

Phalanx

Abstract

In *Phalanx* two groups of soldiers inhabit a landscape viewed from a top down perspective. The objective is to eliminate as many of the other soldiers as possible. Additionally, the landscape contains randomly scattered obstacles such as bushes that can impede a group's movement or at times be moved themselves. As the two players move through the terrain the formation of their soldiers and the layout of the terrain is modified forcing a player to develop new tactics.

Description

Each group of soldiers consists of 4 units played in a box like formation, The group is moved as a single entity one unit width at a time by moving the joystick in a direction (only the four cardinal directions are supported) and pressing its button. A player's rate of movement is roughly limited to once every 300 milliseconds. While each individual unit in a group moves at once, many times terrain might block a single unit's path. In this case the blocked unit will not advance in the desired direction as the rest of the group does. The resultant modification of the soldiers' formation persists from that point on, or until it is modified by later movement into terrain.

Each individual unit has a fixed facing; either up, down, left, or right. While typically fixed, the unit's facing will change if the player attempts to move the unit into the inclosing wall of the playing area. In such a case, the unit is oriented to face away from the wall. This facing governs how terrain and other pieces react to it. If a soldier moves into a non wall obstacle or opposing piece it faces, that obstacle is destroyed. If a soldier moves into an obstacle or piece that it does not face one of two things may happen. If possible, the obstacle will be 'pushed' by the unit. In the case that there is no place to push the obstacle, the unit will be unable to move into that space, and the formation of the group will change as described above. Opposing piece may not be 'pushed'. In the event that two facing pieces advance into the same space simultaneously, both pieces are destroyed.

Obstacles come in three types, mobile, immobile, and dangerous. Immobile obstacles are exactly that. They appear as solid dark green blocks, such as the wall around the playing area. Neutral obstacles act in the manner described above. They may be destroyed, moved, or block movement themselves. Neutral obstacles look like pixelated foliage. Dangerous obstacles appear as fire and destroy any piece that moves into them.

While the rules are simple, requiring the player to navigate four pieces simultaneously seems rather difficult in my estimation. However, as a player loses pieces, the game becomes effectively easier as they have less to keep track of. From one point of view, a player's multiple pieces could be viewed not as power to be used, but as lives to be protected. A player could easily focus on navigating one piece and simply switch their attention to another unit their primary focal point is destroyed. Either way, the novel manipulations create a system highly difficult to master. As such, it might be prudent to create specific levels (opposed to randomly generated) so that a player can formulate and test strategies in a controlled environment.