

y Bill Jahnel

ardline comes from Virgin Interactive, and it reminds me of their mega-store in New York City. For those who have never ventured to the New York City Virgin store, it is a huge multi-level environment that tries to be a lot of things at one time. For the most part, it succeeds. Hardline wants very much to be a first person shooting game, a science fiction adventure game, and a B-movie. It succeeds very well as a shooting game, moderately well as a B-rated movie (for those who like B-rated movies; I do), and is not much of an adventure game. While it may not be a man for all seasons (or all tastes) Hardline generally does what it sets out to do and does so in an entertaining, if not gripping fashion.

[I got you under my skin](#)

The plot is relatively simple, at first. You begin as Ted, a fighter chopper pilot who works freelance in a post-apocalyptic future. The battlefield cities of the world are divided among the Sect (A street punk cult that worships "The Deck") and the Rebels, who oppose the Sect. You spend much of your time getting drawn into the rebel cause and shooting a lot of Sect people. Along the way, you begin to show latent psychokinetic powers. Tracing the origin of those powers, as one might guess in B-movie plots such as these, leads to further understanding of the secret of the Deck.

Gameplay

There are two basic modes of play in Hardline. There is a fairly linear plot which is acted out in live video shots. Being that Virgin produced the title, the quality of the sets is relatively high, and include scenes that non-studio productions could not afford, such as helicopter flights. In between these plot development points you get a fairly standard first-person view mode. Your cursor defaults to a gun sight over anything that you cannot walk towards or manipulate. If you can walk to something the icon shifts to a walking pair of legs; if you can manipulate something it turns into a hand. Inventory objects tend to be a pretty simple lot; they are very key-and-lock items, where you pick up one item that must be used a few rooms over in order to get to the next point in the game. Very few of these puzzles have any challenge to them, and they are more pro-forma adventure concepts. Use a lantern from your inventory to go down a corridor that is too dark to see; use a fire extinguisher on a fire blocking a doorway you want to walk through. As I mentioned before the actual adventure-puzzle aspect of this game is not that strong.

ut they done blowed up real good!

On the other hand, you have many inventive ways to blow things up. Many times when you walk into a place the gun sight will be used frequently, as you get live-action actors running onto the screen shooting at you. You have a health level that maxes out at 100 and drops various amounts depending on what type of projectile you have been hit by. Hardline lets you display these as numbers or as bar lines, the numbers being the most useful display. Over the course of the game you will have the opportunity to collect up to 8 different types of main weapons and up to 4 different types of auxiliary weapons.

Your selected main weapon is fired by the click of the mouse button. Your selected auxiliary weapon (like a grenade launcher) is fired by use of the space bar. The auxiliary weapon has an unusual limitation, in that it must be over a target (The computer calls it "locked") for it to fire. This does limit you using up your auxiliary weapons too quickly, but if you anticipate something popping out from behind a row of boxes, being able to send a grenade in that direction for cover fire would have been nice.

Changing weapons is done by either hitting the numerical 1-8 keys to cycle weapons; the auxiliary weapons are similarly cycled with the QWERTY keys. One big negative is that while your gun sight changes for each different weapon, each weapon type is hard coded into a specific number slot and you may not have a specific weapon or know the number that a weapon you have picked up is assigned to. In clearer terms, the pistol, which is a

very small light weapon, is assigned to key 8. But nowhere in your inventory does it show that the pistol is assigned to the 8 key, and if you only have two other weapons it may appear that it would more logically be the 3 key. Only trial and error can tell you which key is assigned to which weapon, and sometimes in the heat of battle choosing can be confusing.

he other way to change weapons is to press the I key for your inventory, which halts gameplay, and select a weapon. I used this technique much more frequently, but it also has a small drawback. The cursor you use to select your weapon bears no resemblance to where the gun cursor was on the screen when you paused the game. Therefore, when you switch weapons in this manner and you get put back into the heat of the action, there is a tendency to lose your gun sight for a few seconds as you have to start tracking it again.

Getting more health or weaponry involves shooting items dropped by enemies you kill. This is undocumented but becomes pretty obvious quickly. However, in an odd twist of fate, if you are TOO good of a shot you may miss out on some weapons or health. If you kill someone before they are in a certain place, they will not drop the weapons or health kit they might have.

Problem Child

Hardline has a lot of quirks to it, and not just in game play mechanics. The install is one of the singly most counter-intuitive processes known to man. When you put the first CD in the drive, it pre-opens two folders: one which contains a medium install 68k version and a medium install PPC version of Hardline. The other open folder contains what appear to be sound and media files.

What you are supposed to do is close these two folders, chose one from among three install folders (small, medium, or deluxe), drag that folder onto your hard drive and RENAME the folder in order to get the game to work.

Hardline also tends to leave stray bits of code behind and is as finicky as Morris the Cat in its environment. While it can play on multiple screen depths, if you try and switch the screen display modes when in higher resolutions you get a crash. After Hardline quits trying to change resolutions on my Power Mac's Multisync monitor caused a similar crash. Playing on my Quadra 800, the game did not respond at all to some of its command keys. (I was

unable to switch weapons with the number keys for some inexplicable reason.) The instructions also detail how on some Quadras Hardline can be incompatible with system 7.1 or 7.1.1.

In Summary

Hardline is a pretty large multimedia game (3 CDs full) that is entertaining. It won't thrill you, but you'll have a good time. The firefights are challenging and you will have to play some over and over again, as there can be long stretches between getting more ammo or more health. The B-grade movie elements are fun, although a gratuitous sex scene that shows a woman's breast and (depending on whether what I thought I saw was dithering or not) perhaps a, uhm, snatch of something else. Parents of younger children consider yourself fairly warned.

Hardline is fun. If you like the first person shooting environments but crave some more plotline behind the reason for killing things, Hardline is a solid game value for you. There are no real plot surprises, but the game is not really meant to be an all-out adventure game. Even on my 040 play was very smooth and satisfying. Hardline is a fair value for \$35; just come into the game with the understanding that the play emphasis is on shooting and not puzzle solving.

Pros

- Smooth action
- Incorporates storyline into first-person shooting environment
- PowerPC optimized version has very snappy response

Cons

- Finicky in its play environment
- Very counterintuitive installation
- Adventure Aspect is very weak; linear plot
- Sex scene with naked breasts may be unsuitable for younger players

Publisher Info:

Virgin Interactive
tech_support@vie.com

<http://www.vie.com>