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he year is 2050 and world peace has been achieved. Unfortunately for the world, that peace is maintained by one corporation: World United Solidarity (WUS). City life under WUS is sanitary but boring. Out of this peaceful tableau come the Chaos Overlords: powerful crime bosses who will stop at nothing short of total control of the city. As one of these Overlords, you can battle up to five computer lords or go head to head via a network or modem vs another human. With 90 different gangs, dozens of weapons to develop and ten unique battle scenarios, Chaos Overlords is a complex computer "board game". While sometimes frustrating, it does provide hours of gangland fun.

That's Nice Guido, Now Go Out and Play

The city or playing board is an eight by eight graph consisting of sixty-four square sectors. You start with one gang: the Right Hands, who fight for free. From square one you expand your influence on a sector by sector basis. Each sector houses three distinct sites. By ordering your gangs to influence these sites you can take advantage of their unique facilities. Research Labs will speed research; Hospitals, healing, etc... Other sites such as Corporate Towers and Casinos will make you money, which is something you can never have enough of in this game. Perhaps the best way to generate cash is to create chaos. However, if your gangs make things too chaotic and exceed the tolerance level in a sector, they risk a

crackdown by the cyber police: an indestructible cyborg force that turns any gangs it can find into swiss cheese.

Our Gang

You add gangs to your organization from the gang pool at the bottom right hand corner of the screen. If you have the cash, hire one of the three available gangs or drop a wimpy gang from the eligibility list and wait a turn for a more useful gang to pop up. The gang names and resume's are quite amusing. The Pudding Clowns, for example, are extremely difficult to kill and "great fun at parties". The aesthetically displeasing Bad Artists "really suck big time", while the Vampire Walkers do a different kind of sucking altogether and are among the most dangerous of gangs.

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Lead On

As the game progresses, you will expand your territory, control new sectors, and with proper research, equip your gangs with the best weapons and armor money can buy, like the rage repeater and the eminently desirable cool hats. But remember, the opposition is doing the same thing. Soon you will run out of virgin territory to control and will have to fight it out with the other nasty looking heads. Send in particle rifle toting snipers to pick off the enemy or put the fear of God into them with a gang of Fighting Nuns. Sometimes stealth is more effective than sheer force. Sneak in a gang of Shadow Ninjas and snitch on rival gangs to bring about a police crackdown that'll clear the sector of the enemy with no loss to you.

Chaos Overlords includes ten distinct scenarios, both timed and objective. The timed games include: Greed, Power, Acceptance, and Dominance. All can be played out in the gametime equivalents of six months, one, two or four years. The objective scenarios are: Kill 'Em All, Big 40, Eliminate, Siege, Big Man and Armageddon. Each scenario requires a unique strategy for success and as you may have noticed, there are hundreds of combinations, variables and statistics to take into account.

Look Before You Leap

While Chaos Overlords becomes a fun game to play, it doesn't start out that way. Jumping right into the game creates a sensation not unlike landing in an empty swimming pool. You will find yourself flattened and bleeding. Read the manual. Download the Unofficial Chaos Overlords FAQ from the New World Computing web site if it's not on this month's IMG disk. Then put in the necessary hours getting acquainted with the game's mechanics. Until I learned to differentiate between the graphics of the three sites within each sector, they all looked vaguely similar thus necessitating a call up of the info window to see what was what. Although a moniker like "Nancy Boys" is sufficiently self-descriptive, there are ninety unique gangs and it takes some time to grasp the strengths and weaknesses of each. It would be helpful to have a window listing all the gangs under your control with their current position and status. As it stands, you can only access each gang individually or by sector making it hard to see the big picture.

Graphics

Thematically, Chaos Overlords is similar to Syndicate, another mission based gang warfare game. But where in Syndicate you have direct real-time control of your agents during battles, Chaos uses a turn based system. All fighting, if you choose to watch it, is depicted as a generic animation in a little box in which two gang puppets duke it out with their fists, swing swords or fire projectile weapons. A green life bar shows the amount of damage inflicted based on dice rolls and hit points. You have no control over the outcome and the feel is more like inflicting damage on dungeon monsters in an old RPG. A friend of mine looked at the fighting window animation and said "Is that all? Where's the action? That's the most exciting part of the game?" The artwork depicting the gangs is first rate, however, from nightmare mutants to steroid enhanced superheroes.

The Sound Of Chin Music

The background music, which you can turn down or off, consists of a techno beat track that is consistent with the cyberpunk atmosphere of the game and lends itself to repetition. Battles are rife with the sounds of slashing swords, flying fists and gun blasts.

AI

Until I became familiar with the interface and stats, I found that the AI was crushing me on a regular basis. If I were a character in the Godfather series, I'd be the guy (Fredo?) they sent to Vegas who screwed up so often they had to shoot him even though he was family. Fortunately there are four different levels of AI: Goon, Criminal, Crime Lord and for those with a death wish, Homicidal Maniac. I highly recommend playing at Goon level for awhile. For those of you worried about the possibility of the AI cheating, Stickman Games has this to say about their game:

"The computer will never gang up on the player (except maybe in Homicidal Maniac). The computer basically scouts all of the other player to find any weak

spots. The AI does NOT cheat. We were very adamant about making sure that the AI played fairly." (stickman@lava.net, from "An Unofficial Chaos Overlords FAQ", version 0.6.3).

What could be better than a strong and honest AI opponent? How about some live competition! Up to six people can play over a network, or you can play one on one against a friend via modem. You can also challenge a player over the Internet with a TCP/IP connection even if he/she is running Windows 95. (http://www.wizweb.com/arena/chaosOverlords/).

Summary

Chaos Overlords is a very challenging strategic wargame that will delight fans of the genre. Aside from a polished quicktime intro, there are no fancy graphics and gamers who want more control over their turf battles than watching a puppet show may be disappointed. But the bottom line is that once you get accustomed to the interface, this is a game that will have you battling Overlords for control of the city until doomsday, and liking it.

Pros

- Hours of killer gameplay
- Challenging AI
- Two Player capability via network, modem and Internet
- Nice gang artwork and descriptions

Cons

- Looks a lot like a board game
- No control over uninspiring fighting sequences
- Interface takes some getting used to

Publisher Info

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