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[The Political Machine 2008](#)

Bobble your way to the White House

The Political Machine 2008 has one deep flaw: it needs to be played by someone who either has a good understanding of how Presidential elections work in the United States or by someone who is interested in learning about them. I sincerely hope that the game developed by Stardock gets into the hands of people interested in politics and really I think it should be used as school material. Yup, it's that good of a simulation.

I was so proud of my achievements as Lord Kona that I wrote a short article about it. I might even do some After Action Reports regarding other political campaigns. The game feels epic enough, without taking itself too seriously, that you surely feel proud when you win, especially if you crank up the difficulty a bit and play with a longer scenario than the standard 41 weeks.

You should know that you just can't win it in this game. You need to watch out for the actual political leanings of the state where you campaign, know the strengths, easily seen in the attributes, and the weaknesses of your candidate, watch the way the public feeling regarding each political issue develops as the campaign goes on. You also need to be careful in picking a running mate and have all the right answers when you appear on television. The game is by no means a complete simulation of the political aspect of choosing a President, but it does a very good job in presenting some of the intricacies involved. The only thing is that it asks is a bit of time and patience. It's not a game for the casual player, but, as stated above, a game for those interested in politics.

Concept

It's very simple, actually. You pick a candidate or you create one from scratch and then go on to contest the election of the position of POTUS aka President of the United States. There are issues and attributes to all the candidates, money to be spend and acquired, electoral votes to be gained and political mischief to be caused. You will make appearances on talk shows, which might seem all too familiar to people that watch American political coverage and you can call on the power of the media to help you with ads on television and in newspapers. You also get to make policy stands on issues through speeches and there are always some consultants to bring in and smear your opponent. It's all turn based, with each action you perform draining a pool of action points determined by your Stamina stat.

The game offers two modes that will mainly interest a gamer. Quick Play is what you want if you only plan to start a battle from scratch against another candidate, while Campaign pits your candidate against figures from the past and present in increasingly more difficult challenges. And don't forget while I learned during my first hour with the game right click to move your character. I might be politically aware but simple movement controls sometime seem to be too much for me.

Don't forget about the scenarios that Stardock put in the game other than the 2008 Campaign. You can play an 1860 American scenario, with segregation and states rights at the core, or as a Drengin inspired political scenario, where the main issues are the reformation of slave pit conditions and possible alliance with the Yor. Last but not least, there's an European scenario with the twist that it's all portrayed at the level of knowledge of

the American high school student (hint: he gets quite a few things wrong).

*Check out the guy with the green head
Define your political stance and get a big pencil*

Gameplay

The main idea in *The Political Machine 2008* is that presence equals success, to some degree. In order to win elections you need to establish presence, which pretty much means going at least twice to every state of the United States. The mere presence in one place lets regular folk that vote know you are running for office and boosts your standings.

To maintain a presence in a state, the player can build three structures: campaign headquarters, which offers access to issues, allowing you to create more varied speeches (a must especially in battleground states) and bring in money; consulting offices (giving you access to media events and to campaign operatives); outreach centers, which generate much needed endorsement points. Only one can be built in each state and there are three levels per building. I recommend going for the outreach centers first, to get as many endorsements as possible and concentrate on headquarters for the last part of the campaign. Results of the strategy might vary on the selected length of the campaign.

It's very important to manage your resources right. Try to hit all the television shows that show up as events on the map. The Coldcut Report and Barry King Live are really important to supporters. Also try to pick up all random characters, even if some might be bad for you, because there's a chance to score a powerful operative like the Cheerleader or the Heckler early on. Watch out for the money meter and learn to make quick "cash trips" to places like Texas, California and Florida. Never underestimate the importance of a TV add, especially a negative one. You may also want to hire the Speech Writer and the Fashion Consultant early on to increase the strength of your campaign.

If things start going south very quickly, there are some text tutorials, more akin to a manual than a videogame introduction that can help you with some of the finest points of the game. Don't hesitate to check them out.

There are a few things that bug me. One is the simplicity of the talk show mini-games, which are short and where the answers don't seem to influence political standings very much. Another one is the fact that the options for consultants and endorsements are rather limited and that PR clout and Political Action points seem to become quite useless as the game reaches the end. And the actual election animation is long, forcing you to watch as every state declares it is in favor of one candidate or another, without a way to skip to the end.

Visuals and audio

The game is adequate for what it aims to achieve. The bobble heads are all cute and instantly recognizable, the talk show hosts have a little resemblance to actual characters and the map is well rendered. As you can see in the screenshots, the game does not need to be extraordinary in the graphics department, as its main strength lies elsewhere. The one issue that I have related to the graphics is that sometimes switching the overlays for the map to see different data created some artifacts on our test machine. It might be the game, it might be something else, but since it showed up, I thought I should mention it.

Speaking of graphics, the introduction to the game is great, with poor George W. Bush trying to push around some cardboard boxes with his over sized head while the candidates plaster every inch of ground with their adds. It's all quite ironic while at the same time an interesting commentary on the politics system, as is the entire game.

The music in the game (as always) tends to get repetitive after a while, but the irony is actually nicely translated into the sound department. The soundtrack is something like the Muzak of the hypermarket mixed with vaguely patriotic themes. Nice, but I usually crank up some Death Metal while I try to secure the presidency as Lord Kona of Drengi.

*America is a battlefield
A bit of a setback*

Multiplayer

To get into multiplayer, you need to connect through Impulse, the digital distribution platform from Stardock, and get the latest update. After that, you can wage political war on any of your friends that also harbor dreams of becoming President. The game plays out pretty much in the same way as the single player component, with the exception that you have to deal with a human mind and not the AI opponent.

Conclusion

Get this game. Try it out and see how you do in a simple match up. Read up on the Internet about all the things that you do not understand. Read CNN or major blogs for political news. Read statistical data regarding the voting preferences of the white male population of Ohio and then look up information on by how many votes Al Gore lost the election in Florida. It would not hurt to ask someone why Electoral College votes do not always reflect the popular vote and why vice presidents don't matter much.

All the above subjects are touched upon in the game, which manages to depict political mechanism while also criticizing some of them. And it does it all with humor, a light art style and great bobble heads.

If you don't know and do not want to know politics, forget The Political Machine 2008. It's

clearly not for you. If you know politics or want to learn about it, get this game. I am eagerly waiting for the release of Race for Congress and Race for the Senate, which Stardock must be creating.