

16 Tons

Nathalie Pozzi & Eric Zimmerman

16 Tons is a game about negotiation, labor, and commercial transactions that plays with the border between the idealized space that games occupy and the real world out of which they are carved.

In most strategy games the pieces are merely tokens, logical symbols in an abstract system made of pure thought - weightless and pristine. In 16 Tons the weight of the pieces re-asserts their status as physical objects, moving them is work, and the game's resource is not some fictional currency but real dollar bills pulled from the player's own pockets.

The high walls that surround the game space evoke both back room deals and a gamblers' den, and the behavior of players suggests that those aren't such different arenas. At any given time there are usually several players close to winning, but players can't take any direct action themselves. Only through the purchase of influence, involving both resources and persuasion, can players gain the ability to turn the game in their favor. Once their purchase is made they then become the focus of more persuasion as the other players bark advice and wave money to try and convince them that what they think is in their best interest is a mistake.

16 Tons ends, however, not when someone has made the most cunning argument, but when enough capital has slowly and inevitably accumulated to one player, allowing them to purchase influence without the need to negotiate.