbreak of World War II. The player gets to command the U-Boat on a series of patrols in the Baltic, the Atlantic and even the Mediterranean theater of operations, while targeting the whole spectrum of enemy's merchant and combat vessels. Each patrol is open ended, and the player must only return to port to load more torpedoes and bunker fuel. This is one of Deadly Games' better products, and there is no doubt that the product is a good recreation of both the claustrophobic feeling of being trapped in a steel tube 200 meters below the surface, as well as the complexities of WWII torpedo combat. The game does however have several shortcomings, including an absurd movement design that restricts the submarine to 90 degree turns while a making a torpedo run. This was corrected in a follow-on release called U-Boat II. Those interested in a higher fidelity simulation would be better served by considering the latter product, which Deadly Games markets separately.

The CD is rounded out by The Battle of Britain, a relatively straightforward "beer and pretzels" type of strategy game. It covers the famous air battle that is its namesake from the perspective of the British commander directing the air war from the central Operations Theater at Uxbridge. Much like the senior officers who made the historic decisions that influenced the outcome of the aerial engagements, the player is substantially removed from the action. Decisions are based on coastal radar reports and messages send by the Royal Observer Corps. As in the actual Battle of Britain, victory depends not on the ability to defend the English coastline everywhere, but on the players' ability to mass limited air assets to deal crushing blows on particular German raids. Although this game did not hold my fascination for long, it is still entertaining and a reasonably accurate simulation of how the air war over the south-eastern portion of England was actually conducted during WWII.

The four games that constitute this bundle offer good variety of topics, but not much else. They simply do not measure up to the crop of titles currently available from other vendors. I will only recommend this assortment to individuals with a particular interest in one of the four simulations that comprise the Deadly Games Mac Bundle.

The one game that can probably claim the honor of being most responsible for establishing the Macintosh as a serious strategy gaming platform is HARPOON-Classic (****, $20.00, Alliance Interactive Software, (954)-423-4289 -- also available at most software outlets in jewelcase format for 14.99 without hard copy manuals, SoftKey). This complex solitaire simulation of modern air and naval operations focuses on the European, Atlantic, Persian Gulf and Indian ocean theaters of operation. The players directly command all subordinate

units down to the smallest detail, including such items as instructing fighter aircraft to turn on their radars prior to launching their missiles.

Most of the engagements center around a hypothetical showdown between the Warsaw Pact and American led NATO forces. Although this does make the product appear a little dated, strategy gaming fanatics will easily shrug off this inconsequential constraint. What will matter to most of them is the abundance of scenarios included, as well as the extensive collection of ships, subs, airplanes and missiles that are recreated in great detail to ensure a highly realistic simulation. The designers have even seen fit to model such complex elements as electronic warfare operations and the impact of thermal layers on the probability of submarine detection.

ARPOON-Classic is a detailed simulation based on carefully researched weapons, sensors and armament capabilities. It is not for the faint of heart, but the resulting gaming experience remains one of the most rewarding in computer strategy gaming.

This bundle contains not only the 4 original Battlesets and the 3 Designer's Series editions, but also adds the Harpoon Scenario Editor that used to sell separately. This means that when players finally become bored with the over 200 included scenarios covering a broad spectrum of low and high intensity conflict from around the globe, they still have the opportunity to create new battles featuring the combined arsenals of the world's naval powers. Some scenarios are designed specifically for the novice, and are nothing more than a single exchange of fire between a handful of patrol boats. Other battles cover a period of several days and feature the titanic clash of several opposing carrier battle groups, backed by submarines and squadrons of nuclear capable ground based aircraft.

The original version was launched nearly a decade ago, but several mid-life upgrades have maintained the combat edge of this fine simulation to such an extent, that I still recommend it over its unnecessarily complex and far too buggy successor, HARPOON II. The most current Mac version is 1.58a+, and it now features aerial refueling operations, improved sound, and enhanced user interface. The only legitimate gripes that one can make against this excellent product is that there are no two-player options at all, and the initial learning curve is pretty steep. Nonetheless, all those who are willing to discover the factual tactics required to defeat a capable computer opponent will find HARPOON-Classic a challenging and rewarding modern naval combat experience.

Another game bundle centered around a single product is the V 4 Victory-Commemorative Edition (V4V) (***, $19.95, INTRACORP/Three-Sixty:www.intracorp.com, (800) 468-7226). The V4V products are a series of operational level "board game" style simulations covering a major land battle of World War II. Although the focus of the game is the clash of the armies on the two sides, aerial and naval bombardment is also modeled. The CD-ROM contains all four editions originally released by Three-Sixty, but even this way, the whole shooting match barely takes up 9 MB of hard disk space.

Although the V4V series were highly acclaimed, they found a limited audience. The foremost reasons for this are the level of complexity of the games and the minimal computer based automation designed into the product. The players will be responsible for allocating air and naval support for literally dozens of squadrons and combat vessels, while juggling an involved supply system, and moving hundreds of counters across the map one hex at a time. Each battalion and company is individually modeled, requiring that the players become familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of a plethora of units.

The four games cover the fighting for Utah beach, the Nazi fortress of Velikiye Luki, the unsuccessful Allied Airborne operation called Market Garden, and the Commonwealth landings of Gold-Juno-Sword. The two games that recreate the fighting following the D-Day landings are probably the least interesting of the lot. The Allied side is clearly far too powerful to be halted, and the German player is forced to attempt to plug holes in the line as the Wehrmach formations get ground into the Normandy bocage.

The other two engagements are far more interesting. Velikiye-Luki is a terrific example of a battle in which both sides get to go on the offensive. The engagement is fought in extreme weather conditions and features a number of elite fighting formations on both sides. Market Garden is the most intriguing of the all the V4V games, not only because it is fought on challenging terrain, but also because the outcome of the battle hangs in the balance until the very end. The forces are well balanced, the airborne operations add an additional level of complexity, and the game features a full strength Panther battalion, the single most impressive combat unit ever featured in any of the V4V games.

4 Victory features gorgeous graphics, extensive historical detail, and a complex combat system that will challenge all players. During the historic Market Garden campaign, this Jeep company was tasked to capture the Arnhem bridge, but they were ambushed and wiped out before they got to their objective.

The bundle does not contain any improvements or modifications on the original system, although the games are still recent enough so that they do not appear to be dated. However, on the debit side, the AI generally makes a poor opponent, and two player games are the best way to enjoy these titles. Unfortunately the V4V titles do not support network or modem play, and the two player option allows unscrupulous opponents to cheat. Finally, players who have enjoyed ATOMIC's The World at War (WaW) series — that was loosely based on the V4V engine — should be warned that V4V does not contain a number of the refinements introduced in WaW, and may therefore disappoint those who expect a similar level of sophistication from the game. Still, for the cost of a night at the movies for two, the V4V Commemorative Collection provides a heck of a lot more entertainment and probably a great deal more cerebral challenge as well. Even though they will likely not endear themselves to fans of Panzer and Allied General, the V4V titles remain an excellent buy, and a great achievement in computer strategy gaming.

The best value for the money is found in TOTAL WAR! (***1/2, $39.95, Strategic Simulations Group (SSG), (904) 469-8880), a compilation of 10 games issued by the veteran strategy title creators from Australia. When this many titles are offered on a single CD-ROM, it is inevitable that some are "throwaways." In this bundle, that role is filled by Gold of the Americas, a simulation of the conquest of the New World. Originally designed for the Apple IIgs, the blocky graphics and simplistic game play of this game make it ill suited to share the spotlight with the other releases in this assortment. The other nine programs fall into one of four series, all of which were major hits for SSG at one time or another.

Carriers at War (CAW) and CAW II combine to provide a tactical level simulation of all the major carrier battles of the Pacific Theater during WW II. This is one of the oldest games designed by SSG, yet it remains my personal favorite. Players are cast in the role of operation commanders who get to direct surface ships and airplanes in strikes against the opponent's fleet. The battle is resolved in five minute increments, with each airplane, ship and submarine accounted for in a sophisticated combat resolution system. In addition to relegating the enemy to computer control, players can even simulate the lack of coordination between land based assets and naval forces, by allowing the artificial

intelligence to control all aspects of the operation of one or more friendly Task Forces. The game features a detailed surface combat resolution system, which comes in handy with a whole slew of new scenarios that cover the naval campaign in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. This remains an excellent, historically accurate simulation, that continues to please despite the less than glitzy graphics and minimal use of sound.

The CD includes all three editions of the Decisive Battles of the Civil War. Between them, they cover the entire conflict from Bull Run to Nashville. This simulation is concerned only with the land based conduct of battles at an operational level, and does not consider either naval operations or the political and economic aspects of the war. The game includes a faithful representation of communication and chain of command limitations encountered by the Civil War era commanders. Unfortunately, the resulting system can be frustrating to players who want to control things, and not just have to sit back helplessly as the units under their command become less and less responsive as the battle wears on. This game also suffers from dated graphics and minimal use of sound, and when combined with the design decisions that frequently mean that the player is relegated to the role of a spectator, result in a product that I can only recommend to serious Civil War buffs.

The Battlefront series was SSG's most prolific work, going through more than a half a dozen editions covering all theaters of operation during WWII and the Korean Conflict. In addition to the four complete releases, (Rommel, Panzer Battles, Halls of Montezuma, and MacArthur's War) the CD also includes a wealth of scenarios that were originally published in SSG's periodical RUN 5. The game engine was famous for its flexibility, and so it should not come as much of a surprise that the included battles range from an 1847 Marine engagement in Mexico, to the liberation of the city of Hue during the Vietnam War. The simulation considers a number of battlefield factors, accounts for combined arms operations, and even simulates close air support and naval bombardment. This is a simple game that anyone can learn in a few hours, but it also contains sufficient numbers of details which will require some dedication from the payers in order to achieve mastery. The Battlefront games remain highly enjoyable and represent one of the most compelling reasons to purchase this bundle.

our editions of The Battlefront series are included in SSG's TOTAL WAR bundle. One of the most challenging installments covers the fighting in Russia, including this scenario that depicts the main thrust of the armored engagements during the Battle of Kursk.

The last product to be included is the original Warlords. This game is eclipsed by the later Warlords II release, and this particularly obvious since SSG includes a demo of the current version on the CD. Warlords is a strategy wargame that allows up to eight players to struggle for control of an ancient fantasy world. Players get a chance to assemble and direct armies, enlist the services of great heroes, seek out fabled ruins and locate artifacts of immense power. The game even features a simple political system that allows players to forge alliances. As a result, Warlords is a straightforward game that is both challenging and loads of fun. The drawbacks of the game are the lack of modem or network support for eight-player games, and the fact that the game ships with a single map, that of the land of Illuria. Still this title rounds out the SSG bundle very nicely, and is guaranteed to provide hours of excitement to both novice and grognard alike.

All four of the compilations mentioned in this article are likely to attract a following, if for no other reason than the fact that they are a relative bargain compared to other games that are available individually. Despite this, players should weigh the purchase decision carefully, and consider which of the bundled games they are actually likely to play for any length of time. While the Deadly Games CD may not be for everyone, I can wholeheartedly recommend the last three bundles to any player interested in strategy gaming.

Karen Kaye's occasionally irreverent column covers the Macintosh entertainment community, with a focus on adventure gaming, strategy titles and whatever happens to cross her cross her mind at the time. She welcomes your comments at KMKaye@aol.com.