



A new batch of OS/2 games, how to pick up the pieces after a dodgy installation, and why you should use Warp for Internet access. Terence Green brings you the rundown.

In last month's column I promised news of betas of Warp Server, SystemView and Lotus OS/2 products. I should have known better. SystemView for OS/2 was announced on 7th November for an end-1995 release, Warp Server will have gone to manufacturing by the time you read this and will become generally available in early 1996, and the Lotus SmartSuite Betas haven't turned up yet.

In the meantime, OS/2 has been repositioned again. Or rather, it hasn't. During the summer it might have appeared to some that OS/2 was going downmarket and becoming a Windows 95 competitor in the home market. Not so. Despite press releases trumpeting Warp's take-up among home users, OS/2 Warp is still the same safe client/server operating system for large companies that it was before IBM marketeers felt a sudden rush of blood to the head.

Meanwhile, IBM has sent out review copies of Classic Games for OS/2 Warp, SimCity Classic for OS/2, a bunch of card games, some puzzles and block games and a few role-playing shoot-em-ups.

Classic Games for OS/2 is essentially the UK version of the USA's FunPak for OS/2 with many of the really interesting bits removed. What remains is installed into the X:\FUNPAK directory, taking up 17Mb. The US-only FunPak includes gems such as a Windows Paint program for kids, a dictionary and a child development guide. And it runs in any Warp version.

Having installed Classic Games for OS/2 on Warp Connect and not being big on computer games, I pointed a 13-year-old I keep handy for just such occasions at it. She liked the puzzles and word games but trying to run SimCity crashed the system. Perusing the SimCity readme had led me to update a sound driver following installation. I went back and replaced it with the original, which helped,



AboveThe OS/2 Home Page: source of OS/2 information and support
Right Body Music: WebExplorer 1.03 supports HTML 2.0

but the system was still unstable so I backed out of the whole Classic Games installation using the Archive function.

The single life

While mucking about with Classic Games, I noticed that it seemed to work better when I wasn't running any Windows applications. In fact, if you don't need to run any DOS or Windows applications you can make OS/2 more reliable by removing DOS and Windows support using Selective Uninstall. Also, check the CONFIG.SYS to see that PROTECTONLY=YES and IOPL=NO. These changes will make OS/2 more reliable by reducing the amount of direct interaction with the hardware.

Then you only need to worry about buggy OS/2 applications, the quality of the OS/2 video and peripheral drivers you're using and the dreaded "single message queue". The biggest problem with OS/2 once you have the underlying hardware

sorted out, is when a program hangs on input. Because OS/2 has a synchronous message queue, no other process can accept input via the WorkPlace shell (WPS) until the program that has hung while holding the input queue gets going again or terminates.

It is possible to recover gracefully from the lock-up, but it requires a little patience. The message queue handler is much improved with Warp but the problem isn't going to go away until Warp for the PowerPC is ported to Intel, and this is not likely to happen until late in 1996 at the earliest. Warp for the PowerPC has to ship first, around mid-1996. There



will, however, be a further partial fix when Warp II on Intel ships in spring 1996.

In the meantime, the best thing to do once you're sure that OS/2 has frozen is to press Ctrl-Alt-Esc and wait. If you're extraordinarily lucky the Windows List will pop up and you can close down the offending program from there. More usually, nothing will happen and then it's best to wait a while. A dialogue box should pop up naming the program that has stopped accepting input and offering to terminate it. Due to my problems with Classic Games, I found it useful to close down and restart the Windows session as one of the symptoms was a failure to paint the screen properly over any open Windows windows.

If Ctrl-Alt-Esc doesn't work you'll have to reboot Warp, but before you do this, try to

Recovering from a flaky installation

To do this you need to store an archive of your Warp installation before you make any upgrade to the system. Bear in mind that the archive system is no substitute for a full backup of any data you couldn't bear to lose. Archive saves OS/2 initialisation and configuration files, which it backs up in a .KEY file. The files saved include the OS/2 INI files, CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and the desktop configuration. Restoring from an archive sets your OS/2 system back to what it was when the archive was saved.

Archives can be restored at boot time. To bring up the System Recovery menu which allows you to select an archived configuration, hit ALT-F1 when OS/2 is booting and the block cursor is shown in the left-hand top corner of the screen with "OS/2" next to it.

Archive isn't enabled by default, and it only saves three configuration changes, dropping the oldest in turn. For this reason it needs to be used carefully. Enable it from the Desktop Settings Notebook (right-click on desktop, choose settings) once you have your system running smoothly. Each time you reboot, a fresh archive will be saved. Each archive shouldn't need more than a megabyte; you can set the save location if you like.

Once you have saved three archives with the system running smoothly, go back into desktop settings and switch off archiving. You need three good archives because some OS/2 installs, the networking ones especially, reboot the system twice. In future, each time you make a sizeable change to the system, wait until you're sure it works fine and set the archive on again to update the three saved configurations.

reboot via the keyboard with a Ctrl-Alt-Delete which will cause OS/2 to flush its cache buffers to disk before shutting down.

How they are related

It's possible that the problem with the Classic Games Pack was somehow related to my running the Ameol Offline Reader for Windows because of the screen painting symptoms. I use Ameol to access the CIX conferencing system and for email, but unfortunately there's no OS/2 version. The upside is that Ameol occasionally misbehaves under Windows for Workgroups too, and it's far easier with Warp to just close down the Windows session and restart it, leaving all other applications unaffected, than it is to reboot DOS and restart Windows.

I'm still using Ameol to access the CIX conferencing system, but now that CIX has started offering an Internet access service which is fast, inexpensive and reliable, I've mostly moved over to running OS/2 Internet applications. The IBM Web Explorer 1.03 (it only runs on Warp, not on OS/2 2.xx) is still a bit clunky, but it supports most of the new HTML 2.0 features including forms, tables and inline graphics.

A good reason to be on the Internet with Warp is for access to the latest fixes, patches, and technical information. IBM's OS/2 Home Page is the starting point for most of these explorations and it's where you can find answers to support questions after your 60 days free support runs out — handy if you don't want to pay £45 annually to extend it. Be careful, though: I recently spent an hour downloading about 10Mb of an OS/2 FixPack which was still an unsupported pre-release version. Cost-

wise, it's not a killer. An hour-long cheap rate local call costs under a pound and CIX Internet access costs me £15 per month for 25 hours of use. The problem was that I downloaded FixPack v12 which was still in beta when I found it on the Hobbes ftp site. *Don't* do this.

Officially-sanctioned FixPacks are placed on ftp://service.boulder.ibm.com and ftp://ftp.pcco.ibm.com sites. FixPacks which appear elsewhere with higher version numbers are pre-release versions, uploaded by benevolent souls who have been sent the fix by IBM for a specific problem. You can soon tell, when you see the IBM warning in the README.1ST file on the first FixPack disk, that this is a "not for redistribution" issue. Check the two sites mentioned to ascertain the latest FixPack release number.

The most recent official FixPack, v10, is generally available, and is recommended if you're having problems. If you're not, leave well alone. Despite the number, it's the second cumulative public release of Warp fixes and it came out at the end of September 1995. It's a 7.5Mb download and you will need another one-time 1.5Mb download of "kicker" disks (WKICKR.ZIP) in order to install any FixPack. A subset of FixPack v10 files, WFWIN10.ZIP, contains driver fixes and updates for installation.

PCW Contacts

Terence Green can be contacted either by post c/o PCW, or by email to **tgreen@cix.compulink.co.uk**. Updates and fixes other than FixPacks are also to be found on CompuServe (OS2SUPPO), **ftp://ftp.software.ibm.com** and **http://www.ibm.com**