



I know they're out there....

CARRIERS AT WAR

Mood music for war gamers

PUBLISHER: Matrix Games DEVELOPER: Strategic Studies Group GENRE: Real-Time Historical War Game AVAILABILITY: Retail, E-tail (www.matrixgames.com) ESRB RATING: Not Rated
 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 800MHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: 2 players VERSION REVIEWED: Gold Master

REVIEW

War gamers grin when reminded of *Carriers at War*, the 1991 milestone from Strategic Studies Group. In an era when everyone bemoans the woeful A.I. that plagues most war games, 2007's *CAW* reprise gives us hope that virtual admirals can, in fact, give us a regular kick in the pants. And, but for a few blemishes, it brings that grin back.

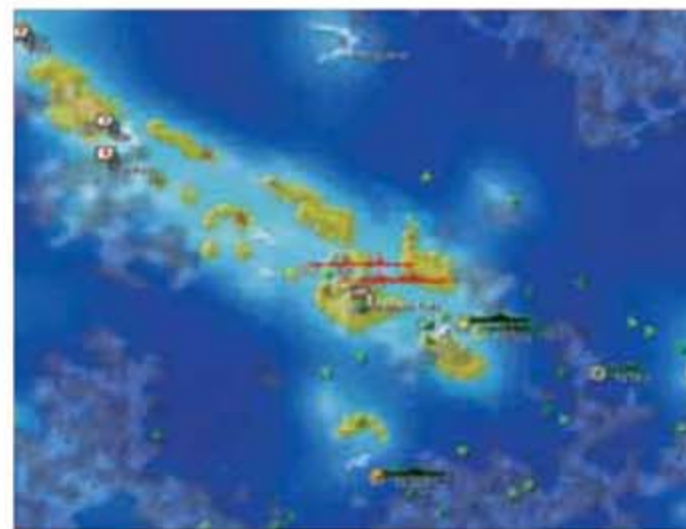
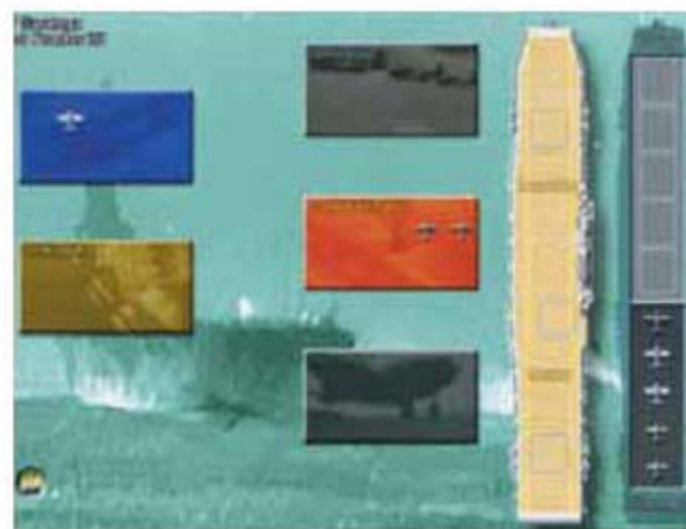
CAW lies on the opposite end of the spectrum from *War in the Pacific* and *Uncommon Valor*, which also cover the war against Japan. While those two games ask the player to micromanage every plane and ship (and land force), *CAW* is a game of carrier strategy. In short: Can you spot the enemy before he spots you? And can you press the advantage?

This means that you don't equip individual aircraft or manage each search plane; rather, you give orders for a general search area, and when a strike opportunity presents itself, you decide how many aircraft to send and how many to keep in reserve. Animations resolve your strikes while you watch, which adds a surprising amount of tension.

CAW takes place in five-minute increments. You can set the game speed as fast or as slow as you like, and any new contacts pause the action. The result is an almost-mesmerizing naval ballet in which you watch your search planes fly out, wait tensely for a contact you can trust, send out a strike, and find you've hit a bunch of cruisers. Meanwhile, the A.I. has 150 dive bombers coming for you. Outdueling *CAW*'s A.I. is satisfying like few other things in war-gaming.

That satisfaction wanes after the first couple games you play. The problem with the new version of the game is that the fixed scenarios play out the same way each time. Because the starting locations are preset, you'll soon learn to make reactive moves before the enemy acts. This is made worse by fog of war sighting reports that aren't variable enough to disguise ships' identities. If you know how many ships are in a group, you can identify that group every time. It wasn't this way in the old game...but it is now.

Fixing these kinds of minor bugs is Strategic Studies Group's specialty; the company exhibits excellent postrelease support. In any case, *CAW* is good enough to justify a purchase of the prepatch version—just don't expect to load each plane and bomb stuff yourself. Let the computer do it, sit back, and wait for the torpedoes. **Bruce Geryk**



The cat-and-mouse game between carrier forces is—appropriately—the best part of the game.

BACK IN TIME



In 1991, war games were good at hiding simplicity through the inclusion of visible-but-irrelevant detail—that's why the new *Carriers at War* seems simpler than the original game. It isn't...but to a war gamer in 1991, having a computer handle all those aircraft and ships seemed complex in itself. Given how far games have come since then, the inability to touch the details directly may frustrate modern gamers. It's a great example of how gaming expectations change our experiences. You really *can't* go home again.

VERDICT

+ An easy-to-grasp game for the novice.

- Not detailed enough for the hardcore.

7/10

GOOD



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