

reviews: **The Bottom Shelf**

The Bottom Shelf is where the older Mac games are usually found at your local software retailer. The games reviewed in this section have been released for some time now but are still selling, so you should get the Inside (Mac Games) scoop.

Mini Review: **TRACON II**

by Brian Thomas

Publisher: Wesson International, Inc. (512/328-0100)

Requires: System 6.03 or better, Mac Plus or better, works in color or B&W. Optional add-on scenery available for United States and Europe sectors.

Protection: None

RACON II is an air traffic control simulation of a "Terminal Radar Approach CONTROL" facility. A TRACON facility controls all arriving and departing aircraft from one or more airports, handing them off to and from Air Route Traffic Control Center and Tower controllers.

"Roger, Roger. What's our clearance, Clarence?" As the TRACON controller, you have your color radar display, a list of "pending" aircraft, and a list of "active" aircraft. A communications window displays the patten of talk between the controllers and aircraft, and there's a sound option that replicates the spoken commands and responses from both the controller (you) and the aircraft. You can pick your assigned area to control (such as Boston, LAX, or Seattle), then select the number of airplanes to appear, and the time in which they are all to appear. Four levels of weather can be selected (with a weather radar display), and three levels of pilot skill (ranging from Perfect to Lousy); both factors are used by the program to determine the likelihood of a pilot following your instructions, completing an approach, etc. You can also specify wind direction and speed, which means you have to mentally figure in a "crab angle" when assigning headings. Emergencies are also available (from "none" to "nightmare"), including engine failures, earthquakes, and interesting encounters with thunderstorms.

The flow of play generally starts with the Pending list: this contains an airplane's flight plan

and intentions. It tells you where the airplane needs to end up, and at what altitude and airspeed. If you fail to satisfy these requirements, you lose points. Once an airplane is "released" (changed from Pending to Active), it can be controlled on the screen: heading, altitude, and airspeed may all be adjusted to get the airplane where it's supposed to be.

Up to three levels of control can be used. The Mac interface, exploiting dialogs and the mouse, is good for beginners. The same interface, with the keyboard, can be used by intermediate users. And, for advanced users, a keyboard-only interface, which uses a "shorthand" linguistic model, can be used. These all work at the same "level"; one can switch from one approach to another, transparently.

[PC to Mac and Back](#). TRACON can communicate with the PC version of Flight Simulator 4. One airplane can be hooked up, via a modem or serial link, and vectored along with the other, simulated aircraft. On the controller side, the FS4 aircraft shows up as another blip. On the PC side, one can see other targets as dots, or, provided one gets close enough, as rendered aircraft (alas, only the standard Cessna or Learjet shapes, though).

The program suffers from a rather PC-ish manual, poor installation instructions (really needs an "Installer" application), and the occasional screen garbage. A "redraw" menu option is provided for this latter problem; it doesn't need to be called very often.

[Cleared for the Option](#). Despite these minor negatives, TRACON II is highly addictive and has attracted a loyal user base. It is recommended for anyone who wants to gain an appreciation of the "other side" of the flight simulation universe. It's also a great PowerBook game for long flights.

Mini Review: **Tessaræ**

by Douglas Kiang

Publisher: Inline Design (203/364-0063)

Pros: Plays equally well in b/w and color, great tile sounds, challenging yet relaxing gameplay, built-in "boss key"!

Cons: none

Requires: Any Macintosh, System 6.0.5 or higher, b/w and color

It's a good thing Tessaræ comes with a built-in boss key, because this is one of those games that will keep you engaged for hours, playing the same field over and over again to try to complete it in the fewest moves possible. The concept of the game is simple: eliminate all the tiles but one from the board by jumping them over one another. What is not so simple is trying to arrange your moves so that you are left with a single tile, and not several tiles scattered around the edges that you aren't able to reach. Upon completion of the board you are rewarded with a satisfying animation of the last tile dissolving and blowing away like sand in the wind.

Tessaræ gives you a choice of grids (called mosaics). The easiest is a simple 6x8 grid, the more difficult mosaics are composed of different shapes which make gameplay more complex. A good strategy in general when playing Tessaræ is to try to move all your pieces toward the center of the mosaic. In a shape with a lot of corners and edges, this can be very tricky indeed. In addition, when tiles land on top of other tiles, their colors and symbols combine: a red circle landing on a yellow cross yields an orange tile with a circled cross

etched into its surface. The only way to remove this orange tile is to jump over it again with another that can “subtract” its color from the tile, i.e. another red or yellow tile. The easiest way to learn Tesseræ, though, is simply to jump in and start playing. Tesseræ also has a very thorough, interactive on-line help feature that fully explains the rules of the game. In addition, its unlimited undo feature allows you to back up all the way to the beginning if you so choose, so you always have the option to change your moves.

Tesseræ is an excellent example of a game whose overall interface is so well-designed that the very act of flipping the tiles in the game is satisfying enough to keep you playing the game for hours. The animation of the flipping tiles is smooth, and the <clack!> of the tile landing on the board is perfectly synchronized to enhance the illusion of a three-dimensional, solid playing tile. On top of all that, the actual game is simple enough to learn while playing your first game, yet becomes increasingly complex as the shape of the grid changes, giving you more corners and edges to take care of. The game plays equally well on a Macintosh Plus as it does on a Centris, and the black-and-white version looks great on a PowerBook. Although the strategy component of the game is perhaps best suited for older children and adults, the animation and sound alone are enough to attract younger children into flipping tiles on their own. If you enjoy engaging strategy and logic puzzles, Tesseræ is a thoughtful, well-designed game that the whole family can enjoy.