

<b>Title:</b>	MindRover: The Europa Project
<b>Developed by:</b>	Cognitoy ( <a href="http://www.cognitoy.com">http://www.cognitoy.com</a> )
<b>Published by:</b>	Cognitoy ( <a href="http://www.cognitoy.com">http://www.cognitoy.com</a> )
<b>Reviewed By:</b>	Tim Maxwell
<b>Official Site:</b>	<a href="http://www.cognitoy.com/mindrover/mindrover.htm">http://www.cognitoy.com/mindrover/mindrover.htm</a>
<b>Overview:</b>	Lemmings with a kick.
<b>Genre:</b>	Strategy/Puzzle
<b>System Requirements:</b>	200 MHz PC, Win 95/98/NT (300MHz or better is recommended) 3D graphics accelerator with OpenGL drivers Sound card 70 MB hard drive space 4X CD-ROM drive or greater 32 MB RAM
<b>ESRB Rating:</b>	Everyone
<b>The Good Press:</b>	Cool gameplay variations; lots of ways to doctor up your vehicles; nearly endless replay value; rocket launchers are a welcome addition to <i>any</i> game
<b>The Bad Press:</b>	Steep learning curve; little to no interactivity; patience is too much of a virtue
<b>Ratings:</b>	Overall Rating: 7 Graphics: 6 Sound: 6 Documentation: 8 Getting Started: 6 Gameplay: 7 Value: 7
<b>Tips:</b>	Successful completion of the tutorials is almost mandatory if you hope to understand the game completely.  If your vehicle isn't performing up-to-snuff, there is no penalty for trial and error. Simply return to the console, make your changes and start over.

It wasn't too long ago when a little-known game called *Lemmings* burst onto the scene and took the game world by storm. The premise was simple: you were in direct control of an army of multi-talented rodents. You were given a venue in which to work, some tools to work with and an objective. It was your job to "program" the rodents to complete that task. I never quite understood why people thought that watching little mice dig holes and build bridges was so entertaining, but admittedly, there was something truly rewarding about devising the master plan and watching the little critters carry it out to perfection. For some odd reason, memories of playing *Lemmings* seem to flood back when I play Cognitoy's new strategy/puzzle game *MindRover: The Europa Project*.

*MindRover* is a truly unique experience—undoubtedly quite different than most games you've ever played. You are a researcher on Europa, one of Jupiter's moons. Apparently, the frigid climate doesn't allow you to get out much, so a good portion of your spare time is devoted to reprogramming "rovers" (futuristic vehicles) to complete various tasks. Some scenarios have you program a vehicle to complete a simple task such as navigating to a certain area on the map. Other challenges include navigating mazes, racing against other vehicles, or combining multiple rovers for an intergalactic melee.

Scenarios are organized into five categories: battles, sports, races, miscellaneous and tutorials. Within each category, there are multiple challenges and difficulty levels from which to choose. Once you've made your choice, you must build and program a vehicle to complete the assigned tasks. You can choose to create a new vehicle for each challenge, or you can simply tweak existing vehicles to adjust to the new guidelines. Building and programming a rover is quite a complicated process—especially when you get to the more difficult scenarios.

First you select a chassis—either hovercraft, wheeled, or treaded. Each has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. For example, a hovercraft is more mobile and can move freely in any direction, but it can't carry as much equipment or withstand as much punishment as its counterparts. Afterwards, you must equip your vehicle with components for movement and navigation, as well as weaponry and sensors. Finally, you must wire it all together and set various properties so the whole package works together as a unit. This isn't all that difficult in the beginning, but as you progress, things tend to get a little dicey. Wiring the vehicles reminds me a lot of trying to wire a home entertainment system—you're faced with a sea of identical looking wires all hooking into identical looking components. It's rather easy to get confused and overlook something and if you do, one or more components won't work. Nothing is more frustrating than spending a good half-hour preparing your vehicle only to watch it drive head-on into a wall and stop. Thankfully, there is no penalty for exiting mid-game and adjusting your vehicle, but perhaps some example vehicles would be helpful early on.

Despite its complicated nature, the ability to customize your vehicle to such an extent is really what makes *MindRover* such an innovative game. There is no right or wrong way to program your vehicle, and a good bit of experimentation and patience will get you a long way. The vast replay value of the game really shines here, and even if you outwit and defeat all the pre-programmed vehicles, a whole new series of challenges await you on Cognitoy's website. Periodic vehicle updates are added to the site so if the game isn't proving difficult enough, you can simply download other human-made vehicles to compete against. Simply put, *MindRover's* replay value and addictive nature should keep you busy for quite some time.

Up until now, I've held-off talking about the graphics and sound in *MindRover* because to me, these areas make little difference in games such as this. That said, the visuals and sound effects are nothing to write home about, but nothing to complain about either. The 3D card requirement makes for some nice smooth vehicle textures and some colorful backgrounds, but a software mode probably could be nearly as good. Sound effects such as engines churning and missiles firing all sound as they should and the techno hip-hop tunes seem to fit in, but again, you won't be heading out to buy a new sound card or surround sound speakers for this one. Neither area really adds to or detracts from the overall gameplay, but I would be remiss if I failed to mention them.

The way I see it, there is just one flaw that really keeps *MindRover* from reaching elite status. Once you've programmed your vehicle (which can feel more like work than play sometimes), there is nothing more for you to do besides watch it in action. Sure, it's quite gratifying watching your perfectly-tuned vehicle leave the opponent in the dust or nuke them with a perfectly-placed rocket, but on several occasions, I felt like some additional control would be welcome. Some of the scenarios take quite a while to fully pan-out, so it can be boring just sitting there watching. This isn't a problem per se, but it just goes to show that this game isn't for everyone and your gaming preferences should be weighted before you decide whether or not to buy this game.

On the whole, you can't help but give credit to Cognitoy for basically inventing a completely new genre. *MindRover* not only makes you use your head (to a high degree I might add), but it offers enough excitement and replayability to give even the best strategy and puzzler games a run for their money. If you

enjoy addictive games that really put your brain to work, you will really enjoy *MindRover*. If not and action or quick reflexes are your forte, you'll want to look elsewhere.