Corporate Wars

MechCommander

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Graphics: *Good.* All your favorite 'Mechs are clearly recognizable, the explosions explode and the weapons fire blasts nicely every time. A few quirks, such as forests that "burn down" in perfect square blocks, and people that literally explode when stepped upon, detract only a bit from the good looks.

Cut Scenes: *Nice.* From the opening sequence to the end, the animated scenes add enough character to the game that you don't mind the space they take up on your hard drive, or the time it takes to load them from the CD.

Storyline: *Narrow.* Your mission is to take back the planet of Port Arthur from the Clans. With a whole universe at war, capturing a single planet seems petty somehow.

Manual: *Adequate.* Sometimes the explanations are a bit patronizing, and elsewhere the manual fails to explain how some things work. Nifty artwork and interjections from a 31st-century Inner Sphere officer make the rulebook an easy read.

Saved Games: *Garbage.* You can't save in the middle of a mission! Considering the difficulty of fights, the ability to save every five seconds or so would be really, really nice. The lack of a "save game" feature is an obvious ploy to extend the amount of time it takes to play through the scenario. This increases the frustration factor immeasurably.

Replay: *Zilch.* After you've taken Port Arthur, you'll never want to play the campaign again. Every battle is set, with the same enemies in the same spots.

Robots: *Weak.* While the **BattleTech** favorites are here, MicroProse took out the entire notion of heat management—what's **BattleTech** without overheated 'Mechs? It's just not the same. The weight and damage-dealing capacity of many weapons have been tweaked, which might cause confusion for veteran players. You can build and design 'Mechs, but what you can do is actually very limited.

AI: *Typical.* Your 'Mechs are not entirely under your control, and as often as not they'll behave cluelessly. I've seen 'Mechs blow off precious ammo at a trivial target, or refuse to close in on an enemy who's pulverizing them with long-range missiles. It isn't much consolation that the enemy AI is just as likely to get confused.

Missions: *Painful.* Time after time, you'll be forced to attack even though you're badly outnumbered. Only by endlessly replaying missions, looking for the critical strategy that will work, can you eventually win the battle.

Computer Advantage: *Nuts.* Almost every mission will pit your forces against incredible odds. Time and again you'll pit 100 tons of 'Mech against 200 tons of enemy (plus supporting units). Is an endless sequence of suicide missions really fun?

The Bottom Line

In a split decision, **Cyberstorm 2** wins a close match! While MicroProse does have a great license, they've tinkered with the rules to the point where the game isn't completely recognizable as **BattleTech**. **MechCommander** looks nice and has some fun moments, but those are easily lost amid hours of frustration as you slog through yet another "outnumbered 3:1, yet I must attack and take zero casualties" mission. By the time you reach the last few missions, it's not such a migraine (assuming you've taken no casualties), but if you can stand crude graphics and an eyestrain-inducing manual, you're better off with **Cyberstorm 2**. C2 has loads of stuff (genetically engineered pilots, research, base building, and, I kid you not, Spam) that don't exist in the **MechCommander** game. In fact, it might not even be fair to compare these two games, since **MechCommander** is more of a "one-time" scenario, and **Cyberstorm 2** is replayable. But they cost about the same, and sometimes life just isn't fair!

Unfortunately, the ultimate big-robot tactical/strategy game has yet to be made for the PC.