

Hearts of Iron 2 Doomsday Armageddon
By Nathaniel Goddard

Hearts of Iron 2 Doomsday Armageddon is a difficult game to easily criticize. Not only is its concept that of grand strategy it lacks characters, story lines, or really any form of complex gaming systems. However, that being said, graphics would be the thing to improve the most. Second would be sound effects, and third better handling of the diplomacy and intelligence tabs.

Paradox Interactive, the developers of HoI2DDA concentrated first and foremost on the concept of a grand strategy game. Everything else was secondary to this notion, including graphics and sound. As a result everything is 2D, units, maps, everything save for the sliders and buttons on the interface. Game play wise I guess that this doesn't matter that much except that it really, really, really looks bad. I can't illiterate this enough, I've seen computer board games (like Risk!) do better. So the ships turn slightly and the planes fly in little circles over a particular zone, maybe an explosion or two but nothing impressive or even mediocre. If the game wasn't so brilliantly designed into such a unique strategy game I likely would be unable to get over the graphics. That becomes an even more impressive thought due to the fact I abhor not playing games simply because of graphics.

If the graphics are bad, the sound is abysmal. I'm not entirely sure whom or what was in charge of doing it but it completely doesn't fit. On the opening and loading screens you are given some dramatic classical-jazz fusion. As strange as this sounds it carries and fits well – for the moment. What becomes irritating is when you realize that the music doesn't stop, nor does it really change either. Since this is a grand strategy game (and remember no eye candy!) your basically left alone with your plan for world domination and this insanely repetitive and highly agitating music – for hours. I understand the need to be dramatic and to add some finesse and variety into the game; in fact, I'm totally for it. However using what amounts to be one song, the same song, for all eternity just makes me run into the sound preferences and disable the music. Which doesn't leave me with much of anything else considering there really isn't any other sound besides it.

Given the scope of the game and how well everything runs this is more of a mild complaint rather than outright "I HATE YOU!" However, during the game it is not uncommon to get bombarded with trade deals, at times a dozen or more. Not only is it extremely time consuming to have to click on each one and either accept or deny it, it becomes annoying. This becomes even more so if playing multiplayer where pausing the game is a big no no, and every unnecessary click means less time managing forces and units that really need to be looked after. The intelligence and diplomacy tabs have a slightly different problem although it is along the same lines. The issue here is that to send spies, and influence nations, by far the two most common commands (at least that I use) you have to go in and enter them every single time, and select each country specifically. It gets even more tedious when, after you do it, there is a cool down period, without any sort of automation it gets frustrating, especially when you lose track of the dates/game time. It may not seem like much when several (game) days pass but when

multiplied dozens if not more times, it quickly adds up to months or years of lost game time in spying, sabotage and assassination.

The good news is that all of these problems would only require moderate amounts of work to correct.

Improving the graphics even slightly would make a substantial difference. I'm not asking for incredibly rendered highly detailed work here, or even Command and Conquer Generals. I'm talking like, Star craft detail. It goes without saying that if this were to occur the world map itself would have to be altered as well. I'm not asking or even expecting miracles here either, just simple terrain mapping that may show major elevation changes or significant terrain changes, such as beaches or cliffs. Units wouldn't even need to 'fight' one another in the dueling action seen in games such as Starcraft, or Command and Conquer, they could keep the same system of movement via arrows. The objective here is not to go overkill (both on the game and the computer processor, remember it's a *world* battleground with over 60 countries!) it's to simply add the 3rd dimension into an otherwise 2D world. This doesn't mean the game engine or combat system needs to be retooled as well, this is simply about looks and nothing else.

Along with the graphics would be to completely redo the music soundtracks and to add in actual sound effects. The current introduction music works well however the trend cannot continue forever like a monotonous record like it does. It is here where I would mix in rock, electronica, and trance and have them playing in the background. Regardless of the possible style of music all of them would be specifically tailored to be more about constant energy and ambiance rather than outright blast, power, and dynamic, in your face, it must be more subtle than that.

Lastly I would add in options on both the diplomacy and intelligence tabs that would allow you to select the country, and then for instance check a box saying 'allow all trade' or 'ask.' For spies it could work something like "automatically send spies" and "automatically influence country" and if they were checked you would be charged the amount of money, the cool down period would occur, and then it would repeat the action until you ceased it or something else prevented it (such as running out of money.)

The changes to Hearts of Iron 2 Doomsday Armageddon that I propose are intended to keep the fundamental concepts and interfaces the unchanged. The one aspect, which makes this software unique, is how it is structured entirely to be a grand strategy game; any fact that would take away from this is not needed. The annoyance with the diplomacy and intelligence sliders is not a criticism of the designers and developers but a discovery made by playing the game, and making observations. If this minor correction was implemented it not only would reduce the micromanagement the player needed to do but would make multiplayer games considerably less frustrating or nothing more than mouse clicking wars.

The changes to the graphics, sound and music are not so radical as to harm the integrity or purpose of the game but serve as an update that would further engage the player. The

idea of being able to see the invasion point with its beaches and hills is so much more thrilling than a simple line on a colored map. The thought of 3D units rather than 2D images will aid in liberating the player from an otherwise mundane world. Together these two evolutions would powerfully shape and influence the game. In the most ideal and perfect sense what would occur is a 3D world where 3D units move in accordance with your commands, and when circumstances warrant battle it out. Combined with a new musical score and powerful sound effects strategies would literally come alive or shatter into bitter defeat before your eyes.

Radical thinking? Perhaps, but then again Honda is a radical game that has set the standard for strategy games. At the time of its conception computers were considerably less robust than they are now. With the advent of mighty processors, graphics cards, ram, it would be easy for computers to handle such an evolution and upgrade.