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Warcraft II

After the spectacular success of Warcraft, few pundits were surprised when Blizzard followed their blockbuster title with a sequel, Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness. Of course, Warcraft II has been out for the PC side for so long now that there is even a Warcraft II Expansion Set available. However, Mac gamers shouldn't be dissuaded by the delay in release. Warcraft II is every bit as endearing, challenging, and enjoyable as its predecessor, and there are quite a few improvements in this second incarnation.

Although the interfaces look very similar between these two games, there are plenty of differences in overall strategy and tactics. The inclusion of air and naval units have stepped up the level of complexity accordingly, but have not infringed on the famous Warcraft ease of use. You can expect to be building transports, oil freighters (oil is needed to build new ships), destroyers, and yes, even submarines and battleships. In the air there are basically two units, one for scouting (cannot attack) and one for fighting. Having the ability to fly over rough terrain changes the complexion of a Warcraft game considerably, as I'm sure you can imagine.

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he interface is essentially the same, however there are a few important changes that are noteworthy. The most critical change lies in the fact that you can select up to nine units at once, thus making large troop movements much easier. The graphics are very crisp and gameplay is almost identical to the PC version. Not to worry though because the PC version uses higher resolution than games such as Command and Conquer, so the result is very pleasing to the eye.

All in all Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness will be another outstanding addition to the Mac gaming catalogue. Blizzard has done an outstanding job of porting both the gameplay, and the fabulously lush rendered cut scenes to the Mac, and we can only hope that we'll be seeing more titles from this quality developer.

Marathon Infinity

Could this be the last Marathon? From the looks of it, yes, it probably will be. The folks at Bungie have been hard at work on Infinity for the last 6-7 months. Is Infinity the next Quake killer? Well, no. Almost no code changes have been made to Marathon Infinity since Marathon 2. There's no bridges (like in Quake), you still can't jump or duck, and there aren't any radical technology advances. So, what have they been doing for the last six months, sitting on their hands?

Nope, they've been working hard on Forge, an excellent map editor that lets you make your own Marathon levels. Similar to a CAD program, Forge uses a 2D draw mode to make polygons, assign lights, place objects like guns, monsters, and scenery. The editor also has a really neat 3D mode that lets you texture your newly created level in real-time.

Making maps in Forge is pretty simple. You begin by creating polygons in a 2D view. Basically you connect lines together to form geometric shapes. After you build your halls, corridors, and rooms, you give it height by assigning height values to the floor and ceiling. This gives your level a 3D space so the player can walk around and fight bad guys.

The real beauty of Forge, however, is the 3D view. When you first go into this "Visual Mode" you are presented with a window similar to that of the game. Using the texture palette you pick a texture and click on the wall to "paint" it. In this mode you can also raise or lower polygon elevations.

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Bungie knows that Forge is a complicated piece of software and they've taken a lot of time to make sure it is as user-friendly as possible. The game will include an extensive Forge manual and tutorial movies that walk you through level making. Stunning!

Bungie (in conjunction with a company called Double Ott) is also working on a 28 level scenario called Tides of Lh'owon. Learning from Marathon 2, the company is spending a lot more time making the maps more challenging, complex, and interesting. The results are fabulous. Some of the geometry in Marathon Infinity is unlike any I've seen in a 3D first person game. New to Infinity is a new texture collection, a new gun (sub-machine gun), and fusion Bob's. Infinity will also come with about 20 network levels for you net fanatics.

Infinity will also ship with Anvil, a cool physics, shapes, and sound editor. With it you'll be able to add your own monsters, change the physics in Marathon, so, for example, a rocket launcher can shoot grenades instead of missiles, and drop in your own sounds.

All in all, Marathon Infinity should be the best Marathon yet. Look for it in late August or early September.

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