

ZENITH

a comp-sci production
by John Valentine

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1. Introduction

What is Zenith?

Zenith [*noun*] Highest point or climax.

Zenith is a first-person immersive action game of skill and strategy where you use the landscape's resources to gain height, and ultimately depose the Sentinel at the **Zenith**.

Zenith is inspired by a clever game concept, which originally appeared as The Sentinel by Geoff Crammond, and has received surprisingly little attention since. This version is mostly faithful to The Sentinel, and I hope to continue working on the game to bring further improvements and more exciting variations to it.

— John Valentine, May 2006.

Freeware

The 'Freeware' status of freeware versions of Zenith means that you may download and use Zenith without charge, and without warranty. If you feel this is a game worth paying for, then you can make a small payment on the website (it is hoped that by the time you read this, the facility to make payments will be available).

Zenith will not become a commercial product, unless future versions of Zenith offer a game that is significantly different from The Sentinel.

System Requirements

Zenith has been designed to run on modest computer hardware, including mobile computers.

Required

- Computer running Windows 98/2000/XP/2003.
- OpenGL support (most modern computers have this support)
- 350MHz / Intel Pentium II or equivalent processor, or better.
- Display capable of VGA (640x480) or better.

Recommended

- 1.5GHz P4 processor or equivalent (e.g. 1.0GHz AMD), or better.
Zenith can be prompted to run in low-power mode to help your computer conserve battery power.
- Hardware-accelerated 3D graphics with at least 8MB dedicated display memory.
- Zenith will take advantage of hardware rendering of sound and graphics.

Notes

- Zenith does not run on MacOS.
- Zenith will run on the Wine emulator on Linux, but some problems with visibility of the game panels have been reported.

Downloading Zenith - Freeware Release

- Point your web browser to <http://www.johnvalentine.co.uk/zenith>.
- Use the **•Download•** link to get the **Zenith.zip** file.

Installing Zenith

- Expand the **Zenith.zip** file to your desktop (if your chosen zip expander has an option to **Expand Here**, use that, because all of Zenith's files are contained within their own folder).
- You may move this folder wherever you want to keep Zenith.
- If you want to uninstall Zenith, just delete the Zenith folder; Zenith does not keep any other files on your computer.

Starting Zenith

- In the **Zenith** folder, you'll find **Zenith.exe** – run it by double-clicking.

If you don't read manuals...

Read this...

- When you run Zenith, a game will start immediately. If this is the very first time you have run Zenith, your game will start at the easiest level.
- You will see hints at the top-left of the screen. These are to help you get started. Press [**F4**] when you've had enough of them, and have won several Landscapes.
- If you want to change the game difficulty or configuration options, then press [**ESC**]. The Settings box then allows you to change these options – see **Settings** for more information.
- There's a Key Reference Guide near the back of this document.
- Oh, and you'll want to know what you are trying to achieve... keep reading!

2. Playing Guide

Objective

Your consciousness occupies a **synthoid shell**, which starts at the bottom of an alien landscape. Your objective is to exploit the landscape and its resources to gain possession of the highest point on the landscape: the **Zenith**.

Quick Overview of Gameplay

- You start at a low level on the landscape, occupying a synthoid shell with a few units of energy in reserve.
- The Sentinel occupies the pedestal at the Zenith (highest point), standing dormant. That's the 'bad guy'.
- The Sentinel is activated by any changes of energy in the landscape – usually by your first 'move', then it slowly rotates, scanning the landscape sector by sector, reducing anything on the landscape that contains more than one unit of energy, before moving on.
- Your synthoid shell is worth three units of energy, so the Sentinel will try to scatter **your** energy.
- You can create objects on any flat square or boulder that you can see, but this costs energy.
- You can absorb objects on any flat square or boulder that you can see, to regain the energy.
- You move around the landscape by creating a synthoid shell, and transferring your consciousness to it.
- To reach higher ground, you might need to create a boulder, create a synthoid shell on top of the boulder, then transfer to the new synthoid shell. From the new position, you might see more flat landscape that you can use.

Now, if you read on, you'll discover how you can do all this...

The view from a synthoid shell

The display is dominated by the view that your synthoid's camera sees.

In this example, the Sentinel can be seen in the distance, and a tree is available for absorption in the left foreground. There are lots of free squares where a new synthoid shell can be created.



View from the synthoid shell

Status information is shown below the view.

From left to right:

- Your energy reserve, shown as a number (e.g. 11)
- Your energy reserve, shown in terms of useful objects (e.g. 1 synthoid shell, 4 boulders)
- A scanner alarm, which lights up orange when a scan is detected, and red when your energy is being sapped.
- A green 'game activity' monitor. This does not have a bearing on the state of the game; it shows green when the game is working, and black when power saving is active.



Status, shown below the view

The Map View

Press [M] to show or hide an overview of the landscape.

You can rotate this view by dragging it, and zoom with keys [I], [O] or the mouse wheel.

The example shown here is a simple beginner's landscape, where the Sentinel is on the high pedestal, and the player's synthoid is on low ground.

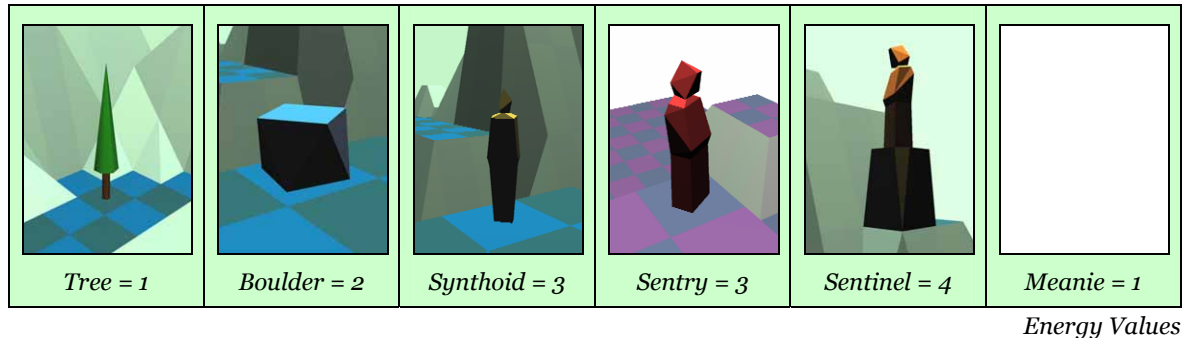
Try not to spend too long looking at the map view; the Sentinel continues to scan while you do so!



Map View

Energy

At the start of every game, the Sentinel already stands dormant at the Zenith, waiting for activity. When activated, the Sentinel will scan the landscape for objects that contain more than one unit of energy, and scatter that energy around the landscape as trees, worth one unit of energy each.



Unluckily, your synthoid shell is worth three energy units, so if the Sentinel scans a synthoid shell, it will begin to sap energy from it. If your energy reaches zero, any further depletion of energy will destroy the synthoid shell, your consciousness will have no container, and the game ends.

Movement

At the beginning of a game, your synthoid will be standing on low ground, looking towards the Zenith. The Sentinel will be dormant, until there is a change of energy on the landscape. A typical starting position is shown in the Map View example on the previous page.

Camera View

When the game starts, you can look around without disturbing the Sentinel. Do so by dragging the view with your mouse, or using the cursor keys (press [ctr1] for fine control with the cursor keys).

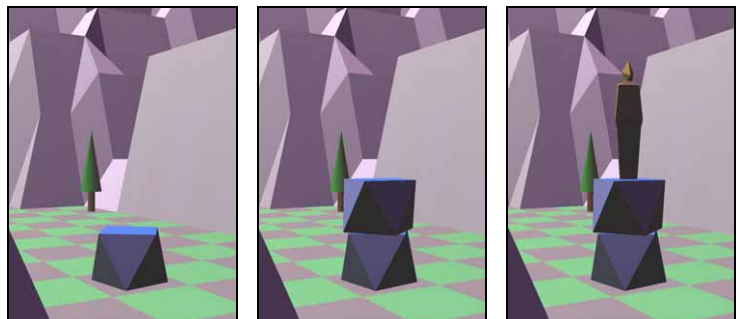
You may zoom the camera view using the mouse wheel, or keys [I] and [O] (pressing [ctr1] gives you fine control over zooming).

Moving

Your synthoid shell does not actually *move* around the landscape. Instead, you find a new position by creating a new synthoid shell, and transfer your consciousness into the new shell. The old shell will be left behind.

You must have 3 or more energy units in reserve to create a **synthoid shell**. To create a synthoid shell, point your mouse cursor at a flat square, and press [R] or [3].

To create a **boulder**, point your mouse cursor at a flat square, and press [B] or [2]. Boulders cost 2 energy units to create, and if you have enough energy, you can stack more boulders on top of the first boulder to create a high column – upon which you can place a synthoid shell.



To **transfer** to a synthoid shell, point at it, and press [Q].

Climbing Higher

Remember, your objective is to climb as high as you can, as quickly as you can, so that you can reach the Zenith. Also, if the square you occupy can not be seen by the Sentries, then they can not absorb your energy!

Absorbing objects

Hover your mouse over a landscape square, or an object, and press key [A] to absorb it.

You can only absorb an object when you can see the square it stands on, or if you can see the boulder it stands on.

In this example, you would be able to absorb the two trees on the left, but none of the others: the trees above are too high, and you can't see any of the square that the tree in the middle is standing on.



Trees on the landscape: which can be absorbed?

You are being scanned!

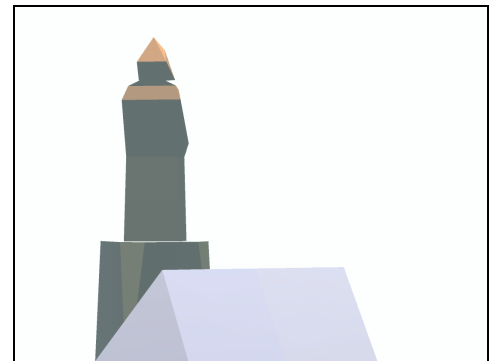
The alarm has activated – the Sentinel has seen you! Soon, it will start scattering any energy reserves you have, so you must move away quickly, to a place that the Sentinel is not scanning.

Near the Zenith: Defeating the Sentinel

If you have reached a point high enough, you will be able to look down at the top of the Sentinel's pedestal.

Only then can you complete the escape sequence to progress to the next landscape:

- Point at the Sentinel or its pedestal, and press [A] or [space];
- Create a synthoid shell on the Sentinel's pedestal [R];
- Transfer to the new synthoid shell [Q];
- Transfer off the landscape [Q].



You are high enough to absorb the Sentinel

The Sentinel is the last object that you may absorb from a landscape, so if you have time, absorb everything you can first.

3. Game Options

Find the game options by pressing [Esc] in the game. Here, you can control the type of game you play, and various factors that affect difficulty and gameplay.

When you're done, press the **Return** button to resume the game, or the **New Game** button to start a new game.

Note that only the **Configuration** settings and the **Game Speed** tweak are effective immediately using **Return**; the other settings take effect only at the start of a **New Game**.

Difficulty

These options control the basic difficulty of game that you play:

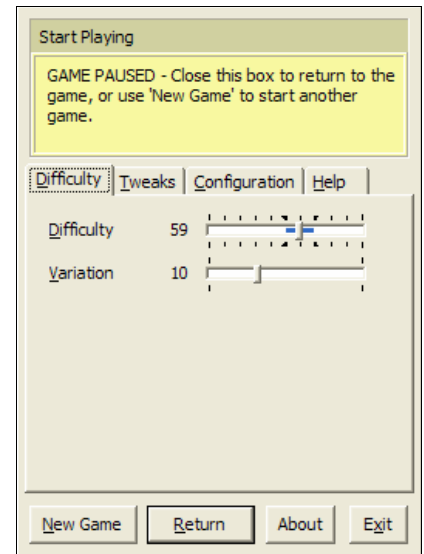
- Use the **Difficulty** slider to select your level of play.
- Use the **Variation** slider to allow Zenith to choose a difficulty level either side of the **Difficulty** you have selected. Zenith may select a game for you that is more difficult, or less difficult, within the range shown by the blue bar on the **Difficulty** slider.

When you successfully finish a landscape, you can carry some of your remaining energy to the next landscape: the more you have at the end, the more you can carry over.

To play again, select a difficulty for your next game:

Easier, **Same again**, or **More difficult**.

If you want more control over your next game, then use the **Configure** button.



4. Configuration and Tweaks

Configuration

Find the **Configuration** settings by pressing [ESC] in the game, and selecting the **Configuration** tab. Here, you can set control options.

Mouse Look

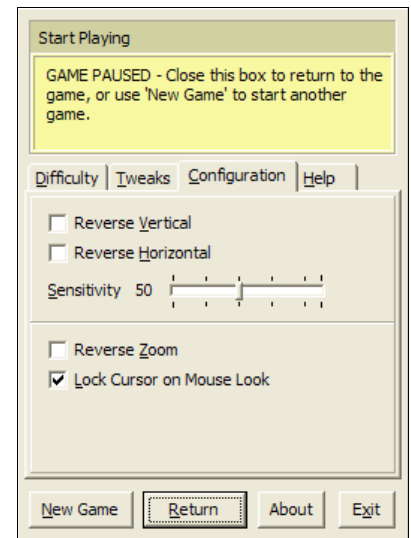
These options change the behaviour of the 'mouse look'. Ordinarily, when you press the left mouse button and drag the mouse, the camera moves in the direction that you drag.

When you use the **Reverse Vertical** and **Reverse Horizontal** options, you are effectively holding the landscape to turn yourself around.

Sensitivity controls the speed that the camera turns when you drag the mouse.

Reverse Zoom changes the way the camera zooms when you use the mouse wheel.

When the **Lock Cursor on Mouse Look** option is enabled, the cursor will remain in the same position when using mouse look. When disabled, the cursor will move around when using mouse look.



Tweaks

Find the **Tweaks** settings by pressing [ESC] in the game, and selecting the **Tweaks** tab. Here, you can set options that affect the gameplay.

If you want to play the same basic landscape every time (tuned to the **Difficulty** level), enable the **Landscape #** option. For varied gameplay it is recommended that you do not enable this option.

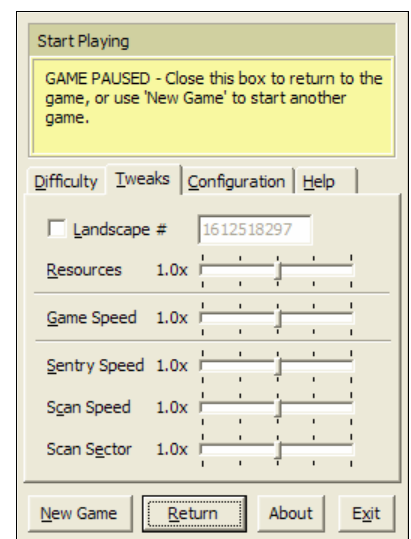
To play landscapes with more trees, set the **Resources** slider to the right (above 1.0x). Setting this slider to the left (below 1.0x) generates landscapes with fewer trees.

To play at a faster pace, set the **Game Speed** slider to the right (above 1.0x). Setting this slider to the left (below 1.0x) plays a slower game. Note that objects are created and absorbed at this speed too, so be prepared to adjust accordingly.

The Sentinel and Sentries will rotate faster when the **Sentry Speed** slider is set to the right (above 1.0x), and will move slower when the slider is set to the left (below 1.0x).

The Sentinel and Sentries will scan and sap energy faster when the **Scan Speed** slider is set to the right (above 1.0x), and will scan and sap energy more slowly when the slider is set to the left (below 1.0x).

When the **Scan Sector** slider is set to the right (above 1.0x), the Sentinel and Sentries will scan wider sectors at a time, and rotate through a wider angle when they move. Setting this slider to the left (below 1.0x) reduces the size of the sectors scanned by the Sentinel and Sentries.



5. Strategy Guide

You might want to explore the game for yourself, to enjoy discovering how the game works. However, we have provided you with some basic gaming tips to start you off

General Gameplay

- **Quick gains**

Gain height as quickly as possible to get out of a sticky situation quickly. Use all available energy to build stacks of boulders, plus a synthoid. From the new vantage point, it should be possible to absorb the old shell, spy a site for a new shell, transfer to a new synthoid shell, re-absorb the previous stack of boulders, and so on, to seek a new site afresh. Simple! Just avoid the Sentinel though...

- **Climbing: think ahead two steps**

Use the height of boulder stacks wisely, and use as few or as many boulders as you need to keep your options open. If you have enough energy to stack 6 boulders, the temptation might be to use them all at once for a quick gain. However, it might be more useful to build a stack of 2 boulders, which saves enough energy to build a stack of 4 boulders in the next stack after that. If you can see ahead two steps, you can plan for what can be seen from the current square, the next square, and the square you plan to occupy after that.

- **When to panic!**

Some games will be very difficult at the beginning, because they offer no way of progressing from the start position, or they are immediately overlooked by a Sentinel or Sentry. Try using the Hyperspace (key [H]) to jump to another location, where your chances of progression might be better.

- **Keep a healthy energy supply**

When a Sentinel scans you, don't be caught short. If you're standing on a pile of boulders, and your energy supply falls below 3 units of energy, you have no means to create a new synthoid shell for your escape.

- **Free energy** (grows on trees!)

Absorb trees as you go, but only if you have time. If you struggle to achieve the height necessary, try absorbing more trees earlier in the game, to give you energy for the extra boulder you need to gain more height (2 trees = 1 boulder).

- **Learn scanning patterns**

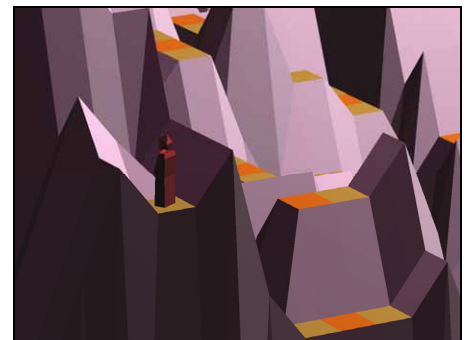
Observe which way Sentinels and Sentries rotate, how often, and by how much. You might see that there is a particularly aggressive Sentinel or Sentry, and change your strategy accordingly.

- **Create time**

Aim to create new Synthoid shells in locations where the Sentinel or Sentries have just scanned, to give as much time as possible before the next relocation is forced. Remember that the Sentinel might have undiscovered friends just about to scan your location.

- **Eliminate enemies**

Absorb Sentries and Meanies as quickly as possible. There's nothing to lose and lots of energy to gain by absorbing them. Take special care with the Sentries are protected by the scenery. They might be able see you; yet you will not be able to see their square, making them dangerous and difficult to eliminate.



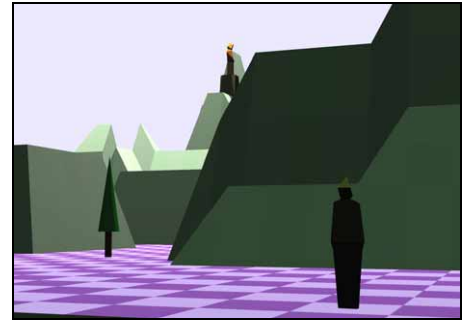
Hidden Sentries are difficult to absorb

- **No lingering**

If you start in an open space, then move away as quickly as possible, as the Sentinel's scan is inevitable. The only times you can look around without threat are: (a) at the start of the game, when the Sentinel has not detected your first energy transfer, (b) when the Sentinel and all the Sentries are absorbed, and (c) when you are shielded from the Sentinel and Sentries by the landscape.

- **Shelter**

If you find a square that is in the shadow of the Sentinel's stare, you have the luxury of being able to wait there while the Sentinel's scan passes. Learn the scanning patterns, so you know when it's safe, and don't assume that you've seen all of the Sentries! Use the map wisely



Hiding from view

End-game

- Hidden spots on high ground are unlikely to offer a view of the Sentinel's pedestal. This makes them a good place to hide, but you'll have to come out of hiding to find another high square before you can absorb the Sentinel.
- In more difficult games, Sentries will be helping the Sentinel. It is possible that some Sentries might survive your climb to the Zenith, or remain unnoticed – they are active even when the Sentinel has been absorbed, and will still be able to leech your energy reserves if they can see the base your synthoid stands on.
- Be wary when a Sentinel is perched on one side of a mountain; it's easy to get stuck on the wrong side.
- If you absorb the Sentinel while standing on a stack of boulders, then you will not be able to re-absorb that stack once you are on the Sentinel's pedestal. Mount your assault on the Sentinel from high ground to finish with as much energy possible.
- Absorb what you can from the landscape **before** absorbing the Sentinel – higher energy reserves allow you to progress quickly to more advanced landscapes.

6. Key Reference Guide

Game	
[Esc]	Show New Game and Configuration options
[Alt]+[F4]	Exit Zenith immediately
[M]	Show/Hide Map (toggle)
[F1]	Show a hint (hints must be enabled)
[F4]	Enable/Disable hints.

View	
[U]	Back/Front
[←] [→] [↑] [↓]	Turn camera (+[ctrl] = fine control)
[I]	Zoom in (+[ctrl] = fine control)
[O]	Zoom out (+[ctrl] = fine control)
[F2]	PNG screenshot to Zenith program folder
[F3]	Full-screen anti-aliasing mode (Default, None, 2x)

Movement	
[Q]	Transfer (exit level when at highest square)
[H]	Hyperspace

Creation	
[1], [T]	Create Tree, costs 1 energy point
[2], [B]	Create Boulder, costs 2 energy points
[3], [R]	Create Synthoid Shell, costs 3 energy points
[A], [space]	Absorb object under cursor, gains energy points

Diagnostics and cheat	
[F9]	Show/Hide Command Console (toggle)

7. Command Console

About the Command Console

The console is not needed to play the game, and is only for players who want to see what's happening, or (dare I say it) cheat! Bear in mind that if you cheat, the satisfaction is dampened for any wins that you achieve!

Viewing the Command Console

To show the Command Console, press [F9] while playing the game. Note that the game will continue playing when you are using the Command Console, but if you press [ESC] in the game window, the game will pause.

Running commands in the Command Console

The command window has two parts:

- At the bottom is the command line, where you enter commands. Just type a command, and press [ENTER]. The drop-down box maintains a history of commands, and any previously-entered commands will be used to auto-complete any typing you have started.
- The remainder of the Command Console shows the responses to your commands. You can copy these to the clipboard if you wish. To clear the window, press the button. See also the LOG command.

Scripting

Zenith is able to run very simple scripts, which are just text files in the `scripts` folder, having one command per line. Run scripts using the `RUN` or `EXECUTE` command. Scripts can run other scripts, but take care to avoid 'circular references'. Some scripts have special uses:

- `DefaultStartGame.zsc` will be run after a landscape has been built at the start of each game.
- `UserPreferences.zsc` will be run after Zenith starts, and after `Preferences.zsc` is loaded. Use this file to tweak performance options, or set any scriptable option.
- `Preferences.zsc` is used by Zenith to store the game's configuration, and is overwritten every time Zenith exits. If you need customisations, put them in `UserPreferences.zsc` or `DefaultStartGame.zsc`.

Command Reference

Underlined letters in this table represent the abbreviated version for a command, e.g. where you see HELP, either H or HELP will run the HELP command.

Console	
<u>H</u> ELP	[<u>C</u> OMMANDS <u>D</u> ETAIL <command name>] Lists commands and their parameters.
<u>C</u> LS	Clears the Console display.
<u>F</u> ONT	{ <u>N</u> AME <u>S</u> IZE <point size> } Displays the current font settings, or sets the font name or size.
<u>T</u> YPE	<filename> Displays a text file. Filenames having spaces should be enclosed in double quotes.
<u>E</u> CHO or !	<text> Show text in the console (useful in scripts). Text having spaces should be enclosed in double quotes.
<u>L</u> OG	[<u>C</u> LEAR <u>S</u> AVE <filename> 0 1 2]. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>C</u>LEAR clears the log, • <u>S</u>AVE saves the log to file, • 0, 1, or 2 sets the debugging level (not enabled on release versions).
Control	
<u>K</u> EYS	Shows the game controls.
<u>E</u> XECUTE or <u>R</u> UN	<filename> Runs a list of commands in a script (text file); <i>filename</i> includes the extension.
<u>N</u> EW	Starts a new game, on a new landscape.
<u>E</u> XIT	Closes Zenith application.
Cheats	
<u>C</u> HEAT	[0 1 off on] Shows or changes the Cheat Lock. When <u>O</u> FF or 0, no cheat commands are effective.
<u>P</u> LAYER	[<player number> [<u>E</u> NERGY <level>]] Shows information, or sets energy level for a player.
<u>G</u> ETHEIGHT	[x, z [, x2, z2]] Shows heights of landscape points.
<u>L</u> ANDSCAPE	[<u>S</u> CANNERS {0 1 2 off on a1}] Shows Landscape statistics, Landscape Size, Scanners, and Players. <u>S</u> CANNERS activates or deactivates scanner activity.
<u>A</u> LLOCATION	Views the game's maximum usage of allocatable capacity.

Configuration		
<u>PREFERENCES</u>	<option> <value>	
	Preferences options and values	
	<u>S_DIFFICULTY</u> <i>level</i>	Sets the Difficulty slider, <i>level 0..100</i>
	<u>S_DIFFVARIATION</u> <i>value</i>	Sets the Variation slider, <i>value 0..100</i>
	<u>S_LANDSCAPERANDOM</u> <i>value</i>	When <i>value</i> is ON or 1 , a completely different landscape is used every game (changing the seed every game). OFF or 0 uses a similar landscape for each game.
	<u>S_LANDSCAPENUMBER</u> <i>seed</i>	<i>seed</i> = landscape code. Used with Difficulty to generate a landscape.
	<u>S_GAMESPEED</u> <i>value</i>	A <i>value</i> above 1 results in a faster game; below 1 results in a slower game.
	<u>S_SENTRYSPEED</u> <i>value</i>	A <i>value</i> above 1 results in a faster sentry movement; below 1 results in a slower movement.
	<u>S_SCANSPEED</u> <i>value</i>	A <i>value</i> above 1 results in a faster sentry scanning; below 1 results in a slower scanning.
	<u>S_SCANSECTOR</u> <i>value</i>	A <i>value</i> above 1 results in wider scan sectors when sentries scan; below 1 results in a narrower scanning sectors.
	<u>S_RESOURCES</u> <i>value</i>	A <i>value</i> above 1 results in more tree resources on a landscape; below 1 results in less trees.
	<u>C_REVERSEHORIZONTAL</u> <i>value</i>	When <i>value</i> is ON or 1 , the horizontal direction of the mouse look is reversed.
	<u>C_REVERSEVERTICAL</u> <i>value</i>	When <i>value</i> is ON or 1 , the vertical direction of the mouse look is reversed.
	<u>C_REVERSEZOOM</u> <i>value</i>	When <i>value</i> is ON or 1 , the direction of the zoom (mouse wheel) is reversed.
	<u>C_LOCKCURSOR</u> <i>value</i>	When <i>value</i> is ON or 1 , the cursor remains in the same place on the screen when mouse look is used.
<u>C_SENSITIVITY</u> <i>value</i>	<i>value 0..100</i> . Larger values turns the camera more with mouse look.	
<u>H_SHOWHINTS</u> <i>value</i>	When <i>value</i> is ON or 1 , the hints panel is shown.	
<u>PERFORMANCE</u>	[{RES FPS AA [Default None 2x 2xHQ 4x 4xHQ] SLEEP [0 1 off on]}] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RES displays resolution, • FPS displays frames-per-second, • AA displays antialiasing, or sets antialiasing mode, subject to availability. • SLEEP displays or sets sleep mode (experimental power saving feature). 	