Random, slightly sorted maunderings about Lucasnet 10/17/84

Target Systems: 68000 based home computers (Mac, Amiga, Mindset, Phillips)

Generic Description: Multiplayer games based on local processing with occasional connection (phone lines or cable) for data transmission.

Lucasfilm Games Alliance: A master computer (non-evil variety) that maintains a huge (1000+ players) database(s) for games. The game universe in the computer would be updated by players whenever they logged in. The computer would do the database manipulation, and simply accept and transmit data to players without letting them actually run programs on the main computer.

Lucasnet Games: A series of games, strongly related in internal structure, loosely related in external (visible) structure, unrelated and unique in theme. These games would be multiplayer games set up for people to run on their home computers. The games would be played in phases:

Phase one: Order entry phase. Player enters new orders for his units. Units are ordered to move, fight, explore, build, destroy, change. Extensive user-friendly graphics and forecasts of the effects of the moves are provided on the screen.

Phase two: Order transmission. All players exchange orders, either by calling one player, or circulating them in a chain until everyone has everyone else's orders.

Phase three: Update. Each computer updates the state of the game universe, based deterministically on orders of units and a shared random seed. Update is depicted graphically, with the same displays as in order entry but with final results affecting the database. Public key encryption and various copy protection tricks are used to avoid cheating. Winner is announced if one or more players have achieved victory conditions. If not, play proceeds to phase one.

Possible themes:

Historical battles (actual and hypothetical)
Exploration (of America, of the Solar System, of our Galactic Arm)
Politics (elections, running countries, revolutions)
Economic (running countries, running businesses, world trade, lemonade stands, interstellar trade)

All of the above (PSL's Empire is a good example)

Program Structure:

The programs would have three parts to them:

1. A standard 68000 "game" with data base and programs to manipulate it, with "black box" interfaces to the other parts of the program -

2. An I/O-graphics package, computer specific, that displays the game information colorfully (or, in Mac, shadefully) and

clearly,

3. A communications interface that standardizes the inter-machine communications (so any of the target machines can play with any other, and part 1 can be machine independent).

Game Structure

Games would be played in the afformentioned phases, with three very general types of play (irregardless of theme):

1. "Automatic" games where the player sets up some high level goals or "doctrines", E.G. a military doctrine of shoot first, ask questions later, an exploration doctrine of send in a few military, and if unopposed send in civilians, otherwise more military. Updates will take care of actual movement and interactions. ROBOTWAR is an example of this kind of game, although with only one round. Political multiplayer team games with each player being a cabinet minister (or co-dictator) and setting up a doctrine independently, then submitting them together and playing several teams against each other are another possibility. You could win as a team, or as an individual (based on what the computer-generated populace thought of your policies).

2. "Semi-Automatic", which can range from automatic games with a few special orders that can effect the database without an update, through games with internal economics and politics under your control, but with interactions between players happening only at updates and according to preplanned doctrines, to games like Flying Buffalo's STARWEB, with almost everything being ordered explicitly, and only a few special situations (ambush, retreats, conditional attacks) being mediated by the computer during update. An example of this sort of game would be one of interstellar exploration. Each player would have real-time control over their home planet, building and exploring their home system, sending out colony ships and explorers and warships on missions. If the stars in this world are a minimum of four light years apart, the updates would take place every four years. At that time any new missions would be transferred between players' computers, with the computers keeping the information secret until the time that ships arrive at the opponent's home planets, probably during the off-line phase. These missions would be controlled by the computer, according to whatever doctrine the player sending the ship out had determined at time of launch. Speed of light would limit communications as well as transport - if an explorer went to a system 6 lightyears away, it would take 12 years (game years of course) to find out if there were any planets there. Once a colony has been established and reaches a certain technology level, they can build an ansible, an instantaneous communications device that works only between planets. Then the colony would be controlled by the player when offline, and new doctrines could be established instantly. Changing technology would make a great difference in this game, and situations like Haldeman's "The Forever War" would easily happen.

3. "Manual" games, where the game mechanics are simple and players can proceed with full control over what happens, exchanging

information at updates but resolving attacks, building, etc. independently. An example of this sort of game is SLAG, by Stewart Eastman for the TRS-80. This game started 2-12 players with identical forces consisting of industry, bombers, ICBM's, ABM's, Subs, Sub missiles, Anti-sub planes, and a spy network. Each turn the players decide what to build with their industrial output (any of the forces mentioned except spys), and whether to move their spy network to a different country. Then they decide whether to launch an attack, and what forces to use. Sub missile attacks are not identified by country. Bomber attacks take two turns to complete, and can be called off on the second turn (keeping the bomber circling over enemy countries). ICBM attacks come through in one turn, so bomber attacks must be launched the turn before to co-ordinate. After the build/attack phase, an update would occur. Before seeing industrial output for that turn, the players would find out if they were under attack that turn, and attempt to fight it off if they were. This is done in an arcade style game with missiles and bombers passing overhead and ABM's being used to shoot them down. Bombers hit only once will drop their bombs and crash. Hit twice, they are destroyed before attacking. Missiles must only be hit once. ICBM and Bomber attacks identify the attacking country, sub missile attacks do not. If the player survives the attack phase with any industry the player's ASW planes can try to spot subs, and go into an arcade game for that phase, sub against plane. Then another build phase, started off with a spy report from the country your spy network is in. This game was lots of fun as a single computer game with many players taking turns, and would go faster with multiple computers. Similar game play with an original game is of course possible.