ENEMY AT THE GATES

You might be one of those who downloaded Barbarians on its release at the end of last year. You may have downloaded the manual, or read through the help file, which explains the rudiments and the interface. You've probably fought quite a few wars. But the enemy still manages to overrun your empire. What is a glorious leader to do? This article gives a few hints on strategy and tactics that aren't in the manual.

The first thing to notice is that difficulty is affected by more than just the game level. Game level affects only the speed at which the barbarians try to spread (1, 2 or 3 squares per turn). Other things that affect game play are the terrain on the map, the resources you gather, and the enemy's distance from your cities.

In general, mountainous empires are more difficult as they allow the barbarians to spread while your armies struggle to get near them. This applies to a lesser extent to heavily-forested areas. But the presence of either feature will provide you with resources that you'd otherwise have to buy. Coastal areas are less of an impediment, apart from the occasional inlet, and any cities on the coast will generate extra gold from sea trade.

But if the map is clear of water and terrain features, your empire produces only food. After a while your population grows, eating all the food which you'd otherwise sell. With your income gone, you can't buy iron and wood to equip more armies, nor pay the soldiers already on the march. So you'll need to expel the barbarians quickly from such a map.

When starting a game, recruit as many soldiers as you can from the cities nearest the enemy. Armies on long marches eat into your gold reserves turn after turn.

Make sure you have enough gold to pay your soldiers! A good rule of thumb is to ensure you have as much gold left as you have soldiers in total. This is playing it safe, as gold is replenished from taxes. As you play you'll have a feel for just how much gold you need to keep at the end of the turn.

Small armies, even of one troop unit, can be useful. Use them to hem in the enemy. They'll probably lose if attacked, but even so they will have stopped the enemy from spreading further that turn. This will buy time for larger armies to get to the battle front.

At the start of the game you will probably have lots of excess food. As your population grows, food surplus will disappear and may even fail. When this starts to happen, keep more population back in every city (i.e. don't recruit the maximum number of troops), so that the city will survive a famine. Five is a good number, as every 5 population in a city earns one extra gold in taxes.

Garrisons are expensive: they eat your food *and* take your gold. Only keep troops in a city when necessary, such as when barbarians surround the city on different sides.

If you're losing, you will know about it long before your last army falls and your last city is destroyed. It's up to you to decide how long to carry on fighting, or when to abdicate and start a new game.

These tips have been picked up over six months of play. You might tinker with them and formulate alternative strategies. If you have any to add, get in touch!

Purple Software's Theole reviewed

Also in this issue:
Pilade 5 review,
Wombat racing review,
Barbarians player guide

It's February and time for another issue of *EPOC Entertainer*. This month we have three reviews: *Theole* by Purple Software, *Pilade5* by Gérard Millet, and *Wombat Racing* by Edward Hannay and David Sansome. This last one is our first ever guest review, written by John Spillett.

There's also a player guide for *Barbarians*, the game released on Christmas Eve and announced in last month's *EPOC Entertainer*. If you're fed up of reading about my own game release month after month, the answer is simple: brush up on your OPL coding skills with the help of *EPOC Entertainer*'s previous programming tutorials, and develop a game of your own!

In the mean time, enjoy the current issue and if there are any comments or requests you'd like to make then please send them to the usual address.

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The 'Ole Truth

Purple Software's Theole board game is put to the test.

Some know it as Reversi. Others know it as Othello. But for some reason, Purple Software know it as *Theole*. Yes, it's the popular board game with the double-sided black and white counters, where you have to claim as much territory as possible before the board is full of pieces.

Theole is played on a board of eight squares by eight. The board starts mostly empty, with black and white having two pieces each in the centre of the board. Each turn, you place a piece with your colour side up. You have to place it so that you sandwich one or more opponent's pieces between this piece and one of your pieces already on the board. When you do that, you turn over those opponent's pieces so that they show your own colour. No pieces on the board are otherwise moved during the game, and eventually the board fills up. It's at this point that the pieces are counted, and the winner is the ones whose colour fills most of the board.

The game was invented as Reversi in the 1880s, credit being claimed separately by two Englishmen. There has been some speculation, though, that the game is even older. It was given a modern revival by a Japanese company under the name Othello, and Microsoft made the game more popular still by including it as standard in early versions of Windows, under its original name.

Despite its simplistic appearance there is plenty of strategy to

the game, so much so that there is an annual World Othello Championship with international contenders. One of the easiest strategic elements to pick up is the concept of corners. As a corner can't ever be surrounded, a piece you put in a corner will remain yours till the end of the game. This can then be used to help surround opposing pieces in that part of the board.

Purple Software have done their usual excellent job in developing this game for EPOC32. A reasonably attractive program on monochrome machines was further improved by the release of colour update for the Series 7 and netBook, which adds stunning colour graphics to the game. One word of warning though—I found that colour graphics were unavailable the first time I ran the game, after installing the colour update. It seems as if you have to run the game at least once in monochrome mode before the colour option becomes available in the preferences.

Configurability includes the usual range of options to be found in Purple games. Game rules are fixed, but that's to be expected as there aren't many variants of this game. People occasionally play on a smaller 6×6 board, and the original game allowed the players to put the first four pieces in any configuration in the centre of the board, but these variations are so out of the ordinary that I wouldn't expect to see them in most computer board games. The usual options are there: one or two player games (or computer-

against-computer demonstrations), difficulty level, and choice of colours. You can also set up the board, so as to play a game part way through. This last option does allow you, after a fashion, to lay the first four pieces as in the original Reversi rules.

Where the configuration really excels is in controlling the visuals. The board can be viewed in 2D or 3D orientation; in 2D mode you can optionally have the move list shown. There is optional animation, so you can watch the pieces being flipped over when they change colour. You can choose from a variety of screen backgrounds. And if you really want, you can have funny cross-shaped pieces instead of the standard discs.

There are only two things that are missing from Theole. The first is Osaris support. The game works on every EPOC32 machine except the Osaris. The other thing missing is better sound support or even configuration. You hear a "blip" when the game is ended or when you have no legal move. That is the only sound. There isn't much scope for sound in most board games, but a click when you place a piece or flip over a series of opposing pieces would have been a good complement to the game's excellent graphics.

Theole is one of those games released for free for EPOC32 by ZingMagic. It has disappeared from their own site, but is still available for download at the Psion Game Database.

Fact File

Author	**Purple Software**
URL	**psion.cyningstan.org.uk**
Licence	**Freeware**
Systems	**All EPOC32 Systems**
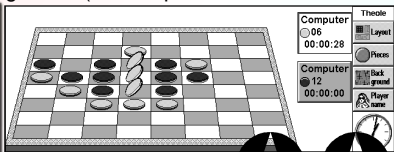
Theole on a Series 5.

Rating

A Perfect Match

A review of the Pilade5 tile matching game.

Among the prodigious output of Gérard Millet is a curious little game called *Pilade5*, designed to work with the Series 5 and the Revo. It's a simple game of matching quantities and qualities of tile, and it looks as if it's based on a traditional game. However, if such a traditional game exists, I can't find any information about it.

The game starts out with twelve "piles" of tiles, each pile containing only one tile at the start of the game. The tiles are differentiated by shape. There are two players, who take turns lifting one pile and adding it to another. You can combine two piles in this way only if both piles have the same number of tiles, or are topped by tiles of the same shape. The game continues until one player has no legal move; the last player who moved wins the game.

Pilade5 offers a computer opponent, who can play first or second, and also allows two people to play against one another. On playing the game a few times I found it to be very much biased in favour of the player who moves first. In my first few games, I managed to win this way without really knowing what I was doing. But on switching to playing second I needed to think much more carefully about where I was moving. it also seems as if the later moves need more thought than those at the beginning of the game, but this may be due to my lack of strategy in the game.

The graphics are nicely presented, and you are given a choice of tile sets, so you can exchange the simple shapes you see at first for cards, ships, animals and a number of other icons. Pilade5 has a few simple

sounds which are played when the game begins and ends and when tiles are moved, though these are nothing spectacular and can be switched off.

The authors offer two versions of the game on their site, one that works with the Series 5 only, and another that works with both the Series 5 and the Revo. What advantage the first version has, if any, isn't made clear. I found that when upgrading from version 1 to version 2 there are minor reliability problems, with the program failing to start. These are easily solved, though, by removing the Pilade5.ini file from your main documents folder.

Overall I found Pilade5 too easy, with games being far too short to keep my attention for long. But it's presentation and quality are good, and there may be more depth of strategy in it than I could find.

Fact File

Author	**Gerard Millet**
URL	**psions5-3495.pagesperso-orange.fr**
Licence	**Freeware**
Systems	**Series 5/5mx and Revo**
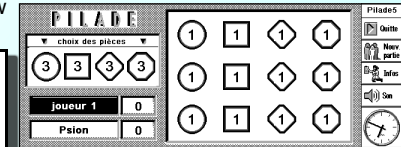
Pilade5 showing plain graphics on a Series 5.

Rating

A Sheep in Disguise?

John Spillett reviews Wombat Racing, by Edward Hannay and David Sansome.

While I was preparing a list of current reliable sources of EPOC downloads for *tobidog.com* I came across *Wombat Racing*. This looked like a change from variations on Fruit Machines so I loaded it up.

It is a classic gambling game where you and the computer bet on Wombats who race across the screen. The winner is the one with

most money after "n" races or who manages to bankrupt their opponent. The first thing to notice is that Wombats look remarkably like sheep!

Each race has 3 runners. There are 8 wombats overall and they are rotated so that at least one runner is different for each race

The options screen allows you to place bets, take out loans, get advice from a tipster, sponsor a sheep (sorry, wombat) and knobble the runners.

The race can be started and the runners race across the screen. See the result and off you go again.

The game has enough options to hold interest and it bears repeat performances. It runs smoothly on a 5MX and the emulator. The main criticisms are that sessions cannot be saved to complete later and the help file, although in the application directory, cannot be accessed from the button on the screen. I have not been able to trace the authors to see if the source code can be updated.

From a programming viewpoint the program is a good example of the NMPD.opx for interactive boxes from Neuon.

Fact File

Author	**E Hannay & D Sansome**
URL	**tobidog.com**
Licence	**Freeware**
Systems	**Series 5/5mx**

Rating