

y Karen Kaye

The Best Laid Plans.....

I am going to come right out and admit it. I was wrong. Well, not completely dead wrong, but certainly in error to the point that I should never give any betting tips on horses running at Saratoga. Should I have ever had any inkling that I had the gift of Nostradamus, the turn of recent events in the MacOS gaming industry have certainly cured me of any lofty pretension.

During a fit of poor judgement in last November's column, I chose to make some prediction about the release of certain entertainment software titles that were in development at the time. What I clearly failed to realize is that the software industry is not regulated by the same laws of physics that order the lives of all the other inhabitants of this planet. It turns out that the programmers art has little resemblance with the work of the rest of us day laborers. While in most other endeavors dedication and effort is normally sufficient to produce the desired result, in the mysterious world of coding, success also seems to require a healthy dose of mystical chanting and a huge heaping dose of luck.

Of course, the poor showing of my predictions can not be blamed entirely on the time delays inherent in the production of complex pieces of software requiring compatibility with a slew of potential hardware configurations. Much of what happened in the past 10 months also depended on the economic outlook at Apple, and how this in turn affected the confidence of publishers who specialize in entertainment titles. Somewhat surprisingly, several companies who have either never published gaming software for the MacOS, or have been on a sabbatical for some time — Microsoft, Origin, and SSI for example — jumped into the market with fresh exuberance. At the same time, I found myself confounded by the poor showing of such long-time bulwarks of the Mac as SSG and 360/Capstone.

lose Combat: Close Combat is a tactical simulation of unparalleled detail and precision, allowing players to recreate WWII squad level fighting with astonishing historic fidelity. Here, an American armored force has been ambushed at a road junction, and the result is burning wrecks all over the place.

However, no amount of quibbling or excuses will make up for the fact that some of my predictions fell on flatly on their face. While Blizzard's Warcraft was indeed on time and on target, my high hopes for Deadly/Games' new product remained unrealized. Drumbeat: U-Boat II featured a number of excellent improvements, but foundered almost immediately after launch due to several inane design decisions such as the inability to restore the game from a previous place in the campaign. On the other hand, not only did SSI complete Allied General on time, but the company was sufficiently pleased with its reception to warrant releasing Panzer General for the MacOS as well. I did not foresee this level of enthusiasm from SSI, but based on the current outlook, I would not be surprised if Fantasy General eventually sees the light of day on a hybrid CD-ROM.

All this being said, it is now time to look at my final prophecy. At the time I believed that in 1996 the MacOS strategy gaming segment would be defined by four soon to be released products: Pax Imperia II, Panzers East, Over the Reich, and Close Combat. Sadly, only one of these games has reaches the store shelves so far.

Blizzard became concerned with the slow progress being made by the Pax Imperia II design team. First, the company removed any mentioned of the upcoming game from the Web page, then they unceremoniously announced that the product had been put on hold indefinitely. Rumors have recently surfaced that the code has been sold to another publisher, who unfortunately has no track record producing titles for the MacOS. The faithful who have been waiting for this game for over 4 years appear to have precious little chance of seeing the product any time soon.

Panzers East became yet another victim of a publisher's change in agenda. Although a very promising title from the creator of the highly successful TacOps — to this date, the only commercially produced game to be purchased by a branch of the military as a training

simulation — this design appears to have fallen way behind schedule and consequently out of favor with Arsenal. The publisher is now concentrating on another strategy that represents another bold step to recreate the full spectrum of military operations in the Pacific during WWII.

[Over the Reich](#): Over the Reich is the upcoming turn based aerial combat strategy game published by Avalon Hill. The game will allow players to fly all the late war aircraft, including this Me-262 jet fighter in the hands of the great German ace Maj Nowotny.

The design teams at Avalon Hill have been rather quiet lately, especially with the departure of Atomic Games to the fold of Microsoft. Although rumors persist that there will be future incarnations of the World at War series from another design team, the only definite product on the horizon is Charles Moylan's Over the Reich. Sufficiently far enough along in its development cycle to warrant a preview in our next issue, this simulation of turn-based aerial combat over the skies of Germany during World War II is likely to be a huge hit in the strategy gaming circles. Although it too appears to be running behind schedule, the design has matured to the point that it seems certain to occupy shelf space in your neighborhood software store in the near future.

And of course, there is Close Combat, the only game whose arrival I managed to forecast with any accuracy. Microsoft and Atomic Games have a huge hit on their hands with this title, and where there is profit, there are likely to be sequels. With the marketing powerhouse at the hands of Bill Gates coupled with the design skills harnessed by Keith Zabalaoui in his teams of programmers and artists, the second installment of Close Combat is likely to be available sooner than some of the other three games mentioned above.

But that sounds like another prediction, and with my track record, I would do better to leave the future of MacOS strategy gaming to the experts on the Psychic Hotline.

Karen Kaye's occasionally irreverent column covers the Macintosh entertainment community, with a focus on adventure gaming, strategy titles and whatever happens to cross her mind at the time. She welcomes your comments at KMKaye@aol.com.