

REVIEWS

SIMNET on a Budget?

iM1A2 Abrams by Interactive Magic, \$49.95. Requires Pentium PC with Windows 95, 2X CD-ROM, SVGA video card and 16MB RAM.

iM1A2 Abrams is currently the only realistic first-person tank simulation on the market. The heir to Microprose's 1990 hit, *M1 Tank Platoon*, *iM1A2* builds on its predecessor's addictive game play and adequate realism. Playing as either a platoon leader or company commander, you must battle your forces through three modern day campaigns in Bosnia, Ukraine, and the Middle East.

Game play is the strongest point of *iM1A2*. You are able to play from any position in your platoon. As the TC, button up and use the IVIS to control your platoon and maintain situational awareness. Unbutton and destroy light vehicles with your .50 caliber. Drop down to the gunner's chair, select your ammo, and engage targets with Sabot, HEAT, MPAT, and STAFF. Or move up to the appliqué computer map and command the battle from a higher tactical level.

Movements to contact, retrograde actions, and hasty attacks are but a few of the mission types available. Playing as a task force commander, you control other combat assets, such as M2 and M3 Bradleys, Apache and Kiowa helicopters, and scout/TOW HMMWVs to complete your mission. Using each unit's strengths results in a successful battle; misusing assets results in quick defeat.

Fire support is one of the most enjoyable aspects of *iM1A2*. The commander has 105mm, 155mm, and MLRS support available during the game, depending on priority of fire and the mission. Watching MLRS land on a threat formation is an experience that has to be seen. A-10 strikes can devastate enemy formations; just make sure you destroy any SAM assets before you call them in!

The sounds and explosions are well done, from the "ON THE WAAAY!" of the gunner to the recoil sound of the main gun. Destruction of enemy tanks and vehicles is fun to watch. Destroyed targets burn long after destruction, cluttering the search for new targets in your thermals. When a sabot hits a tank, the turret is apt to spin and fly into the air. Secondary explosions occur throughout the game as ammunition cooks off.

The artificial intelligence handles the threat well. Once I was engaged in a deliberate defense and had a large enemy formation in my engagement area, so I jumped down to the gunner's chair for some COFT-like fun. As I played gunner and focused on the EA, a threat platoon managed to flank my defense and rout my BP. I learned a valuable lesson about tunnel vision in battle, and kept a watchful eye on the AI from then on to do the unexpected.

All major former Soviet Union equipment is available as threats, even including some that are just appearing now. The T-94 with its 140mm gun is quite a surprise, and will penetrate the frontal armor of your M1 under 1500m. However, you mostly will face T-72s

and T-80s, along with BMP-1 and 2s, along with the occasional BMP-3, which is a foe to be reckoned with. The Hind and Havoc helicopters are potentially the most dangerous threat asset; a wise commander saves his MPATs to deal with them.

The modeling accuracy of *iM1A2* is surprising. Tanks respond to damage realistically, with mobility kills and systems breaking. Rounds damage realistically; long range frontal hits bounce off M1s; BMPs can be killed by .50 cal. at close range. Your HEAT and SABOT rounds may hit the enemy without causing any damage. The T-80 and T-90 tanks with reactive armor prove difficult to kill at long ranges. The M1A2 also is vulnerable from the sides and rear. The "invulnerable" myth is put to rest in this game.

iM1A2 has its drawbacks. The terrain is bland and featureless, without any trees and only the occasional house dotting the landscape. It is very difficult to assume a proper platoon BP without maneuvering each vehicle individually into hull and turret down positions. Even SIMNET type trees would enhance the game tremendously.

The game also does not permit you to modify the initial setup of your forces, forcing you to hastily redirect units at the beginning of each battle. Platoon-level formations are accurate, but assuming a company or task force wedge/column is nearly impossible. The ability to create custom scenarios would also be nice.

iM1A2 Abrams also gives the player an appreciation of the advantages the M1A2 offers over the M1A1. The CITV and IVIS allow the TC to have a much better situational picture than was previously possible. The STAFF and MPAT rounds prove to be very effective. The STAFF is particularly effective at obtaining kills on T-80s at over 2000m due to its top attack ability.

The learning curve of *iM1A2* is steep, but tankers will quickly identify familiar equipment and understand its use better than civilians who would buy this game. Once mastered, the game becomes much more enjoyable to play, and demonstrates the true power of combined arms on the battlefield.

The game also includes a multi-player capability that allows players to play head-to-head, or cooperatively over a network or the Internet. The training potential of this game for TCs cannot be ignored, as it provides a reasonably realistic M1A2 model and accurate gunnery. *iM1A2* is almost as realistic as SIMNET and COFT, and more realistic in some ways. At a price of less than \$50 a copy, it is also a cheaper alternative, requiring only Multimedia Pentium computers to play.

Two more tank simulations are due later this year, one reportedly with assistance from the designers of SIMNET. For those looking for some realistic tank combat, *iM1A2* is the game for you.

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East Front by Talonsoft, A WWII Strategy Game. \$54.95.

June 23, 1941- *The Fuhrer's glorious plan is working perfectly. We have surprised the Russians by crossing the river near Hisakliv before they could respond in force. Now you must continue our success by taking your battalion and breaking out of the bridgehead.*

This is just a sample of one of the many scenarios you may face as a participant in Operation Barbarossa. You assume the identity of either a German invader or a Russian defender trying desperately to protect the Motherland. Thanks to Talonsoft, you can now relive history. Take part in one of the greatest campaigns of WWII in their newest strategy game, *East Front*.

Yes, another strategy game has hit the market. Another game to make your eyes glaze over has been added to the multitude of strategy games already on the shelf. Let this review help you decide as you move up and down the aisle looking for something new and challenging.

It does not take long to figure out the mechanics of this game. The player's guide states, "*East Front* is easy to learn but a difficult one to master." The guide is very helpful and within a short period of time you will be able to move units, shoot artillery, and call in air strikes. If you have not played a strategy game before, this is a good one to start with.

As in real battle, the ability to see the battlefield in a strategy game is vital. *East Front* offers six different views to help you see the entire field of battle. Use the *Jump Map* to get a feel for the overall battlefield. Switch to *2D Normal View* to see the terrain in better detail and the units as either graphical icons or military symbols. For even more resolution, use one of the *3D* views that allows you to see the units as miniatures with individual fighting positions. You will also see the bullets fly and impact their targets in this view.

The best feature that this game has is that it remains challenging. You do not become bored quickly. You won't want to file this game away with the other computer games that you quickly mastered and set aside. You must decide what level of command you are going to play. The game allows you to maneuver and position platoons, but you can command from battalion to corps level as either a German or a Russian. You decide whether you want to play a Campaign, a Scenario, or generate a Battle.

East Front is designed for play in the campaign format. Playing in this mode enables you to choose a commander and fight a series of different battles as you progress through the campaign. Your commander earns decorations and promotions based on his tactical savvy and success in battle.

Playing a scenario enables you to fight a pre-designed, historically consistent battle. Here's your chance to make history repeat itself or change the outcome of specific battles along the Eastern Front. The scenarios are numerous and will take even the most avid player quite a long time to complete.

Generating a battle allows you to pick the basic features of some specific scenarios. This is a good place to practice certain missions before you embark into playing a scenario or campaign. Choose the year, month, area, terrain, weather, and the size and type of unit. Fight a meeting engagement in the dead of winter on the open plains or conduct a river crossing in a heavily forested area. The choices are almost unlimited.

The designers also included some game options that enable you to make the game as easy or as challenging as you want. You can fight the computer at levels ranging from easy to impossible. Furthermore, there is the ability to increase the uncertainty of the battlefield by increasing the level of the "Fog of War."

Not challenging enough? Then design your own scenario. You have the ability to design the terrain and map that you want to fight on. Make each hex exactly the way you want it. Then customize your units and organization to your specifications. Sounds difficult, but again, no advanced computer degree is necessary.

After having fought many tenacious and exhausting battles against the computer, you can also match wits against another living and thinking opponent. Use the two-player hot seat mode to play an adversary using only one computer, or play long distance via the Internet or e-mail options.

System Requirements. For those of you who do not have a Pentium-based computer, do not despair; this game worked well on an older 486DX. The game does require Windows 95, a 486DX or Pentium PC (Pentium recommended), a double speed CD-ROM, 8 MB RAM minimum (16 MB recommended).

For those questions that the Player's Guide just cannot answer, Talonsoft's Homepage probably can. This is a great site that you can browse. You'll find the answers to many frequently asked questions as well as discover some good tips, techniques, and tactics. Look for their page at www.talonsoft.com.

Talonsoft's *East Front* is a fun and challenging WWII strategy game that will hook the novice and keep the strategy game enthusiast sufficiently challenged. While playing, do not be surprised if what seems as if only minutes has passed, when in reality it is hours. Just remember, you have PT in the morning. Good Gaming!

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Armored Fist 2: M1A2 ABRAMS, developed by Novalogic. \$44.95. For DOS 6.2 & WIN95 computer systems.

Abstract: The program *Armored Fist* is a real-time armor simulation that allows the player to take command of one the United

States military's most advanced weapon systems. The simulation is comprised of three levels to accommodate users of various levels of interaction. The simulator allows instant combat for users who want instant action and campaign play for those who want to attempt a role of leadership that many want, but only a select few can have. Includes a multiplier option for campaign warfare.

Minimum Requirements: DX4-100, Soundblaster-compliant sound card, 120MB disk space [for single player], keyboard, 4X CD-ROM, SVGA monitor, 2 MB VESA SVGA card, 16 MB RAM.

NOTE: Although it is possible to play the game with this configuration, I do not recommend it. Attempting to play the game at this level will not give the full effect and graphics that makes this a fully interactive simulation.

Recommended Requirements: P120-P133, SoundBlaster-compliant sound card, joystick, 12X CD-ROM, SVGA monitor, 4MB PCI SVGA card, 32 MB RAM; 33.6-56.6 kbps modem; 300 MB disk space.

Tested On: Dual P120, 64MB RAM, 4MB SVGA PCI card, Windows NT, running WIN95 Boot, Thrustmaster, SoundBlaster 32, 1.6GB drive, Courier I-modem 128 Kbps ISDN.

Setup of the game is extremely easy, with step-by-step instructions, to include the multi-player setup. The user need only know bare computer basics to install the game.

The game start-up screen gives three play options: *Easy Mode*, which gives the user an easy but unrealistic control of the tank; *Realistic Mode*, which gives an extremely accurate control of an M1A2 tank; and *Realistic Mode w/Auto Lock*, which gives the user the ability to control the tank in a "real-world mode," but the user does not have to concern himself with targeting the main gun or .50 cal. I recommend tankers [E1-E9] play in Realistic Mode and tankers [O-1 to O-10] play in Realistic Mode with Auto Lock. This will allow officers to concentrate more on command and control, rather than gunnery. But try them both.

The next screen is the Choose a Campaign screen, where a user can choose campaign or solo action. The Menu screen will appear after a game selection is made. From there, a player can choose "multi-player" or "stand alone" game play. I do recommend playing in multiplayer mode, especially for those users who want to experience a measure of the complexity of command and control on the battlefield. For tank commanders, platoon leaders, and yes, even Black Six himself, the company commander, it is a must to play *Armored Fist 2* in multiplayer mode. Speaking from personal experience of the confusion that exists in trying to command a group of tanks, I recommend those young officers who will be entering AOBC in the near future play *Armored Fist 2* in multi-player mode to obtain a taste of what will be expected of you when you enter MTT in your 13 weeks of AOBC.

As for the game, Novalogic has outdone themselves. The graphics far surpass *F22* [another game by Novalogic], *F-16 Fighting Falcon Gold*, and *M1A2*. It can be argued that the graphics even surpass those seen in SIMNET and CCTT, for those who have 4MB graphics cards and Hi-Res monitors. The game gives

realistic sounds and views, to include [my personal favorite] that a gunner cannot fire the main gun until a loader gives an "Up." In addition, unlike SIMNET, the damage the tank receives in battle is more realistic compared to the actual tank's capabilities, removing those questionable deaths that SIMNET Warriors often suffer in the SIMNET, although the Warthogs [SIMNET instructors] will argue that the SIMNET is the next best thing to being in a tank [excluding CCTT]. Well, after playing *Armored Fist*, I say throw out the SIMNET software and replace it with *Armored Fist* software.

The game has proven itself so well that, within my own unit, my commander has allowed me to supplement the virtual training program [UCOFT, GUARD FIST] with the usage of *Armored Fist 2* on the company's LAN network, to include networking with other units for force-on-force simulations. However, above all, remember this: *A simulation, no matter how good, or real, will NEVER replace in-the-field training mounted on real tanks. Simulations should only be used as training aids to supplement in-the-field mounted training exercises.*

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Fighting on the Brink: Defense of the Pusan Perimeter by BG (Ret.) Uzal W. Ent. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, Ky., 1997. 431 pages, \$39.95.

The study of the Korean War has enjoyed a renaissance in the past decade. It began with the publication of Clay Blair's epic, *The Forgotten War*, in 1987, continued with many other impressive accounts of the war and its participants, and continues with Brigadier General (Ret.) Uzal Ent's fine volume. *Fighting on the Brink* is a detailed account of the first four months of the Korean War. The author integrates seamlessly a myriad of secondary sources into the text of the book's 22 chapters, giving the reader a clear picture of the fighting during the savage first four months of the Korean War. By far the greatest strength of *Fighting on the Brink* is how he weaves personal accounts into the narrative, illustrating the hardships and uncommon valor of the ordinary American GI in the fight for the Pusan Perimeter.

There are no new revelations or striking insights in this book. Instead, the author has crafted a work that serves to remind us of the folly and capriciousness of bad foreign policy, coupled with the cyclical attempts by politicians to reduce the Army to irrelevance. The "New World Order" of the post-World War II era lasted long enough to see the Army emasculated in men, equipment, and training, only to be committed in the hills and rice paddies of Korea less than five years after the surrender of Japan. The problems facing Captain Bill Terman, commander of B Battery, 31st Field Artillery Battalion, in training his men is typical of the experience of most of the units of Eighth Army just prior to the start of the war:

"We have a very real problem in welding together a good, efficient military team over here; the procuring of supplies and equipment [is] erratic and inadequate, and, perhaps most discouraging, the virus of insidious bureaucracy permeating the voluminous paper administration is time-consuming in the extreme." Captain Terman was killed in action in August 1950, but the insidious bureaucracy that hampered his battery and all peacetime armies, is alive and well today.

General Ent goes to great lengths to detail the fight of Task Force Smith and all of the combat of the first four months of the Korean War. In many cases, the author is uncritical of the poor performance of American units in the opening stages of the war. While no one questions the dedication and patriotism of the individual soldiers, there is little doubt today that many of the regiments committed early to the fighting in Korea fought poorly. It is anguishing to read the account of then 17-year-old Private Earsel Bonds as he flees the Task Force Smith aid station, and is told by a sergeant to throw his weapon away because the enemy would kill anyone captured with a weapon. It is equally heartbreaking to read about the destruction of 3d Battalion, 29th Infantry at Hadong Pass on 27 July 1950. Once again men discarded weapons, equipment, and clothing to escape the North Koreans. I gritted my teeth as I read how dozens of soldiers surrendered to the North Koreans, while others fled the battlefield, and still others fought the North Koreans at every opportunity; a battalion of nearly 900 men reduced to less than 300 in a single day. It was a poorly trained and led battalion that performed in a predictable manner.

While the author does a commendable job of writing, the editing of *Fighting on the Brink* is less than stellar. There are numerous misspellings throughout the text and many of the pictures in the book are of poor quality. Many of the photos are poorly reproduced versions from other works. *Fighting on the Brink* has numerous maps that illuminate the narrative, but they too are of mixed quality. Like the photos, most are reproduced from other works, with some of the copies of poor quality.

Fighting on the Brink is a worthy addition to the history of the Korean War. It is the most detailed account of the first four months of the Korean War available. The author succeeds in making the book "live" by making the recollections and remembrances of hundreds of soldiers the centerpiece of each chapter. The real lessons of the war come from the voices of those soldiers, reminding us not to forget the futility and agony of the first four months of the Korean War. That, of course, is the real value of *Fighting on the Brink*. The experiences of Task Force Smith and the rest of the soldiers and Marines who fought to defend the Pusan Perimeter remind me to never allow myself to succumb to "insidious bureaucracy," but always focus on the training and readiness of my soldiers. The next deployment is only a phone call away.

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The Sleeping Giant; American Armed Forces Between the Wars by J.E. Kaufmann and H.W. Kaufmann, Praeger Publishers, 1996. 216 pages, \$55.00.

The Sleeping Giant; American Armed Forces Between the Wars attempts to document the military's fight for survival, preparedness, modernization, and money. The authors, J.E. Kaufmann and H.W. Kaufmann, do a decent job of chronicling the military services' attempts to remain competitive in a dangerous world. In their introduction, the authors state that they wanted a book that "synthesizes the period" without creating a cumbersome text for the average reader. To varying degrees, the authors met the challenge of synthesizing military developments. Unfulfilled was their attempt at making this a readable book.

The available literature on the American military in this era is surprisingly small. While there are many articles and some official histories, there are few books. I began reading this book assuming that this would be a scholarly effort worthy of its steep \$55 price tag. I was very disappointed. *The Sleeping Giant* sheds very little new light on American military policy and development. The book draws from many secondary sources, rarely tapping the wealth of information that exists at the National Archives, the Center of Military History, and the Military History Institute.

While chronicling the military's struggles in the inter-war years, the authors' inherent bias against the isolationist government is blatant. They argue that the shortsightedness of the Republicans, who controlled both Congress and the presidency, directly lead to America's weakness both militarily and politically. If it were not for FDR's keen understanding of foreign affairs and his willingness to listen to his military leaders, America would not have been able to continue as quickly to the Allied war effort.

While describing the military's successes and failures to improve their readiness, the book leaves the reader with many unanswered questions. For example, on pages 77-80, the authors bemoan the government's unwillingness to authorize money to improve or create coastal fortifications at Alaska, Puerto Rico, Guantanamo Bay, and various locations on the American mainland. The authors never explain why these locations were vital to the defense of American interests; nor do they mention that coastal defenses were rapidly becoming obsolescent due to improvements in ships and aircraft. The authors also miss an excellent example of how the rapid pace of technology can cause costs to skyrocket. On page 79, they note the installation of new 16 inch guns in a battery of the Panama Canal's Pacific defenses. By the time the guns were installed in 1929, the Coast Artillery Corps decided they needed to be in casements and that anti-aircraft guns were needed to protect the big guns from aircraft. Yet the authors' tone in the rest of the book was that the U.S. needed coastal artillery. They never discuss the tactical and strategic importance of the weapons in defending American interests.

The Sleeping Giant's most significant contribution is that it warns the reader of the dangers in believing that there is a post-Cold War

dividend. The politicians accepted the notion of a post-World War I dividend and vastly reduced the armed forces. The quality of life for service members dropped radically. Correspondingly, the quality of recruits also decreased. Many military bases were closed and consolidated to reduce costs. Training funds were also reduced so that by 1933, only recruits got target practice with their rifles. The funding for development of new equipment (what we now call force modernization) basically stopped for almost ten years. When funding did start trickling into the military, it was for high profile, big-ticket items like battleships, cruisers, and aircraft. The Army suffered much longer because it was not glamorous and could not compete with the high profile Navy, Marines, and the Army Air Corps. New logistic equipment was virtually ignored until the mid-1930s. There was even a vigorous debate about the role of the National Guard in military plans. Does any of this sound familiar? While today's military does not face reductions as severe, it plays a much larger role in U.S. policy than the military of 70 years ago.

I have many complaints about this book. First, I found it very hard to follow the authors' arguments because they jump from one subject to another without warning. This poor structuring dilutes the argument and makes for a hard read.

Second, as I perused the book, I stumbled across 20 pages of maps, illustrations, diagrams, and charts located in the center of the book. The reader must derive their meaning; they are never mentioned in the text. While some of the charts appear interesting, their small size and poor definition hinder the reader. I also found a few errors in the charts, most notably in Figure 17 – the vehicle armaments on the top do not match the bottom. Simple errors like these draw into question the reliability of the data presented in the book. Overall, the below-average qualities of these diagrams detract from the reader's understanding of the text.

Finally, the authors list nine pages of sources; some from individual participants and official documents, but most from newspapers from the time period and books published decades after WWII. The lack of primary sources is disturbing for a book purporting to be of great scholarly value. The authors may argue that they are only trying to highlight what the people knew at the time, but the authors do not list even one Gallop poll taken during the inter-war years. This is especially disturbing since FDR often focused on public opinion and commissioned many polls on his behalf. Although these polls played a part in the government's domestic policies in the 1930s, they are not discussed in the book.

The Sleeping Giant chronicles the development of the U.S. military between world wars, but does not provide many insights into the thought processes and decisions made by military and civilian leaders. The book presents more questions than answers. More research and definitely more than 216 pages are needed to cover such a broad and complex subject.

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